

HISTORY OF YOGA

Lord Śiva is the founder of yoga, which he first taught to his wife, the goddess Pārvatī. He is also Natarāja, the lord of the dance. Yogis and dancers alike pay respect to him, for he gave humanity this two-fold knowledge so that human beings might experience the holy spirit of divinity in each and every cell of their bodies and find uniformity in diversity, impersonality in personality.

There is a beautiful story of how Lord Śiva invited Lord Viṣṇu to see his dance of destruction and creation which is called tāṇḍavanṛtya. Lord Viṣṇu was seated on Ādiśeṣa, the lord cobra. As Lord Viṣṇu was observing the movement of Lord Śiva, his body became heavy, and Ādiśeṣa was gasping for air. When the dance came to an end, his body became light. Ādiśeṣa asked Lord Viṣṇu what had made him become so heavy, and what had made him become so light. Lord Viṣṇu replied, 'I was totally absorbed in the dance of Lord Śiva and my body started vibrating, which caused heaviness. As soon as the dance was over, I came back to consciousness and became light.' Ādiśeṣa, realising the keen interest of his master in the art of dance, said, 'Sir, if the dance pleased you so much, why should I not learn dance and please you also?' And Lord Viṣṇu said to him, 'A time will come when Lord Śiva will ask you to write the *Mahābhāṣya*, the great commentary on grammar. At that time you can learn dance.' Now the author of the *Mahābhāṣya* is none other than Patañjali, who also studied dance as well as writing a treatise on medicine and the *Yoga Sūtras*. He is considered to be an incarnation of Ādiśeṣa.

In the *Purānas* we can read the story of Patañjali's birth. His mother, Gonikā, was an unmarried tapasvini and a yogini. Having gained tremendous knowledge and great wisdom, and not finding one right pupil to whom to give her knowledge, she prayed to the sun god and as an oblation took water in her hand, saying, 'This knowledge has come through you, so let me give it back to you.' At that moment she opened her eyes and saw something move in her hand. This was Patañjali. 'Pāta' means fallen; 'añjali' signifies the time of prayer. Patañjali was the name given to him by Gonikā, his mother, because of the manner of his birth. It was he who wrote the *Mahābhāṣya*, the great treatise on grammar. He also learned dance, and through dance movements came to know the various functions of the body, so he wrote a treatise on health and medicine. When he had written these two treatises, he felt that his work was still

incomplete, as he had not touched on consciousness. So he said to himself, 'Now let me speak of consciousness,' and began to write his *Yoga Sūtras*, which begin with the statement, 'Yogaḥ chittavṛtti nirodhaḥ': restraint of the movements of consciousness is yoga (*Yoga Sūtras*, I, 2).

We are all caught up in the web of lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and jealousy.

The yogi works to conquer them as recommended by Patañjali: 'Maitrī karuṇā muditā upekṣānām sukha duḥkha puṇya apuṇya viṣayaṇām bhāvanātaḥ chittaprasādanam' - to cultivate friendliness, compassion, joy, and indifference towards happiness and sorrow, virtue and vice, is conducive to mental peace (*Yoga Sūtras*, I, 33).

What is needed is a blend of bhoga-kalā and yoga-kalā. If there is only bhoga-kalā, the art is merely sensual and not uplifting, while if there is only yoga-kalā, it is too elevated and austere to be of value for society. To move, educate and inspire people, these two levels of art need to be combined and blended together so that all may live in the perfect light which illuminates the consciousness. Then there is a vivid vibrancy which enables each of us to live in the field of the soul, so that this mortal body may drink the nectar of the immortal soul and the art may become divine.

Thousands of years ago highly evolved humanists and sages created the system of yoga, a scientific method whereby one is able to develop physically, mentally, and psychologically into a more complete human being. The term 'yoga' is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuk* meaning 'union' or 'yoke'. It implies harmony and balance between all aspects of creation; the impulses and inclinations of the ever-wavering mind being brought under the discriminating yoke of the Higher Self.

Although there are many different forms of yoga practice, the most accessible method for the Western student is that form which takes the physical body as its starting point.

This is Hatha Yoga. The syllables *ha* and *tha* signify respectively the sun and the moon, the flux of positive and negative energies. Balance of these energies results in perfect health, imbalance in disease. Hatha Yoga is thus a complete system of physical maintenance, although physical exercises alone do not constitute Hatha Yoga - that would simply be gymnastics. Hatha Yoga consists of purposefully directed bodily exercises combined with the guidance of the life-force into all parts of the body - each muscle, joint, gland, and nerve fibre - making the body into a conscious and

obedient instrument. The combined action of postures with breath control will eliminate poisons and toxins and will vitalize the body, strengthening the whole nervous system. You will begin to feel energetic, yet relaxed. Free from tension, you will be able to cope more easily with the constantly increasing demands of modern living.

However, there is more to Hatha Yoga than a feeling of physical fitness. By stimulating endocrine activity (endocrine secretions being a major component in the 'manufacture' of emotions), Hatha Yoga becomes a valuable aid in the regulation and stabilization of emotion. If practised conscientiously, it will uplift your mind as well as your emotions, it will raise your consciousness, and it will bring you into harmony with the whole of nature.

