

PART III: GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A PERSONAL ROUTINE

CHAPTER 9

BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR THE PRACTICE OF KRIYA YOGA

In this chapter we are going to discuss a very good teaching method to guide the first steps of those who want to learn *Kriya Yoga*. Its main point is to introduce the concept of *Incremental Routine*, a method of utilizing the different techniques that is not even hinted at in traditional *Kriya* literature. The other chapters of this third part of the book contain key ideas about what is really effective in making the *Kriya* plant flourish at its best.

In my opinion a teacher should always test a student's predisposition for *Kriya Yoga*. To this purpose, a very good routine is the practice of *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* followed by *Ujjayi Pranayama* (see Appendix to Chapter 1, where a good elementary *Pranayama* routine is discussed in detail.)

Those who undertake constant practice of a similar routine will start to perceive the flow of energy that moves up and down the spine. It goes without saying that students who do not succeed in practicing such an elementary routine regularly for at least 3 to 6 weeks should not even ask to be introduced to *Kriya Pranayama* proper.

By the way, *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* is far more important than expert *kriyabans* are willing to admit. Actually – this is my firm opinion – the practice of *Nadi Sadhana* should always be coupled with the basic techniques of *Kriya Yoga*. Thanks to it, a beginner receives a dramatic transformation – many important patterns of energy imbalance disappear. Without this balancing action it is not easy to achieve a *watchful but peaceful alertness*, which is the basis itself of the *Kriya* meditative state.

It is a common experience that after a long practice of *Nadi Sodhana* without adding any other technique you enter a natural meditative state. As for *Ujjayi*, this is the very foundation of *Kriya Pranayama*. Those who practice it and pay due attention to the natural throat sound of the breath will discover that the core phenomenon of *Kriya Pranayama* happens spontaneously.

For many students, the combined practice of *Nadi Sodhana* and *Ujjayi* becomes such a joyous discovery of well-being and joy that they may develop an "addiction" to it. Even if they won't "upgrade" to *Kriya*, a minimal practice of these two techniques will always be part of their life.

About introducing the First Kriya set of techniques

I would avoid the particular frenzy that accompanies a traditional *Kriya* initiation where all the practical instructions are transmitted hastily in one single lesson! This is what usually happens with mass initiations. Within a few days, almost all details are forgotten and one goes through a crisis. The teacher is no longer there

and the other fellow *kriyabans* dismiss their fraternal duties by stating they are not authorized to give counsels.

Instead of this insane and stupid situation, teaching one to one is the only reasonable alternative. Then, things may go differently! The few people who have had this privilege remember the words of their teacher, with the same voice inflection, for all of their lives.

In certain circumstances (one might visit his teacher and not be able to remain there for more than one day), it might be necessary to demonstrate all the techniques in one single lesson, but generally speaking one should be introduced to the *Kriya* techniques a bit at a time so that one can experience them without any tension.

In the first lesson I would not teach *Navi Kriya*, whose "time" will come later, nor *Yoni Mudra* either since that could be a source of disturbance. I would restrict the teaching to *Kriya Pranayama* (first and second part only). After a couple of weeks, the second lesson should be devoted to emphasizing the details of *Kriya Pranayama* that really matter. Only then should the other techniques of *First Kriya* be introduced and checked, and thus the teaching of *First Kriya* be completed.

Some points to be emphasized

1. Experience of the beauty of Talabya Kriya and Om Japa (in the Chakras)

Some organizations, in their didactic effort to bring *Kriya Yoga* to the people, picked out some easy techniques as a preparation.

P. Y. choose to give *Hong Sau* and *Om* techniques for six months. The first technique calms the breath and the psycho-physical system. The second technique addresses listening to the internal (astral) sounds, and the *Om* sound. Both are wonderful techniques, but in Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*, the preliminary techniques are *Talabya Kriya* and the chanting of *Om* in the *Chakras*. A *kriyaban* should never overlook them. They usher a *kriyaban* into a state that is considered a real "benediction." A meditation session could be composed of only these two techniques followed by a few minutes of enjoying the induced calmness. Even in this short time one will taste a very deep calmness.

Oddly enough, *Talabya Kriya* doesn't require concentrating on anything, it is purely physical. Just as an attempt to justify this, we can say that merely pressing the tongue against the upper palate and maintaining the suction effect on the palate for 10-15 seconds, can, in and of itself, generate sensitivity in the *Ajna Chakra* area in a very short time. The detail of extending the tongue plays an important part too. When the tongue is fully extended, it pulls on some cranial bones and leads to decompression of the whole area.

2. Experience the beauty of Pranayama with short breath not only during a Kriya routine but also during additional free moments during the day

A famous *Kriya* teacher said that if you want to make remarkable spiritual

progress, you should engage yourselves in being aware of at least 1728 breaths a day. Experiencing this is surely possible for everyone – at least once in a week – by practicing the technique of *Pranayama with short breath* for about three hours. This is a great feat that will surely produce the *Omkar* experience.

3. *Never skip the practice of mental Pranayama at the end of a routine*

Mental Pranayama has a divine beauty. Without *mental Pranayama*, *Kriya Yoga* risks becoming a self-imposed torture, a nightmare. I bet that without it one unflinchingly gives up *Kriya Yoga*, unless one is sustained by the excitement and expectations created in him by a heavy process of indoctrination.

4. *Experience the importance of Maha Mudra*

It is very wise that a *kriyaban* practices *Maha Mudra* before *Kriya Pranayama*. It is good to feel the difference between *Kriya Pranayama* with and without *Maha Mudra*.

The most serious schools of *Kriya* recommend that for every 12 *Kriya Pranayama*, one should perform one *Maha Mudra* – three remains the minimum number. (To make it clear, those who practice 60 *Kriya Pranayamas* should perform *Maha Mudra* five times, while those who practice 12 or 24 *Pranayamas* should perform it three times.) Unfortunately, having listened to different *kriyabans*, I dare say it would be a miracle if *kriyabans* regularly practiced even the three required repetitions. Others believe they are practicing *Kriya* correctly without ever practicing one single *Maha Mudra*! There is no doubt that if you regularly skip this technique and lead a sedentary life, the spinal column will lose its elasticity. One's physical condition deteriorates over the years and it becomes almost impossible to maintain the correct meditation position for more than a few minutes – that is why *Maha Mudra* is so important for *kriyabans*.

There are reports of *yogis* having achieved fantastic experiences using only this technique. According to their accounts, the perception of *Sushumna* has increased tremendously. There are *kriyabans* who have set aside all the other *Kriya* techniques and practiced 144 *Maha Mudra* in two sessions daily. They consider *Maha Mudra* the most useful among all *Kriya Yoga* techniques.

5. *Avoid any obsession about technical details*

Some students call their teacher every other day with tortuous and bizarre questions. They believe that something valuable can spring only from an impeccable execution of the "magic recipe" of *Kriya*. They pour into their *Kriya* path a remarkable commitment, but get nothing in return. They do not understand how important it is to enjoy the practice as it comes out naturally and to work on refinements – using their intuition and reasoning upon their direct experience – only afterward. It is as if their expectations are a shield that prevents the genuine beauty of *Kriya* from entering their life. However, they will soon get tired of asking questions and will eventually abandon everything.

6. *Understand that the joy coming from meditation is more important than self analysis*

Some *kriyabans* exacerbate the previous obsession for technical details by not trusting the sheer employment of a technique, even it is done correctly, unless it is coupled with toilsome psychological work.

They want to build brick by brick, by the sweat of their brow, as if it were a highly complex project of adding new structure to old structure, the majestic building of their redemption. They think that only by tormenting their psychological structure is it possible to uproot any deeply ingrained bad habit and the very roots of iniquity and egoism. Often they impose upon themselves useless privations and attempt unnatural renunciations. They do not understand what the spiritual dimension of life is. Their idea is that the Divine resides outside our human dimension and therefore we can progress only if we start a strenuous fight against our instincts. Religious conditioning can be very strong, fatal in certain cases.

Some entertain the thought of retiring from active life in order to live a life of self-denial. The few who have the opportunity to achieve this (not necessarily entering a convent but for example quitting their job and living by a modest lifetime annuity) are doomed to discover that this sudden leap into this so ardently longed-for condition does not fulfill their desire for perennial peace coupled with ardent mystical inspiration. The initial feeling of total freedom from worldly engagements breeds good results in meditation but not so deep as imagined. They suffer from an inexplicable drastic diminishing of the sharpness of their concentration. They are fully aware of how insane this is, yet they cannot justify why their free time, instead of being devoted to a deep practice of *Kriya* or to *Japa* or whatever spiritual activity they choose, is depleted in too many useless occupations.

Do not impose on yourself perfect chastity. There are famous books on *Yoga* demanding impossible things. How precious would be a book that teaches how to use one's own intelligence and to think with one's own head!

Avoid any compulsive process of self analysis. Do not try to discover exact grounds on which to justify continuous fluctuations between feelings of well-being and joy during *Kriya* and periods where there will be nothing pleasurable or exciting. The best attitude is to let *Kriya* enter your life and bring all the possible benedictions without tormenting yourself because you feel unworthy. Blessed are those who have the courage to go ahead unswervingly, in spite of their failures, worthlessness and unsuitability!

Behave like a dedicated maid who does her daily duties with patience and circumspection. She prepares the daily meal, taking care of all the details from the tedious task of peeling potatoes to the final art of putting on the finishing touches. The awareness of having completed her job well is her gratification.

In time there is a greater reward for those who practice *Kriya*

conscientiously even if they see no apparent result. Something tremendously vast will manifest and crush down any dichotomy of worthy/unworthy, pure/impure. It is not only a matter of astral sounds and light, cosmic expansion, or basking in endless joy – your very perception of Reality will change. Some will rediscover an almost forgotten potentiality of aesthetic enjoyment (as if they had eyes and heart for the first time); others will be deeply moved by the significance of their family, by the value of lifelong friendship and will be surprised by the intensity of the responses of love from their heart.

At the onset of their *Kriya* path, some students are far from abiding by not only Patanjali's moral rules but also common-sense guided health rules. Often there is a clear split between the new interest in meditation and other well-rooted social habits.

It's a good rule for a teacher to pretend not to notice problematic delusive student behavior. Undoubtedly after months of practice, some changes in a *kriyaban's* temperament and habits will appear, but they will be unstable. A teacher values the constancy of the practice of meditation and avoids censorial attitudes. Often, to help a *kriyaban* get free from a harmful habit, you need only to give him a glance and a smile. The point is that beginners are not able to realize they are slaves to bad habits. Let us take for example the problem of smoking. How many have a clear vision of the real situation? Paradoxically, it is easier to quit smoking because of a new ecological vogue than as a result of a lucid vision of one's addiction to nicotine.

EXPERIENCE THE PEERLESS EFFECTS OF THE INCREMENTAL ROUTINES

Kriyabans customarily practice the same standard techniques day in and day out changing neither the sequence nor the number of repetitions. In fact, an unvarying routine that always takes the same amount of time is what is recommended by many organizations. There is no doubt that a fixed routine is the best practice for beginners; however, practicing it for one's entire life is something else!

In the first part of the book I have introduced the concept of *Incremental Routine*. I strongly recommend that a student focus on fundamental *Kriya* techniques like *Navi Kriya*, *Kriya Pranayama*, and the *basic form of Thokar* and practice them intensively following the format of the *Incremental Routine*. This is one of the most worthwhile activities a *kriyaban* can engage in, an effort that will play a decisive role in building the foundation for a lifelong enjoyment of *Kriya*. When the earnestness of the student is unquestionable, it is wise to encourage them to begin at least one *Incremental Routine*. This counsel should be given without lingering or investigating too much.

I have witnessed unbelievable results in those who follow this counsel, results that are inconceivable to those who follow a traditional practice.

Gopi Krishna wrote how hopeless is the attempt to obtain a full realization of the potentialities contained in the human body and mind by going on only in the

traditional way (a few minutes of concentration following the format of the commonly-counseled unvarying routine.)

"... the whole kingdom is the product of the activity of *Prana* and the atoms of matter both combined. [...] Nothing would be more ridiculous to suppose that this combination of *Prana* and matter which resulted in such marvelous organizations of living creatures be so flimsy and unstable as to yield readily to the human will. The impression prevailing in the minds of some people that a few minutes' exercise of concentration can work miracles in changing one's existing level of consciousness [...] is, therefore, as correct as it would be suppose that repeated light hammer-blows dealt to a metal can lead to the release of atomic energy. An overhauling of the entire human body is necessary to effect a radical transformation of consciousness [...] This is the reason why real success in *Yoga* is so very rare." (Gopi Krishna *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga*).

What happens in athletics gives us a good example of how to progress. Athletes who wish to achieve world class performance must somehow increase the intensity and the quality of their practice. Only through short intensive interval training sessions where they push their physical and mental endurance beyond their normal levels, will they succeed in accomplishing otherwise unachievable levels of performance. This is a "law" no one escapes.

Now, do not be offended by the comparison between *Kriya* and sports. *Kriya* is not a sport, but in the beginning stages of *Kriya*, while applying its different psycho-physical techniques, it has many points in common with the essence of athletics. Both shun the employment of brute force, and both require goals and the diligent channeling of one's strength to achieve them. Both also require analyzing and evaluating one's performance to learn from the experience.

We understand, of course, that this process is an authentic challenge and beginning it is an act of courage, a mature act of trust in *Kriya* and in oneself, a decision that should only be inspired by one's intuition.

Kriya techniques arouse specific effects (especially perceived the next day following the practice) which may appear as disturbing: moods, fancies, memories and suddenly-arising desires. Actually this is a clue that a cleansing process is happening in one's subconscious mind. *Kriyabans* should be familiar with the basic laws of the human psyche. Coupling an *Incremental Routine*, to be practiced once a week, with the daily practice of a simple *Kriya* routine has within itself an equilibrating mechanism that will help them to get through alternating moods that will surely appear during the way.

There are situations such as the anguished feeling of being overwhelmed by a sudden storm of increasingly dark pessimism, in which *kriyabans* should sense if it is necessary to stop their practice for a few weeks. After the pause, the "warrior" in them will return to the battlefield ready to bring this wonderful work to fruition.

I. Incremental Routine of Navi Kriya

Here is an example of the very words we can use to introduce a student to an easy but very important *Incremental Routine*:

"On Saturdays – or on any free day – after a short practice of *Talabya Kriya*, *Maha Mudra* and *Kriya Pranayama*, practice 8 sets of *Navi Kriya*, thus doubling the number of the usual 4 scheduled repetitions. As usual, complete your routine with *mental Pranayama*. The following day, you can take a break from all *Kriya* practices and you can give your mind the balm of a long, tranquil *Japa*. For the next few days, resume the original standard routine.

On the following Saturday, practice 3 times the normal number of *Navi Kriya*, i.e. 12 sets. Of course, this is always to be done within the framework of *Talabya*, *Maha Mudra*... finish with *mental Pranayama*. If possible take a long walk in the evening to calm the deep regions of your psyche. The following day rest by doing just *Japa* and go for a walk... After one week, or two if you wish, practice 16 sets of *Navi Kriya*.... and so on 20, 24...up to 80 sets, which is 20 times the original recommended number.

The increase of this delicate *Kriya* technique should be gradual. If you try to outsmart the process and perform too many repetitions all at once, nothing will come of it because the inner channels close up. Our inner obstacles cannot be removed in one day; our inner force is not strong enough to dissolve them. This internal power is initially weak and must be enhanced week after week. Furthermore, this process should be incorporated within a regular active life.

It is up to you to make your practice days as pleasant as possible. It is advisable to break these long sessions into two parts – to be completed before going to bed. You can conclude each part by lying on your back (*Savasana*: the corpse pose) on a mat for a couple of minutes. You may complete the first part unhurriedly in the morning, carefully respecting every detail. In the afternoon, after a light meal and a little nap, it is fine to go out, find a pleasant place to sit, and then reserve some time to contemplate nature. Then you can complete the remaining prearranged number of repetitions, absorbed in your practice and perfectly at ease. You will see how the effects increase as daylight approaches twilight.

If you always practice in your room, arrange to have a tranquil walk in the evening. Everything will proceed harmoniously and the benediction of blissful silence will unfailingly visit you."

It is possible to choose any variation of *Navi Kriya*, but the best is surely variation [4.2] explained in chapter 8 ("*Coming down through four directions*"). It rivets the attention in a way the basic form cannot. Its smooth shifting of energy along the circumference of the head has an unparalleled effect. As for this variation, since one set consists of 36 descents of energy, preceded and followed by chanting *Om* in the *Chakras*, the process begins with 36 x 2 descents. The next steps are: 36 x 3, 36 x 4...., 36 x 19, 36 x 20. It has been experimentally proven that there is no need to go beyond 36 x 20 repetitions.

As for this variation, it happens that after the first half hour the head movements are hardly noticeable. In other words, the forward, backward, and sideways movement of the chin is reduced to a couple of millimeters!

A good effect of this practice is a striking increase in mental clarity, probably due to the strong action on the third *Chakra* which governs the thinking process. A more calibrated, precise and clear logical process rises from a more efficient synergy between thoughts and emotions. Intuition flows unimpeded when important decisions are to be made.

Unfortunately, traits of hardness might appear sometimes in your temperament. You will find yourself uttering statements that others find offensive and cutting but that for you, in that moment, are the expression of sincerity. Although sustained by a luminous internal intuition, you might hurt friends through your words and only hours later, being alone and detached, notice how those words were inappropriate.

To understand the reason for this problem, let us look into the meaning of "crossing" the knot of the navel. (*Navi Kriya* is done primarily for this reason and secondarily to unite *Prana* and *Apana* and attract them into the spine.) It is explained that the cutting of the umbilical cord at birth splits a unique reality into two parts: the spiritual and the material. The spiritual, which manifests as joy and calmness, establishes itself in the higher *Chakras* and in the head; the material establishes itself in the lower *Chakras*. That rupture between matter and spirit inside each human is a permanent source of excruciating conflicts in the lives of many spiritual searchers. Through this *Incremental Routine* and through conscious effort towards harmony between the two dimensions of Spirit and matter in our daily lives, the healing of this rupture takes place. Although the healing is harmonious, visible manifestations can be interpreted negatively by others, often due to a *kriyaban's* newly acquired confidence and conviction that may appear to be stubbornness or dogmatism. The personality of a *kriyaban* is destined to be ideally collected around a central point and all inner conflicts healed. The effects are perceived inwardly and observed clearly in one's practical life. One feels an inward order settling; each action seems as if it were surrounded by a halo of calmness and headed straight for the goal.

It reminds me of Ahab in "Moby Dick" by Herman Melville: "Swerve me? ye cannot swerve me, ... The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. ... Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!"

II. Incremental Routine of Kriya Pranayama

After some months (when the previous *Incremental Routine* of *Navi Kriya* is completed or at least half completed), the *kriyaban* can begin a parallel process using the technique of *Kriya Pranayama* and increasing it gradually. 36 x 2, 36 x 3, up to 36 x 20 *Kriya Pranayamas* is a very good plan; 24 x 2, 24 x 3,24 x 24 is lighter but also good. Practice in sequence the three phases of *Kriya Pranayama*, abiding by what is said in Chapter 6. When the practice is broken into two or three parts – for example between morning and afternoon – you always start from phase 1, then introduce phase 2 and then phase 3.

I have learned to respect all *Kriya* schools, but I will tell you now that when I tried to increase the number of *Kriya Pranayama* that I was taught to perform in my first school, after 60 repetitions of *Kriya Pranayama* I developed so much nervousness that I couldn't remain sitting. Now, with my new *Kriya Pranayama* (closed mouth, partly with *Kechari* and partly without, and mentally chanting *Om* in each *Chakra*) I neared 1000 *Kriya* breaths, always dwelling in the most complete tranquility.

However, I counsel here to move forward prudently, not giving too much attention to the right length for each breath. During this process (*Incremental Routine*) it is absolutely necessary to follow nature, respecting the rhythm of the breath suited to one's own constitution. If you feel that your breath is too short, don't worry about it! You will have plenty of time in the future to lengthen it. Furthermore, when more than a 100 breaths are practiced, it is wise to make use of the 12 letter *Mantra* "*Om Namo Bhagabate Vasudevaya*" (*Om Na Mo Bha Ga Ba* coming up and *Te Va Su De Va Ya* coming down), which does not mean to apply all the subtle details of *Omkar Pranayama* but simply to utilize that beautiful *Mantra*. During each stage of the process it is important to keep a slender thread of breath up to the completion of the prescribed number. In other words, the process should never become purely mental.

In these optimal conditions, be ready to become absorbed in a most sweet experience. Don't be upset if on some occasions this routine becomes an extraordinary journey in your memory. It happens indeed that by focusing our attention on the *Chakras* we obtain a particular effect: the inner screen of our awareness begins to display a lot of images. This is a physiological fact and we have reasons to suspect that for those who affirm they are exempt from such phenomenon, it is because they do not have enough lucidity to notice it. The *Chakras* are like jewel boxes containing the memory of one's whole life and they give rise to the full splendor of lost reminiscences. The essence of past events (the beauty contained in them and never fully appreciated) is lived again in the quiet pleasure of contemplation while, sometimes, our heart is pervaded by a restrained cry. It is a revelation: the light of the Spirit seems to twinkle in what seemed to be trite moments of our life.

III. Incremental Routine of the Basic form of Thokar

(Procedure [II.1] explained in Chapter 7)

This third *Incremental Routine* has a value beyond words. Its *Incremental* scheme is different from the two previous *Incremental Routines*. We have already hinted at it in Chapter 7. Starting from 12, a *kriyaban* adds six repetitions per week. The fixed maximum of repetitions is 200.

Let us clarify what I mean, adding six repetitions per week. During the first week practice 12 repetitions each day. Then consider the practice of 18 repetitions each day – But, if there are problems, practice this technique every other day. The third week you can practice 24 repetitions on alternate days. It is not necessary to practice every day; rather it is wise to work three days a week on the average. When you reach a consistent number of repetitions (more than 60) the effects are very strong. Therefore be very careful. Do not practice more than 200 repetitions.

I hope the reason is clear why we have said that this last *Incremental* scheme is different from the plan utilized for the *Incremental Routine* of *Navi Kriya* and of *Kriya Pranayama*, in which you practice only once in a week.

As for the necessity of having achieved *Kechari Mudra* before practicing *Thokar*, there are many who have practiced *Thokar* with enthusiasm and with admirable commitment who have benefited from its remarkable effects but who have not realized this *Mudra*. *Kriya* literature affirms *Kechari Mudra* is crucial for initiation into the *Higher Kriyas*. *Acharyas* of original *Kriya* indeed demand to see the actual execution of *Kechari Mudra* – they want the student's mouth opened in front of them and to see the tongue disappear into the nasal pharynx.

Now, there is no doubt that *Kechari Mudra* helps to perceive the vibrational state, rhythm, and astral location of each *Chakra*, but to those who are depressed because they are not able to achieve *Kechari Mudra*, let us remind you (without any fear of being contradicted) that many mystics who experienced the Divine never heard of *Kechari Mudra*.

Many *Kriya Acharyas* claim that: "Until one is established in *Kechari Mudra*, one cannot achieve the state of Eternal Tranquility." This statement is false.

As for a possible *Incremental Routine* of the *Advanced form of Thokar*, it is unrealistic to give any indication. Those who have achieved the breathless state, and are able to effortlessly hold the breath during this practice, are not keen to follow any other cautionary warning about the number of rotations to be practiced. Anyone who succeeds in that form of *Thokar* usually doesn't have the patience to gradually increase the number of the rotations.

During this *Incremental Routine* important experiences occur. An endless Beauty, creating a previously unknown devotion, intensifies around the fourth *Chakra*, as if a mighty hand were squeezing the chest region. One feels like they are being immobilized by an immense strength. It is because of the intensity of this experience, which sometimes seems difficult to endure, that the effect of *Thokar* has been described as "intoxicating".

The dazzling point that is perceived in the center of the heart *Chakra* and that turns out to be the star inside the third eye gives a *kriyaban* a deeper experience. There comes the feeling of being divided into a thousand parts – each one of them on the verge of exploding from bliss. It is only now, having in one's heart the reverberation of such a state, that one learns to meditate without mental pollution, and without imaginings.

I wonder how those devotees who never had a taste of such bliss are able to find the strength to continue practicing *Kriya* for years. You can only thank those uncertain illusions about *Kriya*, those improbable promises that books and *gurus* make to those interested in *Yoga* and meditation to attract them to the *Kriya* path, which keep one tied to this practice until the real experience happens.

*Global Results Achieved through the Completion of the Afore-Described
Incremental Routines*

After completing these three *Incremental Routines*, one has the feeling that entire eons have passed and one has achieved something concrete and permanent. After this once-in-a-lifetime experience, a person seems "older" in wisdom and temperament, as if several decades had passed. They have learned how to keep emotions at bay (I mean superficial emotions) in such a way that only deep sentiments then guide their decisions.

Among other things, we cannot conceive that a *kriyaban* who doesn't develop this faculty can nevertheless "survive" on the *Kriya* path. You cannot imagine how delicate an operation it is remaining faithful to the *Kriya* path that can suddenly go bad! We are governed by emotions and instincts that include our religious conditioning, our weak points, our fears, our doubts, and our pessimism. It is important to have the ability to go our way even when our closest friends are trying to convince us to follow theirs.

I have tried to retrace this theme in some oriental books but I have found so much rhetoric, too many words without practical meaning. They distinguish between positive (affection, happiness, contentment...) and negative (envy, aggressiveness, illusion ...) emotions, but at the end of boring discussions you still have not grasped the essential fact: untamed emotions can create disaster in our life. This fact is serious, and tremendously important. In my opinion, *kriyabans* who are not able to complete at least one *Incremental Routine* of a basic *Kriya* technique are always on the verge of losing everything they have realized.

We all know that frantic and hysterical emotions often rise unexpectedly from one's inner self, then disappear after a while. They actually express a reality devoid of authentic depth but their propulsive action inevitably results in hurried acts accompanied by a sort of cerebral fever, nourished by a narrow, visceral pleasure. When passion inflames one's whole being, it is not possible to be guided by common sense; the consequence is that our deeper and most earnest choices sometimes withdraw to an irrevocable halt.

Just as during the summer hail stones are molded, condensed and enlarged in the air before falling down to the earth and cause disasters, fatal decisions take shape in advance in one's imagination. During daily, frequent daydreams, the perspective of renouncing something positive which requires a great commitment throws a false light upon our immediate future, so that what in the past would appear as an act of cowardice, now seems to glitter at the horizon of our life, like a dull, flat, somber sky that suddenly lights up, serene, in luminous azure blue. When we listen to such alluring emotions, we pave the way for our doom. A wrong decision may become our crucifixion, our covenant with unhappiness, with a state of inner misery that will last a lifetime.

And lo, some put aside *Kriya Yoga* forever while others interrupt a course of studies and throw away a profession they had been dreaming for years for which they had fought and suffered. They do the same with a beloved, with friends, with their family itself. Nothing can stop them: the wise words of people

near them have no power to stop them. An indomitable internal strength wants to produce sheer calamity in their life. Sometimes we have the idea that a person wants only one thing: to affirm with stubbornness his "*right to pain and suffering*." [The sentence in quotation marks is an expression of *the Mother* – main disciple and companion of *Sri Aurobindo*.]

The decision to yield to emotions does not differ from that of an asteroid falling through the atmosphere on its way to fire and destruction.

To this very common tragedy, "emotional maturity" is opposed: this is a healthy relationship with reality, the quintessence of what we visualize when we use the terms "wisdom, mental health, centrality ..." This is exactly what one can obtain through the practice of the *Incremental Routines*.

Another important effect of the *Incremental Routines* is that one develops the quality of a self-teacher.

At the very beginning of the *Kriya* path, it is okay to put a certain amount of trust in a school or in a teacher, but subsequently, one has to trust his own experience and intuition. Most *kriyabans* begin their path as gullible persons, ready to be cheated. The *Incremental Routines* change their life: they replace the infantilism of hanging on "authorized" teachers' every word with an objective estimate of the effects of each technique and of each routine. Unsure and full of doubts, *kriyabans* become able to be acutely creative and ameliorate day by day the execution of the techniques, "reading" with objectivity the obtained results. Having shaped a sound vision of *Kriya*, they do not feel the necessity of practicing under the supervision of *Kriya* experts. In the days following a long session of practice, one has a deeper understanding of the technique through perceiving its essence intuitively. One receives important clues: certain details of a technique appear as wearisome and prove useless; other aspects reveal all their power and are greatly appreciated.

Some remarks about the Tribhagamurari movement related Incremental Routines

In Chapter 7 we have described the micro movement *Tribhagamurari* techniques. That movement is perceived first by simply moving one's awareness along a prescribed path, then through the help of a *Mantra* and also with the help of movements of the head.

As for the purpose of those techniques, the main idea was that they induce the natural movement of *Kundalini* energy and guide it to cross, during its return flow toward its seat in *Muladhara*, the three main knots (*Granti*): tongue/*Medulla*, heart and coccyx. It is obvious that this theoretical explanation would require more space and other key clarification. The given description has raised many doubts in the readers. Their legitimate objections are worth quoting.

A very pertinent one was: "These techniques come from Satya Charan Lahiri (grandson of Lahiri Mahasaya) but we have no proof they come from Lahiri Mahasaya. We know that Satya Charan practiced seriously after retiring.

Now, who guided him, as his father Tincouri Lahiri was no more there. Could he have misinterpreted the diaries and diagrams describing the *Thokar* technique?"

Other readers asked why many schools don't teach anything related to the *Tribhangamurari* movement but consecrate the last stages either to *Thokar* or to *Gayatri Kriya* (the process of raising the *Chakras* into *Kutastha*.)

As many have observed, some drawings which appeared in *Kriya Yoga* books, inspired by Lahiri Mahasaya's diaries, show something similar to the *Tribhangamurari* movement but not identical.

Other questions show the genuine desire to understand where in one's daily routine to place the *Tribhangamurari* techniques and, above all, if the *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* can replace the different stages of *Thokar*.

In my opinion *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* doesn't substitute for the classic form of *Thokar*; *Tribhangamurari* techniques are an enrichment, you can test their power only by practicing them. The problem is that their effect cannot be received if the counseled numbers for each one of them are ignored.

They require an immense amount of dedication during a long part our life – I mean years not months.

The *Tribhangamurari* techniques have the power to create a permanent transformation in your attitude towards *Kriya* by making you acquainted with a mostly unknown ecstatic state while fully living the experience of life – let us define it as a sort of trance with open eyes. Once again, I must stress that they should be experienced first inside a rigid scheme of *Incremental Routines*.

Some students try to relish right away the power of *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* by a desultory, system-less experimentation, far from abiding by the above-mentioned rules. What could be the real impact of the *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* technique remains unknown and not even vaguely foreshadowed.

Now, if you consider the enormous amount of time that these *Incremental Routines* require, you understand that no one is able to tackle with them without having an extreme trust in another person, in one who gives you that instruction, who looks into your eyes and with a serene smile challenges you to experience the mystery of Unworldly Beauty they contain.

The only thing I can do, the only thing worth doing, is to relate what is stored in my memory – the experiences that happened and the spiritual advice received. What happened in my life was a miracle. When I received these techniques, I was completely free from work. I could complete all the *Incremental Routines* as they were proposed to me, even those that appeared as "impossible." Of course, receiving a boost, a strong encouragement, from a person who had already practiced them was indispensable. If I had read those techniques in a book, I would have surely failed in respecting the numbers; the effect would have been far from being the same.

One of the most difficult periods of my life began when I received the *Amantrak* technique. I felt down and had strange emotional and mental mood changes. It was like experiencing a slow recovery from a nervous breakdown that robbed me of my energy and joy of living. Actually I felt an absolute lack of enthusiasm; it was as if there existed no activity that could produce any satisfaction. I felt extraneous to activities that I would otherwise have found very enticing. Some days I remained in my room doing nothing, as in a state of convalescence.

In some ways I was prepared for this event. My teacher had explained that by perceiving this new flow of energy along the *Tribhangamurari* path, one would foster a decrease in the hectic condition caused by superficial emotions. The impression of having no feeling, of being dull, insensible, was only an illusion due to this meaningful internal transformation.

When the amount of practice spent perceiving the *Tribhangamurari* flow became greater than one hour, I felt like I was going to explode. I felt how difficult it was to bear all that power. My dreams were very lucid; I woke up in the morning as if I had lived a deeply intriguing and captivating adventure. Oddly, when I approached the 200 repetitions, any trouble disappeared. That period was marked by an uncurbed enthusiasm about my new practice.

After having completed the prescribed numbers of *Amantrak*, without waiting for the official initiation, I immediately started the practice of *Samantrak*. All of us in the small group knew what would have been the technique of *Samantrak* by simply reflecting on its name (*Sa-mantrak* = with the *Mantra*.) It had to be a 12 syllable *Mantra*: obviously "*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*."

I had my first *Samantrak* session in springtime on a near perfect day, when the pure air, fresh but pleasant, invited me to practice outdoors, where I enjoyed a blue sky with a small cluster of clouds floating in the golden light. I was really happy, and it seemed I had entered a new dimension. There were only few repetitions of the technique, but they changed my mood. *Samantrak* was like turning on various lights along the three-curved path. It was as if so much sun and clear skies finally entered my practice. The *Mantra*'s syllables, which I put with care like seeds in each center, would warm me up the way the sun warmed up the land around me.

The only problem was that the use of the *Mantra* would induce me to go speedily. It was only when I decided to make a special effort to go ahead slowly, that the *Tribhangamurari* path began to be "lit."

Despite the fact that pauses in each *Chakra* were short, I had the impression of reaping the reward of my practice of the *Gayatri Kriya*. The colors of the *Chakras*, namely the colors of the relative *Tattwas*, were perceived, first timidly and then always with great clarity.

Though having not yet completed the last sessions of *Samantrak*, my soul was already projected upon the next step, eagerly anticipating its effects. The words of my teacher at the time resounded in my mind: "The practice of *Thokar* (meaning the *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* technique) will produce a state of intoxication: you will be drunk with joy all day long!"

At long last, I received the yearned-for technique. That moment of my life was really a magic one. I would be lying if I did not say that I have an endless nostalgia for it. Since I practiced this routine in summer and in the open air, I associate it with long sunsets, with evenings that seemed to have no end.

