

YOGA VICHAR

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A Deliberation on the Yoga System

Swami B.G. Narasingha

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Introduction

According to a 2017 survey, about 200 million people worldwide practice yoga. Yoga studios can be found in almost every city; popular books and journals on yoga can be found in every major bookshop; yoga and meditation is taught in hospitals, schools and even prisons. Yoga has been embraced by people from all walks of life, of all age groups – yoga, it seems, is taking the world by storm!

The origins of yoga go back to the timeless wisdom found within the Vedic literature. The *Upanishads* define yoga as “the firm restraint of the senses” and the process by which one “transcends the state of material conditioning.” As most serious practitioners of yoga know, the Sanskrit word yoga is derived from the root *yuj*, meaning to unite or harmonise the individual consciousness with the Supreme Consciousness. The true goal of yoga is the cessation of undesirable mental activities so that one becomes self-realised and situated in a state of transcendence (*samadhi*). Thus, yoga is the system by which one attains self-realisation and realisation of the Supreme.

However, most of what is presently referred to as yoga is something quite different. The world of yoga seems dominated by

commercialism, impersonal philosophy and instructors that are eager to apply their names to 'new' innovative techniques. For many practitioners, yoga is merely defined by popularity, fashion and a series of physical exercises that keep one healthy, trim, stress-free and beautiful and has as much to do with self-realisation as soccer, gymnastics or tennis. Many yoga instructors stress the physicality of *asanas* and lay little to no emphasis upon the true purpose of the yoga process. One can choose to ignore the spiritual aspects of yoga and concentrate solely upon the physical, but that isn't yoga – that is eastern gymnastics!

There are also instructors who mix quasi-spiritual teachings with yoga. Such teachers tell their students that through the practice of yoga they can become one with the universe, or that the goal of yoga is for the individual consciousness and the Supreme consciousness to merge and become one – in other words, to become the Supreme.

In this book, *Yoga Vichar – A Brief Deliberation on the Yoga System*, Swami B.G. Narasingha, based upon the Vedic version and his own unique experiences as a *bhakti-yogi* spanning almost six decades, cuts through the superficial hype and monistic misconceptions that surround yoga today. He brings us back to the basic understanding of what yoga truly is – namely the theistic path of spiritual perfection. At a time when so many seekers of the truth look towards the east for answers to life's questions, *Yoga Vichar* is a timely publication and it is our hope that the reader will obtain guidance and benefit from this book.

The Publishers

The History of Yoga

Yoga has become a household word in today's high speed, hi-tech, socially interactive world. It is taught in health clubs, gyms, studios, schools, *ashrams*, *yogashalas* and practiced at home, but oftentimes with no reference to its deeper cultural roots and higher spiritual goals.

In our modern times, the known history of ancient civilisations can be traced back for around three thousand years. Beyond that, history becomes a grey zone before all but disappearing. At best, historians have some speculative understanding of what the world may have been like tens of thousands of years ago. Many advanced civilisations have come and gone on this planet and all of these cultures have left us some remnants of their phenomenal achievements. In India there is a body of Sanskrit literature which are by far the oldest texts in the history of planet earth, recorded by the Vedic civilisation some 5000 years ago. Before that, this body of knowledge and history was passed down through the ages via an oral tradition. In this literature, which includes numerous *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-gita*, the *Puranas* and the *Yoga-sutras*, the origin of yoga has been recorded as coinciding with the very birth of the universe. Sceptics consider the *Vedas* to be mythology,

however the wisdom contained in the *Vedas* cannot be ignored. In the Vedic version of creation, there was Brahma, the first living being, who practiced yoga, austerity (*tapasya*), meditation (*dhyana*) and *mantra* meditation (*mantra-dhyana*) resulting in his realisation of the Absolute Truth.

At first nothing existed beyond Brahma – only darkness. Brahma sat in *padmasana*. He then controlled his breathing through *pranayama*, closed his eyes and went in search of his inner self through *dhyana*. Then, from the transcendental plane beyond the material universe, he received the *mantras* OM (ॐ), the 18 syllable *gopala-mantra* (क्लीं कृष्णाय गोविन्दाय गोपीजन वल्लभाय स्वाहा ।) and the 24 syllable *kama-gayatri* (क्लीं कामदेवाय विद्महे पुष्पबाणाय धीमहि तन्नोऽनङ्ग प्रचोदयात्।). In this book, only the OM *mantra* will be discussed in detail.

OM is known and recognised widely in the majority of spiritual cultures of eastern philosophy, from the Vedantists of Benares, to the Buddhists of Tibet, to the Theosophists of Los Angeles, and to the Hare Krishna movement. The full transcendental meaning of OM is given in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Vedanta* and the *Bhagavata*. In the *Rig Veda*. we find the following information:

ॐ इत्येतद् ब्रह्मणो नेदिष्टं नाम यस्मादुच्चार्यमाण ।
एव संसारभयात् तारयति तस्मादुच्यते तार इति ॥
ॐ आस्य जानन्तो नाम चिद्विवक्तन महस्ते विष्णो सुमतिं
भजामहे ॐ तत्सत् ।
ततोऽभूत्त्रिवृदोकारो योऽव्यक्तप्रभवःस्वराट् ।
यत्तल्लिङ्गं भगवतो ब्रह्मणः परमात्मनः ॥

One who chants OM, which is the closest form of Brahman, approaches Brahman. This liberates one from the fear of the material world; therefore, it is known as *taraka-brahma*. O Vishnu, Your self-manifest name, OM, is the eternal form of cognisance. Even if my knowledge about the glories of reciting this name is incomplete, still, by the practice of reciting this name I will achieve that perfect knowledge. He who has unmanifested potencies and is fully independent, manifests the vibration *omkara*, which indicates Himself. Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan are the three forms He manifests. (*Rig-veda*)

OM is described throughout the Vedic literature and by the great spiritual masters (*acharyas*) as the seed conception of theism. In the words of Shridhar Dev Goswami:

OM means 'Yes.' Always, wherever we cast our glance to search, in one word the answer is 'yes.' Yes, what you are searching for, is. You are searching for happiness, pleasure, joy and fulfilment. You are in want, and in one word, yes – fulfilment is there. OM (emanating from the flute-sound of Krishna) takes the form of *gayatri*, then the *Vedas* and *Vedanta-sutra*, then it takes the shape of the *Bhagavata* and the *lila*, the divine pastimes of Krishna.

The *Brahma-sambita* states:

अथ वेणुनिनादस्य त्रयिमूर्तिमयी गतिः ।
स्फुरन्ती प्रविवेशाशु मुखाब्जानि स्वयम्भुवः ॥

गायत्रीं गायतस्तस्मादधिगत्य सरोजजः ।
संस्कृतश्चादिगुरुणा द्विजतामगमत्ततः ॥

Then OM (*gayatri*), mother of the *Vedas*, being made manifest by the divine sound of the flute of Sri Krishna, entered into the mouth of Brahma through his eight ear-holes. The lotus-born Brahma, having received OM which emanated from the flute-sound of Sri Krishna, attained the status of the twice-born, having been initiated by Sri Krishna Himself. (*Brahma-sambhita* 5.27)

As a tree or fruit-bearing creeper begins with a seed, so everything begins with OM; the *gayatri mantra* begins with OM; the *Vedas* begin with OM; the *Upanishads* begin with OM; the *Vedanta* begins with OM and the *Bhagavata* begins with OM. Therefore, it can safely be said that our search for the Absolute Truth begins with OM. OM is the seed of theism.

Nonetheless, there is a class of philosophers known as *mayavadis* who suggest that OM *only* denotes Brahman (spiritual light), or the impersonal aspect of the Absolute Truth. This, however, does not correspond with the conclusion of the *Vedas* or the statements of the Absolute Truth Himself. In the *Bhagavad-gita* Krishna says, *vedyam pavitram omkara* – “I am the syllable OM.” As such, OM is known as the *maha-vakya* (great statement) in the *Vedas*.

