

YOGA FOR YAHOO'S

Asana and Pranayama The Technical Practices of Yoga.

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

1. Last week we were able to go away feeling that the back of the job had been broken. We had got rid of bad ways, bad wives, and bad weather. We are comfortably installed in the sunshine, with no one to bother us. We have nothing to do but our work.

Such being our fortunate state, we may usefully put in an hour considering our next step. Let us recall, in the first place, what we decided to be the quintessence of our task. It was to annihilate dividuality. 'Make room for me,' cries the Persian poet whose name I have forgotten,¹ the fellow Fitzgerald translated, not Omar Khayyam, 'Make room for me on that divan which has no room for twain' – a remarkable prophetic anticipation of the luxury flatlet.

We are to unite the subject and object of consciousness in the ecstasy which soon turns, as we shall find later on, into the more sublime state of indifference, and then annihilate both the party of the first part aforesaid and the party of the second part aforesaid. This evidently results in further parties – one might almost say cocktail parties – constantly increasing until we reach infinity, and annihilate that, thereby recovering our original Nothing. Yet is that identical with the original Nothing? Yes – and No! No! No! A thousand times no! For, having fulfilled all the possibilities of that original Nothing to manifest in positive terms, we have thereby killed for ever all its possibilities of mischief.

Our task being thus perfectly simple, we shall not require the assistance of a lot of lousy rishis² and sanyasis.³ We shall not apply to a crowd of moth-

eaten Arahats,⁴ of betel-chewing⁵ Bodhisattvas,⁶ for instruction. As we said in the first volume of 'The Equinox', in the first number:

'We place no reliance
On Virgin or Pigeon;
Our method is science,
Our aim is religion.'

Our common sense, guided by experience based on observation, will be sufficient.

2. We have seen that the Yogic process is implicit in every phenomenon of existence. All that we have to do is to extend it consciously to the process of thought. We have seen that thought cannot exist without continual change; all that we have to do is to prevent change occurring. All change is conditioned by time and space and other categories; any existing object must be susceptible of description by means of a system of coordinate axes.

On the 'terrace' of the Cafe des Deux Magots it was once necessary to proclaim the entire doctrine of Yoga in the fewest possible words 'with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.' St. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians, the Fourth Chapter and the Sixteenth Verse. I did so.

'Sit still. Stop thinking. Shut up. Get out!'

The first two of these instructions comprise the whole of the technique of Yoga. The last two are of a sublimity which it would be improper to expound in this present elementary stage.

The injunction 'Sit still' is intended to include the inhibition of all bodily stimuli capable of creating movement in consciousness. The injunction 'Stop thinking' is the extension of this to all mental stimuli. It is unnecessary to discuss here whether the latter can exist apart from the

beggar will not be reborn, but will instead be absorbed into the Universal Soul.

1 Jami, in his work *Salaman and Absal*. See *Works of Edward Fitzgerald* (1887), Vol 1, page 110.

2 Rishi, an inspired sage or poet. Originally, there were seven Rishis to whom the Vedas were revealed.

3 Sanyasi, also called **renunciate**: a Brahman who having attained the fourth and last stage of life as a

4 Arhat, a Buddhist who has attained Nirvana through rigorous discipline and ascetic practices.

5 Betel, an East Indian pepper plant, *Piper betle*, the leaves of which are chewed with other ingredients.

6 Bodhisattva, a person who has attained prajna, or Enlightenment, but who postpones Nirvana in order to help others to attain Enlightenment.

former. It is at least evident that many mental processes arise from physical processes; and so we shall at least be getting a certain distance along the road if we have checked the body.

3. Let me digress for a moment, and brush away one misunderstanding which is certain to occur to every Anglo-Saxon mind. About the worst inheritance of the emasculate school of mystics is the abominable confusion of thought which arises from the idea that bodily functions and appetites have some moral implications. This is a confusion of the planes. There is no true discrimination between good and evil. The only question that arises is that of convenience in respect of any proposed operation. The whole of the moral and religious lumber of the ages must be discarded for ever before attempting Yoga. You will find out only too soon what it means to do wrong; by our very thesis itself all action is wrong. Any action is only relatively right in so far as it may help us to put an end to the entire process of action.