Through this procedure, the *Tribhangamurari* flow is intensified by specific movements of the head. In Chapter 7 I have described how a continuous slow movement of the chin ends with a jerk directed on a specific center, then, after a micro pause, the movement restarts and there is another jerk directed on the next center and so on – five jerks. The problem is that many *kriyabans* focus all the attention on giving the strokes and don't understand the value of creating mental pressure along each millimeter of the path. The desire to get a strong effect too soon should be curbed. The *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* can be ideally mastered in four steps. Let us here consider the movement sensation up the spine and down along the three-curved path:

1. First of all it is necessary to feel that the movements of the head accompany perfectly, millimeter after millimeter, the flow of the internal current. For some time, we make a point of forgetting any attempt at intensification. Before considering a further step, we do our best to obtain an uninterrupted perception of the current.
2. Only now we can try to intensify the perception of the internal flow by creating a mental pressure along each part of it. We utilize the movements of our head to "touch with pressure" each millimeter of the path, up and down. The chin is to be moved slowly as we are striving to win a strong resistance. In Chapter 7 we have suggested the idea: "like squeezing with a pencil an almost empty tube of toothpaste to get the last little bit out. "
3. Now we focus on what is happening when, stopping for a fraction of a second, we vibrate the related syllable in a center. We develop a resolve to become aware of each of the 12 centers. While points 1 and 2 benefit from our effort with *Amantrak*, point 3 benefits from our effort with *Samantrak*.
4. Only at this point we give all possible emphasis to the five strokes and we perceive also what is radiating out of each center after the stroke.

If I could add a fifth further point, it would be to give extreme attention to what happens while chanting *Teeee* in the *Medulla*. In that moment we must try to reach (to become intensely aware of) the *Kutastha*.

Let me now give an idea of what the standard *Incremental Routine* of *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* implies.

While *Amantrak* and *Samantrak* are practiced every day, the *Incremental* sessions of *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* are practiced once a week (the other days one can, however, practice up to 36 repetitions.) A *kriyaban* must have had all the time necessary to metabolize the subconscious material that the strong action exerted upon *Muladhara* brings to the surface.

A *kriyaban* perceives first a tranquil flow of energy rising along the spine during 20-30 seconds (this is in itself a strong experience), then while coming down, the head follows the inner flow along the three-curved path, cutting the three main knots during 20-30 seconds. The movements are perfectly rational and have only one purpose: to increase the strength of the process. In five places linked with *Va Su De Va Ya* we have the strokes. By moving the head left, then right, then left, a *kriyaban* creates an *Ida-Pingala* balance. At this point there is the stroke upon the *Muladhara* followed by the ascent through the spine. By repeating this process again and again, there is real hope that one succeeds in entering the *Sushumna* channel, stopping the breath and enjoying a blissful ecstatic state!

One begins with 36 rounds; a week later one practices 36x2, then 36x3 ... and finally 36x36 repetitions. This means 1296 rounds! Can you imagine the powerful effects of this action? 1296 means that you begin in the morning and end in the night, doing again and again the same action. There is no doubt that you'll succeed in opening the door of *Sushumna*! Of course you have prepared this experience by practicing 36x35, and before that 36x34.... And don't forget that you have practiced *Amantrak* for months and *Samantrak* for another cycle of months!

Living those long sessions sitting in the open countryside, in total freedom and in a state of mystical "intoxication" was an unforgettable event. For weeks I had the tendency to practice too quickly, risking never tasting the essence of the procedure. In time I appreciated going slowly and feeling that the process of *Thokar* happened along the whole path. This created a particular mental intensity of perception.

When in the late afternoon the practice neared the end, I was keen to diminish the strength of the movements of my head and to enjoy the pure vibration of each syllable. Towards the end of those blessed days, I often violated the instruction to chant the syllables only mentally. I slowly uttered each syllable in a whisper, enjoying a micropause after each of these utterings. This was enough to perceive the sweet irradiation springing out from each center. This perception amplified my experience of joy. In this *Incremental Routine* I found not only peace but love, bliss, intoxication... everything.

One evening, a sound of tolling bells came from a distant village – it was like a cascade of light! It was so unexpected! A part of my mind went on repeating: "A human being has never been granted so much joy!"

To each dubious *kriyaban* I would like to say: "Be assured that if you practice the correct number of *Amantrak* and *Samantrak*, then the experience of *Thokar-Tribhangamurari* will never disappoint you and will become your favorite technique!"

About two months after beginning this last practice, I took part in a group pilgrimage and walked a full night in order to reach a beautiful sanctuary the following morning. I moved around as if my heart bore a brazier within. I perceived that the center of my personality was not in the brain, but in my heart. Walking on, I would murmur the 12 syllables of the *Mantra*, ideally putting each

one of them in the related center. I was perfectly aware that mine was not a commonly established way of practicing, but I could not avoid it.

I started to perceive something in my heart, a sort of tension of tenderness. I experienced the strong power that procedure has of changing the way you look at life. I realized that my mates' lives were wrapped up in love. I understood that the reality of love was the most intense force of life, corrupted only by the pollution of mind. I felt that human beings could not by instinct avoid loving or taking care of somebody – their own children for example. I had no doubts that they were able to give their own life for their children. There was in each one of them the power for great and incredible actions. As a consequence, they could not avoid painful experiences.

I felt as though our lives were soaked in love as well as pain and tragedy. This duality was involved in earthly existence, interwoven with our being. The sentiment of this inescapable reality was experienced as a painful grip tearing my chest apart. As the sun rose over our path and the sanctuary appeared over a hill, something thawed in my depths and there came such an intensity of love that the same experience turned into a "blissful" pain.

Now I was ready to focus all my efforts on the *Micro Tribhangamurari movement*. It was impossible however to drop the *Macro Tribhangamurari movement* entirely. I began experiencing the *Macro Movement* as a form of *Japa* before each *Kriya* routine. With the encouragement of another *kriyaban* – who practiced in this way for months – I began practicing it with open eyes. For reasons that escape my understanding, the psychological effect of this practice was remarkable. From the very beginning I had realized that an important detail was to move not only my head but my gaze also, smoothly, without jerks. Since this detail is very important, let me dwell upon it.

I started with open eyes and chin on the chest. The eyes looked at the floor. I murmured in a whisper the syllables of the *Mantra* and simultaneously raised my chin and gaze. My attention moved centimeter after centimeter, looking at anything that was before me. Then, without turning the face, my head moved toward the left shoulder, then returned to the center while at the same time I raised the chin up as much as possible. During this movement, my eyes turned up high. When, from that chin-up position, my face slowly turned to the right, my eyes followed the movement and ended by looking attentively at the area on my right, as far back as possible. Then my face slowly turned to the left. The eyes followed the movement, shifting horizontally without losing any detail of what was in front of me and ended by looking attentively at the area to my left, as far as possible. During the last four strokes given from the left, the intensity of my gaze diminished and the eyelids closed. In the final instant I felt like falling asleep. In this way I repeat the procedure again and again.

The first effect I noticed from the first day of practice was the intensity of oneiric activity. Some dreams remained very vivid in my imagination during the morning hours. I considered this a privileged way of creating a dialog with the unconscious sphere.

I perfected the ability to meditate anywhere and not be disturbed by

anything. While in the beginning I was inclined to be maniacal in preparing the proper meditation environment and became nervous and worried about the slightest thing, now I loved to meditate in unusual places and impossible situations – e.g. traveling by train or watching a movie. I saw that, strangely enough, such occasions could establish, by contrast, a particular state of awareness yielding unhopd-for results.

My practice of *Macro Tribhangamurari movement* with open eyes continues to the present day and I don't want to contemplate the eventuality of dropping it.

Some remarks about Micro Tribhangamurari routine

When I received this instruction I was told that, analogously to the *Yoni Mudra* which is practiced every night at the moment a *kriyaban* prepares to withdraw his awareness from the body and from the physical world and gets ready for sleep – which is a "small death" – the *Micro movement Tribhangamurari Incremental Routine* is like a peaceful return to the origin – a preparation to "die forever" – meaning to become forever free in Spirit. It was explained to me that this last *Incremental Routine*, besides being the best preparation for the conscious exit out of the body at death (*Mahasamadhi*), burned forever the necessity of reincarnating.¹

A *kriyaban* should make every effort to create the opportunity to grant himself the joy and the privilege of completing the recommended number of repetitions without every yielding to the temptation of hurried practices.

In *Micro-movement Incremental Routine* we have 36 sessions of practice. What's new is that the major part of this session requires more than one day.

On the first day you perceive 36 Micro-movements in each of the 12 centers (you start from what we have already envisaged in chapter 7.) The second session requires that you perceive 36x2 Micro movements in each center. [You experience one single long round: 72 Micro movements in the first *Chakra* without interruption, then 72 in the second *Chakra*, and so on....] After some days, you face the third session with 36x3 Micro movements in each center. Then other days pass by. Then you have your 36x4 session which will fill up your whole day.

The next steps: 36x5, 36x6, 36x7, 36x8, will not only fill up a whole day but also part of the next day. Therefore you must divide your effort into two

¹ As for what happens during the process of *Mahasamadhi*, we have heard many stories about possible "*Kriya* ways" of leaving the physical shell; obviously we cannot vouch for their authenticity. Some assert that the typical practice is *Thokar*; others hint at procedures happening entirely in *Kutastha*. We can reasonably assume that it is not always possible to perform the physical movement of *Thokar*. To focus one's awareness in the spine or at the point between the eyebrows may be the only thing possible. The most interesting thing I've heard is that some *kriyabans*, during the last weeks or months before leaving the body, practice only one technique: perceiving the *Micro-movement Tribhangamurari* nel *Kutastha*. At the moment of death, they merge with the Infinite through the same procedure.

parts. What was heretofore never allowed now happens: you can sleep a whole night between the two parts which are considered one session. What is important is that you start more or less immediately on the morning of the next day. Therefore, you are not allowed to go to work and it is also recommended that you keep silent, avoiding any opportunity for conversation. (However, the use of common sense should always prevail; if addressed, a polite reply is always imperative.)

You can now understand that the following sessions require more days; the last session requires about 12 days! Let me describe what happens during the last session: you perceive 36x36 micro movements in each center! This means: 1296 micro movements in *Muladhara*, 1296 in *Swadhistan*.... and so on, ending after some days in *Muladhara* with 1296 movements.

It is clear that you can complete this routine only when you are free from work. Let me emphasize that one should never skip over a stage. Don't think, "On my next Summer holidays I'm going to find a dozen days to practice 36x36." No! It does not work in this way. Before perceiving the Micro movement 36x36 times in each center you must have perceived it 36x35 times. And before this, you should have perceived it 36x34 times, and so on....

Completing this *Incremental Routine* is really a giant achievement. Many splendid experiences will happen and the last internal obstacles will be cleared one after another.

The period in which I was absorbed in this process is enveloped in my memory by a dreamy aura. I even still find it hard to remember it; sometimes, only in jest, I ask myself if it actually existed. For more than two years I deviated from the common way of living. I practiced all day long, every day, out in the open if possible.

I used to carry along a seat made of a plastic and a wool layer, something to drink, and a thirty-six-bead rosary. I would sit down, breathe deeply and proceed with the *Mantra* and the consequent Micro movement. At the end of each cycle, I would move an object, a little stone, from one side of my body to the other to keep track of the approximate number of 36 cycles.

Often an invincible drowsiness overpowered all my best efforts. On the inner screen of my awareness a lot of images were displayed like dreamlike visions. No help came from changing the position of the legs, practicing *Maha Mudra* several times, or interrupting the practice for a short pause. Many times I wondered what benefit, if any, could be received from what seemed to be a voyage into the unconscious world of dreams.

After interrupting the practice to get some rest, I found out, however, that it did not solve my problem – sleepiness came back as soon as I resumed the practice. There was no way (coffee, a lot of rest...) to find some relief from it; there was nothing to do but to accept the situation.

I went on increasing the length of my sessions. From a certain moment onwards, especially by assuming *Kechari Mudra*, the drowsiness changed into an extraordinary condition of relaxation. More than once I found my back slightly bent forward; I learned not to straighten it with a sudden movement, because that

would interrupt the condition of absorption and quiet.

After many hours of practice, at the end of my day, occasionally, I was caught by such euphoria that I felt the irresistible instinct to swing the body. It was like dancing from a sitting stance, accompanying the dance with a subtle form of internally hitting the center where I was focusing my concentration. Whenever I pronounced the seventh syllable, my trunk swung left, thinking of the following one it swung right... and then left again. When I thought the last syllable my trunk quivered a little, giving such a profusion of bliss!

I learned to practice without being disturbed by anything; in this way, the technique landed in my life as a new instinct arousing spontaneously when I sat down and straightened my spine. From that moment onwards, the heart *Chakra* became a reality manifesting very easily as a warm, pulsing sensation; the other *Chakras* became easy detectable by inducing, through a moderate use of attention, a swinging sensation in them. This event deepened my way of practicing the *Kriya* techniques, erasing forever the necessity of any visualization.²

One day I was on a cliff not far from a beach where a small number of people used to go for a walk. I took shelter under a tree from the sun, and at dusk I went to the beach, leaned my back against a rock and stayed there, pretending to stare at a distant object. I practiced keeping my eyes open. The sky was an indestructible crystal of infinite transparency and the ocean waves were continually changing their color, having in themselves an almost unbearable charm. I was trying to hide my tears behind the black lenses of my sunglasses. I cannot describe what I felt except in poetic form.

There is an Indian song (in the final part of the movie *Mahabharata*) whose lyrics are taken from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* - "I have met this Great Spirit, as radiant as the sun, transcending any material conception of obscurity. Only the one who knows Him can transcend the limits of birth and death. There is no other way to reach liberation but meeting this Great Spirit." When I listen to the beautiful voice of the Indian singer repeating "There is no other way", my heart knows that nothing has the power to keep me away from this state and this terrifically beautiful practice, which I will enjoy for the rest of my life.

² Even a little practice of this exercise is a miracle of sweetness. In the last part of your *Kriya* routine, you can perceive three micro-movements in each of the 12 centers starting from *Muladhara* and returning to *Muladhara*. By repeating this for three rounds, you plunge into a state without parallel. After this routine, you can lay down in corpse pose (*Savasana*) obtaining a particular state of physical and mental immobility where the *Kundalini* energy will rise into the heart *Chakra*.

CHAPTER 10
**THE PRAYER OF THE HEART, THE VERY CORE OF ALL THE MYSTICAL
PATHS**

My purpose is to cope with a vital problem. How many people are there who have started and then give up the practice of the *Higher Kriyas*? Unfortunately many receive *Thokar* without complete explanation and drop its practice after some initial attempts, yielding either insignificant or no results. Other *Kriya* students enact the part of the humble devotee and affirm that for them the *First Kriya* techniques are enough, that there is no need for any other technique. If you tell them they have renounced a great treasure, they will turn a deaf ear to any objection. Now, for those who are willing to consider the matter according to a new perspective, I want to bring the *Higher Kriyas* close to the noble art of the practice of the *Prayer of the heart*.

Actually, in my opinion, *Thokar* (in each stage and variation) in order to be fully realized should be lived in the dimension of the *Contemplative Prayer*. Indeed, if my convictions have any validity, outside that dimension, the whole set of the *Higher Kriyas* risks to become only a toy with which to experiment, to be exalted through it and then let all be disintegrated by endless doubts and incomprehension of what we are doing.

Am saying that the *Kriya* path is incomplete without considering the path of *Contemplative Prayer*? Certainly I am, of this I have no doubts! I am firmly convinced that those who went to Lahiri Mahasaya already practiced *Prayer (Japa)*, probably for substantial part of their life. To them *Kriya Yoga* didn't represent something totally new but was a God sent improvement of what they already were doing, in which they had already poured their soul. For them the lofty procedure of *Thokar* worked and actually gave results because they were already very near to the achievement of the *Prayer of the heart*.

If a person has no factual knowledge with these themes, one will think that I am about to diminish the value of the *Thokar* technique. Well, *Thokar* can induce a particular state in the heart, a state that can be deepened only by a mind transformed by *Contemplative Prayer*. After *Thokar* there are stages that lead to something that I have no words to define. For this reason I will refer to the great mystical traditions, especially Hesychasm and the works of Teresa of Avila.

Practicing the *Contemplative Prayer* in order to create the best ambient for *Thokar* and utilizing *Thokar* to give a boost to the intensity of a *Contemplative Prayer* creates the condition where "the Prayer reaches the Heart". There are no words adequate to express what this implies. Divine Light is experienced in the heart *Chakra*. *Yoni Mudra* intensifies the experience of Light and through it makes the last knot (*Granti*) in the point between the eyebrows explode: with this event all *Kriya* procedures end in full, final Emancipation.

In the following paragraphs you will find good material for refining your practice, fully realizing what *Thokar* has prepared you. *Kriya yoga* is our life and every word that comes from great mystical traditions enriches and inspires us.

Our lifelong effort is greatly benefited from such a study. You will obtain undreamed of results like for example the endless delight of the breathless state.

What I am suggesting (the practice of the *Contemplative Prayer* coupled with *Kriya* techniques, perfecting *Thokar* at the maximum level) is a journey that can take a lifetime to flourish in the full Self-realization state – and perhaps continues beyond the life of the body. Throughout one's life, it can be mediated by different teachers, each one adequate for the appropriate stage of practice and development.

Therefore, I am setting out to take back the discourse of *Japa* introduced in the first part of this book and expand it. I will talk about Hesychast traditions summarizing their key teachings and squeeze the essence of the writings of St. Teresa of Avila. You will also find hints to Sufi and Tibetan traditions. Clearly, the second part of the book could not contain this material.

Contemplative Prayer

What is *Contemplative Prayer*? It is the repetition of a formula which has a devotional meaning of offering, of surrender to God. In Christianity over the centuries, a great deal of incomprehension and misunderstanding has arisen with respect to the practice of *Contemplative Prayer* that it risked an almost total eclipse. For many devotees *Prayer* was – with rare exceptions – a plea to God with the sole purpose of obtaining personal favors or blessings for a suffering humanity.

Now, let us consider only the so called *Prayer of Worship* or *Adoration*. (An example of such a *Prayer* is Lahiri Mahasaya's "*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*". Another could be *Om Namō Shivaya* or *Sri Ram Jay Ram Jay Jay Ram Om.....*) Each person chooses his favorite formula and repeats it many, many times entering a deep state of meditation and contemplation. The *Prayer* is said with meaning and intent, with all the faculties of the soul. It involves the entire human being: the energy of the body, the breath and the pulse manifest the quality of a sovereign calmness. This is *Contemplative Prayer*.

Well, I am affirming that one can understand the whole edifice of *Kriya* and hence put the basis to bring it to perfection only by enthusiastically adopting it as a daily habit.

The consolidated habit of *Contemplative Prayer* characterizes a successful internal transformation of the devotee from a curious and acute researcher, pleased with one's discoveries, to a humble mystic who knows he knows nothing. The "internal dialogue" that hindered every effort of concentration is now under control.

The *Prayer of the Heart* is the goal of the evolution of the *Continuous Prayer*. It is not a simple concept such as *Prayer* uttered with devotion and feeling. It is a deeper experience achieved at the end of a life of surrender to God. Only by working hard to achieve this state, helped by the God Sent gift of *Thokar*, can one reach the summit of *Kriya Yoga*. You are not geared to obtain

any kind of astral experience, but you will come into communion with God and participate in His grace, discover Who is yours already, listen to Who never ceases to talk, possess Who even now possesses you.

You would not seek me unless you had already found me.
(Pascal)

What you will find in this chapter has one purpose only: to stimulate your curiosity (perhaps something dormant in you coming from who knows whence...) to create a momentum which will assist you to begin the practice of *Contemplative Prayer*. Although your initial efforts may be far from an ideal of perfection, you will enter the most extraordinary period of your life.

I invite each *kriyaban* to deepen the themes that are dealt with here. You will find simple books that explain with amazing simplicity everything essential about the practice of Prayer. I am referring for example to biographies of saints, quoting the counsels given by them.

The literature is vast, but there is no purpose in reading everything. The beauty that is born from these texts makes you feel the goal as the nearest of the near, more appealing than anything else in the world. Being aflame for it, you practice beyond the point of exhaustion and achieve your goal.

If initially, as is perfectly understandable, the following paragraphs seem empty rhetoric, the depth and purpose of the treated matter will become apparent as your reading progresses.

The teaching of Hesychasm

Hesychasm (from Greek: ἡσυχασμός *hesychasmos*, meaning "stillness, rest, quiet, silence, tranquillity") is a Christian orthodox movement considering inner peace a necessity for everyone. On Mount Athos the monks worked out a whole system of contemplation based upon a simple Prayer (*Kyrie Iesou Christe, Yie tou Theou, Eleison me ton amartalon* – "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner") which is called the "Jesus Prayer" practiced in complete silence.

Their main teaching is how to reach the lofty state of the *Prayer of the Heart*. Perfection of the *Prayer of the Heart* leads to the highest mystical achievement: the perception of the "Uncreated Light".

Hesychasts interpret Christ's injunction in the Gospel of Matthew which says: "go into your closet to pray", to mean that their first duty is to withdraw inward. Only when we have stilled our hearts and bodies you can be fully open to the presence of the Divine. The body should be held immovable for a long time. The starting point is the rejection of any distracting thought. After ignoring the physical senses, you begin to experience internal stillness. The discipline is tough: you watch your thoughts and courageously fight them. Much of Hesychast literature is engaged with the psychological analysis of tempting thoughts. A great emphasis is placed on humility: disaster will befall if one proceeds with pride, arrogance or conceit.

The book *The Way of a Pilgrim*, a Russian novel written by "Anonymous" in the mid-nineteenth century and translated into English in 1930, is a masterpiece. In the meeting between Orthodoxy and the West which has occurred over the past seventy years, probably no single book has exercised a wider appeal than *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

It is a simple, edifying book, of universal spiritual appeal. It is imminently practical in its advice to not dither in starting the *Jesus Prayer*. The main reason for the work's attraction is the presentation of a wandering hermit's life as the model existence for those who truly wish to lead a spiritual life. Thanks to the inspiration coming from it many feel to be a born again Christian and are able to say the prayer faithfully for several hours daily.³

The story is about a pilgrim returning from the Holy Sepulcher who stopped at Mount Athos and told of his lifelong search for the teaching on how "to pray continually" – the way Saint Paul had recommended – to a monk. One is immediately struck by the opening words: "By the grace of God, I am a Christian, by my actions, a great sinner, and by calling, a homeless wanderer of the humblest birth roaming from place to place. My worldly goods are a knapsack with some dried bread in it, and in my breast pocket a Bible. And that is all".

No one knows for certain if it is a true story about a particular pilgrim or a spiritual fiction created to propagate the mystical aspect of the Orthodox Christian faith. Some, on the basis of other witnesses, identify the author as the Russian Orthodox monk Archimandrite Mikhail Kozlov. Whatever the historical truth, this pilgrim is the ideal representative of a vast category of people who spent their life visiting sanctuaries, churches, monasteries, the Athos Mountain, the Holy Land seeking God through the *Continuous Prayer*.

The pilgrim completes not only a pilgrimage of physical order, but above all spiritual, that is countersigned by some precise, universal stages.

These stages mark the passage from the scheduled appointment with *Contemplative Prayer* said with tongue and lips while fighting the restlessness of the wandering mind, to the intense, lofty experience of the *Prayer of the Heart*, to the fullness of *Continuous Prayer*, going on effortlessly day and night.

The book narrates how the pilgrim was resolute about covering an infinite distance across the steppes, if he had to, in order to find a spiritual guide that would reveal to him the secret of *Continuous Prayer*. One day, his ardor was awarded; he found a spiritual teacher who accepted him as a disciple and

³ Strange as it may seem, for many the first exposure to the *Prayer of the Heart* came from Franny and Zooey by J.D. Salinger: "... if you keep saying that prayer over and over again, you only have to just do it with your lips at first - then eventually what happens, the prayer becomes self- active. Something happens after a while. I don't know what but something happens, the words get synchronized with the person's heart-beats, and then you're actually praying without ceasing."

About the *Philokalia* (which is often used by Hesychasts), it is a collection of texts on prayer and asceticism written from the 4th to the 15th Centuries [first published in Greek in 1782]. In my opinion, it is a tedious text showing the attitude of the mind, obsessed by sin and temptations, to complicate the simplest things. However, it is irrefutable that here and there, some pearls of wisdom are disseminated.

gradually clarified to him every detail of the practice that was so strongly attracting him. The Pilgrim was instructed to repeat the Jesus Prayer 3,000 times a day, then 6,000, then 12,000.

By following this counsel, the pilgrim finds eventually the *Prayer* at his lips and in his mind every waking hour, as spontaneous and effortless as breath itself. In this wonderful condition he comes to experience the effulgence of the divine light, the innermost "secret of the heart". In order to give an idea of what, from now onwards, his life has become, the pilgrim quotes the Gospel passage of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field – identifying himself with them as completely dependent on God: whatever happens, it cannot separate him from God. Like a person enjoying the beauty of a chilly winter near the fireside, one who practices *Continuous Prayer* contemplates either the sad or the joyous spectacle of life having found the infinity of the skies residing in their heart! *Prayer* is a marvelous gem whose glitter warms up life. Its magic spreads into each facet of life, like walking out of a dark room into fresh air and sunlight.

Since the action of *Continuous Prayer* goes on automatically in the mind, always present like a background sound, the "inner dialog", which prevents meditation, is under control: one can live permanently in the dimension of *Mental Silence*.

Hesychasts counsel to care for this state at all stages of one's life at every moment. The first commandment is to preserve in yourself a prayerful spirit – that is, to have God in your remembrance and exert yourself in every way to commit yourself to Him. When this intention is sincerely etched in your mind and heart, then they counsel to "arouse in your heart a *feeling of heat*." They explain that when you have succeeded in attaining this condition, you must develop all your duties in such a way as not to destroy it. You must live this condition and heed it continuously: as soon as it changes, realize that something in your consciousness is creating disharmony. Therefore you must analyze yourself, find the cause of disharmony and rectify it.

They also add: "During active life learn to constantly fix your own attention on the region of the throat – the words of *Prayer* gush out incessantly from there. During immobile meditation feel the words of *Prayer* in the heart."

They explain that in this way soul and body live in harmony and this is the base of the spiritual life. This harmony is not lost during sleep.

I sleep, but my heart waketh
(*Song of Solomon 5:2*)

No wonder that those who experience this state try to live, as much as possible, in solitude. If this is not possible, they try to avoid useless conversations. There are moments during the day, when the breath stops and the awareness is filled only by God's presence.

...The first step is that of purest prayer,
From this there comes warmth of heart,
And then a strange, a holy energy,
Then tears wrung from the heart, God-given.

Then peace from thoughts of every kind.
From this arises purging of the intellect,
And next the vision of heavenly mysteries.
Unheard of Light is born from this ineffably,
And thence, beyond all telling, the heart's illumination.
Last comes – a step that has no limit
Though compassed in a single line –
Perfection that is endless...

(*Monk Theophanis, the Hesychast ascetic of the 8th century*)

Hesychasm: the esoteric procedures

Many readers of *The Way of a Pilgrim* wonder how to undertake the practice of *Contemplative Prayer*. Let us here attempt to summarize the esoteric teachings of the Hesychast method.

A *kriyaban* discovers that those instructions have amazing similarities with the *Kriya* procedures. The study of them provides a particular lens to better understand our *Kriya* discipline. The words of those who had practical experience of the *Prayer of the heart*, are very important for us, and it would be foolish to superficially glance over it.

Basic teaching: how to start the practice of *Contemplative Prayer*

They counsel to murmur the *Prayer* just audibly enough that you can hear yourself. When you are "satiated" of this oral *Prayer*, begin to repeat it mentally. When assailed by distraction or laziness, then return to repeating it aloud. It is very important not to disturb the peace of the practice and to maintain a tranquil rhythm.

You can make a few prostrations (bows from the waist, while the rest is immobile.) Twelve prostrations will suffice in the beginning. That number can be constantly increased. The prostrations warm up the body and strengthen fervor in *Prayer*.

Then sit comfortably and try to lengthen the rhythm of your breath. Breathe in and breathe out producing and perceiving a sweet noise and sensation in the throat. [Strange as it might seem, I have found this instruction in Hesychasm literature. I am not creating this instruction using my *Kriya* knowledge.] As the breath reaches a stable and regular rhythm, combine the *Prayer* with the ingoing and outgoing breath. Establish a link between the rhythm of the breathing process and the mental repetition of the *Prayer*.

As a general rule you should repeat your *Prayer* for a minimum of 15 minutes. You should then gradually increase to a period of 30 minutes. You will need to measure your time: one way is to use a *Rosary*. Then move on to pure mental repetition.

Repeat the words in the center of your mind, behind your forehead. Repeat quietly, unhurriedly, thoughtfully avoiding any imagination. Using imagination may create new mental distractions and hinder clear perception and awareness of the process. Little by little your attention will settle on the meaning

of the words you are using. Your heart will be touched and the *Prayer* will introduce you into its sanctuary. Strive therefore to confine your thought to the *Prayer* and you will surely reach the stage when the mind remains exclusively in the words. This will guide you into the final abduction of the mind into God's dimension.

Advanced teaching: how to move toward the achievement of the *Prayer of the Heart*

During the previous basic stage, it is very likely that the center of your being is located within the region between the eyebrows. This place corresponds to an abstract thought of pure intellectuality and is not fit for all the phases of meditation. If the energy of your thought comes down to the level of the throat, as it normally happens while reciting the *Prayer*, it acquires an evocative power recharged with emotional values. As a consequence there is the tendency to become lost in mental associations. In the advanced stage you move the center of your awareness towards the heart center. The attention reaches complete cohesion; it is sustained by a higher intensity and nothing extraneous can disturb it.

Hesychasts explain that finding "the place of the heart" means to establish one's internal life in a lasting *Present*, where you don't pray anymore with the "mind in the head" but with "the mind in the heart." Achieving this state is a very great experience! Hesychasts explain that one has a drastic realization that "what we have lived till now has been *nothing*."

Let us describe how to move the awareness towards the heart center.

With all your attention focused upon the cardiac center, inhale through the nose, thinking all the words of the *Prayer*. Guide air and *Prayer* to the place of the heart. Exhale feeling that the *Prayer* comes up with the breath and goes out through the nose. (If your *Prayer* is long, recite half during inhalation and half during exhalation.)

After some repetitions, introduce a pause after inhalation. During this pause tilt the chin onto the upper part of the breast, feeling the tension of the neck muscles, hold the breath for how much you are able to do so (comfortably without strain/force), locking your awareness in the heart center and repeating your *Prayer* there several times. Then exhale, repeating it again while breath and *Prayer* rise to the nose.

The most advanced development of this teaching is the following: during the pause you can synchronize the *Prayer* with the beating of the heart. Visualize your heart and turn your eyes to it, as if you are looking at it. Listen attentively with the mind to its pulsations, one after the other. When you are used to this, proceed (always looking internally at the heart) to make each pulsation coincide with a word or with a syllable of the *Prayer*. This can happen also during inhalation and exhalation. This is the most ancient tradition of the practice of the *Prayer of the Heart*.

If you persevere in bringing ahead this practice, you will discover new aspects of it. Patience and commitment should be unshakeable during the practice. If this stage seems difficult to you, remember what St. Simeon the New Theologian said: "Sit in your cell, and the *Prayer* will teach you everything."

Meditation after the previous practice

Forget the breath. Sit (comfortably and without strain) with your head bowed and your eyes directed toward the abdomen. [We can observe that even if a person sits with straight spine, he acquires this position spontaneously when he comes close to the state of *Samadhi*.] Empty your mind of every image. Be tenacious in praying with concentrated focus on the navel but try to enter it, as if the navel were only a "door". Initially, you will find a joyless and dull obscurity but with persistence, a limitless happiness will be reached. You will see the open space within the heart and contemplate the "*Uncreated Light*". Your heart will be filled with the most loving and subtle bliss!

Sometimes you will feel a warm sensation originating from the heart region. This sensation, first mild, may turn into a sensation of solidification of the heart which is felt like a point surrounded by an endless pressure. From this pressure comes a strange experience of pain. We perceive the Divine, the endless Light and we burn of love. We realize the moment has not yet come to become one with that endless Light and Bliss: hence the pain. ⁴

Sectarian religious objections based on patent nonsense

Let us reply with dignity to folly uttered by those people who have never really practiced this path. We have heard from people who call themselves Christians that the Hindu technique of *Mantra (Japa)* cannot be practiced and experienced inside the dimension of the Hesychasm; in other words, it can never be defined *Prayer of the Heart*. They say that there is an infinite distance separating the Christian *Prayer of the Heart* from the Hindu *Japa*. We are stunned by reading such statement as: "Behind some names like *Krishna, Rama, or Shiva* there are demons lying in wait. Once they are invoked by the use of the *Mantra*, the door is open for the devil to begin his theatrical productions, using sounds, images, dreams, and the imagination in general in order to drag the practitioner deeper into deception."

If those critics would practice something similar to the *Prayer of the Heart*, this very fact would bring them joy, not harsh terrible judgment. Why talk about ecumenism if you show such contempt towards Hinduism and *Yoga*? When a person is seriously committed to the habit of *Prayer*, there is no time, no interest, nor any will to be concerned about what pertains to other religious traditions.

Further nonsense is that using this method without guidance is to court

⁴ An Hesychast author gives this explanation: "To pray with the heart, we suffer because we become one with other's pain." He adds: "We must come out from our own self and begin to love the other, must suffer for him, so that we can pray for him. Pain becomes a grace that passes through the body which becomes dead to the world and is crucified."

spiritual disaster, ruining our lungs. They assure that many who have tried to learn the procedure of the *Prayer of the Heart* by themselves, have ruined their lungs and achieved nothing. This seems to me an exaggeration and fundamentally a lie. They go ahead explaining that the various phases of the procedure (gaze turned to the navel, attention to the breath and to the pulsation of the heart upon which to synchronize the *Prayer*) push one into a world of dreams, illusions, and at times, "in a constant state of lust."

We cannot accept the claim that those who explore the way of *Contemplative Prayer*, without the context of a religious community, are prey to total illusion and instead of being in a relationship with God, they grow a subtle form of self-satisfaction – a spiritual narcissism. This accusation is akin to the ordinary accusation that *Yoga* is a process of self-deifying, while the correct attitude should be the will to reunite with God, remaining a distinct person. The ignorance of such affirmations are truly astounding! They don't recognize the fact (which many mystics have often expressed in poetic form) of a completely different attitude – the idea of total, irrevocable union with God. What they are claiming only reveals their limited knowledge of oriental meditation and ignorance of Christian literature, where numerous Christian Saints have expressed their spiritual vision in a way which is identical to that of Saints and *Hindu Rishis*.

