

Kriya Yoga: synthesis of a personal experience

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CHAPTER I SELF-TEACHER

My spiritual search began when, spellbound in an inexplicable way when seeing people sitting in the "lotus position", I bought an introductory book to classical *Yoga*. The ability to do something significant without moving from my place and without the risks and dangers of sports, attracted me like the most perfect art, with no intrinsic limits.

A great expectation toward «certain oriental practices» rose when a schoolmate told me he possessed a detailed text about breathing exercises - *Pranayama* - adding: «these exercises can change a person inside... ». What did he mean? He could not be merely hinting to the attainment of particular conditions of relaxation and concentration; he definitely did not refer to sticking to some philosophy but to something more involving. Intuition suggested to me the attractive possibility of waking up some latent faculties.

My friend would not make up his mind about lending me the book and after some days I was no longer thinking about it. Then, a simple text diverted my sight, *Yoga in 20 lessons*, which I bought at a news-stand in a rail station.

In a corner of our school's gymnasium, during the lessons of Physical Education, after the preliminary group warm-up exercises, my teacher gave me permission to separate from my schoolmates - who were amusing themselves with some team games - and try to master some *Yoga* positions (*Asana*). [My teacher was amazed to observe how I succeeded in moving the abdominal muscles through the *Nauli* technique.]

Objectively speaking, it was no mediocre text; together with each position there was the explanation of the name that designated it, a brief note on the best mental attitude for the practice and several considerations on how each exercise stimulates particular physiological functions (important endocrine glands etc). It was clear to me that these positions were not to be seen as a simple "stretching work-out"; they were means to provide global stimulus to all the physical organs, in order to increase their vitality. The comfort perceived at the end of a session spoke in favor of the real utility of this practice.

MENTAL VOID EXERCISE

A whole chapter was devoted to the "Corpse Position" - *Savasana* - the last to be practiced.

Concerning the instructions, I think the author put in something that he had learned in other contexts.

The teaching, structured with great care, actually constituted an exercise of deep concentration. He also explained, definitely exaggerating, that in a twenty-minute interval it would provide the «mental rest of three hours of sleep».

The text did not lose its focus [as did the majority of books on similar topics that I had read, drawing complicated discourses on different forms of energy within the body - *Prana*] but, through a typically western style, it simply introduced an interesting possibility, that of «stopping all mental functions maintaining a full awareness, without falling into a state of sleepiness».

In other words, it provided the chance to put to rest the faculties of thought, in order to «recharge the whole psychophysical system with fresh energy».

I will briefly describe the exercise since it was essential to me for many reasons; thanks to it, which, then, became a daily habit, I could understand once and for all the fundamental difference between "mind" and "awareness", still crucial for my understanding of *Kriya Yoga*.

It recommended to lie down in the supine position keeping the arms extended alongside the body; the eyes are covered with a bandage to keep the light out. After having stayed still for two or three minutes, the exercise begins with the mental statement: «I am relaxed, I am calm, I am not thinking of anything»; after this, to enter what the author called «mental void» it is necessary to carry out the following unique action: that of giving the thoughts a visual form pushing them away one by one, as if «an internal hand moved them gently from the mental-screen center toward its outskirts». All the thoughts, without exceptions, must be moved aside, even the thought itself of being practicing a technique.

To correctly perform this delicate process it is first essential "to see" each thought, even if its characteristics are abstract. At least in what was my way of doing the job, one should never refuse, do away with or censor the

thoughts; what's important is to set the mental activity to a pause. Then, visualizing them as objects, shift them aside putting them in stand-by; in this way, the developing of an ulterior chain of thoughts is prevented.

After a few minutes, the following situation occurs; while a part of the being gathers in the area between the eyebrows - called *Kutastha* in *Yoga* - and enjoys a pleasant feeling of rest, another part is there, unnoticed, hiding in the outskirts of the former one. Here, a minimal mental activity, like the creation of indefinite images (all of them extremely "mild"), rises. A few minutes later, the awareness is all gathered in the eyebrows region, as if inside a "little, peaceful pond", and it remains there some more minutes. Despite the absence of thoughts, the awareness is always awake and it rejoices at an inimitable feeling of rest.

This state lasts no more than 10 or 15 minutes. The exercise is never carried on for more than 25-30 minutes altogether, from the beginning to the end. The technique inevitably ends in a "curious" way; the state of deep calm is interrupted by the feeling that the exercise has not been done yet, to which the body reacts with a wince whereas the heart beats faster. Then, the awareness that the exercise has been perfectly carried off appears.

NECESSITY OF A BROADER DISCIPLINE

As a student, I used such a practice to rest in the afternoon, between a study session and the following one; I started to love it.

What I had been experiencing during it did not leave me cold; it was interesting to observe how the mental process could be momentarily arrested and how its apparent consistence could fade away while the pure awareness, independent from the contents, would arise. The Cartesian «I think, therefore I am» gradually became «Thinking restlessly caused the risk for me of living without even realizing that I existed; instead of that, this consciousness rose as soon as I learned to think in a calm and orderly way».

Crucial was the moment when I experienced how to extend this technique's essential dynamics to practical life, applying the same discipline to the thoughts during the idle moments. The purpose was not actually to rest but to merge myself into that particular state above the mind, which was revealing itself as my truest essence.

While proceeding with it, I realized the negative effect that an undisciplined mind is able to exert upon the experiences of life. In my observations I was not conditioned by the belonging to such or such philosophical system.

I tried to comprehend the causes of so many human failures, particularly of those that did not seem inevitable at all.

The most important realization was that the mind, almost always hyperactive and chaotic, used up every source of vitality weaving a net of useless thoughts, a suffocating coat around the awareness and around life itself. Such a danger made it difficult to get an authentic and healthy relationship with all the beautiful experiences in life, along with those that can create an inner growth.

I was determined to create a mental discipline to put this situation to an end and to renew the internal strength, leaving behind the wrong habit of thinking disorderly. I wanted to avoid getting lost among different emotive forces, which alternately showed up in the awareness like different personalities.

Extending that exercise to life and practicing it during my time off, or even while I was studying, a peculiar and challenging mood was produced.

My state of mind would frequently produce an almost unbearable anxiety, even anguish at times. My life itself appeared to be emerging like an island from an ocean of sorrow.

This rather simple action of ceasing temporarily every thought was conceived as an act of total renouncement; the usual way of living was turned down, as if entering a sort of "internal death", a devastating "void".

Now I understand that all I had to do was to remain calm, cross this layer of negative emotion and go ahead; instead, I was deliberately cultivating small and useless, newer thoughts to flee from that sorrowful abyss that I indistinctly perceived underneath my psyche. The instinct was to keep feeding myself with countless, evanescent and small emotions; I hung onto them as if they were the only warmth able to spark my existence with meaning and to really protect it from any unpleasant revelation.

It was clear that the continuous nurturing of thoughts and consequent emotions was eating away at the possibility of experiencing authentic feelings. I could not carry on estranging me from myself because - now I am fully aware of it - I would not have succeeded in stabilizing any wholesome reality; on the contrary, I would have just caused the total

exhaustion of my energies and, eventually, I would have been completely trapped in a real pathological emptiness, something that I wanted to keep away from.

In this difficult moment, something came to my aid, infusing me with courage and determination not to give up; it was something that I found in my own culture, something that was not oriental but typically western.

The concepts of Reincarnation, *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Maya* and the like, never helped me in the great turning points of my life. It was not actually possible to solve any deep problem by sticking *ipso facto* to the oriental ways of thinking, simply grasped by reading some related books.

In that part of my life, Mahler's Symphony No.2 "*Resurrection*" almost instinctively attracted me. In the quietude of my room I would listen to it and try to penetrate its meaning by reading everything that I could find about it.

A continuous listening to this symphony, over and over, made it sound in my memory all day long while I was studying or doing other things. It would grow, it would amplify during the moments of quietude, expanding some elated states of my mind to turn them into a bliss that, despite the dismay of reason, gave me a temporary solace.

The words «Sterben werd ich, um zu leben!» - I will die so that I can live! - written by Mahler himself and sung by a choir in the last symphonic movement, were a clear echo to my project; that music and those words became a thread around which my thought crystallized, while the charm of the whole work sharply restored a vision of childish beauty. Mahler caressed with his sensitivity - to my perception without definitely believing in it - a "religious" solution.

In the final words «Was du geschlagen, zu Gott wird es dich tragen!» - what you have earned yourself, will lead you to God! - it seemed to me that he had meant: «a final immersion in the Light will be your final prize for the battle you incessantly kept on fighting».

While dealing with the unreasonable darkness that seemed to lie at the foundation of my existence, the inability of accepting the relief of religion led me to repeating inside « I will die so that I can live! ».

I was determined to refuse the "comfort" of thoughts, the "dim lights" of a mind flickering in the night of insecurity; I wanted to bring to an end everything that was not true, I wanted to cross with wide-open eyes a vast land of woe and meet the unmistakable truth, no matter what it was.

Obscurely, I realized that I also had to die to myself and that this was the greatest and noblest thing that I could do; I had to die to any attachment to mental life, of which I felt the potential danger and which proved to be a real poison to some people.

In that period as well, I lived in something sentimentally difficult. Problems never come alone: mental and affective lives are interdependent. What remained unsolved - toward which my emotionalism pushed me to make only destructive steps - was offered to a kind of internal altar: my usual daily rite - as necessary as the air - of listening to classical music.

I loved Beethoven also; studies on his life, in particular, were nourishment for my soul.

The tragedy of being deaf hit him at his creative peak. He reacted in a most honourable manner, deciding to carry on his artistic path in spite of his condition. The awful impact of his stout decision can be found in the *Heiligstadt Testament*.

He molded an incomparable music from the depths of his self, for his brothers and for the whole humanity.

My religion was the sublime speaking to me through his music.

It represented a calm climbing over the limits of real life and it appeased my longing.

Never would I think that *Yoga* could also drive me to such an ideal dimension: its discipline seemed fit just to cross the wall of thoughts, which were sucking up my vital energy.

It was also not difficult to guess that - by the time an aesthetical stimulus came - *Yoga* could grant me a lasting base of clarity, thus helping me maintain its beautiful atmosphere during the night fed by the darkish sap of my fears.

According to my sensitivity, a very good mental strength could be achieved by extending my discipline to the whole system of *Hatha Yoga*.

This idea filled my grey mood with a faint hope.

For some weeks, more than half an hour a day flew by through a pleasant training.

A book drew my attention upon the bright power of *Pranayama*; my physical exercises were the best preparation for it!

A sudden blaze put silence and stillness into my being; the first hints about *Pranayama* I had been given by that friend of mine stirred the shining intuition that through this discipline I could learn the secret of «dying to myself».

Some prudential remarks in the book - instead of smothering my enthusiasm and guide me to an extreme carefulness - turned on an enormous will to practice it intensively.

I read that «if this *Pranayama* is practiced in an exaggerated way, it will quake the bases of a normal way of living». This warning, brought my interest to exasperation, since all I was trying to achieve was that the things within me set in to change. I needed some "explosive mixture" to win the internal resistances; an authentic inner earthquake was to be preferred to the current stagnation.

The decision to begin the practice of *Pranayama* changed the course of my life. I planted its practice like a seed in the desolation of my soul and it grew into a limitless joy and an internal freedom.

A quotation from the *Bhagavad Gita* says: «*Yoga* is liberation from the contact with pain and misfortune. [He that practices] knows the eternal joy, that which is beyond the edge of our senses and cannot be held by the reason.»

Recalling my friend's words, which once had stirred my interest in *Pranayama*, I can say that this discipline implied much more than a vague internal change; it grasped my hope and brought it forward.

CHAPTER II PRANAYAMA

Now, I will carefully delineate how I practiced *Pranayama*, introducing the topic with some theoretic explanations. May the reader forgive me if this implies a change in the nature of my narration.

THEORY OF CLASSIC PRANAYAMA

It is not difficult a task to understand that the breathing exercises are not aimed to train the chest muscles, to strengthen the diaphragm or to create some peculiar conditions of blood oxygenation; they are to act on the energy - *Prana* - present in our psychophysical system.

During such practice, one should try to perceive the flows of energy through some subtle channels called *Nadi*. The principal *Nadis* are *Ida*, which flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column and is said to be of female nature, and *Pingala* - of masculine nature - which flows parallel to the former one.

Sushumna flows in the middle, beyond the duality inherent to the two preceding *Nadis*.

It is not difficult to imagine that the *Nadis*, just like the water-conducting pipes in the houses, might be "rusty", "dirty", "obstructed", and that this fact is linked with the decrease of vitality in our body. The amount of "dirtiness" in the *Nadis* can be related to disharmony and conflicts inside of our disposition; thus, cleaning these channels through *Pranayama* techniques brings on a transformation in our personality.

There are moments of the day in which we feel more exteriorised, others in which we are more interiorised; in a healthy person this alternation is characterized by a balance between a life of positive relationships and a serene contact with his own depths. Unfortunately, a lot of people lack such a harmony. The too introvert person starts to actually lose contact with the external reality, to the point that this will exert, as a reaction, an excessive influence that will inevitably destroy his internal peace; the too

extrovert person will soon provoke the coming up of all those symptoms commonly regarded as the beginning of a neurotic state.

Through the practice of *Pranayama*, specifically the alternate-nostrils variety, these two opposite tendencies are, at least temporarily, balanced.

As a result, a practitioner develops a greater emotional awareness, a more precise evaluating criteria and a wider range of abilities to elaborate information, i.e. greater operative intelligence. A more calibrated, intense, precise and clearer logical process will rise from a more efficient synergy between thoughts and emotions. In this way, intuition can flow freely in order to face the moments of life for which important decisions are expected to be made.

Of course, common sense suggests that *Pranayama* is not a trick to solve automatically people's psychological and existential problems. When the practice is set in, all the possible inner strength must be employed to achieve a better way of "living". Therefore, all the necessary measures should be considered, in order to challenge the internal barriers; only in this way will *Pranayama* support a stable inner renovation.

When the first good effects begin to be felt, the *yogi* is encouraged to keep on practicing and goes deeper and deeper into it, looking for "something more." This "something" is the *Sushumna* current, which begins to flow, creating an experience of joy, happiness, and elation. Here, the "mystic" venture begins; the practitioner might have no idea of what this experience means, and yet it would happen to him.

Of course, nothing that I mentioned is scientifically verifiable; as far as I am concerned, I decided to verify all these hypotheses. Through a serious practice, I wanted to see by myself if *Pranayama* was really endowed with such a strong potentiality.

I began to practice the following routine in an "absolute" way, with a steadfast concentration, nearly as if it had been my only reason of life. I remember with nostalgia this intensity, especially when, for some reasons, I lack the initial spontaneity.

BASIC ROUTINE

a...*Nadi Sodhana*

It is important to clean his nostrils before beginning the exercise, so that the breath can flow smoothly. This can be commonly done using water or inhaling eucalyptus essence and blowing the nose.

In some cases, there are complaints that one of the nostrils is permanently obstructed; that is a problem of medical solution. If the obstruction is caused by a severe cold, no *Pranayama* exercise should be practiced.

To begin this exercise, the mouth must be closed; the right nostril must be kept closed by the right thumb and air is slowly, uniformly and deeply inhaled through the left nostril. The inhalation lasts from six to ten seconds. It is important not to overdo it to the point of uneasiness.

After having inhaled through the left nostril, a *yogi* closes the left nostril with the right little finger and the ring finger; then he exhales through the right nostril with the same slow, uniform and deep rhythm.

At this point, the nostrils exchange their role; keeping the left nostril closed, air is slowly, uniformly and deeply inhaled through the right nostril. Then, closing the right nostril with the thumb the exhalation is made through the left nostril, once again slowly, uniformly and deeply.

This corresponds to a cycle: in the beginning, six cycles can be made; later, twelve of them.

A *yogi* can use a mental count to make sure the time is the same for both the inhalation and the exhalation. A short pause, amounting to a mental count of three, is possible after each inhalation. The nostrils can be closed with the fingers in different ways; the choice depends on the practitioner only.

[Note: a tradition suggests that the exhalation should last twice the time necessary for the inhalation and the pause after the inhalation should be four times as long. I have never applied such advice, finding it unnatural.]

b...Ujjayi

The technique consists in deeply breathing in and out through both the nostrils, producing a sound in the throat. During the exhalation the noise is not as loud as during the inhalation. After a few days' practice, the respiratory action is lengthened without effort. This exercise is normally practiced twelve times.

[A mental count makes sure that the inhalation and the exhalation have the same duration. It does good to focus not only on the process itself, but on the comfort and the induced calmness as well; in this way, our concentration becomes deeper.]

c...Bandha

The neck and the throat are slightly contracted, while the chin tilts down toward the breast (*Jalandhara Bandha*). The abdominal muscles are slightly contracted to intensify the perception of energy inside the spinal column (*Uddiyana Bandha*). The perineal muscles - between the anus and the genital organs - are contracted in an attempt to lift the abdominal muscles in vertical way, while pressing back the inferior part of the abdomen (*Mula Bandha*).

The three *Bandhas* are applied simultaneously and held out for about four seconds to produce a vibration of the body; this is repeated 3 times.

In time, a sensation of energetic current sliding up along the spinal column - an almost ecstatic internal shiver - will be perceived.

[These "contractions" bring the energy into the spinal column; in *Kriya Yoga* they are to be found in *Maha Mudra*].

d...Final state

With a deep relaxation attitude, the attention is intensely focused on the *Kutastha* - the point between the eyebrows - for at least five minutes.

I practiced this routine in the morning and in the evening with an empty stomach. It was usually preceded by some stretching exercises; also by some simple *Asana* when I had more time. I practiced the *Pranayama* session from the half-lotus position, sitting on the edge of a pillow and keeping my back straight.

Sometimes, in the first sunny days after the winter, when the skies were crystalline and as blue as they had never been, I sat in the open air.

I would contemplate what was around; if in a bushy and ivy-covered ditch the sun shed its light upon some flowers, which a month before were blooming during the cold winter days and in that moment they were still lingering on, regardless of the mildest days, that spell-binding glory would inspire me.

In that beautiful countryside, I concentrated on applying the instructions correctly; later on, the beauty of the alternate feelings of coolness and warmth, produced by the air on the hand I used to open and close the nostrils, captured me; then the pressure, the smooth flowing of the breath... Becoming aware of each peculiarity of the exercise helped me maintain a vigil attention without getting stressed out. In this way the practice turned out to be very pleasant.

KRIYA PRANAYAMA FROM BOOKS

It was during those months that, after having bought the works of *Ramakrishna* and *Vivekananda* and a beautiful book with comments to *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* – the ancient work, fundamental to understand the foundations of *Yoga*, especially *Pranayama* – I finally decided to buy the autobiography of an Indian saint, a book I had already seen some years before without buying it.

I was fond only of practical manuals but then I thought I might find out useful information, such as the addresses of some good schools of *Yoga*. The author whom I will indicate by P.Y. [see the note at the end of the chapter] was an expert of that kind of *Pranayama*, which was first taught by Lahiri Mahasaya and called *Kriya Yoga*.

He wrote that this technique could be mastered by gradually practicing four stages of it: this sparked my curiosity; I loved *Pranayama*, and just the idea of improving it sounded amazingly wondrous.

If the techniques I had already practiced gave me such incomparable results, it was obvious that that four-stage system would make them greater and greater; Lahiri Mahasaya was described as the incarnation of *Yoga*: this led me to think that there must have been something unique in his "way"!

On one side, I went on reading all the books I could find written by this Master [a few of them were in Italian, some in English]; on the other side I began to explore as much literature as I could find about *Yoga*.

Reading P.Y., I was amazed by a personality with unequalled will and an unexpected practical spirit. Studying his writings would not excite me when he spoke on a purely devotional tone, but it did whenever he assumed a more technical tone, making it possible for me to get at some aspects of the subtle art of *Kriya* - I considered it an art in continuous refinement, instead of a religious engagement.

I was impressed by the strength with which the author highlighted the evolutionary value of *Pranayama*, not just including a man's spiritual side but his physical and mental sides too.

He explained that if we compare the human spinal column to a ferromagnetic substance constituted, as taught by Physics, of elementary magnets that turn toward the same direction when they are overlapped by a magnetic field, then, the action of *Pranayama* is akin to this process of magnetization. It was implicit, during this practice, to concentrate on the inner energy and make it rotate, somehow, around the *Chakras*.

By uniformly redirecting all the "subtle" parts of our spinal cord's physical and astral essence, *Pranayama* would burn the so-called "bad seeds" of *Karma*.

[It is good to remember that the concepts of Reincarnation and *Karma* are the bases of the Indian thought and of Lahiri Mahasaya himself; that is why it is worth speaking freely of it, even if *Kriya* is a practice that can be experimented without necessarily having to accept any creeds. It is important to underline this last fact whenever we stick to the common belief that a person inherits a baggage of latent tendencies from his previous lives and that, sooner or later, these tendencies are to come out in actual life. According to this belief, *Pranayama* burns out the effects of the "bad seeds" just before they become manifest in our lives.

It is further explained that those people who are instinctively attracted by methods of spiritual development such as *Kriya*, have already practiced something similar in a "precedent incarnation". This is because such an action is never in vain and in the actual life they get back to it exactly where, in a remote past, they quit it.]

Now, my compelling problem was whether I had to leave or not for India and look for a Teacher who would give me all the clarifications about *Kriya*. At that time, planning to get through very soon with my university studies, I excluded a journey in the near future.

I rather chose to remain here and try to improve my *Pranayama*, using all the books I could find about *Yoga*, no matter what language they would be written in.

The question was, how could I transform my practice so that it could have the power to move and rotate the inner energy around the *Chakras*?

If this had to be - as stated by P.Y. - a universal process, there was no doubt that I would find traces of it through other sources and perhaps I would be able to discern the whole system of *Kriya* in its subtle four phases.

There was something locked in a corner of my memory which became alive again. When I was a child, I used to read everything I came on to, especially books censored by the Church or considered strongly unsuited for my age anyway; I was proud to practice a total freedom of choice and I was not open to any advice. I wasted a lot of time on poor readings. In that great heap of books it was impossible to distinguish in advance between the valuable ones and the many other ones which, through tantalizing titles, contained but tall stories, impossible chimeras aimed at stunning people. In the end I felt I had travelled through an indistinct chaos. I had the bitter feeling that the most precious secrets were still hidden in some other esoteric books, which I was not lucky enough to find.

Now, I vaguely remembered seeing some drawings, somewhere, sketching out the profile of a person and the different circuits of energetic movement through his body. The idea came to seek the needed information in the esoteric books rather than in the classic books on *Yoga*.

I started going to a resale of used books; it was very well furnished, probably because it had once been the Theosophical Society's reference bookstore. I turned down the texts dealing only with philosophical topics, while, in ecstasy and not concerned by the time, I kept on skimming through the books which clearly illustrated practical exercises.

Before purchasing a book I made sure it hinted at the possibility of driving the energy along certain internal channels, of creating a distinct action on the *Kundalini* energy and of arousing it.

Since my first visit, I had been very lucky; while reading the index of a text in three volumes, introducing the esoteric thought of a famous

Brotherhood, I was attracted by the title *Breathing exercise for the awakening of Kundalini*.

Of the more than one thousand pages, only two or three of them were worth reading. They contained a variation of *Nadi Sodhana*; this was, according to the authors, the secret to wake the mysterious energy!

I'll try to reconstruct the technique by sheer memory, being no longer practicing it. During the inhalation through the left nostril, an energetic current is imagined coming in through the nose and down to the base of the spinal column. The sacred syllable *Om* is to be pronounced three times, thereby visualizing and striking the *Muladhar Chakra*.

Then, exhaling, a current starting from the *Muladhar* and going up into the body, and particularly into the spine, is to be felt.

Some notes warned not to exaggerate with the exercise, because of the risk of a premature *Kundalini's* awakening. This was to be avoided by all means.

Definitely, this was not P.Y.'s *Kriya* because, according to several clues, *Kriya* was not to be done through the alternate-nostril breathing.

So, I went on haunting the bookstore; the owner was very nice with me and I felt almost obliged, also considering the cheap price and the perfect conditions of those second-hand books, to buy at least a book per each visit. But sometimes I got very disappointed; a lot of space was usually reserved to theories alien from concrete life, which tried to describe what cannot be seen and what cannot be experienced, the astral worlds, the subtle coverings of energy wrapping our body, whereas precise practical instructions were put in an appendix.

Among these theories, some had hypnotic names but they were only visualization exercises; through them, practitioners hoped to materialize their desires and projects.

One day, after a tiresome selection, I went to the storekeeper holding a book in my hand; he must have realized that I was not convinced about buying it; so, while deciding the price, he remembered something that might interest me.

He led me to the rear, inviting me to rummage in a messy heap of notes within a carton box. Among a consistent quantity of miscellaneous material (complete series of the theosophical magazine issues, scattered notes from an old course of hypnosis, etc.) I came on a booklet, written in German by a certain K. Spiesberger, which illustrated some *Mantras* and

some esoteric techniques. In the beginning I ran onto the *Kundalini-breathing*.

I did not have much familiarity with the German language, but I immediately realized the extraordinary importance of that technique; I would undoubtedly decipher all of it at home, with the help of a good dictionary.

[I cannot help smiling when some half-hearted people insist that they are fond of *Kriya*, yet they will not study some crucial texts in English because they are afraid to misinterpret them. I am convinced that their interest is superficial and rather emotive. Such was my enthusiasm, that I would have studied Sanskrit or Chinese or any other language, if that had given me the chance to understand an essential text on *Pranayama*!

The description of the *Kundalini Breathing* still amazes me; the author, in fact, was not as close to Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* as to the version that P.Y. brought west. During a deep inhalation, the air was to be imagined flowing up the spinal column, abandoning its habitual course; the visualization of this as an empty tube was therefore prescribed and, inhaling, the air was to be imagined streaming along it from its base all the way up to the area between the eyebrows; then, exhaling, the air had to go down back to the base, along the same route.]

In another book, in English, there was an exhaustive description of the *Magic breath* - more or less the same exercise.

[In it, the difference was in feeling the energy "around" the backbone, not inside of it, following an elliptic path. Through the inhalation, the energy had to go up behind the spinal column, to the center of the head; exhaling, it had to go down along the front part of the body, just as in the "Microcosmic Orbit" technique which is described in the Internal Alchemy texts - the mystic tradition of ancient China.]

I forgot about the other material. The smirk of satisfaction I wore before the storekeeper, as if I had found a treasure of unfathomable value, definitely caused an increase of their price.

Walking home, I could not help skimming through the pages; I was curious about some rough drawings illustrating techniques which were based on the movement of energy.

Something that I had read, on the value of the *Magic breath*, filled me with much higher enthusiasm; that was one of the most hidden secrets in the

esoteric schools of all times. If practiced constantly, accompanied by the strength of visualization, it would produce a sort of internal substance allowing for the spiritual eye's vision.

Studying closely these two techniques at home, I convinced myself that the *Magic breath* technique must have surely been Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*, while the *Kundalini Breathing* was a variation of it. I just practiced it for some months.

I was in seventh heaven, because the practice began to give me some extremely beautiful moments; I felt as if my perception of things had changed. Looking around, at the leaves and at some flowers, I tried to enjoy the warmth of the most intense colours, as if they had reflected my inner radiance.

The practice of *Yoga* was gradually coming into my life as an integration. More and more often I had the chance to notice a change in my mind's global functioning – memory, concentration, etc. I could especially see this during my exams. A few minutes before an examination, a little bit of *Pranayama* would endow me with a sudden calm and self-possession, no matter what the questions and the examiner's attitude were.

I would not feel nervous at all. I was able to maintain the necessary self-control to master my speech, often succeeding in expressing clearly not only what I knew, but also something more, which just then seemed to become evident for the first time.

With this experience, a new era began. In the meantime, spring returned and, with it, the habit to practise, especially towards sunset, in the open country.

At the end of the practice, moving my sight around, a landscape might appear among the leaves: a group of distant houses surrounding a bell-tower. I would close my eyes and rely on an inner radiance. I was merged in ecstasy!

Through that "light" I could easily cross the wall of my psychological life.

I recall how, during one quiet afternoon amid some trees, just before sunset, the words of a book, a philosophical comment to some *Upanishads*, came up my mind and I started to repeat them: «Thou are that».

I do not know if my intuition grasped the incommensurable implication of that statement, but yes... I was that light filtering through the leaves, which were of an unbelievably delicate green because spring had spread them all out.

Back home, I did not even try to put down the numerous "moments of grace" I experienced on paper - I would not have been able to do it. My only wish was to go further and further into this new inner experience.

EXPERIENCE IN THE SPINE

One night, something new and radically different from what I had experienced before came about.

This is a kind of "intimate" event. Nonetheless, to share the experience of *Kriya* through a book, I need to talk accurately about things that cannot be considered a vague spiritual phenomenon but a well-defined outcome, reached through the practice of *Pranayama*.

There is no doubt to me that the routine, in the way it was conceived - with a deep *Ujjayi*, an intense practice of the *Bandhas* and an almost ardent concentration on the *Kutastha* - produced it.

Many readers will recognize their own experience in the following description.

One night, absorbed by the reading, I had a shiver similar to an electric current that spread itself in my whole body. The experience was not particularly special, however a thought flashed upon my mind announcing the coming of a deeper experience.

Minutes passed by, but I was not able to go on with the reading; I perceived that my restlessness turned into anxiety, and then it became fear, an intense fear of something unknown to me, threatening my existence.

I definitely never experienced such a terror.

Normally, in moments of danger, I would remain paralysed, unable to think. But now the anxiety was of a different quality; it was a scare of something alien to the common experience, something absolutely unpredictable.

While my mind could not help envisioning the worst hypotheses about what was going to happen, I felt the urgency to do something, even though I did not know what. I set myself in the position of meditation and waited.

I was sure I was close to madness – or to death. A part of me, maybe the totality of that entity I call "myself", seemed at the point of melting away; the worst thoughts hung over me without a clear reason.

In those days I had finished Gopi Krishna's *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks).

Here the author described the splendid awakening experience he had had following an intense practice of concentration on the seventh *Chakra*, whereas – because his body was probably unprepared – he later met serious physical and, as a reflex, psychic problems as well.

According to his description, inside of his body, energy was put in constant motion from the base of the backbone toward the brain. So strong was that energy to force him in bed and to prevent the accomplishment of the normal bodily functions. He literally felt as if he was burned by an inner fire, which he could not put out.

Weeks later, he intuitively discovered the way to check out the phenomenon, which became a stout experience of internal realization.

As far as I am concerned, I was afraid to have come to the threshold of the same experience but since I did not live in India I was scared the people surrounding me might not understand; the experience would have been terrible! Nobody could make sure that, as it happened to Gopi Krishna, my experience would be channelled toward a positive upshot.

During those moments, the spiritual world appeared to me as a sorrowful and horrible nightmare, able to annihilate and destroy him that had imprudently approached it. Ordinary life, on the contrary, seemed to me the dearest, healthier reality. I was afraid I might not be able to get back to that condition anymore. I was absolutely convinced that a mental illness was tearing to pieces my inner being and the reason was that I had opened a door looking out on the infinity, being this far more immense than I had ever foreseen.

I decided to take a break and to put off the fatal moment as long as possible. I was not in the mood to remain in the meditation position. I felt I had to set myself up and get out of the room into the open air. It was night and there was nobody to share a word with!

At the center of the yard I was burdened, choked, almost crushed by a feeling of desperation, envying all those people who had never practiced *Yoga*, feeling guilty and ashamed for hurting through harsh words a friend who had been involved in a part of my search.

He, like so many others, gave up his practice and only bothered about working and enjoying life. Equipped with a juvenile boldness, I had addressed to him some words not affectionate at all, which then started to thunder inside of my head; I felt sorry I had thrown unjustified cruelty at him without really knowing what was in his mind and soul.

At that time, I would have done anything to tell him how sorry I was, because I felt I had brutally violated his right to live the way it was best to him; he simply wanted to pursue mental health rather than become unstable or insane through those practices.

Because of my great passion for classical music, I thought that listening to it might yield a positive effect, maybe a protection from anguish, maybe a help to get back. Why not try, then?

It has been Beethoven's music - his *Concert for Violin and Orchestra* - that calmed me and, after half an hour, eased my sleep.

The following morning I woke up with the same fear in my mind. Nevertheless, I had a whole day before me and the sunlight was shining through the window. I would amuse myself hanging out with other people. I went out and met some friends. I did not let out the things I was experiencing; I spent the afternoon cracking all sort of jokes and behaving like the people I had always considered lazy and dull; I was trying to hide my anguish away.

The first day went by - my mind was very worn out; after two days, nevertheless, the fear diminished and I finally felt safe.

Something had changed anyway, and I actually did not succeed in thinking about the spiritual path.

I went around that idea! The exercises of *Yoga* caused me to feel both sick and scared. The notion itself of "Divine" gave me a feeling of horror!

A week later, I began, calmly and detachedly, to ponder on the meaning of what had happened; I understood the nature of my reaction to that episode.

I had cowardly ignored the experience I had pursued for so long a time!

The dignity in the depth of my soul was leading me to continue my search, exactly from the point where I had quitted. I was ready to accept all that

was to happen and to let things follow their course, even if this process implied the loss of my wholesomeness.

I began to practice *Pranayama* again, pursuing what I had not been able to accept previously; but this time I had the determination not to flee from it.

A few days went by without detecting any form of fear. Then, I experienced something awfully beautiful: I took part in a phenomenon which, from that time on, would re-happen several times.

It was night. I was relaxed in *Savasana* when I had a pleasant sensation, as if an electric wind was blowing in the external part of my body propagating itself, quickly and with a wavy motion, from my feet up to my head. My body was so tired that I could not move, even though my mind had imparted this order.

The tranquillity in my mind was so deep that I did not have any fear. I was absolutely able to maintain the totality of my being composed and serene.

Consequently, the electric wind was replaced by another feeling, comparable to an enormous strength filling into the backbone and quickly climbing up to the brain.

That experience was characterized by an indescribable and so far unknown sense of bliss; the perception of an intense brightness accompanied everything. My memory is condensed in one expression, «a clear and euphoric certainty of existing, like an unlimited ocean of awareness and beatitude ».

In the work *God Exists. I have met Him* (London 1970) by A. Frossard, the author tries to give an idea of his spiritual experience. For that purpose he creates the concept of "inverse avalanche".

The avalanche is something collapsing, running downhill, first slowly, then faster and violently at the same time. Frossard suggests that we imagine an "upside-down avalanche" which begins strengthening at the foot of the mountain and climbs up pushed by an increasing power; then, suddenly, it leaps up toward the sky.

I do not know how long this experience lasted; its peak definitely held out only a few seconds, after which I left everything behind to just fall into a calm and uninterrupted sleep.

Strangely, the following day, when I woke up, I did not think of it; it only came up some hours later, when I was in the open air.

I was caught by the beauty of that experience and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, for many minutes I was literally enthralled by its memory and by its reverberation in my soul.

The thought tried to gain confidence - impossible task - with an experience which was beyond it.

All the things I had thought about *Yoga* until then did not have any importance at all. To me, the experience was like being stricken by a lightning. I did not even have the chance to find out which parts of me were still there and which ones had disappeared forever; I was not able to really understand what had happened to me, rather I was not sure that "something" had really happened.

Beautiful days went by. Then, gradually, a certainty of eternity, a condition stretching out way over the limits of my awareness - a sort of memory hiding in the recesses of my awareness - began to appear before my eyes, as if a new area of my brain was stirred to a full awakening.

I had discovered something which belonged to me, and sooner or later I would master it and bring it up beyond any borders!

Later on, I could witness it again a lot of times. Devoting myself to study up late, only granting myself short resting breaks every now and then, at the moment I laid down exhausted, this would invariably take place in a few minutes and the rush of the energy would occur many times. In the following years I had a lot of opportunities to verify that there were some things in common among those people who had the same experience: firstly, a practice of some form of meditation characterized by a deep concentration in the *Kutastha*; secondly, the presence of a painstaking determination toward what is considered a spiritual destination; finally, a very intense mental job, which would not give up to the natural tendency to fall asleep.

This event guaranteed both the correctness of my practice and a strong yearning for the spiritual goal.

It was necessary that the practice ended with a very intense concentration on the *Kutastha*, almost desperately craving for the experience of the Spirit, as if my life depended on this event. It was to be desired like – using an expression I had found in some oriental texts – «one who is drowning desires to breathe».

I noticed that the awakening would only happen when this great tension was off. The awareness had to be placed first in the most favourable

condition, an intermediary dimension between a state of sleep and a state of vigilance. Sometimes, a few instants before emerging, a wondrous, unreal landscape appeared to my inner vision.

I made the mistake to try to pass onto others my discoveries and to tell about my experience. I spoke so much as to generate a violent reaction. Let us put aside the allegation of madness and of serious mental trouble that some murmured about, almost to avoid the task of listening attentively to me. To them not only was I the victim of an illusion, but also I was unable to love, to respect and to show human sympathy toward others.

The conflict burst out because of my persistence. By that time, it seemed to me so easy to wise them up, to set them free from the mental and emotional prison cell in which I assumed they were living.

To me, human misery consisted entirely in one thing, the tyranny of thought. Therefore I tried to make them aware of something which was like a screen - made of useless thoughts and restless emotions - stopping the immense spiritual experience of boundless joy which was really just behind the anguish and agony of their existence.

I was too convinced that the *Pranayama* had the power to jump over those obstacles and make one to experience the blossoming out of pure, eternal joy! That was, to me, the secret of life - undoubtedly "too simple and bare" according to them!

Only one friend, a "Hippie" [we were in the '70s], showed me some empathy; the only inappropriate thing to him was my zeal in the discipline. All the other people kept harassing me rather bitterly.

There came a period of my life in which I felt so disoriented, wondering what was the meaning of the word "friendship" to me. I began suspecting that I was actually taking advantage of a friendship to just discuss my theories. I had to give up and admit that the ability of expressing true love belonged to others, not to me.

It seemed to me I saw people as through a transparency. Their way of acting and expressing themselves appeared to me accompanied by a kind of hysteria, which seemed to embody a mental deception; they wanted to create a totally false image of themselves. So often, after distressing arguments, fragile expressions of self-torture, they gave the impression of "imploding"; they "disappeared" for some time, going around the same

people they had loved so much up to that time; they could no longer bear up with them.

Perhaps sometimes they could understand my points, but they could not stop for a moment so to have a real dialog with me. Our ways of thinking were very divergent. That transparency of mind I spoke about was a meaningless void, something unnatural to them; it smacked of «death», of a painful and cold grasp and of a threat to the joys of their life.

Imperturbable, I kept following my way, determined to improve the art of breathing - unconcerned about any limit.

While I was looking for all the ways to find the needed information, a letter of the organization founded by P.Y. informed me about the existence of other people, next to me, who practised *Kriya Yoga*.

I was enthusiastic of it, I quivered with some cheerful anticipation to meet them. That night I hardly succeeded in falling asleep.

Note.

The reader will understand that I did not mention the full name of P.Y. - it is not difficult, however, to figure out his identity.

There are many schools of *Yoga* spreading his teachings according to a specific legitimation. One of these, through its representatives, made me realize that not only won't they tolerate the least Copyright violation, but also they won't even appreciate their beloved Teacher's name to be mixed into discussions on *Kriya* on the Internet. The reason is that, in the past, some people used His name to mislead the search of a high number of practitioners who were trying to receive His original teachings. Moreover, I mean to underline that in the following pages I will only summarily linger upon my understanding of His legacy, without any pretension to give an objective account of it. An interested reader should not renounce the privilege of turning to the original texts!

CHAPTER III A KRIYA ORGANIZATION

I came to know that, not far from my place, there was a group of people linked with the school founded by P.Y., and even though he had been dead for many years, they considered him "their *Guru*".

As a habit, they would meet twice a week to practice the *Kriya* techniques together; I had the first contact with them through the *kriyaban* [a person who practices *Kriya*] who used to organize their meetings.

With great enthusiasm and a sort of euphoria fostered by my experiences, I approached him, hoping to share some opinions about our practice.

I remember our meeting with excitement; that was a key event indeed.

He was of about my age, he knew and practiced *Kriya*, having being taught by a direct disciple of P.Y..

I would never have thought that the following words by *Sri Aurobindo* could be applied to the consequences of our meeting: «Too bright were our heavens, too far away, too frail their ethereal stuff».

With a sort of sour irony, I would dare to say that the current phase of my existence was too happy to last long.

Life is made of short moments of calm and balance, in an alternation of vicissitudes; in them, people experience problems, limitations and deformations caused by the human mind through their own skin.

Approaching this man with a total and alarming sincerity, I could not realize what kind of hard shock I was to receive.

He welcomed me with visible enthusiasm, sincerely eager to meet a person with whom he could share his "passion". Since the very first moment of our meeting, standing on his house's doorstep, I told him how fascinated I was by the practice of *Kriya*.

He asked me right away when I had been initiated in the practice of *Kriya*, taking for granted that I had received the teaching from the same organization he was a member of.

When he figured the way I had learned the technique, he got petrified, showing a bitter smile of disappointment.

It was as if I had declared to be the executor of the greatest of all crimes. Setting himself back from the disappointment, he emphasized how *Kriya* cannot be learned through books. There is only one way to receive it: being initiated by a "Minister" of his own organization!

Staring right into my eyes, with an enormous emotive impact, he went on saying that a practice learned from any other source was «worth nothing, it will not be effective in matters of spiritual purpose», and a possible effect might be «a dangerous illusion in which the ego remains trapped for a long time».

According to his words, nobody on earth was allowed to teach that technique, except the few people who were purposely authorized by the direction of the school.

This rule was strictly respected by the components of the group; this was actually the way they had taken in the technique, submitting a precise and solemn promise of secrecy.

Secrecy!

How odd this word sounded to me, what a strange appeal, what a mysterious fascination it exerted upon my being!

Until then, I had always believed that it did not matter at all how a certain teaching was learned, or what book had been read or studied for it; the only important thing was to practice it correctly, always accompanied by the desire to go deeper and deeper into it.

I felt it was not an awkward idea to protect a precious lore from indiscrete eyes. Apparently, secrecy was advisable in this field. Later, during an arc of many years, I witnessed an innumerable series of absurdities originating from this behest; dramatically, I had the evidence that it brought miserable repercussions into the life of thousands of people.

Before any verbal description, he would ask me to practice the technique in front of him. He was naturally pushed by human curiosity and, I suppose, also by the hope that I had gone very far astray from the real *Kriya* in my guessing the technique.

He felt relieved, intimately "reassured" when he saw me breathing through the nose instead of through the mouth, as he was told to; therefore my practice was evidently wrong to him.

He asked me to explain more deeply what I was visualizing during my breathing and, while I was telling him, I saw an inner satisfaction spreading all over his face.

He judged my technique incorrect, thereby verifying a well-rooted prejudice that the technique, learned through illegitimate channels, could not - because of a particular spiritual law - be but corrupted.

The secret he was bound to had not been broken by any of the authors of my esoteric books.

The reader might remember that, according to the given instructions, the way of transporting the energy while breathing could be done through a route around the *Chakras* or inside of the backbone.

I tried both ways but, since P.Y. wrote that it was correct to move the energy «around» the *Chakras*, I mainly settled on the first one; therefore, this was the version I explained.

Besides, having read in another book that during *Kriya Pranayama* the practitioner was supposed to sing *Om* mentally in the *Chakras*, I added this detail as well.

I could not imagine that P.Y. taught the variation of the breath moving inside of the spine, with the breathing done through the mouth and no mental singing of the *Om*.

So, we were in a strange situation - I was telling him exactly what I would discover in the future to be the *Pranayama* taught by Lahiri Mahasaya, and he had a sarcastic simper on, a hundred per cent sure that I was talking nonsense!

Pretending to feel sorry for my consequent disappointment, he informed me in an official tone that my technique had «nothing to do with *Kriya Pranayama*»!

Questioned with dismay about my mistake, at least in general terms, he did not accept to report any detail; he was «not authorized to give out any explanations».

Of course, I felt a strong interest in the correct procedure and subsequently, in some occasions, I "courted" him with the hope of receiving some crumbs of information; but he was a good weasel.

HEAVY CONDITIONING

On that occasion, enflamed by an absolute confidence, he launched himself in a wide digression upon the value of the "*Guru*" [affirming that P.Y. was his *Guru*], or "spiritual Teacher", a puzzling concept to me because it was attributed to a person that he had not known directly.

In his opinion, having been initiated to *Kriya* through the legitimated channels, P.Y. was real and present in his life.

The people who belonged to that group were convinced that the *Guru* - they had not personally known him either - was a special aid sent by God Himself; he had gotten hold of a part of their *Karma* in order to "burn" it in his body.

Such an event [the creation of such kind of relationship with the *Guru*] was, thus, «the greatest luck a human being can ever have».

The logical consequence - underlined with overflowing emphasis - was that, abandoning such form of aid or looking for a different spiritual path, amounted to «a hateful rejection of the Divine's hand, stretched out to offer His benediction».

Since my position was totally inconsistent, he recommended me to send a written account to the direction of the school, describing the details of my vicissitudes, hoping that they would accept me as a disciple. Only then would I start the practice under their guidance.

I saw a strange metamorphosis in him, as if all of a sudden he had been invested of a sacred role; he promised that he would « pray for me »!

I was somewhat stunned by the tones our dialog was turning in to. In order to re-establish the initial agreeability of our meeting, I tried to reassure him about the positive effects that I had gained from my practice. My statement had the effect of worsening the whole matter, giving him the chance of a second scolding which was not totally unfair but, undoubtedly, out of place.

He made clear that I should never look for any tangible effects in the practice of *Kriya*; much less should I display them, because in this way I would «lose them».

That "poor, naïve guy", had gotten straight into an obvious contradiction without even realizing it; he was saying that the results were too important to risk losing them by telling others, and a few seconds before he had underlined that they were of no value whatsoever, rather, «they might be negative and dangerous»!

He began the tale - which, later on, I had the opportunity to hear plenty of times - of the Tibetan *yogi* Milarepa who, getting no positive results from the painstaking practice of his self-learned techniques, received the same instructions kneeling at the feet of and with the benediction of his *Guru* - so that this time the results came out easily.

We all know how the human mind is more conditioned by an anecdote than by a logical inference!

An anecdote - even if it is a total fancy with novelistic purposes - is endowed with a sort of internal "brightness" that conditions a person's common sense; stimulating the emotions and feelings, it is able to make people accept conclusions that are absurd to the faculties of reason.

This story made me speechless; I just did not know how to reply. For that day, at least, I lost the "fight".

I told my friend that I would follow his advice.

A KRIYA GROUP

The room where the group met was elemental but pleasant. Each member paid part of the rental, so that its fruition would not depend on the owner's whims; in this way we also had the privilege of consecrating it to an exclusively spiritual use.

My attendance started in a period that I remember nostalgically; listening to Indian songs translated and harmonized for westerners and, above all, meditating together was a true joy! Everything seemed paradisiacal to me, even though little time was given to the practice - no more than 20 minutes; often, scantily 15 minutes.

Since I had not received *Kriya* "officially" yet, they asked me to limit my practice to simply centering the awareness onto the point between the eyebrows.

A particularly beautiful session of collective practice took place on Christmas Eve; it was enriched by devotional songs and it lasted a lot of hours.

Once a month we had the "social" lunch.

On that occasion I began to know my new *kriyaban* friends more closely. It was a beautiful chance to spend some time talking together and enjoying each other.

Unfortunately, a distinct embarrassment in our behavior spoiled the pleasantries of our meeting.

Since many of us could not enjoy their family approval and - much less - support to the practice of *Yoga*, the only occasion we had to spend time among people with the same ideas and interests had to be an experience of great serenity and relaxation.

But those who directed the school from a distance, had requested not to talk about other spiritual paths and deal with specific details about *Kriya*. Authorized people only could cover such a role; no one in our group could. These prohibitions distorted and mortified our behavior.

During our gatherings, since our conversations were strictly kept on well-defined tracks, we were not able to find a topic for our conversations which would respect the given rules and be, at the same time, interesting.

It was not the right place for worldly gossips unsuitable for a spiritual group. So one single topic was left: the beauty of our spiritual path and our great fortune in having discovered it.

Many of them were convinced that our school was the embodiment of a Divine plan to save humankind from disaster.

No wonder that, after some meetings of mutual "exaltation", an almost frightening boredom started to reign in the group.

As a last resort, some risked entering the realm of jokes; they were no mean jokes, but such a light and innocent sense of humor had to live up to the devotional attitude kept by many of the members. Instead of that, it eventually gave in to the cold attitude of the larger part of them, who would not show a single inch of true joviality.

If someone had tried to uphold the atmosphere of our get-together, he would have been left frozen for the rest of the day.

As a matter of course, the group underwent a great recycling process; many members, who had joined in with enthusiasm, decided to quit after a few months, scraping the whole experience off their consciousness.

Among the people I had met there in those days, I did not manage to find a true spiritual seeker. Even believing that I was among individuals akin to me - which means enthusiastic of *Kriya* - I had to admit that the reality was different.

Some of them reacted to my enthusiasm with annoyance; they could not believe that I had no doubts or uncertainties at all. They considered my euphoria being typical of an immature beginner.

They seemed to censor my excessive interest in the *Kriya* techniques, saying that devotion was much more important and - introducing a concept that I could hardly link to the practice of *Yoga* - loyalty was much more important too.

Looking back to those times, I wonder what those people's opinion about me and my reckless attitude might have been. Definitely a real threat to their dull existence.

They made a moderate effort at the practice of *Kriya* and strived to extract any outer shell of devotion from the depths of their psyche; on the contrary, I made use of the totality of my energy for the improvement of the techniques, in order to have a natural flow of devotion springing from my inner realization.

Each of us had two different approaches to the spiritual aim, without any hope of reaching a point of contact.

Let me say this; I have often seen how a devotional display mostly hides people's own insincerity and negligence. Sometimes, though, it might also disguise the presence of mental troubles. I do not mean to lack respect to people's sufferings, being also unable to put myself in their shoes; but I am fully aware that a true mystic aspiration can make miracles. Playing the part of the perfect devotee cannot.

Since P.Y. wrote that the *Second Kriya* enables the *Yogi* to leave his body consciously at will, I looked for someone who knew the technique, hoping that he could give me a general idea of it at least.

A lady, who had been practicing *Kriya* for years and had once lived by our school's general offices, seemed not to understand my question.

So I summed up the concept with astonishment, recalling the episode of Lahiri Mahasaya's disciple Swami Pranabananda who accompanied the moment of his death with the practice of the *Second Kriya*.

She got visibly nervous, saying that the quotation clearly referred to the technique of *Pranayama*, one breath, then another, and this last one to be (!) the "*Second Kriya*". I know that, up to today, she has remained fixed in her conviction.

I had the impression that the idea itself that a similar technique might exist upset her; it was as if she had made so great an effort in setting the habit of a daily practice of the *First Kriya*, that she felt as if she had «already given out everything she had»; in other words, she could not accept any other technique to bring forth a more engaging dedication.

Anyway, another abomination went far beyond her "willing" ignorance.

An aged lady, perhaps trying to impart me an important lesson of humbleness, called me aside to reveal me that a long time before she had

received the initiation in the so-called *Higher Kriyas*, but she had come to the final decision not to practice them for a matter of (!) «humbleness». She said she had felt so unworthy that she had put them aside and, after some years, she had almost forgotten them – this last point was inconceivable to me!

There had been other people eligible to receive these teachings; they just refused them. When I asked the reason for that apparent exhibition of indifference toward the higher teachings taught by their *Guru*, they looked at me in bewilderment as if my question had violated an implicit law; never criticize or insinuate doubts about a person's intimate choices on the spiritual field.

They replied saying that what they had was enough; then, they briskly got off that topic.

This fact, together with others I had experienced in that school, was a cause of real suffering. It seemed to me I was the only one who loved *Kriya* in a visceral way.

I was disappointed in seeing such a high level of ignorance in those people or, even worse, indifference toward the art of *Kriya*.

Shortly after my admission to the group, I was introduced to an elderly lady who had corresponded with P.Y. himself.

Thanks to her earnestness, sincerity and long-time loyal discipleship, she had been authorized to teach the *Kriya* preliminary techniques.

Her temperament was very sweet and more inclined to the understanding rather than to the censorship.

From what I could read in her face, when she referred to my *Kriya* technique - which had been guessed through my non-orthodox readings - I had the assurance that it was correct and effective.

Nonetheless, she thought that learning the technique from official channels, maybe in the future, I would begin a more beautiful and satisfactory practice. That is why she taught me two preliminary techniques to *Kriya*, categorically inviting me to limit my practice to them only.

The first one eases off the breath and the whole psychophysical system; it is called *Hong-So* because of the employed *Mantra*. The second one concerns the listening to internal [astral] sounds melting into the *Om* sound.

