



Om Yoga

Its Theory and Practice

by

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Preface: Yoga and Freedom

Yoga is all about freedom. Only a fraction of the world's population is formally imprisoned, but none are free from the inevitability of sickness, age, and death. The human condition is subject to innumerable limitations. Who really controls his life fully, attains all his goals, and knows no setbacks of any kind? No one.

Our real Self, the spirit, is ever perfect and free. But we have forgotten that. So we identify with our present experience of limitation and bondage and consequently suffer stress and pain in countless ways. Our situation is like someone who is asleep and dreaming that he is suffering or fearful. To end the fear and pain he needs only to wake up. Yoga is the procedure of self-awakening, the way to freedom from suffering, fear, and limitation—nothing less than the quest for liberation of the spirit. Yoga is an eternal science intended to reveal and manifest the Eternal.

The yoga of the Self

Authentic yoga brings about everything spontaneously from deep within, from the Self. The yoga tradition says that the contemplation of the Pranava, Om, is the contemplation of our own true nature. It is the knowledge of our own Self. The best aspect of all this is that everything happens naturally and spontaneously at just the right time, simply through the Om breath. When the breath and Om are perfectly merged it is the major force of inner transformation-transmutation. The Om breath is the inner secret of the yogi.

Om was first perceived by the ancient yogis of prehistory and is not the exclusive property of any religion or philosophy. It is not a sectarian mantra; it belongs to all without distinction or exclusion. Nor was it invented by those primal sages. Rather, it is swayambhu—self-begotten, self-existent and self-sufficient. It arises spontaneously within, from the Self. It does not have to be artificially implanted or empowered in us by any kind of initiation. This mantra is going on in every one of us, but as long as we are outward-turned we do not become aware of it. It is only during meditation, when we enter into our own depths, that we become aware of Om, which has always been active within us.

The japa (repetition) and meditation of Om are not exclusively Hindu practices, but are also part of the Jain and Buddhist traditions. They are also indicated in the Bible. This should be no surprise since Moses was an initiate of the Egyptian religion which was rooted in Indian philosophy, as was proved by Apollonius of Tyana at the time of Jesus. Like Apollonius, Jesus himself lived and studied in India, and the Christian scriptures reflect this. As stated in the main body of this book, the Nath Yogis, one of the oldest and most respected of monastic orders, claim that Jesus (Isha Natha) was a great adept of their order.

The Goal and the Way

“What world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That? If he meditates on the Supreme Being with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, he is led to the world of Brahman Who is higher than the highest life, That which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1,5,7).

Regarding the Pranava, Om, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (1:28) simply says: “Its repetition and meditation is the way.” The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, as well as the Yoga Sutras, advocate meditation on Om, the sacred Syllable that both symbolizes and embodies Brahman, the Absolute Reality. (See Chapter Three: “Om in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga Sutras.”) Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahasaya, commenting on the Yoga Sutras, says: “Constant japa of the Pranava, Omkar, Which is self-revealing, and constant focus on it as the form of Ishwara, and dedicating all actions to it as if you are not the doer yourself; is Kriya Yoga.”

It is my hope that you will test for yourself the spiritual alchemy of Om Yoga that is set forth here.

“This is the bridge to immortality....May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore beyond darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5, 6).

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

Chapter One: Yoga

“Yoga” is a Sanskrit word that means “to join.” Yoga is both union and the way to 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 spirit-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 through its descent into the material world the spirit lost its awareness of the eternal union and 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 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—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—an experience that completely overwhelms the truth of our immortal life within God. As Blavatsky wrote in *The Voice of the Silence*: “Heaven’s dew-drop glittering in

the morn's first sunbeam within the bosom of the lotus, when dropped on earth becomes a piece of clay; behold, the pearl is now a speck of mire." Each one of us is a dew-drop of heaven, but for countless life-cycles we have found ourselves confined in little body-prisons within the greater prison of the cosmos. And that is where we are right now.

God the Lord

In the Yoga Sutras the word for God is *Ishwara*—the Lord, 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. Yoga is the way to accomplish this.

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).

A particular Spirit. 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.

Untouched. 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 "he." *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, for 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 unite 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 along 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. Every one of us can say with Jesus: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

“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." And Saint Paul: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (I Corinthians 6:17). And Jesus: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). 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 perfected and 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.

There are seven worlds (lokas) or main divisions of relative existence. These worlds are the rungs of the evolutionary ladder. They correspond to the seven levels of consciousness that determine which of the worlds the individual spirit incarnates in. Keeping in mind that “world” in this list does not mean a planet, but a great division that includes within it many levels of existence, many planes of consciousness, here is a list of the seven worlds:

- 1) Bhur Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of matter.
- 2) Bhuva Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of feeling–emotion, instinct, and lower intuition.
- 3) Swar Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of sensory experience.
- 4) Maha Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of thought and reflective perception.
- 5) Jnana Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of fundamental causation and spiritual intuition.
- 6) Tapa Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of mastery of all the lesser elements and levels.
- 7) Satya Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of spirit-consciousness itself.

Bhur Loka is purely material; Bhuva and Swar Lokas are astral; Maha Loka is a mixture of astral and causal; Jnana and Tapa Lokas are completely causal; and Satya Loka is a mixture of extremely subtle causal and pure consciousness.

Incarnating spirits move upward and downward in the three lower worlds of Bhur, Bhuva, and Swar, but once they attain the level of Maha Loka they are never reborn in the three lower worlds unless they will to do so. Spirits may move between the two worlds of Maha and Jnana, but once they reach Tapa Loka they remain there until they evolve into Satya Loka which is the world of the perfectly liberated spirits and the spirits that have evolved beyond Tapa Loka and are so close to liberation that they can arise to such a rarefied spiritual atmosphere as Satya Loka. Those liberated spirits who return to lower worlds for the benefit of others do so as avatars, incarnations of God.

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

Dwelling in the hearts of all, God empowers and guides the questing souls. Gorakhnath, the greatest of all yogis, asked his teacher, Matsyendranath: "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. In the Bible we find the identical teaching. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14). “Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (Psalms 143:10). “I am the Lord thy God which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go” (Isaiah 48:17).

The aspiring yogi can then feel safe and assured, for God will be his guru, just as he has been for all the enlightened throughout the ages. Therefore Patanjali concludes: “Being unconditioned by time he is Guru even of the Ancients” (Yoga Sutras 1:26). This does not mean that qualified spiritual teachers are not helpful to us, but dwelling in the hearts of all, God continues to be the ultimate guru of questing souls.

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.”

Swami Yatiswarananda, Vice-president of the Ramakrishna Mission, wrote to one of his students: “We bring the message of the Guru of gurus....please turn to him for light and guidance, for peace and blessedness....The Lord, the Guru of gurus, alone can give us the shelter, the illumination and the bliss we need.”

Sri Ramakrishna himself said: “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). “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). “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). (These quotations are from the Majumdar translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.)

You are the guru

All spiritual life is self-initiated from within; we are both guru and disciple as Krishna and Arjuna symbolize in the Bhagavad Gita. Ultimately the yogi must be guided by the divine from within his own consciousness. The God-illuminated mind 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).

Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahashaya wrote to a student regarding the guru: “Guru is the one who is all; Guru is the one who is merciful. You are the Guru within yourself” (*Garland of Letters [Patravali]*, Letter 45). In *Purana Purusha* by Dr. Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee it is recorded on page 224 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.”

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 Word That Is God

The Pranava

Writing about Ishwara, the Lord, Patanjali says: “His spoken form [vachaka] is the Pranava” (Yoga Sutras 1:27). Swami Vivekananda translates vachaka: “His *manifesting* word.”

“Pranava” is derived from prana, which means both life-force/breath and life. So we could call it the Word of Life or the Prana-Breath Word. The Pranava is the monosyllable Om (also spelled Aum).

Its history

This sacred Word was the heart of the primeval esoteric wisdom of the sages of ancient India. An essential part of that wisdom is the knowledge of words of power or mantras—a series of verbal sounds whose effect lies not in an assigned intellectual meaning, as is the character of common language, but which possesses an inherent sound-power that can produce a sublime spiritual effect.

In the beginning...

In Chapter One it is 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.” Om is both the Consciousness and the Power that is God. It is his manifesting Word because it makes God manifest to us and is itself the power by which God manifests his will—especially through his creation.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4). The first “act” of God is the projection of himself as Cosmic Vibration: Om. He “speaks” himself and becomes all things. Then we enter Om Itself to come into manifestation. The bodies which we take on are all formed of variations on the fundamental energy or keynote that is Om. We come into relative existence through Om, we evolve within relative existence through Om, and we transcend relative existence and return to God’s perfect being through Om. It is no wonder, then, that Om is also called the Pranava, the Word of Life, the Living Word.

The Word that is God

“I am the Pranava,” declared the infinite Satchidananda through the lips of the avatar Krishna (Bhagavad Gita 7:8). And: “I am Om [Om-kara]” (Bhagavad Gita 9:17). “Among words I am the single-syllable [Om]” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25).

How can a Word be God? How can God be a Word?

All things—the entire cosmos itself—are formed of vibrating energy. This cosmic energy possesses the dual nature of light and sound, both of which are essentially consciousness. The totality of that consciousness is contained and summed up in the Divine Word, Om, known as the *Shabda Brahman*, the Sound God. Om is spoken, yet it is beyond speech in its essence because it is the *source* of speech. Its spoken form is the final step in the objectification of the primal creative stream arising from the inmost depths of being itself, that “point of light within the mind of God” from which has issued all manifested being, all that IS. It is the original movement outward from the omnipresent center which took place when the Supreme Consciousness willed, “I am one; let me become many” (Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:3; Taittiriya Upanishad 2:6).

The Upanishads also tells us that Om is Brahman:

“Om is Brahman, the primeval being” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1).

“I will tell you briefly of that goal which all the Vedas with one voice propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing for which people practice discipline: It is Om” (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.15-17).

“The udgitha [Om] is the supreme Brahman” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7).

“Om is Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

The Word that is me!

They also tell us that Om is our own Self, as well:

“The self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om....Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12).

“Meditate on Om as the Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6).

Om the mantra

Om is the original Word of Power, a mantra, possessing sound-power that can produce a profoundly beneficial effect on the physical, mental and spiritual levels. The word mantra itself comes from the Sanskrit expression *manat trayate* which means “a transforming thought;” literally, “that which when thought carries across”—which produces an objective, perceptible change. It also literally means “a *liberating* thought.” In the Yoga tradition, Om is the supreme mantra, and the most sacred of holy words in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain rituals and meditation.

(Tibetan Buddhism particularly emphasizes the power and value of Om. In Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, Amida Buddha is invoked by saying “Omitofo” [Amida Buddha]. One time when I was participating in a Name Recitation (Nienfo) session, during the dharma talk at the close the leader, the Venerable Manpu, explained that in the depths of meditation—and especially at the time of leaving the body—the practitioner passes from “Omitofo” to “Omito” [Amida] and thence to “Om” which is the essence of “Omitofo” and is the force that carries the cultivator into the consciousness that is the Pure Land or Sukhavati. Pure Land Buddhists also bless water by drawing an Om symbol in it.)

Om is also called: Pranava, Omkara, and Ekakshara. *Pranava* means both life-giver (infuser of prana) and controller of life force (prana). *Omkara* means “the Om” or even “the Om thing” just as *ahankara* means “I-ness” or the principle of “I.” *Ekakshara* means “one letter,” “one syllable” or “the one-syllable Word,” because in Sanskrit the consonants are counted as letters or syllables and not the vowels. (Which is why the Torah has only consonants written out, the vowels being indicated by “points.”) Since *M* is the only consonant, Om is considered to be *ekakshara*. Many monosyllables in Sanskrit have only a single consonant, but *Ekakshara* always means Om specifically. It also means “the Only Imperishable,” indicating its identity with God, and always refers to Om. The first recorded teaching of Sri Ramana Maharshi, written down by him in response to the request of a seeker, was: “The Ekakshara [Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Self.”

Throughout the ages Om has been the mantra specially commended to sannyasis (monastics), and the majority of them—especially those in the Swami Order of Shankara—have generally employed it as the heart of their sadhana (spiritual practice).

Om was the particular focus of the Nath Yogis, a most renowned and revered order of yogi-monks in India. The Nath Yogis claimed to be in direct line from the original yogis, the first of which was a divine manifestation known as Adinath—the Primal Lord. Appearing on earth in humanlike form, God himself taught Matsyendranath, the first liberated human being in this cycle of creation. He in turn taught Gorakhnath, the unparalleled teacher-adept in the yogic succession. Patanjali was also a Nath Yogi. The Nath Yogis claim Jesus—Sri Isha Natha—as a great adept of their order, as recorded in their sacred book, the *Nathanamavali*.

Nearer our own time, the great nineteenth-century Hindu reformer, Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati, renowned as a yogi *par excellence*, practiced the japa and meditation of Om and taught them to others, whatever their mode of life.

What do we do?

What do we do with this sacred word, Om? Shankara in his commentary on the Mundaka Upanishad says: “Just as the bow is the cause of the arrow’s hitting the target, so Om is the bow that brings about the soul’s entry into the Immutable. For the soul when purified by the repetition of Om gets fixed in Brahman with the help of Om without any hindrance, just as an arrow shot from a bow gets transfixed in the target.” And commenting on Patanjali’s statement that Ishwara’s “designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om],” Shankara says: “This sutra explains the form in which the devotee contemplates on him.”

An anonymous commentator on a writing of Shankara says this: “The sound Om is the Name and Symbol of Brahman. One realizes Brahman by meditation on this Om. When Om is uttered with concentration there arises the consciousness of Brahman in the mind. [For] Om is the matrix of all sounds. Brahman is the substratum of the whole universe and Om, too, is the substratum of all sounds. Sounds and phenomena are non-different, so the substratum alone remains. Hence

Brahman is Om.”

The master yogis of India have through the ages said that God and Om are one, that the infinite consciousness of God is inherent in the Syllable Om. Since the individual spirit and God are essentially one (though not the same), we can conclude that Om, repeated within the mind in japa and meditation, will produce the consciousness of God and bring about the restoration of our union with God through the awakening of our spirit-Self that is also Om.

God is guru in the form of Om

Immediately after telling us that God “is Guru even of the Ancients,” Patanjali says: “His spoken form is the Pranava.” In a hymn of the poet-saint Kabir, an Indian mystic of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there are two important statements: “That Word is the Guru; I have heard it, and become the disciple....That Word reveals all.” Beautiful as the thought of God being the guru may be, is it true? If so, *how* is God the guru?

In the depths of God’s being, Om is eternally present, is eternally flowing or rising, and the same is true of each individual spirit. The heart-core of God and the core of the individual spirit are the same in non-dual unity. Om is flowing from the single point where the spirit and the Spirit are absolutely one.

God is eternally stimulating or teaching the spirit to emanate Om as the agent of its evolution and perfection. 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.

Om is the ultimate guru, the infallible teacher and guide from within.

Divine 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 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 they have no relevance to the practice of Om Yoga, which requires no initiation because it is based squarely on the eternal nature and unity of the jivatman and the Paramatman—what to speak of the nature of Om Itself. The japa and meditation of Om are themselves expressions of the eternal nature of God and man. The eternal spirits need no external input to return to their Source.

It is when the individual perpetually experiences the eternal point where Om is common to both itself and God that it can know its oneness with God, and separation from God is impossible for it. Yet it is still itself, still distinct, though its consciousness is totally absorbed in God and it sees only the One, and can say, "God alone exists. There is no other but God." All we need is God himself in the form of Om.

Chapter Three: Om in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga Sutras

Sanatana Dharma—the Eternal Religion—is based on the direct experience of the sages of primeval India as well as the corroborating experiences of yogis throughout thousands of years. Originally all spiritual teachings were committed to memory, but in time they were written down to ensure their correct transmission. Simple as it is, Sanatana Dharma in its purity is found in twelve basic texts: the Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Svetasvatara Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita. This last text is a digest and exposition of the upanishadic philosophy with emphasis on its practical application. Another book, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, presents the practical inner way to experience and manifest the truths of the upanishads and the Gita.

Although Om is to be found in each upanishad, at least as part of the opening and closing mantras of blessing, eight of them have sections dealing with Om Itself.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

“Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being. This is the Veda which the knowers of Brahman know; through it one knows what is to be known” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1). Om is Self-Revealing Divinity. It is the supreme “scripture” through which we come to know “what is to be known,” namely Brahman.

Chandogya Upanishad

“One should meditate on this Syllable [Om]” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.1). For, “That is the quintessence of the essences, the Supreme, the highest” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.3).

“Speech [vak] and breath [prana] are joined together in the Syllable Om. Verily, whenever the pair come together, they fulfil each other’s desire. He who knowing this thus, meditates on the Syllable, becomes, verily, a fulfiller of desires” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6, 7). This is why Om is meditated upon by joining its repetition to the breath, and why it is called the Pranava, the Breath Word.

The upanishad continues with the exposition of Om as the power of fulfillment, saying: “Verily, this Syllable is of assent, for whenever one assents to anything he says simply ‘Om.’ What is assent is fulfillment. He, who knowing this thus, meditates on the Syllable, becomes, verily, a fulfiller of desires” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.8).

“Saying ‘Om,’ one recites: saying ‘Om,’ one orders: saying ‘Om,’ one sings aloud, in honor of that Syllable, with its greatness and its essence. He who knows

this thus, and he who knows not, both perform with it. Knowledge and ignorance, however, are different. What, indeed, one performs with knowledge, faith, and meditation, that, indeed becomes more powerful. This, verily is the explanation of this Syllable” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.9, 10).

A little later the upanishad returns to the power of Om to fulfil desires, saying: “He obtains wishes by singing [intoning], who knowing this, meditates on the udgitha [Om when it is part of Vedic recitation] as the Syllable. This, with regard to the self” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.2.14). That is, those who, desiring to know the Self, meditate upon Om will surely attain Self-knowledge.

“This sound [Om] is that Syllable, the immortal, the fearless....He who knows it thus, praises this Syllable, takes refuge in that Syllable, in the immortal, fearless sound, and having entered it, he becomes immortal” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.4.4, 5). Om is the secret of immortality.

The upanishadic sages had much to say about the sun as the source of life, teaching that all sentient beings have come into the physical plane through the sun which is a gateway to the astral realms. The souls that have evolved beyond the need for earthly experience pass back through the sun to higher worlds. Even more, the sages identified it with Om, saying: “Now, verily, what is the udgitha [Om when it is sung aloud in Vedic recitation] is the Pranava. What is the Pranava is the udgitha. And so verily, the udgitha is the yonder sun and the Pranava, for the sun is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1).

“One should meditate on the breath in the mouth as the udgitha, for it is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3). Since our soul is always breathing Om, by intoning Om in time with the breath we put ourselves in tune with the very wellspring of our existence, linking up with our inmost consciousness.

“Now, verily, what is the udgitha is the Pranava. What is the Pranava is the udgitha. [If one knows this], verily, from the seat of the hotri priest, all wrong singing is corrected, yea is corrected” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.5). Negative karma is a major concern of those who seek liberation, for it ties us to the wheel of constant birth and death. Symbolically speaking, we “sing” our life’s directions as does the hotri priest, and often make mistakes. But through Om, “all wrong singing is corrected, yea is corrected.”

“This is the udgitha [Om], highest and best. This is endless. He who, knowing this, meditates on udgitha, the highest and best, becomes the highest and best and obtains the highest and best worlds. When Atidhanvan Shunaka taught this udgitha to Udara Sandilya, he also said: ‘As long as they shall know this udgitha among your descendants, so long their life in this world will be the highest and best.’ And so will their state in that other world be. One who thus knows and meditates—his life in this world becomes the highest and best, and so his state in that other world, yea, in that other world.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.9.2-4) Om glorifies both this life and the life beyond.

“As all leaves are held together by the stalk, so is all speech held together by

Om. Verily, the Syllable Om is all this, yea, the Syllable Om is all this” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.3). Om is every aspect of life itself. Speech, vak, is the essence of life. Therefore in grave illness and at the time of death the power of speech usually fails. As milk becomes diluted in water, so the consciousness of the departing soul becomes dispersed and wanders, confused. But this is not so for those who cling even in death to the repetition of Om.

Speaking of the final exit of the soul from the body, the upanishad says: “Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun...When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these very rays or he goes up with the thought of Om. As his mind is failing, he goes to the sun. That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers” (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2, 5).

Katha Upanishad

In the Katha Upanishad we find profoundest teachings on the true Self and its destiny. The inquirer asks to be taught the Transcendent Reality. The answer he receives is this: “I will tell you briefly of that Goal which all the Vedas with one voice propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing for which people practice discipline: It is Om” (Katha Upanishad 1.2.15).

Though absolute Unity, God is seemingly dual: transcendent and immanent, with form and without form, with qualities and without qualities, “higher” and “lower” Brahman. So the upanishad says: “Om, indeed, is the lower Brahman; this is, indeed, the higher Brahman. Anyone who, meditating on Om, wishes either of the two [aspects], by him that is attained” (Katha Upanishad 1.2.16).

Om is both transcendent and immanent. In whichever plane we wish to abide, Om is the basis, the illuminator, the key to comprehension and mastery. Furthermore, we can meditate on God with Form (Saguna Brahman) and God without Form (Nirguna Brahman), God with attributes and God beyond attributes, with a single mantra: Om.

Logically, then, the upanishad concludes: “This [Om] is the best means [of attainment and realization]; this means is the Higher and Lesser Brahman. Meditating on Om, one becomes worthy of worship in the world of Brahman” (Katha Upanishad 1.2.17).

Om is that which transforms us, elevating our consciousness to the realm of the Divine and establishing it therein.

Mandukya Upanishad

“Om: this Syllable is all this. All that is past, the present and the future, all this is only the Syllable Om. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only the Syllable Om” (Mandukya Upanishad 1). From the original Sound, Om, all things have come into manifestation as its extension-embodiments.

Everything that has ever existed, now exists, or shall exist, is the expansion of Om. Om is all-embracing Eternity, containing and transcending past, present, and future. There is nothing but Om.

That being true, the upanishad then says: “The Self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om....Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows it thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his self [individual spirit]” (Mandukya Upanishad 8, 12). By means of Om, the eternal wave merges into the eternal Sea.

Mundaka Upanishad

The Mundaka Upanishad speaks further on meditation.

“Taking as the bow the great weapon of the Upanishads [Om], one should place in it the arrow sharpened by meditation. Drawing it with a mind engaged in the contemplation of That [Brahman], O beloved, know that imperishable Brahman as the target” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3).

The power of Om is emphasized by calling it a great weapon. Its intent and effect are serious and mighty—nothing less than union with the Absolute. It is called “the great weapon of the Upanishads” to indicate that Om is the effective means recommended by the scriptures of Eternal Dharma for the realization of God. The japa and meditation of Om impel the consciousness of the yogi toward the Goal: Brahman. Moreover, it is the meditation of Om that refines the consciousness and renders it capable of union with Brahman.

“The Pranava is the bow: one’s self, indeed, is the arrow. Brahman is spoken of as the target of that. It is to be hit without making a mistake. Thus one becomes united with it [Brahman] as the arrow becomes one with the target” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.4). It is Om that ensures we will unerringly (“without a mistake”) reach the Goal.

“He in Whom the sky, the earth, and the interspace are woven, as also the mind along with all the pranas, know him alone as the one Self. Dismiss other utterances. This [Om] is the bridge to immortality” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5). The “He” in this verse is Om Itself, which is Brahman. It is the one Self. To drive the point home that Om is the sole means of uniting with Brahman, the upanishad says absolutely and flatfootedly: *Dismiss other utterances*—all other japa mantras. Why? Because only Om is the direct way to immortality.

Therefore, “Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6).

Prashna Upanishad

Living in the world of gadgetry, from mousetraps to space probes, one of the most frequent questions we (reasonably) ask is, “Does it work?” According to the Prashna Upanishad, “Satyakama, son of Shibi, asked [the Rishi Pippalada]: ‘Venerable Sir, what world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That?’ To him, he said: ‘That which is the sound Om, O Satyakama, is verily the higher and the lower Brahman. Therefore, *with this support alone* does the wise

man reach the one or the other.’...If he meditates on the Supreme Being [Paramapurusha] with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, the Sun. He is led to the world of Brahman. He sees the Person that dwells in the body, who is higher than the highest life....That the wise one attains, *even by the mere sound Om as support*, that which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1, 2, 5, 7).

Om does it all.

Svetasvatara Upanishad

“The udgitha [Om] is the supreme Brahman, and in it are the Triad [the individual soul, the cosmos, and the Cosmic Soul]. It is the firm support, the imperishable. The knowers of Brahman by knowing what is therein [in the all-containing Om] become merged in Brahman, intent thereon [i.e., on Om] and freed from birth” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7). Om unites us with God and frees us from rebirth.

“As the form of fire when latent in its source is not seen and yet its seed is not destroyed, but may be seized again and again in its source by means of the drill [a pointed stick whirled to produce fire for the Vedic sacrifices], so it is in both cases. The Self has to be seized in the body by means of the Pranava. By making one’s body the lower friction stick and the Pranava the upper friction stick, by practicing the friction of meditation one may see the hidden God, as it were” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:13, 14). This passage points out that the japa and meditation of Om are not confined to our spiritual makeup, but affects our whole being, including the body.

Taittiriya Upanishad

“Om is Brahman. Om is all this. He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1). How glorious is Om! It is the Power of Enlightenment.

Bhagavad Gita

The supreme sage, Vyasa, in order to give us a complete picture of the upanishadic wisdom as well as the way to apply it in our life so we may attain the same vision of the sages who authored them, wrote the Bhagavad Gita based on the instructions given by Krishna to Arjuna on the eve of the Great Indian (Mahabharata) War on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Om is a central element in Krishna’s exposition of spiritual life and practice.

Speaking from his perspective as the infinite being, enumerating his major manifestation-embodiments, Krishna says: “I am the Pranava” (Bhagavad Gita 7:8). “I am Om [Om-kara]” (Bhagavad Gita 9:17). “Among words I am the monosyllable [Om]” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25).

The meaning is that Om is not a symbol of God, it is God.

What to “do” with Om is then outlined by Krishna: “Established in yoga

concentration, uttering Om, the single-syllable Brahman, meditating on me, he who goes forth, renouncing the body, goes to the supreme goal. He who thinks of me constantly, whose mind does not ever go elsewhere, for him, the yogi who is constantly devoted [*nityayuktasya*: constantly disciplined or yoked], I am easy to reach” (Bhagavad Gita 8:12-14).

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

The *Yoga Darshan* (Yoga Sutras) of Patanjali is the prime authority on yoga outside the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. Here are its words on God and yoga:

“Ishwara [God] is a particular Purusha [Spirit, Person] Who is untouched by the afflictions of life, actions, and the results and impressions produced by these actions. In him is the highest limit of omniscience.” (“In him becomes infinite that all-knowingness which in others is only a germ”—Swami Vivekananda’s translation of the Yoga Sutras.)

“Being unconditioned by time He is guru even of the ancients. His designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om].” (“His manifesting word is Om”—Swami Vivekananda.)

“Its japa and meditation is the way [*or*: should be done]. From it result [come] the disappearance of obstacles and the turning inward of consciousness. Disease, languor, doubt, carelessness, laziness, worldly-mindedness, delusion, non-achievement of a stage, instability, these cause the distraction of the mind and they are the obstacles. [Mental] pain, despair, nervousness, and agitation are the symptoms of a distracted condition of mind. For removing these obstacles [there should be] the constant practice of the one principle [the japa and meditation of Om]” (Yoga Sutras 1:24-32).

That completes the picture. We need only heed the instruction: “Having known what is said in the ordinance of the scriptures, you should act here in this world” (Bhagavad Gita 16:24).

Chapter Four: Om Yoga Meditation

The supreme master of yoga, Gorakhnath, said this: “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 Vakyan 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).

Normally we lose awareness of our true Self through consciousness of external objects. Since we are habituated—if not actually addicted—to objective consciousness, we can use that very condition to our advantage. Rather than disperse our consciousness through objects that draw us outward, away from the source of our being, we can take an object that will have the opposite effect, present it to the mind, and reverse our consciousness.

Such an object must have two qualities: (1) It must be something whose nature it is to turn our awareness inward and draw it into the most subtle depths of our being, and (2) it must be something that can continue to be perceived even in the most subtle areas of our awareness. Therefore it must be an object that can accompany our questing consciousness inward, not being transcended when the mind and senses are gone beyond. That object is Om. By sitting with closed eyes and letting the mind become easefully absorbed in experiencing the inner repetitions of Om we thereby directly enter into the *state of consciousness* that is Om, the state of consciousness that is Brahman the Absolute.

Sound and consciousness are, practically speaking, the same. Since the individual spirit (jivatman) and God (Paramatman) are essentially one though not the same, we can conclude that Om, repeated within the mind in japa and meditation, will produce the consciousness of both Atman-Selves and restore their lost unity.

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 a 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” (Swetashwatara 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 Vakyanis* 36).

