

## Lesson 15

Once a wandering sannyasin (parivrajaka) entered a village and a pious Brahmin called out to him: "Swamiji, please take bhiksha (food) at my home." The sannyasin did so and after the meal, the Brahmin begged that he be given diksha (initiation). The sannyasin told him to wait some time and continued on his way. After some years the sannyasin again came to the village. The Brahmin was very pleased and again invited him to take food. He did so, and after the meal the Brahmin again asked for diksha. Again the sannyasin replied, "Don't be in a hurry; continue your karma yoga," and went on his way.

Many years passed, then again the sannyasin came to the same village. The Brahmin was overwhelmed. He thought that this time he would definitely get diksha. After the usual meal he raised the matter again, and again the sannyasin told him to wait. This time the

Brahmin became very angry and wanted to know the reason for the delay.

The following day the sannyasin came again to the Brahmin's house for bhiksha but as he was about to place the food in the bowl he noticed something that looked like urine in the vessel. He said: "Swamiji, I can't put food in your bowl, there appears to be urine in it." "What if there is?" replied the sannyasin. "But if I do that it will be polluted, useless!" "Similar is the state of your mind," explained the sannyasin. "While it remains even a little unclean my diksha will be of no value."

Some disciples, even though they may be initiated, cannot proceed on the spiritual path or gain spiritual experiences, for the same reason. They blame their guru, yet it is only because of their unfit state that no progress is made. When the mind is cleansed and pure, then progress is assured.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



## Bhakti Yoga (Part 1)

Bhakti yoga is the yoga of love and devotion. It is devotion to the divine, in whatever form, or non-form you care to see him (or her). It can be devotion to truth, God, the supreme, Brahman, the absolute reality or any other name that you want to call the ineffable. It can be devotion to Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, Rama, Hanuman, Mahavira, Shakti, Shiva, Vishnu, Kali, Durga, Ahura Mazda or even Zeus if you wish. You can express devotion to any form which you regard as divinity incarnated. It can be a great saint, whether dead or alive. It can be your guru. The specific form is unimportant... it is the devotion that you personally feel that is essential. Without this devotion, whether great or small, it is impossible to practise bhakti yoga.

Bhakti can easily be labelled blind dogma and in many cases it has degenerated into exactly this. In the past and in the present day, bhakti has been totally misunderstood and misused. This has led to fanaticism and intolerance. This is not what bhakti is all about. Bhakti is not something that is easily acceptable to the modern intellectual world. This is a great pity, for bhakti yoga is an incredibly powerful method that can lead to higher knowledge and transcendence. Not only this, bhakti yoga can help you to harmonize your life and make life the joy that it should be. People have seen the misuse and corruption of bhakti and have mistaken this for the essence of bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga has vast implications which can transform your life. This topic has been written in an attempt to remove the cobwebs of misconceptions and to show you how bhakti yoga can transform your life. It will be quite a lengthy discussion.

If you are sceptical, there is nothing wrong with this; we don't ask you to believe anything that we write with blind acceptance. Why should you? All we ask is that you read these pages with a reasonably open mind, always remembering that there are far greater implications

behind the path of bhakti yoga than one can imagine. Another thing to remember is that many people would have once laughed and walked away from a person talking about bhakti. But it is amazing how we change, but the change does not come through mere blind acceptance, but through greater understanding and realization of the deeper significance of bhakti yoga.

Another thing to remember is that many great yogis, if not all, expressed bhakti. This was either their path or bhakti came as a result of other paths. Some of them could not stop talking about bhakti. Were they misguided? This is most unlikely, since these were the very people who were regarded by others as wise men. If wisdom can lead to bhakti, or if bhakti can lead to wisdom, then there must be something behind the path of bhakti that is not immediately obvious. Furthermore, these great yogis were clear indicators and examples of what the path of bhakti brings: tolerance, peace, understanding, love of fellow man and many other attributes. It is to these people that you should look if you want to see clear proof of the benefits of bhakti yoga, not those who become bigots and fanatics.

### What is bhakti?

The word *bhakti* comes from the root *bhaja*, which means 'to adore', 'serve', 'love', 'to be devoted'. And this is exactly what bhakti yoga is all about. It is the path of devotion. The word *bhakta* comes from the same root and means 'a person who practises bhakti yoga, who feels devotion'.

Bhakti yoga implies two things: both the path and the experience. A person can be on the path of bhakti yoga and yet have no positive experience of intense bhakti. At the same time, a person can experience intense bhakti, and yet not profess to be on the path of bhakti yoga. Let us illustrate this more clearly by taking two examples:

1. If one is devotionally inclined, then one can follow the path of bhakti yoga. This involves intense concentration of one's entire being on an object of devotion. This method of bhakti yoga can eventually lead to a transcendental experience of overwhelming bhakti. Associated with this bhakti is transcendental knowledge. This bhakti will become stronger and stronger with time and more experience.
2. If one is not devotionally inclined, then the other paths of yoga can be followed instead. These other paths will eventually lead to spiritual experience. This in turn will automatically lead to bhakti, for you will realize something that you did not know before. Whichever method you adopt, the result is the same. The paths of the devotional and the non-devotional individuals will eventually join.

Bhakti is both the means and the expression of higher awareness. It is both the practice and the spontaneous expression of higher knowledge. One leads to the other. Until a certain point on the path of bhakti yoga, there is more faith than experience, but once one has had a definite experience then the whole situation changes. One comes to know that there is indeed a direction to one's aspirations and practices. Bhakti becomes an experience. From then onwards, one knows that one is not chasing a mirage like a man in the desert.

This bhakti increases . . . increases . . . and goes on increasing.

This bhakti spans the infinite chasm between mere faith and divine realization. And it also covers the period when the bhakta attempts to live and express this realization in everyday life. Bhakti bridges the abyss between lack of divine knowledge backed by faith, and the personal experience and knowledge of divinity. Bhakti is not a subject for discussion. It must be felt, known and experienced for oneself. Real bhakti arises spontaneously through higher awareness and knowledge, because of realization of something not known before. Bhakti is the expression and experience of joy at realizing the impossible, at being confronted with direct perception of that which is beyond words. Bhakti, real bhakti that is, cannot be created artificially, for it is an expression of bliss, of something beyond the wildest flights of the imagination.

### **The mechanics of bhakti**

The purpose of bhakti is to develop intense concentration towards one object. This occurs spontaneously if there is a feeling of bhakti towards that object. All one's energy is focussed in one direction. This in turn leads to higher sensitivity and receptivity of the mind-body to higher forces. One becomes a bhakta through experience and not merely through belief.

This method of bhakti has been used by many religions, notably Christianity and Hinduism. In these religions, the whole purpose is to encourage the expression of bhakti in the followers. To do this, specific figures are given as objects of adoration. If this adoration is sufficient, then one can know intense bhakti, bliss and transcendental experience. The method is very powerful, and has led many people to the highest states of awareness. But there has to be strong devotion to obtain the final results.

All of these bhakti religions have used the same method. They have only differed in the specific form (or forms) to which the followers are recommended to devote themselves. The basic mechanics are the same in all cases. They have all used bhakti yoga as a powerful means to transcendence.

The method and purpose of bhakti yoga is to take you away from identification with the little 'I', the body-mind. The aim is to reduce personal whims, conflicts, disharmony, etc., which tend to imprison and severely limit awareness. The aim is to make the mind a perfect reflector, a perfect mirror of experience. It is under these circumstances that one can know higher awareness and bliss.

### **Bhakti - balance for the intellect**

The intellect is a severely limited form of gaining knowledge yet it is the power of the intellect that the modern world seems to most admire. There is nothing wrong with this, providing one can understand its limitations. And it is this that most people don't appreciate. In fact, this will never be appreciated until one experiences something way beyond the intellect, which clearly shows the insignificance of logical thinking as a means to knowledge.

Bhakti is an excellent method of providing a balance to over-rigid attachment to the intellect. It is a great help in removing intellectual constipation and is a means of giving direction

and release to emotions and feelings. One of the biggest problems in the modern world is the inability for intellectual people to express emotions. These emotions become pent-up and suppressed. People forget how to laugh and release their emotions in a positive and non-destructive manner. Emotions are often expressed in outbursts and violence. The path of bhakti provides a perfect method of expressing these unruly emotions. Furthermore, the emotions are not only released, they are channelled towards making the mind one-pointed. This is a positive utilization of emotional forces. The emotions are directed towards the goal of higher awareness and experience.