She did not give me these instructions all at one time, but in two intervals of time, the second one four months after the first one.

In this way I had the unique and splendid possibility to concentrate on the first technique for a long time; only then would the combination of the two techniques come, the first one in the morning and a total immersion in the second one in the night. Therefore, I could experiment the meaning and the beauty of each one.

[A note about Second Kriya

In my spiritual research, the *Second Kriya* technique had been sealed as a secret for a lot of years. Practicing it one day was one of my dreams, to take advantage of its delicate mechanism. I was sure that working with such a procedure without feeling a general healthy effect for my spiritual evolution was unlikely to happen. Such a technique, which Lahiri Mahasaya had given to elect people only, could not but stir my imagination. If I consider what a lot of teachers said and are saying of this technique, I must also consider the idea of a sound jinx hovering over it! As if acting out a perverse will, they unleashed all their ability in generating the wildest of all transformations. One of them tried to convince me that the *Second Kriya* was similar to a Tibetan technique which consisted in boring a hole in the *Fontanella* [top of the head]. The proof of its validity was the same as in the Tibetan tradition; a *kriyaban* should have been able to insert the stem of a flower into it (!). I do not want to oppress the reader with all the nonsense I heard in all those years. The reason why I was completely spellbound by some of those absurdities is that my tendency was to favor complicated techniques. I shared the belief - of a quite common nature in the esoteric world - that the more artificial and strange the technique, the more powerful would it be. The deepest side of me has suffered for years, because I did not have a complete knowledge of the *Higher Kriyas* - I would not be given a lot of parts of them; that is why I feared it could be impossible for me to master the various stages of *Kriya*. The thought of being limited in my personal experience of this mystic path by someone else's will made me furious. I definitely risked losing my way with the possibility that I would never know the correct technique. Nowadays, in the *Kriya* world, there is no doubt that Lahiri Mahasaya's *Second Kriya* is the process of the *Thokar* - in one or another of its different variations - where an abrupt movement toward the chest is made with one's chin and the heart *Chakra* receives a great stimulus. When I had clearly printed in my mind the mechanism of this *Kriya*, I plunged thoroughly into it.]

HONG-SO AND OM TECHNIQUES

The *Hong-so* technique is simple. It consists - after some deep breaths in oxygenating the blood and calming the system - in letting the breath free, repeating mentally the *Mantra "Hong-so"*, the syllable *Hong* during the inhalation and *So* during the exhalation. The concentration, the inner gaze, is to be kept upon the third eye. The essential recommendation is not to influence the breath; it has to go on in a natural and spontaneous way.

These were the technique's practical details but, foreseeing the thought rising in my mind, she went on adding that the procedure was not easy at all, in spite of its apparent simplicity. She said that if the results had been disappointing, the cause would be some subtle mistakes in the practice.

She remained rather vague but, encouraging me with a smile, she concluded: «it is true that the technique calls for a great commitment, but it contains every tool to come into contact with the Divine essence».

I will be honest; my superficial beginner's attitude led me to think of the *Mantra* as a "magical formula", which would produce amazing results.

The school's theoretic teachings introduced the rather strange thesis that this technique had to be approached as the only "scientific" way to obtain a real effective concentration.

This is how I was induced to think that within some days, simply following these instructions, I would be able to develop a superhuman concentration.

As is obvious, I came into a big disappointment; that was the most boring technique in the world. Its practice seemed useless and dull.

I carried on this *Mantra* for weeks, but most of the time I could not remain fully conscious of my breathing.

It was at that very moment that, supported by the same goodwill characterizing my way of learning, I started to observe attentively a couple of details which, in my opinion, were responsible of my failures.

The *Mantra Hong-so*, broadly quoted in the Indian spirituality classical texts, is really excellent to ease off the breathing rhythm gradually, without forcing it. By repeating it mentally over and over, it can easily and naturally conform to a hard-to-change rhythm. Once breathing follows this rhythm, as a consequence it never settles down. Once the rhythm has stabilized itself, inhalations and exhalations are made, even if the body "would like" to stay off-breath for some moments. At this point, short

inhalations or exhalations are made without the body having a physiological need to breathe.

Anybody can avoid this situation by keeping off from any established rhythm during the mental chanting of the *Mantra*. The pauses between a breath and another should be "allowed to exist"; therefore, they should be perceived and enjoyed, no matter if each lasts less than an instant.

This simple fact is sufficient to ease the breath off, while a condition of total and almost perfect immobility stabilizes within the body.

Another detail is based upon the fact that during the inhalation the chest swells out and gets into elastic tension. When the lungs are distended, there is a force trying to bring them back into the previous shape. The pause between the inhalation and the exhalation is contrasted not only by the rhythm but by the chest elasticity as well. Maintaining the concentration on the chest and on its elastic strength is sufficient to make a more comfortable and freer pause after the inhalation; the exercise will then result more harmonious.

Putting all this into practice, my breathing became subtler and subtler and a "virtuous circle" between this growing calmness and a reduced necessity of oxygen brought me to a condition of breathing annihilation, while the movement of the air, outside and inside my lungs, was reduced to a throb. By respecting these simple details, the *Hong So* technique lost completely the aspect of a boring chore and became a wonderful, blissful break.

Trying to discuss my observations with those who were supposed to practice that technique, I realized how hard it was for them to talk about such things. Sometimes I noticed an enormous and unreasonable resistance.

People belonging to the group could be divided into two groups, those who were not satisfied with the practice but planned to try it again in the future with more attention (at that time they would not listen to my reasoning); and those who, on the contrary, could not understand what I was saying.

They sustained, without any conviction or wish to make the least experiment whatsoever, to be sure that what I had proposed was an alteration and a twisting of the original technique.

I remember that when I tried to explain carefully these things to a lady, she pretended to listen attentively to me; in the end, she came out with a dogmatism amounting to the direst violence, saying that she already had a *Guru* and did not feel the need for another one and for further teachings.

I was shocked and wounded, since I was perfectly aware that my explanation did not mean to be "another teaching" at all.

My attempt was not to control or guide the breathing. On the contrary, I used a particular care in order to preserve its spontaneity.

To pass by such episodes one after the other confirmed the idea that the apparent assiduousness of these people to their daily practice was the result of their superstition.

Lacking the sufficient attention to and the concern for the results, they went on performing mechanically what had become an empty ritual, a way to appease their conscience.

Om technique.... Before beginning the *Om* technique, a *yogi* leans his elbows on a comfortable support that can be made for the purpose. The support can be a simple horizontal table of any material, covered with foam-rubber and settled on a vertical stake of adjustable height.

Practicing in the evening or at night is best; it is preferable to lock oneself up in a room, so that nobody will disturb.

The practice consists in closing the ears with the thumbs and in listening to every internal sound, while chanting the *Om* mentally.

The attention, according to the instructions, is directed to the inner part of the right ear, since the subtle sounds can be realized more easily and more persistently there.

The *yogi's* intuition begins a long journey into his deepest memory, that of his Divine origin.

The *Om* can be heard in a lot of variations; it can be easily perceived after the ears have been closed, as soon as the least internal calm is created.

The right attitude is to focus upon the loudest of these variations. This is the secret to succeed in tuning with the real *Om* sound, like the roaring of the ocean.

Each mental repetition of the *Om*, keeping the attention alive, is essential; the awareness patiently follows any feeble inner sound like an "Ariadne's thread" out of the labyrinth of mind. Then, it approaches a vast region, the *Omkar* reality, which is the vibration of the primeval Energy.

That lady explained that her teacher, P.Y. (the same who had decided that this technique, among so many possible ones, should be a necessary

rather than optional preparation to *Kriya*), had tried to explain the teaching of the Trinity in a new way.

Om is the "Amen" of the Bible - the **Holy Ghost**, the "witness", a sound; a proof of the vibration of energy sustaining the universe.

This technique, discovered by the mystics long ago, makes it possible to detect this vibration. Thanks to it, it is also possible to be guided toward such a deep state, which cannot be reached in other ways.

Through this experience, a *kriyaban* can achieve that of the "**Son**" - the Divine awareness that is present inside the above-mentioned energetic vibration.

At the end of his spiritual journey, he can reach the highest reality, the "**Father**" - the Divine awareness beyond every existing thing in the universe.

While the previous *Hong So* technique leads to the development of concentration (also characterized by peace and spontaneous joy), the latter allows for a direct contact with the spiritual Goal.

The lady's explanation was characterized by such a sacred flavor that it accompanied me for the following weeks, helping me overcome the beginning of the practice, where it seems impossible that the sounds will manifest.

I remember nostalgically my time in that slightly illuminated room, where I confined myself like a hermit.

One day, after a three-week practice, having just begun the exercises ten minutes before, so that my awareness was in a state of deep relaxation, I realized I could hear an inner sound. It did not happen abruptly, but I felt as if I had been hearing it for some minutes.

It reminded me of the humming of a mosquito, then it became a bell, heard from a distance; finally, my concentration detected the noise of running waters.

The bell sound was a sweet embrace; it was a really ecstatic experience and it occurred so strangely that it grabbed my awareness and drove me into a sweet dimension, where I felt at ease.

I have personally never had the opportunity to hear sounds such as that of a flute or a harp, which are largely quoted in the classical literature.

Listening to the *Om* meant touching beauty itself.

I could not imagine something similar making a person feel so fine; I felt I was surrounded by the wings of the ineffable.

The experience I was living was far greater than my little self. It was the quintessence of bliss and it went beyond any human hope, beyond any human desire.

All this happened in a very precise moment of my life, when for the first time I indirectly ran into the concept of "devotion". I remember that whenever that sense of bliss arose, I would say to myself: «This is what I have always desired. I do not want to lose it anymore».

Note

The reader might be interested in knowing that this technique does not belong to those included in the *Kriya Yoga*, whenever the internal sounds perception happens without closing the ears. It is not a secret invented by P.Y.. It had been plainly described in the books of classical *Yoga*, called *Nada Yoga* - "the *Yoga* of the sound."

By practicing this technique for months, a *yogi* can obtain a better attitude toward the practice of *Kriya*.

Thanks to this technique a person is able to put aside any anxiety and get to very strong results.

DIFFICULTIES WITH THE KRIYA TEACHINGS

The real *Kriya* technique should be waited, as a rule, for at least a six-month period while, in my case, contingent reasons turned it into two years - the written material traveled by ship and the delay times were enormous.

During this long waiting time I tried to embrace the school's religious vision in every way, even though it was radically extraneous to me.

It was not just a search of the *yogic* way of eating - convinced that it was the best foundation for the practice of *Kriya*-, of finding the methods to prevent a bad health or of finding a job that would not contrast with my spiritual path; I also tried to tune to the school's peculiar Indian-Christian religious atmosphere.

I tried to approach the figure of *Krishna*, imagining Him as the quintessence of every beauty; of the Divine Mother also, who was not the Madonna, but a sweetening of the idea of the goddess Kali. I read and reread only P.Y.'s writings. Sometimes I considered a particular thought of P.Y. so beautiful and perfect that I would write it down on a sheet of paper to hold it in front of me while studying at my desk.

By going on with this trend, I grew away from my real nature. The other members of the group had the tendency to build a veneration for P.Y., as if he were God in human body. A chief of the most important Italian branch of our school told us: «didn't you understand yet that P.Y. is the Divine Mother Herself»?

I remember a lady - it seems a joke but it is not - eating ice cream only if it had the same taste as the legend reported as P.Y.'s favorite.

Most of them believed, through such petty tricks, to increase the devotion for their *Guru*; may it be, I cannot tell, but the risk to lean passively upon the protection of a saint and less upon their practical intelligence was also evident.

While I was continuously receiving unasked lessons of devotion, humility and loyalty, my interest for *Kriya* became a real craving, a burning fever.

I could not understand the reason for which I had to wait for it for so long a time: my great anticipation turned, sometimes, into a useless anguish.

Those who already had received the *Kriya* initiation made fun of me with an unconcealed cruelty and told me: «they won't give you the *Kriya* initiation at all; a devotee should not desire a technique with such intensity: that's neither good nor wise. God is to be mostly found through devotion and surrender».

I tried to be good; I waited and dreamt.

Eventually, the moment came to fill the application form to receive the *Kriya* instructions by mail.

About four months passed by, every day I hoped to receive the coveted material, finally, an envelope arrived. I opened it with an expectation that I am not able to express: I remained deeply disappointed because it contained ulterior introduction material. From the first page index of the material, I understood it was the first of a weekly series, whereas the proper complete technique would be sent within five weeks.

So, for another month, I would have to study just the usual nursery rhymes I already knew by heart.

It happened, instead, that in the meantime a Minister of that organization visited our country and I could take part in the ceremony of initiation.

After waiting for months, it was high time that I came «to an eternal agreement with the *Guru*, to be taught the *Kriya* techniques in the only legitimate way, together with his benediction».

Those who, like me, were ready to be initiated were about a hundred. A beautiful room had been rented for the ceremony at a very high price and embellished for the occasion with lots of flowers, as I have never seen in my life.

Something unique and odd happened; about thirty people from the local group, dressed as if they were the Ministers of a new religion, entered the room lining up with a solemn attitude and their hands joined in prayer.

The two teachers, who had just arrived from abroad, walked meekly and inelegantly, behind them.

Then the ceremony began.

I accepted without objections their demand of swearing everlasting devotion not only to the *Guru* P.Y. but also to a six-master chain; of this chain, Lahiri Mahasaya was an intermediary ring, while P.Y. was the so-called *Guru-preceptor*, or the one who would partially bear the burden of our *Karma* [such was the consequence of a well-known spiritual law].

It would have been really strange if no one had doubts about this; I remember a friend of mine wondering if P.Y. - definitely unable to give any confirmation, being now long resident in the astral world - had really accepted her as a "disciple", to be consequently laden with her *Karma*.

We had been told that Christ was part of this chain because He had once showed up to Babaji [Lahiri Mahasaya's *Guru*] asking Him to send some emissaries in the West to spread the *Kriya*.

This story caused no perplexity at all; rather, perhaps this assurance helped those people whose conscience was a little thwarted (upset they might betray Jesus through this initiation-baptism) when considering the whole mission and teachings as originated from Christ himself.

To receive the initiation to *Kriya* meant being taught, in the context of that ceremony, three techniques, *Kriya Pranayama*, *Maha Mudra* and *Jyoti Mudra* [they never used the proper term *Yoni*].

These techniques - they said - embodied God's most effective blessing toward His privileged creature, the humans, which exclusively possessed an inner body with seven *Chakras*.

The secret and mystic seven-step ladder, revealed through the practice of *Kriya*, is the real speedway to salvation; it is not the only way though, since religions offer many other valid tools.

But it is definitely the fastest and safest way.

My mind was in great expectation for something I had so strongly desired and for which I had seriously been preparing myself for months. It was not what might be called a "sacrament" that I was submitting to, in order to safeguard a family tradition; it was the crowning of a definitive choice.

My heart was immensely happy at the thought of the inner joy that I would gain through the practice of *Kriya*.

Finally, being taught the *Kriya Pranayama*, I found out that I already knew it: it was the *Kundalini-breathing* technique, which I had found time ago in my esoteric readings and which prescribes that the energetic current flows all the way inside the spinal column.

I have already explained that I had not taken in serious consideration that procedure owing to the fact that in P.Y.'s writings, which were my basis for my first glimpsing of the mechanism of *Kriya Pranayama*, it was written that the energy had to be rotated «around the *Chakras*, along an elliptic circuit».

I was not disappointed. Rather, the technique appeared perfect to me.

The school taught each technique's detail in such a way that it would not allow for the least variation and, in addition, it prescribed a routine from which one could not derogate.

Subsequently, if during the practice any least doubt had risen on the correctness of a certain detail, nobody was – even vaguely – encouraged to conduct an experiment and to come to a conclusion by himself. The thing to do was to contact the direction of the school, tell the problem and receive some guidelines, to be accepted as "The Word".

I learned to interact with the "authorized" individuals only, in order to receive some guidance. I trusted their suggestions.

I would instinctively look for their advice as if it were given by perfect beings that could never be wrong.

I believed they were "channels" through which the blessings of the *Guru* flowed and I inevitably thought that - even if they would not admit it out of humility - they had already reached the highest level of spiritual realization.

My desire to deal, in this chapter, with the reasons of my inexorable crisis is not moved by a groundless acidity toward the school.

My aim is, instead, that of discussing a general problem, which will be fundamental in building a good routine inside Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Yoga* – which contains, besides, a far greater number of techniques.

The recommended routine caused me rather big problems.

The first exercise to be practiced was the observation of the breath [the *Hong-So* technique] and this had to last ten to twenty minutes. The breathing was supposed to become more relaxed and to create a good state of concentration in order to facilitate the listening to the internal sounds.

After putting the forearms on a support, the listening to the internal sounds - which would require about the same time - began. There would follow an interruption in the meditation because of the *Maha Mudra*.

Eventually, setting back in a still and stiff position to restore the feeling of sacredness, the *Kriya Pranayama* began in the rigorous respect of all the instructions. The *Jyoti Mudra* would be concluded with a full ten-minute concentration on the *Kutastha*, to absorb the results of the whole job.

Now, the two preliminary techniques were deeply sacrificed.

While the first one was carried off, the practitioner felt he should soon interrupt it to start the second one. This brought to a disturbing feeling, a sort of internal constraint resulting in the following technique.

The unhappiest decision was to suspend the technique of listening to the inner sounds to get up and practice the *Maha Mudra*.

[I know that some people, to avoid, partially at least, this feeling of discomfort, used to begin with the *Maha Mudra*, but the break had to be done anyway in order to practice *Pranayama*.]

The technique of listening was a complete "universe" in itself and it led to the mystic experience; that is why its interruption was a great disturbance.

It was a paradox; just as if, recognizing a friend with joyous surprise among a crowd, I began talking with him. Then, I went suddenly away, lost among the people, hoping to meet that friend again, unexpectedly, so that I could get back to where our conversation had been quitted. This stupid and absurd thing is exactly what I used to do in this routine; the sound *Om* was the mystic experience itself, the only goal I sought.

Why should I have interrupted the listening to the inner sound to regain the mystic contact through another technique?

I forced myself into such absurdity for an extremely long period. I am embarrassed to confess that it lasted no less than three years. Such was the power of that folly that in our group was called "loyalty".

Therefore, I went on without changing the prescribed routine, hoping for a hypothetical future evolution that would allow me to practice with more satisfaction and to have more tangible results.

Through all this conditioning I had become like one of those animals that, fed by man, tend to forget how to be self-sufficient; I carried on for a really long time the tendency to depend on the school's judgment for everything, even for the matters of practical life.

By that time, even under such peculiar circumstances, it would never occur to me to leave the school and start a path on my own. I was convinced that such a choice was impossible, that school being the best one existing. I felt as if it were my second family and P.Y. the best and sole authority in the field of *Kriya Yoga*. I was not aware yet of the simplification to which he reduced Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*, until some sad but providential episodes bailed me out of that delicate situation.

Actually, the school had only provided a written form of the so-called "Higher teachings". Something was there which I just could not fully understand; I wanted to master to the full the technique of *Thokar* [the school called it *Third* and *Fourth Kriya*] based on the unification of the twelve-syllable *Mantra Om Namoh Bhagabate Vasudevaya* with some movements of the head.

All I was asking for was to be shown how the head movements had to be carried through. I wrote to the school direction to fix an appointment with one of its representatives, a Minister who would soon join us to hold classes for our group. I was asking for a favor which should be considered obvious by a rational mind, unaware that it was highly improbable; the school could hardly change its tradition to meet my desire. Probably, I had actually asked something which was a source of embarrassment either for the school or the Minister. There could be many possible explanations for that. The Minister might have had doubts himself on that technique, which P.Y. had written many years before - actually, P.Y. did teach it only to a few students living in the school's headquarters.

By that time I could not understand all that and I was left in dismay when I figured out that the Minister kept on postponing our meeting without valid reasons at all. When we finally met, after I had insisted and insisted, I went through something truly unpleasant.

I was convinced that hypocrisy, bureaucracy, formality, hidden falsity and subtle violence to one's honesty were totally alien to each representative of that school. The feeling I had was akin to meeting an agent of one of the many institutions involved in our social life.

Cruelty was that the Minister refused to show me precisely how the head had to be moved. He tried to convince me instead that I had to practice only what I had been taught in the past, that means the preliminary techniques and those of the *First Kriya*. I replied I would surely keep in consideration his advice; in spite of that I wanted to see how to move my head correctly, to practice them in a hypothetical future.

My insistence turned him nervous, to the point that he rudely recommended me to enclose my questions in a letter to the school's head.

In vain I replied that the movements of the head could not be shown through a letter. That had been his last word!

I had trusted and respected the school; I had studied the whole reference literature as if preparing for a university exam. I was now consternated to bear witness to the senseless whims of a man on power. This situation brought up a doubt - was the organization acting like that toward everybody? If that was so, that was really terrible! After the interview with the Minister, I was in a strange mental and emotive condition. A part of me was truly desperate and that cruelty was not the only reason.

In all of us there are some child-like characteristics that might emerge in difficult moments.

I was afraid that this gentleman, back to the school, might talk on my back saying something that in the future might reduce the probability of obtaining that information. I knew that my relationship with the school had gone through a big quake at its very roots. After that I could no longer rely on the heavenly relationship that for so many years had represented my horizon.

In spite of that, I had a feeling I would get over every hardship, clarifying all my doubts. Moreover, I knew I would be able to turn this destructive experience into something crucial both for my and other people's spiritual improvement. The self-teaching part of me, which I could not suppress to adapt it to the group's rules, was intimately enjoying the whole situation; the school had somehow waken me up by means of a healthy "kick in the butt"; the old me was living again.

My Italian interlocutor was that elderly lady who taught me the preliminary techniques and who was officially invested as a "Meditation Counsellor".

After I had reported to her my sorrow and desperation, she recommended an absolute obedience, saying that my logics was of no value since it originated in the ego and it was not even worth listening to. She said that intelligence is a double-edged weapon; it can be used to eliminate the swelling ignorance but also to cut off abruptly the lifeblood that sustains the spiritual path.

[Allow me to dwell a little more on this, not because I like to report a justification to my stupid attitude, but simply because I wish to describe an almost unreal situation that, thought over with a hindsight, seems to me a matter of psychiatry rather than of spirituality.]

Observing a particular photograph of P.Y. shot on the day of his death, I had the sensation that some tears were going to well up from his blissful eyes [it was not a bizarre feeling, other people told me they had the same impression]; I told her this, simply to have something to say; she became so serious and, with her eyes pointed far off toward an indefinite spot, she soberly uttered: «you have to consider it a warning; the *Guru* is not content with you!».

I kept silent, puzzled.

Then she quoted an episode that proved that her *Guru* was in direct contact with God.

She told me what happened when one of his disciples chose to continue his own spiritual search through other spiritual traditions, deciding to leave P.Y.'s *Ashram*.

The *Guru*, noticing this, got in on the disciple's way to stop him and warn him, when he heard an inner voice - "the voice of God", she specified - ordering him not to interfere with the disciple's freedom.

The *Guru* obeyed and in a flash of intuition he foresaw all the disciple's future incarnations, those in which he would be lost, in which he would keep on seeking – amid innumerable sufferings, jumping from one error to another – the path he was then relinquishing.

Then, in the end, the disciple would return to the same path. The lady said that her *Guru* had been really accurate on the number of incarnations that the whole trip would have taken to be over – about thirty (!).

The moral of this story was clear, something from which one could not escape - even if I had some difficulties I just had to follow the school's advice, «because that is God's will».

If I had not done so, I would lose myself in a labyrinth of enormous sufferings and who knows when I would be able to get back to the correct path.

Although she admired the earnestness with which I was making progress – unlike so many other tepid and half-hearted people who would go to her only to be reloaded with the motivation they could not find in themselves - she was dismayed, for her devotion toward the *Guru* was totally extraneous to me.

By telling me that or other episodes of P.Y.'s life, she tried to let me share her experiences. I am very thankful to her for all the sincere efforts and time spent with me, but how could she thwart my inner nature?

She did only what was in her power; she could not relieve my immense thirst for knowledge of the art of *Kriya*. Unable, as she was, to clarify my technical doubts, she finally said that the Minister's advice was correct; it embodied God's will and the only thing I should have learned was how to wholly surrender to it.

I had the impression that she was permanently expecting me to act in a somewhat "disloyal" way.

Months later she came to know that I had read a book, which our school members were strongly dissuaded from reading.

It was written by a man [D.W.] who had been formerly bound to the organization, and was now a "traitor" to her.

I had no doubt that in the third millennium a person can read whatever he considers more convenient and so did I, finding that book so fascinating that I started distributing it to other friends.

A friend of mine showed me a letter in which she had called me «a man who stabs his *Guru*'s back, handing out daggers to other people as well, so that they can do the same».

Her reaction had been so emphatic that it did not hurt me at all; on the contrary, I felt a sort of tenderness toward her.

I could sense that her actions were driven by waves of emotions and decades of steadfast conditioning.

Seeing her own fears molding, I am sure that while typewriting that letter and pouring into it lots of other considerations to free all the tension she had accumulated, her countenance was serene, as if tasting a delicious, intimate satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV JAPA AND THE BREATHLESS STATE

The Minister and the Meditation counsellor were not down on me. Perhaps they took a liking to me and the problem was inside them. I was informed that both, at the times of their first steps on this spiritual path, had been rather demanding researchers. They suffered a conflict with the rather concisely written description of the techniques left by P.Y.. Doing certain violence to their intimate nature, they came to agreement with a non-definite understanding of the techniques. The meditation counsellor told me about her training in the school and how she received many scoldings. They saw in me their juvenile naivety and found again a conflict, evidently not entirely cured.

The direction of the school, to which I wrote, was, instead, very kind: the reply I was given emanated a hidden goodwill as a vast consoling smile. Later I had the joy of meeting with another representative who resolved the matter without any hysteria.

For a while I relied on some books' advice, to understand what the school could not or did not want to teach me: P.Y.'s complete and unabridged teachings. I have already said that He was unique to me; as a matter of fact I was keen on taking in some tall stories introduced by my group mates: P.Y. allegedly met *Babaji* some years after Lahiri Mahasaya's initiation. In simple words, He might have received some fresher and more effective teachings than the ones which had been given to Lahiri Mahasaya.

I was confident that the things He wrote had in them the totality of information I would use during my life; I used to get annoyed about those hinting at some *Kriya* secrets to be gained out of His school.

The question was, how could I decipher his writings without the school's help? In the written material that I had studied there was a lesson hinting to the *Kechari Mudra*, which was considered essential to the *Kundalini*'s awakening, but there were no indications on how it had to be carried out.

It seemed to me that the school worked as a censorship aimed at keeping me from flying too high.

I was informed that a group of people living in an important European country, being fond of *Kriya Yoga* had tried in vain to be given some explanations on the same technique by the "authorized Ministers". For this purpose, they called an Indian master. The master came and, after

skimming through the written material, he did not acknowledge what he had just read as the *Kriya Yoga* that he had been practicing for so many years.

The written teachings provided by the school were indeed ambiguous; for example, the *Mantra* was presented in an unusual way; a pronunciation especially created for English speakers (om naw maw bhaw....) was the substitute for its actual words.

[It is clear that I respect this choice, but only as long as it is integrated by a note reporting the true and commonly adopted spelling of the *Mantra*.]

Apart from that, the absurd thing was its being always written with twelve separated syllables, as if it was not a *Mantra* but twelve different ones. The average reader would not recognize the *Mantra* at all, thus trying in vain to imagine the origin and the meaning of each of those syllables.

[Other people that I had met in that period ran into the same problem. Discussions, even on the Internet, are still going on concerning aspects of this technique.]

Being acquainted with Indians, I am quite sure that the master was familiar with what he was reading and that he was definitely able, anyway, to remove easily, with few words, every doubt. He was just pretending.

His performance was meant to give the impression that P.Y.'s teachings were totally wrong, deceitful and made-up. This is how his effort in advising them would appear essential. He aimed at appearing as the teacher who saved those people from an abysmal mistake. He advocated the necessity to start all over again and to receive from him the initiation to the *First Kriya*.

As a matter of course, he lost two thirds of the students on the spot. They, in fact, did not accept to be his formal "disciples", as required by the initiation ritual. Those who accepted his conditions were again initiated to the *First Kriya* and were given new techniques such as the *Kechari Mudra* and the *Navi Kriya*.

Incidentally, the absolute confidentiality was broken; in this way I have been able to get some precious information.

Later, the group received the *Higher Kriyas*. Many of them disappeared, as if sucked into a black hole, following the orbit of that Indian master; some others swung in and out of the school, bringing on, as a consequence, a practice characterized by a lot of dissatisfaction and changes of mind.

My personal research took a particular direction. I knew there had been some direct disciples of P.Y. hassling with the school's direction and who, later on, parted from it. I cannot deny I hoped that, for revenge, they had let in the details I needed in some essay about *Kriya Yoga* or in some book of memoirs. There were two or three names of such direct disciples. I purchased all their published material, taped lectures and all. What I found was a devastating banality; the secrets, if they had some, were well guarded.

I continued the quest on books from India dealing with similar topics, no matter if they were not directly related with *Kriya Yoga*. I hoped I might get some correct intuitions through them.

In the meantime, I came across some books written by Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples, who did not have any connection with P.Y. This happened when some friends of mine, back from a trip to India, brought them to me. These books disappointed me and made me miss the clarity of P.Y.'s writing. They were but blank, meaningless words, with an endless number of repetitions in addition to continuous changes of topic, which I considered unbearable. The practical notes, presented as essential, were but scattered notes copied from classical books on *Yoga*.

The lack of care in them made me suppose the author had not bothered about checking the original texts. He most probably took those quotations from books which were also quoting from other quoting books, continuing a chain where each author would add something to mark his personal contribution.

Things went on this way until a profound crisis uprooted every apparent certainty. An event took place which put me in a state I was not able to flee from, unless with a decisive realization and a consequent inner change of convictions. The episode occurred in relation to a delicate human relationship. The ordinary common sense would have probably been enough to find a correct pattern of action, but I was a *kriyaban* [a practitioner of *Kriya Yoga*!], that is why I tried to apply integrally the teachings of P.Y. - I had studied all his writings with the utmost sincerity and earnestness - above all those that had a reference to concrete life.

The problem of the "rules of behavior" was further explored studying the *Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali, since I took for granted that they were the basis of both classical *Yoga* and *Kriya Yoga*.

In order to decide how to behave I chose, among all the writings, those that matched my mental plans, sentences that seemed to confirm my ideas and in this way I fostered the belief that my way of acting was supported from above and that the benedictions and the strength of the *Guru* were with me. The failure came about. It was evident, but I could not accept it in a first moment. I refused to believe that I had acted wrongly; I liked to foster the thought that the other people were unable to live up to my decisions.

It was as if I were "too spiritual" to carry on a life in this world; therefore, mine was a temporary condition that I had to bear with patience for an indefinite - but certainly finite - time. One day everything would resolve in my favor.

Like an unwholesome-minded person, I had lost every contact with reality, until my illusory dream began to desintegrate, slowly but inexorably. This happened when I tried to draft a synthesis of my experiences and I began to recall the events of my spiritual path, starting from the very beginning.

I vividly remembered the first sessions of *Pranayama* and all I had then experimented. In a state of rapture created by the beauty of my past, the thorny pain from the present situation mixed with the elation for a past that had not gone away and that might possibly be retrieved through a simple act of will. The real evil dominating those years of my life became clearer and clearer.

I saw how lethal was the pernicious idea of belonging to a privileged group and of practicing «the fastest technique in the field of spiritual evolution ». This thought had penetrated my awareness, awakening deep emotions in my mind - which prevented me from exerting watchfulness and discrimination toward the common things of life - creating, thus, a big devastation.

Inner laziness and intellectual paralysis resulted.

Now it was no longer possible to avoid the realization that my practice of *Kriya* was shallow. Apart from other foolish thoughts, I accepted the distorted idea that each *Pranayama* technique produced, almost automatically, «the equivalent of a solar year of spiritual evolution» and that through a million *Kriya* breathings I would infallibly reach the Cosmic Consciousness.

Every time I sat down to practice, I tried to perform the greatest possible number of *Pranayama* breathings in order to approach with more and more

hurry and eagerness the moment in which I would complete the above-mentioned number.

In the early years, when my spiritual adventure began, I nurtured no certainties and I faced with courage the feeling of desperation hidden in the depths of myself. *Pranayama* was the tool that would tear apart my internal obscurity.

Now, even if my *Pranayama* was the authentic *Kriya Pranayama* received with all the blessings of a hypothetical *Guru* residing in the astral realms, I was not practicing it any longer with the primal intensity and with the full dignity of the soul, which can arouse only from an intimate necessity.

It was evident that I had totally lost the initial motivation, the spirit of pursuit, the joy of the discovery.

No genuine growth had happened in me; I felt I was barren, hollow.

I was practicing with an arrogant attitude of supremacy, confident in the automatism of my path. It was necessary to return to that stadium of work free from all this mental - passively accumulated - junk; it was necessary to feel again the blessing of sufferings and doubts.

It was necessary to behave not as a man who has found a treasure, hidden it and sleeping satisfied upon it, but as a researcher who develops and makes his finding broader.

The hypnotic atmosphere of the "*Guru's Blessings*" had been, in my case, the cradle through which my ego was fed and strengthened. The necessity of recreating a spirit of authentic search became imperative.

PATANJALI: HOW TO BUILD A KRIYA ROUTINE

At that time I studied Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* where I found many good tips to build a rational *Kriya* routine.

Patanjali's approach to *Yoga* is well known. He was a pioneer in the art of handling rationally the mystic path, aiming to individualize a universal, physiological direction of the inner events. This explained why a certain phenomenon, inherent to the spiritual path, should be preceded and necessarily followed by other ones.

His extreme synthesis may be criticized or, because of its temporal distance, may be hard to understand; however, it is of extraordinary importance.

Patanjali pinpoints eight steps in the *Yoga* path: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*.

There are different ways of translating these Sanskrit terms. I use to interpret them as follows:

Yama: self-control. [Non-violence, avoid lies, avoid stealing, avoid being lustful and seek non-attachment.]

Niyama: religious observances. [Cleanliness, contentment, discipline, study of the Self and surrender to the Supreme God.]

Asana: posture, or physical exercise. The Yogi's posture must be steady and pleasant.

Pranayama: breath regulation. The consequence of the breath regulation is the regulation of the Prana and, then, the natural inhibition of the breath.

Pratyahara: withdrawal of the senses. Awareness is disconnected from the external reality.

Dharana: concentration. Focusing the mind on a chosen object.

Dhyana: meditation or contemplation. The persistence of a focusing action as a steady, uninterrupted flow of awareness, which fully explores all aspects of the chosen object.

Samadhi: perfect spiritual absorption. Deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself.

The comparison between the *Kriya* path and Patanjali's path requires to put every book aside and to rely only on one's personal experience. It is of no use to waste time on interpretations of commentaries, each conveying a

different mystic or esoteric point of view; in such an effort the original message would be distorted and the value of Patanjali's approach drastically reduced.

What I saw at a first glance was that Patanjali's first three steps could be taken for granted without being mentioned.

The moral precepts, the what-is-correct and the what-is-not-correct or, simply, the ethical foundation of the spiritual path, is something that should rather not be taken on with strength as an absolute prerequisite to *Kriya*. To put it simply, it has been seen that people running a morally questionable life were successful in *Kriya*, coming spontaneously to the so-called "virtuous" life, while a lot of conformists failed. A *Kriya* teacher is always inclined to let a student's wrong behavior pass, pretending he does not notice it. He simply does not mind it, laying his confidence in the transforming *Kriya* effect.

On the other hand, it is obvious that if the eagerness to learn *Kriya* and to put into practice its technical instructions pushes a *kriyaban* to go to a teacher, being further proposed to swear on oath on Patanjali's moral rules [*Yama, Niyama*], the student will almost surely do as required.

[In the next chapter I will tell about my association with two *Kriya* teachers. I remember how annoyed I was when my second teacher asked to his audiences a pledge which I knew for a certainty he himself was not able to respect. Before each *Kriya* initiation he used to make his students promise that they would look at the opposite sex - except for their partner - without being physically attracted. To this purpose, he recommended men to look at women as "mothers" and, correspondingly, women to look at men as "fathers". With a sigh of ill-concealed nuisance I waited for him to get through with his delirium and went on with the remaining part of his conference, coming at last to the explanation of the techniques.]

Regarding the "stable and comfortable" meditating position, a good *Kriya* teacher allows a student to choose between the *Half-lotus, Siddhasana* or *Padmasana*; he does not even dream of wasting time on these details, since he knows that the earnest and resolute student will use his common sense to find an ideal and comfortable position, so that he can easily maintain his back straight during the *Kriya* practice.

The *Kriya*'s first meaningful action is obviously Patanjali's fourth step, *Pranayama*.

Pranayama's action on the breath and on the energy in the body creates a state of calmness and *Equilibrium*, which becomes the foundation of the following steps. Patanjali, however, is evasive while dealing with *Pratyahara*: in this state, the energy in the body turns toward the inside and there follows a state where the breath is perfectly absent.

Indeed, this event does not consist of a single but of two steps; first, some specific techniques [*Maha Mudra*, *Navi Kriya* and a large part of the *Higher Kriyas*] requiring physical movement are prescribed; then, a perfect immobility is required and the concentration is directed on the spine [on the *Chakras*] in order to increase the perception of the *Omkar* reality; it is not directed on an abstract or physical object, as it happens in Patanjali's *Dharana*.

Very peculiarly indeed, Patanjali wrote that, after the breath's disappearance, a *Yogi* should look for a physical or abstract object on which he might turn his concentration and practice in a kind of contemplative meditation in a way as to lose himself in it.

It is interesting, for those who practice *Kriya*, to realize that Patanjali's definition of *Dharana* has nothing to do with Lahiri Mahasaya's ideas and intents.

A *kriyaban* encounters the manifestation of the *Omkar* reality – the vibration sustaining the universe, the internal sound that grabs his conscience and leads it to the depths, without any danger of getting lost. His conscience is filled with such a delight that he has no reason for discarding the *Om* perception and choosing another one, which cannot but belong to the kingdom of the mind.

The distinction between *Dharana* and *Dhyana* – to turn the concentration to an object and to start exploring it through a contemplative meditation – is of little account for a *kriyaban*. Whereas it is clear that an ideal *Kriya* session should end with Patanjali's eighth step: *Samadhi*.

Summary

1...A *Kriya* routine begins with an action on the breath [*Pranayama*], which is guided, harnessed, checked and, although long and deep, essentially transformed in a movement of energy.

2.... The spine is magnetized; this creates a situation of deep calmness and tranquility, a sensation of expansion and of internal comfort. The breath and the heart slow their pace.

3... The awareness of the breath is put aside, to "transcend" it thanks to a purely mental process.

A keen perception of *Om*, in the aspect of inner sound and light, happens in perfect immobility.

The concentration on the *Chakras*, either inside or outside of the spine, given by an intuition-suggested rhythm, increasingly enriches the perception of the *Omkar* reality.

4... The constant concern in raising the level of consciousness into the highest *Chakras*, in particular into the *Kutastha*, ends by melting with the *Om*. In total immobility, when relaxation reaches a state of perfection, the energy gets into the spine; the awareness melts into the light, a light that is "as bright as a million suns".

By keeping in mind the foregoing scheme, I could mostly appreciate the *Hong So* and *Om* techniques and I could get a different idea of them. They may embody a complete experience of *Kriya*. Each of them, in its apparent simplicity, reveals to contain different stages, which possess the potential to replace the complete routine.

JAPA AND THE BREATHLESS STATE

I succeeded in overcoming my natural resistance of reading works that did not concern *Kriya Yoga* and I also read Mère's works.

The great fascination for this eminent figure started when I was introduced to the thought of Sri Aurobindo - his *Aphorisms* and his epic poem *Savitri* [Collected works of Sri Aurobindo by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust] were my favorite. After Aurobindo's death, in 1951, Mère was the one continuing his research and giving ground to his dream that the Divine, the intelligent and evolutive form at the base of any existing thing, could come to a perfect manifestation on this planet!

«In matter, the Divine becomes perfect...» Mère said. What I am sure of is that she did not behave as a traditional Guru, even though she tried to extract from every human being looking for inspiration at her feet all his hidden potential. The story of her research is related in *Mother's Agenda* [Institute for Evolutionary Research, New York.]

Her presence in my life, evoked through close and passionate readings, acted like an inner pressure calling for a meaning from each part of my life. She stressed the value of not trying to become pure in other people's

eyes, but to behave in a natural way. To her, we should accept what we are, acknowledging our dark side and the fact that we are basically similar to «those living in obscurity»! I do not remember where I found her statement that «the desire for purity is the greatest obstacle for one's spiritual path». «Do not try to be virtuous - She added - find out to what extent you are united with what is anti-divine.»!

I really cannot describe the explosion of joy and the feeling of freedom I felt reading such revolutionary words! When I went out for a walk, if I met somebody and stopped to listen to him, no matter what he said, a sudden joy would explode in my chest and rise to my eyes to the point that I could barely hold back my tears. Looking at the distant mountains or at other details of the landscape, I would try to direct my feeling toward them in order to turn my paralyzing joy into esthetic rapture; only this could keep back the joy clutching my being, only this could hide it.

With a desperate need of peace and tranquility, I chose to stick to the simplest routine of *Kriya* and to live in a more introverted way.

I stubbornly grabbed the well-known instruction to maintain resolutely, during the day, a smooth attitude toward both pleasant and unpleasant events, while sincerely feeling like a detached "witness". Sustained by the enthusiasm for this new "trick", described in such an alluring way in almost all the books dealing with oriental meditative practices, I succeeded in attaining an almost ideal state but, after some days, I felt under stress as if all was a pretence, an illusion.

It was at this time that I came across a book about the life and experiences of Swami Ramdas, the Indian saint who moved far and wide all over India unceasingly repeating the *Mantra Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*.

This was indeed an important event; his photo - the almost childish simplicity of his smile - kindled my intuition and led me to try the same practice; from this decision something came that still remains in my heart as a peak experience.

I started to practice it aloud during some walks, and then I tried to continue it mentally during my daily chores.

The sound of the *Mantra*, which I had already listened to in a spiritual song recording, gave me the idea of a strong and, at the same, time sweet vibration; the use of a 108-grain rosary made the practice very pleasant.

Even if sometimes I felt a bit dazed, I maintained the determination never to discard the practice. Since I observed, while doing it, an irresistible impulse to put everything in order, I thought that the *Mantra* could work in a similar way by cleaning my mental stuff and putting my "psychological furniture" in order.

As I have written, the choice of my *Mantra* was born from an undoubtable predilection - I shivered with joy at the vibration it created in my awareness. That is why I loved to caress this vibration, prolong it on my lips, make it vibrate in my chest and invest it with my heart's aspiration. I put a lot of force into that practice; my attitude was never that of a supplicating and sobbing devotee, but that of a man one step away from his goal.

When summer came, I practiced my *Japa* every day in the morning and *Kriya* at noon in the open countryside.

One day, after *Pranayama*, while mentally climbing up and down the *Chakras*, I distinctly perceived a fresh energy sustaining my body from inside. I entered a perfect immobility and, at a certain moment, I discovered to be completely without breath. This condition lasted various minutes, without any feeling of uneasiness. There was neither the least quiver of surprise, or the thought: «Finally I have it».

In the following days, before starting with *Pranayama* I looked at the surrounding panorama wondering if I would experience the breathless state again; after 40-50 minutes I had already completed the active part – the last breaths of *Pranayama* – and then, after no more than two or three minutes, while I was moving up and down along the spine, the miracle happened.

It reminded me what Sri Aurobindo wrote about the moment he stepped on the Indian soil, after his long period of studies in England. With a poetical spirit, He told how a vast calm descended, surrounded and remained with him.

Since I verified the perfect association between the practice of *Japa* during the day and the obtainment of this state, I was astonished that one of the simplest techniques in the world, such as *Japa* is, had brought such a valuable result. It was a strange event indeed and it contained a fundamental lesson for me.

Here are my considerations about the subject.

Being no hermits, it is not possible for us to reach the ideal conditions of relaxation in barely an hour. More time is needed to calm one's body until

the state of breathlessness is reached. There are some thoughts which we can visualize, identify and block, but a diffuse persistent background noise nullifies all our efforts.

So, no matter if the *Kriya* process is carried out with maximum care; this background noise will become an unsurmountable obstacle. The only possible way to annul it is not through technical tricks, but through *Japa*; only that, performed during the daily activities, is a successful tool.

There must be definitely a reason why *Japa* ["Continuous Prayer", "Inner Prayer", "Heart Prayer", *Dhikr*] was the basic technique used by a lot of mystics. Even though the oriental traditions recommend to perform *Japa* mentally, I am confident that it should be done aloud - at least during an initial set of a hundred repetitions.

Experience and common sense contradict the belief that a *Mantra* works only if it is given by a *Guru*; it is obvious that an expert helping us choose a *Mantra* and using all his persuasion to win our consent to use it relentlessly, represents the most precious service we can ever take advantage of!

I know that some kriyabans do not use *Japa* during the daytime; they state that Lahiri Mahasaya did not recommend that practice. We can reply that almost all his disciples, Hindus and Muslims, used that practice since it was, at that time and in that place, very ordinary.

I'm convinced that *Japa* can make "miracles", even where our will fails!

In the course of three months I lived in this celestial dimension, perfectly at ease, still, without any other desire of fulfillment. Almost every day I thought: «Do not forget a single instant of this experience; take down every detail of it, have it again, every day of your life, because this is the most real experience which has been experienced ever»! In a blue-colored profundity, it contained the skies of my childhood. It seemed impossible to lose it.

But I lost it. The world of the "traveling *Gurus*" was getting closer to my life, and with it an unbelievable confusion too.

CHAPTER V THE OMKAR DIMENSION OF KRIYA YOGA

During a tour abroad I found a text written by an Indian teacher of *Kriya Yoga*, extolling his method as the original Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Pranayama*, whereas P.Y.'s was mentioned as a slightly modified form of *Kriya*.

I was excited when I read that *Pranayama* would not be correct if the practitioner - without closing his ears - had not felt the *Om* sound.

The statement was worthy to be taken into consideration; it was surely relative to a very deep practice of *Pranayama*.

Reading that book, I had the sensation that its author knew the whole processes of *Kriya Yoga* far better than many other teachers.

Among other theoretic parts, the author said that the final part of the enlightening process would take place in a hollow cavity of the brain, called "the cave of *Brahma*". In its front part there is the pituitary gland (hypophysis), behind it we have the pineal gland. [According to him, these two glands were the seats of the sixth and of the seventh *Chakra* respectively.]

In such cavity, enlightenment can take place not simply metaphorically but in the very literal meaning of this word. An emission of light, similar to a voltaic arc, would happen between the two "poles" and shed light in that area. This process was described as a "mystic union". The whole explanation was accompanied by a helping sketch, which had the psychological effect to eliminate all uncertainties on the validity and universality of this experience.

I had no idea of when and where I could have the opportunity to encounter this teacher, but I was excited like a child receiving the most beautiful of all gifts. I could almost touch the marvelous possibility of deepening my *Pranayama*, clarifying - likely - my doubts regarding routines, *Kechari Mudra* and *Higher Kriyas* too.

In the following months, my fixed idea was to guess how he taught the deepening of the *Pranayama* technique. Sometimes an annoying doubt appeared: once this new teaching had been received, how could I understand whether it was really original or an invention? My reservation stemmed from my conditioning according to which any *Kriya* information, obtained outside my school, could be an invention of those who pursued

their personal interests, like earning money or exerting power over other people.

However, the listening to the *Om* sound with opened ears [unlike in the *Om* technique] could surely be considered the proof of an optimal deepening of *Pranayama*.

I convinced myself that the key technical addition consisted in mentally chanting *Om* in the *Chakras*, while going up and down in the spine and, at the same time, in exerting all the possible attention on the internal sounds.

Pranayama with mental *Japa* was familiar to me, but I had never tried to combine it with the inner listening. The technique of listening to the internal sounds, learned inside the school, had given me the deepest satisfaction. Thanks to that unparalleled experience, I anticipated a striking success in this new undertaking.

I ignored I was approaching indeed not Lahiri Mahasaya's basic *Pranayama* but His *Omkar Pranayama*.

I don't remember how much of these breaths I used to practice each day: surely, I never went over the 48-60 units. After them, I would enjoy observing the breath in the *Chakras*, never relaxing my attention on the internal sounds.

In the book I had found a deep recommendation: if we wanted to make a remarkable spiritual progress, we should engage ourselves in being aware of 1728 breaths a day, placing our attention on each *Chakra* with each different breath. I restricted my practice to a quarter of that number; anyway the time devoted to it was considerable.

The inner sound appeared after just four days of painstaking practice. It was winter. For about three weeks I have been able to stay away from reality. I chose to spend every morning wrapped in the warmth of my home, practicing as much as possible. I entered a season of life in which I experienced a total contentment and ease, as if my *Kriya* path had come to its fulfillment.

Looking back to this experience, it has been for me a sort of vacation, away from life and all its problems and anxieties.

By day, everything seemed surrounded by a padded coat reducing all dissonances. Everything was like transfigured; I was like living in a perfect reality and the whole world was smiling ecstatically at me; every pain took flight, off my sight.

I had the chance to spend some days in a beautiful location equipped for winter sport. Here I could wander the snow-white countryside aimlessly. In the afternoon, while I was lazily getting about, the sun set its way down, painting the landscape with breathtaking colors; the little village, sunk in the snow, started to be all lights. My memory will always hold it as the splendid symbol of my contact with the *Omkar* experience.

The oddness was that I did not know the teacher yet; I had just read his book, but the intensity of my practice was extreme! The winter vacations ended and I got back to my job.

During my spare time, I would think about the precious jewel I had found, visualizing the possibility of a future deepening; such a commitment would be applied to my *Higher Kriyas* too.

One day, still at work, I was in a room from which I could glimpse, through a pane, the far-off mountains and contemplate the purely celestial sky above them. I was in ecstasy! That distant sky was the mirror of my future years, wholly dedicated to my *Kriya Yoga*.

For the first time, the project to retire and to live with a minimal income, maintaining this state for the rest of my days, came upon me.

MY FIRST TEACHER OF KRIYA

Being about to undergo surgery in the United States, that Indian teacher was going to make a stop in Europe; I worked very hard to take part in one of his seminars.

His classes were for me of great emotional impact; he had a majestic and noble aspect, he was "handsomely" wrapped in his ochre clothes, his oldness, his long hair and beard marked the features of the typical sage. I took glimpses of him while he spoke, hidden by the front rows; I heard him talk of Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy according to his personal experience. I found no objection to his words, even if sometimes they fell into a devotional tone. The things he said were marvelous, absolutely new for me.

To him, *Kriya Yoga* was not merely a set of separated techniques but a unique progressive process of tuning with the *Omkar* reality; like the thread uniting all the pearls, *Omkar* goes through all the different phases of *Kriya*.

It had to be perceived not only in the aspect of sound and light but also in the aspect of a "sensation of movement" (some other time he spoke about a feeling of pressure or heaviness).

All the *Kriya Yoga* techniques should be practiced to get to that perception; the *Maha Mudra*, for instance, had to be preceded by a bend forward of the body.

The object of his explanations was not on what he called "long-breath *Pranayama*", but on the following part, where the breath is subtle and faint and it sometimes seems about to stop. He applied an enormous emphasis to this practice.

He was leading me into a wondrous dimension, which I had only caught a glimpse of. He tried his best - "touching" the students and making their bodies vibrate - to make us feel its flavor.

During a separate session he taught us how to introduce the twelve-syllable *Mantra (Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya)* into *Pranayama*, "touching the inner part" of each *Chakra* with each syllable.

[What I learned from him, will be shared in the next chapters.]

The soil my teacher was cultivating began to get sterile, since he chose to leave out some of the techniques Lahiri Mahasaya had passed on - not only those belonging to the *Higher Kriyas*, but also to the *First Kriya* - making his teachings incomplete.

Aware that the original *Kriya* spirit had been lost in other schools, he wanted us to approach the real meaning of it.

He had tried all Lahiri Mahasaya's techniques, concluding that the majority of them were not essential; some of them were rather too delicate and difficult to be learned. Attempts to understand them would, then, result in a useless distraction for the students and a waste of time for him as a teacher. He expressed himself adamantly: the request, by some people, to receive the *Higher Kriyas* implied a lack of engagement in the basic techniques.

All what he said made definitely sense, but it also contributed to his isolation. He did not take into consideration how the human mind really works, through insatiable curiosity and the total rejection of any veto.

