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*Matajis doing puja in the early morning  
alongside the Narmada at Omkareshwar*

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**NĀMARŪPA** *Categories of Indian Thought*, established in 2003, honors the many systems of knowledge, practical and theoretical, that have originated in India. Passed down through the ages, these systems have left tracks, paths already traveled that can guide us back to the Self—the source of all names **NĀMA** and forms **RŪPA**. The publishers have created this journal out of a love for the knowledge that it reflects, and desire that its content be clear and inspirational, without any particular agenda or sectarian bias.

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# DASA MAHAVIDYAS

SATYA MOSES

SIVA AND PARVATI GOT INTO A FIGHT. No one but they can remember what began the disagreement but in the end Siva stormed out of their shared cave vowing never to return. As below so above; even the universal soul of the all things gets into arguments with the universe. This is precisely as it must be, for this reality, this multiplicity of forms, is nothing but disagreement. Duality arises from a fundamental disagreement: That which was one expresses form and the form is now separate from the one. The division of the primary particle, the first cell division of a forming life, the expansion of matter into galaxies and voids between galaxies.

Shakti expands reality. Siva pulls it back into himself. Between them exists an eternal interaction. In some souls it is a dance. In some it is an argument. In most it is some mixture of the two.

So, Siva and Parvati had their fight. Siva left in a huff. Then what happened?

Parvati, in all her cleverness, divided herself into ten distinct forms and waited for Siva in each of the ten directions. No matter where he turned, he found Parvati, and so he softened and they were reconciled. In the individual there is a celebration: unity and multiplicity dance together again in harmonious balance. Until the next disagreement.

The ten forms of Parvati are called Mahavidyas. *Vidya* means wisdom, clarity, the true way of seeing. Our embodied lives are exercises in approaching the present moment, which, one hopes, is truth. A vidya presents a clearer path toward that inevitable joining. The ten forms of the Goddess are ten ways toward a single still point, but they are in no way inferior to that point. They—the creatrix in plurality—cause the Supreme to exist by their opposition to it. Without the dance, without the cycle of division and reconciliation, the game is over and the play ceases. I, fully involved in this play, bow to She who is the mistress of

the game. I bow with humility to the omnipresent Mother.

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE TEN Mahavidyas at Daksheswara Mahadev in Kankhal, near to Haridwar. Haridwar, the “gateway of god”, rests on the edge of the Northern plain of India. Near at hand, the Himalayas, residences of the gods, begin to rise like huge folds in the topographical fabric.

The lingam at Daksheswara Mahadev is notable for its distinctive shape: instead of a cylindrical or ellipsoid form, the Daksheswara lingam is a roundish stone with a large bowl-like depression on top. It sits at the center of a large metal yoni, swimming, as I recall, in milk, Ganges water, and flower petals. Directly across from the temple doorway is another building, part of the same temple complex, which houses a portrait of Anandamayi Ma and the ten Mahavidyas as simple painted reliefs on two inner walls. Devotees are separated from the goddesses by a glass barrier.

I entered and stood before the goddesses, my bare feet resting on the cool marble floor. Their sheer variety was what struck me immediately. On one end there was Kali, her bloody tongue protruding, a severed head raised in her hand. On the other I saw Kamala smiling, seated on a lotus and bathed by frolicking white elephants. In between my eyes rested on Dhumavati, the crone, her mouth black and her body hunching within her horseless chariot. Then I gazed at Chinnamasta, bewildered by her surreal form: a tall, naked body, dancing, holding her own severed head in one hand. From her neck three crimson streams of blood spouted and curved gracefully into her own mouth and the mouths of her two likewise dancing attendants. “What are they?” was the question turmoiling my mind.

Two months later and thousands of feet farther above sea level, I began

to draw them with ink. I learned the distinctive features of the Mahavidyas from books, articles, and conversations with those who knew more than I. I often find that the process of creation, at least for me, is characterized by recurring obsessions. When an image rises to the surface, or descends from without, I must take the opportunity to render its form as soon as I can before the phase passes and a tantalizing new thought arrives. This in itself is, I realize as I write, another method for approaching the present moment. Another vidya.

These ten drawings represent my first effort to seize—no—to surrender to the images of these ten goddesses. Now that I have attempted to express them once, I know that I will eventually make the attempt again, for they are becoming a part of my inner world. Ten beings which were at one time indefinite in the subconscious come forward into their appropriate forms and a new way of seeing opens up. Ten new ways, actually. I honor and bow to the Goddess in all her infinite forms, in her great wisdom, and hope that she continues to allow me to express some small part of her with my own tools and voice. Still, when it comes to expressing art, the artist usually gets in the way. Looking at these ten simple depictions, I can easily find places everywhere where my own preferences and thoughts got in the way of a true expression. I bow once again and humbly ask Her to continuously burn away my limitations so that I can become a clearer, more beautiful glass through which She may shine. ▽

Satya Moses is an artist, illustrator, and full-time vagabond. His love for mystical religious traditions and mythic tales, especially those of the subcontinent, deeply influences his work.

The artist with his 2017 painting ‘Garland of Heads’  
©Robert Moses





**MA KALI** A few of the Mahavidyas enjoy widespread worship throughout India, but most are obscure and enjoy the worship of tantriks. Kali is probably the most well known. Her name could be translated as “One Who Transcends Time” or “Black One.” She is the Ultimate, the Supreme Reality which dissolves the individual ego. Because most are not prepared for this total dissolution, she takes on a bloodthirsty, terrifying form, but in fact she is nothing less than the compassionate mother of all. She wears a garland of severed heads and a skirt made from human arms. Her black skin is reminiscent of the darkness of night, the time when we sleep and forget ourselves and our worldly troubles. She brings destruction and disorder, but only so that the ego may be stripped away at high speed. Hers is the path of total liberation.



**TARA** The second Great Wisdom Goddess is Tara. Though she keeps a low profile in orthodox Hinduism, Tara is popular with Tibetan Buddhists and tantric worshippers. She has many forms, both gentle and fierce. Her fiercest form is Smashan Tara, “Tara of the Cremation Ground.” She dances among the burning corpses wearing a necklace of skulls. Like Kali, she is associated with death and dissolution, both of the ego and the physical body. Despite her fierce appearance she is often worshipped as a protector and regarded as the perfect embodiment of maternal love. She dances on top of sleeping Siva, who represents the universal soul asleep in the individual consciousness. She is trying to wake him up, saying: “Come on, get up and play with me! There’s nothing to fear!”



**SHODASHI** The third Mahavidya is Shodashi. Whereas Kali and Tara take on fearsome forms, Shodashi is beautiful and alluring. She represents cosmic love, universal beauty. With her sugarcane bow she shoots arrows of attraction and enchantment. She is perpetually sixteen years old and lives in a city made from precious metals and gemstones. The four legs of her throne are Rudra (Siva as Destructive Chaos), Brahma (The Energy of Creative Expansion), Ishana (Siva as Transcendent Energy), and Vishnu (The Preserver of the Universe), demonstrating her dominance over all. She is also called Tripura Sundari, meaning “Gorgeous Queen of the Three Cities.” The three cities are, according to many, the three states of consciousness: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep.



**BHUVANESHVARI** Bhuvaneshvari’s name means “Mistress of the World.” World in this case means more than just planet Earth: Bhuvaneshvari rules the entire manifest universe, everything which has form and motion, from the most microscopic bacterium to planets, stars, and galaxies. She is the universe personified. Though we may forget it in our day to day hassles, the principal characteristic of the universe is its incredible beauty, likewise Bhuvaneshvari is said to be indescribably beautiful. Her complexion is like the rising sun. With her noose she ensnares us in the illusion of Limited Reality, the world of forms, and at the same time she uses her goad to push us toward the transcendent undifferentiated Supreme Reality.



**CHINNAMASTA** Presenting "The Goddess Who Beheads Herself." Of all the ten Mahavidyas, Chinnamasta has the most striking and startling iconography. She has severed her own head and holds it in her hand. Three streams of blood flow from her neck, one into her own mouth and the other two into the mouths of her servants. To make matters even more interesting she stands on the back of a woman who is busy having sex with the man beneath her. This imagery has many interpretations. The copulating couple are Kama, god of desire, and his wife Rati, who represents sex itself. One traditional interpretation is that by standing on top of them Chinnamasta demonstrates that she has conquered her desires. They can also be seen as prana, the vital force, moving in two different directions: upward and downward. When the prana is brought into harmony and union then it can be controlled and used to draw the famous Kundalini shakti up the spine, causing the head to "blow up" with experiences of cosmic consciousness (so they tell me!). The head is also symbolic of ego and identity, so Chinnamasta's act of cutting off her own head demonstrates her mastery over and transcendence beyond the ego. When she removes her head she feeds not only herself, but those surrounding her: the ultimate selfless act. She is a goddess of incredible mystery and power. Who else could cut off her own head and drink the blood spurting from her carotid, all with complete focus and control? Very impressive!



**BHAIRAVI** The name Bhairavi literally means "terrifying." Just as a bright light hurts eyes long used to darkness, so the incredible brightness of Bhairavi terrifies the mind used to the "darkness" of limited thought patterns. She is said to shine with the brilliance of ten thousand suns. Of all the Mahavidyas, Bhairavi has the widest range of diverse depictions. Sometimes she is pictured in a lotus pond, looking beautiful and making gestures of blessing. Elsewhere she sits in a graveyard on top of a headless corpse, holding weapons in her hands, with a demonic face. She is associated with cosmic consciousness dormant in the individual, the Kundalini shakti. As the lover of Bhairava (Siva in his terrifying, intoxicated form) she is associated with destruction and divine wrath. Sometimes a mother has to be stern with her children.



**DHUMAVATI** Dhumavati is the only Mahavidya who takes the form of an old woman. She is a widow, described with sagging gray skin, a nearly toothless mouth, and a fierce, ugly face. She represents the aspects of life which are most difficult to accept: poverty, disease, conflict, strife, starvation, old age, and death. She is perpetually hungry and thirsty, consuming anything she gets her hands on; she hangs out in cremation grounds and graveyards, surrounded by carrion crows. She is a difficult goddess to worship sincerely but for those who take refuge in her she is a wise woman, teacher, and protector. It is said that after the entire universe dissolves only she will remain in the void to await the next cycle. She sits in a chariot without horses, which could be seen as symbolic of the immobile status of widows in traditional Indian society, or as a more universal statement: the harsh aspects of life are not going anywhere.



**BAGALAMUKHI** Once a certain demon did long meditation and penances and eventually received a siddhi (supernatural power) which caused everything he said to come true. Being a demon, he used this ability to go around telling people, animals, and gods that they were dead, thus killing them. The universe was becoming rapidly depopulated and the gods were getting worried. They prayed to the Goddess and she manifested as Bagalamukhi, seized the demon's tongue, and drove a nail through it. Before he lost his speech the demon humbly requested that he be worshipped along with the goddess; now they are always depicted together. Bagalamukhi rules over the tongue and the power of speech. Because speech is so often misused she is also associated with cruelty and deceit. However, for those who worship her she becomes benevolent, transforming darkness into light, lies into truth. She is often worshipped for the attainment of magic powers, especially those to do with controlling, harming, or pushing away enemies. The tongue is the most difficult part of the body to control, and she is its masterful controller.



**MATANGI** In orthodox Hinduism creativity and the arts are personified by the goddess Saraswati. Matangi, the ninth Mahavidya, is sometimes called the “tantric Saraswati.” She rules the same areas: inspiration, creativity, and the arts (especially writing and music) but in all other ways she is Saraswati’s polar opposite. Whereas Saraswati is pure, chaste, and heavenly, Matangi is gritty, wild, and earthly. She lives in the forest and is often described as glowing with “intoxicated eyes”, with sweat on her limbs and face. She takes the form of a girl from the Chandala caste, dark-skinned tribals considered filthy in orthodox society, in part because they eat meat. She is associated with filth, refuse, transgressive behavior, and the lower classes of society. Traditionally she is offered the leftovers from a ritual, the “polluted” food, which explains another one of her names: Uchchista Chandali—“uchchista” means leftovers; “chandali” refers to her low-caste status. Like Bagalamukhi she is often worshipped by those who wish to attain magical powers, especially those to do with attracting or enticing other people. She is an enchantress.



**KAMALA** The tenth and final Great Wisdom Goddess is Kamala. She is often equated with Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, and indeed looks very similar and shares the same associations: money, material success, comfort, and stability. For obvious reasons she is one of the most popular Mahavidyas. She sits in a lotus blossom and showers blessings from her hands and eyes. Sacred white elephants bathe her perpetually. Some theorize that the ten Mahavidyas represent a progression from Kali (the most transcendent) to Kamala (the most worldly). But this rather misses the point: all ten goddesses have worldly significance, and all ten are paths to transcendent Supreme Reality. Jai Ma.

# AYURVEDA FOR THE MODERN WORLD

DR. ROBERT E. SVOBODA

PUBLIC TALK in NEW DELHI, 2017

GOOD EVENING TO EVERYONE. IT'S A privilege to be able to come here to the yoga center and speak about Ayurveda. It's a challenge in the sense that I don't know all of you and as such I don't know how much you might know, or not know, about Ayurveda. It will be my responsibility to try to make sure that I am able to convey something that is adequate to keep your attention for the period of time that we will be sitting here. And, also, to be able to do that in a way that will cover the different levels of knowledge of the subject that are present.

I've just come to Delhi a couple of days ago from Benares. I was in Benares for the last part of the Pitr Paksha and for Ghata Sthapana, the first day of Navaratri.

When you do any kind of ritual worship, at least according to the traditions of the Sanatana Dharma, you always indicate to the universe where and when you are doing it. You always indicate that you are located in Jambudwipa, Bharatavarsha, Bharatakhanda, and then wherever you specifically happen to be.

Time is defined in different ways, but usually in the context of the sun and the moon, and the day of the week. Today's tithi is chaturthi, the fourth day of the lunar fortnight. It happens to be the chaturthi of the bright fortnight of the month of Ashwin, the Chaturthi of Ashwin Navaratri, and it is Saturday. Those of you who are students of jyotisha may know that it is a good thing when chaturthi falls on a Saturday; such a day becomes a siddha tithi, a day on which things can be accomplished. We can be happy about this, happier than we are that the moon is still debilitated, which is something that we are not particularly happy about.

We should always try to find ways to be as happy as possible, which is more difficult when the moon is in Scorpio, the constellation in which it is debilitated. We also know that since Shani Maharaj, Lord Saturn, currently occupies Scorpio as well, that the moon and Saturn are currently cohabiting—they have moved in with one another. Happily, the moon is not going to remain with Saturn for very long. Moon will move on and visit all the other constellations.

Modern life is in many ways characterized by the effect of Saturn on the moon. Moon is, as you know, very happy when it is large, prominent, and shining. Moon is not happy when it has dwindled, and is not at all happy when it is conjoined with a hard, astringent, dry, depressing, enervating, ominous planet like Saturn, a planet that sucks up all the juice from living beings. If you are a human being, you are always looking for adequate juice in your life. That is what Ayurveda is all about, trying to facilitate your ability to get juiciness in your life, and to get it in such a way that it is digestible and sustainable, and that will nourish both you and the people around you, your family members and other loved ones, because we're all part not only of our individual organisms but also of the big organism that is made up the entire biosphere that we are living in and are part of.

I've had great blessings in my life, among them that I was able to successfully complete six years at the Tilak Ayurvedic College. Possibly the worst part of that experience, for me, were the bed bugs. Forty years ago there were bed bugs everywhere in India, which made me a proponent of strong poison. I'm very happy to be able to note that I have seen only one bedbug in the past ten, or maybe even twenty,

years here in Hindustan. This makes me very pleased, because in the past they were everywhere. It was tedious, because they were part of everyday life.

They were however helpful from the perspective of rakta daana, of the donation of blood to the environment, which is something that Vimalanandaji espoused. As we are currently in Navaratri, it is appropriate to note that many goddesses are very fond of drinking blood. If you are familiar with the text known as the *Durga Saptashati*, you will recall that famous demon known as Raktabija ("Mr. Blood-Seed"). Wherever a drop of his blood fell to the ground, there another demon would spring up. He was only defeated when Kali sucked up all his blood so that he could not create any more demons. There were times that Kali was sucking up all my blood via these bed bugs; hopefully it was my demonic nature that was being removed.

Those of you who have actually read the *Devi Mahatmya*, or *Chandi Paatha*, know that it begins with a story that frames the text's three main stories. Since we are in the middle three days of Navaratri, the middle story, which concerns the demon Mahishasura, concerns us today. "Mahisha" means "buffalo". I respect water buffaloes for providing milk; I've drunk a lot of buffalo milk in my life. Water buffaloes are not however well known for being intellectually superior animals. They are in fact much better known as being embodiments of tamas.

All human beings are disturbed by tamas, especially nowadays. In India everyone, even those who are not students of yoga or Ayurveda or Jyotisha or Tantra, knows the word tamas; it is part of the language, part of the culture. There is a lot of Ayurveda that is part



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of India's language and culture, that has become implicit in an Indian's understanding of life whether they are aware of it or not. Like the concept of pathya, or parhez, the idea that some foods are appropriate for an individual, and others are not appropriate. This concept is part of a general understanding of what is the optimal way to interact with one's environment to promote general homeostasis.

This brings us to the Sanskrit word "hita", which we can translate as "favorable, suitable, salutary". Another meaning of hita is "arranged, prepared", from which we get "samhita", "well-arranged, methodically prepared," a word that by extension means "compendium, textbook." The most common classical definition of Ayurveda comes from the most common Ayurvedic text, the *Charaka Samhita*. I should note that when most people talk about Ayurveda they are talking about the Sanskrit version of Ayurveda that has been collected in a number of samhitas, in particular the Brhat Trayi (literally, "The Big Three"), those three being the *Charaka Samhita*, the *Sushruta Samhita*, and the *Ashtanga Hridayam*. These texts and others like them were part of a professionalized tradition of physicians that developed as Indian society transitioned into a more urbanized form.

The Sanskrit tradition is not however the only tradition of Ayurveda. Some traditions that have never been written down and are not based on the so-called "high tradition" of Sanskrit may still be useful and valuable even if they're not as widely known and perhaps not as thoroughly detailed. This evening though I will limit myself to the Sanskrit tradition, it being the one in which I was educated and which I know best.

In that tradition the first portion of the definition of Ayurveda in the *Charaka Samhita* is "the knowledge of what will promote sukha and what will discourage dukkha." Sukha literally means "good space": the syllable "kha" means "akasha", which means space, or more precisely the fabric of space, what they call in quantum mechanics

the vacuum energy or the quantum field. When all of the different spaces in your life are well established, and are relatively balanced and harmonious, you can term that state sukha.

Sukha is always a relative thing. Lord Buddha made it a point of teaching "Sarvam dukkham", a phrase that some improperly translate as "all is misery". Life would hardly be worth living if everything was in fact miserable. What Buddha meant was that everything is ultimately unsatisfying because all states of sukha, however perfect, are transitory: Sarvam kshanakam. No matter how well things are going on, some fluctuation will eventually unbalance your environment, internal or external or both, which will disrupt your equilibrium.

Last week in Benares, I was on the one hand pleased to see that the Ganga is no filthier than usual, though on the other hand I could not detect that it had been rendered any less filthy. The current MP for Benares, who is also serving as India's Prime Minister, promised vigorously during his election campaign to clean up Gangaji, and I certainly salute him for trying; but it is such an enormous job that I just can't see quite exactly how he will be able to accomplish it. Perhaps he will be able to accomplish it; perhaps one day it will happen automatically. I don't know. What I do know is that the Ganga is central to anyone's experience of Varanasi, and that there was a time when one could go drink directly from the river, an experience that provided a certain sort of sukha. That time is long gone, and all who visit or live there must acknowledge that dissatisfaction with the condition of Gangaji will be a real part of their experience there and they will have to adapt accordingly.

And that is only regarding the River Ganga. Though we go on pilgrimage to obtain sukha, we will often, especially in a place like Benaras, find external sukha difficult to obtain, as the streets are crowded and filthy, disease is rampant, charlatans and thieves are abundant, and there is always the danger of being run over by a randy bull. Only one who can avoid being shaken by these external challenges will be able to attain

to that sublime internal sukha that only Benaras can offer.

Sukha is what we try to move toward; dukkha is often where we end up. We must ask ourselves what can we do to minimize dukkha and maximize sukha—by which I mean genuine sukha. Many people maintain that they would achieve sukha if they could always enjoy certain substances or perform certain actions. But sukha is not a function of consumption, not something that you possess. It is instead something that you experience, something you are "in a state of".

The *Sushruta Samhita* is fundamentally a text on surgery. Plastic surgery exists in the modern world because the *Sushruta Samhita* was translated, a couple of centuries back, into German, and German surgeons took note. One of Sushruta's procedures, updated and modernized, is still to be found in surgical textbooks today: the pedicle graft. Ayurveda has been altered and improved quite a bit over its lifetime; in fact, Ayurveda in its current form is the result of adaptations deliberately implemented when the Vedic world evolved into the world of classical India. Ayurveda is traditionally supposed to be the upaveda, the secondary body of knowledge to the Atharva Veda; a lore that assists those who work with the Atharva Veda to use it well. Of the four Vedas, the Atharva Veda focuses on practical things, like treating disease. In Vedic days, Ayurveda was a shamanic medical system. Individuals who had employed the mantras of the Vedas to develop great personal power would treat patients chiefly by utilizing that power, which was ultimately the power of prana.

**P**RANA, OR CHI, IS THE LIFE FORCE, the power that inspires all life, the capacity that takes a zygote, a single cell formed by the fusion of sperm and ovum, and causes it to expand and grow into a human organism of many trillions of cells that participate in trillions of complex interactions. Multiply this complexity in a single individual by the convoluted interactions of the seven-plus billion humans on the planet

and add in the individualities and convoluted interactions of the other animals and plants on our Earth, and you get a feel for the magnitude of prana's might.

Prana must circulate in a balanced way in your body and mind in order for you to be truly healthy. You can't see, taste or touch prana but, if you will but refine your perceptions, you can easily learn to 'feel' it; experiencing prana requires not profound sensitivity but rather attention to how things are moving inside you. This is an immutable law of yoga, Ayurveda and Tantra: wherever your attention goes your prana will go. Even a little attention to prana's flow will offer beneficial results. If however you invest the majority of your time paying attention to your phone and tablet and laptop and all your other devices, and pay insufficient attention to ensuring that your prana is flowing freely and circulating healthily, you can be confident that something will go wrong with you.

Perhaps the most important concept in Ayurveda, more important than vata-pitta-kapha, is the concept of guna. "Guna" means "quality, attribute, characteristic". We humans live qualitative lives. Practically speaking it matters not at all to us as human beings what is the temperature of outer space, or of the surface of the sun. Both those temperatures are far too extreme for us to experience them directly and survive. What we do care about as humans is whether we personally feel cold or hot, because when we are either too cold or too hot for our homeostatic balance we lose sukha and experience dukkha instead. Note that different people feel hot or cold at different temperatures. Each of us has likely had the experience of being around another human being who found that what you were finding hot they were finding not at all hot or what you thought was unpleasantly cool was in fact very pleasant to them. An individual's qualitative experience of a particular temperature is far more important to them than is their quantitative experience, expressed in thermometer degrees.

Similarly, your experience of a particular taste is far more important than you than any analysis of the chemical composition of whatever food it is that you are tasting. Your personal experience of the world is in general far more impactful on you than is any objective conception of how things might be; this is guna. If you have already a lot of heat in your system, if your system has a tendency to produce abundant heat, then you will not find it very enjoyable to spend a lot of time in the heat. If, on the other hand, your system has a tendency to run cool then you may find even modestly cool weather unpleasantly cold, and you will likely discover that you can endure more heat than others can. These are to some extent natural tendencies, part of your personal constitution or deha prakriti, and they are to some extent biological behaviors that develop as a result of exposure to your environment. I've had friends who moved from India to cold climates in North America who can no longer endure heat when they visit India again, and friends from North America who move to the tropics and then after some time can no longer take the cold. Your experience of life will always be substantially influenced by a combination of the influences of your innate personal tendencies and your experience of adapting to external conditions. How well your organism is able to cope with these two factors will substantially determine how well or unwell you happen to be.

Those of you who have heard of Ayurveda have probably heard that Ayurveda speaks of three doshas: vata, pitta and kapha. (As a surgeon, Sushruta adds a fourth dosha, blood, but most authorities limit themselves to three). It's useful to remember that these doshas may or may not exist, depending on how we define the word "exist." Though ocean waves "exist" and can be photographed, and can be strong enough to knock you over or drown you, they have no permanence. Similarly, the doshas may exist in some subtle form within the organism, or they may only represent tendencies that are present in the body, accumulations of

certain qualities that have accumulated sufficient momentum that they, like waves, cause the body to react to them as if they do exist.

We in the digital age have a propensity for seeing reality as digitized, made up of discrete units, a propensity that has been strongly reinforced by the rampant commoditization which has reached into all spheres. In the past people had thoughts and shared them with others for free; now we have "intellectual property rights." Water is for sale, air is for sale; pretty much everything is for sale. Things that are for sale must be quantized, measured so that we can identify how many economic units need to be exchanged for whatever is being sold. This quantization usually involves breaking the commodity down into small units: digitization. Digitization promotes commerce because commerce is itself digitized. The more this happens externally, the greater will be our inclination to see the things of the world as being sharply individualized and digitized, even when those things are not so.

This propensity for seeing things as individual units that possess solidity and value also leads many people to see the doshas as quantifiable things that can be grabbed hold of, even though they are probably not things that we can grab hold of. It also makes us make too durable a connection between the concept of dosha and the realities of vata, pitta and kapha, whatever they really are. Dosha means a mistake, a fault, something that either has gone wrong or may cause something else to go wrong. This word is applied to vata, pitta and kapha because those three factors are things that, when out of balance, encourage the organism as a whole to lose its equilibrium. When disturbed, vata, pitta and kapha encourage disturbance.

Sadly, I find that many people who teach Ayurveda teach only this aspect of the doshas. The reality is however more nuanced. So long as vata, pitta and kapha exist in the right quantities in the organism and as long as they are balanced with one another, they are not termed doshas. They are instead

termed dhatus. A dhatu is an essential constituent of the body; the body's tissues are dhatus. Dhatus constitute and support the body. Vata, pitta and kapha are essential components of protoplasmic physiology which, so long as they are balanced, support the body. Moreover, even when vata, pitta or kapha has become over abundant in quantity we still don't call them doshas, so long as they are not out of balance. We instead term them malas. A mala is a waste product, something that your body cannot productively employ, that has to be ejected from it. In such a situation vata, pitta or kapha are not actively malevolent, they are just excessive, and their excess should be eliminated if balance is to be preserved.

Real problems only develop when vata, pitta or kapha go out of balance with one another, which happens when qualities that compose any of them become substantially increased within the system. Only then should they be termed doshas. When we call them doshas under any other conditions we are actually insulting them, and we should not expect them to like being insulted any more than you or I like to be insulted.