Paramatman and jivatman

Why are there so many yoga methods? It is because of differing diagnoses of the root problem of human beings. Buddha said that it was important to ask the right questions to get the right answers. In the same way we must know the real problem of humanity if we are to formulate the solution. If we accept secondary problems as the primary ones our answers will be secondary ones and unable to clear up the fundamental problem whose solution will bring about the solution of all other troubles. For example, our problem is not that we do not know one of the symbolic forms of God mistakenly called “gods,” or an avatar or master. Our problem is that we do not know and experience our individual being (jivatma) within the cosmic being (Paramatma).

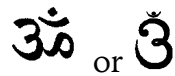
The root cause of our ignorance and its attendant miseries is forgetfulness of our true Self—and God, the Self of our Self. Since the two are really one, it follows that our meditation must consist of that which is common to both the Self (atman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman). And that is Om.

Yoga is a very real union of the Absolute with the relative in a divine alchemy that erases all difference between jivatman and Paramatman while ineffably retaining it. Therefore our yogic practice must be an invocation of both the Absolute and the relative, of Shiva and Shakti. This is accomplished through Om. We are moving toward union every time we intone Om with the inhalation and exhalation, for inhalation and exhalation are Shiva and Shakti. Within the context of yoga the inhalation is the descent of Shiva and the exhalation is the ascent of

Shakti.

Om—the Word

This sacred Syllable is spelled out as Om, but it is usually written in the ideogrammatic forms:



It is most important in repeating Om to pronounce the *O* correctly. It should be pronounced like the long *o* in the Italian or common American manner—as in *home* and *lone*. (In England, Canada, and parts of the American South, the long *o* is sometimes pronounced as a diphthong, like two vowels jammed together: either like “*ay-oh*” or “*eh-oh*.” This is not the correct manner of pronouncing the *O*, which should be a single, pure vowel sound.)

Om is most effective if it is mentally intoned—that is, mentally “sung” on a single note (the pitch does not matter—whatever is spontaneous and natural). This makes the repetition stronger and of deeper effect, because intoning Om unifies the mind and naturally concentrates it.

Om should be intoned giving full value to both the *O* and the *M*. That is, Om should be intoned with equal time on both letters: *Oooooommm*. Not *Oommmmmmm* or *Oooooomm*. You need not be overexact about this, but approximately so.

The way to receive the benefit of a mantra is *japa*, the continual repetition-intonation of the mantra. In this way the invoker is constantly imbued with the power and consciousness inherent in the mantra. It is best to intone Om mentally, silently, and to intone it throughout all your waking hours—not just during meditation.

Whenever we intone Om we align and link our consciousness to our spirit-soul with its innate potential, and with its Source the Divine Spirit and its powers.

Om Yoga Meditation Practice

Breath and sound are the two major spiritual powers possessed by us, and here is how they are combined for Om Yoga meditation.

1) Sit upright, comfortable and relaxed, with your hands on your knees or thighs or resting, one on the other, in your lap.

2) Turn your eyes slightly downward. Then close your eyes gently,. This removes visual distractions and reduces your brain-wave activity by about seventy-five percent, thus helping to calm the mind.

3) Breathe naturally. Your mouth should be closed so that all breathing is done through the nose. This, too aids in quieting the mind. Though your mouth is closed, the jaw muscles should be relaxed so the upper and lower teeth are not clenched or touching one another, but parted.

Be aware of your breath naturally (automatically) flowing in and out as you breathe through your nose. Your breathing should always be easeful and natural,

not deliberate or artificial.

4) Now in a very quiet and gentle manner begin *mentally* intoning (“singing” on a single note) Om once throughout each inhalation and once throughout each exhalation. Fit the intonations to the breath—not the breath to the intonations. If the breath is short, then the intonation should be short. If the breath is long, then the intonation should be long.

Make sure the *O* and the *M* get approximately “equal time”—*Oooooommm*, not *Oommmmmmm* or *Oooooomm*. Don’t torture yourself about this—approximately equal is good enough, and in time your intonations will automatically occur in this right manner. Also, your intonation of Om should begin when your inhalation/exhalation begins and end when it ends. In this way your intonations should be virtually continuous, not with long breaks between them. That is: *OommOommOommOomm*, or *Oomm-Oomm-Oomm-Oomm*, rather than *Oomm...Oomm...Oomm...Oomm*. Here, too, approximately continuous is sufficient.

5) For the rest of your meditation time keep on intoning Om in this manner—in time with the breath—listening to your inner intonations of Om. Let your awareness become fully absorbed in the mentally intoned sound of Om. No need to pull or push the mind—it will naturally come to rest in the sound. Just let the mind relax and sink or melt into it.

6) In time your inner, mental intonations of Om may change to an even more mellow or soft, subtle form, even to an inner whispering that is almost silent, but Om is always fully present and effective, and you will still be intoning Om in your intention. Your intonations may even become silent, like a soundless “mouthing” of Om, yet you will still be intoning Om in your intention. You may find that your intonations of Om move back and forth from more objective to more subtle and back to more objective. Just intone in the manner that is natural at the moment.

7) In the same way you will find that your breath will also become more subtle and refined, and slow down. Sometimes your breath can become so light that it almost seems as though you are not breathing at all, just *thinking* the breath.

8) In Om Yoga we do not deliberately concentrate on any particular point of the body such as the third eye, as we want the subtle energies of Om to be free to manifest themselves as is best at the moment. However, as you meditate, you may become aware of one or more areas of your brain or body at different times. This is all right when they come and go spontaneously, but keep centered in your intonations of Om.

9) Thoughts, impressions, memories, inner sensations, and suchlike may also arise during meditation. Be calmly aware of all these things in a detached and objective manner, but keep your attention centered in your intonations of Om in time with your breath. Do not let your attention become centered on or caught up in any inner or outer phenomena. Be calmly aware of all these things in a detached and objective manner—they are part of the transforming work of Om, and are perfectly all right—but keep your attention centered in your intonations of Om in time with your breath. Even though something feels very right or good when it

occurs, it should not be forced or hung on to. The sum and substance of it all is this: It is not the experience we are after, but the effect. Also, since we are all different—unique, actually—no one can say exactly what a person’s experiences in meditation are going to be like.

10) If you find yourself getting restless, distracted, “fuzzy,” anxious or tense in any degree, just take a deep breath and let it out fully, feeling that you are releasing and breathing out all tensions, and continue as before in a relaxed and easeful manner, without strain.

11) Remember: Om Yoga meditation basically consists of three things: a) sitting with the downturned eyes closed; b) being aware of our breath as it moves in and out, and c) mentally intoning Om in time with the breath and listening to those mental intonations—all in a relaxed and easeful manner, without strain.

12) At the end of your meditation get up and go about your usual daily routine while continuing to intone Om in time with your breath. If sometimes you cannot intone in time with your breath, then intone Om over and over like the tolling of a bell until you can resume intoning with the breath. (See more on this in Chapter Four.)

The yoga of the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita is the pinnacle of Indian philosophy and yoga. This small book, consisting of only seven hundred verses of four lines each, covers every aspect of spiritual life. It is a lifetime study, imparting life-giving knowledge, including instruction in meditation. In the opening verses of the fourth chapter Krishna tells Arjuna that “this imperishable yoga... is the supreme secret” (4:1-3).

First the yogi sits in an upright posture, “holding the body, head and neck erect, motionless and steady, [as though] gazing at the tip of his nose and not looking around” (6:13). Not that he makes himself cross-eyed! He simply turns his eyes slightly downward and closes them.

Next, he breathes through his nose—not his mouth—in a completely natural and spontaneous manner, in this way “equalizing the inhalation and exhalation, moving within the nostrils” (5:27), easily calming and refining the breath.

Then, “established in yoga concentration, uttering Om, the single-syllable Brahman, meditating on Me,” (8:12-13) the yogi meditates upon the Supreme.

And the ultimate result he also tells. “Thus, continually disciplining himself, the yogi whose mind is subdued goes to nirvana, to supreme peace, to union with Me” (6:15).

Finally he gives the purpose of this: “At the hour of death, he who dies remembering me, having relinquished the body, goes to my state of being. In this matter there is no doubt.

“Moreover, whatever state of being he remembers when he gives up the body at the end, he invariably goes to that state of being, transformed into that state of being.

“Therefore at all times remember Me with your mind and intellect fixed on Me.

Without doubt you shall come to Me.

“With a mind disciplined by the practice of yoga, which does not turn to anything else, to the divine supreme Spirit he goes, meditating on him” (8:5-8).

Can it be that simple and easy? Yes, because it goes directly to the root of our bondage which is a single—and therefore simple—thing: loss of awareness.

Now let us look at the various components of our Om Yoga practice so we can understand it fully.

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.

Your meditation place should be as quiet as possible. Do not play music or other kinds of sounds during your meditation, as that definitely interferes with your entering the Silence and perceiving the subtle forms of Om. 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 influences the mind, holding it to the level that corresponds to the rate of pulsation. If you like having a candle or wick lamp burning when you meditate, they should be a kind that does 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 yogis like to burn incense when they meditate. This is a good practice if the smoke does not irritate their lungs or noses. 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.

It is good to keep some sacred symbols or imagery in your meditation place—whatever reminds you that God is present.

Meditation posture

For meditation we sit in a comfortable, upright position. This is for two reasons: so we will not fall asleep, and to facilitate the upward movement of the subtle life force called prana, of which the breath is a manifestation.

It is important that our meditation posture be comfortable and easy to maintain. Though sitting upright, be sure you are always relaxed. Yoga Sutra 2:46 says: “Posture [asana] should be steady and comfortable.” The *Yoga Vashishtha* (6:1:128) simply says: “He should sit on a soft seat in a comfortable posture conducive to equilibrium.” Shankara comments: “Let him practice a posture in which, when established, his mind and limbs will become steady, and which does not cause pain.” Here relaxation is the key for Yoga Sutra 2:47 says: “Posture is mastered by relaxation.”

There are several cross-legged postures recommended for meditation. They are the Lotus (Padmasana), Perfect (Siddhasana), Auspicious (Swastikasana), and Easy (Sukhasana). You will find them described in books on Hatha Yoga postures. I especially recommend *Yoga Asanas* by Swami Sivananda of the Divine Life Society, as it is written from the perspective of spiritual development and also gives many hints to help those who are taking up meditation later in life and whose bodies need special training or compensation.

If you can sit in a cross-legged position without your legs going to sleep and making you have to shift them frequently, that is very good. Some yogis prefer to sit on the floor using a pillow. This, too, is fine if your legs do not go to sleep and distract you. But meditation done in a chair is equally as good. Better to sit at ease in a chair and be inwardly aware than to sit cross-legged and be mostly aware of your poor, protesting legs.

If you use a chair, it should be comfortable, of moderate height, one that allows you to sit upright with ease while relaxed, with your feet flat on the floor. There is no objection to your back touching the back of the chair, either, as long as your spine will be straight. If you can easily sit upright without any support and prefer to do so, that is all right, too, but be sure you are always relaxed.

If you have any back difficulties, make compensation for them, and do not mind if you cannot sit fully upright. We work with what we have, the whole idea being to sit comfortably and at ease.

Put your hands on your thighs, your knees, or in your lap: joined, separated, one over the other—whatever you prefer. The palms can be turned up or down. Really it does not matter how you place or position your hands, just as long as they are comfortable and you can forget about them. There is no need to bother with hand mudras as they are irrelevant to Om Yoga practice.

Hold your head so the chin is parallel to the ground or, as Shankara directs, “the chin should be held a fist’s breadth away from the chest.” Make a fist, hold it against your neck, and let your chin rest on your curled-together thumb and forefinger. You need not be painfully exact, about this. The idea is to hold your head at such an angle that it will not fall forward when you relax. Otherwise you will be

afflicted with what meditators call “the bobs”—the upper body continually falling forward during meditation.

Meditation is not a military exercise, so we need not be hard on ourselves about not moving in meditation. It is only natural for our muscles to sometimes get stiff or for some discomfort to develop. Go right ahead and move a bit to get rid of the discomfort.

Some yogis prefer facing east or north to meditate, but it has been my experience that in Om Yoga it simply does not matter what direction I face. Yet you might want to experiment on your own.

Whatever your seat for meditation—chair, pillow, pad, or mat—it will be good if it can be used only for meditation. This will pick up the beneficial vibrations of your meditation, and when you sit on it your mind will become calm and your meditation easier. For the same reason some people like using a special shawl or meditation clothing or a robe when meditating. If you cannot devote a chair to your meditation, find some kind of cloth or throw that you can put over the chair when you meditate and remove when you are done.

Reclining meditation

If we lie down for meditation we will likely go to sleep. Yet, for those with back problems or some other situation interfering with their sitting upright, or who have trouble sitting upright for a long time, it is possible to meditate in a reclining position at a forty-five-degree angle. This is a practice of some yogis in India when they want to meditate unbrokenly for a very long time. (I know of two yogis who meditated throughout the entire day this way.) There may still be a tendency to sleep, but we do what we can, when we can. Here is the procedure:

Using a foam wedge with a forty-five-degree angle—or enough pillows to lie at that angle, or in a bed that raises up to that angle—lie on your back with your arms at your side, or across your stomach if that is more comfortable. Then engage in the meditation process just as you would if sitting upright.

When you are ill or for some reason unable to sit upright you can meditate in this way.

Alternating positions in meditation

Those not yet accustomed to sitting still for a long time, or those who want to meditate an especially long time, can alternate their meditation positions. After sitting as long as is comfortable, they can do some reclining meditation and then sit for some more time—according to their inclination.

Relaxation

Relaxation is the key to successful meditation just as is ease and simplicity. We need to be relaxed in both body and mind to eliminate the distracting thoughts and impressions that arise mostly from tension.

It is only natural that you will find your mind moving up and down—or in and

out—during the practice of meditation, sometimes being calm and sometimes being restless. Do not mind this at all; it is in the nature of things. At such times you must consciously become even more calm, relaxed, and aware—“lighten up” in the most literal sense. As already said, when restlessness or distractions occur, take a deep breath through your nose, let it out, relax, and keep on meditating.

It is also natural when we begin turning our awareness inward that we will encounter thoughts, memories, various emotions, feelings, mental states, and other kinds of experiences such as lights, sensations of lightness and heaviness, of expansion, of peace and joy, visual images (waking dreams), and such like. None of these should be either accepted or rejected. Instead we should calmly continue our intonations of Om. The inner sound of Om and the states of consciousness it produces are the only things that matter, for they alone bring us to the Goal. We should never become caught up in the various phenomena, however amazing, entertaining, pleasant (or how inane, boring, and unpleasant) they may be, and be distracted from meditation. Experiences must not be held on to, nor should they be pushed away, either. Instead we should be quietly aware of them and keep on with meditation so in time we can pass far beyond such things. This is relaxation in attitude.

Also, feelings of boredom, stagnation, annoyance and inner discomfort may be the resistance of negative energies which will be cleared away by meditation as we persevere, and should not be taken seriously.

Never try to make one meditation period be like one before it. Each session of meditation is different, even though it will have elements or experiences in common with other sessions.

Do not be unhappy with yourself if in meditation it seems you are just floating on the top rather than “going deep.” That is what you need at the moment. Keep on; everything is all right. Remember: Om is not just intelligent, it is Divine Intelligence, and whatever is best for you to experience is what it will produce, either late or soon—but always at the perfect time.

It is important in meditation to be relaxed, natural, and spontaneous—to neither desire or try to make the meditation go in a certain direction or to try to keep it from going in a particular direction. To relax and be quietly observant is the key for the correct practice of meditation.

Yet, correct meditation practice is never passive or mentally inert. At all times you are consciously and intentionally intoning Om. It should be easeful and relaxed, but still intentional, even when your intonations become more gentle and subtle, even whisperlike or virtually silent.

Closed mouth and eyes

Breathing through the mouth agitates the mind, so keeping your mouth closed and breathing only through the nose has a calming effect. So also does closing your eyes, for by closing your eyes you remove visual distractions and eliminate over seventy-five percent of the usual brain wave activity.

Sound

Sound is the basis of all that “is,” and the way to the realization of the All That Is, including our true Self and the Supreme Self, God. “By sound one becomes liberated [*Anavrittih shabdai*]” (Brahma Sutras 4.4.22). Sound is consciousness itself. Sound–mental sound–joined to the breath is the beginning, middle, and end of our meditation practice. Consequently, listening to and experiencing the effects of our inner intonations of Om is the heart of our meditation, the major key to success in meditation. It is essential that we become centered in the etheric levels of our being, from which sound arises.

If things do not feel or seem to be going right, it may mean that you are not fully listening to the sound of Om, but your attention is somewhat divided. At such times I have had everything feel and go right immediately when I relaxed and easefully centered my awareness totally on the sound of Om.

Shabda and Nada

Shabda and nada are both usually translated in yoga texts as “sound” and in many philosophical texts are used interchangeably, but in yogic usage they have a very important distinction. Shabda is sound of any kind made by any means proceeding from any medium—for example, the sound made when a drum is struck or when an object falls to the floor. Shabda encompasses the entire range of natural sounds, including the inherent sound-vibration of physical objects and processes. Nada, however, is very specialized. It is exclusively sound emanated by Divine Impulse, sound that comes directly from Universal Consciousness with no intermediate stages or secondary causes. In a very real sense Nada is the Voice of God. According to the yogis, Om is Nada in this precise, technical sense. It is, therefore, the Voice of the Self.

Putting the awareness on mere shabda—which includes the sounds of the chakras and other inner sounds, even though they emanate from very subtle levels—leads only to their relative source and not to Reality. Only that which comes directly from the Source will lead to the Source, and it must be a dual source, both the Absolute and the relative, Brahman and the jivatman. And that is Om.

Prana and Mahaprana

In the lesser levels of the individual and the cosmos, prana moves as the force of life, but in the higher levels Mahaprana moves as the unalloyed Divine Life, one aspect of which is Om. Because of this, repetition of Om both lifts the yogi up to and invokes the Mahaprana, enabling the yogi to truly live the Divine Life.

As just explained, there are two kinds of sound: ahata (shabda) and anahata (nada). Ahata occurs “in nature,” but anahata is Divine Sound (Divya Shabda) and is spiritual, conveying spiritual opening and insight. Such is Om. Om japa opens the yogi to the inflow of Mahaprana and increases the inflow the longer it is practiced.

Om

The entire realm of manifestation is really nothing more than an infinite variety of sound, variations of a single Sound that is the origin and ending of all other sounds. That Sound is Om, the basic resonant frequency of the entire field of existence: “Verily, the Syllable Om is all this, yea, the Syllable Om is all this” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.3). “Om: this Syllable is all this” (Mandukya Upanishad 1).

It is the keynote of the consciousness that is our true Self: “The Self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om.... Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows it thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his self [individual spirit]” (Mandukya Upanishad 8, 12). “Meditate on Om as the Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6).

And since we and God are one, it is the keynote of divine consciousness as well. “Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1). “That [Om] is the quintessence of the essences, the Supreme, the highest” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.3). “Om is the supreme Brahman” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7). “Om is Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

Om, then, is the entire focus of our meditation. “One should meditate on this Syllable [Om]” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.1). “Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6). And since it has no intellectual meaning, its repetition helps us in getting beyond the conceptualizing mind.

I. K. Taimni has this to say regarding Om, the Pranava: “The first and most effective means which Patanjali prescribed for overcoming the distracted condition of the mind is the japa and meditation of the Pranava. He calls the Pranava the *vachaka* of Ishwara. What is a *vachaka*? A *vachaka* is a name which has a mystic relationship with the *vachya*—the entity designated—and has inherent in it the power of revealing the consciousness and releasing the power of the individual for whom it stands. Such a *vachaka* is Om. It is considered to be the most mystical, sacred and powerful mantra by the Hindus because it is the *vachaka* of Ishwara, the Greatest Power and the Supreme Consciousness.

“It may seem preposterous to the ordinary man not familiar with the inner side of life that a mere syllable can carry hidden within it the potential power which is attributed to it by all yogis, and references to which are found scattered through the sacred scriptures of the Hindus. But facts are facts and they are not at all affected by the ignorance and prejudices of people who disbelieve in them. Who could have believed fifty years ago that a mere neutron moving among a number of uranium atoms could produce an explosion powerful enough to blow up a whole city? Anyone who understands the theory of mantra yoga and the relation of vibration with consciousness should be able to see that there is nothing inherently impossible in the idea of a mystic syllable possessing such a power. Besides, we should remember that the facts of the inner life with which Yoga deals are based upon experience no less than the facts of Science.”

In his commentary on the Yoga Sutras Shankara puts it very simply: “Through Om the Lord is met face to face.” And even further: “When the yogi has understood the identity of Om and Brahman he attracts the grace of the supreme Lord through its repetition and meditation.” And finally: “Meditation is setting the heart on the Lord who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It.”

Now this is very important: When we want to swim in the ocean, we do not dive into a particular wave, but into the ocean itself. A wave, being only a manifestation on the surface of the ocean, must be left behind if we are to sound the depths of the ocean. If we stay with the wave, we will remain as separated from the ocean as the wave is. If we ride the wave like a surfer we will find ourselves being thrown onto the shore and out of the ocean. It is the same with meditation on names and forms—whether of gods, avatars or liberated masters. We need to dive down where name and form cannot go. This is the only way to get beyond unreality, darkness, and mortality. We must meditate on the Self—not on external beings or forms. As Sri Ma Sarada Devi said: “After attaining wisdom one sees that gods and deities are all maya” (*Precepts For Perfection* 672). Sri Ramana Maharshi said: “Since the Self is the reality of all the gods, the meditation on the Self which is oneself is the greatest of all meditations. All other meditations are included in this. It is for gaining this that the other meditations are prescribed. So, if this is gained, the others are not necessary. Knowing one’s Self is knowing God. Without knowing one’s Self that meditates, imagining that there is a deity which is different and meditating on it, is compared by the great ones to the act of measuring with one’s foot one’s own shadow, and to the search for a trivial conch after throwing away a priceless gem that is already in one’s possession” (*Collected Works*, section 28). The upanishads, Gita, and Yoga Sutras know nothing of meditating on gods or ishta devatas—only on Om; for only Om is our Self.

Since we must realize the individual Self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman)—we do japa of Om which includes both. In effective meditation it is essential that the mantra and the Self of the yogi should be actually one—the mantra must proceed from the Self. The Shiva Sutras say: “If the mantra is kept separate from the repeater of the mantra and its goal, one cannot attain the fruit of the mantra” (Shiva Sutras 1:4). The divine Self is both the origin and the goal of Om.

Om is expanding outward in waves from the core of the cosmos. The same is happening with us. From our atma Om is being impulsed outward. By coming into alignment/synchronicity with the atmic impulse through the intonations of Om, we can return to our true state of being.

Intoning

We mentally intone Om in japa and meditation, “singing” it on a single note, because this unifies the mind and enables our awareness to turn inward steadily and surely. Further, intoning the sound makes it easier to be aware of and to hold on to. Remember: if the breath is short, then the intonation should be short, if the breath is long, then the intonation should be long.

Once more: make sure the *O* and the *M* get approximately “equal time”—*Oooooommm*, not *Oommmmmmm* or *Oooooomm*. Don’t torture yourself about this—approximately equal is good enough, and in time your intonations will automatically occur in this right manner. Also, your intonation of *Om* should begin when your inhalation/exhalation begins and end when it ends. In this way your intonations should be virtually continuous, not with long breaks between them. That is: *OommOommOommOomm*, or *Oomm-Oomm-Oomm-Oomm*, rather than *Oomm...Oomm...Oomm...Oomm*. Here, too, approximately continuous is sufficient.

As we go deeper in meditation our perceptions of the inner sound of our mental intonations of *Om* become increasingly subtle. At first they may be more like ordinary sung speech, but they will progress to become more and more soft until they become a kind of “whispering” and in time can be actually silent—a kind of silent movement—very much like when we silently mouth words instead of speaking them aloud.

When we intone in a most subtle, virtually whispered, or silent, way we still think of *Om* as being intoned, and mentally *intend* to intone, even if we do not inwardly hear or sense the difference. And our intonations, however subtle, should never be weak or tenuous.

It is important to let your intonations of *Om* change as they will. They may naturally and spontaneously move back and forth from more objective to more subtle and back to more objective. As a rule the gentle or whispered or silent form of intonation is more effective than ordinary mental intonation as you will experience for yourself.

The voice in the silence—subtle sound

Meditation on *Om* is the true way to enter into silence. Meditation is such a simple practice because the mind must be made simple to reflect the simple (i.e., unitary) God. The mind must be made blind, deaf, and mute in the inner silence. This is a great secret: we cannot attain to silence by mere absence of words or thoughts. Instead, we must find the silence that lies at the heart of *Om*. This is a great mystery. Only he who is adept in meditation is truly keeping silence.

“And Elijah arose, and went unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him,...Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire *a still small voice*” (I Kings 19:8-12).

Wind, earthquake, and fire—but God was not in them. Then there was silence, yet in the silence there was a voice. “A still small voice” means that silent (still) subtle (small) impulse which is the very root of “word” and therefore Word itself. The New King James Version gives it as “a delicate whispering voice.” The Greek

Septuagint has “the voice of a gentle breeze,” evidently keeping in mind that the Holy Spirit is the Breath of God and often manifests as wind. The Slavonic text renders it “the wafting of a silent light.” This, too, is appropriate, for the Holy Spirit is also Light. Actually, it cannot be at all expressed in human terms, for it is far beyond the senses and ordinary experience. But however it might be described, it is the voice of God coming through the pure spirit that is our true essence.

“Still small voice” refers to the subtle sound of Om experienced in deep meditation. It may even be translated “a silent sound,” for in deepest meditation the intonations of Om become whisper-like and even silent while yet remaining in their integrity. That is, they do not stop, but remain in a form that is perfectly silent and still—more like a soundless mouthing of the Word as already said. The subtle intonations of Om may even become more like a silent act of will or ideation (conceptualization) of the repetition of Om.

In Hebrew, “still, small voice” is *demamah dakh kole*. *Demamah* means quiet. It comes from *damam* which means “fade away.” *Dakh* means extremely small in the sense of something extremely subtle, and it also means something that actually makes a thing small or subtle—in this case our consciousness. *Kole* means both “voice” and “sound,” and interestingly has the connotation of singing or intoning.

As a rule the gentle or whispered or silent form of intonation is more effective than ordinary mental intonation. The Pranavic stream can become as light and subtle as the movement of air produced by the wings of a butterfly. This is a mystery, but you will experience it for yourself.

Even in daily japa, we should keep our awareness deep in the subtle sound of Om. The breath is necessary to lead us into the depths of the sound, which is why we join our intoning of Om to it.

Simplicity and subtlety of practice

The simpler and more easeful the yoga practice, the more deeply effective it is. This is a universal principle in the realm of inner development and experience. How is this? In the inner world of meditation things are often just the opposite to the way they are in the outer world. Whereas in the outer world a strong, aggressive force is most effective in producing a change, in the inner world it is subtle, almost minimal force or movement that is most effectual—even supremely powerful. Those familiar with homeopathic medicine will understand the concept that the more subtle an element is, the more potentially effective it is. In meditation and japa the lightest touch is usually the most efficient.

An incident that took place during one of the crusades illustrates this. At a meeting between the leaders of the European forces and Saladin, commander of the Arab armies, one of the Europeans tried to impress and intimidate Saladin by having one of his soldiers cleave a heavy wooden chair in half with a single downstroke of his broadsword. In response, Saladin ordered someone to toss a silk scarf as light and delicate as a spider’s web into the air. As it descended, he simply held his scimitar beneath it with the sharp edge upward. When the scarf touched

the edge, it sheared in half and fell on either side of the blade without even a whisper as he held it completely still. Such is the power of the subtle and the simple. This being so, the simple, subtle intonations of Om are the strongest and most effective form of mantric invocation.

It is important, then, to keep in mind that often when things seem stuck in meditation and not moving as they should, or when the mind does not calm down, it is often because we are not relaxed sufficiently and are not allowing our inner intonations of Om to become as subtle as they should be.

I do not mean to give you the impression that your inner intonations of Om should become feeble or weak in the sense of becoming tenuous—only barely within your mental grasp, and liable to slip away and leave you blank. Not at all. The inner sound of the intonations may become subtler and subtler, but they do not at all become weaker—only gentler and more profound.

Breath and sound

The breath is a dominant factor on all the planes of existence. It is necessary for the vitalization and functioning of all vehicles of consciousness, physical or superphysical. It possesses the essential qualities of both energy and consciousness and is thus able to serve as an instrument for their actions and reactions on each other.

Although we tend to think of attention as merely a state of the mind, the opposite of inattention, it is really a great psychic force. Quantum physics has discovered that when a human being sets his attention on anything, that object is immediately affected to some degree—so much so that a scientist can unintentionally influence the result of an experiment, however controlled the external conditions may be. Thoughts are indeed things, but attention is the fundamental power of thought. Buddha gave great emphasis to the effect of *sati*—attention—in meditation.