I saw the sense of his solitude when, one day, on a *Kriya* reviewing lesson, he told his public that the real *Pranayama* could only take place in total

absence of breath; the one, marked by long breaths, could only be good for «kindergarten children».

He closed his nostrils with his fingers and kept that position for some time; he was simply illustrating a concept without keeping himself from breathing. In spite of that the students were staring at him in loss; he must have been bizarre and peculiar to them.

I could not help thinking how many disappointments must have convinced him to make such a peculiar demonstration. Perhaps he had met people who, after years of long-breath *Pranayama*, did not gain any benefit. Truly, he wanted to share with us the discovery of a life; yet, the beginners could only sense too big a distance to be bridged between them and the master.

Those who already had a good mastering of *Kriya* had the final confirmation that the teacher would never reveal the secret procedures he was an expert of. It seemed to them that all what he had taught was a simple introduction to *Kriya*, but it had not provided the key to the experiential acme. So, literally devoured by the thirst for the complete teachings, they could not concentrate peacefully on what they had already received.

Some might contend that a lot of people obeyed him, and this is actually true; but that kind of people would never do something like organizing a seminar for their teacher. Frankly speaking, their faithfulness was not enough to avoid the worst end. The honest aim of his effort, all the marvelous subtleties that he had applied to *Kriya*, making this practice livelier and by far more beautiful for a lot of practitioners, was not enough to prevent the shipwreck of his whole mission.

The book he had written had been a smart strategic action which made him popular in the west, saving for him a place of crucial importance in the realm of *Kriya*.

Moreover, his Indian-sage figure impressed the people. He really had all the necessary tools to attract the western world. Hundreds of scholars were enthusiastic about him, they were ready to back his mission and treat him like a divinity, being willing to show the same respect to a possible successor.

Yet, after an overwhelming initial enthusiasm, his unhappy choice triggered an inexorable mechanism which pushed away the people who were most indispensable to him. Disappointed by their defection, the more

he stubbornly focused on the essence of *Kriya Yoga*, the less he was able to catch the attention of new people.

If someone had tried to get this absurdity across to him, he would have found himself facing a wall that would never break.

Using the same flyers and changing only the Master's name, some people, who formerly organized his seminars, called another teacher who would substitute him.

He was to become my second teacher. Although his spiritual achievements were almost inexistent, some *kriyabans* who had already met him in India said he was more willing to explain *Kriya* in its complete form.

MY SECOND TEACHER

The magical realm of *Omkar*, which I had partially experienced since I was a young student and which I had been introduced to by the passion of my former teacher, could be neither left aside nor forgotten.

I did not even dream about changing my spiritual path's foundations; this is why I approached my new teacher with the idea of rejecting him if, somehow, he appeared to be trying to guide me away from such a reality.

I met him in Italy, in a *Yoga* center where he had been invited by some disciples; from an informal speech, followed by a question-and-answer section, I came to know that he knew my former teacher and was aware of his choice not to teach the whole body of the *Kriya* techniques. He got clearly across to us that the reason of his trip west was to re-establish the original teachings into a complete form. This was enough to overcome my initial wariness and stir my enthusiasm.

During the following initiation seminar, I indulgently observed some lacks in his behavior which, instead, shocked the other followers. He revealed a real temper. He exploded whenever he was addressed an innocent and legitimate question; he would always sense a hidden purpose or a veiled opposition in the student's words, instead of an excess of curiosity or a care for details. To him, they were challenging his authority.

His explanation of the techniques was reasonably clear but in part unusually synthetic. For instance, his instructions on *Pranayama*, which were formally correct, could be understood only by those who had already been practicing *Kriya Yoga* for a long time.

He would dedicate very little time to this technique, so that one day I decided to time him: the explanation was offered in no more than two minutes!

He carried on that way for years, in spite of his close collaborators' polite complaints. He demonstrated *Pranayama* by means of an excessively loud vibratory sound, made through his epiglottis. He knew that this sound was not correct, but he continued using it to be heard by the last rows of students too, sparing himself the annoyance of getting up and walking among them, as *Kriya* teachers usually do. In any case, he would not bother to say that the sound had to be smooth rather than vibrating. I know that many of the students, believing it was the "secret" that this teacher had brought from India, tried to produce the same sound for months.

Some years later when he asked me to teach *Kriya Yoga* - since he was away - to those people who were interested in it, I rejoiced at this occasion because I could finally explain everything in a complete and exhaustive way. I wanted my students to forget the shame of being refused and of seeing a legitimate question unconsidered.

I had the impression that everything was going on smoothly; all of a sudden the situation started to get complicated. This happened when I wrote a letter to him, some months before his return, to advise him to check the students' comprehension, after the initiation classes, through a guided group practice.

Incredibly, as a reply, he crossed me out of his list of disciples, communicating his official decision to one of his close partners. Probably, my experience with that teacher would have ended that way - and it would have been better - if I had been informed about what was happening. Unaware of the situation, when I welcomed him back to Europe at his arrival, he hugged me as if nothing had happened. He probably interpreted my presence there as an attitude of repentance.

Later on, I got appalled when I realized everything. It was too late to react though. For the benefit of the group's peace, I decided to go on without reacting but I deliberately began to control myself, without making any reasonable suggestion.

In order to be able to tell the definitive crack of our relations, it is necessary to dwell for a while on Lahiri Mahasaya's *Higher Kriyas*. There

is confusion on this topic since there are a lot of schools - each of them created by one of Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples - teaching the techniques in different ways, with omissions of this or that.

This teacher belonged to a particular school which had eliminated all the *Kriyas* presenting the delicate problem of holding one's breath. This is a very important detail in Lahiri Mahasaya's *Thokar* technique.

It is not actually easy to explain how these techniques work; a practitioner has to raise the energy to the lungs' higher level and breathe in a particular way, his breath being so subtle as to become imperceptible.

The teaching methodology becomes problematic when a teacher decides to initiate a whole public instead of a small number of followers. This is the reason that my new teacher used to leave out a whole sequence of techniques which were connected to this delicate point.

I knew them all - I had learned them from other sources - and I kept them away for my future.

A further problem was that the techniques he taught us were not well-explained at all. I tried to be tolerating when it came to some secondary details, but I could scarcely stand that the same technique changed from one year to another. One of them included some precise head movements - it was not Lahiri Mahasaya's *Thokar* on the heart, but a different one. Actually, the last year he came to our group he changed the basic procedure of the movements. When some of the students asked him for a reason for the changes, he pretended not to understand, arguing, later on, that he had not changed anything and that, in the past seminars, a problem of translation might have occurred.

It was I who did that translation. I did not say anything since his lie was too evident: my friends remembered very well the head movements they had formerly seen with their own eyes.

Confronted with other changes, I had the impression that I was cooperating with an archaeologist who was deliberately altering some findings in order to justify them to the public in the theoretic framework he was accustomed to.

Absorbed in these preoccupations, I did not realize that I had almost completely lost contact with the *Omkar* reality. My subconscious mind was beginning to rebel. I can vividly remember a dream in which I was swimming in manure. While the diffusion of *Kriya* touched a lot of people in a superficial manner, attracted by a shallow publicity, behind my mask

of fake delight hid a dry agony. There were moments in which, thinking of my meek beginning in the practice of *Yoga*, my heart felt an indefinite nostalgia for that period, which was ready to rise again and blossom to the full, now that I knew every part of *Kriya Yoga*.

As an answer to some friends abroad, I went to their group to teach them *Kriya Yoga* - on behalf of my teacher. In that group I met a very serious student who asked me a lot of questions. He proved to know from *Kriya Yoga* and we discussed the fact that my teacher had never taught a whole part of the *Higher Kriyas*.

He could understand my embarrassment and he was surprised that I had never talked freely about it to my teacher, since he had chosen me as a *Kriya* teacher! It was absurd for me not to open my heart with him; being aware of his temper, I knew that he would not accept this and that the whole situation might collapse. Yet my duty was to face his reaction.

I knew very well that everybody in my group would suffer if our relationship had come to a final break; just a few friends, in fact, would be able to comprehend the reason for my action.

They felt comfortable with him, and his annual visit was a powerful stimulus; we got ourselves up for his visit with an intense practice of *Kriya Yoga*, as if we had to be tested. Everybody appreciated his philosophy, and I shared this appreciation too.

This was to all of us the best remedy against New Age deformations; it was a solid understanding that *Kriya Yoga* is not meant as an increase of one's mind and ego toward a hypothetically superior mind, but a trip beyond the mind through an uncontaminated territory.

I wrote a letter to him where I mentioned the problems in question, which we would discuss at his arrival. A harsh reply came just a few days later.

He wrote that my excessive attachment to the techniques would never let me out of the fences of my mind; I was like S. Thomas, too desirous to touch with my hand every detail of *Kriya*, whereas I should have tried to spend my time a little better, practicing the techniques I already had. I admit he was right. Lahiri Mahasaya himself used to say that everything could be obtained through the *First Kriya*. Nonetheless, I thought that an informal talk about this issue would not do harm to anybody. I replied to my teacher's letter insisting with my request.

Some weeks later I realized that my name and that of my group had been taken off from his Internet site; my letter brought about a definitive split.

My friends reacted badly to this news. Like a domino effect, some coordinators belonging to other groups in Europe, who had been hardly tolerating his bad manners, took advantage of that episode to break any contact with him. They felt the time was ripe to enjoy this liberation.

I had not even a faint idea of what our group was to become without a teacher joining us in the near future. Without him, in fact, it would remain close, sterile, doomed to die away because no newcomers would bring their enthusiasm in anymore. There would be no new students to be initiated to *Kriya Yoga*.

After some months the wheel of good fortune seemed to be turning again; a new teacher would probably come to the group in one or two years. I accepted the proposal to invite him, as he was a well-regarded person.

Some days later, contacted by the teacher's secretary, she handled the financial side of the trip with such brutality and harshness that I decided to decline the offer. I was really sick and tired of the whole situation; I had enough of behaving like a compliant disciple who begs for crumbs of the "original *Kriya*".

REACHING THE BOTTOM

From then on, I went through a very specific period of my life because I finally decided to move, to travel in various parts of the world and know more groups of people, practicing Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Yoga*; my hope was to meet a real expert of *Kriya*. I was very disappointed from my previous experiences, but I was diving headlong and defenseless into the dreary territory of the *New-Age-polluted Kriya Yoga*. For one person it is like a no-way-out prison, for another one it is the prelude to bitter disappointments and finally abandoning the spiritual pursuit in general.

Haunting seminars on *Kriya Yoga*, I met a lot of people with just as heterogeneous behaviors, whose interests ranged from esoteric philosophies to "New Age" tendencies, in which they floated in loss.

I spent with them one of the strangest and disordered periods of my life. I particularly remember these times of my life whenever I listen to the tape recordings of some devotional chants I bought on those occasions. I was getting used to the "initiating" rituals. Bringing flowers was recommended, some teachers asked for one flower, some others three or six; some fruit was required too - someone might also expect a coconut, forcing the

students to desperately look for it store after store; at last, a donation was required, sometimes a free donation, sometimes a compulsory minimum amount of money was set.

After so many rituals, the explanations were always quick and shallow; a destructive criticism was often raised against information coming from other sources.

I would finish all those initiations repeating to myself how grateful I was, making up my mind about abandoning all other practices and to go down the line for the one I had just received.

My heart would surely have advised me to listen to it, if only I had stopped to think for a moment; it would have told me that I was putting myself on, that the new initiation had only added something insignificant to what I already knew, that the teacher's strict requests would soon become a "cage" from which I would sooner or later break loose.

Those who organized the meetings always gave the impression of being trustworthy scholars and it always guaranteed that no nonsense would ever slip out of their mouths. I was surprised when one of them, beyond simple exhibitionism, quoted by heart some lines from a work by P.Y.; the same, sibylline lines which had been, once, the source of so many uncertainties. He read and read through those texts several times trying to make them out; he really strained upon those texts. I felt that those researchers were my real family; I learned to listen to them respectfully and silently whenever they would correct some of my fancy interpretations on *Kriya Yoga*. They provided good fuel for my brain. Among us there was the acquiescence that our teachers were mostly mediocre persons with visible humane lacks; this might have been tolerable in common people, but strongly contrasting with the personality expected of people who called themselves "spiritual guides". We were not able to find at least one of them who would prove to possess that mastery of *Kriya* which was crucial in such a delicate pedagogic work they were confident to do. Some trifling episodes confirmed our first impression of instability, improvisation and, in one case, even of mental instability. They knew little about *Kriya Yoga* and they taught it in an even more superficial way. In spite of that, those little bits of notions were enough to satisfy us. We were honest researchers hypnotized by the mythical *Guru-disciple* relationship, whose influence we had received from P.Y.'s school. It is strange to realize how the

organization instilled in us the only thing that kept us stoutly devoted to people we actually depreciated.

I also met those I call "New Age" people: how to describe them? In my first school of *Kriya*, I met people whose enthusiasm toward *Kriya Yoga* was very moderate, and it seemed they practiced the few techniques they knew as if making a sacrifice to tame a fickle mind and to expiate the wrong they had done: existing.

"New Age" people on the other hand were yet too passionate about a particular form of *Yoga* or oriental meditative practice, fostering too much faith in its alleged cathartic problem-solving potential.

Bound to a very oriental lifestyle, they particularly loved one characterized by specific sensations that they would cultivate with care and, above all, innocent frenzies. I learned to relate myself to each of them - for example to those who would host me whenever the seminar was held in a distant city - the way an explorer deals with unknown animals, getting up for any eccentric revelation... alleged thaumaturgic powers, prophecies of imminent catastrophes and possibly tips on how to escape them. Some of them - no meanness intended here - seemed to be mentally unstable, sometimes had emotional difficulties. At times, without realizing the way they felt, I would react to their oddness ironically; it was something I just could not help, it came out so spontaneously.

At times, I even thought I might have embittered them; in spite of that, they were always generous toward me and respectful of my personality. Never at all did they try to force something into my mind, sharing with passion everything they had learned, no matter if what they learned cost them a great deal of time, effort and money. Our relationship was based on real affection and it never experienced disagreement, bitterness or formality.

Quite another affair was to meet another variety of seekers: those who stocked up on techniques as for a famine. They affirmed boldly their loyalty to their *Guru* but were on the alert about every new rumour on technical details appearing in books or in websites. A state of despair brought them to take part in a lot of initiation seminars, where a begging devotional attitude and the solemn pledge of secretiveness was the password to be accepted. As soon as the meeting was over, they shared, by cell-phone, the coveted news with other students who, in change, would take part in other initiations and would reciprocate the favour.

Now and then, those who had come back from India, showed on their face the excitement for having seen such an extraordinary land. At the same time, their disappointment for all the things they had not been able to learn started to show out.

Some friends happened to meet a boaster assuring them to know *Kriya Yoga* and to be able to initiate them. This could only happen as long as they had kept it a total secret without establishing any contact with other teachers. In this manner, the boaster made sure that they would not realize it was not *Kriya Yoga* what they were being taught.

I could only realize this when, overcoming some people's inner opposition, I had this technique explained to me as well; mostly, it was nothing more than the mere repetition of a *Mantra*! What made me feel sorry about it was not so much the great advantage gained by those braggers (which for them meant a real fortune at my friends' expense) as their missing the chance to learn *Kriya Yoga* from safer sources.

Something different happened to a friend of mine who met a descendant of Lahiri Mahasaya. This was one of the master's nephews, a man with a great academic background and of a deep knowledge of *Kriya Yoga*, but my friend was not able to learn anything from him.

I was taken aback when my friend told me "something bizarre". He told me that in Benares, and probably in the whole rest of India, *Kriya Yoga* was not practiced any longer. Even the disciples of Lahiri Mahasaya did not know it.

I kept enough control not to interrupt him, then I imagined what had happened; my friend most probably led the discussion toward very small talks. He actually asked him some information on Indian habits, an *Ashram*'s address and, only at the end of the interview – he must have remembered he was in Lahiri Mahasaya's house – he asked if any of the disciples of Lahiri were still practicing *Kriya*.

His demeanour must have lacked the proper respect, because the master's answer resulted in a sarcastically sour negative; in other words: «Definitely not, it is not practiced any longer in here. I dare say it is not in the whole Indian peninsula. Rather, you surely are the only one practicing it!».

My friend's eyes were looking at me surprisingly. I am still not sure whether he was hoping to convince me or was just absorbed in bitter frustration. I did not pry into it. I am not sure – I do not think so anyway – that he realized how foolish he had been with that master.

An answer came for him one month later; he came to know that a man from his same town had recently been initiated to *Kriya Yoga* from the very person he had met in Benares. He was so irritated by that news that he planned to get back to India to raise a protest to that man.

[Unfortunately, this is something he did not have the chance to do; a serious illness got hold of his life. In spite of our huge character difference, I will always be grateful to this friend for all the things that he shared with me concerning his spiritual path.]

To conclude this picture, one episode is worth being quoted.

Another friend of mine remained for some days at an *Ashram*, in the hope he might receive *Kriya Yoga*. The monk running the *Ashram* was away, and my friend received the initiation to *Kriya Yoga* from one of his disciples. In the end, he was given some written material summarizing its techniques.

At the end of his trip, visibly content, he showed me the written material; the techniques did not differ that much from those I already knew, but there were many more details.

Nothing there was, though, that could do away with all my doubts; not a single hint to the *Kechari Mudra*, nothing on the *Thokar* either. On the contrary, I can remember a very complicated technique based on the visualization of the *Chakras* like they are described in Tantric texts.

Each technique was preceded by a theoretic introduction with quotations from ancient books and an illustration which eliminated any possible doubt. To conclude, a precise gradual routine was given. Of course, there was a note guaranteeing that all the mentioned techniques constituted *Kriya Yoga* taught by *Babaji*, Lahiri Mahasaya's mythical *Guru*.

Since that material was very interesting, I would have liked to yield to the illusion that my quest had finally ended, since those notes contained what I was asking for. I simply had to convince myself that *Babaji* had but taken the classical *Yoga* and mixed it with Tantrism to obtain His *Kriya Yoga*.

Ci voleva inoltre l'audacia di pensare che il *Thokar* potesse essere visto come una banale variante dello *Jalandhara Bandha*!

Moreover, the *Thokar* might have been seen as a variation of the *Jalandhara Bandha*!

If the instructions to *Kechari Mudra* were not there, never mind, it probably just meant that it was not important.

With a bit of good will and application I could have closed the circle. Chance made me listen to the recording of a conference, in which the author of those notes said he had found those techniques in some tantric texts which he had translated; he, then, made an accurate selection of them to form a coherent system which constituted his system of *Kriya*. How was it possible, then, to have a note saying that those teachings came directly from *Babaji*?

Simple. As well as with the majority of Indian masters, their disciples would write the books; these people had the beautiful idea to make it more interesting by talking of a hypothetical derivation from the mythical *Babaji*.

The teacher, then, reflecting a classic Indian habit, never checked that material – he was taken aback later on, coming to know about those "supplementary notes". He tried, anyway, to defend his disciples' work stating that after all ... *Babaji's Kriya Yoga* had Tantric origins too.

During that time I studied a history of the western esoteric thought. The reading was tiresome but I found the spirit of my youth in it. Instead of feeling horror at the deformations provoked by the human mind in its occasionally tragic weakness, I understood very well the inquisitiveness of the people involved; I fancied their joy and their exaltation when a new esoteric book, long after being announced to the market, finally came into their hands.

While acquiring familiarity with the main initiating movements, I saw what an enormous impact upon the seekers a book could have, what power, if it gave the impression of containing the key of the esoteric and occult mysteries!

My sympathetic, emotive approach acted as a purgative and kept me from wasting time on new esoterical searches: I felt perfectly satisfied by now, as if this world, my old dear world, was forever effaced from this earth and confined to the dimension of a fable.

Today, if I meet a researcher absorbed in such matters, I feel very near to him and react much better than in the presence of a man lost in pure religious deliriums.

The vice of esotericism can be maniacal too, this is true, but curable, while there is no medicine for the religious manias!

THE MYSTIC DIMENSION OF KRIYA

Of great inspiration was the study of a biography of Kabir [1398 Benares – 1448/1494 Maghar].

Illiterate weaver, Muslim of origin, he was a great mystic, open to the vedantic and yogic influence, an extraordinary singer of the Divine, conceived beyond name and form.

The poems and sentences ascribed to him are expressed in a particularly effective language that remains permanently emblazoned in the reader's memory.

In the last century, Rabindranath Tagore, the great mystic poet of Calcutta, rediscovered the reliability of his teachings, the power of his poetry and made a beautiful translation of his songs into English (New York, The Macmillan Company).

Kabir had as a teacher a Brahmin [Ramananda] and was therefore instructed to conceive Islam and Hinduism as two roads converging toward a unique goal: he was always convinced of the possibility to overcome the barriers that separate these two great religions.

He did not seem to appreciate the holy writings, the religious rituals and dogmas.

That God has to be recognized inside of one's own soul - like a fire fed by continuous care, burning all the resistances, dogmas and ignorance down - this beautifully appears in Kabir's saying: «One day my mind flew as a bird in the sky, and it entered the heavens. When I arrived, I saw that there was no God, since He resided in the Saints!»

Hinduism gave Kabir the concept of reincarnation and the law of *Karma*; Islam gave him the absolute monotheism - the strength to fight all the forms of idolatry and the caste system.

I found the full meaning of the yogic practice in him; he says that there is a garden full of flowers in our body, the *Chakras*, and an endless beauty can be contemplated if the awareness is established into the "thousand-petal Lotus".

Regarding his concept of *Shabda*, which can be translated as "Word" [the word of the Master], we can relate this to the *Omkar* teaching - the *Om* vibration.

According to him this *Shabda-Om* dispels all doubts and difficulties, but it is vital to keep it constantly in our consciousness as a living presence. He taught not to renounce to life and become a hermit, not to cultivate any extreme approach to the spiritual discipline, because it weakens the body and increases pride. He keenly planned to die in Maghar, near Benares - with a last sneer, since who died there, according to the current beliefs, would surely be reborn in the features of a donkey!

I think that studying Kabir's thought may help more than other subjects of research, to understand Lahiri Mahasaya's personality; thus, the core of *Kriya* may be reached as fast as an arrow. In Kabir's sobriety and simplicity we can perceive, as a reflex, the full radiance of Lahiri Mahasaya's light, nowadays veiled by the too-complicated literature related to him.

Part of Lahiri Mahasaya's writings - letters and diaries - reminds us of Kabir, even though another part diverges in a dramatic way.

Lahiri Mahasaya commented verbally some sacred texts. His disciple P. Bhattacharya later printed these interpretations. These books were little known for a long time, as they were written in Bengali. They were later translated into English.

Many people studied that material with enthusiasm, hoping to find some information useful to the understanding of *Kriya*; yet, they were disappointed.

By examining them we remain bewildered since we are not able to extract anything useful; we dare not say they are adulterated but we recognize that their value - from an exegetic point of view - is almost null.

Two hypotheses come out quite spontaneously; the first is that people who compiled such books mixed their philosophy with that of Lahiri Mahasaya; the second is that His thought just started from those sacred texts and then developed on its own, abandoning completely the starting point so that, these notes could not be considered a commentary at all.

I came upon an important book: *Puran Purush* (Yogiraj Publication. Calcutta) based on Lahiri Mahasaya's diaries. It came out in Bengali, thanks to one of Lahiri Mahasaya's nephews, Satya Charan Lahiri (1902-

1978), who had material access to those diaries. Helped by one of his disciples, a writer, he decided to make a selection of the main thoughts which might have been useful to those who practiced *Kriya*.

Even though this book did not seem to respect a logical order in the topics and contained an endless mixture of repetitions and rhetorical sentences, it was a source of great inspiration. I was lucky to find in this book Lahiri Mahasaya's thoughts expressed in a very solid form.

During the summer I used to bring it along with me to the countryside; many times, after reading a part of it, I would raise my eyes to the distant mountaintops and repeat inside of me «I finally have it... » as in a long-lasting state of trance. I looked at the photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya on the front cover; who knows what a state of bliss he was in while being photographed! I saw some horizontal lines on his forehead, his eyebrows raised like in the *Shambhavi Mudra*, where awareness is set upon the head; his chin seemed to maintain the *Kechari Mudra* position. During those days, his figure, with that blissful smile, was a sun in my heart; he was the symbol of the level of perfection, knowledge and love that I was trying to grasp. The characteristic trait of the book was the great importance given to *Pranayama* first, and to *Thokar* secondly.

It strikes his skill in synthesizing concepts whenever he affirms that the whole course of *Kriya* is a great adventure beginning with the *dynamic Prana* and ending with the *static Prana*; I feel a thrill of delight when I read some of the sentences carrying an unimaginable light; «*Kutastha* is God, he is the supreme *Brahma*» or «A *yogi* who has cut the three knots becomes *Trivangamurari* himself. He becomes *Krishna*».

Kabir's essentiality comes to my mind, together with the idea of overlapping the teachings of them both, getting, thereby, a miracle of simplicity.

Lahiri Mahasaya's and Kabir's thoughts are of a monotheistic religion where the *Omkar* reality has substituted the "single God".

All the various names given to Divinity, also used by Lahiri Mahasaya in his diaries, disappear; they become entirely useless words, since it becomes clear that the ultimate reality is *Omkar*!

Now, I realize that a lot of people will turn up their nose at hearing the word "religion". Many people start the *Kriya* path from a wrong attitude, that pseudo-scientific attitude according to which, by performing certain techniques, a person automatically obtains certain results. I know that,

unfortunately, many teachers have trumpeted this incomplete and diverting truth, while some attract people to *Kriya* by promising results that gratify the ego. These teachers would be more honest if they only stressed the mystic nature of *Kriya*!

It is now to any researcher to free himself from this whole heritage, because if he thinks that Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* is a path of "psychological growth", seeking results in the psychological field only, then, sooner or later, his original mainspring will exhaust.

Kriya cannot become a substitute for psychotherapy, and even if it creates an inimitable internal cleaning, it will not clear up the problems which are to be solved through wise behavior in the practical matters of life.

Moreover, we, as human beings, the most rational species of the world, need a path that has a "heart."

In *Kriya Yoga*, we should conceive of our destination as *Omkar* - Love, Comfort and Beauty itself.

Of course, we should face the practice of *Kriya* without expecting to gain back something from it; rather, we should relax by recreating the memory and the atmosphere of the most beautiful, esthetical, sentimental and highest experiences we have ever had in our life. Possessing the intelligence to do this, we could pick into arid ground and find a fresh source of power: the spiritual instinct's driving power, the strongest power man has.

In this way, we can enter a passive but vigilant state, where the "door" begins to open up, letting us into the *Omkar*'s clutch of ecstasy!

CHAPTER VI A DIFFICULT DECISION

In the search of anything pertaining to the *Omkar* experience, I found the writings of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. The first gave a splendid description of his meeting with the "silent music", the "sounding solitude". There is no doubt he heard the *Omkar*'s typical rushing waters sound.

INNER PRAYER AND KRIYA

These two towering figures clarify that perfection in spiritual life cannot be reached without "Internal Prayer",.

The writings by Teresa of Avila explain that a prayer develops through several steps; it is necessary to start with a humble prayer and to gradually rise to the most elevated one, a process she calls «the transforming Union with God». Prayer starting in action, gradually becomes a condition, a state of consciousness.

We can observe that in Catholicism the concept of "Inner Prayer" suffered an almost total eclipse: over the centuries, a great deal of misunderstanding and incomprehension deposited on it.

For all those still practicing it, it seems to have - with the exception of some monasteries - the meaning of a plea to God with the only purpose of obtaining personal favors or blessings on a suffering humanity.

This tendency goes against the classic texts of ascetics and mysticism, where the Prayer is not aimed at changing the so-called "Godly plans" and obtaining anything at all, but at surrendering and accepting His "eternal plan".

I ran into the literary material relating to the *Hesychasm*, a spiritual movement considering the inner peace to be a basic necessity for every human being; its main spiritual tool is the "uninterrupted, continuous Prayer".

The essence of this movement has its place in the book *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, translated from Russian by R. M. French [S.P.C.K., London; there are other good translations].

The story is that of a pilgrim coming back from the Holy Sepulchee who stopped at Mount Athos and told a monk about his lifelong search for the spiritual teaching «to pray continually» - the way Saint Paul had

recommended. He was resolute about covering an infinite distance across the steppes, if he had to, in order to find a spiritual guide that would reveal to him the secret of praying that way. One day, his ardour was awarded; he found a spiritual teacher who accepted him as a disciple and gradually clarified to him every detail of that spiritual path.

Traces of this "esicist" practice date back to 250-355 A.D. by hermits such as Anthony of the desert; it found its greatest development from the XI through the XIV century, in the monasteries of Mount Athos.

We can notice a singular kinship between *Hesychasm* and *Kriya Yoga*. There are hints to a breathing exercise which is similar to our *Pranayama* with an indication of the recommended tongue position, akin to that of *Kechari Mudra*. The way of praying in solitude and immobility results quite similar to our *Navi Kriya*: we are encouraged to be tenacious in praying with the focus of concentration on the navel. It is written: «it is possible to find in ourselves a joyless and lightless obscurity but, persisting, a limitless happiness will be reached».

Once we get over the obstacle of the navel, a whole path unfolds before us, leading to the heart.

Sublime, unforgettable is the description of the moment of the Prayer entering the heart; the effects are strikingly similar to those of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Thokar*!

The link between *Kriya Yoga* and the various forms of Prayer is very interesting and useful; it may fill us with inspiration and cause a revolution in the way we conceive our *Kriya* practice.

The reader might not be ready yet to see this link, especially if, conditioned by the traditional theories of *Yoga*, he is used to looking at *Pranayama* as a mere breathing exercise aiming at the modification of the energetic state of the body, useful only to prepare for the real state of meditation, of introspection.

Let us reflect on this: whenever we chant "Om" in the *Chakras*, before *Pranayama*, whenever we practice *Omkar Pranayama* repeating the twelve-syllable *Mantra*, is it not our form of "Internal Prayer"?

The movement of the energy has an unquestionable role in *Pranayama*; let us try, though, to forget about it for a few days. Let us dive into deep breathing and just think of the syllables in the indicated spots: the flow of

energy will be felt after a while, clear and definite. It will appear spontaneously, as strong as ever.

It might happen to those who have never correctly felt the typical energetic flux of *Pranayama*, that they come to feel it right now!

When we decide to use the *Thokar*'s procedure, we are moving step by step toward the highest pinnacle of the "Heart Prayer", a priceless mystic treasure. It is like knocking on the inner temple's door with the certitude of opening it.

Let us then do all our *Kriya* techniques with this in mind and see what happens!

Thokar is the same process the *Sufis* call "*Dhikr*".

It begins exactly like any Prayer. When the head movements accompany it, the syllables "glide" in and then enter the heart.

The Prayer takes hold of those who are whispering it: it is written that it is the Prayer which "pronounces" the devotee, instead of the devotee pronouncing the Prayer.

This kind of Prayer is no longer a deed but a state of ecstasy in which the ego-mind stops existing.

During the day, after the exercise, we can choose to go on with the uninterrupted Prayer or to remain merged in its after-effects.

As it happened to the pilgrim, it will mark our stupefying and intoxicating merger with a continuous and celestial state of bliss.

This is an intimate perception of a divine presence absorbing every desire and filling our soul with an ineffable beauty enabling us to taste on earth the celestial honey! In this way, the Prayer becomes a living presence, a marvellous gem whose glitter protects one's body and wins all hearts.

Like a person near the fireside enjoying the beauty of a chilly and windy winter to build his nest in, so will we contemplate either the sad or the joyous spectacle of life having found the infinity of the skies residing in our heart!

The experience of this highest form of Prayer will, later, prepare the ground for our meeting with the overpowering and vast experience of the breathless state.

THE FIRST IDEA OF WRITING A BOOK ABOUT KRIYA

Equipped with renewed enthusiasm for the austere but, at the same time, warm path of *Kriya*, I found myself taking advantage of a break, while I was skiing on a winter's day, by looking at the mountains marking out the boundaries of the distant horizon in all directions. In half an hour the sun would paint them pink – of an intense hue on their eastern side and tinged with blue on the western side.

I imagined India to be right behind them, the Himalayas being their continuation.

My thought concerned all *Kriya* enthusiasts who found, as I did, insurmountable obstacles in the understanding of their beloved discipline.

For the first time I dared to contemplate a thought, lingering hesitantly long since in my subconsciousness; a book on *Kriya* explaining every technique in great detail.

How often have I wondered what would happen if Lahiri Mahasaya had written such a book. My imagination led me to visualize the color of its cover, to skim its pages - not so many, like Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

Perhaps some editor would try to force its meaning into his own theories. Nay, I'm sure that some pseudo-*guru* would say that the techniques described in it were for beginners only, while there were much more complicated techniques which could only be passed on by authorized people to chosen disciples. Some people would swallow the bait, contact the author and pay good money to be introduced to those techniques that, through fancy or borrowed from some esoteric book, he had made up!

The book in question did not exist. What could have happened if I had written it?

It was hard, yet possible to summarize the totality of my knowledge of *Kriya* into a book, welding together techniques and theories through a clean, rational vision. Surely the intention was not to celebrate myself or to lay the foundations for a new school of *Kriya*. If it was necessary to talk about my experiences too, this would only be with the purpose of being clearer in the theoretic and technical explanations.

The model could be Theos Bernard's *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* (1943. Rider & Company).

This extraordinary handbook, better than all the others, clarifies the teachings contained in the three fundamental texts of Tantrism: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*. [Many modern English translations of those three classic books are available. For example the translation by Brian Dana Akers for the first, by James Mallinson for the second, by Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu for the third one.]

In spite of having being published many years ago and of several texts of *Hatha Yoga* appearing recently, that book is still one of the best ones.

That is why I thought that a similar book on *Kriya* would be a real blessing for scholars and researchers.

No more rhetorical claims of legitimacy and riddle-like sentences to allow the reader to guess some technical detail and, at the same time, creating doubts anew! I dreamed of a book which proved its validity by incarnating Lahiri Mahasaya's thought, in the simplest and most logical way, in a complete, harmonious set of techniques.

Of course, many teachers of *Kriya* - those who get by on donations received during rituals of initiation and who exert power on people thanks to the pledge of secrecy - would consider my book as a real threat. Maybe what was virtually eternal for them (living like a lord, surrounded by people who have to meet all their needs with the hope of getting the crumbs of their "secrets") might change, and they were scared of that.

They would try to destroy its credibility by means of a pitiless censorship. I anticipated their scornful comments uttered while skimming its pages: «It contains but stories that have nothing to do with Babaji's and Lahiri Mahasaya's teachings. It spreads a false teaching!»

Actually, a book like mine could not be a threat to any honest *Kriya Acharya's* activity, especially if he had accepted to teach the whole *Kriya* - gradually, of course, with the required care - without keeping anything for himself, as a matter of personal power.

But how could I guarantee this to them, without being at odds with the rooted conditioning of their "cerebral chemistry"? I feel so sorry that they might become disappointed. Because it is in my temperament to be pleased in seeing everyone happy!

"New Age" people - lovers of texts enriched with illustrations from Indian folklore - would definitely be disappointed in its sobriety, tossing it aside because it «does not have good vibrations».

Only to those who love practicing *Kriya*, discovering the existence of my book would be a magic touch dissolving a nightmare.

I was already living in that happiness.

Thanks to them, the book would continue to circulate, and who knows how many times it would get back to the teacher who had torn it to crumbs. At times he would have to pretend not to notice that a student was browsing through its pages during his seminars, missing thus part of the conference...

For some minutes I was lost in this kind of reveries; then, the whole sense of the current situation about the spreading of *Kriya Yoga* came brutally back to me.

The request of secrecy had given momentum to a vicious circle. The "wise" Indian Acharyas had no "representatives" in the West and their students did not have permission to teach anything. It was impossible to think that, each year, an innumerable series of charter flights would transport all those interested in *Kriya* - no matter if old or ill - to a remote Indian village, like a pilgrimage to Lourdes or Fatima!

Many researchers, unable to leave for India, went to some teachers who lived in the West. Everyone had been warned that they were superficial and shallow but the thought of receiving, anyway, something useful was predominant.

The Indian teachers had been notified about the situation of our group and had become convinced that, stupid as we were, we did not deserve a better, authentic *Kriya* master. The gap between them and us grew and became definitive. Blinded by dogmas, they decided to remain locked in their ebony towers and went on acting against common sense, demanding even more secrecy from their disciples.

To deteriorate the situation, rumours about *Kriya* modifications unleashed panic: even *Navi Kriya* and *Thokar* were, in some *Kriya* Forums, put in doubt. A *kriyaban* could not but feel **desperate** indulging there with the hope of finding out some technical elucidations.

Sometimes in a *Kriya* Forum, frenzy, anger, wounded egos were hiding behind a mask of kindness; often, unutterable vulgarity unleashed when there was no moderator and people felt free to insult coarsely those with different opinions. But what mostly exasperated me were the answers given to honest people who looked for technical clarifications or enquired

about reliable sources from which to receive them. There were always *kriyabans* who replied with an unacceptable tone - with factious tenderness, betraying the lowest form of consideration - smashing as a dangerous mania the seekers' desire of deepening the *Kriya* subject.

When a researcher asked information about *Kechari Mudra*, frequently the answer was: «it is not important or essential at all!», adding trivialities such as the unwanted advice to improve the depth of the already received techniques and be contented with them.

With what presumptuous attitude dared the writer - in a Forum devoted to the theory and the practice of *Kriya* - affirm the opposite of what all the teachers of *Kriya* are saying?

How could he dare, uninvitedly, enter a person's life, about whom he knew nothing, treating that person as an incompetent and superficial beginner? Was it so damn difficult to answer: «I do not know the subject matter and I don't even know a source to which you can apply»?

I closed my eyes. The present situation seemed to me an absurdity that, unfortunately, wore the clothes of a nightmare - my soul was torn to pieces. Watching the blue sky above the gilded mountain brims turning pink, I realized that the book should have been written.

Of course it was impossible to break the secrecy of *Kriya* without challenging the idea of the *Guru*-disciple relationship. I should have fought a battle within myself and clarified the truth of it amid heavy conditionings. Subdued by a sudden tiredness, I dragged myself back home.

In the evening, I was surprisingly unexcited about my project. I stayed down on my knees in front of the sofa for a while. My head was sinking into the pillows. I set the record player on "repeat" on Beethoven's second movement of the *Emperor Concert*.

Did anybody, loaded with the *Guru*'s blessings received by haunting all the available ceremonies of Initiation led by the legitimated channels, ever practice *Kriya Yoga* with the same dignity and courage with which Beethoven challenged his fate?

I turned down the light and watched the sun go down behind some trees on the top of a hill. The shape of a cypress covered a part of that great, blood-red circle. That was the eternal beauty!

Sitting down from sleepiness, a strange image captured my attention, that of Vivekananda's "investiture" by his *Guru* Ramakrishna. I read that one day, toward the end of his life, Ramakrishna entered *Samadhi* while his

disciple was near him. Vivekananda started to feel a strong current before fainting. Back to consciousness, his *Guru* whispered crying: «O my Naren [Vivekananda], everything I had I gave to you, today. I have become a poor fakir, I do not have anything; with these powers you will do the world an immense good». Later, Ramakrishna explained that the powers he passed onto him could not be used for his own spiritual fulfilment - one had to get to that by himself -, on the contrary, they would help him in his mission as a spiritual teacher.

I think my subconsciousness came up with such a flash as a warning not to yield to the temptation of throwing something valid and precious away. Now, if we say that Ramakrishna was Vivekananda's *Guru*, we are saying something true and unquestionable.

The awareness dawned upon me that the problem was not in the concept of *Guru*, which however deserved to be explored to the full, but in what we westerners have done with such a concept.

THE CONCEPT OF GURU

Since years, I had been strongly pressed to identify the *Guru* with God; at the same time the organization - which advocated the role of extending in time and space the *Guru's* action - must have been considered the materialization of God's blessings. Then, I had accepted secrecy as an inviolable dogma started off by God Himself and not as a human choice.

Still my heart and intuition did not lead me to attach great importance to secrecy; I knew how often Lahiri Mahasay's disciples were already familiar with the techniques they were going to receive from Him.

There is no evidence that He was uncompromising about secrecy, intended as sharing technical details. He asked an overall **discretion**, namely a tendency towards silence on the whole matter, and this is a different thing!

He saw that, especially at the beginning of a *kriyaban's* endeavor, there was the latent tendency to waste a lot of time and energy in communicating to friends the new object of interest. This created a disturbing situation: the *kriyaban* was involved, in fact, in reacting to criticism and sarcasm or, sometimes, he was lured to pose as a spiritual guide.

Lahiri Mahasaya did not fear the free diffusion of *Kriya* - a similar idea cannot agree with any of His ideals - as much as the dangerous, useless, dissipation of energy. He gave a disciple who was proficient and strong

enough the demanding assignment of being a spiritual guide and of sharing *Kriya* freely.

Nowadays, organizations and Acharyas by no means stress discretion rather than keeping the *Kriya* procedures secret. Who is receiving benefit from secrecy?

The organizations affirm that this rule is meant «to keep the teachings pure», but the baffling facts are that they inaugurated an endless chain of *Kriya* alterations!

Acharyas affirm that it is dangerous to give advanced techniques to people who are not ready to bear their power - and quote some of Lahiri Mahasay's sentences about the subject - but isn't this exactly what they are doing during mass-initiation, where there is no personal contact between teacher and student?

Up to here my musings arrived and here they stopped - for months.

It was during this time that I met new researchers and learned from them other *Kriya* techniques; I responded to their kindness by sharing my knowledge. To preserve every detail of the learned techniques fortified and amplified by the new information, I began spending part of the day writing a sort of memo. It started to assume gradually the aspect of a book.

As I went ahead, the problem of the *Guru*-disciple relationship emerged, obscurely, more as a wound than as a theory unfolding its myths. A solution started to take shape, but my heart was reluctant in accepting it.

The concept of *Guru* is not odd: he is the spiritual teacher who permanently removes ignorance in those who lamb-like follow him. [Gu = darkness, obscurity Ru = remove].

Thinking of the memorable, impressive discourse by Dostojevsky about the role of elders in Russian monasteries [*The Brothers Karamazov*], I would never dream of disputing it.

«What was such an elder? An elder was one who took your soul, your will, into his soul and his will. When you choose an elder, you renounce your own will and yield it to him in complete submission, complete self-abnegation. This novitiate, this terrible school of abnegation, is undertaken voluntarily, in the hope of self-conquest, of self-mastery, in order, after a life of obedience, to attain perfect freedom, that is, from self; to escape the

lot of those who have lived their whole life without finding their true selves in themselves. » [Translated by Constance Garnett]

But by obeying the *Kriya* organizations, the role of the *Guru* was attributed to a person that one has not necessarily known directly! As long as the *Guru* is described as a person assigned by God to each disciple, entrusted with the task to partially bear the burden of the disciple's *Karma* and to burn part of it, there are no problems at all. But how does it work when such a *Guru* is not present, because since many years he has left the body and resides now ... in the so-called astral realms? Yet, the relationship between Him and the disciple should work anyway!

The concept that the *Guru*, while living, knew already those disciples that would come after his physical departure is prudently introduced by the organizations; this means that he was already working and suffering for them. It is clear that they would establish the contact with Him through the organization.

I remember that when I was told this, it was for me a delightful disclosure; I felt I was very fortunate and wondered how a similar luck had really come my way! My meditation counsellor took any opportunity to underline how such an event - the disciple-*Guru* bond - was «the greatest good fortune a human being can ever have».

By studying the material furnished by the organization, I tried to persuade myself that the *Guru* was a real presence in my life. After the ceremony, of great emotive impact, of Initiation into *Kriya*, fostering such an idea transformed gradually from an act of faith into a rooted conviction. I knew how the organization considered such confidence, more than any ability to practice *Kriya*, the mark of the student's own successful ripening into a real disciple.

No. Definitely, I could not accept these childish tales anymore; I had to restore the use of my brain and reckon with what I perceived as odd, in contrast with the Indian tradition, as well as with other mystical traditions.

To my mind came, surely suggested by past reflections, the idea of a net; each individual was a junction from which a lot of links fanned out, as from our brain's neurons. When a single individual took an action - a significant one of course, like starting on a mystic path and making good progress on it - he shook the surrounding net as well. A serious practitioner never isolates himself; thus, he will feel other people's positive response,

but he will also be slowed down by their indolence and apathy. It is important to understand that if x draws y , it will also inevitably happen that y draws x .

I saw that the *Guru*-disciple relationship had its foundations in this concept. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda had different personalities, but, considering the deepest and truest side of themselves, they were one thing: a great love bound them together.

A person might carry another person, foster his spiritual progress if and only if he has earned, through his own effort, a particular power. It does not come out because someone else officially bestowed on him any particular role like allowing him to initiate.

As the reader definitely knows, Jung talked of a deeper level than the subconscious, which does not have a similar origin but is «inherited with our cerebral structure» and consists of «the human systems of reacting» to the most intense events that can happen in one's lifetime: rise, death, illness, family, war...

We, as human beings, are linked through this **Collective Unconscious**. If to Freud the Unconscious was a part of the psyche similar to a depot full of old, removed things refused by a nearly automatic act of the will - a heap of things that we cannot recall to consciousness - this Collective Unconscious binds all human beings by the deepest layers of their conscience.

Who claims to have legitimately received the power to initiate may wonder if a similar bond exists between him and the disciple who is going to be initiated.

To accept a disciple doesn't mean to go into a lot of trouble in order to explain *Kriya* to him, but it means to accept lucidly and coherently the future tangles and sufferings that such a relationship might imply. Although we feel sheltered by our fervent aspiration for the Divine, it is wise to admit our frailty and vulnerability.

In Lahiri Mahasaya's writings I never found a conflict with such a way of thinking. The great *Yoga-Avatar* refused to be worshipped as a God. This is a point that some among His followers seem to have forgotten.

He said: «I am not the *Guru*, I don't maintain a barrier between the true *Guru* (the Divine) and the disciple». He added he wanted to be considered like «a mirror».

When a *kriyaban* realizes that Lahiri Mahasaya is the personification of what resides potentially in himself, of what one day he will become, the mirror must be «thrown away».

Whether one likes it or not, that is exactly what He wrote: thrown away.

The people that have been raised in an organization of *Kriya* cannot fully understand the impact of these words; if they understood, they would find a strong conflict with what they have been taught.

To find the truth, it takes the courage to abandon one's own illusions, those that are gratifying and nice and it also takes a good brain.

«God is not a person but a state of consciousness», He remarked!

If that's the case, we can do just one thing: take the decision to do our very best to tune with this Reality, which is beyond our grasp; that's all!

Why then do many feel the exigency to worship some human beings as if they were God?

As long as a student goes to a Teacher to learn *Kriya*, everything is as it should be - on condition that such a teacher is an authentic expert - but when the *Kriya* praxis begins to work and the *Omkar* reality reveals, then the scenery changes: something intimate between the *Kriyaban* and the Divine has started to develop.

Those who find themselves walking alone down the path of their life and have learned *Kriya Yoga*, no matter how, and have the interest, the enthusiasm, the will to stick to it, should be contented with that. The *Omkar* experience will put all the needed "blessings" into their practice.

Those, instead, who have created a bond made of love and respect with an honest *Kriya* expert, who played the role of the *Guru*, possess something which is solely theirs; something which cannot be communicated to someone else, even if they would go on forever narrating the most touching anecdotes of their experience, the wonder of a life rescued from insignificance by the grace of that authentic Master. On the other hand, if their stories contribute to build a legend which doesn't allow for the Master's human nature, their endeavour wouldn't be simply a useless pursuit but could exert a disastrous influence upon the spiritual evolution of other people.

THE WORK

The realization that the mystic path of *Kriya* was universal, that nobody could argue ownership of it, helped me go on writing the book, relieving my resistances, which during some days gripped my chest painfully and produced an overall feeling of awkwardness.

I needed to extract from my huge heaps of notes, collected during years with different teachers, the essential theory. Then, I would have had to get down to a painstaking and earnest practice, experimenting again with each part of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* from the very beginning.

I started to work in stern isolation, like a voluntary prisoner, reducing my social life to the minimum. Years went by without almost realizing it. I practiced all the techniques in high quantities; in this way I could dedicate a more constant attention to what, years before, had been done in a superficial manner. I must admit that, in the past, the towing impulse which led me to finish up the prescribed number of repetitions of each *Higher Kriya* as soon as possible was also the anxiety to obtain the next initiation from my teacher. The ardent desire of "squeezing" everything out of my *Kriya* teachers was because of my fear not to be able to contact them in the future for any reason whatsoever.

Now this enervating situation was over. I was living a quiet moment of my life, free from haste and from any constraint of wearing a mask of hypocrisy; at the long last, I could take my time to concentrate on my techniques, find their essence and write down my own impressions.

Actually, these years have been completely different than the rest of my life. The multitude of experiments I conducted had just one purpose: if a certain variation of a *Kriya* technique - which I was taught in the past - was redundant and ineffective, it would fall down by itself.

In the light of the practice, the essential core of each technique, deprived of any embellishment, appeared as something inevitable, something that could not be but that way.

Still there was a feeling as of working on a difficult puzzle, without having a preview of what was to be obtained in the end.

I proceeded putting everything in the correct order; some techniques pertained to the *First Kriya* in its simplest form, some other ones to the advanced *First Kriya*; some techniques appeared as an arbitrary

simplification of other techniques and they should not be quoted in the book; again others were a justifiable variation and they should be quoted instead.

After the deluding experience with my first *Kriya* school, nothing of what had been received was taken as gospel truth. We lost our innocence when our first teacher, in whom we put all our trust, disappointed us, when we had the proof that they lied to us - even though many voices were shouting that it was for our own good; therefore we couldn't believe blindly in anybody anymore!

A great disturbance came from a set of techniques, which had been given to me as *Dhyana Kriya*: they had something odd in themselves. Their main tool was the power of visualization, brought to the extreme limit. Eminent writers remark [see *Puran Purush*] that such practices do not have any right of citizenship in Lahiri Mahasay's *Kriya*; they have no similarities within any mystic tradition but have a strong, rather, perfect, connection with the esoteric or magic traditions. They had nothing to do with the *Omkar* perception or with the breathless state. It was a relief to polish up my *Kriya* path and my life forever from such a trash.

Now the overall picture seemed harmonious and complete: all the techniques, from the first to the last, cooperated perfectly with each other. In this way the puzzle appeared as completed.

The first basic techniques contained, potentially, the following ones, which were their deepening.

There was the tangible evidence that from the very first moment technical details prepared the *kriyaban* for the evolved phases of the path.

How stupid it would be - as some schools maintain - to work for some months to familiarize with a certain path of energy, to, then, be taught that it was not the definite one, that a better one should be received only by a *Higher Kriya* initiation!

But this was not my case.

The whole picture could be considered complex only because it contained different degrees of refinement and not for any other reasons.

While I didn't meet any difficulties in the description of my first experiences as a self-teacher or of the times of my first school of *Kriya*, when it came to write my personal remarks about the *Kriya* techniques,

those that I had all the reasons to consider Lahiri Mahasaya's, I ran into a considerable impediment.

My writings about the first experiences were intended to prove to the reader how deep my attraction toward *Kriya* was and how desperate and chaotic my research had been; while dealing with the authentic experiences of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* I would have liked the reader to meet *Kriya Yoga* for what it was, without being filtered any more through my experience.

Nevertheless I knew well that the pure account of the techniques didn't do justice to *Kriya*; they would appear lifeless, put into the book just to satisfy some reader's superficial and insatiable curiosity. It was vital to show what a technique comes to be in our lives.

I recalled the first idea related to my book, that to consider Theos Bernard's work [*Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience*] as an example to follow.

Dusty techniques became more than ever actual, feasible, clear in front of the eyes of our intuition.

The problem could only be solved by maintaining a personal tone while discussing the effects of the techniques, and integrating these into a broader vision of reflections about the teaching methodology. Of course these remarks would be added at the end of each chapter, after a clean enunciation of the techniques, in a way that the reader might skip them if he wished.

To understand the reasons for a last predicament I found myself in, an excursion is necessary.

In Lahiri Mahasaya's self-experience, it took some time before a lot of details were systematized in a definite theoretic framework. What Lahiri Mahasaya taught at the very beginning of his diffusion of *Kriya*, was somehow different from what He had in mind at the end of His earthly life. The differences among the various schools of *Kriya* were not always caused by the tendency to simplify the original techniques or to embellish them with spurious material, but rather by the different epochs in which Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples learned *Kriya* from Him.

This does not mean to accept the extreme vision according to which Lahiri Mahasaya gave each disciple a different, "personal" technique - to accept that would be to sanction the annihilation of *Kriya Yoga*!

