

Raja Yoga

A Practical Guide

Swami Suryadevananda

suryadevananda.org

RAJA YOGA
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'Living Meditation' is a sequel to this series and will go deeper into meditation both in life and on the mat.



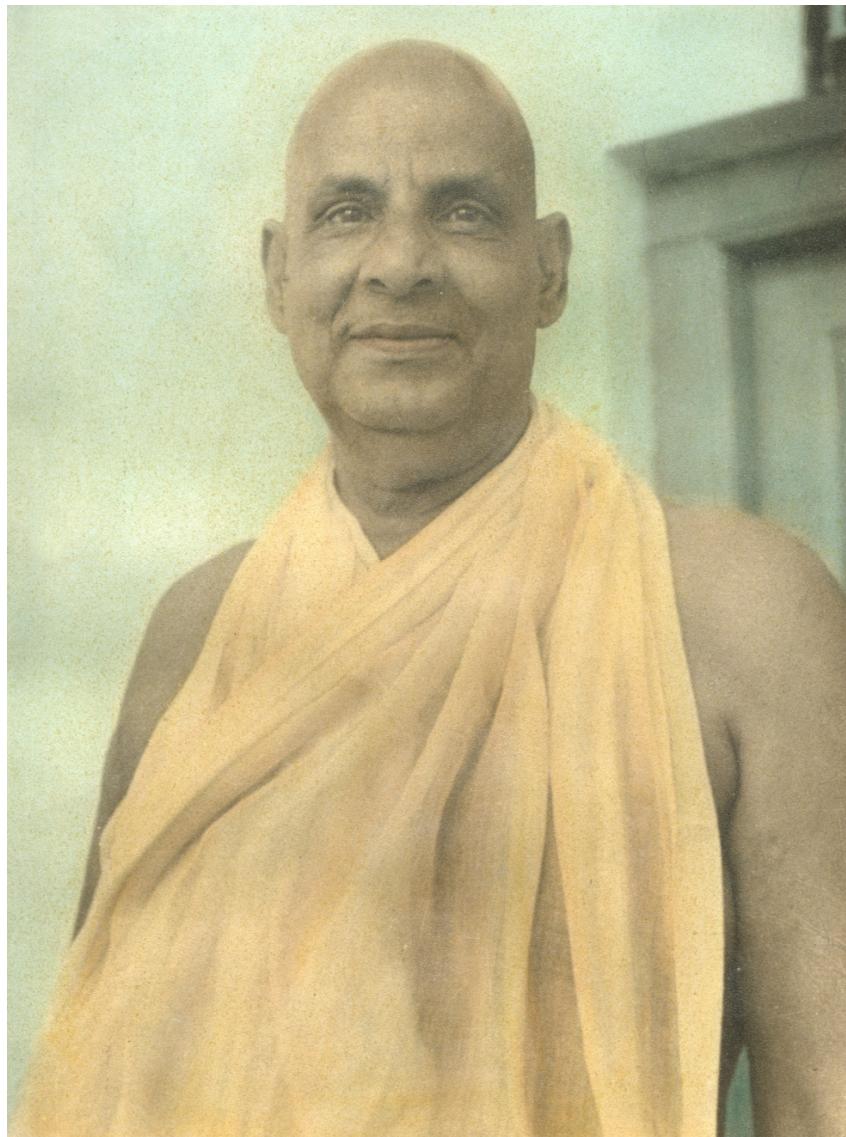
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Dedicated to



Gurudev Swami Sivananda

PREFACE

This series was intended to be a series of short practical essays on yoga but evolved into a video presentation with the very first one. It was felt that this format may make it easier to learn with the main points in video and audio at the same time. The rest in the series started off the same way with writing the main points to be covered and some detail but the audio recording gave room for expansion of content. I was freer on the audio and so it contained more than the text. Now, we have a fusion between the earlier text and the spoken word, now transcribed. Light editing was necessary to make this a stand-alone work without the video or audio or as a guide.

I am most thankful to Sivananda-Usha for transcribing and editing the talks.

The first talk has been broken-up into a small introduction on raja yoga, yama and niyama as separate topics to flow better in line with the eight limbs of yoga. Asanas and pranayama have also separate topics in this version. Samadhi has not been dealt with in this series. At the very end, you will find the guided discussion in a user friendly format which will also be available on the website as a separate download.

Yoga, spiritual life or religion is not coffee table discussion stuff but practice—and all of life is the mat of practice, not just the little prayer area or a room in some building. Swami Sivananda writes, "An ounce of practice is worth more than ten tons of theory".

This is intended as a practical guide, one to read now and practice now as you go along. Theory must give way to practice and practice to experience. Experience shapes understanding and checks habit. The mat of practice involves all of life, not just the sitting area. We must be able to sit inwardly or be steady while we are standing, walking and doing all that we do. This inward sitting is what yoga calls asana, not just an exercise posture.

This inward sitting is something all can and should do as it removes impurities in the mind or habit and paves the way for one's true nature to unfold. This double-sided single action is the purpose of yoga, religion, spirituality: the removal of impurities so one's true nature can be seen. When spirituality enters life, life enters spirituality. Practice diligently.

Swami Suryadevananda
20 December 2012

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RAJA YOGA, A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Raja yoga is a direct way to restore good health to the entire system, understand and transcend all limitations in the mind. In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali lays out the system of raja yoga with eight limbs which is also called ashtanga yoga. It is better to consider them as limbs belonging to one organ and best if practiced together.

Restoration

Any change must start very close—with our attitude towards everything in life. How we see things is what we see. It is here that we must start for any real change, as the triggers of action or the response mechanism lie in our attitude towards people, things and conditions.

To save money, we must have income, avoid unnecessary expenses and have a good savings plan. Similarly, for change, we must avoid all that is counter-productive to overall health—mental and physical.

We struggle with avoiding what is counter-productive in change only because we have not at the same time started functioning in ways that are productive or helpful to our aspiration. When we start functioning in ways that contribute to our aspiration, we turn our back on habit without struggle. When you face the light, the shadow is not seen; when you eat what is healthy, you are avoiding what is unhealthy—there is no struggle because the energy that used to flow in habit is given new direction which you have already embraced.

To wholeheartedly want change is requisite. You cannot sit on the fence and try to renew the old with the new. Change is not a cosmetic inner paint-job—it is making new. The heart has to be new for anything it wishes to renew or there will be endless struggle and pain.

Yama is avoiding the counter-productive and niyama is a positive choice in place of habit. Both of these have to be practiced simultaneously as they are the keys to restoration of good mental and physical health or well-being.

1. YAMA: AVOIDING THE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE

We all want good experiences but often fail to realize that the experiences are not the result of circumstances or conditions but of our actions—mental and physical. Our actions are the result of thought and the triggers of thought are wrong values we hold in our understanding—the heart from where we see things.

For change, we must keep the elements of yama or avoidance right in front of the mind's eye so we are able to make healthier choices instead.

1. Ahimsa: the absence of violence

Ahimsa or the absence of violence comes naturally when you consider none as other or 'our people'. Preference of any kind is unjustified as it results in special treatment to those we consider 'ours' and this results in different treatment to others. The seeds of fear are sown when there is this otherness says sage Yajnavalkya in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad: "Where there is other, there is fear". Fear results in avoidance and frustration, anger and eventually violence result when avoidance is not possible as is often the case.

2. Satyam: honesty in all dealings

Satyam is not only speaking the truth but abidance in truth. Abiding in truth is the expansion of truth within just as the seed abides in the earth and is nourished into a huge tree. We draw from the earth and waters of truth and truth flowers within. One cannot be selective for our selfish convenience—to embrace honesty, we must be honest in all our dealings.

This does not give us the license to be crude and say unkind things as they are uttered without concern for the hurt it may cause others. This is why satyam or truthfulness in all dealings comes after ahimsa or the absence of violence. Before you say something, ask yourself if it will degrade the situation that already exists. If it may, it is better to smile and not disturb things as we must be disturbed first to disturb others or things as they are.

When truthfulness flowers within, we are free from the fetters of worry as there is only one honest and truthful response to any situation in life, and embracing truthfulness is embracing clarity. When there is clarity, there is no need for excessive thought which produces predisposition or conditioning and increases inner limitation.

3. Asteya: avoiding the unnecessary

Asteya is translated as non-stealing or not taking what is not yours. The yogi sees contentment as essential for cultivating asteya or non-stealing. If I lead a simple life, not wrapped up in competing with others or materiality, the urge to appropriate and possess things legally or illegally will just not be there!

When one is caught-up in what is mistakenly called 'quality of life'—there is loss of quality for the one who lives life! When the 'what' becomes important, the 'how' can always be justified. The yogi questions all and any 'what' that arise and sees clearly if any of it is necessary and thus, stays psychologically disentangled from things. We are never caught-up in many things but in 'manyness', which is the passion of the mind.

When you avoid the unnecessary, asteya or non-stealing becomes natural. Contentment is the greatest gain not only monetarily but for peace of mind from the raging fires of passion.

4. Brahmacharya: a life of conservation

Brahmacharya is not just countenance, it is a life of purity or a life lived in the presence of God. Brahmacharya is a life of discipline, not imposed by others or by suppression but by healthier ways that conserve energy and avoid the build-up of passion.

After our education, we begin both our careers and family life. Both these present dual opportunities in regular choices to be made: the pleasant or the good. Pursuit of the pleasant increases passion which compels one towards more, and then asteya or non-appropriation becomes difficult. Choosing the good is the way of selecting just what is necessary and available so as to never fan the fires of passion which blind the inner intelligence in time.

This is why brahmacharya comes after asteya or avoiding the unnecessary. Contentment is the sentry who guards the mind's peace and balance. Brahmacharya or a life of discipline and conservation flows naturally when one is contended with what comes naturally. The yogi realizes that things are not the problem but the wanting is. Wanting of any kind is restlessness and clouds perception and understanding.

Contentment leads to conservation of energy by a lesser demand for energy. Conserved energy is at once available to repair the body and for other functions. A lesser demand for things is a lesser need for thought and there is mental balance as well as conservation of psychic energy, which is very concentrated energy.

5. Aparigraha: the absence of greed

Here again, contentment becomes supremely important. A mind filled with greed or desire to possess is never in balance, always agitated and lacks clarity. The urge to possess does not take into account the needs of others: "I must have..." is felt strongly about things and is self-justified in many ways.

If one lives a life of conservation, greed becomes a non-issue. Without greed or passion, anger has no place. Anger is a response of the mind that is filled with unfulfilled desires—they can even be desires or strong wishes for certain conditions that it feels are important.

When the 'wanting' is disposed of, greed and covetousness becomes a non-issue. Here, we are talking about any and all types of wanting: for people, things or even conditions. There is still dynamic action but it is free of greed or wanting, and therefore, free of fear, disappointment and anger.

We have looked at the yamas, or avoiding the counter-productives. Now, let's look at niyamas, which are positive choices instead.

2. NIYAMA: BETTER OPTIONS INSTEAD

When wisdom is awakened, one makes better choices and chooses the good as a response to every situation in life which naturally increase external and internal purity, health and well-being.

Austerity is both a simple life and a life lived simply—without inner complexity. Contentment naturally brings the avoidance of the unnecessary and the mind is free to pursue the truth. The many practices in yoga are pursuit of truth through different means.

In the quest to know, one confronts one's conditioning or the force of habit and prayer and dynamic self-surrender becomes natural.

1. Saucha: inner and outer cleanliness

Saucha or cleanliness is everything in its right place at the right time. The practice of brahmacharya or a life of conservation requires saucha or total cleanliness in all things.

Fasting is a powerful means to examine, exhaust and get over strong urges by not giving into the urge and instead, facing it squarely to see the urge for what it is. Fasting is not just of the stomach but of the mind too and augments one's will power tremendously by understanding and transcending passion. There are also specific means of increasing physical and mental cleanliness which will be examined later.

2. Santosha: contentment or the absence of passion

We have already looked into contentment as necessary to avoid the force of habit. Contentment is not a state of passivity in life, one is fully engaged in what needs to be done without the action or resulting fruit being the trigger and sustainer of action.

Can we do what needs to be done or necessary without being driven by any personal thought, agenda or result? It is only when we have the clarity and willingness to do 'what needs to be done' that we learn how to separate thought from action. This brings about a significant reduction in thought and energy becomes immediately available for other things.

3. Tapas: external and internal purification

We tend to take very good care of something that belongs to others or something we have borrowed, if we take care of all material things as if they are not ours, we will lessen our attachment to them. Taking care of things we have will also keep them in better condition and lessen desires for newer or better things—increasing contentment.

If we take care of the body and mind as 'not ours', we will be careful in their care. The body will be better taken care of without increasing body-consciousness or attachment to the body—because it ages naturally and because it is not ours.

The practice of pranayama (which we shall discuss later), cleanses the energy pathways of blockages and regulates energy flow.

Similarly, if we take care of the mind carefully, we will not harbor separation, self-centeredness and selfishness—because even though circumstances come and go, effects register on the mind and are very difficult to clean. We will be careful about the company we keep and naturally seek that which promotes overall well-being without any aversion.

On a deeper level, when the inner intelligence watches the mind and directly observes all that goes on outside; existing conditioning starts to exhaust itself. There is a certain amount of residual energy infused into impressions gathered—this is what gives conditioning its strength. We have infused this energy by our careless positive and negative dispositions and the inner intelligence must now engage all that appears within and without for this energy to be diffused. The release of energy is the release of inner tensions which are the hidden springs of action we call conditioning. There is no suppression or manipulation—the uncolored intelligence sees and acts directly, bypassing the promptings of conditioning which weaken by disuse. This psychological burning is also called tapas by Patanjali as this vigilance purifies the mind.