The key accusation is that the insistence on properly performed techniques of meditation as a prerequisite for experiencing well defined mystical states, is in contrast to the teaching of Grace. Unfortunately this accusation is reinforced by innocent fantasies about the workings of our brain and nervous system written and published by some *yogis* who claim that the benefit accrued by repeating the *Mantra* is due to certain frequencies produced by its pronunciation, which cause spiritual vibrations that activate spiritual centers within man. As we know there are plenty of theories about the use of particular sound waves to foster the meditative state The truth is that the fervor of a *yogi's* heart, showing a total, true and sincere surrender to the Divine, cannot be brought onto the table of a scientific laboratory.

Therefore, let us forget those theories and stress one firm point: a *yogi* sincerely believes that a spiritual path can receive a benefit by learning and applying some procedures. A *yogi's* factual experience sanctions that a transformations happen along the path: surrender, total trust in God happens and then comes the Grace of God. Who has the authority of denying this? Why do certain people feel the need to stigmatize this? Are we not able to see that the Hesychast writings in their complexity exemplify the validity, the wisdom, the effectiveness of all this?

The teachings of St. Teresa of Ávila

In the writings of St. Teresa of Ávila⁵ it is clearly stated that perfection in the spiritual life can be reached only by expanding the limit in the practice of *Contemplative Prayer* (she uses the term: "*Internal Oration*.") According to St. Teresa *Prayer* is all in all in the mystical path. There is no other exercise upon which she insists so much in all of her writings and to which she grants such importance. In her opinion, the soul that doesn't create the habit of *Prayer* is lost – it won't reach the mystical goal.

She described nine levels of *Prayer* – not nine different techniques of praying but nine stages that one experiences while continuing to repeat the chosen *Prayer*. Most Catholics are not informed about these levels.

This teaching completes that of the Hesychasm. Here we find a very precise analysis of the various degrees and stages of *Contemplative Prayer*. The stages described happen with spontaneous naturalness.

In her opinion the degrees of *Prayer* are:

1. Vocal Prayer
2. Discursive Meditation
3. Affective Mental Prayer
4. Acquired Recollection
5. Infused Recollection
6. Prayer of Quiet
7. Prayer of Simple Union
8. Prayer of Ecstatic Union
9. Prayer of Transforming Union

1. Vocal Prayer

St. Teresa recommends that beginners should first use vocal *Prayer*. You choose the formula that mostly excites fervor and devotion. In this way you can hope that attention follows what you are saying and to Whom you are addressing it. Vocal *Prayer* must last the time necessary to excite devotion, no more. It is the door to enter the internal castle: "We need no wings to go in search of Him, but have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon Him present within us" (St. Teresa).

2. Discursive Meditation

St. Teresa talks about "reasoned application of the mind to a supernatural truth to have a deep conviction of it and therefore to love it and to practice it with the

⁵ Saint Teresa of Ávila, also called Saint Teresa of Jesus, (March 28, 1515 – October 4, 1582) was a prominent Spanish mystic, Roman Catholic saint, Carmelite nun, and writer of the Counter Reformation, and theologian of contemplative life through *Contemplative Prayer*. She was a reformer of the Carmelite Order. The teaching of St. Teresa flows from her own experience and not from books.

help of the Grace." We appreciate St. Teresa's deep understanding of the human psyche. Actually, this doesn't seem a stage of *Prayer* but it is something that invariably happens after the preliminary phase of vocal *Prayer*, after striving against distractions. At this moment we have a poignant vision of something we can do in life to express not only in words but in deeds also the deepest meaning of our *Prayer*. St. Teresa knows that this process of reasoning mixed with strong power of implementation arrests the *Prayer* for some minutes. However, she knows that this compelling vision has to be accepted. Then, when our heart finds peace, we can resume our *Prayer*.

3. Affective Mental Prayer

Now we enter what is called a "sleep of the faculties"; it is not "trance" nor is it "union." The heart prevails, consolations and sensitive softness are begotten.

4. Acquired Recollection

In this stage you feel the presence of God. "Acquired" means achieved with your efforts. Prayer goes on and you are absorbed in a loving awareness. Your attitude is going to become more and more passive. The soul is, as it were, utterly fainting in a kind of trance. Breathing, and all bodily strength seems to fail, so that it cannot even move the hands without great pain; the eyes close involuntarily, and if they are open, they are as if they saw nothing; nor is reading possible – the very letters seem strange, and cannot be distinguished. The ear hears, but what is heard is not understood. It is useless to try to speak, because it is not possible to conceive the words; nor, if it were possible, is there strength sufficient to utter it; for all bodily strength vanishes, and that of the soul increases.

When a *kriyaban* experiences this stage, one would like to write down something as to fix the the method by which to achieve that state again, to have it again and again in the following practices of *Prayer*. One is sure of the discovery of a secret, but when the eyes are opened and one tries to write, the magic of those moments disappears and one can't remember what exactly was done to reach that state. It is important to understand that this state happens when many conditions are respected and fall into place together – optimal condition of our body, pacification of our emotions, deep silence in our thinking process. It is for this reason that it is useless to seek a precise recipe to reproduce it.

5. Infused Recollection

This state is a logical deepening of the previous state and is the first degree of mystical contemplation. St. Teresa calls it "Infused Recollection" because it comes from Grace. She describes it as a glorious delirium, a celestial folly, a state of unspeakable delights. It is an inebriation of love in which the soul doesn't know what to do, whether to speak or to keep silent, whether to cry or to laugh. The soul is conscious of a deep satisfaction. The soul feels invaded by something that has the taste of eternal life and feels as if coming into contact with an *Endless Goodness*. Hence comes the feeling that there is nothing on the earth

worthy of your desire or attention.

This state produces a partial transformation of our way of living but it needs to be remembered that this state embodies only the beginning of true mystical experience.

6. Prayer of Quiet & 7. Prayer of Simple Union

The body becomes insensitive and the will is totally captivated by irresistible devotion. The other faculties, such as memory, reason, and imagination, are progressively captivated and occupied with God. Both intellect and will are absorbed in God. Distractions are not possible and the external bodily senses are "imprisoned."

In *Kriya Yoga*, we describe this as the first stage of *Samadhi*. At this stage one listens to the internal astral sounds, the sound of *Om* and also witnesses the Divine Light. One is in total absorption, being drawn and merging very deeply into the experience, feeling as if approaching annihilation before such tremendous *Beauty*.

8. Prayer of Ecstatic Union

The description that I am going to give of this state, using the words of St. Teresa is very strange. It is not an exaggeration: she couldn't have found better words attempting to express the inexpressible.

Let us then begin to explain that the soul is wounded with love for the Divine. Body and Spirit are in the throes of a sweet, happy pain, alternating between a fearful fiery glow, a complete impotence, unconsciousness, and a feeling of *suffocation*, sometimes intermixed with such an ecstatic flight that the body is literally lifted into space. From this the subject awakens in tears.

The way with which God hurts the soul is inexpressible. The torment is so alive that the soul goes out of itself, although at the same time so sweet that you can not compare it with any pleasure of the earth. St. Teresa further explains that there are moments in which you can feel like an arrow has deeply penetrated your heart. One laments with such a vivid and intense pain, but at the same time the experience is so delicious one never wants it to end.

9. Prayer of Transforming Union

Also called the "Mystical Marriage", it is the highest state of *Prayer* that can be achieved in this life. It represents the most intimate union of the soul with God; the soul becomes Divine and is no more subject to ecstasy – the contact with God happens even when the body does not assume the appearance of a corpse.

Now the journey of the soul ends. What at one time had the character of supplication or of a sweet conversation with our personal idea of God has progressively transformed into a hard work not based upon fleeting emotions, and has now lead the soul to the ultimate crowning experience of the encounter with God.

Other sources of inspiration: Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism insists so much on the value of *Mantra* that I couldn't avoid quoting this source of inspiration. Their teaching is repeating *Om Mani Padme Hum* ("Hail the jewel in the lotus") again and again until the chaos of your thoughts quiets. We rarely come across technical remarks, practical teachings, but you can find them if you keep on seeking.

Among a great deal of empty chatter, I found an excellent teaching. Let me summarize it: by repeating the *Mantra*, the pulse of your heart becomes clearly evident and your attention turns to the easy movement of breath through your nostrils ... in and out. You're no longer lost in thought. You're not spaced out. You're in the state of meditation. The layers that are covering up your true being, reveal your true nature which is love and compassion.

If Tibetan Buddhists would stop here, all would be perfect. Unfortunately they try a childish demonstration that all the teachings of the Buddha are contained in the *Mantra: Om Mani Padme Hum*. You find also clear exaggerations like the story that if any animal or insect should hear this *Mantra* before dying, it would be reborn to the pure land of *Amitabha*..... Another story is that by reciting the *Mantra* with mindfulness and a proper understanding, all sufferings will dissolve and up to seven generations of that person's descendents won't get reborn in the lower realms....

Annoyed we read that viewing the written form of the *Mantra* has the same effect that reciting it..... or that spinning the written form of the *Mantra* around a wheel is also believed to give the same benefit as reciting the *Mantra*.... We are used to such nonsense and know for certain that the beauty, purity and value of the *Mantra* said with our voice and heart has no substitute.

The Sufi mystical path

The art of *Contemplative Prayer* is developed by the *Sufi* (Islamic mystics) in an astonishing way. Reading some pages of their literature means receiving spiritual the intoxication and joy that are the best antidote to the tendency toward melancholy which can be the worst malady of many spiritually oriented people. Soul stirring ardent feelings and sincerity are to be found there: the celebration of God and nature shines with a strength and amplitude beyond comparison.

I died as a mineral and became a plant; I died as plant and rose to animal; I died as animal and I was Man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar with angels blest; but even from angelhood I must pass on: all except God doth perish. When I have sacrificed my angel-soul, I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.

(Rumi, Translated by A.J. Arberry)

Sufis passionately look for the possibility, in which they firmly believe, of a

direct experience of God. Many practice a private and silent *Adoration*. Others join together in an outward group expression of their love for God.

The word *Dhikr* is commonly translated as "remembrance". Essentially, the practice of *Dhikr* is a form of Prayer in which the Muslim expresses one's remembrance of God. Through *Dhikr* the seed of remembrance is planted in the heart and nourished daily, until the tree of *Dhikr* becomes deeply rooted and bears its fruit.

Most inspiring instructions are given to avoid distractions in such a way that the heart is occupied with neither "family" nor "money". One continues until the heart is continually applied to the *Dhikr*.

Sufis teach that the purpose of *Dhikr* is to purify hearts and souls and to be fortified by the Light of the Divine. When the heart is immersed and enraptured by the Truth, it turns to the highest ideal without being deflected by anything.

How beautiful is to think, to feel that when we open our heart to *Allah* and utters words in His praise, *Allah* fills us with strength and inner peace. How great is the inspiration that we receive from images as this one: "When a servant of *Allah* utters the words "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*" (There is none worthy of worship except Allah) sincerely, the doors of heaven open up for these words until they reach the Throne of *Allah*." Therefore, *Dhikr* is something of tremendous importance.

When praying, the individual bows as a human person and gets up as God.
(*Al-Junayd*)

They teach to begin the practice by uttering the *Mantra* aloud (*Dhikr* of the tongue), then a state of great absorption makes it impossible to go on in this way. At this point the mental practice commences. By persevering assiduously in this way, putting all our concentration into the practice, the syllables chanted mentally are gradually effaced from our awareness and only the meaning of the *Prayer* remains. The mind becomes so calm that it is unable to think, while the deepest sentiments are awakened – the touch of Divine Recollection drives the mind crazy and the most intoxicating of joys begins to expand within.

"Heavens and earth contain Me not, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me."

(*Prophet Muhammad conveying the words of God, Hadith Kudsi.*)

"Know that there is a physical Heart in each body. There is a spiritual Heart in each Heart. There is a Secret in each spiritual Heart. There is a Hidden in each Secret, and there is a Most Hidden in each Hidden. I am in that Most Hidden."

(*The Secret of Islam* 274, by Henry Bayman)

If one wants to follow the *Sufi* path and uses the *Kriya* techniques, one will encounter no difficulties whatsoever. Of course, one should be endowed with a strong self-teaching spirit. There is no doubt that *Thokar* has a great affinity with a particular *Sufi* way of practicing their "*Dhikr*". I am referring to those procedures in which the chanting of the "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*" is accompanied by

the movements of the head.

It's interesting that Lahiri Mahasaya gave the Islamic mantra "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*" to his Muslim disciples to be practiced during *Thokar*. We don't have the exact details of that procedure but it seems reasonable that the head was lifted (with or without the help of the breath) from under the navel up to the brain; after reaching the brain, it moved from the brain to the one shoulder, then to the other shoulder and then it hit the heart.

Some *Sufi* order explains that he who wants to guide his Prayer into his heart, imposes a circular movement to his head and then lowers it on his breast. A modern *Sufi* confraternity practices it in the following way: "*Lâ*" is placed in the head, "*ilâha*" (with head bending to the right) in the right upper part of the chest, "*illâal*" (with head bending to the left) in the left upper part of the chest and "*lâh*" (with head bending down) in the heart; then again "*Lâ*" in the head, while raising it....

As the number of repetitions of the technique increases in intensity, a deep intoxication is felt in the heart. One may abide by the number of repetitions given in *Kriya* schools (related with the practice of the basic form of *Thokar*) or can go beyond them in a completely different dimension. I know that the *Sufis* reach a number of repetitions that is inconceivable to a *kriyaban*.

Conclusion

I hope that what you have read here has stimulate your curiosity (perhaps something dormant in you coming from who knows whence...) to create a momentum which will assist you to begin the practice of *Japa*. I invite you to deepen the themes that are dealt with here by your own study. The literature on this subject is vast, but there is no purpose in reading everything. If initially, as is perfectly understandable, some books will appear as full of empty rhetoric, now and then some sentence will light the sacred fire of an unbelievable enthusiasm which will give new life to your *Kriya* path.

The study of the biographies of saints will make you feel the goal as the nearest of the near, more appealing than anything else in the world. Being aflame for it, you will be able to practice beyond the "point of exhaustion" – in this way you will enter the most extraordinary period of your life, culminating with the achievement of the breathless state. Specific instruction about that is to be find in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 11
THE BREATHLESS STATE

Often I have thought over Lahiri Mahasaya's motto "*Banat, Banat, ban jay!*" (doing and doing, one day it is done!) At first this sentence gave me the idea of one who, without ever losing heart, goes all out to reach the peak of a high mountain. The peak to seize hold after a life long effort was for me that particular state of consciousness of which I had read, called "*Self- Realization*".

Subsequently, I changed my perspective on the meaning of the intensive effort required to follow a spiritual path. I realized that the best way of engaging in something of permanent value consisted only in removing the obstacles created by the mind; when this had been done, the spiritual dimension would manifest naturally, without further effort on my behalf.

The necessary action to start the cleaning process consisted in creating the state of *Mental Silence* and holding onto it during the activities of daily living. The best and surest way to achieve and to maintain the state of *Mental Silence* was *Japa*. Now, when I decided to practice *Japa* every day, something of enormous importance happened then: the breathlessness state spilled an unparalleled experience of divine bliss into my being. My life was forever changed by this event.

Breathlessness does not simply mean that the breath becomes more and more quiet or that the breath is held after a long hyperventilation like divers do. In the breathless state the breath is entirely non-existent.

I experienced this during *mental Pranayama* at the end of my *Kriya* routine. After a few seconds of concentration on the *Chakras*, when my *Kriya* routine had entered the passive phase of *mental Pranayama*, I experienced with full awareness my breath calming down and then disappearing. A cause-effect relationship (*Japa* causing the breathless state) was established beyond any doubt. From that moment, *Japa* became an essential tool to prepare my mind for meditation.

To say the whole truth, the divine gift of the breathless state was prepared by my constant practice of the *Basic Form of Thokar*. However, since about *Thokar* we have already expressed all we know, in this Chapter we limit our discussion to examine how to conceive a good plan for practicing *Japa* daily. The purpose is be sure that the teaching of the *Japa* is understood without misinterpretation.

1. The choice of a Mantra

Choose a *Mantra* (Prayer) that appeals to you. Don't feel obliged to use Lahiri Mahasaya's favored *Vasudeva Mantra* ("*Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*".)

You can, just to give you an idea, choose one from your favorite set of prayers, one that has (by adding, if necessary, *Om* or *Amen* at the beginning or at the end) twelve syllables. Twelve is a perfect number because you can utilize it

during *Kriya Pranayama*, placing each of its syllables in a different *Chakra*. Beautiful twelve syllables *Mantra* can be taken out of *Bhajans* or poems. As an example, from the well-known Adi Shankara's chant you can select the beautiful 12-syllable verse: *Chi-da-nan-da-ru-pah-shi-vo-ham-shi-vo-ham* (That Form which is pure consciousness and bliss, I am that supreme Being, I am that supreme Being!)

One thing should be stated objectively: YOUR *Mantra* should express or evoke exactly what YOU want to achieve and embody the attitude you want to express. For example, the attitude of surrender is expressed by *Mantras* beginning with *Om Namó ...* other *Mantras* might express the absolute non-dual realization, and so on.

Sometimes, the meaning is not as important as having in one's heart the example of a dear saint who used it. But this is effective only if you really love that saint.

Your chosen *Mantra* should have both a strong and a soft tone. It is important to relish it. "Strong tone" means that it is incompatible with an attitude of resigned complaint, rather it implies the happiness that you are attracting through the very repetition of its syllables.

In literature you will see how very beautiful *Mantras* have been built. Here you have the *Krishna Mantra: Om Klim Krishnaya Govindaya Gopi-jana Vallabhaya Swaha*. Here you have the *Durga* (Divine Mother) *Mantra: Om Hrim Dhum Durgaye Namaha....*

Some hesychasts use only "*Kyrie Eleison*". *Eleison* can be translated as: "be your embrace upon me, turn yourself to me." You can appreciate how the sound *Eleison* seems to melt with the sound of the *Om*. What is important to understand is that the chosen Prayer should be able to stimulate your devotion, to unify all your being around the practice.

I hope you are not so naive to believe that a *Mantra* works only if it is received from a "*Guru*." Certainly if you want to lighten your portfolio then race to a teacher and buy your personal *Mantra*.

Naturally in certain occasions having a teacher is justified. When an experienced person helps you to choose a *Mantra* and uses everything in his power of persuasion to convince you to apply it continually, this person does you the greatest of all the favors and is correct to compensate him; but that's all! For example an expert who is familiar and has experience with *Hatha Yoga* and with *Bija Mantras*, can forge for you a wonderful *Mantra*. To a preexistent *Mantra*, after the initial *Om*, your teacher can add some "*Bija*" (seed) *Mantras* like: Aim, Dúm, Gam, Glamu, Glom, Haum, Hoom, Hreem, Hrom, Kleem, Kreem, Shreem, Streem, Vang, ... These sounds were chosen by ancient *yogis*, who felt their beauty and liked their vibration. They were not given by a divinity, they are a human discovery. These seed *Mantras* have no meaning but can enrich a *Mantra* who has a meaning.

After having chosen your *Mantra*, use it for a few weeks to find out whether your mind accepts it or not. It often happens that a person chooses a *Mantra*, begins to utilize it with enthusiasm and then, after a few minutes, realizes to be reciting another one. This is a hint that very probably the right

Mantra has not been found. To experience this first hand is what counts, it is the only reasonable thing to do. Be sensitive and careful to the vibration that it arouses in your body and in your heart.

Some make an unfortunate choice, through which they seem to punish themselves. They affirm their limits and unworthiness. After a short time, their practice falls apart; sometimes they find themselves repeating it once or twice during the day, like a sigh of dejection. This has nothing to do with what we are describing here.

2. How to utilize your Mantra

When you have found your *Mantra*, resolve to complete daily at least one *Mala* (a rosary of 108 beads) of it aloud. Pronounce its syllables with serene attitude. Learn to resonate it in your mouth, nasal passages, chest and head areas.⁶

When you have completed the 108 repetitions, let it go ahead automatically in the background of your mind. If possible, take back the vocal practice of *Japa* in the next hours. Forget the words but feel the protective shell of tangible peace surrounding you. I am not recommending to adopt a particular visualization but to increase the capacity of perceiving what is around you. For sure, it requires additional time, time free from work and from social contacts.

Commit yourself to it as if you had a strong will to knock down a wall that life has placed before you. Pick out an obstacle that defeats your attempts to achieve something important in your life and receive a strong push from the idea that your *Mantra* has the power of destroying it.

Day after day your whole life will become more simple. Unnecessary "necessities" will disappear, your solitary giant undertaking will make you eventually emerging in the dimension of *Mental Silence*.

How to plan your Kriya routine after reaching the Mental Silence

Having practiced *Japa* seriously (both aloud and mentally, therefore NOT ONLY MENTALLY), practice in the evening the following routine:

Preliminary part: Maha Mudra – Navi Kriya – Talabya Kriya – Om Japa (6 repetitions)

Then:

1. Kriya Pranayama or Omkar Pranayama (24-36 repetitions)
2. Basic form of Thokar (12-24 repetitions)
3. Omkar Pranayama (6-24 repetitions)
4. Mental Pranayama (1-3 repetitions) or, as a good alternative, Kriya Pranayama with short breath (utilizing, if this is useful and not distracting, the procedure of micro Thokar we have described in Omkar Kriya)

⁶ A teacher was adamant about the fact that a *Mantra* should be pronounced only mentally. I tried to follow his counsel and it didn't work. After various months I was fed up with my useless attempt: I dared to chant it vocally on my *Mala*. Before completing my 108 repetitions, a spring of happiness and mirth gushed from my heart.

This is enough to achieve the breathless state!

Let us discuss each of these points:

1. Kriya Pranayama or Omkar Pranayama (24-36 repetitions)

After practicing the premisses and having found a comfortable position, you discover that the same *Mantra* utilized during the day is going on by itself in your consciousness. You sit with your back upright, the eyes are closed and you feel that your body is a unique solid vibration. Body and mind reach almost automatically the immobility at *pranic* level. No other preliminary practice can give you the fullness and the peace of that silence obtained through the action of *Japa* during the day. There exists no other method of concentration which would succeed in calming that "background noise" that is the dominant soundtrack of human mind.

Begin the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*. The idea of taking a long breath and thinking your *Prayer* during the inhalation and repeating it (or completing it) during exhalation comes naturally! Discover that your routine can be lived in a very simple and natural way, utilizing the same *Mantra-Prayer* chanted during the day. Many *kriyabans* do not "dare" to adapt their personal *Prayer* to *Kriya Pranayama*. It is as if they were afraid to ruin it, to show disrespect for Lahiri Mahasaya. Yet, if with a *Prayer* that arouses your deepest emotions you can create a more ardent *Kriya Pranayama*, why do not try it? What during the day was a formula affirming your surrender to the Divine, it will now become a tool that will guide you within, towards the ecstatic stages described by mystics.

Feel the pranic current touching all the cells of the spine, up and down. Your attention is focused on one action only: merging the inner chanting of the *Prayer* with a slow, even-paced breath. ***This is now your Kriya Pranayama.***

What you are experiencing is similar to the procedure of *Omkar Pranayama* – only it is more simple! You have not that particular attention on the throat sounds – better said: you have it but it is secondary. Bring ahead this easy experience for 24-36 breaths. Do not entertain any hurry.

At a certain point you might discover that you are not breathing. If this happens, don't abandon the mental repetition of the *Prayer*; intensify the power of touching through it the spinal substance, go ahead with the action of moving it up and down. If this doesn't disturb, you can then repeat your *Prayer* in each *Chakra* and make the breathless state more stable. If this happens, you won't need any other practice and your *Kriya* routine ends here!

2. Basic form of Thokar (12-24 repetitions)

But events don't always go so well. Sometimes it is necessary to add at least 12-24 repetitions of the *basic form of Thokar*. It is true that Lahiri said: "In *First Kriya* you can find everything" but you must accept the situation you are in. Most *kriyabans* need *Thokar*. It helps to calm, appease the heart ganglion which regulate the heart pulse. *Thokar* was conceived to establish a particular calmness

(tranquility) in the heart region. Actually, Lahiri Mahasaya says that: "*Thokar* opens the doors of the inner temple" and explains that when the cardiac plexus is struck by its strong action, the *Prana* related with breathing is directed inward: this results in a spontaneous state of profound and prolonged absorption.

Remark

Instead of using the Mantra *Om Namo Bhagavate...* you can adapt to the procedure of *Thokar* the Prayer that you have repeated during the day.

3. Omkar Pranayama (6-24 repetitions)

A few rounds of the *Omkar Pranayama* are not optional but necessary to reestablish the total calmness in the body after the physical movements of *Thokar*.

4. Mental Pranayama (1-3 repetitions)

It is good to read again the explanation of *Mental Pranayama* given in chapter 6. This sweet procedure can be the decisive turning point where you calm down your breathing dramatically. However many *kriyabans* have difficulties in understanding it. You have to move your awareness up and down the spine pausing in each *Chakra* for 10-20 seconds. Slipping into a hurried practice leads to nothing. A particular joy springs out of the *Chakra* in which the awareness dwells. One should intentionally wait for this event, in each *Chakra*. Start with the first *Chakra* at the base of the spine, wait for a feeling of joy, then move to the second, wait ... then third and so on. After ascending to the *Bindu*, begin the descent, pausing in *Medulla*, fifth *Chakra*, fourth *Chakra* and so on. The instructions given in Chapter 6 explain that, if this is agreeable, *Om* may be mentally chanted in each *Chakra*. You will see how easy it is to create a counterclockwise moving sensation in each *Chakra*. The practice of *Japa* (Prayer) during the day has given you a particular faculty. You feel, nay, you are surprised to discover that you are able to create an internal energetic movement around the nucleus of a *Chakra*, of each *Chakra*. It is as if you can, in a certain way, "touch" the substance of which a *Chakra* is composed.

Don't even dream about holding your breath! Some *yogis*, and even some *kriyabans*, believe that the breathless state is gotten by learning to hold the breath for longer periods of time. There is nothing more wrong!

We have seen (Chapter 6) that: "... one may also perceive the subtle radiation of each *Chakra* in the body..." Well then, keeping on touching with your *Mantra* the nucleus of each *Chakra*, you will perceive a fresh energy that sustains the body from the inside. This is the key point.

While your consciousness settles in a vast space extending behind and over the occipital region you have the perception of having calmed down the inner movements of the body, even at a molecular level.

Forget time and calm yourself even further. Suddenly you have the impression of crossing a screen, emerging in another dimension. The awareness of the *Chakras* has disappeared. Your heart rejoices in discovering that a Prayer does not simply consist of words: a repeated Prayer is a churning process of your

mental *Prana* until that *Prana* becomes static and you are that *Prana* extending beyond your body, in the universe. You are enraptured by the thrill of an unequaled *Freedom*. It is a fantastic state! The cells of your body are internally recharged by a mysterious source that you perceive as "cold liquid light." There is not the least quiver of surprise or the thought: "Now I have it finally!" The restless mind is dissolved. You are perfectly aware, but in a calm and detached way. You are projected out of time, you feel you are above life.

When this happens, a great event happened: this is the true initiation into *Kriya Yoga*.⁷ A tranquil joy, vast as the sky, confirms that this is the key experience of your life.

Kriya is based on the breath. Now, to see it magically annulled implies a great personal satisfaction and also a lesson that nothing else could give.

A deeper way of experiencing the afore described fourth point (*Kriya Pranayama* with short breath utilizing micro *Thokar*)

Before persuading yourself that you are not ready for achieving the breathless state, meekly test the following procedure:

Focus your attention on the *Muladhara Chakra*. Vibrate (think with emphasis) "*Te Va Su*" in *Muladhara*. Do it once. Try to feel that "*Te Va Su*" creates an oscillatory movement inside *Muladhara*. When it becomes natural to have a very short inhalation, inhale only what is necessary, pause an instant and concentrate on the second *Chakra*. Hold the breath gently and vibrate "*Te Va Su*" in the second *Chakra*. Exhale when you feel like exhaling, concentrate on *Muladhara*, vibrate "*Te Va Su*" there. When it becomes natural to have a very short inhalation, inhale only what is necessary, pause an instant and concentrate on the third *Chakra*. Hold the breath gently and vibrate "*Te Va Su*" in the third *Chakra*. Exhale when you feel like exhaling, concentrate on *Muladhara*, vibrate "*Te Va Su*" there.

Go on like that, repeating the procedure between *Muladhara* and the fourth *Chakra*; *Muladhara* and fifth *Chakra*; *Muladhara* – *Bindu*; *Muladhara* – *Medulla*; *Muladhara* – fifth *Chakra*; *Muladhara* – fourth *Chakra*; *Muladhara* – third *Chakra*; *Muladhara* – second *Chakra*. As you see, one cycle is made of 10 short breaths. Repeat more than one cycle, increasing your concentration until your breath is almost nonexistent. Pause in *Anahata Chakra*, repeating there "*Te Va Su*" many, many times, until you perceive light both in *Anahata Chakra* and in the point between the eyebrows. This is the best condition to realize the breathless state. One day you will be able to stop the breath and any movement in the body; it will be like a miracle.

"No me pidáis que lo explique. **Tengo el fuego en las manos**"
(García Lorca)

⁷ *Kriya* initiation ceremonies are just a symbol of what we are here describing.

A final encouragement

I have heard some *kriyabans* affirm impudently that *Kriya Yoga* has nothing to do with *Japa* (much less with the pious practice of *Continuous Prayer*.) Almost annoyed by finding that their path could be polluted by other practices, they pour out their ignorance on you: "Neither *Guruji*, nor Lahiri Mahasaya taught it. *Kriyabans* don't need it."

They are filled with the conviction that *Kriya* works in an automatic, infallible way. Still, if the sense of smugness and self satisfaction will not continue blinding their eyes, they could realize very easily that this *Kriya* path is incomplete when it is not coupled with the practice of *Japa*. Without *Japa* no one is able to make the *Mental Silence* state permanent and *Kriya Yoga* work as it should work. But not only *Kriya Yoga*, but any form of *Sadhana* after some temporary success, is eclipsed by the main occupation of the mind: running dry all its energies in the frantic pursuing of ever new dreamland worlds.

Take the resolute decision not to renounce anymore to the fantastic help that only *Japa* can give. It creates around you the protective mantle of *mental Silence*. In spite of whatever abyss of mental confusion and spiritual aridity you are, its sweet vibration will begin to echo into every fiber of your being, as an angel heralding the season of your resurrection.

Important remark

When you achieve the breathless state, you could fall in a very intense attraction toward some marginal aspects of the mystical path: for example something that ignited your interest during a particular phase of your life. Strange as it may seem, this fact may lead you to lose the breathless state for a long time, even years.

The strength of your elated reaction to the new great experience can produce an inflated sense of importance and worth of those secondary aspects. Devoting yourself to stupid searches, experiencing with unnatural and illogical routines, you might postpone, for better times, all actions necessary to continue to enjoy the breathless state.

You might enter a delicate phase of your life where there is no more the desire to enjoy the simplicity and austerity of the *Mental Silence*. The temptation to put *Japa* aside is tremendous. You might slip in a state of despondency and face the specter of doubt cast upon you by momentary lack of results. There comes the idea that *Japa* is a "poor" practice, that there are plenty of other ways to foster spiritual evolution other than parroting words and sounds. Sometimes this illusion is reinforced by the overindulgence in the thought that your mind needs rest and you should avoid all effort even that of practicing *Japa*. Resist this temptation!

Persevere in seeking only the breathless state and a real heaven will be yours. The realization that you have sat in meditation for minutes – maybe hours – without using your lungs and diaphragm: this is so much more valuable than any other achievement in the world.

Addendum: three important ways of adding power to your Japa

1. Japa rotating in Kutastha

This means to feel your chosen *Mantra* moving as if *Kutastha* were a spherical cage and *Mantra* were a micro motorcycle running inside the round cage as you see in some circus. Of course you are rotating your *Mantra* more slowly! About the breath, it is not necessary to say: forget the breath, because you will see that the breath disappears by itself.

You can use this practice just before meditation. Don't use it in all circumstances of life – for example when you drive a car.

2. Japa oscillating in the back of your heart Chakra

Indeed there is a piece of flesh in your body which, if it be sound, then the whole body will be sound and if it be corrupt then the whole body will be corrupt. Indeed it is the heart.

(Al-Bukhaari)

What I am going to describe will be appreciated by the greatest part of the readers. I have had conclusive proof that this is the most direct way to straighten one's path, in the case there are some problems of unbalance. The following procedure is an unparalleled method to approach the "*Prayer of the heart*". If you have never known this dimension of the spiritual path, try anyway and you will be struck by the beauty of the procedure.

Let us consider a 12 syllables Prayer like *Om Namo Bhagabate Vasudevaya*. Each of the four breathing actions that I am going to describe now lasts 2-3 seconds. Each is accompanied by a particular internal movement of energy.

1. Inhale calmly, perceiving a horizontal movement of energy that from a point at the left (about 6 centimeters) of *Anahata* moves toward a symmetrical point on the right, touching *Anahata* from the back. During this movement, mentally chant *Om* in the first point, *Na* in *Anahata*, *Mo* in the point at the right.

2. Exhale calmly, perceiving a horizontal movement of energy that from the point at the right of *Anahata* moves toward the starting point on the left, touching *Anahata* from the back. During this movement, mentally chant *Bha* in the point at the right, *Ga* in *Anahata*, *Ba* in the point at the left.

3. Inhale calmly, perceiving a vertical movement of energy that from a point over *Anahata* (about 4 centimeters) moves down toward a symmetrical point under *Anahata*, touching *Anahata* from the back. During this movement, mentally chant *Te* in the point over *Anahata*, *Va* in *Anahata*, *Su* in the point under *Anahata*.

4. Exhale calmly, perceiving a vertical movement of energy that from the point under *Anahata* comes up to the point over *Anahata*, touching *Anahata* from the back. During this movement, mentally chant *De* in the point under *Anahata*,

Va in *Anahata*, *Ya* in the point over *Anahata*.

The repetition of these 4 movements, namely to draw this "cross", using two complete breaths and one repetition of the 12 syllables *Mantra* is one cycle. They recommend 108 cycles without hurry. It is clear that this is only an example and one can choose other prayers and blend them with the breath in different ways. You can also make the choice of forgetting the breath, let it flow freely, and practicing mentally only. Still better is to start with the breath and then, gradually internalize the practice, end with a mental practice. It is important to perceive the flow of energy left-right-left, over-under-over

Very interesting it is the possibility of synchronizing the Prayer with the pulse of the heart. In order to experience this is worthwhile to slightly lower the chin of one or two centimeters then totally forget the breath. You will realize that the oscillation of energy and consciousness around *Anahata* tends to become smaller and smaller and collapse in the nucleus of the *Chakra*.

