

Yog Traditions Are Eternal

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(All Sanskrit words are written in italics. Long vowel sounds have been denoted by repeating the vowel again. Use of vowel 'a' at the end of proper and common nouns has been omitted to emphasize the point that there is no long sound of vowel 'a' at the end. For example Yoga is pronounced as Yog and so, has been written as Yog to encourage proper pronunciation.)

ABSTRACT

Yogic traditions for wellness are eternal and universal, being practiced from times immemorial and applicable to people from all walks of life irrespective of age, profession, gender, religion, race or nationality. Yog is neither a religious practice, nor merely a physical fitness routine but a holistic knowledge and management treatise at all the three levels of human existence – physical, subtle and causal. Physical body is known to all but in present times we are so overwhelmed by the illusive world around us that we have taken our own normal existence for-granted, dependent on external forces and I doubt if an average person ever thinks how his/her existence came about in the first place. Were you responsible for it or your parents or someone else? How was the body made, is being sustained and made to work without your conscious knowledge? The subtle and causal levels of body determine the working of the physical body though most of us hardly have a clue about it. Yogic Knowledge and practices guided the *Rishi-Munis* of yore, which is also eminently necessary for the present generation to manage their personal affairs with exact awareness at all three body levels and thereby help maintain a balance between their worldly life and spiritual existence.

The Vedic Knowledge was pronounced not just 5,000 years ago or even earlier known history of Indian civilization but from the very beginning of this Universe; right from the time human race first appeared on Planet Earth. The Creator of this Universe Himself first revealed it to his first son, Lord Brahma who passed it on to subsequent successors of Him in turn. This is somewhat similar to a patent holder who alone can be the best knower of that patent's knowledge. We can think of all the Aborigines in Australia, Asia, Europe and Americas and interestingly they all worshipped their ancestors. The existing dwindling numbers of theirs curse all their illnesses and misfortunes to modernity that took away their traditions in the name of development. If a survey is to be carried out of people affected with non-communicable modern diseases, it will be seen that they have all distanced themselves from Nature and live in a virtual world driven by technology. I see this in our tribal lands in central India, in Andman and Nicobar islands, I saw it in Australia, Africa and Canada. I learnt about the Pagan culture in Poland and Lithuania that existed before advent of Christianity in Europe and those inhabitants are said to have worshipped not just their ancestors but also Sun, Rain, Trees, lands, etc. as Gods. In Lithuania where advent of Christianity took place as late as fourteenth century, some such areas have been brought under heritage sites as remnants of their earlier civilization. We do not have scriptures of those times in other lands but the Vedic literature of India is an unmatched Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge that became the subject of scientific research in past one century and has mesmerized the seekers by its depth, eternity and as a source of Divine Bliss. The beauty of Indian Culture is that it has survived the vicissitudes of times and survived as an eternal Knowledge and Practice.

INTRODUCTION

Without burdening ourselves with that remote a past as the Vedic period, let me base my discourse to just 60 years back, of which I have been a witness and carry distinct remembrance. I found my parents observe lot of traditions at home, as did others also from other faiths – religious practices, cultural festivals and social occasions – like birth, marriage, Holi, Diwali, Baisakhi, Onam, Eid, Christmas Day, etc. Even on normal days the food was cooked fresh and taken by adults only in the quarantined area around the Kitchen. We children without yet having undergone the sacred thread ceremony were not allowed to enter there and were served food outside it. Adults had to change clothes before entering the Kitchen, wash feet, hands and face and would not eat left-over food from previous meal. Morning evening prayers had to be offered before taking meal. They never performed *Yogaasans* or *Praanaayaam*, the way it is done now but their daily activity was totally physical that involved more than a workout of *Yogaasans* and *Praanaayaam*. They were *Karmayogis* and *Bhaktiyogis* of the highest order and remained wedded to their faith till the very last. If I have chosen to stick to the Yogic path, it is primarily because of the influence I got from traditions we have lived at home, what are called *Samskaars*, and not because I consciously decided to go to a *Yogaashram* or Religious School and took training there. My adherence to our Vedic traditions with scientific enquiry has continuously empowered me in my decisions and actions all along my life – be it concerning family, professional career, social relations and networking, spiritual pursuits or just enjoying every moment of life in whatever form they appeared before me. As Gandhiji proved to the British Raj, Spiritual convictions could overcome all forms of physical pain.

My conviction in the Yogic practices is from my own experience of the benefits I have derived from its' practice in my daily living and performance at work place. It does not only ensure good body and mental health but also guides me in achieving my full potential, excellence to the best of ability in each and every action of mine. This is because every action of mine is performed after due deliberations about it in my morning and evening meditations where I am able to bring forth all my knowledge and experiences to guide me in decision making with single-track concentration. That is the beauty of meditation, it helps us to deliberate on all issues clogging our memory and one-by-one, put them in order of priority and seek as much clarity about the best way out as possible. That is the technique of stress management. At the same time, in meditation we can also look at the tasks for the day and seek clarity from all the knowledge/experience stored in our memory concerning that task in deciding on the best possible course of action. With this exercise taking place on a daily basis, morning-evening, such a person is poised with positive energy round the clock and besides excellence in performance, is also able to make best possible time management – another area of constant stress of people about not having time. Meditation is not about getting lost to some unknown world but seeking answers to daily concerns and thereafter, also to realize the reality within about our holistic existence – the true Yogic pursuits.

