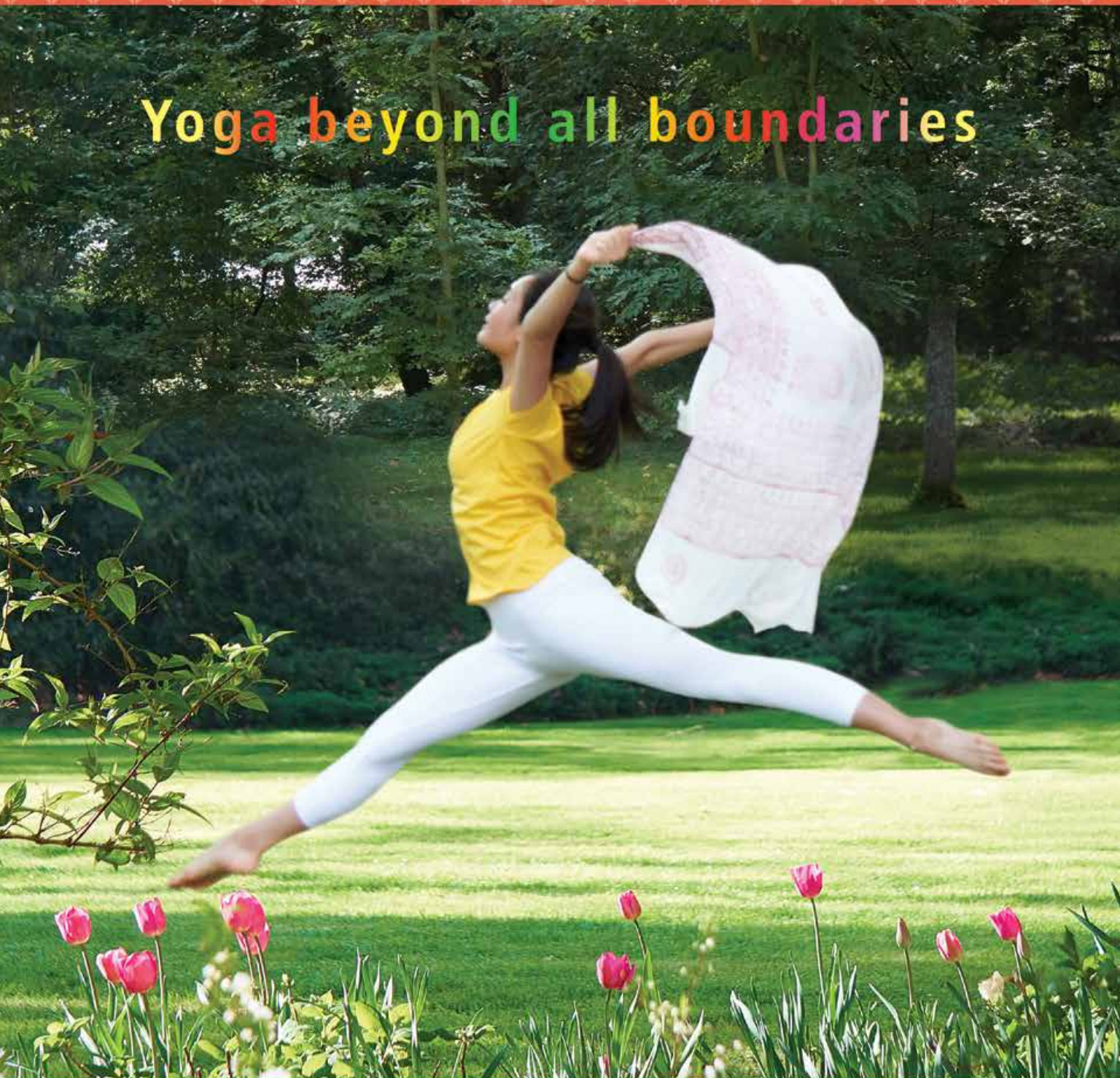


SIVANANDA YOGALife

2020–2021

Yoga beyond all boundaries

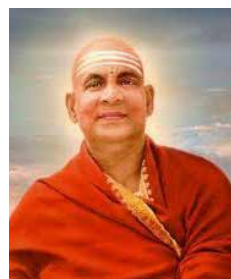


Serve • Love • Give • Purify • Meditate • Realize

International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres

Swami Sivananda (1887 - 1963)

The spiritual strength behind the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres, Swami Sivananda's teachings are a synthesis of all the formal doctrines of yoga. Author of more than 300 books on yoga, Swami Sivananda was a medical doctor before renouncing worldly life for the spiritual path. He founded the Divine Life Society and the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy,



Rishikesh, Himalayas. His main message was: Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realise. In 1957 he sent one of his foremost disciples, Swami Vishnudevananda to the West to spread the ideals of yoga. Swami Sivananda entered Mahasamadhi on July 14th 1963.

Swami Vishnudevananda (1927 - 1993)

Born in South India in 1927, Swami Vishnudevananda entered the ashram of Swami Sivananda at the age of 18.



A world famous authority on Hatha and Raja Yoga, Swami Vishnudevananda founded the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres in 1957 and was author of The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga, Meditation and Mantras, Karma and Disease and a commentary on the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. Swami Vishnudevananda entered Mahasamadhi on November 9th, 1993.

The Executive Board

The Executive Board of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres is comprised of senior disciples of Swami Vishnudevananda, personally chosen and trained by him to direct the organisation after his departure. Each of them has had many years' experience in

teaching all aspects of yoga. They are renowned for their devotion to Swami Vishnudevananda and Swami Sivananda and for their profound knowledge and inspirational teaching and guidance, wisdom imparted to many thousands of students throughout the world.



Swami Durgananda Swami Swaroopananda Srinivasan Swami Sivadasananda Swami Kailasananda Swami Sitaramananda Kanti Devi

Editorial Yoga Life



We are living extraordinary times... the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world in a matter of months, and it seems we are entering a different phase of the world evolution. The successive lockdowns have left a strong impression on people's minds, and many experience its traumatic effects in the form of stress and anxiety. We pray for peace and strength for the individuals and families who have been affected one way or another by the pandemic. May all keep their faith as faith can overcome fear and anxiety.

With this powerful wave of unrest and fear engulfing the planet, the Acharyas of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta centres felt the need to continue bringing the message of peace and unity of yoga to their students.

A new way to reach out to the world was quickly put in place: sharing the teachings on line!

The response was overwhelming, with hundreds of messages coming from all corners of the planet expressing gratitude to be able to continue their practice and connect with other practitioners in this way.

2020 has also been a year where we receive serious allegations against the Sivananda organization and its founder, Swami Vishnudevananda.

We express our heartfelt compassion to all those who have felt hurt at any time of the history of the Sivananda Organization. We sincerely hope that a space of deep listening can be created and that this deep and respectful listening can hopefully lead to mutual understanding and healing.

The board members themselves, who have and intend to continue to dedicate their lives sharing the teachings they have received, are deeply affected by the trauma that this situation has created for many in the Sivananda community who have been shaken in their faith.

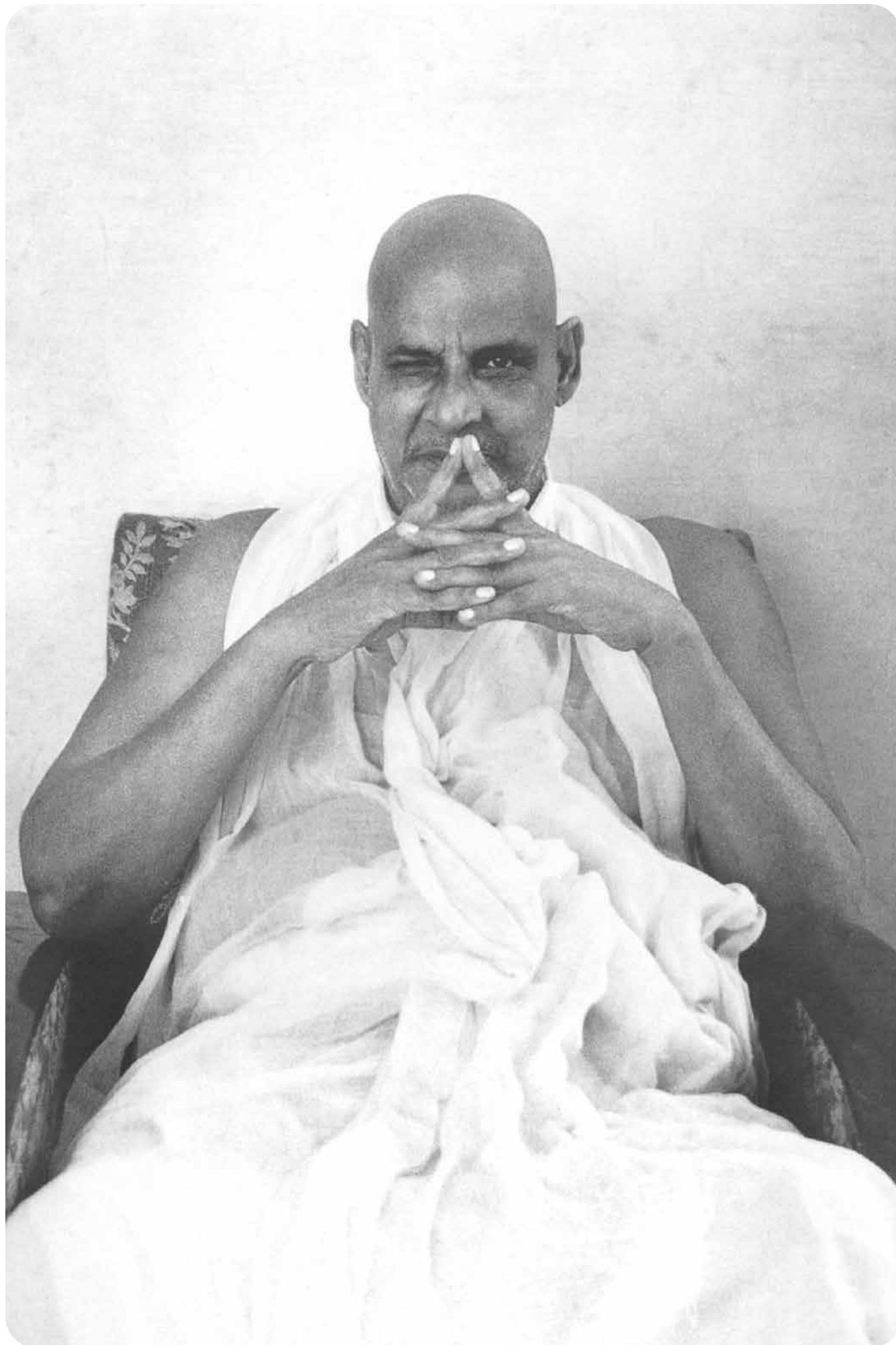
We hope that faith can be re-established going forward.

We would like to thank the staff, karma yogis and students of the Sivananda organization for their love, devotion and continued support.

You can contact us via email at EBMsecretary@sivananda.net

We wish you all good health, strength and inner peace for the New Year.

Om Shanti, the Acharyas of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres



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MEDITATION ON THE POWER OF OM

FROM THE BOOK: MEDITATION ON OM AND
THE MANDUKYA UPANISHAD BY SWAMI SIVANANDA

“Utter OM in each and every breath of the nose. Be ever wakeful in the bliss of OM. Melt the dream of the illusive world in wakefulness of OM. Sink the pains and miseries of samsara in the bliss of OM, the bliss of the Eternal, the Abode of Peace, Bliss and Joy.”

As soon as you sit for meditation, chant OM loudly 3 or 6 or 12 times. Again and again, sing the glory of OM. Apply your heart, mind and soul to the music of OM.

Perform all actions as an adoration of the sacred pranava. Live and move in OM. Make OM the centre of your dwelling place.

Philosophy of OM

The life of all words is vowels. A vowel is that which shines by itself. It can be pronounced by itself. A consonant is that which cannot be pronounced without the help of a vowel placed either before or after it.

A consonant can be sounded with the aid of a vowel. Just as the body depends for its very existence on the soul or the Atman, so also the consonants depend for their very pronunciation on the vowels.

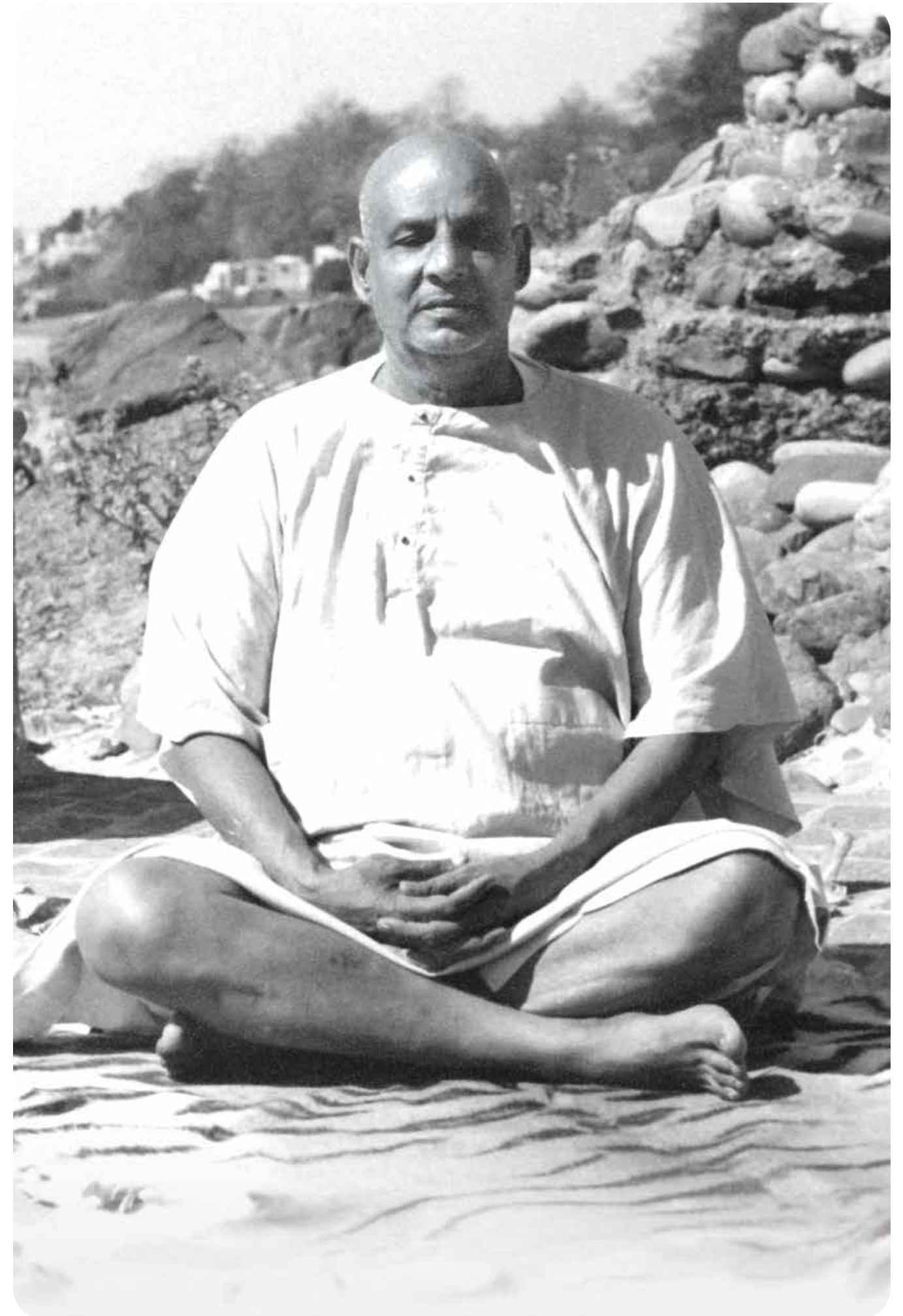
‘A’ and ‘U’ are the parents of all other vowels in Sanskrit. Sanskrit possesses a large

number of vowels compared to any other language in the world. All the letters of the alphabets of all languages are contained in this mysterious, sacred monosyllable OM (AUM). Therefore, it is quite proper to regard OM as the symbol or name of Brahman.

Watch the breath. When you inhale, the sound so is produced; when you exhale the sound hum. You are naturally uttering soham along with every breath. The breath reminds you that you are in essence identical with the supreme Self.

In soham, ‘s’ and ‘h’ are consonants. If you delete the consonants ‘s’ and ‘h’, you get oam or om. Consonants have no independence of their own. They depend on vowels for their existence. ‘S’ and ‘h’ represent the names and forms, of this universe which has only a dependent existence. OM only is the solid reality. OM is the soul of your breath.

There is what is called pancha-santi, five



kinds of incantations, each ending with the word santi or peace. Before each santi there is the word OM. As such OM gives peace, calmness, tranquillity and serenity. This symbol brings the entire universe and all it contains in its span. It means something more, 'a' is the first letter of the alphabet and 'm' is the last syllable in Sanskrit. Thus 'a' and 'm' mean everything from A to Z.

It is the alpha and omega of everything. It represents everything from beginning to end and since there is the other part 'u', OM includes everything we can imagine and something more too. As such, it is a fit symbol to be meditated upon. No other symbol can span so much in its embrace.

Chanting of OM

Chant OM from the very bottom of your heart with profound feeling. When chanting OM, knowing its omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, feel that OM gushes forth with its true colour, from every nerve, every vein, every cell, every atom, every molecule, every electron and the very corpuscle of your body. Pour forth OM vibrations into the world with mighty vigour, speed, force and strength. Get ready now for recharging. Now roar like a lion of Vedanta and chant OM.

Chant OM for five minutes rhythmically with bhava and understanding as soon as you sit for meditation. Learn its meaning. The sound should start from the navel and end at the crown of the head. The mysterious vibrations produced by the chanting of OM will produce one-pointedness of mind and harmony in the annamaya, pranamaya and mannomaya koshas (food sheath, vital sheath and mental sheath) and make the mind in tune with the Infinite.

Drive evil thoughts by chanting OM. Draw inspiration, power and strength by singing OM. Get one-pointedness of mind by doing japa of OM. Melt the mind in Brahman by

meditating on OM and rest in your own sat-chid-ananda svarupa. May that OM guide you, protect you, elevate you, take you to the goal and free you from the round of births and deaths.

Whenever you feel depressed, whenever you get a little headache, take a brisk walk and chant OM while walking. While chanting OM, feel that your entire being is filled with divine energy. Chanting of OM is a potent, easily available tonic and specific for all diseases. OM is a panacea or sovereign remedy for all ailments. Try this prescription yourself and feel the miraculous effects of this divine medicine. Just as you take medicine twice or thrice, take recourse of chanting of OM twice or thrice.

Chanting of OM means going near the source and tapping the cosmic energy that is inexhaustible. When you chant OM, feel 'All health I am'. All pathogenic or disease causing germs are destroyed or burnt by the vibrations of OM. You chant OM while sitting on any comfortable asana in your room for the purpose of regaining, maintaining or improving your health.

OM with Pranayama

You can associate OM with the breath during the practice of pranayama. Mentally repeat 'O' during inhalation and 'M' during exhalation. This will increase the efficacy of pranayama. This is sagarbha pranayama. You can keep OM for constant japa also. Watch the breath and repeat 'O' during inspiration and 'M' during expiration. You can do this practice while walking also. Put sufficient force into the thoughts of OM.

Feel that OM is coming from your soul, this will raise your consciousness to a very high plane. You will become one with the soul, the Atman.

Meditate that the single letter, the supreme light, the pranava, OM is the source of

these three letters 'A', 'U' and 'M'. Inhale the air through the left nostril for the space of sixteen matras, meditate on the letter 'A' during that time. Retain the air for the space of 64 matras and meditate on the letter 'U' during that time. Exhale for the space of 32 matras and meditate on the letter 'M' during that time.

Practise this again and again in the above order. Begin with two or three times and gradually increase the number to 20 to 30 times according to your capacity and strength. To begin with, keep the ratio 1:4:2. Gradually increase the ratio to 16:64:32. The practitioner will get great peace of mind and inner strength.

Tratak on OM

Beginners in the path of jnana yoga should do tratak (gazing) on OM with open eyes in the beginning for about three months. Then they should visualize OM with closed eyes.

Visualisation of OM is the calling up of a clear mental image of OM by closing the eyes. They should repeat OM mentally with feeling and meaning and make the ears hear the sound also so that they may not run outside to hear other sounds.

Have the picture of OM in front of you in your meditation room. Concentrate on this picture. Do tratak also with open eyes. Steady gazing without winking make tears flow profusely. Associate the ideas of infinity, eternity, immortality etc. when you think of OM.

This is meditation with and without attributes. Keep a picture of OM always before your mind and do worship. Burn incense, camphor. Offer flowers. This is a combined method of bhakti and jnana.

Sweet OM

Om is the word of power,
Om is the sacred monosyllable,
Om is the highest Mantra,
Om is the symbol of Brahman,
Om is Soham,
Om is Om Tat Sat,
Om is the source of everything,
Om is the womb of the Vedas,
Om is the basis of all languages,
In Om merge all Trinities,
From Om proceed all sounds,
In Om exists all objects.
O Sweet Om! Potent Pranava!
The life of my life,
The boat to cross this Samsara,
Harbinger of Eternal Bliss,
My redeemer and Saviour!
Guide me and take me
To Brahman, the hidden sage!

WHO AM I

PREPARING FOR JNANA YOGA MEDITATION

BY SWAMI VISHNUDEVANANDA

Taken from an initiation lecture given by Swami Vishnudevananda at the start of the Advanced Teachers' Training Course in Val Morin, Canada in 1982.

When we come to Jnana Yoga meditation we begin with the original knowledge, the knowledge which is held in the Vedas.

It is said that the Vedas came during the previous cosmic night when Brahma was in deep slumber. He himself had been withdrawn by the force of time into the substratum. That substratum is symbolically represented as the navel of Lord Vishnu. There, there is a lotus representing the hidden energy, and into that cosmic lotus, the great creator Brahma has been forced to withdraw and rest in deep, deep cosmic sleep – cosmic nidra.

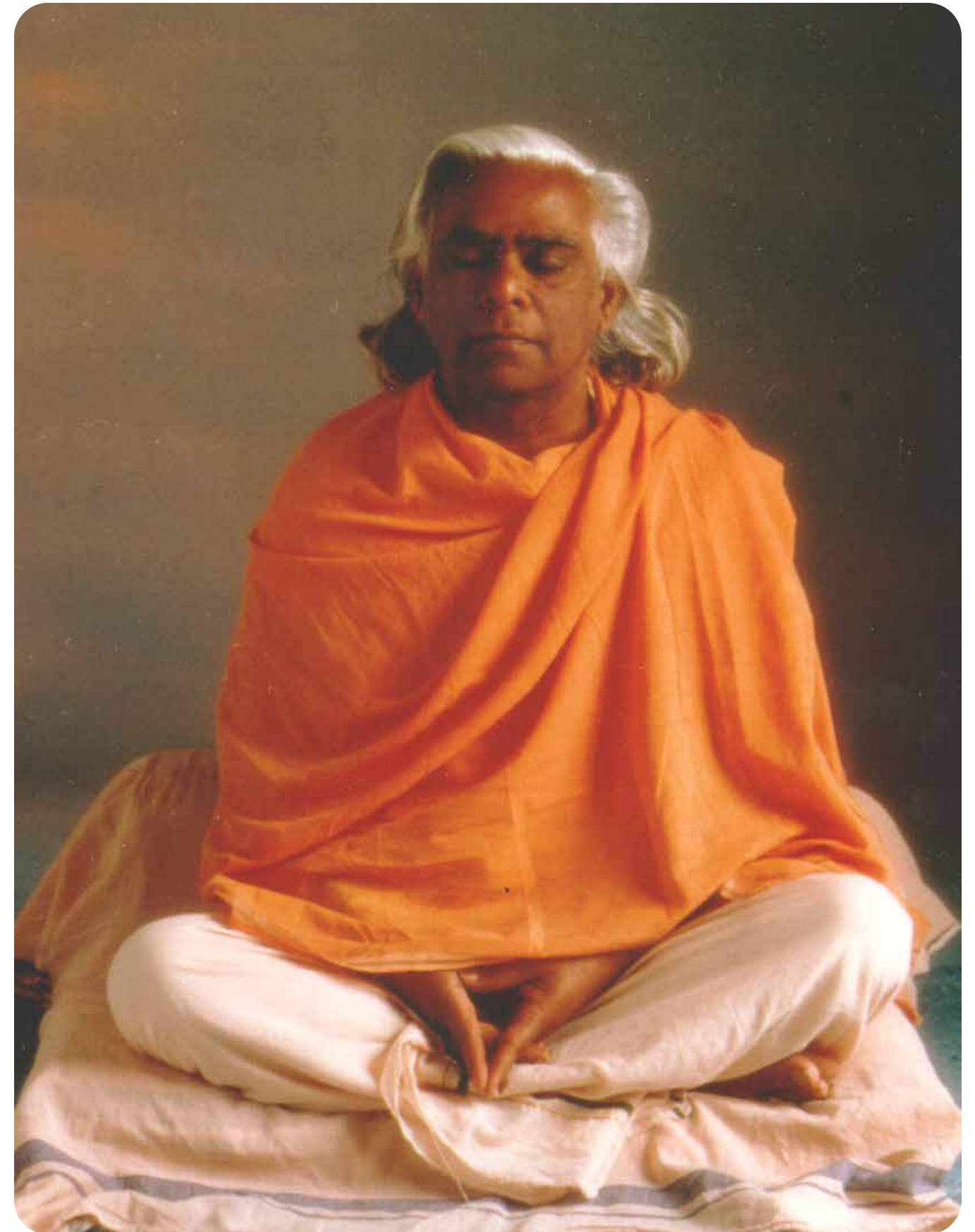
During that time, all of nature that is made up of the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas – is in equilibrium. At that time there is no knowledge: no time, space, or causation. At that time, the Vedas existed only in the memory of the great creator Brahma who is in deep sleep. Just as the knowledge that we have is still there even when we are sleeping although we are not aware of it until we wake up, so it is also with Brahma. We can bring that knowledge only when we are in the waking state. In the deep sleep state whatever knowledge we possess – geometry, philosophy, mathematics, music – all this

knowledge is hidden in deep sleep and can only be brought back when we wake from the sleep state.

It was the same with Brahma, too. In the cosmic night everything is in stand-still, like our deep sleep. At least during our deep sleep, others might be in the waking state or in the dreaming state. When we are in darkness, in other parts of the world there is light. That is not the situation here: here there is no place where there is day or night, time, or space.

There is only stillness, absolute stillness, and as the cosmic night is about to finish its course, at the dawn of the present world Brahma wakes up, just as we are forced to wake up due to our karma. We cannot sleep all day and all night. After several hours we are forced to wake up. It is the same with Brahma also. Due to time, the power of Lord Vishnu, he himself is forced to wake up from his deep cosmic slumber.

At the dawn of the previous cosmic night the forces which were in equilibrium, the three forces of sattva, rajas and tamas are suddenly activated, like a tulip bulb which is activated at the beginning of spring. That tulip bulb was in deep sleep, in a suspended state during the whole winter, but now the energy of the tulip bulb is activated and sends out a small shoot which eventually becomes a tulip flower with colours, beauty and so on.



That hidden nature – Maha Sakti – becomes active, just like the tulip flower becomes active, just like we become active in the morning. The three qualities of nature, sattva, purity; rajas, activity; and tamas, inertia, are no longer in a state of equilibrium and there comes a tremendous oscillation, a vibration, and due to the interaction of these three qualities Sakti is separated and Brahma is able to see the universe yet to come just like in a dream, only in the thought state.

It exists only in the thought state. He exists only in a thought in the universe. He has forgotten the previous creation. He has forgotten everything that he did. Like with amnesia, he has forgotten the past.

Brahma also has cosmic amnesia in the beginning. He doesn't know what his purpose is, what his duty is, what he is supposed to do. But he sees something – a vague recollection – but still it is not very clear at all. As the Sakti is activated and the intensity increases, he is also having the inner urge to find out, first of all his own substratum, the source from where he has come. He must have a source somewhere. And he looks, and there is only cosmic night – cosmic pralaya.

There is nothing there: neither sun, nor stars, nor galaxies, nor moon, neither up nor down. But he visualises himself seated on a lotus – symbolically representing the energy – and he wants to find out where he has come from, what is his purpose, and what he has to do. He has no idea as Sakti has not completely manifested. Just like someone who has just come out of sleep, he doesn't know where he is. In that situation Brahma goes on searching his route.

The route is Lord Vishnu, but he doesn't know. He goes on searching. He goes on to the stalk – symbolically again. For thousands of years he travels, but he still cannot find the beginning. He comes back again and sits in

deep meditation and practises pranayama to create the sakti. As he does intense penance and pranayama, *then comes the word that he hears in his inner ear, 'tapah', 'penance'. 'Do penance'.*

So he goes on doing penance for thousands of years and then he sees the world yet to come, the type of world he is going to create, just like an architect can see the building that he is going to build. In the same way, in his cosmic mind he sees the cosmic universe, the previous cosmic universe that he created that has now been dissolved, and the new one which is going to come, what type of manifestation it is going to be.

So from that cosmic vision that he saw from within the substratum he prays to Lord Vishnu, and from that he created the world, and from that the four Vedas came. That is the original knowledge. The Vedas are the original knowledge. From his mouth, the Vedas came, the universe came, and the knowledge came.

So the Vedas were not created, they existed before, just like gravity existed. Gravity was not invented by Newton; it was discovered by Newton. Even before he discovered gravity, gravity was there – he only realised its existence. In the same way the Vedas were there before, but through the mouth of Brahma and through his first initiation into this Vedic knowledge we are able to receive it in this present creation again.

And again this universe will dissolve, and in Brahma's cosmic night he himself will be withdrawn; all knowledge will be withdrawn back and Brahma will rest again in this cosmic sleep by the force of Vishnu maya – the maya of Lord Vishnu. In this way the universe evolves and dissolves.

We can grasp this concept intellectually by speaking symbolically, but whatever is

understood intellectually is not what this cosmic evolution is, this cosmic dawn, this cosmic energy, this sakti maya. The original state is far beyond our comprehension and so we use these simple stories and this symbolic language to understand what the creator and the gunas are.

It can be explained, but still, it is far beyond our comprehension. What is evolution, what is dissolution, what is Brahma, what is the creator, what is Vishnu, what is Sakti is far beyond our understanding.

Vedanta is the last portion of the Vedas and it is here that the knowledge is stored. Vedanta is the end where there is no more duality. We want to transcend all duality and reach that infinite oneness with the Supreme. So for us, the important question is, 'Who am I?'. That is Inquiry. The question 'Who am I?' is the central question. The next question is, 'Where do I come from?'. Then, 'Where do I go?'.

Moksha is freedom from births and deaths. It is the attainment of eternal bliss. It has neither space nor time in itself; nor is there in it any state, external or internal. You are born to attain moksha or the final emancipation. Moksha is your goal. Kill this little 'I' or egoism through enquiry of Who am I? You will attain moksha and shine as emperor of this world. May you attain moksha in this very birth.

Did this 'I' just come now? Did it have any past? Did 'I' just come in the middle and does it disappear at the end? If so, then we don't have to inquire to find 'Who am I?'. But we all know that this I, this personality, this consciousness in me is not because of the existence of this physical body which I have received from my parents, and which has grown up through the food that I eat – the protein, carbohydrates, and so on.

Is the consciousness this body, or is it

something else? Who am I? Am I this body, or something else?

I know that I cannot be this body, this body was not here these many years ago. Before that this physical body, this visible form, wasn't here. Where was this 'I', this consciousness then? Was this consciousness only created then, at the time of birth or at the time of conception, or was it already there?

This 'Who am I' inquiry, these questions, will lead you to find this 'I', this pure consciousness that was not born, nor was it the product of any creation, nor did it only exist at a certain time. When did this consciousness come? It was always there and it will always be there in the future when this body drops off.

So inquiry is the main method used in Vedanta philosophy – intellectual inquiry. But it is not a dry intellectual inquiry: there is practical meditation and the student is readied and prepared through sama (tranquillity of mind), dama (control of the senses) etc. of the Vedantic discipline, like the yama and niyama in Raja Yoga.

Through the service of the teacher, through inquiry, and through discipline, slowly, slowly the disciple is ready to receive this initiation, and at that time, just like one spark will immediately ignite a whole pile of hay, in the same way his whole self is enveloped with this wisdom, this fire of knowledge, 'I am that I am' aham Brahmasmi.

At that time when the teacher says, 'That Thou art', Tat twam asi, the disciple immediately understands 'Who am I': 'I am not this body, I am Brahman – aham brahmasmi'. When the teacher says Tat twam asi, the disciple realises aham Brahmasmi. But before that inquiry, so many disciplines are necessary.

This is the intellectual approach towards this state: Vedanta. Vedanta literally means 'the end of the Vedas' because it is based on the teaching of the Upanishads, which form the concluding section of the Vedas.

The Vedas are the most ancient scriptures. Nothing ever came before these Vedas. Their origin is unknown, but it is said that they were given through inspiration to the holy men who sat meditating upon God. From Brahma it came through the line of disciples to our own teachers.

Only Vedanta can give you complete intellectual satisfaction. Other philosophies can give satisfaction to your emotions, or various other aspects of your mind, but Vedanta gives absolute intellectual satisfaction. So there is no other philosophy in this universe that can satisfy the intellect of man, however, not all of us have evolved with a pure intellect. We have reason, but it has been tainted by our emotions and by our understanding of the universe through our own physical senses.

To understand Vedanta you need pure reason. Ordinary reason we use to make a living, to satisfy the senses and to conquer others. That is impure reason. That is associated with emotions, like lust, anger, greed, hatred, jealousy, envy, and fear. That reason is not sufficient to understand Vedanta. But once that intellect is pure we will be able to understand this philosophy.

And only the true meaning of Vedanta can bring world peace. 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' That subject you see in all. That Self, that Atman alone shines equally. Name and form are false – that is the true experience. Through the process of discrimination and negation of all that is unreal, name and form is discarded until you reach the point that all that is left is Real: 'I am That I am'.

The intellect is brought only to that certain

extent. This intellect cannot go on forever inquiring 'Who am I?' So sit and inquire, 'I am not this body, this body came from the earth; I am not this mind, this mind is this emotion; I am not this intellect, this intellect is this reasoning; I am not these senses, the senses are only objects. Then, who am I? I am what is left. That is the Self. I am that I am. No more talk, no more inquiry. The intellect also is discarded because the intellect itself is a thought.

