

PART III: HOW TO AVOID FAILURE ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

CHAPTER 10 [FIRST PART]

AN IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDING

I think that the considerations I make here are really important for those who are about to practice *Kriya*. These arise from a serious problem that was widely discussed on a *Kriya* Forum, especially the one concerning the form of *Kriya* that I learned from my first organization.

Some people get nothing from Kriya Yoga

Reading this Forum carefully, it seems that there are people who have devoted a lot of time, effort to the practice of *Kriya*, well they complain that they have not gotten anywhere. Some have spent years in meditation only to realize that they have not made any progress.

Each person is different and each person approaches *Kriya* for his personal reasons. Let's put aside those reasons that have nothing to do with the spiritual path and that could have been solved more easily with a visit to a doctor, or therapy, or changing jobs, or moving or whatever. Let's deal with genuine reasons, those that come from seriously motivated people.

From these Forums it would appear that this technique does not produce what it promises. Some have practiced *Kriya* for 30 years and yet they have not achieved anything, indeed their life seems to have been destroyed. It is claimed that *Kriya* teaches how to immerse ourselves internally to receive the pearls of enlightenment. Unfortunately, someone has never found anything other than constant boredom that numbed their mind.

Some detached observer claims that someone's mind is so clouded by this mental numbing practice that they will continue to practice these techniques mechanically to the grave. The idea of self-realization continues to keep a person tied to a practice that turns out to be lethargic.

The practitioner's faith in God and his willingness to move forward in the practice have been severely tested. Some traditions call these spiritual trials the "dark night of the soul".

It must be said of course that many recognize that from time to time, meditations effortlessly flow into a deep state of awareness: one's thoughts, breath, feelings – everything – ceases to exist. There are momentary

experiences of stillness, bliss. These rare moments are the reward for one's spiritual endeavors. But this really doesn't seem like a great thing.

Difficult situation of those who live as monks

Everything becomes much worse when we take into consideration those people who wish to live a life of self-denial by withdrawing from the active life, for example by entering a monastery (in the field of *Kriya* it is called *Ashram*.) In fact, many people ask themselves the following question: "Is it God's will that I live in the world, creating a family, or does he expect me to decide to become a monk in his plans?"

The reality is that living as a monk is a huge effort: behind the walls of the convent there are many monks who have sworn to live in perfect celibacy, simplicity, loyalty and obedience. Their Rule is drastic: many hours of meditation and many hours of Silence.

Unfortunately, many realized that entering into a condition so ardently desired had not fulfilled the purpose for which this decision had been made. The ardent mystical inspiration that had accompanied them in their choice almost disappeared.

The initial conquered free time, instead of being devoted to fruitful progress along the spiritual path, is exhausted in boring, non-creative pursuits.

It no longer inspires them to listen to the talks (*Satsanga*) of their spiritual guides explaining that the *Guru* is "a self-realized master" and that following the teachings of the master leads to Self Realization. Many years after their entry, these people realized that the best for them was not entering a monastery.

Some former monks tell us that a rigid routine, based on unlivable ideals, presents many difficulties. It is clear that the monastery rules were designed to establish habits and ensure time to practice meditation. Unfortunately many have continued to struggle with the monotony of practicing the same techniques, in the same way, with the same people, day after day, year after year.

The striking contrast is that *Kriya* teachers claim that practicing meditation means experiencing an *ever new joy*. Unfortunately, they rarely found joy in these monotonous meditations.

Many believe that the life of a monk is full of peace, contentment and brotherly love. Well, some psychologists who have visited these *ashrams* have found that the monks' lifestyle is one of the most stressful occupations, along with air traffic controllers, police and firefighters.

Below the surface, in the hearts and minds of some monks there is a lot of anxiety, fear and even psychosis. The goal of being "perfect," the impossible ideal of being representatives of God and the *guru*, can have a devastating effect.

Outwardly, the monks imitate the holy ascetics, mystics and saints and give visitors the impression of being happy, blessed and mirrors of the divine. Internally, they live in quiet despair. Unfortunately this is what we read in the Forums.

Many, after years of titanic efforts, persistently continue to live within this dimension, others have decided to return to the world.

Request against nature: chastity

Let us consider a fact that seems absurd and inhumane to me: monks are required to have overcome sexual desire. For them, sex is strictly forbidden. How reasonable is it to ask for this? Those who accept to live this condition immediately realize how terrible, practically impossible is the inner struggle.

We boldly say that, contrary to *Hindu* traditions and *yoga* mythology, sexual activity goes hand in hand with health and long life and not the other way around as some stupid traditions claim. Science explains that sex strengthens the parasympathetic nervous system (which slows the heartbeat), allowing it to better counteract its sympathetic nervous system (which accelerates the heartbeat).

My thought, for what little it's worth, is that if you want to practice *Kriya* don't even consider the problem of chastity because it's not a problem: deal with *Kriya* by placing your trust in the laws of nature. Don't believe in genuine nonsense. Do not try to follow impossible and unnatural precepts. Do not live in a continuous excruciating conflict even going as far as the rejection of love.

Lahiri Mahasaya admitted in his diaries that sexual desire was sometimes very strong. One day a disciple asked him a direct question: "How can one be definitively free from sexuality?" He replied in a way that left the astonished disciple: "I will be free from sexuality only when my body lies on the funeral pyre." God bless this sincerity! (I knew a *kriyaban* who was so attached to his illusions that he took the above episode as a sign that ... *Lahiri Mahasaya* was not a realized soul!)

Hypothesis

Let's drop the problem of chastity now and let's try to formulate a hypothesis on the situation outlined in the Forums. This hypothesis is that a misleading advertisement on *Kriya* has attracted people who are not suitable for this discipline.