4. Swadhyaya: or self-study

Swadhyaya is not just study of scriptures but self-study through scriptures, teachings and life in general. The seeker is always attentive and 'the mundane' does not exist for him. Life is a flowing, ever-changing, ever-renewing stream. Being a part of life's stream, we are also continually changing and evolving. With the new moving in the new—how can anything be mundane?

When we are not attentive, habit responds to life and what we call 'mundane' is being caught-up in the cycle of habitual perception and response or mechanical living. Swadhyaya, being self-study, requires unbroken observation of the mind and the fire of observation keeps conditioning or habit from perception and action. The inner intelligence sees what is actually in front of it from moment to moment and does what is needed. The energy of conditioning lessens by disuse as the inner intelligence responds to life.

Life, ourselves included, is experienced as ever new—life by its flow of events and ourselves by the inner flow of evolution. Every moment is an opportunity for swadhyaya or self-study in life's study-hall.

Spiritual sadhana or practices such as study of scriptures, japa and kirtan are focused activity of the mind and heart where we learn through practice to do something positive without the

interference of the mind. When we study, we see what is already known interpreting what is being read and learn to read each line afresh. In japa and kirtan, the mind is observed and we discover the way to keep the attention on the mantra or kirtan while witnessing the rise and fall of thought.

5. Ishwar-Pranidhana: or self-surrender

Patanajli uses the term Ishwar-pranidhana, where Ishwar is 'That which Is' or the One Omnipresent Reality called God and pranidhana is a dynamic, whole-souled surrender. Self-surrender is not a cliché or a giving-up but the feeling that guides all action when every cell in one's being feels that the divine omnipresence is the only reality. It is this divine omnipresence Patanjali calls Ishwar or God.

Naturally, if I truly feel God alone Is, every thought, feeling, word and action would testify to this deep feeling. The idea or otherness would not exist and my life would be a living proof of this feeling. All limitations would drop as I would feel I am always in God's presence and self-centeredness would be impossible.

This is why we have Ishwar-pranidhana as the last of the niyamas or better options, not so that it is done last but that we keep whole-souled effort till it is possible. All yamas or avoidances and niyamas or better options instead are designed to shape understanding to this end—where one feels the need for self-surrender through life.

"The 'I' cannot surrender—the 'I' is what has to be surrendered" writes Swami Venkatesananda. Just how to do this? There is no office or form to fill in, no application or clerk or middle-man to speak to. There may never be any feedback at all signifying surrender has happened, and you may never know as 'the you' would not be there to know. When the heart is filled with the feeling of God's omnipresence as the only reality—every action that proceeds from it is testimony to the feeling. Life becomes a stream of opportunity for the heart to express this—not in some emotional song, poem or word but in every blessed thing you do.

Every act is a spiritual act and a different kind of gracefulness floods the heart. Nothing is just tossed away, not even the garbage. One does not tread carelessly, ... one becomes careful in every dealing—whether it be to a human, an insect or a plant. The heart that has been gripped by this feeling cannot hurt others or be selfish, and all the yamas and niyamas become natural to it in their very best form. Each moment is a moment to demonstrate to God and every action the demonstration.

Karma yoga becomes a way of life and bhakti yoga or the way of love becomes the language of the soul. There is unbroken vigilance because one recognizes that the only thing allowed to be called 'ours' is our foolishness and since one is ever in the presence of God—this should not be possible. One's life becomes a living meditation and every act a masterpiece. Life is lived

masterfully and there is order in the mind. Discipline becomes natural and dos and don'ts are not necessary.

These yamas and niyamas are not imposed upon you as rules but suggested by Patanjali as necessary for a life to be lived without conflict. Nothing imposed upon you will be accepted by the heart fully, there will always be selectivity and resistance.

Yoga is an exact science, very beautifully laid out as a prescription for a life without pain or sorrow. The mind that makes this possible can later inquire into itself as it is at perfect peace with things outside and within. The mind must be healed of all tears and division, for pain and sorrow are the results of division.

Let us look at the other limbs of raja yoga next.

3. ASANA

Usually, yoga seems to be associated more with the practice of asanas and pranayama without considering that these are two limbs of yoga and work together with the others.

Asanas and pranayama evolved over time into the system we know as hatha yoga, as a more comprehensive system was felt to be needed not only to keep the body and energy in better condition but as a physical and vital doorway to the discovery of yoga or the unity of things.

The very word yoga implies unity—and discovery of the unity must involve the mind. At first, fragmentation seems to be the experience but all these fragments we call distractions and bubbling thoughts rise and fall in the very same thing—the mind lake. And, there is something that is aware or enables awareness of all this activity.

The practice of hatha yoga seems physical and vital (like breathing) but all activity stems from, is enabled and sustained by the inner intelligence, and it is this intelligence which is beyond personality or ego that the yogi seeks to experience. The physical and mental benefits of hatha yoga are very important but not the most important thing. Without the yoga element, hatha yoga is reduced to a system of exercises—good but not different from other exercises.

The yoga element

Yoga is more concerned with 'being' and not satisfied by merely doing. All doing must enable discovery and transformation of being. Being aware of the activity of the mind is itself disentanglement from thought.

In the practice of yoga asanas, we have an opportunity to discover that it is possible to do something with full awareness and without the interference of thought. This is not to say that asanas are some kind of physical activity that do not require thinking, but to suggest that the inner intelligence is perfectly capable of acting—doing the asana intelligently.

Say you are doing pachimotasana (#7 in the illustrations that follow) where you sit on the floor with your legs outstretched and reach out to hold the toes or feet. Once you begin the asana, you stay fully aware and discover that it is the inner intelligence that does the asana, not you. It tells you how far you can go today and to hold—cautioning you that extending yourself may be unpleasant. This same intelligence within is actively at work within, trying to bring about the flexibility to maintain the posture and to better it. If you are doing the asana intelligently, without trying to get into it like the image you've seen, you will quickly realize when you can extend yourself further and how long you can hold the posture before a signal is sent and received.

Through asana practice, you directly see the intelligence within, which is beyond the ego, at work. This intelligence is not burdened with your hopes, ambition and preference and you see

that all of this is added on by the ego and that there is now a separation between the inner intelligence and the ego. The inner intelligence deals with what actually is—here, the asana you are doing. The ego deals with what it would like, prefer or what it hopes for—that is, thought. The inner intelligence does not respond to thought as it is the ego's creation and sustained by it. The ego dwells and flourishes in its own abyss or in waves of thought.

You quickly learn that by following the inner intelligence, you discover just how long you can stay in the asana and when you can extend further. There is no struggle at all. Struggle is experienced when you 'try' to do it with all your skill, even though the asana seems difficult. The practice of asanas is not about the difficulty of the asana—but about difficulty period. Difficulty is the resistance felt by the interference of the ego with the reality of what actually is or the situation right now.

Through asana, you learn that following the inner intelligence is also self-surrender. The ego gets no play even though you are fully engaged in doing as you are doing intelligently by responding to the inner intelligence instead of the little self or ego. You cannot help but ask yourself why this would not be possible in all the other action in life or life period. Life is a stream of action and response, and if this same inner intelligence is fully empowered, perception and response will flow smoothly.

So, you decide to do an asana and select one, and find that once decided—the inner intelligence works very efficiently and it is what acts. The trapeze artist too learns to trust this same inner intelligence, as there would be no way he or she could consciously adjust the body every moment. They become experts not so much at trapeze but at giving themselves wholly to the inner intelligence. The yogi does not seek expertise in the asana but self-mastery through intelligent asana practice where he directly sees the inner intelligence at work, doing the asana, and learns to follow its lead.

Physical benefits of asana practice

Some of the physical benefits of specific asanas are listed along with the images that follow. These just come; no need to chase after them or be concerned with things like body sculpting. Being fully aware of the inner process is mental sculpting—chiseling away the ego by disuse and using the inner intelligence instead. The physical will just happen, let it come.

Suryanamaskar

Sun Salutations

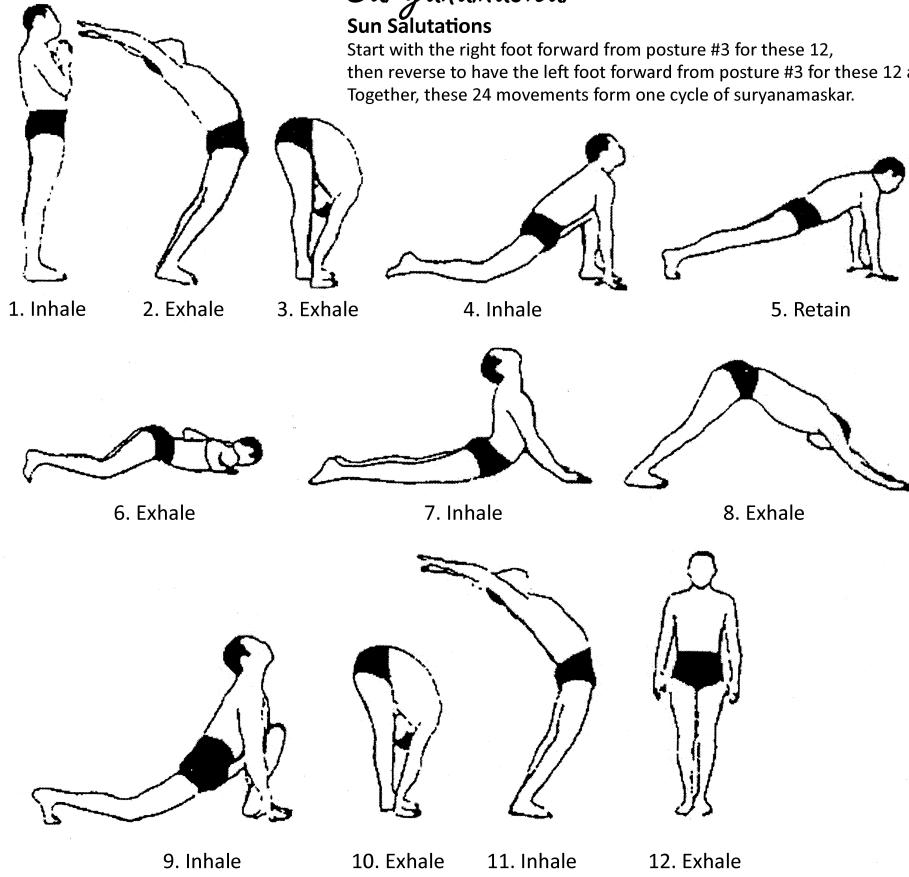
This is a good way to start asana practice and it is seen more as exercise than asana as there is constant vigorous movement. Suryanamaskar or sun salutations will exercise the entire system including the cardiovascular and respiratory system. It does not take any special equipment and can be practiced indoors or outdoors.

Routine: One cycle consists of all 12 movements done in one direction, and then reversed or done in the other direction. Start with 8-10 complete sets (which is all movements with the right leg forward first, followed by all movements with the left leg forward next) and work your way to 20 complete sets.

Suryanamaskar

Sun Salutations

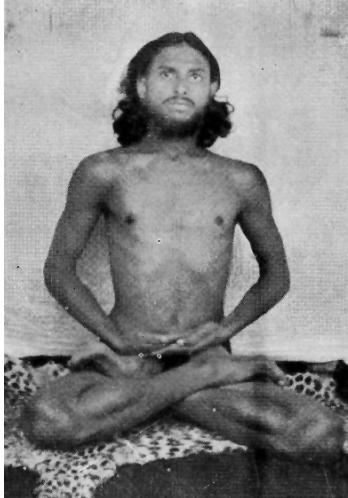
Start with the right foot forward from posture #3 for these 12, then reverse to have the left foot forward from posture #3 for these 12 again. Together, these 24 movements form one cycle of suryanamaskar.



Practice: Start with the right foot forward from posture #3 for these 12, then reverse to have the left foot forward from posture #3 for these 12 again. Together, these 24 movements form one cycle of sun salutations.

BASIC ASANAS

The photos are of Yogi Prem Chaitanya—some 60 years ago. A yogi of high caliber, he was an expert in all facets of yoga. His photos bring out the asana perfectly.



1. Padmasana

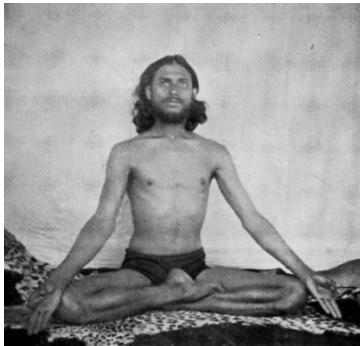
Sit on the floor with your legs stretched forward.

Hold your right foot, bending the leg at the knee and place the right foot on the left thigh.

Similarly, now hold your left foot, bending the leg at the knee and place the left foot on the right thigh.

Keep the body erect and place your hands between the heels in chinmudra.

Time, repetition and utility: As long as possible without moving in japa and meditation. Begin mental japa as soon as you assume the posture; it turns the attention within.



2. Siddhasana

Sit on the floor with your legs stretched forward.

Bend the left leg at the knee and place the heel at the space between the anus and scrotum.

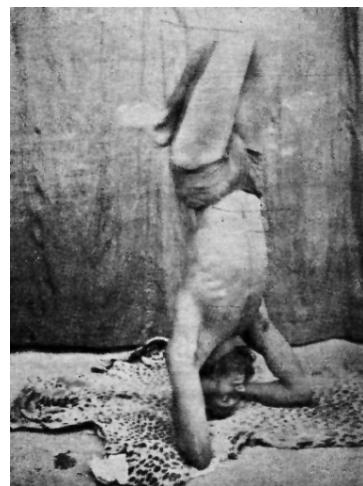
Fold the right leg and place the heel against the pubic bone or just above the genitals.

Keep the body erect and place your hands between the heels in chinmudra.