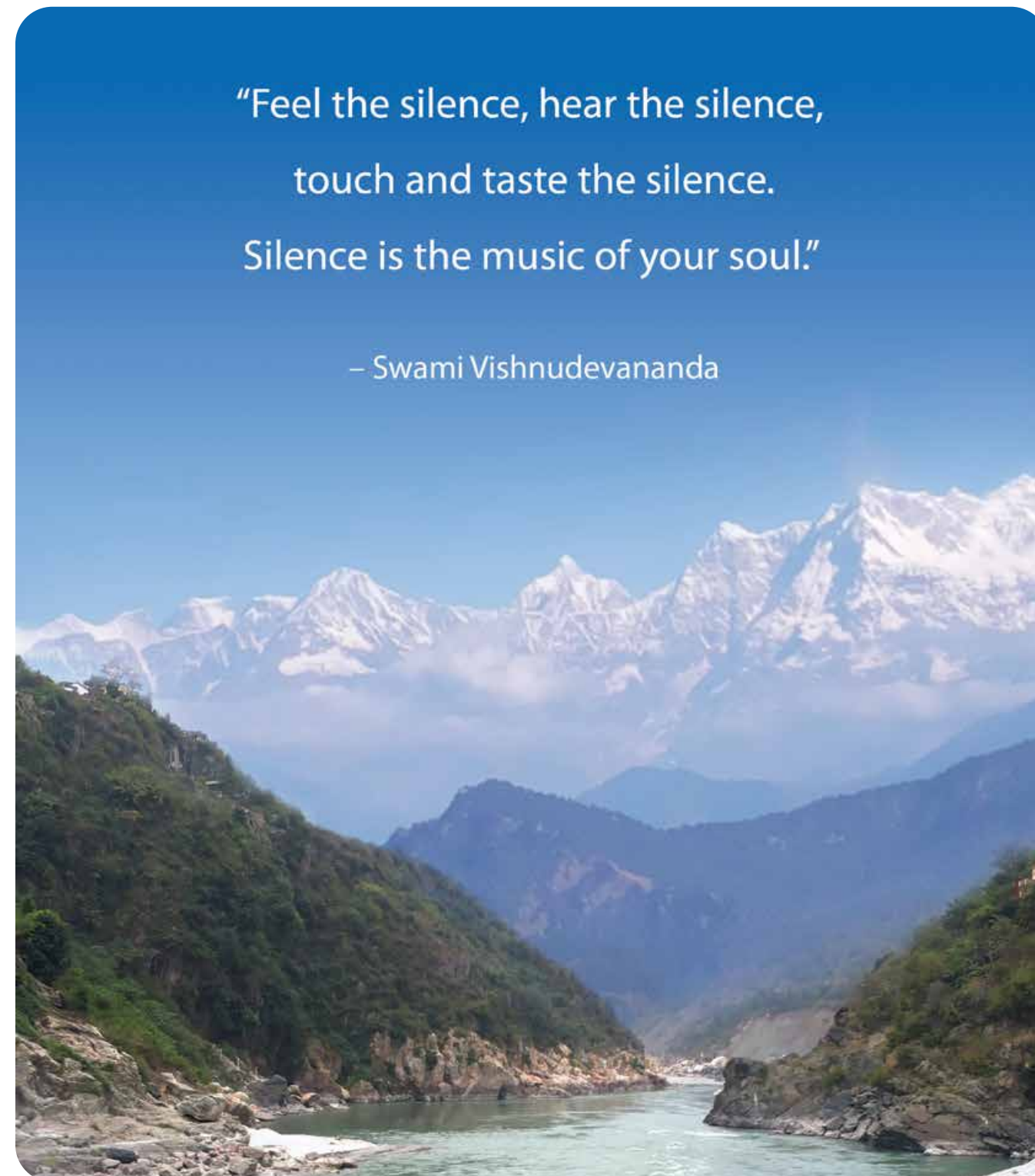
By dying you will not be able to reach the Self. By sleeping you will not be able to reach the Self. By dreaming you will not be able to reach the Self. You will be able to understand what the Self is, according to your evolution. So go on, cleaning. If we want to get the experience of the one Self first we have to clean it.

Then go on, slowly, slowly polishing it and as the veils get thinner and thinner there is no more veil and we realise, 'Oh! I am That I am. I am the universal Self'. I am, and the Universal Self, God, are one. I and my Father are one. I am in you and you are in me. We are one, we are not two. That is Self-realisation. That is the transcendental experience. Everything else – asanas, pranayama, are techniques of how to transcend the veils of the Self.



**"Feel the silence, hear the silence,
touch and taste the silence.
Silence is the music of your soul."**

– Swami Vishnudevananda



SIVANANDA YOGA INDIA RURAL HOSPITAL

Sivananda Rural Hospital, Madurai, offering free medical camps and services ever since its inception in 2015 to neighbouring villages is setting major goals to establish a healthy rural community. In view of Covid 19 pandemic putting the entire world community into a tumultuous phase, we continue to help the people with a duty doctor and two nurses always in attendance to the needy calls of help and assistance from the comfort of their homes.

Illness or Infirmary is a condition in which there is alteration in the internal bodily environment due to external debilitating factors. When made aware of these villainous and notorious agents, the occurrence of ailments could be controlled to a great extent. In the past few years we have been making tremendous and remarkable progress in this direction of educating the villagers of these potential risks they could encounter in day to day life. Failing which we get uncalled visits from Lifestyle Diseases predominantly Diabetes followed close on the heels by Hypertension which could only be subdued but never ridden with permanently.

Swami Sivananda used to tell Wellness begins with **WE** while Illness with an **I**. Our human body is a collection of several systems designed to perform specific functions in close conjunction to maintain its Wellness. Under most instances thanks to our Immune System we are not even made to realise about our being unwell as the strong immunity soldiers form a front line defense. The contraction of a disease due to compromise in the immune levels needs medical attention and care. At this level also our outreach is laudable with free supply of medicines and other needed amenities.

Amongst the rural population the common diseases encountered would be the ones due to poor living standards and low hygiene levels. We have also been doing Awareness Programs to inculcate habits of cleanliness and practice of hygiene measures as part of our Medical Campaign that was met with huge success as proven by our log book of visiting patients.

The main reason for the manifestation of a disease is neglect on the part of people which in a wider picture affects the entire community. Once people are made well aware of the conditions that rings in any ailment, sense of neglect vanishes. The efforts of health care professionals of Sivananda Rural Hospital in making the people unlearn and relearn the aspects of staying healthy and happy is noteworthy making them live the motto of Swami Vishnudevananda, "Health is wealth, peace of mind is happiness". We also thank our Master Swami Sivananda and Guru Swami Vishnudevananda for their grace and blessings in our spiritual journey of moulding a healthy humanity.



SIVANANDA YOGA ASHRAMS & CENTRES MEET AND GREET

One by one, in a rhythm indicated by their respective geographical location, the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Ashrams and Centres all over the world saw themselves obliged to close their doors due to the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Centres and Ashrams which are usually a beehive of activities with students, karma yogis, teachers, guests and visitors joining the yoga practices and dropping in throughout the day, went quiet.

This unusual and unprecedented absence of visiting yogis in the physical Centres and Ashrams was soon replaced by the virtual presence of many practitioners who joined the various online activities which were quickly put in place.

For the staff, focus on sadhana deepened, inner reflection intensified while our personal lives simplified. Every Centre and Ashram representing a little miniature universe in itself with a group of sadhakas living through the experience of lockdown, the need was felt to connect to each of the sadhakas residing in the other Centres and Ashrams around the world.

And so in the midst of the lockdown in April, an online international meet and greet reunion took place with the participation of all the permanent staff members serving in the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres worldwide. A total of 156 members of the extended Sivananda family in 55 different places dotted across the globe gathered on line, each one sharing a few words of inspiration to introduce themselves. Some spoke from any of the Sivananda Centres at the heart of the world's capital cities, others presented themselves from one of the eleven Ashrams in the countryside.

Our hearts warmed in the presence of so many karma yogis serving within the Sivananda organisation. Yoga Acharyas Swami Durgananda, Swami Swaroopananda, Swami Sivadasananda, Swami Kailasananda, Swami Sitaramananda, Srinivasan and Kanti Devi shared encouraging words of inspiration with all of us and we share below excerpts of their presentations.

**“ Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu
May the whole world attain peace and harmony.”**



**Sivananda Yoga International Staff Meeting
April 30, 2020**



SWAMI DURGANANDA

Om Namah Sivaya, everyone worldwide. This is the dream of Swami Vishnudevananda who spread the yoga worldwide and we are all instruments of this. And we are still, we see 125 people now, we are all doing the work and of course we have globally a few problems.

First, we had the investigation problem, then the second one, and now we have the virus. And now we are all in lock down, except for Vietnam which is a little more loose, I hear. But, everywhere else, we are sharing the same task, where this rajasic activity of counting students, counting money, being in big positions, this and that – this is all taken away all of a sudden. And now we are there where we are and everyone can look within and see where they are really standing. Including this speaker.

I must say, it is quite a task but, thank God, we have the teachings. Thank God we have all the written scriptures. We have gurubais around us. And none of us, and this is really remarkable, are sick. I don't know whether you have noticed this. We have around three million people who are sick world wide at this moment and in America 58,000 deaths already, more than in the Vietnam war, and we are faced with tremendous difficulties worldwide, but we are not sick. We have things to eat. We are sharing our teachings. We are with each other – we are not alone, most of us (except for some of us are, maybe inclined to be a little bit alone).

But with all this new technology we can share with each other and what we share is the faith, is the teachings, is the compassion. And it is that goal which we all came for. We came to find out about ourselves, to lift up our consciousness. We are all supporting each other on this. And what the letter said, just now, is everything in a nutshell; why we are here.

Let's embrace each other and let's count that we are absolutely blessed to be in this situation, on this planet, at this moment. And you never know how long we are going to live. We realize we are all mortal. We've forgotten it. But now we know that we are mortal because people are dying left and right. The situation in the world is like that. Nature is breathing. More birds, more animals. Everything is breathing. More flowers. Planet Earth is healing and we should heal with Planet Earth. And that's my prayer for all of us – that we continue on this path and we continue to serve, love, give, purify, and meditate, and realize.

Om Namah Sivaya



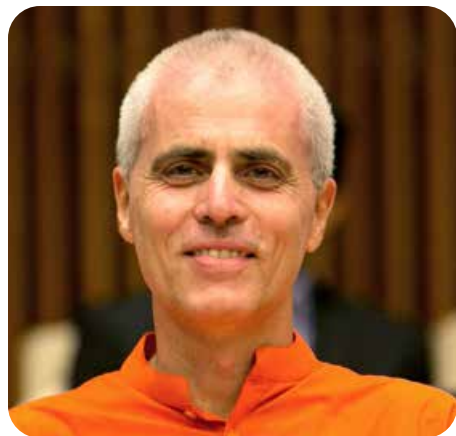
SWAMI SWAROOPANANDA

Om Namah Sivaya. I remember the last meeting that we had in Val Morin with Swamiji, before he went to India for his last trip. And we were with him and said that this organization is my body: take care of it. He meant the whole organization. He didn't mean simply the buildings, but he meant all the staff, all the karma yogis, the yogis, the yoginis that together are forming Swamiji's body. And through this body Swamiji is operating. That was true when Swamiji left his body in 1993 and this is true also now. So when we look during this Zoom using this technology, from my perspective I am seeing Swamiji. I am seeing Swamiji's body. Through this body he operates. And he continues to spread the teachings of Swami Sivananda all around the globe.

Swamiji, in my view, envisioned this situation in which we are in now when he had the vision in the Bahamas in 1969 sitting in the temple, in front of the altar. He saw the whole planet engulfed in fire. He saw people trying to escape the fire: people from all countries, all walks of life, all religions, all denominations. And while they were trying to escape the fire they broke all the borders – physical, mental, and spiritual. And Humanity became one.

In my view, this time that Swamiji envisioned in his great vision is upon us right now. The Coronavirus is like a fire, engulfing the whole planet. And in the face of the Coronavirus, different barriers that we have – national, religious, racial, gender – all these are shattered and, in a sense, humanity becomes one. And because of the technology that we are using everywhere, where we can still communicate online, in many ways and in many senses, indeed, Humanity becomes one. As yogis we are becoming barebone yogis in the sense that many things that were surrounding us, which are not necessarily related to yoga proper, have been shed off. Now, each one of us is in his area and we continue to do what we have done before but we are going deeper. We study, we practice, and we teach. We teach online.

And the planet became smaller. We reach many more people than we reached before. And at the same time, as yogis, we are able to go through an experience that we did not go through for many, many years. So sitting here and seeing everyone, for me I see Swamiji and Swamiji smiling. He is not smiling at the suffering of humanity, because Swamiji taught us that we need to serve humanity in order to relieve the suffering. He is smiling seeing everyone sitting together and through us Swamiji is serving the world as he had done when he was alive. *Seeing all of this, I am inspired. Om Tat Sat*



SWAMI SIVADASANANDA

Om Namah Sivaya. Isn't it surprising how much positive feedback we get from the online classes. I am sure it is the same with you. We get chat messages or emails that they really feel the connection to their practice in a very deep way. And also in the meditations, in the mantra chanting. I have been thinking 'how is that possible? Is Zoom that powerful? What is the real power?' They really have no other choice but to practice at home, that is where everybody is. And maybe our students have practiced sometimes at home at felt some kind of benefit, but maybe in their heart they preferred a teacher. But actually, now at home, they realize the tremendous power of Yoga which is simply in the yoga itself.

While that is happening for them I am also wondering what this time should be for us in the ashram. I can see, as was mentioned before, that everybody is healthy, that this is a time where we can really enjoy a steady rhythm and a time where we can just be the yogi we want to be in our heart. Actually, it is kind of an opportunity to feel more that it is really that one breath that moves through everybody's pranayama whether they are at home, or we are at our centers alone or with some people at the ashram. The one cosmic energy which comes through the mantra. The one teaching which we carry in the mind. And, finally, the one consciousness which carries us all.

So we are very, very blessed, actually, in this situation if we can see it from the yogic perspective. *Om Namah Sivaya*



SWAMI KAILASANANDA

Om Namah Sivaya. So it is really wonderful to see the whole organization like this on a seventeen inch laptop screen. And it also makes it very clear what this organization is. It is people. It is not places or buildings. I is just a group of sadhakas eager to follow the teachings of Yoga, the teachings of our Masters. The situation in the world with this virus also makes this very clear.

And, in a way, it is a blessing in disguise because it makes us all go back to a lot of simplicity. There is not much space for rajas or for too much work or too much activity or distraction. The only way seems to be, as we know but now more than ever, going within. That seems to be the way out. I think that, as an organization, with this situation in the world, there is much that we can do to help the world. First, through this online teaching that we are all experimenting with and which is quite successful so far, but also through the power of mantras, of prayer, of positive thinking. There is a lot that we can share with the world.

So, maybe this vision of Swami Sivananda for a new civilization, as he said in the last chapter of his book on Thought Power, maybe this is the time when Yoga can help to bring his vision of a new civilization. May this situation with the virus is a turning point for humanity – it looks like it could be. And a new world, based on positive values of simplicity, of service, and of unity is going to be brought by the situation. I hope we can all play our part in this challenging but also wonderful situation because so much is possible. Hopefully we can be part in bringing this new reality. *Om Nama Sivaya*



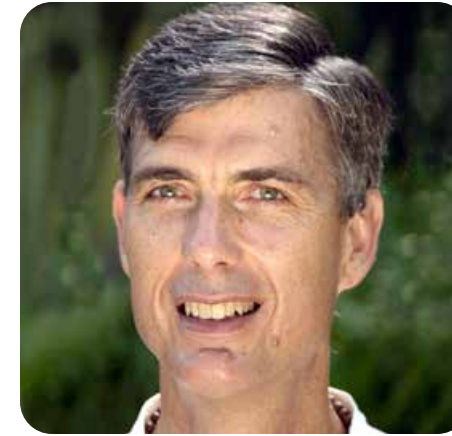
SWAMI SITARAMANANDA

I don't know. This situation recently that the world goes through touched me very much. I was a social worker before and community organizer and it pulled something out from the past and it makes me feel that I really need to be speaking up and try to help others in the world at this time. And sometimes in this period, you know, I found myself crying during certain incredible situations or seeing pictures of incredible things. Sometimes I say 'this is Hell. This is exactly like Hell.'

At the same time we are struggling so that we can see the beauty of the Atman, the beauty and the Truth of God, through this situation. And you know that this is relatively real, it is not really real. And at the same time, as Swami Swaroopanandaji said, we are reminding ourselves of the beautiful teaching of Swami Vishnudevanandaji of Unity in Diversity, but also this teaching that he created of the organization in the first place – the mission of peace, how everyone can become a leader and help the world that is in need. That is the real reason why we are here. I am very inspired at this time and I am very happy to be part of the organization and the group of all of you as gurubais. It feels like sometimes this world is like... like the ashram is going out in the world. With the internet, it feels like there is no separation between the ashram - sometimes we have the tendency to close ourselves off - but we feel like the world is a big ashram. The other thing that I mean to say is, that when I was inviting different people for this meeting, then I have a very clear feeling that this is the Gurukula. Our teaching is based on Gurukula and this is the Gurukula. This means that all of us, the reason why we sit together, that we are all still here together is because of the Guru. And the situation of the Gurukula – that means that we are at the feet of the Guru. And the Guru is, basically, the guiding force in all of us, including the acharyas, including all of you.

The last word that I would like to say at this time, if I may, is to remind everyone, as the acharyas said already, how we have to come back to the barebones now-a-days. But also to remind you that the barebones are the Yamas and Niyamas. That means that we have to be very strict. We have to be much more careful of our actions and show an example. This is the asked of us because, if you look around the world, it is like a circus. So, some purity of teaching needs to come out to this world. We have the responsibility to bring the purity of the teachings and we ourselves have to somehow show that. That is all I need to say.

Thank you very much for being here.



SRINIVASAN

So really, what brought me to Swamiji and to this organization was Swamiji's vision of Peace and an opportunity to find balance and harmony within ourselves as well as in the world and to be leaders in that. And that the practice of yoga is really the practice of our own self-transformation as well as being able to share that practice with others.

The positive sides of Yoga being viral is that we can share the positive aspects of life which we have learned through Swami Sivananda and Swami Vishnu and through the scriptures that they have given us and I am sure that the work that we have to do is huge, huge now to be able to deal not only with this crisis with the covid but also with the crisis of the environment and global warming and this possibility of just pausing and really looking at our lives – what's essential. And the teaching of our gurus – the simple living and high thinking – that inner work and outer work, which are really giving an opportunity for an inner peace and an outer peace.

As I am getting older myself, I am very encourage to see all of the next generations that are also carrying on in this mission of bringing health and unity and peace and sustainability in the world through the practice of Yoga and through the attitude of Unity in Diversity. I wish you all a very strong commitment in that practice and in sharing the teaching because it is very, very important right now to carry on this mission. **Om Namah Sivaya**



KANTI DEVI

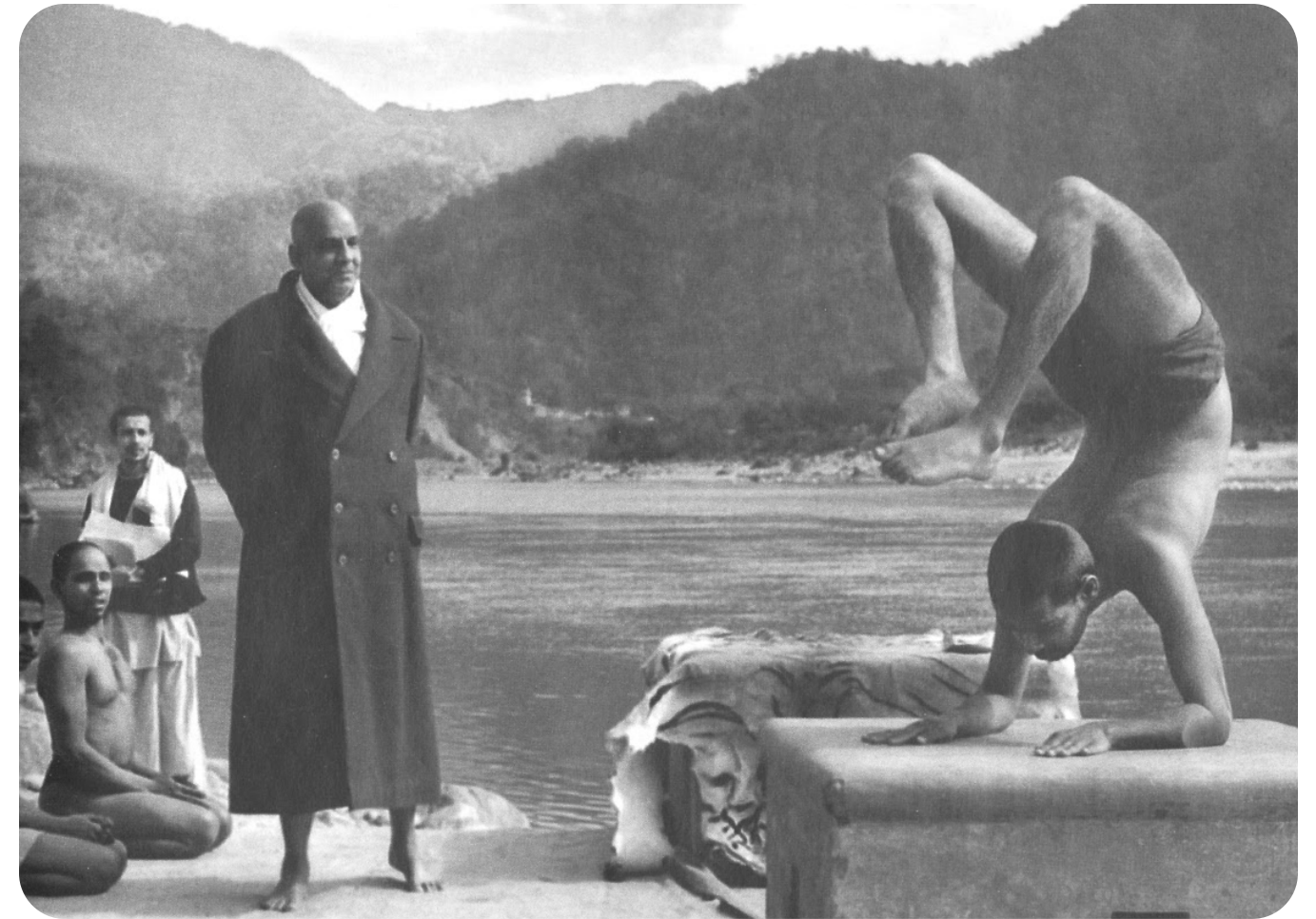
I am very, very happy to see all of you. I am very, very touched and very, very inspired. To see you this way – we are not used to it, but we have to get used to it now. And just to thank all of you for your presence and all the service you are doing in the name of our teachers. What I have from experience with Swamiji for many years, and what I see, is his presence very much in all that is going on in this organization.

In all the challenges that we have to face, as Swami Durganandaji mentioned, they are there and we have to face them and we have to go through but we have also another path that we have to keep on and we will do together. We have our sadhana. We have the teachings. We have what Swamiji gave us to share with the others. We have to commit to that. And this commitment we will not do alone. We will do it all together. We can say, like an organization, as a school of yoga, but I would say as a family.

As a family, as a human being, we will recognize all the good we have and all the other stuff we do not have but we will achieve. Swamiji said that the purpose of his teachings were just to elevate the vibratory level of humanity and I think that there is a need for that. There is a need for yoga in the world. We have this technology now for everyone to reach, but you need to understand that what we need to reach is just not people – we reach the heart of everyone to understand what we are doing and what is the direction that humanity will go. And it is very difficult.

I just want you all to understand that everything you do, everything you experience, it counts. You have to be aware of it all the time. That this avenue that we have – like more communication, ragged clothes, but with the clothes we have to try to express ourselves in a proper manner, to be understood and for us also to understand.

So, I am just very happy to be part of this family, with all of you around, just to spread Swamiji's teaching the way he did. I wish you the best and I hope that we can be together on this beautiful path that is in our hands. Remember that we help ourselves and with that we can help others, too. Om Namah Sivaya. Take care.



THE PLAY OF THE GUNAS

BY SWAMI DURGANANDA



At the occasion of Swami Durgananda's 70th birthday celebrations, the booklet Inner Path was released offering a selection of Swamiji's lecture extracts on yoga as a practical system of universal spirituality.

We share below teachings on the practical applications of the concept of the gunas in daily life, as contained in this special anniversary booklet.

The Sanskrit term guna is usually translated as 'quality.' The three gunas - sattva, rajas, and tamas - represent the characteristic parts and the substance at the basis of nature, prakriti.

In order to attain liberation, we must transcend them as they are forms of avidya, ignorance. The gunas are the basis for identification with body and mind. The person who has left behind the three gunas is free from birth and death, decay and pain, and will attain Self-knowledge.

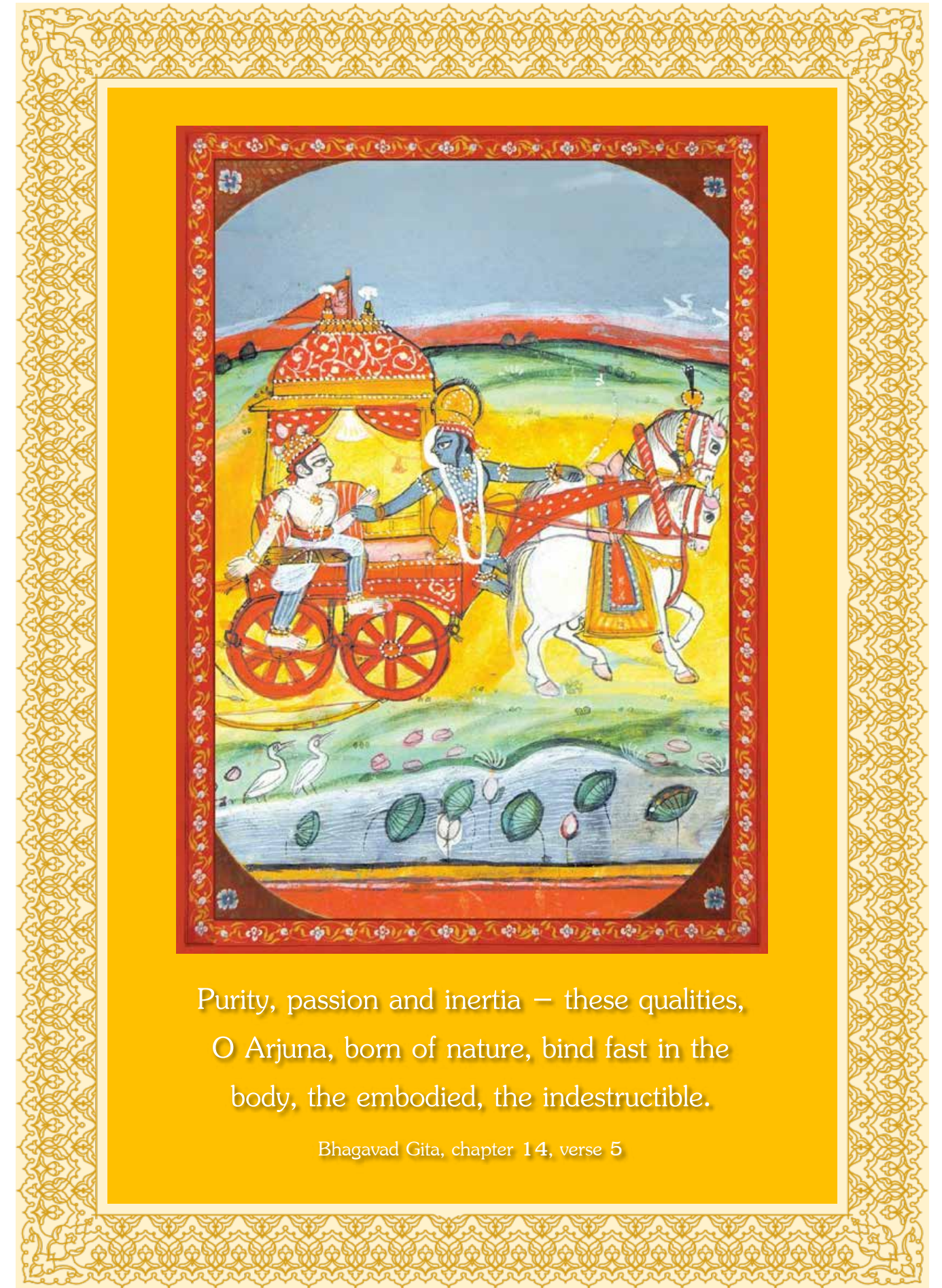
The gunas manifest as:

Sattva (purity, cleanliness, crystal, white). If a person is dominated by sattva, he or she exudes the light of wisdom and the power of discrimination. Pure and elevating thoughts and pure understanding are dominant in the mind of the person who turns away from sensual pleasures and toward knowledge.

However, it is possible to identify so strongly with sattva that attachment develops. At this point the sattvic person enjoys her or his own superiority and boasts about it.

Most importantly for our spiritual development is to cultivate sattva in the overall thought pattern. Take for example driving a car: calmly and full of energy, fast but with control — that is what we mean by sattvic.

Sattva when taking food means to eat unhurriedly and with pleasure, enjoying the taste, and not to wolf down the food thoughtlessly. Sattvic means to continue a conversation calmly during a heated discussion; sattvic is the reaction of a surgeon who suddenly faces an unforeseen complication during an operation and reacts with control. The principle applies to all ways of life. It also means to keep a sense of perspective and to remain calm, to approach



Purity, passion and inertia – these qualities,
O Arjuna, born of nature, bind fast in the
body, the embodied, the indestructible.

Bhagavad Gita, chapter 14, verse 5

something thoughtfully and to concern oneself with it until the matter is completed; it is this method which distinguishes a successful person.

Rajas (restlessness, desire, greediness, red). Rajasic activity can be confused with Karma Yoga or godly activities. Seemingly, selfless service for the world becomes rajasic when the motive behind the activity is linked to personal desires. There are people who cannot sit still even for a minute, and have to keep themselves busy in one way or the other.

A yogi or wise person who sits still, is physically immobile, and tames his mind is the most active person in the world. When intensive activity happens on the basis of sattva, it gives the impression of a wheel that is turning very fast yet appears to be standing still. In contrast to this is uncontrolled energy, which appears so smooth and active. Rajasic describes people who never have time, and who never really feel the need to reflect because they are always in a hurry.

Tamas (forgetting one's duty, confusion, darkness, lack of discrimination, extreme lethargy, mindlessness, losing one's head, errors, black). When nature is in darkness, at night, it is time to rest the body and sleep. If the natural rhythm of sleep and wakefulness is neglected too much, tamas is increased. The science of Ayurveda calls it kapha.

If tamas, lethargy, dominates the physical body, the condition transfers to the mind, to the intellectual and emotional sheath, and depression can follow as well as shortness of breath, aggressive behaviour, and a feeling of being overtaxed by the daily routine. Calmness which is obtained through the use of mood-changing medication, alcohol, or drugs is tamasic.

Tamas frequently manifests itself quite subtly:

You are happy and un-happy in succession. Sometimes you sleep too much and then not enough; sometimes you are contented and patient, at other times you are discontented and impatient; sometimes full of love, other times full of hatred.

Swami Vishnudevananda's five points of yoga - proper exercise, proper breathing, proper relaxation, proper diet, positive thinking and meditation - are a well-proven method to rid the system of accumulated tamas.

The gunas are to prakriti what single jewels are to gold. Just as you cannot separate heat from fire, so the gunas and prakriti cannot be separated and are identical.

The sun is reflected on water. The water moves and has waves and so it appears that the sun moves or has waves on its surface. In the same way, atman appears to be moving when the gunas traverse the mind. But atman is always untouched. The phenomenon is a superimposition.

In the manifested world the gunas are in a state of unbalance and are evident in all aspects of life: nutrition, action, faith, etc. Their effect on the mental plane has to be recognized so that they can finally be overcome.

Gunas and Action

We see the workings of the gunas when we act. Every day we encounter one 'problem' or another, the difference lies in how we respond to it.

We can reflect on our response in our contemplation or meditation in the evening: "Was my reaction to another person in an unpleasant situation sattvic? Did I give the other person space and see that the problem will eventually be solved? Did I react in a rajasic way with equal intensity? Or did I turn

away in a tamasic and lethargic way?"

The situations which cause difficulties are always of the same kind, but depending on external circumstances, they always appear unique. One's reaction to them, and one's own behaviour, are the result of samskaras, the subtle impressions from many previous lives, but also from the present incarnation. These impressions have created desires in the past and they continue to do so. The desires then carry the mark of the predominant guna and can show up at any moment.

It is therefore obvious that as long as all three gunas have not been transcended, then samsara, the wheel of birth and death, keeps revolving.

Generally, when we speak of activity in yoga, we mean rajo guna, but in any one activity all three gunas can manifest. Swami Sivananda says in chapter 14 of his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, the chapter about the gunas, that restlessness can lead to an action which we regret afterward.

The action is completed to fulfil one's own desire rather than to do that which needs to be done. The motive behind an action is always what makes the difference.

It is extremely important to reflect on it and analyse whether this motive is sattvic, rajasic, or tamasic. We may think we are acting selflessly but are in fact fulfilling our own need for fame and recognition. Sattvic peace does come from action, but only from action which is free of egoism.

Otherwise restlessness is created and you become a workaholic, then you become exhausted, then burn out, then turn into a couch potato who is no longer able to do anything, at which point this tendency changes back into restlessness and the wheel starts turning again. It is like the movement

of a pendulum between rajas and tamas.

Often a quite different behaviour can be observed in different areas of life. For example, a person who is active and successful in his or her job and works with great concentration may be lazy and lethargic in private life.

Tamas and rajas live close to one another; the smart and successful, elegant person of the world of work becomes a slothful, lazy person who almost vegetates in a swamp on the weekend. Real cleanliness, true sattva, presupposes that this difference does not exist.

The coexistence of rajas and sattva, however, is the result of intensive training which makes it possible to think in sattva and be active at the same time; a wonderful picture of personal evolution can be realized.

Sattvic activity is the result of calm and concentrated reflection on what needs to be done, which steps need to be taken, in order to serve oneself and humanity. Seen from the outside, it does not appear as action, but as a matter of fact that is the very best activity we can have. Pausing for a moment, and practicing some self-observation before and after the activity calms the mind and the activity becomes sattvic.

Gunas and Avidya

The gunas are considered avidya, a superimposition over vidya. That is why the knowledge of the gunas and their functions is essential in order to free oneself from the clutches of ignorance. With proper detachment we have to keep our distance from the superimposition of the gunas over the atman.

No one can escape the effects of the gunas, but it is important to analyse this phenomenon. It is important to understand its characteristics, to take on the role of

observer rather than identifying with the gunas, to become a gunatita, i.e. one who detaches from the gunas. This is not possible without understanding how they function.

The fifth verse of the 14th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita says: "Purity, passion and inertia - these qualities, O Arjuna, born of Nature, bind fast in the body, the embodied, the indestructible." Whoever identifies with these qualities of nature binds himself to the various sheaths, upadhis, and therefore cannot see the indestructible, the soul, within.

We identify with genetic tendencies, which are an expression of prarabdha karma. Yoga teaches us to give up the identification with the instruments, the body and the mind. Characteristic tendencies are an expression of the gunas, and yoga teaches us to see them, to analyse them, not to identify with them, and to finally overcome them and develop the true Self.

Gunas and Faith

If tamas is predominant, faith will be extinguished, says the Bhagavad Gita. The mind is too lethargic to argue, everything is seen from a negative perspective, the person does not believe in anything.

Everything new will be dismissed first of all as bad, negative and useless; the mind is too lethargic to consider it in any depth or to form an opinion. The belief in oneself and in one's own capacities is weak.

One does not consider the possibility that one could get a certain job, and there for one does not even try or apply. That is a clear sign of tamas domination.

In the rajasic state, according to the Bhagava Gita, the person strives for liberation. There is a prevailing belief in the good and, even, in errors, the good, positive, and instructive is seen.

This is the reason why great and successful people feel sympathy for the errors of others, a feeling which stems from an inner sattvic state. They know the shortcomings which are common to all. People who act in sattva become stronger and more knowledgeable.

Gunas at the Moment of Death

In chapter 14, the Bhagavad Gita deals with the gunas at the moment of passing, when death of the physical body takes place. It explains that the predominant guna at the moment of passing decides the situation of the next incarnation. This is why all cultural rituals accompanying death are designed to calm the mind and lead it to sattva.

If you have the wonderful opportunity to accompany someone at this moment, you can be of assistance, depending on the religion or culture to which the dying person belongs. The frequent tendency to push death aside, not to deal with it, is rajasic. Death is a crossing-over. Yoga knows that it is only a question of matter returning to the elements. The soul, enshrined in the subtle body, does not cease to exist.

Swami Durgananda is Yoga Acharya (spiritual director) of the Sivananda Yoga Centres in Europe



SIVANANDA YOGA FARM GRASSVALLEY, USA

Founded by Swami Vishnudevananda in 1971 and situated on 80 acres in the Sierra foothills of northern California, the Yoga Farm will celebrate its milestone 50-year anniversary in 2021. Beginning in 1974 with the first TTC taught by Swamiji himself, this humble Ashram has graduated thousands of Yoga teachers. Hundreds of karma yogis, through these years of service and selfless love, have contributed to make the Ashram a sweet, beautiful and vibrant place. With our 20 independent cabins, we envision a grassroot, sustainable yogic residential community for the future. Meanwhile, staff continues to work on the garden and the lavender field is waiting for its second round of harvest.

The Yoga Farm was locked down on March 16, however, it turned around and switched to Yoga classes online and offer a full range of courses on Thought Power, Meditation, Hatha Yoga Sadhana week, Stress Relief, Ayurveda, 4 Paths of Yoga, Vegetarian Cooking, and Gita classes as well as workshops from many beautiful guests teachers in the Vedic sciences and psychology. Of note is the conference on "Eco-Yoga" which raises deep concerns about our way of living.

We continue to develop our website blog with many articles and Youtube videos of seminars with Swami Sitaramananda (<https://sivanandayogafarm.org/blog/>) as well as audio podcast (<https://sivanandayogafarm.org/?s=podcast>).

