



MY ESSENTIAL WRITINGS

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

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Swâmi Abhedânanda

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How To be A Yogi

Preface

The Vedanta Philosophy includes the different branches of the Science of Yoga. Four of these have already been treated at length by the Swâmi Vivekânanda in his works on "Raja Yoga," "Karma Yoga," "Bhakti Yoga," and "Jnana Yoga"; but there existed no short and consecutive survey of the science as a whole. It is to meet this need that the present volume has been written. In an introductory chapter are set forth the true province of religion and the full significance of the word "spirituality" as it is understood in India. Next follows a comprehensive definition of the term "Yoga," with short chapters on each of the five paths to which it is applied, and their respective practices. An exhaustive exposition of the Science of Breathing and its bearing on the highest spiritual development shows the fundamental physiological principles on which the whole training of Yoga is based; while a concluding chapter, under the title "Was Christ a Yogi?" makes plain the direct relation existing between the lofty teachings of Vedânta and the religious faiths of the West. An effort has been made, so far as possible, to keep the text free from technical and Sanskrit terms; and the work should therefore prove of equal value to the student of Oriental thought and to the general reader as yet unfamiliar with philosophical systems of the world. —The Editor.

I. Introductory.

True religion is extremely practical; it is, indeed, based entirely upon practice, and not upon theory or speculation of any kind, for religion begins only where theory ends. Its object is to mould the character, unfold the divine nature of the soul, and make it possible to live on the spiritual plane, its ideal being the realization of Absolute Truth and the manifestation of Divinity in the actions of the daily life. Spirituality does not depend upon the reading of Scriptures, or upon learned interpretations of Sacred Books, or upon fine theological discussions, but upon the realization of unchangeable Truth. In India a man is called truly spiritual or religious not because he has written some book, not because he possesses the gift of oratory and can preach eloquent sermons, but because he expresses divine powers through his words and deeds. A thoroughly illiterate man can attain to the highest state of spiritual perfection without going to any school or university, and without reading any Scripture, if he can conquer his animal nature by realizing his true Self and its relation to the universal Spirit; or, in other words, if he can attain to the knowledge of that Truth which dwells within him, and which is the same as the Infinite Source of existence, intelligence, and bliss. He who has mastered all the Scriptures, philosophies, and sciences, may be regarded by society as an intellectual giant; yet he cannot be equal to that unlettered man who, having realized the eternal Truth, has become one with it, who sees God everywhere, and who lives on this earth as an embodiment of Divinity.

The writer had the good fortune to be acquainted with such a divine man in India. His name was Ramakrishna. He never went to any school, neither had he read any of the Scriptures, philosophies, or scientific treatises of the world, yet he had reached perfection by realizing God through the practice of Yoga. Hundreds of men and women came to see him and were spiritually awakened and uplifted by the

divine powers which this illiterate man possessed. To-day he is revered and worshipped by thousands all over India as is Jesus the Christ in Christendom. He could expound with extraordinary clearness the subtlest problems of philosophy or of science, and answer the most intricate questions of clever theologians in such a masterly way as to dispel all doubts concerning the matter in hand. How could he do this without reading books? By his wonderful insight into the true nature of things, and by that Yoga power which made him directly perceive things which cannot be revealed by the senses. His spiritual eyes were open; his sight could penetrate through the thick veil of ignorance that hangs before the vision of ordinary mortals, and which prevents them from knowing that which exists beyond the range of sense perception.

These powers begin to manifest in the soul that is awakened to the ultimate Reality of the universe. It is then that the sixth sense of direct perception of higher truths develops and frees it from dependence upon the sense powers. This sixth sense or spiritual eye is latent in each individual, but it opens in a few only among millions, and they are known as Yogis. With the vast majority it is in a rudimentary state, covered by a thick veil. When, however, through the practice of Yoga it unfolds in a man, he becomes conscious of the higher invisible realms and of everything that exists on the soul plane. Whatever he says harmonizes with the sayings and writings of all the great Seers of Truth of every age and clime. He does not study books; he has no need to do so, for he knows all that the human intellect can conceive. He can grasp the purport of a book without reading its text; he also understands how much the human mind can express through words, and he is familiar with that which is beyond thoughts and which consequently can never be expressed by words.

Before arriving at such spiritual illumination he goes through divers stages of mental and spiritual evolution, and in consequence knows all that can be experienced by a human intellect. He does not, however, care to remain confined within the limit of sense perception, and is not contented with the intellectual apprehension of relative reality, but his sole aim is to enter into the realm of the Absolute, which is the beginning and end of phenomenal objects and of relative knowledge.

Thus striving for the realization of the highest, he does not fail to collect all relative knowledge pertaining to the world of phenomena that comes in his way, as he marches on toward his destination, the unfoldment of his true Self.

