

## Lesson 10

A large camel train passed through the desert and arrived at an oasis, where it was decided to take rest for the night. Drivers and beasts were all anxious to sleep, but when it was time to secure the camels, they found that they were short of one hitching-pin. All the camels were duly tied up, except one. The drivers searched for some means to tether the animal, but none could be found. No one wanted to stand watch all night and lose the night's sleep. Yet at the same time the drivers did not want to lose the camel.

After some thought, one of the drivers had a good idea. He went to the camel, took the rope and carefully went through all the motions of tethering the animal to a pin - an imaginary pin. Afterwards the camel was bedded down, convinced that it was securely bound, and a good night's rest was had by all.

The following morning the camels were released. Everyone made ready to continue the journey, except one camel. It refused to get up. The drivers cajoled and coaxed, but the beast would not move. Eventually one of

the drivers realized the reason for the camel's obstinacy. He stood before the imaginary hitching-pin and went through all the usual motions of untying the rope and releasing the animal. Immediately afterwards, the camel stood up without the slightest hesitation, believing that it was now free.

Of course the camel had been free all the time, but it had allowed itself to be convinced that it was bound. It is the same with each human being - he too is always potentially free, but most people allow themselves to be bound by their mental problems and seemingly oppressive responsibilities. You are really as free as the unpegged camel, yet through conditioning and misconceptions, you think that you are firmly bound. You compare yourself with others, in the same way as the camel did, and automatically believe that you are limited. But you are really free - understand this clearly. All you have to do is to unhitch, release yourself from your mental problems, the imaginary pin of your bondage. All you have to do is to change your attitude.



## Guru: The Guiding Light

*To light a candle one needs another burning candle; in the same way those who are unenlightened need the help of an illumined guru.*

Swami Sivananda

The Sanskrit word *guru* means 'remover of darkness and ignorance'. It is a negative term in that it does not say that the guru gives you anything, only that he removes something. He removes the mental blocks and obstacles that prevent the spontaneous effulgence of the light of truth. The guru's role is to remove the veil, the ignorance, the preconceived ideas and mental conditioning that prevent the already existing light from shining through. The more this accumulated dross is removed, the greater will be our awareness of ourselves and existence.

The means adopted by the guru varies greatly. It can be by personal instruction, by inspiring his followers, by rebuking his disciples for actions which are not in accordance with their nature (adharmic) and by guiding disciples so that their actions are appropriate to their own physical and mental make-up (dharma). But whatever the method used, the aim is the same: higher awareness.

### **The guru-disciple relationship**

In a personal relationship between a guru and a disciple, the guru by virtue of his higher awareness can clearly see the mental blocks that the disciple himself cannot see. He takes steps to help the disciple remove them, by any means that are suitable and justified. The guru supplies the strength which makes progress possible in spiritual life, and the divine love which makes it so rewarding and joyful.

The influence of the guru on the life of the disciple is very real but not always obvious. The process generally takes place on a subtle level and the relationship between guru and disciple on the physical level has little to do with it. In many cases the disciple never, or

only rarely, sees the guru physically. On the other hand the disciple gives himself completely to the guru, using him as a focus for his spiritual aspirations. In a sense the goal of spiritual life, no matter what religion or philosophy, is to transcend the individual self and become united with the infinite nature of the gum. The guru is the gateway to the infinite through which the disciple tries to pass. The guru is the instrument of the God we are all striving towards. He is not interested in his disciples from a personal point of view. His interest is to take us all beyond ourselves to the personal realization of the eternal truth.

The only reason that the guru retains his individuality instead of merging with the absolute is the disciple's need for him. As humans we need a human focus or medium through which we can project ourselves and from whom we can receive truly effective guidance. Few people are able to directly worship and give themselves to an abstract, impersonal God. Moreover, it is impossible to embark on the higher paths of yogic sadhana (spiritual practice) without the supervision of someone who knows its complexities and pitfalls. The guru does not need us, but we need the guru.

The love between guru and disciple embraces and transcends all other human relationships - mother and child, husband and wife or lifetime friends. It is through the guru-disciple relationship that the disciple's potential and energy are given shape and direction to work the best possible good in the world as part of the divine plan.

### **Traditions of the guru**

The guru tradition is common to all religious systems throughout the world. The founders and figureheads of all major religions are gurus: Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, Zarathustra and many more. These gurus have millions of disciples, even though they are no

longer in human form to guide their followers; instead other gurus have taken over the role of transmitting their teachings. In the present day the Pope can be regarded as the guru for Roman Catholics and the Dalai Lama for Tibetans. In Hinduism there are four jagat gurus (universal gurus) in four centres throughout India who act as spiritual leaders for millions of Hindus. On a more personal level, each priest, parson, mullah, rabbi, etc. can be considered as a guru for the group of people that he spiritually instructs. Even the cults of antiquity had gurus. The Druids were spiritual teachers who helped their disciples to higher levels of awareness; in ancient Egypt, Greece, etc., many of the well-known philosophers were gurus: Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, Socrates, Archimedes and others - all had many disciples. Lao Tse, Shankaracharya, Kabir, Guru Nanak, St. Augustine, St. Teresa, the Jewish prophets, the Sufi saints and others too numerous to mention were all gurus. These teachers guided and inspired people on their spiritual path. Their words are perhaps different but their aim is the same: truth, consciousness and bliss.

The guru is an essential part of life. His role is the essence of all mystical systems. As soon as a mystical system discards or loses the guru tradition, then it no longer remains mystical. It does not bring results. It retains all the laws, rules, formalities and rites; it retains the structure or the shell. But it loses the essence or the moving spirit behind it. This essence is the light of the guru. It is he who opens the disciple's eyes to the impossible.

There is a special day in India, the day of the full moon in the month of Ashadha (July), which is traditionally called Guru Poornima. On this day disciples pay homage to the guru, whether mentally from a distance or by their physical presence. At the same time the guru remembers his own guru.

Actually everyone we meet in life can be regarded as our guru because each person can teach us something. Even our enemies can be our best teachers, for they clearly highlight and show us our greatest problems, the obstacles to higher awareness. When we know our mental complexes, the deeper ones of which we are not normally aware, then we can take steps to remove them.

#### How to find the guru

If you have no guru, you may well ask: "How will I find him?" The answer is that you must just go on looking and following the path of tantra-yoga or any other system as a means to bring about greater levels of mental and physical harmony. This will accentuate your sensitivity and receptivity and eventually your guru will find you. We can never find the guru because we cannot recognize him. If we try to choose our own guru, we will choose according to our mental conditionings and projections. And if we choose a teacher who conforms to our present mental whims, then we will never be able to remove those whims, the very aspects of our personality which keep us in bondage. We should remain open, receptive and make personal efforts to tread the yogic path to mental harmony, breaking down current preconceptions. One way to do this is to hear satsang (spiritual teachings) of wise men whenever possible<sup>1</sup>. There is no need to make any commitment or confine yourself to one teacher or one belief, just go and listen. This will help you to direct your life in positive directions. When you are ready, your guru will be waiting for you. Maybe in the next lifetime! Even if you are not looking for a guru he will find you. The guru appears when the time is ripe.

It is essential that the guide be a true guru (sadguru) who is himself fully enlightened and with the highest vision. Such a being lives constantly in a transcendental state of awareness, always in communion with the absolute reality. Even while he lives and acts with people in the world, the guru is one with this infinite reality, for it is his own inner nature or Self, as it is of all other beings, whether they have realized it or not. The guru's individuality as a human being is just one tiny aspect of his being. His personality is a perfect and pure instrument of the infinite, through which unlimited power flows unceasingly to the world around him.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For further details on the subject of satsang refer to Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 1.

## Removal of Mental Problems (Part 2)

The most common manifestation of underlying mental problems is dissatisfaction with the present. This applies to almost everybody. How often do you actually live totally in the NOW? If you are honest with yourself, then you will admit that most of the time, no matter what is being done, you are dreaming or wishing for something else. When you walk to work in the morning you wish you were still in bed. When you are working you wish you were still on holidays and having great fun with friends. When you work in the garden you wish you were eating that wonderful tasty meal that you ate last weekend; and when you take your food you are thinking of the time that you went for a walk in the countryside or worrying about work problems and so on. Very rarely do people live in the present and totally concentrate on the activities in hand. For this reason people perform most actions in life half-heartedly and with very little efficiency and enthusiasm. How is it possible to work properly when the attention of the mind is elsewhere, when the mind is jumping from one thought to another like a wild monkey jumping from one branch to another in a tree?

Yet it is certain that everybody at one time or another has experienced periods, perhaps of short duration, when they were totally concentrated on one activity or something of deep absorbing interest. And if you retrospect, you will perhaps remember that those periods were times of great joy and happiness. Try to recall your past experiences and confirm this fact for yourself. Or you may have noticed when you do your yogic practices that you sometimes feel a wonderful sense of joy welling up from within you. This is particularly noticeable when you are mentally balanced and when you perform your practices with intense awareness. These experiences are so overwhelming that it is difficult to forget them. One of the reasons for this feeling of joy and happiness is the mere fact that for a short time

you lived in the present. That is, during your most memorable yoga practices, you were absorbed in the practice at hand; you stopped obsessively dwelling on other unrelated thoughts. Your attention was on the now. It is the same when you were reading an interesting book, or totally absorbed yourself with an interesting but friendly discussion or involved with your stamp collection. It is living in the present that is important.