At first, people read PY's *Autobiography*. This book plays a decisive role in creating illusions. Those who read it begin to show excessive enthusiasm for the idea of being able to experience something extraordinary. It suggests that *Kriya* comes to us from an *Avatar*, and it

works mathematically. Some people apply for the correspondence course, are enthusiastic about the lessons, feel in harmony and peace. Finally something in their life seems to be going in the right direction! The meaning of life is revealed! They are happy because they believe these teachings are the airway to the Divine etc.

But over time they realize that the enthusiastic words about the "extraordinary effects of *Kriya*" have created a colossal deception. It would have been better not to talk about the "Science of *Kriya Yoga*": it would have been more honest to simply say that *Kriya Yoga* is a very effective method for walking the spiritual path and consists of methods of concentration and breath control. No other words are needed: these are enough to attract those who are ready.

I do not mean that P.Y.'s *Autobiography* be full of illusions. From reading it we receive a clear teaching: whoever faces this path should seek only the Divine and not miraculous powers. However, the reader may linger between the idea of seeking only the Divine, without asking for more, and the pernicious idea of using the power of the will to achieve special health and life-related results. The idea that *Kriya* has a scientific basis and is therefore automatic in its effects is the leitmotif that characterizes PY's writings. Unfortunately, this idea has deluded many people.

In my opinion, the practice of *Kriya* cannot offer guaranteed results. It is said that *Kriya* is "the supreme of all spiritual techniques, the air way to the realization of God" but this does not guarantee you that you will be able to benefit from it.

Affirming that Spiritual Evolution is linked to the number of *Kriya* breaths you will practice becomes an even more inconsistent mirage. Unfortunately these are unclear words. I don't know if you have ever examined with the lens of wisdom the idea that each *Kriya* breath corresponds to a year of spiritual evolution. I ask you this: if you met a true mystic, would you have the courage to affirm this belief in front of him? I really think that you would not dare to meet his gaze realizing that this nonsense would be immediately exposed.

The idea that *Kriya* is the art of manipulating our *karma* and thereby accelerating our evolution comes from magical literature. If you study the history of esoteric movements you will be able to fully understand this. Our approach to *Kriya Yoga* should be far from these ideas.

It is difficult for us to consider *Kriya* as "just another meditation technique". But the fact is, it's just another meditation technique.

The "magic" connected to *Kriya* closes people's minds. They feel they must think of this path as "sacred" by not allowing anyone to question

it. Many cannot admit that some people have had problems with it.

MY VISION ON THE ESSENCE OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

I think that the *Kriya* path is not suitable for those who live only in the mental sphere and do not possess even the slightest aspiration for the spiritual experience.

Unfortunately many people who are interested in *Kriya Yoga* do not have a clear idea of what a spiritual path is. Let us first try to clarify the difference between this concept and that of professing a certain religion.

In addition to physical birth (eating, working, starting a family ...) and mental birth (taking an interest in various problems, taking pleasure in thinking for yourself, planning your future ...) there is a birth to the spiritual life.

One who is born only to mental life, and most people are, cannot understand what birth to spiritual life is. So many times it happens that a religious person believes he is following a spiritual path. But if he is concerned only with the things one must believe in, the things one must do or avoid, the rites in which he must participate, it could be that the spiritual life is still far away and almost unattainable for such a person.

Birth to the spiritual life, this 'third birth' rarely happens. There are two moments in it: the first moment is when the intuition that there is a reality that lies beyond the mental dimension arises and the desire to experience it, to touch it with your hand, is born; the second moment is when this reality actually manifests itself: only then can it be said that a person is born into the spiritual life.

[I] The first moment takes place with the encounter, of great emotional value, with the beautiful, inspiring things of life: pure human love, attraction for Beauty in any form it manifests, being strongly struck by one or more artistic manifestations, the attraction for the spiritual life having met the example of various mystics or saints.

[II] The second moment, that is the encounter with the real spiritual dimension comes from a real experience. It is characterized by spontaneously entering the state of ecstasy. In the state of ecstasy nothing else exists in consciousness except the contemplation of a reality beyond the mind. Here: this is the spiritual dimension.

Well, at least the first phase of the spiritual dimension should be present in those who would like to tackle the spiritual path. Unfortunately, some would like to face it only with a mental, scientific attitude. This is sure:

there will be no result!

Let us ask ourselves: how is it possible to have the experience of a manifestation of the spiritual dimension? There are some experiences that have no explanation, such as near death experiences (NDE) that you can read about in abundance. What is certain is that such experiences change a person's life.

Or it may happen that a person endowed with great spiritual aspiration has practiced a meditation technique with absolute dedication for some time and finally something has happened.

In practice, a person must have obtained, in his own way – and we cannot say anything about this event – a contact with an inexplicable joy that comes from the center of his being, from the depths of his soul. He must therefore have had a mystical experience. This experience moves you deeply, it evokes in you a love, an unstoppable aspiration towards this reality that you have touched with your hand, which took place in your body, in your consciousness. Here, this event, this experience can be an excellent basis for following a spiritual path.

A religion, on the other hand, is something heterogeneous – like a man standing with one foot in one dimension and the other foot in another.

Religion is based first of all on working with the mind to create, elaborate a theological vision, then it deals with the moral aspect, with the things that must be done and what must be avoided.

Religion is concerned in a very secondary way with the fact that some saints have reached the state of ecstasy. This is considered a very rare event that is sometimes viewed with suspicion and disbelief.

So let's not confuse religion with the spiritual path. Religion is mainly made up of retaining a set of beliefs: its nature is a continuous working with the mind.

Being a mystic has nothing to do with religion, the Divine doesn't care at all what religion you profess, only spiritual experience, passion and love for it can make you a mystic, nothing else.

This contact with what lies beyond the mind, therefore, cannot be described with precise terms, it must only be left to be anticipated intuitively. Over time, some of those who have had this experience may sense that it is somehow related to the spine, the spiritual centers found in it, and the intuitive vision that occurs with the "third eye."