Our true Self is all-knowing by its nature. It is the source of infinite knowledge within us. Being bound by the limitations of time, space, and causation, we cannot express all the powers that we possess in reality. The higher we rise above these limiting conditions, the more we can manifest the divine qualities of omniscience and omnipotence. If, on the contrary, we keep our minds fixed upon phenomena and devote the whole of our energy to acquiring knowledge dependent entirely upon sense perceptions, shall we ever reach the end of phenomenal knowledge, shall we ever be able to know the real nature of the things of this universe? No; because the senses cannot lead us beyond the superficial appearance of sense objects. In order to go deeper in the realm of the invisible we invent instruments, and with their help we are able to penetrate a little further; but these instruments, again, have their limit. After using one kind of instrument, we become dissatisfied with the results and search for some other which may reveal more and more, and thus we struggle on, discovering at each step how poor and helpless are the sense powers in the path of the knowledge of the Absolute.

At last we are driven to the conclusion that any instrument, no matter how fine, can never help us to realize that which is beyond the reach of sense-perception, intellect, and thought.

So, even if we could spend the whole of our time and energy in studying phenomena, we shall never arrive at any satisfactory result or be able to see things as they are in reality. The knowledge of to-day, gained by the help of certain instruments, will be the ignorance of tomorrow, if we get better instruments. The knowledge of last year is already the ignorance of the present year; the knowledge of this century will be ignorance in the light of the discoveries of a new century. The span of one human life is, therefore, too short to even attempt to acquire a correct knowledge of all things existing on the phenomenal plane. The life-time of hundreds of thousands of generations, nay, of all humanity, seems too short, when we consider the infinite variety to be found in the universe, and the countless number of objects that will have to be known before we can reach the end of knowledge. If a man could live a million years, keeping his senses in perfect order during that long period, and could spend every moment in studying nature and in diligently endeavoring to learn every minute detail of phenomenal objects, would his search after knowledge be fulfilled at the expiration of that time? Certainly not; he would want still more time, a finer power of perception, a keener intellect, a subtler understanding; and then he might say, as did Sir Isaac Newton after a life of tireless research, "I have collected only pebbles on the shore of the ocean of knowledge." If a genius like Newton could not even reach the edge of the water of that ocean, how can we expect to cross the vast expanse from shore to shore in a few brief years? Thousands of generations have passed away, thousands will pass, yet must the knowledge regarding the phenomena of the universe remain

imperfect. Veil after veil may be removed, but veil after veil will remain behind. This was understood by the Yogis and Seers of Truth in India, who said: "Innumerable are the branches of knowledge, but short is our time and many are the obstacles in the way; therefore wise men should first struggle to know that which is highest."

Here the question arises: Which is the highest knowledge? This question is as old as history; it has puzzled the minds of the philosophers, scientists, and scholars of all ages and all countries. Some have found an answer to it, others have not. The same question was voiced in ancient times by Socrates, when he went to the Delphic oracle and asked: "Of all knowledge which is the highest?" To which came the answer, "Know thyself."

We read in one of the Upanishads that a great thinker, after studying all the philosophies and sciences known at that time, came to a Seer of Truth and said: "Sir, I am tired of this lower knowledge that can be gained from books or through the study of the world of phenomena; it no longer satisfies me, for science cannot reveal the ultimate Truth; I wish to know that which is the highest. Is there anything by knowing which I can know the reality of the universe?"

The sage replied: "Yes, there is; and that knowledge is the highest, by knowing which you can know the true nature of everything in the universe." And he continued, "Know thyself. If thou canst learn the true nature of thine own self, thou wilt know the reality of the universe. In thy true Self thou wilt find the Eternal Truth, the Infinite Source of all phenomena. By knowing this thou wilt know God and His whole creation." As by knowing the chemical properties of one drop of water, we know the properties of all water wherever it appears, so by knowing who and what we are in reality, we shall realize the final Truth. Man is the

epitome of the universe. That which exists in the macrocosm is to be found in the microcosm. Therefore the knowledge of one's true Self is the highest of all knowledge. Our real Self is divine and one with God. This may seem to us at present a mere theory, but the nearer we approach the ultimate Truth, the more clearly shall we understand that it is not a theory but a fact, that now we are dreaming in the sleep of ignorance and fancying ourselves this or that particular person. But as all experience gained in dreams afterwards appears of little consequence; so, waking up from this sleep, we shall find that the knowledge of phenomenal nature, upon which we place so much value at present, is of little importance. We shall then realize that all research in the various branches of science depends upon Self-knowledge, and that Self-knowledge is the foundation upon which the structure of phenomenal knowledge is built.