OM clearly denotes Krishna, and the *Vedanta-sutra* begins with OM. Yet the *mayavadi* philosophers stress the *mantra*, *tat tvam asi*, which they interpret to mean, “I am that,” or “I am God,” and they try to give less importance to OM. OM should never

be thought of as impersonal. That is perhaps the greatest misconception amongst many philosophers and yoga practitioners.

OM is non-different from the sound of Krishna's flute. OM is never impersonal at any time – all that can be impersonal about OM is the misconception that one chooses to attach to it. The *Gopala-tapani Upanishad* discusses OM, and clearly establishes its non-difference from the Absolute Truth, Sri Krishna:

चतुःशब्दो भवेदेको ह्योकारः समुदाहृतः ।
तस्माद्देवः परो रजसेति सोऽहम्
इत्यवधार्यात्मानं गोपालोऽहमिति भावयेत् ।

The sound vibration OM denotes the *chatur-vyuha-tattva* of Balarama, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, and Sri Krishna. As OM transcends the three qualities of material nature, so also one should know oneself to be beyond the identification with the material body. 'I am the eternal servitor of Gopala (Sri Krishna, the cowherd boy of Vrindavana)' – this consciousness must be maintained at all times. (*Gopala-tapani Upanishad* 4I-42)

The *Gopala-tapani Upanishad* further enlightens us that from the Devanagari script of OM we find the conjunct of four syllables that form one sound:

रोहिणीतनयो रामो अकाराक्षरसम्भवः ।
तैजसात्मकः प्रद्युम्नो उकाराक्षरसम्भवः ॥

प्राज्ञात्मकोऽनिरुद्धो वै मकाराक्षरसम्भवः ।
अर्धमात्रात्मकः कृष्णो यस्मिन्विश्वं प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥

The letter 'A' denotes Balarama, the first expansion of Krishna, who is the substratum of the entire universe. The letter 'U' denotes Pradyumna, who is the Super-Consciousness of the universe. The letter 'M' denotes Aniruddha, who is the Super-Consciousness of each individual *atma* in the universe. And the dot (*bindu*) above the 'M' denotes Sri Krishna, the source of all *avatars*. (*Gopala-tapani Upanishad* 55-56)

Meditation on OM begins in this way and one who has realised this knowledge knows OM to be identical with Sri Krishna. A further conception found in the *Gopala-tapani Upanishad* establishes OM as referring to the Supreme Entities, Sri Sri Radha-Krishna, the feminine and masculine forms of the Absolute Truth:

प्रणवत्वेन प्रकृतिं वदन्ति ब्रह्मवादिनः ।
तस्मादोँकारसम्भूतो गोपालो विश्वसम्भवः ॥

The wise and enlightened sages declare that the prime potency of Krishna, Sri Radha, is non-different from OM. Sri Krishna, who is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe, is also non-different from OM. (*Gopala-tapani Upanishad* 58)

If one chants OM, remembering the words of the *Gopala-tapani Upanishad*, then one can attain all spiritual perfection. But if

one only considers OM to be a manifestation of the impersonal Brahman, then one certainly cheats oneself out of the chance of the ultimate realisation of the Absolute Truth.

Thus, yoga and *mantra* meditation can be said to have existed from the very beginning of the universe. Just as Brahma received *mantras* from the transcendental world, the same *mantras* have been passed down since that time and are present in the guru-disciple succession (*parampara*). One should receive such *mantras* for meditation from a genuine guru in disciplic succession. The *Padma Purana* warns that the chanting of *mantras* that are not received in a proper disciplic succession will not produce the desired results:

सम्प्रदाय विहीना ये मंत्रस्ते निष्फलः मतः ।

Any *mantra* that is not received from a disciplic succession is considered to be useless.

Yoga is not something that was created through a social evolution at some period in history. It has existed since the beginning and has been passed down through various societies and disciplic successions, and India has been its heartland since time immemorial.

Evidence of Yoga in Various Cultures

Yoga appears in the archaeological and literary records of civilisations other than that of India. Some scholars surmise that yoga was prevalent in Egyptian civilization, and other ancient societies, such as the Persians and Greeks, also practiced yogic meditations. Pythagorus is said to have gone to India and encountered the Gymnosophists, 'the naked yogis of India.' He also travelled to Egypt where he was initiated into Egyptian meditations. At the beginning of the 5th Century BCE, the Greek philosopher Empedocles taught meditation to his students. Empedocles said:

You must plunge beneath your crowded thoughts and calmly contemplate the higher realities with pure, focused attention. If you do this, a state of inspired serenity will remain with you throughout your life, shaping your character and benefiting you in so many ways. But if you direct your attention instead to the trivial things most people obsess about, the silly nonsense that dulls their minds, you will just acquire more objects which you will ultimately lose.

Later, Greek and Roman writers such as Strabo, Diogenes and Plutarch recorded some of the episodes of Alexander the Great's exploits in India in the 4th Century BCE. In Strabo's book *Geographica*, he cites Onesicritus, one of Alexander's companions, who describes the Gymnosophists as practicing aloofness in "different postures – standing or sitting or lying naked and motionless." Onesicritus says that these Gymnosophists considered the highest doctrine of life as "ridding the spirit not only of pain, but also pleasure", believing that, "man trains the body in order that his opinions may be strengthened."

Diogenes records how the Greek philosopher Pyrrho of Elis, was influenced by the Gymnosophists while travelling in India with Alexander, and on returning to Greece, imitated their habits.

In the 1st Century CE Plutarch recorded how Alexander captured ten Gymnosophists who had incited Sabbas (a local Indian king) to revolt against him. These Gymnosophists were said to be very intelligent, therefore Alexander decided to ask each of them a difficult question, declaring that he would put to death whoever gave an incorrect answer. Furthermore, the oldest amongst the Gymnosophists was made judge in the contest. The first Gymnosophist was asked, "Who are more numerous, the living or the dead?" He replied, "The living are more numerous, since the dead no longer exist." The second Gymnosophist was asked whether the earth or the sea produced larger animals. He replied that the earth did, since the sea was but a part of the earth. The third Gymnosophist was asked which animal was the most cunning. He replied that the most cunning animal was that which man has not yet discovered. The fourth Gymnosophist was asked why he had

encouraged Sabbas to revolt. He replied, "Because I wished him either to live nobly or to die nobly." The fifth Gymnosophist was asked which was older, day or night. He replied, "Day – by one day!" Alexander asked the sixth Gymnosophist how a man could be most loved. He replied, "If he is most powerful, yet does not inspire fear in others." The seventh Gymnosophist was asked how one might become a god instead of man. He replied, "By doing something that a man cannot do." The eighth Gymnosophist was asked which was the stronger, life or death. He answered, "Life is stronger, because it supports so many miseries." The ninth Gymnosophist was asked how long a man should live for. He replied, "Until death seems more desirable than life." Turning to the judge, Alexander asked him to give his opinion. The old Gymnosophist declared that each one had answered worse than the another. Upon hearing this Alexander said, "If that is true, then you should die for making such a poor judgement." "That cannot be," said the judge, "Unless you lied when you said that you would put to death the one who gave the worst answer." Alexander was impressed with the intelligence of the Indian Gymnosophists and dismissed them with gifts.

Many people, in and around the time of Jesus, such as Apollonius of Tyana (A Greek mystic), Simon Magus (a yogi famous for levitation) and Mani (a Gnostic Christian) also travelled to India where he was initiated into Buddhist meditations. The Gnostic tradition later entered Christianity and produced Christian texts that read like the *Upanishads*. Jesus himself is rumoured to have travelled to India and discussed Vedantic philosophy with the *brahmanas* of Jagannatha Puri. Generally speaking, we don't think

of Pythagoras, the Persians, the Greeks, the Egyptians and the early Christians as being yogis, but in fact, certain yoga practices were part of their development.

