

Lesson 12

To abide by the laws of karma yoga is an uphill task but surely not an impossible one. The karma yogi goes on his way through small day to day events. The test lies in trying the attitude of man towards daily problems, severe and ordinary. The one who can detach himself from the exciting effects of joyful events, and from the maddening effects of sorrowful events is a karma yogi in the true sense of the word, for he has offered all he has. For such a man, prayer does not mean remembrance for a few routine minutes, but it means offering of the whole, full life. For such a person, then life itself becomes a constant prayer. Make your life a constant prayer by dedicating yourself to karma yoga.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Karma Yoga (Part 1)

Karma yoga is the yoga of action or work. Its aim is to bring about integration, harmony and union through action. It is a yogic path that is open to everyone, for we all have to work and perform various activities, whether physical or mental. In fact, it is most suitable for the modern, activity oriented world and is ideal for those of us who find it easier to do something than nothing, which is everyone, for there is nobody who can do absolutely nothing. It is impossible. There must always be some form of action, even if it is sleeping, day dreaming or trying to do nothing. It is through karma yoga that we can start to practise yoga twenty-four hours a day utilizing our actions as a means to gain higher awareness.

The significance of karma yoga is usually overlooked by newcomers to yoga and even by people who have been practising other forms of yoga, such as raja yoga and hatha yoga, for many years. The regular practice of yoga techniques for a fixed time every day brings many benefits. Yet one should try to practise yoga throughout the whole day. This is possible through karma yoga. Asanas, pranayama, meditational techniques, etc. bring wonderful results, experiences and knowledge, but one must relate these inner experiences, obtained during these practices, to everyday life. It is for this reason that we have introduced karma yoga at a reasonably early stage in the book - to enable you to put it into practice to the best of your ability. In this way, you will gain much more from the more tangible yoga techniques that you practise every day, including kriya yoga in the future.

Karma yoga as a means to meditation

Karma yoga can lead to exactly the same experiences as other forms of yoga. There is no doubt about this. But it is difficult for most people to appreciate this point, for other paths of yoga such as raja yoga, seem more 'yogic'.

There is a tendency to think that work cannot possibly be yoga, and of course mere work is not yoga. Karma yoga implies something far greater and more profound than work. It implies selfless, concentrated actions, with awareness.

Karma yoga is an important technique for growth and progress along the spiritual path. It helps to bring peace and equanimity into one's life. In itself, it leads directly to higher awareness and knowledge, even though these experiences bear little relation to the actual work being carried out. It is the inner experience that is important, and this is something that cannot be conveyed by words.

Swami Satyananda, like his guru Swami Sivananda, affirms and emphasizes the importance of karma yoga in order to know the experience of meditation. He proclaims: "One should do one task at a time. Total absorption in any work will gradually train the mind to forget its usual fickleness and unsteadiness. If you plunge into the work at hand with undivided keenness and attention, you will derive great help in meditation."

Everyone in the ashram practises karma yoga in one form or another, in the press, office, library, kitchen or wherever karma yoga is an integral and indispensable part of ashram life.

The motto of karma yoga is to: give - give - and give. The prevailing motto in the world is the opposite, namely to: take - take - and take more. It is this latter attitude that prevents progress in spiritual life and the experience of meditation. All the great spiritual teachers throughout history preached that one should reduce and eventually eliminate all actions and thoughts that are motivated by personal gain. Of course this takes time and cannot be done overnight, yet it is absolutely necessary, if one is to eliminate the power of the ego, the obstacle or the veil which prevents the influx of higher consciousness.

Concentration, willpower and mental problems

Most people have a mind that can be compared to a river with a large number of eddy currents. These currents continually react, clash and oppose the mainstream flow. The result is incessant disturbance, turmoil, friction and loss of energy. If engineers want to tap the power of the river for electrical distribution, they have to channel the water flow into one powerful and unified current with as few eddy currents as possible. Then they have to build and install a turbogenerator, which actually converts the energy of the flowing river into electrical energy. There is a transformation of energy. It is the same with the mind. Normally it is disturbed with endless thought currents which continually interact with each other. The fluctuating mind lacks unified power. Yet this situation can be changed and the mind can be made powerful by firstly channelling the thought currents so that they flow in one harmonious stream, without conflict. The mind has to be concentrated until it becomes a perfect instrument, with an integrated single thought flow. This is the role of karma yoga. A concentrated and powerful mind brings this about; it transforms one's experience of life. It leads to things one does not expect just as it is difficult to understand how electrical energy that lights up your house and drives the household gadgets can possibly come from the energy of flowing water. This is the aim of karma yoga: to channel our thoughts and actions so that the mind helps us instead of hindering us, so that the mind becomes one-pointed and a perfect receiver and reflector of experience and higher awareness. Karma yoga, as well as other forms of yoga, develops willpower. The importance of individual willpower is often overlooked. Few people in fact really know what it is. It can be defined as the ability to motivate, mobilize and harmonize all one's activities for the attainment of a definite purpose. In karma yoga, the practitioner sets out to do his work and duties with as much attention and involvement as possible. Using one's inherent skills and abilities, one attempts to achieve maximum efficiency. In fact, the *Bhagavad Gita* has defined karma yoga as 'efficiency in action'. This total absorption in the work at hand leads to great willpower and unleashing of the powers within the mind.

The whole mind and body becomes integrated and tuned to a high degree of sensitivity, and from this one can start to experience meditation.

It is during work and other activities that you can recognize your mental problems. It is through karma yoga that they are recognized and exhausted. It is for this reason that Swami Satyananda says: "Work would become a source of happiness if one can recognize it as a stepping stone towards spiritual enlightenment - samadhi. Karma yoga is the outlet for one's mixed samskaras (mental impressions and problems)."

Karma yoga is a means to clean out the mind of phobias, problems, fears and all other disturbing factors. During karma yoga, a person has to face all types of experiences, whether good or bad. From these experiences you can learn about yourself, your fallibilities and hang-ups. And none of us can avoid work, so why try. We are forced by our very nature to perform actions, so we might as well accept the situation and work. Yet at the same time we should use this work as a method of cleansing the mind and treading the path to higher awareness. Don't merely work, but work with awareness and gain more from your work. This is the aim of karma yoga.

Karma yoga is a method of harnessing the potential of the mind. Each of us has access to this incredible power and knowledge, yet most people never contact it. Karma yoga is the method of unleashing it and utilizing it. Nothing is developed; the potential is already there waiting to be discovered and used.

The playground of the world

The world of karma, actions, thoughts, situations and circumstances is a testing ground. It is a place where one can find out about oneself. It is a workshop, where the mind-body instrument can be sharpened and made receptive to the influx of higher knowledge and awareness. It is in the world that we can test if the psychophysical blade needs sharpening. If it is blunt, which is usually the case, it is through the world of everyday experiences that it can be sharpened to cut through the veil of ignorance. The world is to be used as a means to tuning the mind-body complex.

Many people go to quiet places to find peace. They don't realize that they are carrying the

source of their unhappiness within them. Some people spend years and years in isolation, yet they often fail to find the peace that they so desperately seek. The reason is simple - it is very difficult to find your mental problems when there is no interaction with other people. The problems remain in the mind and act as blocks, though unrecognized blocks. Most people have to interact with others, if they are to confront and remove their mental problems. There is one man who spent five years as a hermit in the Himalayas, intent on finding the experience of illumination. He never found what he was looking for and was eventually forced to return to society. He admitted that although he gained something, he could probably have gained more by remaining in society and practising karma yoga and other yogic practices. Many people have made the same mistake.

If you want to progress on the yogic path it is not necessary to become a recluse and retire to a mountain cave. If you do so, you may feel a taste of peace and tranquillity, but it probably will not be of sufficient depth to allow the spontaneous occurrence of meditation. It will more than likely be a very superficial sense of happiness. Your mental blocks will remain within your mind and prevent meditation.

You will probably be forced to leave your solitude to remove your problems. Not only this, but your desires and cravings for objects, tasty food, etc., which you previously did not think twice about, will drive you back to society. Objects, tasty food, etc., which you took for granted, will envelop the mind, and your thoughts will be totally absorbed in memories of previous enjoyments. We are not saying that people waste their time when they sojourn in the Himalayas, or in any other quiet place, for many have transformed their whole life in this way. But the people who gain meaningful experiences under these circumstances are people who have previously exhausted most of their problems in society. A person who has a reasonably calm mind will probably make good progress and have wonderful experiences in solitude. But the majority of people will waste their time. It is first of all necessary to clean the mind within society while doing yoga, including karma yoga.

It is in the middle of a teeming city or town, or while involved in disruptive work situations

that you are faced with the most overwhelming problems. Otherwise it is difficult to confront them, let alone remove them. A person who lives in a protected environment is not likely to know his or her problems for they will never know the unhappiness of facing uncomfortable situations. It is necessary to become involved with life and practise karma yoga.