Variation

You can alternate this "cross" with an horizontal cross touching the physical heart and the central part of the chest (frontal component of *Anahata*). These two crosses count as two, therefore the time necessary to complete a *mala* is the same. At the end you perceive a greater focusing of your awareness on the nucleus of the heart *Chakra*.

1. and 2. remain the same

3. Inhale calmly, perceiving an horizontal movement of energy that from the seat of *Anahata* moves forward toward the central part of the chest, passing through the physical heart. During this movement, mentally chant *Te* in *Anahata*, *Va* in the physical heart, *Su* in a point located in the central part of the sternum (at the same height as *Anahata*).

4. Exhale calmly, perceiving an horizontal movement of energy that from the point located in the sternum comes back to *Anahata*, passing through the physical heart. During this movement, mentally chant *De* in the point located in the sternum, *Va* in the physical heart, *Ya* in *Anahata*.

Through the instrument of *Thokar* you have learned to stimulate the heart *Chakra* in a strong way. But this is only the first phase of the work, after *Thokar* you must continue guiding patiently the Prayer into the heart. The above described procedure is a means to "dance" with the Prayer "around the heart" until a door opens.

The procedure is effective because it affects, trying to dissolve them, all the dualities that hamper our tuning with the cardiac plexus. The dualities I am referring to are: *Ida* and *Pingala* (flowing sideways the spine and *Anahata*); *Prana* and *Apana* (having their seat over and under *Anahata* respectively). In the variation, you touch the frontal component of *Anahata*: the effect is the overcoming the inner/outer duality.

There is a more elaborate explanation which is related with the "spiritual centers"

of subtle energy in the chest as described by some *Sufi* mystic.

The common knowledge is limited to the heart *Chakra*, *Anahata* which is connected with the experience of oneness with the Divine Person. There are two subtle centers, which are structures different from *Chakras*. The center on the right of *Anahata* is connected with the individual sense of I. The experience of our personality brings to consciousness hidden desires, emotions, motivations, as well as past memories and traumas within one's individual history. The center on the the left of *Anahata* is connected with the experiences of Cosmic Consciousness. This does not mean that when you focus on it you are in a Blissful state. Cosmic Consciousness is the stage that comes after crossing the Collective Unconscious. You must first experience the darkness contained in the human heart and although it pertains to the universe you will perceive it as your own – which usually clashes with one's moral code and one's Self-image.

Practicing the given technique means make Prayer swing between the sense of I and the origin of pure consciousness. The experience of Union can be accessed through this path only. The esoteric experiences of meditation on those centers dissolves the consciousness of pure subjectivity. Eventually, attention is reduced into the focus of the Spiritual Heart which is the core of *Anahata*.

As you repeat this prayer over many months you will find that it makes you so thrilled that you are not able to overstep this initial sweet stage. ⁸

One day you will discover that the Prayer has entered your heart and from which an incommensurable Good is born. The heart thrills in welcoming that state; you sip the celestial honey of a radiation of sweetness which annihilates every desire. Every object will appear transfigured, physical reality will reveal the indwelling presence of Spirit. The radiance brought about by Prayer becomes the gold of your first experience of the Divine. You are permeated by a taste of Eternity: S. Teresa of Avila wrote about an "Endless Goodness." You will feel infinite love blossom in your heart. In fear and joy, in loneliness and companionship, you will feel this love with you.

3. Japa in the body. Introduction to the Kriya of the cells (to be developed in Chapter 12.)

A not widely known fact is that there are mystics who "think" their *Prayers* in their body. This completes what we have seen till now – it embodies indeed the last phase of the process of unfastening the knot of *Muladhara*.

A small collection of written material about this practice has been published almost exclusively by specialized publishers in the esoteric field. These books can be found by rummaging among occult and magic texts. Kerning, Kolb, Lasario, Weinfurter, Peryt Shou and Spiesberger are just a few of the authors. Even though these mystics were born within Christianity and felt on the average in sync with its doctrines, they have been confined to a corner as if they were exponents of esoteric thought, or magicians whose aspirations were to develop secret powers. Any reader who has the patience to research this material,

⁸ It is for this reason that I have counseled an *Incremental Routine*.

skimming through pages and pages of trivial theories and practices whose only goal is to confuse and mislead, will nonetheless find paragraphs of inimitable charm.

Their Prayers are very short, reduced sometimes to a single vowel or syllable. The main technique is to choose a vowel and begin repeating and vibrating it in one's feet and gradually bringing it up to different parts of the body. The same process is repeated with another vowel and so on. Of course, we can use our chosen *Mantra*.

The essence of their teaching is that any sound vibration, if repeated with an unfaltering concentration in the body, can reach its cells – "the whole body will be re-activated with new life and be reborn".

Among those who described this practice, I cannot avoid quoting Mère (Mirra Alfassa), disciple and spiritual successor of Sri Aurobindo. I wrote some introductory lines about her unique spiritual path in the first part of the book (see Chapter 3). Her *Agenda* is a must read. Many experiences we find in it, bringing us back to the practice of the *Mantra* 'thought' throughout the body. The *Agenda* is an amazing "log" of Mirra's attempt to descend into her body to contact the "Consciousness of the Cells", crossing various layers of consciousness (thoughts, emotions, sensations.) It is interesting to note the invaluable help she found in the practice of the *Mantra*. (Her *Mantra* was the splendid *Prayer*: "*Om Namō Bhagavateh.*")

She said to Satprem (her most famous disciple): "Sri Aurobindo gave no *Mantra*; he said that one should be able to do all the work without having to resort to external means. Had he reached the point where we are now, he would have seen that the purely psychological method is inadequate and that a *Japa* is necessary, because only *Japa* has a direct action on the body. So I had to find the method all alone, to find my *Mantra* by myself. But now that things are ready, I have done 10 years of work in a few months."

Walking back and forth in her room, unremittingly concentrated on her body, she repeated her *Mantra* for hours with endless devotion and total "surrender". Each syllable was recharged with her laser-like will and aspiration. The luminous vibration of the Prayer easily made its way through her body and reach an unexplored territory: "... perfect, eternal, outside time, outside space, outside movement ... beyond everything, in ... I don't know, in an ecstasy, a beatitude, something ineffable." The experience she describes is like a breath of the whole body that bypasses the lungs. That sublime state was the very "consciousness of the body," implying that the cells had their own consciousness. The cells, according to her, act as doors: opening on a totally new dimension of consciousness – the only one free from the labyrinths of the mind.

However, to reach this plane, she also had to cross a negative layer which, according to her explanation, was the base of any disease and, apparently, of any casual incident, the origin of every feeling of desperation, deposited therein over thousands of years.

Once experienced, she discovered that when she sat for meditation, as soon as she began the repetition of the *Mantra*, there was an immediate response

in the cells of her body: they all started vibrating as "seized with an intensity of aspiration" and that vibration went on expanding. It was like merging the totality of her being in the vaster manifestation of the Divine inside matter.

In many passages of *Mother's Agenda*, Satprem and Mère discuss how the *Mantra* calms the persons in surrounding areas by creating an atmosphere of such an intensity that disharmonies cease to exist. Furthermore: "*Mantra* has a great action: it can prevent an accident. It simply springs forth in a flash, all of a sudden: "It has to spring up without thinking, without calling: it should issue forth from the being spontaneously, like a reflex, exactly like a reflex."

The *Mantra* is also the sweetest of all things: "On the days when I have no special preoccupations or difficulties (days I could call normal, when I am normal), everything I do, all the movements of this body, all, all the words I utter, all the gestures I make, are accompanied and upheld by or lined, as it were, with this mantra: OM NAMO BHAGAVATEH ... OM NAMO BHAGAVATEH ... all, all the time, all the time, all the time."

Mère was able to notice the difference between those who have a *Mantra* and those who don't. "With those who have no *Mantra*, even if they have a strong habit of meditation or concentration, something around them remains hazy and vague, whereas *Japa* imparts to those who practice it with a kind of precision, a kind of solidity: an armature. They become galvanized, as it were".

Now, if we try to apply such a procedure just for the pleasure of making an experiment, we shall find it has an immediate effect upon our mood. To say it shortly, even a rainy day of November will seem to evoke the mood of the clearest days of Spring. Not only that, in the following days we shall experience something strange. The image of an anthill that's been disturbed comes to mind: countless ants move at a frenetic pace. Similarly our environment appears to us as more agitated, at times aggressive toward us. It is as if everything (especially in the field of human relationships) is conspiring to put us in trouble.

We are surprised that after a long absence some acquaintances return with demanding challenges that require radical changes of attitude on our part. We feel the duty of facing intricate, unsolved issues that in the past we cleverly succeeded in avoiding. Being utterly sincere with ourselves is the only chance we have to cope with all the new challenges.

However, if we behave in such way, we shall be stunned by a very peculiar effect, like "not having a skin anymore." We feel we are perceiving – not only through our awareness but, in a strange way, also through our body – what is passing in another person's consciousness. This will not be experienced as a telepathic phenomenon but as a type of subtle deception: we actually experience a mood which is not our own, which has no reason to exist, but we experience it as if it originated and emerged from the intimate part of ourselves. The first reaction is to vainly search for reasons in order try to justify it, to find plausible grounds for it. When, after a couple of days, it vanishes, only then we actually realize that the strange mood came from another person's consciousness.

The reader might be disappointed by the fact that what I am writing

evokes the most bold of *New Age* manias. It is only after listening to similar effects by other researchers and on account of my commitment to total sincerity, that I have made up my mind to write about this particular experience.

Let me quote a recurrent example. It happens that all of a sudden, a deep depression takes hold of our mood (let us suppose we had previously never been subject to depression), lasts several hours and then disappears; it is not a simple dissonance, a disharmony, but an agonizing pain in a moment in which there is no justification for it. Unfailingly we realize that a significant event had occurred: we had been introduced to a new acquaintance, we had shaken hands and talked with a sincere involvement.

It is well known how good our mind is when it comes to clutching at straws; but when a similar episode is observed with due detachment and, as the days and the months go by, it repeats with mathematical precision, then the evidence of a phenomenon of tuning to another person's consciousness, cannot be denied. What one is and what others are, mixes. It goes without saying that this phenomenon disappears as soon as we cease trying to "inject" a *Mantra* in our body.

Many times I wondered how it is possible that, by guiding breath and awareness into the cells of the body, we obtain such an important result, which has such tangible effects on the material, emotive and psychological planes. To affirm that *Japa* in the body leads a person to perceive reality in a different way is perfectly acceptable, but to assume that it makes things happen that would not otherwise happen (or that would have happened anyway, but in a different way) is quite another thing. This hypothesis has all the appearance of a figment of our imagination. The principle of causality implies that the world ignores what happens inside our consciousness.

How is it possible to justify the affirmation that when we bring our consciousness into the cells of our body, our action has an effect on the surrounding world? Even after many similar episodes, you cannot know whether this is simply an impression or a real fact.

Up to now, this phenomenon has not been completely described in the mystical literature. In order to try to explain it, it is necessary to make two important premises: the first one concerns the knot of the *Muladhara*, the second concerns the concept of the *Collective Unconscious* and the *Principle of Synchronicity* described by C.G. Jung.

First premise. Unfastening the knot of *Muladhara* constitutes the last phase of the spiritual path. As we have already discussed, the *Complete form of Thokar* is utilized for that. Now, a very attractive theory explains that the *Muladhara* knot exists not only in the coccyx region (blocking the opening of *Sushumna*) but extends to each cell of our body (skin, feet and legs in particular) as well. This secondary aspect of the *Muladhara* knot is linked with the psychological dimension which ties all human beings together: the vast ocean of the *Collective Unconscious*. Hence the cells of our body are linked with the deepest layer of our mind – vast as humanity itself.

A complete action concerning *Muladhara* implies guiding awareness into

your body. This is exactly what the afore hinted mystics have done through their particular form of *Japa*.

What we *kriyabans* discover is that by vibrating a *Mantra* in the body (and not only in the so called "spiritual centers" in the spine and brain) we succeed in getting through the last barrier of the mind (the ego separative consciousness) and the effects are totally unexpected.

Second premise. The *Collective Unconscious* is not a poetic concept but a real widening of the sphere of our awareness. Jung introduced terminology which permits us to probe an aspect of the mystical path which would otherwise risk being totally extraneous, not only to our capability of expression but also to our comprehension. I believe that Jung's discoveries are precious for the understanding of the mystical path – perhaps more than many other concepts formulated during the 20th century. Jung discovered that the human psyche is made up of layers or strata, parts of it *shared* by all humanity and called the *Collective Unconscious*. Even though his statements never lacked the necessary prudence, the scientific community never forgave him for dealing with matters that were not considered a part of Psychiatry – such as Alchemy (deemed an absurdity), the realm of myths (considered the result of a senseless imagination) and, more than any other thing, the great value he attributed to the religious dimension; which he considered something universal and fundamentally sane, instead of a pathology. Presently the enthusiasm for his writings remains, especially among those who study topics of a spiritual and esoteric nature.

The contents of the *Collective Unconscious* have never directly been in our immediate conscious perception, and when an infinitesimal part of it bursts forth into our psyche, we are momentarily dismayed.

Since we have hinted at particular facts that in their manifestation seem to ignore the principle of cause-effect, it is important to remember that Jung put a rational basis for the study of this subject in his book *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*.

To explain with simple terms what this is all about, we say that in addition to causality – that which acts in a linear direction of progression of time and puts in connection two phenomena that happen in the same space at different times – we hypothesize the existence of a principle (a causal) that puts in connection two phenomena that happen at the same time but in different spaces. The key point to emphasize is that they have a meaning, a certain sense that ties them together and it is this very meaning that arouses deep emotion in the observer.

Now, if two events happen simultaneously but in different spaces, it is clear that causality (cause-effect chain: one has caused the other or vice versa) is impossible. There would be nothing strange in these events of themselves, save one fact: the observer considers them as a *meaningful coincidence* – like a miracle, something that the universe wants to communicate to him. The observer is intimately touched by what is perceived as the mysterious dimension of life.

An example will help us to better understand this concept. A youth moves a plant in a vase, which falls, breaks into peaces and the young man looks at the wounded plant. He thinks with intensity about the moment when his girlfriend

gave the vase to him as a present. There is emotion and pain in him, the event is feared as an omen. At the same time his girlfriend (this will obviously come to be known subsequently) is writing him a letter to leave him and therefore to break their relationship.

Here the characteristics of the *Jungian Synchronicity* are observed. The two events happen simultaneously and are connected, concerning the meaning (a vase breaks and a relationship is broken), but one is not the cause of the other. When, later, our youth discovers the contemporaneity of the two events, he will be stunned. This is not telepathy or clairvoyance; in telepathy a cause could be hypothesized, for example the existence of cerebral waves transmitted from one person to another. In this case, no cause exists whatsoever. Jung explains that in this situation we have only one event in a multi dimensional reality. The two events are actually only one event, merely seen from two different points of view.⁹

The last phase of the spiritual path, of every spiritual path, consists in dealing with the *Collective unconscious* and with the continuous happening of *Meaningful Coincidences*. This means to cross a swamp (the *Collective unconscious*) without the protective hull (now we feel the pain and the negative feeling of all humanity) with which nature has endowed us. But, maintaining our effort with untamed serenity, we will see the various layers of obscurity melt and we will meet "the abysses of truth and the oceans of smile that are behind the august picks of truth" (Sri Aurobindo). This means we are in touch with the Divine immanent in matter, a reality beyond every expectation, every dream. Pure love and compassion for humanity is born from that.

Lahiri Mahasaya said: "The whole universe is in the body; the whole universe is the final Self." Now we can understand what he meant by such a wonderful statement!

There is a wonderful aspect to this process: all of our psychological problems, especially those connected with negative moods tied with intricate and thwarted plans for the future, appear as a nightmare we have dissolved forever, an illusion out of which we have emerged definitively. The life which up until that point had been full of asperities, now seems to stretch out evenly toward the future. The beauty of living, like wine from a full cup, seems to overflow from every atom and fills the heart.

⁹ In the esoteric literature we find the concept of *Siddhis* (powers). We are very perplex about it. Those who write books on *Yoga* are not able to resist the temptation of copying some lines from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. It's typical to find the ridiculous warning of the danger coming from the abuse of the *Siddhis*. Quoting Patanjali (IV:1), they recount that *Siddhis* are the spiritual powers (psychic abilities) that may occur through rigorous austerities; they explain that they vary from relatively simple forms of clairvoyance, telepathy, to being able to levitate, to be present at various places at once, to become as small as an atom, to materialize objects and more. They recommend to their readers not to ever indulge in these powers since "they are a great hindrance to spiritual progress". *Indulge* - what a beautiful word! If you did see someone practicing *Pranayama* and 'indulging' in a little bilocation for fun, could you tell?! Perhaps they don't think enough about what they are writing because they let themselves be seduced by the dreams of possessing those powers. Perhaps they already visualize all the fuss which will come with it: interviews, taking part in talk shows etc. However, here, I repeat with emphasis, we are discussing quite another phenomenon!

The difficult part of this process is that joining our consciousness with someone else's means involving ourselves with their problems. A lasting transformation in another's state of consciousness happens only when the opacity in them is purged bit by bit. This cannot be achieved by any way other than sharing part of their suffering – feat which might imply a momentary loss of our spiritual realization. Indeed it is a terribly cruel test, that only true love can justify, and implies a momentary loss of our own spiritual realization; such tests must be overcome. In the end, there is something infinitely beautiful that absorbs you in a blue-colored profundity where the pure skies are perceived as they had appeared to us during our infancy.

Now the wasteland, now the silence;
A blank dark wall, and behind it heaven.
(*Sri Aurobindo, from: "Journey's End"*)

CHAPTER 12
PRANAYAMA WITH INTERNAL BREATH

Perfection of *Kriya Pranayama* happens in two different ways.

[I] By becoming stable upon the **ideal time of 22" + 22"**, you arrive at the disappearance of the most important obstacles existing along the *Sushumna* path and, consequently, in your life.

[II] By perfecting the phase of **exhalation** you arrive at filling with *Prana* (coming down from the Cosmic fountainhead through the *Medulla*) the cells of your body expanding the kingdom of your awareness of the physical body to the vaster body which is the life that surrounded us – touching with the awareness what is called the *Collective Unconscious*.

We describe the two achievements separately.

**[I] BECOMING STABLE UPON THE IDEAL TIME OF 22" + 22"
DURING KRIYA PRANAYAMA**

When we learn the technique *Kriya Pranayama* we are taught a minimum of internal anatomy aiming at achieving a working visualization of the spine. Our first experiences with *Kriya Pranayama* are accompanied by a wonder that increases day by day for the intrinsic beauty of the technique. Later, when we are taught to mentally chant *Om* in each *Chakra*, the technique remains just the same simple and effective. The *Chakras* are seen as steps of an ideal staircase leading to the dimension of the Spirit. We can easily visualize its first five steps. Some uncertainty remains about how to visualize the sixth and the seventh. Yet this visualized staircase is distant from actual reality.

In time we come to the realization that between the three initial steps (the first three *Chakras*) and the fourth (heart *Chakra*) there is an enormous distance. Heart *Chakra* is practically unreachable without an integral psycho-physical transformation. We don't even suspect it, but it can remain unreachable for too long. I believe that if we saw the situation as it really is we would get desperate. On the other end, for the few ones who are actually able to reach the fourth step, the fifth and the sixth are very near: the goal of the spiritual path is at hand

Let us clearly state that, apart from beautiful soothing sensations in the spine and glimpses of light in the eyebrow center, with our *Kriya Pranayama* nothing meaningful and substantial happens, for a very long time. Our practice can be called a general preparation and we are wisely invited to wait patiently for future developments.

We are taught that the space that separates the third from the fourth *Chakra*, separates *Apana* from *Prana* (*Apana* is under the third *Chakra*, *Prana* is over the fourth.) Mixing them and guiding the new energy in *Sushumna* is our purpose, yet this internal alchemy is not easy to achieve. It is for this purpose that we are working upon the third *Chakra* with *Navi Kriya* and upon the fourth with the *Thokar*. *Thokar* does not consist only in guiding the energy from the head to the heart but also in dragging the energy from abdomen upward to the heart. The secret of our spiritual realization lies in merging *Prana* with *Apana*.

They will unite one day. All the rest will be a child's play. Each further step will happen in a natural way. Our personality will change drastically: it will immediately exhibit appropriate balance amongst all its functions. After a couple *Kriya* breaths, our *Prana* will be attracted, as from an irresistible magnet, inside the spine and our body would appear as dead. Our awareness, detached from ephemeral things, will rise to the most ineffable spheres of the mystical experience.

Well, besides our commitment to a peerless practice of *Navi Kriya* and *Thokar* we are going to add a very important procedure of uniting the two energies *Prana* and *Apana*. In this chapter we are going to make an important improvement in our *Kriya Pranayama*: during the inhalation, the air entering the lungs will accompany the upward movement of *Apana* only from the first to the third *Chakra*; then there will be no air but only a pure exertion of awareness accompanying *Apana* from the third to the fourth *Chakra* and then to all the other *Chakras*. *Apana* will then gradually merge with *Prana*. This new kind of inhalation will be followed by a tranquil and very enjoyable exhalation.

Practice

In Chapter 7 we have introduced the concepts of: *Bahir Kevala Kumbhaka* (breathless state after exhalation, that is with empty lungs) and *Antar Kevala Kumbhaka* (breathless state after inhalation, that is with full lungs.) In the state of *Antar Kevala Kumbhaka*, breath & *Prana* are located in the higher part of the lungs. Rib cage is expanded but this does not hamper a sensation of relaxation and freedom from body consciousness.

Let us now explain how the constant attempt at achieving *Antar Kevala Kumbhaka* (which happens during the *Advanced form of Thokar*), creates the ability of making our *Kriya* breath last 22+22 seconds.

Check your *Kriya Pranayama* with a chronometer. Try to get a true measure of it; have different breaths in order to measure the mean time. If the employed time is markedly less than 44" for each *Kriya* breath, then very patiently begin to practice *Kriya Pranayama* in the following way:

[1] Inhale slowly and deeply, raising the *Prana* from *Chakra* 1 to *Chakra* 3. This happens in about 6".

[2] Now try to have a short but intense experience of what you have learned in Chapter 7 about reaching the state of *Antar Kevala Kumbhaka*. Hold your breath, expand your rib cage and bring the awareness in *Muladhara*: begin mentally chanting *Om, Om, Om...* rapidly, many times (about two chants of *Om* per second) climbing the innermost channel of the spine like an ant, millimeter after millimeter, reaching the heart *Chakra*. Now perceive the freedom from the breath.

[3] If your lungs are able to receive another minimal quantity of air, utilize your physical breath, otherwise utilize only awareness and intuition to complete the path of the energy linked with *Kriya* inhalation. In a subtle way, awareness and energy move from *Chakra 4* to *Chakra 6* in about 6". It is obvious that the throat sound exists (and is very subtle) only if there is a flow of air through the nostrils.

[4] Now exhale in the most tranquil possible way. Don't care about the length of the exhalation.

Summary:

During *Kriya* inhalation, while the energy moves from *Chakra 1* to *Chakra 3* nothing in particular happens. When the energy is about moving from *Chakra 3* to *Chakra 4*, there is a short pause of the inhalation. The rib cage is expanded and relaxed. The *kriyaban's* awareness is split into two: one part perceives and keeps steady the expansion of the chest, the other part draws energy (which is *Apana*) from *Muladhara* to the third *Chakra*. When it reaches the third *Chakra*, *Apana* merges with *Prana* producing an ecstatic state. The breathing process undergoes a transformation. The last part of inhalation is not made of air entering through the nose but is made of a pure movement of energy. The inhalation is thus completed *in a subtle way*. The process deepens by itself since the ensuing exhalation drags the mixture of *Prana* and *Apana* down, to the door of *Sushumna*. The key ingredient of the process (the drawing up of *Apana* current from *Muladhara* like an ant) becomes more and more natural until the pause necessary to enter the *Antar Kevala Kumbhaka* state disappears.

Effects

When you are first getting used to this delicate process you might feel some tension and doubt you are progressing. You might decide to abandon this practice on the pretext that it is not fit for your physiology. Contrary to what one might think, the effects – spiritual revelations through intuitive discernment and temperamental transformations – can be indeed epochal. Those who master this teaching are astonished at the effects on their psyche.

This practice can help a *kriyaban* to face some important and decisive challenges that life brings before them. Often *kriyabans* understand the necessity of run after something that seems impossible. They might nurture a passion for

something that appears as an utopia, a thing which is absurd to the common reasoning. Well, the afore described practice can provide the energetic potential necessary to achieve that ideal.

[III] PERFECTING THE PHASE OF EXHALATION, FILLING WITH PRANA THE CELLS OF THE BODY

What I'm going to discuss now is not intended to be studied and tested simultaneously with the previous point. It should be practiced months later. It is really too hard working to refine both aspects at the same time. You will tend to practice absent-mindedly one of the two, imprinting indelibly on your mind a wrong way of conceiving its meaning and value. Therefore, don't care now about the rhythm 22" + 22". Just follow in a very relaxed way the minimal direction we are going to give, and focus all your attention upon how exhalation happens. It is clear that, in the future, the two different instructions could be practiced one after the other, but now let us not attempt to accomplish this.

Practice

I. Exhaling Shee sound guides energy into the body

During inhalation, make a loud sound and visualize a powerful vibration departing from the sexual zone, absorbing the energy there and bringing it into the head. During exhalation create a strong pressure of the awareness on the whole body. Perceive that the downward flow of energy permeate all the parts of the body, muscles, internal organs, skin, cells. Breath after breath, while maintaining a slow, deep rhythm of breathing, try to increase the intensity of the sound of the exhaling air in the throat. The *Shee* sound of exhalation helps to inject energy into the cells of your body as if it divided itself in a limitless number of micro hypodermic needle injecting energy and light in each cell.

Before starting the exhalation strengthen the intention of finding (or opening) an internal way to reach the cells of your body. Not one iota of vitality in the air should leave your nose; all the vitality should be directed into the body. Let be inspired by thinking that the *Shee* sound be like "the cry that breaks the hardest rock" – thus Sri Aurobindo was referring to the power of *Bija Mantra*, the "sacred sound of the *Rishi*" – revealing:

...the treasure of heaven
hidden in the secret cavern
like the young of a bird,
within the infinite rock
(*Rig-Veda, I.130.3*)

II. Concentration on the navel, lengthening the exhalation

At the beginning of inhalation, expand the abdomen by pushing out the navel which pushes down the diaphragm. On the contrary, during exhalation

concentrate intensely on the navel as it moves toward the spine. Sure, we have already learned doing this during basic *Kriya Pranayama*: now it deals with intensifying at maximum this detail. Focus your attention on the internal gathering of energy into the abdominal region. This manifests as a peculiar ecstatic sensation that is perceived from the abdominal region to the chest region.

It comes spontaneous making exhalation last a lot more than inhalation. Rather, you have the impression that the exhalation be *lengthened indefinitely*. The experience is similar to a *Navi Kriya* diffused throughout the body.

Often you will find yourself becoming crazy with joy, sometimes with the chin slightly lowered, directed toward the navel as if it were a magnet. The pleasurable sensation becomes orgasmic. Only a faint signal of the need of oxygen appeases its progressive growth. (Occasionally, it is good to stop at this phase to enjoy this state, avoiding going ahead with point III.)

III. Fragmented exhalation

At this point, only a frail shell separates you from the coveted state where all effort ceases. Very useful to cross this veil, is the subtly fragmented exhalation.

Here we consider dividing our exhalation into about 20-30 fragments or even more. This is in itself a pleasurable experience, especially when each fragment tends to become microscopic.

Only if this is really necessary you can ... "cheat" a little bit, provided it is done with a good measure of delicacy. "To cheat" means to interrupt the exhalation, when necessary, inhale briefly and then take back the exhalation and the downward movement of the energy. (To be able to do this without disturbing the delicacy of the phenomenon is an art.)

IV. The experience of the Internal Breathing

The process of *Kriya Pranayama* is leading us toward something stunningly new: a rotation of energy independent from the act of breathing. The exhalation seems to become endless and the fragments of breath seem to have practically dissolved! There is also a faint but clear component of rising energy in the spine. You feel you could lengthen this process infinitely, without ever exhausting its marvel. You have crossed a barrier and reached a seemingly breathless state where there is no air coming out your nose (this cannot be affirmed with scientific certainty.) There is an inner source of fresh energy making you lighter and filling you with strength. The sensation is reminiscent of a brisk walk in the wind. This can not merely be called a joyous state: it is a feeling of infinite safety surrounded by a crystalline state of an immobile mind.

Usually, this experience is enriched by hearing a loud and continuous *Om*. This comforting sound is the confirmation that you are heading in the right direction.

In the initial phases of mastering this practice it is better to avoid any form of *Kechari Mudra*: it might sometimes give the paradoxical impression of hindering your efforts. The reason is that it isolates you from your surrounding environment. During this practice, it is essential that your sensibility be in tune with all that is around.

A great source of inspiration (specific for this practice) is meditating outdoors with the eyes open and with the adamant, steadfast will of becoming one with a mountain, a lake, or a tree in front of us.

A strange phenomenon, that however does not contradict what we have said, is that sometimes the best experiences happen under conditions unfavorable to one's concentration, for example: practicing in a waiting room while pretending to read a magazine; practicing while traveling by train, looking out of the window, giving the impression of being absorbed in one's thoughts... On such occasions, the joy becomes so great that it's difficult to hold back tears.

About the experience of internal breathing

The experience of internal breathing is a peculiar phenomenon of circulation of energy in the body and it is not what a beginner *kriyaban* experiences. The breath is absent, yet one perceives the circulation of the energy, an "internal breath." We have all the reasons to believe that this is the same experience called in Taoist internal alchemy *Macrocosmic Orbit*. There are also good reasons to hold that this is the same experience to which P.Y. referred: "...the current will then automatically move by itself and the joy experienced will be indescribable." It may be also the experience that Lahiri Mahasaya refers in his diaries when, a couple of years after his initiation in the Himalayas, wrote: "Following an excellent *Pranayama*, the breath is wholly internally oriented. After a long period, today (the purpose of) my descent (on earth) has been fulfilled!"

Even if we don't realize the alchemical *Macrocosmic Orbit*, the simple fact adding awareness to the exhalation phase of our *Kriya* breath has surprising effects. It makes you feel the beauty of living as if you had vainly hoped for years on end that the Divine would be part of your daily life, without ever seeing any result, and suddenly you discover that the Divine had always been there.

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth
and the undying suns here burn.
(*Sri Aurobindo, "A God's labor"*)

The sense of beauty and satisfaction is great, as if an impressionist painter had finally succeeded in actualizing their visionary conception conveying the idea that the painted inert substance of matter is composed of multicolored particles of light, like innumerable suns radiating in a brilliant transparency.

There are also effects that we cannot even imagine. I'm referring to touching the psychological dimension that ties together all the human beings: the vast ocean of the *Collective Unconscious*. The first perceptible effect is generating *Synchronicity phenomena* also called: "*Meaningful Coincidences*."

In chapter 11 we have dealt with the theme of the mystics that think a Prayer in their body targeting their will to obtain an unlimited internal pressure of their awareness over the whole body, either by concentrating on it as a whole or following an orderly scheme of "conquering" each part of it. Well, the effects

of the above described way of exhaling during *Kriya Pranayama* is exactly the same, rather more intense.

Meaning of the experience of Internal Breath

Each authentic spiritual path has an "ascending" and a "descending" phase. The "ascending" phase is what is commonly intended with mystic path and that we have discussed in the book up to this point except the procedure of utilizing the vibrational power of a *Mantra* to let the Divine Force descend into our body filling it with awareness; except *Kriya Pranayama with internal breath* contemplating the same phenomenon but in a more intense and direct way.

Each *kriyaban* and each follower of any authentic spiritual path has, sooner or later, to experience fully the "descent" phase. What happens then, is a very strange phenomenon: a single person's spiritual realization is able to create an effect upon the surrounding reality. The action of the "descent" process is that of rousing (in those who are around but are in tune with the practitioner) the force that is driving ahead man's spiritual evolution. The "light" of the Spirit descends to brighten up the clouded mental planes of those who are ready to receive it, even if they are momentarily in deep illusion. It is very strange indeed, to see how the destiny of a man is linked with those who are around; however, if we attentively consider the matter from a philosophical point of view, it cannot be otherwise.

A full unfastening of the *Muladhara* knot cannot happen otherwise. Many *kriyabans* have the intention of living peacefully, always attuned to the higher *Chakras*, considering any other related-with-body-and-matter experience as an illusion. This is very common especially among those who love *New Age* thought. Later they understand by the same intuition kindled by the constant practice of meditation that the only way toward Cosmic Consciousness is to love mankind as our greater Self. When this happens, the "descent" phase begins.

To many mystics the descent experience did not result in states of peaceful expansion of awareness. Being suddenly overtaken by this experience without the necessary protection (cultivating every day a strong awareness of the cells of the body) the ensuing experience resulted in what could have been called a "descent into hell." They suffered from very negative moods and face also physical suffering. The problem is that they went out of themselves and identified with the physical and mental condition of the people they loved. Some accepted this condition and went on heroically with the conviction of expiating in their own flesh what they consider the effect of the sins of mankind. In some occasions they suffered to the point of knowing the blackest desperation. St. John of the Cross calls that state: "The dark night of the soul." Mystics feel as if God had suddenly abandoned them; they doubt the validity of their spiritual path. Although their conscience continually surrenders to God, they keep on believing to be sinners, without any possibility of salvation. In a lengthy and profound absence of light and hope, even if they have the drive to go ahead with outward

expressions of faith, they reach the stage where they doubt the existence of God. The consequence is the feeling of being irremediably impure, lost for eternity.

In my opinion, this experience (dark night of the soul) could be mitigated or even skipped if mystic learned to guide their Divine Realization into the cells of their body.

There is a sentence attributed to the mythical *Babaji* (quoting *Bhagavad Gita*): "*Even a little bit of the practice of this (inward) religion will save you from dire fears and colossal sufferings.*" In my opinion dire "fears and colossal sufferings" deriving from the contact with the quagmires of Collective Unconscious. The perfection of *Pranayama* (achievement of *Pranayama with internal breath*) is the perfect tool, is the jewel which is going to spare us from many dangers and suffering.