Knowledge of the Self or Atman is therefore the highest of all. It is the ideal of the Science of Yoga, and should be the aim of our life. We should hold it as our first duty to acquire this Self-knowledge before we try to know anything concerning the objects of sense-perception. How can we gain it? Not from books, not through the study of external phenomena, but by studying our own nature, and by practicing the different branches of Yoga.

II. What is Yoga?

In all the Sacred Writings of the world as well as in the lives of the inspired teachers, prophets, saints, and Seers of Truth, we find frequent descriptions of miraculous events and powers, which, admitting a certain measure of exaggeration, must still have had some foundation in fact. We, indeed, know that from time immemorial in every age

and in every country there have arisen among the different nations persons who could read the thoughts of others, who could foresee and could prophesy that which afterwards came to pass; but most of these people did not understand the causes of their own peculiar gifts, and tried to explain them by attributing them to the influence of external Beings, whom they called by various names—gods, angels, good or evil spirits.

Some among them even fancied that they were especially chosen to be the instruments of these higher powers and sought to be worshipped as the elect of God or of their particular deity, just as the leaders of certain sects in this country today desire to be adored by their followers. In some instances, those who possessed these unusual powers were looked upon as divine exceptions, as Jesus by the Christians, Mahomet by the Mahometans, and Buddha by the Buddhists. Others again were condemned as sorcerers or witches, and the fear aroused by such persecutions led to the secret practice of divers methods which resulted in still further extraordinary manifestations.

These methods were never written down, but were passed orally from the master to the disciple, who in turn carefully guarded them as sacred mysteries. This is the reason why among ancient nations there grew up so many secret societies, the object of which was to develop certain powers through various kinds of discipline and practices. The Egyptians, the Essenes, Gnostics, Manicheans, Neo-Platonists, and the Christian mystics of the middle ages all had their secret organizations, and some of them still exist, as, for example, the Masonic Lodge. None of the members of these societies ever gave out their secret instructions, nor did they write any books offering a logical or scientific explanation of their practices. Therefore, while there were some among them who advanced far in the attainment of

higher powers, the unusual manifestations resulting therefrom were never understood by Western nations, neither were they generalized into a system or science.

In ancient India, on the contrary, as there was no fear of persecution, the case was altogether different. Every Hindu was obliged, as a part of his religious duty, to develop through daily practice certain powers and to strive to attain to the realization of higher truths. In the streets, on the market-place, in the courts, and on the battle-field were many who had not only reached such realization, but who had carefully classified their experiences and discovered those laws which govern our higher nature and upon which was gradually built up the profound Science of Yoga.

Thus we see that this science, like all others, was based on experience; while the method used in it was the same as that employed by modern science in making all its discoveries of natural law—the method of observation and experiment.

This method is regarded in the West as a distinctly modern innovation, but as a matter of fact it was adopted in India in very ancient times by the “Rishis,” or Seers of Truth. Through the process of close observation and constant experiment they discovered the finer forces of nature, as also the laws that govern our physical, mental, and spiritual being. The truths thus gained through their own experience and investigations, they wrote down in books, preached in public, and expounded to their pupils. Before, however, they affirmed anything about the nature of the soul or God, they had realized it. Before they asked a disciple to practice anything they had practiced it themselves, and had obtained definite results from that practice.

In this way, as the outcome of ages of research in the realms of nature, carried on by a succession of earnest seekers after light, there grew up in India various systems of science, philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, and religion, both speculative and practical, which were grouped under the one common name, "Aryan Religion." The term "religion" was used to include all, because at no epoch in India has religion been separated from these different branches or from the general conduct of every-day existence; and the methods by which these scientific truths were applied in the daily life of an individual to further his spiritual development, were called by the general term "Yoga." "Yoga" is a Sanskrit word commonly used to signify the practical side of religion; and the first concern of the training for which it stands, is to enforce proper obedience to the laws of our moral and physical nature, upon which depend the attainment of perfect health and of moral and spiritual perfection. In Western countries the word has been grossly misunderstood and misused by many writers, who have employed it in the sense of jugglery, hypnotism, trickery, and fraud. Whenever people hear the word "Yogi," which signifies one who practices Yoga, they think of some kind of juggler, or charlatan, or identify him with a fakir or one who practices black magic. The Theosophists have been more or less responsible for this abuse of the term; but those who have studied the Sacred Books of India, as, for instance, the Bhagavad Gita or Song Celestial, as Sir Edwin Arnold calls it in his translation, will remember that each chapter of that Celestial Song is devoted to some kind of "Yoga," or method of realizing the Ultimate Truth and of attaining the highest wisdom; and that a "Yogi" is one who through various practices reaches the highest ideal of religion. This highest ideal, according to the Bhagavad Gita, is the union of the individual soul with the Universal Spirit.

