

## Lesson 13

### Doors of Perception

0 Yajnavalkya, which is the light of this person? The light of the sun, 0 king, said he, by the light of the sun indeed, one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back.

So is it indeed, 0 Yajnavalkya.

0 Yajnavalkya, which is the light of this person after the sun has set? The moon indeed becomes the light. By the light of the moon indeed, one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back.

So is it indeed, 0 Yajnavalkya.

0 Yajnavalkya, which is the light of the person when the sun and moon have set? Fire indeed is his light. By the light of the fire indeed one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back.

So is it indeed, 0 Yajnavalkya.

0 Yajnavalkya, which is the light of this person, when the sun and the moon have set and the fire is put out? Speech indeed is his light. By the light of the speech indeed, one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back. Hence, 0 king, even when one's hand cannot be distinguished, then wherever speech sounds, one can approach there.

So is it indeed, 0 Yajnavalkya.

0 Yajnavalkya, which is the light of this person, when the sun and moon have set, fire has gone out, speech has been hushed? The Self indeed is his light. By the light of the Self indeed, one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back.

*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*



## Karma Yoga (Part 2)

Karma yoga means meditative dynamism - a simple definition, yet with profound implications. One must be wide awake, and yet not conscious of the little self. One must forget oneself, while simultaneously being involved in intense activity. The body and mind perform multitudinous actions, yet one remains in a state of contemplation, of meditative awareness. This is the ideal, but it cannot occur by thinking about it - practice and effort are necessary.

It is very easy, however, to deceive yourself into thinking that you are practicing karma yoga, whereas it is really false karma yoga. This leads to delusion and there is absolutely no change in your being. Many people perform various types of philanthropic work: they donate huge sums of money to trusts and benevolent societies, or they organize charities, social services, etc. Of course, these acts bring many material benefits to others; in this sense they are positive and worthwhile actions. But at the same time, these benefactors don't necessarily achieve meditative experiences. Why? The reason is simple: they are often doing 'selfless work' for a selfish purpose, for an ulterior end, perhaps for admiration or status.

Certainly this is not karma yoga, no matter how good the social repercussions. It is not necessary to be a welfare or social worker to practise karma yoga. One must merely do the work in hand with as little sense of ego as possible, whether it is farming, nursing, engineering, office work or whatever. It is the attitude and feeling, not the action itself that is important. When work is done for a higher or spiritual purpose then it becomes karma yoga; if not then it is merely work. A tribesman kills an animal for food, while a hunter often kills an animal for sport. The action is the same, but the motive is different. It is the same with karma yoga - the attitude must be changed, but not necessarily the action. Changing the

actions and work without a change in attitude will never lead to any significant experience.

### Action and inaction

This is a subject that is commonly misunderstood and is the cause of much confusion. Some people emphatically state that karma (work) is the cause of bondage; that it is action that prevents spiritual illumination. On the other hand, it is also said that karma or work is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. Some people advise one to stop work and do nothing, while others say that one should work incessantly. This confusion arises, as is usually the case, by a limited, literal and over-intellectual understanding of the idea and implications of karma and karma yoga. And of course, without deep experience, this misunderstanding is bound to occur; understanding can only come with personal experience.

This particular controversy - work versus no work - has only arisen through misinterpretation of the teachings of the sages. Sages have said that action is the cause of bondage, but they have also said, almost in the same breath, that action is also the means to liberation. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the classical text on karma yoga, both statements are made: "... do not be attached to inaction."

"Perform action, O Arjuna . . ." (2:47, 48)

Conversely: "I do nothing at all; thus would the harmonized knower of truth think - seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, going, sleeping, breathing." (5:8)

Another two chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* are devoted exclusively to these two seemingly conflicting ideas. Chapter 3 is called the 'Yoga of Action' while Chapter 5 is called the 'Yoga of Renunciation of Action'. Understanding of this apparent riddle really comes through experience and not logical reasoning. The *Bhagavad Gita* brings activity and non-activity together when it says: "He who sees inaction

in action and action in inaction is a wise man: he is a yogi and performer of all actions."

We must all act or do some form of work. We have no choice. We cannot remain completely inactive. This is tersely explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "None can ever remain, even for a moment, without performing action; for everyone is compelled to act helplessly by the very qualities of nature." (3:5)

Even if you do no physical work your mind will continue to work. Even refusing to work is action, but here the action occurs through physical restraint; the mind still works. While lying in bed, perhaps with an illness, you are still active, for your mind is still thinking. There is no such thing as total inactivity in normal states of awareness. Even while sleeping, one is acting - through dreams. Each person must always be doing something, whether physical, mental or both. The subconscious realms of the mind are a continuous hive of activity. You think you are doing nothing, perhaps in a state of drowsiness, but these deeper realms of the mind will continue to operate. You must accept that activity is a part of material life, and having accepted this, you should perform your duties to the best of your ability. Better still, you should try to practise karma yoga. In this way, you will at least use the compulsion to act as a means to higher awareness and knowledge.

Don't renounce work or everyday life. It is not necessary. Try to practise selfless work. This does not only mean welfare or social work, it means doing your work, whether digging a road or administering a multimillion dollar building project, with intensity, detachment and awareness. This is not easy at first, but it becomes easier. You can only do your best. But it is well worth putting into practice, for it will bring many benefits that you don't expect.

If you renounce, it should be renunciation of attachment to the fruits of your endeavours. Try not to think continually of what you will get as reward at the end of your work - your pay, praise, respect, etc. This obsessive dwelling on the fruits of actions intensifies the identification with the individual ego. Don't renounce work, but do it consciously and with as little tension as possible. Don't worry if you make no headway, because this will only lead to more mental tension.

## Dharma

The word *dharma* can be interpreted to mean many things. In this chapter, dharma means those actions which are in accordance with one's mental and physical makeup. It implies those actions which come naturally to an individual and which lead to harmony within the whole framework of the world. It can be roughly, though very inadequately, translated as 'duty'. Dharma is not a subject that can be discussed in depth in a general sense, for the dharma for each individual is different. All we can do here is to give you a very basic guideline to help you recognize and tune in to your own dharma.

Find and accept your dharma and do it. When you are working think of nothing else but the work and if possible not the fruits. Merely do the work in hand to the best of your ability. Do it as worship if you are devotionally inclined. It is by doing one's dharma that one begins to harmonize both with the environment and the inner self. And it is by doing one's dharma in conjunction with karma yoga that one can experience higher states of awareness.

Remember that in fact all work is the same; there is really no such thing as higher or lower work. Whether one uses the body or the mind, it is still merely work; none is really any better or worse than the other. It is society that has said that certain types of work are either good or bad, of high status or low status. Work is work. What is the difference whether one builds a house, cleans a toilet, or rules a country? Work is the tool of karma yoga, the aim is to become the perfect instrument. This is the way to perfection and higher awareness.

The *Bhagavad Gita* lays down very sensible rules regarding one's dharma. It says: "A man always acts in accordance with his individual nature, even the realized man. All creatures follow their nature; what therefore can one accomplish by suppression of one's natural impulses or actions?" (3:33)

Elsewhere it is written: "The perfect individual, like everyone else, acts according to his specific physiological constitution, for he knows that all actions are performed by nature. His true nature, the Self, is not the doer." (18:29)

"Taking delight in his own individual actions (dharma) a man can attain perfection." (18:45)

So if your aim is to make money, then continue making money. If you repress externally, then your mind will only do it internally. If you have ambition then fulfil that ambition, but with as much awareness and detachment as possible. Peace of mind or higher awareness cannot be obtained by avoiding the things that your individual nature demands you to do. You will only suppress the desire and cause more tension and unhappiness. Dive into the turmoil of worldly activity; live out your *samskaras* (mental impressions) but with full awareness. This is essential in order to eventually jump out of the everlasting circle of aimless, egotistical activities.

There are many misconceptions about sin. The Indian scriptures in their characteristic, pragmatic, straight-to-the-point manner, have given an excellent definition of sin or sinful action. It is that which detracts or leads one away from the path to harmony, knowledge and higher awareness. If a person performs his dharma and practises karma yoga, then any action is automatically without sin. There is no absolute or fixed definition, for an action done by one person can lead another away from harmony.

"He who still retains his ego is mentally active even when at rest; but the wise man who is free from egoism is incapable of sin or wrong action." (18:29) Furthermore, it is performance of one's dharma that encourages egoless and sinless actions. This is explained very clearly in the *Bhagavad Gita* as follows: "It is better to do one's dharma without merit, than the dharma of another well performed. He who does the dharma determined by his individual nature incurs no sin." (18:47)

Practise your dharma to the best of your ability. Try not to do the dharma of another person, even though you could do it better, or more easily. You may think that you are helping someone by doing his work, but it may lead to less obvious adverse repercussions, perhaps by making the other person lazy or lose self-respect. So one should adhere to their own dharma (*swadharma*). At the same time try to practise karma yoga. In this way, one will reduce 'sinful' acts and thereby move into the realms of higher experience and knowledge. Incidentally, it is so important not to become caught up in the intellectual definitions of sin that have plagued people with untold phobias

and neuroses throughout history. Sin is merely that which leads one away from the path to enlightenment, nothing more.

It is important to accept one's limitations and do the actions that seem most harmonious, even if contrary to the expectations of others. Too often our actions are decided by other people. We see others doing certain actions, and feel that we must also do the same, even though it may be contrary to our individual personality. We feel obliged to live up to other people's expectations and try to become something that we are not capable of. Unhappiness is the consequence. Choose what you want and do it, but it should be positive, harmonious and what you feel is your dharma. The more you are able to become totally involved in your mode of activity, the better. The work acts as a vehicle. It leads to one-pointedness of mind. Automatically, problems start to fade away. If you are half-hearted in your actions, then the mind loses its power - there is no concentration and it tends to dither here and there. So do your work, your dharma, with intensity and with awareness.

Choose that which seems right for you, which interests you. It can even be a hobby - why not? Don't worry what other people think.

It is better to do positive work than work with negative repercussions. Positive work will not only benefit other people, but will lead you to a more relaxed mind and disposition. Positive or good actions are more conducive to progress in yoga. In a sense, so-called bad thoughts and acts (i.e. egotistical and non-dharmic) mould your character into a certain pattern. This leads to a destiny which is away from the path to higher awareness. On the other hand, thoughts and actions that are good (i.e. selfless and dharmic) lead to a destiny which permits the influx of higher awareness.

Eventually, of course, the aim is to jump beyond the fetters of both good and bad, for these are really relative terms. But this transcendence only occurs in states of higher awareness, and its meaning is beyond the realm of intellectual discussion. Until these stages of illumination, however, one must try to substitute so-called negative, adharmic actions by positive, dharmic actions. Disharmonious thoughts and actions have to be replaced by harmonious thoughts and actions. In a sense, one uses a thorn (good actions) to remove

another thorn (bad actions). Afterwards, both thorns are thrown away. People often say that it is one's duty to help others. This is a very noble sentiment, but actually for most people this is pervaded with a strong odour of hypocrisy. Most people help others merely to help themselves; to gain praise, social status and many other rewards. However, this becomes less and less with increased awareness. The more aware an individual becomes, the less selfish he will become. One actually starts to help other people for their sake, and less for one's own sake. But in the initial stages of karma yoga it is important to realize that any work undertaken, even that done under the guise of philanthropy, is more than likely motivated by an egotistical reason. Accept this and don't try to project the altruistic image. If you practise your dharma you will help yourself, by gradually purifying the mind, increasing concentration and becoming more contented. As a by-product you will also be helping other people, either directly or indirectly. Don't expect praise for your work; it is not deserved, for you are doing the work to help yourself; your efforts to do karma yoga will lead you to higher levels of awareness, not your fellow humans, at least not directly. Why expect praise? It is your privilege to work. It is your privilege to do karma yoga for your own happiness and spiritual evolverment. Don't expect anything in return.

Try not to take yourself or your work so seriously. The world will continue without you. Don't become fanatical but work as well as you can under the given circumstances, with as much detachment and awareness as possible. There is a law of karma. The Hindu, Buddhist, tantric, yogic and other scriptures of India have written reams and reams of information on this subject. In the *Bible* of Christianity, it is beautifully summed up as follows: "... whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

Newton also defined the idea of karma for science: to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This applies to every action in life. As you do and think, so you become; at least on a mind-body level. If you think and act selfishly, then you will tend to become more selfish in the course of time. If a person is greedy, then after a while greed will become the predominant aspect of his personality. His ego drives will be intensified in order to satisfy

his greed. In this manner, the thoughts and aspirations of the mind flow most easily in that direction in which it has been habituated. The mountain streams of the monsoon rainfall will follow the riverbeds that have been carved out by previous downpours. All these mental desires prevent the influx of meditation, for they tend to increase the power of the individual ego. The aim of karma yoga is to follow one's dharma, which tends to diminish ego identification. The aim of karma yoga is to follow the dictates of the individual constitution, those actions which come naturally without effort. This type of karma is dharma and leads to lessening of the bondage of the ego. If you do your dharma, with awareness, then you will automatically start to harmonize with your environment. There will be less mental tension and conflict.

An action is only correct if it is the right action for you under the given circumstances. The same action may be wrong for another person under the same or different circumstances. Know that your actions can lead you to higher experiences and enlightenment, if they are done as karma yoga.

#### **Different types of actions**

Actions can be broadly classified into three specific modes. These modes are directly related to the three gunas (roughly translated as the three aspects of the phenomenal world) called tamas, rajas and sattwa. This is a fascinating subject.

The *Bhagavad Gita* clearly points out the different approaches to work according to individual temperaments. It defines the lowest form of action, tamasic, as follows: "Action done in delusion and without due consideration of its consequences and the effort and materials required, and which may easily bring harm to others, is tamasic." (18:25)

This type of action stems from general ignorance. In tantra, the individual who performs these types of action is classified as *pasku bhava* (instinctive man).

The next form of action, at a higher level, is called rajasic: "Action which is done for the fulfilment of personal desires, for the fruits of the action; which is done with much ego and much effort, is rajasic." (18:24) This is the most common type of action in the world today. In tantra, an individual of this temperament is

known as *veera bhava* (heroic, passionate and active man).

The highest form of action is called *sattwic* and is motivated by understanding. "Duty or actions done without passion, love or hatred, without consideration of the fruits, is *sattwic*." (18:23) This last form of action falls within the realm of *karma yoga* and leads to higher awareness. He is known as *divya bhava* (divinely inspired man) in *tantra*.

The aim of *yoga* is to gradually lead the individual from the *tamasic* states to the *rajasic* states, from doing *tamasic* actions to doing *rajasic* actions, and then progressively towards a predominantly *sattwic* state. Of course, there will be fluctuations between these different states: one will sometimes feel *tamasic* (lazy and dull), at other times *rajasic* (actively inclined) and so on. But through *yoga* it is possible to become predominantly *sattwic* in temperament. This is the launching pad to higher states of consciousness. The culmination of *yoga* is to lead one to the experience of that which is beyond the *gunas*; a state which is beyond the classification of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. This is called *gunatita* in Sanskrit, which means that which is beyond the mind, the sense and the play of nature.

At this stage it is worthwhile pointing out that *karma yoga* does not result in lethargy and lack of interest in work. It is widely believed that only passion, financial benefits and other motives can impel people to work, and that without these inducements there will be a tendency to languish in a state of total laziness and inactivity. Of course, anticipation of reward does make people work - there is little doubt about this. Yet at the same time, this kind of work leads to incessant discord both in the outside world and in the inner environment of the individual. On the other hand, a person who is not motivated by thoughts of personal reward and who has clear insight (*sattwic* temperament) will realize his duty and do it. He will follow the actions that come naturally to his body-mind complex. He will not stop his work, for there is no need. At the same time, he will do his work far more efficiently than if he was motivated for selfish reasons. He will be able to work with the least fuss and with minimum clash of interests in association with other people. The *sattwic* type of person can nimbly dodge around obstacles which tend to

block or confuse other people, perhaps because of pride or stubbornness. A *sattwic* man will think his way around problems as they arise. This is the boon of egolessness.

### **Karma yoga and other paths of yoga**

*Karma yoga* should not be divorced from other forms of *yoga*. Other forms of *yoga* should be supplemented by *karma yoga*, and also *karma yoga* should not be practised in isolation; it too should be supplemented by other types of *yoga*. All the different *yogic* paths mutually reinforce each other. For example, *karma yoga* done with even moderate success will help one to gain more success in meditational practices. Improved concentration through *karma yoga* will help lead one to real meditational experience. In turn meaningful and more profound meditational experiences from *raja yoga*, *kriya yoga*, etc. will help one to more successfully practise *karma yoga*. It is a cyclic process, each helping the other. While meditational techniques help to highlight inner problems, both mental and emotional, *karma yoga* also helps to bring these problems out into the open and finally exhaust them.

*Asanas* and *pranayama* not only help improve meditational techniques, they also help one to perform *karma yoga* more efficiently. And in turn if you achieve even a reasonable flow of concentration during your working day then your daily practice of *asanas* and *pranayama* and meditational techniques will also undergo a vast improvement. You will automatically have a spontaneous flow of concentration throughout the practice, allowing the benefits to really manifest. This in itself is an important reason for trying to practise *karma yoga*. The heightened experiences and peace that one will come to know through the daily *yogic* practices will in turn make it far easier to practise *karma yoga*, which leads to greater relaxation and concentration in daily activities which again will make the daily *yogic* practice program more fruitful. It is a continuous elevating process. This applies to all *raja yoga* systems including *kriya yoga*.

If you are devotionally inclined then *karma yoga* can be directly linked with *bhakti yoga*<sup>1</sup>. *Karma yoga* will also prepare the mind for *jnana yoga*<sup>2</sup>, which requires an intense, concentrated mind. *Karma yoga* is a path for everyone. It supplements all other *yogic* paths.

### Progress in karma yoga

Though one must apply effort in the early stages of karma yoga, eventually it arises spontaneously. There is an excellent Sanskrit and Hindi word called bhava. It means feeling, an attitude that springs up from the very depths of one's being. It is not a hypocritical or false feeling. It is a feeling that arises from the essence of one's nature - an expression of higher knowledge. It is neither pious nor artificial. Because of higher awareness and realization of the deeper relationships with other people, one actually wants to give as much as one can to others. There is no choice; no effort is required. In the beginning karma yoga requires effort and cultivation, but the advent of higher understanding transforms karma yoga into a spontaneous expression of bhava. There is no longer any practice as such, for one begins to radiate real karma yoga.

Another strange thing happens: though one desires less and less fruits, one receives more and more fruits, beyond one's wildest dreams. To those who expect, little or nothing comes. Actually a person who thinks he is doing karma yoga is not, because there is concern for the little self. A person who is really practising karma yoga is so absorbed in doing his work (while simultaneously being a witness), that he in a self-conscious sense does not exist. A person practising karma yoga is not really doing anything. The actions happen through him. If one thinks that he is doing karma yoga then he is automatically operating from an ego level of individual existence and distinction. And this is not karma yoga in the highest sense. A person practising karma yoga really no longer exists as an individual. His mind and body work. He does not. He is inactive amongst continuous activity. We have already discussed this apparent enigma under the heading entitled 'Action and Inaction'. It is action in inaction and inaction in action, and its meaning only becomes understandable through personal experience.

We have briefly discussed the higher stages of karma yoga; in fact, karma yoga in its truest sense. Don't be too concerned with what we have said, for you will never unravel the mystery by logical speculation. Instead you should start to practise karma yoga to the best of your ability, so that you will really know its meaning for yourself.

### Karma yoga according to the Bhagavad Gita

Though we have already given a number of quotations from the *Bhagavad Gita*, we feel it is worthwhile giving a few more selected verses. This may seem a little repetitive, but it will help you to further grasp the essence of karma yoga practice.

*Attachment to the fruits of actions:* "Your right is to work only, never to its fruits. Do not be motivated by the fruits of actions and do not be attached to doing nothing." (2:47)

*Equanimity:* "Do your action, oh Arjuna, with the feeling and attitude of yoga. Abandon attachment and be balanced in success and failure. Equanimity of mind is yoga." (2:48)

*Necessity of action:* "Surely, it is not possible for an embodied being to entirely abandon actions; but he who relinquishes the rewards of actions is a man of renunciation." (18:11)

*Egolessness:* "He who is free of the feeling of the ego, who is not swayed by the feelings of good and bad - though he slays these people, he does not really kill and he is not bound by the actions." (18:17)

*Renunciation and enlightenment:* "He who is totally unattached to anything, who is in control of his individual self, who is devoid of desire - he by renunciation (mentally) attains the supreme state of freedom from action (enlightenment)." (18:49)

"Therefore, without attachment, always perform the actions that need to be done; it is by working without attachment that one can know higher awareness." (3:19)

*Duty:* "Do your duty, for action is far superior to inaction and even the mere maintenance of the physical body would be impossible without some form of action." (3:8)

There are seven hundred verses in the *Bhagavad Gita*, each of which is pregnant with meaning. We strongly urge the reader to obtain a translation of this scripture, explore the mine of knowledge for himself and take out the gold of wisdom.

### The razor's edge according to the Ishavasya Upanishad

The *Ishavasya Upanishad* consists of only eighteen verses, yet contains sublime and practical teachings. It clearly points out the importance - in fact the necessity - of performing one's duties. It emphasizes that one must live in the external as well as the internal world.



One without the other leads to delusion and away from the path to higher knowledge. Many people who have spiritual aspiration are faced with a dilemma: whether to live in the world of action, or to only practise meditational techniques. The *Ishavasya Upanishad* gives a clear answer. It says that one must do both simultaneously. One must be both extroverted and introverted. One must supplement and express one's inner experience with outer actions. This is stated in no uncertain terms as follows: "Those who follow the path of action alone will surely enter the blinding darkness of ignorance. Furthermore, those who retreat from the world in order to seek knowledge through constant practice of meditative techniques, similarly remain in the quagmire of ignorance." (verse 9). This is like the razor's edge: there must be a balance between excessive worldly interest and activity, and over-introspection.

One must try to integrate the paths of extroversion and introversion. If you consider great yogis, saints and sages through history, you will realize that they all expressed themselves in the outside world. Even though they experienced and probably lived permanently in the infinity of enlightenment, they still continued to express themselves in the outer world. This applies to Buddha, Christ and many other people.

