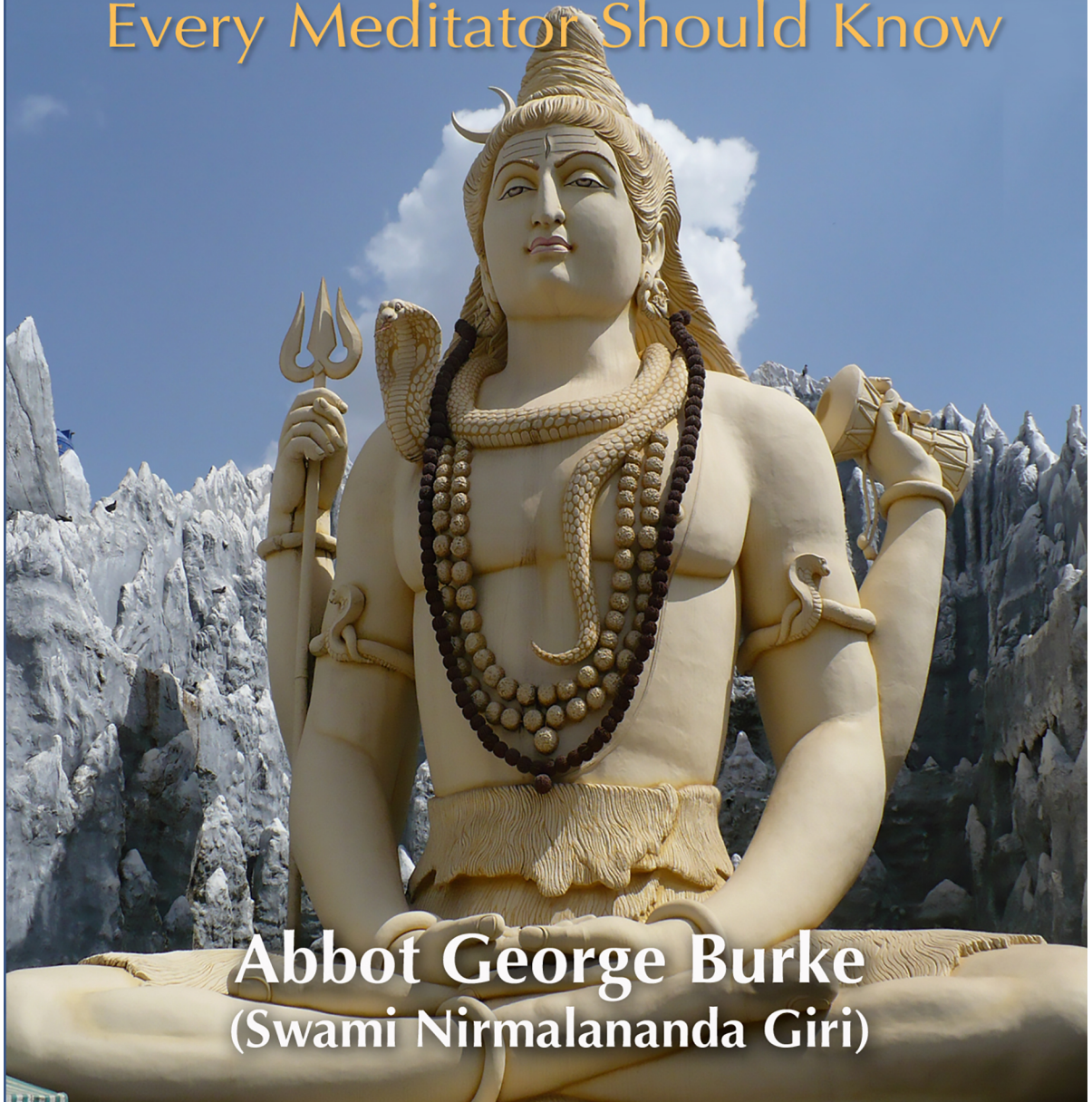


FOUNDATIONS OF YOGA

Ten Important Principles
Every Meditator Should Know



Abbot George Burke
(Swami Nirmalananda Giri)

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Ten Important Principles That Every Meditator Should Know

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The Foundations of Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna frequently spoke of some people who planned to travel overnight on a river in order to attend a wedding the next day. When it was dark they got in the boat and rowed the entire night. When it began to dawn, they saw to their dismay that they were still at the place they started! Why? Because they had not hauled in the anchor and so stayed in one spot.