As we calmly fix our awareness on the breath and the sound of Om, they become increasingly refined. Since it is natural for them to do so, you need not attempt to deliberately make this happen. Your attention and intonations of Om will automatically refine them. As we become more and more aware of the subtle forms or movements of the inner breath and sound, it automatically happens that the breath movements on all levels become slower. This is the highest form of pranayama—cultivation of the breath. All authentic yoga practice involves the breath to some degree, because the breath truly is life (prana).

The purpose of being aware of the physical breath is to enable you to become aware of “the breath of the breath,” the inner movement of consciousness that manifests as the physical breath. The more attention we give to the breath, the subtler it becomes until it reveals itself as an act of the mind, not the body, and finally as consisting of mind-stuff (chitta) itself and Om as the consciousness behind the breath. Both breath and sound, like an onion, have many layers. In the practice of Om meditation we experience these layers, beginning with the most

objective, physical layer and progressing to increasingly subtle layers, until, as with an onion at its core, there are no more layers, but only the pure being of the Self.

The breath and sound become increasingly refined as we observe them, and as a result our *awareness* also becomes refined. Our attention focused on the breath and Om causes their potential to manifest in the way sunlight causes the petals of a flower to open.

We ourselves are waves in the ocean of consciousness and sound. We are Om. So in Om Yoga practice, especially when we experience the permutations of the subtle sounds of Om, we are actually experiencing ourselves. The more we meditate, the higher and higher and further and further we penetrate into the infinite consciousness of which we are an eternal part. That is our point of origin, and the subtle vibrations of Om will take us back there.

Breath and brain

The yogis knew ages ago what Western science took a long time to realize. In the fourth century an anatomist named Oribasius said that the brain literally moves in harmony with respiration. In 1690 a researcher named Slevogt published a book in which he said the same. But the mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg wrote about this as both a physical and a metaphysical phenomenon in his *Oeconomia Regni Animalis* which contains a section titled *De Motu Cerebri*. That was in 1741, and in 1750 J. Daniel Schlichting, a physician of Amsterdam, declared that at each expiration the whole brain becomes elevated or expanded, while during inspiration it subsides and collapses. He showed that this motion is due neither to the contraction of the *dura mater*, nor to a pulsation of the sinuses or of the arteries, but is an intrinsic motion of the entire mass of the brain; that this motion continues during the whole existence of life, and that it is rendered possible by an empty space between the cranium and the brain.

In light of this we see why the yogis regarded the breath with amazement and awe, considering it to be a key to higher states of consciousness. In modern times it has been demonstrated that every cell of the body is affected by the breath, that the entire body expands and contracts in a virtually imperceptible manner in time with inhalation and exhalation. The breath, then, is a major factor in the physical, mental and spiritual alchemy of yoga.

Unexpected benefits of meditation

Here are four scientific reports about the practical benefits of meditation:

1) “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).

2) "In a study published in the journal *NeuroImage*, researchers report that certain regions in the brains of long-term meditators were larger than in a similar control group.

"Specifically, meditators showed significantly larger volumes of the hippocampus and areas within the orbito-frontal cortex, the thalamus and the inferior temporal gyrus—all regions known for regulating emotions.

"We know that people who consistently meditate have a singular ability to cultivate positive emotions, retain emotional stability and engage in mindful behavior,' said Eileen Luders, lead author and a postdoctoral research fellow at the UCLA Laboratory of Neuro Imaging. 'The observed differences in brain anatomy might give us a clue why meditators have these exceptional abilities.'

"Research has confirmed the beneficial aspects of meditation. In addition to having better focus and control over their emotions, many people who meditate regularly have reduced levels of stress and bolstered immune systems. But less is known about the link between meditation and brain structure.

"The researchers found significantly larger cerebral measurements in meditators compared with controls, including larger volumes of the right hippocampus and increased gray matter in the right orbito-frontal cortex, the right thalamus and the left inferior temporal lobe. There were no regions where controls had significantly larger volumes or more gray matter than meditators.

"Because these areas of the brain are closely linked to emotion, Luders said, 'these might be the neuronal underpinnings that give meditators the outstanding ability to regulate their emotions and allow for well-adjusted responses to whatever life throws their way.'" (PhysOrg—May 13, 2009. Source: University of California-Los Angeles)

3) "People who meditate grow bigger brains than those who don't. Researchers at Harvard, Yale, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have found the first evidence that meditation can alter the physical structure of our brains. Brain scans they conducted reveal that experienced meditators boasted increased thickness in parts of the brain that deal with attention and processing sensory input.

"In one area of gray matter, the thickening turns out to be more pronounced in older than in younger people. That's intriguing because those sections of the human cortex, or thinking cap, normally get thinner as we age.

"Our data suggest that meditation practice can promote cortical plasticity in adults in areas important for cognitive and emotional processing and well-being,' says Sara Lazar, leader of the study and a psychologist at Harvard Medical School.

"The researchers compared brain scans of 20 experienced meditators with those

of 15 non-meditators. Four of the former taught meditation or yoga...the rest worked in careers such as law, health care, and journalism....During scanning, the meditators meditated; the others just relaxed and thought about whatever they wanted.

“Some had been doing [meditation] for only a year, others for decades. Depth of the meditation was measured by the slowing of breathing rates. Those most deeply involved in the meditation showed the greatest changes in brain structure. ‘This strongly suggests,’ Lazar concludes, ‘that the differences in brain structure were caused by the meditation, rather than that differences in brain thickness got them into meditation in the first place.’

“Since this type of meditation counteracts the natural thinning of the thinking surface of the brain, could it play a role in slowing—even reversing—aging? That could really be mind-boggling in the most positive sense” (PhysOrg–January 31, 2006. Harvard University. William J. Cromie).

Another report on this study in the *New Scientist*, titled “Meditation Builds Up the Brain,” says that “meditating actually increases the thickness of the cortex in areas involved in attention and sensory processing, such as the prefrontal cortex and the right anterior insula.

“‘You are exercising it while you meditate, and it gets bigger,’ she [Sara Lazar] says....It is further evidence, says Lazar, that yogis ‘aren’t just sitting there doing nothing.’”

4) “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).

Joining Om to the breath

“Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6). The breath and Om arise from the very root of our being, the spirit. Joining Om to the breath extends its transforming vibrations throughout the entire range of our being. It also unites the different aspects of our being and begins more effectively and rapidly evolving us, returning us to the Source—but now transformed.

“The breath is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3). We join intonations of Om to the breath because on the subtle levels it is always producing the sound of Om. The spirit-Self *breathes* Om. So by consciously joining Om to our breathing we link up with our spirit-consciousness and enter into it. Further, when the habit of intoning Om with the breath is established, the simple act of breathing will cue the mind to maintain the intonations.

Om should be intoned once throughout each inhalation and once throughout each exhalation because there are two poles or subtle currents within the causal

realm that make the sound of Om as they move outward and manifest as inhalation and exhalation. In a sense there are two Om's—positive and negative, yin and yang—which together produce the projection of the cosmos and the individual's manifestation therein. So the two Om's affect the two sides of the yogi's being. Ultimately they are one, and by his joining of Om to his breath, each breath moves him onward toward the goal of Divine Unity. "To reach it is said to be the greatest of all achievements. It is my highest state of being. Those who reach it are not reborn" (Bhagavad Gita 8:21).

This is necessary because in all relative beings the prana-breath has become corrupted and confused, binding the spirit rather than freeing it. The prana-breath has gotten out of phase, out of tune or off key—out of alignment with Om, the original keynote of the universe. By intoning Om in time with his breath, the Om yogi takes charge of his prana-breath, realigns and repolarizes it, restoring it to its original form and function. In this way he sets himself squarely in the upward-moving stream of evolution and accelerates his movement within it.

Again: we breathe through the nose, not the mouth.

Making the two into one

We are speaking of "the breath *and* Om," but in reality they are the same thing. The breath is not just a stop and go light, used merely to let us know when to intone Om. The breath is a form, a manifestation, of Om. So are all things, but the breath is the closest to pure Om since it takes its existence directly from Om without any intermediate phase. In Om Yoga we intone Om in time with the breath so the two will remerge and become one, restoring their eternal unity.

It is important that the breath and Om be perfectly integrated. That is why the intonation of Om should begin with the breath movement—whether inhalation or exhalation—and end with its cessation. We need not exaggerate this and turn our meditation into a torment of anxiety, but reasonable care should be taken.

Lalla Yogeshwari on the Omkar Breath

Lalla Yogeshwari sang: "He who has recognized the Brahmarandhra as the shrine of the divine Self, he who has known the anahata [Om] borne upon the breath: his vain imaginings of themselves have fled far away, and he himself [recognizes] himself as a deva [god]. To whom else, therefore, should he offer worship?" (Lalla Vakyani 33). This covers a tremendous amount of ground in a very few words: the sahasrara as the natural abode of the Self which is divine, and the dispelling of ignorance and the arising of Self-knowledge through Om joined to the breath—which flows upward into the sahasrara throughout meditation and the japa of Om outside meditation.

Then she continues: "He within whom steadfastly proceedeth in its upward course the Syllable Om, and naught but it, and for whom the breath forms a bridge to the Brahmarandhra, he bears in his mind the one and only mantra, and of what benefit to him are a thousand mantras?" (Lalla Vakyani 34). In this way she affirms

the necessity of the rising of Om and the breath into the thousand-petalled lotus of the head, the brahmarandhra, “the gate to God [Brahman].” Because of this she insists that Om is “the one and only mantra” for meditation, and says that a thousand mantras are of no benefit to him who knows to invoke Om, “the word that is God,” through japa and meditation.

Finally, she says: “I locked the doors and windows of my body. I seized the thief of my vital airs [prana], and controlled my breath. I bound him tightly in the closet of my heart, and with the whip of the Pranava did I flay him” (Lalla Vakyan 101). The thief of our vital force, which includes the breath, is distraction and ignorance. Through Om we either discipline and bring under control the elements that can be corrected or expel those that cannot be corrected.

So to Lalla the combination of breath and Om was the path to salvation (moksha).

An alternative: tolling bell Om japa

Although Om japa in time with the breath can be considered the norm since “Pranava” can mean “The Breath Word,” those who like may sometimes intone Om over and over in the manner of a tolling bell. The speed of the japa can also be according to your preference, but one thing is absolute: *The japa must be fundamentally continuous*. There should be no significant breaks between the intonations.

The rate of intonation should be easy and spontaneous. Often the intoning will be in time with some vital bodily function beside the breath. For example, I have often found my intonations in automatic synchronization with my heartbeat. At other times I have felt it must be in time with other functions that I could not pinpoint.

However it may be, tolling bell japa has a value of its own in Om Yoga practice, especially when alternated with the breath japa to keep the interest of the mind so it does not wander but keeps the attention centered on the inner intonations of Om.

Cultivating consciousness–true spiritual experience

As already cited, the Shiva Sutras say: “If the mantra is kept separate from the repeater of the mantra and its goal, one cannot attain the fruit of the mantra” (Shiva Sutras 1:4). Although the practical focus of our attention in meditation is our intoning of Om in time with the breath, we must also be aware of the effects the practice produces. For the goal of meditation is perfect awareness of the spirit within Spirit, and our meditation experiences are steps in the ladder taking us onward and upward to the supreme Goal. We experience subtler and higher levels of awareness until we reach the Highest.

We are not obsessed with meditational phenomena, but we are keenly aware of them. We need not analyze them, only observe them in a calm and relaxed manner, understanding that they come and go and are not to be held onto, but perceived like the signs on a highway indicating our position and where we are going. Actually, we are indifferent to them as phenomena, but intent on them as messages from the

spirit and evidences of the transforming power of Om.

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 breath and Om because they arise directly from the atman and will lead us into the consciousness which is the Self.

Long before reaching the level of human birth and thereafter, sentient beings are immersed in a chain of never-ending experiences, many of them absolutely illusory. 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 in this and 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. 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. Sri Ramana Maharshi said: “The Ekakshara [Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Self.” And: “Earnest seekers who, incessantly and with a steady mind, repeat ‘Om’ will attain success. By repetition of the pure ‘Om’ the mind is withdrawn from sense objects and becomes one with the Self.”

Non-dual consciousness

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 experience 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 pure awareness, the witnessing consciousness that is our real Self, we will begin the process of turning all those levels back into pure spirit. “Behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Only yogis say such things, and only yogis realize their full meaning.

Yoga is the fundamental *clearing* of our consciousness. As Saint Paul directs: “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). It is the renewal of our original consciousness regarding which Jesus prayed: “O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). For before the world was we consciously knew that we were one with God, part of infinite being. We need a return to that which we had “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

It is our practice of yoga that is the divine leaven that expands our consciousness into that perfect state that is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven. “Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Matthew 13:33).

The solar path of liberation

“The sun is verily Life.... That very one rises up who is Life, who is identified with all creatures, and who is possessed of all forms. This very one, that has been referred to, is spoken of by the mantra: ‘The realizers of Brahman knew the one that is possessed of all forms, full of rays, endowed with illumination, the resort of all, the single light (of all), and the radiator of heat. It is the sun that rises—the sun that possesses a thousand rays, exists in a hundred forms and is the life of all creatures’” (Prashna Upanishad 1:5, 7, 8).

All plant, animal, and human life on this planet depend upon the sun. It is the subtle powers of sunlight which stimulate growth and evolution. Sunlight particularly stimulates the activity of the higher centers in the brain, especially that of the pineal gland. Even in the depths of the earth a sensitive man can tell when the sun rises and sets above him. The sun truly awakens us in the deepest sense. As

the germinating seed struggles upward toward the sun and out into its life-giving rays, so all higher forms of life reach out for the sun, which acts as a metaphysical magnet, drawing them upward and outward toward ever-expanding consciousness. Sunlight is the radiant form of Om, so the sun initiates the entire solar system into Om. Human beings are solar creatures, therefore to intone Om is natural to them.

When the individual comes into manifestation on this earth he passes from the astral world into the material plane by means of the sun, which is a mass of exploding astral energies, not mere flaming gases. And when the individual has completed his course of evolution within this plane, upon the death of his body he rises upward in his subtle body and passes through the sun into the higher worlds, there to evolve even higher or to pass directly into the depths of the transcendent Brahman.

To ensure that this will take place, the Om Yogi practices the japa and meditation of Om, for the Chandogya Upanishad tells us that Om and the sun are identical in essence, “for the sun is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1) That is, the energy of the sun is a manifestation of Om. Scientists have only recently discovered this phenomenon. On page 16 of the July 2004 issue of *National Geographic* we find this: “Bubbles the size of Texas cover the sun’s face.... Called granules, the short-lived cells of plasma carry heat to the surface through convection, the same way water boils in a pot. The rise and fall of granules creates sound waves, which cause the sun to throb like a drum every five minutes.”

Om yogis intone Om in time with their breath because the solar energies and the breath are intimately connected, for the upanishad further tells us that “the breath is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3).

The Taittiriya Upanishad says: “He who is the Self in man, and he who is the Self in the sun, are one. Verily, he who knows this truth overcomes the world; he transcends the physical sheath, he transcends the vital sheath, he transcends the mental sheath, he transcends the intellectual sheath, he transcends the sheath of the ego. ...He who is the Self in man, and he who is the Self in the sun, are one” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2:8:1; 3.10.4).

Our life depends on the light of the sun, so it is also a manifestation of the power of Om. The japa and meditation of Om aligns us with the solar powers that are Om and thereby greatly increase our life force and the evolution of all the levels of our being.

Om Yoga prepares us for the Great Departure. As the Chandogya Upanishad also says: “Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun. ...When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these very rays or he goes up with the thought of Om. As his mind is failing, he goes to the sun. That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers” (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2, 5).

The solar rays do not just flow into this world, they also draw upward through the sun and beyond. In the human body the process of exhalation and inhalation is related to solar energy, and much of the solar power on which we subsist is drawn into the body through our breathing. Which is why Giri Bala (see *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Chapter Forty-Six) employed a special form of breathing to live without eating. The solar rays do not just strike the surface of our body, but penetrate into the nadis, the channels in the astral and causal bodies that correspond to the physical nerves. Just as the electrical impulses flow through the physical nerves, the subtle solar life force, or prana, flows through the subtle nadis and keeps us alive and functioning. And as we have already seen, the breath as it flows is always sounding Om. The breath, then, is a vehicle for the solar energies that produce evolution, and we increase its effect through the japa and meditation of Om.

The continual intonation of Om, both in and outside of meditation, conditions our subtle levels so that at the time of death we will be oriented toward the solar powers and can ascend upon them—especially if we continue our intonations of Om even after the body has been dropped. Those intonations will guarantee our ascent into the solar world. Those who have imbued themselves with the Pranavic vibrations will enter through the solar gate, whereas those who have not done so will be shut out by it and compelled to return to earthly rebirth.

“At the time of departure from this world, remember Om, the Lord, the Protector” (Yajur Veda 40:15). Whatever we think of most during life we will think of at the time of our death. This is affirmed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (8:5-10): “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. 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.” And the Prashna Upanishad (5:5, 7): “If he meditates on the Supreme Being with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, the Sun. He is led to the world of Brahman. He sees the Person that dwells in the body, Who is higher than the highest life. ...That the wise one attains, even by the mere sound Om as support, That Which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme.”

Those who continually invoke and meditate upon Om during their lifetime will remember Om at the time of death, and by means of Om will ascend to the sun and beyond into the real Beyond.

The earth also “intones” Om

Ten years ago, seismologists discovered that the earth emits oscillations that sound like “the ringing of a gigantic bell”—which is exactly how the yogis have said

Om manifests as the Anahata Shabda within the body in the region of the heart. Researchers say that this vibration creates “waves” on the planet’s surface in both up-down and forward-backward motions. In other words, our world is “breathing”—inhaling and exhaling—and intoning Om, just as do we. So what could be more natural than the practice of Om Yoga?

Yoga Nidra—conscious “sleep”

The purpose of meditation is the development of deep inner awareness. The *Yoga Vashishtha* (5:78), a classical treatise on yoga, speaks of the state “when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state” known in Sanskrit as sushupti. The sage Sandilya in his treatise on yoga, the Sandilya Upanishad, also speaks of “the right realization of the true nature of the sound which is at the extreme end of the pronunciation of the Syllable Om, when sushupti is rightly cognized [experienced] while conscious.” Ramana Maharshi also spoke frequently of this yogic state known as yoga nidra—yoga sleep. Although it is described as “dreamless sleep,” it is much, much more, for there is a deepening of consciousness in this state that does not occur in ordinary dreamless sleep.

Regarding this Sri Gajanan Maharaj of Nasik said: “Not to see anything in dhyana [meditation] shows a state of concentration. When seeing is turned into non-seeing, then there is the real state of samadhi. The state of complete samadhi is like the state of death but it is a state of life after having conquered death. The state of sleep is also a kind of death and he really knows the secret of dhyana yoga whose sleep is nothing but samadhi.”

In deep meditation we enter into the silent witness state, experiencing the state of dreamless sleep while fully conscious and aware. When approaching this state the beginner may actually fall asleep. This is not to be worried about, for such is quite natural, and after a while will not occur. From birth we have been habituated to falling asleep when the mind reached a certain inner point. Now through meditation we will take another turn—into the state of deep inner awareness. Ramana Maharshi said that even if a yogi falls asleep while approaching—or in—yoga nidra, the process of meditation still continues. Yoga Nidra is the state of conscious sushupti—dreamless sleep—and yet much more, for then the awareness is gathered into the Chidakasha, the principle of pure consciousness. And there is a deepening of consciousness that does not occur in any other state.

So when you have this “asleep while awake” state occur, know that you are on the right track—when it is imageless and thoughtless except for your intonations of Om (for those should never stop). “Astral dreaming” during meditation is only that: dreaming illusion. Real visions can occur during meditation, but it is easy to mistake dreams for visions. Therefore it is wise to value only the conscious sushupti experience in meditation, within which Om continues to be the focus of our awareness. This is the true samadhi.

The “workings” of Om

But there is another, seemingly contradictory, side to this. *Yogash chitta-vritti-nirodhah*. (Yoga Sutras 1:2) Patanjali here defines yoga as the stopping (*nirodhah*) of the modifications (*vritti*) of the mind (*chitta*). Superficially considered, this seems to mean merely being blank, without thoughts. But if this were so, dreamless sleep would be yoga, and the more we slept the more enlightened we would become! Still, most yogis tend to think that in meditation no thoughts or impressions should arise—that if they do, the meditation is imperfect and reduced in value. But Om is a transforming-transmuting force, and that implies change, and change is a process. So sometimes you will simply sit in the happy and peaceful silence of pure Yoga Nidra, intent on the sound of your subtle intonations of Om, and at other times things will definitely be going on. Both are equally beneficial, for Om knows what it is doing, and both may occur in the same meditation.

Meditation, then, is not just sinking down into silence and stasis, though that does happen in some meditation periods, but can be an extremely active state. As you meditate, on the subtle levels you may see, hear, feel, and be aware of a great many things—thoughts, visual impressions, memories, inner sensations, and suchlike. All of this is evoked by your practice, and nothing will be a distraction if you simply observe it in a calm and objective manner, keeping your awareness on the breath and intoning Om in time with it.

Your interest should be in your intonations of Om, yet you should be aware of what is going on. The key is to remain a calm observer.

The process of meditation takes place within the spirit-Self. At the end of life, having prepared ourselves by this practice, we shall ascend from the body into the realm of immortality. “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” (Bhagavad Gita (8:8)).

Spending hours in and out of meditation invoking Om constantly produces the most profound changes in the meditator’s psychic energy system on the physical, astral, and causal levels. The union of the prana (breath) and the subtle vibrations of Om produce dramatic repolarization of the consciousness and life force. Sensitive yogis will experience this along with a myriad other transformations.

The three elements of Om Yoga meditation

There are three components of Om Yoga meditation: 1) sitting with downturned and closed eyes; 2) being aware of the breath as it moves in and out; 3) mentally intoning Om in time with the breathing while listening to the inner, mental intonations of Om and becoming absorbed in the subtle sound. If in meditation we feel unsure as to whether things are going right, we need only check to see if these three things are being done and our attention is centered in them. If so, all is well. If not, it is a simple matter to return to them and make everything right.

Of the three, *listening* is the key to success in meditation. That is because if we center our attention in listening to the mental sound of Om as we intone it, we become totally receptive to the effects of Om and also cut off distractions—mostly by

making us indifferent to them. Nearly every time that I just don't feel right in meditation or it seems that things are not going as they should, the moment I remember to be focused on listening to—inwardly hearing—my inner intonations of Om, everything straightens out and moves onward.

It is essential that we be centered in the etheric levels of our being, and this is done by intoning Om and listening to those intonations. This is the Golden Rule of Om meditation. During meditation, whatever happens, whatever comes or goes, relax and keep *listening* to your inner intonations of Om. It is the sound of Om that accomplishes everything. And by listening to it you become totally receptive and responsive to it so it can work its transforming purpose to the maximum degree.

Success in Om Yoga consists of going deeper and deeper into the subtle sound of the Om mantra as we sound it within. It is the thread leading us into the center of Reality.

Invariables

There are certain invariables—absolutes of practice—which we must be aware of and conform to in our meditations. They are:

1) Om *never ceases*. Never. We must not let passivity or heaviness of mind interrupt our intonations by pulling us into negative silence. That would be a descent rather than an ascent.

2) In intoning, we must always give equal value to O and M. At least approximately so.

3) We intone Om in time with the breath, or over and over like the tolling of a bell. At such times our intonations of Om should be virtually continuous, not with long breaks between them.

4) Our mental intonations of Om are gentle, quiet and subtle.

5) We meditate with downturned and closed eyes and closed mouth.

6) Although at times our awareness may be drawn to particular areas of the body or brain—or even the whole body or the energy fields extending beyond the body—we calmly remain aware of the sound of Om, not deliberately fixing our attention on any point or part of the body.

7) The focus, the center of attention, of our meditation is the sound of our mental intonations of Om in time with our breath. In an easeful and relaxed manner we become absorbed in that inner sound. This is meditation; this is spiritual life. We center or merge our awareness in the breath and Om because they arise directly from the atman and will lead us into the consciousness which is the Self.

Prayer

It is traditional for some brief prayer to be made before and after meditation. Usually before meditation a simple prayer is made asking divine blessing and guidance. Then at the end another brief prayer is made giving thanks, offering the meditation to God, and asking divine blessing for the rest of the day. There is no set

form, just words from the heart. This is not essential for Om Yoga practice, but those who are so inclined may find it beneficial.

Japa and meditation of Om

Japa and meditation of Om support each other. Continual japa of Om during your daily routine will increase the effectiveness of your practice of meditation, and daily meditation practice will deepen the effect of your japa outside meditation. By the two wings of japa and meditation we ascend through Om to the Highest that is Om.

Commenting on the Yoga Sutras, Vyasa tells the Om yogi: “It has been said: ‘After Om japa, let him set himself in meditation, after meditation, let him set himself to japa. When Om japa and meditation come to perfection the Supreme Self [Paramatman] shines forth.’” And Shankara, commenting on Vyasa’s commentary, says: “Meditation is setting the heart on the Lord Who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It. Yogis who are engaged in both japa and meditation attain one-pointedness of mind. After japa, which causes his mind to bow before the Lord, let him engage in meditation. When his mind becomes unwavering from meditation on the Lord, let him do japa of Om, for japa leads to meditation. When japa and meditation of Om come to perfection then the Supreme Lord [Parameshwara], the Supreme Self [Paramatman] Who stands in the highest place, shines forth for the yogi.”

When doing japa as we are engaged in other activities there is a profound effect, but we are not able to experience the effects of Om nearly as much as we can while sitting in meditation. The meditation experience is absolutely essential for spiritual progress, just as japa is essential to ensure that meditation will be effective to the maximum degree.

Throughout the day–japa

Meditation is most effective, but its effects need to be sustained throughout the day by continuing to intone Om in an easy and relaxed manner in time with the breath without any strain, just as you do in meditation. That is, Om should be intoned *constantly*, throughout all activities, without break or interruption. Naturally this is difficult, even impossible to do, in the beginning, nevertheless it is possible in time. Immediately upon awakening in the morning the mental intonations of Om should begin and should be maintained even after going to bed until falling asleep. Not only does this deepen your consciousness, it also enables you to obtain much more benefit from your sleep, and the intonation of Om can occur even in sleep.

In time you can be intoning Om even while speaking to others.

The two are one

Meditation and japa–sitting still and moving about–are to become the same thing: absorption in the inner Om. In one there can be total absorption, and in the other it is necessary for the attention to be shared with the outer actions. *But the*

interior process is the same. The difference is only in the degree of experiencing. Therefore meditation is not “engaged in” or “begun” as though it is something different from the totality of the sadhaka’s life. It is simply a seamless continuation. Until he sits, he shares his awareness with externalities. Now he continues to do just the same as before he sat to meditate—intoning Om and listening to it sounding within—but now he is intent on that process alone. “In” and “out” of meditation are merely the difference between partial and total attention. When meditation is “over” things remain exactly the same interiorly, though once more the attention is divided between the inner Om and the outer world.

Preparing for sleep

It is most helpful to do the japa of Om until you fall asleep, for this aids in the development of inner awareness during the waking time and in meditation.

When you lie down to sleep or rest, lie flat on your back with your arms at your side, palms downward, and your legs out straight but relaxed, in the so-called Corpse Pose (Savasana). The feet need not be held straight up. You can also place your arms and hands in another position if you prefer. If you find that lying on your back is not conducive to sleep, then lie in any position in which you can be comfortable. Relax completely, with closed eyes. Do the normal process of meditation until you fall asleep. If you awaken during the sleep period, keep on doing the same until you fall sleep again. This practice is also helpful when you are ill, as it can aid the healing process.

In conclusion

“When you utter ‘Om’ it travels not only all around the earth but throughout all space and eternity”—so said Paramhansa Yogananda. Thoughts do not cease the moment they pass from the conscious mind. They spread out around us, into our aura, the subtle field of biomagnetic and mental energies around our physical body, and then on into the surrounding creation, ultimately extending to the farthest reaches of the cosmos and then returning and striking back into our aura and mind. This is the process of mental karma. By continually doing repetition and meditation of Om, we set up a continuous current of spiritual vibration that in time becomes a perpetual inflow of higher consciousness as it returns to us after having extended throughout creation and benefited all things and all beings therein. In this way we create the highest form of spiritual karma, uplifting and divinizing both ourselves and all that exists.

Furthermore, every thought is a wave or whorl that keeps vibrating in the very substance of our mind (chitta) and even—depending on how strong they were and how often they were repeated—into future lives. Om, then, imbues us with its divine light and power, counteracting the past habit of negative, foolish, or idle thoughts.

Therefore, throughout the day and night, whatever you are doing or whenever at rest, continually intone Om mentally in time with the breath and center your awareness in the mental sound. Since there is no time when you do not breathe,

this is really not difficult with some practice.

Chapter Five:

Breath and Sound in Meditation

When we meditate we do not sit in silent blankness because that would not return us to our eternal consciousness of Spirit. Instead we have to have the right inner environment for the return to take place. This is provided by two things: Om and the breath. So important is this, that although a good deal has been said so far about these two and their joining in meditation practice, I feel that this entire chapter is essential for a perfect understanding of Om Yoga.