This living in the present is an essential part of yoga. Yet at the same time it cannot be developed. A person cannot say to himself: "From now on I am going to live in the present," for within a few minutes he would be living in the past or future again. The reason for continual projection, living in the past or future, is mental disturbances. Therefore, the only really effective way to live more and more in the present is to empty the mind of its hidden problems. Merely being told of the importance of living in the present is not enough, for it can never be practised until mental problems are eliminated. When this is done then living in the present becomes spontaneous and no effort is required.

This attitude is not only important in yoga, it is an integral part of all spiritual systems, which is not surprising, for living in the present is a basic prerequisite of higher awareness. Zen Buddhism in particular emphasizes this point. For example, a Zen master was once asked: "What is the Tao?" He sharply replied: "Your everyday mind." He continued: "When I'm hungry, I eat; when I'm tired, I sleep." This statement seems at first to be rather trite, but it contains a great truth. The person who asked the question was understandably a little perplexed, for this definition of the Tao seemed a little irrelevant, especially since everyone performs the actions described by the master. But what the master was trying to convey is that most people are never, or at least rarely, absorbed in their actions. When they are

eating, they are thinking of multitudes of other activities. When they are sleeping, they are not really sleeping but are caught up in the turmoil of their mind. The master is inferring that a person in higher awareness is totally at one with what he is doing at any given time; the mind is totally concentrated and not scattered in all directions.

Your ability to live in the present and totally absorb yourself in the activities or work being done, without allowing the mind to project vicariously elsewhere, is also a proof of whether or not you have mental problems. If you are continually living elsewhere, with the mind wandering hither and thither, wishing you were doing something else other than what you are actually trying to do, then this is an immediate indication of underlying disturbance. The more the mind projects elsewhere, the more problems you are likely to have. So you can ask yourself the question, "How much do I really concentrate on what I'm doing, without wishing I was doing something else?" Be honest, and you can convince yourself of whether or not you have mental problems.

Why do we continually tend to relive the past, or project into the future with anticipation of events to come? The answer is basically simple - escapism and attachment to intoxicating experiences. Because we are dissatisfied, we try to escape by re-experiencing high points of happiness in the past and by anticipating possible high experiences in the future. For example, we feel depressed on a quiet Sunday afternoon, the result of inner disturbances, perhaps in response to outer events. What better way is there to escape this depression, at least to some degree, than by imagining you are eating a hot, delicious dinner, or that you are with an old girl friend or boy friend? This living out of the present is the easiest way to escape discontentment. Yet it does not lead to deeper happiness and certainly not to higher states of awareness. Most people are in a continuous dream state. They think that they are awake, but they are in fact, sleepwalking. They are not living their life as it really is, but are creating their own hell, heaven or haven of retreat. These are only methods to escape oneself, and to avoid facing up to and removing one's mental problems. And until a person begins to face his problems, there will never be any real change in his dream-like existence.

He will never really start to find lasting happiness and satisfaction.

So cleaning out the mind is the first step in progressively seeing life as it really is and not as you imagine. Yet this requires courage, for the subconscious mind is the repository of basic fears, and it can often be quite frightening to see their root face to face. You need to be fearless and determined to face them and eliminate them. But the benefits you will gain in the long run are more than worth the effort, for your life will progressively undergo a miraculous transformation. Slowly but surely you will start to know what joy really means.

### **Mental problems and illness**

The relationship between mental problems and mental and physical ailments need not be dealt with in great detail here, for most people fully accept that almost all illnesses are a result of some kind of mental disturbance. We merely want to emphasize this point.

The mind, on a personal level, is in a continual state of activity at all stratas. Ideally these processes should occur spontaneously and naturally, without the slightest hindrance. In the mind of most people, however, there is psychological constipation and indigestion, caused by mental frustrations. This results in the growth of psychological tumours in the mind. If these tumours, blocks, frustrations and mental problems are sufficiently intense they can result in psychosomatic illnesses and/or mental illnesses or breakdowns. If the mental problems are milder, but nevertheless present, they will manifest in the form of unhappiness and depression; in fact general discontent with one's relationship with life and other people.

It is widely accepted that there are many illnesses which manifest physically, but which have psychological causes. In modern language these are called psychosomatic diseases. Under this heading are included more obvious related diseases such as neuritis, but actually yoga believes that almost all diseases are caused by mental disturbances. Modern science is slowly coming around to the same conclusion by experiment. For example, the general treatment for cancer in recent times has been radioactive bombardment of the cancerous area. Yet at a symposium held at Stanford University in U.S.A. in 1972, a radiologist had

a far reaching conclusion to convey to medical science. His revelation caused a stir at the meeting. He said that he had been using radiology for many years in the treatment of cancer patients. Because of the widespread occurrence of cancer, thousands of patients besieged him seeking a cure. He of course could not treat them all at the same time and so he was forced to make many of them wait for treatment, often for several weeks. Some of the people were suffering great pain. The usual method of combating this pain is administration of drugs. To reduce this dependence on drugs, the radiologist recommended that the patients relieve their pain by practising relaxation and meditational techniques. To his great surprise many of these people showed marked improvement in their state of health. His conclusion, which he presented to the members of the symposium, was obvious: the cause of cancer lies in the mind, nowhere else. We would also like to add one point: many people claim that the cause of cancer, the only cause, is cigarette smoking. Figures and statistics are presented which clearly show and prove that the incidence of cancer is greater with smokers than with non-smokers. This may be true, but they miss one important factor; namely, that people who smoke are generally those who are very tense. We are not saying that this is the reason why they smoke, but that those who smoke have a tendency to be more tension-ridden. Therefore, we feel that the cause of cancer is not the smoking, but mental tension. Smoking may have some bearing no doubt, but it is a side issue.

It is a similar case with diabetes. Many people attribute its cause to the malfunctioning of the pancreas and perhaps the pituitary gland. No doubt this is the obvious cause of the lack of insulin. But what is the reason for the malfunction in the first place? From contact with large numbers of diabetics in the ashram, we feel that the original cause definitely lies in the mind. Mental disturbance and continual stress interfere with the harmonious working of the physical organs causing them to break down. We know many cases of diabetics who have learned to relax more in life, through yoga practices, and their diabetes has completely disappeared or at least been reduced.

We could talk about numerous other illnesses, epilepsy, heart problems and ulcers, in the same way, but this is not the purpose of this discussion. We merely want to draw your attention to the importance that the mind has on health and lack of health. With removal of mental problems, incredible changes take place in the body and state of health. Many miraculous cures of all types of so-called incurable diseases can be obtained by relaxing the deeper realms of the subconscious mind, by throwing out or coming to terms with one's inner problems. This has been proved over and over again - psychosomatic diseases miraculously disappear.

Incidentally, this also applies to more general illnesses such as common colds, which seem to be caused by germs and nothing else. Well this may be true, we are not disputing this argument. But at the same time, each person has inherent powers to resist the occurrence of disease. The body under normal conditions has powerful autotherapeutic and protective powers to resist disease. Mental problems seriously interfere with this innate property of the physical body and reduce its effectiveness in fighting or preventing the occurrences of illnesses. A clean mind allows the physical body to perform its duties unimpeded. For this reason, the more you remove your problems, the less vulnerable you will be to the onset of disease. This is proved by the fact that people who have a calm and relaxed attitude to life suffer illness of any type much less frequently than other more tension-ridden people.

So emptying your mind of its negative contents will have far reaching consequences on your health. If you are now reasonably healthy, then you will become super healthy. You will start to radiate health. If you now suffer from any kind of disease, especially the more serious ones such as heart problems, cancer, etc., we strongly advise you to start cleaning your mind and learning to relax. Start to practise yoga, for this is the way to cure, in a real sense, your disease and relieve your suffering. Other methods are more than likely to be superficial.

#### **Man is already a harmonious whole**

Many schools of thought say that we are already in a state of perfection and that we always have been and always will be. They

believe that there is no need to do anything or even attempt to change ourselves for we are already perfect. In a higher sense this is absolutely true, but this does not help the person, in fact most people who have mental conflicts and problems. On a more basic level, which is the important level at this stage, people do have problems - they don't function as one harmonious whole. It is only when these problems are resolved that this statement about the inherent harmony of man has any sense, or can even be understood. So let us work on a more basic and practical level by acknowledging that most people do have problems, and that they have to be solved.

Yoga aims to bring about this total harmony between one's fundamental drives, emotions, feelings, intellect, will and one's interpersonal and social relationships. It is meaningless and inconsequential to tell people that they are already in a state of perfection. Their own experience and unhappiness tells them otherwise.