As a rule, people don't consider Buddhism as a type of yoga either, but that is largely because they lack a sufficient understanding of the historical development of Buddhism. Although Buddhism is partially different in its ideology to Indian yoga, it is nonetheless yogic. Buddhists sit in the same *asanas* and use Sanskrit language (or Pali, a Sanskrit derivative) for their *mantras* and prayers. One of the most popular forms of Buddhism in the world is Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetans were not originally Buddhists however but were a shamanistic culture. The Indian yogi, Padmasambhava travelled to Tibet and spread Tantric Buddhism there. Tibetan Buddhism is a mixture of Buddhism, shamanism, *tantra* and yoga.

In China there is the ancient system of Tai Chi, otherwise known as Chinese Yoga which has existed for centuries. In Japan we also find the Zen Buddhist tradition which is very yogic in its practices. Therefore, one could easily say that yoga was just as prevalent around the world in ancient times, as it is in our modern times.

Yoga as Science

We should look upon yoga as a science of consciousness, not a religion. Previously western scientists did not think that yoga had anything to contribute to our understanding of where we come from or what is the origin of our universe. But times are changing – if you research what is current in physics today, you will find quotations from the *Upanishads* in speeches and papers presented by notable physicists who have some knowledge of the Vedic literature.

Several years ago, a biologist named Robert Lanza wrote a book called *Biocentrism*. Lanza is the world's leading stem-cell therapist and clone scientist. Stem-cell therapy uses regenerative cells and proteins from the human body to heal people. It is both a very involved science and a very controversial topic amongst some sections of society. Lanza shook up the whole scientific community by saying that everything we think we know is wrong, particularly everything we think we know about the universe. The most widely accepted theory is that life appeared in the universe as a result of the Big Bang. In other words, life evolved from matter. However, Lanza postulates that the universe is a result of consciousness. Initially, though impressed with Lanza's book,

I did not think that the scientific community was ready for such a quantum change in their world view. However, I was pleased to discover that many scientists take Robert Lanza with the utmost seriousness, so much so that today, many scientific research institutes, such as the Max Planck Institute in Germany, have a department dedicated solely to the study of consciousness as the primal cause of existence. The understanding that consciousness produced matter and not the other way round is perfectly in line with yogic and Vedic conceptions.

Darwin, and those who follow in his footsteps, focus exclusively upon an evolution of material life-forms, leading from one species to the next, culminating in the human form of life. However, the yogic concept focuses upon the evolution of consciousness which manifests in various species until it reaches the human form. Human life is the opportunity for realising the nature of the Absolute Truth and ultimately attaining *samadhi* to transcend the world of birth and death. This is the Vedic paradigm. Consciousness exists before and beyond matter and matter is the result of consciousness. Because of a defect in consciousness, matter is formed, and thus the material universes manifest and we live surrounded by matter.

The yoga system aims to reverse that and to again attain pure consciousness, free from matter. Some like to say that there is a world of pure light – the *Vedas* call this the *brahma-jyoti*. Some ancient texts suggest that within the *brahma-jyoti* there are spiritual planets beyond this material universe, where there is spiritual life and pure consciousness with form. *Samadhi*, the ultimate goal of yoga, is the threshold between this world and

the world of pure light and pure light forms. These light forms are called Vaikuntha planets. The scientists are not exactly at the stage of understanding this yet, but it is a giant step for a scientist to claim that consciousness creates matter.

Historically, it sometimes seems that the further you go back, the more accurate an answer you will find. For example, nowadays physicists are trying to perceive what they call Dark Matter, which they claim makes up about 84.5% or more of our universe. You can't see it, you can't touch it, and you can't smell it. They don't know what it is, but they figure it must be everywhere. They call it an element and they call it Dark Matter and that is what they are looking for using a Super Collider in Switzerland, which costs almost a million dollars a day to run. According to their mathematical calculations, if we add everything we can see in the universe together, there is still 400 times more estimated mass than is observable. The Sankhya philosophy, which is part of yoga, explains what Dark Matter is and refers to it as the ethereal element. Sankhya says that there are eight material elements – earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence, and false ego. The ethereal element is everywhere and its properties are accommodating space for existence. Today's scientists are just figuring it out, but the sages of ancient India explained this in Sanskrit thousands of years ago. They didn't spend a million dollars a day trying to encapsulate it. What else did these sages say about life and this universe? If those sages understood that there is a subtle material element beyond our experience, which is a major contributor to the whole being of the universe, then why should we disregard what they said about yoga and spirituality? When it comes to physics in the ancient world, the yogis and

rishis of India even knew about the atom. Some of the early Greek thinkers such as Democratus and Leucipus also philosophised about the existence of the smallest particles coming together to form the universe – but nobody spoke about the atom again until the 19th Century. If we know that the *rishis* of India were right about these scientific theories, then why should we assume that whatever they wrote about spirituality is simply mythology? Albert Einstein is considered to be one of the most intelligent scientists that has appeared in the modern world. He wrote about the Theory of Relativity – he didn't do a turnaround on the weekends and write Spiderman stories for Marvel Comics. No – because he was present on a particular plane of thinking.

The idea of teleporting material objects from one place to another (even passing thru solid matter) was first spoken of in the west by Nikola Tesla at the beginning of the 20th Century. However, this concept can be found in the Vedic literature thousands of years ago. Teleportation has been shown in Hollywood movies, and is theoretically possible according to scientists such as Tesla, yet it has never been achieved by modern science. Yet we find that the yogic literatures speak about *prapti-siddhi* – the ability to extend one's hand to a distant place and bring back a physical object – for example, a yogi in South India may extend his hand and fetch a pomegranate from Afghanistan.

Another question raised by modern scientists is the question of life on other planets. According to the theoretical physicist and cosmologist, Stephen Hawking there almost certainly is life beyond our world. This again is a concept well explored in the yogic literature. Yogis have been described as travelling to

other planets by a method known today as warp drive theory or time-travel – the ability to warp time and space. Again, modern science admits that this is theoretically possible, yet NASA and the scientists of our time have not been able to achieve it. However, the yogis seem to have known this *siddhi* and were able to go to other planets in almost zero time. This is found in yogic literature and is currently supported by theoretical maths and physics.

Sponge Bob Yogis

One of the things I have noticed about the present day yoga scene is that it has become very commercialised, when in fact, the true teachings of yoga cannot be sold or bought. This begs the question, how much real yoga is actually being transmitted in so many schools, *asbrams* and *yogashalas* that sell the techniques of yoga? Real yogic teachings are a transmission between guru and disciple – not between a ticket-seller and a ticket-buyer! However, it is natural in the yoga culture that there should be some form of remuneration from the student to the teacher. This system is known as *dakshina*. *Dakshina* is not a specified amount of money or goods, but rather a sincere offering (according to one's means) from the student to the teacher in appreciation for having received the knowledge of yoga. *Dakshina* may be in the form of currency, a gift, or even an offering of something as simple as an apple or a flower.

The fact is that the most fundamental knowledge of yoga is oftentimes never transmitted to the student in the commercial schools of yoga, even after having paid an exorbitant price! There are two fundamental principles of yogic knowledge – firstly, as it is stated in the *Vedanta-sutra*, *athato brahma-jijnasa* – “Now in

this human form of life, one should endeavour to understand the Absolute Truth.” The second fundamental point of yogic knowledge is *aham brahmasmi* – “I am a particle of Brahman, a particle of pure consciousness. I am not this material body!” Brahman emanates as the spiritual effulgence of Bhagavan Sri Krishna’s transcendental form:

ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाहममृतस्याव्ययस्य च ।
शाश्वतस्य च धर्मस्य सुखस्यैकान्तिकस्य च ॥

I (Krishna) am the foundation of the immortal, imperishable Brahman, who is the basis of eternal *dharma* and supreme bliss (*Bhagavad-gita* 14.27)

We, as living beings, are eternal particles of that Brahman as stated in *Bhagavad-gita*:

ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सानातनः ।
मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ॥

The living beings of this world are My eternal particles. These living beings struggle with the five senses and the mind, which is the sixth sense within. (*Bhagavad-gita* 15.7)

These are the fundamental principles of yoga and self-realisation, yet these are completely excluded in almost all commercial schools of so-called yoga.