Swami Vivekananda, writing on Raja Yoga, points out that according to the philosophers of India the whole universe is composed of two materials: akasha and prana. “Just as Akasha is the infinite, omnipresent material of this universe, so is this Prana the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this universe.” Sound rises directly from akasha, and breath rises directly from prana. Since they arise from the spirit-center, when their right joining is done they free and enable us to return and merge our consciousness with that center. Joining the two, we go straight to the heart of ourselves and the universe. That is, we go directly to the Heart of Brahman.

The breath and Om are like two firesticks. Fire is inherent in both, but only when the two are brought together in friction does the fire come forth. The “fire” we are wanting to bring forth is the spirit-consciousness that is our real Self.

In Indian mythology it is said that the realm of Vishnu is guarded by two doorkeepers who escort the questing soul into the Divine Presence. This is a symbol of the breath and Om which when united bring the yogi into the world of higher consciousness. In the realm of meditation, the doorkeepers/companions conduct the seeker into the throne room and then stand at the door to guard against intruders. That is, the breath and Om lead us into the realm of the Chidakasha, the Space of Consciousness, and keep guard there against the intrusion of distracting thoughts and states of mind, seeing that nothing disturbs our inner quest. These two companion-friends deserve our careful study.

The Role of Breath in Meditation

Breath, the universal factor

The Sanskrit word prana means both “breath” and “life.” Breath is the single universal factor of life—all that lives, breathes. Therefore meditation practices involving the breath are found in many mystical traditions. The process of breath is identical in all, consisting of inhalation and exhalation—expansion and contraction. It is the most immaterial factor of our existence, the body-mind-spirit link. For this reason, the breath is a natural and logical factor in meditation.

Breath and Yoga

The reason why breath plays such an important part in the technique of classical Yoga lies in the close relation existing between breath and mind. “Breath and mind arise from the same source”—the Self—according to Sri Ramana Maharshi in *Day By Day With Bhagavan*. One of the most profound texts on the philosophy behind yoga, the Shiva Sutras, says: “The connection of pure consciousness with breath [prana] is natural” (Shiva Sutras 3:43). Breath is the meeting place of body, mind, and spirit.

The breath and the *body* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the body is calm, and agitated or labored when the body is agitated or labored. The heavy exhalation made when feeling exhausted and the enthusiastic inhalation made when feeling energized or exhilarated establish the same fact.

The breath and the *emotions* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the emotions are calm, and agitated and labored when the emotions are agitated or out of control. Our drawing of a quick breath, when we are surprised, shocked, or fearful, and the forceful exhalation done when angry or annoyed demonstrate this.

The breath and the *mind* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the mind is calm, and agitated, irregular, and labored when the mind is agitated or disturbed in any way. Our holding of the breath when attempting intense concentration also shows this.

Breath, which exists on all planes of manifestation, is the connecting link between matter and energy on the one hand and consciousness and mind on the other. It is necessary for the vitalization and functioning of all vehicles of consciousness, physical or superphysical.

We start with awareness of the ordinary physical breath, but that awareness, when cultivated correctly, leads us into higher awareness which enables us to perceive the subtle movement behind the breath. Ultimately, we come into contact with the breather of the breath, our own spirit.

In many spiritual traditions the same word is used for both breath and spirit, underscoring the esoteric principle that in essence they are the same, though we naturally think of spirit as being the cause of breath(ing). The word used for both breath and spirit is: In Judaism, *Ruach*. In Eastern Christianity (and ancient Greek religion), *Pneuma*. In Western Christianity (and ancient Roman religion), *Spiritus* (which comes from *spiro*, “I breathe”). In Hinduism and Buddhism, *Atma* (from the root word *at* which means “to breathe”), and *Prana*.

Arthur Avalon

The books of Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodruffe) are unparalleled in their value regarding the many aspects of yoga. Here are three quotations from them regarding breath in the context of yoga.

“The ultimate reality is Saccidananda which, as the source of appearances, is called Shakti. The latter in its Sat (Being) aspect is omnipresent-indestructible (eternal) Source and Basis both of the Cosmic Breath or Prana as also of all vital phenomena displayed as the individual Prana in separate and concrete bodies” (*The Garland of Letters*, p. 140).

“The individual breath is the Cosmic Breath from which it seems to be different by the forms which the latter vitalizes” (*The Garland of Letters*, p. 157).

“Breathing is a manifestation of the Cosmic Rhythm to which the whole universe moves and according to which it appears and disappears” (*Shakti and Shakta*).

Breath, then, is an essential ingredient of liberating yoga because the breath is the spirit-self in extension, and through it we can become established in the consciousness that is the Self.

The identity of the breath with the individual spirit, the atman (Self)

“The Self is the breath of the breath” (Kena Upanishad 1:2).

“The subtle Self within the living and breathing body is realized in that pure consciousness wherein is no duality” (Mundaka Upanishad 3:1:9).

“The breaths are the Real, and their Reality is the Self” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.20).

“The Self is The Truth of Truth, and verily the Breath is Truth, and the Self is the Truth of the Breath” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.3.6).

“He who breathes in with your breathing in is your Self. He who breathes out with your breathing out is your Self” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.4.1).

The identity of the breath with the Supreme Spirit, Brahman

But breath is much more than an individual matter, it is also a bridge to the infinite consciousness, being the living presence and action of God (Brahman).

“O Prana, lord of creation, thou as breath dwellest in the body” (Prashna Upanishad 2.7).

“When one breathes, one knows him as breath” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.7).

“Self-luminous is that being, and formless. He dwells within all and without all. He is unborn, pure, greater than the greatest. From him is born the breath” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.1.2, 3). Since the breath rises from God, it can be resolved back into God.

“Breath is a part of Brahman” (Chandogya Upanishad 4.9.3). Breath is itself divine.

“The being who is the breath within—him I meditate upon as Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.6).

“Breath is the Immortal One” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.6.3).

“The shining, immortal person who is breath is the Self, is Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.5.4).

“Which is the one God? The breath. He is Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.9.9).

“They who know the breath of the breath...have realized the ancient, primordial Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.18).

“The breath is the supreme Brahman. The breath never deserts him who, knowing thus, meditates upon it. Having become a god, he goes to the gods” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.1.3).

Ramana Maharshi on the breath

In *Maha Yoga*, Sri Ramana says: “Pranayama is of two kinds: one of controlling and regulating the breath and the other of simply watching the breath.” In the book *Day By Day With Bhagavan*: “[Seekers] are advised to watch their breathing, since such watching will naturally and as a matter of course lead to cessation of thought and bring the mind under control.” When asked in the same conversation about actually controlling the breath, he commented: “Watching the breath is also one form of pranayama. Retaining breath, etc., is more violent and may be harmful in some cases.... But merely watching the breath is easy and involves no risk.”

In *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*: “To watch the breath is one way of doing pranayama. The mind abstracted from other activities is engaged in watching the breath. That controls the breath; and in its turn the mind is controlled.” And further: “Breath and mind arise from the same source. The source can be reached by regulating the breath.... Regulation of the breath is accomplished by watching its movements.” And: “It is the Atman that activates the mind and the breaths” (*The Power of the Presence*, vol. III, p. 230).

The Role of Sound in Meditation

Liberating sound

Why do we use sound in meditation? “By sound one becomes liberated [*Anavrittih shabdai*],” is the concluding verse of the Brahma Sutras (4.4.22). How is this so?

Why do we use sound in meditation? Why not use one of the other senses or faculties, since touch, sight, taste, and smell must also possess increasingly subtler forms until they reach the point of their emerging? It is true that these four faculties do have subtle forms, but only sound reaches to the ultimate point of emergence.

The five senses correspond to the five elements of which all things consist. Those elements are ether [akasha], air [vayu], fire [agni], water [apah], and earth [prithvi]. That is, their grossest forms are those of sound [shabda], sight [drishti], touch [sparsha], taste [rasa], and smell [gandha] as perceived by the bodily senses. Because of this we use these terms to refer to them. But the water element is not just the liquid we call “water.” It is much more, having roots in the astral and causal planes. The same is true of the other elements.

When relative existence, individual or cosmic, begins, there is a chain of manifestation. First there is the out-turning of the consciousness itself. This modification on the cosmic level is the emerging of the Mahat Tattwa, the Great Element, that is the Personal or Saguna Brahman, spoken of in Christianity as “the Only-begotten of the Father” or “Son” of God. In the individual this is the sense of *asmita*: I-am-ness. Then the Pradhana [Prakriti] modifies itself into the five elements, beginning with ether, and each succeeding element contains within itself some of the preceding elements. That is, air is mixed with some ether. Fire possesses some of the ether and air element. Water has some fire, air, and ether. Earth has some water, fire, air, and ether. So only ether is unmixed, and only ether is “touching” the principle of consciousness—only ether is in direct contact with the spirit. Yet ether (akasha) pervades all the other elements as their prime constituent—actually as their source and core element. Sound is the quality (or faculty) of ether; touch is the quality of air; sight is the quality of fire; taste is the quality of water; and smell is the quality of earth. Sound, then, is the only thing that reaches back to the principle of consciousness. The other elements stop somewhere along the way. Sound, then, can affect all the elements.

The five elements also correspond to the five levels or bodies known as koshas: the anandamaya, jnanamaya, manomaya, pranamaya, and annamaya bodies. These are the will, intellectual, mental (sensory), biomagnetic, and physical bodies. The highest (most subtle) body is the etheric body (anandamaya kosha) which is the seat of sound or speech.

There is more. The other four elements have only one faculty or power, but akasha has two faculties or powers: Vak and Shabda—Speaking and Hearing. The faculties of the four other elements are all passive. The faculty of smell cannot generate smells, the faculty of taste cannot generate tastes, etc., though the memory or imagination of them is possible. Ether, on the other hand, has the capacity to both generate and hear sound on the mental levels. The etheric faculty both speaks and hears what it speaks, is both active and passive. This is unique among the elements. Akasha alone possesses the creative power, the power of sound.

Consciousness is the root of sound—is innate in sound. Sound, then, is the direct means to return our awareness to the inmost level of our being and put us into touch with consciousness itself. At the same time, sound rules all the levels of our being and has the ability to infuse all those levels with the highest spiritual consciousness, to spiritualize every bit of us. Om, then, is both energy and consciousness. Listening to our inner intonations of Om during japa and meditation right away centers our awareness in the highest, etheric level of our being. It returns our awareness to its source and gathers up and centers every other aspect of our being in spiritual consciousness.

Through japa and meditation the Divine Sound, Om, pervades all our bodies, corrects, directs, and empowers them to perfectly and fully manifest all their potentials—which is the root purpose of our relative existence. Through Om Yoga practice all the aspects of our being are brought into perfect fruition and then

enabled to merge back into their Source in the state of absolute liberation. Om Yoga, then, embraces all the aspects of our existence—not only the highest part—and is supremely practical. Om, through its japa and meditation, perfects our entire being.

When we inwardly intone Om and become absorbed in that sound, by centering our awareness in the act of intoning Om and listening to it, we become centered in the Chidakasha, the consciousness that is our Self. Various texts inform us that both Om and the breath arise directly from the Chidakasha. For this reason in Om Yoga meditation we join intonations of Om to the breath.

Experiencing the Chidakasha to greater and greater degrees within meditation is the highest experience for the yogi. The more we meditate the higher and higher and further and further we penetrate into the infinite consciousness of which we are an eternal part. The process of meditation takes place within the Chidakasha, the seat of the spirit-Self that is itself the Chidakasha.

Internal sound

We use sound in Om Yoga, but it is not just any form of sound. It is sound that is produced (generated) in the mind, not sound that is passively heard either through the ears or through the memory of auditory sound. This generation of sound is the process known as thinking. So yoga is accomplished by the generation and observation of a thought in the mind. This is why Shankara, commenting on Yoga Sutra 2:20, says that the activity of pure consciousness in the individual is “observation of thoughts in the mind....Purusha, looking on at thought in the mind alone, sees only that, and never fails to see thought which is his object....To witness is natural to him, in the sense that his essence is awareness of the mind’s ideas.” (“Mind is by definition the object of purusha” observes Vyasa.)

Now this is extremely profound. *The only thing we ever do in our real nature as pure consciousness is to observe thoughts in the intellect (buddhi).* That is why when Sri Ramakrishna was asked: “What is the Self?” he simply replied: “The witness of the mind.” Sense impressions are perceived a step away from that in the lower mind (manas). Perceiving thought is the sole activity of the spirit-consciousness. Perception of thought is also a perpetual—truly an inescapable—activity of the purusha. It is only reasonable then to conclude that to discover the true Self or to cause the Self to become established in its real nature we must employ the faculty of thought. Yet it is thought that is tangling us up all the time in false identities. So it is not just thought in general that we need, but a special kind of thought—one that turns the awareness back upon itself and eventually merges itself into the pure consciousness that is spirit. That unique thought is Om. “Its japa and meditation is the way.” Our eternal nature ensures our success.

The “genealogy” of sound

The cosmos and the individual are manifested by the same process: ever-expanding sound-vibration, Spanda. First there comes the most subtle expansion-

movement or vibration on the causal level where rather than an objective sound it is a *bhava*, the slightest differentiation of primal consciousness. This is known as *dhvani*. Dhvani then expands and mutates into *nada*, which is sound, but in such a subtle form that it is more an *idea* of sound rather than actual sound. Nada develops into *nirodhika*, a kind of focussing of the energy so it becomes potential sound. This expands and becomes *ardha-indu* (*ardhendu*), the “half-moon” which is the crescent shape seen on the Om symbol and on the head of Shiva. This is both thought and sound, but sound that can only be heard as the faintest of inner mental sounds. Ardhendu then expands and becomes *bindu*, the vibratory source-point. This bindu is fully sound, but on the interior level only. It cannot be spoken aloud. It cannot be spoken at all, but only perceived and entered into as the first step back to the source consciousness that is Spirit. Yet, from bindu comes all the permutations that are the various sounds which are combined to form words—including mantras.

According to the yoga scriptures there are three basic forms of sound or speech: 1) *pashyanti*, that which can only be intuited or felt rather than heard—even within; 2) *madhyama*, that which can be heard in the mind as thought; and 3) *vaikhari*, that which is physically spoken and heard outwardly by the ear through the vibration of the air. But beyond even these is the transcendental sound, *para-vak* or “supreme speech” which is soundless sound, consciousness itself. Om encompasses all three.

“When men sent out Vak’s [Speech’s] first and earliest utterances, all that was excellent and spotless, treasured within them, was disclosed...the trace of Vak they followed, and found her harboring within” (Rig Veda 10.71.1, 2). This hymn of the Rig Veda speaks of Vak, the creative Sound from which all things came. This Sound both manifested all things and revealed them—that is, produced the consciousness capable of perceiving them. The sages, the hymn tells us, traced Vak (Om) back to the source and discovered it was within themselves as both Power and Consciousness.

Meditation is the process of tracing discovered by the sages, the procedure by which the yogi enters into the inner levels of Om, tracing it to its very source which is consciousness. As he does so, he experiences within the depths of his awareness the subtle states of consciousness, or *bhava*, inherent in Om. For this reason the word frequently translated “meditation” in texts relating to yoga is *bhavanam*—the experiencing of the inner states of consciousness called “bhavas.” Meditation leads us right into the heart of Om as we trace its sound back through its many permutations to its original *bhava* or impulse of consciousness that expanded outward to manifest as its outermost form of the spoken Om.

Retracing consciousness

As we enter into relative consciousness through the expansion of sound, just so can we enter back into transcendent consciousness through the intentional contraction of sound that occurs in meditation. Tracing Om back to its source, the Om yogi discovers it within himself as both Power and Consciousness, experiencing the subtle states of consciousness inherent in Om.

This procedure is spoken of in the Katha Upanishad: “The Self, though hidden in all beings, does not shine forth but can be seen by those subtle seers, through their sharp and subtle intelligence. The wise man should restrain speech into the mind; the latter he should restrain into the understanding self. The understanding self he should restrain into the great self. That he should restrain into the tranquil self” (Katha Upanishad 1.3.12,13). By “mind” is meant the manas, the sensory mind; by “understanding self” is meant the buddhi, the intellect; by “the great self” is meant the will; and by “tranquil self” is meant the subtlest level, the Chidakasha, the witness-link between our pure consciousness and our perceptions.

In *Viveka Chudamani* (verse 369) Shankara expresses it this way: “Restrain speech in the manas, and restrain manas in the buddhi; this again restrain in the witness of the buddhi [the chidakasha], and merging that also in the Infinite Absolute Self, attain to Supreme Peace.”

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad tells us: “The faculty of speech is the place of merging” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.11). In the subtle sound of Om the consciousness of the yogi is resolved into its pure, divine state.

I. K. Taimni on japa and meditation

In *The Science of Yoga* I. K. Taimni says this regarding japa and meditation:

“Japa begins in a mechanical repetition but it should pass by stages into a form of meditation and unfoldment of the deeper layers of consciousness.

“The efficacy of japa is based upon the fact that every jivatma is a microcosm thus having within himself the potentialities of developing all states of consciousness and all powers which are present in the active form in the macrocosm. All the forces which can help this Divine spark within each human heart to become a roaring fire are to be applied. And the unfoldment of consciousness takes place as a result of the combined action of all these forces...A mantra is a sound combination and thus represents a physical vibration which is perceptible to the physical ear. But this physical vibration is its outermost expression, and hidden behind the physical vibration and connected with it are subtler vibrations much in the same way as the dense physical body of man is his outermost expression and is connected with his subtler vehicles. These different aspects of *Vak* or ‘speech’ are called *Vaikhari*, *Madhyama*, *Pashyanti* and *Para*. *Vaikhari* is the audible sound which can lead through the intermediate stages to the subtlest form of *Para Vak*. It is really through the agency of these subtler forms of ‘sound’ that the unfoldment of consciousness takes place and the hidden potentialities become active powers. This release of powers takes a definite course according to the specific nature of the mantra just as a seed grows into a tree, but into a particular kind of tree according to the nature of the seed.”

And Om being the seed of the totality of consciousness, of Brahman Itself, the Om Yogi grows into Perfect Divinity by means of its japa and meditation.

Ramana Maharshi on Om

“The Ekakshara [“One Syllable”–Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Selfs” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 145).

“Pratyahara [interiorization of the mind] is regulating the mind by preventing it from flowing towards the external names and forms. The mind, which had been till then distracted, now becomes controlled. The aids in this respect are meditation on the Pranava and reflection on the Nada [the subtle sound of Om experienced in meditation]” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 24).

“The purport of prescribing meditation on the Pranava is this. The Pranava is Omkara...the advaita-mantra which is the essence of all mantras.... In order to get at this true significance, one should meditate on the Pranava. ...The fruition of this process is samadhi which yields release [moksha], which is the state of unsurpassable bliss” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 25, 26).

“The subtle body of the Creator is the mystic sound Pranava, which is sound and light. The universe resolves into sound and light and then into transcendence–Param” (Section 215 of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*).

“Om is the eternal truth. That which remains over after the disappearance of objects is Om. It does not merge in anything. It is the State of which it is said: “Where one sees none other, hears none other, knows none other, that is Perfection” (*Yatra nanyat pasyati, nanyat srnoti, nanyat vijanati sa bhuma*) (Section 634 of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*).

“Maunam [silence] is the state of Shakti [power] that emerges from within as Ekakshara [Om]” (*Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, G. V. Subbaramayya, p. 149).

“Yesterday a Hindu asked Bhagavan, ‘Is Omkara a name of Ishwara?’ Bhagavan said, ‘Omkara is Ishwara, Ishwara is Omkara. That means Omkara Itself is the swarupam (the real form of the Self)” (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 60).

“Omkara itself is Brahman. That Brahman is the nameless and formless pure SAT [Reality]. It is That that is called Omkara. ...Omkara which is beyond the speech or the mind and which can only be experienced, cannot be described by word of mouth” (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 119).

“Om is everything” (Day by Day with Bhagavan, Devaraja Mudaliar, p. 214).

“Earnest seekers who, incessantly and with a steady mind, repeat ‘Om’ will attain success. By repetition of the pure ‘Om’ the mind is withdrawn from sense objects and becomes one with the Self” (*Sri Ramana Gita* 3:10,11, Ganapati Muni).

“Japa reaching to the source of sound is the best course for those who are not firm in consciousness which is the source of the ‘I’” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 145). And only Om leads us to the source of sound.

Sri Ramana recommended study of the Ribhu Gita, a traditional text of Advaita. It simply says: “The Syllable ‘Om’ is the self” (Ribhu Gita 10:22).

The Unity of the Breath and Om

As already cited, commenting on Yoga Sutra 1:34, Vivekananda says: “The whole universe is a combination of prana and akasha.” Practically speaking we, too, are formed of prana and akasha—of breath and sound which are the manifestation of prana and akasha. Yoga is a combining of breath and sound.

Om is the essential sound-energy form that manifests in living beings as the breath itself. Om is the sound-form of the subtle power of life which originates in the pure consciousness, the spirit, of each one of us and extends outward to manifest as the inhaling and exhaling breaths. “The breath is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) Hence, through the intoning of Om in meditation we can become attuned to the essential Breath of Life and aware of its subtle movements within. Joined to our breath, the mantric formula Om will lead us to the awareness of Breath and Life in their pure state. For Om is both the breath and the Source of the breath. When joined to Om, the breath becomes a flowing stream of consciousness.

In the beginning

In the beginning, there arose in the ocean of divine consciousness, a point (bindu) from which began flowing the stream of creative energy that manifested as all things, and back into which all things return. That Primal Point became dual upon the very moment of its arising. That duality manifested as Prana/Breath and Sound—specifically, Om. The same thing happened with us. We came into manifestation on the twin streams of subtle breath and Om.

Originally we were unmanifest, as transcendental as our Source. But just as the Source expanded into relative manifestation, so did we. In our undifferentiated being, the state of perfect unity, there manifested a single stress point (bindu or sphota). This did not upset or disrupt the original unity but it did just what I said: it stressed it. Then, so imperceptibly and subtly as to hardly have even occurred, that stress point became dual and began to move internally, producing a magnetic duality so subtle it was really more an idea than an actual condition. Then the halves or poles of that duality began alternating in dominance and a cycling or circling began. This cycling expanded ever outward, manifesting in increasingly more objective manners until at last the full state of relativity was reached complete with a set of complex bodies of infinitely varying levels of energy—everything we call “us.” The same thing had already happened to our Source on a cosmic level so we found a virtually infinite environment for our manifestation. This is the process known as samsara.

The two original poles of the primal unity are prana (life force) which manifests in us most objectively as breath, and shabda (sound) which manifests in us most objectively as the mantra Om—and secondarily that of hearing. These seemingly two creative streams of manifestation are in reality one, inseparable from one another, and together are capable of leading us back to their—and our—source. One or the other can do a great deal toward returning us to Unity, but the ultimate, full return can occur most easily when they are joined in the practice of Om Yoga. Like the

cosmos, we came into manifestation on the twin streams of subtle breath and Om. Together these two “wings” have carried us upward into the heights of evolution.

The return

“Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6). Om is the essence of the breath and the breath is the essence of Om—particularly in their most subtle forms. Speech and breath are manifested and reunited in Om by mentally intoning it in time with the breath. “This is the bridge to immortality” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6).

To turn back from samsara and return to our original unity we must grasp hold of that primal impulse to duality which manifested in the stress point from which all has occurred. Right now that original impulse is manifesting most objectively in the process of our physical inhaling and exhaling and in our inner power of speech as we intone Om. The breath and Om together comprise the evolutionary force which causes us to enter samsara and manifest therein until—also through the breath and sound—we evolve to the point where we are ready to discard the evolutionary school of samsara and return to our original status with a now-perfected consciousness. By joining Om and the breath in japa and meditation we begin moving back to the state where they are one.

“One should meditate on the breath...for it is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) In japa and meditation we join intonations of Om to the breath because on the subtle levels the breath is always producing the sound of Om. We can even say that the soul *breathes* Om. When our intonations of Om become subtle and whisper-like they are the actual “breath sounds,” the real sounds of the etheric breath. So by consciously joining Om to our breathing we can link up with our soul-consciousness and enter into it. That is the point of Unity where the breath and Om are not two extensions, but a single unit. Here, too, the breath is one, moving in a circular manner or expanding and contracting rather than extending and moving in and out or back and forth. Joining our intonations of Om to the breath in a fully easeful manner attunes us to that level of breath and sound.

The evolving breath

Life and evolution are synonymous. Just as Brahman has “wrapped” Itself in creative, evolutionary energy—Prakriti—and is actively engaged in cosmic progression toward perfection, in the same way the individual spirit (atman) is encased in its own energy-prakriti and is evolving it toward perfection. This is life within Life. Both the cosmic and the individual life-force are known as prana—vital energy—which manifests as breath. All that exists is formed of prana-breath, which acts as a mirror for the individual and cosmic spirits, changing and modifying itself as they change and modify—as they evolve. The original Impulse which begins, sustains, and completes all evolution is Om. The dance of creation is the moving of prana-breath to the directing sound-vibration of Om.

Relativity evolves through the alternating cycles of creation and dissolution—

outward movement and inward movement—and in the same way the simple act of breathing evolves all sentient beings—whose fundamental common trait is that of breathing. This is because the breath is always sounding Om in the process the yogis call *ajapa japa*—involuntary/automatic repetition. (This is also true on the cosmic level. The cosmos is breathing Om.) Thus merely living and breathing is a process of ascent in consciousness *if* the individual does nothing to counteract that process—which we all do, retarding our progress and causing ourselves to become bound to the wheel of continual birth and death. So it is necessary to live in the manner that allows this automatic development to go forward and manifest.

In time, however, a profound point of evolution is reached in which the individual becomes capable of consciously evolving himself and thereby speeding up the process of unfolding his consciousness. He does this by consciously doing what he has heretofore done only unconsciously: linking the repetition of Om to his breath, merging it with the breath movements.

The original purpose of the original duality—breath and Om—was to enable us to descend into the plane of relativity and begin evolving therein until we could develop the capacity for infinite consciousness. They not only moved us downward into material embodiment, they also began to impel us upward on the evolutionary scale so we might finally develop or evolve to the point where we can finally share—actually participate—in the infinity of God. If unhindered, they would accomplish this evolutionary movement. But in our present state we are always thwarting their purpose, especially by keeping their action bound and buried in the subconscious rather than resurrecting them into our conscious life, applying them and cooperating with them and thereby accelerating our growth. When awareness of the breath is consciously cultivated, and the sacred mantra Om is joined to every breath, the two currents become united and oriented toward their original purpose, which they then accomplish. In this way every single breath and intonation of Om become a step forward and upward on the path of spiritual evolution.

Two swastikas

Though spoiled for many of us who associate it with the evil of Nazism, the swastika is one of the most ancient symbols of India and has a profound yogic significance. There are two swastikas. One has the “arms” bent toward the right and the other toward the left. They represent two vortices of energy, one moving clockwise and the other moving counterclockwise. They are usually confused by people. The so-called “righthand swastika” with arms bent toward the right is actually a symbol of leftward moving energy, the movement of contraction and involution. The “lefthand swastika” with arms bent toward the left, is really a depiction of rightward moving energy, the movement of expansion and evolution.

Through our attention focussed on the process of intoning Om in time with our inhalation and exhalation, we can become immersed in the subtler levels of that alternating cycle, sinking into deeper and deeper levels until we at last come to the originating point and then transcend that dual movement, regaining our lost unity.

By continual practice of that transcendence in meditation we will become established in that unity and freed forever from all forms of bondage, having attained nirvana—permanent unbinding. This is why both sound and breath must be the focus of our internal cultivation.

The two swastikas do not just depict directions of movement, but are yogic symbols of the inhaling and exhaling breaths joined to the intonation of Om. As already indicated there are two Oms—or two sides of the single Om—one of positive polarity and one of negative polarity. Om intoned while inhaling is of negative polarity—yin, and Om intoned while exhaling is of positive polarity—yang. By intoning Om once while inhaling and once while exhaling we produce a complete Om—of both polarities.

The inner and the outer

There are two breaths, the outer breath and the subtle inner breath which produces it. And there is the outer speech and the subtle inner speech from which it arises. By centering our awareness on the outer breath and sound and merging them we make ourselves aware of the inner Breath and Sound of Life. They occur at the same time and are of the same duration. By attuning ourselves to them we attune ourselves to the spirit from which they take their origin. The more attention we give to the breath and Om, the subtler they become until they reveal themselves as acts of the mind, and finally as consisting of mind-stuff (chitta) itself.

Not “things”

When we examine their nature, we see that the breath and the sound of Om are not “things,” but processes which have the power to draw us into the “core point” from which they arise—the individual spirit itself whose nature is consciousness. In this way the pure Self manifests and works its will, changing all the levels of our being.

Like an onion, breath and sound have many layers. In the practice of meditation we experience these layers, beginning with the most objective layers and progressing to increasingly subtle layers, until, as with an onion at its core, there are no more layers, but only pure being. The breath and our intonations of Om become increasingly refined as we observe them, and as a result our *awareness* also becomes refined.

