

The Inspired Wisdom of Sri Gajanana Maharaj



A Practical Commentary on Leading
an Effectual Spiritual Life

Swami Nirmalananda Giri
(Abbot George Burke)

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A Commentary By

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(Abbot George Burke)

“The series of difficulties which a person has to undergo in this worldly life in due course awakens a desire in him to find out this path leading to unchanging and everlasting happiness.

“He then tries his utmost to discover this path, but he is almost always groping in the dark.

“The main object in writing this is to shed light in this darkness, and to illumine the path for the sake of these struggling human souls.”

(Sri Gajanana Maharaj in *Atmaprabha—The Light of the Self*).

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Foreword

In the foreword to my book *Light of Soham* I wrote:

“Over half a century ago I was blessed and fortunate to discover Sanatana Dharma and Yoga. Two years later I discovered India as my spiritual home. I eagerly took in everything without discrimination and in the ensuing years began sifting through all I had embraced with increasing scrutiny and discrimination. The capstone of this process was my completely accidental discovery of the life and teachings of Sri Gajanana Maharaj (Gajanana Murlidhar Gupte) which was a veritable revelation to me of what a true yogi and ideal master teacher should be, shorn of so much superstition, nonsense and charlatanry regarding gurus and disciples that prevail today in India and abroad—and at that time, in my own mind.

“For over fifty years I had been reading books from India, many of which I had collected myself during my various pilgrimages to India. And during those pilgrimages I had met or seen and heard many renowned yogis and gurus—and some unknown great ones in obscure and unexpected places. Every one of them left a sacred impression in my mind and heart. Yet in reading about Sri Gajanana Maharaj I encountered a holy personality that eclipsed all others for me. I still revered the others, but in the words of Maharaj I found a unique wisdom that altered my perspective on what yoga, yogis and gurus should be. There, too, I discovered the authentic Nath Yogi tradition of Soham Yoga which is to be found in my book *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*. (The life of Gajanana Maharaj is found in my book *Light of Soham*.)

“Those who read this book and ponder its contents thoroughly and well will surely agree with Mr. Ambadas Gopal Paithankar, who said to the matchless yogi, ‘Maharaj, I see in you what I have never seen before, and I hear things explained by you in a manner never heard by me before,’ and the simple reply of Maharaj, ‘What you say is true.’”

Over time I came to realize that much of Gajanana Maharaj’s teachings which naturally assumed a wide knowledge of Yoga and Dharma (Sanatana Dharma) on the part of his Indian friends would only be partially understood by many Western readers through no fault of their own, however sincere their desire to do so. They needed a clarification and even an expansion of his meaning to get the right understanding of his words. This is especially true considering the words of an anonymous disciple of Maharaj who wrote about his biography (which is included in *Light of Soham*): “I think that the present work—the life of Sri Gajanana Maharaj—has come into existence for the sake of those human souls who have been reborn in the Western Countries, but were in their previous lives followers of the Nath Pantha.”

This commentary is meant to help my friends who, like me, have found the words of Gajanana Maharaj a “light in the darkness” (Psalms 112:4).

I continue to read the words of Gajanana Maharaj over and over and hope you will do the same. The words of Maharaj are in bold and my comments in regular type.

Since Maharaj uses a great deal of technical terms, I have included a Glossary at the end.

The Inspired Wisdom of Sri Gajanana Maharaj

Dear N., you must have read various books on this subject, but I have told this to you in brief, not from what I have read but from what I have experienced in myself. You will be fully convinced of its truth when you also will get that Self-experience.

Countless books have been written about yoga and meditation, but they nearly always prove to be valueless except for the opportunists who wrote and published them. A true yogi does not repeat back what he has read, but speaks from his own direct experience—from the transformation of his consciousness. Such a yogi does not ask others to “believe” anything, but rather to practice and discover for themselves what is true. And once he tells them the process of meditation his work is ended and they are able to go on through their own sadhana practice.

Right from the beginning a yogi must be totally self-reliant. Certainly he needs to learn the process of meditation, but that is very simple, something even a child can do. He does not depend on anyone or anything but his own self-effort. Unlike false gurus who are slave-takers, a genuine teacher shows the aspirant how to liberate himself through meditation. And then his task is done. This is very well illustrated by the life of Sri Gajanana Maharaj. (See *Light of Soham*.)

In comparatively modern times, various modern learned men have written commentaries on the Yoga Shastra, but I have heard that they have committed many mistakes. The old commentators were much better because their commentaries are based more upon solid reasoning calculated to satisfy the intellect. But these latter commentators have covered the yogic lore with mystery and created an atmosphere of difficulty about it. These later commentators, instead of explaining all things more openly and on a scientific basis, have made the Yoga Shastra a bogey and rendered it more incomprehensible. The only advantage they got from doing so was the absolute power which they could exercise over their disciples, in their capacity as so-called “gurus.”

This is very true. I have wasted money and time by reading “authoritative” commentaries on the Yoga Sutras. My book *Yoga: Science of the Absolute* may be helpful, but practice alone reveals the nature of yoga. And for that I recommend *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*.

This path of meditation has been shown to you by me. But the result or success will depend upon everyone’s keenness in practicing and his faith in the Self.

No need for “guru’s grace” or even the blessing of God. Once someone who had

failed in his conduct asked Yogananda for his blessing to correct himself. Yogananda told him: “You have my blessing and you have God’s blessing. What is missing is *your* blessing!” The yogi will go only as far as his own practice will take him. God and guru have nothing to do with it.

Consider Self-experience as your real sadguru. Then there will be no necessity of relying upon the words of others, however great they be.

Mistaken ideas of humility have no place in yoga sadhana. The yogi must take every step himself and understand every step taken and the results of every step. “Trust and Obey” (the title of a popular Protestant hymn) is never the way. Do and Learn is the way. But of course this can only be said in the context of real yoga: Soham Yoga. False yoga leads its practitioners further away from truth and reality at every step.

Hence I say there is nothing secret in this path. What little I have told you has been told freely and with frankness.

And that “little” was all that is needed. In Chapter Two of *Soham Yoga* I wrote exactly what Sri Gajanana Maharaj told people:

“The two supreme yogis of India’s history, Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath, and the Yoga Chudamani Upanishad have each made three identical statements that are most important for the yogi, for they present the essence of Soham Sadhana.

“1) The inhalation comes in with the subtle sound of *So*, and the exhalation goes out with the subtle sound of *Ham* (“Hum”).

“2) There is no knowledge equal to this, nor has there ever been in the past or shall be in the future any knowledge equal to this.

“3) There is no japa equal to this, nor has there ever been in the past or shall be in the future any japa equal to this.”

You should not pay any attention to miracles because they are absolutely useless.

Why are miracles not just useless, but *absolutely* useless? Because they are external and material and therefore externalize and materialize our awareness, fixing our minds on material and external values and attainments. In other words, they bind us closer to the illusions of the world in which our ego happily dwells intent on them to the exclusion of any awareness and orientation of consciousness toward the inner, immaterial life. Certainly they proceed from subtle energies, but that just strengthens subtle illusions and delusions. Also, false religion and false “spiritual” teachers, including false gurus, traffic in these things, which are often fraudulent or even non-existent and therefore lies. To believe that miracles are proof of spiritual elevation or even good character is a perilous delusion. Yet they get many disciples for such gurus.

Miracle-workers may not be frauds, but their pathway is a downward one, as is that of their admirers and followers. I personally know of miraculous people who ended up moral and mental wrecks. One healer that I saw perform absolutely astounding cures and instant changes in sufferers’ bodies ended up claiming to be the prophet Elijah

returned to earth (not reincarnated, for his Fundamentalist Protestant religion did not believe in reincarnation) to herald the end of the world. In fact, his son and his travel manager told me of his visions of worldwide devastation in which the year of their happening was revealed to him. Half a century has passed since that year and nothing of the revelations has occurred.

Utter moral wrecks in East and West may work miracles and possess amazing psychic abilities. The famous Amy Semple Macpherson, founder of her own (Foursquare Gospel) church was a drug, alcohol and sex addict, yet she possessed healing and clairvoyant abilities. Friends of mine knew her and personally experienced her abilities. Yet she committed suicide.

Every step in this path of yoga should be minutely scrutinized by the inner sight and tested by experience and reasoning.

But how will a person have the necessary inner sight, experience and reasoning? First, just through their innate intelligence. But mostly through their own insight gained by their sadhana practice which must be supported by the observance of the principles of yama-niyama.

I would never tell you to place your blind faith in anyone, as I consider that to do so leads to self-ruin.

Blind faith certainly leads to inner and outer destruction, but it is necessary for the continuance of yoga and guru cults. Notice that Maharaj says *self-ruin*. Ultimately considered, it is not the fake guru or the fake yoga, but the cooperation, willful blindness, rationalization and continuing “loyalty” of the dupe-disciple that destroys him. I do not speak just from observation but from my own unfortunate experiences spanning half a century of being a willing slave and denier of my own truth—a betrayer of my own Self.

Awaken your discriminating power, test everything in the light of your experience as you test gold in fire and on the touchstone.

The first step in awakening and developing your discriminating power (viveka) is to use what you have already. Meditation supports the growth of discrimination also because it clarifies and intensifies the power of the mind (buddhi). The very experience of meditation accomplishes this because all the experiences of authentic yoga meditation occur as the mind and consciousness are being expanded and evolved.

Of course, I am speaking only of Soham meditation. Based on decades of practicing dud yogas and following dud gurus (“dud” is a very mild word for them), I can tell you from my own experience that Soham sadhana alone truly develops atmic awareness, whereas the false yogas delude through experiences of subtle energies and not liberation of consciousness. As a Soham yogi you can “test everything in the light of your experience as you test gold in fire and on the touchstone.” *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self* and *Light of Soham* show you how.

If you think that there is some sense in what I say, try to realize it in your experience.

Do not just accept and believe, but experience it yourself by the diligent practice of Soham sadhana.

There is no cause of fear in this path. Truth can be proclaimed in broad daylight to thousands of people. There is no danger to it.

One of the things I experienced very quickly after beginning Soham Yoga practice was the absence of fear and doubt. What a relief! But I also realized that my previous yoga practice was so worthless as to be virtually non-existent. And that my fake gurus had been equally worthless. Yet I did not blame or resent them for my wasted time and insecurity because I was so happy and secure as a result of Soham japa and meditation.

For that reason I do not hesitate to tell people the truth about false gurus and their false yogas. But that is only secondary. For I can confidently tell people about the ways of true teachers and the practice and effects of true yoga. For Soham sadhana is the key to reality—both of the Self and the Supreme Self. My very first public talk on meditation half a century ago was called “Yoga: Key To Reality.” But I did not know what I was talking about. Now I do know, and I share it with you. And I can assure you that Maharaj has spoken total truth: there is no danger of harm in the practice of Soham Yoga.

You should, however, keep away from pseudo-saints.

In India the word “saint” is used for monks (sadhus) and gurus. Certainly most monks are not saints and nearly all “gurus” are neither saints nor yogis. The serious yogi should, as Gajanana Maharaj advises, stay away from fake yogis, fake gurus and their fake disciples. For very real harm can result from their association—especially from those gurus that have a power in their words to deceive others.

This is no mythology. I well remember how when I was visiting Sivanandashram in 1963 one of the residents there told me about a yogi living across the Ganges: “Several Westerners who stayed here have met X. Yogi. They told me that whatever he said seemed like truth when they were with him, but when they came away they realized he was speaking nonsense. Also, whatever he asked them to do, they wanted to do it until they left his ashram and realized that his request would be harmful to them if they followed through on it. We are very concerned.” Just a few years later that yogi became the most famous guru known in the West at that time, and many people were harmed psychologically (and some also physically) by the made-up yoga he had “discovered” and taught. Later that year I met him and he asked me to run his American organization. Never.

During the Yoga Boom of the 'sixties in America I met several other eager and mercenary “gurus” from India and became acquainted with them. More than one disciple of one such “guru” told me, “When I speak with him, he seems to be speaking profound and practical wisdom, but the moment I hang up the phone I realize that he had really said nothing—just empty words that sounded good at the time but really

meant nothing when I thought them over.” This false guru taught mantras that confused the mental energies of his disciples. Therefore most of them really did not meditate at all, or only minimally, but kept up the guru-adulation. Some of them came to me in real trouble mentally and physically. I told them to simply stop the japa of the mantra. In each instance they would come back in half an hour or less and say in wonderment: “My problems are all gone! Can it be the mantra that caused them?” And I would tell them to judge for themselves. They did, and all of them severed connections with the guru and his organization.

The sad thing was that nearly all the disciples of these fake gurus eventually dropped all interest in meditation and reverted to their old unconscious ways of life. Some became very bitter about being duped and became active denouncers of yoga and meditation.

I assure you that Gajanana Maharaj was not being negative and narrow-minded. Some of his students had been severely damaged by fake yoga mentally and physically. Soham sadhana was their healing and salvation.

Those who merely rely on their guru without trying to get any Self-experience weaken the power of themselves and will find themselves deluded in the end.

This is a very important fact. I know, because through the years many of my friends that were involved (they thought) in yoga suffered the harm described here by Gajanana Maharaj. This deadly delusion that prevails in India and now abroad has ruined many aspirants because they innocently believed such outrageous lies as:

Sadhana (meditation) without a guru is useless.

Devotion to the guru (guru bhakti) is the whole of spiritual life.

The guru’s grace is everything.

There is no salvation (liberation) without having a guru.

If you are in tune with the guru your salvation is assured.

Your relationship with the guru has existed from eternity.

Those who take refuge in the guru can never be harmed or go wrong.

If God is pleased but the guru is displeased there is no hope for the disciple. If God is displeased but the guru is pleased the disciple is safe.

Every word from the guru’s mouth is a mantra.

The guru has done everything for the disciple, who need only trust in and rely on the guru.

You do not really need to do anything but love and obey the guru.

At the time of death the guru will come and bestow liberation on the disciple.

The guru is God.

The guru is the only God the disciple can know.

Having myself ascribed fervently to these utter delusions that really are blasphemies against both God and the divine Self of the disciple, I well know how deadly and destructive they really are. And I well remember the horror I felt whenever I heard any of the above principles questioned or denied. It took many decades before I finally admitted the falsehood of these ridiculous ideas and fantasies about The Guru.

Gajanana Maharaj presents the two great errors of “disciples.” 1) They rely totally on the guru. 2) They erode and weaken themselves—their own self-power. And if they ever do awaken from these errors (and many never do) they will discover that they are completely deluded as the result of these two follies.

Those who say that yoga is a secret lore are either deceivers and cheats or imperfect yogis, and it is better to keep at a distance from them because they bring a stigma on that celestial science and contribute to its decadence.

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

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

I do not understand Vedanta and its theories. I am, however, seeking in myself my own Self which is one and beyond all these things, which is eternal, which is life and which is joy incarnate.

Gajanana Maharaj does not “understand Vedanta and its theories” because false Vedanta (about which he is speaking) and its theories are foolish and absolutely untrue. There is a tremendous amount of spurious “Advaita” and “Non-dualism” current today. They are simplistic and irrational to the maximum degree, and its teachers and adherents would declare that I say this because I just do not “understand” it. And Maharaj acknowledges that he does not “understand” it either, because it is utter nonsense and juggling of words.

However, Gajanana Maharaj speaks of “seeking in myself my own Self.” There is the

higher Self and the lower self. The lower self is our physical, astral and causal bodies, which include the mind and intellect, and the higher Self is the pure spirit itself, the jivatman, the individual Self which, as Maharaj says, “is one and beyond all these [relative] things, which is eternal, which is life and which is joy incarnate” since it has the Paramatman, the Supreme Self, as its inmost essence. Both the jivatman and the Paramatman are that “which is eternal, which is life and which is joy incarnate.” For our true Self, though not Divinity is yet divine, being a part of Divinity, just as a wave is part of the ocean. The ocean is the wave, but the wave is not the (entire) ocean. Obviously the most urgent and intelligent thing in life is to seek, enter and know our Self and be permanently established in that experiential Knowing.

Mathure: It is said that one must have the support (adhishtana) of God. Please explain to me what is meant by this.

Maharaj: Mathure, you have learnt too much Vedanta. I myself feel that there is no support of any thing to any other thing. Do not pay any attention to the above-mentioned saying regarding the support of God. Try to get the support of your own Self.

God is not a “thing” that will serve as a support for anything in relative existence. The only support we have is our own Self, the Adhyatma, which exists in God alone. And the Self is only known through Yoga sadhana–Soham sadhana specifically.

Make the three things one: the meditator, the act of meditation and the entity to be meditated upon. And be absorbed into the state of joy.

Everything has come out of the Divine Unity, including us. In the highest levels of yoga meditation, the distinctions of the meditator, the act of meditation and the entity to be meditated upon do not exist. There is only the consciousness of Unity. Only the yogi experiences this.

It will be of no use reading and discussing about what is written in thousands of books.

The absolute reality, Brahman, is also the sole reality. Yoga alone reveals Brahman to the yogi. Therefore discussions and debates about what has been written in philosophical books have no value and lead nowhere but to more discussion and confusion.

If your conduct is pure, if you try to follow the principles of morality, and your mind is full of disinterested devotion and you repeat the mantra given by your guru, your mind is sure to be ultimately purified. He who experiences the joy of his own Self naturally and easily follows these rules of conduct!

False gurus claim that a person need only practice the false yoga methods they teach and “automatically” they will get benefit and eventual enlightenment. This is not true. Even Soham sadhana will accomplish nothing if the Soham yogi’s life and mind are not

pure and he does not follow the principles of morality—of yama and niyama. Here is their definition from *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary*:

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. These five are called the Great Vow (Observance, Mahavrata) in the Yoga Sutras.

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.

They are fully explained in the sixth chapter, Foundations of Yoga, in *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*.

There is a false, egocentric devotion to God that is just for personal gain and is only a mirage. True devotion, however, is centered on the realization of God through realization of the Self, and not for selfish, egocentric satisfaction or gain.

The final sutra of the Brahma Sutras is: “By sound one becomes liberated [*Anavrittih shabdai*]” (Brahma Sutras 4.4.22). 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. Sound joined to the breath is the beginning, middle, and end of our meditation practice. Consequently, mentally repeating [intoning], listening to and experiencing the effects of our inner intonations of Soham in time with the breath is the heart of Soham Yoga.

Application of the foregoing is a guarantee of purification of the mind.

Through Soham sadhana the yogi soon begins experiencing the nature of his own Self as ananda—bliss—and happily and easily follows the practice and principles Maharaj has outlined above.

The real mission of saints in this world is to guide aspirants on the spiritual path.

This is the sole purpose of true yogis who teach meditation to aspirants. They are not interested in their students considering them their guru, or loving or honoring them. They simply point out the simple and direct way to Self-realization and stand aside to let them attain that realization by their own effort. They will of course give advice or clarification regarding the students' practice and experiences, but that is all. They will not permit a will-weakening dependence upon them or the idea that they are God's messengers that should be prostrated before, served and adulated. Just the opposite. They help the student to become free and independent.

Gajanana Maharaj embodied this himself. He prohibited his friends (which is what he called his students—not “disciples”) from moving to Nashik to be near him. Further, after a friend had gained experience and made some progress in Soham sadhana, he would sometimes tell him that he did not need to visit him any more. As one friend wrote in a publication, “There is not even the idea of any dependence on him. Rather he makes us independent and free.” This was in total contrast with the manipulative,

emotional idea of a guru being eternally destined for the disciple and “offering shelter for the ages” to those who “took refuge” in him rather than in their own eternal Self.

Gajanana Maharaj did not just practice what he preached, he *was* what he preached.

I, however, wish to impress upon you that while there are a few real saints who can be counted on one’s fingers, there are thousands of hypocrites who merely imitate the outward behavior of real saints.

In the vast land of India with its equally vast number of inhabitants, Maharaj tells us that there are not even a dozen real spiritual teachers, but “thousands of hypocrites who merely imitate the outward behavior of real saints.” Of course, there are a great number that are deluded and believe they are enlightened or commissioned by God to teach others. But a sincere ignoramus can be just as harmful to spiritual aspirants as a deliberate fraud. There is also a kind of sadly negative consolation in the realization that most “seekers” in India—and the world—do not really want to find God, anyway, but to just play what a friend of mine called “the God Game.” Like attracts like, so fake attracts fake. It is a matter of magnetism. The mind is a field of magnetic energy and goes toward that for which it has an affinity. Those who lie to themselves and delude themselves seek and find teachers that lie and delude their followers. Their negative intuition enables them to do so. Naturally, some sincere people are initially attracted and fooled by fakes because of their sincere intentions, but they will eventually recognize the fakery and leave it.

People in the world cannot recognize real worth. They cannot recognize a real gem but are attracted by the tinsel luster of false diamonds. It is difficult under these circumstances to find out the worth of a genuine coin.

It all comes back to the basic vibration of a person’s mind.

A spiritual aspirant or a devotee is sure to attain the right path, provided he follows the right methods.

Now this is very important. Sincerity counts for very little in the spiritual search. Rather it is a matter of seeking in the right way, not like Simple Simon of the poem.

Simple Simon went a-hunting,
For to catch a hare;
He rode an ass about the streets,
But couldn’t find one there.

He went for to eat honey,
Out of the mustard pot;
He bit his tongue until he cried,
That was all the good he got.

He went to ride a spotted cow

That had a little calf;
She threw him down upon the ground,
Which made the people laugh.

I do not know anything else except the two syllables which have been granted to me by my sadguru.

By this he meant the two syllables of Soham. On a deeper level he means that all true wisdom/insight and all true realization of spiritual realities have come to him through the japa and meditation of Soham. His spiritual life is not just inseparable from Soham, it IS Soham since Soham in essence is the very consciousness that is the Self, the jivatman, and therefore the Supreme Self, the Paramatman, which is all things. To know Soham sadhana is to potentially know everything in knowing That which is The All.

Maharaj also means that nothing else is of any meaning or worth compared with Soham. And also that Soham is all meaning and worth. It is itself Yogeshwara, the Lord of Yoga. Soham is the source of Soham sadhana, which is the only thing that reveals the reality and nature of Soham. It is a divine duality that is really one. Soham Kevalam: Soham is Kevala–Oneness; alone; single; independent; perfect; uncompounded; the Absolute. It is also Kevala-advaita: Absolute Non-dualism culminating in liberation. The Soham yogi, then, is a Kevala Advaitin: a non-dualist intent on the attainment of the state of Kaivalya–liberation.

Dear friends, I urge upon you to practice meditation and get actual experience. If after practicing for some time you do not get any experience then say that everything is false. Real saints will always urge you to get actual experience.

Genuine spiritual teachers will not just relate their experiences or what they have read or heard from other teachers, but they will continually emphasize that you must experience everything for yourself—that until you do so you will never really know the truth, that the truth is only known by those who know the Truth of the Self which comes only from Soham sadhana.

Real teachers do not ask for “faith” or “surrender” on your part, but tell you to test everything by your own practice. Nor do they consider that their experience is enough for you. You must gain your own experience.

Those who do not tell you the direct path to Self-experience are worthless and harmful frauds—deluded themselves by false teachers.

A worthy teacher does not tell you that it will take a long time for you to gain at least a glimpse of Atmajnana, for the true sadhana path begins right away to give you some experience which will motivate you to continue—and thereby to continue to experience increasingly higher levels of consciousness. In this way they prevent you from feeling any dependence on them or anyone else.

The day you meet such a teacher is truly for you Independence Day and the door to freedom.

I only take a dose of Soham and that suffices for me.

Whatever the situation, Soham japa and meditation—even just a “dose”—will clarify things for you, even though a lot of doses are needed to become completely cured of the disease of ignorance and delusion. But right now even a little bit of Soham japa and meditation will show you that you are on the right path. And then you will persevere with confidence.

I have told you something in the capacity of a friend as I have been telling some others also. As those others are enjoying spiritual joy, you also may enjoy it. The only thing is that you must continue the practice. I do not wish to lead anyone astray, as I do not possess that art. You have to convince yourself by experience.

Just Do It. Make that your motto.

The true knowledge which is really in you, but of which you are not conscious, will manifest itself to you.

And that truth is nothing less than your own Self and the Self of your Self, the Absolute Reality, Parabrahman.

If a person has any defects, the responsibility for them lies upon him.

We cannot blame anyone other than ourselves for the conduct of others toward us, and the situations we are in are solely the result of our karma, the inevitable result of our of previous actions. And so are the defects of our minds.

You may come to me or not as you like. I do not insist on your listening to my advice and acting according to it. It is a matter which should be left to everybody’s conscience.

That is how a true sadguru—one who shows you the way to enlightenment—speaks. If you are not free in every way at every moment, you are not on the path to ultimate freedom: moksha.

I am a simple man like yourselves; only owing to keeping company with good men I have acquired the qualities of a real human being.

This is an example of Gajanana Maharaj’s humility, for he was born a siddha. However, it was the company of Sri Narayana Saraswati and other mahatmas that awakened (brought into his conscious awareness) his previously acquired Atmajnana—which was fostered by the teachers of his previous lives.

The message for us is that true humanity is not produced by mere human birth, but by becoming a conscious and persevering yogi.

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Varkaries [members of a Vaishnava sect] often say that the body is the temple and the Self is Panduranga [Krishna]. But only those will know the truth of this

statement who try to get inner spiritual experience.

Devotional talk about God gets us nowhere. We must know the God we speak about.

He alone is a true saint who has thoroughly realized the truth of Soham (I am He). His mind, intellect and his senses, and even the hair on his body, are full of the true meaning of Soham. He may or may not do any outward actions. Even though he may do certain actions, he is detached from them. He is videhi (apart from the body), like King Janaka. He looks upon worldly and spiritual things equally, and goes beyond the states of pain and pleasure. He knows the only true Being, and is always experiencing the state of unlimited joy.

Soham is the essence of our true being and must pervade all the aspects of our existence in this world at present. Maharaj is rightly saying that Soham sadhana is not abstract or only rarified in its effect, but that everything about us, even our bodies, are affected by continuous japa and meditation of Soham. You can easily find this out for yourself.

Some people say that meditating upon the Nirakara (Formless) is difficult. But in my opinion it is very easy and in addition it is natural. A man easily gets into the state of samadhi by meditating upon the Nirakara. The path of doing so is, however, concealed and secret. Once you are established in it, you can be in that state although outwardly you may be talking, laughing, playing or sleeping. This power is concealed like the river Saraswati. [The sacred Saraswati river which once flowed above ground, has for centuries been only flowing underground. *Editor's note.*] As some people have not understood this secret path, therefore they mistakenly say that it is difficult and that it would require the passing of many lives to obtain success in it.

To know the truth of this for yourself, begin and maintain the japa and meditation of Soham.

Not to see anything in meditation shows a state of concentration. When seeing is turned into non-seeing, then there is the real state of samadhi.

This is a very important fact. Playing in the mind with visualizations not only fails to produce the desired result, it strengthens our addiction to sensory experience.

Also we see from Maharaj's words that samadhi is a state of unmoving awareness, not cessation of heartbeat or breath. However, in time the breath becomes transmuted by Soham meditation practice and is revealed as the action of the Soham-Self and experienced as the movement of consciousness rather than just the movement of the lungs.

The state of complete samadhi is like the state of death, but it is a state of life after having conquered death.

Maharaj means that our consciousness goes beyond the body and enters into the

real life of the Self—which is the experience of the adept yogi when he does leave the body and thereby discovers his immortality.

If you have learnt Dhyana Yoga it is all well with you. If not, try to learn it.

The implication here is that if you do not know Soham meditation, Dhyana Yoga, then nothing is “all well” with you. But if you learn and practice Soham sadhana all will be very well with you—more than you can presently hope or imagine.

Strictly speaking, God is none else than our own Self. Every one should try to see this Self by the torch of Soham, and obtain the internal sight.

Since Soham proceeds directly from the Self, Soham sadhana reveals the Self to the Soham yogi because it opens and develops his inmost awareness.

Saints have said, “People who have obtained the internal vision are saved, while those who have only the external vision are drowned.”

Those who only experience the external world, and the external aspects of themselves that manifest and function in the external world, will be “drowned” in that state and therefore be “dead” to—unaware of—their true Self and the spiritual realms which that Self inhabits. On the other hand, those who open their spiritual sight by the japa and meditation of Soham will be delivered and saved from what is known as “the ocean of samsara.”

If you really enter inside, your true [sad] guru who is inside will automatically lead you to the right path. Otherwise you will not be able to understand clearly who is leading you on.

The true [sat/sad] guru is your own Self, the Sat, the Sole Reality. None other. But that guru is deep within you, and you can find him only by going to his abode—the very core of your being. The way to do this is not hard: the japa and meditation of Soham. This Soham sadhana will put you in touch with your Guru-Self and you will unerringly and effortlessly find and follow the right path. If, however, you follow another path you will not really understand its nature or its eventual result.

Kabir has said, “If you want to know the Eternal, you will not find Him in the Vedas, the shastras or in the Koran, in the temples or in the mosques. Tapasya, pilgrimage, breath-control, or living only on neem leaves will not lead you to him. You can find him only in your breath (Soham: So when naturally and spontaneously breathing in, and Ham when naturally and spontaneously breathing out).”

In this quotation Maharaj tells us the essence of Soham sadhana: the Soham breath.

All human beings on this earth are really gods, but only those who know themselves enjoy peace and joy.

We are gods because our Self is a wave in the ocean of the Supreme Self, the

Absolute. When we experience that Self, we alone truly experience real, total, peace and joy.

Do not entertain evil thoughts. If, however they arise in your mind, check them then and there by the mantra Soham.

“Thinking about sense-objects will attach you to sense-objects; grow attached, and you become addicted; thwart your addiction, it turns to anger; be angry, and you confuse your mind; confuse your mind, you forget the lesson of experience; forget experience, you lose discrimination; lose discrimination, and you miss life’s only purpose” (Bhagavad Gita 2:62-63). We can become addicted to negative thoughts or feelings of any kind in the way described here by the Gita. It is imperative that we stop them immediately by the repetition of Soham in time with the breath. It works.

The real mission of great saints is to teach ignorant persons how to turn inside towards their real Self. They make the human being realize that he is not insignificant and worthless, but he is really the beloved child of God.

This is just the opposite of false gurus, no matter how much they may expound Advaitic platitudes. First of all, they cannot teach anyone how to turn inside to their true Self because they do not know how to do that themselves. They only know false yoga—not that they really care that it is fake, because their purpose is to keep their disciples ignorant and subservient. They brainwash their followers into thinking that the guru is all that matters, that without him they are helpless and hopeless.

But a true teacher does just the opposite, teaching his students that they truly are the beloved children of God—and therefore are themselves divine in essence and need only realize that through their own experience of japa and meditation. A true teacher knows that the only thing which makes him different from those he teaches is the knowledge of how to do Soham sadhana. And once he teaches that to them he is just the same as them. This is why Gajanana Maharaj always called his students “my friends.”

What is important is that which is happening during the meditation of the yogi.

Those who follow false yoga have to keep reassuring themselves that they are on the right track through continual rationalizations about themselves and their false guru.

But as Maharaj says: It is our meditation experience that matters, not artificial inspiration from external sources, deep insights into external life, and suchlike. Certainly outside meditation the yogi is aware of his increased consciousness, but also realizes that it is natural because it is the consciousness of his Self. And he keeps it within so it will increase through future meditation.

A compulsion to tell others about our spiritual life and experiences or to write them down in detail is a sign that they are not just superficial, they are pathological.

A person gets pleasures and pains in this world according to the good or bad actions of his previous lives. Though saints and mahatmas have all powers, still everyone has to suffer the results of his own previous karma. Saints do not interfere with the working of this law. Their mission in this world is to point out the way leading to everlasting happiness and thus to make persons going to them blessed in the real sense of the term. They pay very little heed to worldly pleasures and pains which are after all of an ephemeral nature.

A person gets pleasures and pains in this world according to the good or bad actions of his previous lives.

Theravada Buddhist monks daily recite the words: “I have nothing but my actions. I shall never have anything but my actions.” This is thoroughly true. Karma is absolute: our past is our present, and our present is our future. There is nothing else for us in life.

What about God’s grace and intervention? God set up the universe and made karma an absolute. Karma is God’s grace, just as is the universe. There is no whimsical intervention by God. We do not receive God’s grace unless it is our karma—created by us. God is not a Sugar Daddy or a Mommy who can be wheedled or flattered into giving us what we want.

Someone once mentioned to Anandamayi Ma about making the world a better place. Ma asked, “Why do you not see that it is perfect right now?” And karma is a major part of that perfection.

When Jesus said, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7:12), he was not making a promise or a noble aspiration, but stating the law of action and reaction: karma. And it is perfect, even though the imperfect ego-based mind does not like it or want it to be so. Wrong ideas about “God’s grace” are a major enticement in false religion to get its followers to do what the religious authorities want. But it is not a reality. Karma is the divine reality.

Though saints and mahatmas have all powers, still everyone has to suffer the results of his own previous karma.

It is not just The Law, it is also For The Best—for *our* Best. For karma is part of the learning experience we call evolution. By analyzing our present state/karma we can know our past and will not need any past-life readings. It also shows us what our mind is really like. Karma is not reward or punishment, merely exact reaction. “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). Simple truth.

Saints do not interfere with the working of this law.

This is absolutely true without exception. Those false gurus who claim to change, dissolve or “take on” the karma of anyone are colossal liars and frauds.

We need to reap what we sow. It is for our eventual benefit. For anyone to “interfere” in another person’s karma is impossible. How well I remember poor backward Virginia McCombs in the third grade being called by the teacher to come up to her desk and bring her arithmetic book. The teacher asked, “Who wrote all the answers to the problems on this page?” And Virginia replied, “My sister did it to help me with my ’rithmetic.” It certainly had not helped her. The same with our karma. It is

ours alone to deal with—which includes learning from it.

Their mission in this world is to point out the way leading to everlasting happiness and thus to make persons going to them blessed in the real sense of the term.

Certainly the saints want others to attain unbroken happiness, but they cannot do it for them. Rather, they tell them the way to gain happiness on their own—happiness which they will never lose. This is the only blessing given by the saints, even though people seek for everything but Self-realization. And they get it from false saints, but it never lasts and they end up empty and unhappy.

For example, the mother of my friend the Maharani of Jind was healed of cancer by the famous Satya Sai Baba. And a few years later it returned and she died of it. He also cured my friend Dr. Judith Tyberg of severe illnesses and told her that her suffering from illness was over for the rest of her life. But in several years she got the illnesses all back and died in a hospital asking her friends to pray that she would die so she could escape the suffering. This is the fate of all who are deceived by false gurus and yogis, and the spiritual desolation and devastation is even worse.

They pay very little heed to worldly pleasures and pains which are after all of an ephemeral nature.

As long as we are in this world pleasures which fade away and pains which make us miserable are literally the order of the day. Knowing this, the saints show us the way to rise above these things and end the cycle of birth and death in this world so we will never again enter this realm of alternating pleasure and pain. But true spiritual teachers make no money from the truth, although the fakes get rich from their deceptions.

Whenever a person, big or small, male or female, feels the want of anything, whether worldly or spiritual, he approaches God and begs Him for granting his desire. We go to a temple. The idol there is of stone. But we, through faith, attribute to it the divine powers of Sri Rama or Sri Krishna and pray to the idol to grant our desires; and we get the fruit of these prayers at some time or other. This is true in the case of all human beings. Whenever a person entertains a desire to obtain some worldly object or to attain spiritual progress, he obtains the fruit of his desire as a result of his efforts in this life or of his karma in previous lives, or owing to fate or destiny—call it anything you like. No astrologer or saint or God is required for that.

I had been continuously studying scriptures and philosophical and spiritual books from India for sixty-two years—not to mention the time I have spent in India listening to discourses from very famous monastics and scholars—but until I read this from the words of Sri Gajanan Maharaj I had never heard even a hint of such a truth: everyone answers his own prayers, and does this through the power of his own mind and will. Yet we are all unaware of that fact. Consequently we need no one but ourselves to get the highest welfare (paramartha). We need only will and work at it. A teacher may be needed to describe the way, but we succeed all on our own. Self-reliance is the key once we know how to make the journey.

Men and women go to a saint, whether a true one or a false one, for getting their desires fulfilled. Some want employment, some are in want of progeny and some want the curing of their diseases.

An aspirant on the spiritual path desires to obtain the bliss of the Self or the vision of God. I wish to say with all the earnestness at my command that every person should internally repeat the mantra Soham and should bear in mind that he himself will be able to fulfill his desires.

Only it must be borne in mind that he must keep his conduct pure, should have at least a little vairagya and should have firm faith in Soham. When once a person obtains this self-confidence, he is sure to get Self-experience and will meet with his real guru. Evil thoughts will then cease to rise.

Those who go to a real saint for fulfillment of their various worldly desires will find that he will not do so, but will only point them to the path of Self-realization: Soham sadhana. Therefore Maharaj says the needful: everyone should continually mentally repeat the mantra Soham in time with the natural, automatic breath (So while inhaling and Ham while exhaling). From this all true benefits will arise without the asking, or he will see how to gain what he needs through his own efforts. However, the aspirant must possess purity of conduct, realize to some degree the emptiness and vanity of the material world, and maintain steadfast faith in Soham by his own continuous japa and meditation of Soham. Through the self-confidence he gains, the Soham sadhaka will experience his Self, his true guru. Then illusions and defilements will no longer arise.

One thing regarding this japa must be remembered. The japa of Soham must be repeated continuously in the mind. It should not be allowed to be known to others that you are repeating the japa.