The emotions are such a powerful force in human beings. Most people are completely ruled by them. They are buffeted to and fro according to the dictates and whims of their emotions. If these emotions can be channelled and concentrated, then one's whole being will also be channelled and concentrated. It is impossible to calm the mind if the emotions are turbulent. It is like trying to calm the sea when there is a typhoon or hurricane in the area. But if you can calm the mind, the typhoon, then the sea will automatically become much calmer. So it is with the emotions: harmonize them and one's whole being will automatically follow suit. This is the boon of bhakti yoga.

#### **Not everyone is devotionally inclined**

Those people who don't feel any form of devotion to any deity or to any person, do not need to cultivate devotion or belief. Why force or artificially create belief or devotion without substance? You would merely be fooling yourself, and it is not necessary. All you must do is to practise other forms of yoga with intensity. Eventually bhakti will arise spontaneously as a consequence of higher awareness and experience. Eventually you will have no choice but to be a bhakta (devotee) because of what you know. It must happen, just as surely as night follows day. This applies to everyone without exception. It applies to those people who at present feel not even the slightest sign of emotion. They will become bhaktas in time, for bhakti is an expression of indescribable bliss, joy and knowledge.

Therefore, if you don't feel devotional, don't practise bhakti yoga at the moment. Practise

other forms of yoga and eventually you will have no choice but to become a bhakta.

Those people, however, who have some form of devotion or belief should definitely follow the path of bhakti because of their very personality. They may lack any form of higher experience, but they spontaneously feel devotion towards something. If you are one of these people then you should direct your emotion towards the object of devotion. For you bhakti yoga can be the express train to expanded awareness. But make sure that you are honest with yourself. If you have to sit down and think what shall I be devoted to, then this is a sure sign that you don't really have an object of devotion. You should not need to sit down and ask yourself the question. If you feel devotion for something, then you will know. There will be no doubt - your heart will immediately tell you the object which captivates your bhakti. If you feel strong devotion to one thing, without doubt, bhakti is the path for you. If you don't feel this overwhelming devotion for something, then at this stage bhakti is not for you. Under these circumstances, bhakti yoga will probably lead to mere ritual and self-deception, rather than transcendence. Practise other types of yoga and bhakti will come in the future.

#### **Bhakti combined with karma yoga**

Karma yoga can be practised as an entirely separate path of yoga. It is not necessary to practise karma yoga with a feeling of devotion<sup>1</sup>. But if you combine karma yoga with bhakti yoga, then the whole process becomes intensified; it becomes supercharged. Karma yoga alone is a powerful sadhana, but bhakti stimulates and accelerates the whole process. This is the main teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

If you are already devotionally inclined, then you should definitely combine karma yoga and bhakti yoga. What better way is there to worship, to express bhakti than through your work? It is also a very productive form of worship that contributes directly to others.

The essence of karma yoga is awareness, detachment and renunciation of the fruits of actions'. When bhakti and karma yoga are combined, it becomes almost easy to renounce attachment to the fruits or rewards of one's actions. One merely sacrifices all actions and endeavours to the object of bhakti, whether it

is the supreme, the guru or whatever. Actions, food, thoughts, objects, pleasures, etc. are all done for something outside yourself. All rewards, praise and fruits of one's work are dedicated to the object of devotion. Though one may enjoy or use the fruits, they are not done specifically for oneself, but as an act of bhakti. This is the way to rapidly harmonize the mind and reduce egoism.

This attitude of devotion also brings about detachment, for actions are not done for oneself, but for something outside one's individuality. The more the surrender of one's actions, the greater will be the detachment. One will cease to be swayed or upset by the ups and downs of life. One will do one's best in work and life, but there will be less buffeting. This is particularly powerful if you adopt the following attitude: "I do not serve . . . the Supreme alone serves." When you feel that you are not really acting but the tool, the instrument of something far greater, then you must become detached, and because of this you work much better and more effectively<sup>1</sup>.

This feeling of non-doership has been summed up in the following quotations: "Think that you are not you; that you do not exist. Think that it is that power which works in all things, also working through you. Practice will eventually reveal this secret to you."

Also: "One must realize through experience that it is He who makes us do everything. Never believe that you are the doer; you will gradually realize this through experience of the doer."

"Always cherish the thought that you are nobody. Whatever there is, it is only the power . . . you are only the medium." This attitude may be merely intellectual in the beginning, but eventually you will discover through experience that it is a sublime truth. Whether you feel this non-doing through the intellect or through personal experience, it leads directly to detachment. One becomes detached in all situations of life. This is the means to harmony, happiness and higher experience.

What about awareness? This is the other vital aspect of karma yoga. How does bhakti relate to increasing awareness? We have partly covered this in the subject of detachment, for the attitude of not being the doer automatically increases awareness. But there is another factor in bhakti yoga which intensifies awareness -

this is remembrance. Most people are unaware because of sleepiness or forgetfulness. If you feel devotion towards something then you are more likely to remember. You are more likely to be awake. And certainly you are more likely to be aware. So a bhakta who remembers his guru, or personal form of the supreme, or whatever, is automatically more aware in all situations in life. This applies to work and karma yoga. The greater the devotion, the greater the awareness.

In the *Uddhava Gita*, Krishna said: "Surrender all fruits of actions to me and maintain ceaseless remembrance of me . . ." There is an old saying: "It's not what you do but the way that you do it." This applies exactly to bhakti and karma yoga. It does not matter whether a bhakta is rich or poor. A poor person can offer even the meanest object as devotion, yet if this is given with total feeling and sincerity, then it is far better than a rich man who gives vast wealth, but without the slightest devotion. It is the same with all acts and work. It is not the acts in themselves that are important, it is the feeling and sincerity behind them.

You can work and play in any way that comes naturally, but always remember your mantra, your guru or your personal deity or whatever. And it is *bhava* that is the keyword. This means intense feeling of devotion. It is this that can supercharge karma yoga and transform your life.

### **Bhakti and the other yogic paths**

We have discussed bhakti yoga integrated with karma yoga. Now we will briefly discuss the other paths in relation to bhakti yoga.

Firstly we want to emphasize one more time that all the paths of yoga lead to the same experience. The realization is the same; it is only the means that are different. All the paths of yoga aim at reducing and eventually eliminating the compulsive grip of the mind-born ego. Bhakti does this by identifying and relegating all one's impulses towards an outside object of bhakti. Eventually one surrenders the ego to the guru, the supreme or whatever. This is not easy, but this is the aim. Jnana yoga on the other hand, attains the same result by intuitive realization that the ego is not the totality of our being. This automatically reduces the hold of the ego and eventually dissolves it<sup>2</sup>. Karma yoga attains the same end

when one ceases to be the doer. Raja yoga reduces the power of the ego by exploring the mind. This leads to understanding of the vast underlying substratum of each human being and every manifested object. The ego automatically drops away when one starts to know the nature of the mind.

All the paths merge with each other, for they are like different petals on the same flower. Jnana (revelatory knowledge) leads to bhakti and bhakti leads to jnana. Karma yoga leads to bhakti and vice versa. In the beginning however, the aspirant must tread that path (or paths) that suits his or her temperament. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says: "I welcome all men, no matter how they approach me. Men pursue me from every direction, O Partha." (4:2)

Some people say that bhakti yoga is the quickest and the best path. Well, this may be true if you are devotionally inclined, but if you are not, then it is not the quickest path. If you are more inclined to actions or to thought, then other paths are probably more suitable at present. Bhakti is powerful, no doubt, but only if you automatically and naturally feel devotion. Eventually, bhakti will arise, for it is inherent in everyone. Each path is powerful if practised and if it suits the personality of the aspirant.