It is the same with religion and yoga. We can work and work at it, doing many spiritual deeds and practices, yet get nowhere—maybe even regress. Why? Because we have not “weighed anchor and cast off from the shore” of samsara and worldliness—especially in the matter of disciplines and purifications. That is why the first limb of Patanjali’s yoga is yama and niyama. Without perfect observance of these ten principles no one can succeed in yoga and spiritual life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ahimsa: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness

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

and mind.”

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

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

Vyasa immediately points out that all the other abstinences and observances—yama and niyama—are really rooted in ahimsa, for they involve preventing harm to ourselves and to others through negative action or the neglect of positive action: “The other niyamas and yamas are rooted in this, and they are practiced only to bring this to its culmination, only for perfecting this. They are taught only as means to bring this out in its purity. For so it is said: ‘Whatever many vows the man of Brahman [God] would undertake, only in so far as he thereby refrains from doing harm impelled by delusion, does he bring out ahimsa in its purity.’” And Shankara explains that Vyasa is referring to delusion that is “rooted in violence and causing violence.”

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

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

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

It is no simple thing to be a yogi.

Satya: truthfulness, honesty

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is interesting that Vyasa considers that truthful speech is informative. By that he means that truthful speech is worthwhile, relevant, and practical. To babble mindlessly and grind out verbal trivia is also a form of untruth, even if not objectively false. Nor is foolish speech to anyone’s gain. Sometimes also people lie

by “snowing” us with a barrage of words intended to deflect us from our inquiries. And nearly all of us who went to college remember the old game of padding out written assignments, giving lots of form but little content in hope of fooling the teachers into thinking the student knew the subject well and was saying something worthwhile—even profound. This is one of today’s most lucrative businesses, especially in the advertising world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Asteya: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriation

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

What constitutes ordinary stealing is well known to almost all, but human beings have thought up countless ways to steal and not seem to be stealing—all the way from putting slugs in pay telephones to getting people to give us things or money which we neither need nor deserve. Theft and untruth are certainly interrelated. So we must analyze Vyasa’s definition and apply it to our situation. But we can consider a few “fudges” that have become respectable and prevalent.

Taking credit that really belongs to another.

Plagiarism, especially in academic matters.

Taking what is not ours, while pretending that we either own it or have it

coming to us.

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

Demanding more than a just price or a just wage.

No paying debts—including taxes.

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

Not giving to others what we owe them or what we are legally or morally obligated to give.

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

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

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

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

Brahmacharya: continence

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

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

Basically, brahmacharya is conservation and mastery of all the energy systems and powers of our being. This is especially true in relation to negative emotions, for tremendous energy is expended through lust, anger, greed, envy, hatred, resentment, depression, fear, obsession, and the rest. Further, they are both the

causes and the symptoms of losing self-control, a major aspect of brahmacharya. Research has shown that persons in the grip of these emotions literally breathe out vital elements of the body. For example, the breath of angry people is found to be laden with copper. So negative emotion depletes us physically as well as energetically. Positive emotions on the other hand actually enhance and raise our energy and physical levels. The cultivation of (true) love, compassion, generosity, cheerfulness, friendliness, and suchlike make us stronger and calmer—essential aspects of brahmacharya. It is noteworthy that the word “virtue” is derived from the Latin word *virtus*—power—which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit word *virya*, which means both power and strength.

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

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

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

The Prashna Upanishad concludes: “To them alone is this brahma world, in whom austerity, chastity and truth are established” (Prashna Upanishad 1:15). The Gita speaks of the worthy yogis as being “firm in the brahmachari’s vow.” (Bhagavad Gita 6:14)

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

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

Aparigraha includes the ideas of non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-

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

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

People do literally lose themselves in "stuff," for they adopt a completely false self-concept. To think that we are what we "have" is to forget who and why we are. Aparigraha clears the inner eye and lets us see our true "face."

The Great Vow

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

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

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

change it. Not even to save our lives can we turn from what is forever right.

