

Lesson 5

What is yoga?

Yoga is a system of living with sense and science, of the realization of ultimate values and altruistic missions of life.

Yoga evolves a harmonious order in mind, matter and man.

Yoga is an absolute departure from basic animal tendencies.

Yoga is a state of aloofness from the artificialities of life and relationship.

Yoga is the culture of tomorrow.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

What is Yoga?

So far in this book we have primarily concerned ourselves with describing the basic rules of asanas, pranayama and relaxation techniques, yet there are many other varied aspects of yoga. The reason behind this was to enable you to practise yoga from the outset. The purpose of this new series of discussions, of which this is the first, is to explain what yoga is all about - how it relates to you, to everyday life, how the structure of yoga is formed, its different paths and how these paths interrelate to achieve the culmination of yoga¹.

Actually, it is impossible to really appreciate the aims of yoga, at least the higher ones, without personal experience. All we can do is to broadly indicate the direction in which yoga can take you, if not its destination. For example, it is possible to indicate on a map the route to a specific town and even describe the layout of the area. Yet at the same time it is impossible for anyone else to experience the journey or to know the town for you. You must do it for yourself. It is the same with yoga. We can indicate the path, the signposts and make adequate attempts to explain the higher aims, but for the personal experiences you must tread the path yourself. And this is the essence of yoga - neither descriptions, nor theories, nor suppositions, but direct personal experience.

In this topic we will discuss mainly the meaning of yoga, giving an outline of its origin and development through the ages.

Definition

Yoga is usually defined as union: union between the limited self (*jiva*) and the cosmic self (*atman*). Without trying to confuse things any further, we would like to point out that there is an anomaly in this definition. For there to be an aim or goal of union there must first be a state of separation. And in fact this separation does not exist. At this very moment you are united with the cosmic consciousness.

Even this statement is not true, for you actually are the cosmic consciousness. So the aim of yoga is not really to unite you with anything, for you are already united. It is to make you realize your identity with the greater Self, to make you know and tune in with your existing inner nature. Yoga is so called (i.e. union) because it is seen and defined in terms of everyday normal life, where each person feels separation from, or does not comprehend the possibility of a higher being. In other words, yoga is seen as union from the point of view of personal identity. At a higher level of awareness there is no separation or any distinction between the so-called individual and consciousness. It is our low level of awareness that clouds the issue and prevents us realizing this identification. There is a beautiful and often quoted Indian story illustrating this point. The general theme is that there is a large elephant being held at different parts of its body by a number of blind men. Each of the blind men in turn attempts to describe the elephant. One holds the tail and says: "The elephant is just like a snake." The second man holds one of the legs and cries: "No, the elephant is like a large pillar." "You're both wrong," says the third man who was holding one ear, "the elephant is exactly like a big fan." The fourth man, who was running his hands along one of the tusks, shrugged his shoulders declaring: "This elephant doesn't resemble in any way the descriptions you have given; it is like a horn." "You're all crazy," said the fifth man who was pulling the trunk, "the best description of an elephant is that it is like the trunk of a banana tree." These five men saw the one elephant in different ways. The elephant itself did not change, and had the blind men been blessed with eyesight they would have seen the reason for the differing descriptions; they would have realized that they were talking about different aspects of the one thing. This is the same conception that most of us have regarding

our identity. We see separation; we see ourselves as distinct from our surroundings and other people, because we are really like the blind men, not seeing or knowing ourselves and our environment as they really are.

In review, we can say that yoga is not really union. It is in fact realization of the union already existing. This is the culmination of yoga. At the same time yoga as it is usually known and understood is the method or path which one adopts to attain the realization of yoga, of one's true identity. Thus yoga has a double meaning; it encompasses both the method and the end point. The meaning of yoga can also be denoted by the words unity and oneness; for the practice of yoga aims at rooting out the ego, this being the aspect of our individuality that enhances the sense of separation from our surroundings. Once the ego is transcended, the individual becomes himself and realizes his real, inner nature.

The definition of yoga that we have just given is a purely spiritual one. There are many other definitions which apply to all the levels of existence and awareness. For example, at the physical level most people have a body that is continually in a state of disruption. The functions of the different organs, muscles and nerves no longer harmonize and assist each other. Instead, they often hamper and act in opposition. For instance, the endocrine system becomes irregular; the efficiency of the nervous system decreases with the result that disease manifests in one form or another. Yoga aims at bringing all these different functions into perfect coordination, so that they work for the overall good of the body. So we can say another definition of yoga is physical harmony and health.

Many people suffer mental disturbances in the form of conflicts, neuroses, phobias and so on which make them unhappy and depressed in life. Yoga aims to smooth out and eliminate all mental problems, both large and small, obvious and subtle. Yoga can also be defined as mental balance and mental peace. Yet another definition of yoga is coordination and harmony between mind and body, so that our body responds perfectly to our mental commands, conscious and subconscious. This was very succinctly explained by Swami Sivananda when he said that: "Yoga is integration and harmony between thoughts, words

and deeds, or integration between head, heart and hands."

From the harmony of the mental and physical aspects of man (including of course the pranic or bioplasmic body and our emotional nature) are derived other positive virtues as by-products. From these arise many other definitions of yoga. The following are a selection taken from the classical yoga text, the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Yoga is equanimity in success and failure (2:48)

Yoga is skill and efficiency in action (2:50)

Yoga is the supreme secret of life (4:3.)

Yoga is the giver of untold happiness (5:2)

Yoga is serenity (6:3)

Yoga is the destroyer of pain. (6:17)

Although there are other definitions in the *Bhagavad Gita* these few are the main ones.

Maharishi Patanjali, writer of the classical yogic text, the *Yoga Sutras*, defines yoga as: "... complete control over the different patterns or modifications of consciousness." In other words, yoga implies control over the conscious, unconscious and super-conscious realms of our being. One becomes the observer of these different higher states attaining complete knowledge of them.

Yoga can be defined as a science for developing creativity; as the science for unfolding the deeper aspects of the personality; as the science of being; as the science of consciousness. Actually, the definition of yoga will be perhaps a little different for each practitioner, for the individual will relate to yogic experiences and hence explain them in different ways. One thing is certain, whatever definition of yoga is chosen, the implications on one's life are vast, for yoga concerns itself with the very core of our lives: body, mind and consciousness. With this in mind, we leave the reader to work out his own definition of yoga through personal experience.

The origin and development of yoga

The origin of yoga lies hidden in the mists of pre-history. It was slowly evolved and developed by the ancient sages, not only in India but all over the world. However, it has been modified to suit regional languages, social ideas and so on. The essence of yoga was wrapped up in or explained in different symbols, analogies and languages. Some traditions believe that yoga was a divine gift revealed to

the ancient sages so that mankind could have the opportunity to realize its divine nature.

Generally the techniques of yoga were passed on from teacher or guru to their disciples by word of mouth. In this way there was a clear understanding of the meaning of the techniques and aims of yoga, for the guru, through his personal experience, could guide the students along the right path and away from any confusion and misunderstanding. In fact, it was only when the various systems of yoga were written down that people began to see contradictions in the teachings. However, these discrepancies are only superficial and arise through misinterpretation. The writers of the classical texts cannot be blamed, for they recorded their ideas on yoga as clearly as possible in order to avoid misinterpretation.

they expounded their ideas with the minimum amount of words so that people would not lose themselves in trying to understand or intellectualize about word meanings, or in other cases they clothed their writings in symbolism and analogies. This was done so that only a person prepared and ready for a teaching would be able to understand the symbolism, if necessary with the help of a guru. However, even though these precautions were taken, many misunderstandings arose, mainly among overly verbose and intellectual scholars who did not have the personal experience to support their commentaries. Unfortunately people have listened to the commentators without resorting to the original texts and the advice of people more in touch with the spirit of yoga. The result has been confusion, and as a consequence many well-intentioned people have performed the most bizarre acts in the name of yoga. Some often quoted examples are walking on fire, sitting in the midday sun and torturing the body in a variety of ways, such as standing on one leg in one place for months on end. The list is endless and could almost be laughable except for the fact that many of these misguided people were so intent and confident in their minds that these are the methods to higher awareness.

The yoga that we now know, that which developed in India, was utilized, at least in its rudimentary form, more than five thousand years ago. In archaeological excavations made in the Indus valley at Harappa and Mohenjodaro in what is now Pakistan, various statues

have been unearthed depicting people practising yoga. They show Lord Shiva (the mythological originator of yoga) and his wife Parvati sitting in various asanas and practising meditation. These ruins were once the dwelling places of people who lived in the so-called pre-vedic age. These discoveries are a definite indicator that yoga was practised in India even before the Aryan civilization invaded and started to flourish in the Indus subcontinent.