Sometimes, in fact, contact with spiritual reality is accompanied by the experience of a strong current of energy in the spine. This experience, especially when it occurs for the first time, can be preceded by

inexplicable fear, at times by real anguish.

Well what I have described is what normally happens to those who practice a meditation technique (such as *Kriya Yoga*) having in the heart at least a modicum of aspiration towards something that resides beyond the confines of the mind. These people are on a path that is sure to bring something good.

Now let's consider people who live only in the realm of the mind. This condition has been our way of life for a long time. Think of those who are perfectly satisfied with life as it presents itself in adolescence and early youth and who simply want to enjoy it: their minds are filled with plans to launch themselves in different, countless directions. Let us respect them and do not give them any moral or, worse still, theological sermon because they could not understand.

Why should we advise these people to undertake the spiritual path? Perhaps because we have intuited that there is some psychological problem in them?

Using *Kriya Yoga* to solve most human problems is like going to the doctor and complaining of a little heartburn after a meal and the doctor says we need a heart transplant. After reflecting on this aspect for a long time, I have come to the conclusion that the number of people who are truly ready for *Kriya*, for which *Kriya* is the thing they need most in life, is very small.

A lot of people do the right thing by putting aside, for the present moment, any plans that involve the practice of meditation. Let these people live their lives, it is not the case that they make it more complicated by making futile efforts by cultivating what seems like a fashion.

The urge to take the spiritual path cannot be artificially created by listening to the speeches of various preachers. It arises from something that is there or is not there. One must first have built his own vision of reality, answered in his own way the fundamental existential questions, giving a clear purpose to his life. And only after this event, he might want a hypothetical experience that is beyond the mind.

In conclusion, a spiritual path has nothing to do with the decision to live in a different way by professing a certain faith and adopting the rites of a certain Church. It has even less to do with methods of extending the powers of the mind, nor with engaging in magical, esoteric, occult practices. In short, the spiritual life does not begin with a decision that is born and develops in a dimension that concerns the realm of the mind.

Being born on the spiritual path means touching something extremely beautiful that happens in our life, remaining positively transformed by understanding that our existence can no longer remain the same.

It also means definitively abandoning any study concerning philosophy, the theological vision that underlies the great religions. It means convincing oneself that such studies only lead to enriching the mind with concepts, definitions that have nothing to do with direct experience. It also means with a lot of patience to abandon any discussion on these points with other people still accustomed to amplifying the role of the mind in spiritual research. It means making them understand with great gentleness and patience the ineffability of the spiritual experience.

REASONS TO TAKE THE PATH OF KRIYA YOGA

I'm talking about my experience. The reason why I chose the path of *Kriya Yoga* is that I have always instinctively been attracted to *Yoga*. I immediately realized that all its different techniques revolve around *Pranayama* – a procedure characterized by breath control. I chose *Kriya Yoga* after reading the famous book *Autobiography of a Yogi* by P.Y .. In this book I was informed that *Lahiri Mahasaya* had spread a technique of *Pranayama* in four fundamental stages and called it *Kriya Yoga*. I did everything I could to learn this technique. Through it I do not seek superhuman "powers" but the peace and comfort that is revealed to me through the process of internalization and the ascent of consciousness.

I have touched the fact that *Kriya Pranayama* is the most direct tool to calm the breath and therefore the mind, bringing it to the state of *mental Silence*. This is what I try to summarize to those who ask me for information on *Kriya Yoga*.

If asked, I explain that I do not have a clear and solid view of what exists beyond physical reality. I think that nobody knows for sure. This is why I do not cultivate an insatiable intellectual investigation on this issue. I believe that there must be a reality greater than what each of us can intuit with our imagination. This reality is a Universal Intelligence superior to our little mind and is present beneath everything that life is made of. I follow the spiritual path to get in tune with this Intelligence. I want to get closer to this Reality that is beyond my mind and express it in my life.

Obviously I understand the real condition of human life. I see how hard, terrible and cruel life can be. From this originated in me the desire to enter a dimension of living that is not the common one.

Well, if I believe that the one who asks me information about starting *Kriya*, has not yet been born to the spiritual dimension but sincerely aspires to it, I give a simple advice. "Practice the two techniques *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* and *Ujjayi Pranayama* regularly for three months. This takes 10/15 minutes, you don't need more. Try to feel if this procedure works, in the sense that you enjoy the practice, you feel good and intend to

continue."

Well, if this person does not feel anything after the practice and cannot even maintain a regular practice, then I explain that *Kriya* is not for him and that he should not blame himself for it.

If for another person my advice works, then I recommend that he learns *Kriya* with complete tranquility as a self-taught person and, if he deems it appropriate, study the instructions contained in chapters 6 and 7 of this book and put them into practice. In the meantime, he can also study what I write in the third part of it.

So I propose to use my instructions as a springboard towards a more advanced meditation practice, personalizing it as much as possible. In fact, I would like everyone to be able to walk alone.

I explain that part of maturing and becoming an adult is coming to realize that our intelligence and morals are as good as those of others and that we are able to make the right decisions for ourselves. After all, we're not meant to stay on our knees for life. We can stand and walk the spiritual path with strength on our legs. The right approach is to abandon all religious ideas, but still remain on the path of the Divine. We can all become a Light for ourselves.

I recommend practicing *Kriya Pranayama* possibly with the three accompanying techniques explained in chapter 7 and above all to conclude each practice with *mental Pranayama*. I recommend only one practice per day and to slightly modify the routine over the course of the days by doing various experiments to understand what works best. I explain that meditation is an individual affair. Some types get along well with some practices, others don't. It's like having an allergy to something. What works for one will not work for everyone. If they want to integrate this practice with other meditation practices (Buddhist, Chinese, Tibetan or similar) they can do it without problems.