Our ashram is situated in a most unlikely place; it seems on initial consideration, to be very badly located. It lies between a railway line and a dusty road. It appears to be caught between 'the devil and the deep blue sea'. Throughout the day the road is very busy, for it is the main road to the River Ganges. It is on this road that the dead are taken to the river for cremation. This is done in a noisy procession, accompanied by a fanfare of drums and trumpets and other clanging instruments. There is continuous noise around the ashram and visitors often comment that the location is most unsuitable. They have concepts and visions of an ashram in the middle of a forest, with thousands of peacocks and other brightly coloured singing birds, running streams of crystal clear water, herds of deer, and perhaps Lord Shiva himself meditating under a tree. Their preconceived ideas are destroyed when they first see our ashram, but it is more than a certainty that the location is perfectly satisfactory because the ashram is not intended as a retreat. It is not a place to escape from the world. If one wants to escape the big, bad world then the ashram is the wrong and the last place to come. It is too noisy, for it retains its relationship with the activities of the outside world. The ashram is actually situated in an ideal place, for if one can do their yogic practices in the ashram then one can do them almost anywhere. It is a place where one learns to come to terms with oneself and the world, where one clearly recognizes and eventually eliminates inner problems. It is a place to practise karma yoga. It is not a place where you can languish in a sleepy state of calmness, and perhaps be fooled into thinking that you are meditating. It is similar to the busy world in general - a place where one interacts with others and discovers one's mental blocks.

To summarize: the world is not to be shunned. It is a place to be used in order to remove our faults and imperfections. There are many people who regard spiritual life, including yoga,

as being divorced from day to day activities and life in general. This is completely wrong. A person must work, but at the same time transform it by doing karma yoga. This is the path to spiritual experience. Eventually a stage will come when you will feel an inner silence and peace amongst even the most intense activity, harassing situations and the noisiest surroundings. At this stage, one is ready to go to the mountains, though there will actually be no need. There will be a feeling of peace in all situations and one will live in the experience of meditation. This is clearly stated in the *Astravakra Cita*: "The enlightened one neither avoids the crowd, nor seeks the forest. Under all conditions, in any place, he remains perfectly balanced." (18:100) One will practise karma yoga, in the deepest sense, continuously.

Fundamentals of karma yoga

The path of karma yoga accepts the material world around us. It accepts that we must function in the world, but its aim is to utilize the objects, thoughts and actions that now bind each individual, in a constructive manner, to eventually transcend them, break the bondage and attain freedom and knowledge. It is done progressively by acting in everyday life, with full awareness, to the best of one's ability. The aim is to become perfectly free in the fullest sense of the word; to become liberated and in tune with consciousness. Yet one cannot become free except by knowing, confronting, using and eventually transcending the limitations of the world. This is the purpose and realm of karma yoga. A butterfly cannot become free and able to fly immediately. First of all it must pass through the trauma and bondage of being a caterpillar. Eventually, the caterpillar skin is discarded and the butterfly is able to fly away to the bliss of freedom. It is the same with each human being; each person must fully experience and understand the world before being able to transcend it and know spiritual bliss and freedom.

One of the basic precepts of karma yoga is very simple, yet very profound: don't be attached to your actions and their consequences. Work then becomes play, it ceases to be work. Work is generally done with a motive and expectation of results or reward, whereas play is done for its own sake. It is from attachment, not the work itself, that we become

unhappy and discontented. Work rarely harms anyone - it is the expectations, status, rewards and so on that cause the mental turmoil. Therefore an important rule of karma yoga is to do your work, but not to become identified with it. Regard the work and its consequences (the fruit) as something completely separate from yourself. Let us illustrate this with an example. Imagine that you have just spent six months writing a book. It is your brainchild and all your own hard work. You are very proud of it and it is a part of you. Then somebody comes along, picks up the book, reads a few pages and abruptly asks: "Which idiot of an author wrote this?" not knowing that it is you. As a result you are insulted and angry, because your pride has been wounded. There are mental reverberations and besides having a furious argument with the critic of your book, you end up unhappy and depressed for many days. The cause of the unhappiness is not really the critic, though of course he might have been a little more diplomatic; the cause lies with your attachment to the book, the fruit of your work and endeavour. If you had regarded the book as something completely different to yourself, then you would not have suffered any upset and anguish as a result of the severe criticism. If you had considered that the book is not you, that it is only an object outside your body and mind, and only the result of actions performed by you, then the emotional and mental upheaval would not have occurred. It is only a matter of identification; yet wrong identification leads to unhappiness, whereas realistic identification leads to harmony in life situations.

Attachment brings pain and misery, while detachment brings about calmness and contentment. Try and change your existing attitudes and develop this detachment in every aspect of your life. It is only a method. From it will come relaxation and eventually higher awareness. Then the detachment will transform itself into love for everything, not ego love for one's own advantage, but compassion. This will happen as surely as night follows day, for you will understand the deeper relationship existing between all people and things.

Karma yoga aims at reducing the control and influence of the ego, and at eventually eliminating it. This effacement of ego becomes much easier if one feels devotion to a cause, to

a person or to a symbol of higher existence. Under these circumstances all one's actions are offered to the object of devotion whether it is a guru, deity or worthwhile cause. If these offerings or services are performed wholeheartedly, without thought of personal gain or advantage, then the individual will automatically perform actions selflessly. The ego motivated actions are reduced, for one's motives will be directed towards something outside oneself. One will automatically practise karma yoga.

This surrender of actions to something outside the ego is called bhakti yoga¹. It is very powerful and is suitable for those people who are more emotional in their makeup. It is very closely related to karma yoga under these circumstances.

Not everyone, however, feels any obvious, overwhelming devotion to someone or something. If this is the case you should try to be aware of your actions. Act like a witness, an observer of all activities as though they are occurring outside yourself. Watch all thoughts and physical actions and reactions with a disinterested attitude. This is closely related to detachment and also leads to dissolution of the ego.

Anyone who is practising or is trying to practise karma yoga does not necessarily need to believe in any religion or in any higher existence. On the other hand, it is not necessary to discard personal beliefs if you have them. Only try to work selflessly, whether sweeping the floor, writing a book, conducting a scientific experiment or doing the household duties.

Ego-centred and egoless action

We will deal with the subject of the ego at some length, for it is so important to understand, even intellectually, how much the ego stunts one's experience of existence and oneself. People seem to expect that loss of ego results in lethargy and laziness. But in fact, egolessness can lead to exactly the opposite: ceaseless and tireless energy and activity. One becomes super efficient in every action and work undertaken. Reduction of ego leads to spontaneous, intense and continuous action which is most appropriate for the given situation.

The very essence of karma yoga is unselfishness; egoless or selfless work, or at least as much as one is able. Actually, until one lives in

a state of meditation, there must always be an element of selfishness in one's actions. When the sense of ego is lost, even for a short period of time, then one is automatically in a state of higher awareness. Until this point, however, you must only do your best to practise karma yoga - nothing more. Try to do your work and make decisions to suit the situations as they arise and as they really are. Act in the way that is best for the given circumstances, instead of working and acting only to suit your personal motives and desires. This helps to reduce the power of the ego. All other forms of yoga help to reduce the hold, the grip of the ego, whether bhakti yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga or whatever. They all aim at reducing the total and overwhelming identification with the individual mind and body, even if it is only for a short period of time. These short periods of intensified awareness and lessened ego states can carry over into everyday life. The purpose of karma yoga is to bring about a reduction of ego or even egoless states continuously throughout the whole day and night.

We have to be very careful with words otherwise confusion will arise. There must always be an ego in operation. It is an indispensable part of the mind-body complex. It is that part of each individual which coordinates the physical and mental functions of the human organism. Without the ego, the mind-body would become totally chaotic. Each organ and function within the organism would go its own way. The ego is absolutely necessary for synchronized functioning and harmony within the mind and body as a whole. The ego in itself is not bad; it is overidentification of the individual with the ego that causes all the problems.

When we say that one must reduce the ego, we mean the influence that the ego has on the external expression or internal attitude of an individual as a whole must be reduced. That is, one should allow the ego to perform its duties of maintaining order within the human organism, yet at the same time, the actions and expressions of the individual in the world should be as selfless as possible. One's actions should not be done for selfish reasons but because the entire situation, surroundings, of which the mind and body are a part, warrants it. The best way to illustrate this point more clearly is by giving an analogy. Consider the

heart of the human body. It is composed of many different cells each of which performs a definite and fixed function. In a sense, each cell of the heart has an independent existence in its own right. Let us say they have an ego. What would happen if each cell began to function independently and not for the overall good of the heart? What would happen if each cell refused to do its duty? The results would be disastrous. The heart would no longer be able to function as a whole and coordinated unit. The heart would reduce in efficiency or even break down completely. And in fact this is exactly what does happen in the case of cancer. The individual cells go their own way. The organ, in this analogy the heart, made up of multitudinous cells, ceases to act as an integrated whole. The cells obey, in a sense, their own egos, and no longer dedicate or sacrifice their duties to the best possible operation and advantage of the organ of which they are a part. Now let us enlarge the analogy a little. Instead of an individual cell, consider an individual human being. Each human has an ego so that the mental-physical organism maintains an identity, a reasonably fixed pattern and shape. This ego is similar to the coercive ego force within each cell, which holds and moulds the different atoms and molecules together, so that the cells keep an individual identity, while simultaneously being a part of the heart. Ideally each human should sacrifice for the good of the overall whole, in the same way that the cell sacrifices itself for the overall advantage and harmony of the whole organism. When man expresses himself in the outside world, the aim is to act in the way that is most conducive to harmony in the inner world and the world around, of which each of us is a contributing part. When a cell acts in a selfish manner, disorder occurs in the organ and disease results. When humans act ego-tistically, then they produce disorder in the world and within themselves. Each ego-centred act contributes to a disease called world cancer. This contribution may be small from an individual point of view, but the sum total of numerous individual selfish actions is disharmony on a world scale.