Continuity of practice has already been outlined, but the other requisite is that we must not be showing to others that we are doing it. That means that we should not be moving our lips, even though silently. And we should not be holding or moving the beads of a japa mala when others are present and thus making a display of ourselves as yogis. An exception regarding the japa mala would be when we are at home with our family who knows our practice or in company with our fellow Soham sadhakas. But at the entry of a stranger or non-yogi the mala should be put in our pocket or out of sight. Nor should we ever tell others we practice Soham sadhana unless they have shown by their words and actions they are serious about learning the yogic path.

That guru alone is a true guru who will lead a disciple to the path of Self-experience.

A false guru (even if sincere) will teach a disciple false yoga that will distract or entertain him and make him mistakenly think he is making spiritual progress when it is all merely imagination–emotion or psychic impressions that have no substance, no ultimate reality.

A true disciple will follow the path to Self-experience by diligent practice of sadhana and application of spiritual principles in his daily life. He alone will succeed in yoga and

spiritual life.

A sadguru must teach yoga not merely by words but must lead an aspirant to the path of Self-experience.

Yoga is not just a philosophy, not just words, but practice that leads to the opening and expansion of the disciple's consciousness and gives him experience of his true Self. A sadguru teaches both the philosophy and the practice that together are the path to Self-realization.

My guru did not teach me Vedanta and the principles established by it and the arguments adduced in books on Vedanta to establish them. He only gave me the mantra Soham and showed me the path leading to Brahman which is beyond all Vedanta and arguments. He made me realize the truth of Tat Twam Asi (Thou Art That) and said that nothing else was required to be told.

In *Light of Soham* you can read about the great yogi Sri Narayana Saraswati that the family of Gajanana Maharaj were visiting when the boy Gajanana received instruction in a vision from Sri Matsyendranath, the first public teacher of yoga, who had been Gajanana's guru in a previous birth. Narayana Saraswati assured Gajanana that his experience was true and told him to practice japa and meditation with the Soham mantra he had received from Sri Matsyendranath. He further predicted that Gajanana would become a master yogi and teacher.

Raja yoga is the best of all yoga practices. The practice of raja yoga can control the impressions produced by a person's ignorance and negative experience and wipe them out. All this controlling is possible only through two things (1) practice and (2) vairagya (detachment). A person who merely carries on practice without having vairagya does not go to the end and has to leave it in the middle, because every now and then he is attracted by sensual objects and he gets tired of trying again and again and leaves off the practice. Perfect control can be accomplished only with the help of both practice and vairagya.

Raja yoga is the best of all yoga practices. The practice of raja yoga can control the impressions produced by a person's ignorance and negative experience and wipe them out.

Both in India and abroad Raja Yoga often means the practice of subtle pranayama, but when Gajanana Maharaj uses the term he means Dhyana Yoga, the yoga of meditation. Meditation–Soham meditation–directly effects the subtle energies of the various bodies, including the mind and intellect, and that includes the impressions such as habits and the conditionings produced by our experiences in this and past lives known as karmas and samskaras. These things are eliminated by Soham sadhana. This is the true purpose of meditation, not the gaining of psychic abilities or the seeing of visions and hearing of astral sounds or movements of energy such as “kundalini.” (I put this word in quotes since most of the time mere subtle energies are mistaken for kundalini.)

Meditation alone leads to Self-realization.

All this controlling is possible only through two things (1) practice (abhyasa) and (2) vairagya (detachment).

Abhyasa is sustained and constant (unbroken) spiritual practice.

Vairagya is non-attachment; detachment; dispassion; absence of desire; disinterest; or indifference—especially indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments.

A person who merely carries on practice without having vairagya, does not go to the end and has to leave it in the middle, because every now and then he is attracted by sensual objects and he gets tired of trying again and again and leaves off the practice. Perfect control can be accomplished only with the help of both practice and vairagya.

This needs no comment, only adoption.

The tamasic power (shakti) is brought under control by carefully reading the principles of Vedanta and contemplating upon them. This is known as shravana [hearing; spiritual study], and forms part of yogic niyama [observances].

As Maharaj indicated in the previous section, sadhana is the absolute requirement for spiritual realization. But in addition the Vedantic teachings of the Upanishads (see the Glossary) should be studied so a right perspective will be held in relation to our sadhana and our practical daily life. He does not mean the countless numbers of books expounding mere intellectual Vedanta—especially the ramblings of “Advaita Vedanta” that are a complete misunderstanding and misapplications of the wisdom of the Upanishads—but the Upanishads themselves. I recommend Swami Prabhavananda’s translation, *The Upanishads, Breath of the Eternal*, and my commentary, *The Upanishads For Awakening*, based on the translation of Radhakrishnan.

Through the practice of yama and niyama the rajasic power of the action of the organs is controlled.

Rajas is the quality of activity, restlessness, passion and desire for an object or goal. Rajasic means having the quality and character of rajas. This is eliminated or controlled by observing what are called The Ten Commandments of Yoga, or Yama (Do’s) and Niyama (Don’ts).

Without all the principles of Yama and Niyama there can be no control, no mastery of the rajasic activity of the senses, the organs of the body, which are the five organs of perception (jnanendriyas)—the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose, and the five organs of action (karmendriyas)—the voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation.

All of this is quite complex and involves constant vigilance and discipline. Authentic yoga practice demands all these elements in a perfect degree. Fake yoga of course often boasts of there being no need for “all that,” but of course that is why it is fake. And the teachers who say that and dispense fake yoga are likewise fake. And quite often the disciples are fakes, as well.

Asana (posture) leads to the steadiness of the limbs and through pranayama

all power of motion is controlled.

This can only be understood in the context of Gajanana Maharaj's teaching, which is that of the pure Nath Yogi tradition, and therefore in relation to Soham sadhana. One of the major traits of Soham meditation is the full relaxation correct practice brings right away. And this what Maharaj mean by "steadiness of the limbs." Soham sadhana consists of observing the natural breath and mentally intoning So when inhaling and Hum when exhaling. This is the process of pranayama in the Nath Yogi tradition, not the breathing exercises of Hatha Yoga or the artificial breathing practices of other schools of yoga.

These two results can only really be understood through the experience of those who practice Soham sadhana. (See *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*, and *Light of Soham*.)

When this stage is reached the mudhawastha—the state of infatuation—of the mind disappears. The state of distraction is controlled by dharana and dhyana and the sadhaka then enters the state of samprajñata or savikalpa samadhi by concentration. This state later on develops into nirvikalpa samadhi.

The states of unfolding consciousness occur in a definite order through the yogi's practice. The several technical terms mentioned here are defined in the Glossary.

This in brief is the full course as described in the Yoga Shastra. But this requires great preparation of the mind. Only those who have left attachment to sensual objects can be the recipients of this knowledge. He alone who first of all subdues the desires of the mind regarding sensual objects, understands their comparative importance or unimportance, keeps his mind in a state of quietude even when enjoying pleasures allowed by the shastras and ultimately leaves off all sense of enjoyment of pleasures, succeeds in ascending to the summit of yoga. He who understands how to dispel thoughts which arise in succession in the mind, he who understands what particular thoughts must first of all be subdued, so also he who understands how to contemplate upon Brahman alone succeeds in arriving at the end of yoga and becoming a master.

This in brief is the full course as described in the Yoga Shastra. But this requires great preparation of the mind.

As just outlined, there must be purification of mind and body and the full observance of yama and niyama. False gurus will never tell this to their disciples because they teach false yoga and not the true yoga that requires these things.

Only those who have left attachment to sensual objects can be the recipients of this knowledge. He alone who first of all subdues the desires of the mind regarding sensual objects, understands their comparative importance or unimportance, keeps his mind in a state of quietude even when enjoying pleasures allowed by the shastras and ultimately leaves off all sense of enjoyment of pleasures, succeeds in ascending to the summit of yoga.

He who understands how to dispel thoughts which arise in succession in the mind, he who understands what particular thoughts must first of all be subdued, so also he who understands how to contemplate upon Brahman alone succeeds in arriving at the end of yoga and becoming a master.

This is all very clear, but a tremendous challenge to the spiritual aspirant who must not hesitate to commit himself to conforming to these ideals. Fortunately, the practice of Soham japa and meditation greatly assist in managing all this. Soham sadhana increasingly enables and renders the aspirant fit to progress onward to the goal.

Many persons think that bhakti (devotion) is easier than yoga, but Sri Jnaneshwar says, “Is there anything as easy as yoga?”

Emotion is common to everyone and often involuntary—especially attraction and infatuation. Liking and loving an object is common to everyone, so it is thought that bhakti is the easiest path, though it is usually not true devotion, just emotion. That is why false bhaktas (devotees) make a display of their bhakti in various ways so they will be seen and respected and perhaps even admired and imitated.

For example, in the heyday of the “Hare Krishna” cult all kinds of antics were staged to “attract” followers. Two friends of mine were walking along a street in Venice, California, when a Hare Krishna “devotee” came walking along a side street with his hand stuck in his “japa bag” looking glum and half asleep. But when he saw they were looking at him he began swinging the bag and half-walking and half-jumping along like a monkey on hot sand while shouting “Hari bol! Hare Krishna!” over and over till he saw they were not responding, So he resumed his gloomy amble as my friends went on their way.

One time in Brindaban I was walking in the evening with my friend Shyam Lal Sharma (a real Vaishnava), when a block away a straggly “procession” of about ten men came around a corner with some kind of music being played by two or three of them. When their leader caught sight of us—especially my white skin, which meant money and maybe an American tour—he began shouting at them, “Sing louder! Dance! Dance!” So they began hopping about and running into one another and interrupting their own music—too out of breath to sing! Sharmaji literally folded up with laughter, but recovered and said, “Let’s get out of here, Swamiji! Who knows what they will be doing next, and we don’t want them to catch us!” So we ran and laughed and escaped conversion to bhakti yoga.

There is really only one authentic meditation yoga, the yoga of the Nath Yogi tradition of which Sri Jnaneshwar (Dnyaneshwar) was one of the most renowned exponents. The West knows little of him, so I would like to tell you something about him.

Jnaneshwar was born in Maharashtra, which is known in India as “the land of the yogis” because the first Nath yogis lived and taught there. He was born Self-realized and had a miraculous childhood. At the age of twenty-one he decided to end his earthly career and directed that an underground marble tomb (just a marble “box”) be made for him. After bidding everyone there farewell he entered the tomb, went into samadhi and was sealed in it. Right from the beginning sensitive people felt that he was alive and aware of all that was going on in the temple erected over his samadhi. After some centuries he appeared to a man in a dream and told him that a tree root had penetrated the marble and was wrapped around his neck. So the samadhi was opened and the root

removed. He spoke to the man he had appeared to for some time and then had the samadhi resealed. Having made a pilgrimage there myself I can assure you that he is aware of everyone who enters the temple and that he “hears” the mental prayers offered to him. This is my experience both from when I was there meditating in the temple and afterward through the years in America. (See the online Wikipedia article “Dnyaneshwar” for more information.)

As a Nath Yogi, Jnaneshwar practiced Soham sadhana which is extraordinarily simple, since it consists of being aware of the natural, spontaneous breath and mentally intoning *So* when inhaling and *Ham* (pronounced “Hum”) when exhaling. This process is done throughout the day and whenever the Soham yogi sits for meditation. That is all. So you can see why Jnaneshwar, himself a Nath Yogi and a practitioner of Soham Yoga, asked, “Is there anything as easy as yoga?” And it gives quick results.

I also think that bhakti which depends upon some external object, is not so easy as Yoga which depends on one’s own Self.

Bhakti cannot exist without there being an object of devotion and the emotion of devotion or love, which in most people is usually ego-based and clouds the mind to some degree. Also there is the idea that the devotee must attain something, such as pure love or the grace of a form of God. Yoga, on the other hand, is the only natural activity there is, since it begins and ends in the divine Self as the object—which need not be attained, but perceived and identified with as our eternal nature.

We have the Self already and *are* the Self, so what could be easier than centering ourselves in it by yoga? Of course, the yoga has to be real, not false, and that yoga is Soham Yoga, because Soham is the only key to realization of the Self—the Self that has eternally been in Soham Bhava and which in its manifestation in relativity has been always breathing and vibrating Soham—the only thing the Self ever really does! So he who always does what his Self always does will easily move along the path to Self-realization which is also Self-revelation.

If a person thinks on these questions deeply and gets explanations for himself, and then leaves off contemplation of things which fetter him and contemplates upon the opposite, he will succeed in putting an end to all pain and obtain the highest bliss. He should fix his mind upon and thoroughly grasp the principle of the Sankhya Shastra that the Self is absolutely free from attachments, and then by means of yoga he should practice meditation.

The Self alone liberates, while everything else in relative existence binds (fettters). Therefore the yogi should be intent on the Self whose essential nature is freedom—liberation—and therefore moksha itself. Such atmajnana—direct knowledge of the Self—liberates and frees the yogi from bondage, attachment and suffering. Always keeping this truth in mind, the yogi should practice meditation on the Soham-Self. Right away this brings about the dawn of jnana and leads onward to its perfection which is liberation (mukti).

Suppose a person sees a rope in the darkness and thinking it to be a serpent, runs away from that place. He will not then be able to see it, but the impression will still remain upon his mind that he has seen a serpent. If, however, he stays at the place, brings a lamp and satisfies himself that it is a rope and not a serpent, all fear vanishes and no impression of the fear remains on his mind. Thus knowledge alone is capable of dispelling the fears of worldly existence.

The realization of Brahman is to be obtained only by the method of Self-experience.

And that method is Soham Yoga.

Once someone asked, "Maharaj, will you grant me the vision of God?" Maharaj replied:

Just see. Suppose you have a lighted lantern in your house and I ask you to bring its light and show it to me here. Will you be able to bring the light here and show it to me? No. Then you would say to me, "I shall at the most be able to tell you what particular means are required and what particular action is to be done in order to generate the light." You would ask me to purchase a lantern, fix a wick in it, put kerosene oil in it, to strike a match, to ignite the wick, etc. Then there would be light.

Similarly, it is not an easy thing to show God. I may tell you in what way you should conduct yourself. When you will be endowed with all the four sadhanas, or when your desires have vanished, or when you are full of devotion, or when your mind is fully detached from all worldly objects and you get knowledge of spiritual matters, you will be able to realize the presence of God who is really without form. You will then be able to see the light of the Self and be one with that Reality which is Self-existent, which is Life and which is Bliss. That is the real God.

A true teacher of yoga does not show us God, but tells us how to "see" God by experiencing God, which is attained through the practice he imparts to us.

The Four Sadhanas are:

- (1) the discrimination between eternal and non-eternal things
- (2) disinterestedness regarding enjoyments in this as well as the next world
- (3) possession of self-control, peace of mind, etc.
- (4) a keen desire for liberation or moksha.

When we are established in these and maintain the japa and meditation of Soham we will come to know the formless reality that is Satchitananda. That alone is God.

God is not an external object which can be shown by simply pointing a finger towards it. A person must get instruction from a sadguru by obtaining his grace. Then when he gets the internal sight, he can see God—not by the physical eyes but by this internal sight which is known as the eye of knowledge.

A sadguru is one who knows the way of Soham Yoga Sadhana and teaches it to us. That is "obtaining his grace," not what the false gurus say it is, for their "grace" is really the deception of their disciples. But as I have pointed out before, false disciples

are very happy with a false guru—and viceversa.

A person's egoism must entirely disappear, his desires must all vanish, he must have complete vairagya (detachment) and he must feel that he is one with God. Then quite naturally he attains everlasting peace and joy. His whole worldly life will be nothing but Brahman. He will go beyond pain and pleasure.

The yogi's external life which before was ignorance and bondage becomes the very presence of God through yoga sadhana.

My sadguru told me to repeat Soham internally and then to get Soham merged into the Supreme Self and enjoy eternal peace and joy. If that was done I myself would become one with the self-existent, eternal and blissful Principle (Tattwa) and experience the presence of that Supreme Self everywhere. I would then become perfect, leave behind all egoism and realize the true "I."

That is how it is done!

If a sadhaka practices dhyana yoga with intensity, I am sure that in this very life he will reach the state of perfection through the power of the Soham mantra.

The key word here is "intensity," which means both constant practice, especially japa outside meditation, and concentration-attention on the inner intonations of So and Ham in time with the breath.

False gurus have their disciples think it will take many lives to realize with their false yoga methods or that at the moment of death two things will happen: 1) the accumulated force of their yoga practice will become activated and 2) "guruji" will come to "take them over" to the realms of liberation.

But Soham Yoga begins right away to have effect and continues to increase in effect as the practice is maintained and yama and niyama are scrupulously observed.

When an aspirant begins to practice meditation, he sees various visions which are as it were sign-posts on the path of Self-realization. As he proceeds he goes beyond these visions and realizes the infinite Brahman which is behind these visions.

Soham meditation begins to reveal the samskaras of the yogi, especially samskaras from previous life sadhana. These revelations often take the form of visions. But they are only passing incidents on the path of Self-realization. As Maharaj says, as the sadhaka proceeds he goes beyond these visions and realizes the infinite Brahman which is behind these visions.

Whenever a disciple would stop having visions, Maharaj would say, "Now you will begin to make progress," indicating that visions can be obstacles to our progress because our ego gets caught up in them and we will thus be distracted from the goal of Self-realization. Because visions can be powerful distractions, Maharaj often had people sit in front of him and meditate. They would have astonishing visions and experiences which ignorant gurus and yogis think are not only signs of progress but signs of

enlightenment. Maharaj, however, did this so they would get through those areas of their subtle bodies from which such experiences arise and move on to the revelation of the Pure Consciousness that alone is Self-realization.

In this manner Maharaj saved them from deception, whereas false gurus and yogis produce such deception by teaching delusive methods and claiming such visions or other experiences are proof of progress in yoga.

It is true, no doubt, that deities which have been seen are perishable. They will disappear after some time. All these visions, even though seen by the internal sight, are after all a play of ideas. The aspirant needs to enter into the state of nirvikalpa samadhi. All ideas are absent in that state and the object of dhyana yoga is to acquire this state in which ideas or thoughts are entirely absent. When all ideas stop Brahman is experienced. There is then no necessity of making any further conscious efforts but this state is automatically reached.

Sri Ma Sarada Devi said, “After attaining wisdom one sees that gods and deities are all maya.” Therefore their visions are worthless even when “real,” and in many cases are no more than delusions. Those who practice so-called “subtle raja yoga” that is no more than subtle pranayama are especially susceptible to this kind of delusion. I was myself.

When people would enthuse to Ramana Maharshi about their visions of deities, he would simply ask: “Did they leave?” Of course the answer was Yes, and he would then ask: “How long are you going to be satisfied with gods that come and go?”

Anandamayi Ma said that whatever comes must go, and whatever begins must end, and whatever is gained must be lost. This is the nature of “things.” But the Self is not like that at all. It is not a thing. It has never come, but has been “us” forever. It has never begun, but has existed eternally. It has always been us—that is why it is called our Self—and therefore having never been attained cannot become lost. This alone should be the focus of our sadhana and our perspective. And the only true yoga or sadhana is that which reveals this truth by direct experience.

The following illustration will give you a clear idea of what I say. As long as the musk-deer does not know that the musk is in its own navel, it runs here and there trying to find the source of the fragrant smell. If the deer would meet someone who would point out that the source of the smell is in the deer’s own navel, would the deer then run here and there? Similarly, ultimately the internal visions also disappear, the aspirant gets the experience that he himself is Brahman and becomes merged in the bliss of the Self.

This is the result of following the instruction of a genuine sadguru. And we can learn the way in a matter of moments! Then having learned, we need only engage continuously in the japa and meditation of Soham by which we cannot fail to gain Self experience. It will be like the dawning of day. At first we are in total darkness, then begin to dimly see objects, then our sight become clearer and clearer as the light advances to full day. And then we see truly and understand where we are.

The ignorant human soul takes its birth and questions, “Who am I [Koham]?” But originally this human soul was full of knowledge and was one with the Supreme Self.

A sadguru gives the answer to the human soul’s question, “Who am I?” by telling him the mantra Soham (I am That) which, having thoroughly convinced the human soul that it is one with the Supreme Self, takes the human soul back to its original state of knowledge and bliss.

Reading this I must admit that my movie-watching memories arise and I recall how in the times I saw *Gone With The Wind* I was always amused at the vehement way in which Doctor Mead exclaims to his wife who starts asking him questions about the establishment of the infamous Belle Watling: “Mrs. Mead—*remember yourself!*” This is what we all need: to remember our Self.

It is tragic that indeed “originally this human soul was full of knowledge and was one with the Supreme Self,” but by coming into relative existence and physical embodiment became identified with that condition and forgot its Self-nature. Then it began to wander hopelessly from life to life and will continue to do so until inner awakening begins and finally brings it into contact with someone who can tell it the liberating mantra Soham and how to use it in japa and meditation. Then such is the divine liberating power of Soham that the individual begins to dimly intuit his union with the Supreme Self and then progress onward, ultimately taken by the awakening divine action of Soham “back to its original state of knowledge and bliss.”

Do not ask any further questions.... I only want to urge that you should now leave off all doubts and begin to practice meditation.

There are people who are in the habit of discussion and seem unable to stop it and just practice what they have learned. Also there are those whose minds keep tossing up Why, What If, and How Can I Be Sure? All this is just to delay actual practice because the ego does not want to lose its grip—distraction and spiritual neglect have become an ingrained habit. The only remedy for this is to let our intelligence and will take charge and ignore the ego-mind and do the needful. I had a friend who would ask, “Why should I meditate if I don’t feel like it?” I would explain that “feel like” should have nothing to do with the matter. But inaction prevailed and she never began the journey to peace. Maharaj is warning us against this “unsure” thinking which is really the negativity of the mind. “Just Do It” is a viable spiritual maxim!

I have got full experience in this very body of the power of Soham. I, therefore, never tell any of my friends to bring the forms of deities before their mind’s eye, but give them the mantra Soham and turn their minds inwards, owing to which all ideas become merged in the sahasradala [the middle of the sahasrara, the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain].

While going towards the sahasradala, some visions in the form of light do manifest themselves. All these visions appear without any effort and they are full

of light. After some time all these visions merge into the Self and the aspirant gets for a short time into the state of samadhi, and experiences great joy.

I have got full experience in this very body of the power of Soham.

Maharaj did not tell his friends what he only supposed was true, but that which he knew was true from having fully experienced it himself by his lifetime of practice. I once saw a filmed interview with Carl Jung. In response to something Jung had said, the interviewer asked him, "So you believe in God"? "No," Jung replied, "I know there is a God." Personal knowledge is the prime requisite before someone can teach another. And in the case of yoga, the student will by his practice gain the same knowledge the teacher gained by his practice. It is inevitable. Maharaj had not just nibbled at the edge of Soham practice, he had immersed himself in Soham sadhana and in that very life attained total, perfect experience of the truth and reality of Soham.

I, therefore, never tell any of my friends to bring the forms of deities before their mind's eye, but give them the mantra Soham and turn their minds inwards, owing to which all ideas become merged in the sahasradala [the middle of the sahasrara, the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain].

The various deities are not realities in themselves but symbols of the divine powers and attributes of God. And they certainly are not ourselves. So those who seek liberation through Self-Realization must immerse themselves in the consciousness that is the true Self. And that consciousness is inherent in the Soham mantra and in the sadhaka as well. Therefore it is the only valid key to the perfect, complete spiritual attainment and realization which is revealed in the sahasrara, the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain. Soham is the mantra proper to the sahasrara and reveals it through constant practice of Soham Yoga sadhana.

While going towards the sahasradala, some visions in the form of light do manifest themselves. All these visions appear without any effort and they are full of light. After some time all these visions merge into the Self and the aspirant gets for a short time into the state of samadhi, and experiences great joy.

All this we will experience for ourselves if we practice diligently and thoroughly observe and embody the principles of yama and niyama.

Saints of old like Jnaneshwar, Eknath, Tukaram and others and comparatively modern saints who had all realized the Self, enjoyed the state of sahaja samadhi even while carrying on worldly actions. My friends experience the same state of sahaja samadhi, though for a short time, for a minute or two. As the practice of meditation increases in intensity, this state of samadhi lasts longer and longer, and ultimately becomes continuous without any limitation of time or space.

This is very clear and can be experienced by all those who apply themselves.

Those who repeat Soham with very great intensity become at once merged in the sound of the inner repetition of the mantra. Hence they are unconscious of any visions of light. Some of my friends, therefore, who get merged in the sound do not see any visions. If you do not see any visions, you should not on that account entertain any doubts regarding the efficacy of Soham.

Sound and the breath are the basis of all authentic yoga. Soham is the sound, and when joined to the breath the practice automatically produces the ultimate state of yoga. Thus Soham Yoga alone is Yoga.

As I do not consider myself as anybody's guru, I do not look upon anyone as my disciple. Some of my young and old friends, owing to their merit acquired in previous lives and owing to the practice of meditation have reached the state of samadhi. But I do not consider any of them as my disciples. Through the grace of my sadguru, I simply give the mantra of Soham to my friends and ask them to practice meditation.

Here we have the perspective that both the teacher and the students should always hold and act upon.

Someone asked Maharaj if there was any benefit in having visions of deities.

It is not of any real use. As long as the mind is not turned inwards, and as long as desires have not entirely vanished, these external appearances are of very little use. All these appearances are illusory like a mirage. So even if a person actually sees Sri Krishna or any other deity, it is merely an appearance and not of much use. Carry on the repetition of Soham. It will be sufficient for you.

For Soham alone will reveal your Self to you. There is a lot of talk in India about meditation, the meditator and the object of meditation becoming one. But only the Soham yogi realizes this, because meditation, the meditator and the object of meditation ARE Soham. And this is truly known to be so through Soham sadhana—nothing else.

Although the mind has always a tendency to leave the object of meditation and run away to other things, the only remedy is to bring it back again and to fix it on the object of meditation. If we try to give a bend to the branch of a tree, in the beginning as soon as we remove our hand from it, it again becomes straight and assumes its original position. But by continuous efforts of bending it and also by tying the bent parts by means of a rope, etc., we succeed in giving it a permanent bend. Similarly, if a person while repeating his japa finds that his mind has wandered away, the only remedy is to forcibly bring it back and to fix it again on the japa.

How incredibly simple and sensible! Just do it. Make Soham japa a habit which in time will become the nature of the mind. This is so because in our inmost consciousness, our true spirit-Self, we are already producing Soham within our breath. So it is already our eternal nature—we just need to make it the nature of our mind and our entire being. These are not just words, they are Truth. But each one must discover this for himself, just as Sri Gajanan Maharaj did before us. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand—within us.

Control over the mind is not obtained merely by such practice. Vairagya

(detachment) is also necessary. The mind naturally runs towards those objects for which it has an attraction. By abhyasa (practice) the fickleness of the mind may be controlled. But its attachment cannot be done away with by mere practice. Pranayama may help towards concentration, but undue importance should not be attached to it. Pranayama, too, will only be useful in removing the fickleness of mind. It cannot remove its attachment.

What will remove the attachment of the mind? One thing: experience of the reality of the Self. After World War I there was a comic song: “How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down On The Farm After They’ve Seen Paree?” The premise was sound: after repeated experience the mind must change. Marcus Aurelius wrote that a mind that has once been expanded will not return to its former dimension. In meditation we right away begin to experience the Self. At first it is slight, but regular meditation increases that awareness bit by bit and spiritual momentum is gained that absolutely will become perfect enlightenment in time.

The saying, “As long as the breath is moving or unsteady, the mind is also unsteady,” is not an absolute truth. The vice versa is also true. Breath becomes unsteady when the mind becomes unsteady. In grief or anger breath becomes more quick. It is not, therefore, safe to expect that mind will be brought under control when the breath is controlled. Hence mind-control and breath-control must be carried on side by side. Hence it has been said by Sri Krishna in the sixth chapter of the Gita: “Wherever the fickle and unsteady mind runs away it should be brought back therefrom and made to fix itself on the Self” (verse 26).

The breath and the mind are at all times integrated or interrelated. They are really one, though dual in form. They cannot at all be separated, but they can get out of synchronization with one another and must be reintegrated. The only way to accomplish this completely is through the joining of the syllables of Soham to the inhaling and exhaling breaths. Merely controlling and directing the breath is not only useless but detrimental, for the breath must be free and natural at all times.

The breath can be restored to its natural order only by the continuous practice of Soham sadhana. There is no other way to return the mind to its natural place and fix the mind on the Self but through Soham japa and meditation.

Someone asked Maharaj: If through the force of some karma in the previous life a sadhaka commits a sinful act in this life, what would be the result in his case?

If a sadhaka commits a sinful act once, in a way it might be explained away as the result of his karma in a previous life or lives designated as prarabdha or sanchita. But if such sinful acts are committed over and over again, and he tries to explain them away by attributing them to his prarabdha, he should certainly be considered as a base man.

Just consider a homely illustration. Suppose there is a live charcoal. You see it, and although you are warned by your friend not to place your foot upon it you, out of a feeling of pride and arrogance, do not heed the warning and place

your foot upon it. You are sure to suffer pain. This is something like prarabdha. But would you ever again place your foot upon a fire even if you are asked to do so by a friend? No. Where has prarabdha gone now? That means that when a person is full of repentance, he does not commit the sin again, nor does he quote shastras and the doctrines of prarabdha and sanchita for justifying the commission of the sin.

A sadhaka, therefore, should exercise his powers of reasoning and discrimination at the time of doing acts. Gradually all his fetters will fall off as he progresses in the practice of meditation.

A *Brief Sanskrit Glossary* defines Prarabdha: “Karma that has become activated and begun to manifest and bear fruit in this life; karmic ‘seeds’ that have begun to ‘sprout.’” It defines Sanchita: “The vast store of accumulated actions done in the past, the fruits of which have not yet been reaped.” Both are inevitable unless eliminated by the purification effected by the practice of genuine yoga sadhana.

Gajanana Maharaj had a great deal to say about false gurus who try to excuse their wrongdoings by saying it is just their prarabdha, but has nothing to do with their Self-realization, which is what makes them gurus. It is also the same with false gurus whose disciples become upset if they become ill, as it is supposed that a liberated person has no prarabdha—that he has purified himself from it or somehow risen above it and cannot therefore suffer its effects. So when the guru inevitably becomes ill or even mentally deranged he and his disciples insist that he is taking on the prarabdha of his disciples and freeing them from suffering in this way. Sincere but deceived disciples of such gurus shed bitter tears when they see the guru’s sufferings, and think “Those are my sins that are making guruji suffer!” And they become even more devoted and enslaved to the guru and his “love” for them. But as Maharaj states, such gurus are base people, incorrigible and unworthy of respect, much less the adulation poured on them by their disciples, many of whom are no better than they—especially the “close” disciples that run the guru’s organization and collect the money given by the other disciples.

Maharaj here explains the ins-and-outs of prarabdha in a very clear manner, showing the sadhaka how not to fall into this evil folly and specious self-justification.

Look at our present-day “saints.” Their jivanmukti [liberation in this life] consists in not doing anything for their maintenance. They have, therefore, to practice tricks for getting their livelihood. They practice more deceits and do more low acts than persons who maintain themselves by labor ever dream of doing. These so-called saints have thrown off all social restrictions.

This is the truth. But among false gurus, like among thieves, there is “honor” which consists of the unspoken agreement, “You don’t tell on me and I won’t tell on you.” So they blithely say to their disciples, “All gurus are really one and should be given equal reverence. You should consider any saint you meet as myself.” I once attended a gathering of such gurus and listened to them discuss how to protect themselves and their business from the effects of one of their number who was being very reckless and

whose organization seemed likely to soon explode in scandal. The question was how to distance themselves from him even though they all had associated with him in the past and endorsed him as a guru, though even then they knew he was thoroughly dishonest. But they were the same as he! It was a meeting of the Yogi Mafia of America. And the same situation has prevailed in India for centuries.

If I, for instance, find some other saint is more respected as a guru and has more disciples, I am sure to spread scandals about him among my disciples and his disciples also.

This, too, goes on “in the backroom” all the time.

Even if these saints do not know anything they can conceal their ignorance by assuming an attitude of being above discussions and arguments and of being merged in everlasting tranquility.

This is a favorite ploy of fake gurus along with convincing their disciples that they do not follow the principles of decency and honesty because they have gone above such restraints, or because the observers do not understand the level on which they are functioning, or the profound reasons why they are acting as they are—but all is for the best and divine in origin. In America the “crazy wisdom” rationalization has been successfully employed for quite some time.

Of course the disciples work to delude themselves, making all kinds of self-rationalizations for the guru’s wrong conduct or telling themselves they are not seeing things the way they really are on the high spiritual levels on which the guru functions. I knew a woman who was continually being touched inappropriately by a supposed yoga siddha, and she said to me, “Well, after all, it is a chakra!”

Let me tell on myself. One time I became friends with a very fine young woman who had gone from high school directly into an ashram in California. She was influenced by a very saintly nun who sometimes spoke on Sundays in the ashram temple. But the actual head of the ashram was another matter altogether. My friend had decided she wanted to live in India, and had asked if she could leave and work to make money to travel there. The guru was very gracious to her face and even said she would “take back” the mantra she had given her at initiation, and all would be well. My friend was so happy about this seeming understanding and kindness.

Interested in seeing this kind and apparently egoless guru I went to the ashram with another friend the very next Sunday. First all, the talk she gave was abysmally bad and childish—delivered with the silliest kind of antics to demonstrate how exalted her consciousness was. Lunch followed, and at the end Lady Guru came up to me and my friend and without preamble began raving about her mission in America and how she represented “the best of India,” all the while jumping around and gesturing wildly and acting like the utterly nasty and out of control fraud she really was.

And do you know what I did? Noble soul, me, sat there feeling that she must see something in me that was negative and very wrong. And I sat there literally praying to her mentally to bless me and help me to understand and correct myself!

Then she bounced out and we left.

Naturally we discussed this bizarre encounter on the way home, and suddenly I realized the truth: she was actually raving at our friend whom she had pretended to be so positive toward. And she was hoping that when we saw her we would relay all the things she had said to us and our friend would understand that all this accusation and defamation was aimed at her and would feel sad and maybe even guilty! So we made a pact to never tell our friend about this monster's ravings. And we never did.

But consider how idiotic I was being in not just letting myself during her tirade see what this evil woman was intending!!! As Sri Ramakrishna often said: "Be a devotee—but why a fool?" I wish I could tell you that I never repeated that foolishness on my part, but I continued to do so for some years in relation to other false gurus, making excuses and rationalizations that only demonstrated my own negativity and affinity for self-deception. I do not blame those false gurus. The fault was all mine. And I was just the usual type of willing dupe that abounds around such spiritual criminals and therefore aids them in their evil.

I therefore say that in my opinion there is no class of scoundrels in this world worse than such saints who profit themselves by deceiving their followers. Whenever such saints are actually observed doing a sinful act, they attribute their sin to their prarabdha and seek protection under its wings. This "prarabdha" many a time saves them, because they do not suffer for their sins in this world. Of course, the punishment meted out to them by God hereafter will be beyond the knowledge of people in this world.

All this argument of prarabdha has been trotted out from the inexhaustible store of Vedanta. All actions which a follower of Charvaka [atheistic philosophy] would do can safely be done by these saints on the authority of the doctrine that saints are beyond sin and virtue, and that they are above all principles of morality which are meant for ordinary people. The only wonder is that these saints have learnt no real lessons from reading works on true Vedanta. I do not mean to say that Vedanta is to be blamed for this. I should not be considered as belonging to that class of social reformers who have attacked Vedanta and have attributed many of the evils in our social system to its doctrines.

Just as there are false gurus and false yoga practices, there is also false Vedanta which is used to deceive seekers. But there is genuine Vedanta that is essential to learn and understand for a clear insight into ourselves and the world around us.

It is also essential to know about the tricks of fake gurus and their followers, and Maharaj's words were the first I ever read on the subject even though I had considered myself a yogi for over fifty years. But I was not really a yogi nor had I ever met any real yogis. Sri Gajanana Maharaj's teachings truly were a light in darkness for me.

What I want to say is this. Without performing the duties of his varna [caste] and ashrama [stage of life], without devotion and without acquiring the four sadhanas, a person can study books on Vedanta like a school or college student

and repeat its doctrines like a parrot. What is the use of all this? Many of the present-day saints are similarly followers of Vedanta only partially.

Here are the definitions of the terms Maharaj is using. Knowing them you will comprehend his meaning in this paragraph.

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.

Varnashrama: Related to the four castes and the four stages (ashramas) of Hindu life; the laws of caste and ashrama.

Varnashram dharma: The observance of caste and ashram.

Ashram(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 (grihasta); 3) the life of retirement (seclusion) and contemplation (vanaprastha); 4) the life of total renunciation (sannyasa).

Ashrama-dharma: Duties pertaining to the four orders or stages of life.

Four Sadhanas: (1) the discrimination between eternal and non-eternal things; (2) disinterestedness regarding enjoyments in this as well as the next world; (3) possession of self-control, peace of mind, etc.; (4) a keen desire for liberation or moksha.

You may have seen many visions, and more may come. But ultimately there is only one Chitshakti (Consciousness and Power of the Ultimate Being), which is without any form and constant. That is where you should become steady. Continue to practice.

All relative sensory experiences of any kind on any level only lead right back to external consciousness and unawareness of the True and the Real which is the Ultimate Being: Brahman of which our true Self is an eternal part. And that Brahman is Consciousness (Chit) in essence. Since all else is changing, there is no peace or stability until we are established in that Primal Consciousness wherein there is no relative object but the eternal Subject that is our true Self. Until that state of awareness is made permanent in us we must diligently and continually practice Soham sadhana which alone leads to that state by its very nature.