According to the Vedic wisdom, every individual living being is wandering in the universe through millions upon millions of

lifetimes in search of inner fulfilment and the Absolute Truth. It is not until one meets a bona-fide guru that his/her search comes to an end.

ব্রহ্মাণ্ড ভ্রমিতে কোন ভাগ্যবান জীব

গুরুর কৃষ্ণ প্রসাদে পায় ভক্তিলতা বীজ

According to their *karma*, all living entities are wandering throughout the universe. Some of them are being elevated to the upper planetary systems, and some are going down into the lower planetary systems. Out of many millions of wandering living entities, one who is very fortunate gets an opportunity by the grace of Krishna to associate with a genuine spiritual master. By the mercy of both Krishna and the spiritual master, such a person receives *mantra*-initiation (*diksha*) and instruction (*shiksha*) into *bhakti-yoga*, the top-most yoga system, thus enabling one to transcend the world of birth and death. (*Chaitanya-charitamrita, Madhya-lila* 19.151)

The situation today is that there are some who have learned yoga from a master without paying, who then turn around and sell those techniques to many naive people from the west. This in itself is a critical violation of the ethos of yoga.

Mysore in South India has now become the yoga hub with the followers of B.K.S. Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois. In my youth it was Hardiwar and Rishikesh – in particular, Swami Shivananda of Rishikesh who was a very renowned yogi at that time. The

first lessons I ever took on yoga were from Shivananda's disciple, Swami Vishnudevananda. The first practices we learned were passing a string through the nose and out of the mouth (*suotra-neti*). The next was swallowing about twenty feet of surgical gauze (*dbauti*) which is a cleaning exercise to help clear out the bile and waste in the stomach that transforms into toxins. Then there was colonics, followed by an exercise for clearing the nasal passage with water (*jala-neti*), which is important for practicing *pranayama*. All these exercises are known as *kriyas*. Only after doing all these *kriyas* and following a strict vegetarian diet, did we learn *asanas* and *pranayama*! This is the real yoga system. Now try to sell that as the introductory steps to yoga at a studio in New York or California!

Nowadays, people just learn to do some stretching which is more akin to aerobics than actual yoga and they do this on a spongy rubber mat which is itself toxic. In relation to this, a friend of mine has sarcastically coined the phrase 'Sponge-bob yogis'. The ancient Sanskrit text known as the *Yoga Yajnavalkya* states that one should perform yoga on a *kusba* grass mat. Traditionally, yogis would perform *asanas* on mats made of grass fibre, wool, cotton or even silk, but never on mats made from plastic or foam rubber.

Yoga must be performed with a pure mind, body, diet and surroundings. That is the first step in yoga. There is an internal physical purification that one must go through because so many toxins are in the joints and muscles. There are so many unwanted thoughts in the mind, so there is a necessity for mental purification also – in other words, yoga without purification is not yoga at all.

Purification continues with *pranayama*. I recently learned that some of the special forces in the U.S. military such as the Navy SEALs practice *pranayama*. They do simple *pranayama* to calm their mind and nerves before being deployed on a mission. *Pranayama* is very, very powerful. Meditation only starts after *pranayama*. Many people attend a yoga class where the instructor says, “We are going to teach you some *asanas* and then we are going to teach you meditation!” They start meditating, but there is no *pranayama* in-between. You cannot meditate unless you can control your life-air. When you practice *pranayama* the mind immediately becomes more peaceful. Unfortunately, *pranayama*, colonics and *kriyas* are not very exciting things to do, so they have not been marketed by the commercial yoga community. Some might say, “That’s okay! If people just get into it, they can ease into some of the more serious steps of yoga later and finally get it all right.” What really happens is that the vast majority of people never do that. They think that whatever they initially learned is all there is. Many are not taught that there are more serious stages to the process. Many are not even taught that yoga comes from India! Even if they do, it is very rare to find someone who knows what the highest goal of yoga is meant to be, and the highest stages of yoga can only be achieved through *abhyasa* (constant practice) – not simply by attending a weekly class or a one-month retreat.

I don’t subscribe to *Yoga Journal*, but whenever I’m in the United States, I take the opportunity to read some back issues. I can’t remember having ever seen an article on *samadhi* in *Yoga Journal*. *Samadhi* is the Sanskrit word for the ultimate state of pure consciousness, which is the main goal to be achieved through

yoga. The *asanas*, which are the most popular, are for the most part the most insignificant division of yoga. *Asanas* are meant to prepare the body for meditation. What I have seen many times in *Yoga Journal* and similar yoga publications are articles focused on weight loss and slimming one's figure, but nothing leading to self-realisation.

Occasionally, some people do inquire about the actual substance of yoga – where it came from, what it is meant to be and what the genuine yogic processes are. That is good, but there is also the commercial side of yoga. Despite the fact that it makes people feel better and healthier, it misses the fundamental purpose of yoga. Yoga means to unite with the Supreme Consciousness, but the so-called yoga of the commercial studios is completely focused on the side-effect of feeling healthy and strong. This isn't yoga, but *bhoga*, which means to increase one's sensual enjoyment.

Many teachers are more interested to sell yoga, rather than actually teach it. I won't mention any names, but I know some teachers in India and some that used to be in India, who knew exactly what they were doing – they were simply selling a product. They were not teaching their students what yoga actually is.

Vegetarian/Vegan Diet

Some years ago, I went on a surf trip to the Lakshadweep Islands and met a certified *ashtanga-yogi* who was also a surfer and had studied under a famous yoga instructor from Mysore. He was also an architect who worked for the prince of Dubai. He had been practicing yoga for eight years, and as we talked I was surprised to learn that he didn't even know that being a vegetarian is a quintessential part of being a yogi! I was very disappointed to hear several years later that he died of a heart attack. Doctors attributed this to his keeping an unhealthy non-vegetarian diet and his consumption of junk food. Unfortunately, he failed to follow some of the most rudimentary teachings of yoga and this led to his early demise.

During my conversation with him, I explained that at the Kumbha Mela festival held in India every twelve years, there are thousands of yogis of every description, some of whom have lineages that go back ten-thousand years. They are all vegetarian. At Kumbha Mela, if someone were to cook meat or attempt to sell meat, it would result in a massive protest. For the Indian yogi, to think of anything other than a vegetarian or possibly a vegan diet, is bizarre, bordering on the absurd.

Recently, I was surprised to read an article in a popular yoga journal about *ahimsa* (non-violence) which actually advocated the eating of meat. According to the author, one doesn't need to become a vegetarian or a vegan. Her interpretation of *ahimsa* was to, "reflect on ways you might support or be kinder, gentler and non-violent to yourself" – this included enjoying a meat-based meal if it made you feel good. This incredibly selfish sentiment goes along with the old 'if it feels good, do it' philosophy. This article completely overlooked the fundamental principle of *ahimsa* which means non-violence to any living creature, not just non-violence to yourself.

For someone who actually knows about yoga, meat-eating is inconceivable, but many yoga teachers today will say nothing, for fear of losing a student (which translates into losing a client). They will not even venture to take the risk of saying that, "Vegetarianism is an important principle – not only for human health and the well-being of animals, but also for the environment we live in." To reduce violence to the animal kingdom down to zero should be our first major goal, but in the case of commercial yoga, there is no emphasis on this point. If you stumble upon it yourself, then your yoga instructor might say, "Yes, that's good." In most cases, the instructors themselves don't follow vegetarianism because they haven't understood the importance of this principle. The yoga that is being taught today is like having a fragment of the Mona Lisa's cheek – only part of her smile is there, but it's not the whole picture.

At present, many vegetarians have turned to a vegan diet, rejecting milk and all dairy products. This is because getting real organic

milk in western countries is very difficult and cows in commercial dairies are grossly abused. Although this is certainly laudable, a vegan diet should not be confused with being a superior yogic diet. In fact, according to the *Vedas*, the ideal yogic diet, practiced by yogis consisted of milk and occasionally a few wild fruits and berries from the jungle.