The Self and the Supreme Self

There are many scriptural statements that Om is our own Self, or atman, such as: “The Self is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self” (Mandukya Upanishad 1, 8). “Meditate on Om as the Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6). But in the Kena Upanishad we also find: “The Self is the breath of the breath” (Kena Upanishad 1:2). And in the Mundaka Upanishad (3:1:9): “The subtle self within the living and breathing body is realized in that pure consciousness wherein is no duality.”

Beyond the Self is the Supreme Self–Brahman–and the scriptures tell us that Om is Brahman as well. “Om is Brahman, the Primeval Beings” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1). “Om is the supreme Brahman” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7). “Om is Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1). And they tell us the same of the breath. The Chandogya Upanishad (4.9.3): “Breath is a part of Brahman.” The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.6) has this to say: “The being who is the breath within–him I meditate upon as Brahman....That which breathes in is thy Self, which is within all....That which breathes out is thy Self, which is within all....Breath is the abode of Brahman.”

Pranayama

Within the yogic system the breath is considered an actual body within the material body. It is called the *pranamaya kosha*–the body formed of breath or prana. And working with it is known as *pranayama*. Pranayama can mean restraint of prana, and it can also mean control [yama] of the breath, but *ayama* also means length, expansion, and extension. Thus pranayama can also mean the lengthening, expansion, and extension of the breath as occurs spontaneously in Om meditation. For Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra 2:50 says that pranayama is “external, internal or suppressed modification [of breath], and it becomes measured or regulated [*paridrishto*], prolonged [*dirgha*] and subtle or attenuated [*sukshmah*].” Sutra 51 says: “That pranayama which goes beyond the sphere of internal and external is the fourth”–that which directly relates to turiya or pure consciousness, beyond the three states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. Also, internal and external can refer either to: 1) inhaling and exhaling, 2) the outer breath accompanied by movement of the lungs, or 3) the internal movement of the subtle prana or breath that has no outer manifestation. It is our steady attention to the breath that is the practice of pranayama. For Shankara says: “Pranayama is caused by a *mental activity* deriving from a restraining effort inherent in the Self.”

Vyasa says that during meditation the breath becomes, “prolonged and light [fine].” In time a meditator becomes aware that there is an internal breath that is the support and stimulus of the bodily breathing. Behind that breath is an even subtler force, and so on back to utter stillness at the core of his being. It is the experiencing of all such subtle forms of breath that is pranayama. Through meditation we effect the inner pranayama and achieve the inner “breathlessness” that is a state of pure awareness.

There is more to this pranayama: “From that [pranayama] is dissolved the covering of light” (Yoga Sutras 2:52). The inner pranayama dissolves the veil which covers the light of the knowledge of the Self. Yet this veil is itself light–the light of subtle matter or energy, the substance of which the most subtle bodies are formed. They are the light that veils the ultimate Light. “The covering of light referred to in this sutra is obviously not used in reference to the light of the soul, but to the light or luminosity associated with the subtler vehicles associated with and interpenetrating the physical vehicle,” according to Taimni in *The Science of Yoga*.

Vyasa expands on this, saying: “It [pranayama] destroys the karma which covers up the light of knowledge in the yogi. As it is declared: ‘When the ever-shining [Self] is covered over by the net of great illusion, one is impelled to what is not to be done.’ By the power of pranayama, the light-veiling karma binding him to the world becomes powerless, and moment by moment is destroyed. So it has been said [in *The Laws of Manu* 6:70, 72]: ‘There is no tapas higher than pranayama; from it come purification from taints and the light of knowledge [of the Self].’” Subtle pranayama, then, is the direct way to dissolve karma and be free, for “it is karma by which the light is covered,” says Shankara. And both he and Vyasa explain to us that karma not only binds us to material experience, it also impels us to create even more karma—and more bondage—in a self-perpetuating circle. But by yoga the karma “becomes powerless, and moment by moment is destroyed.” That is, the karmic seeds are “roasted” and rendered incapable of creating future experience or births and are ultimately completely annihilated. The more we do meditation, the more karma is dissolved.

In a conversation regarding his instructions on breath observation given in the book *Maha Yoga*, Sri Ramana Maharshi remarked: “Pranayama is of two kinds: one of controlling and regulating the breath *and the other of simply watching the breath.*” The purpose of working with the breath is simple: “From that comes the dissolving of the covering of light and the fitting of the mind for meditation” (Yoga Sutras 52 and 53). When by this process the breath is refined, so also is the mind; and eventually so is the nervous system and the entire body. Since the body is a vehicle of the mind this is a very important effect.

But the breath does not accomplish this on its own. It must be joined to intonations of Om. “Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6). “Pranayama is accomplished by effortlessly breathing and joining to it the repetition of the sacred Om with the experience of its meaning, when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state” (*Yoga Vashishtha* 5:78). In the light of this quotation from the Yoga Vashishtha, we see that by joining the repetition of Om to the breath the Om Yogi causes pranayama to go on perpetually throughout the day as well as in meditation.

Their divine work

It cannot be overemphasized that the breath and Om are the *only* objects that transfer our awareness into the subject: consciousness itself. All other objects draw our attention outward, into the experience of them, and perpetuate the loss of Self-awareness which is our root problem. This is true of any objects other than the breath and Om that are brought into meditation. All other mantras, modes of breathing other than totally natural breathing, visualizations, and deliberate rousings of energies and centers of energies, not only are incapable of producing the awareness of pure consciousness, they make it impossible. This should not be forgotten.

Natural (sahaja) practice

If our spiritual practice (sadhana) is to bring us to our eternal, natural state of spirit-consciousness, it, too, must be totally natural. Therefore the term *sahaja* is often found in yoga treatises. Sahaja means that which is natural, innate, spontaneous, and inborn. Om Yoga alone fits this criterion, for the prana/breath movement occurs in every evolving sentient being—even in every atom of the cosmos. And that movement is inseparable from the vibration of the subtle sound of Om. Though seemingly two, the movement of the breath and the vibrating of Om are the same thing, like fire and heat. Not only that, this is the only characteristic common to all forms of existence, from the atom to the perfectly liberated individual. Nothing, then, is more natural than the intoning of Om in time with the breath. It is the key, then, to our inmost, true Self and its revelation.

Chapter Six:

Points For Successful Meditation

Prerequisites for 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.

“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. Shankara says quite forcefully that “following yama and niyama is the basic qualification to practice yoga.”

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 of Yoga 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 further says: “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.

Yogic diet

A fundamental key to success in yoga is diet. For just as the physical substance of the food becomes assimilated into our physical body, the subtler energies become united to our inner levels, including our mind. The observant meditator will discover that the diet of the physical body is also the diet of the mind, that whatever is eaten physically will have an effect mentally. Here are some statements about the nature and effect of food that are found in the upanishads.

“From food has arisen strength [virya], austerity [tapasya], mantra, action, and the world itself” (Prashna Upanishad 6.4). Ascetic discipline (tapasya) and prayer (mantra) are essential to religion, and here we see that the food we eat is their basis. And obviously the kind of food we eat will determine the quality of our discipline and prayer.

“By food, indeed, do all the breaths [pranas, life forces] become great” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.5.4).

“Man, verily consists of the essence of food” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.1.1). So we *are* what we eat.

“From food, verily, are produced all creatures—whatsoever dwell on earth. By food alone, furthermore, do they live....From food all creatures are born: by food, when born, they grow....Verily, different from this, which consists of the essence of

food, but within it, is another self, which consists of the vital breath [prana]. By this the former is filled. This too has the shape of a man. Like the human shape of the former is the human shape of the latter” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.2.1). The spiritual, astral body is drawn exclusively from food, so diet is crucial in spiritual development.

“Food when eaten becomes threefold. What is coarsest in it becomes faeces, what is medium becomes flesh and what is subtlest becomes mind. Water when drunk becomes threefold. What is coarsest in it becomes urine, what is medium becomes blood and what is subtlest becomes prana...The mind, my dear, consists of food, [and] the prana of water...” (Chandogya Upanishad 6.5.1, 2, 4).

“That, my dear, which is the subtlest part of curds rises, when they are churned and becomes butter. In the same manner, my dear, that which is the subtlest part of the food that is eaten rises and becomes mind. The subtlest part of the water that is drunk rises and becomes prana. Thus, my dear, the mind consists of food, [and] the prana consists of water” (Chandogya Upanishad 6.6.1-3,5; the same is confirmed in 6.7.1-6).

“Now is described the discipline for inner purification by which self-knowledge is attained: When the food is pure, the mind becomes pure. When the mind is pure the memory [smriti–memory of our eternal spirit-Self] becomes firm. When the memory is firm all ties are loosened” (Chandogya Upanishad 7.26.2).

“On food rests everything—whatsoever breathes and whatsoever breathes not” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.5.1).

“In the body there are nerves [nadis] called hita, which are placed in the heart. Through these the essence of our food passes as it moves on. Therefore the subtle body receives finer food than the gross body” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.2.3).

Both meditation and diet refine the inner senses so we can produce and perceive the subtle changes that occur during meditation.

Meat is both heavy and toxic—especially from the chemicals spread throughout the tissues from the fear and anger of the animal when it was slaughtered. So our minds will also be heavy and toxic from eating meat as well as poisoned by the vibrations of anger and fear. And then there is the karma of killing sentient beings. Moreover, the instinctual and behavioral patterns of the animals will become our instinctual and behavioral impulses. Fruits, vegetables, and grains have no such obstructions. Consequently, our mental energies will be light and malleable, responsive to our spiritual disciplines. Few things are more self-defeating than the eating of meat. From the yogic standpoint, the adoption of a vegetarian diet is a great spiritual boon. By “vegetarian” I mean abstention from meat, fish, and eggs or anything that contains them to any degree, including animal fats. It is even better to also eliminate all dairy products and derivatives from the diet.

Our general health also contributes to our proficiency in meditation, so a responsible yogi is very aware of what is beneficial and detrimental to health and orders his life accordingly, especially in eliminating completely all alcohol, nicotine, and mind-altering drugs whether legal or illegal. Caffeine, too, is wisely avoided,

and so is sugar.

All of the above-mentioned substances—meat, fish, eggs, animal derivatives, alcohol, nicotine, and mind-altering drugs—deadens and coarsens the mind and body—and consequently the consciousness. Thus they prevent the necessary effects and experiences of subtle Om meditation, reducing it to an exercise in relaxation and calmness rather than the means of liberation—for which it is solely intended.

The sum of all this is that we must do more than meditate. We must live out our spiritual aspirations by so ordering our lives that we will most quickly advance toward the Goal. This is done by observing Yama and Niyama.

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 said. “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 spiritual 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—that is, our thoughts. Our dominant thought should be our intonations of Om. Next to that should be continual thoughts of spiritual matters drawn from our own 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.

Sitting like Buddha

When Gautama Buddha sat beneath the bodhi tree he vowed that until he was enlightened he would not get up even if his flesh and bones were to be dissolved. This is why it is said that Buddha got enlightenment because he knew how to sit. His “sitting” was in the consciousness of the Self, not just the body. So if you “sit” in the same way during meditation, you will be safe from all distractions and illusions as was Buddha.

All the forces of the cosmos came to distract Buddha from his inner quest. Even cosmic illusion itself in the form of Mara came to distract him. But he did not move, either in body or mind. Such steadfastness conquered the forces of ignorance completely. Buddha conquered them by simply ignoring them—which was the only sensible course, seeing that they were just illusions. You, too, can conquer distractions not by combating them, not by killing them, not by “seeing through” them or any such thing—but by just having nothing to do with them. The true Self

does not touch any of these things, so the path to the true spirit involves not touching them in your mind.

By sitting and ignoring the unreal, Buddha found the Real. Therefore many centuries later Jesus simply said: “In your patience possess your souls” (Luke 21:19). To relax and experience is the key for the correct practice of meditation.

Hatching the egg

Each person will experience meditation in a different way, even if there are points of similarity with that of others. Also, meditations can vary greatly for each of us. In some meditations a lot will be going on, and then in other meditations it will seem as though we are just sitting and coasting along with nothing happening. This is exactly as it should be. Some meditations will produce changes and others will be times of quiet assimilation and stabilization.

When nothing seems to be going on at all, we may mistakenly think we are meditating incorrectly or it just does not work. Actually, meditation produces profound and far-reaching changes in our extremely complex makeup, whether we do or do not perceive those changes. Some meditations are times of quiet assimilation of prior changes and balancing out to get ready for more change. If we are meditating in the way outlined, we are doing everything correctly and everything is going on just as it should be—every breath is further refining our inner faculties of awareness.

Very early in the scale of evolution sentient beings are born from eggs. This includes us human beings. So it is not inappropriate to think of our evolution in such terms. All eggs hatch and develop through heat—this is absolutely necessary, just as it is for the germination of seeds (the “eggs” of plants). Yoga is called *tapasya*, the generation of heat, for that very reason. Our meditation, then is like the hatching of an egg. Nothing may seem to be going on, but life is developing on the unseen levels.

The hatching of a chicken egg is a prime example. Inside the egg there is nothing but two kinds of “goo”—the white and the yolk. Both are liquids and have no other perceptible characteristics than color. The hen does nothing more than sit on the egg and keep it warm, yet as the days pass the goo inside the shell turns into internal organs, blood, bones, skin, feathers, brain, ears, and eyes—all that goes to make up a chicken—just by being incubated, by doing “nothing.” At last, a living, conscious being breaks its way out of the shell. No wonder eggs have been used as symbols of resurrection from death into life.

Another apt symbol is the cocoon. The dull-colored, earth-crawling, caterpillar encases itself in a shroud of its own making and becomes totally dormant. Yet, as weeks pass a wondrous transformation takes place internally until one day an utterly different creature emerges: a beautifully colored and graceful butterfly that flies into the sky and thenceforth rarely if ever touches the earth.

The same is true of the persevering yogi and the eventual revelation of his true nature. Through the *japa* and meditation of Om, simple as they are, the “heat” of

the divine vibration causes our full spiritual potential to develop and manifest in us. Tapasya evolves the yogi, turning the goo of his present state into a life beyond present conceptions.

Training for living

Meditation is not an end in itself, but rather the means to an end—to the daily living out of the illumined consciousness produced by meditation. We go into meditation so we can come out of meditation more conscious and better equipped to live our life. The change will not be instant, but after a reasonable time we should see a definite effect in how we perceive, think and act. If the meditator does not find that his state of mind during daily activities has been affected by his meditation, then his meditation is without value. This is especially important for us in the West since meditation is continually being touted as a “natural high” or a producer of profound and cataclysmic experiences. Such experiences may sound good on paper or in a metaphysical bragfest, but in time they are seen to be empty of worth on any level—ephemeral dreams without substance. Success in meditation is manifested *outside* meditation—by the states of mind and depth of insight that become habitual. The proof of its viability is the meditator’s continual state of mind and his apprehension of both reality and Reality.

Many things lighten and purify the mind, but nothing clarifies the mind like the prolonged and profound practice of meditation. The state of mental clarity produced by meditation should continue outside meditation. Meditation should by its nature prepare us for living. At the same time, meditation should establish us in interior life, making us increasingly aware both inwardly and outwardly. This is because reality consists of two aspects: the unmoving consciousness of spirit and the moving, dynamic activity of evolutionary energy. Reality embraces both, and to be without the awareness of one or the other is to be incomplete.

Meditation enables us to see deeply into things outside meditation. Through meditation we cultivate the ability to be objective—separate from objects but keenly aware of them and thus able to intelligently and effectively function in relation to them. Meditation, then, is the most effective school for living open to us. And it manifests in the simplest of ways: a more compassionate outlook, a deeper self-understanding, an awareness of changelessness amidst change, a taste for spiritual conversation and reading, and experience of inmost peace. One man who had been practicing meditation for a while remarked to another meditator, “I can’t figure out what is happening to me. Last night for the first time in my married life I helped my wife do the dishes.”

In the practice of the japa and meditation of Om we are putting ourselves into a totally—even sublimely—different sphere of consciousness and experience from that in which so much phenomena arise. Meditation is done for the development of consciousness—truly pure and simple—whereas it is our active life that is meant for both *seeing* and experiencing. It is all a matter of consciousness—of consciousness that pervades our entire life—not just a “wonderful feeling” in meditation. It is the

fundamental state of consciousness and mind outside of meditation that matters.

Avoiding the gears

In meditation stay away from the gears of the mind! It is the nature of the mind to dance around producing thoughts, impressions, memories, etc. Therefore we do not at all care what potential distractions may arise during meditation. We ignore them. And if we ignore them they are no longer distractions. So stay with Om—with God—and forget everything else. Then all will be yours.

Never come out of meditation to note or write down something. If the inspiration, insight, or idea is really from your higher Self or from God it will come back to you outside of meditation.

Also, do not engage the mind-gears with long prayers, affirmations, and suchlike during meditation. And do not let the mind entice you with “insight,” “inspiration,” or “knowledge” of any kind. According to Shankara the practice of yoga “has right vision alone for its goal, and glories of knowledge and power are not its purpose.”

Experiences and thoughts in meditation: be indifferent

While meditating, many things—some of them quite dramatic, impressive, and even enjoyable, as well as inane, boring, and uncomfortable—occur as a side-effect. Have no desire to produce or reproduce or avoid any state or experience of any kind, to any degree. Our only interest should be our intonations of Om in time with the breath. What arises...arises. During meditation much revealing and release take place in both the conscious and subconscious minds—and sometimes even the physical body—and should always be a passively observed process without getting involved in any way.

Thoughts from the subconscious may float—or even flood—up, but you need only keep on intoning Om in time with the breath. The states of consciousness that meditation produces are the only things that matter, for they alone bring us to the Goal.

Much phenomena can take place during the process of correction and purification that is an integral part of meditation. When the chakras are being cleansed and perfected, they may become energized, awakened, or opened. In the same way subtle channels in the spine and body may open and subtle energies begin flowing in them. This is all good when it happens spontaneously, effortlessly. But whatever happens in meditation, our sole occupation should be with Om and the breath.

Uniting with Om

All that exists is a manifestation of Om, for Om is the essence of all things. Om is perpetually sounding from within the heart (core) of all things, including us. To unite our awareness with that ever-flowing Om through japa and meditation is the true “centering.” Om japa and meditation put us in touch with that inmost stream or current so we can follow it back to its divine source.

Every year in India thousands make pilgrimages to the source of the Ganges and other sacred rivers. Such pilgrimages are externalizations of the pilgrimage of the spirit that is accomplished by tracing the inner river of Om back to its source through meditation. “By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 404). “The sound of the Pranava, Om, originates in the supreme Brahman.... A yogi alone knows that this sound originates from the supreme Brahman.” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 416.)

Many more pilgrims journey to Rudra Prayag (presently known as Allahabad) to bathe in the Triveni, the confluence of three sacred rivers: Ganges, Jumna, and Saraswati. It is believed that to immerse yourself in the waters of the Triveni is to be greatly purified. But this is only an outer action reflecting the inner experience of bathing (immersing) ourselves in the inner intonings of Om in time with the breath and our experiencing of their effects. By this continual “bathing” the entire being of the yogi becomes purified and refined.

Evocation and invocation

In japa and meditation we are not employing Om as a prayer, an affirmation, or a remembrance, but as effective evocation—a calling forth—of our inherent, eternal Self-consciousness, and as an invocation—a calling into us—of the consciousness that is the Supreme Self. Om brings into our awareness the consciousness of both the individual Self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman) in perfect union. The japa and meditation of Om makes us one with our true Self and one with God, merging our being and consciousness with his perfect being and consciousness. Because this is so, we do not need to keep in mind an intellectual meaning of Om (there is not one, anyway) or cultivate an attitude or emotion during our practice. Rather, we relax, listen, and make ourselves open and receptive to its dynamic working within us.

Entering the Silence

The expression “entering the silence” is usually misunderstood as sitting with a blank mind. One mystery of Om is its ability to produce silence through sound—sound that is essentially silence. We go deeper and deeper into the sound, the increasingly subtle sound of Om, until we reach the heart of the sound which is silence. Through our invocation of Om the *state* of silence is produced in our mind by enabling us to center it in the principle of the silent witnessing consciousness. Through Om the yogi leads his awareness into the silence of the spirit which is beyond the clamor of the mind and the distractions and movements of the body. For true silence is not mere absence of sound, but a profound condition of awareness that prevails at all times—even during the noise of our daily life. Silence is also a state of stillness of spirit in which all movement ceases and we know ourselves as pure consciousness alone.

Inner psychic sounds

It may be that sometimes you will hear various inner sounds such as a gong, bell, harp, flute, bee, waterfall, vina, bagpipes, and suchlike. These are often mistaken for genuinely spiritual phenomena when in reality they are only the astral sounds of the bodily functions. For example, the bee sound is the astral sound of cellular division, the flute sound is the astral sound of the lymphatic circulation, the bell sound is the astral sound of the cardio-pulmonary functions, and so forth. They are—in the astral sense—purely physical and have no yogic value whatsoever.

The so-called “Cosmic Om” or “Cosmic Motor” sound heard by some yogis who plug their ears and listen for it is only the astral sound of the cosmic fire element from which the body and the material plane emerge and into which they are dissolved. That this is so is shown by the following upanishadic statement: “This fire which is within a man and digests food that is eaten is Vaisvanara. *Its sound is that which one hears by stopping the ears*” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.9.1). It is psychic not spiritual. Buddha described how during his intense practice of various yogas he became adept at hearing this astral sound, assuming that it was a spiritual experience, until after examining its effects he realized it was just a psychic distraction that led nowhere, and abandoned it.

In short, all such astral sounds should be ignored. Stay with your inner, mental intonations of Om.

Higher techniques?

There are no “higher techniques” of Om Yoga, but through its regular and prolonged practice there are higher experiences and effects that will open up for the persevering meditator. As time goes on the efficiency of the practice and the resulting depth of inner experience will greatly increase, transforming the practice into something undreamed-of by the beginning meditator, for the change really takes place in the yogi’s consciousness. Practice, practice, practice is the key.

We have earlier noted Shankara’s statement that the practice of yoga “has right vision alone for its goal, and glories of [external] knowledge and power are not its purpose.” Spirit-consciousness alone is true and real. The upanishadic seers indicate that the path of liberation is a very simple path—the japa and meditation of Om—and that the result is simple: realization of one’s own Self (atma) and ultimately of the Supreme Self (Paramatma).

The Katha Upanishad makes this very clear. First it speaks of what God (Brahman) really is, saying: “Brahman [is] the all-pervading spirit, the unconditioned, knowing whom one attains to freedom and achieves immortality. None beholds him with the eyes, for he is without visible form. Yet in the heart is he revealed, through self-control and meditation. Those who know him become immortal” (Katha Upanishad 2:3:8, 9). Brahman is pure spirit, beyond all phenomena, beyond all relative existence or relative experience (objective consciousness). Brahman is not perceived by the senses, inner or outer (“none beholds him with the eyes”), yet He is revealed in the core of the yogi’s being in

meditation. “Those who know him become immortal” because they experience their identity with the immortal Brahman. Next the upanishad describes the nature of meditation in which Brahman is realized. “When all the senses are stilled, when the mind is at rest, when the intellect wavers not—then, say the wise, is reached the highest state. This calm of the senses and the mind has been defined as yoga. He who attains it is freed from delusions” (Katha Upanishad 2:3:10, 11).

So here are the characteristics of meditation which the upanishad calls “the highest state”: 1) the senses are stilled, 2) the mind is at rest, 3) the intellect wavers not. Then the idea is really driven home by the upanishad: “*This calm of the senses and the mind has been defined as yoga.*” Shankara affirms that the seeker of spiritual freedom is seeking nothing from meditation “other than the special serenity of meditation practice.” This state is also called *sthirattwa* by the yogis. “He who attains it is freed from delusion.” When Yogiraj Lahiri Mahasaya was asked: “On which deity do you meditate?” He simply replied: “I meditate on *sthirattwa*”—the serenity produced by meditation in which he ever dwelt, and of which he was the embodiment.

Two views on the nature of meditation—and a third

In India there is a long-standing disagreement on the nature and purpose of meditation. One school of thought considers that definite—and conscious—evolutionary change is necessary for liberation; consequently meditation must be an actively transforming process. The other view is that the only thing needed for liberation is re-entry into our true, eternal nature. That nothing need be done at all except to perceive the truth of ourselves. Obviously their meditation procedures are going to be completely different.

There is, however, a third perspective on the matter which combines both views. It is true that we are ever-free, ever-perfect, but we have forgotten that fact and have wandered in aimless suffering for countless incarnations. No one is so foolish as to suggest to a person suffering from amnesia that he need not regain his memory since he has not ceased to be who he really is.

The “memory block” from which we suffer is the condition of the various levels on which we presently function, especially the *buddhi*, the intelligence. It is also a matter of the dislocation of our consciousness from its natural center. Obviously, then, something really does have to be “done” to change this condition. A dirty window need not be changed in nature, but it needs to be cleansed of that which is not its nature for us to see through it. It is the same with a dusty or smudgy mirror.

There is an example from nature that can help us understand this. Research has shown that the energy field around a salamander egg, and all through the stages of a young salamander’s growth, is in the shape of an adult salamander. This indicates that the etheric pattern of a full-grown salamander is inherent even in the egg and throughout the salamander’s development. It is as though the egg has only to hatch and grow around this energy matrix, to fill out or grow into the ever-present pattern. Even when there is only the egg visible to the human eye, the adult

salamander is there in a very real, potential form. It is the same with us. We are always the atman, potential divinity, but that potential must be realized. And meditation is the means of our realization.

Shankara puts forth the question, “How can there be a means to obtain liberation? Liberation is not a thing which can be obtained, for it is simply cessation of bondage.” He then answers himself: “For ignorance [bondage] to cease, something has to be done, with effort, as in the breaking of a fetter. Though liberation is not a ‘thing,’ inasmuch as it is cessation of ignorance in the presence of right knowledge, it is figuratively spoken of as something to be obtained.” And he concludes: “The purpose of Yoga is the knowledge of Reality.” Vyasa defines liberation in this way: “Liberation is absence of bondage.” Shankara carries it a bit further, saying: “Nor is liberation something that has to be brought about apart from the absence of bondage, and this is why it is always accepted that liberation is eternal.”

Liberation, enlightenment, is a state that is not produced but evoked or revealed. Liberation is perception of our eternal nature. It is like something revealed by the light: it is not made existent by the light, it has been there all along in the darkness; but now the light has made it known. Om Yoga, then is a turning, an opening, to Reality, but not attainment of Reality as something not always possessed. It is like a plant turning toward the sun; it is orientation of consciousness. It is *being conscious*(ness). Om Yoga establishes our consciousness in the true Self.

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.

Visions

Most “visions” seen in meditation occur because the meditator has fallen asleep and is dreaming. Yet there are genuine visions, actual psychic experiences, that occur in meditation. I say “genuine,” 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 truth. [He means this in the ultimate sense. Even hallucinations are “real” mental phenomena.] 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).

Falling asleep in meditation

As mentioned before, it is normal for meditators to sometimes fall asleep while meditating, since meditation is relaxing and moves the consciousness inward. Both the body and the mind are used to entering into the state of sleep at such times. After a while, though, you will naturally (and hopefully, usually) move into the conscious sleep state, so do not worry.

At the same time, be aware that falling asleep in meditation can be a signal from your body that you are not getting enough sleep. People are different, and some do need more than eight hour’s sleep. You should consider extending your sleep time or taking some kind of nap break during the day. Falling asleep in meditation can also be a symptom of a nutritional lack, an indication of low vitality.

Please do not do such things as shock your body with cold water, drink coffee, and run around a bit, hoping to force yourself to stay awake in meditation. This is not the way. Listen to your body and take care of it. Yogis are not storm-troopers. We are engaged in peace, not war.

Physical distractions

We have talked about mental distractions, but what about physical ones? Simple: scratch when you itch, yawn when tired, shift or stretch when you have a muscle cramp, and if you feel uncomfortable, shift your position. We are meditating, not torturing or coercing the body. Such distractions are normal and not to be concerned about. If we give them undue attention by being annoyed or disgusted with them, or trying to force our attention away from them, we will only be concentrating on them, and will compound their distracting power. In time most of these little annoyances stop occurring. Until then, just be calm and scratch and rub and move a little, while keeping your awareness where it belongs.

What about noises? Accept them. Do not wish they would stop, and do not try to not hear them. Just accept the noise as part of your present situation. Neither like nor dislike it.

Care only for your meditation, confident that a few itchings, cramping, noises, thoughts, or memories will not ruin your meditation. “Greater is he [the spirit] that is in you, than he [the body] that is in the world” (I John 4:4). It is your *attention* to them, either in rejection or acceptance, that will spoil your meditation. You must guard against that, and relaxation and indifference to them is the way.

Daily meditation

“The self resides within the lotus of the heart. Knowing this, devoted to the self, the sage enters daily that holy sanctuary” (Chandogya Upanishad 8:3:3).

Meditation should be done daily, and if possible it should be done twice daily—morning and evening, or before and after work, whichever is more convenient.