It applies to Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda and so on. They taught their disciples, they travelled giving sermons and tried to help people who sought their guidance. Each of these illumined people continued to act and express themselves in the outside world according to the natural dictates of his mind-body (dharma). Some became hermits; others worked ceaselessly for the general welfare of fellow humans, such as Swami Sivananda and Mahatma Gandhi. None of them became a human vegetable. This does not only apply to those who live in and know the highest states of illumination - it also applies to you. You too must strike a balance between external action and introspection.

The *Ishavasya Upanishad* further emphasizes this important point by saying: "That which is known through doing only external actions, is different to that which is known through introversion. Thus it has been said by the wise." (verse 10)

Total concern with the outside world leads to intellectual knowledge. Only understanding of the internal sphere of existence will bring about deeper understanding of the material world around.

On the other hand, rejection of the worldly life and complete concern for meditational practices and the mind is also a block. How is this? The reason is simple: without resolving and harmonizing one's outer life, one can never really know deeper states of knowledge. Higher states of awareness only occur when there is perfect balance both in the inner and outer worlds. Those people who tend to reject their activities in the world still tend to have many unresolved problems. Rejection of the world does not remove the problems, they merely lie dormant in the mind. These act as obstacles to success in meditational practices. Failure to clear up the outer conflicts and concerns automatically prevents one gaining the highest benefits from introspection. Therefore, there must be a dual process of external activities combined with periods of trying to explore the mind. This applies mainly to the early stages of spiritual life, for eventually there ceases to be any difference between the inner and outer world.

This is what Ramana Maharshi meant when he said: "Setting apart time for meditational practices is only for beginners. A man who is advanced (in the spiritual path) will begin to enjoy deeper beatitude whether he is at work or not. While his hands are in society, he keeps his head cool in solitude."

This applies to a person who lives in higher states of awareness. Most people must combine their daily work, in the form of karma yoga, with daily sessions of meditational practices. There must be acceptance, integration and understanding of both the inner and outer environments. For this reason, it is essential that each person with spiritual aspiration should practise introverting techniques such as raja yoga, kriya yoga, pranayama, etc., combined with and supplemented by methods of harmonizing one's interaction with the external surroundings, such as karma yoga. It is only in this way that one can start to effectively harmonize with both the inner and the outer world. It is only in this way that one can really start to tread the path and know the complete oneness of everything that exists, both internal

and external. It is for this reason that karma yoga is so important, and why Swami Sivananda urged everyone to work and play in both the outer and inner world. This is the reason why everyone does some form of work in our ashram.

#### **Karma yoga in other systems**

No other system documented the essence of karma yoga as carefully as the Indian scriptures, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*. This does not mean that other spiritual systems are ignorant of the implications and utility of karma yoga. Far from it. They just did not write about the subject in detail. Instead, the essence was conveyed by the spiritual master to his disciples on a personal basis. The teacher taught and demonstrated by personal example.

Let us look at Taoism. Intellectuals have wrongly interpreted Lao Tse, the sage who formulated Taoism (he did not invent Taoism, but merely put the ideas on paper). He expounded the idea that one should do only that which needs to be done. Many people thought that he was urging total complacency and laziness. Taoism was branded as the philosophy of idleness, but the critics have missed its essence. Lao Tse meant that people should act as though they are not acting. This is not laziness; it is letting the body-mind act in the way that comes naturally. It is allowing the body-mind to act in accordance with that which has to be done and simultaneously knowing that the true Self (Tao) does not really act. The Self is inactive and is the witness. This is karma yoga and is exactly the same as described in the *Bhagavad Gita*. This close correspondence should not surprise us, for basic truths are universal. They are not the monopoly of any one creed or nation.

The Tao says that one should flow with the current of life. Again this has been grossly misinterpreted. It means that one should try to act in the way that suits the situation as it really is. Don't act from the ego. If circumstances demand that you be industrious or protect your property, then by all means do so. Do that which is demanded by the circumstances, that which is best for the whole. Only then is it right action.

The Tao is very much concerned with the perfection of action. The Fisherman, the carpenter, the builder and other craftsmen

are skilled for one reason: they utilize the available materials and themselves in the best possible manner. They harmonize themselves with the tools at their disposal. If the muscles are overused, if one is beset by worries and tensions, if one is too egotistical, then the work will not be the best that can be achieved. This is admirably summed up by the following verse from the *Tao Te Ching*:

*The man with power does not reveal that he possesses power;  
therefore he keeps his power.  
The man of lesser power tries continually to demonstrate that he has power;  
therefore, in fact, he is without power.  
The man of real power, the expert, does not really act, whereas the man of lesser power acts.*

This is pure karma yoga. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says: "Yoga is efficiency in action." Things happen in the way that they should for the given circumstances. A person on the path of karma yoga makes optimum use of the natural abilities and things available to bring about the best possible actions.

Zen Buddhism has produced some very profound poems on what we would call karma yoga. They are not specific but implied. Zen emphasizes the importance of living every moment to the full. This is karma yoga. A positive action is seen as that action which expresses the fullness of life at a particular time and in given circumstances that make the action possible. This is karma yoga. Every action should be lived and pursued with the greatest intensity. For most persons this is almost impossible, for they are beset and continually distracted by mental tensions, anticipation of results or fruits, personal enmities and prejudices, desire for domination and possession and so many other things. The action becomes the means and not the end in itself.

Zen is very pragmatic and non-escapist in its attitudes. Many people think that Zen and other spiritual systems go against the grain and the flow of life, that they somehow oppose daily life. This idea could not be further from the truth. Zen sees the path to higher awareness to be through the world; it is not to be experienced by escaping from the world. There is a Zen saying that goes something like: "Not

escape from life, but escape into life." This is the essence of karma yoga. Life and its experiences, its ups and downs, are to be used to help one know higher knowledge. The Zen masters shun logic and reasoning in the same way that they would an angry cobra. They demonstrate through action and example. Every act, whether eating food, digging the garden or whatever is regarded as a religious act. They do not try to divorce spiritual aspiration from daily life. They are karma yogis in the fullest sense of the word. Why waste valuable time with useless philosophical ideas? Act, but act with intensity and awareness. Be totally involved in each and every act.

The Zen masters did not preach one thing and then do something else. They actually practised karma yoga (as we would call it). In fact, many Zen masters seem to have carried on the line of work for which they were trained, and why not? There are many stories of masters who were butchers or woodcutters and the work they did was their path of Zen. They saw absolutely no discrepancy between spiritual and daily life. This is perfectly summed up by the master Huang Po: "Don't allow the events of daily life to bind you, but never stop doing them. Only by acting in this way can you become enlightened."

In other forms of Buddhism karma yoga does not seem to have been specifically classified, but in Mahayana Buddhism it is strongly implied. It is said that the purpose of the journey to nirvana (enlightenment) is not taken for the individual but for the benefit of all. The necessity of unselfish motives is inherent in the system. This is karma yoga in essence.

In Christianity there is no systematized form of karma yoga, but again there are powerful hints, suggestions and allusions. In fact, in one short sentence the whole philosophy of karma yoga is summed up. In the Lord's Prayer it says: "Thy will be done."

An explanation is hardly required in view of what we have already said about karma yoga in this topic. It means that the individual on the spiritual path accepts what has to be done and does it, but of course it implies far more than this, for it says "Thy will" which implies that the action is in tune with the cosmic consciousness.

There is one more unforgettable statement which relates to karma yoga. It is as follows:

"The Father (consciousness) and I are one, but the Father is greater than I . . . the Father doeth the work."

The implications and meaning of this phrase are wonderful to say the least. This is an utterance of a mystic in a higher state of meditation. It is similar to many phrases that are abundant in Indian scriptures. This should not be surprising for the experience of samadhi is not located in one place. It is the experience of mystics throughout the world.

We could so easily write a voluminous book on this one quotation, but we will not for we are presently only concerned with karma yoga. This statement indicates the highest stage of karma yoga, and in fact of yoga in general. It tries to describe the impossible: perfect harmony and union between the individual being and supreme consciousness. In this state of experience, the individual does not really do any work. The work happens through the instrumentality of his body and mind. The work is really done by consciousness. This is beautifully described in a similar Indian maxim, which irrefutably utters: "*Naham karta - Harih karta*,"- "I don't do - consciousness does."

So, to summarize, we find that the idea of karma yoga is not confined to the Indian scriptures and yoga. It is common to other systems, including ones that we have not had time and space to mention. However, it is only in the Indian scriptures and in yoga that we find a systematic formulation of its laws and aims. This, of course, has its disadvantages in that it is easily open to gross misinterpretation by intellectual analysts, and this has happened with sad results. The other systems have left the transmission of karma yoga to personal instructions handed from teacher to disciple. This of course has meant that its relevance and application were confined to the few, but at least there was less misunderstanding.

#### **Mahatma Gandhi - karma yogi**

All great yogis, saints and sages are karma yogis, for they perform perfect actions, without the slightest hint of egoism. It is not necessary to do large amounts of work to practise karma yoga. It is the attitude and state of awareness that is important. Even a hermit in his cave can be a karma yogi, even though he does little work. Yet at the same time, there are or have been certain people who are renowned as

karma yogis, for they most clearly and obviously illustrate and epitomize the ideals of karma yoga. They do prodigious amounts of work without desire of fame, without thought of power or money. They work for the sake of the work and often to help other people to raise themselves above the mire of social conditions or spiritual poverty. Probably the most well known example in this century is Mahatma Gandhi. He performed incredible amounts of work, for he was very little influenced by personal likes and dislikes, whims and fancies. His mind was free of the limitations that normally interfere with the actions of most people. Because of this, he was able to view the problems of India and the work that was his duty with pristine clarity.

Most decisions in the world are clouded over by personal friendships and enmities. Gandhi was able to overcome this one-sidedness, and it is through this that he obtained his strength. He had no real personal friends in the usual sense of the word, for all people were his friends, even his so-called enemies. None of his actions were done as a favour. He acted because something needed to be done; the situation demanded it to be so. He acted for the benefit of people in general and that which was for the overall good of the people of India. Some people say that he was stubborn, but he acted because he knew his own mind, could understand the mind of other people and the world situation in a clear undistorted light. He was a politician with a strong mind, yet he showed deep and sincere compassion for all. By vocation he was a politician; by aspiration he was a great karma yogi.

Mahatma Gandhi achieved his success by purifying his mind by continuous effort and karma yoga. Because of this, he achieved tremendous amounts of work, both efficiently and without leaving things half done. He never seemed to tire of his work, unlike most other people who do an hour's work and then lose interest or become fatigued. Why was this? The answer of course lies with the mind. Gandhi, through relentless practise of karma yoga, backed up by other forms of yoga including bhakti and kriya yoga, was able to clean his mind. A mind that is calm can do the most intense work for long periods of time without fatigue. It does not become diverted

by external distractions or inner disturbances. It remains focused on the work in hand. Most people waste their energy on useless, petty, egotistical arguments or heated discussions about nothing. Their mental energy and in turn their physical energy is dissipated in all directions. Little or no power goes towards the work that is to be done.

The combination of concentrated power and detachment becomes almost irresistible. It moves mountains, as the saying goes. Gandhi clearly illustrated this, and we emphasize again that detachment does not mean disdain for the things of the world. Gandhi, though he was surely detached, nevertheless felt and expressed overwhelming compassion. Detachment is the attitude of mind where no matter what happens, there is no negative repercussion and resulting mental disturbance in the mind. One does the best that one can do with one's ability, but at the same time one doesn't allow external events to unbalance or throw the mind. The attitude can be slowly developed and applied as it was so successfully by Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi saw that every action he did (or did not do, depending on the point of view) was part of the divine process of the universe in accordance with the will of the cosmic consciousness. He was only an instrument, a mere witness of his actions.

There are many other people who epitomize the essence of karma yoga. People like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Sivananda show that karma yoga is not just an idealistic thought, but that it is possible. Both of these people, as well as uncountable others, both famous and unknown, have expressed total egolessness in their interaction with the world - perfect expression, perfect response to given circumstances. And what these people can do, you also can achieve. The path and the possibility are open to everyone. Each person can develop a powerful and one-pointed mind and awaken their intuitive faculties. Each person can become a karma yogi. All that is required is the need to attain perfection, together with relentless and continuous practice.

### **Summary of karma yoga**

The aim of karma yoga is to become the perfect reflector of the cosmic consciousness in the arena of the manifested world. Usually this

perfection is impossible to attain because of personal whims. These have to be eradicated.

When one no longer considers himself to be the doer, but merely the instrument, then everything that one does becomes spiritualized and perfect. The actions and work become super-efficient. He becomes the expert of experts in his actions, the least effort produces the greatest results. The individual has equanimity of mind under all situations, for how can an instrument become angry, upset or egotistical? It is the ego and personal desires that make us react adversely with others and the environment.

Karma yoga develops the faculty of concentration, which is essential in all fields, and spheres of life. It also vastly improves the benefits that one gains from meditational practices and will also improve the benefits that one will gain from kriya yoga in the future.

Higher stages of karma yoga become meditation. While performing actions, the karma yogi reposes in the state of meditation, even amongst the most intense activity. The karma yogi rests, floats, dissolves in the divine bliss of higher awareness. The object acted upon, the actions themselves and the karma yogi become one and the same. This is real meditation and real karma yoga.

Awareness in karma yoga is essential. It is important to develop the ability to do the work in hand, while simultaneously being a witness to the actions. Aim to become a detached, disinterested observer. Though it seems to be a paradox, one is able to work more efficiently in this manner without being swayed by personal whims and prejudices, nor motivated by ego likes or dislikes. One does that which is necessary for the given circumstances, as they really are, without favour. One acts from the very core of being - the Self.

Heidegger, the western philosopher, has written: "The artist must turn himself to that which wants to be revealed and permit the process to happen through him."

You too must become an artist in everything that you do. Develop the perception and intuition of the artist, whether you are working in the garden, eating food, singing, typing, writing or whatever you do. Do everything as though you are an artist painting a masterpiece. Do your work, no matter how seemingly trivial, as though you are creating a work of art. Treat

the world stage as your studio. Try to achieve perfection in everything that you do. This is karma yoga. Allow action to happen through the body and the mind, without any effort. Ideally, they should only happen. You must try to become the perfect vessel for the expression of consciousness in the world arena.

Perfect karma yoga cannot occur until the ceaseless chattering and turmoil of the mind settles. The mind must become as clear as a crystal, as calm as a still pond. The mind must be emptied of conflict, then every action and thought will happen. Thoughts will arise like a gigantic eruption in the endless ocean of the mind. They will have great power, yet will quietly fade away as quickly as they arose. The thoughts will settle down into the tranquil depths again without leaving the slightest trace. This is karma yoga.

Karma yoga is impossible to really understand without experience. But even one minute's, even one second's experience of real karma yoga, of the bliss, the perfection will give you full understanding of what we have been inadequately trying to explain. No more questions or contradictions will occur, because you will know. Until this profound experience, one must merely read carefully what we have written, think about it and try to put it into practice, no matter how superficially or inadequately. The precepts of karma yoga seem almost trite, but their implications are overwhelming, and if practised will launch you into the realms of higher awareness.

### **In conclusion**

For most people there has to be a balance: a balance between introspection and external expression in the form of work. The more intense and compelling the work the better, for it will jolt you, force you out of the rut of living in the past. You will be forced to live in the present or anticipate the future. In this way you will be prevented from brooding over your problems. You will become alive. You will be elevated out of the morass of laziness. At the same time, you should do a certain amount of introspection, for this will allow you to confront the contents of your mind, including phobias, conflicts, etc. Work combined with a certain amount of introspection in the form of meditative practices is the way to remove mental problems and gain peace. Instead of

brooding over your complexes etc., you will recognize the root and in time they will disappear through expression or outlet in work and through awareness. This is the start on the path of higher awareness. If the work is slowly transformed into karma yoga, then your spiritual progress will be rapid. You will literally 'fly' into the realms of higher awareness and knowledge.

Therefore, passion and activity are really a means to higher awareness. They are not negative aspects of life to be suppressed. They should be utilized, especially in the earlier stages of development. Your natural drives can help you. Use them, and in the course of time, try to transform your activities into karma yoga.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1

<sup>2</sup> Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 1

## Asanas: Practice

Most people find forward bending asanas reasonably difficult. This is because their backs have lost their flexibility through lack of exercise. This flexibility is most important, for it keeps the spinal column and associated nerves in the best possible condition. In fact, a flexible spine is often a clear indicator of good health, while a rigid spine often signifies poor health. This is illustrated in the case of children, who generally radiate abundant energy and good health, and who find forward bending asanas very simple. Of course, there are many other reasons for their wonderful health, but a supple spine is a contributing factor.

If a person takes sufficient exercise, then the spine will automatically remain flexible. The problem of stiffness and rigidity of the spine only arises with sedentary life, where people don't use their bodies enough. Probably any person who belongs to one of the more primitive tribes in the world would be able to do forward bending asanas without the slightest hesitation or difficulty. People who live close to nature keep their bodies flexible and healthy because of their active way of life. Modern man must find other methods of maintaining health and exercising his body. One method is to do asanas, including forward bending poses, on a regular basis.

The forward bending asana we will describe here is called *paschimottanasana*. It is one of the best of all asanas.

### PASCHIMOTTANASANA (BACK STRETCHING POSE)

This asana has many other names. The most common are *ugrasana* (fierce or powerful pose) and *paschimatanasana*, which has the same meaning as *paschimottanasana*.

#### Terminology

There are many meanings associated with the name of this asana. Literally, the word *paschima*

means 'the back', or 'posterior'; it also means 'the west'. The word *utthan* means 'to stretch'. Therefore, the usual English name of this asana is 'the back stretching pose'.

The word *utthan* is also akin to the word 'tan', which makes up part of the word *tantra* (the mother system of yoga). In this context, it is not physical stretching that is implied, but stretching or expansion of awareness. The word *paschima* still means the back, but has greater significance if it is taken to mean the *sushumna nadi*. This nadi is the most important psychic pathway in the body. During higher states of awareness, *prana* ascends this nadi from the bottom of the back (perineum) to the head (*sahasrara*). In fact, it is said that the experience of higher awareness cannot take place unless *prana* flows within this nadi. So this asana has a very elevated meaning. It means the asana which expands awareness by unleashing pranic currents which flow upwards within the *sushumna nadi*. This is a fitting name, for this is indeed a powerful asana.

#### Scriptural references

This asana is widely mentioned in many ancient texts. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says: "Knees straight and forehead on the knees, hands on toes in a sitting position. It directs vital energy into the back especially in the *sushumna*; the digestive power is increased, the obesity reduced. Man becomes free of diseases and maintains the body in a healthy condition."

It is similarly described in such books as the *Gherand Samhita* and the *Shiva Samhita*. In fact, the *Shiva Samhita* is more specific in praising this asana. It says: "A person who perfects this asana and does it daily induces *vayu* (vital or pranic energy) to flow through the back in the *sushumna*."

#### Technique

There are various methods of performing *paschimottanasana*. Each method has its

advantages, but the basic technique we will give has been chosen because we feel it allows maximum relaxation of the back; this in turn leads to the best possible stretch of the back in the final position. Some alternative methods are given at the end of this topic.



#### **Stage 1: starting position**

Sit on the floor with the legs stretched out in front of the body.

Place your hands on the knees, palms facing downwards.

Relax the whole body, especially the back muscles.

This is the starting position.

#### **Stage 2: forward movement**

Breathe in deeply.

Then, while exhaling, slowly bend your head and trunk forwards.

As you move forwards, slide your hands along the legs towards the feet.

Don't bend your legs.

Bend forwards as far as the flexibility of your back will allow.

Don't strain under any circumstances.

The aim is to hold your big toes with the fingers and to touch your forehead to the knees; however many people, especially beginners, will find this impossible at present.

Merely bend forwards as far as you are able. If possible, grasp your big toes with your hands. If you cannot manage this, hold your feet at the heels.

Otherwise grasp your ankles.

If this is impossible, hold your calves.

Stay in this position.

Consciously relax your back muscles again.

#### **Stage 3: accentuation of forward stretch for beginners**

Those people who can easily grasp their feet or toes and who touch, or nearly touch, their forehead to their knees should proceed directly to stage 4.

Breathe in deeply.

As you breathe out, try to gently pull your

back a little further forwards; you should only use your arms to do this, allowing the back muscles to remain passive.

Don't use excessive force or try to bend too far forwards; even a few centimetres forward movement of your head is more than adequate. Make sure you firmly maintain your grip on the legs, feet or toes.

Keep your legs perfectly straight - this is important.

Hold this slightly accentuated forward bend. Breathe in.

Breathe out and again try to gently but firmly pull your back and head a little further forwards in the direction of your knees and feet. Don't strain.

Breathe in while holding this position.

Repeat the same procedure once more.

Then beginners should breathe in while slowly raising their back to the starting position.

After a short rest repeat the whole procedure again.

#### **Stage 4: final pose**

This stage is to be done by those people who have a supple back; that is, people who can place, or nearly place, their head on the knees. The aim is to gradually elongate the back muscles and stretch the whole spine by gently pulling the head further towards the feet.

Gaze at your feet.

Make sure that you have a firm grip of the toes or feet.

Relax your whole back.

Exhale and gently pull your chin towards the feet.

Keep your legs straight.

Remember, the stretch of the back should be applied by the arms, while the back remains passive.

If you are holding your big toes, then bend your arms downwards and try to touch the floor with the elbows.

If you are holding your heels, then bend your arms sideways.

Don't try to pull your head too far forwards.

At the end of exhalation hold the new position.

Slowly breathe in.

Then while exhaling, again gently pull your head a little nearer to the feet.

Hold the position and breathe in again.

Repeat this procedure three or four times, until your head will no longer move forwards.



Then relax your arms and the rest of your body, but maintain the grip of your hands on the feet or toes.

Rest your forehead or face on your legs.

In this position, the abdomen and chest should press against the thighs and the legs should be straight.

Close your eyes. This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time. Then breathe in while slowly returning to the starting position.