Currently in India the necessity to reduce animal slaughter has become a major political issue. As of March 2017, all slaughterhouses have been completely banned in the holy cities of Mathura, Vrindavana, Haridwar, Rishikesh and others. This includes the slaughter of chickens, goats, sheep, buffaloes and cows. The issue of cow-killing has become a nationwide debate and it is already banned in several states with a potential lifetime imprisonment for offenders. Cow-killing and modern day slaughterhouses have only been in existence in India for a short period of time. Previously, cow-killing and the mass slaughter of animals, and even the eating of eggs was considered an abomination – not just by yogis, but by Hindu society in general.

Our readers may be surprised to learn that in previous times, not only was cow-killing prohibited in India, but in other countries as well, such as Japan, China, ancient Egypt and others. The history of how cow-killing began in Japan is as follows – in 1853 Commodore Perry of the US navy fired his ship's canons upon the port of Edo, forcing the sovereign nation of Japan to submit to trade relations with the United States. Not long after this, a small Buddhist temple named Gyokusen-ji was converted into the first U.S. Embassy headed by Consul General Townsend Harris. Upon taking office, he ordered a cow to be brought to

the embassy where it was killed and roasted for his lunch. Before this event, no cow had ever been slaughtered in Japan. In 1931, the embassy became a shrine again and was renamed, 'The Temple of the Slaughtered Cow.' Even today, the Japanese regularly come to this shrine to offer incense, flowers and prayers of forgiveness for this abomination.

What is often misunderstood is why the cow is protected, revered and even worshipped depending on the culture of the country. The primary reason for this is that the cow is a provider and the cow's two most important contributions are milk and dung. Cow dung is, for all practical purposes, a complete fertiliser and also antiseptic. The cow's urine has a medicinal value in Ayurvedic, Chinese and Unani natural medicines. Most important of all is cow's milk which is a complete vitamin, protein and energy source for humans. Throughout history, we see that human beings from their infancy until old age have been nourished and benefited by drinking whole milk. Whole milk is considered a miracle food – from milk so many nourishing milk products can be made. Because of this, the cow, being a giver of abundant milk, is essential for the development of the body and mind – thus the cow is protected, revered and worshipped. In India, the cow is considered one of the seven mothers and the bull is considered to be father because he assists man in ploughing the fields, producing grains, vegetables and herbs that sustain life. For this reason, in advanced civilisations in Asia, parts of Europe and North Africa, the cow and bull were never slaughtered for food. The seven mothers of Vedic culture are mentioned by the great sage Chanakya as follows:

आत्ममाता गुरोःपत्नी ब्राह्मणी राजपत्निका
धेनुर्घात्री तथा पृथ्वी सप्तैताः मातरः स्मृताः ।

One's own mother, the wife of the guru, the wife of a *brahmana*, the king's wife, the cow, the nurse and the earth – these should be considered as our seven mothers. (*Chanakya Niti Shastra* 5.23)

Ashram Life

There are different types of *ashrams* in the world – they are not all the same. Some *ashrams* may look very similar or even the same at the beginning, but as a student progresses, they become very unique within themselves. They have their own special identity and special interests. They may have slightly different philosophies also, but all genuine *ashrams* follow the standard of Vedic literature and the standard set by self-realised yogis and *acharyas*.

Some *ashrams* and charlatan gurus may teach that you are God. They teach that you are controlling the sun, the moon, the rain etc. during your meditation. *Ashrams* that teach these ideas are factually not traditional or even authentic in the strict sense of the Vedantic and yogic teachings. The fact is, we are not God! We are not even in control of our own destiny, what to speak of the sun and the moon? We do not know how many hairs are on our head, or how many have fallen out today. We cannot control the digestion of our food. The self is certainly not the Supreme Controller of all these things. However, the self is a spark of divinity – like a spark from a fire, or a ray of light from the sun. The self is qualitatively the same as the Absolute Truth, but

quantitatively different. The spark has the qualities of fire, but does not have the totality of fire; a ray of light has the qualities of the sun, but does not have the full potency of the sun. Being a part of the Absolute Truth, the living beings have some of the qualities of the Absolute Truth, but not in full. There is a popular Bengali saying amongst common people in India – *yata mata, tata patha* – “Whatever path you take leads to the same goal” (all roads lead to Rome), but in authentic *asbrams* this is never the teaching. There are three stages of self-realisation mentioned in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavata*:

वदन्ति तत्तत्त्वविदस्तत्त्वं यज्ज्ञानमद्वयम् ।
ब्रह्मेति परमात्मेति भगवानिति शब्दयते ॥

The Absolute Truth is realised in three phases of understanding by seers of the Truth, and all of them are identical. These phases of the Absolute Truth are expressed as Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan. (*Bhagavata* I.2.II)

Brahman means realisation of the spiritual effulgence emanating from the Absolute Truth, Sri Krishna. Paramatama means the realisation of the localised presence of the Personality of the Absolute Truth, Sri Krishna, situated in the hearts of all living beings, guiding their wanderings through millions upon millions of lifetimes. Bhagavan means realisation of the name, form, qualities and activities of the Absolute Truth, Sri Krishna. These are the three stages of realisation mentioned throughout the yogic literature of India – Krishna as the Brahman effulgence, Krishna as the localised consciousness in all living beings and Krishna as Bhagavan, Reality the Beautiful.

If you explore a particular path it may only take you to a certain level of realisation, because that is as far as it goes. All paths of yoga do not necessarily lead to the ultimate realisation of Bhagavan. Some paths of yoga only elevate a person to the stage of Brahman, others to the stage of Paramatama, and yet others, such as the practice of *bhakti-yoga*, lead one to the realisation of Bhagavan. These practices are known as *sadbana*. *Sadbana* includes such things as waking early in the morning at 4:00 am, immediately bathing and performing other yogic cleansing practices, then performing meditation and *mantra* meditation such as OM, *gayatri*, *gopala-mantra*, *kama-bija mantra* and the *Hare Krishna maha-mantra*:

हरे कृष्ण हरे कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण हरे हरे
हरे राम हरे राम राम राम हरे हरे

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Hare Rama hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare

These activities are usually performed between waking and sunrise or shortly thereafter. OM and *gayatri* meditation are performed three times a day at sunrise, midday and sunset, whereas *maha-mantra* meditation can be performed throughout the day and is not restricted to time, place and circumstance. In *asbram* life, the day is often filled with common devotional practices, such as study of the *Vedas* and the philosophy of yoga, working in the *asbram* gardens, performing menial tasks for the maintenance of the *asbram*, and on occasion performing Vedic rituals and observing fast days and spiritual festivals. A yogi in an *asbram*

is engaged 24-7, 365 days a year in the various practices of yoga. The true yogi is not someone who practices yoga for just a few minutes a couple a times a week. The process of self-realisation requires a lifetime commitment. A life in an *ashram* is the best place to achieve this. Some people will stay in an *ashram* for a few weeks, six months, a year or two, and some spend a whole lifetime there.

In Sanskrit, the word *ashram* literally means a place of no work – but if you stay for more than a few days, someone will eventually hand you a broom, a rag, or ask you to do some work in the garden. An *ashram* means a place of no material work. In this world we work to earn a living, to acquire material possessions or to increase our own name and fame. Some people also work for the good of society, but such people are very rare. Most are simply working for themselves and their ‘extended self’ which means their family or community. In an *ashram* everything you do is not for yourself, but for your spiritual self.

The Laws of Karma

Karma means work, and work means reaction. It is similar to Newton's Third Law – “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” The saying, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” has a basis in karmic understanding. If you abuse people and cause others to suffer, the same thing will eventually happen to you. Of course, *karma* is generally understood in terms of human behaviour and our interaction with other people. However, this should be extended to the whole environment, and in particular to our animal friends. Selfish work produces a bad reaction.