These relatively useful actions are therefore those which make for control, or 'virtue.' They have been classified, entirely regardless of trouble and expense, in enormous volume, and with the utmost complexity; to such a point, in fact, that merely to permit oneself to study the nomenclature of the various systems can have but one result: to fuddle your brain for the rest of your incarnation.

4. I am going to try to simplify. The main headings are:

- a. Asana, usually translated 'posture,' and
- b. Pranayama, usually translated 'control of breath.'

These translations, as usual, are perfectly wrong and inadequate. The real object of Asana is control of the muscular system, conscious and unconscious, so that no messages from the body can reach the mind. Asana is concerned with the static aspect of the body. Pranayama is really the control of the dynamic aspect of the body.

There is something a little paradoxical in the situation. The object of the process of Yoga is to stop all processes, including itself. But it is not

sufficient for the Yogi to shoot himself, because to do so would be to destroy the control, and so to release the pain-producing energies. We cannot enter into a metaphysical discussion as to what it is that controls, or before we know where we are we shall be moonstruck by hypotheses about the soul.

5. Let us forget all this rubbish, and decide what is to be done. We have seen that to stop existing processes by an act of violence is merely to release the undesirable elements. If we want peace on Dartmoor, we do not open the doors of the prison. What we do is to establish routine. What is routine? Routine is rhythm. If you want to go to sleep, you get rid of irregular, unexpected noises. What is wanted is a lullaby. You watch sheep going through a gate, or voters at a polling station. When you have got used to it, the regularity of the engines of a train or steamship is soothing. What we have to do with the existing functions of the body is to make them so regular, with gradually increasing slowness, that we become unconscious of their operation.

6. Let us deal first with the question of Asana. It might be thought that nothing would be more soothing than swinging or gentle massage. In a sense, and up to a certain point, this is so. But the activity cannot be continued because fatigue supervenes, and sooner or later the body protests by going to sleep. We must, therefore, make up our minds from the start to reduce bodily rhythm to its minimum.

7. I am not quite sure whether it is philosophically defensible, whether it is logically justifiable, to assert the principles of Asana as they occur in our practice. We must break away from our sorites,⁷ turn to the empiricism of experiment, and trust that one day we may be able to work back from observed fact to a coherent metaphysic.

The point is that by sitting still, in the plain literal sense of the words, the body does

7 Sorites, a form of argument having several premises and one conclusion, capable of being resolved into a chain of syllogisms, the conclusion of each of which is a premise of the next.

ultimately respond to the adjuration of that great Mahatma, Harry Lauder,⁸ 'Stop your ticklin', Jock!'

8. When we approach the details of Asana, we are immediately confronted with the refuse-heap of Hindu pedantry. We constantly approach the traditional spiritual attitude of the late Queen Victoria. The only types of Asana which offer even the most transient interest are those of which I am not going to speak at all, because they have nothing whatever to do with the high-minded type of Yoga which I am presenting to this distinguished audience. I should blush to do otherwise. Anyhow, who wants to know about these ridiculous postures? If there is any fun in the subject at all, it is the fun of finding them out. I must admit that if you start with a problem such as that of juxtaposing the back of your head and shoulders with the back of the head and shoulders of the other person concerned,⁹ the achievement does produce a certain satisfaction. But this, I think, is mostly vanity, and it has nothing whatever to do, as I said before, with what we are trying to talk about.

9. The various postures recommended by the teachers of Yoga depend for the most part upon the Hindu anatomy for their value, and upon mystic theories concerning the therapeutic and thaumaturgic properties ascribed to various parts of the body. If, for instance, you can conquer the nerve Udana,¹⁰ you can walk on water. But who the devil wants to walk on water? Swimming is much better fun. (I bar sharks, sting-rays, cuttle-fish, electric eels and piranhas. Also trippers, bathing belles and Mr. Lansbury.¹¹) Alternatively, freeze the water and dance on it! A great deal of

Hindu endeavour seems to consist in discovering the most difficult possible way to attain the most undesirable end.

