

How to Be a Yogi

Practical Advice To Serious Yogis

Abbot George Burke
(Swami Nirmalananda Giri)

“Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.”

(Luke 14:28-30)

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Why Christians Should Read This Book:

*We strive towards the ancient narrow path that leads to life eternal: So shall
His blessing rest on us and peace forevermore.
(An Esoteric Christian Creed)*

Saint Augustine wrote in the fourth century: “The identical thing that we now call the Christian religion existed among the ancients and has not been lacking from the beginnings of the human race until the coming of Christ in the flesh, from which moment on the true religion, which already existed, began to be called ‘Christian.’”

Earlier Saint Paul had written that the Christian Gospel was that which had already been taught throughout the whole world, “which was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (I Colossians 1:23). Authentic–original–Christianity is not new, but eternal in essence, embracing the Ancient Wisdom that has existed from the beginning of the world.

All master teachers of humanity, including Jesus the Christ, were revivers of that Wisdom, reminders of what was at their time either lost or almost extinguished. Before beginning his public ministry Jesus spent over half of his life in India (see *The Christ of India*). To understand his teachings and to compensate for the loss of virtually all significant Christian writings prior to the fourth century it is necessary to study the basic scriptures and philosophical writings of India—as did Jesus.

Although the term “Sanatana Dharma”—Eternal Religion—is Sanskrit, its meaning found over-reaches all religious boundaries and refers to the unanimous spiritual vision and beliefs of the great saints and liberated masters found throughout the world, whatever period of history or the religious tradition in which they lived and taught. Because it was first expressed in India it is often considered a synonym for Hinduism, but it is much more, being universal and beyond any cultural conditionings. All true religion is a facet of Sanatana Dharma

Preface: Yoga and Freedom

This is not a book about the technique of Yoga, but about that without which the successful practice of yoga is impossible: the Yoga Life. Yoga is not just a practice or a philosophy; it is an entire way of life. Without this understanding and without commitment to the Yoga Life there is simply no need to give yoga a second thought. And by yoga I mean the quest for liberation of the spirit, for Yoga is an eternal science intended to reveal and manifest the Eternal.

Yoga is like a tree. The bark is not the tree; the leaves are not the tree; the branches are not the tree; nor are the roots the tree. But taken all together—that is a tree. If a single one of these elements is missing, then the tree will die. It is the same with yoga—everything must be present to a sufficient degree. That is why the chapter entitled “The Foundations of Yoga” is so important. It contains no options: the whole range of discipline must be present to even begin to be a yogi. Without such a foundation any structure will fall down to ruin.

Many years ago the wife of a professor of entomology told me a story about some students who took parts from several insects and put them together. Approaching their teacher, they showed it to him and asked: “What kind of bug is this?” Looking at it carefully he replied: “It is a humbug!” So is pick-and-choose “designer” yoga.

In the primary grades my readers sometimes had humorous stories about Mrs. Goose. One was about Mrs. Goose taking a bath. She sat and sat in the bathtub and just felt something was not right—but she could not figure out what it was. So she asked several of her neighbors to come and watch her take a bath and see if they could discover what was wrong. They did so, and immediately saw the problem: she had no water in the tub! It is the same with yoga: nothing can be missing.

Please see the Glossary for the definition of unfamiliar words and also for brief biographical information on unfamiliar persons.

For instruction in the technique of Yoga, I recommend that you consult my book, *Pranava Yoga: Divine Word Meditation, Its Theory and Practice*.

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Chapter One: Yoga

“Yoga” is a Sanskrit word that means “to join.” Yoga is both union and the way to that union. What do we join through yoga? First, we join our awareness to our own essential being: the spirit whose nature is pure consciousness. In yoga philosophy this is known as the Atman or Self. Next, we join our finite consciousness to the Infinite Consciousness, God, the Supreme Self (Paramatman). In essence they are eternally one.

According to yogic philosophy the individual atman-spirit originally dwelt in the consciousness of that oneness. But in its descent into the material world the spirit lost its awareness of the eternal union, and lost the capacity to live in and manifest the union on a practical level. Through yoga the lost consciousness can be regained and actualized in the individual’s practical life sphere.

Regarding this, a yogi-adept of the twentieth century, Dr. I. K. Taimni, remarks in his book *The Science of Yoga*: “According to the yogic philosophy it is possible to rise completely above the illusions and miseries of life and to gain infinite knowledge, bliss, and power through enlightenment *here and now* while we are still living in the physical body....No vague promise of an uncertain postmortem happiness this, but a definite scientific assertion of a fact verified by the experience of innumerable yogis, saints, and sages who have trodden the path of yoga throughout the ages.”

Since rational thought precedes rational action, we should begin with the philosophical side of Yoga.

Yoga philosophy

The basic text of the Yoga philosophy is the Yoga Sutras (also called Yoga Darshana), written by the sage Patanjali, a yogi of ancient India. In contrast to other philosophical systems, Yoga is a philosophy which stimulates its investigators to engage in yoga as a practice through which they will experience and demonstrate its truth and worth. What begins as theory develops into practice which culminates in realization. Yoga is philosophy, discipline, and experience. It is a revelation of consciousness.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna the teacher tells Arjuna the student: “There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these kings. Nor is there any future in which we shall cease to be” (Bhagavad Gita 2:12). We are eternal beings, without beginning and without end.

Originally we were points of conscious light in the infinite ocean of Conscious Light that is God. We were gods within God. And so we still are, for it is not possible to be outside of Infinity. Yet we are also here in this ever-changing world—a place that completely overwhelms the truth of our immortal life within God. For countless life-cycles we have found ourselves embodied in material cases, little body-prisons within the greater prison of the cosmos. And that is where we are right now.

God the Lord—Ishwara

In writings on Yoga, the word for God or Lord is *Ishwara*—the Ruler, Master, or Controller possessing the powers of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. Ishwara is the Supreme Power, Parameshwara. It is toward this Ishwara that our life is to be directed if we would attain perfection in yoga. In Yoga Sutra 1:23, Patanjali says that samadhi, the state of superconsciousness where Absoluteness is experienced, is

produced by *Ishwarapranidhana*—the offering of one’s life to God. This is not merely dedicating our deeds and thoughts to God, but consciously *merging* our life in the greater life of God and making them one.

Since yoga is a practical matter, we need some workable, pragmatic understanding of the nature of God. For how will we seek and recognize Him if we have no idea who He is? Patanjali supplies us with exactly the kind of definition we need: “Ishwara is a particular Spirit Who is untouched by the afflictions of life, actions [karma] and the results and impressions [conditionings] produced by these actions” (Yoga Sutras 1:24).

God is a special, unique, conscious Being—not just abstract Existence. God is a “particular Spirit” in the sense that God can be “picked out” or “singled out” from among all other things or beings.

Though God is within all things and all things are within Him, yet He stands apart. This is stated several times in the Bhagavad Gita: “They are contained in me, but I am not in them...I stand apart from them all, supreme and deathless” (7:12, 13). “For my spirit stands apart, watching over Maya, the maker” (9:9). “Standing apart, He sustains” (13:14). “He is within and without: He lives in the live and the lifeless: subtle beyond mind’s grasp; so near us, so utterly distant” (13:15). “Although I am not within any creature, all creatures exist within me” (9:4).

God is unique in the sense that He is *Ekam Evam Advityam Brahman*—the God Who is One, Only, Without a Second. He is not one of many, nor is He even one of two. He is ONE in every sense of the term. God is neither conditioned nor confined in any manner. Therefore He is not touched or tainted by the afflictions or faults of life (relative existence), in contrast to us who live within them as though they were the air we breathe and the basis of our existence. Nor is Ishwara bound or in any way conditioned by actions; therefore He is ever unchanging.

It should be noted that Ishwara is considered to be Male in contradistinction to the divine creative power—Prakriti or Shakti—that is Female. Consequently Ishwara is referred to as “Him.” Brahman the Absolute is referred to as “It” because Brahman transcends such dualities as male and female, positive and negative. (Since the English word “God” almost always implies Ishwara, in this book God will be referred to as “He.”)

Infinite Consciousness: Omniscience

God is the essence and the apex of Consciousness, so Patanjali further says: “In Him is the highest limit of omniscience” (Yoga Sutras 1:25). Commenting on this, Shankara says: “The all-pervading mind of the supreme Lord is in simultaneous contact with every object.” The omniscience of God is total and absolute, for in truth God *is* Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence.

In this sutra Patanjali introduces a significant fact. He does not just say that omniscience (*sarvajña*) is in God, but that the *seed* of omniscience (*sarvajña bijam*) is in Him. Within God is the seed or potentiality of omniscience for those who are united with Him through their practice of yoga. Omniscience is not just objective knowledge, but infinity of consciousness—the Being of God Himself.

The two Selves

“Who am I?” is the age-old question asked with “Who is God?” The true “I” of each sentient being is the individual spirit, the self (atman). But there is more. God (Brahman) is the Self of the self—as the ocean is the “self” of every wave. The illumined know that they are the immortal self whose ultimate Self is the Immortal Itself. We are spirits within Spirit, in a wondrous way both ourselves and Brahman, both finite and

infinite.

“Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, the individual self and the immortal Self are perched on the branches of the selfsame tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter, tasting of neither, calmly observes. The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine Self, bewildered by his ego, grieves and is sad. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord as his own true Self, and beholds his glory, he grieves no more” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1, 2)

“That being who is the power of all powers, and is born as such, who embodies himself in the elements and in them exists, and who has entered the lotus of the heart, is the immortal self” (Katha Upanishad 2:1:7).

“In the effulgent lotus of the heart dwells Brahman, who is passionless and indivisible. He is pure, he is the light of lights. Him the knowers of the self attain” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.9).

“Brahman is supreme; he is self-luminous, he is beyond all thought. Subtler than the subtlest is he, farther than the farthest, nearer than the nearest. He resides in the lotus of the heart of every being” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.7).

“He who glows in the depths of your eyes—that is Brahman; that is the Self of yourself. He is the Beautiful One, he is the Luminous One. In all the worlds, forever and ever, he shines!” (Chandogya Upanishad 4:15:1).

Meditation is the key to knowledge of the self and the Self of the self. Knowing one, both are known—so say the sages. “Wise, self-controlled, and tranquil souls, who are contented in spirit, and who practice austerity and meditation in solitude and silence, are freed from all impurity, and attain by the path of liberation to the Immortal, the truly existing, the changeless Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.11).

Dr. I. K. Taimni, in *The Ultimate Reality and Realization*, says this: “It is only when the realization of being a pure spirit or atma has been attained that it is possible to achieve the final goal of union of the atma with the Paramatma, the Supreme Spirit which exists eternally beyond the manifested universe and from which the manifested universe is derived. When this final realization has been attained and union of atma with Paramatma has been brought about there is not only a complete sharing of consciousness between the two but also of the infinite Power which is inherent in the Universal Consciousness....It is necessary to distinguish between the powers which are acquired on the realization that he is a pure spirit or atma and those which are attained when he is able to destroy the last vestige of egoism and his consciousness becomes united with that of Paramatma. The former, though tremendous in some respects, are still limited, while the latter which are really the Powers of the Supreme Spirit are infinite and can manifest through the center of consciousness of a self-realized individual because there is fusion of the individual consciousness with the Supreme Consciousness and the channel between the two is open.”

God and gods

We are gods within God, finite spirits within the Infinite Spirit. But what is spirit? Yoga tells us that spirit is *consciousness*. We are eternal consciousnesses, each of us individual and distinct. Yet we are more. Each of us takes our being from God as the wave takes its existence from the ocean.

God is the eternal Root, the Ground, of our being, our greater Self. We are not God, but in some ineffable manner God is us—the Self of our self, the Spirit of our spirit. God is all, and we are the parts—each of us possessing an eternal and irrevocable distinction. That is why Krishna told Arjuna: “There was never a time when *I* did not exist, nor *you*,

nor any of *these* kings. Nor is there any future in which *we* shall cease to be.”

“Both the individual self and the Universal Self have entered the cave of the heart, the abode of the Most High, but the knowers of Brahman see a difference between them as between sunshine and shadow” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:1).

God and creation

God, the infinite Spirit, is pure consciousness, but has extended or emanated Himself as the cosmos: physical, astral, and causal. “This universe, before it was created, existed as Brahman. ‘I am Brahman;’ thus did Brahman know himself. Knowing himself, he became the Self of all beings” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1:4:10). This seemingly dual nature of God as Light and Power, as Consciousness and Matter, has puzzled the minds of even the wise.

God, the Original Being, projects Himself as the ever-changing dance of creation, as the evolving light that is the cosmos. God projects the creation, evolves it, and withdraws it back into Himself in a perpetual cycle. The creation can be thought of as God’s body—that God becomes incarnate in creation again and again. And as parts or reflections of God we do exactly the same through reincarnation.

There is a law that governs the place and kind of our embodiment. That law is karma, the principle of exact and inevitable reaction to our own actions and mental states, resulting in a seemingly endless domino effect of continual birth and death. Yoga offers us the possibility of ending this chain of embodiments by awakening-transformation from time and mortality into eternity and immortality.

And us...

All conscious beings have existed eternally within the Being of God, one with Him, distinct though not separate from Him. Rooted in the infinity of God, they have within themselves an innate impulse to transcend their finitude and attain the boundlessness of their Origin. This is impossible, since they are as immutable as God—the only infinite Being. They can become godlike, but they cannot become God. Yet the urge for transcendence is part of their nature.

The solution to this dilemma is simple. The individual consciousnesses cannot alter their natural state of finitude, but they can come to share and participate in the infinite Consciousness of God. Even though they cannot become infinite themselves, they can experience the infinity of their divine Source, just as a psychically sensitive person can experience the thoughts and feelings of others without becoming them. In the same way, spirits can evolve to experience the Consciousness of God while remaining in their naturally limited state. They do not become God the Absolute, but they enter into that Absolute Life and are one with it.

As Shankara explains in his Yoga Sutra commentary: “When the light of several lamps appears simultaneously, it cannot be made out which is the light of which.” Consequently liberated spirits experience the infinite Being of God—infinite Consciousness—as their own being. Krishna has described it this way: “When you have reached enlightenment, ignorance will delude you no longer. In the light of that knowledge you will see the entire creation within your own atman *and* in me” (Bhagavad Gita 4:35).

When the spirits are unshakably established in that Consciousness the goal has been attained. All they need do is develop the capacity for such a state of awareness. This is done by learning to fully experience the state of existence of a being completely different from themselves—while retaining the awareness of their true identity. They can put on the “costume” of a consciousness utterly different from theirs, and not just

experience that other mode of consciousness, but become able to function as that other kind of being.

Evolutionary creation

To enable the spirits to enter into this process, God breathes forth His own Self as the Power from which is manifested all the realms of relative existence, from the most subtle worlds of nearly-perfected beings to the most objective worlds of atomic matter. They can then enter into relative existence by taking on coverings, or “bodies,” of varying grades and patterns of vibratory energies. They descend into this material world and begin working their way up the ladder of ever-evolving forms. Beginning with forms whose scope of consciousness is vastly less than theirs, they work their way upward, entering into higher and higher levels of awareness until they can surpass their original breadth of consciousness and begin to partake of a life of awareness much beyond their own. This then culminates in their developing the ability to share in the Divine Consciousness Itself.

In the intervals between embodiments the spirit spends time in the astral regions where awakening and growth also take place. (This is best explained in the forty-third chapter of *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda.) Upward and upward they evolve until their capacity for awareness is developed to such a perfect state that they can experience and participate in God’s all-embracing Consciousness, thenceforth to live in His infinity.

As Shakespeare wrote, “all the world’s a stage” with the individual spirits wearing their costumes and playing their parts. Just as actors begin with small parts and progress to bigger roles by demonstrating their skill in those smaller parts, so also do the spirits advance to higher and more complex forms of existence and consciousness, at last returning home to God. The Sufi poet, Rumi, wrote:

A stone I died and rose again a plant.
A plant I died and rose an animal;
I died an animal and was born a man.
Why should I fear? What have I lost by death?
As man, death sweeps me from this world of men
That I may wear an angel’s wings in heaven;
Yet e’en as angel may I not abide,
For nought abideth save the face of God.
Thus o’er the angels’ world I wing my way
Onwards and upwards, unto boundless lights;
Then let me be as nought, for in my heart
Rings as a harp-song that we must return to Him.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, one of many great Americans whose belief in reincarnation is overlooked, wrote in his poem, *The Chambered Nautilus*:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting sea!

That is the purpose of creation and our place in it.

God is the guru of all

Gorakhnath, the greatest of all yogis, asked his teacher, Matsyendranath, the first yogi in this creation cycle: “Who is the Primal Guru [Adiguru]?” And Matsyendranath answered: “The Eternal Beginningless One [Anadi] is the Primal Guru” (Gorakh Bodha 21, 22). He continued: “Realization of that Guru gives us immortality” (Gorakh Bodha 24).

Since God is eternal, it is from Him that all knowledge has come—especially the revelation of spiritual truth. As Vyasa observes: “His purpose is to give grace to living beings, by teaching knowledge and dharma [righteousness].” “There is no other but God to give the teaching which is a boat by which they can cross over the sea of samsara, and He teaches knowledge and dharma to those who take sole refuge in Him. ...For all the kinds of knowledge arise from Him, as sparks of fire from a blaze or drops of water from the sea,” says Shankara. Therefore Patanjali concludes: “Being unconditioned by time He is Guru even of the Ancients” (Yoga Sutras 1:26).

Dwelling in the hearts of all, God continues to be the guru of questing souls. This does not mean that qualified spiritual teachers are not helpful to us, but ultimately the yogi must be guided by the Divine from within his own consciousness. So the God-illuminated mind also becomes our guru. “The mind is itself guru and disciple: it smiles on itself, and is the cause of its own well-being or ruin,” wrote the great poet-saint Tukaram (*Tukaram’s Teachings*, by S. R. Sharma, p. 19). “The mind will eventually turn into your guru,” said Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna. (*The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. 340). Swami Brahmananda, the “spiritual son” of Sri Ramakrishna, in speaking about the role of an external guru said: “Know this! There is no greater guru than your own mind. When the mind has been purified by prayer and contemplation it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties, this inner guru will guide you and will continue to help you until the goal is reached” (*The Eternal Companion*, p. 120).

Therefore Tukaram wrote in one of his hymns: “The guru-disciple relationship is a sign of immaturity” (*Tukaram’s Teachings*, p. 20). The fact that Shankara writes in the *Nirvanastakam*: “I am neither guru nor disciple [*gururnaiwa shishya*],” shows that in realization of the Self the limiting guru-disciple relationship is left behind and dissolves away. (There is, however, a non-limiting guru-disciple relationship, such as is seen in the relationship of Yogananda with Sri Yuktswar—especially after Yogananda’s return to India in 1935. This grows out of the earlier guru-disciple interaction if the guru is a perfectly liberated being and the disciple is positively moving toward liberation himself.)

Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahashaya wrote to a student regarding the guru: “No one does anything; all is done by God. The individual [that seems to be the guru] is only an excuse; remain abidingly focused on that Divine Guru; in this is blessing.” And to another: “Guru is the one who is all; Guru is the one who is merciful. You are the Guru within yourself” (*Garland of Letters (Patravali)*, Letters 12 and 45). In *Purana Purusha* by Dr. Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee it is recorded that Yogiraj made these two statements: “I am not a guru. I do not hold the distinction of ‘guru’ and ‘disciple.’” “The Self is the Guru...the immortal, imperishable Guru.”

When Paramhansa Yogananda, who first made Lahiri Mahashaya known in the West through his autobiography, was questioned “about his own role in the religious evolution of this planet,” the great yogi replied: “The one Ocean has become all its

waves. You should look to the Ocean, not to the little waves protruding on its bosom” (Swami Kriyananda. *The Path*, p. 493). Another time he objected strongly to the suggestion that only his writings should be read in the public services of Self-Realization Fellowship, saying: “I came to make you God-conscious, not Yogananda-conscious.” At other times he said: “There is no such thing as ‘Yogananda-realization,’ only God-realization.” To someone who asked about a “disciple,” Yogananda replied firmly: “I never speak of people as my disciples. God is the Guru: They are His disciples” (*The Path*, p. 327). Peggy Dietz, one of the Master’s secretaries, has written in her booklet, *Thank You Master*, on page 21, that Yogananda said: “Please remember that although I am touched by your love, God is the real guru. Worship Him.”

If an aspirant neither has nor desires an external guru he can still succeed in spiritual life. That this is so is proven by the fact that the twentieth-century Masters Shirdi Sai Baba, Neem Karoli Baba, Paramhansa Nityananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, Swami Rama of Hardwar (Ram Kunj), Om Baba of Delhi, Swami Ramdas of Anandashram, and Ramana Maharshi attained enlightenment without the agency of an external guru. Ramana Maharshi particularly emphasized that God is the guru of all, saying: “Only the Supreme Self, which is ever shining in your heart as the reality, is the Sadguru [True Guru]” (*The Power of the Presence*, p. 116).

The supreme example of someone who attained enlightenment without a guru is Buddha, who is referred to in Buddhist texts as “Self-Awakened.” All spiritual life is self-initiated from within; we are both guru and disciple as Krishna and Arjuna symbolize in the Bhagavad Gita.

Paramhansa Nityananda said: “He [God] is the One guru, the guru Who is in all, the guru of the universe. No [human] person can be your guru, a person can only be secondary. The real guru is Guru of the Universe” (*Chidakasha Gita* 105). To emphasize this, Nityananda never gave initiation or became a “guru” in any manner or sense, though he was inspirer, guide, and advisor to many.

Neem Karoli Baba was wont to say, “I make devotees [of God], not disciples” (*Divine Reality*, by Ravi Prakash Pande, p. ii).

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh used to say: “I abhor gurudom”—the debasing of the student-teacher interaction to a personality cult.

A leading spiritual figure of the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Premeshananda, a disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, once wrote: “We have presently become inundated by this ‘guru doctrine.’ The purpose of the guru is to lead us to the realization of God; but God has been left behind, and the guru has become the latest fashion. So it is not safe to talk about a particular person. If one places a powerful personality before others, they will hold on to him instead of to God.”

Swami Yatiswarananda, Vice-president of the Ramakrishna Mission, wrote to one of his students: “We really are not gurus. We bring the message of the Guru of gurus. What all service you can get from me you will. But please turn to Him for light and guidance, for peace and blessedness. As you yourself are finding, human beings are not good enough. The Lord, the Guru of gurus, alone can give us the shelter, the illumination and the bliss we need.” That sums it up very well. The aspiring yogi can then feel safe and assured that God will be his guru, just as He has been for all the enlightened throughout the ages.

In conclusion let us look at the words of Sri Ramakrishna himself on the subject as found in the Majumdar translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: “Satchidananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss] alone is the guru; He alone will teach” (1.2.8; also: 4.2.1, 5.1.2, 5.5.1). “If somebody addresses me as a guru I say, ‘Away you rascal!’ How can I be a guru? There is no other guru except Satchidananda. There is no other refuge

but Him. He alone is the ferryman who takes one across the ocean of relative existence” (1.12.8). “A man cannot be a guru” (2.19.6). “He who says of himself that he is a guru is a person of poor understanding” (3.17.4). “The more you will advance, the more you will see that it is He who has become everything and it is He who is doing everything. He alone is the guru and He alone is the spiritual ideal of your choice. He alone is giving jnana, bhakti and everything” (4.26.2). “Do you pray to Satchidananda Guru every morning? Do you?” (4.9.2).

In the Nikhilananda translation, on October 22, 1885, when someone refers to someone as Sri Ramakrishna’s disciple, he says: “There is not a fellow under the sun who is my disciple. On the contrary, I am everybody’s disciple. All are the children of God. All are His servants. I too am a child of God. I too am His servant. ‘Uncle Moon’ is every child’s uncle!”

The great fourteenth-century yogini, Lalla Yogeshwari, sang about finding her inner guru, her Self:

With passionate longing did I, Lalla, go forth.
Seeking and searching did I pass the day and night.
Then, lo, saw I in mine own house a learned man [pandit],
And that was my lucky star and my lucky moment
when I laid hold of him. (*Lalla Vakyani* 3)

Another teacher

According to Vyasa there is another teacher: our yoga practice itself. He says: “It is yoga that is the teacher. How so? It has been said: ‘Yoga is to be known by yoga. Yoga goes forward from yoga alone. He who is not careless [neglectful] in his yoga for a long time, rejoices in the yoga.’”

Shankara, commenting on these words of Vyasa, discusses the reaction that the awakening person has upon learning about the possibility of liberation from his present state of bondage: “Meditation on his own being, which is the cause that should lead to liberation, begins of itself, caused by karma of a previous life or else by steadfastness in renunciation in this present one. And it goes on of itself, without instruction from a teacher.”

The experience gained from yoga practice itself teaches us the reality and value of yoga. But even more, it opens our intuition and enables us to comprehend the inner workings of the subtle levels of our being and its mastery. Yoga truly becomes our teacher, revealing to us that which is far beyond the wisdom of books and verbal instructions. Moreover, it is practice of yoga that enables us to understand the basis and rationale of its methods and their application. The why and wherefore of yoga become known to us by direct insight.