When, however, vata, pitta and kapha have lost their equilibrium, they do encourage the rest of the organism to lose its equilibrium. Of the three, vata is the most troublesome, because it is the one that most easily goes out balance. Vata is closely related to prana, so closely that really the only difference between the two is that prana always knows the right thing to do and always tries to do it, while vata has lost the global perspective that prana has. Though vata does not possess full information about how best to act, it acts anyway, often over enthusiastically. Prana always centers itself deeply in the tissues; vata is eccentric, a word that literally means "off-center." Vata is not evenly and agreeably distributed throughout the body but rather tends to accumulate in one area. Though it can accumulate anywhere, vata most often accumulates in the large intestine and/or the lungs, which are the two most important organs for absorbing prana from our environment. Lungs take in prana from the air and

colons take in prana from food. Yes, it is the small intestine that assimilates the carbohydrates, fats and proteins from our food, but it is the large intestines that takes in the food's prana.

If you live in a city, your air quality is likely to be not very good, which will keep your lungs stressed all the time. When your lungs are always under stress they will fail to take in prana optimally, which will weaken your system, which relies on regular deliveries of well-integrated prana. In this scenario, you will be tempted to breathe faster, to try to intake more prana; but faster breathing usually means shallower breathing, which takes in less prana and removes less waste products (carbon dioxide, etc.). Then your tissues receive less prana than they would like, and they will always feel starved for prana, which will make you hungrier for air (and for food, which also delivers prana to you). When adequate prana reaches your tissues they feel stable and well-nourished, which makes them feel calm. Inadequate prana, instead of causing your tissues to feel invigorated, will make them feel depleted and fearful of starvation, which will increase the level of nervous energy in your organism. Nervous energy means vata. Prana is something that you want to store in your tissues; nervous energy is not. When you have a lot of nervous energy your tissues feel less calm, less stable, less well-nourished.

If you are paying attention, you will feel a nagging desire on the part of your organism to try to find better nourishment, which will inspire you to search for a way in which to improve the input and digestion of prana in your system. If you are not thinking in those terms then what is more likely to happen is that the motivation of your tissues to be better nourished will remain unconscious and will manifest in you in either a yet further increase in your breathing rate, or a desire for food, or more commonly, both.

If at that point you start to pay attention, you will hopefully start to breathe better, which may reduce your craving to eat. If not, you will head for your snack stash, and will likely grab something that

will provide instant gratification rather than selecting something healthy and digestible. There's nothing wrong with consuming unhealthy snacks from time to time, so long as you don't make it a habit, and that you understand that your organism is looking for something more genuinely satisfying. Even junk food has prana in it, but that prana is low in quantity and is difficult to digest because it is contained in junk. Too much nervous energy in your system will moreover weaken your digestive power, mental and physical, making it even more difficult for you to derive any benefit at all from junk food. And the more your mental digestion is disturbed the easier it will be for you to be allured by things, and deviate from your center.

In Sanskrit "svastha" means "healthy", and "svasthya" means "health". It literally means "being well-established in yourself." Sushruta defined health in this way:

*Samadosha samagnischa samadhatu  
malakriyaha  
Prasanna atma indriya manah svasthya  
iti abhidhiyate*

Note that the word sama appears thrice in the first line. "Sama" means "even, constant, impartial, regular, just"—in English we see it appear as "same". When all the body's physiological activities are 'the same', i.e. when no process or substance is stronger or weaker than it should be, then we can say that the body is healthy.

It would be convenient if that were all that was required for health, but that's not the case, as there is the second line in that verse which informs us that your mind, sense organs and spirit must all be prasanna, which means placid. So, in order to be well-established in yourself—to be svastha, to experience svasthya—your organism needs to exist in a state of homeostatic balance and your mind must be calm and relaxed. But what do we find in the modern world? We find that millions of human beings are spending abundant time and effort trying to attract your attention to themselves so that they can explain to you why you are not happy, why

you are filled with dukkha. Maybe they mention your weight, or the fact that you're not as young as you used to be; maybe they inform you that all your problems are due to the "other": the immigrants, the blacks, the Jews, the Muslims, whoever. They want to make you feel unsatisfactory, to create in you dukkha so that they can sell you something or get you to do something for them that they will tell you will cause you to have sukha.

The more you allow your awareness to get dragged away by such blandishments, the more you are allured to these siren songs, the further you stray from being placid, from being established in yourself; this imbalance will eventually manifest in some manner of disease. In today's world, therefore, you should always be aware of what it is that you are paying attention to, and what is it that is being extracted from you as your attention is dragged away from your center. Otherwise your attention will be captured all the time without you even knowing what is going on. The more your attention is dragged away the more your prana will be dragged away, and the more you will sense, even if unconsciously or subconsciously, that you are being emptied of prana. Whenever you permit your prana to be sucked out by whatever it is you're being lured by, you will subconsciously or unconsciously sense a loss of vitality within your system. That lack of vitality will tempt you to search for a samosa or some Chavanaprasha or whatever is that you have been brainwashed into thinking is the thing that will solve all your problems and make you attractive, young, desirable, rich and happy.

AS A STUDENT OF JYOTISHA I TEND TO think in terms of the Nine Planets, or more precisely the Nava Graha, the "Nine Seizers." The word "graha" means "to grasp, grip, grope", and the Nine Grahas grab hold of you and take your attention in whatever direction they want it to go. When I think about the world in which you and I are currently living it strikes me that we are actually now living in Rahu World. Rahu is

a "shadow planet", a point in the sky where eclipses take place; he is depicted as a head that has no body attached to it. Today tens of millions of people are so addicted to the internet and so completely ignore their bodies. It is as if they have no bodies, only heads that have become mesmerized by the patterns of the colorful shadows that flicker across their screens, patterns that never stop moving. And shadows can be very powerful even if they cannot be touched, smelled or tasted. Shadow patterns can cause you to weep, to laugh, to be catapulted into anger or fear; and shadows can be addictive. The more addicted you are to anything, the more that thing will grab your attention.

The first cause of all disease is upadha, or allurements; everyone is being allured all day long. The essence of Ayurvedic treatment is nidana parivarjanam: abandonment of the cause. If your screens are the cause of your problem, you should abandon them. "Wait!" you will say, "That's impossible! My screens are essential to my life for so many reasons!" And nowadays this is indeed true. But just because your screens are essential to your life does not mean that you should have them on all the time. It does not mean that you should do like some young people do and sleep with your phone under your pillow so you will not miss anything. What this phrase does mean is that you should abandon your attachment to, your addiction to, your enthrallment by your screens.

A friend of mine was recently up in Uttarakand, India and met a sadhu there who looked very agitated. When my friend asked why he was agitated the sadhu replied that because his phone was not working he was unable to check Facebook. This is unsettling to me in so many ways. First, a sadhu should be dead to the world, not concerned with what his other sadhu friends are posting on Facebook. Second, Facebook is now so pervasive and so alluring that it has captivated the attention of people like this man who are supposed to be focusing on the Supreme Reality, not on social media. Third, at least a quarter of the humans on the planet are networked



together on Facebook. This may be a good thing, but we simply do not know, and if it is not a good thing, we may not find that out before something unfortunate occurs. We are experimenting as a race, as a species, with many things about which we have no clue, and we are proceeding ahead with these experiments at a rapidly increasing pace, heedless of potential dangers.

When Ayurveda teaches that treatment involves removal of the cause of the problem, the concern is less with the specific substance or action that may be causative and more with the qualities of that substance or action, qualities that are in some way disturbing to our physical and/or mental equilibrium. In this instance, the screens themselves are less of a problem than the qualities they offer: two-dimensional images that drag us away from the three-dimensional world; an overload of information with little associated actual knowledge; fake news; and most importantly, speed. The whole world today is moving fast and continuing to accelerate, and our screens inject this velocity and acceleration directly into our brains and nervous systems. And since the 'fast' quality increases vata, the ultimate result of having more than two billion people connected on just one website is a dramatic spread of vata to almost everyone, almost everywhere.

As Ayurveda usually suggests the use of an opposing characteristic to balance an attribute that has become too pronounced in a system, we can be sure that the chief way to deal with things that are moving too fast is to slow down. When I advise people to slow down they often tell me, "I'm living in a modern megalopolis and I have to go to work and then return home to my family and I don't know how to juggle everything in my life." These are valid comments, and you do indeed have to do whatever it is you have to do.

However, even if you do have a lot to do that you do have to get done, your experience of life will be very different according to your attitude. If you always feel that you are behind, that you have to keep going faster and faster, you will

always feel like you are falling behind, and your vata will skyrocket. If instead you decide to remain calm and you focus on keeping your prana well centered, your actions will be more efficient, and you will not exhaust yourself with fear and worry. My mentor was always fond of saying that when you walk along a road, it's good to remember that the road does not get tired. You will get tired, but the road will never tire. This is particularly important if you need to walk for fifteen or twenty kilometers, or if you are running a marathon: you must pace yourself if you hope to reach your goal.

Most people today don't pace themselves. Instead they live their lives as if they were in heavy traffic, repeatedly accelerating quickly and then applying the brakes, instead of trying to move forward as steadily as possible. Just as start and stop driving wears out your car, start and stop living wears out your body. We should all aim to live as steadily as possible. If your life is too fast, you need to find ways to slow it down. If you are spending too much time on your devices then you need to go on a 'device diet', involving regular 'device fasting'. Many people fast from food during Navaratri, when maybe they should be fasting from their screens instead, or as well. In Sanskrit one word for fasting is langhana, a word that is derived from the word "laghu", which means "light", the opposite of heavy, "guru". The purpose of langhana is to create lightness in the body and mind. One quality of fire is that it is light, which is why it is wise never to bury your digestive fire under a pile of heavy food. And even if your diet is healthy for six days of the week it is prudent to restrict your intake in some way on the seventh day to give your organism a chance to perform essential maintenance, deal with any as-yet-incompletely-processed foods, eliminate some of the toxins that have accumulated during that week, and in particular take a rest from having to digest all the time.

All this applies to your devices as well. Your body and mind will greatly appreciate it when you make it a point to regularly turn your devices

off for a day, or even half a day, or better yet when you put yourself in an electricity-free location for some time. Then you will remember what life was like when there was no electricity. You will find that even with no screens, life will go on; you will regain perspective, which is a very valuable thing. How many of you can remember what it was like to live in a world without screens? I can easily remember back when telephones were actually tethered to walls with a cord; if you wanted to wander around with your phone, you needed an extra-long cord. I also well recall how forty years ago when you wanted to make a long-distance call in India you would have to sit by the phone waiting for the operator to put your call through. If the operator called and you missed it, you would have to rebook the call, and you might have to sit another day and a half before it would go through again. God help you if you were alone and you had to pee!

Now everything is completely changed, with more than a million new mobile phone connections a month in India alone. Mobile phone use is another giant experiment that has been going on for such a short time that we really do not know what the long-term effects will be. We do know that some evidence suggests that holding your phone next to your head may encourage brain tumors. Not long ago a dear friend of mine died of a brain tumor; she was a doctor who was always on her phone, and there may have been some connection. It's a sobering thought, one that can be addressed at least to some degree by always using a hands-free device when you use your phone. This is a simple, practical expedient that may be slightly inconvenient but will be greatly appreciated by your body.

Life today is very fast; find ways to slow down. Start your day slowly, setting a sustainable pace for your organism. Even if you can't keep to that pace all day long, you will at least have made a good beginning. A sustainable pace does not involve jumping out of bed, gulping down two cups of coffee, then immediately going out and dealing with

the world. Instead you should, just after arising, invest some time in being calm, even if only for a minute or two. Even if you can only spare a single minute for meditation, make full use of that minute. Do as my mentor suggested: Remember that you are going to die, give thanks for being alive, and request assistance not to cheat your conscience during the coming day.

If you have more than one minute available to you then make good use of it. Meditate longer; calm and deepen your breathing; do some yoga or qi gong or some other sort of prana cultivation. In order to have time for these pursuits you will probably have to go to sleep earlier. If you desire good health it is absolutely essential to fall asleep before midnight, and it's really, really desirable to be asleep before eleven p.m. If you are awake after about eleven your organism will think that it is time for you to be active again, and the quality of your sleep will suffer.

The day has seasons, just like the year. After sunrise, the day's heat and light wax until mid-day then slowly wane until dusk. Something energetically similar, but without the obvious heat and light, transpires after sunset and reaches its maximum at midnight. What this means is that if you wait to go to bed until eleven or twelve at night you will be trying to go to sleep after the Fire Element has again been activated in your system. Fire does not promote sound sleep; there will be at that time an increase in the power of heat and light of agni in the good sense and pitta in the not so good sense in the organism. This explains why people with peptic ulcers often find themselves waking up with pain in the middle of the night, and why if you are awake then you get hungry. If you did nothing else but make sure you were in bed by eleven, you would be doing your body a great service.

"In bed" means lying down in the dark with your eyes closed; it does not mean reading, talking, or watching. All devices should be somewhere else, preferably off. Young people today are very reluctant ever to turn their devices off. But they should be off; they can

always be turned on again. Devices that are not off may disturb the quality of your sleep, and inadequate good-quality sleep causes all sorts of problems, and makes all sorts of other problems worse. Make sure that you are in bed by eleven, and that you ate by eight. You need time for your food to exit your stomach before you lie down, so you need to finish eating by about eight if you want to sleep by eleven. If you eat a heavy meal and then lie down, you are requesting your body to do two very different things: to activate your digestion and to inactivate your organism. You don't want to confuse your organism; you want to give it very clear indications of what you expect it to do. An unconfused organism is more likely to serve you well and behave appropriately.

**A**YURVEDA ATTACHES GREAT EMPHASIS to dinacharya and rtucharya, daily and seasonal routines. The word "acharya" can mean "a teacher", but in this case it indicates a particular way of moving. Dinacharya means a well-thought-out way to move through your day; rtucharya, through the seasons. In a way dinacharya and rtucharya are also teachers: they teach you how good you will feel when you follow them, and how you will go out of balance when you do not.

Your day should begin just like the day does, with dawn, or rather, just before dawn. The beginning of a new day is like the beginning of a new life, and you should prepare for it as if you were preparing to be born: giving thanks, meditating, circulating prana. After the day begins you should ideally, like the day, increase your activity gradually, be most active in the middle of the day, then reduce your activity as the day wanes. In any one day human beings have a limited amount of decision-making capability; some people have estimated as little as one hour per day, in total. Therefore, if on a particular day you have important decisions to make you are almost always better off making them in the morning when you are more likely to be focused, unless you have jumped up and consumed a triple espresso. The morning generally has a

greater quality of calm and stability to it because kapha predominates between dawn and noon, and kapha is consistent and juicy, it lubricates the system and promotes stability. This time of day will promote the making of good decisions, more so than the afternoon, which is when vata predominates. Vata is very good for being flustered and confused; vata is not so good for making good decisions.

Because modern life is fast, we need to slow it down. Modern life is also complicated, which suggests that the simpler you make your life, the better it will be for you. Complications will always arise, obviously, but you need not render your entire life complex. You can find ways to make it simple. Maybe this means simple routines, or maybe simple wall hangings and furniture; whatever it may be, if you will induce, inject or involve the quality of simplicity in some way in your life you will benefit from it. It will be medicine for you because it is addressing one of the causative factors that is encouraging you to be out of balance, the causative factor called complexity.

Why should complexity cause disease? Because it keeps you off balance and can promote frustration, but mostly because it over-engages your attention and, therefore, your life force in many and often conflicting directions. Complexity is rarely something that is harmonious, especially not in a megacity where you have to deal with the complexities of all the other residents, who all have their own priorities and intentions. Many of your fellow residents are moreover very unbalanced, and when you're surrounded by twenty million disturbed people then you have to focus extra hard on being calm. It is essential to be as calm as possible because there is nothing calm about the modern world.

Because you are surrounded by lack of calm you may find it to be more beneficial for you to meditate for five minutes every hour instead of for an hour once a day. The Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh has encouraged people, when the phone rings, to wait for a full breath before answering. This gives you time to prepare and center yourself as you inhale and exhale before

you deal with whatever you are about to hear. You can also set your phone to chime every hour, and that chime will remind you to stop what you're doing and take a breath or two or three to help your prana to flow more easily. When you exercise you can focus on finding that pace which permits you to move without panting for breath. Complexity promotes constriction, and constriction promotes shallow breathing, which starves your tissues. Make it a point to breathe properly and you will find that your organism will feel more nourished and less hungry for whatever it is you think you hunger for—food, alcohol, tobacco, loud music or whatever—when you are out of balance, since what you really hunger for is prana.

In my opinion, modern life is always going to promote aggravation of vata, because vata is fast, eccentric, light, mobile, and subtle, and is intensified by fear and grief. Nowadays we have such a lot to fear, and many things to fear that we need not fear, that a general sense of unease is always present in the modern world, a sense of unease and generalized anxiety that is a reliably constant vata increaser.

As for the subtle quality, screen devices incarnate subtlety, providing us with the sensation of meeting someone in person without providing us with much of the body language, odor, and other cues that can be obtained when you are in the same physiological space as is your interlocutor. Without such cues it is difficult for your body to be well established in itself when communicating, since it is taking in cues all the time whether you are aware of it or not. It hears all the background noise of your environment, which is why sometimes city dwellers can't sleep when they visit a very quiet part of the country—they miss that city background noise. Or maybe it's too dark. Whatever the specific objection, what they miss is their conventional environment, however dysfunctional it may be.

It is said in Ayurveda that vata is the strongest of the doshas because it is the easiest to go out of balance and the most difficult to put back

into balance. To counteract this, it is necessary to repeatedly try to guide vata back into balance. Because vata is unstable and unpredictable, a nice daily routine automatically encourages it to become more stable and well-regulated. Ayurveda is so fond of oil application because vata is light, dry and cool and oil, especially medicated oil, is heavy, wet and heating. Also, your skin is filled with nerve endings, and when those nerve endings get oil applied to them they relax, they release their worries and take a little power nap. You need not slather oil onto your body; you will get a good result even if you only apply enough to make your skin feel smooth, particularly just before a shower or bath, which will encourage your skin to absorb it better. Soap should only be used on the skin when it is very dirty, and if you apply only a small amount of oil you won't need soap to wash it off. If you don't have the time or enthusiasm to apply oil to your entire skin, at least apply it to your major joints.

Vata weakens digestion and promotes indigestion. Indigestion is sometimes due to kapha, as after eating too much heavy food especially late in the day, and sometimes it is mainly due to pitta, after ingesting too much sour-salty-spicy-oily food. But very commonly, especially today, indigestion happens because the drying and constricting qualities of vata prevent adequate digestive juice from flowing and cause the gut to become tight so that food cannot move freely within it. That constriction makes it more difficult for the gut to absorb prana, which makes the body feel more prana-deficient, which increases the breathing rate, which intensifies vata further. In such a condition the vata-afflicted person will self-medicate with the sweet, sour and salty tastes, which may give good results if the substances in question are healthy ones. If not, then those tastes will first reduce vata, but only temporarily, after which during digestion discomfort will return.

Happily, we need not procure all our tastes from our food. Applying oil to your body is a lot like imbibing the sweet taste through your skin. You can apply the sweet taste to your ear with

the help of sweet music, and sweet smells can also provide you sweetness as most substances that are fragrant have a certain basic sweetness to them. It's useful to explore all five senses when it comes to vata reduction.

Because vata is light, sometimes the best way to reduce it is to add weight to your arms or legs, or bury yourself in sand, or sleep under heavy blankets so that the sensation of heaviness will make you feel like you have more mass. A common reason that people gain weight when they are under stress is that their bodies use the extra mass to feel more grounded; vata is makes them feel lighter and less grounded, and weight makes them feel more grounded. Circulating your prana throughout your body can also add 'weight' to it, as can doing the appropriate sort of meditation and yoga. Sleep is heavy, and getting an adequate amount of good quality sleep is sometimes just the right medicine for vata, provided that you get up early enough that you can prepare yourself for your day slowly instead of rushing around like a chicken with its head chopped off. Vata does not encourage good digestion, so when in doubt eat easily-digestible food like soup and kitchadi, especially kitchadi made from mung beans, which are the easiest to digest and most sattva-promoting of the beans.

**A** QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE: "*Vatavyadhi* ('disease of vata') is an umbrella term that includes musculoskeletal diseases. How can ulcers also be caused by the dosha of vata? And how to balance vata in particular and the other doshas in general?"

Musculoskeletal diseases like arthritis are very commonly due to vata because vata is in charge of all movements in and of the body and mind. Vata is therefore chiefly contained in and circulated in the nervous system, which controls the musculoskeletal system in order to make the muscles move.

When vata is disturbed, movement is disturbed. Vata causes constriction, and constriction interferes with free movement. I have a friend in Benares who is always inviting me to come over

and dine with his family. Often I demur as when I am in Benares. I always have a lot of things to do. When I demur he will often say, "Sankoch mat karo," which practically means "Don't feel any restriction/shyness/reluctance," and literally means "Don't feel contracted," i.e. don't shut yourself off from accepting our hospitality. In Hindi "sankoch" (from Sanskrit 'sankoca') means "constriction" or "contraction", and vata can cause this to happen at any level of the organism. The ultimate effect of constriction is impaired circulation, first of fluids and ultimately of prana. When prana does not circulate properly, any area that becomes chronically prana-deficient will become devitalized, and diseases develop in devitalized tissues.

How can vata cause an ulcer? For example a peptic ulcer? Here's one way. Suppose that a certain individual is filled with fear. Fear contracts, just as anger dilates, and if this individual experiences that contraction in the stomach that may sufficiently disturb the circulation in the stomach that the tissues can neither take in adequate nutrients nor expel all their wastes. Eventually the tissues become devitalized, and the acid in their environment damages them, and an ulcer results.

Vata can similarly cause a heart attack. Ultimately heart attacks occur due to constriction of a coronary artery, and constriction is ultimately due to vata. The constriction may be chiefly because you have eaten too much and exercised too little and the arteries have become blocked by kapha, or possibly because you have too much pitta which creates inflammation which both narrows the artery and promotes the deposition of plaque. But sometimes the constriction can occur because of neurological or psycho-emotional reasons, even when the arteries are not filled with plaque; that kind of heart attack is created directly by vata.

Relief of vata means relief from constriction, and it is often the case that the contraction in your body is being created by sankoch in your mind. Often, but not always. It is now October, and winter will soon be here. Winter is chilly, and when you

are chilled your blood vessels contract to help you preserve your body heat. This physical contraction can tend to promote sankoch in the mind as well, particularly if you live in a city, where the air is polluted. Then your lungs, which are already being disturbed by the cold, get even more disturbed by the pollution and an anxiety inherent in city life, and all this makes you shut down even more. During the winter therefore it is very important to invest some time every day trying to relax your organism so that its channels will open. You may need to do more exercise in the winter than you do in the summer just to keep your circulation from becoming too constricted.

It is also very important to eat less sugar. Until just a few decades back sugar was a luxury item; no one but the very rich could afford to eat it all the time. Recently I read that if sugar consumption in the United States were to continue increasing at its current rate, by the year 2600 the American diet would consist 100% of sugar. This will not happen, of course—everyone would have died off before that could happen—but people all around the modern world consume far too much sugar. Among the many reasons that white sugar is dangerous is that it promotes unevenness in blood sugar. White sugar makes blood sugar increase very quickly, and since what goes up must come down, when your blood sugar goes up quickly it will afterward go down quickly which will make you hungry and so you will eat more. The more sugar you take in, the higher your blood sugar will go and the further down you will go after you have gotten your high. There is always a rebound effect; what goes up must come down. All this sudden change promotes vata, which creates mental uneasiness, which may make you eat even more.

So please do not to start your day off with sugar, and particularly not sugar with caffeine, which also spikes your blood sugar. Please wait at least two or three hours from when you wake up to consume anything that may cause your blood sugar to increase substantially and quickly. Once that whipsawing blood

sugar wave begins, it will batter you for the rest of the day, which will make it very difficult for you to focus—and lack of focus both is caused by vata and causes more vata. Three tissues in your body cannot store glucose: your skin, eyes and brain. Unstable blood sugar puts these tissues under greater stress, because part of the time they will have abundant glucose-food and part of the time they will be starving. Eventually they will develop a permanent craving for more, especially on the part of the brain which monopolizes a full twenty-five percent of the calories that we take in. When the brain feels like it has a reliable food source, it will promote calm; when it feels starved, it will crave food, which will make you crave food.

So, wait as long as you can each morning before you drink your hot stimulating beverage. And make sure that once every week or two you have a caffeine-free day, and schedule in a full week without caffeine three or four times a year. And apply this sort of restriction to any other dependency or addiction that you might have. You always want your organism to remember what life is like when it isn't being offered those things. This applies even to triphala. You can take triphala for six months at a time, but after six months you need to stop it for a month or so, after which you can go back to it again.

This rule applies to everything, including salt. Salt, also, was once not freely available. Roman legionnaires used to be paid in salt, which is how we got the word 'salary'. The estimate is that, in the days before agriculture, humans took in ten times as much potassium as sodium. Nowadays most people take in twice as much sodium as potassium. This means that we have increased our sodium intake by twenty times. How can this be good for us? Ayurveda suggests that salt is very good for many things, in particular for causing your skin to age quickly. It is wise to reduce your consumption of salt, and to do without salt periodically is very good, even for a day at a time. This also applies to hot spices, because as with salt and sugar, you will find that you build up a tolerance level to

spices, especially chiles. As these items become less immediately satisfying, you will be tempted to increase their quantity and, if you don't watch out, pretty soon your food will consist of nothing but spices, sugar, salt, and maybe some fat. Then problems will occur. *Ati sarvatra varjayet*: excess should be avoided in all things. Since the world we live in is a world of excess, it is up to you to look into your own life and your own experience, to find those areas in which you are already excessive and then to find ways in which to become less excessive.

For example, eating large quantities of meat has various tangible and undesirable consequences. Ayurveda is not a vegetarian medical system, though some people adamantly maintain that it is. Look in the texts and you will find mention of meat-eating. Meat is suggested for those people for whom meat is appropriate, at those moments when their organisms require it. Ayurveda never comments on the morality of eating one food or another; it never opines that something is 'bad' or 'good'. In fact, the *Charaka Samhita* states very clearly that everything in the world, every substance and every action, can be used as medicine. In the context of red meat, however, it goes on to mention that it is best to consume venison or goat, and that no one should never become habituated to eating beef or pork, because consuming them regularly will not promote health. In classical Ayurveda, what is moral is that which makes you healthy and keeps you healthy, and what is immoral is consumption of those substances and performance of those actions that will promote ill health in you.

In this context it is immoral to over-consume protein, any protein. Protein is inefficient fuel for the body, as it produces a lot of acidic waste. It is also immoral to eat too often during the day. Some people who are very vata aggravated may do well to eat four or even five times a day, provided that they eat small amounts of easily digestible food. But eating this often is only appropriate for people whose vata is seriously disturbed. Otherwise you

should preferably eat only one large meal daily, so that your digestive tract is not perpetually trying to digest something. Recently the concept of fasting sixteen hours a day has become popular: do all your eating during eight hours of the day, and have only liquids thereafter. Some people may find it difficult to go sixteen hours without food, but most people can certainly go for twelve hours, particularly if they are sleeping for eight of those hours. The main thing is that you should not force your stomach and intestines to work all day and all night; they were not engineered to do that. They were engineered to have food only occasionally. In almost all pre-industrial human societies there was a season of the year when almost no food was available, so that people were forced to limit their consumption at that time; kind of an enforced fast.