In chapter 2 I tell how my intuition guided me to find the right routine and how I began to feel more satisfied with my practice. From that moment on I never stopped, just one day to experience some small changes. Many times I went forward, others backwards, but I never gave up the practice. I know that unfortunately some people keep banging their heads against the wall, trying to get something out of the way of meditating rigidly given by some organization and it has been going on like this for decades. But if the results are not there, how can they not understand that there must be something wrong with their way of following the teachings?

I explain that to receive a beneficial effect from the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* it is necessary to work patiently and regularly remembering

that success in *Kriya* occurs even if immediate results are not seen.

It is not true that the results appear only through an impeccable execution of the "magic recipe" of *Kriya*. Those who apply the instructions they have received in their own way need only enjoy the practice as it naturally reveals itself to them. Excessive expectations are a screen that prevents the genuine beauty of *Kriya* from entering one's life.

I explain that it is quite normal to receive good effects from the practice of the first four points of *Kriya Pranayama* as they have been explained in chapter 6. *Kutastha* is perceived as a cave where you sit with the firm intention of remaining motionless enjoying the beautiful sensation of your consciousness that smoothly enters the spine. There is no need for any precise visualization of the energy going up and down through it. Everything will happen spontaneously, it is not you who causes this movement. The more you maintain this attitude, the deeper you will enter the spine.

As for the effects of this practice on daily life, you will realize how *Kriya* changes your perception of Reality. Some discover an almost forgotten potential for aesthetic enjoyment (as if they had eyes and heart for the first time); others will be deeply touched by the meaning of their family, by the value of a lifelong friendship and will be surprised by the intensity of the love response that comes from their hearts.

Over time one can see the Divine in everything, find joy in every activity. There may be a sudden unexpected bliss-filled surge of energy through the spine.

CONCEPT OF CLEAN SPIRITUAL PATH

Let us deal with a particularly delicate point: erroneous attitudes towards the spiritual path. This is a more serious problem than is commonly perceived. It must be said that even those born to the spiritual life can forget about it and return to get lost in the mental life.

Do we really think that *kriyabans* who faithfully adhere to a regular meditation practice program are free from unlikely, totally irrational expectations that contradict the very foundations of the mystical path? It's hard to admit, but the mind, the same mind that takes us on the spiritual path, is also the enemy that is constantly trying to screw everything up.

The psychological fragility of many spiritual seekers is truly glaring. Unfortunately, the mind, so keen in science and technology, is ready to take the most absurd expectations as possible when it approaches the mystical path.

So even those born to the spiritual life can carry on a wrong attitude that impoverishes all their practice.

Whoever believes that the practice of *Kriya* is scientific, believes in a great illusion. *Kriya* is just a spiritual practice neither more nor less different from the various mystical paths, and it is also an art to be continually perfected.

Kriya has been advertised in such a way that it is believed to be scientific in the modern sense of the term, ignoring the true meaning of science. The science is based on objective facts that can be verified with a zero failure rate. In other words, science is guaranteed to produce results. *Kriya*, on the other hand, apparently depends on a grace that comes from a reality that is located beyond our mind. So while someone can practice the "scientific" technique of *Kriya* all his life and get nothing in return, other people just need to practice a small amount of it to get results immediately.

Kriya Yoga should always be a " clean " path otherwise failure will occur and all the effort put into it will be reduced to a colossal waste of time. "Clean" means: firmly aimed at abandonment to the Divine and not polluted by the fantasies of the mind.

Even if one has done everything that human madness can conceive and wasted years in exhausting one's vital energy in obsessively pursuing the maintenance of one's own conveniences, now, having known the inexplicable dimension of the spirit, that person has decided to turn the page.

What is expected of those who practice *Kriya* is to have a certain degree of control over the mind, an adequate power of concentration and a minimum capacity for visualization. Other "powers", qualities, knowledge are not necessary. By working with these tools alone, the practitioner will experience intense joy that will grow over time.

To make the reader understand what a "clean" spiritual path is, I will give some examples of what a "polluted" spiritual path is. "

SOME ILLUSORY WAYS OF FOLLOWING THE SPIRITUAL PATH

[1] *First massive illusion: the belief that it is necessary to "grow" on a psychological level*

There are people who believe that it is necessary to help the practice of *Kriya* by working hard to supplement their personal growth. Sometimes this happens when they want to follow certain mental procedures related to Buddhism.

Someone claims with satisfaction: "I am following a path of personal growth! " They do not accept to trust the transformation that *Kriya* creates. They often judge themselves with excessive severity and cultivate feelings of guilt. In other words, they want, before practicing

Kriya, to become "good devotees". Unfortunately in doing so they will never seriously begin the spiritual path as they will never feel that they are ready.

Accept who you are. Do not think that by working hard through self-discipline and striving to improve yourself as a human being, you can destroy the roots of iniquity and selfishness in your consciousness.

Kriya Pranayama techniques do not need to be coupled with psychological work. With pure mental work you will not be "redeemed" by your human nature. Enjoy *Pranayama* by living in the simplicity of *Lahiri's* promise "*Banat, banat, ban jay!*" "*Doing and doing, one day: done!*"

[2] *Second illusion: practicing Kriya with the hope of freeing oneself from serious psychological disorders*

It happens to meet people who have some serious mental disorder and intend to practice *Kriya* hoping to get well. One quickly realizes that there is rarely a genuine spiritual interest in them.

Taking the path of *Kriya* to get rid of depression or other common forms of neurosis is a choice that almost always leads nowhere. Misleading advertising encouraged many to believe that this was possible. But in the spiritual path the results are obtained when a person, in good mental condition, puts a sincere involvement.

If one has a mental disorder and, after experimenting with various alternative remedies, follows the advice of an overly enthusiastic friend and decides to test the *Kriya* path too, he will almost certainly get nothing! Not only that: if, through this process, something good begins to manifest itself in the person, he will not even notice it and will continue to perceive only his problems. Unfortunately, in this situation one cannot feel love but only a little curiosity for *Kriya*. He will subconsciously be afraid of being disappointed and this will surely happen.