Most people think *karma* is always bad, but the actual word *karma* means good results. When you study the laws of *karma*, you will find there are three types – *karma*, *vikarma*, and *akarma* – good reaction, bad reaction and no reaction.

Karma means good work for your next life. For the yogi there is never just one life – we are here now in time and space, and have been countless times before, in this universe and others. The question is where will we go and in what state of consciousness will we be in the next life? This is reincarnation, or *samsara*. The

thing called the 'self', is known in Sanskrit as the *atma* and it is the *atma* that travels from one body to the next, taking on the forms of various species according to one's good or bad activities in life. The *atma* never ceases to exist, it has always been and always will be.

न त्वेवाहं जातु नासं न त्वं नेमे जनाधिपाः ।
न चैव न भविष्यामः सर्वे वयमतः परम् ॥

There was never a time that you, nor I, nor all these warriors assembled here did not exist. Nor shall we cease to exist in the future. (*Bhagavad-gita* 2.12)

Vikarma means bad results. 'Kill and be killed' is basically the law of *vikarma*. We are involved in so many things in this world that cause suffering to other beings, and this suffering eventually comes back to us. Eating meat necessitates the killing of animals. In Sanskrit, the word for meat is *mamsa*. This is a compound word (*mam* – I, and *sa* – he). The meaning is, "In this life I kill him, and in the next life he will kill me!" People are wondering why the world is the way it is. Why is there suffering? The problem of suffering is something that has troubled every philosopher and every religionist in the world from the beginning of history. India understood this problem thousands of years ago and understood that suffering is based upon the laws of *karma*. As long as people commit violence in order to feed themselves, particularly by the mass slaughter of animals, then there will be continued suffering of all types in this world – war, disease, terrorism, etc. Weapons of mass destruction, by some people, are considered to

be the direct reaction of factories for the mass slaughter of animals. If we want peace in this world, then we have to reduce our violence towards the animal kingdom.

Work that is done in an *asbram* doesn't have a material reaction – that is called *akarma*, or work that produces no further material reaction to enjoy or suffer. *Akarma* is activities such as *sadhana* and devotional practices that situated you in transcendence. *Akarma* takes one to a higher plane, a transcendental dimension where there is no good or bad. Good and bad are simply dualities of the material world. *Akarma* elevates one's consciousness and ultimately helps us to attain a life beyond matter. In yoga, this is called *samadhi* (perfection).

Once, one of my students asked me, “Can you see God?” I replied, “You mean that you can't?” It is just a matter of perception. It is not that I look at the sky, the sun or the ocean and I see Krishna dancing with His flute. No – by an evolution of consciousness I understand the emanations of this universe and all beings in it come from that Supreme Spiritual Being. In that sense, yes – I can see God. For someone who does not have the training, the experience or the purification of consciousness, everything is very jaded.

From the *Bhagavad-gita* we learn that Krishna is the Supreme Conscious Being from which all other minute units of consciousness emanate. He is known as Yogeshvara, the Master of all yogis. He speaks the *Bhagavad-gita* to his student Arjuna and shows him that everything has a spiritual dimension – you just need the eyes to see it.

We think that the world is here for us to enjoy, but what will the next generation enjoy? There will not be anything left unless we curb our present spirit of enjoyment. If enjoyment is what the world is for, then why are we running out of so many necessities? In other words, philosophically, that cannot be the spirit of the world. The vision of the world should be that we are an organic spiritual whole, we are all interdependent, we are not here to enjoy, we are here for enlightenment. If we think like this, then exploitation of the elements of this world and nature is greatly reduced, and an atmosphere of peace and prosperity will prevail – that is Vaikuntha.

Bhakti Yoga – The Topmost Yoga System

To say that *bhakti-yoga* is the topmost yoga system may seem to be a biased statement, but this is indeed a fact. The complete study of yoga reveals that devotion must be present in all systems of yoga if one is to have any success at all. In yoga one must persevere and be determined:

संकल्पप्रभवान्कामंस्त्यक्त्वा सर्वानशेषतः ।
मनसैवेन्द्रियग्रामं विनियम्य समन्ततः ॥

One should practice yoga with determination and an unwavering mind. In order to practice yoga, one must reject all thoughts that create material desires and withdraw the senses from the sense objects using the mind. (*Bhagavad-gita* 6.24)

Such determination necessitates that one must be devoted. However, when the spirit of devotion (*bhakti*) completely dominates, it becomes a system within itself – the system of *bhakti-yoga*. This is the complete science of how to devote oneself fully to the highest attainment of self-realisation. The two quintessential processes in *bhakti* are known as *shravana* and *kirtana*. *Kirtana* is the chanting of *mantras* in a group which has been practiced in

India for centuries and has most recently become popular in some western countries. The most prominent of all *mantras* is the *Hare Krishna Maha-mantra*, which was popularised by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the *avatara* of Sri Krishna, who appeared in India in the 15th Century:

हरे कृष्ण हरे कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण हरे हरे
हरे राम हरे राम राम राम हरे हरे

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Hare Rama hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare

However, the process of *kirtana* should be preceded by the process of *sbravana*. *Sbravana* means to hear or receive the *Hare Krishna mantra* from a genuine guru. As previously mentioned, this and all other divisions of the yoga system are not to be sold to the student. This knowledge must come through the proper system of guru and disciple and not passed on from one unqualified student to another. A *kirtana* performance without connection to the authorised system of yoga is simply entertainment and self-deception. *Mantras* are bestowed to the sincere student by the guru for the purpose of purification. In Sanskrit, the word *mantra* means 'to deliver the mind' (*manab-trayate*). The mind is the centre of material desires, bewilderment, anxiety, frustration, lust, anger and greed:

कामोमन्युर्मदोलोभः शोकमोहभयादयः ।
कर्मबन्धश्च यन्मूलः स्वीकुर्यात्को नु तद्बुधः ॥

Which intelligent person would trust the mind, which is the root cause of lust, anger, pride, greed, lamentation, illusion and fear? All of these create the bondage of *karma*.
(*Bhagavata* 5.6.5)

One who has received *mantras* for *kirtana* and meditation from a genuine guru quickly becomes free from all material desires and advances spiritually. The system of meditation in *bbhakti-yoga* is twofold – the chanting of *mantras* and activities performed in devotion. Devotional activities are in themselves a meditation and this enables the *bbhakti-yogi* to engage in meditation throughout the day. Other systems of meditation are generally limited to a few minutes or an hour or so. Therefore, to absorb oneself fully in meditation, the *bbhakti-yoga* system is the best.

Self-realisation through *bbhakti-yoga* is both revelation and achievement. Those who have realised the Absolute Truth through *bbhakti-yoga* do not only have something spiritual within themselves while in this bodily existence – after giving up the present material body at the time of death, the self-realised *bbhakti-yogi* attains a spiritual body in the spiritual universe on one of the spiritual planets known as Vaikuntha or Goloka. The followers of lesser yoga systems may attain the realisation of Brahman or Paramatma, but realisation of Sri Krishna as Bhagavan can only be achieved in the system of *bbhakti-yoga*. This is also corroborated by the authority on *ashtanga-yoga*, Patanjali Muni:

ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद् वा ।

One must be devoted to Ishvara. (*Yoga-sutras* I.23)

That Ishvara is indeed Bhagavan Sri Krishna, which is also stated in the *Brahma-sambhita* composed by Brahma (the first living being to perform yoga in the universe) as follows:

ईश्वरः परमः कृष्णः सच्चिदानन्दविग्रहः ।
अनादिरादिर्गोविन्दः सर्वकारणकारणम् ॥

Krishna, who is known as Govinda, is the Supreme Controller (Ishvara) who possesses a form of eternity, knowledge and bliss. He has no beginning and is the cause of all causes. (*Brahma-sambhita* 5.1)