In his commentary on Yoga Sutra 2:28 Vyasa says: “From practicing yoga, illusion [ignorance] is destroyed and perishes. When it is destroyed, there is manifestation of right vision. In proportion to the practice done, illusion is dispelled. In proportion to its destruction, the light of [spiritual] knowledge increases correspondingly. This increase is an experience of increasing refinement up to the realization of the true nature of the purusha [spirit].”

The Yoga Vashishtha says it clearly and truly: “God Consciousness is not achieved by means of the scriptures, nor is it achieved by the grace of your Master. God Consciousness is only achieved by your own subtle awareness.”

When Gorakhnath asked: “Who is the Guru that leads to the Goal?” Matsyendranath told him: “Nirvana itself is the Guru that leads to the Goal.” That is,

the liberated condition of the Self, though presently buried beneath the debris of lifetimes of ignorance, is itself the inspirer and guide to the revelation of our eternal liberation.

The religion of Yoga

It is commonly said that Yoga is not a religion. But since religion is derived from the Latin word *religere*, which means “to bind back,” and yoga means “joining,” practically speaking yoga is the only religion. The many systems of dogmas and doctrines are by their very nature not really religions at all, and in most instances are systems of superstition—either by the nature of their ideas or practices or by the attitudes of their adherents toward their beliefs and disciplines. Only when Yoga and Self-realization are the matrix around which a philosophy has been formulated for their furtherance is it worthy of our consideration. Other philosophies only produce confusion and distraction from the Goal.

It is yoga alone which reunites the consciousness of the individual to its infinite Source, restoring the lost unity. Earlier I quoted a paragraph from I. K. Taimni’s book *The Science of Yoga* about the purpose of yoga, but omitting his preceding words regarding the relation of yoga to religion—or rather, their difference. Here they are now, for I think you will find them relevant:

“The Orthodox religious ideal which requires people to be good and moral so that they may have a happy life here and hereafter is really a concession to human weakness and the desire to prefer the so-called happiness in life to enlightenment.

“In this respect the philosophy of yoga differs fundamentally from most of the orthodox religions of the world which offer nothing better than an uncertain and nebulous happiness in the life after death. They say in effect ‘Lead a good life to ensure happiness after death, put your faith in God and hope for the best.’ According to yogic philosophy death no more solves your spiritual problem than night solves your economic problem. If you are poor you do not expect on going to bed that your economic problem will be automatically solved next day. You will have to get up the next day and begin where you left off the previous night. If you are poor economically you do not expect to get rich overnight and if you are poor spiritually, bound by illusions and limitations of all kinds, you cannot expect to become enlightened [by simply being reborn] or, if you do not believe in reincarnation, in the vague and unending life which is supposed to follow death.”

Yoga is the way we answer for ourselves the prayer:

Lead me from the unreal to the Real.
Lead me from darkness to the Light.
Lead me from death to Immortality.

Chapter Two: The Implications of All This

In the previous chapter it was said, “To enable the spirits to enter into this process, God breathes forth His own Self as the Power from which is manifested all the realms of relative existence, from the most subtle worlds of nearly-perfected beings to the most objective worlds of atomic matter. They can then enter into relative existence by taking on coverings, or ‘bodies,’ of varying grades and patterns of vibratory energies. They descend into this material world and begin working their way up the ladder of ever-evolving forms. Beginning with forms whose scope of consciousness is vastly less than theirs, they work their way upward, entering into higher and higher levels of awareness until they can surpass their original breadth of consciousness and begin to partake of a life of awareness much beyond their own. This then culminates in their developing the ability to share in the Divine Consciousness Itself.”

How is all this done?

The Conscious Universe

First we have to realize that the ancient yogi-sages of India directly experienced the truth that the entire universe is a manifestation of Divine Consciousness—of God. All “creation” is really Spirit, not matter at all. More to the point, it is the infinitely complex and perfect Thought of God. Just as we create worlds and live in them when we dream or daydream, in the same way the Cosmic Dreamer is “dreaming” the Cosmic Dream of this evolutionary creation. Therefore it all has a meaning and a purpose, and is always absolutely perfect and consistent with itself. We must keep this in mind at all times, but especially when considering our own life within the Dream.

As yogis aspiring to return to the Infinite Being through the self-evolution produced by our yoga practice, we must understand every step of the way—and this requires a comprehension of the specific laws governing our presence within creation and our way out of relativity back into the Absolute.

The beginning—and the end

When the individual spirit-self, the atma, moves in its consciousness from the Absolute to the relative, the first step is an outward-turning of awareness and a production of the seed of dual consciousness that is necessary for its entry into—and out of—the relative state that is fundamentally dual. This is done through the slightest and subtlest of movements that produces a kind of stress-point in our awareness. This is the moment of entry into relativity. Actually, the movement *is* the stress-point. Further, it is the root or seed that is the beginning of all things, the Holy Breath (Holy Spirit), the Holy Light, from which all things proceed and into which all things are ultimately resolved. As a divine seed it contains all that ever shall “be” for that individual spirit. Its unfoldment and manifestation is the history or destiny that it shall experience throughout its time within relative existence.

This initial impulse is dual in nature. First, it is the force that impels the individual onto the path that leads into involution—into experience and identity with increasingly complex forms of manifestation; and it is also the impulse that moves the spirit onto the path of evolution—of growth out of relativity. Second, it is the beginning of duality: a vast chain of constant cycling between two poles—negative and positive—that makes relative existence possible, both as evolving consciousness and evolving organism. First the spirit travels along the path of involution until it reaches the experience of

self-awareness and self-reflection (or analysis) within a human body sufficiently developed to permit—and even perhaps produce—that awareness. Then it begins the path of evolution back to Infinity. Of course, the two paths are really one—it is only a matter of the direction being taken. The point where involution becomes evolution is a kind of watershed or continental divide. All this is a direct production of the Original Impulse which takes place both macrocosmically and microcosmically. This has a profound yogic significance.

How it was intended to be

Originally the evolution of the universe and the conscious beings within it was meant to go smoothly and directly. None would forget their eternal origins and lose awareness of their true Self or identify in any degree with the forms and situations in which they would be evolving within the cosmos. Further, they would only spend a single embodiment in each life-form, expanding their consciousness to the full potential of that form. As soon as this was done, the spirit would consciously, effortlessly, and without pain or conflict, leave that body and just as easily enter into a more complex form that would serve as the next rung on the ladder of evolution. Finally the highest form would be perfected and left behind as the individual merged back into the Absolute, having developed the capacity to share in the Infinite Life, to be a “god” within God. There would never at any time be death in any mode, only a joyful transition from one step to another in the ladder of Return. The evolving consciousness would always be in a perfect state of Satchidananda—the Conscious Bliss of Reality—with no diminution or loss being possible.

How it has come to be

Things did not go as planned—at least not in this creation cycle. Exactly what took place to interrupt the original intent? Paramhansa Yogananda said that one of the seven great creators known as Prajapatis was flawed in some way and attempted to wrest that part of creation which was under his supervision away from the divine plan and rework it to his own flawed ideas, the prime one being the intention to prevent the spirits from evolving beyond his domain. This Prajapati was in charge of the material plane evolution, but somehow managed to also damage the two realms just above him and subject the spirits in those realms to return or falling back into his world for rebirth. The account of “the devil” rebelling and causing the “fall” of angels and archangels is a garbled version of the actual facts. (I have greatly simplified Yogananda’s explanation. For the complete explanation, see the Seventh Discourse of *The Second Coming of Christ*.)

Whether we accept any of the explanations formulated over the centuries or not (the ancient Gnostics had many of them), there is no denying that the following conditions prevail: entities are born over and over again without any realization of the why or wherefore; entities suffer throughout embodiment on the material plane; decay and death are inherent in material existence; complete confusion and delusion rules the consciousness of all sentient beings; all beings—including humans—engage in negative thought and action that blind and bind them more and more. All are helpless against the forces of Mayic delusion.

On the practical level, how did all this confusion come about? The negative force which flawed the universe also flawed the personal world of each individual consciousness, warping and distorting their lower physical and subtle levels to retard or altogether stop their evolution. All kinds of alien and poisonous vibrations began to be produced, rendering them out of touch with the higher bodies, and consequently

out of touch with Spirit. Those false and negative vibrations coarsened the bodies—including the mental bodies—so they no longer responded to the upward pull of evolution. Thus evolution was impeded, being slowed, stopped, and even in some instances reversed. Negative and destructive paths of development became opened, and humanity began pouring into them, “descending to hell” and becoming trapped therein, whether in or out of physical embodiment.

Discovering Yoga

As a result of the foregoing, the time spent on the path of evolution became greatly increased, seemingly impossible to end. Through the development of intuition, which includes memories of previous lives, this fact becomes intensely and painfully evident to us.

Yearning for the means to minimize or altogether eliminate those delays and reversals, the ancient yogis discovered the way to link up with their spirit-will so they could move forward without hindrance. They did this by uniting their outer and inner consciousness and will through bringing the alienated bodies back into alignment with the evolutionary vibrations emanating from the Source, putting themselves back in touch with the cosmos as well as their Self and God. This process has been handed down even until today, though often obscured and nearly lost, in the form of Yoga.

The “religion” of yoga is the way to restore the original evolutionary pattern on the individual level, enabling the yogis go from darkness to the Light of God which fills the horizon of their consciousness completely in the realization-experience that is the ever increasing awareness of God as the prime reality and our individual spirit as secondary, existing only because God exists, drawing on the Infinite Life for our finite life. Our awakening consciousness and our practice of yoga together impel us ever onward and upward. Since God is our own inmost reality we will become increasingly ourselves until we become gods within God, able to say: “I and the Father are one”—and even: “Whoever sees me sees the Father” (John 10:30; 14:9). That is the glory of yoga.

God is guru

Not only was God the first guru, He is still the guru of humanity. For as already said, He has implanted in each one of us the impulse to reunion with Him. Consequently, in the depths of our being, our spirit, the Divine Call is continually flowing or rising. Together we, the universe, and God are vibrating are seeking reunion without interruption. In this way the heart-core of God and the individual spirit are made the same in non-dual unity, the single point where the spirit and the Spirit are absolutely one.

God is eternally stimulating or “teaching” the spirit to seek Him through yoga. In this way God is the guru of each one of us. One finite spirit may reveal to another finite spirit the way to realize its oneness with God, and thereby momentarily become a spiritual teacher for that spirit, but God alone will be the Sat—true and eternal—Guru, the ultimate guru, the infallible teacher and guide from within. “He is guru even of the ancients” (Yoga Sutras 1:26), affirmed Patanjali.

Discipleship

The first American disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda was Dr. M. W. Lewis, who perfectly assimilated the wisdom imparted to him by Yogananda. In a talk given in San Diego, California, in 1955, he said these inspiring words:

“To me the real meaning and understanding of discipleship is that a disciple, a true disciple, is ‘one who follows God.’ Many times the Master said that. In spite of his

realization and his oneness with God, which he had and does have now, he said when leaving Boston, 'Never mind what happens to me. That Light which you see is far greater than I am. That is God Himself.' And so, there is only one Guru, and that is God, and the greater the saint, if we can classify them that way, the surer they are to say, 'I am nothing, God is all.' And so, the Master said that. God alone is reality. He is with you. He is the One Great Guru. And the Master was most humble, because the more you realize there is One Reality, God Himself, the more humble you become, because the ego cannot stay. If you have realization of God, the ego has left.

"And so, realize: who may become a disciple? Anyone; anyone who knows the Presence of God, and follows God. Master often said that someone said to him in India, 'I hear so-and-so is your disciple in America.' He said, 'They say so.' And seeing the confusion on the face of the inquirer, he said, 'I haven't any disciple. They're all disciples of God.' How wonderful that is. And so, just realize, he who knows God may be called a disciple. Now that means you must have contact with God. There must be a relationship between you and God, an understanding, a realization that God is in you, you are in God, there is one consciousness—God alone. Now if you have that, you may be called a disciple." (Dr. Lewis himself was the "disciple" spoken of in India.)

Initiation?

It is commonly believed that an aspiring yogi must be empowered for yoga practice through some kind of initiation or transference of power. There are many exaggerated statements made about how it is impossible to make any progress, much less attain enlightenment, without initiation. But the truth is that Brahman has already initiated us into the evolutionary path at our entry into relativity, and the yoga rishis have revealed the way we return to that path and establish ourselves in it. Yoga is the demonstration of the eternal, single nature of God and man.

Sanatana Dharma, Sanatana Yoga

When you get into an auto, turn on the ignition, press the accelerator, and guide the forward-moving vehicle by means of the steering-wheel, you are acting on a number of premises. The same is true of yoga. Yoga is not just a mechanical practice; it presupposes the vast body of metaphysical principles known as Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Dharma, that is the basis of all true religions. Intelligent practice of yoga is not possible without knowing and adhering to those principles.

The system of practical methodology we call yoga was originated and perfected in India by great sages, every one of which was an adherent of the Eternal Dharma which in turn was incalculably enriched by the subsequent teaching of the master yogis who were enlightened through the yoga system. Both yoga and the philosophy on which it is based—or rather, which stimulated the discovery and development of yoga—are truth in the purest form, exactly like mathematics. Therefore it is not amiss to speak of Sanatana Dharma and Sanatana Yoga—Eternal Dharma (Philosophy) and Eternal Yoga.

Sanatana Dharma is the presentation of the principles of existence itself—of the ultimate Facts of Life and nothing more, cultural or religious. Euclid was Greek, but Euclidian Geometry has no tint of Greek culture, philosophy, or religion. In the same way Sanatana Dharma should never be equated with what is known as modern "Hinduism," the religion that is rooted in Sanatana Dharma but has developed into an elaborate system of beliefs and practices that are purely cultural and subjective—so much so that it can be said to conceal Sanatana Dharma more than reveal it. People can spend an entire lifetime as "Hindus" and never know Sanatana Dharma except in the most obscure and ineffectual manner.

What, then is Sanatana Dharma? Shankara put it this way: “I shall tell you in half a sloka what has been written in millions of books: Brahman is real. The world is illusory. The jiva is nothing other than Brahman.” Obviously these root facts imply a world of principles which a human being needs to know in order to realize the potential that is a living seed within every sentient being. Yoga—philosophy and practice—is that world. Sanatana Dharma and Sanatana Yoga are really the same thing. That which goes outside them is an obscuration not a clarification, a hindrance rather than a help.

Yoga and Dharma are realities, not speculations or conclusions. They are discoveries of universal, unalterable, principles that are verifiable by each individual. Through the ages each yogi has found for himself that they are true. They are not revelations given by an arbitrary deity or a representative of such a deity. They require no faith or bowing of the head to any authority. They are verifiable facts, requiring nothing more than correct practice coupled with intelligent perception. No matter how many yogis there may be, Yoga and Dharma are always purely individual—in fact nothing can spoil Yoga and Dharma more than “groupism” or “movements.” The yogi is always an individual, always a whole, never a part. And so is a Sanatana Dharmi-Yogi.

Dharma and Yoga are the supreme sciences, independent of all else. It is essential that our philosophy and practice be purely an expression of eternal verities. Authentic Dharma and Yoga have nothing to do with “East” or “West” and should have no connotation of them. Again, they are like Euclidian Geometry. The seers that discovered them were from what we call “the East,” but they are universal and neither Eastern nor Western.

Chapter Three: The Foundations of Yoga

Toward the end of his comments on the Yoga Sutras, Shankara makes a valuable remark: “There can be no lamplight unless the oil, wick and a flame are brought together.” The idea is that the successful practice of yoga is not a haphazard or capricious matter. All the elements must be brought together. When united and complete, success is the result.

Since the classical Indian texts on Yoga are the basis of this chapter, the word “yoga” is used throughout. But it should be realized that the word “meditation” is equally applicable, for in ancient India yoga and meditation were synonymous.

Prerequisites for yoga

“Yoga is for the purpose of knowledge of truth,” says Shankara. Knowledge (jnana) does not come about from practice of yoga methods alone. Perfection in knowledge is in fact only for those who practice virtue (dharma) as well as yoga.

All things rest upon something else—that is, all things are supported by another. This is because a foundation is needed for anything to exist. Being Himself the Ultimate Support of all things, God alone is free from this necessity. Yoga, then, also requires support. As Trevor Leggett says in his introduction to Shankara’s commentary on the Yoga Sutras: “This is yoga presented for the man of the world, who must first clear, and then steady, his mind against the fury of illusory passions, and free his life from entanglements.” Patanjali very carefully and fully outlines the elements of the support needed by the aspirant, giving invaluable information on how to guarantee success in yoga.

The first Yoga Sutra says: “*Now* the exposition of yoga,” implying that there must be something leading up to yoga in the form of necessary developments of consciousness and personality. These prerequisites are known as Yama and Niyama. Both Shankara and Vyasa in their comments on the Yoga Sutras say very forcefully that the mere mechanical practice of yoga will not produce enlightenment—that the aspirant must practice dharma in all its aspects, particularly yama and niyama. Commenting on Yoga Sutra 2:29, Shankara says quite forcefully: “Following yama and niyama is the basic qualification to practice yoga. The qualification is not simply that one wants to do yoga, for the holy text says: ‘But he who has not first turned away from his wickedness, who is not tranquil and subdued, or whose mind is not at rest, he can never obtain the Self [even] by knowledge’ (Katha Upanishad 1.2.24).

Yama and Niyama

Yama and Niyama are often called the Ten Commandments of Yoga, but they have nothing to do with the ideas of sin and virtue or good and evil as dictated by some cosmic potentate. Rather they are determined by a thoroughly practical, pragmatic basis: that which strengthens and facilitates our yoga practice should be observed and that which weakens or hinders it should be avoided. It is not a matter of being good or bad, but of being wise or foolish. Each one of these Five Don’ts (Yama) and Five Do’s (Niyama) is a supporting, liberating foundation of Yoga.

Yama means self-restraint in the sense of self-mastery, or abstention, and consists of five elements. Niyama means observances, of which there are also five. Here is the complete list of these ten Pillars as given in Yoga Sutras 2:30,32:

- 1) Ahimsa: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness
- 2) Satya: truthfulness, honesty
- 3) Asteya: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriateness
- 4) Brahmacharya: sexual continence in thought, word and deed as well as control of all the senses
- 5) Aparigraha: non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness
- 6) Shaucha: purity, cleanliness
- 7) Santosha: contentment, peacefulness
- 8) Tapas: austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline
- 9) Swadhyaya: introspective self-study, spiritual study
- 10) Ishwarapranidhana: offering of one's life to God

All of these deal with the innate powers of the human being—or rather with the abstinence and observance that will develop and release those powers to be used toward our spiritual perfection, to our Self-realization and liberation. Shankara says quite forcefully that “following yama and niyama is the basic qualification to practice yoga. The qualification is not simply that one wants to practice yoga. So yama and niyama are methods of yoga” in themselves and are not mere adjuncts or aids that can be optional.

But at the same time, the practice of yoga helps the aspiring yogi to follow the necessary ways of yama and niyama, so he should not be discouraged from taking up yoga right now. He should determinedly embark on yama, niyama, and yoga simultaneously. Success will be his.

Ahimsa: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness

In his commentary on the Yoga Sutras, Vyasa begins his exposition of ahimsa: “Ahimsa means in no way and at no time to do injury to any living being.” “In no capacity and in no fashion to give injury to any being,” says Shankara. This would include injury by word or thought as well as the obvious injury perpetrated by deed, for Shankara comments: “Ahimsa is to be practiced in every capacity—body, speech, and mind.”

Even a simple understanding of the law of karma enables us to realize the terrible consequences of murder for the murderer. As Vyasa explains: “The killer deprives the victim of spirit, hurts him with a blow of a weapon, and then tears him away from life. Because he has deprived another of spirit, the supports of his own life, animate or inanimate, become weakened. Because he has caused pain, he experiences pain himself.... Because he has torn another from life, he goes to live in a life in which every moment he wishes to die, because the retribution as pain has to work itself right out, while he is panting for death.”

Ahimsa is not willfully causing any harm or pain whatsoever to any being whatsoever, in any degree whatsoever. Ahimsa includes strict abstinence from any form of injury in act, speech, or thought. Violence, verbal or physical, causing mental injury or pain, and angry or malicious damage or misuse of physical objects are all violations of ahimsa, unthinkable for the yogi.

Vyasa immediately points out that all the other abstinences and observances—yama and niyama—are really rooted in ahimsa, for they involve preventing harm to ourselves and to others through negative action or the neglect of positive action: “The other niyamas and yamas are rooted in this, and they are practiced only to bring this to its culmination, only for perfecting this. They are taught only as means to bring this out in its purity. For so it is said: ‘Whatever many vows the man of Brahman [God] would

undertake, only in so far as he thereby refrains from doing harm impelled by delusion, does he bring out ahimsa in its purity.” And Shankara explains that Vyasa is referring to delusion that is “rooted in violence and causing violence.”

In his autobiography Paramhansa Yogananda relates that his guru, Swami Yukteswar Giri, said that ahimsa is absence of the *desire* to injure. In the highest sense ahimsa is a state of mind from which non-injury will naturally proceed. “Ahimsa really denotes an attitude and mode of behavior towards all living creatures based on the recognition of the underlying unity of life,” the modern commentator Taimni declares. Shankara remarks that when ahimsa and the others are observed “the cause of one’s doing harm becomes inoperative.” The ego itself becomes “harmless” by being put into a state of non-function. And meditation dissolves it utterly. But until that interior state is established, we must work backwards from outward to inner, and abstain from all forms of injury.

The aspiring yogi must clearly realize that the observance of ahimsa must include strict abstinence from the eating of animal flesh in any form or degree as well as the use of anything obtained by or derived from the slaughter of animals.

He must do nothing in thought, word, or deed that harms his body, mind, or spirit. On the other hand, he must do whatever benefits the body, mind, and spirit, for their omission is also a form of self-injury, as is the non-observance of any of the yama or niyamas.

It is no simple thing to be a yogi.

Satya: truthfulness, honesty

“Satya is said to be speech and thought in conformity with what has been seen or inferred or heard on authority. The speech spoken to convey one’s own experience to others should be not deceitful, nor inaccurate, nor uninformative. It is that uttered for helping all beings. But that uttered to the harm of beings, even if it is what is called truth, when the ultimate aim is merely to injure beings, would not be truth. It would be a wrong.” So says Vyasa.

Shankara says that truthfulness means saying what we have truly come to know is the truth—mostly through our own experience or through contact with sources whose reliability we have experienced for ourselves. “Untruthfulness in any form puts us out of harmony with the fundamental law of Truth and creates a kind of mental and emotional strain which prevents us from harmonizing and tranquilizing our mind. Truthfulness has to be practiced by the sadhaka because it is absolutely necessary for the unfoldment of intuition. There is nothing which clouds the intuition and practically stops its functioning as much as untruthfulness in all its forms,” says Taimni regarding the most personal and practical aspect of satya.

Bending the truth, either in leaving out part of the truth or in “stacking the deck” to create a false impression, cannot be engaged in by the yogi. Regarding numbers it is said that “figures do not lie—but liars figure.” The same is true here. Equally heinous is the intentional mixing of lies and truth. (Some liars tell a lot of truth.) This is particularly true in the manipulative endeavors of advertising, politics, and religion.

Refusing to speak the truth, as well as avoiding speaking or facing the truth, is a form of untruth.

There are many non-verbal forms of lying as well, and some people’s entire life is a lie. Therefore we must make sure that our actions reflect the truth. How many people claim to believe in God and spiritual principles, but do not live accordingly? How many people continually swear and express loyalty and yet are betrayers? We must not only speak the truth, we must *live* it.

Honesty in all our speaking and dealings with others is an essential part of truthfulness. It is absolutely crucial that the yogi make his livelihood only by honest and truthful means. Selling useless or silly things, convincing people that they need them (or even selling them without convincing them), is a serious breach of truthfulness.

Trying to compromise the truth, even a little, making the excuse that “everybody does it” is not legitimate. For “everybody” is bound to the wheel of birth and death *because* they do it—and that is not what we wish for ourselves. We can lie to ourselves, to others, and even to God; but we cannot lie to the cosmos. Karma, the law of cause and effect, will react upon us to our own pain.

It is interesting that Vyasa considers that truthful speech is informative. By that he means that truthful speech is worthwhile, relevant, and practical. To babble mindlessly and grind out verbal trivia is also a form of untruth, even if not objectively false. Nor is foolish speech to anyone’s gain. Sometimes also people lie by “snowing” us with a barrage of words intended to deflect us from our inquiries. And nearly all of us who went to college remember the old game of padding out written assignments, giving lots of form but little content in hope of fooling the teachers into thinking the student knew the subject well and was saying something worthwhile—even profound. This is one of today’s most lucrative businesses, especially in the advertising world.

Speaking truth to the hurt of others is not really truth, since satya is an extension of ahimsa. For example, a person may be ugly, but to say, “You are ugly” is not a virtue. “What is based on injuring others, even though free from the three defects of speech (i.e., not deceitful, nor inaccurate, nor uninformative), does not amount to truth,” according to Shankara.