The first books to mention yoga were the ancient Vedas. Though scholars are not positive, it is generally felt that these books were written at least four thousand, five hundred years ago. They don't give any specific yogic practices, however, but generally allude to yoga in symbolic form - in fact the verses of the Vedas were uttered by rishis or yogis in states of spiritual bliss and knowledge (*samadhi*). It is for this reason that the Vedas are regarded as revealed scriptures - the rishis did not compose the verses but acted in a sense as transmitters through which these revelations were expounded. The Vedas are regarded as the first yogic texts, for they illustrate, even in an indirect manner, the essence of yoga. The word yoga is mentioned in various places in the Vedas, particularly the *Rig Veda*, but it is generally a vague reference to the meaning of yoga in relation to something else, such as harnessing horses together for example. Of course the terms are symbolic, but one would learn little of yoga as it is understood today by reading the Vedas. Many aspects of yoga are mentioned, such as *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and so on, though in little detail. The Self or consciousness was fully understood as being something beyond the body and mind and yet to be realized within. This is not, however, surprising in view of the fact that the inspiration behind the Vedas is from highly evolved yogis. This higher knowledge transcends all national and language barriers. It is something that has been realized by persons in every part of the world and at every period of history. The seers of the Vedas clearly recognized that there existed a dynamic life principle which they called *vayu* (prana). They also clearly saw that this prana was closely related to breathing. The Vedas also briefly mention the existence of pranic centres (*chakras*) within but not of the physical body. The science of sound was clearly

recognized for they mention various mantras (psychic sounds) that can be used for the attainment of both material or worldly goals as well as spiritual aims. In this sense they were probably more advanced than the people of today in the science of mantras, for it is only recently that people have begun to understand the power of sound.

In conclusion we can say that the concept of yoga was known in vedic times in one form or another, as it had been for many thousands of years before. This is not surprising, for there have always been people who have aspired and attempted to tune in with higher consciousness and to transcend their limited individuality. However, in all probability the system of yoga was not properly formulated before and during the time of the recording of the Vedas. The experiences of yoga were known but the science of yoga had yet to be systematized.

It is with the advent of the Brahmanas and Upanishads that we begin to see yoga take shape and assume the form that it has today. The Brahmanas are texts which deal mainly with sacrificial and ritualistic practices, though there is a wealth of knowledge and historical information contained within its pages. They mention *japa* (meditative techniques involving chanting of mantras) and *mouna* (another technique for inducing meditation, which can be translated as 'inner silence') as being two important aspects of yoga². In these texts the universal mantra *Om* is mentioned in written form for the first time, together with its significance. The foundations for the later development of the science of swara yoga (study of the breath and flow of psychic currents and relationship with life) were also laid down, which later led to the classical swara text called *Shiva Swarodaya*. The development of psychic powers through yoga are also mentioned in the Brahmanas, such as the ability to read other people's thoughts.

It is the Upanishads, however, which put yoga on a firmer foundation. It is in these varied texts that we start to see yoga assume a more definite shape. The Sanskrit word Upanishad is made up from the words *shad*, 'to sit', *upa*, 'near' and *ni*, 'learn'. The whole word can be interpreted to mean sit down near and receive teachings from a master. The word *upanishad* can also be interpreted as secret

teaching. There are believed to have been about two hundred different Upanishads, the oldest of which was written somewhere around 600 B.C. and the most recent as late as the fifteenth century A.D. Traditionally, one hundred and eight of these Upanishads are regarded as authentic, and of these only about twelve or thirteen are regarded as being authoritative. The major Upanishads are the *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prashna*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chhandogya*, *Swetasvatara* and *Brihadaranyaka*. They vary enormously in their contents - the *Mandukya* is the smallest with a mere twelve verses while the *Brihadaranyaka* and *Chhandogya* each contain a few thousand words. The Upanishads are also known as the Vedanta - the culmination of the Vedas, for they are said to contain the essence of the Vedas.

The essential message of the Upanishads is that the Self can only be known through union (yoga) and certainly not by mere speculation and learning. Furthermore, it is emphasized again and again that the Self is not to be realized outside; it is not something separate, but at the very core of our being. The Upanishads use words as a means and not as an end. When asked to define the Self, or consciousness, one of the sages gave the wonderful but very unintellectual or illogical reply: '*neti-neti*', which means 'not this, not this'. The Upanishads don't paint a completely rosy picture of the yogic path - effort is required. For as the *Katha Upanishad* says, the path is as narrow as the razor's edge. There is a similar saying from another great yogi and spiritual teacher, Christ, who said: "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life (self-realization)."

Many of the Upanishads try to describe the highest spiritual experiences and the illumination or knowledge that they received. To this end they use analogies, stories and sometimes beautiful poetry. Other Upanishads are more practical and describe mental attitudes that must be cultivated and adopted in order to both begin and make progress on the yogic path. Others make brief statements regarding methods that can be practised in order to induce meditation. Many other topics are also discussed.

The Upanishads are numerous and the subjects that they cover too diversified for

there to be any full treatment of their contents here. However, we can give a brief summary of the scope of their teachings.

Many of the Upanishads devote much space to describing prana and its implications. The earlier Upanishads - the *Brihadaranyaka*, *Chhandogya*, *Taittiriya*, etc., were fully aware of the fact that prana is the substratum behind all life forms. They describe the psychic pathways which exist within, but not of the physical body, through which prana flows, including the all important nadis, ida, pingala and sushumna³. In the later Upanishads such as the *Prashna* and the *Katha* this theme was further developed. The different forms of prana within the body were mapped out according to the functions performed and it is stated that there are seventy two thousand *nadis* or pranic channels within the body. The concept of the *kundalini* (psychic and spiritual power) in the form of a serpent within the body is also indicated.

The early Upanishads, such as the *Kena* and *Isha*, began to indirectly develop and formulate the precepts of karma yoga, though it is left to the later *Bhagavad Gita* to fully expound the essence of karma yoga. It is these Upanishads that first indicate the possibility of treading the yogic path and reaching the culmination while performing one's everyday duties. Until this time there was a tendency to see the yogic and spiritual paths as being completely separate and divorced from worldly pursuits.

Various Upanishads, such as the *Prashna* and *Katha*, deal quite extensively with the mantra Aum. In fact the *Mandukya* devotes its entire commentary to this topic and nothing else. These texts again and again emphasize that meditation can be most easily induced by concentration on Aum. The *Mundaka Upanishad* considers Aum as a bow, the individual self as an arrow and Brahman or the Self as the target. If the arrow is aimed with full concentration, then there is no doubt that it will pierce and merge with the target. So it is with Aum that one can attain the highest states of meditation.

The early Upanishads lay down some of the basic rules of raja yoga which were later fully systematized and expounded by Patanjali. In fact, various useful suggestions are mentioned such as the following two examples: "With the body, head and neck held upright, direct your

awareness to the heart region; and then Aum will be your boat to cross the river of fear." (*Swetasvarara Upanishad*)

In fact this is the first time that a sitting pose suitable for meditational practice was specified in a scriptural text. "The supreme path begins when the five senses and the mind are stilled and when the intellect is silent. This tranquillity of the senses is yoga." (*Katha Upanishad*)

This clearly defines the meaning of the fifth state of raja yoga, *pratyahara*, where a person's awareness is withdrawn from the external world and the sense organs. In fact, this all important stage is preliminary to the attainment of meditation through raja yoga techniques and is elucidated again and again in the Upanishads.

We have only mentioned some of the earliest Upanishads, and the ones that are regarded as being the most important. There is a goldmine of information on other aspects of yoga in the texts we have mentioned, as well as the large number of so-called minor Upanishads. For example, the *Yoga Chudamani* covers a wide range of practical aspects of yoga ranging from asanas and pranayama to psychic centres and self-realization. It also deals with some yogic practices that are part of kriya yoga, though not in much detail. The other Upanishads are also a source of many practical and theoretical principles of yoga. However, the only thing that the Upanishads lack is a systematic treatment and summary of the paths of yoga; they are a conglomeration of profound ideas mixed with various other kinds of information. In fact, we can say that the Upanishads are intended more to inspire than to instruct. During the era of the writing of the Upanishads, right up until quite recently, instructions on practical yoga were always imparted personally by a guru. The writers knew this and so detailed techniques were not recorded. This was left to the discretion of the guru and to later yogic texts.

Though they don't explain yogic practices in any depth, the joy of higher awareness shines through the Upanishads as clearly as the midday sun. They tackle sublime questions of existence with the utmost simplicity and directness. The answers they give are revelations in themselves. The Upanishads are such that they can be read by any person in the world with at least some kind of comprehension and

empathy, without becoming lost in a haze of over-intellectualization as is so easy with many other scriptures. They are meant to simplify not to complicate.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are the two vast epics which were written about three thousand five hundred years ago, a little before the time of Buddha. The *Mahabharata* can be roughly translated using a little imagination as 'The Great Book of Indian Culture' and the *Ramayana* as 'The Path of Rama'. The *Mahabharata* contains well over one hundred thousand verses and the *Ramayana*, though smaller, is still sufficiently bulky to call it more an encyclopaedia than a book. We only intend to give a cursory glance at their contents, for while they propound yoga, they are mainly wrapped in symbolism and stories. Though these two books are works of art in themselves, they don't in the main give a systematic treatment of yoga, apart from the *Bhagavad Gita*, which we will discuss shortly.

The *Ramayana* is a particularly popular scripture even today in India. It portrays the life of Rama in poetry of unsurpassed beauty, which is often sung to the accompaniment of music. Though it contains little or no direct instructions on yoga, it conveys in symbolic form the essence of yogic life and the path that must be undertaken in order to attain self-realization. Superficially it deals with the life of Rama, his wife Sita, various other people and the tribulations that they face during life. But in fact, hidden under this thin disguise is a description of the trials and challenges that a yogi must face, both internally and externally, on the path to transcendental awareness.

