



Om Yoga

Its Theory and Practice

by

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Preface: Yoga and Freedom

“Which is the form of meditation that came to be foremostly employed by seekers after liberation? What should be the object of meditation by such seekers? The form of meditation that came to manifest as the foremost of all, for the regeneration of all seekers, was the First Word, indicative of Brahman: the Syllable Om. Meditation on Om should be resorted to by seekers after liberation. This Syllable *is* the Supreme Brahman.” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:1,2) (Please see the Glossary for the definition of unfamiliar words and also for brief biographical information on unfamiliar persons.)

Yoga is all about freedom. Only a fraction of the world’s population is formally imprisoned, but the entire human race is imprisoned in the body and the earth itself. None are free from the inevitability of sickness, age, and death, however free of them they may be at the moment. The human condition is subject to innumerable limitations. Who really controls his life fully, attains all his goals, and knows no setbacks of any kind? No one.

Our real self, the spirit, is ever perfect and free. But we have forgotten that. So we identify with our present experience of bondage and consequently suffer in countless ways. Our situation is like someone who is asleep and dreaming that he is being tortured and beaten. In reality he is not being touched at all; yet he is experiencing very real pain and fear. He need not placate, overpower, or escape his torturers. He needs only to wake up. Yoga is the procedure of self-awakening.

Om Yoga is the way to freedom from suffering and limitation. “What world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That? If he meditates on the Supreme Being with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, he is led to the world of Brahman Who is higher than the highest life, That Which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme.” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1,5,7)

Regarding Om, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (1:28) simply says: “Its repetition and meditation is the way.” The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, as well as the Yoga Sutras, advocate meditation on Om, the sacred syllable that both symbolizes and embodies Brahman, the Absolute Reality. (See Chapter Eight: Om in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga Sutras.)

It is my hope that you will test for yourself the spiritual alchemy of Om Yoga that is set forth here.

“This is the bridge to immortality. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6)

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Chapter One: Yoga

“Yoga” is a Sanskrit word that means “to join.” Yoga is both union and the way to that union. What do we join through yoga? First, we join our awareness to our own essential being: the spirit whose nature is pure consciousness. In yoga philosophy this is known as the Atman or Self. Next, we join our finite consciousness to the Infinite Consciousness, God, the Supreme Self (Paramatman). In essence they are eternally one.

According to yogic philosophy the individual atman-spirit originally dwelt in the consciousness of that oneness. But in its descent into the material world the spirit lost its awareness of the eternal union, and lost the capacity to live in and manifest the union on a practical level. Through yoga the lost consciousness can be regained and actualized in the individual’s practical life sphere.

Regarding this, a yogi-adept of the twentieth century, Dr. I. K. Taimni, remarks in his book *The Science of Yoga*: “According to the yogic philosophy it is possible to rise completely above the illusions and miseries of life and to gain infinite knowledge, bliss, and power through enlightenment *here and now* while we are still living in the physical body....No vague promise of an uncertain postmortem happiness this, but a definite scientific assertion of a fact verified by the experience of innumerable yogis, saints, and sages who have trodden the path of yoga throughout the ages.”

Since rational thought precedes rational action, we should begin with the philosophical side of Yoga.

Yoga philosophy

Hinduism embraces six systems of philosophy (darshanas), one of which is the Yoga Darshana. The basic text of the Yoga philosophy is the Yoga Sutras (also called Yoga Darshana). It is the oldest known writing on the subject of yoga, written by the sage Patanjali, a yogi of ancient India. Further, the Yoga Philosophy is based on the philosophical system known as Sankhya, whose originator was the sage Kapila. Sankhya is the original Vedic philosophy, endorsed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, India’s most widely-read scripture. (Gita 2:39; 3:3,5; 18:13,19. Also, the second chapter of the Gita is entitled: Sankhya Yoga.) The *Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* says: “Sankhya postulates two ultimate realities, Purusha and Prakriti. Declaring that the cause of suffering is man’s identification of Purusha with Prakriti and its products, Sankhya teaches that liberation and true knowledge are attained in the supreme consciousness, where such identification ceases and Purusha is realized as existing independently in its transcendental nature.” It is not surprising, then, that Yoga is based on Sankhya.

In contrast to the other five systems, Yoga is a philosophy which stimulates its investigators to engage in yoga as a practice through which they will experience and demonstrate its truth and worth. What begins as theory develops into practice which culminates in realization. Yoga is philosophy, discipline, and experience. It is a revelation of consciousness.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna the teacher tells Arjuna the student: “There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these kings. Nor is there any future in which we shall cease to be.” (Bhagavad Gita 2:12) We are eternal beings, without beginning and without

end.

Originally we were points of conscious light in the infinite ocean of Conscious Light that is God. We were gods within God. And so we still are, for it is not possible to be outside of Infinity. Yet we are also here in this ever-changing world—a place that completely overwhelms the truth of our immortal life within God. For countless life-cycles we have found ourselves embodied in material cases, little body-prisons within the greater prison of the cosmos. And that is where we are right now.

God the Lord

In writings on Yoga, the word for God or Lord is *Ishwara*—the Ruler, Master, or Controller possessing the powers of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. *Ishwara* is the Supreme Power, *Parameshwara*. It is toward this *Ishwara* that our life is to be directed if we would attain perfection in yoga. In *Yoga Sutra* 1:23, Patanjali says that *samadhi*, the state of superconsciousness where Absoluteness is experienced, is produced by *Ishwara pranidhana*—the offering of one’s life to God. This is not merely dedicating our deeds and thoughts to God, but consciously *merging* our life in the greater life of God and making them one.

Since yoga is a practical matter, we need some workable, pragmatic understanding of the nature of God. For how will we seek and recognize Him if we have no idea who He is? Patanjali supplies us with exactly the kind of definition we need: “*Ishwara* is a particular Spirit Who is untouched by the afflictions of life, actions [karma] and the results and impressions [conditionings] produced by these actions.” (*Yoga Sutras* 1:24)

The unique Being

God is a special, unique, conscious Being—not just abstract Existence. God is a “particular Spirit” in the sense that God can be “picked out” or “singled out” from among all other things or beings.

Though God is within all things and all things are within Him, yet He stands apart. This is stated several times in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “They are contained in me, but I am not in them...I stand apart from them all, supreme and deathless” (7:12, 13). “For my spirit stands apart, watching over *Maya*, the maker” (9:9). “Standing apart, He sustains” (13:14). “He is within and without: He lives in the live and the lifeless: subtle beyond mind’s grasp; so near us, so utterly distant” (13:15). “Although I am not within any creature, all creatures exist within me” (9:4).

God is unique in the sense that He is *Ekam Evam Advityam Brahman*—the God Who is One, Only, Without a Second. He is not one of many, nor is He even one of two. He is ONE in every sense of the term. God is neither conditioned nor confined in any manner. Therefore He is not touched or tainted by the afflictions or faults of life (relative existence), in contrast to us who live within them as though they were the air we breathe and the basis of our existence. Nor is *Ishwara* bound or in any way conditioned by actions; therefore He is ever unchanging.

Infinite Consciousness: Omniscience

God is the essence and the apex of Consciousness, so Patanjali further says: “In Him is the highest limit of omniscience.” (*Yoga Sutras* 1:25) Commenting on this, Shankara says: “The all-pervading mind of the supreme Lord is in simultaneous contact with every object.”

The omniscience of God is total and absolute, for in truth God is Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence.

Then for the yogi Patanjali introduces a significant fact. He does not just say that omniscience (*sarvajña*) is in God, but that the *seed* of omniscience (*sarvajña bijam*) is in Him. Within God is the seed or potentiality of omniscience for those who are united with Him through their practice of yoga. Omniscience is not just objective knowledge, but infinity of consciousness—the Being of God Himself.

The two Selves

“Who am I?” is the age-old question asked with “Who is God?” The true “I” of each sentient being is the individual spirit, the self (atman). But there is more. God (Brahman) is the Self of the self—as the ocean is the “self” of every wave. The illumined know that they are the immortal self whose ultimate Self is the Immortal Itself. We are spirits within Spirit, in a wondrous way both ourselves and Brahman, both finite and infinite.

“Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, the individual self and the immortal Self are perched on the branches of the selfsame tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter, tasting of neither, calmly observes. The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine Self, bewildered by his ego, grieves and is sad. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord as his own true Self, and beholds his glory, he grieves no more.” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1,2)

“That being who is the power of all powers, and is born as such, who embodies himself in the elements and in them exists, and who has entered the lotus of the heart, is the immortal self.” (Katha Upanishad 2:1:7)

“In the effulgent lotus of the heart dwells Brahman, who is passionless and indivisible. He is pure, he is the light of lights. Him the knowers of the self attain.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.9)

“Brahman is supreme; he is self-luminous, he is beyond all thought. Subtler than the subtlest is he, farther than the farthest, nearer than the nearest. He resides in the lotus of the heart of every being.” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.7)

“He who glows in the depths of your eyes—that is Brahman; that is the Self of yourself. He is the Beautiful One, he is the Luminous One. In all the worlds, forever and ever, he shines!” (Chandogya Upanishad 4:15:1)

Meditation is the key to knowledge of the self and the Self of the self. Knowing one, both are known—so say the sages. “Wise, self-controlled, and tranquil souls, who are contented in spirit, and who practice austerity and meditation in solitude and silence, are freed from all impurity, and attain by the path of liberation to the Immortal, the truly existing, the changeless Self.” (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.11)

Dr. I. K. Taimni, in *The Ultimate Reality and Realization*, says this: “It is only when the realization of being a pure spirit or atma has been attained that it is possible to achieve the final goal of union of the atma with the Paramatma, the Supreme Spirit which exists eternally beyond the manifested universe and from which the manifested universe is derived. When this final realization has been attained and union of atma with Paramatma has been brought about there is not only a complete sharing of consciousness between the two but also of the infinite Power which is inherent in the Universal Consciousness....It is necessary to distinguish between the powers which are acquired on the realization that he is a pure spirit or atma and those

which are attained when he is able to destroy the last vestige of egoism and his consciousness becomes united with that of Paramatma. The former, though tremendous in some respects, are still limited, while the latter which are really the Powers of the Supreme Spirit are infinite and can manifest through the center of consciousness of a self-realized individual because there is fusion of the individual consciousness with the Supreme Consciousness and the channel between the two is open.”

God and gods

We are gods within God, finite spirits within the Infinite Spirit. But what is spirit? Yoga tells us that spirit is *consciousness*. We are eternal consciousnesses, each of us individual and distinct. Yet we are more. Each of us takes our being from God as the wave takes its existence from the ocean.

God is the eternal Root, the Ground, of our being, our greater Self. We are not God, but in some ineffable manner God is us—the Self of our self, the Spirit of our spirit. God is all, and we are the parts—each of us possessing an eternal and irrevocable distinction. That is why Krishna told Arjuna: “There was never a time when *I* did not exist, nor *you*, nor any of *these* kings. Nor is there any future in which *we* shall cease to be.”

“Both the individual self and the Universal Self have entered the cave of the heart, the abode of the Most High, but the knowers of Brahman see a difference between them as between sunshine and shadow.” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:1)

God and creation

God, the infinite Spirit, is pure consciousness, but has extended or emanated Himself as the cosmos: physical, astral, and causal. “This universe, before it was created, existed as Brahman. ‘I am Brahman;’ thus did Brahman know himself. Knowing himself, he became the Self of all beings.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1:4:10) This seemingly dual nature of God as Light and Power, as Consciousness and Matter, has puzzled the minds of even the wise.

God, the Original Being, projects Himself as the ever-changing dance of creation, as the evolving light that is the cosmos. God projects the creation, evolves it, and withdraws it back into Himself in a perpetual cycle. The creation can be thought of as God’s body—that God becomes incarnate in creation again and again. And as parts or reflections of God we do exactly the same through reincarnation.

There is a law that governs the place and kind of our embodiment. That law is karma, the principle of exact and inevitable reaction to our own actions and mental states, resulting in a seemingly endless domino effect of continual birth and death. Yoga offers us the possibility of ending this chain of embodiments by awakening-transformation from time and mortality into eternity and immortality.

And us...

All conscious beings have existed eternally within the Being of God, one with Him, distinct though not separate from Him. Rooted in the infinity of God, they have within themselves an innate impulse to transcend their finitude and attain the boundlessness of their Origin. This is impossible, since they are as immutable as God—the only infinite Being. They can become godlike, but they cannot become God. Yet the urge for transcendence is part of their nature.

The solution to this dilemma is simple. The individual consciousnesses cannot alter their

natural state of finitude, but they can come to share and participate in the infinite Consciousness of God. Even though they cannot become infinite themselves, they can experience the infinity of their divine Source, just as a psychically sensitive person can experience the thoughts and feelings of others without becoming them. In the same way, spirits can evolve to experience the Consciousness of God while remaining in their naturally limited state. They do not become God the Absolute, but they enter into that Absolute Life and are one with it.

As Shankara explains in his Yoga Sutra commentary: “When the light of several lamps appears simultaneously, it cannot be made out which is the light of which.” Consequently liberated spirits experience the infinite Being of God—infinite Consciousness—as their own being. Krishna has described it this way: “When you have reached enlightenment, ignorance will delude you no longer. In the light of that knowledge you will see the entire creation within your own atman *and* in me.” (Bhagavad Gita 4:35)

When the spirits are unshakably established in that Consciousness the goal has been attained. All they need do is develop the capacity for such a state of awareness. This is done by learning to fully experience the state of existence of a being completely different from themselves—while retaining the awareness of their true identity. They can put on the “costume” of a consciousness utterly different from theirs, and not just experience that other mode of consciousness, but become able to function as that other kind of being.

Evolutionary creation

To enable the spirits to enter into this process, God breathes forth His own Self as the Power from which is manifested all the realms of relative existence, from the most subtle worlds of nearly-perfected beings to the most objective worlds of atomic matter. They can then enter into relative existence by taking on coverings, or “bodies,” of varying grades and patterns of vibratory energies. They descend into this material world and begin working their way up the ladder of ever-evolving forms. Beginning with forms whose scope of consciousness is vastly less than theirs, they work their way upward, entering into higher and higher levels of awareness until they can surpass their original breadth of consciousness and begin to partake of a life of awareness much beyond their own.

In the intervals between embodiments the spirit spends time in the astral regions where awakening and growth also take place. (This is best explained in the forty-third chapter of *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda.) Upward and upward they evolve until their capacity for awareness is developed to such a perfect state that they can experience and participate in God’s all-embracing Consciousness, thenceforth to live in His infinity.

As Shakespeare wrote, “all the world’s a stage” with the individual spirits wearing their costumes and playing their parts. Just as actors begin with small parts and progress to bigger roles by demonstrating their skill in those smaller parts, so also do the spirits advance to higher and more complex forms of existence and consciousness, at last returning home to God. The Sufi poet, Rumi, wrote:

A stone I died and rose again a plant.
A plant I died and rose an animal;
I died an animal and was born a man.
Why should I fear? What have I lost by death?
As man, death sweeps me from this world of men

That I may wear an angel's wings in heaven;
Yet e'en as angel may I not abide,
For nought abideth save the face of God.
Thus o'er the angels' world I wing my way
Onwards and upwards, unto boundless lights;
Then let me be as nought, for in my heart
Rings as a harp-song that we must return to Him.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, one of many great Americans whose belief in reincarnation is overlooked, wrote in his poem, *The Chambered Nautilus*:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

That is the purpose of creation and our place in it.

God is the guru of all

Since God is eternal, it is from Him that all knowledge has come—especially the revelation of spiritual truth. As Vyasa observes: “His purpose is to give grace to living beings, by teaching knowledge and dharma [righteousness].” “There is no other but God to give the teaching which is a boat by which they can cross over the sea of samsara, and He teaches knowledge and dharma to those who take sole refuge in Him....For all the kinds of knowledge arise from Him, as sparks of fire from a blaze or drops of water from the sea,” says Shankara. Therefore Patanjali concludes: “Being unconditioned by time He is Guru even of the Ancients.” (Yoga Sutras 1:26)

Dwelling in the hearts of all, God continues to be the guru of questing souls. This does not mean that qualified spiritual teachers are not helpful to us, but ultimately the yogi must be guided by the Divine from within his own consciousness. “The mind is itself guru and disciple: it smiles on itself, and is the cause of its own well-being or ruin,” wrote the great poet-saint Tukaram (*Tukaram's Teachings*, p. 19). “The mind will eventually turn into your guru,” said Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna. (*The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. 340) Swami Brahmananda, the “spiritual son” of Sri Ramakrishna, in speaking about the role of an external guru said: “Know this! There is no greater guru than your own mind. When the mind has been purified by prayer and contemplation it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties, this inner guru will guide you and will continue to help you until the goal is reached.” (*The Eternal Companion*, p. 120)

Therefore Tukaram wrote in one of his hymns: “The guru-disciple relationship is a sign of immaturity.” (*Tukaram's Teachings* by S. R. Sharma, p. 20) The fact that Shankara writes in the *Nirvanastakam*: “I am neither guru nor disciple [*gururnaiwa shishya*],” shows that realization of the Self the limiting guru-disciple relationship is left behind and dissolves away.” (There is,

however a non-limiting guru-disciple relationship, such as is seen in the relationship of Yogananda with Sri Yukteswar—especially after Yogananda’s return to India in 1935. This grows out of the earlier guru-disciple interaction if the guru is a perfectly liberated being and the disciple is positively moving toward liberation himself.)

Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahashaya wrote to a student regarding the guru: “No one does anything; all is done by God. The individual [that seems to be the guru] is only an excuse; remain abidingly focused on that Divine Guru; in this is blessing.” And to another: “Guru is the one who is all; Guru is the one who is merciful. You are the Guru within yourself.” (*Garland of Letters (Patravali)*, Letters 12 and 45)

When Paramhansa Yogananda, who first made Lahiri Mahashaya known in the West, was questioned “about his own role in the religious evolution of this planet,” the great yogi replied: “The one Ocean has become all its waves. You should look to the Ocean, not to the little waves protruding on its bosom.” (Swami Kriyananda. *The Path*, p. 493) Another time he objected strongly to the suggestion that only his writings should be read in the public services of Self-Realization Fellowship, saying: “I came to make you God-conscious, not Yogananda-conscious.” At other times he said: “There is no such thing as ‘Yogananda-realization,’ only God-realization.” To someone who asked about a “disciple,” Yogananda replied firmly: “I never speak of people as my disciples. God is the Guru: They are His disciples.” (*The Path*, p. 327)

If an aspirant neither has nor desires an external guru he can still succeed in spiritual life. That this is so is proven by the fact that the twentieth-century Masters Shirdi Sai Baba, Neem Karoli Baba, Paramhansa Nityananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, Swami Rama of Hardwar (Ram Kunj), Om Baba of Delhi, Swami Ramdas of Anandashram, and Ramana Maharshi attained enlightenment without the agency of an external guru. Ramana Maharshi particularly emphasized that God is the guru of all, saying: “Only the Supreme Self, which is ever shining in your heart as the reality, is the Sadguru [True Guru].” (*The Power of the Presence*, p. 116)

The supreme example of someone who attained enlightenment without a guru is Buddha, who is referred to in Buddhist texts as “Self-Awakened.” All spiritual life is self-initiated from within; we are both guru and disciple as Krishna and Arjuna symbolize in the Bhagavad Gita.

Paramhansa Nityananda said: “He [God] is the One guru, the guru Who is in all, the guru of the universe. No [human] person can be your guru, a person can only be secondary. The real guru is Guru of the Universe.” (*Chidakasha Gita* 105) To emphasize this, Nityananda never gave initiation or became a “guru” in any manner or sense, though he was inspirer, guide, and advisor to many.

Neem Karoli Baba was wont to say, “I make devotees [of God], not disciples.” (*Divine Reality*, by Ravi Prakash Pande, p. ii.)

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh used to say: “I abhor gurudom”—the debasing of the student-teacher interaction to a personality cult.

Swami Yatiswarananda, Vice-president of the Ramakrishna Mission, wrote to one of his students: “We really are not gurus. We bring the message of the Guru of gurus. What all service you can get from me you will. But please turn to Him for light and guidance, for peace and blessedness. As you yourself are finding, human beings are not good enough. The Lord, the Guru of gurus, alone can give us the shelter, the illumination and the bliss we need.” That sums it up very well.

Another leading spiritual figure of the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Premeshananda, once wrote: “We have presently become inundated by this ‘guru doctrine.’ The purpose of the guru is to lead us to the realization of God; but God has been left behind, and the guru has become the latest fashion. So it is not safe to talk about a particular person. If one places a powerful personality before others, they will hold on to him instead of to God.”

The aspiring yogi can then feel safe and assured, for God will be his guru, just as He has been for all the enlightened throughout the ages.

In conclusion let us look at the words of Sri Ramakrishna himself on the subject as found in the Majumdar translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: “Satchidananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss] alone is the guru; He alone will teach.” (1.2.8; also: 4.2.1, 5.1.2, 5.5.1) “If somebody addresses me as a guru I say, ‘Away you rascal!’ How can I be a guru? There is no other guru except Satchidananda. There is no other refuge but Him. He alone is the ferryman who takes one across the ocean of relative existence.” (1.12.8) “A man cannot be a guru.” (2.19.6) “He who says of himself that he is a guru is a person of poor understanding.” (3.17.4) “The more you will advance, the more you will see that it is He who has become everything and it is He who is doing everything. He alone is the guru and He alone is the spiritual ideal of your choice. He alone is giving jnana, bhakti and everything.” (4.26.2) “Do you pray to Satchidananda Guru every morning? Do you?” (4.9.2)

Another teacher

According to Vyasa there is another teacher: our yoga practice itself. He says: “It is yoga that is the teacher. How so? It has been said: ‘Yoga is to be known by yoga. Yoga goes forward from yoga alone. He who is not careless [neglectful] in his yoga for a long time, rejoices in the yoga.’”

Shankara, commenting on these words of Vyasa, discusses the reaction that the awakening person has upon learning about the possibility of liberation from his present state of bondage: “Meditation on his own being, which is the cause that should lead to liberation, begins of itself, caused by karma of a previous life or else by steadfastness in renunciation in this present one. And it goes on of itself, without instruction from a teacher.”

The experience gained from yoga practice itself teaches us the reality and value of yoga. But even more, it opens our intuition and enables us to comprehend the inner workings of the subtle levels of our being and its mastery. Yoga truly becomes our teacher, revealing to us that which is far beyond the wisdom of books and verbal instructions. Moreover, it is practice of yoga that enables us to understand the basis and rationale of its methods and their application. The why and wherefore of yoga become known to us by direct insight.

In his commentary on Yoga Sutra 2:28 Vyasa says: “From practicing yoga, illusion [ignorance] is destroyed and perishes. When it is destroyed, there is manifestation of right vision. In proportion to the practice done, illusion is dispelled. In proportion to its destruction, the light of [spiritual] knowledge increases correspondingly. This increase is an experience of increasing refinement up to the realization of the true nature of the purusha [spirit].”

The religion of Yoga

It is commonly said that Yoga is not a religion. But since religion is derived from the Latin word *religere*, which means “to bind back,” and yoga means “joining,” practically speaking yoga is the only religion. The many systems of dogmas and doctrines are by their very nature

not really religions at all, and in most instances are systems of superstition—either by the nature of their ideas or practices or by the attitudes of their adherents toward their beliefs and disciplines.

It is yoga alone which reunites the consciousness of the individual to its infinite Source, restoring the lost unity. Earlier I quoted a paragraph from I. K. Taimni's book *The Science of Yoga* about the purpose of yoga, but omitting his preceding words regarding the relation of yoga to religion—or rather, their difference. Here they are now, for I think you will find them relevant:

“The Orthodox religious ideal which requires people to be good and moral so that they may have a happy life here and hereafter is really a concession to human weakness and the desire to prefer the so-called happiness in life to enlightenment.

“In this respect the philosophy of yoga differs fundamentally from most of the orthodox religions of the world which offer nothing better than an uncertain and nebulous happiness in the life after death. They say in effect ‘Lead a good life to ensure happiness after death, put your faith in God and hope for the best.’ According to yogic philosophy death no more solves your spiritual problem than night solves your economic problem. If you are poor you do not expect on going to bed that your economic problem will be automatically solved next day. You will have to get up the next day and begin where you left off the previous night. If you are poor economically you do not expect to get rich overnight and if you are poor spiritually, bound by illusions and limitations of all kinds, you cannot expect to become enlightened [by simply being reborn] or, if you do not believe in reincarnation, in the vague and unending life which is supposed to follow death.”

Yoga is the way we answer for ourselves the prayer:

Lead me from the unreal to the Real.
Lead me from darkness to the Light.
Lead me from death to Immortality.

Chapter Two: The Word That Is God

Writing about Ishwara, the Lord, Patanjali says: “His spoken form [vachaka] is Om.” (Yoga Sutras 1:27) Swami Vivekananda translates it: “His *manifesting* word is Om.”

In Chapter One it is said, “To enable the spirits to enter into this process, God breathes forth His own Self as the Power from which is manifested all the realms of relative existence, from the most subtle worlds of nearly-perfected beings to the most objective worlds of atomic matter.” Om is both the Consciousness and the Power that is God. It is His manifesting Word because It makes God manifest to us and is Itself the Power by which God manifests His will—especially through His creation.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:1-4) The first “act” of God is the projection of Himself as Cosmic Vibration: Om. He “speaks” Himself and becomes all things. Then we enter Om Itself to come into manifestation. The bodies which we take on are all formed of variations on the fundamental energy or keynote that is Om. We come into relative existence through Om, we evolve within relative existence through Om, and we transcend relative existence and return to God’s perfect Being through Om. It is no wonder, then, that Om is also called the Pranava, the Word of Life, the Living Word.

Word-God

“I am Om, the Word that is God.” (Bhagavad Gita 7:8) So declared the infinite Satchidananda through the lips of the avatar Krishna. Also: “I am Om.” (Bhagavad Gita 9:17) And: “Among words I am the sacred syllable Om.” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25) Long, long before that the Vedic Seers had declared: “In the beginning was Prajapati [God the Creator], with Him was the Word, and the Word was truly the Supreme Brahman.” (*Prajapati vai idam agra asit. Tasya vak dvitiya asit. Vag vai paramam Brahman.* Krishna Yajurveda, Kathaka Samhita, 12.5, 27.1; Krishna Yajurveda, Kathakapisthala Samhita, 42.1; Jaiminiya Brahmana II, Samaveda, 2244)

How can a Word be God? How can God be a Word?

All things—the entire cosmos itself—are formed of vibrating energy. This cosmic energy possesses the dual nature of light and sound, both of which are essentially consciousness. The totality of that Consciousness is contained and summed up in the Divine Word, Om, known as the *Shabda Brahman*, the Sound God. Om is spoken, yet It is beyond speech in Its essence because It is the *source* of speech. Its spoken form is the final step in the objectification of the primal creative stream arising from the inmost depths of Being Itself, that “point of light within the mind of God” from which has issued all manifested being, all that IS. It is the original movement outward from the Omnipresent Center which took place when the Supreme Consciousness willed, “I am One; let Me become Many.” (Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:3; Taittiriya Upanishad 2:6)

The Word that is God

The Upanishads tells us that Om is Brahman:

“Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being. Through It one knows what is to be known.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1)

“I will tell you briefly of that Goal which all the Vedas with one voice propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing for Which people practice discipline: It is Om.” (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.15-17)

“Om is the Supreme Brahman.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7)

“The real nature of Brahman is identical with the Pranava.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 2:8)

“God is the Syllable Om.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:17)

“Om is Brahman. Om is all this. He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1)

The Word that is me!

They also tell us that Om is our own self, as well:

“The self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very self. He who knows It thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his self [individual spirit].” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12)

“Meditate on Om as the self.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3)

Om the mantra

Om is the original Word of Power, a mantra. A mantra is a series of verbal sounds whose effect lies not in an assigned intellectual meaning, but in an inherent sound-power that can produce a specific effect, physically or psychologically. The word mantra itself comes from the Sanskrit expression *manat trayate* which means “a transforming thought;” literally, “that which when thought carries across”—which produces an objective, perceptible change. It also literally means “a *liberating* thought.”

In the Yoga tradition, Om is the supreme mantra, the most sacred of holy words. Although it is first found in the spiritual writings of Hinduism, Om is used by Buddhists and Jains in their rituals and meditation, and has also passed over into the Jewish, Christian, and Moslem religions in the form of Amin (Amen), which is intoned at the end of all prayers, and in Christianity is even a title of Christ. “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” (Revelation 3:14)

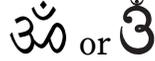
Tibetan Buddhism particularly emphasizes the power and value of Om. In Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, Amida Buddha is invoked by saying “Omitofo” [Amida Buddha]. One time when I was participating in a Name Recitation (Nienfo) session, during the dharma talk at the close the leader, the Venerable Manpu, explained that in the depths of meditation—and especially at the time of leaving the body—the practitioner passes from “Omitofo” to “Omito” [Amida] and thence to “Om” which is the essence of “Omitofo” and is the force that carries the cultivator into the consciousness that is the Pure Land (Sukhavati). Pure Land Buddhists also bless water by drawing an Om symbol in it.

Om is also called: Pranava, Omkara, and Ekakshara. *Pranava* means both life-giver (infuser of prana) and controller of life force (prana). “That which causes all the pranas to prostrate themselves before and get merged in the Paramatman, so as to attain identity with Him, is for that reason known as the Pranava.” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:10a) *Omkara* means “the Om” or even “the Om thing” just as ahankara means “I-ness” or the principle of “I.” *Ekakshara* means “one letter,” but its usual meaning is “one syllable” or “the one-syllable Word.” It also

means “the Only Imperishable,” indicating its identity with God, and always refers to Om. The first recorded teaching of Sri Ramana Maharshi, written down by him in response to the request of a seeker, was: “The Ekakshara [Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Self.”

Om—the Word

This sacred syllable is spelled out either as Om or Aum, but It is usually written in the ideogrammatic forms:



It is most important in repeating Om to pronounce the *O* correctly. It should be pronounced like the long *o* in the Italian or common American manner—as in *home* and *lone*. In England, Canada, and parts of the American South, the long *o* is sometimes pronounced as a diphthong, like two vowels jammed together: either like “*ay-oh*” or “*eh-oh*.” This is not the correct manner of pronouncing the *O*, which should be a single, pure vowel sound.

Om is also considered to be formed of the three letters *a*, *u*, and *m*, which represent the three states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep respectively, as well as the physical, astral, and causal levels of existence. In Sanskrit, when *a* and *u* are combined they produce the sound of *o*. However, this only applies to verbal speech. In mental “speaking” we make the pure sound of *o*, not *a* and *u* together. So the inner Om is only two letters, not three.

Om is more effective if it is mentally intoned—that is, mentally “sung” on a single note (the pitch does not matter—whatever is spontaneous and natural). This makes the repetition stronger and of deeper effect, because intoning Om unifies the mind and naturally concentrates it.

Om should be intoned giving full value to both the *O* and the *M*. That is, Om should be intoned with equal time on both letters: *Oooooommm*. Not *Oommmmmm* or *Oooooomm*. You need not be overexacting about this, but approximately so.

The way to receive the benefit of a mantra is japa, the continual repetition-intonation of the mantra. In this way the invoker is constantly imbued with the power and consciousness inherent in the mantra.

Om in man the microcosm

“The Pranava is both the atman and Brahman; they are united to each other.” (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad) Whenever we intone the Pranava in Its most objectified form as the syllable Om we align and link our consciousness with Its Source. In the microcosm of the human being resides all the powers and processes of the macrocosm of the universe, and in the human being the highest faculty is that of speech. Speech is the projecting of the inner consciousness of the speaker. How much more so when the speaker wields the Power of The Word.

The vibrating column of air within the body from which speech is produced—represented by the flute of Krishna—is the objective embodiment of the essential creative power of the human being and is imbued with both the individual and universal characteristics of the consciousness that wields it. The essence of this power is Om, for It encompasses the beginning and end of the sounds that can be verbally produced. The first sound is that which is produced deepest within the chest, at the bottom of the column of air, the sound of long *O*. The final sound is the resonance made by the closed lips at the very end of that vibrating column, the sound of *M*. Put together the *O* and *M* form the Pranava: Om.

What do we do?

What do we do with this sacred word, Om? Krishna tells us: “Engaged in the practice of concentration, uttering the monosyllable Om [that is] Brahman,...[the yogi] attains to the supreme goal.” (Bhagavad Gita 8:12-14) Shankara in his commentary on the Mundaka Upanishad says: “Just as the bow is the cause of the arrow’s hitting the target, so Om is the bow that brings about the soul’s entry into the Immutable. For the soul when purified by the repetition of Om gets fixed in Brahman with the help of Om without any hindrance, just as an arrow shot from a bow gets transfixed in the target.” And commenting on Patanjali’s statement that Ishwara’s “spoken form is Om,” Shankara says: “This sutra explains the form in which the devotee contemplates on Him.”

An anonymous commentator on a writing of Shankara says this: “The sound Om is the Name and Symbol of Brahman. One realizes Brahman by meditation on this Om. When Om is uttered with concentration there arises the consciousness of Brahman in the mind. [For] Om is the matrix of all sounds. Brahman is the substratum of the whole universe and Om, too, is the substratum of all sounds. Sounds and phenomena are non-different, so the substratum alone remains. Hence Brahman is Om.”

The master yogis of India have through the ages said that God and Om are one, that the infinite Consciousness of God is inherent in the Syllable Om. Since the individual spirit and God are essentially one (though not the same), we can tentatively conclude that Om, repeated within the mind in japa and meditation, will both produce the consciousness of God and the restoration of our union with God.

Some great yogis and Om

Throughout the centuries Om has been the mantra specially commended to sannyasis (monastics), and the majority of them—especially those in the Swami Order of Shankara—have generally employed It as the heart of their sadhana (spiritual practice).