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

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

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

Shaucha: purity, cleanliness. Shaucha means purity and cleanliness within the context of attaining unobstructed clarity of consciousness. “He is not grasped by the eye nor even by speech nor by other sense-organs, nor by austerity nor by work, but when one’s (intellectual) nature is purified by the light of knowledge then alone he, by meditation, sees Him who is without parts” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.8). “When nature is pure, memory becomes firm. When memory [smṛiti—memory of our eternal spirit-Self] remains firm, there is release from all knots of the heart. To such a one who has his stains wiped away, Bhagavan Sanatkumara shows the further shore of darkness” (Chandogya Upanishad 7:26:2). Which is why Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) And Saint John: “Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” (I John 3:2-3)

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

Physical cleanliness is important for it eliminates bodily toxins and prevents disease. Inner purification is important for it eliminates mental toxins and prevents inner ills. For the yogi, the most important external aspect of shaucha is purity of diet. This is because the food we eat determines the vibration of our body and our mind. For this reason it is only wisdom to eat a purely vegetarian diet.

Those who carefully—yes, scrupulously—adhere to a vegetarian diet, omitting all meat, fish, and eggs, and avoiding anything that contains them to any degree will perceive how valuable it is to keep such a dietary regimen. (Again, see *Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet*.) Not only will their general health improve greatly (assuming that they eat a balanced and nutritious vegetarian diet), they will see how much lighter and intuitive their minds become. A vegetarian diet greatly facilitates the practice of meditation, making very subtle states of consciousness

readily attainable and perceptible. Those who have eaten meat, fish, and eggs for a long time may have to wait a while before fully gaining the benefits of vegetarianism, but it will not be long before they begin to see its beneficial effects to some degree.

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

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

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

Santosha: contentment, peacefulness

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

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

freedom from the “bigger and more is better” syndrome that grips most of us.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Swadhyaya: introspective Self-study, spiritual study

Swadhyaya means “Self-study.” This is usually interpreted as the study of the sacred texts which deal with the nature of the true Self (spirit) and its realization. “Swadhyaya is study of works on liberation (moksha),” says Vyasa. “Swadhyaya is study of works on liberation such as the Upanishads,” comments Shankara. But it also means keeping a careful watch on the ego-based mind so as to be aware of its

delusive and destructive tricks. For it is no external “devil” or “Satan” we need fear, but the “enemy within,” the “Dweller at the Threshold” which is our ego-mind complex that has blinded and enslaved us from life to life and has no intention of giving up its domination of us just because we practice a bit of meditation. Therefore we must be wary of its cunning and subtle ways and carefully analyze the debris it casts up into our consciousness in the form of thoughts and emotions. In this way we will see the direction in which it would pull us. We must take our susceptibility to its machinations most seriously. In swadhyaya we look at and analyze the mind in the calmness and intuition born of meditation.

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

Ishwarapranidhana: offering of one’s life to God

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

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

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

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

It is incontrovertible, then, that yoga is a thoroughly *theistic* endeavor, one which makes God the center of life and its aim, as well.

The results of perfection (siddhi) in yama and niyama

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

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

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

Perfection in ahimsa

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

Perfection in satya

“On being firmly established in truthfulness [satya], the result of action rests upon him alone.” (Yoga Sutra 2:36) Luckily, we have quite a few authoritative commentaries to elucidate this obscure language. All are unanimous in saying that when the yogi is firmly established in truth in all its aspects, then whatever he says or wills comes about without any action being needed to produce it. As Vyasa explains: “When he says: ‘Be righteous,’ that man becomes righteous; told by him: ‘Do you attain heaven,’ that one attains heaven. His word is infallible.” “When truth is firm in him, events confirm his words,” adds Shankara. Yogananda gives an example of this in the first chapter of his autobiography. My friend, Sri Abani Lahiri, told me that his grandfather had the same power even as a child. Once he became angry with another little boy and said, “You should die!” Immediately that boy became deathly ill and was declared by the doctors to have only a few hours of life remaining. When his parents were told, “That Brahmin boy told him to die,” they called for him and asked him to tell their son to live. He did so, and the boy was immediately well. Jesus, too, had this power as a child and had to learn how to control it, as recorded in the “apocryphal” gospels. By the power of his word Sri Ramakrishna caused hibiscus blossoms of two different colors to grow on the same plant. At the end of his earthly life, anyone who heard Sri Ramakrishna speak of spiritual awakening became spiritually awakened.