Kriya can work even if you are not a "religious" person, but *Kriya* should be the object of your enthusiasm and aspiration. When a person suffers from neurosis, he generally fails to feel genuine devotion. One cannot look at *Kriya* with suspicion: "Does it really work"? No human being will ever be able to touch the supreme Good of *Kriya* unless he places it, with human and sincere trust, in the ideal area of the sacred.

[3] *Third illusion: Expanding the Potential of the Mind*

This is an illusion, let me tell you, deadly. In the past, I was invited by a local cultural institution to lecture on the history of the cultural movement we now call *New Age*.

This commitment helped to free me from various esoteric-magical conditioning. To prepare for these lessons, I had to reflect on where the line between genuine mystical research and the cultivation of magical ambitions lay. I realized the suggestibility and vulnerability of the human psyche especially as it approaches the spiritual path.

This was a peaceful time in my life: I felt gratified to have the time and opportunity to study the best essays and textbooks available – I mean books written by academics who didn't belong (or were smart enough to hide their belonging or affiliation) to any particular mystical school and thus manifested a detached attitude towards this matter.

I also greatly appreciated those texts which were capable of presenting the essence of those mystical movements which had flourished around the great religions.

From the very first lesson, I tried to communicate what is usually expressed with the word "mystical". I stressed that even if in some context the term "Mystic" evokes a relationship with the mystery, with the concept of initiation (from the Greek μυστικός [mustikos] – initiated) into secret religious rituals (from the Greek μύω, to hide), a mystic is the one who sincerely tries (by adopting any form of mental or physical discipline) to surrender, with the utmost sense of respect, to *something* that exists beyond the territories of the thinking process and is the essence of perfect fulfillment – unattainable by the acrobatics of our never satisfied mind.

The problem was that this "*something*" beyond the mind was not understandable, it did not create attraction for most of my listeners. In fact, speaking privately with them, I understood that they were cultivating the most surprising illusions. Unfortunately, I realized that most of them had come to my classes to receive fuel and support for third illusions. Despite all my explanations, they did not understand what a mystical path really is and they had no idea what boundless joy can come from practicing a "clean" spiritual path.

One day, after talking to one of them, I felt a sense of discouragement and I felt the need to walk in the fresh air. The feeling of alienation seemed to stretch to the horizon and touch the edge of the sky. I had a thought, bright and full of warmth: even if the people I was associating with were not attracted by the ideals of the great saints of the past, and rather they nourished the instinct to corrupt any sacred and liberating teaching, I would still have remained firm in my path not because I had faith in one day getting good effects from it, but because it had already given me something incomparable. I didn't need to look for reasons: it was the radiance of my memory that saved me every time, every day.

[4] *Fourth illusion: mixing Kriya with "New Age" therapies*

Meeting a *New Age* group of *kriyabans* was like meeting a family a little larger and less dogmatic than my first *Kriya* group who strictly followed PY's teachings. I remember this particular period of my life whenever I happen to listen to the recordings of devotional songs that I bought back then. I used to fall in love with an Indian *Bhajan* and chant it inside me all day long. For me it was like food; I really felt like I was eating that music.

Sometimes I was unable to understand their clumsy attempt to respect an oriental way of life. Their behavior was characterized by innocent manias.

The new group combined *Kriya* practice with some "cathartic" techniques (which created a process of purification). Their intention was to produce a cleansing effect on their psyche by bringing any repressed material to the light of consciousness. They explained – and this idea is not absurd – that by removing the inner blocks, the evolutionary process of *Kriya* would be easier.

While their efforts in practicing the *Kriya* techniques were not remarkable, they tried by every external means (readings, devotional songs, convocations ...) to extract from the depths of their psyche any trace of religious attitude, any residue of spiritual aspiration. I can't say for sure if some of them were born to spiritual reality. I have not been able to understand it.

Searching for alternative medicines, group therapies directed by eccentric individuals with no academic training, were expensive distractions to add to *Kriya*.

I was struck by the tendency to spend a lot of money on training seminars focusing on strange therapeutic methods such as aromatherapy, crystal therapy, chromotherapy... When I dared to question the validity of the whole thing they felt annoyed. They told me there was no reason to be perplexed about their practices without trying them.

They commented, "It is our *Karma* that is giving us the best of all opportunities to grow in all fields. We should respond positively. We must not oppose this beneficial current, otherwise we may ... have to be reborn on this physical plane. just to fully experience this opportunity!" "Our *Kriya* practice will receive a great benefit because *Kriya* is practiced with the energy present in the body and is recharged by the flow of the *Universal Energy*."

They were convinced that all their research, all their expensive activities made their spiritual path as easy as a walk.

My relationship with those researchers was based on true affection and never came to disagreement, bitterness or empty formality. Those friends

were always generous to me and respectful of my personality. They passionately shared everything they had learned, no matter if it cost them so much money, and they never insisted on imposing anything on me.

I considered their activities as a colossal waste of time but I did not have the courage to say this to them.

Too much insistence on the cleaning process is like preparing your home to receive a distinguished guest; cleaning it continuously and decorating it, delighted by a rapt awareness of all that the house grants – in the meantime, after repeatedly ringing the bell, the expected guest is neglected on the doormat ...

Several years have passed, some friends are still there, to get... the full cleansing of their subconscious mind. The work in the field of *Kriya* is totally forgotten, reduced to nothing.

[5] *Fifth illusion: frantically search for a technique higher than Kriya*

There are people who do not engage deeply with the technique of *Kriya* and, after following it for some time, neglect it, they seek a technique of spiritual evolution superior to *Kriya*. In fact, they are convinced that centuries ago there was a "superior" technique taught to very few particularly advanced people.

