

YOGA

What it is, and what it is not

The ability to stop at will the fluctuations or modifications of the mind which is acquired through constant practice in a spirit of renunciation, is called Yoga. True Yoga is practised with a view to attaining salvation. The stoppage of the fluctuations of the mind or its modifications implies the art of keeping only one idea before the mind's eye and shutting out all other ideas or thoughts. In an advanced state of practice, it is possible to suspend all ideation. The two important features of Yoga to be noted are (i) that there is the suppression at will of the modifications of the mind and (ii) that it is not casual but has been developed into a habit through constant practice, not for gaining a personal end, but in a spirit of renunciation. If without any effort, independently of any volition there is at any time a quiescence of the cognitive faculty of the mind that is not Yoga. It has been found that some men suddenly get into a mental state of quiescence; they imagine that at the time they were not conscious of anything. From physical symptoms, such quiescence looks like sleep. Fainting, fit, catalepsy, hysteria etc. also bring about a similar state of mental inactivity. By the conditions mentioned before, this state cannot however be regarded as Yoga. Again, some naturally have, or by practice acquire, the power of stopping the circulation of blood or of going without food for long or short periods, none of them is Yoga. Holding up the breath for some time in a particular physical mode or posture is not real Yoga either, because in men capable of performing such feats, the power of concentrating the mind at will on any particular object, is not found as a matter of necessity.

In the Yogic concentration, where only a single item or thought is kept in the mind to the exclusion of others there are stages. When the same item of thought can be kept constant in the mind for some length of time, the Yogic process is known as Dhyāna (meditation). When the meditation becomes so deep that forgetting everything, forgetting as it were even one's own self, the mind is fixed only on the object contemplated upon, such voluntary concentration is called Samādhi (intense concentration). This feature of Samādhi should be understood thoroughly. Ignorant people think that any form of quietness of the mind or trance or loss of consciousness of external objects is Samādhi; but that has nothing to do with Yoga.

There are different kinds of Samādhi depending on objects con-