Those who realise Brahman and Paramatma will enter Brahman. However, only the yogis in bhakti-yoga have the qualification and realisation to enter Vaikuntha and Goloka. Those who enter Brahman, either through Brahman or Paramatma realisation, will have to return to the material worlds of birth and death because eternal existence is incomplete without transcendental bliss (*ananda*). Complete *ananda* is only truly found in Vaikuntha and Goloka. The *ananda* of Brahman is a negative bliss based upon the euphoria of momentary freedom from the clutches of birth and death. This *ananda* is compared to the water found in the hoof-print of a cow, whereas the *ananda* of Vaikuntha and Goloka is compared to that of an infinitely vast ocean. Those who attain such *ananda*, realising Sri Krishna as the Supreme Absolute Truth, under the guidance of a bona-fide guru, are considered to be the greatest of yogis:

योगिनामपि सर्वेषां मद्गतेनान्तरात्मना ।
श्रद्धावान्भजते यो मां स मे युक्ततमो मतः ॥

I consider the best of all yogis to be the *bhakti-yogi* who abides in Me, who meditates upon Me and who worships Me with firm faith. (*Bhagavad-gita* 6.47)

Such yogis enter the spiritual planets of Vaikuntha and Goloka and never again return to this world of birth and death:

न तद्भासयते सूर्यो न शशाङ्को न पावकः ।
यद्गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते तद्धाम परमं मम् ॥

My Supreme Abode (Goloka) is not illumined by sun, moon or fire. Once attaining that abode, one never returns. (*Bhagavad-gita* 15.6)

A description of the spiritual planet of Goloka and Sri Krishna, Reality the Beautiful, is given in the *Brahma-sambita* as follows:

श्रियः कान्ताः कान्तः परमपुरुषः कल्पतरवो द्रुमा
भूमिश्चिन्तामणिगणमयी तोयममृतम् । कथा गानं नाट्यं गमनमपि
वंशी प्रियसखी चिदानन्दं ज्योतिः परमपि तदास्वाद्यमपि च ॥ स
यत्र क्षीरब्धिः स्रवति सुरभीभ्यश्च सुमहान् निमेषाद्वाख्यो वा व्रजति
न हि यत्रापि समयः । भजे श्वेतद्वीपं तमहमिह गोलोकमिति यं
विदन्तस्ते सन्तः क्षितिविरलचाराः कतिपये ॥

I worship the divine abode of Goloka, where the goddesses of fortune are the loving consorts to the Supreme Person

Sri Krishna who is their only lover. In that place, every tree is a desire tree; the land is made of touchstone; all water is nectar; every word is a song; every step is a dance; the flute is the dearest friend; the light is full of spiritual bliss and all things there are most relishable; where vast oceans of milk continuously flow from millions of cows; where time does not pass away even for half a moment. That realm, Goloka Vrindavana, is only known to a very few self-realised yogis in this world. (*Brahma-sambita* 5.56)

चिन्तामणिप्रकरसद्मसु कल्पवृक्ष
लक्षावृतेषु सुरभीरभिपालयन्तम् ।
लक्ष्मीसहस्रशतसम्भ्रमसेव्यमानं
गोविन्दमादिपुरुषं तमहं भजामि ॥

I worship Krishna, the Original Person, who is tending the cows, in that divine realm where the abodes are built with touchstone, surrounded by millions of desire trees. He is constantly served with great care and attention by hundreds of thousands of goddesses of fortune. (*Brahma-sambita* 5.29)

वेणुं क्वणन्तमरविन्ददलायताक्षं
वर्हावतंसमसिताम्बुदसुन्दराङ्गम् ।
कन्दर्पकोटिकमनीयविशेषशोभं
गोविन्दमादिपुरुषं तमहं भजामि ॥

I worship Krishna, Reality the Beautiful, who is playing His flute, with beautiful eyes like blooming lotus petals. His

head is decorated with peacock feathers, and His charming form, tinged with the hue of rain clouds, is so alluring that it enchants millions of Cupids. (*Brahma-sambita* 5.30)

आलोलचन्द्रक-लसद्वनमाल्यवंशी
रत्नाङ्गद प्रणयकेलिकलाविलासम् ।
श्यामं त्रिभङ्गललितं नियतप्रकाशं
गोविन्दमादिपुरुषं तमहं भजामि ॥

I worship Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, whose neck is decorated with a garland of forest flowers that swings to and fro. His hands, that hold His flute, are adorned with jewelled bracelets. His threefold bending form as Shyamasundara is eternally manifest as He enjoys His various pastimes of divine love. (*Brahma-sambita* 5.31)

प्रेमाञ्जनच्छुरितभक्तिविलोचनेन
सन्तः सदैव हृदयेषु विलोकयन्ति ।
यं श्यामसुन्दरमचिन्त्यगुणस्वरूपं
गोविन्दमादिपुरुषं तमहं भजामि ॥

I worship Krishna, who is always contemplated on by those whose eyes are anointed with the salve of divine love. His eternal form as Shyamasundara, is eternally endowed with inconceivable qualities and He is always situated within the hearts of yogis devoted to Him. (*Brahma-sambita* 5.38)

Conclusion

To paraphrase the *Bhagavata*, the conclusion is that the ultimate object of yogic knowledge is Sri Krishna, Reality the Beautiful. The purpose of performing rituals and offerings is to please Krishna. Yoga is for realising Him. All activities are ultimately rewarded by Him only. He is supreme knowledge and all austerities are performed to know Him. *Dharma* is rendering loving service unto Him. He is the supreme goal of life. The *dharmā* for all humanity is *bhakti* unto Krishna. Such *bhakti* must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self. By rendering devotional service unto Sri Krishna, one immediately acquires devotional knowledge and detachment from the world. All occupational engagements are certainly meant for ultimate liberation – they should never be performed for material gain. Furthermore, according to great sages, one who is engaged in this ultimate occupation should never use material gain to cultivate sense gratification.

Life should never be directed toward sense gratification. One should desire only a healthy life, or self-preservation, since a human being is meant for inquiry about the Absolute Truth

Conclusion

(*atbato brahma jijnasa*). Nothing else should be the goal of one's activities. The seriously inquisitive student of yoga, well equipped with knowledge and detachment, realises the Absolute Truth by rendering *bhakti* as taught by the guru and the Vedic literature. Therefore, with one-pointed attention, one should constantly hear about, glorify, meditate upon and remember Sri Krishna, Yogeshvara (the Master of yoga) who is the protector of all surrendered beings. Sri Krishna cleanses desire for material enjoyment from the heart of the yogi who has developed the urge to hear His messages, which is in itself virtuous when properly heard and chanted.

As soon as irrevocable *bhakti* is established in the heart, the effects of passion and ignorance, such as lust, desire and hankering, disappear. Then the yogi is situated in goodness and he becomes completely happy. Thus established in the mode of pure goodness, the yogi who has given up all material association, and whose mind has been enlivened by contact with *bhakti*, gains self-realised knowledge of the Absolute Truth. Certainly, since time immemorial, all transcendentalists have rendered service to Sri Krishna, with great delight, because such *bhakti* is enlivening to the self. This is the conclusion of the practice of yoga culminating in the system of *bhakti-yoga*.

Glossary

Abhyasa – Constant and dedicated spiritual practice.

Acharya – A self-realised spiritual master.

Akarma – Devotional activities performed solely for the service of Krishna.

Ananda – Transcendental bliss.

Aniruddha – An expansion of Krishna.

Ashram – A spiritual sanctuary for self-realisation.

Ashtanga-yoga – The eightfold yoga system expounded by the sage Patanjali.

Atma – The individual unit of consciousness.

Avatara – A manifestation of Krishna, appearing in different forms.

Balarama – The first expansion of Krishna.

Bhagavad-gita – The ancient Sanskrit yoga treatise spoken by Sri Krishna to His friend Arjuna.

Bhagavan – The personal and most complete aspect of the Supreme.

Bhagavata – The *Bhagavata Purana*, one of the most important books in *bbakti-yoga*.

Bhakti – Devotion to Krishna.

Bhakti-yoga – The yogic process of devotion towards Krishna.

Brahma – The first living being in the universe and secondary creator.

