

Lesson 7

There was a man who was blind from birth. Someone told him about the beauty of the sun. He was very interested but very sceptical. He said: "What is this light that you talk about? I have no conception or idea about it. Can I hear the light with my ears?" His companion said: "No, of course not. The light does not make any sound." Then the blind man asked, "Then let me taste it." "Oh no," said his friend, "you can't taste light." "All right," said the blind man, "then let me feel the light." "That also is impossible," said his companion. "And I suppose I can't smell it also," said the blind man a little cynically. "Correct," said his friend. "Then how can I believe in such a thing as light? For me it is a myth, a castle in the sky." His friend thought for some time and then had an idea. "Let us go and see Lord Buddha. I hear that he is giving satsang nearby. He surely will be able to make you experience and know the meaning of light."

So they visited Buddha. They asked how the blind man could be made to understand the meaning of light. Buddha was very sharp in his answer. He said: "Not even one hundred Buddhas can explain the meaning of light to this man. The experience of light is a personal experience." But the Buddha understood that the eye defect was superficial and that it could be cured by a simple operation. He therefore arranged that the blind man visit a person who could correct his eyesight. After some time the man was able to see. He saw light for the first time. Through his own experience he was able to understand the meaning of light.

He exclaimed: "Now I believe that light exists. I can see the sun, the moon, the trees and so many other things. But it is only possible through my own experience. All the descriptions that people gave me could never convince me, nor could their descriptions convey the meaning of light. It is only through showing me the method of regaining my sight that I am able to understand from personal experience." The man was overwhelmed with joy. His whole life was changed.

This man's dilemma is similar to the dilemma that most people have with spiritual life. Many people hear God is this, and God is that. Thousands and thousands of accounts are given of spiritual experiences. But these descriptions are actually useless, like the description of light to the blind man was also useless. The only thing that is useful is the explanation of how you can gain spiritual experience for yourself. It was only when the blind man took steps to remove his eye defect that he was eventually able to see. It is the same with spiritual life. The multitude of descriptions of spiritual experiences, God, etc. are useless. The most positive step that you can take is to begin your sadhana, to find out the experiences for yourself. You too will find the LIGHT - the spiritual light from your own experience, in the same way that the blind man eventually discovered the light for himself when his eyesight was restored. And when you have your own experience then explanations are not necessary. They become totally superfluous.

Diet and Digestion

A great many disorders of the body are directly connected with malfunctioning of the digestive system. In this way the digestive system has a direct influence on one's daily life. You must have noticed for yourself that when you are experiencing digestive trouble you tend to be pessimistic and easily irritated. Conversely, a healthy digestive system allows one to be optimistic and cheerful. In short, the digestive system can help or prevent us enjoying life to the full. It is for this reason that yoga stresses the importance of maintaining the best possible health of this system. We do not intend this book to become a textbook on physiology, but we think that with a greater knowledge you will tend to treat the body with more respect. Moreover, a better understanding will help you to participate more actively and joyfully in your daily life, which of course is one of the main aims of yoga. For this reason we will briefly discuss the functions of the digestive system.

Digestive system - how it works

The food we eat cannot be absorbed directly into the body. It must first undergo a process of conversion into substances which can be directly conveyed into the bloodstream - the carrier and distributor of our foods throughout the body. This process is called digestion. (For a full understanding of the following text, refer to the diagram of the digestive system included overleaf.)

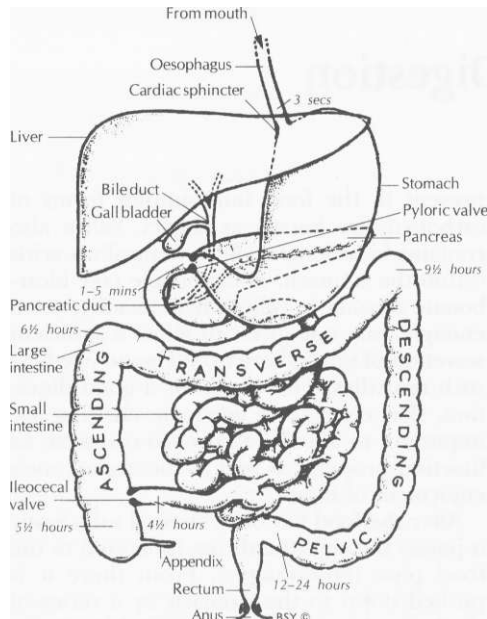
Digestion begins when food enters the mouth. The role the mouth plays in digestion is twofold: it physically breaks down the food into smaller fragments through the act of chewing while simultaneously secreting saliva through the salivary glands. The quantity of saliva secreted depends on the taste and look of the food, as well as on appetite. However, normally during the day one to two litres of saliva are secreted. Saliva contains the enzyme ptyalin, which starts to break down the starches

present in the food into simpler forms of carbohydrates known as sugars. Saliva also contains bicarbonate, which neutralizes acids within the stomach. Many people take bicarbonate of soda to relieve hyperacidity, yet if enough time was given to allow a sufficient secretion of saliva there would be no need for such remedies. Therefore, for a good digestion, slow eating and adequate chewing are important to allow the saliva to complete its function properly as well as increasing one's enjoyment of food.

After the food has been chewed sufficiently it passes through the throat (pharynx) to the food pipe (oesophagus). From there it is pushed down to the stomach by a series of rhythmic waves known as peristalsis. At the entrance to the stomach lies the cardiac sphincter, which allows the food to pass into the stomach.

The stomach when empty is about the size of your hands held palm to palm. Its walls are much thicker than any other part of the digestive tract. The stomach is designed to knead and churn the food with the gastric digestive juices, which are secreted by the millions of glands lining the stomach wall. These gastric juices are mainly comprised of the enzymes pepsin and hydrochloric acid, which are responsible for the breakdown of proteins. Rennin, which is secreted in less quantity, coagulates or curdles certain types of foods (such as the caseinogen of milk solids) so that they can be exposed for a longer period of time to the action of the digestive juices. Another important enzyme present in the gastric juices is pepsinogen, which terminates the action of the saliva. Together with hydrochloric acid, it also destroys germs which might be present in the food. The amount of gastric juices secreted depends on the amount of food consumed as well as the person's appetite. Tasteless, monotonous food produces little gastric juices, whereas pleasant, tasteful food

The Digestive System



Given figures denote time taken for first particles of food eaten to reach that point

encourages abundant secretions of these juices. However, on an average several litres a day are utilized. An average meal requires about 800 cc of gastric juices to be secreted from the stomach walls. This is not all released during meals; about 200 cc are secreted while eating and the remainder during the subsequent time that the food remains in the stomach.

The length of time that solid food stays in the stomach varies from two to six hours, depending on the nature of the food. Fats are more difficult than proteins and carbohydrates, and therefore remain in the stomach longer. Water and other liquids do not stay in the stomach for more than a few minutes. They pass almost immediately into the small intestine and are quickly absorbed into the bloodstream.

From the stomach the food gradually passes into the small intestine through the pyloric valve in a semi-liquid form called chyme. The first section of the small intestine is called the duodenum. Within the duodenum further digestive juices are mixed with the food from various glands within the gastrointestinal

system. The pancreas is the most important of these glands. The pancreatic secretions contain powerful enzymes including amylase, lipase and trypsin which are capable of digesting all types of foodstuffs - proteins, fats and carbohydrates. The pancreas does not function properly unless the food has already been sufficiently mixed with hydrochloric acid from the stomach. This is why some people who secrete insufficient hydrochloric acid fail to digest their food properly. About 600 cc of pancreatic juices are used every day.

Another important gland in the digestive system is the liver, which is the biggest single gland in the body. It is primarily concerned with the storage of food after it has been absorbed by the blood. It changes and stores the food in the form of glycogen. When energy or nutrition is required in any part of the body, the glycogen is converted into glucose (blood sugar) and discharged into the bloodstream for distribution. It also aids the pancreatic juice, lipase, in breaking down the fats. It performs this function by producing a clear, golden-coloured liquid called bile which is stored in the gallbladder, where it becomes more concentrated. This liquid not only aids the pancreatic juices but also helps to keep the food moving in the small intestine by stimulating the peristalsis.

The walls of the small intestine look and feel like velvet. It is lined with hundreds of thousands of hair-like nodules called villi which contain tiny blood vessels. They increase the surface area of the small intestine so that the nutrients in the chyme can be easily absorbed by the bloodstream and carried to the liver for storage. A further feature of the villi is their constant motion, which progressively moves the food along the intestinal tract. In this manner, food is allowed to come into contact with the different types of enzymes secreted by small glands which are also embedded in the intestinal walls. These enzymes include lactose, maltose, enterokose and sucrose, all having various functions to perform. Minerals and vitamins are also absorbed into the body from the small intestine.

In the intestinal walls are various muscles which relax and contract when stimulated by special nerves during what is termed intestinal peristalsis. During the digestion process, the small intestine is in constant motion under the

action of this peristalsis and the food is progressively moved along the intestinal tract and brought into contact with the enzymes and villi.

The term small intestine is confusing for the total length is over six meters. The word small refers to the smaller diameter when compared to the large intestine, which is only one and a half meters long. Food must traverse the whole length of the small intestine undergoing great changes and having the bulk of its nutrients absorbed into the bloodstream.

The chyme completes its journey through the small intestine and passes into the large intestine by way of the ileocecal valve. This valve regulates the flow of the chyme to the large intestine by preventing the small intestine emptying too quickly. At the same time it prevents any chyme from going back into the small intestine. At the point of entering the large intestine, the chyme contains mainly waste products (undigested food) and water. The water is largely absorbed in the large intestine to prevent dehydration of the body. The remaining waste matter proceeds to the rectum where it is eliminated from the body in the form of stool. This completes the process of digestion.

How to eat

As we have already shown, the digestive system is one of the most dynamic of all operations taking place within the human body. The system digests virtually anything edible providing enough time is allowed to enable the individual organs to carry out their inter-related duties. The digestive tract has a unique capability of secreting the exact combination of juices required for a particular mixture of foods. However, it must be emphasized that it can only successfully complete this process providing it is not hampered by the presence of great quantities of food eaten too quickly. Therefore eat slowly. In this way the body receives more nutrition from the food and you will enjoy your meal to a greater extent.