Om was the particular focus of the Natha Yogis, surely the most renowned and revered order of yogi-monks in India’s history. Their tradition claimed that Jesus (Isha Natha) was a great adept of their order. (See *The Christ of India*.) In his book *Mother Worship* Swami Swahananda sums up their involvement with Om as the heart of their sadhana: “The Natha Yogis specialized in the worship of Om along with that of Shiva. To them, Om is the first sound, the most elementary sound, the one unproduced, undifferentiated natural sound, the most spontaneous self-expression of energy or power in audible form. Om is the Name of the Supreme. Every uttered sound is particular, produced from the strokes of the vocal organs, and broken into parts. But Om is an *anahata-nada*, a universal continuous sound behind all broken sounds. It is in the heart, and the search for it is the search for Brahman. The steady and drawn out repetition of Om is prescribed as an effective help in this search. According to the Natha Yogis, the heart, the seat of the *anahata sound*, is not located in any particular part of the body, but gradually shifts from lower yogic centers to the higher ones and ultimately to the sahasrara where union of Shakti with Shiva is attained. Om, again, has been identified with the three gunas—sattva, rajas and tamas—which constitute the world. It is also regarded as the original bija-akshara, or syllable source.” (*Mother Worship*, p. 46)

Nearer our own time, the great nineteenth-century Hindu reformer, Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati, renowned as a yogi *par excellence*, practiced the japa and meditation of Om and

taught them to others, whatever their mode of life. Swami Vivekananda also generally recommended the repetition and meditation of Om. Perhaps the greatest teacher of Om sadhana in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was Swami Rama Tirtha, who propagated Om Yoga in India, Japan, and America. A few decades ago, one of the most revered yogis in Delhi, the capitol of India, was Om Baba who, as his name implies, continually meditated upon Om. Another renowned twentieth-century exponent of Om was Paramhansa Nityananda of Ganeshpuri, whose *Chidakasha Gita* contains some of the most profound statements on Om and Its application by the yogi.

Sri Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh, a true Yogiraj (King of Yoga), was a master of all forms of yoga and wrote a great deal about Om in spiritual practice, including an entire book: *Meditation on Om*. One month before his mahasamadhi he revealed to his close disciples that the heart of his meditation practice was the japa of Om. It was also observed that he did the japa of Om throughout the day as well, often tracing the ideographic form of Om over and over again on his thigh as he sat in silence. He also wrote the following:

I sat alone on a block of stone
On the banks of the Ganges or Bhagirathi.
Mother Ganges blessed me.
I meditated on OM and its meaning—
The Word that is the symbol of Brahman.
The little personality was lost.
The mortal limit of the self was loosened.
But there was infinite extension.
I entered into the Nameless beyond;
I realized the quintessential unity of bliss.
No words can describe the thrill of joy,
The magnanimous mystic experiences,
The supremest and divinest height of felicity!
The little “I” fused into the incandescent brilliance.
Two become one now,
It was all Tejomaya Ananda—
One Mass of transcendental light Bliss.
(*Vairagya Mala*, section 61)

God is guru in the form of Om

Immediately after telling us that God “is Guru even of the Ancients,” Patanjali says: “His spoken form is Om.” In a hymn of the poet-saint Kabir, an Indian mystic of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there are two important statements: “That Word is the Guru; I have heard it, and become the disciple....That Word reveals all.” Beautiful as the thought of God being the guru may be, is it true? If so, *how* is God the guru?

In the depths of God’s Being, Om is eternally present, is eternally flowing or rising, and the same is true of each individual spirit. The heart-core of God and the core of the individual spirit are the same in non-dual unity. Om is flowing from the single point where the spirit and the Spirit are absolutely one.

God is eternally stimulating or “teaching” the spirit to emanate Om as the agent of its evolution and perfection. In this way God is the guru of each one of us. One finite spirit may reveal to another finite spirit the way to realize its oneness with God, and thereby momentarily become a spiritual teacher for that spirit; but God alone will be the Sat–true and eternal–Guru.

Om is the ultimate guru, the infallible teacher and guide from within.

Initiation?

It is commonly believed that an aspiring yogi must be empowered for yoga practice through some kind of initiation or transference of power. There are many exaggerated statements made about how it is impossible to make any progress, much less attain enlightenment, without initiation. But they have no relevance to the practice of Om Yoga, which requires no initiation because it is based squarely on the eternal nature and unity of the jivatman and the Paramatman—what to speak of the nature of Om Itself. The japa and meditation of Om are themselves expressions of the eternal nature of God and man. The eternal spirits need no external input to return to their Source.

It is when the individual perpetually experiences the eternal point where Om is common to both itself and God that it can know its oneness with God, and separation from God is impossible for it. Yet it is still itself, still distinct, though its consciousness is totally absorbed in God and it sees only the One, and can say, “God alone exists. There is no other but God.”

All we need is God Himself in the form of Om.

Chapter Three: Om Yoga Meditation

Meditation is the process of centering our awareness in the principle of pure consciousness which is our essential being. We have lost awareness of our true self through awareness of external objects, and become habituated—even addicted—to objective consciousness. Rather than disperse our consciousness through objects that draw us outward away from the source of our being, we must take an object that will have the opposite effect, present it to the mind, and reverse our consciousness. That object is Om. By sitting with closed eyes and letting the mind become easefully absorbed in experiencing the inner repetitions of Om we thereby directly enter into the *state of consciousness* that is Om, the state of consciousness that is Brahman the Absolute.

The Practice of Om Yoga Meditation

1) Sit upright, comfortable and relaxed, with your hands on your knees or thighs or resting, one on the other, in your lap.

2) Breathe naturally. Your mouth should be closed so that all breathing is done through the nose. This aids in quieting the mind. Though your mouth is closed, the jaw muscles should be relaxed so the upper and lower teeth are not clenched or touching one another, but parted.

3) Gently turn your eyes upward as though looking at a point far distant. But do not strain or try to force your eyes to turn up to a degree that is uncomfortable. Then gently close them—do not squeeze them tight. This removes visual distractions and reduces your brain-wave activity by about seventy-five percent, thus helping to calm the mind. It also stimulates superconscious awareness as will be explained soon.

4) Be aware of your breath naturally (automatically) flowing in and out as you breathe through your nose. Your breathing should always be easeful and natural, not deliberate or artificial.

5) Now begin *mentally* intoning (“singing” on a single note) Om once throughout each inhalation and once throughout each exhalation. Fit the intonations to the breath—not the breath to the intonations. If the breath is short, then the intonation should be short. If the breath is long, then the intonation should be long. Make sure the *O* and the *M* get approximately “equal time”—*Oooooommm*, not *Oommmmmmm* or *Oooooomm*. Don’t torture yourself about this—approximately equal is good enough, and in time your intonations will automatically occur in this right manner. Also, your intonation of Om should begin when your inhalation/exhalation begins and end when it ends. In this way your intonations should be virtually continuous, not with long breaks between them. That is: *OommOommOommOomm*, or *Oomm-Oomm-Oomm-Oomm*, rather than *Oomm...Oomm...Oomm...Oomm*. Here, too, approximately continuous is sufficient.

6) For the rest of your meditation time keep on intoning Om in this manner—in time with the breath—listening to your inner intonations of Om. This enables you to enter effortlessly into the Witness Consciousness that is your finite spirit within the Infinite Spirit that is God.

7) In time your inner mental intonations of Om may change to a more mellow or softer form, even to an inner whispering, but Om is always fully present and effective. Your intonations may even become silent, like a soundless “mouthing” of Om, yet you will still be intoning Om

in your intention. Amazingly Om can become a silent sound, as you can experience for yourself. But of this be sure: *Om never ceases*. Never. You may find that your intonations of Om move back and forth from more objective to more subtle and back to more objective. Just intone in the manner that is natural at the moment.

8) In the same way you will find that your breath will also become more subtle and refined, and slow down. Sometimes your breath can become so light that it almost seems as though you are not breathing at all. At such times you may perceive that your inhaling and exhaling are more like a magnetic pull in and out instead of actual breath movements. This occurs as the prana that produces the breath switches back and forth in polarity from positive to negative.

9) In Om Yoga we do not deliberately concentrate on any particular point of the body such as the “third eye,” as we want the subtle energies of Om to be free to manifest themselves as is best at the moment. However, as you meditate, you may become aware of one or more areas of your brain or body at different times. This is all right when they come and go spontaneously, but keep centered on your intonations of Om.

10) Thoughts, impressions, memories, inner sensations, and suchlike may also arise during meditation. Be calmly aware of all these things in a detached and objective manner, but keep your attention centered in your intonations of Om in time with your breath. Do not let your attention become centered on or caught up in any inner or outer phenomena. Om can also produce peace, awareness and quiet joy in your mind as well as soothing radiations of energy in the physical and subtle bodies. Be calmly aware of all these things in a detached and objective manner—they are part of the transforming work of Om, and are perfectly all right—but keep your attention centered in your intonations of Om in time with your breath. Even though something feels very right or good when it occurs, it should not be forced or hung on to. The sum and substance of it all is this: It is not the experience we are after, but the effect.

11) If you find yourself getting restless, distracted, “fuzzy,” anxious or tense in any degree, just take a deep breath and let it out fully, feeling that you are releasing and breathing out all tensions, and continue as before.

12) Remember: Om Yoga meditation basically consists of three things: a) sitting with the eyes turned up and then closed; b) being aware of our breath as it moves in and out, and c) mentally intoning Om in time with the breathing and listening to those mental intonations—all in a relaxed and easeful manner, without strain.

13) At the end of your meditation time, keep on intoning Om in time with your breath as you go about your various activities. Since you cannot keep your eyes turned up outside meditation, as much as is possible or practical try to keep a general awareness of the “thousand-petalled lotus” of the brain all the time, feeling that the breath and Om are taking place there. In this way you can keep “near” the Chidakasha state you experience in meditation.



The yoga of the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita is the pinnacle of Indian philosophy and yoga. This small book, consisting of only seven hundred verses of four lines each, covers every aspect of dynamic spiritual life. It is a lifetime study, imparting life-giving knowledge, including instruction in meditation. In the opening verses of the fourth chapter Krishna tells Arjuna that “this imperishable yoga... is the supreme secret.” (4:1-3)

First, the yogi sits in an upright posture. “Let him firmly hold his body, head and neck erect and perfectly still.” (6:13)

His eyes should be turned upward without strain and closed, “shutting out (all) external contacts and fixing the gaze inside [within] the eyebrows.” (5:27) This is not actual concentration on the point between the eyebrows, which would cause strain and tension, but a relaxed looking upward as though looking through the eyebrows at a point far distant. (More about this later.)

Next, he breathes through his nose—not his mouth—in a completely natural and spontaneous manner, in this way “equalizing the outgoing and incoming breaths moving within the nostrils,” (5:27) easily calming and refining the breath. Krishna says that the yogis “offer as sacrifice the outgoing breath in the incoming, and the incoming in the outgoing, restraining the courses of the outgoing and the incoming breaths, solely absorbed in the restraint of the breath.” (4:29) The “offering” of the exhalation into the inhalation and vice versa refers to the smoothing of the breath until there is no significant or marked pause between inhaling and exhaling, but rather there is a smooth transition from one to the other—one seeming to arise from the other, both together being a single organic unity. Some Buddhist texts refer to this as “joining” or “circling.” As we become more and more aware of the subtle forms or movements of the inner breaths, it automatically happens that the breath movements on all levels become slower; this is what is meant by “restrained”—not the holding of the breath. We need not try to produce this deliberately, since attention itself modifies and decreases the breath. As a result we easefully remain relaxed and “solely absorbed in the movement of the breath.” This, according to Krishna, is the sacrifice known as pranayama.

Then, through the japa of Om, “having fixed the life-breath in the head, engaged in the practice of concentration, uttering the monosyllable Om—the Brahman—remembering Me always,” (8:12-13) the yogi meditates upon the Supreme. For Krishna, the embodiment of that Supreme, tells us: “I am the syllable Om.” (7:8) “I am the Sacred Monosyllable [Om].” (9:17) And: “Among words I am the monosyllable Om.” (10:25) Further, in this last verse he continues: “Among sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa,” indicating how Om is to be employed by the yogi.

And the ultimate result he also tells. ““With the senses, the mind and the intellect always

controlled, having liberation as his supreme goal, free from desire, fear and anger—the sage is verily liberated for ever.” (5:28) “Thus, always keeping the mind balanced, the yogi, with the mind controlled, attains to the peace abiding in Me, which culminates in liberation.” (6:15)

Finally he gives the rationale and affirmation of this: “Whosoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering Me alone at the time of death, he attains My Being; there is no doubt about this. Whosoever at the end leaves the body, thinking of any being, to that being only does he go, because of his constant thought of that being! Therefore, at all times remember Me.... With mind and intellect fixed (or absorbed) in Me, thou shalt doubtless come to Me alone.” (8:5-7)

“At the time of death, with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion and by the power of Yoga,...he reaches that resplendent Supreme Person....Uttering the monosyllable Om—the Brahman—remembering Me always, he who departs thus, leaving the body, attains to the supreme goal.

“I am easily attainable by that ever-steadfast Yogi who constantly and daily remembers Me, not thinking of anything else [with a single or one-pointed mind]! Having attained Me these great souls do not again take birth [here], which is the place of pain and is non-eternal; they have reached the highest perfection.” (8:10, 13-15)

Simple and easy

Can it be that simple and easy? Yes, it can, and is. Suppose some people who have always lived in tents entered a house and came upon a locked door. Knowing nothing of doors, locks, and keys, how would they open it? They might throw themselves against it, beat on it with their fists or heavy objects such as sledgehammers or even some kind of battering ram. If someone approached them with a tiny key they could easily snap in two and told them it would open the door, they would laugh at him. But he would simply insert the key, turn it, and enter. It would be that simple and that easy. Om Yoga is also that simple and easy because it goes directly to the root of our bondage which is a single (and therefore simple) thing: loss of awareness.

Now let us look at the various components of our Om Yoga practice so we can understand it fully.

The place for meditation

It will be most helpful to your practice if you have a special place exclusively for your practice of meditation. Your mind will begin to associate that place with meditation and will more easily enter a quiet and peaceful state when you sit there. If you can set aside an entire room for practicing meditation, or even a large well-ventilated closet, that is good, but just an area in a room is adequate. The important thing is that the area be devoted exclusively to your meditation.

Your meditation place should be as quiet as possible. As a rule earplugs are not recommended for the practice of meditation since you can become distracted by the sensation of pressure in the ears, or the chirping, cricket-like noises that go on all the time in the ears, or the sound of your heartbeat. But if you need them, use them. Your place of meditation should ideally be a place where you can most easily forget outer distractions, but if it is not, you can still manage to practice meditation successfully.

It should be softly or dimly lighted. (Full darkness might tend to make you go to sleep.) It

is also good to turn off any electric lights, as their pulsation—even though not perceived by the eyes—affects the brain waves and subtly agitates the mind. (Halogen lights do not pulsate, so they are no problem if they do not glare.) If you like having a candle or wick lamp burning when you meditate, they should be a kind that does not flicker. Even a very dim electric light somewhere in the room out of the range of your sight is better than a flickering candle or lamp in front of you.

The room should be moderate in temperature and free from drafts, both cold and hot. It is also important that it be well ventilated so you do not get sleepy from lack of oxygen in the air.

Some meditators like to burn incense when they meditate. This is a good practice if the smoke does not irritate their lungs or noses. Unfortunately, most incense, including that from India, contains artificial, toxic ingredients that are unhealthy. The two best kinds of incenses to use are *genuine* sandalwood or frankincense. Sandal is considered the highest vibratory fragrance. Frankincense and rose also possess a very high vibration. There are several brands of incense that are genuine, but the Auroshika brand made at the Aurobindo Ashram in India is the most trustworthy.

Sit upright

We sit upright for two reasons. First, so we will not fall asleep. Second, to facilitate the upward movement of the subtle life force called prana.

It is important that our meditation posture be comfortable and easy to maintain. Yoga Sutra 2:46 says: “Posture [asana] should be steady and comfortable.” The *Yoga Vashishtha* (6:1:128) simply says: “He should sit on a soft seat in a comfortable posture conducive to equilibrium.” Shankara comments: “Let him practice a posture in which, when established, his mind and limbs will become steady, and which does not cause pain.” Here relaxation is the key. Though sitting upright, be sure you are always relaxed, for Yoga Sutra 2:47 says: “Posture is mastered by relaxation.”

There are several cross-legged postures recommended for meditation. They are the Lotus, Perfect, Auspicious, and Easy Postures, or: Padmasana, Siddhasana, Swastikasana, and Sukhasana. You will find them described in books on Hatha Yoga postures. I especially recommend *Yoga Asanas* by Swami Sivananda of the Divine Life Society, as it is written from the perspective of spiritual development and also gives many hints to help those who are taking up meditation later in life and whose bodies need special training or compensation.

If you can sit in a cross-legged position without your legs going to sleep and making you have to shift them frequently, that is very good. Some yogis prefer to sit on the floor using a pillow. This, too, is fine if your legs do not go to sleep and distract you. But meditation done in a chair is equally as good. Better to sit at ease in a chair and be inwardly aware than to sit cross-legged and be mostly aware of your poor, protesting legs.

If you use a chair, it will be good if it can be used only for meditation. (The same applies to a pillow, pad, or mat used for cross-legged meditation.) This will pick up the beneficial vibrations of your meditation, and when you sit on it your mind will become calm and your meditation easier. If you cannot devote a chair to your meditation, find some kind of cloth or throw that you can put over the chair when you meditate and remove when you are done. (Some people like also using a special shawl or meditation clothing or a robe when meditating.)

If you have any back difficulties, make compensation for them, and do not mind if you

cannot sit fully upright. We work with what we have, the whole idea being to sit comfortably and at ease.

There is no objection to your back touching the back of the chair, either, as long as your spine will be straight. To hold your back in tension is a distraction. If you can easily sit upright without any support and prefer to do so, that is all right, too.

Put your hands on your thighs, your knees, or in your lap: joined, separated, one over the other—whatever you prefer. The palms can be turned up or down. Really it does not matter how you place or position your hands, just as long as they are comfortable and you can forget about them. There is no need to bother with “mudras” as they are irrelevant to Om Yoga practice.

Hold your head so the chin is parallel to the ground or, as Shankara directs, “the chin should be held a fist’s breadth away from the chest.” Make a fist, hold it against your neck, and let your chin rest on your curled-together thumb and forefinger. You need not be painfully exact, about this. The idea is to hold your head at such an angle that it will not fall forward when you relax. Otherwise you will be afflicted with what meditators call “the bobs”—the upper body continually falling forward during meditation.

Meditation is not a military exercise, so we need not be hard on ourselves about not moving in meditation. It is only natural for our muscles to sometimes get stiff or for some discomfort to develop. Go right ahead and move a bit to get rid of the discomfort.

Some yogis prefer facing east or north to meditate, but it has been my experience that in Om Yoga it simply does not matter what direction you face. Yet, you might want to experiment on your own.

Relax

Relaxation is the key to successful meditation just as is ease and simplicity. When we are relaxed the subtle life energies become freed to flow upward, as already mentioned. We also need to be relaxed in both body and mind to eliminate the distracting thoughts and impressions that arise mostly from tension.

It is only natural that you will find your mind moving up and down—or in and out—during the practice of meditation, sometimes being calm and sometimes being restless. Do not mind this at all; it is in the nature of things. At such times you must consciously become even more calm, relaxed, and aware—“lighten up” in the most literal sense. As already said, when restlessness or distractions occur, take a deep breath through your nose, let it out, relax, and keep on meditating.

It is also natural when we begin turning our awareness inward that we will encounter thoughts, memories, various emotions, feelings, mental states, and other kinds of experiences such as lights, sensations of lightness and heaviness, of expansion, of peace and joy, visual images (waking dreams), and such like. None of these should be either accepted or rejected. Instead we should calmly continue our intonations of Om. The inner sound of Om and the states of consciousness it produces are the only things that matter, for they alone bring us to the Goal. We should never become caught up in the various phenomena, however amazing, entertaining, pleasant (or how inane, boring, and unpleasant) they may be, and be distracted from meditation. Experiences must not be held on to, nor should they be pushed away, either. Instead we should be quietly aware of them and keep on with meditation so in time we can pass far beyond such things. This is relaxation in attitude.

Never try to make one meditation period be like one before it. Each session of meditation is different, even though it will have elements or experiences in common with other sessions.

Do not be unhappy with yourself if in meditation it seems you are just floating on the top rather than “going deep.” That is what you need at the moment. Keep on; everything is all right. Remember: Om is not just intelligent, It is Divine Intelligence, and whatever is best for you to experience is what It will produce, either late or soon—but always at the perfect time.

It is important in meditation to be relaxed, natural, and spontaneous—to neither desire or try to make the meditation go in a certain direction or to try to keep it from going in a particular direction. To relax and be quietly observant is the key for the correct practice of meditation.

Yet, correct meditation practice is never passive or mentally inert. At all times you are consciously and intentionally intoning Om. It should be easeful and relaxed, but still intentional, even when your intonations become more gentle and subtle, even whisperlike or virtually silent.

Closed mouth and eyes

Breathing through the mouth agitates the mind, so keeping your mouth closed and breathing only through the nose has a calming effect. So also does closing your eyes, for by closing your eyes you remove visual distractions and eliminate over seventy-five percent of the usual brain wave activity

Upturned eyes

But there is more regarding the eyes. The eyes have a definite esoteric effect on the mind and its subtle energies as well as the polarization of those energies. When the eyes are turned down, they lead into subconscious experiences, especially when they are closed, and even into the sleep state. When the eyes are held straight ahead, they keep us alert and aware of our surroundings, even if the eyes are closed, and confine our awareness to the ordinary conscious state. When the eyes are turned up, they begin transferring our awareness into the levels of superconsciousness. For when the eyes are turned up, the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain, the Sahasrara, begins to open and become active.

The position of the eyes cause one of the three gunas—tamas, rajas, and sattwa—to predominate in our consciousness. When the eyes are turned down, tamas—subconsciousness—prevails. When the eyes are turned directly forward, rajas—waking consciousness—prevails. When the eyes are turned up, sattwa—superconsciousness—prevails.

Meditating with upturned eyes causes the subtle mental energies that pervade the body to begin moving upward into the higher centers of perception in the brain and its astral and causal counterparts. This is why in the Bhagavad Gita (5:27) Krishna speaks of the yogi “shutting out external contacts and fixing the gaze inside [within] the eyebrows.” This is usually translated “between the eyebrows”—at the so-called “third eye”—but *antare bhruvoh* can only mean “inside the eyebrows.” This can also legitimately be translated: “fixing the ‘seeing’ inside the eyebrows,” the idea being that at times during meditation the inner “gaze”—in the sense of awareness—becomes focused on or centered in the front of the forehead behind the eyebrows or as though looking upward through the eyebrows. You will find that this happens quite naturally when you turn your eyes upward and close them. Another verse speaks of how “at the time of death, with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion and by the power of Yoga,

fixing the whole life-breath in the middle of the two eyebrows [*bhruvor madhya pranam aveshya samyak*], he reaches that resplendent Supreme Person.” (Bhagavad Gita 8:10) A more literal translation is: “having united the prana in the middle of the two eyebrows.” This, too, is a spontaneous phenomenon. Remember that the word in the text is prana, which also means the breath. You will find that on occasion you may even experience that the subtle breath is taking place within the area of the eyebrows or the forehead.

In the sixth chapter, verse thirteen, he says that the yogi should sit with upturned eyes, “as though gazing at the origin of his nose”—*swam nasikagram samprekshya*—the eyebrow level of the forehead. The purpose of this is not to concentrate on “the third eye” as is usually thought, and certainly not to make ourselves cross-eyed, but because when we lift our gaze gently upward toward the eyebrow level as though looking at a point far distant (it may help to think of looking upward into the sky), it will cause our awareness as well as our subtle life energies to begin moving upward to higher levels of consciousness.

We must be very sure that this is done without any strain. Nor should the eyes be crossed to any degree. In time your eyes will turn upward easily and naturally, and at the right degree or angle.

A final word on the subject: Even though our upturned eyes are an important element in our meditation practice, once we do turn them up we should forget all about them and become centered in the awareness of our intonations of Om in time with our breath.

Not placing the awareness on the body

Brahman being formless, so also is our meditation. And since Brahman is everywhere, we do not put our mind on any particular place or point in the body. Putting our attention on any point of the body induces body awareness, confines and limits the effects of our meditation, and divides our attention which should be on the subtle sound of our Om intonations. Rather, we fix our attention on Om which is both our individual spirit (jivatman) and the Supreme Spirit (Paramatman). At the same time, Om is at the core of every cell, of every particle of every atom in our body, so every intonation of Om vibrates throughout the entire body, as well as the astral and causal bodies.

Sometimes during meditation you may spontaneously become more aware of some point or area of the body, and that is all right, but keep the focus of your attention on the breath and your intonations of Om, letting whatever happens, happen.

Sound

Sound is the basis of all that “is.” Sound is the way to the realization of the All That Is, including our true self and the Supreme Self, God. “By sound one becomes liberated [*Anavrittih shabdai*].” (Brahma Sutras 4.4.22) Sound is Consciousness itself. Sound—mental sound—is the beginning, middle, and end of our meditation practice. Consequently, listening to and experiencing the effects of our inner intonations of Om is the heart of our meditation practice.

American studies in business psychology have uncovered a most interesting fact: people can detect falsehood much more easily if they are only listening to a speaker and not seeing him. This is because sound stimulates the etheric bodies which reflect the light of the spirit, the wisdom faculty in man. Knowing this many thousands of years ago, the Vedic yogi-seers instructed their students to meditate on sound alone, for from sound arises knowledge (jnana), including self-knowledge.

Om

The entire realm of manifestation is really nothing more than an infinite variety of sound, variations of a single Sound that is the origin and ending of all other sounds. That Sound is Om, the basic resonant frequency of the entire field of existence: “Verily, the Syllable Om is all this, yea, the Syllable Om is all this” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.3). “Om: this Syllable is all this” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12).

It is the keynote of the consciousness that is our true self: “The Self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows It thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his self [individual spirit]” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12). “Meditate on Om as the Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6).

And since we and God are one, it is the keynote of Divine Consciousness as well. “Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1). “That [Om] is the quintessence of the essences, the Supreme, the highest” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.3). “Om is the Supreme Brahman” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7). “God is the Syllable Om” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:17). “Om is Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

Om, then, is the entire focus of our meditation. “One should meditate on this Syllable [Om]” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.1). “Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6). And since It has no intellectual meaning, Its repetition helps us in getting beyond the chattering mind.

I. K. Taimni has this to say regarding Om, the Pranava: “The first and most effective means which Patanjali prescribed for overcoming the distracted condition of the mind is the japa and meditation of the Pranava. He calls the Pranava the *vachaka* of Ishwara. What is a *vachaka*? A *vachaka* is a name which has a mystic relationship with the *vachya*—the entity designated—and has inherent in it the power of revealing the consciousness and releasing the power of the individual for whom it stands. Such a *vachaka* is Om. It is considered to be the most mystical, sacred and powerful mantra by the Hindus because it is the *vachaka* of Ishwara, the Greatest Power and the Supreme Consciousness.

“It may seem preposterous to the ordinary man not familiar with the inner side of life that a mere syllable can carry hidden within it the potential power which is attributed to it by all yogis, and references to which are found scattered through the sacred scriptures of the Hindus. But facts are facts and they are not at all affected by the ignorance and prejudices of people who disbelieve in them. Who could have believed fifty years ago that a mere neutron moving among a number of uranium atoms could produce an explosion powerful enough to blow up a whole city? Anyone who understands the theory of mantra yoga and the relation of vibration with consciousness should be able to see that there is nothing inherently impossible in the idea of a mystic syllable possessing such a power. Besides, we should remember that the facts of the inner life with which Yoga deals are based upon experience no less than the facts of Science.”

In his commentary on the Yoga Sutras Shankara puts it very simply: “Through Om the Lord is met face to face.” And even further: “When the yogi has understood the identity of Om and Brahman he attracts the grace of the supreme Lord through Its repetition and meditation.” And finally: “Meditation is setting the heart on the Lord Who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It.”

Now this is very important: When we want to swim in the ocean, we do not dive into a

particular wave, but into the ocean itself—though we may pass through a wave. Also, the wave, being only a manifestation on the surface of the ocean must be left behind if we are to sound the depths of the ocean. If we stay with the wave, we will remain as separated as the wave is from the ocean. If we “ride” the wave like a surfer we will find ourselves being thrown onto the shore and out of the ocean. It is the same with meditation on names and forms—whether of “gods” or liberated “masters”—rather than diving down where name and form cannot go. This is the only way to get beyond unreality, darkness, and mortality.

We must meditate on the Self—not on external deities or symbolic forms of psychic states. As Sri Ma Sarada Devi said: “After attaining wisdom one sees that gods and deities are all maya.” (*Precepts For Perfection* 672.) The upanishads, Gita, and Yoga Sutras know nothing of meditating on “gods” or “ishta devatas”—only on Om, for only Om is our Self. Here are a few upanishadic statements on the subject:

“The Self is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self.” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12)

“Directly realize the self by meditating on Om.” (Vedantasara Upanishad 1)

“Meditate on Om as the Self.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6)

“Om is the atman himself.” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad)

“Om is a single syllable that is of the nature of the Self....Om is the true form of the Self.” (Tarasara Upanishad)

Om is expanding outward in waves from the core of the cosmos. The same is happening with us. From our atma Om is being impulsed outward. By coming into alignment/synchronicity with the atmic impulse through the intonations of Om, we can return to our true state of being.

Intoning

We mentally intone Om in japa and meditation, “singing” it on a single note, because this unifies the mind and enables our awareness to turn inward steadily and surely. Further, intoning the sound makes it easier to be aware of and to hold on to.

Once more: Be sure in your intonations to give equal value to the *O* and the *M*, letting them resonate inwardly—*Oooooommm*, not *Oooooomm* or *Oommmmmm*. Again, you need not be painfully exacting about this—just make sure the *O* and the *M* are *approximately* equal. Also, it is good if the intonations of Om are virtually continuous, not with long breaks between them: *OommOommOommOomm*, or *Oomm-Oomm-Oomm-Oomm* rather than *Oomm...Oomm...Oomm...Oomm*.

As we go deeper in meditation our perceptions of the inner sound of our mental intonations of Om become increasingly subtle. At first they may be more like ordinary sung speech, but they will progress to become more and more soft until they become a kind of “whispering” and in time can be actually silent—a kind of silent movement—very much like when we silently mouth words instead of speaking them aloud.

When we intone in a most subtle, virtually whispered, or silent, way we still think of Om as being intoned, and mentally *intend* to intone, even if we do not inwardly hear or sense the difference. And our intonations, however subtle, should never be weak or tenuous.

It is important to let your intonations of Om change as they will. They may naturally and spontaneously move back and forth from more objective to more subtle and back to more objective.

Breath

The breath is a dominant factor on all the planes of existence. It is necessary for the vitalization and functioning of all vehicles of consciousness, physical or superphysical. It combines in itself in some mysterious manner the essential qualities of both energy and consciousness and is thus able to serve as an instrument for their actions and reactions on each other.

The purpose of being aware of the physical breath is to enable you to become aware of “the breath of the breath,” the inner movement of consciousness that manifests as the physical breath.

The more attention we give to the breath, the subtler it becomes until it reveals itself as an act of the mind, not the body, and finally as consisting of mind-stuff itself. The breath, like an onion, has many layers. In the practice of Om Yoga meditation we experience these layers, beginning with the most objective, physical layer and progressing to increasingly subtle layers that are rooted in pure being.

Since it is natural for the breath to become increasingly refined as you observe it, you need not attempt to deliberately make this happen. Your attention and intonations of Om will automatically refine it.

As we become more and more aware of the subtle forms or movements of the inner breaths, it automatically happens that the breath movements on all levels become slower. This is the highest form of pranayama. (See Chapter Four: Breath and Sound in Meditation.)

Joining Om to the breath

“Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6) The breath and Om arise from the very root of our being, the spirit. Joining Om to the breath extends Its transforming vibrations throughout the entire range of our being. It also unites the different aspects of our being and begins more effectively and rapidly evolving us, returning us to the Source—but now transformed.

“The breath is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) We join intonations of Om to the breath because on the subtle levels it is always producing the sound of Om. The spirit-self *breathes* Om. So by consciously joining Om to our breathing we link up with our spirit-consciousness and enter into it. Further, when the habit of intoning Om with the breath is established, the simple act of breathing will cue the mind to maintain the intonations.

Om should be intoned once throughout each inhalation and once throughout each exhalation because there are two poles or subtle currents within the causal realm that make the sound of Om as they move outward and manifest as inhalation and exhalation. In a sense there are two Oms—positive and negative, yin and yang—which together produce the projection of the cosmos and the individual’s manifestation therein. So the two Om’s affect the two sides of the yogi’s being. Ultimately they are one, and by his joining of Om to his breath, each breath moves him onward toward the goal of Divine Unity. “To reach It is said to be the greatest of all achievements. It is my highest state of being. Those who reach It are not reborn.” (Bhagavad Gita 8:21)

This is necessary because in all relative beings the prana-breath has become corrupted and confused, binding the spirit rather than freeing it. The prana-breath has gotten out of phase, out of tune or off key—out of alignment with Om, the original Keynote of the universe. By intoning Om in time with his breath, the Om yogi takes charge of his prana-breath, realigns

and repolarizes it, restoring it to its original form and function. In this way he sets himself squarely in the upward-moving stream of evolution and accelerates his movement within it.

It is very necessary for us to begin our intonations of Om when our inhalations/exhalations begin, and end the intonations when the breath movements end. This is because one object of Om Yoga is to perfectly synchronize Om with the breath in case the two have gotten out of phase with one another. This is why you may find on occasion that you tend to feel like beginning your intonations of Om somewhat after (or even before) the breath begins its movement. The remedy for this is to bring them into harmony by making sure to intone in sync with the breath.

Again: we breathe through the nose, not the mouth.

Making the two into one

We are speaking of “the breath *and* Om,” but in reality they are the same thing. The breath is not just a stop and go light, used merely to let us know when to intone Om. The breath is a form, a manifestation, of Om. So are all things, but the breath is the closest to pure Om since it takes its existence directly from Om without any intermediate phase. In Om Yoga we intone Om in time with the breath so the two will remerge and become one, restoring their eternal unity.