We understand that when a disciple appeared a second time before Lahiri Mahasaya, he could receive the *Thokar* as "Second Initiation" or "*Second Kriya*" or be instructed, instead, about how to tune more deeply with the *Omkar* reality, how to better perceive the reality of the *Chakras*, how to discover their location in the spinal column and in the *Kutastha*....and this would be his "*Second Kriya*".

In my description then, I could not and should not depend, once and for all, on what any renowned *Kriya* teacher, opposing other traditions, was holding; I had to find the courage to settle on a system that represented my – therefore **subjective** hence questionable - attempt to define a synthesis.

The more I thought of a way out of this uneasy situation, the more I would find that my thought, which I believed to be clear, was really uncertain and contradictory. Driven by an inclination both to annoyance and exasperation, whenever I succeeded in phrasing an idea I would scantily be satisfied with it the next day.

Finally, practical decisions were taken regarding the order of presenting the techniques. As for the *Higher Kriyas*, it seemed logical to start with the *Thokar* and to end with the subtleties of the *Omkar* perception.

I felt relieved and, with this principle in mind, I was able to complete the book.

Of course, if a person now asks me for a proof, for evidence of the techniques' authenticity, he could not but remain disappointed.

I can only say that the set of techniques shared in my book does not take origins just from a single source. Different teachers, spiritual researchers who studied with other teachers and my personal study contributed to define it.

Any seeker of authentic *Kriya*, after reading my book, should go ahead with his search; if something useful can be drawn from my search, it is fine.

As it happened in my life, no researcher will ever be satisfied until he takes to the field and gets his hands dirty.

If he made a hundred percent commitment to seek only the mystic goal and not the chimera of self-growth, then the Intelligence inside the *Omkar* vibration would be his guide.

Since our tie with my second teacher was broken, a lot of people asked me information about *Kriya* - whom to learn it from or whom to receive

the *Higher Kriyas* from. Obviously, they did not belong to the organization, in whose eyes I was a traitor, one who, long ago, «had fallen from the path».

As for me, to any earnest researcher I was in contact with, I gave a copy of the first draft of the book.

Caught as by an obsession of precision, I continually improved it and I felt it was never ready to be posted on the web.

In the meantime, my friends were making fun of me; it seemed that I could never set the word "end" to my work.

One suggested that it was a myth I had created... giving me the strength to live and therefore, my book, would never be completed.

I didn't feel any internal pressure to put it on the web until I received the decisive push!

An episode happened, which in the past I would not have given importance to. In the present situation, it caused a violent reaction in me.

A friend of mine, with whom I had shared everything of my spiritual path, accompanying me in my ventures with both the teachers and suffering the same woes on his own skin, went to India for a vacation, where he visited a teacher whom I held in great esteem but never had the opportunity to meet him personally.

My friend explained to that Teacher the deplorable situation of the diffusion of the *Kriya* here in the West and particularly all the vicissitudes of our group; the Teacher said he felt sorry for us and that he was willing to help us.

My friend had his *Pranayama* reviewed.

When he got back to Italy, I met him; he was very happy and asked me to practice *Pranayama* in front of him. He told me there was a mistake in my practice. When I asked him what it was, his reply literally froze me: he could not tell me, since he promised the teacher he would not reveal anything.

He had asked indeed his teacher's permission to correct eventual mistakes of our practice: the answer had been negative, moreover the teacher swore him to secrecy.

Was this teacher - who manifested the intention to help us - concerned that we would not find any need to visit him after our mistake was revealed?

Was he really so mean?

I did not put pressure on my friend to tell me everything about his talks with the Master. I could not and would not enter the privacy of his experience, but how could he just let me go on with my mistake?

I considered this to be absurd and reacted badly. My friend was taken aback when I cut our discussion and left.

Considering the episode later, I realized what this incorrect detail was: I had not made the abdominal breath in a particularly visible way, I was sure of this fact because it was the only thing my friend was able to see – we did not talk about inner details of the practice.

By now every hesitation was defeated; I asked a friend for help in giving a brief check on my English translation and published the book on the web.

CHAPTER VII INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST KRIYA

DISCLAIMER OF RESPONSIBILITY

The techniques described herein are exposed for study reasons only and serve as a comparison with the works of other researchers. The author hopes this work will spark intelligent feedback: any remarks, criticism, corrections and additions are welcomed.

I wish to make clear that this book is not a manual of Kriya! I may write one in the future and face the problem of how to divide the whole matter into different lessons, trying, for each level of learning, to give all the necessary indications. However, certain techniques cannot be learned by means of a manual. An expert has to check their execution. There are delicate techniques such as Maha Mudra, Pranayama, Thokar and Yoni Mudra, which cannot reasonably be learned only with the help of some written material.

It is also necessary that an expert check the impact of the techniques on the practitioner. Each person is an individual for whom no one can predict the effects of a particular technique, especially if practiced in strong doses.

In the text below, Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya techniques are revealed. The author is disclaimed from all responsibilities in case of negative results, especially in the case that one decides to practice the techniques without having their execution checked by an expert first. Those who mean to go through this path, should do it with a due sense of sacredness, being aware of the wealth that it can bring to their life. They should reserve the right and the duty to control their own destiny, securing for themselves expert counsel or guidance.

[When you go to an expert, please let him know if you have any kind of physical problems, like high blood pressure, lung problems, signs of hyperventilation In that case, surely he will guide you through a very mild form of Pranayama – with correlated Mudras – counseling, if need be, only a mental practice of them.]

BASIC TECHNIQUES

Now, let's talk about the *First Kriya* techniques - the first two can be practiced even some hours before the following ones. The ideal times for practice are morning before breakfast, noon before dinner [lunch], late afternoon before evening meal [supper], night 2-3 hours after meal.

Talabya Kriya

Starting from a relaxed position, the *kriyaban* sticks the tongue to the palate, creating a suction cup effect and always maintaining the tip of the tongue turned towards the teeth. One opens the mouth so that the tongue, which for some instants has been kept attached to the palate, can click off it; the stretching effect on the tongue Fraenum should be clearly perceived. The tongue is immediately pushed outward toward the chin. This work is repeated 50 times [no more than 10 times in the beginning!].



Talabya Kriya: by opening the mouth in front of a mirror, notice that the Fraenum alone comes forward



Kechari Mudra: by opening the mouth in front of a mirror, just the root of the tongue is seen; it is the Uvula which comes forward.

After months of practice, this technique produces the *Kechari Mudra*: inserting the tongue into the nasal pharynx cavity, keeping it firm in that position with a physical and mental effort - in the beginning with the help of one or two fingers pushing the tongue near its root. [Lahiri Mahasaya was absolutely against cutting the Fraenum to obtain faster and easier results].

A lot of people practice the *Talabya Kriya* incorrectly because they instinctively turn their tongue backwards (or keep it vertical), erasing the whole effect. It is very important that the tongue is kept pointing outward touching the teeth before sticking it to the palate.

This technique creates a perceptible relaxing effect on the thinking process; that is why it will never be left aside once the *Kechari Mudra* is achieved. It is unknown why this action on the Fraenum is capable of reducing thought production. However, anyone can readily verify this relaxation effect of *Talabya Kriya* by simply practicing it.

[Note. The effect of *Talabya Kriya* is enhanced by the following exercises:
a... pulling the tongue past the tip of the nose with the help of a piece of cloth around it.
b... keep pushing the tongue back with an index or middle finger.]

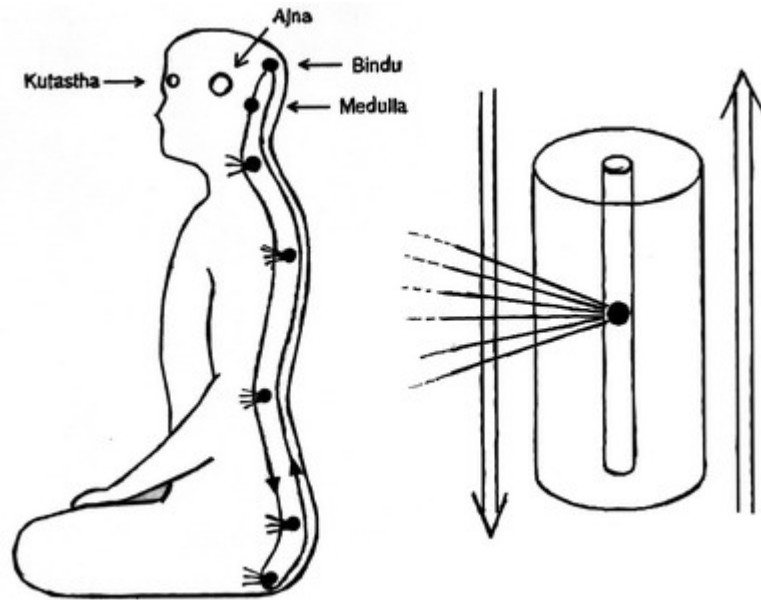
Om Japa around the Chakras

Ascending and descending, the *Mantra "Om"* is "vibrated" in each *Chakra*. A total of six-twelve complete cycles are performed; some rotations can be performed while chanting the *Mantra* aloud while the rest chanted mentally. Rising along the spine, each *Chakra* is touched on the posterior up to the cervical *Chakra*, terminating on *Bindu*. The process is then reversed on the anterior side from *Bindu* to the *Medulla* and down the other *Chakras*, till the *Muladhar* is reached. This represents one complete cycle. See the picture showing the location of the *Chakras*.

[In all *Kriyas* - starting from this one up to the last *Higher Kriya*, we like to follow a path which is a loop starting and returning in *Muladhara*; by going up we ignore *Medulla* which comes into play just after *Bindu*.]

While doing *Om Japa* around the *Chakras* one should attempt to perceive their external components, that is their irradiation piercing the internal part of the body [see following discussion]. The correct pronunciation for the *Mantra* should not be "ommm" like in "Tom" but "ooooong" like in "song", with a long-drawn "o" [In this technique, "Om" is a pure vowel

sound. When pronouncing Indian Mantras - like *Om namo bhagavate ...* or *Om namah Shivaya ...* - the consonant "m" in "Om" is heard. Here it is *not* heard because the "o" is very long and, at the end, the mouth is not completely closed, thus creating the nasal sound "ng". Chanting AUM is by no means correct.]



[The *Chakras* are subtle astral organs inside the spinal cord, ideal steps of a mystic ladder guiding safely to the highest experience of the Spirit. It is important to feel intuitively where they are located. A lot of people believe in the possibility of applying to *Kriya* what they find in the books on *Yoga*; but this is not the way it works. With that misguided notion, a *kriyaban* can run the risk of losing the real meaning of the *Kriya* techniques, or part of their riches.

We should keep in mind that *Kriya* is a natural process; it is a spontaneous setting of a higher level of consciousness accompanied by subtle movements of energy in the body. This may happen, of course, only to those who constantly maintain a relentless aspiration for the Divine and who are able to reach the sufficient degree of relaxation.

On the contrary, some students of *Kriya* bring into their practice the same eager and occasionally insensitive attitude they have in life - especially if they are imbued by Esotericism and Magic Thought. They trust this or that text but are not attentive enough to comprehend that some events happen only in due time.

In the very beginning, the energy flows only near the ideal spots described in the specialized literature but cannot reach them, either because the correct level of calmness is not yet established or because there is no unobstructed channel leading to them. Sometimes it happens that they are totally mistaken, with fantasies impossible to come about, and surely Nature will not suit their corrupted schemes. Their expectations will only result in hampering any genuine progress.

Here is what I usually notice: some students contest the fact that, in the beginning of *Pranayama*, the energy should flow around the *Chakras* instead of through the innermost channel of the spine, as they would expect. They don't accept the idea of the *Chakras*' duality including their external component which I am going to write about shortly. In the same way they would prefer to bring the ascending energy into the *Kutastha* or into the *Fontanelle* rather than into the *Bindu*. It is useless, however, to guide the flow of energy to where it cannot physically flow. To superimpose our book-born desires to our delicate *Chakra* structure is a form of violence that leads to nothing. The following information sounds rather vague, yet it is useful for a *kriyaban*'s awareness to proceed in the correct direction for all the necessary time, namely to foster a process of perception that will surely lead to the highest of all goals.

In the beginning, the right thing to do is trying to feel distinctively all the various parts into which the backbone is divided. We can start with the coccyx region, where the first *Chakra*, the *Muladhar*, is located; the second *Chakra* finds its place at sacrum's height; the third one is in the lumbar region, at navel's height; the fourth one is in the dorsal region, at heart's height; the fifth one is placed at the foot of the cervical vertebrae. Independent traditions situate the location of the sixth *Chakra* in different places. According to *Kriya* tradition its location is the so-called *cave of Brahma* a hollow cavity of the brain with the pituitary in the anterior part and the pineal gland in the back. *Kutastha*, the center between the eyebrows, the "third eye" or "spiritual eye", the organ of inner vision, is tied to it but it must be kept distinct. The same is true for the *Medulla Oblongata* (on top of the spinal cord, below the pons, and anterior to the cerebellum) although it is very close to the correct seat of the sixth *Chakra*. In the next chapter we shall see how to better locate this *cave of Brahma*; as for the techniques exposed in the present chapter, it is sufficient to

identify the seat of the sixth *Chakra* with the region of the brain where the *Medulla* is located.

A very important center, *Bindu*, has its seat in the occipital region, where the hairline twists in a kind of vortex and where some Hindus, with their shaven head, wear a lock of hair.

It can be located by fixing the attention on *Kutastha* and coming back an inch higher up. This center is connected both with the sixth *Chakra* and with the seventh, *Sahasrara*, acting as a door to it.

The seventh *Chakra*, *Sahasrara*, is not to be considered like the other ones; it is in fact a superior reality and we can experience it only in the state of breathlessness. It is not possible, then, to concentrate on it the way we are used to with the other *Chakras*. It is only possible to "tune" with the state that is embodied by it. For this reason, it is necessary to utilize the *Bindu* as a doorway.

All the procedures of *Kriya*, "work" in the space between the first *Chakra* *Muladhar* and the *Bindu*; the result of such action is the settling of the energy and of the awareness in the seventh *Chakra*. [I will comment another time about the unorthodox role of the *Bindu*.]

Before starting with the explanation of *Pranayama*, it is important to get through to the reader that the first five *Chakras* have an "inner component" as well as an "external component".

The former one can be visualized as a tiny and dim "light" within the innermost channel of the spinal column, facing upward, turned toward the Spirit. The "external component" can be visualized as a beam of light, an irradiation of energy, coming out of the spine, piercing forwards the internal part of the body.]

Maha Mudra

A *kriyaban* sits on the left heel, with the right leg fully extended or stretched in front. [By doing this, the left heel exerts a pressure on the perineum. This pressure point correlates perfectly with the location of *Muladhar Chakra* and is the best means of drawing one's concentration to this *Chakra*.]

During inhalation he raises the energy into the *Bindu*. Then, holding his breath, he stretches forward - in a relaxed way - so that his hands can lock the big toe in.

[The vast majority of the *kriyabans* are not able to achieve such a pose without certain back injury. They should by no means keep the leg straight, but angle it at the knee in the most suitable way! This *Mudra* must be comfortable, it must not hurt!]

Holding the breath in the outstretched position - a muscle contraction at the base of the spine is kept while the abdominal muscles go into a slight retreat - *Om* is mentally chanted in the *Kutastha*, from six to twelve times. Returning to the start position, during a long exhalation, focus is on the energy descending to the base of the spinal column.

The entire procedure is repeated with the right heel on *Muladhar* and left leg outstretched in front. The procedure is repeated once more with both legs outstretched to complete one cycle of *Maha Mudra*. This three-movement cycle is repeated two more times for a total of nine extensions.

[Note. Many schools teach to pull the knee of the about-to-be-outstretched leg - or both the knees, before the third movement - to the chest in order to straighten the spine.]

Introduction to the Kriya Pranayama

The body is relaxed, the spinal column is kept straight and free of all tensions, the tongue can be kept horizontal or with the tip slightly turned backward. [It is obvious that those who have succeeded in it will assume the *Kechari Mudra* position]. The eyes are closed, relaxed, as if looking into the distance through *Kutastha*.

A deep inhalation, producing an unvoiced sound in the throat like that of a distant waterfall, acts like a hydraulic pump to raise the energy from the foot of the spinal column to the *Bindu*; a deep exhalation brings the energy back to the foot of the spinal column.

Let us discuss in detail the route taken by the energy.

1....The awareness rises from the *Muladhar* along the posterior of the spinal column, approaching the second *Chakra*, then the third one, the fourth one and so on until you reach the occipital region where *Bindu* is located.

2...A two-second pause follows, during which the radiance of the *Kutastha* taps at the awareness - as a blurred presence of light, a glow permeating the brain.

3...A deep, unhurried exhalation, of the same length as the inhalation, brings the energy back to the foot of the spinal column. The awareness touches the *Medulla* first; then meets the "external component" of each *Chakra* until the energy is perceived in the *Muladhar*. Only a slight hiss is produced in the throat during the exhalation. After a long practice and thanks to *Kechari Mudra*, that slight hiss will turn into a fine flute-like sound. [Like each part of the *Pranayama* technique, this will happen with the mouth closed.]

4...When the calm energy pauses for two seconds in the region around the *Muladhar*, a growing feeling of calmness and immobility is felt. By improving the technique, an ecstatic feeling like a blissful shiver is also perceived.

The breathing is abdominal breathing. During the inhalation, the abdomen expands and the chest has a slight drift, result of the abdominal expansion; during the exhalation, the abdomen retreats and, at the end of the exhalation, there is a clear perception of the navel drifting toward the spine. If all this is done with a correct and relaxed attitude, the resulting pauses are natural and pleasant.

It is incorrect practice to fill the chest with air by bringing breath too literally up to the higher *Chakras*.

The beginner has a rhythm of about 18-20 seconds per breath. The related literature points out that the perfect *Pranayama* is made of 80 breaths per hour - about 45 seconds per breath. Only during long sessions, a *kriyaban* can try to reach this rhythm. A beginner should ignore the above; instead one tries, in a natural, untroubled way, to complete 12 or 24 breaths, regardless of timing.

Navi Kriya

Without attempting to control the breath, one's awareness goes slowly up along the spinal column, placing the syllable *Om* [ooooong] in the first five *Chakras* and, skipping the sixth Chakra, in *Kutastha* as well. The chin is tilted down toward the chest and *Om* is chanted – either aloud or mentally - in the navel approximately 75 times [one may use beads to keep the count but a rough estimate is fine]. The hands, with the palms downward, are joined together cross-fingered; the thumbs touch with a

very light pressure the navel for every single *Om*. The chin is then raised [to a moderate extent, but as much as possible, feeling the contraction of the muscles at the base of the neck], the concentration drifts to *Bindu* first and then down to the third *Chakra*. *Om* is chanted – either aloud or mentally - approximately 25 times in the third *Chakra*. The hands, with the palms upward and the fingers crossed, are kept behind the back and, for every *Om*, the thumbs apply a light pressure on the lumbar vertebrae. [The breath is by no means coordinated with the *Om* chanting.] The chin's normal position is then resumed and the *Om* is thought in each *Chakra*, from *Kutastha* to *Muladhara*. This is one complete cycle of *Navi Kriya*. One must not neglect to perform at least 4 cycles of *Navi Kriya*.

As we go along with the technique, a calm energy is perceived gathering in the center of the *Samana* current, in the middle-lower part of the abdomen.

Mental Pranayama and Paravastha

To enter a perfect physical and mental stillness as easily as possible, the practitioner has to draw three deep breaths, each of them ending with a fast and as complete an exhalation as a sigh. Then he goes slowly up with the awareness in the *Chakras* - the syllable *Om* may be mentally chanted in each *Chakra*.

The *Chakras* are like knots that can be untied if "touched" with our concentration; the secret lies in maintaining the awareness in each of them until a particular sensation of sweetness is felt, as if that *Chakra* were "melting". A *kriyaban* does not feel he is practicing a technique, but he enjoys a sensation of rest and soothing relaxation. About 10-20 seconds are spent in each *Chakra*; his own intuition leads him to turn the awareness to the following one. One may chant *Om* [ooong] on the *Chakras* but, in the beginning, it is more convenient to simply pay attention to them.

After ascending to *Bindu*, one begins descending down along the anterior side of the spine; perceiving not only the melting sensations but also the subtle irradiation of the "external component" of each *Chakra*. This is not a complicated technical detail; it is just a matter of pure awareness, a natural feeling leading to the realization that the *Chakras* are sustaining each part of the body's vitality.

The process of rising and descending through the *Chakras* is carried on as long as it is comfortable and functional enough to increase a particular

state of *absorption* in the revelation of peace, joy, and inner sound vibration. This is the most beautiful part of the routine. After some minutes, the head's upper part undergoes a sort of lighting and the *kriyaban* keeps concentrating on it for a long time without feeling any fatigue. Lahiri Mahasaya called this state simply *Paravastha* - "state after *Kriya*". This word is linked with the concept of *Tranquility*, "*Sthir Tattwa*" – *calm, static Prana* which is experienced in the last minutes of a *Kriya* session. [Since it has a broader meaning, we shall add some reflections on it later.]

It is wise to remain in this dimension as long as possible: the ideal is from ten to twenty minutes.

Yoni Mudra

At night, before lying down to sleep, the *kriyaban* calms the whole psychophysical system with some deep breaths; after that, he raises the energy into the central part of the head [the *cave of Brahma, Ajna*] through a deep inhalation.

He closes the head "openings" - the ears with the thumbs, the eyelids with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, the lips with the ring and the little fingers - so that all the energy may light up *Kutastha*. [The index fingers should not in any case press on the eyelids; it would be harmful and of no use!] Holding the breath until one needs to breathe again and repeating *Om* mentally several times, one observes the light of the "spiritual eye" that gathers and increases in intensity in that place. The breath is held until the necessity to breathe out is compelling. After bringing down awareness along the anterior side of the spine, the practice is complete. [Yoni mudra is performed only once but it is not prohibited to repeat it two more times.]

It is possible to have some precious experiences right after getting through the first level of sleep.

Here is an example of a beginner's routine:

- 1...Short practice: Talabya Kriya; Om Japa; Mental Pranayama.
- 2...Complete practice: Talabya Kriya; Om Japa; Maha Mudra; Navi Kriya; Pranayama [12-24]; Mental Pranayama; Yoni Mudra.

3...Alternative: Talabya Kriya; Om Japa; Pranayama [12-24]; Maha Mudra; Navi Kriya; Mental Pranayama; Yoni Mudra.

NOTES

The correct *Pranayama* is to be realized over time and it is almost impossible that a teacher is able to communicate all its details in one single lesson. Usually a teacher prefers to give only the bare essentials and this can be done in different ways: hence the many seemingly variations between one school and another.

It may happen that, in the disciple's mind, the few words about *Pranayama*, uttered by the teacher, go on ringing for years - often the same, and with the same inflection of voice, that the teacher once received from his own teacher. Sometimes these words produce a tangible effect, perhaps only after years. At other times, unfortunately, success will be out of reach and the student may be perpetually dissatisfied. The will to respect those words push the practitioner to continue the practice of *Pranayama*, breath by breath, in exactly the same way, short-circuiting any possible hope of success. The disciple experiences only a vague feeling of satisfaction, owing to the self-imposed discipline and sets all his hope on a hypothetical far-off evolution.

During the period of my first *Kriya Yoga* school, I remember how some friends who were practicing with regularity, assumed a downhearted resigned expression when they revealed their predicament. They felt nothing during their *Pranayama* and they went on practicing just for the sake of adhering to the notion of "loyalty".

For them "to feel nothing" meant that they did not feel the cold-warm currents in the spine, as they were taught to feel. In such a way they confounded a minor detail with all the rest, with the essence of *Pranayama*, which is anything but that. After years of complaints and stagnation they had remained blocked in this very situation. Their only sin was: they still felt nothing but kept practicing in the same way! They were unable to adjust due to a lack of self-analysis and mental flexibility! How does one explain to them that *Pranayama* is different from cold-warm currents?

In the following exposition I'm going to present my way to introduce a person to the art of *Pranayama*.

I think we should be "loyal" to our fresh and genuine will to perfect *Pranayama*. "Loyalty" should not be confused with stubborn dullness.

1....My advice to those who have never practiced any *Yoga* technique and wish to start on this path is to first get familiar with the *Nadi Sodhana* and the *Ujjayi Pranayama*.

To some students I teach how to use the *Aswini Mudra* [to repeatedly contract the muscles at the base of the spine with the rhythm of about two contractions per second]. Although this technique is not part of *Kriya Yoga*, some teachers advise it to those who are unable to practice *Kechari Mudra*. To learn it at the very onset of their endeavour is helpful: it gives the future *kriyaban* the option of introducing it, if need be, in his *Kriya Pranayama*.

I think that anybody can practice *Aswini Mudra* in the first 12-24 breaths of *Pranayama*, during both the inhalation and the exhalation, then, afterward, the physical movement should decrease in intensity and the whole procedure internalized. Thanks to it, the awareness is strongly brought into the spine, in a more intense way than with any other technical trick.

2....While observing how a student reacts to this routine, it is already possible to anticipate if the practitioner will come to success in the discipline of *Kriya*. An positive perspective arises when the beginner realizes that the practice direct influences his mood, that it has the power to change his whole day's tone.

It is a common fact that the aforesaid routine creates, during the rest of the day, an intense joy - things around look different, as if everything were more beautiful, as if a light were running through the veins of nature and of other people. If the student does his exercises with increasing care, if he reminds us not so much of the classical figure of a devotee but of a student who, with a feeling of reverence, is learning how to play a musical instrument, then there are good reasons to be optimistic about him or her.

The turning point is when the *kriyaban* guesses that his inner Self contains a potentially unlimited joy, which might explode with a deeper practice. Instead of being keen on cradling in the actual pleasing sensations - for which he has a sort of fear anyway - and instead of exhausting the

"catalogue" of all possible human doubts, his intelligence and courage forge in him the unshakeable decision to go further and deeper, to leap forward toward the *Kriya* proper.

3....When I explain and show somebody the *First Kriya* set of techniques, I usually recommend to not start right out with its complete practice. Also there is no need to feel guilty if in the first weeks some day's practice is omitted.

Of course, I do my best to convince those who listen to me not to wait for the "ideal situation" before starting the practice - like changing job or moving out - otherwise the decision will be postponed for an infinite amount of time! A *Kriyaban* should always face each session with a high degree of patience - trying to follow all instructions in a disciplined and respectful manner.

My advice is not to foster excessive expectations; that would lead to disregarding the techniques' "naturalness" and developing an excessive tension, which will be very hard to get rid of. With the aim of transferring the idea of *Kriya* as a mystery of joy to be discovered within a natural way of life and not as a means to obtain supernatural powers, I never push people to make their expectations become true through the power of autosuggestion.

Many people are convinced that one of the requirements to practice *Kriya* is the ability to create at will a state of perfect **concentration**: this is the final result, not the first step! It is normal for the mind to float continuously toward a thousand opposite directions, as if the practitioner's daily activities were carried on. This is what *Kriya* will defeat as time goes by. Considering that, why feel guilt if concentration seems impossible to grasp in the beginning? A lot of people have followed paths of "personal growth". All of these experiments ended up a mere waste of energy and time; our mind's effort cannot give us that embrace that comes from eternity and that leads to eternity.

Putting aside the attempt of "strangling our mind with our mind", by concentrating only on the breath, one day, the real power of "silence" will take possession of our thoughts. Only then will it be possible to define our mind as "inexistent", rather than as a mind having reached success in its concentration effort.

4...It is very important to experience how beautiful it is to practice a short session of just *Talabya Kriya* and *Om Japa*. Some organizations, in their

effort to bring *Kriya Yoga* to people have picked out some useful preparatory techniques. Well, in Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* the preliminary techniques are just the quoted ones. Whoever experiences a sense of wonder in observing how the *Talabya Kriya* can right away calm one's mind, does not require concentration on anything. A pure physical action will suffice. Then, chanting the *Mantra* in the way it was described, until the abdomen, the chest and the spinal column vibrate, brings the *Kriyaban* to obtain a state that is a real "benediction".

5...Regarding *Maha Mudra*, there are people who believe they are practicing their *Kriya* correctly without ever practicing this. By listening to different *kriyabans*, I dare to say that it is a miracle to find a person who regularly practices its three canonical repetitions.

It is useless to go on remarking that there is a ratio between the number of its repetitions and the number of the breaths - it is recommended, indeed, that for each 12 *Pranayama*, one should perform one *Maha Mudra*. However, three repetitions are enough and by no means to be neglected.

Maha Mudra is one of the basic techniques of *Kriya Yoga* and its importance becomes clear since it incorporates all three *Bandhas*. Applied simultaneously, when the body is bent forward, the three *Bandhas* produce the feeling of an energetic current moving up the spine. It is clear that, renouncing this exercise and living a sedentary life, the spinal column loses its elasticity. The physical conditions get worse as the years go by and it becomes almost impossible to maintain the correct meditation position for more than a few minutes - that is why *Maha Mudra* is so important for the *kriyaban*.

6...In explaining *Pranayama*, trying to be purposely simple, I always choose a balanced, rational and flexible approach. The previous *Om Japa* - which unhappily many don't consider even worthy of diligent use - acts like a flywheel and makes the correct procedure of *Pranayama* happen very easily. Moving the awareness along the elliptical route around the *Chakras*, no effort is required for concentration to become deeper.

The energy comes up along the back of the spinal column with an interrupted continuity until the *Bindu* is reached.

Since, frequently, there are doubts about the descent path, we can say that the distance between the inhaled and exhaled paths is about 0.5-1 inch.

As for the upper part of the circuit, we can notice that to bring the awareness up to the *Bindu* generates the perception of the inner light, that

emanates from the *Kutastha*. Even if nothing happens, it does not mean that the practice is wrong. *Kutastha* awareness is a spontaneous revelation that takes place when there is sufficient stillness in the body.

A beginner can lift the awareness up to the *Medulla*, then pause and come down.

The action of lifting the awareness up to *Bindu* is deeper in its implications; it embodies the ultimate energetic path, the one we are going to be acquainted with in all the *higher* techniques.

7... If a *kriyaban* has already practiced and appreciated the technique of *Kriya Pranayama* with the semi-closed mouth, he can gradually add the new instructions without discarding the previous ones - since the open-mouth breath gives a wonderful sense of presence in the spine.

Common sense guides us to begin with mouth open and, after a certain number, go to nose breathing: there are many reasons for regarding the open-mouth breath unnatural when protracted indefinitely. I have heard about a student who received counsel from an eminent *Kriya* teacher to limit himself to a maximum of 36 breaths with the mouth open. I deem this is a very wise advice and I do not take the position to affirm that this procedure is all right for all *kriyabans*. I find no valid reasons for which I should teach *Pranayama* with mouth breathing to anyone, even though this could be of help to the beginner.

My aim is to teach Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*; I prefer to avoid all what would later be abandoned.

To the bizarre statement that mouth-*Pranayama* is superior to nose-*Pranayama*, because it brings the current into *Sushumna*, I reply that only the breathless state can succeed in bringing the energy into *Sushumna*.

I do not believe that Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples were all stupid to spend their life moving the energy into the *Ida* and the *Pingala Nadi* and not into *Sushumna*!

8...As for the discussion whether the chanting of *Om* in the *Chakras* during *Pranayama* is correct or not: we understand that the chanting of the 12-letter *Mantra* [*Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, a syllable in each *Chakra*] follows the same principle and is called *Omkar Pranayama* [see next chapter]. Therefore the question is: should a *kriyaban* decide for *Omkar Pranayama* once and for all and then stick to it for the rest of his life? A *kriyaban* enjoys the wealth of both techniques - *Pranayama* and *Omkar Pranayama* - he does not restrict himself to just one of them.

During initial *Pranayama*, all our attention should be given to move the energy around the *Chakras* - while we are doing this, we are subconsciously aware of their existence but we do not give specific attention to them and we do not chant *Om* in them.

9....The concluding *mental Pranayama* is not just another technique to be done after *Pranayama*, but its logic development. This is, undoubtedly, the most beautiful part of the routine - as long as we are not disturbed in anyway while experiencing it!

When breathing becomes calm and awareness is absorbed in the revelation of the *Chakras*, it is wise to remain in this dimension as long as possible. After some weeks of effort - although with no strain - it is possible to perceive, right at the end of each session, something cradling and comforting, which is going to remain in one's memory.

Different are people's reactions at it: some speak of sweetness; others feel having gone out of the dimensions of time....

10...Let us lastly try to understand what the word *Paravastha* means.

It is not only the joy and the peace experienced in the last minutes of a *Kriya* session, but also something vaster, expanding during the day, as sound and natural as a healing process.

After the *Kriya* routine, we feel, sometimes, as convalescents; we perceive we are in a lofty state and we understand it is our duty to do all we can to protect it from the wounds of life.

The secret is how to find a balance between the use of the thinking process and the act of diving into that pond of peace which is created in our heart as soon as we recall the *Kriya* effect. Our continually frantic mental activity begins to subside.

After some years of discipline, when the breathless state destroys any restricting anthropomorphic concept of the Divine, and cleans us from all conditioning, the Advaita vision of the "Formless Divinity" will never leave us. The state of *Tranquillity* is no more to be searched for; flashes of the ending state of freedom will lighten the horizons of the mind. This kind of "spiritual rent" is then enjoyed in daily life. Lahiri Mahasaya called this state, on some occasions, *Par-Paravastha* that means "the state that comes after the after effects of *Kriya*". His simple eloquence does not compete with the worn-out expressions of poets.

CHAPTER VIII IMPROVING THE FIRST KRIYA

Let us describe how, after some months of practice, the different techniques of the *First Kriya* may be deepened.

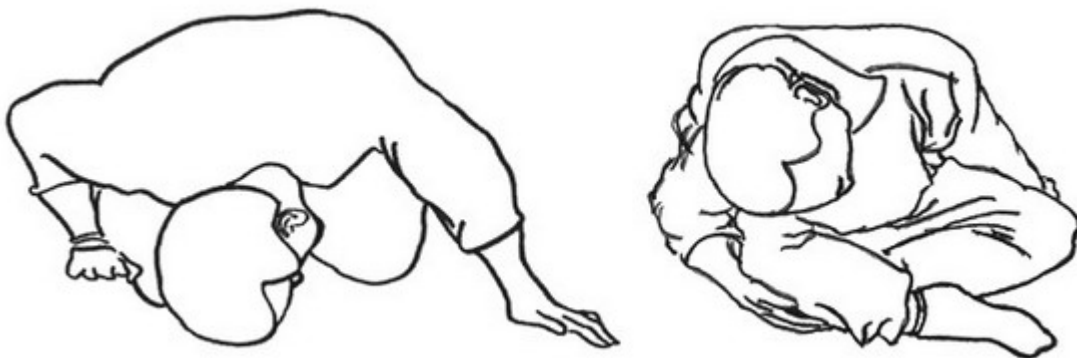
The *Talabya Kriya* and the *Om Japa* in the *Chakras* remain the same.

Maha Mudra

I...Forward bows

[This exercise, besides being a wonderful preparation for it, is in itself a milder version of *Maha Mudra* proper. When the two techniques are done in succession, the ideal conditions are created for the best execution of the *Pranayama* technique. To practice both techniques, or only *Maha Mudra*, is a personal choice.]

After inhaling like in *Pranayama*, the half-lotus position is maintained – sitting on the heels is also ok – the body is bent forward; the head is placed in the region between the knees. The hands may be used at will; breath is not controlled or retained even though the energy is kept in the head as if the breath was being held [this skill will develop through practice]. The head is placed close to the right knee, the face is turned toward the left knee, so that it is possible to perceive a pressure in the right side of the head; then the head is placed close to the left knee, the face is turned toward the right knee: a pressure in the left side of the head is perceived. Then one places his head between both knees. In this position, the pressure should be felt centrally in the forehead.



Forward bending starting from sitting on the heels and starting from the half-lotus

After completing the three manoeuvres, the starting position with the head and spine erect is resumed. Then, to end one cycle of this *Kriya* exercise, the energy is brought down from *Kutashta* to *Muladhara* with one long exhalation. This exercise should be repeated three times at least.

II...Deeper form of Maha Mudra

Let us consider the *Maha Mudra* instructions given in the previous Chapter. When the right leg is extended, the right hand grabs the right foot's toes while the left hand grabs the inner side of the right foot; now the face is turned left. From this position, the breath is free to flow in order to stay down for a longer time and feel the "the inner pressure" in the right side of the head. It is clear that the same perception is the objective to reach in the left side of the head, when practicing the opposite position. When both legs are extended, the pressure must be felt in the front part of the head.

Ajna Chakra tuning

The following instructions are effortlessly and profitably realized when practicing with the tongue in *Kechari Mudra* position. A *kriyaban* perceives an virtual line from *Kutastha* back to the occipital region, as well as a virtual line connecting the temples. Subtly swinging the head back and forth and then sideways may support the perception of the two lines' intersection point. [It is above the *Medulla* and a little bit forward.] By deepening the concentration there for two minutes, with the tongue touching the uvula or in the perfect *Kechari Mudra*, it will be possible to perceive some taste [*Amrit*, nectar] on the tip of the tongue.

Kriya Pranayama proper

Let us consider the *Pranayama* instructions given in the previous Chapter. The *Pranayama*'s subtle procedure is deepened in the course of time. Some experiences happen spontaneously [like the exhalation's flutelike sound which comes about as soon as *Kechari Mudra* is put into practice] and the *kriyaban*'s awareness simply takes note of them effortlessly. Other experiences [like the awakening of the *Samana* current

and the rising of all energy and awareness to the top of the head] take place only when some technical detail is introduced; this may occur only when the time is ripe.

As always, a *kriyaban*'s good judgment and inner voice guide him when adding new techniques. In the following paragraphs, I share new instructions to deepen the mechanism of *Pranayama*. However, if in the course of implementing these new details a *kriyaban* experiences difficulties, pain or stressful sensations persisting over several days then by all means he returns to the previous instructions. It simply means that he is not ready yet to proceed to the next level of practice or that he is not following the instructions correctly! The good effects of peace, inner joy and the manifestation of inner sounds [revelation of the *Omkar* reality] should always go on increasing!

I...Kechari mudra and flutelike sound

It is well known that *Pranayama* performed with *Kechari Mudra* is characterized by the sound of a "flute", *shee shee...* audible during the exhalation. Lahiri Mahasaya describes it as something «similar to when one blows air through a keyhole». He says it is like «a razor by which everything - that is: the mind - is cut off». It has the power to cut any external disturbing factor off, thoughts included.

A good degree of relaxation is always required in order to experience this sound: a keen effort to increase its intensity will result in its disappearance. When it appears, the sensation is that it has its origins in the frontal part of the pharynx instead of in the throat. While a *kriyaban* is waiting for this phenomenon, he can invite it, "open the doors" to it, by creating it in his conscience. During the inhalation he can attune to *Awww...* [like in "Awe"] and during the exhalation he can think *Sheee..* [eee... like in "bee"] very intensely. These two *bija Mantras* lead inexplicably to the transformation of the pranic body. Their mental intonation is valuable, but it should not be forgotten that this is only a temporary step: one day both *Kechari Mudra* and the natural flute-like sound must appear.

The aforesaid sounds should not become a "crutch" to lean on forever; that would lead to a coarse, tamasic way of practicing *Pranayama*, preventing the real flute-like sound to appear.

II...The awakening of the Samana current

Let us further deepen our *Pranayama* performance. During the inhalation, is it possible to feel the energy rising behind the spinal column and it is also possible to feel the energy coming in through the nose, flowing into the lungs, crossing the diaphragm and entering the abdomen. During the exhalation it is possible to feel the descent of the energy, to which we have become used, and a warm current coming up from the abdomen. The more this awareness increases, the more heat is produced in the navel. It is explained that, when this happens, *Prana* and the *Apana* unite in the navel, thus activating the *Samana* current and that the produced **heat** is like an "arrow" that, starting from the center of the "bow-body", can finally reach its "target", the *Kutastha*, and reveal the spiritual light. Such depth within the practice is unimaginable for a beginner.

III...Raising the awareness to Sahasrara through Shambhavi Mudra

After an overall number of 36 breaths, a *kriyaban* can adopt the *Shambhavi Mudra* position. The eyebrows are raised. With the eyelids closed or half-closed, the eyes look up to the roof with no movement of the head. In the beginning, a light tension is perceived in the eyeballs muscles, but the position is maintained rather easily once you get over that tension.

The *Pranayama* goes on as usual, there is no change in it; the awareness has its center in the upper part of the head, as if the whole essence of the person moved up there. In this way it is possible to touch the region of imperturbable calmness [*static Prana*], that resides in the upper part of the head. As a result, one experiences *Pranayama* more spontaneously and the energy descent in the body is looser, softer and more complete.

Navi Kriya [variation]

Let us take into consideration the procedure of *Navi Kriya*.

While all its details [movements or the head, total number of its repetitions] remain unchanged, the *Om Mantra* is chanted in alternation between *Kutastha* and the navel. Then, correspondingly, *Om* is chanted in alternation between *Bindu* and the third *Chakra*.

Omkar Pranayama

This technique is a real jewel: its purpose is not only to move the energy inside the spinal column, but also to listen to the vibration of *Om*. While *Pranayama* is notably the central technique of *Kriya*, the *Omkar Pranayama* is the very foundation from which all the *Higher Kriyas* derive: they are truly a deepening of it. In *Omkar Pranayama* the *kriyaban* "touches" each *Chakra* internally with the help of the syllables of the Sanskrit *Mantra* "*Om Namoh Bhagabate Vasudevaya*". [I am sure the reader knows the correct pronunciation; that is why I will not add any phonetic symbol.]

At the onset of this technique the inhalation is divided into six parts; during the first one, the concentration is on the *Muladhar*, where the syllable *Om* is mentally chanted; during the second one, the concentration is on the second *Chakra*, where the syllable *Na* is mentally chanted ... and so on, until *Ba* is mentally placed in the *Bindu* and the inhalation is completed. [Notice that in the *Bindu* we don't think *Va* but *Ba*: this convention has been established over the years.]

During the process, the muscles at the base of the spinal column are slightly contracted. At the end of inhalation, the breath is held for 2-3 seconds, as well as the contraction, and the awareness makes a complete, anticlockwise turn along the crown of the head, inside the brain, starting from the occipital region and returning there. The head accompanies this tour with a very slight rotating movement tilting slightly back, then to the right, to the front, to the left, back.

Then the contraction is eased off and the exhalation begins. This is divided into six parts as well; during the first one, the concentration descends to the *Medulla* and the syllable *Te* is chanted there; during the second one, the

concentration descends to the fifth *Chakra* and the syllable *Va* is placed there... *Su... De... Va...* and so on, until *Ya* is mentally verbalized in the *Muladhar*. During a 2-3 second pause at the end of the exhalation, the awareness makes a complete, anticlockwise turn around and inside the *Muladhar*; then the process is repeated in this way from 6 to 12 times. [The timing depends from the person; usually it is of 20-30 seconds for each complete round but it can be longer.]

After these initial fragmented breaths, the normal way of unfragmented breathing is resumed. *Omkar Pranayama* goes on in a more refined way. Now, the breath [continuous and smooth while the mental singing of the syllables of the *Mantra* in each *Chakra* is always done with great accuracy] produces only a slight, weak sound in the throat, or it comes out soundless. The contraction at the base of the spine is interiorized and is gradually replaced by a mental pressure. During the turn of the awareness inside the brain the head tends to remain still. What is important to underline, is that during inhalation and exhalation the flow of energy touches each *Chakra* deeply [it winds round it and almost "caresses" it]! What, during the early instructions of *Pranayama*, was premature to be hoped for, almost impossible to happen, now occurs naturally, easily. The awareness and energy begin to flow inside the subtle channel of *Sushumna*. It is not a matter of correct visualization: it is clearly felt!

Moreover, the anticlockwise turn of awareness around the crown of the head and brain seems to be deeply sucked in, surrounding and stimulating the *Medulla*. When, at the beginning of exhalation, *Tee* is chanted there, a strong pressure is felt around the *Medulla*; later it extends to each *Chakra* and, even later, to the whole body.

The *kriyaban's* consciousness is engrossed in the powerful internal sound of *Om*. In the first days of practice it may not be perceived; it is necessary to be patient because the effort of each day adds to that of the previous day until the experience takes place.

Mental Omkar Pranayama

I Part one:

To enter a perfect physical and mental stillness, a *kriyaban* draws three deep breaths, each of them ending in a fast and complete exhalation like a sigh. He moves slowly up with the awareness in the *Chakras*, as already

described in the *Mental Pranayama* procedure in the previous chapter. His awareness is maintained in each of the *Chakras* until he feels a particular sensation of sweetness, as if that *Chakra* were "melting". To deepen his concentration he can utilize a new tool: to repeat mentally in each *Chakra* its relative syllable [*Om Om Om Om ...* in the first one, *Na Na Na Na ...* in the second one...etc]. The rhythm is that of one or two syllables per second. If - this may happen indeed! - he perceives easily his heart pulsations, he can synchronize the mental repetition of the syllables with the pulsations.

The whole procedure is very subtle indeed and sometimes it is better to abide just by the *Mental Pranayama* instructions given in the previous chapter. It may be observed that, since the *kriyaban* has touched the dimension of *Omkar Pranayama*, the *Chakras* are now not visualized with their two components but only as dim lights in the spine.

In any case, how does a *kriyaban* know if he is practicing correctly? When his awareness feels no stress whatsoever and part of it is always turned toward listening to the internal sounds - which appear and increase - then the practice is surely correct. This procedure is repeated for each *Chakra*, going upwards and downwards. Usually one round is enough, but the entire cycle may be repeated once or twice. Usually the *Paravastha* state [being overwhelmed by the peace and joy experienced, in an intense degree, in the upper part of the head] takes over and one does not desire to apply any other procedure.

II Part two:

The following procedure may be added, sometimes, according to one's intuition and need. With a very short inhalation [about one second], a *kriyaban* visualizes his *Muladhara Chakra* raised into the *Sahasrara* region - seen as a vast diffuse white light [he may choose to adopt a mild form of the *Shambhavi-Mudra* eyebrows position]. During the subsequent short but natural exhalation, the awareness is led again to the starting point, and then it is shifted to the second *Chakra*. [It is not necessary to visualize the *Muladhara Chakra* returning into its place, unless that happens naturally.] The same procedure is repeated for the 2nd *Chakra*, the 3rd, the 4th, the 5th and for the *Bindu*.

After *Bindu*, the shifting is done for the *Medulla* and the procedure goes on in the reverse order. A very short inhalation raises *Medulla* to the *Sahasrara* subtly and, after the ensuing exhalation, the awareness is shifted

to the fifth *Chakra*, etcetera, until eventually, *Muladhar* is raised to *Sahasrara* as before. This cycle can then be repeated several times, keeping in mind not to overdo it, as this is a powerful technique that can produce a spacey, supercharged effect of the brain. It is better to add repeated cycles over time rather than face the prospect experiencing continuous head and neck pain throughout the entire day!

This process produces two extremely valuable results:

a... It makes the breath so short and subtle that it seems almost to disappear.

b... It deepens the tuning with the *Omkar* reality - the sound and the inner light perception amplifies constantly.

Yoni Mudra [improvement]

The tip of the tongue is pressed firmly upon the highest point inside the nasal pharynx [*Kechari Mudra*]. The *kriyaban* sets his concentration on the *Muladhar* and fills the region around it with calm energy. He waits until a deep relaxation mixed with a feeling of bliss spreads throughout the body. A tremendous feeling of immobility, as if the body were becoming a statue, sets in. Thanks to a much internalized inhalation, the energy is guided, inch after inch, from *Muladhar* up to *Kutastha*. The air entering the lungs is minimal, the thoracic cage extends only slightly. Then the head openings are closed [thumbs closing the ears, index fingers at outer edges of eyes, middle fingers closing the nose, ring and little fingers closing the lips] and the breath is "stopped" in *Kutastha*. The thoracic muscles are relaxed. The mental attitude is *to keep the breath quiet*. The sensation is having the breath compressed from throat to *Kutastha*.

In these ideal conditions, the most delicate aspect of the technique is faced: the frequency of singing the syllable *Om* in *Kutastha* is increased by one per day, from a minimum of 12 repetitions to a maximum of 200. There should be no rush at all! The subtle, very delicate way of achieving the aforesaid result is revealed by an instinct, hidden until now. The practice ends as usual: the hands are taken off the head, the breathing is free, the arms rest and concentration remains, for some more minutes, on *Kutastha*.

VERTICAL ROUTINES

The **horizontal routine** - whose length is as constant in time as that of a fence's pegs - is the only system of practice recommended by many organizations and by a limited number of *Kriya* teachers. It consists in a daily practice of the same set of techniques, changing neither the order of practice nor the number of their repetitions.

A **vertical routine** is a peculiar feature of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*. It consists in, once in a week, putting the usual routine aside and in using instead just one technique, whose number of repetitions is gradually increased - just like the pipes of an organ gradually increasing in length.

This vertical routine is applied to each *Kriya* in succession until the very last *Higher Kriya* is verticulized. That is, one incrementally adds a preset number of repetitions to a particular *Kriya* technique until a total number of repetitions is reached some months later. Then the process begins again with another *Kriya* until the very last is "vertically climbed".

Now let us understand why a vertical routine is so important.

It has been observed that the human being cannot bear the repetition of the same, identical routine for an infinite time, and nobody can escape this "law". What happens is that one's psychophysical system becomes accustomed to the practice and stops reacting, causing the routine either to become ineffective or not as effective as in the beginning. This same principle applies to athletes who wish to achieve world class performance; they must do interval training where they push their physical and mental endurance beyond their normal everyday levels. In this way their bodies adapt slowly to otherwise unachievable levels of performance while at the same time boosting their satisfaction or sense of accomplishment.

Practicing the same technique every single day, a *kriyaban* might run into boredom and annihilation of the initial enthusiasm.

An expert wrote that the hope of obtaining a deep change through such a practice amounts to the hope that hitting a piece of iron once a day might make it, after some years, release the atomic energy that it contains within.

By contrast, introducing the vertical processes a *kriyaban* will discover a stout inner transformation, both in his psyche and in his ability to enter states of ecstasy. The *Kriya* techniques involved in that plan will be mastered, coming to an objective beyond reach through purely horizontal techniques.

Navi Kriya [*] and *Pranayama / Omkar Pranayama* [**] are the best techniques with which to begin a vertical process: their importance is beyond words!

[*]...After a short practice of *Maha Mudra*, *Talabya Kriya* and *Pranayama*, a *kriyaban* practices twice the standard quantity of *Navi Kriya* [8 units]; after some days he can practice three times the standard. During the following days, he can avoid practicing or he can just limit himself to a brief practice at will. After a week's rest – useful to absorb the practice's effects – he can practice four times the standard quantity and so on up to twenty times the standard quantity [80 units]. His effort will not be as hard as to be impossible. The final stage of the vertical process is challenging, but, a week before, a *kriyaban* must have assimilated 76 repetitions and the week before that, 72....

Each stage must be experienced within a single day: this is vital to make any resistance blow up. If we try to be smart and do abruptly the final dose, it is like doing nothing, because the inner channels close up.

It is like pouring too quickly a liquid from one bottle to another bottle having a smaller opening: all the liquid is spilled out. Therefore, a vertical process must be done in a gradual way and digested, bit by bit, amid normal daily activities. Our inner obstacles cannot be blasted in one day, not just because our constitution could not bear it, but also because our clearing force initially is weak and must be augmented week after week.

It is important to point out that the long sessions of practice are not necessarily continuous; on the contrary, it might be interesting to divide them in two or three parts by introducing interruptions. Needless to say that a practitioner can choose to practice every other week; in less than a year the process will be completed anyway.

Note. The following **variation** of *Navi Kriya* can be adopted. After chanting *Om* from *Muladhar* to *Kutastha*, the chin is tilted down. A long expiration is started, feeling the energy descending from the region of *Kutastha* to the navel and, crossing it, moving toward the inside of the abdominal region, where the *Samana* current is located. During the exhalation, *Om* is chanted mentally 10 to 15 times, accompanying the energy's descent throughout its route, as if applying some "soft pushes".

The head goes back to its normal position; a short inhalation follows [two seconds maximum, without the concentration on any *Chakra*] just to raise the energy into the head.

The head bends toward the left shoulder - there is no turn of the face - and the procedure is repeated. A long expiration, together with the *Om*, descends with the movement of energy, heading downward from the head's left side along the body's left side, crosses the belt's left side and moves toward the inside of the abdominal region. The same procedure is repeated likewise, keeping the head bending backward, then rightward, then forward, then leftward and so on. The basic session of this advanced form of *Navi Kriya* consists of 36 descents [this is $36/4 = 9$ rotations of the head]. It ends with *Om Japa* done from *Kutastha* to *Muladhar*. [One session typically lasts 8-10 minutes.]