Here are some more suggestions to bear in mind:

1. Always take small mouthfuls.
2. Non-fried solid food should be chewed about thirty times; fried foods a little longer.
3. Try to keep general conversation to a minimum until the end of the meal.

4. Try to eliminate all thoughts of difficulties or problems from your mind during the meal. Calmness is conducive to good digestion, whereas tension and anger result in indigestion.

These suggestions may seem too demanding at the outset, and we agree. We don't intend this advice to become strict practice; however, we do feel that the benefits to be secured from these suggestions are sufficient to warrant not only a mention here, but also application at your dinner table.

Nutrients and their role in the body

Food can be divided into four general categories as follows:

1. *Carbohydrates and fats* provide our body with its energy requirements. The greatest amount of energy consumed goes into maintaining the correct body temperature. In fact, about seventy five percent of the energy in the body is required for this purpose, depending on the climate. The remaining energy is utilized by the muscles throughout the body, whether for the internal organs such as the heart, lungs, etc., or for the outer limbs such as the arms or legs. Fats also form protective layers which shield the delicate body organs from injury and allow storage of energy for future use. However, over-consumption of these foods leads to overweight. Butter and oils are almost pure fat, while refined sugar is practically one hundred percent carbohydrate. This latter category also includes food such as potatoes, rice and bread, which are predominantly carbohydrate, containing very little fat.

2. *Proteins* are the remarkable materials from which new cell tissues are built. Proteins are needed to repair worn-out tissues, as well as being essential to growth and muscular development. They are also necessary for the production of special substances that build up the body's immunity. There are large numbers of different proteins, all of which perform a definite role. Proteins are needed by everyone, but are required in greater quantities during childhood, adolescence, pregnancy and lactation, or any time the body is constantly expending a lot of energy.

Proteins are an essential part of our diet and are abundantly present in such foods as milk, cheese, meat, fish, eggs, grains, beans, lentils, nuts, etc.

3. *Mineral salts* are yet another category of the essential elements required by the body. They are present in minute quantities but are nevertheless vital in the maintenance of correct body functioning. The kinds of mineral salts present in the body are numerous and varied, with each carrying out diversified functions. Some, such as phosphorus and calcium, are necessary for the building of strong teeth and bones. Phosphorus is also essential in the functioning of the brain cells. These two minerals are found in green vegetables, cheese, soya beans, potatoes and fish.

Iron, which is needed in greater quantities by women than men, is important in the production of haemoglobin, a protein in the blood cells. Without iron the blood is unable to transport oxygen throughout the body and so unable to perform its duties. The best sources of iron are meat, eggs, raisins, spinach, whole grain cereals, liver, apricots and potatoes.

In the body there are only a few grains of iodine, yet it is one of the most important minerals. The majority of iodine absorbed by the body is utilized by the thyroid glands in the production of thyroxine, which is essential in regulating the body metabolism. It also directly controls the growth rate of the body and as such is especially needed during pregnancy, childhood and adolescence. Iodine is found in iodized salt, seafood and vegetables.

Salt in the form of sodium chloride is also essential for the maintenance of the normal acid-base balance in the body. Without it we could not live. Remember, however, that too much salt tends to raise the blood pressure and causes swelling in the legs. So a moderate amount of salt is recommended, although during warm weather the intake should be raised.

4. *Vitamins* are the fourth and last category in our list, but far from the least important. At the same time, a great deal of uncertainty of the function of vitamins is held by scientists and laymen alike. The specific way in which vitamins work is not positively known but it is widely believed that they act as a catalyst for numerous chemical reactions within the body. We will briefly discuss the role of the different vitamins.

Vitamin A is needed by all important organs of the body. It is essential for the health of the

respiratory, digestive and urinary tracts. It keeps the mucous membranes of the nose, throat and windpipe strong and healthy, helping to prevent colds and other infections of this region.

Vitamin A is also concerned with the growth and development of the body and aids in reproduction and lactation. It keeps the skin smooth and clear and is essential for keenness of vision. When this vitamin is absent all tissues suffer. The skin becomes thick and rough, the eyes become dull and lustreless, and infections commonly occur over the entire body. The best sources of vitamin A are cream, butter, whole milk, egg yolk and carrots, together with numerous other fruits and vegetables.

Vitamin B complex consists of more than a dozen different vitamins. Some are required for the transference of energy in the cells, while others are used in the formation of red blood cells. One of the most important is thiamine (vitamin B1), which is concerned with the nerves and muscles. Neither can work properly if there is a deficiency of thiamine. Without sufficient quantities of thiamine the body would be in a perpetual state of aches and pains. It is most prevalent in liver, brewer's yeast, peanuts, whole grain cereals, meat and eggs.

Riboflavin is another important member of the vitamin B complex. It is necessary for the maintenance of healthy skin and eyes, but possibly its most important function is in the production of enzymes that help to digest food. Niacin, another member of this group, is also important to the digestive system. These elements of vitamin B complex are found in liver, eggs, milk, cheese and whole grain cereals.

Vitamin C is the great healing vitamin of the body. It is essential for building bones, maintenance of the walls of the smaller blood vessels, strengthening the teeth and gums, and in aiding the absorption of iron from the digestive tract. Vitamin C is also required by the body in large quantities during disease. It is found abundantly in fresh fruits, leafy vegetables, potatoes and tomatoes.

Vitamin D is necessary for the development of strong healthy bones. Its chief function is to maintain the correct balance between calcium and phosphorus in the body. Its deficiency causes a disease called rickets, during which

the bones become soft and pliable. It can be obtained from milk and eggs, but is unique in that the body produces its own supply by the interaction of the sun and the natural skin oils. The body therefore produces much of its own vitamin D and does not depend on food to supply its requirements.

Vitamin E is still a mystery to modern scientists, but it is believed to influence the reproductive functions and muscular activities of the body. It is contained in whole grain cereals, green vegetables, coconut oil and other vegetable oils.

Vitamin K is necessary for the process of blood clotting and is found in green vegetables, soya beans, tomatoes and eggs.

There are over twenty known vitamins and the ones we have mentioned are the most important. You will notice that these vitamins are present in a great variety of foods; therefore it is not necessary to worry about your vitamin intake. If you eat a sensible mixed diet it is a certainty that you will never be deficient in vitamins. The same is true for all essential requirements in the body, for a healthy body has the ability to transform one type of foodstuff into another as required. Many yogic practices, especially surya namaskara and pranayama, increase the efficiency of this transformation process. A person who is able to gain control of his system can live on a simple diet and transform it internally to other substances as his body requires.

Remember fats and carbohydrates give energy; proteins are mainly for growth and maintenance; minerals and vitamins are for protection, control and regulation of biological processes.

Food and preparation

In order to receive the greatest possible benefits from the foods you buy, it is preferable to avoid over-refined foods such as white rice, flour and white sugar. Nature has provided us with all the nutrients we need, so why buy artificial and adulterated foods? There are also several preparation hints that we can offer to enable you to obtain the most from your food. However, we stress that you should not become too fanatical in the following of food rules in general, but rather treat them as you do your cooking - in other words, don't overdo it!

1. Rinse off surface dirt, but do not scrub too hard to avoid washing away all the nutrients in the skin.
2. Cook vegetables in as little liquid as possible.
3. Save the liquid to make soups or gravy etc.
4. Steaming or baking vegetables is better than boiling or frying away their nutritional value.
5. Do not overcook vegetables.
6. When frying use as little oil as possible.

Remember, good and thoughtful food preparation is also essential for good digestion in a direct manner. Tasteless, monotonous and badly prepared food does not stimulate the appetite and the salivary and gastric glands secrete less juices than required.

Better alternatives

The following chart will enable you to avoid foods that are either detrimental to digestion or processed so that they lose their prana and nutritional value.

This chart is solely for your guidance. If you are unable to obtain these foods do not worry; they are only preferred foods, not essentials.

Foods to avoid	Foods to use
Denatured foods: white flour, white bread, cakes and buns; polished white rice.	Whole wheat, barley, rye or corn flour bread; whole or partially polished rice
White sugar, sweets, jam, sweet syrups, fruit in syrups, light treacle, heavily sugared drinks and glucose drinks.	Honey, brown sugar, molasses, black treacle; fresh fruit.
Fats and oils of animal origin; saturated acid fats.	Vegetable oils and clarified butter
Heat treated, canned foods; processed foods in which artificial sweeteners, flavourings and chemical preservatives are used (always read the small type on labels before purchasing).	Fresh foods, naturally processed foods; processed foods like dried fruits or lentils, organically grown products.

Summary

With the advent of scientific knowledge, the subject of diet and nutrition has become increasingly popular. In fact, there are hundreds of books and magazines almost entirely dedicated to this topic. Though well intentioned, many of these books tend to make people worry too much about their food habits and become neurotic. People start to wonder whether they are consuming the right food and in sufficient quantity to cater for vitamin deficiency. This food neurosis is a far worse problem than a body which is deficient in nutrients of a certain type. So we emphasize - the importance of different foods should not become an obsession in any way, or another problem. If you refer to the heading entitled 'Nutrients and their role in the body' you will find that all the nutrients the body needs are found in a wide range of food types. Therefore, if you are eating a reasonably varied diet, then it is a certainty that you are obtaining all your food requirements.

The purpose of this topic has been to describe the functioning of the digestive system in simple and basic terms in the hope that the reader will become more aware and understanding of the body and have respect for the way it works. Again we repeat try not to become a food faddist or neurotic. If you do, then the whole purpose of this discussion has been defeated.

Because of the importance of digestion in maintaining good health we will include further discussions on this topic later in the book¹.

Notes

- ¹ Vegetarianism - Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 1
Disorders of Digestion - Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 1

Asanas: Meditative Asanas

The important feature of any meditative asana is that it should allow the practitioner to sit undisturbed in one position for extended periods of time without discomfort. Meditational practices aim to direct awareness inside the mind and this is totally impossible if the awareness is engrossed and entangled with external events, including the physical body. Introspection is impossible if one continually fidgets, scratches or experiences physical pain. Therefore the aim is to sit in a sufficiently comfortable position that allows the physical body to be forgotten.

Most asanas are not suitable for meditational practices because they require some muscular effort or sense of balance in order to maintain them. For example, bhujangasana, sarpaasana and marmakasana are excellent asanas for inducing physical and mental health and harmony, but because they require some physical effort they are not suitable asanas for meditational practice¹.