The international multilingual Stress Relief Counselling Service offered online (www.sivanandastressrelief.org) with 108 Yoga teachers and graduates of the 800-hour Sivananda Yoga Health Educator Training (SYHET) program is appealing for your constant reference and collaboration in promotion.

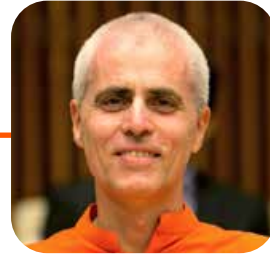
From many temples at the ashram, swami Vasishtananda and staff, through pujas and homas, send to the world in crisis, our prayers for health, peace and happiness for all beings.

www.sivananda.org/farm



DEEPENING THE YOGA PRACTICE

BY SWAMI SIVADASANANDA



This article offers practical advice to help you with the inner experience of yoga. It is important to remember that progress in our practice should be approached in a holistic manner. If we experience difficulties in one aspect of our practice, we can balance these out by other aspects where we may be more proficient. In fact to be strong in one aspect does not necessarily indicate overall progress.

Asanas and the Three Gunas

In order to increase harmony and peace within our lives, we need to be aware of the influence of the three gunas or the three qualities of nature. These are sattwa, rajas and tamas.

Connect with Sattwa

Sattwa is the foundation of creativity and inner peace. Watch the sunrise or sunset out in nature. At this time sattwa predominates in the atmosphere and uplifts body and mind. Eat fresh and pure vegetarian food at times when the sun is high, rather than after sunset. Water neutralises energies. Take a shower before practising yoga, but wait at least fifteen minutes after a yoga session before showering. The scent of sandal or rose from good incense or essential oil enhances sattwa.

Avoid Rajas

Avoid all stimulants such as coffee, tea, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, garlic or any of the onion family, as well as synthetic alcohol-based perfumes. Loud music, too much talking, or associating with large groups of people all increase rajasic energy.

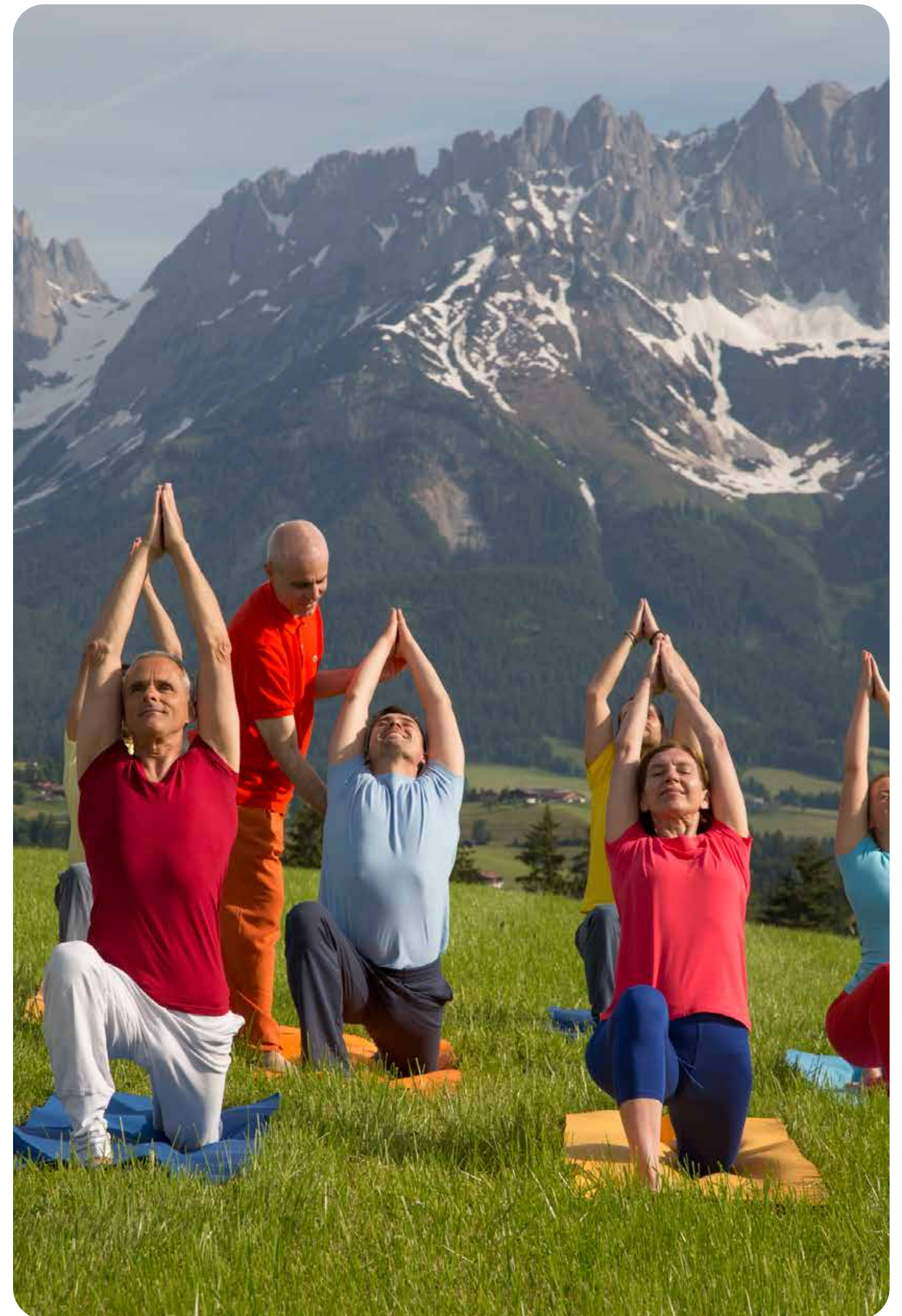
Avoid Tamas

Meat and stale food, poorly-ventilated rooms, oversleeping, overeating, lack of cleanliness in your living space, and lack of physical exercise all increase tamasic energy.

Positive Effects of Asanas on the Gunas

The energy changes experienced during asana practice are actually not an increase in quantity, as commonly perceived, but rather a change in quality. The vibratory level changes from tamas and rajas to sattwa.

Imagine a yoga class where half the students enter with a rajasic energy. They are unable to relax, their breath is accelerated and they constantly adjust their pose. The other half of the class is in a tamasic state. Their bodies feel heavy, breathing is short and shallow, and the relaxation pose seems the only attractive posture for them.



Now imagine the class is told to come into the shoulderstand and hold it quietly for three minutes. Those students with rajas, will find the holding uncomfortable. Their minds say: "I need variation." As they hold the pose, after a minute or so their breath will automatically deepen and slow down, muscles will relax, and the energy will shift to sattwa.

Those students with more tamas in their system will also find maintaining the posture uncomfortable. But their question will be "When can I return to the relaxation pose?" Holding the pose will stimulate the breath and heart beat, and tamas will be transformed into rajas and then into sattwa.

The more we avoid tamasic and rajasic influences in our daily lives and the more contact we have with sattwic influences, the more quickly the asanas will change our vibratory level. With practice, even twenty to thirty minutes of asana practice will be enough to produce a change in the gunas. The practice of asanas gives us tremendous confidence to face whatever challenges life presents us with, because we begin to understand that creativity and peace are accessible with each session. More advanced yogis can change the gunas by mere will power.

Asanas and the Yamas and Niyamas

Both the physical body and the mind are a manifestation of Mother Nature, or shakti, in her microcosmic form. The yamas and niyamas of the eight-limbed or ashtanga yoga system are guidelines for a harmonious relationship with the world, or shakti in her form as macrocosm.

They are non-violence, truthfulness, sublimation of sexual energy, non-stealing, non-acquisitiveness, cleanliness/purity, contentment, austerity, study of the scriptures and surrender to God.

The spiritual aim of asanas and pranayama is to awaken the dormant shakti in the muladhara chakra or root chakra at the base of the spine and to unite her with Siva or the unchanging consciousness in the crown chakra at the top of the head. The higher the shakti moves up in the chakras, the more she is experienced as universal energy. Finally the experience of the inner and the outer shakti become One.

If the universal laws of the yamas and niyamas are ignored, shakti as the Soul of the world is negated. The practice of asanas loses its spiritual meaning and the inner shakti will not reveal herself. Here, the practitioner will tend to shift his attention outwards.

The asana experience will be more isolating than unifying and the shakti will manifest as maya (illusion) in thoughts such as: "Oh what exceptional capacities I have, what exceptional physical purity I have (this thought itself is a mental impurity), what exceptional physical beauty I have." Asanas practised as "performance yoga" in order to attract the attention of others leads nowhere.

An ashram or yoga retreat is an ideal place to experience the interrelationship of the yamas and niyamas and the asanas. Communal living in simple conditions enriches us when we approach it with a spirit of sharing. If we come with the attitude "what's in it for me?" we become isolated and end up unhappy and dissatisfied.

The possibilities for tension and friction are innumerable. When they are overcome through yamas and niyamas, the inner shakti responds positively in the asanas and expansion of consciousness occurs while practising.

Karma yoga or the practice of selfless service for the good of others offers the best practical training for the acquisition of the yamas and niyamas.

Pratyahara and Dharana in Asanas

Pratyahara is the imitation of the mind by the senses, which comes by withdrawing the senses from their objects. Raja Yoga Sutras II/54

The five senses function through the projection of prana. It is an illusion to think that we take prana in when we use our senses. For example, for the ear to hear, nerve impulses travel back and forth between the central nervous system and the ear, and prana is projected towards the sensory object.

Through pratyahara or withdrawal of the senses, the senses become so well controlled that they simply follow the mind. If the mind does not want to hear sounds, the sense of hearing is automatically withdrawn. Asanas can help attain mastery over this limb of raja yoga.

When we hold an asana we focus on the movement of prana in the body. We project prana to contract certain muscles and then withdraw it again to relax them. The movement of sense-energy is similar, only the vibratory level is higher.

During asana practice, we may feel subtle sensations in the body, such as body weight, a subtle warmth or the perception of infinity when we visualise the space in the atoms of the cells. These experiences turn the senses inward, thus avoiding, in a natural manner, the need to repress the outward-moving tendency. The sensory experience in asanas is so attractive, that these outward-moving tendencies are relinquished with little or no resistance.

The mind is prana at the highest vibratory level. Dharana or concentration is difficult because we must abandon all thoughts that distract us from the object of concentration. In asanas there are innumerable ways to help the mind concentrate.

There is variety, and yet this variety is contained within one field, the body. We develop dharana by projecting mental prana onto that one field. The more we practise control of prana through asanas, the better the chance we have of experiencing dharana.

Overcoming Body Conditioning

The way our body is built actually determines how we view time and space. We look ahead into the future, while behind us lies the past. When we are awake with our eyes open, we create mental patterns which lead us to perceive life in terms of future or past events. With this to contend with, how can we dream of reaching the yogic ideal of "being here now"?

Yoga asanas skillfully take us away from the notions of ahead and behind, front and back. Forward bends are counterbalanced by backward bends, and vice versa. Even though there may be quite some movement during a yoga class, we do not stray from the mat.

During relaxation, we move systematically from the feet to the head, following the pathways of the peripheral nervous system and back to the central nervous system, i.e. the spinal cord and the brain. The same pattern is applied in pranayama and the meditation exercises. The upward flow of energy not only takes us away from spatial perception, but stimulates the chakras, creating a different perception of time.

Overcoming the Conditioning of Language

The same limitations, which have their source in the environment, occur with language. Here is an object – a table for example, and it must have a name to have a form. But also very subjective experiences such as emotions are labeled with words.

These words reflect a collective consciousness, which does not necessarily correspond to the consciousness of the individual. The average vibratory level in society is of rajas (activity, passion). Language is not only used in spoken communication, but is also the fundamental vehicle for the thinking process. It is therefore difficult to raise the awareness to higher levels of consciousness, if the very words with which we think correspond to the relatively low vibration of the collective consciousness.

Mantras are words which were not created to describe objects and are not related to the collective consciousness. They were revealed to sages in deep meditation. The root sounds of mantras correspond to the vibratory levels of the chakras.

Symbolically traditional drawings of the chakras represent petals of the chakra-lotus, each associated with one letter of the Sanskrit alphabet. When we repeat a mantra, we bypass the mechanism of ordinary language, and connect to higher mental states such as intuition and inner peace.

Swami Sivadasananda is Yoga Acharya and teaches workshops throughout the Sivananda Centres in Europe and Teachers' Training Courses Worldwide.



SIVANANDA YOGA RETREAT HOUSE AUSTRIA

We welcome you to a sanctuary of peace surrounded by fresh air, pure water, green meadows and quiet woods. The Sivananda Yoga Retreat House was founded in 1998 and is nestled on a sunny slope with panoramic views on the Tyrolean Alps.

The Sivananda Yoga Retreat House has developed over the last 22 years to become a source of inspiration and a spiritual home for many yoga practitioners in Europe and beyond.

A wide range of programmes are on offer: teachers' training courses, further education courses for teachers, mountain magic yoga vacations, ayurveda nutrition courses and special holiday retreat programmes.

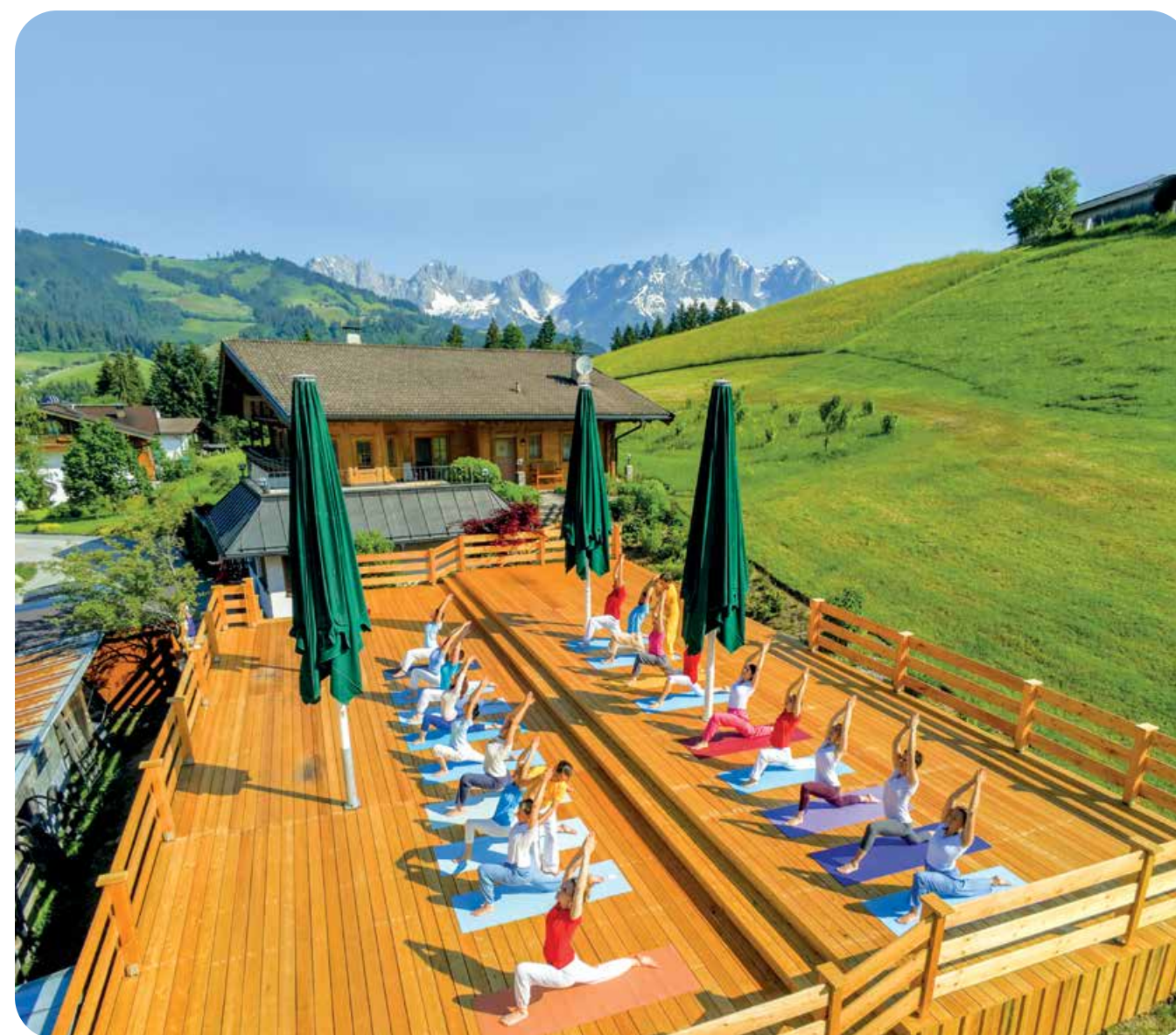
What awaits you:

- motivated, practising yogis
- a variety of interesting themes
- a solid introduction to yoga and meditation
- individual advice based on experience
- summertime practice on the outdoor cedar platform
- daily mantra chanting as well as prayers and ceremonies for inner and outer peace
- introspective leisure moments on the Retreat House terrace
- delicious vegetarian meals in a friendly atmosphere
- incomparable walks and hikes
- a well-stocked boutique with a selection of books, music and yoga accessories
- new healthy habits in a smoke- and alcohol-free environment

Come and explore the possibilities for yourself. It may turn out to be a life changing experience!

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REITH ASHRAM STAFF



THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF MEDITATION

BY SWAMI KILASANANDA



“Meditate, meditate, this is the only way.” - Swami Sivananda

In these times of lock-down and global insecurity, the teachings of yoga about meditation are more precious than ever. Turning within for peace and stability seems the only way.

We share below teachings on the transformative power of meditation as contained in “The Sivananda Book of Meditation”, which was released in 2003. This book provides guidance to the preparatory steps of meditation as well as a clear understanding of its vast potential.

The gradual progress in physical and mental well-being that comes when you meditate is mostly silent and unseen, like the quiet unfolding of a bud into a flower in the hours of the night. Try not to set up expectations or goals for change as this may well discourage you if you feel you do not reach them within a certain time. Changes occur at deep and subtle levels and only gradually will they reveal themselves either to you or to the outside world.

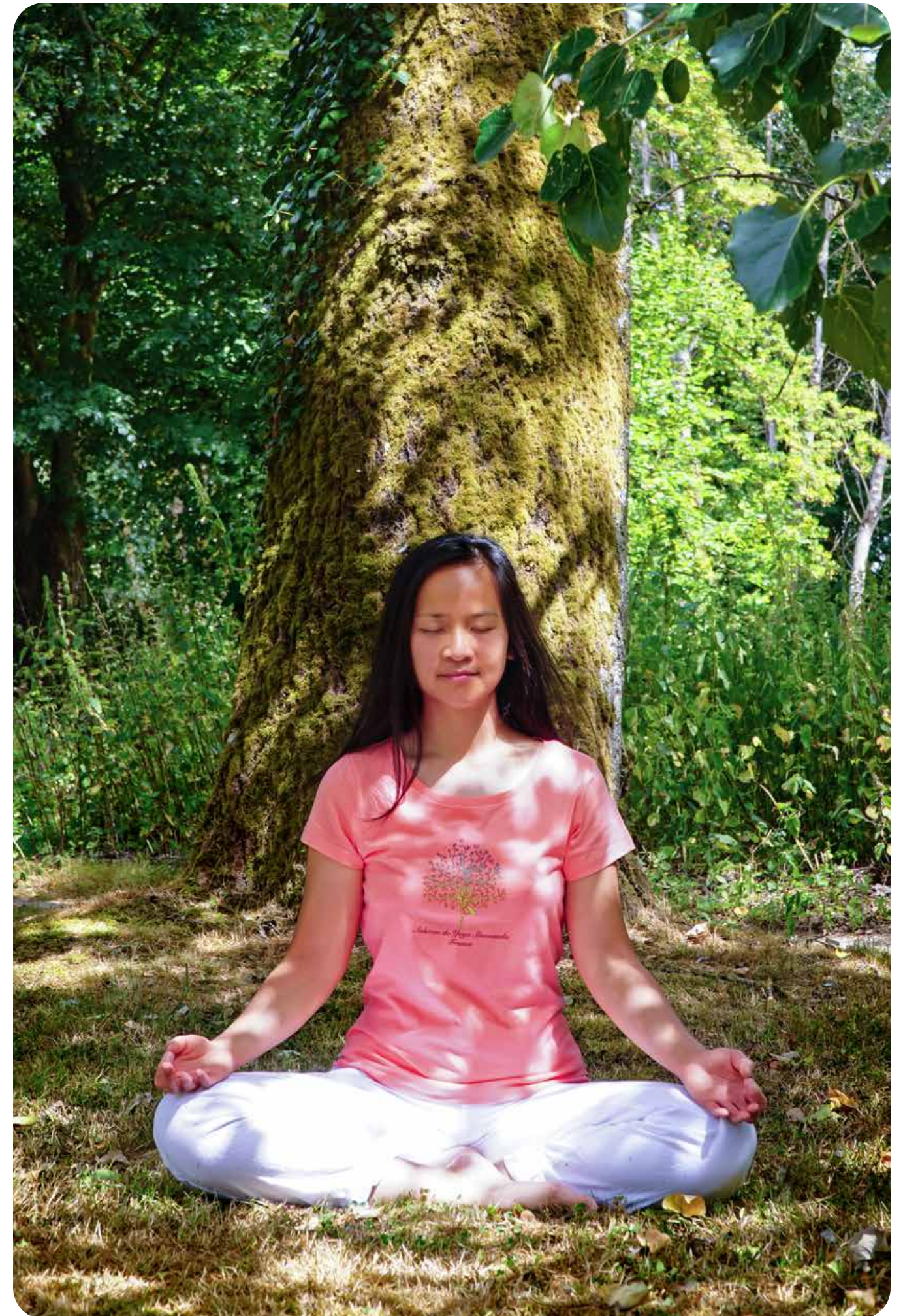
Of course, there are no objective tests to measure your progress in meditation.

However there are universal indicators that all those who meditate on a regular basis will experience sooner or later.

Meditation, a great energiser

Meditation is a vigorous tonic to the physical system. Only recently scientists have become aware of the relationship between mind and cells. Until a few years ago they would react with extreme scepticism to yogic demonstrations of mental control over supposedly involuntary functions such as heart beat, respiration and circulation.

They believed the autonomic nervous system to be independent of any conscious mental process. Bio-feedback techniques now prove that most bodily functions can be controlled by concentration. Modern research substantiates the fact that the mind can control the activity of a single cell, as well as groups of cells.



Each of the body cells is governed by the instinctive, subconscious mind. Each has both individual and collective consciousness.

When thoughts and desires pour into the body, the cells are activated, and the body obeys the group demand. During meditation there is generally a tremendous acceleration of positive energy to the individual cells, rejuvenating them and retarding decay. The powerful soothing waves penetrate the cells and exercise a benign influence on all its organs, setting in motion a process of healing and strengthening that prevents and cures many diseases. It is an established fact that those who meditate on a regular basis visit the doctor and hospital far less than those who do not practise.

Meditation is a great energiser. You will feel newly alive, full of vim, vigour and vitality. Meditation helps to prolong the body's anabolic process of cell production, growth and repair and to reduce the catabolic, decaying process. After the age of 35 our brain cells die off at a rate of 100,000 a day; meditation reduces this decline, preventing or minimising senility.

Once you meditate, the time you normally devote to sleep can gradually be reduced to as little as three hours a night for advanced meditators and still you will still feel more rested and peaceful than before. You will develop a powerful digestive system, with scanty excretions and reduced food intake; you will enjoy a lightness of the body and mind. Your senses will sharpen resulting in heightened perception and enabling you to hear sounds and see objects more clearly and at a more subtle level.

Sparkling eyes, steady gaze, powerful but sweet voice, beautiful complexion and sweet smell along with a strong and healthy body will tell you that your meditation is proceeding well.

Achieving calmness of mind

By decreasing the heart rate and consumption of oxygen, meditation greatly reduces stress levels and acts as powerful tonic not only to the body but also to the nervous system. Each part of the body, down to the individual cells, is allowed to relax and rejuvenate. Real progress in your practice is really and accurately measured by the peacefulness, serenity and calmness that you demonstrate in the waking state.

Does your mind seem to be shedding a little of its dullness or heaviness? Do you feel more peaceful, happier with yourself and less prone to emotional outbursts? Are serenity of mind and a sense of contentment starting to flourish? If the answer is yes to any of these questions then you will know that you are advancing in your practice. You will become aware that you identify closely with emotions, thoughts and actions and will gradually move away from this, assuming the role of witness, as if you were watching someone else.

By observing yourself without judgement or praise, you will lessen the power of your habitual thoughts and emotions to control you. In detaching from the games of the ego, you learn to take responsibility for yourself. If you suffer from addictions of any kind, you will find that your cravings for the addictive substance or action will gradually fade.

Attachments, likes and dislikes, and their accompanying restlessness and agitation of mind will diminish. Negative tendencies will become less and your mind will become steadier; your face will be calm and serene. Balance and composure, harmony, happiness and satisfaction of life will establish themselves. You will have an unruffled mind. You will be calm, tranquil and poised.

The development of inner clarity

Along with mental strength comes a

corresponding expansion in the power of your intellect. The practice of concentration increases will-power and memory, the result of which is a sharp and bright intellect. Alacrity, acumen and agility will slowly broaden your capacity to turn out tremendous work.

Your ability to clarify ideas and remove doubts will develop and as a consequence you will become skillful in making correct and speedy decisions. What used to take four hours will take only one. What was cloudy and hazy before will become clear and definite; what was difficult before will come more easily; and what was complex, bewildering and confusing will be grasped effortlessly. You will work with scientific accuracy and great efficiency. You will have a one-pointed, clear, strong, subtle mind, with mental images clear-cut and with thoughts well-defined and well-grounded. You will discriminate and detach from the trammels of day-to-day living, resulting in less stress and more peace.

The gradual transformation of the personality

As a result of this new found peace, you will experience a changed view of the universe and different patterns of behaviour will develop. Lethargy and laziness, pain and sorrow will decrease and cheerfulness and joy will grow. Because your attention to what you do as you do it will increase, you will find you live more in the present.

The time you spend in dreaming of an imaginary future or of an exaggerated past will lessen. You will find that you remove clutter from your life. Most meditators, within a few weeks' of starting their practice, clear out drawers, cupboards and files. You will attack, with gusto, jobs and tasks that have been waiting for you for many months. Your pending file at work, instead of being piled high, will seldom be full.

As you advance in your practice, you will gradually develop a love for all, even for those who despise you. Your strength of mind will allow you to bear insult and injury and to meet the challenges of everyday life with energy, fortitude and patience. Situations and people that previously upset you will now no longer do so.

The computers will still break down, the traffic still grind to a halt, the boss still put you under pressure, but you will find that you are less affected by the turmoil, keeping a cool head and balanced mind when before you were stressed, angry and anxious. You will develop a magnetic and dynamic personality.

Those who come into contact with you will be influenced by your inspiring and more compassionate behaviour, powerful speech and spiritual nature. People will draw joy, peace and strength from you. You will attract people to you and lift their mood and minds.

The expansion of consciousness

The practice of meditation releases great amounts of spiritual energy, resulting in pure thought and, in due course, intuitive knowledge. It provides a lasting spiritual rest which must be experienced to be understood. You will receive inspiration, grace, and spiritual strength. You will attain higher states of awareness and the experience of unity which leads to divinity. You will catch the glory of God and the splendour and immanence of truth. You will develop a greater sense of purpose, a more sublime goal in life. You will learn to introspect more deeply and develop a desire and willingness to engage in selfless service.

With meditation comes freedom from fear of death. Most people think that death is the end of existence, but in fact, death means only the extinction of the present name and form. The greater the identification with name and form, the greater is the fear.

The practice of meditation develops detachment from this name and form. It makes you aware of the ever-changing nature of the body and of all phenomenal existence.

In recognising the ephemeral nature of the world, you will begin to realise that your holding on to objects, body, emotions and your cumbersome ego-identity, is the very cause of your suffering and is due to your ignorance of your true identity.

As you gradually let go of this need, and as the fear of losing what you never have really possessed vanishes, your consciousness will start to expand and a new sense of Self will emerge. Eventually, you will see the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.

Of course, these signs of progress will not manifest immediately, and you may require many years of regular practice before you start to reap some of the more profound benefits outlined. Do not grow dejected with the idea that you are not making headway. Sometimes the progress will be imperceptible.

However, even after a month or two you will start to see improvements in your life at all levels. Your friends and family will ask whether you have been on holiday or have taken some cure!

When these changes do start to appear, try not to become complacent and curtail your practice. Do not become self-satisfied. This is so important. As we pointed out earlier, the layers of impurities of the mind run deep and it is only when you start to work on them that you realise how many there are. If you conquer one obstacle, another obstacle will be ready to manifest.

If you control the sense of taste, you may find another sense strengthens with doubled force to assail you. If you remove greed,

anger may appear more forcefully than before. If you drive egoism through one door, it enters through another.

Great patience, perseverance, vigilance and undaunted strength are needed. Be firm, steady and steadfast. People may mock you. Be silent. People may insult you; be silent.

Every temptation that is resisted, every destructive thought that is curbed, every desire that is subdued, every angry word that is withheld, every noble aspiration that is encouraged, every sublime idea that is cultivated, adds to the growth of will-force, good character, and attainment of inner peace. You will engage in rich and rewarding relationships as you learn to understand yourself and others better; you will experience a full and well-lived life as you take control in ways that previously seemed impossible. Meditation paves the way for perfection; continue your practice and reap the beauty of peace and stillness that will slowly unfold within.

Swami Kailasananda is a Yoga Acharya and director of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres in England and France. She studied Sanskrit and is the author of the Sivananda Book of Meditation.

Enjoy the abiding peace

Swami Sivananda

When you enter the silence through deep meditation, the outside world and all your troubles will drop away.

You will enjoy Supreme Peace.

In this light is Light of Lights.

In this silence is real strength and joy.

Shut out the doors of the senses.

Still the thoughts and emotions.

Sit motionless and calm in the early morning hours.

Ignore the coloured lights.

Have a receptive attitude.

Go alone with the Lord.

Commune with Him.

Enjoy the abiding Peace in Silence.

SIVANANDA YOGA MADURAI MEENAKSHI ASHRAM, INDIA

The Madurai Meenakshi ashram, founded in 2002, sits nestled within the forest lands of Tamil Nadu with stunning views of the Western Ghat mountain range and only one hour from the holy temple city of Madurai. The ashram grounds have been designed in accordance with vastu, the ancient science of architecture and design.

From the early days the ashram wanted to construct a temple for goddess Kali. In 2015 this vision was realised and the ashram temple was inaugurated. Construction is currently underway for a new reception building close to the ashram gate which will allow for a smoother arrival at the ashram. The building also will house new guest rooms and a terrace asana platform.

Our gardens---and our population of cows--- have been slowly expanded over the past two years. We now grow several varieties of rice, beans, and vegetables. We produce fresh buttermilk from our ashram cows. We have secured a building near to the ashram and are planning to inaugurate the Sivananda Institute of Health (SIH), Madurai in October of this year. The building is well-equipped with fifteen guest rooms, treatment rooms, dining hall, and yoga/meditation room. We hope to continue offering Yoga Vacation, Teachers' Training Courses, Ayurveda programmes, and special programmes within this beautiful natural setting and sharing the teachings for many years to come.

The Madurai ashram joined with the other Indian ashrams as "Team India" to offer a schedule of online classes, courses, satsangs, and specialised workshops and short courses conducted by our staff and some outside teachers. We have three functioning studios set-up in our new Ayurvedic building.

We are also producing a beginners' series of short instructional videos. Every few days we release another video. The videos have proven very helpful in directing online students who may have difficulty with the practices. The series will culminate in a collection of audio and demonstration practice sessions which refer back to the videos.

<https://www.sivananda.org/madurai>

MADURAI ASHRAM STAFF



Anoop



Parvathy



Rahul



Chetan



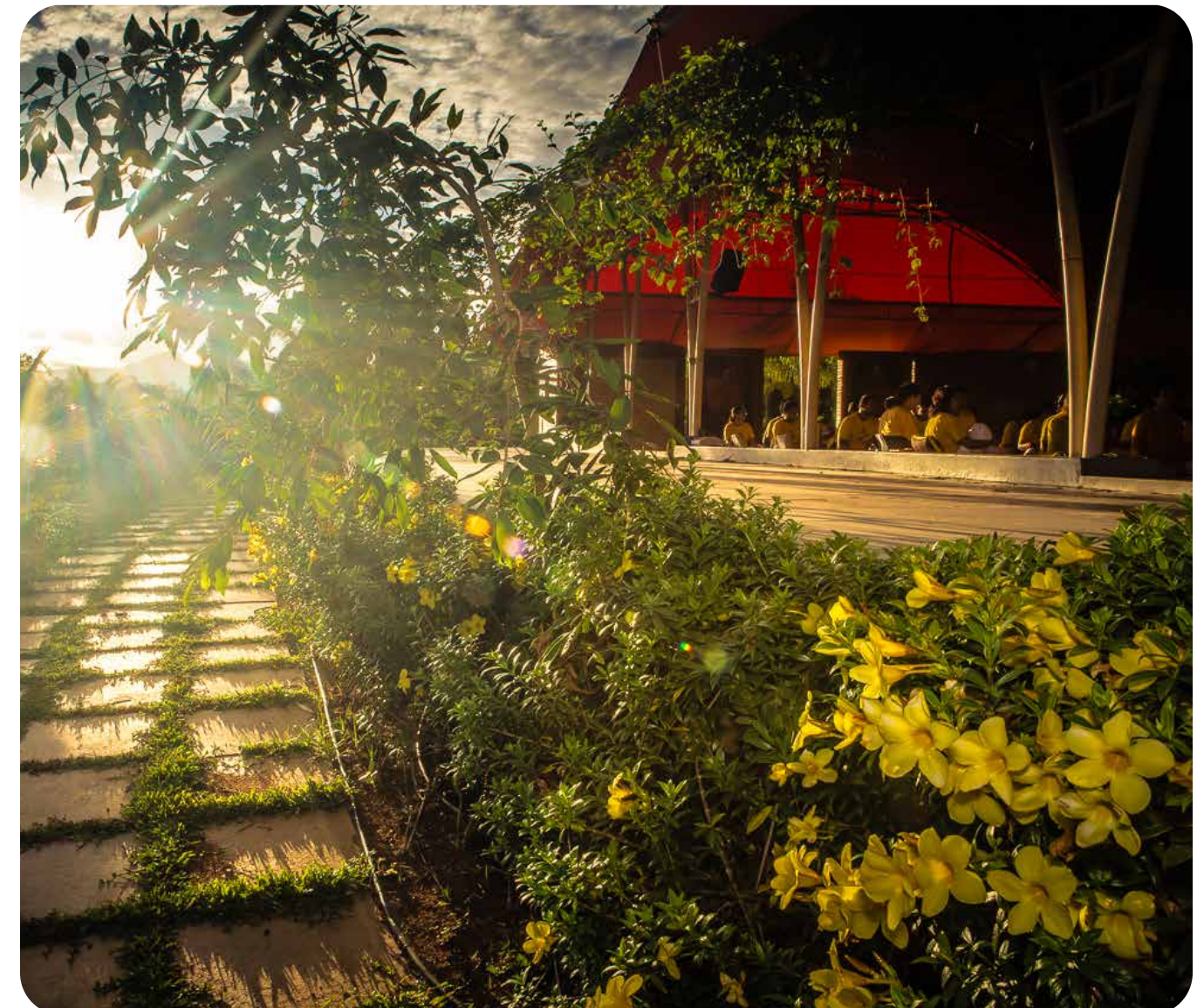
Nassim



Nirmala
Chaitanya



Santosha



THE **ROLE** OF A YOGA TEACHER

DURING THE TIME OF COVID -19

BY SWAMI SITARAMANANDA



Yoga teachers as leaders

The important thing here is that we are uniting together as Yoga teachers, Sivananda Yoga teachers. We have a mission to be leaders in this time of need and to help people. The aims and goals of the Sivananda Yoga Teacher Training Course is to create leaders who themselves have experienced the way to peace and in turn can show others the way to peace in times of crisis. During the unprecedented Covid-19 crisis the world is now going through, the most important thing a Yoga teacher can do is to be an example to others by continuing to do sadhana (spiritual practice). Yoga teachers are practitioners and not preachers. They lead by example.