An important aspect about traditions is Faith. In fact, we all talk about Faith in terms of religion as adherence to religion initially is a matter of faith, a belief that living by it will help me lead an ethically meritorious life. It may convert into conviction in due course after realizing the Truth behind those practices of Faith, as I have experienced in my own up- bringing these past 66 years. Mahatma Gandhi had a very unique way of looking at issues. He had pledged himself to live by Nonviolence and Truth, the

first two preconditions of leading a Yogic path. He perhaps drew this conclusion and strength to stand by it from Bhagwat Gita, the well-known song celestial delivered by Lord Krishna to Warrior Arjun in the battle of Kurukshetra (story from the Epic Mahaaabaarat), which was his most prized possession and he always kept it with him. Ghandhiji used to argue that every action of his must first be nonviolent, then abide by Truth, and be logical and if any of these conditions were not fulfilled, he would not go by such an action. On occasions where he could not test the action on any of these three benchmarks, he relied on Faith, whether his Faith would forbid him from such an action. And if even this benchmark was not directly involved in the issue and he was still obliged to perform such an action, he would surrender such an action to God. And if we reflect on the first two steps of *Ashtaangyog*, viz. *Yam* and *Niyam*, we would realize that he was primarily practicing *Yams* and *Niyams* in all his actions and daily living. There is the 4th verse in Sunderkaand chapter of the epic Raamaayan that reads as follows:

***Taat Swarga Upwarga Sukha Dhariya tulaa ik ang,
Tool na taahi sakal mili jo sukh lav satsang.***

Meaning the joy and comfort to be drawn in company of Truth (saintly persons, *saatvic* surroundings that scatter positive energy and divinity all around) far outweighs the joy and comfort of heaven and beyond heaven put together. That was the kind of lives most people were encouraged to follow and *Bhaktiyog* (path of devotion), *Karmayog* (path of selfless action), *Dhyaanyog* (path of meditation) and *Gyaanyog* (path of Knowledge) of the Bhagwat Gita and Raamaayan propelled people in India to work towards '*Purushaartha Chatushtaya*' or the four-fold objectives of *Dharma* (learning to live a life of righteous path), *Artha* (earning righteous living), *Kaama* (creating progeny) and *Moksha* (deliverance from the cycle of death and birth) after having attained the fortune of taking the highest form of birth on earth as a human being. All the four paths are complementary and supplementary of one another and not exclusive of each other. This in deed is the purpose of pursuing the higher spiritual path of Yog, that of attaining *Samaadhi* or unifying with Divinity.

As the Vedic Knowledge tells us: *Yathaa Ande Tathaa Brahmaande* or 'As is the body, so is the Universe and vice versa'. Just as if the rule of law prevails in the world and there is good governance, everyone can live happily and comfortably, same thing is with our body, which is governed by Nature's Laws. In Nature, everything is interdependent and not exclusive. But in present times, each individual is self-centered, including in affairs between spouses, amongst family members and relations, each one wishes to safeguard own interest and others' interests become secondary. But isn't it the law of Nature also – survival of the fittest? There is a vital difference though between the two – in case of human beings, it is not the survival issue at stake but the issues of greed, jealousy, enmity, lust, anger, desire, etc. that dominate and influence all decisions and actions. To be able to think otherwise and work for everyone's good and happiness constitute the fundamentals of Yog Science.

Some years back in Poland as India's Ambassador, I was taking part in a discussion on Cultures of different countries and the representative from US told that in their Culture, children are told to be 'Independent and Enterprising'. That, he said, was American Culture. I entirely agree with that approach for individual growth but that has to be balanced with understanding each individual's inner reality as well, that of emotional field that depends entirely on inter-personal relations. Individual growth

does not take place in vacuum and is integral to the environment around him/her. Individuals have to learn to team up, to recognize others' right before laying claim to one's own right; in other words recognize that we are social animals and shall prosper in community while maintaining balance with Nature. Even animals enjoy family life and some live in large family like elephants. When we are motivated by self-interest alone, the first and foremost interest to be safeguarded is the 'I' and when that happens, there cannot be selfless service, also called *Sevaa*. But **the primary prerequisite of a Yogic Way of Life is to eliminate the I, which is a formidable barrier in the journey to unite (Yoga) first with the Self/Soul/Atman and then with everything else around us. These days everybody says, "I want peace" and if we learn to erase the 'I' and 'Want' from this universal longing of all, only the third word Peace will remain. But it is not so simple to realize this in practice. We first need to know what constitutes the 'I'.**

I personally think that the main difference between Vedic traditions and modern Western value systems is the absence of role of spiritual field in everyone's daily living. 15-20 years of age is not sufficient to attain emotional maturity or financial security and introduces a big fear of uncertainty in children's formative lives. Elderly people in their wee years likewise do not need state social welfare but emotional bond from their own siblings. In fact, maturity about life comes only after one has entered the householder's responsibilities and experienced the pains of married life; those of raising a family, looking after the aged parents and grand parents, performing social responsibilities, etc. That is why the Joint Family system in all Cultures prior to modern lifestyles of nucleus family was so healthy and symbiotic, taught togetherness rather than individual centered living.

The four broad divisions of 25 years each in one's whole life, **viz. *Brahmacharya, Grahastha, Vanprastha and Sanyaas***, as per Vedic traditions provide for renunciation (*Sanyaas*) as the final goal of human birth. The first 25 years are spent in learning the righteous path and education (path of *Dhrama*). The art of detachment from worldly bondage is very difficult without living through the second *Grahastha ashram* successfully as it teaches the art of *Sevaa* and sacrifices that kill the ego or the 'I'. Also, ask yourself the question: who is a *Brahmin*? The answer is – not necessarily the one born in a Brahmin family but the one who has complete knowledge about the Creator and His Creation or the *Brahmaand* and who remains absorbed in knowing more and more about Truth (*Brahman*) in this illusory world of *Maayaa*. Obviously this is the most difficult task to achieve and that is why the Brahmin class was given such a high place of recognition. In fact, it is no different even now though we call them professionals and not Brahmins. Birth alone does not determine our *Varna* or caste but as Bhagwat Gita tells – our character and actions decide our classification in one of the four broad *Varnas* or classifications as a *Brahmin* (the learned), a *Kshatirya* (Warrior), a *Vaishya* (Trader) or a *Shudra* (involved with lowly considered jobs).

History of modern medicine is just about 200 years plus. How did people manage their health needs before that? Did they have all the diseases that human race is currently inflicted with? Definitely not. I recently saw in a celebrated Russian Anatomy book the history of medicine being traced to Greece philosophers and not to the Yog and Ayurved knowledge of the Vedic period of India, which represent holistic human health sciences. The entire field of Psychiatry mirrors the knowledge

of Patanjali Yog *Sutras*. What is ironic is that even in the present age of globalization, some religious groups, out of ignorance, still relate Yog to a religious practice and encourage their adherents to stay away from it. But modern medicine has come to realize the limits of 'matter', which cannot deal with things beyond matter – the metaphysical and Spiritual. Therefore, they too are now leaning towards these sciences. Yog and Ayurved delve deep into the metaphysical plane and beyond and those keeping themselves away from it obviously are distancing themselves from a very empowering scientific knowledge base of holistic human health and wellness discipline.