10. When you start tying yourself into a knot, you will find that some positions are much more difficult and inconvenient than others; but that is only the beginning. If you retain 'any' posture long enough, you get cramp. I forget the exact statistics, but I gather that the muscular exertion made by a man sleeping peacefully in bed is sufficient to raise fourteen elephants per hour to the stratosphere. Anyway, I remember that it is something rather difficult to believe, if only because I did not believe it myself.

11. Why then should we bother to choose a specially sacred position? Firstly, we want to be steady and easy. We want, in particular, to be able to do Pranayama in that position, if ever we reach the stage of attempting that practice. We may, therefore, formulate (roughly speaking) the conditions to be desired in the posture as follows:

1. We want to be properly balanced.
2. We want our arms free. (They are used in some Pranayama.)
3. We want our breathing apparatus as unrestrained as possible.

Now, if you will keep these points in mind, and do not get side-tracked by totally irrelevant ideas, such as to imagine that you are getting holier by adopting some attitude traditionally appropriate to a deity or holy man; and if you will refrain from the Puritan abomination that anything is good for you if it hurts you enough, you ought to be able to find out for yourself, after a few experiments, some posture which meets these conditions. I should very much rather have you do this than come to me for some mumbo-jumbo kind of authority. I am no pig-sticking pukka sahib¹² – not even from Poona¹³ – to put my hyphenated haw-haw humbug over on the B. Public.¹⁴ I would rather you did the thing 'wrong'

8 Sir Henry Lauder, known professionally as Harry Lauder, was an international Scottish entertainer, described by Sir Winston Churchill as "Scotland's greatest ever ambassador!"

9 Crowley's footnote: "In coitu, of course. –ED."

10 Udana as a 'nerve': the nearest I can find for this is that it's a "life sustaining energy of the diaphragm, the third of the five airs of Ayurvedic philosophy, the life force governing upward motion." There, it's a green aura operating from the throat to the head.

11 This is probably George Lansbury (1859 - 1940), Member of Parliament for Poplar Bow and Bromley, socialist, Christian pacifist, and newspaper editor.

12 Literally "absolute master", used by the English in India to mean "true gentleman" or "excellent fellow".

13 Poona, now Pune, in the state of Maharashtra was during Crowley's time the political center of India.

14 Crowley's footnote: "One Yeats-Brown. What are Yeats? Brown, of course, and Kennedy."

by yourselves, and learned from your errors, than get it 'right' from the teacher, and atrophied your initiative and your faculty of learning anything at all.

It is, however, perfectly right that you should have some idea of what happens when you sit down to practise.

12. Let me digress for a moment and refer to what I said in my text-book on Magick with regard to the formula IAO. This formula covers all learning. You begin with a delightful feeling as of a child with a new toy; you get bored, and you attempt to smash it. But if you are a wise child, you have had a scientific attitude towards it, and you do *not* smash it. You pass through the stage of boredom, and arise from the inferno of torture towards the stage of resurrection, when the toy has become a god, declared to you its inmost secrets, and become a living part of your life. There are no longer these crude, savage reactions of pleasure and pain. The new knowledge is assimilated.

13. So it is with Asana. The chosen posture attracts you; you purr with self-satisfaction. How clever you have been! How nicely the posture suits all conditions! You absolutely melt with maudlin good feeling. I have known pupils who have actually been betrayed into sparing a kindly thought for the Teacher! It is quite clear that there is something wrong about this. Fortunately, Time, the great healer, is on the job as usual; Time takes no week-ends off; Time does not stop to admire himself; Time keeps right on.¹⁵ Before very long, you forget all about the pleasantness of things, and it would not be at all polite to give you any idea of what you are going to think of the Teacher.

14. Perhaps the first thing you notice is that, although you have started in what is apparently the most comfortable position, there is a tendency to change that position without informing you. For example, if you are sitting in the 'god' position with your knees together, you will find in a few minutes that they have moved gently apart, without your noticing it. Freud

would doubtless inform you that this is due to an instinctive exacerbation of infantile sexual theories. I hope that no one here is going to bother me with that sort of nauseating nonsense.