## TECHNIQUES

When a person is experiencing mental or emotional anguish or strife, other people often try to console them by saying: "It's all in the mind." Of course, this is fundamentally true, but the statement is usually said in such a way that infers that the problem is not important for it is only in the mind. It implies that anything which has its source in the mind is inconsequential and perhaps a little unreal. If we forget, or if we close our eyes to an object it does not cease to exist; it is still there. Similarly, subconscious disturbances, childhood impressions, etc. do not disappear when a person is not aware of them. They remain in the mind and can cause havoc in an individual's daily life. The parts of the subconscious mind that one is not aware of at present are every bit as real as internal or external things of which we are aware. So to console a person with mental conflict or physical ailments that it is only in the mind (and therefore not worth worrying about) is merely evading the most important issue at hand. It is these seemingly unreal inner mental problems, conscious and subconscious, that are the internal objects that cause unhappiness in the outer interaction with the world. We want to make this point clear.

Because some people don't fully accept that the mind is the real reason behind their dissatisfaction, and perhaps that the contents of the mind are somehow imaginary, they usually attempt to combat unhappiness by striving to alter their outer interaction with life and other people. Although this may help, it merely treats the symptoms and not the cause. Adapting to the external environment is important, no doubt, but it must be supplemented by a more basic and lasting remedy<sup>1</sup>. That is, it is necessary to explore and clean out the negative contents of the mind. The method that we will discuss in this topic is meditational practices.

### **I. Meditation practices for removing mental problems**

We have already described various forms of meditational practices, together with an explanation of the theory of meditation. For this reason we will not delve into the individual practices as such, but will concern ourselves with showing how meditational techniques can be used to remove mental problems.

As you become more competent in meditative practices and learn to relax more, you will begin to delve into your subconscious mind and will come face to face with strong thoughts and visions; many of these will represent your subconscious and suppressed problems. Do not worry if you don't have these experiences, for time and practice are both necessary before achieving some success.

You may become aware of some gruesome aspects of your mind. These must not be suppressed, but allowed to arise. They may create emotional responses such as fear; this is almost to be expected. But as much as possible you must try to watch these manifestations of the subconscious mind bubble to the surface without like or dislike, without any emotional link whatsoever. You must be aware of them. This is essential. If you fight them, resist them, or perhaps even enjoy them you will not be purging them. It is essential that you watch the occurrence with a feeling of total detachment. Imagine that they are occurring outside yourself. That is, you must try to develop the attitude that these occurrences are somehow separate to yourself. Don't identify with them for this will only push them back into the subconscious.



The mere fact that you are conscious of the subconscious manifestations with a detached attitude is in itself a powerful weapon in eliminating the hold they have over your life. The mere recognition of them with awareness is sufficient to remove the underlying, mental disturbances from your mind. In fact you have almost no choice - the problems are automatically scrubbed from the mind. Many people practise meditational techniques and may have no overwhelming confrontation with fearful data, yet after some time they notice a great change in their attitude towards life. The cleaning has been occurring but in more subtle ways. Some people, on the other hand, are suddenly confronted with a great gush of their subconscious problems. They may even be unhappy for some time, but again the overall result will be greater contentment in life. The experiences that you will go through only you will know. But whatever 'garbage' you confront and exhaust will definitely be beneficial; of this there is no doubt.

How does mere awareness of this subconscious data remove it from the mind? There may be a combination of reasons, but our belief is as follows. To explore the subconscious in the first place there has to be a reasonable degree of relaxation. Without a measure of relaxation a person's attention will remain externalized; it cannot go inwards to the inner world of the mind. Therefore, when this subconscious data is recognized you must be in a relaxed state. You have no choice. From your own experience in the external world you will know that when you are relaxed, events or confrontations with situations no longer have the same influence on you, as they would if you are tense. When you are relaxed you automatically see things in a new light. They have less adverse effects on your being. It is the same when you face your subconscious problems during meditational techniques. Besides recognizing them more clearly in the first place, they no longer greatly affect you and because of your state of relaxation and awareness you exhaust them. If you were tense and faced your inner problems (which is probably impossible) they would more than likely have a great influence on you and you would not exhaust them.

This method of confronting problems in a state of relaxation is widely used in psychiatry,

as a method of exhausting a patient's conflicts, conscious or subconscious. It is called desensitization and will be discussed subsequently. The basic mechanics and idea is the same as in meditational techniques.

Though it may seem no more than playing with words, we would like to make one point clear; namely that subconscious data inherent in mental problems cannot really be removed from the mind. We often say that problems are or should be removed from the mind. This is merely an expression, for in fact all the data in the mind is permanently imprinted there. What we really mean when we talk about removing mental problems is that one's reaction to inner problems or memories is removed. For the purpose of explanation we can say that a mental problem is composed of two aspects: the actual data (i.e. cows) and the emotional response (i.e. fear) to that data. Therefore, when a mental problem is removed, what is really meant is that the emotional response has been neutralized. The emotional response is in a sense disconnected with the subconscious data. For example, perhaps one reacts with fear when confronted by a cow, perhaps because a big cow chased you when you were three years of age. When the problem is removed, perhaps by meditational techniques, the subconscious data still remains in the mind, but now the fear is no longer associated with cows. You will see cows, maybe even remember when you were chased by the big cow, but now you will no longer feel fear. This is what we mean when we say that mental problems are removed from the mind. The emotional response is neutralized. This may seem a technical point, and perhaps a little laboured and irrelevant, but we have emphasized it so that you more clearly understand the process involved in the cleaning out of the mind. This will also further clarify why it is important to recognize subconscious data with an attitude of detachment and awareness. It is in order to change your emotional reaction to subconscious problems, so that instead of experiencing negative emotions one feels indifference. In other words, the aim is to see your mental problems and in a sense overwrite, replace your usual emotional responses with another response which is devoid of emotional content - detachment. When you have no emotional response to subconscious data, then

you have removed that particular problem. The aim is to neutralize, disconnect all negative emotions with all subconscious data.

The reader should not however make the mistake of assuming that all the purging of the undesirable elements of the subconscious mind occurs during the meditation practice. This would be totally incorrect, for the process of cleaning the mind occurs in a nebulous manner and at the most unexpected times in daily life. Somehow meditational practices and yoga techniques in general sharpen one's sensitivity to associations with outside events. This is a difficult subject to discuss and perhaps the best way is to give a concrete example. The following was an actual experience.

When a sadhaka was about ten or twelve years of age, fishing was the most gratifying and enjoyable preoccupation in life. The bait which was generally put on the hook was a maggot, the larva form of bluebottles called gentles. These were purchased by the thousands in a specially designed metal box from a local shop that catered exclusively for fishing. After a day of fishing it was customary to throw all the maggots in the river as feed for the fish and to empty the box. On one occasion the maggots were kept in the metal box with the intention of using them on the following day. But actually that following day did not arise for some reason. Maggots, as nature intended, have a natural habit of changing into flies. And just this happened within the confines of the box, but the boy did not know, for he was too preoccupied with other interests to even give it a second thought. Then one day he opened the box, curious to see what was in it. And he was petrified, for hundreds of black, buzzing flies surged into his face on their way to freedom. The mind is very impressionable at any age, especially when young, and that experience left a strong emotional shock and fear clearly imprinted in his subconscious mind. After a day or so the event was forgotten or suppressed, but the fear remained. It did not surface again to conscious perception until one day in the ashram. Early one morning after an hour and a half of yogic practices, he was idly gazing out of the ashram from a second storey room, when he spotted about twenty-five jet black pigs. There was almost an explosion in his mind and suddenly the vision of those multi-

tudes of flies emerged to conscious perception. The group of pigs had stimulated the emergence of this subconscious memory. An outside event had brought to conscious perception a long forgotten emotional shock. Had this occurrence happened when the sadhaka was tense and not relaxed then he would have probably felt some form of unhappiness or depression, without actually knowing the cause. The problem would have caused its damage and remained in the confines of the mind. But under the actual circumstances, he was very relaxed. As such, the problem in its root form came to perception and was exhausted. The impression of the pigs and the flies was shrugged off without the slightest emotional upset. Directly it was the stimulus given by the pigs, but indirectly it was the state of relaxation and the influence of meditational practices. This is an example from experience to illustrate how meditational practices and yoga in general work to exhaust problems in subtle ways. The reader may possibly have similar experiences.

Meditational practices also contribute to removing mental problems in a more positive manner. That is, they don't only lead to removal of emotional links with conflicts, but depending on the depth and proficiency of the individual they lead to joy and knowledge. This acts as a strong current that in a sense overwhelms one's mental problems and makes them seem unimportant. One is so much influenced by the joy and new knowledge acquired that one will begin to see life in a new light. One's attitude to other people and situations will change in a positive direction. A taste of meditation, real meditation, is so overwhelming that conflicts seem almost trivial and insignificant in comparison. This automatically leads to the removal and neutralizing of one's problems.

So if you want to find peace and joy in your life, we urge you in no uncertain terms to begin meditational practices now. And by this we mean asana, pranayama and relaxation techniques, for in our opinion these are really (if done properly) no less than forms of meditational techniques.