Yoga teachers as influencers, spreading positive thoughts

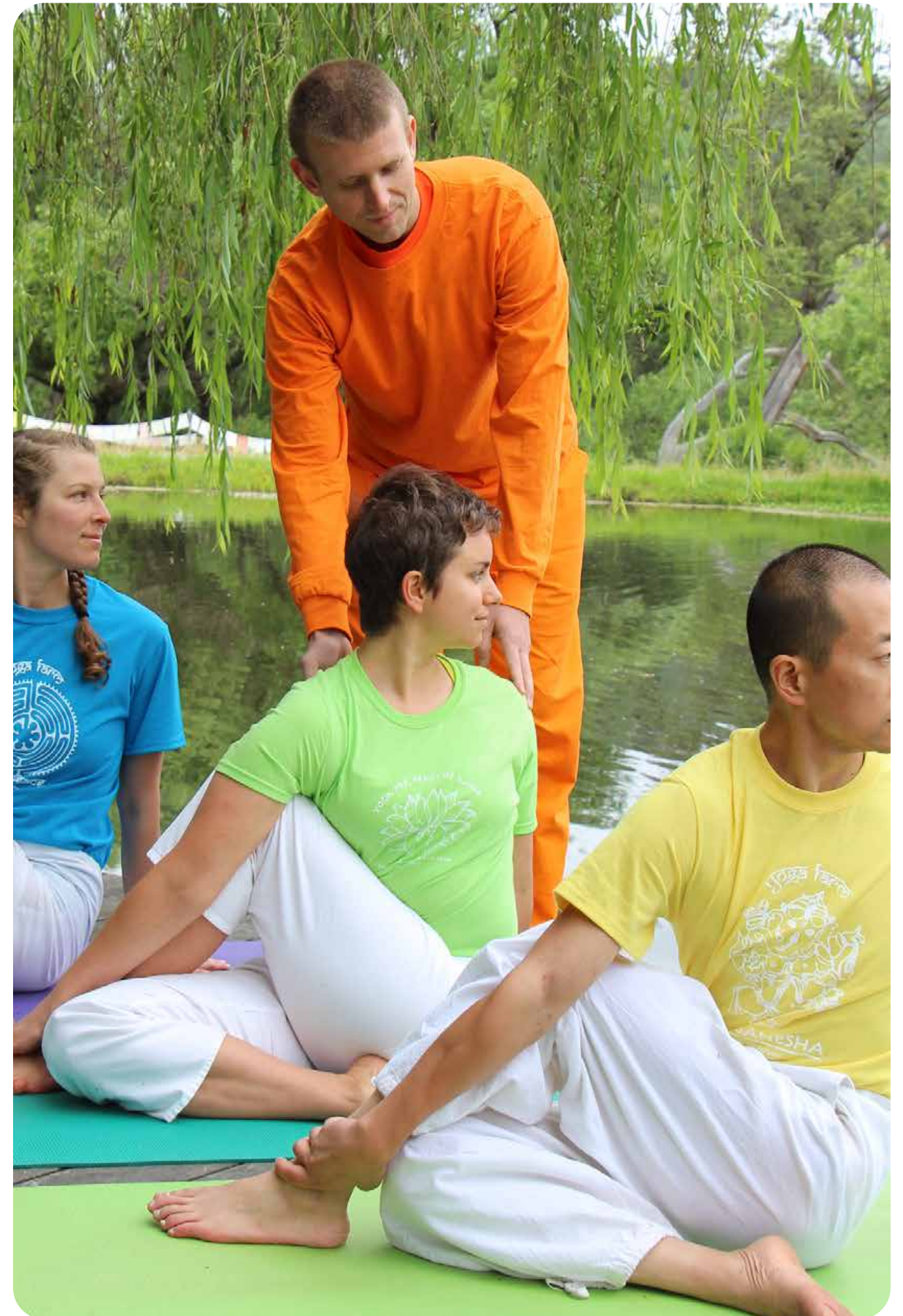
During this pandemic, when the world is in panic and confusion, it is important to understand that crisis changes the vibration of the whole world. At this time, it is important that yogic teaching becomes known, so people learn how to turn their negative thoughts to positive thoughts and begin to understand the cumulative actions of their thoughts. This is what the Yoga teacher needs to know, that his or her

thinking is not only relating to him or herself or to the people in the same room or house with them. Thinking together as a collective consciousness, our positive thinking, affects the whole world.

Now more than ever we need to be aware of this, that our positive thoughts or positive words affect the world. The way we can help the world to heal is to keep uplifting our consciousness by the conscious practice of Yoga sadhana. You may think you are alone in your house doing your practice and your voice does not count, but any thoughts that you broadcast during and after sadhana are very powerful.

Moreover, as you practice Yoga and meditation now, switch your intention to do it for the sake of the world. This way, your practice not only is improving your life but also improves the vibration of the whole world.

Yoga teachers are empathetic, sensitive and realize the suffering, the grief and feel the negativities of people around them and in communities of the world. They feel what people go through when everything in their life is collapsing or changing; when the whole world is in lockdown; when they



have to stay home, have lost their job; are in dismay about what to do to fill up their time; and wonder what to do to prevent total collapse?

Yoga teachers know that this is a moment of transition, a moment of choice for all. Yes, as Yoga teachers, we have a choice, either we are going to be depressed and go down with everybody or we are going to stay strong in satsanga and rise up, shifting our consciousness with the whole world.

By positive thinking, as a result of sadhana, Yoga teachers anchor themselves and become influencers of the world's collective thought to play a leading role in the world's shift in consciousness.

Yoga teachers as powerhouses raising vibrations with mantra

The easiest way to increase your vibration to help the world is to repeat a mantra. Those who are Sivananda Yoga teachers know what a mantra is. There are several mantras that you can repeat, now more than ever. Yoga teachers can gather people together to repeat the mantras because of the collective healing effect. It's like adding the energy together and you know that when you add energy, you don't just add energy to your country but you add energy to the whole world. We create this positive energy to balance out all the negative vibrations.

You know that mantra has an effect. It is a question of knowledge, not just of blind faith. This way, you can repeat a few mantras, teach people to repeat the mantra properly and gather in groups to repeat mantra. It helps to strengthen the mind. The mantra's healing properties are radiating out.

The best mantra that you can use, record, broadcast and play is the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, an excellent mantra for healing and for liberation. Someone that is sick or upset mentally because they have lost their loved

ones or are afraid of sickness, can use this Mantra:

***Om Tryambakam Yajamahe Sugandhim
Pushthivardhanam. Urvaarukamiva
Bandhanaan Mrityormuksheeya Maamritaam***

Please record this mantra and play it for those who are anxious in your household and community. Play it at low volume all the time, 24 hours a day, so they can hear it. Even though they might not understand the words, it brings peace to their mind. Play mantras for those who have just died or are on the sick bed.

Every Yoga teacher needs to use his or her consciousness when repeating mantra. You cannot really repeat the mantra with only your lips, but rather you have to repeat the mantra with your heart, because consciousness or God is dwelling in your own heart.

Yoga teachers as counselors

When the world is lost and afraid, it is important that Yoga teachers explain a few helpful points:

- ***The connection between Prana, Thought and Immunity:***

The more that you know how to increase prana, the stronger you become and the stronger your immune system will be to prevent disease. You need to explain this to your students and to your family, the link between prana and thought.

Prana is found in nature. By changing your lifestyle to connect to the prana in nature you improve your immunity. The best thing to prevent the world from being sick is to increase immunity, which is the mechanism nature has given us to prevent diseases. The prana needs to be high. You increase the prana by absorbing the prana from nature.

This is done by leading a proper lifestyle,

by proper contact with the earth (eating the right food, contemplate trees, mountains, gardening, etc.); water (drink pure water, bath in rivers, oceans); fire (being in the sun daily, eat warm food); air (breathing exercises in the clean air) and; ether (being in a positive thought atmosphere).

We need to learn how to conserve prana and not spending prana through negative thinking, such as useless worries and actions that are mindless. We need to learn to train the mind, to concentrate the mind, to perform only mindful actions. The higher the prana, the more that we increase immunity and prevent disease.

Increase the prana through your connection with nature, decrease the loss of prana by detaching from the sense objects and the negative thoughts, worries and emotions. Too much information on the Internet that you cannot digest will cause you to lose prana. Gather only the information that you can digest. Like food, if you eat too much, you cannot digest what you eat, toxins will build up.

- ***Listening, comforting, being present:***

At this current time people need comfort, not merely calmness but also a comforting presence and comforting words. Of course, we cannot meet each other like before, now we are in quarantine—but you can call people on the phone and talk.

Yoga teachers need to know that their presence is important. Sometimes you have some kind of feeling with people and relationship and you don't want to talk to them, but now is a good time to transcend this kind of limitation that comes from ego, relationship dynamics.

Now it is good to call people, your friends and relatives, and reach out to your neighbors to give them comforting words. It's very easy to give comforting words:

"How are you? How are you doing? We are concerned about you. Is everything okay, we love you." Give these kinds of comforting words and offer empathy.

Empathy means we understand why you lost your job. We understand why you are at home and you don't know what to do and you're depressed, you're worried. We understand. Empathy comes by listening. People need to be able to talk out their worry. Then you just listen without trying to give an answer because really truly nobody has an answer. Be humble and just try to listen, not just engaging people when you feel that you have an answer. Nobody has an answer.

Listen to what they have to say, whatever they're worried and concerned about. That's enough to help them to comfort them and to help them to calm down. It is a need to be listened to.

- ***Relaxation by contemplating Nature***

Being in nature helps us to relax. Maybe you have to be quarantined in your house and you cannot go out but you can look at your plants and take care of your plants or flowers. Look through the window and look at the trees. Anything natural helps us to relax. You have to do it, focus on nature. We can do an exercise contemplating on nature. We don't have to go anywhere. Actually, you can sit in one place and just look at the tree and look at the water in the pond, look at the dog that is passing by. Just contemplating.

By being still, learning how to contemplate, everyone experiences a state of calmness, and not just calmness, but a state of joy and unity. This is exactly what we mean when we talk about spiritual relaxation. There are a lot of techniques of Yoga that can bring you to that state. Yoga has a wealth of information we can apply to achieve physical, mental and spiritual relaxation. The more you apply, the more you see that it works, and the more

that it encourages you to use it more.

Now is the time for Yoga and Yoga teachers to share the secret techniques and methods to serve the world. There's no time to lose. This is the time. Yoga teachers need to explain to people that the way they can take care of their fear and anxiety is through increasing relaxation, physically, mentally and spiritually.

- **Yoga for overcoming anxiety**

A few pointers for Yoga teachers to help people to overcome anxiety:

Breathing: The first point is to help people to improve the breath-body-mind awareness. Improve breath, body and mind awareness with rhythmical breathing. Just breathe with the diaphragm to get more oxygen, but also use rhythmical breathing.

When you do asana, make sure that people coordinate their breath with their movement and do pranayama. People are sometimes afraid to breathe because they are afraid of bringing in the virus. It's wrong thinking because this only creates more tension.

Asanas for stress resilience: The second point is to increase prana by moving the body. If you feel that you are stuck and if you feel that you are panicking, then the flow of prana is blocked. When the prana is blocked your thoughts goes down more. You need to just keep moving, but properly, by performing Yoga postures in proper sequence to move the prana and to balance the flow of prana.

We increase our capacity to deal with stress when the prana is balanced. Simple moving of the body, stretching but moving the body in the way of Yoga, right and left, backward and forward, in a balanced manner with awareness helps to balance the prana and increase stress resilience.

Improve Mental-Emotional Balance:

The third point is to improve mental and emotional balance. Mental and emotional balance is accomplished by regulating the breath. If you feel tension, you need to learn to exhale properly, calmly and slowly as possible to release tension. Let's say you are talking to the neighbor and the neighbor is panicking, you can tell them, "OK, calm down now, just exhale slowly. Inhale and exhale to the count of six, or inhale and exhale to the count of ten.

Go very slowly and they will calm down. Then the breath needs to go with the movement and the concentration of the mind. The awareness and the concentration need to be there. People cannot practice Yoga when they are stressed. Why? Because their mind is obsessed with something external. At that time, you tell them to lie down, to stretch, to breathe, and to concentrate on the breath.

Learn Ayurveda: Increase Ojas Shakti

to avoid burn out: The fourth point is to understand that if we burn out (immunity goes down), the virus can attack. One Ayurvedic teacher states the virus is a pitta disease, which means there is too much heat in the body. That is why relaxation is important. If you have too much heat and too much anger and too much thinking and too much stress, what you are doing is burning out your ojas. Ojas is the helpful energy that sustains life.

What you need to do is increase the ojas shakti, increase the power of sustenance that brings contentment, gratitude and the sense of relaxation. The key is in increasing ojas. This is the subtle energy as taught by Ayurveda. This is a good time to learn Ayurveda. Apply Ayurvedic principles in your diet and your lifestyle to increase ojas. When you see people that are anxious, they cannot sleep well. You need to apply some warm oil on your body, on your head. You can use



warm sesame oil. Even warm water can be put on the body. You can rub warm water on your body. You can eat properly. Eat very nutritious, simple food. The essence of the food will nourish you, feed the ojas and will help you to calm down.

If you have ghee, you can take one or two teaspoons of ghee in your food and you will be nourished. Warm almond drink is also very good for increasing ojas. You need to have a positive feeling and connection to the Divine. That will give you the direct connection to the source of life and will sustain you and increase your ojas Shakti.

In this time of the Covid-19 threat, we need to increase ojas Shakti, which means increasing our quality of life, not destroying life by our wrong habits. It's a time to be much more careful of what we eat, think and feel.

Increase the sense of safety: The fifth point we have already talked about, to create the sense of security, warmth, of quiet and support so that we feel safe. The key is feeling safe. To let go of the worries and the defense mechanism because if you feel worried and your fight-or-flight response is activated, your defense mechanism will wear you out.

So it is important to relax, to activate your parasympathetic nervous system by Yoga asana in a conscious manner, rhythmical breathing—all this is helping to activate your parasympathetic nervous system along with the faith that we talked about.

Increase the detachment attitude: The sixth point is relaxation but going deeper. It is about a change of attitude towards life. The prevalent attitude before was the attitude of being passionate about life, passionate about enjoyment of the senses, a rajasic attitude, running here and there so life feels more meaningful experiencing and enjoying

everything. That is called a rajasic kind of activity.

Now we need to decrease these rajasic activities. We need to increase our attitude of detachment. This is a meditative, contemplative attitude towards life, stepping back to find the fullness within and detaching from what is going on outside.

Yoga teachers as spiritual health educators

Holistic health encompasses the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of being. The whole world has a fever and is forced to quit the race, to stay home, to rest and to detoxify.

This is a great opportunity for Yoga teachers to offer the pearls of spiritual wisdom from Yoga philosophy teachings:

The best person who can support you is your own Self:

The sense of connection is very important for mental health. The connection is with your own Self and with others. However, in this new context of social distancing when everyone is asked to stay away from each other, stay home and not traveling, when they are deprived from social activities, how can we counsel people that are isolated, depressed, angry and worried? Social distancing and lock down might help to slow down the spread of the virus, but there is an increase in the spread of the negative virus of the mind. When people are worried and lonely, they send negative thoughts into the atmosphere.

What to tell them? We tell them to turn inward and feel the inner strength and the Self-love within. We help people feel connected to their own Self by teaching Yoga techniques of asana, pranayama and meditation.

Do Self Affirmation:

Teach people to practice Self-affirmation. For example, ask the person to write down this sentence and repeat it many times: "I am content and happy with my Self," or "Day by day, everything is improving, everything is better in every way," or "I am happy with the present moment".

Affirm your Self and repeat what you feel is good. If you keep repeating the positive thought that helps you, that thought gains more momentum and more power in the psychic world and helps you in due time.

For example, when you are panicking, this affirming thought will rise to the surface of the mind to help you. Self affirmation needs to be done as a habit. Another practice is to create a daily gratitude list and use what we are grateful for as affirmations.

Teach a gentler Yoga class:

The last point to remind Yoga teachers who teach asana class in the time of crisis, is to teach a gentler Yoga class, an encouraging and calming Yoga class. This is to help with the stress and trauma that many of your students are experiencing.

Of course, in this time of social distancing, we advise that Yoga teachers do not correct the students and do continue to teach people online, using video conferencing.

Restoring faith, faith gives you stronger immunity:

The last point is to help people to restore faith. In times of crisis, people tend to doubt, to be afraid, and to lose their faith. People might be suspicious of nature, because the virus comes from nature, or they might be afraid and doubtful of the supreme intelligence that allows such tragedy to take place.

The helpful link to point out to them is their inherent connection with Mother Nature, the mother Goddess, the universal presence within our own body and always around us.

This is nature. People need to reconnect with Mother Nature instead of being fearful and blameful of Her. For a Yoga teacher, it is very important to have strong faith, because you have to be positive and guide your students out of their fears.

Fear immediately disappears the moment faith is restored.

Vedanta philosophy about the Self and the not-Self:

For a Vedanta student, it is helpful that we talk about the Self, the immortal Atman, ever-present, untouched, blissful as the consciousness underlying all things. Remember the Atman and detach from all that is transient and changing. Use your higher faculty to discriminate, to know the difference between what is permanent and that which changes, what is the Self and that which is the not-Self.

Remember that there is a presence within you, a consciousness within you that is here, no matter what. Find safety and comfort in that presence as your own inner reality. Tune to that divinity that we see outside as the all-present, nourishing and caring Mother Nature.

Swami Sitaramananda is Acharya of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres. She is the director of Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm, California and the Sivananda Ashram Resort and Training Centre in Da Lat, Vietnam.

SIVANANDA YOGA ASHRAM ORLEANS FRANCE

Welcome to a haven of peace. The Ashram de Yoga Sivananda was inaugurated in 2003 in the presence and under the guidance of European Yoga Acharyas Swami Durgananda and Swami Sivadasananda. It is situated on the border of the majestic forest of Orleans, the largest national forest in France, 100 km south of Paris. The Ashram is set in the midst of vast open spaces, old forests with century old trees populated with countless species of birds, breathtaking sunrises and sunsets.

The main temple dedicated to Lord Krishna was constructed in the early days and over the years, smaller shrines for Sri Hanuman, Lord Ayappa and Goddess Kanyakumari were built. The temple anniversaries are celebrated every year in August under guidance of the South-Indian resident priest and this festive summer celebration is accompanied by a Bhagavata Saptaha. The Krishna temple is accommodated in an elegant marquee structure and the vision is to construct a permanent temple building according to the ancient science of Vastu.

The Ashrams natural environment and the deep silence of the countryside provide an ideal setting for practicing yoga, meditation and relaxation. While enjoying the yoga practise on one of the two outdoor platforms, in the scenic meditation attic or the newly constructed spacious yoga hall, the pressures of modern life are far away. A permaculture garden has been set up including an edible landscape project, providing active relaxation while gardening.

The Ashram programmes range from yoga vacations, Teachers' Training courses and Ayurveda programmes to themed certificate courses, the six month programme Yoga Life Immersion Training and specialised further trainings for yoga teachers.

We look forward to welcoming you to the spiritual oasis of the Ashram and sharing the yoga life with you during your stay.

www.sivananda.org/orleans

ORLEANS ASHRAM STAFF



PRAYER FOR WORLD PEACE

FROM THE BOOK: WORLD PEACE BY SWAMI SIVANANDA

When you sit for meditation in the early morning hours, send out currents of your love and peace to all living beings. Say:

*“Sarvesham Swasti Bhavatu – May auspiciousness be unto all;
Sarvesham Santir Bhavatu – May peace be unto all;
Sarvesham Poornam Bhavatu – May fullness be unto all;
Sarvesham Mangalam Bhavatu – May prosperity be unto all;*

Lokah Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu – May happiness be unto the whole world”

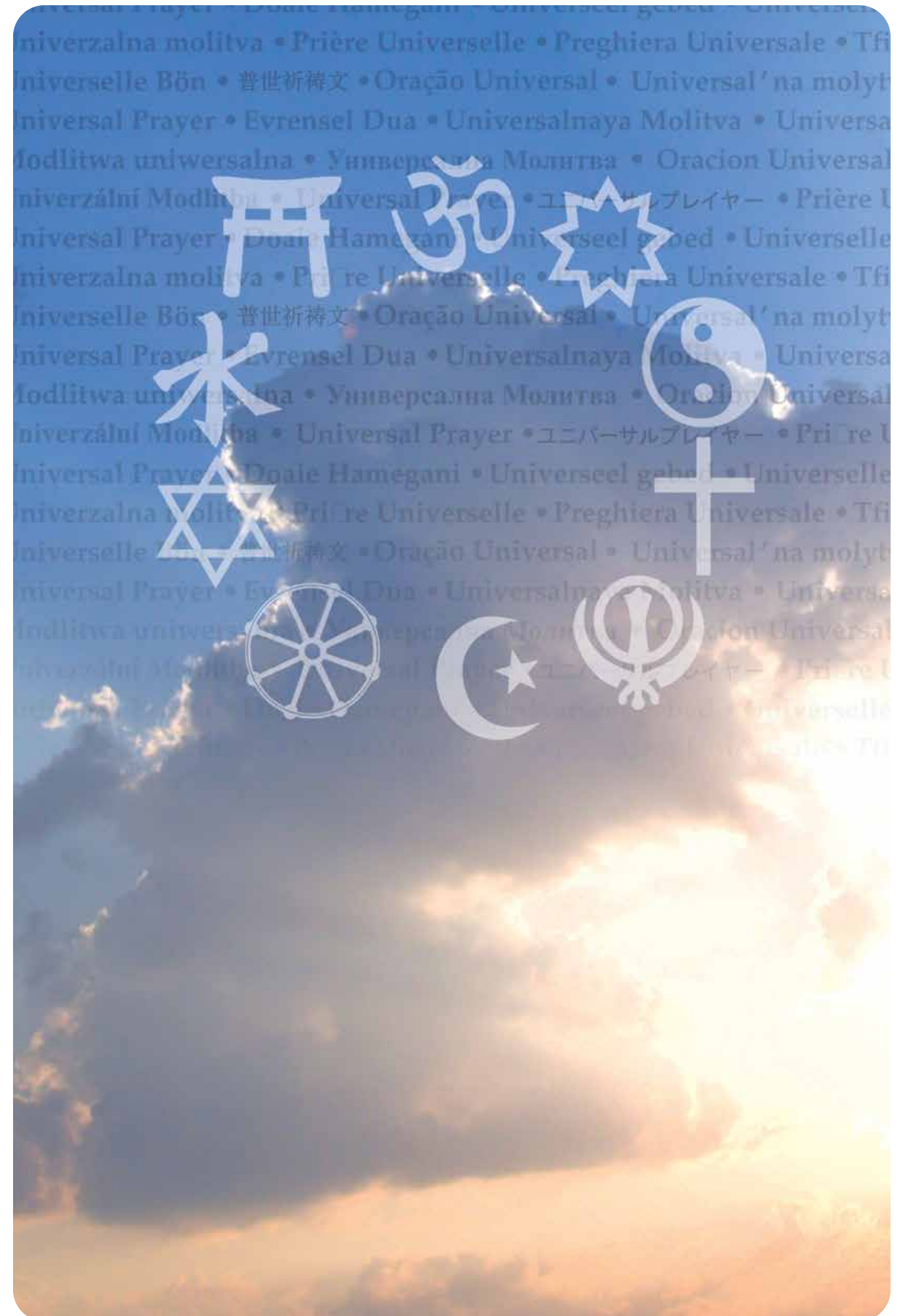
Let us pray for the peace of all. May absolute peace reign over the whole world. May all nations and communities be united by the bond of pure love. May all enjoy peace and prosperity. May there be deep, abiding peace throughout the universe. O All-compassionate, Adorable Lord! Grant us eternal peace, purity and strength to serve our country and humanity and the Mahatmas and the preceptors.

May we all work together harmoniously with the spirit of self-sacrifice for the wellbeing of the world. May we all develop cosmic love and universal brotherhood. May we see God in all faces. May we all possess an understanding and forgiving heart, broad tolerance and adaptability. Grant us inner eye of wisdom, O Lord, with which we behold oneness of the Self everywhere.

*Peace be to the East! Peace be to the West!
Peace be to the North! Peace be to the South!
Peace be above! Peace be below!
Peace be to all creatures of the universe!*

*Om poornamada poornamidam ,Poornat poornamudachyate
Poornasya poornamadaya, Poornamevavasishyate.*

*“That is full; this is full. From that Full this full has come;
when this full is taken from that Full, It always remains full.”*



THE POWER OF PRAYER TO HELP THE WORLD

BY SWAMI RAJESHWARANANDA



“
Prayer is a mighty spiritual force. The invocation of that force is our contribution to help the world. We think that we are too insignificant, too small to contribute to the well-being of the world, but we are told by Master that constant sincere prayer is a positive contribution towards the upliftment of the world.”

- Swami Sivananda

In difficult times we often forget that we have an incredible instrument on hand that we can use as a support in our struggles. Prayer.

We often think that in order to pray properly we have to have a specific time, place and solitude, but in reality prayer is a constant practice of connecting with the intangible, with the maximum expression that our mind and heart can conceive. We may call it God, the Supreme Reality, Divinity, Supreme Nature or our own Self. It matters not what name we give it.

What is needed is the right intention, the intention to connect from the heart. Prayer opens our heart and the more we pray, the easier it becomes to do so. As we pray for peace in the world and for understanding, we connect with all, and our heart and mind as well as our consciousness expand. We connect with those in need, with those who are suffering physically, mentally and spiritually. We pray for those who are facing

these challenges.

We don't need to use complicated words or formulas, only a few humble words with a pure soul and pure intention are sufficient. In prayer we invoke prosperity, auspiciousness, blessings, strength, righteousness, harmony and balance.

We place our prayer in the centre of the heart, the space within the heart, the space of consciousness. We connect to the presence of the divine within and we pray, so all our cells vibrate with that prayer, creating the same effect that happens when we recite mantra with Bhav (devotion, right feeling or intention).

The deeper we go into our heart the closer we come to our consciousness, the pure silence within and it is here where the connection to the universal takes place. So many of our problems—fear, stress, anxiety—are due to a lack of devotion. They



Universal Prayer

By Swami Sivananda

O Adorable Lord of Mercy and Love
Salutations and prostrations unto Thee
Thou art Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient
Thou art Sat-Chid-Ananda
Thou art Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute
Thou art the Indweller of all beings.
Grant us an understanding heart, equal vision,
Balanced mind, faith, devotion and wisdom.
Grant us inner spiritual strength
To resist temptation and control the mind.
Free us from egoism, lust, anger, greed, hatred and jealousy.
Fill our hearts with Divine Virtues.
Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us ever remember Thee.
Let us ever sing Thy glories.
Let Thy name be ever on our lips.
Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever.



arise because we do not connect with the highest reality. A person of devotion never feels lonely. Prayer puts us in contact with the divine presence everywhere, at anytime.

Extracts from Bliss Divine by Swami Sivananda

Here are some extracts from the chapter on prayer from the book Bliss Divine by Swami Sivananda.

- Prayer is not asking. Prayer is communion with God though single-minded devotion.
- Prayer is nearness to God.
- Prayer is tuning the mind with God.
- Prayer is fixing the mind in God.
- Prayer is meditation on God.
- Prayer is surrendering oneself to God completely.
- Prayer is the mystic state when the individual consciousness is absorbed in God.
- Prayer is an uplifting of the soul to God, it is an act of love and adoration to Him.
- Prayer is an adoration and worship of God.
- Prayer is thanksgiving to God for all His blessings.
- Prayer is an invocation, a calling forth of spiritual forces ever-flowing through the human heart, mind and soul.

“There are no problems that cannot be dissolved by prayer, no sufferings that cannot be allayed by prayer, no difficulties that cannot be surmounted by prayer and no evil that cannot be overcome by prayer. Prayer is the miracle by which God’s powers flow into human veins.”

- Swami Sivananda

Benefits of Prayer

“Prayer is a mighty spiritual force. Prayer is spiritual food for the soul. Prayer is a spiritual tonic.

Prayers are powerful spiritual currents. There is nothing so purifying than prayer. If you pray regularly your life will be gradually changed and moulded. Prayer must become habitual.

Prayer lightens the heart and fills the mind with peace, strength and purity. When the mind becomes pure and sattvic through the power of prayer, the intellect becomes sharp and keen. Prayer elevates the mind. When you pray you link yourself with the inexhaustible cosmic power house of energy – Hiranyagarbha – and thus draw power, energy, light and strength from him.

Prayer works wonders. Prayer moves mountains. Prayer is an unfailing remedy for all situations.”

Swami Sivananda has left us as an everlasting legacy with the Universal Prayer which we repeat twice daily as part of our spiritual practice. It is universal because there is no

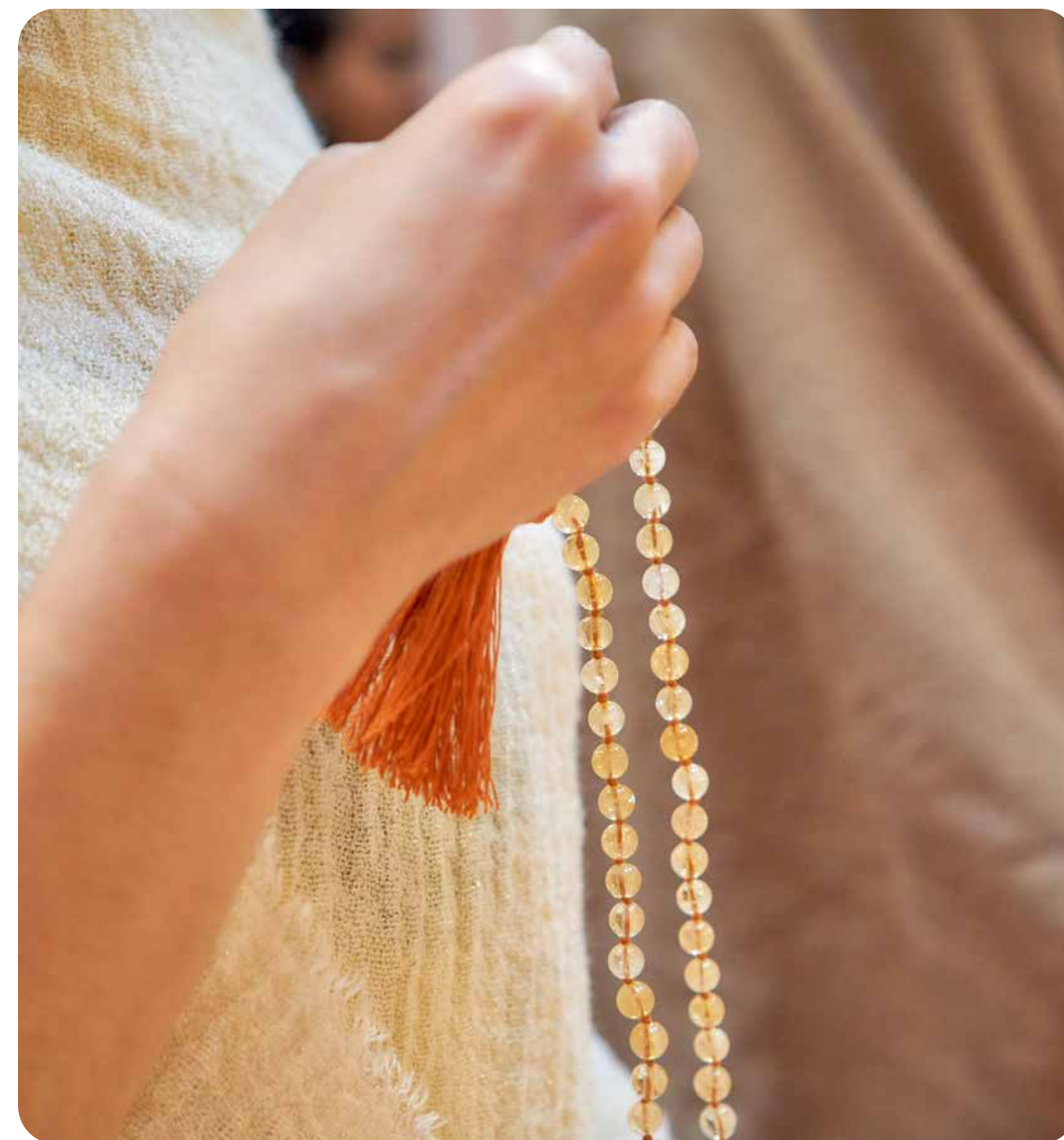
need to belong to a specific religion, or have any religion at all, to connect to its meaning. It is a universal prayer because it connects us one to another through service and love.

It begins with a glorification to the Almighty—the repetition of which brings humility—an acknowledgment of the Supreme Power and the nature of the Supreme Absolute. If there is anything to ask for or to invoke it is only the positive

qualities that are within us and the means to acknowledge the purity of the Soul. The prayer is to identify our Self with the Supreme Self in the rite of the prayer itself.

May our constant, sincere prayers join together to bring peace to the world.

Swami Rajeshwarananda is the director of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre in Rome, Italy.



PERFECT HEALTH THROUGH AYURVEDA

BY DR.SUDHINDRA UPPOOR



Excerpts from a lecture given by Dr. Sudhindra Upoor during the Sivananda Teachers' Training Course in Rudraprayag, India, 22 October 2019.

Let us learn the basics of Ayurveda. You will learn a lot about your body. You will learn where, exactly, you stand in terms of your body constitution, your vitality and your Ojas.

The whole concept of Ayurveda evolves around the Pancha Mahaboot, the five macro-elements. What are the five macro-elements? What is there in the universe? Up above is space. This is the first macro-element.

The second is air, the third is fire, the fourth is water and the fifth is earth. These elements should always be in the same order as in the universe. Space, air, fire, water and earth. Fire has an upward direction and water a downward direction, hence this order. The fundamental concept of Ayurveda is that this body you have, is a mini universe in itself. The five elements in that specific order, reflecting how they exist, is very important. And your body is a mini universe.

The area of the neck and head is in line with the first element, space, this is the cosmic

energy. The important organs here are the brain, the sense organs like the eyes, nose, tongue, ears, the skin and the thyroid gland. Second in the universe was air. Our two lungs and the heart are the 'air' organs. The area of the lungs and the heart is the air belt.

Third in the universe is fire. Down there you have your liver, your gallbladder, your pancreas and stomach. In yoga terms, you call it the solar plexus. These solar plexus energies are the fire energies. These are your cooking energies, it is your kitchen. The fire cooks the food.

The fourth energy is water. You have your kidneys, your ureter, your urine bladder and your urine coming out. This is the water energy.

The Fifth in the universe is earth. The reproductive energies, the lower energies, are the earth energies. Why do we call this the earth energy? When you have a seed in your hand, you put it in the earth for reproduction. That is why this area in your body is the earth area. To produce new crops, new agriculture, you need the soil. Five elements in the body. This is the engine of the car and the four tyres of the car are your four limbs, two hands and two legs.



Dhanvantari, the God of Ayurveda

These are just there to move the engine. The five elements in the universe are directly linked to the five elements in your body.

You will probably have heard of the terms Vata, Pitta, Kapha. Let's repeat the five elements: Space – air; fire – water – earth. Space + air = Vata. Fire + water = Pitta. Fire burns and water cools it down. How can these two live together? In what form can they live together? As acid, liquid acid. The liquid fire in your body is Pitta: the hydrochloric acid, the urine, the salty tears. The third one is Kapha. Water + earth = Kapha. Water is mentioned twice. Why is that? Space + air = Vata. Fire + water = Pitta. Water + earth = Kapha.

We have to go back to the fundamentals. Our body is a mini universe. How many types of water are there in the universe? Seawater and the drinking water – two types. The seawater – salty water and acid water – belongs to Pitta. And the alkaline water in the body belongs to Kapha. That's why water is included twice. The alkaline water is the saliva, the juices and soft mucus within the body. When this alkaline water mixes with earth, this is Kapha. When the acidic water mixes with fire, this is pitta.

We can see them as belts: air and space, is the Vata belt, the tummy belt is the Pitta belt and the kidneys and the reproductive area is the Kapha belt.

The three doshas Vata, Pitta, Kapha present the activities occurring within your body.

Now let us study the definition of 'health' within Ayurveda. It is very important to understand what health is. The World Health Organisation has listened to various definitions of health, the Western, the Ayurvedic, the homeopathic... and finally concluded that the definition of health is the Ayurvedic one, which it has approved.

