

Effort, awareness and joy

When you are practising a pose in yoga, can you find the delicate balance between taking the pose to its maximum extent, and taking it beyond that point so that there is too much effort creating wrong tension in the body?

When you are overstretching somewhere to get the optimum movement, have you ever noticed that you are also giving too little attention to other parts of the body? That disturbs the body and makes it shake. If the root of a tree is weak, the tree itself cannot be strong. Suppose you are doing a head-balance. What happens if you stretch your legs in order to get a good pose and let your neck muscles become loose, or if your elbows do not grip the floor, so the fear comes that you are falling or swaying from side to side? Because the strong muscles try to control the pose, the weak muscles give way. When doing the pose, therefore, you have to maintain a single stretch from the floor to the top without letting any part drop. When you are stretching the legs, you have to send an alarm signal to your arms: 'I am stretching a leg, so don't lose your attention!' That is awareness. Because we lose our awareness and our attention is partial, we don't know whether we are holding the grip or not.

You can lose the benefits of what you are doing because of focusing too much partial attention on trying to perfect the pose. What are you focusing on? You are trying to perfect the pose, but from where to where? That is where things become difficult. Focusing on one point is concentration. Focusing on all points at the same time is meditation. Meditation is centrifugal as well as centripetal. In concentration, you want to focus on one point, and the other points lose their potential. But if you spread the concentration from the

extended part to all the other parts of the body, without losing the concentration on the extended part, then you will not lose the inner action or the outer expression of the pose, and that teaches you what meditation is. Concentration has a point of focus; meditation has no points. That is the secret.

In concentration, you are likely to forget some parts of the body as you focus your attention on other parts. That is why you get pain in certain parts of the body. It is because the unattended muscles lose their power and are dropped. But you will not know that you are dropping them, because they are precisely the muscles in which you have momentarily lost your awareness. In yoga there is one thing you should all know: the weakest part is the source of action.

In any yoga pose, two things are required: sense of direction and centre of gravity. Many of us do not think of the sense of direction, yet in each pose, both the sense of direction and the centre of gravity need to be maintained. To maintain the centre of gravity, the muscles all have to be aligned with each other.

If there is an overstretch in certain muscles, the centre of gravity also shifts. Perhaps through insensitivity you are not aware that you are doing this. Insensitivity means that part of the body is dull – that it has no awareness – and this is the part where pain will develop. You may have the impression that there is no pain while you were performing the pose, but the pain comes later. How is it that you didn't feel any pain at the time?

Take the example of a pain in the back at the top of the buttock bone when you have been performing a forward bend such as *paścimottāṣana*. If you have this problem, observe next time you perform the pose that one leg will be touching the floor and the other buttock slightly off the floor, and one sacro-iliac muscle will be stretching on the outside while on the other side, the inner part of the muscle stretches. That is due to one muscle being sensitive and the other insensitive. They each move according to their own developed memories and intelligence.

Are you aware of all these things? Perhaps you are not, because you don't meditate in the poses. You do the pose, but you don't reflect in it. You are focusing, trying to do the pose well. You want to

do the optimum, but you are doing the optimum only on one side. That is known as concentration, not meditation. You must shift the light of awareness from that side to cover the other side as well; that is what is required for practice.

If you have any kind of problem, you have to observe what is happening in the pose. Is there alignment, or is there nonalignment? Perhaps your liver is extending, but your stomach is contracting, or perhaps it is the other way round. Your teacher can also observe this and touch the relevant part to help you extend the stomach or the liver, so that they are on a par with each other and you find the right adjustment and placement of the physical organs.

In your practice you will find within your own body that one part is violent and another part non-violent. On one side is deliberate violence because the cells are overworking. And on the so-called non-violent side there is non-deliberate violence, because there the cells are dying, like still-born children. I give a touch to the part where the cells are still-born, so that there can be a little germination – so that the cells can have new life. I create life in those cells by this adjustment which I make by touching my pupils. But this creative adjustment is seen by some people as violence, and I am described as a violent or aggressive teacher!

This touch of the teacher on the body is not like the touch of massage. It is more than massage – it is auto-adjustment which massage cannot produce at all. The effect of this touch in yoga is permanent because we make the person understand subjectively the process which is taking place in his or her body. In massage you cannot do this. You use strength and the effect is only momentary. The principle is the same but the effect will not be there.

You should not mix massage with yoga. If you do some good yoga, then take a massage, just see what will happen to you the next day. You will be half dead! Massage is relaxing, but it is forced relaxation, coming from external manipulation. Yoga is extension – extension giving freedom for the body to relax by itself. This is a natural relaxation.

Let us return to the question of effort. If you observe the effort involved in doing the pose as a beginner, and then continue to observe the effort as you make progress, the effort becomes less and

less, but the level of performance of the āsana improves. The degree of physical effort decreases and the achievement increases.

As you work, you may experience discomfort because of the inaccuracy of your posture. Then you have to learn and digest it. You have to make an effort of understanding and observation: 'Why am I getting pain at this moment? Why do I not get the pain at another moment or with another movement? What have I to do with this part of my body? What have I to do with that part? How can I get rid of the pain? Why am I feeling this pressure? Why is this side painful? How are the muscles behaving on this side and how are they behaving on the other side?'

You should go on analysing, and by analysis you will come to understand. Analysis in action is required in yoga. Consider again the example of pain after performing pāśchimottānāsana. After finishing the pose you experience pain, but the muscles were sending messages while you were in the pose. How is it that you did not feel them then? You have to see what messages come from the fibres, the muscles, the nerves and the skin of the body while you are doing the pose. Then you can learn. It is not good enough to experience today and analyse tomorrow. That way you have no chance.

Analysis and experimentation have to go together, and in tomorrow's practice you have to think again, 'Am I doing the old pose, or is there a new feeling? Can I extend this new feeling a little more? If I cannot extend it, what is missing?'

Analysis in action is the only guide. You proceed by trial and error. As the trials increase, the errors become less. Then doubts become less, and when the doubts lessen, the effort also becomes less. As long as doubts are there, the efforts are more because you go on oscillating, saying, 'Let me try this. Let me try that. Let me do it this way. Let me do it that way.' But when you find the right method, the effort becomes less because the energy which dissipates into various areas is controlled and not dissipated further.