In the modern world however, and especially during the past fifty years, food has become available to most people twenty-four hours a day, which is completely abnormal from the body's point of view. And unless you are always doing something to restrain yourself, you are going to be tempted to eat more, and more often, than you should, because the temptation to eat is being broadcast to you continually. All the more reason to dedicate one day per week, or one day every two weeks, to some sort of fasting. When you are inundated with food it is therapeutic to deliberately restrict yourself occasionally, to let your system rest and perform maintenance on itself and eliminate some of its toxins.

**FROM THE AUDIENCE:** "Ayurveda seems to be promote lacto-vegetarian diet"

Ayurveda seems to do that because Ayurveda has manifested in a particular cultural context, first in the people who developed Ayurveda originally and now in the culture in which it chiefly manifests. But when we apply it to other cultures, it promotes other diets.

"Modern western research says avoiding all animal products promotes health and reverses all diseases like cancer."

Some research says that; other research says something else.

It is good I think to remember that conditions in the past were very different from conditions now. Ayurveda emerged in India, and in the past when people in India were really enjoying dairy, they were getting their milk from Lakshmi the cow, who lived with the family as a beloved family member. She ate healthy plants, some of them with medicinal qualities, and enjoyed quiet days and nights. Nowadays the dairy we get comes from a multitude of cows many of whom are not physically healthy or mentally contented. A couple of weeks ago in Kuala Lumpur I spoke at a conference of cancer survivors. One of the other speakers was a doctor from Australia who mentioned research that identified an important co-factor of breast cancer in humans appears to be infection with the bovine leukemia virus. It turns out that when you drink milk that has been pooled from 500 cows or more, there is 100% guarantee that that milk contains the bovine leukemia virus.

Now, I am fond of dairy products, so this was a disturbing piece of news that has made me less enthusiastic about consuming dairy. Unless you have access to a healthy cow or buffalo or goat, most people should probably avoid dairy. Of course, if you cannot digest it, as is the case with billions of people around the world, you should avoid it completely. At the behest of my mentor, I lived solely on fruit and dairy for six years, and greatly enjoyed the effects of that diet. Both I and the world were forty years younger, and the dairy available in India then was healthier than the dairy available in India now. At this age, I find that I cannot consume as much dairy as I did back then, because my digestive fire is now much lower, as is the case with almost everyone as they age.

What is most important for anyone is that they actually digest what they eat. It's not what you eat but rather what you digest that counts; and for that matter, it's really not what you digest but what you absorb that matters. And frankly, what you absorb is less significant than what you actually assimilate, which is in fact of even less consequence than what you actually utilize. You should

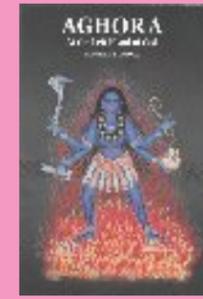
therefore consume only what you know you are going to utilize, which is why you need to take time, on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis, to ask your body what it really wants to eat, and when. Many people nowadays don't even know when they're really hungry; they can't tell the difference between mental hunger, emotional hunger, and physical hunger. Many people have no idea of what physical hunger actually is because they consume something or other all day long. When you consume water alone for a day, then you will gain a greater perspective on what physical hunger really is, particularly when you begin to utilize your inner eye. When you can visualize an eye on the inside looking around your body and seeing what there is to see there, you will start to understand better how you function, and how to improve this function. Obviously you are not using your physical eye to do this. Your physical eye is only the organ for the sense of sight; the sense of sight is not limited to that organ. The sense of sight is humanity's most important sense, and we use our inner eyes all the time, we visualize things all the time. When you turn your gaze inwards you will be able to learn how to perceive what is going on with you. Then you will better know how to promote sukha in yourself and in others.

So please take a look on the inside. You will always be attracted to the outside, so kindly counteract that tendency of being externalized by bringing your awareness towards the inside, even for a few minutes at a time each day. You will not regret it.

Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu!  
Namaste. 🙏

**Dr. Robert Svoboda** is the first Westerner to graduate from a college of Ayurveda and be licensed to practice Ayurveda in India. During and after his formal Ayurvedic training he was tutored in Ayurveda, Yoga, Jyotish, Tantra and other forms of classical Indian lore by his mentor, the Aghori Vimalananda. He is the author of twelve books.

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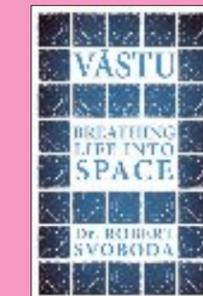
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# SRI CAKRA BOX

NELSON MEADOWS

Photographs ©RobertMoses

THIS IS NOT THE WORK OF A TEACHER OR A SCHOLAR. I have never made it into the world of a gallery artist either. It has been with the “eyes” of a student that I have proceeded, probing what interests me as if with “a fine-tooth comb”. By re-creating and re-assembling that which catches my attention something begins to evolve; an object emerges whence I can peruse and ponder while letting the mind go off to wander. In moments of grace it seems the unseen can take precedence, can have its effect—and I always give to this my utmost attention, coaxing and nurturing it as though a newborn life. My success in this venture would be for you the viewer to experience some of the enjoyment and delight, to provoke the wonder in you!

This Sri Cakra was done as a companion piece to the Kali Yantra featured in Namarupa Issue 18 (Winter 2013/2014), comprising a five to ten year journey inspired a great deal from the reading of *Aghora: At the Left Hand of God* by Dr. Robert Svoboda. If there is still anyone who hasn't read this trilogy, I highly recommend it.







# ETERNAL PRESENCE: BHAGAWAN NITYANANDA OF GANESHPURI

GRAHAM AJIT BOND

DEEP IN ALL SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS is the insight that our fleeting world of phenomena emerges from, and is held within, an eternal presence. We intuit and glimpse that a state of connection to this eternal presence is possible through peak experiences, contact with great beings, ritual, mantras, and yoga practice.

In the early twentieth century film *Solaris*, Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky creates memorable scenes of a seething galactic mass like a gigantic brain that created mind-changing and wish-fulfilling phenomena among the crew of the spaceship sent to study it in the eternity of outer space. But earthbound humans craving for energetic encounter with such formative powers, have claimed similar effects from the company of those absorbed in Brahman. Such great beings are routinely bothered by those seeking miraculous cures, interventions and supernatural support, though they remind us that the highest gift they have to give is freedom from all desires and the fulfillment of our life's purpose.

Bhagawan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri is an example of one kind of absorption into the ground of Being: that of the *avadhut* or *renunciate* who is beyond conventional traditions. He is honored as one of Maharashtra's greatest contemporary spiritual masters—a *Siddha* absorbed in eternal, "nitya," bliss, "ananda."

This article is an invitation to connect with the silent ocean of the Supreme through the yogic practice of *darshan*; connecting energetically with the inner state of a great being through pictures that contain his grandeur, his freedom, and his grace. Patanjali suggests in his *Yoga Sutra* 1:37, "Focus your mind on a being who has risen above attachment and aversion" so you can also become free.

Traditional Indic understanding tells us that whatever such a being says is mantra; that their gestures are *mudra* and their actions, however surprising or odd, are always auspicious. It's said that when such a being looks at anyone, they receive the *darshan* of Truth. Those who had his living *darshan* describe Bhagawan Nityananda as a silent ocean of eternal presence. Today, since his *mahasamadhi* in 1961, his image is revered in homes, temples, and taxis as a source of connection to the eternal presence and the healing intelligence of supreme Consciousness.

In *Vivekachudamani*, Sri Shankaracharya lets us know that conventional ideas of saintliness fail in judging another's deep connection with supreme Consciousness. "Sometimes a fool, sometimes a sage, sometimes possessed of regal splendor; sometimes wandering, sometimes as motionless as a python, sometimes wearing a benign expression; sometimes honored, sometimes insulted, sometimes unknown—thus lives the man of realization, ever happy with supreme bliss."

Though he loved children and did charitable works, Bhagawan Nityananda mostly lay "motionless as a python," in a state beyond the body, occasionally uttering often incomprehensible phrases or sounds. Thousands who came for his *darshan* say their prayers were answered, their commitment to *sadhana* deepened, and their minds stilled. His essential teaching was, "The heart is the hub of all sacred places. Go there and roam." At his first *darshan*, Mr. Parulekar tells us, Nityananda said to him, "Nirmala mana; nischchala mana; vishaala mana.—Purified mind; unwavering mind; immutable mind."\*

Little is known about Nityananda and his early *sadhana*. It is said he was "born a *Siddha*." After early years in South India, the adult Nityananda settled in (what was in those days) remote jungle in the Tansa Valley, a few hours drive north of Mumbai. The town of Ganeshpuri grew around him, with an ashram and now houses the shrine in which he was interred after his *mahasamadhi*.

The pictures that follow are an invitation to contemplate the state of an *avadhut* or *siddha*—one who is free to roam beyond the limits of "the Matrix;" one who is aligned with the healing intelligence of the deepest levels of Being. Perhaps we can glimpse and appreciate the importance of honoring such rare beings who are open doorways to the inner Self. ❖

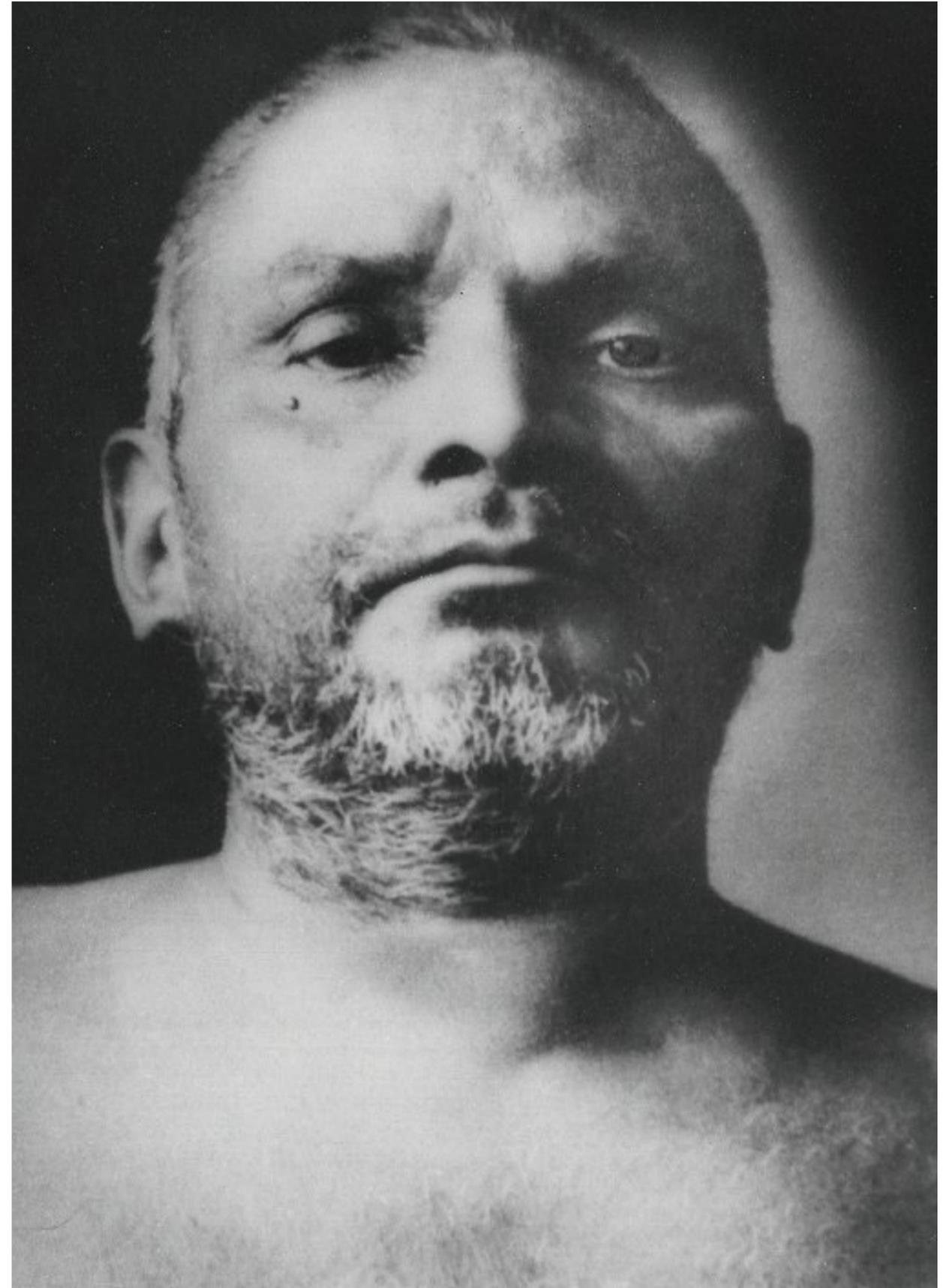
*Samastam kalpana-maatram  
hyatma muktah sanatanah  
Iti vijñāya santruptam  
nityanandam namamyaham*

The entire universe is only a mental construct; the Self alone is free and eternal.

Thus reflecting, he is satisfied—  
to that Nityananda, I bow.

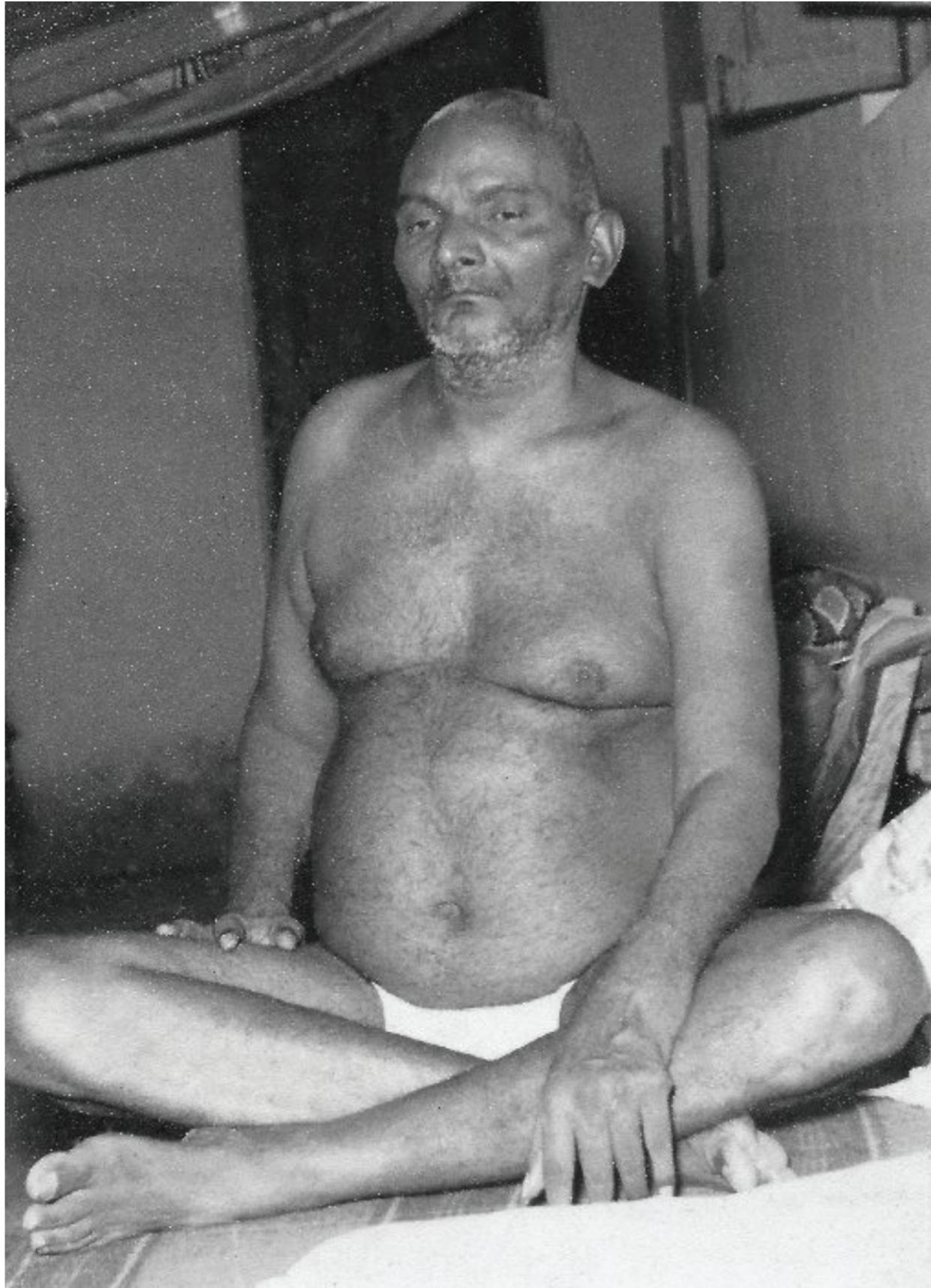
*Sri Avadhuta stotram verse 6*

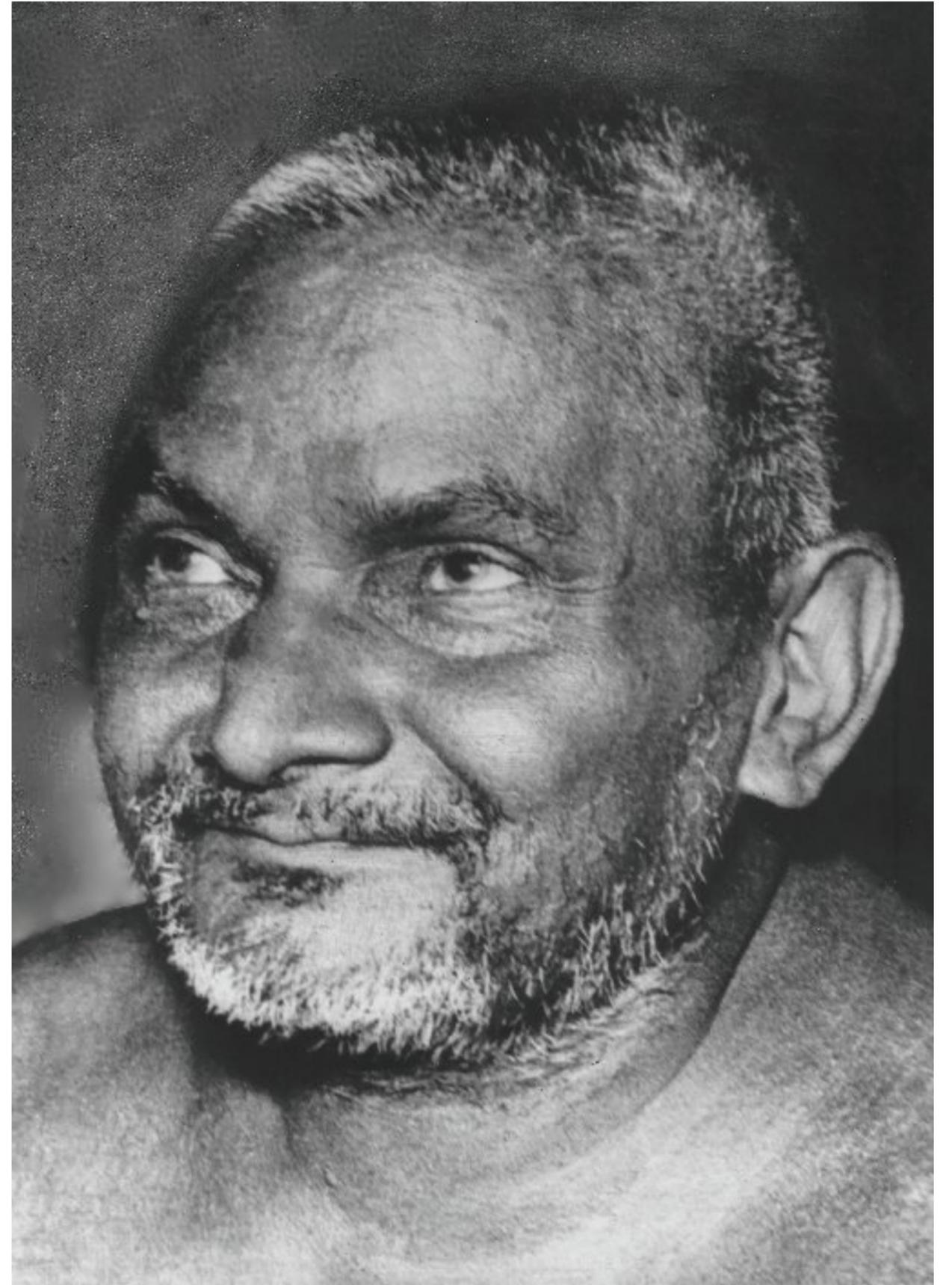
Graham Ajit Bond began his many visits to India in the village of Ganeshpuri and the temple of Bhagawan Nityananda. He studied and practiced yoga for many years in the ashrams of Swami Muktananda, one of the disciples of Bhagawan Nityananda. He's a media producer living in Berkeley, California.



\*From the Introduction to *Bhagawan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri* published in 1996 by one of his disciples, Swami Muktananda. Rare early film footage of Nityananda walking in his ashram in Ganeshpuri, and even in animated conversation, can be found on YouTube.









# TEMPLE OF THE 64 YOGINIS

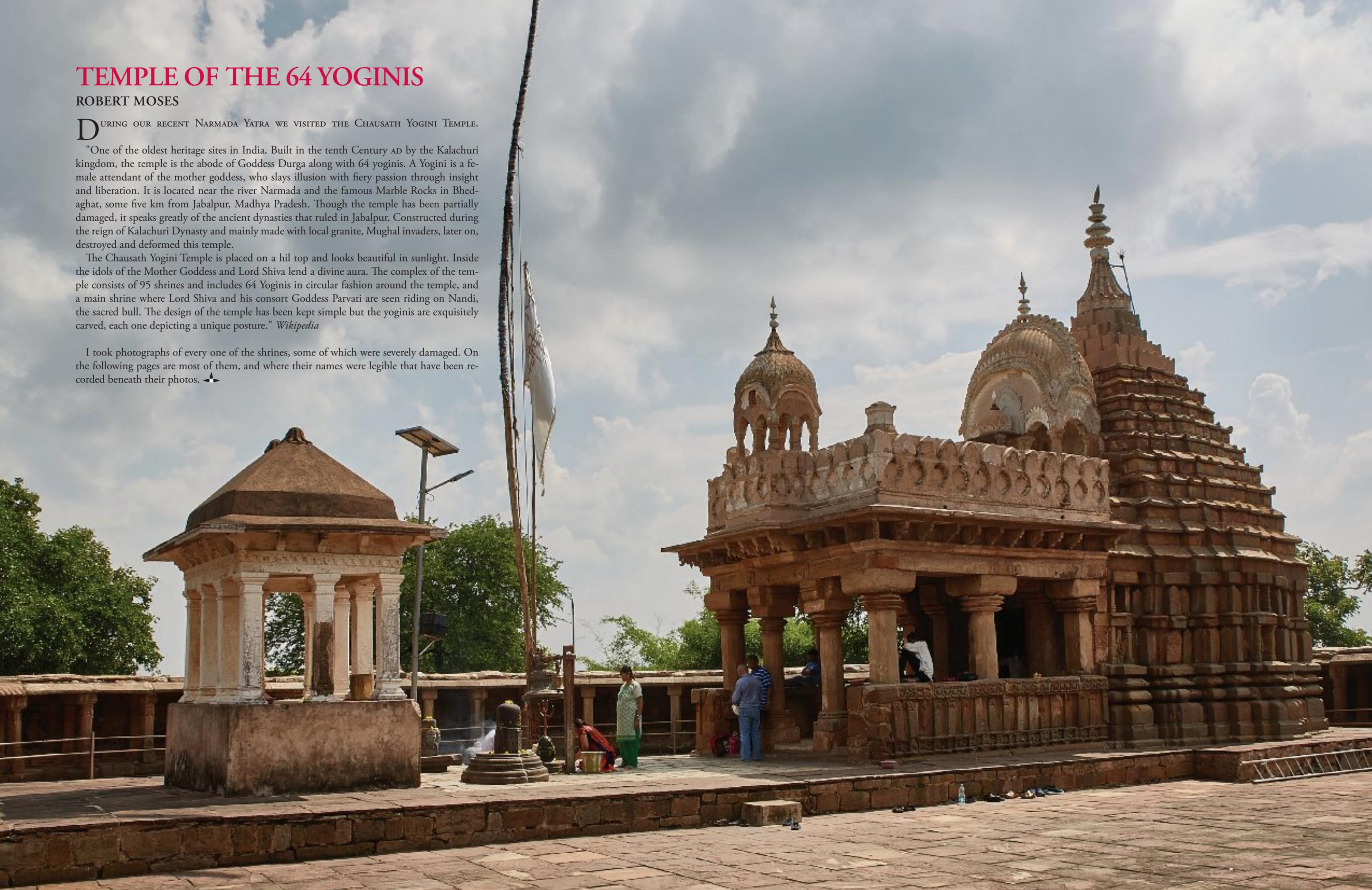
ROBERT MOSES

**D**URING OUR RECENT NARMADA YATRA WE VISITED THE CHAUSATH YOGINI TEMPLE.

"One of the oldest heritage sites in India. Built in the tenth Century AD by the Kalachuri kingdom, the temple is the abode of Goddess Durga along with 64 yoginis. A Yogini is a female attendant of the mother goddess, who slays illusion with fiery passion through insight and liberation. It is located near the river Narmada and the famous Marble Rocks in Bhed-ghat, some five km from Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. Though the temple has been partially damaged, it speaks greatly of the ancient dynasties that ruled in Jabalpur. Constructed during the reign of Kalachuri Dynasty and mainly made with local granite, Mughal invaders, later on, destroyed and deformed this temple.

The Chausath Yogini Temple is placed on a hil top and looks beautiful in sunlight. Inside the idols of the Mother Goddess and Lord Shiva lend a divine aura. The complex of the temple consists of 95 shrines and includes 64 Yoginis in circular fashion around the temple, and a main shrine where Lord Shiva and his consort Goddess Parvati are seen riding on Nandi, the sacred bull. The design of the temple has been kept simple but the yoginis are exquisitely carved, each one depicting a unique posture." *Wikipedia*

I took photographs of every one of the shrines, some of which were severely damaged. On the following pages are most of them, and where their names were legible that have been recorded beneath their photos. 🚩





*Śrī Simha Simhā*



*Śrī Anitakārī*



*Śrī Vibhatsā*



*Śrī Tirachittā*



*Śrī Audārā*



*Śrī Pamḍavī*



*Śrī Rupinī*



*Śrī Vārāhī*



*Śrī Khemukhī*



*Śrī Pamḍavī*



*Śrī Kamdā*



*Śrī Erudī*



*Śrī Mandodarī*



*Śrī Jamnavī*



*Śrī Yamunā*



*Śrī Nilaḍamvarā*



*Śrī Rānājirā*



*Śrī Nandinī*



*Śrī Sarvatomukhī*



*Śrī Jamnavī*



*Śrī Yamunā*



*Śrī Nilaḍamvarā*



*Śrī Terānvā*



*Śrī Ganēśah*



*Śrī Shaṇḍinī*



*Śrī Ajitā*



*Śrī Pimgalā*



*Śrī Rīdhālīdevī*



*Śrī Abkhalā*



*Śrī Chanḍikā*





*Śrī Aingīnī*



*Śrī Tapānī*



*Śrī Isvari*



*Śrī Lamṭā*



*Śrī Jāhnavī*



*Śrī Brahmanī*



*Śrī Padmahānsā*



*Śrī Jhanginī*



*Śrī Deddā*



*Śrī Dākinī*



*Śrī Māhēshvari*



*Śrī Hamisini*



*Śrī Uttālā*



*Śrī Vāṃdhānī*



*Śrī Takārī*



*Śrī Hamisini*



*Śrī Nālinī*



*Śrī Gandharī*



*Śrī Darrpahārī*



*Śrī Ghaṁṭālī*



*Śrī Bhīṣaṇī*



*Śrī Raṅginī*



*Śrī Dhadharī*



*Śrī Kṣatradharminī*



*Śrī Jahā*



*Śrī Phanendrī*



*Śrī Thikkinī*



*Śrī Vaiṣṇavī*



*Śrī Thakinī*



*Śrī Vīrēndrī*



# THE INNER MEANINGS OF ASHTANGA YOGA

DISCUSSION WITH DEEPAK CHOPRA AND EDDIE STERN

**DEEPAK CHOPRA:**

How is everyone?