There is another factor. By not acting for the overall good of the heart or any other organ, the cancerous cell brings about its own downfall. Its ego-centred action results in

failure and eventual destruction of the organ and in turn disintegration of the cell's own material existence. It is the same with humans. All self-centred acts tend to bring about destruction of the individual, physically and mentally. By acting in accordance with the need, the dictates of the whole, the individual treads on the path to higher awareness. Moreover, every selfless and harmonious act also helps other people to tread the same path, even if they don't know it consciously. The more selfless you become the more you and others will gain in an overall and individual sense. This is a paradox, but nevertheless a great truth.

The previous analogy is perhaps a little crude, but it does clearly illustrate the desirability of egoless actions and the undesirability of ego-centred acts.

How does a person know the best actions to suit any given situation? This can only be achieved gradually through practising yoga and increasing your awareness. At first it is difficult, in fact impossible. But eventually it becomes easier and easier, and one spontaneously makes perfect, egoless actions. At first when you try to perform karma yoga, merely aim to practise to the best of your ability. The most appropriate action and decision for a situation requires an awareness of all the factors involved. It needs detachment, understanding and desirelessness. Most people have so many preferences, personal desires, and mental problems that they can only see a limited portion of any situation. The mental apparatus, because of lack of harmony, causes inadequate and unsuitable responses. Thus the actions of most people are rarely appropriate for the given circumstances. You may have seen such obvious cases for yourself, especially perhaps when you were a disinterested onlooker of other people. Because of lack of direct involvement, it is possible to take a more comprehensive and balanced view of the problem at hand. The people involved have been ruled by their own greed, passions, status, etc., intent on obtaining as much out of the situation as possible for themselves. The result was that the final actions and decisions were not the best that could have been made. As a spectator you could see very clearly how ego-centred the actions were. On the other hand egoless action is that which brings the

best possible results in a particular situation; it is perfectly suitable for the factors involved. But this is the spontaneous byproduct of meditation and for the present most people must just do their best to act without the ego.

It is worth pointing out, however, that even perfect actions with awareness, can still cause harm to other people or the surroundings. This is not the criterion of selfish action. Even great saints, who epitomize total egolessness, sometimes cause harm to others. But they have not done this for egotistical motives. This is the difference. They have either performed an act while in meditation that was the best that could be made and some people were hurt as a byproduct; or they have deliberately hurt another person, without the slightest ego motive, but for the good of the other person, perhaps to wake them up to higher experiences or to remove mental blocks. Actually, physical destruction is part of life; it is continually happening around us. The lion hunts the herd of zebra - no ego is involved. The zebra that is caught is merely the one that was not quick enough to escape. The lion must eat and a zebra has to provide the food. This is an example of a perfect, egoless action. The lion looks at the herd of zebra and chooses the zebra that is most vulnerable. The lion sees the situation as it is and then acts accordingly. The action is not clouded by dislike for one particular zebra, or by hatred of zebra as a whole. The act is made because the circumstances demand it. Take another example. Our body is continually throwing out dead cells. This is absolutely necessary for the health of the body. The best possible action is made to bring about maintenance and health of the body. A cell is not thrown out because there is enmity between it and the human ego, or because the cell is not as pretty as the neighbouring cell. The cell is discarded because it becomes superfluous. The cell is sacrificed because it is necessary in view of the overall consideration of the body. In a sense, it is perfect egoless activity. So it is with human actions; they become perfect if there is no personal, ego-centred motive involved. Some harm may be done, but the actions themselves will be warranted by the situation.

Thus, perfect egoless actions occur while in states of meditation, done spontaneously for the advantage of the whole, and not for limited

personal gain. However, this is the ideal and one must at present only do one's best. In fact, it is difficult to consciously reduce egotistical action, for most people are completely habituated and enveloped with the feeling of individuality.

The influence of the ego therefore must predominate. Practise all types of yoga, including karma yoga and try to be aware throughout the entire day. In time the power of the ego will automatically drop away. You will spontaneously begin to perform selfless acts, because of your experience and knowledge of the deeper aspects of existence and one's relationship with other people.

We have perhaps laboured the subject of the ego, but we have done so because it is essential to steadily reduce its power and influence in one's life. It is the ego that taints and diminishes your experience of life, that keeps a person blind to the things around and within and prevents the ascent into higher awareness. The whole point of karma yoga is to reduce and eventually eliminate the conditioned ego drives and actions.

Renunciation

It is very easy to totally misunderstand yogic ideas and to become bewildered by apparent contradictions. A good example is the idea of renunciation. One is often told to renounce the world and take up a life of contemplation. On the other hand, one hears that they should not discard objects and duties, but live fully in the world, while practising karma yoga. There seems to be an obvious and irreconcilable contradiction between these two viewpoints. But actually there is no contradiction - both ideas say the same thing. The confusion only arises because of wrong interpretation. Some people leave all their material possessions and duties, thinking that this is renunciation. It is not necessary to leave the actions and things of the world. One should try to renounce not the actions or possessions, but attachment to them. This is the meaning of renunciation. It is renouncement of the attachment to objects, not the actual objects or situations themselves. There is a big difference in these two meanings.

Whichever path or paths of yoga you adopt, the initial aim is to relax the mind-body complex, to make it healthy, to reduce the sense of ego and to bring about various other

related, positive changes that we have already mentioned. Some people retire to a quiet place and start to practise hatha yoga and raja yoga. However, as we previously pointed out, this method is only for those who don't have too many inner conflicts or strong ties with the world. There are few people who can do this, for most have responsibilities and no great urge to leave the busy world anyway. Furthermore, it is not necessary to become a hermit; continue your daily activities and practise karma yoga. In both cases, living in solitude or in bustling surroundings, one should develop a sense of renunciation. This is necessary to gain the most from all yogic practices. If a man retires to a cave, with outward renunciation of the world, but with a deep inward longing for worldly objects and enjoyments, then he is fooling himself and will make no progress in his sadhana. This is not renunciation, for he is still very much attached. The path for most people is in and through the world and while practising yoga, including karma yoga. Continue to be involved with the things of the world, for these are part of life and there to be experienced. Why not? But at the same time you must try to become more aware and detached so that the ups and downs of daily life have less influence on you. The aim is to develop a mental attitude so that even grave crises will not shake you in a deeper sense. They may affect you superficially but not overwhelmingly. This does not mean that you should become like a vegetable, or hardened and totally indifferent, but that you accept life as it is, with its conflicts, hardships and apparent unfairness. This is renunciation.

Anyone can start to develop the attitude of renunciation. A king or a beggar can renounce and still live in the world of activity and duties. A king can be surrounded by fabulous wealth and still be totally detached. There were a number of kings in ancient India, such as Ashoka and Janaka, who epitomized renunciation. Conversely, a beggar can be completely attached, even though he has no material belongings. This is the case if he is continually craving objects and pleasures that he does not have - real renunciation is a mental attitude; it is not at all concerned with what one possesses or does not possess.

Does non-attachment or renunciation mean that people will become socially irresponsible?

This is a common question and criticism. No, this will not happen. In fact, exactly the opposite will occur. Those persons who become more detached in the real sense of the word, will become more responsible to society and mankind. The *Bhagavad Gita* makes this point very clear: "... he (who has renounced) delights in the welfare of all creatures" (5:25) In other words, one works better by being detached and so in this way everyone benefits more fully.

In the ashram there are two cars, both good cars. Many people say and think: "How can the sannyasins in the ashram be real swamis because they are still very much attached and absorbed in the material benefits of the world?" This is a total misunderstanding of the idea of renunciation. They fail to realize that there is little or no attachment to the cars in themselves. They are in the ashram merely for utility. Even though they are polished regularly and kept in good order, they are regarded as merely objects to be used. There is no sentimentality and no real attachment. It is the mental attitude that is important. The essence of renunciation is being able to renounce attachment to the objects yet still be involved with them.

This renunciation has to be cultivated and evolved gradually. At first it will be very limited renunciation, and will probably be more intellectual than anything else. There will be little depth of feeling. But as you continue to practise yoga you will find that renunciation will arise spontaneously and with more and more intensity. You will automatically become more detached as you progress along the path of yoga.

In karma yoga, work with total renunciation is called *nishkama karma* - 'selfless work'. Though no fruits are expected, it actually brings the greatest fruits, it brings peace of mind, higher awareness and knowledge.