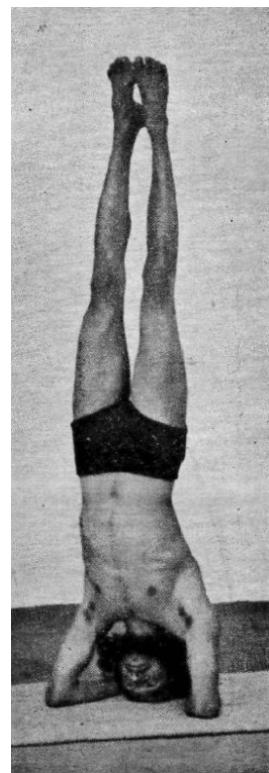
Time, repetition and utility: As long as possible without moving in japa and meditation. Begin mental japa as soon as you assume the posture; it turns the attention within.



Step # 2



Step # 3



Step # 4

3. Sirshasana

Step #1: Sit in vajrasana or on your knees with a folded blanket or soft seat in front of you. Interweave and interlock your fingers and place it on the seat so the arms form a triangle with the locked fingers and forearms. Place the top of your head on the blanket, close to the finger-lock. Raise the body and bring the knees to the chest, toes still touching the ground. (not shown above)

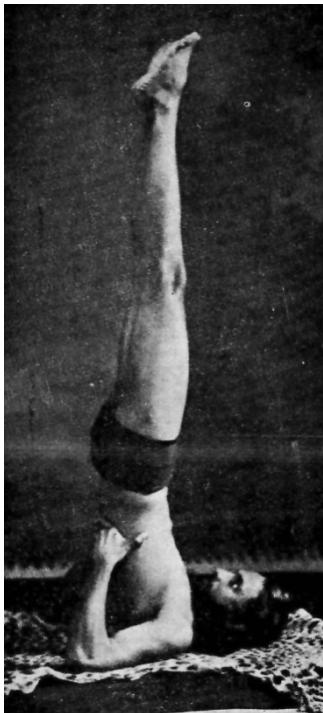
Step #2: Slowly raise the toes from the ground till they can be folded above the thighs.

Step #3: Raise the thighs so the bent legs fall back naturally and the knees are facing up.

Step #4: Straighten the knees so the toes are pointing straight up and the body erect, in one straight line.

Benefits: The king of asanas, sirshasana, has many benefits including improving memory, eyesight, hearing, chronic constipation, preserves vital energy.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 1 minute to 3 minutes, repeat 2 times.



4. Sarvangasana

Lie on your back and slowly raise the legs.

Lift the hips and legs vertically, resting the elbows on the ground firmly to support the back with both hands.

Raise the legs till they are vertical, toes pointing up.

Press the chin against the chest and hold.

Benefits: Excellent overall toner, it massages the thyroid glands, gives spinal flexibility, promotes healthy blood flow, removes constipation and other stomach disorders and rejuvenates the entire system.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 1 minute to 3 minutes, repeat 2 times.



5. Matsyasana

First sit in padmasana and slowly lay backwards till you are lying on your back.

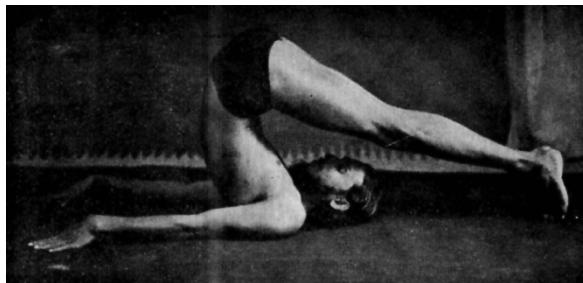
Lift the trunk and head, resting the top of the head on the ground by arching the back.

Catch the toes and hold the position.

Benefits: Relieves neck cramps caused by sarvangasana, strengthens the waist, back and neck, opens the larynx and trachea and fills the lungs with a deep supply of fresh air.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 1 minute to 3 minutes, repeat 2 times.

Note: Should be performed after sarvangasana, especially if you have held it for more than 2 minutes.



6. Halasana

Lie flat on your back, keeping the two hands near the thighs palms down.

Without bending the legs, raise them gradually, keeping the hands on the ground.

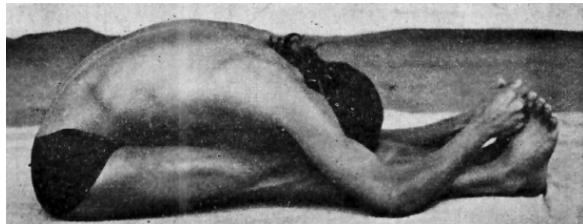
Raise the hips and lower back and bring the toes to the ground just beyond the head.

Keep the knees straight and close together.

With the chin against the chest, breathe slowly through your nose.

Benefits: Stretches the muscles of the back, strengthens the abdominal muscles, pulls on the whole spine giving each vertebrae and ligament plenty of fresh blood supply, tones the spinal nerves and rejuvenates the nervous system.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 1 minute to 3 minutes, repeat 2 times.



7. Pachimotanasana

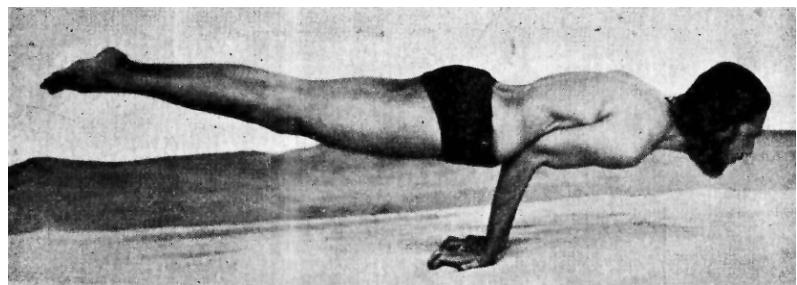
Lie flat on your back with your legs and thighs extended and straight.

Slowly raise your head and chest as if you are rolling forward gradually and bend the trunk forward till you are able to reach and hold onto the toes.

If possible, you can bury your head between your knees.

Benefits: Rouses the gastric fire and makes the breath flow through the sushumna nadi, tones and reduces fat in the abdominal area, tones spleen and liver, increases bowel movements, removes constipation, cures piles, controls diabetes and increases spinal elasticity.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 1 minute to 3 minutes, repeat 2 times.



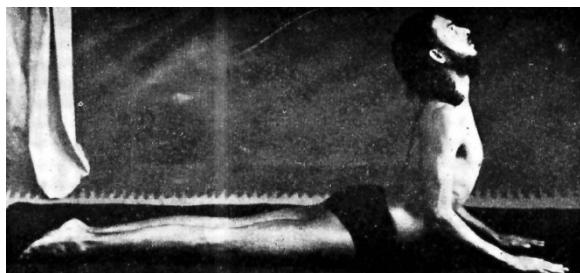
8. Mayurasana

Step #1: Kneel as shown above with arms joined or touching each other, resting on the ground palms down and fingers pointed to the feet. Curving the fingers slightly, will offer better balance. Support the body with the forearms and bring the abdomen slowly down against the joint elbows.

Step #2: Stretch the legs and rest the toes on the ground. Inhale and raise both legs together so they are parallel to the floor and the body is in one straight line from the head to the toes.

Benefits: Restores stomach disorders, tones the liver, pancreas, stomach and kidneys, strengthens the hand muscles and improves balance.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 5 seconds to 30 seconds, repeat 2 times.



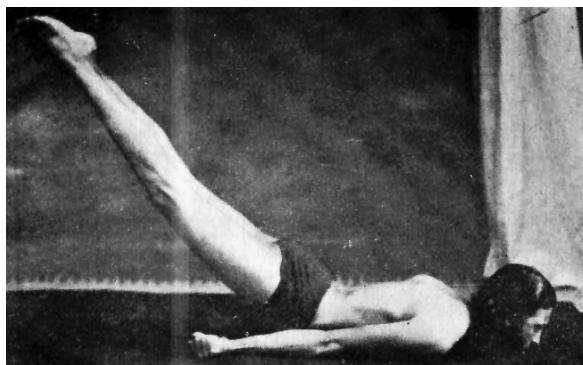
9. Bhujangasana

Lie on the floor face down, completely relaxed, arms stretched out before you, palms flat on the floor.

Raising your head and torso, let the spine bend nicely while the rest of the body, from the waist down, touches the ground.

Benefits: Tones the deep and superficial muscles of the back, relieves back pain due to prolonged sitting and overwork, tones ovaries and the uterus in ladies.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 30 seconds to 1 minute, repeat 2 times.



10. Salabhasana

Lie on the floor face down, completely relaxed with your hands along the body, palms up.

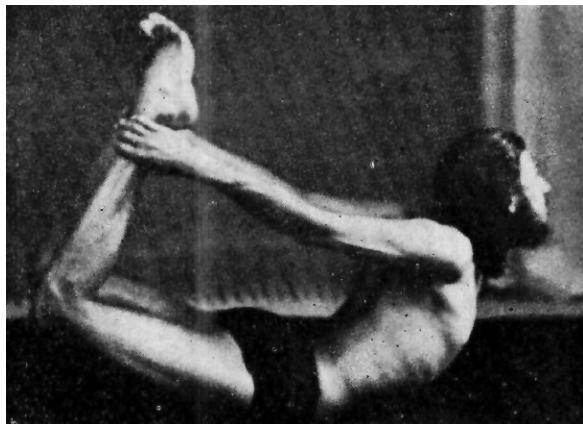
Rest the chin on the ground by raising the head up a little.

Inhale, stiffen the whole body and raise the legs together while keeping the knees together and straight.

Raise the sacrum or lower back a little along with the legs. The weight of the legs will shift to the chest and hands. Hold while keeping the thighs, legs and toes in a straight line.

Benefits: Develops the upper half of the body, tones vertebrae and sacral regions, strengthens all abdominal muscles, relieves constipation and tones the liver, pancreas and kidneys.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 10 seconds to 45 seconds, repeat 2 times.



11. Dhanurasana

Lie on the floor face down, completely relaxed.

Bend the knees to fold the legs over the thighs.

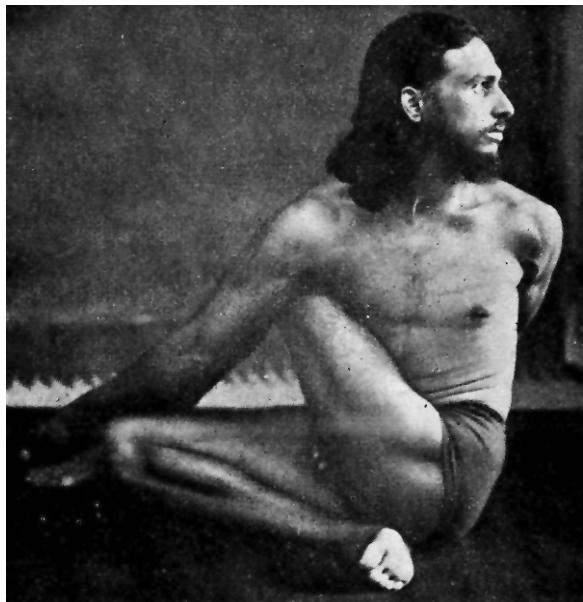
Raise the head and chest and hold the ankles with the hands.

Raise the head, body and knees by pulling the legs. The weight of the body will rest on the abdomen.

Keep the spine nicely arched so it resembles a bow. The arms and forearms should be straight and firm and the knees together.

Benefits: Supplements bhujangasana, massages back muscles, energizes digestion, reduces fat and invigorates appetite.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 30 seconds to 2 minutes, repeat 2 times.



12. Ardhamatsyendrasana

Sit on the floor with your legs stretched forward. Bending the right leg at the knee, set the heel against the perineum.

Bend the left knee and lifting it with your hands, extend the left foot over the right leg and place it on the ground next to the right knee.

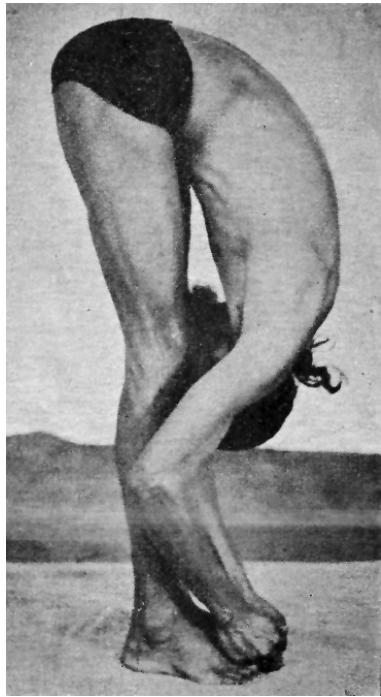
Pass the right hand over the left knee and catch the left foot firmly.

Swing the left hand back and try to hold the left thigh. Give a steady pull to twist the spine and turn towards the left.

Repeat the same process on the right side also.

Benefits: Increases spinal elasticity, massages the abdominal organs and tones spinal nerves.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 1 minute to 2 minutes, repeat 2 times.



13. Padahastasana

Standing upright and inhaling, raise your hands over your head.

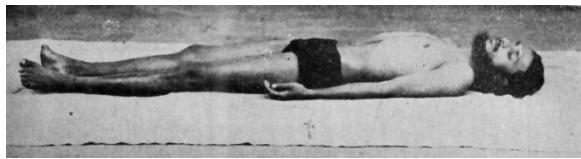
Exhaling, bend forward till the hands touch the toes and the head touches the knees.

Keep the knees straight and unbent and your arms touching the ears all the while.

In time, you will be able to bury the face between the knees and keep your palms flat on the floor.

Benefits: Includes all benefits of pachimotasana, increases height, tones abdomen and overall body, reduces abdomen fat and makes the body lighter.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 1 minute to 2 minutes, repeat 2 times.



14. Savasana

Lie flat on your back with your legs and thighs straight but relaxed.

The heels should be together and toes naturally apart.

Close your eyes and consciously relax the mind and all the muscles of the body. Then, after taking a deep breath and exhaling completely—feel the prana in each part of the body from the toes to the top of the head.