It is true that in analysis you dissipate energy at first. Later you will not. That is why effort will become less. Direction will come, and when you go in the right direction, wisdom begins. When wise action comes, you no longer feel the effort as effort – you feel the effort as joy. In perfection, your experience and expression find balance and concord.

The depth of āsana

The body cannot be separated from the mind, nor can the mind be separated from the soul. No-one can define the boundaries between them. In India, āsana was never considered to be a merely physical practice as it is in the West. But even in India nowadays many people are beginning to think in this way because they have picked it up from people in the West whose ideas are reflected back to the East.

When Mahātmā Gandhi died, George Bernard Shaw said that it may be another thousand years before we see another Mahātmā Gandhi on this earth. Mahātmā Gandhi did not practise all the aspects of yoga. He only followed two of its principles – non-violence and truth, yet through these two aspects of yoga, he mastered his own nature and gained independence for India. If a part of yama could make Mahātmā Gandhi so great, so pure, so honest and so divine, should it not be possible to take another limb of yoga – āsana – and through it reach the highest level of spiritual development? Many of you may say that performing an āsana is a physical discipline, but if you speak in this way without knowing the depth of āsana, you have already fallen from the grace of yoga.

In the sections that follow, I shall give a little more detail of what is involved in performing an āsana, and show how within the one discipline of āsana all the eight levels of yoga are involved, from yama and niyama through to samādhi. I deliberately pursue in depth the various levels involved in the performance of āsana, because in the West this practice is too often considered to be only physical.

When we start working on the performance of āsanās, we all begin by just scratching the surface of the pose: our work on the pose

is peripheral, and this is known as conative action. The word 'conatus' means an effort or impulse, and conation is the active aspect of mind, including desire and volition. Conative action is simply physical action at its most direct level.

Then, when we are physically doing the pose, all of a sudden the skin, eyes, ears, nose and tongue – all our organs of perception – feel what is happening in the flesh. This is known as cognitive action: the skin cognises, recognises the action of the flesh.

The third stage, which I call communication or communion, is when the mind observes the contact of the cognition of the skin with the conative action of the flesh, and we arrive at mental action in the āsana. At this stage, the mind comes into play and is drawn by the organs of perception towards the organs of action, to see exactly what is happening. The mind acts as a bridge between the muscular movement and the organs of perception, introduces the intellect and connects it to every part of the body – fibres, tissues and cells, right through to the outer pores of the skin. When the mind has come into play, a new thought arises in us. We see with attention and remember the feeling of the action. We feel what is happening in our body and our recollection says, 'What is this that I feel now which I did not feel before?' We discriminate with the mind. The discriminative mind observes and analyses the feeling of the front, the back, the inside and the outside of the body. This stage is known as reflective action.

Finally, when there is a total feeling in the action without any fluctuations in the stretch, then conative action, cognitive action, mental action and reflective action all meet together to form a total awareness from the self to the skin and from the skin to the self. This is spiritual practice in yoga.

The body comprises three tiers, which are themselves composed of several sheaths. The gross body, called the *sthūla-śarīra* corresponds to the physical or anatomical sheath (*annamaya-kośa*). The subtle body, or *sūkṣma-śarīra*, is made up of the physiological sheath (*prāṇamaya-kośa*), the mental sheath (*manomaya-kośa*) and the intellectual sheath (*vijñānamaya-kośa*). The innermost body, on which all the others depend, is known as the causal body,

or *kāraṇa-śarīra*. This is the spiritual sheath of joy (*ānandamaya-kośa*). When all these sheaths come together in each and every one of our trillions of cells – when there is oneness from the cell to the self, from the physical body to the core of the being – then the pose is a contemplative pose and we have reached the highest state of contemplation in the āsana.

That is known as integration, which Patañjali describes in the third chapter of the *Yoga Sūtras*, and which involves integration of the body (*śarīra-saṁyama*), integration of the breath (*prāṇa-saṁyama*), integration of the senses (*indriya-saṁyama*), integration of the mind (*manah-saṁyama*), integration of the intelligence or of knowledge (*buddhi-saṁyama* or *jñāna-saṁyama*) and, finally, integration of the self with all existence (*ātma-saṁyama*).

This is how the āsanās have to be performed. It cannot come in a day and it cannot come in years. It is a lifelong process, provided that the practitioner has the yogic vitamins of faith, memory, courage, absorption, and uninterrupted awareness of attention. These are the five vitamins required for the practice of yoga. With these five vitamins you can conquer the five sheaths of the body and become one with the Universal Self.

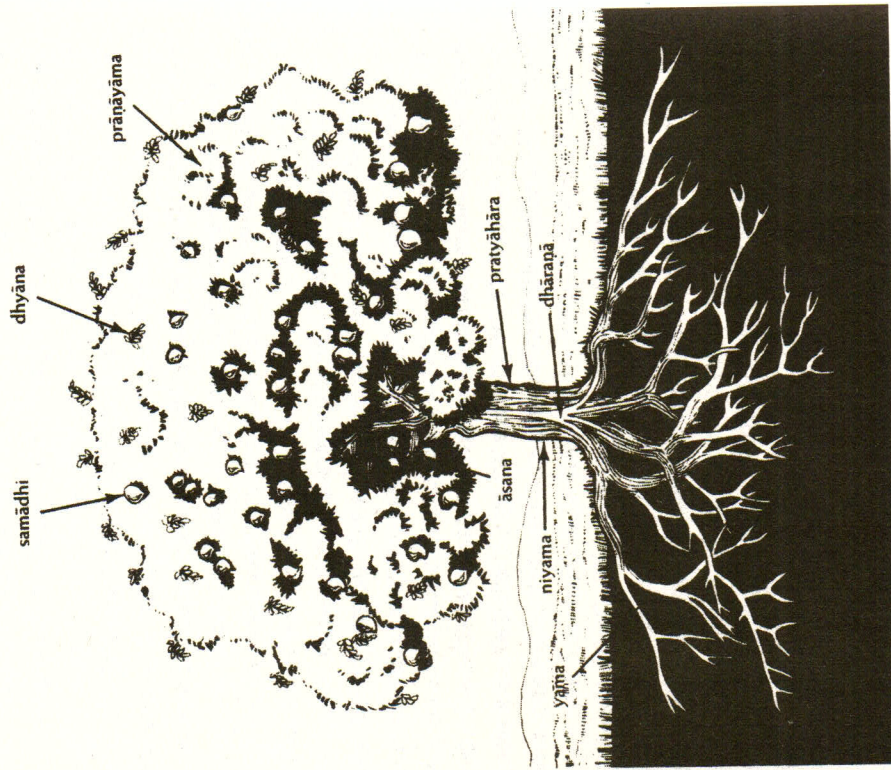
Since yoga means integration, bringing together, it follows that bringing body and mind together, bringing nature and the seer together, is yoga. Beyond that there is nothing – and everything! In a yogī who is perfect, the potency of nature flows abundantly.