**VOICES:**

Good.

**DC:**

Are you aware?

**VOICES:**

Yes.

**DC:**

Who's saying yes?  
Who's the person, what is the entity that is saying yes? I'm going to ask you the question again, are you aware?

**VOICES:**

Yes.

**DC:**

So, "Are you aware?" is a thought. And, "Yes" is also a thought. In between those two thoughts is you, and that's awareness, okay? So I'm going to ask you the same question. This time, don't answer it, just slip into the awareness. Are you aware? So simple, right? That's the presence of spirit. So you can slip into it anytime you want.

Today we are going to talk about the deeper significance of yoga.

If you read the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, which is the most important text in yoga—Patanjali is a great rishi. The word rishi in Sanskrit means "the one who sees." As opposed to "the one who perceives." Rishi cognizes and sees the truth. Patanjali wrote the first—our most authoritative book—on yoga. It's called *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. It describes the eight limbs of yoga. Eight limbs, let's say, of Raja Yoga, or a component of Raja Yoga. The second sutra is "Yogas chitta vritti nirodah." "Chitta" means awareness, consciousness; "vritti" is the modifications of consciousness; "nirodah" means the subsiding of the modifications and settling into pure awareness. Which you



*Deepak Chopra and Eddie Stern*

did for a moment when I asked you, "Are you aware?" It was a glimpse of that, right?

Therefore, another way to define or express the first sutra is, yoga is the silent witnessing awareness, awareness of itself and its modifications, which are the mind, the body and the universe. In reality, there's no mind, body or universe. Those are concepts for experience. In reality, all there is awareness and its modifications that we experience as sensations, images, feelings, thoughts. These are the modifications of consciousness. If they are subtle, we call that the mind. If they are a little more gross, we human beings, who like to define things, call that the body.

And if they're outside there, or we think they're outside—they're all in consciousness—we call that universe. Yoga is getting in touch with yourself and the mind, body, universe that you're constantly creating.

That is the second sutra, and as I kind of elaborated a little bit, it slipped into the third and fourth.

Today we have with us ES, who is, I think, one of the most important figures in the world in the field of Ashtanga yoga, which you've all heard of as a particular branch of yoga. But "Ashtanga yoga" simply means "the eight limbs of yoga." So what we thought we'd do today is talk about the eight limbs of yoga.

Let's start with only a glimpse, not necessarily in order because I always get mixed up with yoga. But the first limb is yama, right?

#### EDDIE STERN:

Right.

#### DC:

Why don't you explain what yama is.

#### ES:

Okay. Basically, the sutra that Deepak spoke of, "Yogas chitta vritti nirodah," is basically like an equation: Yoga equals these other three things.

Yoga is the stilling of the vrittis, which are the modifications or patterns in the field of chitta, which is the mind or the field of consciousness. That's the second sutra. The first one says, "Atha yoga anu-shasanam." And the word "atha" means "now". It is said that the first words that

Brahma, the lord of creation in the Hindu trinity, the first words that he ever uttered were "ah" and "tha", which means "Now". The eternal present is always happening.

So the yoga sutra begins with "atha". In fact, in a lot of the yogic texts from the *Rigveda* on, the first word they start with and the last word they end with are a clue to everything else that the whole book is going to be about. So when the yoga sutra starts with "atha", it means that this whole book is just about "now". This whole book is about: What are you going to do to be present? Now is always happening in every single moment of your life. Then everything else is the explanation.

Yoga, therefore, becomes a process of entering into that state. When we're practitioners—which we all are—we're practicing to try to be in the present moment. Then, when we become siddhas, or perfect beings, we are in the state of yoga, we're not in the process of yoga. So yoga is a practice and a process. And then it ends in a state.

The eight limbs, beginning with yama, are the process that we follow to do all these different things so we can come into this state of yoga. Yama is basically the practices we're going to follow and adhere to in our relationship to the world around us—that we see as outside of us—in order to help our mind be calm and clear and perceptive.

#### DC:

For the sake of simplicity, in contemporary terms, yama and niyama are basically codes of conduct. Things that you don't do—like you're not envious, you're not greedy—and also things that you observe. And if I can be very simple, I would say these are not an imposed morality but the kind of ethics that spontaneously emerges as you go deep within and expand your state of awareness.

#### ES:

Exactly.

#### DC:

So the golden rule, in a way.

#### ES:

Something like that. The five yamas are ahimsa, which is nonviolence; satya,

which is honesty; asteya, which is not stealing—not stealing stuff, but also not stealing other people's thoughts or ideas; brahmacharya, which is sexual responsibility; and aparigraha, which is not coveting that which doesn't belong to you.

And when you look at the yamas as Deepak just described them, they're basically qualities of pure consciousness. Pure consciousness doesn't harm anybody, doesn't steal anything, is never sexually inappropriate. You're bringing yourself into alignment, as it were, with these principles of pure consciousness which don't violate any of these rules.

#### DC:

And then there are the niyamas, the observances.

#### ES:

Saucha, cleanliness; santosha, contentment; tapas, spiritual practice; svadhyaya, repetition of mantra or self-study; and ishvara pranidhana, which is surrender to the unknown or to God. Ishvara pranidhana is the idea that I can't get there on my own, that I need some help. That I can go as far as I can by my own steam, but a certain point we just don't know everything.

#### DC:

It's the inner attitude which sets the stage, not an imposed morality but an ethics that comes from going deep into your natural state, which is pure consciousness. Now we are ready to move into the practice of yoga. This is the prelude.

The third limb of yoga is asana, which is what you do every day. You go to yoga class and you practice your asanas. The word "asana" in Sanskrit actually means "seat". This is my asana right now. Everybody is in an asana. But we can go a little bit beyond that and say asana is the seat of awareness. All the different postures that you do every day, they are different states of awareness. As you move your body to cat-cow or sun salutation, you're shifting your awareness at the same time. Eddie, would you elaborate on asana as seat of awareness and breath, which is prana?

#### ES:

Everyone probably has heard the word prana, which is quite often translated as

energy, or vital energy. The word "ana" literally means "breath". And then "pra" means "that which comes before", which is the energizing factor of breath. So in "asana", the verbal root "as" means to sit, and "ana" means breath. In an asana, literally what we're doing is sitting with our breath. We might be moving. We might be still. We might be upside down. We might be backwards. I'm usually backwards. But all those times, you're going to be sitting with your breath. And that's how you move into a state of awareness.

#### DC:

And there are how many asanas? Hundreds of them, right?

#### ES:

There are said to be as many asanas as there are living beings. So every living being has a seat of awareness.

#### DC:

And then from asana we move to pranayama, which is awareness of breath, and actually influencing the breath in many ways. Asana and pranayama go together, right?

#### ES:

Yes.

#### DC:

As we do our practice, we're also aware of the breathing. And here I'd like to bring out how asana and pranayama together actually influence our brain, our mid-brain, the vagus nerve. In Latin, it's called the "vagus"; in English, it's "the vagabond". It goes everywhere. It starts in your mid-brain. It influences your speech. It influences your breathing. It influences your heart rate variability. It influences the movement of the diaphragm. Then it goes into the internal organs and innervates every organ in the body, the abdomen, liver, spleen, kidney, and then all the hollow organs—stomach and intestine and colon.

At our center in California, we're looking at the effects of vagal stimulation caused through the practice of asanas and pranayama, on what happens to the microbiome. There's traffic between the brain and your body's organs, back and forth, bi-directional. It's a multiple-lane

highway. All kinds of messages are going from your brain to your body, and back from the body to your brain.

These messages, in modern terms, include peptides like serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, and opiates that influence mood, but also regulate the immune system, regulate the effects of these immuno-modulators, which are also antidepressants. There's a connection between your mood, your posture, your breath and what we would call bioregulation, how the organs are regulating themselves.

Ultimately, healing is nothing other than the return to wholeness, which means the same thing as holiness, health, healing. All of it means the same thing. It is returning your body to its natural state of self-regulation, homeostasis, or healing. We are looking at this in all kinds of aspects right now, because there's modern research that shows that if you stimulate the vagus nerve, in some patients with epilepsy, the epilepsy goes away. Accidentally they found that it cures rheumatoid arthritis and bronchial asthma, any state, even irritable bowel where there's inflammation.

Can you tell us a little bit about the connection between asana, pranayama, and what you are finding about the brain, the mid-brain particularly, which we're not normally aware of, right? It's regulating everything right now that's happening in our body: blood pressure, heart rate, immune system. How does yoga help us navigate this un-manifest mind, which is never sleeping? It's more awake than our conscious mind.

#### ES:

I truly wish I knew. This is a topic that Deepak actually knows a lot more about than I do, and we talk about it quite a bit. It's a topic of endless fascination for me as well. One of the things that I've been thinking about lately is how a lot of these mid-brain and brain stem activities, like heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, sleep, respiration, which are all of our survival functions, which are going on all the time, are all the things that the yogis were seeking to transcend.

They wanted to conquer sleep. They wanted to conquer hunger and thirst. If you look at a lot of the pranayamas, even

a simple one like sheetali—one of the things that sheetali is supposed to give you the power of is to transcend hunger and thirst. Why would they want to do all these things?

The very subtlest part of our self-identity is called ahamkara in Sanskrit, which means the "I-maker." This sense of "I" is tied in completely with our survival functions. If we get even a little bit hungry, we get grumpy and we start wondering where we're going to get food. If we're a little bit tired, we need to sleep, and everything needs to go away.

All of the things which drive us in our daily lives which we don't think about are the things that we're linking ourselves to with our self-identity. And so on the most, most subtle level, the way the yogis were going to get beyond the idea of a identity separate from the rest of the universe was to transcend it. So they needed to transcend the brain stem and the mid-brain functions.

The vagus nerve, which starts from the mid-brain and comes down through the brain stem and then through the larynx and the pharynx, and then into all the internal organs, is bi-directional. It's going to be sending messages from the body to the brain almost more than it's transmitting messages from the brain to the body.

By trying to transcend the brain stem and the mid-brain functions, we begin to grab control of our nervous system, which is normally ruling every waking and sleeping interaction that we have. So, in essence, we get to hack our nervous system so that we can understand how to gain control of these autonomic processes and become one with them or transcend them.

#### DC:

Even on a very superficial level, with a yoga class or pranayama, there are ways to increase heart rate, decrease heart rate, change heart rate variability. In fact, to learn how to influence your autonomic nervous system is a yogic accomplishment, in essence, right?

#### ES:

It is. And heart rate variability is basically a snapshot of our autonomic nervous system. It shows what's happening. Deepak was telling me a wonderful story to-

day, actually, about his father diagnosing his brother based on heart rate variability when he was in a different country. You can read everything that's happening in your body if you know how to read these heart rate charts. What was the question again?

**DC:**

The yogis know how to, through intention, influence what's happening. I'm leading to the next step, which is pratyahara.

We've talked about yama and niyama, asana, pranayama. The next step is pratyahara, to shut off the senses and actually experience your inner world. And the English word for that is "interoception". Perception is the world outside. Interoception is the world inside, including what's happening in your body organs, what's happening in your mental space, what's happening in the world of your relationships with life and the universe, et cetera.

As people practice pratyahara, they actually start to have powers, if I may use the word. Maybe it's not a good word. But they start to recognize that this part of our mind, which we call the subconscious mind—which is a terrible word because it's actually the superconscious mind, which is connected to the mind of the universe—as we now begin to navigate this subconscious mind consciously, we begin to realize that our subtle intentions, which are called sankalpa, can actually, through pratyahara, influence what's happening in our body.

As we move up into the next few steps of yoga, you'll see how they can influence the external world as well, through what are called siddhis. But before we go there, talk a little bit about your understanding from a yogic point of view of pratyahara.

**ES:**

From the perspective that my teacher taught me, he said that pratyahara was when you see divine radiance, or God if you believe in God, everywhere, in everything that you look at. He always gave the example of a wall: You look at a wall, and you look at that wall until you don't see a wall but you see divine radiance or pure consciousness manifesting as the wall.

**DC:**

Because the wall is an experience in your consciousness, and ultimately is a modification of consciousness that you call the wall. Right?

**ES:**

Exactly.

**DC:**

There's nothing there, no wall. It's a modification of your consciousness as a sensation, as an image, as a feeling, as a thought—

**ES:**

As a concept.

**DC:**

—and you then objectify it as the wall or the floor or another person or the entire universe. Pratyahara.

**ES:**

Pratyahara is really this crystal-clear clarity of perception where we begin to use the sense organs in a different way. Perhaps use the sense organs for what they were really meant for. And since the sense organs are directly tied into our nervous system and the entire neural network, what we need to do first is make our nervous system strong enough and purified enough to be able to hold the reality that Deepak was just talking about.

Right now our nervous system is going in many different directions due to the distractions that we face in the world. Our mind might be telling us one thing and our body might be telling us another, and our nervous system is stuck in the middle. For example, if you're really tired and you have another fifty or twenty emails that you have to answer, your body might be telling you, "I really need to sleep", and your mind might be telling you, "You can do a little more." Your nervous system is stuck in the middle, but has to do what your mind tells you to do.

The asanas and pranayamas are starting to get your body and your nervous system together, and then pratyahara is bringing the mental aspect into it as well. Now we're going to use all of these faculties to move towards where we really want it to be. We need our nervous system to be in

cooperation with us. The important part of pranayama's effect on the vagus nerve is that when we are harmonizing and toning all of these aspects of our nervous system, our nervous system will cooperate with what we want it to do. If that makes sense.

**DC:**

We slowly move from yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara to the next three stages, which actually take us first into a broader awareness and then into union with all that exists. The next stage is called dharana. And the way it's usually translated is "concentration", which is a word I dislike thoroughly. "Focused awareness" is a good way to describe dharana.

**ES:**

"Concentration" implies that your mind is grasping at something to hold on to it. The word dharana comes from the root "dr", which means "to place" or "to hold". So, I'm going to place this glass on the table, and the table is going to hold the glass for me.

When you do dharana, you're resting your awareness on your object of contemplation, and you're just resting it there like a cup is resting on a table. There's no mental strain, actually. It's just the placing of your awareness in one place, and hoping that it's going to stay there. But you're going to have to keep on placing it there, again and again and again and again.

**DC:**

And the more you do it, the more you're training your mind and ultimately wiring your nervous system to make that a habit. So—

**ES:**

It's a habit, yes.

**DC:**

—you can become aware of whatever you want to. Attention and intention, focused awareness and intention—sankalpa—these are the ways that the un-manifest, the infinite, become the manifest, the finite. Mind, body, universe.

Dharana is the sixth step. And then following this is the seventh step, dhyana, which means meditation. The last or

eighth step is samadhi, which means transcendence. The combination of dharana, which is focused awareness, dhyana, which is meditation, and samadhi, which is transcendence, means union between subject and the object of perception or awareness, this combination is called samyama. And this leads to what are called siddhis.

The great Maharishi Patanjali says that when we practice samyama we develop what are called siddhis. Siddhi is the name of a goddess. And the goddess is the one who unfolds supernormal powers.

There's another goddess who's her sister called Riddhi. Riddhi has influence over the elements and forces of the universe. So if you have siddhis, now you can look into the future, you can look into the past, you can remember other lifetimes, you can cultivate dormant potentials of love, compassion, joy. You can find hidden objects. All kinds of things that are considered as these supernormal powers.

They're not really supernormal; they're dormant potentials that exist in all of us, in that part of our being which is non-local. Local is here and now. This, where we are sitting now, is a local place. Non-local is getting to a domain which is outside space, time and causality. It's where the software of the universe exists. The cosmic mind. Dharana, dhyana, and samadhi are the key to that. And when we have this, we open up these potentials which are called supernormal powers, siddhis and riddhis, but which are actually dormant potentials.

Patanjali warns us that you shouldn't get attached to these siddhis, because that's not the goal of yoga. The goal of yoga is union with the divine. But here is the proof. As you get into union with the divine, you notice that you have all these what today people call psychic powers, which is another terrible word. Because these are normal dormant potentials. Everyone is a psychic that way.

**ES:**

Potentially.

**DC:**

What does Patanjali have to say about it?

**ES:**

A bunch of things. First, I just want

to backtrack a little. I really like that you brought up Riddhi and Siddhi as these two twin goddesses. Siddhi is also sometimes translated as "perfection". But Riddhi and Siddhi are actually the two wives of Ganesha.

One of the meanings of Ganesha is that he is the lord of thresholds. And a threshold can be an invisible border between two different spaces. You walk from one room into another and you cross over a threshold. That threshold is kind of invisible because the space in one room is the same as the space in the other, but you enter into a different dimension.

When you go, for example, from the outside world into a temple, you're entering into a spiritual space. When you walk from the outside world and you get on your yoga mat, you're entering into another world that you're creating there.

That crossing over the threshold into a spiritual dimension is one of the things that Ganesha rules, which is why he has a human body and an elephant head, a different dimension. This is my favorite meaning of Ganesha—the lord of thresholds. One of the invisible thresholds of our body is the brain stem. It's part of the brain, but it doesn't have a well defined structure like the prefrontal cortex or anything like that; it's a small, one-inch part of the brain stem called the medulla oblongata, between the spinal cord and mid-brain. It's a crossing-over place between all of the brain activity and the rest of the nervous system.

When we access Ganesha and he grants us access through his blessings, we get the whole brain activity and transcend the nervous system and enter into this larger space. Ganesha rests in the brain stem, in the medulla oblongata, which is reminiscent of his bija mantra which is "gam", and also is in the guttural region of the throat, ruled by the vagus nerve.

With the perfections, there's a principle in the philosophy of sankhya called satkaryavada, which means that the effect is contained within the cause. For example, if you grind a sesame seed, you get tahini, depending on where you are, or you could get sesame oil. If you plant an apple seed, you're going to get an apple tree. You're never going to plant an apple seed and get tahini, and you're never going to grind up

a sesame seed and get an apple tree. Because contained within the sesame seed is the potential for anything that comes from sesame.

Every single object in the world has latency, something that exists within it already that will manifest and grow when you meditate upon it. If you meditate upon the sun, for example, you're going to get the knowledge of all of the heavenly bodies that come along with that. If you meditate on the kurma nadi, which falls right at the base of the throat near the vagus nerve, you get steadiness, shairyam.

All of the different perfections are actually objects or things within the body and the world that we can meditate upon. And when we have sameness with that thing we're meditating upon, the inherent quality of that thing will manifest in our lives. And it could be anything from absolute, pure, focused awareness to knowing a past life.

**DC:**

Okay, when you look at Ganesh, and a very simple way of looking at Ganesh is to see that every part of his body actually has meaning. You see a big head—he's introspective, meditative, reflective; big, flapping ears—he's the best listener in the world. Listens not only with his ears, but with his heart, his mind, his soul.

The trunk of an elephant, it has power, but it also has discernment. So the trunk can uproot a tree, but it can also find a needle in a haystack. The two tusks, one tusk is broken, one is whole. Life comes in opposite pairs. There's joy, there's suffering. There's up and down. There's good, there's inertia, and there's enlightenment, there's ignorance. And he's witnessing that.

He has a big belly—he says, "I can digest your problems. Give them to me, and I'll digest them." And sometimes you see that around his belly is a snake. He's reeling in his ego. You see one foot in the ground, one foot usually raised. One is in the absolute, in the transcendent world, and the raised is in this world. He's in this world and not of it. He's local and he's not local.

There's a rat there, which is to remind us that even the enlightened can succumb



*Eddie Stern and Deepak Chopra*

to greed and temptation. And the two goddesses, Siddhi and Riddhi, are there. If you represent the state of consciousness that Ganesh symbolizes, then the goddesses are going to support you. And these goddesses will awaken your dormant potentials, the siddhis and the riddhis. Is that a fair description?

**ES:**

Yes. Perfectly beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.

**DC:**

Now we get to the real point. As we're doing these eight limbs of yoga, we are shifting our state of consciousness. There are, again, many states of consciousness. Each state of consciousness creates its own brain physiology. Each state of consciousness creates its own perception of the world. Each state of consciousness creates its own cognition, its own moods, emotions, feelings, its own relationships. In other words, as our consciousness expands and changes. So now we're going to go through the seven states of consciousness, and Eddie's going to tell us about each. The first is deep sleep.

**ES:**

Deep sleep is when there is an absence of content in the field of your mind.

**DC:**

It's a spiritual experience of non-local awareness, right?

**ES:**

Correct.

**DC:**

Why do we need deep sleep? What does it open us up to? Are we going back to our source?

**ES:**

It's said in the yoga texts that when we are in deep sleep, we contact our inner being. We come closest to pure consciousness during deep sleep. One of the current things I like most about deep sleep is that when we are in deep sleep, the brain, which has its own lymphatic system called the glymphatic system, is

draining the debris of all of our thoughts during the day. Our brain activity leaves debris in the brain like plaque buildup. When we're in deep sleep, the glymphatic system of the brain is draining all this debris out so that our mind is fresh. This is why we need our eight hours of sleep every day, so the mind actually can have the time to clean itself.

**DC:**

Is sleep returning us to our soul?

**ES:**

According to yoga, yes.

**DC:**

And that's why when we come out of it, we are fresh.

**ES:**

Correct.

**DC:**

And now there's all this research that during sleep, you're doing unconscious processing. Sleep enhances your creativity. It is actually the best health strategy you can have. Ultimately the goal is to wake up in deep sleep, which is what we'll come to. Second stage, dream. So there are Sanskrit words for this, right?

**ES:**

Swapna. Nidra.

**DC:**

Swapna is the dream state.

**ES:**

Nidra is sleep.

**DC:**

What is happening in the dream state?

**ES:**

During dreams we're processing the things that we haven't processed during the day.

**DC:**

Are we visiting the subtle world, the subtle body?

**ES:**

According to the yogis we have three

bodies and five different sheaths. We have a physical body, which includes the extended world around us. We have a subtle body, which is comprised of prana, or breath, and our nervous system; the mind—our thoughts, emotions and memory; and the intellect, which is our faculty of discrimination.

We're basically dwelling in the region of the subtle body during the dream state, primarily within the field of mind, which is all of our thoughts, emotions and memories that are buried under the surface which we're not experiencing during our waking state. In fact, in chapter one of Yoga Sutras, Patanjali says that you can get clarity of mind or stillness—*nirodha*—of the mind, by meditating on your deep sleep and dreams while you're awake.

**DC:**

While you're awake. I want to come back to that. But in the tradition of the Tibetan Buddhists, there are these *bardos* after death. Are we actually going into that subtle domain when we die?

**ES:**

I don't know about the *bardos* so much in relation to the dream state in yoga. They are probably similar, but there's also probably some distinctions.

**DC:**

But it is still the subtle body?

**ES:**

It's still the subtle body. And we want to be able to navigate it to some degree, because after we die, the body is finished. The thing which is going to reincarnate and go forward is the intellect. And along with it, all of our *samskaras* and all of our *vasanas*.

Even though we're not in our body, there's still this collection of *samskaras* and *vasanas*, or subtle impressions and desires, that are like a big bundle of karma that's going to take form somewhere else. But first we're going to be experiencing those *samskaras* and those *vasanas* out of the body, and it can be scary. You can feel completely lost because it's our body that we feel most at home in. So the yogis want to become comfortable with all of the levels of mind, so that when we're not in the

body anymore we don't experience great fear, and then get sent in the direction of fear as we reincarnate. Is that accurate?

**DC:**

Yes, that is very good. *Samskaras* are translated as impressions, but they're memories. They're the potential of our memories. And the *vasanas* are translated as tendencies, but they're the subtle potential for desire. Both are coming from karma, which is past experiences and choices.

Karma, memory and desire. You might say they're software of your soul that recycles through cosmic time on the journey of enlightenment. The subtle body kind of hints at that world, that subtle world of karma, *samskara* and *vasana*.

**ES:**

We have to become comfortable in that world the same way we become comfortable in our bodies through doing postures. We become comfortable in our subtle body through doing meditation and chanting.

**DC:**

Then we come to the third stage. And that is waking state, which is right now, hopefully. Okay? You are in this waking state. It's very real for you, just like your dream was very real last night when you were dreaming. Only after you finished your dream sleep and woke up this morning you said, "Oh, that was a dream."

And right now this is very real. But perhaps you could wake up from this and say, "Oh, that was an interesting waking state."

Can you say a little bit about the waking dream that we call waking?

**ES:**

Reality?

**DC:**

Reality.

Is this the real reality?

**ES:**

Exactly. We've gone a little bit backwards, because we're not concerned about doing things in order tonight. Usually you have waking, dreaming, and

then deep sleep, and then what Deepak will describe next.

So the waking state is kind of our shared reality. We take it to be reality, but everyone is experiencing it slightly differently. Which is one of the problems.

**DC:**

Based on karma, memory, desire, right?

**ES:**

Exactly. Based on our perception. So according to whatever we have imprinted upon the software, as it were, we're going to perceive the world in different ways. Whatever our upbringing is, whatever our birth, wherever we're from, whatever our culture is, we're going to perceive the world in different ways. We're going to call that perception of the world our waking state, and we're going to wish that everyone saw it the same way we did.

And so that's kind of a shared reality that doesn't always link up. The next reality after that is our dream state, where only we are experiencing that. As you all know, when I'm having a dream, when you're having a dream, we're not sharing in that dream state together.

**DC:**

What you said was very important. We did go a little backward. We started with sleep, dream and waking. But it's the other way. Waking is first. Dream is now more subtle. And deep sleep is going into a fundamental state of pure consciousness. Now we'll talk about the fourth state. The fourth state is called *turiya*.

**ES:**

*Turiya* is a transcendent state. While waking, dreaming and sleeping are seen as modifications and changing states, in *turiya* we get into the first zone of non-changing state. It's actually not even called a state. We call it the fourth state, but really it is just this transcendent, pure consciousness where there isn't change anymore. Because in the first three, we have a lot of change. Even in deep sleep there's change, because we come out from it. But in *turiya*, there's no change anymore.

**DC:**

In *turiya* there's no change, and everything that is change is seen as the modifications of the self. That's the fourth state.

**ES:**

For lack of a better word.

**DC:**

For lack of better word. Then the fifth is called *turiyatita*. *Turiyatita* is when the silent witnessing awareness, which is your being, is now fully awake, in waking, dreaming and sleeping. If you were in *turiyatita*, you would be witnessing your body-mind right now; you would be witnessing your body-mind in dreams; you would be witnessing your body-mind in deep sleep. And you would have the realization, "Oh, that's the body-mind. It's not me."