Working one side at a time, start by focusing your attention on the toes, then go on to the calf muscles, knees, and thighs. Now, feel both sides of the lower body relaxing at the same time.

Next, feel the prana in the abdomen, chest, back and buttocks area.

Next, the hands, first working one side at a time from the fingers to the forearms, biceps, and the whole arm. Now, feel both arms relaxing at the same time.

Next, feel the prana in the shoulders, neck, face muscles and the top of the head.

Finally, feel the prana filling the brain with fresh energy and relaxing it completely.

Gently roll from side to side and get up gracefully.

Benefits: Can be done anytime you feel the need for conscious total relaxation.

Time and repetition: Slowly increase the time from 8 minutes to 15 minutes one time.

4. PRANAYAMA

Prana is life-force, the energy that sustains and animates all life. Pranayama is control of prana through regulation of breath. It is prana that animates breath within and makes the winds blow without. It is also this same prana that makes thought rise to the conscious mind. There are not two or more energies but one energy that manifests differently.

Breath is the external manifestation of prana within and the practice of pranayama makes the movement of prana efficient. Efficient movement of prana through breathing exercises is also experienced as efficiency in the mind where the erratic movement of thought is brought to good order.

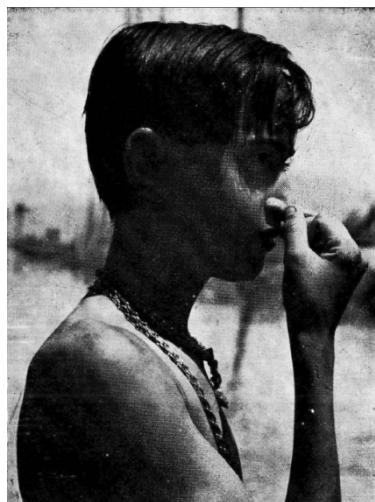
The yoga element basics apply here as well in full measure. Once you begin the practice, you notice that many adjustments take place within; retention becomes longer as does exhalation. People generally breath shallow and inhale longer than exhaling. This increases the residual carbon dioxide build-up which makes one feel tired and spent. Once you set about pranayama practice, you will notice the intelligence within restoring the body through prana or life-force which flows through the movement of breath. Here again we find a way to give ourselves to this inner intelligence by not cooperating with the ego which will prompt you to retain for a shorter time and gasp for breath more quickly. This does not mean that you push the envelope and breathe aggressively but recognize the false cry of the ego by seeing that it is possible to retain just a little longer and breathe out a little more fully by seeing directly that it can be done. There is no pressure or violence, the inner intelligence simply assures you that it is possible.

Long distance runners know this secret too well—that it is the mind that runs through the body and what is referred to as 'second wind' is what happens when the inner intelligence starts running, bypassing the little ego that would rather be... .

Pranayama must be done very intelligently, just like asana practice as the inner intelligence is awakened and empowered and this inner intelligence—aside from being very efficient—knows how to do what needs to be done, while at the same time rejuvenating the entire system. Efficiency is not just in the doing but in doing without loss and with replenishment. This, the ego just does not know.

There are different types of pranayama but here, we shall be concerned with just one simple pranayama—Swami Sivananda's 'Sukha Purvak Pranayama'. Quite similar to the alternate nostril breathing pranayama, this version does not use time as a measure for inhalation, retention or exhalation but asks that you try to pay attention to retention and exhalation in retaining them for as long as is—with the emphasis on 'as long as...'. This simple pranayama done with full awareness and heart will teach you many things about what is possible while

restoring overall health and well-being and costing nothing at all. There are many other types of pranayama and cleansing techniques in the yoga system that you can use as needed.



(A young boy practicing pranayama)

Sukh Purvak Pranayama

Sit comfortably in padmasana with eyes closed.

Close the right nostril with the right thumb and breath in very slowly through the left nostril.

Keeping the right thumb over the right nostril, close the left nostril with the last three fingers of the same hand and retain the breath 'as long as' you comfortably can.

Releasing the thumb from the right nostril, gently release the breath through it.

Reverse the cycle by first closing the left nostril with the last three fingers of the right hand and breathing in through the left nostril.

Close the right nostril with the right thumb of the same hand and retain the breath 'as long as' you comfortably can.

Release the last three fingers from the left nostril and release the breath through it.

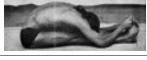
Alternating the cycle is one pranayama.

Benefits: All of what we have discussed in the yoga element with asanas apply to pranayama as well. Physically, the body becomes healthier as deeper breathing dispels residual carbon dioxide and one feels increased energy levels. The increased supply of fresh oxygen results in better repair and maintenance and digestion and sleep improve significantly. Mentally, regulation of prana significantly reduces lethargy and restlessness of the mind or tamas and rajas. The mind is in a better state for concentration and meditation.

Time and repetition: Start with 10 pranayama cycles and gradually increase the number to 20 cycles and practice twice a day, in the morning and evening.

PRACTICE CHART

Padmasana and siddhasana are mainly for japa and meditation. Recommend sitting in them while sitting in your normal activities at home to increase flexibility. Sitting in vajrasana for about 10-15 minutes after your meal helps digestion.

		From time	To time	Times
Suryanamaskar		8-10 cycles	20 cycles	
(More a well-rounded system of exercise, it is recommended before the asana routine)				
	Sirshasana (You can go longer if inclined)	1 minute	3 minutes	2
	Sarvangasana (You can go longer if inclined)	1 minutes	3 minutes	2
	Matsyasana	1 minutes	3 minutes	2
	Halasana	1 minutes	3 minutes	2
	Pachimotanasana	1 minutes	3 minutes	2
	Mayurasana	5 seconds	30 seconds	2
	Bhujangasana	30 seconds	1 minute	2
	Salabhasana	10 seconds	45 seconds	2
	Dhanurasana	30 seconds	2 minutes	2
	Ardhamatsyendrasana	1 minute	2 minutes	2
	Padahastasana	1 minute	2 minutes	2
	Savasana	1 complete relaxation		
Pranayama		10 cycles	20 cycles	

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5. PRATYAHARA

So far, so near

So far, we have looked briefly into four of the eight limbs of yoga. Let us refresh the mind with some of what we have looked into and keep it near, rather than far.

Yama is the intelligent avoidance of all that is not conducive to aspiration—and niyama, its counterpart, is better choices in place of habit. These are very different from virtues as they are means to expand consciousness from individual or self-centered living to a broader, more universal way of living. The mind is gradually purified as we learn to act or respond to life based on what actually is instead of being rooted on self-centeredness.

Through asana one brings firmness to the posture and mind and at the same time, removes the lethargy of the body and mind as well. All through asana practice one discovers the presence of chit-shakti or intelligence-energy that sustains this body very well without any need for the ego-personality. Pranayama is its counterpart, and through regulation of prana (life-force) it removes tossing of the mind. Asana and pranayama thus bring stability and fixity to the body and mind and at the same time, give insight into chit-shakti which sustains the body.

These four limbs bring us to the fifth—pratyahara, which is usually translated as abstraction from objects. Let us try to understand pratyahara in a broader way and for this, let us use the word object for all things external including people, conditions and things to make it easier.

The need or benefit for pratyahara

We do not usually associate with objects (and I'm using this in the widest sense of externality to include people, conditions and things) but with our ideas of them. So, there is an idea of the object and there is a tendency based on that idea—both these in the space of the one mind. Say I eat an apple for the first time and find that it is very juicy and sweet—these qualities get associated with the apple in my mind indistinguishably. Now, I find this to be very tasty and have a feeling to repeat the experience of juicy and sweet for which I must naturally have the apple.

Already, the apple becomes secondary to the 'very juicy, sweet and tasty' qualities which I have superimposed on the apple. This does not mean that apples are not 'juicy, sweet and tasty' but all apples are not this way—some apples are tart. So, when we eat a tart apple, we find it to be not quite as tasty, as the sweetness we expected is not experienced. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a slightly tart apple, it is delicious in its own way but ... not what we expected. The object does not correspond to the *idea* of the object and so the experience is not as good. The

fault is never in the object but in the collision of the object—what actually is and as it is—with our ideas, hopes and expectations.

Self-control to sense-control

All our problems are because of this inner collision of ideas, hopes and expectations with reality or things as they are. In pratyahara, the entire mind is included into the field of observation along with objects or all things external. This fire of observation keeps existing concepts from interfering with perception or seeing things as they are and action, or our response, without standing outside all things.

Direct perception is the flow of attention to what actually is and this is also called dharana or concentration where the rays of the mind flow unimpeded or unscattered to *what actually is* and we will look into this more deeply a little later. Pratyahara is abstraction which results when there is a fire of observation which ignites dharana or concentration to see *what is*, while pratyahara includes the mind into the field of observation and this keeps *what is not*, out—ideas, hopes and expectation or concepts from interfering with perception and response.

The mind becomes calm

When you realize that it is not only possible but better to let the inner intelligence directly see and respond to situations, the mind—which is not at all efficient as it is heavily laden with so many hopes and desires—is unburdened. The energy that was all along being expended to try and fulfill our hopes and desires was being done to bring about satisfaction and peace, and one sees that this comes not by trying to make the outer world correspond to the inner world but in *adjusting the inner world* to what actually is and as it happens.

Pratyahara is in this way the release of the load of desires, hopes and expectations and also results in the emptying of the mind of all these hidden triggers of action. Static memory happens automatically and this just comprises images, names or data—and this is very useful as it helps recalling information without interfering with the object, as such. Dynamic memory however is purely subjective, and its energy is called rajas or passion which gets infused as it were into the object itself, making it difficult to see things as they are.

When the entire activity of the mind is included in the field of perception, things are seen as they are without adulteration or interference of conditioning, and rajas or blind passion is gradually thinned by disuse. When the inner intelligence is used, existing notions, concepts and ideas are starved of their energy—and static memory or images and names, which help in distinguishing one from the other, alone remain.

The calm and peace that results as the scattered rays of the mind once again return give rise to a sense of inner fullness and completeness. Renunciation of desires is no loss—it is at once peace and gain only. Objects will still be there and can be enjoyed as they come naturally, but the torment of hope that craves for the outer to correspond with the inner is abandoned. When desires are abandoned, one enjoys all things better—contrary to the notion that fulfillment of desires is satisfaction, as it is desire that is a wanting that does not satisfy even during appeasement.

Pratyahara and dharana go together just as the earlier pairs of limbs of yoga we have covered. There must be dharana or direct perception of things as they are and at the same time, the mind must be included in the observation. Pratyahara or abstraction makes sure that the senses do not associate with objects wrongly, based on existing notions in the mind that have nothing at all to do with things as they are. The mind thus gets purified of its dross—the conditioning it has carried for so long, and it now becomes stable and fit for concentration and meditation to follow. A mind filled with hopes, desires and expectations is not fit for concentration or meditation.

Bringing about pratyahara

Before going any further, it is important to realize that pratyahara or any step in yoga is not a technique, though it may involve technique or practice. It is not possible to be the same old person with the same old mind that functions in the same old way and hope that yoga will bring about improved experiences—don't delude yourself in this.

Yoga calls for a radical transformation by living in a different way that requires and results in a new person—renewed by returning to the natural state. For this, *we must see all things as they are*, ourselves included, and respond to situations by doing what needs to be done and not what we would like to do or what would please us or 'our people'. If there is no enthusiastic willingness to let go of limitation—the gates to wider expanses will stay closed by our own choice.

To bring about pratyahara, one must first see the futility and absurdness of all limitation, not selective limitation, and be passionate about change as much as one submerged underwater is passionate about surfacing to breathe—but our great desire to change without any desperation at all.

Pratyahara in japa practice

Japa is repetition of a mantra or name of God and is the best way to begin understanding and changing the inner mechanism. I have covered this in an earlier writing so let's look at how japa can help in pratyahara or abstraction.

When you repeat and listen to the mantra mentally, you soon experience the rise of other thoughts we call distraction. Almost immediately, one is either distracted by identifying with the thoughts or one experiences dissatisfaction by the presence of 'these other thoughts' which one had hoped not to experience.

Both the rise of another thought and the feeling about that rising thought are taking place in the same mind and you are aware of both. Continue repeating and listening to the mantra within you, seeing the rise and fall of both distractions and feelings about distractions as well in the same mind and you will understand that you are quite different from even these feelings, which have a big hand in throwing up the distractions. The direct observation and understanding of this will bring great peace and melt into concentration and meditation.

Pratyahara in life

Yoga practices are not relegated to the mat or prayer area—they must enter life. When yoga enters life, life enters yoga. The understanding by your *direct awareness* must enter all of life and relationships. You must be able to see things as they are and respond to what needs to be done without the interference of thought or conditioning.

There is no suppression or any such thing in avoiding thought—just a choice to use the intelligence which is beyond thought and always awake and ready. Thought has gained far too much importance in our lives by excessive reliance—it will regain its place as a function of awareness or consciousness by using awareness or consciousness itself.

Just as you are fresh in attention to the mantra each time, you have to be inwardly fresh to each and every situation as it happens and once it is over—let it go, don't continue juggling with it mentally or you will increase conditioning. There should not be any struggle in this, as once a situation is over, another is right in its place and it should have your full attention—even if it be sweeping the floor.

Practice on the mat and in life

If you practice japa diligently, with heart, mind, body and non-mechanically—you will discover you are quite different from these images and feelings towards them or conditioning and how to continue doing what needs to be done without getting mixed-up with them. Practice on the mat will sharpen the ability to function in a healthier way amidst all the stimulus of life. Being able to see things as they are and doing what needs to be done will sever the reliance on thought or existing conditioning; and not dwelling on it mentally once the action is over will prevent the build-up of new conditioning.

Thus, practice on the mat will sharpen the ability to respond to life better and life lived expertly will deepen your practice. Both these avenues will feed on each other and purify the mind of the heavy load it has carried for too long. Your health and energy levels will improve very significantly, as energy wasted earlier is returned to the body for repair and other functions.