The roots

All the eight limbs of yoga have their place within the practice of āsana. The first limb of yoga is yama, which is likened to the roots of the tree because it is the foundation from which all the rest will grow. Let us look at how the principles of yama are present in the performance of an āsana.

As we have said, yama contains the principles of ahimsā, or non-violence, satya, or truthfulness, asteya, or freedom from avarice, brahmacharya, or control of sensual pleasure, and aparigraha, or non-covetousness. Suppose that in performing an āsana you are stretching more on the right side and less on the left. An unethical state is setting into your body. There is violence on the right side where you are stretching more, and the left side, where the stretch is less, appears to be non-violent. On the right side you are being violent because you are saying, 'Do as much as you can! Stretch as much as you can!' It is a deliberate violence because you are overstretching. On the left side, where you are not stretching so much, maybe you have the idea that you are not being violent. But an intelligent practitioner of yoga observes that at the same time as he is consciously doing violence on one side, he is also unconsciously doing violence on the other. Because the right side is more capable and extends further, you are making good use of the body cells on that side, while on the left side you are not making full use of your cells. Though it may appear non-violent, it is also violence as the cells will die when they do not perform their functions as they should. One side thus manifests deliberate violence, and the other side non-deliberate violence.

If you extend the right side more, and if the left side does not stretch so much, should you not observe the duality between the



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right and the left and make use of the left side intelligently to be on a par with the right? This is known as balancing violence and non-violence, and at that moment both the violence and the non-violence disappear. What is required is integration between the right and left sides of the body, and this balance of the two sides is true non-violence.

When the right and the left are integrated, there is truth, which is the second principle of yama. You need not observe truth – you are already in truth, because you are not escaping by failing to perform on the weaker side. And when there is total stretch in the āsana, there is a tremendous understanding and communication between the five sheaths of the body from the physical towards the spiritual and from the spiritual towards the physical. Thus, there is control of physical sensations, mental fluctuations and intellectual contemplation, and this is brahmacharya. Brahmacharya means the soul moving with your action. When there is oneness of the soul with the motion, that is known as brahmacharya.

Because you are giving total attention to performing equally on the right and the left, there is no attachment or avarice, for when the soul is moving with the intelligence in the body, there is nothing to possess, nothing to seek. There is also freedom from greed, because motivation disappears; when motivation disappears, so does possession, and with non-possession, acquisitiveness also comes to an end.

These are the principles of yama as they appear in the performance of every one of the āsanās. This is what is known as ethical discipline in the performance of āsana.

The trunk

*The trunk of the tree corresponds to the principles of niyama.
What is the role of niyama in the performance of āsana?*

The first principle of niyama is śauṇha, which means cleanliness. Suppose that in a posture you bend well on the right side of the body. That means you have irrigated and cleansed that side. But if you do not bend the left side in harmony with the right, then your left side will not be cleansed. If you have not irrigated the left side, how can there be śauṇha? When both sides bend harmoniously they are properly cleansed and irrigated by the blood, which carries with it the biological energy known as prāṇa.

You know how electricity is produced: water flows like a waterfall onto turbines which rotate under the action of the water to generate the current. So also, when we are performing āsanās, we make the blood fall on every one of our cells like water onto a turbine, to release the hidden energy of our body and bring new light to the cells. When that light comes, we experience santoṣa, contentment, which is the second principle of niyama.

Beyond this contentment, there is a higher state of contentment and a higher level of performance of āsanās, which are expressed in the other three levels of niyama: tapas, svādhyaia and Īśvara-praṇidhana.

What is tapas? Tapas is usually translated as austerity, but its meaning is better expressed as burning desire. It is a burning desire to cleanse every cell of our body and every cell of our senses, so that the senses and the body may be made permanently pure and healthy and leave no room for impurities to enter into our system. It is in this spirit that the āsanās should be performed. This is karma-yoga, the

yoga of action, because the burning desire to keep each and every part clean requires us to act.

What of *svādhyaṃ*? *Sva* means self, *adhyā* means study. As I said earlier, we are made up of three tiers and five sheaths, ranging from the gross body to the causal body and from the anatomical sheath to the spiritual sheath of bliss. To know the total functioning of these three tiers and five sheaths of the human being is *svādhyaṃ*, study of the self from the skin of the body to the core of the being. This is known as *jñāna-yoga*, the yoga of spiritual discernment.

Finally, *Īśvara-praṇidhāna* is *bhakti-yoga*, the yoga of devotion. When, through your practice, you have reached a higher state of intelligence, and that mature intelligence makes you lose the identity of the self, you become one with God because you surrender yourself to Him. This is *Īśvara-praṇidhāna*, surrender of one's actions and one's will to God. It is the last of the five principles of *niyama*.

In short, the effect of *āsana*s is to keep the skin, cells, nerves, arteries and veins, respiratory and circulatory systems, digestive and excretory systems, mind, intelligence and consciousness, all clean and clear. This involves all the aspects of *yama* and *niyama*, which are the roots and the trunk of the tree of yoga.

The branches

The branches of the tree are the āsana-s. What is the right attitude and approach to the performance of an āsana?

You have to become completely and totally absorbed, with devotion, dedication and attention, while performing the pose. There should be honesty in approach and honesty in presentation. When performing a pose, you have to find out whether your body has accepted the challenge of the mind, or whether the mind has accepted the challenge of the body. Are you working from the body to get the factual feeling of the pose, or are you doing the pose because you have read in books that it is going to give such and such an effect? Are you caught in the web of what you have read, searching for the experience of somebody else's written word, or are you working to know with a fresh mind what type of new light is cast on the pose by your own experience while performing it?