Summarizing:

The first phase of unfastening the *Muladhara* knot is enter in *Sushumna*; then follows to cover the mystical ladder of the *Chakras*, up to perceive clearly the spiritual eye. All this produces a heaven of ecstatic states. But entering the spiritual eye, entering totally and permanently only to a condition: after finding the Spiritual Light and Cosmic Sound in the higher centers of the brain, it is necessary to guide this Light into the *lower Chakras* and into the body. Later one intuitively learns how to infuse it into what surrender us. By studying the biographies of the mystics, it appears evident that the experience of cooperation with the collective evolution is not an optional, is not a choice that you can avoid. It begins at the most appropriate moment namely when the awareness knocks at the doors of *Kutastha*. It happens by virtue of a universal law and its first manifestation is a burning love for mankind.

As we have already clarified the "descent" path does not consists in sending "good vibrations" and other pious intentions. The most effective – and at the same time safest – way to proceed is: continuously filling the body with awareness. We make a specific act using of course the power of visualization. The Divine Force descend into our body, spread in each cell and spill over to the external reality. By working in this way we can cross unharmed the thick wall of collective opacity.

The descent process is fascinating. Sure, the encounter with a certain degree of suffering is unavoidable.

It is a basically sound healthy at the point that resolves any our prison made of psychological problems. This is almost always the first fact that you notice. The psychological problems dissolve immediately, indeed you realize, with a sens of relief, they were a complete illusion.

This descent, we said, has difficult moments. Lahiri himself suffered. I am reminded of the famous episode when one day he "drowned" in the body of people who were shipwrecked in a far away sea. Lahiri Mahasaya did not ask that experience, had not endeavored to attract it. It happened suddenly; he

accepted fully it and we don't know, but we can guess, what supreme solace he was able to bring to those poor souls.

I consider also how St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) had many times all the pains of death by being metaphysically near some wounded soldiers who were dying far away from home on the field of battle.

Even if it is a painful process, it is always better practice the descent as a matter of will and choice than wait the life itself exert upon us various sharp downward tugs. Those tugs are an unwelcome experience to force us to focus on the body. Much more better to abandon the obsession of utilizing *Kriya* only as a means for obtaining the *Samadhi* state, shunning the idea of working for the spiritual evolution of mankind. Let our *Kriya* path be complete.

Many, with the emergence of spiritual maturity, appreciate the theoretical possibility for the "spiritual" man to infuse the Divine into mankind, into all the living things, into matter. But then they decide that this is only a romantic ideal. In the last part of their life, some *kriyabans* are lost in conjectures on improbable levels of *Kriya* beyond those we already know, claiming that *Babaji* will introduce us to these levels in the astral worlds. That seems to me a parody of the esoteric and theosophic thought. On the contrary we learn that the last levels of *Kriya* are not achieved in the beyond but here on earth, facing, when the right moment comes, a perilous contact with the Collective Unconscious, uniting our spiritual realization with the ignorance and opacity contained in all human minds.

Lahiri Baba and saints are a mirror for all *kriyabans*. What happened in their body will one day happen in our body. Perhaps we may think that we are not ready for following Lahiri Mahasaya's example, but even if we have not his wisdom and neither the inner "Sun" of persons like The Mother, we can at least patiently turn our heart toward this new dimension of the spiritual path. If we constantly and inexorably exclude any difficult achievement from our dreams and goals, our spiritual venture risks falling apart. What we can do now is therefore to strive to perfect our *Kriya Pranayama* endlessly and any future experience of expansion of awareness will happen in the most favorable modality for our spiritual evolution. We cannot live with a mind lost in illusion and a heart fictitiously open to universal love but in reality hard and resistant like a stone. In this situation our achievement instead of a state of enlightenment risks to resemble a chronic state of drowsiness.

Seeking heaven's rest or the spirit's wordless peace,
Or in bodies motionless like statues, fixed
In tranced cessations of their sleepless thought
Sat sleeping souls, and this too was a dream.

(*Sri Aurobindo, Savitri; Book X - Canto IV*)]

Appendix 1 – About premature Kundalini awakening

While browsing through the Web pages dealing with *Kriya Yoga* or *Yoga* in general, you will find some pages warning against the dangers of "premature awakening of *Kundalini*". The list of the problems that the allegedly premature awakening would cause is limitless.

There are also a few web sites that warn against any form of meditation, hinting at the possibility of a break with reality with unusual or extreme strengthening of emotions, in particular agitation and anxiety, long-term disorientation where one has become unable to focus long enough to work.

Kundalini is Sanskrit for "coiled". It is conceived as a particular energy coiled like a serpent in the root *Chakra* (*Muladhara*). The representation of being coiled like a spring conveys the idea of untapped potential energy having its seat at the base of the spine.

Some authors foster the idea that this great concentration of energy has its seat in our entire body, not only at the base of the spine. It sleeps in our body, underneath the layers of our consciousness, waiting to be aroused by spiritual discipline.

In *Kundalini Yoga* a seeker aspires to harness this tremendous power through specific techniques (particular breathing patterns, *Bandhas*, *Mudras*, *Bija Mantra*...) and guide its rising from the *Muladhara* up through the *Sushumna*, activating each *Chakra*. It is explained that when *Kundalini* arrives at the crown *Chakra* (*Sahasrara*), it bestows infinite bliss, mystical illumination etc.

The concept of *Kundalini* is very useful since it can be utilized to express what generally happens in any authentic spiritual path. The concept of *Samadhi* (or religious ecstasy) is very akin to "*Kundalini* awakening". It may manifest as a series of bliss waves rising through the spine and entering the brain. The experience usually lasts from few instants to a couple of minutes. It is like having a volcano erupting inside, a "rocket" shooting up through the spine! Other times, it may appear like an intense bliss in the chest region – suddenly you are inside an immense joy and wake up with tears in your eyes. Sometimes an electric wind on the surface of the body, propagating from feet up to head, announces the experience.

The deepest experience is when the point (*Bindu*) in the center of *Kutastha* expands into a tunnel. The awareness is pulled through it. It is like burning with endless joy for several seconds – you are filled with the euphoria obtained by this short but unforgettable plunge into Eternity.

Some were so elated by their experience that wrote about it. I remember an article in a specialized magazine in which the woman who had the experience attributed the event to an imaginary individual who, purportedly, granted her every intimate detail. You understand that it is the lady herself to write since it is highly improbable that another person had communicated her such profusion of details of the event. Her alleged act of humility was annihilated by the title she

gave to her article: "Forerunners of a new race"!

She gave the impression of not having understood the teaching contained in the experience. In her description, *Kundalini* awakening happened in her body as a privilege bestowed to a person by divine intervention. We know instead that this event is very common to those who open for the first time a spiritual book like a Saint biography. The experience comes before any practice is done; it may spring from the vibratory shock produced by the same idea of the overwhelming power of the mystical path capable of sweeping away all man's certitudes.

But let us come back to the main talk, the alleged dangers coming from an hypothetical *Kundalini* awakening. We read also that: " Through practicing *Kundalini Yoga*, an aspirant can develop occult, psychic powers. These powers can be used for constructive or destructive purposes, but quite often they are misused. For example the ability to read someone else's mind can create problems and is likely to be ... resented by those who it is used on." This is comic! When we find such amenities we wonder: "who on earth has written such nonsense and with what purpose"?

Unfortunately there is a tendency in the Web to duplicate pages from site to site without changing a comma. If one makes up that a yogi died of spontaneous combustion during the practice of *Pranayama*, he can verify that, after a couple of months, this story will appear on some web sites.

Other things instead, make one feel very sad. I read that *Yogis*, sooner or later, are inclined to fall into sorcery and black magic because they evoke, unaware, negative entities. The author claimed that: "When you repeat that Mantra *Om, Om...* you are actually invoking a demon spirit to come and possess your mind. He added his testimony: "During a meditation session began to levitate. Ever since that second I haven't slept as a human, I lost my sleep! Whenever I closed my eyes, I saw the flames of Hell, I didn't dare to close my eyes, I couldn't! I became a psychiatric case, and 26 times I've been hospitalized."

I had a hard time meeting people who claimed that *Kriya* was responsible of all their psychological (perhaps they meant psychiatric) problems and of some physical troubles too. Hence, I should believe that by breathing fresh air, focusing the mind on the spine and on particular centers in the head while mentally chanting a *Mantra* (in extreme synthesis *Kriya Yoga* can be reduce to this) they had developed all kinds of mental and physical ailments. From a benediction as it seemed at the very beginning, *Kriya* turned out to be a curse, a misfortune. They referred contemptuously the same techniques that I had experimented so many times, with so much love, drawing the purest delight.

When I heard all this, my reaction was: "How, with what attitude, with what expectation, did these persons approached *Kriya Yoga*? *Kriya* cannot be responsible of all this. Impossible! They say *Kriya* will make me crazy ... well, if I must go crazy, I prefer to go crazy because of *Kriya*, instead because of living a materialistic life, where the spiritual dimension has no place. If the germs of madness are inside me, they will come into bloom both if I practice *Kriya* and if

I do not practice it. Yet, considering the glorious moments experienced, I will walk the *Kriya* path without an ounce of fear, had I to burn in it."

This was my way of thinking and of dismissing the topic. Now, I keep on with the usual enthusiasm but I am prudent when I talk about *Kriya* to other people especially if I perceive them as having specific problems of mental or emotional loss of balance.

As for the patent exaggerations and absurd accusations about alleged dangers from *Yoga* in general or specifically from *Kundalini Yoga* or *Kriya Yoga*, I cannot abstain from a strong suspicion that such charges come from persons who had for a long time some forms of deviant behaviors, such spiritism or magic and drug abuse.

A short remark upon drug use and mental disturbances

Personally, I've always been taken aback when some people blamed their *Kriya* practice (even the most simple preliminary practices), for damaging their psyche but said nothing about different drugs they have taken for years!

Here is a typical example. A friend that recently has shared our interest for meditation tells us that after practicing some simple techniques of meditation (something very mild like awareness of the breath or concentration on the *Chakras*) has lost his mental equilibrium and has experienced the most intense attacks of anguish and terror. He makes a big fuss about it, posting on *Yoga* forums, stigmatizing with ungrateful words both our early incitement to practice and our later reassurances when his uneasiness began to manifest.

Instead of feeling angry with him, we react calmly and start reasoning why he went to India each year, for a long series of years, without ever showing interest for *Yoga* or for the Indian spirituality. To get different types of drugs at a low price and consume them obviously! We are adamant about that. Later by other common friends we come to know that he took not only opiates but also acids, any kind of amphetamines and (emulous of Carlos Castaneda) didn't disdain the use of psychotropic plants.

At this point, we need to stop trying to get him to reason upon how absurd is to believe that some simple *yogic* exercises have caused his unhappy mental situation. It is obvious that he wants to exorcize the rather frightening thought of having seriously damaged his brain thorough drugs abuse and of being in a condition of permanent, fatal psychic disorder. The very idea that his past unwary choices can reasonably be put in causal relation with his present mental disorder is removed.

It falls to our lot to do nothing else than listening to him without reacting while he puts all the blame on *Yoga* for all his troubles and tragedies. Oh, if only we had a magic mirror in which our friend could see a synthesis of his past years and realize how inconsiderate and cruel he had been toward his body and therefore toward his cerebrospinal system!

The experience of Gopi Krishna

To those who practice the classical *Pranayama* (especially with *Bandhas* and with long pauses of holding the breath) the experience of a rising energy through the spine happens and they can have an experience of panic. Usually, this irrational fear disappears within a couple of days.

Through intense concentration on *Sahasrara* only, Gopi Krishna got into trouble. His life was both blessed by ecstatic bliss and tormented by physical and mental discomfort. In 1967 he wrote his excellent testimony in *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* [currently available under the title *Living With Kundalini*]. His book is of great inspiration: it gives a clear and concise autobiographic account of the phenomenon of the awakening of *Kundalini*.

He experienced this "awakening" in 1937 although he had not a spiritual teacher and was not initiated into any spiritual lineage. He practiced concentration for a number of years. His main technique consisted in visualizing "an imaginary Lotus in full bloom, radiating light" at the crown of the head. As he sat meditating – exactly as he had for the three hours before dawn each day for seventeen years – he became aware of a powerful, pleasurable sensation at the base of his spine. He continued to meditate; the sensation began to spread and extend upwards. It continued to expand until he heard, quite without warning, a roar like that of a waterfall and felt a stream of liquid light enter his brain.

"Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. Entirely unprepared for such a development, I was completely taken by surprise; but regaining self-control instantaneously, I remained sitting in the same posture, keeping my mind on the point of concentration. The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder, I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light." (Gopi Krishna *Living With Kundalini*).

This experience changed radically the scheme of his life. He experienced a continuous "luminous glow" around his head and began having a variety of psychological and physiological problems. At times he thought he was going mad. He adopted a very strict diet and for years refused to do any other concentration exercise.

"The keen desire to sit and meditate, which had always been present during the preceding days, disappeared suddenly and was replaced by a feeling of horror of the supernatural. I wanted to fly from even the thought of it. At the same time I felt a sudden distaste for work and conversation, with the inevitable result that being left with nothing to keep myself engaged, time hung heavily on me, adding to the already distraught condition of my mind. [...] Each morning heralded for me a new kind of terror, a fresh complication in the already disordered system, a deeper fit of melancholy or more irritable condition of the mind which I had to restrain, to prevent it from completely overwhelming me,

by keeping myself alert, usually after a completely sleepless night; and after withstanding patiently the tortures of the day, I had to prepare myself for even worse torment of the night. "

Let us consider now how he emerged from this negative experience into a wonderful state of awakening that blessed him to the end of his life. He discovered that the esoteric teachings contained a number of practices that might help him to bring the energy back into balance. His main cure reminds a lot the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*.

".... a fearful idea struck me. Could it be that I had aroused *Kundalini* through *pingala* or the solar nerve which regulates the flow of heat in the body and is located on the right side of *Sushumna*? If so, I was doomed, I thought desperately and as if by divine dispensation the idea flashed across my brain to make a last-minute attempt to rouse *Ida*, or the lunar nerve on the left side, to activity, thus neutralizing the dreadful burning effect of the devouring fire within. With my mind reeling and senses deadened with pain, but with all the will-power left at my command, I brought my attention to bear on the left side of the seat of *Kundalini*, and tried to force an imaginary cold current upward through the middle of the spinal cord. In that extraordinarily extended, agonized, and exhausted state of consciousness, I distinctly felt the location of the nerve and strained hard mentally to divert its flow into the central channel. Then, as if waiting for the destined moment, a miracle happened. There was a sound like a nerve thread snapping and instantaneously a silvery streak passed zigzag through the spinal cord, exactly like the sinuous movement of a white serpent in rapid flight, pouring an effulgent, cascading shower of brilliant vital energy into my brain, filling my head with a blissful lustre in place of the flame that had been tormenting me for the last three hours. Completely taken by surprise at this sudden transformation of the fiery current, darting across the entire network of my nerves only a moment before, and overjoyed at the cessation of pain, I remained absolutely quiet and motionless for some time, tasting the bliss of relief with a mind flooded with emotion, unable to believe I was really free of the horror. Tortured and exhausted almost to the point of collapse by the agony I had suffered during the terrible interval. I immediately fell asleep, bathed in light and for the first time after weeks of anguish felt the sweet embrace of restful sleep."

From then onwards, Gopi Krishna believed that this experience originated a process in which his whole nervous system would be slowly reorganized and transformed: he tried to write about the mystical experience and the evolution of consciousness from a scientific point of view. He theorized that there existed a biological mechanism in the human body, known from ancient times in India as *Kundalini*, which was responsible for creativity, genius, psychic ability, religious and mystical experience. In his opinion, *Kundalini* was the true cause of evolution.

Now, we notice that:

a. He did exactly what in *Kriya* you are asked not to do (exclusive concentration

upon *Sahasrara Chakra*.)

b. He saved himself by doing exactly what in *Kriya* you are asked to do (raising a cold current through the spine.)

In *Kriya* we learn that a routine which is totally based on a strong concentration on the *Sahasrara* is not appropriate for beginner or medium level students. The concentration on *Sahasrara* should be prepared by a long concentration on the point between the eyebrows or at *Medulla* or at that point which is called *Bindu* (see chapter 6). This preparation should last years not months. Building a strong magnet in *Sahasrara* is the most powerful way to stimulate the rising of *Kundalini*. You might experience moments of panic or in which you feel unrelated with the reality.

Then, let us reflect upon to the modality through which Gopi Krishna started a process of recovery. Convinced he had aroused *Kundalini* through *Pingala*, he made a last desperate attempt to bring in activity *Ida*, thus neutralizing the internal fire that was devouring him. He tried to create a cold current coming up toward the brain within the central channel of the spine. This action, patiently repeated, helped him out of his predicament.

Note

Another interesting testimony about Kundalini awakening is that of B. S. Goel's (1935-1998) described in his: *Psycho-Analysis and Meditation*. He was a very rare individual. His experience of *Kundalini* awakening happened when he was 28 and was quite dramatic. *Kundalini* got awakened on its own. During this long process, his friends thought he was "losing his mind". He went up and down India looking for someone who could explain what was happening to him. He found many people that had theories. However they did not know. His uniqueness lies in his experience of classical psychoanalysis along with meditation, which he advocated. When he was 35, his *Guru* appeared in his dream, and told him that Psycho-analysis and Marxism, both of which he had embraced, were false ways to happiness. He told him the only path to inner peace and joy was through God. In 1982, he opened an ashram in the Himalayas to help and guide other aspirants who had *Kundalini* experiences.

What is interesting for us is that Dr. Goel talks about the different degrees of suffering he went through as his ego was destroyed and rebuilt. He was the first, apart late Swami Satyananda Saraswati who studied the role of *Bindu* point, in the occipital region. He explained that "when the consciousness marches toward *Bindu* (which he calls *Brahma-randhra*) the ego-formations will get exposed before the consciousness in free-associations, in free writings, in dreams, and above all, in meditation itself.

In the last part of the book, while discussing "signals toward the final goal", among a lot of signals he had the courage to quote one in particular whom is not usually treated in book but in those book who want of mimic all the gurudom matter. He quotes "the great desire for being pierced and penetrated." About "pierced", he exemplifies it with the "desire of putting a nail at the mid-point between the two eyebrows. About "penetrated", he clarifies that the desire of penetration at *Bindu* may, out of ego-ignorance "turn into the desire of passive anal-penetration." He clarifies that an ordinary sexual act cannot satisfy the person who need really penetrated at the *Bindu* to get final spiritual bliss. He adds that: "as long as he does not reach that stage, he may often indulge in compulsive homo-sexuality. It is very probable that many saints of all ages might have remained great homosexuals if they had stopped their spiritual effort in their

pre-sainthood period."

Kundalini awakening and Kriya Yoga

When *Kundalini* experience happens as a result of *Kriya* practice, you won't feel disoriented. If not refused or repressed, the repetition of such experience gives you an unshakable certainty of the value of *Kriya* techniques. However you must understand and accept one thing: you are like one who, dead in appearance, had visited the afterworld and then had returned to walk again amongst human beings. It is clear that no one understands you. Therefore keep silent and try to improve your practice of *Kriya*.

After having experienced *Kundalini* awakening, some settle in a lethargic situation in which they are perfectly satisfied in establishing an agreeable atmosphere in their life. And this happens mainly because they rationalize they have received enlightenment and thus no further effort is required.

Don't deceive yourself: your Ego is intact, it hasn't turned into a "divine Ego". The path to become an Emancipated Soul, begins now and there is no step that can be disregarded.

Avoid going to "traveling gurus" to tell what has happened to you. They have no time to take care of anyone. They repeat hastily some general guidance and go away. They may even don't recognize the authenticity of the experience. Their lack of spiritual realization is, in some cases, really remarkable. You have the means to be your own *Acharya*. Let us consider what might be a simple criterion to judge the excellence of your routine. It should not be the amount of pleasure received while practicing a *Kriya* technique. Going ahead seeking pleasurable sensations during meditation means to put your ego as the compass needle of your spiritual journey. Tuning with the *Omkar* reality during the practice; achieving the breathless state when the routine is on the verge of ending; a sense of perfect fulfillment after *Kriya*, being moved to tears when you are alone and look at a mountain or at whatever beautiful corner of your surrounding landscape ... the coexistence of all these signs is surely a more reliable criterion.

You must be able to see the Divine in everything, to find joy in everything: work, free time, family, friends, contemplation of nature, art ... Sometimes it is difficult to be always attuned to an internal authentic feeling of fulfillment ... but you must study your routine, refine it continuously until this happens.

Never relax your guard and never stop using the common sense. Meditation relaxes the mistrustful side of your personality; you will tend to disregard your inner wisdom. I could bring many examples but I want to consider here the teachings that tend to poison you against the world, that alienate you from the society you are in. They try to amputate your individuality and your desires; they try to cut you from everything interesting and thrilling in life.

Do not impose chastity to yourself believing you must behave like a saint. Some rational and intelligent *kriyabans* believe impossible things. They state

authentic nonsenses and live excruciating conflicts getting to the refusal of love.

Lahiri Mahasaya admitted in his diary that at times his sexual desire was really strong. One day a disciple put him a direct question: "How can one be definitively free from sexuality?" He replied in a way that let struck dumb the disciple: "I will be free from sexuality only when my body will lie on the funeral pyre." God bless his sincerity! (I knew a *kriyaban* who was so bound to his illusions that he took the aforementioned episode as a sign that ... Lahiri Mahasaya was not spiritually realized!)

Sometimes the experience of a substantial and spontaneous rising of energy through the spine happens. Although being blissful in itself, you could react with a feeling of uneasiness and undefined fear. Usually this fear (which can turn into real anguish or panic) is absorbed in a short time, without problems. Sometimes, you might feel being walking in equilibrium on a rope between mental health and alienation. This phenomenon has happened to almost all mystics. There is nothing to fear! However it is always wise you have a sheet anchor at disposal – here you can find the two urgent actions to be done.

I. *Mula Bandha* (108)

Sit quietly and practice slowly, but intensely, 108 *Mula Bandha*. Contract all the muscles at the base of the spine, maintain the contraction for a couple of seconds and relax. Repeat. Forget the breath, try to attune to calmness in the point between the eyebrows. Don't be in a hurry: each hold and relax should last at least four seconds. You can have more than one session in order to complete 108 repetitions. Beside this, try to have plenty of physical activity.

II. *Create a cool sensation inside the spine utilizing your breath*

(This is exactly what Gopi Krishna did to get out of his awful situation.)

When the problem persists, sit with erected spine and concentrate all your mental strength in the point between the eyebrows. Use all your imagination to raise a fresh current up the spine. This can be done by inhaling through the mouth while keeping the tongue in the position of *Sitali Pranayama* or through the left nostril – having closed somehow the right nostril. To practice *Sitali*, raise the borders of the tongue to form a "U" e let it protrude beyond the lips. Inhale deeply through tongue and mouth. Exhale through the nose. Feel a fresh sensation in the mouth, transfer it in the spine. Repeat this for a couple of minutes until you feel something changing.

Further recommendations

1. *Be always prudent while holding your breath*

Be always cautious with *Kumbhaka* (holding your breath). The famous author J.K. Taimni in his *The science of Yoga* (The theosophical publishing house Adyar, Chennai, India • Wheaton, Il, USA) writes:

"*Kumbhaka* affects the flow of pranic currents in a very marked and fundamental manner and enables the *Yogi* to gain increasing control over these currents. [...] Not only is *Kumbhaka* the essential element of real *Pranayama* but it is also the source of danger in the practice of *Pranayama*. The moment one starts retaining the breath, especially after inhalation, in any abnormal manner the danger begins and one can never know what it will lead to. [...] *Kumbhaka* unlocks the doors of unexpected experiences and powers. If it is taken up without the necessary preparation and guidance it is sure to lead to disaster."

Kumbhaka is very powerful and in *Kriya Yoga* it is adopted with special procedures: *Yoni Mudra*, *Thokar*... Between the two extreme eventualities: to never hold your breath or to overuse *Kumbhaka*, chose an intermediary percentage of seconds of *Kumbhaka*. Regulate this percentage according to your ability to bear the originated power. If this is respected, if it is combined with *Maha Mudra*, *Navi Kriya* and *Yoni Mudra*, you will cover all the spiritual journey in a safe way.

2. Concentrate upon the Chakras in a balanced way

Don't cultivate stupid theories according to which all your problems originate from the blockage of this or that *Chakra*. Don't utilize techniques that work on a single *Chakra* with the hope of unlocking it. Our internal knots are not as we usually visualize them, namely like ordinary rope-knots. They have a kind of mutual dependence, they are subtly inter-twined, one inside the other.

After studying the theory of knots (*Granthis*), do not focus too insistently upon eliminating the one that you deem is the most important. You risk to enforce those very knots you want to eliminate. Don't be like a surgeon who wants to remove a gallstone embedded in a organ, without taking all the care not to destroy the organ and kill the patient.

It is correct to affirm that the knots are the root cause of our miseries, because they nourish the exhausting world of superficial emotions and thoughts. But it is not correct to think that they are our arch-enemies. They blur our vision of the Spirit but without them we would immediately dissolve in the Spirit, we could not lead a normal life. They are at the base of the instinct of self preservation.

Remember that the balanced techniques of *Kriya Pranayama*, *Thokar*, *Thokar Tribhangamurari* and *mental Pranayama* work upon all the knots simultaneously. Increasing gradually the repetition of these basic procedures is always the best choice!

If you concentrate for some time on *Muladhara*, give the same concentration to all the other *Chakras* and always end by concentrating on the point between the eyebrows. In one commentary by Lahiri Mahasaya to the sacred writings, it is written: "Being tranquil at the coccygeal center, do not stay longer. If you stay longer at the coccygeal center, then negative *Samadhi* (a negative state of absorption) will take place. So after getting up again, you should start practicing *Kriya*." If, just to give an example, you use *Thokar* to hit different times the *Muladhara Chakra* and you don't integrate this with other practices to stimulate the higher *Chakras*, the result is mainly a state of greyish

mind that appears in the day following the practice. It is difficult to sustain that uncomfortable sensation – as if your soul were scratched.

3. *Do not utilize procedures wholly based on the power of visualization*

Usually visualization techniques are introduced as an omni-beneficial activity. But visualization is a force acting in your psychic inner world, thus necessarily there should be obstacles and dangers to be considered.

Some schools teach you to create a virtual reality through the power of your imagination. The visualization procedure brought to the extreme limit is useless and treacherous. You believe you are entering the spiritual dimension but you are entering the kingdom of alienation. Always remember that when you do a purely mental work that doesn't envisage verification, the danger is certain.

Remind Jung's words:

"The deliberately induced psychotic state, which in certain unstable individuals might easily lead to a real psychosis, is a danger that needs to be taken very seriously indeed. These things really are dangerous and ought not to be meddled with in our typically Western way. It is a meddling with Fate, which strikes at the very roots of human existence and can let loose a flood of sufferings of which no sane person ever dreamed." (C. G. Jung, Introduction to *The Tibetan book of the Dead*.)

What are, according to Jung, the "deliberately induced psychotic states"? Unfortunately he does not explain it in detail and does not bring examples. However it is not difficult to understand that a psychotic state is the one in which you see things that do not exist, have a relationship (listen to voices, receive messages) from a dimension you have created in your mind and that exists only for you.

Appendix 2 – Cleaning the Kriya path from all esoteric-magic manias

Sometimes I ask myself if the ideas contained in appendix 1 and 2, should have been placed before the description of the *Kriya* techniques. This would have been correct and logical. But how many readers welcome a digression upon wrong attitudes towards the spiritual path? Such pages would just annoy those who seek information about the *Kriya* path. In a first reading they would surely be ignore.

It is a fact that when *kriyabans* discover my book, they behave like timorous animals when enter a unfamiliar territory. They wonder if to give a modicum of trust to the author and therefore have a quick reading of the technical part. Often they try to test immediately some technique and that's all there is to it. Later, if they decide to begin a serious experimentation, then, to make sure that they've understood fully, they pay attention to other parts of the book, and perhaps even to those that they judge useless digressions that the author has added for ... increasing the number of pages of the book. Readers have their own ideas about the spiritual path and they reject anything that could challenge them.

In my opinion, the problem of considering the wrong attitudes towards the Spiritual path is a more serious theme than what is commonly perceived. A full realization of the faddiness that keep many *kriyabans'* mind busy could drive any serious *Kriya* teacher crazy. Do we really think that all the *kriyabans* who stick faithfully to a schedule of regular practice are free from insane and totally irrational expectations that contradict the very basis of the mystical path?

Well, confident at the end of our work, that a discussion upon this theme won't disturb anyone (it will probably pass unnoticed) let us face it now and try to see the reasons of a tormenting doubt: "Often we introduce to another person the value of *Kriya Yoga*. This person sustains undecided although with a benevolent attitude the impact with our enthusiasm. It may happen that later this person begins to show an uncurbed enthusiasm about the idea of undertaking this discipline. Now, is it possible that this odd change is due to the fact that our too enthusiastic words about the amazing effects of *Kriya* have created a colossal deception?"

If some part of our explanation has been twisted or overlooked by our listener, a dangerous illusion has taken solid roots in his/her mind. The greatest and most insidious delusion is that *Kriya* is an scientifically based, and therefore almost automatic, tool of self therapy (psychological.) The project of embarking on the *Kriya* path with the hope of getting free from depression or other common forms of neuroses leads nowhere. If you have a sick mind and after having experimented with alternative remedies, you follow the counsel of a too much enthusiastic friend and try the *Kriya* path too, you won't obtain anything, except for a headache. If, through this process something good happens in your psycho-physical system you will not recognize it and get only anguish. In this situation there is no love for *Kriya*. You fear in your heart you will be disappointed and you will.

Kriya works when there is love for the Divine and great appreciation for the *Kriya* techniques. You cannot look at *Kriya* with suspicion: "Does it really work"? No human can ever touch the *supreme Good* of *Kriya* unless you place it, with unshakeable trust, above all the other achievements of the world. You cannot clumsily try to camouflage your skepticism by pretending a nonexistent spiritual interest. *Kriya* can work even if you are not a "religious" person, but it should be the object of your enthusiasm and aspiration.

Kriya is not a psychological journey in the realm of our mind but a spiritual path. Forgetting this gives all deformations green light. For example some nourish the groundless expectation that *Kriya* practice might amplify their mental powers. This idea is subtly fostered by some *Kriya* literature.

I don't want to say that this is the only idea that comes out from certain literature. By no means! It describes the spiritual path in a correct way, inviting you to seek the Divine only, quoting the Gospel with authority. Yet the preceding idea is created by many discourses. It gives origin to an almost inextinguishable oscillation between seeking the Divine only, surrendering to His will without asking any other thing, and to use will, imagination and effort to get some tangible results – which it is the aspect that, just in order to be understood, I call "magic".

This situation is made more unstable by the fact that, owing to religious conditioning, the idea of moving towards God might remain, for many persons and for a long time without an ounce of attractiveness.

The dawning of a spiritual awakening is when suddenly the *Omkar* dimension enters one's life. *Omkar* is important, very important. Without it, you can repeat all day long: "Thou art that" but you don't grasp its meaning. You are only enjoying lofty ideas. Even if you believe in a Higher *Self* and desire to live without betraying it, if you are not in contact with the *Omkar* reality, you betray your Higher *Self* continuously.

I am not afraid of saying that without this baptism, one's practice of *Kriya* is a caricature of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*. You cannot talk only about evolution. "Evolution" is a vague, inconsistent mirage which destroys all genuine spiritual aspiration. An hypothetical evolution is less than nothing compared to the experience of contacting and merging into the *Omkar* vibration.

I began to free myself from all esoteric-magic conditioning when I was invited by a local cultural institution to give lessons on the present tendency of creating self-made religion. I went through the whole history of western esotericism. You can understand where the boundary line between the genuine mystical quest and the cultivation of magic ambitions lay when you are familiar not only with the history of the mystical movements but esoteric too.

I was delighted to prepare the lessons by studying the best available essays and textbooks – I mean books written by academics who didn't belong (or were so smart as to hide their membership or affiliation) to any particular mystical school and manifested a detached attitude toward the whole matter. I appreciated those texts that were capable of presenting the essence of those religious

movements which flourished freely around the great religions.

This was an unclouded period of my life: I was very gratified to have time and opportunity to pursue such studies. The impact of certain readings, the liveliness of certain historical facts, had the effect of cleaning my path from useless dogmas admitted innocently into my life through the door of meek adapting to the ideals of my first *Kriya* organization. I was struck by the devastating inconsistency of many esoteric movements, widely recognized as demanding and elitist. Many magnificent terms, which would have once allured me, turned out to be totally empty of any significance. Their redundancy filled me with nausea as if they were an obscenity brought forth by a monster. I was stricken by the weakness of the human mind, by its discouraging slowness in dissolving glaring deceptions and fallacies.

Since the first lesson, I tried to communicate what is being expressed clearly with the word "mystic." I repeated that even if in some context the word *mystic* evokes a relationship with the mystery, with the concept of initiation (from the Greek μυστικός [mustikos], an initiate) into secret religious rituals (also this from the Greek μύω, to conceal), a *mystic* is one who tries sincerely (adopting any form of mental and or bodily discipline) to surrender themselves to *something* which is the quintessence of supreme comfort, *something* which lays beyond the territories of the mind – unattainable by the acrobatics of a never satisfied mind.

The problem was that that *something* beyond mind was unintelligible and had no appeal for most part of them. I repeated to no purpose how frail (full of suggestibility and vulnerability) was the human psyche when it deals with approaching the spiritual path. I saw that my students showed scant regard for this theme. They didn't seem to realize the relation it had with their own life. Rather someone contested me remembering me the great value of the curiosity in bringing forth the scientific search.

I realized with cold mind that some listeners came to my lessons in the hope to receive support and fuel for their illusions. Towards the end of cycle of lessons I tried to extoll the concept of a "*clean* mystical path" – a path directed one pointedly towards the total surrender to God and not polluted by the fantasies and deformations of the human mind.

I talked privately with some students about how to approach the very core of the spiritual path. I extolled the value of spiritual classics like: "*Tales of a Russian Pilgrim*".

I extolled how beautiful and valuable it was feeling like pilgrims, like those souls who followed the thousand-year-old spiritual tradition of *Continuous Prayer*. It was evident that I had strongly strayed off of my didactic theme. However they forgot everything just five minutes after our conversation and revealed the stimulus of the most curious illusions with the firm proposal of cultivating them on their own with great delight.

At the end of this didactic experience I had clear in front of me the great danger to consider any spiritual path as a magic process. Actually, there are some aspects of *Kriya* advertising that seem an invitation to tread the path of Magic. "You will

develop this, you will develop that..." There is a subtle conditioning, seeds of illusion that will flourish at due time.