A friend who was interested in *Kriya* told me that he had studied some of the so-called "masterpieces" of esoteric literature and recommended me to read them. I agreed to read what he lent me. I entered an almost hypnotic state and did not immediately realize that every chain of ideas contained in these texts had no basis, but was only the brainchild of the author's unbridled imagination. Through a profusion of intoxicating words, the author had dared to develop his ideas, free from the relationship with reality and the rules of logic. Everything was just a mental pastime.

One day this friend met a self-appointed expert in occult matters who claimed to know the secrets of an almost extinct esoteric path and, in particular, a spiritual technique practiced millennia ago by a few highly evolved beings. This "expert" explained to him: "Now that humanity is more and more materialistic, such teachings are not revealed to anyone" then after a pause and with a sigh, he finally concluded: "Today's students would not know how to appreciate such secrets. and, in their hands, they could be dangerous."

The expert gave the impression of being a dreamer, but he was not as naive as he seemed. He used fascinating terminology similar to that of the *Kabbalah* and also spoke effortlessly of the original Christianity, whose texts (canonical and apocryphal) he was able to interpret in an unconventional way.

My friend tried to introduce himself to him as a true adept, disclosing that he was willing to accept any request, as long as this

extraordinary secret was revealed to him. The clever expert, after having expressed some reservations, finally pretended to capitulate and murmured: "Then it's okay, but only for you, just because I feel I'm being *guided* to make an exception."

Then my friend, poor victim trembling with emotion, lived the best moment of his life, convinced that the meeting with the expert had been decided in the "high places." The donation to be offered during the initiation – combined with the promise to keep absolute secrecy – it was remarkable, it had to represent the great value attached to that event. The teacher obviously stated that this donation would be transferred to a monk who helped maintain an orphanage. (It's a true classic! ... there's always an orphanage in the middle of these stories!)

While my friend, completely satisfied, was preparing to receive a gift ... incomparable (he received the explanation convinced that it was a gift and that nothing could adequately compensate for the blessings this gift would bring in his life) the rascal decided absently what kind of technique he would explain during the initiation, illustrating it with dazzling solemnity. My friend received it all and spent two days in a state of pure fervor.

Later, imprisoned in his chimera, he saw the rekindling of his passion and the comedy was repeated. He learned of other incomparable "revelations". This illusion is, in fact, invincible. After receiving his "drug", he continued his inexorable journey towards the abyss. Who knows if, one day, he will realize that the techniques he had paid a fortune for were taken from some books and altered, so that he cannot guess their origin.

[6] *Sixth illusion: faith in Baraka*

The belief that the power (*Baraka*) of the great Masters of the past is still present in their descendants as a non-stop chain is quite common. I met a *kriyaban* who was convinced that spiritual progress could not happen except through the reception of this "power". He told me that in his life he received multiple *Kriya* initiations from those who claimed to have a valid lineage, although the teachings he received added nothing to what he already knew. He was enchanted by the idea of "transmission of power". That power already had within it the ability to redeem.

He did not give much importance to the practice of *Kriya* techniques – he said that they only served to purify himself before receiving the real "initiation" which for him meant "power". He was convinced that "lineage" was the most important factor to look out for while approaching a spiritual teacher

He talked a lot about the importance of following moral rules [Patanjali's *Yama* and *Niyama*.] The phases of *Pranayama* and *Pratyahara* which were my alpha and omega, were nothing for him without *Yama* and

Niyama. He behaved very cordially to me but when he spoke to me of the absolute place he gave to the moral rules listed by Patanjali he managed to make me feel like a worm. He criticized my obsession with perfecting the practice of *Kriya*. He explained that the very desire to master a meditation technique meant cultivating a desire and this was against the principles of Buddhism.

Over time, I realized that this way of following moral rules was a farce, with no level of depth and understanding of human nature.

[7] *Seventh illusion: belief of being already enlightened*

Those interested in practicing the path of *Kriya Yoga* know that serious daily discipline awaits them.

Let us focus our attention on people who became spontaneously "Enlightened" (or rather self-realized, freed from ignorance, having received enlightenment from their inner self.) Think for example of the sage *Ramana Maharshi*. Everyone is free to try to follow what *Ramana Maharshi* advised to do or to keep asking the question: "Who am I?" Reading books about his history can undoubtedly inspire us. I believe that this discipline is valid but only for spiritually evolved people and these persons are very rare.

I tried to confront the question posed by *Ramana Maharshi*. I gave myself a beautiful and poetic answer, I experienced a sense of liberation, but nothing changed in my life. The fact is that we cannot imitate such a sage by pretending to be "*Enlightened*." I understand that my path is to follow a discipline that requires psycho-physical effort and not simply an exercise in mental acrobatics. That is why I practice the discipline of breathing which is called *Pranayama*.

I am perplexed by those who have decided to walk the *Jnani* path by doing pure mental work by convincing themselves that they are like *Ramana Maharshi*: the mind is very good at nurturing this illusion.

I met a person who once practiced *Kriya*, and then, with a mechanism similar to self-hypnosis, he was convinced that he was already free from *Maya* and that therefore any other discipline was no longer necessary.

It is bad to say this but the image of a person enjoying a beautiful day lying on an inflatable mattress floating above a lake of manure comes naturally to me. The miasma of the fetid substance that supports the mattress gives off a revolting smell. But the person looks at the sky and dreams of being in the sky, immersed in a pure dimension of light. It is enough to hold your nose to ignore the stench that surrounds us.

When these people think, "I am *Maya* free" they are not telling a lie. We are actually potentially Divine! But it is also true that when they state it openly, at that precise moment they should feel that "potentially" is one

thing and reality and quite another thing.

In their philosophical view, we *kriyabans* are in a state of illusion. Our destiny is to work and fight all our life without achieving anything.