It is important that the breath and Om be perfectly integrated. That is why the intonation of Om should begin with the breath movement—whether inhalation or exhalation—and end with its cessation. We need not exaggerate this and turn our meditation into a torment of anxiety, but reasonable care should be taken.

Subtler sound and refined breath

More and more it is becoming known, even scientifically, that whenever we put our attention on something, the object begins changing. This is true of our breath and our intonations of Om. As we calmly fix our awareness on them they become increasingly refined. The breath becomes gentler and easeful, often slowing down until our breathing becomes as light as the breeze of a butterfly’s wings. It is the same with our internal intonations of Om. The inner sound becomes softer and whisperlike, and even virtually silent. These refinements will occur naturally and easily; there is no need to try to make them become more subtle. Whatever is right at the moment—Om will bring it about.

We ourselves are both consciousness and sound—sound waves in the ocean of Consciousness and Sound. We are Om. So in Om Yoga practice, especially when we experience the permutations of the subtle sounds of Om, we are actually experiencing ourselves.

The Chidakasha

“He who journeys on the ship of Om, in him the inner akasha becomes manifest by and by.” (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:28) “Assuming the meditation posture, and all the while introspecting, the yogi should listen to the sound [of Om]....By persisting in the practice in the same manner further and further, the sound will be heard subtler and subtler....The mind, lost in that sound forgetting everything outside, becomes one with it, like water and milk and forthwith merges with the Chidakasha.” (Nadabindu Upanishad 39)

In advanced yoga treatises we frequently encounter this term, “Chidakasha,” which means “the Space (Ether) of Consciousness.” This is the level of existence and consciousness so

pure and subtle, so interwoven with Spirit, that it is indistinguishable from Spirit. By not fixing our attention on any point in the body, but by turning the eyes gently upward during meditation we activate the higher centers of consciousness in the subtle bodies and thus become aware of the formless and placeless Chidakasha. Those who continually attune and merge their consciousness in this way with the Chidakasha will in time become totally identified with the individual spirit-self and with the Supreme Spirit. Since all things have arisen from/in the Chidakasha, this merging is the beginning of Cosmic Consciousness.

Various texts inform us that both Om and the breath arise directly from the Chidakasha. For this reason in Om Yoga meditation we join intonations of Om to the breath. Experiencing the Chidakasha to greater and greater degrees within meditation is the highest experience for the yogi. The more we meditate the higher and higher and further and further we penetrate into the Infinite Consciousness of which we are an eternal part. Meditating with upturned eyes right away begins centering our awareness in the Chidakasha, in the etheric levels of our being.

Though we do not put our attention on the body, we will experience subtle changes taking place even physically, especially in the spine and brain—and even at the “third eye.” By turning our eyes upward and intoning Om in time with the breath we activate literally thousands of channels in the physical and subtle bodies, causing the life force to spontaneously, effortlessly, flow upward into the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain (Sahasrara Chakra) and then merge into the Chidakasha, into the Divine Light that is the essence of Om, the Life-Giving Word, the Pranava.

The process of meditation takes place within the Chidakasha, the seat of the spirit-self. This is the Paradise from which we fell into the “earth” of material consciousness, and to which we return through meditation. Then at the end of life, having prepared ourselves by this practice, we shall ascend from the body into the realm of immortality. “The man who, having subjugated his senses, repeats every day the Pranava Mantra, shakes off his mortal coil and is converted into the Chidakasha which is but another manifestation of Parabrahman. For Om is the Parabrahman Himself.” (The Agni Purana)

Rising into the Sky of Consciousness (Chidakasha)

It is absolutely essential that we understand the necessity to avoid a deliberate fixing of the attention on any place in the body. For we need to let the divine energy (divya shakti) of Om go where it will, sometimes settling for a while in one place and then moving on to another—and much of the time not settling anywhere, but rising upward and pervading everywhere. Especially we need to let the sacred movement rise ever upward into the Sky of Consciousness, the Chidakasha, which is the natural abode of Om, since it originates there. That, too, is our point of origin, and the subtle vibrations of Om will take us back there along with Itself. The Yoga Upanishads make two very important points regarding this.

First, we do not deliberately confine our attention to any particular point of concentration because the subtle movements of Om seek out various avenues or “gates” during meditation. The Amritabindu Upanishad says: “By means of Om he [the meditating yogi] sees the way, the way along which his prana [and breath] goes; therefore one should always repeat It so that he goes along the right way: through the heart-gate, the air-gate, the gate which leads upward, and the opening of the gate of liberation which is known as the open orb [the sun.]” (Amritabindu Upanishad 25, 26)

Although the Bhagavad Gita (8:10) speaks of the yogi departing from the body through the point between the eyebrows, the ajna chakra, that is only one of the gates of departure for the yogi—though it is the usual one, which is why it is mentioned. There are other, higher gates, and we must leave the prana free to seek out the one that corresponds to our state of development, for the gate we exit through leads us into the world (loka) that corresponds to it. In meditation we do not leave the body, but the prana rising up to one of those points can stimulate in us the higher consciousness “native” to those higher worlds, and prepare us to ascend there at the end of life. “Rising” to one of those gates can also enable us to receive the spiritual energies of those worlds while yet here in this world.

Second, it is the goal of the prana and the vibrations of Om during meditation to move upward like smoke and merge into the sky, the Chidakasha, and experience the consciousness that is beyond any gates or worlds. This is the most important aspect. So the prana must be left free to do so by our just “letting it be” and not directing or confining it in any way. Speaking of this upward movement of the prana and Om, the Matirayana Upanishad (7:11a) likens it to the way smoke pours upward into the sky and merges into it: “In this process that power, during the motion of prana, emerges as the wafting of smoke, as when a lump of salt is thrown into water or as the thought of one who meditates extends itself.” The Matri Upanishad (7:11) presents the same idea, saying: “Verily, the nature of the Chidakasha is the same as the Syllable Om. With this Syllable, indeed, that rises up, goes upward and pours forth....In the breathing Om is like the action of smoke; for when there is motion of air the smoke rises to the sky in one column and follows afterward one air current after another.” It is necessary to let the subtle vibratory movement of Om go where It will.

The gentle turning up our eyes in meditation will ensure that this all comes about as it should.

Khechari Mudra

Mudras are usually thought of as hand positions, but positions of the eyes are sometimes referred to in yogic texts as mudras. For example, in the miraculous photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya found in the first edition of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, the great yogi is demonstrating the eye position known as Sambhavi Mudra.

The turning up of the eyes in Om Yoga meditation is the real Khechari Mudra. In Sanskrit, *kha* means the sky, space, or ether (akasha). *Char* means “to move.” So *khechari* means “sky walking”—moving in the etheric space that is the limitless basis of everything, the akasha that is consciousness itself. Khechari Mudra is the procedure which enables the yogi to be a *khechara*—one who flies in the Sky of Consciousness.

Khechari Mudra opens the “sky” of the Sahasrara, the Thousand-Petalled Lotus—and even beyond. Spending hours of meditation in this inner space produces the most profound changes in the meditator’s psychic energy system, including the spine and brain, on the physical, astral, and causal levels. The union of the prana (breath) and the subtle vibrations of Om operate like laser surgery on the brain. Dramatic repolarization of the consciousness and life force also take place. Sensitive yogis will experience this along with a myriad other transformations.

The solar path of liberation

All plant, animal, and human life on this planet depends upon the sun. It is the subtle

powers of sunlight which stimulate growth and evolution. Sunlight particularly stimulates the activity of the higher centers in the brain, especially that of the pineal gland. Even in the depths of the earth a sensitive man can tell when the sun rises and sets above him. The sun truly awakens us in the deepest sense. As the germinating seed struggles upward toward the sun and out into its life-giving rays, so all higher forms of life reach out for the sun, which acts as a metaphysical magnet, drawing them upward and outward toward ever-expanding consciousness. Sunlight is the radiant form of Om, so the sun initiates the entire solar system into Om.

Human beings are solar creatures, therefore to intone Om is natural to them. Again, the Amritabindu Upanishad says: "By means of Om he [the meditating yogi] sees the way, the way along which his prana goes. Therefore one should always repeat It [Om] so that he goes along the right way: through the heart-gate, the air-gate, the gate which leads upward, and the opening of the gate of liberation which is known as the open orb [the sun.]" (Amritabindu Upanishad 25, 26)

The gate of liberation! When the individual comes into manifestation on this earth he passes from the astral world into the material plane by means of the sun, which is a mass of exploding astral energies, not mere flaming gases. And when the individual has completed his course of evolution within this plane, upon the death of his body he rises upward in his subtle body and passes through the sun into the higher worlds, there to evolve even higher or to pass directly into the depths of the transcendent Brahman.

To ensure that this will take place, the Om Yogi practices the japa and meditation of Om, for the Chandogya Upanishad tells us that Om and the sun are identical in essence, "for the sun is continually sounding 'Om.'" (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1) That is, the energy of the sun is a manifestation of Om. Scientists have only recently discovered this phenomenon. On page 16 of the July 2004 issue of *National Geographic* we find this: "Bubbles the size of Texas cover the sun's face.... Called granules, the short-lived cells of plasma carry heat to the surface through convection, the same way water boils in a pot. The rise and fall of granules creates sound waves, which cause the sun to throb like a drum every five minutes."

Om yogis intone Om in time with their breath, for the upanishad further tells us that "the breath is continually sounding 'Om.'" (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) The solar energies and the breath are also intimately connected.

Our life depends on the light of the sun, so it is also a manifestation of the power of Om. The japa and meditation of Om aligns us with the solar powers that are Om and thereby greatly increase our life force and the evolution of all the levels of our being.

Om Yoga prepares us for the Great Departure. As the Chandogya Upanishad also says: "Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun. ...When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these very rays or he goes up with the thought of Om. As his mind is failing, he goes to the sun. That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers." (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2,5)

The solar rays do not just flow into this world, they also draw upward through the sun and beyond. In the human body the process of exhalation and inhalation is related to solar energy, and much of the solar power on which we subsist is drawn into the body through our

breathing. Which is why Giri Bala (see *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Chapter Forty-Six) employed a special form of breathing to live without eating. The solar rays do not just strike the surface of our body, but penetrate into the physical nerves–nadis. The nadis are also the channels in the astral body that correspond to the physical nerves. Just as the electrical impulses flow through the physical nerves, the subtle solar life force, or prana, flows through the subtle nadis and keeps us alive and functioning. And as we have already seen, the breath, as it flows, is always sounding Om. The breath, then, is a vehicle for the solar energies that produce evolution, and we increase its effect through the japa and meditation of Om.

The continual intonation of Om, both in and outside of meditation, conditions our subtle levels so that at the time of death we will be oriented toward the solar powers and can ascend upon them—especially if we continue our intonations of Om even after the body has been dropped. Those intonations will guarantee our ascent into the solar world. Those who have imbued themselves with the Pranavic vibrations will enter through the solar gate, whereas those who have not done so will be shut out by it and compelled to return to earthly rebirth.

“At the time of departure from this world, remember Om, the Lord, the Protector.” (Yajur Veda 40:15) Whatever we think of most during life we will think of at the time of our death. This is affirmed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (8:5-10): “At the hour of death, when a man leaves his body, he must depart with his consciousness absorbed in Me. Then he will be united with Me. Be certain of that. Whatever a man remembers at the last, when he is leaving the body, will be realized by him in the hereafter; because that will be what his mind has most constantly dwelt on, during this life. Therefore you must remember Me at all times, and do your duty. If your mind and heart are set upon Me constantly, you will come to Me. Never doubt this. Make a habit of practicing meditation, and do not let your mind be distracted. In this way you will come finally to the Lord, Who is the light-giver, the highest of the high.” And the Prashna Upanishad (5:5,7): “If he meditates on the Supreme Being with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, the Sun. He is led to the world of Brahman. He sees the Person that dwells in the body, Who is higher than the highest life. ...That the wise one attains, even by the mere sound Om as support, That Which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme.”

Those who continually invoke and meditate upon Om during their lifetime will remember Om at the time of death, and by means of Om will ascend to the sun and beyond into the real Beyond. “As it is said: ‘Indeed the sun is this Om;’ therefore one should meditate and make himself ready to unite himself with it.” (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:3)

Yoga Nidra—conscious “sleep”

The purpose of meditation is the development of deep inner awareness. The *Yoga Vashishtha* (5:78), a classical treatise on yoga, speaks of the state “when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state” known in Sanskrit as sushupti. The sage Sandilya in his treatise on yoga, the Sandilya Upanishad, also speaks of “the right realization of the true nature of the sound which is at the extreme end of the pronunciation of the syllable Om, when sushupti is rightly cognized [experienced] while conscious.”

In deep meditation we enter into the “silent witness” state, experiencing the state of dreamless sleep while fully conscious and aware. When approaching this state the beginner may actually fall asleep. This is not to be worried about, for such is quite natural, and after a while will not occur. From birth we have been habituated to falling asleep when the mind

reached a certain inner point. Now through meditation we will take another turn—into the state of deep inner awareness.

Although I said it is “dreamless sleep” it is of course much, much more, for there is a deepening of consciousness in this state that does not occur in ordinary dreamless sleep.

So when you have this “asleep while awake” state occur, know that you are on the right track—when it is imageless and thoughtless except for your intonations of Om (for those should never stop). “Astral dreaming” during meditation is only that: dreaming illusion. Not that visions cannot occur during meditation, but it is easy to mistake dreams for visions. Therefore it is wise to value only the conscious sushupti experience in meditation, within which Om continues to be the focus of our awareness. This is the true samadhi.

The “workings” of Om

But there is another, seemingly contradictory, side to this. *Yogash chitta-vritti-nirodhah*. (Yoga Sutras 1:2) Patanjali here defines yoga as the stopping (*nirodhah*) of the modifications (*vritti*) of the mind (*chitta*). Superficially considered, this seems to mean merely being blank, without thoughts. If this were so, dreamless sleep would be yoga, and the more we slept the more enlightened we would become! Still, most yogis tend to think that in meditation no thoughts or impressions should arise—that if they do, the meditation is imperfect and reduced in value. But Om is a transforming-transmuting force, and that implies change. And change is a process. So sometimes pure Yoga Nidra will occur, and at other times (often in the same meditation) things will definitely be going on.

Meditation, then, is not just sinking down into silence and stasis, though that does happen in some meditation periods, but is a spontaneous, extremely active state. As you meditate, on the subtle levels you may (will) see, hear, feel, and be aware of a great many things—thoughts, visual impressions, memories, inner sensations, and suchlike. All of this is evoked by your practice, and nothing will be a distraction if you simply observe it in a calm and objective manner, keeping your awareness on the breath and intoning Om in time with it.

Your interest should be in your intonations of Om, yet you should be aware of what is going on because Om literally is your guru and will be showing and telling you a great deal. Most things you should just let fly by on their own, but occasionally you will receive marked intuitive impressions. Your higher intelligence (*buddhi*) usually works through intuition/conceptualization, but at times your spiritual mind will literally talk to you. I am aware that a lot of people let their mind babble on and think God is talking to them, but that is no reason not to tell you the truth: Om is your Master Teacher, and will teach you in many ways while truly changing you at the same time. The key is to remain a calm observer and able to distinguish between the worthless antics of the lower mind and that which is being produced directly by Om for your betterment.

Yet at other times you will simply sit in the happy and peaceful silence of Yoga Nidra, intent on the sound of your subtle intonations of Om. Both are equally beneficial, for Om knows what It is doing, and both may occur in the same meditation. Om is truly the Pranava, the Life-Giver, and will live *in* you *as* you, for It *is* you.

The three elements of Om Yoga meditation

There are three components of Om Yoga meditation: 1) sitting with the eyes turned up and then closed; 2) being aware of our breath as it moves in and out, and 3) mentally intoning

Om in time with the breathing and listening to those mental intonations. They are the essential ingredients of Om Yoga meditation, and we should confine our attention to them. If in meditation we feel unsure as to whether things are going right, we need only check to see if these three things are being done and our attention is centered in them. If so, all is well. If not, it is a simple matter to return to them and make everything right.

Of the three, listening to the mental intonations of Om is the major key to success in meditation. It is essential that we become centered in the etheric levels of our being, from which sound arises, and this is done by inwardly intoning Om and listening to those intonations. During meditation, whatever happens, whatever comes or goes, relax and keep *listening* to your inner intonations of Om. It is the sound of Om that accomplishes everything. And by listening to It you become totally receptive and responsive to It so It can work Its transforming purpose to the maximum degree.

Invariables

There are certain invariables—absolutes of practice—which we must be aware of and conform to in our meditations. They are:

1) *Om never ceases*. Never. We must not let passivity or heaviness of mind interrupt our intonations by pulling us into negative silence. That would be a descent rather than an ascent.

2) In intoning, we must always give equal value to both *O* and *M*. At least approximately so.

3) We always intone Om in time with the breath.

4) Our intonations of Om, like the breath to which we are linking them, should be virtually continuous, not with long breaks between them. That is: *OommOommOommOomm*, or *Oomm-Oomm-Oomm-Oomm* rather than *Oomm...Oomm...Oomm...Oomm*.

5) We always meditate with closed mouth and eyes.

6) During meditation the eyes should be gently raised upward as though looking at a point far distant and above us.

7) The focus, the center of attention, of our meditation is the sound of our mental intonations of Om in time with our breath. In an easeful and relaxed manner we become absorbed in that inner sound. This is meditation; this is spiritual life.

Cultivating consciousness

Our intention in meditating is to center our awareness permanently in the consciousness of who we really are—in the spirit whose nature is itself pure consciousness. We center or merge our awareness in the breath and Om because they arise directly from the atman and will lead us into the consciousness which is the Self.

Shankara defines correct meditation as “meditation established in the perception of the nature of Spirit alone, pure Consciousness itself.” Yoga Sutra 3:55 tells us: “Liberation is attained when the mind is the same as the spirit in purity.” That is, when through meditation we are permanently filled with nothing but the awareness of pure consciousness, liberation is attained. “That is the liberation of the spirit when the spirit stands alone in its true nature as pure light. So it is.” This is the conclusion of Vyasa. The pure consciousness of I AM alone prevails.

The root cause of our ignorance and its attendant miseries is forgetfulness of our true Self—and God, the Self of our Self. Since the two are really one, it follows that our meditation

must consist of that which is both self (atman) and Supreme Self (Paramatman). And that “one thing” is Om. For: “The Pranava is both the atman and Brahman; they are united to each other.” (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad)

The atman-self is never anything but consciousness, yet it, like God, has extended itself outward as the many levels of our present state of being. Unlike God, we have lost control over just about everything, and by becoming absorbed in awareness of our external being have caused it to take on a virtually independent existence, dragging us along with it. Conversely, by keeping ourselves centered in the pure awareness, the witnessing consciousness that is our real self, we will begin the process of turning all those levels back into pure spirit.

It is awareness of our inner intonations of Om that enables us to become centered in our true self. Sri Ramana Maharshi said: “The Ekakshara [Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Self.” And: “Earnest seekers who, incessantly and with a steady mind, repeat ‘Om’ will attain success. By repetition of the pure ‘Om’ the mind is withdrawn from sense objects and becomes one with the Self.”

Prayer

It is traditional in India for some brief prayer to be made before and after meditation. Usually before meditation a simple prayer is made asking divine blessing and guidance. Then at the end another brief prayer is made giving thanks, offering the meditation to God, and asking divine blessing for the rest of the day. There is no set form, just words from the heart. This is not essential for Om Yoga practice, but those who are so inclined may find it beneficial.

Japa and meditation of Om

Japa and meditation of Om support each other. Continual japa of Om during your daily routine will increase the effectiveness of your practice of meditation, and daily meditation practice will deepen the effect of your japa outside meditation. By the two wings of japa and meditation we ascend through Om to the Highest That is Om.

Commenting on the Yoga Sutras, Vyasa tells the Om yogi: “It has been said: ‘After Om japa, let him set himself in meditation, after meditation, let him set himself to japa. When Om japa and meditation come to perfection the Supreme Self [Paramatman] shines forth.’” And Shankara, commenting on Vyasa’s commentary, says: “Meditation is setting the heart on the Lord Who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It. Yogis who are engaged in both japa and meditation attain one-pointedness of mind. After japa, which causes his mind to bow before the Lord, let him engage in meditation. When his mind becomes unwavering from meditation on the Lord, let him do japa of Om, for japa leads to meditation. When japa and meditation of Om come to perfection then the Supreme Lord [Parameshwara], the Supreme Self [Paramatman] Who stands in the highest place, shines forth for the yogi.”

When doing japa as we are engaged in other activities there is a profound effect, but we are not able to experience the effects of Om nearly as much as we can while sitting in meditation. The meditation experience is absolutely essential for spiritual progress, just as japa is essential to ensure that meditation will be effective to the maximum degree.

Throughout the day—japa

Meditation is most effective, but its effects need to be sustained throughout the day by continuing to intone Om in an easy and relaxed manner in time with the breath without any

strain, just as you do in meditation. That is, Om should be intoned *constantly*, throughout all activities, without break or interruption. Naturally this is difficult, even impossible to do, in the beginning, nevertheless it *is* possible in time. Immediately upon awakening in the morning the mental intonations of Om should begin and should be maintained even after going to bed until falling asleep. Not only does this deepen your consciousness, it also enables you to obtain much more benefit from your sleep, and the intonation of Om can occur even in sleep.

Because of the importance of staying attuned to the Chidakasha, outside our times of meditation we should maintain “Chidakasha awareness” by keeping our awareness on/in our head in a very gentle and relaxed manner, feeling our breath subtly moving within the Thousand-Petalled Lotus of the brain and “hearing” our inner intonations of Om softly sounding there.



Sometimes it may be difficult or impossible to intone Om with the breath, for example when doing strenuous exercise and the breath is labored or irregular. At those times Om should just be intoned over and over like the tolling of a bell until you can resume the intonations with the breath.

Preparing for sleep

It is most helpful to do the japa of Om until you fall asleep, for this aids in the development of inner awareness during the waking time and in meditation.

When you lie down to sleep or rest, lie flat on your back with your arms at your side, palms downward, and your legs out straight but relaxed, in the so-called Corpse Pose (Savasana). The feet need not be held straight up. Relax completely, with closed eyes—either turned up or turned down according to your wish. Do the normal process of meditation until you fall asleep. If you find that lying on your back is not conducive to sleep, then lie in any position in which you can be comfortable and relaxed.

If you awaken during the sleep period, keep on doing the same until you fall sleep again.

This practice is also helpful when you are ill, as it can aid the healing process.

In conclusion

“When you utter ‘Om’ it travels not only all around the earth but throughout all space and eternity”—so said Paramhansa Yogananda. Thoughts do not cease the moment they pass from the conscious mind. They spread out around us, into our aura, the subtle field of biomagnetic and mental energies around our physical body, and then on into the surrounding creation, ultimately extending to the farthest reaches of the cosmos and then returning and striking back into our aura and mind. This is the process of mental karma. By continually doing repetition and meditation of Om, we set up a continuous current of spiritual vibration that in

time becomes a perpetual inflow of higher consciousness as it returns to us after having extended throughout creation and benefited all things and all beings therein. In this way we create the highest form of spiritual karma, uplifting and divinizing both ourselves and all that exists.

Furthermore, every thought is a wave or whorl that keeps vibrating in the very substance of our mind (chitta) and even—depending on how strong they were and how often they were repeated—into future lives. Om, then, imbues us with Its divine light and power, counteracting the past habit of negative, foolish, or idle thoughts.

Therefore, throughout the day and night, whatever you are doing or whenever at rest, continually intone Om mentally in time with the breath and center your awareness in the sound. Since there is no time when you do not breathe, this is really not hard.

Chapter Four: Breath and Sound in Meditation

We do not sit in silent blankness because that would not return us to our eternal consciousness of Spirit. Instead we have to have the right inner environment for the return to take place. This is provided by only two things: Om and the breath. They will not do it separately—they must be joined, and joined in the right way.

Swami Vivekananda, writing on Raja Yoga, points out that according to the philosophers of India the whole universe is composed of two materials: akasha and prana. “Just as Akasha is the infinite, omnipresent material of this universe, so is this Prana the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this universe.” Sound rises directly from akasha, and breath rises directly from prana. Since they arise from the spirit-center, when their right joining is done they free and enable us to return and merge our consciousness with that center. Joining the two, we go straight to the heart of ourselves and the universe. That is, we go directly to the Heart of Brahman.

The breath and Om are like two firesticks. Fire is inherent in both, but only when the two are brought together in friction does the fire come forth. The “fire” we are wanting to bring forth is the spirit-consciousness that is our real self.

In Indian mythology it is said that the realm of Vishnu is guarded by two doorkeepers who escort the questing soul into the Divine Presence. This is a symbol of the breath and Om which when united bring the yogi into the world of higher consciousness. In Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist temples it is common to find three images on the altar: the deity in the middle and on either side the two companions of the deity whose favor enables the devotee to communicate directly with the deity. In Christian iconography there is the depiction known as the Deisis in which Jesus is in the middle and the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist are on the sides.

In the realm of meditation, the doorkeepers/companions conduct the seeker into the throne room and then stand at the door to guard against intruders. That is, the breath and Om lead us into the realm of the Chidakasha, the Space of Consciousness, and keep guard there against the intrusion of distracting thoughts and states of mind, seeing that nothing disturbs our inner quest.

These two companion-friends deserve our careful study.

The Role of Breath in Meditation

Breath, the universal factor

The Sanskrit word prana means both “breath” and “life.” Breath is the single universal factor of life. Its inception gives us life, and its cessation brings us death. All that lives, breathes—the commonality of breath transcends all difference. The process of breath is identical in all, consisting of inhalation and exhalation—expansion and contraction. It is the most immaterial factor of our existence, a manifestation of the body-mind-spirit link. For this reason, the breath is a natural and logical factor in meditation.

Breath and Yoga

Life causes us to breathe, and breath causes us to live. Breath leads us into the outer life,

and it will lead us into the inner life—to the principle of Life itself. Therefore meditation practices involving the breath are found in many mystical traditions.

Breath plays such an important part in the technique of Om Yoga because the breath is the meeting place of body, mind, and spirit.

The breath and the *body* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the body is calm, and agitated or labored when the body is agitated or labored. The heavy exhalation made when feeling exhausted and the enthusiastic inhalation made when feeling energized or exhilarated establish the same fact.

The breath and the *emotions* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the emotions are calm, and agitated and labored when the emotions are agitated or out of control. Our drawing of a quick breath, when we are surprised, shocked, or fearful, and the forceful exhalation done when angry or annoyed demonstrate this.

The breath and the *mind* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the mind is calm, and agitated, irregular, and labored when the mind is agitated or disturbed in any way. Our holding of the breath when attempting intense concentration also shows this.

Breath, which exists on all planes of manifestation, is the connecting link between matter and energy on the one hand and consciousness and mind on the other. It is necessary for the vitalization and functioning of all vehicles of consciousness, physical or superphysical.

We start with awareness of the ordinary physical breath, but that awareness, when cultivated correctly, leads us into higher awareness which enables us to perceive the subtle movement behind the breath. Ultimately, we come into contact with the Breather of the breath, our own spirit. In many spiritual traditions the same word is used for both breath and spirit, underscoring the esoteric principle that in essence they are the same, though we naturally think of spirit as being the cause of breath(ing). The word used for both breath and spirit is: In Judaism, *Ruach*. In Eastern Christianity (and ancient Greek religion), *Pneuma*. In Western Christianity (and ancient Roman religion), *Spiritus* (which comes from *spiro*, “I breathe”). In Hinduism and Buddhism, *Atma* (from the root word *at* which means “to breathe”), and *Prana*.

The identity of the breath with the individual spirit, the atman (self)

The breath is the spirit in extension. “The Self is the breath of the breath.” (Kena Upanishad 1:2) “The breaths are the Real, and their Reality is the Self.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.20)

The breath is a key to experience of the Self. When we relax and make ourselves aware of the breath, the mind naturally turns within and begins tracing the breath-thread back to the consciousness of which it is the dualistic manifestation. This is accomplished by breathing naturally and letting the breath do as it will rather than by forcing it into artificial modes.

The breath can lead us inward into the center—to the spirit. When we observe the breath, we actually observe our spirit acting. “He who breathes in with your breathing in is your Self. He who breathes out with your breathing out is your Self.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.4.1) Through the breath we can become established in the consciousness that *is* the Self.

The identity of the breath with the Supreme Spirit, Brahman

But breath is much more than an individual matter, and therefore is more than a means to

uncover the individual consciousness of which it is a manifestation. It is also a bridge to the Infinite Consciousness, being rooted in the Supreme Spirit. The breath is the living presence and action of God.

“O Prana, lord of creation, thou as breath dwellest in the body.” (Prashna Upanishad 2.7)

“When one breathes, one knows him as breath.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.7)

“Self-luminous is that Being, and formless. He dwells within all and without all. He is unborn, pure, greater than the greatest. From him is born the breath.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.1.2,3) Since the breath rises from God, it can be resolved back into God.

“Breath is a part of Brahman.” (Chandogya Upanishad 4.9.3)

“The being who is the breath within—him I meditate upon as Brahman.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.6)

“Breath is the Immortal One.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.6.3)

“The breath is real, and He [Brahman] is the reality of the breath.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.3.6)

“The shining, immortal person who is breath is the Self, is Brahman.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.5.4)

“Which is the one God? The breath. He is Brahman.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.9.9)

“They who know the breath of the breath...have realized the ancient, primordial Brahman.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.18)

“The breath is the Supreme Brahman. The breath never deserts him who, knowing thus, meditates upon it. Having become a god, he goes to the gods.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.1.3)

Ramana Maharshi on the breath

In *Maha Yoga*, Sri Ramana says: “Pranayama is of two kinds: one of controlling and regulating the breath and the other of simply watching the breath.”

In the book *Day By Day With Bhagavan*, we find the following related to the just-cited passage from *Maha Yoga*: “[Seekers] are advised to watch their breathing, since such watching will naturally and as a matter of course lead to cessation of thought and bring the mind under control.”

When asked in the same conversation about actually controlling the breath, he commented: “Watching the breath is also one form of pranayama. Retaining breath, etc., is more violent and may be harmful in some cases.... But merely watching the breath is easy and involves no risk.”

In *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*: “To watch the breath is one way of doing pranayama. The mind abstracted from other activities is engaged in watching the breath. That controls the breath; and in its turn the mind is controlled.” And further: “Breath and mind arise from the same source. The source can be reached by regulating the breath.... Regulation of the breath is accomplished by watching its movements.”

And from the third volume of *The Power of the Presence*: “It is the Atman that activates the mind and the breath.” (*The Power of the Presence*, vol. III, p. 230)

The Role of Sound in Meditation

Liberating sound

Why do we use sound in meditation? “By sound one becomes liberated [*Anavrittih shabdai*],” is the concluding verse of the Brahma Sutras (4.4.22). How is this so?

When relative existence, individual or cosmic, begins, there is a chain of manifestation. First there is an out-turning of Consciousness, an Expansion which is known as the Chidakasha, the Space (Ether) of Consciousness. Immediately there arises within this infinite Expanse a movement that produces a Sound. This is the Cosmic Breath, and Om is the Sound. From that Sound-Movement comes all that exist in the realm of Relativity.

This means that consciousness is the root of sound—is innate in sound. Sound, then, is the direct means to return our awareness to the inmost level of our being and put us into touch with consciousness itself. At the same time, sound rules all the levels of our being and has the ability to infuse all those levels with the highest spiritual consciousness, to spiritualize every bit of us. And the essence, the root, of all sound is Om, that is both energy and consciousness. Listening to our inner intonations of Om during japa and meditation right away centers our awareness in the highest, etheric level of our being. It returns our awareness to its source, gathers up and centers every other aspect of our being in spiritual consciousness.

Through japa and meditation the Divine Sound, Om, pervades all our bodies, corrects, directs, and empowers them to perfectly and fully manifest all their potentials—which is the root purpose of our relative existence. Through Om Yoga practice all the aspects of our being are brought into perfect fruition and then enabled to merge back into their Source in the state of absolute liberation. Om Yoga, then, embraces all the aspects of our existence—not only the highest part—and is supremely practical. Om, through Its japa and meditation, perfects our entire being.

Internal sound

We use sound in Om Yoga—but it is not just any form of sound. It is sound that is produced (generated) in the mind, not sound that is passively heard either through the ears or through the memory of auditory sound.

The cosmos and the individual are manifested by the same process: ever-expanding sound-vibration, Spanda. As we enter into relative consciousness through the expansion of sound, just so can we enter back into transcendent Consciousness through the intentional contraction of sound that occurs in meditation. Tracing Om back to Its source, the Om yogi discovers It within himself as both Power and Consciousness. Through meditation he experiences the subtle states of consciousness inherent in Om.

This procedure is spoken of in the Katha Upanishad: “The self, though hidden in all beings, does not shine forth but can be seen by those subtle seers, through their sharp and subtle intelligence. The wise man should restrain speech into the mind; the latter he should restrain into the understanding self. The understanding self he should restrain into the great self. That he should restrain into the tranquil self.” (Katha Upanishad 1.3.12,13) By “mind” is meant the manas, the sensory mind; by “understanding self” is meant the buddhi, the intellect; by “the great self” is meant the will; and by “tranquil self” is meant the subtlest level, the Chidakasha, the witness-link between our pure consciousness and our perceptions.

In *Viveka Chudamani* (verse 369) Shankara expresses it this way: “Restrain speech in the manas, and restrain manas in the buddhi; this again restrain in the witness of the buddhi [the chidakasha], and merging that also in the Infinite Absolute Self, attain to Supreme Peace.” Om does this through increasingly subtlety.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad tells us: “The faculty of speech is the place of merging.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.11) In the subtle sound of Om the consciousness of the yogi is resolved into its pure, divine state. The upanishads unanimously teach that the syllable Om is the atman; that one who knows this through meditation has his jivatman [individual spirit] merged in the Paramatman [Supreme Spirit]. Who knows Om as such, he alone is a sage, none else.