Deeper knowledge of existence does not arise separately from bhakti or devotion. They arise simultaneously. As one gains more knowledge, so bhakti increases. As both knowledge and bhakti increase, so actions become more incisive, powerful and efficient. This is karma yoga. Also as these other attributes arise, so one is more able to explore and know the mind (raja yoga). These are all interrelated. As all these things increase, so does the experience of beatitude; one becomes enveloped in a cloud of intoxicating bliss. This is the wine of the tantras and the soma of the Vedas. It is the nectar . . . the amrit . . . the divine fragrance. Therefore, remember these paths are not rigidly separated, they are all intimately connected.

They show that bhakti (devotion) and jnana (knowledge) are not really very different; various sages have cleverly defined them. For example, in the *Viveka Chudamani* by Shankaracharya it says: "Among things conducive to liberation, bhakti is most important. Seeking

after one's real nature is one definition of bhakti yoga. Enquiry into the truth of one's being is devotion . . ." (verses 31, 32)

#### The focal point of devotion

You can devote yourself to anything. But it must be something for which you spontaneously feel bhakti, love or devotion. The object is a means to an end. The object should not be imposed on your character. It should not be foreign or unnatural to your personality. It should be something for which devotion arises spontaneously. This is so important; but it can be anything. In the *Uddhava Gita*, a section of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, it says: "The Supreme can be worshipped in whatever image or medium for which the worshipper feels reverence and devotion, for being the soul of the universe, I (Krishna) dwell in all things."

You can choose anything, for whatever you worship is a form of the supreme. In the case of devotees of Krishna, he represents, symbolizes and is everything. He is the essence of all things. Though he is usually depicted in human form, playing a flute and with a peacock feather in his hair, he can actually be represented by any form, any object. The well known form of Krishna is highly venerated by large numbers of people in India. Many people feel overwhelming bhakti for this human form of Krishna. He captivates their hearts and all their aspirations. And this is wonderful, for it can easily lead to higher experience and expanded awareness. But Krishna is not restricted to this form. He can be anything. It is the focus of attention that is important. If you feel devotion for one particular form then use it as a means of expressing bhakti.

In Christianity, the focal point of bhakti is Christ or the Virgin Mary. These can also lead to transcendence if the bhakti is great enough. In fact, this is the method that many great Christian saints have utilized in order to know the unspeakable. Saints like St. Bernard, St. Teresa, St. Francis and so forth were all bhaktas. They all used their love of Christ as a means to deeper understanding of existence. In this way, they harmonized their whole being. From this arose cosmic understanding and bhakti.

In tantra, there are vast numbers of forms of Shakti, the cosmic mother. They all represent the various aspects of existence. They all represent the absolute. It does not matter

whether it is Kali, Durga, Chhinnamasta, Tripurasundari, Saraswati, Dumavati, Shodashi, Bhuvaneshwari, Annapurna, or any of the hundreds of other traditional forms of Shakti. If you feel bhakti to one of these forms, and many people do in India, then you should direct your emotional and mental energy towards it. This will channelize all the forces of your being.

Incidentally this is why the spiritual climate of India is so extraordinary. There are countless numbers of different deities, all of which are perfectly acceptable as a focal point of bhakti. Such is the tolerance and freedom of worship. The worship of the supreme can be directed towards anything. Why not? All these different images act as a centre through which one can expand awareness. But there must be compelling devotion. There must be attraction towards a particular form. Without this, there cannot be bhakti.

Even certain systems of Buddhism utilize deities as a means to higher awareness. Actually, Buddha was against the use of deities, for he knew that they could so easily lead to superstition, ignorance and dogma. This is partly true, and was certainly the case in Buddha's time when religion had totally degenerated into mere ritual without meaning, purpose and understanding. But this will not occur if one keeps in mind the purpose of bhakti and is tolerant of other forms of worship. Bhakti can lead to expanded awareness. Many Buddhists after the death of Buddha realized that there was justification for the use of deities. Because of this, many deities were introduced into such sects as Tibetan Buddhism - Amogh Siddhi, Tara, Avaloketeshwara and others. These represent different aspects of existence and states of awareness. They can be used as objects of bhakti. They can invoke power well beyond their material form.

In Islam, Mohammed discouraged the worship of images of the supreme for the same reason as Buddha, because among superstitious people it can so easily lead to mere idolatry. This again was certainly true when Mohammed was alive. People worshipped idols in a blind fashion. Rituals were performed in mere lip language without any real feeling, which led to ignorance, exactly the opposite purpose of worship and bhakti. There has to be an attitude of understanding.

Islam, however, is a bhakti religion. The bhakti is directed towards Allah, the all embracing Lord. He is worshipped as an abstraction.

What we have said about Islam also applies to Judaism: the bhakti is directed to a nebulous or formless form of the supreme. So, you can use a specific form as a focus of devotion, or you can use an abstraction. It does not really matter. The important thing if you feel some type of bhakti is that you express it and channel it in one direction towards the form, or non-form of the supreme.

You can express bhakti towards anything . . . Krishna, Christ, Rama . . . anything that spontaneously creates a feeling of devotion from your heart. You can use a symbol such as Aum or the cross. You can use a mantra; in fact this is an excellent method, especially if you are attracted by the specific sound of a mantra and that which it represents. You can express bhakti towards a great saint, or yogi or a sage, and best of all towards a guru. A guru will not only act as a focal point of bhakti, he will also inspire you in your practices and give direct guidance. This is the personal grace of the guru.

The object of devotion should be something that attracts you as a lamp attracts moths. It should be something that you cannot stop thinking about. It should be something that you can relate to, identify with. The aim is that the object of bhakti overwhelms your whole attention. If there is something or someone who acts as a magnet for your bhakti, then adopt this as your object of devotion.

This bhakti towards a particular form leads to other things which transcend the external nature of the object. With experience, your bhakti will transform itself so that it encompasses more and more. Eventually, there is no need to confine oneself to devotion of a limited figure, because a feeling of devotion or veneration for everything develops. But this must arise spontaneously; there is no need to cultivate any feelings. It should arise naturally from the very depths of your being.

### **The form of the supreme**

People often say: "How can Krishna, Rama, Christ, etc. possibly be the supreme? Why should we worship the supreme in a limited form?" But this misses the whole point of



worship and bhakti. If the supreme, the absolute is everywhere in everything, then why not also in the form of Krishna or Christ? It does not matter whether it is Krishna or Christ, or whether it is Krishna or Krist! There is no difference. It does not matter what form you choose. Furthermore, this worship or bhakti to a specific form, this personalization of the supreme, is a means for you to know the higher experience for yourself. Everything and anything is simultaneously the absolute and not the absolute. This seems a contradiction in logical terms, and it is. But you must understand the implications behind this statement for yourself. Forms or deities such as Krishna and Christ are both the supreme and not the supreme. It depends entirely on one's level of awareness. The important thing, however, is that anything for which you feel overwhelming, intense bhakti can be the means to go beyond the normal, mundane levels of awareness and experience.

They say that Krishna, Christ, Rama, etc. are avatars (divine incarnations), but actually everything and everyone in the universe is a divine incarnation. You are yourself a divine incarnation, but probably don't know it. The idea and aim is to go beyond the limitations of one's individual self and to know the transcendental nature of one's real self.

Therefore, the best advice we can give here is that you discard all rational, intellectual thought and discussions about the validity of worshipping a certain form of incarnation of divinity. The answer to the question is way beyond the intellect - the answer is transcendental. All you have to do is to express and channel bhakti to any form that comes naturally to your personality. The answer will come in time. All doubts will be dispelled. You will in time, realize the real, ineffable, unspeakable nature and purposes of worshipping a specific form.

Scientifically, this idea of the unlimited in the limited or the infinite in the finite is not new. Let us give an example. Scientists have been amazed at the implications behind research into the nature of the DNA molecule. If you have forgotten what the DNA molecule<sup>3</sup> is, it is the so-called molecule of life. It is the molecule of incredible complexity, which moulds individual characteristics in human beings. It is the blueprint of hair colour, size of

feet, height and all other features of each person. It determines the pattern of growth from childhood to adulthood. It is the molecule that fixes our mode of life and we have to follow its dictates on a physical level. But there is much more. Scientists are beginning to tell us, with the awe of mystics, that this molecule contains the entire knowledge of our evolutionary past. It contains the collective unconscious of the human race. It contains the memory of events that occurred thousands and millions of years ago. It contains the entire history of existence. The scientists probably find it hard to believe the facts for themselves, but they are forced to this conclusion through experience and research. It is something that the conditioned mind cannot easily accept or grasp.