One might assume that relaxation asanas, such as shavasana would therefore be the most ideal for they require absolutely no effort². In fact, they can be used for meditational practices but we don't recommend them because it is so easy to relax to such a degree that one falls asleep. And sleep is as far away from meditation as tension. What is required is a high state of relaxation combined with intensified wakefulness. The sages in the past found, from experience, that there are specific asanas most suitable in this respect. There are six of these, known as the classical meditational asanas:

1. *Padmasana* (lotus pose)
2. *Siddhasana* (accomplished pose for men)
3. *Siddha yoni asana* (accomplished pose for women)
4. *Swastikasana* (auspicious pose)
5. *Ardha padmasana* (half lotus pose)
6. *Vajrasana* (the thunderbolt pose)³

The first three asanas 1, 2 and 3 are traditionally accepted as the best meditative asanas.

One should aim to sit in any one of these positions if possible. The second three asanas 4, 5 and 6 are also excellent meditative asanas, which are far easier to perform while being nearly as good as the first three.

Many people will find all six of these classical asanas too difficult and uncomfortable. Under these circumstances either of the following two simpler meditative asanas are suitable:

7. *Veerasana* (hero's pose)
8. *Sukhasana* (easy pose)³

We would like to point out that we don't expect you to practise all these meditative asanas. We are describing them here in order to keep them together as a specific group, as it is useful for reference purposes. Devote your attention to mastering one or two of them at the present time. You can try others in the group later when you have spare time.

The basic features of meditation asanas

In the ancient text, the *Yoga Sutras*, Rishi Patanjali has tersely summed up the essence of meditative asanas in the following manner: "The posture should be steady and comfortable. The posture is mastered by relaxing effort (not trying too hard) and by thinking about the Ananta (this is a mythological serpent symbolizing equilibrium - in particular the stability and the correct orbit of the earth around the sun)."

The first sentence requires no explanation. If we try too hard without relaxing during asanas, we create more tension instead of the desired aim of relaxation. Of course the word ananta does not mean much to most people, but the idea behind it is that by thinking about its symbology - stability and equilibrium - the practitioner will feel these attributes in the position of his body. The word ananta also has a connection with the notion of endlessness. By invoking a feeling of endlessness, the individual will feel insignificant compared to the infinity around him. In this way, there will

be less tendency to worry about trifling problems that prevent us from relaxing and sitting comfortably for a period of time.

The spine and head are held upright in all the meditative asanas. There are two main reasons for this. The first is to allow free breathing without the slightest hindrance. In other words, all the parts of the body concerned with breathing, namely the chest, diaphragm and abdomen, can move without interference. Secondly, a straight but relaxed spine is less likely to result in backache. This is a common problem with many people when they have to sit in one position for a reasonably long period of time. This subject will be discussed more fully under a subsequent heading.

Another common characteristic of the meditative asanas is that they all have a very firm and stable base. This is absolutely necessary in order that the body remains steady throughout the meditational or pranayama practice. In all the meditative asanas, except vajrasana, the legs are folded so that they form a triangular base. This prevents the body from toppling either backwards or forwards. Furthermore, in this position the arms and hands can be placed in a comfortable position on the knees or in the lap. In this position they are not likely to cause any disturbance.

As we have already mentioned, the meditative asanas are designed so that the least amount of effort is required to maintain them. This is very important in order to attain maximum relaxation and to be able to forget the body during meditational practices.

Incorrect position of the back

The most common mistake made by beginners when they sit in a meditative asana is to hold the back too straight. That is, they sit with their back arched, the navel pushed forwards and the head thrown backwards. This may look very impressive, especially to people who do not practise yoga, but it is not very comfortable. Further, not many people will be able to maintain this position for more than a few minutes without slumping forwards. This is merely replacing one extreme with another.

Actually, when we say keep the spine straight, we are asking the impossible, for the normal shape or contour of the spine is certainly not straight, it is S-shaped. No matter how much

you try, you will not be able to make your spine perfectly straight - the bone structure prevents this. When we instruct you to keep your spine straight, we mean that the back should be held upright without slumping forwards or being arched backwards. In other words, allow the spine to take the position in which it is most comfortable. You will find from personal experience which is the best position of your back.

We again emphasize that you should try to avoid either slumping forwards or straining backwards. Both of these positions prevent optimum relaxation and free breathing. It is impossible to relax if you are struggling to hold the spine in an abnormally arched position, just as it is impossible to relax with an aching back from a forward slumped position. And we assure you that backache is most likely to occur if you are slumped forwards. It is essential for optimum results to hold your head and back in a comfortable upright position.

Mastery of meditational asanas

There are very few people who can sit in the classical meditational asanas without previously loosening up their legs over a period of time. Those who can are usually children. For this reason it is essential that the reader regularly practises special exercises to loosen up the leg muscles and joints⁴.

At first you may feel that your legs are too stiff to sit in any of these advanced sitting positions. This happens to everyone. Yet, with perseverance, even those people with the stiffest legs can master meditative asanas. The author speaks from experience, for when he first started practising yoga, he could not even sit in sukhasana, the cross-legged pose. But with persistent practice the legs became looser and more flexible, until he was able to sit in any of the meditative asanas with more comfort than sitting in an armchair.

The mental attitude is very important. If you start pessimistically with the belief that you will never master meditative asanas, then you have immediately defeated yourself. Be optimistic. Assume that it is only a matter of time and practice before you can sit comfortably in any of the asanas. If you believe this enough then the mind, which controls the body, will automatically begin to make physical changes.

In other words, your mind will fix a role and your body will prepare and change itself accordingly. You will find that your legs become progressively flexible over a period of weeks and months. Both regular physical loosening up exercises and mental determination are necessary.

It will be with a wonderful feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction that you will eventually sit in one of the more difficult classical meditative asanas for the first time.

you may only hold the final pose for a second or so when discomfort will oblige you to quickly unfold your legs again. Yet at this stage, you have more than passed the halfway mark towards full proficiency in the asana (called *asana siddhi* in Sanskrit). The aim must now be to extend the period of time in which you can maintain the final pose. This must be done slowly over a period of weeks and months. No excessive force should be utilized; all that is necessary is to increase the duration by a few seconds every day.

Eventually you should be able to sit in a meditative asana for half an hour and more, without the slightest urge to move the body. This implies that the asana is comfortable and without the slightest physical pain. It is under these circumstances that you will start to gain the most from your meditational and pranayama practices. Your awareness will more easily become one-pointed for it will not be disturbed by discomfort of the body.

Premeditative loosening up

We have already emphasized that it is essential for the body to be as comfortable and relaxed as possible during meditative and pranayama practices. Even those people who can sit in all the meditative asanas without the slightest difficulty will occasionally experience stiffness. This is especially likely in the early morning when the body is stiffer than at any other time of the day.

For this reason a program of asanas is recommended before practising meditation and pranayama. These will not only loosen up the whole body in preparation for the sitting pose, but will also calm the mind. We particularly recommend the practice of the six leg loosening exercises⁴. It is not necessary to do them all - one or two is sufficient. In particular, we recommend the half butterfly and hip

rotation which can be done within a few minutes. Do more of the exercises if you have the time. They will help you to gain the most from your practices, for you will be less troubled by aches and pains in your legs. We recommend that these exercises be done by both beginners and experts alike, just before commencing meditation and pranayama. These exercises are especially useful when you have no time to perform asanas, perhaps in the evening.

Which meditative asana to practise?

There are eight meditative asanas. We do not expect you to practise all of them regularly, for there is no need. Choose any one of them in which you feel the most comfortable and use it for the duration of your practice. However the three asanas, padmasana, siddhasana and siddha yoni asana, are considered the best asanas and you should aim at eventually mastering one of these three. Some people believe that padmasana is superior to siddhasana and others say the opposite. Actually neither one is superior, they are equally as good as each other. However, some practices of yoga, including kriya yoga, prescribe either padmasana or siddhasana for specific purposes. Remember, siddha yoni asana is the female equivalent of siddhasana.

These three asanas are not the best or most suitable because they look spectacular or because they are difficult. There are very good reasons why they are the preferred sitting positions for meditational practice. Firstly, these asanas provide the most stable and rigid sitting positions of all meditative asanas. The body feels as firm and as immovable as a rock. Secondly, these asanas will automatically encourage the practitioner to hold the back and spine upright with little or no effort. There is much less tendency to slump forwards compared to other sitting positions. Thirdly, the contact area between the body and the ground is large. This distributes the weight of the body over a wide area, thereby preventing the occurrence of pain in the buttocks. This is one of the main faults of sukhasana³. The weight of the body is supported on a small area of the buttocks, which quickly results in discomfort. If you are a beginner to yoga, we don't expect you to be able to sit in these three preferred asanas immediately, for they require

flexibility of the legs. This suppleness can only be attained with regular practice over a period of time. In this case meditational and pranayama practices can be performed using a simpler sitting position. For this purpose swastikasana, ardha padmasana and vajrasana are excellent asanas. Furthermore, they progressively loosen up the legs so that one can eventually sit in padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. The three simpler asanas are all splendid sitting positions for they keep the back straight, provide a good area of contact with the floor, and are reasonably steady. The reader must choose for himself through personal experience which is best for him.

If you cannot sit in any of the asanas we have just mentioned, then use either sukh-asana or veerasana. These are both reasonably good sitting positions, but not as beneficial as the other sitting poses for the back easily slumps forwards and one feels discomfort.

If you are exceptionally stiff, then you may find that all of these asanas are unsuitable. Under these circumstances sit with your legs outstretched in front of the body, if necessary leaning your back against a wall for support.

Sitting in a comfortable chair is often recommended for meditational and pranayama practices. However, we don't advise this for it quickly leads to discomfort; the body will slump forwards, one will move and be continually aware of the body. This will occur in even the plushiest armchairs, unless of course you relax so much that you fall asleep. So we emphasize that you should not practise while sitting in a chair of any kind. If, however, there is some physical reason why you cannot take any position but one in a comfortable chair then you should by all means do so. Shavasana could also be used for meditation if necessary but as we have previously mentioned it is not recommended because it is so conducive to sleep.