In addition to this total honesty, you have to have tremendous faith, courage, determination, awareness and absorption. With these qualities in your mind, your body and your heart, you will do the pose well. The *āsana* has to enshrine the entire being of the doer with splendour and beauty. This is spiritual practice in physical form.

Āsana means posture, which is the art of positioning the body as a whole with a physical, mental and spiritual attitude. Posture has two aspects, namely posing and reposing. Posing means action. Pose is assuming a fixed position of limbs and body as represented by the particular *āsana* being performed. Reposing means reflection on the pose. The pose is re-thought and readjusted so that the various limbs and parts of the body are positioned in their places in a proper order and feel rested and soothed, and the mind experiences the

tranquillity and calmness of bones, joints, muscles, fibres and cells.

By reflecting on which part of the body is working, which part of the mind is working, and which part of the body has not been penetrated by the mind, we bring the mind to the same extension as the body. As the body is contracted or extended, so the intelligence is contracted or extended to reach every part of the body. This is what is known as reposing; this is sensitivity. When this sensitivity is in touch equally with the body, the mind and the soul, we are in a state of contemplation or meditation which is known as āsana. The dualities between body and mind, mind and soul, are vanquished or destroyed.

The structure of the āsana cannot change, as each āsana is an art in itself. One has to study each āsana arithmetically and geometrically, so that the real shape of the āsana is brought out and expressed in the presentation. The distribution of the weight of the body should be even in the muscles, bones, mind and intelligence. Resistance and movement should be in concord. Though the practitioner is a subject and the āsana an object, the āsana should become the subject and the doer the object, so that sooner or later the doer, the instrument (body) and the āsana become one.

Study the aspect of an āsana. It may be triangular, round, rainbow-shaped or oval, straight or diagonal. Note all these points by observation, and study and act within that field, so that the body may present the āsana in its pristine glory. Like a well-cut diamond, the jewel of the body with its joints, bones and so on, should be cut to fit into the fine framework of the āsana. The whole body is involved in this process, with the senses, mind, intelligence, consciousness and self. One should not adjust the āsana to fit into one's body structure, but mould the body to the requirement of an āsana. Then the āsana will have the right physical, physiological, psychological, intellectual and spiritual bearing.

Patañjali says that when an āsana is correctly performed, the dualities between body and mind, mind and soul, have to vanish. This is known as repose in the pose, reflection in action. When the āsanās are performed in this way, the body cells, which have their own memories and intelligence, are kept healthy. When the health

of the cells is maintained through the precise practice of āsanās, the physiological body (prāṇamaya-kośa) becomes healthy and the mind is brought closer to the soul. This is the effect of the āsanās. They should be performed in such a way as to lead the mind from attachment to the body towards the light of the soul so that the practitioner may dwell in the abode of the soul.

The leaves

As the leaves aerate the tree and provide nourishment for its healthy growth, so prāṇāyāma feeds and aerates the cells, nerves, organs, intelligence and consciousness of the human system. When we are performing an āsana, we can only extend the body fully if we synchronise the breath with the movement. Prāṇa is energy. Āyāma is creation, distribution and maintenance. Prāṇāyāma is the science of breath, which leads to the creation, distribution and maintenance of vital energy.

Unfortunately, some teachers ask their pupils to hold the breath while performing āsanās. Nowhere in the original texts is it said that one should hold the breath. When we hold the breath, are we attending to the pose, or are we attending to the breath? When we inhale, the brain moves forward like a leaf. When we exhale, it goes backward. When we hold the breath, the brain becomes stiff, so how can we find stillness in the body? Any āsana done on an inhalation will end in merely physical action, whereas an āsana done on an exhalation is vital and organic, and produces physiological action and cellular health. Doing the pose with retention is only muscular – that is the way of practising which I would call physical as opposed to spiritual yoga!

When everything is one – when you reach a state of perfect union between your body, your mind and your soul – then you forget your body, you forget your breath and you forget your intelligence. This does not come in two or three days. It may take fifty or sixty years to experience what I am saying. Till then you can use exhalation as a help, because you are a beginner.

It is true that exhalation can help you to do the pose well for a moment because the body is freed of tension. If your stomach is not

well and you are constipated, the doctor gives you a laxative; then after a few motions you feel completely empty and free in your intestines. Similarly, the yogī gives exhalation as a laxative so that the tension in the cells of the body is removed. But if after fifty years you are still doing it like that, then you have made no progress physiologically or mentally. See that in your daily practice there is a progression and a transformation. If I were to do yoga today just as I did it when I began in 1934, then my practice would be like a healthy tree which does not give any fruit, or a healthy woman who cannot bear children. I am not doing that type of yoga. I want my action to bear fruit. The true fruit of yoga is not a material achievement or performance. Yogīs never measure the intake of oxygen. That is not what they are interested in. The yogī's interest is to keep the head and the heart clean through the harmony of breath, and this is achieved through the practice of prāṇāyāma. The fruit of your action will tell you whether you are on the right path or not.

There is a very fine story in the Purāṇas which speaks of amṛtamanthana, or nectar-churning, where the nectar of life was drawn out by the churning of the ocean. The demons and the angels were fighting each other for the establishment of dharmā, or virtue. The angels followed the policy of virtue, and the demons favoured vice. As the demons were stronger than the angels, vice was increasing in the universe, so the angels approached Brahmā and Śiva who advised them to ask Lord Viṣṇu, the protector, for guidance to establish virtue. Lord Viṣṇu's advice was that they should churn the ocean to bring out from it the elixir of life. As distribution was his concern, they could then leave the rest to him.

Mount Meru was thrown into the ocean to serve as a churning rod, and the king cobra, Ādiśeṣa, was used as a rope to move the mountain. The demons, being stronger, took hold of Ādiśeṣa's head, and the angels held the tail. While they were churning, the mountain sank down into the ocean, so they could not churn at all. So Lord Viṣṇu took the form of Kūrma, the turtle, and went down to the bottom of the ocean to lift the mountain so that they could churn again.