Ramana Maharshi on Om

“The Ekakshara [“One Syllable”–Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Self.” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 145)

“*Pratyahara* [interiorization of the mind] is regulating the mind by preventing it from flowing towards the external names and forms. The mind, which had been till then distracted, now becomes controlled. The aids in this respect are meditation on the Pranava and reflection on the Nada [the subtle sound of Om experienced in meditation].” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 24)

“The purport of prescribing meditation on the Pranava is this. The Pranava is Omkara...the advaita-mantra which is the essence of all mantras.... In order to get at this true significance, one should meditate on the Pranava. ...The fruition of this process is samadhi which yields release [moksha], which is the state of unsurpassable bliss.” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 25,26)

“Maunam [silence] is the state of Shakti [power] that emerges from within as Ekakshara [Om].” (*Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, G. V. Subbaramayya, p. 149).

“Yesterday a Hindu asked Bhagavan, ‘Is Omkara a name of Ishwara?’ Bhagavan said, ‘Omkara is Ishwara, Ishwara is Omkara. That means Omkara Itself is the swarupam (the real form of the Self).” (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 60).

“Omkara itself is Brahman. That Brahman is the nameless and formless pure SAT [Reality]. It is That that is called Omkara. ...Omkara which is beyond the speech or the mind and which can only be experienced, cannot be described by word of mouth.” (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 119).

“Om is everything.” (Day by Day with Bhagavan, Devaraja Mudaliar, p. 214).

“Earnest seekers who, incessantly and with a steady mind, repeat ‘Om’ will attain success. By repetition of the pure ‘Om’ the mind is withdrawn from sense objects and becomes one with the Self.” (*Sri Ramana Gita* 3:10,11, Ganapati Muni)

Sri Ramana recommended study of the Ribhu Gita, a traditional text of Advaita. It simply says: “The syllable ‘Om’ is the self.” (Ribhu Gita 10:22)

The Unity of the Breath and Om

Commenting on Yoga Sutra 1:34, Vivekananda says: “The whole universe is a combination of prana and akasha.” Practically speaking we, too, are formed of prana and akasha–of breath and sound which are the manifestation of prana and akasha. Yoga is a combining of breath and sound. “When Om unites with the breath and moves in the body, this is Pranava.” (Paramhansa Nityananda, *Chidakasha Gita* 95) Om is called the Pranava, which means Enlivener and Breather, the idea of the latter expression being that Om is the essential sound-energy form that manifests in living beings as the breath itself. Om is the sound-form of the subtle power of

life which originates in the pure consciousness, the spirit, of each one of us and extends upward and outward to manifest as the inhaling and exhaling breaths. “The breath is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) Hence, through the intoning of Om in meditation we can become attuned to the essential Breath of Life and aware of its subtle movements within. Joined to our breath, the mantric syllable Om will lead us to the awareness of Breath and Life in their pure state. For Om is both the breath and the Source of the breath.

When joined to Om, the breath becomes a flowing stream of consciousness.

In the beginning

In the beginning, there arose in the ocean of Divine Consciousness, a point (bindu) from which began flowing the stream of creative energy that manifested as all things, and back into which all things return. That Primal Point became dual upon the very moment of its arising. That duality manifested as Prana/Breath and Sound—specifically, Om. The same thing happened with us. We came into manifestation on the twin streams of subtle breath and Om.

Originally we were unmanifest, as transcendental as our Source. But just as the Source expanded into relative manifestation, so did we. In our undifferentiated being, the state of perfect unity, there manifested a single stress point (bindu or sphota). This did not upset or disrupt the original unity but it did just what I said: it stressed it. Then, so imperceptibly and subtly as to hardly have even occurred, that stress point became dual and began to move internally, producing a magnetic duality so subtle it was really more an idea than an actual condition. Then the halves or poles of that duality began alternating in dominance and a cycling or circling began. This cycling expanded ever outward, manifesting in increasingly more objective manners until at last the full state of relativity was reached complete with a set of complex bodies of infinitely varying levels of energy. Like the bit of grit in an oyster, the original point (bindu) began manifesting as everything we call “us.” The same thing had already happened to our Source on a cosmic level so we found a virtually infinite environment for our manifestation. This is the process known as samsara.

The two original poles of the primal unity are prana (life force) which manifests in us most objectively as breath, and shabda (sound) which manifests in us most objectively as the mantra Om—and secondarily that of hearing. These seemingly two creative streams of manifestation are in reality one, inseparable from one another, and together are capable of leading us back to their—and our—source. One or the other can do a great deal toward returning us to Unity, but the ultimate, full return can occur most easily when they are joined in the practice of Om Yoga. Like the cosmos, we came into manifestation on the twin streams of subtle breath and Om. Together these two “wings” have carried us upward into the heights of evolution.

The return

“Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6) Om is the essence of the breath and the breath is the essence of Om—particularly in their most subtle forms. Speech and breath are manifested and reunited in Om by mentally intoning It in time with the breath. “This is the bridge to immortality.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6)

To turn back from samsara and return to our original unity we must grasp hold of that primal impulse to duality which manifested in the stress point from which all has occurred. Right now that original impulse is manifesting most objectively in the process of our physical

inhaling and exhaling and in our inner power of speech as we intone Om. The breath and Om together comprise the evolutionary force which causes us to enter samsara and manifest therein until—also through the breath and sound—we evolve to the point where we are ready to discard the evolutionary school of samsara and return to our original status with a now-perfected consciousness. By joining Om and the breath in japa and meditation we begin moving back to the state where they are one.

“One should meditate on the breath...for it is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) In japa and meditation we join intonations of Om to the breath because on the subtle levels the breath is always producing the sound of Om. We can even say that the soul *breathes* Om. When our intonations of Om become subtle and whisper-like they are the actual “breath sounds,” the real sounds of the etheric breath. So by consciously joining Om to our breathing we can link up with our soul-consciousness and enter into it. That is the point of Unity where the breath and Om are not two extensions, but a single unit. Here, too, the breath is one, moving in a circular manner or expanding and contracting rather than extending and moving in and out or back and forth. Joining our intonations of Om to the breath in a fully easeful manner attunes us to that level of breath and sound.

The evolving breath

Life and evolution are synonymous. Just as Brahman has “wrapped” Itself in creative, evolutionary energy—Prakriti—and is actively engaged in cosmic progression toward perfection, in the same way the individual spirit (atman) is encased in its own energy-prakriti and is evolving it toward perfection. This is life within Life. Both the cosmic and the individual life-force are known as prana—vital energy—which manifests as breath. All that exists is formed of prana-breath, which acts as a mirror for the individual and cosmic spirits, changing and modifying itself as they change and modify—as they evolve.

The original Impulse which begins, sustains, and completes all evolution is the Pranava, the Prana-Breath Word: Om. The dance of creation is the moving of prana-breath to the directing sound-vibration of Om.

Relativity evolves through the alternating cycles of creation and dissolution—outward movement and inward movement—and in the same way the simple act of breathing evolves all sentient beings—whose fundamental common trait is that of breathing. This is because the breath is always sounding Om in the process the yogis call *ajapa japa*—involuntary/automatic repetition. (This is also true on the cosmic level. The cosmos is breathing Om.) Thus merely living and breathing is a process of ascent in consciousness *if* the individual does nothing to counteract that process—which we all do, retarding our progress and causing ourselves to become bound to the wheel of continual birth and death. So it is necessary to live in the manner that allows this automatic development to go forward and manifest.

In time, however, a profound point of evolution is reached in which the individual becomes capable of consciously evolving himself and thereby speeding up the process of unfolding his consciousness. He does this by consciously doing what he has heretofore done only unconsciously: linking the repetition of Om to his breath, merging It with the breath movements.

The original purpose of the original duality—breath and Om—was to enable us to descend into the plane of relativity and begin evolving therein until we could develop the capacity for infinite consciousness. They not only moved us downward into material embodiment, they also began to impel us upward on the evolutionary scale so we might finally develop or evolve

to the point where we can finally share—actually participate—in the infinity of God. If unhindered, they would accomplish this evolutionary movement. But in our present state we are always thwarting their purpose, especially by keeping their action bound and buried in the subconscious rather than resurrecting them into our conscious life, applying them and cooperating with them and thereby accelerating our growth. When awareness of the breath is consciously cultivated, and the sacred mantra Om is joined to every breath, the two currents become united and oriented toward their original purpose, which they then accomplish. In this way every single breath and intonation of Om become a step forward and upward on the path of spiritual evolution.

Two swastikas

Though spoiled for many of us who associate it with the evil of Nazism, the swastika is one of the most ancient symbols of India and has a profound yogic significance. There are two swastikas. One has the “arms” bent toward the right and the other toward the left. They represent two vortices of energy, one moving clockwise and the other moving counterclockwise. They are usually confused by people. The so-called “righthand swastika” with arms bent toward the right is actually a symbol of leftward moving energy, the movement of contraction and involution. The “lefthand swastika” with arms bent toward the left, is really a depiction of rightward moving energy, the movement of expansion and evolution.

Through our attention focussed on the process of intoning Om in time with our inhalation and exhalation, we can become immersed in the subtler levels of that alternating cycle, sinking into deeper and deeper levels until we at last come to the originating point and then transcend that dual movement, regaining our lost unity. By continual practice of that transcendence in meditation we will become established in that unity and freed forever from all forms of bondage, having attained nirvana—permanent unbinding. This is why both sound and breath must be the focus of our internal cultivation.

The two swastikas do not just depict directions of movement, but are yogic symbols of the inhaling and exhaling breaths joined to the intonation of Om. As already indicated there are two Oms—or two sides of the single Om—one of positive polarity and one of negative polarity. Om intoned while inhaling is of negative polarity—yin, and Om intoned while exhaling is of positive polarity—yang. By intoning Om once while inhaling and once while exhaling we produce a complete Om—of both polarities.

The inner and the outer

There are two breaths, the outer breath and the subtle inner breath which produces it. And there is the outer speech and the subtle inner speech from which it arises. By centering our awareness on the outer breath and sound and merging them we make ourselves aware of the inner Breath and Sound of Life. They occur at the same time and are of the same duration. By attuning ourselves to them we attune ourselves to the spirit from which they take their origin. The more attention we give to the breath and Om, the subtler they become until they reveal themselves as acts of the mind, and finally as consisting of mind-stuff (chitta) itself.

Not “things”

When we examine their nature, we see that the breath and the sound of Om are not

“things,” but processes which have the power to draw us into the “core point” from which they arise—the individual spirit itself whose nature is consciousness. In this way the pure self manifests and works its will, changing all the levels of our being.

Like an onion, breath and sound have many layers. In the practice of meditation we experience these layers, beginning with the most objective layers and progressing to increasingly subtle layers, until, as with an onion at its core, there are no more layers, but only pure being. The breath and our intonations of Om become increasingly refined as we observe them, and as a result our *awareness* also becomes refined.

The self and the Supreme Self

There are many scriptural statements that Om is our own self, or atman, such as: “The Self is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self.” (Mandukya Upanishad 1,8) “Meditate on Om as the Self.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6) But in the Kena Upanishad we also find: “The Self is the breath of the breath.” (Kena Upanishad 1:2) And in the Mundaka Upanishad (3:1:9): “The subtle self within the living and breathing body is realized in that pure consciousness wherein is no duality.”

Beyond the self is the Supreme Self—Brahman—and the scriptures tell us that Om is Brahman as well. “Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1) “Om is the Supreme Brahman.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7) “Om is Brahman.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1) And they tell us the same of the breath. The Chandogya Upanishad (4.9.3): “Breath is a part of Brahman.” The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.6) has this to say: “The being who is the breath within—him I meditate upon as Brahman....That which breathes in is thy Self, which is within all....That which breathes out is thy Self, which is within all....Breath is the abode of Brahman.”

Pranayama

Within the yogic system the breath is considered an actual body within the material body. It is called the *pranamaya kosha*—the body formed of breath or prana. And working with it is known as *pranayama*. This is commonly thought to be breathing exercises and breath control, but Patanjali speaks of “pranayama which goes beyond the sphere of inhalation and exhalation.” (Yoga Sutra 2:51) Through profound observation of the breath an Om yogi becomes aware that there is an internal breath that is the support and stimulus of the bodily breathing. Behind that breath is an even subtler force, and so on back to utter stillness at the core of his being. It is this process that is pranayama. During meditation the physical breath becomes, as Vyasa says, “prolonged and light [refined, subtle].”

But the breath does not accomplish this on its own. It must be joined to intonations of Om. “With Om alone he should breathe.” (Amritabindu Upanishad 20) “Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6) “Because in this manner he joins the breath, the Syllable Om, and all this in its manifoldness therefore this is called Yoga [joining]. The oneness of the breath, the mind, and likewise of the senses [through japa of Om with the breath] and the abandonment of all conditions of existence, this is designated as Yoga. One draws in the pranas by means of the Syllable Om.” (Maitri Upanishad 6:22-26)

Many scriptures declare that Om Itself is pranayama, for it is the Pranava—the Breath Word. I am giving quite a number of quotations on this matter because the opposite opinion is commonly held by even those who claim to be qualified teachers of yoga, and I want it to be

clear that I am not presenting my own idea or stretching a point.

“Pranayama is composed of the Pranava, Om. [Therefore] he should repeat the Pranava mentally. This only will be pranayama.” (Darshan Upanishad 6:2,5,6)

“Pranayama is accomplished through concentrating the mind on Om.” (Saubhagyalakshmi Upanishad)

“The Pranava alone becomes the pranayama.” (Sandilya Upanishad 1:17)

“Pranayama is accomplished through the right realization of the true nature of the sound which is at the extreme end of the pronunciation of the syllable Om, when sushupti [the dreamless sleep state] is rightly cognized [experienced] while conscious.” (Sandilya Upanishad 1:46)

“The Pranava is the vital breath of all living beings from Brahma [the Creator] to the immobile beings [such as plants and minerals]. Being the Prana thus, It is called Pranava.” (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 3:14)

“Pranayama is accomplished by effortlessly breathing and joining to it the repetition of the sacred Om with the experience of Its meaning, when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state.” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:78) In the light of this quotation from the Yoga Vashishtha, we see that by joining the repetition of Om to the breath the Om Yogi causes pranayama to go on perpetually throughout the day as well as in meditation.

Their divine work

It cannot be overemphasized that the breath and Om are the *only* objects that transfer our awareness into the subject: consciousness itself. All other objects draw our attention outward, into the experience of them, and perpetuate the loss of self-awareness which is our root problem. This is true of any objects other than the breath and Om that are brought into meditation. All other mantras, modes of breathing other than totally natural breathing, visualizations, and deliberate rousings of energies and centers of energies, not only are incapable of producing the awareness of pure consciousness, they make it impossible. This should not be forgotten.

Natural (sahaja) practice

If our spiritual practice (sadhana) is to bring us to our eternal, natural state of spirit-consciousness, it, too, must be totally natural. Therefore the term *sahaja* is often found in yoga treatises. Sahaja means that which is natural, innate, spontaneous, and inborn. Om Yoga alone fits this criterion, for the prana/breath movement occurs in every evolving sentient being—even in every atom of the cosmos. And that movement is inseparable from the vibration of the subtle sound of Om. Though seemingly two, the movement of the breath and the vibrating of Om are the same thing, like fire and heat. Not only that, this is the only characteristic common to all forms of existence, from the atom to the perfectly liberated individual. Nothing, then, is more natural than the intoning of Om in time with the breath. It is the key, then, to our inmost, true Self and its revelation.

Chapter Five:

Points For Successful Meditation

Responsiveness to yoga practice

The body is the vehicle through which the individual evolves during the span of life on earth, and must be taken into serious account by the yogi who will discover that the body can exert a necessary effect on the mind. If wax and clay are cold they cannot be molded, nor will they take any impression. If molasses is cold it will hardly pour. It is all a matter of responsiveness. Only when warm are these substances malleable. In the same way, unless our inner and outer bodies are made responsive or reactive to the japa and meditation of Om we will miss many of the beneficial effects. Hence we should do everything we can to increase our response levels, to ensure that our physical and psychic bodies are moving at the highest possible rate of vibration.

A fundamental key to this is diet. For not only does the physical substance of the food become assimilated into our physical body, the subtler energies become united to our inner levels, including our mind. The yogi who observes will discover that the diet of the physical body is also the diet of the mind, that whatever is eaten physically will have an effect mentally. (One who does not know this is no yogi at all.) The Chandogya Upanishad (6.5.4; 6.6.1,2,5) tells us: “Mind consists of food. That which is the subtle part of milk moves upward when the milk is churned and becomes butter. In the same manner, the subtle part of the food that is eaten moves upward and becomes mind. Thus, mind consists of food.”

Meat is both heavy and toxic—especially from the chemicals spread throughout the tissues from the fear and anger of the animal when it was slaughtered. So our minds will also be heavy and toxic from eating meat as well as poisoned by the vibrations of anger and fear. Moreover, the instinctual and behavioral patterns of the animals will become our instinctual and behavioral impulses. Fruits, vegetables, and grains have no such obstructions. Consequently, our mental energies will be light and malleable, responsive to our spiritual disciplines. There is no greater spiritual boon to the meditator than the adoption of a vegetarian diet. (See *Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet*.) By “vegetarian” I mean abstention from meat, fish, and eggs or anything that contains them to any degree, including animal fats.

Both meditation and diet refine the inner senses so we can produce and perceive the subtle changes that occur during meditation.

Our general health also contributes to our proficiency in meditation, so a responsible yogi is very aware of what is beneficial and detrimental to health and orders his life accordingly, especially in eliminating completely all alcohol, nicotine, and mind-altering drugs whether legal or illegal. Caffeine, too, is wisely avoided, and so is sugar.

The sum of all this is that we must do more than meditate. We must live out our spiritual aspirations by so ordering our lives that we will most quickly advance toward the Goal. This is done by observing Yama and Niyama, often called the Ten Commandments of Yoga. They are: 1) *Ahimsa*: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness; 2) *Satya*: truthfulness, honesty; 3) *Asteya*: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness; 4) *Brahmacharya*: sexual continence in thought, word and deed as well as control of all the senses; 5) *Aparigraha*: non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness; 6) *Shaucha*: purity, cleanliness; 7) *Santosa*:

contentment, peacefulness; 8) *Tapas*: austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; 9) *Swadhyaya*: introspective self-study, spiritual study; 10) *Ishwara Pranidhana*: offering of one's life to God.

Yogic Environment

Not only do we need a special place in our home favorable to meditation, our entire environment should be examined to see that it, too, is not mentally and spiritually heavy, toxic, disruptive and agitating. The same is true of our employment and our associates—business, social, and familial. The most important environment, of course, is the inner one of our own mind—that is, our thoughts. Our dominant thought should be our intonations of Om. Next to that should be continual thoughts of spiritual matters drawn from our own study of spiritual writings, attendance at spiritual discourses, and conversation with spiritually-minded associates. Our minds should naturally move in the highest spiritual planes. This is neither impossible nor impractical, for everything proceeds from and is controlled by the Supreme Consciousness.

Sitting like Buddha

When Gotama Buddha sat beneath the bodhi tree He vowed that until He was enlightened He would not get up even if His flesh and bones were to be dissolved. This is why it is said that Buddha got enlightenment because he knew how to sit. His “sitting” was in the consciousness of the Self, not just the body. So if you “sit” in the same way during meditation, you will be safe from all distractions and illusions as was Buddha.

All the forces of the cosmos came to distract Buddha from His inner quest. Cosmic Illusion itself in the form of Mara came to distract Him. But He did not move, either in body or mind. Such steadfastness conquered the forces of ignorance completely. Buddha conquered them by simply ignoring them—which was the only sensible course, seeing that they were just illusions. You, too, can conquer distractions not by combating them, not by killing them, not by “seeing through” them or any such thing—but by just having nothing to do with them. The true Self does not touch any of these things, so the path to the true spirit involves not touching them in your mind.

By sitting and ignoring the unreal, Buddha found the Real. Therefore many centuries later Jesus simply said: “In your patience possess your souls.” (Luke 21:19) To relax and experience is the key for the correct practice of meditation.

Hatching the egg

Each person will experience meditation in a different way, even if there are points of similarity with that of others. Also, meditations can vary greatly for each of us. In some meditations a lot will be “going on,” and then in other meditations it will seem as though we are just sitting and coasting along with nothing “happening.” This is exactly as it should be. Some meditations will produce changes and others will be times of quiet assimilation and stabilization.

When nothing seems to be going on at all, we may mistakenly think we are “doing it wrong” or just “marking time.” Meditation produces profound and far-reaching changes in our extremely complex makeup, both when we do or do not perceive those changes. Some meditations are times of quiet balancing out to get ready for more change. We can be assured that if we are meditating in the way I have outlined, we are doing everything correctly and

everything is going on just as it should be—every breath is further refining our inner faculties of awareness.

Very early in the scale of evolution sentient beings are born from eggs. This includes us human beings. So it is not inappropriate to think of our evolution in such terms. All eggs hatch and develop through heat—this is absolutely necessary, just as it is for the germination of seeds (the “eggs” of plants). Yoga is called *tapasya*, the generation of heat, for that very reason. Our meditation, then is like the hatching of an egg. Nothing may seem to be going on, but life is developing on the unseen levels.

The hatching of a chicken egg is a prime example. Inside the egg there is nothing but two kinds of “goo”—the white and the yolk. Both are liquids and have no other perceptible characteristics than color. The hen does nothing more than sit on the egg and keep it warm, yet as the days pass the goo inside the shell turns into internal organs, blood, bones, skin, feathers, brain, ears, and eyes—all that goes to make up a chicken, and just by being incubated. At last, a living, conscious being breaks its way out of the shell. No wonder eggs have been used as symbols of resurrection from death into life.

Another apt symbol is the cocoon. The dull-colored, earth-crawling, caterpillar encases itself in a shroud of its own making and becomes totally dormant. Yet, as weeks pass a wondrous transformation takes place internally until one day an utterly different creature emerges: a beautifully colored and graceful butterfly that flies into the sky and thenceforth rarely if ever touches the earth.

The same is true of the persevering yogi and the eventual revelation of his true nature. Through the *japa* and meditation of Om, simple as they are, the “heat” of the divine vibration causes our full spiritual potential to develop and manifest in us. *Tapasya* evolves the yogi, turning the goo of his present state into a life beyond present conceptions.

Training for living

Meditation is not an end in itself, but rather the means to an end—to the daily living out of the illumined consciousness produced by meditation. We go into meditation so we can come out of meditation more conscious and better equipped to live our life. The change will not be instant, but after a reasonable time we should see a definite effect in how we live. If the meditator does not find that his state of mind during daily activities has been affected by his meditation, then his meditation is without value. This is especially important for us in the West since meditation is continually being touted as a “natural high” or a producer of profound and cataclysmic experiences. Such experiences may sound good on paper or in a metaphysical bragfest, but in time they are seen to be empty of worth on any level—ephemeral dreams without substance.

Success in meditation is manifested *outside* meditation—by the states of mind and depth of insight that become habitual. The proof of its viability is the meditator’s continual state of mind and his apprehension of both reality and Reality.

Many things lighten and purify the mind, but nothing clarifies the mind like the prolonged and profound practice of meditation. The state of mental clarity produced by meditation should continue outside meditation. Meditation should by its nature prepare us for living. At the same time, meditation should establish us in interior life, making us increasingly aware both inwardly and outwardly. This is because reality consists of two aspects: the unmoving consciousness of spirit and the moving, dynamic activity of evolutionary energy. Reality embraces

both, and to be without the awareness of one or the other is to be incomplete.

Meditation enables us to see deeply into things outside meditation. Through meditation we cultivate the ability to be objective—separate from objects but keenly aware of them and thus able to intelligently and effectively function in relation to them. Meditation, then, is the most effective school for living open to us. And it manifests in the simplest of ways: a more compassionate outlook, a deeper self-understanding, an awareness of changelessness amidst change, a taste for spiritual conversation and reading, and experience of inmost peace. One man who had been practicing meditation for a while remarked to another meditator, “I can’t figure out what is happening to me. Last night for the first time in my married life I helped my wife do the dishes.”

In the practice of the japa and meditation of Om we are putting ourselves into a totally—even sublimely—different sphere of consciousness and experience from that in which so much phenomena arise. Meditation is done for the development of consciousness—truly pure and simple—whereas it is our active life that is meant for both *seeing* and experiencing. It is all a matter of consciousness—of consciousness that pervades our entire life—not just a “wonderful feeling” in meditation. It is the fundamental state of consciousness and mind outside of meditation that matters.

Avoiding the gears

In meditation stay away from the gears of the mind! It is the nature of the mind to dance around producing thoughts, impressions, memories, etc. Therefore we do not at all care what potential distractions may arise during meditation. We ignore them. And if we ignore them they are no longer distractions. So stay with Om—with God—and forget everything else. Then all will be yours.

Never come out of meditation to note or write down something. If the inspiration, insight, or idea is really from your higher self or from God it will come back to you outside of meditation.

Also, do not engage the mind-gears with long prayers, affirmations, and suchlike during meditation. And do not let the mind entice you with “insight,” “inspiration,” or “knowledge” of any kind. According to Shankara the practice of yoga “has right vision alone for its goal, and glories of knowledge and power are not its purpose.”

Just as the mind has gears, so does the body—especially “chakras” and “kundalini.” In the upanishads, Gita, and Yoga Sutras there is no mention whatsoever of such things—not because they do not exist, but because we need pay no special attention to them. By always centering our awareness in Om, gradually we will gain perfect control of all the bodies and the energies of which they are composed and orient them toward higher consciousness and power. The sacred light and power of Om will flow into every cell of every level of our being, awakening all our inner faculties and forces—and all spontaneously and naturally without having to do anything special to produce it. Consequently, during meditation much phenomena can take place during the process of correction and purification that is an integral part of meditation. When the chakras are being cleansed and perfected by the subtle vibrations of Om, they may become energized, awakened, or “opened”—and that is just fine. In the same way subtle channels in the spine and body may open and subtle energies begin flowing upward. But whatever happens in meditation, our sole occupation should be with Om.

Again it must be emphasized that we never deliberately put our attention on any part or

area of the body, as that will confine and limit the effects of the meditation process.

Uniting with Om

All that exists is a manifestation of Om, for Om is the essence of all things. Om is perpetually sounding from within the heart (core) of all things, including us. To unite our awareness with that ever-flowing Om through japa and meditation is the true “centering.” Om japa and meditation put us in touch with that inmost stream or current so we can follow it back to its Divine Source.

Every year in India thousands make pilgrimages to the source of the Ganges and other sacred rivers. Such pilgrimages are externalizations of the pilgrimage of the spirit that is accomplished by tracing the inner river of Om back to its Source through meditation. “By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol.” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 404.)

Many more pilgrims journey to Rudra Prayag (presently known as Allahabad) to bathe in the Triveni, the confluence of three sacred rivers: Ganges, Jumna, and Saraswati. It is believed that to immerse yourself in the waters of the Triveni is to be greatly purified. But this is only an outer action reflecting the inner experience of bathing (immersing) ourselves in the inner intonings of Om in time with the breath and our experiencing of their effects. By this continual “bathing” the entire being of the yogi becomes purified and refined.

Evocation and invocation

In japa and meditation we are not employing Om as a prayer, an affirmation, or a remembrance, but as effective evocation—a calling forth—of our inherent, eternal Self-consciousness, and as an invocation—a calling into us—of the Consciousness that is the Supreme Self. Om brings into our awareness the consciousness of both the individual Self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman) in perfect union. The japa and meditation of Om makes us one with our true Self and one with God, merging our being and consciousness with His perfect Being and Consciousness. Because this is so, we do not need to keep in mind an intellectual meaning of Om (there is not one, anyway) or cultivate an attitude or emotion during our practice. Rather, we relax, listen, and make ourselves open and receptive to Its dynamic working within us.

Entering the Silence

The expression “entering the silence” is usually misunderstood as sitting with a blank mind. One mystery of Om is its ability to produce silence through sound—sound that is essentially silence. We go deeper and deeper into the sound, the increasingly subtle sound of Om, until we reach the heart of the sound which is silence. Through our invocation of Om the *state* of silence is produced in our mind by enabling us to center it in the principle of the silent witnessing consciousness. Through Om the yogi leads his awareness into the silence of the spirit which is beyond the clamor of the mind and the distractions and movements of the body. For true silence is not mere absence of sound, but a profound condition of awareness that prevails at all times—even during the “noise” of our daily life. Silence is also a state of stillness of spirit in which all movement ceases and we know ourselves as pure consciousness alone.

Even in daily japa, we should keep our awareness deep in the subtle sound of Om. The breath is necessary to lead us into the depths of the sound, which is why we join our intoning of Om to it.

Simplicity and subtlety of practice

The simpler and more easeful the yoga practice, the more deeply effective it is. This is a universal principle in the realm of inner development and experience. How is this? In the inner world of meditation things are often just the opposite to the way they are in the outer world. Whereas in the outer world a strong aggressive force is most effective in producing a change, in the inner world it is subtle, almost minimal force or movement that is most effectual—even supremely powerful. Those familiar with homeopathic medicine will understand the concept that the more subtle an element is, the more potentially effective it is. In meditation and japa the lightest “touch” is usually the most efficient. This being so, the simple subtle intonations of Om are the strongest and most effective form of mantric invocation.

An incident that took place during one of the crusades illustrates this. At a meeting between the leaders of the European forces and Saladin, commander of the Arab armies, one of the Europeans tried to impress and intimidate Saladin by having one of his soldiers cleave a heavy wooden chair in half with a single downstroke of his broadsword. In response, Saladin ordered someone to toss a silk scarf as light and delicate as a spider’s web into the air. As it descended, he simply held his scimitar beneath it with the sharp edge upward. When the scarf touched the edge, it sheared in half and fell on either side of the blade without even a whisper as he held it completely still. This is the power of the subtle and simple practice of Om Yoga meditation.

It is important, then, to keep in mind that often when things seem “stuck” in meditation and not moving as they should, or when the mind does not calm down, it is often because we are not relaxed sufficiently and are not allowing our inner intonations of Om to become as subtle as they should be. For the subtler the intonations, the more effective and on target they are.

Even so, I do not mean to give you the impression that your inner intonations of Om should become feeble or weak in the sense of becoming tenuous—only barely within your mental grasp, and liable to slip away and leave you blank. Not at all. The inner sound of the intonations may become subtler and subtler, but they do not at all become weaker—only gentler and more profound.

Higher techniques?

There are no “higher techniques” of Om Yoga, but through its regular and prolonged practice there are higher *experiences* and *effects* that will open up for the meditator. As time goes on the efficiency of the practice and the resulting depth of inner experience will greatly increase, transforming the practice into something undreamed-of by the beginning meditator—for the change really takes place in the yogi’s consciousness. Practice, practice, practice is the key.

We have earlier noted Shankara’s statement that the practice of yoga “has right vision alone for its goal, and glories of [external] knowledge and power are not its purpose.” Spirit-consciousness alone is true and real.

The upanishadic seers indicate that the path of liberation is a very simple path—the japa and meditation of Om—and that the result is simple: realization of one’s own self (atma) and ultimately of the Supreme Self (Paramatma). First there is the establishment in the pure consciousness that is our essential being as individuals, and then establishment in the Infinite

Consciousness that is the Essential Being of all beings: God.

The Katha Upanishad (2:3:8, 9) makes this very clear. First it speaks of what God (Brahman) really is, saying: “Brahman [is] the all-pervading spirit, the unconditioned, knowing whom one attains to freedom and achieves immortality. None beholds him with the eyes, for he is without visible form. Yet in the heart is he revealed, through self-control and meditation. Those who know him become immortal.”

Brahman is pure spirit, beyond all phenomena, beyond all relative existence or relative experience (objective consciousness). Brahman is not perceived by the senses, inner or outer (“none beholds him with the eyes”), yet He is revealed in the core of the yogi’s being in meditation. “Those who know him become immortal” because they experience their identity with the immortal Brahman.

Next the upanishad describes the nature of meditation in which Brahman is realized. “When all the senses are stilled, when the mind is at rest, when the intellect wavers not—then, say the wise, is reached the highest state. This calm of the senses and the mind has been defined as yoga. He who attains it is freed from delusion.” (Katha Upanishad 2:3:10, 11)

So here are the characteristics of meditation which the upanishad calls “the highest state”: 1) the senses are stilled, 2) the mind is at rest, 3) the intellect wavers not. Then the idea is really driven home by the upanishad: “*This calm of the senses and the mind has been defined as yoga.*” Shankara affirms that the seeker of spiritual freedom is seeking nothing from meditation “other than the special serenity of meditation practice.” This state is also called *sthiraattwa* by the yogis. “He who attains it is freed from delusion.” When Yogiraj Lahiri Mahasaya was asked: “On which deity do you meditate?” He simply replied: “I meditate on *sthiraattwa*”—the serenity produced by meditation in which he ever dwelt, and of which he was the embodiment.

Two views on the nature of meditation—and a third

In India there is a long-standing disagreement on the nature and purpose of meditation. One school of thought considers that definite—and conscious—evolutionary change is necessary for liberation; consequently meditation must be an actively transforming process. The other view is that the only thing needed for liberation is re-entry into our true, eternal nature. That nothing need be “done” at all except to perceive the truth of ourselves. Obviously their meditation procedures are going to be completely different.

There is, however, a third perspective on the matter which combines both views. It is true that we are ever-free, ever-perfect, but we have forgotten that fact and have wandered in aimless suffering for countless incarnations. No one is so foolish as to suggest to a person suffering from amnesia that he need not regain his memory since he has not ceased to be who he really is.

The “memory block” from which we suffer is the condition of the various levels on which we presently function, especially the buddhi, the intelligence. It is also a matter of the dislocation of our consciousness from its natural center. Obviously, then, something really does have to be “done” to change this condition. A dirty window need not be changed in nature, but it needs to be cleansed of that which is not its nature for us to see through it. It is the same with a dusty or smudgy mirror.