The qualifications of the seeker

The first five limbs of the yoga system are the qualifications of the seeker, and ignoring or taking any lightly will create a soft-spot or vulnerability. These five limbs of yoga—yama, niyama, asana, pranayama and pratyahara—correspond to the fourfold qualifications of the seeker of jnana yoga or sadhana chatushtaya.

1. Viveka: proper discernment between the unreal and the real.
2. Vairagya: absence of passion
3. Shadsampat: the six virtues which include
 - Sama: tranquility
 - Dama: intelligent control of the organs of sense and action
 - Uparati: movement from self-centeredness to universality (pratyahara here)
 - Titiksha: fortitude and power of endurance
 - Shraddha: unmistakable faith in God
 - Samadhana: one-pointedness of mind.
4. Mumukshutva: intense yearning for liberation from samsara, the never ending cycle of birth, existence and death.

Before moving on to dharana

The sincere seeker must give up all ideas of separation which manifest in the feelings of 'I' and 'mine' and then burst forth into 'you' and 'yours'; 'this' and 'that' and so on. This is the loom on which the fabric of conditioning weaves itself and all resulting limitation is therefore self-sought and self-imposed. You alone can dismantle and abandon this machinery, and though it is a very difficult task—it is not one that will daunt the sincere seeker.

6. DHARANA

Pratyahara is conservation of psychic energy and one gets mental strength, inner peace and a healthy inner life. Dharana or concentration is a steady flow of attention in one direction, object or idea.

The practice of dharana increases inner strength by reducing distractedness and increased efficiency from perception to action. The depth of dharana or concentration increases sattva or inner clarity and balance.

Beginning the practice

In the beginning, it is good to fix the mind on something external like a picture of one's deity, a candle flame, a rose or anything that you feel will hold your interest and awareness. It is good not to change the object of meditation, though you may experiment a little initially. The important point is that you must be very interested in the object or else the rise of distractions which you are interested in will carry away your attention. The object of meditation becomes a target to steady the flow of attention and the mind's habit to scatter thoughts lessens.

Some prefer to concentrate on something abstract from the start instead of something tangible and feel best to concentrate with their eyes closed. There is nothing wrong with this except the choice must be because you feel you can do this and not as a bold, ambitious move. You can always start with something tangible and then shift to the abstract by abstract ideas associated with the picture and concentrate with your eyes closed. Proceed slowly but with firm steps and you will lay a good foundation for meditation. Missed steps will demand a return to the basics, and backtracking in practice is not a good way to tread. Proceed in concentration with firm footing and understanding and soon you will know when you are able to concentrate on subtler objects and themes.

The practice of concentration

Make sure that neither cell phones, land-line phones or other devices enter the room if you wish to practice; otherwise, this is not for you.

Sit in any cross-legged position with or without a cushion, however you feel comfortable. If you cannot sit cross-legged, sit on a chair, keeping your back straight and feet uncrossed, flat on the floor. Use a timer for the duration you select—it is good to start with 12-15 minutes as it takes a little time to get settled in initially.

The object of concentration should be at eye level so the neck can be kept straight without tilting. Gaze at the object of concentration and let your attention form a steady link in its flow to the object.

Become aware of every detail in the object while watching within also, as thoughts about it will try to interfere and color the perception or assessment. Take an interest in discovery by observation but without allowing a concept to form about it. This is possible if you continue to observe keenly.

More and more detail will become observable and the mind will get saturated by the object. You will be able to close your eyes momentarily and not lose the flow of attention as the object will be seen within quite clearly.

Try to keep the eyes open for as long as possible, initially; the eyes will start watering anywhere from the 6-8 minute mark. Let them close gently a little before and continue to concentrate on the object within. As the image within starts losing clarity, open the eyes and there should be seamless observation where you do not feel the outside or inside as being any different.

The mind will try to connect observation with all kinds of thoughts; be steady and feel that with every breath, you are observing afresh. Let the thoughts rise and they will fall on their own accord. You will discover a great secret—if you leave these other thoughts and feelings about them as well alone, they will leave you alone too. They just come and go and do no harm.

The important thing is to not break the ray of attention on the object of meditation till the timer sounds. Say some prayers and leave the area gracefully.

Understanding distractions

We have already discussed a little of this earlier under pratyahara but let's relook at some important points. During concentration, other thoughts will rise in the mind and almost instantly, an urge will be felt to think about them, to dwell on them or participate in the thoughts. *This is a very important point*—you must be aware of the rise of other thoughts and of the urge to think of them. Often, we see the other thought rise but we are not aware of the urge to think on that thought and when the urge rises, we get swept away, getting ourselves mixed up with the urge. The image or thought is static memory and harmless. Often, it is used as an avenue for the strong feeling or dynamic memory which craves repetition. Examples of this are experienced in our daily life: if you are angry with someone, the anger may vent on others though they have nothing to do with why you are angry.

Going beyond distractions

As we have noted, we are concentrating on the object of meditation, and both the other thought and the surging urge to dwell on it are not us but something rising in us like waves in an ocean. The urge may still hold the image for a short while but will fall fast, as the urge and

image or other thought exhaust each other by lack of fresh energy by you not identifying being with them.

The interest you take in the object of meditation will raise the quality of the flow of attention towards it and make the urge a little more distinguishable. It is here many seekers struggle, as the mind wants to flow towards what they call 'distractions' which are just other thoughts of interest that seem a little more interesting than their object of concentration.

The rise and fall of other thoughts or what we call distraction is not the problem, neither is the urge to dwell on them—but to slip in attention, get mixed-up with the urge and start expanding the thought is distraction. When you are distracted, you shift from the tract intended to another tract—never having become aware. As long as you feel you are *doing* something in concentrating, you are susceptible to this dislodging. If you feel it is not just something you are doing but looking directly within which is 'being'—you will hold steadier, as being is not just existence, it is also *awareness of existence* at the same time. Doing need not always be connected with being, but being is capable of doing as part of being itself. When a mother sees her child in some danger, it is not her physical frame that responds but being, the very existence in her sees a danger that must be addressed, and all of her rises into action.

I'm discussing this here because with dharana, we are entering the inner court of yoga (there are some different opinions about the what constitutes the inner court). The first five limbs also have their inner elements but work on the developing the seeker for this inner adventure—which is an act of *being*, and this *beingness* does what is needed. The ego cannot do yoga.

Single action of pratyahara and dharana

Pratyahara arouses and awakens the inner intelligence, as the mind is brought into the field of observation along with 'things outside'. The direct observation of the mind is abstraction or withdrawal from concepts, ideas, habit or conditioning. The same intelligence also directly perceives what is outside and this flow of attention is called dharana or concentration.

Interruption or distraction is not the rise and fall of other thoughts or urges, but an interruption or shift in your own attention—from what you intend to observe to something else due to inability to concentrate. When the inner intelligence watches the mind or within and at the same time flows uninterruptedly towards the object of attention or outside, there is a single movement of pratyahara and dharana or abstraction and concentration.

Benefits of pratyahara and dharana

Meditation will come naturally to one who practices concentration. A distracted mind is a breeding ground for all kinds of physical and mental illnesses. A concentrated mind will

manifest itself in good physical health, abundant energy and will never cause worry, suspicion or be anxious, as it will extend its best effort when any situation presents itself. One becomes very efficient in all things and has high output as wastage of all sorts is eliminated. Newer skills will be learnt more easily as the concentrated mind does not have inner resistance. The most difficult and trying of situations will be handled with calm, equipoise and finesse and one will walk lightly where others tread heavily.

Some practical hints

Do one thing at one time and do it with full concentration and heart. Once done, don't continue to dwell on it—done means done mentally too.

All action has equal value, nothing is secular or mundane, as actions are a mirror in which we see our motives and have an opportunity to do what needs to be done best, as part of the situation itself, without trying to stand outside things with a personal motive.

Yama and niyama lay the foundation for a healthy arrangement with people, things and conditions outside as well as within, in the inner world. It brings order to the mind and this ordered mind can start building positively.

Asana and pranayama not only purify the body and energy pathways, they renew healthy connections in the subtle pathways and increase the psychic energy which will be needed for pratyahara and dharana to follow.

The base of the first four will eliminate any soft-spots or areas one is most likely to fall. It does not mean that one should not or cannot practice concentration from the beginning, but that the fundamentals should not be brushed over casually and over-confidently.

To increase sattva or clarity and balance, one has to decrease tamas and rajas. The practice of asanas and pranayama will help but only if one consciously thins desires and passions that will always ignite the embers of rajas. Practicing asana and pranayama and still living a life filled with desires, hopes and expectations is like walking far each day to get water with a bucket full of holes.

Be wise and know where to start, proceed gradually but with sure footing and you will not have to backtrack. Backtracking in all ways and regrets of all sorts are two serious obstacles for the seeker that must be avoided.

These first six limbs of yoga seem difficult and perhaps even boring at first because we are always used to doing something to in order to get something good, pleasant and better. If you approach yoga with this attitude, you will find it quite unappetizing, unpleasant and even distasteful or painful. Yoga is a journey that seeks to know the truth at every stage. In the initial

stages, you will see the truth about your own self, the condition of your mind and the force of habit, and this may not be pleasant if you came in order to feel good. If however you came to yoga to know the truth, to see your mind, inner world and feelings as they are—however turbulent—will be a good thing, as you know what needs to be done next. A seeker of truth must embrace the truth from the very beginning in his or her heart—and if this has been done, one will never have regrets or any use for a rear-view mirror. One will march forward boldly and confidently but gently, with humility.

Next, we look at meditation where we will spend quite some time and study a few series of writings, notes and more. The mat or field of practice includes all life. Be diligent in your practice.

7. DHYANA OR MEDITATION

Meditation is learnt while meditating. The teachings on meditation help in the approach and throw some light on dealing with obstacles as looking within does not involve our normal ways of perception and understanding. We will cover one method or approach to meditation here which involves the use of a mantra.

In this series

First, let's focus on understanding by looking into some of the principles and a little theory but quickly get into practice as well. Getting into practice right along with theory will reduce concepts from forming and give rise to pertinent questions that need further clarification.

Next, let's build on the first and go through three guided meditations with the focus on practice. Here, we will meditate, using the theory from the first as a framework for looking within.

In the next series

Lastly, in a separate series titled, 'Living Meditation', let's build on the practices discussed here and try to throw some light on dealing with distractions and obstacles.

Naturally, this means there will be redundancy and overlap but these may be quite useful in going from understanding to experience.

UNDERSTANDING

The objective and approach

It seems contradictory to use terms like 'objective' and 'approach' in yoga as yoga is the discovery of the existing unity or the subject in all things—experiencing itself as itself. But, we have to use the words of language which are based on subject-object relationships. Dissecting any writing is an easy task but does not accomplish anything as the words are never the substance indicated. I hope we can together look at what these words *point to* instead of stopping at the words used.

The objective of yoga, and meditation in particular, is direct perception of one's true nature. For this, thought and the thinker of thought (or the ego), have to be included in the field of observation. You may feel that you are the thinker of thought, but most of the time thought is thinking itself and consciousness or being identifies with it as it reflects what and how we have felt or may still feel.

For ease of understanding, let us consider meditation in three steps:

1. Stabilization: by looking within, we realize our distinctness from thought and can continue in practice and life without getting mixed up in rising and falling thoughts.
2. Mastery of Mind: we begin inquiry into the mantra to understand its content by direct experience. Understanding one thought is understanding all thought and the mind.
3. Self-Inquiry: the inner intelligence which has inquired into and thoroughly comprehended thought, is turned on itself in direct self-inquiry.

Let us begin with stabilization, which is thinning the oscillation of the mind, or bringing order to the mind.

1. Stabilization

We are distinct from thought, as we are aware of it. Thought is habit, and identifying with thought is also a habit. Each time we identify with thought, it strengthens its hold on consciousness.

Yoga, and meditation in particular, seeks to discover being and just who we are by direct observation. What is called practice is only because, for whatever reason, we were not able to experience a full experience or quest of self-knowledge.

Practice is not disconnected from life or its objective; neither is it a preliminary step or a series of steps. Everything you do must be done *consciously*, as every moment is an opportunity to discover the truth of who we are and the true nature of things—and hence, every action is practice.

In the early stages of meditation, we first learn how to look within, to be aware of the rise and fall of thought, and our distinctness from thought. We realize that we are distinct from thought by *this* direct observation. We then find a way to rest in this realization and continue meditation without the interference of thought. What we call distractions are other thoughts that rise and fall on their own if not interfered or identified with—without *any* suppression at all. Old thoughts still have residual energy, or energy infused in them, by our earlier likes and dislikes. They have gained strength by constant use and will exhaust themselves *on their own* by disuse.

When the inner intelligence sees *what actually is*, without the interference of thought, it is direct perception. Existing conditioning weakens by disuse. When the same inner intelligence does what needs to be done—without what I want to do—it is direct action. Empowering the inner intelligence enables one to live without accumulating *any* new conditioning. In

meditation, we discover how to see what *actually is*, and to be able to continue meditating without getting mixed up in thought. This stabilizes, or restores, the natural relationship between consciousness and thought.

Having found a way to perceive and act without the interference of thought on the mat, you must continue to do so in life. A good portion of the day is spent in relationships and activity, and we must learn to interact and act, doing what needs to be done, without the interference of thought, habit, or preference. This challenge awakens the inner intelligence, as all thought must now be observed. If one's day and all its activity has the background of *living meditation*, what is generally known as seated meditation will come about without struggle. If, however, one's day is without living meditation, or ongoing vigilance, attempts to meditate in the quiet of the room will be a struggle at best.