We must realize that 'I' is mostly striving to connect us with the external world where 'Internet' and information technology in present times have become our critical tools but the Yog science provides us that most powerful 'Innernet' that helps us to direct the 'I' to it's own origin, the 'Self', the soul within, that helps to maintain a critical balance between intense pulls of materialism towards that illusory external world we call '*Maayaa*', and remaining within Nature's overarching laws we call the emotional and spiritual world. It provides that critical balance between these two worlds, which does not allow us to go down hill and become a victim of those modern diseases of anxiety, depression and nervous breakdowns, which in turn can lead to dreaded diseases.

Developments since the industrial revolution of over past two centuries and technological and digital revolution of last half a century has catapulted human race to virtual spaces rather than living in the natural world. A recent survey of public opinion in the United States has shown that increasing number of people are getting concerned at the pace of digital technology and its influence on lifestyles development where human touch may disappear from their lives. Robots may become life companions. I truly sympathize with twenty-first century-born children because their living environment is mostly cutoff from Nature, they hardly get the desired level of parental attention or love, care and company of grand parents that we in India took for-granted until just 2-3 decades back,. Children with single parent are even more traumatized. Do we call this modernity and development? I wasn't surprised to read the front-page headline in 19-20 April 2014 International New York Times that I read while transiting in Frankfurt that day, captioned: "For a fringe of activists, world's end really is nigh. A British author turns from saving the planet to accepting its collapse". The British author Paul Kingsnorth had founded the Dark Mountain Project in 2009, a loose network of ecologically minded artists and writers, but during their August 2013 meeting on the chalk downlands of southern England, it was "mourning, grief and despair". "We are living, he says, through the "age of ecocide," and like a long-dazed widower, we are finally becoming sensible to the magnitude of our loss", wrote Daniel Smith. The caption under the large front-page photo showing Kingnorth standing alone in an old-growth forest read: "Paul Kingnorth has moved to rural Ireland, where he and his wife will grow their own food and home-school their children. He argues that civilization is approaching collapse".

Current issues confronting our Youth and their lifestyles are primarily arising because they go against some very fundamental laws of Nature. Shortcomings of our educational system and ignorance about religious commands and practices, cultures and traditions, etc. are also not empowering them adequately to deal with their day-to-day issues and confusions. Non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes,

heart and kidney failures, cancer, etc. are arising out of faulty food habits, work practices and stressed lifestyles. We do not even realize that there cannot be a better laboratory for Spiritual realization than our own body itself and we do not need to wander in research laboratories for it. We are relying on scientific research in external world about a world that does not exist external to human body and cannot be measured by machines made of matter without life in it. It is like the Vedic dictum that God cannot be seen or realized by human senses. I have seen Yog researchers so stressed about their research and yet they are researching on 'Stress Management'. I wish to emphasize that the deeper aspects of benefits from Yog practice get reflected on your personality and cannot be measured by laboratory machines. Whatever parameters we are monitoring are limited to the physical body but the real transformation of Yogic practices gets reflected on Ego, which no body talks about.

Yogaasans, *Praanaayaam* and Meditation provide us the management techniques to clear all inner confusions/ ignorance and keep at bay the causes of sufferings while still living lives with joy and a sense of fulfillment of every mission in life. A deeper study of Yog Sutras and Bhagwat Gita shows the depth and quality of scientific knowledge those great *Rishis* and Learned Masters of yore possessed about Nature and the entire Creation, including the human race, on Mother Earth. They could perform acts like disappearing instantly from a place and then being seen at the same time at more than one places elsewhere, tame a ferocious animal, float in water, etc. that would be termed as miracles but these are not miracles. Instead, these are super natural powers of energy control and transmissions attained and exercised by them to manifest the desired results. But a true Yogi does not use such powers for public display but only to continue his journey towards *Nirvaan*. In March 2014 during the International Yog Festival at Rishikesh, we had organized performance of a Yogi who could float in water without effort with his legs crossed in Lotus posture and his head straight up out of water and with both hands holding a small Bhagwat Gita book above water and reading verses from it loudly. It was magical for the large gathering witnessing it standing around the Holy Pond in Hemkunt Saheb Gurudwara in Rishikesh but as he explained, he could fill his abdomen with plenty of air such that his body weight was less than that of the displaced water by his immersed body in the water. This is the simple Archimedes principle of floating in water for any person to verify.

Those fundamentals are eternal, not subject to change where as the material world (*Prakriti*) is continuously evolving on the basis of *Trigunas* and yogic practices seek to ensure that this evolution within each individual remains inspired by *Sattva Gunas* so that he/she leads a better life than what it is to be without such empowerment. Yog science provides complete control over your physical health and mental peace as it deals with human existence in an integrated way at the three levels – Physical, subtle and Causal. It not only deals with the body exercises (*Yogaasans*) and breathing (*Praanaayaam*) but also helps to understand the necessity of maintaining a regular lifestyle. Your thought process has to rise above the five root causes of sufferings – Ignorance, Illusion, Attachment, Enmity and Fear of death. How to regulate your thoughts? How do thoughts arise in your mind in the first place? How to: tell the truth at all times; do not steal; live a very disciplined life – do not indulge in gratifying your senses all the time and instead keep them under complete control of the intellect; do not fancy for a life full of comforts as

your body then gets rusted; keep personal needs to the bare minimum, etc.? Thus, the Yog practice starts with your mind – that is training the mind to lead a daily routine of well-defined activities under strict intellect discipline. All this constitutes the first two steps of *Maharshi Patanjali's AshtaangYog*, viz. *Yam* and *Niyam*.

Eating and Sleeping are also two very important activities that determine the health of the physical body, which is the gross level of your living (*Sthool Shareer*). Besides taking a balanced diet, you also need to know the way of eating food and the right quantity of it. How much water to drink and when? How to avoid indigestion or other ailments? Poor sleep also affects body health, for sleep helps body to re-coupe from fatigue. To ensure that you get enough hunger and sleep, you must ensure a fixed schedule for meals and bedtime everyday. It is good practice to wake up before sunrise and also ensure 6-8 hours of good sleep depending on individual requirements. The science of Eating, Breathing and Sleeping is an art and you must obtain full knowledge of it. Just these three routines can assure good physical health. Other Yogic practices will help progress towards higher states of realizations about oneself. The Ayurved science is specifically dealing with maintenance of Physical health of the body and treatment of diseases.