Notes

- ¹ Bhakti Yoga: Part 1 — Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1; Part 2 - Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 1; Part 3 - Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 1; Part 4 - Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 1

Hatha Yoga: Shankhaprakshalana

Shankhaprakshalana is a method of evacuating and cleansing the entire alimentary canal, from mouth to anus. In fact, this is the meaning of the word *shankhaprakshalana*. It is such a wonderful technique that it is surprising that it has not been adopted more widely throughout the world. To the best of our knowledge, it is the only systematic, sure and gentle method of thoroughly cleaning the entire digestive system. Though laxatives empty the system, they do so forcibly and cause excessive irritation. Moreover, laxatives do not scrub the whole digestive tract as thoroughly as the moderate method of Shankhaprakshalana.

This practice is also known as *varisar dhauti*. The word *vari* means 'to clean' or 'wash'. It is also called *kaya kalpa* which means a technique to transform the whole body. And indeed it does just this; it improves the condition and health of the entire organism.

Scriptural references

Shankhaprakshalana is mentioned in many of the old yogic texts. However, it is rarely given in detail, for it was intended for practice only under the direct guidance of a teacher or guru. It is totally impossible for one to understand and practise the full technique of shankhaprakshalana by reading traditional yogic texts. For example, one of the most detailed descriptions is given in the *Gherand Samhita*: "Drink water slowly up to the vocal cord. Move the water in the stomach. Then evacuate it." (1:17)

The text gives no more practical information, though it does give one more verse to extol the benefits of the practice. "Varisar is most secret. It purifies the body. One who perfects this with great effort acquires a divine body." (1:18)

The ancient yogis purposely recorded vague descriptions of this technique and many others. They wanted people to know that the technique existed, yet did not want people to practise without the direct guidance of an expert. There

is a lot of sense in this, for if shankhaprakshalana and other yogic techniques are done incorrectly, they can cause more harm than good. Therefore, the ancient yogis were careful; they encouraged people to be interested, but made it necessary that they seek and find a guru before they could practise the technique. Actually we are breaking tradition here by publishing full details. But we do so with the explicit understanding that we prefer you to practise the technique of shankhaprakshalana under expert guidance. However, we have published details of this technique in order that those people who are unable to find a suitable teacher can practise by themselves. It is such a wonderful and beneficial method of cleansing the body that we would like it made available to as many people as possible and not limited to a few. But we emphasize, if you do practise alone, without tuition, that you must follow the instructions exactly as we have given them. If you don't do this, perhaps disregarding a seemingly inconsequential rule, then you may harm yourself. We have warned you. In the section on food restrictions, we have given an example of how a person can cause harm to himself by breaking a basic rule. Read it carefully.

Having said this, we urge you to try shankhaprakshalana for yourself, with or without guidance.

Preparation

It is advisable to take only a light, semi-liquid diet in the evening and night before shankhaprakshalana.

Don't do any asanas early in the morning before commencing and also do not take any food, tea, coffee, etc. before the practice.

Plenty of hot water should be made available. The amount depends on the number of people intending to do the practice. But a bucket of hot water should be ready before beginning. There should be one person with

you who does not do the practice and he or she can prepare more hot water as it is required. Furthermore, while you are actually doing the practice this extra person can start to prepare the special food which you will eat when you have completed the practice.

Using another bucket, mix this hot water with cold water so that you have a large quantity of lukewarm water. The water should be reasonably warm, but not so warm that you cannot drink it comfortably. Then you must add salt to this water so that the water tastes salty. In other words, don't add too much salt so that the water is undrinkable, but at the same time add enough so that it can be tasted. As a guide, we suggest that you add salt in the proportion of two teaspoonsful per litre of water. This need not be exact. You must use your own discretion. Thoroughly dissolve the salt in the water. The importance of salt has already been explained¹.

A glass should be made available for each person who is doing the practice. Each person is likely to consume more than sixteen glasses of water, so make sure that you have a steady and sufficient supply of warm water.

Wear light and comfortable clothes. In fact, the clothing in which you normally practise asanas would be the most suitable.

Climate

It is important that shankhaprakshalana is practised only when the climatic conditions are not extreme. That is, you should not practise when the weather is very cold. Therefore, if you live in a country with a cold climate you should practise in the summer when the days are warm. This is important for it is easy to chill the stomach and intestines if you practise shankhaprakshalana in cold weather. Similarly, don't practise when the weather is oppressively hot, for this will tend to make you sweat during the practice. Remember, that you will be performing five asanas eight times each, and probably this procedure will be repeated more than eight times (that is, $5 \times 8 \times 8 = 320$ movements). This requires a lot of energy. Therefore, practising in hot conditions will be a most uncomfortable experience. If you live in a hot country, we suggest you practise in the morning and possibly in wintertime.

Surroundings

The best place to practise is in a garden or on a veranda where you are in contact with fresh air. Also make sure that a toilet is reasonably accessible. In the later stages of shankhaprakshalana it becomes a little difficult, to say the least, if you have to run a hundred yards to the nearest toilet. It is not necessary to practise in the toilet, or immediately outside the toilet, but the toilet should be situated reasonably near, within a few seconds walk, so that you can reach it quickly when circumstances demand it. Another point to note is that it is most ill advised for large numbers of people to practise together when there is only one toilet available. This is a catastrophic situation, for you will have twenty people fighting each other to use the same toilet. A good ratio is that there should be one toilet for every two or three people.

Do not treat shankhaprakshalana as a gravely serious affair. Don't start the practice with an attitude of grim determination, for this is a sure way to create tension and prevent free bowel movement. Approach the practice with a feeling of fun and lightheartedness, for this is the way to finish the practice quickly and enjoyably. We have found in the ashram that the practice seems to take much longer, to drag like a long boring speech, if the people involved are cheerless and gloomy. It becomes a chore, a burden to be endured rather than a pleasant, refreshing experience. It is for this reason that we advise that shankhaprakshalana be practised in a jovial and friendly group atmosphere, for it is this setting that makes the practice fun and easy to carry out.

Time

The complete practice of shankhaprakshalana takes two days. This includes about three or four hours for the actual cleansing process, and the remainder of the time for rest. If you cannot spare two days, we suggest that you do not practise, but wait until you have the time available, perhaps during your holidays or do laghoo shankhaprakshalana instead¹. However, if you have a weekend free, without any duties or commitments, we suggest that you practise during this time.

Generally, the best time of the day to begin is about seven o'clock in the morning, but this will depend on the weather.

SHANKHAPRAKSHALANA

Drink 2 glasses of warm salty water as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty drinking the salt water try to imagine, though it may be difficult, that you are drinking a refreshing cup of tea.

But, don't sip the water - drink it as quickly as possible; if you slowly sip the water it will take you the whole day to finish the practice. And in fact you might not finish at all.

When you have drunk 2 glasses, you must perform the 5 shankhaprakshalana asanas²:

1. Tadasana - 8 times
2. Tiryaka tadasana - 8 times
3. Kati chakrasana - 8 times
4. Tiryaka bhujangasana - 8 times
5. Udarakarshanasana - 8 times

The asanas must be performed correctly.

Then quickly drink 2 more glasses of salt water.

Repeat the 5 asanas 8 times each.

Then drink 2 more glasses of salt water and again perform the 5 asanas 8 times each.

Now you must go to the toilet.

Even though you might not feel any urge to empty the bowels, you must still go.

But, under no circumstances should you strain; merely sit or squat on the toilet for a short time, say a minute or so.

Whether you have a bowel movement or not, it does not matter.

Return to the place of practice.

Drink 2 more glasses of salt water and then perform the asanas again, 8 times each.

Then go to the toilet again.

Don't use any force trying to produce a bowel movement.

Then drink 2 more glasses of water and repeat the asanas.

Again go to the toilet.

Continue in this way - drink salt water, perform the asanas and then go to the toilet - until the end of the practice. After some time, you will have some bowel movement; it may be after 6 glasses, 10 glasses, 16 glasses, 20 glasses or more. The number of glasses is not important some people need many more than others, before they have any results. Don't compare yourself with others under any circumstances. Let them do their practices in their own time. Don't worry if you take much longer to get an initial motion or complete the practice, compared to others.

In your first bowel movement, you will probably evacuate solid stool.

Continue to drink the salt water and do your asanas.

Eventually, you will find that you start to evacuate a mixture of stool and water with each bowel movement.

Continue to drink the water and do your asanas.

As you progress, you will find that you excrete more and more water and less solid stool; towards the end of the practice, in fact, you will merely release a brown or yellow liquid.

Continue to drink water and do the asanas.

Continue the practice until you emit perfectly clean water.

This is a sure sign that your intestines are perfectly clean, probably the cleanest they have been ever since you were born.

Take 2 more glasses of water, practise the asanas, and again go to the toilet; this will make sure that your intestines are in the best and cleanest condition.

This is the end of the cleansing practice.

Some people finish very quickly while others take as long as 4 hours.

On the average, between 16 and 25 glasses of salt water must be taken before perfectly clean water is evacuated. Some will take even less and some will take more.

Supplementary techniques

Though not compulsory, we recommend that the following two practices be done immediately after completing shankhaprakshalana:

1. Kunjal kriya³
2. Jala neti⁴

In the ashram we always finish shankhaprakshalana with these two practices, for we have found it gives the best possible cleanliness of the entire digestive tract. First practise kunjal kriya, then jala neti.