Let us meditate. Sit in any cross-legged posture. The use of a cushion will raise the buttocks and remove the strain from the knees and hips while bringing about flexibility gradually. It is important to keep the back and neck straight and the head facing forward naturally, without bending down. If you cannot sit cross-legged on the floor, sit on a chair, but keep your legs uncrossed to preclude the urge to switch the legs over; and keep the feet flat on the floor with your back straight.

Light a candle or incense in your prayer area and offer some prayers from the heart. Set the timer for 15 to 18 minutes and close your eyes when you recite the mantra 'Om' three times. With each 'Om', feel that you have let go of all concerns: social and family, work and profession, and all personal as well as spiritual concerns. You should not have any expectation from meditation itself while still meditating with all being.

A quick note: in the steps that follow, pause briefly during each of the 'become aware of, or realize' that are mentioned, to make *sure* that you have actual awareness or realization before moving on to the next. Let us begin. Become aware, or realize, that you are seated for meditation. Becoming aware does not involve thought. To realize is to *make real* by direct knowledge. Meditation is sustained by direct experience. Your attention will come to the activity of meditation.

Become aware of the space you are seated in. The attention will now tighten from the activity to the room or general space you are seated in. Become aware of the footprint of the body. This is the space your body has in contact with the floor, or the floor and chair. Now, the attention will narrow from the general space to the precise footprint of your body, and you should be able to feel this footprint at one stroke.

Internalizing awareness. Become aware of the act of breathing. The awareness now shifts from the footprint of the body to within, and starts to investigate the breathing. It will dovetail or follow the breathing through its inhalation and exhalation. If your attention is keen, you will feel the warmth and humidity of your breath.

Now, introduce the mantra to the rhythm of your breathing, repeating it mentally once while inhaling and once while exhaling. You can choose any ishta-mantra or the shorter mantras like 'Om Namah Shivaya' or 'Om Namo Narayanaya' as per your preference, but do not change your mantra once chosen. If you have a personal deity, it is good to select the ishta-mantra of that deity. Do not alter your breathing. Instead, stretch the mantra so that it aligns to the natural rhythm of your breathing. In the initial stages, the mantra helps by stabilizing the relationship between thought and consciousness.

Now, introduce the image of your chosen deity, or any other object—such as flowers or a candle flame—in the center of your chest. This is recommended, as a visual image will aid stability. The attention is on repeating the mantra and listening to the mantra mentally. The image held within will substantially reduce visual distractions. If you feel that you can carry on with just repeating and listening to the mantra, feel free to do so, but progress is better if you can hold an image within you.

Tratak, or gazing, is an auxiliary practice. If you have trouble or difficulty holding the image, practice some tratak or gazing separately. This involves staring at the image selected for about 6-8 minutes each sitting, or till the eyes get slightly watery. This will accelerate the power of concentration by gathering the rays of the mind into single focus.

Soon, other thoughts will rise and you will be aware of them, naturally. Let them rise, as they do, and fall as they do, as well. Your attention is on repeating and listening to the mantra mentally, and the mantra will start getting more clearly audible if you are repeating it clearly. Just as the inner intelligence investigated your breathing by following it in and out, it will start to investigate the mantra to know what it is made of, and where it is being heard within you.

It is important not to create any space in terms of, 'I am the intelligence here' and 'the mantra is repeating over there someplace.'—and there is no spatial separation within where all this is taking place. All this is happening within the indivisible mind and you have to awaken the inner intelligence which is not localized, but present in every cell of your being. Thought requires subject and object—or space—and, hence, there is movement. Direct awareness does not have spatial separation and, hence, does not involve movement. And, therefore, one should be completely relaxed and free of any inner stress.

When the timer goes off, repeat the mantra 'Om' three times and gently open your eyes. It is good to say some prayers immediately following meditation. Sit for a while before getting up, and leave the area gracefully.

Stay at this step till you feel you can continue without being distracted for the most part. Do not see these steps as milestones of achievement, as that is the domain of the ego. Be slow, but walk with careful strides and you will attain some level of mastery in every sitting! Sincere interest in the object of meditation—the mantra here—will keep the attention fresh and this will offset other thoughts and distractions. The rise and fall of distractions is not the problem, being distracted *is*.

We have covered one auxiliary practice earlier—trataka, or gazing—to help concentration. Here is a good exercise to sharpen the attention, which can be done separately. Sit just as you did with the earlier steps till you bring your attention to the act of breathing. Follow the inhalation and try to pinpoint the moment—and, if possible, the location—where inhalation *itself* turns to exhalation. You can use a verbal 'Now in, in, in, in...' till you detect some change, and then reverse it to 'Now out, out, out, out...' to pin down the time and location of change. This is a very beneficial exercise, and I recommend it twice daily.

2. Mastery of Mind

So far we have covered the first step, which involves stabilization, or balance, between thought and consciousness. This is done to reduce the oscillation of the mind so inquiry can begin. Here begins the second part which leads to mastery of the mind. When you have been able to continue with your session so far—without being distracted for the most part—you should flow into the second step. Let us now continue where we left off.

Your attention has been steady on repeating and listening to the mantra mentally within you. Now, the inquiry of 'what?'. Let the string of inquiry rise *just once* when the attention is steady. 'What is this mantra? What is it made of? And where is it being heard in me?' You must know the actual content of the mantra—just what the mantra is made of by direct experience. In other words, the inner intelligence has to contact the mantra—touch the mantra being repeated mentally. The inner intelligence has to contact thought—*directly*. Intellectually, you may know that the mantra is made of thought. But wipe that out of your mind—and challenge the inner intelligence to know by *direct* experience.

This is the center-point and pivot in meditation. It is here that the seeker faces the subject/object tangle, which he or she must overcome. So far, we have not used thought, but we have introduced now *one string* of thought to direct the inner intelligence to inquire into the mantra *directly*. Do not keep repeating the question, thinking it will aid your inquiry. It will

not. On the contrary, the ego will start intellectual gymnastics and give you all kinds of fantastic exists off the highway of inquiry. Sit still, and let your full attention be on articulating, and hearing, the sound of the mantra—clearly each time. Interest is key to awakening the intelligence and inquiry. Becoming simultaneously aware of the precise moment and rise of other thoughts without losing the attention on the sound of the mantra will further sharpen the intelligence.

When the inner intelligence contacts thought, there is mastery of mind, so this step requires your most sincere commitment. It is in this step that you awaken and empower the inner intelligence and disengage thought as the medium of perception, action, and experience. Follow the same sequence of ending meditation when the timer goes off, as with the first step.

3. Self-Inquiry

So far we have dealt with the first step of stabilization to reduce the oscillation and bring about harmony or balance between thought and consciousness,... and the second step of mastery of mind—where we introduced the mantra and begin inquiry into what the mantra is, and where it is being heard. This helps us overcome the subject/object tangle to go beyond *all* distractions and brings mastery of mind.

Now, we begin the third and last step of self-inquiry. It is advisable to take to this step, or third step, after you have succeeded in your direct inquiry and realization of the substance of the mantra. So far, the inquiry has been in the nature of 'what?'. This step changes the nature of inquiry to 'who?', which is the most subtle inquiry. Mastery of mind is also complete empowerment of the inner intelligence which must now inquire into its own nature.

We have used a string of thought to give direction to the inner intelligence when inquiring into the mantra. Now, let this string of thought arise naturally one more time as this: 'Am I the repeater of the mantra or the listener of the mantra?' Alternatively, you can also inquire 'Who am I?'

Friends, I recommend the former, or 'Am I the repeater of the mantra or the listener of the mantra?'—because, it is easy to get sidetracked in an open inquiry of 'Who am I?' and get off the ramp of inquiry by intellectualizing. Unless one is very well established in dispassion, and the heart is free of desires completely, an open-ended inquiry like 'Who am I?' is challenging. The former gives some structure for inquiry without involving thought and keeps one from drifting, or drowsiness.

What happens from here is God's grace.

Closing thoughts...

Friends, let us take a few moments to recap what we have covered. Meditation using the mantra in three steps. In the first step—stabilization—we repeat the mantra and listen to the sound of the mantra within us. Soon we become aware of the rise and fall of other thoughts. By continuing to repeat and listen to the mantra, we realize our distinctness from thought, and discover a way to do what needs to be done without getting mixed up in thought and without suppressing thought. This restores a balance between thought and consciousness and, hence, it is called stabilization. The second step begins the inquiry of the mantra. This is the centerpiece or pivot in meditation, where one is faced—and must overcome—the subject/object tangle. Here, the question is raised once: 'What is the mantra made of, and where is it being heard within me?' Here begins the inquiry into the content of the mantra. Consciousness must contact the mantra, or consciousness must contact thought. Mastery of one thought is mastery of all thought—and this is why the second step is called mastery of mind. This brings us to the third step, or self-inquiry. That which has so far been conscious of, must now become conscious of *its own self*... must realize its own self. And, the question is raised again, 'Am I the repeater of the mantra, or the listener of the mantra?' in an attempt to discover, or realize, the self. This is the third and final step.

Friends, this has been compact and I know probably difficult to meditate along. But next, we will go through the sequence of meditation in pure practice, without some of the theory,... without theory at all—using the mantra to stabilize and inquire. Remember, the mat or field of practice includes all life. Be diligent in your practice.

MEDITATION 101: STABILIZATION

In the last presentation, we discussed approaching meditation in three steps: stabilization, mastery of mind, and self-inquiry. Let us just briefly review what we have covered earlier.

We are distinct from thought as we are aware of them. Thought is habit; and identifying with thought is also a habit. Each time we identify with thought, they strengthen their hold on consciousness.

Today, we take up the first step in guided meditation: stabilization. Looking within, we realize our distinctness from thought and are able to continue without getting mixed up with thought.

Let us then begin...

Sit in any cross-legged posture. The use of a cushion will raise the buttocks and remove the strain from the knees and hips while bringing about flexibility gradually. It is important to keep the back and neck straight and the head facing forward naturally, without bending down. If you cannot sit cross-legged on the floor, sit on a chair, but keep your legs uncrossed to preclude the urge to switch the legs over and keep the feet flat on the floor, with your back straight.

Light a candle and/or incense in your prayer area and offer some prayers from the heart. Set the timer for 15-18 minutes and close your eyes while you recite the mantra 'Om' three times.

You should not have any expectation from meditation itself while still meditating with all being.

Today, let us meditate together for about 20 minutes.

Let us meditate...

Om... Om... Om...

Become aware, or realize, that you are seated here for meditation. To become aware, or to realize, does not involve thought. The inner intelligence knows this and it is your direct experience. The inner intelligence will now come to the activity of meditation.

Now become aware of the general area, room, or space in which you find yourself. The attention will go from the activity to the space or room in which you find yourself.

Become aware of the footprint of your body. The footprint of your body is that surface area with which your body has contact with the floor, or the floor with a chair if you are seated on a chair. Try to feel this footprint at one stroke—all of it.

Now, become aware of the act of breathing. As you do so, the inner intelligence, or your attention, will go from the footprint within to the breathing, and start to investigate it. It will follow your breathing all the way in, as far as it can go, and all the way out as far as it can go. If your attention is keen, you will also become aware of the warmth and humidity of your breathing.

Now introduce the mantra—shorter mantras, ishta mantras—like 'Om Namah Sivaya' or 'Om Namo Narayana'—and it doesn't matter which one. Introduce the mantra to the rhythm of your breathing. Do not alter your breathing; instead, stretch the mantra to cover the natural span of your breath so that you are repeating the mantra one time with every inhalation, and one time with every exhalation,... mentally, within you. Your attention is on repeating the mantra clearly and listening to the mantra clearly, and afresh each time. Introduce an image that corresponds with your mantra, ishta devata, chosen deity, or any image of your choice, and hold that image in the center of your chest. This will help reduce the amount of obstacles, especially the visual distractions. What is important is not to change the mantra, or the image. You have to go beyond them.

Your attention is still on repeating the mantra and listening to the mantra—mentally, within you. Soon, other thoughts which are generally called distractions, but they are just other thoughts, will rise in the mind. Let them. Your attention is on repeating the mantra and listening to the mantra while you hold the image in the center of your chest. Let these other thoughts rise; they will fall just as they have arisen, on their own, as long as you do not get entangled with them, or identify with them. Because other thoughts, or distractions, are not the problem, but *being distracted is*. Do not suppress them. Simply be curious about this mantra. You are facing the mantra completely—as you repeat it and listen to it clearly. The sound of the mantra, though mental, will start—or should start—drawing you to it, becoming clearer and clearer. Let these other thoughts rise and fall. They will exhaust themselves.

...meditation ends...

Om... Om... Om...

Closing thoughts...

These things are helpful:

Same time, same place, same method.

Try to stay with the same ishta mantra and the image; we have to go beyond them.

Make sure you have nothing pinging on your attention, awareness, within 40 minutes after your meditation, or your mind will naturally tend to gravitate towards it, initially at least.

Try not to have too heavy a meal—keep meditation between an hour to two hours after you have eaten.

Stay well hydrated.

Wear loose and comfortable clothing.

And above all, be patient and diligent.



Next, in Meditation 201, let us go through these steps and further into inquiry into the mantra. Remember, the mat or field of practice includes all life. Be diligent in your practice.

MEDITATION 201: MASTERY OF MIND

In the last presentation, we covered stabilization—the first step—where, by looking within, we realize our distinctness from thought, and can continue with practice and life without getting mixed up in rising and falling thoughts.

Today, we take up the second step in guided meditation, which is inquiry into the substance of the mantra, to directly understand its content. This results in mastery of mind.

This is the 2nd of three guided meditation sessions. In the first one, we didn't speak a whole lot—we tried to get into it. That is what meditation is all about. You learn meditating by meditating. You don't learn meditating by looking in books or reading of things of that kind. Those things can teach you a few things about how to look within, and they can give you a few pointers about what we call distractions or objects, obstacles, and further our understanding on it. But meditation is learned by meditating.

Let us recap a few points of what we covered last time and go on from there.