The second level of living is at mental level (*Sookshma Shareer* or Subtle body), which you cannot see but are aware of activities at this level. Mind, intellect and memory are knowledge faculties that process the information gathered by the five senses of perception, namely ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose and the five action organs, namely speech, hands, legs, anus, and sex organ. You are continuously using these faculties and are aware of their existence but I do not think you have any clue about the subtle way of working of these faculties and the way they exercise control over body activities.

The third level of existence is the Ego level (*Kaaran Shareer* or Causal body). Ego is the reflected image of the Self or the Soul on the brain's memory plane called the *Chitta*. The Self is a pure entity, a detached onlooker, representing the link in your body with God. But when it enters a given body, the individual's *Trigunaatmak Chittavrittis* or personality traits from past births also come enveloping it. So, it's pure identity as an embodiment of God gets transformed to that of the individual and is called the 'Ego' or the *Jeeva* or simply the 'I'. Thoughts evolve with time in tune with your *Chitta's* knowledge enrichment and correspondingly the *Chittavrittis* also evolve and determine the changing nature of Ego, called the Consciousness.

Thus, food for the Causal body is your thought process, which when refined and purified to higher and higher levels of Eternal Truths, also purifies the Ego to become closer to the Self. This is possible by acquiring deeper and deeper knowledge/wisdom from the Vedic literature and attained Gurus so that Ego can be rid of the envelop of all the ignorance & illusions and enabled to become one with the pure Self. Spirituality is all about this process through continuous study of the self, then meditating over it to realize it personally firsthand, which then becomes pure wisdom

that can tranquilize all the *Chittavrittis* responsible for mental distractions and destabilizations. When *Chitta* reaches a pure state, it reflects the Self in its pure form because there is no more the envelop of ignorance. The reflected Self or the Ego is exactly the same as the pure Self. This is the state of union or Yog of the self or 'I' with the pure Self, the state of Self-realization. The state of God-realization is one more step away where the seeker has to rise from the Pure Self state to that of merger in the Supreme Self, the *Parmaatman*. That is the state of *Kaivalya Samaadhi* or *Tooriya* state.

The first lesson in Yog Practice is to know your place in Nature. We must know that body is our first home, our first temple. We all say 'God is within us' and that means body has to be the temple. If body is temple, then we cannot be taking liberties with body but giving it our utmost attention to keep it in perfect nick and never abuse it like smoking, alcohol, other immoral activities. The house that we build and call home is actually home for the body and not for the reality within you. That 'I' living with in the body is continuously moving with the body and does not stay back at home while your body ventures outside the home.

Secondly, Nature is our first Guru. We must always look to Nature's ways of existence to know answers to our doubts. How do animals, birds, water creatures, reptiles, bacteria, virus, fungi, etc. live and act? We too are governed by those very principles in varying degrees. Look at their ways of drying their bodies, exercising, fasting when not well, etc. Look at infant children, how much they can exercise their bodies on their back and belly both. We need to continue those activities so that our body continues to stay flexible and muscles, ligaments, bones, cartilages, all tissue are well-developed. We need to wander in Sun and actively interact with Nature to remain in balance and harmony with it, for we are a product of Nature.

Yog Science, according to its originator, as scripted by Maharshi Patanjali in his *Yog Sutras*, is a discipline, a management art of controlling and subliming your "*Chittavrittis*", which are impulses/emotions/thought process arising out of your memory plane called the *Chitta* (memory cells of the brain) that distract the Mind. It empowers you to live your life to its full potential in every walk of your life while staying in perfect and peaceful balance with everything else happening around you. Established in Yog, you will neither irritate/agitate anyone nor get irritated/agitated by others, maintain equipoise in all situations – good or bad, happy or sad, insult or elation, loss or profit, etc., stay detached while performing all duties to perfection (*Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam* – Bhagwat Gita), have attachment or enmity with none, continuously endeavour to rise above ignorance and surrender to God.

You have to realize a major difference between Yog and Ayurved. The latter deals with your body as living matter. So, an Ayurved *Vaidya* (Sanskrit name meaning doctor) and his therapists are working on your body at all the three levels to bring it to normal health whereas in Yog, your Guru can only guide you, show you the path but the real effort, action or sustained practice has to be entirely yours, your Guru cannot do it for you. Yog Practice is a journey performed all by yourself to the microcosm inside your body. This journey after transcending the five body sheaths is all along in

the Thought Plane where there is no physical path to follow and, therefore, you need constant guidance of an accomplished Guru to answer all your doubts, confusions, hesitations, road blocks, etc. arising on the way. Secondly, there is no time limit for attaining mastery in Yog practice. You cannot say that I want to master it in one week or one month or even ten years. There are so many factors, including your *Karmas* or destiny from past births that would determine your progress. It will depend on the intensity, regularity, universality, depth and sincerity of an all-inclusive practice. Even after final attainment, it does not end but continues till the very last breath and if not united with the Supreme Soul or attained *Moksha/Nirvaan* in this life, to the next birth.

Kriyaayog: It is also very important to realize that after explaining the entire science of Yog in the first chapter, Maharshi Patanjali provides the starting point of Yog *Sadhnaa* in the first three *Sutras* of second chapter, which do not relate to *Yogaasans* and *Praanaayaam* but concentrate on three of the five *Niyams*. That confirms the necessity of laying emphasis on *Yam* and *Niyam* because they help to engineer our thought process without which nothing can be achieved. Let us consider the first three *Sutras* of chapter II, the *Saadhan Paad*:

Sutra 1 “Tapah-Swaadhyaaye-Ishwarpranidhaanaani Kriyaa Yogah” explains that *Tapah* (austerities), *Swaadhyaaya* (study of the scriptures to gain higher and higher knowledge about the Self) and *Ishwarpranidhaan* (surrender to God) together constitute the science of ‘*KriyaaYog*’.