Conceit or pride, happiness or sorrow, are the states of consciousness in this physical body. We do not need them at all.

Actually they are only momentary illusions to which we must not cling, but rather must move onward through yoga sadhana to that ultimate state of being which is beyond these lesser states.

If you think that your physical body is "I" then you are doomed. Then you will go through lakhs [hundreds of thousands] of birth cycles, just due to the infatuation for this body. Therefore forget the attachment to this body and concentrate on Ultimate Being. That is how you are going to cross over this

material world. Then you will know the Almighty. You will worship him with faith. You will have happiness in the mind which will be always immersed in unwavering happiness.

This is thrilling truth which we must move toward daily by yoga sadhana. Just believing it means nothing. We must KNOW it by BEING it.

The physical body and such material things are not the Atman [Self]. The life of the body is you, the Atman. When you realize this then you will become one with The Ultimate Being. You will comprehend the nature of Self-realization. You will see the entire world as your Self. The illusion of dwaita (duality) will be banished. You yourself will be Brahman.

Life is not experience of the body and the world around it. That is actually death—the death of our consciousness through immersion in material delusions. We are not just alive—we are life itself, because our Self is Life. What we think is life and living is just a dream, and dreaming through being spiritually asleep. When we awaken into the consciousness that is the Self we begin to live.

It is a mistake to try to imagine what the state of realization described here is like, for it is beyond all things and therefore not “like” anything. But it can be experienced and understood. “Therefore be a yogi” (Bhagavad Gita 6:46).

With meditation alone you will understand everything one after another. No other effort is required. This alone is the practice you need to continue.

But to continue it the purification and support from observance of yama and niyama is absolutely necessary, for without that support no experience or knowledge is possible.

The Atman residing in your heart is great, he is always filling the universe. He can be seen only with the inner eye, as you can experience for yourself.

The best exposition of the nature of the Self is found in the sixth chapter of the Chandogya Upanishad. It is lengthy but very beneficial to read and ponder. So here it is.

When Svetaketu was twelve years old, his father Uddalaka said to him, “Svetaketu, you must now go to school and study. None of our family, my child, is ignorant of Brahman.”

Thereupon Svetaketu went to a teacher and studied for twelve years. After committing to memory all the Vedas, he returned home full of pride in his learning.

His father, noticing the young man’s conceit, said to him: “Svetaketu, have you asked for that knowledge by which we hear the unheardable, by which we perceive the unperceivable, by which we know the unknowable?”

“What is that knowledge, sir?” asked Svetaketu.

“My child, as by knowing one lump of clay, all things made of clay are known, the difference being only in name and arising from speech, and the truth being that all are clay; as by knowing a nugget of gold, all things made of gold are known, the

difference being only in name and arising from speech, and the truth being that all are gold—exactly so is that knowledge, knowing which we know all.”

“But surely those venerable teachers of mine are ignorant of this knowledge; for if they had possessed it, they would have taught it to me. Do you therefore, sir, give me that knowledge.”

“Be it so,” said Uddalaka, and continued thus:

“In the beginning there was Existence, One only, without a second. Some say that in the beginning there was nonexistence only, and that out of that the universe was born. But how could such a thing be? How could existence be born of non-existence? No, my son, in the beginning there was Existence alone—One only, without a second. He, the One, thought to himself: Let me be many, let me grow forth. Thus out of himself he projected the universe; and having projected out of himself the universe, he entered into every being. All that is has its self in him alone. Of all things he is the subtle essence. He is the truth. He is the Self. And that, Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU.”

“Please, sir, tell me more about this Self.”

“Be it so, my child:

“As the bees make honey by gathering juices from many flowering plants and trees, and as these juices reduced to one honey do not know from what flowers they severally come, similarly, my son, all creatures, when they are merged in that one Existence, whether in dreamless sleep or in death, know nothing of their past or present state, because of the ignorance enveloping them—know not that they are merged in him and that from him they came.

“Whatever these creatures are, whether a lion, or a tiger, or a boar, or a worm, or a gnat, or a mosquito, that they remain after they come back from dreamless sleep.

“All these have their self in him alone. He is the truth. He is the subtle essence of all. He is the Self. And that, Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU.”

“Please, sir, tell me more about this Self.”

“Be it so, my son:

“The rivers in the east flow eastward, the rivers in the west flow westward, and all enter into the sea. From sea to sea they pass, the clouds lifting them to the sky as vapor and sending them down as rain. And as these rivers, when they are united with the sea, do not know whether they are this or that river, likewise all those creatures that I have named, when they have come back from Brahman, know not whence they came.

“All those beings have their self in him alone. He is the truth. He is the subtle essence of all. He is the Self. And that, Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU.”

“Please, sir, tell me more about this Self.”

“Be it so, my child:

“If someone were to strike once at the root of this large tree, it would bleed, but live. If he were to strike at its stem, it would bleed, but live. If he were to strike at the top, it would bleed, but live. Pervaded by the living Self, this tree stands firm, and takes its food; but if the Self were to depart from one of its branches, that

branch would wither; if it were to depart from a second, that would wither; if it were to depart from a third, that would wither. If it were to depart from the whole tree, the whole tree would wither.

“Likewise, my son, know this: The body dies when the Self leaves it—but the Self dies not.

“All that is has its self in him alone. He is the truth. He is the subtle essence of all. He is the Self. And that, Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU.”

“Please, sir, tell me more about this Self.”

“Be it so. Bring a fruit of that Nyagrodha tree.”

“Here it is, sir.”

“Break it.”

“It is broken, sir.”

“What do you see?”

“Some seeds, extremely small, sir.”

“Break one of them.”

“It is broken, sir.”

“What do you see?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“The subtle essence you do not see, and in that is the whole of the Nyagrodha tree. Believe, my son, that that which is the subtle essence—in that have all things their existence. That is the truth. That is the Self. And that, Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU.”

“Please, sir, tell me more about this Self.”

“Be it so. Put this salt in water, and come to me tomorrow morning.”

Svetaketu did as he was bidden. The next morning his father asked him to bring the salt which he had put in the water. But he could not, for it had dissolved. Then said Uddalaka:

“Sip the water, and tell me how it tastes.”

“It is salty, sir.”

“In the same way,” continued Uddalaka, “though you do not see Brahman in this body, he is indeed here. That which is the subtle essence—in that have all things their existence. That is the truth. That is the Self. And that, Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU.”

“Please, sir, tell me more about this Self,” said the youth again.

“Be it so, my child:

“As a man may be blindfolded, and led away, and left in a strange place; and as, having been so dealt with, he turns in every direction and cries out for someone to remove his bandages and show him the way home; and as one thus entreated may loose his bandages and give him comfort; and as thereupon he walks from village to village, asking his way as he goes; and as he arrives home at last—just so does a man who meets with an illumined teacher obtain true knowledge.

“That which is the subtle essence—in that have all beings their existence. That is the truth. That is the Self. And that, O Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU.”

“Please, sir, tell me more about this Self.”

“Be it so, my child:

“When a man is fatally ill, his relations gather round him and ask, ‘Do you know me? Do you know me?’ Now until his speech is merged in his mind, his mind in his breath, his breath in his vital heat, his vital heat in the Supreme Being, he knows them. But when his speech is merged in his mind, his mind in his breath, his breath in his vital heat, his vital heat in the Supreme Being, then he does not know them.

“That which is the subtle essence—in that have all beings their existence. That is the truth. That is the Self. And that, O Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU.”

The chitshakti (power of mind) is not understood by the ignorant.

This subtle energy which is essentially consciousness can only be understood by the yogi through direct experience in meditation. And as someone who spent half a century experimenting with a vast range of “yogic” practices I can tell you in all truthfulness that only Soham sadhana gives the needed experience. All other methods simply wander around and make their practitioners simply wander around as well. Soham is the way.

Other gurus may tell you differently, but you will realize by yourself who is this “I”?

False gurus create a very real dependency on themselves in their disciples through many means, mostly silly little slogans that really are pure falsehood, dust in the eyes of their trusting disciples. But the truth is that the yogi realizes everything *by himself* through the meditation and japa of Soham. There is no imagined “guru’s presence” at any time or experience of “guru’s grace.” It is not only not needed, it is an obstacle to true realization, only an extension of the dream-myth of samsara which the Soham yogi leaves behind along with the guru myth.

You have to ask your own mind this question: Since the “I” is neither the physical body, neither the prana, nor the trishudhi (the combination of mind, intellect and body), then who is this “I”? This has to be searched out first.

The one who has created this body, made the breath work, gave vision to the eyes—who is he? The ears are enabled to hear, the tongue made capable of speech—similarly our other organs are made to perform predesignated functions with whose power?

All this is not done by us. The one making this happen is within this body itself. It is his power, he is the doer and the one getting it done. How much more need I tell you?

The Indestructible Power is this. It does not have any color or shape. That is atma swarupa, the form of the Self; you need to understand this. That is the mother of the five elements, space, earth, fire, wind and water. She is the one who creates, maintains and destroys this universe. She is all-encompassing. That is chitshakti, the power residing in the mind. Understand this. Now what

remains?

She is the mother of universe; if you understand her then you are Brahman. You will not be separate from anything else. THAT will be God. That will be Sadguru. He will reveal Aham Brahman—I am Brahman.

This needs no comment, but it does need to be taken seriously and eventually realized through sadhana.

Therefore concentration comes first. Steadiness of mind and other elements come later. You will acquire it gradually. Repeat Soham within your mind.

This is extremely easy to experience for yourself. Meditation practice that needs any kind of preliminaries inner or outer is not true yoga. For decades I had all sorts of “get ready” things before meditation because the meditation methods I had been taught were worthless and led nowhere but into delusion and imagined spiritual experiences and progress. The pump had to be primed because the well was dry. Now, at the beginning of every meditation session I am always amazed at the fact that I need only Do It: Close my eyes and mentally intone *So* when I inhale (naturally) and *Ham* [“Hum”] when I exhale (naturally), experiencing my intonings and their effects without effort, letting Soham reveal its inner workings and effects to me. Soham truly is my only sadguru. What a relief—and what a reality!

You have to comprehend the One Principle in all this. You need to concentrate either on saguna (with form) or nirguna (without form). Consider everything as the Atma Tattwa, the Principle of the Atman, whether saguna or nirguna. This physical body is the temple of God. The prana is the form of Lord Shiva.

Everything lies within us—not within the body, for that is not “us,” but within our inmost consciousness which is the Self. This Self is the deity within the body-temple waiting to be known by us.

Leaving behind all remaining ignorance, just repeat Soham.

For everything but Soham is ignorance. Soham alone is Knowing.

In the eagerness of your mind, desiring Soham experience [Soham Bhava-see Glossary], you want it right now. But that is not appropriate. A great deal of practice is required for this. You will have to follow a great deal of strict discipline. That kind of tapasya [spiritual discipline] is very difficult to carry on. “If you want to be in the state of Brahman then you have to endeavor intensely,” is very easy to read, but to bring it into reality is a very difficult task.

Gajanana Maharaj is speaking of the fact that the ultimate realization is not an immediate attainment, but requires a great deal of sadhana practice before the yogi is capable of such realization. However, Soham sadhana produces tangible results right away after only a little practice—IF the beginning yogi is a pure vegetarian, abstains absolutely from nicotine, alcohol and mind-altering substances and observes yama and niyama totally. But it has been my observation that signs of being on the right path

almost always arise to some degree in the experience and mind of the beginning yogi. Unless something in the yogi's diet and discipline prevent it, there should be some signs of the effect of Soham sadhana within a reasonably short time—in a month at least. Of course, I am assuming that the yogi is meditating a reasonable length of time and is steadily increasing that time as he continues to practice. And as I say, he must not be hindering himself by allowing any factors inner or outer to inhibit his practice in any way.

Here I should say quite plainly that if anything or anyone is opposing your practice of meditation and observance of yogic discipline and is thereby hindering you in any way, then remove them from your life sphere—or remove yourself from their life sphere. For if you cannot withstand and overcome external opposition, how will you withstand and overcome the internal opposition of your own negativity and ignorance? You will not.

Tapasya, spiritual discipline, is often bitter in the beginning but when continued unbrokenly it becomes the greatest sweetness and fulfillment. In time it is effortless because it becomes an expression of the yogi's true being—the most natural thing possible.

As one of the most famous yogis of the Nath Yogi tradition said: “He that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22).

You might say, “If there is the blessings of the guru, then that person can achieve anything.” But there is no shortcut to the practice. The importance of practice is that you will get experiences gradually and in the right order. This cannot be achieved in just one birth without spiritual merit from previous births.

You might say, “If there is the blessings of the guru, then that person can achieve anything.”

The quotation is standard propaganda from the fake gurus and their disciples. But as Maharaj says, there is no getting around the fact that the yogi's personal practice is all that gets him anywhere. “Guru's grace” simply has no existence in the world of real yoga sadhana. It is the yogi's own “grace” that saves him, for his grace is bestowed by himself on himself—and that grace is his own practice which produces results.

But there is no shortcut to the practice.

There is no Short Path to Self-realization, and there is no jumping over and beyond a single step of the path to liberation. Rather:

The importance of practice is that you will get experiences gradually and in the right order.

It is all completely according to the eternal divine order. No guru or devotion can impel the aspirant even a fraction of an inch toward the goal. Rather, he walks it all himself from the first to the last step without any assistance whatsoever needed, because genuine yoga needs no boost or “grace” other than that of the yogi which he bestows on himself through his sadhana. The sadhana is both his empowerment and his Self-realization. The yogi is thus self-actualized through his sadhana which is his own Self revealed. Only the Nath Yogis understand this, because Soham Yoga alone is the genuine yoga.

This cannot be achieved in just one birth without spiritual merit from previous births.

A bishop once said to me regarding the behavior of people in general: “Behind a big front is a big back. So always look for that to know what is really going on.” Self-realization is the “biggest” thing in the yogi’s life. And it is the result of merit accrued through lifetimes of spiritual practice and aspiration. It is the “big back” of Self-realization. But when it is there, Self-realization can be achieved in one lifetime. Gajanana Maharaj assured his student-friends that it was possible through Soham sadhana, and he himself was proof of that assertion. Truly his words were and are The Words Of Life.

All the accumulation of good or bad karma has to be enjoyed or suffered by all beings. Your accumulation of some good karma was there, therefore you have come on this path. You know all this. Then why are you harboring doubts? You need to just practice the path of Soham that I have shown you. This is the path which will take you across the sea of samsara; you will get what you wished for. You have to keep this in mind for sure.

All beings in relative existence, from the lowest to the highest worlds, create karma and experience its effects in those worlds. There are no exceptions except for those who have dissolved their karmas through the transformation of Self-realization. The purpose of karma is learning through experience, so there is no avoidance of reaping our karmic consequences until we attain Self-realization and therefore need no further relative experience. Jnana–atmajnana–is the only door to liberation.

The good karma which opens the yogic path to us is the karma of spiritual aspiration, not just positive actions in previous lives. So a person has to have a spiritual orientation through many lives before the door of yoga opens to him. Just to meet someone like Gajanana Maharaj is the result of great good karma; and to become a student of such a teacher requires an even greater store of positive karma. Therefore, to put forth our best effort continually is the only intelligent response and use of that karma. We should not doubt our capacity to attain liberation in this very life. If we did not have the ability to do so, we would never have even come into the orbit of the path of sadhana.

The important fact is that practice of Soham sadhana is the sole way to pass over the ocean of samsara–of relative existence and consciousness. If we truly desire liberation, and not just the cessation of unpleasant experiences and situations, it shall be ours. Moksha is not just the cessation of suffering, it is the total ending of all involvement in relative, finite existence by entry into our eternal state of being as the pure Self or Atman which is eternally a part of–and united to–the Supreme Self, Parabrahman, the Absolute.

The aspiration for liberation through sadhana must be kept in mind and lived unbrokenly until that goal is reached. And Soham sadhana is the way.

With meditation, all anxieties and doubts vanish. With meditation comes peace. With meditation, knowledge becomes pure. With meditation the intellect (buddhi) becomes pure.

By “meditation” here Gajanana Maharaj means both japa during all activities and formal, sitting meditation—the unbroken stream of Soham smarana (remembrance), centering our awareness in the subtle, mental intonation of Soham in time with the breath. The most amazing thing I experienced at the very beginning—I mean even the first hours of my practice of Soham in time with the breath—was the vanishing of all anxieties and doubts regarding Soham sadhana. I KNEW that I had at last found The Way.

Before that I spent over fifty years of devoting myself to one form of supposed yoga after another, realizing after long practice that each one was taking me nowhere, then taking up another method and finding the same result. But refusing to take No for an answer, I kept on until one day while surfing the internet by accident I found the life and teachings of Sri Gajanana Maharaj.

Maharaj and his teachings were revelations to me. I sat and began observing my natural breath, mentally intoning *So* when I inhaled and *Ham* when I exhaled. After about five minutes I inwardly exclaimed to myself: “Oh! THIS IS IT!” And kept on. A real yogi at last. No groveling before some guru and joining some sampradaya. Just Soham.

And that was the answer, the key to everything. I experienced for myself the truth of these blessed words:

With meditation, all anxieties and doubts vanish.

With meditation comes peace.

With meditation, knowledge becomes pure.

With meditation the intellect (buddhi) becomes pure.

Take the lamp of knowledge of the Self (Atmajnana) in your hand. You are neither any god, goddess or any other being. You are the Original Form (Adi Rupa). You are yourself Brahma Prakash (Brahman in the form of light). Brahman does not admit of any differentiation. This is the play of Atma Sukha (Happiness of the Self). No one apart from you is playing this. It is a constant, pure Essence. That is Adi Brahman, the Ultimate Being. To realize the Atman you need the inner sight.

What is the lamp of knowledge of the Self? Soham. It is itself the Inner Self. We are not any god, goddess or avatar of history. Therefore meditation on any of them and recitation of mantric invocations of them cannot reveal the Self—just the opposite; it will prevent us from knowing the Self.

What is the inner sight we require? It is the light of Soham which is our original form, the light of Brahman, beyond all differentiation, happiness and contentment in the experience of the Self. Everything but Soham is separate from us; but Soham is the ever-existing pure Essence: Adi Brahman, the Ultimate Being. To realize this we need the inner vision-experience which is inherent in Soham. Therefore it is the only lamp of Self Knowledge. Find this out for yourself, as have all the Nath Yogis throughout their history. Soham Kevalam. Soham Alone.

Come to your senses. Understand my words. Store them in your mind. Become fortunate. First you must follow the path. The path to Brahman the Source is full of mind-boggling insights. You have to be steady, so make the resolve to be so.

This is the wake-up call we all need. We should look at it sentence by sentence, for it is packed with essential knowledge we need.

Come to your senses.

We must wake up and function in our right, clear-seeing mind—the mind of the true spirit-Self. This is the first step in spiritual life and awakening. It is spiritual sanity and intelligence. Those who lack this cannot even correctly conceive of spiritual life, much less have a clue as to how to live a spiritual life. Those without this awakening and understanding cannot possibly comprehend anything about the yoga path, and speaking with them is a thorough waste of time. As the saying goes: “Never try to teach a pig to sing. It only wastes your time and annoys the pig.” And just because someone is intellectually curious and says they are “interested” does not mean that they can understand a word you will say. And if they do, they will not like it. Jesus, himself a Nath Yogi (see Appendix One of *Soham Yoga*, and *The Christ of India*), said: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Matthew 7:6). I know the truth of this from my own experience as a beginning yogi.

Understand my words.

The understanding we need of Maharaj’s words is certainly an intellectual grasp, but it is much, much more. What we need is a real insight into the depths and the heights of the yoga philosophy and life. And that insight is mostly intuition—an intuition that cannot exist without a significant degree of spiritual evolution on our part and the positive karma that comes from sincere and sustained spiritual endeavor in a previous lives.

Store them in your mind.

The wisdom Maharaj is speaking must be assimilated by us, literally built into the fabric of our minds and lives. Other wise his words have no effect on us. This is very well illustrated by a parable of Jesus.

“Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

“Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Hear [understand] ye therefore the parable of the sower.

“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth” (Matthew 13:3-9; 18-23).

The ability to comprehend and keep hold of the understanding and insight into spiritual matters is a rare thing. Do not expect to find it frequently in others, and you may not find it at all. This is why the yogi must be prepared to walk the path alone throughout his life. Occasionally we do find someone that seems qualified, but as time passes their interest wanes and they vanish. Others, however, feeling guilty at their spiritual infidelity, become hostile and defensive and tell you how wrong you are and then walk away in “righteous” indignation. About such people Yogananda said: “Blot them out of your mind.” Do not pursue them or wait for them to wake up and return. They will not. Forget them and keep on walking the way alone.

Become fortunate.

This is a very interesting counsel. We always think that people are fortunate or unfortunate by karma, that it is a matter of being “lucky” or “unlucky.” But Maharaj sees with a yogi’s eyes. Those without spiritual motivation or attainment are impoverished, whereas those with spiritual motivation and attainment are rich and have abundance of positive karma. These are spiritual riches that can be gained only by spiritual means—especially by the practice of yoga sadhana, which means that those who persevere in practice daily increase their spiritual wealth.

First you must follow the path.

All the previous counsels are profound and very necessary, but Maharaj wants us to understand very clearly that these are not attainments in themselves—they are *results* that come from the primary factor: conforming our life to the principles of yoga, especially yama-niyama, and then in all things living as a yogi, sadhana being the foundation of everything else.

The path to Brahman the Source is full of mind-boggling insights.

Absolutely! Within the first two or three weeks of practicing Soham Yoga I discovered things about the makeup of my subtle inner mechanism (antahkarana) that I had never found hinted in the decades of my reading of books on yoga, including those of the renowned Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe). I learned important things about the nature of the nadis, sushumna, kundalini and chakras, for example. Only Soham sadhana revealed this to me, and that is reasonable since only the Soham sadhaka is going to know what to do with that knowledge. I can cool-headedly and rationally tell you that all of my not inconsiderable experiences from practice of ordinary “yoga” were utterly childish in comparison with what began and continued for

me through the power of Soham. And besides that, I began to understand much more about the philosophy and concepts of Sanatana Dharma than ever before.

You have to be steady, so make the resolve to be so.

Yes, the journey of a thousand miles may begin with one step, but it consists of countless more steps, otherwise we will never get to the destination. And the journey must be continuous and constant, not in fits and starts. Continuous perseverance is not just an important factor, it is the journey itself. Yoga is a lifetime commitment and a total life commitment, as well. It is a matter of All Or Nothing. "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive [labor fervently] to enter in at the strait [narrow] gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.... but he that endureth [continues] to the end shall be saved" (Luke 13:23-24; Matthew 10:22). We must realize this at the very beginning and keep it in mind to the very end. It is true: Plod Rhymes with God.

In reference to the foregoing statements, Maharaj continues:

Thus the sadguru blessed me, lit the lamp of knowledge within me and erased my ignorance by giving me knowledge. Thus he taught me, and it became etched on my mind.

We need no comment on this: just to follow Maharaj's example and attain exactly what he attained through Soham sadhana.

There is just one Atman (Self) which is the same in every being. If you are holding the chakras, then you will easily be freed from the cycle of birth and death.

There is no need of different paths for different temperaments and suchlike, for the atman in each sentient being (not just human beings) is the same, for they are all part of the one Paramatman. Soham is functioning in every breathing entity (including plants), awaiting its conscious awakening in the human beings that become Soham yogis and awaken their chakras through Soham sadhana.

The Nath Yogis are very conversant with the chakras, and if you experience any of them, or the adharas, you will understand what you are perceiving. However there is no need to work with any of them, because during the practice of Soham Yoga, every chakra and nadi is affected and glow with subtle light. As the process continues, they increase in brightness and begin to develop as a seed does when exposed to heat and light. The same is true of every cell and every atom in the yogi's being on all levels, physical, astral and causal.

While in the material world repeat and meditate on Soham, which will save all beings provided they constantly remember it.

In the Gita God speaks through Krishna saying to all of us: "You find yourself in this transient, joyless world. Turn from it, and take your delight in me. Fill your heart and mind with me, adore me, make all your acts an offering to me, bow down to me in self-surrender. If you set your heart upon me thus, and take me for your ideal above all others, you will come into my Being" (Bhagavad Gita 9:33-34).

This is a very high and intense ideal. How can it be achieved? Maharaj has told us in the above words. As long as we are in this world we should continually repeat and meditate on Soham. For Soham is the savior of all those who constantly keep it in mind through repeating it in time with the breath and experiencing its effects as they do so. Truly, “And though you were the foulest of sinners, this knowledge alone would carry you like a raft, over all your sin” (Bhagavad Gita 4:36)

Absolutely unparalleled and unequaled is this Soham Yoga, which makes the material world disappear from the mind and the Self appear. When you use other means like rituals and asceticism they do not give you what you wish for.

This first sentence is a paraphrase of the words of Sri Matsyendranath and Sri Gorakhnath and the Yoga Chudamani Upanishad: “The inhalation comes in with the subtle sound of *So*, and the exhalation goes out with the subtle sound of *Ham*. There is no knowledge equal to this, nor has there ever been in the past or shall be in the future any knowledge equal to this. There is no japa equal to this, nor has there ever been in the past or shall be in the future any japa equal to this.” For it truly does expunge the delusions of the world from our mind and reveals the Self to us in direct experience. External acts such as religious rituals and physical austerities cannot do this, though they have genuine value in purifying us and preparing us for the realization bestowed by Soham Yoga.

When the jiva, the individual Self, and Shiva, the Supreme Self, merge inwardly through the japa of Soham, that is the means whereby you can become immortal when perfectly established in that state. Understand that this Soham Hansa (Swan of Soham) state is the ultimate state in yoga.

This sacred union is accomplished “through the japa of Soham,” and “is the means whereby you can become immortal.” But you must become totally, permanently established in that state.

Although in the West we always think of swans as swimming graciously through water, in India the swan, the hansa, is known for its ability to fly high above the earth through the sky and is considered a symbol of the sun itself—the fully risen sun of the illumined Self in the sky of infinite consciousness, the chidakasha. The illumined Self is itself Soham and bears within itself the ultimate state in yoga, the Self-realization which is attained through Soham sadhana alone.

Meditate on the sounds of the inner, mental repetitions of Soham until they reveal the Self.

This is the path of Soham sadhana: the absorption of the yogi—the total filling of his awareness with the sounds of the inner, mental repetitions of Soham and experiencing their effects leading to the revelation/realization of the Self.

Listen to my words with full attention. Soham is a Purna [complete, all-encompassing] Mantra.

There are countless mantras for specific purposes, but Soham is the supreme mantra because it affects every aspect of our being and our lives. This is quite a claim, but those who seriously engage in Soham sadhana can attest that this is true. Maharaj once stated that he felt there was no disease that Soham could not cure, meaning that prolonged practice of Soham would purify all the karmas of the sadhaka, including the karmas that produce illness or defects in the body. When the sun rises it does not just illumine some things and not others, but all equally. In the same way, the light of Soham purifies and corrects everything in our lives—inner and outer. Practice will reveal this to anyone.

With this [Soham] you will become a Self-realized person, an Atmajnani.

Soham is Brahmajnana [knowledge-experience of Brahman].

This is because Soham is Soham Bhava, the consciousness “I am That” which is Brahmajnana.

Soham is the Nirguna Brahman.

Nirguna Brahman is beyond all relative existence which is Saguna Brahman. The Saguna binds, but the Nirguna liberates. Through Soham the Unattainable is attained.

Soham is the Only Guru.

This is absolutely true. Through Soham all is known and all is attained. For Soham is the Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahman—Brahman that is Truth and Infinite Knowledge—Satchidananda Itself. Those who immerse themselves in the japa and meditation of Soham will find that it becomes the guru that leads to total liberation.

Everything is Soham Brahman, Soham Shabda, Soham Atmaram [Self], Soham Vishnu, Soham the All-pervading, Soham Shiva, Soham Shakti, Soham Krishna, Soham Brahma, Soham Veda, Soham Shabda Brahman, and Soham Sudarshana.

Soham is All, and everything listed here is both known and attained through/in Soham.

One who attains Soham Sudarshana is the same as the Lord Krishna.

Lord Krishna is a purnavatara, a manifestation/incarnation of the fullness of Divinity. He attained that state through Soham and therefore holds the Soham Sudarshana in his hand—his consciousness. And it will be the same for those who attain siddhi through Soham.

The Shastras have been expounding the Soham Sudarshana for ages.

The sole message of the scriptures is the possibility and attainment of moksha. This realization, the Soham Bhava, is itself the Soham Sudarshana.

Soham Sudarshana is Nirguna (without attributes) and Saguna (with

attributes).

Soham embraces and contains within itself the nirguna and saguna states—the total range of existence.

Soham is the state of an Avadhuta.

Avadhuta means “cast off” in the sense of 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, embodying the highest state of asceticism or tapas. The state of realization is the embodiment of Soham Bhava, the state of the avadhuta.

Soham Brahman is attained by practicing meditation on Soham. Attain Soham Brahmajnana, and even death will prostrate before you.

Soham is itself the state of immortality and vanquishes death absolutely.

Soham is the essence of ritual worship.

The real purpose of ritual worship is to align our awareness with the divine by external means. But he who immerses himself in Soham becomes one with the God men worship and thereby performs the ultimate worship of God.

Meditate with the Soham Brahman.

Often when we see something we say, “Let me see that,” even though we already do see it. What we really are asking is “Let me get to know that by touching and experiencing it.” To meditate with Soham is to experience the Soham Brahman ourselves.

Soham is the Muktidata [one who gives Moksha/Liberation].

Then look nowhere but to Soham for liberation.

Soham is the Brahma Bhagavad Bharata [the Divine Scripture of India].

The scriptures of India are vast and therefore extremely complex. But Soham is the essence, the capstone, of them all. He who knows Soham knows all that need be known. In truth, all sacred knowledge has come from the Divine Source that is embodied in Soham

Soham is the giver of Brahmajnana [knowledge of Brahman].

This may seem an exaggerated statement, but it is not. When the yogi immerses himself in the japa and meditation of Soham he begins to discover that Brahman Itself is embodied in the Soham mantra. At first that awareness is slight—so much so that he may not even realize what he is experiencing. But as time goes by, he understands that every inner repetition of Soham is a linking with the Ultimate Consciousness that is both his individual Self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman), that Soham is both the path and the Goal. It leads to Brahmajnana and is Brahmajnana—the realization

of Brahman. Such realization is, as Shankara often remarked, like the holding of an amalaki (myrobalan) fruit in the palm of one's hand.

Soham is the meaning of the Bhagavad Gita.

At the end of each chapter of the Bhagavad Gita are the words: "Thus in the Upanishads of the glorious Bhagavad Gita, the science of the Eternal, the scripture of Yoga...." Soham itself is the basis of the words of the Gita: "I will give you all this knowledge, and direct spiritual experience, besides. When a man has that, nothing else in this world remains to be known" (Bhagavad Gita 7:2). For Soham is itself "that innermost secret: knowledge of God which is nearer than knowing, open vision direct and instant. Understand this and be free for ever from birth and dying with all their evil" (Bhagavad Gita 9:1).

Soham is the Gayatri.

Gayatri is a poetic meter, but when we say "the Gayatri" we mean the Savitri Gayatri, the Rig Vedic mantra for enlightenment: "We meditate on the effulgent glory of the divine Light; may he inspire our understanding." This is the expression of our aspiration, but Soham is the power that fulfills that aspiration. Thus it is the Gayatri in living form; both a mantra and the realization that is produced by the mantra. This can be discovered for himself by any yogi that perseveres in Soham sadhana.

Soham is all that is sacred.

This has two meanings. 1) Soham is the essence, the revelation, of all that is sacred. 2) Soham transforms our entire being into That which is sacred in itself—the all encompassing Brahman.

Soham Sadhana is complete in itself.

Think how simple Soham Sadhana is: Mentally intoning *So* while naturally inhaling and *Ham* while naturally exhaling. But what it accomplishes is infinite. Consider how simple Einstein's equation $E=mc^2$ is, yet from that has come the atomic bomb and all the developments of atomic power. Think how small a key is compared to the mass of the door it opens, and how minimal is the action of turning the key in the lock. But its effect is not small, either. (Think how simple it is to strike a match, but the burning of thousands of acres of forest can result.) The Soham key is all we need to open our consciousness and imbue it with divinity.

Meditating on Soham makes the mind still, and in that stillness is the first stage of samadhi. This meditation is itself samadhi.

This is an extremely important statement, since so many books and articles about yoga and meditation are aimed at an audience looking for amazing and spectacular accounts of yogic experiences rather than simple truth. Consequently people have utterly absurd ideas about the nature of real meditation, and samadhi in particular. Samadhi does come in stages, but all those stages occur spontaneously as a result of

Soham meditation. It is incredibly easy and natural.

Soham eliminates all obstacles.

Experience reveals this, but only when the practice is supported by yama and niyama and purification—especially in diet, since the mental energies are drawn exclusively from the food the yogi eats.

Soham meditation should be done quietly and privately.

Gajanana Maharaj would not allow his students to even speak his name to others or let anyone know they were practicing meditation. (If they told him about someone they felt was capable of Soham Yoga practice he might allow them to tell about him or to bring them to meet him. But it was very rare.)

Maharaj always told his students to never reveal that they meditated and never to engage in discussions about yogic subjects with others. Practice of meditation is a deeply personal matter and it is detrimental to speak of it to others. Naturally there can be exceptions to this, but a yogi must be very careful. Those who cannot keep silent about their practice and keep their spiritual life centered within themselves are not qualified to be yogis. A great saint once said, “I have often regretted speaking, but never have I regretted keeping silent.”

Soham meditation will eliminate all desires and karmas and will break the cycle of birth and death.

This does not mean that the yogi need not put forth any effort to order his life according to yogic principles, but that those who do so order their lives will find that any potential obstacles will be eliminated by Soham meditation.

Soham meditation makes you imperishable and immovable.

That is because the light and life of the imperishable and immovable Self will fill your consciousness and life since Soham is your Self—or rather, you yourself are Soham.

Soham is the Self, and one learns of it only after many births.

Therefore, your learning about Soham is itself proof that you are ready to be a yogi and succeed in Soham Yoga practice. Now it is all in your hands. Go forward!

Soham is the seed of Self-realization.

Soham is inseparable from the Soham Bhava, the realization of one’s Self as Soham—the consciousness and total realization: “I Am That Divine Self!” As the seed grows into the full plant if it is planted and watered and tended carefully, in the same way the Soham yogi will attain realization if he orders his life in conformity with the principles of the yoga life.

All the siddhas meditate on Soham.

This has two meanings. 1) The perfected yogis who dwell in the highest level of

existence, Siddhaloka, the world of the siddhas. always are immersed in the contemplation-meditation of Soham. 2) All siddhas, and those who are destined to become siddhas, meditate on Soham throughout their life in this world and beyond.

With Soham meditation, one is purified.

Just as light dispels darkness and fire purifies gold, so Soham meditation purifies the physical, astral and causal bodies of the yogi. Even more, it corrects their polarities and integrates them with one another and corrects defects in them. Gajanana Maharaj said that he felt that there was no disease Soham could not cure.

Soham meditation gives the ultimate state of moksha.

The truth of this statement can be demonstrated by the yogi's dedicated adherence to Soham sadhana and the disciplines that support it and make the various bodies of the yogis more responsive to the power of Soham.

Through Soham the adept sadhaka is able to do anything and abide in Self-knowledge.

This, too, is an amazing statement, but the Soham yogi can experience it for himself. Practice is the way.

To what I am going to tell you, listen carefully. Keep your awareness within the head [the brain, the sahasrara chakra, the thousand-petalled lotus]. There you will find the Gurupada, the feet of the Inner Guru, the Self. Be absorbed in the subtle sound of your mental intonations of Soham in time with the breath.

Soham is the mantra of the sahasrara, and its japa and meditation establish the Soham yogi's awareness in the sahasrara. It is good for the yogi to occasionally deliberately put his awareness in the whole brain and hear and feel his intonations of Soham vibrating there.

In *From the Finite to the Infinite* Swami Muktananda Paramahansa says: "[The Guru Gita] speaks of a mantra in the sahasrara, at the crown of the head. Inside there is a triangle [trikuti] and there are two syllables, *So* and *Ham*, and the mantra Soham arises from there. Right in the center of this triangle the guru dwells. For this reason, you don't have to continue to search for a Guru. If you see that Guru, you will receive messages from him. If you experience this relationship between a Guru and a disciple, even for a moment, it is more than enough."

I know this to be true from my own experience. I have seen and perceived the Gurupada (Feet of the Guru) very clearly. I will not describe it, so when you see it yourself you will know it is real and not think it is your imagination based on my description.

Meditation Yoga is mild and clear.

How much is conveyed here in so few words! It is very important for the yogi to ignore all the chills-and-thrills descriptions of yogic experiences by deluded yogis—

especially their cataclysmic “kundalini” experiences that are either lies or proofs of their psychosis. Soham sadhana is absolutely natural for the yogi since it is based on the fundamental realities of his own nature. Therefore, amazing as the Soham yogi’s experiences will be, at the same time they will be gentle, correcting and healing and fully comprehensible. He will learn much from them, but because they are completely natural and truly real he will not be overwhelmed or overcome by them—as I have heard practitioners of false yoga bragging about.

The world, Brahman and the Self should all be merged. That is the true Brahmajnana, there is nothing else besides this.