## **2. Desensitization**

Many people have problems that they know with certainty, yet still the problems cannot be

removed. That is, even though the problems are consciously known, they still continue to assert a negative influence on an individual's life. An example, common with many people, is fear of insects such as spiders. They are fully aware of this fear for whenever they see an insect they immediately suffer an emotional upset, sometimes great, sometimes small, depending on the nature of the confrontation. That is, if the individual is in a state of tension, or if the spider is seen suddenly or under particularly unexpected circumstances, the intensity of the emotional shock will be greater.

The real cause of this fear lies, of course, in the subconscious mind and will no doubt be eventually thrown out by meditational techniques. But there is a more direct method of neutralizing conscious fears, which is very simple and yet very effective. It is called *desensitization*. The method is as follows: first of all, you must relax yourself as much as possible. This can be achieved by practising your normal daily yoga program, or by practising a meditational technique or shavasana for some time.

Choose a convenient method that you think will induce the greatest relaxation. When you are relaxed, you must try to visualize yourself confronting the object of your fear. In other words, mentally create a picture of the object. Let us take fear of mice, as an example. Try to visualize a picture of a mouse or mice; the clearer the image the better. If you have difficulty in visualizing a mouse then try to relive and revive memories of your past, perhaps uncomfortable and unpleasant ones, in which you interacted with a mouse. Do this as intensely as you can. At first you may experience great fear. If the fear becomes too great then of course discontinue the practice. But if possible face the problem and totally confront the object of your fear. Do this for a few minutes if possible and then rest. The following day repeat the process, making sure that you are relaxed as much as possible prior to the practice. You should find that your emotional reaction to the object of your fear is reduced. Confront yourself with all aspects of the mouse (or whatever your fear is) - a big mouse, many mice, mice in disturbing surroundings. Confront yourself with as many associations of mice that your mind can think of or visualize.

You should repeat the procedure on a daily basis until such time as you experience absolutely no emotional response whatsoever. When you can create images and thoughts of a mouse and remain detached, a witness, then you have essentially exhausted your fear. If you wish you can test whether or not the fear still remains by actually facing the object in the outside world. This is your choice. If the fear is still there, then of course you must continue with the practice until the object is no longer a disturbance in your life. The same procedure can and should be repeated with any fear that is known to you. It can be fear of the opposite sex, of heights, of darkness or any phobia in fact that you can think of.

The rationale of this technique is simple, namely that people are less likely to react emotionally to objects that are normally objects of fear, if the objects are confronted in states of relaxation. In everyday life one would jump when confronted with the frightening object, but during relaxation the emotional reaction is either lessened or nullified. In a sense the fear is overcome and the ability to face the object during a period of relaxation carries over into daily life. This technique is commonly used by psychiatrists in the following manner.

A patient acknowledges that he is afraid of something, perhaps lizards. The psychiatrist systematically relaxes the patient. Then the psychiatrist shows the patient a picture that illustrates the fear, in this example a photograph or drawing of a lizard, or describes a vivid picture of a lizard, which the patient tries to visualize. Instead of reacting with fear the patient is calmer and is shown that the lizard can be faced and that it need not always be an object of dread. From this, the patient eventually becomes able to face lizards in the outside world. The system in yoga is the same but the individual must be his own psychiatrist.

This method is an excellent tool in exhausting mental problems and their accompanying emotions, and is a good supplement for meditational techniques. The reader is recommended to use it widely to combat the more obvious, conscious fears.

### 3. Autosuggestion

This is also a very simple yet powerful technique. If required, it can be used in conjunction with desensitization.

The power of suggestion is well known. It is so powerful that many people autosuggest themselves into illnesses. In other words, they think that they will suffer from an illness and in time they do suffer. People are continually autosuggesting themselves into negative situations. They feel inferior and eventually they act and project themselves as being inferior. On the other hand, some people think that they are superior and so their whole being and attitude towards life is pervaded with a feeling of superiority. Each of these states is as bad as the other, but they do illustrate the power of suggestion. Another person desires very much to pass an examination; he creates an autosuggestion and it is more than probable that he will pass. It depends on the depth of the autosuggestion; a shallow, half-hearted suggestion is unlikely to bring results, but a strong autosuggestion that penetrates the depths of the mind, will bring results without doubt. Autosuggestion is the driving force behind our actions in life, and by this we include suggestion from other people and the environment for these in turn are translated into autosuggestion. That is, in life we are continually receiving suggestions from our surroundings and other people and in turn transmitting our own suggestions. This in turn, if powerful enough and motivating enough, is transformed into autosuggestions. Take an example: a person meets another person who impresses him very much. If this impression is very deep (we would say suggestion) then that individual develops an autosuggestion to aspire to be like the person he met. Another person sees a beautiful garden, and if his nature is such, this suggestion will transform into autosuggestion to create his own garden to the same degree of beauty. The examples are endless. Our aim is to clearly and briefly convince you of the power of autosuggestion.

Autosuggestion is a powerful tool for eradicating and neutralizing mental problems. Let us take an example by considering a person who is scared of the dark. Since we spend much of our lives in the dark, and in fact it is impossible to totally avoid the dark, this fear or phobia will cause the individual a lot of mental distress. His mind will be in a continual state of tension and trepidation, consciously and subconsciously for he will always anticipate the next time he will be plunged into the

infernal blackness. The original cause of the problem lies in the subconscious and must be recognized and eliminated eventually by meditational practices. Autosuggestion, however, is a valuable tool in helping him to come to terms with his fear at the present time. The person must first of all think and convince himself of the fact that this fear is really ridiculous. Though it causes emotional tension, as a factor in itself, it is essentially absurd. Initially this is only on an intellectual level, but the suggestion will eventually infiltrate into the deeper realms of the mind. Realize that the environment is no different whether it is light or dark. Consider that most people are not afraid of the dark, so why should I have this fear? And so on. Remember this is only on an intellectual level, but the autosuggestion will help you very much to remove the phobia.

Autosuggestion can be applied to all types of consciously known problems. It is especially effective if applied during states of relaxation in the same way that we described desensitization. Therefore, autosuggestion is ideally practised after your yoga program or any method of systematic relaxation. You can also use autosuggestion before and after sleep. It is during times of relaxation that the mind is receptive to suggestion. Repeat the autosuggestion, perhaps in the example we have given: 'I am not afraid of the dark', with intensity for a few minutes or so. This will help bring about the required change. If done with little feeling or belief, or half-heartedly then it will fail to bring about the required results.

As we have already pointed out, the real problem lies buried deep in the recesses of the subconscious mind. In the case of fear of the dark, you may have had an unfortunate experience when you were very young. Perhaps you were locked in a small, dark cupboard when you were three years old. Whatever the cause of your phobia it lies in your mind. The best way to remove the phobia is to find the root and exhaust it through meditational practices. Of this there is no doubt. But autosuggestion is a useful and effective aid in initially overcoming the problem and should be used as much as possible. By injecting a new attitude into the mind concerning the object of fear, the old negative, crippling attitude is neutralized and rendered ineffective, inactive and powerless.

You can use autosuggestion to help combat all types of phobias, fears, complexes, conflicts, etc., once they are known.

### **Summary**

We have given three techniques for cleaning the subconscious mind of its problems. If you have been practising yoga regularly then you will already be fully familiar with meditational practices. Desensitization and autosuggestion, however, are two new techniques. They are surprisingly simple to put into practice but they can bring wonderful results, given time and perseverance.

We emphasize that it is no good merely reading about these techniques and knowing them. They must be practised. So we urge you to persevere with meditational practices, and to supplement them with desensitization and autosuggestion where it is appropriate. The reader must decide for himself when and how they are used, for it is you who are facing your mind. If, however, you are unsure, perhaps a little confused or have strange experiences then seek the guidance of a teacher who has the experience and knowledge of meditational techniques.

### **Notes**

Lesson 9, Topic 2

1 Removal of Mental Problems (Part 1) - Book I,

## Hatha Yoga: Sutra Neti

Sutra neti (nasal cleaning with thread) is an advanced process for cleaning the nose. It supplements and performs the same function as jala neti, namely it cleans and removes blockages in the nasal passages<sup>1</sup>. In this way, free flow of air through both nostrils is achieved, this being so important for many yogic practices as well as general health.

In jala neti, salt water is used to clean the nose; in sutra neti a catheter (a long, thin rubber tube) or twined strands of cotton thread are passed through the nostrils.

### Scriptural references

The ancient yogis had great respect for sutra neti and the benefits it bestowed on the practitioner. It is mentioned in various texts, the most descriptive of which is from the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: "Take soft cotton threads about one foot long and insert them through the nostril and out the mouth. The siddhas (accomplished yogis) call this neti. One should use a suitable thickness of twined strands (sutra), there being no hard and fast rule. In the practice one end of the sutra is put into one nostril, the other nostril is closed with the thumb or ring finger. Then do pooraka (inhale) through the nose and rechaka (exhale) slowly through the mouth. By doing this again and again the end of the sutra will enter the back of the mouth. Now hold the end that is in the mouth and the other end that is already outside and pull the sutra backwards and forwards.