When your period of meditation is over, do your utmost to maintain the flow of the japa of Om in time with your breathing in all your activities. For those who diligently and continually apply themselves, attainment is inevitable.

When you find yourself with some time—even a few minutes—during the day, sit and meditate. Every little bit certainly does help.

Length of meditation

How long at a time should you meditate? The more you meditate the more benefit you will receive, but you should not push or strain yourself. Start with a modest time—fifteen or twenty minutes—and gradually work up to an hour or an hour and a half, perhaps once a week meditating even longer if that is practical. But do not force or burn yourself out. It is a common trick of the negative mind to have you meditate for a very long time and then skip some days or weeks and then overdo it again. It is better to do the minimum time every day without fail. Remember the tortoise and the hare.

Also, if you go about it the right way and live in the manner which makes you supremely responsive, one hour’s meditation can equal hours of meditation by the undisciplined and unpurified.

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, give them a copy of this book and discuss the general and practical aspects freely.

“Concentration”

Although in this book you will find the word “concentration,” it is not used in the sense of forcing or tensing the mind. Rather, we are wanting to become *aware*—that is *attentive*—to the fullest degree. And this is accomplished in Om Yoga by relaxation in body, mind, and attitude. Our attention on Om is always gentle,

though determined. It is not a spike we are driving into our mind. We are floating in Om, not crashing into it.

In meditation not just the body, but the mind must be relaxed. This relaxation is what most readily facilitates meditation. Think of the mind as a sponge, absolutely full of water. If you hold it in your hand, fully relaxed, all will be well. But if you grip it or squeeze it tightly, water will spray out in all directions. This is exactly how it is with the mind. If you “hold” it in a state of calm relaxation, very few distractions in the form of memories and thoughts will arise. But if you try to force the mind and tense it, then a multitude of distractions will arise.

Learning to continually do japa of Om

By keeping up the inner repetition of Om all the time, whatever you may be doing, you will be perpetually cultivating supreme awareness itself. A good way to get yourself habituated to the constant japa of Om is to do japa while you are reading—simply looking at or scanning the page rather than verbalizing in your mind. (This is the secret of “speed reading.”) Once you learn to do that, since reading demands so much attention, you will pretty well be able to keep the japa going in other activities. Eventually you will be able to do japa of Om even when speaking with others.

Inner negativity

Impulses to negativity or foolishness, whether mental or physical, exist in our minds in the form of samskaras or vasanas. (Samskaras are impressions in the mind produced by previous actions or experiences, and vasanas are bundles or aggregates of similar samskaras.) Worries and anxieties about these samskaras and vasanas in the form of “sins,” “temptations,” and “wrong thinking” torment a lot of seekers uselessly. Even more futile is obsession with “getting rid of the ego.” For the Om yogi 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.

Focus on prakriti

Om Yoga affects our energy-bodies, not our inner consciousness—it *reveals* our consciousness rather than changes it. The purpose of Om Yoga is liberation, and to this end it affects the prakriti (energy complex) which is the adjunct of our purusha (spirit). Because of this, it is only natural and right that thoughts, impressions, sensations and feelings of many kinds should arise as you meditate, since your meditation is evoking them as part of the transformation process. All you need do is stay relaxed and keep on intoning Om in time with the breath.

The Om yogi is already in the Self, is the Self, so in Om Yoga he is looking at/ into his personal prakriti in the same way God observes the evolving creation. Om Yoga purifies and evolves the bodies, including the buddhi, and realigns our consciousness with its true state, accomplishing the aims of both schools of meditational thought previously mentioned. “Om is Brahman. Om is all this. He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

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.

It has 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 yogis I have known.

A great secret

“Receive that Word from which the Universe springeth!... How many are there who know the meaning of that Word?” asked Kabir.

Om is a great secret—the secret of enlightenment. But how is it a secret, when it

has been written and talked about so much, and is repeated at the beginning and end of sacred recitations, and eulogized as the highest and holiest of mantras? A story from India will tell us how.

Once a man was taught a mantra by a yogi. “You must keep this mantra absolutely secret, for it is known to only a very few,” the yogi told him. But the next day in the morning as the man walked through the town he noticed that a great many people were repeating that mantra aloud—especially as they did their morning ablutions. Indignantly he went to the yogi, told what he had observed, and demanded to know why he had claimed the mantra was a secret known only to a few. The yogi said nothing in explanation, but brought a shining green object from his pocket and handed it to the man with the instruction that he should show it to the people he met in the town and ask them how much they would buy it for—but he was not to actually sell it to them. “When you do this, I will explain about the mantra,” he promised.

The first person he met was a woman who sold vegetables; she offered some eggplants for it, wanting it for her baby to play with. He showed it to some merchants in small shops who offered him small amounts of money for it as a curiosity. A wealthy merchant said that it was an excellent imitation emerald and offered him a goodly sum, for he wanted it to make jewelry for his wife. A banker examined it, declared it to be a genuine emerald, and offered him a great deal of money for it. Amazed by this, the man took it to a jeweler who told him that it was the largest and most perfect emerald he had ever seen. “No one in this land, not even the king, has enough money to purchase this emerald,” he concluded.

Frightened at having such a valuable in his keeping, the man hurried back to the yogi and returned the emerald. Smiling, the yogi put it back in his pocket. “Now will you tell me why you claimed the mantra was secret, when everybody in town seems to know it?” demanded the man. “I have already done so by your experience with the emerald,” the yogi replied. “How many of the people knew what it really was?” “Only the banker and the jeweler,” the man admitted. “And the others—did not their offers for it correspond to their opinion of it and their own financial worth?” “Yes.” “There you have it. The mantra I taught you is in the memory and on the lips of many in a superficial way. They repeat it a few times and then drop it. Only those who meditate upon it can know it in truth—as they at the same time increase in spiritual status. My friend, that mantra is very little *known*, but I hope you will strive to realize its value by your own Self-realization through its use.”

The man understood. And so will those who come to know the secret of Om through their own practice. For it is Om that draws us out from the Primal Depths, Om that evolves us to the uttermost possibilities, and Om that liberates and returns us to the Source to share eternally in the fullness of the Life Divine.

Chapter Seven: The Yogi's Subtle Anatomy: Aids to Meditation

Gorakhnath asked Matsyendranath: “How can a yogi have meditation that goes beyond the physical?” The answer was most relevant to the subject of this chapter: “He should meditate within his body to rise above the body” (Gorakh Bodha 99, 100). Later Matsyendranath told him: “To destroy deception or duality one should reside within” (114).

The sole purpose of the cosmos is evolution, and this is especially true of the human body. Though frequently mistaken for an obstacle or distraction by spiritual seekers, the body is a perfect evolution machine, and its components should be known and worked with. At the same time it is essential for us to know what is significant and what is not, otherwise we can become lost in the complexity of the several energy systems that comprise the human organism.

The yogic sages have explained the subtle anatomy of a yogi's bodies which he must refine and evolve to assist in his ultimate liberation. In the twelfth chapter of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda wrote about his guru Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri: “Master numbered many doctors among his disciples. ‘Those who have ferreted out the physical laws can easily investigate the science of the soul,’ he told them. ‘A subtle spiritual mechanism is hidden just behind the bodily structure.’” The internal alchemy of yoga is a process that occurs when the entire internal mechanism (antahkarana) is perfectly synchronized. Then the transmutation is inevitable and the internal mechanism opens the way into the kingdom of heaven—limitless consciousness.

Just as God is embodied in the multilevel manifestation we call creation or the universe, manifesting himself as the physical, astral, and causal cosmos while yet transcending it, in the same way each sentient being is embodied in a universe of its own, exteriorly finite but interiorly infinite. Neither God (the Paramatman) nor the individual spirit (the jivatman) evolve, for they are eternally perfect and unchangeable, but their “bodies” do evolve over ages beyond calculation. The evolution of the Divine cosmos is consciously intentional, but the evolution of the individual cosmos is subliminal and therefore unconscious until it reaches a point where the individual spirit can comprehend and take charge of it consciously—in other words the point at which it becomes a yogi.

One of the most valuable books for the aspiring yogi is *Philosophy of Gorakhnath* by Akshaya Kumar Banerjea, himself an accomplished yogi in the Nath Yogi tradition whose main center, by the way, is in Gorakhpur, the birthplace of Paramhansa Yogananda whose brother Sananda was really named “Gorakhnath” at his birth. Speaking of the reunion of the subtle forces within the individual—including his physical body—Banerjea observes: “The material body is as much a

playful self-revelation of the Supreme Spirit (with Shakti) as life and mind and has no really separate non-spiritual existence. The body is perceived as a non-spiritual reality, so long as the mind is concentrated upon its material spatio-temporal character. When the mind is concentrated upon the Spirit within it, not only the mind, but the body also is spiritualized, i.e. its spiritual nature is unveiled.” Consequently the yogi gives attention to the physical, astral, and causal bodies that are the vehicles of his consciousness—the consciousness he intends to unite with its Source.

Responsiveness to yoga practice

We cannot lessen the effectiveness of Om Yoga, but we can certainly lessen or even prevent our responsiveness to it and the effect it will have on us. The bodies, physical, astral, and causal, are the vehicles through which the individual evolves during the span of life on earth, and must be taken into serious account by the yogi who will discover that they can exert a powerful, controlling effect on the mind. If wax and clay are cold they cannot be molded, nor will they take any impression. If molasses is cold it will hardly pour. It is all a matter of responsiveness. Only when warm are these substances malleable. In the same way, unless our inner and outer bodies are made responsive or reactive to the japa and meditation of Om we will miss many of the beneficial effects. Hence we should do everything we can to increase our response levels, to ensure that our physical and psychic bodies are moving at the highest possible rate of vibration and are functioning in harmony at the maximum level, and with perfect polarity and interaction between them.

All of this being so, we are ready to consider some practices that can certainly enhance our progress in Om Yoga.

1) Khechari Mudra

The Chidakasha and the Sahasrara

Since we are essentially consciousness, authentic yoga deals directly with consciousness. And when we speak of consciousness we do not mean “consciousness of spirit,” as though spirit were an object and consciousness of spirit only a condition of awareness, but we mean spirit itself which is consciousness, the eternal subject.

In yoga treatises we frequently encounter the term “Chidakasha,” which means “the Space (Ether) of Consciousness.” This is the level of existence and consciousness so pure and subtle, so interwoven with Spirit, that it is indistinguishable from Spirit, which is why the yogis say that the spirit-Self dwells *in* the Chidakasha and *is* the Chidakasha. The Bhagavad Gita says in the beginning of the fifteenth chapter that the entire field of relative existence is like a tree whose roots are above and whose branches and leaves are below in the material world. This is not only true of the macrocosm, but also of each one of us that are microcosms—reflections of the macrocosm. Our “roots” are in our brain, the

Sahasrara, and our body, limbs, and senses are the trunk, branches, and leaves. The Chidakasha, the indwelling spirit of the Sahasrara is literally the taproot into the Infinite, the gateway of higher consciousness—both ascending and descending.

In the introduction to his book, *Pranava Gita*, Swami Pranavananda Giri, “the saint with two bodies” written about in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, sums up the whole purpose of our involvement with intoning Om to experience the Chidakasha: “The omnipotent inordinate cause is Paramatma. That Paramatma is within this body. The exact location of this Paramatma in the body and how the mind may be made to merge with It, has been determined by the yogis. Sadhakas have seen through their practice, that this Paramatma, despite the fact that it is omnipresent, exists in the Chidakasha in a conscious form, and the Pranava is its expression.” The Chidakasha is the abode of our Self, the center-point of our incarnation in relative existence.

In the esoteric writings of both Hinduism and Buddhism we find references to “the jewel in the lotus.” The lotus is the Sahasrara and the awakened consciousness of the yogi is the jewel. It was said in ancient India that the cobra has a jewel in its head which confers immortality, so the ignorant went around killing cobras and looking in their heads for the jewel that would make them immortal. Of course, they found no such thing, since the jewel in the head of the cobra is the Divine Light within the Sahasrara which has been awakened by the practice of yoga and is represented by the extended hood of the cobra.

The Sahasrara is the true Sukhavati, the abode of the Buddha of Infinite Light (Amitabha), a personification of the Chidakasha. As Blavatsky wrote in *The Secret Doctrine*: “Each of us has within himself the ‘Jewel in the Lotus,’ call it Padmapani, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, or whatever name we may give to our Divine Self.”

Awareness of the Sahasrara is spiritual consciousness itself. From the enlivened Sahasrara the sacred light and power of Spirit will flow into every cell of every level of our being. The Bhagavad Gita describes the yogi as “having placed his vital breath [prana] in the head, established in yoga concentration, uttering Om, the single-syllable Brahman” (8:12-13). By intoning Om in time with the breath we activate literally thousands of channels in the physical and subtle bodies, causing the life force to spontaneously, effortlessly, flow upward into the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain (Sahasrara Chakra) and then merge into the Chidakasha, into the Divine Light within the Sahasrara that is the essence of Om, the Life-Giving Word, the Pranava.

Om is the ruling mantra of all the aspects of our being, but it is specifically the mantra of the physical, astral and causal Sahasrara. The repetition and meditation of Om awakens, empowers, and perfects the Sahasrara in all its aspects and thereby does the same for all the rest of our physical and subtle makeup. This includes the elimination of those psychic snarls, whorls, blocks, and conditionings that are our karma.

Those who through Om Yoga continually attune and merge their consciousness in this way with the Chidakasha will in time become totally identified with the

individual spirit-Self and with the Supreme Spirit. Since all things have arisen from/ in the Chidakasha, this merging is the beginning of Cosmic Consciousness.

The Sahasrara

In the subtle anatomy, the energy levels, of the yogi, there are seven centers or chakras. The highest of these is the Sahasrara, the Thousand-Petalled Lotus of the astral brain. According to the great nineteenth-twentieth century yogi, Paramhansa Nityananda, the chakras in the spine are really reflections of the archetypal centers in the brain. The Sahasrara chakra contains them all as well as reflex points that control every aspect of the yogi's physical, astral and causal makeup. Consequently the yogi's attention is continually oriented toward the Sahasrara.

In the esoteric writings of both Hinduism and Buddhism we find references to "the jewel in the lotus." The lotus is the Sahasrara and the awakened consciousness of the yogi is the jewel. As Blavatsky wrote in *The Secret Doctrine*: "Each of us has within himself the 'Jewel in the Lotus,' call it Padmapani, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, or whatever name we may give to our Divine Self."

The thousand-petalled lotus, the Sahasrara Chakra, is the place where individual consciousness and cosmic consciousness meet and are one. Everything is there. The individual complex of each person originates in the Sahasrara, and the Sahasrara itself is a map or miniature of the cosmos—physical, astral, and causal. It is the dwelling place of pure consciousness (Spirit), both individual and cosmic. Consequently, liberation is experienced in the Sahasrara. It is the Paradise from which we fell into material consciousness and to which we must be restored through yoga. Within the Sahasrara Paradise, our own Garden of Eden, is the Tree of Life (Genesis 2:9), whose fruit of Self-knowledge will make us immortal gods within God (see Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24; Revelation 2:7, 22:2,14). Through the Sahasrara the subtle energies of the higher planes flow into the brain and body, making it the origin and seat of all supernatural experiences and abilities as well as the point of communication with higher planes and higher consciousness.

Khechari Mudra

In meditation Sahasrara awareness is accomplished easily by simply turning up the eyes—not in an exaggerated or forceful way but gently, slightly, almost casually. This opens or activates the higher levels of awareness in the Sahasrara that are collectively known as the Chidakasha, the Ether of Consciousness that is the eternal, immortal spirit.

The upturned eye position is known to the yogis as Khechari Mudra. Mudras are usually thought of as hand positions, but positions of the eyes are also referred to in yogic texts as mudras. For example, in the miraculous photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya found in the first edition of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, the great yogi is demonstrating the eye position known as Sambhavi Mudra.

In Om Yoga meditation practice Khechari Mudra is the gentle and simple turning up of the eyes—not too far up or with any strain at all. After a while you may

automatically turn your eyes up higher and that will be just fine. But there must never be any strain.

In Sanskrit, *kha* means the sky, space, or ether (akasha). *Char* means “to move.” So *khechhari* means “sky walking”—moving in the etheric space that is the limitless basis of everything, the akasha that is consciousness itself. Khechhari Mudra is the procedure which enables the yogi to be a *khechara*—one who flies in the Sky of Consciousness. For Khechhari Mudra opens the “sky” of the Sahasrara, the Thousand-Petalled Lotus. Sensitive yogis can experience this.

This practice of Khechhari Mudra in meditation was advocated by Swami Govindananda, one of the most renowned yogis living in Kashmir (and later Brindaban) in the twentieth century. He was continually intoning Om inwardly and outwardly, and advised all his students to practice Om japa with upturned eyes—even with open eyes if they liked. T. N. Dhar, who knew the saint and wrote a brief biography, comments: “Through the repetition of this practice, the aspirant can see with his open eyes the supreme light and experience eternal bliss. The Swami maintained that it helps the sadhaka to recognize his true self and experience a state of ecstasy, which makes him totally in-drawn so that he does not feel like coming out.”

It is important, though, to realize that we are not straining the eyes upward to look at or through the third eye. We are simply looking upward and letting things take their course. I personally call it “flying the friendly skies” of the opening and expanding Sahasrara/Chidakasha. Lalla Yogeshwari, whose writings about the Omkar Breath we will be considering is a short while, speaks of the Om Yogi as “he within whom steadfastly proceedeth in its upward course the Syllable Om, and naught but it, and for whom the breath forms a bridge to the Brahmastrandhra,” the ultimate chakra within the Sahasrara.

Outside meditation



Since you cannot keep your eyes turned up outside meditation, if you like you can keep a general awareness of the “thousand- petalled lotus” of the brain, feeling that the breath and Om are taking place there. In this way you can keep “near” the Chidakasha state you experience in meditation.

2) Chakradhara

Chakras

Just as the outer universe is a complex of many interrelated points such as suns

and planets, in the same way the material and subtle bodies of the yogi—which reflect and react on one another—are a network of life energy points known as chakras. Chakras are points in the bodies into which the universal life force (vishwaprana) flows. Without that constant inflow the bodies would become dormant and disintegrate—would die. The chakras are both entrances and exits for the cosmic life power as well as reservoirs of that power and points of intelligent direction of the power. According to the primal yoga tradition there are numberless chakras, but only seven need occupy the Om yogi’s attention. These are:

- 1) The Muladhara, located at the base of the spine
- 2) The Swadhishthana, located in the spine a little less than midway between the base of the spine and the area opposite the navel.
- 3) The Manipura, located in the spine at the point opposite the navel.
- 4) The Anahata, located in the spine opposite the midpoint of the sternum bone.
- 5) The Vishuddha chakra, located in the spine opposite the hollow of the throat.
- 6) The Ajna chakra, located at the point between the eyebrows—the “third eye.”
- 7) The Brahmarandhra chakra, located at the crown of the head.

Chakradhara

“Chakradhara” means “Holder/Wielder of the Chakras,” and is a practice which awakens, aligns, orients, and develops the seven chakras.

The practice is very simple, consisting of directing our mental intonations of Om in time with the breath to each of the chakras in turn, beginning at the Muladhara and ending at the Brahmarandhra.

Here is a diagram showing the location and order the chakras are worked with in Chakradhara.



The practice of Chakradhara

Sit just as you do for meditation, with either downturned or upturned closed eyes, aware of the breath.

1) Place your awareness on the Muladhara. As your breath naturally flows *in*, intone Om once throughout the inhalation. “Hear” and “feel” (imagine) the intonations of Om vibrating there.

2) Move your awareness upward to the Swadhishtana and as your breath naturally flows *out*, intone Om once throughout the exhalation, hearing and feeling the intonations of Om vibrating there.

3) Move your awareness upward to the Manipura and as your breath naturally flows *in*, intone Om once throughout the inhalation.

4) Move your awareness upward to the Anahata and as your breath naturally flows *out*, intone Om once throughout the exhalation.

5) Move your awareness upward to the Vishuddha chakra and as your breath naturally flows *in*, intone Om once throughout the inhalation.

6) Move your awareness upward to the Ajna chakra and as your breath naturally flows *out*, intone Om once throughout the exhalation.

7) Move your awareness upward to the Brahmarandhra chakra and as your breath naturally flows *in*, intone Om once throughout the inhalation.

8) As your breath then naturally flows *out*, simply intone Om throughout the exhalation, not placing your attention at any chakra.

These eight steps make up one cycle of Chakradhara.

Your inhaling breaths have a positive magnetic polarity and your exhaling breaths have a negative magnetic polarity. In the same way, each of the nine chakras has a corresponding polarity. Therefore it is important that you fix your awareness on a chakra while your breath is of the same polarity as that chakra. Consequently it is very important that you place your awareness on the Muladhara as you inhale, the Swadhishtana as you exhale, and so on up to the Brahmarandhra, alternating polarities in the correct order. Please attend to this carefully in order to attain the maximum benefit from the practice of Chakradhara.

As chiropractic and osteopathy align the vertebrae, so Chakradhara aligns and synchronizes the chakras so they can function as they were intended for the elevation of our consciousness.

At the beginning of meditation and whenever you feel it is needed, do one or more cycles of Chakradhara. Let your intuition guide you as to when and how many. Note that Chakradhara can be done with downturned eyes or with upturned eyes—Khechari Mudra—whichever you prefer.

Outside meditation, if you feel the need for it, do one or more cycles of Chakradhara—as long as it does not interfere with what you are doing at the moment. (You need not be sitting down or having your eyes closed to do Chakradhara outside meditation.)

3) Tolling Bell Japa

Although Om japa in time with the breath can be considered the norm considering that “Pranava” can mean “The Breath Word,” those who like may sometimes intone Om over and over in the manner of a tolling bell. The speed of the japa can also be according to your preference, but one thing is absolute: *The japa must be fundamentally continuous.* There should be no significant breaks between the intonations. Also the rate of intonation should be easy and spontaneous. Often the intoning will be in time with some vital bodily function beside the breath. For example, I have often found my intonations in automatic synchronization with my heartbeat. At other times I have felt it must be in time with other functions that I could not pinpoint.

Tolling bell japa has a value of its own in Om Yoga practice when sometimes it is alternated with the breath japa to keep the interest of the mind so it does not wander but stays centered on the inner intonations of Om. *However, japa with the breath is the norm for Om Yoga practice, and most of your japa should be in time with the breath.*

Afterword: It Is All Up To You

All the theory and eulogy in the world regarding a meditation practice mean virtually nothing. *But practice is everything.* In meditation more than anything else, practice certainly does Make Perfect. And the practice is so marvelously simple.

Krishna told Arjuna: “One, perhaps, in thousands of men strives for perfection; and one perhaps, among the blessed ones, striving thus, knows Me in reality” (Bhagavad Gita 7:3). To enable each one of us to become “one in a million,” yoga was given by the sages to the human race. Its sacred methodology ensures that not a moment of our endeavor is wasted or ineffectual. Those who pursue the path of yoga unto the death of ignorance will be crowned with life. Those who cast aside the false life of the ego shall enter into the true life of the spirit.

Many have heard of the philosophy and practice of meditation, many have enjoyed lectures and books on the subject (some have even given the lectures and written the books), and yet have never taken up the practice to any degree. 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 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 up to you. The sane and sober voice of the Upanishadic Rishis assures us that through the simple japa and meditation of Om all possible spiritual attainments will be realized.

"He who knows Om need know nothing further," declares the Mandukya Upanishad.

"Through Om the Lord is met face to face," Shankara assures us in his Commentary on the Yoga Sutras. And in his commentary on the Taittiriya Upanishad: "Wishing to attain the supreme Self one does japa of Om; and he does indeed attain Brahman through that Om."

The Mundaka Upanishad avers: "Om is the bridge to immortality. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness."

The *Mantra-Yoga-Samhita*, verse 71, calls Om "the best of all mantras," adding that all other mantras receive their power from it. And later in verse 73:

When people hear the Pranava they hear the Absolute itself.

When they utter the Pranava they go to the abode of the Absolute.

He who perceives the Pranava sees the state of the Absolute.

He who always has the Pranava in his mind has the form of the Absolute.

Om.

A Basic Sanskrit Glossary

Abhaya(m): “Without fear;” fearlessness; a state of steadfastness in which one is not swayed by fear of any kind.

Abhedananda, Swami: A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who spent many years traveling and teaching Vedanta and Yoga in America.

Abhimana: Egoism; conceit; attachment; I-sense; pride; the function of the ego; the delusion of “me” and “mine;” identification with the body.

Abhyasa: Sustained spiritual practice.

Abhyasayoga: Yoga, or union with God, through sustained spiritual practice.

Acharya: Preceptor; teacher; spiritual teacher/ guide; guru.

Adharma: Unrighteousness; demerit, failure to perform one’s proper duty; unrighteous action; lawlessness; absence of virtue; all that is contrary to righteousness (dharma).

Adhibhuta: Primal Being; Primal Element; Primordial Matter. Also: Supreme Being and Supreme Element.

Adhidaiva: Primal God; Supreme God.

Adhikara: Authority; qualification; jurisdiction; prerogative; office; claim; privilege.

Adhikari(n): An eligible or qualified person; a worthy person. It implies both fitness and capability.

Adhiyajna: Primal Sacrifice; Supreme Sacrifice.

Adhyatma: The individual Self; the supreme Self; spirit.

Adhyatmic: Pertaining to the Self, individual and Supreme.

Adi Purusha: The First or Original Purusha. See Purusha.

Adishakti: Primal Power.

Aditya: The sun; the Sun God.

Advaita: Non-dualism; non-duality; literally: not [a] two [dvaita].

Advaita Vedanta: The teaching that there is only One Reality (Brahman-Atman), as found in the Upanishads. Non-dualistic philosophy, especially that of Shankara.

Advaitic: Non-dual; having to do with the philosophy of Advaita (Non-Dualism).

Advaitin: A proponent of Advaita philosophy.

Advaitist: A proponent of Advaita philosophy.

Adyasakti: The Primal Energy.

Agama: Scripture; particularly scriptures dealing with the four topics of temple construction and the making of images, philosophy, meditation practice, and methods of worship.

Agastya: A sage and reputed seer of many hymns in the Rig Veda.

Agni: Vedic god of fire.

Agnihotra: “Fire offering;” a Vedic fire sacrifice.

Aham Brahmasmi: “I am Brahman.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

Ahamkara: See Ahankara.

Ahankara: Ego; egoism or self-conceit; the self-arrogating principle “I,” “I”-ness; self-consciousness.

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

Aishwarya: Dominion, power; lordship; divine glory; majesty; splendor; attribute(s) of Ishwara.

Ajapa japa: A yogic term that means the natural, spontaneous sound of the breath that goes on perpetually through the simple act of breathing. This sound is extremely subtle, and though non-verbal is the highest form of mantra.

Ajna chakra: “Command Wheel.” Energy center located at the point between the eyebrows, the “third eye.” The medulla center opposite the point between the eyebrows.

Akarma: Inaction; non-doing.

Akasha: Ether; space; sky; literally: “not visible.” The subtlest of the five elements (panchabhuta), from which the other four arise. It is all-pervading, and is sometimes identified with consciousness—chidakasha. It is the basis of sound (shabda), which is its particular property.

Akhanda: Unbroken (literally: “not broken”); indivisible; undivided; whole.

Akshara: Imperishable; indestructible, immutable, undying; undecaying; unchanging—all in reference to the individual self and the Supreme Self, Brahman. It also means syllable and is used in reference to the ekakshara—the one syllable, the One Imperishable: Om.

Amrita: That which makes one immortal. The nectar of immortality that emerged from the ocean of milk when the gods churned it.

Anahata: “Unstruck;” “unbeaten.” Continuous bell-like inner resonance; the heart; the heart chakra; the inner divine melody (mystic sounds heard by the Yogis); supernatural sound; So’ham.

Anahata chakra: “Unstruck.” Energy center located in the spine at the point opposite the center of the chest (sternum bone). Seat of the Air element.

Ananda: Bliss; happiness; joy. A fundamental attribute of Brahman, which is Satchidananda: Existence, Consciousness, Bliss.

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

Anandamayi Ma: One of the major spiritual figures in twentieth-century India, first made known to the West by Paramhansa Yogananda in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

Ananta: Infinite; without end; endless; a name of Shesha, the chief of the Nagas, whose coils encircle the earth and who symbolizes eternity, and upon whom Vishnu reclines.

Anatma(n): Not-Self; insentient.

Anga: Limb; individual part; accessory; member. The yoga expounded by Pantanjali in the Yoga Sutras (Yoga Darshan) has eight limbs: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, dharana, dhyana, pratyahara, and samadhi.

Anitya: Impermanent; transient.

Anna(m): Food; matter.

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

Antahkarana: Internal instrument; fourfold mind: mind, intellect, ego and subconscious mind.

Antaryamin: Indweller; inner guide; inner ruler; God as the Inner Controller.

Anubhava: Perception; direct personal experience; spiritual experience; intuitive consciousness and knowledge.

Anushtana: Observance; religious exercise; repetition of a mantra for a set number of times during a given period; systematic performance of religious practices, usually undertaken for some definite period of time.