### **Breathing**

To summarize: Inhale deeply in the starting position (stage 1).

Exhale as you bend forwards (stage 2).

Inhale as you hold your position (stage 3 or 4).

Exhale as you pull yourself further forwards (stage 3 or 4).

Continue inhalation and exhalation in stage 3 or 4 as you accentuate the flexion of the spine.

Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose.

Inhale as you return to the starting position.

### **Points to remember when doing the asana**

Paschimottanasana is an excellent asana that gives many benefits, if it is done correctly. Read the following instructions and carry them out when performing the asana:

1. Make sure that there is perfect coordination between the breathing and physical movement. This is necessary to bring about the best possible flexion of the spine.
2. Keep your legs straight throughout the entire practice. This applies particularly to beginners, who will be tempted to bend their legs in order to obtain a greater forward bend. If you bend your legs the asana becomes very easy and even those people with the stiffest body will be able to touch their heads to their knees. This may give you a glimmer of satisfaction, but you will obtain little or no benefit. One of the main purposes of the asana is to stretch the muscles of the spinal region and the back of the legs (hamstring muscles). So keep your legs straight and flat on the floor, even though you may feel disillusioned at your inability to bend more than slightly forwards.
3. Don't use excessive force or violent jerks in order to do the asana. This is important,

for it is so easy to strain the back and hamstring muscles. The muscles should be progressively stretched over a period of days and months. Don't use undue force in order to perfect and master the asana during your first or second attempt. If you are unable to touch your knees, or even hold your feet, don't worry or despair, all that is required is time and practice.

### **Relaxation**

Relaxation of the back muscles is essential in order to gain proficiency in this asana. Even the slightest muscular contraction of the back will impede the forward bend to some degree. The more you relax the more you will be able to bend forwards. It is inability to systematically relax the spinal muscles that makes this asana reasonably difficult for beginners.

To gain the best possible flexion of the body, it is worthwhile spending a short period of time relaxing the back muscles before attempting the asana. A good method is to be aware of breathing and to simultaneously imagine that the spine is made of rubber. With practice you should find that you gain more control over your muscles and will be able to relax them at will.

Furthermore, it is important that the back remains relaxed when you bend forwards. To do this, you must allow the spinal muscles to be passive, letting the arm muscles supply all the effort that is required. The same applies to the hamstring muscles at the back of the legs; let them remain passive.

### **Anchoring points of the hands**

The final position of the hands is important, for the hands provide the fixed point by which the back is pulled forwards by the arms. The following are the main positions:

1. The thumbs and index fingers of each hand hold the two big toes. This is the best position and should be performed by those who are able. By pulling the toes, one tends to simultaneously keep the legs straight by a levering action. The practitioner should experiment for himself. Therefore, using the toes as the anchoring point simultaneously gives the hamstring muscles the best possible stretch.
2. The fingers can be interlocked and the hands hooked around the bottom of the toes.

This is as good as holding the big toes.

3. One can hold the heels. This method is not as good as methods 1 and 2, for it tends to bend the legs.

4. The hands can grasp the ankles or calves. This is for beginners and not very useful for keeping the legs straight and stretching the hamstring muscles. As soon as your back becomes more flexible you should try to hold your feet or toes.

#### **Awareness**

Awareness should be directed towards breathing, physical movement and relaxation of the body while moving into the final pose. In the final pose be aware of the breathing pattern.

#### **Duration**

Beginners should do at least three rounds (as described in stage 3) every day.

Those who can do stage 4 should remain in the final position for as long as they can do so comfortably. Three minutes is a reasonable time for general health benefits. If you want to induce profound states of relaxation, try to hold it for longer periods, up to say fifteen minutes, but this is only for those people who have been practising asanas for some time.

#### **Sequence**

Paschimottanasana should be followed by a backward bending asana such as bhujangasana or shalabhasana. It can also be practised after backward bending asanas as a counterpose.

For general health benefits the asana can be done at any time during your asana program. However, we particularly recommend that this asana be done immediately before meditational practice. This especially applies if you only want to practise a meditational technique without other yogic practices, perhaps because of lack of spare time. Paschimottanasana is a wonderful preparatory technique, for it quickly loosens up the body, removing stiffness and induces high states of relaxation and wakefulness.

#### **Limitations**

People who suffer from slipped disc or sciatica are advised not to practise paschimottanasana. Allow at least three hours to elapse after food before doing this asana.

#### **Benefits**

The asana stretches and tones the spinal and hamstring muscles and the associated nerves. Because it improves the efficiency of the spinal nerves in particular, it has beneficial repercussions throughout the entire body. It loosens the hip joints. It helps to remove excess fat in the abdominal region. The asana tones all the abdominal organs, including the liver, pancreas, spleen, kidneys and adrenal glands. As such it helps to remove diabetes, flatulence, constipation, etc. It has been found useful for alleviating various types of sexual maladies, for the asana gives a direct massage of the pelvic region.

This is an asana that is traditionally well known for its utility in harmonizing nervous and pranic energies within the body. As such it is very useful for helping to bring about states of meditation.

#### **Advanced practices from the final pose**

The two following practices can be performed from the final pose. As such they should only be attempted by people who can easily assume and stay in the final pose. Both these methods accentuate the influence of the asana on the physical and pranic body and mind.

#### **Method 1**

Remain in the final pose for some time. Then slowly move your head towards the thighs, keeping your forehead in contact with the legs.

As you push the head backwards, try to arch the back upwards as much as possible.

Simultaneously move your hands backwards and hold the side of the knees, with the forearms beside the thighs.

Try to accentuate the curvature of the back by using the arms as levers.

Hold the final position for as long as you can. The basic practice of paschimottanasana produces the maximum elongation of the spine and separates the individual vertebrae.

This alternative practice produces the best possible flexion of the spine.

#### **Method 2**

Stay in the final pose (stage 4) of the basic technique for some time.

Then breathe in and raise your head and shoulders.

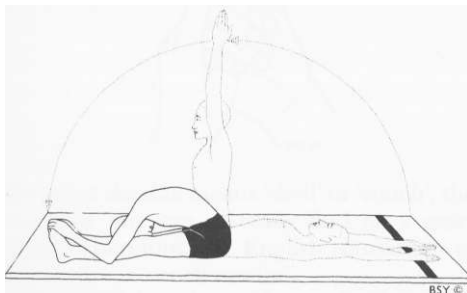
Simultaneously, you have to curve the spine by pushing the abdomen downwards, so that it remains in contact with the top of the thighs. Try to raise your head and shoulders as high as possible, but while keeping your abdomen and navel as low as possible. Stay in this raised pose for as long as you can while holding the breath. Then exhale and return to the final pose of the basic technique. Hold your breath for a short time and then repeat. Do this 3 times. This additional practice accentuates the influence on the spine, as well as all the other benefits of paschimottanasana.

### Variations

There are many variations of paschimottanasana. The following are a few of the most important ones.

#### GATYATMAK PASCHIMOTTANASANA (DYNAMIC BACK STRETCH POSE)

This asana loosens up the whole body, as well as giving many of the same benefits as the basic form.



### Technique

Lie flat on your back. Stretch your arms behind your head. Relax the whole body. Raise the trunk to the sitting position, keeping the arms above the head. Bend forwards and do paschimottanasana. Retain the final pose for a short time. Then return to the sitting position. Lean backwards and return to the starting position. Repeat the whole process a number of times in quick succession.

### Breathing and awareness

Breathe normally in the starting position. Inhale while taking the sitting position. Exhale while bending forwards into paschimottanasana. Hold the breath in the final pose and inhale while returning to the starting position.

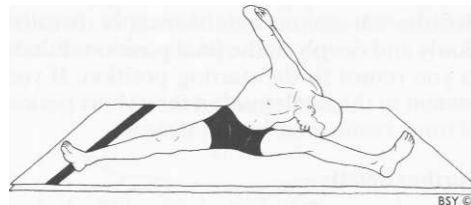
The awareness should be on the physical movement and breath.

### Number of rounds

Do as many rounds as you can up to a maximum of ten.

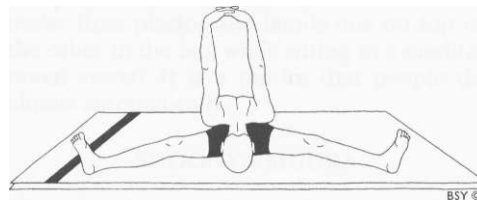
#### PADA PRASAR PASCHIMOTTANASANA (LEGS SPREAD BACK STRETCH POSE)

This asana can be translated as 'the legs spread back stretch pose'.



### Variation 1

Sit with your legs straight and spread apart. Clasp your hands behind your back. This is the starting position. Twist your trunk slightly to the right. Keeping your arms straight, push them upwards behind your back. Simultaneously, bend forwards and try to touch your head to your right knee. This is the final position. Stay in the final position for as long as is comfortable. Then return to the starting position. Repeat the same movement on the left side.



### Variation 2

Take the same starting position as variation 1, with the hands clasped behind the back. While raising your arms behind your head, try

to touch the ground directly in front of your body with the forehead.  
This is the final position.  
Return to the starting position.

### **Variation 3**

Take the same starting position as the other two variations, but do not clasp your hands behind your back.

Bend forwards and grasp your big toes with your hands.

Try to touch the floor directly in front of the body with your forehead. This is the final position.

Remain in the final position for some time, then return to the starting position.

### **Breathing for all three variations**

Breathe in deeply in the starting position. Breathe out as you bend forwards. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final position. Inhale as you return to the starting position. If you remain in the final position for a short period of time, retain your breath instead.

### **Further details**

These three variations are more difficult than the basic form of paschimottanasana, and should not be attempted till you have mastered the basic form.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 3

## Mudras: Hand Mudras

The following four mudras are traditional hand mudras. There are many other hand mudras, hundreds in fact, three of which we have already described: jnana, chin and chinmaya mudras<sup>1</sup>. We don't intend to go into very much detail about these mudras for it is far better that you practise them yourself.

The mudras that we have given here are particularly useful, for they can be done in your daily meditational program with little extra effort and no extra expenditure of time. They are ideally suited for integration with meditative techniques, for they intensify the power and the benefits that you will obtain.

### SHANKHA MUDRA



The word *shankha* means 'shell' or 'conch', the type that one can so easily find on a quiet beach. Therefore, the English translation of this mudra is 'conch mudra'.

The conch is an integral part of religion, for many of the deities, such as Vishnu, Lakshmi and Shiva are shown blowing or holding this symbolic object. Even in the opening chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna and Arjuna blow their conches: "Then, Madhava (Krishna) and the son of Pandu (Arjuna) who were seated in their magnificent chariot, yoked with fine white horses, blew their divine conches." (1:14)

In ancient European tradition also, the conch is often utilized. For example, the tritons used the conch as a trumpet.

The most obvious thing that this conch, or rather its sound represents, is the cosmic, inner

sound of each and every individual. This is the sound that links the individual with highest consciousness, like a puppet on a string. This is called *nada*, or *shabda*, in Sanskrit. This is logos in some of the western traditions. When the conch is blown it makes a penetrating sound like a long Aum. This is the reason it is sounded during religious ceremonies.

While sitting for meditational practice the most comfortable method of holding this mudra is to position the hands as shown, then rest them on your lap.

### BHAIRAVA MUDRA



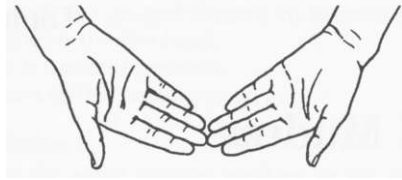
Bhairava is one of the forms of Shiva, said to be fearsome and formidable. The consort of Shiva in this case is called Bhairavi (Shakti)... that is, the power that manifests this particular aspect of existence.

There is a distinct sect of tantra who worship this aspect of Shiva and Shakti. They are called bhairavis. There is also a well-known tantric text called the *Bhairava Tantra*.

For the purpose of meditative practice, this is a particularly comfortable mudra. What is easier than placing the hands one on top of the other in the lap, while sitting in a meditational asana? It is a mudra that people do almost automatically.

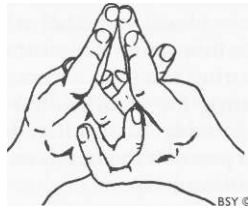
### SHOONYA MUDRA

The word *shoonya* means 'voidness' or 'emptiness'. It is used very much by Buddhists to describe the indescribable state of nirvana (supreme enlightenment). In this context it does not mean, as so many people think and



write, a state of nothingness; it means exactly the opposite: a state of totality, of oneness, devoid of ego, devoid of even the slightest turmoil, craving or dissatisfaction.

#### MAHAYONI MUDRA



This is a mudra that is widely practised in tantric circles. The word *maha* means 'great' or perhaps even better in this context 'supreme'. The word *yon*i means 'womb', 'source' or 'origin'. Therefore, this mudra can be called the 'supreme source mudra'.

This is such an important mudra for it symbolizes the unity between the individual and consciousness. It symbolizes the return of the individual to his source, his origin. It is not only a symbol, for this mudra is used to help invoke this realization and experience. It is such a simple looking practice, but it possesses vast power of invocation, if it is done under the correct circumstances.



To perform this mudra you will need to wrap and bend your fingers in a weird combination of directions. Having secured the mudra as shown in the two figures you can either hold the hands in front of the chest or rest them on your lap. The choice is yours.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

## Pranayama: Practice

In Lesson 12 we introduced you to the fourth stage of nadi shodhana pranayama called bahir kumbhaka<sup>1</sup>. We emphasized that you should not hold your breath for a long duration after exhalation in the early stages of practice. This is important. We suggested that you hold your breath externally for no longer than the duration of inhalation. That is, if you breathe in for a count of 5 (seconds), then you should also do bahir kumbhaka for no longer than a count of 5 (seconds); if you inhale for 3 seconds then outer retention should only be for 3 seconds. And so on. If you have mastered this, and if you simultaneously have no strain or difficulty in performing inhalation, exhalation and antar kumbhaka (inner retention with control), then increase the duration of bahir kumbhaka.

The previous ratio given was 1:8:6:1:1:8:6:1 for the complete practice<sup>1</sup>. If you have mastered this ratio, then you can adopt a new ratio as follows: 1:8:6:2:1:8:6:2 for inhalation: antar kumbhaka: exhalation: bahir kumbhaka: inhalation: antar kumbhaka: exhalation: bahir kumbhaka.

Don't strain. The motto should be 'slowly, slowly'.

### Notes

Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 4

## Meditation: Chidakasha Dharana

Each of us at one time or another has looked at the sky and stars at night and felt an ineffable awe at the immensity of everything. Some feel an inexpressible joy while others feel a sense of complete insignificance compared to this infinite colossus called the cosmos. Some people may become a little depressed yet this is not necessary if each and everyone of us also looked inwards to the unfathomable depths of the internal cosmos of the mind. This inner universe is just as awesome, breathtaking, stupendous and exciting as its outer equivalent; in fact, it is more so. It is also infinite in extent. It is limitless. It is by knowing the nature of the inner cosmos that one ceases to feel totally dwarfed by the outer cosmos. This is the whole reason for meditational practices.

In Sanskrit the material universe around us is called the *mahakasha*. The word *maha* means 'great', and *akasha* means 'space' or 'ether'. Therefore, *mahakasha* literally means 'the great space' or 'ether'. It is the exploration of the *mahakasha*, the external universe, that almost everyone has been totally concerned with in the past and today. This applies to the farmer, the engineer, the sailor and the astronaut. They are all exploring the potential of the material cosmos in their own way.

It is a sad thing, yet nevertheless a fact, that very few people make any attempt to explore the inner cosmos. They don't even know of its existence. Man continues to go further and further into outer space but neglects the infinite within himself. Almost everyone is so engrossed in looking outwards that they forget to look inwards. In Sanskrit the inner cosmos is called the *chidakasha*; the word *chit* means 'consciousness'. Therefore, the literal translation of the word *chidakasha* is 'the space of consciousness'. In the *mahakasha* we see the material world and the innumerable occurrences and forms of the macrocosm. In the *chidakasha* it is possible, though few realize it,

to view the infinite psychic events occurring within each and every human being. This is the aim of all meditational practices, including the practice we will now discuss, called *chidakasha dharana*.

### CHIDAKASHA DHARANA

This is one of the most widely used techniques in yoga. It is generally incorporated with other practices. It is concerned with the mind screen; with watching the space (*chidakasha*) in front of the closed eyes. The word *dharana* means 'to concentrate' or 'to be aware'. This technique can be called 'awareness of the inner space of consciousness'.

#### **Much ado about nothing**

Just for a minute or so, close your eyes. What do you see? You should see a space in front of your closed eyes. It is something you have seen many times before, but have probably never paid much attention to it. The space may be black, it may be dark orange or it may be any other colour. But there should be a space, ether or a firmament in front of your closed eyes. It may seem rather insignificant. This is the mind screen. It is on this screen that you will, with sufficient practice and relaxation, see the most incredible psychic events - events that you never dreamed were taking place within, you. Watch and see for yourself by doing meditational practices. At first you will see nothing for you will be too tense. You may not see anything for many months, but there will come a time when you will be suddenly confronted with the most incredible psychic film show you have ever seen.

This mind screen can also be likened to a cave the cave or entrance to the depths of your mind. Consider a real cave in the side of a mountain. If you stand outside and look into the cave you will see nothing. You must have experienced this for yourself. All you can see



is an impenetrable wall of blackness, so black that you cannot see anything in the cave. Then as you start to walk in the cave and your eyes slowly become accustomed to the murky darkness, you begin to see things. These things were there previously, but you were unable to perceive them. Now you begin to see them. You begin to see more and more things. The cave that before seemed to be only blackness, is seen to be full of so many objects: rocks, stalactites and stalagmites, litter of all types and perhaps even a hermit meditating in the far corner! As you become more familiar and accustomed to the darkness and nature of the cave, so you see things that you did not previously expect. It is the same with the mind-cave. At first when you look into the cave of the mind you will see nothing. You will most probably be tempted to think that there is nothing there to be seen. But as you look deeper into the depths of the mind-cave you will begin to see things that previously were inconceivable. Things were already there - they did not magically appear; but they were there without your knowledge, without your awareness. You start to develop awareness of your inner being. This is *chidakasha dharana*.

So we urge you to explore the cave of your mind and find out what is contained within. It will be the most profitable expedition that you have ever made and will ever make.

#### **Posture**

Any comfortable sitting pose can be used.

#### **Technique**

Make yourself comfortable in your chosen sitting position.

Adjust yourself so that there will be no need to move your body during the practice.

Make sure that your spine and head are erect, but without excessive arching or straining of the back; sit in a comfortable and upright position.

Close your eyes. Start the practice.

#### **Stage 1: body awareness**

Practise *kaya sthairyam*.

Be completely aware of your body.

There should be a continuous flow of attention to the physical body.

The more you are aware of the body, the more steady will the mind become; steadiness of the

body automatically implies steadiness of the mind and vice versa.

Rotate your awareness throughout the different parts of your body.

Then become aware of the whole body.

There should be homogeneous awareness of the whole body sitting on the floor; not awareness of one part of the body, but the entire body, which you can feel as a totality.

Remain aware and feel the immobility of the body.

Feel that your body is like a stone statue.

Eventually there will be no need to create the feeling, it will come spontaneously.

Continue to do *kaya sthairyam* for about 5 minutes, or for as long as time permits.

Then proceed to stage 2.

#### **Stage 2: Aum chanting**

Chant AUM seven times . . . slowly.

Feel the vibrations resonating, reverberating throughout the whole body.

Be completely absorbed, aware of the sound of Aum.

Feel that nothing else exists except Aum.

When you have finished, proceed to stage 3.

#### **Stage 3: breath awareness**

Be aware of your breathing process; if you wish you can practise *anuloma viloma* and *prana shuddhi*<sup>2</sup>.

Fix your attention on your own breath.

Let your breathing be natural.

Don't force or try to control it.

Be aware of the breath as it flows in and out of your nostrils.

You breathe in . . .

You breathe out . . .

And when you breathe in, know that you are breathing in; when you are breathing out, know that you are breathing out.

Total awareness of the effortless, natural breathing.

Usually, the breathing occurs without your awareness - it occurs unconsciously. Now you must feel it, know that it is continuously taking place within you.

You must be aware of it, as though you have never breathed before.

Imagine that this is the first time you have ever breathed; feel and experience the bliss of breathing.

There must be unbroken and unceasing

awareness of the breathing process.  
 Listen to the sound of the breath.  
 Feel the breath flow in and out of the nostrils.  
 Continue in this way for a few minutes.  
 Then try to feel the air entering each nostril separately.  
 As you breathe in, the two flows of air move upwards and meet at the eyebrow centre.  
 As you breathe out, the two flows of air diverge from the eyebrow centre and move downwards in the shape of an inverted V.  
 The air flow in each nostril forms a triangular pathway, with the top of the triangle at the eyebrow centre.  
 Continue to experience this alternate convergence and divergence of breath flow as you inhale and exhale respectively.  
 Feel the air being sucked in . . .  
 Feel the air being gently forced out.  
 Be aware.  
 Imagine that you are merging with the breath.  
 Then after some minutes, leave awareness of the breath and proceed to stage 4.

#### **Stage 4: chidakasha dharana**

Look at the space in front of your closed eyes - chidakasha.  
 Be relaxed; don't strain.  
 Merely watch.  
 Be a witness to anything that may appear, any visions or whatever.  
 Don't try to interpret or analyze.  
 Look into the cave of your mind.  
 Look deeply.  
 It looks very dark . . . oh, so dark . . . but look deeper.  
 You may not see anything, but don't worry, just continue your practice.  
 Expect nothing, only watch.  
 Be an observer.  
 After some time you may see colours, streaks of light, visions, strange forms, vivid memories and so on; however, more than likely you will continue to see only an empty screen.  
 Whatever occurs, remain a disinterested witness.  
 Let things happen. Don't anticipate anything.  
 Look into the ether of your being.  
 Peer into the darkness as though you are trying to find something in a dark room.  
 Look at the totality of chidakasha; don't confine your attention to any one place . . .  
 Let your vision take in the full extent of

chidakasha in the same way that you would take in the whole screen of a television or cinema.  
 Survey the whole screen of the mind.  
 Observe . . . observe . . . and continue to observe.  
 You don't have to do anything, only watch.  
 This is so simple, but can bring incredible experiences if you persist.  
 So persevere, and find out the multi-dimensional activities of the mind.  
 But don't expect . . . the less you expect, the more you will see.  
 Continue in this way for about 5 or 10 minutes; more if you have time to spare.  
 Then proceed to stage 5.