So science is looking and pointing in the same direction as yoga and religions. Science is also starting to revise its attitude towards atoms. Many top scientists have already discarded the mechanical model of the 'simple' atom. They no longer regard an atom as merely a collection of electrons buzzing and whirling around a central nucleus. This may be a reasonable picture, but tests and experiments indicate beyond doubt that the nature of the atom is much more than the mechanical model. There is a substratum, an essence that lies hidden behind each and every atom. Each atom seems to be like a whirlpool a centre where cosmic forces are focussed. So where will this type of thinking and such discoveries take us? Possibly to the point where yoga and science hold each other's hand and realize that they are basically talking about the same thing.

What we are trying to point out is that each particle in the universe is connected to the infinite. Therefore, is it inconceivable that any point, any object, any focus, any deity can lead us to transcendental experience? You must answer this question for yourself through personal experience, but this in a sense gives scientific validity to the idea and method of bhakti yoga. One concentrates on a specific point. This leads to the beyond. Devotion of one's mental and emotional powers to a limited object can lead to transcendence. If you are scientifically inclined and you are following modern discoveries, then you should be able to see a glimmer of sense in the idea of attaining the infinite through the finite.

The explanation we have given is not intended to explain the power of bhakti. There is far more behind experiencing the transcendental by means of the finite, than can be explained in current scientific terminology. But what we have tried to do is to show that the worship of a finite object or deity is not totally alien to science. If science can tell us that each and every DNA molecule contains the immeasurable collective unconscious, then is it absurd, to suggest that bhakti or devotion to an object can also lead directly to the awareness of the infinite consciousness?

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says: "A bhakta can worship me in any form; whatever form he chooses, I will justify and accept his bhakti." This sums up the whole subject. Follow your own feelings of devotion, if you have them.

Don't feel obliged to worship only traditional forms. You can choose aspects of nature if you wish, as did so many poets such as Wordsworth. Worship can be in so many different ways. The great scientist George Washington Carver expressed his bhakti when he said: "When I touch that flower I am touching infinity. It existed before there were human beings on this earth and will continue in the millions of years to come. Through that flower, I talk to the infinite which is only a silent force."

#### Love of everything

Needless to say, it is not easy to love and feel bhakti towards everything. In fact, it cannot arise until one wallows in states of higher awareness. When one is in perfect tune with the infinite, whether for a second or a lifetime, then one spontaneously feels love for everything without exception or stipulation.

At the same time, it is a very useful practice in bhakti yoga to superimpose divinity in any form that you conceive, whether tangible or intangible, on everything that you see in the world. That is, you can try to worship everything, seeing all as a manifestation of divinity. That is, if you are a devotee of Krishna, then you can try to see Krishna, in form or essence, in everything. At first this attitude and feeling is more intellectual than anything else. But with practice, bhakti will arise automatically in the light of personal experience. Then you will truly see divinity in everything not through faith or belief, but through personal knowledge and experience.

One should try to see divinity in everyone no matter what their faults and propensities. In the *Uddhava Gita* it says: "One should treat all others with respect and honour, in the same way that one shows devotion to the supreme (here in the form of Krishna). This leads to freedom from hatred, envy, malice, self-conceit." This is not easy to put into practice without a definite transcendental experience. But if you do this, even to a small degree, then your mind will become more and more relaxed. Moreover, it will also be wide awake and alert because of the remembrance. This is a rapid means to meditation.

The *Uddhava Gita* continues: "... Believing the Lord to be in all things, he (the bhakta) should worship all things, whether a pariah, dog, or a donkey until he experiences the real meaning of divinity in all things." This can lead to the experience of the great Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore when he wrote: "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers. It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle of birth and death, in ebb and flow. I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this word of life. And my pride is from the life throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment."

The aim is to see the supreme divinity in every face, to worship everyone and everything, because everything is indeed divine. But you should feel bhakti towards things not because they are different, but because everything is in fact the essence of yourself.

It is when you start to feel this bhakti towards everything that you start to harmonize with others and with yourself. It is under these circumstances that you will gain happiness from the happiness of others. There is a saying that goes something like: "to find joy in another's joy, is the secret of happiness." It doesn't mean that you have to walk around joking and laughing with everyone. This is more likely to be show and falsity than anything else. It means living your life, but being tolerant of others, trying to understand others, trying to increase the happiness level of those people that you meet if it is possible. A man's life has meaning

when a little more love and light comes into the world through his efforts. This bhakti towards fellow beings was expressed powerfully by St. Francis of Assisi when he wrote the following poem:

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, let me sow pardon.  
Where there is doubt, to sow faith.  
Where there is despair, to sow light.  
And where there is sadness, let me sow joy.  
Oh, Divine Master, grant that  
I may not so much seek to be consoled,  
As to console.  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And it is in dying (to the ego) that we are  
born to eternal life (expanded awareness).*

This is the way to reduce the fetters of selfishness. It is also the way to make the mind more receptive to higher experience.

There is a state of bhakti called *madhura* (divine sweetness). This is love of the divine in everything. One sees beauty and perfection everywhere. Wherever one looks one sees the form of the divine. There is love for everything. One looks outwards and only sees the work and essence of the supreme. This is an intoxication of bliss. One becomes saturated with bliss, for there is nothing that is not the supreme essence. It can be compared to the love that a man feels towards a woman, his beloved; or the love a woman shows towards her beloved. But this love is directed towards everything, yet, and this is the strange thing, it is simultaneously love that is non-directional; it is merely love and bliss in itself. It is not directed towards anything in particular, for this implies separateness and difference. It is both love for everything and love for nothing specifically.

In India, there are wonderful devotional songs which try to depict this indescribable state of all-encompassing bhakti. The great bhakta Tukaram wrote a song, one among many, called *Virat Bandana* in the Maharashtrian language of West India. The rough translation of the title is 'world prayer'. The first verse is as follows:

*In every place are you,  
In every shape are you.  
Your names are many,  
But you are really only one.  
Your playground is this visible universe.  
In all this play, in all this carnival,  
There is verily only you.*

There is another beautiful Sanskrit song called *Shyam Ki Madhuri*, which means the 'sweetness of the supreme'. It is a song that names all things of the world as being the essence of sweetness of the supreme. The song expresses the feeling of the person who feels *madhura bhakti* - divine love of everything.

Bhakti is like being in love with everything continuously, from humans, to the birds, the flowers . . . everything. You have no choice, for you realize their real nature and the nature of yourself and with this 'impossible' relationship, how is it possible not to feel love for everything? When you gain a peep, a glimpse of the essence of everything, the essence that is normally hidden from the eyes of most people, bhakti must result. Find out your real nature and the nature of everything and you will feel bhakti. You will never be the same person again.

But this state comes only when one has the grace of expanded awareness. Once you have had a taste of the divine kiss from the lips of the beloved, then you will feel unquenchable thirst and aspiration for the supreme consciousness. The bhakta will chase and worship the supreme like a madman. One will forget everything except the divine. One divine kiss and one's whole life is transformed.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This has previously been explained in Karma Yoga, Part 1 and 2: Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1 and Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 1

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

<sup>3</sup> For further details on the DNA molecule refer to 'Meditation and the Mind': Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 2

## Topic 2

# Amaroli

In this topic we intend to describe various aspects of *amaroli*, or urine therapy. Many people have actually used urine as a means of removing certain ailments. We have read of almost miraculous cures of chronic diseases attributed solely to amaroli. We cannot vouch for the cure of leprosy, cancer, etc. through amaroli, for we lack the actual experience, but at the same time we are prepared to keep an open mind on the subject. We will present the facts as we see them, so that you can decide for yourself whether amaroli is valid or not.

### The wisdom of the ancients

Many ancient and tested traditional systems have praised the benefits of amaroli. In tantra there is one whole text devoted to it. The text is called the *Damara Tantra* and the process is called *shivambu kalpa vidhi*. The word *shivambu* has various meanings; in this context, it means 'urine'; the word *kalpa* here means 'to change', or 'to revitalize' and *vidhi* means 'process' or 'technique'. Therefore, *shivambu kalpa vidhi* can be translated as 'the practice of using urine to regenerate the body'.