The body-mind plays an infinity of roles. Once it was a baby, then it was a child, a teenager. It's a doctor, a writer, a teacher of yoga. But that's not me. Those are just my roles. It might be my destiny to play an infinity of roles, but I'm not the roles I play.

The most comfortable English translation of *turiyatita* is cosmic consciousness. Because now you're a non-local being that is not subject to birth and death. The modifications of your being are subject to birth and death. This is what Lord Krishna is referring to when he says, "Water cannot wet it, wind cannot dry it—"

**ES:**

"Fire cannot burn it."

**DC:**

Unborn, not subject to death. And this then is followed by what is called *Bhagavan Chetana*. *Chetana* means consciousness, *Bhagavan* means the Divine, or God. You mentioned that earlier, the divine consciousness. Every object is seen for what it is, a local object. That's a tree. That's a flower. That's a rock. But as you go deeper into the nature of that, you see it's the whole universe. Trees, rainbows and sunshine, and earth and water and wind and air, it's the infinite void. It's the whole universe. And a snapshot of perception, a concept of that is tree. *Ramakrishna* had that experience, right?

**ES:**

Yes, when he would worship Kali—the mother goddess who he was totally, obsessively drawn to with love and devotion—when he would worship her, in the midst of his worship he would forget his mantras and he would forget all the things he was supposed to do. Because the entire world would turn into the divine mother's radiance. All he would see everywhere was the divine mother. So there was nothing left for him to worship, because he himself and everything else were all that divine radiance.

**DC:**

Now God is not difficult to find. God is impossible to avoid. Whatever you see is radiating with the light of divine awareness. If you ask scientists, "What is light?" They'll say, "It's photons." But light is the light of awareness. How do photons translate into this beautiful world, with sound and music and taste and texture? There's only one light. It's the light of consciousness. Awareness is now moving in the direction of its source. And this is a stage of yoga.

And then the last stage is called Brahman consciousness. Maybe you can say a few words about Brahman consciousness.

**ES:**

Yes. The Brahman consciousness is the absolute consciousness. It's beyond time, space, location, causality. It's beyond name and form. It's beyond anything that we can cognize in any of the other states. Basically, according to Vedanta, Brahman is manifesting as all of this that we see here in front of us.

We can use everything we see in the world as tracks to trace ourselves back through this whole journey that we've described with Deepak, through all of the different levels. So the Bhagavan darsan or chetana stage is one of my favorite ideas, because we have this idea of Bhagavan, which is divine radiance or effulgence. Radiant brilliance.

Back in the 14th century, there was a forger by the name of Dionysus who was pretending to be one of the last disciples in the line of Paul, Saint Paul. He wrote a tract on the celestial hierarchies. What he was saying was that God was light, God

was radiance, and left his imprint of radiance on every single thing in the entire universe, in the entire world. He wrote in his Celestial Hierarchies that God was similar to a signet ring, that when you impress the signet ring upon the wax, it leaves the emblem. That emblem remains, but the signet ring moves on to make other emblems elsewhere. So basically everything that we see in the whole universe has God's imprint upon it. If we looked at any of the objects carefully, we would see the radiance coming through them. And that was our doorway, our entryway, into a spiritual journey. We could follow through all of the different levels by having that doorway of light opened to us as we entered into it.

**DC:**

In Sanskrit, universal consciousness or God is Brahman. And then the universe is Brahmananda (bliss of Brahman.) This manifest universe is Brahman vibrating within itself. And that Brahman is vibrating within you right now as Atman or cosmic soul. And that Atman is vibrating as Jiva, your individual soul with its karma, memories, desires, which is then vibrating as the subtle body of mind, intellect and ego. Then that is manifesting as the prana and the physical body through which you are also manifesting your universe. And though ultimately there's only Brahman and Brahmananda, you are the universe. Aham Brahmasmi is the final realization. "I am the universe."

**ES:**

That totally sums it up.

And one other thing, if I may. Brahman is said to be infinite. And also, Brahman has infinite ways of being self-aware. And one of those ways of being self-aware is as a ripple. When there are infinite ripples overlaying each other—which enters into the standing field waves in quantum mechanics and all that—these ripples overlap and the patterns that are formed are standing patterns. And these standing patterns—even if you have a clear lake and you drop a pebble into it and it creates ripples, and then you drop a pebble over here and then it creates ripples, as those ripples intersect the patterns always stay

the same. Those patterns are creating our causal body, which is the—

**DC:**

Karana sharira (causal body).

**ES:**

Exactly. And then the causal body creates the patterns of our subtle body—the intellect and the mind and the prana—and also the physical body, which is the patterns of all the stuff we see in front of us. All of these are the infinite ways in which Brahman can know itself. And we use these patterns existing here to experience that we are the universal patterns existing infinitely in every moment.

**DC:**

So you came to yoga class to improve your flexibility and you discovered that you're the source of the universe. That's the whole point. What we are doing right now, studying with neuroscientists, with experts like Eddie, with mathematicians and physicists—we're trying to actually see what the brain would look like as we move into these higher states of consciousness.

Because the brain is the map. Brain is not the source of consciousness. It's the map with which you access your consciousness. Every experience is recorded in the brain. And then ultimately in your body. Just think of experience being recorded on a DVD or a CD, or even online. That's the record of experience. Of course you can play back, and you can recall the experience. But you're not the CD. You're not the brain. You're not the DVD. You're the one who's imprinting experience on this instrument, which is your body, your brain.

And then, of course, the more you imprint that, the more you can replay it, and the more you can learn from it and the more you can move to these states of consciousness. That would be called the neuroscience of enlightenment, which is the next frontier in neuroscience, I think, or should be.

I think it would be very appropriate if Eddie could do a chant for us to bring this evening to a conclusion before we open it up for a few questions.

**ES:**

Om sahanaavavatu sahanaubhunaktu  
sahaveeryam karavaavahai  
tejasvinaavadheetamastu  
maa vidvishaavahai  
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

This says,  
*May we be protected together.*  
*May we be nourished together.*  
*May we grow together.*  
*May our learning be brilliant,*  
*and may we never argue.*  
*Om, peace, peace, peace.*

This is a traditional prayer between the teacher and student; we are all teachers and we're all students. It's quite often said at the beginning and end of any instructional endeavor. This is a satsang, and in satsang there is an interchange of teachings and information. So it's a fitting and apt mantra to chant.

**DC:**

We have time for a few questions. I hope everyone realizes what yoga is. Yoga is related to the English word "yoke". Jesus says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Why? Because I'm the light of the universe. And the light is me. The light is in you. The light is manifesting right now as this universe of space-time and causality. That's what yoga is. Awakening the light of consciousness within us. Questions for Eddie?

**FEMALE VOICE:**

Hello. I love what you said about looking at a specific point or aspect of something with kind of an open awareness, and that the true essence of that, whatever it is, will come forward into your awareness. And I've been doing some research, actually, on mirror meditation, actually having people focus on their own reflection in the mirror, but keeping an open awareness.

And what we're finding is sort of the same thing, that people are really opening up to seeing different possibilities in themselves just by perceiving themselves without criticizing themselves, opening up to the possibility that there's more there. And we found that mirror meditation increases self-compassion, it decreases stress, anxiety and depression, and we're

just starting to look at the neuroscience aspects of it to see how, actually, you can see the true essence in things just from looking with awareness.

**ES:**

Beautiful.

**FEMALE VOICE:**

So I'm really inspired by what you said.

**ES:**

Super.

**FEMALE VOICE:**

Thank you.

**ES:**

It's right there in Yoga Sutras. Patanjali doesn't talk about a mirror, but it's the same principle.

**DC:**

It reminds me of something in the early days when I was with Maharishi. We were looking at the science of meditation. This was in Boston. A lot of neuroscientists in the world were talking about how meditation reduces stress, and Maharishi was smiling. And after everybody left, he called me to his side. He asks, "What is this stress?" He'd never heard the word. I explained to him what stress was. And he said, "Oh." It was so foreign to him. I told him, people say meditation helps them sleep better. He said, "Oh. I thought it was for waking up."

Totally foreign to him.

When we were doing research on neuropeptides, the molecules of emotion, I was so excited. I went to India and talked about these molecules—serotonin, dopamine. He said, "They're not real." Because in Vedanta it says, if you can see it, if you can touch it, if you can taste it, if you can imagine it, if you can think about it, if you can conceptualize it, it's not real. What is real is that without which you cannot taste, smell, conceptualize, imagine, or perceive. What is that? It's the light of awareness. And that is formless. Without the formless, there is no form.

Tagore, in one of his poems, says, "Where is the fountain that throws out these flowers in a ceaseless outbreak of ecstasy? Where is that fountain?" He says,

"In this playhouse of infinite forms, I caught sight of her that is formless. And so my life was blessed." Your life is blessed when you get in touch with the formless being inside you, without which there is no form, no experience.

**FEMALE VOICE:**

So when you're aware of the vastness of reality as you've described it, then you can't help but be aware of how ultimately insignificant you are in the great scheme of things. You are a bit of dust in time and space. By being aware of that, how do you then go about your life every day caring about trying to do something when ultimately the totality of whatever you do is really so incredibly small at the end?

**ES:**

First of all, I just want to say that the lady who asked the question, her name is Deborah Kenny, and she runs five charter schools in Harlem called the Harlem Village Academies. She brought a bunch of her teachers here tonight. And for the past three years, Deborah has been creating a mindfulness program that Deepak and I both had a part in. It's part of the culture of all of her schools, and she just called me the other day to say, "It took some time, but we're really starting to see some change in the culture of how the kids and the teachers and everyone are behaving with each other."

I think that's the answer to your question. First of all, I think that every speck of dust and every grain of sand is important and has its place in the universe, and has that imprint of radiance upon it when we look at it. It's not insignificant. Maybe it's insignificant only on its own, but it's not insignificant in relation to everything else.

When it comes to us living our lives, and the people around us, and the children that you're helping, the feelings that they have are real, and the sufferings they go through are real, and the violence in our neighborhoods, and the pain that we have from broken families and not enough food on the table is extremely real.

If we can do something to help relieve some of that suffering in the lives of the people around us, that's infinitely important. And that's the glorification of every speck of dust and every grain of sand in

our entire world. So I think you are the answer to that. What you're doing, and the joy and the safe space you're providing to children in really, really difficult parts of their lives and areas of the city—that is beautiful, and you should be commended, and we love you for it.

**DC:**

Thank you. But even as you're doing that, keep in your awareness that when you say "You," or "I," the I or you is not your body-mind. Okay? Your body-mind is a continuum of intermittent experiences in the real you, which is the consciousness of the universe.

And so yes, for a thin slice of cosmic time, this is a body-mind, with its karma, memory and desire. Which also, by the way, does not get destroyed as the body is destroyed. As we saw. There are the samskaras, the vasanas; they keep recycling till you find your true home at the source.

By just keeping that awareness in the body-mind while you do everything you're doing with lots of love and compassion, you don't get sucked into the melodrama of it. Because if you're getting sucked into the melodrama, then you'll exhaust yourself. You'll burn out. If you do it with the same love and compassion, keeping connected to the infinite source, you'll be doing it much more creatively, and with more love, and with more compassion.

**ES:**

And the work will always be fulfilling.

**MALE VOICE:**

When we sit here and we listen to you, if people are anything like me, they feel calmer, better, and it's really wonderful. And when I practice yoga I feel wonderful at that time, and if I sit and meditate a little bit I feel wonderful at that time. Then I have to go and deal with my cell phone or my computer or whatever else. How can we take this quest for awareness out into the street, and practice out there?

**DC:**

First, daily practice. Keep doing it. Daily practice of both meditation and yoga. Second, slip into that awareness. When you say, "I'm having this anxiety," perhaps you can ask, "Who's the I that is having the

anxiety?" Because the I never has anxiety. It's the experience in I that is giving it the feeling of anxiety. So slip into the awareness in which all experience occurs, including the experience of your body-mind.

**ES:**

That's the purpose of practice, is basically to change your baseline reactivity or response to the external environment.

**DC:**

See, if you do that, habitualize, you'll also one day say, "What is this stress?"

**ES:**

One more question. That's all we have time for.

**FEMALE VOICE:**

Thank you so much for being here for us. I am so grateful. This has been a wonderful evening. I had a friend come to me today, this afternoon. And I think that we can all relate to this, because it happens just because we're human.

He said to me, "I can't get in touch with my breath, and I can't really breathe. And I'm just trying. And that is also leading into me not being able to really get in touch with how I feel. And it's also resulting into me not really having a taste for life. And I can't really see things." And I didn't know how to answer my friend.

I said to him, "I'll think about that." But I see this person a lot. Because I'm here tonight and he's not here, is there maybe an answer that you can convey to him that you have?

**ES:**

You first, Deepak.

**DC:**

Okay, so the best answer to that is your presence. Not what you say, not what you do, not any advice. But your being-ness, your presence, which is you as an aware, conscious being. The Yoga Sutras actually say that, when you are perfectly established in that presence, then all beings around you cease to feel hostility or anxiety or anything else.

Today we are doing research, again, with other scientists, into the bio-field. Your body is right now radiating an elec-

tromagnetic field which can be picked up about eight feet from where you are. It probably extends all through space and time, but we can't actually detect it.

And your bio-field, if it's coherent, it suggests a very settled state of centered being. If you're anxious, if you're feeling hostility, anger, resentment, grievances, anything that's kind of taking you out of your center of being or awareness, then your bio-field will be incoherent.

Right now, all our bio-fields are creating waves of electromagnetic activity, and they're interfering with each other. So there's a bio-field of our collective consciousness right here in this room. I'm talking pure science. And that bio-field is affecting people outside this room, and they don't even know it.

The opposite also happens. If you get drawn into somebody's drama and anger and hostility or anxiety or stress—well you can see what happens in a mob. In England when they have these soccer matches and they have some disagreement, the mob starts to get angry, it reaches a critical threshold, and then they burn down the stadium and there's a riot.

There is such a thing as collective consciousness. That collective consciousness influences, monitors, regulates other beings as well, all sentient beings, including your dog or your cat if you have one.

So the best thing you can do for another person is to be present. And that also means deep listening. In fact, there's neuroscience that shows that when you are present and deeply listen to a person, no advice, nothing—you asked, "What can I say to him?" Nothing. Okay. You are present. That presence can be felt because presence is the same thing as spirit. The science shows the amygdala—the part of the brain which is creating all this distress—will start to cool down in the presence of deep listening. So your presence will cool down another person. The best thing you can do for another person is to transcend to that level yourself. It's not what you say, not what you do. Just show up.

**ES:**

That's definitely the best answer. That was a beautiful answer.

When you talk about electromagnetic fields, and we look at everything we're doing, everything is basically electromagnetic field changes. Health and illness, life and death, these are all field changes. But we identify very strongly with what we think the reality of a particular field that we always want to be in is.

The idea of just being present and listening. A rishi is a seer, like we started off with. But another definition of the word "rishi" is "listener", because they heard the mantras within their own hearts, and then brought those forth into the world. Patanjali says, Atha—Now—we should be present. He was a rishi, which means we should listen. And in that listening and being present, we get everything that you just spoke about.

**DC:**

What is heard is called shruti, which is the mantra. And then along with that comes smriti, which is the memory. The memory is, "I am the source of the universe." Okay. And that is so beautiful. Maharishi used to use three words, "rishi", "devata" and "chhandas"—the knower is called rishi, the process of knowing is called devata, and the known is called chhandas. Rishi is the seer. Devata is the invocation from the seer of this mantra, and the memory of wholeness. And chhandas is what manifests out there. So beautiful.

**ES:**

Beautiful. ♣

**Deepak Chopra, M.D., F.A.C.P.** is the co-founder of the Chopra Center for Wellbeing, the founder of the Chopra Foundation, and a world-renowned pioneer in integrative medicine and personal transformation. He is the author of more than 85 books.. Learn more at [www.deepakchopra.com](http://www.deepakchopra.com).

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# YOGA & SCIENCE

## THE MECHANISMS OF YOGA AND MEDITATION



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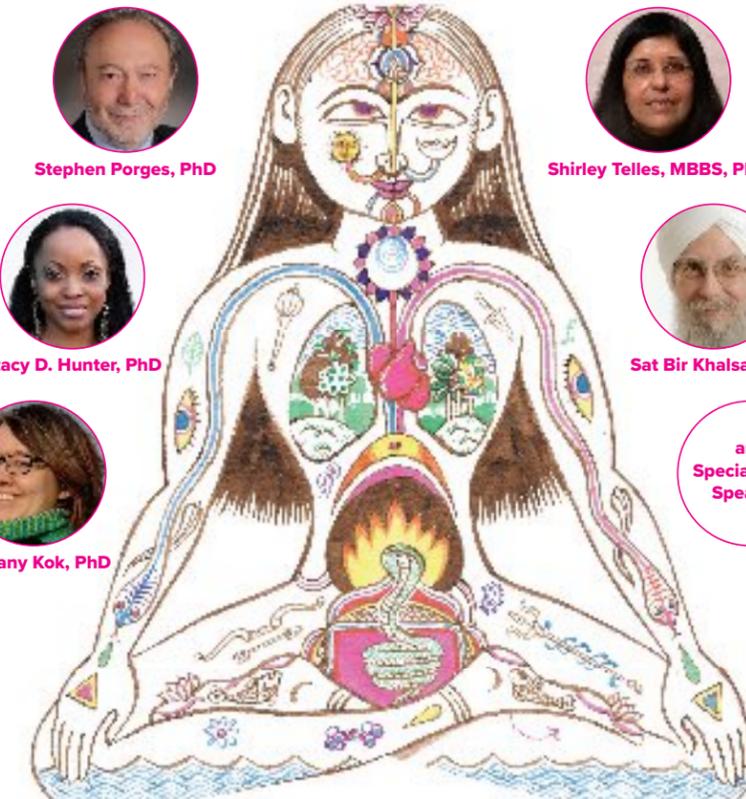
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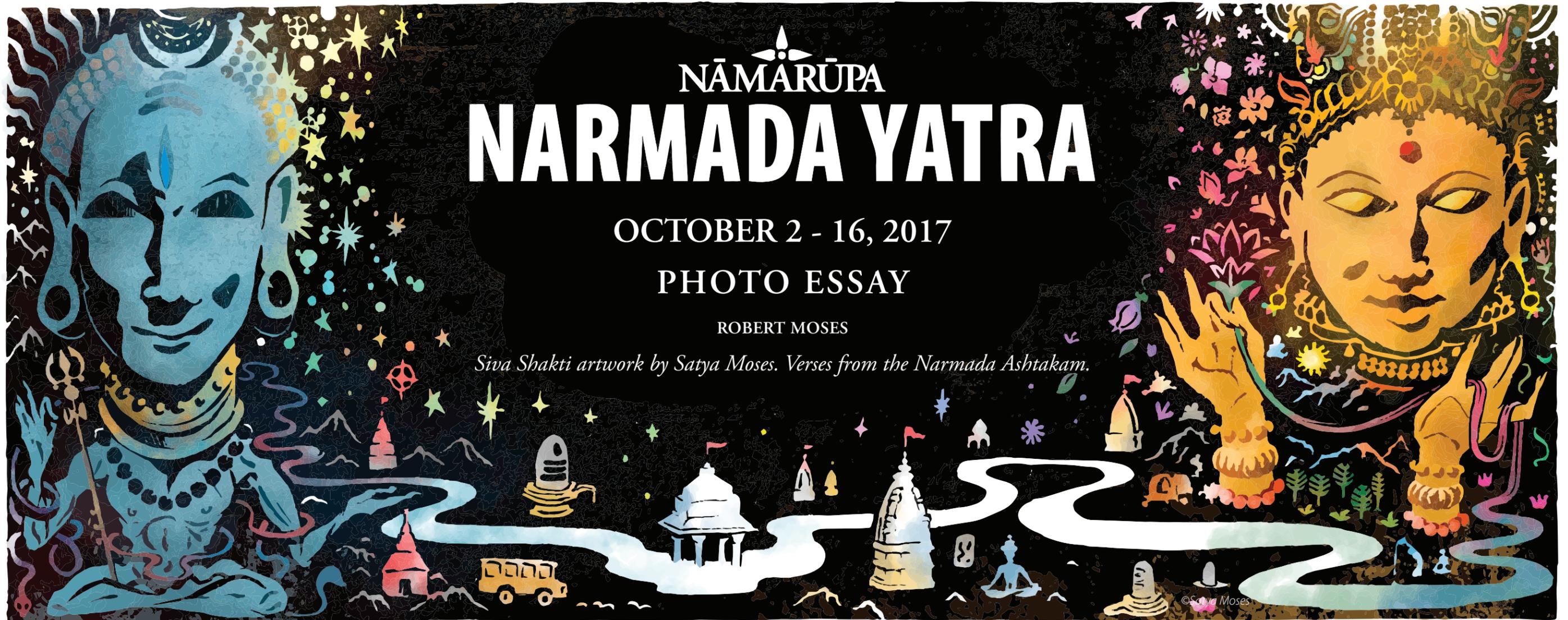
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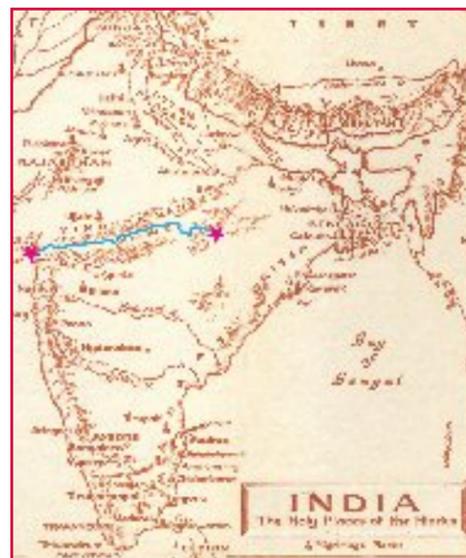
NĀMĀRŪPA  
**NARMADA YATRA**

OCTOBER 2 - 16, 2017

PHOTO ESSAY

ROBERT MOSES

*Siva Shakti artwork by Satya Moses. Verses from the Narmada Ashtakam.*

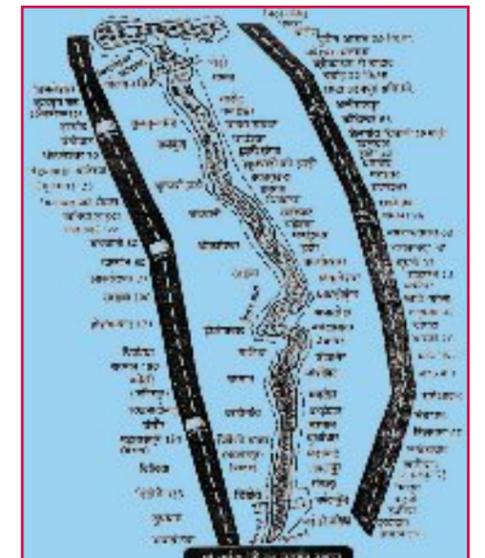


The ancients knew that walking around sources of positive energy would charge one with the same positive energy. The Narmada river is worshipped as a goddess; the tradition of Her circumambulation is called Narmada Parikrama.

The Parikrama is an adventurous spiritual journey around the sacred river through hills, dense forests, gorges, ravines, rocky patches, caves, plateaus, and plains. It is a religious pilgrimage involving visits to temples, ghats, shrines, and villages. It is a form of devotion to please Ma Narmada who takes care and looks after the hardships and needs of all those who undertake the Parikrama. She is a living deity with whom pilgrims interact and communicate on mental and spiritual levels. Narmada Parikrama is believed to grant boons to householders, siddhis to renunciates, peace to

troubled souls, worldly possessions to those in need, and happiness to all. "Narm-da" means one that gives happiness and joy.

Narmada Parikrama involves walking alongside the river from her origin at Amarkantak to the sea, crossing to the other side, and walking back to the origin. Properly done, it involves walking 2,624 km, taking three years, three months and thirteen days. Narmada is the flow of spiritual consciousness in the heart of India, historically older than the Ganga. Small groups of Parikramavasi travel along Narmada carrying their belongings. People claim that their lives have seen dramatic changes during and after the Parikrama. It is believed that a Parikramavasi's wishes, made on the banks of Narmada, come true; his or her hopes are fulfilled. Photographs ©RobertMoses



*Temples at Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh, where the  
Narmada River, the Son River, and the Johila River emerge.*

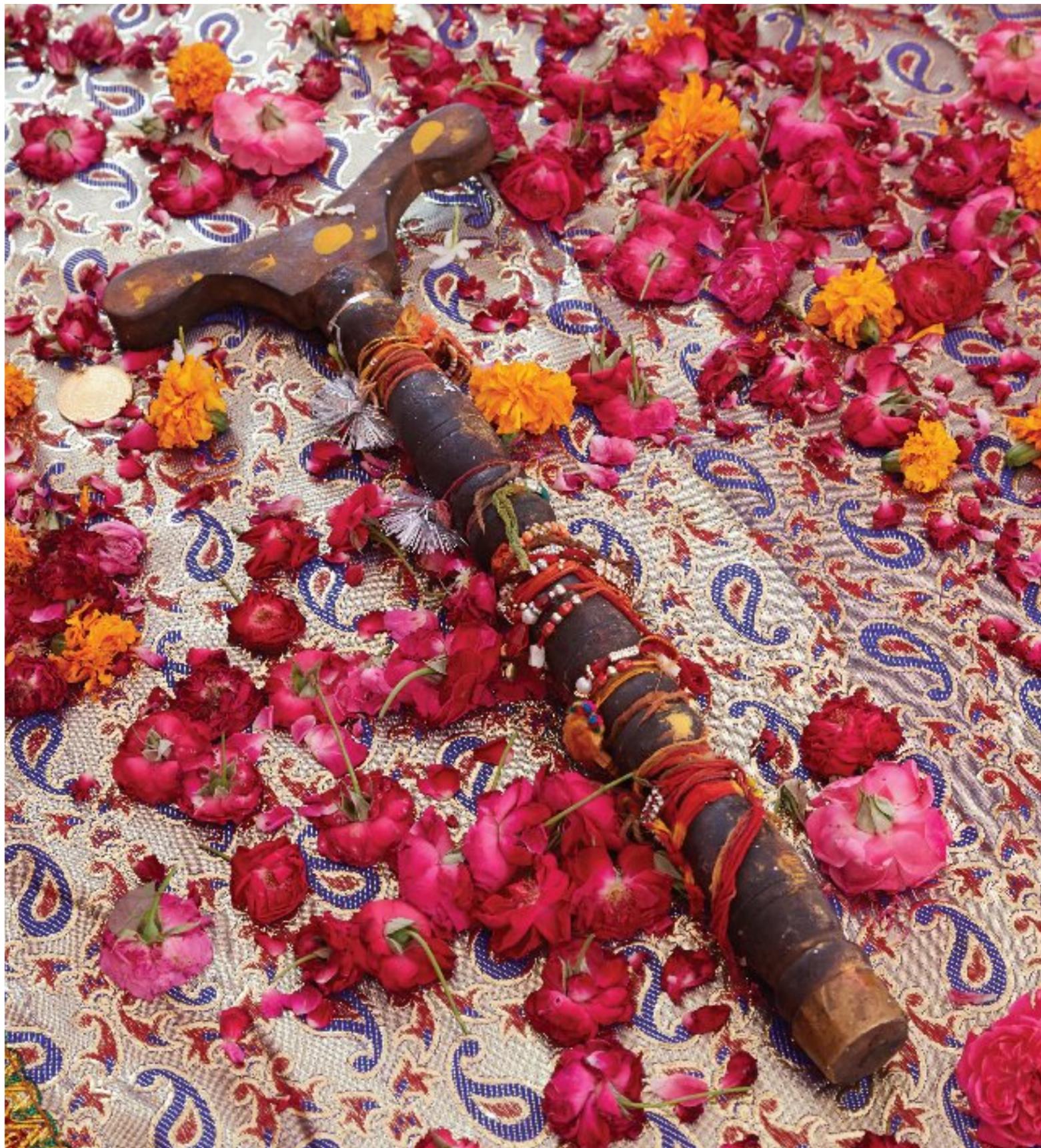
*Salutations to Devi Narmada. Your river-body, illumined with sacred drops of water,  
flows with mischievous playfulness, bending with waves. Your sacred water has the  
divine power to transform those who are prone to hatred, born of sins.  
You put an end to the fear of the messenger of death by giving Your protective armor.  
O Devi Narmada, I bow down to Your lotus feet, please give me Your Refuge.*

Narmada Ashtakam Verse 1





Samadhi Shrine of Matsyendranath, first guru in the lineage of Hatha Yogis of the Nath sect. Near Omkareshwar, Madhya Pradesh. A yogi's danda is being worshipped.