Perfection in asteya

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

Perfection in brahmacharya

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

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

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

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

Perfection in aparigraha

“On non-possessiveness [aparigraha] being confirmed there arises knowledge of the ‘how’ and ‘wherefore’ of existence.” (Yoga Sutra 2:39) Regarding this Vyasa says: “‘What is this birth? How does it take place? What do we become [both in this life and after death], who shall we be and in what circumstances shall we be?’ Any such desire of his to know his situation in former, later, and intermediate states is spontaneously gratified.” Nothing is more bewildering to the human being than his existence in this world—particularly the how and why of his even being here—no matter how much external philosophy in the form of books or teachers may attempt to answer the gnawing questions set forth by Vyasa. The reality of the situation is this: until the individual knows for himself by direct perception gained through his own development, life must remain a confusing mystery for him. Since the yogi is attempting to extricate himself from the bonds of birth and death, it is imperative

for him to know the why and wherefore of human embodiment in all its aspects. He does not need more theory, however plausible and appealing; he needs to know. This knowledge comes from within when all blocks to communication with his inmost consciousness are removed. For this birth has been determined solely by him in his nature as a potentially omniscient and omnipotent spirit. Perfection in non-possessiveness bestows the needed insight. "Since he has no attachment to outer possessions, illumination of the field of his own Self appears without effort on his part," explains Shankara.

Perfection in shaucha

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

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

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

Patanjali is not finished with the matter of shaucha. Since body and mind are inextricably related, he continues: "From mental purity arises purity of the inner nature, cheerfulness, one-pointedness, control of the senses, and fitness for the

vision of the Self.” (Yoga Sutra 2:41) Nobody has objection to these, I am sure. When the inner bodies are pure they are refined and fluid, capable of the most subtle practice of yoga and reaching the highest states of consciousness. This state of inner purity is particularly accomplished by thought and diet.

For the inwardly pure there is no need for artificial “positive thinking.” Cheerfulness and optimism rise up from within him as a matter of course. And continue arising. Gone forever are mood swings and the “ups and downs” of life. No more valleys or mountaintops: he soars in the sunlit sky of the spirit as naturally as the eagle flies in the air. Whether engaged in outer or inner activity, his mind is intent upon its purpose, no longer scattered or flapping like a flag in the wind. One-pointed meditation becomes effortless for him. No longer does he struggle with the unruly senses and the mind about which Arjuna says, “The mind is truly unstable, troubling, strong and unyielding. I believe it is hard to control—as hard to control as the wind” (Bhagavad Gita 6:34).

Perfection in santosha

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

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

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

“Of what nature is this joy?

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

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

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

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

Pitris in their paradise.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“One hundred times the joy of Prajapati is one unit of the joy of Brahma: but no less joy than Brahma has the seer to whom the Self has been revealed, and who is without craving.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.8.1)

Perfection in tapas

“Perfection of the sense-organs and body result after destruction of impurity by tapas.” (Yoga Sutra 2:43) Tapas is like the fire that refines gold through the burning out of all impurities. In relation to the body, tapas removes its limitations and defects. This has been shown by scientific studies: “Everyone around the water cooler knows that meditation reduces stress. But with the aid of advanced brain-scanning technology, researchers are beginning to show that meditation directly affects the function and structure of the brain, changing it in ways that appear to increase attention span, sharpen focus and improve memory. One recent study found evidence that the daily practice of meditation thickened the parts of the brain’s cerebral cortex responsible for decision making, attention and memory. Sara Lazar, a research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital, presented preliminary results last November that showed that the gray matter of twenty men and women who meditated for just forty minutes a day was thicker than that of people who did not.... What’s more, her research suggests that meditation may slow the natural thinning of that section of the cortex that occurs with age.” (*How to Get Smarter, One Breath At A Time*, Lisa Takeuchi Cullen. *Time*, January 16, 2006, p. 93.) “There was a study reported at the American Geriatric Association convention in 1979 involving forty-seven participants whose average age was 52.5 years. It found that people who had been meditating more than seven years were approximately twelve years younger physiologically than those of the same chronological age who were not meditating.” (Gabriel Cousens, M.D., *Conscious Eating*, p. 281.)

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

Perfection in swadhyaya

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

Perfection in Ishwarapranidhana

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

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

Self-realization: the goal

“This Self within the body, of the nature of light and pure, is attainable by truth, by austerity, by right knowledge, by the constant (practice) of chastity. Him, the ascetics with their imperfections done away, behold” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.5).