To understand the definition of health according to Ayurveda, we should first learn a few key Ayurvedic terms: (i) Dosha, (ii) Dhatu, (iii) Agni, (iv) Mala and (v) Rasa. We will study these in order to understand the basic principles of Ayurveda. We have already studied the Doshas: Vata, Pitta, Kapha. The second term is Dhatu. Sapta Dhatu = seven tissues. Your body has seven tissues. The first tissue is the lymphatic system. The second is the circulatory system. The third is the muscular system. The fourth is the fatty tissue. The fifth is the bone (skeletal) system. The sixth is the bone marrow (nervous system). The seventh system is the hormonal system, oestrogen in women and testosterone in men.

These seven tissues in the body are very important in learning about Ayurveda. The Sanskrit names are: Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, Shukra. In English: lymph, blood, muscle, fat, bone, bone marrow, hormones.

I will introduce a new term, Ojas. Why is it so important to learn about Ojas? Your ultimate aim in learning yoga, chanting the Sanskrit mantras and listening to spiritual teachings is to improve your vital energy or Ojas. This is the ultimate vital energy in your body. Where does this Ojas come from?

The base chakra is the muladhara chakra, the root. The next chakra, going up your body, is the svadhisthana chakra, the adrenaline plexus. Then the manipura chakra, the solar plexus. The next one is the anahata chakra, your heart plexus. The next is the thyroid plexus, the visuddha chakra. Then comes the ajna chakra, the command plexus, the pineal gland, which has to open up with your yoga practice.

What is the meaning of mula? It is root. If your muladhara chakra is strong, and only then, your whole body is ultimately strong. What is the muladhara chakra? Remember

the seventh tissue, the hormones? The bottom line here is very simple; unless and until you have good hormonal energy, there is no ultimate vitality in your body. It is all about how you use your hormones. You want to use them only for sexual gains? Or for nourishing your energy and uplifting your chakras?

It is up to you. Bring up the hormonal energy to nourish your svadhisthana chakra, the adrenaline plexus. Then bring it up to manipura chakra, the solar plexus and then by practice to anahata chakra, the heart chakra and the visuddha chakra, the thyroid plexus. Then the nourishment begins and your face starts to glow. You can see men and women with a six-pack looking good, but there is no glow in their faces.

You bring hormonal energy to nourish your Ojas, your vital energy. So, testosterone, progesterone and oestrogen have the ultimate responsibility. The ultimate energy comes from there. It is all about how you utilise it, in your yogic karma or to keep a physically healthy body. This is called the ultimate vitality – after the seven tissues are nourished, you use the testosterone, oestrogen and progesterone to get Ojas into your body.

Yogis with high Ojas do not even eat food. Swallowing just a drop of Ojas, the ultimate nectar, they don't need food. One yogi was observed in a hospital with cameras all around him and he stayed there for three months without any food, just sitting in meditation and taking a drop of nectar called Ojas. He was not weak or sick, but vital and active. To attain the Ojas in your body, you need to maintain your vitality, maintain the vital seven tissues in your body.

Now the next topic is Agni. What is the meaning of Agni? Fire! I will define Agni in one sentence: You are what your digestive fire is. It is as simple as that. If you have

good digestion, a good appetite, no gas in your stomach, if you don't get constipated, if you don't have acidity all the time, that means you are healthy. You will never get any diseases. All the diseases originate from the gut. You are what your gut is. Always keep your digestive fire active.

What is Mala? It is the excretion of the body. There are three excretions or Malas: urine, faeces and sweat. If somebody does not sweat, it is a big problem. If someone does not go to the loo, it is a big problem. If someone does not have good urination, your kidneys will be damaged. These are the three malas, the three excretions.

The next topic is Rasa. What is Rasa? It is taste. How many tastes are there?

Six: sweet, salt, sour, spicy, bitter and astringent.

What is astringent? What is the taste of black coffee? What is the taste of pure honey, the aftertaste? This is astringent, not sweet. It leaves an aftertaste in your mouth. Black coffee, honey, green tea, yoghurt, salad leaves are astringent tastes. You will come to learn why the six tastes are so important when you apply this to yourself.

Now that we explained all these keywords, we can return to the definition of health in Ayurveda. A very important word is Sama. Sama means the balanced, middle path. Do not do anything extreme in your life. Eat good food, wear good clothes, practice a good lifestyle. Yoga is an example. Is doing yoga for 12-15 hours a day good for you? No way. Is sleeping for 12 hours good for you? No way. Everything follows a balanced, middle path.

Now we are ready to understand the definition of health through understanding the meaning of Sama. The definition of health in Sanskrit is: sama dosha, sama

dhatu, sama agni, mala kriya. The doshas, Vata, Pitta, Kapha should be 'in sama', balanced. Sama dhatu: the seven dhatus should be in sama. Mala kriya: good excretions, good sweat, tears, urination. Sama agni: good digestive fire. When these are in sama, then health is fine, even the Western science agrees. What makes the Ayurvedic definition of health unique? In Sanskrit: Prasanna atma indriya manaha swastha iti abhideyate – prasana means happy.

Prasana atma means happy soul. Prasana indriya means happy sense organs, listen well, talk well, see well. Manaha means happy mind. Only then are you considered healthy. Not only are your doshas sama, but your dhatus are sama, your mala kriya is good and you have a good agni. But until and unless you have a happy soul, happy mind, happy senses, you are never considered healthy. That's why yoga is so important. Mantra chanting is important as well as giving and being loving and compassionate towards others. You need to have good, happy senses and a good, happy soul, instead of a six-pack body, to be considered healthy. This definition is approved by the World Health Organisation.

Only consider yourself very healthy when you are very cheerful. Apart from being very flexible, having a good body – be happy. Only then, can you consider yourself to be at your healthiest.

So far, this has been about the theory of Ayurveda. From now on, it is about applying Ayurveda to yourself. To do this, you have to know your body type. Two Sanskrit words apply here: Prakriti and Vikriti. Prakriti means the body constitution you are born with. Vikriti means your body disbalance. Ayurveda classifies seven prakriti, or types of body constitution.

The first one is Vata body constitution. The

second is Pitta body constitution. The third is Kapha body constitution. The fourth is VP, Vata-Pitta. The fifth is VK, Vata-Kapha. The sixth is PK, Pitta-Kapha. The seventh is VPK, Vata-Pitta-Kapha, all three together. These are the seven personalities, and you will correlate in one of them.

Vata constitution

Vata persons are thin, lean, either too tall or too short and they are always on the run. You ask them so sit at one place and listen, but no, no, they are always moving around – restless personalities. They have thin facial features, a small face, small eyes, a small forehead and they are always talking, you cannot hold them still for long. The digestive system of this personality is 'you never know what is coming tomorrow'. Constipation, diarrhoea, defecation four times today, tomorrow nothing, gas today, good appetite tomorrow, an unpredictable digestive system. These people usually have certain types of fearfulness. 'Should I go to Rudraprayag?' 'Might there be an earthquake there?'

There is always some fear that holds them back. This is the typical Vata Prakriti. Thin, lean, talkative, not sleeping well, dreaming a lot, and the dreams are fear-centric.

Pitta constitution

These are the moderately built people, the medium build personalities. Medium height, medium weight, medium build. Soft, silky, wavy hair, sharp facial features, sharp nose, sharp penetrating eyes. Good digestive fire, until they are subjected to stress - then their digestive system goes wrong. And very clearly no constipation whatsoever.

The mind of Pitta is disciplined, punctual, structured, and work-centered. But every Dosha is equal, no Dosha, no Prakriti, no body constitution is ever superior, no body constitution is inferior. The minus point of the



pitta personality is egocentricity, it is always me, me, me and myself. They put "me" first, 'it is my money', if there is an earthquake, they jump first, not bothering about other people or the friend next to him. This is the Pitta personality.

The best way to remember the difference between Pitta and Vata is by using animal analogies. The Vata personality is a deer. They are always fearful, worried that a tiger will attack them, they are always on the move, and there is always some anxiety. The Pitta personality is a cat. You see the plus points of the cat, it keeps itself clean and neat, is professional, there is no problem. You leave the cat and come to Rudraprayag and the cat takes care of itself back home, they know what to do. But if the cat does not like you and you try to hold it, what happens? It will scratch you and run away. This is typical Pitta personality.

Kapha constitution

The Vatas are thin, the Pittas are medium build. The big ones are the Kapha personalities. Never, ever confuse this with obesity. Obesity is a disease. But the Kaphas are the well-built, big people. Broad shoulders, big, good looking – this is your Kapha type. Well built, not fat and with a big personality. Kapha personalities have heavy, good, fine hair, big facial features, big face, big eyes, big ears. It is so strange that when you come across them in your life, they are always so big, so heavy, but they eat so little.

They have a digestive system that is sensitive. Many go to the loo twice. They have soft motions and do not absorb vitamins well into the body. They are very stable in the mind. They know what they want to do, they do not lose their temper, or get angry or irritable. Pitta gets irritable. Kapha does not get irritable. But as we said, every Dosha has plus and minus points. The minus point of the Kapha personality is that they can

be very lazy. Slow. Tomorrow. No interest. Sleep. They cannot be professional. They are the best people to go on holiday with, but not to work with. This is the typical Kapha personality.

So now, animal-wise, an example of the Kapha personality is the domestic Indian bull. You honk, honk, honk, on the road, but he is not bothered to move. Their behaviour is slow, relaxed, no problem, happy, not losing their temper. This is the typical Kapha personality.

If you have visited some temples in India, you will have seen pieces of art with the head of a tiger, the body of a deer and tail of a crocodile. What is this? This indicates a mixture of personalities. The personalities number four, five and six are mixtures. Now the seventh has all three, Vata-Pitta-Kapha. When you do yoga, when you do Sadhana, when you do spirituality, when your Ojas is at your ultimate best, you have Vata, Pitta and Kapha, all three together in balance. The ultimate aim of yoga, of Ayurveda, of everything, is to get this balance. VPK, all three together in balance. When these are in disbalance, this is the moment when you will die. But if they are in balance, this is ultimate health and ultimate vitality.

So these are the seven personalities. The deer, the cat, the bull, the mixtures and all three together.

What is the advantage of knowing your body constitution? When you know what your Prakriti and Vikriti are, your whole diet and lifestyle revolves around this. Not all people, according to Ayurveda, can eat the same food. With sixty people, there are sixty different diets. For example, universally, as you can see on social media, cider vinegar is said to be beneficial but it does not suit everyone. Every personality is different. So, avoid intermittent fasting and do not ever do any type of diet like unless you know what

your body constitution is, what your Prakriti and your Vikriti are. Then you will know what foods are good for you, what foods are bad for you and what foods are neutral or average for you. This is where the body constitution helps, so, know your Prakriti and your Vikriti too, your body constitution and your body disbalance.

Dr Sudhindra Uppoor did his postgraduate studies in Ayurveda at the Gujarat Ayurveda University. He comes from a family of Ayurvedic doctors and specialises in pulse diagnosis or nadi pariksha and jiva pariksha, tongue diagnosis, as well as the body detox program. He practices in Goa, India.



WHY SHOULD WE BE VEGETARIAN

BY JEAN JAMES GARREAU



Today this question is at the heart of many institutions in our public life and regularly makes the front page of magazines, because we are at a time when we are living a true ‘food transition’.

We need a better way to feed an increasingly populated planet and try to stop, on a worldwide scale, malnutrition by excess (obesity) or by default (famine)..

Nevertheless, I imagine that you, reader of this magazine, because of your approach and your interest in yoga, already follow this vegetarian diet. And to tell the truth, I do not know any vegetarians well-established in this diet, who are not familiar with dietary, culinary and other issues concerning it.

The reflection I would like to share with you revolves more around a summarised approach made up of many good reasons and motivations that inspire us to become vegetarian and maintain us sustainably on this diet.

In Western culture, you do not become vegetarian just like that, either by tradition or impulse ... it is more of an individual approach, like learning to walk – you get up, you try, you fall, you start again ... and then you get there.

The reasons that govern this change are often very diverse and to complicate matters, sometimes very personal. I would therefore articulate them around three main lines of thought: health, fullness, and joy.

Health and vegetarianism

It is a field with many studies that are accessible to each and every one of us.

In the preamble, let us briefly recall what is generally meant by a person following a vegetarian diet: a person who does not eat meat or fish, but who consumes eggs and dairy products. We also speak of an ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet. The yogic diet is lacto-vegetarian: a diet that also excludes eggs.

It is distinguished from vegan diets that do not include any animal products.



And then there has been another fashionable term in recent years, "flexitarian", which refers to people who occasionally eat meat or fish. We also speak of "semi-vegetarian".

The health benefits of a vegetarian diet are "truly impressive," as T. Colin Campbell reports in his book, *The Campbell Report*. (The China Study, 2007.) A vegetarian diet improves many chronic diseases and conditions prevalent in our modern societies such as obesity, diabetes, certain cancers, cardiovascular diseases and so on.

However, it is interesting to point out that the leading area where the effect of a vegetarian diet is remarkable is cardiovascular disease. Knowing that these diseases are the main cause of death in our industrialised societies, diet therefore has a direct impact on longevity and life expectancy ... on good health. According to John Robbins' book, *The Food Revolution*, vegetarians (and vegans) live an average of six to ten years longer than the rest of the population.

Various studies have reported this for many years, and certain medical researchers have even been treating patients suffering from coronary artery disease by modifying their diet (Esselstyn, 1995 & Ornish, 1990), as reported by Campbell in his study *In China*.

By offering patients a vegetarian diet with a high proportion of fruit and vegetables, they have obtained remarkable results. In 2013, a study by researchers at Oxford University (Crowe & co), reported that vegetarians have up to 32% less risk of contracting heart disease. We can without a doubt put forward that being a vegetarian is good for the heart.

Of course, this is on condition that we do not over-compensate, replacing meat and fish with the same quantities of eggs and cheeses, and finding ourselves in the predominant food ratio of our developed countries, that is: 70-75% of animal products

to 25-30% of plant products.

Campbell has even put forward a ratio comprising 10% of foods of animal origin to define a threshold below which we have a protective effect against certain cancers.

We should also be reminded that the World Health Organization in 2015 classified red meat as probably carcinogenic, (WHO, 2015) because studies had proved that it increased risks of colorectal cancers or breast cancers.

In general, the vegetarian diet is rich in fibre and antioxidants, and low in cholesterol, hence its protective and preventive effects against cardiovascular disease and cancer.

If becoming a vegetarian is undeniably good for our health, according to a large majority of health professionals and as concluded by many epidemiological studies, the diet must not be practiced in an arbitrary manner.

"The vegetarian diet must be followed in a balanced way to avoid deficiencies and favour optimal nutritional intake." (YUKA, 2019)

Here again, many tools are at the disposal of each and every one of us (especially on the internet) to educate ourselves, to practice and retransmit.

Becoming a vegetarian is therefore an excellent choice for greatly improving your health. The positive effects are felt quickly, and it is this feeling that is highly motivating.

Campbell, in his report advises the most sceptical or hesitant, to try for one month and feel the benefits. "The challenge is the transition," he says, "because there are psychological and practical barriers ... however, the benefits for you will be simply miraculous ... and you will even be amazed at the ease with which you take on new habits."

Fullness and Vegetarianism

The reasons for a food transition, from the predominant diet in our Western societies to a different diet practiced for thousands of years by other human societies, often result from becoming conscious of the faults or the errors of the active system in place.

It is interesting to note that the word 'conscious' comes from the Latin root 'cum' which means 'with', and 'scientia' which is related to the Latin verb 'scire' which means 'to know'.

To become conscious therefore means 'to know with' ... that is to say 'to bring to one's mind' that the me-subject is well-connected to the object or phenomenon that I describe. So, this means that the me-subject has a power of action over what I observe and understand.

Becoming conscious, to succinctly summarise the action, consists of linking things, objects or events together and also, of using mental and intellectual activity. 'Our brain' is there to solve problems, to find solutions. It allows us to overcome difficulties in everyday life, whether it is on an individual or a collective scale.

These little philosophical paragraphs may seem far from our subject, Why become vegetarian?, but we will see that on the contrary, they enlighten the situation!

In reality, becoming conscious of things or situations is entirely an ecological attitude because ecology, in its most pragmatic definition, is the science that studies the links or relationships between one (or more) organism(s) living with its (their) environment (biotope).

And to take a step further in our reflection, we will emphasise that human ecology is the science that studies the links and

relationships between human beings (societies and/or individuals) and their surrounding environment.

It analyses the impacts caused by their activities that are put in place to satisfy their primary needs, or not. This makes human ecology a transversal discipline, treating many other disciplines.

Concerning the need to eat, if other sciences such as sociology teach us that human societies build their foundations around their eating habits, we can present the notion of 'food system', because it is from this system that we can analyse the stakes and the consequences of a diet mainly based on plant resources, as is vegetarianism.

The notion of 'food system' links together the different stages that bring us our diets, which are the production of food resources, their transformations, their distributions and finally their consumption.

These different levels of the system obviously have physiological, economical or ecological impacts on individuals, societies and the environment. These impacts will be different depending on the diet.

The interest in the analysis is obviously to find dietary models that have the most beneficial impacts possible for improving the health of the economy, the people and of nature.

Eating Habits or Diet

We need to know that in a system, we cannot touch or modify one level without affecting all the others, which also implies that nowadays our act of eating can have effects at thousands of kms away, from farm to plate. Few of us accord this the right amount of importance to our food choices.

Nowadays, numerous studies and analyses show the total impact of our diets based on a consumption ratio of 70-75% of foods of animal origin to 25-30% of foods of plant origin, and this with the perspective of feeding 9-10 billion human beings in the decades to come.

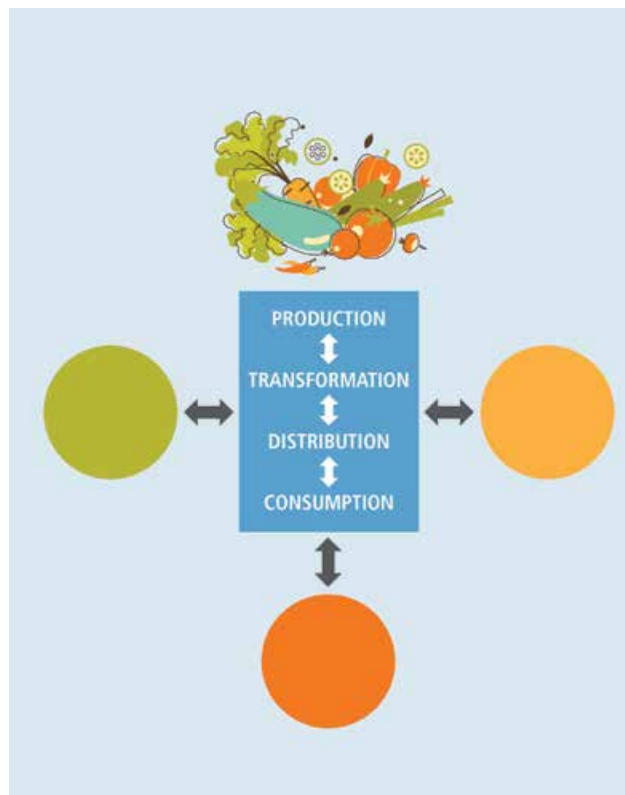
Meat production is a very costly industry, with many negative socio-economic and environmental impacts (destruction of agricultural models, over-exploitation of soils, deforestation, depletion or exhaustion of aquifer or fishery resources, food pollution and contamination, climate change, etc., etc. ...) the list is long and demoralising!

The question, Why become vegetarian? therefore takes on its full meaning in this analysis because reversing the dominant ratio of consumption of animal products to plant ones (75:25) in the population of 'rich' countries, is part of the solution to this problem.

This food transition really brings benefits to the environment even more if we eat local, organically farmed food, as well as bringing major socio-economic benefits. To add a little humour, if eating vegetarian food is good for the heart, it is also good for the pocket of individuals, and of communities!!!

(Watch on YouTube: "Comment nourrir l'avenir?" / "How to feed the future?" Only available in French)

To introduce this paragraph, I allowed myself to speak of the fullness of being vegetarian because finding a solution to an individual or collective problem brings fullness, serenity, and 'peace of mind'. The alignment of our thoughts, our words and our actions in a coherent dynamic, leads to fulfilment by providing people with great psychological strength.



Currently (but also for a long time past), moral values, philosophical thinking or religious beliefs, and knowledge in the light of our science, and our individual and collective rise in awareness, all lead us to question the act of killing or exploiting animals to satisfy our food needs.

Here too, the process of becoming vegetarian finds a positive resonance with the problem and allows us to respect our sensitivities.

Many ideologies or movements develop around these topics, but I will not address them here. I would simply point out that human experience shows that our intellect or our consciousness are not always sufficient to lead us sustainably towards a food transition.

Trying, practicing, living vegetarianism and feeling its benefits in our body and in our mind, through an improvement of our physical as well as psychological health, are undoubtedly very important in the vegetarian approach, but one ingredient is lacking ... and this ingredient is joy.

Joy and Vegetarianism

The notion of joy in any change of habit, whether it is food or something else, is essential. This is the true driving force of change.

For a new behaviour or attitude to be sustainable, it must bring us at least as much, if not more, joy than the previous behaviour did. Nevertheless, the notion of joy is complex, and ... dynamic. It evolves and can educate itself, but it always requires an open mind, open ears and respect for oneself.

In the choice of vegetarian eating, the joy of well-prepared, tasty, refined, colourful, varied dishes is very important. The good news for non-vegetarians who are wondering about this diet and want to take the step, as well as for experienced vegetarians, is that a high-end gastronomy of vegetarian cuisine exists. The spices, textures, colours, the ingredients are countless and the creativity of each and every one can be fully put into action.

In addition, the joy of eating is inseparable from the joy of sharing, of taking communion together around a table. This aspect is important and not to be neglected in the choice of becoming vegetarian. This applies as much to someone embarking on the adventure as to those accustomed to this diet.

Being able to share meals with family, friends, relatives and other people is part of this emotional balance, which is not, of course, strictly speaking simply linked to the vegetarian diet, but for someone who practices this diet, sharing must also be fully experienced.

The pleasures from making and eating tasty vegetarian dishes and of sharing them with others are all good emotional reasons that generate well-being of the mind, body, and

heart.

"Nothing will benefit human health and increase the chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet." (Albert Einstein)

If these reasons, at first analysis in our argument, are not those that determine the choice of becoming vegetarian, they nevertheless have a direct impact on us. Regardless of whether we adopt and maintain this diet, it is much more important that we consider them.

Learning about vegetarian cuisine is easy these days. Books, blogs and workshops abound in all countries of the world and we can only be very grateful to those who share them. However, not citing any references here leaves everyone the joy of making these discoveries for themselves.

Conclusion

Nowadays, opposite food transitions are evolving and are taking place before our very eyes.

"According to FAO (the Food and Agriculture Organization), world consumption of animal proteins is increasing (in a 2007 report, it is mentioned that it would have doubled in less than 50 years) and this in the 'developing' countries or developed countries like China."

Although the vegetarian (or vegan) population continues to increase in rich countries, there is also a significant decrease in overall meat consumption. Unfortunately, population and demographic growth distribution show that the current food dynamics still favour the over-consumption of animal proteins.

If, as we have seen briefly above, the negative consequences of these choices are multiple: climate change and the rising

oceans have become major concerns for the world's population.

Still, according to the FAO, "raising animals necessary for food is responsible for 15% of total greenhouse gas emissions, which is more than transport". In 2019, the IPCC (the Inter- governmental Panel on Climate Change, a group of experts in the United Nations) indirectly suggested in its annual report, giving pride of place to plant proteins because, "the reduction in livestock production is to be considered as one of the best strategies for stopping global warming and de- forestation". (YUKA, 2019)

If this news has opened many debates in our Western societies, as we have already said, becoming a vegetarian is not (and probably never will be) an 'official' suggestion coming from our institutions. it remains a rather personal challenge, not always easy to live with, and not always socially accepted. Achieving this either for emotional, moral or even health reasons is a very personal choice and hardly questionable.

In reality, the reasons that bring about and solidify this food transition, are a mixture of all those mentioned above. We cannot generalise or rationalise them with the aim of convincing people and this article does not set out to do so. In these changes, it is the very notions of mixture, balance and dynamic that intervene, that are the characteristics of a living process that is getting into action.

Nowadays, economic improvements for individuals, as well as populations, bring at least a basic freedom, to choose what we put on our plate. This choice is taken in the light of our reflections and our knowledge. So, we are free to make fair and durable, individual choices.

We often miss out on the fact that these individual choices quickly have a collective impact, as long as they are shared, multiplied and well-rooted in each and every one of us.

But for a vegetarian (as for any other cause), it is useless to try to impose our individual ideas, because as Gandhi said so well, "The example is not the best way to convince, it is... the only way".

Jean James Garreau hold a PHD in biology and founded Sojami, a company specialising in lacto fermentation of soja milk.

He created a research platform in human ecology, the IRENIS association and co-directed the documentary 'Comment Nourrir l'Avenir?' Which can be seen on Youtube. Recently, he launched the project jedelesprit.com on how to nourish the spirit.



SIVANANDA YOGA RETREAT NASSAU BAHAMAS

The Sivananda Ashram Yoga Retreat Bahamas is located across the bay from Nassau, Bahamas, on one of the finest beaches in the world. It is truly an island paradise and a sanctuary of peace surrounded by natural beauty. Edged by pristine white sand beaches and crystal blue waters, and situated among five and a half acres of lush tropical gardens, the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Retreat provides an ideal environment for practice, rest, rejuvenation, and immersion in the daily practices of a yogic lifestyle. People come from around the world to expand and deepen their knowledge of yoga and Vedanta.

The ashram provides an immersion into a classical yoga tradition and yogic lifestyle, with a daily schedule that includes meditation, pranayama (yogic breathing practices), asana (yoga postures), and learning. We host hundreds of courses, trainings, talks,

performances, and special events each year (View program calendar) with highly regarded teachers within the Sivananda lineage as well as world-renowned guest teachers, presenters, and performers.

We are a traditional yoga ashram with a mission to teach classical yoga. All are welcome at our ashram. We learn from many traditions, and actively promote Unity in Diversity through interfaith and inter-spiritual dialog, including perspectives from science and the arts. We seek to promote outer peace in the world through inner peace, by sharing the wisdom and practices of yoga and contributing to a positive shift in consciousness on the planet.

The ashram was founded in 1968 by Swami Vishnudevananda, named in honor of his teacher, Swami Sivananda. Swami Vishnudevananda was invited to speak in

Nassau, where he met Mrs. Natalie Boswell. His love of God was expressed in his love of humanity, and he ended up helping Mrs. Boswell's daughter, who suffered from serious problems, turned her life around using yogic methods. This led Mrs. Boswell to want to support him. She decided to give him her estate on Paradise Island for the creation of a yoga ashram. Swami Vishnudevananda had seen a magnificent aura over the land and knew that this would be the site of the second ashram.

Similarly to the rest of the other Sivananda ashrams, our mission is to spread peace, health, and joy through the practice and philosophy of yoga and Vedanta. Our vision is to serve as a beacon of light in the world as a gathering place for learning and the exchange of ideas and experiences that impact individuals and the world in important ways.

Our values are:

- unity in diversity, we promote conversation and exchange through interfaith symposia and events
- self-transformation through yoga, we teach a yogic lifestyle for the attainment of joy, health, and longevity

- the yoga of service, the ashram runs on the devoted service of people
- spiritual community, daily gatherings for satsang bring us all together for meditation, chanting, and teachings
- devotion, daily practices that express love for the Divine, in all its forms

Our Work

We are a center for spiritual growth and learning

- helping individuals to heal on all levels — physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually — through the teachings of yoga, as well as by introducing healing methods and approaches from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions.
- helping individuals to progress on the spiritual path and attain Self-realization through the classical teachings of yoga (Karma, Bhakti, Raja, and Jnana Yogas)
- helping humanity to unite by bringing together people from all walks of life and a variety of spiritual paths, healing methods, religions, and sciences. Promoting the message of unity in diversity and outer peace through inner peace.

www.sivananda.org/bahamas

BAHAMAS ASHRAM STAFF



CREATE YOUR OWN SPIRITUAL POWER CENTRE AT HOME

BY SWAMI BHAGAVATANANDA



“ The supreme state is Self-realisation or Brahma-sakshatkara. The second in rank is meditation. The Yogi practises Sadhana or unceasing meditation on the Supreme Self. The third is the worship of symbols. The fourth is the performance of rituals and pilgrimages to holy places. ”

- Swami Sivananda

Spiritual seekers have always taken inspiration and strength from places that are naturally charged with pure and uplifting energies. Many of these places we find in nature, like the bank of a river, by the sea, deep in a forest or high on a mountain top. Prana (vital energy) and Sattva (purity) are naturally abundant in these places.

Then, some of these high-prana-places are man-made and serve as pilgrimage centres, like temples, churches, synagogues, mosques or ashrams. The Sadhana (spiritual practices) and prayers done in these places, accompanied by Mantras or any kind of spiritual chants and the pure thoughts left behind by saints and yogis who have been spending time at these places also create a powerful atmosphere conducive to spiritual growth.

Many pilgrimage centres actually combine

both the power of nature and the power of prayer, like the many temples to be found at the banks of the Ganga or up in the Himalayas. Or for example all those ashrams that have been established in a peaceful nature setting, away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

By visiting these places, we tune into these pure and powerful energies and absorb them for our benefit. It is true, that an advanced yogi can meditate anywhere, even in a busy public place in downtown London or any other metropole, but, honestly, who is truly that advanced, except a few saintly beings? The rest of us, we need all the support we can get to uplift and control our mind. As we know from psychology, our environment influences our mental state; we constantly absorb on a subconscious level the energies and thoughts of people and situations around us, positive and negative.



The mind works by force of association, whatever surrounds us, is absorbed into the mind. Sometimes we even need protection from our own mind, when it decides to bring up negative thoughts all on its own. Hence, the necessity to surround ourselves with positive energies or what the yogic scriptures call “good company” to help us to create and maintain a peaceful, clear state of mind.

So, what are we waiting for, let's go on a pilgrimage to the sacred spots in the Himalayas right now! Ahem, small problem? Closed borders? Transportation limited? Access to nature spots restricted? Financial limitations?

Well, we'll simply need to create our own spiritual power centre at home, which is a lovely thing to do, because we'll have access to it all the time, 24/7. Also, the lockdown taught us the value of spending time at home, so what could be a better home improvement plan than transforming your living space into a little ashram?

It is much easier than one might think and can be achieved through 3 means:

1. Create a sattvic (pure, harmonious) environment

In Yoga, this is called Saucha, purity.

“Purity is of two kinds, internal purity and external purity. Freedom from Raga-dvesha (likes and dislikes), purity of intentions, purity of motives, and purity of Bhava (feelings) constitute internal purity. Purity of body through bath, etc., purity of clothes, purity of surroundings like the house and its neighbourhood, constitute external purity. External purity generates pure thoughts.”

- Swami Sivananda

When we are in an unclean and disorganised place, it is difficult to keep a clear, structured mind. Therefore, keep your home clean – especially your Sadhana place, but it applies to the whole place, as energies radiate out.

Maintaining Sattva in your home is not only about removing clutter and dust, but also to uplift and increase the Prana level of your place and allow a free flow of Prana.

If the meditation place is clean, but the kitchen isn't, this uncleanliness will spread out.

Leave the shoes by the door. They carry the energy of the hectic world around you. It is better to avoid bringing this kind of energy into your home.

For the same reason, take a shower and change your clothes when you get home from work, because your clothes and your skin also absorb the energy of your surroundings. Water energizes us and neutralizes negative energies.

Keep a set of clothes made of natural fibres like cotton exclusively for your spiritual practice and wash them frequently. If you wear your office attire for meditation, it will remind you of your office work and cause distraction.

While cleaning, don't forget to check on hidden dust-traps in your home, like under the bed and on book shelves and avoid dusty curtains.

The fridge can be another hotspot. We tend to think, the fridge is automatically a sterile zone – unfortunately it is not. Hence, wipe out your fridge weekly. Best is, to cook only as much food as you can eat, which also saves you from the dilemma of throwing away leftovers and wasting food.

Air out your place well, especially if your

yoga practice happens in the same room where you sleep. Fresh air is full of Prana.

Keep your home not only clean, but also tidy – an untidy place makes an untidy mind and disturbs the Prana flow.

The great Yogi Ramakrishna Paramahansa trained his disciples to always return everything to the spot from where they took it. He saw that as a spiritual practice and concentration exercise.

Feng Shui and Vastu teach us that even clutter in a non-visible place, like for example a closed cupboard, has a heavy, depressing effect on our physical and mental wellbeing. A good spring-cleaning (at any time of the year) where we give away unused stuff will take care of this.

2. Establish a little sacred place as your personal power centre

According to the yogic scriptures, it is best to have a separate room for your Sadhana, as it keeps that room free from worldly influence and a powerful spiritual energy can grow.

But if we're sharing our home with several people or are living in a tiny studio, a reality check will suggest that this is not be possible.

What to do?

Dedicate a small area of your home to your spiritual practice and arrange a shelf or screen or a house-plant in such a way that it creates a protected area. Keep that little space extra-clean and neat and use it only for spiritual practices like asanas, pranayama, meditation, mantra repetition, chanting and spiritual reading. Avoid bringing social media, internet, television, non-spiritual reading matter and overstimulating music into that place and don't chitchat or take your meals there either.

Now comes a very important step: establish an altar!

You do not need to be a religious person to benefit from an altar. An altar is the spiritual heart of your place. On your altar, you put symbols that radiate Prana and positivity. Your altar will remind you of your Higher Self and serve as focal point for your meditation. If you are of an devotional temperament, your altar becomes a powerful channel to communicate with the Divine.

“A symbol is absolutely indispensable for fixing the mind. The mind wants a prop to lean upon. It cannot have a conception of the Absolute in the initial stages. Without the help of some external aid, in the initial stages, the mind cannot be centralised. In the beginning, concentration or meditation is not possible without a symbol.”

- Swami Sivananda

From your altar, positive energy will radiate out into the rest of your home.

An altar will inspire you and remind you not to forget your spiritual practice.

And when you feel exhausted, depressed or hurt by the ways of the world, just sitting in front of your altar will comfort you and fill you with new strength and positivity.

What goes on the altar?

- Choose North or East for your altar, as these directions are conducive to your spiritual practice.
- Set up a low table or a low shelf for your altar, so that you can sit crossed-legged in front of it without straining your neck.
- Cover it with a beautiful cloth, because if we see something beautiful, the mind gets uplifted.
- In case, you set up your altar on the floor, put it on a tray or a piece of cloth, so that your altar items don't touch the floor

directly (this would dissipate the energy).

- If you are sharing your home with people who resent having an altar around all the time, set it up in a cupboard with doors or a curtain and close it once you've finished your Sadhana.

A candle or an oil lamp.

- Light is an expression of positivity, beauty and warmth, Light also represents clarity and knowledge and symbolizes the Light of our Soul.
- Make sure you extinguish your candle before you leave the place.

A flower

- You can use a flower in a vase or a potted flower or flower heads or petals or a flower garland. Just don't put a prickly cactus!
- Flowers uplift our mood by their beauty. They also radiate a sweet, gentle energy, softening our heart when we look at them. They represent the blossoming of our Sadhana.

A spiritual symbol

- Choose whatever inspires you, whatever uplifts your mind. It can be a stone or a conch that you collected during a vacation by the sea or a statue or a picture of Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, Vishnu, Siva, Durga, Ganesha, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, OM ...
- One symbol only is enough, but you can also put several. But the one with the most important meaning to you should be in the middle.
- If you have been initiated into an Ishta-Mantra (mantra dedicated to one specific form of the Divine), you should put that symbol in the centre.
- If you have a spiritual Master, put a picture of him/her on the altar.
- It will invoke the blessing and protection of your Master.
- Optional: an incense of good, natural quality in an incense holder or an

essential oil cold diffuser; use only pure, high quality essential oils.

- Don't use incense made of chemical fragrances, they are bad for your health and bad for the Prana in your room!
- The smoke from an incense has purifying qualities.
- A calming, pure fragrance, for example sandalwood, will set the proper atmosphere for meditation.
- Burning incense symbolizes burning the ego: when we work to overcome the ego, it will create smoke (some resistance and emotional pain) , but when it's finally gone, only sweet fragrance will remain in the form of a positive, loving mind.