Brahman – The impersonal effulgence emanating from the body of Krishna.

Brahmana – A Vedic priest and teacher.

Brahma-samhita – An ancient Sanskrit texts containing the prayers of Brahma to Sri Krishna.

Chatur-vyuha-tattva – The fourfold manifestations of Krishna in Vaikuntha.

Chaitanya-charitamrita – A biographical book about the life and teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu – The *avatara* of Sri Krishna who appeared in India in the 15th Century to teach bhakti-yoga.

Chanakya – A famous ancient Indian statesman and scholar of the 4th Century BCE.

Chanakya Niti-Shastra – A book containing aphorisms concerning social and moral behaviour by Chanakya.

Dakshina – A traditional gift of gratitude from a student to a teacher.

Devanagari – The Sanskrit script.

Dhyana – Meditation.

Diksha – Initiation into a sacred *mantra*.

Gayatri – A Vedic *mantra* glorifying the Supreme Truth.

Goloka – The topmost spiritual planet where Krishna eternally resides.

Gopala – Sri Krishna, the cowherd boy of Vrindavana.

Gopala-mantra – The 18 syllable *mantra* invoking Sri Krishna.

Gopala-Tapani Upanishad – An *Upanishad* glorifying Sri Krishna and His abode.

Govinda – A name of Krishna, meaning ‘the Lord of the cows and the material senses.’

Ishvara – The Supreme Controller, Sri Krishna.

Jagannatha Puri – A holy city in Orissa, East India.

Kama-gayatri – A Vedic hymn describing the beauty of Sri Krishna.

Karma – The system of action/reaction. *Karma* also refers to activities that produce beneficial reactions.

Kirtana – Musical glorification of Sri Krishna.

Kusha – A perennial grass that grows in India and is considered sacred.

Lila – The divine pastimes of Sri Krishna.

Maha-mantra – The foremost *mantra* for deliverance in this age, comprising of the names of Krishna.

Maha-vakya – Great philosophical maxims from the *Upanishads*.

Mantra-dhyana – Meditation upon a *mantra*.

Mayavadi – A follower of monistic philosophy.

Om (omkara) – The primeval spiritual sound vibration.

Padma Purana – An ancient Vedic text.

Padmasambhava – An 8th Century Indian Buddhist monk who brought Buddhism to Tibet.

Padmasana – The ‘lotus position’, a cross-legged yoga posture.

Paramatma – The manifestation of Krishna within the heart of all living beings.

Parampara – A disciplic succession of guru-disciple.

Patanjali – The author of the *Yoga-sutras*.

Pradyumna – A form of Krishna.

Pranayama – Controlling the breath, the seat of the life-air.

Puranas – Ancient Vedic texts.

Sadhana – Spiritual practices.

Samadhi – The perfection of the yoga process.

Samsara – Repeated birth and death in the material world.

Shravana – The process of listening to mantras and spiritual topics.

Shyamasundara – A name for Sri Krishna meaning ‘One who has a beautiful dark complexion.’

Shridhar Dev Goswami – A famous 20th Century *bbakti-yogi* of the philosophical school of Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

Tantra – Mystical texts, generally in the mode of darkness.

Tapasya – Physical or mental austerities meant for spiritual attainment.

Radha – The principle consort and eternal potency of Sri Krishna.

Rig Veda – One of the four ancient Vedas.

Shiksha – Spiritual instructions.

Siddhi – Mystic powers.

Swami – A yogi in the renounced order of life.

Taraka-brahman – The name of the Absolute Truth that delivers one from repeated birth and death.

Upanishads – The section of the *Vedas* that deals with transcendental philosophy.

Vaikuntha – The spiritual world where Krishna and His *avatars* eternally reside.

Vedas – The four principle *Vedas* – the *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*.

Vedanta-sutras – The aphorisms that explain the end of all knowledge.

Vikarma – Activities that create detrimental results.

Vishnu – The *avatara* of Krishna; the cosmic preserver.

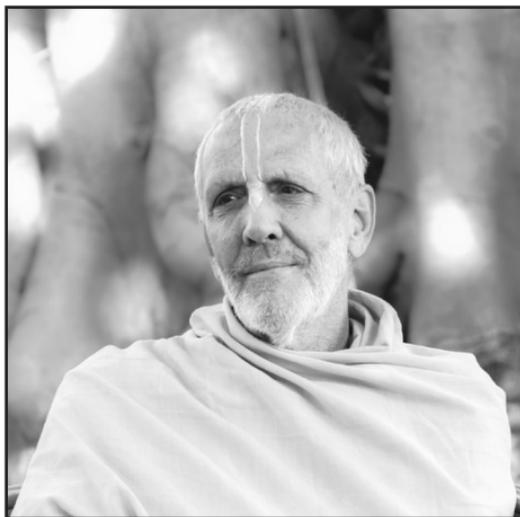
Vrindavana – The appearance place of Sri Krishna.

Yogashala – A place where yoga is practiced.

Yoga-sutras – The aphorisms on yoga by Patanjali Muni.

Yoga Yajnavalkya – An ancient treatise on yoga by the sage Yajnavalkya.

Yogeshvara – A name for Krishna, meaning the Master of Yoga.



About the Author

Swami Bhakti Gaurava Narasingha was born in 1946 in the USA and grew up in California, Florida and Hawaii. Swami Narasingha began the practice of yoga in 1967. During that same year he met his guru, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of the Hare Krishna movement in the west, and in 1970, became his direct disciple. In 1976 Swami Narasingha accepted the renounced order of *sannyasa* (becoming a Swami) and travelled extensively for many years in holy places in India. In the period between 1986 and 1999, Swami Narasingha also studied under

the renowned *bhakti-yoga-acharyas* Swami B.R. Shridhar Maharaja and Swami B.P. Puri Maharaja.

In 1994 Swami Narasingha established Sri Narasingha Chaitanya Ashram (also known as Govindaji Gardens) and the Kaliya-mardana Krishna Ashram in South India. At both of these centres, Swami Narasingha currently instructs students, disciples and followers in the methodology and philosophy of *bhakti-yoga*.

Swami Narasingha has written many articles for such spiritual journals as *Clarion Call*, *Gaudiya Vedanta*, *Gaudiya Touchstone* and *KrishnaTalk*. He has also authored several books such as *Vaishnava India*, *Kumbha Mela*, *Evolution of Theism*, *The Authorized Sri Caitanya-Saraswata Parampara*, *Prakrita-rasa Aranya-chedini*, *Prabhupada Vijaya*, *The Meaning of Sannyasa*, *Sri Damodara-katha*, *Sri Gayatri Mantrartha Dipika*, a commentary to Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura's *Prakrita-rasa Shata-dushini*, a translation and commentary on the *Bhagavad-gita*, and most recently *Yoga-Vichar – A Brief Deliberation on the Yoga System*.

In addition to these literary contributions of his own, Swami Narasingha has edited and published, *In Search of the Ultimate Goal of Life* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *Words from the Guardian of Devotion*, *Follow the Angels*, *Encounters with Divinity*, and *Upadeshamrita* by Swami B.R. Shridhar as well as the book, *Prabhupada Saraswati Thakura*, describing the life and precepts of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura with many rare photos.

Swami Narasingha has also been the inspiration behind Devavision Productions, producing documentary videos such as *The*

Universal Teacher, Kumbha Mela, Gandaki and Himalayan Pilgrimage. Devavision Productions has also produced a series of lectures by Swami B.R. Sridhar such as *Gayatri, Absolute Harmony, Darshana, Ujjvala-nilamani, Fools Rush in Where Angels Fear to Tread* as well as *The Art of Sadhana* series by Swami B.P. Puri.

Swami Narasingha spends most of his time in India, as well as Mexico, where he has a number of *ashrams*. He also visits various countries in Europe such as Czech Republic, Slovakia, Italy and Germany, where he has students.

For more information on the books, articles and lectures of Swami Narasingha please visit the following URLs:

www.gosai.com