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

About the Author

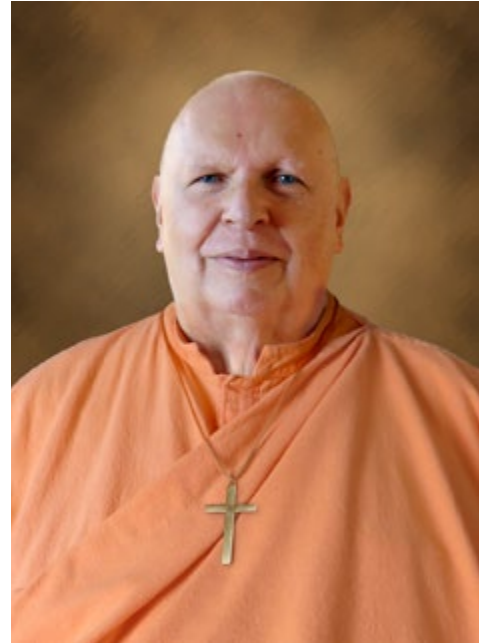
Abbot George Burke (Swami Nirmalananda Giri) is the founder and director of the Light of the Spirit Monastery (Atma Jyoti Ashram) in Cedar Crest, New Mexico, USA.

In his many pilgrimages to India, he had the opportunity of meeting some of India's greatest spiritual figures, including Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and Anandamayi Ma. During his first trip to India he was made a member of the ancient Swami Order by Swami Vidyananda Giri, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, who had himself been given sannyas by the Shankaracharya of Puri, Jagadguru Bharati Krishna Tirtha.

In the United States he also encountered various Christian saints, including Saint John Maximovich of San Francisco and Saint Philaret Voznesensky of New York. He was ordained in the Liberal Catholic Church (International) to the priesthood on January 25, 1974, and consecrated a bishop on August 23, 1975.

For many years Abbot George has researched the identity of Jesus Christ and his teachings with India and Sanatana Dharma, including Yoga. It is his conclusion that Jesus lived in India for most of his life, and was a yogi and Sanatana Dharma missionary to the West. After his resurrection he returned to India and lived the rest of his life in the Himalayas.

He has written extensively on these and other topics, many of which are posted at OCOY.org.