There are 108 verses devoted entirely to amaroli. It is suggested that the urine be either taken alone or with various types of herbs. If you wish to find out more you should read the text yourself. We will quote three verses that summarize the whole process:

"A sensible man gets up early in the morning when three quarters of the night has passed (about 3 or 4 o'clock) faces the east and passes urine." (verse 6)

"The initial and concluding flow of urine is to be discarded. The intermediate flow is to be consumed. This is the most suitable method." (verse 7)

"One should take one's own urine. The mouth and tail of a snake contain poison. In the same way, the first and last portion of flow tend to be unwholesome. This is widely accepted." (verse 8)

The whole process is solemnly explained to Parvati by her husband Lord Shiva.

In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, a traditional tantric yogic text, it says: "The first and last portion of *shivambu* (urine), which is pungent, should not be taken. The intermediate flow should be consumed daily. This is called amaroli according to the *Khandakapalika*."

There are many more ancient references. Amaroli is widely mentioned in ayurvedic texts such as the *Susruta*. So there is nothing new about drinking urine.

### Is urine a poison?

One of the prime functions of the kidneys is to maintain the fluid balance of the body. That is, the body must be kept at a reasonably fixed level of alkalinity (ph); to do this the kidneys remove acid from the body. This occurs especially after meals. Associated with this elimination are various other constituents, one of which is ammonia. It is this ammonia that some people would object to, as it is poisonous in certain quantities. However, in the amounts that the body produces, especially from a vegetarian low-protein diet, it is not a problem.

### Contents of urine

Urine contains: urea, creatinine (protein), uric acid, amino nitrogens, ammonia, sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, chloride compounds, sulphate compounds (organic and inorganic), enzymes, hormones, trace elements

It contains various other constituents, the amount and concentration of which depends on diet and health. Most of these materials are essential substances for maintaining the body and can be recycled. This is one of the reasons why amaroli may give so many benefits. However, this is still subject to experimental verification and as yet no real scientific proof has been given to substantiate the claims of proponents of amaroli.

### **Overcoming fear**

If you want to start to practise amaroli, the biggest obstacle is your own mind. It is difficult for most people to even touch urine, let alone take the first sip. This has to be overcome gradually.

The best method of overcoming your phobia is to first of all wash your hands in urine. Then the following day, or after a few days, start to wash different parts of your body. Eventually you should be able to wash your whole body in urine. Of course you should also wash afterwards with water.

Then, during washing with urine, tentatively put a drop on your tongue. You will find that it is not as bad as you think it is. In fact, you may even find it tasty. There is one man in the ashram who says that it reminds him of Jamaican beer (not mm).

Eventually you will find that you can take a sip of urine without the slightest hesitation. It is then a short step to actually consuming a glassful of urine. It is only cultural brain-washing that makes us nauseous at the thought of consuming urine.

## **PRACTICE**

### **External therapy**

Many people wash themselves thoroughly with urine every morning. After a minute or so this is all washed off with water. The effect is to remove inlaid dirt, grease and toxins from the skin. It has an osmotic and solvent action which draws out impurities. This is aided by the warmth of urine opening the pores of the skin; your body produces its own hot water, why not use it? At the same time, salts from the urine are taken in through the pores of the skin replacing lost salts.

Anyone who has cuts, grazes, sores or similar open wounds can use urine as a disinfectant. Not only does it keep the wound clean and free from infection, but it also seems to aid the speed of healing. If you suffer from boils, pimples or fungus infections such as athlete's foot, then you can use urine as a means of drawing out the underlying impurities. If you burn or scald yourself you can also use urine as a method of disinfecting and drying up the weeping sore. This also applies to blisters. It is said that a mixture of urine, ginger and salt rapidly removes ringworm and eczema. It is

also useful for alleviating mosquito and other similar insect bites. All these points make regular washing with urine a worthwhile habit. Don't waste your urine - use it.

People suffering from measles, chickenpox and other similar ailments can bathe in their own urine. Alternatively you can use urine packs. Urine packs can also be kept on wounds, boils, lumps and swollen areas of the body for prolonged periods of time. For small burns, ice or cold water is recommended, but for larger burns urine packs should be kept on for short durations. The pack should consist of a folded cloth, soaked in warm urine. These packs can also be utilized for certain internal diseases.

Urine can also be associated with massage. This applies to a full treatment of massage as well as massage during your daily bath. The massage should be directed towards the heart to stimulate the return flow (venous) of blood to the heart. This massage will stimulate the local blood circulation, remove toxins and squeeze impurities out of the skin.

### **Internal therapy**

There are some people who praise and worship amaroli, claiming urine to be the divine nectar of life. Ardent supporters give a long list of diseases which can be treated with urine, including diabetes, kidney diseases, heart ailments, high blood pressure, oedema, malaria, general fevers, colds, asthma, menstrual disorders, piles, intestinal diseases, cancer and many more. If you suffer from any of these diseases then you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by trying amaroli. If possible, you should contact a doctor or nature healer who has empathy with amaroli, to obtain advice on the method to be employed for your circumstances. The therapy can be used for both chronic and acute diseases, but in the case of acute disease, such as gastroenteritis, it can be used as an adjunct to conventional therapies.

Those people who have read the topic on shankhprakashalana<sup>1</sup> will appreciate the similarity between the salty water used in that practice and salty urine. The salt content of urine varies greatly. The first flow of urine in the morning is about two to four times more concentrated than urine passed in the daytime. This solution is hypertonic (that is, containing

more salt than normal body fluid). Under these circumstances, the osmotic pressure may draw water out of the body into the intestines. This flushes the system and has many beneficial repercussions. This directly helps to relieve constipation and indirectly other common ailments.

Depending on the diet, the amount of salt in the diet and the amount of water consumed, your urine during the day will tend to be hypotonic (that is, containing less salt than the body fluid) or isotonic (containing the same quantity of salt as the body fluid). The urine will be hypotonic if you consume sufficient water. This urine will be quickly absorbed into the blood to flush the kidneys, muscles, etc.

#### **Amaroli and fasting**

For removal of disease, amaroli is usually combined with fasting, either partial or total. The fasting in itself is a wonderful method of removing many types of diseases. All the energy of the body is directed to rectifying defects. Under normal circumstances it is largely preoccupied with processes of digestion. When you stop taking food then the energy is redirected to healing the body and purging waste material. However, we issue a warning: before undertaking a prolonged fast with amaroli you are strongly advised to seek expert guidance.

If you have no illness, then you can merely practise amaroli without fasting, or if you wish, you can fast for a regular short duration, perhaps one day a week. For example take your lunch, and then eat nothing until lunch on the following day. During fasting you can consume all your urine, taking care to discard the head of the first few flows. Even missing one meal can help to rest the digestive system, especially if you are a big eater.

Amaroli in combination with simple, balanced and vegetarian food is also recommended. The following are the basic rules and techniques of amaroli:

- If you intend to combine amaroli with fasting then you should reduce the intake of processed foods, meat, salt, spices, starches and heavy foods a few days before. Start to eat more fruits and vegetables.
- On arising in the early morning drink the intermediate portion of the urine. It is traditionally said that the urine should be

consumed from an earthen or copper vessel.

If you are ill you can take urine throughout the day. If you are healthy, three times daily - in the morning and then after meals is sufficient. It is approximately one hour after meals that there are said to be many valuable enzymes, and other chemicals present in urine.

You can use urine for gargling, especially for a sore throat.

Do neti with urine (*wamootra neti*). The method is the same as for neti with salt water<sup>2</sup> and can help to clear eye, ear, nose and sinus ailments, as well as headaches and so on.

You must use your discretion when you practise. If you are unsure consult an expert.