Tapah includes the many physical and subtle pursuits in austerities that help the seeker to strengthen his willpower. For example, fasting regularly on fixed days, getting up early in the morning and retiring early at night – preferably at fixed timings, performing pilgrimages, helping the needy, etc. are the external dimensions of austerities. Controlling senses, anger, greed, lust, etc. are internal dimensions of *Tapah* and the seeker has to constantly set higher and higher standards of austerities to overcome these obstacles and attain faith and trust on the path of Yog. The seeker looks for higher and higher knowledge to strengthen his willpower. He remains observant all the time, every sense impulse is first analyzed by his intellect and only after looking at the pros and cons, he strives to stick on to the righteous path. In this way by subjecting himself to a highly disciplined living or austerities, the seeker strengthens his willpower and gains empowerment to control his *Chittavrittis*.

Swaadhyaaya is regular study of scriptures to learn about the real nature of things happening all the time around us, acquiring knowledge about what is right, what is wrong, what is the righteous path, pitfalls to be avoided, sins to be curbed, and so on. Knowledge so acquired helps the seeker to regulate his daily living accordingly and *Swaadhyaaya* thus becomes an integral part of uplifting his living, his lifestyle, his existence. An ignorant person without acquiring or having such knowledge cannot even think of taking the first step and question of having the willpower or desire to practice the Yog science would not arise at all.

Ishwarpranidhaan meaning surrender to God is the simplest path to connect inwards leading to *Samaadhi*. But it is not so simple as it sounds. Surrender to God implies that everything is done in the name of God and

individual does not pride himself/herself for his/her achievements. It helps in purifying *Chittavrittis* and progress on the Yog path. These are all interdependent practices even though they may sound independent of each other, which are preparatory to advancing on the path of *Maharshi Patanjali's AshtaangYog*. Before we surrender to God, we must know Who, What and where God is and for that *Swaadhyaaya* or study of the Vedic texts or scriptures of other religions is a must.

These three attributes together are called *Kriyaa Yog* and form the foundation of the path to Self-realization. **The most important and forthright lesson to be understood right in the beginning is that the first step in Yog science starts not with *Yogaasans* but with moderating lifestyle, monitoring the thought process, inculcating basic moral and human values, gaining higher and higher wisdom and surrendering to God – that invisible Cosmic Power that is beyond scientific exploration in laboratories.**

Sutra 2 “Samaadhi-bhaavanaarthah Klesh-tanoo-karanaarthscha” meaning *KriyaaYog* is meant to inculcate the yearnings for *Samaadhi* and ease & dismantle obstacles in it's path. It clarifies that *KriyaaYog* helps to ease the *Klesh* (obstacles) in the path of Yog and ignites the initial curiosity towards *Samaadhi*. The seeker is propelled by an inner urge towards God realization. It may be interesting to know that Paramhansa Yognanda, author of the bestselling book on *KriyaaYog*: 'Autobiography of a Yogi' and the chain of Gurus preceding him were practitioners of *KriyaaYog*. He had migrated to the USA in early AD 1920s on instructions of his Guru to spread the practice of *KriyaaYog* in that continent. The Self Realization Fellowship (SRF) established by him is still active worldwide under the *Guru-Shisya* Parampara (Master-disciple tradition).

Sutra 3 “Avidyaa-asmitaa-raag-dwesh-abhiniveshaah Kleshaah” meaning Ignorance, Illusion, Attachment, Enmity and Fear of death are the five obstacles on the path to God Realization. They reside in the *Chitta* or subconscious mind as *vrittis* or habits and determine the individual's personality. The person's actions at any given time depend on which one of his *vrittis* is dominating at that time and which others are in supporting role.

Necessity of *Yogaasans* and *Praanaayaam*

Yogaasans and *Praanaayaam* exercise all body joints to keep them free from any toxins and waste deposits, so that there is no blockage in the free flow of communication through the nerves and blood vessels flowing through the arteries or veins. A whole series of exercises of all the body joints, carried out with rhythmic deep and brisk breathing rounds, has been developed by Yogis in the past, more commonly known by the name '*Sookshma Vyaayaam*' or Flexibility Exercises, that provides an absolutely clear experience of the meaning of body healing through blood circulation and mental promptings through the central nervous communications to the body parts to guide each one of them to maintain normal health. Once the body attains good flexibility, it is possible to practice more complex body postures, called *Yogaasans*, to further ensure body's total health. Thereafter, *Praanaayaam* helps in bringing the body to complete stillness so that the senses also get withdrawn from

their subjects and mind can be directed inwards to intellect and memory sheaths. This is the fifth step of *Pratyaahaar*. It is possible to clearly experience the five sheaths in the body, viz. food, energy, mind, intellect and memory through this process. This then leads to the last three steps of *Ashtaangyog*, viz. contemplation, concentration and finally connectivity of the 'I' towards the Self/Soul/*Atman*. While I do not wish to go into details of *Yogaasans* and *Praanaayaam* since there is sufficient focus on these in normal discourses, I would focus more on the last three steps of *Ashtaang Yog* practice, that of connecting with the 'I' first and then directing it towards the Self for its continuous purification and sublimation.

Vrese 18 in '*Purush Sukta*' (II Chapter of **Rudrashtadyaayi**) reads as follows:

***Vedaahme-tam-purusham-mahaantam-aadityavaranam-tamasah-parastaat,
Tamewa-vididtwati-mrityneti-naanyah-panthaa-vidyateyanaya.***

Meaning there is no other way to get over the fear of death than getting to know that Supreme Purusha or God who like the Sun removing all darkness, is the remover of all individual ignorance about their life/existence. And the only way to know God is to unite with Him and that is the pinnacle of *Yog Saadhanaa* or never ending intense *Yog* practice until merger in God.

Wisdom is God

I have seen many references in Upanishads and other religious books to conclude that 'Knowledge is God', which can be easily explained by a profound argument about God being a 'Perfect Individual'. He possesses all the best qualities that one can imagine. We ask him for virtues depending on our own understanding of the virtues. In other words, God is our role model with all the best of qualifications that we can think of. Such a person has to know everything. Or we can say that total knowledge represents God or Knowledge is God. No wonder *GyaanYog* (path of knowledge) is also one of the many paths of Self-realization.