Thirst

After completing shankhaprakshalana and the supplementary practices, you may feel thirsty. But you must not drink any water for at least three hours; all other drinks are also prohibited. This is important for various reasons. If you drink cold water then this will tend to chill the digestive system, especially since the digestive system has been scrubbed super clean. Furthermore, immediately after com-

pleting the practice, the body sets to work reproducing a new protective layer on the stomach and intestinal wall; this is supplemented by the ghee from the food you will shortly eat. If you drink water then you will tend to dilute and further scrub away the new protective film.

Rest immediately after completing practice.

When you have completed shankhaprakshalana and the two supplementary practices then you should take complete rest for forty-five minutes. Don't sleep; merely sit quietly. If you wish you may lie down, but we emphasize that you take care not to fall asleep. If you do sleep you may get a thumping headache. This short period of time is important for your whole digestive system to take a well-earned rest. Rarely does your digestive system take total rest, for it is almost continually digesting food. Even when it is not digesting food, it does not completely rest, for then it takes the opportunity to clean out the digestive tract of debris, impurities and waste particles of food. This forty-five minutes is a time for the digestive system to revitalize itself.

During this period of rest you might find that you need to excrete more water from the bowels. Don't worry this is normal.

Preparation of special food

While you are resting after shankhaprakshalana, another person who has not done the practice should be preparing the special food for you to eat. You should not prepare the food yourself, you should only rest.

The food must be prepared from rice (white or brown), pulses (mung dal) or lentils, cooked with ghee (clarified butter). This is known as *khichari*. The rice should be of high quality and easily digestible. In some countries, pulses or lentils, and ghee may be difficult to obtain, but they are available in a well-stocked health food shop. Make sure that the pulses or lentils are also good quality and easily digestible.

Sufficient food must be prepared to fill each person, who has done shankhaprakshalana. That is, each person must eat a sufficient amount to replace the volume of food that has been removed from the digestive system by the salt water.

The rice and lentils can be cooked in water together until they are soft. Simultaneously

the ghee can be warmed and melted. When the rice and lentils are cooked, a little salt and turmeric (*haldi*) can be added if necessary, though this is not essential. Then mix in ghee abundantly so that the final preparation is reasonably liquid.

This special food is absolutely necessary to gently and effectively relubricate the whole digestive tract. Remember, shankhaprakshalana does not only remove all waste matter from the digestive system, but it also removes all the natural mucus layers from the intestinal walls. Therefore, after the cleansing practice, the walls of the digestive tract are completely bare. The ghee, in reasonable quantities (hence the mushy food preparation), is essential to replace the natural film on the intestinal walls with a temporary coating. Of course, the body will eventually produce a new layer but this takes a little time. It is a completely abnormal condition for the intestines to be without this protective coating and also to be empty. Therefore, it is essential to eat a reasonable amount of khichari. The ghee provides a temporary film on the wall, while the rice provides a simple, digestible packing material. The lentils supplement this diet by giving the body an easily digestible source of protein.

A further factor is that rice (especially white rice, we are told) tends to create mucus. This, of course, is just what is needed after shankhaprakshalana in order to protect the inner lining of the alimentary canal. Khichari must also be prepared for the evening meal.

When to eat

Each person who has done shankhaprakshalana should eat the khichari preparation after taking his forty-five minutes rest. If a large group of people do the practice, it is certain that each person will take their food at different times. Don't allow more than one hour to elapse after finishing shankhaprakshalana before eating your food.

Each person should take the same diet of khichari in the evening. Make sure that you eat sufficient food to fill your stomach. You may not feel like eating, but you must take food, for this is necessary to quickly reline and fill your intestines. Without its natural lining, the intestines are very vulnerable to infection, so make sure that you take plenty of ghee.

Subsequent rest

Having eaten your food, you should take further rest. However, it is important that you don't sleep for at least three hours. You will be tempted to sleep, but try not to. If you do sleep you will pay the penalty. One practitioner, when he first did shankhaprakshalana was fast asleep within five minutes after taking food. Even though he was advised otherwise, he could not resist the overwhelming temptation to sleep. He did not sleep for a few hours, or even eight hours. He slept from about midday on the day of the practice, throughout the whole afternoon, the whole night, until noon the following day, and even when he woke up, it was because someone woke him. He felt very groggy and wanted to continue sleeping; even for the rest of the day, he wanted to do nothing but lie down and sleep. Of course, this is only one experience, there are many other different ones. We have known of some people who, contrary to advice, have gone to sleep too early, and who have felt grogginess and lethargy for the next few days. For some reason or another, premature sleep seems to lead to a long period of physical lethargy.

So don't sleep for at least three hours after taking food, if you don't want to be sluggish during the rest of the day and the following day. For three hours you should rest without doing any physical or mental work. After this time has elapsed, you may sleep if you wish. In this way you will avoid any side-effects.

Food restrictions

These apply for one week - no less. If you cannot abide by these food restrictions, we suggest that you do not practise shankhaprakshalana.

You should avoid the following foods: chemically processed, synthetic, pungent, acidic and non-vegetarian foods. This includes alcohol, cigarettes, tea, coffee, soft drinks, milk, buttermilk, yoghurt, spices and any characteristically acidic fruits such as lemons, oranges, grapefruit, pineapple, etc.

You must eat a simple, pure and reasonably neutral (that is not overacidic) diet. You may include most foods such as rice, wheat, bread, most types of fruits and vegetables with low acid content, nuts, lentils, pulses, soybeans, etc. You must use your discretion and common sense in this respect. Remember you have

cleansed the whole digestive system. If you eat the wrong food it may have adverse reactions on the digestive tract, so make sure that you follow closely the diet we have indicated. Furthermore, make sure the food is clean, well cooked (if this is necessary) and not poisonous. After shankhaprakshalana your digestive system is more vulnerable to unsuitable, bad or dirty food, so take extra care to protect your body, following the instructions we have given. To further emphasize this important point, here is an example of a person who did not follow these regulations. He did shankhaprakshalana under guidance, and was warned not to take unsuitable food for one week. But he was very fond of richly cooked pancakes, so the day after the practice, he passed by a pancake shop with a rich display of tasty pancakes in the window. They looked so nice covered in a thick coating of syrup. He knew it was not advisable to eat even one pancake, but he shrugged his shoulders and thought "I did the practice yesterday, today is another day; one, two or perhaps three pancakes won't do any harm." And he went ahead and ate the pancakes enjoying them very much. But for the following month his whole digestive system was completely out of balance. He found it difficult to eat any type of food, and when he did, he merely suffered from diarrhoea and nausea. It was a distressing month, caused by indulgence at the wrong time. Eventually he had to resort to fasting to bring his body back to normal. Had he waited a week before taking his pancakes, no problems would have arisen. So we emphasize that for one week you must use your discretion in the food that you eat.

There is one more factor that we would like to point out: the whole aim of doing shankhaprakshalana is to clean out the poisons and accumulated waste from the digestive system. Therefore, if you start to load the digestive system with the wrong food after doing the practice, you have defeated the whole purpose of this cleansing technique. You have wasted your time. So if you do shankhaprakshalana and you want to gain the most benefits from the practice, then take great care to follow the diet restrictions.

Asana practice and other physical activities

You should not do your regular asana program on the day you perform shankhaprakshalana,

or the following day. A lot of energy must be expended to practise shankhaprakshalana asanas, so it is important to give your body a rest. That is, you may continue your asanas on the second day after doing the practice. For two days also avoid excessive mental and physical activities.

Caution

The rules of shankhaprakshalana are extensive. There is a valid reason, however, for each rule and they should be carried out without fail. If you disregard even one rule, you may experience harmful or disagreeable consequences, which is a great pity, for this technique can give so many benefits.

Frequency

This is quite a long and complex practice. Therefore, normally, you should not practise more than twice a year. That is, you should allow six months to elapse before doing shankhaprakshalana for a second time. Under special circumstances however, it may be necessary to repeat the practice after a short time has elapsed, perhaps in the case of a person who has chronic constipation. But don't do it without seeking expert guidance.

Limitations

This practice is not to be done by people who suffer from peptic or duodenal ulcers. People with high blood pressure should not practise alone, but should seek proper guidance.

Benefits

Shankhaprakshalana purifies the whole body. There is no medicine or method (apart from a prolonged fast) that can clean the small and large intestines so thoroughly as this practice.

Many diseases are directly or indirectly caused by accumulation of toxic waste matter in the intestines. This practice expels all impurities from the digestive tract and thereby helps to purify the blood system. This can result in a wonderful and noticeable improvement in general health as well as helping to remove specific ailments. In particular, it has been found useful for the treatment of diabetes, hyperacidity, constipation, dysentery and many other ailments connected with impure blood such as bad complexion and excessive occurrence of boils or pimples.

Those people who feel healthy can also do the practice, for they can improve their health, making them feel lighter, more cheerful and exhilarated with life. Furthermore, it will help to make their minds sharper.