"The alternative technique is to put one end in one of the nostrils, and closing the other nostril, do pooraka (inhalation). Then close the nostril containing the sutra and do rechaka (exhalation) through the other nostril. By doing this again and again the sutra will eventually come out of the second nostril. Now pull both ends of the sutra alternately. But very few persons can do this second method.

"Sutra neti purifies the kapala (frontal brain) and removes impurities from the nose. The

power of eyesight is increased and the eyes become bright."

The method described in this ancient text is quite difficult, especially the second form. Even if one could do them, a lot of time would be required, far more than most people of today have available. If you want to try the traditional methods then go ahead, but there are far easier techniques of attaining the same end. It is these modified methods that we will teach you in this topic.

### Equipment

Two types of equipment may be used:

1. *A long, thin, rubber urethral catheter.* This can be purchased from almost any pharmacy for a very small sum of money. Catheters come in different sizes, which are assigned different numbers according to the outside diameter. The choice of the size of the catheter of course depends on the individual nasal passage, but sizes 4, 5 or 6 are generally suitable.

This is a modern improvisation which makes the performance of sutra neti much easier and quicker. However, the nasal passages are not cleaned as effectively as when the traditional cotton thread is used. Also, the final stage of sutra neti is virtually impossible if a catheter is used. However, the use of a catheter means little preparation is necessary for sutra neti, which makes it much more convenient than the use of cotton thread.

2. *A bundle of cotton threads* held together at each end with beeswax. The thread should be soft and of good quality. The method of preparation is as follows:

- Cut a number of strands of the thread to lengths of about forty-five centimetres or a little more. Cut enough so that the diameter of the strands of thread when held in a bundle is about three millimetres. Of course the diameter of the bundle should suit your nasal passages, but on your first attempt this width is sufficient.

- Heat some beeswax.
  - Hold the end of the bundle of threads and trim the end so that all the individual ends are in line with each other. Twist the end of the bundle.
  - Soak the first twelve centimetres of the trimmed twisted end in the hot beeswax and allow it to harden into a stiff but pliable cord.
  - Trim the other end of the bundle of threads to the same length so that the total length of the cord is about forty-five centimetres. Twist the end for about ten centimetres and then soak in beeswax. Allow to harden.
- The waxing of the other end is necessary for stage 3 of the practice. The cord (or sutra) is now ready for use. This preparation takes quite a long time and we recommend that a number of such cotton threads should be prepared when you have some spare time and stored in a clean box or tin.

#### Posture

Any comfortable sitting or standing position may be taken, though a squatting position

(kagasana) is particularly suitable if it is comfortable.

### SUTRA NETI

#### Stage 1

Either a catheter or cotton thread may be used for this stage.

Gently push the narrow end of the catheter or the waxed end of the cotton thread cord into the left nostril.

As you slowly push the sutra into the nostril, twist it so that it enters the nostril easily.

Don't under any circumstances use force; the interior of the nose is very delicate and any undue force could cause damage.

Eventually you should feel the end of the sutra emerging at the back of the throat.

With your index finger and thumb or your middle and index finger, whichever you prefer, reach into the throat and pull the end of the sutra out through the mouth.

This action may make you retch a little at first, but with practice it will cause absolutely no disturbance.



If you are using a cotton thread sutra, then the middle unwaxed portion should be in the nasal passages, with the waxed end emerging from your mouth and the other unwaxed end emerging from your nostril. If you are using a catheter, then one end will emerge from the mouth and the other end from your nostril. Hold each end of the sutra with the hands and gently pull the sutra backwards and forwards. If you feel any pain or discomfort, stop immediately.

Move the sutra to and fro no more than 35 times on your first attempt.

Release your hold on the unwaxed end, pull the waxed end and remove the sutra from your nose.

#### Stage 2

This stage is exactly the same as stage 1, but the sutra is passed into the other nostril and out of the mouth.

#### Stage 3

Only people using a cotton thread sutra can do this stage.

After completing stage 2, the sutra should be left so that it still passes through one of the nasal passages, one end emerging through the mouth and the other end emerging through one nostril.

Push the other waxed end of the sutra, from the nose, into the other nostril and pull the end through the mouth.

In this position, both waxed ends emerge from the mouth.

Loosen the hard wax at the last 5 cms of each end of the threads so that the individual strands of thread again become separated.

Point the two ends of the sutra towards each other and push the separate threads so that they merge with one another.

Then twist the sutra so that the two ends become joined.

If the joint is too thick, then some of the strands can be cut away; the joint should be sufficiently thin so that it can pass through the nostrils.

The sutra is now in the form of a circle.

Slowly draw the joint into the mouth, progressively sliding the sutra through the nostrils.

Eventually the joint should again be outside the body, but this time it will be located between the entrance to the two nostrils.

Disconnect the joint.

The sutra is now in such a position that it enters one nostril and emerges from the other - it no longer passes through the mouth.

Gently pull the sutra to and fro.

If there is the slightest discomfort, stop the practice immediately.

Only a few movements of the sutra are recommended during your first few times of practice, the number of times being slowly increased as you gain proficiency.

You should use your discretion in this respect. Then pull one end of the sutra and slowly withdraw it from the nose.

#### **Duration, frequency and time of practice**

If a catheter is used, stages 1 and 2 can be completed in a short time, much less than five minutes. If you use a cotton thread sutra, then stages 1, 2 and 3 can be completed in less than ten minutes. This of course does not include preparation which should be done at another time. Under no circumstances should the practice be hurried.

In each stage pull the sutra to and fro a suitable number of times. At first there may be a little uneasiness, for the nerves and mucus membranes will not be accustomed to the extra stimulation. If this is the case, slowly increase the number of movements of the sutra over a period of time, thus allowing the nerves and membranes to become more resistant and stronger. At first only a few movements (which should not cause discomfort) and certainly not more than fifteen times. With practice the number of movements can be increased to fifty.

This technique should not be done every day. Once every few days or every week is more than sufficient. The best time for practice is in the morning before breakfast; this is particularly relevant to those persons who tend to retch as they reach into the mouth to recover the end of the sutra.

#### **Supplementary practice**

After completing sutra neti one should then do jala neti<sup>1</sup>, as this will flush out all the impurities and particles in the nose, including those that have been dislodged by performing sutra neti, and leave the nasal passages in the cleanest possible condition.

After performing both sutra and jala neti, the nasal passages may feel a little sore and

raw, and perhaps very dry. For this reason, it is a good idea to conclude your practice by doing either *dugdha neti* (neti with milk) or *ghrita neti* (neti with ghee). These are very simple techniques which merely involve introducing a few drops of milk or ghee (clarified butter) into the nasal passages. To do this, hold the head back and sniff the fluid into the nose from a suitable vessel. Remember only a small amount of milk or ghee is required; don't flood your nose. Ghrita or dugdha neti will temporarily replace the natural protective film of mucus in the nose that has been rubbed or washed away by sutra and jala neti. However, this practice is optional, for the body will manufacture and replace the old film with a new film, within a short period of time.

If the nostrils are particularly blocked prior to attempting sutra neti, then jala neti can be performed before sutra neti as well as afterwards.

#### **Precautions**

The nasal passages are extremely delicate; as such no undue force should be used to push the sutra through the nostrils. As you push the sutra into the nostril, it should be slowly twisted so that it more easily overcomes obstructions. If you find, even after persistent attempts, that you are unable to push the sutra into the nose, then seek expert advice from an experienced teacher.

Make sure that the sutra is clean before inserting it into the nostril. It is best not to try sutra neti until you can perform jala neti without difficulty.

#### **Limitations**

Persons who suffer from chronic haemorrhage (bleeding) of the nose should not do this practice without expert guidance.

#### **Benefits**

Sutra neti gives a frictional massage to the internal mucus membranes of the nose, strengthening the membranes, making them more efficient and more able to effectively condition (that is clean, moisten, disinfect and warm) the air that you breathe as it enters the nose prior to entering the lungs.

Sutra neti stimulates many of the large number of nerve endings in the nasal passages. This improves the innervation of the various



functions of the nose and their connections with the brain.

This stimulation also causes a slight irritation to the mucus membranes, resulting in an increased blood circulation in the nose which tends to encourage excessive secretion of mucus for a short period of time. This is very beneficial, for it removes any stagnation of blood in the nostrils and flushes out the secretory glands. The organs in the nose are consequently encouraged to function far more effectively. This includes the eyes, since the tear duct outlet in the nose and the blood supplies are closely connected.

Sutra neti is an excellent method of preventing colds or other inflammations of the nose, especially if it is supplemented with jala neti. The nasal passages are rendered more resistant to attack by germs or viruses.

The ideal combination is sutra neti performed in conjunction with jala neti. Jala neti removes the less ingrained obstructions and flushes out the nose, while sutra neti removes the more obstinate foreign bodies and dried up mucus deposits. It is for this reason that we highly recommend that jala neti be practised immediately after sutra neti to flush out all the particles in the nose and leave it in the cleanest possible condition.