The vertical process increases the number of descents with multiples of 36: 72, 108....., until $36 \times 20 = 720$ descents have been completed. As the process becomes gradually more intimate, the head movements are just hinted. Each *Navi Kriya* session ends by chanting *Om* from *Kutastha* to *Muladhar*.

[**]... 1x36, 2x36, ...20x36 *Pranayamas* is a very good plan; 1x24, 2x24, ...24x24 is lighter but good anyway. It should be underlined that when more than a hundred breaths are practiced, it is wise to shift to *Omkar Pranayama*. If all the recommendations are followed, the conscience will find itself floating in a state of infinite softness, in a great and soothing spiritual light.

Since this process is of primary importance, it is worth spending a few words on it, at the risk of seeming pedantic.

After 36 breaths a *kriyaban* can adopt the particular concentration of the *Samana Pranayama* and after another 36 breaths that of *Shambhavi Pranayama*.

The situation can be summarized in this way:

1st week: 36 Basic Pranayama

2nd week: 36 B. + 36 Samana Pr.

3rd week: 36 B. + 36 Samana + 36 Shambhavi Pr.

4th week: 36 B. + 36 Samana + 36 Shambhavi + 36 Omkar Pr.

5th week: 36 B. + 36 Samana + 36 Shambhavi + 2x36 Omkar Pr.

.....and so on until

20th week: 36 B. + 36 Samana + 36 Shambhavi + 17x36 Omkar Pr.

[We can break the routine into two - morning and afternoon - in different ways. Let us, for example, consider the eighth week: [36 B. + 36 Samana + 36 Shambhavi + 5x36 Omkar Pr.]. The split can be roughly thus: Morning: 36 B. + 36 S. + 36 Sh. + 1x36 Om; Afternoon: 4x36 Om.

It makes more sense to make the split in this way: Morning: 24 B. + 12 S. + 36 Sh. + 1x36 Om; Afternoon: 24 B. + 12 S. + 36 Sh. +3x36 Om.]

NOTES

You have seen several details added to previously learned techniques and the whole matter may now seem to be more complicated.

Actually, when it comes to writing a book, it is important to be as accurate as possible. A reader has the whole time to reflect; his doubts must be prevented as much as possible. What one usually sees is that some students come up with very intelligent questions that may catch us unprepared. Sometimes we may even be inclined to think that they invented them just to complicate everything, but that is not so. Sometimes they point to deficiencies in our explanation or to subtle contradictions. With this in mind, I feel it is my duty to clarify more and more, even at the risk of making my explanations long-winded.

In real life, a student is required to practice, thereby awakening his capacity of self-directed learning and learning to understand by himself the subtleties of the process.

Let me take the opportunity of adding a few remarks about these new details. Then I will make some concluding comments on the subject that I am so keen on: the vertical processes.

1.... Some schools teaching *Kriya* prescribe that, during *Pranayama*, the gaze is concentrated in the *Kutastha*; in other schools there is a bit of confusion where the focus of the concentration should be.

In the basic explanation of *Pranayama*, I have simply written: "The eyes are closed, relaxed, as if looking into the distance through *Kutastha*."

In the current chapter, right at the onset of the practice of *Pranayama*, I have added to direct one's concentration to the sixth *Chakra*, in the central region of the head. *Ajna Chakra* is like a cave where a *kriyaban* may take shelter. In other words, following the movement of energy around the

Chakras, the awareness gathers spontaneously exactly there. When this condition is stable, effortless, the *Pranayama* comes out perfect.

Also, the seemingly complex *Samana Pranayama* happens without problems. From the inside of this ideal cave, the *kriyaban* visualizes simultaneously the energy rising up behind the spine and the air descending to the lower abdomen. During each exhalation he watches the energy going down, accompanies the movement of the navel towards the inside with some awareness, feels the diaphragmatic muscles and becomes aware also of the air moving out of the lungs. All this creates an intense heat sensation in the region of the navel. A short state of ecstasy follows.

Then, during the *Shambhavi Pranayama*, a *kriyaban* will have the impression that the ideal cave, where his consciousness is gathered, is raised to the *Fontanelle* - or floating in the sky above the body - and from there he is looking down at his body experiencing the *Pranayama*.

2... The advanced form of *Maha Mudra*, introduced by the **forward bows**, is the best work to tune with the *Omkar* reality in its deepest aspect of internal movement sensation.

It may seem odd, but I'm convinced that it is better to limit one's practice just to these forward bows and to *Maha Mudra* and then sit peacefully attuned to the *Omkar* dimension, without *Pranayama*, than to have an isolated *Pranayama* practice without this foundation.

It is very useful to turn the head and rest there for some seconds, while the object of concentration is the vibration and the feeling of pressure in the lower side of the head. By a number of repetitions of this posture as well as the symmetric position, the two parts of the brain become equilibrated from the energetic point of view: this balances the *Ida* and the *Pingala* currents, whose unbalance is the main reason for the obstruction at the base of the spine. I don't know if these bows came from Lahiri Mahasaya, but it is sure that some of His major disciples taught them.

3... From the teaching point of view, when I am sure that a person has begun the vertical processes, I take into consideration the delicate matter of *Kechari Mudra*.

Besides the *Talabya Kriya*, I teach to push inward, with the fingers, the base of the tongue: it helps to reach the uvula and to lengthen the fraenum. One day, removing the fingers, the tip of the tongue remains

"trapped" in that position - the soft palate acts like an elastic tape, it sustains the tongue preventing it from slipping out and getting back to the normal position.

This is a turning point since, *while* holding the tongue in this position, a number of *Pranayama* breaths may be performed.

By repeating each day the same attempt, *Kechari Mudra* is improved. After an average of ten days, it is possible to fill the tip of the tongue into the nasal-pharynx hollow, keeping it there for a couple of minutes. The sense of irritation and the increase of salivation is soon left behind; from then on, the practice of *Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra* will be easy and comfortable. Then the tongue will touch the top of the palate in the nasal pharynx and will stay vertical.

A large body of *Kriya* literature describes how important is to perceive the so-called "nectar" - the elixir of life, *Amrita* - a fluid with a sweet taste coming down from the brain in the body through the tongue. Not induced by autosuggestion, it bestows a great feeling of perfect spiritual joy.

In order to foster this experience [and at the same time to stimulate the *Kundalini* awakening] it is recommended to touch, with the tip of the tongue, three specific points.

- 1... the uvula,
- 2... the bone protrusion, like a small asperity in the roof of the palate [inside the nasal pharynx] under the pituitary gland,
- 3... the soft tissue above the nasal septum [inside the nasal pharynx, hinted, in the *Kriya* literature, as an "uvula above the uvula"].

The tip of the tongue should rotate on these spots at least for 20-30 seconds; then, in the manner of sipping a liquid, some flavour will be tasted on the surface of the tongue.

The exercise is repeated several times during the day.

When the real nectar sensation manifests, one focuses on it while keeping the tongue in contact with one of the centers describe above.

Since our birth, our energy kept flowing outward making us unable to get in touch with our inner supply of energy. The main purpose of *Kechari Mudra* is to restore this ability; to perceive the nectar, means that contact is restored.

Sometimes we really do not realize the amount of energy we squander when we indulge in imaginary thought conversations or scenarios.

This "inner activity" is a pernicious way of depleting all of our vitality.

Kechari Mudra can turn this tendency into its opposite: the condition in which our personal experiences and activities are considered and metabolized through the mirror of intuition.

As for my experience, the first days that I learned how to insert the tongue in the nasal pharynx hollow, a very uncomfortable sensation was felt in the pharynx accompanied by an increase in salivation resulting in frequent swallowing.

The real problem was a feeling of "dizziness": the mental faculties felt fogged up but, after two weeks, everything returned to normal.

When *Kechari Mudra*, in its correct form [with the tongue behind the soft palate] was practiced for a many hours, an unusual happiness would be felt during the next day, even without doing any *Kriya* practice. Inspired by Lahiri Mahasaya's advice that the tongue can also be pushed further up so that its tip touches a higher center in the upper part of the pharynx, I extended the tongue to its limit. As a result, I experienced a great attraction toward *Kutastha*, along with the sensation of having reached, with the tip of the tongue, a higher position. As any anatomy book will reveal, the tongue, being totally contained in the nasal pharynx, cannot reach any upper part of it: Lahiri Mahasaya's sentence has to be read in a symbolical sense and should be applied to the lifting of the energetic level.

4....To conclude these notes, I would like to remark that the dynamics of *Samana Pranayama* remind of the statement in the Gita regarding the *Yogi* "offering the inhalation to the exhalation, and the exhalation to the inhalation."

In the Internal Alchemy of Ancient China this kind of practice is called "fourfold immortal breathing" because there are two currents to be aware of during inhalation and two currents to be aware of during exhalation.

The *Prana* current operates in the zone of the lungs and the *Apana* current in the abdomen: the diaphragm separates them.

If a *kriyaban* strictly follows the advice to keep the concentration always inside the spine, the aforesaid process is dramatically hampered.

A lot of devotees do not move their awareness a single inch from the spinal column; they do not even try to feel the movement of energy around the *Chakras*, afraid they might reduce the whole to a "less spiritual technique". Thus *Pranayama* suffers a profound distortion; the recommendation to

visualize the spinal column as a tube as "subtle as a thermometer's mercury channel" - while the energy going up like "the mercury" as the temperature rises - must be used during *Omkar Pranayama* only, when the initial work upon the energy contained in the body has already been done!

The reason for so many aberrations lies in the conviction that the ancient texts on *Yoga* are the foundation of *Kriya*. Actually, nowadays some teachers prescribe the study of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* as a prerequisite to receive the initiation to *Kriya Yoga*. That text, together with the *Gheranda Samhita* and the *Shiva Samhita*, does not contain - and it cannot contain - the theoretical foundations of all the *Kriya* techniques.

A lot of people are convinced that Lahiri Mahasaya did not bring anything new, that each part of his *Kriya* can be found in both classical and tantric *Yoga*.

In my opinion, to investigate the origins and the essence of *Kriya Yoga* it is necessary to study all the great mystic paths and not just the basis of *Yoga*. Of course, I am not talking about the "esoteric" or the "magic" paths; my reference includes only the non-contaminated paths, born spontaneously at the margin of the great religions, or following the experience of a great Mystic who was often harassed by the official guardians of such or such religious tradition.

Lahiri Mahasaya used the best and the strongest methods at his disposal; his system is valid and each of its phases is exactly what it should be.

The *Kriya* process happens first outside the spinal column, then inside and, finally, inside the core of the *Omkar* reality.

About the vertical processes...By sharing *Kriya* with other researchers, I noticed that the accomplishment of the two previously described vertical processes is a decisive step: a student incapable of completing them, if desired with slighter doses, will hardly proceed on this path.

He will play sometimes with the *Higher Kriyas*; after some months he will be annoyed with the whole thing; later - either in a timid or in a conceited manner - he will discard *Kriya Yoga* entirely. Or, fostering doubts about the techniques he is practicing, he will keep on looking indefinitely for the original Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* by haunting various web sites and forums. Alas, that's life!

To those who ask why one should start with the *Navi Kriya*, I explain that the vertical process of *Pranayama* is very subtle and that *Navi Kriya* is

an excellent preparation for it. One may begin vertical *Pranayama* as soon as half the process of vertical *Navi Kriya* has been achieved.

In the other (horizontal) days the practitioner should go on with the *First Kriya* routine, not exaggerating the concept of discipline. He should also enjoy days that go by without doing anything.

It is up to his intelligence to make the practicing days as pleasant as possible. It is good to wake up early in the morning to do half the work and take a little rest right after it; lunch can be followed by a short walk in the open air. The last part of the practice is to be completed in the afternoon. In the evening, if he can afford a walk at full ease, a powerful calmness would fill the sphere of his thoughts. That is when the benediction of a blissful silence comes.

To everyone I counsel the variant of *Navi Kriya* in which the energy is guided from the head to the belt region, across four different directions. The purpose of entering that realm of peace and tranquillity is at hand and by no means an abstract aim. This catches the attention in a way impossible in the other variants.

The turning of the energy in the circumference of the head has a strong effect; a *kriyaban* has the vital necessity of distributing his energy in equal quantities in each part of his brain.

It is curious to see how some students of *Kriya*, those who want to awaken the *Sahasrara Chakra* and bother to find out the best *Mantra* to be thought in the upper part of the head, are incapable to comprehend how useful the mechanics of this last technique can be to advance toward that very purpose!

There is another important point to be made: after many repetitions of this kind of *Navi Kriya*, before the exhalation begins, something new happens. A little resistance manifests, as if the lungs cannot move. The resistance is eventually defeated by the awareness of something subtly entering one's body.

This is the beginning of the *Pranayama with internal breath* - a very important topic that will be developed in detail later [chapter XII].

The psychological effect, typical of this practice, is that of **unification**. It is just as if all the different sides of one's personality unite and consolidate into something new and, at the same time, very ancient. By the end of this process, one has the feeling that whole eons have passed by!

As for the *Pranayama*'s vertical process, one thing must be clarified: during each stage, up to the completion of the prescribed number, it is important to keep a slender thread of breath. In other words, the process should never become purely mental.

During the progress of the practice, a *kriyaban* learns to go on along the thin borderline between the breath and the no-breath state.

The *kriyaban* must be reassured that any unpleasant mood will not last long; it is the symptom of great transforming processes happening inside. When the transformation is complete, an authentic and true satisfaction will follow.

My experience...The only problem I met practicing the vertical processes was that sometimes the inner screen of my awareness was displaying a lot of images - of course, they were dreamlike visions. And this is the reason why sometimes I was lead to practice with half-opened eyes.

This disturbance - as I perceived it then, while now I consider it a physiological process - found no cure. No help came from practicing the *Maha Mudra* several times; changing the position of the legs, as well as interrupting for a short pause the practice, it was all useless.

In the already quoted book *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the protagonist describes how the cloud of his thoughts shrouded him anytime he practiced his method of prayer; he experienced «a great heaviness, a lethargy, a boredom and an invincible sleepiness».

This is a universal phenomenon: a *kriyaban* should become able to remain full aware, while remaining in that diffuse and irresistible stillness that seems to forerun one's sleep.

Only when I fully accepted to witness a continuous profusion of images from my past, when I ceased fighting them in an impossible attempt to remove them, a miracle happened. Instead of originating an incessant chain of thoughts, those images transfigured into an endless beauty, they disappeared as if their real substance was only bliss.

I realized that an inner thread bound all my past actions; it was clear that, quest after quest, it guided me always towards the mystic realization.

Those images invited my to cast a glance to the misty sources from which my current trend of life originated.

My heart was caught by the perception that something pure, enchantingly pure - which was part of my past - was again emerging in my life.

As soon as the effects of my practice crystallized in my conscience into a total order, giving birth to a coherent action, I thought of Ahab's behaviour in Melville's *Moby Dick*: «The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!»

As for the *Pranayama*, reaching the 720 repetitions, it was not a straining task, but a natural procedure; after each practice, I would feel the intense miracle of this new epoch of my life.

Near the sunset, practicing in the countryside with half-open eyes, my *Pranayama* would assume the consistency of the sky. «Enough, enough I've had of the mind and all its phoney stars - I would repeat Sri Aurobindo's words - let's turn on the suns that are never off!».

SUMMARY CHART

Technique	Duration for 1 unit	Begin With	Daily routine after some months	Verticals - if prescribed - to be done once in a lifetime
Talabya Kriya	1.5 -2 secs	10	50	-----
Om Japa	30 secs	6 to 12	6 to 12	-----
Basic Pranayama	18 -20 secs; up to 45 secs	12	24 - 36 max108	Vertical of Pranayama is a combination of Basic, Samana, Shambhavi and Omkar
Maha Mudra	[1 unit is 3 extensions] 60 - 80 secs	3 x 3 ext.	For each 12 Pranayama, past 36, one more Maha Mudra	-----
Navi Kriya	140-160 secs	4	2 - 4	4x1,4x2, ... ,4x20 Very boring: much better with the advanced variation
Advanced Navi Kriya	[1 unit is 36 descents] 8-10 min	1	1	1x1,1x2,...1x20 [w]
Samana and Shambhavi Pranayama	18 - 20 secs; up to 45 sec	12	12 - 24	-----
Omkar Pranayama	20 secs	12 [after at least 24 Pranayama - Basic and Samana]	12 [after at least 24 Pranayama - Basic and Samana]	36 basic; 36 Bas + 36 Sam; 36 Bas +36 Sam + 36 Shamb;... from then on add 36x1 Omkar, 36x2 ... 36x17 for a total number of 36x20 breaths [w]
Mental Pranayama	2 - 4 minutes	Different rounds	A global time of 10-20 minutes	-----
Yoni Mudra		1 "round"	1 "round"	1 "round" The singing of Om is increased of one per day up to 200

[w] = the work is done once a week: during the other days minimal doses of the technique are practiced

CHAPTER IX HIGHER KRIYAS IN THEIR BASIC FORM

The *Higher Kriya* techniques have been specifically conceived to untie the knots of the heart (*Hridaya* or *Vishnu Granthi*) and of the *Muladhar* (*Brahma Granthi*). They are the seals protecting - as Mère would say - «our right to pain and suffering».

We shall deal with the subject of the knots in Chapter X. The knots [tongue, navel, heart and *Muladhar*] tend to hamper the whole *Kriya* process as if they were meant only to preserve our ignorance indefinitely.

They cut us off from the infinite reservoir of energy all around us, nourish the world of superficial emotions and thoughts and are the root cause of our miseries. Mère's sentence hints to the fact that there is a firm tendency in us to retain forever our present state.

The phase of the *Kriya* path we are about to deal with is of extraordinary importance; the matter is difficult, extremely delicate and more fascinating than one would ever have imagined. Before rushing into the technical descriptions, let us clarify some important points.

I...The practice of the *Higher Kriyas* always takes place after *Navi Kriya*, within a routine like one of those described in the previous chapters. The only exception to this rule is when a *kriyaban* is an expert and he can create, at will, deep interiorization without the aid of any preliminary *Kriyas*. If such is the case - his breath remains calm, he perceives the inner sounds and the feeling of bliss continues to increase - he may skip *Pranayama*, and *Navi Kriya*.

After finishing his *Higher Kriya* practice, to enter perfect physical and mental stillness, he takes three deep breaths, each of them ending with a quick exhalation, as complete as a sigh. Then he goes slowly up and down with his awareness in the *Chakras* - as already described in the *Mental Pranayama* procedure.

II... As for the specific doses of these *Higher Kriyas*, as they have been handed down by tradition, a *kriyaban* can deviate from them, choose to take whatever amount he wishes and receive, nevertheless, remarkable results.

The *Kriya* path is an endeavour through which we gain more and more freedom and therefore it is always a joyful experience. It should not be forced into a stressful practice. If any teacher has ever given out such an idea, that is due to his own psychological problems and conditioning. In any case, considering the value of the vertical processes, it is vital to complete them, with their canonical doses, at least once in a lifetime.

III...These techniques should always co-operate to establish a foundation of harmony and calmness. A practitioner should be able to have an objective vision of his work and to know whether it is done correctly or incorrectly. In this case the advice of an expert is highly recommended.

IV... In India, the way a practitioner does *Kechari Mudra* is crucial for his initiation in the *Higher Kriyas*. Indian *Acharyas* claim to see the actual execution of the *Kechari*; they want the student's mouth to be opened in front of them and his tongue to disappear in the nasal pharynx.

It is a fact that practicing the *Higher Kriyas* with one's tongue stuck in the nasal pharynx is different from practicing with the tongue in a normal position. It is explained that the internal pressure, produced by *Kechari*, makes the *Thokar* work in the most effective way.

On the other hand, *Kechari Mudra* can be really difficult, almost impossible for some people. Then, is the whole practice of the *Higher Kriyas* to be avoided?

My opinion on this matter is that Lahiri Mahasaya certainly asked for the regular effort of *Talabya*, but He also gave initiation in the simple form of *Thokar* to those who could not perform the correct tongue positioning. His attitude, his taking part of human suffering leads me to believe that.

Through a regular practice of *Talabya Kriya* - prior to *Pranayama* or at any time during the day - it is possible to get many of the *Kechari*'s typical effects. *Kechari* develops through several stages: a lot of people are able to maintain the tip of their tongue on the uvula, but they are not able to stick it completely into the nasal pharynx or to touch a particular area in the palate's upper part. I think that the first stages of it give the opportunity to receive great results by the easy form of *Thokar* we are going to see shortly.

I do not want to be misinterpreted! I am not saying that *Kechari* is not important; I am fully aware that it is an effective and powerful tool - I will show its great importance in the evolved form of *Thokar*.

Easy form of Thokar [widely known as Second Kriya]

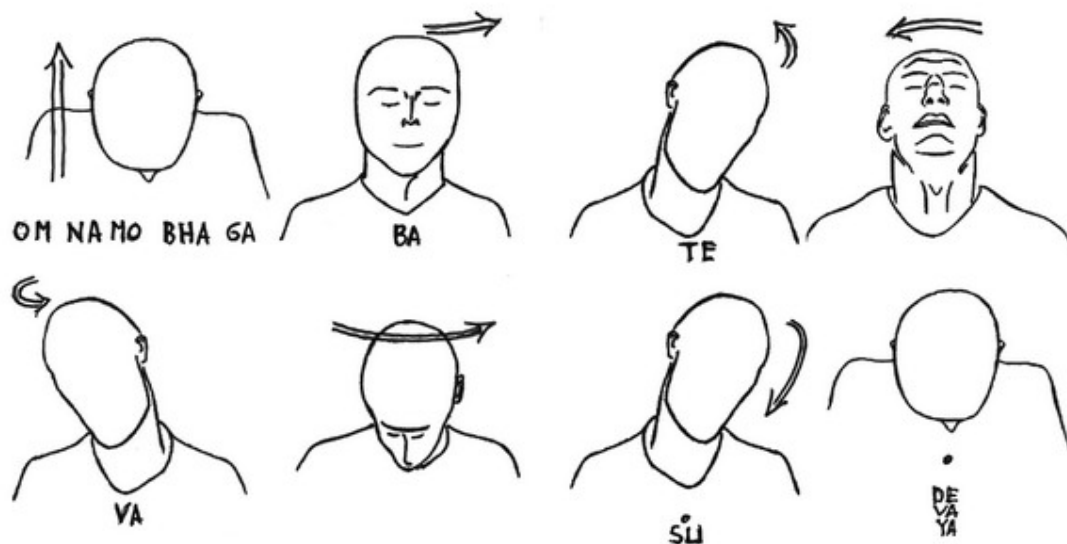
Let us begin by describing the easy form of *Thokar* which contains the full beneficial effect of the advanced form of *Thokar* and therefore is enough in itself to produce the enormous power needed to untie the knot of the heart.

First, the environment to be created is like that of the *Omkar Pranayama*. The syllables of the *Mantra* "*Om Namoh Bhagabate Vasudevaya*" touch each *Chakra*. *Thokar* means to add some movements of the head which are more intense than those in *Omkar Pranayama*: a complete anticlockwise rotation, followed by a stroke directed towards the center of the chest. With the chin on his chest, a *kriyaban* slowly inhales and starts raising the awareness along the spinal column, touching the very nucleus of the *Chakras* with the syllables [the syllable *Om* is placed mentally in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second one, *Mo* in the third one, *Bha* in the fourth one, *Ga* in the fifth one and *Ba* in the *Bindu*]; simultaneously, the chin is raised as if to follow the inner movement. During the inhalation, the muscles at the base of the spinal column are contracted.

The rising energy touches the internal part of the spinal column, ideally entering every *Chakra*. When the chin is up, horizontal, the inhalation ends with the concentration on *Bindu*. The breath is held, the muscles contraction is kept. The head begins its round by moving to the left shoulder [left ear moves slightly towards the left shoulder, the face does not turn left or right and the movement is free of all bouncing], *Te* is thought in the *Medulla*. The head tilts back a little and in a sweeping arc reaches the right shoulder, [the right ear coming near the right shoulder], the syllable *Va* is thought in the cervical *Chakra*. The rotation goes on, the head bends forward just a little and moves left until the left ear is near the left shoulder [the face is not turned to the left]. From this position, the chin is tilted down diagonally as if to strike the center of the chest, whereas *Su* is placed into the heart *Chakra* through a high mental intensity. [An expert *Kriya Acharya* shows how the physical strike, while not being forceful,

creates a remarkable inner effect. If one allows the weight of one's head to push the chin toward the chest, this act is surely too powerful and also harmful. The mindful physical effort is simultaneously aimed at lowering the chin, resisting the force of gravity, and concluding with a slight but intensely felt jolt within the fourth *Chakra*.]

The awareness remains there for one or more seconds, enough to perceive an irradiation, starting from the heart *Chakra*. The head is kept down, the contraction at the base of the spinal column is eased off; through a very subtle exhalation the remaining syllables are "placed" into the first three *Chakras*: *Da* into the third one, *Va* into the second one and *Ya* into the first one. [The duration of this process is about 24 seconds.]



For several weeks, the *kriyaban* is guided to perform this technique twelve times a day. Then he is guided to increase gradually the repetitions up to a maximum of 200. The presence of physical problems [the cervical vertebrae are vulnerable indeed!] may require that the chin not be forced into a sudden movement to bring it close to the chest. When a more delicate movement is recommended, the perception of energy in the fourth *Chakra* is created by the sheer power of concentration.

Variation

Everything - inhalation, movements of the head, doses - is identical, except for one detail: when the head nears the left shoulder, *Te* is thought in the

heart Chakra; when the head nears the right shoulder, the syllable Va is thought in the heart Chakra.

[*Su* is placed into the heart *Chakra* and the remaining syllables are "placed" into the first three *Chakras*.]

While in the previous form of *Thokar* a flow of energy and inner light moved from the *Medulla* to the heart *Chakra*, crossing the cervical *Chakra*, a particular internal perception may accompany the mental placing of the three syllables *Te Va Su* in the heart *Chakra*. If this *Chakra* is visualized as a little horizontal disk of a coin's dimension, with a diameter of about an inch, a flow of energy, the sensation of something swinging, may be projected by the physical movements of the head on the surface of this imaginary disk.

To be more precise, while the head is moving left, an inner energy flow to the left is perceived; when the head moves right, a movement rightward is perceived; when the head moves back toward the left shoulder this inner movement moves left, and when the chin is down this inner movement draws the missing part of an ideal "S" run from bottom to top. Of course, it must be remarked that the technique is effective also without this visualisation.

Thokar with the repetition of the movements [widely known as Third Kriya]

The *Thokar*, with the repetition of the movements within one single, long breath, is a really astonishing technique. It creates an increase of power and energy in the fourth *Chakra*, thus producing an intoxicating experience of joy.

We are in the same environment as with the *Omkar Pranayama*. Also here, the syllables of the *Mantra* "*Om Namō Bhagabate Vasudevaya*" touch, going up and down, each *Chakra*. While holding the breath - at the end of the inhalation - when the energy is in the head, the *kriyaban* repeats the whole set of the movements of the head placing the syllables *Te Va Su* several times in the places we have already clarified. [A *kriyaban* chooses

one of the two aforesaid variations: either in the *Medulla*, cervical and heart *Chakra* or in the heart *Chakra* only.]

The technique concludes exactly as the preceding one, placing the syllables *De*, *Va* and *Ya* in the respective *Chakras*. This technique is performed within a single, long, breath. Usually, in the first days when familiarizing with the technique, a *kriyaban* is guided to repeat the whole set of movements 12 times and it may last around 70-80 sec, from inhalation to exhalation.

Now let us deal with the instruction to increase the number of the head movements up to 200 while holding the breath, which the *kriyaban* - judged eligible by his teacher - receives.

The authentic meaning of this instruction needs to be thoroughly grasped! Trying to get to a high number of rotations at a high speed, obsessed by holding the breath, is absurd. It amounts to a mere violence against one's own body! Wrong are those who say that this power comes in due time, also with the help of the *Kechari Mudra*; it cannot come and it will never come! Simply put, it is not possible.

At the same time, *Kumbhaka* [holding the breath], is such an important phase of *Pranayama* that some *Yoga* teachers doubt whether a modified way of breathing which does not include any *Kumbhaka* can be called *Pranayama* at all.

It is observed that when we are about to do something which requires our total attention, our breath is automatically held. We are not deliberately doing *Pranayama*, but our breath is suspended of its own accord; this demonstrates how natural this fact is. In *Pranayama* the inhalation is called *Puraka*, which literally means "the act of filling"; the exhalation is called *Rechaka*, meaning "the act of emptying". Retention of breath is called *Kumbhaka*, meaning "holding". *Kumbha* is a pot: just as a water pot holds water when it is filled with it, so in *Kumbhaka* the breath and the *Prana* is held in the body.

In the classic *Yoga* literature there are four types of *Kumbhaka* described.

I...The first is exhalation and retention. This is known as "*Bahya Kumbhaka*" (External *Kumbhaka*)

II....The second, "*Abhyantar Kumbhaka*" (Internal *Kumbhaka*), is holding the breath after a deep inhalation. Usually this kind of *Kumbhaka* is accompanied by the use of the three *Bandhas*, especially when the exercise of *Pranayama* is practiced for an increased number of repetitions.

III....The third type is that practised by alternate breathing – *Nadi Sodhana*; it is considered the easiest form of *Kumbhaka*.

IV...The fourth one is the most important of all, the peak of *Pranayama* and it is reached by a deep training in the other three processes. It is called *Kevala Kumbhaka* or automatic suspension of breath: it is the breathless state about which we have already written.

Here we are considering the **internal *Kumbhaka***. It is absolutely recommended not to maintain it to the point of experiencing uneasiness, but a beginner cannot resist the impulse to hold his breath forcefully, just to see if this is an easy way to catch the ... *Samadhi* state.

Some teachers, perhaps to spare their students this dead end [not only wrong but dangerous], changed the dynamics of the *Higher Kriyas* by teaching to forget the breath entirely and to restrict themselves to a mental practice [the breath goes on by itself in a natural way]. This is not a bad teaching: it is a compassionate way to avoid a *kriyaban* to hurt himself - provided that it is not regarded as definitive!

In my opinion, it is only through the right form of *Kumbhaka* that the heart knot is untied. The right way to do it is not difficult at all; it is a matter of instinct and it is discovered by respecting both the detail and the doses of the procedures of the *Higher Kriyas*.

When a *kriyaban*, maintaining an unhurried attitude, works diligently at them, he will discover how to summon up, through an inhalation, a big amount of energy in the upper part of the chest. In that state, the technique is carried on, without bothering about what happens to the breath. [In this state the lungs are completely filled with air: the breathing is not abdominal like in *Pranayama*.]

It doesn't matter if a minimal quantity of air flows in and out of the body. With the aim not to breathe - which does not mean holding one's breath [it might sound identical but it is not] - a practitioner should proceed in a free-of-tension way.

The natural and pleasing experience, together with the sensations of warmth and of exciting joy in the fourth *Chakra*, brings the *kriyaban* to feel as if he is not breathing. The impression is to have the breath compressed in the space from the throat to the *Kutastha*. The feeling that it is dissolved, to not need it, is completely different from that of holding it. Instead of trying to win some apnoea record, a *kriyaban* learns to fill his

system with *Prana*, to fill it to the utmost possible extent, just as a pot may be filled with water to the brim. What he discovers is a non-forced *Kumbhaka*, not the real *Kevala Kumbhaka*. There must necessarily be an imperceptible exhalation whenever the chin is moved toward the chest; similarly, an imperceptible inhalation is produced whenever the chin is brought back up. A molecule of air passing through the nostrils cannot for the world ruin the technique and its effects! It will not interrupt the sensation of the perfect stillness of the breathing process.

Something very peculiar takes place: the energy is equally distributed in the whole system and this calms the mind in an unparalleled way. The so called "*Kriya state*" takes place and the *Thokar* is applied in the best of ways.

A decisive stimulus is provided on the knot of the heart and a great action occurs in the *Kutastha*: this is the core process of this higher procedure.

The surveillance of an expert teacher is capable to awaken the kriyaban's intuition and help him to experience this miracle of beauty.

Technique of raising the Chakras into the Kutastha [widely known as Fourth Kriya]

The *Gayatri Mantra* is considered to be a supreme vehicle for gaining spiritual enlightenment. Its purest form is *Tat Savitur Varenyam Bhargho Devasya Dhimahi Dhiyo Yonaha Prachodayat*.

[Oh, great Spiritual Light who have created the Universe we meditate upon Your glory. You are the embodiment of Knowledge. You are the remover of all Ignorance. May You enlighten our Intellect and awaken our Intuitional Consciousness.]

This *Mantra* is prefaced with either a short or a long invocation.

The short is: *Om Bhur, Om Bhuvah, Om Swaha*.

The terms *Bhur, Bhuvaha, Swaha* are invocations to honour the planes of existence (physical, astral and causal) and to address to their presiding deities.

The long invocation is: *Om Bhur, Om Bhuvah, Om Swaha, Om Mahah, Om Janah, Om Tapah, Om Satyam*.

This invocation is more complete since it recognizes that there are more planes of existence: the seven *Lokas*.

Mahah is the mental world, the plane of spiritual balance; *Janah* is the world of the pure knowledge; *Tapah* is the world of intuition; *Satyam* is the world of Absolute, Ultimate Truth.

[This is not the right place to develop this information. Regarding the pronunciation of the Sanskrit *Mantras*, each reader will find it on the web. We can be satisfied with the explanation that these are the seven sounds which activate our *Chakras* and connect them to the seven great spiritual realms of existence. Through this procedure, a spiritual light is infused in each *Chakra* which reveals itself as a vibrational rhythm in *Kutastha*.]

The seven *Chakras* are usually connected with these *Mantras* according to the aforesaid order: Muladhar - *Om Bhur*; Swadhistan - *Om Bhuvah*; Manipur - *Om Swaha*; Anahat - *Om Mahah*

Unlike this "Yogic way", the *Kriya* tradition [see *Lahiri Gita* and *Pranab Gita*] ties Manipur with *Om Mahah* and Anahat with *Om Swaha*. The reason is that the world of thinking, evoked by *Om Mahah*, is more fit for the nature of the third *Chakra*, while the causal world of pure ideas, recalled by *Om Swaha*, is related to Anahat *Chakra*. In conclusion we associate a *Mantra* to each *Chakra* in this way: Muladhar - *Om Bhur*; Swadhistan - *Om Bhuvah*; Manipur - *Om Mahah*; Anahat - *Om Swaha*; Vishuddhi - *Om Janah*; Medulla - *Om Tapah*; Bindu - *Om Satyam*.

The technique starts with focusing on the first *Chakra*. During a short inhalation [of one or two seconds], it is imagined to be raised into *Kutastha*, to be seen herein as a bright "moon".

The route to be followed from a *Chakra* to the *Kutastha* is an almost straight line; the lifting happens in an instant. It is not a movement of energy like in *Pranayama*. The visualization of *Kutastha* can be that of a sphere containing the six piled-up *Chakras* - namely the astral spine.

[It is also possible to visualize it like a tunnel starting from the point between the eyebrows and protruding forward like a horizontal proboscis in the space in front of the body: having crossed its opening, we find first the vibration of the *Muladhar*, then, moving forward, the vibrations of the other *Chakras*. We proceed, thus, through subtler levels, towards infinity.]

As in the previous technique, the basis of the procedure is that the breath is harmoniously held. This means that the *Prana* is gathered in *Kutastha*.

When the *Muladhar* is visualized in the *Kutastha*, a very slight oscillating movement of the head is carried out. The head swings left for less than an inch, right, left again, ending with a small, barely hinted twitch in the middle. This physical movement accompanies the perception of an inner movement inside the golden disk of the *Chakra*. *Om Bhur* accompanies the oscillation with *Bhur* vibrating in the center of the disk.

Once 36 repetitions have been carried out, an exhalation brings the *Chakra* back down - to give an idea, this process may last about two, two and a half minutes. The same procedure is repeated for each *Chakra* up to the *Medulla*.

[While in the beginning the sensation of inner movement might seem to be the same for every *Chakra*, later on it becomes something particular to each one of them. A *kriyaban* learns to detect the «different rhythms of the *Chakras*». He becomes intuitively aware of the *Chakras*' true location - which is not in the spine, but in *Kutastha*.]

Once a *kriyaban* is able to see the Spiritual Eye and the tiny star inside, then he should direct all his concentration on it while mentally chanting *Om Satyam* at least 36 times. No effort should be made in controlling or manipulating one's breathing pattern – whether one is breathing or not – the idea is to deepen one's absorption there.

If he is not able to see the tiny star, he wisely uses its trigger point which is the *Bindu* in the occipital region: from *Kutastha* he comes behind into *Bindu*, where *Om Satyam* will be repeated from 36 up to 200 times.

At this point he can enter the *Paravastha* state or reverse the procedure by "lowering" gradually his attention to *Kutastha* and the *Medulla* simultaneously, to *Kutastha* and cervical *Chakra* simultaneously, to *Kutastha* and heart *Chakra* simultaneously mentally chanting the respective *Mantras* until he is tuned with *Kutastha* and *Muladhar* simultaneously. Then he enters the *Paravastha* state.

A NOTE ABOUT THE THOKAR

The *Thokar* technique marks one of the most beautiful moments in a *kriyaban*'s life. He feels a really appeasing presence in his heart and moves around as if his heart bore a brazier within. He perceives that the center of his personality is not in his brain, but in his heart; a different way of seeing life is born. For some time he feels that the heavenly dimension of the Beyond has become his own life. Carrying on with his life, he feels the assurance of a definitive belonging to this dimension. Intoxicated by this new condition and comparing it with that of the mystics, he wonders how it will be possible for him to go on playing his worldly role without being paralyzed by such bliss!

As the months go by, the effects are sometimes more difficult to bear. Lahiri Mahasaya wrote in his diaries that when the cardiac plexus is struck - by means of the *Thokar* - the *Prana* that is linked to the breathing is «directed inward, a spontaneous state of profound absorption catches the practitioner, bringing him into a condition of stability and quiet for a prolonged period of time. *Thokar* opens the doors of the inner temple. » He wrote that the *kriyaban* will be touched in deep and will learn to see what others cannot or do not actually want to see. Let us explain this point.

The heart knot is the main cause for a man's tendency to being influenced by other people, by churches and by organizations in general. Noticing how many illusions religions and cults would dish out, his participation in other people's sorrow grows. He may feel sorry for all those people who, in the abyss of a tragedy, kept on imploring their God not with a true genuine religious spirit but almost as if they were compelled into this suppliant attitude in order to avoid even worse calamities. At times, the sentiment of this devastating reality fills his heart with tears, like a painful grip tearing his chest apart. But this is a fleeting experience: then comes such a high intensity of love that the experience turns into an experience of "blissful" pain.

Every session of *Thokar* amounts to digging a stream of inspiration out of the arid soil of one's acquired indifference, where the waters of primitive aspiration can flow again.

Like a hammer, the *Thokar* destroys the grey walls of the prison one has built around himself; it clarifies some twisty psychological mechanisms

which led to taking wrong decisions and to a daily violence to one's necessities.

Life is hard; when the moral fabric of a man is wounded, this fundamental contact is not possible through the normal means of self-analysis. The healing does not occur through intelligence and comprehension but through a limitless burning intoxication which can be obtained only through the *Thokar*. The impact of a *Thokar* performed with passion can alienate one from himself and from his present life, and offer him a higher way to a new life.

Now let us consider the main result that the fervid, ardent, enthusiast practice of *Thokar* leads to. It may be defined as the power to keep superficial emotions at bay; this has a deep consequence for practical life. Emotive maturity of a person means that his decisions will spring from real wisdom and not from superficial emotions. Let us make an excursion and understand what damage emotions can do to one's life.

Discrimination should always be the main quality in charge of our way of living among other people; so, there should be no room for any hasty decision. Violent, frantic and hysterical emotions often rise unexpectedly from our inner self, to disappear after a while. They actually express a reality devoid of authentic profundity but their propulsive action inevitably results in hurried acts accompanied by a sort of cerebral fever, nourished by a narrow, visceral pleasure.

When passion is inflaming a person's whole being, it is not possible for this person to be guided by common sense; the consequence is that some challenging schemes of behaviour - those which might guide him toward a more complete and evolved stage of existence - often withdraw to irrevocable halts.

Sometimes, fatal decisions start taking shape in advance in our imagination - just like, during the summer, hail stones are moulded, condensed and enlarged in the air before falling down to the earth and causing disasters - especially whenever we squander our time away fancying over the change of some circumstances of our life.

During those open-eyed dreams, absorbed in the idea of avoiding something difficult, we float in an illusory happiness. This perspective throws false "light" on our existence, so that what, in the past, would

appear as an act of cowardice, now seems to glitter at the horizon of our life, like the clear and transparent day hovering over the stream.

Not only does a person dream to flee from a difficult university exam, but he takes up, suddenly, the plan of abandoning his whole course of study.

The damage caused by emotions is making us blind; we cannot see that our ideal and sudden leap into a "new and happy condition" puts to a halt an irreplaceable chance to grow up.

The same thing happens whenever we decide to put a difficult human relationship to an end.

Sometimes we believe that an important relationship of ours will never take a different course; turning to relaxation in such a situation, we cannot accept the idea that something might threaten our childish fantasy, our perfect synthesis with another human being.

As soon as, from the other person, the tiniest hint comes that something in this relationship should be reconsidered, rebuilt in a different way or at least discussed with quietude and with due concern, we react as if hurt in our soul by a useless and cruel violence.

We feel as if our counterpart did not appreciate the present peace to such an extent that she/he would sadistically fuel enervating discussions with useless topics; discussions which could be postponed to the future or rather never be engaged in, since our intuition says they are of no value.

If, in the end, we actually acknowledge the necessity of resuming a boring and unpleasant discussion of old, we feel as if swallowing a black, sharp-edged rock.

A person who believes to be listening to his heart and who is actually just venting his or her most violent frustrations, can, on this occasion, reject any discussion and break off that relationship with an action of such "radiant" free will as to overwhelm all bystanders. In the following instants, especially when the risk of retracing one's steps appears, pride will prevail, driving the presently exciting pleasure to the top.

Existence seems to be as beautiful as ever; the person feels like reborn after a long and painful malady, enjoying every little action with uninterrupted voluptuousness, maybe even surrounded by flashes of blue.

Is this the expression of true freedom? Is this "acting from the heart"?

How could we call happiness this act of walking on the ashes of what had been built on patience and sacrifices and for which we have trembled and even shed tears? Have we been totally blind in the past? Of course, by

succumbing to our disastrous emotion, we demonstrate to be blind now! The effect does not differ from that of an asteroid falling through the atmosphere on its way to fire and destruction.

Several days go by and the person's heart feels heavy; a blurred sadness hued with pessimism toward all human relationships reveals that this experience was all but a "leap toward the sky".

A good crumb of the person's self is lost forever, trapped in that very relationship which belongs to a past that can no longer be reached due to the person's fear to endure the full impact of a truthful and honest reminiscence. A subtle deception of our mind makes it more convenient to believe that we had accepted a relationship with a wrong person and this will be what we are going to repeat inside, hastily and sharply, just to silence the conscience which invites us to see the episode in its true light.

We are going to say: «I acted from the heart». Nonetheless, how could we have listened to it during our hasty decision? The heart calls for true silence to make its voice audible among a choir of commonplaces.

He that abides by the laws of the heart has no haste; he knows that his "heartful" perspective is unshakable and will survive to the fleeting glimpses of the momentary deceptions.

A NOTE ABOUT THE TECHNIQUE OF RAISING THE CHAKRAS

The technique of raising the *Chakras* into *Kutastha* leaves its mark from any point of view. A *kriyaban* discovers that even with lesser doses than those prescribed he can obtain astonishing results.

The strong concentration applied on *Kutastha* and *Bindu* - either in the fantastic situation in which a *kriyaban* is able to see the tiny white resplendent star inside the Spiritual Eye or concentrating on its trigger point in the occipital region - creates a great psychological order extending to all the aspects of life, from any point of view.

This process touches those regions of one's psyche where one never brings his awareness; a *kriyaban* develops the ability to see his life as it really is and realizes the reason for many wrong decisions.

The ego is not just a function that needs be made transparent and destroyed; it is, rather, something that sets up a complicated mental structure based on incorrect ways of reacting to certain stimuli. It can be destroyed with the work in *Bindu*. As days go by, the ego's more subtle

tricks suddenly become noticeable. When the movement sensation in *Bindu* increases in strength, the *kriyaban* wakes up in the morning having spent a night full of quite vivid dreams (though not an utterly sleepless night).

Leaving aside the psychological effects and concentrating upon the subtle, esoteric ones, this technique's most delicate aspect, the ability to distinguish in the mirror of *Kutastha* the *Chakras*' different rhythms, enriches the *Omkar* experience in a way, impossible to grasp intellectually. If, up to now, a sort of "shroud" prevented contemplation of the Spiritual Eye, through this technique - especially by prolonged concentration in *Bindu* - this obstacle will suddenly disappear.

[While some schools do accept the concept of the trigger point of *Bindu* in the occipital region, others give so great an importance to this concentration that they teach to reach the *Bindu* gradually by visualizing all the six *Chakras* one after another, each in a different position, diagonally, from *Kutastha* to *Bindu*. I think it is wise to utilize the concentration on the *Bindu*. There are too many traditions which - at times identifying *Bindu* with the *pineal gland* - affirm this is the best way to reach the *Sahasrara*.]

A stable transformation is perceived while performing the daily practice of *Pranayama*. This technique becomes more beautiful; it seems to have a laser in *Kutastha*, which can operate everything our will wants it to. *Pranayama* happens without any effort, while one's awareness enjoys a full rest in *Kutastha*. The stimulus to breathe in is naturally accompanied by the sensation of energy climbing up; and this happens in a powerful way, by itself, as never experienced before!

Kutastha is the unique motor of this movement of energy, which becomes stronger and stronger.

Witnessing this event, a *kriyaban* understands that until now some kind of subtle inner violence was involved in his practice of *Pranayama* in order to force the movement of energy. Now he understands that it is sufficient to increase concentration in *Kutastha*!

Strong experiences take place in the spine. Although it is not always possible to classify them as "*Kundalini* awakening" - such an expression should be limited to the final and irreversible experience of Self Realization - they happen while relaxing in a supine position.

Sometimes the energy seems to be extracted from every part of the body, even nails and teeth, sucked upward as by a powerful magnet. Sometimes a sensation is felt of bliss blowing up in the heart; there is also the perception of celestial music. One has the impression of being divided in a thousand parts and each of them seems on the verge of exploding from joy and love.

CHAPTER X SETTING DEFINITE GOALS

Many *kriyabans* entertain just one dream: learning all the techniques of *Kriya Yoga*, assembling them in the most effective order of practice and settling in a regular daily practice of this complex but well integrated whole. Until that moment, they think they are missing something essential and are never completely happy.

We comprehend perfectly that if a researcher fancies that there are better techniques, which he unfortunately does not know, he cannot be satisfied with himself. The same if he harbours doubts about the authenticity of the techniques he possesses. But even if, one day, he has all the original techniques at his disposal and has full trust in their authenticity, he will find out that his problems have only begun.

This is due to the fact that a definitive routine cannot exist! The concept of a perfect and ultimate routine is inconsistent: definitive means that any progress with it is impossible. As already pointed out, no one can tolerate the repetition of the same, identical routine for an infinite time. One's psychophysical system will not react as expected and the initial enthusiasm might inexorably decay into annihilation.

It's not a wonder that a shallow person, who up to this moment has been motivated by curiosity and by an instinctive pleasure in experimenting, finds himself in a doubtful, hesitant state. The propulsive strength of the novelty is over; he doesn't know whether the best for him is to go back to his starting point and try to master the very basics of *Kriya* or to rummage around in the attempt to discover something that could bring him more quickly to the spiritual dimension.

The fact that also a *kriyaban*, who has been practicing very intensely, encounters a phase of despondency, is strange indeed. After a long - I would not say wearing but surely strenuous - process of mastering the techniques, that which could have been a phase of pure enjoyment turns into a really challenging period.

He has witnessed a process of cleansing in the field of his personality and perhaps it is really for this reason that he is not able to succeed in finding again his initial, adamant and enthusiastic drive. He needs to settle in a more mature approach.

It is true that some enthusiastic *kriyabans* can indeed go on for years repeating every day a complicated set of techniques but, in the end, they also capitulate and come back to a simpler routine. In an attempt to save themselves from a complete shipwreck, they cut some techniques off the whole set [usually the *Higher Kriyas*] and return to their initial routine of *First Kriya* - often neglecting the *Mudras*.

They see a possible solution in the utter simplicity.

Small wonder that very rarely this decision leads to good results - this would mean that the *Higher Kriyas* have already played their role once and for all, which is almost impossible.

Alas, more often than not, this attempt fails to restore the past feelings of fulfilment: it seems that a gilded epoch has faded forever.

Many *Kriya* undertakings end up in a desolate condition: a *kriyaban* has, now and then, as a result of his practice, just little sparkles of joy and is content with that. He hopes that a hypothetical miraculous change of the situation will take place in the future years. Sometimes he ends in the definite withdrawal from any practice. His enthusiasm and joy are kept alive uniquely by just one "high" activity: that of reading the reports of others' spiritual experiences in the new best-selling spiritual books.

We must, of course, pay all possible respect to his freedom of living the spiritual path in his own way; but on the other hand, it is clear that his attitude has buried his hopes once and for all.

To enjoy, at the very beginning of the path, that kind of literature - I am not referring to the high literature of other fields, which is a perennial nutriment of our brain - is a good thing; but what is the point of seeking a continuous confirmation of one's spiritual beliefs, in order to renew the determination to give, one day, a concrete form to them, knowing unconsciously that this day will never come?

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce a possible way out. I'm going to show how the aforesaid phase of dismay may be transformed into a thrust toward the real target of *Kriya Yoga*, toward great accomplishments, greater than what the *kriyaban's* imagination can conceive.

But first it is necessary to have some introspection about the theoretical foundation of *Kriya Yoga*.

At the time of attending my first school of *Kriya*, the suggested theoretic approach considered the action of *Pranayama* to be a process aiming at producing the so-called "magnetization" of the spine, followed by the rise of the spiritual energy inside of it. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* gave some help for a narrow understanding of the consecutive steps to get at this result; by studying this work, a *kriyaban* could take his cue for important reflections.

Patanjali's principles remain a vital help to avoid common mistakes when planning whatever routine but, in order to understand each part of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*, it is necessary to mould a non-naïve vision of all its aspects.

Just to give an example, the essential role of the so-called "vertical" processes does in no way fit into Patanjali's context: how they are giving more fulfillment and permanent psychological transformation than any other routine, remains unexplained.

To clarify this and other aspects as well, it is necessary to include in our consideration the concept of the **knots**.

Maybe the reader has already found Lahiri Mahasaya's sentence: «Any religious path consists of four stages characterized by the untying of four internal "knots" (*Granti*): tongue, navel, heart and *Muladhar*». Surely he has read that *Kriya Yoga* is a four-phase path. The question arises spontaneously: are these four phases one and the same thing as the process of untying the four knots?

In other words, in the beginning of the path, does a *kriyaban* work at unfastening the knot of the tongue, then with a further initiation does he work at unfastening the knot of the navel and so on?

The answer is negative. The whole subject is very interesting and deserves a thorough discussion.

The **FIRST STAGE** of *Kriya Yoga* is centered around the *Pranayama* technique. A permanent action upon the whole personality happens because three important forces radiating from the *Chakras* - Sexuality, Love and Spirit - are mixed together.

The fracture originating at one's birth accounts for the fact that a unique reality was split into three parts, which began to fight one another. The spiritual side of a man, which manifests as joy and calmness, established itself in the higher *Chakras* and the head; the material side, in the lower

Chakras. Such split is the permanent source of many miseries: there can be no lasting happiness if the original unity is not recomposed, at least partially. Therefore, in *Pranayama*, the energy is moved first around the *Chakras* (behind the spine and in the frontal part of it) and is not immediately forced into the spine. The sexual energy is the agent that makes us rejoice at the sensorial perceptions and gives us the strength, the determination, to fight the battle of life and to obtain all the necessary things - unfortunately, another reason why we fight is to obtain things which are superfluous to our living; this is a cause of endless difficulties.

The energy of love becomes a deep feeling [beware of superficial emotionalism!] toward another person; the joy we feel before a work of art, becomes fuel for fair-minded actions born out of inner, noble instincts and ethic laws. The highest peaks of aesthetic contemplation, where the vast prophetic visions may manifest, can only be lived through the spiritual energy.

Often, in common religious tradition, a person is taught how to maintain, rather to cultivate it as a virtue, the division between matter and spirit.