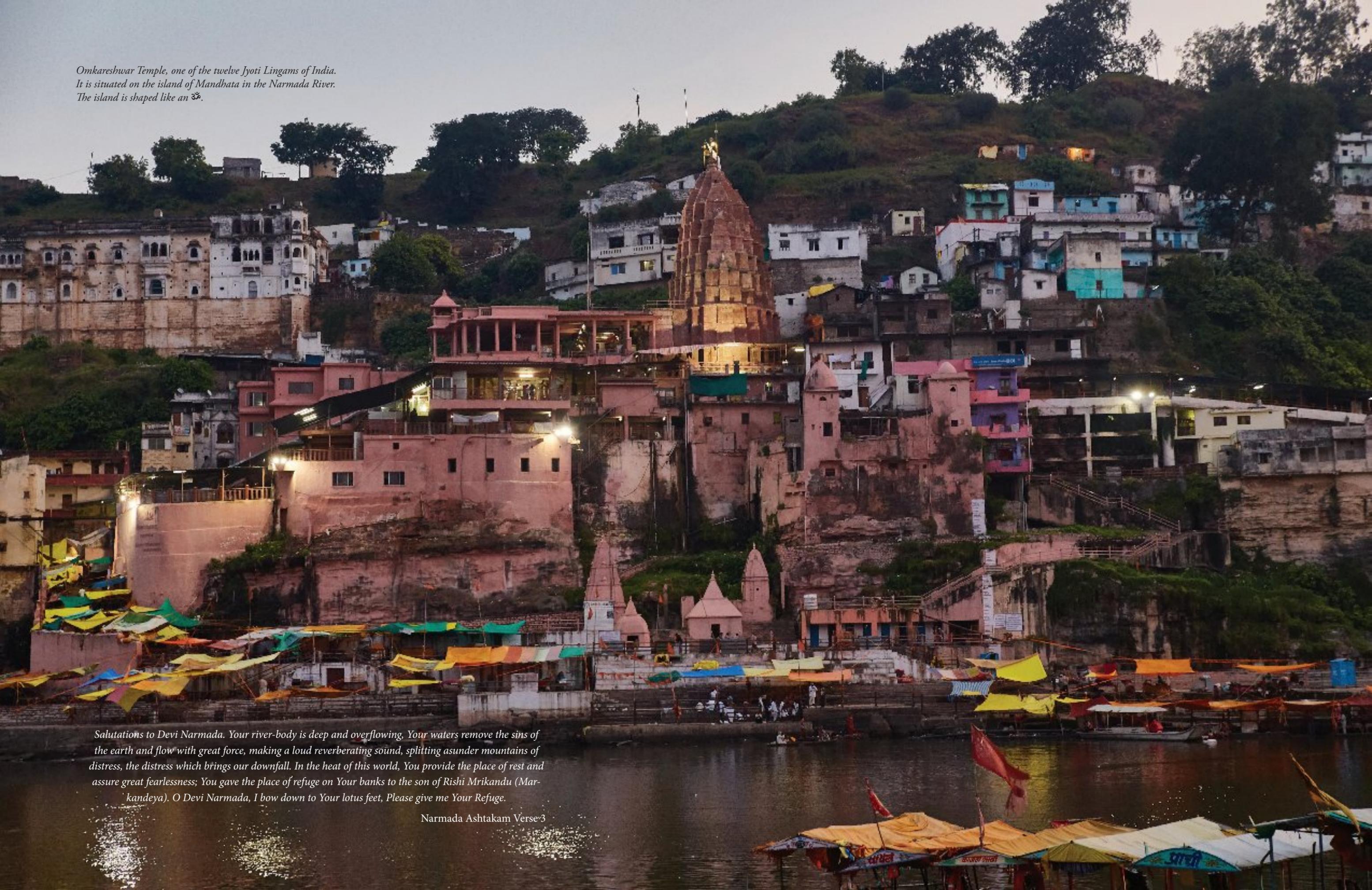
A wide river at dawn with many boats and people on the ghats. The scene is peaceful, with the water reflecting the soft light of the rising sun. In the foreground, two women in colorful saris stand on the stone steps of the ghat, looking towards the water. To their right, two other women are kneeling, engaged in a ritual. The middle ground is filled with numerous boats, some with colorful tarps and flags. The background shows a bridge and buildings on the opposite bank, all under a hazy, early morning sky.

*Salutations to Devi Narmada. You confer Your divine touch to the lowly fish merged in Your holy waters; You take away the weight of the sins in this age of Kali; You are the foremost among all tirthas (pilgrimages); You confer happiness to the many fishes, tortoises, crocodiles, geese, and chakra birds dwelling in Your water. O Devi Narmada, I bow down to Your lotus feet, Please give me Your Refuge.*

Narmada Ashtakam Verse 2

*Early morning arati to Ma Narmada on the ghats at Omkareshwar, Madhya Pradesh.*

*Omkareshwar Temple, one of the twelve Jyoti Lingams of India.  
It is situated on the island of Mandhata in the Narmada River.  
The island is shaped like an ॐ.*



*Salutations to Devi Narmada. Your river-body is deep and overflowing, Your waters remove the sins of the earth and flow with great force, making a loud reverberating sound, splitting asunder mountains of distress, the distress which brings our downfall. In the heat of this world, You provide the place of rest and assure great fearlessness; You gave the place of refuge on Your banks to the son of Rishi Mrikandu (Markandeya). O Devi Narmada, I bow down to Your lotus feet, Please give me Your Refuge.*

Narmada Ashtakam Verse 3

*Salutations to Devi Narmada. O Devi, after I have seen Your divine water, my attachment to the worldly life has indeed vanished, Your water, which is revered by the son of Rishi Mrikandu (Markandeya), Rishi Shaunaka, and the enemies of the Asuras (i.e. Devas), Your Water which is a protective shield against the sorrows of the ocean of worldly existence, caused by repeated births in this ocean of Samsara, O Devi Narmada, I bow down to Your lotus feet, Please give me Your Refuge.*

Narmada Ashtakam Verse 4

*Salutations to Devi Narmada. You are worshipped by innumerable invisible celestial beings like Kinnaras (Celestial Musicians), Amaras (Devas), and also Asuras and others; Your river-body with auspicious waters, as well as Your river banks which are calm and composed, are filled with the sweet sounds of innumerable cooing birds, You confer happiness to great sages like Vashistha, Sista, Pippala, Kardama, and others. O Devi Narmada, I bow down to Your lotus feet, Please give me Your Refuge.*

Narmada Ashtakam Verse 5



*Narmada at Maheshwar in the morning.*

*Narmada at Maheshwar in the evening.*

*Salutations to Devi Narmada. Rishis Sanatkumara, Nachiketa, Kashyapa, and others, who are like the six-footed bee (since they seek the honey of divine communion), hold Your lotus feet in their hearts; bee-like sages Narada and others also hold Your lotus feet in their hearts. You confer happiness to Ravi (Sun), Indu (Moon), Ranti Deva and Devaraja (Indra) by making their works successful, O Devi Narmada, I bow down to Your lotus feet, Please give me Your Refuge.*

Narmada Ashtakam Verse 6

*View from Ahilya Fort of the ghats along the Narmada at Maheshwar.*



*Salutations to Devi Narmada. You cleanse innumerable invisible and visible sins with Your river-body, the banks of which are beautifully decorated with innumerable sarasas (cranes or swans). In that holy place, You give both bhukti (worldly prosperity) as well as mukti (liberation) to the series of living beings including animals (who take Your shelter). The presence of Brahma, Vishnu, and Sankara in Your Holy river-body provides a protective shield of blessings to the devotees). O Devi Narmada, I bow down to Your lotus feet, Please give me Your Refuge.*

Narmada Ashtakam Verse 7

*The marble rocks on the Narmada near Jabalpur.*



*Pachmarhi Way at Siva Cave in the Satpura Range, Madhya Pradesh.*



*Salutations to Devi Narmada. O, I only hear the sound of immortality, flowing down as Your river-body, originating from the matted hairs of Sankara, and filling Your river banks, There, everyone, whether kirata (mountain-tribe), suta (charioteer), vaddava (brahmin), pandita (learned and wise) or shattha (deceitful) gets purified within the dance of Your waters. By vigorously removing Paapa (sins) and Tapa (heat of the miseries of life) of all animals (including man), You confer that happiness born of purification. O Devi Narmada, I bow down to Your lotus feet, Please give me Your Refuge.*

Narmada Ashtakam Verse 8

*Salutations to Devi Narmada. Those who always, during three times of the day, recite this Narmadashtakam, they do not ever undergo misfortune; it becomes easy to obtain the great privilege of going to the abode of Mahesha, which is very difficult for an embodied being to attain, and those persons do not have to see the fearful world again (by taking birth).*

Narmada Ashtakam Concluding verse.

*Bhojtal, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.*



*Hanumanji at Pachmarhi Way in the Satpura Range, Madhya Pradesh.*

# WRITINGS ON YOGA

## H.H. SRI SWAMI SIVANANDA

Published by THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY Uttaranchal, Himalayas, India

[www.dlshq.org/teachings/teachings.htm](http://www.dlshq.org/teachings/teachings.htm)

### FOUNDATION OF YOGA

DEVELOP VIRTUES LIKE GENEROSITY, forgiveness and love. Mere Yogic Kriyas alone will not help you much. Do self-analysis daily and eradicate your faults and evil, slavish habits. Rectify your defects such as selfishness, pride, jealousy and hatred. You must cultivate a compassionate and loving heart first. At all times you must share what you have with others and practice selfless service. Then only will you get purity of heart. Yoga is unity, identity, homogeneity, oneness and sameness with God.

Many aspirants neglect these preliminaries and jump, out of curiosity, to Yogic Kriyas for getting psychic powers. It is really a serious blunder. They will have a hopeless downfall. Therefore, be careful. Mere Yogic Kriyas cannot bring about the desired results. The purification of the heart is of paramount importance. The aspirant must free himself from lust, anger, greed, jealousy, hatred, egoism, vanity, attachment, pride and delusion. This is more difficult than control of breath or the practice of Yoga Asanas.

Virtuous qualities such as mercy, tolerance, adaptability, courage, patience, balanced state of mind and cosmic love should be assiduously cultivated. Sages have always laid great stress on selfless service, generous charity, purity and simple living.

With firm faith, application, perseverance, careful attention to even small details, and fortitude in trials, you must set forth and proceed on the path of Sadhana.

YOGA IS NOT HIDDEN IN CAVES, NOT sequestered in thick Himalayan forests. It is not in taking mountain herbs. God is not a coward to run away from towns, cities and villages. Practice Yoga in your own home. When the desire to practice Yoga comes, it means that liberation is near at hand. Now, take the plunge.

It is a blessing to be a Yogi. Practice Yoga and preach. Hatha Yoga ensures good physical and mental health. You must utilize this to the best advantage by deep meditation on the Atman or inner Self. Self-realization should be your goal. This should be achieved by the constant remembrance of God, by righteousness, by a life of virtue and by the practice of Yoga.

Becoming a Yogi does not involve the abandonment of anyone or neglect of any duties. It means switching over from a life of purposelessness to the path of God. It entails a change of your attitude towards life and in the methods pursued for liberating yourself. True and lasting renunciation is, after all, a matter of the attitude of the mind.

There is only one institution for you which can train you to evolve into a full-bloom Yogi, and that is where Providence has placed you—your own home. Mind is indeed the cause of bondage and liberation; a restless mind will find rest nowhere except in its own annihilation. The mind should be attacked on all sides with every possible type of weapon—with the repetition of God's Name, study of religious scriptures, devotion, practice of silence, service. Pranayama,

Japa, prayer, Kirtan and meditation. All these should be combined.

Do not look upon Yoga as something beyond you or as calling for any extraordinary efforts. You can remain in your station of life, carry on your work and at the same time embark on the Yogic path. Do Japa, prayer, Kirtan, meditation and Asanas regularly.

Any effort in the direction of Yoga never goes in vain. You will realize thereby the fruits of even a little Yogic practice.

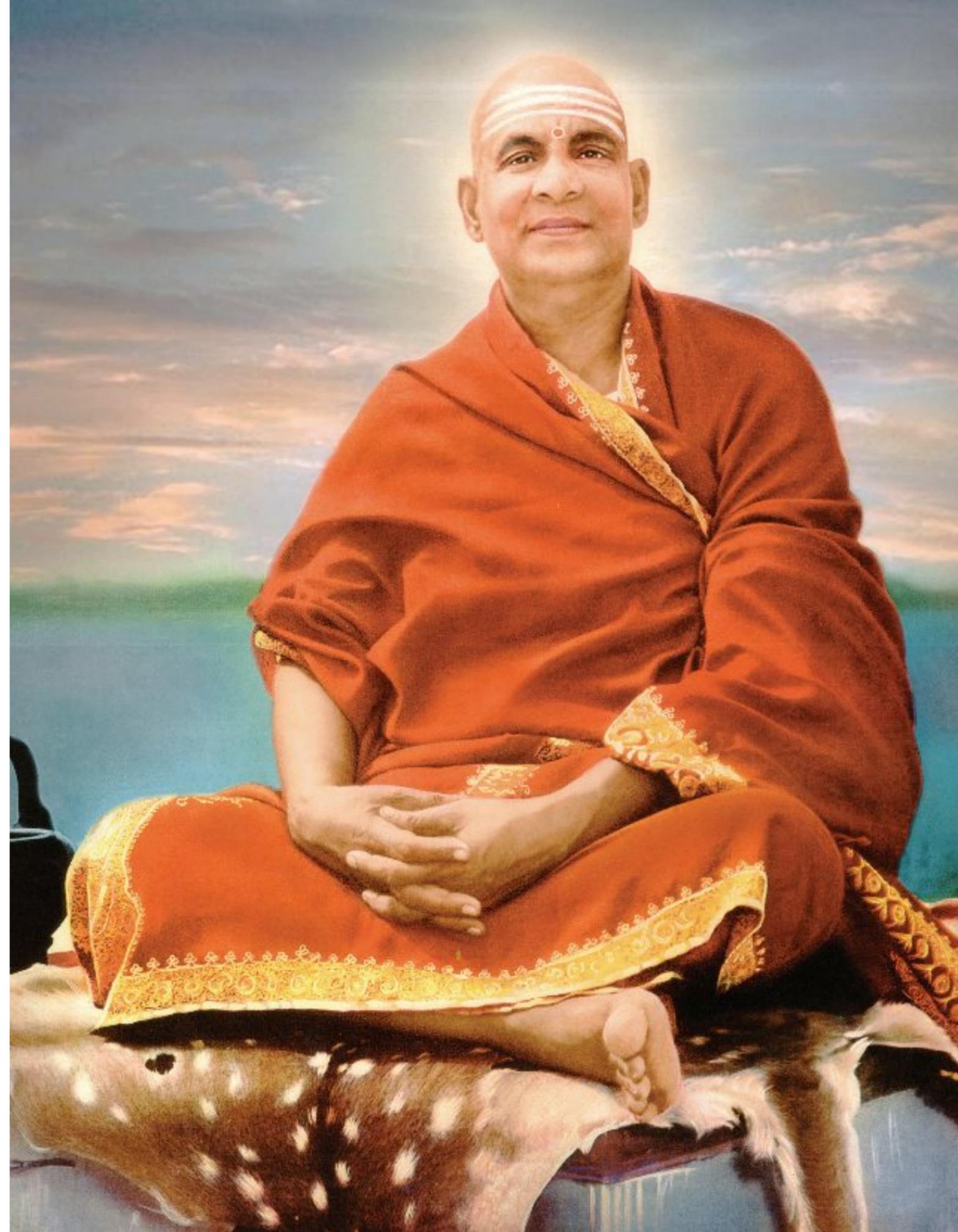
Yes, there is a popular notion that Yoga is only for the intelligentsia. It is not so. Yoga is for all. Everyone can and should practice Yoga from his own station in life.

I can impart to your noble self training in one of the most ancient Hindu medicines—the great miracle panacea for all ills—Yoga. Become a Yogi from this moment.

The aim and end of Yoga is Self-realization. Yogic methods should not be applied for mere material gains.

Yoga does not consist in just reading books and discussion at a club table. It consists in practicing what you already know.

Every activity, from the rearing of children to the management of the home, can be readily converted into Yoga. Kindly study the first six chapters of the Gita again and again. Merely running away from crowds is not a sign of Yoga. The performance of all actions as an instrument in His hands, and with the consciousness that this world is pervaded by Him, the Supreme Spirit, is called Yoga. ❖



Excerpt from:

## PRACTICAL LESSONS IN YOGA

### YOGA AND ITS OBJECTS

YOGA PHILOSOPHY IS ONE OF THE six systems of Hindu Philosophy which exist in India. Unlike so many other philosophies of the world, it is a philosophy that is wholly practical. Yoga is an exact science based on certain immutable Laws of Nature. It is well known to people of all countries of the world interested in the study of Eastern civilisation and culture, and is held in awe and reverence as it contains in it the master key to unlock the realms of Peace, Bliss, Mystery and Miracle. Even the philosophers of the West found solace and peace in this Divine Science. Jesus Christ himself was a Yogi of a superior order, a Raja-Yogi indeed. The founder of the Yoga Philosophy was Patanjali Maharshi, who was not only a Philosopher and a Yogi, but a Physician as well. He is said to have lived about three hundred years before Jesus Christ.

Patanjali defines Yoga as the suspension of all the functions of the mind. As such, any book on Yoga, which does not deal with these three aspects of the subject, viz., mind, its functions and the method of suspending them, can be safely laid aside as unreliable and incomplete.

The word *Yoga* comes from the Sanskrit root “Yuj” which means “to join.” Yoga is a science that teaches us the method of joining the individual soul and the Supreme Soul. It is the merging of the individual will with the Cosmic or Universal Will. Yoga is that inhibition of the functions of the mind which leads to the absolute abidance of the soul in its own real nature of Divine Glory and Divine Splendour. It is the process by which the identity of the individual soul and the Oversoul is established by the Yogi. In other words, the human soul is brought into conscious communion with God. Yoga is the Science of sciences that disentangles the individual soul from the phenomenal world of sense-objects and links with the Absolute, whose inherent attributes

are Infinite Bliss, Supreme Peace, Infinite Knowledge and Unbroken Joy.

Yoga is that state of Absolute Peace wherein there is neither imagination nor thought. Yoga is control of mind and its modifications. Yoga teaches us how to control the modifications of the mind and attain liberation. It teaches us how to transmute the unregenerate nature and attain the state of Divinity. It is the complete suppression of the tendency of the mind to transform itself into objects, thoughts, etc. Yoga kills all sorts of pain, misery and tribulation. It gives you freedom from the round of births and deaths, with its concomitant evils of disease, old age, etc., and bestows upon you all the Divine Powers and final liberation through super-intutional knowledge.

The word Yoga is also applicable in its secondary sense to the factors of Yoga, viz., self-training, study, the different actions and practices that go to make up Yoga as they are conducive to the fulfilment of Yoga and, as such, indirectly lead to emancipation. Union with God is the goal of human life and that ought to become the touchstone of all human endeavours. That is the be-all and end-all of existence.

Equanimity is Yoga. Serenity is Yoga. Skill in actions is Yoga. Control of the senses and the mind is Yoga. Anything by which the best and the highest in life can be attained is also Yoga. Yoga is thus all-embracing, all-inclusive and universal in its application leading to all-round development of body, mind and soul.

THE OBJECT OF YOGA IS TO WEAKEN what are called the five afflictions. The five afflictions are Ignorance, Egoism, Likes, Dislikes and the instinct of self-preservation (or clinging to bodily life). Ignorance is the fertile soil which bears an abundant crop of the rest. On account of ignorance only egoism has manifested. Wherever there is egoism, there invariably exist likes, dislikes and

the rest, side by side. Clinging to bodily life or fear of death is born of likes only. It is nothing but attachment.

Egoism is a specific form of ignorance. The mind gets itself attached wherever there is pleasure. If the mind likes pomegranate, it gets itself attached to this fruit, as it derives pleasure from eating it. The mind runs after things that have been associated with agreeable experiences in the past. This is attachment (like). The mind runs away from objects which have caused pain. This is dislike. These are all the faults of man himself. The world can never hurt you. The five elements are your best teachers. They help you in a variety of ways. The things created by the Lord are all beneficial. It is only the creation of man that brings pain and misery. These five afflictions bind you to the outside objects and reduce you to piteous slavery. These afflictions remain as tendencies even when they are inoperative. These afflictions and tendencies can be attenuated by Yogic discipline.

On account of ignorance you have forgotten your primitive Divine Glory. On account of this evil you are not able to remember your old status of Godhood, your original immortal, blissful, divine nature. Ignorance is the root cause of egoism, likes, dislikes and the rest. These five afflictions are great impediments to Yoga. They stand as stumbling-blocks to the attainment of Self-realisation.

These five afflictions remain in a dormant, attenuated, overpowered or fully developed state. When the husband begins to quarrel with the wife, his love for her becomes dormant and he shows dislike for her for the time being. In a Yogic student these afflictions become thinned out or attenuated by the spiritual force of his Yogic practices. But they do exist in a subtle state. They cannot do any havoc. They are like the cobra whose poisonous fangs have been extracted by the snake-charmer.

The “overpowered state” is that state in which one set of impressions is kept under restraint for some time by another powerful set of impressions; but they manifest again, when the cause of the suppression is removed. In a worldly man with passions and appetites these can be seen operating in fullest swing. But in a fully developed or full-blown Yogi these afflictions and impressions are burnt in toto.

Owing to ignorance you have mistaken the physical body for the Self and this is all the mistake you have committed. But it is a serious mistake indeed. By changing your mental outlook, by purifying your heart and intellect, you can attain Knowledge of Self. Mind, Prana, body and the senses are all instruments only. The real Seer is the Self who is pure, unchanging, eternal, self-luminous, self-existent, self-contained, infinite and immortal. When you begin to identify yourself with this immortal, all-pervading Self, all miseries will come to an end.

Likes and dislikes are the causes for doing good and evil deeds. Good and evil deeds bring pleasure and pain. Thus the round of births and deaths is kept from time immemorial by the six-spoked wheel of Likes, Dislikes, Virtue, Vice, Pleasure and Pain.

The Yogic student should first try to weaken the five afflictions. Three practices are prescribed for this purpose. They are Austerity (Tapas), Study of Scriptures (Svadhya) and Resignation to the Will of the Lord (Isvara-pranidhana). The practitioner should have intense faith in the efficacy of his practices. Then the energy to carry on with the practices will manifest by itself. Then the real memory will dawn. When there is memory, then there is no difficulty in practicing concentration. If there is concentration, discrimination will dawn. That is the reason why Patanjali says: “Samadhi will come through faith, energy, memory, concentration and discrimination.”

Therefore, to get success in concentration, meditation and the practice of Yoga, you must have tremendous patience, tremendous will and tremendous perseverance. Plunge yourself in

concentration. Merge the mind in the one idea of God and God alone. Let the mind fully get absorbed there. Forget other things. Let the whole body, muscles, tissues, nerves, cells and brain be filled with the one idea of God. This is the way to positive success. Great sages and saints of yore have practiced Yoga in this way only. Work hard. You will reach the goal. You will also become a great saint. Whatever one has achieved can be achieved by others also. This is the Law.

### YOGA SADHANA

SADHANA MEANS ANY SPIRITUAL practice that aids the aspirant to realise God. It is a means to attain the goal of life. Without Sadhana, no one can achieve the goal. Sadhana differs according to taste, temperament and capacity.

You can realise the goal of life by four different paths. Just as one and the same coat will not suit Mr. John, Mr. Smith, Mr. Dick and Mr. Williams, so also one path will not suit all people. These four paths lead to the same goal, viz., the attainment of the Ultimate Reality. Roads are different but the destination is the same. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: “Howsoever men approach Me, even so do I reward them, for, the path men take from every side, is Mine, O Partha.” The four paths are: the path of work (Karma-Yoga), the path of devotion or love (Bhakti-Yoga), the path of psychic control (Raja-Yoga) and the path of self-analysis and knowledge (Jnana-Yoga).

These divisions are not hard and fast. There is no line of demarcation between one and another. One path does not exclude the other. For instance Karma-Yoga is suitable for a man of active temperament; Bhakti-Yoga for a man of emotional temperament; Raja-Yoga for a man of mystic temperament; and the path of Jnana-Yoga or Vedanta for a man of will or reason. Each path blends into the other. Ultimately they all converge and become one. Thus it is hard to say where Raja-Yoga ends and Jnana-Yoga begins. All aspirants of different paths meet on a common platform in the long run.

Religion must educate and develop the whole man—his head, heart and hand. Then only there will be perfection. One-sided development is not commendable. The four paths, far from being antagonistic to one another, indicate that the different methods of the Yoga System are in absolute harmony with each other. Karma-Yoga leads to Bhakti-Yoga which in its turn leads to Raja-Yoga. Raja-Yoga brings Jnana. Supreme devotion is Jnana only. Bhakti, it should be borne in mind, is not divorced from Jnana. On the contrary, Jnana intensifies Bhakti. Karma-Yoga removes the tossing of mind, Raja-Yoga steadies the mind and Jnana-Yoga removes the veil of ignorance and brings in the Knowledge of Self. Every Yoga is a fulfilment of the preceding one. Thus Bhakti is the fulfilment of Karma, Raja of Bhakti, and Jnana of all the preceding three.

THE PRACTICE OF KARMA-YOGA PREPARES the aspirant for the reception of knowledge of Self. It moulds him into a proper Adhikari (aspirant) for the study of Vedanta. Ignorant people jump at once to Jnana-Yoga without having any preliminary training in Karma-Yoga. That is the reason why they fail miserably to realise Truth. The impurities still lurk in their minds. The mind is filled with likes and dislikes. They only talk of Brahman or God. They indulge in all sorts of useless discussions, vain debates and dry, endless controversies. Their philosophy is on their lips only. In other words, they are lip-Vedantins. What is really wanted is practical Vedanta through ceaseless selfless service.