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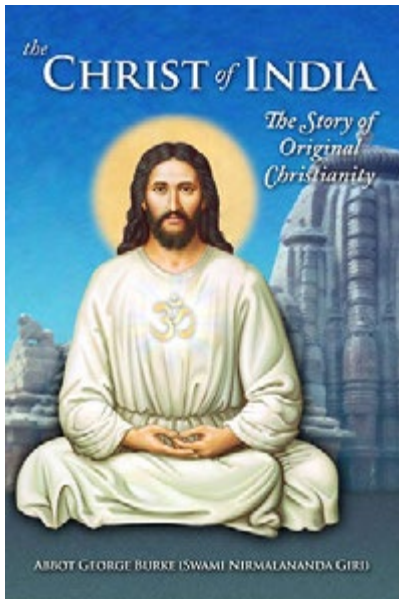
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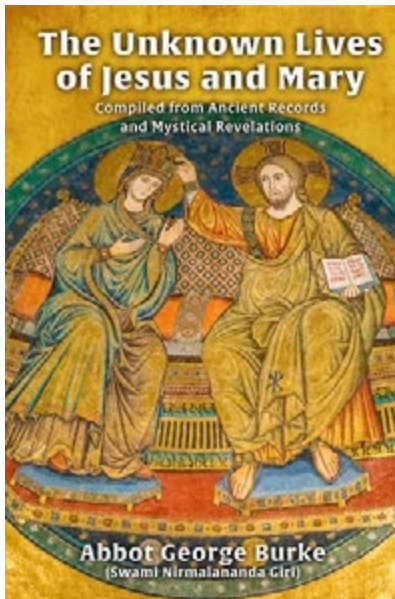
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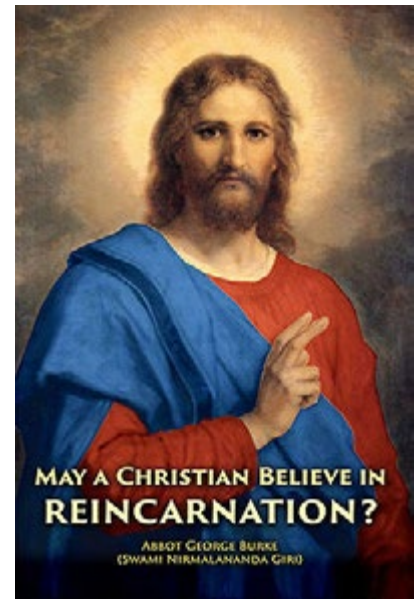
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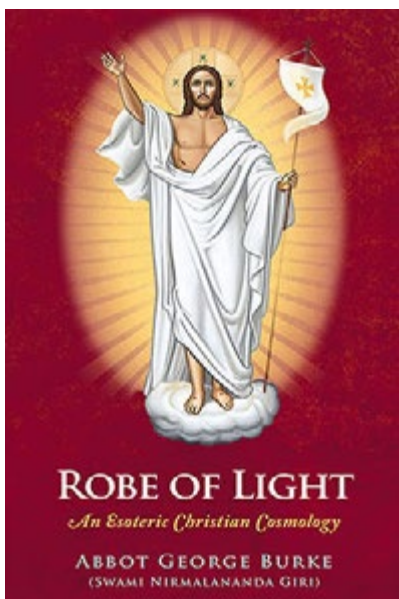
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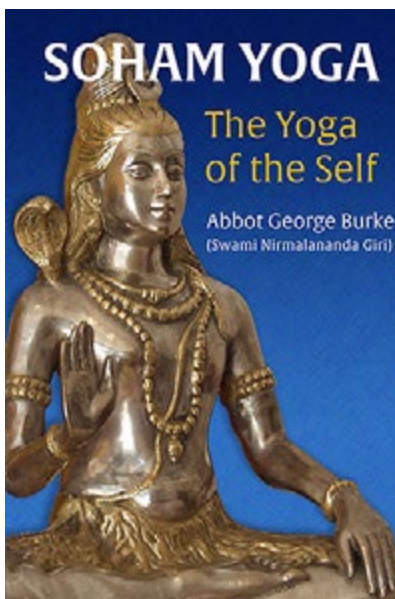
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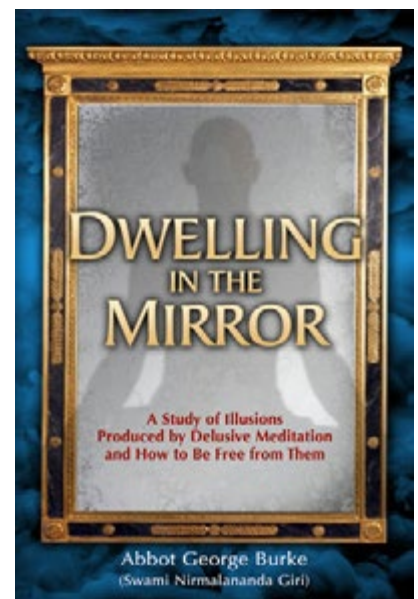