15. Now it is necessary, in order to hold a position, to pay attention to it. That is to say: you are going to become conscious of your body in ways of which you are not conscious if you are engaged in some absorbing mental pursuit, or even in some purely physical activity, such as running. It sounds paradoxical at first sight, but violent exercise, so far from concentrating attention on the body, takes it away. That is because exercise has its own rhythm; and, as I said, rhythm is half-way up the ridge to Silence.

Very good, then; in the comparative stillness of the body, the student becomes aware of minute sounds which did not disturb him in his ordinary life. At least, not when his mind was occupied with matters of interest. You will begin to fidget, to itch, to cough. Possibly your breathing will begin to play tricks upon you. All these symptoms must be repressed. The process of repressing them is extremely difficult; and, like all other forms of repression, it leads to a terrific exaggeration of the phenomena which it is intended to repress.

16. There are quite a lot of little tricks familiar to most scientific people from their student days. Some of them are very significant in this connection of Yoga. For instance, in the matter of endurance, such as holding out a weight at arm's length, you can usually beat a man stronger than yourself. If you attend to your arm, you will probably tire in a minute; if you fix your mind resolutely on something else, you can go on for five minutes or ten, or even longer. It is a question of active and passive; when Asana begins to annoy you the reply is to annoy it, to match the active thought of controlling the minute muscular movement against the passive thought of easing the irritation and disturbance.

17. Now I do not believe that there are any rules for doing this that will be any use to you. There are innumerable little tricks that you might try; only it is, as in the case of the posture itself, rather better if you invent your own tricks. I will

¹⁵ Crowley's footnote: "Some Great Thinker once said: 'Time *marches* on.' What felicity of phrase!"

only mention one: roll the tongue back towards the uvula, at the same time let the eyes converge towards an imaginary point in the centre of the forehead. There are all sorts of holinesses indicated in this attitude, and innumerable precedents on the part of the most respectable divinities. Do, please, forget all this nonsense! The advantage is simply that your attention is forced to maintain the awkward position. You become aware sooner than you otherwise would of any relaxation; and you thereby show the rest of the body that it is no use trying to disturb you by its irritability.

But there are no rules. I said there weren't, and there aren't.

Only the human mind is so lazy and worthless that it is a positive instinct to try to find some dodge to escape hard work.

These tricks may help or they may hinder; it is up to you to find out which are good and which are bad, the why and the what and all the other questions. It all comes to the same thing in the end. There is only one way to still the body in the long run, and that is to keep it still. It's dogged as does it.

18. The irritations develop into extreme agony. Any attempt to alleviate this simply destroys the value of the practice. I must particularly warn the aspirant against rationalising (I *have* known people who were so hopelessly bat-witted that they rationalised). They thought: 'Ah, well, this position is not suitable for me, as I thought it was. I have made a mess of the Ibis position; now I'll have a go at the Dragon position.' But the Ibis has kept his job, and attained his divinity, by standing on one leg throughout the centuries. If you go to the Dragon he will devour you.

19. It is through the perversity of human nature that the most acute agony seems to occur when you are within a finger's breadth of full success. Remember Gallipoli!¹⁶ I am inclined to think that it may be a sort of symptom that one is near the

critical point when the anguish becomes intolerable.

You will probably ask what 'intolerable' means. I rudely answer: 'Find out!' But it may give you some idea of what is, after all, not *too* bad, when I say that in the last months of my own work it often used to take me ten minutes (at the conclusion of the practice) to straighten my left leg. I took the ankle in both hands, and eased it out a fraction of a millimetre at a time.

20. At this point the band begins to play. Quite suddenly the pain stops. An ineffable sense of relief sweeps over the Yogi – notice that I no longer call him 'student' or 'aspirant' – and he becomes aware of a very strange fact. Not only was that position giving him pain, but all other bodily sensations that he has ever experienced are in the nature of pain, and were only borne by him by the expedient of constant flitting from one to another.