3. Perform Arati daily at your place

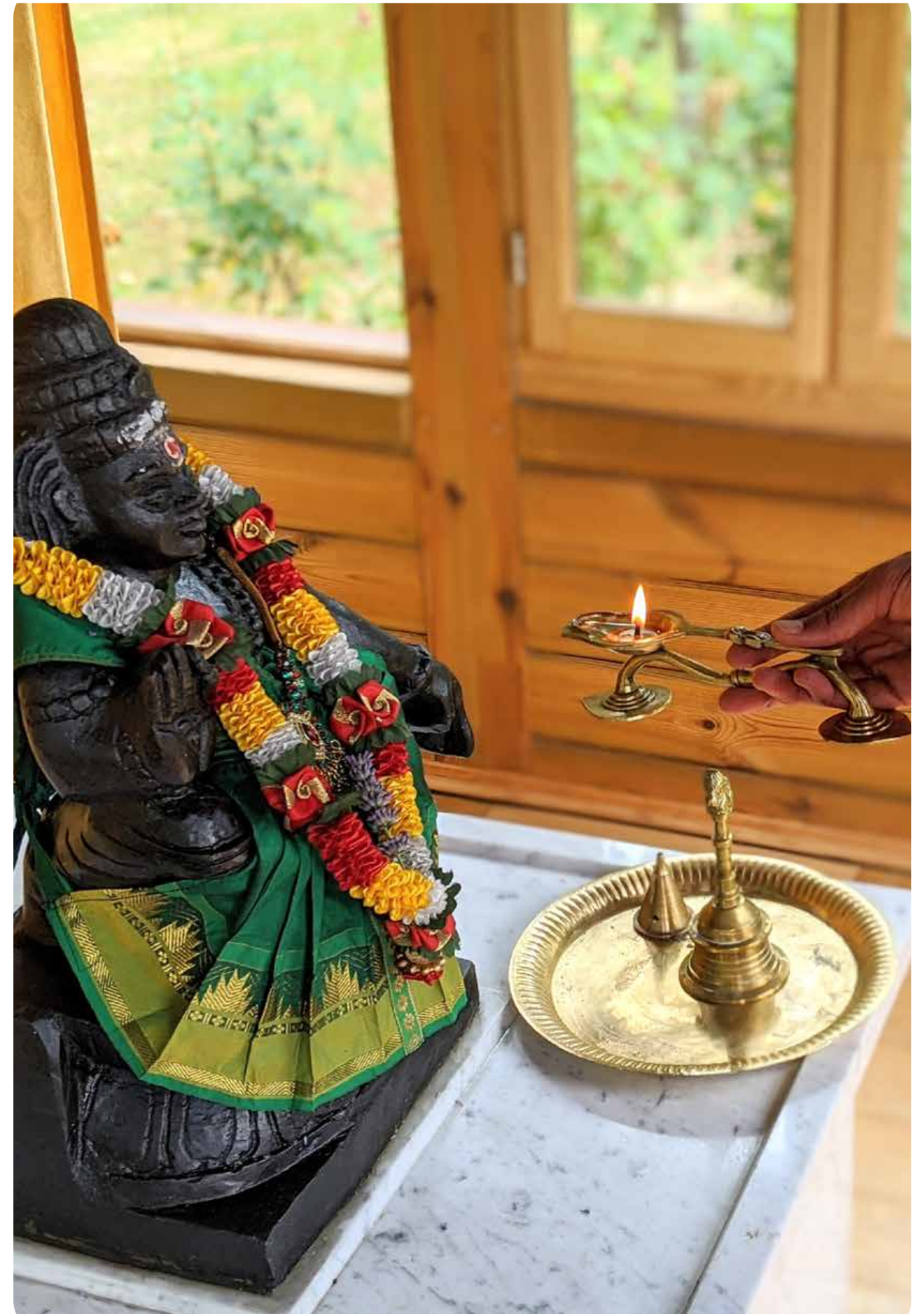
Arati is the yogic light ceremony to purify and uplift the vibratory level of any place. It combines the purity and positivity of light with the purity and positivity of Mantras. Lights also represents our Supreme Self or the Divine. We remember our true Self during Arati.

Arati is especially helpful to counteract negative or disturbing energies - for example after renovations in your home, an awkward visit, a quarrel, etc.

But in fact, Arati should be done daily under any circumstances, just for the sake of uplifting and purifying your mind and your home.

The Sivananda Centres and Ashrams do Arati twice daily, morning and evening.

All over India, Arati is done in temples as highlight of a spiritual ceremony. The principle of waving light is always the same, but the mantras can be very different according to which aspect is invoked, for example during the Ganga Arati which is performed along the banks of the Ganges, Mantras praising Ganga are chanted.



What you need for doing an Arati:

An Arati lamp or a tea candle on a little plate or an incense

- the function of an Arati lamp is that you can hold it in your hand and wave it around while it is lit, so, any set up that fulfils this purpose will do.

A little bell

- the sound of a bell drowns out worldly sounds and reminds us that time is precious and that we should use it to focus on the present moment and do Sadhana.
- Prasad as an offering (fresh fruits or sweets or dried fruits like raisins).
- What you use for Prasad should be used only for Prasad, don't taste it before it is offered at the altar and don't use leftover fruits (like half a banana). You can for example keep a little bag of raisins close to your altar and each time take out only your daily portion needed for Arati.
- The meaning of Prasad: literally "Grace".
- It represents a selfless act – we offer, instead of taking, thus purifying the heart. Symbolically it also means offering the fruits of our actions to the Divine.
- Practical effect: Prasad is kept during Arati at the Altar and gets charged with the positive energy of light and the mantras of the Arati and then afterwards we eat this positivity by eating Prasad.

How to do Arati:

- Put the bowl with Prasad on the altar and put a little portion of it directly in front of your spiritual symbol
- light your Arati lamp/tea candle/incense
- take the Arati lamp in your right hand and touch your left hand to your right hand or forearm. Stand at the side of your altar.
- If a second person is present, he/she can ring the bell. If not, take the bell in your left hand.
- Chant the mantras of the Arati, calmly waving the light clockwise in big circles in

front of the altar while ringing the bell

- At the end of the Arati, take the lamp in your left hand and with your right palm symbolically wave the light 3 times towards the altar. Then put the Arati lamp down and put both your hands above the flame and pass them over your third eye and head to symbolically connect with the light.
- If other people are present, offer the light to the altar first, then take it back into your right hand and offer it to all present. Then you take it last. For extinguishing the flame, wave it out or use a candle extinguisher. Don't blow it out. Fire is considered too pure to be touched with the breath.
- Prostrate. The symbolical meaning of a prostration is the surrendering of the ego. By prostrating, we indicate that our Higher Self is given priority and the ego comes second place.
- Distribute Prasad among all present. The little portion you offered directly to your spiritual symbol should remain a while at the altar, then you can dispose of it somewhere in nature like into a river or under a tree. Most Yoga masters even agree that you can eat it, once it has been at the altar for a while

Mantras to be chanted during Arati

Here a simple, but powerful version:

- 3 x OM
- 3 x Om Gam Ganapataya Namah (invocation of Ganesha, the energy to remove obstacles)
- 3 x Om Gum Gurubhyo Namah (Invocation of the spiritual teacher)
- 3 x Om Aim Sarasvatyai Namah (Invocation of Sarasvati, the energy of knowledge, wisdom and creativity)
- Then you can select the Mantra(s) of the deity/deities that you have on your altar and chant some or all of them, each three

times :

- Om Namah Sivaya (Siva, energy of transformation)
- Om Namo Narayanaya (Vishnu, energy of peace)
- Om Sri Ramaya Namah (Rama, energy of Dharma = duty)
- Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya (Krishna, energy of cosmic love)
- Om Dum Durgayai Namah (Durga, cosmic energy behind all everything)
- Om Hreem Mahalakshmyai Namah (Lakshmi, energy of positivity and abundance)
- If you have a spiritual Master, chant his/her name as well, for example, if you feel connected to Swami Sivananda, chant three times: Om Namo Bhagavate Sivanandaya

Minimalistic Arati

- wave a lit incense clockwise and chant a few times "Om Om Om" before offering the light of the incense to the altar.

Full Arati

- The full Arati that is chanted during the Satsangs at the Sivananda Centres is quite long, since in the universal spirit of Yoga it invokes many forms and manifestations of the Divine.
- If you feel inspired to learn it, here is a link to the text with translation.
- <https://sivanandaorleans.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Arati-engl-with-meaning.pdf>
- Download it and chant along in the Satsangs to learn it bit by bit by heart!



Swami Bhagavananda is co-director of the Ashram de Yoga Sivananda in France.

The Yoga LIT Experience

You have taken the Sivananda Teachers' Training Course, maybe the Advanced Teachers' Training Course and wonder what is the next step for you to move further in your practice and spiritual life?

The Ashram de Yoga Sivananda in Orleans is offering you a new possibility to expand your knowledge and yoga experience in a six-month guided residential programme of study, practice and service. You will immerse yourself in a yogic lifestyle, expand your knowledge, develop your teaching skills and discover your hidden talents while living in the inspiring and protected atmosphere of a spiritual community.

Yoga LIT is the first step to developing a Yoga University at the Ashram de Yoga Sivananda for the long term study of yogic and vedic sciences in the Gurukula tradition (the ancient yogic system of learning). The minute I read about the LIT program, I knew I had to do it. I didn't practice yoga much before my TTC 2 years ago, nor much after. However, this newly gained energy and knowledge gave me the strength and determination to make the changes I needed in my life, professionally and sentimentally. It felt liberating at first, but after a while, I realized that these external changes were not sufficient. Something was still missing inside.

I was not ready then to commit to full time karma yoga but I had the desire to go deeper into my quest of truth and understanding. At 35 years old, I sensed the urge to ground my life into a strong spiritual and physical discipline. With daily satsangs, asana and pranayama practice, karma yoga and studying, along with weekly teachings and thorough interview with a swami, the LIT program seemed the perfect toolbox to finally implement yoga into my cells !

As a result, I received precious guidance from the scriptures and the swamis, but also from this new life style of living among nature, in a community of fellow karma yogis, going through the same « yogic washing machine ». My intuition grew by developing my concentration and being daily in touch with my body. My positivity improved by contemplating nature, singing my heart out in satsangs, sharing with like-minded people and reading inspirational writings. My mental stability developed along with my physical strength.

Nonetheless, I am starting to accept that the spiritual path is like peeling an endless onion. The deeper gets the practice, the biggest the challenges! It seems that the more I cultivate relaxation, contentment and light inside of me, the more I create a healing space for my being to express what needs to be addressed....how ever uncomfortable that may be ! It feels like a battle sometimes but it is such a release to eventually see then accept myself the way I am, and beyond. *I am now ready to do karma yoga until the ATTC this summer !"*

Sivapriya is staff at the Ashram de Yoga Sivananda where she completed TTC and the Yoga LIT programme.



SIVANANDA YOGA DHANWANTARI ASHRAM NEYYAR DAM, INDIA

Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwantari Ashram is named after the deity Lord Dhanwantari the deity considered to be the progenitor of the science of ayurveda. The establishment originally belonged to Gopala Vaidya, an ayurvedic physician and operated for many years as an ayurvedic retreat/ashram.

The ashram passed from him to Swami Vishnudevananda in 1978. The first Sivananda Teachers' Training Course was held here in 1978. Original buildings such as the Rama Hall, the Narayana Hall and the Devi Temple are still functional.

Since then there has been a gradual expansion of property to accommodate the growth in student numbers. Original accommodation built from coconut leaves and cow dung has been replaced by permanent structures, including a three storey building of air-conditioned rooms for guests. Yoga Halls, yoga platforms and a plethora of accommodation now peppers the estate. Future plans include expansion of the Sivananda Institute of Health with the construction of a new clinic with residential accommodation for up to eighty guests and twenty-five treatment rooms.

The Neyyar Dam ashram has joined with the other Indian ashrams as "Team India" to offer a schedule of online classes, courses, satsangs, and specialised workshops and short courses conducted by our staff and karma yogis. We have set up a studio at the top of the Ashram where internet reception is reliable. And we film outside with a beautiful view of the mountains for some of our classes. Many of our staff are involved as teachers, demonstrators, Zoom hosts and technicians.

<https://www.sivananda.org/neyyardam>

NEYYAR DAM ASHRAM STAFF



Yoga for Climate Action

Yoga and Earth Care

This article is based on a recent slideshow exhibition produced by the New York Sivananda Yoga Ranch for the United Nations. The theme is related to climate change from the perspective of yoga and sustainability.

Yoga and the Pursuit of Happiness

“Health is wealth.

Peace of mind is happiness.

Yoga show the way!”

- Swami Vishnudevananda (1927 - 1993)



All **Life** is **Sacred**

Yoga begins and ends with the premise and the practice that all Life is Sacred.

“I am the Self seated in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings. – Bhagavad Gita: X,20

Yoga is the practical experience of the Divine Self within, and the realization of That as the Self of all.

“All creation is an organic whole. Man makes himself miserable by separating himself from others.

Let all life be sacred.

Then this world will be a paradise of beauty, a heaven of peace and tranquility.”

– Swami Sivananda, Bliss Divine on “Life.”

Swami Sivanananda (1887 - 1963)



Yoga **Transforms**

Yoga practice balances the individual to directly experience health, a peaceful quiet mind, and a compassionate heart. Yoga practice awakens one to the needs of the planet, and empowers them with courage, inner-strength and respect for diversity, leading to compassionate action to help alleviate suffering and to model balanced living.

What does yoga mean to you?



Climate Change: **Planetary & Human Imbalance**

Planetary imbalance is the result of individual and collective human imbalance.
To honour the laws of nature and all creation, means overcoming kama, krodha, loba, moha, mada and matsarya; lust, anger, greed, illusion, pride and envy.

Short-term profit, power and pleasure must be subordinated to the collective, long-term health and happiness of the planet.
Confused priorities have created human imbalance on all levels of society.

Yoga and Health: The Five Points of Yoga

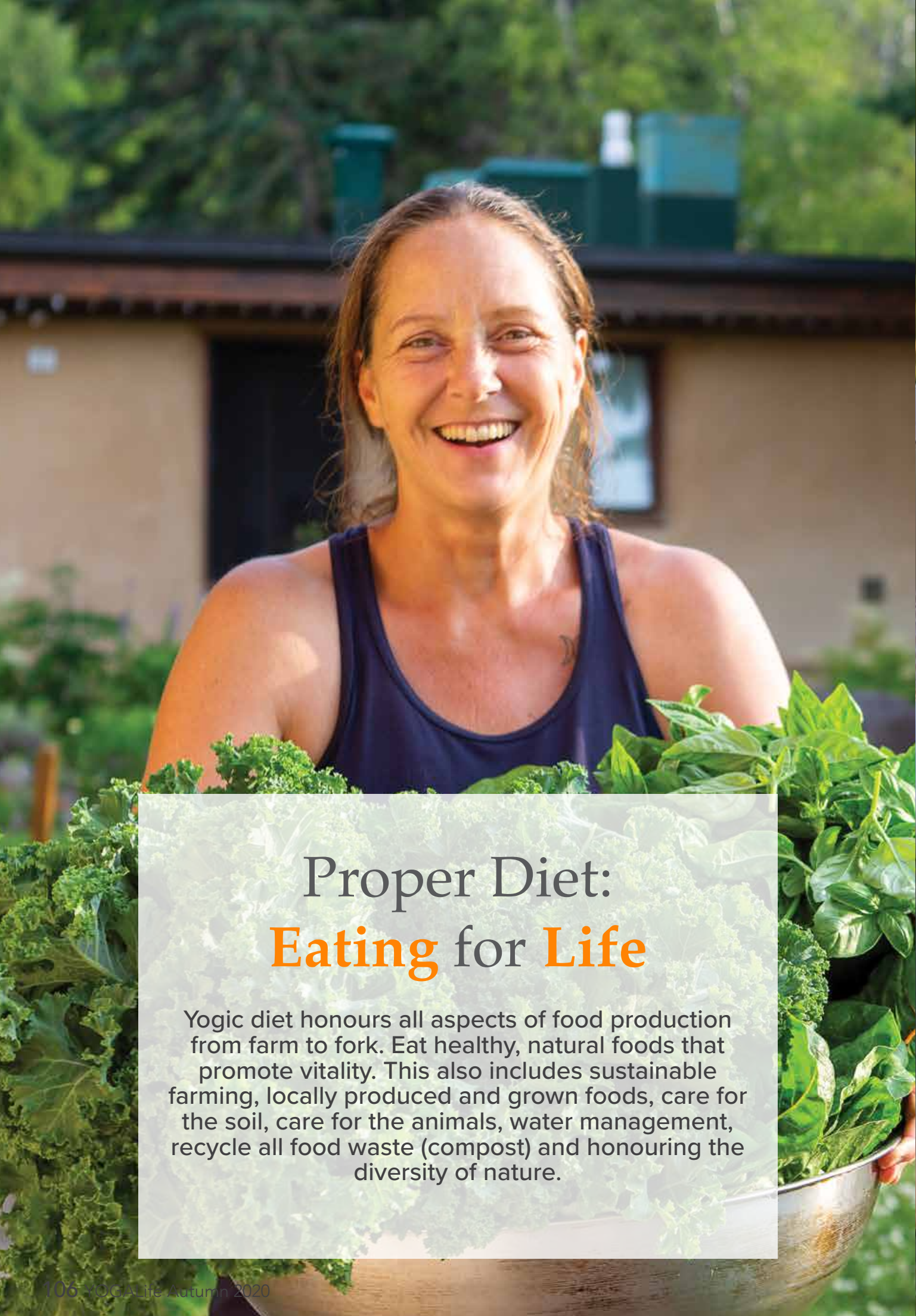
Yoga practice makes health accessible to all, and broadens the perspective from short-term individual needs to recognise the collective, Universal Life.

Each helps to bring balance to the individual and collective. This is a balanced Yoga Life.

The Five Points of Yoga:

1. Proper Exercise – Asana
2. Proper Breathing – Pranayama
3. Proper Diet – Harm-free and Healthy
4. Proper Relaxation – Savasana: physical, mental, and spiritual relaxation
5. Positive Thinking, Vedanta and Meditation, Dharana





Proper Diet: **Eating for Life**

Yogic diet honours all aspects of food production from farm to fork. Eat healthy, natural foods that promote vitality. This also includes sustainable farming, locally produced and grown foods, care for the soil, care for the animals, water management, recycle all food waste (compost) and honouring the diversity of nature.



Positive Thinking:

- Devotion
- Gratitude
- Contentment
- Caring for oneself, others and the planet
- Realisation of the Universal Life

A young boy with short dark hair, wearing a blue t-shirt and a red beaded necklace, is shown in profile, meditating with his eyes closed. He is sitting on a white cloth on a mat. In the background, other people in blue shirts are also meditating in a bright, airy room.

Meditation

Meditation is the direct experience of peace, universal love, joy and oneness. It is the practice of letting go of negative desires, prejudices and fears.

A quiet mind makes healthy choices, choosing the good over pleasant.

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a purple t-shirt and a gold necklace, is shown in profile, meditating with her eyes closed. She is sitting on a white cloth on a mat. In the background, other people are also meditating in a bright, airy room.

Karma Yoga Compassionate Action

Karma Yoga is conscious, compassionate action that benefits society and the planet. It is acting from a healthy attitude of 'How can I help?' to make a positive difference. It is right livelihood and skill in action.



Hatha Yoga

The practices of Hatha Yoga offer direct experience of healthy, balanced living. Healthy posture, breathing and relaxation centre the practitioner as they consciously connect to universal life.

Raja Yoga

Self-discipline leads to a quiet, healthy mind and intuitive experience of healthy relationship with self, nature, humanity and ultimately the sacred, universal spirit that animates and integrates all of life.




Bhakti Yoga: **Devotion** To Life

Inspired compassionate living empowers selfless service. The science of Climate Action is based on observing the sacred laws of nature and modelling the application of technology, lifestyle and economy accordingly.

“Live in love. Breathe in love. Sing in love. Eat in love. Drink in love. Talk in love. Meditate in love. Think in love. Take the honey of love and become an embodiment of love.

You will enjoy the highest peace and bliss.’

Swami Sivanananda (1887 - 1963)



Raja Yoga: Ethical Principles **Satya**, Living Dharma & Honouring Life

Taking an honest assessment of our actions and their consequences in the world. Taking responsibility for our lifestyles. Taking responsibility for the ‘Inconvenient Truths’

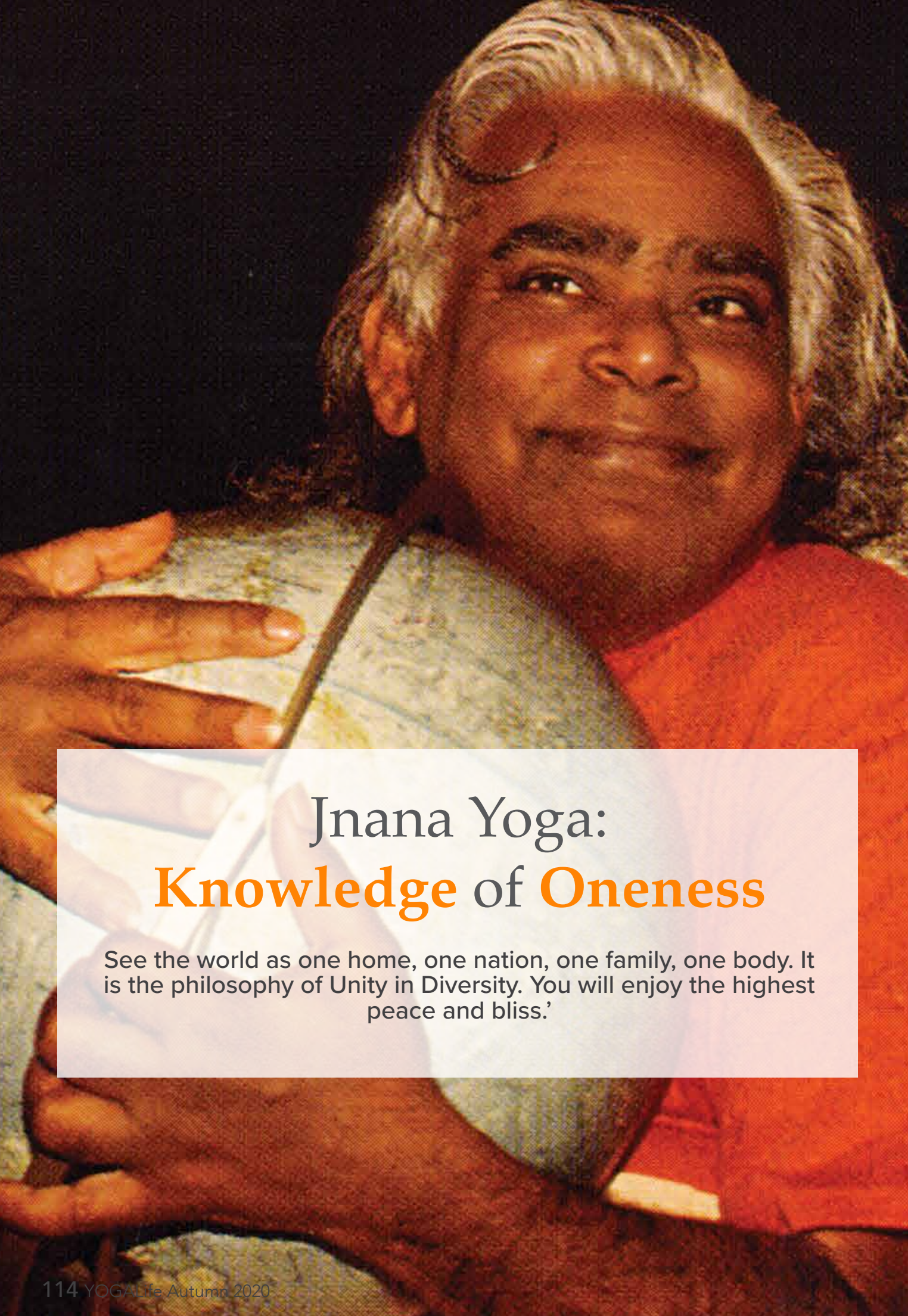
What is the truth of my actions?

Asteya, Restraint of Exploitation

Asteya is the restraint of people as well as nonrenewable resources. It is the practice of sustainable and conscious living. The principle of ‘simple living and high thinking’ is asteya’s foundation.

Aparigraha, Surrendering Greed

Aparigraha rejects habits and attachments that compromise freedom, health and integrity for creature comforts, power and consumerism. It is the practice of surrendering one’s greed for the benefit of the common good.



Jnana Yoga: **Knowledge of Oneness**

See the world as one home, one nation, one family, one body. It is the philosophy of Unity in Diversity. You will enjoy the highest peace and bliss.'



Climate **Action**

Climate action in the spirit of Yoga is the art of right living, as both offer tools for healthy living, healthy relationships and healthy priorities.

Yoga is the quest for truth that builds integrity and character, along with the tools to live the integrity necessary for the Climate Action needed to reserve and adapt to Climate Change.

'To forget to dig in the earth and tend to the soil is to forget ourselves.'

- Mahatma Gandhi (1869 - 1948)

SIVANANDA YOGA RESORT & TRAINING CENTRE, VIETNAM

Sivananda Yoga Resort and Training Center, in Da Lat, Vietnam, was founded in January 2017. Situated close to the beautiful Tuyen Lam Lake, amid pine trees and close to large areas of untouched forest, the location is ideal for rest, healing and practice. The high altitude of Da Lat means that we enjoy a year-round spring-like climate. The focus of the ashram is on promoting healthy lifestyle through use of the classical Yoga practices, in addition to which we offer specialist care at our Ayurveda Center. <http://www.sivananda.org/vietnam>

DA LAT RESORT STAFF



LIKITA JAPA

A PRACTICAL WAY OF MEDITATION

BY SWAMI JYOTIRMAYANANDA



“A mantra is a mass of radiant energy. Every mantra has got tremendous force. It helps the spiritual power and reinforces it.”

- Swami Sivananda

The word 'mantra' is derived from the root man which means to think. Tra means to protect or to free and thus a mantra protects our own mind from negativity and frees it from the bondage of the illusory world. Mantras fill the mind with purity, improve concentration, generate harmony and divine love.

Methods of mantra meditation

There are three ways to use the mantras:

- Mental repetition – repeating the mantra mentally in silence
- Verbal repetition – repeating the mantra aloud
- Likitha japa – writing the mantra

In the mental repetition of a mantra, the mantra is repeated in harmony with the natural rhythm of the breath. Mental repetition is considered a very powerful method and requires a concentrated mind.

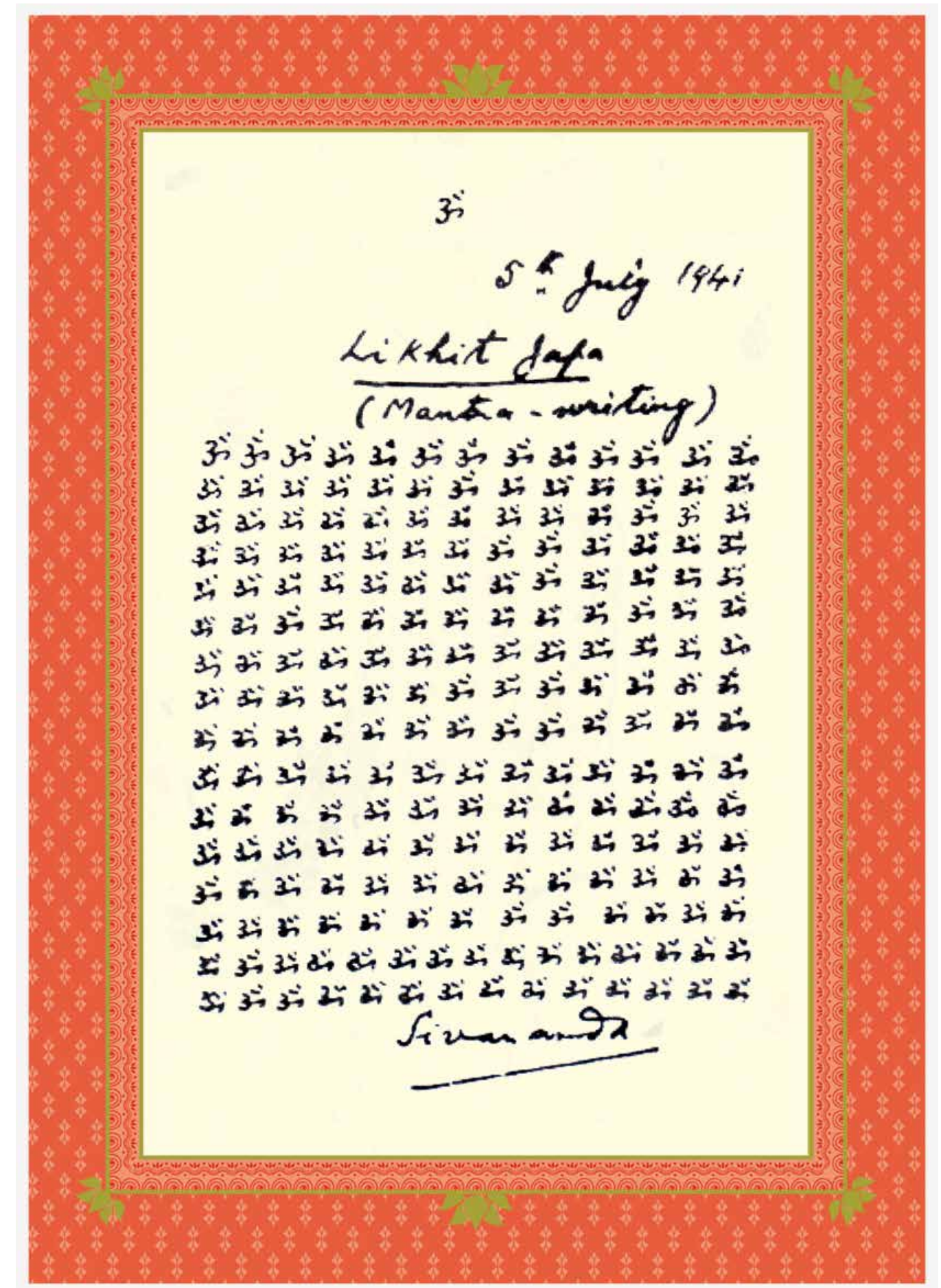
In the verbal repetition of a mantra, the organ of speech is involved which makes it easier to keep the attention focussed. External sounds are muffled when repeating a mantra aloud supporting the process of inner concentration further.

Likitha japa includes mental repetition of the mantra with the mind simultaneously reciting the mantra while writing. As the hands and the organ of sight are active in likitha japa, this method tends to concentrate the mind easily and efficiently.

There is no need to choose one method as a personal practice while excluding the other methods. You can use the three different ways of mantra meditation alternately, according to the mantra practice that naturally draws you more at any given point. Providing variety to the mind helps concentration and keeps the practice fresh and inspired.

Likitha Japa

If you have received mantra initiation, then you can write your own personal mantra during likitha japa like Om, Soham, Om Sri Maha Ganapataye Namah, Om Namah Sivaya, Om Namo Narayanaya, Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya, Om Sri Ramaya Namah, Om Sri Durgayai Namah, Om Sri Maha Lakshmyai Namah, Om Aim Saraswatyai Namah, Om Sri Hanumateh Namah.



If you do not have a personal mantra, then you can use the mantra Om Namō Narayanaya for your practice of likitha japa. This is a mantra for inner peace and world peace which creates very harmonious and soothing vibrations.

You can write the mantra in orderly lines just like when writing sentences or you can express your creativity by creating forms and shapes - according to your temperament. One uniform style of writing or drawing will help concentration. You have a choice of scripts: you can write the mantra in the Western alphabet, in Devanagari (Sanskrit alphabet), or in any other script depending on your linguistic background.

You can write the mantra in front of your altar as part of your sadhana, your daily or regular spiritual practice. There is though no need to limit your mantra writing practice to a specific time or a specific place. It is also possible to write your mantra during the hidden moments of the day when a little time becomes unexpectedly available: at work, when travelling, while sitting in a waiting room.

For practicing likitha japa at home or in your spiritual community, it is best to reserve a notebook specifically for the purpose of mantra writing. You can keep it on your bookshelf with spiritual literature or place it near your altar. Day after day, the pages of your notebook will fill themselves with a special spiritual vibration which will radiate out into the room where the notebooks are kept and far beyond.

Om Namō Narayanaya mantra bank

The pages and notebooks with written mantras transform an ordinary piece of paper into a mass of radiant energy. Once the paper or the notebook is full, you can respectfully keep them near your place of worship.

Swami Vishnudevananda transformed a rock cave high in the Himalayas, into an 'Om Namō Narayanaya mantra bank'. He called this mountain the Vishnu Peak, it is accessible by foot after a long climb from the cave in Gangotri in the state of Uttarakhand in North India where Swamiji used to spend time in seclusion. Since 1987, likitha japa notebooks and loose sheets of papers with mantras written by yogis all over the world have been deposited in the mantra bank.

A crystal was placed on top of this rock cave to magnify the energy of the mantras even further and make them radiate out over the whole area and into the entire world.

If you would like to make a contribution to the Om Namō Narayanaya mantra bank, kindly send your likitha japa notebooks and/or sheets of paper to any of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres in the world. We will make sure that your mantra donations find their way to the Vishnu Peak and are deposited into the mantra bank.

OM NAMO NARAYANAYA

Benefits of mantra writing

From the book Sadhana by Swami Sivananda

(An easy, practical and scientific form of Yoga for modern busy people)

Mantra writing leads to meditation

Of the various methods of Japa described in the scriptures, Mantra writing is the most efficacious. It helps the aspirant in concentrating the mind and gradually leads to meditation.

Benefits

- **Concentration**
Distractions are minimised as the mind, tongue, hands and eyes are all engaged

with the mantra. This increases the power of concentration and efficiency in work.

- **Control**
The mind is controlled by the power of mantra and it will work better and quicker for you.
- **Evolution**
Due to the repeated innumerable impacts of the mantra on the subconscious mind, subtle, spiritual impressions are made, which hasten the soul's progress in evolution.
- **Peace**
If you are disturbed due to worries or untoward incidents, the mind will get calm and peaceful.
- **Force**
A mighty spiritual force is generated in course of time in the atmosphere of the place, where you write mantras or keep the notebooks. It helps in secular and spiritual progress.

Conclusion: Begin today. Do not procrastinate. Give it a sincere trial. Be a master of your mind, not its slave. Write from one to three pages a day. Follow the rules as far as possible if you want quicker results.

Rules for mantra writing

- Select a mantra, or name of God, and write it with ink in a notebook daily in any script on one to three pages.
- Sit in the same place at the same time daily. If possible, keep it under lock and key.
- Write after a bath, or after washing hands, feet, face and mouth.
- Sit in one pose throughout. Do not move until completed.
- Observe silence, and avoid talks, engagements, or calls.
- Fix the eyes on the notebook. Do not move until completed.
- Repeat the mantra or name mentally while writing.
- Fix the mind on the form and attributes

of the Lord, while writing the Name or Mantra.

- Adopt one uniform system of writing, top to bottom or left to right.
- Write each mantra or Name completely at a time and not in parts.
- Do not change Mantra or Name. Select one and stick to it for life.
- Preserve all completed books near your place of worship.

Swami Jyotirmayananda serves at the Ashram de Yoga Sivananda in France

SIVANANDA KUTIR NETALA, INDIA

The Sivananda Kutir, situated on the banks of the Ganges, was the last of the ashrams established during Swami Vishnudevananda's lifetime. It was passed to him by Swami Chaitanyananda in 1991 and had been the abode of sadhus and swamis for many years previously.

It is the smallest of the Indian ashrams with space for fifty guests in dormitories and twin share rooms, offering Sivananda Teacher Training Courses and Sadhana Intensive programmes from April to October. It is a stopping point for the Sivananda organisation's yatra groups en route to Gangotri and the Sivananda Guha, the cave where Swamiji would spend many months in seclusion. Most importantly, it is the place of Swami Vishnudevananda's Jalasamadhi, an occasion which is celebrated from 2nd – 9th November each year with beautiful pujas and homas.

www.sivananda.org/netala

NETALA ASHRAM STAFF



TEACHERS' TRAINING COURSE ONLINE

TESTIMONIALS OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE BY STUDENTS

Throughout the lockdown, it has been a joy to practice and share the authentic yoga teachings online and to remain connected. Participants of the online Sivananda yoga classes, courses and group meditations commented how much the virtual teachings shared comfort and supported them in tuning to inner peace in the midst of isolation.