Another spiritual text called the *Yoga Vashishtha* is regarded as a direct offshoot and continuation of the *Ramayana*. This too is a compendium of spiritual inspiration and notable for the depth of its scientific and spiritual ideas. Many scientific ideas only recently promulgated are clearly written in this treatise. The text attempts to explain all aspects of creation and link them ultimately to consciousness. All aspects of life are discussed, from health and disease to happiness and misery. It discusses various methods to attain spiritual realization and emphasizes time and time again the importance of direct perception and experience as opposed to second-hand knowledge. It speaks of various yogic paths, in

particular the path of meditation and jnana. Pranayama is also recommended as a method of controlling the mind and inducing meditation. It is not, however, a book to be read by beginners of yoga, for although it is a goldmine of knowledge and beautiful poetry, it does not map out in any detail the path to be taken. It is essentially devoid of practical aspects of yoga and is really intended for people who already have a knowledge of yogic techniques and have had higher experiences.

The *Mahabharata* contains many passages which directly relate to yoga interposed in its main theme - the military struggles during a certain period of Indian history. However, the essence of its teachings is contained in the world famous section called the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is a poem of seven hundred verses in which Arjuna, a great warrior, is instructed in the practice of yoga by Krishna, incarnation of God, who assumes the role of charioteer during the main battle of the epic. Though its text can be easily seen as contradictory by over-intellectual analysis or an over-literal interpretation, it has been and still is a source of inspiration and guidance to those following the path of yoga. As one makes progress along the yogic path, so one sees more and more layers of wisdom emerge from its pages; it continually unfolds higher and higher levels of meaning. The apparent contradictions and anomalies slowly fade and one begins to realize what a wonderful text it really is.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a yogic scripture par excellence, and is applicable to people throughout the world and in every walk of life. It maps out in concise, but specific manner, the yogic paths of *karma yoga* (the path of action), *jnana yoga* (the path of intuition), *bhakti yoga* (the path of devotion) and *dhyana yoga* (the path of meditation). In fact, with regard to *karma yoga* it can be considered the supreme treatise.

It is in the *Bhagavad Gita* where we really see that yoga is for everyone and not for the recluse. Before the writing of this text there was a tendency to regard yoga as unworldly and unconnected with daily life. It is the *Bhagavad Gita* that urges everyone to start practising yoga here and now, and not to consider it something to be practised on retirement from one's responsibilities or some time in the future when the opportunity

presents itself. It is to be practised now as an integral part of one's life. Another important aspect of the *Bhagavad Gita* is that it blends all the different aspects of yoga into a comprehensive whole. With the practice of yoga there should not be confinement to one path. In fact this is impossible. Integration of all the different paths is necessary. Though a person might follow one path in particular, the other paths should also be practised where possible. The *Gita* makes this point very clear. Before the time of writing the *Gita*, there was a tendency to see separation between the different paths and even to consider some of the paths as mutually exclusive. It is the *Gita* that formulates the basic structure of the science of yoga as it is known today.

So far we have mainly concerned ourselves with the development of literature on yoga. This must be the case, for we only know with certainty the direction of yogic development by reference to the ancient texts. At the same time, however, yoga was simultaneously being refined and developed by its practitioners and gurus, who then passed on their teachings by word of mouth. In fact, it is certainly these people who evolved and improvised yoga practices by their personal experience in an endeavour to achieve the best results. All the texts can do is to reflect current and prevalent ideas.

Since the teachings of yoga were generally passed on orally, its development was haphazard. Different teachers taught different methods so that before it was systematized, yoga was a collection of varied and unrelated techniques, riddled with all types of personal beliefs and superstitions. It is here that the writers of the ancient texts served their greatest purpose by bringing all these different ideas together and integrating them. One of the most successful of these writers was Rishi Patanjali who wrote the text called the *Yoga Sutras* some time before the birth of Christ. This is still regarded as the classical and authoritative book on raja yoga. In a mere one hundred and ninety six verses, Patanjali has considered the essential philosophy, background, techniques and attainments of raja yoga. In a sense, it can be said that he is the compiler more than the writer, for he took all the important existing practices which were used for many centuries up until his time and

united them into one comprehensive and harmonious system. He certainly did not invent the path of raja yoga for its constituents were known in essence since the beginning of the vedic period thousands of years before.

The whole subject of raja yoga is treated in a most scientific manner starting from moral precepts, leading on to the physical and mental aspects and finally self-realization. Some of Patanjali's terse comments on the mind are far ahead even of modern day psychological ideas. In fact the modern trend in psychology is towards adaptation and implementation of the ancient ideas of yoga, particularly those propounded by Patanjali.

The essential foundations of yoga as we now know it were laid down by the time Patanjali had finished writing his *Yoga Sutras*. Many more texts and developments were to follow, but the structure of yoga was outlined; all that was required was the filling in of the empty spaces. This was done mainly by large numbers of commentators who interpreted and reinterpreted the traditional texts. Often this caused more confusion than clarity, because many differing commentaries arose resulting in controversy and speculation. Nevertheless a few of these scholars did throw some light on the traditional yogic texts. An example is Shankaracharya, who personally interpreted twelve different Upanishads, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, as well as writing many original books on yoga such as *Viveka Chudamani* (Crest Jewel of Wisdom), *Aparokshanubhuti* (Direct Experience of Reality) and the *Atma-bodha* (Knowledge of the Self). These treatises are masterpieces in themselves. Shankaracharya was a man who had extensively practised yoga for himself and knew through personal experience the significance of yoga. He was not content, as were so many others, to merely analyze intellectually the science of yoga without personal experience.

There are many other contributors to the development of yoga who we have yet to mention. Bhakti yoga, though practised throughout the eras of yoga, was given a particularly strong boost in the middle ages by such bhakti yogis as Kabir, Tulsidas, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Nam Dev and many more. They all wrote wonderful poetry which even now inflames the heart with its devotional feeling. People such as Kabir not only expres-

sed their intense love in their poetry, but also interspersed it with clear practical advice on the path of bhakti yoga and other paths.

Large numbers of hatha yoga texts were written throughout the ages. The most well-known of these are the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the *Shiva Samhita*, the *Gherand Samhita* and many more. These texts give details on asanas, pranayama and other hatha yoga practices, together with techniques for performing mudras, bandhas, etc. However, all the books emphasize that the hatha yoga practices are not specifically aimed at making the body healthy. They are a means to higher ideals, which first demand a healthy body. There are many sages and yogis who have contributed to the growth of yoga, such as the ancient yogis Gorakhnath, Matsyendranath, Janaka, Yajnavalkya, Ashtavakra, Vyasa and so many others, as well as the yogis of recent times such as Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Swami Sivananda and our guru Swami Satyananda. The list is endless. The number of books on yoga runs into the thousands. For example, the *Ashtavakra Gita* is a sublime text containing the utterances of yogis in advanced states of meditation; the *Anu Gita* of the *Mahabharata*, which is said to be a further explanation of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Krishna to Arjuna, his disciple; the *Brahma Sutras*, which attempt to consolidate in a condensed form the essence of the Upanishads; the *Vyasabhasya* which gives a masterly commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; Narada's *Bhakti Sutras*, which gives rules for practising bhakti yoga, and so on. And this list grows with every year that passes.

We have only given a brief glimpse of the origin and development of yoga. There is much more to be said, but there is no space, for many volumes would be required and besides, those who are sincerely interested in the history and literature of yoga can take the steps to find out for themselves. For those who want to tread the yogic path, such a deep knowledge is not necessary. The books that we have mentioned contain the essence of yoga and can easily be obtained by anyone who wants to investigate the original yogic texts. However, for personal growth through yoga it is not necessary to read any of these books, for yoga is one hundred percent practice. These techniques are widely available

in modern books on yoga, in ashrams and yoga schools and can be learnt from a competent guru, which is the best way.

Notes

¹ For further information refer to The Structure of Yoga - Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 1

² Japa - Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5

Mouna - Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 4

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 3

Surya Namaskara

The Sanskrit word *surya* means 'sun', and the word *namaskara* means 'salutation' or 'worship'. Therefore, this practice is known as 'salutation to the sun'. Surya namaskara is a dynamic exercise. It is neither an asana nor a part of traditional yoga. But because it is such a wonderful practice we have incorporated it into the yoga techniques that we teach.

We always recommend practitioners to include it as an essential and integral part of their yoga program. It revitalizes the whole body, removes all signs of sleep and is excellent for preparing the body and mind so that maximum benefits can be derived from the subsequent asanas, pranayama, meditational practices and so on. It loosens up all the joints, flexes all the muscles of the body, massages the internal organs, activates the respiratory and circulatory systems as well as helps to tone all the other systems of the body. In short, it harmonizes the whole body-mind complex.

It can be practised at almost any time of the day and in any place. No special preparations are necessary. If you feel tired during the day, a few rounds of surya namaskara will quickly restore the lost vitality, both physically and mentally. If you feel angry or depressed, surya namaskara is an excellent antidote; not a panacea, but a great help in removing emotional disturbances. It is a rhythmical, symmetrical exercise which is really a pleasure to perform. When it is perfected, the body almost appears to flow through the different movements without any effort or conscious will. Each part of the body seems to move automatically into the right position at the right time and in the right sequence without any effort. If you try it for yourself you will know what we mean.

Symbolic and spiritual significance

The sun has been adored since time immemorial. The ancient people worshipped the sun with awe, knowing that the sun generates

the heat and light necessary to sustain life. They knew that without it there would be no life and no movement. If the sun ceased to exist then life would be snuffed out like the flame of a candle.