Mundakopanishad speaks (verses I/5-6) about God as *Paraavidhyaa* (supreme knowledge) and the four Veds (Rig, Yaju, Saam and Atharva) and the six *Vedaangs* (limbs of Veds) - *Shikshaa, Kalp, Vyaakaran, Nirukta, Chhanda* and *Jyotish* - as the *Aparaavidhyaa* (knowledge of the Universe). The latter empowers seekers to learn about the *Paraavidhyaa*. Adishankaraachaarya declares that there is no difference between realization of the *Parmaatman* and gaining the *Paraavidhyaa*, in other words gaining knowledge about God is as good as realizing Him. Verse 6 then provides the attributes of God (He cannot be realized by senses of perception or attained by the organs of action, He is unborn, without description or form, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient, the smallest in appearance and largest also by way of Creator of the whole universe, etc.). Anyone who can realize those attributes or have a firsthand experience of the same, can claim to have realized God.

But what is Wisdom? Knowledge when personally experienced and found to be true becomes Wisdom for that seeker. We talk of theoretical and applied sciences. The former postulates and develops theoretical knowledge and the latter puts it to actual use or performs laboratory research to verify correctness of the theoretical knowledge so developed. So, applied science is verified knowledge, which we call wisdom or

experienced knowledge. In general context, we utilize the word wisdom in more of a moral or human values terms because these have been tested generation after generation as a healthy practice for human development. Knowledge of physical world is one dimension of modern higher education whereas Knowledge of the entire Universe, including the Spiritual Universe, delves in the realm of higher wisdom (*Aparavidhya*). Knowledge about God becomes Wisdom when we experience His presence within us, as also within everyone else.

We all can be Godly if we also imbibe Godlike qualities. *Maharshi Patanjali* makes a categorical statement in *Sutra I/25* that God is the ultimate in Knowledge. Nothing is beyond Him. This is the precise reason that every religion has fixed so many codes of conduct in daily life to raise individual characters. To be true to one's religion, one has to faithfully observe the daily chores of living and conduct and then alone can one claim to be a true follower of his religion. Mahatma Gandhiji explained this subject so precisely. He said religion is a matter of faith and that all religions are equal. There cannot be one superior to the other. "Whether Whitney Houston thanks Jesus as her Lord and personal saviour at the Grammy Awards, or the Pope invokes His name in daily prayers, it is the "Christ of Faith" whose continuing and powerful presence makes a difference in People's lives. The charismatic preacher of first century Palestine remains in the shadow" (source: Tikkum Magazine website, San Francisco, US).

‘I’ - the Body Manager

The best way of understanding the relationship between the body and the ‘I’ within is to compare it with a vehicle. There are so many makes and models of cars. But car by itself can do nothing, it is dead matter, cannot move until the driver drives it. It’s performance would depend on the driver's knowledge of the car and it’s working, of traffic rules and regulations and of streets through which he has to drive to the destination. It is also normal to have car breakdowns. Some breakdowns like a flat tire, empty gasoline tank or a run down battery can be easily detected but there can be other causes like engine trouble, electrical fault, etc. that a normal driver would not know and has to call for a mechanic or get the car towed to the service center. But if the driver is knowledgeable and trained to handle even such breakdowns also, he would be a clear winner.

This is exactly true for the human body also. The body is just like the car, cannot do anything by itself, knows nothing about itself. There is a driver inside, called ‘I’ who causes everything to happen and the more he gets to learn and understand about the body and it’s working, the better he can manage it’s upkeep and performance. That is why it is so important to make use of Yog and Ayurved sciences to learn about this inter-connectivity of physical, subtle and causal bodies within our body. ‘I’ is equipped with the three subtle faculties of mind, intellect and memory with which it operates the body through the senses. The knowledge about maintaining good health of the body and ways of fixing the possible illnesses and breakdowns in it can be pre-stored in the memory cells of the brain by conscious learning and experience, to be used by ‘I’ when

needed; just as the mechanic learns all about car breakdowns before becoming a car mechanic or software is pre-loaded on the computer hard-disc to enable it perform the assigned tasks.

The car breakdown is not such a serious problem so long as the driver has full knowledge of the breakdown but suppose the car is in perfect condition and the driver breaks down. That is a clear disaster. The same is true with our existence in present times. The body is easy to handle but health of the 'I' seated inside the body is more important and even more difficult to maintain, for average people just do not know about the it. Most people think of the body to be the 'I'. When we talk of the nervous breakdowns or emotional imbalances, it does not relate to the physical body but to the subtle and causal bodies. So, any disturbance or breakdown at the latter two levels has to be seen as a very serious matter as it directly impacts on the physiology and biochemistry of the physical body and needs to be addressed urgently.

The top priority has to be to know the body constitution, its working and who and where the driver is inside the body? The performance of the driver is determined by his adherence to the path of *Dharma* (moral and ethical human values), which lays down the traffic rules of the subtle and causal bodies, and adherence can come provided the person has knowledge of it in the first place. Therefore, ultimately what determines the performance of the 'I' in the body is the knowledge of the Self possessed by it and stored in his memory or the *Chitta*.

Consciousness

A debate on subjects like Consciousness and Intelligence appears confused without first determining its actual existence and play. A clear definition needs to be given to identify them before starting a serious discussion on the subject. The Upanishads and the *Yog Sutras* provide an exact understanding of the different sheaths of human existence – the food sheath, the energy sheath, the mind sheath, the intellect sheath and the happiness sheath. The last of these, the happiness sheath lies in the Consciousness and if a seeker can transcend this sheath, he then enters the realm of pure Self and is able to discriminate between the Ego and the Self. Intellect sheath no doubt lies in intellect but this too without the coordination of the *Chitta* remains disabled. Therefore, the memory plane is the sheet anchor of each and every individual's existence and any discussion on Consciousness or Intelligence without acknowledging the central role of *Chitta* is meaningless. This again establishes the fact that Yog is all about management of *Chitta* as defined in I/2 *Yog sutra*.

The simplest way to understand the exact nature of Consciousness is to consider its opposite, viz. Unconsciousness or even deep sleep. We know for sure that in both these situations, the soul stays in the body and there is also flow of life energy (*Praan*) in the body; the breath continues uninterrupted. The only thing that gets disabled is the memory. The person has no knowledge of events during this time because nothing is recorded on the memory. Even deep sleep is interpreted as a state of 'zero knowledge'. When someone claims that he slept soundly, he actually claims that he has no knowledge of the period he was sleeping; when and

how the time of sleep passed. In the state of unconsciousness also, the person has no information of what happened during that much period of unconsciousness. Therefore, what determines the state of consciousness is the ability to record all the events taking place during this time.