Apana: The prana that moves downward, producing the excretory functions in general; exhalation.

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

Apunya: Demerit; vice; non-meritorious acts; unvirtuous deeds; sinful. See *Punya*.

Arani: Sacrificial wood stick for creating fire through friction.

Arjuna: The great disciple of Krishna, who imparted to him the teachings found in the Bhagavad Gita. The third of the Pandava brothers who were major figures in the Mahabharata War. His name literally means “bright,” “white,” or “clear.”

Artha: Wealth; object; thing. It is the secular value which is both desired and desirable. It satisfies the acquisitive tendency in individuals. It is the economic value.

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 Eightfold Aryan Path.”

Arya Dharma: The Dharma of the Aryas. See *Sanatana Dharma*.

Arya Samaj: The organization founded by Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati in the nineteenth century to encourage the restoration of the more ancient and simple forms of original Vedic religion.

Asamprajñata samadhi: Highest superconscious state where the mind and the ego-sense are completely annihilated.

Asana: Posture; seat; meditation posture; Hatha Yoga posture.

Asat: Unreal[ity]; nonbeing; nonexistence; false; falsehood.

Asatya: Unreal; untrue.

Ashanti: Absence of peace of mind; restlessness; distraction.

Ashram(a): A place for spiritual discipline and study, usually a monastic residence. Also a stage of life. In Hinduism life is divided ideally into four stages (ashramas): 1) the celibate student life (brahmacharya); 2) the married household life (grihastha); 3) the life of retirement (seclusion) and contemplation (vanaprastha); 4) the life of total renunciation (sannyasa).

Ashtanga Yoga: The “eight-limbed” Yoga of Patanjali consisting of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi (see separate entries for each “limb”).

Ashuddha: Impure; incorrect.

Ashuddhi: Impurity.

Ashwattha: The pippal (sacred fig) tree, in the Bhagavad Gita, the eternal tree of life whose roots are in heaven. The “world tree” in the sense of the axis of the earth and even of the cosmos.

Asmita: I-ness; the sense of “I am;” “I exist;” sense of individuality.

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

Asura: Demon; evil being (a-sura: without the light).

Asurim: The state of an asura, one who dwells in darkness (a-sura-without the light). The condition of those negative souls who are turned away from divinity and moving further into degradation of consciousness and mode of life.

Atma(n): The individual spirit or Self that is one with Brahman. The true nature or identity (self).

Atmajnana: Knowledge of the Self.

Atmic: Having to do with the atma-spirit or self.

Aum: Alternate spelling of Om.

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.

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, whose behavior is not bound by ordinary social conventions. Usually they wear no clothing. The highest state of asceticism or tapas.

Avatar(a): A Divine Incarnation.

Avidya: Ignorance; nescience; unknowing; literally: “to know not.” Also called ajnana.

Avidyamaya: Maya, or illusion causing duality, has two aspects, namely, avidyamaya and vidyamaya. Avidyamaya, or the “maya of ignorance,” consisting of anger, passion, and so on, entangles one in worldliness. Vidyamaya, or the “maya of knowledge,” consisting of kindness, purity, unselfishness, and so on, leads one to

liberation. Both belong to the relative world. See Maya.

Avyakta: Unmanifest; invisible; when the three gunas are in a state of equilibrium' the undifferentiated.

Ayam Atma Brahma: "This Self is Brahman." The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Mandukya Upanishad).

Ayurveda: "Life-knowledge." The ancient system of Indian medicine formulated by the sage Dhanvantari and considered part of the Vedic revelation.

Bandha: "Lock;" bond; bondage; tie or knot.

Bel: A tree whose leaves are sacred to Siva; also the fruit of the same tree.

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 One endowed with the six attributes, viz. infinite treasures, strength, glory, splendor knowledge, and renunciation; the Personal God.

Bhagavati: Goddess; the feminine form of Bhagavan.

Bhairava: Shiva.

Bhakta: Devotee; votary; a follower of the path of bhakti, divine love; a worshipper of the Personal God.

Bhakti: Devotion; dedication; love (of God).

Bhakti Marga: The path of devotion leading to union with God.

Bhakti Sutra: An aphoristic work on devotional Yoga authored by the sage Narada. Another text by the same title is ascribed to the sage Shandilya.

Bhakti Yoga: The yoga of attaining union with God through the prescribed spiritual discipline of the path of devotion.

Bhakti Yogi: One who practices Bhakti Yoga.

Bhaktivedanta (Swami): The founder of the Hari Krishna movement in America.

Bharat(a): The proper Sanskrit name for India; one of the brothers of Rama; a title of Arjuna.

Bharati: Indian

Bharat(a)varsha: The land of India.

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

Bhavanam: Meditation. "Bhavanam is setting the heart on the Lord Who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It" (Shankara, Commentary on the Yoga Sutras). It has the connotation of all the awareness becoming focused and absorbed in it.

Bhavatarini: "Savior of the World (or Universe);" a title of the Divine Mother, especially Kali.

Bhaya: Fear; terror.

Bheda: Difference distinction; disjunction.

Bhiksha: Almsfood—food obtained by begging or that is offered to a monk.

Bhikshu: One who lives on bhiksha (almsfood); a mendicant; a sannyasi; also a

designation of a Buddhist monk.

Bhoga: Enjoyment, pleasure; experience; perception; also food (usually what has been offered to a deity).

Bhrigu: An ancient sage, so illustrious that he mediated quarrels among the gods.

Bhuta (1): What has come into being; an entity as opposed to the unmanifested; any of the five elementary constituents of the universe; element.

Bhuta (2): A spirit. Some bhutas are subhuman nature spirits or “elementals”, but some are earthbound human spirits–ghosts. Bhutas may be either positive or negative.

Bija: Seed; source.

Bija Mantra: A “seed” mantra from which realization grows as a tree from a seed; usually a single-syllable mantra that is called “seed” because of its small size as a dot or point of sound.

Bindu: Point; dot; seed; source; the creative potency of anything where all energies are focused; the point from which the subtle Omkara arises that is experienced in meditation.

Bodha: Consciousness; knowledge; “to be awake;” enlightenment.

Bodhi: Enlightenment; “to be awakened;” the state of the awakened yogi, or buddha.

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 satyam; jagan mithya; jivo brahmaiva naparah: “Brahman is real. The world is unreal. The jiva is none other than Brahman.” This is Shankara’s renowned “Vedanta in half a verse.”

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

Brahmachari: One who observes continence; a celibate student in the first stage of life (ashrama).

Brahmacharini: Female “brahmachari.”

Brahmacharya: Continence; self-restraint on all levels; discipline; dwelling in Brahman.

Brahmajnana: Direct, transcendental knowledge of Brahman; Self-realization.

Brahmajnani: One who possess Brahmajnana.

Brahmajyoti: The Light of God.

Brahmaloka: The world (loka) of God (Brahman); the infinite consciousness of God.

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.

Brahmana: A knower of Brahman. A Brahmin. A Vedic liturgical text explaining the rituals found in the Vedic samhitas (collection of hymns). A guidebook for performing those rites.

Brahmananda: The bliss of communion with Brahman.

Brahmanirvana: The state of liberation (nirvana) that results from total union with Brahman.

Brahmarandhra: “The hole of Brahman,” the subtle (astral) aperture in the crown of the head. Said to be the gateway to the Absolute (Brahman) in the thousand-petaled lotus (sahasrara) in the crown of the head. Liberated beings are said to exit the physical body through this aperture at death.

Brahmarishi: A knower of Brahman.

Brahmavadin: Literally “one who walks the path of Brahman.” One who advocates that there is one existence alone—Parabrahman.

Brahmavidya: Science of Brahman; knowledge of Brahman; learning pertaining to Brahman or the Absolute Reality.

Brahmin (Brahmana): A knower of Brahman; a member of the highest Hindu caste consisting of priests, pandits, philosophers, and religious leaders.

Buddha: “And awakened one;” one who has attained enlightenment (bodhi), and thereby moksha (liberation). The usual reference to Gautama (Sakyamuni) Buddha of the sixth century B.C,

Buddhi: Intellect; understanding; reason; the thinking mind; the higher mind, which is the seat of wisdom; the discriminating faculty.

Buddhi Yoga: The Yoga of Intelligence spoken of in the Bhagavad Gita which later came to be called Jnana Yoga, the Yoga of Knowledge.

Caste: See Varna.

Chaitanya: Consciousness; intelligence; awareness; the consciousness that knows itself and knows others; Pure Consciousness.

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

Chakradhara: “Holder/Wielder of the Chakras,” a yogic practice in which the mantra So’ham is mentally intoned at each of the nine chakras in turn.

Chandala: An untouchable, or outcaste; literally: “wild” or “bad.”

Chetana: Consciousness. Whereas chaitanya is the principle of pure consciousness, chetana is consciousness occupied with an object. It is this “consciousness” that Buddha rejected as an obstacle.

Chidakasha: “The Space (Ether) of Consciousness.” The infinite, all-pervading expanse of Consciousness from which all “things” proceed; the subtle space of Consciousness in the Sahasrara (Thousand-petaled Lotus). The true “heart” of all things.

Chinmaya: Full of consciousness; formed of consciousness.

Chintana: Thinking; reflecting.

Chit: Consciousness (that is spirit or purusha); “to perceive, observe, think, be aware, know;” pure unitary Consciousness.

Chitshakti: Power of consciousness or intelligence.

Chitta: The subtle energy that is the substance of the mind, and therefore the mind itself; mind in all its aspects; field of the mind; field of consciousness; consciousness; mind-stuff.

Chitta-vritti-nirodha: Cessation of the modifications of the mind; control of thoughts; Patanjali's definition of Yoga.

Daityas: Demons who constantly war with the gods. Sometimes "races" or nationalities who acted contrary to dharma and fought against the "aryas" were also called demons (daityas or asuras).

Dakshinamurti: A name for Lord Shiva as the silent teacher. Vedic Religion declares that in every cycle of creation God manifests as Dakshinamurti and becomes the guru of the first human beings—those who were most spiritually evolved in the previous creation—teaching them the path to liberation (moksha).

Dama: Self-control; control of the senses; restraint.

Dana: "Giving;" gift; charity; almsgiving; self-sacrifice; donation; generosity.

Darshan: Literally "sight" or "seeing;" vision, literal and metaphysical; a system of philosophy (see Sad-darshanas). Darshan is the seeing of a holy being as well as the blessing received by seeing such a one.

Darshana: "Seeing" in the sense of a viewpoint or system of thought. The Sad-darshanas are the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta.

Dasanami: "Ten named." A term for members of the monastic order of Shankaracharya headquartered in the four quarters of India (Sringeri, Dwaraka, Badrinath and Jagannath Puri). After their proper monastic names they add one of ten titles (Saraswati, Bharati, Puri, Tirtha, Ashrama, Giri, Parvata, Sagara, Vanam, Aranya) according to their monastic succession.

Dasyu: A slave; a symbolic term used in the Vedas for those of low and bound consciousness who are the opposite of the Aryans.

Dattatreya: A famous sage, son of the Rishi Atri and Anasuya. His birth was a divine boon, hence his name: Datta—"given"—and atreya—"son of Atri." Considered a divine incarnation and known as the Lord of Avadhutas, he is often revered as the embodiment of the Supreme Guru. He is credited with the authorship of the *Avadhuta Gita*, the *Jivanmukti Gita*, and the *Tripura Rahashya*.

Daya: Mercy; compassion; grace; empathy.

Dayananda (Maharishi Swami): A leading reformer within Hinduism in the nineteenth century (1824-1883) and the founder of the Arya Samaj.

Desha: Place; locus; spot; space; country.

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. Devas are the demigods presiding over various powers of material and psychic nature. In many instances "devas" refer to the powers of the senses or the sense organs themselves.

Devaloka: The world (loka) of the gods.

Devata: Godhead; god; divinity; celestial being. See Deva.

Devatma: The divine, inner Self.

Devi: Goddess; the Supreme Shakti (Divine Power) or Divine Mother, or a demigoddess.

Dharana: Concentration of mind; fixing the mind upon a single thing or point. “Dharana is the confining [fixing] of the mind within a point or area” (Yoga Sutras 3:1).

Dharma (1): The righteous way of living, as enjoined by the sacred scriptures and the spiritually illumined; characteristics; law; lawfulness; virtue; righteousness; norm.

Dharma (2): Attributes; natures; essential/visible characteristics; characteristic form; properties; qualifications.

Dharma shastras: Scriptures which set forth the rules for society and individuals, including spiritual observances. Manu Smriti is the most authoritative—and the foundation—of all the dharmashastras of India.

Dharmakaya: Reality; the Void; the Absolute; Sheath of the Law—the Embodied Law.

Dharmashala: A place for pilgrims to stay, either free of charge or at a minimal cost.

Dharmic: Having to do with dharma; of the character of dharma.

Dvaita: Dual; duality; dualism.

Dhyana(m): Meditation; contemplation.

Diksha: Initiation.

Dosha: Defect; imperfection; blemish; fault; shortcoming. In Yoga philosophy there are five doshas: lust (kama), anger (krodha), greed (lobha), delusion (moha), and envy (matsarya).

Drishti: Seeing; sight; vision; view; opinion; gaze; perception.

Dukha(m): Pain; suffering; misery; sorrow; grief; unhappiness; stress; that which is unsatisfactory.

Durga: “Incomprehensible One;” “Difficult to reach;” the Universal Mother; she rides a lion (or tiger) and carries a weapon in each of her eight arms symbolizing the powers of the Self against ignorance and evil. She is invoked against all forms of evil—physical and metaphysical. Considered the consort, the shakti, of Shiva.

Dwandwa(s): The pairs of opposites in nature (prakriti) such as pleasure and pain, hot and cold, light and darkness, gain and loss, victory and defeat, love and hatred.

Dwapara Yuga: See Yuga.

Dwesa: Aversion/avoidance for something, implying a dislike for it. This can be emotional (instinctual) or intellectual. It may range from simple nonpreference to intense repulsion, antipathy and even hatred. See Raga.

Dwija: “Twice born;” any member of the three upper castes that has received the sacred thread (yajnopavita).

Ekadashi: “The eleventh.” The eleventh day of each half of the lunar month

(that is, the eleventh day after the new and full moons) that is devoted to the worship of Vishnu and his avatars.

Ekakshara: A common term for Om meaning “the Single Syllable” or “the Single Letter.”

Ekam-eva-advitiam: “One, only, without a second.” A description of Brahman.

Gajanana Maharaj: Sri Gajanana Maharaj (Gajanan Murlidhar Gupte) of Nasik in western India (Maharashtra state) was a saint of the Nath Sampradaya in the first half of the twentieth century.

Gana: One of a group of spirits that wander together—usually of various types. The term is also used as a kind of “miscellaneous” category for entities that have not otherwise been identified. A gana may be benevolent or malevolent, but is usually disorderly, chaotic, and wild in the sense of untamed or unruly, and potentially dangerous (hazardous). A gana’s appearance is usually deformed, repulsive, or frightening. Shiva is said to be always accompanied by a group of devoted ganas.

Ganapati: “Lord of the Ganas” (the spirits that always accompany Shiva). See Ganesha.

Gandharva: A demigod—a celestial musician and singer.

Ganesha: The elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati; the remover of obstacles; lord (pati) of the ganas (spirits that always accompany Shiva); god of wisdom; god of beginnings; the granter of success in spiritual and material life; in ritual worship he is worshipped first, and is therefore known as Adi-deva, the First God.

Ganga: See Ganges.

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.

Gayatri Mantra: A Rig Vedic mantra in the gayatri meter invoking the solar powers of evolution and enlightenment, recited at sunrise and sunset.

Gayatri Meter: A meter found only in the Rig Veda, consisting of three lines of eight syllables each. It is considered especially appropriate for mantric invocation of deities before worship.

Gerua: The brownish-orange mud used to dye the clothing of Hindu monastics; the color produced by dyeing with gerua is also called gerua.

Ghee: Clarified butter.

Giri: Mountain; one of the ten branches of the Shankara Order.

Gita: Song; The Bhagavad Gita.

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

Grihasta: A married “householder;” the second stage (ashrama) in life.

Guha: Cave; secret; secret place; the heart (hridaya guha).

Guna: Quality, attribute, or characteristic arising from nature (Prakriti) itself; a mode of energy behavior. As a rule, when “guna” is used it is in reference to the three qualities of Prakriti, the three modes of energy behavior that are the basic qualities of nature, and which determine the inherent characteristics of all created things. They are: 1) sattwa–purity, light, harmony; 2) rajas–activity, passion; and 3) tamas–dullness, inertia, and ignorance.

Guru: Teacher; preceptor; spiritual teacher or acharya.

Guru Nanak: Founder of the Sikh religion.

Gurukula: “Teacher’s school” or “teacher’s abode.” A gurukula is the residence of a spiritual teacher where young students (brahmacharis) came to live and learn.

Hamsah: “I am He;” swan.

Hansa: Swan; see Hamsah.

Hanuman: A powerful monkey chief of extraordinary strength and prowess, whose exploits are celebrated in the epic Ramayana, the life of Rama. He was an ideal devotee (bhakta) and servant of Lord Rama.

Hara: “One who takes away;” a title of Shiva; the destroyer; the remover.

Hari: Vishnu.

Hatha Yoga: A system consisting of physical exercises, postures, and breathing exercises for gaining control over the physical body and prana.

Havan: Fire sacrifice; yajna.

Himsa: Injury, violence; killing.

Hiranyagarbha: Cosmic intelligence; the Supreme Lord of the universe; also called Brahman.

Holy Mother: A reference to Sri Sarada Devi (Saradamani Mukhopadhyaya), the wife of Sri Ramakrishna, believed by many to have been an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

Homa: Vedic fire ritual/sacrifice.

Hridaya: Heart; center or core of something; essence; the Self.

Ichcha: Desire; will; wish; divine will; free will. From the verb root icch: “to wish,” “to will.”

Ichcha shakti: The power of desire; the power of the will; Shakti in the aspect of omnipotent Divine Will.

Ida: The subtle channel that extends from the base of the spine to the medulla on the left side of the spine.

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

Indriya: Organ. The five organs of perception (jnanendriyas) are the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose. The five organs of action (karmendriyas) are the voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation.

Isha: The Lord; Ishwara.

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).

Jada: Inert; unconscious; matter.

Jagadguru: "World guru;" world teacher.

Jagat: World; cosmos.

Jagrat: The waking state.

Janaka: The royal sage (raja rishi) who was the king of Mithila and a liberated yogi, a highly sought-after teacher of philosophy in ancient India. Sita, the wife of Rama, was his adopted daughter.

Japa: Repetition of a mantra.

Jiva: Individual spirit.

Jivanmukta: One who is liberated in this present life.

Jivanmukti: Liberation in this life.

Jivatma(n): Individual spirit; individual consciousness.

Jnana: Knowledge; knowledge of Reality—of Brahman, the Absolute; also denotes the process of reasoning by which the Ultimate Truth is attained. The word is generally used to denote the knowledge by which one is aware of one's identity with Brahman.

Jnana Marga: The path of discriminative knowledge leading to union with God.

Jnana Yoga: The path of knowledge; meditation through wisdom; constantly and seriously thinking on the true nature of the Self as taught by the upanishads.

Jnana-kanda: The parts of the Veda dealing with the knowledge of the Absolute Brahman; the upanishads.

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

Jnanendriya: The five organs of perception: ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose.

Jnani: A follower of the path of knowledge (jnana); one who has realized—who knows—the Truth (Brahman).

Jyoti(h): Light; flame; illumination; luminosity; effulgence.

Kabir: An Indian mystic of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Kala: Time measure, as in the time required to recite a mantra. It also sometimes means levels of creation or manifested beings.

Kailash(a): "Crystalline;" the name of the mountain home of Siva—a mountain peak in the Himalayas (in present-day Tibet) revered as the abode of Shiva, that is a famous place of pilgrimage.

Kaivalya: Transcendental state of Absolute Independence; state of absolute freedom from conditioned existence; moksha; isolation; final beatitude; emancipation.

Kaivalya-mukti: Liberation.

Kala: Time; a unit of time; part; aspect; bit; death (or Yama); fate; black.

Kali: "The Black One;" the black-skinned goddess who emerged from the body of Goddess Durga to defeat the demons that were attacking her. She wears a garland of skulls (or severed heads) around her neck and a skirt of severed arms—

both symbolizing the sense of egotism. In one hand she wields the sword of spiritual wisdom (prajna) and in the other carries a severed head (ego). Despite her fearsome appearance, her two other hands are held in the gestures (mudras) that indicate: “Fear not” and “Draw near.”

Kali Yuga: The dark age of spiritual and moral decline, said to be current now. See Yuga.

Kalpa: A Day of Brahma—4,320,000,000 years. It alternates with a Night of Brahma of the same length. In the Day of Brahma creation is manifest and in the Night of Brahma is it resolved into its causal state.

Kama: Desire; passion; lust.

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

Karana sharira: The causal body (where the individual rests during sound, deep, dreamless sleep, the intellect, mind and senses being reduced to an unmanifested potential condition), also known as the anandamaya kosha, the “sheath of bliss.”

Karma: Karma, 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.

Karma Yoga: The Yoga of selfless (unattached) action; performance of one’s own duty; service of humanity.

Karma Yogi: One who practices karma yoga.

Karma-kanda: The ritual portion of the Veda. The philosophy that Vedic ritual is the only path to perfection.

Karma-kandi: One who follows the Karma-kanda as philosophy and practice.

Karmendriya: The five organs of action: voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation.

Karmic: Having to do with karma.

Karuna: Mercy; compassion; kindness.

Kashi: Varanasi (Benares).

Kaviraj: Ayurvedic physician.

Kevala: Oneness; absolute; alone; single; independent; perfect; uncompounded.

Khechari Mudra: “Sky-walking” mudra that enables the yogi to “move” in (or expand into) the Chidakasha. There are two forms of Khechari Mudra. In Hatha Yoga it is the insertion of the tip of the tongue into the nasal cavity above the upper

palate. In meditation (Dhyana Yoga) it is the gentle turning upward of the eyes as though looking at a point far distant.

Kirtan: Singing the names and praises of God; devotional chanting.

Klesha: Literally, taints or afflictions. The kleshas are: ignorance, egotism, attractions and repulsions towards objects, and desperate clinging to physical life from the fear of death. (See Yoga Sutras 2:2-9.)

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.

Kripa: Grace; mercy; compassion; blessing. There are three kinds of kripa: 1) sadhana kripa, the grace of self-effort; 2) guru kripa, the grace of a teacher, and 3) divya kripa, divine grace.

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.

Kriya: Purificatory action, practice, exercise, or rite; action; activity; movement; function; skill. Kriyas purify the body and nervous system as well as the subtle bodies to enable the yogi to reach and hold on to higher levels of consciousness and being.

Kriya Shakti: The power or faculty of action.

Kriya Yoga: The Yoga of Purification: “Austerity (tapasya), self-study (swadhyaya), and offering of the life to God (Ishwara pranidhana) are Kriya Yoga” (Yoga Sutras 2:1).

Krodha: Anger, wrath; fury.

Kshama: Forgiveness; patience; forbearance.

Kshatriya: A member of the ruler/warrior caste.

Kumaras (Four): Those advanced souls—Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata—who at the beginning of this creation cycle refused to engage in worldly life despite the command of Brahma. They were then taught by Lord Shiva, in the form of Dakshinamurti, the mysteries of Brahmajnana and attained liberation.

Kumbhaka: Retention of breath; suspension of breath.

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.

Kutastha: Immutable; absolutely changeless; not subject to change; literally: “summit abiding” or “on the summit.”

Kutira: Hut; cottage; house; building; hermitage.

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

Lakshmi: The consort of Vishnu; the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

Lalla Yogeshwari: A fourteenth-century yogini of Kashmir whose hymns and verses are still regarded as among the greatest treasures of Kashmiri literature and

yogic lore.

Laya: Dissolution; merging.

Laya Yoga: Process of absorption of the individual soul into the Supreme Soul; concentration of the mind with a view to dissolve it; that kind of yogic meditation where the mind is carried on progressively from grosser to subtler ideas until it is dissolved in the Unmanifested or Para Brahman; the yoga sometimes known as Omkaralayacintana—the merging of the consciousness into Om.

Lila: Play; sport; divine play; the cosmic play. The concept that creation is a play of the divine, existing for no other reason than for the mere joy of it. The life of an avatar is often spoken of as lila.

Lobha: Greed; covetousness.

Loka: World or realm; sphere, level, or plane of existence, whether physical, astral, or causal.

Madhu: Honey; sweet substance; sweet.

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.

Mahabhutas: The Five Elements (Panchabhuta): ether (akasha), air (vayu), fire (agni), water (ap), and earth (prithvi).

Mahadeva: "The Great God;" a title of Shiva.

Mahamantra: "The Great Mantra," popularly known in the United States and Europe as "the Hare Krishna Mantra"—Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare; Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare.

Mahamaya: "Great illusion;" divine Power operating as identified with the Supreme Lord. A title of Shakti, the Goddess.

Mahaprana: The undifferentiated, intelligent cosmic life-force that becomes the five pranas; all things contain the mahaprana and are manifestations of the mahaprana; the dynamic aspect of universal Consciousness; the superconscious Divine Life in all things.

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.

Maharaj(a): "Great king;" lord; master; a title of respect used to address holy men.

Maharshi: Maha-rishi—great sage.

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

Mahashakti: The Great Power; the divine creative energy.

Mahat Tattwa: The Great Principle; the first product from Prakriti in evolution; intellect. The principle of Cosmic Intelligence or Buddhi; universal Christ Consciousness, the "Son of God," the "Only Begotten of the Father," "the firstborn

of every creature.”

Mahatma: Literally: “a great soul [atma].” Usually a designation for a sannyasi or a saint.

Mahavakya: Literally: “Great Saying.” The highest Vedantic truth, found in the Upanishads, there are four Mahavakyas: 1) Prajñanam Brahma–“Consciousness is Brahman” (Aitareya Upanishad); 2) Ayam Atma Brahma–“This Self is Brahman” (Mandukya Upanishad); 3) Tat Twam Asi–“Thou art That” (Chandogya Upanishad); 4) Aham Brahmasmi–“I am Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad).

Maheshwara: The Great Ishwara; Shiva.

Maitreya/Maitri: Friendliness; friendship; love.

Mala: Taint; impurity; defilement; defect; ignorance, limitation of consciousness.

Manana: Thinking, pondering, reflecting, considering.

Manas(a): The sensory mind; the perceiving faculty that receives the messages of the senses.

Manasic: Having to do with the mind (manas).

Manasarovar: A sacred lake near Mount Kailash the abode of Shiva. Pilgrims not only bathe in the lake on the way to Kailash, they often see visions in its water, hence the name “Lake of the Mind.” The present Dalai Lama was found through visions seen in Manasarovar.

Mandir(a): Temple; abode.

Mangala: Auspicious.

Manipura chakra: Energy center located in the spine at the point opposite the navel. Seat of the Fire element.

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

Mantra(m): Sacred syllable or word or set of words through the repetition and reflection of which one attains perfection or realization of the Self. Literally, “a transforming thought” (manat trayate). A mantra, then is a sound formula that transforms the consciousness.

Mantra Yoga: The Yoga of the Divine Word; the science of sound; the path to divine union through repetition of a mantra—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.

Manus: Progenitors of the human race who were also its lawgivers and teachers.

Manusha(m): Human being; humanity.

Mara: The embodiment of the power of cosmic evil, illusion, and delusion.

Marga: Way; path; street; approach to God-realization (bhakti marga, jnana marga, karma marga, yoga marga, etc.).

Math: A monastery.

Matsyendranath: Guru of Gorakhnath and the first publicly known Nath Yogi, having become a disciple of Adinath who is considered an avatar of Shiva. As with

Gorakhnath, we have no dates for him.

Mauna(m): Silence–not speaking.

Maya: The illusive power of Brahman; the veiling and the projecting power of the universe, the power of Cosmic Illusion. “The Measurer”–a reference to the two delusive “measures”: Time and Space.

Mayic: Having to do with Maya.

Mimamsa: An enquiry into the nature of a thing; the science of philosophical logic enquiring into Vedic knowledge. Usually a reference to Purva-Mimamsa, one of the six schools of orthodox Indian philosophy. It focuses on the Vedas and the Vedic rites to establish their supreme spiritual value and authority.

Mirabai: A sixteenth-century Rajasthani princess, whose devotional songs are among the greatest written in India.

Moha: Delusion–in relation to something, usually producing delusive attachment or infatuation based on a completely false perception and evaluation of the object.

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.

Mudra: A position–usually of the hands/fingers–which inherently produces a desired state in the subtle energy levels (prana).

Mukta: One who is liberated–freed–usually in the sense of one who has attained moksha or spiritual liberation.

Mukti: Moksha; liberation.

Muladhara chakra: “Seat of the root.” Energy center located at the base of the spine. Seat of the Earth element.

Mulaprakriti: The Root [Basic] Energy from which all things are formed. The Divine Prakriti or Energy of God.