Most of the ancient civilizations developed religions which were based on sun worship. It was personified by various deities: Mithras of the Persians, Osiris of the Egyptians, Baal of the Chaldeans, Apollo of the Greeks, Surya, the Lord of the heavens in the vedic period of India and so on. All these deities represent rejuvenation of the world's existence. Various temples and a variety of places were consecrated for the worship of the sun: the pyramids of Egypt, the Yucatan of Mexico, the Ziggurats of Babylonia and Chaldea. It is from these ancient cults that much of the background, rites and symbolism of modern religions have come, but hidden under many different guises and interpretations.

Let us consider the Hindu trinity - Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer and Shiva the destroyer. These symbolize three aspects of life and are directly related to the daily movement of the sun. The passage of the sun can be divided into three phases - the rising, the midday and the setting phase. In time these came to represent the three aspects of life - growth or creation, sustenance or maturity and death, destruction or decay. Thus evolved Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma, the creator, is symbolized by the dawn, the time when things come alive and the daytime cycle starts again. Vishnu the sustainer, is symbolized by the daytime sun which radiates energy into the world allowing things to grow and live. Shiva, the destroyer, is symbolized by the setting sun, which takes with it the energy vibrations of the sun. Yet this disappearance of the sun is only a prelude to its resurrection the following morning. Sunset is necessary for the sun to rise again; decay is necessary for growth, replenishment and rejuvenation, in

the same way as destruction of previous concepts is necessary for spiritual growth.

The sun was not only worshipped because of its material nature and power, though it might well have been by less informed persons. The sun itself is a symbol. It symbolizes spiritual illumination and knowledge, the light in the darkness of ignorance. It represents the essence, the spirituality which exists in all material things. It is this essence which is worshipped by the more enlightened people of the ancient cults and religions. The material sun is the manifestation of the deeper, hidden background or substratum. This has been clearly explained by Paracelsus, the medieval alchemist, as follows: "There is an earthly, material sun, which is the cause of heat; and all who are capable of seeing it, even those who are blind, can feel his heat. And then there is an eternal sun, which is the source of wisdom; and those who are spiritually awakened will see this sun and be conscious of His existence."

The material or terrestrial sun is the manifestation of the invisible, spiritual and celestial sun. The spiritual sun represents the spiritual aspects of existence, and from it the material sun of material aspects of life is derived. Therefore, it is the spiritual sun that is regarded as the source of power and inner light but because the material sun can be seen by all, it is this aspect that is seemingly worshipped.

The yearly cycle of the sun was regarded by many ancient cults and religions as symbolic of the life of man, and in fact of all living things. The birth date of the sun took place three days after its winter solstice. This is because the sun was regarded as dying on its winter solstice (i.e. 22nd December). At this time its power, the intensity of its rays is the lowest (in the northern hemisphere). Three days later (25th December) the sun could be easily and distinctively seen to start to grow stronger and the days start to become longer. This symbolizes the rebirth of life, but more importantly, it symbolizes rebirth into spiritual consciousness. This date was important in many ancient cults, and still is in many religions today.

The sun is a symbol of immortality, for while it died every evening, it was reborn the following morning. The rising of the sun is a time for joy and wonder, for it raises all things from the dead. It restores life again. It is for this reason that surya namaskara was evolved in ancient

India. It is mentioned in the *Rig* and *Yajur Vedas*, ancient scriptures of India, where various prostrations are prescribed for worship of the sun. However, at that time it did not have the form it has now. It consisted of various static poses combined with mantras. It was not the dynamic exercise that we know today. It is only recently that the individual static poses were combined to form the coordinated exercise that we will describe in this topic.

Many people still worship the sun in one form or another. You can treat surya namaskara as an expression of your regard for the sun, whether it is the material aspect or that underlying spiritual aspect that the material sun symbolizes. Or, if you are not inclined to worship, then do surya namaskara for the sake of maintaining and inducing good health. This is the stepping stone to spiritual awareness and peace.

Basic features

Surya namaskara consists of live essential aspects. All of them must be done to gain the optimum results from the practice. These aspects are as follows:

1. *Physical postures*: there are twelve physical postures which correspond to the signs of the zodiac. During the sun's apparent journey through the heavens it passes through each of these celestial houses in turn. It remains in each zodiac for about thirty days and is said to triumph over each sign as it enters its domain. Each position in surya namaskara corresponds to one of these signs of the zodiac.

2. *Breathing*: the whole movement of surya namaskara from start to finish is synchronized with breathing. Each position is associated with either inhalation, exhalation or retention of breath. Nothing is forced or unnatural, for the breathing corresponds to the pattern one would normally do in relation to the physical movement. Correct automatic breathing should occur naturally without any prior instructions. However, details of the correct relationship between movement and breath are given to ensure it is done perfectly, for it is an important part of the practice. Without synchronization between the breath and the movement many of the benefits of surya namaskara are missed.

3. *Mantras*: associated with each of the twelve positions of surya namaskara is a specific

mantra. A *mantra* is a combination of syllables, sounds or phrases, realized by ancient sages, which have been widely known in India for thousands of years. They are evocative sounds and through their power of vibration have subtle, yet powerful and penetrating effects on the mind and body. While doing surya namaskara, a particular mantra is repeated either silently or uttered aloud with each position. When surya namaskara is combined with correct breathing and these *bija mantras* (seed sounds), the entire mind and intellect are energized. These *bija mantras* create a vibration and it is this which creates the energy. Mantras may or may not have specific meanings, but the vibrations which they create should reach every fibre of one's being. The mantras of surya namaskara are energized sound. When repeated loudly, clearly and with devotion, these mantras give the greatest possible benefits to those who utter them, either hastening the curing of an ailment, acquiring stability of mind and self-control, or dissolving tensions caused by modern living.

The *bija* or seed mantras are:

1. *Om hram*
2. *Om hrim*
Om hrum
4. *Om hraum*
5. *Om hraum*
6. *Om hrah*

The full mantras, one for each movement of the exercise are:

1. *Om Hram Mitraya Namah*
2. *Om Hrim Ravaye Namah*
3. *Om Hrum Suryaya Namah*
4. *Om Hraim Bhanave Namah*
5. *Om Hraum Khagaya Namah*
6. *Om Hrah Pushne Namah*
7. *Om Hram Hiranyagarbhaya Namah*
Om Hrim Marichaye Namah
9. *Om Hrum Adityaya Namah*
10. *Om Hraim Savitre Namah*
11. *Om Hraum Arkaya Namah*
12. *Om Hrah Bhaskaraya Namah*

The meanings of these names of the sun are as follows:

1. *Mitra* - friend
- Ravi* - shining
- Sunn* - beautiful light
4. *Bhanu* - brilliant
5. *Khaga* - who moves in the sky
6. *Pushan* - giver of strength

7. *Hiranyagarbha* - golden centred

8. *Marichi* - lord of the dawn

9. *Aditya* - son of Aditi

10. *Savita* - beneficent

11. *Arka* - energy

12. *Bhaskara* - leading to enlightenment

However, before you attempt to integrate these mantras with each position we strongly advise that you first perfect the physical movements and synchronization of breath in surya namaskara to gain the maximum benefits.

4. *Awareness*: this is an essential element of surya namaskara. Without awareness the many beneficial results are reduced.

5. *Relaxation*-, this is not strictly a part of surya namaskara. However, it is a necessary supplementary practice that should be done without fail on completing your rounds. Any relaxation technique can be adopted, but the best method is shavasana¹.

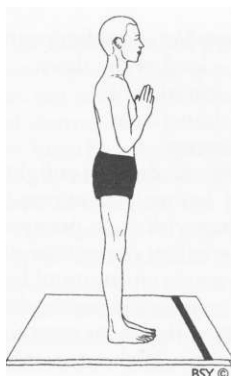
Sequence for learning surya namaskara

You should first familiarize yourself with the twelve postures. In the initial stage only be concerned with mastering the sequence of the physical movements, paying little or no heed to the breathing or mantra repetition. Eventually you will find that all the movements are performed automatically; little or no conscious thought or direction is required. At this stage the movements have been programmed into the mind. Awareness of the physical movement is very important.

After this has been mastered ensure that the breath is correctly synchronized with the movement. Awareness should be on both the physical movement and the breathing. Later the mantras can be learnt and synchronized with each position. In the final stage the awareness should be directed as much as possible on the movement, breathing and mantra repetition. In its final form, surya namaskara consists of these different aspects welded together to give an integrated whole. Therefore, to make sure that the final practice is correct it is essential to master this technique in the progressive manner described.

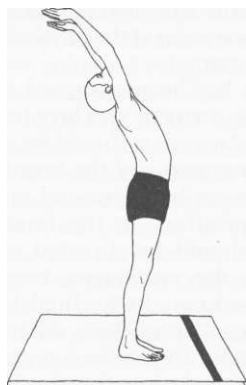
Technique - postures and breathing

The following pages describe step by step the twelve different positions of surya namaskara together with the associated breathing sequence.



POSITION 1: PRANAMASANA
(PRAYER POSE)

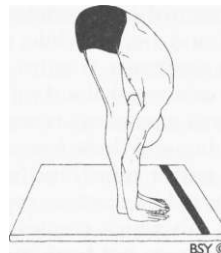
Stand erect with the feet together.
Face the sun or the direction of the sun.
Place the two palms together in front of the chest in an attitude of prayer, the namaskara mudra.
Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
Be aware of the body for at least half a minute.
This will prepare you for the forthcoming practice.
Try to consciously relax the muscles of the body.
Breathing: Breathe normally with full awareness.