There is an example from nature that can help us understand this. Research has shown that the energy field around a salamander egg, and all through the stages of a young salamander’s

growth, is in the shape of an adult salamander. This indicates that the etheric pattern of a full-grown salamander is inherent even in the egg and throughout the salamander's development. It is as though the egg has only to hatch and grow around this energy matrix, to fill out or grow into the ever-present pattern. Even when there is only the egg visible to the human eye, the adult salamander is there in a very real, potential form. It is the same with us. We are always the atman, potential divinity, but that potential must be realized. And meditation is the means of our realization.

Shankara puts forth the question, "How can there be a means to obtain liberation? Liberation is not a thing which can be obtained, for it is simply cessation of bondage." He then answers himself: "For ignorance [bondage] to cease, something has to be done, with effort, as in the breaking of a fetter. Though liberation is not a 'thing,' inasmuch as it is cessation of ignorance in the presence of right knowledge, it is figuratively spoken of as something to be obtained." And he concludes: "The purpose of Yoga is the knowledge of Reality."

Vyasa defines liberation in this way: "Liberation is absence of bondage." Shankara carries it a bit further, saying: "Nor is liberation something that has to be brought about apart from the absence of bondage, and this is why it is always accepted that liberation is eternal."

Focus on prakriti

Om Yoga affects our energy-bodies, not our inner consciousness—it *reveals* our consciousness rather than changes it. The purpose of Om Yoga is liberation, and to this end it affects the prakriti (energy complex) which is the adjunct of our purusha. Because of this, it is only natural and right that thoughts, impressions, sensations and feelings of many kinds should arise as you meditate, since your meditation is evoking them as part of the transformation process. All you need do is stay relaxed and keep on intoning Om in time with the breath.

The Om yogi is already in the self, *is* the self, so in Om Yoga he is looking at/into his personal prakriti in the same way God observes the evolving creation. Om Yoga purifies and evolves the bodies, including the buddhi, and realigns our consciousness with its true state, accomplishing the aims of both schools of meditational thought mentioned. "Om is Brahman. Om is all this. He who utters Om with the intention 'I shall attain Brahman' does verily attain Brahman." (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1)

Shoes

Since we are talking about material things (prakriti), this might be a good place to mention that it is best to meditate without shoes, because shoes (whatever material they are made from) carry the vibration of the dirt they contact each day.

A matter of magnetism

Prana takes on many forms, including biomagnetism, the force which maintains our body and its functions. The body itself is magnetic, and any disturbance in polarity or magnetic flow is detrimental to health. Leather inhibits the natural flow of the life force (prana). Leather shoes block the upward flow of prana from the earth into our bodies, and leather belts interfere with the flow of prana within the body. On the more metaphysical side of things, the use of leather—or any slaughtered-animal-derived substance—in any manner is a violation of the principle of ahimsa, as Yogananda points out in chapter four of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. It is also an infraction of the principle of shaucha. (See Chapter Seven: The Foundations of Yoga.)

It has long been my experience that sleeping with the head toward the north (the feet pointing south) can cause a magnetic conflict or disturbance in the body, adversely affecting sleep—and even causing nervousness and restlessness. This is also the experience of many yogis I have known.

Visions

Most “visions” seen in meditation occur because the meditator has fallen asleep and is dreaming. Yet there are genuine visions, actual psychic experiences, that occur in meditation. I say “genuine,” but Ramana Maharshi gives the true facts about all visions when he says: “Visions do occur. To know how you look you must look into a mirror, but do not take that reflection to be yourself. What is perceived by our senses and the mind is never the truth. [He means this in the ultimate sense. Even hallucinations are “real” mental phenomena.] All visions are mere mental creations, and if you believe in them, your progress ceases. Enquire to whom the visions occur. Find out who is their witness. Stay in pure awareness, free from all thoughts. Do not move out of that state.” (*The Power of the Presence*, vol. 3, p. 249)

Falling asleep in meditation

It is normal for meditators to sometimes fall asleep while meditating, since meditation is relaxing and moves the consciousness inward. Both the body and the mind are used to entering into the state of sleep at such times. After a while, though, you will naturally (and hopefully, usually!) move into the conscious sleep state, so do not worry.

At the same time, be aware that falling asleep in meditation can be a signal from your body that you are not getting enough sleep. People are different, and some do need more than eight hour’s sleep. You should consider extending your sleep time or taking some kind of nap break during the day. Falling asleep in meditation can also be a symptom of a nutritional lack, an indication of low vitality.

Please do not do such things as shock your body with cold water, drink coffee, and run around a bit—hoping to force yourself to stay awake in meditation. This is not the way. Listen to your body and take care of it. Yogis are not storm-troopers. We are engaged in peace, not war.

Physical distractions

We have talked about mental distractions, but what about physical ones? Simple: scratch when you itch, yawn when tired, shift or stretch when you have a muscle cramp, and if you feel uncomfortable, shift your position. We are meditating, not torturing or coercing the body. Such distractions are normal and not to be concerned about. If we give them undue attention by being annoyed or disgusted with them, or trying to force our attention away from them, we will only be concentrating on them, and will compound their distracting power. In time most of these little annoyances stop occurring. Until then, just be calm and scratch and rub and move a little, while keeping your awareness where it belongs.

What about noises? Accept them. Do not wish they would stop, and do not try to “not hear” them. Just accept the noise as part of your present situation. Neither like nor dislike it.

Care only for your meditation, confident that a few itchings, cramping, noises, thoughts, or memories will not ruin your meditation. “Greater is he [the spirit] that is in you, than he [the body] that is in the world.” (I John 4:4) It is your *attention* to them, either in rejection or

acceptance, that will spoil your meditation. You must guard against that, and relaxation and indifference to them is the way.

Daily meditation

“The self resides within the lotus of the heart. Knowing this, devoted to the self, the sage enters daily that holy sanctuary.” (Chandogya Upanishad 8:3:3)

Meditation should be done daily, and if possible it should be done twice daily—morning and evening, or before and after work, whichever is more convenient.

When your period of meditation is over, do your utmost to maintain the flow of the japa of Om in time with your breathing in all your activities. For those who diligently and continually apply themselves, attainment is inevitable.

When you find yourself with some time—even a few minutes—during the day, sit and meditate. Every little bit certainly does help.

Length of meditation

How long at a time should you meditate? The more you meditate the more benefit you will receive, but you should not push or strain yourself. Start with a modest time—fifteen or twenty minutes—and gradually work up to an hour or an hour and a half, perhaps once a week meditating longer if that is practical. But do not force or burn yourself out. It is a common trick of the mind to have you meditate for a very long time and then skip some days or weeks and then overdo it again. It is better to do the minimum time every day without fail. Remember the tortoise and the hare.

Also, if you go about it the right way and live in the manner which makes you supremely responsive, one hour’s meditation can equal hours of “ordinary” meditation.

Keep it inside

Do not dissipate the calmness and centering gained through meditation by talking about it to others. Experiences in meditation are not only subtle, they are fragile, as delicate as spun glass, and speaking about them can shatter their beneficial effects. Bragging, eulogizing, and swapping notes about meditation experiences is a very harmful activity. Avoid it.

Do not satisfy any curiosity about your personal yogic experiences or benefits except in the most general terms. Naturally you can tell people that meditation helps you, but do so in only a general way unless you really feel intuitively that you should be more specific. When people seem truly interested in spiritual life and serious about it, give them a copy of this book, or of *Introduction to Om Yoga*, and discuss the general and practical aspects freely.

“Concentration”

Although in this book you will find the word “concentration,” it is not used in the sense of forcing or tensing the mind. Rather, we are wanting to become *aware*—that is *attentive*—to the fullest degree. And this is accomplished in Om Yoga by relaxation in body, mind, and attitude. Our attention on Om is always gentle, though determined. It is not a spike we are driving into our mind. We are floating in Om, not crashing into it.

In meditation not just the body, but the mind must be relaxed. This relaxation is what most readily facilitates meditation. Think of the mind as a sponge, absolutely full of water. If you hold it in your hand, fully relaxed, all will be well. But if you grip it or squeeze it tightly,

water will spray out in all directions. This is exactly how it is with the mind. If you “hold” it in a state of calm relaxation, very few distractions in the form of memories and thoughts will arise. But if you try to force the mind and tense it, then a multitude of distractions will arise.

Learning to continually do japa of Om

By keeping up the inner repetition of Om all the time, whatever you may be doing, you will be perpetually cultivating supreme awareness itself. A good way to get yourself habituated to the constant japa of Om is to do japa while you are reading—simply looking at or scanning the page rather than verbalizing in your mind. (This is the secret of “speed reading.”) Once you learn to do that, since reading demands so much attention, you will pretty well be able to keep the japa going in other activities. Eventually you will be able to do japa of Om even when speaking with others.

Reclining meditation

If we lie down for meditation we will likely go to sleep. Yet, for those with back problems or some other situation interfering with their sitting upright, or who have trouble sitting upright for a long time, it is possible to meditate in a reclining position at a forty-five-degree angle. This is a practice of some yogis in India when they want to meditate unbrokenly for a very long time. (I was told of two yogis who meditated throughout the entire day this way.) There may still be a tendency to sleep, but we do what we can when we can. Here is the procedure:

Using a foam wedge with a forty-five-degree angle—or enough pillows to lie at that angle, or in a bed that raises up to that angle—lie on your back with your arms at your side, or across your stomach if that is more comfortable. Then engage in the meditation process just as you would if sitting upright.

When you are ill or for some reason unable to sit upright you can meditate in this way.

Alternating positions in meditation

Those not yet accustomed to sitting still for a long time, or those who want to meditate an especially long time, can alternate their meditation positions. After sitting as long as is comfortable, they can do some reclining meditation and then sit for some more time—according to their inclination.

Inner negativity

Impulses to negativity or foolishness, whether mental or physical, exist in our minds in the form of samskaras or vasanas. (Samskaras are impressions in the mind produced by previous actions or experiences, and vasanas are bundles or aggregates of similar samskaras.) Worries and anxieties about these samskaras and vasanas in the form of “sins,” “temptations,” and “wrong thinking” torment a lot of seekers. Even more futile is obsession with “getting rid of the ego.” For the Om yogi who regularly practices meditation and arranges his inner and outer life so as to avoid their counteracting or conflicting with his practice there is no need for such self-torture. Speaking of these negative and troublesome things, Shankara confidently says: “they are dissolved along with the receptacle, the chitta.... Because they have no effect, they are not given attention, for when a thing is falling of itself there is no point in searching for something to make it fall.” I. K. Taimni says: “As the object of meditation continues to fill

the mind completely there can be no question of emptying the mind.”

Too upset to meditate?

I knew a man who frequently refused medication, saying, “I’m too sick right now to take medicine. I’ll take it when I feel better.” This amazed me, but we tend to do the same thing regarding meditation. It is the only way to real peace, but when our lives are being swept with the storms of grief, disaster, fears, anger, and suchlike, we say the same thing. “I am too upset to meditate. I’ll do it later.” But meditation has the ability to soothe and eliminate all disturbed thoughts and inner states. So whenever any distracted or negative conditions arise in our minds and lives, meditation is the key to peace and clear thinking.

A great secret

“Receive that Word from which the Universe springeth!...How many are there who know the meaning of that Word?” asked Kabir.

Om is a great secret—the secret of enlightenment. But how is it a secret, when it has been written and talked about so much, and is repeated at the beginning and end of sacred recitations, and eulogized as the highest and holiest of mantras? A story from India will tell us how.

Once a man was taught a mantra by a yogi. “You must keep this mantra absolutely secret, for it is known to only a very few,” the yogi told him. But the next day in the morning as the man walked through the town he noticed that a great many people were repeating that mantra aloud—especially as they did their morning ablutions. Indignantly he went to the yogi, told what he had observed, and demanded to know why he had claimed the mantra was a secret known only to a few. The yogi said nothing in explanation, but brought a shining green object from his pocket and handed it to the man with the instruction that he should show it to the people he met in the town and ask them how much they would buy it for—but he was not to actually sell it to them. “When you do this, I will explain about the mantra,” he promised.

The first person he met was a woman who sold vegetables; she offered some eggplants for it, wanting it for her baby to play with. He showed it to some merchants in small shops who offered him small amounts of money for it as a curiosity. A wealthy merchant said that it was an excellent imitation emerald and offered him a goodly sum, for he wanted it to make jewelry for his wife. A banker examined it, declared it to be a genuine emerald, and offered him a great deal of money for it. Amazed by this, the man took it to a jeweler who told him that it was the largest and most perfect emerald he had ever seen. “No one in this land, not even the king, has enough money to purchase this emerald,” he concluded.

Frightened at having such a valuable in his keeping, the man hurried back to the yogi and returned the emerald. Smiling, the yogi put it back in his pocket. “Now will you tell me why you claimed the mantra was secret, when everybody in town seems to know it?” demanded the man. “I have already done so by your experience with the emerald,” the yogi replied. “How many of the people knew what it really was?” “Only the banker and the jeweler,” the man admitted. “And the others—did not their offers for it correspond to their opinion of it and their own financial worth?” “Yes.” “There you have it. The mantra I taught you is in the memory and on the lips of many in a superficial way. They repeat it a few times and then drop it. Only those who meditate upon it can know it in truth—as they at the same time increase in spiritual status. My friend, that mantra is very little *known*, but I hope you will strive to realize its value by your own self-realization through its use.”

The man understood. And so will those who come to know the secret of Om through their own practice. For it is Om that draws us out from the Primal Depths, Om that evolves us to the uttermost possibilities, and Om that liberates and returns us to the Source to share eternally in the fullness of the Life Divine.

Chapter Six: Om Yoga–Ashtanga Yoga

“From the practice of Yoga, spiritual illumination arises which develops into awareness of Reality.” (Yoga Sutras 2:28)

Om Yoga: Ashtanga Yoga

The yoga of the Yoga Sutras is usually called the Eight-limbed (Ashtanga) Yoga. “Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi are the eight limbs.” (Yoga Sutras 2:29) The Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali and Om Yoga are really the same thing.

1) Yama (Restraint)

Yama consists of the five Don'ts of Yoga:

- 1) Ahimsa: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness
- 2) Satya: truthfulness, honesty–i.e., non-lying
- 3) Asteya: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness
- 4) Brahmacharya: sexual continence and control of all the senses
- 5) Aparigraha: non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness

2) Niyama (Observance)

Niyama comprises the five Do's of Yoga:

- 1) Shaucha: purity, cleanliness
- 2) Santosha: contentment, peacefulness
- 3) Tapas: austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline
- 4) Swadhyaya: self-study, spiritual study
- 5) Ishwarapranidhana: offering of one's life to God

Both Yama and Niyama are analyzed in the next chapter.

3) Asana

In the Yoga Sutras “asana” does not mean Hatha Yoga postures, but only meditation postures. Asana is both the sitting posture chosen for meditation and steadiness in that posture. It is this second aspect that is meant by Patanjali.

4) Pranayama

It is usually thought that pranayama is composed of the words *prana* and *yama*, which mean breath (or life-force) and restraint (or control). But it really comes from *prana* (breath) and *ayama*, which means lengthening, expansion, and extension. In meditation the breath becomes subtle, refined, and slow (lengthened, expanded, and extended). Yoga Sutra 2:50 says that pranayama “becomes measured or regulated [paridrishto], prolonged [dirgha], and subtle or attenuated [sukshmah].” “Prolonged and light [subtle],” says Vyasa. Sometimes it is long and slow and sometimes it is slow but short. Whichever it may be, it is always spontaneous and not controlled—or even deliberately intended—in any way. This is accomplished through objective observation of the breath, and is not an artificial breathing exercise.

There is more to this pranayama, however. Patanjali tells us: “From that comes the dissolving of the covering of light and the fitting of the mind for meditation.” (Yoga Sutras 2:52,53) That is, the inmost pranayama dissolves the veil which covers the light of the Self. Yet this veil is itself light—the light of subtle matter or energy, the light of which the most subtle bodies are formed. They might reasonably be called “light that veils the (ultimate) light.” As Taimni observes in *The Science of Yoga*: “The covering of light referred to in this sutra is obviously not used in reference to the light of the soul, but to the light or luminosity associated with the subtler vehicles associated with and interpenetrating the physical vehicle.”

This “covering of light” is our karma, for “it is karma by which the light is covered,” says Shankara. Vyasa expands on this, saying: “It [pranayama] destroys the karma which covers up the light of knowledge in the yogi. As it is declared: ‘When the ever-shining [self] is covered over by the net of great illusion, one is impelled to what is not to be done.’ By the power of pranayama, the light-veiling karma binding him to the world becomes powerless, and moment by moment is destroyed. So it has been said: ‘There is no tapas [spiritual practice] higher than pranayama; from it come purification from taints and the light of knowledge [of the self].’” (*The Laws of Manu* 6:70,72) Both Shankara and Vyasa explain to us that karma not only binds us to material experience, it also impels us to create even more karma—and more bondage—in a self-perpetuating circle. But by meditation karma “becomes powerless, and moment by moment is destroyed.” That is, the karmic seeds are “roasted” and rendered incapable of creating future experience or births and are ultimately completely annihilated.

How could simple observation of the breath do all this? It cannot. There must be a second factor: Om. The Yoga Vashishtha tells us. “Pranayama is accomplished by effortlessly breathing and joining to it the repetition of the sacred Om with the experience of Its meaning, when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state.” (*Yoga Vashishtha* 5:78) The more we do japa and meditation of Om the more karma is dissolved. Om Yoga, then, is the direct way to dissolve karma and be free.

5) Pratyahara

Abstraction or withdrawal of the senses from their objects by turning the awareness inward is known as pratyahara. In Om Yoga we accomplish this by the simple expedient of turning our eyes gently upward, closing them, and relaxing them. Immediately the awareness begins to withdraw inward. Breathing only through the nose also helps in this.

6) Dharana

“Dharana is the confining [fixing] of the mind within a point or area,” says Yoga Sutra 3:1. The word that can be translated either “point” or “area” is *desha*, as in *Bangladesh*—the area where Bengalis live. We accomplish this by gently turning our eyes upwards and fixing our attention on the etheric level of inner speaking and inner hearing, on our inner intonations of Om.

7) Dhyana

Dhyana is the process of meditation itself. In Yoga Sutra 3:2, Patanjali defines dhyana as “the uninterrupted flow of the mind—the content of the consciousness—in a single and unbroken stream.” This we accomplish by inwardly intoning Om in time with our breath and listening to those intonations. The sutra may also be translated: “Meditation is the unbroken flow of

awareness of the object.” Vyasa says: “Meditation is continuity of the experience of the meditation-object.”

Shankara defines meditation as “a stream of identical vrittis [thoughts] as a unity, a continuity of vrittis not disturbed by intrusion of differing or opposing vrittis. This is dhyana”—a continuous stream of inner intonations of Om. And He contrasts the beginning stage of meditation, dharana, with meditation itself, saying: “Whereas in dharana there may be other impressions of peripheral thoughts even though the chitta has been settled on the object of meditation alone—for the chitta is functioning on the location [desha] as a pure mental process—it is not so with dhyana, for there it [the object of meditation] is only the stream of a single vritti untouched by any other vritti of a different kind.”

By the continual intonations of Om with the breath we produce a stream of identical waves in the chitta until that stream becomes a continuous unitary flow of rarefied sound, a single object or wave that is “untouched” by any other thought or impression.

8) Samadhi

The state in which the mind unites with and identifies with the object of meditation is known as samadhi. This is purely a state of the mind (chitta) and has nothing to do with physical phenomena such as the cessation all outward sensations, breath, and heartbeat, though awareness of those phenomena certainly does cease in samadhi.

Fundamentally, samadhi is a state in which your awareness, your breath, and the inner intonations of Om become one. When the consciousness merges into and becomes revealed as Om Itself, that is the true samadhi. It is the perfect merging of the consciousness of the individual spirit with the Consciousness of the Infinite Spirit, for Om is both of these.

Regarding this, Sri Ramakrishna said: “By crossing over this maya of living beings and the universe, one is able to reach reality. One attains samadhi by piercing nada (the sound barrier). The nada is pierced through repetition of Om and one attains samadhi.” (Part Four, Chapter Two, of the Mazumdar translation.)

States of consciousness

Although asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi may be considered as processes of meditation, in a higher sense they are really stages of awareness passed through in meditation.

Asana is the initial stage of body awareness as we sit in the chosen posture and arrange ourselves comfortably. Pranayama is the slowing down and refinement of the breath leading to awareness of the pranas moving in the physical and subtle bodies that results from our physical and mental relaxation (asana) and observation of the breath. Pratyahara is the turning inward of the mind resulting naturally from our closed eyes, relaxation, bodily ease, and the calming of the breath. Dharana is the fixing of the awareness in the etheric levels of our being as we mentally intone and listen to the sound of Om. Dhyana is Dharana in an unbroken stream when the awareness is absorbed in intoning and listening to Om. Samadhi is the experience of the absolute unity of the breath, Om, and the meditator.

In asana the awareness is centered in the physical body, the annamaya kosha. In pranayama the awareness is centered in the pranic (biomagnetic) body, the pranamaya kosha. In pratyahara the awareness is centered in the sensory mental body, the manomaya kosha. In dharana the awareness is centered in the intellect-intelligence body, the jnanamaya kosha. In dhyana the

awareness is centered in the will-etheric body, the anandamaya kosha. In samadhi the awareness transcends the bodies and unites with the atman-spirit.

Asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and the annamaya, pranamaya, manomaya, jnanamaya, and anandamaya bodies also correspond to the earth, water, fire, air, and ether elements respectively.

Chapter Seven: The Foundations of Yoga

Toward the end of his comments on the Yoga Sutras, Shankara makes a valuable remark: “There can be no lamplight unless the oil, wick and a flame are brought together.” The idea is that the successful practice of yoga is not a haphazard or capricious matter. All the elements must be brought together. When united and complete, success is the result.

Since the classical Indian texts on Yoga are the basis of this chapter, the word “yoga” is used throughout. But it should be realized that the word “meditation” is equally applicable, for in ancient India yoga and meditation were synonymous.

Prerequisites for yoga

“Yoga is for the purpose of knowledge of truth,” says Shankara. Knowledge (jnana) does not come about from practice of yoga methods alone. Perfection in knowledge is in fact only for those who practice virtue (dharma) as well as yoga.

All things rest upon something else—that is, all things are supported by another. This is because a foundation is needed for anything to exist. Being Himself the Ultimate Support of all things, God alone is free from this necessity. Yoga, then, also requires support. As Trevor Leggett says in his introduction to Shankara’s commentary on the Yoga Sutras: “This is yoga presented for the man of the world, who must first clear, and then steady, his mind against the fury of illusory passions, and free his life from entanglements.” Patanjali very carefully and fully outlines the elements of the support needed by the aspirant, giving invaluable information on how to guarantee success in yoga.

The first Yoga Sutra says: “*Now* the exposition of yoga,” implying that there must be something leading up to yoga in the form of necessary developments of consciousness and personality. These prerequisites are known as Yama and Niyama. Shankara says quite forcefully that “following yama and niyama is the basic qualification to practice yoga.”

Yama and Niyama

Yama and Niyama are often called the Ten Commandments of Yoga, but they have nothing to do with the ideas of sin and virtue or good and evil as dictated by some cosmic potentate. Rather they are determined by a thoroughly practical, pragmatic basis: that which strengthens and facilitates our yoga practice should be observed and that which weakens or hinders it should be avoided. It is not a matter of being good or bad, but of being wise or foolish. Each one of these Five Don’ts (Yama) and Five Do’s (Niyama) is a supporting, liberating foundation of Yoga.

Yama means self-restraint in the sense of self-mastery, or abstention, and consists of five elements. Niyama means observances, of which there are also five. Here is the complete list of these ten Pillars as given in Yoga Sutras 2:30,32:

- 1) Ahimsa: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness
- 2) Satya: truthfulness, honesty
- 3) Asteya: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness
- 4) Brahmacharya: sexual continence in thought, word and deed as well as control of all the

senses

- 5) Aparigraha: non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness
- 6) Shaucha: purity, cleanliness
- 7) Santosha: contentment, peacefulness
- 8) Tapas: austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline
- 9) Swadhyaya: introspective self-study, spiritual study
- 10) Ishwarapranidhana: offering of one's life to God

All of these deal with the innate powers of the human being—or rather with the abstinence and observance that will develop and release those powers to be used toward our spiritual perfection, to our self-realization and liberation. Shankara says quite forcefully that “following yama and niyama is the basic qualification to practice yoga. The qualification is not simply that one wants to practice yoga. So yama and niyama are methods of yoga” in themselves and are not mere adjuncts or aids that can be optional.

But at the same time, the practice of yoga helps the aspiring yogi to follow the necessary ways of yama and niyama, so he should not be discouraged from taking up yoga right now. He should determinedly embark on yama, niyama, and yoga simultaneously. Success will be his.

Ahimsa: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness

In his commentary on the Yoga Sutras, Vyasa begins his exposition of ahimsa: “Ahimsa means in no way and at no time to do injury to any living being.” “In no capacity and in no fashion to give injury to any being,” says Shankara. This would include injury by word or thought as well as the obvious injury perpetrated by deed, for Shankara comments: “Ahimsa is to be practiced in every capacity—body, speech, and mind.”

Even a simple understanding of the law of karma enables us to realize the terrible consequences of murder for the murderer. As Vyasa explains: “The killer deprives the victim of spirit, hurts him with a blow of a weapon, and then tears him away from life. Because he has deprived another of spirit, the supports of his own life, animate or inanimate, become weakened. Because he has caused pain, he experiences pain himself.... Because he has torn another from life, he goes to live in a life in which every moment he wishes to die, because the retribution as pain has to work itself right out, while he is panting for death.”

Ahimsa is not willfully causing any harm or pain whatsoever to any being whatsoever, in any degree whatsoever. Ahimsa includes strict abstinence from any form of injury in act, speech, or thought. Violence, verbal or physical, causing mental injury or pain, and angry or malicious damage or misuse of physical objects are all violations of ahimsa, unthinkable for the yogi.

Vyasa immediately points out that all the other abstinenances and observances—yama and niyama—are really rooted in ahimsa, for they involve preventing harm to ourselves and to others through negative action or the neglect of positive action: “The other niyamas and yamas are rooted in this, and they are practiced only to bring this to its culmination, only for perfecting this. They are taught only as means to bring this out in its purity. For so it is said: ‘Whatever many vows the man of Brahman [God] would undertake, only in so far as he thereby refrains from doing harm impelled by delusion, does he bring out ahimsa in its purity.’” And Shankara explains that Vyasa is referring to delusion that is “rooted in violence and causing violence.”

In his autobiography Paramhansa Yogananda relates that his guru, Swami Yukteswar Giri, said that ahimsa is absence of the *desire* to injure. In the highest sense ahimsa is a state of mind from which non-injury will naturally proceed. "Ahimsa really denotes an attitude and mode of behavior towards all living creatures based on the recognition of the underlying unity of life," the modern commentator Taimni declares. Shankara remarks that when ahimsa and the others are observed "the cause of one's doing harm becomes inoperative." The ego itself becomes "harmless" by being put into a state of non-function. And meditation dissolves it utterly. But until that interior state is established, we must work backwards from outward to inner, and abstain from all forms of injury.

The aspiring yogi must clearly realize that the observance of ahimsa must include strict abstinence from the eating of animal flesh in any form or degree as well as the use of anything obtained by or derived from the slaughter of animals.

He must do nothing in thought, word, or deed that harms his body, mind, or spirit. On the other hand, he must do whatever benefits the body, mind, and spirit, for their omission is also a form of self-injury, as is the non-observance of any of the yama or niyamas.

It is no simple thing to be a yogi.

Satya: truthfulness, honesty

"Satya is said to be speech and thought in conformity with what has been seen or inferred or heard on authority. The speech spoken to convey one's own experience to others should be not deceitful, nor inaccurate, nor uninformative. It is that uttered for helping all beings. But that uttered to the harm of beings, even if it is what is called truth, when the ultimate aim is merely to injure beings, would not be truth. It would be a wrong." So says Vyasa.

Shankara says that truthfulness means saying what we have truly come to know is the truth—mostly through our own experience or through contact with sources whose reliability we have experienced for ourselves. "Untruthfulness in any form puts us out of harmony with the fundamental law of Truth and creates a kind of mental and emotional strain which prevents us from harmonizing and tranquillizing our mind. Truthfulness has to be practiced by the sadhaka because it is absolutely necessary for the unfoldment of intuition. There is nothing which clouds the intuition and practically stops its functioning as much as untruthfulness in all its forms," says Taimni regarding the most personal and practical aspect of satya.

Bending the truth, either in leaving out part of the truth or in "stacking the deck" to create a false impression, cannot be engaged in by the yogi. Regarding numbers it is said that "figures do not lie—but liars figure." The same is true here. Equally heinous is the intentional mixing of lies and truth. (Some liars tell a lot of truth.) This is particularly true in the manipulative endeavors of advertising, politics, and religion.

Refusing to speak the truth, as well as avoiding speaking or facing the truth, is a form of untruth.

There are many non-verbal forms of lying as well, and some people's entire life is a lie. Therefore we must make sure that our actions reflect the truth. How many people claim to believe in God and spiritual principles, but do not live accordingly? How many people continually swear and express loyalty and yet are betrayers? We must not only speak the truth, we must *live* it.

Honesty in all our speaking and dealings with others is an essential part of truthfulness. It is absolutely crucial that the yogi make his livelihood only by honest and truthful means.

Selling useless or silly things, convincing people that they need them (or even selling them without convincing them), is a serious breach of truthfulness.

Trying to compromise the truth, even a little, making the excuse that “everybody does it” is not legitimate. For “everybody” is bound to the wheel of birth and death *because* they do it—and that is not what we wish for ourselves. We can lie to ourselves, to others, and even to God; but we cannot lie to the cosmos. Karma, the law of cause and effect, will react upon us to our own pain.

It is interesting that Vyasa considers that truthful speech is informative. By that he means that truthful speech is worthwhile, relevant, and practical. To babble mindlessly and grind out verbal trivia is also a form of untruth, even if not objectively false. Nor is foolish speech to anyone’s gain. Sometimes also people lie by “snowing” us with a barrage of words intended to deflect us from our inquiries. And nearly all of us who went to college remember the old game of padding out written assignments, giving lots of form but little content in hope of fooling the teachers into thinking the student knew the subject well and was saying something worthwhile—even profound. This is one of today’s most lucrative businesses, especially in the advertising world.

Speaking truth to the hurt of others is not really truth, since satya is an extension of ahimsa. For example, a person may be ugly, but to say, “You are ugly” is not a virtue. “What is based on injuring others, even though free from the three defects of speech (i.e., not deceitful, nor inaccurate, nor uninformative), does not amount to truth,” according to Shankara.

Our intention must never be to hurt in any way, but we must be aware that there are some people who hate the truth in any form and will accuse us of hurting them by our honesty. Such persons especially like to label any truth (or person) they dislike as “harsh,” “rigid,” “divisive,” “negative” “hateful,” and so on and on and on. We would have to become dishonest or liars to placate them. So “hurting” or offending them is a consequence of truthfulness that we will have to live with. The bottom line is that truth “is that uttered for helping all beings.” For non-injury is not a passive quality, but the positive character of restoration and healing.

Silence can also be a form of untruth, particularly in dealing with the aforementioned truth-haters. For truth is only harmful when “the ultimate aim is merely to injure beings.” But if some people put themselves in the way of truth, then they must take responsibility for their reactions to it.

Will Cuppy defined diplomacy as “the fine art of lying.” Sadly, it often is. So we must be sure that we do not deceive under the guise of diplomacy or tactfulness.

Self-deception, a favorite with nearly all of us to some degree, must be ruthlessly eliminated if we would be genuinely truthful.

“Therefore let one take care that his speech is for the welfare of all,” concludes Shankara.

Asteya: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriation

Asteya is abstinence from stealing, which Vyasa defines as: “the improper appropriation to oneself of others’ things.” He then concludes: “Refusal to do it, in *freedom from desire*, is non-stealing.”

What constitutes ordinary stealing is well known to almost all, but human beings have thought up countless ways to steal and not seem to be stealing—all the way from putting slugs in pay telephones to getting people to give us things or money which we neither need nor deserve. Theft and untruth are certainly interrelated. So we must analyze Vyasa’s definition

and apply it to our situation. But we can consider a few “fudges” that have become respectable and prevalent.

Taking credit that really belongs to another.

Plagiarism, especially in academic matters.

Taking what is not ours, while pretending that we either own it or have it coming to us.

Taking what is not legitimately coming to us, even if freely given. People do this continually in relation to welfare benefits and insurance claims.

Demanding more than a just price or a just wage.

No paying debts—including taxes.

Forcing others to give us something we want from them, whether material or metaphysical.

Not giving to others what we owe them or what we are legally or morally obligated to give.

A lot of people (especially churches and religious groups) expect others to continually give them things or services which they are perfectly capable of paying for. (I am not speaking about unsolicited gifts or charity—that is virtuous.) Or they want big discounts given to them.

Once a natural health practitioner—whose financial situation was much worse than mine—told me that she was willing to charge only half her usual fee for my treatment, and would even treat me for free if I wanted. I explained to her that since I could afford the full amount it would be stealing from her for me to either accept a discount or free treatment. And I cited the Yoga Sutras in support of my contention. The law applies to *all*.

The prophet Malachi posed the question, “Will a man rob God?” (Malachi 3:8) That is extremely easy to do and extremely common. We all need to ponder that possibility seriously and see if in some way we are doing that very thing.

But all these forms of stealing are inner or outer acts, whereas Vyasa defines non-stealing as essentially a psychological state of “freedom from desire.” This, then, is the goal of abstinence from stealing. What must be attained is the state of mind in which there is absolutely no desire or impulse to steal. “Stealing cannot exist in those whose desire has been cut off,” says Shankara.

Brahmacharya: continence

“Brahmacharya is restraint of the sex organ and other senses,” says Vyasa. From this we see that brahmacharya has a twofold nature: control and continence.

Control: Spirit has two aspects: consciousness and energy. Consciousness is constant, whereas energy is cyclic. It is the movement of energy that produces (and is) our experience of relativity, and it is the development of energy that is the process of evolution. Therefore the conservation and application of energy is the main determinant of success or failure in spiritual endeavor. Diffusion and dissipation of energy always weakens us. Hence brahmacharya is a vital element of Yoga, without which we cannot successfully pursue the greater life of Higher Consciousness.