This tear within the person, inside his intimate essence, fosters the conflict between the instinct, the needs of the body and the aspiration of the soul. Unfortunately, for countless men the word "Spirit" becomes definitively a synonym of sacrifice and penance.

The *Kriya* path includes the end of each conflict, it establishes the *kriyaban* into a substantial unity of intention - his heart resides in the spiritual reality but at the same time he has a full experience of life.

In *Pranayama*, the sexual energy coming out of the first and second *Chakras* is brought to the level of the heart. The energy of love comes out of the heart *Chakra*; the two mix together, supplying a person with enough determination not to succumb to any obstacle and to realize love in all the forms in which it normally manifests. The reinforced energy of love is brought into the higher *Chakras* (*Vishuddhi*, *Ajna* and *Sahasrara*) from which the energy of Spirit radiates. The spiritual energy, surrounding love with its irradiation, transforms it into aesthetical rapture, creating the aspiration to find out and to enjoy beauty in the outer reality. That energy is brought down into the cells of the body to nurture them and to stir the perception of a fresh energy permanently sustaining the body from inside.

In order to make this mechanism work, the circuit must be closed. Here we understand the value of untying **the knot of the tongue** with the performance of *Talabya Kriya* and *Kechari Mudra*. This knot cuts us off from the tremendous reservoir of energy in the *Sahasrara* region. At the very moment *Kechari Mudra* is realized, a *kriyaban* cannot understand what is happening to him. If he spends a lot of time with the tongue in this position, unbelievable moments of pure calmness and mental silence fill his whole being: the mind begins to lose its despotic role! Sometimes, stunned and disoriented, he may feel to be as a convalescent just coming out of a state in which the mind was jammed.

But let us now return to the process to circulate the energy. After some energy rotations, the awareness tries to cross the "door" of the navel and reach the seat of the *Samana* current, in the lower-medium part of the abdomen. This region contains the state of peace we enjoyed before our birth.

It is necessary to cross the **knot of the navel** in order to find it again. This knot originates from the trauma of cutting the umbilical cord. The *Navi Kriya* heals the old wound in the region of the abdomen. To settle one's awareness again into the area of the lower abdomen means to build the best foundations of the whole *Kriya* journey.

The place of the abdomen where the *Samana* current originates is, according to the Taoist terminology, called *Dan Tien*.

In Chinese mystic literature the process of entering that region is designated through expressions like: «Coming back to the center»; «The union of heaven and earth»; «The birth of the golden flower»; «The creation of the dazzling gem».

As the *Hesychasm's* mystic tradition [see Glossary] explains in an exhaustive manner, this is the best way to find the "route to the heart" and settle in a unique quietness state.

The psychological, immediately perceptible transformation following this procedure, is the unification of all the different facets of one's personality, the discovery of a unique internal thread connecting all the past actions with the forces that are currently bringing our spiritual aspiration forward.

The **SECOND STAGE** of *Kriya Yoga* is mainly directed to work in a firm way on **the knot of the hearth** and, on occasion, to begin the work upon the knot of the *Muladhar*.

This knot is to be blamed for the superficial emotions that nourish the world of thoughts and cover, suffocating, the kingdom of deeper feelings. It is the root cause of the human attitude to become psychologically reliant on others and to accept as truth only what is displayed within the frame of the magnificence of churches and organizations.

Until this knot is unfastened, we cannot have a real touch of the spiritual reality: the heart beats madly as soon as some spiritual experience is approaching us and destroys abruptly the calmness and the state of consciousness we have gained with so much difficulty.

The *kriyaban* who has mastered the *Pranayama* and the *Navi Kriya*, adds the powerful action of the *Thokar*.

The various technical details and the variants of this technique do not divert his attention from tuning to the *Omkar* dimension. Lahiri Mahasaya wrote that *Thokar* will succeed in opening the door of the internal temple. The proof that this process has hit the target is the apparition of an inner bell sound; while listening to this sweet inner sound which, as light as a fall of petals, knocks softly on the doors of intuition, there comes the realization that all the experiences of love are like splendid crystals blooming around its gilded thread. We realize that the deep feeling of hope that has warmed our heart innumerable times since infancy, the vast comforting smile surrounding us in misfortune, is the *Omkar* reality itself. To interrupt the routine at this point would be foolish: the work on the knot of the heart has just begun.

The **THIRD STAGE** of *Kriya Yoga* is the completion of the previous work.

The main distinguishing feature of this third stage is the achievement of the breathless state.

It can appear only if the *kriyaban* learns how to maintain the consciousness upon Spirit during the whole day. The experience of the *Mental Pranayama* [or of the *Trivangamurari* based technique – see Chapter XI], is fantastic! If a *kriyaban*, engulfed in this dimension, sits for a long time, he experiences an elation that nothing else in life can give.

The **FOURTH STAGE** of *Kriya Yoga* is mainly directed to go past the state of breathlessness and merge with the *Omkar* reality which manifests, in perfect physical and mental immobility, as the paralyzing bliss of the *Samadhi* state. The mind that contemplates the Ultimate Reality vanishes, dissolves. The *kriyaban* goes beyond the essence of Time and attains lasting peace.

The powerful obstruction at the base of the spine blocking this experience is called the **knot of the *Muladhar***.

It is explained that its essence is the action of the two unbalanced lateral currents of *Ida* and *Pingala*. However, it must be explained that to untie this knot means not only to have reached a perfect Equilibrium state with the end of any tension between opposites. The implications of opening this knot are much deeper. All our life, each aspect of our mental states should lift up and open to the Divine. One day the door to the kingdom of Spirit will be opened and our energy and awareness will cross it!

Since at that moment we shall perceive the Spiritual eye and we'll have the experience of entering it; since this vision represents the cross-section of the spine, visible in the spot between the eyebrows, it is not a mistake to affirm that the location of this knot is not only in *Muladhar* but also in the *Kutastha*.

Now, with this theory in mind, we understand that the *Kriya* path appears to be a long walk consisting in destroying one after the other the seals that maintain the illusion working in us. There is no doubt that the full mastering of these four stages requires years of work and a *kriyaban* has to return to his own footsteps many times in order to work again on a knot he believed to have untied. A knot is like a gallstone, embedded in an organ, that a doctor must remove, gradually and with due care not to destroy the organ or kill the patient.

Through each *Kriya* routine, we work upon all the four knots:

I...With the introductory techniques like the *Maha Mudra*, with the basic procedures of *Pranayama* and *Navi Kriya*, our action is directed mainly toward the tongue and the navel knots, secondarily toward the heart and the *Muladhar* knots.

II...After *Navi Kriya*, a deeper action is directed toward the heart knot and, secondarily, upon the *Muladhar* knot; this may happen through *Mental Pranayama* alone or through *Omkar Pranayama*, *Thokar*...

III... The role of the *Mental Pranayama* is to deepen at the maximum degree the process of unloosening completely the heart knot; this action comes to perfection by mastering the breathless state.

IV....When the *Samadhi* state engulfs the *kriyaban's* consciousness the *Muladhar* knot opens - at least for a certain amount of time. The work must go on until all the knots are opened completely and permanently: this condition of a human being is what is meant by the expression "Self Realization"!

How can the *Kriya* work be brought to completion in one's lifetime, with due carefulness?

An intelligent, prudent way of proceeding is far from a shallow practice. The *kriyaban*, loyal to his aspiration, should be cautious and intelligent at the same time.

The stories that some day the "curtain" will open as by divine grace, have had a deadly effect on many persons.

Many times I have heard the story of a man who practiced *Kriya* during all of his life while experiencing nothing; only at the end of his life, just some minutes before his death, he had the coveted experience of illumination.

This story has provoked puzzlement in me because I saw the real intention of the persons that told it: «Keep silent, do not pose questions and go on with what you have!» I clearly saw that the story was like a double-edged weapon! It gave the impression to teach the virtue of perseverance but encouraged a stubborn practice of a daily routine which had all the attributes of a superficial and hasty ritual. Nothing could come out of it!

Automatic evolution [...one year for each *Kriya Pranayama*...] through the same routine, twice a day all one's life, is a myth leading nowhere! A *kriyaban* who lives accompanied by a permanent source of pleasure originating from the idea of having found the right path and having made the wisest of all choices, ignores that his ego has become the compass needle of his spiritual venture!

To avoid this pitfall, a *kriyaban* should react by setting himself two definite goals:

A.... A real and deep ***Omkar* tuning** during at least the final part of each *Kriya* routine.

B....Mastering the **breathless state**.

OMKAR TUNING

Omkar is the vibration of the primordial energy sustaining the universe: it grabs our awareness and leads it into the depths of the mystic experience, without any danger that it would get lost. He who follows any spiritual path infallibly meets this manifestation of Divine essence, whatever may be his preparation and his beliefs.

[I dealt with this theme in Chapter III discussing the technique of listening to the inner sounds; I resumed the same argument in Chapter V.]

Lahiri Mahasaya described the inner sweet sound *Anahat* [literally not produced by any physical cause] originating from the dynamism of the *Prana* like the one «produced by a number of people beating against a bell», «as continuous as the oil that is spilt out of a bottle».

There is a resistance in recognizing that the continuous tuning with *Om* - even during the daily life - is the surest way towards the purpose of the mystic path. Many frantically seek impossible surrogates for it. Some, hoping to gain the essential quality of *devotion*, become ensnared in worthless practices, such as those - borrowed from esotericism and magic - involving intense visualizations.

Over the years, we realize how essential it is to maintain the *Omkar* perception during the day. The effort involved has to be prolonged beyond the *Kriya* session, recalled during every aspect of life. When, in the hope of enjoying more freely some coarse pleasure, we willingly chop off this tuning, such intention brings us out of that reality for a very long time, as if we had been transported into another continent.

Awareness of an inner sound will appear sooner or later. Then the perception of it will change as body and mind become purified and elevated.

There are different levels of development in the experience of inner sounds: one will hear a bumblebee, the drum, the lute, the flute, the harp, the clapping of thunder or a hum like an electrical transformer. Some of these sounds are actually just the sounds of one's own body, especially the blood pumping. Other sounds are actually the "sounds behind the audible

sound." It is into this deeper realm that, while all the time gently easing the mind into relaxed concentration, one's awareness is drawn.

This is a highly enjoyable form of meditation; one's listening skills will improve and one will become more sensitive.

All the *Higher Kriyas* have but one essential purpose: to cooperate with a deeper tuning with the *Omkar* dimension!

The refinement and purification of the personality is a step-by-step process which takes many months of dedicated practice to reach the real cosmic sound of *Om*. This is a roar containing all the above-quoted astral sounds. It is stated that one cannot hear this inner sound until he has progressed along the spiritual pathway to the level of the heart *Chakra* and has, therefore, pierced the heart knot.

This implies that without undergoing a multidimensional transformation of all the levels of the being, it is not possible to achieve this sublime experience. The procedure of *Thokar Kriya* is also very useful.

Yogic tradition connects this inner sound with *Kundalini* itself. When this sound reaches its maximum rate, it becomes still. It reveals its nature as a movement - impossible to be intellectually grasped - within a perfect stillness. *Samadhi*, or union with the Absolute Reality, can be entered then. After attuning to this Reality, it is possible to enter that stillness and silence at any time in our lives with a pure act of will.

As soon as a *kriyaban* feels to be out of the *Omkar* tuning, he must put immediately all his *Higher Kriyas* aside and plunge intensively in the *Omkar Pranayama* practice.

In order to express all his potential capacity of effort, he can set a definite target, such as that of completing 20736 *Omkar Pranayamas*. In 144 days, by practicing 144 *Omkar Pranayamas* each day, this task could be accomplished.

Besides the preliminary techniques [*Talabya Kriya*, *Maha Mudra* and *Om Japa*] he can have, in the morning, a session of *Nadi Sodhana* followed by the forward bendings and by a long concentration on the heart *Chakra* with the tongue in the *Kechari Mudra* position.

The balancing effects of this introductory phase will "open" his brain; he will become aware of a peculiar pressure in his head, which announces the nearing of the *Omkar* experience.

While practicing the technique of *Omkar Pranayama*, he never puts aside the intention of interiorizing that procedure. By awakening to the fact that he is the sole Master of himself, he is going to discover different ways of getting into the deep; through his intuition, he will be able to experience the *Chakras* as the truest reality of his being. Later, he will add again whatever form of *Higher Kriyas*, being very careful to perceive an increase of the inner sound perception. A prolonged mental *Pranayama* remains always the best way to conclude his daily practice.

MASTERING THE BREATHLESS STATE

We have seen that the *Kriya Yoga*'s third stage is marked by the state of breathlessness.

It is an unbelievable state - its essence is a tangible, perfect sense of freedom. Compared to it, the common way of living is *suffocation*. It should not be necessary to repeat that breathlessness is different from forcefully holding the breath. It does not mean that the breath becomes more and more quiet; one simply does not feel the need to take in any breath at all. Or he takes in a very short breath and doesn't feel the need to exhale for a very long time.

This state can be experienced after the practice of the *Higher Kriyas*, very rarely in the midst of them. It is correct to say that, on occasion, some sparks of this state may come, as a sudden rapture, in the first instants following the *Thokar* stroke, but the permanence in the breathless state comes through a deep mental *Pranayama*.

When all the techniques are over, when the body is still and the awareness keeps moving very very slowly up and down inside the spinal column, a striking perception of immobility, together with an inner lightness and utter mental transparency is the first mark of its appearance. The breathing process is like frozen; neither is the least need for breathing perceived. This state does not produce any inner throb of surprise, anxiety or tension: a *kriyaban* is not upset by the thought: «I am not breathing»; he feels a fresh energy enlivening his cells from inside, and fully enjoys a new state of living where there is no need to breathe at all. An incomparable sense of inner freedom - which will never be forgotten - is its result.

Here I am synthesizing all that is needed to embark on the task of achieving this state. What I'm writing comes from experience, not from books.

I...It is important to choose a *Mantra* which has in itself both a strong and a soft tone. Listening to the Indian chants, a person can choose among a wide range of *Mantras* [the *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya* Mantra may be employed]; it is also possible to choose a prayer in one's own language, as long as it is made of a few words.

Even if a person has proven that he can attain the breathless state without *Japa*, he will see how this state is stabilised by adopting the custom of performing a great deal of *Japa* during the day.

It is fine to start practicing it aloud during a walk, and then, during the daily activities, going on mentally with it. The sound of the *Mantra* should vibrate in one's mouth, head and chest; the use of a *mala* [108-grain rosary] is fine. Even if sometimes a *kriyaban* may feel a little bit dazed, he maintains the determination never to discard the practice. Elated by the vibration created in his awareness by the *Mantra*, he invests it with his heart's aspiration. [During this form of *Japa*, usually one does not concentrate on the *Chakras*, however it is not wrong to concentrate on them following any particular scheme.]

II.... In the main session of the routine, during each *Pranayama* exhalation, it is important to perceive the irradiation of each *Chakra* that shrouds the body's internal organs - the same perception is going to increase and deepen during the instant preceding the occurrence of the breathless state.

[The fanatics - those who stick to the path of *Kriya* without receiving any reward from it, who claim, since the very beginning of their effort, to experience the *Pranayama* current moving only in the subtle channel of the *Sushumna* - if, by chance, they approach the breathless state, they will observe that it commences in the body, in its cells, with a fresh sensation of energy sustaining each individual atom. With a bit of luck, this experience will change their dogmatic outlook.]

III...After the *Pranayama* technique, a minimal dose of *Omkar Pranayama* is practiced; this is followed by the favorite form of *Thokar* which should not exceed 12-18 rotations. After the practice of *Thokar*, with the purpose that a sensation of calmness and peace is re-established in the psychophysical system, it is fine to get back, at least for six breaths, to *Omkar Pranayama*. Then three deep breaths are taken - each one ending with a short sigh-like exhalation. The breathing awareness is put aside.

The concentration is first directed on the *Chakras* - a 10-20 seconds pause in each one of them is the ideal - they are felt as knots which unravel as soon as they are slightly "touched" by some anticlockwise rotations of

one's awareness. A particular sense of sweetness is the confirmation that, up to here, the procedure is correct.

As already pointed out, the key to the breathless state is to be simultaneously aware both of the *Chakras* and of a fresh energy sustaining each cell of the body.

The breathless state settles by keeping up with this effort in a perfect state of physical immobility.

[I want to add a piece of information which, in some cases, may turn to be useful.

Some *kriyabans* found as decisive the help of the *Aswini Mudra*, inside their *Pranayama*. During both the inhalation and the exhalation they repeatedly contracted the muscles at the base of the spine. Those movements decreased in intensity as soon as the whole procedure went on. They said it caused an energy flush through the entire body, a wavelike awareness of fresh energy and light in the region around the first three *Chakras*. After *Pranayama*, *Aswini Mudra* died down completely.]

The experience of the breathless state changes the course of one's life - the decision to put *Kriya* in the first place of one's life and to use the will power to protect it by any means, becomes imperative.

Absence of breath does not mean action; it is total lack of movement and of the least thought-caused throb, however it is from it that an action is born which changes one's destiny. Aurobindo wrote «The mind does not act; it simply releases an irresistible action from its recess».

In my opinion, during his first year of practice, a *kriyaban* should not aim at reaching this state - he would certainly be disappointed. This state can only come after there has been a considerable change in one's physical and mental sphere. The required inner change calls for a couple of years at least, before it can take place; it starts with the vertical processes of *Navi Kriya* and *Pranayama*. It grows and strengthens itself by increasing gradually the number of repetitions of any form of *Thokar*. When a *kriyaban* is eligible for that technique and works earnestly with it, the state of breathlessness waits for its appropriate moment to spill an infinite joy and an unparalleled experience of freedom into his being.

Success may come as soon as the *kriyaban's* inner conflicts disappear. It is not only a matter of cleaning the *Nadis*, or of astral purification of some "shells"... it is also a matter of intelligence and will power.

The repeated experience of the breathless state destroys the reality of the worldly illusions and of any restricting anthropomorphic concept of the Divine; the Advaita vision of the "Formless Divinity" bursts out and overwhelms the Ego. Flashes of the ultimate stage of freedom touch the mind. It represents the certainty of having finally found something stable and immutable within the evanescent flux of existence which sometimes seems to have the consistence of an infinite sequence of reflexes on the water. This is the core attribute of an authentic "religious" life. Those who spend their time writing and discussing religion without having experienced that state are really unfortunate.

CHAPTER XI FURTHER HIGHER KRIYAS

Advanced form of Thokar

The movements are different from the already illustrated forms of Thokar; only the final part, which brings the stroke into the heart, is identical.

With one's chin on the chest, a *kriyaban* slowly inhales and starts raising the awareness along the spinal column, touching the spinal *Chakras* with the syllables [the syllable *Om* is placed mentally in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second one, *Mo* in the third one, *Bha* in the fourth one, *Ga* in the fifth one and *Ba* in the *Bindu*]; simultaneously, the chin is raised as if to follow the inner movement. Simultaneously during the inhalation, the muscles at the base of the spinal column remain contracted and the hands (with interlocked fingers) are placed upon the navel area so as to push the abdominal region upward, thus creating a mental pressure upon the first three *Chakras*.

The rising energy touches the internal part of the spinal column, mentally entering each *Chakra*. When the chin is up, horizontal, the inhalation ends and perception is at *Bindu*. The breath and muscle contraction are held.

Without turning the face, the head moves toward the left, then it returns to the starting position while at the same raising the chin up as much as possible. [The position is that of the second part of the *Navi Kriya*, with the head fully back.] A short pause of the head movement and a contraction of the head's rear muscles follows.

In that very instant, the *kriyaban* has an intensified perception of the *Medulla* - he feels as if the *Medulla* touches the *Bindu* and the two become one. In that instant the syllable *Te* is mentally vibrated in the *Medulla*, perceiving that, from there, it reaches *Kutastha* and explodes there.

The revelation of *Kutastha* may happen in that very instant.

This event has both a passive side [a pure perception of a certain thing which is independent from our will power or from any visualization ability] and an active side [our pushing the tongue upwards and forwards as a thrust to enter the *yoni-like Kutastha*].

Here the reader does not need any more words to understand the extraordinary value of the *Kechari Mudra* tongue position!

A *kriyaban* makes an effort to go higher and forward with the tongue and has the feeling of having reached and touched *Kutastha*.

Before the head's movement, a minor light sensation is present in the *Bindu* center. It descends to the left, curving and entering the *Medulla*: here it explodes in the great golden-white light of the spiritual eye.

Let us go back to the description of the technique.

From that chin-up position, the face turns to the right and then to the left: during this movement the fifth cervical *Chakra* is perceived and the syllable *Va* is mentally vibrated in it. Thence from the left position the chin strikes the middle of the chest and the syllable *Su* is vibrated in the heart *Chakra*.

[We may observe that the light perception seems to flow toward the right part of the chest - accompanying the physical movement of the head. Then it curves and goes to the left by crossing the fifth cervical *Chakra* and when the chin strikes the chest, winds downward and enters the heart.

This inner flow, connecting the three higher *Chakras* - *Medulla*, fifth and fourth - with the *Bindu*, is an approximation of the *Trivangamurari* movement - three-curve movement - that we are going to encounter in a deeper way in the techniques described in the next chapter.]

The muscles at the base of the spinal column are relaxed and, while exhaling, the remaining syllables *De*, *Va* and *Ya* are placed into the 3rd, the 2nd and the 1st *Chakras* respectively.

For some weeks, the *kriyaban* is guided to repeat this technique twelve times. Then he is guided to gradually increase the repetitions up to 36.

The presence of physical problems [the cervical vertebrae are very sensitive!] requires delicate movements. Regarding this detail, a *kriyaban* is guided with specific considerations.

Note.

As with the previously described *Thokar* technique, one may repeat the head movements numerous times while retaining the breath. Once again the idea is not to pass out due to lack of oxygen to the brain, but rather to bring one's breath/energy to the chest/neck area and allowing it to circulate subtly from that level. It must be noted now that when a person tries to

increase, in this way, the number of the movements of his head, he finds this last procedure of the *Thokar* too elaborate and intricate. We can now surmise why the easy form of *Thokar* [and even simpler forms] came into being.

Technique of raising the Chakras into Sahasrara

A *kriyaban* raises his eyebrows and perceives a crepuscular light in the upper part of his head. The crown of his head can be ideally divided in twelve parts: the first six on the right side, starting over the *Bindu* and coming to the front, the remaining on the left side coming back to the starting point.

The technique starts with focusing on the first *Muladhar Chakra*. Thanks to a short inhalation [about one - two seconds], this *Chakra* is mentally raised into the first of these twelve parts.

The concentration is simultaneously put on the *Chakra* and on the first part of the crown of the head. An inner swinging sensation, accompanied by the mental repetition of *Om Om Om Om ...*, is perceived there. This goes on for about 36 repetitions of "*Om*".

As we have discussed in the previous forms of the *Higher Kriyas*, the breath is harmoniously held. At the end of it, a short exhalation brings that *Chakra* back down. The concentration moves to the second *Chakra* which, in the same way, is raised into the second part of the crown of the head. The *kriyaban* tries to perceive there the inner swinging sensation and repeats *Na Na Na Na ...* for about 36 times.

The same procedure is repeated in the various parts of the crown while the concentration moves to the 3rd *Chakra*, the 4th, the 5th, *Bindu*, *Medulla*, the cervical *Chakra* and finally to *Muladhar*. [Of course, all the different syllables of the *Mantra* are utilized.]

Usually, after "one tour" the *Paravastha* state takes over.

Thokar on all the Chakras [without or with Maha Veda Mudra]

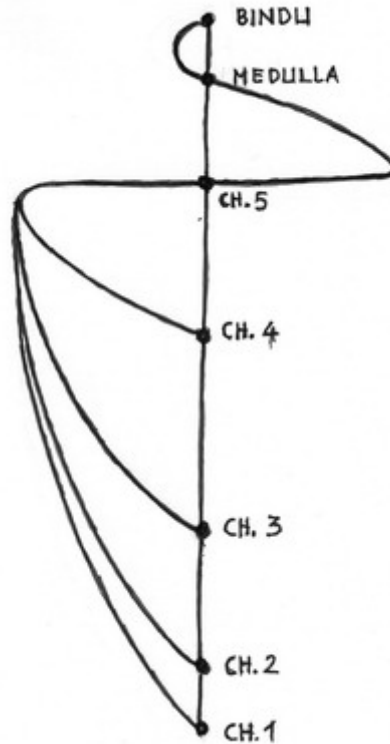
We have noticed that some schools of *Kriya* place the practice of *Maha Mudra* and of *Yoni Mudra* at the end of each *Kriya* routine. This is to open the knot of the *Muladhar* and guide the calm energy, produced in the whole psychophysical

system by the previous techniques, inside *Sushumna*. Such an action represents the crowning of one's effort and it is therefore correct to put it at the end of the routine. Practicing such procedures with deep awareness, the currents of *Prana* and *Apana* are united, and the *Samana* current - already awakened in the belt region through *Pranayama* and *Navi Kriya* - is increased and guided into *Sushumna*.

The widespread habit of practicing *Maha Mudra* before *Pranayama* and *Yoni Mudra* before going to sleep has its justification too. *Maha Mudra* is very useful to prepare the body for *Pranayama* - this happens in such a remarkable degree that this is the standard recommended praxis by many *Kriya* schools. As for the *Yoni Mudra*, it gathers all one's spiritual aspiration and directs it into the *Kutastha* just before sleep. At the end of the main routine, *Mental Pranayama* is practiced in their stead. The stillness of the breath and of the *Prana*, deepened by the action of the concentration directed up and down the spine, "melting" so to say the *Chakras*, yield the same result as the pair of *Maha Mudra* and *Yoni Mudra*. In this prospect of work, the following advanced procedures are practiced keenly before the *Mental Pranayama* by some evolved *kriyabans*. The technique we are going to consider is not the completion of the last form of *Thokar* and therefore it is not conceived to replace it. The above-described advanced form of *Thokar* is a masterpiece which is complete and perfect in itself: the following procedure is an extra. It is utilized to act more directly upon the *Muladhara* knot.

The few *kriyabans* who utilize it, do so after achieving the breathless state - in this way they are in the condition to take on its effects which are very strong. [In the following pages I will clarify this.]

The technique begins like the previous one. The syllables *Te*, *Va* and *Su* - with the stroke - are placed in the *Medulla*, in the cervical *Chakra* and in the heart *Chakra*. Then, while keeping the breath, only the final striking movement is repeated and mentally directed toward the third *Chakra* where the syllable *De* is vibrated. This movement is repeated and the concentration is directed toward the second *Chakra* where the syllable *Va* is vibrated. Finally, the movement is repeated once more and the concentration is directed towards the first *Chakra* where the syllable *Ya* is vibrated.



At this point, the head remains still while a slow exhalation takes place increasing concentration on the *Muladhar Chakra*.

For some weeks, the *kriyaban* is guided to repeat this technique twelve times. Then he is guided to gradually increase the repetitions up to 36.

[Variation. The *Chakras* can be stricken by following another scheme. The syllables *Te*, *Va* and *Su* - with the stroke - are placed in the *Medulla*, in the cervical *Chakra* and in the heart *Chakra*. Now the first two head movements with the same concentration on the *Medulla* and cervical *Chakra* are repeated, while the strike movement is directed towards the third *Chakra* where the syllable *De* is vibrated. Then the movements are repeated and the strike movement is directed toward the second *Chakra* where the syllable *Va* is vibrated. Again the movements are repeated and the strike movement is directed toward the first *Chakra* where the syllable *Ya* is vibrated.

A *kriyaban* can either stop the process here or repeat the procedure in inverse order. The whole set of movements is repeated with the stroke on *Muladhar*, then another set with the stroke on the second *Chakra*, then another set with the stroke on the third *Chakra*, then another set with the stroke on the fourth *Chakra*; then in descending order till the *Muladhar* is struck. The practice is closed in the same way: the head remains still while a slow exhalation takes place increasing the concentration on the *Muladhar Chakra*.

This technique is practiced only once a day.

The progressive increase plan varies from person to person, according to the experienced effects. Only the guidance of an expert can lead a *kriyaban* safely in the process of increasing the number of movements of the head.]

Addition of Maha Veda Mudra

During the last repetition of the previous form of *Thokar* [either in the basic form or in its variation] after the action of directing the stroke on *Muladhar* - the breath is held, the chin is down - a *kriyaban* lifts his body just a few millimeters with the help of his hands and then he lets it go.

The buttocks touch the floor with a mild jolt. The energy at the base of the spine wakes up - an ecstatic feeling follows. This action of lifting the body can be repeated some more times [up to nine] always holding one's breath. This action is called *Maha Veda Mudra* - *Veda* means perforation, obviously of the knot of the *Muladhar*.

The practice ends by exhaling slowly and remaining calmly concentrated on the energy that is felt radiating from the *Muladhar*.

This procedure is practiced only once a day. Of necessity, it should be followed by the technique of raising the energy into the *Kutastha* or into the *Sahasrara*.

KRIYAS OF THE "CALM BREATH"

If we take into consideration the practices, handed to us by the most famous mystic traditions, specifically designed to get us started on the spiritual path, we can easily tell the essential ones. The continuous prayer during our daily chores [*Japa*], the attitude of watching the breath pattern or a specific technique of working with our breath [controlling it in any way] and, the crowning touch, blending this action with the more soothing "heart prayer": all this is more than enough to make our effort set firmly in the correct direction. Inner joy, which grows into a boundless ecstatic state, is our reward - as long as it is correct to call it a reward; someone would say it is not a reward but the discovery of our innermost nature.

Now, if we wish to say in few words what one devotee should do in the last part of his path when he is very near to his destination, we are taken aback, we cannot immediately think of a single, definite technique.

Some traditions recommend picturing some specific forms of the Divine, others visualizing some abstract objects like the *Yantras* [geometric diagrams], while others, pointing out that the Final Experience should happen by itself, deny the value of any procedure whatsoever.

In *Kriya Yoga* we learn that the last action leading to the Final Experience consists in concentrating on the *Trivangamurari* inner movement - the "three-curve movement" - the highest manifestation of the *Omkar* reality. Through this perception we start the last part of our voyage, roaming a wonderful territory where we will lose forever even the last rags of illusion.

As strange as it may sound, some *Kriya* teachers completely erased this teaching, while a few others used to be proud of saying that this inner movement had appeared to them in the particular form of *Krishna* or *Shiva*. Instead of transmitting the correct technique, they have pushed their disciples into worshipping those divinities as if this were a canonical part of *Kriya*. A distorting chaos was the consequence of it all. It is correct to say that the character of prince *Krishna*, described in the *Mahabharata* and especially in the *Bhagavad Gita*, reminds us of the *Trivangamurari* form; his legs and back are kept in a peculiar position clearly determining three curves, but that's all there is to it.

Unable to comprehend the subtleness implied by the teaching of the *Trivangamurari*, some say that it brings you out of the *Sushumna*, the spinal column's inner channel. They state that this procedure has nothing to do with the Indian tradition.

Alas, when a *kriyaban* hears that, he is led to ignore - maybe forever - such an authentic treasure, especially if his initial experience with these techniques is not as positive as he expected!

The truth is that these techniques can be performed only as long as a *kriyaban* is in attunement with the inner channel *Sushumna*. In any other case, he would perceive nothing. When a *kriyaban's* awareness is in the spinal column, he perceives his own body not through his senses, but through *Kutastha*. During this elevated state, the movement *Trivangamurari* is perceived and realized as one's actual body.

These techniques can be enjoyed even without first being immersed in the breathless state but when they are practiced in that state, it is possible not only to reach the *Samadhi* state, but also to transcend the essence of Time and to obtain final freedom.

Amantrak

Let us now consider how the inner movement *Trivangamurari*, the subtler aspect of the *Omkar* reality, is perceived in one's body.

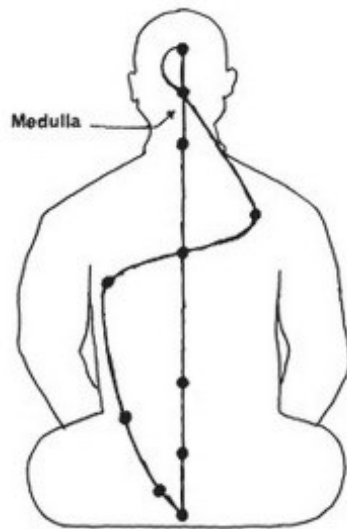
After practicing the *Pranayama* and the *Navi Kriya* techniques, a *kriyaban* checks his meditation position and tries to make it comfortable enough to keep it still as long as possible.

The technique is started off by slowly raising the awareness along the spinal column [half a minute is the time needed to get to *Bindu*], focusing on a sense of inner power and vibration, which also rises.

[It is difficult to add words clarifying in detail how this should happen. However, through full experience of the previous techniques, perceiving this current should not be that difficult; that is why I will not include any further comment on that].

After touching *Bindu*, the awareness starts descending through the body.

As shown in the picture, the current draws three curves that touch the *Medulla*, the heart *Chakra* and, lastly, *Muladhar*. The whole *Trivangamurari* movement takes place on an virtual plane containing the spinal column. The difference between this inner movement and that perceived through the previous *Thokar* techniques, lies in its intensity; now, a person has all the necessary time to come to a more "precise" perception of it, let us say, "inch by inch". And, what is most important, there is no more room left for any doubt that this movement is the effect, the projection of the head's physical movement, because it reveals itself as a mystic reality of its own, universal yet born with us, following our very structure.



The four new centers, localized along the descending flux, must not be considered new *Chakras*; they are, instead, small "vortexes" of current within the main current. A practitioner should not get upset trying to pinpoint them; this is something that happens in due time.

The body's right side center can be visualised in the back, about an inch above the right nipple's height, whereas the opposite center, on the left side of the body, is situated in the back about an inch under the left nipple's height.

Half a minute is ideally required both to rise and to descend, and a stop of about a second is made in *Muladhar*; so one round is one minute, but if it comes out to be shorter, let us say 45/50 seconds, this does not mean that the procedure is done incorrectly.

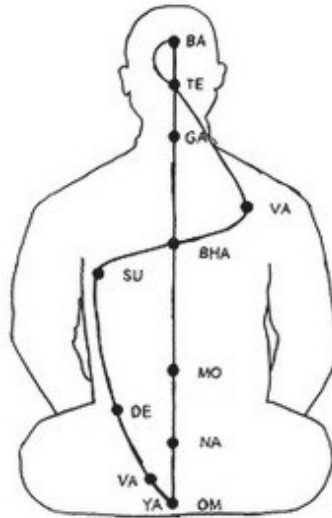
The secret of these technique hides in good concentration skills, in immobility and in the ability to bear the power resulting from this technique.

The perception is repeated 25 times a day for two weeks; then add 25 more times every two weeks and so forth, until 200 repetitions are reached. The power originating from this practice can be so strong that the practitioner might prefer a more gradual increase, limiting his or her practice to 10 movements for ten days, to go on augmenting it by 10 repetitions – every ten days, of course – until 200 repetitions are reached.

During the months of practice, many things might occur and many difficulties might pose an obstruction; intuition will advise on how to maintain overall control.

Samantrak

The technique does not change, but perception is intensified thanks to the twelve-syllable *Mantra*.



While the inner movement rises, the syllables *Om*, *Na*, *Mo*, *Bha* and *Ga* are put into the first five *chakras*, the syllable *Ba* into *Bindu*.

Then it descends along the left side, curving till the *Medulla*; this is where the seventh syllable, *Tee*, is chanted.

At this point the inner flux moves toward the right side of the body, reaching the center where the eighth syllable, *Va*, is placed. It curves and crosses diagonally the heart *chakra* region and it gets to where the ninth syllable, *Su*, is vibrated. The syllables *De* and *Va* find their location along the inner movement's last segment, the syllable *Ya* in *Muladhar*.

The process of progressive increase does not change from the previous technique. Once the number has been completed, the *kriyaban* intensifies the perception of the *Trivangamurari* movement by introducing a particular form of *Thokar*.

Special form of Thokar

With the chin on his chest, a *kriyaban* starts practicing raising the awareness very slowly along the spinal column and touching its respective centers with the syllables [*Om Na Mo* etc. are placed into the *Chakras* as in the *Samantrak* technique], while raising the chin as if to follow the inner movement. When the chin is straight up, perception is at *Bindu*. The movements of the head are similar to those we are acquainted to by

practicing the advanced form of *Thokar*, but they are far slower and there are five "strokes". Let us clarify.

The head moves slowly to the left without turning the face, tilts slightly backwards, begins the round but stops in the central position. The chin is already up but it is raised to an upper position as to intensify the perception of the *Medulla*, where the seventh syllable, *Teee*, is vibrated.

In that very instant, *Kutastha* is also neatly perceived.

From the chin-up position, the face turns slowly to the right, the chin is calmly lowered until it reaches a position parallel to and above the right shoulder. During this movement, the inner *Trivangamurari* flow, as lightly as a brook, reaches the eighth center.

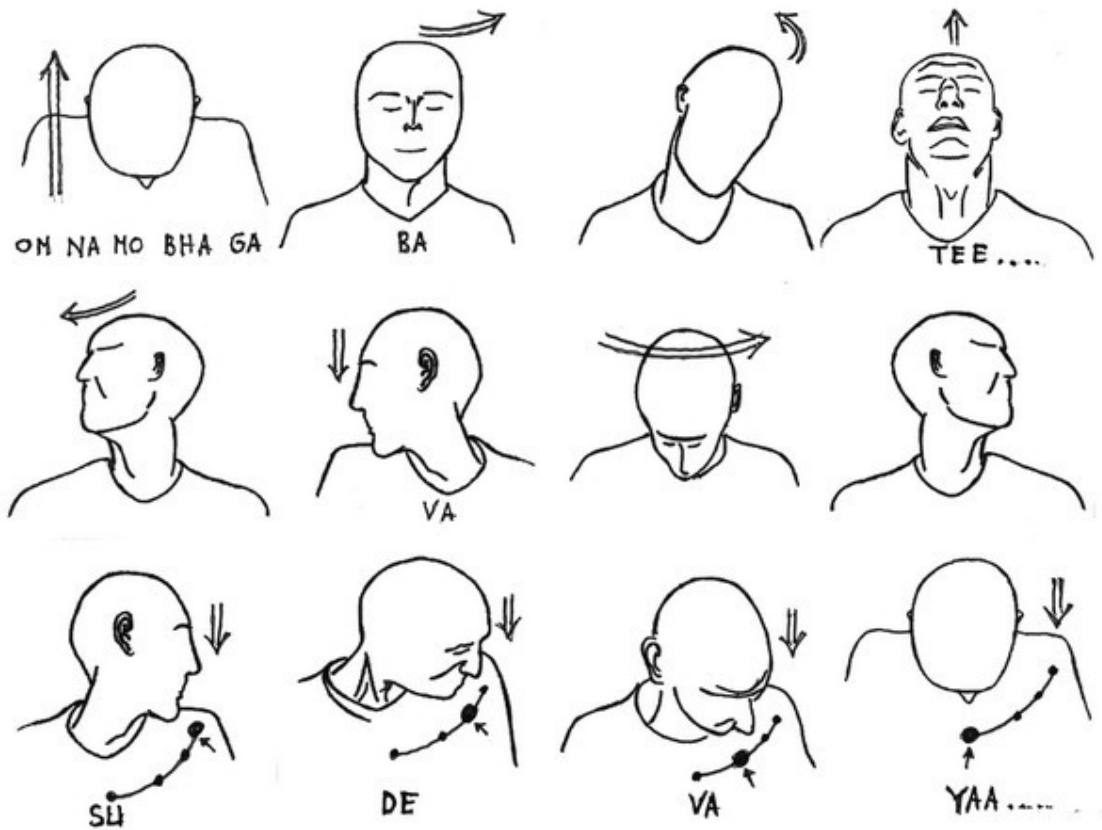
[There is no doubt about the speed of the movement of the head: the *Trivangamurari* flow goes on as in the previous technique and the head just accompanies it.]

At this point the chin, being parallel to the ground and above the right shoulder, touches the latter for an instant and it is in this very instant that the syllable *Va* is vibrated in the eighth center. [The shoulder also makes a small motion upward to make the contact with the chin easier]. This is the first of five strokes.

Right after it, the face turns left in a very, very slow motion, accompanying, millimeter by millimeter, the perception of the inner flux getting across the fourth *Chakra*.

The second stroke similarly takes place on the left side, when the syllable *Su* is chanted in the ninth center. Thence, the chin, grazing the left side of the collarbone, goes slowly toward its initial position, in the middle of the chest. During such movement - exactly when the syllables *De* and *Va* are thought in the tenth and eleventh centers - two light strokes are given to the collarbone in intermediate positions; in the end, the last chin stroke on the chest is carried out when the syllable *Ya* is placed into *Muladhar*.

A pause of about a second follows. *Kriya* teachers say that one round should last ideally one minute, but the practical experience is that it lasts 40/50 seconds.



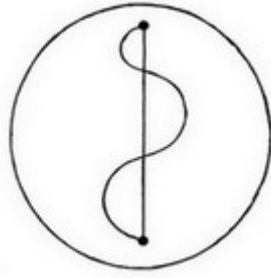
This technique is repeated 36 times a day until it becomes quite familiar. At this point, the *kriyaban* is guided to face the engaging process of vertical increase whose various stages happen no more than once a week! Each increment is 36, until 36x36 is reached.

The teacher helps with any problem met during such process - I am referring to stress and pain in the cervical vertebrae and in the muscles of the neck. Abrupt movements should be avoided; it is thus possible to reach a deep mental concentration at the moments of thinking each of the five syllables.

Micro movement technique

A *kriyaban* directs his awareness to *Muladhar* - which is visualized as a horizontal disk or coin with a diameter of approximately an inch - and, through the sheer use of his intuition, feels it inside of *Kutastha*.

As soon as the reality of *Muladhar* is clearly felt in *Kutastha*, the *Trivangamurari* movement in reduced dimensions – similar to that already experienced in large-scale dimension through the three previous techniques - is perceived both there and on the virtual coin's surface.



There are two methods to produce this perception.

Without Mantra... The *Trivangamurari* movement in reduced dimensions [we shall call it "micro" movement] is perceived, without the aid of the *Mantra*, as a reality going on by itself. It goes without saying that if the researcher has no experience of the "macro" movement [macro means in large-scale dimension; its opposite is micro], he will hardly get that of the "micro" movement. It is perceived if and only if he has worked properly with the previous *Kriyas*. On the other side, even an expert *kriyaban*, may need, just in the very beginning, to foster this perception by a very faint, lateral swinging of the spinal column.

With Mantra.... The micro movement is perceived with the help of the *Mantra* "*Om Namō Bhagabate Vasudevaya*", which is chanted mentally. The *Mantra*'s syllables are used like little thrusts to render the inner movement perception clear and deeper. Obviously, the number of times the *Mantra* is chanted in its entirety is equal to the number of times the micro-movement is perceived. Soon we are going to clarify what is the best number.

The same experience occurs in each of the other *Chakras*, *Bindu*, *Medulla*, the four centers outside the spine and, again, *Muladhara*. [All the centers are visualized as horizontal disks.]

Some students demand to know how long each micro-movement lasts. Lahiri Mahasaya's recommended: «Don't be in a hurry!»; each micro-movement usually lasts about 10-12 seconds. Its duration cannot be decided by us, but is determined by an intrinsic rhythm.

The gist of this procedure is to be able to perceive the inner movement both in *Kutastha* and in the *Chakra*'s location; part of the awareness indeed remains always inside *Kutastha*.

We must understand that a *kriyaban* will already have mastered the mechanism of the *Raising-the-Chakras* techniques. Therefore it is evident that every time a *kriyaban* feels that part of his awareness is no more in *Kutastha*, that it has slowly glided down to his throat or chest, he knows how to raise it again from the spine into *Kutastha*.

Now let us clarify the number of times this micro movement is going to happen in each center.

A... The first scheme is to do only one complete round throughout the twelve centers and perceive the micro movement an equal number of times in each one of them, for example 12 times.

B... The second scheme is to do more than one complete round throughout the twelve centers while perceiving the micro movement 3 times in each center. In chapter XII we shall see that this scheme is the optimal tool to reach the *Samadhi* state.

Vertical processes...When the micro movement perception becomes quite familiar, one day it is perceived $12 \times 2 = 24$ times in each of the 12 centers. After some days, the micro-movement is perceived 12×3 times in each of the 12 centers. Each increment is 12, until 12×12 is reached. There is no problem in completing this process.

There is also another process of vertical increase, reserved for those having retired from work. This is by far the most challenging of all the vertical processes.

On the first day, the micro-movement is perceived 36 times in each of the 12 centers [scheme A]; on the second day it is perceived $2 \times 36 = 72$ times, and so on ever increasing with 36 times, until an entire day is not sufficient to complete the round.

That is why the work must be divided in two days - what in the vertical processes is not done, now becomes the rule. On the morning of the second day, the technique is resumed exactly where the night before it had been interrupted. As usual, between one stage and the next, some days or weeks go by. Proceeding, a single stage may require three days, then four, and so on, till the final $[36 \times 36]$, which might require a week or more to be completed.

During each stage, it is wise to keep silent, avoiding any occasion of conversation. Yet, the use of common sense should always prevail; if addressed, a polite reply is always imperative.

At this point I think that the reader longs for synthesis and order. The two easy techniques of *Thokar*, described in Chapter IX, and the following procedure of raising the *Chakras* into *Kutastha* are a complete set to untie the knots of heart and *Muladhar*, other techniques may therefore be dispensed with.

Other techniques have been added in this XI Chapter. The first is the difficult [owing to the peculiar role of *Kechari Mudra*] advanced form of *Thokar*. It is the deepening of the easy form: its role is almost the same, although its action upon *Kutastha* is remarkable. The second technique is that of raising the *Chakras* into *Sahasrara*, which may be considered both a variation and a completion of that of raising the *Chakras* into *Kutastha*. Then a set of techniques has been introduced which have a more direct influence upon the knot of the *Muladhar*. The procedure of the *Thokar* on all the *Chakras* is the most delicate one and must be followed by the technique of raising the *Chakras* into *Kutastha* or into *Sahasrara* - if this is omitted, the *kriyaban* may be confronted by a very black mood. Then we have introduced the so-called *Kriyas* of the "calm breath". The Macro movement *Trivangamurari* is experienced through the techniques of *Amantrak*, *Samantrak* and the special form of *Thokar*. The technique of the Micro movement is the highest of all the techniques. Now a scheme follows with the standard doses for mastering each technique. As regards the final use of the techniques, see Chapters X and XII.

SUMMARY CHART

Technique	Duration for one unit	Begin with	After some time, inside the daily routine	Vertical procedures, if prescribed.
Easy form of Thokar	24 secs	12	24	Increase of one unit a day up to 200
Thokar with repetitions of the movements	70 - 80 secs [Inh., 12 sets of movem., exh.]	Inh., 12 sets of movem., exh.	Inh., 24 sets of movem., exh.	Increase of one repetition of the movements a day up to 200
Raising the Chakras into Kutastha	14 – 20 minutes	36 mantras per Chakra	36 mantras per Chakra	-
Advanced form of Thokar	24 secs	12	24 - 36	It is better to use the easy form of Thokar in order to reach the 200 repetitions
Raising the Chakras into the Sahasrara	8 minutes	36 mantras per Chakra	36 mantras per Chakra	-
Thokar on all the Chakras	28-30 secs; one more second for each jolt	12	24	-
Amantrak and Samantrak	50 - 60 secs	25	36	From 25 to 25 each two weeks up to 200
Special form of Thokar	45 - 50 secs	36	36	36x1,36x2,...,36x36 [w]
Micro	10 -12 secs x 3 x12 = 6-8 min	4 rounds	4 rounds	12x1x12 centers x 1 round, 12x2 x12x1, ... 12x12 x12x1

[w] = the work is done once a week; during the other days minimal doses of the technique are practiced

It would be a grotesque and unrealistic decision to try and practice all of these techniques in one single session. But certain combinations are possible. Below, two examples of "complete" routines are presented. It is clear that a *kriyaban* tries countless schemes: to do so is fundamental for the understanding of each technique's effect. He will discover that, for his level of evolution, some techniques represent a played out preliminary stage; others, having once played a role of secondary importance, can now be assigned a key position in the subtle phases of his practice.

Each routine is divided into four parts. In the first of the two routines, the basic procedures of the *Higher Kriyas* exposed in chapter IX, come after the techniques of the *First Kriya*; in the second one, the other *Higher Kriyas* are utilized. The essential mechanism of each technique is recalled and in some cases a comment has been added. The doses are meant as minima. This is to have sufficient time to enjoy the final phase of each routine.

FIRST ROUTINE

First part	<p>Talabya Kriya... The <i>kriyaban</i> sticks the tongue to the palate, opens the mouth so that the tongue, which for some instants has been kept attached to the palate, can click off it. Then the tongue is pushed outward toward the chin. A strong calming effect on the thinking process is perceived.</p> <p>Om Japa... A greater calmness settles in the whole psychophysical system by vibrating the <i>Mantra Om</i> in each <i>Chakra</i>; this can be done either by singing <i>Om</i> aloud or mentally.</p> <p>Maha Mudra... By stretching forward upon each leg and upon both, by giving a pressure on the perineum region and by holding his breath while chanting <i>Om</i> mentally in <i>Kutastha</i>, a <i>kriyaban</i> prepares his body for <i>Pranayama</i>.</p> <p>Pranayama... The body is relaxed, the spinal column is kept straight, the eyes are closed, relaxed, as if to look at the distance through <i>Kutastha</i>. A deep inhalation, producing an unvoiced sound in the throat like that of a distant waterfall, acts like a hydraulic pump to raise the energy from the bottom of the spinal column to <i>Bindu</i>; a deep exhalation brings the energy back to the bottom of the spinal column. The breathing is mainly abdominal.</p> <p>Navi Kriya... <i>Om</i> is chanted in alternation between the <i>Kutastha</i> and the</p>
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	<p>navel approximately 75 times. [And approximately 25 times alternately in the <i>Bindu</i> and in the third <i>Chakra</i>.]</p>
<p>Second part</p>	<p>Omkar Pranayama.... Through very subtle <i>Pranayama</i> breathing, a <i>kriyaban</i> stimulates his <i>Chakras</i> with the <i>Mantra</i> and the sheer power of his concentration. A sensation of inner pressure and immobility spreads throughout the body. The perception of the wondrous sound of <i>Om</i> is enjoyable to the highest degree.</p> <p>Easy form of Thokar ... While holding the breath, the head nears the left shoulder, <i>Te</i> is thought in the <i>Medulla</i>. The head tilts back a little and in a sweeping arc reaches the right shoulder, the syllable <i>Va</i> is thought in the cervical <i>Chakra</i>. The rotation goes on, the head bends forward just a little and moves left until the left ear is near the left shoulder. From this position, the chin is tilted down diagonally as if to strike the center of the chest, whereas <i>Su</i> is placed into the heart <i>Chakra</i> through a high mental intensity. Then, through a very subtle exhalation, the remaining syllables are "placed" into the first three <i>Chakras</i>.</p> <p>Advanced form of Thokar...The head moves toward the left, tilts slightly backwards, then it does two movements simultaneously: one is to return into its central position, the second is to raise the chin. The <i>kriyaban</i> has an intensified perception of the <i>Medulla</i> and the syllable <i>Te</i> is mentally vibrated in the <i>Medulla</i> and in <i>Kutastha</i>. From that chin-up position, the face turns to the right, then to the left and during this movement the syllable <i>Va</i> is mentally vibrated in the fifth cervical <i>Chakra</i>. Thence from the left position the chin strikes the middle of the chest and the syllable <i>Su</i> is vibrated in the heart <i>Chakra</i>. While exhaling, the remaining syllables <i>De</i>, <i>Va</i> and <i>Ya</i> are placed into the 3rd, the 2nd and the 1st <i>Chakras</i>, respectively.</p> <p>Thokar on all the Chakras... Everything is like the previous <i>Thokar</i> technique but the final stroke is repeated and directed also toward the lower <i>Chakras</i>. While holding the breath, immediately after the stroke on <i>Muladhar</i>, a <i>kriyaban</i> lifts his body with the help of his hands just for few millimeters and then lets go. The buttocks touch with a mild jolt the floor. This action of lifting the body can be repeated some more times [up to nine times]. This is practiced once.</p> <p>Raising the Chakras into Kutastha Thanks to a short inhalation each <i>Chakra</i> is ideally raised into <i>Kutastha</i>. The breath is held in a natural way. With each <i>Chakra</i>, a different syllable of the <i>Gayatri Mantra</i> is repeated 12, 24 or 36 times and a slight inner swinging sensation is perceived inside <i>Kutastha</i>. Then all concentration is directed toward the star of the spiritual eye or toward the <i>Bindu</i> and the chant of <i>Om Satyam</i> is done more than 36 times.</p>

Third part	<p>Mental Pranayama ... A <i>kriyaban</i> takes three deep breaths. He moves his awareness slowly up through the <i>Chakras</i>; awareness is maintained in each of them until a particular sensation of sweetness is felt, as if that <i>Chakra</i> were "melting". This procedure is repeated going upwards and downwards.</p>
Fourth part	<p>Paravastha... A <i>kriyaban</i> puts all his awareness on the upper part of the head. The previous procedure has created a sense of light in the head and above. The <i>kriyaban</i> keeps on concentrating on that light for a long time without feeling any fatigue.</p> <p>He is absorbed in the revelation of boundless peace, joy and freedom. This is the <i>Tranquillity</i> state leading, eventually, to the <i>Eternal Tranquillity</i> state.</p>

SECOND ROUTINE

First part	<p>Talabya Kriya Om Japa Maha Mudra Pranayama Navi Kriya</p>
Second part	<p>Omkar Pranayama</p> <p>Amantrak and Samantrak ... The macro movement <i>Trivangamurari</i> is perceived by slowly raising the awareness along the spinal column; after touching <i>Bindu</i>, the awareness starts descending through the body. The current draws three curves that touch the <i>Medulla</i>, the heart <i>Chakra</i> and, lastly, <i>Muladhar</i>. Thanks to the twelve-syllable <i>Mantra</i>, the perception is then intensified.</p> <p>Special form of Thokar... With the chin on his chest, a <i>kriyaban</i> starts practicing raising the awareness very slowly along the spinal column and touching its relative centers with the syllables [<i>Om Na Mo</i> etc. are placed into the <i>Chakras</i>], thus raising the chin as if to follow the inner movement. When the chin is straight up, then the perception is at <i>Bindu</i>. The head moves slowly to the left without turning the face, tilts slightly backwards, begins the round but stops in the central position. The chin is already up but it is raised to an upper position as to intensify the perception of the <i>Medulla</i>, where the seventh syllable, <i>Tee</i>, is vibrated. In that very instant, <i>Kutastha</i> also is neatly perceived. From the chin-up position, the face turns slowly to the right, the chin is calmly lowered until it reaches a position parallel to and above the right shoulder. At this point the chin, being parallel to the ground and above the right</p>

	<p>shoulder, touches the latter for an instant and it is in this very instant that the syllable <i>Va</i> is vibrated in the eighth center. Right after that, the face turns left in a very, very slow motion, accompanying, millimeter by millimeter, the perception of the inner flux getting across the fourth <i>Chakra</i>.</p> <p>The second stroke similarly takes place on the left side, when the syllable <i>Su</i> is chanted in the ninth center. Thence, the chin, grazing the left side of the collarbone, goes slowly toward its initial position, in the middle of the chest. During such movement - exactly when the syllables <i>De</i> and <i>Va</i> are thought in the tenth and eleventh centers - two light strokes are given to the collarbone in intermediate positions; in the end, the last chin stroke on the chest is carried out when the syllable <i>Ya</i> is placed into <i>Muladhar</i>. A pause of about a second follows.</p>
Third part	<p>Samantrak... Immobility is restored and the perception of the <i>Trivangamurari</i> flow is very strong.</p> <p>Micro...With the help of the <i>Mantra</i>, the micro movement is perceived in each of the twelve centers - the first five <i>Chakras</i>, <i>Bindu</i>, the <i>Medulla</i>, then <u>the four centers outside the spine</u> and <i>Muladhar</i>. The perception happens three times in each, going slowly up and down at least four times.</p>
Fourth part	<p>Paravastha...The previous procedure results in the state of <i>Samadhi</i>. If this does not happen, the <i>kriyaban</i> puts all his awareness on the upper part of the head. He is absorbed in the revelation of boundless peace, joy and freedom.</p>

NOTES

About Thokar on all the Chakras.... I like to underline how difficult this process has been for me.