Hindu writers, however, have used the word “Yoga” in various other senses. I will mention a few of them in order to give some conception of the vastness of the field covered by this term. First, “Yoga” means the union of two external objects. Second, the mixing of one thing with another. Third, the interrelation of the causes which produce a common effect. Fourth, the orderly equipment of a soldier or of any person in any profession. Fifth, the application, discrimination, and reasoning that is necessary for the discovery of a certain truth. Sixth, that power of sound which makes it convey a specific idea. Seventh, the preservation of what one possesses. Eighth, the transformation of one thing into another. Ninth, the union of one soul with another or with the universal Spirit. Tenth, the flowing of a thought current towards an object. Eleventh, the restraint of all thought action through concentration and meditation. Thus we see how many different branches of art, science, psychology, philosophy, and religion are included in the various definitions of this one word. It seems, indeed, in its scope and range to take in every department of nature. If, however, we consider the literal meaning of the word, we shall more easily understand why it is so all-inclusive.

It is derived from the Sanskrit root “Yuj,” which means to join. The English word “yoke” also comes from the same root. Originally the literal signification of the two words was almost the same. The root-verb “Yuj” signifies to join oneself to something, or to harness oneself for some task. Thus in its primary meaning it conveys the same idea of preparing for hard work as the common English expressions “to go into harness,” or “to buckle to.” The effort required is mental or physical, according to the object in view. If the object be the acquirement of perfect health, or longevity, then the effort of both mind and body to accomplish this through certain practices is called

“Yoga.” So is it again if the object be the development of psychic powers. The same word is used likewise to indicate the mental training necessary for the attainment of self-control, of the union of the individual soul with God, of divine communion or of spiritual perfection. Volumes upon volumes have been written in India describing the different branches and methods of this applied science of “Yoga,” and the various ideals that can be attained through its practice; also what qualifications fit a beginner for undertaking any of these methods, what stages he must pass through in order to reach the goal, what obstacles stand in the way, and how they can be overcome.

Patience and perseverance are absolutely necessary for anyone who desires to enter upon the path of Yoga; those who are not patient cannot hope to arrive at true realization. Those, again, who take it up out of curiosity or through an impulse of temporary enthusiasm, must not expect to get results, and must not blame the teacher for their failure to do so, since the fault is entirely their own. The same teachings, when carried out with understanding and in the right spirit, will bring wonderful results. They will only come, however, to the student who follows strictly the instructions of a living master, who will direct him in the practice of both physical and mental exercises.

Aspirants to the study of Yoga can be divided into three classes: First, those who are born Yogis. There are some who, having practiced Yoga in a previous incarnation, come here as awakened souls, and as such manifest remarkable powers from their very childhood. Their natural tendency is to lead a pure life, for right living and right thinking are their sole concern, and they possess wonderful powers of self-control and of concentration. Sense pleasures and those things which fascinate the ordinary mind have no

charm for them. Even when they are surrounded by all the comforts of life and have every material resource at their command, they yet feel like strangers in a strange land. Few there are who can understand properly the mental condition of these characters. Physicians may be brought to them, but medical treatment may only make them worse; the writer knows of cases where harm has been done in this way. By the law of attraction, however, they are bound to be drawn sooner or later into the companionship of some Yogi. Here they find exactly what their inner nature has been craving, and at once they feel happy and at home. The instructions of the Yogi appeal to their minds; they begin the practice of Yoga under his direction, and proving easy and natural to them, they soon obtain excellent results. Thus from youth they take up the thread of the practice at the very point where they dropped it in their past existence; and through a firm determination to overcome all obstacles in their way, they progress rapidly and gradually attain to the highest ideal of spiritual life. Nothing in the world can prevent their onward march, so intense and strong is their longing for realization.

The second class includes those who are born as half-awakened souls. In need of further experience, they go through various paths without finding the right one. They take each new step tentatively, and in this constant experimenting, they waste a great deal of energy and a large portion of their lives. If such partially awakened souls, following out a tendency created in their previous existence, have the good fortune to come in contact with a Yogi and take up the practice of Yoga, they may, through perseverance and earnestness, achieve much in this life, although they will necessarily advance more slowly in the path of spirituality than those who belong to the first class.

In the third class are to be found all those unawakened souls who begin their search after Truth and the practice of Yoga for the first time in this life. Even from childhood they are irresistibly drawn towards sense objects and sense pleasures; and if they take up the practice of Yoga, they find great difficulty in following its teachings and meet numerous obstacles along the way. Their environment is not favorable for the practice, and even when they try, they cannot easily conquer it. Their health is not good, their mind is scattered, and they suffer from various kinds of disease and mental disturbance. They also lack determination, find it wellnigh impossible to control the senses, and have to fight hard to adjust their mode of living to the new requirements. With so much to contend against they naturally obtain but small results even after long practice. If, however, such persons can persevere and strengthen their wills through a slow and regular practice of Hatha Yoga, struggling manfully to overcome the many obstacles in their way by the practice of breathing exercises and by following the directions of a competent teacher, who understands them, they may in this life be able to control in a large measure their physical health and acquire a certain amount of Yoga power. Hatha Yoga is especially useful for this class of aspirants. Through the practice of breathing exercises they will gradually gain control over their bodies, and will, in course of time, be prepared for the study of Râja Yoga, which will arouse the powers latent in their souls.