#### **Stage 5: concentration or trataka**

This stage is for those people who can mentally create and easily visualize an inner symbol on the mind screen<sup>3</sup>.  
 Visualize and concentrate on your chosen symbol created on the mind screen.  
 You can choose any symbol that suits you . . .  
 But you must be able to visualize a clear, steady image.  
 Be completely aware of the symbol.  
 Try to imagine that there is nothing else but the symbol.  
 Your whole awareness is channelled towards the symbol.  
 This will make your whole mind one-pointed . . .  
 This will lead into the deeper realms of the mind.  
 This symbol will be your rocket into the internal depths of space, into the ether of consciousness.  
 Continue this practice for as long as you are able.  
 Then proceed to stage 6.

#### **Stage 6: Aum chanting and chidakasha dharana**

Slowly repeat Aum 7 times (more if you have time).  
 Try to be simultaneously aware of the sound of Aum and chidakasha.  
 Then at the end of Aum chanting, once again become aware of chidakasha, the space in front of your closed eyes.  
 Remain a witness to anything that takes place there. If subconscious fears or suppressed feelings surface to your awareness, try only to watch with detachment.

If you see extraordinary visions, don't become excited for there is much more; there will come a time when you will see impossible things, so impossible that you will be totally unable to be emotionally excited.

Continue for a few minutes.

Be aware of your body and of the surroundings.

Then open your eyes.

This is the end of the practice.

### **Relaxation**

Like all other meditational techniques, relaxation of the body and mind is essential. Without this prerequisite you will not gain meaningful and profound experiences. If the mind is disturbed or incessantly thinking about work, family problems or perhaps anticipating the delights of breakfast, then you will achieve little or nothing. It is for this reason the technique of chidakasha dharana that we have described has been combined with other meditational practices. The preliminary techniques of kaya sthairyam, Aum chanting and breath awareness systematically induce deep relaxation. These practices are very important.

However, don't feel obliged to stick to these practices when performing chidakasha dharana. You can combine any other meditative techniques that you feel are justified, or any that you particularly like. The important thing is that you attain deeper states of relaxation. It is in this manner that you will start to dive into the depths of the mind-cave. If you are not reasonably relaxed, both physically and mentally, then you will never penetrate the surface, the veil of the chidakasha. So make sure you systematically relax yourself through any yoga techniques, whether asanas, pranayama or meditative techniques.

### **Duration**

The practice that we have just described should take about half an hour. You can increase or decrease the duration according to available time by either extending or contracting the time of the stages, or by omitting certain stages or adding stages of your choice. You must use your discretion in this respect.

Whatever meditational technique you do, try to finish off by watching the mind screen for a few minutes.

### **Removal of mental problems**

We don't intend to become too deeply involved in this subject here, for we have already treated it in depth<sup>4</sup>. All we want to do is to indicate that chidakasha dharana is a powerful tool for helping to remove mental blocks, fear, etc. As we said previously it is important to first of all recognize one's mental problems before they can be removed. The majority of the mental problems of most people lie embedded in the subconscious realms of the mind, just below the level of conscious perception. That is, immediately behind the veil of blackness that you see when you close your eyes. It is there that the roots or seeds of all mental problems lie. These seeds cause unhappiness and disharmony by erupting, by sprouting, by manifesting into the conscious realms. A large proportion of people remain totally unaware of the cause of their unhappiness or dissatisfaction throughout their entire lives. By regularly doing chidakasha dharana, one can see the source of mental problems and in turn remove them.

You should clearly understand (perhaps it is better to find out for yourself) that the language of the subconscious mind is not words - it is the language of symbols, of psychic symbols. The subconscious mind speaks in symbols, whether it is through dreams or during the practice of meditative techniques such as chidakasha dharana. Subconscious problems are stored, so to say, in the mind in the form of symbols. When one confronts these symbols in a state of relaxed awareness, then they can be removed. The reader should take note that we did not say that the symbols should be confronted in a state of relaxation, for this means sleep to most people, and one's subconscious problems can never be eradicated during sleep. The symbols must be faced in a state of relaxation combined with awareness. You must be fully awake when you confront these psychic manifestations. This is the role of chidakasha dharana.

In a sense, one works out one's subconscious problems in symbolic form. It is more than likely that there will be little or no intellectual understanding of the cleansing process, but the process will nevertheless take place. But you must practise regularly.

It is essential that you merely watch the psychic symbols with as much detachment as

possible. This indifference and lack of emotional response to these psychic visions in deeper states of relaxation will tend to carry over into daily life. In this way, things that previously caused fear or conflict or whatever will cease to do so. The scourge of subconscious fears etc. will cease to plague you and make your life unhappy.

There is another reason why it is important to be a witness to occurrences on the mind screen: it is only by watching, by being a witness that you allow subconscious data to freely arise to conscious perception. It is only in this way that the subconscious bubbles of the mind can spontaneously reach the surface. If you expect something you will only hinder the process.

There is another important use of chidakasha dharana. Previously we discussed the method of desensitization<sup>5</sup>. This is a method where one purposely and consciously creates a mental image of objects of fear or phobia on the mind screen, while in states of relaxation. In this manner, the more obvious psychological problems can be purged. Chidakasha dharana is ideally suited for this purpose, for one merely tries to create and project the object of neurosis on to the mind screen as part of the practice of chidakasha dharana. A good time to practise this technique would be at the end of stage 6 in the method we have given in this topic.

Remember, the purpose of meditational practices such as chidakasha dharana is not only to remove your gross mental problems, it is also to dive into the depths of the mind. The psychic manifestation of subconscious mental problems arise only from the superficial layers of the mind. The grosser problems exist in seed form just below the surface of the mind ocean. You will confront them in the earlier stages of meditational practices. The eventual aim is to go much deeper into the depths of the mind. Once these levels are contacted and experienced, your life will shake at the very foundations, not catastrophically but with joy.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 5

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed explanation on trataka refer to: Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

<sup>4</sup> Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 2

<sup>5</sup> Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2

# Tantra

This discussion is not intended to be practical. It has been included to give you a general background and introduction to tantra. Many of the ideas may seem a little strange at first, yet the more one delves into tantra the more one will understand its sublimity. Its philosophical concepts reach up to the loftiest heights in an effort to express the inexpressible, yet they have not lost touch with practical application. Many philosophies become lost in words and are not applicable to the average person. They formulate complicated conceptions that in no way relate to the individual and his attempts to grapple with and understand life. They rarely make any effort to show the individual how he can experience higher awareness for himself. Tantra, on the other hand, is a practical system. It is called a *sadhana shastra*, which means that it is a practice-oriented scripture. Its purpose is to give each and every individual spiritual illumination by any means that is suitable and available. It consists of a vast number of different practices to suit all types of people, combined with the highest concepts realized by tantric sages throughout the ages in states of deep meditation. It is because of this combination that we have such high regard for tantra.

We want you to consider tantra with an open mind. Do not blindly accept its ideas. Merely assimilate them. You must prove for yourself if they are really valid through your own personal experience and realization. The thing to remember is that tantra is more of a science than anything else. It does not ask you to believe anything on face value. It is a 'test and see' system. Only when you have the experience can you believe what you hear. The essence of tantra is personal experience through practice.

## The science of the infinite

Tantra is the science of seeing, feeling, knowing the infinite in and through the finite. It leads

one to the experience of the infinite through the limited world of form. And once the infinite has been seen in one object, it is then a short step to seeing the infinite in everything. Tantra teaches knowledge and experience of the macrocosm through the instrumentality of the microcosm. It teaches knowledge of the unlimited through the means of the limited; knowledge of the supreme consciousness (paramatman) through knowledge of the individual consciousness (jivatman). Tantra is a means to know your divine nature and then the divine nature of everything. It is a method of utilizing the material to tune in with the immaterial, of using the manifest to know the unmanifest. It is a method of being swallowed into the infinite, of being sucked into the infinite through a whirlpool of material objects and energies. The world is used as a stepping stone to the beyond, to that which is indescribable. The objective universe is utilized as a launching pad into the eternal. Tantra aims at expanding the experience of everyday life, of enjoying and living life to the full, as a means to higher awareness. It encompasses all aspects of life, whether in the material world or that which is transcendent.

## Tantra - the universal system

Tantra is in the widest sense a universal system. It has been and still is a way of life for various diverse groups of people throughout the world. Though there may be local differences, the basic premise is fundamentally the same: that for the sake of understanding, worship and spiritual practices, existence is divided into two aspects - the unmanifested and the manifested. In fact, the real nature of the world and existence is way beyond even this concept, but this must be realized in higher states of awareness. For practical purposes it is convenient to make this division. In Indian tantra, the subject of this topic, these two aspects are called Shiva (consciousness) and

Shakti (power or energy of manifestation). For the sake of convenience and symbology, Shakti is regarded as the cosmic mother. In modern language, she is referred to as mother nature, though few people who use this term realize its origin and significance.

This concept is not confined to India. In Taoism of China there is *Tao* and *Teh*. The Tao corresponds to Shiva (though there are some slight reservations about this) and Teh is exactly the same as Shakti or the mother of the universe. The ancient Egyptians worshipped Osiris (consciousness or Shiva) and Isis (the mother, Shakti, or the cosmic power of manifestation). In Christianity there is the Virgin Mary - a symbol of the universal mother. The father, needless to say, is consciousness. The first two cards of the Tarot pack are the Magus and veiled Isis, representing consciousness and the power of manifestation respectively. And so we could go on giving so many other examples, but this is not the place. What we want to indicate is that the concept of the cosmic mother and the accompanying symbol or personification of consciousness does *not* depend on time, place and race. The concept is universal, it is ingrained deeply in the collective psyche of humanity.

Tantra is a system that carries on the tradition that has been practised throughout the world since time immemorial. It is not really something that has been invented; it is an expression of the deeper realizations of man. The system of tantra (universal tantra, not necessarily the form prevalent in India) has been practised for good reasons - the most obvious being that this concept or understanding of existence has been found to be true up as far as reasonably elevated levels of awareness. This division of Shiva and Shakti is verifiable by personal experience from moderate states of awareness to elevated levels of awareness. This concept has been found to be valid by mystics in states of meditation. It is the expression of mystical experiences of countless sages, yogis, saints, etc. throughout the ages. It has been formulated because of realizations in states of meditation. It is only at indescribable levels of awareness that the concept breaks down ... and this is still covered by tantra, for Shiva and Shakti merely become one and the same. So bear this in mind - the

concept of Shiva and Shakti and all the other similar personifications throughout the history of mankind are based on mystical experiences.

Another reason why the concept of Shiva and Shakti is so profound is that it is easily amenable to practical application. It was adopted by people throughout the ages because it facilitated powerful spiritual practices which could give an individual his own experience. This concept provides a base from which practices can be utilized to lead to union, communion with a power far greater than that of the individual. The system of Shiva and Shakti, the system of tantra throughout the world, leads to higher awareness, knowledge and beatitude.

An integral part of tantra is the use of sound in the form of mantras as a method of invoking higher forces. In English, mantras can be called incantations. Magic circles (mandalas and yantras) are also used. Both incantations and magic circles are an integral part of many universal systems, both old and new, and especially esoteric systems. And we can still see the remains of ancient magic circles used by ancient peoples. What is Stonehenge in Britain, but a cosmic magic circle? What are the Pyramids, but cosmic mandalas? The Mayan pyramids of Central America are surely mandalas, places for the invocation of higher vibrations. We could give thousands of examples, and they would all be rather obvious ones. There are millions of small seemingly insignificant magic circles that one would not normally look at twice and are so commonplace that they are not given any thought. For example, here in India almost every large tree has some form of altar as its base. Each and every one is a mandala, though more than likely the people who built them did not realize this.

To repeat: the essence of tantra is universal. It comes naturally to the psyche of man in general. It is not something that is imposed as are many other things in life. The essence of tantra comes naturally to man, even modern, city dwelling man, for though one can make superficial changes to one's life, there are certain things that stir the very depths of one's being. The essence of tantra is ingrained in the psyche of every man, as it has been in the peoples of bygone eras.

### Tantra defined

We are now talking about tantra as it exists in India.

The word tantra is made up of two words: *tanoti* and *trayati*. The word *tanoti* means 'to expand', 'to stretch', and to 'extend', while the word *trayati* means 'to liberate' or 'free'. Therefore, *tantra* (tan+tra) means to expand one's experience and awareness of everything, to extend the frontiers of apprehension beyond the material, and hence to attain spiritual knowledge and liberation.

Tantra is also known as *tantrica*, *kauladharmā*, *kaulika* or *kaula*. The word *kaula* is derived from the word *inula*, which means family, society or community. Thus *kaula*, *kaulika* and *kauladharmā* can be interpreted as the way of the community, the way of the family, or perhaps the way of brotherhood and fellowship. The word *kula* also means the fetters of the family, but this is in a different context. The word *kula* also means 'the cosmic power of manifestation' (Shakti), and *akula* means 'consciousness' (Shiva). Therefore, the path of *kaula* is the unity of Shiva and Shakti, cosmic union, or nirvana. It is said that the system of *kaula* implies simplicity of living combined with harmony of inner and outer surroundings, together with understanding and acceptance of others. The dormant cosmic power in man is often known as *kulakundalini*. Therefore, *kauladharmā* is a system for unleashing the cosmic forces and potential (*kundalini* or Shakti) in man.

People who follow the path of tantra are called *tantrics*, *kaulas* or *kaulikas*.

Tantra is a system intended to teach us how to live life to the fullest. It is a means to successfully come to terms with life and its seeming complications and eventually become enlightened.

### Scope

Tantra is really a compendium of many other systems, for it includes and encompasses a wide selection of the different aspects of human life. It is concerned with the realms of the physical, psychic, mental and spiritual. It is concerned with work, play, devotion, thought and so many other parts of human affairs. A tantric text called the *Varahi Tantra* gives an elaborate description of the main subject of tantra. They are summarized as follows:

1. Consciousness
2. The creation and destruction of the physical universe (*shristi* and *pralaya*)
3. Worship of deities (*devi* or *deva pooja*)
4. Classification of beings
5. The heavenly bodies - astronomy and astrology
6. The different levels of awareness (*lokas*)
7. The psychic pathways and centres in the human framework (*nadis* and *chakras*)
8. Laws and duties in society
9. Sacramental rites (*samskaras*)
10. Consecration of forms of deities (*murtis*)
11. Incantation (*mantras*)
12. Magic circles (*mandalas* and *yantras*)
13. Symbolic and invocative gestures (*mudras*)
14. Spiritual practices (*sadhana*)
15. Worship (*pooja*) both internal and external
16. Consecration of houses, wells, etc.
17. Description of holy shrines
18. Magic (*yogamaya sadhana*)
19. Ceremonial rites and initiations (*diksha*)
20. Yoga - including asanas, pranayama, meditative methods, etc.
21. Medicine of many types, including *ayurveda* which is a herbal science combined with yogic practices
22. Science.

To this list we would add that tantra also included alchemy, the art of living a fruitful and blissful life, and the use of sexual energy as a means to unfold higher awareness.

Thus it can be seen that tantra includes a wide range of topics. At one time in history, it is said that there were 14,000 tantric texts in existence. Now, only a few texts remain for most of the traditional texts have been lost or destroyed.

It should be remembered that present day Hinduism is almost entirely based on tantra; it is not based completely on the Vedas as so many people think. The principal deities of the Vedas are Prajapati, Agni, Indra, Varuna, etc., and these are not an integral part of modern Hinduism. To the best of our knowledge there are almost no temples erected to these Vedic deities in present day India. Vishnu (the sustainer), Shiva (the auspicious and the dissolver), Saraswati (patron of knowledge and learning), Kali (Shakti), Durga (another aspect of Shakti), etc., are all key deities in Hinduism. Temples by the thousands upon thousands exist throughout India dedicated to these

deities. And they all stem directly from tantra. Of course, very few people would accept this, for tantra has fallen into some disrepute through misunderstanding. But as far as we are concerned Hindus are unknowingly closer to tantra than they believe.

The scope of tantra is vast. It is intended to cover every aspect of man's life from early morning to late at night, from birth till death. It is intended to make life more harmonious and blissful in every action and situation. It is for all types of people, from housewives to monks. It is a system that teaches us how to fully know and use the world we live in, as well as to tune in with higher consciousness.

Practical tantra is often summed up by three main aspects: tantra (here meaning the rules, principles and the system), mantra (the vehicle of consciousness) and mandala or yantra (the form of consciousness). This is a terse definition that probably will not convey much at first reading. But within these three aspects is included everything in the material universe. This of course is taking the fullest possible meaning of the words, but we can say that everything around us is composed of mantra and yantra. This includes each and every human being.

#### The origin and development

No definite date can be assigned to the beginning of tantra. It was not invented or formulated as such. Its nebulous beginnings lie in the mist of prehistory. It did not arise through the inspiration of one person, as did Buddhism, Christianity, etc. It grew slowly throughout the ages. It developed in all parts of the world. It did not follow a fixed pattern of growth, but varied according to local circumstances and the influence of different tantric sages or yogis. Often, the methods in different localities seemed to contradict each other, but this was only on a superficial level - they were all a part of tantra.

Tantra in India started to be moulded into a semblance of the system as we now know it when man learned the art of writing. Since that time, thousands of tantric texts have been written, many of which often contradict each other over minor points. But this is not surprising, for the attitudes of societies also change; what is suitable for one society is often unsuitable for another. Of course, the essence

is the same and they all fit into the system of tantra.

The starting point of tantra is that one should be tolerant of other people's views, for differences are generally only superficial. Seemingly opposing viewpoints generally point to the same truth. Because of this attitude of tolerance and understanding, tantra slowly encompassed and fused together various beliefs, forms of worship and techniques. The main sects of tantra will be discussed briefly: they are *shaktas*, *shaivites* and *vaishnavites*. They are all part of tantra. Even though they may appear to say and believe in different things, they really say and believe in the same thing. This diversity of thought is a noticeable characteristic of tantra. This arose because tantra opened its arms and embraced a wide range of systems, even though they seemed contrary or mutually exclusive. It did not try to eradicate seemingly antagonistic beliefs. This attitude of tolerance can only arise when a system grows naturally in an environment of openness, joy and freedom, devoid of dogma. This can only happen when a system brings the results and experiences that it promises, when it actually produces peace and contentment among its followers, when it actually makes people more aware and understanding. Dogma can only arise when people are unhappy, when they live in low states of awareness, and when through lack of experience they are both unsure of themselves and the doctrine that they follow. Tantra brings bliss and higher consciousness. It brings about that which it talks about, that which it promises. It does not talk about castles in the sky and about things that people cannot actually experience for themselves.

Tantra is a system that grew naturally with man, as he evolved (here we mean evolution in an historical sense). It was not thrust on man. It was a way of life which developed spontaneously as man moved through and lived in the various bygone eras. A system that is imposed on man causes disruption in the same way that the Eskimo mode of life would cause disruption if it was forcibly imposed on the people of India. It does not fit. Tantra, in its multitudinous forms, grew and matured with man as he adapted to new situations and adopted new ways of living. It is for this reason that tantra is both tolerant and practical - it



developed naturally in response to man's needs.

Tantra is widely said to be based on the Vedas. This is, however, very disputable for there is much evidence to suggest that the root of tantra predates the writing of the Vedas, just as it seems that tantra in other forms existed in Europe long before the writing of the Bible. This is a very nebulous subject, for we must also remember that the vedic system must also have existed long before it was put in written form. It is probably truer to say that the origin of both the vedic and tantric ways of life are lost in the depths of prehistory. It is really impossible to say which arose first.

People tend to use texts as a method of dating the origin of the tantric and vedic systems, and this is not a very realistic indicator. The oldest known tantric texts were written after the Vedas. This is clearly implied by the fact that the Vedas were written in Vedic Sanskrit, whereas the tantric scriptures were written in the later Paniniya Sanskrit of this upanishadic era. Because of this fact, historians have automatically assumed that tantra comes from the Vedas. Nearly all modern books on this subject have made this assumption, but it is not really a logical conclusion for various reasons. Firstly, it is a possibility that the oldest tantric texts have been lost (remember the tantric belief that old texts will become redundant and automatically disappear). Secondly, the date of the oldest tantric scriptures does not necessarily fix the era when tantra started to become a thriving way of life. Tantra must have existed long before it was recorded in written form, it is an evolved system, not a suddenly created system. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how tantra arose directly from the Vedas when the texts are so different. There are many similarities also, but the differences are more noticeable. The safest thing that can be said is that both systems arose gradually at some indefinite time in the past. It is almost impossible and a little presumptuous to say that one arose from the other. There are so many facts that indicate otherwise. Of course, they influenced each other when they came in contact... sometimes negatively, other times positively.

This subject could be discussed indefinitely, but we will close the issue at this point. The important thing is that both systems have their

use; they have both been abused in various ways; both have been misinterpreted and both have accumulated their cobwebs. Both systems utilized in the way that was originally intended can bring harmony in all spheres of life and eventual transcendence.

Tantra arose, not in order to renounce or to escape the world, but in order to experience the things of the world more fully, and at the same time to use the ways of the world to attain higher states of awareness. It is a spiritual system, a psychological system, a psychic system, a science of life - call it what you like. But it is a practical system that produces results and personal experience. It has grown from the experiences and understanding of wise men throughout the ages. Tantra is not a stagnant system; it is a system that adapts itself to the needs of the times. In fact, it is a tantric belief that old texts on tantra will fade away and new ones will always be written to replace them. The essence of the texts will be the same, but the expression and relationship to prevalent social conditions will be different. Tantra has changed and been developed throughout the ages. It has not remained attached to a fixed dogma. It is still growing and adapting itself in the present era and will continue to mould itself to man's needs in the future.