Mulashakti: Root power or energy; Mulaprakriti.

Mumukshu: Seeker after liberation (moksha).

Mumukshutwa: Intense desire or yearning for liberation (moksha).

Muni: “Silent one” (one observing the vow of silence (mauna); sage; ascetic.

Nada: Sound; the resonance of sound; mystic inner sound; the primal sound or first vibration from which all creation has emanated; the first manifestation of the unmanifested Absolute; Omkara or Shabda Brahman; the inner sound of Om experienced in meditation.

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.

Naga: Snake.

Nagas: Astral beings that often interact with human beings, usually taking the form of snakes. (In Sanskrit naga is the word for snake.)

Nanak (Guru): Founder of the Sikh religion in the fifteenth century.

Narada: A primeval sage to whom some of the verses of the Rig Veda are attributed.

Narayana: A proper name of God—specifically of Vishnu. The term by etymology means a Being that supports all things, that is reached by them and that helps them to do so; also one who pervades all things. He Who dwells in man. Literally: “God in humanity.” Sadhus often address one another as Narayana and greet one another: “Namo Narayanaya”—I salute Narayana [in you].

Nataraja: “King of the Dance,” a title of Shiva the Cosmic Dancer. The whole creation is the dance of Shiva.

Nath Yogis: An ancient order of yogis, sometimes called Siddha Yogis, claiming Patanjali and Jesus (Isha Nath) among their master teachers.

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.

Neti-neti: “Not this, not this.” The way of describing the indescribable Brahman by enumerating what It is not; the analytical process of progressively negating all names and forms, in order to arrive at the eternal underlying Truth.

Nidra: Sleep; either dreaming or deep sleep state.

Nirguna: Without attributes or qualities (gunas).

Nirguna Brahman: The impersonal, attributeless Absolute beyond all description or designation.

Nirmala: Without impurity; pure; without defect or blemish.

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

Nirvana chakra: Energy center located beneath the crown of the head and opposite the middle of the forehead—in the midst of the brain.

Nirvikalpa: Indeterminate; non-conceptual; without the modifications of the mind; beyond all duality.

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. The highest state of samadhi, beyond all thought, attribute, and description.

Nishkama karma: Desireless action; disinterested action; action dedicated to God without personal desire for the fruits of the action; selfless action.

Nitya: Eternal; permanent; unchanging; the ultimate Reality; the eternal Absolute. Secondarily: daily or obligatory (nitya karma—that which must be done every day).

Nityananda (Paramhansa): A great Master of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the most renowned So’ham yogi of our times. His Chidakasha Gita contains some of the most profound statements on philosophy and yoga.

Nivritti: Negation; the path of turning away from activity; withdrawal. Literally, “to turn back.” The path of renunciation.

Nivritti Marga: The path of renunciation, of withdrawal from the world.

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.

Ojas: Vitality; vigor; luster; splendor; energy; spiritual energy. The highest form of energy in the human body. In the spiritual aspirant who constantly practices continence and purity, other forms of energy are transmuted into ojas and stored in the brain, manifesting as spiritual and intellectual power.

Om: The Pranava or the sacred syllable symbolizing and embodying Brahman.

Omkara: Om.

Padmasana: Lotus posture; considered the best posture for meditation.

Panchabhuta: The Five Elements (Mahabhuta): ether (akasha), air (vayu), fire (agni), water (ap), and earth (prithvi).

Pandita: Scholar; pundit; learned individual.

Papa(m): Sin; demerit; evil; sinful deeds; evil deeds.

Para(m): Highest; universal; transcendent; supreme.

Parabrahman: supreme Brahman.

Paramananda: Supreme (param) bliss (ananda).

Param[a]purusha: See Purusha.

Paramartha: The highest attainment, purpose, or goal; absolute truth; Reality.

Paramatma(n): The Supreme Self, God.

Parameshwara: The supreme (param) Lord (eshwara; 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.

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

Parampurusha: The Supreme Spirit; Supreme Person.

Paranirvana (Pali: Paranibbana): 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.

Para-shakti: Supreme Power.

Parivrajaka: “One who wanders;” a roaming ascetic; one who has renounced the world; a sannyasin.

Parvati: “Daughter of the Mountain;” the daughter of King Himalaya; the consort of Shiva; an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

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

Pingala: The subtle channel that extends from the base of the spine to the medulla on the right side of the spine.

Pitri: A departed ancestor, a forefather.

Pradhana: Prakriti; causal matter.

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

Prajna: Consciousness; awareness; wisdom; intelligence.

Prajñanam Brahma: “Consciousness is Brahman.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Aitareya Upanishad.

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

Prakash(a): Shining; luminous; effulgence; illumination; luminosity; light; brightness. Pure Consciousness, from the root kash (to shine) and pra (forth); cognition.

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.

Prakritilaya: Absorbed or merged in Prakriti; the state of yogis who have so identified with the cosmic energy that they are trapped in it as though in a net and cannot separate themselves from it and evolve onwards until the cosmic dissolution (pralaya) occurs in which the lower worlds of men, angels, and archangels (bhur, bhuwah and swar lokas) are dissolved.

Pralaya: Dissolution. See Mahapralaya.

Pramana: Means of valid knowledge; logical proof; authority (of knowledge); means of cognition (from the verb root ma—to measure and pra—before or forward).

Prana: Life; vital energy; life-breath; life-force; inhalation. In the human body the prana is divided into five forms: 1) Prana, the prana that moves upward; 2) Apana: The prana that moves downward, producing the excretory functions in general. 3) Vyana: The prana that holds prana and apana together and produces circulation in the body. 4) Samana: The prana that carries the grosser material of food to the apana and brings the subtler material to each limb; the general force of digestion. 5) Udana: The prana which brings up or carries down what has been drunk or eaten; the general force of assimilation.

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

Pranava: A title of Om, meaning “Life-ness” or “Life-Giver.” Om is the expression or controller of prana—the life force within the individual being and the cosmos.

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. It also means the refining (making subtle) of the breath, and its lengthening through spontaneous slowing down of the respiratory rate.

Prarabdha: Karma that has become activated and begun to manifest and bear fruit in this life; karmic “seeds” that have begun to “sprout.”

Prasad(am): Grace; food or any gift that has been first offered in worship or to a saint; that which is given by a saint. It also means tranquility, particularly in the Bhagavad Gita.

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

Pravritti: Action; endeavor. Literally: "to turn forth."

Pravritti Marga: The path of active involvement in the world.

Prayag: Rudraprayag, the modern-day Allahabad, site of the Triveni—the confluence of the three sacred rivers: Ganges, Jumna (Yamuna), and Saraswati.

Prayaschitta: Atonement (through various prescribed acts); expiation; mortification.

Prema: Love; divine love (for God).

Prema-bhakti: Intense love of God.

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.

Preta: Ghost; spirit of the dead.

Puja: Worship; ceremonial (ritual) worship; adoration; honor. Usually involving the image of a deity.

Pujari: One who performs ritualistic worship (puja).

Punarjanma: "Birth again;" rebirth/reincarnation.

Pundit: Scholar; pandita; learned individual.

Punya: Merit; virtue; meritorious acts; virtuous deeds. See Apunya.

Puraka: Inhalation.

Purna: Full; complete.

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 (Highest or Best of the Purushas).

Purushartha: The four goals of human life: wealth (artha), desire (kama), righteousness (dharma), and liberation (moksha). The first is the economic value, the second is the psychological value, the third is the moral value, and the fourth is the spiritual value. Human effort; individual exertion; right exertion

Purushottama: The Supreme Person; Supreme Purusha. (See Purusha.)

Raga: Attachment/affinity for something, implying a desire for it. This can be emotional (instinctual) or intellectual. It may range from simple liking or preference to intense desire and attraction. Greed; passion. See Dwesha.

Raga-dwesha: The continual cycle of desire/aversion, like/dislike.

Raja Yoga: See Ashtanga Yoga.

Rajarshi: "Royal sage;" a king who knows Brahman; an epithet of King Janaka.

Rajas: Activity, passion, desire for an object or goal.

Rajasic: Possessed of the qualities of the raja guna (rajas). Passionate; active; restless.

Rajoguna: Activity, passion, desire for an object or goal.

Rakshasa: There are two kinds of rakshasas: 1) semidivine, benevolent beings, or 2) cannibal demons or goblins, enemies of the gods. Meat-eating human beings

are sometimes classed as rakshasas.

Ram: A title of Brahman the Absolute. Though sometimes used as a contraction of the name of Rama, many yogis insist that it is properly applied to Brahman alone and employ it as a mantra in repetition and meditation to reveal the Absolute. Interestingly, Ram (Rahm) is also a title of God in Hebrew.

Rama: An incarnation of God—the king of ancient Ayodhya in north-central India. His life is recorded in the ancient epic Ramayana.

Rama Tirtha: One the key spiritual figures in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. A former university professor of mathematics in the Punjab, Swami Rama Tirtha traveled throughout India and even to Japan and America, preaching the truths of Advaita Vedanta and vigorously teaching the practice of Om Yoga.

Ramakrishna, Sri: 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 with the unspoken question—the attitude—of “Who am I?” until the self (atma) is revealed.

Ramanuja (Sri): The great Vaishnava teacher of the eleventh century who formulated the philosophy known as Vishishtadvaita Vedanta (Qualified Non-Dualism).

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.

Rasa: Taste; essence; savor; juice; nectar of delight.

Rechaka: Exhalation of breath.

Rig Veda: The oldest scripture of India, considered the oldest scripture of the world, that consists of hymns revealed in meditation to the Vedic Rishis (seers). Although in modern times there are said to be four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva), in actuality, there is only one Veda: the Rig Veda. The Sama Veda is only a collection of Rig Veda hymns that are marked (pointed) for singing. The Yajur Veda is a small book giving directions on just one form of Vedic sacrifice. The Atharva Veda is only a collection of theurgical mantras to be recited for the cure of various afflictions or to be recited over the herbs to be taken as medicine for those afflictions.

Rik (or Ric): A hymn, usually a hymn of the Rig Veda.

Rishi: Sage; seer of the Truth.

Rita(m): Truth; Law; Right; Order. The natural order of things, or Cosmic Order/Law. Its root is ri, which means “to rise, to tend upward.” It is said to be the basis for the Law of Karma.

Rudra: Shiva. Derived from rud—he who drives away sin or suffering.

Rupa: Form; body.

Sabija: “With seed;” with attributes; producing samskaras or subtle karmas.

Sabija samadhi: Savikalpa samadhi wherein the seeds of samskaras or karmas are not destroyed, and which produces the highest and subtlest of samskaras or karmas.

Sad-darshanas: The six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta.

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

Sadhana: Spiritual practice.

Sadhana-chatushtaya: The fourfold aids to spiritual practice: 1) the ability to discriminate between the transient and the eternal (nitya-anitya-astu-viveka); 2) the absence of desire for securing pleasure or pain either here or elsewhere (iha-anutra-atha-phala-vairagya); 3) the attainment of calmness, temperance, spirit of renunciation, fortitude, power of concentration of mind, and faith (shama-damadi-sadhana-smaptti); 4) an intense desire for liberation (mumukshutwa).

Sadhu: Seeker for truth (sat); a person who is practicing spiritual disciplines. Usually this term is applied only to monastics.

Saguna: Possessing attributes or qualities (gunas).

Saguna Brahman: Brahman with attributes, such as mercy, omnipotence, omniscience, etc.; the Absolute conceived as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe; also the Personal God according to the Vedanta.

Sahaja: Natural; innate; spontaneous; inborn.

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

Sai Baba: See Shirdi Sai Baba.

Sakshatakara: Self-realization; direct experience; experience of Absoluteness; Brahmajnana.

Sakshi(n): The witness self; the kutashta which passively observes the actions of the body and the senses; seer; the intuitive faculty.

Sama Veda: A collection of Rig Veda hymns that are marked (pointed) for singing. It is sometimes spoken of as the “essence” of the Rig Veda.

Samadarshana: Equal vision; seeing all things equally; equal-sightedness; equanimity.

Samadhi: 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. See Samprajñata Samadhi, Asamprajñata Samadhi, Savikalpa Samadhi, and Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

Samadrishti: See Samadarshana.

Samana: The prana that carries the grosser material of food to the apana and brings the subtler material to each limb; the general force of digestion.

Sampradaya: Tradition; philosophical school; literally: “handed-down

instruction;” also a line of initiatic empowerment.

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

Samsaric: Having to do with samsara; involved with samsara; partaking of the traits or qualities of samsara.

Samsarin: One who is subject to samsara—repeated births and deaths—and who is deluded by its appearances, immersed in ignorance.

Samskara: Impression in the mind, either conscious or subconscious, produced by previous action or experience in this or previous lives; propensities of the mental residue of impressions; subliminal activators; prenatal tendency. See Vasana.

Sanatana: Eternal; everlasting; ancient; primeval.

Sanatana Dharma: “The Eternal Religion,” also known as “Arya Dharma,” “the religion of those who strive upward [Aryas].” Hinduism.

Sankalpa: A life-changing wish, desire, volition, resolution, will, determination, or intention—not a mere momentary aspiration, but an empowering act of will that persists until the intention is fully realized. It is an act of spiritual, divine creative will inherent in each person as a power of the Atma.

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), the second chapter of which is entitled “Sankhya Yoga.” *A 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.

Sannyasa: Renunciation; monastic life. Sannyasa literally means “total [san] throwing away [as],” absolute rejection.

Sannyasi(n): A renunciate; a monk.

Sannyasini: A female renunciate; a nun.

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.

Saraswati: The goddess of speech, wisdom, learning and the arts—particularly music.

Sarva: All; everything; complete.

Sarvajña(twa): Knowing everything; omniscience.

Sat: Existence; reality; truth; being; a title of Brahman, the Absolute or Pure Being.

Satchidananda: Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; Brahman.

Satsang(a): Literally: “company with Truth.” Association with godly-minded persons. The company of saints and devotees.

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

Satya Loka: “True World,” “World of the True [Sat]”, or “World of Truth [Satya].” This highest realm of relative existence where liberated beings live who have not entered back into the Transcendent Absolute where there are no “worlds” (lokas). From that world they can descend and return to other worlds for the spiritual welfare of others, as can those that have chosen to return to the Transcendent.

Satya Yuga: See Yuga.

Sattwa: Light; purity; harmony, goodness, reality.

Sattwa Guna: Quality of light, purity, harmony, and goodness.

Sattwic: Partaking of the quality of Sattwa.

Savikalpa Samadhi: Samadhi in which there is objective experience or experience of “qualities” and with the triad of knower, knowledge and known; lesser samadhi; cognitive samadhi; samadhi of wisdom; meditation with limited external awareness. Samprajñata samadhi.

Seva: Service; selfless service.

Shabda: Sound; word.

Shabda Brahman: Sound-God; Brahman in the Form of Sound; Omkara; the Vedas.

Shabdakshara: “Sound-syllable;” Om.

Shaiva/Shrivite: A worshipper of Shiva; pertaining to Shiva.

Shakti: Power; energy; force; the Divine Power of becoming; the apparent dynamic aspect of Eternal Being; the Absolute Power or Cosmic Energy; the Divine Feminine.

Shankara (1): “The Auspicious One.” A title of Shiva.

Shankara (2): 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.

Shama: Calmness; tranquility; control of the internal sense organs; same; equal.

Shanta: One who possesses shanti.

Shanti: Peace; calm; tranquility; contentment.

Sharanam: Refuge; protection, shelter.

Sharira: Body; sheath; literally: “that which perishes,” from the root shri which means “to waste away.”

Shastra: Scripture; spiritual treatise.

Shastri: One who is a scholar and teacher of the scriptures (shastras).

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.

Shiva: A name of God meaning “One Who is all Bliss and the giver of happiness to all.” Although classically applied to the Absolute Brahman, Shiva can also refer to God (Ishwara) in His aspect of Dissolver and Liberator (often mistakenly thought of as “destroyer”).

Shraddha: Faith; confidence or assurance that arises from personal experience.

Shruti: That which is heard; revealed scripture in the sense of divine communication. Usually applied to the Vedas, Shankara also spoke of the Upanishads as Shruti.

Shuddha: Pure; clear; clean; untainted.

Shuddhi: The state of purity (shuddha); purification.

Shudra: A member of the laborer, servant caste.

Shunya: Void; no-thing; emptiness.

Shyama Charan Lahiri: See Lahiri Mahasaya.

Siddha: A perfected–liberated–being, an adept, a seer, a perfect yogi.

Siddhaloka: The highest realm of existence in which the fully liberated (siddhas) live. (However, wherever a siddha is, that place is siddhaloka.)

Siddhi: Spiritual perfection; psychic power; power; modes of success; attainment; accomplishment; achievement; mastery; supernatural power attained through mantra, meditation, or other yogic practices. From the verb root sidh–to attain.

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.

Sloka: A Sanskrit verse. Usually it consists of two lines of sixteen syllables each, or four lines of eight syllables each.

Smarana: Remembrance (of God).

Smriti: Memory; recollection; “that which is remembered.” In this latter sense, Smriti is used to designate all scriptures except the Vedas and Upanishads (which are considered of greater authority).

Spanda: Vibration; expanding vibration; flutter; throb; movement; creative shakti; pulsation; creative pulsation; apparent motion in the motionless Shiva which brings about the manifestation, maintenance, and withdrawal of the universe; the principle of apparent movement from the state of absolute unity to the plurality of the world.

Sphurana: Vibration.

Sri: Holy; sacred; excellent; venerated (venerable); revered; a term of respect similar to “Reverend.” Also: prosperity, glory, and success—and therefore an epithet for Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and abundance, the consort of Vishnu. It is often used as an honorific prefix to the name of deities and holy persons to indicate holiness (Sri Krishna, Sri Swami N., etc.). Also used as the equivalent of the English “Mr.” (Srimati would be the equivalent of “Mrs.”)

Sri Yantra: The mystical diagram showing the movement of the spiritual energies inherent in and produced by the supreme mantra: Om. The Sri Yantra has

also come to be identified with the energy-power of the Divine Mother, and if often worshipped by her devotees.

Sri Yukteswar Giri, Swami: The guru of Paramhansa Yogananda.

Sruti: Sacred scripture. The Vedas and Upanishads.

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

Sthitaprajna: One who is established in the divine Consciousness or superconsciousness.

Sthiti: Steadiness; condition or state; existence; being; subsistence; preservation.

Sthula: Gross material; physical entity; atomic matter.

Sthula-sharira: Gross body; physical body; body of atomic matter.

Sukha(m): Happiness; ease; joy; happy; pleasant; agreeable.

Sukshma: Subtle; fine.

Sukshma-sharira: Subtle body; astral body (also called *linga sharira*).

Sura: Divine being; deva; one who is filled with light.

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

Sushumna: A subtle passage in the midst of the spinal column, corresponding to the spinal cord, that extends from the base of the spine to the medulla oblongata in the head.

Sushupti: The dreamless sleep state.

Sutra: Literally: a thread; an aphorism with minimum words and maximum sense; a terse sentence; in Buddhism, an entire scripture.

Sutratma: “The thread-Self;” immanent deity of the totality of the subtle bodies, referring to the Gita verse: “On Me all this universe is strung like pearls on a thread” (7:7).

Swabhava: One’s own inherent disposition, nature, or potentiality; inherent state of mind; state of inner being.

Swadharma: One’s own natural (innate) duty (*dharma*, based on their *karma* and *samskara*). One’s own prescribed duty in life according to the eternal law (*ritam*).

Swadhishthana chakra: Energy center located in the spine a little less than midway between the base of the spine and the area opposite the navel. Seat of the Water element.

Swadhyaya: Introspective self-study or self-analysis leading to self-understanding. Study of spiritual texts regarding the Self.

Swami: Literally, “I am mine”—in the sense of absolute self-mastership. It could be legitimately translated: “He who is one with his Self [Swa].” It is often used in the sense of “lord” or owner as well as a spiritual guide or authority. God Himself is the ultimate Swami. As a matter of respect it is always used in reference to *sannyasis*, since they have vowed themselves to pursue the knowledge of the Self, or those considered to be of spiritual advancement.

Swapna: The dream state; a dream.

Swara: Sound; accent; tone.

Swarupa: “Form of the Self.” Natural–true–form; actual or essential nature; essence. A revelatory appearance that makes clear the true nature of some thing.

Swayamprakash(a): Self-luminous; self-illuminated.

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.

Talu chakra: Energy center located at the root of the palate opposite the tip of the nose.

Tamas: Dullness, darkness, inertia, folly, and ignorance.

Tamasic: Possessed of the qualities of the tamo guna (tamas). Ignorant; dull; inert; and dark.

Tanha: Craving; desire; thirst.

Tantra: A manual of or a particular path of sadhana laying great stress upon japa of a mantra and other esoteric practices relating to the powers latent in the human complex of physical, astral, and causal bodies in relation to the cosmic Power usually thought as the Divine Feminine.

Tantric: Pertaining to Tantra.

Tapa: Trouble; acute anxiety; anguish; suffering.

Tapa Loka: The world of tapasya; the world beyond rebirth where adept yogis perpetually engage in tapasya (yoga) until they attain liberation and pass upward into Satya Loka, the realm of the liberated ones who know Brahman.

Tapas: See tapasya.

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.

Tat Twam Asi: “Thou art That.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Chandogya Upanishad.

Tattwa: “Thatness.” Principle; element; the essence of things; truth; reality.

Tejas: Radiance; brilliancy (especially spiritual); the element of fire; Agni; heat.

Tejomaya: Full of tejas; full of light; resplendent.

Thakur: “Master” or “Lord.” A reference to God or to a holy person considered to be one with God.

Tirtha: A sacred place of pilgrimage; a river or body of water in which it is auspicious and spiritually beneficial to bathe; the water offered in ritual worship and then sprinkled on or drunk by the devotees.

Treta Yuga: See Yuga.

Triguna: The three gunas or qualities: sattwa, rajas, and tamas. (See the entry

under Guna).

Trigunatita: Beyond the three gunas.

Trimurti: “The three forms”—Brahman, Vishnu, and Shiva, the Hindu “Trinity.”

Trishna: Thirst; craving; desire.

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.”

Tyaga: Literally: “abandonment.” Renunciation—in the Gita, the relinquishment of the fruit of action.

Tyagi: A renouncer, an ascetic.

Udana: The prana which brings up or carries down what has been drunk or eaten; the general force of assimilation.

Udgitha: The Pranava [Om] when it is sung aloud in Vedic recitation.

Upadesha: Spiritual instruction.

Upadhi: Adjunct; association; superimposed thing or attribute that veils and gives a colored view of the substance beneath it; limiting adjunct; instrument; vehicle; body; a technical term used in Vedanta philosophy for any superimposition that gives a limited view of the Absolute and makes It appear as the relative.

Upanishads: Books (of varying lengths) of the philosophical teachings of the ancient sages of India on the knowledge of Absolute Reality. The upanishads contain two major themes: (1) the individual self (atman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman) are one in essence, and (2) the goal of life is the realization/manifestation of this unity, the realization of God (Brahman). There are eleven principal upanishads: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Shvetashvatara, all of which were commented on by Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhavacharya, thus setting the seal of authenticity on them.

Upasana: “Sitting near” or “drawing near;” worship; adoration; contemplation of God or deity; devout meditation; both teaching and learning.

Urdhvareta yogi: A yogi in whom the seminal energy flows upwards.

Vachaka: That which is denoted by speech.

Vachya: That which is denoted by speech.

Vaikhari: Sound that is spoken and heard.

Vairagi: A renunciate.

Vairagya: Non-attachment; detachment; dispassion; absence of desire; disinterest; or indifference. Indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments.

Vaishya: A member of the merchant, farmer, artisan, businessman caste.

Vak: Speech.

Vakya: Word or statement.

Vanaprastha: Literally: a forest dweller. The third stage of life (ashrama) in

which, leaving home and children, the husband and wife dwell together in seclusion and contemplation as a preparation to taking sannyasa.

Varna: Caste. (Literally: color.) In traditional Hindu society there were four divisions or castes according to the individual's nature and aptitude: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra.

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.

Veda: Knowledge, wisdom, revealed scripture. See Vedas.

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, the Brahma Sutras compiled by the sage Vyasa.

Vedanta Sutras: The Brahma Sutras.

Vedantin: A follower of Vedanta.

Vedas: The oldest scriptures of India, considered the oldest scriptures of the world, that were revealed in meditation to the Vedic Rishis (seers). Although in modern times there are said to be four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva), in the upanishads only three are listed (Rig, Sama, and Yajur). In actuality, there is only one Veda: the Rig Veda. The Sama Veda is only a collection of Rig Veda hymns that are marked (pointed) for singing. The Yajur Veda is a small book giving directions on just one form of Vedic sacrifice. The Atharva Veda is only a collection of theurgical mantras to be recited for the cure of various afflictions or to be recited over the herbs to be taken as medicine for those afflictions.

Vedic: Having to do with the Vedas.

Vidya: Knowledge; both spiritual knowledge and mundane knowledge.

Vijnana: The highest knowledge, beyond mere theoretical knowledge (jnana); transcendental knowledge or knowing; experiential knowledge; a high state of spiritual realization—intimate knowledge of God in which all is seen as manifestations of Brahman; knowledge of the Self.

Vijnani: One endowed with vijnana.

Vikshepa: The projecting power of the mind, causing external involvement; the movement of pushing outward or away; the projecting power of ignorance; mental restlessness resulting from the awareness moving out from the center that is the Self; Distractions; causes of distractions; projection; false projection; the tossing of the mind which obstructs concentration.

Vimala: Purity; unblemished; without stain or defect.

Virya: Strength; power; energy; courage.

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: The philosophy of Qualified Non-Dualism formulated by Sri Ramanuja.

Vishnu: “The all-pervading;” God as the Preserver.

Vishuddha: Supremely pure; totally pure.

Vishuddha chakra: “Supreme purity.” Energy center located in the spine opposite the hollow of the throat. Seat of the Ether element.

Vishwaprana: The universal life force (prana).

Viveka: Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between the Self and the non-Self, between the permanent and the impermanent; right intuitive discrimination.

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

Vritra: One who hates the light and burrows into the dark; a symbolic term used in the Vedas for those of low and bound consciousness who are the opposite of the Aryans.

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

Vyana: The prana that holds prana and apana together and produces circulation in the body.

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.

Yajna: Sacrifice; offering; sacrificial ceremony; a ritual sacrifice; usually the fire sacrifice known as agnihotra or havan.

Yama: Restraint; the five Don'ts of Yoga: 1) ahimsa–non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness; 2) satya–truthfulness, honesty; 3) asteya–non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness; 4) brahmacharya–continence; 5) aparigraha–non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness.

Yantra: Geometrical designs of the energy patterns made by mantras when they are recited or which, when concentrated on produce the effects of the corresponding mantras. Though often attributed to deities, they are really the diagrams of the energy movements of those deities' mantras.

Yati: Wanderer; a wandering ascetic.

Yoga: Literally, “joining” or “union” from the Sanskrit root yuj. Union with the Supreme Being, or any practice that makes for such union. Meditation that unites the individual spirit with God, the Supreme Spirit. The name of the philosophy expounded by the sage Patanjali, teaching the process of union of the individual with the Universal Soul.

Yoga Darshana: See Yoga Sutras.

Yoga Maya: The power of Maya, of divine illusion. It is Maya in operation, the operation/movement rising from the presence (union–yoga) of God (Ishwara) within it, and therefore possessing delusive power.

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 Vashishta to Lord Rama on meditation and spiritual life.

Yogabhrashta: One who has fallen from the practice of Yoga.

Yogananda (Paramhansa): The most influential yogi of the twentieth century in the 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.

Yogini: A female practitioner of yoga.

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

Yuga: Age or cycle; aeon; world era. Hindus believe that there are four yugas: the Golden Age (Satya or Krita Yuga), the Silver age (Treta Yuga), The Bronze Age (Dwapara Yuga), and the Iron Age (Kali Yuga). Satya Yuga is four times as long as the Kali Yuga; Treta Yuga is three times as long; and Dwapara Yuga is twice as long. In the Satya Yuga the majority of humans use the total potential—four-fourths—of their minds; in the Treta Yuga, three-fourths; in the Dwapara Yuga, one half; and in the Kali Yuga, one fourth. (In each Yuga there are those who are using either more or less of their minds than the general populace.) The Yugas move in a perpetual circle: Ascending Kali Yuga, ascending Dwapara Yuga, ascending Treta Yuga, ascending Satya Yuga, descending Satya Yuga, descending, Treta Yuga, descending Dwapara Yuga, and descending Kali Yuga—over and over. Furthermore, there are yuga cycles within yuga cycles. For example, there are yuga cycles that affect the entire cosmos, and smaller yuga cycles within those greater cycles that affect a solar system. The cosmic yuga cycle takes 8,640,000,000 years, whereas the solar yuga cycle only takes 24,000 years. At the present time our solar system is in the ascending Dwapara Yuga, but the cosmos is in the descending Kali Yuga. Consequently, the more the general mind of humanity develops, the more folly and evil it becomes able to accomplish.