Initially I practiced this technique only for a couple of weeks. It would be an euphemism to say that I met a gloomy mood: it was as if my very soul was scratched. An image from my youth now constantly and maniacally was before my eyes: men corralled up like animals in a narrow space, forced by their instincts to eat and reproduce; one would appear at any moment, get at another one at random and cut his head off in front of all the others. I imagined the corral's members murmuring some circum-stantial words such as «Nothing will ever be the same now». Then, with a vitreous eye, they would turn back to their normal activities.

I decided to flee from this unbearable condition putting this technique aside.

I returned to the technique a year after my first attempt.

The reason for this decision was that, if there was a truth that sooner or later I would have to confront, I wanted to do it rather sooner than later. So I got back to that practice, fearlessly increasing the doses according to the instructions I had received. In the meanwhile, I started dealing more carefully with the happenings of life by integrating this technique in a routine where the energy it generated would be forced upward into the spinal column's channel. After some days, my mind was again lost in reverie about the human condition - free from the previous determinism, though - when a marvellous experience came. It was the experience of the *Pranayama with internal breath*. I will go back to it in Chapter XII.

About Amantrak ... One of my teachers introduced this technique saying that the inner *Trivangamurari* flux passes through the heart *Chakra* cleaning a lot of dirt off; that is the reason of its peculiar effect of cutting oneself off from reality. Its action decreases indeed the hectic condition caused by our superficial emotions - fed by certain energies in that *Chakra* - substituting them with the vibration, with the touch of the *Omkar*. This leads to a total modification of the perspectives through which a person sees life.

Introducing this *Kriya*, sometimes I get away from the official doses, recommending 36 perceptions a day for one month, then I counsel to merge in the wonderful experience of the following technique up to 200 repetitions. The reason lies in my conviction that the *Samantrak* technique gives very good results without the complete, challenging preparation of the *Amantrak* technique. Then I suggest the vertical process of the special form of *Thokar*. I had the chance to verify that it has never created problems to anyone; rather, it marked the best periods in their lives.

Naturally, as for the whole *Kriya*, it is important to practice from the heart, with enthusiasm.

As for my experience, after the first weeks of *Amantrak*, after I had practiced fifty rounds, I felt I was about to explode! This would happen anytime the energy, going down from the spinal column's left side, reached *Muladhar*.

Waking up in the morning, I would linger for a short while in the aura of very involving dreams, as if I had lived a deeply intriguing and captivating adventure. The real problem was that during the day I lacked enthusiasm; in no place would I feel at ease and no activity would produce any satisfaction in me. Whenever wandering about the countryside, I was used to take in the beauty that seemed to spread from everything surrounding me; there was nothing, now, I was alien to everything.

The thought dawned on me that my attachment to the beauty of landscapes and of nature might be a form of dependence; for a whole month I spent more of my time at home, as if in a state of convalescence. Eventually, playing on my will power I was able to finish this technique.

About Samantrak... The *Mantra*'s syllables, which a *kriyaban* carefully places, like seeds, into each center, work in a way that something is started to be perceived in the heart, a sort of tension of tenderness. The *Trivangamurari* flux acquires more light. The *Omkar* perception is made more stable.

As for my experience, I started the *Samantrak* just when a fantastic March, a blue, cloud-free sky and pure air invited me to practice in the outside; the habit of digesting great quantities of *Trivangamurari* perception made me able to experience this process as a pleasing engagement, with no need to confront any particular problem.

The *Mantra*'s syllables, which I would carefully place into each center, would warm me up the way the sun warms up the nature. Whenever the first effects took life in me, I reconsidered the best literature on Prayer in different religious contexts. These readings were flannel for my soul; they created the conditions for the good inner disposition I was to experience during a pilgrimage.

I walked a full night with a group of people in order to reach a beautiful sanctuary the following morning. Walking on, I would murmur the syllables trying to visualize the twelve centers, as much as possible. I was perfectly aware that that was not a canonical way of practicing, but I could not help it.

Something started to be perceived in my heart, a sort of tension of tenderness; then I realized that my mates' life was wrapped up in love. I understood that the reality of love was the most intense force of life, corrupted only by the pollution of mind.

Thinking of humanity as a single thing, I felt that a man cannot by instinct avoid loving or taking care of somebody - like his own children; as a consequence, he cannot avoid painful experiences. I had a feeling that even the most egoistical person is able to give his life away for his children; even he can find in himself the power for great and incredible actions.

The warmth of that night's feelings lingers on in my heart!

About the special form of Thokar... According to my personal experience, experimenting also by murmuring the *Mantra*, during the long days of the vertical stages, is fine. Just for 36 repetitions, each of the syllables may be

pronounced aloud. After each syllable, there should be a brief pause, isolated and protected from any haste; an instant is enough to perceive a sweet irradiation springing out from each center. This will amplify the experience of joy - limitlessly.

As for my experience, I completed the special form of *Thokar* vertical process during the following summer; in the beginning I would work two days per week, then one day per week.

A new way of living the spiritual path took hold of my self. I learned to re-awake an intense esthetic rapture for the beauty of nature and to take advantage of this technique to amplify such an ecstasy. The classic idea of using *Kriya* to go beyond mind was substituted by the more captivating idea of using it to burn my mind with the flame of beauty itself!

I would practice for two hours in the morning in my room, carefully respecting every detail; I would set my body up for the afternoon practice, when I could allow myself the pleasure of sitting in the open air. I would not focus too much on the strokes, rather concentrating on the *Trivangamurari* flux, until it seemed to be carved into my flesh.

I was happy to go out after a light meal and a little nap; as soon as I reached a beautiful place to sit down, I would reserve some time to contemplate nature. Then I would complete the set doses perfectly at ease.

Everything proceeded in harmony and became fantastic as daylight approached twilight. One day, during the evening, a sound of tolling bells came to me from a distant village - it was like a cascade of light! This surprise was so unexpected that my heart throbbed with joy; I opened my eyes, which did not focus on anything in particular. It was a delicious miracle; the intensity of such beauty was really impossible to bear! A recessed part of my mind continued to repeat: «A human being has never been granted so much joy!»

The thought went to some researchers with whom I had shared *Kriya*; in those days they had given me the evidence that they were progressing in a way worthy of admiration

A few years before I would stake my head that it was not possible to practice *Kriya* without begging and obtaining it from an organization. Now, the contrary had been proved. This was my supreme joy!

[It is true that a solemn ritual impresses the rarity of the event into a person's mind, but it is also true that somebody - in the west at least - feels a bit embarrassed at any kind of ceremony and prefers a more sombre way to learn it. In my life, having a technique explained in an informal manner by an expert has always been a providential event; being able, then, to practice in the open country, surrounded by a beautiful scenario, has always been far better for me than any ceremony whatsoever.]

About Micro movement technique... Often a *kriyaban* is caught by a strong, overpowering sleepiness. After interrupting the practice to get some rest, he finds out, however, that such does not solve his problem, since this sleepiness comes back as soon as he resumes the practice. There is no way [coffee, a lot of rest...] to find some relief from it; there is nothing else to do but accepting this

situation. More than once he finds his back slightly bent forward; he learns not to straighten it with a sudden movement, because that would interrupt the condition of absorption and quiet.

Occasionally, a *kriyaban* is caught by such euphoria that he feels the irresistible instinct to swing his body. He really cannot resist. It is like dancing from a sitting stance, accompanying the dance with a subtle form of *Thokar*. Whenever he pronounces the seventh syllable, his trunk swings left, it swings right thinking the following one, and then left again. When he thinks the last syllable, his trunk quivers a little giving such a profusion of bliss! That condition is paradisiacal.

Concerning the effects, something peculiar may take place. A strong need for truth zeroes all his diplomatic masks. He cannot tolerate the least deformation of truth. His reaction is always a calm one, but he tries to go inexorably and all the way into any problem, until he finds the truth.

The difficulty in bearing a superficial behaviour becomes the cause of some break-ups. Nature hates vacuum, so other people come into his life to keep the flame of friendship alive.

The years during which I was absorbed in the vertical processes of *Amantrak micro* and *Samantrak micro* - not long ago as I write this - occur to my memory as enveloped by a dreamy aura; it is actually very difficult for me to refer to specific details regarding them. They led me to a different dimension without space or time.

Even a little practice was always a miracle of sweetness.

This procedure contains something mysterious, maybe the smell of the final experience.

I was lucky that pension age came early in my life. I was actually proposed an even more engaging job than the previous one. I had waited for years and ravenously desired to face the impossible doses of the final micro movement vertical process [up to 36x36!]; there was no other job for me!

I spent a lot of time in the open. I used to carry along a seat made of a plastic and a wool layer, something to drink and a thirty-six-grain rosary. I would sit down, breathe deeply and proceeded with the *Mantra* and the consequent Micro movement.

At the end of each cycle, I would move an object, a little stone, from one side of my body to the other to keep track of the approximate number of 36 cycles.

I learned to practice without finding any disturbance in what was around; in this way, the technique embarked in my life and blended with it.

One day I was in a cliffy place not far from a beach, where a not high number of people used to go for a walk and stop for a little rest in the surroundings.

During daytime I would take shelter from the sun under a tree; at dusk I would go to the beach, lean my back against a rock and stay there, pretending to stare at a distant object. I practiced keeping my eyes open; the sky was an indestructible crystal of infinite transparency, the waves were continually changing their colour, having in itself an unsustainable charm. I was trying to hide my tears behind the black lenses of my sunglasses.

I cannot describe what I felt, unless in poetic form.

There is an Indian song [in the final part of the movie *Mahabharata*] whose lyrics are taken from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* - «I have met this Great Spirit, as radiant as the sun, transcending any material conception of obscenity. Only the one who knows Him can transcend the limits of birth and death. There is no other way to reach liberation but meeting this Great Spirit».

When I listened to the beautiful voice of this Indian singer repeating "There is no other way", my heart was enflamed. Nothing would have the power to keep me from this state and this terrifically beautiful practice, which I would enjoy for the rest of my life.

CHAPTER XII FINAL GOALS

Let us resume the discussion of Chapter X about the importance of setting oneself definite goals.

We have acknowledged how unfruitful is striving to find the best "definitive routine". After delineating the theoretical foundation of *Kriya Yoga* - its four stages and the meaning of the four knots (*Granthis*) - we have outlined a wiser way to use our time: to pursue, by means of a concerted effort, the following goals:

A.... A real and deep ***Omkar*** tuning.

B.... Mastering the **breathless state**.

These can be assumed as the "intermediate" targets because to the earnest *kriyaban* they are reasonably at hand.

Now let us complete the scheme and delineate those which can be called the "final" goals.

C.... Reaching the first stages of ***Samadhi***.

D...Getting closer to the experience of ***Pranayama with internal breath*** - the perfection of *Pranayama*.

After an intricate chapter like the previous one, let us free our discourse from too many technical details and point out just the essentials which can impel the *kriyaban* to walk the last steps and take off toward the Eternal.

REACHING THE FIRST STAGES OF SAMADHI

The *Samadhi* state is the powerful revelation of the *Omkar* reality as almost "unbearable" bliss accompanied by a unique calmness of the lungs and of the heart. A strong energetic current moves up inside the spinal column. This state can be induced in various ways. At times, during a deep introverted state of consciousness, a sudden sound, perceived in the periphery of one's conscience, may create an outburst of joy, going far

beyond all what has been experienced before; it lasts for just a few instants. In *Kriya Yoga* we learn how to invite this state inside a perfect physical, mental and emotional stillness: we try to foster the ideal conditions which give us the opportunity to enjoy its ecstatic trance for a longer time.

The following schedule may prove to be very useful: the micro movement perception is used in a particular moment of the day, during a session when the psychophysical conditions, being prepared by wise practice in the morning, are ideal - there is nothing new. This session is performed at noon or at sunset, with an empty stomach.

Preparation in the morning... The day begins with *Nadi Sodhana* [with *Aswini Mudra* if possible] followed by the forward bendings and *Maha Mudra*; through the technique of the *Samantrak* [or through the special form of *Thokar* described in Chapter X] a particular warmth is originated in the heart; this appeases the thinking process and brings along the dimension of "Unceasing Remembrance" during the daily activities. A sweet affection establishes in the *kriyaban's* heart while he lives all the different facets of his existence.

Main routine... Inside the basic routine, after a minimum of *Omkar Pranayama*, the Mantra *Om Namoh Bhagabate Vasudevaya* helps to perceive the *Trivangamurari* micro-movement in each of the 12 centers - three times a center.

[The centers are the first five *Chakras*, *Bindu*, the *Medulla*, then the four centers outside the spine and *Muladhar*].

The secret of *Samadhi* lies in the fact that the practitioner is able to maintain a perfect physical, mental and emotional immobility. When a strong feeling of beatitude manifests, he doesn't get excited in any way!

Perfectly at ease, he goes on merging with the *Omkar's* deepest aspect, until the state of *Samadhi* emerges. Usually, four complete rounds of the described procedure hit the mark!

Additional practice in the night.... It is well known that the Adam's apple is linked to the fifth *Chakra*; the sternum region with the fourth *Chakra*; the navel with the third one; the genitals region with the second one and the perineum with the first one. When these points are touched

with concentration, all the energy in the region of the body situated in front of each *Chakra*, is revived.

Let us now clarify how a *kriyaban* concentrates on these points.

The practice is started in *Kutastha*, using the twelve-syllable *Mantra* to obtain the perception of the *Micro movement*. This is repeated 12 times.

Then the awareness goes into the Adam's apple; the same thing is repeated the same number of times. The same is repeated in the central region of the sternum; then in the navel; then in the pubic region. In the perineum and in *Muladhar* it is not necessary to have two series of perceptions [12 in the perineum and 12 in the *Muladhar*]; one perception will do. Once this has been done, it is to go up from inside the spinal column to reach the second *Chakra* and having the same perception 12 times; then the same perception in the third *Chakra* and so on up to the *Medulla*, ending in *Kutastha* again.

So strong is the concentration produced by this process during the final rise that the facial muscles may relax, causing the mouth to open up!

That is the best time to practice *Yoni Mudra*.

GETTING CLOSER TO THE PERFECTION OF PRANAYAMA

We have already made clear that the *Pranayama* technique is to be perfected in the due course of time and that it is almost impossible that a teacher can succeed in communicating all the relating information in one single lesson.

Patience, confidence and will to perfect the technique are always brought into play; the reward is the experience of increasingly stunning states of consciousness which lay beyond the narrow fences of our mind.

We have often heard that: «an expert who has mastered the *Pranayama* process can gain anything through it», where "anything" means the spiritual harvest. Now the question is: to what height of perfection can a *kriyaban* bring the *Pranayama* procedure? As far as I know, there is a universal agreement upon the perfection of *Pranayama*: it consists in the known mechanism of energetic movement around the *Chakras* and the spine, carried on without the help of the breath, namely in the perfect stillness of the physical breath. This is an experience of unthinkable beauty, left to the *kriyaban's* exploration in different degrees of intensity and strength, until the end of his life.

In order to describe this process, let us proceed by degrees.

We saw that rotation of energy around the *Chakras* is the fundamental principle of *Pranayama* - to set this mechanism clearly against the improper variations which require to go immediately inside the spine, was not a search for polemics but a clarification intended to emphasize the essential ingredient of *Pranayama*.

Let us consider such mechanism.

During exhalation, when the energy goes down, the awareness is totally focused on the gilded liquid light, coming down both within and on the surface of the body.

Let us suppose that the exhaling *Shee* sound is like a hypodermic needle which injects the awareness into the cells.

By going ahead, a particular pleasing sensation, during the last moments of each exhalation, is experienced: it is like an "impossible" orgasmic sensation.

It is as if the breath is squeezed out of the lungs and this created a sensation like that of a faint suffocation. Well, this phenomenon is so blissful to cry from joy. It is like being closed in a cage, pressing against a wall, which in itself would be unbearable, but the anticipation of the freedom outside the cage, beyond the shell, creates bliss. This is the first hint of a greater experience.

The "internal breath" sets in as soon as the *kriyaban* is led by his intuition to forget the breath and concentrate only on the free rotation of the energy.

Surely, many times he has tried this and nothing happened: he was not able to perceive the energy moving. Now, it goes on rotating and a sublime joy explodes in his being. There is the perception of having crossed a barrier, of being in another territory. A feeling of infinite safety, solidity and reliance originates. To interrupt this experience seems an impossible task. This state is as solid like a rock. Usually the experience is enriched by the listening to a loud and continuous *Om* sound.

The same experience can start during *Omkar Pranayama*. Whereas during the inhalation the *kriyaban* keeps on "touching" each *Chakra* internally, by contrast during the exhalation the concentration goes intensely into the body - the whole body, muscles and skin included. When the syllable *Te* is vibrated, the whole head is felt, during the mental chanting of *Va*, the muscles of the neck are

felt, during *Su* those of the chest and so on ... until *Ya* kindles the awareness not only in *Muladhar* and in the perineum but also in the legs and feet. By indefinitely repeating and interiorizing this procedure, the physical breathing action dies down and the "internal breath" state may set in.

Whatever may be the way this "inner breath" is obtained, during the following days - of course if the experience is repeated and if great care is given to it - a *kriyaban* has two kinds of experiences.

I... The beauty of nature, like wine from a full cup, seems to overflow from every atom and fill his heart; he rejoices of an unfathomable clarity of mind. The presence of whatever kind of problems pertaining to the normal way of living, especially in the psychological field, seems a nightmare which has dissolved forever, an illusion out of which he has emerged definitively; his life, which, so far, may have been full of asperities, seems to stretch out evenly toward the future.

II... He feels as "not having a skin anymore".

This is a metaphoric way to indicate that he has the impression to have perceived, more than once, - not only through his awareness but, in a strange way, also through his body - what was passing in another person's consciousness.

The reader may be disappointed that I'm reporting this impression because it may evoke the New Age manias. If I had written that through the concentration on *Kutastha*, the awareness expands in the universe, he would have granted a yawny acceptance of it. Now, it is only after listening several times to the reports of some researchers, that I have made up my mind to report this peculiar experience. Suddenly a deep depression takes hold of a *kriyaban's* mood that may last several hours and then disappears; it is not a simple dissonance, a disharmony, but an agonizing pain in a moment in which there is no justification for it. Then, the *kriyaban* is left aback remembering a significant circumstance: he had been introduced to a new acquaintance, had shaken hands and talked with a sincere involvement. Of course we all know how good our mind is when it comes to clutching straws; but when a similar episode is observed with the due detachment and, as the days and the months go by, it repeats with mathematical precision, then the evidence of a phenomenon of attunement with another person's consciousness, cannot be denied.

To connect this phenomenon with the action of bringing the awareness into the cells of the body, we have the most deep and secret affirmations by the mystics from ancient China [see the concept of the *macrocosmic orbit*], we have also the experience of Mère and of some westerner mystics.

Mère... We know that Her *Mantra* was: *Om Namō Bhagavate*, and that She started repeating it while walking to and fro in Her room. She aimed at bringing the spiritual life into Her body, continually charging this action up with a constant aspiration for the Divine in order to carry it off in the dimension of matter.

Her *Mantra* easily made its way through the various layers of Her conscience - thoughts, emotions, instincts as well - until it lighted a negative layer as the base of all impossibilities, the origin of every feeling of desperation, deposited therein during the course of whole millennia.

It took a long time to cross it, but Her awareness finally reached the cells and an incomparable experience "exploded". She found an eternity of perfection in it! The *Agenda* is an amazing "log" containing Her impossible adventure. Talking to Satprem, Mère told him that, by going on in bringing Her awareness into the cells of Her body, a lot of people around started to react as if She had invaded their intimacy. Whereas some researchers look at Her descriptions as absurd, they are indescribably moving and inspiring.

Some Christian mystics.... There are descriptions of mystics who "thought" the prayers in their body. I have a lot of reasons to believe that this practice is still being used. Their prayers were very short, to the point that they would reduce it to a single syllable. The majority of them preferred the use of a vowel, making it vibrate mostly in their feet; some others would begin from their feet to gradually bring up their conscience along their whole body.

The small collection of written material they left is published almost exclusively by some specialized publishers in the esoteric field; they can be found rummaging among occultism and magic texts. Kerning, Kolb, Lasario, Weinfurter, Peryt Shou, Spiesberger... these are just few of the names I can remember. These mystics - even though they were born within Christianity and felt completely in sync with its doctrines - have been confined in a corner as if they were exponents of the esoteric thought, or magicians whose aspiration was the development of secret powers.

The reader who has the patience to make a research, skimming through pages and pages full of trivial theories and practices whose only goal is to mix up and mislead him, will eventually find paragraphs of inimitable charm. The essence of their teachings is that any sound's vibration, if repeated with an unfaltering concentration in the body, can reach its atoms, so that the soul will find a direct link with the Divine Intelligence - « the whole body will be re-activated with new life and be reborn».

The idea that, with the sweet pressure of the *Pranayama's internal breath*, a *kriyaban* can break the barrier of the body and touch another person's consciousness, seems a fable. But by diving deeper into this topic we enter straight into the core of the mystic process.

The mystic path, at its closing stages, discloses a **twofold nature**: the first aspect is to subtract energy from the body and lead it into the spine in order to merge with the *Omkar* dimension of *Kutastha* and *Sahasrara* - however out of one's body; the second is to discover the fantastic dimension of *Divine Intelligence* inside the cells of one's body.

These two experiences alternate as day and night. The first one is a heaven of pure joy. The second is a totally different and paradoxical kind of joy: at times it seems to be boundless, at other times it seems to carry the pains of mankind.

I think that when the highest form of energy moves independently from breath inside the whole body, there occurs, in a mysterious way, a contact with the psychological dimension which ties all human beings together - this is exactly the Jungian concept of *Collective Unconscious*. I believe that Jung's discoveries are precious for the understanding of the mystic path - perhaps more than many other concept formulated during the 20th century.

Even though his statements never lacked the necessary prudence, the scientific community never forgave him his dealing with matters that were not considered part of Psychiatry, such as Alchemy (deemed an absurdity), the realm of myths (considered the result of a senseless imagination) and, more than any other thing, the great value he attributed to the religious dimension, which he considered something universal and fundamentally sane, instead of a pathology. Nowadays, the enthusiasm for his writings remains, especially in those who deal with topics of spiritual and esoteric nature.

The body has been described as a shell containing one's soul but now we must accept the idea that, passing through this shell, we can touch everything, including other people's consciousness!

Those who think the perfection of *Kriya* is entering the spine and *Kutastha*, make a fatal mistake. Perfection of *Pranayama* cannot be achieved when breath disappears and awareness is settled above the body; it can be achieved, however, when breath is transformed in pure energy, which moves by itself and expands indefinitely.

My belief is that Lahiri Mahasaya hinted at this perfect form of *Pranayama* when he wrote: «Following an excellent *Pranayama*, the breath is wholly internally oriented. After a long period today, my descent has been fulfilled.» (*Puran Purush*)! With this strong statement he certainly did not simply refer to the movement of energy which in *Kriya Pranayama* is perceived as moving internally simultaneous with physiological breath.

The routine I am now going to discuss leads in the aforesaid direction.

Preparation... To reach the breathless state, we have already added *Japa*; here we add *Japa* in the body. This means using a *Mantra* - both in stillness or while moving around - keeping a constant awareness of each part of our body. As mentioned above, the *Mantra* may be very short, to the point that it is reduced to a single syllable or a vowel. We may vibrate it in our feet and gradually bring it up throughout the body.

Main routine... At the very onset, next to *Om Japa*, a brief practice of *Thokar* on all the *Chakras* can be performed. The energy, thus stimulated in the three lower *Chakras*, is then raised with *Maha Mudra*.

Then the basic form of *Pranayama* follows. During exhalation it is important to use all the power of visualization to guide the energy into the body cells. After a certain number of breaths, it is up to one's intuition to give up the awareness of breathing at the right moment and to start concentrating on the rotation of energy as an independent phenomenon. A crystalline outspread of joy and a feeling of absolute comfort will be felt. The beauty of the whole experience can be expanded by looking around, at the end of the session, without fixing the eyes on a determined point.

[The *Thokar* on all the *Chakras* can be used in the following manner.

After just one round of this form of *Thokar*, immobility is resumed and concentration is applied to the rise of the energy inside the spinal column. The breath can either be present or not, it can either be short or long. The *Thokar* procedure is repeated. The rise of energy can be more marked when the process of the "Internal Breath" sets in. The work continues while internalizing the whole procedure, in other words, limiting the head movements as much as possible.]

During this process a *kriyaban* may dig a tunnel through the unconscious mind-rock, until the resorts of the purest dimension of existence appear. By placing his heart beyond the thick wall of collective sorrow, he will perceive the scent and the immensity that inhabit the other side of that wall.

In a mysterious way, the bright beam of his effort will pass through the layers of the Collective Conscience, allowing what is obscure, lethargic

and dark to become transparent and to find its collocation in universal harmony.

Kriya Yoga is not only a fly toward the heaven but also the discovery of «the abysses of truth and the oceans of smile that lie beyond the narrow peaks of truth». (Sri Aurobindo)

MAHASAMADHI

Mahasamadhi is defined as the conscious exit out of the body, at death. It does not mean to be aware during death - millions of souls had this experience - but to cooperate, through *yogic* tools, with the death process. There is no violence to the body, rather a deep respect for it. It happens when the infallible spiritual intuition feels that the moment is right, not earlier.

The spinal channel is made of three parts, each contained in the preceding one: during *Mahasamadhi* the *kriyaban* sees the three parts of the so-called spiritual eye - the cross section of the spine - and enters the central one. While in the state of *Samadhi* a minimum of energy remains in the body, to maintain it living, during *Mahasamadhi* the whole *Prana* leaves the body.

Now, if a *kriyaban* is able to foresee the right moment in which he should leave his body, he can get ready for this fundamental rendezvous with the infinite Source, by practicing special procedures like the following. Let us understand why it has been called the procedure to «die forever»: the common belief is that when a *kriyaban* is able to perform *Mahasamadhi*, his degree of Self-realization is so great that he does not need to reincarnate anymore on this physical plane.

The power of performing *Mahasamadhi* comes from the mastering of the *Navi Kriya* technique, the *Thokar* procedure and the experience of the *Trivangamurari* micro movement.

Let us recall the process of increasing the repetitions of the latter. On the first day, the micro-movement is perceived 36 times in each of the 12 centers; on the second day it is perceived $36 \times 2 = 72$ times, and so on

We have discussed how the work must be divided over more than one day. Well, during the last months of his life a *kriyaban* may complete 36×48 perceptions for each center, this means that he perceives a total of 20736 micro-movements. A minimum of 12 days is required but it is wise to live

this experience in 24 days; in this way, each day he may enjoy some light physical activity, like a walk.

I repeat again: the 20736 micro-movement perceptions are to be practiced months before the expected moment of the death and, if possible, repeated more than once.

Just as *Yoni Mudra* marks the last moment of the day when, having concluded all activities, a *kriyaban* goes to bed - in other words he withdraws his awareness from the body and from the physical world [a "small death", so to speak] - so, getting involved in this last effort characterizes that phase of life in which all the other desires and preoccupations are won by the overflowing enthusiasm to dive all the way into the realm of Spirit, with the certainty that, this time, it is going to be forever! A *kriyaban* will accept peacefully the natural decadence of his body, including some physical disturbances with their consequent pain.

When the right moment comes, death's mechanism, shunned by our most rooted instinct, is invited by calming the heart and by merging deeply with the *Omkar* reality. The same meditation techniques we have utilized for years are applied during this process. There exists no secret technique, only an already acquired ability.

It might happen that, during the last instants of a *kriyaban*'s life, he will be lucky enough to be practicing *Thokar* and, through it, to throw his body out.

He will perform just one *Thokar* and stop the heart: he will apply so much mental strength to the stroke, that he will withdraw the very energy that keeps the heart throbbing. It might happen that it will not be possible to perform the physical movement of *Thokar*. He will do his best to remain aware during the last instant: he will merge in the micro movement in *Kutastha* and then go out....

To experience that, is his ardent hope and determination.

CHAPTER XIII TO GET STARTED

After a big feed of techniques, it is necessary to retrace the reasons which led to the compilation of this book and close with a thorough discussion of what is intended for *mystical path*. The aim was to share the whole thing regarding *Kriya Yoga*; this involves distinguishing it unambiguously from other endeavours meant to achieve vague esoteric goals, or those pertinent to the alternative Medicine. The understanding of this difference is particularly important for the *kriyaban*, especially for what concerns his choice about which techniques to apply, his attitude in carrying out his effort and in judging the obtained results.

Deprived of such discrimination, he would behave as a child that handles tools which are not suited for him - I would not dare to say that these are dangerous, but it is certain that he could not draw from them the beauty that, virtually, they contain.

To be honest, this theme should have been dealt with in a detailed foreword of this book but we know that almost nobody reads the prefaces. The reader thinks it worthwhile giving a glance to it only if, at a first partial reading of the book, he finds it really motivating. He prefers to get the general idea of which are the author's motivations - manias too - and linger over some technique, just to see to what level of depth they are discussed. Sometimes he behaves like a timorous animal, roaming in an unexplored territory, wondering whether to attribute a crumb of trust to what the author is communicating. The techniques of which he reads the description are probably familiar to him, but he can be confronted with new aspects of them; he may decide to test them by coupling - even in the strangest of ways - with those he already is accustomed to. If all seems to work, he may take into account the preface, skipping definitively those parts which smell the slightest rhetorical tone.

On account of this, I have decided to clarify here the concept of mystical path, as to close a circle that began by narrating my distant experiences in search for a technique that could teach me the way of dying to myself and to live really. At that time I could not understand that what I was looking for with so much resoluteness was the path toward the *mystical experience*, nothing else.

Definition

Mysticism is the search for and the obtainment of the state of communion, through the direct experience, with the Divine.

Mysticism is the internal teaching of each religion, its deepest meaning, underneath any symbol and belief - the mutable wraps imposed by the human mind. It is the flow of internal truth perceived by those researchers who are able to transcend the form and reach directly the essence of reality. The word mysticism evokes a relationship with the mystery, with the concept of initiation [from the Greek *μυστικός* (*mustikos*), an initiate] to secret religious rituals [also this from the Greek *μω*, to conceal]; nevertheless those who feel only a sense of attraction for this dimension cannot be defined mystics.

The mystic is neither a curiosity seeker nor a philosopher, even if he sets, in words, such reality amongst the highest of his values; a specific fact has to happen, almost daily, in his life: the employment of some procedures to calm the mind, while addressing the devotion of his heart to his much-loved conception of the Divine. Thus he is always in the search of approaching the ecstatic state. In agreement with the great mystics' thought, his attitude is not to conquer anything, but to make a total gift of himself. He does not think of any immediate benefit except his *Supreme Good*, which is the Divine.

Even if someone holds that, because of the ineffability of the experience, we should not pretend to clarify the sense of the term *communion*, I think that one has the duty to dwell upon this concept and extract from his reflections a clear point of view. Can the reader conceive the idea that a human being - through the use of whatever practice, putting in it all the earnestness and skill he is able to develop - becomes equal to God?

Despite the conflicting interpretations, I believe that the experience of the Divine, which is obtained by mystics anywhere, is always the same. According to their reports, I conclude that the answer cannot be but negative. Merged in a recollective state, with a hint of delightful regret for a state that was not yet totally theirs in the very moment they were writing, they found words that, also after centuries, arise in us an unambiguous

intuition. Their experience was a movement toward a condition of perfection which seemed to escape in front of them - to be sought indefinitely.

It doesn't matter through what name, and through what play of words, any spiritual experience can be pointed at, it remains in us as a tension toward the total reintegration of our being with the eternal truth and this is going to be confirmed through our unceasing effort in every aspect of our life.

Yet some texts, by employing words like *Samadhi*, *Moksha*, *Nirvana*, Self-realization, refer to a state of *accomplished union*, which is *identification* with God.

Personally, I do not consider authentic any mystic who expresses his sure conviction to be God; at the same time I can accept that, in certain occasions he affirms his identity with the Divine. This is not a play of words. The affirmations of the mystics are amazing, contrary to our expectations, paradoxical - they affirm and they deny the same fact - but we can each time understand what they mean.

While discussing quietly and judiciously, one thing is to sustain to have become God; it is quite another thing to affirm the endless nature of one's own soul. The first is a colossal falsehood, an unpleasant and even comic utterance; the second is a means to rouse the realization of our nature, a shining, *Mantra*-like affirmation.

The mystic uses expressions like "I am That" as a declaration of his intention and repeats them while increasing his aspiration toward the Goal. Such a *Mantra* has the power to prolong the immensurable joy experienced in the state of deep ecstasy.

There are people who, in order to avoid misconceptions, prefer to ban the term "communion" or "union" and define mysticism as the process of illumination: to be awakened from the illusory dream that our life is.

After achieving the Goal, man is able to live in the best of the ways, accepting any sharp difficulty that comes across his path, being able to face what he was not able to perform when he was blinded by the powerful illusion of *Maya*.

DIFFERENT INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Let us consider some events, which may boost one's enthusiasm about embarking on the mystical path.

1. A not unusual way of tasting the supernatural dimension is when an indefinable heightened experience suddenly manifests as a result of esoteric practices.

Some people love to explore the mysteries inherent to the "human potential". While, perhaps, for many years they went on with their studies without knowing exactly what they were looking for, their heart was pointing, constantly, the way to the Divine. After moving amid bewildering mediocrities, they came to a text where some meditative practices of oriental mould were described. Through a constant and intense practice, although unnaturally complicated, they bestowed an awakening experience that leaves them amazed, astonished.

It is as if the scene brightened suddenly and a new air began to circulate. In the silence created in their mind the search is invested with a deeper meaning. The Spiritual Reality revealed as the *Immutability* itself. Their Soul awakened to the realization that it exists forever. Our researcher found the strength to stop living as all people are living. For the first time they detached from the world of common affairs, inhabited by the greyish perspectives of an uncertain future.

2. A deeply religious individual who knows nothing of meditation techniques, one day listens to someone who relates his mastering the power of relaxation through some *yogic* or *taoistic* tools. He may decide to test some practice. At the very beginning he may be excited by the effectiveness of what he considers a collection of tricks that do not have the dignity to be considered an integral part of a spiritual path. He discovers, later, that his religious life receives a quite new one-pointedness; he lives moments of great transports of devotion and enthusiasm. He may begin to look at the practice of those exercises in a completely new way and decide to make a regular practice of them.

He understands that the mechanics of the spiritual path are not at odds with the rational principles. Although he may still be convinced that the success

in the spiritual search lies also in a particular inborn tendency, from that moment onwards he will work seriously, writing down his progress in a spiritual diary.

3. In this example, the commitment to the mystical path comes into existence when a person discovers the value of the Prayer; I mean the repeated Prayer, which in India is called *Japa*.

The matchless value of this simple practice can be experienced in particular occasions such as, for example, a group pilgrimage. Let us imagine that during such a circumstance, someone begins to recite the so-called *rosary* - a set number of repetitions of the same Prayer. New to this practice, our individual, even if tired and almost gasping for breath, doesn't withdraw himself from this pious action. While walking and praying in an undertone, he begins to enter a state of unknown calmness. He looks with different eyes at the show of continuously changing landscape and has the impression of living a paradisiacal situation. When the group rests for an intermediate pause or when reaches the destination, let us assume that our fellow has the grace to be left alone - undisturbed. Likely, he slips into an introspective state and recognizes that a state of happiness lies beneath his thoughts and pervades his perceptions.

During his life, he may have not known the meditative-ecstatic condition but now he is pervaded by something very real vibrating in his own heart, which he identifies, definitely, with the *Spiritual Reality*.

In different occasions of his past, while trying to increase his devotion by remaining calm, he used to drift off to sleep or was seduced by the whirlpool of his mad thoughts, which elaborated, in endless variations, his own fancies and fears. Now the ecstatic state assumes the consistence of reality, becomes almost unbearable; overcomes him.

Similar situations, inner unforgettable events, often recur; sometimes, they the mark an act of sudden, sincere and wholehearted *conversion*.

Yet, a similar state is natural: it is the outcome of a mind which is appeased - in this situation by the Prayer but it may be from another reason as, for example, by many deep breathings - and of a body which is relaxed and therefore doesn't interfere with the awareness. This state is pure, "clean", since it happens unexpectedly.

Obviously nothing can be said about how, in the following days, our person will elaborate the experience. Let us leave out those who consider

the occurrence as a divine indication to mark how exceptional they are. Let us consider the normal, common devotee, who comprehends that the experience came out of the particular psycho-physical conditions characterizing the pilgrimage and, chiefly, by means of the unceasing repetition of the Prayer. He has no doubts that the experience cannot be reproduced at the sheer use of the will. He does not attempt at recalling it through mental acrobatics or by magnifying one's emotions.

He possesses self-esteem, he has the confidence he is able to draw the experience down in the prosaic reality of daily life - again through Prayer, of course.

By undertaking this practice, some problems may arise. Which is the best Prayer, what is the best time to use it and how? Then it is not automatic that one will feel its benefits in as a strong a way as during that memorable day. Rather he may feel like a convalescent with a feeling of desolation in his heart. The noise coming from the external world may reach his ears as amplified, while his widened sensibility could give him the impression of having become more fragile, vulnerable and defenseless. Not everyone has the endurance of accepting the absence of any result for days and days.

Some other obstacle, just having the impression of feeling the increased aggressiveness of other people, may block the experience for months.

Good reading may be helpful, as for example *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way* about which I have already written. There are passages in it that make us feel the perfume of a "clean" spiritual path. [Obviously, he who reads must use the common sense to interpret that wealth according to the registers of his sensibility, otherwise he could not be able to appreciate either the formula used by the pilgrim or his particular devotional attitude.]

Another inspiring book is also that of Swami Ramdas *In quest of God* [Anandashram].

4. A strange event that leads a person to undertake a spiritual discipline results when, subsequently to a serious accident, one has a *near death experience*. For those who don't know the matter we remember that in the recent times that experience has become quite well known, especially with the development of the techniques of cardiac resuscitation. Raymond

Moody turned on the popular interest in such experiences with his book *Life after Life* (1975). Some surveys following such a date pointed out that thousands of people in the U.S.A. affirmed to have had similar experiences.

The descriptions - picked up not only by that author but from other sources also - agree in the feeling to be dead, to float above one's own body and to see the surrounding area. The whole experience is lived within a sense of endless love and peace. Many add to have had the feeling they were moving upward, through a tunnel or a narrow corridor, while the synthesis of their life was passing in front of the mirror of their own consciousness. Some divergent accounts followed about the meeting with deceased relatives, with spiritual figures like beings of light. The feeling of having arrived at a boundary and to be re-sent back into one's own body - often with deep reluctance to return - concluded the experience.

This event is tied with a severe physical trauma, which causes the arrest of the heart. By no means do we underestimate the tragic impact that it has upon one's life; however, objectively speaking, such an episode is held dear as few others. It brings a man over the edge of the abyss, offers a unique occasion to give a look at the beyond, letting him almost touch the Eternal Light. For the majority of people it remains the most real experience and, paradoxically, most "alive" of their existence. While few tend to bury the event in the subconscious, others begin their spiritual search.

In these examples the dimension of Spirit can literally explode within one's own existence. It is looked upon without ideas of renunciation, mortification or expiation. The mystical path is regarded as a stable irradiation of sweetness, warmth and love.

MEANING OF THESE LAST CHAPTERS

We shall try to come close to the understanding that *the path bringing us to the attainment of the Mystical Goal is strongly hindered [and, unfortunately, sometimes totally stifled] by the puzzling weakness of the human mind.*

We know that almost every human being possesses manias of any type; the mystical procedures give a consistent help in going ahead notwithstanding them.

In the field of *Kriya*, for example, the thought of having reached this or that level of evolution, the superiority complex originated by having been initiated by a certain Teacher whose lineage is held noble, the pleasure originated by the very idea that *Kriya Yoga* is superior to all other spiritual paths, contribute to thicken the armour of the ego and clouds the intelligence: one's practice is severely affected.

Sometimes the fellow who believes he is an "evolved spiritual researcher", is only not yet an emotionally mature adult. Posing as one who is consecrated by a superior destiny, he tries to disguise his complexes - enormous as abysses - of intellectual inferiority.

However the situation is not hopeless.

The complete shipwreck of the spiritual journey happens either when a man stubbornly and on purpose grabs to his manias, distilling pleasure only from them, or when nourishes a dependence on anything which is extraneous to his own being.

Briefly, the lethal factors are:

[A] The betrayal of the purpose of the mystical path with the dedication to the sheer enjoinder of the path itself.

This attitude beguiles a researcher into giving plenty of attention to what originates from the pure and simple following the mystical path while losing sight of the final objective. It is self evident that one cannot fool himself by claiming that he is pursuing the Divine Goal, when he is interested only in his well-being, in the advantages that happen by the sheer fact of applying certain techniques. He may argue that he is living a

settling-down period before pointing to the final mystical involvement. But he resembles a person who prepares his house for a distinguished guest and goes indefinitely on polishing and decorating it while, after ringing the bell, this guest sits neglected on the doormat.

[B] Some are able to tangle their life by believing that *the only way* of treading the spiritual path is to receive a particular blessing and infusion of power from any entity which is extraneous to one's own being.

It is obvious that a student should consult books, take part in lectures and seminars on the spiritual subject, try to converse constructively with other persons; but this does not mean that he believes that outside an organized structure, far from the feet of eminent spiritual guides, his *Highest Good*, in the center of his heart, dries up.

Nowadays, too much wasted literature [which favours the contempt for the whole cultural patrimony of the West, considered irremediably devoted to materialism...] pollutes his mind, threatening to make him lose his integrity.

The fundamental tenet is that he recovers his self trust, because no one but himself holds the key of the spiritual path.

CHAPTER XIV WRONG ATTITUDES

Let us dwell upon some attitudes that blur the clean desire to achieve the mystical goal, distort it up to make it pointless. Let us consider the most common ones and begin, at least according to my experience, with the most recurrent.

"New Age" attitude

During the twentieth century, the human thought made a strong step forward along a healthy direction. There are many grounds to believe that, in the future, such an epoch will be studied with the same respect with which nowadays Humanism, Renaissance, Enlightenment ages are studied. Since distinguished men of science contributed to the *New Age* sensibility, there is no need to dwell on the affirmation, irrelevant for our understanding, according to which such a progress coincided with the entry of the solar system in the sign of the Aquarium - from this belief it derived the term "Age of Aquarius" or "New Age."

The character of that age was marked by the perception of something "planetary" at work. People realized that the discoveries of Physics, of Alternative Medicine, of the new developments of the Depth Psychology, all brought towards the same understanding: the substantial interdependency among universe, body, psyche and spiritual dimension of man.

The esoteric-initiatic societies, overcoming for a long time the differences of culture and religious vision, had already recognized this truth, which now, became common heritage.

Among other things, it was also accepted that evil really exists, that it is an intrinsic factor pertaining to the instinctual dimension of man. It is tied with all forms of egoism, cruelty, ruthlessness and with the tendency of exploitation of the environment. It can blind man to such a point that he becomes the instrument of the ruin of the Earth and of the disappearance of the conditions which are indispensable to his life. Far-off was the theological vision implying a despotic role of man, put in the center of a creation, which seems to have no other purpose than that to satisfy his needs and whims. Dependent as he is upon everything surrounding him,

man has the duty of taking decisive steps to protect the environment. The longing for a lifestyle that takes into account man's spiritual dimension, grows in accord with a political-ecological engagement.

The *New Age* cultural aspect doesn't encourage ideas opposed to the most authentic sense of the mystical search. To begin one's spiritual path inside such an environment could be, in theory, a fascinating venture.

It makes no difference, if the room, in which one sits in *meditation*, is plentiful with or deprived of some multicoloured posters, decorations, crystals or other objects. The problem is that a lot of people, attracted by this environment, are mentally fragile. It is clear that, with reference to their mental state, the experts would not find any trouble in their personality - perhaps just hints of a disposition not quite suitable to the concrete situations of life.

The psycho-physical comfort, the total harmony with life is considered a step inherent to the spiritual life.

It is typical for these kind of persons to take part in various forms of alternative, mild psychotherapy during weekend seminars. Those methods recall the traditional ones, giving great importance to open personal reports about eventual childish traumas. From the legal point of view, such activities must be camouflaged as social games, cultural or religious activities. People, sitting on the ground and placed in circle face to face with others, form work groups: they learn to overcome inner resistance and share, although with a certain embarrassment and, sometimes, acute suffering, experiences that they had never told before.

There is no problem with those activities; however it is important to observe that they have nothing to do with the spiritual path. For a researcher who has the mystical Goal in his heart, these activities may be an expensive distraction which may enthrall him for years and strengthen a wrong - I dare say lethal - attitude.

One may waste years in trying to find again, through hypnotic regression, his past lives in order to revive and understand deeper traumas ...

It is not the search of the psychological healing that guarantees the final result, it is the deep aspiration for the goal, the bliss of the deep meditation that can bring us nearer to the final result. Spirituality may be undoubtedly considered a recovery process, a global one, not just limited to the physic or the mental plane.

That seems to be forgotten by those who are continually concerned in finding a technique more powerful than the one they are actually doing, pointing at the elimination of one energy block, then another

The more one person probes this field, the more confusion and complications he will find.

New Age adepts rebuke, annoyed, that there is no reason to be perplexed about other new and rather expensive remedies, without having tried them: «It is our *Karma* that is giving us the best of all the opportunities to grow in all the planes».

«We are expected to answer in a positive way. We don't have to stay jammed against this beneficial current otherwise we could have ... to die and born again just to live those experiences that we are now shunning!»

Amid many activities, it is easy to understand how, while pursuing the ideal of creating a perfect inner [through a complete personality cleanness] and a comfortable outer environment, the mystical goal may lose its appeal and the spiritual path become dead and buried.

Harmless methods like aromatherapy, crystal therapy, colour therapy... arouse great enthusiasm, seem to work for some time, afterwards are forsaken when the person gets bored.

It is quite a different thing to be enmeshed in a multi-level marketing systems spreading modern methods of spiritual healing. The person can be allured to invest in expensive seminars in order to have his energy channels opened and to learn the secret how to heal others with the use of the *Universal Energy*. All this may cost a lot, also because usually the seminars are not given nearby but abroad, in expensive residences. This interest is dangerous because a person may give up the complete surrender to the Divine will, may cultivate the attitude to behave himself as a demigod.

These people's reasoning may be even charming, appealing... but for a mystic they are *bullshit* - he can see the concealed intent and feel a total disgust for that.

Another temptation is that of reaching at little cost, with faster means than those traditional ones, the *Illumination*. Some groups claim that the classical meditative practices, the sober methods adopted for a long time by the mystics of various religions, are not valid for our time - they were

all right up to 50 years ago, but with the *new era* man has evolved and is ready to employ faster tools.

New Age people become enthusiastic for expensive techniques shared over the weekend at some beauty resort, spa, vacation... which in 20 minutes a day produce regeneration of the DNA, expansion of conscience ever gotten with other means, final liberation etc.

Some become dependent from a cunning fellow who, according to the needs, assumes the role of the psychotherapist, of the spiritual teacher, of the alternative physician who, with a pendulum in his hand, is able to diagnose everything, from the slightest indispositions to the most serious illnesses, as well as to suggest remedies.

Some are plunged into situations of such a narrowness of vision to appear grotesque and end up in real mental institutions. Their desire to find the total freedom ends in an incredibly scanty way. They defend to the death and worship as he was an *Avatar* [Divine Incarnation] a person who is an authentic scoundrel: they live only to make him wealthy.

Esoteric attitude

The term mysticism is sometimes used for denoting convictions that don't properly return to the idea of a path leading the soul to unite with the Endless one. Some employ it to designate interests that can be set at the outskirts of the proper mystic achievement - without clarifying if it is to be knowingly avoided or if it is expected to ensue as an epiphenomena.

Charming is the consideration of the mystical path as the incessant striving to favour the evolutionary drive that will bring to man the psychophysical tools through which the spiritual Reality will entirely manifest in his life. This vision is based on the conviction that man possesses potentialities still to be developed.

Now, believing that by improving the potentialities of one's mind [memory, concentration, ability of visualization....] we shall automatically produce an elevation of our being towards the spiritual dimension, is an illusion. Nevertheless, there are those who try to suit for such a purpose various esoteric techniques, even those described in the rituals of *ceremonial magic*. They are convinced that only by taking possession of certain rituals, formulas, symbols made accessible to few initiates, it is possible to complete that evolutionary jump conducive to the liberation.

They understand intuitively the difference between magic and mystical dimensions, yet, in certain moments, they are possessed by the uncontrollable excitement to squeeze from certain books or from certain teachers some secrets they believe of inestimable value. Sometimes their reasoning is not illogical: «The fundamental texts dealing with the spiritual path affirm that the mind has to reach the perfect silence. However the techniques that bring the mind to that state are practised with the mind, using, for example, its power of visualization. Well, the so-called *occult powers* [control of all the forms of energy, dominion upon the five elements tied up with the *Chakras*...] could turn to be very useful. By possessing them, the mystical path would become a "stroll"».