And Soham Yoga accomplishes it effortlessly and naturally.

When [the sense of] “you” and “him” merge, that is the real Veda.

Veda means knowledge and wisdom as well as the four scriptures known as Vedas (see Glossary). When your sense of existence as an individual consciousness merges with awareness of the Divine Consciousness and Being, you will experience—and be—the real Veda. Soham sadhana is the sure path to this realization.

The main factor in sadhana is the sattwa guna. Understand that through practice.

A *Brief Sanskrit Glossary* has this definition: “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.”

The Bhagavad Gita says the following about sattwa:

“Sattwa is stainless, luminous, and health-giving (salubrious); it binds by attachment to happiness and by attachment to knowledge....Sattwa causes attachment to happiness.....Sattwa prevails over rajas and tamas....When the light of knowledge shines in all the gates of the body, then it should be known that sattwa is dominant.... When the embodied one dies when sattwa is dominant, then he enters the stainless realms of the knowers of the Highest....The fruit of action performed well (well done), is sattwic.....From sattwa arises knowledge.... Those established in sattwa go upward....” (Bhagavad Gita 14:6, 9-11, 14, 16-18).

As the yogi practices Soham sadhana, the continuous process of purification or refinement takes place throughout the complex of his bodies. This results in the increase and eventual dominance of sattwa in him. Such things are comprehended only when they have occurred in the individual—not by descriptions such as this, which are only obscure hints because of the very nature of the subject. It is mystery, not mystification.

Yoga is primary. Understand that as the truth.

This means two things. Yoga is absolutely fundamental to the development of the human being. It is not just for mystics and the especially “spiritual.” It is also the bedrock, the sole, foundation of conscious evolution–self-evolution–without which there is no transcendence of the human condition.

This is the truth, the most important truth anyone can know–if he acts upon it–and understands that Soham Yoga is the only yoga. Not the best or the highest. The only yoga.

A Self-realized person thinks nothing of the material world.

This, too, has a dual meaning. 1) The Self-realized person considers that the material world, the world of atomic matter, has no value or meaning for him in the light of the reality and the destiny of his true Self. 2) The Self-realized person knows that the material world does not exist as a self-existent entity, but rather is only a reflection of the immaterial world mistakenly thought to be material. These two principles may seem contradictory, but the East has known from the beginning that this dichotomy is basic to relative existence-experience. The “Eastern mind” is capable of thinking in dichotomy–in two opposite directions at the same time. I learned this in just a few days after coming to India for the first time. The emergence of this mind–for it is innate–is the beginning of the possibility of becoming a yogi. And yoga is a “becoming” that is not at all a matter of will or intellect. It is a transformation that is the beginning of yoga–not a result of anything whatsoever. Wanting and willing have nothing to do with it. It either happens or it does not. And it rarely happens outside India or to a non-Indian. As an Indian yogi once said, “If you believe, you will see; but if you do not see, you will not believe.” Think that over.

“I” and “You” does not touch his mind.

This too has a dual meaning. 1) Seeing anything in a dual manner is not possible for the Self-realized. 2) Ego, which is the basis of “I” and “You” does not touch his mind because the ego-sense has long ago disappeared in the total awareness of the Self.

A Self-realized person escapes from hundreds of thousands of birth and death cycles.

There is absolutely no possibility of ending the cycles of birth and death other than through Self-realization, for the Self alone is outside the cycles, untouched by them although it perceives them. For it never identifies with them. The birth/death cycles are eternal for everyone else.

In the Bhagavad Gita, through the mouth of Krishna, God himself tells us: “Since you accept me and do not question, now I shall tell you that innermost secret: knowledge of God which is nearer than knowing, open vision direct and instant. Understand this and be free for ever from birth and dying with all their evil. This is the knowledge above all other: purifier and king of secrets, only made plain to the eye of the mystic. Great is its virtue, its practice easy: thus man is brought to truth eternal. Those without faith in this, my knowledge, shall fail to find me: back they must turn to

the mortal pathway, subject still to birth and to dying.

“This entire universe is pervaded by me, in that eternal form of mine which is not manifest to the senses. Although I am not within any creature, all creatures exist within me. I do not mean that they exist within me physically. That is my divine mystery. You must try to understand its nature. My Being sustains all creatures and brings them to birth, but has no physical contact with them. For, as the vast air, wandering world-wide, remains within the ether always, so these, my wandering creatures, are always within me. These, when the round of ages is accomplished, I gather back to the seed of their becoming: these I send forth again at the hour of creation. Helpless all, for Maya is their master, and I, their Lord, the master of this Maya: ever and again, I send these multitudes forth from my Being” (Bhagavad Gita 9:1-8). This process is eternal. Therefore those who do not detach themselves from relative existence shall never be free.

And we must not think that this process exists only in this material universe. Birth and death go on continually in the astral and causal worlds as well, though their trauma is not so intense. Only in transcending all relativity can peace and stability be attained. It truly is an escape from imprisonment and insecurity.

A Self-realized person attains liberation from rebirth. That, too, through and in this physical body.

Liberation is not a matter of karma or embodiment or disembodiment. It is solely a matter of consciousness, for the Self is nothing but consciousness. So the idea that person must be disembodied to attain liberation is erroneous, including the mythology that at the disciple's death as he leaves the body his guru will liberate him. Each one of us liberates himself while in the physical body. Otherwise there is no liberation for any of us. This is the way things are. This is why yoga is the sole resort of the true mumukshu—the seeker after liberation (moksha). And there is no true yoga but Soham Yoga through which the yogi liberates himself by his own sadhana effort. All else is falsehood and self-delusion. Soham is the only hope.

Make this as your routine: meditate at least for an hour or so. Thus you will quickly have experience.

We do not just believe in Soham, we unite with it through Soham sadhana. “For him who does not meditate there is no peace or happiness” (Bhagavad Gita 2:66), so the Soham yogi understands that his liberation is attained only through Soham meditation. Meditation must become as much a part of our life as waking and sleeping. The more we meditate the sooner realization becomes ours. And here we see that Gajanana Maharaj tells us that one hour is the shortest time we should meditate. (Not that we should foolishly neglect meditation if at some times we do not have a full hour to meditate.) Three to four hours daily is an ideal minimum.

By right behavior, right thoughts, philanthropy and reading spiritual books, understand what is truth and what is not.

This is a most informative statement. Meditation is not enough. Right behavior and right thoughts, which are produced by the observance of yama and niyama, are necessary. And so is the helping of others motivated by kindness and mercy. The study of spiritual books is also a requisite—not an option—though yoga and guru cults usually discourage it. Only with these supports to our meditation can we hope to understand what is truth and what is not. There are no exceptions.

Consider anyone as a child of the Almighty; salute them lovingly and create for yourself peace on earth.

The universal law is: “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). To create for yourself peace on earth, “Follow peace with all men” (Hebrews 12:14)—a peace of loving-kindness.

Do not have attachments in the material world, and restrain all attraction. Then there will be no differentiation between people, and your mind will be centered in the Self.

This is a very high ideal which is only possible through a great deal of spiritual discipline. But it becomes possible when the three previous sections are perfectly and unfailingly followed.

Among all the different stages of the powers of Shakti, the power of Soham is the most exalted.

The entire range of relative (subject/object) existence is formed of Shakti—Divine Power or Energy which is essentially Consciousness. The primary Duality of existence is spoken of as Shiva-Shakti. The Shiva Principle (Tattwa) is unmoving Consciousness, whereas the Shakti Principle (Tattwa) is moving Consciousness, dynamic Power which manifests as all the levels of Evolving Energy. Shiva and Shakti are one, but relative beings perceive and speak of them as two. Since the focus of the yogi is evolution leading to transcendence of all relativity, Shakti is the center of his focused awareness and the means by which he ascends to perfect Self-realization.

The range of manifestations of Shakti is virtually infinite. But the highest is Soham, which is the supreme transformational power or shakti. At the same time it embraces all levels and manifestations of shakti. This being so, Soham is the beginning and ending of all evolution. Therefore, to evolve ourselves and attain the pinnacle of Consciousness, Soham in the dynamic, transformative form that is Soham Yoga is both the means and the goal. Consequently, Soham is the only focus or element needed to attain siddhi (perfection) or Self-realization. This is the message of the Nath Yogis, the original yogis, and of Sri Gajanana Maharaj of Nashik, the living embodiment of Soham.

One of Gajanana Maharaj's students related the following: On one occasion when I was sitting near Sri Gajanana Maharaj in meditation, I thought I was going through a

deep valley. There was partly light and partly darkness there, and when I went almost to the bottom, I heard the sound of “Soham” coming from above, and the sound of “Koham” coming from below. When I asked Maharaj what it meant, he said, “Koham means ‘Who Am I?’ to which the answer is ‘Soham, I Am That’–God.”

Who Am I? is the primal impulse within every single entity within the range of evolutionary existence. For countless incarnations/manifestations the evolving individual is impelled by this force whose ultimate goal or purpose is the realization-knowledge-experience of Soham: I Am That. Therefore I said previously that Soham is the beginning and ending of all evolution. Soham is both the seed and the fruit of the ultimate realization of the Self.

I am neither a saint nor a Maharaj. As ordered by my guru, Sri Narayana Saraswati, I tell the mantra Soham given to me by him to any one who comes to me. I do this in the manner of a friend. In the words of Ramdas, “One should teach others what one knows and make all people around one wiser than before.” My master has allotted this work to me. Whoever comes to me with a sincere desire, I tell him this mantra, through the power of my master.

The account of Maharaj’s meeting with Sri Narayana Saraswati and its subsequent results is found in *Light of Soham*.

Notice that Maharaj does not say he “initiated” people, as do the gurus who claim to empower the disciple, or that those he taught (“told” the mantra Soham) were his disciples. Rather, as a friend he taught anyone who came to him with the desire for Self-realization. For Soham was not something new to them, but the inner impulse that had been carrying them along the path of evolution from the beginning. But whereas it previously was operating on a subliminal or subconscious level, through learning Soham from Maharaj it became part of the friend’s conscious life–his sadhana practice.

And Maharaj did not consider that he was giving the friend anything of his (Maharaj’s) own, but rather was relaying to him that which had come down through the ages beginning with Sri Adinath, the first known Nath Yogi, to Sri Narayana Saraswati, who had handed it on to him.

And what they did with that teaching was solely their own doing by their own power. It was like any other learning. The one who taught me to read had not invented the alphabet or writing or printing or books, but only handed on to me what centuries of teachers had imparted to their students. What I did with it was up to me. I am sure that many of my classmates never read a single book after graduating from high school. But I did; and now I have written this book you are reading. And what you do with the information you learn is now all up to you. I have nothing more to do with the matter.

I look upon all human beings as being equal. All living creatures bear the Divine Spirit and hence every human being is fitted to follow the spiritual path. I do not look upon any one as wicked or unfit to follow the spiritual path. Whoever comes to me, I tell him what I know.

As Jesus, himself a Nath Yogi, told his friends “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). And: “I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). This is the true way.

But it is not my custom to accept any worship, service, dakshina [gift or offering] or arati as a guru first and then to instruct that person.

Arati is a ceremony of worship in which lights, incense, or other offerings are waved before an image or symbol of the Divine. The things Maharaj lists here are not just the norm in India, they are considered absolutely necessary in relation to a guru. But Maharaj shows us that a true guru has nothing to do with such things. I have met fake gurus who allowed their disciples to dress them up as a god or goddess and worship them—supposedly just to be gracious to the disciples and not disappoint them. Those who like this can find thousands of gurus in India or here who will thrive on all that. But those who wish to learn the true way should realize that true gurus never engage in such absurd antics.

It was a real shock when I read about Maharaj and his honest and true ways as a spiritual friend, because I, too, had waved the lights and made the offerings and put crowns on the clowns. But it was also a relief when I saw the circus for what it was and gratefully went the way of the wise.

Nor do I mislead women.

In reading about Maharaj we find that he had very few women disciples. At first we might think that this means he did not like women or thought that they should not or could not take up yoga sadhana. But that is not so. First, he had few women disciples in comparison with the glitter gurus who abound in “gopis” and “matajis” among their disciples and in their ashrams. Second, Maharaj saw very few people at all. When he left his body it was estimated that in his entire life he had only instructed about fifty people in Soham sadhana. For he refused all publicity, and as I have related he would see no one but those he agreed to meet after a friend had told him about a possibly worthy person qualified to be a yogi. His disciples were as a result mostly men. If they considered that their wives or female relatives were both interested and qualified to be yogis Maharaj would meet them. And if they (not their husbands) expressed a desire to learn meditation, then Maharaj taught them *in their husband’s presence* (this is important) and guided them just as he would any male student. But he always respected the ways of real dharma and never was alone with a woman. I have never forgotten the woman in the Calcutta Howrah railway station that forcibly ejected a man from a “women only” railway carriage right next to the carriage I was in. The man made a fuss about such “backward ideas” and she said loudly and clearly, “It is a matter of dignity!” She was right. And in India at that time there were seats reserved for women only in public buses. And it was out of respect, not misogyny.

My sadguru had me drink the nectar [amrita] of Nama (Name of God) and I tell you the same Nama, being ordered by my sadguru to do so.

This is an unusual statement. Usually in India when the Name of God is referred to, it means a proper name such as Shiva, Krishna, Rama, Durga, etc. It may refer to the simple Names as I have listed, but it also may mean a mantra to a particular form of God such as Om Namah Shivaya, Om Sri Krishnaya Namah, and so on.

Soham, being a statement—I Am That—is by itself not considered either a formal mantra or an actual Divine Name. Only in Maharaj's teachings have I found this idea of Soham being a Name of God. Obviously this is unique to the tradition of the Nath Yogis whose entire sadhana is based on Soham.

Soham is the embodiment or sound-form of a particular state of consciousness: the Soham Bhava, the Consciousness of the Unconditioned Absolute Brahman. Naturally there would be no form considered proper to Soham since the Unconditioned Absolute Brahman has no form whatsoever. Nor does It have a proper name, for it is beyond all designation or description, and is not an object that can be named or described.

Obviously the Nath Yogis and Maharaj are in another realm altogether: that of the authentic original yoga. And in that realm Soham is the only true Name of God (Brahman). And that Name is itself Amritam: That which makes the yogi immortal (amrita—undying). Therefore Maharaj taught others to assimilate (“drink”) it by constant japa and meditation and thereby to realize—enter into—their own immortal Self.

I am approaching the stage of perfection. If you also wish to come with me, you should repeat that Nama, Soham, in your heart with firm faith.

Soham is repeated mentally, silently. It is easily done so with firm faith because the aspiring yogi will right away begin experiencing its reality and its beneficial effects. Those who follow Maharaj's instructions will journey on the road to perfection (siddhi) as did he.

Your deep-rooted mental tendencies will vanish and the dirt of desire accumulated in previous births and in this birth will be washed away and your individual Self will be merged into the Universal Self and you will always remain in your real, original state and thus attain everlasting peace.

This is the state that you will attain through correct and sustained practice of Soham Yoga. It will not happen overnight, but if you persevere it will happen just as Maharaj says.

The advice that I give to others is not given in the capacity of a guru, but in that of a friend.

The Nath Yogis such as Gajanana Maharaj know that God alone is the guru, that those who show the way to Self-realization are the aspirants' friends, but God is the guru of all.

In the Bhagavad Gita God is addressed in these words: “You are the Father of the world, of the animate and inanimate, you who are to be revered, *you are the worshipful Guru*” (Bhagavad Gita 11:43).

“The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings” (Bhagavad Gita 18:61). 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).

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the oldest and longest of the upanishads, tells us: “In the beginning this (world) was only the Supreme Self [Paramatman], in the shape of a person. Looking around he saw nothing else than the Self. He first said, ‘I am Soham’ [Soham asmi]” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1:4:1). So by Soham sadhana God becomes our guru.

“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.

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 Guru of questing souls. All others are really only teachers (acharyas), valuable though they may be.

Sri Ramakrishna said, “Satchidananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss] alone is the Guru; he alone will teach” (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* 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 [ishta devata] 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).

The foregoing citations are taken from the Majumdar translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. In Nikhilananda’s translation we find: “‘I am a guru...’—that [thought] is ignorance” (p. 307.). “A man cannot be a guru” (p. 616). “If somebody addresses me as guru, I say to him: ‘Go away, you fool! How can I be a teacher?’” (p. 633). Sri Ramakrishna was also fond of a devotional song addressed to God, which said: “Thou art my ever-gracious Guru” (p. 207).

God is the guru of humanity because he has implanted in us the Soham mantra. In the depths of our being, God is perpetually stimulating—actually teaching—Soham as the agent of the spirit’s evolution and perfection. In this way God is the guru of each one of us. 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. “He is guru even of the ancients,” affirmed Patanjali (Yoga Sutras 1:26).

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

“To me the real meaning and understanding of discipleship is that a disciple, a true

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

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

Dr. Lewis himself was the disciple spoken of in India.

Soham is God. Soham is our guru.

I give this advice through the inspiration of my guru Sri Narayana Saraswati, and almost in his words. I, too, am still a student and I am sure that in some birth, either this or future, I shall attain the state of perfect union with Brahman (the Supreme Self).

There are some points in these two sentences that need our attention.

I give this advice through the inspiration of my guru Sri Narayana Saraswati, and almost in his words.

In the previous section I give a lot of quotations about God being the sole guru, and here Maharaj refers to Sri Narayana Saraswati as his guru! And this is so.

In Hindu tradition there is the distinction between the guru and the upaguru. *Upa* means associated or adjunct. The upaguru is the human teacher which imparts the wisdom of the infinite Guru: Ishwara or Bhagavan. Because of the divine wisdom which he teaches, the upaguru is revered, for without him who would show the aspirant the way to Self-realization? Therefore Maharaj is totally indebted to Sri Narayana Saraswati for his role in Maharaj's spiritual life. (See *Light of Soham*.)

The upaguru certainly is the sadguru, for he shows the way to the Real, to the realization of the Absolute Brahman as the aspirant's true Self. Maharaj even says that he gives spiritual instruction "through the inspiration of my guru Sri Narayana Saraswati, and almost in his words." For the Nath tradition must be scrupulously learned, observed and passed on to others. Yet we see that Maharaj preferred to be called the "friend" of those he taught, and whom he also called his "friends."

I, too, am still a student and I am sure that in some birth, either this or future, I shall attain the

state of perfect union with Brahman (the Supreme Self).

This is a realistic perspective on the part of Maharaj. There is a vast difference between someone who has transcended the human status and someone who has passed upward through all the worlds or levels of evolution and transcended them. Such a being, such a siddha, is greater than our small, human-limited ideas of God. The term purna (total; complete) avatar (incarnation) is easy to say, but impossible for anyone that is not himself a purnavatar to comprehend.

Maharaj was a great master yogi whom many of the Nath tradition believed was the reincarnation of Sri Chouranginath, the very first disciple of Sri Matsyendranath, the first public teacher of the Nath Yogi tradition. (Chouranginath was also crippled like Maharaj.) Yet Maharaj considered himself as still ascending the evolutionary ladder of Soham until “in some birth, either this or future, I shall attain the state of perfect union with Brahman” and be a purnavatar. This is the correct perspective, though simplistic views prevail today on the subject.

I have got certain experiences by the practice of meditation and japa. I shall give you certain directions through my guru’s grace, which you should follow and see what happens. If you are not benefited, you may leave them aside.

How completely different are these words from those of the deluded and deluding false gurus, who would never dare to utter such things to their hearers whom they intend to snare in the glittering net of their words which, though thoroughly false and fatuous, will appeal to those who love show and high claims—especially about the divine guru and the helpless, dependent disciple whom he will liberate at the time of death. And absolute loyalty and obedience until death is not at all demanded by Maharaj—just the opposite.

See how simply and humbly he speaks: “I have got certain experiences by the practice of meditation and japa.” He does not boast of liberation or of being liberated in many past lifetimes—a virtual avatar!

And does he tell his hearers to have faith and loyalty? Does he “vow” himself to them at “diksha” or have them vow themselves to him forever as his disciples? No. He says regarding his instructions: “I shall give you certain directions through my guru’s grace.”

And what should those so instructed do with them? “You should follow [them] and see what happens.” That is all! The experience of the student will tell whether Maharaj’s teachings are true or false! The student is to be the judge through honest self-scrutiny regarding those teachings. He is to be the sole judge of the practice he has been given. “Faith” and “loyalty” do not come into the picture at all. Freedom and self-reliance are the gifts given to them by Maharaj. For then Maharaj continues: “If you are not benefited, you may leave them aside.” No emotional blackmail or threats about “abandoning the guru” and “wandering for lifetimes.” Practice And Decide For Yourself is the counsel of Maharaj.

He set his students free right from the very beginning. He never snared them in emotional entanglements and nonsense about “love” between himself and the student.

Nothing such as: “Will you always love me as I love you?” as one fake guru would demand from each disciple.

Nor did he exact a solemn vow from his students to always practice his instructions for the rest of their life. “...you should follow and see what happens. If you are not benefited, you may leave them aside.”

See the difference between a true yogi and the fakes.

You will get the darshan of the Supreme Self by going into the Brahmarandhra (the center of the brain).

As cited earlier, Swami Muktananda Paramahansa wrote: “[The Guru Gita] speaks of a mantra in the Sahasrara, at the crown of the head. Inside there is a triangle [trikuti] and there are two syllables, *So* and *Ham*, and the mantra Soham arises from there. Right in the center of this triangle the guru dwells” (*From the Finite to the Infinite*, p. 307). The trikuti is also called “the feet of the Guru” who is God, *So* and *Ham* being the two feet. There he also said: “The Guru is always immersed in Soham. When the disciple becomes that Soham, he is a true disciple” (*From the Finite to the Infinite*, p. 285).

The awareness of the yogi is automatically drawn into the Sahasrara/Brahmarandhra by the japa of Soham in time with the breath.

Concentrate upon the mantra [Soham] and the result will inevitably follow.

Only a single step is needed to gain the ultimate realization—a step we must be “taking” all our life. Therefore Maharaj says:

O my mind, be always repeating the japa of Soham.

Through faith in Soham external worship has been left behind. The soul has been realized in the form of Soham. Through the sound of Soham the guru has been beheld—that guru who saves people by the principle of Soham.

Self-realization being the inmost experience, the yogi realizes that he should rely on the interior process of Soham sadhana alone. Looking for God outside himself, the aspirant is fated to fail, but looking for God inwardly through Soham sadhana, he is guaranteed to succeed. For Soham is the Self, the Guru That Saves.

Sri Ramdas has said, “Oh mind, you yourself have accumulated sin and merit in previous lives, and hence you have to endure the resulting good and evil in this life.”

Every creature has to endure the effects of his sins and good actions done in previous lives, and there is no escaping them.

People generally think of karma as something created by bodily action and experienced through the body and its conditions and surroundings. But Sri Ramdas addresses the mind (manasa) as the accumulator of positive and negative karma: punya and papam. This is why Sri Ramakrishna often said, “the mind is everything.” Maharaj comments on the words of Sri Ramdas, assuring us that every sentient being undergoes the results of his positive and negative actions, and thinking and willing are

also actions of the mind.

Karma is not some kind of doom, nor is it reward and punishment. It is action and reaction. “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). Learning is the purpose of karma. We are to learn the character of our thoughts and actions. As I said, we are not being punished or rewarded, we are just experiencing the inevitable results of our previous deeds. If we learn the lessons then our karma is fulfilled-dissolved. If we do not learn, then it keeps coming back to us until we do learn. There is no escaping in the sense of “forgiveness.” Karma is in our mind. When we elevate and purify our mind the karma is either transmuted into positive karma or is eliminated altogether. No one “escapes” from karma, but we can dissolve it through right thought and action—japa and meditation of Soham being the leading and surest means.

Fake gurus often claim they are “taking on” the karma of their disciples. This is impossible. As the Buddhist sutra says: “I have nothing but my karma; I shall never have anything other than my karma.” We make the difference. And no one can “work out” the karma of others. When a fake guru gets ill it is claimed that he is taking on the karma of his disciples since as a liberated being he can have no negative karma. But he can and does. Why? Because he is not liberated! He is something else that begins with the letter “I”—a liar. But when the hoodwinked disciples see Sri Guru in pain or physical decrepitude they grieve and believe that it is their karma he is suffering for them.

Although I am continuously suffering from bodily ailments I enjoy bliss in the contemplation of the Self [Atman]. The joy that I then experience is beyond description in words. The nature of every experience is such. If you want to realize the sweetness of sugar or the bitterness of quinine, you must taste it yourself. Any amount of description in words will never make you realize it. Self-realization is similarly a matter of experience, and firm faith alone will enable one to get that experience.

These are the words of a genuine yogi and a teacher-guide of yogis. He does not pretend to have no karmas or to be taking on the karmas of others. His ailments are his, and none other’s karma. Naturally we may wonder how it is that Maharaj was ill for twenty days out of every month—as he himself said. But as far as we know he never explained it, so speculation about it is pointless. What matters is his imparting the liberating path of Soham sadhana to his friends, who all attained spiritual heights by diligently following that path. And we can do the same.

My guru showered his grace upon me and gave me the ajapa japa mantra of Soham. This grace has deeply entered the innermost recesses of my heart. I can only say that I am enjoying complete rest in the shade of my guru’s grace.

There is a great deal of foolish talk about “guru’s grace” in the fake yoga world, but the concept is valid. It only need be understood. We see from these words that Sri Narayana Saraswati did not impart some esoteric power to Maharaj, some magical transformation as is claimed by the fake gurus. Rather, he instructed Maharaj in the

process of Soham Yoga. That was his grace: knowledge of Soham. And through subsequent practice of what he was taught, Maharaj could say, "This grace has deeply entered the innermost recesses of my heart." We, too, can experience complete rest—perfect peace—by doing the same with the knowledge of Soham sadhana. And that grace will thereby also be our own grace upon ourselves. For those who do not save themselves will not be saved.

I have above described in short the state of supreme peace that I have been enjoying. Naturally, all my actions are directed in creating as many sharers in this my state as possible. A description of my experiences is merely a part of these activities, and I try to see that others also get similar experiences.

Here we find the mindset of a true yoga master. It is his nature to focus on helping as many people as possible to experience what he is experiencing—not setting himself up as a great master beyond their comprehension and a minor deity to be literally worshipped and given every material comfort and advantage. This is, however, the way of the false gurus and their false disciples—for like attracts like.

The only way anyone can experience the supreme peace in which Maharaj lived is to learn and do what he learned and did: Soham Yoga. All they need is to learn the way from him and their success is assured if they continually apply what they learn. Maharaj never occupied his and their time with explaining subtle points of philosophy or expounding scriptures. Rather, he showed the way to the liberated consciousness which is embodied in all genuine philosophy and scriptures.

Maharaj did not tell of his experiences to convince others to admire him and become his disciples, but to inspire them to apply the same sadhana through which he had attained liberation. Nor did he imply that he was unique in his experience and realizations. Just the opposite. He told them that they could experience exactly what he did—and he showed them the way.

A single candle can light a thousand other candles, and once their wicks catch fire they are just like that candle, and can light a thousand others themselves. And each candle burns on its own, thoroughly independent of the others. Together and individually they make a great light in the darkness. There is no greater or lesser light among them. All are sources of light, and can make others into light sources as well.

This is the way of the Nath Yogis.

Every human being is ceaselessly trying to acquire happiness or to increase his share in it and to avoid pain, or at least to lessen it as much as possible. But the experience is just the contrary. He is ever feeling the lack of something and is always plunged in misery. Things which are pleasant in the beginning end in sorrow, and misery is always on the increase and gets the upper hand.

As man does not really understand wherein lies his happiness, he passes his days in the vain hope of securing happiness some time or other. Death catches him in its grip while his search for happiness is still going on. People do not profit by the example of their companions and fellow-beings, and so continue the

same search and follow the same path. They, however, do not stop to think wherein lies real and lasting happiness.

A man, if he thinks deeply about this, will come to know that all things in this world which appear pleasant are perishable and false like a mirage. They either cause pain or increase the pain which is already there. No one, however, acquires this insight. On the contrary, everyone is entangled more and more in this snare of misery and finds it difficult to see a way out of the maze.

It is therefore necessary that some royal road should be pointed out so that people going by that path might root out this unending sorrow and pain and reach the destination where there is everlasting peace and happiness. I am putting before the world my experiences in order that people might find an easy, short and sure way of reaching this goal of everlasting happiness.

When you get experience for yourself, you will be sure that you are on the right path. You will yourself enjoy full, complete and everlasting happiness and also lead other forlorn and miserable fellow-beings to the same path. It is the grace of my guru that prompts me to show this easy and royal road to the people who are engaged in worldly pursuits.

How simple are these words, yet how truly awesome in their scope. And they are for everyone, whatever their status in life may be. There is no one who is not ready. But they all must be willing.

There is a simple and royal road to obtain real happiness and bliss, a road which does not require the abandoning of worldly life and of our usual worldly activities. This path is known as Dhyana Yoga or Raja Yoga or Karma Marga. If you follow this path you are sure to reach the goal.

A tremendous amount has been written through the centuries making distinctions between Dhyana Yoga, Raja Yoga and Karma Yoga (Marga). Yet Maharaj tells us that division and distinction among them is an error. They are really one thing, though it has differing names. And that one thing is Soham Yoga.

To thoroughly understand the “I,” to seek for It and to catch hold of It, is the goal of this path. For a human being, whether man or woman, this is not an easy task. A keen desire to find out this “I,” a firm determination to carry on the search for It and great perseverance in sticking to this pursuit: these are the steps which an aspirant has to ascend if he wants to reach the goal. Once you reach the high pinnacle you can sit and cast a glance on the panorama of worldly existence spreading out below you.

The goal of real yoga is to experience the Self totally, to lack nothing in experience and knowledge of the yogi’s eternal being. This is the only goal of yoga.

Maharaj honestly says that attaining this goal is not an easy matter. Then he lists three essential factors necessary to succeed in yoga.

- 1) A keen desire to find out this “I.”
- 2) A firm determination to carry on the search for It.

3) Great perseverance in sticking to this pursuit.

All three are not just desirable, they are essential–indispensible. As Maharaj says: “These are the steps which an aspirant has to ascend if he wants to reach the goal.”

There is a story told in India about a young man who came to an ashram and asked the guru if could live there, and what would be required of him. The guru told him that beside hours of meditation he would be expected to join in the daily work of the ashram and its maintenance, and to engage daily in intense study of the scriptures. “This is required of all who live here,” concluded the guru. “And what will you be doing?” inquired the young man. “I will be overseeing the work activities and teaching the scripture study,” replied the guru. “Well, why don’t you make me a guru?” asked the young man, “That appeals to me a lot more than being a disciple!” As Maharaj said, it is not an easy task—for the lazy ego that wants to maintain itself in the manner to which is it accustomed. “Once you reach the high pinnacle you can sit and cast a glance on the panorama of worldly existence spreading out below you.” But not until then!

A person who feels this urge to find out the “I” and thus to enjoy this unrivalled empire of complete and unchanging bliss, is known as a mumukshu [a seeker after liberation–moksha]. To complete this search and to be in the enjoyment of this everlasting happiness is known as obtaining moksha. The path which leads to this moksha is known as yoga. This yoga is merely a means leading to the end.

Yogananda said that there are people so enamored of seeking that they are not interesting in finding, so much enjoying traveling that they never want to arrive. Since the goal of yoga is Self-realization and false yoga does not produce that realization, for such seekers there are the guru cults and the yoga cults. The guru cults make the guru and relationship with the guru the prime interest, though the disciples rarely have any contact with the guru except at activities which make money for the guru. The yoga cults extol the fake yoga practices they peddle and propagandize it continually. And their dupes keep congratulating themselves on how blessed they are to know this “highest technique” which often requires a series of initiations so the suckers will figure that eventually they will learn something that really works—so they keep hanging on and hoping.

But true yoga teachers and students know that only one thing matters: Self-realization. And they expect their practice to lead to it and accept nothing less.

To find out the “I,” the following things are necessary. First, a person must obtain the grace of a sadguru. Without giving the least scope to doubts and misgivings he must have firm, unswerving faith. Then he will be able to see clearly the path before him. This is known as Anugraha. When this Anugraha is obtained, he must carry on the japa of the mantra. This mantra is Soham, which is the answer to the question “Who am I?” The meaning of the mantra is: “I am He,” “I am God.” The sadhaka must carry on the japa with firm faith.

Unfortunately the term “sadguru” has come to carry the connotations of what

Swami Sivananda called “gurudom” in which such statements as “guru is God” are prevalent. (Regarding this, Sivananda wrote, “I abhor gurudom.”)

What, then, is a sadguru? A sadguru is one who teaches us the way to realize the Sat: the Real, the Self. The grace of a sadguru is not some mystical, spiritual or supernatural “empowerment” or protection or invisible guidance from within. Rather, it is the merciful and caring instruction of a qualified aspirant in the knowledge of yoga sadhana and assistance in any subsequent questions or difficulties that might arise regarding its practice.

But such care will be meaningless unless the aspirant sets his will and attention to every aspect of his practice and brings his daily life into conformity with the spiritual principles which underlie yoga itself. That is the real faith that is required of him, because as Saint James said, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20).

So we see that success requires two qualified people: the teacher and the taught. Then the aspirant will certainly “be able to see clearly the path before him.” This is the true anugraha: divine grace, favor and assistance. But that anugraha will be “dead” without the japa of the mantra Soham. Those who persist in the japa continually will come to know the ultimate truth: Soham—I am That.

The continuous repetition and meditation of this mantra, Soham, is known as abhyasa (practice). This japa will not interfere with any of your worldly duties. As the contemplation proceeds, the broom of Soham will sweep off the dirt of the innumerable desires entertained through the course of previous lives from the heart, and the heart will then become pure. Owing to this, a sense of detachment will grow and the mind will be entirely free from desires. As soon as you reach this stage, you will be immersed in the bliss of the Self. Then you will reach the summit and attain your goal.

This is all quite wonderfully clear, but we should look at the statement: “This japa will not interfere with any of your worldly duties.”

Throughout my years as a yogi I have continually heard the complaint that people could not follow the yogic path or practice because of external factors such as employment, personal traits, the opposition of those close to them, prior commitments and even their health. Although the japa will not interfere with the worldly duties, the duties do! Or so it is claimed. Sometimes this is true, and sometimes it is false—just a trumped-up excuse to avoid spiritual life and development.

If the worldly duties (obligations) interfere with our sadhana, then those duties have to be eliminated and others that do not interfere substituted in their place. Let me give an example. I was one of the first male long-distance telephone operators in the United States. Before I could be trained for long-distance I had to get some preliminary experience with the basic equipment, one of which was a small desk-like structure that had a vertical double line of keys. This was early days of direct-dialing, and when someone direct-dialed, a beep-beep came in my ear and I would say, “The number you are calling from, please.” The caller would say the number and as they did so I had to enter the number on the keys in front of me, punch another key and away their call

would go and another signal often came in immediately. To my way of thinking the most important thing in my life was constant mantra japa, and this work certainly interfered with it—very much. So at the end of the first day I resolved that if after two weeks I could not maintain the japa and key in the numbers at the same time, I would quit and find another job. Since where there is a will there really is a way, in two weeks I could keep up the japa and do the needful. So I stayed on and became a long-distance operator, often hearing a caller say to someone with them, “This telephone operator sounds like a man!”

Swami Trigunatitananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, made a sign for the San Francisco ashram that said: “Do Or Die. But You Won’t Die!”

Supposing all these things happen: you try to keep your mind pure and by continuous contemplation a feeling of detachment grows up in your mind. Still the question remains whether you, the sadhaka, can be said to have progressed. You can get a very satisfactory answer to this question.

To understand this clearly, let us take the very familiar instance of university and other examinations. There is a fixed curriculum and the question paper is the same for all candidates. We find thousands of students appearing for these examinations. All these students have completed their studies and have answered the question papers. Then why should there be the necessity of looking to the results of these examinations? All the candidates do not pass. Not only that, but several of them have to appear again and again and continue the same studies till their efforts are crowned with success. This is a matter of common experience. We see that the various candidates get marks according to their preparation and that many get failed and have to appear again.

The same analogy holds good in the case of spiritual matters. Every aspirant must, with perseverance and firm faith, carry on the abhyasa (practice) until he becomes fit to be the recipient of the final experience.

His progress will depend upon his practice in this life. But it goes without saying that he is sure to attain the goal sooner or later.

As the yogis say in India: *Banat, Banat–Banjai!* Doing, Doing–Done!

The next question is, “How far has the sadhaka progressed and has his aptitude for getting the ultimate experience increased or not?” There is a very easy method to find out the answer to this question. Just look back retrospectively. Consider what was the tendency of your thoughts before you began your practice, what were your defects and what were your merits then, and observe the tendency of your thoughts now. See whether your good qualities have increased and your defects have become less. If you observe these things minutely you will get an answer to the above question.

This really needs no comment, but it certainly needs inclusion in a compilation of Gajanan Maharaj’s teachings.

The following are some of the characteristics that accompany the stage of the realization of the final experience.

1) Desire, aversion, attachment and fondness for sensual enjoyments are conspicuously absent.

2) A feeling of complete detachment reigns.

3) The mind is, as it were, nullified. All disturbing waves of thought subside and the deep, calm ocean of peace pervades everywhere.

The real object of getting this human life is fulfilled. The real nature of "I" is thoroughly understood.

The continuous practice of dhyana and japa leads to this stage. In that stage, the dhyata, dhyana and the dhyeya—the contemplator, contemplation and the object of contemplation—become one, and thereby the real object of devotion is fulfilled.