There must be a balance between too much discomfort so that one cannot forget the body and too much comfort so that one falls asleep. The eight meditative asanas we have listed have been found throughout thousands of years of practice to most perfectly fit this role.

Backache and pain in the legs

Whichever sitting asana you use in the beginning, you are sure to feel aches and pains in the back and legs. Over a period of time this

tendency can be removed by daily practice of asanas that exercise and flex the whole body, strengthening the muscles, loosening the joints and releasing tension in the nerves. These other asanas not only prepare the body for the sitting positions, but help to bring about health of mind and body.

After sitting in one position for some time, these aches and pains can be removed in a variety of ways. The best way to remove leg pains is to slowly straighten your legs and then bend them a few times at the knees. This quickly releases tension. The best way to remove backache is to bend the back forwards, backwards and then to the right and the left. Three excellent asanas are shashankasana, bhujangasana and marm vakrasana¹. Although there are many more asanas that can be utilized the reader can experiment and find out for himself the most suitable ones.

There is conflicting opinion as to whether one should bear aches and pains without moving during meditation and pranayama or to remove the aches and pains by adjusting the position of the body and then continuing the practice. Actually discretion must be used in this respect. Ideally one should not move while performing meditational or pranayama practices, but this is very difficult if you suffer great pain. Furthermore, it is impossible to be fully aware of the practice in hand if one's attention is diverted due to physical pain. Therefore we recommend that a reasonable degree of discomfort be tolerated, for if you absorb yourself in the practice it is possible to forget your aches and pains. However, if the aches and pains are overwhelming and you see no chance of being able to forget the body, then adjust your position, loosen up your limbs and then reassume your sitting position to continue your practice.

Eventually this problem will not arise, for your body will become sufficiently flexible and relaxed to prevent discomfort and your awareness will become increasingly fixed on performing the practice. Under these circumstances you will not be aware of pain, even if the body is uncomfortable, and there will be no tendency to move or fidget.

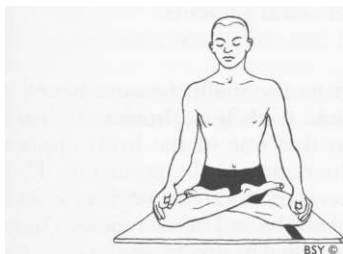
Caution

Under no circumstances should you use excessive force to try to sit in any of these asanas. Be

patient and wait for the leg muscles to stretch and become more flexible over a period of time. Strain will only cause more harm than good.

PADMASANA (LOTUS POSE)

This is one of the best meditative asanas. The sitting position itself is conducive to physical and mental calmness. At first it is quite difficult for most people to perform, and uncomfortable if held for more than a few minutes. However, with practice this asana will prove far more comfortable than the simpler sitting positions, such as veerasana and sukhasana. It holds the trunk of the body and the head as though they are a pillar, with the legs as its firm foundation. This asana almost automatically makes one want to be still. It is with good reason that Buddha is usually depicted in this pose.



Technique

Place a blanket on the floor.
Sit with the legs stretched forwards.
Slowly fold one leg and place the foot on the thigh of the opposite leg.
The sole of the foot must face upwards, with the heel in contact with the front of the lower abdomen.
When you feel comfortable, fold the other leg in the same way, also placing the foot on top of the opposite thigh.
In the final pose, both knees should rest comfortably on the floor.
Hold the back and head upright, but without strain. Close your eyes.

Position of the hands and arms

Relax the arms with the elbows bent. The hands can be placed either on the knees or clasped in the lap. Choose the position that you find most comfortable. If you place your hands on the knees you can practise a number

of mudras. There are two important ones - namely jnana mudra and chin mudra⁵.

General advice

Some people find that this asana is most comfortable if the left leg is folded first; others, if the right leg is folded first. Experiment and find out for yourself which is most suitable.

Allow the shoulders to relax without raising or hunching them.

You may find this asana easier if you place a small cushion under the buttocks before assuming the final pose. Before sitting in padmasana we advise all people to loosen up their legs by practising the half butterfly and knee rotation exercises⁴. Do not force your legs into padmasana if they lack the necessary flexibility. Practise ardha padmasana instead.

Limitations

People suffering from sciatica or sacral infections should not attempt this asana.

Benefits

Padmasana induces mental calmness, which is the essential prerequisite for pranayama and meditative practices. This tranquillity also helps to bring about physical health and mental equilibrium on a permanent basis. The steadiness of the body induces steadiness of the mind. The position and pressure of the feet against the thighs reduces the flow of blood to the legs. This blood supply is redirected towards the abdominal and pelvic organs, thereby toning up the organs, muscles and nerves in this region.

SIDDHASANA (MALE ACCOMPLISHED POSE)

The Sanskrit word *siddha* has many meanings and implications. It means 'power' and 'perfection', so that this asana can also be called the perfect pose or the powerful pose. The word *siddhi* is derived from *siddha* and means a psychic power or faculty developed through yogic practices. This includes clairvoyance, telepathy as well as many other lesser known powers such as the ability to disappear at will. Siddhasana is believed to be the asana that helps to develop these powers.

It is an excellent meditative asana and the equal of padmasana. It is often used in specific

practices for it applies pressure in the region between the anus and the sexual organs (mooladhara chakra). Siddhasana can only be practised by men. The female equivalent is called siddha yoni asana.



Technique

Sit with the legs stretched in front of the body. Fold your right leg and place the sole of the right foot against the inside of the left thigh. Your right heel should be placed so that it presses against the area between the anus and the genitals (the perineum).

This is an important aspect of Siddhasana.

Adjust your body until you are comfortable and the heel is firmly applied against the perineum.

Then fold your left leg and place the left foot on top of the right calf.

If possible, try to adjust the position of the left heel so that it presses into the pelvis immediately above the genitals.

Your genitals should therefore lie between the two heels.

If you find this last position difficult, do not worry; merely place your left heel as near as possible to the required position.

Adjust the position of the left toes so that they can be pushed into the space between your right calf and thigh.

The left toes should fit into this space without any pain or general discomfort.

If necessary, this space can be enlarged slightly by using the hands or temporarily adjusting the position of the right leg.

Then grasp your right toes, either from below or above your left leg and pull them upwards into the space between your left thigh and calf. Adjust the body so that it is comfortable.

The knees should be in contact with the ground.

The heels should preferably be one above the other.

Hold the spine and head upright, yet relaxed.

General advice

A cushion can be utilized to elevate the buttocks slightly and to reduce pressure between the lower ankle and the floor. The practitioner must find out for himself whether it is best to fold the right leg or the left leg first.

Many people experience discomfort because of the pressure applied where the two ankles cross each other. If necessary, place a folded cloth or piece of sponge between the legs at this point to reduce the pain. At first you may find the pressure at the perineum difficult to bear for more than a minute or so. With practise this time will be increased.

This asana requires a reasonable degree of leg flexibility. Therefore do not attempt to force your legs beyond what their flexibility will allow.

Limitations

Siddhasana should not be practised by people with sciatica or sacral ailments.

Benefits

Siddhasana gives essentially the same benefits as padmasana. It differs, however, from padmasana in that one of the heels applies pressure in the region of the perineum. This pressure is necessary in various yogic practices such as moola bandha and vajroli mudra. These are used a great deal in kriya yoga techniques together with siddhasana. This pressure is important, for it is concerned with awakening a psychic centre in this area called the mooladhara chakra. This will be discussed in the future⁶.

SIDDHA YONI ASANA (ACCOMPLISHED POSE FOR WOMEN)

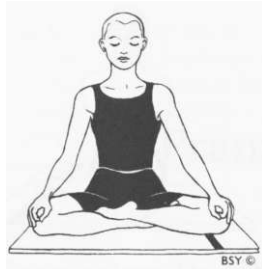
The Sanskrit word *yoni* means 'womb' or 'source'. In this context it means that this asana is the female equivalent of siddhasana. It is to be practised by women instead of siddhasana.

Technique

Sit on the floor with your legs extended straight in front of you.

Fold your right leg and place the sole of the right foot so that it is in contact with the inside of the left thigh.

Adjust your right heel so that it presses firmly against the front of your vagina (labia majora).



Adjust your body position so that you are comfortable, while simultaneously feeling the pressure of the right heel.

Then fold your left leg and place the left foot on top of the right calf.

Gently slide the left toes into the space between the right calf and thigh.

Pull your right toes upwards into the space between your left calf and thigh.

Adjust your body so that you feel comfortable. Ensure that your knees are firmly on the ground.

Make sure that your spine and head are held erect.

Close your eyes and imagine that your body is firmly fixed in the ground as though it is a tree.

Further details

One should refer to the sections in siddhasana for more information on the position of the hands and arms, general advice and limitations.

Benefits

Siddha yoni asana is an excellent pose and the equal of padmasana. It is utilized with many other practices which aim at awakening mooladhara chakra.

This asana is necessary for women because the position of the mooladhara chakra is slightly different to that of men.

It has a direct influence on the nerve plexuses of the female reproductive system. It helps one to gain control over the neuropsychic impulses which are concerned with the mooladhara chakra and the associated physical sexual organs.

SWASTIKASANA (AUSPICIOUS POSE)

The Sanskrit word *swastika* means 'auspicious' or 'favourable'. It is symbolized by the swastika, which is known by various religions and cults

throughout the world. Some people regard it as the most universal of symbols. It is only in this century that it has developed negative associations. The symbol has many meanings but a common one is that its spokes represent the different corners of the world and the universe, and that everything has a meeting point and common centre - consciousness. This asana can be regarded as the one most favourable for realizing the unity of existence.

Swastikasana looks very similar to siddhasana but it is far easier to perform because neither of the heels apply pressure at the base of the trunk.

Technique

For illustration see siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

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

Fold the left leg and place the left foot near or in contact with the right thigh muscles.

Bend the right leg and push the right toes into the space between the left thigh and calf muscles.

Then pull the toes of the left leg upwards into the space between the right calf and thigh muscles.

Adjust the body until you feel comfortable.

The hands can be placed on the knees in jnana mudra, chin mudra or chinmaya mudra⁵; or the hands can be clasped and held in the lap. Relax the arms and allow the shoulders to drop.

Close your eyes and relax the whole body.