This is also a very important practice for those people who intend to perform intensive yogic techniques for higher awareness. For example, we always insist that people who come to the ashram to do a concentrated course of spiritual practices for a fixed length of time (*anushthana*) should first of all do shankhaprakshalana. We have found that in this way they gain the most benefits from the course and their practices. Shankhaprakshalana, by purifying the body, helps greatly to make the mind and body more receptive to higher vibrations.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 1

⁴ Book I, Lesson 1; Topic 2

Asanas: Practice

There are a number of asanas which are performed from the standing position. The following group is specially chosen as being some of the most useful of the standing asanas. One of the great advantages of these standing asanas is that they can be practised at any time or any place without formality. Of course, we don't expect you to start practising in the middle of the office or factory floor, but you can go to a quiet place to practise them without any preparation. Many people who sit at a desk, machine or in any one place during their work for long periods of time, will find the following asanas most useful for encouraging good blood circulation, eliminating aches and pains in the back, neck and throughout the whole body.

TRIKONASANA (TRIANGLE POSE)

The word *tri* means 'three' and the word *kona* means 'angle'. Therefore, *trikonasana* can be translated as the 'three-angle pose'. However, it is usually called the 'triangle pose'.

There are five distinct movements involved in the whole practice. They all start from the same standing position - that is, with the legs wide apart.

Movement 1

Stand erect with your feet about 1 metre apart. Raise your arms sideways to shoulder height; that is, your arms and shoulders should form one straight line.

This is the starting position.

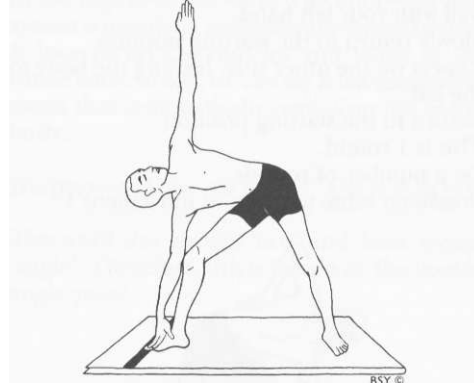
Slowly lean to the right and bring the right hand to the right toe.

During this movement you may bend your right leg slightly.

Your arms should remain in one straight line, with your head facing forwards.

Don't bend forwards.

This is important; you should bend as much as possible to the side.



To do this, you may push the left side of your pelvis slightly forwards.

Your arms, legs and the whole body should lie in one vertical plane.

When your right hand touches your right foot, your left hand should simultaneously point directly upwards.

To complete the movement, turn the head upwards and gaze at your left hand.

This is the final position and is shown above.

Return to the standing position, performing the movements in reverse sequence.

Make sure you keep your arms in one straight line throughout the entire movement.

Repeat the same movement, but leaning to the left.

Then return to the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Do a number of rounds.

Breathing: exhale while bending the body to the side and inhale while straightening the body and returning to the starting position.

Movement 2

Repeat the same procedure as movement 1, as far as the point where you touch your right foot with your right hand, your head facing forwards.

In this position your left arm should be vertical.

Slowly swing your left arm downwards over the left side of your head.
In the final position, your left arm should be horizontal and touching your left ear.
Remember, you must try not to bend forwards but take great care to keep your whole body in one vertical plane.

To accentuate the influence of the asana, imagine you are trying to touch the opposite wall with your left hand.

Slowly return to the starting position.

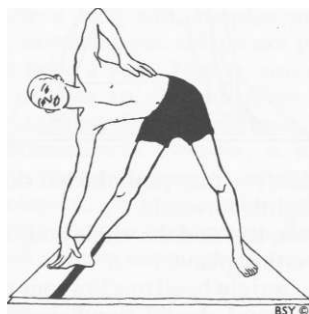
Repeat on the other side, leaning the body to the left.

Return to the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Do a number of rounds.

Breathing: same as given in movement 1.



Movement 3

Stand in the same position as for movement 1. Place your palms on either side of the waist.

This is the starting position.

You must face forwards throughout the whole practice, keeping your legs, arms, trunk and head as much as possible in one vertical plane. Lean to the right side, while slowly sliding the right hand down the right hip and leg, towards the right foot.

Simultaneously raise your left hand upwards towards the armpit, keeping the palm in contact with the side of your chest.

Don't strain, but try to touch your right foot with your right hand.

This is the final position.

Try to resist the temptation to bend your body forwards - the bend should be sideways from the waist.

Slowly return to the starting position, bringing your right hand upwards and pushing your left hand downwards to resume their original position at the side of the waist.

Now bend the body to the left side, repeating the same procedure.

Return to the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Do a few more rounds.

Breathing: same as given for movement 1.



Movement 4

Stand with your feet at least 1 meter apart; in fact, as wide as possible.

Place your hands behind your back and hold your left wrist with your right hand.

This is the starting position.

Twist the hips to the right, keeping the feet in the same position.

Slowly bend to the right side.

To some extent you will have to bend forwards; however, try to bend as much as possible to the side, keeping your trunk and legs in one straight line.

Try to touch the right knee with your nose.

If necessary, you can bend your right leg slightly at the knee.

This is the final position; hold for a second or so.

Return to the starting position.

Repeat exactly the same procedure on the left side of the body.

This is 1 round. Do a number of rounds.

Breathing: inhale deeply in the starting position.

Exhale slowly as you bend your body. Retain the breath in the final position and inhale while returning to the starting position.

Movement 5

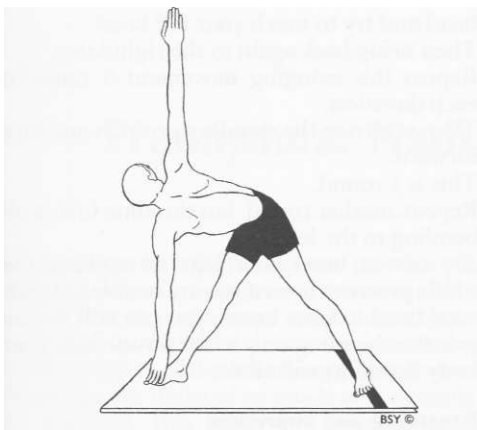
Stand erect with your feet about 1 meter apart.

Extend your arms horizontally to each side.

Bend forward at the waist so that your head, trunk and arms lie in one horizontal plane.

Look forwards.

Swivel your trunk to the right and touch your right foot with your left hand.



.Allow your arms to swivel so that when your left hand touches your right foot, your right arm points upwards.

At the end of the movement, twist your head and look upwards at your right hand.

This is the final position.

Stay in the final position for a second or so.

Then swivel your trunk in the opposite direction, touching your right hand to your left foot.

Twist your body in this way a number of times. Then face forward and return to the starting position.

Breathing: inhale while raising your arms to the horizontal position in the initial standing position. Exhale as you lean forwards. Hold your breath while twisting your body to each side. Breathe in as you resume the standing position. Breathe out as you lower your arms.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Awareness

Maintain awareness of the movement and the breathing.

All movements should be performed as smoothly as possible without excessive jerking.

Number of rounds

This depends on the time you have available. try to do three to five rounds of each movement.

Sequence

The practice of trikonasana consists of the five movements we have described. They should preferably be done in the sequence we have

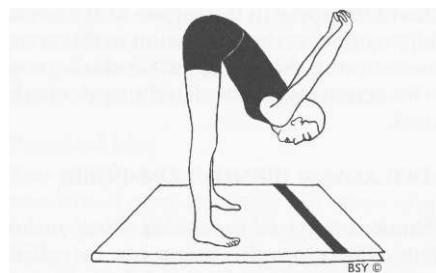
given, one after the other. However, if you lack time or particularly like one of the movements, there is absolutely no reason why you cannot practise any one or more of the movements for a longer period of time.

Benefits

All the movements have a wonderful influence in the region of the waist. The entire nervous system is toned up, especially the spinal nerves. It loosens up the muscles and joints of the whole body; in fact, we can say it is a compound asana that systematically revitalizes the entire body.

DWIKONASANA (DOUBLE ANGLE POSE)

The word *dm* means 'two' and *kona* means 'angle'. Therefore, this is known as 'the double angle pose'.



Technique

Stand erect with your legs one foot apart.

Place your hands behind your back.

Interlock your fingers.

Without straining, twist your arms, so that the palms face outwards away from the body; the hands should remain interlocked.

This is the starting position.

Bend forwards from the waist while simultaneously bringing your arms upwards behind your back.

Furthermore, you should try to bring your arms upwards as much as possible, but don't strain.

The arms will act as a lever, and will accentuate the stretch given to the shoulders and the chest.

Stay in the final position for a few seconds, pushing the arms upwards as far as you can. Then return to the starting position allowing the arms to hang downwards and relax completely.

This is 1 round.
Do further rounds according to available time.

Breathing and awareness

Exhale as you bend forwards. Inhale as you return to the starting position. Hold your breath in the final pose.

Awareness should be on the movement, breathing and applying an accentuated stretch to the chest and shoulders in the final position.

Number of rounds

Up to a maximum of ten rounds, according to the available time, is a reasonable number.