We suggest you combine amaroli with yoga practices to give a more integrated approach to health.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2

<sup>2</sup> For details of neti with salt water refer to Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

## Asanas: Benefits

When describing the benefits of asanas there is always the tendency of oversimplification. The concrete benefits that we attribute to each asana in this book, though definitely valid, are

only scratching the surface. We are actually underselling the vast benefits that can be obtained from them. We generally confine ourselves to listing the physical benefits and pointing out the parts of the body that are specifically influenced. These benefits are true enough, but asanas act in far greater depth. They don't actually affect specific parts of the body to the exclusion of all other parts. Every asana has positive and harmonious repercussions on the whole being of the practitioner. They act on the gross and easily perceivable physical body, but far more important in relation to maintaining or improving health and removing disease, they act on the psychic (pranic body) and personal mind. It is the influence on these far more subtle aspects of being that bring about the main benefits of asanas. But it is these more subtle planes that cannot be discussed in concrete terms. They have to be experienced. It is imbalance in the flow of prana and mental disharmony etc. that are the root causes of disease. Asanas help to harmonize both these spheres.

Asanas don't really act in a specific sense, but in a total sense. That is, they tend to harmonize the entire subtle instrumentation of the individual being. This in turn helps to rapidly bring about vibrant health, or at least improved health. Of course, we could say more about the effects on the mind and the pranic body, but the relationships and interactions are very subtle, and any attempt to be specific only leads to gross overgeneralization and eventually more confusion. It is for this reason that we stick to describing benefits that come from asanas through direct physical reasons, such as massage, stretching the nerves, etc. But the greatest and more profound benefits come through the influence of the asanas on

the pranic and mental bodies. It is these influences that can bring about remarkable improvements in one's overall health and attitude towards life.

Ideally, asanas should be done amidst conditions of peace and harmony. It is in this manner that they will most effectively purge the system of all types of abnormalities, whether physical, pranic or mental. This is one of the reasons why a sojourn in a quiet haven, combined with yogic practices such as asanas, is so therapeutic. Furthermore, asanas give greatest benefits if you simultaneously change food habits, sleep habits, etc. so that they are more conducive to well-being. The habits here are the ones that are obviously detrimental to good health. We won't discuss them here for you are more than likely fully aware of them. Even if you don't change inharmonious habits, asanas will still help to bring about good health, but they work less successfully and efficiently. In fact, without this effort to reorientate your way of life, they will probably only manage to maintain the status quo and prevent you going further down the road to ill health. We don't want you to become a faddist, or to suppress your natural inclinations. All we want you to do is to bear these factors in mind when you try to gain good health and when you utilize asanas as an aid.

Think of your body as an iceberg, the physical body being the part that lies above the waves of the sea. The greatest bulk of the iceberg lies unseen, submerged in the depths of the sea. It is the same with your individuality; most of it lies unseen in the more subtle layers of the pranic and mental body. It is this hidden aspect, the majority in fact of the total, which has the greatest control and influence on your mode of life, health, etc. During the practice of asanas, it is only the physical manipulations that are seen. One also becomes aware of increased flexibility etc. Yet while doing asanas (and here we mean correctly with awareness and relaxa-

tion), there are vast harmonizing processes occurring below the normal levels of perception in the mind and pranic body. These are the most important revitalizing influences of asanas, yet also the least obvious. It is only with increased awareness that one becomes more and more familiar with these processes. The pranic flows are harmonized. These are the intermediaries between the mind and the physical body and they have a controlling influence on the processes occurring within the physical body. They are very real . . . they only seem unreal because they cannot be perceived in normal states of awareness.

To do asanas correctly, there must be awareness. This leads to relaxation of the subconscious mind and the eventual purging of mental conflicts etc. The mind is also acted on through the physical body. The physical practice induces harmonious flows of nerve energy, breathing, heartbeat and so forth. These in turn help to harmonize the pranic flows within the pranic body, which in turn helps to calm the mind.

The physical, pranic and mental bodies are only arbitrary classifications. They don't really exist as watertight compartments. They are part of the same totality of individual existence. It is only through limited awareness that one sees oneself as mainly a physical body with an accumulation of a few thoughts. The being of an individual extends from the physical, through the pranic and into the mental. And even much deeper again beyond limitation and definition, but at this stage we don't want to go further than the personal mind. It is the same with the iceberg. We all accept, at least most of us, that there is far more than the part that protrudes above the water. The totality is both above and below the sea. The totality of the iceberg is both visible and not visible. It is the same with individual existence; the physical body is the only part that most people see. In states of higher awareness these other realms can be perceived.

Our main purpose in this topic is to point out and emphasize that asanas act on deeper spheres of our individual being. Though they are predominantly physical, they have positive, harmonious repercussions on the more subtle realms of our being. Of course, most of the control and influence on the physical body comes from the more subtle layers, but there

is also a feedback so that the physical aspect influences the more subtle spheres. Let us illustrate this with the analogy of the iceberg again. The greatest control, in a sense, comes from the ice that lies below the sea. That is, the top section floats according to the dictates of the submerged part. But conversely, the top also affects the lower portion. If you start changing the contour or nature of the ice above the sea there will be repercussions below the waves, because it is a whole unit. There are interactions. It is the same with the direct action of asanas on the physical body: there are repercussions in deeper realms, beyond normal perception. This is the important point to remember. Asanas affect your mind, psychic body and physical body. You may not be aware of the subtle influences, but they take place.

So when we list the benefits of asanas, remember that far more is implied. Every asana has an influence on one's whole individuality, whether small or large. This even applies to the simplest asana. It is unrealistic to define rigid boundaries where asanas work and don't work, give benefits and don't give benefits. They affect and help to harmonize your whole being. We give specific benefits only because they are obvious from the physical nature of the asanas, can be easily felt in oneself and can be easily described. But the deeper benefits take place way below the level of perception of most people. You must experience them for yourself. So when reading the benefits that we briefly describe remember that there is much, much more that we don't mention.



## Asanas: Practice

Having already described *bhujangasana* and *shalabhasana*<sup>1</sup> we will now describe *dhanurasana* (bow pose), which combines the benefits and features of both these backward bending asanas and also has some specific physical benefits of its own. Ideally, all three asanas should be done together, one after the other. However, those people who are short of spare time can practise *dhanurasana* as an alternative for the other two.

### DHANURASANA (BOW POSE)

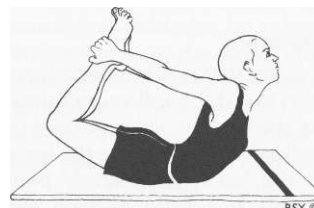
The Sanskrit word *dhanu* means 'a bow'. Therefore, this is called 'the bow pose', because in the final pose the body resembles a bow, the trunk and thighs representing the wooden part of the bow and the lower parts of the legs and the arms representing the bowstring. This is a perfect description of the asana.

#### Scriptural references

This is a well-known asana and mentioned in various yogic texts. To save unnecessary repetition we will merely quote a verse from the *Gherand Samhita*: "While lying on the ground, stretch your legs as straight as sticks. Catch hold of your feet with your hands behind the back. Adjust your body so that it takes the shape of a bow. Rock to and fro. This is *dhanurasana* according to the yogis." (verse 1:19)

#### Basic technique

There are a number of variations of *dhanurasana*, all having their own good points. The method that we will describe as the basic technique is the one most widely practised and taught. Try this technique and also the alternative methods described later. Compare them and choose the variation that suits you. Lie flat on the floor, facing downwards. Bend the legs at the knees and bring the heels as close as possible to the back.



Reach back with your hands and grasp the ankles of each leg.

Hold the feet together so that the big toes are in contact.

Place your chin on the ground.

Relax your whole body, especially your back.

This is the starting position.

Breathe out deeply while on the ground.

Breathe in deeply.

Then tense your leg muscles and try to straighten your legs.

This is of course impossible because of the anchoring effect of the arms.

The result will be that you will arch your back and lift thighs, chest and head off the ground. The only muscular contraction should be in the legs.

The back, the arms and the rest of the body should be relaxed as much as possible.

The arms should remain straight and passive; they take no part in the actual raising of the body but act as tie bars.

Hold the head back and raise the chin.

You should adjust your position so that the soft part of the abdomen (the belly) supports the weight of the entire body on the ground; this can be achieved by adjusting the height of the head or by slackening or tensing the legs. Hold your breath in the final pose.

Stay in the final pose for as long as it is comfortable.

Don't strain.

Then slowly relax the leg muscles and return to the starting position.

When you reach the ground, breathe out.

Relax the whole body for a short period of

time until the respiration returns to normal. Then you can repeat the practice.