POSITION 2: HASTA UTHANASANA
(RAISED ARMS POSE)

Raise both arms above the head, keeping hands separated by a shoulder's width.
At the end of the movement bend the head, arms and upper trunk backwards.

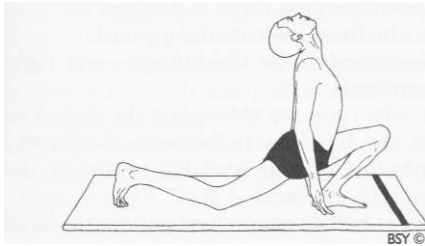
The palms should face forwards.
The movement should be executed in one smooth motion with awareness.
Breathing: Inhale while raising the arms.



POSITION 3: PADAHASTASANA
(HAND TO FOOT POSE)

Bend forward and place the palms of the hands on the floor, either in front of or on each side of the feet.
The movement should be continuous and without any jerking.
Keep the legs straight.
If possible, try to touch your knees with your forehead or chin; (be careful of your nose for you may cause injury when doing surya namaskara quickly).
Under no circumstances should undue force be used in order to attain the final position.
Breathing: Exhale as deeply as possible while bending forwards and if possible accentuate the contraction of the abdomen, especially in the final position.
Beginners: Beginners and people with stiff backs will find the final pose difficult to attain. If you cannot touch the floor with your hands, or at most can only touch the floor with your fingertips, don't worry. It is only a matter of practice. As you become more supple through yoga practices, you will be surprised to find how easy it becomes to place the palms flat on the floor. Only time and practice are necessary. It is important that the legs remain straight in position three, so that the leg muscles (hamstring muscles) are stretched and the legs become more flexible. However, beginners who cannot touch the floor will have to adapt in the following manner: bend forwards as far as you can and try to touch the floor with the fingers or hands, keeping the legs straight. Try to stretch the legs a little more by reaching towards the floor with the fingers, then bend

the legs to place the palms on the floor in order to assume position four. However, if avoidable, the legs should not be bent.



POSITION 4: ASHWA SANCHALANASANA
(EQUESTRIAN POSE)

Stretch the right leg backwards as far as you can.

Simultaneously bend the left leg at the knee, but keeping the left foot in the same position. The palms should remain on the floor and the arms should remain straight.

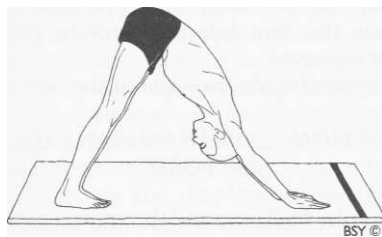
Beginners: If this is too difficult for beginners the palms can be raised off the ground, with only the fingertips in contact with the floor. This helps to increase the arch of the back.

In the final position the toes and knee of the extended right leg should be in contact with the ground.

Complete the movement by bending the head backwards and arching the spine as much as possible without straining.

The movement should be executed smoothly and with awareness.

Breathing: inhale deeply as you move the body.



POSITION 5: PARVATASANA
(MOUNTAIN POSE)

Raise your right knee.

Simultaneously lower your head towards the floor and bend the back so that the buttocks move upwards.

Stretch the left leg backwards and place the left foot beside the right foot.

Then raise the buttocks as high as possible into the air and further lower the head so that it lies between the two arms.

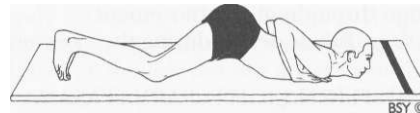
The legs should be straightened in the final position.

Try to press the heels of both feet towards the ground.

Throughout the practice the arms must remain straight, and the hands and right foot should remain in contact with the floor.

Though attainment of position five requires the movement of various parts of the body, all the movements should be synchronized to form one harmonious and smooth motion.

Breathing: exhale deeply as you perform the movement.



POSITION 6: ASHTANGA NAMASKARA
(WORSHIP WITH EIGHT POINTS)

This position is so called because in the final pose eight points of the body are in contact with the ground.

Lower the body to the ground, first bending the legs and placing the knees in contact with the floor.

Bend the arms and lower the head and trunk towards the ground.

Try to brush your forehead along the surface of the floor as you move the head and trunk forwards.

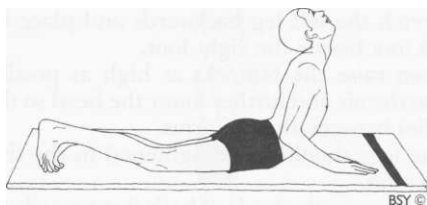
At the end of the forward movement of the head and trunk, let the chest brush along the surface of the floor and rest the chin on the ground.

Finally raise the abdomen and hips slightly off the ground.

In the final position the eight points should be on the ground: the chin, the chest, two palms, two knees and the balls of both feet.

The whole movement should be smoothly executed.

Breathing: Hold the breath outside, i.e. don't breathe in.



POSITION 7: BHUJANGASANA
(COBRA POSE)

Lower the hips to the ground.
Simultaneously straighten the arms so that the head and back arch upwards.
In the final position the head and back should be bent backwards as far as is comfortable, but try to keep the abdomen as close as possible to the floor, without straining.
The position of the hands and feet should not change throughout the movement.
Breathing: Inhale deeply during the movement.

POSITION EIGHT: PARVATASANA
(MOUNTAIN POSE)

This position is a repeat of position 5.
From the arched position of bhujangasana bend the back in the opposite direction so that the buttocks move upwards.
Keep the arms and legs straight and don't move the position of the hands and feet.
In the final pose the buttocks should be as high as possible, the head should be between the arms and the heels should be gently pressed towards the floor.
Breathing: Exhale while performing the movement.

POSITION 9: ASHWA SANCHALANASANA
(EQUINE POSE)

This position is a repeat of position 4. Bend the left leg and place the left foot between the two hands. Simultaneously raise the head upwards, arch the back downwards and lower the right knee to the floor. The position of the two hands and the right foot must not change. The arms should remain straight throughout. In the final pose, accentuate the arching of the back and bend the head backwards as far as possible.
Breathing: Inhale deeply while assuming the final pose.

POSITION 10: PADAHASTASANA
(HAND TO FOOT POSE)

This position is the same as position 3.
Lower the head towards the ground.
Simultaneously raise the buttocks and right knee upwards.
Then, when you are able, place the right foot beside the left foot in between the hands. Straighten the legs and try to touch the forehead to the knees.

Breathing: Exhale deeply as you move the head towards the knees.

Beginners: Ideally, the hands should remain on the floor throughout the movement. However, beginners will find that because of inflexibility of the back they will be unable to straighten the legs if they try to keep their hands on the floor. They should, therefore, allow their hands to leave the floor as they straighten the legs. However, in position three they should stretch the fingers further towards the floor for a few seconds when their legs are straight. This will encourage the back to become more supple so that you can eventually keep the palms on the floor with the legs straight.

POSITION 11: HASTA UTTHANASANA
(RAISED ARMS POSE)

This position is the same as position 2.
Smoothly straighten the whole body.
Keep the arms straight and separated by about a shoulder's width.
Raise the arms over the head and lean the head, arms and back slightly backwards.
To do this the abdomen must be pushed a little forwards.

Breathing: Inhale throughout the movement.

POSITION 12: PRANAMASANA (PRAYER POSE)

This is the final pose and the same as position 1.
Bring the palms together and hold them in front of the chest.
Relax the whole body.

Breathing: Exhale while assuming the final pose.

Breathing: Breathe normally while remaining in the final position prior to continuing the practice.

One complete round

We have described twelve positions. This constitutes a half round of surya namaskara. One full round consists of twenty-four positions. To complete the second half of surya namaskara the same twelve positions are repeated but with two minor modifications. These are as follows:

1. In position 16 the left leg is extended backwards followed by the right leg in position 17. This is instead of stretching the right leg backwards as in position 4, followed by the left leg in position 5.
2. In position 21 the right leg is brought forward followed by the left leg in position 22. This is instead of bringing the left leg forwards in position 9 followed by the right leg in position 10. The breathing sequence and the mantras remain unchanged. This alternation of the twelve basic positions to form twenty-four is necessary to ensure that both halves of the body are exercised equally - surya namaskara is a perfectly symmetrical exercise.

Breathing

Make sure that you breathe through the nose and not the mouth. If necessary, dojala neti before commencing surya namaskara or your daily practice program.

The breathing sequence in surya namaskara is perfectly natural and should occur spontaneously. The breathing that we have already related to each position is that which the body will automatically do, and any attempt to breathe differently will prove uncomfortable and awkward. There is an easy principle to remember when you are learning surya namaskara. When you bend backwards, inhale, for the chest expands, inducing air into the lungs. And when you bend forwards, then you must exhale, because the abdomen is being compressed, which in turn reduces the volume of the lungs, via the diaphragm, and air is forced out of the lungs. Only while assuming position six, is the breath retained, and if you experiment for yourself you will find that this is also perfectly natural, for it is difficult to lower the body and breathe at the same time.

In summary, there is little or no effort required on your part to ensure correct breathing: your body will tell you. But what you must do is accentuate the inhalation and

exhalation more than the body will do naturally. Some effort will be required in this direction.