### **The importance of stage 3**

In stage 3 the sutra was arranged so that it emerged from both nostrils, crossing from one nostril to the next at the back of the nose. The flow of air through each nostril varies; sometimes the flow is greater through the left nostril and sometimes the flow is greater through the right nostril. Sometimes the flow through each nostril is equal and this is very important in yoga. Predominant air flow through the right nostril corresponds to extroversion and physical activity and flow of air predominantly through the left nostril represents introversion. When the flows are balanced, then this is conducive to higher awareness; one is neither lost in outside activities nor mentally brooding over problems or whatever. There is a balance and this balance is conducive to relaxation and receptivity in your whole being.

This balance in flows can only occur if both nostrils are unblocked and if the passage that links the two nostrils in the back of the nose

prior to entry into the throat is also unblocked. Stages 1 and 2 of sutra neti clean and remove obstructions in each individual nostril. Stage 3 also does this, but simultaneously it ensures that there is an unimpeded passage between the two nostrils inside the nose. Jala neti does the same thing of course, but not nearly as directly and effectively as sutra neti.

In particular, we recommend sutra neti as an excellent preparatory method for all types of pranayama techniques. For example, sutra neti will be most useful if done immediately before practising nadi shodhana pranayama. It will encourage the freest possible flow of breath through the alternate nostrils. The problem of course is time; if you have sufficient time then do sutra neti before practising pranayama, otherwise don't worry.

### **Notes**

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

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

## Topic 1

# Asanas: Practice

In an integrated asana practice program the back should be bent and stretched alternately backwards and forwards, and also given a twist in both directions. We have already introduced a number of asanas that adequately bend the spine backwards and forwards, but as yet we have only given one that twists the spine, namely meru vakrasana<sup>1</sup>. This is a reasonably good asana, especially for people who have very stiff backs. If you have been practising meru vakrasana regularly then you should now be sufficiently supple to attempt the far superior asana - ardha matsyendrasana.

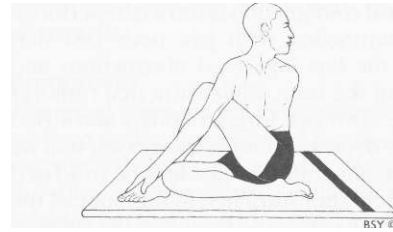
### ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA (HALF SPINAL TWIST)

This asana is named after the great yogi Matsyendranath, who is reputed to have performed meditational practices in the full form of this asana called matsyendrasana. This is one of the most difficult asanas in yoga, requiring a 'rubber body'. For this reason we will concern ourselves only with the easier half form of the asana at this stage. Later we will introduce the full form for those who have attained sufficient flexibility of body to attempt it without causing any injuries<sup>2</sup>.

As a matter of interest, there is a well-known and fascinating story attached to yogi Matsyendranath in Hindu mythology. It is said that long ago Lord Shiva was teaching his wife Parvati the fundamental practices of yoga beside a river. The aim was that yoga would be brought out of its secrecy and disseminated throughout the world. In the river was a large fish and it listened to the lessons with rapt attention. Parvati noticed the fish and told Lord Shiva. Immediately Shiva transformed the fish into the form of man - no other than yogi Matsyendranath. Because of the knowledge that he had acquired by his attentive hearing of Shiva's discourses Matsyendranath was from then onwards regarded as the human

originator of yoga. It is said that all the yogic teachings that are now in existence have come from Matsyendranath, through his various disciples such as Gorakhnath. We leave the reader to accept or interpret this story in any way that he wishes.

Incidentally, the Sanskrit word *matsya* means 'fish', which explains how Matsyendranath and the asana which we will shortly discuss got their names.



#### Technique

Ardha matsyendrasana is not a difficult asana to perform, but unfortunately it is difficult to write about without becoming lost in a tangled description of arms and legs. Therefore, while we will try to make the description as simple as possible, we advise you to carefully study the accompanying picture while reading the instructions, and while actually attempting to physically perform the asana.

#### Stage 1: starting position

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

Bend the right leg and place the right foot on the outside of the left knee.

Adjust the position of the right foot so that the sole is flat on the floor with the ankle in touch with the side of the left knee; the foot and toes should point forwards.

Place the left hand on the left side of the body; this will act as support for the next body adjustment.

While leaning on the left arm, fold the left leg backwards to the right.

Place the left heel so that it is in contact with the right buttock.

The legs should now be in the position as shown in the above figure.

Then slowly and gently twist the trunk to the right.

Place both hands on the floor on the right side of the body, making the arms straight.

Then try to grasp the right ankle with the left hand; don't strain.

The left arm should be adjusted so that it is straight and so that the back of the arm is in contact with the right knee and calf; the right knee should be as close as possible to the left armpit.

To take the position described it will be necessary to twist the trunk a little more to the right and to push the right thigh towards the abdomen.

The picture shows the position of the left arm very clearly.

If the left arm is in the correct location then you will feel that it acts as a lever against the right leg; this leverage automatically tends to twist the trunk even further to the right.

Place the right arm behind the back, pushing the hand either towards the top of the spine or towards the outside of the left thigh.

This is the starting position.

### **Stage 2: final position**

Make the trunk as straight and vertical as is comfortable.

Relax the whole body, especially the back.

The back should remain totally passive throughout the entire execution of the asana. Inhale deeply and then with exhalation slowly twist the trunk further to the right.

Remember that this torsion of the back should be applied by leveraging the left arm against the right leg; there is no reason to use the back muscles even slightly.

Try to twist the trunk as much as is comfortable, without strain.

Then turn the head in the same direction as the trunk so that you face over your shoulders. This is the final pose.

Make sure that the trunk and head are upright and that the back muscles are relaxed.

Breathe slowly and as deeply as is comfortable. Stay in the final position for some time; then return to the starting position and straighten both legs.

Repeat stages 1 and 2 but twisting the body to the left.

### **Direction of twist**

Many people make the mistake of twisting in the wrong direction. In other words, they place their right arm against the right leg or their left arm against the left leg. In this position there is no leverage. Under these circumstances, one thinks how easy the asana is to perform, which it is, but unfortunately it gives little or no benefits. The correct direction of twist is essential to obtain full benefits from the asana.

There is a very simple and direct method of quickly knowing if you have twisted the trunk in the correct direction. Imagine that the leg that points backwards, the one with the heel pressed against the buttock, is an arrow or a pointer. Your trunk must be twisted in the same direction as the arrow. In other words, in the final pose you should face in the direction that the arrow points. If this is not the case then you will definitely know that you are doing the asana incorrectly.

### **Points to remember**

The reader should bear the following points in mind when practising the asana:

1. Do not sit on the heel; merely place the heel in contact with the side of the buttocks.
2. Make sure that the back is as passive as possible; this is important to obtain optimum benefits.
3. Do not try to twist the spine more than its flexibility will allow; with time and practice your muscles will become more supple and you will gradually find that you will be able to twist more and more.
4. In the final position the shoulders should remain at the same level.
5. Keep the back straight and upright in the final position.

### **Breathing, awareness and duration**

Exhale as you twist the body into the final pose. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final position.

Your point of awareness will depend on whether the eyes are open or closed.

*Eyes closed:* be aware of breathing, or the eyebrow centre. When you become sufficiently proficient to remain in the final pose for some

time, then you can imagine that the breath is moving inwards and outwards at the eyebrow centre. As you breathe in feel the ingoing air piercing the eyebrow centre; as you breathe out feel the outflowing air being pushed out at the eyebrow centre. Your awareness should be on this process.

*Eyes open:* direct your gaze as far behind the back as possible, preferably fixing your attention on a point or spot on the wall.

Experiment and find out for yourself the method which you prefer. Keeping the eyes closed is more beneficial because it is more likely to concentrate the mind and also induce introspection. When the eyes are open there is more of a tendency for one's attention to wander over the objects in vision instead of remaining focussed on one point on the wall.

Beginners should only spend a few seconds in the final pose, if necessary alternately twisting the body three or four times on each side. This will loosen up the back. In fact, we advise beginners to stay in the final pose, hold their breath for a comfortable time, and then return to the starting position and repeat on the other side of the body. This procedure can be repeated a number of times.

When the back becomes more supple then start to gradually increase the duration of the final pose, while breathing slowly and deeply. This can be done over a period of weeks. Eventually you can spend a few minutes in the final pose in each direction of twist.

### Sequence

Ardha matsyendrasana should be performed in every asana program if possible, after completing a sequence of forward and backward bending asanas. In this manner, the back is given the best possible exercise.

Furthermore, the back may be a little stiff after performing a number of backward and forward bending asanas. Ardha matsyendrasana brings about an almost instantaneous release of any tension. This is a good reason why it should be practised after most other asanas.

### Limitations

People who suffer from peptic ulcers, hernia or hyperthyroidism should not do ardha matsyendrasana unless under expert guidance. Women should not practise after two or three

months of pregnancy. People who suffer from sciatica or slipped disc may gain much benefit from this asana (many people have already done so in our experience), but you should be careful, especially if your case is severe.