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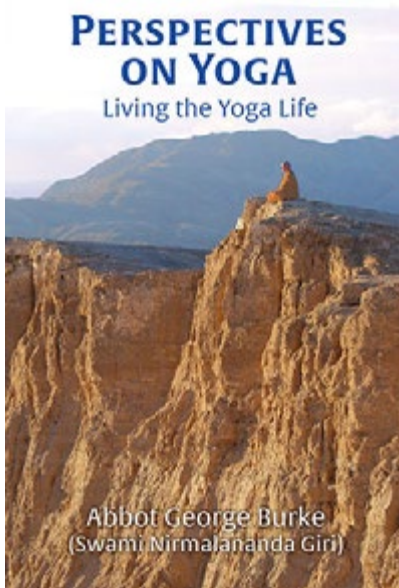
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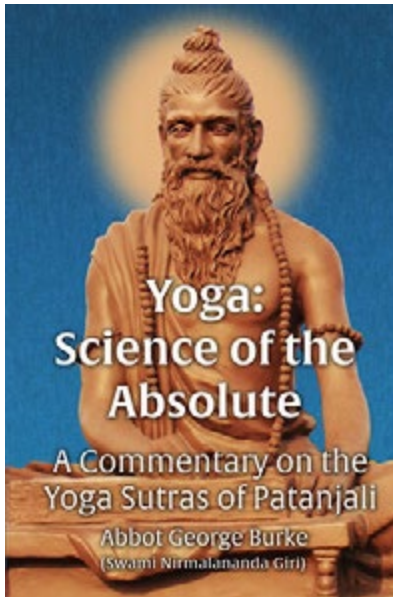
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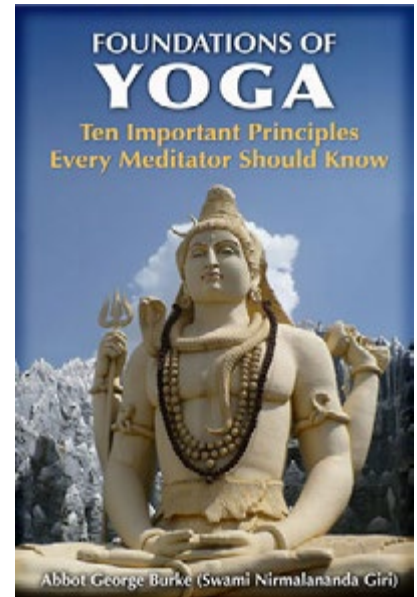
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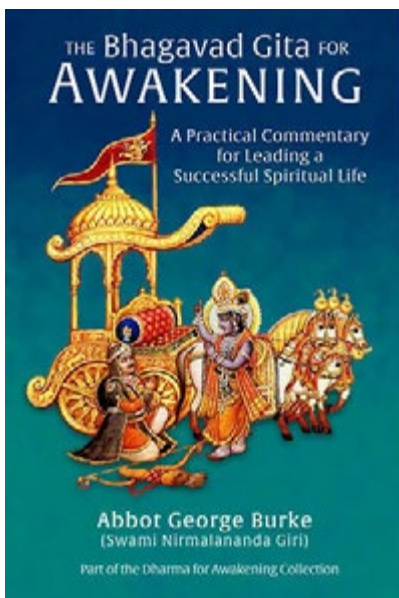
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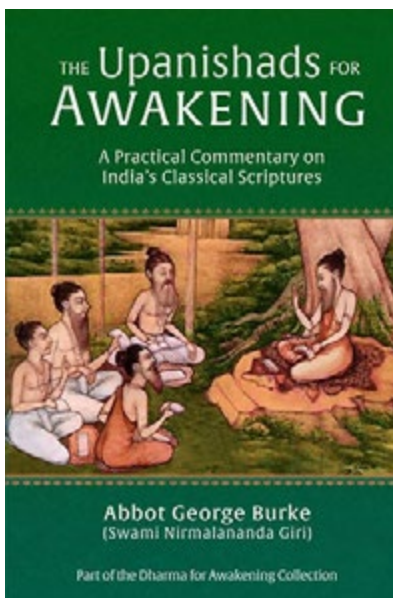
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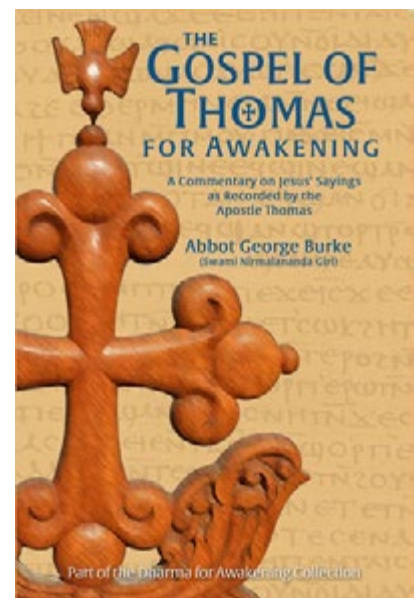