This churning of the mountain is nothing but inhalation and exhalation. Like the mountain churning the ocean, the spine acts as

a churning rod for breath in our body. When inhalation and exhalation take place, the spine sends energy flashing forwards, backwards, upwards and downwards to produce the elixir of life, or *jīvāmṛta*, in our system. Lord Viṣṇu in this story is the same as *puruṣa*, the soul, in human beings. Viṣṇu, in the form of our innermost self, or *ātma*, causes us to breathe and thereby draw on the external energies which, at their gross level, contain the nuclear energies of the elixir of life. Thus we grow in health and harmony and increase our span of life by drawing the hidden energy from the ocean of the universal atmosphere.

Philosophically speaking, inhalation is the movement of the self to come into contact with the periphery: the core of being moves with the breath and touches the inner layer of the skin – the extreme frontier of the body. This is the outward, or evolutionary process of the soul. Exhalation is the return journey: it is the involuntary process, where the body, the cells and the intelligence move inwards to reach their source, the *ātma*, or the core of the being. This evolutionary and involuntary process within each individual is *prāṇāyāma*.

Thus, in each cycle of breath, we have two paths towards understanding the existence of God. They are known as *pravṛtti-mārga*, the path of creation, and *nivṛtti-mārga*, the path of renunciation. *Pravṛtti-mārga*, the outward path of creation, is in inhalation, and *nivṛtti-mārga*, the inward path of renunciation, is in exhalation. On the basis of this philosophy, the yogis were trained to reach a balance between these two states. Thus *abhyāsa*, practice, and *vairāgya*, renunciation, are brought together in cohesion in the practice of *kumbhaka*, which is usually translated as retention.

Kumbhaka is retention of breath, intelligence and self, where the lifted Lord – the core of the being – in the inhalation is held by the practitioner as long as he or she can maintain it. This is *ātma-dhyāna* – meditation on the soul. One does not simply hold the breath by physical retention, but holds on to the very self, which was raised up and elated through the inhalation. The moment one lets the self sink, the retention of breath becomes merely physical and mechanical, and is not true *kumbhaka* at all. In inhalation, as I said before, the self comes to the surface, like Lord Viṣṇu who, after

descending to the bottom of the ocean, lifted up the mountain to churn the ocean again. To maintain the stability of the lifted self is true *kumbhaka*. It is a purely divine state of practice in which inhalation (*pūraka*), retention (*kumbhaka*) and exhalation (*rechaka*), are all involved. In *kumbhaka*, the self becomes one with the body and the body becomes one with the self. It is the divine union of body and mind in inhalation, exhalation and retention.

If you look at breath in the form of the respiratory system, it is physical. But when the action of the breath on the mind is studied and understood, it becomes spiritual. *Prāṇāyāma* is the bridge between the physical and the spiritual. Hence *prāṇāyāma* is the hub of yoga.

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The bark

When you are thoroughly and totally absorbed in your presentation of the āsana, forgetting neither the flesh nor the senses – when the five organs of action and five organs of perception are all brought into play in their correct function and relationship – that is pratyāhāra. Pratyāhāra is usually translated as withdrawal of the senses. This means drawing the senses from the periphery of the skin towards the core of the being, the soul. The moment the mind becomes silent, the self rests in its abode and the mind dissolves. Similarly, when the muscles and joints are rested in their positions, the body, senses and mind lose their identities and consciousness shines in its purity. This is the meaning of pratyāhāra.

We have seen that Indian thought distinguishes between five sheaths of the body: the anatomical, the physiological, the mental, the intellectual and the spiritual. How is it that we distinguish between the mental and the intellectual body? Why do we divide the mind into two parts which for Western psychology are one and the same? We distinguish between the mind, which gathers information, and the intelligence, which has the power to discriminate right from wrong, and to reason clearly.

Philosophy is not Eastern or Western. Methods are given by philosophers for individual development. You may be a Westerner and I an Easterner, but your weaknesses and my weaknesses, your elation and my elation are the same – no distinctions need to be made between them. If Eastern and Western philosophies appear to be different in approach, you have to remember that Eastern philosophy is very old and Western philosophy much younger. Philosophy in the

West is rationalistic. All things are discussed from the intelligence of the head, and not from the intelligence of the heart. Yet a new distinction is emerging, even in the West. There is now psychology and parapsychology, so a new category has come into existence. True philosophy is the blending of the intelligence of the head and of the heart, as we have been taught, for example, by Buddha, Rāmakṛṣṇa, Śrī Rāmānuja and Saint Francis of Assisi.

The intellectual aspect of the mind gathers, collects and accumulates information, but has no power of discrimination. Discrimination is known as pratyāhāra. Pratyāhāra is the culturing and civilising of the senses of perception. In much of our life, memory supersedes intelligence. Memory triggers the mind, and because the mind is triggered by memory, we go for past experiences only. Memory is afraid that it may lose its identity, so before the mind has a chance to call upon the intelligence, memory comes in and says, 'Act! Now! Immediately!' That is known as impulse, which commonly governs our actions. Many people are impulsive. Impulsiveness means acting at once without giving a thought. That is why pratyāhāra, the fifth stage of yoga, has been given to us. You have to make sure that memory gives the right response.

The five organs of perception come into contact with taste, sound, touch, sight and smell, and send their impressions to the mind. Through the mind, they are stored in the well of memory. Memory longs for further experiences and ignites the mind, which by-passes intelligence and directly stimulates the organs of action to go in pursuit of these experiences. Throughout this process, the intelligence tries to measure the advantages and disadvantages so that it may balance the memory, the mind and the organs of perception. But they do not listen to the judicious advice of the intelligence. Because of past experiences of pleasure, they thirst for more and more. Thus, demands and desires increase. The desires tempt the mind for further enjoyment. Through this repetitive enjoyment, the organs of action lose their potency and are no longer capable of exciting the organs of perception or the mind. One continues to hanker for past impressions, but fails to get satisfaction. This breeds the seed of unhappiness. Here, the fifth aspect of yoga, pratyāhāra,

enters as a true friend to rescue the unhappy person, so that he or she may find happiness in the delight of the soul.

The mind, which until now had by-passed intelligence, approaches intelligence for guidance. Then intelligence with its discriminative faculty weighs right and wrong, and guides the mind not to depend completely on memory and its impressions. This act of going against the current of memory and mind is *pratyāhāra*. With the help of intelligence, the senses commence an inner journey and return to their point of origin. This process of weighing one's instincts, thoughts and actions is the practice of renunciation (*vairāgya*). Detachment from the affairs of the world and attachment towards the soul is *pratyāhāra*. From now on, energy is conserved and used when necessary without hankering for repetitions. Memory experiences new and fresh impressions, and is subdued, becoming subservient to consciousness. It is consciousness which grasps intelligence (*buddhi*) and makes it rest at the source of consciousness (*dharmendriya*). Then impulsive nature comes to an end, and intuitive insight flows freely.