Meditation and japa produce the state described by Maharaj—a state that is also the goal. This is the real fulfillment of human life. In that attainment total Unity of our being with Infinity is a permanent experience. This alone is real devotion to God.

As the sadhaka progresses, he gets certain powers (siddhis) in the natural course. He, however, must not be attracted towards those powers, but must carry on the practice with firmness. If he allows himself to be attracted by them, he becomes their prey and various obstacles then arise in the path of his progress, which sometimes is altogether stopped.

The ego desires two things: possession and power. Therefore the sadhaka must be vigilant and never caught in this dual trap and end up being possessed and powerless himself in the grip of the ego. A terrible addiction!

Our astral and causal bodies possess many potentialities usually undreamed of by us. There is no potential power or knowledge that we cannot develop or attain through the evolution that comes about through yoga practice. But because of the infatuation of the ego for these things we can be in great danger when they come into our possession or grasp. For if we do not immediately and ruthlessly reject and banish them, we will either forget spiritual life and become engrossed in these distractions like an infant playing with its toes, or we will use them for egoic advantages and desires and eventually lose all we have gained and be left wandering and empty—only a shell, a shadow of what we could have been if we had not deceived ourselves through ego.

Maya still makes the offer: "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9).

Now there is another question: Whether there is any use of carrying on the japa of Soham if we have no faith in its efficacy. The answer to that is that the repetition of the japa will always be useful, even though done without faith. It will never do you any harm.

This question is an old ploy of the deluded unseeker. One of my closest friends whom I taught how to meditate said to me several times, "What is the use of me

meditating if I don't really want to or feel like it"? She was highly intelligent, but the question was abysmally stupid. If you do not want to be injured can you jump in front of a fast-moving vehicle and not get hurt or killed? If you do not want to take medicine, but do so anyway, will it not work despite your aversion? If you do not want to get wet but jump into water, will you remain dry? Such an objection about not having faith or interest is utter foolishness. Soham Yoga works. Always. As Solomon said, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" (Proverbs 6:27-28). One of the words for yoga sadhana is tapasya—the generation of heat.

No doubt all the shastras and saints lay stress on faith, and hence the above statement will appear contrary to their teachings. However, if you go deep into the matter and observe minutely, you will easily be able to reconcile the two statements.

Without having faith—although it may be in the subconscious mind—no one will be induced to practice the japa. As soon as a person begins to repeat the japa, faith is there accompanying the japa like its shadow.

If we carefully follow this argument the seeming contradiction will cease to trouble us. A real mumukshu or devotee will never be deceived by the seeming contradiction, and will never allow his mind to be disturbed and turned away from the path.

A lot of people who do not want to get anywhere spiritually, yet whose egos will not let them be blatantly honest about their aversion-allergy to spiritual life—which includes spiritual practice—seek frantically for reasons to quit it or never start it. And the "faith" question which Maharaj is referring to is a common one. But he tells us two facts about ourselves. Within our subconscious, if there is no samskara (past life impression) from the practice of Soham sadhana in a previous life we will not be persuaded to take up the japa of Soham. The second is that "as soon as a person begins to repeat the japa, faith is there accompanying the japa like its shadow." That is, it is the very nature of Soham japa to create faith in us regarding its practice. This was my immediate experience, as I have related before.

But Maharaj's words appear to be like the statement I relayed some time back: "If you believe you will see; but if you do not see you will not believe." It seems to be a Chicken Or The Egg type of conundrum. But it is not. Here is a relevant passage from *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*.

"The universality of Soham Yoga practice is shown in the Garbha Upanishad which describes the various phases of the child's development in the womb. In the seventh month after conception, the soul receives knowledge of its past and future. It knows who it has been and who it will be, what it has suffered and what it will suffer. This profoundly disturbs and even frightens the child, so it begins calling on God for help. Since God is the indweller in all beings, he has all along been aware of the child's dilemma, and when it calls out to him he calms it by revealing the Atma Mantra, Soham, to it as a trait of its eternal being. When it takes refuge in that mantra,

repeating it in time with its internal breath which after birth will produce the lung-breath, it remembers its nature as part of God, from whom it is inseparable. In this way God has become its guru even in the womb. As Kabir said: 'The Guru awakened me within by imparting just one word.' Immersed in Soham awareness, the awareness of its true nature, it becomes calm and serene. But it loses this awareness in the trauma of birth and begins crying, making the sound Kwanh, Kwanh, or Ko'ham, Ko'ham: "Who am I? Who am I?" forgetting the insight it had gained. It loses the memory of Soham and begins to identify with the body and its characteristics. Plunged into ignorance through forgetfulness, it begins to live out that ignorance, unaware of the Self. Later if he comes to learn about Soham, he can regain his lost identity."

We have been repeating Soham in the womb before every birth in the human form. So nothing is more ingrained in us than Soham.

Only those whose negative karmas and samskaras control them totally will refuse to try the japa of Soham—or will (subconsciously) deliberately practice it incorrectly so they can say it has no value. I have been amazed by people writing to me asking if they can practice Soham sadhana in a different way than is outlined in *Soham Yoga*. Some of them have been very creative in coming up with wrong ways to practice. Of course, the purpose is to avoid the effects of right practice and thereby maintain their negative samskaras, delusions and ignorance.

How do we know who is a genuine, sincere aspirant? By Maharaj's preceding words: "A real mumukshu or devotee... will never allow his mind to be disturbed and turned away from the path."

The sadhaka alone, who has gained the aptitude for spiritual knowledge in his previous life, will develop a liking for this practice leading to oneness with Brahman, and he alone will ultimately enjoy everlasting bliss. All dross is sure to be swept away from the heart of such a sadhaka by the constant japa of Soham. If the seed of Soham is sown in such a field, it is sure to sprout into a beautiful tree which will be laden with the fruit of the bliss of Self-realization. Such sadhakas will be enjoying unchanging bliss and will very easily cross the river of worldly existence. When a sadhaka reaches this stage he can very easily control his mind, intellect and ahamkar. The power generated by the constant repetition of the Soham mantra is sure to lead to the complete deliverance of the sadhaka.

This is so perfect and so wonderfully true that no explanation or expansion is needed. Let's get on to the goal!

This mantra [Soham] is the inner, subtle sound produced by the incoming and outgoing breaths. Everyone is breathing and producing this sound, but no one is conscious of it. Hence no one practices this japa. But if anyone carries on the practice by fixing his attention upon this japa, he will be sure to obtain its fruit.

After being graced by my guru I carried on the japa with perseverance and firm faith, and later this practice became my nature.

Actually, the repetition of Soham is already our nature in our subtle bodies, for they are all vibrating Soham. And the Soham yogi becomes aware of this through his own japa and meditation.

Some people with devotion in their hearts come to me and persist in asking me to be their guru and favor them with my grace. They later on tell me that they had sakshatkar (realization). I listen to all these things and also observe them. Oh God, all these things come to pass through your grace alone. There is not the slightest doubt about this. You yourself gave me the mantra of Soham. I give them the same mantra. Through the power of this mantra you shower your grace upon them and bless them with real knowledge. I am only sorry that you have all along kept me an ignoramus. I, however, have determined to serve my guru to the end of my life, having fixed my firm faith in him. If you wish, keep me the same sort of ignoramus in all my future lives also. But I only pray to you to save all those who put their faith in the mantra of Soham, each according to his aptitude. According to your will the cycle of worldly existence will be carried on. Only let me never be separated from your feet.

This is the perspective of all genuine spiritual teachers. It is not mere humility, it is enlightened understanding. Fake gurus have various ways in which they play “little me” and “the unworthy servant of you all,” but it is just what they are: fake. These words of Gajanan Maharaj embody the inner disposition of all real spiritual teachers.

My brothers and sisters, if you also carry on the practice with firm faith and assiduity, you too will get experience in a greater or lesser degree. From amongst all who thus try, only those whose practice reaches perfection will get Self-realization. Faith, perseverance and continuous effort lead to success and realization of the Self. If your efforts are weak, or if you abandon the practice in the middle and ask why you do not get experiences which others get, it will be a senseless question not deserving any answer. “There is no firm conviction and the mind is wandering everywhere.” If such is the state, abhyasa (practice) will be useless and will be of no avail. Hence you must have firm faith and realize your oneness with Brahman through the power of the mantra.

Soham sadhana is the way to realization, but just knowing the process is in itself nothing. Persistent practice of japa and meditation by the sadhaka is the thing that does the needful.

The Dhyana Yoga of the Nath Pantha which has been handed down from Matsyendranath acts like a light which clearly shows the right path. I say this from my own experience. As the sadhaka has to repeat the japa and also to meditate, this path is known as Dhyana Yoga. With firm faith, having turned back the course of thoughts from the outward world to inside himself, a sadhaka has to carry on the japa and meditation for a long time. As he progresses, he gradually reaches perfection and realizes that his own soul has been his sadguru.

This stage is known as oneness of jiva (the individual soul) and Shiva (the Supreme Soul). It is also called sakshatkara. A sadhaka then naturally enjoys the bliss of the Self and becomes devoid of desire for anything else. This path is also known as Dhyana Yoga or Karma Marga, because a sadhaka gets sakshatkar after progressing through many steps. He also attains complete knowledge, hence it is called Jnana Yoga. I therefore again and again say that people should have recourse to this simple path of self-deliverance.

Soham sadhana, when practiced correctly as outlined in *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self and Light of Soham*, becomes its own teacher and revealer. The Soham yogi eventually comes to realize that his own Self is his sadguru because as he inwardly does the japa and meditation of Soham he comes to know that he has been repeating Soham with each breath throughout all his existence in relativity. Only he did not know it, and it was necessary for him to learn it and apply it. Learn And Apply—this is the way to illumination.

Now let us see how a man should act in worldly life so that he may progress spiritually while leading a life of the world. It must be admitted that it is very difficult for an ordinary person to leave the worldly life. He thinks that there is a great responsibility upon him in this world. He is always putting forward excuses such as that he has a large family and that he alone is its supporter; he has, therefore, no time for the present to devote to spiritual matters; he will see about them later on when his responsibilities become less. To him I will say, “My good friend, do not leave your family. Continue to do your worldly duties as you are doing now. Only begin the practice of Dhyana Yoga and carry it on and stick to it with perseverance. You can thus kill two birds with one stone. You will be able to lead a worthy worldly life and also to progress spiritually. Try it and you will be convinced of the truth of what is said above from your own experience.”

If a person follows this method while leading his life in the world he will surely attain Self-realization. Such a person need not renounce the world. Only he must follow this method with great perseverance and firm determination. He must only have the will to do so, and his efforts will surely be crowned with success.

People make all kinds of excuses for not seriously taking up the spiritual life—including yoga sadhana. There are those that pretend that being a yogi is incompatible with ordinary, secular life. But that is nonsense, for nothing is more compatible or more natural than the yoga life. Of course, many things are considered normal and natural in the world that are not at all—they are violations of a person’s innate nature. And they will be used as excuses by those who not only have no desire to lead a spiritual life, but have an aversion to it.

The term “supernatural” is usually used in a completely illegitimate way. For what is more natural than God, the source of all? The truth is, the spiritual life is the only natural life, and anything else is sub-natural, subnormal. If people prefer such a life that is their business, but why lie or delude themselves into thinking they are being

“normal”?

But Maharaj is speaking to honest and sincere people who mistakenly think they cannot maintain an active spiritual life while leading a “worldly” life. So he speaks these words of hope and assurance. And they are simple: “Continue to do your worldly duties as you are doing now. Only begin the practice of Dhyana Yoga and carry it on and stick to it with perseverance. You can thus kill two birds with one stone. You will be able to lead a worthy worldly life and also to progress spiritually.” That this is possible has been proven over and over by great sages and saints such as Raja Janaka, the Emperor Ashoka and Saint Louis of France. Someone once asked Saint Thomas Aquinas, the great philosopher-saint, how one could become a saint. He simply replied, “Will it.” Want to, and put forth your will power and you will succeed.

Maharaj concluded: “Try it and you will be convinced of the truth of what is said above from your own experience.”

While practicing Nishkama Karma Yoga or Raja Yoga, many a time various miracles take place at our hands. This stage is known as the stage of siddhis (powers). There is a danger at this time of our becoming either afraid or triumphant or proud. Very great care must be taken at this time. Otherwise we shall become as blank as we were at the beginning of our spiritual career. If we make use of these powers for obtaining fame or wealth, our spiritual progress will be entirely stopped and we shall stray away far from our goal of acquiring the knowledge and realization of the Self.

If we however consistently maintain the attitude that we are not the authors of these miracles, we are not responsible for them and they happened naturally, they will not operate as obstacles on our path and we shall easily attain our goal and gain complete peace and happiness.

It is ironic that although siddhis—psychic powers—are continually denounced in India, at the same time they alone are cited as proof of a person being Self-realized! But there is a difference between the exercise of siddhis and the miracles that occur around a genuine yogi.

First of all, a true yogi never “works” any miracle, but someone who practices false yoga, such as those partially based on tantra or other esoteric principles, may gain psychic powers and use them. However, they are not truly *yoga* powers, because they do not come from the practice of authentic yoga. They are simply *psychic* powers. This is because no matter how sincere a practitioner of false yoga may be, he is not really a *yogi* at all—just a developed psychic.

Obviously, the effects of true yoga and false yogas will be completely different. Real yoga has only one aim and result: spiritual awakening leading ultimately to Self-realization. This is why when my friend Sri Dattabal, who had many siddhis from practice of tantric methods, asked Swami Sivananda about his psychic experiences or attainments, Sivanandaji replied, “I have never had any psychic experiences.” And that was true. All his experiences were not psychic but spiritual, leading to his Self-realization.

Right from the first moments of his practice, the authentic yogi is being subtly and profoundly changed by spiritual alchemy: the transformation from material/psychic to spiritual. This has many internal and external effects, one of which is the transformation of the field of subtle personal energies that completely surround the yogi—the field known as the “aura.” As the yogi progresses (evolves) the aura becomes increasingly stronger and affects both him and those who come within his aura or near it. As it increases in strength, it also expands and becomes much larger in size. An ordinary person’s aura may extend a few feet around him on all sides, but the yogi’s aura can become extremely wide. I once sensed the aura of a yogi over a hundred feet from where he was inside a building. I know, because I pointed to it and asked someone if he was in there, and they said he was. I have more than once stood up when I felt a great yogi approaching from outside the building I was in. Once I was sitting beside a temple when I felt a tremendous Presence coming from behind the temple. I stood up automatically and in a few moments a yogi came in sight blazing with light.

I say all the foregoing to say this: When the aura of a genuine yogi becomes empowered and transformed into divine Light and Power, miracles can occur to him and to those who are within the range of his aura. But they are spontaneous and not at all deliberate. They are totally natural—truly natural, for they come from spirit, not from psychic energies.

Here are two corroborating examples from the life of Jesus.

“As he [Jesus] went the people thronged him. And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchd. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately” (Luke 8:42-47).

“They [Jesus and his apostles] came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole” (Matthew 14:34-36).

Such miracles occur around highly evolved yogis and liberated masters. Understanding the nature of such miracles they assure people that they personally have not done the miracles. Naturally the people assume they are being humble, but they are telling the truth. Just as a diseased person spreads their disease to others, so a highly evolved yogi by his mere presence brings about miracles without his intention. They are truly completely natural in their occurrence.

Every human being is sent into this world for the purpose of enjoying the bliss of the Self while doing worldly actions in a detached spirit, and of realizing the Godhead.

One of the most striking things about Maharaj is his unique views. He does not say we must realize the Self and so be freed from earthly birth and death. He does not say that the purpose of human birth is to undergo—and eventually eliminate—the karmas that impel us to birth here. Nor does he say that human birth is a result of ignorance. Rather it is the result of our destiny to live in the bliss of the Self even now as we engage in the actions made necessary by our karma. And this bliss will enable us to live and act in a detached manner which will culminate in God-realization through the realization of our Self which is one with God. For to truly know our Self is to know God.

We must not get entangled in the nets of sex and money.

Lust and greed immerse us in materialism and make us forget our true Self and identify with the ego which ever craves for the objects of lust and greed. This is an addiction which produces ever-increasing desire and bondage. Sex and money produce lust and greed in us, and the more we are involved in them the more our lust and greed increase until we are consumed by them and cannot conceive of existence without them. We believe that to lose them is to lose life. This horrible delusion torments and degrades us through life after life. The suffering this also entails does not wake us up to our folly, but blinds and binds us even more. Where is there hope? Like the fish caught up in the nets we suffocate and die in our consciousness.

Yogananda said that once when he was walking through a neighborhood in Boston he realized that the houses were just like chicken coops and the people in them were like chickens that scratched and pecked and laid and hatched out eggs and ended up fried chicken! We must escape these nets and the frying pan of this world.

If we want to make our whole worldly life full of bliss, we must meditate on the Self through the mantra of Soham.

This is because Soham is inseparable from our Self and leads us to awakening into the Self. Since the Self is itself Satchidananda—reality, consciousness and bliss—our entire life in this suffering and miserable world becomes full of bliss—full of the experience of our divine Self. This is achieved through the japa and meditation of our Soham-Self.

Such has been my own experience, and I have reached this stage entirely through the grace of my sadguru and through meditating on Soham. I cannot say that I have attained this stage through my own efforts. This Soham which has come out of the Avyakta (the Unmanifested) has brought the shakti (power) of the Avyakta with it, and owing to this shakti everything of mine has become Krishnarpana (one with the Godhead). Hence, Maya does not trouble me. I have become one with Soham and I have realized my Self by meditating on it. I am

enjoying unchanging bliss.

All that is needed for total fulfillment is learning the process of Soham sadhana and then applying it through constant japa and meditation of Soham. Soham is the seed, and when we plant it in our consciousness and cultivate it through its japa and meditation, it grows into the mighty tree of perfect and permanent Self-realization.

Every religion has got its own saints and prophets. If a person of whatever religion has firm faith and meditates on the Self, he is sure to go beyond pleasure and pain and to attain everlasting bliss.

Despite the varieties of religions and their differences, as Jesus said, “Only one thing is necessary” (Luke 10:42). We must all realize our Self. And how is this done? Maharaj continues:

The mantra Soham is the sole savior.

This seems extreme and very narrow-minded, and I would have thought so when I first read it, except for the fact that half a century of trying one “yoga” method after another had proved to be pointless. When I read the life and teachings of Sri Gajanan Maharaj—the teachings of the authentic Nath Yogi Sampradaya—both Maharaj and his words were a complete revelation to me. All the false yoga methods I had tried and the false gurus I had followed had a common basis: ignorance of real yoga. When I read about Maharaj and read his simple yet profound words it was an inexpressible relief. It only took about five minutes of doing Soham Yoga for me to realize that I had found something completely different from ever before. And even now every meditation is a revelation of the rightness of Soham sadhana. There are no words to adequately describe the experience of Soham Yoga. Everything I had done before I saw as insubstantial and even childish—as were my experiences from the various practices.

I am absolutely sure of this, not merely intellectually but through experience of the Self.

This is the only real and trustworthy basis of faith in Soham: experience of it for oneself.

I only say that all saints have resorted to this very mantra, and when their thoughts become entirely merged in the Supreme Self they become one with Brahman and shine forth in this world. Through meditation on Soham I am enjoying the same bliss which they enjoy. I am following in their footsteps and taking draughts of the supreme bliss. These saints have boldly declared in their imperishable words that they have been saved by Soham, and that others will also be saved by the same mantra. Future saints also will preach the same principle.

It only remains for us to gain the same experience and conviction by dedicated practice.

Saints handed over to me the mantra Soham which was hidden in the Avyakta in the deep recesses of my own soul. This treasure was with me but I had forgotten the place where it was hidden. The saints pointed out to me that place, and from that time I have been continuously contemplating on the Self.

The Nath Yogis through Sri Narayana Saraswati, and especially through the revelation of Soham given to Maharaj by Sri Matsyendranath himself, handed on the mantra of Soham to Maharaj—the mantra which was inherent in his own eternal, transcendent Self that is the Avyakta. All that was needed was the simple knowledge of Soham sadhana through which Maharaj began to know his Self through diligent practice that culminated in his total, perfect knowledge of the Self. This can be our experience, as well.

This Soham which has come out of the Avyakta is ever present in the hearts of men. Saints become one with this Soham which is in their own hearts and then the Soham merges itself again into the Avyakta.

This is indeed the Way, the Truth and the Life.

I therefore think that Soham is the real Karma [action leading to liberation], it is the “I” and the saints have made me realize this “I.” This Soham is the real secret. It is God, it is Karma [Yoga], that makes us realize this through their grace. Through continuous practice and meditation on the Self a person attains a stage in which actions become automatic. Such actions may be called sakama or nishkama. Just as saguna and nirguna are one, similarly in that stage sakama and nishkama are one. He does not look to the result and is indifferent whether the actions result in loss or gain. He is ready to endure both. He is sure that the body, this earthly tenement, is not his own. Hence he does not care whether pleasure or pain is the result of that action.

Soham is both the way and the goal. Fearlessness and contentment are the result of its japa and meditation. And this occurs very soon if the practice is continuous.

Maya was born from the Avyakta and the world was born from Maya. You may also say if you like that the world was born first and then Maya was born. It is just the same. Saints have said in their imperishable words that Maya is Brahman and Brahman is Maya. A sadhaka has to get an understanding of this principle. When he does this, his whole samsara (worldly life) becomes full of bliss. Whatever actions he then does, his mind is always steeped in bliss. That action may be sakama or nishkama. He becomes absolutely detached. In that stage the thoughts expressed by him are of great benefit to all, whether they are ignorant or learned. If people listen to these thoughts and act to bring them into practice, they become full of love for their “guru.” Then, their egotism, kama (desire; lust), krodha (anger) and lobha (greed; avarice) become as if dead. Their kama, krodha, etc., produce no reaction in others or in themselves.

Maya, delusion, is really only in our minds, in the limited and often erroneous way

we view the world and ourselves. Soham sadhana clears all this up in time by the yogi's own experience. All that Maharaj says here is not just theoretically correct, but verifiable through Soham Yoga practice.

This is the true path of progress for a mumukshu. A mumukshu must carry on this practice with great devotion and selfless love for at least twelve years. He will then be able to reach Self-realization. The faithful sadhaka then reaches the stage of vijnana (supreme knowledge). He reaches the stage when his own Atman (Self) becomes his guru.

This is verifiable only by prolonged and faithful practice of Soham sadhana.

To trouble a saint regarding our worldly affairs is detrimental to our spiritual progress, because this shows that we attach undue importance to them. And when our worldly desires are not fulfilled, our faith in the saint becomes shaky. Some persons come to me and ask me to remove their worldly troubles. "I have incurred a debt of four thousand rupees. This makes my mind uneasy. Kindly shower your grace upon me and make me free from care." Such are some of the complaints which are often brought to me by people. They desire that I should ward off their difficulties and troubles.

Spiritual teachers are continually pestered by people with the "gimmes." Some yogis have psychic powers and give them what they want, though it almost always evaporates after a while. This includes healing of various physical diseases or problems. A true spiritual teacher like Gajanana Maharaj will not give such people what they want. Maharaj always told people to seek out those who had such powers and get what they wanted from them. A true yogi has only one thing to give: the knowledge of Soham sadhana—japa and meditation.

It is quite true that adversity is good for a man as it often leads to his spiritual advancement. A person who is extremely troubled by adverse circumstances and has lost his peace of mind many a time goes to a saint. If the merit acquired by him in his previous life is of a high order, and he comes in contact with a real saint who has attained Self-realization, the emotional state of his mind then is such that he naturally puts his faith in what the saint tells him and accepts it with full reverence and submission. He then carries on the practice of the japa of the mantra given to him and is greatly befitted. It however does not follow that the saint will remove that person's worldly difficulties and troubles. A real saint will never do this.

Here we have the plain truth.

Therefore when people come to me for the redress of their worldly troubles I plainly tell them that every person must patiently bear the troubles sent to him by his fate (karma), and that the best way of solving worldly difficulties is to follow worldly and practical methods. They however argue as follows: "A saint is

like a mother to his disciples and other people who come to him for shelter. A child is full of frolic and joy and is engaged in various games and playthings. But when it becomes hungry, it comes crying to its mother. Does not the mother then see to its wants and pacify its hunger? Similarly, we are leading our lives pleasantly in this world as long as our circumstances are good. Our mind is then at ease. When, however, troubles arise and our peace of mind is lost, if we go and fall at the feet of a saint, should not that saint shower his grace upon us and ward off our difficulties like a good mother?"

My answer to such sort of arguments is this. There are some persons who come to me solely with the object of achieving their worldly objects. They have nothing to ask in spiritual matters. To such I say, "This is not my business. You should go to those saints who happen to possess such powers."

There you have it: the true words of a true spiritual teacher.

It is the mission of real saints to point out the path which leads to sure and everlasting peace and happiness to persons who, being extremely harassed by worldly troubles, are in urgent need of finding out a way which will take them out of all troubles and establish them in everlasting peace. Real saints have this power of granting boundless happiness and complete peace of mind. My sadguru has put this very responsibility upon me. He, through me, shows this path with ardent love to spiritual aspirants. He takes into consideration all the obstacles and difficulties that beset this path, and removes them. If the removing of a worldly difficulty or the fulfilling of a worldly desire is necessary for the further spiritual progress of the disciple, and positively helpful to him, he will fulfill that desire also. But it must be remembered that in such cases there is no opposition between the fulfillment of that desire and the decree of fate or karma—in other words the will of God. This means such a fulfillment is in consonance with the law of karma.

Sadhana is the means by which we eliminate the two causes of misfortunes and difficulties: our karma and our ignorance. There is no other remedy for these two obstacles than Soham.

The repetition of Soham may be sakama or nishkama. As Soham is based on the workings of nature, its japa, though it may be carried on with the object of fulfilling earthly desires, will ultimately be united with the real Soham which is enshrined in the innermost core of our being, and thus bring into awakening the power of the Paramatman. Objects of earthly desires are not permanent. The joy which is felt in their attainment is evanescent. But the effect of even the sakama japa is not altogether lost. It retains its force and awakens the power of the Self.

The only way to know if this is the truth is to practice Soham Yoga diligently.

The japa of Soham should be repeated in as natural a manner as possible. There is no necessity of assuming any particular posture (asana). It should be

carried on even while doing worldly actions. No misgiving should be entertained regarding its effect even though there may be absence of concentration. Such doubts are groundless. Even when we feel that our mind is concentrated, that state of concentration is only apparently so. The mind is in its very nature extremely fickle, and we cannot be sure when it will dart away and throw us into a whirlpool of thoughts. Everyone knows that this state of concentration is generally momentary. It is no doubt true that in the state of samadhi the mind is concentrated for a longer duration, but that state of samadhi also is not permanent; it lasts only for some time. After that the person again descends into consciousness of surrounding worldly objects, the play of good and bad desires generating pleasure or pain is resumed, and the body carries on its usual activities.

This practical good sense of Sri Gajanana Maharaj is exemplified here. The basic message is clear: Just Do It.

The state of samadhi or concentration can be compared to that of sleep. In the state of sleep there is real concentration. When we get up we say that we had very good sleep, that we were entirely unconscious of the world and that our mind was completely merged in the Self. Our Self alone was present as the Seer. Still we often see that sometimes even in sleep we dream and find ourselves taking part in the dream world. That is to say, we leave the state of concentration and again enter into the world of thoughts. If this is so even in the state of sleep, then how much more difficult would it be to go into a state of concentration in our waking state? Hence it would not be proper to abandon the japa on the ground that one cannot concentrate upon it.

The ego bolstered by our own ignorance (and often spiritual laziness) likes to think up problems and obstacles of which to accuse us and provide excuses for neglecting our sadhana. A favorite ego ploy is to set forth an exaggerated idea of what “being spiritual” really is so we can assure ourselves in false and dishonest “humility” that we are not worthy, not ready and not able. Not so! Where there is a will there is always a way.

Some people think that if they carry on the japa they may get into a state of continual indrawn or abstract concentration, and then it will be difficult for them to carry on their worldly duties easily. This idea also is false. Soham is our real nature. If we become one with it we will, on the contrary, be able to carry on our usual worldly duties more efficiently.

This is most important. Genuine spiritual practice empowers and enlightens us. As Sri Ramakrishna often said: “If you can weigh salt you can weigh sugar.” If we can succeed in spiritual life we will succeed in worldly life. Both require the application of intelligence and will. If we can do one of them, we can do the other as well.

An atheist might say, “I cannot understand all this. God and the Paramatman

are all ideas and guesses. What have I to do with them?" Let us for the sake of argument admit that what he says is true, that these are all ideas. Now let him answer the following question: "You know that these are all ideas. Who is it that knows about these ideas and is conscious of their being mere ideas?" A person sometimes says, "I am ignorant." Let him consider who is the knower of his ignorance. A person sometimes says, "I do not want this, I do not want that." Even though he might say that he does not want anything, still the "I" will always remain. This "I" is Soham, and eternal peace is its nature. A person might say that he does not want all this bother about God, dhyana, devotion, faith and concentration. All right; but let him say whether he wants peace, calmness and happiness or not. Even if he thinks that these ideas about God, etc., are false and illusory, still he must admit that there is somebody inside him who thinks them false and illusory. This knower inside us is the "I" and that "I" is Soham.

Soham is our true Self. Our true Self is Soham. That is why only the Soham yogi will ever come to know the fulfillment of the ancient prayer:

Lead me from the unreal to the Real.

Lead me from darkness to the Light.

Lead me from death to Immortality.

As long as the breath goes on, life goes on, and the activities of the body go on. The saints have explained the meaning of the incoming and outgoing breath, and Soham is the sound which is produced by the incoming and outgoing breath. This Soham sound is ceaselessly being repeated in our body whether we are conscious of it or not. If we become conscious of this internal Soham, we shall experience peace of mind. If we fully understand this Soham, we shall attain complete bliss, which is the real nature of Soham, and become one with it.

The japa and meditation of Soham is The Way.

Some persons do not understand the difference between meditation (dhyana), and concentration (ekagrata). Suppose a sadguru asks a person to sit before him and repeat the Soham mantra mentally. A few minutes later the guru asks him, "How did you feel? Had you any thoughts? Was the flow of thoughts going on as usual, or was there any difference? How was the japa going on?" When such questions are asked the aspirant appears to be a little confused, and is usually found to answer in the following manner: "Maharaj, my mind was quite calm. Not a single idea arose in my mind. The japa was going on in an undisturbed manner. I was enjoying peace. But, Maharaj, my mind was not concentrated. I could hear the sounds and movements taking place around me."

It is a common idea with ordinary aspirants that as soon as they hear the mantra Soham pronounced by the sadguru their mind should become concentrated and they should enter into the state of samadhi. It is a laudable wish, no doubt, but it is out of place at the time. Because when the sadguru tells the aspirant to meditate upon Soham, he does not tell him to get concentrated at

once. He tells him to repeat the japa of Soham in order that he may be able to meditate properly. The main idea in meditation is that while the japa is going on there should not be the flow of other thoughts disturbing the repetition of the mantra.

This gives the right perspective since we often expect a very intense and dramatic result immediately when we meditate. But through meditation we evolve steadily and surely; we do not just jump into the Infinite!

We are often like the little boy who for years kept waiting for the day he would begin school. Finally he went off for his first day of school with great enthusiasm and excitement. But when he came home he was drooping and moping. "What's the matter?" asked his mother. "Didn't you like school?" "Yes, I liked it all right," he replied, "but I have to go back tomorrow!" And many more days, too, through the years. It is the same with the yogi. As a woman experienced in the spiritual life once told me: "Plod rhymes with God."

In the case of some aspirants, however, owing to some practice done in the previous life they get concentrated as soon as they begin meditation according to the instructions of the guru. They also see some visions. But this only shows that they must have practiced to some extent in their previous life. They therefore get all those experiences almost at once. But this does not mean that they have, owing to this, got everything which is to be obtained from a sadguru. They, too, must not stop there, but carry on further practice until they reach the final goal of human life.

Often at the beginning of meditation practice we get some dramatic results. If so, these are the effects of spiritual karma from yoga practice in previous lives. It is good to have some hints of good things to come and even some spiritual experiences, but there still remain years of spiritual practice to come. We must not just become a yogi—we must keep on being a yogi every moment of every day of our life.

"All possible troubles beset the worldly life." Keeping this truth firmly in mind, it is necessary to get deliverance from samsara (worldly existence) by the internal repetition of Soham.

This world is filled with trouble and sorrow—even for the yogi at first. So he must constantly cling to the japa and meditation of Soham and in that way pass from the difficulties of earthly life into the tranquility and happiness of the Self which is itself Soham.

The seeing of many visions is not a sure sign of progress. Real progress lies in the continuous meditation on the sound of the inner Soham japa going on without a break after the visions have stopped. If a person carries on the continuous practice of the Soham japa, his mind will in course of time get concentrated upon it, and he will then experience the state of samadhi.

According to a yogi's past development he may see light or visions when he first

meditates, but he must go beyond such subjective experiences that are really only distractions, though the ego seizes upon them and congratulates itself fulsomely. As Maharaj says, real progress lies in the continuous meditation on the sound of our inner Soham japa at all times, both in and out of meditation. That will lead to the highest spiritual state of perfect liberation and enlightenment.

In the state of samadhi there is no consciousness of the external world, and there is experience of bliss. But this state lasts only for a short time. As soon as the normal consciousness is gained, the world makes its presence felt as before and the old play of desires, full of pleasure and pain, commences. Thus it will be seen that it is a mistake to suppose that we have reached our final goal when we reach the state of samadhi.

What is necessary in this stage is that even while we are conscious of worldly objects our meditation on Soham must be ceaselessly going on, and the worldly objects and events should produce no reaction on our mind, making it unsteady.

Hence it is necessary to carry on the meditation of Soham ceaselessly. When this practice is carried on continuously, a state is reached when the presence of the Paramatman is felt in all the three states: the waking, the dreaming and the sleeping.

When this is reached we experience the state of samadhi even while we are doing worldly activities. The mind itself becomes one with Soham and the truth of the following words is realized: “The mind has become fixed and motionless in one place. Atmic bliss has, therefore, been realized to the full. Nothing remains lacking.”

Practice really does make perfect. It is easy to get obsessed with samadhi and visions and yoga powers, but only the consciousness produced by Soham japa and meditation really matters. The other things are distractions from the only Real Thing: enlightenment through Soham sadhana.

Many aspirants go to a guru taking their stand on Sri Tukaram’s lines, “The sadguru makes his disciple like himself at once. No time is required for him to do this.” They however, should also remember the words of the same saint to the following effect: “Tuka says that haste is of no use. Unless the proper time of acquisition has arrived, nothing can be achieved.” They will thus not be deceived in their expectations.

Many years ago when the Hare Krishna movement was beginning in New York City, a man wrote to Swami Bhaktivedanta saying that the previous weekend he had sung the Hari Krishna mantra along with the devotees in Central Park. “Am I enlightened?” he asked. Swamiji replied: “When you have eaten a big meal do you have to ask if you are full? Keep on chanting Hare Krishna.” It is the same with Soham.

The object of the above-mentioned discussion is not to make aspirants despondent and abandon the practice through a sense of frustration if they find

that their efforts are not crowned with success in a short time. They are sure to realize the real power of Soham after some days if they carry on the practice continuously, with great intensity. There is absolutely no doubt about this. I say this from my own experience. The aspirant should have the firm determination that he will carry on the practice of Soham intensely in the future, although he might have failed to do so in the past.

Although Maharaj does not mean that only a few days are needed to gain significant experience in Soham sadhana, he certainly means that it should not take a long time before results are experienced. The time required will be according to the aspirant's practice in previous lives.

In my personal accounts I tell that in just five minutes of practice I knew This Is It. But I had fifty years of attempts to succeed in yoga. That, and practice in previous lives, enabled me to understand the reality and value of Soham Yoga in a matter of minutes. And as I continued the practice through days, weeks and months I realized more and more that I was certainly on the right track. One factor was the fact that Soham japa and meditation gave me experiences that I had only had hints of in previous years, and many experiences that I had not imagined could even occur. As I have said elsewhere: Soham practice revealed that all the prior methods I had spent years on were nothing but child's play compared to Soham Yoga. They were of no more lasting value than an infant's playing with its toes. This is no exaggeration.

If an aspirant carries on the continuous meditation on the sound of the inner [mental] Soham japa, he will become one with Soham. If he happens to die in this stage he can be sure of attaining liberation through union with God after his death.

This is an incredibly important statement. If a sadhaka becomes one with Soham and continues in that state he will not have to return to earthly rebirth, but will continue in Soham sadhana and attain to Self-realization in one of the realms of Tapa Loka—The World of Sadhana.

What does he mean by “one with Soham”? It is the state in which the sadhaka is continually aware of Soham by continually repeating it inwardly in time with his breath and experiencing being one with it as his inmost reality. This is not the Easy and Cheap Yoga, as I once saw a fake yoga described in an ad in *Fate* magazine sixty years ago. It takes time, dedication and determination. But it can be done, and the following section explains it.

It is very difficult to bring our mind to bear upon the contemplation of God at the time of our death. The force of desires is very great at that time, a person becomes a prey to them, and owing to this has to go through the cycle of various lives. If, however, he gets himself accustomed to the continuous intense contemplation of the sound of the inner Soham japa, his mind at the time of death will not be entangled in the meshes of worldly desires, but will be merged in Soham and hence he will be sure to go to a higher state after his death. I

therefore say to you all: commence the japa of Soham and carry it on ceaselessly.