1. Hatha Yoga.

Hatha Yoga is that branch of the Science of Yoga which teaches how to conquer hunger, thirst, and sleep; how to overcome the effects of heat and cold; how to gain perfect health and cure disease without using drugs; how to arrest

the untimely decay of the body resulting from the waste of vital energy; how to preserve youth even at the age of one hundred without having a single hair turn grey, and how thus to prolong life in this body for an indefinite period. Anyone who practices it will in the course of time acquire marvellous powers; powers indeed, which must dumbfound a psychologist or anatomist. A few years ago a Hatha Yogi was brought to England. Although in middle life he looked like a boy of eighteen. Not only was his physical condition perfect, but through practice he had mastered eighty-four postures of the body. He could bend his limbs in so astonishing a way that it seemed as if his joints must be unattached, while his bones were as though made of some elastic substance. Many English physicians and surgeons came to see him and were amazed at the extraordinary positions of his limbs. They brought a skeleton and tried to fix its bones in the same positions, but could not do so without breaking them. Afterwards they reached the conclusion that if the bones were once fixed in those positions the limbs would be unfitted for any kind of work. Yet the example of the Yogi openly contradicted their statements. His limbs were strong and of good use to him in every possible way. He could walk, lift heavy weights, and move about with absolute ease. The writer himself saw him in India, and also other Hatha Yogis who could accomplish equally wonderful feats. The primary object of these various postures described in Hatha Yoga is to gain control over the involuntary muscles of the body, which is impossible to the ordinary man. We all possess this power latent within us, but the Hatha Yogis were the first to discover a scientific method by which it could be developed.

All Hatha Yogis eat very little, but they can also go entirely without food for days and even for months, and succeed in conquering sleep. The author knew of one who had not

slept for twelve years, and who was nevertheless in perfect health. He has also seen a Hatha Yogi who usually ate, for instance, a piece of unleavened bread in twenty-four hours, and who refused to wear warm clothing in the coldest winter weather, and yet who voluntarily worked hard as a street laborer without showing the least sign of fatigue. It may seem impossible to the majority of people, who have made themselves such slaves to sleep and food as to imagine that if they do not sleep eight or nine hours out of the twenty-four and eat pounds of flesh, they cannot live. Hatha Yogis are the living contradictions of such opinions. Perhaps the reader is familiar with the account of that Yogi who was buried alive for forty days in an hermetically sealed box, with a guard of English officers to watch the spot night and day. During these forty days the Yogi could neither eat, sleep, nor breathe, yet at their expiration he was brought back to consciousness without any ill effects and he lived for many years.

Then again these same Yogis who do not eat, sleep, or drink for a long period, can, if they wish, eat as much as ten persons at one time without suffering any unpleasant consequences. Of course they do not eat any kind of meat. They digest their food consciously, as it were. They claim that by a third eye they can, so to speak, see what is going on in their internal organs. Why should this seem incredible to us when the discovery of the Roentgen rays has proved everything to be transparent?

Some of the Hatha Yogis have extraordinary eyesight. They can not only perceive objects at a great distance, but can also see clearly in complete darkness, even being able to pick up a pin from the floor without the least glimmer of ordinary light to guide them. This will not appear so strange when we remember that there is invisible light in the atmosphere of a perfectly dark room. If we can learn to

use this atmospheric light, imperceptible to the common eye, and can develop our eyesight, there is no reason why we should not see things in the dark. The Yogis understand this and know the method by which the power of eyesight can be developed. As regards distinguishing objects at a great distance, this is not so difficult to believe since we know that there are persons living, not Yogis, who can see the moons of Jupiter without the help of any instrument.

This branch of optical science in Hatha Yoga is called in Sanskrit "Trâtaka" Yoga. It teaches, among other things, how, through gazing on one object and at the same time performing certain special breathing exercises, many optical maladies can be cured as well as the power of sight strengthened. The authentic records of Hatha Yogis vouch for the fact that it produces many beneficial effects when properly practiced under the direction of a competent master of Hatha Yoga.

A Yogi who is expert in this science of optics can fascinate or madden another by his optical powers. The process of hypnotism or mesmerism verifies this claim. A Yogi can likewise read the thoughts of another by looking at his eyes; for according to the Yogi the eye is the index of the mind. Here it may be asked, how do the Yogis acquire these powers? They do not get them from outside. These powers are dormant in every individual, and through practice the Yogis bring them out. They say: "Whatever exists in the universe (the macrocosm) exists also in the human body (the microcosm)." That is, the finer forces exist potentially in our own organism, and if we study our nature carefully we shall be able to know all the forces and the laws which govern the universe.