The basic idea of consciousness represents our state of awareness about things happening in and around us as experienced by our senses and assessed by the intellect. State of knowledge stored in the *Chitta* is the most important component defining the state of Consciousness. In the computer language, we can divide Consciousness in two parts – the hard disc and the software along with data stored on it. So, even if the hard disc has huge memory capacity, without the software and data stored on it, the hard disc by itself is irrelevant. In my view, the *Chitta's* knowledge base is the real operative part of Consciousness whereas the memory cells comprising the *Chitta* provide the hard disc or the physical existence of the *Chitta*.

We already know that the body cannot operate without *Praan* and the Self. Also, the Self is a non-doer and instead, its reflected image in the *Chitta* plane, called the *Jeeva* or Ego, is the real doer as already explained. The *Jeeva* draws its empowerment entirely from the knowledge stored in the *Chitta* and the two together (reflected Self and the Knowledge) in reality constitute the Consciousness. Thus, with the changing state of memory from moment to moment because of new knowledge and experiences being gained by it and the less important contents fading out of it, the Consciousness is in a continuous state of evolution. In fact, it can be systematically developed to reach any levels an individual wishes to acquire.

We can thus conclude that *Jeeva* in reality is the true Consciousness. But since the reflected image of Self is a constant, the only other fluctuating factor directly constituting the Consciousness is the knowledge base of the *Chitta*. So, all evolution process of Consciousness directly depends on the evolution of the *Chitta*. This is why the entire Yog science focuses on *Chitta* and sublimating the *Chittavrittis* to a zero state. All other faculties like the senses, the mind, the intellect, the *Praan* and the reflected Self are instruments to help shape the nature of *Chitta*.

It would thus be fair to relate the operating part of Consciousness to knowledge, which is not a physical entity and, therefore, is not matter. It is generally accepted that the seat of Self is the thumb-size cave in the normal human heart whereas the memory plane lies in the brain. Medical Science has full knowledge of the memory cells in the brain but the knowledge stored in the memory cells is not physical in nature and, therefore, medical science cannot directly deal with it. Psychiatrists explore this plane through conversations with the individuals but Yog science and more specifically the field of Spirituality directly deal with training of the self's thought process by the Self. This is where the *Praanaayaam* and *Dhyaan* practices of Yog become very relevant in training the Consciousness and provide firsthand clarity on these subjects without studies or experiments on memory cells of the brain as physical entities or matter storing the knowledge. Health of memory cells is a

separate issue and any degeneration in them would obviously directly impact on the knowledge stored in them.

J. Krishnamurti, the great Thinker of 20th century, writes in his book 'Freedom from the Known' in Chapter III 'Consciousness – The Totality of Life – Awareness' (page 24): "Consciousness is the total field in which thought functions and relationships exist. All motives, intentions, desires, pleasures, fears, inspirations, longings, hopes, sorrows, joys are in that field. But we have come to divide this consciousness into the active and the dormant (subconscious)" We can thus see that *Chitta*, which is the repository of all experiences and knowledge and from where thought originates, is the key to Consciousness. Krishnamurti further clarifies (page 25): "It is only when you divide consciousness, which is all thought, feeling and action into different levels (fragmentary existence depending on the different roles being played at different times by the same individual like that of a householder, community member, at work place, etc.) that there is friction."

What I find interesting in Krishnamurti's discussion is his insistence on relating thought to past events only, which are stored in the *Chitta*, and that is why he argues for freedom from this known past. "A mind which is not crippled by memory has real freedom", he argues (page 33). So long as we remain glued to past memories and do not come out of it, there is no freedom for thought to explore new grounds. So, it is essential that seekers on the spiritual path learn to dissociate themselves from past events and store only the knowledge part of it – the lessons learnt from those events have to be absorbed well as lessons for the future to move on to higher states of consciousness. The major clash of interest in modern life-styles arises out of this individualism where the consciousness is being trained all the time to guard self-interest without concern for others' interests, what to talk of the interests of other creatures at large or the Nature as a whole. Therefore, freedom from the past and detachment from the self (ego) helps to explore new horizons towards higher states of consciousness.

"Thought is never new, for thought is the response of memory, experience, knowledge. From the old you derive pleasure, never from the new. There is no time in the new." Krishnamurti writes (page 33) and clarifies, "... – if you can look at it without wanting the experience to be repeated, then there will be no pain, no fear, and therefore tremendous joy." This indeed is the seed for creative thoughts and sometimes to an entirely new stream of thoughts as well, even if their prompting still came from past knowledge stored in the *Chitta*. The last three limbs of *Ashtaang Yog* are meant to explore new grounds through the judicious management of thoughts. This is possible when we get freedom from the known, though the known can also be a seed for exploring new grounds. This is the thrust of verse 5 of Ch. VI in Bhagwat Gita where the seeker is told that the Self is your best friend when *Sattvaguna* dominates and also the worst enemy when *Tamoguna* dominates.

Also, the only way to get rid of problems is to find solutions for them so that they do not clog our memory and then burden our living. This is the

way to raise our Consciousness to higher and higher levels and can be accomplished by regular practice of *Swaadhyaaya* (study of the self) and meditation every morning and evening to connect inwards and reflect on the readings from daily *Swaadhyaaya*. The fact remains: “*Ekam sat, vipraah bahudhaa vadanti*”, meaning Truth is one though the learned narrate it in many different ways and that is why Vedic wisdom (*Aa No Bhadraa Kratavoyantu Vishwatah*) tells us to allow all good knowledge from any source (diverse cultures and religions) in the world to flow freely into your faith to further enrich it. Mahatma Gandhi used to say to throw open doors and windows of your home so that winds of all cultures and religions could freely flow in.

I see meditation time as quality time for self-reflection and to connect with our pure Self to ponder over our own real life issues without anyone else’s involvement and give our total attention to each and every issue that has remained unresolved and is burdening our memory. Since every individual is different, their knowledge base and understanding of different subjects would also be different and they would have their own ways of finding answers to personal problems in meditation. Therefore, the primary objective of meditation is to clear the unresolved issues from memory by finding answers to them. For this, the person would obviously have to independently empower himself with complete knowledge of the subject from every possible sources available to him before sitting for meditation, for knowledge is the prime tool for resolving issues.