What is necessary is that we must devote our attention to this Soham. The more your attention is directed towards Soham the greater will be the change in your mind and thoughts.

No commentary needed,
But it should be heeded.

Soham is the real nature of the “I” in the body, and this Soham is ceaselessly going on: the “I,” the Soham inside. The speaker, doer, the action itself and in fact everything will be one with Soham. I am at present experiencing to some extent the bliss of such a state, and anyone else who will do as I have done will attain similar bliss. As long as the “I” dwells in this body, we must get into the habit of repeating Soham. Ceaseless repetition will make the trend of all thoughts full of Soham.

Soham is an entity, a process and a state of being since it embraces all being, and indeed is all being. To know anything we must know Soham. And we know Soham by realizing It as our Self. In Soham all truly is One. And it is itself the way to Unity—true Advaita. We become Soham to realize that we have always been Soham.

This “I” inside the body may be called by any name. It may be called God or Nature or any other name. The knowledge of this “I” leads to peace and happiness. Is there anyone who does not want this peace and happiness? Our mind is like a mirror. Various thoughts are always arising and having their play in the mind. According to the different thoughts, the mind is plunged in sorrow or in joy. We should think about the “I” inside, who is the witness of all these thoughts. That is Soham.

If we sit quiet and at ease divesting the mind of all disturbing thoughts, we shall get a glimpse of this witness inside. The mirror of our mind has been covered over with the dirt of innumerable impressions left by bad thoughts entertained through the course of innumerable previous lives. The dark soot of kama and krodha is lying in thick layers on the surface of this mirror. It is our duty to try to wash away all this dirt and soot by means of good desires, and by increasing the flow of good thoughts.

Various doubts and misgivings assail the mind. This is the natural result of evil impressions left on our mind by bad thoughts in previous lives. But there is no reason why we should feel discouraged. Our present duty is to get ourselves accustomed to the entertaining of good thoughts.

Continual japa and meditation of Soham will bring the resolution of all doubts through the purification of our mind—our total being.

Every mumukshu should ceaselessly put up strong efforts to meditate upon Soham. It does not matter even if the japa is sakama. He should not give any thought as to when the japa will lead to the final attainment of the goal. His

efforts should be directed towards trying to keep his attention fixed on the sound of the inner Soham japa. He should try to fix his attention on Soham even while doing worldly actions. This Soham will in course of time remove the dirt of bad thoughts and make the mirror of the mind clean. As soon as the mirror becomes clean, the blissful nature of Soham will be realized. Hence we should direct all our efforts towards keeping our attention fixed on Soham without any break. If we do so we shall surely attain complete peace and happiness and life will be full of bliss.

Rather than questioning about the when and where of success in Soham sadhana we should simply keep our awareness in our inner repetitions of Soham. Whatever we are doing, our awareness should be centered in Soham. "But one thing is needful" (Luke 10:42).

Sri Tukaram says, "Wherever I go you are always with me to bear me company." The companion here referred to is none other than Soham. Wherever you may be, in whatever condition you may be, this Soham, this witness, this Paramatman, is always your companion. You have never been or will ever be separated from Him because you and He are one. Only you are not conscious of His nearness and presence. You must first become fully conscious of His nearness and presence and then lose the sense of this consciousness also by becoming one with Him. Then you will be bliss incarnate, everlasting, unchanging bliss.

I am telling all this from my own experience. If you put forth strong efforts in the direction I have mentioned above, you are sure to attain success.

Soham has been with us from eternity and will lead us back into awareness of that unity. This itself is Self-realization. Soham is both the lock, the key and the door. It is itself the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The mind must be internally immersed in Soham and become full of bliss. If my mind is absolutely clean and full of the bliss of Soham, entirely devoid of egotism and concentrated in the internal sound of the inner Soham japa even when outwardly doing worldly actions, I shall consider myself as extremely fortunate. Through the grace of my sadguru, my practice is going on in the direction of obtaining this eternal bliss and I can say from experience that I feel that I have ascended some steps on the steep path leading to the temple where eternal peace and happiness have been enshrined.

Having learned the way to Self-realization through the merciful grace of Maharaj and all the Nath Yogis before and after him, their blessings will be with us and active within us until we reach the goal that is the way: Soham.

About a fortnight ago a learned shastri came to visit me. He had read some of the letters sent by me to my friends, and also the messages which I had given to some religious institutions, and owing to it a sort of respect had been created in

his mind for me. He said to me, “Maharaj, the thoughts expressed by you are of a very high order. They receive much support from the Upanishads and treatises on Vedanta.”

I replied, “Punditji, you have considered the thoughts expressed by me from the shastric points of view and called them sound. This does not give me any very great pleasure. The reason is that I do not attach any importance to the delight obtained from high and beautiful thoughts of others. If you had expressed your agreement with at least one of these thoughts, having felt the truth of it from your own experience of the state mentioned in it, I would have felt highly delighted.

“If a person comes to me and tells me his own thoughts, the truth of which has been tested by his own experience, I will pay more respect to him than to a person who repeats like a parrot the thoughts, however high they may be, of great men like Sri Shankaracharya, Jnaneshwar or Tukaram. It does not matter whether the thoughts of the first-mentioned person are highly developed or not.”

A single word spoken from experience is more than a thousand words of theory. In the twelfth chapter of Autobiography of a Yogi we are told the following incident.

With ostentatious zeal, a scholar shook the ashram rafters with scriptural lore. Resounding passages poured from the Mahabharata, the Upanishads, the bhasyas [commentaries] of Shankara.

“I am waiting to hear you.” Sri Yukteswar’s tone was inquiring, as though utter silence had reigned. The pundit was puzzled.

“Quotations there have been, in superabundance.” Master’s words convulsed me with mirth, as I squatted in my corner, at a respectful distance from the visitor. “But what original commentary can you supply, from the uniqueness of your particular life? What holy text have you absorbed and made your own? In what ways have these timeless truths renovated your nature? Are you content to be a hollow victrola, mechanically repeating the words of other men?”

“I give up!” The scholar’s chagrin was comical. “I have no inner realization.”

For the first time, perhaps, he understood that discerning placement of the comma does not atone for a spiritual coma.

Soham is always present as a witness in everybody’s mind. An ordinary man of the world is not conscious of this “I” which is always awake. As soon as a man gains consciousness of the ever-existing presence of this “I” he attains the goal of human life. This stage is known as sakshiavastha (the state where the “I” is consciously felt to be the ever-present witness). This Soham is ever present in every being in the form of his own Self. This Soham is continuously going on, it never stops. This Soham which is seen in all animate and inanimate things is my Jani Janardan (God present in all human beings), and wherever I use the words “Jani Janardan,” I mean by it this Soham, present in all.

I therefore tell you with all the emphasis I can command that you should at

once begin to repeat the japa of Soham with firm faith. It does not matter if you place no faith in me. Have firm faith in Soham and you will attain the same bliss that I am enjoying.

We have passed lifetimes believing spiritual authorities of many kinds. But finally we must awaken to the fact that only what we ourselves have experienced and understood is for us The Truth.

I learned of Soham sadhana from the printed words of Sri Gajanana Maharaj, but not having met him I could not have faith in him or his words. But when I did the japa and meditation of Soham for myself, I immediately had complete faith in it. Then I believed all that Maharaj had said about Soham. And I daily believe it more and more through my own experience of Soham.

I shall now give you an illustration from everybody's experience. When we sleep, we sometimes dream and after that go into complete unconsciousness. In that state nothing is felt, we go into the Avyakta. When we awake, if somebody asks us, "How did you sleep?" we reply, "I got very good sleep and was full of bliss." Thus, when a person is born, he begins to speak about his experience in words. That is, when he comes out of the Avyakta he begins to describe his experiences in words. Every person, be he learned or ignorant, saint or an ordinary person, is required to have recourse to words in order to express his ideas.

Saints like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa have given the illustration of a doll made of salt. They say if a salt doll enters water it is turned into water. Can it then describe its experience of water? If it wants to describe the experience, it must keep one foot in water and the other on land. Hence, saints who have been one with the Avyakta come out of the Avyakta by assuming bodies full of light, and are born into this world for the deliverance of other human beings. By their own acts and advice they teach the world how to make this Maya full of bliss, how to go beyond pleasure and pain and how to obtain eternal peace and happiness. They say to the people in the world, "Your treasure (of bliss) is with you; only you have forgotten the place where it is hidden." The saints neither give anything to the world nor do they take anything from the world. They carry out their mission and remain aloof and at peace with themselves.

If the mumukshus follow implicitly the advice of the saints without entertaining the least doubt, with full faith and real love, by continued practice they will succeed in curbing all evil tendencies and in resisting all temptations of lust and greed. They will then get realization of the bliss of the Self, and attain the stage which was attained by such immortal saints as Sri Jnaneshwar or Sri Tukaram. There is not the least doubt about this.

The master yogis cannot really express to us the nature of the Absolute or the nature of Soham, the means of realization of the Absolute. But we can experience both through the japa and meditation of Soham and ourselves prove the truth of Maharaj's words.

While carrying on the contemplation of Soham, an aspirant should always be carefully observing whether his worldly desires are gradually dropping off. The gradual dropping of worldly desires, and the capability to perform worldly actions solely from a sense of duty and not with a view to achieve some object, are sure signs of spiritual progress.

If an aspirant makes it a point to see that his attention is continuously fixed on Soham, that his mind is growing more and more detached, and that he is continuously carrying on the practice with firm faith in the path prescribed to him, I am sure that he will certainly reach the goal. Whether a person is a mumukshu, a sadhaka, or a siddha, if all his desires have completely disappeared and he has attained a complete sense of detachment, then he attains a stage in which Pandharpur [the major pilgrim city for Vaishnavas in Maharashtra, site of the famous Vithoba (or Vithala) Temple of Lord Krishna] is always with him wherever he stays. There is no necessity for him to go anywhere.

Certainly the test of all philosophies and disciplines is the result in the mind and life of the aspirant. And it is the aspirant who must examine and evaluate the results of his spiritual convictions and his Soham Yoga practice. Anyone can philosophize, but only the yogi can realize.

I have first practiced what I preach. Hence people should also translate these precepts into practice, and then see whether they are true or not. I therefore urge all people, whether ignorant or learned, mumukshus or sadhakas, to carry on the japa of Soham with their attention continuously directed towards it.

Personal knowledge is the fundamental necessity for success in spiritual life—and especially yoga. Maharaj has not given us any theories or speculations at any time. Rather he has given us the knowledge realized through his own experience of Soham, and shown us how to get the same knowledge for ourselves. He has not asked us to believe, but to practice and attain.

Some people say that the present age is the age of material happiness. The present Yuga is Kali Yuga. In this Yuga it is extremely difficult to attain the highest goal of Self-realization. Naturally, men in general will be always striving to obtain material happiness.

I, however, think that it is not proper to be complaining about external conditions. A little consideration will, on the contrary, convince us that external conditions are almost the same in all Yugas. The change lies in the mind, the attitude it adopts. According to the attitude of your mind you will feel that the age is Satya Yuga or Kali Yuga. Everything thus depends on your mind. Hence I say that you should get your mind immersed in the ceaseless contemplation of Soham and then you will find that the difficulties created by troublesome external conditions will automatically disappear.

Sri Ramakrishna said, “The mind is everything.” Obsession with yugas and all

things external is the fundamental characteristic of a yogi who is not a yogi at all. The problem is that such a person does not know or practice true yoga. So instead of looking inside himself and knowing the Self he is busy telling himself that it is the world around him that produces his interior state. And he is right. He is a samsarin, a product of samsara and therefore samsaric—not atmic. Certainly the earth-oriented person goes through the various stages of general consciousness that are the yugas. But the yogi has taken charge of his consciousness and its evolution, and consequently is not earth-oriented but always lives in the satya yuga of spiritual consciousness through the practice of Soham sadhana.

(See the Glossary for information on the yugas.)

Now I shall say a few words regarding abhyasa (practice). Some persons carry on the japa for some time, but owing to want of intensity on their part, when they find that they are not making marked progress, or when they do not see any visions, they give up the practice, thinking that fate is against them. Or if they carry on the japa, they do it merely mechanically without any heart in the matter.

If our mind is unsteady, if it does not feel any joy in the contemplation of Soham, we should ask ourselves the question: Why do we not enjoy pleasure in doing the japa? The obvious answer is that it is our own lack of faith that comes in the way, and bars us from getting this joy. There is also another thing. Thousands of bad impressions have been accumulated in our mind through the course of previous births. How can all these impressions disappear at once?

In the case of those whose bad impressions have been cleared away to an appreciable extent, if they carry on the practice they will get some spiritual experiences sooner or later according to their merit. If any bad desires have beset their mind in this life, the continuous contemplation of Soham will gradually destroy all those desires in this very life. In the next life the remaining bad impressions and bad desires, and kama, krodha and lobha generating them or generated by them, will surely disappear. You should have no doubt regarding this in your mind. You may have no faith in me, but you must have faith in Soham.

This is the plain and full truth. We must all take it to heart if we would truly pass from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to the Light and from death to Immortality.

Soham is the real path of knowledge (Jnana Marga). Owing to this, egotism disappears. In the path of knowledge, the sadhaka's consciousness becomes more and more comprehensive, until it becomes all-pervading. But all this is nothing but the play of the "I," and Soham teaches this very principle.

Thus, in the path of knowledge one becomes all-pervading and one with the universal Being.

Each of us can experience this for himself through Soham sadhana.

I therefore say again and again, that the real power lies in the mantra, Soham.

This power is also centered in you. If you thoroughly realize this power, and become one with it, you will easily attain atmic bliss, even though you may be leading a worldly life. You will be thoroughly happy internally, as well as in your worldly life. Soham awakens the power in you which is lying dormant.

Nearly all religions disempower their adherents by making them think they can do nothing without them—without external guides or authorities. False gurus are even worse, making their followers believe that they cannot even begin the spiritual path without their grace and teaching. This is perhaps the most poisonous lie of all lies. For all grace and knowledge and power lies within each one of us. And we cannot open our consciousness to attain that grace, knowledge and power through the agency of anything external to us. We must initiate the search and empower ourselves through the japa and meditation of Soham. There is no other way, for there is no means or goal other than Soham Itself. With the light of Soham we can enlighten ourselves and attain perfect liberation. As said before: Soham is The Way, The Truth and the Life. And through Soham we will realize that our own Self is also The Way, The Truth and the Life. For the Self and Soham are one.

My brothers and sisters should remember that a liking for and devotion to God is the result of the accumulation of great merit in previous lives. If you have this liking, God in the form of Soham who has His dwelling in the outgoing and incoming breath of every human being will be realized by you. I say this from my own experience. You may have no faith in me but you should have faith in this Soham.

This is the ABC of spiritual life and awakening.

Do not allow your faith to be shaken although in the beginning you do not get any experiences. If you give this consideration to the matter of Soham, you will find that having faith in Soham is a matter solely depending upon your own mind. Even if owing to bad impressions of past lives doubts assail your mind, it lies with you to drive away these doubts with assiduous efforts, remembering that therein lies the successful fruition of your life. If persistent and continuous practice is carried on, the mind is concentrated and becomes one with the mantra, and all thoughts disappear. Only you must have a true and firm determination. We can be said to have a true and firm determination only when we are able to translate our ideas into action. Hence saints have said, “God grants the fulfillment of true and firm determination, and the desires entertained by the devotees are crowned with success” (Tukaram).

Hence, it is clearly your duty to have firm faith in the mantra. If you have this absolute faith, you will surely attain your goal. About that there is no doubt. There is no room for doubt in the case of real affection, which is absolutely free from any doubts and misgivings.

The truth.

The real “I” which dwells in the heart of everyone is the sole abode of this unchanging happiness and bliss. He who becomes one with this “I” gets hold of this sole source of happiness, and therefore feels no need of any pleasure which is derived from the enjoyment of external objects.

The path which leads to the true knowledge of this “I” and to the realization of oneness with it, is the path of spiritual progress.

He who desires to go by this path must naturally practice self-restraint and keep himself detached from material pleasures. Abandoning of material pleasures outwardly, or abandoning them by merely forcibly curbing the mind, is of very little use. The renunciation must be mental: the mind must gradually develop a dislike for these material pleasures.

If you will try to immerse your mind in the continuous contemplation of the sound of the inner Soham japa, this renunciation becomes easy. The mind becomes one with Soham, and then the ajapa japa begins. In this stage our whole worldly existence becomes full of happiness. The mind of a person who attains this stage goes beyond pleasure and pain. It becomes full of universal love, and he feels nothing but love in this material world which to others is full of pleasure and pain.

Elsewhere I have written about a young man that everyone considered a daft fool because he was always so abstracted in his thought and manner. One day he was gone, so people went to where he lived. There they found a piece of paper with the words: “I pass though this world, and no one knows that Paradise is within.” This is true of all Soham yogis.

Only saints like Jnaneshwar and Tukaram obtained Paramartha. [The highest attainment, purpose, or goal; absolute truth; Reality.] When this state of everlasting joy is reached, this world, the next world, heaven or hell—which to an ordinary person appears to be full of contrasts of pleasure and pain—becomes nothing but universal, all-pervading joy and bliss incarnate. This stage is what is known as Paramartha.

To obtain this Paramartha is the goal of human life, and you can obtain it by your own persistent and honest effort. Efforts are necessary to obtain any object in the world. Are we not required to put up strong efforts to obtain money or learning? And are our efforts always crowned with success? But do we on that account abandon efforts to obtain these things? Similarly, we must continually make strong efforts to obtain the realization of the real “I.” The various difficulties and obstacles which arise in this path must be removed, just as we do in worldly matters.

In other words, we alone can do it. No one can do it for us. Soham.

Various qualities are necessary to carry on worldly transactions efficiently. But there is one thing which far surpasses all these qualities taken together, and that is strong good sense, which is natural and not acquired. By reading we can at the

most obtain useful and varied information, but to make proper use of that information at the proper time requires natural good sense and intelligence. I here remember a saying: "God should be known through good sense and intelligence."

This is a simple statement, but it illustrates a very important principle. It shows that real intelligence is a very important qualification. If a person possesses this intelligence, he will not need to read various books. He will be able to solve all his difficulties by the exercise of his keen intelligence. Wisdom acquired from books is, after all, one-sided. This keen intelligence is useful in worldly as well as spiritual matters.

Maharaj's wise and beautiful words can inspire us, but if we do not cultivate practical intelligence and capability we will get nowhere. We need not be a genius or an intellectual, but Yogananda rightly said that stupid people cannot find God. Stupidity is a state of mind and a way of life. How can someone get out of that state and life? By Soham sadhana. I have seen dull people develop intelligence and practical abilities by becoming yogis. And this should be no surprise, for intelligence and understanding are part of our innate nature. We need only bring it forth by our practice of Soham Yoga.

When will a sadhaka reach the ultimate goal of human life? My friends, such questions are bound to assail the mind. To entertain various doubts and misgivings is quite natural to the mind. As long as a person is alive, his mind will always be full of thoughts, good or bad. Hence it is futile to wait till the mind abandons all mistaken thoughts and doubts. People who think that they will not be able to make any progress in spiritual matters until this inflow of thoughts is stopped should pay particular attention to the following illustration.

There are bound to be innumerable waves on the sea. If a person thinks that he will swim in the sea when all these waves are stopped, will he ever be able to swim in the sea? He will surely come to know that the waves will never stop and he will never be able to swim. Similarly, every person who wants to follow the spiritual path should not wait for the disappearance of all thoughts, but should start the contemplation of Soham and try to keep his mind fixed upon it. He should not allow his mind to be diverted from it by the waves of thoughts.

As long as a person identifies himself with this body these doubts and thoughts are sure to assail him and cause disturbance. A sure way to escape from the clutches of these thoughts is to develop a feeling that we are not the body. It is the nature of mind to carry on the continuous play of thoughts. The mind (manas), the intellect (buddhi), and the chitta (field of consciousness) are all inside us. Buddhi is the power which enables us to determine. The mind is always fickle and moving from one idea to another, and when the mind concentrates upon something it is called chitta. A sadhaka, therefore, should concentrate upon Soham and thus turn his mind into chitta. If he continues this practice for some time, his mind will gradually gain in calmness and ultimately will become one with Soham and with the inherent, everlasting bliss which is the

real nature of Soham, and thus his chitta will become chit (consciousness). Once this stage is attained, that person will experience unlimited joy. Such a person is easily able to identify himself with all persons with whom he comes into contact, and with all circumstances in which he finds himself placed. His peace of mind is never disturbed, and he is always immersed in everlasting and unchanging bliss. He attains the goal, and the real purpose of human life is fulfilled.

This is perfect. Please read this through carefully, pausing to think of each statement. And then make it part of your own thinking.

If the body falls in the gutter, it can be washed and cleaned by water, but if the mind is dirty, full of doubts and full of desires for many objects, how can it be washed and purged of its impurities? The only way of cleansing the mind is to immerse it in the contemplation of Soham. All the impurities are then washed away. Sri Tukaram has said, ‘If your life is impure, what can soap do?’ The mind is purified, and all the dirt from it is swept away by the broom of Soham.

The mind is impure because it is out of tune, out of phase, with Soham that is the very basis of its existence. In the same way, anything that is not in harmony with Soham or which is in opposition to it is defilement. So the power of total purification on all levels of our being is Soham itself.

He who has burnt away all avarice and destroyed the very roots of evil desires and thus completely purified and cleansed his mind by the continuous contemplation of Soham will never be attracted by the glitter of the worthless things of this world.

This is a most profound and meaningful statement and is a test of whether or not the Soham yogi has really dissolved all ignorance and attachment to the follies and illusions of this world. He “will never be attracted by the glitter of the worthless things of this world” and will have the intelligence and insight to know what is of worth and what is worthless in this world.

To be a yogi is the greatest endeavor in which we can engage. The mind of the worldling (child of the world) is shallow and narrow, whereas the mind of an adept yogi is deep and wide–vast, even. And so is the true dharma of the yogi: it reaches into and transforms both the heights and the depths of his being. He who would be eternal (sanatana) must follow the eternal dharma–Sanatana Dharma–which is the foundation of all spiritual evolution and of the ultimate liberation.

There is a great difference between an ordinary mind and a mind immersed in the contemplation of Soham. The most important principle is that he who wants to obtain spiritual knowledge must discard all material pleasures. It must be remembered that only when a person becomes entirely devoid of any desire of obtaining prosperity in this world or the next does he attain the goal of human life. He who wants to tread the path of spiritual progress must gradually acquire a sense of detachment.

This is not some high-flown statement intended to impress. It is pure fact. So those who intend to hold on to and (perhaps secretly) foster their delusions and addictions major and minor in their mind need not even begin the Soham path if they do not want the total revolution of mind that is the only possible consequence of Soham Yoga practice. Those who do not desire profound and far-reaching change should not enter the yogic path, for such change is the sure result for those that persevere.

Of course Maharaj is very practical and tells us that a sense of detachment is necessary for spiritual progress, and the yogi gradually acquires it through his continuing practice of Soham Yoga. It is important to understand that detachment is not only indifference, it is the state in which the objects of delusion and distraction which would hinder and eventually destroy our sadhana cannot touch and influence our mind. They cease to exist for the yogi as he progresses toward that liberation which is truly perfect freedom.

The sphere of spiritual progress lies beyond reason and intellect. The question of pain or pleasure in this world or the next is absolutely irrelevant in this connection. By entertaining ideas of pleasure or pain, the mind gets entangled in the meshes of sankalpa or vikalpa (desire or doubts). Instead of wasting valuable time like this, you should utilize it in the contemplation of Soham.

Since we are so caught in the mind from birth we cannot conceive of that which transcends the mind and the power of intellectual conception itself. But the sphere of reality lies beyond the mind and the intellect. Therefore any kind of feelings, ideas and insights, however exalted, have nothing to do with the realm of the spirit which is far beyond them. What the world calls “meditation” is simply focused thinking on a subject. This is manana—mental activity—and not dhyana—meditation.

Desire for and thoughts of health and happiness and success in this world or a higher world are not only “absolutely irrelevant in this connection,” they are hindrances to spiritual progress. They are not wrong in themselves, but they must never be thought of as the goal or rewards of spiritual endeavor. We must aspire to something beyond them: realization of the Self.

There is a false “mysticism” of the mind and intellect in which the person becomes completely absorbed in and enamored of “insights” and “deep understanding” and various intellectual gymnastics. They eventually evaporate and leave us as ignorant and materialistic as we were before. I have seen this sad consequence many times in yogi friends who got distracted with the ego-involvement which their supposedly profound experiences and insights really both masked and fostered. From flying high they crashed low and remained there for the rest of their life.

Yummy Meditation is not just a waste of time, it is self-destruction. There are many false yogas that give irrelevant but entertaining and astounding experiences, but they lead to a dead end, and often a dead soul as their result.

Soham Kevalam.

God has innumerable names, and people are calling out His various names according to their individual liking. Although it is so, still it must be remembered that Kabir says: “Rama Nama is repeated by almost all people—by thieves, by licentious people, and by rich people. But that Nama (Name) by which Dhruva and Prahlada [two children who attained spiritual perfection by calling on the Divine Name] were saved was something different.” One must remember that the Siddha Name of Soham alone will be useful in easily crossing this ocean of worldly existence and ending the cycle of births and deaths. This Siddha Nama is a power; it is like a mother to the universe, and it is the entity that is calling itself “I” in the body. It is a flame of love.

There are countless sahasranamavalis—lists of a thousand names of a particular deity, such as the Thousand Names of Shiva, the Thousand Names of Durga, the Thousand Names of Krishna, etc. Throughout India the Name of the avatar Rama (Ram Nam) is perhaps the most commonly evoked.

Kabir is cited by Maharaj because he was in the Nath Yogi tradition and wrote about Soham. For example, he wrote the following song in which the Self is addressed as a Swan:

Tell me, O Swan, your ancient tale.
From what land do you come, O Swan? to what shore will you fly?
Where would you take your rest, O Swan, and what do you seek?
Even this morning, O Swan, awake, arise, follow me!
There is a land where no doubt nor sorrow have rule: where the
 terror of Death is no more.
There the woods of spring are a-bloom, and the fragrant scent
 “Soham” is borne on the wind:
There the bee of the heart is deeply immersed, and desires no other joy.

And further:

“You should take a dip in the Manasarovar [of the Divine Absolute] and perform the japa of Soham. The japa of Soham is beyond the limits of sins or sacred virtues.”

“His password is Soham.” [Soham is the password which admits us into liberation, into the Being of Brahman.]

“The Supra-Causal Realm (Bhanwar Gupha) is vibrating with Soham.”

But the most important words of Kabir are these: “If you want to know the Eternal, you will not find him in the Vedas, the shastras or in the Koran, in the temples or in the mosques. Penance, pilgrimage, breath-control, or living on nothing but neem leaves, will not lead you to him. You can find him only in your breath. [So when inhaling, and *Ham* when exhaling.]”

Elsewhere Maharaj refers to this, saying:

“Rama Nama is repeated by almost all people—by thieves, by licentious

people, and by rich people. But that Nama by which Dhruva and Prahlada were saved was something different.” I boldly tell you with firm assurance that the “different” Nama referred to by Kabir in these lines is none other than Soham. He who makes that Nama his own becomes one with the universal power. His words acquire the force of truth, and hence are full of power.

Most words, even names, are designations—nothing more. But Soham is different, for “he who makes that Nama his own becomes one with the universal power. His words acquire the force of truth, and hence are full of power.” This can be the experience of anyone who applies himself to Soham Yoga.

If you repeat the Soham mantra in your mind, by continuous practice your mind gets concentrated upon it. The concentration may be called dhyana. If this force is uninterruptedly stored up in your heart, be sure that you have obtained the goal of human life.

The attainment is as simple as the practice. Soham!

Somebody might say, “We have carefully listened to what you have told us. But what would be the use of all this for solving the practical difficulties of our actual life in this world?” No doubt this question is very important.

If your difficulties remain as they are, all this effort of japa and concentration would be useless and good for nothing. But I say this with all emphasis, that once you get the experience of the Avyakta, the power of the Avyakta is such that it will more than suffice for solving all possible difficulties in your worldly life. Once that is done, you will get such a power that it will either drive away all possible difficulties which beset you, or all difficulties will automatically disappear.

And the Avyakta is experience through Soham since Soham is the Avyakta. This everyone can experience.

True karma [yoga] lies in remaining absolutely calm and undisturbed by fixing your abode in the all-pervading Chaitanya [Consciousness]. I have said something about karma [yoga] before. Here I put it in the shortest way and the fewest words: To remain indifferent to pleasure and pain, and to perform actions from a sense of duty supported by the basis of Self-knowledge, is the real karma [yoga]. Lord Krishna describes himself as “Aham,” that is, “Soham,” which is the real power of Avyakta.

All this in a single word.

The ultimate responsibility of obtaining success in worldly or spiritual matters rests upon ourselves. It is through intense devotion and persistent efforts that we have to achieve success. As we progress, we shall ourselves come to know the stage we have acquired in our previous life. Through incessant practice, desires for sensual pleasures slowly become less and less and ultimately disappear, and the aspirant reaches the final goal of everlasting happiness. Only

you must have the lighted torch of Soham with you, and must try to obtain peace in its light. I have said what I know from my own experience. Everybody should try to realize it by his own experience. Soham is the soul, and there is everlasting peace in the soul. That itself is the Avyakta, the Unmanifested, in which everything lives, moves and has its being. Obtain everlasting peace by the mantra of Soham. This simple method surely and certainly leads to the goal.

All action makes a change, an impression, in the subtle energies which comprise our mind and body. These energies then manifest as karmas, the destiny that results from those actions, and samskaras—a person's mental characteristics, his entire personality. Those who fill their minds with Soham throughout all their days and nights will create for themselves the highest karmas and samskaras that will bring them into full Self-realization, the very fulfillment of their destiny as evolving consciousnesses destined for perfection.

The world is like a big jail, and people are born into it to serve out their sentences. Have therefore a wholesome fear of this jail, and try to purge away your sins and evil desires by the japa and contemplation of Soham. You need not do anything else for the purpose of your deliverance.... Carry on the practice of Soham with a heart full of faith and determination.

In the game of life, Soham is the Get Out of Jail Free card.

Everyone should repeat Soham. It surely and certainly leads to the knowledge of the Self and the attainment of everlasting peace. One's actions then in the worldly life are automatically done, and one is absolutely detached from them, just as a lotus leaf is from water.

Soham is the way to illumined consciousness and illumined life.

To a man who had had spent many years in practicing pranayama:

It is much better and also easier to get control over the mind [through meditation] instead of trying to get control over the breath.

The breath arises directly from the Self. This is why the Soham yogi can experience the Self to a definite degree even from the beginning of his sadhana. This is the distinctive character of Soham sadhana. It does not lead him from object to object like someone lost in a labyrinth (which other yogas/yogis do), but steadily increases the depth and scope of his initial Self-perception within the breath. He starts out with what he shall end with, the only difference being the continual expansion of the scope of his experience of that One Thing. To control, manipulate and alter the breath itself rather than experience the full scope of the breath is genuine folly, for that will lead the yogi away from Self-experience into mere externalized breath awareness.

In Soham sadhana the breath itself is the direct route to atmic consciousness since it is produced by the atma and is itself the action of the atma. There are a lot of phony (and silly) "direct routes" and "direct paths," but the breath itself is the way to atmadarshana: the knowledge of the Self.

In raja yoga, otherwise known as dhyana yoga, one who wishes to attain the spiritual goal must practice a good deal and that, too, regularly.

I assume that only a small number of those who read this book will remember the Yoga Boom that took place in America beginning with the arrival of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in 1962 and lasting for about ten years, during which many “gurus” came from India, gained thousands of followers and established organizations and ashrams in many places. Then it nearly all evaporated, though some of the (profitable) fraud lingers on in a few places. Nearly all followed the lead of Mahesh Yogi in assuring their potential disciple-customers that they not be vegetarians, need not bother with Indian religion, need not meditate for long periods, need not bother with any code of morality (including brahmacharya) or even honesty.

But Gajanana Maharaj is not a fake and does not want us to be fake yogis. So he tells us the simple fact: there is no attainment of Self-realization without much meditation. And that cannot be done in spurts of stop and go, but must be continuous and regular.

Besides, one must to a certain extent be disgusted with worldly existence.

This, too, is bedrock truth. A yogi must be motivated to attain freedom from the round of birth and death, to ascend in consciousness beyond this and all worlds (lokas) and become permanently established in Self-realization. To end samsara and enter nirvana: total freedom in Spirit. Those who find themselves “at home” in this world and who like it need not bother with yoga. But those who know in their inmost heart that they do not belong here, and they want no more of it in any form, can through sadhana become free of this world and live in the reality of their own Self.

Blind faith is harmful in raja yoga and is contrary to its principles. If a guru or a saint merely asks you to put your faith in him and he does not enable you to realize some experience within your Self, you should tell him plainly that there is nothing secret in raja yoga, which is not a mysterious science. All its practices are open.

This I find very interesting and unprecedented. Maharaj tells the aspirant to challenge a fake guru and expose his fraud by stating the truth to the faker himself.

In the days of the Yoga Boom I spoke at the yoga retreats and the centers of some of the various yoga organizations. The beginning of the end began when several key figures in these organizations spoke with me about their realization that the guru and his organization were false and they could no longer have any association with either. They approached me because their disillusionment was no intense and painful they wanted to make sure they were seeing clearly and that it would not be “disloyal” to leave the guru and the group. They trusted me. And I had through the years seen so much wrong in both the gurus and their organizations—along with the perpetration of truly cruel fraud on the sincere and devoted people I respected—that I honestly assured them that they were seeing true and not deluded. Their trust had been betrayed. They

left the organizations very quietly without creating any disturbance and in time I was officially banned by several gurus from even entering their centers. In time most gurus returned to India and their organizations faded away except for the ones that were monetarily profitable to the Americans running them. A few still remain.

In the course of a conversation Maharaj remarked that if the student would practice meditation as directed, in the course of time he would reach even the state of samadhi. The student then asked Maharaj, "Do you go into samadhi? What is the nature of your practice?" Maharaj replied:

I was practicing meditation and going into the state of samadhi even when I was in my mother's womb. Now I do not do anything and I cannot do anything. Strictly speaking I do not do anything; whatever appears to be done by me is done by Rama (God). I am simply as it were playing in this world in a peaceful state of mind. I do not understand Vedanta and its theories. I am, however, seeking in myself my own Self which is one and beyond all these things, which is eternal, which is life and which is joy incarnate.

This tells us that Maharaj was a great siddha long before this incarnation, and likely was the great yoga siddha Sri Chouranginath. It may seem unlikely to ordinary "reason," but with yogis the impossible is possible and the commonplace transformed into the miraculous.

The simple truth is that Maharaj's attainment and spiritual state is beyond the comprehension of anyone that is not of equal status.

Once Maharaj happened to visit a place where people began talking about miracles and how the gurus performing them were often exposed as unworthy teachers and frauds. One of them asked Maharaj who was silent, "Why don't you say anything?" His reply was this:

My Sadguru Mother has pointed out the path to me and has given me the mantra of Soham. If you ask me anything about it, I might be able to say something.

Maharaj refused to be drawn into pointless discussion of subjects about which people simply go around and around to no purpose of benefit whatsoever. Even though they were intent on the ways of fakes, Maharaj volunteered to speak of the spiritual reality that is Soham sadhana.

My Sadguru Mother. This is a most interesting expression. "Sadguru" means a true (sad) teacher (guru) who teaches the way to both intellectual truth and spiritual reality (realization). Maharaj's mother died when he was a very small child. When she was dying, her unmarried sister came to look after the children. She forcefully told her that as soon as she heard of some great yogi she should take the boy to him and him to bless the child. (Actually she told her to literally lay the boy on the yogi's feet and beg his blessing.) After a few years this did happen, and Gajanana was blessed by a great yoga master Sri Narayana Saraswati. (This is related in *Light of Soham*.)

To the boy Gajanana his guru became both his earthly and spiritual mother—his Sadguru Mother.

Has pointed out the path to me. This is what really mattered: his guru told him the path

to spiritual realization and ultimate freedom.

And has given me the mantra of Soham. For Soham sadhana is the path to Reality.

If you ask me anything about it, I might be able to say something. Maharaj has nothing to say as idle conversation, even if it involved discussing spiritual matters to some extent. But if those present wanted to know the way to the Absolute Consciousness, then he was willing to “say something.” Such was his diffidence and humility. And his response also reveals the prime principle of the Nath Yogi tradition: the student must on his own ask for instruction; a true Nath teacher will not offer or persuade in any way. This is why as a Nath Yogi Jesus said: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). The aspirant must on his own ask, seek and find. Because yoga is only for spiritual adults with independence and initiative. And they must demonstrate this from the very beginning.

In a conversation mention was made of false “saints” and their devious ways. Maharaj simply said in response:

I must see that my own house is swept quite clean.

This is the right perspective: not just “being nice” about others, but realizing that we alone are responsible for ourselves and must focus on that responsibility and fulfill it.

It is true that one should have a discerning mind. If a spiritual aspirant has real insight, he will not be deceived.

Spiritual intelligence is not just an asset for the yogi, it is an absolute requirement. The old nonsense about “judge not” and “don’t beat up yourself” must be ruthlessly banished from our analysis of ourselves. We must face up to the truth about ourselves at all times. Certainly we should not condemn or hate ourselves, but we should condemn and detest all the delusions and illusions we so often allow ourselves. Nobody is going to straighten us out but ourselves. Honesty is indeed the best policy and Maharaj assures us that if we exercise real insight we will not be fooled by ourselves or others. Fake gurus deceive those who deceive (or ignore the truth about) themselves—especially in regard to the fake gurus themselves.