Our intention must never be to hurt in any way, but we must be aware that there are some people who hate the truth in any form and will accuse us of hurting them by our honesty. Such persons especially like to label any truth (or person) they dislike as “harsh,” “rigid,” “divisive,” “negative” “hateful,” and so on and on and on. We would have to become dishonest or liars to placate them. So “hurting” or offending them is a consequence of truthfulness that we will have to live with. The bottom line is that truth “is that uttered for helping all beings.” For non-injury is not a passive quality, but the positive character of restoration and healing.

Silence can also be a form of untruth, particularly in dealing with the aforementioned truth-haters. For truth is only harmful when “the ultimate aim is merely to injure beings.” But if some people put themselves in the way of truth, then they must take responsibility for their reactions to it.

Will Cuppy defined diplomacy as “the fine art of lying.” Sadly, it often is. So we must be sure that we do not deceive under the guise of diplomacy or tactfulness.

Self-deception, a favorite with nearly all of us to some degree, must be ruthlessly eliminated if we would be genuinely truthful.

“Therefore let one take care that his speech is for the welfare of all,” concludes Shankara.

Asteya: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriation

Asteya is abstinence from stealing, which Vyasa defines as: “the improper appropriation to oneself of others’ things.” He then concludes: “Refusal to do it, in *freedom from desire*, is non-stealing.”

What constitutes ordinary stealing is well known to almost all, but human beings have thought up countless ways to steal and not seem to be stealing—all the way from putting slugs in pay telephones to getting people to give us things or money which we

neither need nor deserve. Theft and untruth are certainly interrelated. So we must analyze Vyasa's definition and apply it to our situation. But we can consider a few "fudges" that have become respectable and prevalent:

Taking credit that really belongs to another.

Plagiarism, especially in academic matters.

Taking what is not ours, while pretending that we either own it or have it coming to us.

Taking what is not legitimately coming to us, even if freely given. People do this continually in relation to welfare benefits and insurance claims.

Demanding more than a just price or a just wage.

Not paying debts—including taxes.

Forcing others to give us something we want from them, whether material or metaphysical.

Not giving to others what we owe them or what we are legally or morally obligated to give. A lot of people (especially churches and religious groups) expect others to continually give them things or services which they are perfectly capable of paying for. (I am not speaking about unsolicited gifts or charity—that is virtuous.) Or they want big discounts given to them.

Once a natural health practitioner—whose financial situation was much worse than mine—told me that she was willing to charge only half her usual fee for my treatment, and would even treat me for free if I wanted. I explained to her that since I could afford the full amount it would be stealing from her for me to either accept a discount or free treatment. And I cited the Yoga Sutras in support of my contention. The law applies to *all*.

The prophet Malachi posed the question, "Will a man rob God?" (Malachi 3:8). That is extremely easy to do and extremely common. We all need to ponder that possibility seriously and see if in some way we are doing that very thing.

But all these forms of stealing are inner or outer acts, whereas Vyasa defines non-stealing as essentially a psychological state of "freedom from desire." This, then, is the goal of abstinence from stealing. What must be attained is the state of mind in which there is absolutely no desire or impulse to steal. "Stealing cannot exist in those whose desire has been cut off," says Shankara.

Brahmacharya: continence

"Brahmacharya is restraint of the sex organ and other senses," says Vyasa. From this we see that brahmacharya has a twofold nature: control and continence.

Control: Spirit has two aspects: consciousness and energy. Consciousness is constant, whereas energy is cyclic. It is the movement of energy that produces (and is) our experience of relativity, and it is the development of energy that is the process of evolution. Therefore the conservation and application of energy is the main determinant of success or failure in spiritual endeavor. Diffusion and dissipation of energy always weakens us. Hence brahmacharya is a vital element of Yoga, without which we cannot successfully pursue the greater life of Higher Consciousness.

Basically, brahmacharya is conservation and mastery of all the energy systems and powers of our being. This is especially true in relation to negative emotions, for tremendous energy is expended through lust, anger, greed, envy, hatred, resentment, depression, fear, obsession, and the rest. Further, they are both the causes and the symptoms of losing self-control, a major aspect of brahmacharya. Research has shown that persons in the grip of these emotions literally breathe out vital elements of the body. For example, the breath of angry people is found to be laden with copper. So

negative emotion depletes us physically as well as energetically. Positive emotions on the other hand actually enhance and raise our energy and physical levels. The cultivation of (true) love, compassion, generosity, cheerfulness, friendliness, and suchlike make us stronger and calmer—essential aspects of brahmacharya. It is noteworthy that the word “virtue” is derived from the Latin word *virtus*—power—which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit word *virya*, which means both power and strength.

“A place for everything and everything in its place,” is not just a maxim of orderliness. When applied to the individual’s energy systems it is the root of strength and health on all levels. Every atom of personal energy possessed by us has both a place and a purpose. To ensure correct placement, and expenditure, of energy is the essence of the yogic science. And brahmacharya is its foundation.

Continnence: Sexuality is usually considered the main focus of brahmacharya because it has such a powerful grip and influence on the human being. It is considered that if sex is mastered, all the senses will be mastered as well. There is simply no way to convince those addicted to and enslaved by sex that continence is supreme wisdom. But a few facts can be meaningful to the sincere seeker.

The life of the senses stifles the life of the spirit by carrying away the discrimination of the intellect, as Krishna says: “The mind, which follows in the wake of the wandering senses, carries away discrimination, as the wind a boat on the waters” (Bhagavad Gita 2:67). The basic life-force, the prana, is dissipated through any intense activity of the senses, thus weakening the inner being. But sexual indulgence is incalculably more destructive of consciousness than any other form of sense experience, for it expends the life-force to a degree far, far beyond that of other sense experiences. Both body and mind are depleted through sexual activity.

The Prashna Upanishad concludes: “It is in those who have tapas and brahmacharya that truth is established” (Prashna Upanishad 1:15). The Gita speaks of the worthy yogis as being “firm in their vow of brahmacharya” (Bhagavad Gita 6:14).

For practical information on brahmacharya the following books are extremely valuable: *WARNING: Sex May Be Hazardous to Your Health* by Dr. Edwin Flatto, *Science Discovers The Physiological Value of Continence and Nutritional Sex Control and Rejuvenation* by the great twentieth century Rosicrucian, Dr. Raymond Bernard, *The Practice of Brahmacharya*, by Swami Sivananda, and *The Role of Celibacy in Spiritual Life* by Swami Chidananda.

Aparigraha: non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness

Aparigraha includes the ideas of non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, and non-acquisitiveness. Vyasa’s definition is most practical: “Seeing the defects in objects involved in acquiring them, and defending them, and losing them, and being attached to them, and depriving others of them, one does not take them to himself, and that is aparigraha.” Here, as in the other foundations, the true virtue or observance is mostly internal, leading to the correct state of mind for successful yoga practice.

Basically, when a person sees all the effort expended on “things” as well as the unhappiness attendant on both keeping and losing them—what to speak of awareness of their inherent defects—he wisely backs away and frees himself from Thingolatry. Of course we all have to obtain and use many kinds of things, but we can do so objectively, not letting ourselves get stuck up in them like the tar baby of the Uncle Remus story. Being possessed by possessions is truly a great misery; and the belief that happiness comes from external things is truly a great folly.

People do literally lose themselves in “stuff,” for they adopt a completely false self-

concept. To think that we are what we “have” is to forget who and why we are. Aparigraha clears the inner eye and lets us see our true “face.”

The Great Vow

After listing ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha, Patanjali continues: “These, not conditioned by class, place, time or occasion, and extending to all stages, constitute the Great Vow” (Yoga Sutra 2:31). They are the Great Vow because they require the exercise of will and because of their dynamic effect on us. Even more, they are great because, like the elements, they are self-sufficient, depending on nothing else, and because they cannot be mutated into something else. They are always what they are, and for that reason they are always to be observed with no exceptions whatsoever. They cannot be neglected or omitted for any reason—absolutely. Patanjali lists the possible conditions which do affect lesser observances: class, place, time or occasion, and stages. A brief consideration of each will be helpful.

Class. No one can mitigate or omit the observance of ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha because of “who” he “is.” In yoga, too, no one is above the law. That is, no one can produce the effects of Yama without their observance. I knew an Archbishop with a quick sense of humor. Once he made a pungent remark about someone, and a woman objected, saying, “That remark is not Christian.” He simply smiled and replied, “Madam, I do not have to be a Christian—I am an Archbishop!” He was making a joke, but this is an attitude of many, springing from the blindness of egotism.

Place. Whatever may be the ways of a particular place or group of people in which we may find ourselves, the observances of Yama are incumbent upon us. “When in Rome do as the Romans” is one of the silliest axioms ever coined. Peer pressure must never be an influence on us. Nor should unjust rules or laws have any effect on us. What is right must always be done. The will or opinion of others cannot change our obligation to observe the Great Vow. Nor can external conditions change it. Not even to save our lives can we turn from what is forever right.

Time or occasion. Human beings have for some reason always thought that “now” abrogates what was right or true in the past. It does not. Nor does a situation effect any change in what must be done by us as aspirants to yoga. Aversion to being “out of step” or “alienated from society” has no place in the mind and heart of the yogi.

Stage. We never “get beyond” the observance of the Great Vow. Those at the very end of the spiritual journey are as obligated to fulfil the Great Vow as those who are at the beginning. Also, we cannot “go too far” or “overdo” our observance of the Vow. It is all or nothing. “Ahimsa and the others are to be maintained all the time and in all circumstances and in regard to all objects without any conscious lapse,” declares Vyasa. Shankara points out that the Great Vow must be observed by us in relation to all beings—not just confined to humans.

Once again we see the psychological nature of the five components of the Great Vow and how their observance is based upon the courage, self-respect, and self-knowledge of the yogi.

Shaucha: purity, cleanliness

Shaucha means purity and cleanliness within the context of attaining unobstructed clarity of consciousness. “This Brahman, this Self, deep-hidden in all beings, is not revealed to all; but to the seers, pure in heart, concentrated in mind—to them is he revealed” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:12). “When through discrimination the heart has become pure, then, in meditation, the self is revealed” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.8).

“When the senses are purified, the heart is purified; when the heart is purified, there is constant and unceasing remembrance of the self; when there is constant and unceasing remembrance of the self, all bonds are loosed and freedom is attained” (Chandogya Upanishad 7:26:2). Which is why Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). And Saint John: “Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (I John 3:2,3).

“Internal shaucha is the washing away of the stains of the mind,” according to Vyasa. “Shaucha implies purity in seeing and listening...and washing away the stains of the mind, such as desire and anger, by the waters of meditation,” adds Shankara.

Physical cleanliness is important for it eliminates bodily toxins and prevents disease. Inner purification is important for it eliminates mental toxins and prevents inner ills. For the yogi, the most important external aspect of shaucha is purity of diet. This is because the food we eat determines the vibration of our body and our mind. For this reason it is only wisdom to eat a purely vegetarian diet consisting of grains, vegetables, and fruits. (The best information on diet can be found in the books of Dr. Neal Barnard, particularly *Food for Life: How the New Four Food Groups Can Save Your Life*.)

Those who carefully—yes, scrupulously—adhere to a vegetarian diet, omitting all meat, fish, and eggs, and avoiding anything that contains them to any degree will perceive how valuable it is to keep such a dietary regimen. Not only will their general health improve greatly (assuming that they eat a balanced and nutritious vegetarian diet), they will see how much lighter and intuitive their minds become. A vegetarian diet greatly facilitates the practice of meditation, making very subtle states of consciousness readily attainable and perceptible. Those who have eaten meat, fish, and eggs for a long time may have to wait a while before fully gaining the benefits of vegetarianism, but it will not be long before they begin to see its beneficial effects to some degree.

Vegetarian diet is a crown jewel for the yogi since it embodies the foundations of ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha, shaucha, and tapas and produces purity and clarity of mind and heart.

There is another, far-reaching aspect to shaucha. While discussing the process of evolution, Vyasa and Shankara also speak about the way to infuse ourselves with higher consciousness. They give the simile of terraced fields on a mountainside. The farmer floods the highest field. When it has received enough water, he then breaks the earth barrier between it and the next, lower field, and the water pours down into it and fills it. And so the process goes until all the fields are watered. Vyasa then firmly declares that mere right or good action or external religiosity effect nothing in the way of transformation into a higher grade of consciousness, but that rather it is a matter of the removal of *obstacles* to higher consciousness that is needed. He points out that no effort is needed to get the water into the field—or the higher consciousness into the individual—except that expended in the removal of the barriers. So the secret is to remove whatever blocks the process of evolution, and it will occur as spontaneously as the water pours down into the field.

It is the removal of obstacles that is the highest form of shaucha. To underscore this, Vyasa continues: “Then again, a farmer in his field cannot force the nutrients of water or earth into the roots of his grain. What does he do, then? He removes the obstructing weeds. With these gone, the nutrients enter, of themselves, the roots of the grain.” In the same way, when negative karmas, habits, deeds, thoughts, influences, associations, and situations are uprooted from our minds and lives, the higher consciousness and states of evolution will occur naturally. This is exceedingly

important for us to keep in mind. For it is purity (shaucha) in this form that enables the divine light to reach us.

Santosha: contentment, peacefulness

Santosha consists of the passive aspect of contentment and peacefulness and the more positive aspect of joy and happiness. Santosha is a fundamentally cheerful attitude based on a harmonious interior condition and an intellectually spiritual outlook. This is possible only through meditation, and is one of the signs of progress in meditation. This must not be equated with mere intellectual “positive thinking” or a forced external “happiness” which is a camouflage, not a real state. Santosha is an inner-based quality that occurs spontaneously. It need not be cultivated or “acted out” any more than the blossoming of a flower.

Santosha is also contentment with simple living, and relates to aparigraha. Vyasa says that “santosha is being satisfied with the resources at hand and so not desiring more.” Shankara says: “As a result of the satisfaction with what is at hand, even though there may be some lack, he has the feeling, ‘It is enough.’” Santosha is freedom from the “bigger and more is better” syndrome that grips most of us.

Santosha is also the absence of negative emotions and the presence of positive emotions. In its highest form santosha is the contentment and peace that comes from resting in our own spirit.

Tapas: austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline

Tapas literally means “to generate heat” in the sense of awakening or stimulating the whole of our being to higher consciousness. It is commonly applied to the practice of spiritual discipline, especially that which involves some form of physical austerity or self-denial. The sages of ancient India were very conversant with the principles of physics and formulated their symbols accordingly. When an object is heated, its molecules begin to move at a faster rate than usual. Thus, tapas is a procedure that causes all the components of the yogi to vibrate at a much higher rate, and to eventually become permanently established in that higher vibration.

Regarding physical tapas Vyasa writes: “Tapas is endurance of the opposites. The opposites are hunger and thirst, heat and cold, standing and sitting, complete silence and merely verbal silence.” (“In complete silence, nothing like hand-signs is allowed, whereas in the limited silence, indications by hands, etc., are permitted and it is only actual speech that is banned,” according to Shankara.) Shankara says these opposites may occur naturally or by our own choice through self-denial. And both Vyasa and Shankara say that tapas is always done in the light of the capability of the yogi and is never exaggerated, strenuous, or beyond the yogi’s natural ability.

Basically, tapas is spiritual discipline that produces a perceptible result, particularly in the form of purification. Tapas is the turning from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to the Light, from death to Immortality. But it is never a matter of mere thought or desire, it is always *practical action* towards that end. Consequently, whenever tapas is spoken of it always implies the practice of yoga and the observances that facilitate yoga practice.

We are dual in nature: consciousness and energy, spirit and matter. This being so, we need to realize that although we are essentially consciousness (spirit) we are also energy, and therefore we *are* our bodies and our minds. Or rather, we are the conscious intelligence that manifests as our bodies and minds. Our lives need to be lived in this perspective. For example, when we understand this truth we understand why such observances or disciplines as yama, niyama, vegetarianism, and moral

conduct are so beneficial and necessary for us.

Swadhyaya: introspective self-study, spiritual study

Swadhyaya means “self-study.” This is usually interpreted as the study of the sacred texts which deal with the nature of the true Self (spirit) and its realization. “Swadhyaya is study of works on liberation (moksha),” says Vyasa. “Swadhyaya is study of works on liberation such as the Upanishads,” comments Shankara. But it also means keeping a careful watch on the ego-based mind so as to be aware of its delusive and destructive tricks. For it is no external “devil” or “Satan” we need fear, but the “enemy within,” the “Dweller at the Threshold” which is our ego-mind complex that has blinded and enslaved us from life to life and has no intention of giving up its domination of us just because we practice a bit of meditation. Therefore we must be wary of its cunning and subtle ways and carefully analyze the debris it casts up into our consciousness in the form of thoughts and emotions. In this way we will see the direction in which it would pull us. We must take our susceptibility to its machinations most seriously. In swadhyaya we look at and analyze the mind in the calmness and intuition born of meditation.

The highest form of self-study is that which is known as *atma vichar*—inquiry into the Self (spirit). We must never let go of the vital question: Who am I? We must do all we can to find the answer—not from others or from our intellectual ponderings, but by direct experience of ourselves as pure spirit. Taimni puts it this way: “Though swadhyaya begins with intellectual study it must be carried through the progressive stages of reflection, meditation, tapas, etc. to the point where the sadhaka is able to gain all knowledge or devotion from within, by his own efforts. That is the significance of the prefix *swa* (self) in swadhyaya. He leaves all external aids such as books, discourses, etc. and dives into his own mind for everything he needs in his quest.”

Ishwarapranidhana: offering of one’s life to God

The final foundation, for which all the others are a necessary preparation, is Ishwarapranidhana—the offering of one’s life to God. This is far more on every level than simple religious devotion, and much more than any kind of discipline or self-denial done in the name of spirituality. *It is the giving to God of the yogi’s entire life*, not just a giving of material offerings or occasional tidbits of devotion to God, however fervent or sincere. Moreover, as Taimni points out: “The fact that the progressive practice of Ishwarapranidhana can ultimately lead to samadhi shows definitely that it signifies a much deeper process of transformation in the sadhaka than a mere acceptance of whatever experiences and ordeals come to him in the course of his life. ...The practice of Ishwarapranidhana therefore begins with the mental assertion ‘Not my will but Thy will be done’ but it does not end there. There is a steady effort to bring about a continuous recession of consciousness from the level of the personality which is the seat of ‘I’ consciousness into the consciousness of the Supreme Whose will is working out in the manifest world.”

Ishwarapranidhana is total giving. The yogi does not eke out droplets of his life, but pours out his entire life in offering unto God. He gives all that he has—even his very self. And this is only sensible, for the entire aim of yoga is the reunion of the individual spirit with the Supreme Spirit, the falling of the drop into the Immortal Sea. Ishwarapranidhana anticipates this divine union and ensures its accomplishment. This is why the first law-giver, Manu, says that the highest sacrifice (*medha*) is *purushamedha*—the sacrifice of the individual spirit.

Ishwarapranidhana is also mentioned in Sutra 1:23, where Patanjali says that the

attainment of samadhi is brought near to the yogi “by offering of the life to God.” Vyasa comments: “As a result of Ishwarapranidhana, which is bhakti [devotion and love for God], the Lord bends down to him and rewards him,...and the attainment of samadhi and its fruit is near at hand.” Shankara says: “The Lord comes face-to-face with him and gives His grace to the yogi who is fully devoted to Him....The grace is effortlessly gained through the omnipotence of the Supreme Lord. By that grace of the Lord, samadhi and its fruit are soon attainable.”

It is incontrovertible, then, that yoga is a thoroughly *theistic* endeavor, one which makes God the center of life and its aim, as well. Ishwarapranidhana is merging the individual consciousness with the Cosmic Consciousness of Ishwara.

The results of perfection (siddhi) in yama and niyama

Shankara makes a very bold—and bald—statement about yoga: “*Success in yoga is determined by result alone...observable by direct perception.*” As the ever-memorable Dr. Bronner used to say: “Judge only by the amazing results.”

Patanjali lists siddhis—psychic powers or effects—that result from the perfect observance of yama and niyama. Since yama and niyama deal with the innate powers of the human being—or rather with the abstinence and observance that will develop and release those powers—the manifestation of the development and perfecting of those powers will be automatic.

Before considering the specific siddhis resulting from perfection in yama and niyama, it should be explained that perfection in these virtues means that the ignorance which causes their opposites such as injury, lying, and stealing, has been completely eliminated from the yogi, and also that their reappearance in his thought, speech, or behavior has become absolutely impossible. So perfection (siddhi) in yama and niyama is not a matter of action or inaction but one of perfected consciousness.

Perfection in ahimsa

“On being firmly established in non-violence [ahimsa] there is abandonment of hostility in his presence” (Yoga Sutra 2:35), The eminently desirable nature of this siddhi is evident. Wherever a yogi perfected in ahimsa may be, there no hostility can arise; and if it is already present somewhere, upon the yogi’s entry it will cease. The one perfected in ahimsa is a living fulfillment of the Prayer of Saint Francis, and is truly an instrument of divine peace. This was true of Buddha in whose presence hired assassins and even a mad elephant became at peace and incapable of doing harm. “This happens with all living beings,” says Vyasa. Many times it has been observed that in the presence of perfected sages wild animals become tame, even friendly, not only toward human beings but even toward their usual enemies or prey. “In the presence of that one who follows ahimsa, even natural enemies like snake and mongoose give up their antagonism,” says Shankara. Violent human beings, too, have become peaceful and gentle after contact with holy people in whom ahimsa was completely realized.

Perfection in satya

“On being firmly established in truthfulness [satya], the result of action rests upon him alone” (Yoga Sutra 2:36). Luckily, we have quite a few authoritative commentaries to elucidate this obscure language. All are unanimous in saying that when the yogi is firmly established in truth in all its aspects, then whatever he says or wills comes about without any action being needed to produce it. As Vyasa explains: “When he says: ‘Be righteous,’ that man becomes righteous; told by him: ‘Do you attain heaven,’ that one attains heaven. His word is infallible.” “When truth is firm in him, events confirm his

words,” adds Shankara. Yogananda gives an example of this in the first chapter of his autobiography:

“Another early recollection is outstanding; and literally so, for I bear the scar to this day. My elder sister Uma and I were seated in the early morning under a *neem* tree in our Gorakhpur compound. She was helping me with a Bengali primer, what time I could spare my gaze from the near-by parrots eating ripe margosa fruit. Uma complained of a boil on her leg, and fetched a jar of ointment. I smeared a bit of the salve on my forearm.

“Why do you use medicine on a healthy arm?”

“Well, Sis, I feel I am going to have a boil tomorrow. I am testing your ointment on the spot where the boil will appear.”

“You little liar!”

“Sis, don’t call me a liar until you see what happens in the morning.” Indignation filled me.

“Uma was unimpressed, and thrice repeated her taunt. An adamant resolution sounded in my voice as I made slow reply.

“By the power of will in me, I say that tomorrow I shall have a fairly large boil in this exact place on my arm; and *your* boil shall swell to twice its present size!”

“Morning found me with a stalwart boil on the indicated spot; the dimensions of Uma’s boil had doubled. With a shriek, my sister rushed to Mother. ‘Mukunda has become a necromancer!’ Gravely, Mother instructed me never to use the power of words for doing harm. I have always remembered her counsel, and followed it.”

My friend, Sri Abani Lahiri, told me that his grandfather had the same power even as a child. Once he became angry with another little boy and said, “You should die!” Immediately that boy became deathly ill and was declared by the doctors to have only a few hours of life remaining. When his parents were told, “That Brahmin boy told him to die,” they called for him and asked him to tell their son to live. He did so, and the boy was immediately well. Jesus, too, had this power as a child and had to learn how to control it, as recorded in the “apocryphal” gospels. By the power of his word Sri Ramakrishna caused hibiscus blossoms of two different colors to grow on the same plant. At the end of his earthly life, anyone who heard Sri Ramakrishna speak of spiritual awakening became spiritually awakened.

Perfection in asteya

“On being firmly established in non-stealing [asteya], all kinds of precious things come to him” (Yoga Sutra 2:37). Another translation of the second half of the sutra can be: “All kinds of precious things *present themselves* to him.” All the treasuries of earth not only are open to someone perfect in asteya, their contents actively seek him out. Yet such a one neither desires or seeks them. If he did, they would no longer come to him. Precious things may be given by others to those perfected in asteya, or simply appear from the divine hand of Providence. The former Shankaracharya of Joshi Matt, Jagadguru Brahmananda Saraswati, refused to allow anyone to donate money either to himself or to the monastery, whose expenses were great. Yet, he had a box which was always filled with money from which he provided for all the monastery’s needs. Yogananda had a little box with a slot in the top where he put in or took out money without counting or keeping record. Yet it was always full. Sri Brahma Chaitanya, a Maharashtrian saint who lived into the twentieth century, was known to be without any resources whatsoever and lived in total frugality. Yet he once made a pilgrimage to Benares where he gave away a tremendous amount of money to the poor and the monastics. As he sat on a simple mat, he kept putting his hand under it and producing

the money from an inexhaustible supply. Paramhansa Nityananda literally pulled fortunes in rupees from his clothing to pay for projects he was supervising. Some yogis can simply reach up in the air and bring down anything they desire.