Pratyāhāra means not allowing memory to play its favourite trick. Memory is made to remain as if non-existent, so that there is a direct connection between mind and intelligence. This process is not described at all in Western psychology, which does not make the distinction between mind and intelligence. These two parts of the mind are known in Indian philosophy as the fluctuating mind and the still, or stabilised mind. If you have mastered this, then yoga is in your grasp and you will have new knowledge and a new understanding of life.

When an object is held against a flawless crystal, it reflects without refractions. Similarly, when the consciousness is cleansed from the clutches of thought-waves, it becomes highly sensitive, stainless, pure and absolute as the seer. From then on, the consciousness realises that the perceiver, the instrument of perception, and the object to be perceived are the same, and the mind can reflect without refraction or distortion. Patañjali says that at this stage, memory, having reached its ripeness, loses its existence, and the mind, freed from past memories, becomes ever alert, ever fresh and ever wise (*Yoga Sūtras*, I, 43).

The sap

To bring the wandering mind to a state of restraint is known as dhāraṇā. Dhāraṇā is concentration, or complete attention. It is the juice which flows within the branches and the trunk of the tree towards the root.

Consider a lake. Does the water touch the banks only on one side and not on the other, or does it touch the banks equally everywhere? When you are performing an *āsana*, your consciousness, like the waters of a lake, should touch the frontiers of the body everywhere. Where, then, is there room for thoughts to arise? How can there be a thought arising when you are doing a perfect *āsana* – when your intelligence has spread through your whole body?

It is because you perform the *āsana* compartmentally that your awareness is interrupted by thought-waves. But if you perform it wholly, with cells, nerves, intelligence, consciousness, and the very self, then perhaps you may experience the *āsana* differently. Learn to do it as a single unit all at once, maintain that state, and then see whether it is a thoughtful or a thoughtless state, whether there is a space between the thoughtful and the thoughtless state, or whether the thoughtful and the thoughtless states lose their identities.

To be thoughtfully thoughtless is concentration as well as meditation. Absence of thoughts is not forgetfulness. You must run along a single thread like a spider which walks along one strand of its web. There is a single thread for the spider to move along, and for you there will be one single thoughtful state. If you forget the thoughtful state, then that is known negatively as a thoughtless state. But to remain positively and thoughtfully thoughtless is *samādhi*.

The thoughtful state requires deliberate attention. To remain

thoughtless also requires deliberate attention. Hence, there is really no thoughtless state at all, and no thoughtful state either. You do not become empty. You remain full and fully aware. This is dhāraṇā, which leads in time to dhyāna and samādhi, and this is how the āsanās have to be performed.

The flower

In the performance of āsanās, two avenues or paths are involved. One is the evolutionary, expressive or exhibitive path, taking the self towards the body, towards the pores of the skin, towards the periphery. The other is the involuntary, intuitive or inhibitive path, where the vehicles of the body are made to move towards the self. The union of these two paths is the divine marriage of the body with the soul and the soul with the body. It is meditation.

We must learn in our performance of āsanās to express the outer form and beauty of the pose without losing our inner attention. The skin is an organ of perception. It does not act. It receives. All actions are received by the skin, but if your flesh overstretchs when you are performing an āsana, the skin loses its sensitivity and sends no message to the brain. In the West, you tend to overdo the stretch. You want to get something. You want to do it quickly. You want to succeed in doing the pose, but you don't feel the reaction. The flesh extends so much that it makes the organ of perception insensitive, and because it has become insensitive, the reflection from the action to the mind is not felt.

Medical science speaks of efferent and afferent nerves. The efferent nerves send messages from the brain to the organs of action for them to act. The afferent nerves send messages from the organs of perception to the brain about what they perceive. The yogis also speak of these things, but use different words. The efferent nerves are known as fibres of the flesh or nerves of action (karma-nāḍī), and the afferent nerves are called fibres of the skin or nerves of knowledge (jñāna-nāḍī). Perfect understanding between the nerves of action and the nerves of knowledge, working together in concord,

is yoga. In the practice of yoga there should be a space between the end of the fibre of the flesh and the end of the fibre of the skin – a space between receiving the message from the organs of perception and the message returning to the organs of action. If you do that, that is meditation. Usually we leave no space because we feel we have to act immediately. This is not meditation.

You should know that though the brain is situated in the head, the mind exists in the entire fabric of man. The moment the brain receives a message, it will either immediately send a message of action based on memory, or it will pause to discriminate. The mind and the brain look at the message. You reflect on it. You reason: 'Am I doing this right? Am I doing it wrong? Why have I got this sensation on this side? Why am I getting that sensation there?' That is known as reflection. You reflect on the action produced by the flesh, which is perceived by the skin. You judge what is right and what is wrong. When you judge and make an equal balance everywhere, it is *dhyāna* – it is contemplation. It is *dhyāna* in the flesh, *dhyāna* in the skin, *dhyāna* in the mind, *dhyāna* in the intellect. There is no disparity between these four.

You have judged. You have reached a state of balance, so there is oneness. There is awareness through your whole being from the skin to the self and from the self to the skin. Then you know how to see outside and how to see inside. There is fullness inside and fullness outside. But unfortunately, in meditation as it is often practised today, we go in the name of meditation into loneliness and emptiness. Loneliness leads to dejection and emptiness to inertia. Emptiness is not meditation. In sleep you are also empty. If emptiness were meditation, then by sleeping for eight hours every day, we should all become evolved souls. Yet we have not changed at all!

In the *Rāmāyana* epic, we read of the demon king Rāvaṇa of Sri Lanka, who had ten heads. These ten heads symbolise the five *kārmendriyas*, or organs of action, and the five *jñānendriyas*, or organs of perception. King Rāvaṇa had two brothers, called Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana. These three demon kings of Sri Lanka represent the three *gunas*, or qualities of being: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* is light. *Rajas* is dynamism, or hyperactivity. *Tamas* is inertia, or dullness.