Hatha Yoga, again, teaches the cure of disease through breathing exercises and the regulation of diet and of the

general habits of the daily life. But it does not claim that physical health is the same as spirituality. On the contrary, it tells us that if a healthy body were a sign of spirituality, then wild animals and savages who enjoy perfect health would be exceedingly spiritual; yet they are not, as we know. The principal idea of these Yogis is that physical maladies are obstacles in the path of spiritual progress, while a healthy body furnishes one of the most favorable conditions for the realization of the highest spiritual truths in this life. Those who do not possess good health should, therefore, begin to practice Hatha Yoga.

In the practice of Hatha Yoga strict dietetic rules must be observed. Anything that is sharp, sour, pungent, or hot, like mustard, liquors, fish, flesh of animals, curd, buttermilk, oil cakes, carrots, onions, and garlic should not be eaten. Food, again, which, having been once cooked, has grown cold and been rewarmed, should be avoided; as should also excess of salt or acidity, or that which is hard to digest. Rice, barley, wheat, milk, sugar, honey, and butter are good for a Hatha Yogi's diet. The manner in which Americans live in hotels and boarding-houses, where the food is often unclean, is far from favorable to this practice. Food cooked for hundreds of people in a restaurant cannot be equally good for all and may easily cause disease.

Those who wish to enjoy perfect health must be careful about what they eat; they must also observe all the laws of hygiene regarding cleanliness of the body, fresh air, and pure water. They should not live in over-heated houses; neither should they indulge in artificial stimulants, especially beer, wine, and coffee. The habit of excessive coffee-drinking is a serious menace to the American nation. Many people are already suffering from nervous prostration as a result of indulgence in this direction, and

there are very few cases in which the nervous system will not be affected by it to some extent.

He who wishes to practice Hatha Yoga should first of all find a Hatha Yogi teacher, who has perfect control over his physical body; and having found him. he should lead a life in strict accord with his instructions. He should live in a secluded spot and where the changes of weather are neither sudden nor extreme. He should be a rigid vegetarian and abstain from all kinds of drinks that stimulate the system. He should never fill the stomach with a large quantity of food. He should observe the moral laws and practice absolute continence. He should learn to control his senses, keep his body clean, and purify his mind by arousing feelings of kindness and love towards all living creatures.

The beginner in this branch of Yoga should gradually conquer the different postures of the body and limbs. These postures are called in Sanskrit Âsana. There are altogether eighty-four of them described in the science of Hatha Yoga. Each of these, when practiced with special breathing exercises, develops certain powers latent in the nerve centers and the different organs of the system. Another object in practicing Âsana is to remove the Tamas element which causes heaviness of the body, and to free the system from the effects of cold, catarrh, phlegm, rheumatism, and many other diseases. Some of the exercises increase the action of the stomach and liver, while others regulate the activities of the other organs. Tremor of the body and restlessness of the limbs, which are such frequent obstacles in the way of gaining control over the mind, may easily be removed by the practice of Âsana.

The reader may get an idea of the Âsana from the following descriptions:

I. Sit cross-legged on the floor, placing the left foot on the right thigh and the right foot on the left thigh, and keeping the body, neck, and head in a straight line.

II. After sitting in this posture, hold the right great toe with the right hand and the left great toe with the left hand (the hands coming from behind the back and crossing each other).

III. Sit straight on a level place, firmly inserting both insteps between the thighs and the calves of the legs.

IV. Assuming posture No. I, insert the hands between the thighs and the calves, and, planting the palms firmly on the ground, lift the body above the seat.

V. Sitting on the floor, stretch the legs straight in front, hold the great toes with the hands without bending the knees.

VI. Having accomplished this posture, touch the knees with the forehead. This Âsana rouses gastric fire, makes the loins lean, and removes many diseases.

VII. Holding the toes as in posture V, keep one arm extended and with the other draw the other toe towards your ear as you would do with the string of a bow.

VIII. Plant hands firmly on the ground, support the weight of the body upon the elbows, pressing them against the sides of the loins. Then raise the feet above the ground, keeping them stiff and straight on a level with the head. This Âsana, according to Hatha Yoga, cures diseases of the stomach, spleen, and liver, and all disorders caused by an excess of wind, bile, or phlegm. It also increases the power of digestion.

IX. Lie upon the back on the floor at full length like a corpse, keeping the head on a level with the body. This Âsana removes fatigue and brings rest and calmness of mind. The student of Hatha Yoga, having perfected himself in controlling some of these postures, should next take up the breathing exercises. He should carefully study the science of breathing in all its aspects. Posture No. I is one of the easiest and best Âsanas for one who wishes to control the breath. It favors a tranquil circulation and slow respiration.