One day I felt inclined to argue with one of these people and carry on the discussion till I drop. I saw how his mind was capable of destroying, impoverishing everything I had always loved in life. I was just trying to tune in to his reasoning but his way of thinking only succeeded in bringing me into a state of alienation. When this person tried to demonstrate to me the state of *Samadhi*, looking at his wide open eyes staring into the void I realized that I was facing a person suffering from mental problems.

[8] *Eight illusion: consider themselves radically inferior to other people*

Some people have no confidence in themselves and consider themselves, from a spiritual point of view, radically inferior to other people who believe they are now free from all illusions, spiritually "enlightened."

This happened in the life of a dear *kriyaban* friend older than me, worthy of the utmost respect, who had embarked on the path of *Kriya* many years earlier. We dated in the final part of his life. He lived alone and my heart sank when I couldn't visit him for months. I met him for short afternoons when we walked around talking quietly. I write this line with a pain in my heart as I have never met a kind and selfless person like him.

I witnessed an inexorable process that led him to believe that his spiritual goal was for him to live, in a future incarnation, next to a "divine being" who for him was the living example of perfection. He told me that when he was young he had met only once the woman who was at the head of the *Kriya* organization founded by PY. Well, he told me that success in *Kriya* meant receiving a benign look of love and approval from such a person! I tried to convince him that deifying any inspiring figure could be the end of his spiritual adventure.

He was discouraged because he had seen God in that person, but he did not have the courage to see God within himself. The problem was that this way of thinking ended up corrupting the innocence of his spiritual disposition.

He expressed what, years before, he would not even have dared to think: the alleged evolution of the individual, achieved through *Kriya*, was undeniable, but so slow, as to be practically insignificant. The *Kriya* technique was, for him, like a religious rite that had to be carried out scrupulously, but only to demonstrate one's loyalty to this spiritual path.

He had fatally accepted the idea that on this planet there were special people, Self-realized, forever free from *Maya*, while, on the other hand, there were irreparably common people who would have to wait who

knows how many incarnations to get a glimpse of lighting. Unfortunately, that vision supported the plot on which he had continued to weave his thinking.

One day he vented all his melancholy. Considering how superficially – so he said – he had practiced the techniques of meditation, he had no doubts that, in this life, he would certainly have missed the "goal". He already dreamed of future incarnations where he would practice within an *ashram* near a Self-realized Master. He had already devoted his heart to this ideal destiny.

I felt a gigantic wave of inexplicable nostalgia, which was ready to overwhelm me, but which remained held, as if suspended, all around us. Today that he is gone, I wonder if the intuition of the transforming value of *Kriya*, an intuition that enlightened and sustained the first years of his path, was gradually erased from his mind due to the human tendency to emphasize (and support with an avalanche of anecdotes) the greatness of certain people who were "impudently" holy, perfect, majestic. My friend had made the tragic mistake of believing that the eternal spiritual Source at the center of his being would wither if he were condemned to live far from a divine being, similar to the one towards which he had directed the ardent expectations of his heart.

CHAPTER 10 [SECOND PART]

PRACTICAL COUNSELS

Premise on hypothetical dangers of meditation

Browsing the net often you will find warnings that warn against any form of meditation. There are reports of disconnection with reality with extreme strengthening of emotions, in particular agitation and distress, long-term disorientation where one is made unable to concentrate long enough to be able to do any work.

As for the hypothetical "premature awakening of *Kundalini*", the problems it could cause would have no limits.

We read that: "... an aspirant can develop occult powers. These powers can be used for constructive or destructive purposes, but very often they are misused. For example, the ability to read another person's mind can create problems and it is likely that those on whom this power is used ... will resent." This is really funny! When we find such nonsense we wonder who ever wrote such amenities.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency on the Internet to copy pages and bring them back to other sites without even changing a comma. If one invents that a yogi died of self-combustion during the practice of *Pranayama*, he will be able to verify that this news will appear after a couple of months on different web sites.

We read that *Yogis*, sooner or later, will get involved.... in witchcraft and black magic since they evoke, although unaware, negative entities. One author explained that: "When you repeat the *Mantra Om, Om* ... you are invoking a demonic spirit that comes to take possession of your mind." He added his testimony: "During a meditation session I began to levitate. From that second on I could no longer sleep like a human being; lost sleep! Whenever I closed my eyes, I saw the flames of Hell, I didn't dare close my eyes, I couldn't! I became a psychiatric case, and was hospitalized 26 times." I'm sorry for this poor fellow who obviously had serious mental health problems!

My experience of hearing such complaints was not without conflict. I went through some very bitter moments when I met people who told me that *Kriya* was responsible for all their psychological problems (perhaps they meant psychiatric) as well as some physical ailments.

I should have believed that simply by breathing and focusing the mind on the spine and on particular centers in the spine, they had developed various mental and physical ailments. From a blessing as it

seemed at the beginning, *Kriya* in their specific case turned out to be a serious misfortune! Those same techniques that I had experimented several times, with so much love, obtaining the purest of delights had been a disaster for them.

My reaction was this: "But how, with what spirit, with what expectations, these people faced *Kriya Yoga*? They tell me that it leads to madness ... well if the germs of madness are inside me, they will blossom both if I practice *Kriya* and otherwise. Thinking back to the glorious moments I experienced, I will walk this path without a minimum of fear, even if I should burn myself in it. "

What then should I say to those people who do not talk about the various drugs they have been using for years! A friend told me that after practicing some simple meditation techniques (something very mild such as awareness of the breath or concentration on the *Chakras*) he lost his mental balance and experienced intense attacks of anguish and terror. He made a big fuss with his complaints for example by writing on a forum dedicated to the practice of *Yoga*.