Interestingly, the word 'Hatha' also translates as 'force' - that tremendous force which you can harness to help overcome many negative manifestations both around you and within you. Hatha Yoga is no self-seeking showmanship, no fanatic asceticism, torture, or fancy gymnastics. It is a scientific tool, pleasant and enjoyable, which can help you achieve balance of bodily, mental, and emotional functions.

NON VIOLENCE - AHIMSA

When man becomes steadfast in his abstention from harming others, all creatures will cease to feel enmity in his presence.

YOGA-SŪTRAS -

By this aphorism Patanjali expresses the principle of non-violence, of *ahimsa*. This is the essence of yoga, of union, of integration, and the realization that all is one. *Ahimsa* requires us to live in such a way that no other creature is harmed by our thoughts, words, or actions. Patanjali's statement speaks of energy, the high vibration of pure harmlessness, readily and instinctively perceived by all creatures.

The meaning and extent of harm caused by action towards plants, animals, and fellow humans is sadly apparent all around us. Verbal violence manifests in abusive, foul language, slander, and gossip. Yet the most elusive form of injury is through thought. Thought is less tangible, apparently fleeting. Thoughts of anger, hatred, envy, resentment, and jealousy all contain the element of harm toward others. Such projections of negative thought energy reflect on the individual's surroundings by producing reactions like antipathy and fear. Thoughts of intended harm promote the arousal of instincts for self-preservation - flight or fight - and vital energy is thus depleted.

The conscious practice of *ahimsa*, however, has wonderful results. Energy previously wasted in the three forms of attack can now be stored. Stored energy converts into power, which is cumulative, and you become a powerhouse of positivity. The high vibration of genuine harmlessness, of selflessness, compassion, and love transmits itself to all beings. A shield of absolute positivity renders aggression harmless. This is the power which conquers all.

Relax briefly and turn your attention to a place of peace within you.

MEDITATION

Tips To Help Your Balance

If balancing postures have been a source of frustration to you, the following ideas may help to correct the difficulty.

First of all, check your technique. When performing the Tree Pose, for instance, ensure that the hips are level and that the supporting foot, the tailbone, and the neck are in direct alignment. Visualize the supporting leg 'pushing' into the floor.

Inhale deeply as you raise your arms above your head, and concentrate your gaze on a spot in direct line with your eyes. The breath should be calm and even. Do not force concentration as this will impart rigidity to your body and create further imbalance.

Forcing balance on your body while in a state of emotional upheaval will also prove frustrating; in fact, it will increase the difficulty. However, if you can acknowledge your emotions and current limitations, you can begin to deal with them. Laughing at your own temporary ungainliness or at a tumble may solve the problem then and there. Worry, anger, and emotional upset are often accompanied by a feeling of constriction and of tightness around the navel and heart region. Heartfelt laughter can bring noticeable release almost instantly, re-establishing equilibrium.

Most of you have experienced situations of illness, grief, and other upsets, times when 'leaning' on another person for a while provided the support which enabled you to find your own balance — to stand on your own two feet again. By the same token, you can use a temporary support for your balancing postures. Use a prop such as a chair, the wall, or anything you can hold on to briefly for support. The mere pleasure and satisfaction of being able to do the posture will eliminate much frustration and will promote further improved balance.

You cannot, of course, lean against or hold on forever to a wall, a chair, people, ideas, institutions, or habits. Props are tools designed to help you find your own balance within your own self-reliance.

Patanjali, a great logician of ancient times, states in his treatise on the science of yoga, *The Yoga Sūtras*, that . . . meditation is the unbroken flow of thought towards the object of concentration. In other words, whatever you may concern yourself with or think

about intently, whatever you concentrate upon, you enter into, make a part of yourself, and gain knowledge thereof. Such is the law.

Thinking is a serious responsibility. Using this process consciously, remember that you determine the choice of the object of your concentration and subsequent meditation. It is unwise to underestimate the risk of persistent, haphazard thought.

A constant flow of thought towards ugliness, violence, or crime, or towards incidents and objects which arouse negative emotions such as anger or jealousy, is not likely to result in serenity and contentment. It will create fear and misery. However, to let the mind dwell on truth, beauty, and goodness will have an uplifting and wholesome effect upon your whole system. The flower meditation you have just done will illustrate this point.

In the ensuing week you may wish to contemplate on further wonders of Nature . . . on the majesty of an ancient oak tree . . . on the purity of freshly fallen snow . . . on the magnificence and serenity of a sunset over a quiet lake . . . Let your imagination take you on a peaceful walk through the forest or by the ocean. Any experience or situation which affects you peacefully and serenely is of benefit. When meditating on Nature, you identify with the nature of Nature and all her manifold aspects. You also perceive the perfect balance and harmony which prevails in Nature — despite the efforts of humankind to upset this balance.

The process of meditation is a wonderful tool to gain balance and strength in meeting the difficulties and temptations of life. It can transform your life. Take a moment to reflect on the relationship between the concentrated performance of asanas, thought discipline, meditation, and your own evolverment. Then meditate in solitude, and in quiet, peaceful surroundings. Meditate on love, tolerance, forgiveness, strength, and patience. Meditate on the perfect balance in Nature, and on the perfect balance within your own body and your own being. And one day, you may wish to go beyond body, beyond Nature . . .