A beginner should first practice abdominal breathing through both nostrils, keeping a measured time for inspiration and expiration. Gradually he should be directed by his master to hold the breath in and out. Practicing this internal and external suspension of breath for a few weeks, he should next take up alternate breathing. He may inspire through the left nostril for four seconds and expire through the right for four seconds, then reverse the order, breathing in through the right and out through the left. The alternate breathing exercises will purify the nerves and will make the student well-fitted for higher breathing exercises. The student should then breathe in through one nostril for four seconds, hold the breath counting sixteen seconds, and breathe out through the other nostril counting eight seconds. This exercise, if practiced regularly for three months, will generate new nerve-currents and develop the healing power that is latent in the system.

The Yogi who wishes to cure organic trouble or disease of any kind, should combine the higher breathing exercises with the different postures of the body which bear direct relation to the disturbed organ. He should arouse the healing power stored up at the base of the spine and direct it to the diseased part.

Hatha Yoga describes various methods for cleansing the internal organs. Some of them are extremely beneficial to those who suffer from chronic headache, or cold in the head, catarrh, dyspepsia, or insomnia.

The drinking of cold water through the nose removes headache or chronic cold in the head. A Hatha Yogi cleanses the passage between the nose and the mouth by passing soft cords of delicate thread through the nostrils and bringing them out at the mouth. He can pass the cord through one nostril and bring it out through the other. This purifies the head, makes the sight keen, and removes disease in the parts above the shoulders.

A Hatha Yogi cleanses the alimentary canal by swallowing a long piece of fine muslin three inches wide. He purges the impurities of the intestines by drawing water through the opening at the lower extremity of the alimentary canal. This he does with the help of breathing exercises without using any instrument. Then shaking the water by the alternate exercise of the rectimuscles of the abdomen, he throws out the water through the same passage. An expert Yogi can wash the whole of the alimentary canal by drinking a large quantity of water and letting it pass through the opening at the lower extremity.

Thus he becomes free from stomach or intestinal disorder. These exercises are especially recommended for those who are flabby, phlegmatic, or corpulent.

He cures insomnia by assuming posture No. IX, at the same time taking a few deep breaths and holding them after each inspiration.

A Hatha Yogi can swallow his tongue. It is said that he who can swallow his upturned tongue is freed from old age and death, conquers sleep, hunger and thirst, and rises above time. The powers of a perfect Hatha Yogi are indeed wonderful. He can do and undo anything at his will. He is the master of all physical laws.

Thus we see that perfect health and longevity are the immediate results of the Hatha Yoga practices. To the real seeker after Absolute Truth, however, they have small value except as they become a means of attaining superconscious realization. According to him, if a man lives five hundred years and yet in that time does not reach the state of God-consciousness, he is little better than an oak tree which may outlast many generations and grow to great size, but is in the end only an oak tree. That man, on the contrary, who dies at the age of thirty, having realized his oneness with Divinity, has achieved infinitely more than he who possesses perfect health, longevity, psychic powers, or the gift of healing; for he has become a living God in this world and can point the way of salvation to all mankind. Therefore the exercises of Hatha Yoga should be practiced only so far as the earnest truth-seeker does not attain Râja Yoga, which alone will lead the soul to God-consciousness and perfect freedom.

2. Râja Yoga.

Hatha Yoga, as we have already seen, is wholly devoted to the control of the functions of the body and to the mastery of the physical forces, its ideal being a sound constitution, well-fitted to overcome those physical and environmental conditions which stand as obstacles in the path of spiritual progress. Râja Yoga, on the contrary, deals entirely with the mind and psychic power and may be called the science of applied psychology. Its aim is to remove all mental

obstructions and to gain a perfectly controlled, healthy mind. The main purpose of its training is to develop and strengthen the will as well as the power of concentration, and to lead the seeker after Truth through the path of concentration and meditation to the ultimate goal of all religion.

This path is called Râja Yoga or the Royal method (Râja means "king") because the power of concentration and will-power are not only greater than any physical force, but are essential to the acquisition of all other powers. The man who possesses a vigorous mind controlled by a well-developed will, with strong power of concentration, can easily become the master of physical nature and in a short time attain the realization of Truth; and it is the special province of Râja Yoga to teach how this can be accomplished. Its study has been encouraged by all those who have come in contact with the Râja Yogis of India either in ancient or modern times. It was extolled by Pythagoras, by Plato and the Neo-Platonists like Plotinus and Proclus, by the Gnostics and the Christian mystics of the middle ages; and even to-day it is in some measure practiced by some of the Roman Catholic monks and nuns of the higher orders. Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, spoke in praise of it, declaring its object to be the unravelling of the mystery of the nature of the human soul and the unfoldment of the latent powers existing in each individual. It has been proved by the living example of Yogis that through its practice that power can be acquired by which all other forces in the universe may be controlled; and Râja Yoga claims that whoever has gained mastery over his mind, can govern all the phenomena of nature.