Perfection in brahmacharya

“On being firmly established in brahmacharya, vigor [virya] is gained” (Yoga Sutra 2:37). Virya is not ordinary physical strength, but an almost supernatural power that manifests as strength of body, mind, and spirit. When through brahmacharya the yogi’s normal bodily power is conserved, a marvellous alchemical change takes place, augmenting and transmuting his energies to a level unknown to others. The truth that those who keep their bodily energies intact can accomplish whatever they will has been demonstrated for thousands of years by celibates of all lands and spiritual traditions.

Regarding the brahmachari possessed of virya, Shankara says: “He brings out great qualities without limit from himself. He has irresistible energy for all good undertakings. The sense is, that he cannot be thwarted by any obstacle.” See how great spiritual reformers have changed the lives of untold thousands, their influence reaching over the world and lasting even beyond their physical life span. So great is the virya of some saints that their mere touch can heal. Sometimes the clothing they have worn or objects they have touched heal the sick and work other miracles. Virya also manifests in the brahmachari’s words, giving them a power not found in those of others. As Vyasa comments on this sutra: “From the attainment of virya, he draws out invincible good qualities from himself. And when perfected in it, he becomes able to confer knowledge on pupils.”

Through the accumulation of virya the powers of the mind develop beyond all bounds. Yogis have often displayed profound knowledge of subjects they had never studied, and on occasion have shown remarkable artistic abilities.

Virya affects the physical body, too. Swami Dayananda, the great Indian spiritual reformer of the nineteenth century, was once mocked by a man to whom he recommended brahmacharya for increase of bodily strength. When the man got into his horse-drawn chariot and told the driver to go on, the chariot would not move. The driver whipped the horses, but to no avail. In disgust and perplexity the man got out of the chariot and discovered Swami Dayananda holding on to its rear axle!

Perfection in aparigraha

“On non-possessiveness [aparigraha] being confirmed there arises knowledge of the ‘how’ and ‘wherefore’ of existence” (Yoga Sutra 2:39). Regarding this Vyasa says: “What is this birth? How does it take place? What do we become [both in this life and after death], who shall we be and in what circumstances shall we be? Any such desire of his to know his situation in former, later, and intermediate states is spontaneously gratified.” Nothing is more bewildering to the human being than his existence in this world—particularly the how and why of his even being here—no matter how much external philosophy in the form of books or teachers may attempt to answer the gnawing questions set forth by Vyasa. The reality of the situation is this: until the individual knows for himself by direct perception gained through his own development, life must remain a confusing mystery for him. Since the yogi is attempting to extricate himself from the bonds of birth and death, it is imperative for him to know the why and wherefore of human embodiment in all its aspects. He does not need more theory, however plausible and appealing; he needs to *know*. This knowledge comes from within when all blocks to communication with his inmost

consciousness are removed. For this birth has been determined solely by him in his nature as a potentially omniscient and omnipotent spirit. Perfection in non-possessiveness bestows the needed insight. “Since he has no attachment to outer possessions, illumination of the field of his own self appears without effort on his part,” explains Shankara.

Perfection in shaucha

“From purity [shaucha] arises disgust for one’s own body and disinclination to come in physical contact with others” (Yoga Sutra 2:40). This siddhi certainly will not be thought desirable in a body-and-sex-obsessed society that insists on being touched and hugged (and often more) by all and sundry, but the serious yogi should consider it carefully. After all, his intention is to disengage himself from the grinding gears of samsara—the chief of which is body-consciousness. Not only are human beings obsessed with their own bodies, they compound the problem by incessant contact with those of others. This contact results in the confusion and conflict of their personal energies (prana) by the invasion and admixture of other’s prana with theirs—particularly their psychic energies. Losing the integrity of their energies in this way, their life force become unbalanced, weakened, damaged, and—yes—defiled. This condition manifests as an endless series of physical, mental, and spiritual ills. “I am not myself” becomes a truism in relation to them. But for those who carefully observe shaucha it becomes otherwise.

“When by practicing purity and seeing the defects in the body, he becomes disgusted with his own body, he becomes free from obsession with the body; seeing what the body essentially is, he has no intercourse with others,” writes Vyasa. The disgust for the body spoken of here is not a hatred or an obsessive aversion for the body, but rather a profound disillusionment with the body springing from awareness of its many defects, not the least of which is its unreliability and inevitable mortality. The body is also seen to be a repository of pain, disease and filth, however fine the present momentary outer appearance may be. It is in fact a treasury of death.

“With the ordinary purification of the physical body we become more sensitive and begin to see things in their true light. Cleanliness is mostly a matter of sensitiveness. What is intolerably disgusting to a person of refined nature and habits is hardly noticed by another person whose nature is coarse and insensitive. So this feeling of disgust towards one’s own body which develops on its purification means nothing more than that we have become sensitive enough to see things as they really are.” So says I. K. Taimni.

Patanjali is not finished with the matter of shaucha. Since body and mind are inextricably related, he continues: “From mental purity arises purity of the inner nature, cheerfulness, one-pointedness, control of the senses, and fitness for the vision of the self” (Yoga Sutra 2:41). Nobody has objection to these, I am sure. When the inner bodies are pure they are refined and fluid, capable of the most subtle practice of yoga and reaching the highest states of consciousness. This state of inner purity is particularly accomplished by thought and diet.

For the inwardly pure there is no need for artificial “positive thinking.” Cheerfulness and optimism rise up from within him as a matter of course. And continue arising. Gone forever are mood swings and the “ups and downs” of life. No more valleys or mountaintops: he soars in the sunlit sky of the spirit as naturally as the eagle flies in the air. Whether engaged in outer or inner activity, his mind is intent upon its purpose, no longer scattered or flapping like a flag in the wind. One-pointed meditation becomes effortless for him. No longer does he struggle with the unruly

senses and the mind which Krishna says are as hard to tame as the wind (Bhagavad Gita 6:34).

Perfection in santosha

“From contentment [santosha] he gains unsurpassed [superlative] happiness” (Yoga Sutra 2:42). This is because santosha is a state completely free from all desire for objects or the compulsion to gain some outer thing not yet possessed. Such desire is itself great pain—as is usually its fulfillment. Taimni says: “There is a definite reason why superlative happiness abides in a perfectly calm and contented mind. A calm mind is able to reflect within itself the bliss [ananda] which is inherent in our real divine nature. The constant surging of desires prevents this bliss from manifesting itself in the mind. It is only when these desires are eliminated and the mind becomes perfectly calm that we know what true happiness is. This subtle and constant joy which is called *sukha* and which comes from within is independent of external circumstances and is really a reflection of ananda, one of the three fundamental aspects of the self.”

Vyasa has this comment: “So it is said: ‘Whatever sex pleasure there may be in the world, whatever supreme happiness may be enjoyed in heaven, they cannot be accounted a sixteenth part of the happiness of destruction of craving.’” Simply being without compelling desires is great happiness and peace. Here is how the Taittiriya Upanishad expresses it:

“Who could live, who could breathe, if that blissful self dwelt not within the lotus of the heart? He it is that gives joy.

“Of what nature is this joy?

“Consider the lot of a young man, noble, well-read, intelligent, strong, healthy, with all the wealth of the world at his command. Assume that he is happy, and measure his joy as one unit.

“One hundred times that joy is one unit of the joy of Gandharvas.

“One hundred times the joy of Gandharvas is one unit of the joy of celestial Gandharvas.

“One hundred times the joy of celestial Gandharvas is one unit of the joy of the Pitris in their paradise.

“One hundred times the joy of the Pitris in their paradise is one unit of the joy of the Devas.

“One hundred times the joy of the Devas is one unit of the joy of the karma Devas.

“One hundred times the joy of the karma Devas is one unit of the joy of the ruling Devas.

“One hundred times the joy of the ruling Devas is one unit of the joy of Indra.

“One hundred times the joy of Indra is one unit of the joy of Brihaspati.

“One hundred times the joy of Brihaspati is one unit of the joy of Prajapati.

“One hundred times the joy of Prajapati is one unit of the joy of Brahma: but no less joy than Brahma has the seer to whom the self has been revealed, and who is without craving” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2:7, 8).

Perfection in tapas

“Perfection of the sense-organs and body result after destruction of impurity by tapas” (Yoga Sutra 2:43). Tapas is like the fire that refines gold through the burning out of all impurities. In relation to the body, tapas removes its limitations and defects. This has been shown by scientific studies: “Everyone around the water cooler knows that meditation reduces stress. But with the aid of advanced brain-scanning

technology, researchers are beginning to show that meditation directly affects the function and structure of the brain, changing it in ways that appear to increase attention span, sharpen focus and improve memory. One recent study found evidence that the daily practice of meditation thickened the parts of the brain's cerebral cortex responsible for decision making, attention and memory. Sara Lazar, a research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital, presented preliminary results last November that showed that the gray matter of twenty men and women who meditated for just forty minutes a day was thicker than that of people who did not...What's more, her research suggests that meditation may slow the natural thinning of that section of the cortex that occurs with age" (*How to Get Smarter, One Breath At A Time*, Lisa Takeuchi Cullen. *Time*, January 16, 2006, p. 93).

"There was a study reported at the American Geriatric Association convention in 1979 involving forty-seven participants whose average age was 52.5 years. It found that people who had been meditating more than seven years were approximately twelve years younger physiologically than those of the same chronological age who were not meditating" (Gabriel Cousens, M.D., *Conscious Eating*, p. 281).

The process is described by Vyasa as follows: "As tapas becomes complete, it destroys the veiling taint of impurity; when the veiling taint is removed, there are siddhis of the body like the ability to become minute, and siddhis of the senses in such forms as hearing and seeing things which are remote." The body is no longer locked into its habitual patterns of size or location. Nor are the senses any longer limited to functioning within the bounds of proximity of objects. The body and senses become as free as the yogi's spirit, and as expanded in their scope.

Perfection in swadhyaya

"From self-study [swadhyaya] arises communion with the beloved deity" (Yoga Sutra 2:44). This sutra is not speaking of communion with God the Unmanifest Absolute, but with His manifested forms or with powerful beings—gods, realized Masters, and others who have evolved beyond the earth plane. "Gods, sages, and perfect beings to whom he is devoted come before the vision of the man intent on swadhyaya and give him their help," says Vyasa. The help can be in the form of protection, removal of inner or outer obstacles, and even spiritual teaching. His aspiration expressed through swadhyaya and his love and admiration for them of which, through their omnipotence, they are ever aware, draw them to grant him encouragement, assistance, and instruction.

Perfection in Ishwarapranidhana

"Accomplishment of (or success or perfection in) samadhi arises from Ishwarapranidhana" (Yoga Sutra 2:45). Though we can define samadhi in many accurate ways, when we think about it we realize that samadhi is totally coming to rest in spirit, the cessation of all else, and the centering of our being in God. Samadhi is entering into the heart of God, into the Silence that is the only truth. The perfection of that state is samadhi, which therefore is produced by total devotion of our life to God.

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that follow'st all my way,
I yield my flickr'ing torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's glow its day
May brighter, fairer be.

A final word on the subject from Vyasa: "The samadhi of one who has devoted [offered] his whole being to the Lord is perfect...[By] the knowledge [resulting] from that [samadhi he] knows a thing as it really is."

Self-realization: the goal

"This effulgent self is to be realized within the lotus of the heart by continence, by steadfastness in truth, by meditation, and by superconscious vision. Their impurities washed away, the seers realize him" (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.5).

And I. K. Taimni: "The student of yogic philosophy will see in these unusual developments which take place on practicing yama-niyama the tremendous possibilities which lie hidden in the apparently simple things of life. It appears that one has only to penetrate deeply into any manifestation of life to encounter the most fascinating mysteries and sources of power. Physical science which deals with the crudest manifestation of life touches the mere fringe of these mysteries and the results which it has achieved are little short of miraculous. There is, therefore, nothing to be surprised at in the fact that the yogi who dives into the far subtler phenomena of mind and consciousness finds still deeper mysteries and extraordinary powers."

Chapter Four:

Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet

The mind

Bondage and liberation are states of mind. The mind, as a mass of vibrating energy, is limited by the constitution or condition of that energy. If the energy is heavy or inert, little can be done with it to produce the state of silence and clarity needed to reflect the truth of spirit. Certain elements darken the mind and make it thick or heavy, vibrating very slowly—sometimes seemingly not at all. On the other hand, some elements lighten the mind, making it fluid and subtle, vibrating at a very high level. It is this latter condition that is needed for attaining the state of liberation—or rather, the state that liberates the spirit from the illusion of bondage and suffering. It is really the mind that becomes liberated, but that liberation also affects the essentially ever-free spirit and sets it free. To attain such liberation the mind must be purified and refined, vegetarian diet being one of the best and strongest means for its purification.

Diet and consciousness

Although diet is commonly considered a matter of physical health alone, since the Hermetic principle “as above, so below” is a fundamental truth of the cosmos, diet is a crucial aspect of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development. For diet and consciousness are interrelated, and purity of diet is an effective aid to purity and clarity of consciousness.

The purification of our subtler levels depends upon the purification of our physical entity. This makes sense when we realize that all that goes to constitute a human being is formed of energies of various types, and the only source of energy is that which is brought into the body through sunlight, air, and food. And it is material food that provides by far the greatest amount of the energy from which our multilevel complex is shaped.

When we realize that any physical object has all the levels which we do, namely, the physical, biomagnetic, sensory, intellectual and will bodies, we can understand the importance of the kind and quality of food we eat. For not only does the physical substance of the food become assimilated into our physical body, so also do the subtler energies become united to our inner levels. This is the teaching of the Chandogya Upanishad: “Mind consists of food. That which is the subtle part of milk moves upward when the milk is churned and becomes butter. In the same manner, the subtle part of the food that is eaten moves upward and becomes mind. Thus, mind consists of food” (Chandogya Upanishad 6.5.4, 6.6.1,2,5).

We cannot get a marble statue from clay, nor can we get wheat bread from barley meal—the end product is still going to consist of the nature of the material started with. So it is with all our bodies, gross and subtle. They will reflect the character of the food which has gone into their formation.

The esoteric side

Nothing that exists is “solid matter.” All physical objects are formed of molecules that are formed of atoms that are formed of particles that in the ultimate analysis are vibrating energy—not “things” at all. The only difference between gold, wood, water, and living human flesh is the pattern or behavior of the energy of which they are

composed. If we go through the whole range of relative existence from the bottom—where we are—right up to the top, to (but not including) the realm of pure spirit, it is all energy of varying kinds, though one in essence.

The same is true of our individual, private universe we call “me.” It is composed of successive layers of energy from very subtle to very gross. All the levels of energy that exist in creation exist in us as well. We are actually small reflections of the greater universe. Our spirit pervades our little cosmos, enlivening and directing it, just as God pervades, enlivens, and directs the universe.

All which we experience as “us” are just different strata of cosmic energy vibrating at differing rates. The physical body is the densest stratum, behind which is the stratum of biomagnetic energy that keeps the body going and links it to another field of energy which is the mind. (By “mind” is meant the perceiving part of us which can see, hear, smell and so on, by means of the messages conveyed from the sense organs through the nervous system into the brain.) Beyond the mind is the intellect, the part of us that not only sees a hand but knows it is a hand—and not a foot. Beyond the intellect is an even subtler level from which our power of will arises. Human consciousness and human behavior are nothing but the states and activities of these various bodies of vibrating energy.

From whence do all these energy layers come? First we get these energy levels from our parents, but as we grow and develop we replace and increase those energies through the food we eat, although we receive some energy from light and air.

We are what we eat

It is obvious, then, that the food we eat is going to determine the quality and condition of all the levels of our being. Our food has the same levels we do, and the different energies of the food are absorbed into our corresponding levels. Therefore when we eat something, it not only affects us on all levels of our existence, it becomes those levels. In this very real sense we indeed are what we eat. In esoteric philosophy our various levels are looked upon as separate bodies through which our consciousness operates. Since those bodies are formed essentially from the food we eat, they will be conditioned by and function according to the kind of energy extracted from the food. We are very much like the child’s toy that is a series of colored rings stacked on a rod. That is, we are successive layers of subtler and subtler energy that are connected to the physical body. From these energy levels the different life processes are empowered and administered.

When the energies within us are positive, they produce harmonious states of mind and behavior. But when the energies are negative, they move in a random and chaotic manner and produce negative states of mind and, consequently, negative behavior. Moreover, these toxic energies can also manifest as physical illnesses or defects. Substances that are toxic to the body—such as meat, alcohol, nicotine, and drugs—are toxic on the inner levels as well, and their ingestion poisons all our bodies by putting into them negative energies which are going to manifest in the disrupting manner just described. On the other hand, fruits, vegetables, and grains are reservoirs of pure, basic life energies which are very light and malleable. These energies are easily assimilated into all our bodies and made to take on our specific, unique life vibrations and karmic patterns.

Diet and the mind

As stated at the very beginning, the bondage and liberation of an individual is exclusively a matter of his mind, and the process of liberation is a matter of purifying

and transmuting the mind. Since the mind is formed of the subtle energies of that which we eat, we can realize that diet is one of the most crucial aspects of the spiritual aspirant's regimen, for it will determine the quality and effectiveness of his meditation experience. Just as soft wax readily takes the impression of a stamp and retains it—in contrast to cold, hard wax—so the mind formed of light and pure food energies will respond most readily and permanently to the liberating samskaras produced by meditation. Diet, then, can be a major determinant of our success or failure in spiritual life.

Higher perception

What is perception? Volumes have been written on that question, but we can consider it very simply. The mind is a field of energy which, when acted upon, is modified. Those modifications are the perceptions which the pure consciousness of the spirit witnesses, and which the intellect—also an energy field—classifies and evaluates. So the mind shapes itself in response to stimuli, and it is the modifications of the mind-energy which we perceive—not the actual thing itself. Obviously, then, the mind should be extremely sensitive and capable of easily forming into the patterns of perception. For this to be so, the mind (and intellectual) energies must be light and fluid. Such energies are obtained through eating substances composed of those energies—and those substances are fruits, vegetables, and grains.

It has been scientifically proven that plants react to thoughts—they are telepathic. If we take the energies of plants into our higher levels we will then naturally develop intuition and other subtle perceptions.

Energy, consciousness, and will

To help us better understand the mechanics of developing higher consciousness, we can consider the behavior of water. A bowl of water can easily be made to form into waves and eddies in response to movements of the bowl or of air currents. Thick syrup, on the other hand, will respond very little, and tar will not respond at all. So it is with the mind according to the type of energies which go into its composition.

For the intentional evolution of consciousness, the mind has to be very light and responsive, and that is accomplished mostly through diet. The mind must not only be sensitive to random impressions, it must also be shaped by our illumined wills. In a sense, we must sculpt our minds, forming them into instruments of higher awareness. To facilitate this, the mind must be as malleable as possible.

Just as cold clay cannot be worked with for modeling, but warm clay is easily used, in the same way the mind must be responsive to shaping by our will. Animal energies were never meant for higher consciousness, and consequently cannot be attuned to anything beyond the most mundane perceptions. The energies of fruits, vegetables, and grains, being unconditioned, can easily be made to vibrate to the highest potential.

The spiritual value of vegetarianism

The major thing to keep in mind when considering the subject of vegetarianism is its relevancy in relation to our explorations of consciousness. We need only ask: Does it facilitate my spiritual growth—the development and expansion of my consciousness? The answer is Yes.

“One acts according to one's prakriti. Even the jnani does so. Beings follow their own prakriti; what will restraint accomplish?” (Bhagavad Gita 3:33). Many supposedly moral or spiritual problems are only matters of energy behavior. If the energies are purified and re-centered where they belong, instantly the problem vanishes. But such a

purification and repositioning is not possible with energies other than those absorbed from sunlight, air, and plant life.

Conscious evolution

Practices for conscious evolution consist of two processes: (1) purification, refinement, and repolarization of energies and (2) placement of energies in higher levels. This means that our energies must be responsive, malleable and moveable.

Appollonius of Tyana, a great Master who lived in Greece shortly before the time of Jesus, was asked how he was able to work miracles. His simple answer was: "I have never eaten the flesh of animals." Of course he did not mean that abstinence from meat alone made him a miracle-worker—otherwise all vegetarian animals and humans would work miracles naturally. What he meant was that the condition of his mind and body, resulting from being a strict vegetarian, had enabled him to successfully engage in the inner disciplines required for spiritual enlightenment—disciplines he had learned from the yogis of India.

Best of All

The best part about all this is that you can discover the truth for yourself by simply trying a vegetarian diet. Of course it must be a sensible one with those things that will nourish the body correctly. But you need only go on a vegetarian diet, eat correctly, and watch for the benefit. It will come.

Chapter Five:

The Gita Speaks To The Yogi

The wise yogi reads the Gita daily and ponders its truths. The more he does so, the more he will understand as his buddhi (intellect/intelligence) is being continually purified and enlightened through daily meditation.

The entire scripture is directed to the yogi, so all seven hundred verses speak to him, but I would like to present those that are specific about the principles of the Yoga Life.

Confidence in yoga

“In this yoga, even the abortive attempt is not wasted. Nor can it produce a contrary result. Even a little practice of this yoga will save you from the terrible wheel of rebirth and death” (2:40).

“The scriptures declare that merit can be acquired by studying the Vedas, performing ritualistic sacrifices, practicing austerities and giving alms. But the yogi who has understood this teaching of mine will gain more than any who do these things. He will reach that universal source, which is the uttermost abode of God” (8:28).

Total dedication

“In this yoga, the will is directed singly toward one ideal” (2:41). “When can a man be said to have achieved union with Brahman? When his mind is under perfect control and freed from all desires, so that he becomes absorbed in the Atman, and nothing else” (6:18).

“Great is that yogi who seeks to be with Brahman, greater than those who mortify the body, greater than the learned, greater than the doers of good works: therefore become a yogi” (6:46).

“How hard to break through is this, my Maya, made of the gunas! But he who takes refuge within me only shall pass beyond Maya: he, and no other” (7:14).

“Strive without ceasing to know the Atman, seek this knowledge and comprehend clearly why you should seek it: such, it is said, are the roots of true wisdom: ignorance, merely, is all that denies them” (13:11).

“The Lord lives in the heart of every creature. He turns them round and round upon the wheel of his Maya. Take refuge utterly in him. By his grace you will find supreme peace, and the state which is beyond all change” (18:61, 62).

“Give me your whole heart, love and adore me, worship me always, bow to me only, and you shall find me: this is my promise who love you dearly. Lay down all duties in me, your refuge. Fear no longer, for I will save you from sin and from bondage” (18:65, 66).

Inward orientation

“Only that yogi whose joy is inward, inward his peace, and his vision inward shall come to Brahman and know Nirvana” (5:24).

Solitude

“The yogi should retire into a solitary place, and live alone” (6:10).

“Adore me only with heart undistracted; turn all your thought toward solitude, spurning the noise of the crowd, its fruitless commotion” (13:10).

Self-discipline

“He must exercise control over his mind and body” (6:10).

Detachment from material things

“He must free himself from the hopes and possessions of this world” (6:10).

Constant in meditation

“He should meditate on the Atman unceasingly” (6:10).

“Make a habit of practicing meditation, and do not let your mind be distracted. In this way you will come finally to the Lord, who is the light-giver, the highest of the high” (8:8).

“When a yogi has meditated upon me unceasingly for many years, with an undistracted mind, I am easy of access to him, because he is always absorbed in me” (8:14).

“If a man will worship me, and meditate upon me with an undistracted mind, devoting every moment to me, I shall supply all his needs, and protect his possessions from loss” (9:22).

Regard for scriptures

“He who flouts the commandments of the scriptures, and acts on the impulse of his desires, cannot reach perfection, or happiness, or the highest goal. Let the scriptures be your guide, therefore, in deciding what you must do, and what you must abstain from. First learn the path of action, as the scriptures teach it. Then act accordingly” (16:23, 24).

Moderation

“Yoga is not for the man who overeats, or for him who fasts excessively. It is not for him who sleeps too much, or for the keeper of exaggerated vigils. Let a man be moderate in his eating and his recreation, moderately active, moderate in sleep and in wakefulness. He will find that yoga takes away all his unhappiness” (6:16, 17).

Compassionate

“Who burns with the bliss and suffers the sorrow of every creature within his own heart, making his own each bliss and each sorrow: him I hold highest of all the yogis” (6:32). This is most important. Many sincere yogis think that unattachment means to be indifferent to others. I have known some yogis who tried to cultivate indifference to their children, showing them no love or affection. This is a terrible misunderstanding.

“A man should not hate any living creature. Let him be friendly and compassionate to all” (12:13).

Devoted to God and loving God

“He gives me all his heart, he worships me in faith and love: that yogi, above every other, I call my very own” (6:47).

“Devote your whole mind to me, and practice yoga. Take me for your only refuge. By doing this, you can know me in my total reality, without any shadow of doubt” (7:1).

“Great in soul are they who become what is godlike: they alone know me, the

origin, the deathless: they offer me the homage of an unwavering mind. Praising my might with heart and lips for ever, striving for the virtue that wins me, and steadfast in all their vows, they worship adoring, one with me always” (9:13, 14).