### Simpler technique for beginners

Those people who have very stiff backs have a lot of difficulty doing ardha matsyendrasana. Under these circumstances be careful not to use excessive force, or strain yourself, but you should either continue to practise meru vakrasana until your back becomes more flexible<sup>1</sup>, or attempt the simpler form of ardha matsyendrasana that we will now describe: Sit on the ground with both legs outstretched in front of the body.

Place your right leg in the same position as explained for ardha matsyendrasana.

Keep the left leg outstretched; don't bend it. Then repeat the rest of stage 1 and then stage 2 as described for ardha matsyendrasana.

All details are basically the same, and even though it is far easier, the benefits are nearly as good.

After some time when your back becomes looser, you should try to master ardha matsyendrasana.

*Note:* If you can nearly do ardha matsyendrasana, but still experience a little difficulty, then to make the asana easier to perform you can make the following adjustments: 1. Place the forward facing foot in front of the adjoining knee of the other leg. 2. Place the forward facing foot in contact with the inside surface of the forward facing knee, instead of the outside surface.

Again, when your back becomes more supple, revert to the position already described.

### More advanced variation

If you find ardha matsyendrasana easy then you can try the following more difficult form: Adjust your body in the way explained in the first part of stage 1.

Instead of grasping your right ankle with your left hand, you should push your left hand and arm underneath the bent right leg, that is, the space between the calf and thigh of the right leg.

A little bit of adjustment may be necessary, but it is possible to reach backwards behind the back with the left hand.

Don't strain.

Fold your right arm behind the back in the way described in the basic technique.

try to grasp the right and left hands behind the back.

We repeat, don't force, for this needs a reasonable degree of flexibility. If your back is sufficiently supple you may even find that you can grasp the wrist of one hand with the other hand.

*Note:* This variation gives greater leverage and therefore an accentuated twist of the back. For this reason the influence of the asana is enhanced. A further advantage of this variation is that it is more stable; therefore it is possible to remain in the final pose for longer periods of time compared to the basic form of ardha matsyendrasana.

### **Benefits**

This asana acts predominantly on the abdomen and the spine, by applying a powerful torsion to the trunk of the body. When the trunk is twisted the muscles and nerves of the back and spine are contracted on one side, while the muscles and nerves on the other side are simultaneously stretched. When the trunk is twisted in the opposite direction then the process is the same but reversed. The overall result is an excellent alternate compression and extension of these nerves and muscles bringing them into the best possible condition. As with many other asanas, sluggish and stagnant blood is squeezed out of the spinal regions and encouraged to recirculate to the heart and lungs for purification, which also contributes much to bringing the spinal muscles and nerves into optimum health.

This torsion of the spine is useful for reducing the tendency of adjoining vertebrae to fuse together, this being most prevalent with elderly people.

Ardha matsyendrasana has been found beneficial in the treatment of backache, neckache and headache as well as general body stiffness. It helps to remove any tendency towards round shoulders and has been found useful by many people who have mild cases of sciatica and slipped disc. Remember also that the health of the body depends greatly on the condition of the spinal nerves, for these are the communication lines between the brain and body.

The organs in the abdomen are also alternately compressed and stretched, the compression being partly applied by the pressure of the thigh against the abdomen. This gives the organs a good massage, recirculates impure blood, and tones up the associated nerves. It has been found useful for helping to treat all manner of ailments, including diabetes, indigestion, rheumatism and constipation. In the case of constipation, it is important that the body is first of all twisted to the right, because faecal matter travels up the ascending colon along the transverse colon, and then downwards in the descending colon before being expelled from the body. Therefore an initial twist to the right followed by a left hand twist compresses the colon and activates the nerves associated with intestinal peristalsis in the same order as the progressive movement of faecal matter.

If this asana is done for long periods of time with awareness then it can bring about a wonderful sense of relaxation and easily lead to fruitful introspection. The fact that yogi Matsyendranath once practised inner yoga techniques in the full form of the asana is a good recommendation.

### **Notes**

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

<sup>2</sup> Book III, Lesson 36, Topic 3

## Topic 1

# Pranayama: Practice

Continue to regularly practise nadi shodhana pranayama in the manner previously described<sup>1</sup>. We consider nadi shodhana a most important yogic technique. It is for this reason that we are devoting so much time to it. We could easily have described all the stages in one lesson, but this would not have encouraged you to practise it for yourself. It is when we slowly progress stage by stage as part of a sadhana, that there is more likelihood of actual practice on the part of the reader. And it is only by practice that you will gain benefits, instead of knowing the techniques merely as an acquired piece of knowledge. Furthermore, nadi shodhana cannot be perfected in a matter of days - many weeks and months are necessary. So if you have been practising regularly, we urge you to continue for the benefits will be great if you persevere. If you have not started or if your practice has been intermittent, then you should try to find time to practise regularly, even if it is only a few minutes every day. A little is better than nothing.

If you have mastered the ratio previously given, namely 1:4:2:1:4:2, then proceed to the following ratio 1:6:4:1:6:4 for inhalation: retention: exhalation: inhalation: retention: exhalation.

Under no circumstances should you strain. If you cannot manage to comfortably carry out the ratios we have given, then remain at the stage that is suitable for your personal capabilities.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nadi shodhana: Stage 3: Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4 and Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 4

## Mudras: Bhoochari Mudra

Bhoochari mudra is an allied technique to agochari and shambhavi mudra and all three are excellent forms of *trataka*<sup>1</sup>. Agochari and shambhavi mudras are often integrated with other yogic techniques or done specifically during one's yogic practice program. Bhoochari mudra on the other hand, though it can be done in your daily program, can easily be practised in everyday life. It can be done without other people realizing that you are practising a yogic technique.

It is an excellent, simple, yet effective practice that brings tranquillity and concentration of mind if done for a reasonable period of time with awareness.

### Definition

The word *bhoo* means 'earth', and *chari* means 'moving' or 'dwelling'. As such we are not going to attempt a sensible, literal translation into English. We prefer to call this practice 'nothingness gazing'.

### Posture

This mudra can be practised in any position and almost any place. You can do it while standing, sitting, lying, as you wish. You can do it in the privacy of your own house, at work or at play, whatever is convenient. However, if you practise at home in a sitting pose, it is best to face a blank wall. This ensures that there are no obstructions in your vision which can distract your attention from the practice. This is not essential, only preferable.

### Preliminary procedure for beginners

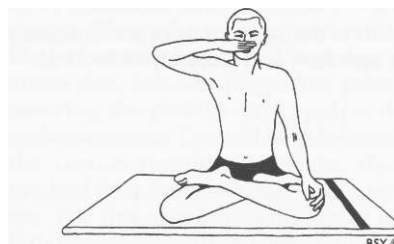
Keep your eyes open.  
Raise your right hand in front of your face.  
Hold the palm so that it is flat and so that it faces downwards, with all the fingers together.  
Place the side of the thumb so that it is in contact with the top of the upper lip.  
The elbow should point to the side of the body.

Focus your eyes on the tip of the little finger, which will be the furthest point of your hand from the eyes.

Gaze at the tip of the little finger intently for a minute or so, if possible without blinking or flickering the eyes.

If other thoughts arise let them but try to keep simultaneous and continuous awareness of the fingertip.

Then after a minute or so, remove your hand but continue to gaze at the space where the little finger was situated.



BHOOCHARI MUDRA  
(NOTHINGNESS GAZING)

Beginners should practise the previous procedure. When they become more proficient they can leave it and start bhoochari mudra without any preliminaries.

Gaze intently at the nothingness in front of the face (where the little finger was positioned in the procedure for beginners).

Become fully engrossed in the nothingness - the empty space.

Be aware of other thoughts if they arise, but anchor your awareness to the nothingness at the same time.

Even if other things are occurring in front of the eyes, they should only be blurred.

In fact, if you are totally aware of the nothingness then you should not even notice them; even if your eyes see outer events there should be no registration of the fact in the field of conscious perception.

All you can see and are aware of is the nothingness; this is the aim.

From this will come calmness, introspection and concentration of mind.

Continue the practice for as long as you have time or circumstances will permit (perhaps during a bus ride, but don't miss your destination).

#### **Time and place**

Almost anytime and anywhere. It can be practised before meditational techniques if required though it is a meditational technique in its own right.

At first this simple practice is reasonably difficult for there are so many outer distractions that continually lure one's attention in other directions. As with every other yoga technique it is a matter of practice makes perfect.

#### **Benefits**

The benefits of doing this mudra are as already given for agochari and shambhavi mudra<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Agochari mudra: Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5;  
Shambhavi mudra: Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 5



## Meditation: Trataka (Stage 3)

The previous two stages of trataka are concerned with first of all focussing one's attention on an external object, followed by the resulting after-image<sup>1</sup>. The third stage of trataka which we will shortly describe, inner or antar trataka alone, is a more advanced technique. It can be either practised as a sequel to stage 2, or as a separate practice in its own right.