Further details

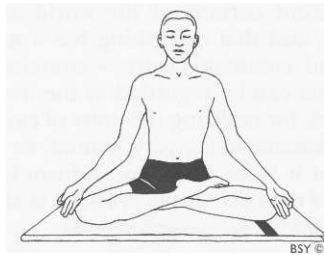
Details on limitations and general advice are as given for padmasana.

Benefits

Swastikasana looks very much like siddhasana and siddha yoni asana and gives basically the same benefits. However, it is not such a good asana because it does not press the area of the mooladhara chakra. As this is important, swastikasana is not generally used in kriya yoga. However, it is an excellent asana for general meditational practices and pranayama, and should be used by those people who cannot sit comfortably in the better but more difficult meditative asanas.

ARDHA PADMASANA (HALF LOTUS POSE)

This is an excellent asana to prepare the legs for padmasana. It is also a good meditative asana in its own right.



Technique

Sit on the floor with the legs extended in front of the body.

Fold the left leg and place the left foot on the floor beside the right thigh.

Then fold the right foot on top of the left thigh. Without straining, try to place the heel of the right leg as near as possible to the abdomen. Adjust your body to a comfortable position. Hold the back, neck and head upright. Place the hands on the knees or clasp them and place them in the lap.

Close your eyes and relax the body.

Preparation for padmasana

If you can do ardha padmasana then you are well on the way to mastering padmasana. Use this asana to prepare the legs for padmasana. In this respect alternately fold one leg on top of the other, if necessary, while doing pranayama or meditational practices. That is, first fold the legs so that the right leg is on top. When this position becomes uncomfortable or the next time you sit for practice, place the left leg on top. In this way you will loosen up both legs. If one of your legs is more flexible than the other, then you should spend more time sitting in ardha padmasana with the least flexible leg on top. This will increase the flexibility of the leg.

VEERASANA (HERO'S POSE)

This is a simple asana which is rarely used for meditative practices. Yet we feel that for many people it will be more comfortable than suhasana, since there is a larger area of contact with the ground.



Technique

Place a folded blanket on the floor.

Sit with the legs outstretched in front of the body.

Bend the left leg and place the left foot so that it is under and to the side of the right buttock. Now bend the right leg over the top of the left leg, placing the right foot beside the left buttock.

Arrange the position of the knees so that one is above the other.

Hold the head, neck and back upright.

Place the hands either on the feet; on the knees, one on top of the other, palms facing downwards; or on your lap, one on top of the other, palms facing upwards.

Choose the most comfortable position in which your arms are totally relaxed.

Relax the whole body. This is the final pose.

Note: there are other forms of veerasana, but this one is the most useful for sitting purposes. There are no limitations.

Benefits

This is a comfortable sitting position for those people who cannot sit in the more difficult meditative asanas. Like all meditative asanas, it is conducive to physical and mental equilibrium.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

² Shavasana: Part 1 - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5; Part 2 - Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

³ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

⁴ Ardha titali asana, kawa chalasana and shroni chakra - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3; poorna titali asana, kashtha takshanasana and vayu nishk-asana: Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4

⁵ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

⁶ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

Pranayama: Practice

In the next lesson we intend to describe nadi shodhana pranayama stage 3¹. This involves retention of breath at the end of each inhalation. As a preparation for this stage we want you to incorporate breath retention for small durations into your daily practice of nadi shodhana stage 2.

PREPARATION FOR NADI SHODHANA - STAGE 3

Technique

Sit in any comfortable meditative asana.

Do stage 1 of nadi shodhana².

A few minutes practice through each nostril is sufficient.

Then do stage 2 of nadi shodhana³.

Remember the aim is to eventually make inhalation and exhalation fixed at the ratio 1:2.

This can slowly be accomplished over a period of time.

The duration of each exhalation and each inhalation should be also progressively increased, keeping the ratio fixed.

Don't strain.

Continue this practice according to the time available.

When you find absolutely no difficulty in practising stage 2 and you stabilize your breathing so that the durations of exhalation and inhalation occur spontaneously without effort, then begin to retain your breath after inhalation.

At first, only hold your breath for a second or so, counting mentally as you do.

The duration of this retention can slowly be increased in each practice session and over the weeks of regular practice.

At this stage retain your breath for no longer than 5 seconds.

For clarity we will briefly describe 1 round:

Breathe in through your left nostril, keeping the right nostril closed.

Retain your breath for a short time with both nostrils closed.

Breathe out through your right nostril with the left nostril closed.

Breathe in through your right nostril.

Retain your breath.

Breathe out through your left nostril.

This is 1 round.

Remember that the ratio of inhalation to exhalation should be 1:2. That is, for every count of inhalation, 2 counts must be allowed for exhalation.

Further details

This subject will be fully discussed when we describe nadi shodhana stage 3¹. The practice we have given here is merely intended as preparation.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4

³ Nadi shodhana (stage 2) - Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 4

Meditation: An Introduction

The aim of meditation practices is to induce the spontaneous state of meditation. It is impossible to teach meditation, no matter what many people say. If a person tells you that he will teach you meditation then he is not being strictly truthful. Though it is probably no more than a play of words, the only thing that anyone can teach is a method that will lead you to the experience of meditation. Remember this important point: meditation is unteachable by the very fact that it is beyond words.

Because meditation is impossible to define in concrete terms, its meaning is widely abused and misunderstood. Many people sit down, close their eyes for some time and consider that they have meditated. Well, maybe they have - who are we to say otherwise? But generally it is the case that one broods over problems and thinks of external happenings while in this so-called state of meditation. This is definitely not meditation. Though the eyes may be closed, there is no introspection if the mind is thinking about the outside world, about a cup of tea, breakfast, work or many other distractions. This is merely living in the outside world with one's eyes closed. It is little different to actually taking part in the outer phenomena with the eyes open. Meditation is beyond this inner or outer interaction with the world.

The state of experience of meditation is not only confined to those people who sit in a quiet place with their eyes closed and perform various practices to induce meditation. This is merely one method of meditating and is called raja yoga. It is also possible to be in a state of meditation while performing everyday duties. This is more in line with the practices of karma yoga and bhakti yoga. A person can perform the most trivial actions and yet simultaneously be in the highest stages of exultation. He can cut the lawn, drive a car, make policy decisions, wash the dishes and at the same time exist in a state of meditation. And probably no one else, unless they were also in a similar state, would

realize. Your actions would in no way indicate that you are meditating. This is what the Zen masters attempt to convey when they say:

*How wondrous this, how mysterious;
I carry fuel, I draw water.*

Ho loji

*Pursuing the tasks of everyday life
I walk along the ancient path.
I am not disheartened in the mindless void,*

Chikan

So remember, there are different paths to meditation. Some involve actions in the outside world (as is the case with karma yoga) while others involve introspection and temporarily leaving aside outside activities (as with raja yoga). In this discussion, though we will speak about meditation in general, our attention will be mainly on meditation in relation to raja yoga.

The evolution of man

During the last few thousand years man has made great steps in his evolution. The early nomadic forms of man were primarily concerned with survival, with obtaining the basic necessities of life and protecting himself against environmental hazards. Since then man has been more and more able to control nature in accordance with his own needs and whims. In other words, nature has increasingly become the servant of man instead of the enemy. Particularly in modern times man has been able to devote more time to affairs outside mere survival. People are able to think about such questions as existence and happiness. Furthermore, whereas primitive man's evolution was determined by the external environment, modern man is able to decide the direction of his own evolution. The direction of man's evolution so far has in general been physical and mental. That is, the human body became an increasingly efficient

instrument and the mind more capable of heightened intellectual sophistication and deeper thoughts. This process is still continuing. Yet at the same time, this path of evolution appears to have come to a dead-end. Or rather we should say that this evolution process seems now to be suspended above an abyss. The path continues on the other side of the chasm, yet to continue on this path one must build a bridge. This bridge is meditation. Each of us have reached a certain point in our evolution, yet at the same time our present condition and values seem to be lopsided. Something is missing from our lives. This missing link is inner, spiritual evolution. This is the whole point of meditation.

Evolution is a continuous progression from the unrefined to the refined, from the disorderly to the orderly and from the gross to the subtle. The present time is a crossroads in the path of evolution. We can either continue our present physical and rational development and fall into the abyss, or we can develop and untold our more subtle inner faculties to land safely on the other side. In other words, we can continue to concern ourselves only with the external world to the exclusion of our inner being, or else we can realize our inner potential while still expressing ourselves in the outer environment. This is the choice. The first choice leads to chaos and unhappiness as is prevalent in the world today. The alternative leads to knowledge, happiness and a harmonious interaction not only with yourself but with others. Furthermore, the first choice has limitations in its scope, whereas the second offers infinite possibilities, for it leads into new and higher planes of existence, new planes of consciousness, and to indescribable states of happiness. The second choice is the spiritual path. It does not lead to abandonment of the external world. On the contrary, it leads to even more growth, enjoyment and accomplishment in day to day activities.

This alternative path of evolution has been known and explored by large numbers of people throughout history. It is not something new or recently discovered. It is not a path that has been taught and practised by a few deluded people with their 'heads in the clouds'. On the contrary they were very practical people. They were the saints, prophets, mystics, sages and yogis who have existed in all places,

eras and in all societies. They all knew that the path each of us must tread lies in awakening our inner potential.

Let us consider a few of their sayings: Christ said, "The kingdom of God is within you." And this same idea was declared by another great sage, for Buddha said: "Look within, thou art the Buddha (pure in consciousness)." This was echoed by the Greeks, for they wrote above the main door of their temples the following sentence: "Man, know thyself, and thou shalt know the universe". In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna affirmed this when he said: "Meditation is far better than knowledge (intellectual knowledge)." In recent times this was beautifully phrased by Ramakrishna Paramahansa as follows: "The fabled musk deer searches the whole world over for the source of the scent which comes from within."

How is it possible that these different people, living at different times in different parts of the world and with different languages and social backgrounds could utter exactly the same idea, though clothed in dissimilar terms? The answer is obvious: they were speaking about a basic truth of existence. These people knew that the path of evolution of higher awareness lies in unfolding the inner realms of our being. It does not lie in totally absorbing or losing ourselves in hectic external actions. It is possible for everyone to learn from their experiences and from the knowledge that they tried to pass on to other people.