It teaches that mind is the sovereign power of the universe, and that when its forces are properly concentrated upon

any particular object, the true nature of that object will be revealed. Instead of using an instrument, if we properly utilize the mental powers which we already possess, and focus them absolutely upon one point, we can easily know all the particulars regarding the thing upon which they are directed. This object may be physical, mental, or spiritual. The concentrated mind of a Yogi may be compared to an electric search-light. By throwing the converged rays of his mind toward a distant object, whether gross or subtile, all the details of that object are illumined and made known to him. The vision of ordinary persons is not so penetrating because their mental forces are dissipated like the scattered rays of an ordinary light. In the same way, if the mind can be concentrated upon internal objects or upon truths that exist in the realm of the universal, perfect knowledge of those things can be acquired.

Thus it becomes evident that the power of concentration is greater than sense-power, or than that which can be gained by the help of instruments. If we can develop it by controlling our mental faculties, by making the mind introspective, and by checking all distractions which draw the mind outside; and can direct our concentrated mental energy toward our higher Self, the true nature of the individual ego will be revealed, and we shall realize that our immutable Self is the Soul of all, and that it is the same as the ultimate Reality of the universe. We shall then perceive that the Divine Being, whom in ignorance we worship as separate from ourselves, is not far from us, is not dwelling outside of us, but is our own omnipotent Self residing within us. We shall also recognize that the same Spirit is one and all-pervading, and that it is the Absolute Truth underlying the name and form of every phenomenal object. This knowledge will emancipate the soul from the bondage of ignorance.

Râja Yoga maintains that the outer world exists only in relation to the inner nature of each individual. What mind is to itself, the phenomenal world of sense-perception is to the mind. The external is only the reflection of the internal; that which we gain, that which we receive, is only the likeness or reflection of that which we have already given. Mental phenomena are merely the effects of invisible forces, which cannot be discovered by the senses or by any instrument which the human mind can invent. We may try forever to know these finer forces through the medium of our sense-perceptions, but we shall never arrive at any satisfactory result. A Râja Yogi understands this and therefore attaches little value to instruments. He does not depend upon his sense-powers, but endeavors to gain all knowledge through the power of concentration. The science of Râja Yoga gives the various steps which lead to the attainment of this ideal. It explains clearly and scientifically the processes and methods by which concentration can be developed. It does not, however, ask the student to accept anything on hearsay, or to believe anything on the mere authority of scriptures or of writers. But it states certain facts, requests the student to experiment, experience the results, and draw his own conclusions.

There is nothing mysterious in the system of Râja Yoga. On the contrary, it points out the laws which govern so-called mysteries and explains under what conditions the phenomena of mysteries are produced. It shows that so long as the real cause of an event is unknown it appears mysterious to us. Standing upon the solid ground of logic and reason, the science of Râja Yoga unravels the riddles of the universe and directs the individual soul toward the attainment of the final end of all religions. Its principles are highly moral and uplifting. It helps the student to understand the true purpose of life and describes the way

by which it may be fulfilled here and now. Râja Yoga tells us that we should not think so much of what will happen after death, but that we should make the best use of the present and unfold the latent powers which we already possess, while it reminds us again and again of the fact that the advancement made in this life will be the foundation of future progress. If we gain or develop certain powers before we die, those powers will not be lost, but will remain with us wherever we go after death; while external possessions, we know, cannot accompany us in the grave. The only things that we can carry out of life are our character, our experience and the knowledge gained therefrom. They are our real possessions; and it is these which Râja Yoga will help us to develop; since its chief object is to mould the character and lead the student to the knowledge of the divine nature of the soul. The methods which it teaches can be practiced without joining any secret organization, but merely by following the directions of a true Râja Yogi, who is pure and simple, whose mind is free from doubts, and who is unattached to the objects of the phenomenal plane.

The practice of Râja Yoga is divided into eight steps. The first four are the same as those of Hatha Yoga. The first and second, Yama and Niyama, include all the ethical laws that govern our moral nature. The strict observance of these laws is necessary to the practice of the other steps of Râja Yoga. All the fundamental principles of ethics expounded by Buddha and all the truths proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount are contained in these first two steps. A beginner in the practice of Râja Yoga should live a strictly moral and pure life, otherwise he will not advance in this path, nor will he reach the highest Truth or realize the Divinity that dwells within him. A neophyte must remember that purity, chastity, and morality are the very corner-stones of the structure of the Science of Yoga. In the requirements of the