All three brothers meditated, and they attained great powers. Lord Brahmā came before Kumbhakarna, the middle brother, to offer him a boon, saying, 'I am pleased with your meditation. Ask, and I will give you what you want.' Kumbhakarna was so pleased that he did not know what to ask for, so he asked for *nidrā*, sleep. Lord Brahmā granted his request and he slept for three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Lord Brahmā said to him, 'If you wake up yourself you are immortal, but if somebody disturbs your sleep your death is certain.'

The eldest brother was Ravana, who carried away Sita, the wife of King Rama. He attained such physical strength through his powerful meditation that he brought Kailasa, the mountain of Siva, onto the earth. When Lord Siva asked him what he wanted, he said, 'I want you,' so that he could carry him. But even when Lord Siva was in his hands, he could not get out of his mind the beautiful Sita. Though he also did a tremendous meditation, his infatuation drew him to possess Sita. In one hand he had Lord Siva, and in the other he had the lust for somebody's wife. He reached God, yet could not control his senses, and carried Sita away with him to his kingdom.

The third brother, Vibhishana, knowing very well that his eldest brother had made a mistake, pleaded with him to give back Sita to her husband. 'You have seen Lord Siva. Why this ordinary woman? Leave her. Give her back to the one to whom she belongs.' But Ravana did not listen to Vibhishana, so the war took place between Rama and Ravana, and he was defeated.

The two elder brothers were killed in the war, but Vibhishana, the youngest brother, surrendered to Lord Rama, saying, 'You are a virtuous man. Bless us so that virtue may come back to my kingdom.' Rama granted Vibhishana's wishes. Thus Vibhishana's meditation alone was a pure, *sattvic* meditation. Though all three brothers reached the highest pinnacle of meditation, one remained in a *tamasic* state, one in a *rajasic* state, and only one was in a pure *sattvic* state.

I have given you this story so that you may consider on what level your intelligence is functioning after meditation. Is it *tamasic* intelligence, *rajasic* intelligence or *sattvic* intelligence? Just closing the eyes does not give you what meditation is. Pure meditation is one

where all one's vehicles – the organs of perception, the organs of action, the mind, the brain, the intelligence, the consciousness and the conscience – are drawn towards the core of the being without any division in that state. Meditation is a dynamic balance of intellectual and intuitive consciousness.

You may all have practised meditation. I too have practised it. You may be doing meditation sitting in a corner and becoming empty within yourselves with that emptiness which comes also in sleep. I do not do that meditation. I meditate, not sitting in a corner, but in every movement of my life, in every position I perform, in every āsana.

Maybe you have read the *Bhagavad Gītā*; where we are asked to keep the body in a rhythmic, harmonious state without any variations between the right and the left, the front and the back, measuring from the central line of the body which runs from middle of the throat to the middle of the anus. Can I adjust the various parts of my body, as well as my mind and intelligence, to be parallel to that central line? Can I sit like that? It is so simple to read, but how difficult it is to follow!

Do my intelligence and consciousness run parallel in my body without disturbing the banks of my river, the skin? Can I extend my awareness of my self and bring it to each and every part of my body without any variation? This is what I mean by fullness in meditation. I am full in my body. I am alert in my brain. I allow my mind to stretch itself, to diffuse, to cover the various parts of my body. Thus, I learn how to be at one with my body, my brain, my mind, my intelligence, my consciousness and my soul without any divisions at all. That is how I practise. That is why for me there is no difference between āsana and dhyāna. Where dhyāna is, there must be āsana. Where āsana is, there must be dhyāna.

The fruit

By studying in depth the performance of āsana, I have shown how, even by performing one āsana, the entire human system can be integrated. Yet we unnecessarily disintegrate yoga, which, by definition, is an integrated subject, when we call it physical yoga, mental yoga, spiritual yoga, jñāna-yoga, bhakti-yoga, kuṇḍalinī-yoga, siddha-yoga, and so on. It is very unfortunate. Why do we demarcate and divide that which unites each individual from the body to the soul?

How many of you really know how to do an āsana? How many of those who say that āsanās are physical know the depth of the way of doing them which I have been describing? You need to rub yourself with words and with works. Put the words to the test of your experience. Do not be carried away by my words or anyone else's words. Rub yourself with each word through work and practice. Rubbing means to experience. Go with it! Find out! You develop original intelligence by rubbing the thought with experience, and that originality is meditation. Using somebody else's words and then saying you are practising yoga is what I call being a carbon copy. It is a borrowed intelligence. Borrowed intelligence cannot become meditation.

I request you to rub yourself with my words and with other people's words, and until they are digested, do not form opinions. Then you will enjoy the bliss which is unalloyed, untainted and free from stains. Experience is real; words are not real. They are somebody else's words, but it is your own experience. So put everything to the test of experience. When stability in experience is sustained and when the feeling of experiences does not waver, it is samādhi.

'Sama' means balanced, in harmony. When the soul, which is the cause of existence, diffuses and harmonises everywhere, that is samādhi. Many people say that samādhi means trance, but trance is not the right word for it. In samādhi you are fully aware. Consciousness diffuses everywhere, through all the sheaths of the body and all its parts. And yet we say that the end of yoga is to forget the body and to forget the mind. As the essence of the tree is hidden in the seed, so the essence of the tree of man is hidden in the seed of the soul. You cannot see the tree in the seed, and you cannot see the self in that innermost seat of the soul. So in the culminating moment, the self too is forgotten, but you forget it by going deep into it. Diffusing the soul into each and every part of the body is samādhi.

There are two kinds of practice in yoga. When you are totally absorbed in it, without the reflection of past impressions, but doing and adjusting from moment to moment towards perfection and precision, it becomes spiritual. If you are oscillating, if your mind is wandering or if there is a difference between yourself, your body, your mind and your thoughts, then it is sensual, though you may be practising yoga and though you may call it spiritual.

You are a beginner in yoga. I too am a beginner from where I left my practice yesterday. I don't bring yesterday's poses to today's practice. I know yesterday's poses, but when I practise today I become a beginner. I don't want yesterday's experience. I want to see what new understanding may come in addition to what I had felt up to now. In this quest, my body is my bow, my intelligence is my arrow, and my target is my self. I am aware inside and I am aware outside. We must learn to stretch the bow well before we can hit the target, so go on extending the bow of your body. Then the arrow of your intelligence will become sharp, and when you release the arrow, it will hit the target, which is your soul. Don't worry about the target. When the bow is stretched well and the arrow is sharp, you will hit it.