All real saints have said that the source of real joy is in ourselves. In order to understand how to experience this internal joy of the Self, it is necessary to go to a sadguru and act according to his instructions. If once you know the real path leading to this Self-experience, you can enjoy the bliss of the Self even though you may be leading a worldly life.

All real saints have said that the source of real joy is in ourselves. False teachers point to themselves in their teaching and fool people into thinking that making some connection with them is necessary. But real teachers insist that the source of all happiness and wisdom is within each one of us.

In order to understand how to experience this internal joy of the Self, it is necessary to go to a

sadguru and act according to his instructions. The way to turn inward is the path of knowledge and Self-experience leading to Self-realization. And that way is yoga sadhana. To learn that way we need the instruction and guidance of those who have travelled that way successfully before us. A sadguru is not some glamorous figure of renown or one who displays himself as the pattern and the ideal. Rather, a genuine sadguru simply point out the simple way to the Divine Unity. What follows after is our doing alone. If we practice yoga, we find the Goal. If we do not, we remain in ignorance. It is our choice. A true teacher puts the entire matter into our hands by showing us the way. The rest is up to us.

If once you know the real path leading to this Self-experience, you can enjoy the bliss of the Self even though you may be leading a worldly life. You fully know the real path by following it and gaining your own experience and insight. You need nothing else than this because “greater is he [the Self] that is in you, than he [the ego-mind] that is in the world” (I John 4:4).

Every person will get the fruit of his actions.

This is an Absolute. There are actually three Universal Absolutes: karma, reincarnation, and the evolution of consciousness. They are inseparable. Karma is the simple fact: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). It is a matter of action and reaction. This produces continual rebirth until the individual evolves himself through yoga sadhana and attains the ultimate: Self-realization.

There is no away around this dictum. It must be faced and dealt with. We bear the total responsibility for our actions and reactions—and ultimately our freedom through Self-realization.

My sadguru has given me the shining torch of Soham.

When we are in the darkness of ignorance the gift of light, of illumination, is a great blessing. Without light we hardly dare to move. A blazing torch in the darkness shows us the way and also gives light to those around us. Such was the shining torch of Soham given to Maharaj by Sri Matsyendranath as related in *Light of Soham*. This was confirmed by Sri Narayana Saraswati who upon first meeting the boy Gajanana stated that he was an initiate of the Nath Panth. Gajanana Maharaj was himself a Light In Darkness, a beacon of Soham shining in the world. Where there in Soham there is no darkness; only light.

Miracles are inherent in every one. They are not required to be procured from outside.

This is an extremely striking statement, and could only be made honestly (that is, with real knowledge, not mere speculation or philosophizing) by a Nath Yogi.

Miracles are especially the coin of the tantrics and the charlatans. There is an insatiable market for miracles throughout the world, but especially in India where most people have at least a minor understanding of their nature. Those who work miracles may be either yogis of true spiritual power and realization, occultists (positive or

negative) with knowledge of the manipulation of subtle forces or entities, or frauds using various means (even sleight of hand) to deceive the public. And in all three of these categories we find an abundant number of gurus.

As usual the Nath (Soham) Yogi is in a completely other realm from these. The Nath Yogi does not “work” or “perform” miracles in any way. Rather, the miracles occur of themselves within the yogi’s aura (energy field) as a spontaneous expression. They truly do happen of themselves. This is perfectly natural, just as is the growth of a child into an adult. It is a natural happening as much as breathing or blinking the eyes.

A demonstration of this is given in the Gospel of Saint Luke in relation to Jesus, himself a Nath Yogi. “A woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchd. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately” (Luke 8:43-47).

Jesus was the embodiment of divine consciousness in which all imperfection is dissolved or corrected. So when the woman touched his clothing the divine power automatically flowed into her and corrected all malfunctions of her body. This is a natural occurrence around yogis. It is usually manifested within those near them in the form of spiritual awakening or upliftment. But healing does occur also. When Sivananda entered a room divine power and light entered with him. Correction in the form of inner and outer healing occurred instantly without any willing on his part. It was the same with Anandamayi Ma. There were instances in both their lives when men deeply involved in organized crime were forced by relatives to have their darshan. Instantly they were reformed and their lives were changed.

In the same way miracles occur around a perfect yogi as a matter of course. He does not will or “do” them, it just happens naturally. This will be the experience of the true yogi.

To saints all days are equally good. They do not look to auspicious or inauspicious days or times.

“Auspicious” and “inauspicious” days or times are real occurrences, but only in relation to external, material things or events. The yogi need not even take thought about them, since they have only a minimal or no effect on him.

Obsession with “good luck” and “bad luck” is ignorance and superstition. And so is the obsession with “the yugas” that prevail among yogis that are not real yogis. The real yogi knows that his life is directed by his own intelligent will and his consciousness is fixed in his Self through his sadhana. The true yogi already lives beyond this world where there are no such things as yugas, etc. That is why Maharaj said in an earlier citation, “A little consideration will convince us that external

conditions are almost the same in all Yugas. The change lies in the mind, the attitude it adopts. According to the attitude of your mind you will feel that the age is Satya Yuga or Kali Yuga. Everything thus depends on your mind. Hence I say that you should get your mind immersed in the ceaseless contemplation of Soham and then you will find that the difficulties created by troublesome external conditions will automatically disappear.”

Go straight to your goal and be one with your Self. Then duality will disappear, and you will enjoy the real bliss of the Self.

This is the whole picture in two sentences. But it is possible only if the yoga Maharaj taught is learned and diligently practiced. Otherwise the aspirant wanders around and around, trying to see in a few minimal and irrelevant experiences proof that he is on the right track. I speak from experience.

Maharaj was asked by someone to explain the meaning of Sat, Chit and Ananda.

Sat means that which is never destroyed, which always exists. It is nothing but Brahman.

Chit means that it is self-effulgent as consciousness in all the three states, the waking, the dreaming and the sleeping states.

Ananda means bliss. A thing is dear to us not for the sake of that thing but for the sake of our Self, which is the real object of all our love and is therefore the only entity which is dear to us. The Self is, therefore, bliss: Ananda.

You are the Self and the Self is essentially Brahman. This principle should be thoroughly grasped through Self-experience.

Soham sadhana is the way to Self-experience.

Visions themselves are not the real thing. These visions later on disappear and the sadhaka then experiences the bliss of the Self. That is the goal of human life.

“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 7:24:1)

“For where there is duality as it were, there one smells another, there one sees another, there one hears another, there one speaks to another, there one thinks of another, there one understands another. Where, verily, everything has become the Self, then by what and whom should one smell, then by what and whom should one see, then by what and whom should one hear, then by what and to whom should one speak, then by what and on whom should one think, then by what and whom should one understand? By what should one know that by which all this is known? By what should one know the knower?” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.14).

However, various kinds of experiences may be seen by the yogi as he progresses. The wise thing to do is understand they are only signposts on the way, but are never

the Goal—the Self. Therefore the sadhaka keeps moving onward through various experiences until he reaches That which is beyond experience. And discovers that it is his own Self.

Owing to merit acquired in previous births, if a disciple carries on the practice as instructed by his guru with firm faith and disinterestedness, he becomes fit for treading the path leading to the highest goal, although he may be leading a worldly life. He becomes submerged in joy within himself.

No one comes to the authentic yogic path without much positive karma accumulated in previous lives. The *Sri Narada Pancharatna* says that to be born in India and even live for only one minute requires a great amount of good karma. How much more, then, is tremendous good karma needed to come to the path of Yoga? And once having come to that path, how crucial it is to take it up and continue it throughout one's life.

Many people like to make the excuse that they are “in the world” and have worldly obligations and entanglements and therefore cannot tread the path of the yogi successfully. But Maharaj assures us that the only thing needed is to take up the practice, and nothing can hinder our success if we persevere.

As this Soham Mantra is the mantra of all the Nine Nathas and as it is also the mantra signifying the action of breathing of all creatures, an aspirant who takes to it is sure to make some progress in this very birth and to get experiences showing his progress.

“How do I know it will work?” is a very reasonable question in many aspects of life. Prior experience or example is a legitimate area for investigation, as well. So Maharaj takes us right back to the beginning of the Nath Yogi Sampradaya to the nine great siddhas who were the first to attain moksha through Soham sadhana. The Soham mantra worked for them, most certainly, therefore we can feel confident in our practice. But there is more: it is the nature of the sadhana itself that guarantees success. For Soham is the mantric form of the breath—inhalation and exhalation. So in the mantric seed sound (bija mantra) of the inhaling breath, and *Ham* (pronounced *Hum*) is the mantric seed sound of the exhaling breath. Soham is the underlying power or impulse—*mula shakti*—of the breath, and therefore is the breath itself. Therefore Soham sadhana will absolutely bring about the awakening of the sadhaka. The diligent yogi will perceive this for himself through prolonged practice. It is inevitable, as long as the practice is correct and continuous. Therefore the Soham yogi will make progress in realizing the Self and will have the experience of the divine and infinite nature of the Soham mantra and its effects.

Since everyone breathes, Soham sadhana is the natural heritage of all who aspire to total awakening and total liberation.

The ajapa japa is automatically going on in the breath (So in taking the breath in, and *Ham* in giving out). When one repeats this japa of Soham consciously

then it is called ajapa japa.

“Ajapa japa” is 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. It also means the mantra Soham which is produced by the breath itself, without any conscious effort in its repetition. It literally means “unrepeated repetition” in the sense that it occurs spontaneously without any effort on the part of the individual—a kind of “unspoken speech.” It is eternal; never beginning and never ending. When this Soham japa is consciously and intentionally repeated by the yogi, that is also “ajapa japa.”

The Absolute is knowable. Yogis become immortal by always repeating Soham. Holding the Soham Sudarshana in mind, regain your true form: the Self. Through this Soham you will be able to attain Self-realization. You will easily hold the Ida, Pingala and Sushumna in your hand and control them. If you can control them by one hand (i.e., easily) then you will attain Self-realization as surely as the sun shines in the sky.

The Absolute is knowable.

How is it possible for the finite (jivatman) to know the Infinite (Paramatman)? Because they are essentially one, as are the waves and the ocean.

But how will it be done?

Yogis become immortal by always repeating Soham.

This is because the essence of the mantra Soham is the Soham Bhava, the consciousness of I Am That—The Immortal Self. Furthermore, the eternal, immortal Self in each sentient being is always repeating Soham in time with the breath, for the inhalation produces the subtle sound of So and the exhalation produces the subtle sound of Ham (“Hum”). Consequently, when we keep mentally intoning Soham in time with the breath we link up our awareness with our own Self which is always one with the Supreme Self. So we become one in consciousness with both our individual Self and the Supreme Self. And permanent establishment in that united consciousness is itself liberation—moksha.

Holding the Soham Sudarshana in mind, regain your true form: the Self.

By “sudarshana” Maharaj means the Sudarshana Chakra, the invincible weapon of Lord Vishnu which is able to cut through anything, and is a symbol of the Lord’s power of cutting through all things which bind the jiva to samsara. Thus it is the divine power of liberation (moksha). Soham is the real Sudarshana which eliminates all ignorance and bondage and restores us to our original state of divine awareness and being.

Through this Soham you will be able to attain Self-realization. You will easily hold the Ida, Pingala and Sushumna in your hand and control them. If you can control them by one hand (i.e., easily) then you will attain Self-realization as surely as the sun shines in the sky.

The physical sudarshana chakra used by an Indian warrior in battle was a razor-sharp flat steel disk with a hole in the center. The warrior put his forefinger in the hole, holding it horizontally, and began moving his forefinger in a circle until the disk was whirling rapidly. When it was moving at optimum speed, the warrior aimed it at the

enemy and released it. The momentum carried it forward and severed the enemy's head or at least mortally wounded him. Because of its sharp edge it easily did its intended damage.

Maharaj is assuring us that we will not need to go through herculean labors and struggle and strive for a lifetime to attain Self-realization through Soham sadhana. We cannot be lazy or careless, and we must be steady and persistent in our practice, but it will not require tremendous labor and decades of struggle toward the goal. Rather, it will occur spontaneously because Soham sadhana is the very nature of our Self. It is right at hand and the process is going on within us all the time without any volition on our part. We only need link up with that process through conscious inner intonations of Soham in time with the breath. Then the result happens. It may not be overnight, but it will not be the entire span of a normal lifetime, and certainly not the "many lifetimes" the ignorant gurus and disciples who are not Soham yogis think it will require. And as Maharaj indicates in his final sentence, our Self-realization will be inevitable.

Disciples ask the guru, "Where is the 'Soham Sudarshana'? Please explain it to me."

Listening to the disciple's query, the guru says, "The Soham Sudarshana is in the breath, which eliminates the three types of anxieties, namely: those pertaining to this physical body, those pertaining to this material world and those pertaining to the attainment of moksha. Soham Sudarshana is when the mind is moving in the interior ajapa by the repetition of Soham in time with the breath."

Just repeating Soham as an affirmation, a mahavakya (great saying—major principle) or a regular mantra not synchronized with the breath is not Soham sadhana and is not in any manner the Soham Sudarshana. Those who just parrot "Soham... Soham... Soham" over and over or in any other manner than mental intonations of *So* joined to the inhalation and *Ham* joined to the exhalation, are not practicing Soham sadhana at all.

True Soham sadhana in time with the breath is the true Soham Sudarshana which frees the yogi from all fears and anxieties arising from involvement with the body and the material world—and also from any anxieties or doubts regarding the way to attain liberation (moksha), for the sadhaka's own experience of the effects of Soham shows him that he is on the unerring path to Self-realization.

Soham and the breath are inseparable, for they are essentially one, arising directly from the Self.

Soham is the pure Sudarshana, which removes all distinctions and gives the experience of Unity in diversity. He who has this Sudarshana in his hand becomes himself Lord Sri Krishna. The four Vedas, the six Shastras [sadarshanas] and the eighteen Puranas describe nothing else except the Sudarshana.... The Sudarshana is situated in your breath. It destroys the three

kinds of pains which beset a human being.

This sums up all the foregoing on the subject of the Soham Sudarshana. From this and all that went before on this subject we come to understand the nature and purpose of Soham sadhana. It ends samsara.

Go after the Soham Sushumna [the Sushumna awakened by Soham japa in time with the breath]. Having taken a human birth, this is the bhakti (devotion) you should be pursuing.

One of the worst things that has happened to modern India was the “bhakti movement” that swept India in the sixteenth century. The delusion, illusion, deceit and spiritual exploitation that has operated unchecked under its cover is simply incomprehensible.

Shankaracharya rightly defined devotion (bhakti) as the search for the vision of God, and wisdom-knowledge (jnana) as the actual experience of God and the resulting liberation of the individual. Emotion and intellectuality are not bhakti or jnana, but ego-based frauds. This is the view of the Nath Yogis. Therefore Gajanana Maharaj tells us to awaken our higher faculties by elevating our consciousness through Soham sadhana which will activate the Ida, Pingala and Sushumna simultaneously and in harmony. Then the subtle pranas will flow uninterruptedly upward into the Sahasrara and establish the yogi in atmic awareness that in time will culminate in Self-realization. Actually, all the nadis of the subtle bodies are purified and activated through Soham. This may seem an exaggerated claim, but if you practice correctly and long enough you will experience this yourself.

If one fixes his attention on the sound produced by the breath, the three nerves–Ida, Sushumna, and Pingala, become free in their actions.

In Soham sadhana the yogi observes his breath and mentally intones *So* and *Ham* in time with the breath–*So* while inhaling and *Ham* while exhaling–listening to his inner, mental intonations. When his attention is centered in those inner, mental intonations, then the dynamic process of the sadhana takes place on many levels in many forms. One aspect is the complete awakening and functioning of the Ida, Sushumna and Pingala in the yogi’s spine in its physical, astral and causal levels. He will come to know and understand the subtle realities within himself.

Paramartha [the highest spiritual attainment] is a thing which is to be achieved by one’s own efforts.... There is a very easy method which should be followed by him. He should remain quietly where he is, and at once begin the japa of Soham. He should repeat the japa with a pure mind, and should have firm faith that the Soham japa will fulfill all his wishes.... The Soham mantra is the real savior. If it is repeated with intense faith, accompanied with a sense of detachment from all worldly objects, it will itself make him understand what is true and what is false.... Our salvation really lies in our own hands. I therefore advise my mind to always get immersed in the contemplation of Soham, and thus

to free itself from the snares of all such doubts.

Let us give the same good advice to our own minds.

A sadhaka comes to realize the power of the soul and ultimately to grasp that there is one everlasting and all-pervading Being which is present in everything, and which is the only thing that exists. He then becomes one with Soham. He obtains everything which is to be obtained, to him nothing remains unattained, all his doubts are solved, and he is immersed in everlasting bliss. He becomes one with Brahman, and never falls from this stage.

I would like to stress further that one has to reach the goal of life by one's own efforts only.

Dependence on anything or anyone other than one's Self is sure to lead to disappointment and difficulties. Soham is itself the Atmabala, the power of the Self.

Teachings that need no comment.

Someone asked Maharaj what was really meant by Atmajnana (knowledge of the Self), Atma Sakshatkara (realization of the Self), and spiritual progress. Maharaj asked why he should explain those things for nothing. The man said that if he answered, and he could understand, he would then begin the practice of Soham Yoga until he attained knowledge of the Self.

All right. Just see. If a sadhaka thinks that seeing of divine visions is the ultimate goal, that it is Self-realization, that he has attained the highest stage, and nothing further remains to be done or achieved, it is sheer ignorance on his part. Because as long as there is duality, the flow of pain and pleasure continues unabated, and everlasting happiness is as far away as ever. If you think carefully, you will see that whatever is seen and heard is bound to disappear. But the knowledge of the Self is permanent and imperishable. This argument, I think, will appeal to all, whether they are theists or atheists. Seeing of lights or visions and hearing of divine sounds do not indicate the achieving of Atma Sakshatkara. To realize that the One Eternal Being on which these visions and sounds play and move is none other than our own Self is the real Atma Sakshatkara [Self-realization]. To be one with the everlasting Being is the real Sakshatkara.

When a person attains this oneness, his mind entirely becomes devoid of sankalpa (desire) and vikalpa (doubts), and it becomes absolutely indifferent. It goes beyond pleasure and pain. Actions are then automatically performed according to the prakriti dharma (promptings of nature). He becomes absolutely fearless, and is entirely devoid of egotism. When this state of mind is attained, then only can it be said that there is Atma Sakshatkara or Atmajnana. He is, as it were, merely sporting as a child while doing any actions. He is entirely detached from them. This is what is known as Sakshiavastha (the state of being merely a witness of one's actions). Progress means the gradual attainment of this state of mind. We can ourselves get a clear idea of our progress. There is no necessity to ask anyone else about it.

In that state, although passions may be there according to the previous character of the aspirant, still the passions come and go automatically, without taking effect in the form of wrong actions. Right actions are naturally and automatically done. This state is known as Atmajnana. When this stage is reached, never-ending bliss and peace are attained. This is what is known as the sahaja state. This is merely another word expressing the same idea as Atmajnana. Merely defining Atmajnana, Brahmajnana, bliss, or samadhi is of very little use.

In short, I wish to emphasize that he who has no attachment for worldly objects, who is perfect, has completely controlled his senses, and whose mind is entirely devoid of any desire for sensual pleasures, who remains in the world but is, as it were, out of it—because of his entire detachment—he alone obtains the sovereign kingdom of everlasting atmic bliss. He becomes one with Soham, and obtains the real grace of his sadguru. His mind is pure like the water of the Ganges, which moves in its course purifying all who come in contact with it. All bad thoughts entirely disappear, and his actions are quite naturally done. He is externally, as well as internally, quite calm and at peace.

In this stage he sees Brahman in all things; in other words, he is entirely immersed in the experience that everywhere there is nothing but all-pervading joy and bliss. His joy and peace are not dependent upon anything else, and hence they are everlasting. They are not disturbed under any circumstances, however adverse. His experience tells him that he himself has taken the form of the biggest as well as the minutest things. This is the real meaning of Soham. This is the real Atmajnana. Without this Atmajnana, all actions are useless. This is the meaning of Sri Krishna's words.

Those who have read some religious books and those who have listened to religious discourses must have often heard the words: Jivatma, Shivatma, and Paramatman. Jivatma is the individual soul who experiences pleasure and pain in this worldly life. Shivatma is the Paramatman who is the root cause of all the activities in the Universe. The absolute Being who pervades all things and is also beyond them is the Paramatman, otherwise known as Brahman. One and the same Being has been given these different names according to the different aspects in which he has been looked at.

Thus there is one absolute principle on which the ideas of Jivatma, Shivatma, and Paramatman have been superimposed. We get superficial, wordy knowledge of these terms from religious books and discourses, and our mind is confused. Now, where is he located who gives these different names and utters these words? He is located in this body, in the heart. This "I" located in the heart of all human beings, conceives these different aspects and gives utterance to these different names. If you search for this "I," you will come to know it is an absolute principle having no form, no attributes and which cannot be described in words. If it is without attributes and without form, can it ever be perceived by

the eye? No.

Then if you ask about the nature of this principle, for an answer you should see what all saints have said about it. They say that the real nature of this “I” is unchangeable bliss. The everlasting bliss residing in our heart is the sign by which the absolute truth can be traced. Every human being is ceaselessly trying to get happiness. Nobody is needed to tell him to do so. The reason why every human being ceaselessly tries to find happiness is because unchanging bliss is the real nature of the “I” inside him. When a person realizes the nature of this bliss, he has nothing more to do. All his activities stop.

When the “I” has been seen by the “I”—that is, the real “I” has been realized by the egoistic “I”—the duality between the seer and the seen disappears and now nothing further remains to be seen. When this stage is reached one realizes that the “I” pervades everywhere, and that nothing has existence except this all-pervading Self. In this stage the phenomenal world has no existence. Referring to this stage, Sri Ramdas has said, “Why are you asking about the cause, etc., of this world which, in fact, has no existence and was never born?” This state is indescribable in words. All words, therefore, are meaningless, and silence is the only eloquence regarding it.

In order to attain this natural stage, saints have prescribed a certain practice. The Soham which is in the hearts of all saints who have obtained Self-realization has manifested itself, and helps the saints to realize the blissful nature of the Self. In this connection Sri Tukaram has said that the body is the real Pandharpur and the soul is the real Vitthala.

I, too, told myself, my mind, to contemplate ceaselessly on Soham. The mind is pliable and turns towards that to which it is made to turn. When the mind, therefore, was made accustomed to the japa of Soham, the mind became one with Soham, and thus became merged in the Paramatman. Through the ceaseless contemplation of Soham, the mind became one with the Paramatman, and began to enjoy the everlasting and unchanging bliss which is the nature of the Self.

All actions that one does in this stage naturally become dedicated to God (Krishnarpana), and therefore are nishkama. There being absolutely no egotism, the idea that “I am doing the actions” is altogether absent, and therefore the karma becomes nishkama, and the apparent doer is all the while immersed in his natural bliss, and is thus absolutely detached, although leading a worldly life. I have therefore to request you all to carry on the practice of japa continuously.

Do not care to see whether your actions are sakama or nishkama; only take care to see that your attention is continuously directed to the japa. It does not in the least matter if you do not have recourse to any other sadhana. You are sure to be successful in the end.

Lord Krishna has said in the Gita that the mind, which by nature is fickle and hence difficult to be controlled, can be brought under control by constant practice (abhyasa). Thus, practice is the most important means of controlling the

mind.

If we carry on the japa with firm faith, we clearly realize after some time the power of the mantra. If we train our mind to entertain only good thoughts, not only are we ourselves benefitted, but our conduct produces good effects upon others also. This light of Soham inside us sheds its luster on our whole life and makes it full of happiness. Its beneficial influence is also felt by the whole external atmosphere around us. The first thing required is firm faith without any doubts and misgivings, and the second is the continuous practice of the mantra japa.

If therefore you continue the practice steadily, the tendency of the mind towards good thoughts and actions will be more and more increased, and owing to the ceaseless contemplation of Soham there will gradually be the realization of your own inherent blissful nature, and the mind will be enjoying complete peace and happiness.

Brothers and sisters, if you carry on the practice of japa with full faith and ultimately realize your oneness with Soham, you too will become full of bliss like myself. Be assured that the blessings of my sadguru will accompany you all along in your practice.

I have given expression to these ideas which have arisen in my innermost heart, and as such they are not my words but the words of the Paramatman dwelling in my heart. Whether they are true or false, I leave it to the world to judge.

I do not know whence these words come out of my mouth. You have kindly listened to them with favorable attention. I am thereby filled with extreme joy. There might have been mistakes committed by me through ignorance, or there might have been unpleasant expressions used by me inadvertently. You should kindly pardon me for them.

With these words I stop and enter into the deep and changeless love and joy of the ajapa japa of Soham.

SOHAM

Appendix One: More Wisdom of Sri Gajanana Maharaj

A disciple of Sri Gajanana Maharaj wrote a two small booklets of poetic verses in the old Marathi literary language that very few understand now. Our ashram had them translated into English. The following teachings of Maharaj are very important, especially the first one.

The importance of Soham is that it changes the mind's attitude [bhava, outlook] as soon as it is chanted [repeated/intoned]. You will experience it yourself; watch it changing you from within.

False gurus and false yoga methods keep their followers waiting for results, giving all kinds of reasons—usually implying some lack on the part of their followers—as to why they are not getting any significant and lasting effects from their practice. Mostly they claim that time is needed for the followers to become purified or prove their sincerity before “gururji” brings about their success through his “grace” won by their effort. The implication is that the follower is totally dependent on the false guru—and often the whole “guru-parampara” lineage.

But Soham sadhana practiced correctly by an aspirant who has ordered his life to conform to the principles of yama-niyama will yield results virtually immediately. And it will not be in the form of flashing lights and chills and thrills, but in very real change in the yogi's perceptions and inner condition, or bhava. (*A Brief Sanskrit Glossary* defines bhava: “Subjective state of being (existence); attitude of mind; mental attitude or feeling; state of realization in the heart or mind.”)

Right away the Soham sadhaka experiences peace, contentment and freedom from all anxiety or doubt regarding his practice and his spiritual future. As I have related elsewhere, within five minutes of my first time practicing Soham japa in time with the breath I suddenly said to myself: “O! I love this!” In a short time I had to go out for a few hours, so I sat in the back of the car with Soham, and it was the happiest day of my life. A day or so later I had to go for a trip taking about an hour and a half both ways, and I again sat there marveling at the wonder that was Soham Yoga.

This was in contrast to all the previous bogus yogas I had practiced which produced some peculiar sensations but ultimately produced nothing—except for the ones that literally harmed me mentally and physically. If I had bought the proverbial “pig in a poke” I would at least have had a pig to show for all my trouble and sacrifice. With Omar Kayyam I could say that I went out the same door I came in, but with some scars.

Soham healed and removed those scars and did the needful, including giving me the insight and courage to say that I had wasted my time and trust on fake gurus and fake yogis. But I never feared or was anxious about my Soham sadhana. Nor did I need

“faith” in any teacher or teaching. Most of all I understood that my confusion and waste of time was my own fault—that I had willfully blinded myself with “guru bhakti” regarding the tricksters I had even literally worshipped—and unquestioningly obeyed by practicing methods that were getting me nowhere. I lied to myself with rationalizations about Sri Guru and the latest “jet plane route to God” that always proved so pitiful it did not even crash, just fizzled out, “not with a bang but a whimper.” I was responsible—not the fake guru, the fake yoga or the fake organization that was going to be the eventual cause of world peace and enlightenment. (Some even claimed to be “the religion of the future.”)

Soham sadhana changed my entire perspective and dispelled my fear of speaking the truth about the unholy con games of the yoga world.

But best of all, I really did experience the effects of Soham and watched it changing me from within. I had peace, contentment and confidence.

Soham Kevalam. Soham Alone.

With just meditation [and japa of Soham], you will understand everything one after another. No other effort is required. This is just the practice you need to continue.

I hardly need to point out that this is an astonishing statement. Right away (often immediately) Soham sadhana begins to open the sadhaka’s understanding and gives insight where before there was incomprehension. And everything unfolds in a definite, precise order. Nothing depends on moods, expectations or external conditions, and definitely not at all is there a continuing need for a guru or teacher, since in the Nath Yogi tradition someone who already knows the practice instructs the aspirant in Soham meditation and japa, and the matter is closed. From then on the yogi’s practice will be guide and teacher. Amazing but true. Nothing is needed but the yogi’s perseverance in Soham japa and meditation.

The importance of practice is that you will get experiences serially. Also this cannot be achieved in just one birth without accumulations from previous births.

Again it is affirmed that in Soham sadhana everything comes about in order, just as a journey on foot is accomplished by taking a step at a time. And there is no skipping or shortcut either needed or possible. Again: Soham Kevalam.

The second sentence is not a rationalization for the yogi not accomplishing everything in time, as it would be in the mouth of false gurus and false yogis. Rather it is a statement that no one comes to Soham Yoga without accumulation of much spiritual karma in previous lives. So the fact that the yogi has learned Soham Yoga is proof that he has the requisite qualifications and karma and can attain the goal in this very life if he perseveres. The moment the Nath guru-teacher concludes the simple instructions the yogi is on his way and he alone decides whether he perseveres and succeeds. It truly is a matter of Going, Going, Gone. (*Gate, gate, para gate, para sam gate, bodhi-swaha!*)

This physical body is the temple of God. Life is the form of Lord Shiva. Leaving aside all the remaining ignorance just repeat Soham.

If this body is the temple of God, then he who dwells in it is God in essence. If this life is itself a manifestation of the Supreme Purusha (Shiva) it needs to be only realized or recognized as such—in other words: experienced. Everything that does not lead to this realization is ignorance and should be ignored as the yogi immerses himself at all times in the japa and meditation of Soham.

You might say, “If there is blessings of a guru, then that person can achieve anything.” But there is no shortcut to the practice.

About a month after I arrived in India I met a man who showed me a photo of his very famous guru. Then he explained that his guru had taught him a very complex yogic technique along with several complex variations—all at the same time. He concluded, “Guruji told us that it was usually taught only in several stages, but said that by his grace we would be able to do it all.” Then he admitted that he never had done it all, nor had any other of his fellow disciples!

A true and worthy teacher gives instruction in Soham sadhana which is already part of the very nature of the aspirant, who therefore needs no shortcut since Soham is already in him as his inmost existence. The way is simple and easy. It only needs traveling.

You only need to just practice the path that I have shown you. This is the path which will take you across.

Relative existence is called the ocean of samsara, and it must be crossed over or transcended. Soham sadhana takes the Soham yogi over and into Self-realization. Sustained practice alone is needed.

The teacher shows us the path—the practice. And that is the sum of it. He does not “empower” us or the mantra. The idea of claiming to empower the divine sound of Soham is insane, but the guru ego is insane, as is the disciple ego.

You are neither any god, goddess or any other being. You are the Original Form [Adi Rupa]. You are yourself Brahma Prakash—Brahman in the form of Light.

Since we truly are “neither any god, goddess or any other being,” the idea of doing japa of a mantra that produces the form or bhava of such beings is foolish and pointless. Rather, since we are that which Gajanana Maharaj here says we are, the only reasonable—and therefore effective—mantra is Soham, the mantra of our own Self and the Supreme Self.

Go after the Soham Sushumna. Having taken a human birth, this is the bhakti (devotion) you should be doing.

Here we see a very different concept of bhakti than the one usually propagated. That is because Gajanana Maharaj was a yogi—a Nath Yogi—and therefore had an

understanding that the merely sentimental non-yogi could not possibly have. Adi Shankara said that jnana (wisdom/knowledge) was actually knowing God, and bhakti was the process of attaining jnana through meditation.

The Sushumna is the central nadi in the spine up which the Kundalini rises to the Sahasrara and transforms the yogi into a mukta purusha, a liberated being. This is only possible through prolonged practice in which the japa of Soham enters the Sushumna. (This can only be experienced or understood by those who persevere in Soham sadhana.) Therefore Gajanana Maharaj tells us to “go after” this state. It is not to be attempted deliberately, but must be experienced naturally as a result of adept Soham Yoga practice. He elsewhere said, “When the power of breath gets an upward turn, the breath proceeds upwards through the Sushumna and... proceeds to the brahmarandhra at the centre of the brain. The Soham consciousness then merges in the unknowable Supreme Self and the sadhaka attains perfection.”

Only perfection (siddhi) in Soham sadhana can accomplish this.

Holding the Soham Sudarshana in hand, forcibly conquer the evil tendencies.

“Sudarshana” refers to the Sudarshana Chakra, which *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary* defines as: “The invincible weapon of Lord Vishnu which is able to cut through anything, and is a symbol of the Lord’s power of cutting through all things which bind the jiva to samsara. Thus it is the divine power of liberation (moksha).” Sudarshana Chakra is the moksha mantra Soham in which the Soham Yoga adept immerses his consciousness and entire being and thus conquers all evil tendencies and dispels all illusions and obstacles to total Self-realization. And it does not do so by “shakti” (power) but, as I say, by the consciousness inherent in Soham which pervades, purifies and perfects the yogi’s entire being.

Where is the Soham Sudarshana? The Soham Sudarshana is in the breath, which eliminates the anxieties pertaining to the physical body, the material world, and the divine [daivic] world.

Practice reveals that Soham and the breath are inseparable, that essentially they are the same thing. And the union of the breath and Soham comprise the Soham Sudarshana which transforms and transmutes the entire existence of the sadhaka into the life divine.

Fearlessness and freedom from anxiety and insecurity are fundamental effects of Soham sadhana in the mind and life of the Soham yogi.

When the jiva [individual Self] and Shiva [the Supreme Self] merge through Soham, from my experience that is the way whereby you become immortal.

Soham is innate in both the jivatman and the Paramatman, therefore through Soham sadhana they unite and the immortality of the Supreme Self is revealed in the individual Self.

Concentrate your mind and listen to my words: Soham is a Purna [Complete,

All-encompassing] Mantra. With this you will become Self-realized.

There is nothing right and true that the Soham mantra cannot accomplish. Soham embraces the entire being of the yogi. Thus Self-realization becomes the persistent yogi's constant and permanent state.

Soham is the seed for Self-Realization.

Plant the seed of Soham in yourself through constant japa and meditation of Soham, and Self-realization will be the natural fruit that develops.

All the siddhas meditate on Soham.

This means both that the siddhas, including those in Siddhaloka, the highest level in relative existence, Siddhaloka, the world of the siddhas, are always immersed in the liberating awareness of Soham, and that they all ultimately attained liberation through Soham, even if their involvement with Soham only began in higher worlds.

Through Soham meditation, one is purified.

Through Soham sadhana, on all levels of his being the Soham yogi is purified by the total elimination of all that is not the Self.

Soham meditation imparts the ultimate state of mukti: liberation.

You will come to know this for yourself by your own practice. It cannot be otherwise.

The following words of Gajanan Maharaj need no comment.

I shall give you an everyday illustration. Suppose some night you get very sound sleep. When you get up next morning you say to others, "For the last month or so I did not get good sleep. But last night I got such a sound and deep sleep that I was greatly delighted." Now just see. If you were in deep sleep, how can you say that you got sound sleep? Who was awake in that state? Had you seen who was awake in that state? Who enjoyed the bliss of sleep, and who is now describing his feelings in that state?

This "I" is present in each and everything, even in the minutest atom of dust. It is your Self. Know it. Through continuous meditation on Soham be one with that Self which itself is the Supreme Self. I cannot tell you anything beyond this. This God is in my heart, similarly he is in your heart also. When through the japa [and meditation] of Soham you will get the internal sight, you will be able to understand everything..

Someone asked Maharaj the meaning of Sat, Chit and Ananda.

Sat means that which is never destroyed, which always exists. It is nothing but Brahman. Chit means that it is self-effulgent as consciousness in all the three states, the waking, the dreaming and the sleeping states. Ananda means bliss. A

thing is dear to us not for the sake of that thing but for the sake of our Self, which is the real object of all our love and is therefore the only entity which is dear to us. The Self is, therefore, bliss: Ananda. You are the Self and the Self is essentially Brahman. This principle should be thoroughly grasped by means of arguments, the authority of the Vedas and lastly through Self-experience.

Appendix Two:

Introduction to Soham Yoga

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

The individual Atman-spirit (jivatman) originally dwelt in the consciousness of that oneness. But through its descent into the material world the spirit lost both its awareness of the eternal union and the capacity to manifest it on a practical level. Through yoga the lost consciousness can be regained and actualized in the yogi’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.”

Soham

Yoga is based on the science of spiritual sound, or mantra. A mantra is a series of sounds whose effect lies not in an assigned intellectual meaning, but in an inherent sound-power that can produce a specific effect physically or psychologically. The word mantra itself comes from the Sanskrit expression *manat trayate* which means “a transforming thought,” that which produces an objective, perceptible change. When joined to the breath, Soham is the supreme mantra of Self-awareness and Self-knowledge culminating in liberation.

Soham (which is pronounced like “Sohum”) means: I Am That. It is the natural vibration of the Self, which occurs spontaneously with each incoming and outgoing breath. Through becoming aware of it on the conscious level by mentally repeating it in time with the breath (*So* when inhaling and *Ham* when exhaling), a yogi experiences the identity between his individual Self and the Supreme Self.