Those who follow the path of Karma-Yoga should do work for work's sake, without any motive. Two things are indispensable requisite in the practice of Karma-Yoga. A Karma-Yogi should have extreme non-attachment for the fruits of his works and secondly he should dedicate all his actions at the Altar of God with the feeling of Isvararpana (self-surrender). Non-attachment brings freedom and immortality. Attachment is death. Non-attachment is eternal life. Non-attachment makes a man absolutely fearless. When you thus

consecrate all your actions to the Lord, you will naturally develop devotion towards Him, and the greater the devotion the nearer you are to the Lord. You will slowly begin to feel that God directly works through your body and senses. You will feel no strain in the discharge of your works now. The heavy load you felt previously on account of your false egoism has now vanished out of sight, never to return.

The doctrine of Karma-Yoga forms an integral part of Vedanta. It expounds the riddle of life and the riddle of the universe. It brings solace, satisfaction and happiness to one and all. It is a self-evident truth. Fortunately, even the Westerners have begun to acknowledge its importance and veracity. Every sensible man or woman will have to accept it. "As you sow, so you reap" holds good not only on the physical plane but in the moral world as well. Every thought and every deed of yours generate in you certain tendencies which will affect your life and hereafter. If you do good actions in a selfless spirit, you will naturally soar high to regions of bliss and peace. Karma-Yoga is the lowest rung in the Spiritual Ladder; but it lifts us up to ineffable heights. It destroys pride, selfishness and egoism. It helps growth and evolution.

Every work is a mixture of good and evil. This world of ours is a relative plane. You must therefore strive to do such actions that can bring maximum of good and minimum of evil. If you know the secret of work, the technique of Karma-Yoga, you will be absolutely free from the taint of Karma. That secret is to work without attachment and egoism. The central teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Yoga-Vasishtha* is non-attachment to work. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna:

"O Arjuna, work incessantly. Your duty is to work always. But do not expect fruits. The lot of that man who expects fruits is pitiable. He is the most miserable man in the world."

Generally people have various motives when they work. Some work in society for getting name and fame, some for money, some for getting power and position, and some others for getting enjoyments in heaven. Some build

temples and churches with the idea that their sins will be washed off. Some perform sacrifices for getting children. Some sink wells and tanks so that their names will be remembered even after their death. Some lay out gardens and public parks with the idea that they will enjoy such lovely parks and gardens in heaven. Some do acts of charity with the idea that they will be born in the house of a Henry Ford or a Rockefeller in their next birth.

The greatest service that one can render to another is the imparting of Knowledge of Self. Spiritual help is the highest of all. The root cause for all suffering is ignorance (Avidya) only. Cut the knot of Avidya and drink the sweet Nirvanic Bliss. That sage who tries to remove the ignorance of men is the greatest benefactor in the world. If you remove the hunger of man, it is after all a temporary physical help. It is removal of physical want for three or four hours. Then again the hunger manifests. The man remains in the same miserable state. Thus it is safe to conclude that building of hospitals, poor-houses, dharmasalas or choultries for distribution of free food, clothes, etc. is not the highest kind of help, though they are absolutely necessary. I say this is not the highest kind of help, because I ask: How long can these last? Miseries have to be eradicated once and forever. The world will remain in the same miserable state even if you build millions of hospitals and feeding-places. There is something that can put an end to all these miseries, sufferings, worries and anxieties, and that something is Knowledge of Self.

**B**HAKTI-YOGA IS THE PATH OF DEVOTION or the path of affection that is suitable for people of devotional temperament or in whom the love-element predominates. Ladies are fit for this path, for affection predominates in them. Generally there is an admixture of devotional and intellectual temperaments in all persons. Hence Bhakti-Yoga is suitable for the vast majority of persons. In Bhakti-Yoga the devotee makes absolute and unreserved self-surrender. He depends upon the Lord for everything. He is extremely humble and

meek. He develops devotion to the Lord gradually to a very high degree by repeating the Name of the Lord, studying the Holy Scriptures and practicing the nine modes of devotion. Hearing the Name of the Lord, singing His praises, remembering His presence, serving His Lotus-Feet, worshipping Him, bowing before Him, attending on Him, loving Him as a Friend and surrendering of the self entirely to Him are the nine modes of devotion. The devotee will observe austerities, pray frequently to Him and offer mental worship to Him. He will serve his fellow-men realising that the Lord dwells in the hearts of all. This is the Sadhana for those who wish to tread the path of Yoga of devotion.

Sri Sankara, the great Advaita Jnani, was a great Bhakta of Lord Hari, Hara and Devi. Jnanadeva of Alandi, a great Yogi of late, was a Bhakta of Lord Krishna. Ramakrishna Paramahansa worshipped Kali and got Jnana through Swami Totapuri, his Advaita Guru. Appayya Dikshitacharya, a famous Jnani of South India, author of *Siddhanta Lesha* and other monumental works on Vedanta, was a devotee of Lord Siva.

It behoves, therefore, that Bhakti can be combined with much advantage with Jnana. Bhakti is a means to an end. It gives purity of mind and removes mental oscillation (Vikshepa). Sakama Bhakti (devotion with expectation) brings Svarga (heaven) for the devotee, while Nishkama Bhakti (devotion without expectation) brings purity of mind and Jnana.

A life without love of God is practical death. There is no power greater than love. You can win the hearts of others through love alone. You can conquer your enemies through love alone. You can tame wild animals through love alone. The glory of love is ineffable. Its splendour is indescribable. The power of love is unfathomable.

True religion does not consist in ritualistic observances, baths and pilgrimages but in loving all. Cosmic Love is all-embracing and all-inclusive. In the presence of pure love all distinctions and differences, all hatred, jealousy and egoism are dispelled just as darkness is dispelled by the penetrating rays of the

morning sun. There is no religion higher than Love. There is no knowledge higher than Love. There is no treasure higher than Love, because Love is Truth, Love is God. This world came out of Love; it exists in Love and it will ultimately dissolve in Love. A heart without love is a desert without water. God is an ocean of Love. In every corner of His creation, you can see ample evidence of His unbounded Love for His children.

It is all so easy to talk of Universal Love, but when you come to the practical field, you manifestly show signs of failure. If Mr. John speaks ill of you and uses harsh words, you are thrown out of balance instantaneously. You get irritated, show your angry face and pay him in the same coin. You do not like to part with your possessions when you see people in distress. A man who is struggling to develop Cosmic Love and realise Him through Love cannot keep anything for himself more than he actually needs for keeping his life going peacefully. He will willingly sacrifice even this little to serve a needy person and undergo starvation with much pleasure. He will rejoice that the Lord has given him a wonderful opportunity to serve Him. People generally talk of Universal Love but are very niggardly in action. They show lip-sympathy and lip-love in mere words. This is nothing short of hypocrisy.

Those who talk of Universal Love should endeavour to develop various good qualities. They should serve humanity untiringly day and night with disinterested, selfless spirit for many years. They must be prepared to bear calmly insults and injuries. Then only there is a prospect of developing Cosmic Love. Otherwise it is all vain, flowery talk and idle-gossiping only.

The saints, seers and prophets of the world have spoken of Love as the end and aim of life. Lord Krishna has preached Love through His flute. Lord Buddha was an ocean of Love. He gave up His body to appease the hunger of a tiger's cub. Raja Sibi gave flesh equal to the weight of a pigeon from his own breast to satisfy the appetite of a hawk. Lord Rama lived a life of Love and showed Love in every inch of His activ-

ity. Lord Jesus also preached and practiced Love in the fullest measure.

O dear children of Love! Draw inspiration from their teachings and tread the path of Love. Remember Him. Feel His indwelling presence everywhere. See Him in all faces, in all objects, in all movements, in all feelings, in all sentiments, in all actions. Meditate upon His form with single-minded devotion. Become a peerless devotee of the Lord in this very life, nay in this very second.

**T**HE STUDENT TREADING THE PATH of Raja-Yoga has to ascend the Spiritual Ladder step by step, stage by stage. There are eight limbs in Raja-Yoga, viz., Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. By practicing Yama and Niyama at the outset the student gets ethical training and purification of mind. By developing friendship, mercy and complacency, he destroys hatred, jealousy and harshness of heart and thereby gets peace of mind. By practicing Asana he steadies his posture and gets complete control and mastery over his body. Then he practices Pranayama to remove the tossing of mind and destroy Rajas (passion) and Tamas (inertia). His body becomes light and elastic. By practicing Pratyahara (withdrawal of the Indriyas, or senses, from sensual objects) he gets strength and peace of mind. Now he is fit for concentration which comes of itself. He practices meditation and enters into Samadhi. By the combined practice of concentration, meditation and Samadhi (Yogic Samyama), he gets various Siddhis (powers). By concentration on the senses, egoism, mind, etc., he gets various other powers and experiences. He now sees without eyes, tastes without tongue, hears without ears, smells without a nose and feels without a skin. He can work miracles. He simply wills and everything comes into being.

**T**HOSE WHO FOLLOW THE PATH OF Jnana-Yoga or Vedanta should first acquire the four means of salvation, viz., Viveka, Vairagya, Shat-Sampatti and Mumukshutva. Viveka is discrimination between the Real and the unreal. Vairagya is indifference or dispassion

for sensual objects herein and hereafter. Shat-Sampatti is the sixfold virtue, viz., Sama, (calmness of mind), Dama (restraint of the senses), Uparati (satiety), Titiksha (power of endurance), Sraddha (faith) and Samadhana (one-pointedness of mind). Mumukshutva is intense longing for liberation. Then they should approach a Brahma-Nishtha Guru (one who is established in Brahman or God), who has fully realised the Supreme Self and hear the Scriptures directly from his mouth. Then they should reflect and meditate on what they heard and attain Self-realisation. Now the Jnani exclaims in exuberant joy: "The Atman alone is; One without a second. Atman or the Self is the one Reality. I am Brahman (Aham Brahma Asmi). I am Siva (Sivoham). I am He (Sivoham)." He, the liberated soul, sees the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.

**T**HERE ARE ALSO THREE OTHER forms of Yoga in addition to the four mentioned above. These are Hatha-Yoga, Mantra-Yoga and Laya-Yoga or Kundalini-Yoga. Hatha-Yoga relates to the physical body: Asanas, Bandhas, Mudras, Pranayama, vow of silence, steady-gazing, crystal-gazing, standing on one leg, etc. Hatha-Yoga is not separate from Raja-Yoga. It prepares the student to take up Raja-Yoga. Hatha-Yoga and Raja-Yoga are, therefore, the necessary counterparts of each other. No one can become a Yogi of a perfect order without a clear knowledge of the practice of the two Yogas. Raja-Yoga begins where properly practiced Hatha-Yoga ends. A Hatha-Yogi starts his Sadhana with his body and Prana (breath); a Raja-Yogi with his mind. A Hatha-Yogi gets different powers when the mighty Kundalini-Sakti reaches the Sahasrara Chakra (at the top of the head); a Raja-Yogi gets psychic powers by the combined practice of concentration, meditation and Samadhi at one and the same time.

Mantra-Yoga relates to the recitation of certain Mantras (sacred words to which definite powers are ascribed), such as Om Namo Narayana, Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya and Om Namah Sivaya. Laya-Yoga is Kundalini-Yoga.

Concentration on the sound emanating from the heart-lotus is Laya-Yoga. Laya is dissolution. The mind is dissolved in God just as a lump of ice is dissolved in a tumbler of soda-water.

A Jnana-Yogi can practice his Sadhana even while walking, eating and talking. He is not in need of any Asana or room. But a Raja-Yogi wants a room and an Asana for his practice. A Jnana-Yogi is always in Samadhi. He is not affected by Maya or illusion. There is no 'in Samadhi' and 'out of Samadhi' for a Jnani, whereas a Yogi is affected by Maya when he comes down from his Samadhi. A Raja-Yogi plugs his mind, as it were, through effort, just as you plug a bottle with a cork, and thus stops all mental activities. He tries to make the mind quite blank. He remains as a silent witness of all the activities of his mind and intellect. A Raja-Yogi commences his practice with his mind. A Jnana-Yogi starts his practices with his will and reason. A Karma-Yogi does selfless service to kill his little self. A Bhakta or devotee of the Lord practices self-surrender to annihilate his egoism. A Jnani practices self-denial. The methods are different but all want to destroy this self-arrogating little "I," the root cause of bondage and suffering. Karma-Yoga prepares the mind for the reception of Light and Knowledge. It expands the heart ad infinitum. It breaks all barriers that stand in the way of unity and oneness. Bhakti and meditation are also mental Karmas. There can be no Jnana without Yoga. The fruit of Bhakti is Jnana. Have you now understood the nature of the four Yogas and their interrelations?

There is a verse in Sanskrit the gist of which runs as follows: "The Sastras are endless; there is much to be known; time is short; obstacles are many; that which is the essence should be grasped just as the swan does in the case of milk mixed with water." I therefore want you to start doing some kind of spiritual practice or other and realise the goal of life and justify your existence before the Lord on the "Day of Judgment."

## YOGIC DISCIPLINE

YOGA IS ROOTED IN VIRTUE. ETHICAL discipline is very necessary for success in Yoga. Ethical discipline is the practice of right conduct in life. The two moral back-bones of Yoga are Yama and Niyama, which the aspirant must practice in his daily life. These correspond roughly to the ten commandments of Lord Jesus or to the noble eightfold path of Lord Buddha. Non-injuring (Ahimsa), truthfulness (Satyam), non-stealing (Asteya), continence (Brahmacharya) and non-covetousness (Aparigraha) are the component parts of Yama. Internal and external purification (Saucha), contentment (Santosha), austerity (Tapas), study of religious and philosophical books (Svadhya) and self-surrender to the Lord (Isvara-Pranidhana) come under Niyama. Practice of Yama and Niyama will eradicate all the impurities of the mind. In fact, Yama and Niyama form the cornerstones of Yoga philosophy.

Pre-eminence is given to abstinence from injuring any living creature (Ahimsa) amongst all other virtues. There must be non-injuring in thought, word and deed. Non-injuring is placed first because it is the source of the following nine. The practice of universal love or brotherhood is nothing but the practice of non-injuring. He who practices non-injuring will get quick success in Yoga. The practitioner must abandon even harsh words and unkind looks. He must show goodwill and friendliness to one and all. He must respect life. He must remember that one common Self dwells in the hearts of all beings.

Truthfulness (Satyam) comes next in order. Thought must agree with word, and word with action. This is truthfulness. These virtues are attainable only by the unselfish. Truth can hardly arise unless there is pure motive behind all actions. The word of the Yogi must be a blessing to others.

Then comes non-stealing (Asteya). You must be satisfied with what you get by honest means. The Law of Karma is inexorable. You will have to suffer for every wrong action of yours. Action and reaction are equal and opposite. Amassing wealth is really theft. The whole

wealth of all the three worlds belongs to the Lord. You are only a caretaker of his wealth. You must willingly share what you have with all and spend it in charity.

The fourth virtue is the practice of celibacy. That portion of human energy which is expressed in sexual union when controlled, becomes transmuted into a form of special spiritual energy called Ojas-Sakti and this is stored up in the brain. If you practice Yoga and at the same time lead an impure, voluptuous and immoderate life, how can you expect progress in Yoga? All great spiritual giants of the world have practiced celibacy and that is the reason why they were able to thrill and electrify the whole world through the power of the special spiritual energy they had stored up in their brains. A Yogi with an abundance of this energy keeps his audience spell-bound, as it were, and sways them even as a monarch sways his dominions. There is a peculiar charm in his smile and power in the words emanating from his heart. He produces a very profound impression in the minds of all with whom he comes in contact.

Brahmacharya is the basis of acquiring immortality. Brahmacharya brings material progress and psychic advancement. Brahmacharya is the substratum for a life in the Atman. It is a potent weapon for waging a relentless war against the internal monsters—passion, greed, anger, miserliness, hypocrisy, etc. It contributes to perennial joy and uninterrupted, undecaying bliss. It gives tremendous energy, clear brain, gigantic will-power, bold understanding, retentive memory and good power of enquiry (Vichara-Sakti). It is through Brahmacharya and Brahmacharya alone that you can have physical, mental, moral and spiritual advancement.

What is wanted is restraint and not suppression of sexual desire. In restraint no sexual thought will arise in the mind. There is perfect sublimation of sex-energy. But in suppression the aspirant is not safe. There are sexual thoughts. When favourable opportunities occur, the repressed desire manifests with redoubled force and vengeance, and there is the danger of a miserable downfall. One should be very careful.

After Dhanvantari had taught all the secrets of the Ayurveda system of medicine to his disciples, they enquired the key-note of this science. The master replied: "I tell you that Brahmacharya is truly a precious jewel; it is the one most effective medicine, nectar indeed, which destroys disease, decay and death. For attaining peace, brightness, memory, knowledge, health and Self-realisation, one should observe Brahmacharya which is the highest duty. Brahmacharya is the highest knowledge; Brahmacharya is the greatest strength. Of the nature of Brahmacharya is verily this Atman, and in Brahmacharya It resides. Saluting Brahmacharya first, the cases beyond cure I cure. Aye, Brahmacharya can undo all the inauspicious signs."

WHAT IS WANTED IS DEEP INNER life. Silence the bubbling thoughts. Keep the mind cool and calm. Open yourself to higher spiritual consciousness. Feel the Divine Presence and Divine Guidance. Fix your mind at the Lotus-Foot of the Lord. Become like a child. Speak to Him freely. Become absolutely candid. Do not hide your thoughts. You cannot do so, because He is the Inner Ruler (Antaryamin). He watches all your thoughts. Pray for Mercy, Light, Purity, Strength, Peace and Knowledge. You will surely get them. You will be established in Brahmacharya.

A Yogic student should abstain from greed. He should not receive luxurious presents from anybody. Gifts affect the mind of the receiver. These five virtues must be practiced in thought, word and deed, for they are not merely restraints but change the character of the practitioner, implying inward purity and strength. Besides these, the would-be Yogi should also practice certain other active virtues such as cleanliness of body and mind, contentment, austerity, study of religious and philosophical books and self-surrender to God. Contentment does not mean satisfaction, but willingness to accept things as they are and to make the best of them. Austerities like occasional fasting and observance of silence increase the power of endurance. Self-surrender is the regarding of every work as that of the Supreme Lord and

renouncing all claims to its fruits. Study of religious books fills the mind with piety and purity. Such a rigorous ethical discipline brings a sense of freedom and moral elevation. When you are sufficiently advanced in the above practices, you can face every temptation by calling in the aid of pure and restraining thoughts.

Two things are necessary for attaining success in mind-control, viz., practice (Abhyasa) and dispassion (Vairagya).

You must try your extremest level best to be free from any desire for any pleasure, seen or unseen, and this dispassion can be attained through constant perception of evil in them. Dispassion is renunciation of attainment. It is aversion to sensual enjoyments herein and hereafter. The dispassion or detachment is of two kinds, the lower and the higher. Vijnana Bhikshu distinguishes the inferior and superior types of Vairagya in the following way: "The former is a distaste for the good things of life, here or hereafter, due to the experience that they cannot be acquired or preserved without trouble while their loss causes pain and that the quest is never free from egoistic feelings. The latter, however, is based on a clear perception of the difference between intelligence and the objects that appear in its light."

There are various stages in dispassion. The determination to refrain from enjoying all sorts of sensual objects is the first stage. In the second stage certain objects lose their charm for the spiritual aspirant and he attempts to destroy the attraction for others also. In the third stage the senses are controlled, but a vague longing for the sensual enjoyment remains in the mind. In the fourth, the aspirant loses completely all interest whatsoever in the external objects. The final stage is a state of highest desirelessness. It is this kind of dispassion that bestows Absolute Independence on the Yogi. In this stage the Yogi renounces all kinds of psychic powers, even such as Omniscience, etc.

It is by practice and dispassion that the passage of thought towards external objects can be checked. Mere indifference will not serve the purpose. Practice is also necessary. Remembering God al-

ways is also practice. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna with reference to this practice of controlling the mind: "Abandoning without reserve all desires born of the imagination by the mind, curbing in the aggregate of the senses on every side, little by little let him gain tranquillity by means of Reason controlled by steadiness; having made the mind abide in the Self, let him not think of anything. As often as the wavering and unsteady mind goeth forth, so often reining it in, let him bring it under control of the Self." (*Bhagavad-Gita*: VI-21, 25, 26).

Sound and other objects make the mind wander away. Mind is drawn towards external objects by the force of desire. By convincing oneself of the illusoriness of sense-objects through an investigation into their nature and by cultivating indifference to worldly objects, the mind can be restrained and brought back to finally abide in the Self. In virtue of this practice of Yoga, the Yogi's mind attains peace in the Self. Practice consists of constantly repeating the same idea or thought regarding any object. By constant reflection and exercise of will-power, suggestions should be given to the sub-conscious mind not to look for enjoyment in the changing world without, but in the changeless within. You should exercise great vigilance to get hold of opportunities when the mind dwells on sense-objects, and then suggest to it new meanings and interpretations and make it change its attitude towards them with a view to its ultimate withdrawal therefrom. This is called practice.

The chief characteristic of the mind in the waking state is to have some object before it to dwell upon. It can never remain blank. It can concentrate on one object at a time. It constantly changes its objects and so it is restless. It is impetuous, strong and difficult to bend. It is as hard to curb as the wind. That is the reason why Patanjali Maharshi says that the practice must be steady and continuous and it must stretch over a considerable period and be undertaken with a perfect faith in its regenerating and uplifting powers. You must not show any slackening symptoms at any stage of practice.

Restraint does not come in a day, but by long and continued practice with zeal and enthusiasm. The progress in Yoga can only be gradual. Many people give up the practice of concentration after some time, when they do not see any tangible prospect of getting psychic powers. They become impatient. They do little and expect much. This is bad. Doing any kind of practice by fits and starts will not bring the desired fruit. Direct experience is the goal of life. Though the effort or practice is painful in the beginning, yet it brings Supreme Joy in the end. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: "Supreme joy is for this Yogi, whose mind is peaceful, whose passionate nature is controlled, who is sinless, and of the nature of the eternal." (*Bhagavad-Gita*: Ch. VI-27).

Control your senses. Calm your mind. Still the bubbling thoughts. Fix the mind in the lotus of the heart. Concentrate. Meditate. Realise Him intuitively this very second and enjoy the Bliss of the Self.

Have firm and unshakable faith in the existence of God, the supreme, undying, intelligent Principle or Essence or Substance who exists in the three periods of time—past, present and future. He has neither beginning, middle nor end. He is Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute and Bliss Absolute).

**O**IGNORANT MAN! WHY DO YOU vainly search for happiness in the perishable external objects of the world, conditioned in time, space and causation? You have no peace of mind. Your desires are never fully gratified. You may amass boundless wealth, beget beautiful babies, earn titles, honours, name, fame, power, publicity and all you want, and yet your mind is restless. You have no real, abiding happiness. You feel you still want something. You have no feeling of fullness. Never, therefore, forget from this moment onwards that this feeling of fullness or eternal satisfaction can be obtained only in God by realising Him through constant practice of self-control, purity, concentration, meditation and practice of Yoga.

There is restlessness everywhere. Self-

ishness, greed, jealousy and lust are playing unimaginable havoc in every heart. Fights, skirmishes and petty quarrels are polluting the atmosphere of the world and creating discord, disharmony and unrest. The bugle is blown and the armies march to the battlefield to destroy their enemies. One nation wages war against another nation for acquiring more dominions and power. Side by side with these bloody wars, peace-movement is also working for bringing harmony and peace, for eradicating dire ignorance, the root cause of all human sufferings and for disseminating Divine Knowledge.

The greatest need of the world today is the message of love. Kindle the light of love in your own heart first. Love all. Include all creatures in the warm embrace of your love. Nations can be united by pure love only. World wars can be put to an end to by pure love only. The League of Nations cannot do much. Love is a mysterious divine glue that unites the hearts of all. It is a magical healing balm of very high potency. Charge every action with pure love. Kill cunningness, greed, crookedness and selfishness. It is extremely cruel to take away the lives of others by using poisonous gas. This is a capital crime. The scientist who manufactures the gas in the laboratory cannot escape without being punished for this crime by the great Lord. Forget not the Day of Judgement. What will you say unto the Lord, O ye mortals, who run after power, dominions and wealth? Have a clean conscience and pure love. You will verily enter into the Kingdom of God.

How mysterious is the universe! How mysterious are the silent workings of the unseen Power, who prompts passionate people to wage wars on the one side and pious people to disseminate Divine Knowledge on the other and bring peace and happiness to the suffering humanity at large!

Desire is the real enemy of peace. Restlessness is fed by desire just as fire is fed by oil. In the *Yoga Vasishtha* you will find Sage Vasishtha saying to his royal disciple Rama: "O best of intellects! the obliteration of latent desire, Gnosis and the dissolution of the mind, if attempt-

ed simultaneously for a sufficient length of time, bestow the desired fruit." Lord Krishna also says to his royal disciple Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra: "It is desire, it is wrath, begotten by the quality of mobility; all-consuming, all-polluting, know thou this as our foe here on earth. As a flame is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an embryo by the amnion, so is wisdom enveloped by it. Enveloped is wisdom by this constant enemy in the form of desire which is insatiable as a flame. Mastering first the senses, slay thou, O mighty armed, the enemy in the form of desire, destructive of wisdom and knowledge."

Swami Vidyaranya Sarasvati, the reputed author of *Panchadasi* and *Jivanmukti-Viveka* says: "So long as these three (obliteration of latent desire, Gnosis and the dissolution of the mind) are not well attempted repeatedly, the state of Jivanmukti (liberation in this life) cannot be realised, even after the lapse of hundreds of years." When the mind is dissolved and there is no sensation of any external cause which can fully rouse mental impressions, latent desire fades away. When latent desire fades away, and there remains no cause for that functioning of the mind which we call lust, anger, etc., the mind is also dissolved. When the mind is annihilated, Gnosis will arise.

The Hindu Scriptures maintain: Mind alone is, to man, the cause of bondage or liberation; lost in enjoyment, it leads to bondage; freed from the objective, it leads to liberation. As mind freed from the objective leads to liberation, one desirous of liberation or success in the path of Yoga must always try to wipe off the objective from the plane of his mind. When the mind severed from all connections with sensual objects and confined to the light of the heart, finds itself in Ecstasy, it is said to have reached its culminating point. The mind should be prevented from functioning, till its dissolution is attained in the heart; this is Gnosis; this is concentration; the rest is all mere logomachy.

Desire may be described as the hankering for things, which gains such mastery over the mind as to preclude even enquiring into their antecedents and

consequences. Man at once becomes that which he identifies himself with, by force of strong and deep attachment and loses memory of everything else in the act. The man, thus subdued by desire, fixing his eye on everything and anything, is deluded into believing it is the real thing. Due to loss of control man perceives everything with beclouded eyes in this deluded fashion, like one under the influence of a strong intoxicant.