“Peace is your birth right. Peace is in front of you, behind you, to the right, to the left, above and below. Peace is the only living reality. Lead a simple life. Practise meditation daily and establish peace in your own heart. Be still. Be in tune with the divine will. Get deep down into the innermost recesses of your heart and plunge in the ocean of peace. Then radiate it to your neighbours and all who come in contact with you. Disseminate it far and wide.” Swami Sivananda from his book *World Peace*

The encouraging response to the online teachings inspired us to offer a Sivananda Yoga Teacher Training Course Online (TTCOL). In May and June, TTCOL's took place in English, French, German and Spanish with participants joining from all over the world. The training is based on the classical TTC curriculum accompanied by an

hour of daily individual coaching and will be complemented by an extra training module that will be offered directly in an Ashram environment.

Personal experiences

We share below the experiences of three participants of the French, German and Spanish online TTC's:

“ This experience was magical. I followed the course from Canada where I live since two years now. These four weeks of training have taught me so much, both on the theoretical as well as on the practical level. I felt so good and connected with myself during these four weeks, it really is an experience to live in order to understand it!

The positive energies and vibrations of the Ashram have settled at home. This is magical because I was able to turn a small corner of my apartment into a small spiritual centre filled with beautiful, positive energies.

I would like to thank all the teachers at the Ashram who taught both the theoretical as well as the practical classes of an exceptional quality. We could feel that the teachings were pure and sincere and always shared with great care. I felt very connected to this great spiritual family that we formed together, students and teachers. I want to

give special thanks to my tutor who guided me every day during those four weeks of training. These moments of exchange have been very beneficial for me, they were shared with much sincerity and kindness.

I have developed deep friendships and felt a very beautiful energy and connection throughout the group of students.

Swami Vishnudevananda said, “I created this training to give the opportunity to those who wish to develop their potential and dormant strength, and to build a better world”. I will do everything I can to share in return this “better world”, this pure and intense light of yoga, like the teachers have done with us. “

I would like to end with a big thank you for this unique and humanly rich experience.
Flora, French TTCOL May 2020

“ I am very grateful to be at a time when my circumstances have allowed me to be part of the TTC online course. It is an enriching experience that I have lived with curiosity, enthusiasm and discipline. I hope that more people can live it as I did, without prejudice, worry or anxiety. For me it has been a mirror, a challenge, and a starting point of a living path to be explored. I sincerely hope that more and more people can get to experience this TTC online course. “
Chanyu, Spanish TTCOL June 2020



“ Being able to complete the Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Course from my home is part of the most valuable experiences I made. The contents were packed with purpose, truth and warmth and even through the screen left a deep impression in the heart. During these 4 weeks this warmth transformed my home into a shining and spiritual environment which profoundly supported my lifestyle, being in peace and harmony. The daily contact with the Sivananda staff and also with the other centers transcending the continent, not only made me feel that I am part of it but also helped me to see, feel and manifest the unity.

I thank each one of you from my heart for your effort and the passing on of these wonderful teachings, which you share with the world with all the possible means and such an inspiring devotion. “

I'm looking forward to meeting you all soon in person.
Adelina, German TTCOL May 2020

HOW TO MAINTAIN MENTAL HEALTH

BY SWAMI SITARAMANANDA



CLASSICAL YOGIC METHODS TO DEAL WITH FEARS

In this talk, we will try to understand, in the context of the global epidemic, how fear and anxiety create havoc and take away your well-being and mental health, and how faith is so important in dispelling fear.

We will address the question step by step in 4 points keeping in mind the need for prevention of disease due to poor immune system impacted by negative emotions, and the need for healing emotionally in order to heal physically.

1. First we need to understand all facets of **FEAR, STRESS, and ANXIETY.**
2. What are the causes of fear?
3. Some Yogic methods for dealing with fear.
4. Cultivating faith to dispel fear and anxiety.

What is Fear?

Fear is a very strong primitive emotion, present in animals, as it serves a very basic purpose: It helps us to survive. It is at the base of our stress response: fight, flight or freeze.

Things that appear unfamiliar to us, or situations beyond our immediate comprehension, cause us fear. Fear creates imagination of darkness, of falling and distorts the mind. Fear is therefore based in unreality.

When we are fearful, we become paralyzed and lose our faculties. We freeze, unable to do anything to solve our problem.

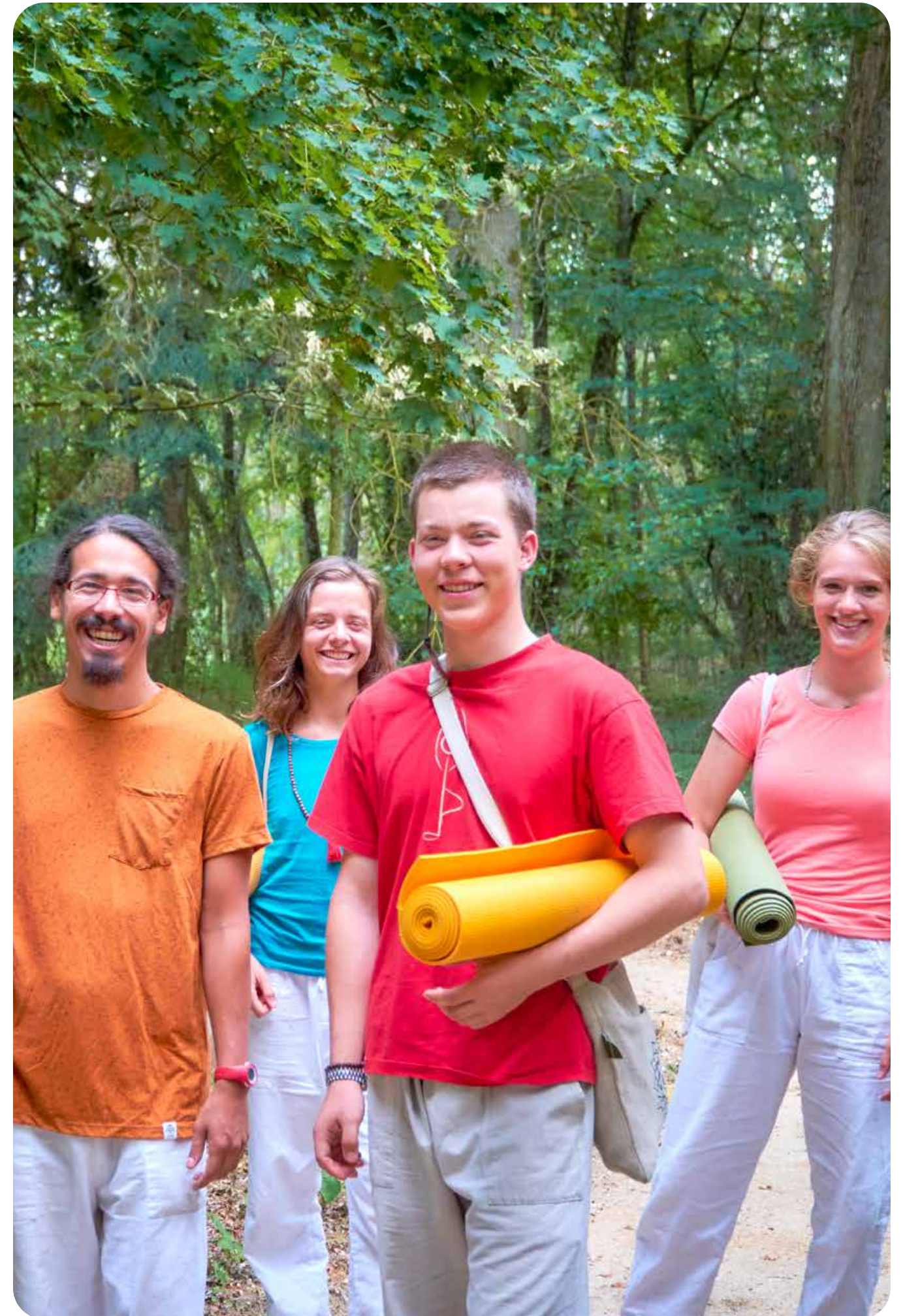
Fear is of two kinds, normal fear and imaginary fear. According to Swami Sivananda, the percentage of normal fear will only be five percent whereas imaginary

fear will come to ninety-five percent. Normal fear is healthy. It paves the way for one's progress; it preserves life. So in the context of the possible virus infection, we wash our hands, clean our handrails, stay put and avoid socializing, etc.

Imaginary fear causes diseases, as it depletes all energy and produces uneasiness, discomfort and disharmony, etc.

Examples of imaginary fear

You might be afraid that you will get infected and there is no cure, you might be afraid that your business will collapse and you will be destitute, that you will lose your job as the companies downsize themselves, that your kids will not be able to study, that your husband's staying at home will lead to change of the relationship dynamic causing frustration and divorce, etc.



Some behaviors due to fear and panic:

- Hoarding
- Isolation, hatred of others, blameful attitude
- Shame and guilt
- Depression
- Constant tension, hyper vigilance
- Addictions, drink our sorrow away
- Enjoy life while you still can
- "I do not care! "

What is Stress?

Stress is the cause of many forms of diseases, especially chronic stress. We have a built-in stress response in our nervous system in the form of the fight or flight mechanism in response to situations of danger to our survival. However, our stress response might not be adequate.

Remember that Stress is subjective and can be changed once an understanding of the causes of our stress is obtained.

5 Causes of Stress

Low prana: Refer to our previous talk about the relationship between low prana and negative thoughts. We can alleviate our stress by increasing the prana through Yoga practice and positive lifestyle.

Negative emotions: Not only fear and anxiety, but also anger, which comes from expectations and desires unfulfilled, can create stress. Grief is another negative emotion creating stress.

Lack of adaptability: If we develop flexibility in mind and behavior, it helps to tackle the cause of our stress.

Existential anxiety: The imminent danger of the virus epidemic might trigger our fundamental anxiety of existence which can be calmed down only by a broader picture about life and death and our sense of meaning.

Karma: We cannot help but ask the question why, and we have to accept our collective karma at this time. The pandemic situation is not sparing any place on earth. We need to ponder over our collective responsibilities.

In short, to build stress resilience in this time we need to increase prana, spend less prana, convert negative emotions into positive ones, be ready to adapt to new situations, have more faith to deal with our existential anxiety and understand our collective and individual karma.

What is Anxiety?

Disruption in life activity might create anxiety. Anxiety is even worse than fear, because unlike fear, we cannot identify its source. Anxiety is fear that has no name. With anxiety, there is no creativity, no productivity, we are depressed and our minds lose the capacity to think clearly. Anxiety is an emotion like fear is an emotion.

It is usually associated with autonomic hyperarousal and attentive hypervigilance, in which the internal and external environments are monitored intensely for information relevant to the sense of threat.

It is an expression of the life-preserving fight or flight response and is an essential biological mechanism for motivating the organism for action in response to danger.

It prepares us to deal with varied and challenging life situations. It is the reaction to the perception of an external or internal danger.

Under the spell of anxiety, you might find it difficult to maintain normal day-to-day activities and you keep feeling anxious in anticipation of calamity or disaster, which might afflict you sometime in the future.

Parents and spouses need to be aware that the children or spouses might be subject to tension, guilt, stress, anxiety, nervousness and worry. They might be replaying the separation anxiety suffered in childhood.

In general, try to leave space, be available but less demanding and perfectionistic, stay calm and empathetic instead of responding with more tension and projected fear. It is a cause for concern if this feeling affects your normal day-to-day activity. Try to establish a routine in daily life and adapt to the situation.

Routine, schedule, normalcy as much as possible, daily discipline serve all to cope with stress. Know that what stresses you might not be what stresses your spouse or children. Know that anxiety is difficult to pin down. It may give rise to vague emotions of discomfort coming from diverse persistent thoughts combined together.

This feeling of discomfort creates an anxious mood, but no one knows the underlying cause. Everyone is able to endure a certain threshold level of anxiety, but please take note that this threshold is different for each person.

The impending sudden rise of the epidemic attack while your daily routine has changed, and the fabric of the society surrounding you changes drastically, makes people suffer from impaired concentration and with all the time now on their hands, people staying home might find it difficult to perform even simple routine tasks.

Anxiety may be non-specific and arise spontaneously with no apparent relationship to any obvious event. This type of anxiety becomes all pervading in the everyday life of the one suffering, which may result in both psychic and somatic symptoms.

This non-specific and excessive anxiety is pathological and needs to be helped with Yoga and relaxation techniques.

Look for symptoms of avoidance behavior. Watch out for this avoidance behavior. Also, become aware of the practice of sending warm reassuring words, explaining to family and friends the concept of "social distancing", be sensitive to children perceiving this as rejection, and keep engaging family in positive community activities while in quarantine.

Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder

Excessive anxiety or worry for long period of time can turn into anxiety disorder, involving worry about possible misfortune to one's child (who is in no danger) and worry about finances (for no good reason). In children and adolescents, this may take the form of anxiety and worry about academic, athletic and social performance.

When the person is anxious, there are many signs of motor tension, autonomic hyper-activity (muscle aches or soreness, restlessness and easy tiredness, shortness of breath, palpitations, sweating, dry mouth, dizziness, nausea, diarrhea, flushes or chills and frequent urination).

Other signs are symptoms of vigilance or scanning including feeling on edge, exaggerated startle response, difficulty concentrating or mind going blank because of anxiety, trouble falling or staying asleep and irritability.

Symptoms of Panic Attacks

Symptoms last a few minutes. Unexpected, intense terror, shortness of breath, dizziness or vertigo, shaky feeling, palpitations, sweating, abdominal distress, numbness, chest pain discomfort and fear of going mad can be triggered by situations of being outside of home alone, being in a crowd, standing in line or travelling in a vehicle.

Symptoms of Compulsive Obsessive Disorder

Obsessions are persistent ideas, thoughts, impulses or images that are experienced as intrusive, distressful and senseless.

Compulsions are repetitive, purposeful and intentional behaviors that are performed in response to or to relieve oneself from a tension. Example: handwashing, counting, checking and touching.

Causes of Fear

From the perspective of classical Yoga philosophy, the cause of fear is attachment, our grasping on to illusory things and beliefs. Being attached means we are stuck or bogged down.

Fear is the opposite of letting go.

The first cause of fear is the attachment to the body and the ensuing fear of death.

The nature of our illusions creates fears. There are two classical analogies to help us understand the nature of our illusions.

The first is called the "Snake and the Rope". A man is walking in the darkness and sees a snake in the path. He is frightened and immediately runs and gets his friend who has a lamp. When they shine the light on the snake it is seen for what it is, a rope.

When we react to situations with fear, we operate out of a limited consciousness. We have forgotten that the sun is shining beyond the clouds. Yet the clouds of fear obscure the light of the sun. We must have faith to seek out the sun when the mind experiences darkness.

Whether we are dealing with specific fear or general anxiety, we need to cultivate the courage to face our illusions and be who we really are.

We need to have the courage to remove our wrong beliefs and identifications, our thinking that we are a certain thing, when really all those beliefs and identifications are simply attachments and not the one we really are, the eternal strong presence within.

Mechanism of Fear

Fear feeds on past experiences that have no independent reality in the present. Through superimposition we are creating our reality. We attach our meanings, ideas and conditions to people, situations and objects. Our practice is to separate ourselves from these illusions and realize the true nature of **REALITY**, of our own **SELF**. Fear and worry cause us to feel overwhelmed or limited.

As a result, we identify ourselves as a victim. We have become powerless to express our potential. Remember the **POWER OF NOW**. In the Now we can experience the **POWER of BEING**.

Often times we grow attached to ideas about ourselves, other people and the world around us. We get attached to things the way they were.

We need to introspect and think, because in so doing we come back to the present, feel strong in the present, become creative in the present. This means we are letting go of our ideas how things should be, and we are ready for positive and creative changes:

- Change of the way we make a living (class on line, work at home)
- Change the way we eat (simpler food, cooking our own)
- Change the way we socialize (read books instead of using the internet, relax in nature).
- Change the way we do spiritual practices (more mantras, more prayers, more meditation)



Classical Yogic methods to deal with fears

Depends on your temperament, you can apply the following 4 classical methods, separately or together. Try to see which one is fitting you more at the moment.

A. Karma Yoga methods (active practical temperament) : Think of how to be helpful for others in this situation. Avoid thinking only about yourself. This will open your heart and alleviate anxiety that comes from attachment.

B. Bhakti Yoga Methods (emotional temperament): Surrender to the Divine plan. Trust that all will be well. Learn to relax. Transform fear to faith. We will talk about this more at the end.

C. Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga methods (analytical temperament , people already having a practice of Hatha Yoga)

- Improve breath-body-awareness with rhythmical breathing exercises and pranayama. Slow down, do restorative Yoga.
- Increase and balance the flow of prana for greater energy and stress resilience. Balance the right- and left- brain activities. This is the key. Another class on prana is upcoming.
- Improve mental and emotional balance by the regulation of breath, movements and concentration of mind. Awareness is important, not to force.
- Increase ojas, the energy of sustenance, of immunity, that comes from your deep heart. Make sure to improve the quality food, not quantity (nervous eating). Also you can increase your mental attitude of trust and devotion. This subtle Ojas will increase your contentment, gratitude and relaxation.

- Increase calm, reduce fear: Use props (blankets, pillows) when doing Yoga practice or when relaxing to create a sense of security, warmth, quiet and support so you and your family members or students will feel safe to let go of defences, to calm the senses and mind. Do only comfortable postures.
- Experience physical, mental and emotional relaxation. Increase the right attitude for life – detachment.
- Experience connection with one's Self and others through deep relaxation, slow deep exhalation. Detachment from body, mind and emotions.
- Teachers need to be gentle, encouraging and calming. The same as in trauma sensitive yoga guidelines.

D. Jnana Yoga methods (for intellectual philosophical temperament): Remember the True Self, the Atman, the Soul untouched by diseases and separation. Assert your Healthy Self. Do Self-enquiry, you are not the body nor the mind. Remove the veils of fear by exercising your thinking and discrimination and by detachment.

What is faith?

Replacing fears and anxieties with faith

We need to cultivate faith, which will replace knowledge and help us to be calm in the face of calamity or diseases. We need to not only to rekindle our own faith, but also help others to develop faith.

WHAT TO DO:

We need to nurture the 3 types of faith:

1. Faith in own self (reconnect with One's core self): Self-reliance, which may be the same as faith in one's Self, means we must rely on our own inner strength, dwelling within us as opposed to relying on an ego self. Fear exists when we don't know the Truth about the Self (the Atman). Until we have such knowledge of the Self from our own direct experience, we must rely on faith, in order to progress in our life. Ultimately faith is replaced by direct experience of the Self. Truth or Knowledge can be glimpsed intuitively, even if we do not have a name for it.

So calm down and trust yourself. One student approached me very worried because she had a cough and she just travelled back from England and wondered if she should go to the hospital and be tested. I told her: "Look within, ask yourself the question, "Am I going to die soon? Am I healthy?", to which she nodded.

I sent her to the hospital and the doctor said it is a common flu and she should just rest. There is no COVID-19 test available anyway unless she is ready to travel to another city. She did not go, but I believe that she regained confidence and overcame her fears by being asked to find the answer from within.

The Truth that will set us free from all fears, resides inside of us, but it is a long, hard journey to find it. However, we must start to walk on that journey with humility and sincerity. We lack experience in the beginning, as we do not really have a clue where to look when trying to look within. In that journey faith keeps us going.

2. Faith in nature and the supreme intelligence (i.e. cooperate with Natural Laws for healthy living and improve immunity).

Meditate, shift consciousness from the past to the present. Try to see a bigger picture and channel the emotions into devotion and the courage to face our illusions. Faith in God springs from an inner feeling that there is something greater than you, a supreme being that indwells one's essential spirit.

When one is enriched with abiding faith, one is able to recognize God's grace operating in all things. We are on a journey of self-discovery to uncover the truth of whom it is that we are, a journey guided by faith. We can think of faith as the bridge that carries us from one experience of grace to the next.

3. Faith in the teachings and the practices. The sacred teachings say that you are like the Shining Sun untouched by fears and diseases. There are days when clouds fill the sky and we can't see the sun. But you know the Sun is there. To regain vision of the Inner sun, we must learn to clear away the impurities of the mind by the observance of the Niyamas.

- Ethical guidelines of conduct to purify: Practice of asanas, pranayama, for example)
- Contentment (turning mind inwards)
- Austerity (renunciation, discipline, endurance, simple life)
- Self study (introspection)
- Self-surrender. Self-surrender means accepting what is; letting go and letting God's will prevail. Let it be. Bear the consequences of past actions coming in the present. Have faith that eventually everything will pass. We must also practice endurance and know that the journey is not going to happen overnight. The challenge of enduring past karma is learning not to react or retaliate. Forgive and forget.

GUIDANCE ON WHAT NOT TO DO

1. Avoid negative company with those who believe in the wrong things. This is the surest way to kill your faith and increase your fear. Therefore, avoid negative people. This includes media as negative company, as well as internet gossip sites.

2. Following the Yamas: Practice patience with Self and others. **Do not be angry or violent.** Do not lie. Do not steal. Try to turn inward beyond the senses. Let go of our greedy tendency. Live a simple life; **the more one depends on material objects the more fear one will have.**

Everything is a test of faith: we have the choice to spiral down or spiral up. We need to learn how to overcome doubts and fears, how to renew our faith and not to lose faith, which makes us weak and move in the wrong direction.

Often disease brings **doubt and guilt**, feelings of rejection, of not having self-worth, or loss of faith. What we must keep in mind is that any kind of faith will make us feel strong, even when we have faith in the wrong thing. So we might have faith in the doctor or in the medicine, in the type of treatments we follow.

The opposite of faith is doubt. Doubt will make us feel weak. Doubt comes when we lose faith. We become doubtful in the underlying order of the Universe or of Nature. This is because our expectations are not being met. When something happens that fails to meet our expectations, we lose faith in God, the Universal law and ourselves. But remember, our journey towards fearlessness implies renewing ourselves.

Keep your mind and heart open. When temporarily losing faith, try to find out the cause of our doubt, which is always a certain aspect of our ego, and embrace again your truth in the form of faith. Company with those who have no doubt is very powerful in removing doubts.

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SIVANANDA ASHRAM YOGA CAMP, CANADA

After having founded the Montreal center, Swami Vishnudevananda noticed a considerable drop in class attendance during the summer, as people left the city to enjoy nature in the countryside. He devised the concept of a Yoga Vacation and held his first Yoga Camp in 1961 in St-Hippolyte, Quebec at the summer home of some student.

The success of this first Yoga Camp and the increasing number of visitors at week-end programs allowed the present site to be established in February 1962. Students worked tirelessly to clear the land and in the summer of that year the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Camp was opened. Since this time, the Camp has expanded and is now located on over 265 acres of woodland, a refuge of peace and tranquility for those wishing to experience the yogic way of life in the idyllic Laurentian Mountains.

The Subramanya-Ayyappa Temple was Swami Vishnudevananda's last wish and project before his Mahasamadhi in November 1993. Swamiji himself chose the site, on top of the foresty hill overlooking the ashram, where the Temple should be build. The construction started during the last year's of Swamiji's life and was completed and inaugurated in the summer of 1994. Ever since its opening the temple has been attracting thousands of devotees yearly. Through its offering of inspiring daily pujas (ceremonies) performed by traditionally trained Indian Temple priests and highly colorful festival celebrations like the extremely popular Kavaadi , it provides during temple season (April to November) constant spiritual support to ashram staff and guests.

The Krishna Temple, inaugurated in 2002, was build on the original location of the dome-shaped meditation temple which was so dear to Swami Vishnudevananda. The Krishna shrine which constitutes the heart of the temple has been built around the original Krishna Murthi (statue) which Swamiji worshiped for so many years. The temple remains the main meditation center of the ashram and welcomes ashram residents all year round for the twice-daily satsangs (meditation encounters including meditation, mantra chanting and lecture).

Besides weekly yoga retreats and Teachers Training Courses, the Yoga Camp also organizes every summer a Kids Camp and a Teen Camp. Swami Vishnudevananda showed great interest in the well-being of children and considered it a vital mission to teach them the principles of yoga so they would grow to become able citizens of the world and emissaries of peace.

www.sivananda.org/camp

YOGA CAMP STAFF



ASPECTS OF IMMUNITY IN AYURVEDA

BY ANGELA HOPE-MURRAY



“ All diseases begin with minimum morbidity. In due course of time they can progress to a fatal course. Hence prevention at the onset of disease is the most preferred option. At least it should be treated at the earliest opportunity for the welfare of humanity. ”

- (C.Su.11/63)

I am sure all of us who have walked through the countryside recently have been aware of the immense power and beauty of nature. A much closer look reveals that the earth is beginning to suffer because of our actions. The sound of the abundance of familiar birds is now lost to silence, although on the surface, hedgerow flowers and foliage are in full spate. It is plain to see that in many places arable fields are desiccated and devoid of any variety of vegetation save the unnaturally green landscape.

The power of a pause

All students of yoga will be acquainted with the power of a pause but we push our soils to grow crops relentlessly without a break. This situation has led to the use of millions of tons of agro chemicals being distributed over the land, which destroy not only the micro biome of the earth but also our own gastro-intestinal tract where two-thirds of the immune system resides.

Therefore, it seems completely timely that the immune system, not only ours but also the planet's, is the hot topic on all our minds at present.

Here, I draw on the Chinese character for crisis. Popularly mistranslated because it also means opportunity, a more precise definition is the point where change happens. This directs us to the fact that we are being given a giant break, worldwide, to readdress some of the imbalances and to consider what we really want for our children, the planet and ourselves.

Immunity, equilibrium and harmony

In Ayurveda, viyadhikshamatva is considered synonymous with immunity. It means 'disease forgiveness' or the capacity of an individual to resist disease. Ayurveda's foremost goal is to maintain homeostasis in the body known as swastha, meaning to be established



in the self. Charaka the great sage called this resistance vyadhibalavirodhatvam interpreted as, the capacity of the body to fight against manifest diseases. Also, some 1,000 years ago there are documented cases of inoculation in Ayurveda in a text called Sacteya. It was a process whereby material is taken from infected persons, as for instance cows' udders as in the case of smallpox, and introduced into another subject to induce immunity.

Ayurveda is a preventative medicine par excellence and building bala or strength is a keystone for health giving excellence of the tissues. This equates to equilibrium of the doshas, dhatus and agni, and to efficient removal of wastes according to the sage Shustruta. This harmony of our physiology nourishes our hearts and gives prasanna or happiness in our relationship to the soul, the senses and the mind.

Mind, body and spirit as a complete system

Ayurveda elegantly addresses the mind, body and spirit as a complete system. These facets of our nature are not independent of each other, so accordingly I will address all three systems and give you some practical tips for their management.

On the physical plane, to maintain our immunity the body depends on a substrate called ojas, which can be defined as the vital essence of all the body tissues. It has the overall responsibility for defending the body against disease and infirmity. Just as oils are the ojas of a plant, the most refined tissue of the body is ojas. Thus, if you have good ojas you will rarely get sick. It has a correspondence to substances such as gamma globulin in western medicine. Neurotransmitters like melatonin and serotonin are western analogues too. This is why an abundance of ojas, which is soma rich, gives us the experience of bliss.

Meditation and the total surrender to the present converts apara (raw) ojas to para (superior) ojas. Ojas exists as two types circulating via the heart, para ojas of which you have eight drops and is the superior quality, and apara ojas that measures itself as half an anjali (half cupped handful), which is the raw unrefined type. It is said to smell like roasted rice, look like ghee and taste like honey. It operates in concert with prana (life-force) and tejas (inner radiance). Ojas (primal vigour) works as a container and nourishes the other two forces. When in balance they give good disease resistance and a long, happy life. Imbalance causes autoimmune diseases where tejas burns ojas. These energies are subtler expressions of vata, pitta and kapha.

An excellent way to stimulate the flow of ojas is to massage jatru marma, which is located in between the clavicles at the top of your rib cage at the front of your chest, just below the base of the neck. Jatru means to preserve health. It is vital to the patency of our immune system and is known as ojo-granthi, the seat of ojas. You can massage it with sandalwood oil or tap it gently to energise the point.

Western holistic theory meets ancient eastern wisdom

Psychoneuroimmunology, which was introduced to the west by Robert Ader in 1981, is the study of the interaction of the central nervous system and the immune system. The idea that thoughts and feelings affect our health is listed under Adhyatma draya guna samgraha in Ayurveda.

We can all observe the wisdom of this ancient knowledge when we experience feelings of sorrow and joy and how they can affect our health. During the current pandemic, very high levels of psychological stress and anxiety have been shown to depress the immune system and have been

associated with increased susceptibility to upper respiratory infections. (Pederson.et.al, 2020)

The practice of good conduct or sadvritta is the basis of all the other immune system supports. Spiritually, we need to ask ourselves, are we acting in total alignment with what we are thinking?

Otherwise we become the harbingers of toxic emotions, which are stored in the sadhak pitta and vyjnana maya kosha (the sheath of intellect). The Kato Upanishad informs us that the mind is a river of thoughts. We need to keep the 'e'-motions in motion to stop them crystallising into toxins which get lodged in the body and cause disease, so for example if we need to cry, let the tears flow.

Chanting can be one of the safest and simplest ways of eliminating and assimilating some of our unprocessed emotions. They will still show up again but over time you won't get so entangled in them.

Pranayama practice is vital for the immune system to function well. As I mentioned before, prana works in tandem with the other vital immune components tejas and ojas, circulating them around the body. Modern science now acknowledges the powerful effects of breathing practice. C. B. Pert, Research Professor in Biophysics and Physiology at Georgetown University Medical Center opinions in 'Molecules of Emotion' that:

// There is a wealth of data showing that changes in the rate and depth of the breathing produces changes in the quality and kind of peptides released in the brain stem and vice versa. Virtually any peptide found anywhere else can be found in the respiratory

centre. This peptide substrate may supply scientific rationale for the powerful effects of consciously controlled breath patterns. //

These peptides influence immunity, endurance and mood and give us a potential biological rationale for the ancient concept of prana. The nose directly contacts the hypothalamus via the olfactory lobe. Besides regulating body temperature it also influences our emotional state because it is part of our limbic system or lower mind, which often plagues us with circling thoughts. So, 15-20 minutes of pranayama practice a day will handsomely reward you and distribute precious prana throughout your system.

Immune-boosting Ayurvedic recipes

Ayurvedic medicines, which are simple to procure and specifically support the immune system, are Turmeric Milk, and Chyvanprash: 1tsp twice daily. This herbal jam consists mainly of amalaki (phyllanthus embelica), a type of Indian gooseberry, and contains all tastes barring salty. It is a rasayana for pitta dosha without diminishing agni. In Europe, we are just about to get a crop of gooseberries which like amalaka, are very rich in vitamin C, that has been shown to support the immune system. This jam or avaleha is one of the most important rasayanas in Ayurveda and is composed of two words, namely Chyvan which is the name of a sage and prash which is a foodstuff or a drug suitable for consumption and also connotes degenerative change.

The story goes that the Ashwini twins, who were physicians of the gods gave Chyvan the forest rishi, a tonic to improve his vitality and strength. He had undertaken a lengthy sadana to become enlightened and was weak and emaciated.

The aforementioned recipe was recorded in the Charaka Samhita and is widely accepted as being the most superior of herbal tonics. Rasayana is a modality of Ayurveda, which involves the promotion of prolonging life, increasing immunity and preventing degenerative changes. A note here about the current formulation of chyvanprash, in that eight rare herbs are no longer in the current formulations.

Among these are four herbs belonging to the orchid family and the Indian government has put a restriction on their use. Look for organic formulas when you choose to use it. The good ones will be a more expensive because of the quality of the end product, as it takes time and money to select the best ingredients.

Another indispensable rasayana is comprised of haritaki, bhībitaki and amalaki, which are known to stimulate the production of good immune function and are a tonic for all seven tissues in the body. There are two gateways of prana to our bodies, one is the lungs where prana is carried in the form of oxygen and the other is the large intestine where prana is absorbed from our food.

This is why the tried and tested triphala churna takes centre stage: 500mg-1g of the powder taken at night before bed in warm water is the dose for the rasayana effect.

It is not only a wonderful balancer of all three doshas but also aids in absorption of prana in the colon and the lungs. In particular, it benefits apana vata, which is the downward moving force, to function smoothly and to remove accumulated wastes from our systems. It can be safely taken for six months to a year without any ill effects.

Aligning to circadian rhythms

An emerging science is that of chronobiology which recognises the importance of the align our bodies with the circadian rhythms of the planet. Ayurveda acknowledged the primacy of this some 5,000 years ago and called it dinacharya or flowing with the day. Sleep is one of the four pillars of health in Ayurveda. It is now understood that the body processes 7 grams of metabolites in the brain while we sleep through what are called the glymphatics.

We need to get at least 6-7 hours of sleep a night for this process to happen efficiently. Equally important is exposure to sunlight for the production of vitamin D. It is nature's antibiotic and it also has been shown to reduce inflammatory cytokines. In ancient times there was less air pollution and a different dress code, so this essential vitamin was produced in correct quantities.

Maintaining your immune system

Finally, and perhaps the most important factor in the maintenance of our immune systems is our daily diet. It should be light, non-constipating or gas forming, fresh and organic where possible. It is best to cook and consume fresh food, not to fry it, avoiding heavy and oily qualities. Hot water sipped throughout the day and tulsi tea is beneficial to prevent the accumulation of toxins. Only eat until your stomach is ¼ full, to allow for good digestion. Include mung beans, lentils, wheat, barley, seasonal vegetables, turmeric, cumin, coriander and honey (not cooked) in your daily food intake.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy this time of tranquillity and reevaluate what is important in your life. We cannot go back to how it was before and it is upto each of us to work towards the evolution of a better world with love and blessings.

Angela Hope-Murray D.O. has been a practitioner of complementary medicine for over 30 years. She has trained extensively in Ayurveda with dr Vasant Lad and has been a close colleague of Dr Robert Svoboda. She earned a Doctor of Osteopathy degree from the Oxford Brookes University and is a dedicated proponent of the Ayurvedic tradition in the UK.



Some of the ingredients in Chyvanprash: Amla, Guduchi, Shatavari, Brahmi, Ashwaganda, Bala, Pippali, Gokshura

THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

STILLING YOUR MIND, ONE THOUGHT AT A TIME

BY CHANDRIKA



“As a result of Meditation new channels are formed in the brain, new thought currents are generated and new brain cells are formed. // Meditation and Mantras – Swami Vishnudevananda

The Health benefits of Meditation

Meditation practitioners know it works – for some of us, however, the question may arise: is there scientific proof? Today, thanks to great improvements in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and other imaging techniques, there is a growing body of evidence of both physical and mental health benefits of meditation. This article looks at the most interesting aspects of the current scientific research on meditation.

A short note on meditation research

Many studies tend to use a small number of subjects for a relatively short time – making their outcome less reliable. Keep this in mind when looking at scientific research on meditation and yoga. One way of getting around this problem is to take all the smaller studies on the same topic and make one big study out of their findings. This is a scientific review.

General Health

It may sound counterintuitive that mere

“sitting and concentrating” should improve physical health, but it does.

Regular meditation strengthens the immune system and may reduce inflammation and biological aging. One small study showed that mindfulness meditators produced more antibodies (a function of the immune system) in response to vaccination than those who didn't meditate.

Participants in another study of just 5 days of 20-min per day meditation had a significant decrease in stress-related cortisol and an increase in immune system activity as well as less anxiety, anger and fatigue, confirming the connection between stress and the immune system and emotional wellbeing.

Even more inspiring: these effects were shown with mindfulness meditation; just imagine the boost your immune system will get with meditation practices that actively foster positivity like mantra meditation or loving kindness meditation.

A strong immune system is the foundation



of physical health, and research (albeit all smaller studies) has shown that meditation helps a variety of medical conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, asthma, type II diabetes (lowering blood sugar and insulin levels), PMS, headache, and other acute and chronic pain (raising pain thresholds, perceived pain intensity and anticipatory anxiety). By also increasing sattva, vairagya and viveka, which automatically lead to making better lifestyle choices, meditation may help in more than one way to stay healthy and happy.

High blood pressure and stress are risk factors for heart disease, and meditation reduces both. Scientific results are so convincing that the American Heart Association included meditation in their official guideline for the treatment of high blood pressure. In addition to conventional treatment (the "blood pressure pill"), they recommend adding meditation and/or other mind-body techniques such as yoga.

Stress and Mental Health

Stress relief and -management is one of the most common reasons why many people meditate. Regular meditation has been found to stimulate the relaxation response (the parasympathetic nervous system) and to shut off the sympathetic nervous system. As mentioned before, meditation decreases cortisol, the hormone of chronic stress.