“Whatever your action, food or worship; whatever the gift that you give to another; whatever you vow to the work of the spirit: O son of Kunti, lay these also as offerings before Me. Thus you will free yourself from both the good and the evil effects of your actions. Offer up everything to me. If your heart is united with me, you will be set free from karma even in this life, and come to me at the last. My face is equal to all creation, loving no one nor hating any. Nevertheless, my devotees dwell within me always: I also show forth and am seen within them. Though a man be soiled with the sins of a lifetime, let him but love me, rightly resolved, in utter devotion: I see no sinner, that man is holy. Holiness soon shall refashion his nature to peace eternal; O son of Kunti, of this be certain: the man that loves me, he shall not perish” (9:27-31).

“Those whose minds are fixed on me in steadfast love, worshipping me with absolute faith, I consider them to have the greater understanding of yoga... Quickly I come to those who offer me every action, worship me only, their dearest delight, with devotion undaunted. Because they love me these are my bondsmen and I shall save them from mortal sorrow and all the waves of Life’s deathly ocean” (12:2, 6, 7).

“He who is free from delusion, and knows me as the supreme Reality, knows all that can be known. Therefore he adores me with his whole heart” (15:19).

Constant remembrance of God/Self

“At the hour of death, when a man leaves his body, he must depart with his consciousness absorbed in me. Then he will be united with me. Be certain of that. Whatever a man remembers at the last, when he is leaving the body, will be realized by him in the hereafter; because that will be what his mind has most constantly dwelt on, during this life. Therefore you must remember me at all times, and do your duty. If your mind and heart are set upon me constantly, you will come to me. Never doubt this” (8:5-7).

“On Him let man meditate always, for then at the last hour of going hence from his body he will be strong in the strength of this yoga, faithfully followed: the mind is firm, and the heart so full, it hardly holds its love. Thus he will take his leave: and now, with the life-force indrawn utterly, held fast between the eyebrows, he goes forth to find his Lord, that light-giver, who is greatest” (8:10).

“You find yourself in this transient, joyless world. Turn from it, and take your delight in me. Fill your heart and mind with me, adore me, make all your acts an offering to me, bow down to me in self-surrender. If you set your heart upon me thus, and take me for your ideal above all others, you will come into my Being” (9:33, 34).

“Be absorbed in me, lodge your mind in me: thus you shall dwell in me, do not doubt it, here and hereafter” (12:8).

“Who sees his Lord, within every creature, deathlessly dwelling amidst the mortal: that man sees truly. Thus ever aware of the Omnipresent always about him, he offers no outrage to his own Atman, hides the face of God beneath ego no longer: therefore he reaches that bliss which is highest. Who sees the separate lives of all creatures united in Brahman brought forth from Brahman, himself finds Brahman” (13:27, 28, 30).

The mind of the yogi

“He must free himself from the delusion of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ He must accept pleasure and pain with equal tranquility. He must be forgiving, ever-contented, self-controlled,

united constantly with me in his meditation. His resolve must be unshakable. He must be dedicated to me in intellect and in mind. Such a devotee is dear to me. He neither molests his fellow men, nor allows himself to become disturbed by the world. He is no longer swayed by joy and envy, anxiety and fear. Therefore he is dear to me. He is pure, and independent of the body's desire. He is able to deal with the unexpected: prepared for everything, unperturbed by anything. He is neither vain nor anxious about the results of his actions. Such a devotee is dear to me. He does not desire or rejoice in what is pleasant. He does not dread what is unpleasant, or grieve over it. He remains unmoved by good or evil fortune. Such a devotee is dear to me. His attitude is the same toward friend and foe. He is indifferent to honor and insult, heat and cold, pleasure and pain. He is free from attachment. He values praise and blame equally. He can control his speech. He is content with whatever he gets. His home is everywhere and nowhere. His mind is fixed upon me, and his heart is full of devotion. He is dear to me. This true wisdom I have taught will lead you to immortality. The faithful practice it with devotion, taking me for their highest aim. To me they surrender heart and mind. They are exceedingly dear to me" (12:13-20).

"Be humble, be harmless, have no pretension, be upright, forbearing, serve your teacher in true obedience, keeping the mind and the body in cleanness, tranquil, steadfast, master of ego, standing apart from the things of the senses, free from self; aware of the weakness in mortal nature, its bondage to birth, age, suffering, dying; to nothing be slave, nor desire possession of man-child or wife, of home or of household; calmly encounter the painful, the pleasant" (13:7-9).

"Yogis who have gained tranquility through the practice of spiritual disciplines, behold him in their own consciousness" (15:11).

"A man who is born with tendencies toward the Divine, is fearless and pure in heart. He perseveres in that path to union with Brahman which the scriptures and his teacher have taught him. He is charitable. He can control his passions. He studies the scriptures regularly, and obeys their directions. He practices spiritual disciplines. He is straightforward, truthful, and of an even temper. He harms no one. He renounces the things of this world. He has a tranquil mind and an unmalicious tongue. He is compassionate toward all. He is not greedy. He is gentle and modest. He abstains from useless activity. He has faith in the strength of his higher nature. He can forgive and endure. He is clean in thought and act. He is free from hatred and from pride. Such qualities are his birthright" (16:1-3).

The life of the yogi

"Learn from me now how man made perfect is one with Brahman, the goal of wisdom. When the mind and the heart are freed from delusion, united with Brahman, when steady will has subdued the senses, when sight and taste and sound are abandoned without regretting, without aversion; when a man seeks solitude, eats but little, curbing his speech, his mind and his body, ever engaged in his meditation on Brahman the truth, and full of compassion; when he casts from him vanity, violence, pride, lust, anger and all his possessions, totally free from the sense of ego and tranquil of heart: that man is ready for oneness with Brahman. And he who dwells united with Brahman, calm in mind, not grieving, not craving, regarding all men with equal acceptance: he loves me most dearly. To love is to know me, my innermost nature, the truth that I am: through this knowledge he enters at once to my Being. All that he does is offered before me in utter surrender: my grace is upon him, he finds the eternal, the place unchanging. Mentally resign all your action to me. Regard me as your dearest loved one. Know me to be your only refuge. Be united always in heart and

consciousness with me. United with me, you shall overcome all difficulties by my grace” (18:50-58).

The right response

“By your grace, O Lord, my delusions have been dispelled. My mind stands firm. Its doubts are ended. I will do your bidding” (18:73).

Chapter Six: Living the Yoga Life

Meditation

The supreme master of yoga, Gorakhnath, said: “He who aspires to any attainment without the practice of yoga meditation cannot succeed in hundreds of years” (Gorakh Rahasyam 4). Meditation is the process of centering our awareness in the principle of pure consciousness which is our essential being. In this way we will never lose sight of our real identity. That is why Lalla Yogeshwari used to sing:

My teacher spoke to me but one precept.
He said unto me, “From without enter the inmost part.”
That to me became a rule and a precept.
And therefore naked began I to dance. (*Lalla Vakyani* 94)

Divesting herself of all thoughts and impressions, external and internal, Lalla entered her eternal Self, and thus “naked” began to dance the dance of inner bliss that is the nature of the Self. As the Gita says: “Only that yogi whose joy is inward, inward his peace, and his vision inward shall come to Brahman and know Nirvana” (Bhagavad Gita 5:24).

Meditation is the process of restoring our consciousness to the center—our eternal spirit-self—and keeping it there so our evolution will proceed exactly according to the divine plan without any more delays or deviations. Here are some statements of the upanishads regarding meditation.

“This Self, deep-hidden in all beings, is not revealed to all; but to the seers, pure in heart, concentrated in mind—to them is he revealed” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:12).

“Wise, self-controlled, and tranquil souls, who practice austerity and meditation, attain by the path of liberation to the immortal, the truly existing, the changeless Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.11).

“With mind illumined by the power of meditation, the wise know the Self, the blissful, the immortal” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.7).

“This Effulgent Self is to be realized by meditation and by superconscious vision” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.5).

“In meditation the Self is revealed” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.8).

“By the rightly meditative, the Self is fully known” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.4).

“One who knows, meditates upon, and realizes the truth of the Self—such an one delights in the Self, revels in the Self, rejoices in the Self” (Chandogya Upanishad 7:25:1, 2).

“Knowledge of the Self is gained through meditation” (Swetashwatar Upanishad 1:15, 16).

Knowing this, Lalla Yogeshwari also used to sing:

An ascetic [yati] wanders from holy place to holy place.
To seek the union brought about by visiting himself. (*Lalla Vakyani* 36)

It is important that meditation become the heart, the dominant factor, of your life; for then God will be the heart, the ruler, of your life.

True signs of progress in meditation

In *Journey to Self-Realization*, a collection of talks by Paramhansa Yogananda, at the end of the talk entitled “The True Signs of Progress in Meditation,” he gives the following list of seven indications of progress in meditation practice:

An increasing peacefulness during meditation.

A conscious inner experience of calmness in meditation metamorphosing into increasing bliss.

A deepening of one’s understanding, and finding answers to one’s questions through the calm intuitive state of inner perception.

An increasing mental and physical efficiency in one’s daily life.

Love for meditation and the desire to hold on to the peace and joy of the meditative state in preference to attraction to anything in the world.

An expanding consciousness of loving all with the unconditional love that one feels toward his own dearest loved ones.

Actual contact with God, and worshipping Him as ever new Bliss felt in meditation and in His omnipresent manifestations within and beyond all creation.

Inner negativity

Impulses to negativity or foolishness, whether mental or physical, exist in our minds in the form of impressions or conditionings produced by previous actions or experiences. Worries and anxieties about these impulses in the form of “sins,” “temptations,” and “wrong thinking” torment a lot of seekers. Even more futile is obsession with “getting rid of the ego.” For the one who regularly practices meditation and arranges his inner and outer life so as to avoid their counteracting or conflicting with his practice there is no need for such self-torture. Speaking of these negative and troublesome things, Shankara confidently says “they are dissolved along with the receptacle, the chitta.... Because they have no effect, they are not given attention, for when a thing is falling of itself there is no point in searching for something to make it fall.” I. K. Taimni says: “As the object of meditation continues to fill the mind completely there can be no question of emptying the mind.”

Too upset to meditate?

I knew a man who frequently refused medication, saying, “I’m too sick right now to take medicine. I’ll take it when I feel better.” This amazed me, but we tend to do the same thing regarding meditation. It is the only way to real peace, but when our lives are being swept with the storms of grief, disaster, fears, anger, and suchlike, we say the same thing. “I am too upset to meditate. I’ll do it later.” But meditation has the ability to soothe and eliminate all disturbed thoughts and inner states. So whenever any distracted or negative conditions arise in our minds and lives, meditation is the key to peace and clear thinking.

Keep it inside

Do not dissipate the calmness and centering gained through meditation by talking about it to others. Experiences in meditation are not only subtle, they are fragile, as delicate as spun glass, and speaking about them can shatter their beneficial effects. Bragging, eulogizing, and swapping notes about meditation experiences is a very harmful activity. Avoid it.

Do not satisfy any curiosity about your personal yogic experiences or benefits except in the most general terms. Naturally you can tell people that meditation helps you, but do so in only a general way unless you really feel intuitively that you should be more specific. When people seem truly interested in spiritual life and serious about it,

recommend the books that have been helpful to you.

It is also good if you keep your meditation place very private and do not allow anyone else to go there unless they are going to be meditating with you. At no time should anyone sit on your meditation chair, throw, pillow, or mat.

The place for meditation

It will be most helpful to your practice if you have a special place exclusively for meditation. Your mind will begin to associate that place with meditation and will more easily enter a quiet and peaceful state when you sit there. If you can set aside an entire room for practicing meditation, or even a large well-ventilated closet, that is good, but just an area in a room is adequate. The important thing is that the area be devoted exclusively to your meditation. (It can be helpful to have a special shawl, or meditation clothing, or a robe that you only wear when meditating, as it will absorb and hold the vibrations of meditation. After a while, just putting them on helps in entering a meditative state.)

Your meditation place should be as quiet as possible. As a rule earplugs are not recommended for the practice of meditation since you can become distracted by the sensation of pressure in the ears, or the chirping, cricket-like noises that go on all the time in the ears, or the sound of your heartbeat. But if you need them, use them. Your place of meditation should ideally be a place where you can most easily forget outer distractions, but if it is not, you can still manage to practice meditation successfully.

It should be softly or dimly lighted. (Full darkness might tend to make you go to sleep.) It is also good to turn off any electric lights, as their pulsation—even though not perceived by the eyes—affects the brain waves and subtly agitates the mind. If you like having a candle or wick lamp burning when you meditate, they should not flicker.

The room should be moderate in temperature and free from drafts, both cold and hot. It is also important that it be well ventilated so you do not get sleepy from lack of oxygen in the air.

Some people to keep sacred symbols or imagery in their meditation place to remind them of spiritual ideals.

A few more points

It is often recommended to face east or north when meditating, but it has been my experience that it simply does not matter what direction you face. Yet, you can experiment on your own. It has, however, long been my experience that sleeping with the head toward the north—the feet pointing south—can cause a magnetic conflict or disturbance in the body, adversely affecting sleep and even causing nervousness and restlessness. This is also the experience of many meditators I have known.

The body itself is magnetic, and any disturbance in polarity or magnetic flow (biomagnetism) is detrimental to health. Leather inhibits the natural flow of the life force (prana). Leather shoes block the upward flow of prana from the earth into our bodies, and leather belts interfere with the flow of prana within the body. On the more metaphysical side of things, the use of leather—or any slaughtered-animal-derived substance—in any manner is a violation of the principle of ahimsa [non-killing], as Yogananda points out in chapter four of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. It is also an infraction of the principle of shaucha [purity or cleanliness].

It is best to meditate without shoes, because shoes carry the vibration of the dirt they contact each day. If you feet tend to get cold, then special socks or comfortable, cloth houseshoes can be worn.

Some meditators like to burn incense when they meditate. This is a good practice if

the smoke does not irritate the lungs or nose. Unfortunately, most incense, including that from India, contains artificial, toxic ingredients that are unhealthy. Two excellent kinds of incense are the Auroshika brand made at the Aurobindo Ashram in India and the Resin-on-a-Stick incense made by Fred Soll Incense in the United States. Sandalwood, frankincense, and rose fragrances have particularly high vibrations.

True spiritual experience

Sentient beings—long before reaching the level of human birth and after—are immersed in a chain of never-ending experiences, many of them absolutely illusory with no basis of any kind. Yoga philosophy goes further and says that all experiences are delusions. Some, such as hallucinations, have no objective reality at all, and other experiences may be based on some degree of actuality, but our misinterpretation of them turns them into delusions as well. “Maya” is not outside us, but an interior condition.

The yogi’s fervent aspiration is to experience the Real, the Truly Existent (Sat) which we call Brahman, the Paramatman. So immediately he is confronted with the crucial question: What is true spiritual experience? This must be answered lest he wander for future lifetimes through delusional experiences he mistakes for realities. Since yoga deals with the mind—the major source of illusory experience—the yogi is very susceptible to mistaking the unreal for the real, just as he was before becoming a yogi! The masters of yoga have given us clear information as to the nature of real spiritual experience.

When Gorakhnath asked Matsyendranath: “What is the abode of knowledge [jnana]?” the Master replied: Consciousness [chetana] is the abode of knowledge” (Gorakh Bodha 21, 22). Shankara defines correct meditation as “meditation established in the perception of the nature of Spirit alone, pure Consciousness itself.” Yoga Sutra 3:55 tells us: “Liberation is attained when the mind is the same as the spirit in purity.” That is, when through meditation we are permanently filled with nothing but the awareness of pure consciousness, liberation is attained. “That is the liberation of the spirit when the spirit stands alone in its true nature as pure light. So it is.” This is the conclusion of Vyasa. Pure consciousness alone prevails. True spiritual experience, then, is the experience of pure, unalloyed consciousness that is the nature of spirit and Spirit, of the individual and the cosmic Self.

True spiritual experience is the non-dual experience of Spirit. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says: “When there is duality, as it were, then one smells another, one sees another, one hears another, one speaks to another, one thinks of another, one knows another. But when everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should One know That owing to which all this is known—through what should one know the Knower?” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2:4:14). The Chandogya Upanishad tells us: “Where one sees nothing but the One, hears nothing but the One, knows nothing but the One—there is the Infinite. Where one sees another, hears another, knows another—there is the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite is mortal” (Chandogya Upanishad 24:1).

The atman-Self is never anything but consciousness, yet it, like God, has extended itself outward as the many levels of our present state of being. Unlike God, we have lost control over just about everything, and by becoming absorbed in awareness of our external being have caused it to take on a virtually independent existence, dragging us

along with it. Conversely, by keeping ourselves centered in the pure awareness, the witnessing consciousness that is our real Self, we will begin the process of turning all those levels back into pure spirit.

Our intention in meditating is to center our awareness permanently in the consciousness of who we really are—in the spirit whose nature is itself pure consciousness. We center or merge our awareness in the consciousness which is the Self.

Visions

Most visions seen in meditation occur because the meditator has fallen asleep and is dreaming. There are genuine visions, actual psychic experiences, that can occur in meditation, but Ramana Maharshi gives the true facts about all visions when he says: “Visions do occur. To know how you look you must look into a mirror, but do not take that reflection to be yourself. What is perceived by our senses and the mind is never the [ultimate] truth. All visions are mere mental creations, and if you believe in them, your progress ceases. Enquire to whom the visions occur. Find out who is their witness. Stay in pure awareness, free from all thoughts. Do not move out of that state” (*The Power of the Presence*, vol. 3, p. 249).

Illusions of progress and enlightenment

“The trouble with ignorance is that it picks up confidence as it goes along” (Arnold H. Glasgow). The ego-ruled mind can only delude. This is why we continually find people burbling along about how their insights and experiences have freed them, renewed them, or made them so wise, only to see them continually recycling through the same old illusions, ignorance, and attendant suffering over and over, like people who are continually quitting smoking or losing weight, but never really do. The ego is not only a liar, it is The Lie. For this reason we must be very careful that we do not get deluded into thinking we have attained something when we have not. Here, for example, are the words of the famous ballet dancer Nijinsky:

“I am not afraid of you. I love now. I loved you always. I am yours and I am my own. You have forgotten what God is. But I have found Him. I love everybody. I live everywhere. I am the flesh. I am the feeling. You are dead because your aims are death. I am the spirit. I am love. I am Nijinsky of God. I love Him, and God loves me. I am a cloud of God.”

Are these the words of an enlightened soul? With a few adjustments they would bring tears to the eyes of New Age seminar junkies and would sell very well as a wall poster with a nature scene background. They could even be set to music—or at least to the sound of surf and seagulls—and sold at a profit. But they actually are the ravings of a homicidal maniac, taken down as he sat on the floor of his padded cell in a strait jacket—a strait jacket he needed because he would kill anyone who came into the cell, including his wife to whom these words were dictated and whom he regarded as a spiritual ignoramus incapable of understanding his great illumination. She had forgotten God and was dead; but he had found God and was life and love—so he was convinced. But he was wrong. He was homicidal. He was insane.

Here are some examples of foolishness elevated to enlightenment in the ego-blinded mind.

1) The young yogi had spent several weeks in the Himalayan depths, enclosed in a cave of his own finding. He had left the plains of northern India and come to the abode of silence. There, in his cave, he had engaged in various yogic practices according to his whimsy. The result was his being overwhelmed by the surety that he had attained

total enlightenment and was no longer even human, but divine. Therefore he had no reason for living. He arose and walked out of his cave in a straight path. As soon as he came to a precipice he would calmly walk over it and plunge to his death, ending a now-pointless existence. But in his march to death he passed through a meadow filled with flowers. There he sat down. After some time he seemed to feel the “call” of all those in the world who needed him, and decided that he would not kill himself. Rather, he would return to the plains and there share his experience with others. This he did, and today is a noted and prosperous guru in both India and America.

2) About the same time another yogi was sitting in the Himalayan foothills, meditating in the total darkness of a vast cave. He had an experience of the subtle energy field of the brain that is not at all an uncommon occurrence even to beginners in meditation. Yet, concluding that he was thereby enlightened, he, too, left to become a famous and wealthy guru of East and West.

3) Also around this time a young American was meandering through Ceylon. During one of his attempts to meditate he fell asleep and saw a vivid dream image of a peacock feather. Since the peacock is considered a spiritually significant symbol in Hindu mythology, he inferred upon waking up (“coming out of samadhi” in his later recountings) that he was enlightened. He returned to America as a “Master” who accepted credit cards.

4) A few years later another young American was studying in northern India with Tibetan refugee lamas. After many hours of meditation he fell asleep and dreamed most realistically that he was eating radishes. When he awoke he gave forth with a violent belch—and tasted radishes! Confident that he had now gotten all there was to get in Oriental mysticism, he immediately returned to the United States and became a spiritual figure in the early years of the New Age.

5) A successful executive secretary in Canada who was also a student of yoga led a small discussion and meditation group. At the onset of menopause she began to experience mild convulsions, fainting spells, and—on occasion—visual hallucinations whenever she would attempt to practice the breathing exercises that formed the basis of her yogic practice. Highly intelligent, she readily understood that her problem was a manifestation of hormonal imbalance and the “change of life” cycle. However, when she told her small coterie of admirers that she was planning to consult a gynecologist about the advisability of medical treatment for her disorder, she encountered a flood of protest. “Mataji! You are not fainting or having ‘hot flashes.’ You are entering samadhi!” “This is not menopause, it is ‘entering the cloud of unknowing.’” “You are experiencing ‘the Great Void!’” Nonsense prevailed over good sense, since it is more appealing to the egoic mind to be thought metaphysical than menopausal. And “Stoned Out Mama,” as she herself and her followers came to call her on occasion, became a spiritual leader of the New Age.

None of the foregoing accounts have been either exaggerated or written sarcastically. They are straightforward fact. I have met examples 1, 2, and 5 and seen them in action. I have heard a recording of example 3 telling about his peacock feather enlightenment. Several admirers of example 4 told me about his “enlightenment” just as he had told them.

I have met three Jesus Christs and one Virgin Mary, and a series of lesser delusionals, including a man in Bengal through whom the goddess Kali supposedly did automatic writing. These examples are only a fraction of a drop in the vast ocean of human minds and lives devastated by spiritual self-delusion, and are related here not for mockery or criticism but as a warning to the indiscriminating and unwary seeker. For one of the tests set before those who seek the gold of spiritual illumination is the

offering of the “fool’s gold” of egoic illusion.

False awakening

“It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite” (Isaiah 29:8). Did you ever *dream* that you woke up? Remember how frustrated you were when you discovered that you were really still asleep and dreaming? Some people have had the experience of dreaming a whole series of awakenings, in each one thinking: “Now this time I am really awake,” only to find out that it was still a dream.

What if our meditation does not result in a real awakening or escape from the maze of illusion, but results only in a delusive extension of the dream of the mind? What if we even have a series of awakening experiences only to ultimately find that they, too, are unreal—merely new illusions replacing old ones? That this is possible I know both from my own experience and that of others who have consulted with me and whom I have observed. How many times have you and I heard people say: “I thought I got rid of that problem a long time ago; and here it is!”?

It is not enough to take up the practice of meditation in just any form. As Buddha insisted, there must be the practice of *right* meditation. What is right meditation—and what is wrong meditation? The answer is not complex. Right meditation is that which removes all illusion and shows us the truth of things in a direct, unitive manner. Wrong meditation is that which either perpetuates or creates illusions, however grand and appealing they might be. And, as I have quoted at the beginning, the trouble with ignorance is that it picks up confidence as it goes along.

Uncomfortable as it might be, every yogi must be keenly aware of his mind’s capacity to fool him, and he must ruthlessly examine his experiences and his states of mind to determine whether he is really on the right track or not. We must mercilessly question our own minds and be very slow in concluding that we are making progress. This is not doubting, this is insisting on knowing the truth. People waste entire lifetimes in foolish religion, mysticism, and delusive yoga practice. If you are honest and truthful in your investigation, it should not take long for you to find out the facts.

As I have said, it should not take so very long before you can gauge the character of your practice. If you are faithfully meditating each day and following exactly the instructions given you, it seems to me that no more than three months’ practice should make it clear to you if you are on the right path or being bamboozled and led astray. And it may take much less time than that. But be aware: if your intuition warns you that you are on the wrong track and you ignore it or refuse to even consider it, then you may fall into delusions that will last for years, if not for the rest of your life. I have seen this happen to many whose ego would not let them look squarely at the truth of their situation. I do not tell you this to frighten you, but I certainly do hope you will be apprehensive of your own ability to deceive yourself and therefore be ever watchful lest you, too, wander on—a spiritual delusional that cannot be helped because he refuses to admit he needs help. This is the ultimate vengeance of the ego on those who try to dethrone and cast it down in perpetual banishment, never again to arise.