He is at ease; because, for the first time in his life, he has become really unconscious of the body. Life has been one endless suffering; and now, so far as this particular Asana is concerned, the plague is abated.

I feel that I have failed to convey the full meaning of this.

The fact is that words are entirely unsuitable. The complete and joyous awakening from the lifelong and unbroken nightmare of physical discomfort is impossible to describe.

21. The results and mastery of Asana are of use not only in the course of attainment of Yoga, but in the most ordinary affairs of life. At any time when fatigued, you have only to assume your Asana, and you are completely rested. It is as if the attainment of the mastery has worn down all those possibilities of physical pain which are inherent in that particular position. The teachings of physiology are not contradictory to this hypothesis.

The conquest of Asana makes for endurance. If you keep in constant practice, you ought to find that about ten minutes in the posture will rest you as much as a good night's sleep.

¹⁶ The Gallipoli Campaign, or Battle of Gallipoli, took place in WW I in what is now Turkey between April 1915 and January 1916. Its commemoration is highly significant in Australia and New Zealand.

So much for the obstacle of the body considered as static. Let us now turn our attention to the conquest of its dynamics.

22. It is always pleasing to turn to a subject like Pranayama.

Pranayama means control of force. It is a generalised term. In the Hindu system there are quite a lot of subtle sub-strata of the various energies of the body which have all got names and properties. I do not propose to deal with the bulk of them. There are only two which have much practical importance in life. One of these is not to be communicated to the public in a rotten country like this; the other is the well-known 'control of breath.'

This simply means that you get a stop watch, and choose a cycle of breathing out and breathing in. Both operations should be made as complete as possible. The muscular system must be taxed to its utmost to assist the expansion and contraction of the lungs.

When you have got this process slow and regular, for instance, 30 seconds breathing out and 15 in, you may add a few seconds in which the breath is held, either inside or outside the lungs.

(It is said, by the way, that the operation of breathing out should last about twice as long as that of breathing in, the theory being that breathing out quickly may bring a loss of energy. I think there may be something in this.)

23. There are other practices. For instance, one can make the breathing as quick and shallow as possible. Any good practice is likely to produce its own phenomena, but in accordance with the general thesis of these lectures I think it will be obvious that the proper practice will aim at holding the breath for as long a period as possible – because that condition will represent as close an approximation to complete stillness of the physiological apparatus as may be. Of course we are not stilling it; we are doing nothing of the sort. But at least we are deluding ourselves into thinking that we are doing it, and the point is that, according to tradition, if you can hold the mind still for as much as twelve seconds you will

get one of the highest results of Yoga. It is certainly a fact that when you are doing a cycle of 20 seconds out, 10 in, and 30 holding, there is quite a long period during the holding period when the mind does tend to stop its malignant operations. By the time this cycle has become customary, you are able to recognise instinctively the arrival of the moment when you can throw yourself suddenly into the mental act of concentration. In other words, by Asana and Pranayama you have worked yourself into a position where you are free, if only for a few seconds, to attempt actual Yoga processes, which you have previously been prevented from attempting by the distracting activities of the respiratory and muscular systems.

24. And so? Yes. Pranayama may be described as nice clean fun. Before you have been doing it very long, things are pretty certain to begin to happen, though this, I regret to remark, is fun to you, but death to Yoga.

The classical physical results of Pranayama are usually divided into four stages:

1. Perspiration. This is not the ordinary perspiration which comes from violent exercise; it has peculiar properties, and I am not going to tell you what these are, because it is much better for you to perform the practices, obtain the experience, and come to me yourself with the information. In this way you will know that you have got the right thing, whereas if I were to tell you now, you would very likely imagine it.
2. Automatic rigidity: the body becomes still, as the result of a spasm. This is perfectly normal and predictable. It is customary to do it with a dog. You stick him in a bell-jar, pump in oxygen or carbonic acid or something, and the dog goes stiff. You can take him out and wave him around by a leg as if he were frozen. This is not quite the same thing, but near it.