Basically, brahmacharya is conservation and mastery of all the energy systems and powers of our being. This is especially true in relation to negative emotions, for tremendous energy is expended through lust, anger, greed, envy, hatred, resentment, depression, fear, obsession, and the rest. Further, they are both the causes and the symptoms of losing self-control, a major aspect of brahmacharya. Research has shown that persons in the grip of these emotions literally breathe out vital elements of the body. For example, the breath of angry people is found to be laden with copper. So negative emotion depletes us physically as well as energetically.

Positive emotions on the other hand actually enhance and raise our energy and physical levels. The cultivation of (true) love, compassion, generosity, cheerfulness, friendliness, and suchlike make us stronger and calmer—essential aspects of brahmacharya. It is noteworthy that the word “virtue” is derived from the Latin word *virtus*—power—which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit word *virya*, which means both power and strength.

“A place for everything and everything in its place,” is not just a maxim of orderliness. When applied to the individual’s energy systems it is the root of strength and health on all levels. Every atom of personal energy possessed by us has both a place and a purpose. To ensure correct placement, and expenditure, of energy is the essence of the yogic science. And brahmacharya is its foundation.

Continnence: Sexuality is usually considered the main focus of brahmacharya because it has such a powerful grip and influence on the human being. It is considered that if sex is mastered, all the senses will be mastered as well. There is simply no way to convince those addicted to and enslaved by sex that continence is supreme wisdom. But a few facts can be meaningful to the sincere seeker.

The life of the senses stifles the life of the spirit by carrying away the discrimination of the intellect, as Krishna says: “The mind, which follows in the wake of the wandering senses, carries away discrimination, as the wind a boat on the waters.” (Bhagavad Gita 2:67) The basic life-force, the prana, is dissipated through any intense activity of the senses, thus weakening the inner being. But sexual indulgence is incalculably more destructive of consciousness than any other form of sense experience, for it expends the life-force to a degree far, far beyond that of other sense experiences. Both body and mind are depleted through sexual activity.

The Prashna Upanishad concludes: “It is in those who have tapas and brahmacharya that truth is established.” (Prashna Upanishad 1:15) The Gita speaks of the worthy yogis as being “firm in their vow of brahmacharya.” (Bhagavad Gita 6:14)

For practical information on brahmacharya the following books are extremely valuable: *WARNING: Sex May Be Hazardous to Your Health* by Dr. Edwin Flatto, *Science Discovers The Physiological Value of Continence* and *Nutritional Sex Control and Rejuvenation* by the great twentieth century Rosicrucian, Dr. Raymond Bernard, *The Practice of Brahmacharya*, by Swami Sivananda, and *The Role of Celibacy in Spiritual Life* by Swami Chidananda.

Aparigraha: non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness

Aparigraha includes the ideas of non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, and non-acquisitiveness. Vyasa’s definition is most practical: “Seeing the defects in objects involved in acquiring them, and defending them, and losing them, and being attached to them, and depriving others of them, one does not take them to himself, and that is aparigraha.” Here, as in the other foundations, the true virtue or observance is mostly internal, leading to the correct state of mind for successful yoga practice.

Basically, when a person sees all the effort expended on “things” as well as the unhappiness attendant on both keeping and losing them—what to speak of awareness of their inherent defects—he wisely backs away and frees himself from Thingolatry. Of course we all have to obtain and use many kinds of things, but we can do so objectively, not letting ourselves get stuck up in them like the tar baby of the Uncle Remus story. Being possessed by possessions is truly a great misery; and the belief that happiness comes from external things is truly a great folly.

People do literally lose themselves in “stuff,” for they adopt a completely false self-concept. To think that we are what we “have” is to forget who and why we are. Aparigraha clears the inner eye and lets us see our true “face.”

The Great Vow

After listing ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha, Patanjali continues: “These, not conditioned by class, place, time or occasion, and extending to all stages, constitute the Great Vow.” (Yoga Sutra 2:31) They are the Great Vow because they require the exercise of will and because of their dynamic effect on us. Even more, they are great because, like the elements, they are self-sufficient, depending on nothing else, and because they cannot be mutated into something else. They are always what they are, and for that reason they are always to be observed with no exceptions whatsoever. They cannot be neglected or omitted for any reason—absolutely. Patanjali lists the possible conditions which do affect lesser observances: class, place, time or occasion, and stages. A brief consideration of each will be helpful.

Class. No one can mitigate or omit the observance of ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha because of “who” he “is.” In yoga, too, no one is above the law. That is, no one can produce the effects of Yama without their observance. I knew an Archbishop with a quick sense of humor. Once he made a pungent remark about someone, and a woman objected, saying, “That remark is not Christian.” He simply smiled and replied, “Madam, I do not have to be a Christian—I am an Archbishop!” This is an attitude of many, springing from the blindness of egotism.

Place. Whatever may be the ways of a particular place or group of people in which we may find ourselves, the observances of Yama are incumbent upon us. “When in Rome do as the Romans” is one of the silliest axioms ever coined. Peer pressure must never be an influence on us. Nor should unjust rules or laws have any effect on us. What is right must always be done. The will or opinion of others cannot change our obligation to observe the Great Vow. Nor can external conditions change it. Not even to save our lives can we turn from what is forever right.

Time or occasion. Human beings have for some reason always thought that “now” abrogates what was right or true in the past. It does not. Nor does a situation effect any change in what must be done by us as aspirants to yoga. Aversion to being “out of step” or “alienated from society” has no place in the mind and heart of the yogi.

Stage. We never “get beyond” the observance of the Great Vow. Those at the very end of the spiritual journey are as obligated to fulfil the Great Vow as those who are at the beginning. Also, we cannot “go too far” or “overdo” our observance of the Vow. It is all or nothing. “Ahimsa and the others are to be maintained all the time and in all circumstances and in regard to all objects without any conscious lapse,” declares Vyasa. Shankara points out that the Great Vow must be observed by us in relation to all beings—not just confined to humans.

Once again we see the psychological nature of the five components of the Great Vow and how their observance is based upon the courage, self-respect, and self-knowledge of the yogi.

Shaucha: purity, cleanliness

Shaucha means purity and cleanliness within the context of attaining unobstructed clarity of consciousness. “This Brahman, this Self, deep-hidden in all beings, is not revealed to all;

but to the seers, pure in heart, concentrated in mind—to them is he revealed.” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:12) “When through discrimination the heart has become pure, then, in meditation, the self is revealed.” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.8) “When the senses are purified, the heart is purified; when the heart is purified, there is constant and unceasing remembrance of the self; when there is constant and unceasing remembrance of the self, all bonds are loosed and freedom is attained.” (Chandogya Upanishad 7:26:2) Which is why Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) And Saint John: “Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” (I John 3:2,3)

“Internal shaucha is the washing away of the stains of the mind” according to Vyasa. “Shaucha implies purity in seeing and listening...and washing away the stains of the mind, such as desire and anger, by the waters of meditation,” adds Shankara.

Physical cleanliness is important for it eliminates bodily toxins and prevents disease. Inner purification is important for it eliminates mental toxins and prevents inner ills. For the yogi, the most important external aspect of shaucha is purity of diet. This is because the food we eat determines the vibration of our body and our mind. For this reason it is only wisdom to eat a purely vegetarian diet consisting of grains, vegetables, and fruits. (The best information on diet can be found in the books of Dr. Neal Barnard, particularly *Food for Life: How the New Four Food Groups Can Save Your Life.*)

Those who carefully—yes, scrupulously—adhere to a vegetarian diet, omitting all meat, fish, and eggs, and avoiding anything that contains them to any degree will perceive how valuable it is to keep such a dietary regimen. (Again, see *Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet.*) Not only will their general health improve greatly (assuming that they eat a balanced and nutritious vegetarian diet), they will see how much lighter and intuitive their minds become. A vegetarian diet greatly facilitates the practice of meditation, making very subtle states of consciousness readily attainable and perceptible. Those who have eaten meat, fish, and eggs for a long time may have to wait a while before fully gaining the benefits of vegetarianism, but it will not be long before they begin to see its beneficial effects to some degree.

Vegetarian diet is a crown jewel for the yogi since it embodies the foundations of ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha, shaucha, and tapas and produces purity and clarity of mind and heart.

There is another, far-reaching aspect to shaucha. While discussing the process of evolution, Vyasa and Shankara also speak about the way to infuse ourselves with higher consciousness. They give the simile of terraced fields on a mountainside. The farmer floods the highest field. When it has received enough water, he then breaks the earth barrier between it and the next, lower field, and the water pours down into it and fills it. And so the process goes until all the fields are watered. Vyasa then firmly declares that mere right or good action or external religiosity effect nothing in the way of transformation into a higher grade of consciousness, but that rather it is a matter of the removal of *obstacles* to higher consciousness that is needed. He points out that no effort is needed to get the water into the field—or the higher consciousness into the individual—except that expended in the removal of the barriers. So the secret is to remove whatever blocks the process of evolution, and it will occur as spontaneously as the water pours down into the field.

It is the removal of obstacles that is the highest form of shaucha. To underscore this, Vyasa continues: “Then again, a farmer in his field cannot force the nutrients of water or earth into the roots of his grain. What does he do, then? He removes the obstructing weeds. With these gone, the nutrients enter, of themselves, the roots of the grain.” In the same way, when

negative karmas, habits, deeds, thoughts, influences, associations, and situations are uprooted from our minds and lives, the higher consciousness and states of evolution will occur naturally. This is exceedingly important for us to keep in mind. For it is purity (shaucha) in this form that enables the divine light to reach us.

Santosha: contentment, peacefulness

Santosha consists of the passive aspect of contentment and peacefulness and the more positive aspect of joy and happiness. Santosha is a fundamentally cheerful attitude based on a harmonious interior condition and an intellectually spiritual outlook. This is possible only through meditation, and is one of the signs of progress in meditation. This must not be equated with mere intellectual “positive thinking” or a forced external “happiness” which is a camouflage, not a real state. Santosha is an inner-based quality that occurs spontaneously. It need not be cultivated or “acted out” any more than the blossoming of a flower.

Santosha is also contentment with simple living, and relates to aparigraha. Vyasa says that “santosha is being satisfied with the resources at hand and so not desiring more.” Shankara says: “As a result of the satisfaction with what is at hand, even though there may be some lack, he has the feeling, ‘It is enough.’” Santosha is freedom from the “bigger and more is better” syndrome that grips most of us.

Santosha is also the absence of negative emotions and the presence of positive emotions. In its highest form santosha is the contentment and peace that comes from resting in our own spirit.

Tapas: austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline

Tapas literally means “to generate heat” in the sense of awakening or stimulating the whole of our being to higher consciousness. It is commonly applied to the practice of spiritual discipline, especially that which involves some form of physical austerity or self-denial. The sages of ancient India were very conversant with the principles of physics and formulated their symbols accordingly. When an object is heated, its molecules begin to move at a faster rate than usual. Thus, tapas is a procedure that causes all the components of the yogi to vibrate at a much higher rate, and to eventually become permanently established in that higher vibration.

Regarding physical tapas Vyasa writes: “Tapas is endurance of the opposites. The opposites are hunger and thirst, heat and cold, standing and sitting, complete silence and merely verbal silence.” (“In complete silence, nothing like hand-signs is allowed, whereas in the limited silence, indications by hands, etc., are permitted and it is only actual speech that is banned,” according to Shankara.) Shankara says these opposites may occur naturally or by our own choice through self-denial. And both Vyasa and Shankara say that tapas is always done in the light of the capability of the yogi and is never exaggerated, strenuous, or beyond the yogi’s natural ability.

Basically, tapas is spiritual discipline that produces a perceptible result, particularly in the form of purification. Tapas is the turning from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to the Light, from death to Immortality. But it is never a matter of mere thought or desire, it is always *practical action* towards that end. Consequently, whenever tapas is spoken of it always implies the practice of yoga and the observances that facilitate yoga practice.

We are dual in nature: consciousness and energy, spirit and matter. This being so, we

need to realize that although we are essentially consciousness (spirit) we are also energy, and therefore we *are* our bodies and our minds. Or rather, we are the conscious intelligence that manifests as our bodies and minds. Our lives need to be lived in this perspective. For example, when we understand this truth we understand why such observances or disciplines as yama, niyama, vegetarianism, and moral conduct are so beneficial and necessary for us.

Swadhyaya: introspective self-study, spiritual study

Swadhyaya means “self-study.” This is usually interpreted as the study of the sacred texts which deal with the nature of the true self (spirit) and its realization. “Swadhyaya is study of works on liberation (moksha),” says Vyasa. “Swadhyaya is study of works on liberation such as the Upanishads,” comments Shankara. But it also means keeping a careful watch on the ego-based mind so as to be aware of its delusive and destructive tricks. For it is no external “devil” or “Satan” we need fear, but the “enemy within,” the “Dweller at the Threshold” which is our ego-mind complex that has blinded and enslaved us from life to life and has no intention of giving up its domination of us just because we practice a bit of meditation. Therefore we must be wary of its cunning and subtle ways and carefully analyze the debris it casts up into our consciousness in the form of thoughts and emotions. In this way we will see the direction in which it would pull us. We must take our susceptibility to its machinations most seriously. In swadhyaya we look at and analyze the mind in the calmness and intuition born of meditation.

The highest form of self-study is that which is known as *atma vichar*—inquiry into the self (spirit). We must never let go of the vital question: Who am I? We must do all we can to find the answer—not from others or from our intellectual ponderings, but by direct experience of ourselves as pure spirit. Taimni puts it this way: “Though swadhyaya begins with intellectual study it must be carried through the progressive stages of reflection, meditation, tapas, etc. to the point where the sadhaka is able to gain all knowledge or devotion from within, by his own efforts. That is the significance of the prefix *swa* (self) in swadhyaya. He leaves all external aids such as books, discourses, etc. and dives into his own mind for everything he needs in his quest.”

Ishwarapranidhana: offering of one’s life to God

The final foundation, for which all the others are a necessary preparation, is Ishwarapranidhana—the offering of one’s life to God. This is far more on every level than simple religious devotion, and much more than any kind of discipline or self-denial done in the name of spirituality. *It is the giving to God of the yogi’s entire life*, not just a giving of material offerings or occasional tidbits of devotion to God, however fervent or sincere. Moreover, as Taimni points out: “The fact that the progressive practice of Ishwarapranidhana can ultimately lead to samadhi shows definitely that it signifies a much deeper process of transformation in the sadhaka than a mere acceptance of whatever experiences and ordeals come to him in the course of his life....The practice of Ishwarapranidhana therefore begins with the mental assertion ‘Not my will but Thy will be done’ but it does not end there. There is a steady effort to bring about a continuous recession of consciousness from the level of the personality which is the seat of ‘I’ consciousness into the consciousness of the Supreme Whose will is working out in the manifest world.”

Ishwarapranidhana is total giving. The yogi does not eke out droplets of his life, but pours out his entire life in offering unto God. He gives all that he has—even his very self. And this is

only sensible, for the entire aim of yoga is the reunion of the individual spirit with the Supreme Spirit, the falling of the drop into the Immortal Sea. Ishwarapranidhana anticipates this divine union and ensures its accomplishment. This is why the first law-giver, Manu, says that the highest sacrifice (medha) is purushamedha—the sacrifice of the individual spirit.

Ishwarapranidhana is also mentioned in Sutra 1:23, where Patanjali says that the attainment of samadhi is brought near to the yogi “by offering of the life to God.” Vyasa comments: “As a result of Ishwarapranidhana, which is bhakti [devotion and love for God], the Lord bends down to him and rewards him,...and the attainment of samadhi and its fruit is near at hand.” Shankara says: “The Lord comes face-to-face with him and gives His grace to the yogi who is fully devoted to Him....The grace is effortlessly gained through the omnipotence of the Supreme Lord. By that grace of the Lord, samadhi and its fruit are soon attainable.”

It is incontrovertible, then, that yoga is a thoroughly *theistic* endeavor, one which makes God the center of life and its aim, as well.

The results of perfection (siddhi) in yama and niyama

Shankara makes a very bold—and bald—statement about yoga: “*Success in yoga is determined by result alone...observable by direct perception.*” As the ever-memorable Dr. Bronner used to say: “Judge only by the amazing results.”

Patanjali lists siddhis—psychic powers or effects—that result from the perfect observance of yama and niyama. Since yama and niyama deal with the innate powers of the human being—or rather with the abstinence and observance that will develop and release those powers, the manifestation of the development and perfecting of those powers will be automatic.

Before considering the specific siddhis resulting from perfection in yama and niyama, it should be explained that perfection in these virtues means that the ignorance which causes their opposites such as injury, lying, and stealing, has been completely eliminated from the yogi, and also that their reappearance in his thought, speech, or behavior has become absolutely impossible. So perfection (siddhi) in yama and niyama is not a matter of action or inaction but one of perfected consciousness.

Perfection in ahimsa

“On being firmly established in non-violence [ahimsa] there is abandonment of hostility in his presence.” (Yoga Sutra 2:35) The eminently desirable nature of this siddhi is evident. Wherever a yogi perfected in ahimsa may be, there no hostility can arise; and if it is already present somewhere, upon the yogi’s entry it will cease. The one perfected in ahimsa is a living fulfillment of the Prayer of Saint Francis, and is truly an instrument of divine peace. This was true of Buddha in Whose presence hired assassins and even a mad elephant became at peace and incapable of doing harm. “This happens with all living beings,” says Vyasa. Many times it has been observed that in the presence of perfected sages wild animals become tame, even friendly, not only toward human beings but even toward their usual enemies or prey. “In the presence of that one who follows ahimsa, even natural enemies like snake and mongoose give up their antagonism,” says Shankara. Violent human beings, too, have become peaceful and gentle after contact with holy people in whom ahimsa was completely realized.

Perfection in satya

“On being firmly established in truthfulness [satya], the result of action rests upon him

alone.” (Yoga Sutra 2:36) Luckily, we have quite a few authoritative commentaries to elucidate this obscure language. All are unanimous in saying that when the yogi is firmly established in truth in all its aspects, then whatever he says or wills comes about without any action being needed to produce it. As Vyasa explains: “When he says: ‘Be righteous,’ that man becomes righteous; told by him: ‘Do you attain heaven,’ that one attains heaven. His word is infallible.” “When truth is firm in him, events confirm his words,” adds Shankara. Yogananda gives an example of this in the first chapter of his autobiography. My friend, Sri Abani Lahiri, told me that his grandfather had the same power even as a child. Once he became angry with another little boy and said, “You should die!” Immediately that boy became deathly ill and was declared by the doctors to have only a few hours of life remaining. When his parents were told, “That Brahmin boy told him to die,” they called for him and asked him to tell their son to live. He did so, and the boy was immediately well. Jesus, too, had this power as a child and had to learn how to control it, as recorded in the “apocryphal” gospels. By the power of his word Sri Ramakrishna caused hibiscus blossoms of two different colors to grow on the same plant. At the end of His earthly life, anyone who heard Sri Ramakrishna speak of spiritual awakening became spiritually awakened.

Perfection in asteya

“On being firmly established in non-stealing [asteya], all kinds of precious things come to him.” (Yoga Sutra 2:37) Another translation of the second half of the sutra can be: “All kinds of precious things *present themselves* to him.” All the treasuries of earth not only are open to someone perfect in asteya, their contents actively seek him out. Yet such a one neither desires or seeks them. If he did, they would no longer come to him. Precious things may be given by others to those perfected in asteya, or simply appear from the divine hand of Providence. The former Shankaracharya of Joshi Matt, Jagadguru Brahmananda Saraswati, refused to allow anyone to donate money either to himself or to the monastery, whose expenses were great. Yet, he had a box which was always filled with money from which he provided for all the monastery’s needs. Yogananda had a little box with a slot in the top where he put in or took out money without counting or keeping record. Yet it was always full. Sri Brahma Chaitanya, a Maharashtrian saint who lived into the twentieth century, was known to be without any resources whatsoever and lived in total frugality. Yet he once made a pilgrimage to Benares where he gave away a tremendous amount of money to the poor and the monastics. As he sat on a simple mat, he kept putting his hand under it and producing the money from an inexhaustible supply. Paramhansa Nityananda literally pulled fortunes in rupees from his clothing to pay for projects he was supervising. Some yogis can simply reach up in the air and bring down anything they desire.

Perfection in brahmacharya

“On being firmly established in brahmacharya, vigor [virya] is gained.” (Yoga Sutra 2:37) Virya is not ordinary physical strength, but an almost supernatural power that manifests as strength of body, mind, and spirit. When through brahmacharya the yogi’s normal bodily power is conserved, a marvellous alchemical change takes place, augmenting and transmuting his energies to a level unknown to others. The truth that those who keep their bodily energies intact can accomplish whatever they will has been demonstrated for thousands of years by celibates of all lands and spiritual traditions.

Regarding the brahmachari possessed of virya, Shankara says: “He brings out great qualities without limit from himself. He has irresistible energy for all good undertakings. The sense is, that he cannot be thwarted by any obstacle.” See how great spiritual reformers have changed the lives of untold thousands, their influence reaching over the world and lasting even beyond their physical life span. So great is the virya of some saints that their mere touch can heal. Sometimes the clothing they have worn or objects they have touched heal the sick and work other miracles. Virya also manifests in the brahmachari’s words, giving them a power not found in those of others. As Vyasa comments on this sutra: “From the attainment of virya, he draws out invincible good qualities from himself. And when perfected in it, he becomes able to confer knowledge on pupils.”

Through the accumulation of virya the powers of the mind develop beyond all bounds. Yogis have often displayed profound knowledge of subjects they had never studied, and on occasion have shown remarkable artistic abilities.

Virya affects the physical body, too. Swami Dayananda, the great Indian spiritual reformer of the nineteenth century, was once mocked by a man to whom he recommended brahmacharya for increase of bodily strength. When the man got into his horse-drawn chariot and told the driver to go on, the chariot would not move. The driver whipped the horses, but to no avail. In disgust and perplexity the man got out of the chariot and discovered Swami Dayananda holding on to its rear axle!

Perfection in aparigraha

“On non-possessiveness [aparigraha] being confirmed there arises knowledge of the ‘how’ and ‘wherefore’ of existence.” (Yoga Sutra 2:39) Regarding this Vyasa says: “What is this birth? How does it take place? What do we become [both in this life and after death], who shall we be and in what circumstances shall we be? Any such desire of his to know his situation in former, later, and intermediate states is spontaneously gratified.” Nothing is more bewildering to the human being than his existence in this world—particularly the how and why of his even being here—no matter how much external philosophy in the form of books or teachers may attempt to answer the gnawing questions set forth by Vyasa. The reality of the situation is this: until the individual knows for himself by direct perception gained through his own development, life must remain a confusing mystery for him. Since the yogi is attempting to extricate himself from the bonds of birth and death, it is imperative for him to know the why and wherefore of human embodiment in all its aspects. He does not need more theory, however plausible and appealing; he needs to *know*. This knowledge comes from within when all blocks to communication with his inmost consciousness are removed. For this birth has been determined solely by him in his nature as a potentially omniscient and omnipotent spirit. Perfection in non-possessiveness bestows the needed insight. “Since he has no attachment to outer possessions, illumination of the field of his own self appears without effort on his part,” explains Shankara.

Perfection in shaucha

“From purity [shaucha] arises disgust for one’s own body and disinclination to come in physical contact with others.” (Yoga Sutra 2:40) This siddhi certainly will not be thought desirable in a body-and-sex-obsessed society that insists on being touched and hugged (and often more) by all and sundry, but the serious yogi should consider it carefully. After all, his

intention is to disengage himself from the grinding gears of samsara—the chief of which is body-consciousness. Not only are human beings obsessed with their own bodies, they compound the problem by incessant contact with those of others. This contact results in the confusion and conflict of their personal energies (prana) by the invasion and admixture of other's prana with theirs—particularly their psychic energies. Losing the integrity of their energies in this way, their life force become unbalanced, weakened, damaged, and—yes—defiled. This condition manifests as an endless series of physical, mental, and spiritual ills. “I am not myself” becomes a truism in relation to them. But for those who carefully observe shaucha it becomes otherwise.

“When by practicing purity and seeing the defects in the body, he becomes disgusted with his own body, he becomes free from obsession with the body; seeing what the body essentially is, he has no intercourse with others,” writes Vyasa. The disgust for the body spoken of here is not a hatred or an obsessive aversion for the body, but rather a profound disillusionment with the body springing from awareness of its many defects, not the least of which is its unreliability and inevitable mortality. The body is also seen to be a repository of pain, disease and filth, however fine the present momentary outer appearance may be. It is in fact a treasury of death.

“With the ordinary purification of the physical body we become more sensitive and begin to see things in their true light. Cleanliness is mostly a matter of sensitiveness. What is intolerably disgusting to a person of refined nature and habits is hardly noticed by another person whose nature is coarse and insensitive. So this feeling of disgust towards one's own body which develops on its purification means nothing more than that we have become sensitive enough to see things as they really are.” So says I. K. Taimni.

Patanjali is not finished with the matter of shaucha. Since body and mind are inextricably related, he continues: “From mental purity arises purity of the inner nature, cheerfulness, one-pointedness, control of the senses, and fitness for the vision of the self.” (Yoga Sutra 2:41) Nobody has objection to these, I am sure. When the inner bodies are pure they are refined and fluid, capable of the most subtle practice of yoga and reaching the highest states of consciousness. This state of inner purity is particularly accomplished by thought and diet.

For the inwardly pure there is no need for artificial “positive thinking.” Cheerfulness and optimism rise up from within him as a matter of course. And continue arising. Gone forever are mood swings and the “ups and downs” of life. No more valleys or mountaintops: he soars in the sunlit sky of the spirit as naturally as the eagle flies in the air. Whether engaged in outer or inner activity, his mind is intent upon its purpose, no longer scattered or flapping like a flag in the wind. One-pointed meditation becomes effortless for him. No longer does he struggle with the unruly senses and the mind which Krishna says are as hard to tame as the wind. (Bhagavad Gita 6:34)

Perfection in santosha

“From contentment [santosha] he gains unsurpassed [superlative] happiness.” (Yoga Sutra 2:42) This is because santosha is a state completely free from all desire for objects or the compulsion to gain some outer thing not yet possessed. Such desire is itself great pain—as is usually its fulfillment. Taimni says: “There is a definite reason why superlative happiness abides in a perfectly calm and contented mind. A calm mind is able to reflect within itself the bliss [ananda] which is inherent in our real divine nature. The constant surging of desires prevents this bliss from manifesting itself in the mind. It is only when these desires are

eliminated and the mind becomes perfectly calm that we know what true happiness is. This subtle and constant joy which is called *sukha* and which comes from within is independent of external circumstances and is really a reflection of ananda, one of the three fundamental aspects of the self.”

Vyasa has this comment: “So it is said: ‘Whatever sex pleasure there may be in the world, whatever supreme happiness may be enjoyed in heaven, they cannot be accounted a sixteenth part of the happiness of destruction of craving.’” Simply being without compelling desires is great happiness and peace. Here is how the Taittiriya Upanishad expresses it:

“Who could live, who could breathe, if that blissful self dwelt not within the lotus of the heart? He it is that gives joy.

“Of what nature is this joy?

“Consider the lot of a young man, noble, well-read, intelligent, strong, healthy, with all the wealth of the world at his command. Assume that he is happy, and measure his joy as one unit.

“One hundred times that joy is one unit of the joy of Gandharvas.

“One hundred times the joy of Gandharvas is one unit of the joy of celestial Gandharvas.

“One hundred times the joy of celestial Gandharvas is one unit of the joy of the Pitris in their paradise.

“One hundred times the joy of the Pitris in their paradise is one unit of the joy of the Devas.

“One hundred times the joy of the Devas is one unit of the joy of the karma Devas.

“One hundred times the joy of the karma Devas is one unit of the joy of the ruling Devas.

“One hundred times the joy of the ruling Devas is one unit of the joy of Indra.

“One hundred times the joy of Indra is one unit of the joy of Brihaspati.

“One hundred times the joy of Brihaspati is one unit of the joy of Prajapati.

“One hundred times the joy of Prajapati is one unit of the joy of Brahma: but no less joy than Brahma has the seer to whom the self has been revealed, and who is without craving.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2:7, 8)

Perfection in tapas

“Perfection of the sense-organs and body result after destruction of impurity by tapas.” (Yoga Sutra 2:43) Tapas is like the fire that refines gold through the burning out of all impurities. In relation to the body, tapas removes its limitations and defects. This has been shown by scientific studies: “Everyone around the water cooler knows that meditation reduces stress. But with the aid of advanced brain-scanning technology, researchers are beginning to show that meditation directly affects the function and structure of the brain, changing it in ways that appear to increase attention span, sharpen focus and improve memory. One recent study found evidence that the daily practice of meditation thickened the parts of the brain’s cerebral cortex responsible for decision making, attention and memory. Sara Lazar, a research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital, presented preliminary results last November that showed that the gray matter of twenty men and women who meditated for just forty minutes a day was thicker than that of people who did not...What’s more, her research suggests that meditation may slow the natural thinning of that section of the cortex that occurs with age.” (*How to Get Smarter, One Breath At A Time*, Lisa Takeuchi Cullen. *Time*, January 16, 2006, p. 93.) “There was a study reported at the American Geriatric Association

convention in 1979 involving forty-seven participants whose average age was 52.5 years. It found that people who had been meditating more than seven years were approximately twelve years younger physiologically than those of the same chronological age who were not meditating.” (Gabriel Cousens, M.D., *Conscious Eating*, p. 281.)

The process is described by Vyasa as follows: “As tapas becomes complete, it destroys the veiling taint of impurity; when the veiling taint is removed, there are siddhis of the body like the ability to become minute, and siddhis of the senses in such forms as hearing and seeing things which are remote.” The body is no longer locked into its habitual patterns of size or location. Nor are the senses any longer limited to functioning within the bounds of proximity of objects. The body and senses become as free as the yogi’s spirit, and as expanded in their scope.

Perfection in swadhyaya

“From self-study [swadhyaya] arises communion with the beloved deity.” (Yoga Sutra 2:44) This sutra is not speaking of communion with God the Unmanifest Absolute, but with His manifested forms or with powerful beings—gods, realized Masters, and others who have evolved beyond the earth plane. “Gods, sages, and perfect beings to whom he is devoted come before the vision of the man intent on swadhyaya and give him their help,” says Vyasa. The help can be in the form of protection, removal of inner or outer obstacles, and even spiritual teaching. His aspiration expressed through swadhyaya and his love and admiration for them of which, through their omnipotence, they are ever aware, draw them to grant him encouragement, assistance, and instruction.

Perfection in Ishwarapranidhana

“Accomplishment of (or success or perfection in) samadhi arises from Ishwarapranidhana.” (Yoga Sutra 2:45) Though we can define samadhi in many accurate ways, when we think about it we realize that samadhi is totally coming to rest in spirit, the cessation of all else, and the centering of our being in God. Samadhi is entering into the heart of God, into the Silence that is the only truth. The perfection of that state is samadhi, which therefore is produced by total devotion of our life to God.

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that follow’st all my way,
I yield my flickr’ing torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine’s glow its day
May brighter, fairer be.

A final word on the subject from Vyasa: “The samadhi of one who has devoted [offered] his whole being to the Lord is perfect....[By] the knowledge [resulting] from that [samadhi he]

knows a thing as it really is.”

Self-realization: the goal

“This effulgent self is to be realized within the lotus of the heart by continence, by steadfastness in truth, by meditation, and by superconscious vision. Their impurities washed away, the seers realize him.” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.5)

And I. K. Taimni: “The student of yogic philosophy will see in these unusual developments which take place on practicing yama-niyama the tremendous possibilities which lie hidden in the apparently simple things of life. It appears that one has only to penetrate deeply into any manifestation of life to encounter the most fascinating mysteries and sources of power. Physical science which deals with the crudest manifestation of life touches the mere fringe of these mysteries and the results which it has achieved are little short of miraculous. There is, therefore, nothing to be surprised at in the fact that the yogi who dives into the far subtler phenomena of mind and consciousness finds still deeper mysteries and extraordinary powers.”

Chapter Eight: Om in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga Sutras

Sanatana Dharma—the Eternal Religion—is based on the direct experience of the sages of primeval India as well as the corroborating experiences of yogis throughout thousands of years. Originally all spiritual teachings were committed to memory, but in time they were written down to ensure their correct transmission. Simple as it is, Sanatana Dharma in its purity is found in twelve basic texts: the Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Svetasvatara Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita. This last text is a digest and exposition of the upanishadic philosophy with emphasis on its practical application. Another book, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, presents the practical inner way to experience and manifest the truths of the upanishads and the Gita.

Although Om is to be found in each upanishad, at least as part of the opening and closing mantras of blessing, eight of them have sections dealing with Om Itself.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

“Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being. This is the Veda which the knowers of Brahman know; through it one knows what is to be known.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1) Om is Self-Revealing Divinity. It is the supreme “scripture” through which we come to know “what is to be known,” namely Brahman.

Chandogya Upanishad

“One should meditate on this Syllable [Om].” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.1) For, “That is the quintessence of the essences, the Supreme, the highest.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.3)

“Speech [vak] and breath [prana] are joined together in the Syllable Om. Verily, whenever the pair come together, they fulfil each other’s desire. He who knowing this thus, meditates on the Syllable, becomes, verily, a fulfiller of desires.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6, 7) This is why Om is meditated upon by joining Its repetition to the breath, and why it is called the Pranava, the Breath Word.

The upanishad continues with the exposition of Om as the power of fulfillment, saying: “Verily, this Syllable is of assent, for whenever one assents to anything he says simply ‘Om.’ What is assent is fulfillment. He, who knowing this thus, meditates on the Syllable, becomes, verily, a fulfiller of desires.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.8)

“Saying ‘Om,’ one recites: saying ‘Om,’ one orders: saying ‘Om,’ one sings aloud, in honor of that Syllable, with its greatness and its essence. He who knows this thus, and he who knows not, both perform with It. Knowledge and ignorance, however, are different. What, indeed, one performs with knowledge, faith, and meditation, that, indeed becomes more powerful. This, verily is the explanation of this Syllable.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.9, 10)

A little later the upanishad returns to the power of Om to fulfil desires, saying: “He obtains wishes by singing [intoning], who knowing this, meditates on the udgitha [Om when it is part of Vedic recitation] as the syllable. This, with regard to the self.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.2.14) That is, those who, desiring to know the Self, meditate upon Om will surely attain Self-knowledge.