False non-dual experience

This delusive state of someone who thinks his is in non-dual consciousness is described in the nineteenth century science-fiction classic *Flatland* by Edwin A. Abbott, a brilliant Shakespearean scholar and mathematician. The book is about a two-dimensional being who is suddenly pulled up into the world of three dimensions and

the difficulties he encounters upon returning to the world of two dimensions and attempting to communicate his experience. At one point his inter-dimensional guide and mentor shows him two other worlds: Lineland, where there is only one dimension, and Pointland, where there are no dimensions at all—not in the sense of the transcendence of dimensionality, which is possible and even inevitable in genuine spiritual evolution, but in the sense of a regressive shrinking of consciousness to the point of incapacity for perceiving dimensions.

Here is the account. As you read it, note how the rhapsodies of the “King” of Pointland are like the modern expositions of non-dual enlightenment through meditation that are a continuing echo of the Drug Explosion of the nineteen-sixties.

“During my slumber I had a dream. We were moving together toward a bright but infinitesimally small Point, to which my Master directed my attention.

“Look yonder,” said my Guide, “in Flatland thou hast lived; of Lineland thou hast received a vision; thou hast soared with me to the heights of Spaceland; now, in order to complete the range of thy experience, I conduct thee downward to the lowest depth of existence, even to the realm of Pointland, the Abyss of No Dimensions.

“Behold, yon miserable creature. That Point is a Being like ourselves, but confined to the non-dimensional Gulf. He is himself his own World, his own Universe; of any other than himself he can form no conception; he knows not Length, nor Breadth, nor Height, for he has had no experience of them; he has no cognizance even of the number Two; nor has he a thought of Plurality; for he is himself his One and All, being really Nothing. Yet mark his perfect self-contentment, and hence learn this lesson, that to be self-contented is to be vile and ignorant, and that to aspire is better than to be blindly and impotently happy. Now listen.”

“He ceased; and there arose from the little buzzing creature a tiny, low, monotonous, but distinct tinkling, as from one of your Spaceland phonographs, from which I caught these words, ‘Infinite beatitude of Existence! It is; and there is none else beside It.’

“What,” said I, “does the puny creature mean by ‘it’?” ‘He means himself,’ said the Sphere: ‘have you not noticed before now, that babies and babyish people who cannot distinguish themselves from the world, speak of themselves in the Third Person? But hush!’

“It fills all Space,” continued the little soliloquizing Creature, “and what It fills, It is. What It thinks, that It utters; and what It utters, that It hears; and It itself is Thinker, Utterer, Hearer, Thought, Word, Audition; it is the One, and yet the All in All. Ah, the happiness ah, the happiness of Being!”

The spiritual deadliness of such delusion is revealed further when an attempt is made to help the King of Pointland out of his false sense of non-duality so he can truly progress in consciousness.

“Can you not startle the little thing out of its complacency?” said I. ‘Tell it what it really is, as you told me; reveal to it the narrow limitations of Pointland, and lead it up to something higher.’ ‘That is no easy task,’ said my Master; ‘try you.’”

“Hereon, raising my voice to the uttermost, I addressed the Point as follows: ‘Silence, silence, contemptible Creature. You call yourself the All in All, but you are the Nothing: your so-called Universe is a mere speck in a Line, and a Line is a mere shadow as compared with—’ ‘Hush, hush, you have said enough,’ interrupted the Sphere, ‘now listen, and mark the effect of your harangue on the King of Pointland.’

“The lustre of the Monarch, who beamed more brightly than ever upon hearing my words, shewed clearly that he retained his complacency; and I had hardly ceased when he took up his strain again. ‘Ah, the joy, ah, the joy of Thought! What can It not achieve

by thinking! Its own Thought coming to Itself, suggestive of Its disparagement, thereby to enhance Its happiness! Sweet rebellion stirred up to result in triumph! Ah, the divine creative power of the All in One! Ah, the joy, the joy of Being!

“You see,” said my Teacher, “how little your words have done. So far as the Monarch understands them at all, he accepts them as his own—for he cannot conceive of any other except himself—and plumes himself upon the variety of “Its Thought” as an instance of creative Power. Let us leave this God of Pointland to the ignorant fruition of his omnipresence and omniscience: nothing that you or I can do can rescue him from his self-satisfaction.”

Really, what more need be said? The dangers of such a counterfeit transcendence should be evident to those not already hopelessly deluded through such profound distortions of consciousness.

Detecting delusion

It would be impossible to list and analyze the infinite variety of delusions of enlightenment, but we can list some basic principles by which we can diagnose the character of the many claims to enlightenment.

First of all, anyone who claims to be enlightened is usually not. Some centuries ago a bishop learned that a great disturbance had arisen in a convent regarding a nun who was thought to be a saint by some and thought to be a fool by others. He decided to visit the convent and attempt to restore peace. Upon his arrival the nuns assembled, and without preamble the canny bishop demanded: “Which one of you is the saint?” “Me!” said a nun as she jumped up. “The matter is closed,” the bishop said, turning to the abbess. “This nun is no saint, for a saint never claims to be one.”

The reason a truly enlightened person does not tell others he is enlightened is the very nature of enlightenment itself. Enlightenment is not an attainment, an experience, or a state of consciousness. Rather it is the true *nature* of each one of us. It is not an attribute but our eternal state of being. Further, being beyond time and space, enlightenment cannot really “take place.” Therefore no one can say “I have become enlightened” or “I am enlightened.” The illumined simply say “I am,” or like Buddha: “I am awake.” The Kena Upanishad puts it this way:

“If you think that you know well the truth of Brahman, know that you know little. What you think to be Brahman in your self, or what you think to be Brahman in the gods—that is not Brahman. What is indeed the truth of Brahman you must therefore learn.

“I cannot say that I know Brahman fully. Nor can I say that I know him not. He among us knows him best who understands the spirit of the words: ‘Nor do I know that I know him not.’

“He truly knows Brahman who knows him as beyond knowledge; he who thinks that he knows, knows not. The ignorant think that Brahman is known, but the wise know him to be beyond knowledge” (Kena Upanishad 2:1-3)

Nor can enlightenment be in any way described, being far beyond any capability of language to convey. This being so, any verbal description of enlightenment cannot be true. It is interesting to note that Paramhansa Yogananda, when writing of his first experience of Cosmic Consciousness entitled his account “An Experience in Samadhi,” not an experience of enlightenment. And even the highest form of samadhi, nirvikalpa samadhi, is said by the yogis to be beyond describing.

The greatest exponent of spiritual reality in India, Adi Shankaracharya, in his Stanzas on Nirvana simply stated: “I am not bound; I am not free” for he had transcended all such possibility. That is enlightenment indeed.

Karma, reincarnation and total personal responsibility

Believing in karma and reincarnation as intellectual theories counts for very little if it does not affect our life and thought. What is needed is an intelligent understanding and a practical application of the principles of karma and reincarnation.

What is karma? *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary* gives this rather lengthy definition: “Karma is derived from the Sanskrit root *kri*, which means to act, do, or make, means any kind of action, including thought and feeling. It also means the effects of action. Karma is both action and reaction, the metaphysical equivalent of the principle: ‘For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.’ ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap’ (Galatians 6:7). It is karma operating through the law of cause and effect that binds the jiva or the individual soul to the wheel of birth and death. There are three forms of karma: sanchita, agami, and prarabdha. Sanchita karma is the vast store of accumulated actions done in the past, the fruits of which have not yet been reaped. Agami karma is the action that will be done by the individual in the future. Prarabdha karma is the action that has begun to fructify, the fruit of which is being reaped in this life.”

Even those who accept the foregoing definition usually do not know the real nature of karma. Karma is commonly thought to be a kind of force circling somewhere in the universe awaiting a moment to enter into our life and create some type of event or situation. Some Eastern-oriented groups even speak of “the Lords of Karma” implying there are some great beings who, like the Fates of old Greek mythology, allot to us the things that are to occur in our life. Both are misconceptions.

First, karma is totally psychological—as is our presence and experience in this relative plane of existence. It literally is “all in our head,” but in such a complex manner that it appears to be an objective reality, a maze which we must solve to be free of it. That is why the American sage Margaret Laird entitled one of her books *We Are The World We Walk Through*. All our karma is stored in our mental bodies, the manomaya and jnanamaya koshas. The universe is a vast field of magnetism in which like attracts like. The whorls in our mind known as samskaras and vasanas are our karma as well as our mental characteristics. Whatever in the cosmos vibrates exactly in harmony with those mental configurations is drawn into our life-orbit, and that encounter and consequent effect is “karma” as we experience it. As the Chinese proverb says: “When mean-spirited people live behind the door, mean-spirited people come knock on the door.” Buddha was most insistent on karma being purely mental.

Second, we control our karma absolutely, though on a subliminal level which usually causes us to think our karma is a blind reactive force or a visitation of divine will. Before we come into each incarnation we review our karma and decide what is to come to fruition in the new life. It is just like packing a suitcase preparatory to going on a trip. When we arrive at our destination we take out of the suitcase exactly what we

put in it ourself. This means that before we enter the womb we have planned the whole scenario of our life, that we know everything that is going to happen to us—at least in a broad manner, for within certain parameters we do have the power to direct our present-life karma and determine the course of its flow. So karma is always under our control, and is never an independent force. We create our karma and create our many lives.

Can karma be dissolved, or must it be “worked out”? Karma can only be dissolved or erased. All that is needed is an alteration in the mental energies of which karma consist. That is why deep and prolonged meditation is so important. For karma cannot be worked out—it is either eliminated or it is not.

A common misconception is that karma is worked out by experiencing its effects. For example, if I steal fifty dollars and someone steals fifty dollars from me, it is believed that my karma has thereby been worked out. Wrong. Karma is a shaping of the mind, a magnetism that draws to me situations that express or mirror my karma—and therefore my mind. Karma is not created by an action alone, but by the mental state which inspired the action. Theft is done by someone with thief-consciousness. Being stolen from does not remove that consciousness, it just adds frustration and anger. So in my hypothetical situation, if someone steals from me it only indicates my inner thief-consciousness and in no way removes or even lessens it. As a consequence, people with thief-consciousness are going to keep coming into my life and stealing from me until I expunge my own thief-consciousness. So until I purify my mind—especially through meditation—the chain of theft is going to go on and even reach into my future lives. That is why when two people came to Yogananda and complained about one another he simply said: “Change yourselves.” That is the only solution.

The upshot of all this is the necessity to squarely face the truth that we are totally responsible for our life at all times. The good news is that if we do not like our present life situation we can change it by changing our mental energies through the observance of yama and niyama, and most especially through meditation. “Therefore, Arjuna, become a yogi” (Bhagavad Gita 6:46).

The two major obstacles

We have all lived a tremendous number of lives, ranging from single-celled organisms to human beings. For millions (no exaggeration) of lives we have struggled up the ladder of evolution and now stand at the point where we can consciously complete our journey and enter the state of total liberation—Nirvana. But there are many hindrances to this final stage of growth, most of them internal in the form of deep-rooted conditionings, karmic habit patterns that have been strengthened in every life. They are a tremendous inner force, so ancient and ingrained that they literally are “second nature,” blocking the realization of our True Self.

There are two major habits—addictions, actually—that lead all others in blocking spiritual growth: sex and eating the flesh of sentient beings. They are so profoundly instinctual, so utterly ingrained in us from previous lives human and subhuman, that they blind us to their destructive nature, seeming not only normal but necessary. Yet no one can attain liberation without the absolute elimination of them.

The eating of sentient beings is the easier of the two to halt because there is so much reliable medical research showing how harmful it is to the body—and therefore the mind. A sense of compassion and mercy, traits of a developed awareness, impels even children to realize how much better it is to cease this practice. Yet people who quit often fall back into the habit never to escape a second time in this life.

The most powerful of the two is the habit of sex—in whatever form it takes. If we do

get a glimpse of its terrible consequences and enslavement, it appears so colossal a force as to seem impossible of elimination. In fact Buddha said that if there had been a second obstacle the equal of sex to overcome, he could not have attained nirvana. This in itself shows how necessary it is to erase it from our life forever, along with the other evil of preying on bodies: the eating of meat. Both are egocentric devourings of others. These are the facts, and no denying can change them a whit.

These two factors make success in meditation impossible, for they are the antithesis of spiritual life and growth. Unless these habits are deleted from every part of our being, there is no possibility of our becoming freed from rebirth. They are the greatest chains that have bound us to the wheel of birth and death for ages—even cycles of creation. They are the common denominator of all bound entities, sure and certain guarantees of return to material existence.

Sex and meat-eating are the greatest darkeners of consciousness, making the psychic forces within us dull, heavy, and sluggish. They prevent the yogi from developing the subtle awareness needed in meditation and stymie his attempts to refine his mind and liberate his consciousness from ego and materiality. They ensure that his consciousness is oriented downward, and act like ballast in a balloon—however high it flies it will eventually be pulled back down to earth. Only those who oppose the habits and addictions of previous lives can hope to gain ultimate freedom.

Refusing the truth

Paramhansa Yogananda often said: “People are so skillful in their ignorance.” This can most clearly be seen in religion when they delude themselves about the disciplines taught by their founders. The best example I know is in regard to Yama-Niyama and the Five Precepts of Buddha. Neither of these allow any exceptions—there is either absolute observance or absolute abstinence. You either observe them all the time or none of the time. Yet people convince themselves that in the matter of eating meat which breaks the rule of non-killing, and sexual indulgence which is also prohibited, there are extenuating circumstances and exceptions. There is no basis whatsoever for this dishonesty except their own carnal addictions. It is like a friend of mine who ran a Stop sign and was pulled over by a policeman. He tried to justify himself by saying that he had slowed way down. “The sign says Stop, not Slow,” replied the policemen and gave him a ticket. These principles and precepts say Stop, not Slow. Those who only slow down are not followers of either Patanjali or Buddha.

Yogic Environment

Recently one of our monks showed me two containers. In each one was a very small, green plant less than an inch high, consisting of two leaves. “I planted these nine weeks ago,” he told me. “Really? What is wrong with them?” I asked. “I used the wrong kind of potting soil, so they won’t grow,” he told me. It is exactly the same with the study of philosophy and the practice of meditation: if there is not the right environment, inner and outer, nothing at all will come of it. Not only do we need a special place in our home favorable to meditation, our entire environment should be examined to see that it, too, is not mentally and spiritually heavy, toxic, disruptive and agitating. The same is true of our employment and our associates—business, social, and familial.

The most important environment, of course, is the inner one of our own mind—our habitual state of awareness as well as our thoughts. Our dominant awareness should be that of our inner consciousness. Our thoughts should be thoughts of spiritual matters drawn from our study of spiritual writings, attendance at spiritual discourses,

and conversation with spiritually-minded associates. Our minds should naturally move in the highest spiritual planes. This is neither impossible nor impractical, for everything proceeds from and is controlled by the Supreme Consciousness.

Buddhi–intelligence

Yoga is not based on moods or feelings—exactly the opposite. It is based on intelligence. It is not intellectual in the modern, academic sense, but it is centered in the buddhi, which *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary* defines it as: “Intellect; understanding; reason; the thinking mind; the higher mind, which is the seat of wisdom; the discriminating faculty.” The buddhi is the faculty of understanding, of knowing. Without it we would not even be human. In the Gita Krishna speaks of Buddhi Yoga, the Yoga of Intelligence, which later came to be called Jnana Yoga, the Yoga of Knowledge.

“By buddhi yoga you shall free yourself of the bondage of karma” (Bhagavad Gita 2:39).

“To those who are constantly steadfast I give the buddhi yoga by which they come to Me” (Bhagavad Gita 10:10).

“Seek refuge in the buddhi” (Bhagavad Gita 2:49).

“Those who are established in the buddhi are freed from the bondage of rebirth and go to the abode that is free from pain” (Bhagavad Gita 2:51).

“With firm intellect [buddhi], undeluded, knowing Brahman, one is established in Brahman” (Bhagavad Gita 5:20).

“He knows that infinite happiness which is grasped by the intellect [buddhi] and transcends the the senses, and, established there, does not deviate from the truth” (Bhagavad Gita 6:21).

“The buddhi is our highest faculty, very near to the Self: “The mind [manas] is superior to the senses; moreover, the intellect [buddhi] is superior to the mind; that which is superior to the intellect is the Self” (Bhagavad Gita 3:42).

Awakened intelligence is necessary for the yogi, since “from destruction of buddhi one is lost” (Bhagavad Gita 2:63).

As already stated, buddhi is not mere intellectualism, it involves Right Action. Discipline is that which awakens the buddhi, for the Gita further says: “There is no intelligence [function of buddhi] in him who is undisciplined [uncontrolled]” (Bhagavad Gita 2:66).

In its highest form, buddhi is spiritual intuition, but intuition which is firmly based on intelligent understanding. Without buddhi the entire life is little more than confused whimsy.

Viveka and vairagya

Two of the essential psychological factors for success in yoga are viveka and vairagya. They are not moods or feelings, but intelligent insights arising from buddhi yoga, without which the authentic Yoga Life cannot be lived.

First is viveka: Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between the Self and the non-self, between the permanent and the impermanent. It is also right intuitive discrimination, ever-present intelligent discrimination between the transient and the permanent. Its importance can hardly be exaggerated. Without the clear sight of viveka the mind and life are in constant flux and contradiction.

The yogi must have an intelligent discernment regarding all the elements in his life. He must know what is worthwhile and what is useless, what is beneficial and what is harmful, what is true and what is untrue, what liberates and what binds, what

enlightens and what darkens, what pleases the ego and what liberates the spirit.

Viveka enables us to see the truth of all things, and the more we exercise it the more it increases and evolves. Viveka is a result of spiritual and intellectual maturity. As Saint Paul said: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (I Corinthians 13:11). It is a matter of spiritual growth. In the beginning we often have to rely on the judgement of those wiser than us. Again, the Gita is our best guide.

Inseparable from viveka is vairagya which is really a result of honest viveka. It is defined in *A Brief Sanskrit Dictionary* as: “Non-attachment; detachment; dispassion; absence of desire; disinterest; or indifference.” Vairagya is the attitude the yogi has toward those things that viveka tells him are delusive and distracting from the path to the Supreme.

For the yogi “good” is not what is merely pleasant, but that which is spiritually beneficial. Those people, things, or situations which lead us toward Self-realization are good; those that do not lead us toward Self-realization, or hinder our attainment of realization, are not good. Anything which helps us in our search for God is good, and that which hinders or prevents our search is not good. Our only friends are those that take our minds toward God, and our enemies are those that take our minds away from God (and that includes those who immerse themselves in worldly trivia and speak and think only of that trivia).

Vairagya is not hating, condemning, or being disgusted with something—it is wise indifference. The Gita describes the adept yogi as: “He who does not agitate the world, and who is not agitated by the world” (Bhagavad Gita 12:15). As Saint Paul further said: “The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). This is because we only appear to live in the material world, but our real life is in the realm of spirit. When Panchanon Bhattacharya was grieving over the death of Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri (Lahiri Mahasaya), the Master suddenly materialized before him and said: “Why are you sorrowing? You do not live in this world. You live with me!” I have lived with yogis who were always in the Real World, not this fever-dream we mistakenly identify with. I have met saints who lived in God so strongly that just seeing them transferred my awareness to their true world—at least for the time I was with them.

“Without doubt the mind is unsteady and difficult to restrain; but by practice [abhyasa] and by indifference [vairagya] it is restrained” (Bhagavad Gita 6:35). Vairagya like viveka is a sign of growing up spiritually.

(Swami Sivananda wrote an entire book entitled *How To Get Vairagya*. A free copy can be downloaded from <http://www.dlshq.org/download/download.htm>)

Focus on prakriti

“One acts according to one’s prakriti. Even the jnani does so. Beings follow their own prakriti; what will restraint accomplish?” (Bhagavad Gita 3:33). This is one of the most important statements of the Gita, and one which is most significant to the yogi. Just as the prakriti-energy of which the universe is formed is really the consciousness of Brahman, so all the bodies of a human being are his consciousness. This leads us to an important principle: To change our consciousness we must change our prakriti, and to change our prakriti we must change our consciousness—they are interdependent. Yoga, and only yoga, can accomplish this, but without purity of diet and scrupulous observance of yama-niyama, yoga is impossible to any meaningful degree.

Yoga affects our energy-bodies, not our inner consciousness—it *reveals* our consciousness rather than changes it. The purpose of yoga is liberation, and to this end it affects the prakriti (energy complex) which is the adjunct of our purusha. The yogi is

already in the Self, *is* the Self, so in yoga he is looking at/into his personal prakriti in the same way God observes the evolving creation.

Shoes

Since we are talking about material things (prakriti), this might be a good place to mention that it is best to meditate without shoes, because shoes (whatever material they are made from) carry the vibration of the dirt they contact each day.

A matter of magnetism

Prana takes on many forms, including biomagnetism, the force which maintains our body and its functions. The body itself is magnetic, and any disturbance in polarity or magnetic flow is detrimental to health. Leather inhibits the natural flow of the life force (prana). Leather shoes block the upward flow of prana from the earth into our bodies, and leather belts interfere with the flow of prana within the body. On the more metaphysical side of things, the use of leather—or any slaughtered-animal-derived substance—in any manner is a violation of the principle of ahimsa, as Yogananda points out in chapter four of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. It is also an infraction of the principle of shaucha.

The focus of our life

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Matthew 13:44). The kingdom of heaven is our eternal spirit-self. It is hidden in the “field” of the body according to the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, and we must “buy” that field through the disciplines and practices of yoga. And the price of purchase is ALL that we have. It is the same for everyone: our entire life must be dedicated to the attainment of liberation.

Holy solitude

“The yogi should retire into a solitary place, and live alone” (Bhagavad Gita 6:10). It is not enough to live in a solitary place, the yogi should live alone. Why? “Adore me only with heart undistracted; turn all your thought toward solitude, spurning the noise of the crowd, its fruitless commotion” (Bhagavad Gita 13:10). Solitude is necessary so we can live “with heart undistracted.”

The greatest monk of the Christian church was Saint Arsenios the Great who lived in the Egyptian desert. At the beginning of his spiritual search he prayed for guidance from God. A voice sounded from heaven, saying: “Arsenius: Flee men.” Which he did, and became “an earthly angel and a heavenly man” as a result.

This holy solitude is an ideal to be striven for. It need not involve living miles from others. Location is the key. For example, I am writing this in a house located on the side of a tree-covered mountain. When I look out the window I see at the foot of the mountain a neighborhood which includes a campground, but no noise is ever heard from there at any time. I can also see a minor highway at the foot of the mountains across the valley that is also silent. But the important thing is that the atmosphere is totally solitary. It feels as though this property is many miles from other habitations. Having lived far out in the countryside away from all others, I know the feeling and it is the same here. The windows are kept open much of the year and the only sounds usually heard are birds and breezes.

A yogi living in a tranquil neighborhood can turn his home into a spiritual haven and live in there alone with God. I knew two yogis who lived in Beverly Hills in a

sound-proofed apartment in splendid solitude. Again, location is the key—and the yogi's sincere intention.

It was said of an ancient Christian hermit who lived in the desert of Israel: "He went into the desert and took the whole world with him." So living in quiet solitude while having the mind filled with worldly clamor is defeating the purpose. It is crucial to control the telephone, not let others invade your quiet, and not bring in the world through newspapers, news magazines, or news programs on radio and television.

What if you have a family or unavoidably live with others? Then you can follow the advice of Ram Gopal Mazumdar, the Sleepless Saint of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. "Are you able to have a little room where you can close the door and be alone?...That is your cave....That is your sacred mountain. That is where you will find the kingdom of God." I knew a nun who used to climb up into a tree so she could be alone, hidden by the leaves from being disturbed by others. At the same time you must find the right balance between being alone and being with those you live with.

For those that live with others, going into solitude occasionally was one of the major spiritual practices advocated by Sri Ramakrishna. Here are some of the things he said about it.

"The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities; it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix the mind on God is very difficult, in the beginning, unless one practices meditation in solitude. When a tree is young it should be fenced all around; otherwise it may be destroyed by cattle.

"To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest. And you should always discriminate between the Real and the unreal. God alone is real, the Eternal Substance; all else is unreal, that is, impermanent. By discriminating thus, one should shake off impermanent objects from the mind."

"One must go into solitude to attain this divine love. To get butter from milk you must let it set into curd in a secluded spot: if it is too much disturbed, milk won't turn into curd. Next, you must put aside all other duties, sit in a quiet spot, and churn the curd. Only then do you get butter.

"Further, by meditating on God in solitude the mind acquires knowledge, dispassion, and devotion. But the very same mind goes downward if it dwells in the world....

"The world is water and the mind milk. If you pour milk into water they become one; you cannot find the pure milk any more. But turn the milk into curd and churn it into butter. Then, when that butter is placed in water, it will float. So, practice spiritual discipline in solitude and obtain the butter of knowledge and love. Even if you keep that butter in the water of the world the two will not mix. The butter will float."

It is essential that you spend some time each day alone, but as often as you can it is good to go away to a solitary place for meditation and spiritual study. But it should be a personal retreat, not in some place where you can get pulled into their routine. (Some retreat facilities have individual houses for retreatants to live alone.)

I am not speaking of being anti-social, but of being a serious yogi.

Be natural

The great Master Yogananda said that when we are alone we should be truly alone, forgetting the world and everything in it, including all that is dear to us, but when we are with others, we must really be with them. He was the perfect example of this. When he was alone and withdrawn the awesome atmosphere around him bespoke of his total absorption in God, and when he was with people they felt his entire heart was

with them, that he was their very own. Yet, he was never over-familiar or “folksy.” His was the perfect balance, and we must seek the same.