There are mantras that change things and others that reveal the eternal nature of things. Soham does both. According to the Nath Yogis (see *Philosophy of Gorakhnath* by Ashkaya Kumar Banerjea), Soham has existed within the depths of God from eternity; and the same is true of every sentient being. Soham, then, will reveal our inner being. By meditating on Soham we discover our Self, within which Soham has existed forever.

The simple intonation of Soham in time with the breath, as will be described later, will do everything in the unfolding of the yogi's spiritual consciousness. For sound and breath are the totality of Soham sadhana.

The practice is very simple, and the results very profound. Truly wondrous is the fact that Soham Yoga can go on all the time, not just during meditation, if we apply ourselves to it. The whole life can become a continuous stream of liberating sadhana. "By the mantra 'Soham' separate the jivatman from the Paramatman and locate the jivatman in the heart" (Devi Bhagavatam 11.8.15). When we repeat Soham in time with the breath we are invoking our eternal being. This is why we need only listen to our inner mental intonations of Soham in time with the breath which itself is Soham.

It is my hope that through practice you will experience for yourself the value and benefits of Soham Yoga that is presented in this booklet. The important thing about Soham Yoga is that it really works. It only takes perseverance. Archimedes said: "Give me a fulcrum and I will move the world." Soham Yoga is the fulcrum.

The Eternal Word

The ancient yogis of India discovered that the root impulse of inhalation makes the subtle sound of *So*, and the root impulse of exhalation makes the subtle sound of *Hum* (written as *Ham* in Sanskrit). Since all creation is the thought or ideation of God, meaning is inherent in everything, including the breath: "That [*So*] I am [*Ham*]." In this way every living being is perpetually intoning Soham (Sohum) at the core of their being, saying: I AM THAT: the spirit-Self which is a divine part of the Divine Infinite.

No matter how many ages we wander in forgetfulness of our divine origin and nature, we are always affirming "I am That" without ceasing at each breath. But we have lost the awareness of that sacred thread of inmost knowledge and are now wandering without direction or discernment. But by mentally intoning Soham in time with the breath—*So* when inhaling and *Ham* when exhaling—we consciously take hold of the thread and begin moving in the right direction.

Repeating Soham in a constant flow with the breath turns the mind inward and produces spiritual awareness in an ever-increasing degree. So whenever we intone Soham in time with the breath, we align and link our consciousness with its origin: both our spirit and Divine Spirit.

Pronunciation

For the repetition of Soham to produce its effect it must be pronounced correctly. Soham is pronounced like our English words *So* and *Hum*. The short a in Sanskrit is pronounced like the u in *up* or *hunt*, so we say "hum" even though we write it as "ham."

It is most important 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.

The same is true of the *U* in *ham* (hum). As already pointed out, it is pronounced like the *u* in *up* or *hunt*—not like the *u* in *truth* or *push*, as is done in parts of Great Britain.

A mantra 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 unifies the mind and naturally concentrates it.

The Practice of Soham 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 and close them gently. This removes visual distractions and reduces your brain-wave activity by about seventy-five percent, thus helping to calm the mind. During meditation your eyes may move upward and downward naturally of their own accord. This is as it should be when it happens spontaneously. But start out with them turned slightly downward without any strain.

3) Be aware of your breath naturally (automatically) flowing in and out. Your mouth should be closed so that all breathing is done through the nose. This also 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. Breathe naturally, spontaneously. Your breathing should always be easeful and natural, not deliberate or artificial.

4) Then in a very quiet and gentle manner begin *mentally* intoning Soham in time with your breathing. (Remember: Soham is pronounced like our English words *So* and *Hum*.)

Intone *Soooooo*, prolonging a single intonation throughout each inhalation, and *Huuuuuu*, prolonging a single intonation throughout each exhalation, “singing” the syllables on a single note.

There is no need to pull or push the mind. Let your relaxed attention sink into and get absorbed in the mental sound of your inner intonings of Soham.

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. It does not matter if the inhalations and exhalations are not of equal length. Whatever is natural and spontaneous is what is right.

Your intonation of *Soooooo* should begin when your inhalation begins, and *Huuuuuu* should begin when your exhalation begins. In this way your intonations should be virtually continuous: *SooooooHuuuuuuSooooooHuuuuuuSooooooHuuuuuu*.

Do not torture yourself about this—basically continuous is good enough.

5) For the rest of your meditation time keep on intoning Soham in time with your breath, calmly listening to the mental sound.

6) In Soham meditation we do not deliberately concentrate on any particular point of the body such as the third eye, as we want the subtle energies of Soham 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 such sensations come and go spontaneously, but keep centered on your intonations of Soham in time with your breath.

7) In time your inner mental intonations of Soham may change to a more mellow or softer form, even to an inner whispering that is almost silent, but the syllables are always fully present and effective. Your intonations may even become silent, like a soundless mouthing of Soham or just the thought or movement of Soham, yet you will still be intoning Soham in your intention. And of this be sure: *Soham never ceases*. Never. You may find that your intonations of Soham 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.

8) In the same way you will find that your breath will also become more subtle and refined, and slow down. Sometimes the breath may not be perceived as movement of the lungs, but just as the subtle pranic energy movement which causes the physical breath. Your breath can even become so light that it seems as though you are not breathing at all, just *thinking* the breath (or almost so).

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 Soham 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 Soham and are perfectly all right, but keep your attention centered in your intonations of Soham 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, 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.

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

Breath and sound are the two major spiritual powers possessed by us, so they are combined for Soham Yoga practice. It is very natural to intone Soham in time with the breathing. The way is simple and easy.

12) At the end of your meditation time, keep on intoning Soham in time with your breath as you go about your various activities, listening to the inner mantric sound, just as in meditation. One of the cardinal virtues of Soham sadhana is its capacity to be practiced throughout the day. The *Yoga Rasyanam* in verse 303 says: "Before and after the regular [meditation] practice, the repetition of Soham should be continuously done [in time with the breath] while walking, sitting or even sleeping.... This leads to

ultimate success.”

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. Soham is the seed (bija) mantra of nirvanic consciousness. You take a seed, put it in the soil, water it and the sun does the rest. You plant the seed of Soham in your inner consciousness through japa and meditation and both your Self and the Supreme Self do the rest. By intentionally intoning *So* and *Ham* with the breath we are linking the conscious with superconscious mind, bringing the superconscious onto the conscious level and merging them until they become one. It is divinely simple!

Soham Yoga Sadhana in three sentences

The two supreme yogis of India’s history, Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath, and the Yoga Chudamani Upanishad have made three statements that are most important for the yogi, for they present the essence of Soham Sadhana.

1) The inhalation comes in with the subtle sound of *So*, and the exhalation goes out with the subtle sound of *Ham*.

2) There is no knowledge equal to this, nor has there ever been in the past or shall be in the future any knowledge equal to this.

3) There is no japa equal to this, nor has there ever been in the past or shall be in the future any japa equal to this.

The implication is that the unequaled, and therefore supreme, knowledge and the unequaled and supreme yoga practice are the mental intonations of *So* throughout the inhalation and *Ham* throughout the exhalation. And therefore that intoning *So* and *Ham* in time with the breath is the totality of Soham Yoga practice.

Such gimmicks as thinking the breath is going up the spine with the intonation of *So* and down the spine with the intonation of *Ham*, or intoning Soham at the chakras, are not Soham Sadhana. Consequently, the Soham yogi’s attention should be only on the movement of his breath and his mental intonations of *So* and *Ham* in time with it.

These three statements of Matsyendranath, Gorakhnath and the Yoga Chudamani Upanishad also imply that the difference between Soham Yoga and other yogas is the difference between lightning and lightning bugs.

How is this? Because according to the Isha and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads the fundamental nature of both the Supreme Self (Ishwara) and the Individual Self (Jiva) of each one of us, is Soham.

First, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1:4:1) tells us: “In the beginning this (world) was only the Supreme Self [Paramatman], in the shape of a person. Looking around he saw nothing else than the Self. He first said, ‘I am Soham’ [*Soham asmi*].”

Second, the Isha Upanishad (16) tells us that as we are leaving the body at the time of death we should say: “I am that Purusha [Spirit-Self]: I AM SOHAM.”

Soham Sadhana takes us directly and immediately into the consciousness of the Self and the Supreme Self, simultaneously. Other yoga practices do not do this, but go about it in a roundabout manner, taking many years (if not decades) before even beginning to do what Soham Sadhana does from the very first.

In Soham Yoga only the sufficient time to experience the full range of Self-experience and become permanently established in that experience is necessary for the Soham yogi to become liberated. As soon as he truly knows: "I am Soham," the Great Work is complete. For Ishwarapranidhana not only means offering the life to God, it also literally means offering the breath (prana) to God. This is done by intoning *So* during inhalation and *Ham* during exhalation, both in meditation and the rest of the day and night. In this way Soham Bhava, God-consciousness, is attained.

What can you expect?

Yoga and its practice is a science and the yogi is the laboratory in which that science is applied and tested. At first the aspirant takes the word of a book, a teacher or other aspirants that a yoga method is worthwhile, but eventually it is his personal experience alone that should determine his evaluation of any yoga practice. Because each person is unique in his makeup there can be a tremendous difference in each one's experience of yoga. Nevertheless, there are certain principles which can be stated.

If a yogi is especially sensitive or has practiced the method in a previous life, he may get obviously beneficial results right away. Yet for many people it takes a while for a practice to take hold and produce a steadily perceptible effect. One yogi I knew experienced satisfactory effects immediately. Then to his puzzlement for some days it seemed that absolutely nothing was happening, that his meditation was a blank. But he had the deep conviction (no doubt from a past life as a yogi) that Soham sadhana was the right and true way for him. So he kept on meditating for hours at a time. Then one morning during the final hour of meditation results began coming in the form of experiences that he had not had before. All doubt was dispelled, and he knew he was on the right track. From then onward everything was satisfactory, though there were alternating periods of active experiences and simple quiet observation of inner rest.

Experiences, as I say, can be different for everyone, but certainly peace and refinement of consciousness can be expected. Many things will occur that simply cannot be described because ordinary human language has no words for them. The real test is the yogi's state of mind outside meditation. This he should watch carefully. And he must make sure that he is always practicing correctly. Fortunately, Soham sadhana is simple and easy to do.

Warning: Do Not Interfere!

We are used to directing and controlling as much of our life as possible. But what applies to the external life as wisdom is not necessarily so in the internal life of meditation. The very simple twelve points given previously when followed exactly in a relaxed and calm manner will produce the inner environment in which Soham can do its divine work of revealing itself as the consciousness that is the yogi's true Self. If there is any interference in the form of trying to change something or direct the meditation or experience in any way, the process is interrupted and will produce no results. Naturally, since the practice is so incredibly simple and we have read all kinds of propaganda about "powerful" yogas and the chills and thrills they produce and the

“profound insights” and even visions of higher worlds, etc., that supposedly result from them, we wonder if there surely isn’t “more than this to it” and consider trying out such gimmicks as intoning Soham at the chakras, integrating it with some artificial form of pranayama, concentrating on the spine while visualizing/imagining currents moving up and down the spine, and other “enhancements” that may entertain but will only be obstacles to success in Soham sadhana.

The truth is that Soham intoned in time with the breath immediately begins producing a tremendous number of yogic kriyas (processes), but kriyas that are so subtle and natural that they are usually not perceived. It takes real refinement of the mental energies to experience much of what Soham effects in the entire being of the yogi. I have been astonished at how profound the effects of Soham sadhana are, and some of my experiences have been really incredible, but I have had decades of yogic practice behind me to enable me to experience and understand the workings of Soham. I am not describing any of these experiences lest when you encounter them yourself you wonder if your experience is only autosuggestion based on my description.

Be wise and just breathe and intone Soham in time with it with eyes closed during meditation and open during the rest of the day’s activity. Nothing else, but just being aware of that process and listening to the inner intonations of Soham is the secret and the assurance of success. And that is all. Soham must not be interfered with—it really cannot be, so any attempt will interrupt and spoil the practice and drag you back on the path of samsara, however “yogic” it may seem to you.

Simplicity 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 effective. This being so, the simple subtle intonations of Soham are the strongest and most effective form of mantric invocation.

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 simple practice of Soham Yoga meditation.

Subtlety of practice

Soham sadhana is extraordinarily powerful, yet until we become attuned to it by some time of practice it may seem very mild, just a kind of yogic sitting-up exercise. But it is a mighty tool of yoga alchemy. The secret of its power and effectiveness is its subtlety—the very thing that may cause it to be disregarded and not recognized for its intense value, for it is the subtle energies that are able to work lasting changes in our awareness. The more evolved consciousness or energy becomes, the more refined and subtle it becomes—truly spiritual.

It is the very subtle energies that are able to work lasting changes in our awareness. The more evolved consciousness or energy becomes, the more refined and subtle it becomes. Thus it is the highest level of spiritual powers alone that are able to effect our ascent in consciousness.

Tension of any kind interferes with these energies. 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 Soham to become as subtle as they should be. For the subtler the intonations, the more effective and on target they are.

Even so, I do not mean to give you the impression that your inner intonations of Soham 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 and therefore more effective.

An exception

In point 6 of the Soham Meditation instructions I said that “we do not deliberately concentrate on any particular point of the body such as the third eye, as we want the subtle energies of Soham to be free to manifest themselves as is best at the moment.” There is an exception to that. On occasion, such as at the very beginning of meditation or when during the rest of the day you find your attention drifting from the breath and Soham, it can be helpful to make yourself very gently (lest you give yourself a headache from tension) aware of your entire brain (Sahasrara) area, feeling that the breath and Soham intonations are taking place there.



A short time of this awareness (which can arise spontaneously as well) is sufficient, because correct practice will result in Sahasrara awareness naturally.

Practice is the key to success

All the theory and eulogy in the world regarding a meditation method mean virtually nothing. *But practice is everything.* In yoga more than anything else, practice certainly does Make Perfect. And the practice is so marvelously simple. Consequently, as a friend I urge you in every sense of the expression to literally take this practice to heart. Meditation produces steady spiritual growth if there is steady practice.

The secret of success is regularity in meditation. If you meditate regularly, every day, great will be the result.

So it really is all up to you. The sane and sober voice of the sages and scriptures of India assures us that through the simple japa and meditation of Soham all possible spiritual attainments will be realized.

A final word

There is an entire book on the subject of Soham Yoga entitled: *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*, which we recommend you read. Another valuable book is *Light of Soham*. You will find them posted on: ocoy.org, and for sale on Amazon.com.

About the Author

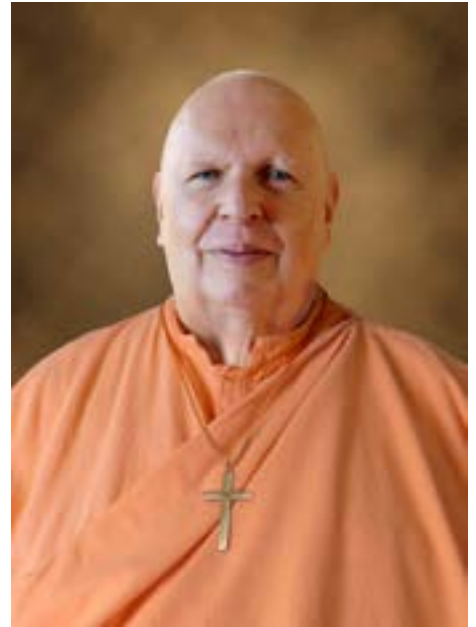
Swami Nirmalananda Giri (Abbot George Burke) is the founder and director of the Light of the Spirit Monastery (Atma Jyoti Ashram) in Cedar Crest, New Mexico, USA.

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.



Atma Jyoti Ashram (Light of the Spirit Monastery)

Atma Jyoti Ashram is an esoteric Christian monastic community for those men who seek direct experience of the Spirit through meditation, sacramental worship, discipline and dedicated communal life, emphasizing the inner reality of “Christ in you the hope of glory,” as taught by the illumined mystics of East and West.

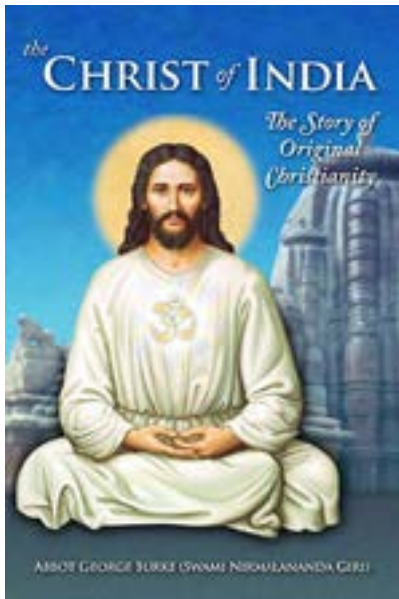
The public outreach of the monastery is through its website, OCOY.org (Original Christianity and Original Yoga). There you will find many articles on Original Christianity and Original Yoga, including *Esoteric Christian Beliefs*, *Foundations of Yoga* and *How to Be a Yogi* are practical guides for anyone seriously interested in living the Yoga Life.

You will also discover many other articles on leading an effective spiritual life, including *The Yoga of the Sacraments* and *Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet*, as well as the “Dharma for Awakening” series—in-depth commentaries on these spiritual classics: the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Dhammapada, and the Tao Teh King.

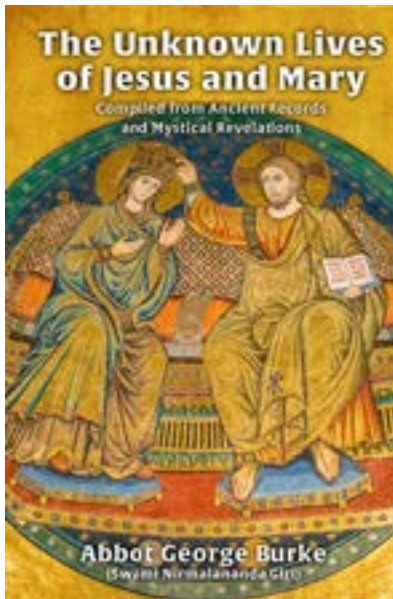
You can listen to podcasts by Abbot George on meditation, the Yoga Life, and remarkable spiritual people he has met in India and elsewhere, at <http://ocoy.org/podcasts/>

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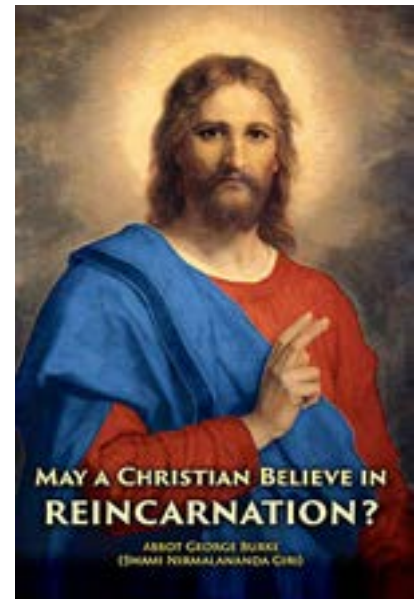
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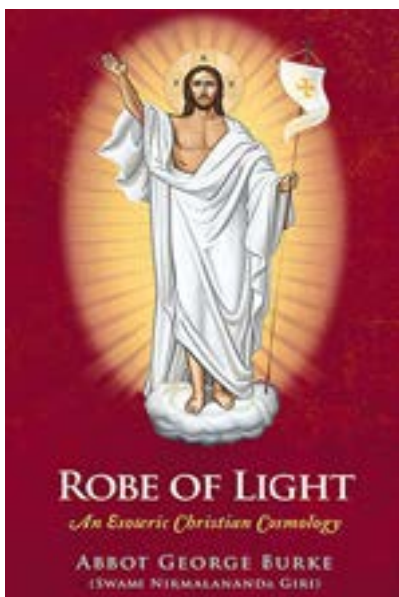
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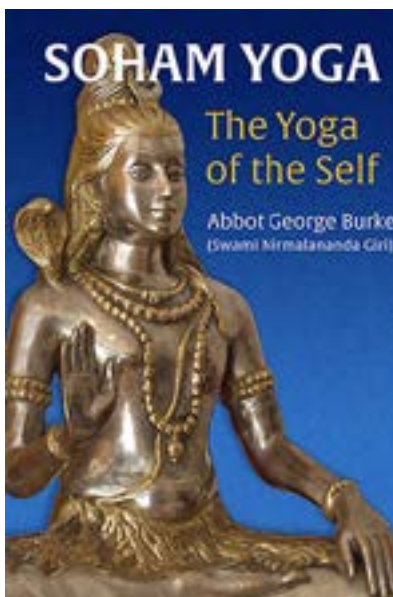
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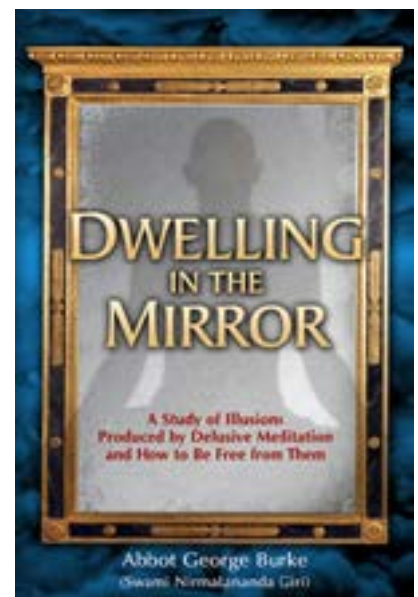
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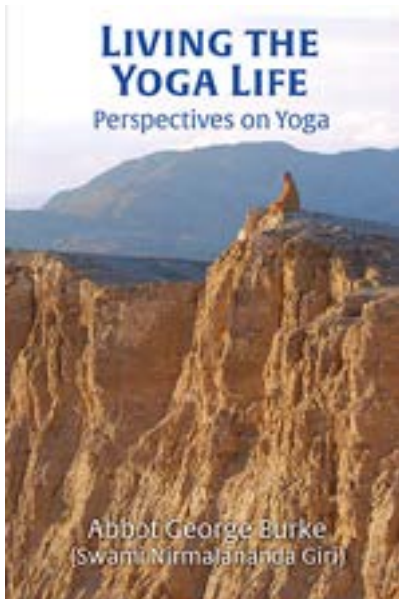
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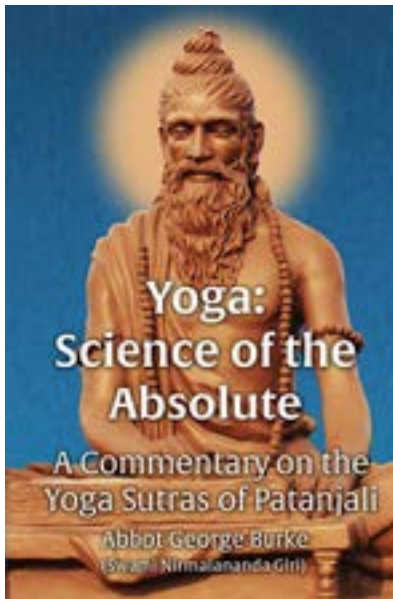
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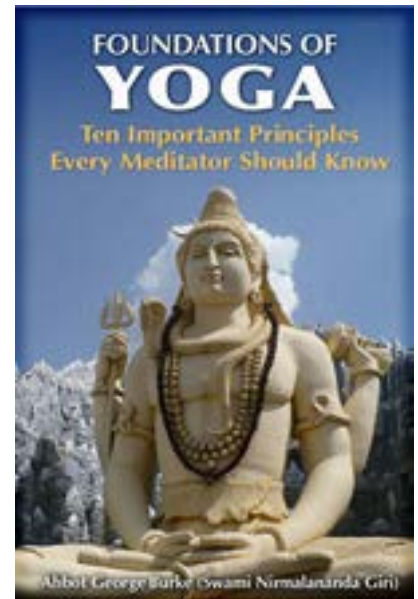
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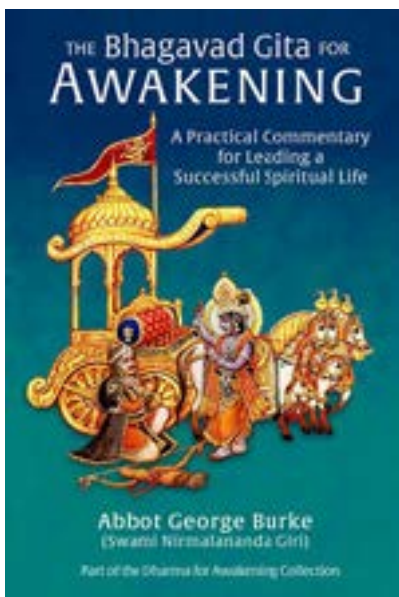
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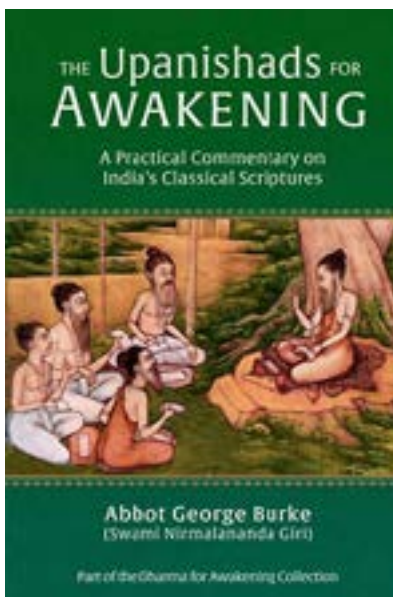
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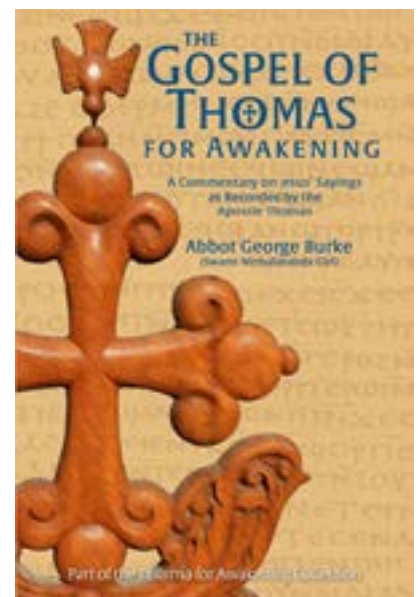
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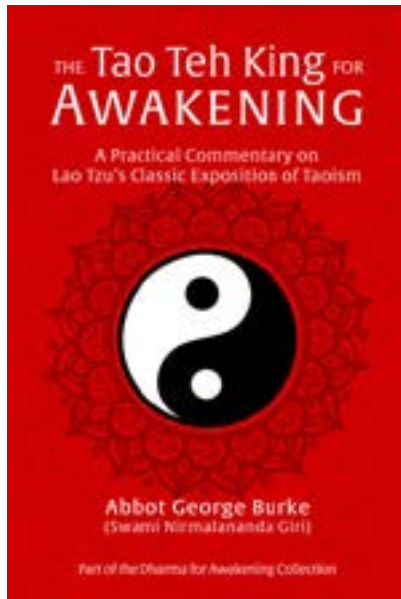


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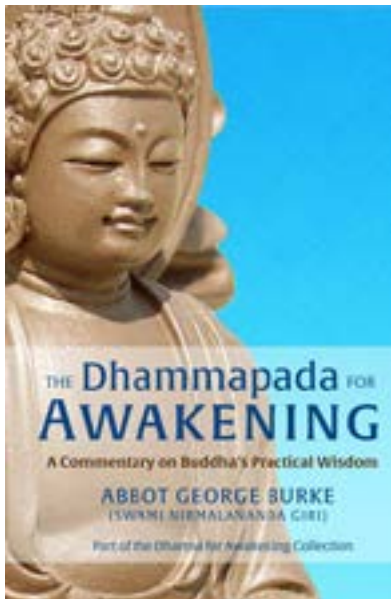


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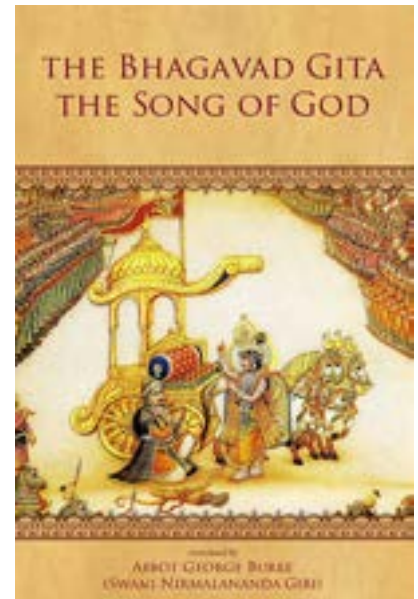
Satsang with the Abbot: "This is yet another very insightful, thought-provoking and well-founded book by Abbot George, which covers an extremely wide range of topics... a work worthy of reflective study!" –Br. Julian-Ozana



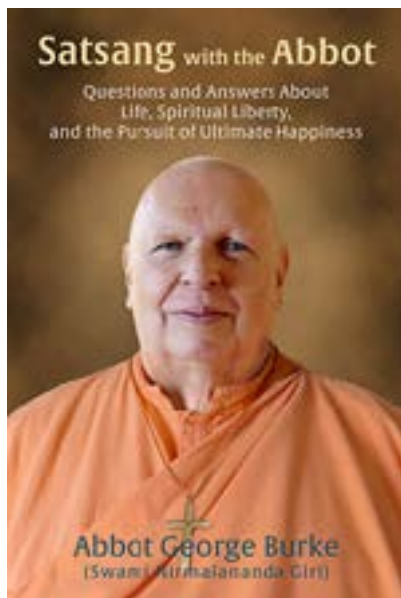
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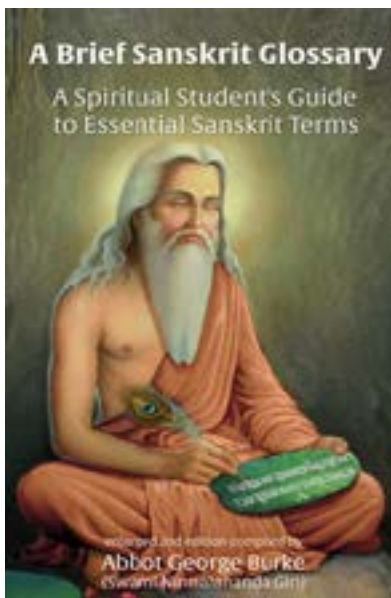
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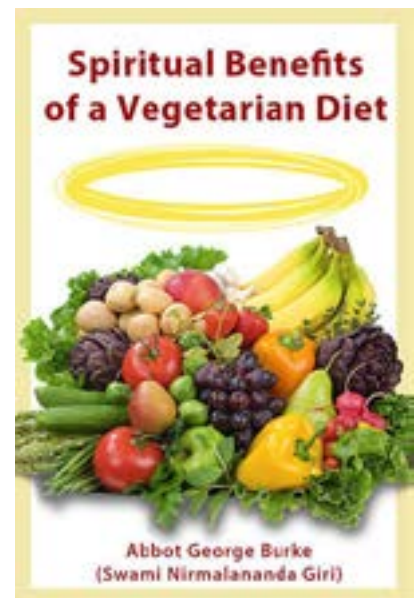
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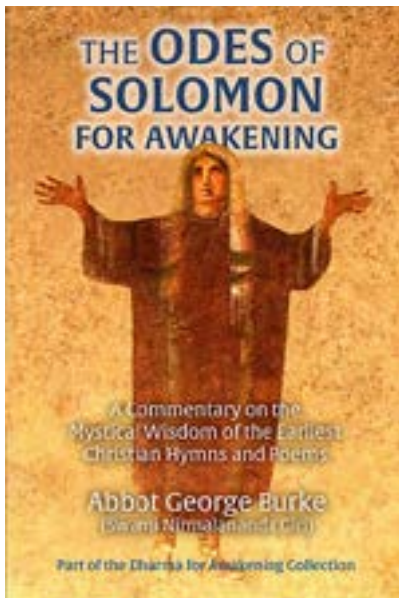
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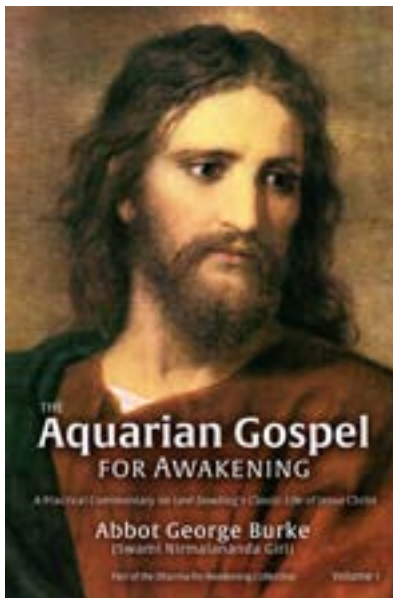
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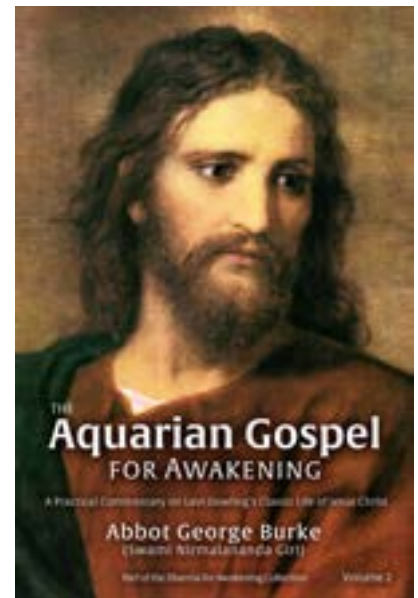
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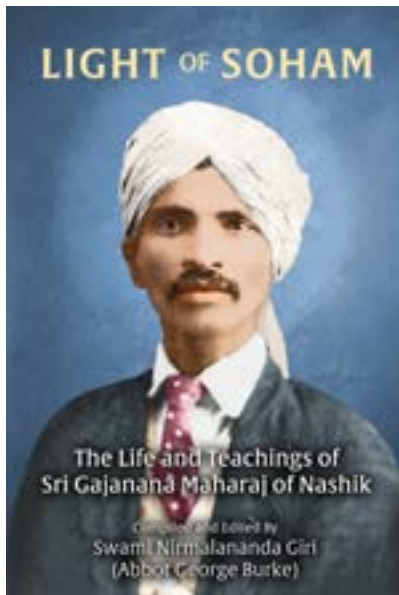
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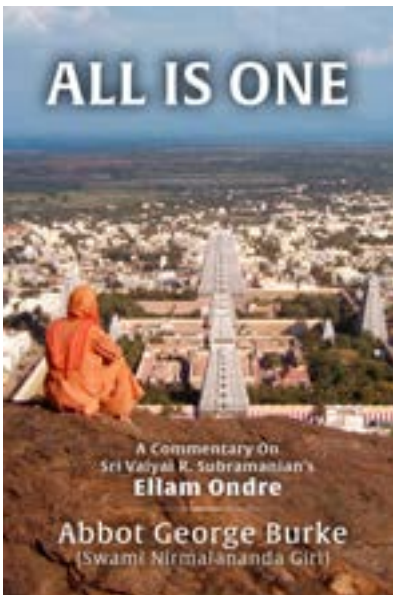
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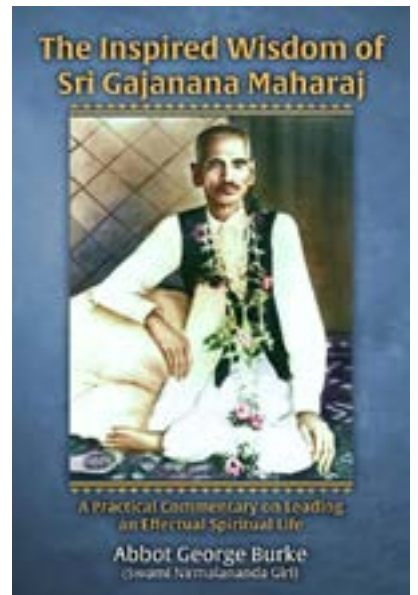
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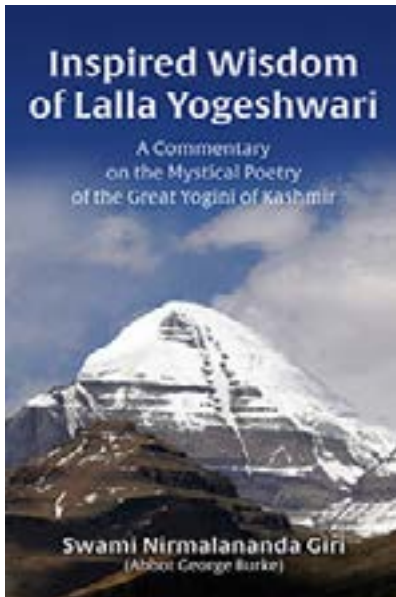
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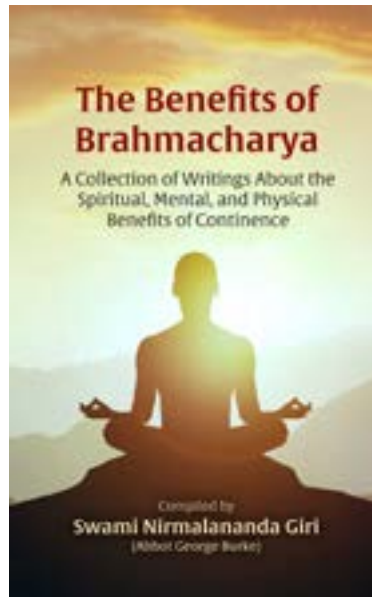
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