Infinite dormant potential exists within each of us. It is there waiting only to be discovered. To find it, however, we must plunge into our inner being. In a sense we must be like an explorer; but instead of exploring outer unknown territories we have to discover the inner uncharted environment. Like the first explorers of the world, we don't really know where it will lead us. We must be like Marco Polo, for example, unknowing of the nature of our journey and destination. Marco Polo had strange but wonderful experiences on his journey and fabulous riches at his destination - China. It is the same with meditation. We cannot tell you the wonderful experiences that you will have on your inner journey; only that you will surely have them. Many people did not believe the stories and experiences that Marco Polo described when he returned home.

It is the same with meditation; no one will believe people who relate their experiences unless, of course, they have made a similar journey themselves.

The choice is yours: either you continue to devote all your attention to fumbling around in the outside world as most people now do, or else you try to evolve in a new direction - inwards, following the advice of those who have already made the same choice and quest. The choice is easy because you do not have to give up your present lifestyle. All you need is the interest to make the inner journey of self-discovery and to back it up with yogic practices, including meditation.

We all deceive ourselves. We assume that what we see around us is all that there is. Further, we think that our personality is the totality of our being. People wander all over the world trying to find themselves, not realizing that the greatest marvel lies within. This was clearly pointed out by St. Augustine when he lamented: "Men travel to gaze upon mountain heights and the waves of the sea, broad flowing rivers and the expanse of the ocean, and yet pass by themselves, the crowning wonder."

Consider a calm, still lake in which is reflected a big full moon. The image of the moon looks real and if the real moon was not in the sky to remind us otherwise, many would mistake the reflection for the moon itself. The reflection cannot exist by itself, yet the moon can exist without reflection. It is the same with our personality - we see only the reflected personality and mistake it for our real nature without realizing that the personality manifesting at present is dependent on something deeper. To find our real Self is higher meditation.

Even modern scientists acknowledge that there is far more to each person than is commonly believed. Many eminent scientists have echoed the words of the ancient sages. They have said that the majority of our potential remains untapped. Some quote ninety-five percent of our latent capacity lies dormant, others ninety percent. Actually these are only random figures to illustrate that we are definitely not utilizing much of our potential. Some of these scientists are now sounding like mystics. They say that the greatest discoveries and explorations of the future will be in the

mind and not in the outer world. Instead of exploring space, we will start to make deeper and deeper journeys into inner space. This is the direction of the evolution of man.

The depths of the mind

Yoga and modern psychology are fully aware of the deeper layers of the mind. Many of us have heard of the subconscious, and unconscious realms. Nevertheless, many people still hold the naive idea that the mind thinks only of conscious images at any given time. We fail to realize that the mind is like a vast computer which is continually receiving, sorting out, analyzing and rejecting millions of bits of data. In a computer we generally only see the printout or final result. The information within the mind which we don't normally see is arbitrarily termed the unconscious and subconscious. The mind is often compared to an iceberg, the conscious mind being the one-tenth that lies above the water, and the unconscious and subconscious parts being the far larger nine-tenths that are submerged below the surface of the water. Even this is a gross understatement, for there is far more below the surface than we can even dream.

The mind, in its unconscious and subconscious realms, contains different facets of being. It contains our basic urges and instincts. It contains the intellectual and rational aspects of our being. It contains primitive memories with which we have had totally no connection in our life. It contains ideas, visions, dreams that are far more awe-inspiring than even the most vivid fiction novel. The mind contains the most incredible and almost impossible aspects that are completely inconceivable to most of us. The aim of yoga and meditation is to bring these normally unknown layers of the mind to conscious perception. The term expansion of consciousness is also used but often conveys the wrong idea because consciousness is the substratum or the essence behind existence; as such it is impossible to expand consciousness.

It is only by knowing the depths of the mind that we can really know ourselves as well as the world around us. As an analogy, consider the outer world as an infinite horizontal circle. This circle represents the realm of time-space and the centre represents eternity or timelessness. Most of us confine our attention only to

the outside world, remaining on the circumference of the circle. We find it impossible to enter the circle and reach the centre. The only way to enter the circle and break away from our fetters is to explore the mind. In this way we begin to simultaneously realize truths in the external world. The more we become aware of the depths of the mind, the nearer we approach the centre of the circle. When we reach the centre it is called self-realization.

Each type of journey that we make requires a vehicle. If we walk in the park then our legs assume this role. If we travel to the local town then we go by bus, train or car. If we go to a country across the sea, we travel by ship or aeroplane. The journey into inner space also requires a vehicle - the vehicle is meditation.

The fundamental mechanics of meditation practice

The techniques of meditational practices are reasonably easy to learn. Yet they will never bring results unless they are practised regularly and with dedication. Sad to say, many people believe that to experience meditation it is necessary to fill the mind with numerous different techniques, none of which they practise seriously. As a result they gain nothing. This is an easy pitfall, for we are all habituated to believing that results come through learning. That is, we believe that the more facts we accumulate the wiser we will become. In intellectual terms this may be partly true but it is certainly not true with meditational practices, and for that matter with yoga in general. A person can know almost nothing intellectually and yet by knowing one meditational technique and practising it with dedication, can experience the joy and knowledge of meditation. Success does not depend on factual knowledge. Throughout history there are numerous examples of both uneducated and highly educated people who have achieved the highest states of meditation. We all have access to the mind potential, whether rich or poor, intellectual or non-intellectual, young or old, male or female. The main requirements for delving into the mind and realizing its potential are aspiration and practice. This is the way to experience the bliss and transcendental knowledge of meditation.

As we have already mentioned, there are two principal methods of inducing meditation:

passive and active. Active methods are practised during everyday life, when one walks, talks, eats and performs daily functions. This is the realm of karma yoga and bhakti yoga. The aim is to be in a state of meditation while actively involved in worldly events. This does not imply that actions are performed indifferently, or that the aspirant walks around in a sleeping state. Far from it. The person will perform his activities with greater enthusiasm, efficiency and energy.

Passive methods to induce meditation are the ones that we normally term meditational practices. This is the method of raja yoga. A fixed period of time is set aside daily solely for the purpose of introspection. These methods can also lead to meditation outside the actual time of practising the passive techniques. In other words, the state of meditation carries over into everyday life. It is this form of passive practice that we will discuss here.

Actually, even the word passive is a misnomer for it is only the body that is passive and motionless. The internal environment can be a hive of activity on a conscious level, either spontaneous or intentional, whether it is desired or not. In some people this process is automatic. Many people watch a person practising passive meditational techniques and assume that the person is either asleep or unconscious. This may be the case, but if the practices are done properly this could not be further from the truth.

The first step is to overcome disturbances of the body. It is difficult for most people to sit comfortably in one position for more than a minute or so without feeling pain or wanting to scratch. This causes the awareness to be wholly externalized - exactly the opposite to what is required, for the aim is to direct the awareness inwards to the workings of the mind.

The next step is to try to achieve calmness of mind and relaxation. Most people have a mind that is like a stormy sea. Before we can see below the surface we must first of all settle down the tumultuous waves. This is done through awareness. In other words, we try to be aware of one object, symbol or process of thought. This takes practice, but eventually it is possible to focus the awareness on one thing to the exclusion of all others. This one-pointed attention allows the awareness to pierce and enter the various depths of the mind. A dull

arrow will not penetrate the target, whereas a sharp one well-aimed will decisively pierce the bull's eye. This point of awareness acts as a vehicle for the journey into the mind. It is merely a means to an end. Furthermore, this point of awareness prevents the meditator falling into a state of unconsciousness. That is, it is very easy to lapse into a state of sleep if one relaxes mentally and physically and tries to do meditational practices. This point acts as a continual reminder of our awareness. The vehicle in karma yoga is intense, concentrated work; in bhakti yoga overwhelming devotion to a person or one object, and in jnana yoga the vehicle is an all absorbing enquiry.

Many people try to concentrate too hard in order to meditate. However, concentration does not come easily or spontaneously to a disturbed mind. Therefore, to try to attain concentration they strain themselves; instead of becoming relaxed and calm, they actually create more tension. Under these circumstances it is impossible to meditate. For this reason we don't advise people to concentrate intently. Instead, we ask them to be aware of an object or process of thought to the best of their ability. That is, if the mind tends to wander, then don't fight it - let it wander, but remain aware of the object or thought process. In this way you will not only attain one-pointedness but will simultaneously enjoy a state of mental and physical relaxation.

There are many things that can be used as an object of one-pointedness. It does not matter as long as the object is able to hold one's attention easily. The following are a few of the most common objects: the breathing process, mantras such as Aum, an external or internal picture of a great sage or guru, the tip of the nose, different parts of the body or any other symbol that appeals to you. One particularly good practice utilizes awareness of the thought process itself. Remember, all these are the means that lead to meditation, not meditation itself.

We have only briefly mentioned the fundamental mechanics of passive meditational practices. Because we have spoken very generally, without detail, virtually all specific practices conform to this basic mode or pattern. Our mind, at its different layers, is in a continual state of chatter. Normally this inner disturbance together with our over-extrovert-

ed way of life prevents us from seeing into the mind. Meditational practices are a way of drawing aside the curtains of the mind and peering inside. We cannot talk about meditation, we can only discuss the practices that lead to meditation. Most people are in a fluctuating state of emotional turmoil. This is a serious impediment to meditation. It is so difficult to relax sufficiently and become one-pointed even when we are alone. We are continually beset by worries, dislikes, jealousy and many other emotional disturbances and these cannot be overcome in one night. Time is necessary. Meditational techniques will help to bring about this end, but we sincerely advise the practitioner to refer to our previous discussion on relaxation¹.

Meditational practices are excellent methods of confronting the problems, conflicts and other disturbances hidden in the normally inaccessible recesses of the mind. Once we face these negative aspects of our mind they will automatically drop away. Each person can become his own psychiatrist-cum-psychologist. As these problems are gradually removed, so one's life becomes an expression of joy and happiness. Our lives will be transformed.

It is very easy to give the wrong impression about meditation and meditational practices. It is possible for everyone to know the joy of meditation, yet at the same time effort is required. It would be most surprising if a person starts to meditate on the first attempt. In fact we have never known this to happen. Regular and sincere practice and time are required. The time depends on the individual, on his problems, on his dedication and other factors. But all effort is worthwhile, more so than anything else you are likely to do in your life. So don't expect instant meditation but persevere in your practices.