25. Men of science are terribly handicapped in every investigation by having been trained to ignore the immeasurable. All phenomena have

subtle qualities which are at present insusceptible to any properly scientific methods of investigation. We can imitate the processes of nature in the laboratory, but the imitation is not always exactly identical with the original. For instance, Professor J. B. S. Haldane attempted some of the experiments suggested in 'The Equinox' in this matter of Pranayama, and very nearly killed himself in the process. He did not see the difference between the experiment with the dog and the phenomena which supervene as the climax of a course of gentle operation. It is the difference between the exhilaration produced by sipping Clos Vougeot '26 and the madness of swilling corn whiskey. It is the same foolishness as to think that sniffing cocaine is a more wholesome process than chewing coca leaves. Why, they exclaim, cocaine is chemically pure! Cocaine is the active principle! We certainly do not want these nasty leaves, where our sacred drug is mixed up with a lot of vegetable stuff which rather defies analysis, and which cannot possibly have any use for that reason! This automatic rigidity, or Shukshma Khumbakham, is not merely to be defined as the occurrence of physiological rigidity. That is only the grosser symptom.

26. The third stage is marked by Buchari-siddhi: 'the power of jumping about like a frog' would be a rough translation of this fascinating word. This is a very extraordinary phenomenon. You are sitting tied up on the floor, and you begin to be wafted here and there, much as dead leaves are moved by a little breeze. This does happen; you are quite normal mentally, and you can watch yourself doing it.

The natural explanation of this is that your muscles are making very quick short spasmodic jerks without your being conscious of the fact. The dog helps us again by making similar contortions. As against this, it may be argued that your mind appears to be perfectly normal. There is, however, one particular point of consciousness, the sensation of almost total loss of weight. This, by the way, may sound a little alarming to the instructed alienist. There is a similar feeling which occurs in certain types of insanity.

27. The fourth state is Levitation. The Hindus claim that 'jumping about like a frog' implies a genuine loss of weight, and that the jumping is mainly lateral because you have not perfected the process. If you were absolutely balanced, they claim that you would rise quietly into the air.

I do not know about this at all. I never saw it happen. On the other hand, I have often felt as if it were happening; and on three occasions at least comparatively reliable people have said that they saw it happening to me. I do not think it proves anything.

These practices, Asana and Pranayama, are, to a certain extent, mechanical, and to that extent it is just possible for a man of extraordinary will power, with plenty of leisure and no encumbrances, to do a good deal of the spadework of Yoga even in England. But I should advise him to stick very strictly to the purely physical preparation, and on no account to attempt the practices of concentration proper, until he is able to acquire suitable surroundings.

But do not let him imagine that in making this very exceptional indulgence I am going to advocate any slipshod ways. If he decides to do, let us say, a quarter of an hour's Asana twice daily, rising to an hour four times daily, and Pranayama in proportion, he has got to stick to this – no cocktail parties, football matches, or funerals of near relations must be allowed to interfere with the routine. The drill is the thing, the acquisition of the habit of control, much more important than any mere success in the practices themselves. I would rather you wobbled about for your appointed hour than sat still for fifty-nine minutes. The reason for this will only be apparent when we come to the consideration of advanced Yoga, a subject which may be adequately treated in a second series of four lectures. By special request only, and I sincerely hope that nothing of the sort will happen.

29. Before proposing a vote of thanks to the lecturer for his extraordinarily brilliant exposition of these most difficult subjects, I should like to add a few words on the subject of Mantra-Yoga, because this is really a branch of Pranayama, and one which it is possible to

practise quite thoroughly in this country. In Book IV., Part I., I have described it, with examples, quite fully enough. I need here only say that its constant use, day and night, without a moment's cessation, is probably as useful a method as one could find of preparing the current of thought for the assumption of a rhythmical form, and rhythm is the great cure for irregularity. Once it is established, no interference will prevent it. Its own natural tendency is to slow down, like a pendulum, until time stops, and the sequence of impressions which constitutes our intellectual apprehensions of the universe is replaced by that form of consciousness (or unconsciousness, if you prefer it, not that either would give the slightest idea of what is meant) which is without condition of any kind, and therefore represents in perfection the consummation of Yoga.

Love is the law, love under will.