We know that in every religious-mystic tradition there is always some trace of magic thought - it is rare to meet one which is entirely devoid of some trace. Magic is in our unconsciousness, we have to admit it. What it is needed to understand is that the search of the so-called "occult powers" - supposed that they exist and can be gotten through such exercises - occupies a whole life: death follows and nullifies all the effort. Why not seek the Divine Essence, directly?

One cannot play with the spiritual path; it is possible to follow it only by possessing discrimination, emotional maturity. Whatever is his past - a researcher could have done all that human folly grants, even pursued the most villainous intentions, wasted years by exhausting his vital energy - what counts is that, from a certain moment onwards, he is able to turn over a new leaf and accept the deep dignity and loftiness that resides in his consciousness as his guide. Otherwise he may end up in a miserable condition.

There are instances in which the same economic bases, essential to the living of our researcher and its family, can be swept away, destroyed to shambles. A typical one is when a self-named expert in occult matters purports to know the secrets of an almost disappeared esoteric path and, in particular, a spiritual technique - far more advanced than those known today - which was practiced centuries or millennia ago, from few privileged ones. The aspect of a rascal, that prevails upon that of the naïve dreamer, will easily bewitch our researcher and worm a lot of money out of him.

«Now that humanity is different from before, such teachings are not revealed to anyone» he will start off; then he will pause and finally, with a

sigh, conclude: «The actual researchers would not know how to appreciate them and, in their hands, they could be dangerous.»

He will use an enchanting terminology near to that of the Kabbalah (mystical movement within the Judaism) or he will talk of the original Christianity, about whose well known sacred texts he will be able to offer a non-conventional interpretation.

Our victim will try to get round the teacher; in reality will fall into the trap. He will confide he is prepared to whatever sacrifice, provided that this extraordinary secret will be revealed to him.

After having expressed some reservations, at long last the teacher will capitulate but.... «Only for you, only because I feel I am *guided* to make an exception.»

Our adept, quivering of emotion, will live the best moment of his life, convinced that the meeting with the expert was decided in the higher spheres.

The donation he is going to offer during the initiation - united to the promise to maintain the absolute secretiveness - will be conspicuous since in that way he will confirm the great value he attributes to that event.

The donation will serve to the teacher for carry on good works - obviously.

[Such teachers affirm invariably to transmit the donations to a certain monk - curiously not priest - which takes care of an orphanage.]

While the adept, completely satisfied, is preparing to receive such an incomparable *gift* [our occult expert underlines with emphasis that it is a gift and that nothing could adequately compensate the benedictions that such an initiation will bring in the adept's life] the teacher is distractedly deciding what kind of trash-stuff he is going to demonstrate with glaring solemnity.

As soon as the new technique is acquired and tested with indescribable emotion, our researcher will spend one or two days of sheer fervour. In the future he will still hear about other incomparably valuable "revelations". Imprisoned in his chimeras, he will witness the rekindling of his passion and the comedy will repeat. The illusion is, in effect, indomitable. After having received his drug, he will continue his inexorable run towards the abyss. After having covered a vast round, all the roads, one after the other, will begin to close in front of him.

We cannot predict if, one day, he will realize that the techniques for which he has paid a fortune had been taken from some books and altered in order not to guess their origin.

Attitude to favour the work on the psychological plane

This attitude lies in not having a complete trust in the power of mystical techniques. Some people, from the first time they listen to a teacher or read about the practical aspects of the spiritual path, brood over one single worry: «What can I do, in order to ameliorate myself? The Goal has to be gained through a consistent effort, a battle inside one's consciousness: Prayer, breathing exercises or whatever are only the frame.»

In their opinions no mystic limited his efforts simply to devotional activities but worked very hard in destroying the roots of iniquity and of egoism in his consciousness.

When they decide to apply a mystical technique - that is when their path really begins - they continually torment themselves. This attitude may derive from many things, one may be the idea that God resides outside human beings and an individual can come close to Him only if he has some merit. They perceive their mind as largely imperfect but have some hope to ameliorate it, in the due course of time.

The person we are taking into consideration has something in common with the two previous types.

Like the *New Age* person, he is open to anything that can clean his personality but wish working only with methods based upon self-analysis and upon the sheer use of the will. He reads good books, preferably in the psychological area, not biographies of saints, which may confirm the idea he is not fit for the spiritual world. [While reading every biography, his satisfaction is directly proportional to how much and how dramatically the author confides his deep-rooted defects, against which he fought desperately during all his life.]

With the second researcher - the esoteric type - he shares his absolute desire for freedom and the predilection of working in the laboratory of his own mind - not within any kind of work groups. But he finds that all the esoteric stuff is an absurd collection of trifles, to which he is not suited. He obsesses on each friend by continual reports of what he is experimenting.

He works to desperately construct brick by brick his mystical experiences. He is not able to connect with what he cannot understand, what is totally extraneous to him.

He expects that in each session of meditation, only what can be grasped with the mind can happen: when his mind seems to disappear and his mental building seems to crumble, he is on the alert and, instead of relaxing, blocks every experience.

This attitude makes sure that the really important steps on the mystical path become virtually impossible. The solution may be only one: that a genuine experience may suddenly emerge and sweep him away - we hope that he cannot succeed in running away from it.

Attitude to put the spiritual knowledge at the first place and neglect the practice

The characteristic of this type is to cultivate the pure spiritual knowledge. Once, he may have thought that this had to be just the initial phase of his search, but, in practice, during all his life he has restricted to do only that. He spends all his time reading books of spiritual content and discusses them during endless vigils with friends of similar interests. There are good books from which to draw benefit, but it seems that our friend keeps himself very distant from them; he affirms, in truth, that he has already read them all - but this is not true.

If, by chance, we welcome his suggestion and read a book he recommends, we find it overloaded with too many themes, each mentioned in an unclear way. We begin underlining almost everything ... mainly because we aren't sure we have all understood and plan to return later upon it. If we decide to continue our reading, we enter an almost hypnotic state and, perhaps, we don't realize immediately that's a clear case of insanity.

Later, we realize that each chain of ideas is without support; their basis is the unbridled imagination of the author. We are amazed to see how, through an intoxication of words, his imagination unfolds free from the comparison with the reality and from the rules of logic. We wonder how can our friend think, with such entertainment, he can evolve somehow. From him we would like to hear a sincere admission that all this is pure fun - comparable to that of reading thrillers or playing chess.

As years go by, he holds his "herd" spellbound by reproducing, with varied words, the same beliefs; he ends being the "wise man" of the village. He goes on turning himself in his own cage; the only evolution is the widening of his lexicon.

Sometimes he makes himself ridiculous with the inflexibility of his conjectures and generalizations [as for example when he affirms that the inhabitants of a certain country are not fit for the spiritual path or when he says that a certain personage, could not be self-realized because once he was caught smoking or eating meat....]

He knows some well-structured methods of spiritual exploration, but as far as the concrete application of the techniques is concerned, he experimented just a few times. He had some result - at least this is what he tells - which exalted but, at the same time, worried him; from that moment onwards he didn't practise anything.

His extreme prudence [it resembles that of an oldie with a trembling walk] is synthesized in the following reasoning: «It is better that I don't start practising techniques whose effect I am not sure of; it is better to wait for a thoroughly understanding of the spiritual dimension. Only when I am totally sure of what I am about to handle, I will begin the practical work. In the meantime I will live by strictly conforming to the highest ethical principles, as recommended by the great teachers of the past».

If we have to believe him, the self-discipline that characterizes his life has developed such strength that no distraction touches his mind when he turns to contemplate the last Reality - the meditative state emerges alone, without need of techniques!

This may be true, of course, but we do not believe it; we have a feeling that he lives in the antechamber of the mystical experience. While his life is spent by grinding spiritual ideas, sometimes - or, better still, too often - we discern in his mind nervousness, pride, and resentment.

It is clear that we could not and should not judge him, but we want to find a plausible reason that clarifies at least to ourselves why endless wealth attend to reveal just behind the screen of his mental revolutions and he doesn't make the least step to seize it.

We conjecture that the intensity of some techniques may have disturbed him by putting before his eyes some dark side of his personality. His reasoning guides us to consider his behaviour as caused by *fear*.

He affirms that the techniques of meditation are tricks with which one cannot reach the Divine and that they represent a stage of development he has already got over; actually, he fears their action which might be like a jolt jeopardizing his psychic poise. He is like one who mulls over a wonderful journey yet, being afraid of the airplane, does not decide to set off.

He eagerly talks with those who practise spiritual techniques; his care for any admission of trouble, strengthens the suspicion that he is merely seeking a confirmation of his fears.

A secondary reason explaining his behaviour may be an concealed conviction of being *unworthy* of the mystical experience. Often, he extols the value of the ethical principles and insists that to practice any technique of meditation without a sound morality, is useless.

Hearing this, again and again, annoys us; we wonder if he is putting our choices in discussion, while indeed he is addressing to himself. It seems strange but to find this cancer in someone's disposition is not uncommon.

Likely, each one of us has a similar friend: a real good person, who lives always, passionately, the intention of doing some good to humanity. He is full of respect toward all the people. Sometimes he is embittered in seeing how his disinterested actions clash with the ignorance and the coarseness of people. In his strange life-choices we read constantly one message: «Do not think that I am yielding to the common way of living!» He ardently aspires to follow the path of the Great Ones; nevertheless, oddly cloaked as a superiority complex, lack of intellectual and intuitive insight is holding him back.

During his adolescence, a cloud began to thicken in his conscience, when his religious ideals caused him not accept what emerged from the depths of his personality; he could not realize that what he was experiencing was universally healthy.

Many times we used generously our time in the effort to open his eyes, but we acknowledge we have wasted our time. Now, the duty toward our soul should prevail over that of courtesy. Sometimes we wonder if we are selfish, but for what reason should we waste our time only in consolidating his decision?

The force of mutual excitement originating from recurring banquets of words is a sort of projection toward an ideal of soul-friendship; but through

it we don't get to anything, rather, in a dangerous way, we estrange us from our soul.

As a superb ruin, our friend becomes a recluse and the one who saves him from the total solitude is, as for a subtle retribution, the simple man, ignorant as a goat, the friend with which he will spend nights in speaking - only to have a human face in which to fix his gaze

To regard the mystical path as an alternative therapy

Those interested in spiritual themes are aware that not everything works in the best of ways in their personality; taking into account also the frenzied way of common living, they aim in restoring a balanced situation in their being. To combine the pursuit of the mystical goal with the attempt to correct these inadequacies, is reasonable and natural. What we are going to take into account is quite another situation.

We dwell upon the dramatic condition of those who have serious psychological troubles - I mean a mental illness, diagnosed by one or more doctors. There are striking differences among them; one is the attitude towards any pharmacological therapy [allopathic or alternative], another lies in the decision to apply to one's life some meditative practice, which could have been taken by mutual consent with the therapist [Psychologist or Psychiatrist] or could represent their independent choice.

To come out from a devastating situation and live normally as any other human being is the most pressing desire in their consciousness, an emergency that permeates their thinking and behaviour. Some try to apply the mystical techniques for this reason only - camouflaging clumsy their hopes with a fictitious spiritual interest.

They are under the charm of the promotion of some mystical discipline. In some way, they received guaranty that certain spiritual techniques have therapeutic effects and, in their case, would operate miracles.

Any rational person, who is familiar with the mystical path, cannot but remain perplexed in hearing that. Never should one entertain hope of receiving a substantial help by practicing that techniques without the right spirit, taking them as a medicine. The attitude should be clean and honest, otherwise the undertaking leads to nothing. The spiritual path has to become an integral part of one's life, accepted as one's own body; otherwise it is better to drop it immediately. The mystical path cannot be a

graft, cannot be looked at with suspicion - «does it really work»? No man can touch the *supreme Good* if not for election, by placing it above all the other achievements of the world.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to express this obvious truth to those individuals, without being rough and annoying them. However, after having toiled hard at finding the proper words, they won't give up their experiments: psychic suffering is too excruciating!

Even if, after a long time in which nothing encouraging has happened, they meet moments of deepest despair, such persons will keep on with their effort because they will have no alternatives and still think of those unlikely promises of healing.

Indeed, to observe how they strive to achieve mastery of some meditative practices excites our admiration. Of course, by observing more closely, we notice an obsessive self-observation and realize they do not know how to cope with small contrarities coming into their practice, as well as into their life; they give too much importance to facts that can be ignored or resolved with the common sense. Sometimes they shock by what appears as an enormous opportunism. They exasperate all people around: when they become attached to a person, they tend to squeeze him, slowly but unrelentingly, up to a point that, as Carlos Castaneda wrote, it remains *nothing*. To eliminate definitively the few friends that are yet near them, they use a lethal mechanism. They wring accurate and detailed counsels regarding no matter what [physical and mental health, meditative routine...] then, by applying them, they hurt themselves. In order to make their friend feel guilty about having given such a suggestion - and with the hope of obtaining greater attention from him - they declare they have applied them to the letter. Instead of getting him more near, they are going to lose him, inexorably. He will take an oath not to help them anymore in any way. He will be seized with blind fury and - forgetting any past custom of courtesy and kindness - will annihilate them with a merciless judgment, of whose hardness and inflexibility he will have, for a lot of time, grounds for regret.

[In the *Kriya* organizations these are the people that create damage. They think they have never received enough and are always complaining about something. I believe that if those organizations have, with time, become full of prohibitions and of what seem to us an absurd bureaucracy and

formality, this happened because of the motives and demands of people like that.]

If we spend a lot of time trying to help them, we will have other grounds to feel uncomfortable. As in the fable of Bluebeard, there are some "rooms" where they won't let us enter. I'm not referring to intimate matters but to facts about which it is acceptable to discuss – for example to maintain a double life when it is not essential and it is extremely wearing...

When we come to the point, they grow darker and roughly break off the conversation. When we reflect about what could help them, we feel bothered by not being able to consider the complete picture of their life. We sense there is a region in their life where they preserve and nourish a malefic mushroom from which they extract the elixir of their suffering.

Yet, reflecting with more calmness, we wonder if they are right in insisting in this way. Who knows what good will come out from their effort? Who can, actually, exclude that some good comes out?

Sometimes we feel they have two personalities: one of façade with which we are fighting and another, deep, with which we cannot communicate, which is free from any suffering and, clean and serene, is looking at us. They will always go on complaining, yet who knows if there is some light at the end of the tunnel? Sometimes we wonder if we disappeared from their life, they would be completely and perfectly happy.

CHAPTER XV DEPENDENCES

The different previously commented attitudes can appear mixed in various ways and receive a further inextricable complexity when a dependence on whatever church, organization or sect lays at the basis of a man's disposition.

To study in a scientific way this phenomenon is a really interesting matter since it enriches the psychological understanding of the human mind's mechanisms.

It is clear that such structures didn't originate from other planets: they possess what man put in there, they express what exists in his consciousness. Superstition, excessive importance given to useless rituals, adoration of idols... these elements are everywhere to be found. For a researcher who would invest his time in studying this matter, there are so many sources from which he can draw precious material.

Undoubtedly striking is the material supplied by the institutions that aim at defending people from sects. Shocking are the web sites created by the ex-adepts of a sect or ex-disciples of a worldwide known *Guru*.

This study promotes the internal cleaning; our consciousness is guided to inquire if what we are reading has any justification at all. Since the whole appears absurd and unpleasant to us, we feel a strong drive to insulate in our lives and in our spiritual path only the essential and clean elements. The purpose of this chapter is restricted to share some considerations about what may happen to those who want to tread the mystical path and, at the same time, are determined to preserve a tie with their native church or whatever spiritual organization or esoterically oriented group.

Churches

Let us consider a well-structured religion, like the one which, during our childhood, guided our spiritual formation.

Whatever may be the figure of its Founder (a Soul who achieved the perfect union with the Divine), it is not automatic that His actual representatives intend to guide their followers to reach the same Goal. In fact, perhaps they don't even conceive that very idea as possible; centuries have created a fatal separation with the original spirit.

Often the Founder's intents can be barely guessed through fragmentary, and easily misinterpreted, texts. Another problem is that repeatedly, at the top of those churches, sat people who were experienced at managing material wealth but not at imparting mystical instructions. The achievement of that state, which is the true, authentic goal of any religion, might have been put aside or even, on certain occasions, regarded as a phenomenon of insanity.

The power that a church has upon a single individual is based on the strength with which its religious myths were inculcated in the individual's consciousness during his childhood. Introduced through tales and made more real by some pleasant depictions, those myths were invested by a particular solidity and strength. Some among them - especially if they extolled an ideal character that was missing in the family constellation - was engraved with a particular strength. Although during one's adolescence those myths were put aside, a throb of love remained for that part of the past which they reminded. In the full maturity, someone can not resist their enchanting charm. This happens especially when the sense of safety and personal solidity wavers or, in general, when the mood is that to retreat into himself.

The perfume of those old tales grows like an intense nostalgia - a balm of infantile joy spreading on the never-healed wounds of one's own existence. Taking part to religious rites may start a chain of memoirs of lost times and of disappeared dear ones ... the heart is affected, deep feelings are involved as hardly as ever.

Such indescribable sweetness gives an unassailable solidity to the infancy's myths, which are going to become fixed elements in one's way of thinking. The pact is clear: «You, ancient dimension with a tale's flavour, are distilling the perfume of the most beautiful time of my life: I will defend your existence from the destructive strength of reason».

Let us not forget that we are interested but in what happens to one who is attracted by the mystical path and begins, hesitant, practising some procedures. Truly, his choice should be entirely compatible with his link with the church, rather encouraged by the same without reserve. It could be developed by following some famous mystic's footprints.

But to realize this, it takes intelligence, self trust, determination and not to be continually misled by contrary opinions.

In this delicate moment a so called spiritual guide or director, may cause great conflict.

In a church, the person who has the responsibility to guide others may be captivated and ensnared by some current of the modern theological thought. The vice of studying too many books, with a tempting title and a striking cover, and shun the classic mystical tools like Prayer - deemed as suitable for simpletons - can corrode the nucleus of the religious life. There are books that dirty the conscience and burn the intellect.

Churches are very tolerant and allow that one acts as a spiritual director although he entertains some doubts and lives a mild existential crisis.

They hope lays in that, through coping with other people's doubts, he may gradually comes out of his dilemmas.

But, the continuous cerebral effort to reply with clever answers - sometimes so nice or strange to stun - to other people's existential questions and sighs, wears out his genuine faith. He may choose to estrange himself from the well consolidated traditional mystic experience and repeat some evident absurdities.

For example that the mystical life consists only in studying and meditating upon the Holy Writings, that Prayer has a worth but only if it is done in community...

Therefore, he will try to convince our fellow that his practices are odd and also that his very desire to proceed along the mystical path is a dangerous fixation, born from the wrong books or from psychological unresolved problems. He will go on explaining that the mystics are men which were chosen by God, to whom He granted a particular *grace*: «we should by no means try to follow their footsteps, least we become mentally unstable».

The emotional implication of this words, climbs over the awareness' reasons and exerts an almost irresistible power in the subconscious realm: it can burn to ashes the aspiration of our researcher. Our fellow could be convinced that his main duty is to make his doctrinal formation solid and therefore to join some sessions of catechism. Obviously there is nothing to say against catechism and the study of the dogmas of a religion, a part that it is integrated with the study of the works of the great mystics.

A merely rational study of dogmas and of theological truths may not harmonize with the sensibility our person is now laboriously developing.

As he is honest and would not entertain the idea that in the religious dimension, one has to cohabit with small contradictions, he will be thrown into crisis and experience senses of guilt.

In other words, it is rare that he succeeds in finding the courage to go on following, unperturbed his path.

We know that the strength with which he can withstand any contrary suggestion is directly proportional to the experiences of divine joy met in meditation - but we must not forget that we are considering a beginner.

But not only the certified guides may be misleading; sometimes a friend of the same church, upset by the world of those phenomenon like apparitions, often tied with evil prophecies can frighten our researcher, choke his throat with fear, stamping as contrary to religion the techniques he is practising.

The anguish to be on the wrong path, doomed to eternal damnation, not appeased by the incontestable certainty of the contrary, creates a hardening of his heart and the splendid adventure comes to a standstill.

The situation can evolve in different ways.

Some give up reading books, which have not the approval of their church and start becoming suspicious of their same thoughts. While talking with others, they manifests an unpleasant dogmatic strength and, sometimes, they seem to be governed by primordial and childish emotions.

Their bewildering spine-chilling intellectual dishonesty produces in their old friends a violent reaction; when it appears clear that they have gone too far, embarrassment and silence are created around.

This situation, unfortunately irrecoverable, is the cause of a total renewal of the persons with which they mix - this is really what they subconsciously desired.

For some people the situation can evolve in a different way. Months of stagnation may go by, but during a beautiful sunny day, in the middle of the nature [great teacher indeed, sometimes more than books!], in front of a boundless extending panorama, without realizing what he is doing, our insecure researcher can find himself practising the most banal and simple technique of meditation. Here he will dare to receive again inside his being the warm of a contemplative state. From that moment onwards, his splendid adventure can be rekindled again, but without guides, this time!

Modern organizations

Let us consider those organizations - far younger than the traditional religions - which teach methods of spiritual introspection. There are different opinions about the benefits coming from these structures. Some people are convinced that they are always harmful - in effects there are temperaments that will never find in them a congenial environment. The rather excited team spirit that they stir up is an anathema for those who tackle the mystical quest with a free mind. Others believe that, if they are well structured and imbued with a spirit of unselfish service, they can be very useful, at least during the starting phases of one's learning process.

With a positive sense of thankfulness and respect, it is spontaneous that an individual remains in touch with the school of meditation in which he has moved his first steps. If he receives inspiration from it, there is no reason to dissuade one to skim its newly published books - or the recently appeared recordings. To keep on with turning to an organization in order to receive suggestions and directions about the practice of meditation or even about the matters of daily life, is quite another thing. All agree that if an individual, owing to a psychological dependence, remains tied up to them, this is a real trouble.

There are organizations which are rigid as well as tolerant ones; all have the tendency to underline the superiority of their techniques in comparison with those traditional.

An excessive emphasis to initiatic procedures may give the impression they do not deal with a comprehensive mystic discipline pointing at a thoroughly transformation of an individual, but with secrets to be exploited. Those who cling to this idea may assume an unpleasant attitude. Such condition is exasperated when the concept of *Ascended Master* is introduced. Allegedly, "ascended" is an individual who has undergone the process of ascension: although no more present in his physical body, he subtly directs and protects from the heavens those who are faithful to his reference organization.

The idea is instilled that one cannot take a single step forward along the mystical path without His subtle blessings.

This belief concerns a lot of esoteric brotherhoods. They teach that the path of spiritual improvement happens through subsequent transfers characterized by particular ceremonies in which a person, who acts as a channel of a higher power, allows that this power opens and purifies the "internal channels" of the adept. Only in this way the pure knowledge and the perfection during life can be gotten.

The conviction is that the strength of the great Teachers of the past, their power, their subtle vibration is still present in their descendants - not by blood but by transmission of power, as a non-stop chain.

Frequently the adepts are enthralled with a pleasant refrain: «Aren't you glad of having found the best path and of been granted the blessing of a true *Guru*? Aren't you delighted that He has been chosen for you by the Divine Himself?» «Oh yeess that I am happy» they exasperate the feeling of satisfaction.

Such recharging of enthusiasm is, curiously, considered necessary for those who, more than any other, are already imbued with such a belief.

About the methods of spiritual introspection, organizations affirm they have to be received through the correct channels. In other words, they have not a value in themselves but are to be activated by a proper initiation to become effective. [This sound strange. It seems they are like that Software that, in order to work, must be activated by the manufacturing house. It is hard to accept this as true since, elsewhere, the same techniques are recommended as tools of certain, scientific value.]

A part from the world of *initiatic magic*, although the value of a spiritual guide is greatly extolled, nowhere the spiritual methods are deprived of their value if they are not learned in non-conventional ways.

In each organization there are students who desire, as soon as possible, to receive its complete esoteric teaching, in order to work independently.

They reason in this way: «I don't know if - as the organization is affirming - I am really tied with a chain of invisible Masters or if, one day, I will meet one in person. In the meantime I want to work soundly, therefore I need to know all the technical subtleties of the path. Through them, I will invest all my efforts in the attempt to internally travel toward the *Kutastha* [spiritual eye], and reside there!».

[Of course when they think of a living Master they do not think of a *Guru* like one of those publicized in the various web sites, who arrive in a city, grant hastily the initiation and then leave. They envisage a person toward whom there

are deep reasons to feel respect and with whom it is possible to create and maintain a real connection.]

But, as it regards receiving the whole set of teachings, this is almost impossible. Some techniques are reserved to those who have shown loyalty to the organization and who, after years of practice of the basic techniques, submit a complete and unexceptionable report; if they dare trying to learn those techniques from their fellow brothers, they clash violently with the pledge of secrecy. This prohibits to share freely the received information. The situation is really odd. In this behaviour one perceives not only the power of a pledge and of dogma but also the wretched phantom of *pride*. Just to make an example, he who had a private talk with an organization's authorized teacher and received on the occasion deeper information about a certain technique, won't reveal the details, won't share the outcome of his probing even with those who are his friends and who know and practice the same technique.

Our researcher becomes desperate; he cannot accept other persons to decide if he is worthy of receiving certain teachings: they are his *Supreme Good* and it is a cruelty to think other persons hold its key.

Note

Organizations maintain that the secrecy is meant to keep the teaching pure. This is as a fascinating sentence as false: the best method to implement this idea were to submit it to a book, to a particular video recording in which an expert illustrates all the technical details. It is reasonable that a teacher gives more specific suggestion to his student. As an arrow, they will center the target and furnish a vital help. This action cannot be exported, passed on to others. While this fact is unquestionable, to demand secrecy about a short and essential description of the technique is not a feasible proposition.

Unfortunately all this hardens the temperament. While the members of an organization are convinced of embodying the spiritual dimension, those who observe them from the outside notice they are intolerant up to brutality. The action of indoctrination [supposedly aiming at strengthening the commitment to the practice] exasperates the sense of exclusiveness and reinforces to paroxysm the armour of pride.

The cohesion of the group of adepts, the sect vocabulary, which becomes the substitute of thinking, brings emotionalism to reach the dangerous limit of the hysteria and makes the brain wither. The deadly factor is that although and individual becomes aware that something amid the received teachings is contradictory and weak, he gives his full consent that they develop into the plot on which he would weave his thought during the rest of his life.

To explain his final breakdown, we must back out and explain that the consistent financial means of which the organization disposes serve not only to maintain the beauty of their buildings but also to shed lustre on those personages who hold the reins of the organization.

The affective attachment to one of these persons has the effect of diverting and corrupting the strength once employed in the spiritual search. While his meditative practice wanes, he will try to earn by all means a place in that personage's heart.

We know that even a thousand benedictions won't add anything to the fact that the Divine resides in the center of his being. But this evidence is poor, colourless, it doesn't reload of enthusiasm our proud adept since it makes all the people flatly equal.

There are moments in which, perceiving his total solitude, he considers how superficially he has practised the meditation techniques and senses that, in this life, he will surely miss the "target ". Further, he is able to express what he has never dared to think: was perhaps the hope of a mathematical evolution through the meditation techniques a supreme illusion?

He will try to clutch at the only thing that now appears solid and trustworthy: the religious faith in which he was born. It is still planted in his heart: something exists in the next life. He is satisfied just with this thought.

Particular groups and sects

If we have understood the influences that come from a connection with a church or an organization, there is no need to take into account the class of the sects. For sure the events tend here to take a bad turn. Oft the mystic venture therein ends in adoration of the sect's leader and of his secretary who, all of a sudden, gives birth to a child, becomes his wife actually and is called *Divine Mother*... The customary (boring) scandals with legal aftermath follow...

We are not interested in gossip. We want to study those mechanisms that slowly but relentlessly deform the simple and pure mystical pursuits.

Let us quote here just one example of a group, which cannot be considered a sect.

I mean a spiritualistic-based group, which derives its occult teachings from a non-physic source. To be entangled in this kind of activity is an amazingly easy way to destroy, in short time, years of genuine spiritual effort.

While some come to this reality dreaming a contact with a deceased relative or friend, some are moved only by the sheer thirst of occult knowledge. If the practice of spiritualism kept its promises, it would be the most valid mine of information - a direct connection with the beyond, far more accurate than any living teacher, any book, any other source!

The classical spiritualism - characterized by a Medium who enters a trance state and a desk which answers the questions put by the bystanders through a code of loud raps - has handed over its place to more modern methods such as the easy one where all the participants - putting their hands on the upside-down glass that so easily moves among the letters of the alphabet stamped on a comfortable flexible tablet - are *medium* themselves.

One may like better the most accessible revelations of a *Channeler*. This is a person who, without so many complications, lets the invoked entity express through the flood of his own eloquence. It is curious to see how the *Channeler's* biographies trace a unique scheme. Once they were sceptic of their own faculties and would not accept to yield to the higher Will who had decided to entrust them the mission to serve as medium between spirits and humanity. From the same ultra mundane source came the inspiration to mix the flow of the various revelations with the diagnosis of unlikely illnesses, with prescription of expensive alternative remedies.

If, for a certain period, you associate with persons who practice spiritualism, you will perceive around them an authentic and strong spiritual atmosphere - even if with certain *New Age* nuances. Although tighten around he who organizes the séances, they seem to address him with an attitude of human, respectful friendship but not with the solemn attitude of worship.

They feel they are infinitely more fortunate than any other spiritual researcher: while all others follow human living beings, they follow the instruction coming from those souls who enjoy the infinite eternal light. Although they firmly believe that a great worldly upheaval (cataclysm) is round the corner, they are always quiet and optimistic, having received the assurance that they will be saved. They walk on air. There is so much

convenience and solace in belonging to these groups, why grieve over the plentiful contradictions in the literature concerning spiritualism? By resorting to a trick they are able to overcome the problem that there are inconsistencies in the received description of the geography of the beyond if compared with those coming from other Mediums.

It is enough conceiving various parallel universes, clearly one for each spiritualistic group.

We have some grounds to assume that the untrustworthy soil of spiritualism is one of the best areas to cultivate splits inside the personality. Every now and then, in some of these spiritualistic adepts, we notice signs of a schizoid personality. Suddenly, they puzzle and trouble us not only on account of their words but also of what appears through their eyes. It is as if, from behind the mask of their face, another personality appeared, extremely self-confident, but who actually allow others to deceive and defraud him in the worst of the ways. They seem they don't possess the least sense of the reality.

Because of this, the link between the Medium and the person who puts a question (to the spirits) must be taken into account.

A part from the *automatic writing* in which the one who asks is the same person that gives the answer, the Medium knows in advance the preferences and anticipations of the person who addresses him. Therefore all becomes as a closed circuit: question and answer reverberate to the endless like the whistle of a microphone set next to the acoustic boxes. As anyone can observe, the messages are always comforting. If the Medium starts to disappoint one's hopes he may lose his job! Every adept, even of limited intelligence, receives the message that the Divine has assigned him *an important mission...*

[In more than one occasion, I observed that those people who were interested in the world of *Kriya* exulted in having the privilege to communicate with the historical Masters of *Kriya*. It was pathetic and even amusing to hear that, invariably, the disclosure was unanimous: «In this epoch, the *Kriya* is old-fashioned and useless».]

Conclusion

People who live one of the described situations are half-conscious victims of conditionings and/or of a large amount of religious and esoteric concepts, accumulated and badly integrated, during the arc of a whole life. All this dirt has dried up the brook of their original inspiration. Talking with them and explaining why certain habits and practices are dangerous or entirely useless - like crutches for a fit athlete - is a waste of time.

Perhaps, "to skin", they seem dull. We cannot know the deep causes why such conditionings are engraved in an indelible way in their psyche. As far as we are concerned those persons are a mirror where to detect more easily the weaknesses that we bring inside. In the past, certain ways of their behaviour were ours and, perhaps, partly, they are still ours!

What we are thinking of them, perhaps someone is thinking of us. It is clear that we can do nothing for them, nevertheless they are a precious key to know ourselves.

CHAPTER XVI A CLEAN PATH

From the already shared parts of the theory of *Kriya Yoga*, the reader has understood that, in the recently published *Kriya* literature, I treasure Lahiri Mahasaya's sentences extracted from His commentaries to the Holy Writings or from His diaries. His affirmation that every religious path [mystic path] is constituted by *four steps* corresponding to the unfastening of the *four knots* [tongue, navel, heart and *Muladhar*] is really valuable. The theoretical vision of *Kriya* in Chapter X started from this concept. But from now on we won't speak of *knots*: we shall bring forward a simpler and startling useful basic idea. All the complications of the mystical path are minimized by identifying it with the discipline of *Prayer* (otherwise called *Japa*). Starting aloud, becoming mental and blending with the control of the breath, it disappears with the breath in the ecstatic state. Prayer is the red thread that crosses all the phases of the spiritual path, from the first step to the last one. Abandoning gradually the *active* attitude [use of the will], it is in the *passive* phase of Prayer [pure perception] that the mind dissolves and the union with the Divine happens. There are simple ways to unite Prayer and breath, as well as more delicate ones that can be learned at a later time, when one has mastered the basic steps.

I believe that this way of considering the mystical practice will be of a certain utility to those who are following any *Kriya Yoga* routine. In the first years of his *Kriya* practice the student's duty is to explore each detail of this discipline, later he should strive to achieve utter simplicity. Too much attention to the technical details may be accompanied by a sense of aridity - as if, along the road, something of very important had been lost.

Well, I am convinced that by considering *Kriya* as the perfection of the art of Prayer, a norm is found to not disperse one's effort.

[In *Kriya Yoga* the Prayer is the *Mantra Om* or *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*]

If we concentrate upon it with an absolute ardour - until to the exhaustion of our being, if necessary - we shall reach that middle zone between Prayer and breath, where both disappear and become pure mental strength. This is guided in our body, in its cells, in our spine, in each *Chakra* and in the star of the spiritual eye - which will become visible. The mystical path is all there.

THE CONTINUOUS PRAYER

The repetition of a short Prayer is called, in India, *Japa*. The term derives from the Sanskrit root "*Jap*" that means: "to pronounce in a low voice, to repeat internally". It is worthwhile to begin *Japa* aloud. One does not try to dominate the thoughts or create the mental void but simply rests in such pronunciation, makes it resound in his head, breast and body. A feeling of reverence - natural or created with patience - should, if possibly, pervade the practice. In this - easily attainable - conditions the practice of *Japa* has the power of a pneumatic hammer that tears asunder the complicated mental structures and allows to cross uninjured its swamps and to reach the dimension of the pure awareness.

I apologise to repeat some concepts that are present in the other parts of the book. The reason is that I deem probable that some reader will begin the study of the techniques of meditation from here. I counsel that reader to find a 12 syllable Prayer and begin with it the practice of *Japa*. It is always possible to adapt a short prayer - by adding *Om* or *Amen* at the beginning or at the end, doubling it; and it is possible to shorten a longer Prayer. The chosen Prayer should have both a strong and a soft tone. It is important to relish it; otherwise it would be better not even to begin the practice. "Strong tone" means that it is incompatible with an attitude of supplication and complaint. The selected Prayer should not be an affirmation of our limits: it must imply the presentiment of a happiness which is surely to come, a shining attainment of which we feel certain. If the choice were unhappy, then a state of boredom and dissatisfaction would certainly follow.

In any case, after two or three days, a great reluctance of doing the *Japa*, a dark mood during the day lead one to conclude that the chosen Prayer is inappropriate.

Since the Prayer is repeated at least one hundred times a session, a rosary of beads known as *Mala* is useful. Some believe that a *Mala* assumes the energy of the Prayer that, with it, is chanted. For this reason they use a particular *Mala* with each particular Prayer.

What is really essential, is to be determined to complete each day at least one *Mala*. The mind has gotten used to more complicated things - it will try to diminish in every way the value of this action. After having uttered it aloud for 108 times it can be chanted mentally, almost automatically, during the daily chores.

This is a battle against the diffuse persistent background noise constituted by useless thoughts, which is the substance of the common state of consciousness.

Now, let us clarify what *Continuous Prayer* means.

During the day, one tries at all costs to be in silence especially where in appearance it is more difficult, for example in a bus, in the marketplace. I mean a deep mental silence that becomes a calmness that is perceived in the whole body. In the background of his own consciousness, a person tries to maintain obstinately the repetition of the syllables or - when he talks with people or reads or writes – at least the power of calmness produced by it. Instead of being involved in what he is doing, he cares not to lose the feeling of the center of his being as unchangeable calmness. Within his body, at the place of the present messy vibrations, he perceives a unique vibration. In this way all the parts of his existence, although characterized by the daily preoccupations, become a continuous flow of experience of the Divine. He, who lives in this way, will get states of deepest ecstasy happening suddenly during the day.

Japa refers also to the repetition of whatever pure sound [*Mantra*: from "*Manas*", mind and "*Tra*", protection] that doesn't have a precise meaning and is not a Prayer in the common acceptation of the term. The mystics experimented the power inherent in certain sounds, which came to them through their intuition, to penetrate the various planes of the being - even the physical - and bring great peace and harmony everywhere.

Well known are the "bija" [seed] *Mantras*: HROM, KLIM, STRIM, VANG, DÚM, GLOM...

Shorter *Mantras* – constituted by two letters like YAM, RAM, LAM, or by one letter as OM, TA, VA, MA... - are not frequently used for *Japa* [during the daily life] whereas are thoroughly used during the meditation session.

PERFECTING THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

Now let us find out how the previous practice of *Continuous Prayer* can be perfected up to a point of getting such a strong effect that it is no more lost, even when the vicissitudes of life attempt to destroy the meaning of the mystical path and wipe out every motivation to tread it.

Mystics teach an irrefutable truth: **the strongest and surest method is that in which the practice of the Prayer is supplemented - at least for one hour a day - with the control of the breath and the concentration on the cerebrospinal axis.**

[It is an art to be learned with a lot of sensibility. This is possible only in a place where nobody can disturb us. Surrounded by a comfortable environment, deeply serene, we sit in perfect immobility.]

An ideal routine in four parts follows, which illustrates the method.

Note. In order to understand the procedure I am about to describe, it is necessary that the reader have minimum information about the *Chakras*. In the VII chapter, we wrote that they are subtle astral organs inside the spinal cord, ideal steps of a mystic ladder guiding safely to the highest experience of the Spirit...

Here we won't neither repeat nor try to describe them by tracing the ancient *Yoga* tradition. It is not necessary to visualize them as it is pointed out in the complicated sketches found in the traditional tantric texts. With a certain mental transparency, they can be felt internally as different levels of awareness. They are centers where the spinal energy intensifies. With the following procedures, they will emerge to the consciousness in a clear way.

1...Prayer aloud in the Chakras

One sits in a comfortable way but with the spine straight. The first thing he does is to utter aloud the Prayer in each *Chakra*. (It can be whispered). One can start with the coccyx region, where the first *Chakra*, *Muladhar*, is located, then one goes to the zone at sacrum's height where, inside the backbone the second *Chakra* is located, then to the third one in the lumbar region at navel's height, then to the fourth one in the dorsal region, at heart's height, then to the fifth one at the foot of the cervical vertebrae, then to the sixth in the occipital region, where the hairline twists in a kind of vortex. Then one descends with the Prayer in the alternative

sixth *Chakra* location in the *Medulla oblongata* (bulb on top of the spinal cord, below the pons, and anterior to the cerebellum), goes over to the cervical *Chakra*, to the dorsal etc.. to the first *Chakra*.

This is one round, six makes the ideal practice.

As soon as we whisper the Prayer in each *Chakra*, a great mental silence and a well-being feeling will pervade our being.

The Prayer overcomes the confusion of our mind; it gives us the power "to see", "to touch" each thought and therefore to "stop it." This practice excites our deepest aspiration and brings the awareness in the deepest part of the spine.

2...Prayer integrated with a long breath

a... The body is relaxed; the spinal column is kept straight and free of all tensions. With the mouth closed and the right thumb that closes the right nostril, one inhales slowly through the left nostril. During this inhalation the first half of the Prayer is thought. The *Chakras* are not thought of. Then the left nostril is closed with the little finger and ring finger - of the same hand, or with the thumb of the left hand - and one exhales through the right nostril while thinking the second half of the Prayer. Then, the nostrils exchange their role: keeping the left nostril closed, the air is slowly inhaled through the right nostril thinking the first half of the Prayer. Then, closing the right nostril with the thumb, one exhales through the left nostril thinking the second half of it. This corresponds to a cycle; in the beginning, six cycles can be made - later, twelve. The concentration is on the breath, on the quality of each single breath; the awareness adheres to the coolness or the warmth of the breath [inhalation - exhalation]. The consciousness learns to rejoice fully of each single breath.

b...One inhales deeply through both nostrils, producing a slight sound in the throat and visualizing the first half of the Prayer that raises from the base of the spinal column to the occipital region; then one exhales while thinking the second half of the Prayer that goes back to the base of the spinal column. After some days one succeeds in visualizing the syllables of the Prayer each in a different *Chakra*: the first half while going up and the second half while going down. This exercise is repeated 12 - 24 times.

Many *kriyabans* ask with too much insistence, at times obsession, that all the possible and imaginable details of the *Kriya Pranayama* technique are explained to them. To face that discipline doesn't mean to ask of one's own body unnatural performances. The art of controlling the breath and the energy is based on universal principles; those who presume to clarify all its technical details, will get tired very soon. After having filled with notes and drawings their notebook, they will leave everything. It is as if their pencil and sheets of paper was a shield to prevent the genuineness and the beauty of the *Kriya Pranayama* to enter their life. They do not understand that there is a natural and inevitable progression for mastering it. It is important to perceive the subtle movement of energy in the spine, but it is more important to learn how not to obstruct its passage with our tension.

This is a simple version of *Omkar Pranayama*. The procedure of *Nadi Sodhana* is here used in substitution of *Maha Mudra*.

This exercise is easier than Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra*. The mind is established in the intermediate area between the perceptions of the external reality and the allure of the internal Bliss. It assumes that detachment that allows the judicious, wise, sometimes premonitory, vision. By moving through the *Chakras*, the current crosses all the planes of one's being. The mood will be lighter for a lot of the time. By enjoying this procedure one lays the best psychological foundation of a future complete success with the technique of *Kriya Pranayama*.

3...Mental Prayer in the Chakras

After having drawn three deep breaths, each of them ending with a fast and as complete an exhalation as a sigh, and after having forgotten the breath entirely, the whole Prayer is mentally repeated, in a calm way, in the first *Chakra*. Then one goes slowly up with the awareness in the second center and so on... then down ...and one keeps on in this way [up and down] till the available time is up.

Some rules must be respected:

I...Do not to allow other people or various circumstances to disturb it - if it happens, you will receive an internal wound. This is the most important phase of the whole mystical process. You must defend it. It creates a particular power in one's awareness, which is transferred in the activities of the day. In a serene depth, like a blue sky, the mystical pursuit will then go ahead unhampered.

II...This third practice won't give satisfactory results if it is too short. It should last between one third and two thirds of the whole routine.

III... The way one thinks the Prayer in the *Chakras* should be adequate to his needs. There are obviously different forms to do this inner action; here we have pointed out the simplest, that is to stay in each *Chakra* the time necessary to think slowly only once the complete Prayer. It is possible to think it two, three times. Experience teaches not to stay in a *Chakra* for less than 10 seconds and not to exceed the minute.

IV... While experiencing this beautiful practice and enjoying all the sweetness that springs out of it, the mind gives its last signs of activity. At times the inner look turns, tenderly, to some image that is formed on the mental screen; it is not always a real memory but rather something symbolic, a remnant of some memory transfigured by the joy. It's up to us to turn it into aspiration toward the Divine: by catching the joy of the Spirit glittering behind each image.

By going ahead with the practice, different phases are crossed.

(a) The first is that of *Mental Silence*. It is characterized not only by the absence of thoughts - or from their extreme slowing down - but by an increase of the awareness of one's existence. One feels that life is all around him, yet momentarily extraneous. There is a great resistance to interrupt one's physical immobility. The eyes, if they were eventually open or half shut, would close by themselves and if one would hold them open - for instance to avoid drowsiness - then one wouldn't see anything.

(b) The second phase is that of the perception of *the three divine qualities* [sound, light and movement sensation]. By continuing with the mental Prayer, a light of various aspects is perceived in the *Kutastha* and above the head; it varies from a diffused light to the intense light of the so-called spiritual eye. A feeling of internal light gives the idea that our being is constituted by an intensity of gilded light. In this state the distractions are no more possible. Together with inner sound, there can appear, in each *Chakra*, the sensation of an inner movement. While at the start the Prayer produces a certain effect on the *Chakras*, now this effect seems to happen by itself: it is a paradoxical feeling of movement in the most total immobility.

[This phenomenon is described in different ways in the various mystical paths. In the descriptions of the Christian mystics it is narrated the experience of being touched by the Divine.]

(c) The third phase is the contact with the divine joy.

At this point the practice of the Prayer as mental repetition of words starts to be lost along the way; it remains only the will to not lose that state and to return to the Prayer as soon as the words return to mind. The Prayer has become the sheer attitude to go on perceiving a love that boundlessly grows. The person now feels to be invaded by something that has, so to say, the taste of eternity. The soul feels to be in contact with an *endless goodness* [I do not know another way to describe it, I borrow an expression of S. Teresa of Avila]. When breath and mind

disappear, the consciousness is transported far, more distant than any known territory. It is a state that makes death indifferent - from it an incommensurable good is born.

(d) The fourth phase is the state of ecstasy (*Samadhi*). Even if rare, we must not forget that it is a natural, physiological experience: it is the state where the consciousness is totally isolated from the outside: there is no breathing and the pulse is practically nonexistent. It comes by itself when the time is ripe.

4...Prayer in the point between the eyebrows

Before getting up from the position adopted for the meditation and returning to full activity, one's consciousness wants to rise even higher. The Prayer is repeated at least three times in the point between the eyebrows [*Kutastha*]. By intensifying the concentration, the syllables are perceived like the action of a chick that tries to perforate, with the beak, the hull that contains it.

This exercise is also useful when the previous one [3] has not gotten the expected effect. By intensely practising the Prayer in the point between the eyebrows everything will go into place and the inner joy which seemed compromised will manifest.

Supplementary practices to be integrated with time:

A...Prayer of the heart

Let us consider the procedure: *Prayer integrated with a long breath* [2]. After having inhaled briefly and placed the first six syllables in the *Chakras* [the sixth, as we have already explained, in the occipital region], while holding shortly the breath, the head moves slightly toward left and the seventh syllable is thought in the *Medulla*, then the head moves slightly toward right and the eighth syllable is thought in the cervical *Chakra*, then the head approaches diagonally the breast, as to touch it with the chin, and the ninth syllable is thought in the *Chakra* of the heart; then, while the head remains down, the exhalation begins and the remaining three syllables are placed in the lower *Chakras*. The procedure is repeated 12 times. Then one resumes shortly [six breaths are enough] the procedure: *Prayer integrated with a long breath* [2] - thereby, the state of calmness which the movements of the head may have upset is recreated. Then one

chooses if to practice the following [B] technique or forget the breath entirely and enjoys the: *Mental prayer in the Chakras* [3].

This technique is a slightly simpler form of *Kriya Yoga's Thokar*. In spite of its simplicity, it creates bliss in the *Chakra* of the heart, especially when it amplifies one's ardent aspiration toward the Divine. A great strength of love will penetrate the heart. The feeling is paradoxical, since consists the simultaneous presence of a sort of pain and such a sweet *Goodness* that cannot to be compared with any pleasure of the earth. Sometimes the person yields to let some tears of joys pour out of his eyes: it seems impossible to sustain the impact with such strength.

B...Prayer integrated with a short breath in the Chakras

This procedure can be used after the: *Prayer integrated with a long breath* [2], independently if the previous: *Prayer of the heart* [A] has been utilized.

Through an inhalation, thinking the first half the Prayer, the energy is lifted from the first to the second *Chakra*; a very short pause follows [less one second]; then, with a short exhalation, thinking the second half of the Prayer, the energy is lowered from the second to the first *Chakra*.

Through an inhalation [always with the same time], thinking the first half the Prayer, the energy is lifted from the first to the third *Chakra*; a very short pause follows [less one second]; then, with a short exhalation, thinking the second half of the Prayer, the energy is lowered from the third to the first *Chakra*.

[During this second breath it is as if the second *Chakra* did not exist]...

[To prevent some doubts let us be more exhaustive. The inhalation is not long as that of the technique no.[2]; it lasts on average around 3-4 seconds. During it the awareness is concentrated in the effort to raise the energy. The exhalation lasts as much as the inhalation. The various breaths have the same length of time even if the paths of the energy measure differently.]

Now it should be clear how the exercise goes ahead.

... the energy is lifted from the first to the fourth *Chakra* and then it is lowered. [In this phase it is as if the second and the third *Chakra* would not exist.]

... same thing from the first to the fifth one...
... same thing from the first to the occipital region...
... same thing from the first to the region above the head...
... again same thing from the first to the region above the head ...
... same thing from the first to the *Medulla*...
... same thing from the first to the fifth one...
....
... same thing from the first to the second..

This is a cycle. It consists in 12 breaths and lasts about 80/90 seconds. After two, three cycles, a great sense of interiorization will be perceived. Then one passes to the practice of: *Mental prayer in the Chakras* [3]. If one practises 12 cycles [144 breaths] each respiratory act will be shorter than 3-4 seconds. It will have the tendency to become very rapid and to be transformed in a pure mental act. Applying this procedure for at least 12 days [1728 breaths] one will enjoy a period of unbelievable introspection that will remain forever in one's memory as a heavenly experience.

Note. Since there are individuals whose health condition [mental or physical or both] manifests in the fact that they find the long and deep breaths, especially if repeated, unpleasant, the previous technique [B] can be a permanent substitute for the technique [2]

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

He who practices a discipline like the one described - especially if enriched by the Prayer of the heart - undergoes a tangible psychological transformation. Many mental fetters - some conditioning that seemed immovable - start to yield. [See the discussion in Chapter IX about the effects of *Thokar*]

In the decisive matters of life, nobody succeeds in stopping the person from going deeper, inexorably, up to touch the unpolluted truth. His thinking becomes compact, of a solidity that other people's suggestions don't succeed in shattering. He is not able to bear the least deformation of truth. But truth is total truth. It touches the reality of life and the reality of his whole personality, deep instincts included. This hard-to-take reality marks out the last part of the mystical path.

Many think that, at these heights, the joy of the mystic is not diminished by anything. But how could his joy be perfect when he perceives the echo of other people's desperation - of the Divine that they are and that, in His boundless dream, vaster than millions of galaxies, He dreams also histories of endless, immense pain?

If we study the biographies of the saints we find an undeniable fact: they passed through excruciating suffering. The idea that the mystical experience is only untainted joy is an illusion.

A shocking experience happens when the mystic brings the light of the Spirit into the depths of his own being. In this life or in another, if the path is not only a new form of drug to get a deceptive happiness, this fact cannot be avoided. The dark parts of his being do not disappear automatically, they are perceived as suffering - pure, inexplicable suffering.

Some mystics call this state *the dark night of the soul*.

If the mystic is able to go ahead, he will realize that each shadowy part of his being is a symbol of the darkness that is inherent in the human nature.

What he is and what others are, mingles - this is very difficult to accept. It is not a theoretical realization, a beautiful poetic thought but an excruciating reality.

In the beginning of his path the mystic has only tried to reach the heavens; by so doing year after year, he has risked making his heart hard and resistant as stone and imbue his mind of the cold of a steel blade. For years he may have not known the suffering; yet the result may be that the compassion, the true love has gone far away from him.

He believed that, while treading his path, it was possible to spiritualise, to convert into light all the parts of his being, even the unconscious side, instincts included. And with this object in view, he tried to take a step forward toward the other human beings, by helping them unselfishly. Then he discovered that, despite his nature, his ability to walk in another's shoes, his actions, brought ahead with total sincerity, didn't succeed in helping anyone but increased only the disorder.

Later, he understood that it was necessary to develop the courage to emotionally dissociate from the impediments and the troubles of other persons. Only after years of practice, when his awareness learned how to go out of the convolutions of his brain, he did something positive for others, almost without being aware of it.

The experience of discovering in our selves every man's cruelty and darkness, which gives the impression of the impossibility to touch the Spiritual reality, thorns our armour in a pitiless way. Through the breaks in our armour, a love and a pity enters that any reasoning, any cultivated sensibility could never have given to us. Through a cruel and incessant anguish we raise up to a beatific absence of pain, through an endless sense of rebellion for this universal evil, which we cannot explain, we come to an unchangeable peace.

The authentic compassion is born and then the blooming of Beauty.