We all tend to be sceptical of things of which we have no experience. This is our constitution. With meditation it is far easier to be sceptical and disbelieving than with many other concepts, for it is intangible. Even the author was deeply sceptical when he was first introduced to the possibilities of meditation. He found it difficult to comprehend how 'merely closing one's eyes' could lead to anything more than sleep. This of course is a natural tendency. It is only through personal experience that this naivety and the accompanying doubts are

slowly but surely erased. Furthermore, we emphasize that you can read volumes of books on meditation and still disbelief will exist. It is only the personal experience of meditation, even if it is the faintest glimmer, that can make us realize the power, knowledge and joy that are our heritage.

Notes

The Art and Science of Relaxation - Book I,
Lesson 1, Topic 5
The Root Cause of Tension - Book I, Lesson 2,
Topic 7
Relaxation - Shavasana (Part 2) - Book I, Lesson
2. Topic 8

Topic 1

Meditation: Rules for Practice

To experience meditation it is essential to follow a few basic rules and preparations. The following general suggestions are intended for those people who have never known meditation but have the aspiration to find out what it is for themselves. Lack of preparation can prevent one making progress, especially in the early stages. It is therefore important that the following rules are carried out to the best of your ability and whenever possible.

Time: It is best to have fixed times for your daily meditational practices. This regularity establishes a familiar routine ensuring that the mind and body are prepared for the practice.

The best period of the day is early in the morning, or in the evening before retiring for bed. In fact, the most auspicious hours are between four and six o'clock in the morning. In India this time of the morning is called *brahmamuhurta* and is known to be especially conducive to meditation. At this time the body and mind are likely to be most relaxed. Furthermore, this is the quietest time of the day with least likelihood of being disturbed by outer diversions. It is the time when you are not normally overwhelmed by your daily problems.

It is important to practise either before eating or a few hours after. It is difficult to relax with a full stomach. If you must practise after meals, it is best to eat moderately.

Duration: Some people in their enthusiasm begin by devoting a very long time to their practices. However, gradually this enthusiasm tends to wane. For example, one person might decide to practise for an hour every day. The second day this will be shortened for any excuse that is available. On the third day the practice will be further reduced and on the fourth day he might leave it completely. It is far better to begin with a duration that you can easily maintain every day. Even ten minutes practice every day is better than one hour one day, half

an hour the next day and no time on the third day. Be realistic and choose a period of time that you can set aside for your practice. As you progress, slowly increase the time as required. It is very important not to regard the practice as a burden; it should be thought of more as a time of pleasure.

Sitting position: Use the prescribed meditational asanas¹.

Place of practice: Choose a clean, peaceful atmosphere in which to practise. It should be well ventilated but not breezy. It should be dry but not hot. Don't sit on a cold floor. Place a blanket or rug beneath you. Leave a reasonable amount of space around you so that you are not disturbed by furniture or other objects. Try to use the same place daily.

Clothing: This depends on climatic conditions; however, your clothing should be as light as possible under the circumstances. Furthermore, your clothing should not be tight or interfere in any way with the breathing process.

If there are many flies, mosquitoes or other insects present, wrap a sheet or light blanket around you to keep them at bay. Alternatively, those people living in hot climates can remain under their mosquito netting. This is important, for it is very difficult to practise properly with flies and mosquitoes buzzing around you.

Sleep: It is normal for most people to sleep when they relax. However, this is not the aim of meditational practices. Some people may start to get up a little earlier than usual to do their yoga practices. These people in particular will often find it difficult to stay awake. Try not to sleep, for if you do you are really wasting your time waking early in the first place. If you want to sleep, then it is better to stay in bed. There are various methods of overcoming this tendency to sleep: one can go to bed earlier at night and/or take a shower before the practice or at any time that one feels sleepy. If you use cold water it is more drastic, but better. There

is an alternative method which works over a longer period of time: this is the method of autosuggestion. That is, suggest to yourself before your practice and at other times during the day that you will not fall asleep during meditational practice. If you say this with resolution, then the idea will take root in the subconscious mind.

Probably the best way to prevent sleep during meditational practice is to do asanas and pranayama beforehand. These techniques are excellent for inducing heightened wakefulness. Apart from this, they simultaneously bring about relaxation of the mind-body complex. As such they are powerful tools in obtaining the most from meditational techniques. For this reason we recommend asanas and pranayama as an integral part of your yogapracticeprogram.

There are some people who feel exhausted after meditational practice. This is exactly the opposite feeling to that which is to be expected. Meditation should bring about relaxation. If it fails to do this, then it is a sure indication that you are not practising correctly. Most probably you are trying too hard to concentrate, instead of merely being aware and allowing the mind to wander. Don't fight and struggle with the mind as though it is an enemy to be subdued by force. Treat it more as a friend and try to coax it by gentle persuasion. Meditation should be a source of joy. It is a time when we tune in with deeper aspects of our nature. This cannot lead to fatigue. If it does, then check for mistakes in your method of practice.

Optimism and pessimism: Many people expect to experience meditation on their very first day of practice. This is most unlikely to happen. One should merely practise with perseverance and accept whatever comes. Even though you might not feel the exhilaration of meditation, you will definitely gain many other benefits, including a relaxed attitude to life and mental peace.

At times you will become disheartened and doubtful of the claims that are made for meditation. You will feel that perhaps you are wasting your time and chasing 'a castle in the sky'. Everyone experiences this feeling at one time or another. Don't despair for the transcendental experience of meditation is the heritage of all of us, the treasure of life waiting to be found.

Physical relaxation: The basic hurdles to overcome in meditational practices are physical pain, stiffness and general tension. It is an essential prelude to be able to forget the physical body. This is impossible if you are continually aware of aches and pains. There are various methods to systematically relax the whole body. The best method is a combination of asanas before attempting your meditational practices. In fact, asanas are designed specifically for this purpose.

If you don't have time to practise asanas, then there is an excellent method of bringing about reasonable relaxation of the body within a short time. The practice to use is naukasana². Briefly, naukasana tenses the whole body for a short time and then relaxes it again. Repeat a few times. This is an excellent method of attaining physical relaxation quickly. It works on the principle that after accentuated physical tension there is a tendency for the body to take the opposite extreme, namely relaxation.

There is another method in which the different limbs of the body are tensed as much as possible one after the other. Lie flat on your back in shavasana². Direct your awareness first of all to your right leg and tense it as much as possible for as long as you are able, without strain. Then release and relax. Then repeat with the left leg, the two arms, the fists, the abdomen, chest and shoulders, and finally the whole body. This should take about five minutes and is a rapid way of relaxing the body in preparation for meditational practice.

Mental relaxation: The whole point of meditational practices is to induce mental tranquility as a means to meditation. However, it is often difficult to progress with the practices because of emotional and mental tensions. Asanas and pranayama are excellent methods of calming even the most turbulent mind. This is another reason for practising asanas and pranayama before attempting meditational techniques.

Often we are overwhelmed by obsessive and persistent thoughts which have emotional overtones, such as jealousy, hatred, pride, fear and a multitude of others. These are not easy to remove. On no account should you suppress them, for they will only lie dormant in the subconscious mind. Let these lingering and exhausting thoughts arise but try to watch them with awareness. That is, look at the thoughts as though they are something

different from yourself, as though they are happening outside you. In this way they will lose their intensity and cease to overpower you. Of course prevention is better than cure. It is preferable that these emotionally loaded thoughts occur as little as possible in the first place. This can be done by adopting the rules we have already explained in previous discussions², together with constant practice of yoga in all its forms.

Actually the cause of tension is in the mind. Through meditational practice you will slowly come face to face with the source of these disturbances. People experience these agitations in many different forms. But they are only the manifestations. The cause or nucleus lies far deeper in our mental being. We will always be unhappy and emotionally disturbed while we have this nucleus existing within the subconscious mind. This core is in the form of a conflict or a complex of which our outside activities are merely a reflection. It is only by clearly seeing and understanding the subconscious problems that they can be removed. This is slowly but surely brought about by meditational practices. In this way one will become more and more mentally and emotionally relaxed. Furthermore, increasing benefits will be gained from the practices. The more you relax, the more you will be able to delve into the mind. Simultaneously, the more you delve into the mind, the more you relax. It is a two-fold process that occurs side by side.

Rational thought: Try to leave aside intellectual thinking when you do meditational practices for the aim of meditation is to transcend both rational and irrational thoughts. This is not an easy process. Don't suppress the continuous stream of thoughts, but again merely become aware of them. Try to absorb yourself in the practice at hand.

Vehicle for awareness: A symbol, process or sound is required to act as a vehicle to fix your attention so that your awareness may be directed into the mind. These will be suggested when we describe specific techniques. However, the reader may wish to find a suitable vehicle to suit his own personal tastes. You must know and be guided by what holds your attention most easily. It is not possible in this book to cater for all individual preferences. We can only indicate vehicles in general terms and which we have found to be suitable for large

numbers of people. Therefore, we give the following advice as an aid to help you find and choose that which is best for you.

Generally the vehicle of awareness is more powerful if it has some deep meaning or significance. You are more likely to be able to attain deep concentration if the object rivets or holds your attention, because your awareness is less likely to wander here and there, and will be directed into the realms of the mind. If the vehicle has little or no significance for you, then your awareness is most likely to be inattentive. Under these circumstances you might become frustrated and strain yourself in an endeavour to attain one-pointedness. This detracts from success and progress in meditational practices.

A vehicle of awareness can be almost anything. If you belong to a religious group, then you can use an image or form of God. That is to say, if you are Christian, then you are most likely to succeed in concentrating the mind if you use a picture or image of Christ or any great Christian saint. If you are Buddhist, then choose Buddha. If you are Hindu, then you can choose any of the incarnations or avatars of God, such as Krishna, Rama and so on. You must use your discretion in this respect. Only you can choose a symbol which has deep meaning for you.

If you don't belong to any religious group, then there are many other forms that you can choose instead. If you have a guru, then concentrate on his form, or you can concentrate on a cross, a yin yang symbol, the symbolic form of Auriel, the breathing process, any mantra, a rose, a lotus, the moon, the sun, a candle, etc. We repeat, you can choose anything but you must feel an affinity and attraction for the object and be drawn to it without effort.