#### **Texts and sects**

Tantra consists of a large number of sects and subsects, which have characteristically different rituals and modes of spiritual practice. This seems a little confusing and contradictory to those who are not familiar with the implications of tantra. Basically, of course, all the sects follow the same path, for the differences, even those that seem the greatest, are merely different ways of expressing and eventually experiencing the same thing. However, one must be careful in making generalities about tantra, for it is so easy to make one definite statement about tantra only to find that the opposite is clearly written in some obscure tantric text. This must be the case for as we have already said, tantra has embraced many systems within its fold throughout the ages. Having said this, however, we can say that tantra can be divided into five sects, according to the deity which is worshipped and the basis of their sadhana. These are as follows:

Sect	Deity	Literature
Vaishnavas (or Vaishnavites)	Vishnu	Vaishnava Agamas (Pancharatra)
Shaivas (or Shaivites)	Shiva	Shaiva Agamas
Shaktas	Shakti	Shakta Agamas
Sauras	Surya (the sun)	Saura Agamas
Ganapatyas	Ganapati	Ganapatya Agamas

Remember that the presiding deity can be worshipped in many aspects. For example, Shakti has hundreds of different traditional aspects, all of which can be included in shakta sadhana.

The tantric texts are often called agamas, and less often nigamas. The texts of the shaiva and shakta sects are generally given in the form of a dialogue between Shiva (deva) and his consort Shakti (devi). Where the questions are posed by Shakti and the answers given by Shiva, the texts are known as *agamas*. In an ancient text called the *Agamadvaita Nirnaya* it states: "An agama is so called because it proceeds from the mouth of Shambhu (Shiva) and is conveyed to Girija (Shakti, his wife), having first been approved by Vasudeva (Vishnu)."

Shiva plays the role of the spiritual teacher (*guru*) and Shakti plays the part of the disciple (*shishya*). Sometimes, however, Shakti acts as the teacher, as she does, for example, in a scripture called the *Nigama Kalpadruma*. In this case the scripture, (shastra) is called nigama. In the *Agamadvaita Nirnaya* it also says: "Nigama is so called because it emanates from Girija (Shakti) to be heard by the ears of Girisa (Shiva), having been approved by Vasudeva (Vishnu)." Thus, in the case of nigamas, Shakti is the guru. What we have so far said applies mainly to the shaiva and shakta sects. This form of dialogue between the teacher and the disciple is significant for it shows the importance of the guru-disciple relationship. This is a fundamental aspect of tantra. The texts of the other sects are also usually called agamas though the form is not a dialogue between Shiva and Shakti.

Let us briefly consider the five main sects.

#### **Vaishnavas**

The presiding deity of this group is Vishnu (the sustainer), who is said to maintain and

uphold the universe. Vishnu is said to appear in incarnation whenever mankind is in spiritual and material need. So far, nine incarnations (*avatars*) have come, including Rama and Krishna. The tenth and last, it is believed, will come in the future. He is Kalki, and it is believed he will bring the present Kali age to an end and bring the new golden age. The wife of Vishnu is Lakshmi, who represents prosperity in all spheres. This group includes vast numbers of people in India today, though very few would admit to following the path of tantra. In fact, they would probably be offended if you made such a suggestion, for much abuse has been heaped on tantra through misunderstanding. This sect of tantra has been absorbed into the main stream of Hinduism, of which it is probably the most popular and most widely practised path. It is mainly a path of devotion (*bhakti*) and thousands of beautiful stirring songs have been composed and are sung as an expression of this devotion.

The two most popular avatars of Vishnu are Rama and Krishna. Rama is the main figure of the mythological masterpiece called the *Ramayana*, in which his wife is Sita. This wonderful epic tells the universal story, in allegorical form, of the battle each person must pass through to know higher consciousness. Krishna is the subject of many books and the central figure of the world famous masterpiece, the *Bhagavad Gita*. His consort is usually known as Radha.

The literature of the vaishnavites is commonly called the *Pancharatra* (five nights). It is so called because this sect is associated with five special nights of worship and ritual during the year. These five nights are said to be very auspicious on the spiritual path. In the *Mahabharata*, an immense Indian epic, it is said that the sage Narada acquired the knowledge contained within the *Pancharatra* from Rishi Narayana (Vishnu). Narayana acted as the guru and taught his consort Lakshmi (the deity of prosperity).

Pancharatra literature is said to consist of 108 agamas, but in fact the actual number is not certain. According to the *Sammohanan Tantra*, vaishnava literature consists of 75 tantras, 205 upatantras, as well as various yamalas and damaras. In this context, the tantras and the upatantras are intended for people who are receptive to spiritual experi-

ences (sattwa), the yamalas for those people who are more active in nature (rajas), and the damaras are intended for those who lack any spiritual aspiration whatsoever (tamas). Most of the *Pancharatra* texts have been lost or destroyed. Among the texts that are still available are the *Vishnu Rahasya* and the *Mahasatanakumar Samhitas*.

The vaishnava sect has spread beyond the shores of India. It is very popular in many parts of Southeast Asia, especially in Bali, Cambodia, Thailand, Java, etc. In all these places, many temples have been erected for the worship of Vishnu.

### Shaivism

This group worships and bases its practices on tuning in and harmonizing directly with consciousness. It personifies consciousness in the form of Lord Shiva, who is the substratum from which the manifested world arises by the action of Shakti. It is a sect that tends more towards renunciation, both mentally and physically; though for practical purposes it is only the mental renunciation that is really important. The basic philosophy of shaivism is the same as the shaktas. It says that the absolute Brahman is both static and dynamic. It is all pervading and transcendental (consciousness) and dynamic (energy). The static is Shiva and the dynamic is Shakti. The entire created universe is no more than a play of Shakti. The whole world is not really an illusion, in a higher sense, but the expression of Shakti. Shaivites worship the static aspect, whereas the shaktas worship the dynamic aspect. The practices of shaivism are based on the static aspect, whereas the shakta practices are based mainly on the dynamic, manifested aspect. The purpose and the end point are the same.

The worshippers or followers of this sect are called shaivites and have a particularly large following in South India. There are various schools of shaivism of which the main ones are:

1. *Northern advaita*, which is also called *Kashmir shaivism* and *trika* (i.e. the system of the trinity - supreme consciousness, individual consciousness and the material world).
2. *Southern shaivism*, which is also, called *Shaiva siddhanta*, the principle or doctrine of Shiva. Other sects include nathas, kramas, bhairavas etc.

The aim of shaivism is to dissolve all mental modifications so that one can see that which is beyond thought. To bring about this experience it utilizes a large number of practices. In fact, we can say that yoga in its many forms is the very essence of practical shaivism. Probably the most important mantra is *Shivoham* (I am Shiva) which is repeated over and over again in the heart centre.

It is said that there are twenty-eight traditional texts of shaivism, supposed to have been revealed by Shiva personified in an aspect with five heads. Each of the five mouths is said to have spoken and contributed to the total 28 texts. The name of each of these tantras is well known but they are not readily available. Possibly they have all been destroyed. Information on them is rather vague.

Apart from these traditional texts there are large numbers of other texts, especially within the two principal shaiva sects that we have previously mentioned. The southern shaiva school has produced many elevating and inspiring texts that combine the highest realm of thought with overwhelming devotion. For example, the *Shiva Rahasya* (the essence of shaivism) is a masterpiece, especially a section called the *Ribhu-gita*. Another wonderful book is a tantric text called the *Tirumandiram* which outlines the precepts of shaiva siddhanta. It was written by a great sage called Tirumular. The text clearly states that the Vedas and the agamas (of tantra) are all inspired spiritual works; they only differ in the emphasis on specific practice. Each of the chapters is actually called a tantra. It is full of sensible instruction and the power of devotion. Though the text is devoted to Shiva, it clearly points out that one will eventually accept and encompass all other deities and beliefs, for they will be seen to be one and the same. There are a large number of other texts on shaivism in the languages of South India. It is strange, however, that for some reason these wonderful texts have never received as much attention as they deserve by people outside shaivism.

Kashmir shaivism has also produced tantric texts that reach the loftiest heights of philosophical thought combined with practical application. Its principal scripture is called the *Shiva Sutra* (science of shaivism) and is said to have been revealed to the great seer Vasugupta in the eighth or ninth century. It is a

text that fully encompasses the Samkhya philosophy (used in the path of jnana yoga) and adds much more. It maps out the path of evolution of the manifested universe (which includes each and every individual) from the absolute to the material. It is a masterpiece. It says that both Shiva and Shakti originate from the absolute, which they call Parasamvit. You must read the text for yourself. This same school of Shaivism has also produced many other books, such as the *Paramarthasara* (which roughly translates as the meaning of the supreme essence), *Vijnanabhairava* (science of the shaivas), *Pratyabhijnahridaya* (the essence or source of knowledge of the absolute) and *Shivastotravali* (hymn of Shiva). There are many other books, too numerous to mention here.

Shaivism is intimately connected with the shivalingam. This is a beautiful symbol that in the highest sense represents consciousness. Many systems throughout the world, past and present, have also worshipped the same symbol or a similar symbol. It is for this reason that we can say that the essence of Indian shaivism is universal. It is only the localized expression that is different.

### Shaktas

Followers of this path base their practices on worship of Shakti, the cosmic power that creates, sustains and eventually withdraws the universe. This includes each and every individual. Shakti is rooted in and is the active form of the passive, unchanging aspect which is known as consciousness (Shiva). This split is made as a convenient method of trying to explain the unexplainable. The individual consciousness is rooted in and is Shiva, whereas the body and mind are manifestations of Shakti. Therefore, the sadhana of the shaktas is concerned with purification and use of the body, mind and the material world in general as a way of tuning in with the underlying consciousness. The emphasis is on Shakti because this is the manifestation of consciousness, and it is through the manifestation of Shakti in one's own body and mind that one can attain the supreme experience. Therefore, the shaktas are worshippers of Shakti. They use the manifested world as a means of going beyond. They see the world as a place to be utilized and enjoyed in order to merge with consciousness. It is here that the followers of

shaiva and shakta differ from each other: the shaivists say renounce and lose interest in the world of objects as much as possible, whereas the shaktas say that the world should be used and enjoyed. The end point is the same - transcendence.

The shaktas depict Shakti in a vast number of forms. She is widely known as Kali, Tara, Devi, Tripura, Sundari, Bhairavi, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Durga and many more. These different aspects of cosmic energy are depicted as feminine figures or goddesses. In the widest sense, the shaktas worship everything in the world, for every object from the tiniest atom to the largest star is a manifestation, an expression of the cosmic power called Shakti. To the shaivite, she is the consort and inseparable half of Shiva-Shakti. To the vaishnavites, she is the wondrous splendour in the heart of Vishnu. To the shaktas, she is the mother of all the universe, who controls the creation, sustenance and dissolution of everything.

These feminine forms are merely convenient ways of representing specific aspects of this cosmic power. And of course, this cosmic power is not really feminine just as Shiva (consciousness) is not really masculine. They are denoted and portrayed in female and male forms only for convenience of understanding. Shakti is regarded as feminine for it is within the womb of a woman that new life grows and is created. Thus, the development of the foetus in the womb of a woman is very symbolic of the continuous process where the material universe grows in the cosmic womb of Shakti. What better way is there to depict this cosmic process in terms that the average man and woman can understand?

The path of the shaktas is to accept and utilize the forces that we see, feel and experience around us. The aim is to create harmony between the individual and the environment. This will bring calmness, acceptance, and understanding in relation to the world we live in. This contentment, together with the harnessing of cosmic forces through the use of mantras, yantras, etc. is a means to higher awareness. It is also the means to gain control of the world in which we live at all levels, whether physical, psychic, mental or whatever.

The literature of the shakta sect is extensive. Many of its texts are widely known and utilized. They include the following: *kularnava*,

*kamadhenu, kubjika, tantraraja, varahi, nila, jnanarnava, gayatri, yogini, rudra yamala* and the *bhuttashuddhi* tantras. There are many, many more. The *kama sutra*, *kama ratna* and other texts concerning sexual relations and techniques can also be included among shakta literature. One of the most recent and comprehensive tantric texts is called the *Maha Nirvana Tantra* (supreme liberation of enlightenment). It covers a wide range of subjects, covering metaphysics, philosophy, everyday life, as well as the spiritual path. It deals with the creation and destruction of the universe, mode of liberation from ignorance, nature of Shiva and Shakti, the worship of Brahman, origin and worship of devas (celestial beings), description of the various levels of being (lokas) and many other subjects. It is mainly orientated towards practise, and deals extensively with rituals, mantras, yantras, japa, yoga and other forms of practice (sadhana). It also deals with everyday life and prescribes rules for harmonizing an individual's interaction with society.

Traditionally, there are 64 texts of the shakta sect, ranging from the *Mahamaya Shambhar* to the *Devimata Tantra*. These texts seem to deal with many things that would appear rather strange to the average person of today. They deal with rituals carried out in graveyards (in the *Yogini Balashambhar*), methods of fulfilling desires (in the *Brahmayamala*, *Vishnuyamala*, etc.), as well as practices for experiencing and knowing the supreme (in the *Brahmi Tantra*, *Maheshwari Tantra*, etc.). Many of them are concerned with magic of all types. That is, methods of influencing and controlling the internal and external world through the power of invocation, mantras, etc. A number of the books are intended primarily for monks (sannasins), these including the *Purvamnaya*, *Paschimamnaya Tantras*, etc. The subjects that these tantras cover are vast and many of them would be easily open to misuse and abuse. If practised by the wrong people, they could be misapplied and used for selfish, destructive ends; this is the realm of what is commonly called 'black magic'. For this reason most of these texts have remained secret, for if they were openly published, they could lead to more harm than good. The prime aim of tantra is enlightenment and these other subjects, if performed for selfish ends, would merely lead one from the prime experience of life.

There is nothing to stop a shakta also being a shaivite, for Shiva and Shakti are intimately related. In practice, the main difference between shaivism and shaktism is merely the emphasis. While the shaivites lay greater stress on the unmoving, all pervading consciousness of Shiva, the shaktas lay more stress on the dynamic aspect of existence or consciousness called Shakti. Of course, they are really concerned with the same thing, and one can worship both simultaneously. If you prefer to direct your spiritual practices to either one of them, then this automatically implies acceptance and thereby worship of the other. Within the realm of Shiva-Shakti is the entire range of possible human existence. So what is to prevent worship of both?

We can go further: every deity of every religion, all the deities of all tantric sects and in fact any deity that has ever been conceived is no more than one of the multitudinous forms of Shakti (or Shiva). There is nothing in the manifested universe that is not an expression of Shakti. So, in a sense, all religions and sects come under the banner of the shaktas. Of course, the shaktas of India have developed some characteristically far out spiritual practices, but this does not detract from the essential universality of the shaktas. All is Shakti and therefore everything can be regarded and worshipped as Shakti.

We want to end this section by emphasizing that the ancient people of the world were fully aware of the power of spiritual practices orientated towards Shakti. Let us take an example. The ancient Egyptians, like tantrics past and present, knew that the manifested world is the key, the door to the beyond. Instead of calling the power in the world Shakti, they called it Isis. Only the name is different; the basis is the same. It was stated: "I, Isis, am all that has been, all that is and all that shall be; no mortal man (man of low awareness) hath ever unveiled me."

It is only through spiritual practices that Isis, or Shakti, can be unveiled. It is only by raising one's level of awareness that one can pierce the veil (maya) that surrounds Isis. Shakti was known by other names in other parts of the world, for the ancient sages knew that she is the means to transcend. She is still the means in the present day.

### Saura sect

This sect worships the sun (surya). Though they may appear to worship the physical sun, the real object of worship is that of which the sun is but a symbol: the absolute (Brahman). It is a fitting symbol, for in the same way that the material sun illuminates and sustains the solar system, so the supreme illuminator sustains and is the source of everything seen and unseen, known and unknown. The followers of this sect regard the sun as an emblem of the absolute. Furthermore, the material sun is an indicator of the power of shakti operating throughout the universe, and it is a symbol of the light of consciousness of Shiva.

This sect has its roots in the depths of time, for the sun has always been venerated by people throughout the world. Many people have regarded it as mere nature worship, without really understanding the deeper significance. Yet the sun is an obvious nature created symbol of power. Even those who lacked sophistication and who perhaps lived in primitive conditions could, like everyone else, feel the power of the sun. They could gaze in awe at the rising sun, feel its power and feel a strange stirring within them, a feeling that made them grasp a glimmer of the immense power of the cosmic or spiritual sun shining directly through their inner being. No religious system is really necessary.

The followers of sun worship in India are found mainly in Assam, Orissa and Bengal. In fact, there is a wonderful and world famous temple in Konarak, Orissa which is dedicated to Surya, the sun and all it represents. In certain bygone civilizations, the spiritual sun was also personified: Mithra by the ancient Persians, Apollo by the Greeks, and so on. In fact, it would seem that many religious traditions have worshipped the spiritual sun in a personified form. However, in modern times this has been heavily disguised and people usually fail to realize that a deity or form has its roots in sun worship. Without the material sun, nothing could live. In the same way, nothing could exist without Brahman, the light of consciousness (Shiva) and the power of manifestation and sustenance (Shakti). Worship of the sun is an obvious, yet beautiful way of venerating the transcendental through means of a symbol. This sect has almost faded away as a distinct sect in present day India.

### Ganapatya sect

The followers of this sect venerate the chubby elephant deity known as *Ganapati* or *Ganesha*. He is the son of Shiva and Parvati (Shakti) and represents the understanding that comes through the mind. In other words, it is through consciousness and its manifestation (Shiva-Shakti) that one gains mental understanding.

Ganesha is an aspect of the absolute and is widely worshipped throughout India in almost all Hindu rites and ceremonies. The worshippers invoke Lord Ganesha before commencing any important undertaking, for nothing can be achieved without mental understanding. This applies to everyday duties as well as enlightenment. Ganesha is the controller of all accomplishments. Without the grace of understanding, nothing can be achieved. It is for this reason that he is such an important deity, and why a specific sect has arisen around him. Without mental understanding how can anything be initiated or successfully carried out?

Followers of this sect are more prevalent in western India. Huge processions are entirely devoted to the veneration of Ganesha. However, this sect has really ceased to be a distinct tantric group as such and has been absorbed into the mainstream of Hinduism.

Ganesha is traditionally regarded to be the scribe of many of the important scriptures of India, including the tantras. That is, when Shiva, Shakti, Krishna or any other deities, together with rishis, seers, etc. discoursed, Ganesha wrote everything down. He represents the higher understanding that must accompany all scriptures before they can be written, and before they can be utilized by the reader. In fact, Ganesha is invoked at the beginning of many of the tantric texts; the very first words are: 'Shree Ganeshaya Namaha', which means 'Salutations to the blessed Ganesha'. This is done to encourage correct understanding by both the writer and the reader. There is also a well-known tantric text called the *Ganesha Tantra*.

This system of tantra is simple, direct and yet sublime and it can lead to spiritual heights. It is by invoking and focussing one's powers on mental understanding (personified by Ganesha) that one can actually bring about a high level of understanding in oneself. All that is required is the overwhelming need to know ... a need that springs from the very depths of

one's heart. This is the same as worshipping Ganesha, providing one understands the significance of Ganesha. From this understanding will come many other things, including illumination and bliss.

### **Tantric centres**

There is a well-known story concerning Shiva and his consort *Sati* (an aspect of Shakti), concerning the origin of the traditional centre of tantra. There are many versions but the following is a brief summary of its main theme. Sati was the daughter of Daksha (Prajapati). Much against the wishes of Daksha, who intensely disliked Shiva, Sati yearned for and eventually married Shiva. At a later time, Daksha held a vast worship and sacrificial ceremony (*yajna*) to which all the deities were invited, all that is except Shiva and Sati. Sati came to hear of this through sage Narada, and she was very angry at not being invited. After much pleading she finally persuaded Shiva to allow her to attend. When she reached the ceremony she immediately became involved in an argument with her father regarding the non-invitation of her husband and herself. Her father said that they were not invited because Shiva was so dirty, never wore clothes, was always adorned with a number of snakes and was generally unrepresentable to the other deities. Sati became so angry that she jumped into the fire and killed herself. Shiva heard of this, and in a furious mood went to the meeting, caused havoc, disrupted the sacrifice, picked up the remains of Sati's body and flew off into the celestial regions. He caused terrific disturbances among the deities and nothing could be done to calm him down. Eventually, however, Vishnu, flying on his garuda bird, sliced Sati's body into various pieces with a discus, the weapon with which he is associated. The different parts of the body fell in various places throughout the Indian subcontinent. The places where they fell are said to be where tantric centres subsequently grew. Of course the story is very symbolic, but we will not discuss this here.

The tantric centres are known as *pithasthanas* (holy places), which are considered sacred by tantric worshippers and it is said that temples to Shiva and Shakti have been erected there. The number of these holy places is not certain. Some sources say that there are 4, 50, 51,

64,108, etc. However, as a matter of interest, it is said that the following places are included in the important holy tantric centres of India: Nasik (Maharashtra), Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), Brindavan (Uttar Pradesh), Kalighat (Calcutta), Amarnath (Kashmir), Mathila (Bihar), Ratanabali (Madras), Prayag (Allahabad), Puri (Orissa), Benares (Uttar Pradesh), Bahula (Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Oddiyana (in the valley of the Swat River - now in West Pakistan) and Jalandhara (between India and Tibet). There are many more; these are merely a few examples. There is much uncertainty and confusion about the actual sites and one will receive various accounts from different people. This shows that the centres are not so important with regard to practice of tantra, and that a person can create a tantric centre in his own home. Though there is some good reason for having sacred centres, the essence of tantra is surely to have one's own sacred shrine and to worship the holy centres in one's own body.