I don't advertise *Kriya*, but I know what I would say: "*Kriya Yoga* is a spiritual path based on good methods of concentration and Prayer. These methods had been utilized for centuries." Not a word more. I would never show pics of people who were successful in *Kriya*, I didn't either report of famous personages praising *Yoga* in general or *Kriya Yoga* ... since this gives the idea you want to sell something.

I don't appreciate that some *Kriya* school use sometimes (during mass initiation) rites similar to Magic. They employs symbolism, purification fire rites, to engender belief. The greatest similarity is that both (*Kriya* and Magic) require to take an oath of secrecy about the techniques. In religion there is discretion not secrecy. Discretion comes spontaneous to intelligent and sensitive people, secrecy is unnatural, irrational, impractical and therefore requires an oath.

There are two tendencies in magic and therefore two ways of straying a spiritual path. The first is the mania of receiving initiation from exponents of an ancient lineage, the second is the mania of knowing all the most powerful procedures in the world in order to find out the best of the best.

A recollection of two very particular kriyaban friends

By my first *Kriya* teacher, I knew a person who wasn't there in the spasmodic search for original *Kriya* but because of the illustrious line of descent of that teacher. He said that "line of descent" was the most important thing to care while approaching a spiritual teacher.

He was adamant in practicing *Kriya* with wrong modalities, making glaring mistakes. For instance, he neglected the normal rules of health, refused, during meditation, to assume the correct position of the backbone, didn't even try to get immobility in the final part of his routine. It was impossible to correct him. He behaved toward me in a very cordial way but, when he talked about the absolute place to be given to ethic rules listed by Patanjali, he was able to make me feel like a worm. He criticized my obsession to perfect the practice of *Kriya*. He explained that the very desire to master a meditation technique meant cultivating desire and this was against Buddhist principles.

The belief that the power (Baraka) of the great Teachers of the past, is still present in their descendants, as a non-stop chain is common enough. But he was convinced that spiritual progress cannot happen except through receiving this "power". In his life he was destined to went on receiving *Kriya* from those who claimed to have a valid lineage although their teachings didn't add nothing to what he already knew. He was spellbound by the idea of "transmission of power." He believed that the power received through initiation had in itself the power of redemption.

He gave not so much importance to be serious in the practice of the *Kriya* techniques – he said they were just to purify oneself before receiving the real "initiation" which for him meant "power." What I never understood of him was

that now and then he went to assist to the liturgical practices of a Catholic church only "as a bland form of exorcism."

Unfortunately, he went on paying attention to the revelations coming from a healer (a channeler ¹⁰) to whom he went in order that the spirits reveal to him the karmic reason of a light illness that in my opinion, could be cured easily following the usual hygienic rules. Later he met a group of people who practiced spiritualism and had Kardec as occult teacher. It was enough for him to hear that name to immediately feel part of that group who had the characteristics associated with Cultic Groups. What was lived there seemed to me a child's play were it not for the fact that my friend supported handsomely his group.

He plunged into situations of such a narrow vision that his life style appeared grotesque. It was a revelation for me to witness his mental fragility. It was as if, from behind the mask of his face, another personality appeared, extremely self-confident but paradoxically allowing others to defraud him in the worst of the ways. His original desire to find a channel that put him in direct contact with the power and blessings of the ancient masters ended in the worst of all prisons. He gave all his possessions, and the totality of his time, to a person who was an authentic rogue. ¹¹ He claimed to have had the privilege ... to communicate directly with P.Y. and with Lahiri Mahasaya. It was pathetic and, to an extent, even amusing being told that his message coming directly from the hereafter: "In this epoch, the *Kriya* is old-fashioned and useless. Devotion is enough!".

Another *kriyaban* friend seemed to live only for "improving" his *Kriya* by incorporating various esoteric procedures, even those described in some esoteric books. He was convinced that only by using certain formulas and initiatic symbols, was it possible to complete the evolutionary jump conducive to liberation.

After a great insistence, I accepted to read what for him was a masterpiece of initiatic literature. The book surprised me for the quantity of information it

¹⁰ Classical spiritualism - characterized by a person (medium) who enters a trance state at a desk, answers the questions put by the bystanders through a code of loud raps - has handed over its place to more modern methods such as those where all the participants, putting their hands on an upside-down glass to move it among the letters of the alphabet stamped on a comfortable flexible tablet (Ouija board). Many prefer the more accessible revelations of a *channeler* who lets the invoked entity express through the flood of his own eloquence. It is interesting to see how the *channeler's* biographies trace a common scheme. All tell that once they were skeptic of their own faculties and would not accept yielding to the higher Will who had decided to entrust to them the mission to serve as medium between spirits and humanity. Once their mission was accepted, from the same ultra mundane source came the inspiration to mix the flow of the various revelations with the diagnosis of unlikely illnesses, with prescription of expensive alternative remedies.

¹¹ I have some grounds to believe that the untrustworthy soil of spiritualism is one of the best areas to cultivate splits inside one's personality. Apart from the *automatic writing* in which the one who asks is the same person that gives the answer, the Medium knows in advance the preferences and anticipations of the person who addresses him. Therefore all becomes like a closed circuit: question and answer reverberate in an endless loop like the feedback of a microphone set next to its loud speaker. As anyone can observe, the messages are always agreeable. Every adept, even of limited intelligence, receives the message that the Divine has assigned him *an important mission*... I believe that this is, psychologically speaking, very dangerous.

contained. While reading it, I entered an almost hypnotic state and didn't immediately realize that each chain of ideas therein contained had no basis at all, but was only offspring of the unbridled imagination of the author. Through an intoxication with words, the author's imagination dared to develop free from the relationship with reality and from the rules of logic. The whole thing was only a pure mental enjoyment – comparable to that of reading a fantasy novel. Reading Tolkien would have been immensely more interesting and wise. How can you think of experiencing something concrete by just reading such junk? I counseled to my friend some good books; he stated he had already read them. But it was a lie – he preferred to keep them at a distance.

I came to know that he was the spiritual guide of a small group of persons. I can't imagine what he taught them since he never talk to me of this activity.

One day he met a self-named expert in occult matters who purported to know the secrets of an almost extinct esoteric path and, in particular, a spiritual technique far more advanced than those known today, which was practiced centuries or millennia ago, by few privileged beings. This "expert" guided him sweetly but with the surety of a mature professional, towards a situation in which his economic base, essential to his living, was at risk of being swept away, completely reduced to shambles. He easily bewitched him. "Now that humanity is different from before, such teachings are not revealed to just anyone" he started off, then after a pause and with a sigh, finally concluded: "Today's students would not know how to appreciate them and, in their hands, they could be dangerous."

The expert created the impression of being a dreamer, but was not so naïve as it seemed; he used an enchanting terminology similar to that of the Kabbalah (mystical teaching within Judaism) and talked effortlessly about original Christianity also, whose texts (canonical and apocryphal) he was able to interpret in a non-conventional way.

My friend tried to captivate the teacher in order to present himself as a true adept. Confiding that he was willing to accept whatever toll and deprivation, consenting to whatever behest, provided that this extraordinary secret will be revealed to him, he actually fell into the trap. After having expressed some reservations, our smart teacher at long last capitulated, murmuring: "Only for you, only because I feel I am *guided* to make an exception". My friend, a poor victim quivering with emotion, lived the best moment of his life, convinced that the meeting with the expert had been decided in the higher spheres. The requested donation to be given during Initiation -- united to the promise of keeping absolute secrecy -- was conspicuous, since in that way he would confirm the great value attributed to that event. The teacher said that the donation would be transferred to a monk who was helping an orphanage. (It is a real classic! ... there is always an orphanage in these stories.)

While my friend, completely satisfied, was preparing to receive such an incomparable *gift* (he received the explanation that it was a *gift* and that nothing could adequately compensate the benedictions that such an initiation would bring to his life) the scoundrel distractedly decided what kind of trash-stuff he was going to demonstrate with glaring solemnity. My friend received with

indescribable emotion, the new technique and spent two days in sheer fervor.

Later, imprisoned in his chimera, he witnessed the rekindling of his passion and the comedy repeated. He heard about other incomparable valuable "revelations". This illusion is, in effect, indomitable. After having received his "drug", he continued his inexorable run toward the abyss. I cannot predict if, one day, he will realize that the techniques for which he paid a fortune had been taken from some books and altered, so he would not to guess their origin.

Conclusion

We all know that to be entangled in esoteric, magic, occult rituals, spiritualistic practices... is an amazingly easy way of destroying, in a short time, years of genuine spiritual effort. Study and understand this topic until until you feel it as a nightmare.

Erase once and for all the insane idea that *Kriya* is the art of manipulating your *karma* and thus acceleration your evolution. Let Magic manipulate aspects of reality through knowledge of occult laws.

Regard *Kriya* as the art of Prayer and of "complete surrender" not through the mind but through tranquillizing all the *Prana* in your body. Feel you are a pilgrim in this world. Start the practice of *Japa* with all your heart while your mind will judge it a dull activity. From now on, consider the state of *Continuous Prayer* the shining destination of your spiritual venture. Don't occupy your thoughts with any other achievement. By following through with your resolution, all will be perfect in your path.

Appendix 3 – Importance of studying the Radhasoami movement

Why should *kriyabans* give their time study the *Radhasoami* cult? Because Sri Yukteswar and P. Yogananda were part of it and because the literary material produced by this movement is very inspiring for all those who are seeking to be in tune with the *Omkar* Realty.

The *Kriya* path is a process of refining, in successive stages, one's attunement with *Omkar*. Now, *Radhasoami* is a monotheistic religion having the *Omkar Reality* as the "single God." We can say the same about *Kriya Yoga*. *Omkar* is the final goal of *Kriya* and the unique essence which percolates through all its phases.

Radhasoami movement teach procedures that are very similar to the techniques *Hong Sau*, *Om*, *Kriya Pranayama* and the technique that P.Y. calls *Second Kriya*. These procedures in their entirety are called *Surat Shabda Yoga* (*Surat* means "soul," *Shabda* means "word". The "word" is the "Sound Current", the "Audible Life Stream" or the "Essence of the Absolute Supreme Being".)

Every *kriyaban* who feels a strong tie with P.Y.'s teachings will surely read with shivers of surprise what comes out from *Radhasoami* literature.

It is reasonable to infer that some disciples of Lahiri Mahasaya belonged to a *Radhasoami* group and perhaps, without even being fully aware of this, added to *Kriya* some elements of theory and practice which belonged to this movement.

Radhasoami is also referred to as *Sant Mat* (Path of the Saints). It is considered a derivation of *Sikhism*.¹² Even if the spiritual organization *Radhasoami* (*Radha Swami*) was formally founded in 19th century India, actually, the tradition is much more ancient and it relates to the teaching of Kabir and then Guru Nanak.

The writings of Kabir (1398 Benares - 1448/1494 Maghar), have deep similarities with the experiences and thoughts of Lahiri Mahasaya. Kabir's concept of *Shabda*, which can be translated as "Word" (the word of the Master), can be related to the *Omkar* teaching. According to Kabir this *Shabda-Om* dispels all doubts and difficulties: is vital to keep it constantly in our consciousness as a living presence.

The literature about Kabir and Guru Nanak (1469 Nankana Sahib - 1539 Kartarpur) is very inspiring. Their teachings overlapped perfectly. Kabir, an illiterate Muslim weaver, was a great mystic, open to the vedantic and *yogic* influence, and an extraordinary singer of the Divine, conceived beyond name and form. The poems and sentences ascribed to him are expressed in a particularly effective language that remains permanently emblazoned in the reader's memory. In the last century, Rabindranath Tagore, the great mystic poet of Calcutta, rediscovered the reliability of his teachings and the power of his poetry, and made beautiful translations of his songs into English. Kabir conceived Islam and

¹² The *Sikh* religion is founded on the teachings of Guru Nanak and nine successive Gurus; it is the fifth-largest organized religion in the world. It is interesting that the key distinctive feature of *Sikhism* is a non-anthropomorphic concept of God, to the extent that one can interpret God as the Universe itself.

Hinduism to be two roads converging toward a unique goal. He was convinced of the possibility of overcoming the barriers that separate these two great religions. He did not seem to base his teaching upon the authority of the holy writings; he shunned the religious rituals. Kabir taught not to renounce to life and become a hermit, not to cultivate any extreme approach to the spiritual discipline, because it weakens the body and increases pride. God has to be recognized inside of one's own soul - like a fire fed by continuous care, burning all the resistances, dogmas and ignorance. This is beautifully stated in Kabir's: "One day my mind flew as a bird in the sky, and entered the heavens. When I arrived, I saw that there was no God, since He resided in the Saints!" Hinduism gave Kabir the concept of reincarnation and the law of *Karma*; Islam gave him the absolute monotheism - the strength of fighting all the forms of idolatry and the caste system. I found the full meaning of the *yogic* practice in him. He says that there is a garden full of flowers in our body, the *Chakras*, and an endless beauty can be contemplated if the awareness is established in the "thousand-petal Lotus".

"Who is there playing upon a flute in the middle of the sky? The flute is being played in trikuti (eyebrows center), the confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna. The sound emanates from the north! Cowherd girl, hear the sound of the flute and lo, they are all hypnotized by the nada." "It is a music without strings which plays in the body. It penetrates the inner and the outer and leads you away from illusion." (Kabir).

Beloved Guru Nanak gave the same teaching. He disapproved of ascetic practices and taught instead to remain inwardly detached whilst living as a householder. "Asceticism doesn't consist in ascetic robes, or in having a walking staff, nor in visiting burial places. Asceticism is not mere words; asceticism is to remain pure amidst impurities!" Traditionally, release from the bondage of the world was sought as the goal, therefore the householder's life was considered an impediment and an entanglement. In contrast, in Guru Nanak's teaching, the whole world became the arena of spiritual endeavor. He was bewitched by the beauty of creation and considered the panorama of nature as the loveliest place for worship of the Divine. He expressed his teachings in Punjabi, the spoken language of northern India. His disregard for Sanskrit suggested that his message was without reference to the existent Holy Scriptures. He made a deliberate attempt to completely cut off his disciples from all the ritualistic practices, orthodox modes of worship, and from the priestly class. His teaching demanded an entirely new approach. While a full understanding of God is beyond human beings, he described God as not wholly unknowable. God must be seen through "the inward eye", sought in the "heart". He emphasized that the revelation of this is to be achieved through meditation. In his teachings there are hints as to the possibility of listening to an ineffable internal melody (*Omkar*) and to taste the nectar (*Amrit*).

"The Sound is inside us. It is invisible. Wherever I look I find it."
(Guru Nanak).

There were also a group of teachers that assumed prominence in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent from about the 13th century. Their teachings are distinguished theologically by inward devotion to a divine principle, and socially by an egalitarianism opposed to the qualitative distinctions of the Hindu caste hierarchy and to the religious differences between Hindu and Muslim. In the modern times the first name to signal is that of **Param Sant Shiv Dayal Singh ji** who created the Radha Soami movement in January 1861 (the same year in which Lahiri Mahasaya is reported to have received initiation into *Kriya Yoga*).

This movement contemplates "teaching a spiritual path which is intentionally easier than those described in the ancient scriptures as it requires nothing more than sitting quietly and looking and listening within." They teach that there are no other means of spiritual liberation, except through the *Omkar* experience. Without actual, conscious, participation in the internally audible Life Stream, no one can ever escape the net of *Karma* and reincarnation, or ever become free and happy. They explain that no other system leads so easily to the highest regions of mystical experience.

The founder Param Sant Shiv Dayal Singh ji died on 1878 in Agra, India. He did not appoint a successor, resulting in a succession crisis upon his death. Several disciples eventually came to be regarded as successors, which led to splits within the group. These splits led to the propagation of Radhasoami teachings to a wider audience although with slightly varied interpretations.

The main teachings and philosophy of Radhasoami

The main features of this movement are the following:

I. *Radhasoami* affirms that *Om* is the Word referred to in the Bible: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) The Sound vibration, the dynamic force of creative energy that was continuously being sent out from the Supreme Being at the dawn of the universe's manifestation throughout the ages, molding all things animate and inanimate; could be listened to through a multiphase procedure known as *Surat Shabda Yoga*.

The central technique of *Surat Shabda Yoga* aims at uniting the essence of what we call "ourselves" with the Supreme Being through a procedure of inner listening. This technique consists in attuning the soul to the spiritual current ever vibrating within. God is within us but physical eyes cannot see Him, nor can these physical ears hear His Voice. Nevertheless we can hear the "divine pressure" that hums all around us. By entering into the silence and closing our ears we can perfectly catch that celestial melody and therefore realize the presence of God within ourselves. It takes a little time to develop it and *Om* can be heard by anyone! This is an amazing, marvelous event for each human being!

From the sacred moment when the student hears this music, he is never again alone. He enjoys the companionship of God Himself. Contact with this

Primal Source of peace, love, and bliss, removes our fears, worries and anxieties. *Radhasoami* explains that from age to age, the great Masters come to revive this knowledge, after materialism has obscured it. They give us back our supreme joy, that who bring us directly to our ultimate spiritual freedom.

II. *Radhasoami* emphasizes the need of a living spiritual Master or Satguru. There is no doubt that the concept of *Guru* has a special place in Indian thought. One of the main Hindu texts, the *Bhagavad Gita*, is a dialog between God in the form of *Krishna* and the warrior prince *Arjuna*. Their dialog summarizes the ideal relationship between *Guru* and disciple. *Radhasoami* extols the role of the *Guru*. In *Radhasoami* thinking this relationship is elaborated in great detail – exactly in the same way I heard from my *Kriya* organization but with an important difference: this *Guru* cannot be dead (or, as they prefer to say, not having relinquished his body through *Mahasamadhi*). *Radhasoami* is ironic about those people who imagine themselves followers of some dead Master. They comment: can a woman marry a dead man and live with him? Can a dead doctor give medicine? One person may revere the memory of a dead master or read his writings. One may feel in his heart love and veneration-for him. But he can never be a real Initiate of that Master.

Coming back to the real situation, namely the relationship with a living *Guru*, this role is so important that there is a saying that if the devotee were presented to the *Guru* and God, first he would pay respect to the *Guru*, since the *Guru* had been instrumental in leading him to God. A disciple could never break off the sacred connection with the *Guru* under any circumstances.

Initiation to *Surat Shabda Yoga* procedures is a very important moment. *Radhasoami* does not initiate everyone who asks for it. One has to be spiritually "ready" for initiation. After one has been chosen for initiation, he is taken into a closed room, where the initiator explains the fundamental theoretical points we are dealing with. Beside this, at the time of initiation, he is given a first-hand inner experience of the internal Light which appears in the point between the eyebrows. The initiator activates this Light stationed at the third eye of the disciple. Through it, one comes to "know God". When a soul establishes contact with this Light, the Light takes it back to the Godhead, its original home. Although some sects forbid idolatry, generally the would-be initiate bows, kneels, or generally prostrates before the *Guru* and worships him. They explain that a *Guru* takes on himself part of the *karma* of the disciple, appears to them at the moment of death in order to introduce them to God. As for the meditation techniques, they can be learned later from other authorized persons from the initiator and in any case the disciple takes a vow of secrecy.

III. *Radhasoami* emphasizes the need of weekly gathering for spiritual fellowship, spiritual service that can manifest in many forms and for listening to the talks of their living Master. Often such discourses revolve round the necessity of coupling meditation with a life of high moral values. (Vegetarian diet, no intoxicants or recreational drugs...) at the same time carrying out their responsibilities to family, friends and society. Attending to these meetings is

considered of paramount importance. During them, one has experience of meditation under the direct guidance of his teacher.

Before giving a summary description of the *Radhasoami* techniques, let us underline a key factor that *Radhasoamis* are very proud of. They claim that the limitation of all religions has been their inability to make God real to their devotees. Actually, we can not imagine that men would live as they do, think and act as they do, if God were real to them, if they had actually seen Him and loved Him. God must become real to the individual, not a mental concept but a living reality. To practically all men, God is simply an abstract idea, a mental concept. How can one worship and love a mental concept? When most people say they love God, it simply means that they have a certain emotion induced by different factors. But this has not the least thing to do with God-realization.

There is but one method of making God real to the seeker: that is, to make him see God and hear Him. When the disciple hears the enchanting music of the internal sounds, then this process has begun. But that realization is not complete. When he rises by the aid of subtler procedures to the still higher planes, his "spiritual being" meets with the Light of *Kutastha*, it is then that he experiences perfect God-realization.

Now, the sound of *Om*, being the bridge between the physical and the astral world, the conscious and the unconscious, the form and the formless is the best experience to increase devotion for the Divine.

Techniques

The meditation routine is practiced daily in the comfort and convenience of one's own home.

1. Position

The teachers of *Surat Shabda Yoga* encourage meditation in the quiet of the early morning (before breakfast), and before sleep. Meditation begins with first relaxing the body and making it still. The position is comfortable either sitting in a chair (both feet flat on ground) or in a cross-legged position with spine erect, keeping spine, head and neck aligned naturally. It is important to gradually develop the ability of sitting relaxed and without any bodily tension.

2. Perceiving light in Kutastha

In order to begin the upward journey, a Sadhak must learn to "go within" – this is accomplished by concentration at the Third Eye Center. They explain that the seat of the Spirit is at the point between the two eyebrows. It is on this point that the Sadhak having closed his eyes must focus his attention. Concentration moves ideally from that point, horizontally out, 20-25 centimeters from the forehead. No tension is put on the eyes or forehead. The gaze is focused on the middle of the dark inner screen: gradually the darkness will fade to lighter and lighter shades, eventually opening into the infinite space. This experience is deepened

during the next practice n.3.

Note

Some modern cults that are a derivation of *Radhasoami* teach this following right hand position. The eyelids are closed. The index finger rests lightly on the point between the eyebrows; thumb and middle finger rest lightly on each closed eyeball, to steady and stop the eyeballs from moving. Start from the corner of the eyeballs, press very very slightly the eyeballs up from the bottom. You should see the light forming inside your head. You get the sensation that your head is flooded with light. We must emphasize that it is not the pressure on the eyeballs that counts – the purpose of the hand position is meant simply to steady them and to allow you to focus better.

3. Simran at Kutastha

The teacher gives the disciple a *Mantra*; *Simran* means the repetition of this *Mantra*. It is simply a method of helping the mind to come to complete rest and remain at rest in the given center. Repeating internally the *Mantra* in *Kutastha* helps one to raise the consciousness of the Self to higher regions. *Simran* is the key that helps transcending thought (time and space) and opens the door of the inner being.

Radhasoamis are invited to use the " Panch Naam", the "5 Names of God": 1. *JotNirinjan* 2. *Ongkar* 3. *Rarankar* 4. *Sohang* 5. *Sat Nam*

The disciple sits still, eyes closed, mentally repeating the *Mantra*, gazing into the middle of the darkness lying in front of him. If he perceives the inner light, the concentration is on it. Breathing is natural and free flowing. This process automatically draws the spirit-currents, normally dissipated all over the body, toward the spiritual center. When the inward gaze has brought to a sharp and steady focus, one finds that the darkness will fade and light will emerge. Concentrate in the middle of it and continue repeating slowly your *Mantra*. Eventually one experiences the withdrawal of the sensory currents and a very peculiar state sets in: like of "numbness". The Inner Light ceases flickering and develops into a bright spot in the central portion of the forehead. Gradually, this brilliance enlightens every constituent of the body from within. Every cell, every tendril is seen as sparkling with a reflection of this unique glow. The divine glow ends the darkness of ignorance. Perfect control of the flow of the thoughts and emotions ensues.

4. Nada Yoga

This technique is practiced covering ears and eyes using an arm prop. Some combine the listening to the inner sounds with the attempt to taste nectar (*Amrit*) by sticking the tongue to the roof of the mouth. (See technique n.6) In order to hear the "divine sound", novices are asked to block their ears with the thumbs so they cannot hear any external sounds. Usually one places the thumbs in the ears and pulling back just far enough not to be listening to the blood pounding through your ears. [Variation: each thumb is placed in the ear and each hand is twisted upwards so that the four fingers of each hand rest on the top of your head, with each thumb tip lightly but firmly in each ear hole, sealed with the twisting action.]

One listens to the internal sound coming at first from the right side and ultimately from the top of the head. To some devotees this sounds like a bell. At a certain moment, it begins to fairly enchant you and to pull you up with increasing attraction and power. You will find yourself listening to it with rapt attention and deep delight, completely absorbed in it. You will never wish to leave it. During this practice, the *Mantra* given in the previous technique is not repeated.

5. So ham Pranayama

The nostrils in a human body are like the holes in a flute. We know that the in and out flow of air produces typical sounds that you can listen to, concentrate upon and thus amplify especially when the breathing process is deep and slow. The sound of the breath is "So" during inhalation and "Ham" (hung) during exhalation. These sounds are not loud and clear like other audible sounds. Nevertheless, they can be "perceived" concentrating upon each breath in a silent ambient.

Listen to the sound of the in and out breath as "So-Ham": "So" on the in-breath, "Ham" on the out-breath. A great help and inspiration for this practice is to consider breath not only as a flow of air but as a manifestation of the cosmic *Om* vibration. A Sadhak should also attempt to feel an illuminating current of *Prana* entering along with the breath; it is absorbed during the following pause and injected into the body during exhalation. If you are constantly aware of this, you achieve the breathless state. Therefore this technique is also referred to as *Kevala Kumbhaka*. During it you can hear also the internal sounds: the full realization of Nada Yoga can be achieved. The total duration of this practice can range between five minutes (for beginners) to thirty minutes (for the trained).

6. Kechari

I have not found in *Radhasoami* the exercise of *Talabya Kriya* but only the following instruction.

"Curl your tongue up to the roof of your mouth. Get the tip to touch the uvula make contact with the "divine nectar" that is constantly flowing through your body. Go further and enter the nasal passage. Usually you will experience the nectar only after much practice. It is claimed that this nectar is the 'living water', the 'bread of life' of which Jesus spoke. You can combine *So Ham Pranayama* with *Kechari*; or you can practice *Kechari* alone."

7. Locate the Chakras in the dorsal spine

The *Radhasoami* movement believes that besides the 6 *Chakras* in the physical body, there are 6 *Chakras* in the grey matter of the brain, and 6 in the white matter. The 6 spinal *Chakras* are materialistic in nature, therefore they are not to be stimulated (you don't use specific *bija Mantras* to activate them as you do in *Kundalini Yoga*) but they are simply astrally located. Strange as it may sound, long meditation upon the Chakras is not the right action to be done in order to achieve "*Mukti*" (liberation.) But by astrally locating them we acquire the ability to leave the human body at will – a practice sometimes referred to as "dying

while living". The technique consists in assuming *Kechari Mudra* while concentrating upon the physical location of each *Chakra* until its particular luminous vibration begins to appear. When this happens you don't dwell upon that *Chakra*; you focus on the physical location of the next each *Chakra* and so on – the pause upon a *Chakra* lasts only for the necessary time to have that subtle perception of it.

8. Higher form of So Ham Pranayama

When the physical location of the 6 spinal *Chakras* is clearly established in the mind, the *Kundalini* energy can be stimulated by creating a strong mental pressure on the six *Chakras* along the spinal column. This is possible only after having practiced for a long time the previous techniques.

Let's get to the point: practice *So Ham Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra*: piercing the *Chakras* happens during inhalation. While breathing in slowly, with the focus of concentration upon the subtle sound of "so", try to feel the pressure of the *Prana* contained in the inhaled air. It surrounds, winds and tights around each *Chakra* during its coming up. Exhalation happens as in the basic form of *Soham Pranayama*: do it very relaxed listening to the sound of the breath coming out as "Ham". By repeating this procedure, the pressure upon each *Chakra* increases.

9. Subtle phases of meditation to intensify Omkar experience

The location of the other 12 *Chakras* in the brain is gradually revealed by moving the *Prana* in a circular (or elliptical) way inside the brain. A very slight breath can be used just at the very beginning of this procedure, then breath is forgotten and you use only the pure strength of your will. There are plenty of such procedures adopted by the different *Radhasoami* groups. Here I hint to a couple of them (which represent, in my opinion, the most effective and efficient way to merge into the *Omkar* dimension.)

[I] Awareness and *Prana* move upwards along the right temple, then to the left (under the skull vault), downwards along the left temple and finally to the right touching *Medulla* and closing the ellipse. All the movement happens inside the brain.

You will hear internal sound inside the right ear. Then you will hear it inside the left ear also. Go ahead with the internal movement and listen to both tones simultaneously. When the energy in the two is balanced, a circle is formed, creating a force field. It may take you about five minutes to hear both tones at the same time.

Now, guide the two vibrations into the center of the cranium, where they will meet and blend into a slightly different sound. At the apex of this procedure you will have the revelation of the spiritual eye. A deep Bell sound will lead you in the *Samadhi* state. This is the culmination of this particular practice and contemplation.

[II] Awareness and *Prana* move forward along the right part of the crown, then

move backwards along the left part of the crown, returning to the starting point over the occipital region. All movement happens horizontally under the skull vault.

After completing a great number of rounds, the soul has sufficient force to penetrate the 18th portal (this for *Radhasoamis* is the most elevated *Chakra* that is found in the white part of the brain). This portal opens on the true, indestructible "*Radhasoami*" – the ocean of the Spirit. This is the ultimate goal to be achieved via meditation practices.

Conclusion

We were taught that Lahiri Mahasaya learned *Kriya Yoga* in 1861 from Mahavatar Babaji. We have discovered that he learned also from other sources and brought ahead during his life a continuously process of experimentation. We assume that the hypothesis that he learned also from *Radhasoami* tradition is reasonable. But we have no doubt that Lahiri Mahasaya has enriched the *Surat Shabda Yoga* path tremendously.

Lahiri Mahasaya learned also from other traditions like *Sufi*. *Radhasoami* teaches that *Om* is to be heard by closing the ears, Lahiri insists that *Om* is to be heard without closing the ears (and this feat which is relatively difficult while trying to master *Kriya Pranayama* becomes possible with *Thokar* and *Kechari Mudra*). *Radhasoami* teaches that the spiritual goal is to reach the higher centers in the brain and be lost in that Light; Lahiri Mahasaya emphasizes that the turning point is to discover the Light in the heart center and be lost there: "Externally oriented air from above has to be made internally oriented. Through *Thokar*, this air opens the door of the temple of *Anahata Chakra*. Then deep engrossment occurs." *Thokar* creates a great stimulus in the fourth *Chakra* guiding you to meet the white starlet (the true *Bindu*) whose contemplation opens the door of the *Sushumna*. The great effect of the *Thokar* is to "initiate" you to the *Omkar* dimension not only as Sound but also as Spiritual Light. But you must insist with this over every measure. Further procedures open you to the *Omkar* dimension in the aspect of movement swinging sensation which is the most subtle and mysterious perception in which it is said resides the key to go belying time and space.

Lahiri Mahasaya although knowing that many need a cult, a structure in which move their first steps, respects the dignity of the human person and was against any cult founded upon his *Kriya Yoga*. Although knowing that his example was important in the first phase of the student's *Kriya* path didn't want to play the part of a traditional *Guru* because he knew that in the long run this pretense was detrimental to the final emancipation of the person.

Appendix 4 – Hidden treasures in P.Y.'s Kriya Yoga

This appendix is devoted to those students who are conversant with the *Kriya* techniques as they are given by the organizations that spread P.Y.'s teachings. Those techniques are only hinted at in the following text, not fully described. The symbols K1, K2, K3 and K4 are utilized to denote the four *Kriyas* as they were given by P.Y., while the preliminary techniques are denoted with their full name: "*Hong Sau technique*" and "*Om technique*." Therefore, when in the following text you read "K2" remember that we are referring to the particular technique of the *Second Kriya* as it was given by P.Y..

After my book appeared on the Web, I had intense email exchanges with various researchers. Among them there was a large group of people who had received the *Kriya* techniques from P.Y.'s organization. They had browsed my book just for curiosity. Having seen the similarity between their experiences and mine, they expressed some of their technical doubts. The purpose of this appendix is to share some ideas about the best employment of some of P.Y.'s techniques.

It is a fact that those who came from P.Y.'s school prove to be the most "serious" and kind people.¹³ Some of them would have greatly appreciated a seminar on the *Higher Kriyas* where not only the technical details were demonstrated but also a theoretical scheme had been given providing devotees with resources to conceive – and subsequently improve – their routine in the best of the ways. For many *kriyabans* the crisis with their school began when their request to have a Seminar on the *Higher Kriyas* received an incomprehensible, anachronistic "NO".

Recently a couple of the organizations based upon P.Y.'s legacy proved to have understood that it doesn't pay to behave in such a way.

The ideas expressed here come from my direct experience and from a personal meeting with a *kriyaban* who struck me with his extraordinary commitment to the regular practice of *Kriya*. Although unsatisfied with his understanding of the subtle mechanism underlying those procedures and tormented by many doubts, he never dismissed the practice. Meeting such an ardent devotee meant for me finding again, reflected in his eyes, the *gold* that once lighted my life when for the first time I skimmed through the pages of the famous P.Y.'s autobiography.

He said he was following the *Kriya* path for one reason only: to surpass the boundaries of his mind and merge with the Ineffable, not to worship any human being. Apart from the technique of *Kechari Mudra*, he didn't feel the necessity of mixing P.Y.'s *Kriya Yoga* with any other teaching.

¹³ "Serious" is, in my opinion, a *kriyaban* who goes ahead with the practice of *Kriya Yoga* in spite of apparent unsuccess, who studies (and remembers their contents) all *Kriya* material produced by organization or that you can read on line.

Our meeting was an extraordinary event. While we were exchanging opinions and experiences, (at different moments of our lives we had studied the same books about *Yoga*) I felt that the bitterness, mixed with curiosity and trust, that I had perceived in his mind a few minutes before when he had summarized the ups and downs of his *Kriya* path, was dissolving.

How to achieve a good performance of P.Y.'s Kriya proper

At this point the discourse became less and less theoretical and more and more practical. Trying to improve our *Kriya* routine, we had many second thoughts about mouth or nose *Pranayama*, *Kechari*, circuit of energy.... At first we had obeyed the suggestions given by P.Y.'s organization but then we have trusted our intuition. We plunged straight into a discussion on all the technical details that aimed to foster an ideal execution of the technique of *Kriya proper*. Initially, we didn't touch the theme of the *Higher Kriyas*.