**A**S YOU THINK, SO YOU BECOME. Think you are a High Court judge, High Court judge you will become. Think you are the monarch of the whole world, monarch of the whole world you will become. Think you are a great teacher, teacher you will become. Think you are poor and weak, poor and weak you will become. Think you are a multi-millionaire, multi-millionaire you will become. Think you are a Yogi, Yogi you will become. Think you are a saint of spotless character, saint of spotless character you will become. Think you are God or Atman or Brahman, God or Atman or Brahman you will become. The whole universe is governed by this wonderful Law of Nature.

Always think rightly and act rightly. Never try to seize the possessions of others. Never envy your neighbours. Entertain noble and sublime thoughts. Have supreme self-confidence and courage. Whatever you do, do it with a will to succeed. You will, by all means, succeed in all your endeavours. Success is yours. You will know of no failures. This is the Sovereign secret. Meditate upon this Secret daily in the morning for some time and enjoy the Bliss of the Self.

In the *Vishnupurana* you will find: "If the deluded fool loves the body, a mere collection of flesh, blood, pus, faeces, urine, muscles, fat and bones, he will verily love hell itself! To him who is not disgusted with the nasty smell from his own body, what other argument need be adduced for detachment?"

It is a well-known fact that enjoyment cannot bring you satisfaction of desire. On the contrary, it aggravates desire and makes man more restless. The root cause of all human sufferings and miseries is

the craving for worldly enjoyments. The more you hanker after these sensual enjoyments, the more unhappy do you become. The desires also grow when they are not fulfilled. You can never be happy as long as the craving for enjoyments exists.

Desire is born of ignorance (Avidya). Attachment, longing and preference are the constituents of desire. Do not endeavour to fulfil desires. Try to reduce your desires, as best as you can. Withdraw the fuel of gratification. Then the fire of desire will get extinguished by itself. Just as a gheeless lamp dies out, when the ghee is withdrawn, even so the fire of desire will die when the fuel of gratification is withdrawn. If attachment is eradicated, then longing and preference for objects will die by themselves.

Man commits various kinds of sins and injures others when he exerts to get the desired objects. He has to reap the fruits of his actions; hence he is brought again and again into this round of births and deaths. If you increase one object in the list of your possessions or wants, the desire also increases ten times. The more worldly objects you possess, the more distant you are from God. Your mind will always be thinking and planning as to how to get and guard the objects, how to earn tons of money and keep them safe. If the acquired objects are lost, your mind is completely upset.

Cares, worries, anxieties and all sorts of mental torments increase with the objects. No doubt, it is painful to earn money. It is more painful to keep the money that is earned. It is still more painful if the money gets reduced. And it is extremely painful if the whole money is lost. Money is the abode of all sorts of pain. That is the reason why in India a Sadhu or a Sannyasin does not possess anything. In his grand vision, he does not possess his body also. He constantly asserts. "The body is not mine; I am not body." A real Sannyasin is one who feels: "I am bodiless." These Sannyasins lead a life of perfect dispassion and ruthless renunciation. Renunciation brings in its train supreme Peace.

It is very difficult to become absolutely desireless. A liberated sage or a full-blown Yogi alone is entirely free from the taint of desires, for he has complete-

ly annihilated his mind and is enjoying the supreme Bliss of the Self within. How can desires arise in him who is plunged in the ocean of Divine Bliss?

**A**NEOPHYTE IN THE SPIRITUAL PATH should entertain noble desires. He should do virtuous actions. He should develop intense longing for liberation. In order to achieve this end, he should study the Holy Scriptures regularly and systematically. He should betake himself to the company of the wise. He should practice right conduct, right thinking, right speaking and right acting. He should practice regular meditation. By and by, all old vicious desires and sensual cravings and evil propensities will vanish. Hey Saumya! Lead a life of perfect contentment. Contentment is the bliss of life. The cold ambrosial waters of contentment will quickly extinguish the fire of desires. Contentment is the chief sentinel who keeps watch over the domain of Peace or the Kingdom of God.

The old subdued desires recur, persist and resist. They assert: "O ungrateful man! You gave me shelter in your mind all along. You enjoyed various objects of the world through me only. If there is no desire for food and drink, how can you enjoy food and drink? If there is no desire for sexual union, how can you enjoy sex? Why are you so cruel towards me now? I have every right to dwell in this abode of your mind. Do whatever you like." But you should not be discouraged even a bit by these threats. All desires will be thinned out gradually by meditation and Yoga. They will eventually perish in toto beyond resurrection.

A strong mind has influence over a weak mind. Mind has influence over the physical body. Mind acts upon matter. Mind brings bondage. Mind gives you liberation. Mind is the devil. Mind is your best friend. Mind is your Guru (Spiritual Preceptor). You will have to tame your mind. You will have to discipline your mind. You will have to control your mind. This is all you have to do.

Study your feelings and emotions. Analyse them. Dissect them. Do not identify yourself with these feelings and emotions. Separate yourself from these

feelings and emotions. Stand as a silent witness. Identification with these feelings and emotions is the cause of bondage and misery.

Anger is a modification of desire in the mind. There is no modification in the Self, the real “I” or Atman. A worldly man identifies himself with anger and so he becomes miserable. This is ignorance only. The body and the mind are your instruments for growth and evolution. Identify yourself with the big, infinite “I” by utilising these two instruments and become a master of your mind and body. You are the driver of this engine—body and mind. Assert your birthright and become free, my child. Understand the trick of this mischievous mind. It has played with you long enough. Attain complete mastery over it. You can do this easily by the practice of Yoga.

Watch and chop and clip the thoughts as soon as they arise from the mind. Kill them dead on the spot. If you find it difficult to do this, become indifferent. Do not mind them. Allow them to take their own shape. They will soon die by themselves. Or, sometimes you can chop the thoughts and when you get tired of doing so, you can adopt the method of remaining indifferent. The latter method is more easy. If you tie a monkey to a post, it becomes more turbulent; if you allow it to move about at its own will and pleasure, it is not so very turbulent. Even so, when you try to fix the mind at a point, it becomes more turbulent. Therefore various kinds of evil thoughts enter into the minds of neophytes at the time of concentration. But they need not be unnecessarily alarmed. If you find it difficult to focus the mind at one point, allow it to jump a while like a monkey. Do not wrestle with the mind. It will soon get exhausted and will then be waiting to obey your behests. Now you can tackle it easily.

Free yourself from the tyranny of the mind. It has tormented you mercilessly for so long a time. You have allowed it to indulge in sensual pleasures and have its own ways. Now is the time to curb it just as you would curb a wild horse. Be patient and persevering. Practise daily thoughtlessness or inhibition of

thoughts. The task may be difficult in the beginning. It will be indeed disgusting and tiring, but the reward is great. You will reap Immortality, Supreme Joy, Eternal Peace and Infinite Bliss. Therefore practice diligently in right earnest. It is worth doing. Be on the alert. If you are sincere in your wish and strong in your resolve, nothing is impossible under the sun to accomplish. Nothing can stand in your way. If you fail in your attempt, do not be discouraged. Remember the thrilling story of the dreadful fight between Hercules and the prodigious giant. In the course of his journey in quest of adventures, Hercules encountered a monster, who was so wonderfully contrived by nature that every time he touched the earth, he became ten times as strong as before. By remembering this incident you will get inner strength and courage. You are bound to succeed.

Realise that you are neither body nor mind, that you were never born nor will you ever die, that you are invincible, that nothing in this world can hurt you, that you are the Sun around whom the whole universe revolves. The whole knowledge is treasured up within the chambers of your heart. Procure the key and unlock the doors of Knowledge. Yoga is the Key. You will attain unruffled peace, marvellous self-control and tremendous will-power.

**B**EHOLD! THERE ON THE BANKS OF the holy Ganga at Rishikesh, Himalayas, a Sage, a Paramahansa Sannyasin of eighty summers, with lustrous eyes, serene face, magnetic personality, bright complexion, sits with a loin-cloth only. There is a small grass-hut beside him underneath a tree. Inside the hut you will find a small wooden bowl (Kamandalu) for keeping water and an ordinary stick. This is all his personal effect. He is always sitting there in a contemplative mood. He never talks, nor laughs, but occasionally nods his round, shapely head and smiles gently. He never stirs from the place. He is unaffected by the heat of the summer sun or the biting cold of the winter. He never uses blankets, no, not even in winter. What a wonderful power of endurance! He lives

on some milk and fruits only. His heart is filled with purity, mercy, compassion, sympathy and love! People from various parts of the country flock to him in hundreds and thousands in season and out of season with flowers and fruits in their hands, prostrate at his Holy Feet, worship him with their offerings and leave the place with his ready blessings. He never talks, but all doubts are cleared in his mere presence. People forget the world, their families, their children. They bathe in his magnetic aura. Such is the benign influence of a liberated sage who is verily a beacon-light to the world at large.

Now here is a man living in the busiest part of a metropolis. He earns a fat salary. He spends half of his earnings in gambling and in drinking. The other half goes to cinema and prostitutes. He eats fish, meat and smokes heavily. He runs into debts every month and finds it hard to make both ends meet. He dislikes sages and saints. He has no faith in God or in scriptures. He is very cruel-hearted. He attends ballrooms and theatres, goes to bed at 2 a.m. and gets up at 9 a.m. He wears a care-worn face even though he appears in costly silken finery. He is always gloomy and depressed. His heart is filled with lust, anger, greed, vanity, hypocrisy and egoism. Compare for a moment the life of this man with that of the magnanimous Sage of the Himalayas! They are poles asunder. The one is a God-man, the other is a brute man. But if the brute-man seeks the company of the God-man, he will surely give up his old dirty habits. Just as iron is transmuted into gold by the touch of the philosopher’s stone, so also the brute-man will be radically changed into a veritable saint by and by through constant contact with a developed Yogi.

Good friend! Slay this serpent of ignorance mercilessly. Get Knowledge of Self: This will give you Freedom or Liberation. Ignorance is your deadliest enemy. He has plundered the Jewel of Wisdom for long ages. Rise above temptations of this little world. This world is a show for five minutes directed by the juggler Maya, or mind. Beware. Do not get yourself entrapped. Money, sex, power, name, fame—these are the live tempting baits of Maya. Those

who have not fallen victims to these illusory baits will surely reach the other shore of immortality and fearlessness—the shore beyond darkness where there is perennial joy and eternal sunshine. Reach this shore through indefatigable struggle, rigid discipline and rigorous practice of Yoga.

From the condition of your mind, from your feelings and conduct, you can very well understand the nature of your actions in your previous lives and can nullify or counteract the effects of evil actions by doing good actions, Tapas, discipline and meditation. Try to lead a life of non-attachment. Discipline your mind carefully. No one is free from pains, diseases, troubles, difficulties. You will have to rest in your divine nature. Then alone you will draw strength to face the difficulties of life. Then only you will have a balanced mind. Then only you will not be affected by external morbid influences and discordant vibrations. Regular meditation in the morning will give you new strength and inner life of joy and bliss. Practice meditation. Feel this joy and bliss despite your stormy conditions and adverse circumstances. Gradually you will grow spiritually. You will attain Self-realisation.

Abandon this eat-drink-and-be-merry policy. Look always upwards and onwards. Have an ideal before you. Live up to it at any cost. You can become as great as anyone else. Give up this inferiority complex. Give up the superiority complex also. The idea of inferiority and superiority is born of ignorance. Inferiority complex will cause worry. Superiority complex will generate pride and vanity. Put up the switch of the eternal Light in the innermost chambers of your heart. Keep the Divine Flame burning steadily. Feed it regularly. Throw your whole heart and soul into spiritual practices. Waste not even a single minute. Be persistent and methodical in your Sadhana. Marshal up all your forces properly and powerfully even as the Lieutenant-General in the army marshals up his armies on the battlefield. All miseries will melt away soon. You will shine as a glorious Jivanmukta with the highest realisation. All sense of separateness, distinction, duality, difference

will vanish out of sight. You will feel oneness and unity everywhere. You will feel that there is nothing but Brahman or God. What a magnanimous vision you are blessed with! What an exalted state, what a sublime, soul-stirring and stupendous experience will be yours! You will get dumbfounded. This state is indescribable. You must experience it by direct intuitive perception.

**I**NTROSPECT DAILY IN THE MORNING and examine the various nooks and corners of your heart. The mind is very diplomatic and cunning. The ego will keep several desires for secret gratification. Many desires will be lurking in your mind. It is very hard to detect their presence. Aspirants who are puffed up with their scholarly erudition and some powers (Siddhis) cannot trace the existence of these under currents of desires in their minds. They pose themselves as great Yogins, deliver lectures in various parts of the world, build Ashrams and make disciples. Nevertheless, it should be admitted, their speeches do not produce any deep impression in the minds of the hearers. These speeches are like empty bullets.

The secret desires attack the student of Yoga mercilessly, whenever a suitable opportunity presents itself, and destroy all his noble qualities and sublime ideals. They pounce upon the student of Yoga with a vengeance and redoubled vigour and bring a hopeless downfall that has no parallel. Those who have a pure, subtle intellect, who remember God always, who thirst for communion with Him, who practice daily introspection, self-analysis and meditation will be able to detect the presence of lurking desires, not others. He who has abandoned all desires, who is free from all yearnings, attains everlasting Peace. He enjoys the supremest Happiness. The fewer the desires, the greater the happiness. That desireless Yogi who roams about in the world with a loin-cloth and a blanket only is the happiest man in all the three worlds.

Selfishness is a negative attribute of the lower mind. It is a modification of desire that arises in a mind filled with passion. It is the first-born child of ig-

norance or indiscrimination. It is the greatest obstacle to the practice of Yoga. It is the bane of life. It contracts the heart ad infinitum and intensifies the idea of separateness from others. Selfishness goes hand in hand with egoism, hypocrisy, vanity, miserliness, cunningness, dishonesty and pride.

How to eradicate this selfishness? The answer is simple enough. Selfless service in some form or another, cultivation of the opposite virtuous qualities, viz., nobility, magnanimity, disinterestedness, integrity, generosity, charitable nature, mercy and universal love—all these will go a long way in the eradication of this dire malady, the deadly foe of peace and Yoga. Positive overpowers the negative. This is an infallible dictum in Yoga.

**T**O SUM UP THE FUNDAMENTAL REQUISITES for the practice of Yoga: You should have absolute fearlessness, regard for every creature that breathes, respect for truth, continence, absence of greed, a life of contentment, austerity, absence of anger and hypocrisy. Moral excellence is not the final goal of life but is only the means to that end. When the Yogi is established in these virtues, he gets some powers such as effectiveness of speech, arrival of unsought wealth, vigour of body and mind, clear and lucid undertaking of life’s events, clarity of thought, steadiness of attention, control of the senses, immense joy and intuition. Beloved Immortal Self! Observe vow of silence. Keep the mind fully occupied. Sit on your favourite Asana and do regular meditation. Sing the Name of the Lord. Twirl the beads. Study the Scriptures. Practice celibacy or be very, very moderate in sexual acts. Take almonds every morning. Do not consult doctors. Do not think of your disease. Divert the mind from the body. Be cheerful always. Smile, whistle, laugh, dance in joy and ecstasy.

Think of God and meditate upon Him with true devotion and feeling and merge in Him. This is the goal of life. You have attained it after a long and continued struggle for some years with zeal and enthusiasm. You have now become a Jivanmukta (living liberated soul). Hail, hail to thee, a thousand hails, my child. ❀

# MEETING PADMANABHA

JAIDEV DASGUPTA PH.D.

A FEW MONTHS BACK, I TRAVELED through parts of the state of Kerala in India. The last stop in the trip was Kovalam beach. A mere twenty minutes' drive away from Kovalam, in Trivandrum or Thiruvanthapuram, was the much revered, famous, and ancient Temple of Padmanabha. In recent years, the temple has attracted a lot of attention because of the enormous amount of hidden treasure worth tens of billions of dollars in gold, silver and diamonds found in its six secret vaults. It is now considered perhaps the richest temple in India. Until the Supreme Court of India took the initiative to have them opened, mystery was shrouding these vaults.

There is yet another mystery around this temple—about its origin, which is lost in antiquity. There are no reliable historical records to establish the date of the building of the temple. Some speculate the temple to be as old as 5,000 years.<sup>1</sup> Based on mention of the temple in the Sangam Period of literature (from the fifth century BCE to 3rd century CE), it is considered to be at least as old as that period, if not older.<sup>2,3</sup> Certain Puranas—ancient Hindu texts that appeared in written form between the third to tenth or maybe twelfth centuries CE<sup>4</sup>—are also believed to mention this temple. The story of the temple becomes even more mysterious as its origin is also tied to two separate but similar tales of god Vishnu presenting himself to two of his devotees, Divakara Muni and Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar.

Oblivious to its past and present mysteries, I had added the temple to my itinerary because I was advised that

it was worth visiting. Little did I know that before meeting Padmanabha I had to deal with mundane reality and a few personal challenges. Just outside, before approaching the temple, I was told that one cannot wear his or her usual clothes inside the temple. Men have to wear a dhoti in a lungee fashion, and women, unless they are in Indian Sari, have to either wrap a dhoti around their clothes, if wearing Indian dresses, or change into a dhoti and cover the upper part of the body with a piece of white cloth.

Accordingly, I had to engage in business transactions before entering the temple. After buying and changing into a dhoti, I had to pay a fee to the cloak room to deposit my clothes along with any other belongings I had on myself, including wallet, cell phone, etc. This commerce before entering the temple was so disturbing and repellent to me that I decided not to go in. Somehow, the idea of mixing business with religion or spirituality did not sit well in my mind. But my wife was ready to go. Paulose, our driver and quasi-guide on the trip, a wonderful person with whom I had the opportunity to spend about ten days traveling, told me, "Sir, go see your God. Otherwise, after a long trip to this place you will regret that you did not see Him." These words had a metaphorical ring to them. I decided to follow his advice. Paulose even stood in line to buy me a dhoti, advised me on which cloak room to use, and carried our cell phones and umbrella while we were inside the temple. He also shared a bit of interesting trivia, perhaps to lighten my mood,

that the Hindus and the Christians in Kerala wrapped lungee from the right side while the Muslims did it from the left; an interesting way of introducing, asserting, and displaying one's identity, I mused.

The heat outside the temple was already unbearable at 10:30 in the morning in the month of January. But once inside the temple, both the outer heat from the sun and the inner fire caused by my lingering anger for being forced to commerce and conform, vanished!

THE TEMPLE IS A MASSIVE STRUCTURE built of stone. Despite the heat outside, the stone floor and the long corridors of the temple were cool. Tall, thick, flat stone columns on both sides of the corridors support the ceiling made of slabs of rock. Each column has engravings of many celestial and human figures.

My next challenge, inside the temple, was to stand in line for darshan, or the sight, of Sri Padmanabha. Somehow, in India, when we stand in a line, we take a vow of not following two rules: one, stand in a single file, and two, do not push the person in front of you. We believe that by pushing people ahead of us, we reach our goal faster—and so we push! But I have a distinct dislike for bodily contact with people, especially strangers. I feel kind of claustrophobic.

Interestingly, the temple management has found a nice solution for such problems. For a small donation or fee (Rs. 150 to 180) one can cut short the line. But, as the Lord would have it, the short and long lines merge before reach-



ing the viewing windows. At this point, men, women, young and old, forget their differences and flow in a stream for a short glimpse (priests continuously shouting "Chalo, chalo!" "Move! Move forward!") of the much-praised idol of Padmanabha. And this glimpse is worth all the trouble!

**B**UT WHO IS PADMANABHA? FOR THE glimpses of whom millions of tourists and devotees are drawn to this temple, year after year?

Padmanabha is one of the thousand names of the Hindu god Vishnu. It is a descriptive name which means "The one from whose naval (*nabha* or *nabhi*) arises the lotus (*padma*)."<sup>1</sup> The Padma is the source from which creation proceeds. This is an ancient Indian creation myth, and anyone familiar with the story can see the whole myth articulated in a most aesthetic manner in this beautiful image of Padmanabha, the supine figure of Vishnu in deep yogic sleep (*Yoga-nidra*). For believers, it's a highly moving sight, an emotional event. To experience it, they do not mind traveling long distances, waiting in long lines under the hot sun, and being squeezed and pushed forward.

The full figure of the reposing Vishnu isn't visible. Three narrow windows provide three sights: the first shows the head and the face of Vishnu with a long, strong and shapely arm outstretched toward the viewer with a hand hanging limply, suggesting deep sleep; the middle or second view is of a lotus arising out of Vishnu's naval with the demi-god Brahma seated in it; the third window provides the glimpse of his feet. A lot of gold and jewels decorate the body of the deity. The chamber itself is dimly lit with lamps, not allowing a clear, full view of the deity while leaving much to the imagination. Yet one can see and admire the beautiful work of art.

Besides beauty, the image captures the entire Hindu view of reality: that creation, the universe or the cosmos, is an emanation from or the manifested aspect of a vast infinite and unfathomable reality. This reality, which is without beginning or end, is anthropomorphized as Vishnu or Padmanabha. While the

lotus arising from his body with creation unfolding from it speaks of the active aspect of the deity, the reposing figure of sleeping God is eloquent about the detached, peaceful and tranquil nature of reality. Despite having the two contrasting polarities of action and tranquility, there is no sign of strife or tension in the image, as if creation does not require exertion of force or will.

In this image people see their beginning, their entire life, and their end. The three important existential questions—where we come from, who we are, and where we are going—are answered in the image of Padmanabha. Past, present and future are all embraced in this view. It gives people the solace that they are not alone, that they are part of an incomprehensible and infinite divine being which is above and beyond the concerns of life, and that even after the end of physical life, they will continue to exist in this reality in some form, somewhere—they are not lost forever. This reality, this deity, is their destiny.

**I**T IS EXTREMELY HARD FOR US human beings to accept or even imagine complete personal annihilation. Such thoughts of total loss create a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness of life. One is so much in tune with purposeful thinking in daily life that one is habitually driven to believing that even the overall creation must have a plan and a purpose for life. Otherwise, why go through the hassle of living? The repose in the figure of Padmanabha conveys assurance that at the end of the strife-full life awaits peace and calm, something that each person seeks in the depth of his or her mind. Though we engage in and even love the life of action and competition, we also seek peace and harmony.

And this contrast is visible right on the premises of the temple as well, with businesses running outside while there is complete peace and inaction in the chamber of the deity. Not only the image of Padmanabha, but the temple as a whole, captures the contrasting aspects of reality. The manifested aspect arises with action, change and time in it as opposed to the un-manifested as-

pect which is inactive, changeless and eternal. It is such a universal theme of existence that anyone capable of rising above sectarian thinking, can appreciate what is conveyed through the image of Padmanabha.

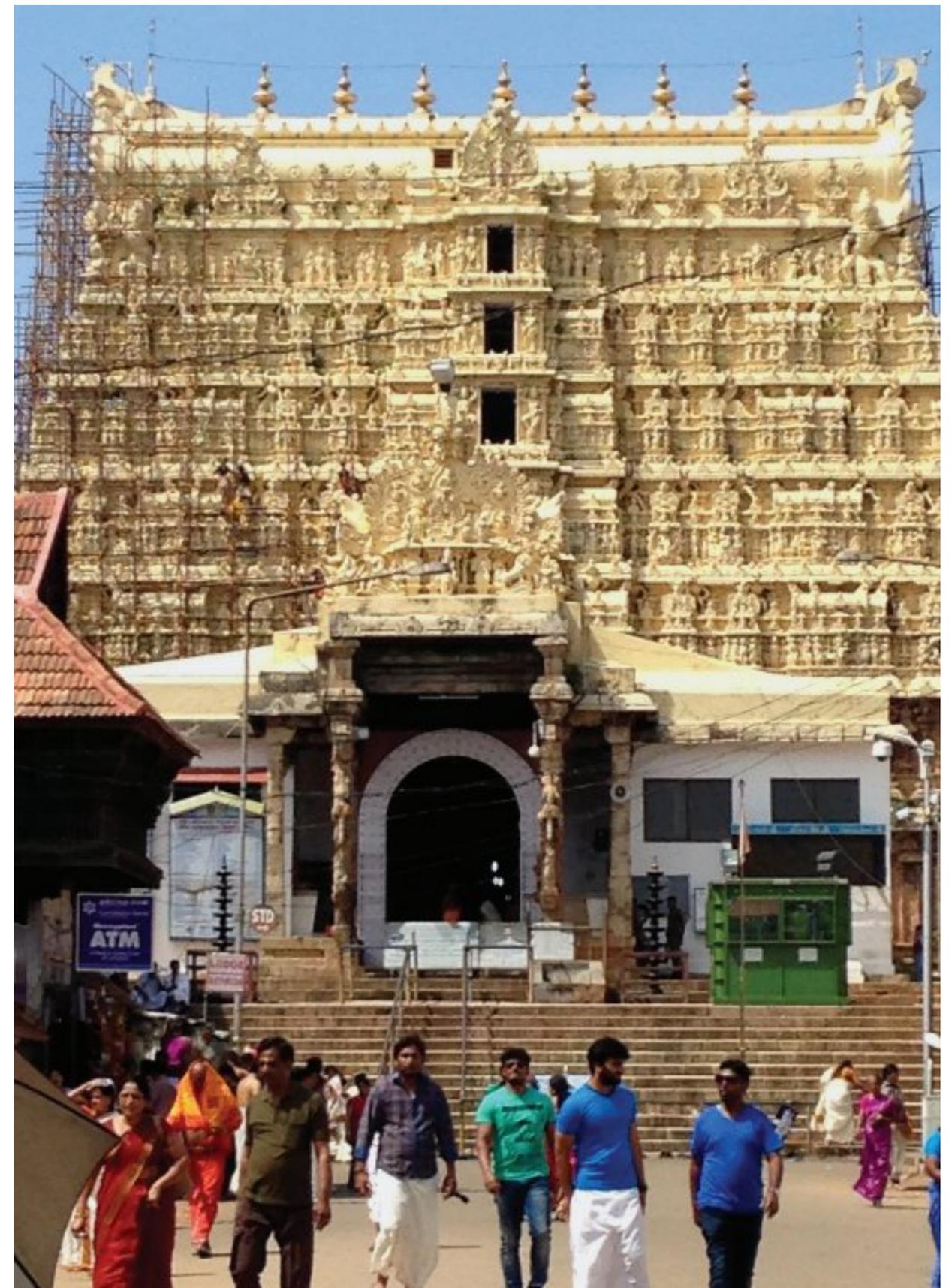
That it is in the nature of reality to express itself is displayed in the spontaneity and ease from the body of Vishnu. The manifested and knowable reality issues forth from the depths of the un-manifested and un-knowable. The world of duality, of subject and object, of mind and matter, and of sacred and profane, emerges from the one single reality.

The appearance of human consciousness and speech in the world may be considered natural and inevitable consequences of the same impulse to express. Starting from other creatures displaying signs of having some sort of speech for communication, reality seems to have bloomed fully in humans, with not only the fully developed capability of speech but also with so many languages for expressing themselves. The art of representing this reality in the form of Sri Padmanabha is itself a language. Thus, it seems that, through human beings, reality looks at and wonders about itself. Philosophical thoughts about reality arise from this wonder. And perhaps, in the vein of representing reality anthropomorphically, one may venture to say that reality seeks to know itself and enjoys representing and viewing itself in multiple forms and ways. Whether this seeking is purposeful or a sheer play just for the sake of it, is anyone's guess. ❖

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Padmanabhaswamy Temple. Photograph by Jaidev Dasgupta.



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