Many people think that “keeping silence” is a good thing, and it is if it is silence of mind and heart, but if it is nothing more than not speaking, it is of little worth. So do not waste your time “in silence” around other people—that is just ego display and an annoyance to others. Instead, seek solitude, for when there is no one to speak to that is the best silence.

Whether a yogi is alone or with others, he should always be relaxed, cheerful, and thoughtful of others.

When you are with people and it seems you are wasting your time sitting and listening to inane and silly talk, you will not be wasting your time if you calmly sit and meditate with open eyes. Never “go into meditation” around others—that is just holy show and escapism. If it does not look odd, there is nothing wrong in looking downward or at some blank surface as you continue to be what one spiritual writer called an “interior soul.” But the moment your attention is needed, give it wholeheartedly and enter into things as long as there is no harm in them. And please do not go slinking off for a meditation fix like some addict sneaking a cigarette. Stay put and keep on with the cultivation of consciousness through your inner yoga process. The spiritual vibrations will help everyone around you.

Nevertheless...

What I have written above should be followed in moderation. Whenever you can, be alone and quiet. Please do not get caught in the net of “good works” and “helping others.” These kind of activities are good for those who have not yet learned to cultivate the inner life, but believe me your solitary life and meditation will help more people than any external acts ever could. Every moment of your practice makes it easier for other yogis to maintain their practice and contributes to the awakening of those who do not yet know yoga.

Absolutely avoid the opposite sex. (If you are attracted to your own sex, then avoid everybody.) Do not fall into the trap of “just good friends” or think that disparity of age matters. Past life impressions are ready to rise and disrupt the spiritual life of the unwary. And really have nothing to do with those that tell you: “I am your mother”—or father. I have never known a one of those who said that who were not defiled in thought and intention despite the cover of love and affection—which the yogi should realize is improper. Remember: to the yogi there should be no “special people” or “exceptions to the rule” in these matters. You may have to put up with emotional blackmail from these “offended” and “hurt” people, but their attempts to accuse and make you feel guilty are proof positive of their negative and destructive nature.

By the way: Learn to become totally deaf to those who say to you: “I only want you to be happy.” They NEVER really want any such thing. They want to manipulate you into making *them* happy.

Be prepared for opposition, ridicule, and even vicious reaction to your aspirations to the yoga life. If you cannot stand up to outer pressures, how will you stand up to the delusions of your ego-mind? Another thing: Never think that you have to justify your beliefs and way of life. Do not get snagged into “discussions” with those who oppose your life and think you need prove anything to them. They are blind and deaf, and will remain so for a long time. As Yogananda told aspirants in reference to such people: “You go after God” and leave them far behind. Change your vibrations, and those people will disappear from your life, even if only after they make a lot of fuss.

Here is a conversation Mahendranath Gupta, “Master Mahasaya the Blissful

Devotee” in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, had with Sri Ramakrishna (referred to here as “M” and “Master.”)

“M. (to the Master): What should one do if one’s wife says: ‘You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide?’

“MASTER (in a serious tone): Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life. Let her commit suicide or anything else she likes. The wife that hampers her husband’s spiritual life is an ungodly wife.

“Immersed in deep thought, M. stood leaning against the wall. ...suddenly going to M., he [Sri Ramakrishna] whispered in his ear: But if a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control—the king, wicked persons, and his wife. Sincere love of God on the husband’s part may eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life. If the husband is good, then through the grace of God the wife may also follow his example.

“This had a most soothing effect on M.’s worried mind. All the while he had been thinking: Let her commit suicide. What can I do?

“M. (to the Master): This world is a terrible place indeed.

“MASTER (to the devotees): That is the reason Chaitanya said to his companion Nityananda, ‘Listen, brother, there is no hope of salvation for the worldly-minded.’”

A friendly caution

Now I am going to give you a piece of advice regarding associations that may seem severe, but it is very necessary and based on practical experience: Do not keep animals either in or outside your home. Animal slavery for our amusement and “love” is morally wrong. Animals were not intended to be captured and bred away from their true nature for human amusement and obsession. One of the effects of this is the harm to the health of humans who live in close contact with animals. Many times it has been found that pets were the source of their owner’s illnesses. Children are especially susceptible to picking up problems from animals. Both children and adults can get heart worms from dogs, for example.

It is ridiculous to avoid contact with human beings who at least have human vibrations, and yet keep the company of an animal which will be a distraction and a source of animal vibrations. I have observed that people of low consciousness and development, however well they may hide it, absolutely need to keep an animal around so they can associate with subhuman consciousness and have someone inferior to them that they literally own and from whom they claim to get “unconditional love.” And of course they continually say that animals are better than people.

It is also absurd to abstain from eating meat in order to observe ahimsa, yet feed it to animals.

Sri Ramakrishna said that when a man or woman get old and are obviously heading for death, instead of preparing for the end of their life they get and keep a cat, becoming very attached to it. I expect we all know people who refer to their animals as little girls or little boys and call themselves mommy or daddy in relation to them. And then there are the people who think they are being cute when they speak of being “owned” by their pets. But it is a sad truth.

Please avoid this shameless exploitation of animals and willful taking on of what can only be a distraction from spiritual life and a lowering of your consciousness. A yogi must take on disciplines far beyond those of ordinary people—samsarins slated for future births in ignorance.

Have a sense of humor

As Yogananda pointed out, St. Francis de Sales used to say: “A saint that is sad is a

sad saint!” and we are saints in training. A sense of humor is indispensable to the yogi—especially about himself. The good ashrams in India are what Sri Ramakrishna called “a mart of joy.” Those who live there freely laugh and enjoy jokes and even pranks. Swami Sivananda was known for his lively sense of humor, and Yogananda loved to tell funny things that had happened to him and also played pranks. (His favorite was dropping bags of water out of windows and spraying people with a hose. It was really a blessing with holy water!) Sometimes, because of his accent and hearty laughing in the telling of a story, people would say: “I could hardly understand a word, but I never laughed so much in my life.”

Enjoy yourself

When I met Swami Satyananda Giri, the author of *Yogananda Sanga*, in 1963, I asked him to tell me about Sri Yukteswar, Yogananda’s guru, since Satyananda had lived for many years with Sri Yukteswar and was the first person Yogananda took to meet him after becoming his disciple. Since it is usual for people to have a perception of Sri Yukteswar as severe and exacting, I was surprised to hear his first words: “In his entire life he never hurt the feelings of anyone, but was always gentle and kind.” (This does not mean he did not discipline those who asked for it, for discipline only “hurts” the sore ego.) But the most impressive thing he told me was his quotation of Sri Yukteswar’s often-said words: “He is a real man who can sing his life through!”

Since God is bliss, the yogi’s life should be joyful, based on optimism about his future in God and reflecting the divine experience that comes in meditation—and later all the time. Frankly, the yogi alone can really enjoy himself without needing the frantic “fun” and distractions prized by those who live in a world of unreality, darkness, and mortality. So when I urge you to enjoy yourself I mean it in the perspective of yoga.

There is a story of a serious man who was shocked when he saw some very ascetic monks joking and laughing. Noticing this, one of the monks later on asked him: “Can you shoot a bow?” When the man said he could, the monk asked: “Do you always keep the bow strung tightly?” “No,” said the man, “If I did, the bow would loose its tone and become slack and useless.” “In the same way,” replied the monk, “it is good to relax the mind through innocent enjoyment and even laughter. A mind held in tension will either snap or go slack.” However there is a great difference between relaxing and being lax, and we should act accordingly.

It is good to do things just for the enjoyment, not insisting that all we do be “useful,” “constructive,” or “educational,” though the principles of yama-niyama can never be ignored or laid aside for even a moment.

Use your head

God gave us a brain so we would use it. As a child I noticed that people turned off their mind when they entered the church door and turned it back on when they left. Considering the idiocy of what they saw, did and heard there, it was no doubt a good idea, but it would have been better if they had recognized foolish religion for what it was and searched for something better. So I was very disappointed when after becoming a yogi I constantly saw people agreeing with stupidity, arrogance, and misinformation dispensed by teachers and other authority figures of the yoga world. No matter how moronic the “reasoning” handed them, they just looked bright-eyed and noble and said: “O yes!” Nothing can come of this pious acquiescence to ignorance and falsehood.

Here it is in a nutshell: Spot The Looney. And acknowledge the looney as being a looney and their looniness as being looniness. Forget the hype, the miracle stories, the

accounts of great yoga feats, the list of what “big” people revere them, the prophecies of supposed saints about how great they were going to be—or are. A fool is a fool and none more vicious than a religious/spiritual fool. Some are not fools but heartless frauds. So look closely and long and make your own conclusion about the teachers, gurus, and avatars that abound now they have found the wealth of the West. And that includes the ones in India waiting like spiders for you to come fall into their web.

In East and West people have a reputation for holiness and avatarness that are really foolish or crazy. Some are senile in varying degrees. The same applies to yoga. If you notice that the practitioners of a yoga are either duds or falling apart mentally and physically, then get away and stay away. Ignore their rhapsodies about how beneficial it has been to them—this only proves the depth of their delusion.

Trust your own experience. If a yoga is not delivering the goods, drop it. Do not be fooled by the old nonsense about not digging in a number of places rather than sticking to one. When professionals drill for water or oil, if they do not find any after some days or weeks they have the sense to abandon the site and drill elsewhere. Drill a thousand “holes” if necessary until you find one that gives real results. How will you know? Right away you will begin seeing the positive spiritual effects, which will keep on developing from your practice.

Here is the wisdom of Swami Vivekananda about much of supposed yoga and the supposed gurus who peddle it: “They exercise a singular control for the time being over sensitive persons, alas! often, in the long run, to degenerate whole races. Ay, it is healthier for the individual or the race to remain wicked than be made apparently good by such morbid extraneous control. One’s heart sinks to think of the amount of injury done to humanity by such irresponsible yet well-meaning religious fanatics. They little know that the minds which attain to sudden spiritual upheaval under their suggestions, with music and prayers, are simply making themselves passive, morbid, and powerless, and opening themselves to any other suggestion, be it ever so evil. Little do these ignorant, deluded persons dream that whilst they are congratulating themselves upon their miraculous power to transform human hearts, which power they think was poured upon them by some Being above the clouds, they are sowing the seeds of future decay, of crime, of lunacy, and of death. Therefore, beware of everything that takes away your freedom. Know that it is dangerous, and avoid it by all the means in your power.”

“Secret techniques”

Never take vows to a guru or institution before being given the “secret techniques.” Nobody with an operating mind would buy something they had never seen, making non-refundable payment in advance. No worthy spiritual teacher would require this. How can you reasonably declare loyalty and adherence to something or someone you do not know? As Sri Ramakrishna said: “Be a devotee, but why a fool?”

Furthermore, wherever there is secrecy there is charlatanry. A lot of egotists like to think they know something others do not. (Remember the little children that liked to sing-song: “I know something you don’t know!?”) Yogis immersed in secrets and secrecy are both immature and false. One time we met a “light of yoga” after he had given a slide lecture on India, throughout which he had expressed contempt for the land and the people. When told we had associated many years with one of the best-known teachers of modern India, he asked eagerly: “Did you learn any secret techniques?” because he and his organization trafficked in such phony spiritual currency. Why it did not occur to him that once a secret is told it is no longer a secret is beyond me.

Swami Vivekananda had this to say about secrecy in yoga: “In India, for various reasons, it [yoga] fell into the hands of persons who destroyed ninety per cent of the knowledge, and tried to make a great secret of the remainder....Anything that is secret and mysterious in these systems of Yoga should be at once rejected. The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in all other matters, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it. Mystery-mongering weakens the human brain. It has well-nigh destroyed Yoga—one of the grandest of sciences. From the time it was discovered, more than four thousand years ago, Yoga was perfectly delineated, formulated, and preached in India. It is a striking fact that the more modern the commentator the greater the mistakes he makes, while the more ancient the writer the more rational he is. Most of the modern writers talk of all sorts of mystery. Thus Yoga fell into the hands of a few persons who made it a secret, instead of letting the full blaze of daylight and reason fall upon it. They did so that they might have the powers to themselves.”

Some things to avoid

Avoid the merely religious—the more religious, the more they should be avoided. Remember that crazy religion makes crazies, lying religions make liars and hypocrites, and ignorant religion makes ignoramuses.

Avoid those whose religion is nothing more than believing in some book or doing merely external observances.

Avoid spiritual dabblers and followers of fake gurus or false religions. Sincerity counts for nothing when a person is sincerely ignorant.

Avoid vows of any kind, and that includes any of your own making. Do not vow: Do it. Live it.

Avoid health crazes, but do learn about alternative therapies, especially vibrational medicine and those that deal with bio-energy. They are the most suitable for a yogi, though other modes of medicine should not be ignored or rejected.

Avoid proselytizers of all sorts, whatever their philosophy.

Avoid all supposed yogis and gurus that make annual tours around the world.

Avoid shallow people of all types.

Avoid those who do not respect your spiritual orientation and life.

Avoid those that claim to be “spiritual but not religious.” They are not. True religion is the science of the spirit, and that alone opens the path to spirituality.

Avoid the impure and the materialistic.

Avoid people who are hell-bent on making themselves and others “nice.”

Avoid those who cannot take a stand on anything.

Avoid those who advertise themselves (and their religion if they have any) as “inclusive” and “non-judgmental.” They are morally and spiritually bankrupt, and usually immoral.

As said previously, avoid women that want to be your “mother” and men that want to be your “father.” Even in India this is always a prelude to attempted sexual impropriety. And remember: old people can have very “young” ideas about you-know-what.

Avoid those that are “offended” when your ideas do not suit them and “hurt” when they cannot bully or blackmail you into conforming to their ways or get you to do what they want. HOLD TO YOUR PRINCIPLES. Once you lose them you have nothing at all—and are nothing at all.

Avoid those that have no sense of humor—especially about themselves.

Avoid all political entanglements.

Avoid all “good deeds” and social activism—and those addicted to them.

Avoid all Western “advaita teachers” and most of the Eastern ones, too.

Avoid all religious and spiritual teachers and teachings that are not based on yoga and spiritual experience. (I use “yoga” here in the broad sense of any consciousness-opening methodology.)

Avoid like poison those who use any kind of mind-altering substance, pretending it “opens” them to higher consciousness and perceptions.

Avoid all addicts of any kind: they are next to demons.

Avoid becoming addicted to anything yourself, material, intellectual, or spiritual (God excepted).

Avoid thinking you can help others when they will not help themselves. You have to do it alone, and so do they. Point them to your sources of wisdom and let them go for it on their own steam. Otherwise you are just churning water in hope of getting milk and trying to dig a hole in the sky—it will never happen.

Avoid those that are not willing to “go it alone” just as you are doing.

Avoid people who have to be consoled and cajoled to keep up spiritual life.

Avoid those who continually claim to be “disturbed,” “worried,” and “confused”—especially in relation to you and your ideals and way of life.

Avoid those who claim to be liberal or broad-minded. They never are.

Avoid those who claim they need spiritual “help.” God truly does only help those that help themselves.

Avoid anyone who habitually says: “I am a ‘doubting Thomas.’” They are not doubters, but deniers who will become very unhappy with you if you prove to be true the things they pretend to doubt.

Avoid monotonous and boring people. As a wonderful American saint once said to me in reference to man I knew: “Why carry around empty space?”

Avoid useless thought and talk about “getting rid of the ego.” Meditate and ego will vanish like the ghost it really is.

Avoid compromise like the death-bearing evil it is.

Avoid food-faddism and be very wary of what the “experts” say about diet. In fact, pay very little attention to “scholars,” “experts,” and (especially) “scientists” and “science.”

Avoid thinking there is anything you cannot live without—except God.

Avoid the world of men and live in the world of God.

Some helpful “do’s”

Make your house a personal spiritual haven and your heart a hermitage.

Watch and take care of your health, getting a medical and dental checkup at least twice a year. The moment a problem arises, get professional help. It is very unlikely you can cure yourself on your limited knowledge. Without health any form of life is difficult, including the yoga life. Do not be like a “yogi” friend of mine who decided she could cure diabetes with ginseng and other “natural cures.” She ended up in a coma, nearly dying, and spent the rest of her life an invalid on dialysis.

Swami Sri Yukteswar told all his students to only be close friends with other yogis

Keep holy depictions or imagery throughout your home, especially the photographs of saints and masters.

Follow a diet that is healthy and appetizing. No food that is repulsive or boring is good for you. (Yogananda really insisted on this, as more than one of his disciples told me.)

Acquire an extensive Sanskrit vocabulary, but do not study Sanskrit itself unless you feel you must, for it is a years-long process in which you might have done better by

reading good translations.

Extend your mind

Meditation will expand your consciousness, but the mind–manas and buddhi–must also be cultivated and expanded by spiritual study.

As a yogi you will become very sensitive to the spiritual effects of sound. Especially seek out good religious music of both East and West. Unfortunately a lot of contemporary recordings of Indian music are sung in a raucous or phony style and loaded with silly sound effects and instruments–the worse being the vibraphone. Look for traditional Indian music played on traditional instruments. Avoid recordings that have heavy jungle-beat drumming–another curse of modern Indian bad taste. The recordings of Yogananda’s chants sung by the monks and nuns of Self-Realization Fellowship are very good, Brahmacharini Meera’s recordings being at the top, for she was a true saint. Do not forget Buddhist and Taoist music. (If, however, oriental music sounds too peculiar to your ears, do not bother with it.)

The Christian music of both East and West holds great potential for upliftment and calm. Whatever the style, acapella singing is almost always best. Recordings of Eastern Orthodox Greek and Russian liturgical music can be extraordinarily beautiful, as well as that of other Slavic countries. If Gregorian chant appeals, good, but if not it is just fine. Gregorian was originally intended to be sung with a holding note or ison, and not monophonically. Also it was sung much faster and did not sound like the singers were heavily sedated all the time. (Both these defects are modern aberrations stemming from the French monastery of Solesme.) Do not disdain ordinary church hymns, some of which have a profound message when heard with a yogi’s perspective. Remember: Yogananda’s favorite hymn was *In The Garden* which, when looked upon as a description of meditation is really inspiring.

Never listen to a piece of music like it is medicine–if it does not really appeal to you, listen to something else or enjoy outer silence.

Spiritual reading–top priority (the best left for last)

I will never cease to bless the day I began to read the Bhagavad Gita, and then shortly after the *Autobiography of a Yogi*. (With Peggy Dietz I can heartily say: “Thank you, Master.”)

Before listing some books that I feel are very important for the yogi to read (and in some cases reread many times), I want to assure you of the necessity for spiritual reading. It is a great source of mental purification when engaged in as an extension of meditation by maintaining inner awareness while reading.

The yogi need not be an intellectual–perhaps even should not be–but he must be intelligent and informed–not so he can burden others with revelations of his knowledge (which must not be confused with wisdom), but so he can attune himself to the departed masters of the spiritual life who have infused their writings with their own state of realization. Also, he needs to dialogue with himself inwardly about those ideas, engaging in an intellectual version of chewing the cud. If he does not think about these high things, what will he think about?

At the beginning of my yoga search I was in a harshly anti-intellectual group who wanted the members to read nothing but their own publications (which were very few and very feeble in most instances). I was always rebuked when others saw my “big” library of not even two dozen books! One leader expressed chagrin when he learned I had read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Why? Because their teachings were so minimal and inconsequential, as well as without any basis in authentic Indian texts,

they were terrified that their members might encounter other, better and more sensible ideas. They were right...I did and I quit. Such a mentality is one sign of a destructive cult. A yogi should not hesitate to look into any philosophy or spiritual inquiry. He should be very informed about the various religions and philosophies of the world.

Although I recommend the following list, it is just a hint. There is a big world out there and since we are living in it we should take advantage of it. There are not only books out there, there are immense resources on the internet, including many websites which are actual libraries of online texts, including our own ocoy.org.)

The most important books

First, there are five books whose value cannot be estimated. They are foundation stones of understanding spiritual life and spiritual philosophy. They should be read through many times carefully and reflectively. I think they should be made the yogi's lifetime companions and guides.

1) *The Song of God: Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Swami Prabhavananda of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

2) *The Upanishads, Breath of the Eternal*, by Swami Prabhavananda.

3) *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramhansa Yogananda—the first edition facsimile by Crystal Clarity Publishers (with the exception of this and the second edition also published by Philosophical Library, the original publishers, later printings are so altered and falsified they are misleading.)

4) *Meditation and Spiritual Life*, by Swami Yatiswarananda of the Ramakrishna Mission of India (in America: the Vedanta Society).

5) *The Philosophy of Gorakhnath*, Akshaya Kumar Banerjea, Motilal Banarsidass.

These are treasures beyond valuation. I read the first three nearly fifty years ago and they are still supplying me with new insights. I am sure they will do the same for you if, as I say, they are read meditatively. Banerjea's book should be a philosophical "Bible" for all yogis.

Other books by Yogananda

The heads of the five great monasteries founded by Shankara are given the title of Jagad-Guru—World Teacher. Certainly great masters have been mahants of those monasteries, but they had no spiritual influence outside India, so they were not jagad-gurus. But Paramhansa Yogananda during his lifetime was a true World Teacher, and continues to be through the following books:

Man's Eternal Quest (collection of talks).

The Divine Romance (collection of talks).

Journey to Self-realization (collection of talks).

The Science of Religion.

Sayings of Paramahansa Yogananda (originally *The Master Said*).

God Talks With Arjuna, (commentary on the Bhagavad Gita).

The Second Coming of Christ, (commentary on the Gospels).

This is not a complete list. All of Yogananda's writings are beyond price, as are his recordings. I may have written extensively on various religious traditions and yoga—as seen on the ocoy.org website—but I can say that all which is true and worthwhile in my writings is based squarely on the knowledge I gained from studying Yogananda's writings. Except for the two most basic ideas that God exists and man is immortal, I do not think there is a single significant truth I know that did not come from Yogananda.

And without his teachings those two ideas would never have been understood by me and made part of my life. He was and is a light unto my path, and I hope he will be the same for you.

Therefore I also highly recommend two books about Yogananda: *The New Path* and *Paramhansa Yogananda*; both by Swami Kriyananda.

Other books

For Sanskrit terms I recommend: *Yoga Vedanta Dictionary* by Swami Sivananda; *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* by John Grimes; and *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary*, which is found on our website.

After a while look into other translations of the Bhagavad Gita for in-depth study. I particularly recommend the translations by Swami Swarupananda, Swami Sivananda, and Winthrop Sargeant. Sargeant's translation is the absolute best for word-by-word study, an essential ingredient of the serious yogi's library.

Investigate other translations of the upanishads for the same reasons. Among the best are those of Radhakrishnan, Swami Sivananda, Swami Gambhirananda, Swami Madhavananda, and Swami Jagadananda.

Everything by Shankara is of inestimable value. I would start with his *Vivekachudamani* (Crest Jewel of Discrimination) translated by either Swami Madhavananda or Swami Prabhavananda. His Gita commentary can be a bit heavy-handed because he wrote it to present his interpretation and at the same time vanquish opposing views. Actually some of his similar writings are much like those of Saint Thomas Aquinas in form and style—not the easiest to read and comprehend. His commentaries on the upanishads (included in the translations of Swami Gambhirananda, Swami Madhavananda, and Swami Jagadananda) are exceptionally helpful, though, and I have found his minor works of great value also.

Do give attention to Sri Ramanuja and Sri Madhavacharya. Vedanta is not just advaita (non-dualism), it is also vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism) and dvaita (dualism). Together the three views comprise Vedanta. The writings of these three great teachers cover the entire range of legitimate Vedantic thought, and all three are right in their own sphere. Dvaita is the reality of the waking state (jagrat), vishishtadvaita is the reality of the dreaming state (swapna), and advaita is the reality of the dreamless sleep state (sushupti). They are all three “real,” but they are transcended by the fourth and ultimate state of consciousness, turiya, and since that is beyond words there are no teachers, just realizers—the yogis. And the Avadhuta Gita says: “Some uphold advaita (non-duality) and others uphold dvaita (duality); they do not realize the Ultimate Truth, Which is distinct from and transcends both dvaita and advaita.”

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, translated by Swami Nikhilananda, is a remarkable treasury of spiritual philosophy. It consists of stenographic records of conversations with Sri Ramakrishna spanning several years. It was set down by Mahendranath Gupta, who next to Sri Yukteswar was the most important influence in Yogananda's spiritual development. (He is written about in Yogananda's autobiography as “Master Mahasaya the Blissful Devotee.”) It is good to read it straight through the first time, but you can also simply open it at random and read amazing things, including the words of truly spiritual songs.

The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, by Levi H. Dowling. This is a transcription of the psychic investigations into the life of Christ made by Dowling in what is popularly known as “the akashic records” and I believe contains the the authentic teachings of Jesus, but makes no claim to infallibility or absolute accuracy.

Two books of authentic Christian wisdom are *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counsel* (translator: William Johnston), and *Theologia Germanica* (translator: Susanna Winkworth).