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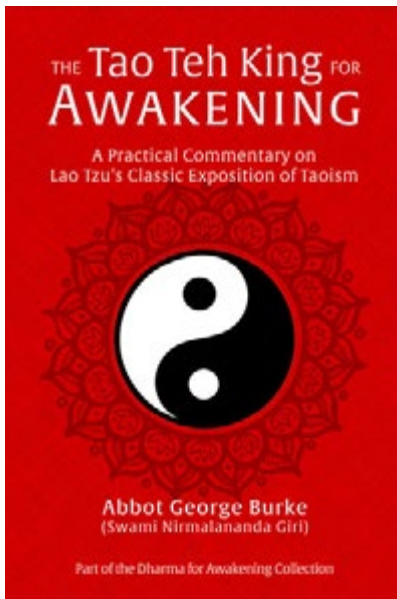
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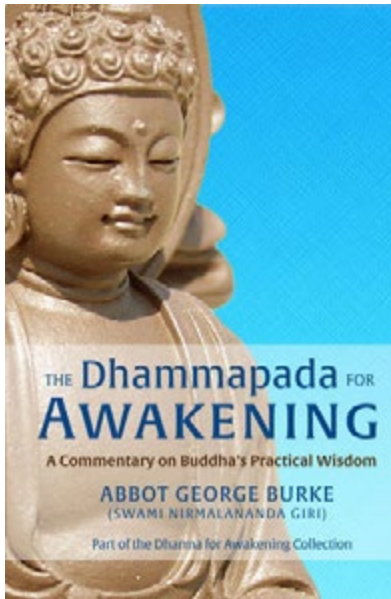
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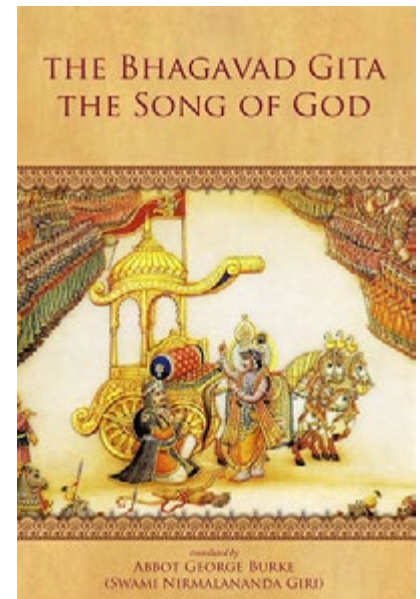
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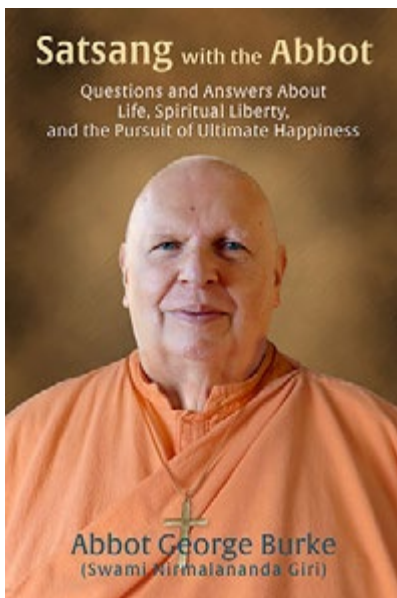
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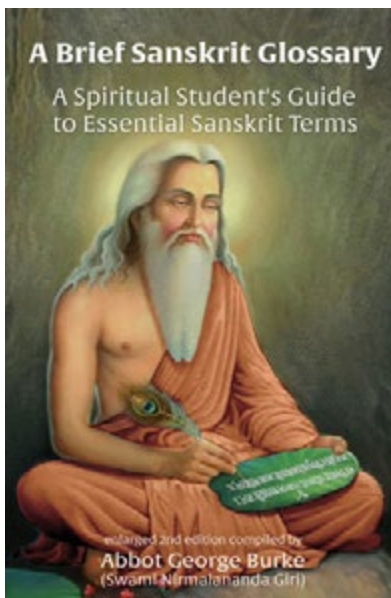
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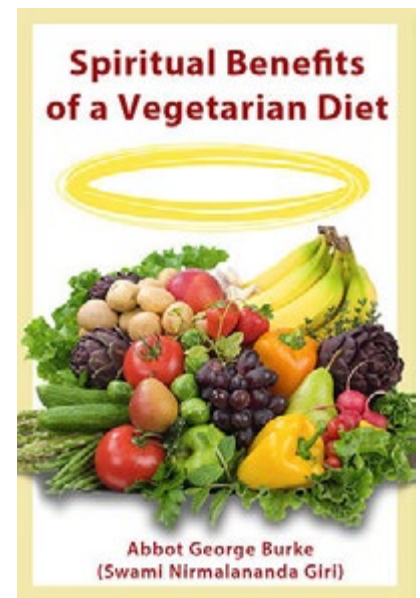
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