Positive Psychology has beautifully shown that positive emotions and relaxation are linked: Self-generated positive emotions

via loving-kindness meditation increase the body's relaxation response (parasympathetic nervous system) and feeling socially connected, both these things help increase positive emotions. Researchers concluded that positive emotions, positive social connections, and physical health influence one another in a self-sustaining upward-spiral dynamic.

Meaning: The more you relax, the easier it is to become positive and to feel connected. The more positive and connected you feel, the more you relax, which in turn makes you feel more positive and connected and so on and on..... The conclusion for the Yogi: A good time to meditate on positive qualities is after final relaxation to prolong relaxation and boost positive feelings and mood.

How does this translate into real life? Meditation improves psychological and cognitive functions, including attention, concentration, memory, compassion, and empathy, which are all factors of emotional wellbeing. It activates regions of the brain, which improve mood. These effects can be felt: Large reviews show that contemplative practices like meditation can reduce stress and increase well-being in comparison to active psychotherapy. For a group of nurses, mindfulness meditation proved to be an effective strategy for preventing and managing workplace stress and burnout. Other reviews found that meditation reduces psychological stress, PTSD, anxiety, pain intensity and depression, but better quality studies are needed for definite proof.

It would follow that meditation should also have a therapeutic benefit for insomnia, phobias, and eating disorders, but here also, studies are too small to really say.

Meditation changes the brain

The brain constantly changes and restructures itself according to our physical and mental actions, and meditation really does change the brain. These structural changes can be: increased volume and density (i.e. growth) of various brain regions. In fact, the most marked innovation in meditation research has been the ability to examine these structural as well as functional changes in the brain. Imaging techniques are now sensitive enough to show structural changes of the brain as a result of long-term practice.

This means we can see beyond the brain's momentary activity during meditation, proving the incredible effect that with meditation (and other yogic practices) we rebuild our brain- we actually can change ourselves.

But how do we experience this change in our brain? A study of longstanding Buddhist meditation practitioners demonstrated that the resting state of the brain may be altered by longterm meditative practices. While it may be obvious that during meditation we feel good, are positive and less stressed, the point here is: This state persists in times when we do not actively meditate- which for most of us is our daily lives.

One review of almost 300 meditation practitioners found numerous longterm effects on the brain. Several brain regions had increased in volume and density, including areas key to meta-awareness (being aware of your emotions and feelings in the moment you are experiencing them), body awareness (being more receptive to your body's signals: tense shoulders, for example), and self and emotion regulation.

This means long-term meditation practice helps us control and inhibit negative emotions (fear, worry) and emotional responses. It helps us distance ourselves from our emotions. It strengthens our capacity for higher thinking, executive functions and control of instincts. It helps us focus and pay attention and increases memory, empathy and compassion.

Other research has concluded that meditation is brain-protective, because long-term meditators seem to lose less brain tissue with age compared to those who do not meditate.

Neural networks and concentration

Another, relatively new and very interesting field of research is the study of neural networks in the brain, linking the practice of concentration to positive mental health outcomes.

We have already heard that the practice of meditation may transform the resting state into a more meditative state. The

“When the mind is turned to a particular thought and dwells on it, a definite vibration of matter is set up and often, more of this vibration is caused, the more does it tend to repeat itself to become a habit, to become automatic. The body follows the mind and imitates its changes.”

Thought Power” - Swami Sivananda

“Meditation kills all pains, sufferings and sorrows. Meditation produces sense of oneness.

Meditation is an aeroplane that helps the aspirant to soar high in the realms of eternal bliss and everlasting peace. It is a mysterious ladder that connects earth and heaven and takes the aspirant to the immortal abode of Brahman.” - Swami Sivananda

opposite of meditation (or concentration) is daydreaming or mind wandering. With a new technique, the so called fMRI (= functional magnetic resonance imaging) we can see whether the brain is daydreaming or concentrating. The fMRI does this by identifying two networks in the brain:

When we concentrate, we activate a network of brain regions: the Task-Positive Network (TPN). When we daydream (inattentive wandering of the mind and ruminating) the Default Mode Network (DMN) is active.

Both act like two people on a seesaw: You can either switch on one or the other, not both at the same time.

Studies suggest that increased DMN activity (more daydreaming and less concentrating) may reduce the ability to think and concentrate (cognitive performance), and in turn, reduced DMN activity (less daydreaming and more concentrating) improves cognitive performance. Increased DMN activity has been associated with depression, anxiety, and addiction. It becomes obvious when we think about it: giving in to daydreaming promotes depression and anxiety. Concentration creates happiness.

Health is wealth, peace of mind is happiness, yoga shows the way.

“ Swami Vishnudevananda

The wonderful news here is that meditation, “ has been associated with reduced activity in the DMN in a resting state (= while we are not meditating). This means regular meditation helps reduce DMN activity in our daily lives. This improves attention and memory and supports positive health outcomes. Reduced DMN activity may be one of the main reasons behind the many mental health benefits of meditation as mentioned above.

Meditation is a wellspring of health and happiness. Even a little but regular practice is literally transformative for body and mind and hopefully there will be many more studies proving this in the future.

Chandrika is an Ayurvedic therapist, medical doctor and a Sivananda Yoga Teacher. She teaches anatomy and physiology in the Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Courses in Europe. She co-authored the book Practical Ayurveda (Dorling Kindersley)



SIVANANDA YOGA TAPASWINI ASHRAM GUDUR, INDIA

Inaugurated in 2017, Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Tapaswini ashram is situated in a lush valley near the quiet town of Gudur, Andhra Pradesh. The ashram consists of over fifteen acres of land with mango orchards and a delightful variety of flora. Its closeness to Chennai—three hours by car—makes it an ideal getaway for city dwellers. In the centre of the ashram is a beautiful temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, Shri Dakshinamurthy and other deities including Ganesha, Subramanya, Raja Rajeshwari, Hanuman and the Navagrahas. We have a herd of beautiful Gir cows. Their presence adds immense positivity to our surroundings.

The ashram was donated by the Tapaswini Trust and we have renovated as well as constructed new buildings, including double rooms, dormitories, the Yoga Hall, dining area and kitchen. We grow a variety of vegetables and have planted trees, with drip irrigation to provide an efficient watering solution as well as conserve water. Our aim is to spread the word about the ashram and slowly build a community to help us grow together. We can accommodate almost ninety guests and plan to increase this number in the future. We have successfully conducted TTC, Sadhana Intensive, Kids' & Teens Camp and Yoga Sadhana Programme.

<https://www.sivananda.org/gudur>

GUDUR ASHRAM STAFF



Sandeep



Kalesh



Sharmeen



Niranjana



Stuti



PERMACULTURE AND YOGA

AN INTRODUCTION

BY JEREMY THOMPSON

“ Permaculture is a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labor; and of looking at plants and animals in all their functions, rather than treating any area as a single product system. ”

- Bill Mollison

Permaculture appeared in the mid 70's as a symptomatic response to a quickly changing world.

While so many forests and wildlife reserves are exploited and transformed into large scale crop or cattle production, when natural resources are exploited faster than they are created by mother earth, in an age when the Human specie evolved into a being with so much influence and power that he is capable of creating long term damage on that very environment that feeds him, and when all of the natural laws of life seem to be disregarded in the face of the materialistic religion that we impose upon ourselves, permaculture is like a beam of sunlight through a dark sky.

It is not a method. Neither is it a step by step guide or a miraculous solution that can free man from himself. Well exploited, permaculture is a philosophy and a way of life that can help counter many growing

problems such as scarcity of quality food, a life with no meaning separated from natural cycles, isolation from community and the growing energy crisis we are already experiencing.

As the founders, Bill Mollison and David Holgrem presented permaculture, it is a collection of natural and moral principles based on the sheer and scientific observation of mother nature.

Philosophies vulgarized

– or how the age of information extracts meaning from philosophical contexts

It seems that in this modern day of age, information travels extremely quickly. This gives one access to so much knowledge if he is willing to look into it. It is also an opportunity for many to vulgarize philosophical systems in order to make them more accessible to the general public. However, it doesn't make population more intelligent or aware.



If, to a certain aspect, it develops a form of consciousness concerning a specific matter, it simultaneously lessens the philosophy and turns it into a “to-do” method or a set of rules which are amputated from their philosophical and cultural background. This obviously happened to yoga which is generally considered as a set of gymnastic postures you would practice once a week or at best once a day in order to improve your general health condition.

This is, however, an illusion. Yoga is much more than asanas, and one may practice asanas all day through, and never meet the state of Yoga, whilst another might not practice asanas at all but be a great yogi, despite the apparent disconnection with the yogic culture. This is what happened to permaculture when it went viral around the world. If I mention permaculture, you might visualize vegetables growing on lumps of earth, or gardens in which everything is mixed together.

You may see people working barefoot with dreadlocks, or weeding acres of land by hand in order to sustain a garden without the use of chemicals. You may see small family farms, chickens and ponds, people burying logs or sleeping on their garden chairs. You may have an idea about it being a gardening way for the lazy.

Whilst permaculture excludes none of the previous, it is not what it is about either, because such a vision of permaculture is like imagining an ascetic in a cave of the Himalayas or the most improbable posture when we speak of yoga : it misses the point. Yoga is a way of life. So is permaculture. It rests upon principles that are in compliance with the philosophy.

Principles, not rules !

As you will find out, the principles of permaculture correspond very logically with the Vedantic philosophy and way of

life. They are very much in relationship with Yamas, the first ethical branch of Raja Yoga. Permaculture originally meant “Permanent agriculture” but was quickly expanded to “permanent culture” since the social dimension is integral to the philosophical system.

Main principles include “observe and Interact”, “Catch and Store Energy”, “Obtain a Yield”, “Apply Self Regulation and Accept Feedback”, “Use and Value Renewable Resources and Services”, “Produce No Waste”, “Design From Patterns to Details”, “Integrate Rather Than Segregate”, “Use Small and Slow Solutions”, “Use and Value Diversity”, “Use Edges and Value the Marginal”, and “Creatively Use and Respond to Change”.

Design – or how to create resilient ecosystems as a whole

The main tool used to create a resilient ecosystem is design. Design in permaculture means to planify, project and create a sustainable ecosystem which answers the needs of all living beings.

It is the root of the tree, that without which nothing can hold and grow. When a design has been studied and thought of seriously enough, and has included social, economical, political, ecological and environmental reflexion, it is ready to be put into application.

It is important to note here that nature and life constitute a perpetual movement and therefore modifications can and often will appear with time. This corresponds to the principle “Apply self regulation and accept feedback” (viveka, discrimination). Simply using a lot of tools in a disordered manner leads to confused results just like absence of methodology or vision in your sadhana (practice) leads to unclear outcome.

Is permaculture a solution to modern age crisis ?

... and some metaphysical concepts

Is permaculture a solution to a growing crisis ? The answer is yes... and no. The world as we know it today is the image of ourselves, our aspirations and desires, our thoughts and fears. Saying that the problem relies on nothing but a materialistic plane is very wrong and limiting. However, evolution is a fascinating thing and its ways are numerous. If someone decides to “green the desert”, then that is an opening also for higher consciousness to interfere, and stuck minds can be inspired or break free from old and obsolete beliefs.

On the materialistic level, permaculture definitely offers the solutions to a better, healthier, cleaner and more resilient human lifestyle that integrates the whole.

Through design, small or large areas are modeled in order to offer locally grown food, access to shelter and services as well as proximity with a community. The main strength of the philosophy is to think of systems as a whole and create coherent design that respects life in a universal way.

Just like Yoga, the principles that govern permaculture may be applied independently from any culture or religion. There is no dogma or even any rules. Only principles that are based on universal moral ethics such as non-violence and honesty.

Other principles rest upon the observation of natural laws of life such as the absence of any waste in nature, the cycle of elements and resources in natural systems. To the rational scientific mind as to the spiritually advanced being, they will appear as common sense. They apply to every region of the planet.

Reflexions on human nature

It is interesting to observe, though, how

much the modern human community is separated from such simple principles and ethics of life. In a world of physical, mental and spiritual crisis, is it randomness that led our food to be sprayed with poisons, that modern agriculture has a low energetic efficiency and caloric outcome for a huge carbon footprint ?

Does the sense of family and community reside more on superficial markers than on strong truthful relationships ? Is it accidental if mankind searches for answers outside himself, depending on exterior stimulation for a moment of forgetfulness ? It is not.

The crisis we experience in this 21st century is very much in relationship with the way we live our lives : ignorant and dependent. Ignorant of the true nature that surrounds us and the one within ourselves, and dependent on the outer to bring us answers to our lives. Our fear and ignorance made us accept things which no human could have accepted had he more of viveka, discrimination from right and wrong, and was he more in resonance with ahimsa, non violence or if he pursued the truth, and nothing but the truth. Of course this ignorance is not new.

But mankind, as mentioned earlier, has reached levels of power and control which make his ignorance more dangerous than ever before as the repercussions are worldwide and more impacting and dangerous for all living creatures.

We cannot rely on our minds or instincts to find solutions. As Albert Einstein once said : “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”. We have to step out of the box. Shift paradigms. It starts by looking within ourselves and recognizing, not mentally, but from a deeper inner experience that incoherence and duality is deeply rooted within us. From there, from that space of silence and light, we work upward.

A new way to serve the divine

It is a worldwide and new duty (dharma) for men and women conscious of the ecological and political crisis we face to take responsibility and cherish the earth with whom we share our journey. Every person has a way to contribute. You shouldn't see too little or ever feel contented. It is like your sadhana (practice). Even if your progress appears slow and maybe insignificant, adjust, adapt and keep working ! You never want to ally to the dark side.

Even if you die and didn't reach your objective, at least you did your very best, and your soul grows. A single drop of water in the ocean is worth your effort. In the name of peace. In the name of truth. In the name of honesty. In the name of strength. In the name of God.

Permaculture is just a word. It is, however, a fantastic way to serve the higher power through awareness of self as a microcosm and as a conscious actor in the scene of the universe.

How to act ? What can I do ?

Anybody can choose to make some changes. So how can you take action ? Every single one of us can choose to shed a new light upon the world and our habits that create the world we live in. It is of the greatest importance that you become conscious of the real problem and its pluridimensionality.

For this, you should read, research, question all of your actions and see yourself as part of the problem. Don't make others responsible. Don't point fingers. Instead, take action ! By this understanding you can enter the state of disinterested action or karma yoga. You will do the greatest good to yourself and therefore to the world as well.

Here are a few ideas for small or large scale actions :

- Review your consumption habits (foods, plastics, perishable articles, necessities).
- Find locally grown food with permanent soil cover and visit your local farmers.
- Watch and read articles on permaculture (inform yourself).
- Reduce your high energy consumption habits and find alternatives.
- Capture and store energy in your home (isolation, solar water heating, water recuperation, south windows etc...). Build ecologically and locally.
- Plant trees on your own land or in other areas. Create habitats for wildlife.
- Create a strong community around yourself in your local area for ecological action. Request help from professional permaculture designers if necessary.
- Spend time outside, observe and contemplate nature. Feel the presence of divine within all things and beings. Be vulnerable. Be inspired.
- Go slowly but surely (one step at a time).
- Think of how you can value things that are not perfect for the moment (for example you may have to buy non ecological products but you can share them with the community. You may have a business that produces waste, but maybe some of that waste can be valued, or a new concept created).
- Grow your own food. Plant trees that bear fruit and nourishment for future generations. Abundance starts today.
- Sensitize public with meetings,



projections, and your personal implication. Awaken higher ecological consciousness and necessity to act and shift current paradigm.

- Create a long term permaculture design on land you already possess or invest in land for this type of project.
- Financially support a permaculture project.
- In your own way, by all means possible, work towards autonomy for your family, farm or community.
- Never believe you know it all (or anything at all for that matter).
- Take a permaculture design course.
- Do your sadhana. Take up a spiritual journey. Look within. Get help.
- Journaling will help you measure your progress, limitations and needs on your path.

Awareness versus habits and mind - From thought to action

There is a great difference between knowing that a problem exists and actually being fully aware of it. It is like the gap that separates you knowing your breath from the actual awareness of your breath. One is pure mind whilst the other is true experience.

How can one watch a documentary about the pollution of waters and soil, about animal abuse or any other regrettable modern problem we face, and, within a few hours or days, go back to his life of habits having forgotten or dismissed the information in some dark area of the mind? Why is it that we know intuitively the practice of meditation is so important, and, yet, we keep thinking we have a lot of time and carry on our amnesiac lives? These are questions about the human nature.

Why is it so hard to change our habits? While science examines neuropathways and discovers that zones of pleasure and ease are associated with the known and comfortable, the ancient wisdoms as well as our intuitive knowledge tells us to look inward rather than outward. There is a path that must be followed for the ones that want to transcend past the known and enter the truth. It is not an easy thing to overcome our conditioning and beliefs.

However, it is a very possible task. How many of us wish we acted but never really do? How many desire a more nourishing life filled with joy, peace and a real meaning to our existence?

The vedantic yogic path is a way to self knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. Action, devotion, knowledge and self-control are all ways to the divine. We live on a material plane of dualistic nature but in the most subtle manner there is always only the One. Acting on any level with awareness, intention, detachment and faith will lead us closer to the divine.

Learn from the masters. Selfish action is what binds us to samsara (cycle of death and rebirthing). Permaculture is a good opportunity to practice detachment as we design for community and future generations. We think of the well-being of all living creatures. And yes, there remains some ego, but with such a constant introspection and practice, we get closer every day.

«Serve, love, give, purify, meditate and realize» was Swami Sivananda's favourite message to the world. It is your choice how you choose to serve because the ways are numerous.

Creating abundance, community, and helping life thrive is one very good way to serve the divine. Have you heard of the quote «ignorance is bliss»? This means that

while you live in ignorance, there are a lot of things you can do that you cannot when you enter the known. However that state of ignorance is also a state of suffering. When you enter the known, at least you know there is a reason for your suffering, but it's up to you to purify your mind and soul. It's work!

You have finally reached the step of the door to self realization. It is up to you to take the next step. And the ones after that. Now you know about permaculture. There is so much more you should look into and read about. This article wants to inspire you to look deeper inside your human nature, your limits, and go beyond the known.

As a final word...

There is a lot of hope that humanity, within our lifetime, can rise to a higher state of consciousness and will create a beautiful flourishing environment that respects all of life, an environment which is also optimal for spiritual growth. Permaculture ethics tell us to take care of mother earth, take care of humanity, and share resources equally.

What is your next step? How will you change your own life to change the world? What footprint are you leaving upon the world, and how can you make it more respectful and meaningful? The infinite possibilities of existence are within every moment. It is up to every single one of us to be the change we wish to see in the world... today.

Om Namah Sivaya

Jeremy Thompson took TTC at the Ashram de Yoga Sivananda in 2019 and is an inspired permaculture practitioner in the South of France.



ASHRAM & CENTER NEWS

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTRE *Berlin, Germany*



During the shutdown in spring the Sivananda Yoga Center in Berlin was closed for about 3 months. We started to teach online Yoga classes together with the Sivananda Yoga Retreat House in Reith, Austria and the Sivananda Yoga Centres in Munich and Vienna.

In spring and summer our little garden with the Asana platform was transformed into an oasis of peace. Swami Annapurnananda and Satya put a lot of care and love in cultivating flowers and herbs. The Asana platform was cleaned and painted freshly, ready for students to come. We reopened the center at the beginning of July and during the summer most of the yoga classes were taking place outside.

Everybody was enjoying the beautiful surrounding. Teaching continues now inside, following the social distancing rules and students are grateful that we are open and are able to offer classes, courses and satsangs.

SIVANANDA YOGA RESORT & TRAINING CENTER *Da Lat, Vietnam*



The year has been a busy one, despite COVID pandemic looming and many restrictions. We started with the initiation of a new SYHET Asia course in January, and a large TTC group in February, an ATTC group in March and a Sadhana Intensive in April. Guest visits were restricted for a few months, but many courses and classes continued online.

Due to the successful containment of Covid-19 in Vietnam the Ashram was able to reopen with normal functioning from May 1st.

Swami Sitaramananda stayed in Vietnam ashram the whole year and kept us inspired. We have welcomed many guests, including larger retreat groups, who are especially appreciative of the Yogic teachings on health, wellness and finding peace of mind within, in these difficult times. We have continued with online teaching, having found this an effective way to keep connected with students far and wide. Swami Sitaramananda has been broadcasting a regular satsang on Sundays which is translated into Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian. The residential TTC in July was successful despite being in the middle of the 2nd wave of Covid 19 in Vietnam. With Guru's protection and many efforts keeping heightened hygiene and social distancing, 59 students graduated, mainly vietnamese. In the summer, we were able to conduct a Children's Yoga camp, an Ayurvedic Abhyanga course, a Children's Yoga teachers training, Gentle Yoga teachers training, Restorative Yoga course, a Pratyahara and conscious relaxation course (Yoga Nidra) as well as usual meditation courses and retreats.

With Guru's grace, we were also able to conduct successfully the first TTC ON LINE FOR ASIA with 37 students from many countries and assisted by 39 teachers, translators and mentors. It was a technological and human feat with simultaneous translation into Japanese, Chinese and Korean and teachings happening at many locations at the same time (Dalat Ashram, Yoga Farm,

Japan Shojiko Retreat, Ho Chi Minh Center). Swami Sitaramananda, Swami Narayanananda, Shakti Chaitanya, Priya Chaitanya, Daya Chaitanya, Saraswati, Shambhu, Sivashakti, Sivakami, and about 15 more Staff of the ashram are keeping up with sadhana and we felt deeply God's and Guru's blessings and protection.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTRE *Da Lat, Vietnam*



Sivananda Yoga Da Lat Center has moved to a new place in a valley near the lake last March. It is 5 min away from downtown and yet very quiet. The new house has 3 asana rooms, 2 resident rooms, and 1 staff room.

During the lockdown of Covid-19, we had to close the center but still offered online classes. At the moment, we have already reopened the center and everything is back to normal. Swamiji's come and do satsang every week to build up the energy for the center.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA NATARAJA CENTRE *Delhi, India*



By Masters' Grace the closing months of 2019 and the first months of 2020, witnessed a slew of programmes and workshops apart from ongoing classes and courses. These included workshops on Shatkriya, Prana & Pranayama, Balancing Postures, Headstand, Yoga for Weight Loss Course among others.

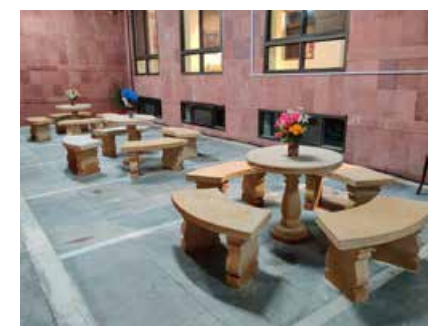
A special Vedanta Workshop on Bhaja Govindam in February conducted by Ravi Eashwaran Ji and a Body Mind & Wellness Workshop was conducted in March. A special demonstration

class was also conducted in Select City Walk, Delhi's premier shopping as part of our outreach programme.

Our festivals included Diwali, Christmas Eve celebrations, and Makar Sankranti saw participation from our children yogis as well as elders. 2020 was ushered in by mantra chanting as well as our cultural programme (Bhajan Sandhya) on New Year's Eve.

To continue spreading the universal message of Yoga, and for supporting students and staff during the lockdown phase, the Sivananda organisation moved to providing online classes and workshops.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA DWARAKA CENTRE *Delhi, India*



The Sivananda Dwarka Centre was very busy with projects right up to the lockdown. The basement was renovated, with air-conditioning now in place.

The asana halls on the first and second floors were redecorated and new murtis of Lord Vishnu and Lord Nataraja installed.

We now have a beautiful terraced area with marble tables and chairs and a hanging garden for students to relax before or after a class. A new wooden floor was laid in the Satsang Hall. Classes and courses continued on apace, and are now being held online.

SIVANANDA ASHRAM YOGA FARM *Grass Valley, USA*



Founded by Swami Vishnudevananda in 1971 and situated on 80 acres in the Sierra foothills of northern California, the Yoga Farm will celebrate its milestone 50-year anniversary in 2021. Beginning in 1974 with the first TTC taught by Swamiji himself, this humble Ashram has graduated thousands of Yoga teachers. Hundreds of karma yogis, through these years of service and selfless love, have contributed to make the Ashram a sweet, beautiful and vibrant place.

The Yoga Farm was locked down on March 16 up till now and around 15 staff (including swami Jnaneshwarananda, swami Dharmananda, Swami Adiparashaktiananda, Swami Vasishtananda, remain in the ashram keeping up the spirit with daily satsangs and on line Yoga classes and courses plus special intensive retreat on holidays: Memorial day on Eco-Yoga, Independence day on Vedic sciences, Labor day on Ayurveda, and upcoming Thanksgiving on Unity in Diversity. Many courses were offered on line: Thought Power, Meditation, Hatha Yoga Sadhana week, Stress Relief, Ayurveda, 4 Paths of Yoga, Vegetarian Cooking, and Gita classes, Vedic sciences and psychology, India arts, Zero Karma Diet cooking classes, Cleansing retreats.

The most inspiring courses this summer/fall have been the Taste of TTC intensive retreat on line, ending with TTC ON LINE IN AUGUST (20 students) and TTC OL EAST/WEST USA OCTOBER (25 students). The SIVANANDA YOGA HEALTH EDUCATION TRAINING (800 hr) resumed on line in September (16 students) .

In this changing and divine world, we are sending you from many temples at the ashram, its Yoga hall, and Radha Krishna Hall, plus 20 residential cabins, our prayers for health, peace and happiness.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA TAPASWINI ASHRAM *Gudur, India*



The Sivananda Ashram in Gudur has been busy with many projects going on simultaneously. Extensive landscaping has been carried out in the grounds, with solar street lights and solar fencing for agriculture installed.

We built a new Yoga Hall on top of the dormitory and constructed a beautiful thatched roof for the main Yoga Hall. We have brought in an environmentally-friendly drip irrigation system, a new generator and power room, we redid our signage and most evident – we repainted our magnificent temple. We also increased the number of our blessed cows. Courses were well -attended and we have taken our teaching online during this time.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTRE *Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam*



The HCM center was closed for one – two months in March-April during the height of the lockdown and the pandemic in Vietnam. Very creatively and bravely, the staff remaining in HCM city resorted to on- line teachings and kept themselves busy and most importantly kept their faith and sadhana strong while increasing puja and prayers.

The situation of Covid 19 came quickly under control in Vietnam and the Center was able to open doors and resumed activities in May. Staff who was stuck in the ashram came back and the Center came back to its vibrancy and creativity. During the summer, staff went again to help the TTC in July at the ashram which happened during the 2nd wave of Covid 19 but everyone was doing well.

In september, staff Swami Pranavananda and Ganga chaitanya participated in the inspirational teachings of TTC ON LINE ASIA. With new Karma Yogis coming out from TTC, the HCM Center reached record high student count in october with more than 500 students a week. We pray for the health and peace of all.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTRE *Los Angeles, USA*



LA Center switched to teaching online without blinking when it became apparent we could no longer let even a few students into the Center for class because of Covid-19. We started teaching two gentle open classes per day to complement the two 2-hour classes taught at the Yoga Farm.

Sivananda yogis who don't live near a Center are in heaven. We launched a 30-Day Pranayama Challenge on Instagram right away on March 20. The 30-minute free sessions at 8:00am and 5:00pm were meant as a steady support, educating on prana, immunity and positivity – and leading increasing numbers of rounds of anuloma viloma.

The Challenge has been repeated twice – morning session only – and those students are new frequenting our classes and workshops. We offered a 21-Day Surya Namaskar Challenge on Instagram as well.

The first Yoga 1 course we taught online was with students in Brazil. A whole new world opened up. We started teaching a course a week on a sliding scale, plus daily afternoon workshops. Students requested to attend morning satsang online, so now we have a sweet group joining every morning. We are offering weekend talks with our loyal presenters – easier logistics since they don't have to travel. Sitarist Hasu Patel is teaching a regular course on Indian Classical Music, to the delight of the students.

We are offering cook-along workshops – even guiding people to make dosas! Despite the extra prana needed to teach online, we are inspired to be developing a wider, and sincere, community, knowing that we will continue Zooming well into the future.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA MEENAKSHI ASHRAM *Madurai, India*



Construction is currently underway for a new reception building in close proximity to the ashram gate. The building will allow for a smoother arrival at the ashram and make it easier for us to welcome new guests. The four level building also will house new single and double guest rooms, offices, a meeting room, vehicle parking, and a terrace asana platform.

We have had to pause construction due to the lockdown situation but hope to resume quite soon and be complete the building in time for next season in October. During the last six months we had instituted new 6-day special programmes within the yoga vacation. The programmes go much deeper into aspects of practice and yoga philosophy.

The programmes have been well received, particularly by our long-term guests and those who return each year. We plan to continue to offer them in the next season.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTRE *Munich, Germany*



The center is open since July. We offer Drop-In classes, courses and satsangs. Teaching goes very well adhering to the social distancing rules.

New air decontamination machines help us to also offer safe conditions in autumn and winter time. Parallel to the onsite activities we also teach in the online schedule of the European Sivananda Yoga Centers.

SIVANANDA ASHRAM YOGA RETREAT, *Nassau, Bahamas*



We have been closed since mid-March and in total quarantine. We plan to re-open as soon as this becomes possible. It has been a special time of retreat, sadhana and a lot of study of Vedanta.

We started to transition our courses and programs to the online platform. We have been offering yoga, meditation, positive thinking, yoga sutra and Vedanta courses online with good attendance and great success.

We also had some successful online workshops with our guest speaker and all our satsangs – morning and evening – are livestream for free with many students joining. We are inspired by this new way to reach thousands of people all over the world, and especially those who are unable to travel to the ashram.

Our senior staff are happy to share their knowledge with this new technology and continue with our service to so many people who are in great need for those teachings, now more than ever.

SIVANANDA KUTIR *Netala, Himalayas, India*



Sivananda Kutir at Netala has been undergoing internal restructuring to use space more efficiently. Kailash double rooms have been renovated and the floor above now houses four new double rooms with attached bathrooms. The men's dormitory is now located above these with a wonderful view of Mother Ganga. Both sets of rooms have a comfortable common lounge area. The office building has also been reconstructed for office, housekeeping and boutique use, whilst on the floor above it a very much needed second men's dormitory has been created.

The temporarily- extended kitchen is now permanent with a cement roof, proper floor tiling and granite work surfaces making it a spacious and clean. Above the kitchen is a new double room with bathroom. The first and second floor rooms have plenty of open space around allowing enjoyment of the fresh Himalayan air. Do come and visit.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA DHANWANTARI ASHRAM *Neyyar Dam, India*



A new wheel chair-friendly path has been constructed connecting the Sivananda Institute of Health with the Ashram main entrance and Rama Hall.

As well as allowing access for patients for the clinic it has the added benefit of bringing a feeling of harmony with the nature around. A wonderful addition to our landscape.

ASHRAM DE SIVANANDA YOGA *Orleans, France*



From the tranquil and peaceful atmosphere of the Ashram in lockdown, a French online TTC took place in May and we joined an international online TTC with a group of French students in June. The classical yoga teachings found their way into the homes and hearts of the students who united online from various parts of the world.

The Ashram reopened on a small scale at the end of June and it was a joy to share the teachings of yoga again directly in person.

Onsite TTC's took place in July, August and October, an ATTC in July and a Sadhana Intensive course in August. An extra training module for the online TTC graduates was organised in August to complement their teaching skills.

The Hanuman building which has celebrated its first anniversary provides two luminous teachings spaces with beautiful views on the gardens and the temple. With the social distancing rules, the additional halls provide much needed extra space for yoga classes and serve as well as a spacious dining area. The permaculture garden and the newly constructed greenhouse are providing an abundance of fresh vegetables as well as an abundance of karma yoga harvesting them all. Staff feel grateful to share and practice the teachings of yoga in the protected environment of the Ashram.

SIVANANDA YOGA RETREAT HOUSE *Reith, Tyrol, Austria*



The Retreat House was closed since beginning of March until the end of June due to the Pandemic situation. By mid March, we started an Online programme, mostly free of charge with an overwhelming positive feedback.

A first Online Yoga Teachers' Training Course in German language took place in May, a second one in June in English, German, Spanish and French. Despite the physical separation, there was a great spiritual connection and authentic teaching situation. The Retreat House was open for yoga vacation since 26th of June until end of September. We were happy to be able to teach the teachers' training courses on-site in August and September. The next re-opening is scheduled for mid December.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTRE *Tokyo, Japan*



The Tokyo Centre closed in April because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The improved situation allowed our reopening in June. During closure, we launched various online classes and courses. This new way of interacting was much appreciated by our students. Tokyo Center is now gradually returning to normal, though the pandemic has brought about significant changes in lifestyle.

We will continue to provide online programs in addition to live classes from now onward. The number of those who are struggling with physical and/or mental imbalance due to self-imposed restrictions on going out is growing, resulting in an increased number of beginners who want to practice yoga at home. Beginner courses and such self-care programs such as Ayurveda have been more popular than regular open classes under these circumstances.

In September, the Tokyo Center and Shojiko Retreat staff and karma yogis were involved in the first ASIA TTC ON LINE. A group of 20 students from Japan, some of them had their planned residential TTC in May in Japan cancelled, participated on the TTC on line course along with other 17 students from different asian countries. We are happy to be able to serve to Japanese students such deep knowledge from our lineage.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTRE *Toronto, Canada*



Toronto center has been closed for on site classes for almost 4 months but we have quickly switched to an online platform. We offered free open classes throughout these months that allowed us to keep in touch with our students. Conversations with them after the class were meaningful and gave us lots of inspiration to continue teaching during this time.

We also organized many courses on Bhagavad Gita, Ayurveda, hatha yoga and meditation. Staff did a lot of cooking workshops that included sharing our meals virtually with students after the workshop.

We also had special guests courses that we ourselves felt very grateful to attend. We reached out to nursing homes and offered chair yoga classes that we felt especially inspired to offer. It was a good learning in adapting and adjusting to new circumstances.

Staff are grateful for peace and quiet that allowed us to stay well connected to the practice so we can continue to serve all to the best of our abilities.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTRE *Trivandrum, India*



The Sivananda Trivandrum Centre received a new coat of paint this year. It is now a wonderful beacon of light in the busy street and easily visible to all who go past.

We have received many passers by who have been attracted in and made inquiries about our classes.

SIVANANDA ASHRAM YOGA CAMP *Val Morin, Canada*



With love and gratitude in our hearts, the Ashram Yoga Camp re-opened at July's end to welcome back guests to our beautiful land. After months of being closed due to pandemic restrictions, the Ashram is alive with a vibrant community again.

We were truly blessed during the closure to have such incredibly creative and committed staff and students who lifted each other's spirits and collaborated to find engaging ways to share our hope and teachings. Moving our platform online, pooling teachers from India and USA in addition to our Ashram teachers, we were able to reach people from all over the globe. Together we hosted over 500 classes and programs with the support of close to 9000 participants.

Being open and able to offer TTC onsite was another delightful gift for our community. During the month of August, students were eternally grateful and thus eager to gain the full experience of our internationally acclaimed Teacher Training Course (all physical distancing, hygiene measures and restrictions were and still are observed and honoured to keep everyone safe). Fully invested in their journey, they left transformed and confident to share Sivananda Yoga teachings and philosophy with their communities.

We are still open and invite you to come stay with us a while! Enjoy a variety of nourishing retreats that will help soothe and quiet your soul. The mountains have magic here waiting for you.

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Unite for a healthy planet

A gathering of 100,000 minds

Every first Sunday of the month at 2pm (Central European Time) for 30 minutes

The Sivananda organisation has launched a worldwide peace action: gathering 100,000 meditation practitioners across the globe once a month for a 30 minute practice of meditation, positive intention and repetition of the peace mantra *Om Namo Narayanaya*.

When a certain percentage of people in the world align their minds at the same time with a strong positive intention, this can neutralise the chaos and unrest generated by negative thinking, ignorance, and greed. The Mantra *Om Namo Narayanaya* was given to humanity to be used in time of need to generate powerful waves of harmony and peace.

We invite all yoga students and anyone wanting to help creating a positive future for humanity to participate in this large scale peace mission. Let us join in this effort to bring about a shift in the world consciousness. The focus of our meditation will be the unity of all beings including our home, planet earth, as well as raising awareness towards global warming.

For further information on joining this peace action please contact:
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