Everything by I. K. Taimni is a marvel of clear and relevant wisdom. His commentary on the Yoga Sutras, *The Science of Yoga*, is the best I know.

Everything by the following writers are classics of enlightened insight:

Margaret Laird

Meister Eckhart

Johannes Tauler

Henry Suso

John Ruysbroeck

Akshaya Kumar Banerjea

For the facts about diet, I recommend *Diet For a New America* by John Robbins, *What's Wrong With Eating Meat?* by Vistara Parham, the books of Dr. Neal Barnard, particularly *Food for Life: How the New Four Food Groups Can Save Your Life*, and *The RAVE Diet and Lifestyle* by Mike Anderson, whose latest book *Healing Cancer From Inside Out* is a must read.

Gorakhnath speaks to the yogi

In conclusion here are the immortal words of Gorakhnath which he addressed to all yogis in the *Gokakh Bani*:

“O Yogi, die; die to the world. Such death is sweet. Die in the manner of Goraksha who ‘died’ and then saw the Invisible.

“Speak not in haste, walk not in haste. Take slow cautious steps. Let not pride overtake you. Lead a simple life, says Gorakshanath.

“Goraksha says: Listen, O Avadhuta, this is how you should lead your life in this world. See with your eyes, hear with your ears but never speak. Just be a dispassionate witness to the happenings around you. Do not react.

“Goraksha says one who remains steadfast in observing his sadhana keeping his spiritual practice, food habits and sleeping habits under strict yogic discipline neither grows old nor dies.

“Goraksha says he who meditates, controls the five senses [withdrawing] from their pleasures and burns his body in the holy fire of Brahman finds the Great God [Mahadeva].

“The mind is dull and fails to comprehend the secret of the yogamarga [path of yoga]. It is very capricious and is always engaged in mischief, thus causing a man to drift away from the true path.

“The mind itself is the abode of the good as well as of the evil. One may either let the good prevail or may allow free play to the evil instincts. This mind is pure and pious only when it lets the good in it prosper.

“If the mind promotes the evil instincts residing in it then it becomes impure and impious. Yogamarga is the means by which the mind can be trained to promote and sustain the good instincts.”

And from the *Goraksha Sataka*:

“O excellent men! Practice Yoga, the fruit of the wish-fulfilling tree [kalpataru], which brings to an end the misery of the world” (6).

“[The yogi should be] chaste, one who eats little, an abstainer from worldly pleasures, a practicer of Yoga” (54).

In the *Gorakh Bodha*:

Gorakhnath: “How should one sit and how walk, how speak and how meet [others];

how should one deal with one's body?" Matsyendranath: "He should sit, walk, speak and meet *awake and aware*; with his attention and discrimination thus handled, he should live fearlessly" (91, 92).

Afterword: It Is All in Your Hands

In yoga, practice combined with right thinking and living is everything. Many have heard of the philosophy and practice of yoga, many have enjoyed lectures and books on the subject (some have even given the lectures and written the books), and yet have never seriously taken up the practice to any degree. Why? They simply did not make the connection between the beautiful theory and the actuality of their own lives. This is pretty much the trouble in all “spiritual” matters—people do not make the connection or transition from the theoretical to the practical. Consequently, as a friend I urge you in every sense of the expression to take this practice “to heart.”

It is the matter of perseverance that usually presents the greatest difficulty to the meditator. It is essential in yoga, as in ordinary matters, to realize that all goes according to precise laws. Wishing, wanting, hoping, praying, believing—or their opposites—have no effect at all. When speaking of meditation, Patanjali says: “Its application is by stages” (Yoga Sutras 3:6). That is, meditation keeps moving onward in its effect *when regularly practiced*, just like the taking of a journey. It all goes in an exact sequence. Therefore we cannot expect that meditation will produce enlightenment in a random way like a slot machine in its payoffs. Meditation produces steady growth if there is steady practice.

The secret of success is regularity in meditation. “A diamond is a piece of coal that never gave up.” Paramhansa Yogananda formulated a more spiritual version: “A saint is a sinner who never gave up.” If you meditate regularly, every day, great will be the result. Water, though the softest substance known, can wear through the hardest stone by means of a steady dripping. In the old story of the tortoise and the hare, the tortoise won the race because he kept at it steadily, whereas the hare ran in spurts. He ran much faster than the tortoise, but the irregularity of his running made him lose the race. Meditation keeps moving onward in its effect when regularly practiced, producing steady growth through steady practice. The more we walk the farther we travel; the more we meditate the nearer and quicker we draw to the goal.

Yoga, the spiritual state, is produced by yoga the practice. Those who persevere in their yoga practice find unfailing and abundant happiness, peace, and fulfillment. Certainly the goal is not reached without much practice through the years, but every step of the way is blessed and brings rejoicing to the yogi’s heart. Then at last no more steps are needed, and he enters the ocean of Satchidananda. “A tiny bubble of laughter, I am become the Sea of Mirth Itself,” wrote Yogananda.

So it really is all in your hands. Your life as a yogi is totally in your hands; and you need to put that life in God’s hands.

Glossary

Adhara: “To support or prop;” support; substratum; body apparatus. In yoga, it means various places of the body where the attention is focussed for control, concentration, and meditation; adhara’s are reservoirs of pranic energies, storage units for the energies that flow into the subtle bodies through the chakras.

Avadhuta: “Cast off” (one who has cast off the world utterly). A supreme ascetic and jnani who has renounced all worldly attachments and connections and lives in a state beyond body consciousness. The highest state of asceticism or tapas.

Ahimsa: Non-injury in thought, word, and deed; non-violence; non-killing; harmlessness.

Ajna chakra: Energy center located at the point between the eyebrows, the “third eye.”

Akasha: “Not visible;” ether; space; sky; the subtlest of the five elements, from which the other four elements arise; the substance that fills and pervades the universe; the particular vehicle of life and sound; the element from which the sense of sound (shabda)—both speech and hearing—arises.

Ananda: Bliss; happiness; joy.

Anandamaya kosha: “The sheath of bliss (ananda).” The causal body. The borderline of the Self (Atman).

Annamaya kosha: “The sheath of food (anna).” The physical—or gross—body, made of food.

Aparigraha: Non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness.

Arahat: An enlightened one who has become freed from the bondage of birth and death.

Arani: Sacrificial wood stick for creating fire through friction.

Arjuna: The third of the five Pandava brothers. A famous warrior and one of the heroes of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata. Friend and disciples of Krishna, it was to Arjuna that Krishna imparted the knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita.

Arya(n): One who is an Arya—literally, “one who strives upward.” Both Arya and Aryan are exclusively psychological terms having nothing whatsoever to do with birth, race, or nationality. In his teachings Buddha habitually referred to spiritually qualified people as “the Aryas.” Although in English translations we find the expressions: “The Four Noble Truths,” and “The Noble Eightfold Path,” Buddha actually said: “The Four Aryan Truths,” and “The Aryan Eightfold Path.”

Asana: Posture; seat.

Ashtanga Yoga: The “eight-limbed” Yoga of Patanjali consisting of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.

Asteya: Non-stealing; honesty; non-misappropriateness.

Atma(n): The Spirit or Self.

Aurobindo Ghosh, Sri: One of India’s greatest yogis and spiritual writers, he was at first involved in the Indian freedom movement, but came to see that yoga was the true path to freedom. His ashram in South India became one of the major spiritual centers in modern India, and his voluminous spiritual writings are read and prized throughout the world.

Bhagavad Gita: “The Song of God.” The sacred philosophical text often called “the Hindu Bible,” part of the epic Mahabharata by Vyasa; the most popular sacred text in Hinduism.

Bhagavan: The Lord; the Personal God.

Bhakti: Devotion; love (of God).

Bhava: Subjective state of being; attitude of mind; mental attitude or feeling; state of realization in the heart or mind.

Bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk.

Bindu: Point; dot; seed; source; the point from which the subtle Omkara arises that is experienced in meditation.

Bodhisattva: One who is destined to be a Buddha; the highest attainment, second only to Buddhahood.

Brahma: The Creator (Prajapati) of the three worlds of men, angels, and archangels (Bhur, Bhuwah, and Swah); the first of the created beings; Hiranyagarbha or cosmic intelligence.

Brahma Sutras: A treatise by Vyasa on Vedanta philosophy in the form of aphorisms. Also called the Vedanta Sutras or Vedanta Darshana.

Brahmacharya: Continenence; self-restraint on all levels; discipline.

Brahman: The Absolute Reality; the Truth proclaimed in the Upanishads; the Supreme Reality that is one and indivisible, infinite, and eternal; all-pervading, changeless Existence; Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute (Satchidananda); Absolute Consciousness; it is not only all-powerful but all-power itself; not only all-knowing and blissful but all-knowledge and all-bliss itself.

Brihaspati: The guru–priest and teacher–of the gods.

Buddhi: Intellect; understanding; reason; the thinking mind.

Chakra: Wheel. Plexus; center of psychic energy in the human system, particularly in the spine or head.

Chidakasha: “Conscious ether” or “conscious space.” The infinite, all-pervading expanse of Consciousness from which all “things” proceed; the subtle space of Consciousness in the Sahasrara (Thousand-petalled Lotus). The true “heart” of all things.

Chitta: The subtle energy that is the substance of the mind.

Deva: “A shining one,” a god–greater or lesser in the evolutionary hierarchy; a semi-divine or celestial being with great powers, and therefore a “god.” Sometimes called a demi-god.

Dharma: Dharma.

Dharana: Concentration of mind; fixing the mind upon a single thing or point.

Dhyana: Meditation; contemplation.

Dharma: The righteous way of living, as enjoined by the sacred scriptures; characteristics; virtue.

Ganges (Ganga): The sacred river–believed to be of divine origin–that flows from high up in the Himalayas, through the plains of Northern India, and empties into the Bay of Bengal. Hindus consider that bathing in the Ganges profoundly purifies both body and mind.

Gita: The Bhagavad Gita.

Gorakhnath/Gorakshanath: A master yogi of the Nath Yogi (Siddha Yogi) tradition. His dates are not known, really, but he seems to have lived for many centuries and travelled throughout all of India, Bhutan, Tibet, and Ladakh teaching philosophy and yoga.

Guyon, Madame: A seventeenth-century French Catholic mystic.

Hesychia: “The Silence;” the Christian name for Anapanasati.

Indra: King of the lesser “gods” (demigods).

Ishwara: “God” or “Lord” in the sense of the Supreme Power, Ruler, Master, or

Controller of the cosmos. “Ishwara” implies the powers of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience.

Ishwarapranidhana: Offering of one’s life to God (Ishwara).

Japa: Repetition of a mantra.

Jhana: Meditation. (In Sanskrit: dhyana)

Jiva: Individual spirit; embodied spirit; living entity; life.

Jnana: Knowledge; wisdom of the Reality or Brahman, the Absolute.

Jnana: Knowledge; wisdom of the Reality or Brahman, the Absolute.

Jnanamaya kosha: “The sheath of intellect (buddhi).” The level of intelligent thought and conceptualization. Sometimes called the Vijnanamaya kosha. The astral-causal body.

Kabbalah: The esoteric/mystical tradition in Judaism.

Kabbalistic: Relating to the Kabbalah.

Kapila: The great sage who formulated the Sankhya philosophy which is endorsed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. (See the entry under Sankhya.)

Karma: Action. It is of three kinds: 1) all the accumulated actions of all previous births, 2) the particular portion of such karma allotted for being worked out in the present life, and 3) current karma being freshly performed by the individual. It is the karma operating through the law of cause and effect that binds the jiva or the individual soul to the wheel of birth and death.

Kosha: Sheath; bag; scabbard; a sheath enclosing the soul; body. There are five such concentric sheaths or bodies: the sheaths of bliss, intellect, mind, life-force and the physical body—the anandamaya, jnanamaya, manomaya, pranamaya and annamaya bodies respectively.

Krishna: A Divine Incarnation born in India about three thousand years ago, Whose teachings to His disciple Arjuna on the eve of the Great India (Mahabharata) War comprise the Bhagavad Gita.

Kundalini: The primordial cosmic energy located in the individual; it is usually thought of as lying coiled up like a serpent at the base of the spine.

Lahiri Mahasaya: Shyama Charan Lahiri, one of the greatest yogis of nineteenth-century India, written about extensively in *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

Mahabharata: The world’s longest epic poem (110,00 verses) about the Mahabharata (Great Indian) War that took place about three thousand years ago. The Mahabharata also includes the Bhagavad Gita, the most popular sacred text of Hinduism.

Mahapralaya: The final cosmic dissolution; the dissolution of all the worlds of relativity (Bhuloka, Bhuvaloka, Swaloka, Mahaloka, Janaloka, Tapaloka, and Satyaloka), until nothing but the Absolute remains. There are lesser dissolutions, known simply as pralayas, when only the first five worlds (lokas) are dissolved.

Mahasamadhi: Literally “the great union [samadhi],” this refers to a realized yogi’s conscious departure from the physical body at death.

Manomaya kosha: “The sheath of the mind (manas–mental substance).” The level (kosha) of the sensory mind. The astral body.

Mantra: Literally, “a transforming thought” [*manat trayate*], or more exactly: “a *transubstantiating* thought.” A mantra, then is a sound formula that transforms the consciousness.

Mantric: Having to do with mantra(s)—their sound or their power.

Manu: The ancient lawgiver, whose code, *The Laws of Manu (Manu Smriti)* is the foundation of Hindu religious and social conduct.

Mara: The force of cosmic delusion or ignorance objectified. The Buddhist

equivalent of “Satan” in its broadest sense.

Maya: The illusive power of Brahman; the veiling and the projecting power of the universe, the power of Cosmic Illusion.

Moksha: Release; liberation; the term is particularly applied to the liberation from the bondage of karma and the wheel of birth and death; Absolute Experience.

Nadi: A channel in the subtle (astral) body through which subtle prana (psychic energy) flows; a physical nerve. Yoga treatises say that there are seventy-two thousand nadis in the energy system of the human being.

Neem Karoli Baba: One of India’s most amazing and mysterious spiritual figures. The life of this great miracle-worker and master spanned from two to four centuries (at the least), including most of the twentieth century.

Nirvana: Liberation; final emancipation; the term is particularly applied to the liberation from the bondage of karma and the wheel of birth and death; Absolute Experience.

Nirvikalpa Samadhi: Samadhi in which there is no objective experience or experience of “qualities” whatsoever, and in which the triad of knower, knowledge and known does not exist; purely subjective experience of the formless and qualitless and unconditioned Absolute.

Nityananda (Avadhuta Paramhansa): A great Master of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India. His *Chidakasha Gita* or *Nitya Sutras* contains some of the most profound statements on yoga and spiritual life.

Niyama: Observance; the five Do’s of Yoga: 1) shaucha–purity, cleanliness; 2) santosha–contentment, peacefulness; 3) tapas–austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; 4) swadhyaya–self-study, spiritual study; 5) Ishwarapranidhana–offering of one’s life to God.

Noetic: Having to do with the mind, especially as a field of subtle energies.

Paccekebudda: One who is almost a Buddha, and whose attainment of Buddhahood is assured.

Pali: The ancient language in which the complete teachings of Buddha were recorded.

Pandavas: The five sons of King Pandu: Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. Their lives are described in the Mahabharata.

Pañña: Wisdom.

Parabrahman: Supreme Brahman.

Paramatma(n): The Supreme Self, God.

Parameshwara: The Supreme (Param) Lord (Ishwara).

Paramhansa: Literally: Supreme Swan, a person of the highest spiritual realization, from the fact that a swan can separate milk from water and is therefore an apt symbol for one who has discarded the unreal for the Real, the darkness for the Light, and mortality for the Immortal, having separated himself fully from all that is not God and joined himself totally to the Divine, becoming a veritable embodiment of Divinity manifested in humanity.

Patanjali: A yogi of ancient India, the author of the Yoga Sutras.

Paranirvana: Paranirvana.

Paranirvana: The Supreme, Final Nirvana, when the perfectly enlightened individual is released from physical embodiment, never to return to birth in any world, high or low.

Patanjali: The author of the Yoga Sutras.

Pitri: A departed ancestor, a forefather.

Prajapati: Progenitor; the Creator; a title of Brahma the Creator.

Prajna: Consciousness; awareness.

Prakriti: Causal matter; the fundamental power (shakti) of God from which the entire cosmos is formed; the root base of all elements; undifferentiated matter; the material cause of the world. Also known as Pradhana.

Pralaya: Dissolution. See Mahapralaya.

Prana: Vital energy; life-breath; life-force.

Pranamaya kosha: “The sheath of vital air (prana).” The sheath consisting of vital forces and the (psychic) nervous system.

Pranayama: Control of the subtle life forces, often by means of special modes of breathing. Therefore breath control or breathing exercises are usually mistaken for pranayama.

Pratyahara: Abstraction or withdrawal of the senses from their objects, the fifth limb of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga.

Premeshananda, Swami: Affectionately known as “Premesh Maharaj,” Swami Premeshananda was a disciple of Sri Sri Ma Sarada Devi, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, and a renowned monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

Purusha: “Person” in the sense of a conscious spirit. Both God and the individual spirits are purushas, but God is the Adi (Original, Archetypal) Purusha, Parama (Highest) Purusha, and the Purushottama (Best of the Purushas).

Ramakrishna: Sri Ramakrishna lived in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, and is regarded by all India as a perfectly enlightened person—and by many as an Incarnation of God.

Ramana Maharshi: A great sage of the twentieth century who lived in Arunachala in South India. He taught the path of Self-Inquiry (Atma Vichara) wherein the person simply turns his awareness within asking “Who am I?” until the Self (atma) is revealed.

Ramdas (Swami): One of the best-known and most influential spiritual figures of twentieth-century India, founder of Anandashram in South India and author of the spiritual classic *In the Vision of God* as well as many other inspirational books.

Sadguru: True guru, or the guru who reveals the Real (Sat–God).

Sadhaka: One who practices spiritual discipline—sadhana—particularly meditation.

Sadhana: Spiritual practice.

Sahaja: Natural; innate; spontaneous; inborn.

Sahasrara chakra: The “thousand-petalled lotus” of the brain. The highest center of consciousness, the point at which the spirits (atma) and the bodies (koshas) are integrated and from which they are disengaged.

Samatha: Calmness, deep peace of mind.

Samadhi (Pali): Meditation, the calm of meditation.

Samadhi (Sanskrit): The state of superconsciousness where Absoluteness is experienced attended with all-knowledge and joy; Oneness; here the mind becomes identified with the object of meditation; the meditator and the meditated, thinker and thought become one in perfect absorption of the mind.

Sampajañña: Self awareness.

Sampradaya: A line or succession of spiritual teachers or spiritual teaching; a “school” of doctrine or practice, such as Vedanta or Yoga.

Samsara: Life through repeated births and deaths; the process of earthly life.

Samskara: Impression in the mind produced by previous action or experience; prenatal tendency. See Vasana.

Sankalpa: Wish; desire; volition; resolution; will; determination; intention.

Sankhya: One of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy whose originator was the sage Kapila, Sankhya is the original Vedic philosophy, endorsed by Krishna in

the Bhagavad Gita. (Gita 2:39; 3:3,5; 18:13,19. Also, the second chapter of the Gita is entitled: Sankhya Yoga.) The *Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* says: “Sankhya postulates two ultimate realities, Purusha and Prakriti. Declaring that the cause of suffering is man’s identification of Purusha with Prakriti and its products, Sankhya teaches that liberation and true knowledge are attained in the supreme consciousness, where such identification ceases and Purusha is realized as existing independently in its transcendental nature.” Not surprisingly, then, Yoga is based on the Sankhya philosophy.

Sanskrit: The language of the ancient sages of India and therefore of the Indian scriptures and yoga treatises.

Santosh: Contentment; peacefulness.

Sarada Devi (“Holy Mother”): The virgin-wife of Sri Ramakrishna, and a great teacher in her own right, considered by many to be an incarnation of the Mother aspect of God.

Satchidananda: Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute; Brahman.

Sati: Awareness, mindfulness.

Satya: Truth; the Real; Brahman, or the Absolute; truthfulness; honesty.

Shankara: Shankaracharya; Adi (the first) Shankaracharya: The great reformer and re-establisher of Vedic Religion in India around 300 B.C. He is the unparalleled exponent of Advaita (Non-Dual) Vedanta. He also reformed the mode of monastic life and founded (or regenerated) the ancient Swami Order.

Shaucha: Purity; cleanliness.

Shirdi Sai Baba: Perhaps the most renowned spiritual teacher of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India. His fame continues to grow in this century as well.

Siddhi: Spiritual perfection; psychic power.

Sivananda (Swami): A great twentieth-century Master, founder of the world-wide Divine Life Society, whose books on spiritual life and religion are widely circulated in the West as well as in India.

Spota: The Sanskrit original of our English word “spot;” manifest; the idea which bursts or flashes—including the Pranava which burst or flashes forth from the Absolute and becomes transformed into the Relative.

Srimad Bhagavatam: A popular Hindu scripture.

Sthirattwa: Steadiness or firmness of body or mind; the steady tranquillity born of meditation.

Sukha: Happiness; joy; happy; pleasant; agreeable.

Surya: The sun; the presiding deity of the sun, sometimes identified with Vishnu (Surya-Narayana) or the Absolute Brahman.

Surya-mandala: The circle (orbit) of the sun.

Sushupti: The dreamless sleep state.

Sutra: A sacred text.

Sutra: Sutra.

Swadhyaya: Introspective self-study or self-analysis leading to self-understanding.

Taimni, I. K.: A professor of chemistry in India. He wrote many excellent books on philosophy and spiritual practice, including *The Science of Yoga*, a commentary on the Yoga Sutras. For many years he was the spiritual head of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society headquartered in Adyar, Madras (Tamilnadu), and traveled the world without publicity or notoriety, quietly instructing many sincere aspirants in the path to supreme consciousness.

Tapas (tapasya): Austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; spiritual force. Literally it means the generation of heat or energy, but is always used in

a symbolic manner, referring to spiritual practice and its effect, especially the roasting of karmic seeds, the burning up of karma.

Tripitaka: The complete collection of Buddhist scriptures.

Triple Gem: The Buddha, The Dharma, and the Sangha.

Tukaram: A poet-saint of seventeenth century India (Maharashtra) devoted to Krishna in his form of Panduranga (Vittala).

Turiya: The state of pure consciousness. A *Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* defines it as: “The superconscious; lit., ‘the Fourth,’ in relation to the three ordinary states of consciousness—waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep—which it transcends.”

Upanishads: Knowledge portion of the Vedas; texts dealing with the ultimate truth and its realization.

Vasana: A bundle or aggregate of similar samskaras. Subtle desire; a tendency created in a person by the doing of an action or by enjoyment; it induces the person to repeat the action or to seek a repetition of the enjoyment; the subtle impression in the mind capable of developing itself into action; it is the cause of birth and experience in general; the impression of actions that remains unconsciously in the mind.

Vedanta: Literally, “the end of the Vedas;” the Upanishads; the school of Hindu thought, based primarily on the Upanishads, upholding the doctrine of either pure non-dualism or conditional non-dualism. The original text of this school is Vedanta-darshana or the Brahma Sutras compiled by the sage Vyasa.

Vipassana: Clear-sight; insight—not in the intellectual, but in the intuitive sense.

Vivekananda (Swami): The chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who brought the message of Vedanta to the West at the end of the nineteenth century.

Vritti: Thought-wave; mental modification; mental whirlpool; a ripple in the chitta (mind substance).

Vyasa: One of the greatest sages of India, commentator on the Yoga Sutras, author of the Mahabharata (which includes the Bhagavad Gita), the Brahma Sutras, and the codifier of the Vedas.

Yoga: Literally: union; abstract meditation or union with the Supreme Being; union with God; any course that makes for such union.

Yoga Darshan(a): Hinduism embraces six systems of philosophy, one of which is Yoga. The basic text of the Yoga philosophy—Yoga Darshana—is the Yoga Sutras (also called Yoga Darshana), the oldest known writing on the subject of yoga, written by the sage Patanjali, a yogi of ancient India. Further, the Yoga Philosophy is based on the philosophical system known as Sankhya, whose originator was the sage Kapila.

Yoga Nidra: A state of half-contemplation and half-sleep; light yogic sleep when the individual retains slight awareness; state between sleep and wakefulness.

Yoga Sutras: The oldest known writing on the subject of yoga, written by the sage Patanjali, a yogi of ancient India, and considered the most authoritative text on yoga. Also known as *Yoga Darshana*, it is the basis of the Yoga Philosophy which is based on the philosophical system known as Sankhya.

Yoga Vashishtha: A classical treatise on Yoga, containing the instructions of the Rishi Vashishtha to Lord Rama on meditation and spiritual life.

Yogananda (Paramhansa): The most influential yogi of the twentieth century West, author of *Autobiography of a Yogi* and founder of Self-Realization Fellowship in America.

Yogi: One who practices Yoga; one who strives earnestly for union with God; an aspirant going through any course of spiritual discipline.

Yogic: Having to do with Yoga.

Yogiraj: “King of Yogis,” a title often given to an advanced yogi, especially a

teacher of yogi.