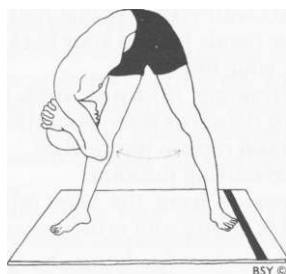
Benefits

This asana gives a wonderful stretch to the chest, thereby loosening up the associated muscles and nerves.

It also helps to tone up the nerves and muscles of the spine in the region of the neck, helping to increase the circulation in this area. It loosens up the shoulder joints and is a good asana for removing stiffness in the upper back and neck.

DOLASANA (PENDULUM POSE)

The Sanskrit word *dol* means 'to swing' or 'to oscillate'. Therefore this asana can be called 'the swinging pose' or 'the pendulum pose'.



Technique

Stand erect with your feet about 1 meter apart. Raise your arms and interlock your fingers behind your neck.

Point your elbows sideways.

Twist the upper part of your body to the right, keeping your feet firmly fixed on the ground. Bend forwards and touch your head to your right knee.

Remaining in the bent position, swing your

head and try to touch your left knee.

Then swing back again to the right knee.

Repeat this swinging movement 3 times in each direction.

Then return to the standing position and face forward.

This is 1 round.

Repeat another round, but this time first of all bending to the left.

Try not to bend your legs throughout the whole practice. Even if you are unable to touch your head to your knees, you can still do the practice, bending only as far forwards as your body flexibility will allow.

Breathing and awareness

Exhale as you bend forwards. Hold your breath while you perform the swinging motion. Breathe in as you raise your body.

Keep awareness on the physical movement, breathing and relaxation of the lower back muscles.

Number of rounds

Do at least three rounds.

Benefits

This asana gives the same basic benefits as trikonasana, though it has a specific influence on the spinal nerves and muscles of the lower back. It is an excellent preparatory asana for the more difficult forward bending asanas, such as paschimottanasana¹ and janu sirshasana² which require a reasonably high degree of flexibility in the region of the lower back.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 4)

At this stage in your pranayama practice you should start to practise outer retention. That is, it is time to supplement inhalation, exhalation and inner retention (antar kumbhaka) with retention of the breathing process when the lungs are deflated as much as is possible. In Sanskrit, this stage is known as *bahir kumbhaka*, or sometimes *bahiranga kumbhaka*.

Bahir kumbhaka is a very important part of pranayama practices and will bestow many benefits. However, as we have already emphasized, you must slowly develop the capacity to retain the breath externally. Don't try to hold the breath for too long in the beginning, even if at first it may seem easy. This applies particularly to outer retention, for this is a function that the lungs and associated nerves are rarely required to carry out. Each of us has held his or her breath many times, but almost invariably it is with an initial intake of air beforehand. That is, we generally take a deep inhalation before holding the breath. This applies in many sports, such as swimming. We do not normally empty the lungs immediately prior to holding the breath, but fill them to maximum capacity. Thus people are more accustomed to inner retention.

NADI SHODHANA - STAGE 4 BAHIR KUMBHAKA

You should continue the same ratio of breathing that we gave in the previous lesson¹, but add the new mode of *bahir kumbhaka* to it. The ratio will be 1:8:6:1:1:8:6:1 made up as follows:

Inhale through left nostril (pooraka)	1
Retain breath internally (antar kumbhaka)	8
Exhale through right nostril (rechaka)	6
Retain breath externally (bahir kumbhaka)	1
Inhale through right nostril	1
Retain breath internally	8
Exhale through left nostril	6
Retain breath externally	1

This is one round. Each round should be done in the same manner, one after the other.

Remember, the ratio we have given corresponds to the actual relative durations of inhalation, exhalation and both inner and outer retention. That is, if you breathe in for a count of 5 (seconds), for example, then you should retain internally for a count of 40, exhale for a count of 30 - and externally retain for a count of 5. This is one example. Only you will know your own capability, and you must set the duration of each stage in accordance with the given ratio to suit your proficiency. Whether you inhale for a count of 1, 2 or 10 seconds, there should be absolutely no strain.

Practical hint

You will find the practice is much easier to execute if you breathe out very slightly, immediately before releasing *bahir kumbhaka*. That is, when you have completed *bahir kumbhaka*, you should exhale slightly before inhaling. This will help to release the kind of lock that the lungs take after a duration of outer kumbhaka. This small trick brings the lungs and the associated nerves smoothly into operation once more to draw air into the body.

This little stratagem can also be used at the end of inner retention. That is, after completing inner retention you can breathe in very slightly before exhaling.

Awareness

Make sure that you maintain awareness of both breathing and mental counting. This is essential in order to make the mind relaxed and one-pointed.

Warning

Once again, we would like to emphasize that you should make sure that no irregularities occur. If you notice any negative mental or physical repercussions as a result of practising pranayama, then seek advice.

Another point to remember is that those people who have any serious physical or mental imbalance must take care before attempting to practise pranayama, especially the higher stages. In this category we include those people who have high blood pressure, people who are extremely neurotic and so on.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 4

Meditation: Aum Chanting

The meditational practice we will now describe is Aum chanting. It is possible to write an encyclopaedia on this subject, but in accordance with the electrifying brevity of the mantra Aum, we will try to reduce verbose details to a minimum. If so much can be said and inferred in the short, simple sound of Aum, then we will also try not to cause mental constipation by giving overelaborate explanations. In fact, the only thing that needs to be said is: A-A-A-A-A-U-U-U-U-U-M-M-M-M-M-M

This practice is so simple to explain yet the benefits and experience that it can bring are profound. The mantra Aum is the king of mantras. Experience of the meaning of Aum leads automatically to the fullest understanding of all other mantras, which are generally limited in that they are intended for specific purposes or for particular types of people. Aum on the other hand is totally non-specific. It can be practised by everyone.

The mantra Aum is not merely a monosyllable. It is a sound that has been realized by the ancient rishis in the highest states of meditation. It is for this reason that continuous and intense awareness of Aum can in turn take the spiritual aspirant to the same states as the ancients who realized it.

Aum according to the Mandukya Upanishad
The *Mandukya Upanishad* is a well-known ancient text that is concerned solely with the meaning and significance of Aum. It says that: "The syllable Aum is the universe. It is Brahman (the absolute). It is time - past, present and future. It is also that which transcends time."

Then it continues: "This Self, which is one with Aum, has three aspects; and beyond these there is the undefinable...the Fourth."

Then it proceeds to assign meanings to the three different parts of the Aum mantra and for Aum as an indivisible whole. These are summarized as follows, with correspondence on the microcosmic and the macrocosmic level:

It is the cosmic mantra Aum that unites the limited existence with the unlimited. It is Aum that merges the microcosm with the macrocosm, the individual with the universal. Aum acts as the bridge. The text concludes by saying: "The fourth, the Self, is Aum. It is unutterable and beyond the mind. In it, the universe is enveloped...whosoever really knows Aum, the Self, becomes the Self."

If the reader is interested refer to this short (12 verse) Upanishad in the original. However, we emphasize that it is important not to become too attached to concepts regarding Aum, for

Microcosm	Macrocosm	State of Experience
Syllable 'A' Individual physical body	material universe	wakeful state; perception only of the external world through the senses
Syllable V Individual mind	cosmic mind	dream state; perception of mental impressions
Syllable 'M' Intuitive awareness at individual level	consciousness substratum of universe	deep sleep; experience of bliss and revelatory knowledge
Syllable AUM' as a whole Atman (Self)	Brahman	fourth state (turiya); beyond all conceptualization

actually the real meaning of Aum is impossible to put into words. All the numerous meanings assigned to it are superficial for they are mere words, which tend to distort the real significance. The syllables A, U, M are also said to represent Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the sustainer) and Shiva (the dissolver) as well as many other things. But actually the meaning of Aum can only be known by personal realization. And then one cannot even speak about its meaning . . . one becomes speechless. It is impossible to explain the meaning of Aum rationally. It is beyond intellectual concepts.

Other scriptural references

There are a vast number of other Indian scriptures which also mention the cosmic Aum. They all speak of it in glowing terms. The following are a few selected quotations: "Those who want enlightenment should reflect on the sound and meaning of Aum. Aum is the indestructible Brahman. Aum is the bow, the individual being is the arrow and Brahman is the target. When the arrow is released from the bow it goes straight towards and into the target. Like this, the sadhaka (spiritual aspirant) should reflect on Aum and thereby merge with Brahman." (*DhyanaBindu Upanishad*)

"Fire, though potentially present in firewood, is not seen until one stick is rubbed against another. The Self is like that fire; it is realized by constant awareness of the sacred syllable Aum. Let your body be the stick that is rubbed and Aum be the stick that is rubbed against it. Thus you will realize your real nature, which is hidden within, just as fire, in a sense, is hidden in wood." (*Shwetashvatara Upanishad*)

"Aum is the holy sound of the universe. It is the sound form of the Self." (*Maitri Upanishad*)

Aum is mentioned in numerous other traditional yogic scriptures: the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Yoga Vashishtha* as well as many of the tantric texts.