“This sound is that syllable, the immortal, the fearless....He who knows it thus, praises this Syllable, takes refuge in that Syllable, in the immortal, fearless sound, and having entered it, he becomes immortal.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.4.4, 5) Om is the secret of immortality.

The upanishadic sages had much to say about the sun as the source of life, teaching that all sentient beings have come into the physical plane through the sun which is a gateway to the astral realms. The souls that have evolved beyond the need for earthly experience pass back through the sun to higher worlds. Even more, the sages identified it with Om, saying: “Now, verily, what is the udgitha is the Om. What is Om is the udgitha. And so verily, the udgitha is the yonder sun and the Om, for the sun is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1)

“One should meditate on the breath in the mouth as the udgitha, for it is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) Since our soul is always breathing Om, by intoning Om in time with the breath we put ourselves in tune with the very wellspring of our existence, linking up with our inmost consciousness.

“Now, verily, what is the udgitha is the Pranava. What is Pranava is the udgitha. [If one knows this], verily, from the seat of the hotri priest, all wrong singing is corrected, yea is corrected.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.5) Negative karma is a major concern of those who seek liberation, for it ties us to the wheel of constant birth and death. Symbolically speaking, we “sing” our life’s directions as does the hotri priest, and often make mistakes. But through Om, “all wrong singing is corrected, yea is corrected.”

“This is the udgitha [Om], highest and best. This is endless. He who, knowing this, meditates on udgitha, the highest and best, becomes the highest and best and obtains the highest and best worlds. When Atidhanvan Shunaka taught this udgitha to Udara Sandilya, he also said: ‘As long as they shall know this udgitha among your descendants, so long their life in this world will be the highest and best.’ And so will their state in that other world be. One who thus knows and meditates—his life in this world becomes the highest and best, and so his state in that other world, yea, in that other world.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.9.2-4) Om glorifies both this life and the life beyond.

“As all leaves are held together by the stalk, so is all speech held together by Om. Verily, the Syllable Om is all this, yea, the Syllable Om is all this.” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.3) Om is every aspect of life itself. Speech, vak, is the essence of life. Therefore in grave illness and at the time of death the power of speech usually fails. As milk becomes diluted in water, so the consciousness of the departing soul becomes dispersed and wanders, confused. But this is not so for those who cling even in death to the repetition of Om.

Speaking of the final exit of the soul from the body, the upanishad says: “Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun....When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these very rays or he goes up with the thought of Om. As his mind is failing, he goes to the sun. That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers.” (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2,5)

Katha Upanishad

In the Katha Upanishad we find profoundest teachings on the true Self and its destiny.

The inquirer asks to be taught the Transcendent Reality. The answer he receives is this: “I will tell you briefly of that Goal which all the Vedas with one voice propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing for Which people practice discipline: It is Om.” (Katha Upanishad 1.2.15) To be very colloquial: Om is IT.

Though absolute Unity, God is seemingly dual: transcendent and immanent, with form and without form, with qualities and without qualities, “higher” and “lower” Brahman. So the upanishad says: “Om, indeed, is the Lower Brahman; this is, indeed, the Higher Brahman. Anyone who, meditating on Om, wishes either of the Two [aspects], by him that is attained.” (Katha Upanishad 1.2.16) Om is both transcendent and immanent. In whichever plane we wish to abide, Om is the basis, the illuminator, the key to comprehension and mastery. Furthermore, we can meditate on God with Form (Saguna Brahman) and God without Form (Nirguna Brahman), God with attributes and God beyond attributes, with a single mantra: Om.

Logically, then, the upanishad concludes: “This [Om] is the best means [of attainment and realization]; this means is the Higher and Lesser Brahman. Meditating on Om, one becomes worthy of worship in the world of Brahman.” (Katha Upanishad 1.2.17) Om is that which transforms us, elevating our consciousness to the realm of the Divine and establishing it therein.

Mandukya Upanishad

“Om: this Syllable is all this. All that is past, the present and the future, all this is only the Syllable Om. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only the Syllable Om.” (Mandukya Upanishad 1) From the original Sound, Om, all things have come into manifestation as Its extension-embodiments. Everything that has ever existed, now exists, or shall exist, is the expansion of Om. Om is all-embracing Eternity, containing and transcending past, present, and future. There is nothing but Om.

That being true, the upanishad then says: “The Self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om....Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows It thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his self [individual spirit].” (Mandukya Upanishad 8, 12) By means of Om, the eternal wave merges into the eternal Sea.

Mundaka Upanishad

The Mundaka Upanishad speaks further on meditation.

“Taking as the bow the great weapon of the Upanishads [Om], one should place in It the arrow sharpened by meditation. Drawing It with a mind engaged in the contemplation of That [Brahman], O beloved, know that Imperishable Brahman as the target.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3) The power of Om is emphasized by calling it a great weapon. Its intent and effect are serious and mighty—nothing less than union with the Absolute. It is called “the great weapon of the Upanishads” to indicate that Om, *and Om alone*, is the effective means recommended by the scriptures of Eternal Dharma for the realization of God. The japa and meditation of Om impel the consciousness of the yogi toward the Goal: Brahman. Moreover, it is the meditation of Om that “sharpen” the consciousness and renders it capable of union with Brahman.

“The Syllable Om is the bow: one’s self, indeed, is the arrow. Brahman is spoken of as the target of that. It is to be hit without making a mistake. Thus one becomes united with it [Brahman] as the arrow becomes one with the target.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.4) It is Om that ensures we will unerringly (“without a mistake”) reach the Goal.

“He in Whom the sky, the earth, and the interspace are woven, as also the mind along with all the pranas, know Him alone as the one Self. Dismiss other utterances. This [Om] is the bridge to immortality.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5) The “He” in this verse is Om Itself, which is Brahman. It is the one Self. To drive the point home that Om is the sole means of uniting with Brahman, the upanishad says absolutely and flatfootedly: *Dismiss other utterances*—all other japa mantras. Why? Because only Om is the way to immortality.

Therefore, “Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6)

Prashna Upanishad

Living in the world of gadgetry, from mousetraps to atom bombs, one of the most frequent questions we (reasonably) ask is, “Does it work?” According to the Prashna Upanishad, “Satyakama, son of Shibi, asked [the Rishi Pippalada]: ‘Venerable Sir, what world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That?’ To him, he said: ‘That which is the sound Om, O Satyakama, is verily the higher and the lower Brahman. Therefore, *with this support alone* does the wise man reach the one or the other.’...If he meditates on the Supreme Being [Parampurusha] with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, the Sun. He is led to the world of Brahman. He sees the Person that dwells in the body, Who is higher than the highest life....That the wise one attains, *even by the mere sound Om as support*, That Which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme.” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1,2,5,7)

Om does it all.

Svetasvatara Upanishad

“Om is the Supreme Brahman, and in It are the Triad [the individual soul, the cosmos, and the Cosmic Soul]. It is the firm support, the imperishable. The knowers of Brahman by knowing what is therein [in the all-containing Om] become merged in Brahman, intent thereon [i.e., on Om] and freed from birth.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7) Om unites us with God and frees us from rebirth.

“As the form of fire when latent in its source is not seen and yet its seed is not destroyed, but may be seized again and again in its source by means of the drill [a pointed stick whirled to produce fire for the Vedic sacrifices], so it is in both cases. The Self has to be seized in the body by means of the Syllable Om. By making one’s body the lower friction stick and the Syllable Om the upper friction stick, by practicing the friction of meditation one may see the hidden God, as it were.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:13,14) Here we may see a hint of the practice of integrating our intonations of Om with the breath as well as the way our awareness may be drawn to various points in the body during meditation. It also points out that the japa and meditation of Om are not confined to our “spiritual” makeup, but affects our whole being, including the body.

“The knower of the real nature of Brahman that is identical with the Pranava, after keeping his body erect, by holding the three parts [the chest, the neck, and the head] in an upright posture, placing all the organs of perception and action along with the mind in his heart, should cross all the formidable streams [of samsara] with the ferryboat of the Pranava.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 2:8) “Heart” in this verse means the Self, the core of our being, rather than the physical heart or the “heart chakra.” The idea is that through meditating on Om all the “streams” or faculties of our mind become merged in the consciousness of the Self.

This is perfect enlightenment, so the upanishad also says: “God is the Syllable Om, out of Him proceeds the Supreme Knowledge.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:17)

Taittiriya Upanishad

“Om is Brahman. Om is all this. He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1) How glorious is Om! It is the Power of Enlightenment.

Bhagavad Gita

The supreme sage, Vyasa, in order to give us a complete picture of the upanishadic wisdom as well as the way to apply it in our life so we may attain the same vision of the sages who authored them, wrote the Bhagavad Gita based on the instructions given by Krishna to Arjuna on the eve of the Great Indian (Mahabharata) War on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Om is a central element in Krishna’s exposition of spiritual life and practice.

Speaking from his perspective as the Infinite Being, enumerating his major manifestation-embodiments, Krishna says: “I am the syllable Om.” (Bhagavad Gita 7:8) “I am...the sacred monosyllable.” (Bhagavad Gita 9:17) “Among words I am the monosyllable Om.” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25) The meaning is that Om is not a symbol of God, It *is* God.

What to “do” with Om is then outlined by Krishna: “Engaged in the practice of concentration, uttering the monosyllable Om—the Brahman—remembering Me always, he...attains to the supreme goal. I am easily attainable by that ever-steadfast Yogi who constantly and daily remembers Me.” (Bhagavad Gita 8:12-14)

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

The *Yoga Darshan* (Yoga Sutras) of Patanjali is the prime authority on yoga outside the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. Here are its words on God and yoga:

“Ishwara [God] is a particular Purusha [Spirit, Person] Who is untouched by the afflictions of life, actions, and the results and impressions produced by these actions. In Him is the highest limit of omniscience.” (“In Him becomes infinite that all-knowingness which in others is only a germ”—Swami Vivekananda’s translation of the Yoga Sutras.)

“Being unconditioned by time He is teacher even of the ancients. His designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om].” (“His manifesting word is Om”—Swami Vivekananda.)

“Its japa and meditation is the way [*or*: should be done]. From it result [come] the disappearance of obstacles and the turning inward of consciousness. Disease, languor, doubt, carelessness, laziness, worldly-mindedness, delusion, non-achievement of a stage, instability, these cause the distraction of the mind and they are the obstacles. [Mental] pain, despair, nervousness, and agitation are the symptoms of a distracted condition of mind. For removing these obstacles [there should be] the constant practice of the one principle [the japa and meditation of Om].” (Yoga Sutras 1:24-32)

That completes the picture. We need only heed the instruction: “Having known what is said in the ordinance of the scriptures, you should act here in this world.” (Bhagavad Gita 16:24)

Afterword: It Is All Up To You

All the theory and eulogy in the world regarding a meditation practice mean virtually nothing. *But practice is everything.* In meditation more than anything else, practice certainly does Make Perfect. And the practice is so marvelously simple.

Krishna told Arjuna: “One, perhaps, in thousands of men strives for perfection; and one perhaps, among the blessed ones, striving thus, knows Me in reality.” (Bhagavad Gita 7:3) To enable each one of us to become “one in a million,” yoga was given by the sages to the human race. Its sacred methodology ensures that not a moment of our endeavor is wasted or ineffectual. Those who pursue the path of yoga unto the death of ignorance will be crowned with life. Those who cast aside the false life of the ego shall enter into the true life of the spirit.

Many have heard of the philosophy and practice of meditation, many have enjoyed lectures and books on the subject (some have even given the lectures and written the books), and yet have never taken up the practice to any degree. They simply did not make the connection between the beautiful theory and the actuality of their own lives. This is pretty much the trouble in all “spiritual” matters—people do not make the connection or transition from the theoretical to the practical. Consequently, as a friend I urge you in every sense of the expression to take this practice “to heart.”

It is essential in yoga, as in ordinary matters, to realize that all goes according to precise laws. Wishing, wanting, hoping, praying, believing—or their opposites—have no effect at all. When speaking of meditation, Patanjali says: “Its application is by stages.” (Yoga Sutras 3:6) That is, meditation keeps moving onward in its effect *when regularly practiced*, just like the taking of a journey. It all goes in an exact sequence. Therefore we cannot expect that meditation will produce enlightenment in a random way like a slot machine in its payoffs. Meditation produces steady growth if there is steady practice.

The secret of success is regularity in meditation. “A diamond is a piece of coal that never gave up.” Paramhansa Yogananda formulated a more spiritual version: “A saint is a sinner who never gave up.” If you meditate regularly, every day, great will be the result. Water, though the softest substance known, can wear through the hardest stone by means of a steady dripping. In the old story of the tortoise and the hare, the tortoise won the race because he kept at it steadily, whereas the hare ran in spurts. He ran much faster than the tortoise, but the irregularity of his running made him lose the race. Meditation keeps moving onward in its effect when regularly practiced, producing steady growth through steady practice. The more we walk the farther we travel; the more we meditate the nearer and quicker we draw to the goal.

Yoga, the spiritual state, is produced by yoga the practice. Those who persevere in their yoga practice find unfailing and abundant happiness, peace, and fulfillment. Certainly the goal is not reached without much practice through the years, but every step of the way is blessed and brings rejoicing to the yogi’s heart. Then at last no more steps are needed, and he enters the ocean of Satchidananda. “A tiny bubble of laughter, I am become the Sea of Mirth Itself,” wrote Yogananda.

So it really is all up to you. The sane and sober voice of the Upanishadic Rishis assures us that through the simple japa and meditation of Om all possible spiritual attainments will be

realized.

“He who knows Om need know nothing further,” declares the Mandukya Upanishad.

“Through Om the Lord is met face to face,” Shankara assures us in his Commentary on the Yoga Sutras. And in his commentary on the Taittiriya Upanishad: “Wishing to attain the supreme Self one does japa of Om; and he does indeed attain Brahman through that Om.”

The Mundaka Upanishad avers: “Om is the bridge to immortality. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness.”

The *Mantra-Yoga-Samhita*, verse 71, calls Om “the best of all mantras,” adding that all other mantras receive their power from It. And later in verse 73:

When people hear the Pranava they hear the Absolute itself.

When they utter the Pranava they go to the abode of the Absolute.

He who perceives the Pranava sees the state of the Absolute.

He who always has the Pranava in his mind has the form of the Absolute.

Om.

Appendix One: The Yoga of Sound

Why sound?

“By sound one becomes liberated [*Anavrittih shabdai*],” is the concluding verse of the Brahma Sutras (4.4.22).

Why do we use sound in meditation? Why not use one of the other senses or faculties, since touch, sight, taste, and smell must also possess increasingly subtler forms until they reach the point of their emerging? It is true that these four faculties do have subtle forms, but only sound reaches to the ultimate point of emergence.

The five senses correspond to the five elements of which all things consist. Those elements are ether [akasha], air [vayu], fire [agni], water [apah], and earth [prithvi]. That is, their grossest forms are those of sound [shabda], sight [drishti], touch [sparsha], taste [rasa], and smell [gandha] as perceived by the bodily senses. Because of this we use these terms to refer to them. But the water element is not just the liquid we call “water.” It is much more, having roots in the astral and causal planes. The same is true of the other elements.

When relative existence, individual or cosmic, begins, there is a chain of manifestation. First there is the out-turning of the consciousness itself. This modification on the cosmic level is the emerging of the Mahat Tattwa, the Great Element, that is the Personal or Saguna Brahman, spoken of in Christianity as “the Only-begotten of the Father” or “Son” of God. In the individual this is the sense of *asmita*: I-am-ness. Then the Pradhana [Prakriti] modifies itself into the five elements, beginning with ether, and each succeeding element contains within itself some of the preceding elements. That is, air is not “pure” but is air mixed with some ether. Fire possesses some of the ether and air element. Water has some fire, air, and ether. Earth has some water, fire, air, and ether. So only ether is unmixed, and only ether is “touching” the principle of Consciousness. In other words, only ether is in direct contact with the spirit. Yet ether (akasha) pervades all the other elements as their prime constituent—actually as their source and core element. Sound is the quality (or faculty) of ether; touch is the quality of air; sight is the quality of fire; taste is the quality of water; and smell is the quality of earth. Sound, then, is the only thing that reaches back to the principle of consciousness. The other elements stop somewhere along the way. Sound, then, can affect all the elements.

There is more. The other four elements have only one faculty or power, but akasha has two faculties or powers: Vak and Shabda—Speaking and Hearing. The faculties of the four other elements are all passive. The faculty of smell cannot generate smells, the faculty of taste cannot generate tastes, etc., though the memory or imagination of them is possible. Ether, on the other hand, has the capacity to both generate and hear sound on the mental levels. The etheric faculty both speaks and hears what it speaks, is both active and passive. This is unique among the elements. Akasha alone possesses the creative power, the power of sound.

When we inwardly intone Om and become absorbed in that sound, by centering our awareness in the act of intoning Om and listening to It, we become thoroughly centered in the Chidakasha, the Infinite Consciousness that is our only Self.

The five elements also correspond to the five levels or bodies known as koshas: the anandamaya, jnanamaya, manomaya, pranamaya, and annamaya bodies. These are the intelligence, intellectual, mental (sensory), biomagnetic, and physical bodies. The highest

(most subtle) body is the etheric body (anandamaya kosha) which is the seat of sound or speech.

Sound, then, is the direct means to return our awareness to the inmost level of our being and put us into touch with consciousness itself. In fact, consciousness is innate in sound. At the same time, sound rules all the levels of our being and has the ability to infuse all those levels with the highest spiritual consciousness. Sound has the power to “spiritualize” every bit of us. And the essence, the root, of all sound is Om.

A special form of sound

We say that we use sound in Om Yoga—in meditation especially. But it is not just any form of sound. Rather, it is sound that is produced (generated) in the mind—not sound that is passively heard either through the ears or through the memory of auditory sound. This generation of sound is the process known as thinking. So yoga is accomplished by the generation and observation of a thought in the mind. This is why Shankara, commenting on Yoga Sutra 2:20, says that the activity of pure consciousness in the individual is “observation of thoughts in the mind....Purusha, looking on at thought in the mind alone, sees only that, and never fails to see thought which is his object....To witness is natural to him, in the sense that his essence is awareness of the mind’s ideas.” (“Mind is by definition the object of purusha.” Vyasa) Now this is extremely profound. *The only thing we ever do in our real nature as pure consciousness is to observe thoughts in the intellect (buddhi)*. Sense impressions are perceived a step away from that in the lower mind (manas). Perceiving thought is the sole activity of the spirit-consciousness. Perception of thought is also a perpetual—truly an inescapable—activity of the purusha. It is only reasonable then to conclude that to discover the true self or to cause the self to become established in its real nature we must employ the faculty of thought. Yet it is thought that is tangling us up all the time in false identities. So it is not just thought in general that we need, but a special kind of thought—one that turns the awareness back upon itself and eventually merges itself into the pure consciousness that is spirit. That unique thought is Om. “Its japa and meditation is the way.” Our eternal nature ensures our success.

The “genealogy” of sound

The cosmos and the individual are manifested by the same process: ever-expanding sound-vibration, Spanda. First there comes the most subtle expansion-movement or vibration on the causal level where rather than an objective sound it is a *bhava*, the slightest differentiation of primal consciousness. This is known as *dhvani*. Dhvani then expands and mutates into *nada*, which is sound, but in such a subtle form that it is more an *idea* of sound rather than actual sound. Nada develops into *nirodhika*, a kind of focussing of the energy so it becomes potential sound. This expands and becomes *ardha-indu (ardhendu)*, the “half-moon” which is the crescent shape seen on the Om symbol and on the head of Shiva. This is both thought and sound, but sound that can only be heard as the faintest of inner mental sounds. Ardhendu then expands and becomes *bindu*, the vibratory source-point that is depicted in the Om symbol as a point or dot.

The bindu is composed of three parts or aspects: nada, bindu, and bija (seed). Nada is predominantly consciousness, and corresponds to Shiva or God the Father. Bindu is predominantly energy, and corresponds to Parvati or God the Holy Spirit, the Mother. Bija is both consciousness and energy, and corresponds to Ganesha, or God the Son. According to

the yoga scriptures there are three basic forms of sound or speech: 1) *pashyanti*, that which can only be intuited or felt rather than heard—even within; 2) *madhyama*, that which can be heard in the mind as thought; and 3) *vaikhari*, that which is physically spoken and heard outwardly by the ear through the vibration of the air. But beyond even these is the transcendental sound, *para-vak* or “supreme speech” which is soundless sound, consciousness itself.

This bindu is fully sound, but on the interior level only. It cannot be spoken aloud. It cannot be spoken at all, but only perceived and entered into as the first step back to the source consciousness that is Spirit. Yet, from bindu comes all the permutations that are the various sounds which are combined to form words—including mantras. As we enter into relative consciousness through the expansion of sound, just so can we enter back into transcendent Consciousness through the intentional contraction of sound that occurs in meditation.

“When men sent out Vak’s [Speech’s] first and earliest utterances, all that was excellent and spotless, treasured within them, was disclosed....the trace of Vak they followed, and found her harboring within.” (Rig Veda 10.71.1, 2) This hymn of the Rig Veda speaks of Vak, the creative Sound from which all things came. This Sound both manifested all things and revealed them—that is, produced the consciousness capable of perceiving them. The sages, the hymn tells us, traced Vak (Om) back to the source and discovered It was within themselves as both Power and Consciousness.

Meditation is the process of tracing discovered by the sages, the procedure by which the yogi enters into the inner levels of Om, tracing it to its very source which is consciousness. As he does so, he experiences within the depths of his awareness the subtle states of consciousness, or bhava, inherent in Om. For this reason the word frequently translated “meditation” in texts relating to Om Yoga is *bhavanam*—the experiencing of the inner states of consciousness called “bhavas.” Meditation leads us right into the heart of Om as we trace the “thread” of Its sound back through Its many permutations to Its original bhava or impulse of consciousness that expanded outward to manifest as Its outermost form of the spoken Om.

Inner psychic sounds

It may be that sometimes you will hear various inner sounds such as a gong, bell, harp, flute, bee, waterfall, vina, bagpipes, and suchlike. These are often mistaken for genuinely spiritual phenomena when in reality they are only the astral sounds of the bodily functions. For example, the bee sound is the astral sound of cellular division, the flute sound is the astral sound of the lymphatic circulation, the bell sound is the astral sound of the cardio-pulmonary functions, and so forth. They are—in the astral sense—purely physical and have no yogic value whatsoever.

In short, all such astral sounds should be ignored. Stay with your intonations of Om.

Out of the labyrinth

Theseus, an ancient epic hero, was condemned to die in a Cretan labyrinth. He survived because he had a thread which was anchored at the entrance of the maze. By following the thread he escaped. Sound is the thread, the following of which in meditation will lead us out of the deadly labyrinth of samsara. Specifically, Om is the sound-thread that leads us out since It is the first Sound that arises in Eternity. Thus It leads back to the Origin of all things: Divine Consciousness.

Or we could put it this way: The subtle thread of Om is extending from the Center of Reality outward into/as all things. Through Om Yoga meditation we ascend back to the center with every breath. This ascent also evolves us. So we sit, ascend, and evolve.

This being so, it is crucial for us to continually remember throughout our meditation that the sound of Om should be the object of our attention. Throughout meditation keep hold of the thread of the Pranava and you will be led to freedom from all bonds.

I. K. Taimni on japa and meditation

In *The Science of Yoga* I. K. Taimni says this regarding japa and meditation:

“Japa begins in a mechanical repetition but it should pass by stages into a form of meditation and unfoldment of the deeper layers of consciousness.

“The efficacy of japa is based upon the fact that every jivatma is a microcosm thus having within himself the potentialities of developing all states of consciousness and all powers which are present in the active form in the macrocosm. All the forces which can help this Divine spark within each human heart to become a roaring fire are to be applied. And the unfoldment of consciousness takes place as a result of the combined action of all these forces....A mantra is a sound combination and thus represents a physical vibration which is perceptible to the physical ear. But this physical vibration is its outermost expression, and hidden behind the physical vibration and connected with it are subtler vibrations much in the same way as the dense physical body of man is his outermost expression and is connected with his subtler vehicles. These different aspects of *Vak* or ‘speech’ are called *Vaikhari*, *Madhyama*, *Pashyanti* and *Para*. *Vaikhari* is the audible sound which can lead through the intermediate stages to the subtlest form of *Para Vak*. It is really through the agency of these subtler forms of ‘sound’ that the unfoldment of consciousness takes place and the hidden potentialities become active powers. This release of powers takes a definite course according to the specific nature of the mantra just as a seed grows into a tree, but into a particular kind of tree according to the nature of the seed.”

And Om being the seed of the Totality of Consciousness, of Brahman Itself, the Om Yogi grows into Perfect Divinity by means of Its japa and meditation.

Appendix Two: The Glories and Powers of Om

The amount of material in the authoritative scriptures of India and the words of realized saints regarding Om, is truly surprising. Here I have arranged extracts from the scriptures as well as from Vyasa and Shankara, the two greatest authorities on the scriptures, to give an overview of the whole subject of Om in its various aspects.

Om is God (Brahman)

“Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1)

“That [Om] is the quintessence of the essences, the Supreme, the highest.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.3)

“I will tell you briefly of that Goal which all the Vedas with one voice propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing for Which people practice discipline: It is Om.” (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.15-17)

“Om is the Supreme Brahman.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7)

“The real nature of Brahman is identical with the Pranava.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 2:8)

“God is the Syllable Om.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:17)

“Om is Brahman.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1)

“Brahman is the Truth that is indicated as ‘Om.’” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:30)

“The monosyllable Om is the highest Brahman.” (Manu Smriti 2:83,87)

Om is both Saguna (With Form) and Nirguna (Without Form) Brahman

It is commonly thought that Om is to be used only for meditation on the Formless Transcendent (Nirguna) Brahman, but the following show that, since Om encompasses both the Saguna and Nirguna aspects of Brahman, it can also be used for meditation on God With Form. Saguna and Nirguna are sometimes spoken of as “lower” or “lesser” and “higher.”

“Om, indeed, is the Lower Brahman; this is, indeed, the Higher Brahman. Anyone who, meditating on Om, wishes either of the Two [aspects], by him that is attained. This [Om] is the best means [of attainment and realization]; this means is the Higher and Lesser Brahman.” (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.15-17)

“OM is Brahman—both the conditioned and the unconditioned, the personal and the impersonal. By meditating upon it the wise man may attain either the one or the other.” (Prashna Upanishad 5.2)

“Whether the unconditioned Brahman or the conditioned Brahman, the Syllable Om becomes a means of realizing It. For another scripture has it, ‘The Syllable Om is the higher and lower Brahman.’” (Shankara, Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad)

“Om is both the higher and the lesser Brahman.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Karika)

Om is the True Name of God

“Om is the Name of the Supreme Lord.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Yoga Sutras)

Om bestows the vision of God

“As the form of fire when latent in its source is not seen and yet its seed is not destroyed, but may be seized again and again in its source by means of the drill [a pointed stick whirled to produce fire for the Vedic sacrifices], so it is in both cases. The Self has to be seized in the body by means of the Syllable Om. By making one’s body the lower friction stick and the Syllable Om the upper friction stick, by practicing the friction of meditation one may see the hidden God, as it were.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:13,14)

“That which is manifested by the Pranava is the Lord (Ishwara) Himself. ...When the yogi has recognized the power of Om to express Its meaning, the Lord, he should undertake japa and meditation of It on the Lord Who is signified by Om. When the yogi thus engages in japa and meditation of Om, his mind becomes one-pointed. So it has been said: ‘After Om japa, let him set himself in yoga [meditation], after yoga, let him set himself to japa. When Om japa and meditation come to perfection the Supreme Self [Paramatman] shines forth.’” (Vyasa, Commentary on the Yoga Sutras)

Om unites us with God (Brahman)

“Taking as the bow the great weapon of the Upanishads [Om], one should place in It the arrow sharpened by meditation. Drawing It with a mind engaged in the contemplation of That [Brahman], O beloved, know that Imperishable Brahman as the target. The Syllable Om is the bow: one’s self, indeed, is the arrow. Brahman is spoken of as the target of that. It is to be hit without making a mistake. Thus one becomes united with it [Brahman] as the arrow becomes one with the target. He in Whom the sky, the earth, and the interspace are woven, as also the mind along with all the pranas, know Him alone as the one Self. Dismiss other utterances. This [Om] is the bridge to immortality. Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6)

“Om is the Supreme Brahman.... The knowers of Brahman by knowing what is therein [in the all-containing Om] become merged in Brahman.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7)

“He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1)

“The holy word, Om bestows the highest state.” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:54)

“Just as the bow is the cause of the arrow’s hitting the target, so Om is the bow that brings about the soul’s entry into the Immutable. For the soul when purified by the repetition of Om gets fixed in Brahman with the help of Om without any hindrance, just as an arrow shot from a bow gets transfixed in the target.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Mundaka Upanishad)

“Yogis who are engaged in both japa and meditation attain one-pointedness of mind. After japa, which causes his mind to bow before the Lord, let him engage in meditation. When his mind becomes unwavering from meditation on the Lord, let him do japa of Om, for japa leads to meditation. When japa and meditation of Om come to perfection then the Supreme Lord (Parameshwara), the Supreme Self (Paramatman) Who stands in the highest place shines forth for the yogi.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Yoga Sutras)

Om is the Veda of Brahman-knowers

“Om is...the Veda which the knowers of Brahman know.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1)

“The threefold Knowledge is based on the Omkara. It [Om] is another Triple Veda; he who knows that Om is truly learned in the Veda.” (Manu Smriti 11:266)

Om is the mantra by which we worship God and the gods

“Among words I am the Ekakshara [Om]; among sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa.” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25) The word *yajna*, usually translated “sacrifice,” has more the idea of offering. Japa of Om is certainly the highest offering possible, for it is God Who is being offered.

“How should one perform devotion to the Lord, and what is the means of that devotion? To explain the form in which the devotee contemplates on Him, the sutra says: ‘His designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om].’ Of the Lord Who has been described, the designating Word is the Pranava. ...The word Pranava is explained in the following way etymologically: *pra* stands for *prakarshena*: ‘perfectly;’ *nu* (from *nava*) means *nuyate*: ‘He is praised.’ Thus Pranava, the word Om, praises (*pranauti*) the Lord. That is, the Lord is devoutly worshipped (*pranidhiyate*) through It by His devotees. They bow down (*pranam*) to Him through It. Through It they worship (*pranidha*) the Lord mentally; here the extra *dha* stands for the final [syllable] *va* of Pranava. ...From the termination *ava* is understood *avati*: ‘He favors.’ He brings out His devotees from *samsara*, He leads those in *samsara* to *nirvana*, he brings to a devotee unsurpassed joy, he grants him *samadhi* to lead him to the highest truth. But all these meanings are associated with the most intense love of the Lord. ...When the Lord is continuously worshipped in the mind by means of this syllable, Om, He gives His grace. ...Through Om the Lord is met face to face.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Yoga Sutras)

“It is proper to employ Om as a means for practicing worship of God. ...When the yogi has understood the identity of Om and Brahman he attracts the grace of the supreme Lord through Its japa and meditation. Meditation is setting the heart on the Lord Who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Yoga Sutras)

Om, being God, should also be worshipped

“Just as the image of Vishnu or any other god is regarded as identical with that god (for purposes of worship), so is Om to be treated as Brahman.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad)

“The syllable Om is the inmost essence of all essences. It is supreme because of Its being the symbol of the Supreme Self. It is competent to be worshipped as the Supreme Self. It is competent to take the place of the Supreme Self since It is to be worshipped like the Supreme Self.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad)

“The Vedic rites are meant for the worship of the very Om because It is a symbol of the Supreme Self. The worship of That [Om] is surely the worship of the supreme Self.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad)

Om is the key to our spirit (atman)

“He obtains wishes by singing [intoning], who knowing this, meditates on the udgitha [Om] as the syllable. This, with regard to the self.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.2.14) Lest we misunderstand and think that Om is to be employed to fulfill just any desire or whim, in this verse the sage informs us that the “wishes” gained through meditation on Om are those relating to the self, the immortal spirit; that those who have lost the consciousness of the self shall regain it through Om meditation.

“The Self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om.” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12)

Om IS our spirit (atman)

“The Self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows It thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his self [individual spirit].” (Mandukya Upanishad 1,8,12)

“Meditate on Om as the Self.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6)

Om enables us to know both our self and God, the Self of our self

“The Self [atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows It thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his self [individual spirit].” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12)

“I shall now enter into the self by the self indicated by the culmination of the Om-sound—as a lamp without fuel.” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:87)

“The one that is awakened is the inner self, that is the supreme self whose name is Om.” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:2:48)

“Om is essentially the same as the Self. ...And the Supreme Brahman, too, is but Om. ...Om is the same as the supreme as well as the inferior Brahman...by virtue of its being a means for the attainment of Brahman.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad)

Om is the source of creation and evolution

“The Cosmic Spirit utters Om and by pure will creates the various objects.” (Yoga Vashishtha 3:67)

Om is the essence of the evolutionary solar energies

The life-producing energies of the sun are the energies of Om. Om is the sun of body, mind, and spirit, the Life-Giver of all. All plant, animal, and human life on this planet depends upon the sun. It is the subtle powers of sunlight which stimulate growth and evolution. The sun truly awakens us in the deepest sense. As the germinating seed struggles upward toward the sun and out into its life-giving rays, so all higher forms of life reach out for the sun, which acts as a metaphysical magnet, drawing them upward and outward toward ever-expanding consciousness. Sunlight is the radiant form of Om, so the sun initiates the entire solar system into Om. Human beings are solar creatures, therefore to intone Om is the most natural thing they can do.