### **Tantra - the scripture of the Dark Ages**

The tantric texts give elaborate descriptions of the different eras of the manifested world. It is said that the universe is manifested for the duration of one day of Brahma, and that it is reabsorbed in an unmanifested form for the duration of one night of Brahma. Brahma is the personified form of the principle of creation. The day of Brahma is called a *kalpa* and is said to last for 4,320,000,000 years. This period is further divided into *mahayugas* (great ages) which periodically repeat themselves over and over again. Each of these mahayugas is further divided into four *yugas* (eras):

1. *Satya Yuga*: the Golden Age or the era of truth
2. *Treta Yuga*: the Silver Age
3. *Dwapara Yuga*: the Copper Age
4. *Kali Yuga*: the Iron Age or the Dark Age

According to tantra as well as many other systems throughout the world, we are currently living in the Dark Age (Kali Yuga). This age is reputed to have started from 3120 years before the Christian era. This period that we are now living in is said to be an era when harmonious living falls to an all time low, a period when people are almost totally out of balance with themselves and the environment.

You must judge for yourself if this is true or not.

It is said that each of the four ages has its own type of scripture to lead each individual to higher awareness if he has the aspiration. The tantric scriptures are regarded as ideal for the present Kali Yuga. In the *Kularnava Tantra* it states: "In the Satya Yuga the form of scripture is revelation (*shruti*). In the Treta Yuga, memorized scriptures (*smriti*) are to be followed. The scriptures of the Dwapara Yuga are the *puranas* (scriptures in the form of myths), while the *agama* (tantra) is the most suitable for the Kali Yuga."

Actually the scripture of the Satya Age does not lie in any book - it is the direct revelatory experience by the individual. Books would not be necessary whether in the Satya Yuga of the universe or the Satya Yuga of an individual's life - the point in one's life when one begins to tune in with higher spheres is the Satya Yuga for each of us. Under these conditions there is no need for any scriptures, there is no need to rely on other people's words, for one will have direct experience of the meaning of all scriptures for oneself. This is the meaning of *shruti*, the scripture of the age of truth.

In the Treta Yuga, people are said to be less able to comprehend, experience and appreciate the higher realms of knowledge and awareness. For this reason, it is necessary that the experiences of seers be written down as scriptures and remembered. This will act as guidance for any spiritual aspirant and people in general. The scriptures include all the scriptures that have been written down by every religion. In India, these type of scriptures are called *smriti* (remembered knowledge). They are secondhand knowledge as opposed to direct personal spiritual experience. These texts would include the Koran, the Bible, the Upanishads, the Dhammapada and many other traditional texts.

Thus tantra has fully realized that different periods of time require different methods of spiritual instruction and practice to attain enlightenment. Furthermore, the explanations and presentations of specific texts are suitable only for a particular era, after which the texts must be presented in another form. Of course, the final aim of cosmic realization is the same, but the techniques and concepts must be

taught in a way that is acceptable and most easily understood in the prevailing social rules and conditions. Tantra has never said that any of its texts is the final statement on spiritual life. It has always said that the texts are only suitable for a certain time, after which they become redundant. As far as we know, no other spiritual system has ever said this. The tantras realize that the attitudes of man and environmental conditions change with time. Therefore, they realize the obvious: that the instructions and methods in spiritual texts must also change. It is in this way that they will help man not hinder him. The means is different, but the aim is the same.

New tantric texts have arisen throughout the ages and new tantric texts will continue to appear as the present Kali Yuga proceeds. These texts will be recorded as seers have intuitional insights into the changing needs of man.

#### Unity of Shiva and Shakti

In the following discussion we are specifically talking about the shakta and shaivite sects, with the emphasis on the shaktas.

Shiva represents the unmanifest and Shakti the manifest. Shiva is the formless and Shakti is the formed. Shiva is consciousness and Shakti is energy, not only in the cosmos as a whole, but in each and every individual. Shiva is the supreme consciousness pervading each individual and Shakti is the power that manifests the potential contained within the consciousness in different manifested centres within man and the universe. The roots of Shakti are in Shiva. Though one is manifested and the other unmanifested, they are in the ultimate sense one and the same. One is the principle of changelessness and the other is the principle of change. Shakti is change within changelessness and Shiva is changelessness as the root of change. This relationship seems contradictory in logical terms, yet the experience of perfect oneness and unity of the changeless and the changeable, the dissolution of duality, is the aim of tantra as well as yoga. There is ultimately no difference between Shiva and Shakti, but this is not realizable except in states of higher awareness. And this realization transforms life into a source of wonder and joy.

Everything that you see around you, everything that is physical, psychic, mental or



whatever, is Shakti both individually and collectively. This includes your mind and body. It includes every tree, every dog, every stone, the sun. Shakti is everything. All these manifestations have come from the underlying substratum, Shiva. The aim of tantra is to retread, in a sense, the path of manifestation, so that Shakti is the vehicle to reunite the individual with Shiva and know the supreme experience, samadhi, nirvana or whatever you want to call it. Tantra aims to lead you on the path back to union of Shiva and Shakti, union of the individual being (jiva) with the param-atman (supreme).

Tantra says that Shakti, or the power of creating separate centres of manifestation (i.e. objects, individuals, etc.) is in essence consciousness itself (Shiva). However, the power of the phenomenal world around us veils itself (through maya), and it is not obvious at ordinary states of awareness that it is indeed consciousness. Each and everything in the created universe is no more than manifested consciousness. But strange though it seems, there is no change in the nature or content of consciousness, even though everything comes from it. In the *Ishavasya Upanishad* it says:

*That is full, this is full.  
From full, the full is taken,  
the full has come.  
If you take out the full from the full,  
the full alone remains.*

The great ancient sage of Europe, Plotinus, said exactly the same thing: "The one is every thing and also not every thing. It is not every thing because it is the source of every thing. It is transcendently every thing, because there every thing is . . . , or, more exactly, is not yet but is to be."

These two quotations are the essence of tantra and every religion. Don't worry if you don't understand their meanings, for what they are trying to convey defies intellectual speculation.

Consciousness is an inexhaustible source of everything in the universe, yet ever transcending the things which come out of it. Consciousness never ceases to be what it was, is, and will be. From Shiva comes the universe as a whole and everything individually through the power of Shakti. . . yet Shiva remains ever

the same. At the same time, Shiva and Shakti, in the highest sense, are one and the same. This is the eternal mystery, the eternal wonder, which ever defies description. It is far better to count every stone on the beaches of the world than try to attempt to describe the impossible.

Tantra regards the material universe as the form, pattern, or expression of the totality. According to tantra, both the manifested and unmanifested, the background and the projection, the film and the screen are real. In fact, to tell a person that the things around him are unreal is nonsensical for his personal experience in normal levels of awareness tells him otherwise. Also from the point of view of tantric, yogic or any other spiritual practice, the world must be regarded as real. One must use the body, the mind and other aspects of the world to know that which is beyond. If one regards the mind and body as unreal, as do some systems, then how can one practise spiritual techniques, how can one practise with things that are unreal? Of course, this is a ridiculous point of view in normal levels of experience. Many other systems regard the universe as unreal because it changes. Though it is really no more than a matter of definition, tantra says that everything, whether it changes (Shakti) or is changeless (Shiva) is actually real. Both are no more than two different aspects of the totality.

Shiva is father (*pita*) of all that moves and is motionless. He is said to be naked - clothed in open space (*digambara* - clothed in everything in the universe). Nowadays, he is usually depicted wearing a tiger skin and portrayed as holding a trident which represents the three qualities of nature - *tamas* (inertia and darkness), *rajas* (activity) and *sattwa* (light and harmony) of which he is the eternal master. He is said to ride a bull called Nandi. Shiva contains within himself the seeds of creation. He is symbolized by the shivalingam. He is totally unconditioned, in a continual state of nirvikalpa samadhi, with total absence of duality, of this and that. Shiva is the king of all yogis (*Yogeshwara*) for he represents the supreme experience. He is also known as *Kuleshana*, lord of the kaulas, those who have reached the highest stage of tantra (*Kaulachara*).

Shiva also means many other things, in different moods or aspects. Don't be confused by these. Sometimes, for example, he is called

Rudra, the destroyer, who seems to be more like Shakti in nature (the dissolving aspect). But the important thing to understand or at least appreciate is that there is really no contradiction between regarding Shiva as the inactive, passive personification of consciousness (as we have already emphasized) and also regarding him as a more active personification in the form of Rudra, the destroyer. This merely further emphasizes that the active and the inactive, the manifest and the unmanifest are really one and the same. All these deities, Shiva, Shakti or whatever, really represent exactly the same thing: the absolute. Only the symbol, the representation is different. And why not? If you wish, you can create your own deity and it will be as valid as any other. This widespread worship of vast numbers of deities indicates the incredible complexity (yet such simplicity when understood) and tolerance of the all embracing spiritual climate of India.

Shakti is known by many names and aspects. She is known as *prana* when associated with the organization and growth of matter in all forms of life. She is known as *kundalini* - the power that lies dormant in everything, including man, and which can be unleashed through yogic and tantric practices, as well as all other spiritual practices. She is known as *Kali*, the dissolver (not the destroyer) of the world, who withdraws everything into her womb at the end of the allotted life span. She is known and depicted in many pictures and statues as *Parvati*, the epitome of the loving, faithful wife of Shiva. She is called the primordial power - *Adya*, the universal mother - *Ishwari*, the consort of *Ishwara*, the lord of the universe. She is also known as *Avidya rupini* (the form of ignorance) for it is she who produces ignorance and individuality. Conversely, she is also known as *Vidya rupini* (the form of knowledge) for she is the means to removing bondage and knowing liberation or enlightenment. As the *Kularnava Tantra* says: "By that which one falls, so one will raise oneself."

In other words, she is the mind of each of us, which can either enslave us or free us. She is known as *Maya* (the creator of illusion) for it is through her power that one fails to see unity and know higher awareness. At the same time, it is through the power of Shakti that the world is experienced. Without Shakti, you would not be able to experience the world, for it is she

who creates the mind and body. It is through Shakti that Shiva can experience himself. Shakti is also *Parabrahman*, the absolute, when she becomes Brahman at the time when Shiva and Shakti unite. Endless different forms of her are worshipped in India - *Uma*, *Gauri*, *Durga* and so on. Her forms are infinite, for there is no end to her power and the things that she manifests. Her forms are as numerous as the reflections of the moon. She is continually active, creating, sustaining and then reabsorbing or dissolving everything into Shiva, only to be recreated. This is a continual process without end.

Remember, as we have already pointed out, the concept of Shiva and Shakti is not confined to India. We have already said that tantra is universal and indeed it is. For example, in a book of ancient Greece called the *Phaedrus* by Plato it says: "What is on earth (Shakti) is merely the resemblance and shadow of something that is in a higher sphere, a resplendent thing that remains in an unchangeable condition (Shiva)."

This clearly illustrates the principle of Shiva and Shakti. There are many other examples. Consider the ancient *Gnostics*. These were really a European tantric sect, which interpreted Christianity with far deeper meaning than understood by most people. They interpreted it in the light of higher experience. But let us not get distracted; we want to point out the similarities between Shiva and Shakti and this ancient system of gnosis (enlightenment). One of the Gnostic mystics, Simon the Magus, is reputed to have said the following: "The universal eons (cyclic periods of creation as given in tantra) consist of two branches, without beginning or end, which spring up from one root (the absolute) . . . the invisible power and the unknowable silence. One of these branches is manifested from above and is the universal consciousness ordering all things and designated male (surely this is Shiva); the other branch is female and is the producer of all things (Shakti)."

The text continues, but we will not. The Gnostics even divided human beings into three distinct groups, which is exactly the same as tantra. The lowest group, in terms of awareness, are those who worship and only know of the existence of the material world. This group is called *pashu*, or instinctive man in tantra.

The second group include those who worship an underlying reality without experience, but with blind belief. This is similar though not exactly the same as the second classification of tantra, namely *veera*, or heroic man; the third group of humans are those who know and live in higher awareness. In tantra these are known as *divya*, or divine man. So the ancient system of gnosticism is fundamentally tantric in nature. There are many other systems in the world that are very similar. These will not be discussed here through lack of space.

Energy, including matter and consciousness are functioning together in the cosmos as well as in each and every human being. This combination gives rise to the world we see around us; it gives rise to time and place. Energy is controlled by consciousness, and consciousness cannot express itself except through energy. In a tantric book by Shankaracharya called *Saundarya Lahari* it says: "How can Shiva function without Shakti?" Therefore, tantra says that to merge with consciousness one must use Shakti as the means.

There is a supreme experience where Shiva and Shakti no longer exist as separate entities. Some call it Brahman, others call it 'not this, not this' to show that it is inexpressible. Others say that it is one without a second. It is the state of nirvana, samadhi, perfect oneness and so many other words. This is the stage when Shiva merges so closely with Shakti that they become one. They embrace each other so tightly they cease to be separate. This is the meaning of many of the sculptures of personified male and female Shiva and Shakti in India. It depicts the state of being, the enraptured embrace where self-identity and separateness disappears. This is the divine embrace.

### **Why worship a deity?**

In the minds of modern man, worship is often regarded as superstition. Because of misunderstanding, people no longer grasp the meaning and reason for worship, and the purpose of worship is so simple, yet profound. It is to focus one's whole attention on something to the exclusion of all other distractions. This brings about loss of ego and transcendence.

by absorbing oneself in an object with total attention it is possible to transcend the limitations of the ego; it is possible to go beyond the normal fetters of human under-

standing and identification. It is possible, through worship, to know the experience of higher consciousness. So remember this point well: worship is a means to an end. Worship of a deity or anything else should not be regarded as an end in itself. This is the mistake that countless people have made. They worship deities without understanding. They worship blindly and dogmatically and don't realize that the worship is a means to something far greater. For this reason, their worship does not take them very far. It may help a little but it will not lead to high levels of awareness.

There is another important point. One can concentrate on a deity or a symbol or anything else without a feeling of devotion. Many people in fact do this and gain wonderful experiences. But at the same time, concentration is far easier, effective and overwhelming if the object of concentration, of absorption, is also an object of devotion or worship. This, in a sense, transforms a 'third rate fuel into a first class, high octane fuel'. Worship or devotion transforms the spiritual practice into a far more powerful form of experience.

Tantra does not aim to make you consider a stone idol as the truth. Tantra regards worship of any relative aspect of existence as the means to break through into the experience of the real, as a means to fuller harmony and knowledge.

Anything that you choose can be regarded as a form of Shakti (or Shiva, as you wish). Of course, this will be a slight divergence from traditional forms of Shakti as known in India. But the scope and benevolence of tantra will allow this extension of its boundaries. Such is its flexibility.

Tantra in the shakta form asks you to regard everything that you see as a form of Shakti. Even though you have had no higher experience one should try to regard them as such. One should try to regard all pleasant and beautiful things as Shakti, as well as things that are normally classified bad such as disease, famine and war. One should try to see a reason or sense or divinity even in things that appear to be destructive. It is the seeming contradiction and unfairness of the world that cause most people to be in a continual state of mental imbalance. They see death and illness and so many other distressing afflictions of the world as being unjust or unwarranted. They are

continually torn between ugliness and beauty. They see strife side by side with peace and this leads to mental confusion. Even on an individual basis, a person is sometimes happy, sometimes unhappy; sometimes up, sometimes down; sometimes healthy, sometimes unhealthy. Tantra says you should try to see all these things as part of the cosmic process of creation, sustenance and dissolution. Regard all the pleasant and unpleasant things in the world as no more than the power and justice of Shakti. Instead of seeing bad in destruction and good in creation regard them all as facets of the power of Shakti. Remember, that for things to be created, they must also be destroyed. For things to be pleasant there must also be unpleasantness. It is not easy to accept these things when they affect a person directly, but one should try more and more to see everything as being no more than change brought about by Shakti. Good and bad are only human concepts. The more one is able to accept the world as it is, without making value judgements, the more calm and contented the mind becomes. One starts to tune in with the environment and to see harmony between processes where before one saw only disharmony. One begins to see unity instead of disunity and becomes receptive to cosmic vibrations and in turn to higher knowledge and bliss.

In the *Mahanirvana Tantra* it says that Brahman, the absolute, is known in samadhi by those people who look upon all things alike, who are above all extremes, such as heat and cold, good and bad, etc. who are devoid of all wandering thoughts and who are free of ignorance and doubts regarding the nature of their body and the Self. It clearly emphasizes that one should try to see harmony in everything in life without exception.

Tantra makes it clear that consciousness, Shiva, can be known through concentration and devotion to the manifestations of the world in the form of Shakti, which are really the embodiment of Shiva. Most people need a form or an object as a point of worship or concentration; and tantra says that this is perfectly acceptable and the way to the experience of the formless, objectless consciousness. Tantra says worship, absorb yourself in any object, Kali, Durga as you wish. There is no Shakti without Shiva and so one automatically leads to the other. This is the

reason for the deification of some aspect of existence, no matter how obscure or unlikely.

According to tantric texts such as the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, even Shakti herself in the form of Parvati was confused about the reason for worship of her many forms. She asked Shiva how worship could lead anyone to the experience of Brahman or the supreme experience. Shiva answered: "You are the supreme manifestation (*para prakriti*) of Brahman, the supreme consciousness (*param-atman*) and from you has come the entire universe. You are its mother. You are the origin of all manifestation. You are the form of everything. Your root is in Brahman who is actionless. It is you, moved by desire, who create, protect and withdraw this world with, all that moves and is motionless. Therefore, by worshipping you your devotees will surely reach the Supreme."

Thus by concentrating on or worshipping any form of Shakti, the individual is in fact worshipping Brahman. This is also widely mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Krishna says: "In whatever way men approach me, so do I reward them. My path men tread in different ways (that is, they choose different methods and objects of worship)." (4:11)

An individual can concentrate on anything from a candle to a deity. If the concentration is sufficiently powerful and constant, then the practice can lead to higher awareness. In the *Agni Parana* it says:

*By the worship of Rudra one becomes Rudra himself.  
By the worship of Surya one becomes Surya himself.  
By the worship of Vishnu one becomes Vishnu himself.  
By the worship of Shakti one becomes Shakti herself.*

In the *Bible* Christ says: "None shall know the kingdom of heaven (Brahman or the supreme experience) but through me." These are not the exact words but the meaning is clear: worship of one thing (in this case Christ) will lead to something beyond. Thus blind worship has come to mean and be understood as blind superstitious faith, but its implications are far deeper and profound and not what most people think it is.

Enjoyment and enlightenment

This is a continuation of what we have just said in the previous section. If everything that we

see around us is no more than Shakti, the manifested form of Shiva, then everything that we see and utilize in life can be regarded with a feeling of reverence. Every act that we do in life can be transformed into a form of worship by merely regarding it as divinity incarnated. In the broadest sense there is really no exception, and one can feel or express veneration whether eating food or practising yogic techniques. There is ultimately no difference. This is the essence of tantra, especially the shakta form.

Tantra is called *Bhuktimuktikaranika* - the system of enjoyment and enlightenment or liberation through experience. It does not see any rigid demarcation or distinction between worldly or spiritual life. It sees everything as part of everything. In this sense it is different to many other systems, which tend to completely dissociate worldly and spiritual life, often inferring that enjoyment in life is detrimental to progress along the path to higher awareness. Tantra, on the other hand, says that the world is here to be experienced, so experience it, know it, and eventually gain enlightenment. Tantra is possibly the most understanding and least dogmatic system ever devised. It is a system of joy, not a system of sour, dour, narrow and tyrannical restrictions. It is a system of bliss, from top to bottom, from a material and physical sense to a spiritual sense. It aims to give the individual higher awareness here and now in every action.

#### **Pravritti and nivritti paths**

Scientifically, evolution is defined as the process where more refined life forms (vehicles of consciousness) grow and develop from the less refined. That is, more advanced life forms arise from lower forms, the gross produces the subtle. This is the theory of scientific evolution. Tantra and Indian thought in general has a completely different concept of evolution. Tantra regards the refinement of life forms (that is, scientific evolution) as merely the pattern of the manifested world. It is the blueprint, the design. It is not the source of life as we know it. The real meaning of evolution, written about by Indian sages thousands of years before Darwin, is the process of Shakti arising or evolving out of Shiva, of the material evolving out of the immaterial. That is, in a deeper sense, each

and every life form is not the result of the unfoldment of previous life forms, every form of life has evolved from the underlying source of existence called consciousness. The subtle does not evolve from the gross (scientific evolution) but the gross evolves out of the subtle (spiritual evolution). Consider a movie film. It has a story that unfolds from the beginning to the end; this can be compared to scientific evolution. Each scene is related to the next but at the same time the story in the film is not the source of the pictures. The source of the picture is elsewhere, namely on the film strip. The film strip can be compared, though grossly, to consciousness. It is a projection of the film on to the screen from the film strip that tantra and other Indian systems regard as evolution, not the flow of the story itself.

This evolution (in the tantric sense) or manifestation of the material world, including life, is in two directions: the outward and the inward. In the outward direction (termed *pravritti*) Shakti plunges downwards and produces the world of forms. In the inward direction (termed *nivritti*) Shakti moves in the opposite direction from the gross to the more subtle. The further Shakti moves outwards and downwards, the deeper is the veil of ignorance. The greater the inward and upward movement of Shakti, the greater the awareness, the knowledge or the grace (*anugraha*) of divinity.

There is an exact parallel concept in Taoism. Shakti is known as Teh which is divided into yin (*nivritti*) and yang (*pravritti*). Yin is the tendency to return to the source, to withdraw and concentrate itself and merge itself with the substratum of consciousness. Yang is expansion, action and creation of all things. These are two rhythms - the yang or action and going forth, of flowering potential; and yin is the retracing, the return to the centre.

The aim of tantric practice is to reverse the downward and outward movement of Shakti and retrace one's steps along the inward and upward path to higher awareness. The aim is to reverse the direction of evolution and return to the source: to reunite Shakti with Shiva.

Tantra divides people into two basic groups:

1. Those who follow the *pravritti* path, the path of extroversion, the path of the world, of activity and of sensual enjoyment.

2. Those who follow the nivritti path, the path for those who want to return to their source and know their real self.

Most people are ideally suited to the pravritti path. Tantra caters for both groups of people and prescribes special practices for each group. The path to enlightenment is first of all to follow the path of pravritti: to exhaust and fulfil all interest in the things of the world. In this manner one will progress naturally to the nivritti path. No force or effort will be required - it will arise spontaneously. It is the nivritti path that eventually leads to experience of the infinite. But most people are not ready for the nivritti path and must first of all tread the pravritti path and enjoy life in all its facets to the full. The practices of tantra are designed to lead the individual smoothly through both paths to the supreme experience. Tantra recommends those practices that are most suitable for the personality and stage of development of the individual. It realizes clearly that there is no point in forcing the path of introspection 'down the throats' of people who are not ready or who are completely disinclined towards it. Such is the depth of understanding and breadth of tantra. Its aim is to lead everyone to enlightenment but in a natural manner that does not build up complexes and do more harm than good.