### Breathing

First exhale and then inhale deeply in the starting position. Hold your breath as you raise the body, stay in the final pose and return to the ground. Exhale when you have returned to the starting position.

### Mistakes to avoid

This is an asana that is often done incorrectly. Take care to avoid the following mistakes:

- Tensing the back in order to raise the body into the final pose. Only use the leg muscles and let the back be passively bent backwards. This is a little difficult for many people, but with practice it will become easier.
- Holding the feet instead of the ankles. Make sure that your hands wrap around the region of the ankles, not the feet.
- Separating the feet. Keep the feet together so that the big toes remain in contact throughout the entire practice. Beginners will find it easier to keep the knees apart. If you wish you can try to bring them closer together while in the final pose. This will intensify the effect of the asana.
- Resting the weight of the body on the ribs instead of the soft part of the abdomen in the final pose. Adjust the balance of your body so that the belly lies in contact with the floor. This is easily done by adjusting the height of the head, by either tensing or relaxing the leg muscles, accordingly.
- Bending the arms. Keep the arms straight throughout the entire practice.

### Variation 1

This method is essentially the same as the basic technique already described, but with one notable difference: the breathing is deep and slow in the final pose.

The technique is as follows:

Do all the actions described for the basic technique as far as raising the body into the final position. Instead of holding the breath, breathe slowly and deeply. Try to accentuate the rhythmical expansion and contraction of the abdomen with the breathing.

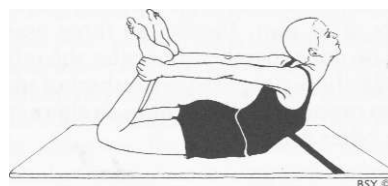
Stay in the final pose for as long as possible without strain.

Then return to the ground.

This method is a little more difficult, but it gives an accentuated massage to the abdominal organs.

### Variation 2 - for beginners

The following is a simplified version of dhanurasana. It is called *saral dhanurasana* (easy bow pose). It gives basically the same benefits as other forms but at a slightly reduced level. It is a good asana and is ideally suitable for beginners and for people who cannot do the other forms of dhanurasana.



The technique is as follows:

Take the starting position described for the basic technique.

Place both the knees and feet together.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe out deeply.

Breathe in deeply.

Tense the leg muscles and bend the feet backwards towards the head as far as possible. Keep the knees and the thighs on the ground throughout the entire practice; don't raise them.

Try to raise the head and chest as high as possible off the ground, using only the leverage of the legs.

Let the back muscles remain passive.

This is the final position.

In the final pose, the breath can either be held or can be deep and slow.

That is, the breathing can be as given for the basic technique or for variation 1. Choose that which you like best.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time.

Then slowly lower the head and the chest to the ground by relaxing the leg muscles.

Repeat the practice when the breathing has returned to normal.

### Variation 3 - rocking

While in the final pose one can rock to and fro on the abdomen. This increases the massage

of the inner organs. To initiate this rocking movement it will be necessary to both:

1. Alternately tense and relax the leg muscles slightly,
2. Breathe in and out.

Both of these actions change the position of the centre of gravity and induce a forward and backward movement. At first the movement will be slight, but it will increase as the body gains momentum. When in full motion, the chin will nearly touch the floor at one extreme and the thighs will touch the floor at the other extreme. Needless to say, the back must be tensed during this variation.

Do as many rocking movements as you can without excessive strain. Men should be careful not to injure themselves by compressing or squashing their testicles. Beginners will probably find it easier to separate the knees while rocking to and fro. This rocking motion cannot be done in variation 2 - saral dhanurasana.

#### **Awareness and duration**

Direct your awareness to the breathing and relaxation of the back. In variation 1, you can be aware of the alternate inflation and deflation of the abdomen in the final pose. In the rocking variation you should be aware of the coordination of breathing and the flexion of the legs to induce the rocking.

Remain in the final pose for as long as possible without strain. Do it as many times as you wish providing there is no excessive drain of energy. We recommend 3-5 rounds.

#### **Limitations**

People who suffer from a weak heart, high blood pressure, hernia, peptic or duodenal ulcers, appendicitis, colitis and other abdominal ailments, should not do this asana.

#### **Precautions**

Don't practise dhanurasana after meals; wait for at least three or four hours.

It is advisable not to do dhanurasana immediately before going to bed at night, as this asana stimulates the adrenal glands and the sympathetic nervous centre in the navel. You may find this prevents the onset of sleep.

#### **Sequence**

In your asana program, dhanurasana is ideally practised after bhujangasana and shalab-

asana respectively<sup>1</sup>. It should be followed by a forward bending asana as a counterpose.

#### **Benefits**

Dhanurasana roughly duplicates the benefits of bhujangasana and shalabhasana. However, there are notable differences. In shalabhasana, the back muscles are tensed, while in dhanurasana they are passive. In bhujangasana, the back muscles should also be relaxed, but the main influence is on the small of the back in the region of the sacrum. In dhanurasana, the main influence is the intense intra-abdominal pressure. Each of these asanas has its place in an asana program. They complement each other. It is for this reason that they should be done one after the other.

Dhanurasana is very useful for overcoming lethargy and sluggishness in mind and body. It has a direct effect on the solar plexus at the navel, which is a large sympathetic nervous centre so important for healthy functioning of the organs of the body.

These nerves are brought into maximum efficiency, which in turn leads to improved functioning of the whole body, especially the digestive, eliminative and reproductive organs.

It decongests the entire abdominal region and its organs. The liver, the multi-duty organ of digestion is massaged, which leads to an overall improved digestion. The pancreas is toned up so that it secretes the correct amount of glucagon and insulin at the right time. The entire alimentary canal is reconditioned, as well as accessory glands. Blood is encouraged to flush through the whole system and this acts as a cleaning process. The kidneys are rendered more efficient, which leads to better fluid balance within the body. It helps to alleviate constipation, dyspepsia, sluggishness of the liver, diabetes and excess fat.

The spinal column is realigned and rejuvenated. The ligaments, muscles and nerves are given a good stretch, especially on the front (anterior) surface. This relieves stiffness and the spine is made more supple and healthy. The deep muscles of the back are exercised which recirculates stagnant blood.

Dhanurasana massages the heart. This is done via the diaphragm, which is pushed towards the heart by the extra pressure in the abdomen. It is also useful for alleviating various chest ailments. For example, it is suitable for

removing the hunching tendency of asthmatics, which aggravates ill health. Dhanurasana realigns the back and thereby improves the breathing processes. This in turn leads to free flow of air through the nasal passages.

Various endocrinal glands are massaged and toned, notably the thyroid and the adrenals. The secretions of the adrenals are regularized. Blood is flushed through the glands. It is this effect that quickly removes tiredness, for cortisone is secreted to give you the required lift; or if you are overactive, the secretion of cortisone is reduced so that the body attains balance. This also helps to alleviate various types of rheumatism.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2 and Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 3

## Pranayama: Practice

One of the main aims of pranayama is to induce a deep state of mental and physical tranquillity. The slower the breathing rate the better. The sound should be imperceptible, or nearly imperceptible. But the breathing must not be forced, if you find difficulty in breathing slowly, then you should reduce your duration of retention.

There is also another factor to remember if you are practising reasonably long breath retentions and prolonged inhalations and exhalations. You will find it difficult if you are eating large meals. You should reduce your intake of food if you find that pranayama is uncomfortable. This will not only enhance the benefits of pranayama but also make it far easier to do. If you feel any negative effects from the practice then you should stop for some time. If necessary contact a qualified yoga teacher for further guidance. It is better to be safe than sorry.

### **Integration of jalandhara bandha and nadi shodhana stage 4 (continued)**

In the previous lesson we combined nadi shodhana with the practice of jalandhara bandha. The internal retention (antar kumbhaka) was done while locking the chin in jalandhara bandha. The previous ratio was 1:8:6:2. This is quite an advanced ratio especially when combined with jalandhara bandha<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, for this lesson you should continue the same practice. Remember that the ratio for inner retention is 8. It is during this period that you should practise jalandhara bandha. At this stage don't attempt to do jalandhara bandha with outer retention of breath. This will come later.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 4

## Topic 2

# Meditation: Japa (Part 2)

As the subconscious mind is progressively cleaned out and one makes headway in meditational practices, one is confronted by the enormity of the psyche and overwhelmed by incredible visions, premonitions of the future and many other things. Though one should watch these infinite numbers of psychic manifestations, it is so essential not to become too enraptured, enthralled and enslaved by them. Watch them by all means, but don't be distracted from going deeper into the more subtle realms. And it is possible to go deeper, much deeper than even the imagination dares penetrate.