“Now, verily, what is the udgitha is the Om. What is Om is the udgitha. And so verily, the udgitha is the yonder sun and the Om, for the sun is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1) The most significant part of this verse is the statement that “the sun is continually sounding ‘Om,’” indicating that the evolutionary energy of the sun is a manifestation of Om. Our life depends on the light of the sun, thus our life is also a manifestation of the power of Om. The japa and meditation of Om aligns us with the solar powers that are Om and thereby greatly increase our life force and the evolution of all the levels of our being.

“Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis [astral “nerves”]. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun. ...When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these very rays or he goes up with the thought of Om. As his mind is failing, he goes to the sun.

That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers.” (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2,5)

Om encompasses and comprises all being and existence

“Verily, the Syllable Om is all this, yea, the Syllable Om is all this.” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.3)

“Om: this Syllable is all this.” (Mandukya Upanishad 1,8,12)

Om is past, present, future, and eternity

“All that is past, the present and the future, all this is only the Syllable Om. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only the Syllable Om.” (Mandukya Upanishad 1,8,12)

Om is protection

“Remember Om, the Lord, the Protector.” (Yajur Veda 40:15)

Om produces peace and harmony

“Only Its [Om’s] knowers sit here in peace and concord.” (Rig Veda I.164.39)

“My heart is established in the peace indicated by the resonance of Om.” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:87)

“He should repeat Om till the mind gains perfect peace.” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:128)

Om liberates us at the time of death

“At the time of departure from this world, remember Om.” (Yajur Veda 40:15)

“Then Satyakama, son of Shibi, asked him [the Rishi Pippalada]: ‘Venerable Sir, what world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That?’ To him, he said: ‘If he meditates on the Supreme Being [Parampurusha] with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, the Sun. He is led to the world of Brahman. He sees the Person that dwells in the body, Who is higher than the highest life. ...That the wise one attains, even by the mere sound Om as support, That Which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme.’” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1,5,7)

“Having confined the mind in the heart and...engaged in the practice of concentration, uttering the one-syllabled Om—the Brahman—and remembering Me, he who departs, leaving the body, attains to the Supreme Goal.” (Bhagavad Gita 8:12-14)

“The soul, when it departs from the body, goes upward by meditating on the Self with the help of Om as he did while living.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad)

Om delivers us from rebirth (samsara)

“Om is the Supreme Brahman.... The knowers of Brahman by knowing what is therein [in the all-containing Om] become merged in Brahman, intent thereon [i.e., on Om] and freed from birth.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7)

“The knower of the real nature of Brahman that is identical with the Pranava, should cross all the formidable streams [of samsara] with the ferryboat of the Pranava.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 2:8)

“By means of the boat of Om that is Brahman one crosses over [samsara, the ocean of

birth and death]. The idea is that by controlling the senses through Om the enlightened person should cross over the currents of the river of transmigration with the help of that Om.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Svetasvatara Upanishad)

Om conquers fear

“One should concentrate one’s mind on Om, for Om is Brahman beyond fear. For a man, ever fixed in Brahman, there can be no fear anywhere.” (Gaudapada [the teacher of Shankara], Mandukya Karika 25)

“One should concentrate the mind on Om, Which is essentially the supreme Reality, for Om is Brahman beyond fear, because for one who is ever fixed in It, there can be no fear anywhere, in accordance with the Vedic text, “The enlightened man is not afraid of anything.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Karika)

Om contains—and confers—all states of consciousness

“[The turiyatita state] is the Eternal, beyond the eternal and the transient; it is a pure mass of consciousness. In it there is no question of diversity. It is all, it is supreme blessedness and peace, it is beyond expression. It is purest Om. It is transcendent. It is supreme.” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:34)

Om confers all true and worthwhile knowledge

“Through it [Om] one knows what is to be known.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1)

“By this [Om] does the threefold knowledge proceed.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6-10. “The threefold knowledge” may be interpreted as being knowledge of body, mind, and spirit, knowledge of the physical, astral, and causal worlds, knowledge of the threefold Vedas, or knowledge of the Three Eternals: God, Creation, and Souls. Whichever it might be, it is certain that Om is the basis of such knowledge. In other places we see that to know Om is to know the Veda.)

“God is the Syllable Om, out of Him proceeds the Supreme Knowledge.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:17)

“The threefold Knowledge is based on the Omkara. It [Om] is another Triple Veda; he who knows that Om is truly learned in the Veda.” (Manu Smriti 11:266)

Om bestows immortality

“One should meditate on the udgitha as this syllable [Om]....This sound is that syllable, the immortal, the fearless. Having entered this, the gods became immortal, fearless. He who knows it thus, praises this Syllable, takes refuge in that Syllable, in the immortal, fearless sound, and having entered it, he becomes immortal, even as the gods became immortal.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.4.1-5)

“This [Om] is the bridge to immortality.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5)

“Because Om is the symbol of the Supreme Self it is the cause of immortality.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad)

Om removes all obstacles

“From it [Om] comes the disappearance of obstacles.” (Yoga Sutras of Patanjali)

Om is the supreme mantra

“This [Om] is the best means [of attainment and realization]; this means is the Higher and Lesser Brahman. Meditating on Om, one becomes worthy of worship in the world of Brahman.” (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.15-17)

“Om, being so important, should be used as a means to self-realization. If it is used as a means to realization, the entire Vedas are practically used.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad)

“One should meditate on the syllable Om, which is the Udgitha. This syllable, Om, as the Name of the Supreme Reality, is nearest to Him; when It is used He surely becomes gracious just as a man becomes so when his favorite name is used. ...It is a symbol [indicator] of the Supreme Self (Paramatma). Thus it is known in all the Upanishads that Om, as a name and as a symbol, holds the highest position of being an aid to the meditation of the Supreme Self. ...The syllable Om is the inmost essence of all essences. It is supreme because of Its being the symbol of the Supreme Self. It is competent to be worshipped as the Supreme Self. It is competent to take the place of the Supreme Self since It is to be worshipped like the Supreme Self.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad)

“Om being beyond measures is Turiya, It has infinite dimension and Its extent cannot be determined. It is auspicious and holy because of the negation of all duality. He who knows Om is a sage because of his meditating on the Supreme Reality, and not any other man, though he may be learned in the scriptures.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Karika)

Om should be the object/subject of our meditation

“One should meditate on this Syllable [Om].” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.1)

“Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6)

Om is the foremost object of meditation

“Dismiss other utterances. This [Om] is the bridge to immortality.” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5)

“The monosyllable Om is the highest Brahman. ...Undoubtedly a Brahmin reaches the highest goal by japa of Om alone, whether he performs other rites or neglects them.” (Manu Smriti 2:83,87)

“Ishwara [God] is a particular Purusha [Spirit, Person] Who is untouched by the afflictions of life, actions, and the results and impressions produced by these actions. In Him is the highest limit of omniscience. Being unconditioned by time He is teacher even of the ancients. His designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om]. Its japa [constant repetition] and meditation is the way [or: should be done]. From it result [come] the disappearance of obstacles and the turning inward of consciousness. Disease, languor, doubt, carelessness, laziness, worldly-mindedness, delusion, non-achievement of a stage, instability, these cause the distraction of the mind and they are the obstacles. [Mental] pain, despair, nervousness, and agitation are the symptoms of a distracted condition of mind. For removing these obstacles [there should be] the constant practice of the one principle [the japa and meditation of Om].” (Yoga Sutras of Patanjali 24-32)

“Having known Om, one should not think of anything whatsoever [but Om].” (Gaudapada, Mandukya Karika 24)

“Om is surely the lower Brahman; and Om is considered to be the higher Brahman. Om is without cause, and without inside and outside; and It is undecaying. Om is indeed the beginning, middle, and end—everything. Having known this way indeed one attains immediately. One should know Om to be God seated in the hearts of all. Meditating on the all-pervasive Om, the intelligent man grieves no more. The Om, without measures and possessed of infinite dimension, is the auspicious entity where all duality ceases. He by whom Om is known, is the real sage, and not so is any other man.” (Gaudapada, Mandukya Karika 24,26-29)

“When the syllable Om is known, one should not think of anything whatsoever, serving any seen or unseen purpose; for he has got all his desires fulfilled.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Karika)

“Om is used to serve as a means to the meditation on Brahman. As other scriptures say, ‘This is the best help (to the realization of Brahman) and the highest.’...‘One should concentrate on the Self, uttering Om.’ [Mahanarayan Upanishad 24:1] ‘One should meditate upon the Supreme Being only through the Syllable Om.’ [Prashna Upanishad 5:5] ‘Meditate upon the Self with the help of the Syllable Om.’ [Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6] And so on. Although the words ‘Brahman,’ ‘Atman,’ etc. are names of Brahman, yet on the authority of the scriptures we know that Om is Its most intimate appellation. Therefore it is the best means for the realization of Brahman.” (Shankara, Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad)

Om should be intoned in time with the breath

“Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6) Both speech and breath are manifested and reunited in Om—both in speaking Om aloud and in mentally intoning it in time with the breath. Om is the point of their origin and their return. By joining Om and the breath in japa and meditation we begin moving back to the state where they are one.

“One should meditate on the breath in the mouth as the udgitha, for it is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) In both japa and meditation we join intonations of Om to the breath because on the subtle levels the breath is always producing the sound of Om. We can even say that the soul *breathes* Om. So by consciously joining Om to our breathing we can link up with our soul-consciousness and enter into it. This is what is happening when during meditation our intonations of Om become more subtle and whisper-like, and from soul-consciousness we will pass into spirit-consciousness—all through Om.

Om is (and accomplishes) the highest pranayama

“Pranayama is accomplished by effortlessly breathing and joining to it the repetition of the sacred Om with the experience of Its meaning, when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state.” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:78)

Om is the Sound that leads to Silence

“I abandon all thoughts and notions; contemplating Om, I shall remain in the self, in total inner silence.” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:81)

The idea is not that after some time in meditation we simply sit, silent and blank, but rather that the inner intonations of Om become increasingly subtle until they pass beyond sound into an actual silent form—not the mere cessation of repetition—that is the state (stithi) of Om, from which all sounds arise: the bhava of Om.

Om transforms us into divinity

“This is the udgitha [Om], highest and best. This is endless. He who, knowing this, meditates on udgitha, the highest and best, becomes the highest and best and obtains the highest and best worlds. When Atidhanvan Shunaka taught this udgitha to Udara Sandilya, he also said: ‘As long as they shall know this udgitha among your descendants, so long their life in this world will be the highest and best.’ And so will their state in that other world be. One who thus knows and meditates—his life in this world becomes the highest and best, and so his state in that other world, yea, in that other world.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.9.2-4. “Highest and best” is an upanishadic title for God.)

Glossary

Advaita: Non-duality; literally, “not two.”

Ahankara: Egoism or self-conceit; the self-arrogating principle “I,” “I” am-ness; self-consciousness.

Ahimsa: Non-injury in thought, word, and deed; non-violence; non-killing; harmlessness.

Ajapa japa: The natural japa (mantric sounds) made by the breath as it flows in and out.

Ajna chakra: Energy center located at the point between the eyebrows, the “third eye.”

Akasha: “Not visible;” ether; space; sky; the subtlest of the five elements, from which the other four elements arise; the substance that fills and pervades the universe; the particular vehicle of life and sound; the element from which the sense of sound (shabda)–both speech and hearing–arises.

Anahata: “Unstruck;” “unbeaten.” Continuous bell-like inner resonance; the heart; the heart chakra; the inner divine melody (mystic sounds heard by the Yogis); Om.

Ananda: Bliss; happiness; joy.

Anandamaya kosha: “The sheath of bliss (ananda).” The causal body. The borderline of the Self (atman).

Annamaya kosha: “The sheath of food (anna).” The physical–or gross–body, made of food.

Aparigraha: Non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness.

Arjuna: The third of the five Pandava brothers. A famous warrior and one of the heroes of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata. Friend and disciples of Krishna, it was to Arjuna that Krishna imparted the knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita.

Asana: Posture; seat; Hatha Yoga posture.

Asmita: I-ness; the sense of “I am;” “I exist.”

Ashtanga Yoga: The “eight-limbed” Yoga of Patanjali consisting of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi (see separate entries for each “limb”).

Asteya: Non-stealing; honesty; non-misappropriativeness.

Atma(n): The individual spirit or self.

Aurobindo Ghosh, Sri: One of India’s greatest yogis and spiritual writers, he was at first involved in the Indian freedom movement, but came to see that yoga was the true path to freedom. His ashram in South India became one of the major spiritual centers in modern India, and his voluminous spiritual writings are read and prized throughout the world.

Avatar: A Divine Incarnation.

Bhagavad Gita: “The Song of God.” The sacred philosophical text often called “the Hindu Bible,” part of the epic Mahabharata by Vyasa; the most popular sacred text in Hinduism.

Bhakti: Devotion; love (of God).

Bhava: Subjective state of being (existence); attitude of mind; mental attitude or feeling; state of realization in the heart or mind.

Bhavanam: Meditation. “Bhavanam is setting the heart on the Lord Who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It.” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Yoga Sutras*)

Bija: Seed; source.

Bindu: Point; dot; seed; source; the point from which the subtle Omkara arises that is

experienced in meditation.

Brahma: God as creator (Prajapati) of the three worlds of men, angels, and archangels–bhur, bhuvah, and swah; the first of the created beings; Hiranyagarbha or cosmic intelligence.

Brahma Sutras: A treatise by Vyasa on Vedanta philosophy in the form of aphorisms. Also called the Vedanta Sutras or Vedanta Darshana.

Brahmacharya: Continnence; self-restraint on all levels; discipline.

Brahman: The Absolute Reality; the Truth proclaimed in the Upanishads; the Supreme Reality that is one and indivisible, infinite, and eternal; all-pervading, changeless Existence; Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute (Satchidananda); Absolute Consciousness; it is not only all-powerful but all-power itself; not only all-knowing and blissful but all-knowledge and bliss itself.

Brihaspati: The guru–priest and teacher–of the gods.

Buddhi: Intellect; understanding; reason; the thinking mind.

Chakra: Wheel. Plexus; center of psychic energy in the human system, particularly in the spine or head.

Chidakasha: “Conscious ether” or “conscious space.” The infinite, all-pervading expanse of Consciousness from which all “things” proceed; the subtle space of Consciousness in the Sahasrara (Thousand-petalled Lotus). The true “heart” of all things.

Chitta: The subtle energy that is the substance of the mind.

Dakshinamurti: A name for Lord Shiva as the silent teacher. Vedic Religion declares that in every cycle of creation God manifests as Dakshinamurti and becomes the guru of the first human beings–those who were most spiritually evolved in the previous creation–teaching them the path to liberation (moksha).

Dayananda (Maharishi Swami): A leading reformer within Hinduism in the nineteenth century and the founder of the Arya Samaj.

Darshan: Literally “sight” or “seeing.” Darshan is the seeing of a holy being as well as the blessing received by seeing such a one.

Deva: “A shining one,” a god–greater or lesser in the evolutionary hierarchy; a semi-divine or celestial being with great powers, and therefore a “god.” Sometimes called a demigod. Devas) are the demigods presiding over various powers of material and psychic nature.

Dharana: Concentration of mind; fixing the mind upon a single thing or point.

Dharma: The righteous way of living, as enjoined by the sacred scriptures and the spiritually illumined; characteristics; virtue.

Dhvani: Tone: sound; word; the subtle aspect of the vital shakti or the jiva in the vibrations.

Dhyana: Meditation; contemplation.

Ekakshara: A common term for Om meaning “the Single Syllable” or “the Single Letter.”

Ganges (Ganga): The sacred river–believed to be of divine origin–that flows from high up in the Himalayas, through the plains of Northern India, and empties into the Bay of Bengal. Hindus consider that bathing in the Ganges profoundly purifies both body and mind.

Gandharva: A demigod–a celestial musician and singer.

Gita: The Bhagavad Gita.

Guna: Quality, attribute, or characteristic arising from nature (Prakriti) itself; a mode of energy behavior. As a rule, when “guna” is used it is in reference to the three qualities of Prakriti, the three modes of energy behavior that are the basic qualities of nature, and which determine the inherent characteristics of all created things. They are: 1) sattwa–purity, light,

harmony; 2) rajas–activity, passion; and 3) tamas–dullness, inertia, and ignorance.

Guru: Teacher; preceptor.

Guru Nanak: Founder of the Sikh religion.

Ekakshara: A common term for Om meaning “the Single Syllable” or “the Single Letter.”

Indra: King of the lesser “gods” (demigods).

Ishta-devata: Beloved deity. The deity preferred above all others by an individual. “Chosen ideal” is the usual English translation.

Ishwara: “God” or “Lord” in the sense of the Supreme Power, Ruler, Master, or Controller of the cosmos. “Ishwara” implies the powers of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience.

Ishwarapranidhana: Offering of one’s life to God (Ishwara).

Japa: Repetition of a mantra.

Jiva: Individual spirit; embodied spirit; living entity; life..

Jivatma(n): Individual spirit. See Jiva.

Jnana: Knowledge; wisdom of the Reality or Brahman, the Absolute.

Jnanamaya kosha: “The sheath of intellect (buddhi).” The level of intelligent thought and conceptualization. Sometimes called the Vijnanamaya kosha. The astral-causal body.

Kabir: An Indian mystic of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Kapila: The great sage who formulated the Sankhya philosophy which is endorsed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. (See the entry under Sankhya.)

Karma: The law of action and reaction, the metaphysical equivalent of the principle, “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). It is karma operating through the law of cause and effect that binds the jiva or the individual soul to the wheel of birth and death.

Khechari Mudra: “Sky-walking” mudra. The turning up of the eyes in meditation. In Hatha Yoga, the insertion of the tongue upward and behind the palate, blocking the nasal passages.

Kosha: Sheath; bag; scabbard; a sheath enclosing the soul; body. There are five such concentric sheaths or bodies: the sheaths of bliss, intellect, mind, life-force and the physical body–the anandamaya, jnanamaya, manomaya, pranamaya and annamaya bodies.

Krishna: A Divine Incarnation born in India about three thousand years ago, Whose teachings to His disciple Arjuna on the eve of the Great India (Mahabharata) War comprise the Bhagavad Gita.

Kundalini: The primordial cosmic energy located in the individual; it is usually thought of as lying coiled up like a serpent at the base of the spine.

Kurukshetra: The battlefield in Northern India where the Mahabharata (Great Indian) War took place, and where the Bhagavad Gita was spoken.

Lahiri Mahasaya: Shyama Charan Lahiri, one of the greatest yogis of nineteenth-century India, written about extensively in *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

Loka: World or realm; sphere, level, or plane of existence, whether physical, astral, or causal. There are seven lokas: Bhuloka: The material plane of atomic matter. Bhuvaloka: The lesser astral world, similar to the material plane (Bhuloka). Swa(r)loka: The median astral world. Mahaloka: The higher astral world. Those who attain this world need never be reborn in the three lower worlds of Bhur, Bhuvah, and Swah. Janaloka: The world that embraces both the highest astral levels and the lower causal levels. Tapoloka: The median causal world exclusively inhabited by advanced spirits who perpetually engage in meditation–tapasya.

Satyaloka: The highest causal world inhabited by those who have attained liberation (moksha).

Mahabharata: The world's longest epic poem (110,00 verses) about the Mahabharata (Great Indian) War that took place about three thousand years ago. The Mahabharata also includes the Bhagavad Gita, the most popular sacred text of Hinduism.

Mahapralaya: The final cosmic dissolution; the dissolution of all the worlds of relativity (Bhuloka, Bhuvaloka, Swarloka, Mahaloka, Janaloka, Tapaloka, and Satyaloka), until nothing but the Absolute remains. There are lesser dissolutions, known simply as pralayas, when only the first five worlds (lokas) are dissolved.

Mahasamadhi: Literally "the great union [samadhi]," this refers to a realized yogi's conscious departure from the physical body at death.

Mahat Tattwa: The Great Principle; the first product from Prakriti in evolution; intellect. The principle of Cosmic Intelligence or Buddhi; universal Christ Consciousness, the "Son of God," the "Only Begotten of the Father," "the firstborn of every creature."

Manas: The sensory mind; the perceiving faculty that receives the messages of the senses.

Manomaya kosha: "The sheath of the mind (manas-mental substance)." The level (kosha) of the sensory mind. The astral body.

Mantra: Sacred syllable or word or set of words through the repetition and reflection of which one attains perfection or realization of the self. Literally, "a transforming thought" [*manat trayate*], or more exactly, "a *transubstantiating* thought."

Manu: The ancient lawgiver, whose code, *The Laws of Manu (Manu Smriti)* is the foundation of Hindu religious and social conduct.

Mara: The embodiment of the power of cosmic evil, illusion, and delusion.

Maya: The illusive power of Brahman; the veiling and the projecting power of the universe, the power of Cosmic Illusion.

Moksha: Release; liberation; the term is particularly applied to the liberation from the bondage of karma and the wheel of birth and death; Absolute Experience.

Nada: Sound; the resonance of sound; mystic inner sound; the primal sound or first vibration from which all creation has emanated; the first manifestation of the unmanifested Absolute; Omkara or Shabda Brahman. The inner sound of Om experienced in meditation.

Nadi: A channel in the subtle (astral) body through which subtle prana (psychic energy) flows; a physical nerve.

Nataraja: "King of the Dance," a title of Shiva the Cosmic Dancer. The whole creation is the dance of Shiva.

Neem Karoli Baba: One of India's most amazing and mysterious spiritual figures. The life of this great miracle-worker and master spanned from two to four centuries (at the least), including most of the twentieth century.

Nirguna: Without attributes or qualities (gunas).

Nirguna Brahman: The impersonal, attributeless Absolute beyond all description or designation.

Niyama: Observance; the five Do's of Yoga: 1) shaucha-purity, cleanliness; 2) santosha-contentment, peacefulness; 3) tapas-austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; 4) swadhyaya-self-study, spiritual study; 5) Ishwarapranidhana-offering of one's life to God.

Nityananda (Paramhansa): A great Master of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

and the most renowned Om yogi of our times. His *Chidakasha Gita* contains some of the most profound statements on Om and Its application by the yogi.

Om: The Pranava or the sacred syllable symbolizing and embodying Brahman.

Omkara: Om.

Pandavas: The five sons of King Pandu: Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. Their lives are described in the Mahabharata.

Parabrahman: Supreme Brahman.

Paramatma(n): The Supreme Self, God.

Parameshwara: The Supreme (Param) Lord (Ishwara).

Paramhansa: Literally: Supreme Swan, a person of the highest spiritual realization, from the fact that a swan can separate milk from water and is therefore an apt symbol for one who has discarded the unreal for the Real, the darkness for the Light, and mortality for the Immortal, having separated himself fully from all that is not God and joined himself totally to the Divine, becoming a veritable embodiment of Divinity manifested in humanity.

Patanjali: A yogi of ancient India, the author of the Yoga Sutras.

Pitri: A departed ancestor, a forefather.

Pradhana: See Prakriti.

Prajapati: Progenitor; the Creator; a title of Brahma the Creator.

Prakriti: Causal matter; the fundamental power (shakti) of God from which the entire cosmos is formed; the root base of all elements; undifferentiated matter; the material cause of the world. Also known as Pradhana.

Prana: Vital energy; life-breath; life-force.

Pranamaya kosha: “The sheath of vital air (prana).” The sheath consisting of vital forces and the (psychic) nervous system.

Pranava: A title of Om. It means “Life-ness” or “Life-Giver.” It is the expression or controller of prana—the life force within the individual being and the cosmos.

Pranayama: Control of the subtle life forces, often by means of special modes of breathing. Therefore breath control or breathing exercises are usually mistaken for pranayama.

Pratyahara: Abstraction or withdrawal of the senses from their objects, the fifth limb of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga.

Premeshananda, Swami: Affectionately known as “Premesh Maharaj,” Swami Premeshananda was a disciple of Sri Sri Ma Sarada Devi, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, and a renowned monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

Purusha: “Person” in the sense of a conscious spirit. Both God and the individual spirits are purushas, but God is the Adi (Original, Archetypal) Purusha, Parama (Highest) Purusha, and the Purushottama (Best of the Purushas).

Rajas: Activity, passion, desire for an object or goal. One of the three gunas.

Rama Tirtha: One the key spiritual figures in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. A former university professor of mathematics in the Punjab, Swami Rama Tirtha traveled throughout India and even into the West, preaching the truths of Advaita Vedanta and vigorously teaching the practice of Om Yoga.

Ramakrishna: Sri Ramakrishna lived in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, and is regarded by all India as a perfectly enlightened person—and by many as an Incarnation of God.

Ramana Maharshi: A great sage of the twentieth century who lived in Arunachala in

South India. He taught the path of Self-Inquiry (Atma Vichara) wherein, whatever the mode of spiritual practice, the yogi keep focussed on the fundamental attitude, “Who am I?” until the self (atma) is revealed.

Ramdas (Swami): One of the best-known and most influential spiritual figures of twentieth-century India, founder of Anandashram in South India and author of the spiritual classic *In the Vision of God* as well as many other inspirational books.

Rishi: Sage; seer of the Truth.

Sadguru: True guru, or the guru who reveals the Real (Sat-God).

Sadhaka: A spiritual aspirant who practices sadhana.

Sadhana: Spiritual practice.

Saguna: With attributes or qualities (gunas).

Saguna Brahman: The supreme Absolute conceived of as endowed with qualities like mercy, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, etc., as distinguished from the undifferentiated Absolute-Nirguna Brahman.

Sahaja: Natural; innate; spontaneous; inborn.

Sahasrara chakra: The “thousand-petalled lotus” of the brain. The highest center of consciousness, the point at which the spirits (atma) and the bodies (koshas) are integrated and from which they are disengaged.

Samadhi: The state of superconsciousness where Absoluteness is experienced attended with all-knowledge and joy; Oneness; here the mind becomes identified with the object of meditation; the meditator and the meditated, thinker and thought become one in perfect absorption of the mind. See Samprajñata Samadhi, Asamprajñata Samadhi, Savikalpa Samadhi, and Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

Samsara: Life through repeated births and deaths; the wheel of birth and death; the process of earthly life.

Samskara: Impression in the mind produced by previous action or experience; prenatal tendency. See Vasana.

Sanatana Dharma: “The Eternal Religion,” also known as “Arya Dharma,” “the religion of those who strive upward [Aryas].” Hinduism.

Sankhya: One of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy whose originator was the sage Kapila, Sankhya is the original Vedic philosophy, endorsed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. (Gita 2:39; 3:3,5; 18:13,19. Also, the second chapter of the Gita is entitled: Sankhya Yoga.) The *Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* says: “Sankhya postulates two ultimate realities, Purusha and Prakriti. Declaring that the cause of suffering is man’s identification of Purusha with Prakriti and its products, Sankhya teaches that liberation and true knowledge are attained in the supreme consciousness, where such identification ceases and Purusha is realized as existing independently in its transcendental nature.” Not surprisingly, then, Yoga is based on the Sankhya philosophy.

Sanskrit: The language of the ancient sages of India and therefore of the Indian scriptures and yoga treatises.

Sannyasi: A renunciate; a monk.

Santosh: Contentment; peacefulness.

Sarada Devi (“Holy Mother”): The virgin-wife of Sri Ramakrishna, and a great teacher in her own right, considered by many to be an incarnation of the Mother aspect of God.

Sat: Existence; reality; truth; being; a title of Brahman, the Absolute or Pure Being.

Satchidananda: Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute; Brahman.

Sattwa: Light; purity; reality. One of the three gunas.

Satya: Truth; the Real; Brahman, or the Absolute; truthfulness; honesty.

Shabda: Sound; word; Vedas: Omkara.

Shabda Brahman: Sound-God; Brahman in the Form of Sound; Omkara, or the Veda.

Shakti: Power; energy; force; the Divine Power of becoming; the apparent dynamic aspect of Eternal Being; the Absolute Power or Cosmic Energy.

Shankara: Shankaracharya; Adi (the first) Shankaracharya: The great reformer and re-establisher of Vedic Religion in India around 300 B.C. He is the unparalleled exponent of Advaita (Non-Dual) Vedanta. He also reformed the mode of monastic life and founded (or regenerated) the ancient Swami Order.

Shaucha: Purity; cleanliness.

Shirdi Sai Baba: Perhaps the most renowned spiritual teacher of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India. His fame continues to grow in this century as well.

Shiva: A name of God meaning “One Who is all Bliss and the giver of happiness to all.” Although classically applied to the Absolute Brahman, Shiva can also refer to God (Ishwara) in His aspect of Dissolver and Liberator (often mistakenly thought of as “destroyer”).

Siddhi: Spiritual perfection; psychic power.

Sivananda (Swami): A great twentieth-century Master, founder of the world-wide Divine Life Society, whose books on spiritual life and religion are widely circulated in the West as well as in India.

Spanda: Vibration; flutter; throb; movement; creative shakti; pulsation; creative pulsation; apparent motion in the motionless Shiva which brings about the manifestation, maintenance, and withdrawal of the universe; the principle of apparent movement from the state of absolute unity to the plurality of the world.

Sphota: The Sanskrit original of our English word “spot;” manifest; the idea which bursts or flashes—including the Pranava which burst or flashes forth from the Absolute and becomes transformed into the Relative.

Sthirata (Sthirattwa): Steadiness or firmness of body or mind; the steady tranquillity born of meditation.

Sukha: Happiness; joy; happy; pleasant; agreeable.

Sushumna: A subtle passage in the midst of the spinal column, corresponding to the spinal cord, that extends from the base of the spine to the medulla oblongata in the head.

Sushupti: The dreamless sleep state.

Sutra: An aphorism with minimum words and maximum sense; a terse sentence.

Swadhyaya: Introspective self-study or self-analysis leading to self-understanding.

Taimni, I. K.: A professor of chemistry in India. He wrote many excellent books on philosophy and spiritual practice, including *The Science of Yoga*, a commentary on the Yoga Sutras. For many years he was the spiritual head of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society headquartered in Adyar, Madras (Tamilnadu), and traveled the world without publicity or notoriety, quietly instructing many sincere aspirants in the path to supreme consciousness.

Tamas: Dullness, inertia, folly, and ignorance. One of the three gunas.

Tapas (tapasya): Austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; spiritual force. Literally it means the generation of heat or energy, but is always used in a symbolic manner, referring to spiritual practice and its effect, especially the roasting of karmic seeds,

the burning up of karma.

Tejas: Radiance; brilliancy (especially spiritual); the element of fire; Agni; heat.

Tejomaya: Full of tejas; full of light; resplendent.

Tukaram: A poet-saint of seventeenth century India (Maharashtra) devoted to Krishna in his form of Panduranga (Vittala).

Udgitha: The Pranava [Om] when it is sung aloud in Vedic recitation.

Upanishads: Books (of varying lengths) of the philosophical teachings of the ancient sages of India on the knowledge of Absolute Reality. The upanishads contain two major themes: (1) the individual self (atman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman) are one in essence, and (2) the goal of life is the realization/manifestation of this unity, the realization of God (Brahman). There are eleven principal upanishads: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitaryeya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Svetashvatara, all of which were commented on by Shankara, thus setting the seal of authenticity on them.

Vachaka: That which is denoted by speech.

Vak: Speech.

Vasana: A bundle or aggregate of similar samskaras. Subtle desire; a tendency created in a person by the doing of an action or by enjoyment; it induces the person to repeat the action or to seek a repetition of the enjoyment; the subtle impression in the mind capable of developing itself into action; it is the cause of birth and experience in general; the impression of actions that remains unconsciously in the mind.

Vedanta: Literally, “the end of the Vedas;” the Upanishads; the school of Hindu thought, based primarily on the Upanishads, upholding the doctrine of either pure non-dualism or conditional non-dualism. The original text of this school is Vedanta-darshana or the Brahma Sutras compiled by the sage Vyasa.

Vedas: The oldest scriptures of India, considered the oldest scriptures of the world, that were revealed in meditation to the Vedic Rishis.

Vedic: Having to do with the Vedas.

Vivekananda (Swami): The chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who brought the message of Vedanta to the West at the end of the nineteenth century.

Vritti: Thought-wave; mental modification; mental whirlpool; a ripple in the chitta (mind substance).

Vyasa: One of the greatest sages of India, commentator on the Yoga Sutras, author of the Mahabharata (which includes the Bhagavad Gita), the Brahma Sutras, and the codifier of the Vedas.

Yama): Restraint; the five Don'ts of Yoga: 1) ahimsa–non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness; 2) satya–truthfulness, honesty; 3) asteya–non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriateness; 4) brahmacharya–continence; 5) aparigraha–non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness.

Yoga: Union; abstract meditation or union with the Supreme Being; the name of the philosophy by the sage Patanjali, teaching the process of union of the individual with the Universal Soul; union with God; any practice that makes for such union.

Yoga Darshan(a): Hinduism embraces six systems of philosophy, one of which is Yoga. The basic text of the Yoga philosophy–Yoga Darshana–is the Yoga Sutras (also called Yoga Darshana), the oldest known writing on the subject of yoga, written by the sage Patanjali, a yogi of ancient India. Further, the Yoga Philosophy is based on the philosophical system

known as Sankhya, whose originator was the sage Kapila.

Yoga Nidra: A state of half-contemplation and half-sleep; light yogic sleep when the individual retains slight awareness; state between sleep and wakefulness.

Yoga Sutras: The oldest known writing on the subject of yoga, written by the sage Patanjali, a yogi of ancient India, and considered the most authoritative text on yoga. Also known as *Yoga Darshana*, it is the basis of the Yoga Philosophy which is based on the philosophical system known as Sankhya.

Yoga Vashishtha: A classical treatise on Yoga, containing the instructions of the Rishi Vashishtha to Lord Rama on meditation and spiritual life.

Yogananda (Paramhansa): The most influential yogi of the twentieth century West, author of *Autobiography of a Yogi* and founder of Self-Realization Fellowship in America.

Yogi: One who practises Yoga; one who strives earnestly for union with God; an aspirant going through any course of spiritual discipline.

Yogic: Having to do with Yoga.

Yogiraj: "King of Yogis," a title often given to an advanced yogi, especially a teacher of yogi.