#### **Ritualistic worship**

Much of tantra is concerned with worship in a ritualistic form using incantation (mantras) and magic circles or altars (mandalas). This is not done for superstitious reasons or in a blind manner. There is a very good reason for this form of spiritual practice, namely, eventual transcendence. All religious systems use this method, but generally the aim of ritualistic worship is lost sight of and it degenerates into mere automatic and meaningless actions. Because of this, little or no benefits result and in fact many people eventually come to regard ritual as mere ignorance, which it is indeed in most cases. There must always be a clear understanding of the purpose of ritual, to know that it is a means to go beyond. This is a point that tantra constantly bears in mind.

Modern man tends to scoff at rites and worship as mere superstition, and because there is no basis for worship in modern scientific thought. But there are stranger

things in this world than science can even dream about, let alone study. As Shakespeare said: "There are more things in heaven and earth . . . than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Tantra also knows this, for it utilizes systematic ritual with awareness as a means to contact the things that science cannot contact, even with its delicate and complicated instruments. The rites of tantra work, if they are done correctly, and the proof is not in books or theories but in personal experience.

Rites are utilized for invoking and tuning in with levels of being - psychic, etheric, etc. which are beyond normal perception and the detection of current scientific instruments. Actually this is not quite true, for recent experiments in various countries, including Russia, Bulgaria, etc. are beginning to detect and measure levels of activity and being beyond man's normal perception. Scientific experiments are clearly showing the reality of human psychic fields, pranic pathways, telepathy, clairvoyance and other so-called 'unscientific' phenomena. (For further details refer to *Psychic Discoveries behind the Iron Curtain*). Tantra aims at tuning in with all these different levels of manifestation - this is called *magic* (not magic associated with conjuring tricks on a stage, but contacting and utilizing the cosmic forces within and without). These forces are beyond the range of understanding, perception and knowledge. If you don't believe in these different levels of being, then don't . . . find out for yourself through personal experience. One of the methods of contacting these forces is through ceremonial magic or ritualistic worship.

The reader should again remember that magic or rites have been and still are an integral part of all forms of religions and mystical systems throughout the world. The explanation in rational or scientific terms is not important; they bring results and experiences, and if one experiences something then it must be so, no matter what science says. What does one believe: one's own experience or a scientific statement that says it cannot be so? You can choose as you wish, but we prefer personal experience as being the most important.

Rites are concerned with worship, set actions, mantras, mudras and other actions. These make the mind calm, receptive and one-pointed. This is conducive to the experience of meditation, which will transform one's

understanding and relationship with life, oneself and other people. Thus we repeat again that rituals are the means to something else.

The object of worship is usually a deity. This represents the whole purpose of the practice. It is a symbol of that which is to be invoked. In a sense, it is the power incarnated. This symbol represents Shakti, the power of a particular aspect of existence. This Shakti is to be invoked by feeling or devotion (*bhava*), concentration (*dharana*), incantations (*mantras*), symbolic gestures (*mudras*) as well as other practices. This brings about a change in one's being. One becomes receptive to that power symbolized by the deity. This is difficult for most people to appreciate without experience, so we will illustrate with an analogy. Consider a string of a musical instrument. When it is plucked it can bring about a change in one's feeling or being. A symbol of Shakti can do the same thing, but it does not merely bring about a change in one's feelings ... it also brings about a change in one's level of awareness. This is not a very good example, for the experience we are trying to explain is far greater than any analogy.

Tantra aims to transform every action in life into a ritual, so that the individual performs every action and thought with a feeling of worship and awareness. The action of bathing, dressing, sitting for worship, offering various symbolic sacrifices, sexual relations, stages of development from inception in the womb, birth to marriage, etc. are transformed into worship.

The aim of tantra is to unleash the cosmic energy in man, so that he rises to higher levels of awareness. This is often done by self-identification with a particular devata, which represents or personifies a particular cosmic force. Such is the power of mental concentration. Perfect one-pointedness and merging of one's entire mind flow towards the devata leads to transcendence, something that is totally beyond the devata itself.

Tantra is a system which tries to make the individual more aware of every action and every thought. Every ritual requires attention, whether it is a set ceremonial ritual of worship, or an everyday chore or duty. Each ritual has to be done with attention. They cannot be done mechanically or unconsciously. They have to be done with awareness, which eventually

leads to meditation. Tantra worship is not confined to the temple. It is done from the moment one gets out of bed in the morning to the moment one returns to bed in the night. Its purpose is to intensify awareness. It leads the aspirant to a continuous stream of meditation throughout the day.

#### The mandala and yantra

A *mandala* is a magic circle, in which one performs tantric rites. It is a focus of cosmic powers. During worship and other tantric practices a mandala becomes the centre of the universe in a symbolic sense and in a far deeper sense beyond normal comprehension. A tantric mandala is usually laid out according to a fixed plan; in fact the making of the mandala is a tantric rite in itself.

As we have already pointed out under the heading entitled 'Tantra - The Universal System', everything in the manifested world is in essence a mandala. Each and every object is a focal point of consciousness. There is not one thing that is not a mandala. Everything is a point of manifestation of Shakti... an expression of the underlying consciousness. It is for this reason that deep concentration on anything, and we mean anything, can bring about higher awareness and realization of the deeper nature of that object. But almost every person lacks sufficient power of concentration to do this. Instead, the power of the mind is dissipated in all directions. But the power is there to be used when the individual is ready; it only needs to be tapped. It is for this reason that devotion is an important, though not indispensable, part of tantric meditative practices. It increases, supercharges the power of concentration. Concentration becomes far more powerful and piercing when it is backed up by emotional feeling or reverence.

Each person is a mandala, each thought is a mandala, each deity, each chakra ... each and everything. The guru too is a mandala - a very powerful one in fact. This may be a little far away from the normally accepted meaning of the word mandala, but as far as we are concerned the guru is indeed a mandala. He in a sense, draws down cosmic consciousness, acting as a magnet through which this consciousness expresses itself most obviously and clearly. He radiates the inner light of consciousness to everyone ... he glows with it. It is

through the guru that cosmic powers are unleashed, attracted and transmitted to the disciple. This is the grace of the guru mandala.

Sexual union is also a powerful mandala. That is why it can be a means to meditation. When a man and a woman make love, then they are creating a magic circle, a mandala.

The definitions that we have given are wide. For the sake of tradition and simplicity, we will define a mandala more specifically as a centre or special place, possibly consecrated by special rites, which is used for tantric practices. This means, when you are doing your yoga practices, you are really creating a mandala, a magic circle. You are creating a centre and trying to tune in with, invoke and harmonize with higher consciousness. Do you realize this? You are really performing a rite when you do asanas, pranayama and other practices. Of course, there is probably no worship involved as such, but it is nevertheless a form of rite. Remember this point if you have a tendency to scoff at rituals.

What is a yantra? A yantra is a specific form of mandala, which consists of geometrical shapes and figures, and sometimes diagrams of deities (especially in the Buddhist tantra system). This is also a deified form of an aspect of existence, though it is less obvious. A yantra is a particularly powerful form of mandala and deep concentration on it can lead to higher realization of its nature.

The Sanskrit word *yantra* is such a descriptive word and is perfectly apt for the name of this form of mandala. According to the dictionary, it means an instrument, a machine, an apparatus, an implement. And this exactly sums up the mystical diagram in all ways. It is indeed an implement, a machine (though not an electrical or mechanical one) because it acts as an instrument for tuning in with consciousness. It is indeed a machine - a machine to induce states of meditation. It is a spiritual machine.

One yantra we have given at the end of this topic is called *shree yantra*. It is the most well known of all yantras and is a particularly powerful tool for inducing meditation. It acts as a powerful point of focus for spiritual aspirants. If your concentration is intense enough, then it can bring higher realization. At first it is a mere geometrical configuration, but by deep concentration and reflection one is sucked through the centre, so to say. One

realizes the nature of the yantra, and simultaneously the nature of the sadhaka himself. All you have to do is to concentrate on the yantra and plunge through the middle.

Mandalas and yantras are an indispensable part of tantra; without them tantra would not be tantra. Without them tantra would fail to give the result that it does. We are not asking you to believe in the power of mandalas and yantras, but at least keep an open mind and in the future practise for yourself, so that you can know from your own experiences.

### Mantras

Mantras on a gross level are special sound patterns. On a deeper level they are much more. Together with mandalas and yantras, mantras are the most important aspects of tantra. They are the essence of practical tantra. Almost invariably, mantras and mandalas or yantras are utilized in conjunction with each other to form powerful combinations. A mandala, yantra or devata is the form of consciousness, while the mantra is the vehicle of consciousness. The mandala, yantra or devata is the manifested form, configuration of Shakti, while the mantra, which is also Shakti, is the link between consciousness and form. This applies to everything in the world around us. The visible form is the expression while the mantra is the vehicle of expression. The mantra is the direct link with the beyond. The world we know is materialized and shaped through mantras, through sound at all levels and degrees of subtlety, generally way beyond one's usual perception of sound. The mantras originate in the consciousness substratum of Shiva. And there is absolutely no reason why mantras cannot be used to retrace the direction of manifestation so that one again merges with consciousness. A train that goes from here to Delhi can also be used to return. A mantra is therefore a means to make a U-turn and retrace one's footsteps, one's path back to the source. A mantra can and does transport one from low levels of awareness to higher levels.

Most people are unfamiliar with the science of mantras. Conversely, if a person is familiar with mantras they usually lack personal experience, or even worse, they associate mantras with sorcery and witchcraft. People often have concepts and visions of witches



chanting incantations and making spells while stirring some evil brew in a big round pot, intent on some mischief, perhaps with the broomstick ready so that they can quickly fly off into the nether worlds. Such is the nonsense, superstition and misunderstanding that surrounds the use of mantras. And this is a great pity for they can help to transform one's life. Like mandalas, mantras imply far more than is understood on first impression. They can bring about experiences that cannot even be talked about. They are often described as specific sound structures, but there is far more inherent in mantras for they extend their influence into the realms of the subtle. In a sense, their roots are in the subtle and their branches are in the more gross levels of existence. It is only at low levels of awareness that they are seen and understood as mere sound patterns. They are far, far more.

Actually, the use of mantra is a science, a very wonderful science. In the past this science was widely practised in all parts of the world. In recent years it has been sadly neglected as people become more and more attached to gross and materialistic explanations of phenomena. But the science of mantras is being revived and will bring vast repercussions in the world of the future. This must happen, for it is the power of mantras that can unlock the secrets of nature and the universe. Mantras will be used as a scientific tool, in the same way that light and lasers, and electron microscopes are currently used to peer into the deeper realms of nature.

The inner being of every individual is in continual contact with something much greater than the limitations of individuality. Most people are never aware of this; it is beyond normal levels of awareness. Mantras bring about a state of 'resonance' between the individual and the depths of the inner being. Psychologists would say that the individual tunes in with his collective unconscious. Mantras are the means to harmonize with these inner cosmic forces. Specific mantras are used to contact particular realms of the inner being.

Again don't make the mistake of thinking that this power of mantras is confined to tantra, for it definitely is not. It is an integral part of many eastern systems, including Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. It is also a part of systems throughout the world, including western

systems, though it is usually hidden in esoteric language and symbols.

### **Magic**

Magic occurs in the realm of the material universe (maya). Everything that happens around us in the world, whether the birth of a child, the growth of a tree, a flying bird or the digestive process, it is really magic. What can be more magical than the incredible phenomena occurring around us every second of the day? All that magic rites involve is the manipulation of the universal magic around and within us. Modern science, in a sense, does this through various energy manipulations: electrical, mechanical, biological and so forth. The tantric, yogi or magician invokes cosmic forces, psychic forces, etc. by means of mantras, mandalas, rites and other tantric practices. If you don't think this is possible, then we don't intend to persuade you otherwise. In fact, we again point out that there is no reason why you should believe anything without personal experience. Only keep an open mind to possibilities, and remember that magic rites have been practised throughout the history of mankind.

The basic premise of magic is that the macrocosm is reflected in the microcosm, though in fact the relationship is far deeper than this. Therefore, change in the outer world, in the phenomenal universe and in the individual himself can be invoked by magical means. The microcosm is the gateway to the macrocosm. Undertaking of the inner leads to understanding of the outer. Understanding of maya leads to its mastery.

In tantra, magic is to be used to bring about positive changes in one's being and surroundings. Unfortunately, magic is easily open to abuse in the form of black magic. This leads to a person's downfall, for negative actions lead to negative repercussions on the magician. There is a tendency for the misapplied use of magic to rebound. Tantra, of course, discourages misuse of magic. It advocates that magic should be used to bring about harmony; it should be in accordance with one's nature (dharma). This is often called white magic. But magic is magic; it is only inappropriate or appropriate use that transforms it into black or white magic. The power is there in each individual; it is the way that it is used that is

important. If it is used properly then it can lead to extraordinary experiences, higher awareness and knowledge. If used wrongly, for personal gain or for purposes of revenge, then the practitioner will suffer.

Most people are either very sceptical about magic, or they regard it as supernatural. But actually it is no more than an extension of one's natural faculties beyond the range that most people comprehend and experience. Magical power is real ... as real as anything else that exists. But it is beyond the normal experience. The power of magic stems from the dictum of the *Vishvasara Tantra* which says:

*What is here is elsewhere;  
What is not here is nowhere.*

It stems from the dictum of Hermes Trismegistus of ancient Egypt, who said: "What is below is an image of that which is above; And that which is above is an image of that which is below for the purposes of magic or miracle."

All tantric and yogic practices are a form of magic invocation, for they are trying to tune you in with something else, whether it is inner peace, knowledge or whatever. And the greatest form of magic is nirvana, samadhi, kaivalya or whatever you want to call the state of enlightenment.

Christ was a magician, for he performed miracles. Buddha was a magician, Mohammed was a magician, Moses was a magician, together with an innumerable number of yogis and saints throughout the ages. A guru is a magician, let there be no doubt about this. And so on. Magic merely covers the aspects of existence which are beyond normal low states of awareness. It is magic brought about by spiritual practices that will take you to indescribable states of consciousness, knowledge and bliss.

Magic is the process of spiritual alchemy, for it fuses the individual consciousness with the supreme consciousness. It transmutes the mortal into the immortal. Man finds his real nature. It is by looking inside that one discovers the secrets of the universe and the supreme secret. This is magic.

### **The guru**

We don't want to go into the details of the guru-disciple relationship here; all we want to

do is to point out the role of the guru in tantra'. It is the guru who pushes and inspires his disciples to higher levels of awareness. In the higher stages of tantra, he is indispensable. He is the very essence around which everything else revolves. He is the sun from which all the planets in the form of disciples draw their energy and aspiration.

When tantra was widely practised in India (and other parts of the world) it seems certain that each tantric community had a spiritual centre, a focal point, a pivot... a guru. Without a guru, tantra in the higher stages cannot be practised. This does not mean that you cannot practise tantric techniques without a guru, for it is possible in the early stages. This is the reason why we are starting to introduce you to tantra; if you needed a guru to practise then there would be no point in publishing details. But at a certain stage one needs a guru. There comes a point in a person's life when he is ready to surrender himself to a guru. And when you are ready, when you reach a certain level of awareness, then your guru will find you. You will not find him, he will find you. Then he will initiate you into the higher stages of tantra. You will not meet your guru, whoever he is, until you are ready, until you have reached a certain point. Perhaps you will not even be looking for a guru, perhaps not even know the meaning of the word guru, but at a certain stage your guru will appear. That is the starting point of higher tantra; even if you have not practised tantra before.

Until you are ready, until you meet your guru, then you must practise yoga and tantra and wait for the guru to appear and lead you up the ascending stairway to higher awareness.

The guru, the right guru for you, is so important. Many people listen to other people in order to know the path, but often the instructor is at the same level of awareness as the student and under these circumstances, little or nothing is gained. It is a case of the blind leading the blind or as it is so succinctly put in the *Bible*: "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (*Matthew 15:14*)

It is only a person who is at a higher state of awareness who can successfully guide the disciple along the narrow path, often described as the razor's edge. A guru is a guru because he is at a higher level of awareness and as such can clearly see the disciple's pitfalls and blocks.

Because of this higher awareness he can take steps to remove these mental obstacles.

### **Tantra and yoga**

How is tantra related to yoga? Yoga is well known, yet tantra is surrounded and veiled in an aura of superstition and mystery. This in a way is very strange, for in fact yoga and tantra are in essence the same system. They are intimately related. To be more specific: yoga is a part of the more encompassing, wider system of tantra. All practices such as asanas, pranayama, all yogic paths such as karma yoga, bhakti yoga, kundalini yoga, hatha yoga, mantra yoga, kriya yoga and so on, are all an integral part of tantra. All the practices that you know as yoga are also part of tantra. You have already been practising tantra and you have not known it!

Some people say that the science of yoga originated from Samkhya philosophy, but this is not really true. Yoga as it is widely known and practised, the yoga that has been practised in India for thousands of years, comes directly from tantra. Even Samkhya, which is a wonderful system of classifying the material world as a means to enlightenment (a way of jnana yoga to be more specific) is an integral part of certain sections of tantra, namely Kashmir Shaivism. In a wider sense, yoga has its roots in all religious systems, whether the path of the Vedas, Christianity, Buddhism or whatever. Yoga is an integral part of all religions. But the classified system of yoga as you know it, the form of yoga that originated, developed and flourished in the rich environment of India, comes almost completely from tantra. All the practices in this book are basically tantric.

To sum up: tantra covers a vast range of interests, from rituals to rules of regulating one's life, from astrology to ayurvedic medicine. Yoga on the other hand is more specific; it is in general concerned with directly influencing the mind and body as a method of attaining good health, mental peace and eventually higher awareness. Tantra has the same aim, but it includes within its fold a greater range of methods and interests. We can say: tantra is the mother and yoga is the son.

### **Suitability for the present age**

Tantra has grown naturally throughout the past eons. It has never really been rigidly

defined as a whole, which actually is a point in its favour, for it allows tantra to adapt to the continually changing conditions and not become frozen with fixed dogmas.

Actually, as we have already pointed out, tantra is probably the only system that fully realizes that its written texts become semi-redundant in the course of time. People's tastes and attitudes, social rules and conditions change and so forth. Each society has specific characteristics with which the individual has to come to terms on the path of physical and mental well being and higher awareness. It is for this reason that tantric tradition says that new tantric texts will be revealed and recorded. These will automatically replace archaic texts that have lost their relevance. This is not merely an idea, for it has actually occurred; most of the age-old traditional tantric texts are no longer available; they have either been lost, hidden or destroyed. Most of the tantric texts that are now in circulation are comparatively new. That is, they have been written during the last few hundred years. The old texts seem to have faded away according to the edicts and predictions of tantric traditions.

One might wonder why tantra, being such a fundamental and life-enriching system, is not now widely practised in India. Actually tantra is still practised, but it is disguised and has been absorbed into Hinduism, the compendium of religions which has tended to absorb everything into its bosom. Its significance however has been widely forgotten, or even worse, it has been extensively misunderstood and abused. For this reason, tantra has tended to be regarded with some contempt; it is associated with mad sorcerers and so many malpractices. But this reputation is harsh, to say the least, and is generally unfounded. The reason for this reputation is complex, but one of the main reasons is that many of the tantric texts are written in the so-called meaningful 'twilight language'. That is, the practices of tantra are explained in symbolic terms, which can only be understood with personal guidance from a guru. This was done to protect the contents of the tantric texts from misinterpretation, misuse and abuse. This ruse or device did network, however, and tantra was misapplied and misconstrued on a wide scale. You must remember that some of the tantric rituals are very technical and complex. It is therefore

so easy to misinterpret them without the guidance of a competent teacher.

#### **And it came to pass**

Tantra encompasses all aspects of life. Its philosophical basis reaches the loftiest heights of comprehension, yet at the same time is amenable to practical application. It has different levels of meaning and significance which only unfold themselves gradually through personal experience.

Modern man is looking for something, but does not know what it is. We feel that tantra, including yoga, is the answer that you are looking for. It is based on the wisdom and experiences of thousands of tuned in enlightened sages, throughout the ages. It is tested by time.

Without joy and experience of higher awareness, life is dull, frustrating and often purposeless. Even one small glimpse of a transcendental experience will inject new aspiration, new joy into even the most unemotional person. Tantra promises just this: higher awareness, happiness and knowledge. Tantra is a method of instructing and leading you to material and spiritual fulfilment. Cosmic awareness can come through participation in the world; it is not necessary to reject life and become an ascetic. This is the way of tantra.

Tantra is a system for those people who are not ascetically inclined and who are intimately involved in the activities of the world. It is therefore most suitable for modern man. It is a means for removing inhibitions and complexes. Tantra says that life should be an expression of joy, though the acts of joy should of course be dharmic (harmonious) and not adharmic (disharmonious). Tantra takes the individual by the hand and slowly leads him towards higher awareness. Tantra says: "Why suffer guilt about actions and thoughts; every act should be a form of worship, for everything is Shakti... which is Shiva."

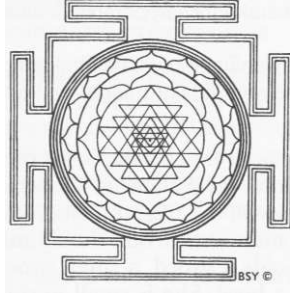
#### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Guru - The guiding light: Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 1

## Tantra: Yantras

Hereunder we give you some of the best known and powerful tantric yantras, the mystic diagrams which, when properly concentrated and meditated upon, or trataka practised thereon, bestow both *bhukti* and *rnukti* (enjoyment and liberation). We have given the name of the yantra, its mantra, and its presiding deity. Mantra, yantra and devata are the essence of tantra yoga.