Don't make the mistake of assuming that Aum is confined to Indian spiritual systems. It is found in the Islamic faith in the slightly modified form of Amin; it is also found in the religions of Judaism and Christianity in the form of Amen. It does not take much imagination to see that these mantras have the same root. Also it is said in the ancient Indian scriptures that Aum is the first cause of the material universe, it is the power of Brahman

(the absolute) through which the universe is created. It is the shakti of tantra. In the Gospel according to St. John, in the very first verse it says: "In the beginning was the word (Aum) and the word was with God (Brahman) and the word was God . . ."

This is exactly the same as the utterances of the ancient rishis, recorded for posterity in the *Upanishads* and other Indian scriptures. Compare this previous biblical statement with the following quotation: "This word (Aum) is verily Brahman. It is the highest. He who knows its meaning and worships it attains the supreme goal and knows everything." (*Katha Upanishad*)

From this and other selected verses we have given previously you will realize that we are talking about exactly the same thing. We could go on, but will stop at this point. All we want to say is that Aum is truly the universal mantra. It is far better to start chanting Aum and reflect on its meaning yourself than to become deluded by verbal knowledge. In this manner you will be on the path to finding out the real meaning of Aum, the meaning that cannot be conveyed by any book. If you do this there will be absolutely no need to read about Aum.

Pronunciation

Aum can be chanted slowly or quickly. Each method is as good as the other and you must experiment yourself to find out your own preference. If it is chanted quickly, then it is a powerful method to synchronize it with the heartbeat. In this manner, you can feel Aum resonating throughout the whole body in tune with the natural heart rate. Under these circumstances, Aum seems to chant itself; if you wish you can imagine Aum emanating from the heart region. Another excellent method is to coordinate the Aum chanting with the pulse at the eyebrow centre. This again is very powerful and very conducive to introspection and relaxation, and eventually meditation. Fast Aum chanting is best done mentally and not verbally, for loud chanting will tend to drown out perception of the heartbeat or pulse.

If Aum is chanted slowly it can be made to last for many seconds, depending on the capacity of the individual. There should be a definite pronunciation of each of the syllables 'A', 'U' and 'M' with a gradual transition from one to the other. The syllable 'A' is pronounced

like 'AH' or 'a' in the word 'palm'. The syllable 'U' is pronounced 'oo' as in the word 'room'. The syllable 'M' is not sounded by moving the lips like the usual 'm' sound. It is sounded after 'A' and 'U' like a humming sound: 'm-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m'. This humming sound can be extended for as long as the practitioner wishes, but normally the 'M' sound should gradually taper off at the end of the chant.

Long Aum chanting can be both mental or verbal, though for most purposes verbal chanting is to be preferred. This particularly applies to beginners, for loud chanting or group chanting tends to more effectively calm a disturbed mind. And because most people have a mind that is in a continual state of conflict and turmoil, verbal chanting of Aum is generally preferable and most suitable for the majority of people. In a sense it overwhelms one's mental attention. One is almost forced to concentrate on the sound and pronunciation of Aum, and the mind tends to forget its usual worries and mental distractions. This is why verbal Aum chanting is recommended for beginners, if it is possible. If it is likely to create problems by disturbing others in your house, then of course you must practise mental repetition of Aum.

As you make progress in yoga, then you can practise more and more mental Aum chanting, for this is most conducive to introspection, once your mind is reasonably relaxed. A particularly good practice is to first of all chant Aum verbally for sometime (the longer the better) and then change over to mental Aum chanting. This is a systematic method of withdrawing your awareness from the outside world and directing it inwards to explore the mind. It also systematically calms the mind.

You should pronounce Aum, whether mentally or verbally, so that it is a harmonious sound. It should come naturally without being forced. It is through continuous, melodious sound that the mind will become relaxed. It should be: "Like the continuous flow of an oil stream and like the vibration of a bell. This is the way to pronounce Aum and the way to really know the meaning of the Vedas."

DhyanaBindu Upanishad)

The pronunciation is so important. If you are still not sure then we suggest that you go to a local yoga school or ashram to hear the sound of Aum from people with experience.

Awareness

Ideally one should be aware of the following two things while practising Aum chanting:

1. The sound, whether mental or verbal;
2. Reflection on the meaning of Aum.

To do the two at the same time may be a little difficult at first, but if you can do this you will achieve the best results. If you wish you can be aware of one of the following during your practice: either the sound combined with its meaning; the sound combined with concentration on the symbol; or concentration on the symbol combined with reflection on its meaning. Choose for yourself through experimentation, or contact a competent person for advice as to what is most suitable for you.

If you simultaneously practise *trataka* on Aum, then the image can be external or internal, depending upon your capacity of visualization. The best is internal concentration on the symbol of Aum, but it is a little difficult for beginners. It is difficult to hold a steady image for a long period of time.

If you concentrate on an external symbol of Aum you can use any that are available, or one that you may feel inspired to draw for yourself. It should not be too large, for the aim is to focus the awareness on a limited field of attention. You can alternate external *trataka* with internal *trataka*, while simultaneously practising Aum chanting¹.

If you concentrate on an internal image of the symbol of Aum, then you can create it in the space in front of the closed eyes or you can create it at the heart centre as suggested by the *DhyanaBindu Upanishad*: "Concentrate on Aum at the heart centre as though it is a candle flame the same size as your thumb." Make sure that you continue Aum chanting with awareness.

It is not compulsory to practise *trataka* on the symbol of Aum. If you wish you can remain aware only of the sound. This alone is very powerful and will quickly soothe away the tensions of the mind. This method is particularly useful for those people who have trouble practising *trataka*.

AUM CHANTING

Little needs to be said about the practice for it is so simple and we have already explained most of the relevant points. The following

brief description is for awareness of only the sound of Aum. The reader can integrate concentration on the symbol of Aum and reflection on the meaning for himself if he wishes.

Sit in a comfortable asana and close the eyes. Start to intonate Aum, either slowly or quickly. Let the chanting be aloud if this is convenient. Try to be aware completely of the sound of Aum. Lose your whole being in Aum.

Let the sound emanate from your whole being. Feel as though your whole body and mind is resonating in harmony with the sound.

Imagine that you are simultaneously the transmitter and the receiver of Aum.

You are like a radio station.

Be totally aware of Aum.

Continue in this manner for as long as possible (at least 15 minutes is reasonable).

Then stop Aum chanting and be aware of the pulse at the eyebrow centre.

When you can distinctly detect it, synchronize it with the mental sound of Aum.

Be aware of the internal sound of Aum at the eyebrow centre, vibrating in harmony with the pulse.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time.

End the practice by chanting Aum loudly 3 times.

Duration

Many people practise this simple yet powerful technique for hours. In fact some people try to maintain awareness of the mental sound of Aum continuously, whether they are working, playing, eating or sleeping. It can take one to profound meditational experiences. Practise for as long as available time will permit.

Reflection

This is a method of jnana yoga and can be practised by those people who have good concentration and determination. If you really want to know the meaning of Aum from the depths of your heart, then you will find it. It may take one week, one month, one year or many years, but the meaning will come. It will come like the crash of thunder, it will be like 'crashing through the sound barrier'. And when you know its meaning, through personal experience, then your whole being will change, for you will know the impossible.

Benefits

The benefits are profound. Firstly, it is one of the most powerful methods of rapidly relaxing the entire mind and body. As such, it quickly brings mental peace and can help very much to prevent or soothe away many psychosomatic disorders. Whenever you feel tense, depressed, angry or any other negative emotions, then you should practise Aum chanting. Though it is a simple practice it can lead to high states of meditation and realizations of higher truths. Little more needs to be said.

Integration with other meditative practices

This is not the last you will hear of Aum, for it is widely integrated with many other meditational techniques. In fact, all meditative practices can be profitably started and ended with Aum chanting. It is an important part of kriya yoga, where it is intimately combined with yogic techniques.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

Daily Practice Program

You can now practise Aum chanting as a meditative technique in its own right, or you can integrate it with trataka in the manner that we have described. Aum chanting immediately prior to your regular meditative practice will help very much to relax the mind and ending your meditational session with Aum chanting makes a final powerful impact. You should fit in Aum chanting in the way that you feel is most suitable.

The more you practise, the longer you practise and the more regularly you practise, corresponds directly with the amount of benefits that you will obtain.

The new stage of bahir kumbhaka should now be integrated with your pranayama practice if you have reached proficiency in performing the pranayama practice described in the previous lesson.

If you have intestinal problems or feel you need a thorough cleaning of the digestive tract, then you should seriously think about spending two days doing shankhaprakshalana. As we have pointed out, you can practise by yourself, but it is preferable to carry out the cleansing process under expert guidance.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Trikonasana	3 each part	10
Dwikonasana	5 rounds	3
Dolasana	3 rounds	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	14
Aum chanting with Trataka		30
		90

Program 2: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Trikonasana	3 each part	9
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	12
Aum chanting with Trataka		18
		<hr/> 60

Program 3: duration 3/4 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Trikonasana	2 each part	6
Shashankasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	10
Aum chanting	—	15
		<hr/> 45

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour (for general health) is the same as the above Program 3 excluding the practice of Aum chanting.