What is your state of mind when you are practising yoga? For what purpose are you doing it? Is it to improve your presentation of yourself in order to be more attractive to people as you walk down the street? Or are you doing it to cultivate your self from the body to the soul? If this latter thought is there, then it becomes spiritual.

Sensuality and spirituality are like two sides of a coin – if you turn the coin one way it is spiritual; the other way it is sensual.

It is a subjective matter. You do not require a certificate from an outsider to tell you whether your sādhana, your practice of yoga, is spiritual or sensual. Only the practitioner can test for himself or herself whether their practice is divine or non-divine, because the spiritual is subjective, as the core of the being is subjective. Outsiders cannot see the core of the being. They can only see the body and its manifestations. They cannot see the intuitive side. We need not be disturbed by the views of outsiders who look on our cover, the body, and try to tell us whether we are divine or non-divine.

When you get up early in the morning, have you ever noticed the state of your mind? And have you ever noticed the state you are in when you go to bed at night, before you go to sleep, when you are very near the bed and you go to lie down. Can you explain what that state is? Do you think of the body? Do you think of the mind at that moment? Or does the very core of the being go to lie on the bed? It is the feeling of a split second. It is a moment. I am asking about that moment. The bed is there. You are here. Everything is ready, and you just lie down.

What is your state before you put your head on the pillow? At that time you are not aware of the body or of the mind, but you just lie on the bed. And what is your state after you put your head on the pillow? At that moment you say, 'Oh, thank God!', and you have come into your mind. In the previous moment your body was active, your mind was active, your intelligence was active, but they were all drawn towards the self in order for the self to lie down. That is called being in the moment, because there was no presence of mind or of body, only the presence of the self. If you catch that state and increase it in your active life, you can do anything in the world without losing the inner spiritual contact. Contact with your self is known as spiritual or divine contact. Hence you remain divine, though you are engaged with the activities of the world.

When you see something beautiful, does the body see or does the mind see? What is it that sees? For a moment, you just remain there, open-mouthed. You are in a spiritual state. Then you say, 'I see it',

and in that moment you have brought it to your mind. You have covered your self and you have come to the mind.

As I said, it is like the two sides of a coin. If you turn it like this, it is self; if you turn it like that, it is the body and the mind and the world around you. This way it is a spiritual pleasure; that way it is a sensual pleasure. Remember that no outsider can tell you if your practice is spiritual or physical sādhanā. I may be meditating, but in my heart of hearts I may be thinking of a beautiful girl. For others, I may be meditating, but inside, what am I doing?

You have to learn to catch those states. Before going to bed, how is it that your mind does not work? When you see a beautiful blue sky, before you say, 'the blue sky', what is the state of your mind? Or when the sun on the western horizon is completely red like an apple, so beautiful that you can't speak, what is your state at that moment? In the lake you see a fish. Something attracts you. But then you cry, 'Look, look!', and you lose your spirituality because you come to your senses.

So you have to be watchful second by second in order to know what is spiritual and what is non-spiritual. I cannot demarcate. Those who demarcate are dishonest. You should learn to see only purification, not demarcation. If my self exists in all my cells, how can I say the existence of the cell is physical? The self exists in the cell. I exist here. If I exist here, how can I say it is a physical body? When the mind and the thought-waves dissolve in a new approach, as long as you remain in that new approach, that is spiritual. The moment you memorise it, it is sensual.

To try to repeat an experience is mechanical sādhanā, not spiritual. You have to keep the experience in your pocket, as it were, and then see what is coming today. You should not call back yesterday's experience. That experience has become finite, because it is recognised. Keeping that recognition in your pocket, see what is coming in today's practice. If you work like that, your practice is spiritual sādhanā. But if you want to repeat today the experience of what was new yesterday, it is repetition; it is not sādhanā – it cannot be spiritual.

A tree has millions and millions of leaves. Each leaf is different,

yet they are all part of the same tree. You also have numberless leaves in your various thought-waves, actions, reactions, fluctuations, feelings, failings and restraints, but they are all connected to the same root, the core of the being. You should aim to see yourself in totality, to see the tree in totality without naming it as flower, fruit, leaf or bark. The moment you see the leaf, you forget the tree. Similarly, if you say that you want to meditate and you forget the other limbs of yoga, you are no longer seeing the whole tree.

If you touch a live electric wire, you get a shock. In your body, your intelligence should be like a live wire, so the moment there is some wandering of the attention or some forgetfulness, the shock will tell you that something is running away in your head. This is action in meditation. This is meditation in action. Thus, there is no difference between action and meditation, as there is no difference between haṭha-yoga and rāja-yoga. 'Haṭha' means the will-power of intelligence, and rāja is the soul. Intelligence, being the bridge between the soul and the body, is the thread used to weave the body and soul into a divine union, a divine marriage, known as samādhi, or absoluteness in oneself. This is the fruit of the tree of yoga.

One has to plough the ground to make the soil soft, remove weeds, water and manure the growing plant, then delicately tend and nurture it so that the tree will grow in health and strength and yield its delicious fruit. We know that the spiritual essence of the tree is concentrated in the juice of its fruit, which is the culmination of the growth of the tree. We pluck the fruit and savour its taste. The joy of that taste can be felt, but cannot be expressed in words.

In the same way, the tree of yoga needs to be carefully followed through its various stages if we are to experience its results. Yama cultivates the organs of action so that they may act for the right ends; niyama civilises the senses and organs of perception; āsanas irrigate each and every cell of the human body and nourish it through copious blood supply; prāṇāyāma channels the energy; pratyāhāra controls the mind and cleanses it of all its impurities; dhāraṇā clears the veil that covers the intelligence, and sharpens it to grow sensitive as it acts as a bridge between the mind and the inner consciousness; dhyāna integrates intelligence, and in samādhi the rivers of

intelligence and consciousness flow together and merge in the sea of the soul, so that the soul may shine in its own glory.

Thus, the tree of yoga – yoga-vṛkṣa – leads us by its practice through layer after layer of our being, till we come to live and experience the ambrosia of the fruit of yoga, which is the sight of the soul.