### SRI YANTRA



#### Sri Tripura Sundari Dhyanam

बालावर्कमण्डलाभासां चतुर्बाहान्त्रिलोचनाम् ॥  
पाशांकुशशरान्श्चापन्धारयन्तीं शिवाम्भजे ॥

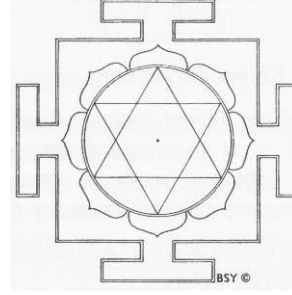
Bālārkkarmandalābhasām chaturbbāhān-  
trilochanām.  
Pāshāṅkushasharānshchāpandhārayantim  
Shivāmbhaje.

She radiates like the aura surrounding the rising sun. She has three eyes and four hands. She holds the pasha (noose of bondage), ankusha (hook), bow and arrow. I meditate on you who is the form of Shiva.

#### Mantra

ह्रीं कण्ठे ह्रीं हसकहल ह्रीं सकल ह्रीं  
Hrīm Kaeīla Hrīm Hasa Kahala Hrīm Sakala Hrīm

### SHIVA YANTRA



#### Shiva Dhyanam

ध्यायेन्नित्यमहेशंरजतगिरिनिभञ्चारुचन्द्रावतंसं  
रत्नाकल्पोज्ज्वलाङ्गम्परशुमृगवराभीतिहस्तम्प्रसन्नम् ॥  
पद्मासीनंसमन्तात्स्तुतममरणैर्व्याघ्रकृत्तिवसानं  
विश्वाद्यंविश्वबीजंनिखिल भयहरम्पञ्चवक्त्रंनेत्रम् ॥ 1 ॥

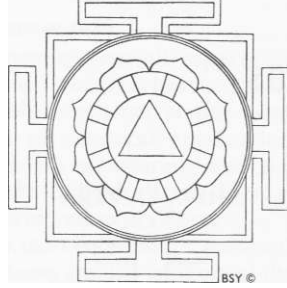
Dhyāyennityammaheshamrajatagirinibhanchāru-  
chandrāvatansam  
Ratnākālpojīvalāṅgamparashumrigavarābhitihās-  
tamprasannam.  
Padmāsinamsamantātstutamamaraganairvyāghra-  
krittimvasānam  
Vishvādyam vishvabijannikhila bhayaharam-  
panchavaktrānnetram.

He is beyond the seed of creation. He dispels fear of the universe. He has five heads, each of which has three eyes. He sits in padmasana (the lotus pose) on a tiger skin. All the gods pray to him who performs the vara mudra (dispelling of fear) and abhaya mudra (granting of boons). In his other hands he holds an axe and a deer. He is always cheerful and graceful. I meditate on the form of Shiva, whose body is like the silver mountain and on whose head is the crescent moon.

#### Mantra

ॐ नमः शिवाय  
Om Namaḥ Shivāya

## YANTRA RAJ



### Dakshina Kalika Dhyanam

मेघांगीं शशिशेखरां त्रिनयनां रक्ताम्बरां विभ्रतीम्।  
पाणिभ्यामभयं वरञ्च विलसद्भारविन्दस्थिताम् ॥  
नृत्यन्तं पुरतो निपीय मधुरं माध्वीकमद्यं महाकालम्।  
वीक्ष्य विकसिताननवरामाद्यां भजे कालिकाम् ॥

Meghāngim shashishekarām trinayanām  
raktāmbarām vibhratim.  
Pāṇibhyāmabhayam varancha vilasadrāravinda  
sthitām.

Nrityantam purato nipiya madhuram  
mādhvikamadyam mahākalam.

Vikshya vikasitānanavarāmādyam bhaje kālīkām.

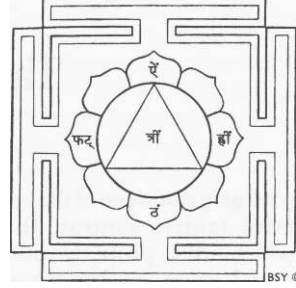
I meditate on that form who is seated in the fully blossomed red lotus, with red garments, whose complexion is dark, who has three eyes and the crescent moon shining in the forehead, who enjoys the play of mahakala intoxicated with madhvika madya, who is the bestower of boons and dispeller of fears; to Kalika I offer my salutation.

### Mantra

ॐ ह्रीं श्रीं क्रीं परमेश्वरी दक्षिण  
कालिके ह्रीं श्रीं क्रीं स्वाहा

Om Hrīm Shrīm Krīm Parameshvarī Dakshina  
Kālike Hrīm Shrīm Krīm Svāhā

## TARA YANTRA



### Tara Dhyanam

प्रत्यालीढपादार्पिताङ्घ्रिशवहृत्थोराट्टहासापरा।  
खगेन्दीवरकर्त्रिखर्परभुजाहुं कारबीजोदभवा ॥  
खर्व्वा नीलविशालपिंगलजटाजूटैकनागैर्युता।  
जाड्य्य यस्यकपालकर्तृ जगतां हन्त्युग्रतारास्वयम् ॥

Pratyālidhapādārpitānghrishavahritghorāṭṭāhāsāparā.  
Khangendivarakartrikharpparabhujāhūmkārabijod-  
bhavā.

Kharvā nilavishālapingalajatajūṭaikaanāgairyyutā.  
Jādyannyasyakapālakartrijagatam hantyuḡratā-  
rāsvayam.

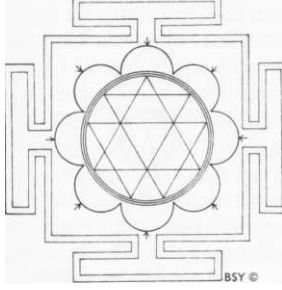
She places both feet on the heart of a corpse, in pratyālidha (as if about to shoot an arrow). She laughs with the frightful laugh of a horse. She who manifests from the humkar (bija mantra) holds a sword, a small sword, a blue lotus and a bowl. She is small in stature and blue in complexion, having voluminous matted and braided hair decorated with snakes. She is called Ugratara (the fierce one) who is able to stir the world in its three spheres into activity. She preserves and destroys.

### Mantra

ऐं ओं ह्रीं क्रीं हूं फट्

Aim Om Hrīm Krīm Hūm Phaṭ

## DURGA YANTRA



### Durga Dhyanam

सिंहस्कन्धसमारूढान्नानालंकारभूषिताम् ॥  
 चतुर्भुजाम्महादेवीन्नागयज्ञोपवीतिनीम् ॥ १ ॥  
 रक्तवस्त्रपरीधानाम्बालाकसदृशीतनुम् ॥  
 नारदाद्यैर्मुनिगणैः सेविताम्भवगेहिनीम् ॥ २ ॥  
 त्रिवलीवलयोपेतनाभिनालसुवेशिनीम् ॥  
 रत्नद्वीपेमहाद्वीपेसिंहासनसमन्विते ॥  
 प्रफुल्लकमलारूढान्ध्यायेताम्भवगेहिनीम् ॥

Simhaskandhasamārūdhānnānālankārabhūshitām.  
 Chaturbhujām mahādevi nāgayajnopavitinim.  
 Raktavastra paridhānam bālārkkasadrishitanum.  
 Nāradādyairmmuniganaih sevitamabhavagehinim.  
 Trivalivalayopetanābhinālasuveshinim.  
 Ratnadvipemahādvipe simhāsanasamanvite.  
 Prafullakamalārūdhān dhyāyettāmbhavagehinim.

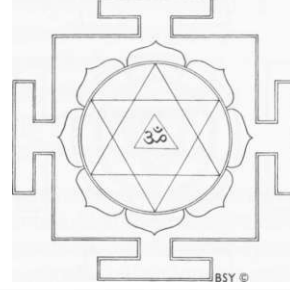
She is decorated with various kinds of ornaments and is riding a lion. She wears a serpent as the sacred thread. She has four hands and wears blood-coloured garments. Her body radiates like the rising sun. Munis like Narada always show devotion: "Oh Bhavagehini, whose navel is a beautiful junction having three parallel lines in the great island of jewels, sitting on the throne of a lotus blossom, I meditate on Thee who is the root of the world."

### Mantra

ॐ ह्रीं दुर्गायै नमः

Om Hrīm Duṃdurgāyai Namaḥ

## BAGALAMUKHI YANTRA



### Bagala Dhyanam

मध्येसुधाब्धिमणिमण्डपरत्नवेदीसिंहासनो-  
 परिगताम्परिपीतवर्णाम् ॥  
 पीताम्बराभरणमाल्यविभूषितांगीन्देवीन्मामि-  
 धृतमुद्गरवैरिजिह्वाम् ॥ १ ॥  
 जिह्वाग्रमादायकरेण देवीं वामेनशत्रून्परिपीडयन्तीम् ॥  
 गदाभिघातेन च दक्षिणेनपीताम्बराद्यां द्विभुजान्नमामि ॥ २ ॥

Madhyesudhābhdhimanimandaparātnavedi  
 simhāsanoparigatāmparipitavarṇām.  
 Pitāambarābharanamālyavibhūshitāngin  
 devinnamāmidhrita mudgaravairijihvām.  
 Jihvāgramādayakarena devim vāmenashatrūn  
 paripidayantim.  
 Gadābhighātēna cha dakshinena  
 pitāambarādhyām dvibhujānnamāmi.

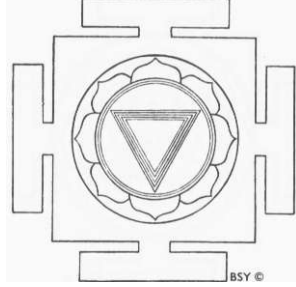
She wears yellow coloured garments, a garland, and various types of ornaments. She is sitting on a throne on an altar of precious jewels surrounded by the ocean of nectar; on that Devi I meditate. She holds a club (mudgara) and is pulling the tongue of the enemy. I prostrate myself before her who firmly holds the tongue of the enemy with her left hand and strikes him with that club.

### Mantra

ॐ ह्रीं बगलामुखिसर्वदुष्टानांवाचम्मुखंस्तम्भयजिह्वां-  
 कीलयकीलयबुद्धिन्नाशय ह्रीं ॐ स्वाहा।

Om Hrīm Bagalāmukhī Sarvvaḍustānām Vācham  
 Mukham Stambhaya Jihvam Kīlaya Kīlaya  
 Buddhin Nāshaya Hrīm Om Svāhā

## KALI YANTRA



### Kali Dhyanam

शिवारूढाम्हाभीमांघोरदंष्ट्रां हसन्मुखीम्  
चतुर्भुजांखंगमुण्डवराभयकरां शिवाम् ।  
मुण्डमालाधरान्देवीं ललज्जिह्वादिगम्बराम्  
एवं सञ्चिन्तयेत्कालीं श्मशानालयवासिनीम् ॥

Shavārūdhām mahābhimām ghoradanstrām  
hasanmukhim.  
Chaturbhujāmkhangamundavarābhayakarām  
Shivām.  
Mundamālādhārāndevīm lalajjihvādigambarām.  
Evam sanchintayetkālīmshma shānālaya vāsinim.

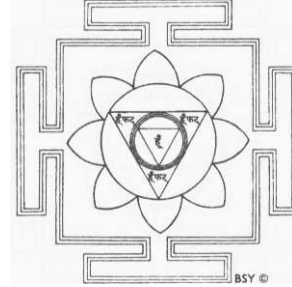
Standing on a corpse, the great and fearful Kali has grotesque teeth. She is laughing wildly. In two hands she holds a sword and a head; with her other two hands she shows the vara mudra (for granting boons) and the abhaya mudra (for dispelling fear). She wears a garland made of heads; her tongue is outstretched and her body naked. Kali lives in the cremation ground. I concentrate on her form.

### Mantra

क्रौं क्रौं क्रौं ह्रीं ह्रीं ह्रीं दक्षिणे कालिके  
क्रौं क्रौं क्रौं ह्रीं ह्रीं ह्रीं स्वाहा।

Krīm Krīm Krīm Hrīm Hrīm Hūm Hūm Dakshīne  
Kālike Krīm Krīm Krīm Hrīm Hrīm Hūm Hūm  
Svāhā

## CHHINNAMASTA YANTRA



### Chhinnamasta Dhyanam

प्रत्यालीढपदांसदैवदधतीञ्छिन्नशिरस्कत्रिकान्दिग्वस्त्रंस्व-  
कबन्धशोणितसुधाधाराम्पिवन्तीमुदा ॥  
नागाबद्धशिरोमणिन्निनयनांतद्युत्पलालंकृतां रत्यासक्तमनोभवो  
परिदृढान्ध्यायेज्जवासन्निभाम् ॥

दक्षे चातिसिताविमुक्तचिकुराकर्त्रीन्तथाखप्परं  
हस्ताभ्यान्दधतीरजोगुणभवा नाम्नापिसावर्णिनी ॥  
देव्याश्छिन्नकबन्धतःपतदसुग्धाराम्पिवन्तीमुदा  
नागाबद्धशिरोमणिर्मनुविदाध्येयासदासासुरैः ॥  
प्रत्यालीढपदाकबन्धविगलद्रक्तम्पिवन्ती मुदा  
सैषायाप्रलयेसमस्त भुवनम्भोक्तुंक्षमातामसी।  
शक्तिः सापिपरात्पराभगवती नाम्नापराडाकिनी  
ध्येया ध्यानपरैः सदा सविनयं भक्तेष्ट भूतिप्रदा ॥

Pratyālidhapadānsadaivadadhatichhinnamshiram  
kartrikāndigvastrāmsva kabandhashonitasudhā-  
dhārām pivantimmūdā.  
Nāgābaddhashiromaninrinayanamtriddiyutpalālam-  
kritām ratyāsaktamanobhavo  
paridridhāndhyāyejjavāsannibhām.  
Dakshe chātisitāvimuktachikurākartrinta-  
thākapparam  
hastābhyāndadhatirajogunbhavā  
nāmnāpisāvarnini.  
Devyāshchhinnakabandhatampatadasrigdhārām-  
pibantimmūdā  
Nāgābaddhashiromaninrinmanu-  
vidādhyeyāsadāsāsuraih.  
Pratyālidhapadākabandhavigaladraktampivantimmūdā  
saishāyāpralayesamastabhuvanambhoktum  
kshamātāmāsi.  
Shaktisāpiparātparābhagavati nāmnāparādākini  
dhyyeā  
Dhyānaparaih sadā savinayam bhakteshta-  
bhutiprada.

She stands in pratyalidha and holds her own disembodied head and gladly drinks her own blood as it streams from her neck. Her clothes



are the four directions. She has three eyes and wears the serpent on her forehead. She is in the position of the union of Rati and Kama. I meditate on that form which radiates like a red flower (Java). On her right side the nayika holds a small sword and a bowl. She is Varnini

by name and is produced out of the blood of the Devi. She joyfully drinks the blood streaming from the chopped head of the Devi. On her left side is the nayika Dakini who also stands in the position of pratyahidha, and drinks the blood streaming from the Devi. She can digest all the worlds at the time of dissolution.

#### Mantra

श्रीं ह्रीं क्लीं ऐं वज्रवैरोचनीये हूं हूं फट् स्वाहा  
Shrīm Hrīm Klīm Aīm Vajravairochaniye Hūṃ  
Hūṃ Phaṭ Svāhā

#### Vishnu Dhyanam

शान्ताकारम्भुजगशयनम्पद्मनाभं सुरेशं  
विश्वाधारंगनसदृशम्मेघवर्णं शुभांगम् ।  
लक्ष्मीकान्तम्कमलनयनंयोगिभिर्ध्यानगम्यं  
वन्देविष्णुम्भवभयहरं सर्वलोकैकनाथम् ॥

Shāntākārambhujagashayanampadmanābham  
Suresham Vishvādharāngaganasadrisham-  
meghavarnnam shubhāngam.  
Lakshmikāntam kamalanayanam yogibhird-  
dhyānagamyam  
Vandevishnumbhavabhayaharam sarvalokaika-  
nātham.

He is calm and sleeps on the snake Ananta from whose navel there rises a lotus. This is the God of gods, the support of the universe, who is like an infinite sky. He has a beautiful physique and is the husband of Lakshmi. His eyes are like full-grown lotuses. I meditate on Vishnu who is the remover of all fear in this universe.

#### Mantra

ॐ नमो नारायणाय  
Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya

Note: For this dhyanam use the Shiva Yantra.

#### Dhumavati Dhyanam

विवर्णाचञ्चलादुष्टादीर्घाचमलिनाम्बरा ॥  
विमुक्तकुन्तलारूक्षाविधवाविरलद्विजा ॥  
काकध्वजरथारूढाविलम्बितपयोधरा ॥  
शूर्पहस्तातिरूक्षाक्षधूतहस्तावरान्विता ॥  
वृक्षपाशकुटिलाकुटिलेक्षणा ॥  
क्षुत्पिपासादितानित्यम्भयदाकलहास्पदा ॥

Vivarnnāchanchalādushtādirghāchamalināambarā.  
Vimuktakuntalārūkshāvidhavāviraladvijā.  
Kākadhvajarathārūdhāvilambitapayodharā.  
Shūrppahastātirūkshākshādhutahastāvarānvitā.  
Pravridhdhaghonātubhrishankutīlākutilekshana.  
Kshutpipāsārditānityambhayadākalahāspadā.

She is very pale, fickle and wicked. She has dirty clothes and unkempt hair. She is cruel, the brahmin widow riding on a chariot whose flag is a crow. She is haggard, has pendulous breasts, holding a shurpa (a bamboo basket). She is crooked and mischievous, she is always hungry and thirsty. She is a dreadful and quarrelsome aspect of Shakti.

#### Mantra

धूं धूं धूमावतीठःठः  
Dhūm Dhūm Dhūmāvati Ṭhaṭ Ṭhaṭ

Note: For this dhyanam use the Shiva Yantra.

#### Matangi Dhyanam

श्यामांगीशशिशेखरान्त्रिनयनां रत्नसिंहासनस्थिताम् ॥  
वेदैर्बाहुदण्डैरसिखेटक पाशांकुशधराम् ॥

Shyāmangishashishekharaṅtrinayanām ratna-  
simhāsanasthitām.  
Vedairbāhudandairasikhetāka pāshānkusha-  
dharām.

She is enthroned on a jewelled throne, her complexion is black, and the crescent moon is in her crown. She has three eyes. In her hands she holds sword, mace, pasha (noose) and ankusha (hook).

#### Mantra

ॐ ह्रीं क्लीं हूं मातंग्यैफट् स्वाहा  
Om Hrīm Klīm Hūṃ Mātangyai Phaṭ Svāhā

Note: For this dhyanam use the Shiva Yantra.

### Kamatmika Dhyanam

कान्त्याकाञ्चनसन्निभांहिमगिरिप्रख्यैश्चतुर्भर्गजै-  
र्हस्तोत्क्षिप्तहिरण्मयामृतघटैरासिच्यमानांश्रियम् ॥  
बिभ्राणाव्वैरमञ्जयुग्ममभयंहस्तैश्चिरीटोज्ज्वलां  
क्षौमाबद्धनितम्बबिम्बललितांवन्देऽरविन्दस्थिताम् ॥ 1 ॥

Kāntyākānchanasannibhāhmimagiriprakhyai-  
chaturbhirggajaih  
hastotkshiptahiranmayāmritaghatairāshichya-  
mānāmshriyām.  
Bibhrānāmvarmabjayugmamabhaymhastaim-  
kiritojjvalām  
Kshoumābaddhanitambabimbabalitāmvandeara-  
vindasthitām.

I meditate on the Devi whose complexion is as bright as gold. Four elephants pour nectar on her holding four jars made of gold. Her hands hold two lotuses and the other two are in vara (granting boons) and abhaya (dispelling fears) mudras. She wears a most precious jewelled crown, and sits on a lotus.

### Mantra

ॐ ऐं ह्रीं श्रीं क्लीं ह्रौं सौः जगत्प्रसूत्यै नमः  
Om Aiṃ Hrīm Śrīm K्लीं Hasouḥ Jagat Prasutyai  
Namaḥ

*Note:* For this dhyanam use the Shiva Yantra.

## Daily Practice Program

At this stage you may feel a little overwhelmed but you should not, for we don't expect you to do all the practices, only the ones that you like, or the ones suggested in our list of practice programs. You must use your discretion.

For those people who have become really involved in their yoga practices and want to increase the duration of their program, we have changed the length of the practice programs. From now on we will still give four programs but they will be for 2, 1 1/2, 1 and 1/2 hour respectively.

Include paschimottanasana into your daily practices, as it is such an important asana.

We have introduced you to some new hand mudras. We have chosen these particular mudras, not only because they are aesthetically beautiful and expressive, but because they can easily be utilized while doing meditation practices. You don't need to do them all; merely choose any that you like and practise them. Of course, if you prefer to use jnana, chin or chinmaya mudra, then continue to do so<sup>1</sup>.

Continue your pranayama practice in the manner that we have explained in the text.

In a way, we feel we are swamping you with meditational practices. But you must choose only the practices that you like. Don't try to practise more than one or two distinct techniques, unless you have time that is. Regularity in one practice is the key to higher awareness, not knowledge of large numbers of techniques or superficial attempts to try all of them. Stick with any that you like, persevere and in this way know from personal experience what they can bring you.

If you like trataka, then you can, if you wish, concentrate on the Sri Yantra<sup>2</sup>. Otherwise practise chidakasha dharana. They are all excellent meditative methods.

And lastly we cannot emphasize enough the importance of karma yoga. Try to practise karma yoga every day. This is not easy, we realize this, but only try. Even a moderate degree of success can transform your life.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
<b>Program 1:</b> duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	5
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Marjari-asana	—	4
Ushtrasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	24
Aum chanting	—	20
Chidakasha Dharana	—	30
		120

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<b>Program 2:</b> duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	9
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Ushtrasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	24
Chidakasha Dharana	—	30
		<hr/>
		90

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<b>Program 3:</b> duration 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	10
Chidakasha Dharana	—	20
		<hr/>
		60

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<b>Program 4:</b> duration 1/2 hour for general health		
Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	10
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		30

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

<sup>2</sup> Topic 6 of this lesson