Don't become attached to the psychic world. Watch, experience, but always try to remain a witness. Be detached ... be aware. This is the means of not becoming ensnared and distracted from going deeper into one's being. Of course, at this stage you may not be exploring the psyche, but you will in time, if you persevere. We give this warning so that you bear it in mind when you start to delve into the incredible realms of the psyche below the subconscious (or, perhaps beyond the subconscious is a better term). Don't be waylaid too long by the pleasant scenery, and it is really so beautiful, on your way back to the source. Always remember that the aim is to reach and experience the essence of your being. Don't get lost. In the previous lesson we gave an introduction to japa, together with a few practices'. In this topic we want to give a few more techniques.

### JAPA-PART 2

#### Reflection

The practice of japa can bring wonderful benefits if you reflect on the meaning of the mantra. This can be done during the actual practice or throughout the day. This need to know must come from the very depths of your heart. It will not bring results if you do it half-

heartedly. Each mantra has vast power which you have to unfold. You have to merge yourself with the mantra and experience everything that the mantra evokes. Each mantra represents something that cannot be spoken about. It has to be experienced. This is why we are not very interested in explaining the meaning of mantras. This is bound to be superficial. You must find out the meaning of a mantra for yourself. No person can ever explain the real meaning of a mantra to another person. Communication cannot bridge the chasm between verbal meaning and direct experience.

This process of reflection on the meaning of a mantra intensifies the whole process of japa sadhana. However it is really for people who have penetrating powers of enquiry and who have a one-pointed calm mind. You are not obliged to reflect on the meaning of a mantra during japa. Japa will give wonderful results without this reflection, but it can lead to the highest fruit of japa sadhana.

#### Devotion

Devotion is another powerful method of intensifying the practice of japa. It is to be practised by those people who are naturally inclined towards worship. It is for those people who are notably emotional in character.

Each mantra is shakti, each mantra is a direct link to the divine. Therefore, when you chant your mantra, try to feel that you are communing with the divine essence. Feel love in your heart. Be aware of all the associations of the mantra. Let this welling-up of feeling (bhava) fill your whole being. Eventually the heart will recite the mantra spontaneously. This will intensify the whole process of japa.

#### Japa sahita dhyana

The Sanskrit word *sahita* means 'together with', or 'combined with'. The word *dhyana* means 'meditation'. This practice is a combination of

lapa and awareness of an inner symbol (antar trataka)<sup>2</sup>.

If you chant the mantra Aum then you can use the corresponding symbol as a focus of attention. If you have a personal mantra and don't know its symbol then you should use this, otherwise you can choose any other symbol in association with your mantra. If you have an ishta devata, then you can use this for trataka. If you are not too sure on this point contact a qualified teacher.

Incidentally, each mantra is inseparably associated with a definite symbol or form. Therefore, if your mind attains a deep state of relaxation and one-pointedness and receptivity, and if the whole mind is filled with the sound of the mantra, then the specific psychic symbol will spontaneously arise to conscious perception. In this way, you will find out the exact form or symbol of your mantra.

The method is basically the same as we have already described in the previous lesson<sup>1</sup>, but **YOU** must visualize your chosen symbol in front of your closed eyes. If so inclined, you can feel devotion or reflect on the meaning of the symbol and mantra.

If your mind is not one-pointed it is quite difficult to visualize a clear picture. Therefore, we recommend that you first of all calm down your mind and remove distracting thoughts by practising methods 1 and 2 described in the previous lesson<sup>1</sup>. When the mind becomes concentrated, then you can start to practise japa sahita dhyana. This is a more difficult practice, but it is also more powerful. Your awareness must flow towards the mantra, the symbol and the japa rotation. If you find it difficult to maintain a fixed inner image, practise the method previously explained<sup>1</sup>.

### **Likhit japa**

The word likhit means 'written'. Therefore, this practice is called 'written japa'. It involves writing the form of the mantra down in a notebook hundreds of times. For example, you can write the symbol of Aum as follows:

You can of course choose any symbol that you wish.

The letters should be as small and as neat as possible. This will increase the concentration. Write each symbol with the utmost care, proportion and sense of beauty. Let each symbol be a work of art, at least to you.

As you write each mantra, you should mentally chant the associated mantra. This may not seem to be a meditational practice, but it is nevertheless. If you write pages and pages of symbols and simultaneously chant the mantra, then you will induce one-pointedness and harmony of mind. If you associate this writing with devotion and/or reflection on the meaning, then this is even better. This is a well-known practice in India. During the month of Shravana, Hindus traditionally pick numerous leaves from the bilva tree. The mantra *Aum Namah Shivaya* is written on each leaf with red powder and offered to Lord Shiva. This practice continues for a month and generates great devotion.

This is a practice you may like to try on a quiet Sunday afternoon, instead of reading a newspaper or sleeping.

### **Sumirani japa**

This form of japa is designed to be practised throughout the whole day. It is usually done with the aid of a mala with 27 beads. This is carried around by the individual on all occasions. Of course, this may not be very practicable for most people, but this is the traditional method. With people who undertake full time sadhana, this practice is often done continuously. That is, whatever the circumstances, the mala is rotated and the mantra mentally chanted. It is said that this should also be done during sleep. The aim is that eventually the mantra arises spontaneously from the very depths of your being. You don't need to chant the mantra - the mantra chants itself. Your whole being resonates with the mantra. The mala rotates itself. This makes the mind incredibly one-pointed and powerful, and helps in gaining success in other spiritual practices and can induce meditation in itself. It is very powerful, but it is also very difficult and impractical for the average person. It is a little difficult to continuously rotate your mala while talking to your boss, while driving the car, while attending a meeting or whatever, but it is at least a practice you can try when you have a holiday, when you are walking or when you have some spare time. If you chant your mantra regularly during all spare time, then eventually the mantra will manifest itself automatically at any time when you are free of tasks or commitments. It will repeat itself in the background of

all your actions. This is very powerful and will quickly lead you to higher experiences.

**Ajapajapa**

This is spontaneous japa which arises in harmony with the natural rhythms of the mind-body complex. We will introduce this subject later in the book'.

**General note**

Japa only becomes overwhelmingly powerful when it is done regularly without fail.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7

<sup>3</sup> Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5



## Daily Practice Program

We have introduced you to two subjects that are regarded by many people as suspect: bhakti yoga and amaroli. All we want you to do is keep an open mind to both these topics. If you are uncertain, then don't commit yourself, but at least be open to the possibility of their validity. Many people have used them and praised them, not because they were deluded but because they obtained benefits. If you feel any disinclination to practise amaroli, then don't. We have introduced this subject more to open your eyes than for a specific practical application. We have the highest regard for

bhakti yoga. It is the high octane fuel rocket to expanded awareness, if and only if, you are inclined towards bhakti. If you don't feel that bhakti yoga is your path, then follow other paths, but at least keep an open mind.

In Lesson 14 we introduced the meditative technique of japa. Continue to practise it and also continue with pranayama in the way described in the text.

Little needs to be said about the other practices that we have introduced, namely dhanurasana, only that it should be practised.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
<b>Program 1:</b> duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Dhanurasana	3 rounds	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and		
Jalandhara Bandha	—	20
Aum chanting	—	10
Japa	—	30
Chidakasha Dharana	—	15
		120

Program 2: duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Dhanurasana	3 rounds	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha	—	15
Aum chanting	—	4
Japa	—	25
Chidakasha Dharana	—	5
		90
Program 3: 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Dhanurasana	3 rounds	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Yoga Mudrasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
Japa	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana	—	5
		60
Program 4: duration 1/2 hour for general health		
Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Dhanurasana	3 rounds	3
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
		30
Try to find more time so that you can practise the very important meditational techniques.		