A wise person as a rule is a good listener, for he realizes that he does not have the monopoly on wisdom and even the knowledge he possesses, came to him through a learning process from other sources. His own contribution in its making has primarily been by way of being a good observer / listener / analyzer / imbiber, etc. and accepting & absorbing all the new knowledge coming his way. *Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev* writes (The Age newspaper, New Delhi, 23 May 2011), “Who and what you are right now is just your accumulated past. And whatever information you have gathered is a limited possibility.” So, a wise person realizes the enormity of our Universe and the limited exposure he possesses about moment to moment events taking place on just one planet, mother Earth, what to think of events on rest of the planets in the Universe. Today, we do have the technological advantage of knowing so much about places we have never visited or events we were not witness to. But just a century ago when aviation industry was in its infancy and information and communication technologies were unheard of, people had no access to real time information. The Vedic knowledge could not have been compiled if the wise people limited themselves to their own knowledge and refused to be open to newer information coming their way from different directions and sources.

Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev writes, “It is always good to seek someone or something which is a little larger than yourself and to give yourself to that process. If you become bigger than that, move on and find something still bigger; till then you should just listen because that’s the way to grow. If you obey only to yourself, you will just recycle your past and ensure and enshrine the limitation of who you are. One who enshrines his limitations

is working against the fundamental aspiration in every human being, which is to expand, to become free.” He further clarifies, “Obeying this limited possibility (your knowledge) makes your life into a recycle bin of the old; you will never allow any future possibilities to happen to you. While it takes a lot of intelligence to see that you are enslaved, a fool thinks he is free.”

Our own self-interests and egoist tendencies stop us from listening to others; to reason and reality. The ego comes in the way by not being open to newer and better ideas / information / knowledge than what we have stored in our memory from the past. I have myself seen endless instances where I thought I had the correct knowledge but reality turned out to be otherwise. The moment we realize the above Truth, we would not have difficulty in intellectual growth; in finding causes (followed by solutions) of most discords and disputes – be they in family, society or between nations.

Ego or self or the ‘I’ and process of transformation to Self

Let us now try to go little deeper and clearer in understanding the ‘I’ or Ego. I got this clarity once in my own meditation. This happened in Warsaw while I was serving as my country’s Ambassador to Poland. One day during my regular early morning meditations, I felt as if I was clearly floating in the Happiness Sheath of the body. My eyes were closed and body totally still, I was perhaps in a different consciousness plane. A thought started flashing on my mind: “How does this Inner Happiness show on my face?” Slowly the thought became intense and my meditation was broken. I opened my eyes and tried to see my face. I was sitting in my lotus posture with body completely still. I wondered as to why I could not see my face despite my best efforts to do so. For few seconds I was not sure what was going on and then first time the realization came to me that I had never seen my face and all the time I was only seeing my mirror image or a photo of myself. This was a very telling revelation.

I then argued to myself at that very moment of meditation that when my physical face, which is my identity and a reality, is not seen to me without the use of a mirror, how can I see the Soul inside my body, which has no form? I still continue reflecting from time to time on this incident, especially when I talk about it in my workshops or in conferences like this and every time some more depth or newer meaning emerges out of it. That was the first time I also got a clear understanding of the concept of *Asmitaa/Maayaa* or Illusion. For example, my face is reality but the mirror image is an illusion. It stays there until the mirror is there and the moment the mirror is removed, so is the illusion. The mirror image is not a perfect reflection unless there is 100% purity of the reflecting surface. We look at 10 different mirrors and the image will show ten different faces of the same face depending on the impurities on each reflecting surface. You ask ten different people about the same object and there will be 10 different statements, even if with very minor differences of punctuation. Though the object being described by each individual is a constant but each observer’s own understanding of the object comes into play, which is different for each individual. That is why we say ‘**beauty is in the eyes of the onlooker**’. This is a very telling statement and we must

recognize that when I comment on others' personalities, it primarily reflects my own personality, my thought process.

When we apply this analogy to the soul, we have to first figure out the mirror on which the soul reflects and registers its presence. By itself, it is said to be a non-doer, remains as a passive observer of the activities or its mirror image – the 'I' (Bhagwat Gita). *Yog Sutras* tell us that this mirror is the *Chitta*, which can be explained by logic, for *Chitta* is the repository of all knowledge and action of each individual. Therefore, when the soul reflects on the *Chitta*, it acquires the entire contents of the *Chitta* and becomes the 'I' or the Ego. So, when the 'I' wishes to pursue the path of *Nirvana* and merge with the soul, it will have to work on the *Chitta* and reverse all the deviations on it from the true nature of the soul, so that the reflected image of soul in the *Chitta* is exactly the same as the soul. That is why *Yog* practice involves continuous purification of the *Chitta* to a tranquil state and finally in the *Kaivalya* state, its existence literally ceases, as if the mirror has been withdrawn and the *Yogi* is then established only in Self, there is no more an 'I' because *Chitta* ceases to exist.

The important thing to realize is that whatever crisis you are going through in life also happens to others. I myself have been through many ups and downs in my life but at the ripe age of over 65 years, I do realize that many of those 'so called crisis' were actually turning points in my life for a better future. Crisis in life are nothing unusual, only the degree varies. You can analyze why things went wrong for you at crucial times in the past to take advantage or lessons out of it for the present and future but not to get lost or depressed about the past misfortunes. So, you have to constantly reassure yourself of changing course for the better and change that part of your lifestyles, which has caused you sufferings and adopt those things that bring you permanent joy. Then life becomes enjoyable with everything that comes on your plate. In this way we can clearly understand the meaning of the 'self' being our best friend (unite with Self) and worst enemy (stay disconnected with Self).

In conclusion, I wish to categorically state that *Yog* science helps us to learn well beyond the mere body health and mental peace, it trains to know our ego and beyond ego, the true Self. It gives us a clear understanding about the way each individual operates and empowers us to appreciate others' strengths and our own shortcomings. It gives us confidence to say sorry when we are in the wrong and forgive others if so necessary. *Yog* trains us to develop Willpower and then everything can be within our reach. *Yog* is not just for Stress Management, it also outlines techniques for reflecting on issues in meditation to come out with best possible solutions; in other words, bring out excellence in work.

New Delhi, 26 April 2014