The first is awareness. Awareness is different from thinking. When you think of something, it is usually in exclusion to something else or other things. But awareness is not like that. For instance, if a bee happens to sit on my shoulder, I am instantly aware—at the very moment the bee sat—that it is now here, and it either has stung me or is about to sting me. So, time does not come into awareness. It is not—I think, and then a thought arises in my mind. As the bee sits on my shoulder, at that very instant I am aware of what has happened or what is about to happen, where. So location or space, and time, do not enter into awareness.

The second thing is that it is not in exclusion to something else. I could be talking to you and a bee could be on my shoulder. I am aware of both at the same time: that I am talking to you and of the bee at my shoulder—without any separation of time.

So thinking is exclusive; and thinking also involves the time and space process. Awareness does not involve time and space and it is all-inclusive. It is this *awareness* that meditates.

So we give the awareness a little bit of direction only because we are not used to functioning with total awareness as yet. And we bring the awareness to the activity of meditation. We begin with that. Once we have seated ourselves and said a few prayers, we bring the awareness to that.

Then, next, we become aware of the room or general space in which we find our self.

Next, we tighten the awareness a little bit by bringing it to... 'tighten' is actually not a good word; we hone... we sharpen the awareness a little bit and realize that this awareness can do these things—and at the same time realize that it is not an exclusion to other things.

So we sharpen the awareness by bringing it to the footprint of our body—the footprint being that surface area with which our body has contact ... if you are seated on the floor, or the floor and chair. Then we inwardize this awareness and become aware of the act of breathing.

Now, something very important—unlike thinking, which is not curious at all because it is based on other notions, supported by the notions and it focuses on, mostly on concepts. This awareness is very curious. The minute you align into something it starts to investigate. The minute you bring it to the footprint of our body, it starts to move around and become aware of —'This is it.'—not based on other notions or the past, or whatever,... but based on right now, what actually is. This is it. And it presents you with that footprint—'This is it.' As you inwardize this awareness and make it aware of the act of breathing or become aware of the act of breathing, it starts to investigate the breathing at once. It starts to follow the breathing in, and it starts to follow the breathing out. It is very curious because it is not based on any notions. It's based on direct, pure perception—which is to *know* something *without* the involvement of thought at all. And it starts to wonder how and why and in what way. This inhalation itself turns to exhalation. What is this,... and where is it taking place? Then we introduce the mantra, and the inner intelligence starts to investigate the mantra.

Now we mentioned the last time about introducing an image to stabilize the visual awareness, and that's what it does. So we hold the image of either the ishta devata, your chosen deity, or any image that you have selected, in the center of your chest. While you hold that image in the center of your chest, you continue to repeat the mantra and listen to the mantra. That, my friends, has primary focus. And the inner intelligence starts to investigate the mantra.

Now, we help it along a little bit by giving it a little direction—again, not because it needs it, but this is how we sharpen this attention. We've never used this; we have relied on thought far too much and given thought far too much importance. So the reason for this direction is actually to sharpen the awareness, and to trust awareness.

Now we go one step further: we bring up this prompt, or this feeling, just one time to give this awareness some direction. What is this mantra? Where is it being heard? And, as you feel this, and as this thought rises just one time—and there are only a couple of times that thought is going to be introduced—as something to give direction to this attention. Otherwise, we'd be generally aware of everything that goes on,... but we have to go into self-inquiry, and so, this sharpening of the awareness.

Now, you may know intellectually that the content of the mantra or the substance of the mantra is thought—but that has to be abandoned, because meditation is not possible if you start with thought. Thought is only introduced to give direction to the inquiry that's about to begin. And why the mantra? The mantra,... the content of the mantra,... is thought; and consciousness must understand thought by direct perception, by direct contact—in other words, the unlimited, or awareness, has to contact the limited to be able to go beyond it. In that there is freedom from all thought. The substance of worry, anxiety, stress—all of these things—is thought. In understanding thought, you go beyond all thought and you are never bothered by thought again. This has to happen for self-inquiry to begin. If there has been no mastery of thought or mastery of mind—whichever, they are the same thing—self-inquiry, or turning awareness on itself,... to know what it is,... is not going to be possible. It is going to be continually interested in thought, distracted by thought, and mixed-up with thought. It has to be freed,... consciousness, awareness, has to be freed from the grips of thought. For that, it must *totally and thoroughly* understand thought—not intellectually, because intellectual is thought again. It has to know it directly. This inner intelligence has to *apprehend it, touch it, feel it* and know—THIS IS IT! At that point you are free from thought completely.

So the second step may sound or may feel very familiar because we go through the same steps or processes till we come to the point where this question arises once again: 'What is this mantra? What is this mantra made of?' and 'Where is it being heard in me?'

Again, don't create space. Because it is being heard in you, you are separate from that if it is being heard within you. So you have to feel this from within—the mantra itself. You have to understand the mantra from within—not from without—that this mantra or sound is over there and I am over here, because it is not so internally! It is all happening in the same mind-lake.

So as you steady yourself, the awareness is challenged to know *what* this is, and *where* this is. What is it made of? What is thought? It is here that a perfect understanding occurs where awareness understands thought *completely* and transcends thought. And that is why this is called 'mastery of mind'.



Now let us meditate together for about 20 or 22 minutes and go through all the processes we did earlier, and then beyond into inquiry into the mantra.

Sit in any cross-legged posture. The use of a cushion will raise the buttocks and remove the strain from the knees and hips while bringing about flexibility gradually.

It is important to keep the back and neck straight and the head facing forward naturally without bending down.

If you cannot sit cross-legged on the floor, sit on a chair, but keep your legs uncrossed to preclude the urge to switch the legs over; and keep the feet flat on the floor with your back straight.

Light a candle and/or incense in your prayer area, and offer some prayers from the heart. Set the timer for 20-22 minutes and close your eyes while you recite the mantra 'Om' three times. You should not have any expectation from meditation itself while still meditating with all being.

Let us meditate...

Om... Om... Om...

Realize that you are seated here for meditation. As you do, your thoughts, feeling and attention should join the activity of meditation that you have embarked upon.

Become aware of the room or space in which you find yourself now. Awareness is instantaneous: it does not involve time,... it does not involve thought. As you become aware, it instantly presents you: this is the room, this is the space.

Now become aware of the footprint of your body. The footprint of your body is that surface area with which your body has contact with the floor or the chair on the floor if you are seated on a chair. You should be able to feel this,...visualize this,... and know this at one stroke. Again, awareness does not involve thought. It is direct perception or apprehension of the actual substance of what you are aware of within you intuitively,... directly.

Next, become aware of the act of breathing. As you do, this inner intelligence or attention will at once start to investigate this breathing to know what this is. If that does not happen, you're still thinking. Thought is based on other thought. Direct perception or the inner intelligence looks at *what actually is* and presents it without any time delay—this is it!

So this inner intelligence will start to investigate the breathing by following it as far in as it can go and as far out as it can go while inhaling and exhaling. If your attention is keen, you will also be aware of the warmth and humidity of your breathing.

Introduce the mantra,... shorter mantras like 'Om Namah Sivaya' or 'Om Namo Narayana'—these are called ishta mantras, and you can select any one, but stay with it. Introduce the mantra to the rhythm of your breathing. So you are repeating the mantra one time while inhaling and one time while exhaling,... mentally or within you. Do not alter the rhythm of your breathing. Simply stretch the mantra to cover, or fit, the natural rhythm of your breathing.

Introduce the image of your ishta devata or chosen deity or any other image that you have selected; but, again, just like the mantra, don't change it. Hold that image within you in the center of your chest. This will reduce visual distraction or oscillation. Your attention is still on the sound of the mantra being repeated within you. Let this thought or feeling arise in you just one time to give direction to this inner intelligence. What *is* this mantra? How come I hear it within me? Where is it being heard?—and what is it made of? Don't keep asking these questions; just let this feeling come once, and the inner intelligence will start to investigate or inquire. It will become completely absorbed in the sound of the mantra and seek to know what it is—without thought.

Other thoughts may rise. Let them rise, and let them fall. If your attention is on the mantra, it will be aware of them, but it will not get mixed up or entangled with them. The rise of other thoughts is not the problem—being distracted is. And there is no force involved in meditation. You are simply interested in the mantra, and this interest is inquiring into it. Other thoughts will rise; try to be aware of the moment they have risen, and they will fall.

...meditation ends...

Om... Om... Om...

Closing thoughts...

Meditation is a state of being. The keys to success in meditation—both on the cushion and in life—is sincerity and diligence.

Next, in Meditation 301, let us go through these steps—and further, to self-inquiry.

Remember, the mat or field of practice includes all life. Be diligent in your practice.

MEDITATION 301: SELF-INQUIRY

Earlier, we covered stabilization, the first step; and in the last presentation we covered 'mastery of mind'—the second step. This brings us to self-inquiry.

Let us, once again, review some of the important points discussed earlier. We are distinct from thought, as we are aware of them. Thought is habit; and identifying with thought is also a habit. Each time we identify with thought, they strengthen their hold on consciousness.

Today, we take up the third step in guided meditation—self-inquiry. The inner intelligence, which is inquired into, and thoroughly comprehended thought is turned on itself in direct self-inquiry.

Greetings...

Earlier, in Meditation 101, we dealt with stabilization. Stabilization is the cultivation of awareness to a degree where the existing thoughts, or conditioning, do not overpower or impinge on consciousness. One is therefore able to see what exactly it is and what appears in front of one without existing notions and thoughts interfering in direct perception.

Then we moved on a little further into Meditation 201. Meditation 201 starts off with the same fundamentals, the same basics, but then it introduces a mantra. And the form of inquiry into the mantra includes—what? What is this mantra? Where is it being heard? What is the content of the mantra. 'What?' is a little easier to cultivate inquiry with. 'Who?' is a subtler form of inquiry, and we save that for when we can understand thought completely. There must be mastery of thought, or mastery of mind, before we begin self-inquiry. To begin self-inquiry and have the interference of thought or something that's other, seems to be futile. So, it's important to stay at that stage where the inquiry into the mantra results in actual confrontation with the content of the mantra, or the content of thought. We must directly understand what this mantra is, or what the content of the mantra is, or the content of thought is—or, mastery of mind. It is then that a state of inner balance comes about. When thought does not rise to impinge—thoughts may rise, thoughts will fall—but consciousness or awareness does not get mixed up and identify with thought. It is important to reach that state before self-inquiry will begin, or it could end up being an intellectual game and you may go on for a long time without realizing that the car has been parked all along and there has been no real movement.

When there has been this understanding of the content of mantra by direct experience, then we know—this is it! This is what this mantra is made of, or the structure and content of thought by direct experience. At that point, there is mastery of mind. It is then, in that state of inner balance, that we begin *self*-inquiry.

So far, it has been mastery of the object,... understanding of the object, thought, or the mantra. Now we begin from 'what?' to 'who?'—who is it that is aware of this mantra? And that subtle... that is the subtlest form of inquiry—'who?'. 'What?' is a little bit coarser, so we start off with 'what', get all of the otherness out of the way, and achieve a state of inner balance.

Then begins the 'who', which is inquiry into the self. Who is it that is aware? That which was aware of the mantra, and of thought, has to become self-aware. Awareness has to become self-aware. And this we deal with in meditation 301.

Let us begin...

Sit in any cross-legged posture. The use of a cushion will raise the buttocks and remove the strain from the knees and hips while bringing about flexibility gradually. It is important to keep the back and neck straight and the head facing forward naturally without bending down.

If you cannot sit cross-legged on the floor, sit on a chair, but keep your legs uncrossed to preclude the urge to switch the legs over; and keep the feet flat on the floor, with your back straight.

Light a candle and/or some incense in your prayer area, and offer some prayers from the heart.

Set the timer for 20-22 minutes and close your eyes while you recite the mantra 'Om' three times.

You should not have any expectation from meditation itself, while still meditating with all being.

Let us meditate...

Om... Om... Om...

Become aware that you are seated here for meditation. Your attention should be on the act of meditation, on which you have embarked.

Now, become aware of this room or general space in which you find yourself. The awareness or attention will go from the activity of meditation to the room or space in which you find yourself.

Become aware of the footprint of your body. The footprint of your body is that space with which your body has contact with the floor, or the floor and chair if you are seated on a chair. You should be able to feel this intuitively or directly at one stroke.

Now let us take this attention within and become aware of the act of breathing. As you do so, this awareness or attention will at once start to investigate the breathing. As we have discussed earlier, awareness or attention discovers what *is*, what actually is—afresh each time, because it is independent of memory. And so if you feel concepts being applied, you know that awareness is not working,... memory is. Interest is key to attention, or awareness.

Let this awareness follow your breathing as far in as it can go, and as far out as it can go. If your attention is keen, you will also be aware of the warmth and humidity of your breathing.

Introduce the mantra to the rhythm of your breathing so that you are repeating it and listening to it one time with each inhalation, and one time with each exhalation. Do not alter your breathing; simply stretch the mantra so that it covers the span and width of your natural breath.

Introduce the image that corresponds with your mantra or ishta devata, or an image that you have selected, and hold that in the center of your chest. The purpose for this is to stabilize your visual awareness and reduce distraction. The focus of your attention is still on repeating the mantra and listening to the mantra mentally within you. Let this question arise naturally once: 'What is this mantra?... what is it made of?... and where is it being heard within me?' This will give some direction to the awareness, which will begin to investigate. It is important not to create space—that I am here, and the mantra is there someplace, because this is all taking place within you, where there is no division. So you have to become aware by being very still. In that stillness, the mantra,... mantra's content and structure,... have to be known. You have to contact the mantra and understand its content and structure by *direct* experience. This is called 'mastery of mind'. Over two-thirds of your work in meditation are done when you come to this stage, because there will be tremendous balance in mind.