Awareness

Awareness is an essential part of surya namaskara. If it is performed without any awareness or any attempt to be aware most of the benefits are lost².

If you have time it is preferable to stand for a few minutes in position one preparing yourself physically and mentally for the coming practice. The eyes should be closed. If you don't have very much time, then thirty seconds is sufficient. Be aware of your whole body and the breathing pattern. Try to feel that you are detached from your body and breathing.

See or feel a mental picture of the different parts of the body and try to relax them, but at the same time try to remember that you are merely witnessing. The different parts of the body and the breathing are something external; feel as though you are apart from them. Be aware of sensations, but again with a feeling of detachment, with the attitude of being the witness. Experience the peace that comes through merely being, without the confusion and tension of life or having to do something. During daily life most of us are continually extroverted, or if we are introverted it is usually of a morbid, self-deprecating form, just for a short time be introverted with awareness of your feelings. Do not plan for the future or regret the past. Live in the present, even if only for a short time. This can bring wonderful peace of mind.

When you are ready, begin the practice. Maintain awareness throughout. Your eyes may be opened or closed, although after mastering the practice it is better to keep the eyes closed. Witness the various movements of the body and the corresponding breathing. Don't lose yourself in the practice, watch and be continually aware of every movement you perform. In this way surya namaskara becomes a very powerful practice. It not only harmonizes the whole body and mind, but it also develops the ability of awareness and concentration. These wonderful and practical benefits will carry over into your daily life.

Relaxation

An essential sequel to surya namaskara is relaxation. It is necessary to rest the body and

allow the heartbeat and respiration to return to normal. It is also essential to intensify the feeling of mental peace and awareness. Any method of relaxation can be utilized, but we highly recommend shavasana because it is a scientific method which induces optimum relaxation of mind and body, at the same time intensifying the awareness¹.

The time spent on relaxation depends mainly on the time taken to perform surya namaskara. At least three or four minutes should be spent relaxing for every ten minutes of surya namaskara. At least five minutes should be spent relaxing if it takes twenty minutes to practise surya namaskara. It is important to relax the body until the heartbeat and respiration return to normal. The practitioner must use his own discretion in this respect.

Tempo

You can do surya namaskara as rapidly or as slowly as you wish; the choice is yours. At first, it should be done slowly to ensure correct development of the movement and breathing. With regular practice your body will begin to gradually flow through the different positions. Under these circumstances you will automatically be able to perform each round in less time. However, be careful not to do the practice so quickly that the inhalation and exhalation becomes shallow and the mantras are not pronounced correctly. Eventually, you will find that the tempo of surya namaskara will be automatically fixed by the time necessary to perform the movement, breath and mantra.

Number of rounds

The number of rounds depends on the health of the individual as well as on the time available. Surya namaskara should not be done to the point of exhaustion. Beginners should start with no more than two or three rounds and add one more round on each successive two days. In this way the body will gradually become accustomed to the increased exercise.

It is really impossible to lay down a fixed number of rounds to be done every morning, for this depends entirely on the individual. Do as many as you can in the time available. However, at the slightest sign of exhaustion stop the practice and relax the body. In fact, the body should be your guide as to the

number of rounds that you can manage - listen to it carefully and take heed of it. As a rough suggestion, however, a person of reasonably good health should eventually aim to do about twelve rounds every morning. Of course, those who are able can do more, and many people do. If you are not sure on this point seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher who can prescribe a suitable number of rounds to suit you individually depending on your state of health.

Sequence

Surya namaskara is ideally practised before doing other asanas, as it helps to remove any sleepiness and to loosen up the body in preparation for your asana practice.

When and where

The best time to practise surya namaskara is in the morning at sunrise. Face the rising sun to absorb the health giving ultraviolet rays. If this is impractical in view of the time of sunrise, climatic conditions and coordination with other yogic practices, it can be done first thing in the morning, preferably after going to the toilet.

Surya namaskara can be practised at other times during the day. However, it is important to wait at least three hours after meals, before attempting the practice. Later in the morning before lunch and in the afternoon before dinner are both good times. It is not advisable to do surya namaskara before sleep because it activates the entire body and this is the opposite effect to what is desired before going to bed.

If possible, practise in the open air, perhaps on a lawn or any clean flat surface. A thin mattress, mat or blanket can be placed on the ground but it must be firmly fixed. Otherwise, while learning surya namaskara in particular, the mat tends to slide backwards.

Limitations

There are absolutely no sex or age limitations with regard to the practice of surya namaskara; both young and old, male and female can do it and gain its many benefits. However, ladies should not do it after their fourth month of pregnancy, but it can be continued after childbirth. Furthermore, ladies are advised not to do it during menstruation as a precautionary measure.

People with certain ailments, such as sciatica, slipped disc, high blood pressure, coronary ailments and so on should not do surya namaskara. If you are not sure on this point seek expert guidance.

Precautions

Surya namaskara is a powerful method of eliminating toxins from the body. However, these toxins should not be eliminated too quickly, for they may manifest in a number of uncomfortable ways, such as huge painful boils. If any such symptoms or sign of fever begins to show, reduce the number of rounds of surya namaskara or even stop altogether for a few days. The toxins must be eliminated from the body, but it should be done gradually over a period of weeks or months, utilizing surya namaskara, asanas and pranayama.

As we have already stated, don't strain yourself by doing more rounds than your physical condition will comfortably allow. Additionally, don't attempt surya namaskara if you are ill, because at this time all the energy of the body needs to be internalized to heal and remove the ailment.

Instructions

At first some mental effort is required to memorize the different positions, breathing and the mantras. An excellent method of quickly mastering the exercise is for a friend to read you the instructions while you accordingly carry them out. In this way all the important aspects of the exercise will be clearly imprinted in your memory.

Benefits

The obvious characteristic of surya namaskara is the fact that it exercises the entire body. The back is bent forwards and backwards, the arms and legs are bent and straightened, the abdomen is compressed, stretched and so on. It is an integral exercise that influences the health of the whole body. It is not confined to developing one part of the body, such as the arm muscles, like so many other forms of exercises and gymnastics.

The body consists of various systems and organs which interrelate and coordinate with each other to give the best possible health and efficiency. It is very easy for these systems to become disrupted. The result is disease and

lack of vitality etc. Surya namaskara brings these systems - the circulatory, respiratory, endocrinal, etc. - into balance with one another, thereby helping to prevent and remove disease. Let us briefly discuss some of the main systems in the body and how they benefit from surya namaskara.

Digestive system: The abdominal organs and stomach are alternately stretched and compressed. This imparts a healthy massage to the internal organs and ensures that they function correctly, or if they don't currently work efficiently, encourages them to do so. Many diseases of the digestive system can be prevented and removed by the regular practice of surya namaskara.

Eliminative system: Rapid elimination of waste materials from the body is essential. Often undigested waste products remain in the intestines and bowels due to constipation, which can result in various other disorders. Surya namaskara stimulates the peristalsis of the intestines helping to remove any tendency towards constipation.

The kidneys are also important eliminative organs. They filter impurities from the blood and eliminate them from the body in the form of urine.

Therefore, any disorder or inefficiency in the workings of the kidneys will result in impure blood. Surya namaskara gently massages these two organs, increases their supply of blood, as well as speeds up the circulation throughout the body. The result is that the kidneys are encouraged to function properly while at the same time the blood is given an additional flush and filter through the kidneys. For best results one should supplement the daily practice of surya namaskara by drinking plenty of clean, fresh water.

A high proportion of the body's waste products are eliminated through the skin. This process works particularly well when a person sweats profusely. Often toxins accumulate in the skin, manifesting as boils and pimples. If a good sweat was developed regularly there would be less tendency for this to happen as the toxins would reach the outer surface of the skin and be washed off. Surya namaskara results in increased perspiration and thereby encourages the elimination of toxins from the body, helping to prevent skin ailments. This is an excellent method of acquiring a fresh com-

plexion, especially if one takes a bath after surya namaskara or the yoga practice program.

Circulatory system: Surya namaskara increases the heartbeat and the workings of the whole circulatory system, helping to eliminate waste materials from the body. Areas of sluggish blood are also removed and replaced by purified and oxygenated blood. All the cells of the body receive extra nutrition enabling them to function more efficiently. This leads to better health and increased vitality.

The lymphatic system is also speeded up. This system is most important in protecting the body against infection. It is the body's auto-therapeutic system and without it the body would quickly succumb to disease. Surya namaskara, by increasing the circulation and the removal of poisonous bacteria, directly aids the lymphatic system to work more efficiently in its fight against illness.

Respiratory system: Most people tend to breathe superficially in short and shallow gasps. This starves the body of the oxygen it requires for perfect health. Carbon dioxide also tends to accumulate in the system. Further under-utilization of the lung capacity allows a build-up of germs which can lead to various illnesses. Surya namaskara, when done correctly, accentuates the exchange of air to and from the lungs, opens and expands the intricate alveoli, or air sacs, of the lung tissue and exercises the muscles of the surrounding chest region. The lungs are emptied of impurities and stale air and the body and brain are revitalized by the extra supply of oxygen they receive. One can almost feel the extra super-charge of energy.