Most of us are fascinated by many things but without feeling any overwhelming attraction. Under these circumstances continue the practices that we give you. You will still make progress if you have the aspiration. Eventually, however, as you begin to explore the deeper realms of your mind, you will suddenly be confronted by a psychic symbol which has previously unknown significance for you. Even if you try to analyze the image, you may not be able to understand why it is so compulsive. The symbol will almost overpower you with its

intensity. Some people are completely surprised at the nature of the symbol which they find has great appeal for them. It may even be a symbol of a culture that is completely alien to your present way of life. Nevertheless, it is this symbol that you can adopt for your vehicle of awareness if you wish. You can either make a drawing of the symbol or you can develop the ability to create the symbol mentally in front of your closed eyes. The important thing is that the symbol is perfectly clear and vivid, whether mental or on paper. A useful vehicle of awareness is a body process, such as breathing. This is used in many techniques.

Some people, especially those who are more inclined towards abstraction, can use an idea or a question as a vehicle. This applies particularly in the realm of jnana yoga, where the practitioner totally absorbs himself in an enquiry about the nature of himself and existence. Or one can use abstract concepts such as the idea of infinity, compassion, eternity or love. However, these forms of vehicles for awareness are too difficult for most people, at least in the earlier stages of yoga practice. As such, we recommend that you adopt a process, symbol or object that is more concrete. Most of the meditational practices we will give will be of this more tangible type. Full details of this topic will be given when we describe specific practices.

Awareness: We have already extensively mentioned awareness under the other headings; however, we will again briefly summarize. The essence of meditational practice is to develop awareness. That is, awareness of the different realms of the mind. Without awareness, meditation is impossible.

Remember, awareness means that you must be a witness to processes within the mind as well as the process of the meditational techniques. In other words, you should feel apart from your thoughts. Don't lose yourself in them or associate with them. Merely watch the processes as though you are a spectator³. If your mind tends to wander and contemplate on other things apart from your practice, do not become frustrated or try to suppress this tendency. This happens to everyone. On some days we are so relaxed that our awareness automatically fixes itself on the vehicle of awareness, without any effort. On the other hand, at other times our attention jumps

around like a monkey in a tree. You must accept the bad with the good. The way to subdue the mind is to allow it to wander as it wishes and not to force it to concentrate. Give it free rein, but at the same time be aware of the fact that it is roaming, roving and rambling. In other words, simultaneously maintain awareness of the different thoughts of the mind, together with the process of the meditational practice in hand. After some time you will find that the mind will cease to wander - it will automatically become fixed on the practice. We emphasize again: do not force one-pointedness.

Sometimes the mind will be particularly disturbed. It will incessantly jump from one thought to the next, or be totally obsessed by a problem or some other emotional conflict in your life. An excellent method of overcoming this seemingly impossible situation, and in order to gain relaxation, is to chant a mantra over and over again. A good mantra is Aum, which under these circumstances should be chanted loudly and for as long as possible⁴. If you do this with intensity, it has an almost incredible calming influence on the mind. It is so simple yet very effective.

Notes

¹ Topic 2 of this lesson.

² The Art and Science of Relaxation - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

Relaxation: Shavasana (Part 2) - Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

³ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 5

Topic 1

Meditation: Kaya Sthairyam

In this lesson we have devoted a lot of our attention to the subject of meditation and meditational asanas. We have emphasized how important it is to be able to sit in one position without movement and without the distraction of the physical body. The first aim of meditational practice is to forget the body. However, the following practice, kaya sthairyam, seems to contradict this basic rule. During this technique one tries to be aware of the body to the exclusion of everything else. That is, instead of forgetting the body, one must try to accentuate awareness of the body. At first this may seem a little paradoxical. However, it is based on a good understanding of the workings of the mind.

The mind is like a little child. If you order a child to do something, he will quite often do the opposite. There appears to be a rebelliousness, a need to defy. The mind acts in the same way. If you force the mind to forget the body and be aware of another subject, it seems to suddenly develop a fascination for the body. The more you try to forget the body, the more difficult it becomes. Knowing this tendency of the mind, this practice adopts a contrary approach. That is, it almost forces the mind to be aware of the body for a long period of time. The mind, as usual, rebels. The mind automatically tries to think of something else and it forgets the body. And this is exactly the aim of meditational practices. After practising kaya sthairyam intensely for even a few minutes you will find that the awareness spontaneously directs itself inwards. One will automatically start to introspect.

Kaya sthairyam is an excellent technique for preparing your body and mind for other meditative practices. As such, it should be practised whenever possible prior to other meditational techniques.

The Sanskrit word *kaya* means 'body'; the word *sthairyam* means 'steadiness'. Therefore, this practice induces steadiness of the body.

Technique

Sit in any comfortable meditative asana. Adjust your position so that you feel the least possible discomfort.

Straighten the spine and hold the head erect.

Place the hands on the knees or in the lap.

Close your eyes and relax yourself completely.

Be aware of your whole body.

Feel that your body is part of the ground.

Imagine that your body is growing from the ground like a tree - your torso and head are the trunk, and your legs are the roots.

Convince yourself that because your body is part of the ground it cannot and will not move.

You are as steady as a large tree.

Feel all the sensations of your body and if possible try to create a mental image of your body. Be aware of any aches or pains.

Direct your awareness to the source of this discomfort and try to be aware of nothing else. Let this pain be a focus for your awareness; this will not be difficult.

If your mind starts to wander, let it.

But simultaneously try to maintain your awareness of the pain in your body.

Continue for a few minutes.

Then direct your awareness to your right foot.

Be aware of nothing else but your right foot.

After a short time, transfer your awareness to the left foot.

Create a mental picture of the left foot and/or feel the sensations connected with it. Continue to be aware.

Transfer your awareness to your right leg, and repeat the process.

Repeat the same procedure in turn with your left leg, with your whole back, abdomen, chest, right arm, left arm, neck, head and finally the whole body.

This is 1 round.

Intensify your awareness as much as possible; that is even though your awareness may stray onto other subjects, maintain awareness of your body.

Do another round. Be aware.

Suggest to yourself that 'I will not move my body'. Make a resolve that you will be still, and will not move or shake throughout the whole practice. Your body must be like a statue - motionless.

Imprint the suggestions in your mind; in this way you will gain the most benefits from this practice. Even if you have the impulse to move a finger or a toe or to adjust your clothing or to scratch, try to overcome this urge.

When you feel the need to move you must say to yourself: "No, I will not move my body until the end of the practice."

Move your awareness to the different parts of the body. Feel the different parts of the body as you have never felt them before.

In this way continue the practice.

After some time you should find that your body becomes very stiff and rigid.

You will find that you become increasingly detached from your body. You will see your body as something separate from yourself.

You will find that your body feels as though it is weightless. You will find that you have less and less need or inclination to move the body. This stiffening of the body is called psychic stiffening. At this stage you are well prepared for other meditational practices in which your focal point of awareness is internal.

Duration

Practise as many rounds as you wish according to the time available. There are some people who have made great progress in meditational practices using only this technique. Some people practise this technique for hours and hours with great success. However, five or ten minutes practice before other meditational techniques is highly recommended.

Use as a preparatory technique

Kaya sthairyam, as we have already indicated, is an excellent meditative technique in its own right. However, its main use is to steady and relax the body, in preparation for other techniques. Furthermore, one of the biggest obstacles for most people in attaining successful meditation is the inability to forget the body. We are almost obsessed by the existence and sensations of the body. This prevents our awareness being directed elsewhere. Kaya sthairyam is a systematic technique for induc-

ing disinterest in the body. As such, it is a useful prelude to other practices.

Inattentiveness

It is a certainty that your awareness will not remain fixed on the body throughout the practice. You will become aware of other thoughts and distractions. Under no circumstances should you suppress this wandering tendency. This will only create tension. On the other hand, do not become so lost in thoughts that you pay no attention to the body. You must be simultaneously aware of both the body and any interfering thoughts that arise.

Prolonging the duration of meditative asanas

This is an excellent technique for progressively lengthening the time that one can remain in a meditative asana. First choose one of the meditative asanas already discussed¹. Then over a period of weeks and months progressively increase the time that you remain in the asana without movement. At first you should be realistic; in other words, only sit in the asana for as long as you can comfortably do so. Then each day gradually increase the duration. While sitting in the asana, practise kaya sthairyam. Make a resolve that you will remain in the asana for a prescribed length of time. Throughout try not to make the slightest movement even though you may feel discomfort. In this way, you will eventually gain mastery over the meditative asana. At the same time you are preparing yourself for meditational techniques, either immediately afterwards or some time in the future.

Notes

¹ Topic 2 of this lesson

Daily Practice Program

In order to gain mastery over at least one of the meditative asanas, we advise you to sit in any one of them as much as circumstances and time will permit; for example while reading, watching television, talking or at any other

convenient time when you have to remain in one position. Furthermore, you should continue some of the leg loosening exercises whenever you have the time¹.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	to suit you	10
Shavasana	—	4
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Poorna Titali Asana	—	3
Kawa Chalasana	—	3
Kashtha Takshanasana	—	3
Vayu Nishkasana	10 rounds	3
Utthanpadasana	2 times	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Meru Vakrasana	2 each side	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	5
Stage 2	—	5
Preliminary to stage 3	—	5
Meditation practice: Kaya Sthairyam	—	10
Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi (with Ujjayi Pranayama)	—	15
		<hr/> 90

Program 2: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit you	7
Shavasana	–	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	2
Poorna Titali Asana	–	2
Utthanpadasana	2 times	3
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shashankasana	–	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Mem Vakrasana	1 each side	2
Shavasana	–	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	–	4
Stage 2	–	4
Preliminary to stage 3	–	4
Meditation practice: Kaya Sthairyam, Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi (with Ujjayi Pranayama)	–	10
		<hr/> 60

Program 3: duration 3/4 hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit you	6
Shavasana	–	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	2
Poorna Titali Asana	–	2
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shashankasana	–	3
Mem Vakrasana	1 each way	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	–	
Stage 1	–	4
Stage 2	–	4
Preliminary to Stage 3	–	4
Meditation practice: Kaya Sthairyam	–	10
		<hr/> 45

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour		
Surya Namaskara	to suit you	6
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Vakrasana	1 each way	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	4
Stage 2	—	4
Preliminary to stage 3	—	4
		30
Try to find time to practise Kaya Sthairyam.		

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4