Now, for self-inquiry, there are a few ways. You can either directly inquire, 'Who's aware?', ... but that is not very advisable for most, because you could begin intellectualizing: 'It is So-and-so,... It is such...', and so on. To reduce intellectualizing and keep direct perception without interference of thought, it is better to use the structure we have so far and take it a step further by letting this question rise naturally: 'Am I the repeater of the mantra, or am I the listener of the mantra? Are these two different?' The emphasis is still on 'who?', but we are taking the support of the mantra to reduce intellectualizing and getting off the train early. It will still lead you to the same end; because you are looking to see if there is a seam in unconsciousness or a gap: 'Am I the repeater of the mantra, or am I the listener? Are these two?' So you are looking at 'who?' with the structure that we reduce making a mistake. Still keeping the emphasis on direct inquiry of 'who?', but without the risk of an open-ended inquiry. 'Am I the repeater of the mantra or am I the listener of the mantra? Are these different?' That question arises just once and this inner awareness starts looking within itself.

...meditation ends...

Om... Om... Om...

Closing thoughts...

Let us briefly recap what we have covered in these three sessions...

In Meditation 101, we become aware of the movement of thought. This cultivates awareness and brings about stabilization or inner balance.

Moving on to Meditation 201, there is an inquiry into the mantra. One must directly understand the structure and content of thought. To *know* the mantra is to know thought, or mastery of mind. And here, to know is not an intellectual grasp, it is to know something *from within*—directly, without the involvement of thought.

Further, into Meditation 301, we inquire into the self—That which was aware of thought and the mantra must now become self-aware.

Meditation, however, is learnt while meditating. Meditation is not something you do on a mat or cushion, but a state of consciousness,... the state of being.

Most of the work is in making the mind and body fit to meditate. The earlier limbs of Raja Yoga are indispensable in this, and anything overlooked will demand a turnaround later when the stakes are much higher.

Meditation does not involve any struggle at all, and any form of struggle or tension is a sure sign of something very wrong.

Remember, the mat or field of practice includes all life. Be diligent in your practice.

GUIDED MEDITATION 101: STABILIZATION

Set the timer, let us meditate...

Meditation 101	Sequence	Notes
	Om... Om... Om...	Chant 'Om' three times and close your eyes.
	Become aware, or realize, that you are seated here for meditation.	To become aware, or to realize, does not involve thought. The inner intelligence <i>knows by direct experience</i> . The inner intelligence will now come to the activity of meditation.
	Become aware of the general area, room or space in which you find yourself.	The attention will go from the activity to the space, or room, in which you find yourself.
	Become aware of the footprint of your body.	The footprint of your body is that surface area with which your body has contact with the floor, or the floor and the chair. Try to <i>feel</i> this footprint at one stroke—all of it.
	Become aware of the act of breathing.	The inner intelligence, or your attention, will go from the footprint within to the breathing—and start to investigate it. It will follow your breathing all the way in and all the way out—as far as it can go. If your attention is keen, you will <i>also</i> become aware of the warmth and humidity of your breathing.
	Introduce the mantra to the natural rhythm of your breathing.	Use shorter mantras, ishta mantras, like 'Om Namah Shivaya'. Do not alter your breathing. Stretch the mantra to cover the natural span of your breath. Repeat the mantra mentally once with every inhalation, and once with every exhalation. Your attention is on repeating and listening to the mantra clearly—each time.
	Introduce an image that corresponds with your mantra ishta-devata, chosen deity, or any image of your choice—and hold that image in the center of your chest.	This will help reduce the amount of obstacles—especially the visual distractions. Your attention is <i>still</i> on repeating the mantra, and listening to the mantra—mentally within you.

	<p>Soon, other thoughts which are generally called distractions—but they are just other thoughts—will rise in the mind. <i>Let them!</i></p>	<p>Your attention is on repeating the mantra, and listening to the mantra, while you hold the image in the center of your chest. Let these other thoughts rise. They will fall just as they have risen—on their own—as long as you do not get entangled with them, or identify with them; because other thoughts or distractions are not the problem, but being distracted is. Do not suppress them. Simply be curious about this mantra. You are facing the mantra completely, as you repeat it and as you listen to it clearly. The sound of the mantra, though mental, will start or should start drawing you to it—becoming clearer and clearer. Let these other thoughts rise and fall. They will exhaust themselves.</p>
	<p>Meditation continues till the timer sounds...</p>	<p>Chant 'Om' three times as the timer sounds, then open your eyes gradually.</p>
	<p>Om ... Om ... Om ...</p>	<p>Leave the area gracefully.</p>

GUIDED MEDITATION 201: MASTERY OF MIND

Set the timer, let us meditate...

Meditation 101	Sequence	Notes
	Om... Om... Om...	Chant 'Om' three times and close your eyes.
	Become aware, or realize, that you are seated here for meditation.	To become aware, or to realize, does not involve thought. The inner intelligence <i>knows by direct experience</i> . The inner intelligence will now come to the activity of meditation.
	Become aware of the general area, room or space in which you find yourself.	The attention will go from the activity to the space, or room, in which you find yourself.
	Become aware of the footprint of your body.	The footprint of your body is that surface area with which your body has contact with the floor, or the floor and the chair. Try to <i>feel</i> this footprint at one stroke—all of it.
	Become aware of the act of breathing.	The inner intelligence, or your attention, will go from the footprint within to the breathing—and start to investigate it. It will follow your breathing all the way in and all the way out—as far as it can go. If your attention is keen, you will <i>also</i> become aware of the warmth and humidity of your breathing.
	Introduce the mantra to the natural rhythm of your breathing.	Use shorter mantras, ishta mantras, like 'Om Namah Shivaya'. Do not alter your breathing. Stretch the mantra to cover the natural span of your breath. Repeat the mantra mentally once with every inhalation, and once with every exhalation. Your attention is on repeating and listening to the mantra clearly—each time.
	Introduce an image that corresponds with your mantra ishta-devata, chosen deity, or any image of your choice—and hold that image in the center of your chest.	This will help reduce the amount of obstacles – especially the visual distractions. Your attention is <i>still</i> on repeating the mantra, and listening to the mantra—mentally within you.

	Soon, other thoughts which are generally called distractions—but they are just other thoughts—will rise in the mind. <i>Let them!</i>	Your attention is on repeating the mantra, and listening to the mantra, while you hold the image in the center of your chest. Let these other thoughts rise. They will fall just as they have risen—on their own—as long as you do not get entangled with them, or identify with them; because other thoughts or distractions are not the problem, but being distracted is. Do not suppress them. Simply be curious about this mantra. You are facing the mantra completely, as you repeat it and as you listen to it clearly. The sound of the mantra, though mental, will start or should start drawing you to it—becoming clearer and clearer. Let these other thoughts rise and fall. They will exhaust themselves.
Meditation 201	Let this thought or feeling arise in you just one time to give direction to this inner intelligence: 'What is this mantra? How come I hear it within me? Where is it being heard? And, what is it made of?'	Don't keep asking these questions. Just let this feeling come once, and the inner intelligence will start to investigate or inquire. It will become completely absorbed in the sound of the mantra and seek to know what it is—without thought.
	Other thoughts may rise. Let them rise, and let them fall.	If your attention is on the mantra, it will be aware of them, but it will not get mixed-up or entangled with them.
	Meditation continues till the timer sounds...	Chant 'Om' three times as the timer sounds, then open your eyes gradually.
	Om ... Om ... Om ...	Leave the area gracefully.

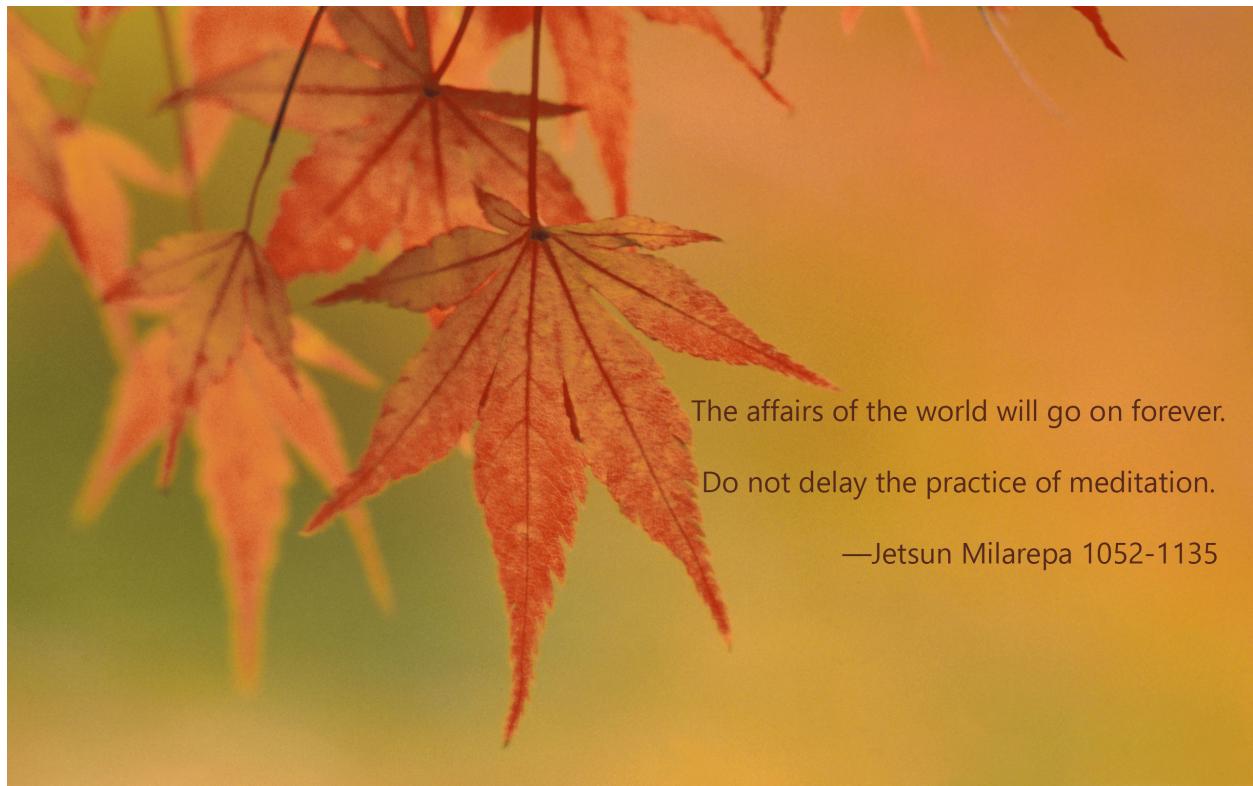
GUIDED MEDITATION 301: SELF-INQUIRY

Set the timer, let us meditate...

Sequence	Notes
Om ... Om ... Om ...	Chant 'Om' three times and close your eyes.
Become aware, or realize, that you are seated here for meditation.	To become aware, or to realize, does not involve thought. The inner intelligence knows by direct experience. The inner intelligence will now come to the activity of meditation.
Become aware of the general area, room or space in which you find yourself.	The attention will go from the activity to the space, or room, in which you find yourself.
Become aware of the footprint of your body.	The footprint of your body is that surface area with which your body has contact with the floor, or the floor and the chair. Try to feel this footprint at one stroke—all of it.
Become aware of the act of breathing.	The inner intelligence, or your attention, will go from the footprint within to the breathing—and start to investigate it. It will follow your breathing all the way in and all the way out—as far as it can go. If your attention is keen, you will also become aware of the warmth and humidity of your breathing.
Introduce the mantra to the natural rhythm of your breathing.	Use shorter mantras, ishta mantras, like 'Om Namah Shivaya'. Do not alter your breathing. Stretch the mantra to cover the natural span of your breath. Repeat the mantra mentally once with every inhalation, and once with every exhalation. Your attention is on repeating and listening to the mantra clearly—each time.
Introduce an image that corresponds with your mantra ishta-devata, chosen deity, or any image of your choice—and hold that image in the center of your chest.	This will help reduce the amount of obstacles—especially the visual distractions. Your attention is still on repeating the mantra, and listening to the mantra—mentally within you.

	Soon, other thoughts which are generally called distractions—but they are just other thoughts—will rise in the mind. Let them!	Your attention is on repeating the mantra, and listening to the mantra, while you hold the image in the center of your chest. Let these other thoughts rise. They will fall just as they have risen—on their own—as long as you do not get entangled with them, or identify with them; because other thoughts or distractions are not the problem, but being distracted is. Do not suppress them. Simply be curious about this mantra. You are facing the mantra completely, as you repeat it and as you listen to it clearly. The sound of the mantra, though mental, will start or should start drawing you to it—becoming clearer and clearer. Let these other thoughts rise and fall. They will exhaust themselves.
Meditation 201	Let this thought or feeling arise in you just one time to give direction to this inner intelligence: "What is this mantra? How come I hear it within me? Where is it being heard? And, what is it made of?"	Don't keep asking these questions. Just let this feeling come once, and the inner intelligence will start to investigate or inquire. It will become completely absorbed in the sound of the mantra and seek to know what it is—without thought.
	Other thoughts may rise. Let them rise, and let them fall.	If your attention is on the mantra, it will be aware of them, but it will not get mixed-up or entangled with them.
Meditation 301	Let this thought or feeling arise in you just one time to give direction to this inner intelligence: 'Am I the repeater of the mantra, or am I the listener of the mantra?—are these two different?'	The emphasis is still on 'who?', but we are taking the assist of the mantra to avoid intellectualizing. You are looking to see if there is a split in consciousness: 'Am I the repeater of the mantra, or am I the listener?—are these two? Are these different?' That question arises just once, and this inner awareness starts looking within itself.
	Meditation continues...	Chant 'Om' three times as the timer goes off, then open your eyes gradually.
	Om ... Om ... Om ...	Leave the area gracefully.

'Living Meditation' is a sequel to this series and will go deeper into meditation both in life and on the mat.



The affairs of the world will go on forever.
Do not delay the practice of meditation.

—Jetsun Milarepa 1052-1135

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