Endocrinal system: This system plays an important part in determining our well-being and attitude towards life. It consists of a large number of different chemicals (hormones) which interact with each other, reinforcing or counteracting each other. Even the slightest imbalance can cause widespread repercussions in the form of disease. A well-known example is diabetes. There are many other illnesses which are a direct result of hormonal imbalance. The hormones are the officers of the body, the brain is the commander and the parts of the body are the soldiers. It is the hormones that mobilize and coordinate the different functions of the body. Rate of growth, sexual functions, excitability and so on are all controlled by hormones.

Surya namaskara harmonizes this system helping to remove any irregularities by directly massaging the relevant glands and improving their blood flow. Imbalance of the endocrinal system is often caused by mental tension. Surya namaskara can help to remove or reduce this deeper cause of hormonal malfunction, especially if it is supplemented by other yoga practices.

Nervous system: The multitudes of nerve connections throughout the body are gently stretched, massaged and stimulated while doing surya namaskara. It is these nerves that connect the different parts and organs of the body with the brain. The nerves are the intermediaries. Even if an organ is in perfect condition it can only function as well as the nerves will allow. If the nerves are unhealthy then the functioning of the associated organs must suffer. If the pipe connecting the water tank to the tap is blocked, then the tap cannot work properly, even though it might be perfectly new. It is the same with the body's nervous system. The nerve fibres determine how well the organs and muscles of the body function.

Most modern, sedentary people don't exercise their bodies sufficiently. As a consequence the nerve connections tend to become lazy and atrophy develops. Surya namaskara tones up these nerves and simultaneously awakens the associated brain centres. One feels more alive after a few rounds of this exercise.

Muscles and skeleton: Surya namaskara exercises all the main muscles and joints in the body. The muscles are contracted and extended and any impure, stagnant blood is redirected back to the lungs and kidneys for purification. It is an excellent method of loosening up the body for asana practice.

Subtle influences: Surya namaskara can give many additional and perhaps more important benefits beyond the physical. It depends on your attitude. If you are aware and totally involved with the intonation of the mantras, the breathing and the movements, it will induce peace of mind. It is therefore a very useful exercise in reducing emotional conflict, neurosis and stress, especially when supplemented by other yoga practices. If one is devotionally inclined then the exercise can be done with full knowledge of the significance of worshipping

the sun. This will purify the heart and mind. Suna namaskara also helps to bring the flow of pranic or bioplasmic energy into balance and remove blockages in the nadis through which it flows. Surya namaskara is an excellent practice with which to start the day. It helps to prepare you in every way to face the oncoming day with physical and mental strength and confidence.

Summary

Suna namaskara is a panacea for those people who live in cities and towns and who find insufficient time and opportunity to take adequate exercise. People in the country automatically exercise their bodies and relax their minds, as well as feel an intimate relationship with everything around them. It is urban people who suffer from the majority of diseases. The main reason is lack of exercise and peace of mind. Surya namaskara is the answer, especially if done in conjunction with other yogic techniques. There is no reason why most people cannot practise it daily. It only takes a matter of ten minutes or so. During this short period of time the body is exercised in the most systematic and comprehensive manner possible. There is no other exercise that can surpass it. Running, walking and swimming are all excellent exercises no doubt, but they don't exercise the body as effectively as surya namaskara in the time available. So needless to say we highly recommend that you practise suna namaskara. In fact, we regard surya namaskara so highly that we will recommend that you practise it in your daily practice program from now onwards throughout the book.

Notes

- Shavasana: Part 1 - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5;
- Part 2 - Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8
- For further details on the subject of awareness - Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 5

Topic 4

Hatha Yoga: Vatsara Dhauti

The subject of burping has long been controversial in various societies throughout the world. In China and during the middle ages of Europe, it was almost a ritual to end a meal by burping. This clearly showed that one had enjoyed his food. If a person did not burp he was likely to be labelled bad mannered or even a boor. Burping was almost considered an art. This art has been lost in modern societies because it is considered both crude and distasteful. Nevertheless, we are devoting this next topic to the revival of this noble and ancient art.

The *Gherand Samhita* says the following: "Shape your lips like a crow's beak and drink air. Let the air swirl in the stomach for some time and then allow it to expel itself. Vatsara dhauti is a most secret technique to purify the body. It destroys all diseases and increases the gastric fire." (1:15-16)

Usefulness of practice

Under normal circumstances burping brings a wonderful and immediate sense of relief. It is a normal response which none of us can avoid, for we all tend to swallow air while we eat. This is trapped in each mouthful of food and accumulates in the stomach. The amount of air swallowed, of course, varies greatly with eating habits, but it may be as high as half a litre. A little of this passes into the intestinal tract but most of it is expelled by means of the simple expedient of burping.

Vatsara dhauti utilizes the same basic process, but instead of inducing air into the stomach by eating food, it is induced by voluntary effort. In other words, air is sucked into the stomach while inhaling. To many people, especially children, this technique will come almost naturally. In fact, they will have already practised it for the fun of hearing the resulting noise on expulsion, without realizing that they are performing an ancient practice of yoga.

The main reason for doing the practice is to clean the stomach of stale, foul smelling gases. Furthermore, many processes of digestion work far better when there is a liberal supply of oxygen in the stomach. The oxygen seems to encourage the best possible digestion of food. In this way, aeration of the stomach aids digestion and eliminates waste gas.

VATSARA DHAUTI

Sit in any comfortable position.

The aim is to direct the inhaled air into the stomach instead of the lungs.

Open your mouth.

If you wish you can purse your lips together like a crow's beak as given in the *Gherand Samhita*, but this is not essential.

Try to suck air into the mouth.

To do this you must try to create a vacuum in the stomach.

This is not difficult, but may require a little practice. It can either be done in one sucking action, or in a series of gulps.

Choose whatever method is easiest.

Fill the stomach as much as possible.

Then completely relax.

Don't try to expel the air; it will automatically come out in its own time.

This is vatsara dhauti, secret of all the ages.

Frequency and time of practice

You can practise it as many times as you want, but once or twice is sufficient just before eating. It can be done at any time of the day, but preferably not during or immediately after a big meal. This practice is most useful, however, if performed just before you eat a large or heavy meal as it stimulates the digestive system to work at a higher level of efficiency.

Benefits

We have treated this practice in a rather light-hearted and superficial manner, because it is

very difficult to be serious and factual about such a maligned subject. However, we emphasize that we are serious when we say that this practice is beneficial. It increases the digestive power of the body by improving the chemical reactions taking place within the stomach. It removes impure and unwanted gases and helps to eliminate and prevent hyperacidity and especially heartburn.

When one considers that a large number of ailments arise from digestive disorders, the necessity for a healthy digestive system becomes obvious. Vatsara dhauti is one method of attaining this end.

Topic 4

Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 2)

In this topic we will further develop the practice of nadi shodhana by describing the more advanced form of stage 2, the preliminary form of which was described in the previous lesson¹.

The essential requirement of nadi shodhana is slow, deep and rhythmical breathing. This results in less number of breaths every minute, for as one breathes more deeply the frequency of respiration automatically decreases. In everyday life most people breathe fifteen to twenty times per minute. These are generally shallow gasps which utilize only a very small portion of the available lung capacity. As such, a lot of energy is used in breathing, with a relatively small return in terms of the energy that we induce into the body. In other words, we could easily induce the same or even more vital energy into the body, in the form of oxygen, and expend less muscular energy by breathing slowly, deeply and rhythmically. Rhythm too is important, for spasmodic, jerky respiration also tends to use up far more muscular energy than smooth and relaxed respiration. This is one of the reasons, although not the main one, for practising nadi shodhana pranayama: to train us to habitually breathe in a sensible and economical manner.

Rapid breathing is directly associated with excitability, nervousness, anger and other extreme emotions. Anyone who doubts this should watch carefully how their breathing rate increases when they feel angry. This may be a little difficult or even impossible, because most people become completely involved and identified with their emotions. It is difficult to be aware of oneself under conditions of intense emotions; in fact if we were able to observe our feelings as a witness then these intense outbursts would gradually disappear. However, try to watch how other people's moods relate to their breathing. Or as an alternative, consider the breathing rates of different animals as illustrative of the direct connection

between excitability and respiration. Animals which breathe slowly such as elephants, snakes, tortoises, etc., epitomize calmness, whereas fast breathing animals such as birds, dogs, cats and rabbits appear to live a much more stressful existence.

Another related factor is that animals which breathe slowly are also renowned for their longevity. The ancient yogis clearly recognized this fact and recommended slow and deep breathing as a means to achieve not only a long life, but also a calm and relaxed one. From this stabilization it is possible to make progress in yoga.

People who suffer from nervous disorders should particularly take note of this association between breathing and nervousness, for they especially tend to breathe quickly and superficially. From this nervousness results directly or indirectly most, if not all, illnesses. Regular practice of nadi shodhana pranayama helps to calm the mind and the nerves. This applies particularly to sedentary people who have a tendency to breathe in short, sharp gasps and it is no coincidence that most nervous diseases occur among town and city dwellers.

The primary purpose of pranayama is to induce mental tranquillity as a means to meditation. Nadi shodhana is no exception. First of all it progressively reduces the rate and increases the depth of respiration. Secondly, by balancing the flows through the two nostrils it helps to bring the pranic body into balance. Both of these aspects induce calmness of mind. The slower one breathes and the more one is aware of the process, the greater the degree of tranquillity attained. This is the reason why in nadi shodhana stage 2 we emphasize the importance of progressively slowing down the breathing rate.