The first point of discussion was *Kechari Mudra*: if and how to introduce it into the practice of *Kriya proper*. P.Y. in his writings and in his talks gave the definition of this *Mudra* without introducing any practical exercises to be performed over a certain period of time in order to achieve and master it. Despite this, both we have achieved it without much effort: while I applied the classic exercise of *Talabya Kriya*, my friend achieved it by following the tips he had found in a *Yoga* web site.

Now, the problem was that my friend thought that *Kechari Mudra* should be reserved for the practice of the *Higher Kriyas*. This came from the weird belief that only mouth-*Kriya* had the power to bring the *Prana* flow into the innermost channel of the spine: *Sushumna*. He took that as a dogma. Therefore he had renounced *Kriya Pranayama* with *Kechari* because by applying it (or by simply keeping the tip of the tongue touching the middle of the upper palate) the tongue blocks the flow of air through the mouth.

To tell the truth, he had experimented with *Kriya* with *Kechari*. He stated that it had for him the best possible calming function, that it was the best tool to prepare the meditation phase after *Kriya proper*. However, at the end, he came to the conclusion that such *Pranayama* was too "weak", that it had not the "evolutive power" of mouth-*Kriya*. It was clear that my friend had tormented himself for a long time trying to take his decision.

He had also personal interviews with ministers of the organization. By the way, he informed me, this was a detail I didn't know, that P.Y. had taught to some disciples to practice with mouth wide open while it was a common fact that other direct disciples of his practiced with half open mouth with the central part of the lips almost in contact.

After listening to him, acknowledging that in the past my reasoning moved along the same routes, I could assert my firm points:

[1] Mouth-*Kriya* has the remarkable power of granting a clear cold current sensation during inhalation and then warm current sensation during exhalation. This is indubitable. Therefore, there is no reason to drop it definitively, even after achieving *Kechari Mudra*.

[2] We have reasonable evidence for considering the theory of the superiority of mouth-*Kriya* baseless. Actually, this *Pranayama*, if practiced in large numbers (more than 48) induces a state of tension and nervousness. This uneasy sensation becomes marked when one approaches a hundred of repetitions. Surely in that state the energy does not flow in *Sushumna*. If it were so, the more you practice, the calmer you become, being soon lost in the ecstatic state.

Some *kriyabans* boast that in this mouth-*Pranayama*, the *Ida* and *Pingala* currents have no role: only *Sushumna* is affected! It has been explained that the energy flows into *Sushumna* only when you reach the breathless state. In the beginning *Ida* and *Pingala* have a role. The cold sensation during inhalation and the warm sensation during exhalation are the effect of *Ida* and *Pingala*. Only by deepening our *Kriya*, we transcend all that, our breath disappears, the actual *Om* sound is perceived.

[3] Nose-*Kriya* with *Kechari Mudra* but **without** mental chanting of *Om* in each *Chakra* is not wrong [is by no ways *tamasic* as some claim after reading Lahiri Mahasaya's letters], but has its reason to exist. A *kriyaban* will do the wisest thing by guiding the energy along the path described in the 1930 P.Y. writings. That circuit is natural and beautiful. I am still unable to get over the unfortunate decision of simplifying it in later editions.

When a *kriyaban* is able to go close to the required throat-and-nasal-pharynx sound and concentrate hundred per cent only upon that, then the sound of breath becomes flute-like. This sound cannot be learned during initiation but is experienced after years of committed practice. It has been explained that: "The flute-like sound appears only when the spine is clean, like the empty tube that we visualize during *Kriya Pranayama*." And when the spine is clean, the oceanic sound of *Om* becomes audible. The apparition of this sound causes the *Kundalini* energy in *Muladhara* coming up spontaneously through the *Sushumna* into the brain. When this happens, there is no other technique to apply; when it does not happen, then it is wise to add the mental chanting of *Om* in each *Chakra*. [In chapter 6 we have clarified how to mentally pronounce *Om*.]

[4] Nose *Kriya* with *Kechari Mudra* **with** mental chanting of *Om* in each *Chakra* is a true delight, a real heaven. During this practice, the intensity of the throat sounds decreases. As for tradition, *Om* is chanted 12 times: 6 during inhalation and 6 during exhalation. During inhalation, you chant *Om* in *Chakras* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and *medulla*. [In P.Y.'s teaching and also in Sri Yukteswar's writings, *medulla* is considered the most appropriate place for locating the sixth *Chakra Ajna*.] At the end of inhalation, the energy has reached the eyebrows center. During exhalation, the energy goes up through the forehead, reaches fontanelle, then comes down to *Bindu*. The other 6 chants happen in the same points but in reverse order

(*medulla*, fifth *Chakra*...) While coming down, *Om* is placed in the back part of each *Chakra* – which is always in the spine and not in the back of the body.

[5] Those who are not satisfied from their perception of the movement of *Prana* along the spine, should add to *Maha Mudra* some moderate exercises for the spine: especially lateral bending and torsion. *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* can be practiced with great benefit before *Maha Mudra*. It helps to complete the effect of *Maha Mudra*: removing the obstacles that block the door of the *Sushumna*.

[6] One can also practice the exercise with the fists in front of the the mouth given during *Kriya* initiation. This exercise is not only a didactic tool to explain the *Kriya Pranayama* perceptions, it is also an extraordinarily tool to create a keen sensation of **presence** in the spine. It is a smart variation of *Sitali Pranayama*.¹⁴ To intensify its action, you can practice it with a fragmented breath. Dividing the breath in small fragments while you are intensely concentrating on the spine, feeling a power that rises millimeter after millimeter (and likewise descends during fragmented exhalation) has a very effective action. After this exercise, the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* is very easy.

[7] After *Kriya Pranayama*, one should move his/her awareness up and down along the spine. This action leads to what can be called *mental Pranayama*: an active concentration on the *Chakras*, pausing in each one of them for 10-20 seconds and enjoying what comes out of it.

The benefit of *Kriya Pranayama* should be conquered with a minimal effort. After *Kriya proper*, one should not simply remain immovable waiting for the time go by ... like one who is awaiting that the shot of medicine given into a muscle by an injection spreads pacifically and is possible to stand up and walk without compromising the action of such treatment.

This is the best place to apply the core principle of the *Hong So* technique. One can visualize the breath (always short, calm, spontaneous breath) going up and down with *Hoooong* and *Soooo*. After a couple of minutes, the breath is so short and calm that you can succeed in perceiving that a micro breath is happening inside each *Chakra*. A short breath, almost invisible happens in the *Muladhara* and one thing with the soothing chant of *Hong so*. The same happens in the second *Chakra*, then in the third ... and so on... up and down along the spine... until there is no more breath, only *Hong So* in each *Chakra*.

[8] Before standing, *Jyoti Mudra* seems perfect to obtain the experience of Spiritual Light and close the *Kriya* routine in the best of the ways.

¹⁴ "Curl comfortably your tongue and protrude it slightly past the lips to form a tube. Inhale deeply and smoothly through the tongue and mouth -- a cooling sensation is felt over the tongue and into the throat. Exhale through the nose ideally directing the fresh breath in all the parts of your body." This is a common way of practicing *Sitali Pranayama*.

Summarizing, a good routine could be:

[I] – Preparation: balancing the Ida and Pingala currents

- ▶ Nadi Sodhana Pranayama
- ▶ Maha Mudra
- ▶ Exercises for the spine – lateral bending and torsion
- ▶ Talabya Kriya if one desires to achieve Kechari Mudra

[II] – Central part: intense effort to magnetize the spine

- ▶ Mouth-Kriya (no more than 24)
- ▶ Nose-Kriya with Kechari Mudra, without mental chanting of Om in each Chakra
- ▶ Nose Kriya with Kechari Mudra, with mental chanting of Om in each Chakra

[III] – Approaching the breathless state and immersion in the Omkar reality

- ▶ Mental Pranayama or Hong So in the spine followed by Hong So in each Chakra
- ▶ Jyoti Mudra to obtain the experience of the Spiritual Light

In order to enjoy *Kriya Pranayama* at the maximum degree, one can make the following effort at least once in life. Let us consider taking the decision to complete **20736 Kriya Pranayamas with Kechari and with mental chanting of Om in each Chakra** – either 144 each day for 144 days or 72 each day for 288 days! You can begin each session in the way you prefer (mouth open or closed) – after some rounds you will surely practice what we have described in point [4]. All the effort should be directed to listening to the internal sounds, hence to contact and merge with the *Omkar* dimension. The commitment of one's own will to bring forth a continuous attention to the internal sounds will bring you in a higher plan of sensitivity. Instead of chanting only the *Om* syllable, you can utilize the twelve letter Mantra *Om Na Mo Bha....*

Remarks about K3 and K4

When *kriyabans* receive K3 and K4, they are not able to resist the temptation of trying K4 on the spot – "if it leads to *Samadhi*, why not try it now"? After about 15 - 20 rotations, *Kumbhaka* becomes stressful. Instead of giving up, they repeat the same attempt a couple of times, while discomfort increases and a feeling of nausea or dizziness goes on launching its alarm signals. Eventually they stop, defeated. The gain is zero, less than zero! Not only they have not obtained the slightest trace of *Samadhi*, but they have lost the initial tranquil state.

Well, let us try to set the procedures of K3 and K4 within a well-adjusted training process. A very good idea is to distinguish in the teaching of K3 two different teachings: K3 without head movements and K3 with head movements.

- K3 without head movements.

Practice the K3 instructions in immobility, without movements of the head. Inhale, placing the syllables where prescribed; intensify the awareness at the point between the eyebrows. Remember to apply the mental pressure at the base of the spinal column. Exhalation begins immediately after the concentration at the point between the eyebrows: it guides the current into the prescribed centers. While vibrating the syllables in the correct places, there could be a micro pause in each one of them; however, the flow of the breath should not lose its quality of smoothness and the inhaling and exhaling sound remains continuous.

It has been explained that this practice in immobility is: "the art of astral diving through the spinal tunnel." The gist of the practice lies in the constant effort of raising the awareness along the spinal column millimeter after millimeter with a continuous mental pressure. One must have trained the power of his concentration to the point of being able to maintain this pressure with uninterrupted continuity. It is like squeezing with the thumb an almost empty tube of toothpaste (from its base up to its opening) to get the last little bit out. *Kechari Mudra* is extraordinary in creating the necessary "mental pressure." The exhalation is more tranquil: the energy glides downwards as a cascade of light coming from above.

- K3 with head movements

Those who embark on this venture should learn to perform the head movements in a very delicate way. No one should allow the weight of one's head to push the chin toward the chest: in this condition, the physical movement is definitely too powerful and harmful for the neck. Hence, mindful physical effort is required while striking the chest but at the same time resisting the force of gravity. Some define this last movement of the head as a "blow" or a "stroke." Perhaps it is much more correct to define it as a "tap", or a "slight jolt." "Jolt" means that the chin comes down, touches the chest but does not remain glued there – after an instant it comes up immediately. The point is to produce an intense effect within the fourth *Chakra*.

Let us consider the speed of the movements. Usually they happen without altering that rhythm with which the syllables are mentally chanted during inhalation. But you can go slower. Since *De, Va, Ya* are chanted in a slower way in order to accompany a full exhalation, you can also chant *Te, Va, Su* with the same rhythm as *De, Va, Ya*. In this way, there is plenty of time for concentrating deeper on each blow. To be more clear: if inhalation and exhalation happen in 8 + 8 seconds, the movements of the head with *Te, Va, Su* happen in a time that varies from 4 to 8 seconds.

- About K4

The difficulty in practicing this technique lies in trying to hold the breath without having first calmed the *Prana* in the body and raised the energy *Apana* residing under the belt into the higher part of the thorax. To increase the number of rotations of the head up to 200, without breathing, seems a mere illusion. On the contrary, this becomes feasible when a *kriyaban* has completed the right preparation. But what could befittingly be called a right preparation for K4?

The decisive procedure – endowed with a shattering psychological cleaning power – is to complete **two *Incremental Routines*** regarding the two afore-hinted aspects of the K3 technique. [See chapter 9 for a definition of *Incremental Routine*.]

a) The first *Incremental Routine* concerns K3 without the movements of the head.

Tradition envisages beginning with 12 repetitions and adding one repetition a day until you reach 200 repetitions. This is to be done once a day, during the main routine. (After this practice, forget the breath and remain immobile, practicing the best form of *mental Pranayama*.) If you have a secondary session, the same technique can be resumed for 12-36 times.

Instead of adding one repetition a day, you can adopt a simpler plan: practice 25 repetitions a day for two weeks. Then practice 50 repetitions a day for another two weeks. Then practice 75 repetitions a day for another two weeks ...then 100... ...125... and so on until you practice 200 repetitions a day for two weeks.

Completing this *Incremental Routine* is a challenging, but not particularly difficult, undertaking; time goes by without much notice and what could seem to be an exhausting task (doing more than 100 repetitions) turns out to be as easy as a moment of rest.

b) The second *Incremental Routine* concerns K3 with head movements. The plan of *Incremental* increase is the same of the previous *Incremental Routine*.

The crucial detail whose importance cannot be over emphasized is that during each movement of the head, while the breath is held, you do not lose the perception of the current reaching and piercing each *Chakra* (*Medulla*, cervical and heart *Chakra*).

At the completion of both procedures (a year or more is required) the student is able to direct a tremendous amount of energy into the heart *Chakra* and is ready to reach high levels of perfection with K4.

Prudence with K4 is highly recommended!

A wise way of tackling the K4 technique is here described. Ours is not a commonly accepted method but it can help those who are stuck in an unsatisfactory practice of K4.

Let us suppose that while holding your breath in a non-forced way, you

are able to practice the movements of K4 for a precise amount n of times; let us also suppose that the day after the practice, you don't feel pain in the cervical vertebrae or in the neck muscles. Well, presumably you are in the condition of practicing $n+6$ rotations. In order to feel comfortable, abide by the following technical detail:

During the last part of your inhalation, don't make the act of sealing the lungs (closing the trachea – as when you are diving into water) but keep them as if you are going to begin a new inhalation. Feel an increase of *Prana* in the upper part of the lungs. You will have the sensation that the breath is annihilated and you can complete your task easily. (Of course that depends on months and months of conscientious practice of K3.)

When $n+6$ movements are completed, exhale comfortably and don't repeat the procedure till the next day. For one week don't try to increase beyond this new $n+6$ "record". If there are problems with the cervical vertebrae, you can wisely practice on alternative days. If everything goes in the best of the ways, increase by six rotations a week. However, as you can easily presume, you won't be able to increase the number of rotations indefinitely. At a certain point you will come up against a threshold that seems impossible to trespass. Don't worry if this threshold is small, even inferior to 50-60 rounds. When will you effortlessly reach the 200 rotations as Lahiri Mahasaya prescribed? Never? Don't think so. Read carefully the following instructions and test them.

Keeping your chest expanded and the abdominal muscles and diaphragm perfectly immobile, allow that a minimal (almost imperceptible) sip of air can go out whenever your chin is lowered toward the chest; and an imperceptible sip of air can enter whenever the chin is brought up. Let us be clear: don't make the intentional act of inhaling and exhaling; your role is limited to letting the afore described phenomenon happen freely, not impeded. What is important is that you don't lose the sensation that the physical breath doesn't exist and all the *Prana* is immobile in the upper part of the lungs.

Increase until it is comfortable – therefore don't set the objective of achieving the 200 rotations.

Do you think that this method is wrong, nothing but a deceitful trick? Maybe it is, but through this way of proceeding, something beautiful is approaching. One day you realize that during your practice the previously hinted little sips of breath don't happen. An increase of energy in the fourth *Chakra* is strikingly perceived. You realize you are rotating your head while keeping a perfect effortless *Kumbhaka*. A wonderful sensation of freedom from breath happens. A simple explanation of this event is based on the consideration that the adopted procedure has a soothing effect on the ganglia tied with the breathing process. In this condition, you will be able to reach the 200 rotations.

Information about K2

Many are convinced that K2 as taught by P.Y. is incorrectly named "*Second Kriya*". Indeed, it is quite different from the *Second Kriya* as taught by various schools which corresponds to K3. I have known students who felt deceived just for this reason and had dropped it. However the technique is decidedly valuable. The story that P.Y. received this instruction from Swami Kebalananda is plausible. I believe that a similar technique is hinted at in Gheranda Samhita: "... close ears, eyes, meditate on the six *Chakras* one by one."

The technique K2 is an advanced and extremely difficult teaching which is based on a procedure which is not restricted to "physically locating the centers", but whose purpose is definitely higher. You focus mind and *Prana* on each one of them until their essence is revealed. The "essence" of each one is the *Tattwa* related to it. We have already touched upon the theme of *Tattwas*, the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, ether). K2 leads you to perceive not only their colors but something more: the static *Prana* related to their vibrational rate.

Actually, there are some writings in which P.Y. explains in a very clear way the physical changes that happen when your awareness attunes to the different *Tattwas*. Each *kriyaban* runs into these writings by studying the correspondence course. It's odd that those writings are not specifically linked to those of *Second Kriya*. P.Y. explains how your breath flows through your nostrils and describes the different flavors you perceive in your mouth when you attune to each *Tattwa*.

And finally, last but not least, we must point out that in the group of the writings accompanying the K2 instruction, two other extremely important techniques are described. They are given without a specific name: the first, very clearly explained, is a delicate technique conceived to help you to perceive the astral spine, the other could be called the art of "*Motionless Thokar*".

1. Technique for perceiving the Astral Spine

The technique to perceive the astral spine is explained after P.Y. has expatiated on *Kundalini* and given a clear hint at the necessity of *Kechari Mudra*. At a certain point, P.Y. explains how, once stable in the meditation *Asana*, a *kriyaban* gently sways the spine, left and right in order to feel the astral spine as separate from the body. The core of the teaching is then experienced in immobility by traveling up and down the spine, mentally chanting *Om* in the location of the *Chakras*.¹⁵ It is a very simple teaching and yet it is great! The result can leave you astonished! I don't comment on it further, since P.Y.'s few lines about it are exhaustive.

2. Technique of motionless Thokar

The procedure of "*Motionless Thokar*" is hinted at in a not-easy-to-understand sentence about the "psycho-physical blows given at the different locations of the

¹⁵ There is a direct disciple of PY who teaches *Second Kriya* exactly in this way. You mentally chant *Om* at each *Chakra*'s location, from *Muladhara* to the point between the eyebrows, then in *Sahasrara*, cervical, heart *Chakra* This cycle is to be repeated for 6 to 12 times, and the practice is concluded by a final rising into *Sahasrara*.

Chakras." No further practical explanation is given. The information I have received is that the "psycho-physical blows" are obtained by mentally placing the syllables of a *Mantra* inside a *Chakra* visualized as a horizontal disk like a coin.

There are many ways of doing this, I suggest here only one.

The breath is forgotten. Mentally repeat in each *Chakra* (starting from *Muladhara* and going upwards) the Mantra: *Om Na Mo Bha Ga Ba Te Va Su De Va Ya*. Divide the *Mantra* in four parts: *Om Na Mò // Bha Ga Bà // Te Va Sù // De Va Yà*. Four taps (soft blows) happen when we think the accented syllables *Mò, Bà, Sù* and *Yà*. You can mentally chant "Om" at the left of the center of each *Chakra*, "Na" at the right and "Mò", with a soft tap, in the center of it. The oscillation perceived during this internal action is a matter of millimeters. A light oscillatory movement of the spine can accompany and strengthen the internal movement. Repeat the same procedure with *Bha Ga Bà*, thus giving a second psycho-physical blow at the *Chakra*. Then vibrate *Te Va Sù* and *De Va Yà*. Repeat the same procedure with all the other *Chakras*. The ideal would be to complete from three to six rounds, up and down.

A slight contraction of the muscles around each *Chakra* may accompany this action but, as the procedure begins to produce its sweet effect, physical immobility becomes predominant.

Some Remarks about the Hong Sau Technique

The routine recommended by the organizations that spread the teachings of P.Y. is: Recharging exercises; Hong Sau; Om technique; Maha Mudra; Kriya proper; Jyoti Mudra; Final concentration in the spine and in the *Kutastha*. When the Higher Kriyas are added, they are practiced after Kriya proper or after Jyoti Mudra.

In time, there comes a tendency to simplify. Many eliminate entirely the preliminary techniques *Hong Sau* and *Om*; some practice only one or both after *Kriya proper*, at the place of the final concentration in *Kutastha*.

Both techniques are excellent if practiced after *Kriya proper*. They give their best effect if enjoyed alone without any hurry.

Facing the issue of the *Hong Sau* technique, we agree that this is not a technique that gives you the ability of concentration. Whoever decides to practice it seriously must be endowed with the ability to maintain a high level of concentration. The procedure, as designed by P.Y., starts with some deep breaths. Literature explains that they oxygenate the blood and calm the system; actually, they put into motion the essential mechanism of *Kriya Pranayama* – mixing and balancing *Prana* and *Apana*.

As for the *Hong-sau Mantra* ¹⁶ there's not much to say about it; it should not be taken as a "magical formula". It must merge with your breath, of which you must be constantly aware. If you relax your keen awareness of it and remain there as if hypnotized by the pleasing sound of the two syllables *Hong* and *Sau*, you shall be disappointed. Your mind will not be prone to being internalized and it won't surrender to the meditative state.

If you respect two fundamental principles, in a matter of two three minutes you shall find yourself in a fantastic state.

The first principle (which sounds strange to many students) is to never establish a rhythm in the mental chanting of *Hong Sau*. The mental chant of this *Mantra*, repeated over and over, can easily and naturally conform to a hard-to-change rhythm. If your breath follows this rhythm, it is clear as the sun that it will never settle down! Once the rhythm has stabilized itself, even if the body "could" physiologically stay off-breath for some instants, the breathing process will continue implacably.

I am sure that many students don't realize they are in the condition of living the experience of the breathless state. The fact is that many have practiced this technique for years and cannot doubt the correctness of their practice. When students understand that a rhythm was almost always present in their practice, then the problem is nearly cured. But sometimes one must take a significant amount of time to dwell upon the concept of rhythm. After inhalation or after exhalation, a student must always wait for the impulse to breathe to appear. When there are the physiological conditions that a pause could naturally appear, *kriyabans* should not accept that the implacable rhythm created in their mind (hong-so-hong-so...) prevents it. The pause should be experienced, no matter if it lasts just a couple of instants! Students who abide by this principle will soon verify how this small detail is sufficient to ease the breath off, in a very drastic way.

The second principle consists of considering another factor that conspires to annihilate the pause after inhalation and in contrasting it. A *kriyaban* must become conscious of the movement of the rib cage. During inhalation, the chest swells out and gets into an elastic tension. This elastic force tries to be released immediately after inhalation. The pause of the breath after inhalation is jeopardized not only by the rhythm of the mental chanting of *Hong Sau* but also by the chest elasticity. When you get over the problem of the rhythm, then there is only this second detail to be observed. Students must be aware of this elastic strength and should block the instinct to release it. The pause after the inhalation should exist freely. Again, a student must always wait for the impulse to breathe to appear. Putting all this into practice, a "virtuous circle" between this growing calmness and the reduced necessity of oxygen is realized.

¹⁶ This techniques is also taught with *Sau* during inhalation and *Hong* during exhalation. You discover that the effect is same.

GLOSSARY

This glossary has been added for those who already know the meaning of the most common terms used in Kriya but do not wish to retain uncertainties about the way they are utilized in this book.

Alchemy [taoist internal -- Nei Dan] The Taoist Internal Alchemy is the mystical tradition of ancient China. It reminds us of the techniques of First Kriya with such precision that we have all the reasons to assume that it consists of the same process.

Apana Apana is one of the five forms of energy in the body. Associated with the lower abdominal region, it is responsible for all the bodily functions (elimination for example) that take place there. Kriya Pranayama, in its initial phase, is essentially the movement of Prana (the particular form of energy present in the upper part of the trunk – lungs and heart) into Apana and the movement of Apana into Prana. When we inhale, the energy from outside the body is brought within and meets Apana in the lower abdomen; during exhalation, the Apana moves from its seat up and mingles with Prana. The continuous repetition of this event generates an increase of heat in the navel region: this calms the breath and kindles the light of the Spiritual Eye.

Asana Physical postures fit for meditation. According to Patanjali, the yogi's posture must be steady and pleasant. The most part of the kriyabans are comfortable with the so-called *Half-lotus* [see]: this, indeed, avoids some physical problems. For the average kriyaban, *Siddhasana* [see] is considered superior to any other Asana. If we take finally into account those kriyabans who are expert of Hatha-Yoga, who have become very flexible, the perfect position is undoubtedly *Padmasana* [see].

Aswini (Ashwini) Mudra "Ashwa" means "horse"; "Aswini Mudra" means "Mudra of the female horse" because the anal contraction resembles the movement a horse makes with its sphincter immediately after evacuation of the bowels. There may be slightly different definitions of it and, sometimes, it is confused with Mula Bandha [see]. The basic definition is to repeatedly contract the muscles at the base of the spine (sphincter) with the rhythm of about two contractions per second. This Mudra is a direct way of getting in touch with the locked and stagnant energy at the base of the spine and to pump it up.

Bandha In Yoga no practice of Pranayama is considered complete without the Bandhas. They are energy valves as much as they are locks, not simple muscle contractions, which prevent the energy from being dissipated and redirect it inside the spine. [See Jalandhara Bandha, Uddiyana Bandha and Mula Bandha]

In the very beginning of the Kriya path, a yogi has only an approximate understanding of the Bandhas, later one will come to a complete command and will be able to use them, with slight adaptations, in most of the Kriya techniques. The three Bandhas, applied simultaneously, create an almost ecstatic inner shiver, a feeling of energy current moving up the spine. Sushumna Awakening is sustained.

Bindu A spiritual center located in the occipital region where the hairline twists into a kind of vortex. Until the energy, scattered in the body, reaches the Bindu, a sort of shroud prevents the yogi from contemplating the Spiritual Eye. Bringing all one's force

there, in that tiny place, is not an easy task because the deeper roots of the Ego are to be found right there; they must be faced and eradicated.

Breathless state It is experienced after years of Kriya practice. It has nothing to do with holding the breath forcefully. It does not simply mean that the breath becomes more and more quiet. It is the state where the breath is entirely non-existent, with the subsequent dissolution of the mind. Many kriyabans are not able to conceive such a state. There is a halo of mystery that surrounds its description; people think it is impossible and that any affirmation about its occurrence is false. Nevertheless, it is possible, even if it is experienced only after years of Kriya practice. When it manifests, a kriyaban does not feel the need to take in any breath at all or one takes in a very short breath but doesn't feel the need to exhale for a very long time. (Longer than the time which medical science considers possible.) The breath becomes so calm that the practitioner has the factual perception that one is not breathing at all; one feels a fresh energy in the body, sustaining its life from inside, without the necessity of oxygen. According to the Kriya theory, this state is the result of having completed the work of cutting of the heart knot.

Bhrumadhya The region between the eyebrows, linked with Ajna Chakra and with the vision of the third eye (Kutastha).

Chakra The word Chakra comes from the Sanskrit cakra meaning "wheel" or "circle". The Chakras are the "wheels" of our spiritual life; they are described in the tantric texts as emanations from the Spirit, whose essence gradually has expanded in more and more gross levels of manifestation, reaching eventually the dimension of the base Chakra, the Muladhara, embodying the physical world. The descended energy-consciousness lies coiled and sleeping at the base of the spine and is called Kundalini - she who is coiled. We human beings consider only the physical world as real: it is only when our Kundalini awakens that we regain the full memory of the reality of the subtle dimension of the Universe.

No author has ever "proven" the existence of the Chakras – as no man has ever proven the existence of the soul. It is difficult to describe them: we cannot bring them onto a table in a laboratory. In any Yoga book we find descriptions which rest on a translation of two Indian texts, the Sat-Cakra-Nirupana, and the Padaka-Pancaka, by Sir John Woodroffe, alias Arthur Avalon, in a book entitled The Serpent Power. The matter depicted there seems to be unnaturally complicated, almost impossible to be utilized. These concepts had been further polluted by theosophy and similar esoteric literature. The controversial C. W. Leadbeater book "The Chakras," is in large part the result of the mental elaboration of his own experiences.

Through the practice of Kriya, we can have an experience of the Chakras. Located over the anus at the very base of the spinal column, in the lower part of the coccyx, we encounter the root Chakra - named **Muladhara** in Sanskrit, a center which distributes energy to the legs, to the lowest part of the pelvis, irradiating especially the Gonads (testes in men, ovaries in women). Muladhara symbolizes the objective consciousness, the awareness of the physical universe. It is related to instinct, security, to our ability to ground ourselves in the physical world, to the desire for material goods and also the building of a good self-image. If this Chakra is in a harmonious state, we are centered and have a strong will to live.

The second, or sacral Chakra - **Swadhisthan** - is placed inside the spine between the last lumbar vertebrae and the beginning of the sacrum. It is said that its

energetic projection is the area of the sexual organs - in part it intersects the region of Muladhara's influence. Since it is related to base emotion, sexuality vitality, creativity, and to the deepest part of the subconscious realms, a deep stimulus of it produces deep involving dreams; its action may be perceived as a feeling of living a fable, whose nature is sweet and alluring.

The **Manipura** - navel center or solar plexus - is placed in the spine at the level of the navel, near the end of the dorsal vertebrae and the beginning of the lumbar vertebrae. It is said to influence the pancreas and the adrenal glands on top of the kidneys. This connection gives fuel to the idea that this Chakra has the same role played by those glands: higher emotion and energy - just like the role played by adrenalin. It is said that it fosters a sense of personal power, secure feeling of "I Am.". Grounded and comfortable with our place in the universe, we are able to affirm with determination the purpose of our life.

The **Anahata** - heart center, located in the spine at the height of the middle part of the dorsal vertebrae - is said to influence the thymus, which is part of the immune system. There is a universal agreement that it is related to higher emotion, compassion, love and intuitiveness. When a person concentrates on it, feelings of profound tenderness and compassion will start to develop. A healthy and fully open heart Chakra means to be able to see the inner beauty in others—in spite of their apparent faults. One is able to love everyone, even the strangers we meet on the street. There is a progression from the instinctual "gut emotions" of the lower Chakras to the higher emotions and feelings of the heart Chakra. What is of great interest for us, is that opening this center means to see life in a more neutral manner and see what others cannot see. It ends the predisposition to being influenced by other people, by churches and by organizations in general.

Vishuddha - throat center, exactly amid the last cervical vertebrae and the first dorsal vertebrae - is said to influence thyroid and parathyroid. Since it controls the activity of the vocal cords as well, it is said that it has something to do with the capacity to express our ideas in the world. It seems to be related with the capacity for communication and with taking personal responsibility for our actions. The person with a healthy throat Chakra no longer thinks to blame others for his or her problems and can carry on with life with full responsibility. Many authors state it awakens artistic inspiration, the ability to develop superior aesthetic perception.

Ajna - the third eye Chakra, located in the central part of the brain - influences the pituitary gland [hypophysis] and the small brain. The hypophysis has a vital role in organism, in the sense that together with the hypothalamus it acts as a command system of all other endocrine glands. In Sanskrit, "Ajna" translates to "command," which means it has the command or control of our lives: through controlled action, it brings to reality the fruit of our desires. Consequently, it is said that Ajna Chakra has a vital role in the spiritual awakening of a person. It is the seat of the intuition.

The supreme Chakra is the **Sahasrara** - crown Chakra - right above the top of the head. It is said that it influences, or is bound with, the pineal gland. It allows detachment from illusion and is related to one's overall expansion of awareness and degree of attunement with the Divine Reality. It is a superior reality and we can experience it only in the state of breathlessness. It is possible to "tune" into it by utilizing the **Bindu** as a doorway.

Teachings pertaining to the "**Frontal Chakras**" are to be found by some kriyabans coming from Sri Yukteswar's disciple lineage. The perineum is the first one, the genitals region is the second one, the navel is the third, the central part of the sternum region is the fourth, the Adam's apple is the fifth and the point between the

eyebrows may be considered as the sixth. The core of the Kriya teaching regarding them, is that when these points are touched with concentration, the energy around the correspondent Chakra in the spine is revived.

Dharana According to Patanjali, Dharana is the concentration on a physical or abstract object. In Kriya, Dharana consist in directing the focus of our attention toward the revelation of Spirit: Omkar's inner sound, light, and movement sensation. This happens just after having calmed the breath.

Dhyana According to Patanjali, Dhyana ensues from contemplating the essential nature of the chosen object as a steady, uninterrupted flow of consciousness. In Kriya, the awareness, dwelling upon the Omkar reality, is soon lost in Samadhi.

Flute sound (during Kriya Pranayama) During the exhalation of Kriya Pranayama, a slight hiss is produced in the throat; when a kriyaban succeeds in assuming the position of Kechari Mudra, then the quality of that sound increases. It has been likened to the "flute of Krishna". Lahiri Mahasaya describes it: "as if someone blew through a keyhole". This highly enjoyable sound cuts to pieces any distraction, increases mental calmness and transparency and helps to prolong effortlessly the practice of Kriya Pranayama. One day the flute sound turns into the Om sound. In other words, it gives rise to the Om sound, whose vibration will be so strong as to overwhelm the flute sound. During this event, a strong movement of energy climbs up the spine.

Granthi [see knot]

Guru The importance of finding a Guru (teacher) who supervises the spiritual training of the disciple is one of the tenets of many spiritual paths. A Guru is a teacher, a guide and much more. The scriptures declare that the Guru is God and God is the Guru. We are accustomed to explaining the term "Guru" on a metaphorical interplay between darkness and light, in which the Guru is seen as the dispeller of darkness: "Gu" stands for darkness and "Ru" for one who removes it. Some scholars dismiss that etymology; according to them "Gu" stands for "beyond the qualities" and "Ru" for "devoid of form". In order to gain all the benefits from the contact with the Guru, a disciple has to be humble, sincere, pure in body and mind and ready to surrender to his Guru's will and instructions. Usually, during initiation (Diksha) Gurus bestow the esoteric knowledge upon their disciples, through which they will progress along the path to Self realization. The internal phenomenon of Shaktipat happens: the dormant spiritual realization within the disciple is awakened.

Kriya organizations don't insist upon the concept of Shaktipat but accept all the rest, rather they are founded upon the afore summarized tenets. On the contrary, Lahiri Mahasaya's ideas seem to go in a significantly different direction. Once he said: "I am not the Guru, I don't maintain a barrier between the true Guru (the Divine) and the disciple". He added that he wanted to be considered a "mirror". In other words, each kriyaban should look at him not as an unreachable ideal, but as the personification of all the wisdom and spiritual realization which, in due time, the Kriya practice will be able to produce.