However, little benefit is likely to be gained from the practice if you have not already developed the ability to create and perceive a clear internal image at will. This can be done with or without an external and material counterpart. In order to help the reader decide whether or not to practise inner trataka by itself we suggest the following criteria:

1. If you cannot visualize and maintain a clear inner-image you should continue to practise trataka stage 1 or 2.
2. If you can hold a clear inner counterpart to an outer object and perhaps even produce an internal image at will, we suggest that you leave stage 2 and proceed to stage 3.
3. If you have plenty of time at your disposal then you can practise both stages 2 and 3, one after the other.

The important thing is that you don't attempt stage 3 without being able to fix your awareness on a clear inner-image. If you have a vague inner-image or even no image and you attempt to do stage 3 then you will either fall asleep or become enveloped in the usual patterns of thought play. In either case you will gain nothing in fact you will lose, for you will waste your valuable time. So use your discretion and choose the practice that is most suitable for your degree of proficiency.

### TRATAKA - STAGE 3

In this form of trataka the attention is focused only on an internal image. It is more difficult than outer trataka practised alone, or outer trataka combined with inner trataka<sup>1</sup>.

#### Choice of image

This should be the same as the outer object that you have already chosen for trataka stages 1 and 2. If you are happy to visualize a candle flame then continue to do so. If you feel attraction for the symbol Aum then use this as your inner-image. The important thing is that you are able to internally visualize the object of your choice without too much effort.

#### Location of the eyebrow centre

Throughout the practice the inner image has to be visualized and projected at the eyebrow centre. This is far easier if one can feel some kind of sensation on the skin at that point. To attain this, lick one finger just prior to commencing the practice and apply a dot at the eyebrow centre. This will help to initially locate the correct position. However, though this method does help, the water will soon evaporate. For this reason it is far better to apply a little mercury, menthol, camphor or tiger balm, which will give a definite sensation at the eyebrow centre that will last throughout the entire duration of the practice. If the reader can think of a better alternative then that should be used instead.

Of course, if you can easily fix the position of the eyebrow centre then it is not necessary to adopt any means to produce a slight pressure or sensation.

#### Technique

For the purpose of description we will use a candle flame as the inner-image. There are 4 steps. Don't proceed to the next stage until you have achieved competency in the preceding stage.

#### Step 1: preparation

First of all sit in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, keeping them closed throughout the entire practice. Practise kaya sthairyam<sup>2</sup>.

Be totally aware of the steadiness of the whole body. Feel that the body is unmoveable and fixed on the ground; a part of the ground. Continue to practise kaya sthairyam for a few minutes.

Become aware of the eyebrow centre (or bhrumadhya).

Without undue strain focus your attention on the sensation on the skin between the two eyebrows.

Try to think of nothing else but the eyebrow centre.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes, until you can feel a definite sensation at that point.

Then proceed to step 2.

#### **Step 2: inner visualization**

Try to visualize the flame of a candle at the eyebrow centre.

At first most people will find it difficult to see only a candle flame; these people should adopt the method that we have given at the end of this description or any other method that will help them to create a clear inner-image.

Try to hold the image at the eyebrow centre.

If the image fades or disappears, don't worry but merely try to recreate it again.

Keep the image steady at the eyebrow centre. When the internal picture is steady and you have no difficulty creating a clearly defined image proceed to step 3.

Don't begin step 3 until you have mastered step 2, even though it may take a few days or weeks.

#### **Step 3: breath awareness**

Stare intently at the inner-image.

Then you have to be simultaneously aware of your breath.

Practise ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra<sup>3</sup>.

As you breathe in you should imagine that the flow of air is moving from the eyebrow centre backwards to the back of the head.

At the same time be aware of the sound of the breath caused by ujjayi pranayama.

As you breathe out you must try to feel that the air is moving forwards from the back of the head to the eyebrow centre.

Furthermore, you have to imagine and feel that the image is moving backwards and forwards.

As you inhale, feel the sound and backward movement of the breath and also the image being almost pulled backwards.

Then you exhale; be aware of the sound and the forward motion of the breath while feeling that the image is being almost pushed forwards. Try to do this with every breath.

At first it is difficult, but with practice it becomes easier and easier.

Eventually one feels in a sense that it is perfectly natural for the breath to move to and fro in the head.

Carry on in this manner for at least 10 minutes or more.

#### **Step 4: looking into the image**

Now leave ujjayi pranayama, khechari mudra, together with awareness of the breath and the accompanying sound.

Now you have to investigate the nature of the image.

You must try to pierce through the exterior reality of the inner-image.

Look intently at the image and try to probe its shape and nature.

Gaze into the candle flame as though you are looking for something.

See the wick in the middle of the flame.

Try to gaze into the depths of the flame.

Feel and see the aura of the flame penetrating your mind.

Perceive as much detail as you are able.

Feel the collected rays of your awareness probing the flame in an attempt to discover its deeper significance.

What is the nature of the flame?

What is the deeper essence behind what you can see?

Continue in this manner for at least 5 or 10 minutes or until the end of the practice.

The longer you practise the better, especially if you have an exceptionally clear inner-image. Then release the image and be aware only of your eyebrow centre.

And when you are ready open your eyes.

#### **Creation of an image**

The most difficult part of this technique is the creation and visualization of the inner-image and then maintaining it for a prolonged period of time at the eyebrow centre. The following is a method which may be useful as an aid in creating the inner-image.

Close your eyes.

Imagine you are doing outer trataka.

See a mental picture of the whole candle, the flame and even the desk or stool on which it is placed.

If necessary you can even visualize a mental picture of yourself sitting in front of the candle.

When you have a reasonably clear visualization, slowly reduce the field of the picture by gradually moving towards the flame.

Continue until you can only see the candle and the flame.

This is a suitable inner-image for antar trataka.

*Note:* Many people find that this is an easier method of creating the object of awareness in inner trataka. Of course you can use the same procedure for any other object that you care to choose, especially if you have previously practised outer trataka over a period of weeks. Once you can easily visualize the inner-image

you must be able to hold it at the eyebrow centre. This takes some practice but ability slowly develops if you persevere over a few days and weeks.

#### **Duration**

Try to practise for at least half an hour if not

#### **Benefits**

The benefits are as enumerated for trataka stage 1, though far more accentuated<sup>1</sup>.

Under normal waking conditions of life we are subjected to a continuous stream of sensory data from the outside world. Added to this are the multitudes of thoughts that arise from our subconscious mind, many in response to negative emotions and reactions to inner and external events. Because of this, the enormous power and potential of the mind is not utilized. Instead the mind operates at a very low level compared to its fullest potential.

Its energy is dissipated in all directions. Trataka cuts off this continual bombardment of the mind by centring the attention or field of awareness at one point. In this way, we are able to become aware of the potential of the mind, for it spontaneously shows itself under these ideal conditions of concentration. Furthermore, trataka is a method of consolidating the power of the mind, so that it can be directed towards some useful end, whether material, mental or spiritual.

#### **Incorporation into Trataka - stage 2**

The method that we have just described can also be easily and effectively combined with trataka stage 2. In fact, those who wish can gain great benefit from this combination, especially those who have difficulty in creating a clear inner-image. In particular the process of 'looking into' described in step 4 can be adapted for use in outer trataka. We leave the reader to choose his or her own system of combination.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Trataka: Stage 1 - Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6  
Stage 2 - Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

<sup>3</sup> Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

## Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have given more tangible methods of rooting out mental problems. That is, meditation techniques in general, desensitization and autosuggestion. These practices are intended for practical application not merely for accumulated knowledge, so we strongly urge you to put them into practice. If you do this, wonderful changes can occur in your life.

Try to do sutra neti together with jala neti<sup>1</sup>; once a week is ideal, perhaps on the weekend when there is more spare time available.

Practise bhoochari mudra when you find that you have nothing to occupy your attention

for some time. Instead of reading the newspaper try bhoochari mudra - it is far more restful.

If you find you need more time for yoga practices, make sincere attempts at rising half an hour earlier in the morning. This is important so that you can start to seriously practise meditational techniques such as trataka.

Continue the practices of trataka and pranayama as described in this lesson.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
<b>Program 1:</b> duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	2
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	10
Bhoochari Mudra	—	9
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	30
		90

<b>Program 2: duration 1 hour</b>		
Surya Namaskara	–	5
Shavasana	–	3
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	–	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	–	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	–	4
Stage 3 (new ratio)	–	10
Bhoochari Mudra	–	5
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	–	20
		<hr/> 60
<b>Program 3: duration 3/4 hour</b>		
Surya Namaskara	–	5
Shavasana	–	3
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	–	2
Ardha Matsyendrasana	–	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	–	3
Stage 3 (new ratio)	–	5
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	–	18
		<hr/> 45
<b>Program 4: duration 1/2 hour for physical fitness</b>		
Surya Namaskara	–	5
Shavasana	–	3
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	–	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	–	5
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	–	3
Stage 3 (new ratio)	–	5
		<hr/> 30

#### Notes

Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