NADI SHODHANA- STAGE 2 (ADVANCED)

The reader should refer to the first part of nadi shodhana stage 2' where we described how to progressively slow down the respiration. Nadi shodhana stage 1 must be practised for a few minutes', followed by stage 2, with the aim of making the inhalation and exhalation longer and longer in duration but always maintaining the ratio 1:1. Before you attempt the second part of stage 2 you should perform the above process. Then without break continue the following practice.

Technique

Start to slowly increase the duration of exhalation.

Remember to continue to mentally count the duration of exhalation and inhalation.

Each interval of counting should last for 1 second; in other words if you breathe in for a count of 5 then this corresponds to a duration of 5 seconds.

Make sure that you are aware of both the mental counting and the process of breathing. Remember 1 round consists of inhalation through the left nostril, followed by exhalation through the right nostril, inhalation through the right and finally exhalation via the left. Over the space of 5 rounds make the exhalation 1 second longer than inhalation.

For example, if you breathe in for a count of 5 then exhale for a count of 6.

If you breathe in for a count of 10 then exhale for a count of 11.

The actual count depends entirely on how far you have progressed with the previous lesson¹. Don't under any circumstances use force or strain.

Your duration of exhalation and inhalation should be perfectly comfortable.

Then after a few rounds add 1 more second onto the duration of exhalation.

Do this only if you are able to do it comfortably.

After a few more rounds try to further increase the exhalation by 1 more second.

Continue in this manner until you either find it impossible to increase the length of duration any further without straining, or if you reach a stage where exhalation is twice as long as inhalation.

The eventual aim is to make the ratio of

exhalation to inhalation fixed at 1:2.

How quickly you attain this depends of course on what your count was for the initial 1:1 ratio. However, don't try to progress too quickly - there is plenty of time.

When you reach the 1:2 ratio then you should start to increase the inhalation by 1 second and the exhalation by 2 seconds to maintain the same 1:2 ratio.

Continue to increase the actual duration over each practice session.

In this way you should be able to start each sitting with a larger and larger count as you make progress.

Remember it is essential to maintain awareness of breathing and mental counting throughout the whole practice.

Do the practise for as long as you have the time available.

General hints

If your nose is blocked it is essential to perform jala neti prior to practising pranayama². Even if your nose is reasonably clear it is still beneficial to do jala neti prior to your yoga practices.

Try to breathe without making any noise as the air enters and leaves the nostrils. Noise is a sure sign that you are breathing too quickly. Of course, if you cannot breathe sufficiently slowly to eliminate noise then don't worry, only bear this in mind. With practice your breathing rate will definitely reduce. The breathing must be relaxed and without violent heaving and movements of the body.

Try to practise yogic breathing⁵.

Timing

It is important to maintain a constant speed of counting and that each count or time unit is one second. To check this in the early stages, time the duration of practice on a clock. To do this, merely note the time of commencing the practice, perform a set number of rounds without changing the time of inhalation and exhalation and note the time at the end of the practice. From this you can work out the period of each round. By dividing this period by the number of counts for one round, the duration of each count or time unit can be calculated. From this you can adjust your counting rate, speeding it up if it is too slow, or slowing it down if it is too fast. Eventually you will be

able to count uniformly so that the duration of each time unit is one second. This will become an ingrained habit and will be very useful for future practices.

Sequence

To recapitulate, one should first of all do nadi shodhana stage 1, then the preliminary part of stage 2¹ and finally stage 2 that we have described in this topic. At first the time that you have available to do pranayama should be divided into three parts: a third allocated to each of the above three divisions. If you have sufficient time and as you progress, slowly increase the relative duration of the final part of stage 2.

Full details of duration, awareness, precautions and benefits can be found in the previous lesson¹.

Notes

¹ Nadi shodhana: stage 1 - Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4; stage 2 - Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 4

Meditation: Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi

In the previous lesson we introduced you to a meditational technique which utilized awareness of the breath as a means for inducing relaxation, introversion and eventually (we hope) a meditative state¹. In this topic we will develop the same theme by describing two methods called anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi, which also require breath awareness.

Though anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi have different names and are often performed separately, they are ideally practised together, one following on from the other. If you have time, these practices can be done after performing the previous meditation practice¹.

These two practices closely relate to and can be easily integrated with the practices of nadi shodhana that we have already discussed. In fact they supplement each other.

The Sanskrit word *anuloma viloma* means up and down', 'alternate' or 'reversed'. This is a technique in which the flow of breath is reversed through each nostril alternately. The word shuddhi means 'purification' and the word prana you already know². Therefore, prana shuddhi can be defined as a practice which purifies the flow of prana in the body.

Technique

.Assume a comfortable sitting position. Shavasana can also be used, if preferred, but a sitting pose is best for there is less tendency to sleep. Furthermore, a sitting pose should certainly be assumed if these techniques are performed immediately after the practice of pranayama.

Relax the whole body and close the eyes. Become totally aware of the breathing process. Feel as though nothing else exists but your breath.

First do anuloma viloma.

try to feel that you are only breathing in and out of the left nostril; some imagination may be necessary for this condition might not be the case.

However, your imagination will help to bring this state about in reality.

Continue this practice for a minute or two.

Then repeat the same thing with your right nostril; try to feel that the whole flow of breath is moving in and out of the right nostril.

Again do this for a minute or so.

Be aware of breathing throughout the practice.

Now you must try to mentally control the breath flow moving in and out of each nostril alternately.

Feel that you are inhaling through the left nostril.

Then feel the exhalation through the right nostril.

Feel the breath being inhaled through the right nostril.

And then the breath being exhaled via the left nostril.

This is 1 round of anuloma viloma.

Do 4 rounds.

Then you have to do 1 round of pranashuddhi.

This involves breathing in and out through both nostrils together.

Prana shuddhi is sometimes called conical breathing for one imagines the flow of air moves through both nostrils simultaneously in the form of an inverted 'V'.

In other words, during inhalation the flows of air through both nostrils meet at a point at the centre of the eyebrows; and during exhalation the air flows diverge from the centre of the eyebrows.

Both imagination and awareness are required. A single inhalation and exhalation is 1 round of prana shuddhi.

.Alter this you do 4 more rounds of anuloma viloma followed by 1 round of prana shuddhi. Continue practising in this manner.

Simultaneously mentally count each round starting from 100 and ending with 1 in the following way: 100 - one round of anuloma viloma (i.e. breathe through left, out through right, in through the right and out through

the left nostril). 99 - second round of anuloma viloma. 98 - third round of anuloma viloma. 97 - fourth round of anuloma viloma. 96 - one round of prana shuddhi.

And then the whole process is repeated - 95, 94, 93, 92 anuloma viloma followed by 91 for prana shuddhi. And so on.

It is important not to forget the order and awareness of counting.

If your mind wanders and you forget to count then you must start again.

If you have time continue the practice until you reach the count of 1.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Do not force the breathing but allow it to assume a normal flow.

The duration, of course, depends on the time that you have available. At least ten minutes is necessary. To perform the whole practice from one hundred to one, however, will require more than ten minutes if one breathes at the average relaxed rate of about fifteen respirations per minute. In this case those people who have less time available can start with a count of fifty instead of one hundred. The reader must use his own discretion in this respect.

As in all practices of yoga, awareness is essential. Complete awareness of both breath and mental counting must be maintained throughout the practice. This is a little difficult at first and one will find that after a few rounds or even less that one has lost track of the counting. This indicates loss of awareness of the practice in hand. Don't worry about this - there are very few people, especially beginners, who can do the complete practice from start to finish without losing count. One must merely start to count again. With practice you will make noticeable progress and be able to keep your awareness on the counting and breath.

Sequence

Anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi are ideally performed directly after practising nadi shodhana pranayama. It can also be practised alone or following on from the breathing technique in Lesson 4, as a method of inducing relaxation¹. It can be done at any time during the day.

Benefits

It brings about relaxation of the mind and body, increases mental concentration and awareness and is a method of inducing states of meditation.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

Daily Practice Program

At this stage the student should be more aware of his or her own physical body and the parts of the body which are especially stiff or malfunctioning and therefore require particular attention. Although our human bodies are similar in design they are different in makeup. For example, some people have stiff legs, while others have stiff backs; and in the same way some people have abdominal disorders while some have ailments in other areas of the body. Therefore we feel that only you, the practitioner, can really choose the most beneficial practice program to suit your

personal needs. We will continue to suggest programs and you should continue to use them as a guideline, adapting them more and more to your own needs by adding or eliminating practices. This applies mainly to asanas.

The inclusion of meditational practices in the program is very important, therefore try to find the time daily for a separate practice of meditation. At this stage at least 10 minutes, if not more, should be allocated to meditational techniques such as anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi. This is essential if one wants to progress on the path of yoga.

Practice	Rounds	.Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	3 to start	6
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Marjar-iasana	15	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Vakrasana	2 each side	3
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1 and 2 (prel and adv)		15
Meditation practice:		
Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi		12
		60

Program 2: duration 3/4 hour		
Surya Namaskara	3 to start	5
Shavasana	–	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	9
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shashankasana	–	3
Marjari-asana	15	3
Mem Vakrasana	1 each side	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1 and 2 (prel and adv)	–	12
Meditation practice:		
Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi	–	12
		<hr/> 45

Program 3: duration 1/2 hour		
Surya Namaskara	3 to start	5
Shavasana	–	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shashankasana	–	3
Mem Vakrasana	1 each side	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1 and 2 (prel and adv)	–	12
		<hr/> 30