Now the question is: do the Kriya techniques work outside the Guru-disciple relationship? There is of course no scientifically proven answer. In this matter we can use either faith or reason. Many kriyabans are confident they are able to transform the no-matter-how-received instruction into "gold". They think: "Beyond either reasonable

or improbable expectations of finding a Kriya expert at my disposal, let me roll my sleeves up and move on!"

Half-lotus This asana has been used for meditation since time immemorial because it provides a comfortable, very easily obtained, sitting position. The left leg is bent at the knee, brought toward the body and the sole of the left foot is made to rest against the inside of the right thigh. The heel of the left foot should be drawn in as far as possible. The right leg is bent at the knee and the right foot is placed over the fold of the left leg where the thigh meets to hip. The right knee is dropped as far as possible toward the floor. The hands rest on the knees. The secret is to maintain an erect spine: this can be obtained only by sitting on a cushion, thick enough, with the buttocks toward the front half of the cushion. In this way the buttocks are slightly raised, while the knees are resting on the floor. When the legs grow tired, the position is prolonged by reversing the legs. In certain delicate situations, it may be providential to do it on a chair, provided it has no arms and is large enough. In this way, one leg at a time can be lowered and the knee articulation relaxed! Some Yoga teachers explain that the pressure of a tennis ball (or of a folded towel) on the perineum can give the benefits of the Siddhasana position.

Hesychasm The word Hesychasm derives from the Greek word "hesychia" meaning inner quietness, tranquility and stillness. Outside this condition, meditation is not possible. It is a discipline integrating the continual repetition of the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"). It was already used by the early Church Fathers in the 4th and 5th centuries) with the practice of asceticism.

There were hermits dwelling in the desert, seeking inner peace and spiritual insight, while practicing contemplation and self-discipline: they had no doubts about the fact that knowledge of God could be obtained only by purity of soul and prayer and not by study or mental amusements in the field of philosophy. Later, their method of asceticism came to the fore as a concrete set of psychophysical techniques: this is properly the core of Hesychasm. It was Simeon, "the new theologian" (1025-1092), who developed the quietist theory which such detail that he may be called the father of this movement. The practice, which involved specific body postures and deliberate breathing patterns, was intended to perceive the *Uncreated Light of God*. The monks of Athos might have kept on contemplating peacefully this Uncreated Light (they considered it to be the highest goal of earthly life) had not their methods been denounced as superstitious and absurd. The objection was mainly based on a vigorous denial of the possibility that this Uncreated Light was God's essence. In approximately the year 1337, Hesychasm attracted the attention of a learned member of the Orthodox Church, Barlaam of Seminara, a Calabrian monk who held the office of abbot in a Monastery of Constantinople and who visited Mount Athos. There he encountered the hesychasts and heard the descriptions of their practices. Barlaam, trained in Western Scholastic theology, was scandalized and began to combat it both orally and in his writings. He called the hesychasts "omphalopsychoi" - people having their souls in their navels (owing to the long time they spent concentrating on the navel region). Barlaam propounded a more intellectual approach to the knowledge of God than the one taught by the hesychasts: he asserted that the spiritual knowledge could be only a work of inquiry, brought ahead by one's mind and translated in discrimination between truth and untruth. He held that no part of God, whatsoever, could be viewed by humans. The practice of the hesychasts was defended by St. Gregory Palamas. He was well educated in Greek philosophy and defended Hesychasm in the 1340 at three different synods in Constantinople, and he also wrote a number of works in its defense. He used a

distinction, already articulated in the 4th Century in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers, between the energies or operations of God and the essence of God: while the essence of God can never be known by his creatures, His energies or operations can be known both in this life and in the next; they convey to the Hesychast the truest spiritual knowledge of God.

In Palamite theology, it is the uncreated energy of God which illuminates the Hesychast who has been vouchsafed an experience of the Uncreated Light. In 1341 the dispute was settled: Barlaam was condemned and returned to Calabria, afterwards becoming bishop in the Roman Catholic Church. Later, Hesychast doctrine was established as the doctrine of the Orthodox Church. Up to this day, the Roman Catholic Church has never fully accepted Hesychasm: the essence of God can be known, but only in the next life; there can be no distinction between the energies and the essence of God.

Today Mount Athos is the well-known center of the practice of Hesychasm.

Ida [see Nadi]

Jalandhara Bandha In Jalandhara Bandha the neck and the throat are slightly contracted, while the chin is pressed against the breast.

Japa [See prayer]

Kechari Mudra This Mudra is carried in one of the two following ways:

1. By placing the tongue in contact with the uvula at the back of the soft palate.
2. By slipping the tongue into the nasal pharynx touching, if possible, the nasal septum.

According to Lahiri Mahasaya a kriyaban should achieve it not by cutting the tongue Frenulum but by means of Talabya Kriya [see]. Kechari is literally translated as "the state of those who fly in the sky", in the "inner space". Kechari is compared to an electrical bypass of the mind's energetic system. It changes the path of Prana flow causing the life force to be withdrawn from the thinking process. Instead of allowing the thoughts to jump like frogs here and there, it causes the mind to be quiet and allows focusing it on the goal of meditation. We do not realize the quantity of energy we squander away when we get lost in our thoughts, in our plans. Kechari turns this pernicious way of exhausting all of our vitality into its opposite. The mind begins to lose its despotic role: the "inner activity" happens no more by the thinking process but by the effortless development of the intuition. Coupled with Kriya it is a substantial aid in clarify one's complicated psychological structures. A more elusive claim is the experience of the elixir of life, "Amrita," the "Nectar." This is a fluid with sweet taste perceived by the kriyaban when the tip of his tongue touches either the uvula or the bone protrusion in the roof of the palate under the hypophysis. The Yoga tradition explains that there is a Nadi going through the center of the tongue; energy radiates through its tip and when it touches that bone protrusion, this radiation reaches and stimulates the Ajna Chakra in the center of the brain.

Kevala Kumbhaka [see Breathless state]

Knot The traditional definition of the Granthis identifies three knots: the Brahma Granthi at the Muladhara Chakra; the Vishnu Granthi at the heart Chakra and the point between the eyebrows. Those are the places where Ida, Pingala and Sushumna Nadi meet.

Brahma Granthi (located in Muladhara) is the first knot. It is related to our physical body: it preserves the ignorance of our infinite nature and is the first obstacle in the spiritual search, since it obstructs the Kundalini's path as she begins to move toward the higher centers. The world of names and forms creates restlessness and prevents the mind from becoming one pointed. Ambitions and desires trap the mind. Until one unties this knot, one cannot meditate effectively.

Vishnu Granthi is located in the area of the heart Chakra (Anahata), and is related to the astral body and to the world of emotions. Lord Vishnu is the lord of preservation. This knot creates the desire to preserve ancient knowledge, traditions, institutions, and religious orders. It produces "compassion", a keen desire to help suffering humanity. Discriminating knowledge combined with Yoga effort can unfasten the Knot of Vishnu and obtain deliverance from the traditional bonds, deeply rooted in our genetic code.

Rudra Granthi is related to the causal body and to the world of ideas, visions, and intuitions. At a point between the eyebrows, the Ida and Pingala Nadis cross over and then come down in the left and right nostrils, respectively. Ida and Pingala are time bound; after piercing the Rudra knot, the time bound consciousness dissolves - the yogi establishes himself in the supreme Atman whose seat is Sahasrara Chakra. Perfect emancipation is achieved.

Lahiri Mahasaya underlines the importance of overcoming two other obstacles: tongue and navel which are unfastened by Kechari Mudra and by Navi Kriya, respectively. The knot of the tongue, cuts us off from the reservoir of energy in the Sahasrara region. The knot of the navel originates from the trauma of cutting the umbilical cord.

The four phases of Kriya Yoga are experienced by unfastening all the afore mentioned knots, in the following order:

- I. Knot of the tongue
- II. Knot of Vishnu (heart Chakra)
- III. Knot of the navel
- IV. Knot of Brahma (Muladhara) & knot of Rudra (point between the eyebrows)

As we can see, in Lahiri Mahasaya's vision, two secondary knots (tongue and navel) have become of primary importance and two main knots (Brahma and Rudra) are considered a two-phased event that characterizes the fourth and last stage of Kriya. [see chapter 7 for further discussion.] It has been explained that there is a strong connection between Brahma and Rudra knots. Actually, having already unfastened the knots of tongue, heart and navel, as soon as you cross the door of Sushumna (in Muladhara), you come up instantaneously, unimpeded, to the "door of the infinite" in the point between your eyebrows.

Kriya Yoga If we want to understand the essence of Kriya Yoga it is necessary to put aside some definitions found on the web. "Kriya Yoga is the science of controlling life energy [Prana]." "Kriya Yoga is a technique that activates the astral cerebrospinal centers." "Kriya Yoga hastens the practitioner's spiritual development and helps to bring about a profound state of tranquility and God-communion." "Kriya Yoga brings about the stilling of sensory input."

I don't want to contest them, but I think that Kriya is broader than what is implied. There are definitions which say nothing: they make a misleading synthesis of its methods and list its effects in the same way one would describe Hatha Yoga or Raja

Yoga practice. Patanjali refers once to Kriya Yoga: "Kriya consists of body discipline, mental control, and meditating on Iswara." [Yoga sutras II:1] This is definitely correct, but by following the further evolution of his thought, we are led astray. Although he states that by constantly remembering the inner sound of Om we can achieve the removal of all the obstacles that block our spiritual evolution, he does not develop this method. He is far from describing the same spiritual discipline taught by Lahiri Mahasaya.

Kriya Yoga is a "mystic path" utilizing the best tools used by the mystics of all religions. It consists of control of breath [Kriya Pranayama], prayer [Japa, Mantra] and pure effort of attuning with the Omkar Reality. The soothing process of calming the breath, followed by the Thokar procedure, guides the bodily energy into the heart Chakra, holding thus, as in a grip of calmness, the unceasing reflex originating the breath. When a perfect stillness is established, when all the inner and outer movements cease, the kriyaban perceives a radiation of fresh energy sustaining each cell from inside; then the breathless state settles in. When the physical breath is totally transcended and a circulation of energy happens in the body – the breath is said to have become "Internal" – a feeling of infinite safety, solidity and reliance originates. It is like having crossed a barrier and moved into a measureless space: Kriya yoga is a miracle of beauty.

Kumbhaka Kumbhaka means holding the breath. It is such an important phase in Pranayama that some Yoga teachers doubt whether a modified way of breathing which does not include any Kumbhaka can be called Pranayama at all. It is observed that when we are about to do something which requires our total attention, our breath is automatically held. We are not deliberately doing Pranayama, but our breath is suspended of its own accord; this demonstrates how natural this fact is. In Pranayama the inhalation is called Puraka, which literally means "the act of filling"; the exhalation is called Rechaka, meaning "the act of emptying". Retention of breath is called Kumbhaka, meaning "holding". Kumbha is a pot: just as a water pot holds water when it is filled with it, so in Kumbhaka the breath and the Prana is held in the body. In the classic Yoga literature there are described four types of Kumbhaka.

I. We breathe out deeply and hold the breath for a few seconds. This is known as "Bahir Kumbhaka" (External Kumbhaka).

II. The second, "Antar Kumbhaka" (Internal Kumbhaka), is holding the breath after a deep inhalation. Usually this kind of Kumbhaka is accompanied by the use of the Bandhas.

III. The third type is that practiced by alternate breathing - breathing in deeply through the left nostril, then holding the breath and then exhaling through the right... It is considered the easiest form of Kumbhaka.

IV. The fourth type is the most important of all, the peak of Pranayama. It is called Kevala Kumbhaka or automatic suspension of breath: it is the breathless state where there is no inhalation or exhalation, and not even the slightest desire to breathe.

In the Kriya praxis, the underlying principle of I. is present in some variations of Navi Kriya and in all those procedures involving a series of very long and calm exhalations which seem to end in a sweet nothing. Internal Kumbhaka II. happens in different Kriya techniques; particularly in Yoni Mudra, Maha Mudra and Thokar. Maha Mudra, with its balancing action on the right and on the left side of the spine, contains also – in a broader sense - the principles of III.: alternating breathing. A turning point in Kriya is the achievement of IV. Kevala Kumbhaka. In Kriya we distinguish between "Bahir" (external) and "Antar" (internal) Kevala Kumbhaka.

"Bahir (external) Kevala Kumbhaka" (the development and climax of I.) appears during mental Pranayama (or during any procedure linked with the Third Kriya) after having relaxed and thus emptied the rib cage.

"Antar (internal) Kevala Kumbhaka" (the development and climax of II.) appears during the highest refining of Yoni Mudra, Maha Mudra and Thokar (or during any procedure linked with the Fourth Kriya) after having completed a long inhalation, with the rib cage moderately full of air-Prana.

Kundalini The concept of Kundalini and, particularly, of its awakening, provides a framework which is convenient for expressing what is happening along the spiritual path. Most of the spiritual traditions have some awareness of Kundalini; not all are equally open in exposing the practical details of the process. Kundalini is Sanskrit for "coiled": it is conceived as a particular energy coiled like a serpent in the root Chakra (Muladhara). The representation of being coiled like a spring conveys the idea of untapped potential energy. It sleeps in our body and underneath the layers of our consciousness, waiting to be aroused either by spiritual discipline or by other means - like particular experiences of life. It is depicted as rising from the Muladhara up through the Sushumna, activating each Chakra; when it arrives at the crown Chakra (Sahasrara), it bestows infinite bliss, mystical illumination etc. It is only through repeatedly raising of the Kundalini, that the yogi succeeds in obtaining Self realization. Its rising is not a mild sense of energy flowing inside the spine. Its movement is like having a "volcano erupting" inside, a "rocket missile" shot through the spine! Its nature is beneficial; there is an evident resistance in trusting the reports of Kundalini awakening accompanied by troubles such as patently disturbed breathing patterns, distortion of thought processes, unusual or extreme strengthening of emotions... We are rather inclined to think that a dormant malady, brought to open manifestation by thoughtless practice of violent exercises or drugs is the cause of those phenomena. Insomnia, hypersensitivity to environment may indeed follow the authentic experience. In a "true awakening," the force of Kundalini eclipses the ego altogether and the individual feels disoriented for some time. All is absorbed in a short time, without problems. Alas, the search for a repetition of the episode may lead to disorderly and careless practice of strange techniques, without ever establishing a minimal foundation of mental silence. Each book warns against the risk of a premature awakening of Kundalini and asserts that the body must be prepared for the event. Almost any yogi thinks he or she is capable of sustaining this premature awakening and the warning excites them more than ever: the problem is that many do not have (or have lost) a genuine spiritual approach and nourish a fairly egotistical condition.

In the Kriya theoretical framework we consider Kundalini to be the same energy that exists throughout the body and not specifically residing in the Muladhara Chakra. We seldom use the term "Kundalini awakening" and try to avoid what could give the impression that such an experience has an alien nature: Kundalini is our own energy; it is the purest layer of our consciousness.

Kutastha Kutastha, the "third eye" or "spiritual eye" is the organ of inner vision (the unified astral counterpart of the two physical eyes), the place in our body where the spiritual Light manifests. By concentrating between the eyebrows, a formless darkness is first perceived, then a small crepuscular light, then other lights; eventually we have the experience of a golden ring surrounding a dark stain with a blazing tiny white point inside. There is a connection between Kutastha and Muladhara: what we are observing in the space between the eyebrows is nothing but the opening of the spinal door, which

is located at the root Chakra. Some Kriya teachers affirm that the condition for entering the last and the highest Kriya stage is that the vision of the spiritual eye has become constant; others identify it with the condition in which the energy is perfectly calm at the base of the spine. Therefore both affirmations are one and the same.

Maha Mudra Maha Mudra is a particular stretching position of the body. The importance of this technique becomes clear as soon as we observe how it incorporates the three main Bandhas of Hatha Yoga. There are indeed a thousand and one reasons to practice Maha Mudra with firmness. There is a ratio between the number of its repetitions and the number of the breaths: it is recommended that for each 12 Kriya Pranayama, one should perform one Maha Mudra.

Mahasamadhi [see Second Kriya]

Mantra [See prayer]

Mental Pranayama In mental Pranayama a kriyaban controls the energy in his body by forgetting the breathing process and focusing only upon Prana in the Chakras and in the body. His awareness dwells on both the inner and the external component of each Chakra until he feels a radiation of fresh energy vitalizing each part of the body and sustaining it from inside. This action is marked by the end of all the physical movements, by a perfect physical and mental stillness. At times, the breath becomes so calm that the practitioner has the absolute perception they are not breathing at all.

Mula Bandha In Mula Bandha the perineal muscles - between the anus and the genital organs - are slightly contracted while a mental pressure is exerted on the lower part of the spine. (Differently from Aswini Mudra, one does not simply tighten the sphincter muscles; in Mula Bandha the perineum seems to fold upward as the pelvic diaphragm is drawn upward through the motion of the pubic bone.) By contracting this muscle group, the current of Apana which normally gravitates downward is pulled upwards, gradually uniting with Prana at the navel. Mula Bandha has thus the effect of causing Prana to flow into Sushumna channel, rather than along Ida and Pingala.

Nada Yoga Nada Yoga is the path of union with the Divine through listening to inner sounds. Surat-Shabda-Yoga is another name for Nada Yoga. Nada Yoga is an experiential meditation. It has its basis in the fact that one who follows the mystical path infallibly meets this manifestation of Spirit - whatever may be their preparation and their convictions. It is a highly enjoyable form of meditation; anyone can be involved in this even without having fully understood it.

You may use a particular position of the body— a squatting position with the elbows resting on the knees, just to give an example—to plug both the ears. Remaining quietly seated, you simply focus all your attention on subtle sounds that come from within, rather than the audible sounds from outside. It is recommended to repeat mentally, unremittingly, your favorite Mantra. Awareness of inner sound must happen, sooner or later; your listening skills will improve and you will become more sensitive. There are different levels of development in the experience of inner sounds: you will hear a bumblebee, the drum, the lute, the flute, the harp, the clapping of thunder or a hum like an electrical transformer. Some of these sounds are actually just the sounds of your body, especially the blood pumping. Other sounds are actually the "sounds behind the audible sound". It is into this deeper realm that, while over time gently easing the mind

into relaxed concentration, your awareness is drawn. After some weeks of dedicated practice you will tune in with a sound deeper than all the above-quoted astral sounds. This is the cosmic sound of Om. The sound is perceived in different variations; Lahiri Mahasaya describes it as "produced by a lot of people who keep on striking the disk of a bell". It is continuous "as the oil that flows out of a container".

Nadi Subtle channels through which life energy flows throughout the body. The most important are Ida, which flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column (it is said to be of female nature), and Pingala (of masculine nature) which flows parallel to Ida on the right side; Sushumna flows in the middle and represents the experience that is beyond duality.

Nadi Sodhana Alternate nostril breathing exercise, it is not a part of Kriya Yoga proper. Yet, because its effects of appeasing and cheering up the mind (especially if it is practiced in the morning) are unmatched, some kriyabans make it a regular part of their routine.

Navi Kriya The essence of this technique is to dissolve inhalation and exhalation at the state of equilibrium in the navel, the seat of the Samana current. It is coupled in various ways with the practice of Kriya Pranayama. Some schools which do not specifically teach it provide some substitutes for it.

New Age The *New Age* sensibility is marked by the perception of something "planetary" at work. Since distinguished men of science have contributed to the *New Age* sensibility, there is no need to dwell on the affirmation, irrelevant for our understanding, according to which such a progress coincided with the entry of the solar system in the sign of Aquarius - from this belief it derived the term "Age of Aquarius" or "*New Age*". The essential thing is that people realized that the discoveries of Physics, of Alternative Medicine, the developments of the Depth Psychology, all converged toward one and the same understanding: the substantial interdependence among the universe, body, psyche and spiritual dimension of human beings. The esoteric-initiation societies, overcoming for a long time the differences of culture and religious vision, had already recognized this truth, which now, has become common heritage. During the twentieth century, human thought has made a strong step forward in a healthy direction.

There are many grounds to believe that, in the future, such an epoch will be studied with the same respect with which nowadays Humanism, Renaissance and Enlightenment ages are studied. The *New Age* thought deserves a deep respect for many reasons. If I hint at some "frenzies" I refer to the excessive use of alternative remedies for any type of real or imaginary troubles and to even more dangerous theories borrowed with a lot of superficiality from various esoteric currents, rather than to a depth progress in the understanding, in the expansion of the awareness out of the narrow fences of the small ego tied up obsessively to the maintenance of its petty conveniences.

Nirbikalpa Samadhi [see Paravastha]

Omkar Omkar is Om, the Divine Reality sustaining the universe, whose nature is vibration with specific aspects of sound, light and inner movement. The term "Omkar" or "Omkar Kriya" is also utilized to indicate any procedure fostering the Omkar

experience -- it may be a variation of Kriya Pranayama utilizing the Mantra Om Na Mo Bha..., it may include the practice of Thokar.

Padmasana In this asana the right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh with the soles of the feet turned up. The name means the "posture in which the lotuses (the Chakras) are seen." It is explained that, combined with Kechari and Shambhavi Mudra, this Asana creates an energetic condition in the body, suitable to producing the experience of the internal light coming from each Chakra.

Personally, I do not counsel anyone to perform this difficult posture. There are yogis who had to have cartilage removed from their knees after years of forcing themselves into Padmasana. In Kriya Yoga, at least for those living in the west and not used to assuming it since infancy, it is much wiser, healthier and comfortable to practice either the Half lotus or the Siddhasana posture.

Paravastha This concept is linked with that of "Sthir Tattwa (Tranquility)". Named by Lahiri Mahasaya, Paravastha designates the state that comes by holding onto the after-effect of Kriya. It is not just joy and peace but something deeper, vital for us as a healing. From our initial efforts directed at mastering the techniques, we perceive moments of deep peace and harmony with the rest of the world, which extend during the day. Paravastha comes after years of discipline, when the breathless state is familiar: the tranquility state lasts forever, it is no longer to be sought with care. Flashes of the ending state of freedom comfort the mind while coping with life's battles.

Pingala [see Nadi]

Prana The energy inside our psychophysical system. Prana is divided into Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana and Vijana, which have their location respectively in the chest, in the low abdomen, in the region of the belt, in the head and in the remaining part of the body - arms and legs. That the term Prana is interpreted in two ways should not create confusion – provided that one considers the context in which the word is used. In the initial phases of Kriya Pranayama we are mainly interested in Prana, Apana and Samana. When we use Shambhavi Mudra and during mental Pranayama we contact Udana. Through many techniques (like Maha Mudra) and by the experience of Kriya Pranayama with Internal Breath we experience the fresh vitalizing nature of Vijana.

Pranayama The term Pranayama is comprised of two roots: Prana is the first; Ayama (expansion) or Yama (control) is the second. Thus, the word Pranayama can be understood either as the "Expansion of Prana" or as the "Control of Prana". I would prefer the first but I think that the correct one is the second. In other words, Pranayama is the control of the energy in the whole psychophysical system by using the breathing process with the purpose to receive a beneficial effect or to prepare the experience of meditation. The common Pranayama exercises - although they may not involve the perception of any energetic current - can create a remarkable experience of energy rising in the spine. This is not negligible since this experience causes the skeptical practitioner the discovery of the spiritual dimension and pushes him or her to seek something deeper.

In **Kriya Pranayama** the breathing process is coordinated with the attention of the mind up and down along the spinal column. While the breathing is deep and slow, with the tongue either flat or turned back, the awareness accompanies the movement of the energy around the six Chakras. By deepening the process, the current flows in the

deepest channel in the spine: Sushumna. When by a long practice a subtle form of energy circulates (in a clearly perceivable way) inside the body while the physical breath is totally settled down, the kriyaban has an experience of unthinkable beauty.

Prayer [Japa, Mantra] Prayer is an act of communion with the Higher Reality that allows a person to make a reverent plead, to seek guidance, to offer praise or simply to express their thoughts and emotions. The sequence of words used in a prayer may either be a set formula or a spontaneous expression in the praying person's own words. Whatever be the appeal to God, this act presupposes a belief in the Divine Will to interfere in our life. "Ask, and ye shall receive" (Matt. 7:7, 8; 21:22). Prayer is a subject of wide range and scope; here I will restrict it to the repetitive prayer. In India, the repetition of the Name of the Divine is known as Japa. This word Japa is derived from the root Jap - meaning: "to utter in a low voice, repeat internally". Japa is also the repetition of any Mantra, which is a broader term than prayer. Mantra can be a name of the Divine but also a pure sound without a meaning. A certain number of sounds were chosen by ancient yogis who sensed their power and used them extensively. (Some believe that the repetition of a Mantra has the mysterious power of bringing about the manifestation of the Divinity "just as the splitting of an atom manifests the tremendous forces latent in it"). The term Mantra derives from the words "Manas" (mind) and "Tra" (protection): we protect our mind by repeating unrelentingly the same healthy vibration. Usually a Mantra is repeated verbally for some time, then in a whisper and then mentally for some time. In most forms of Japa, the repetitions are counted using a string of beads known as a (Japa) Mala. The number of beads is generally 108 or 100. The Mala is used so that the devotee is free to enjoy the practice without being preoccupied with counting the repetitions. It may be performed whilst sitting in a meditation posture or while performing other activities, such as walking.

Sahasrara The seventh Chakra extends from the crown of the head up to the Fontanelle and over it. It cannot be considered of the same nature as the other Chakras, but a superior reality, which can be experienced only in the breathless state. It is not easy therefore to concentrate upon it as we do with the other Chakras. Only after a deep practice of Kriya Pranayama, when the breath is very calm, is the attunement with it possible; a particular pressure over the head may be felt.

Samadhi According to Patanjali's Ashtanga (eight steps) Yoga, Samadhi is the state of deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself: it results naturally from Dharana and Dhyana. In my opinion, Samadhi does not mean "union with God." We take so many things for granted. Our language is strongly hampered: magniloquent words risk meaning nothing. To become one and the same thing with God is different from to awaken to the realization that we are a part of That One? Words deceive our comprehension and kindle egoist expectations. One is thrilled by words such as: absolute, eternal, infinite, supreme, everlasting, celestial, divine....

I have half a mind to suggest a sober definition of Samadhi, which may stimulate a reflection upon the meaning of the spiritual path. Let me therefore define Samadhi as independent from any accident, beatific, near death experience (NDE). The descriptions of Samadhi and of NDE follow the same pattern: actually the nature of the phenomenon which takes place in the body is almost the same. This opinion may disappoint those who smell a restrictive and limiting shade of meaning in it; however I prefer to think in this way and discover much more during the actual Samadhi

experience than to thrive in rhetoric. Even if Samadhi were no more than a NDE experience, however it would have a superlative value. In both the experiences, the awareness can provide a glimpse of the Eternity beyond mind; then (this happens to the trained yogi) that lofty awareness blends, integrates with the customary life, which is totally transformed for the better. To those who wonder if it is fair to diminish the worth of the Kriya ecstatic state by reducing it to a process of contacting for some time the after life dimension, we could reply that this genuine experience is unmatched in fostering in a clean way the Kriya Yoga ideals of a balanced spiritual life.

Shambhavi Mudra A Mudra in which the ocular bulbs and the eyebrows are upturned as much as possible; often the inferior eyelids relax and a bystander can observe the white of the cornea under the iris. All the visual force of the ocular nerves is gathered on the top of the head. Lahiri Mahasaya in his well known portrait is showing this Mudra.

Second Kriya It has been reported that by using the Second Kriya technique, Swami Pranabananda, an eminent disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya, left his body consciously (this feat is called Mahasamadhi - the conscious exit out of the body, at death). There was no violence to the body; the feat happened only at the most proper moment - according to a Karmic point of view when the moment was right. Now the debate is: what procedure did he make use of?

a... Many claim it was the technique of Thokar. It is possible that he arrested the movement of the heart and therefore left his body. He might have done one single Thokar and stopped his heart; this means he put so much mental strength in this act as to block the energy which kept his heart throbbing.

b... Some believe that this supreme calming of the heart was achieved only by a mental action of immersion in the point between the eyebrows, entering the light of Kutastha. The reports say that those who were around him did not notice any head movement. Similarly when other great ones left their body there was no movement.

c... In my opinion, Mahasamadhi is not a "shrewd esoteric trick" to master the mechanics of a painless suicide. Surely each great master relies upon his already built ability to enter Samadhi. By creating a total peace in his being, the soul's natural desire to regain union with the Infinite Source puts in action a natural mechanism of appeasing the cardiac plexus.

Siddhasana The Sanskrit name means "Perfect Pose". In this Asana, the sole of the left foot is placed against the right thigh so that the heel presses on the perineum. The right heel is placed against the pubic bone. This position of the legs, combined with Kechari Mudra, closes the pranic circuit and makes Kriya Pranayama easy and profitable.

Sushumna [see Nadi]

Talabya Kriya It is a stretching exercise of the muscles of the tongue, and particularly of the Frenulum. The purpose is to attain Kechari Mudra [see]. This practice creates a distinct calming effect on the thoughts and, for this reason, it is never put aside, even after Kechari Mudra is achieved.

Thokar A Kriya technique based on directing the calm Prana - collected in the head through Kriya Pranayama - toward the location of one (usually the 4th) or more

Chakras, by a particular (jerking) movement of the head. Guiding Prana into the Anahata Chakra, a light grows in the region between the eyebrows. This fosters the breathless state. By increasing the concentration on the spiritual light, the lights of all the other Chakras are revealed. The practice of Thokar is to be deepened throughout the years in order to get the ability to enter the state of Samadhi with just one stroke. Studying the practices of the Sufis, (see the studies conducted by Gardet and M. M. Anawati, esp. Gardet in *Revue Thomiste* (1952-3)), we discover that Thokar is a variant of the Sufi's Dhikr. Dhikr is the practice of the "memory" of the Divine, which is brought about by repeating a particular short prayer during the day and by guiding it, during moments of seclusion or group devotional practice, into particular centers of the body through specific head movements. It might have happened that Lahiri knew this technique since youth. Some forms of prayer he saw were mild forms of Thokar. It was His genius to develop it to the utmost perfection.

Tribhagamurari Some Kriya Acharya teaches the practice of Thokar in a very particular way. The central teaching is guiding your awareness along a three-curved path called Tribhagamurari (Tri-bhanga-murari = three-bend-form). This path begins in Bindu, bending to the left, it descends into the seat of the Rudra knot (the region from Medulla oblongata to Bhrumadhya between the eyebrows), goes across it and continues toward the right side of the body. Then it reverses direction cutting the Vishnu knot whose seat is in the heart Chakra. Then it reverses again its direction pointing toward the seat of the Brahma knot in the coccyx region, which is also crossed by entering the spine and coming up toward Bindu.

These teachers explain that in the last part of His life, Lahiri Mahasaya drew with extreme precision the three-bends form which is perceived by deepening the after-Kriya-Pranayama meditation.

Uddiyana Bandha Abdominal lock: it is usually practiced with breath out but in Kriya it is also utilized with breath in especially during the practice of the main Kriya Mudras: Maha Mudra, Navi Kriya and Yoni Mudra.

To practice it with breath out, utilize, at least partly, Jalandhara Bandha. Take a false inhale (perform the same action of an inhale without actually pulling any air into the body.) Draw the belly up as much as possible. Hold your the breath out. To practice it with breath in, contract slightly the abdominal muscles until you intensify the perception of the energy in the spinal column in the region of Manipura Chakra.

Yama – Niyama Yama is Self-control: non-violence, avoiding lies, avoiding stealing, avoiding being lustful, and non-attachment. Niyama is religious observances: cleanliness, contentment, discipline, study of the Self and surrender to the Supreme God (Brahman). While in most Kriya schools these rules are put as premises to be respected in order to receive initiation, a discriminating researcher understands that they are to be considered really as the consequences of a correct Yoga practice. A beginner cannot to much depth understand what "Study of the Self" means. Some teacher repeats, parrot fashion, the necessity of observing those rules and, after having given absurd clarifications of some of the above points (in particular which mental trick to utilize in order to ... avoid being lustful), passes on to explain the techniques. Why utter empty words? Whom is he trying to fool? The mystic path, when followed honestly, cannot compromise itself with any rhetoric. When an affirmation is made, it is that. Yama and Niyama are a good topic to study, an ideal to bear in mind, but not a vow. Only through practice is it possible to understand their real meaning and, consequently, see them

flourish in one's life.

Yoga Sutra (by Patanjali) The Yoga Sutras are an extremely influential text on Yoga philosophy and practice: over fifty different English translations are the testimony of its importance. Although we are not sure of the exact time when their author Patanjali lived, we can set it between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. The Yoga Sutras are made up by a collection of 195 aphorisms dealing with the philosophical aspects of mind and awareness, thus establishing a sound theoretical basis of Raja Yoga - the Yoga of self discipline and meditation. Yoga is described as an eight stage (Ashtanga) path which are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. The first five steps build the psycho-physical foundation for having a true spiritual experience; the last three are concerned with disciplining the mind up to its dissolution in the ecstatic experience. The Sutras define also some esoteric concepts, common to all the traditions of the Indian thought, such as Karma. Although, at times, Patanjali is called "the father of Yoga", his work is actually a compendium of pre-existing oral Yoga traditions, an inhomogeneous whole of practices betraying an indistinct and contradictory theoretical background. However, the importance of Patanjali's work is beyond discussion: he clarified what others had taught; what was abstract he made practical! He was a genial thinker, not just a compiler of rules. His equilibrium between theism and atheism is very appreciable. We do not find the least suggestion of worshipping idols, deities, gurus, or sacred books - at the same time we do not find any atheistic doctrine either. We know that "Yoga," besides being a rigorous system of meditation practice, implies devotion to the Eternal Intelligence or Self. Patanjali affirms the importance of directing our heart's aspiration toward Om.

Yoni Mudra The potential of this technique includes, in all effects, the final realization of the Kriya path. Kutastha - between the eyebrows - is the place where the individual soul had its origin: the delusive Ego needs to be dissolved there. The core component of this Mudra is to bring all the energy into the point between the eyebrows and hinder its scattering by closing the head openings - the breath is quieted in the region from throat to the point between the eyebrows. If a deep relaxation state is established in the body, this practice succeeds in generating a very intense ecstatic state, which spreads throughout one's being. About its practical implementation, there are minor differences among the schools: some give a greater importance to the vision of the Light and less to the dissolution of breath and mind. Among the first, there are those who teach, while keeping more or less the same position of the fingers, to focus upon each Chakra and to perceive their different colors. One satisfactory remark, found in the traditional Yoga literature, is that this technique gets its name "Yoni", meaning "uterus", because like the baby in the uterus, the practitioner has no contact with the external world, and therefore, no externalization of consciousness.

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