I had a strong suspicion of this friend. Why did he go to India every year, for a long series of years, without ever showing any interest in *Yoga* or Indian spirituality? I thought that maybe he was going there to get different kinds of drugs at low prices. I learned that for years he made use not only of opiates but also of acids, of all sorts of amphetamines and (emulating Carlo Castaneda) he had not denied the use of psychotropic plants. It was evident that by complaining in front of me, he was trying to exorcise the terrible suspicion that he had seriously damaged his own brain and that he was in a condition of permanent, fatal psychic disorder. He removed the hypothesis that his unfortunate past choices could be causally related to his present mental situation.

I often think about how shocking it would be to have a magic mirror where you could see a summary of your past actions and realize how reckless and cruel we have been to our bodies! I understand that in some cases a pre-existing mental disorder may prompt a person to seek drugs as a remedy. Well, in such cases I do not believe that the use of *Yoga* techniques can aggravate the condition of the state of alienation.

WHAT TO DO TO FACE NEGATIVE STATES DURING KRIYA PRACTICE

Let us face an authentic fact that has a lot to teach us. Let us consider the experience of *Gopi Krishna*. His key book is: *Kundalini: Evolutionary Energy in Man* – it is also published under the title *Living with Kundalini*.

This book contains a clear and concise autobiographical account of the *Kundalini* awakening phenomenon. *Gopi Krishna* experienced such an

awakening in 1937, although he did not have a spiritual teacher and was not initiated into any spiritual lineage. His excellent testimony was written in 1967. *Gopi Krishna's* existence was blessed with states of bliss but also plagued by physical and mental distress.

His main practice had been to visualize "an imaginary Lotus in full bloom, radiating light" located on top of his head. One day, as he sat meditating – exactly as he had done for three hours before dawn, every day for seventeen years – he became aware of a powerful, pleasant sensation at the base of his spine. He continued to meditate; the sensation began to spread and extend upward. It continued to expand until he heard, almost without warning, a roar like that of a waterfall and felt a stream of liquid light enter his brain.

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

This experience radically changed the pattern of his life. He experienced a continuous "luminous glow" around his head and began to have a variety of psychological and physiological problems. Sometimes he thought he was going crazy. He adopted a very strict diet and, for years, refused to do any more concentration exercises.

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

But let's read how he emerged from this negative experience and learn about a wonderful state of spiritual awakening that blessed him for the rest of his life. He had read in the esoteric texts that there were a number of

simple practices that could serve to bring the energy back into balance in his body. Its main remedy is very reminiscent of the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*.

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

Very interesting therefore is the way described by which *Gopi Krishna* set in motion a healing process. Convinced that he had raised *Kundalini* through *Pingala*, he attempted, and succeeded, to set *Ida* in motion, thus neutralizing the inner fire that was devouring him. He made a precise decision and kept repeating it with ferocious determination: he mentally created a cold current that rose within the central channel of the spine. This was enough to save him!

From that point forward, *Gopi Krishna* believed that this practice had a healing process in motion. He wrote about mystical experience and the evolution of consciousness from a scientific point of view. He theorized that there was a biological mechanism in the human body, *Kundalini*, responsible for creativity, genius, mystical experience. He

understood that *Kundalini* is the true cause of evolution. Of course, only a balanced method could set in motion a healthy *Kundalini* awakening.

In conclusion, what we can learn from the experience of *Gopi Krishna* is that a routine which is totally based on strong concentration in the *Sahasrara* is not appropriate for most people. Building a strong magnet in the *Sahasrara* leads you to experience moments of panic or moments when you feel disconnected from reality. If you are a beginner, forget about the techniques in which you focus for a long time on the fontanel or above it. We are all very grateful to the AYP site where the reasons for what we are saying are clearly explained.

Another interesting testimony on the awakening of *Kundalini* is that of *B. S. Goel* (1935-1998) described in his: *Psychoanalysis and Meditation*. He was truly a person without equal. His experience of *Kundalini* awakening at the age of 28 was quite dramatic. *Kundalini* awoke by itself. His friends thought he was "losing his mind" during this long process. He traveled every corner of India to look for someone who could explain what was happening to him. Many people could not help but quote and comment on various theories. They practically knew nothing. The uniqueness of this person lies in his experience of classical psychoanalysis combined with the meditation of which he was a keen advocate.

When he was 35, his *Guru* appeared to him in a dream, and told him that Psychoanalysis and Marxism, which he had believed, were false paths that did not have the power to lead him to happiness. He also told him that the only path to inner peace and joy was to go through the search for the Divine. In 1982, he opened an *Ashram* in the Himalayas to help and guide other aspirants who had had *Kundalini* experiences.

What interests us is that *Goel* talks in detail about the different degrees of suffering he went through as his ego was destroyed and rebuilt. He is the only one, apart from the late *Swami Satyananda Saraswati*, to study the role of the *Bindu* (spiritual center located at the back of the head where the hairline forms a kind of vortex). He explained that "when consciousness marches to *Bindu* (which he calls *Brahma-randhra*), the ego formations will be exposed to consciousness in free-association, in improvised writings, in dreams and above all, in meditation itself.

In the last part of the book, discussing the "signs that indicate the approach of the final goal", among a set of signs, he had the courage to mention one in particular that is not usually dealt with in books – apart from those books that want to be ironic on the whole "*Guru*" thing. He relates "the great desire to be pierced and penetrated." As for "pierced", he exemplifies it as the desire to put a fingernail in the halfway point between the two eyebrows. As for "penetrated" he clarifies that the desire for

penetration to the *Bindu* can, due to the ignorance that comes from the ego, to become the "desire for passive anal penetration." He makes it clear that a common sexual act cannot satisfy the person who really needs to be penetrated into the *Bindu* to find the ultimate spiritual bliss. He adds that: "until it reaches that stage, the yogi can often indulge in compulsive homosexuality." "It is likely that many saints of all ages would have remained great homosexuals had they stayed in their previous to holiness period."

Let us now try to conceive a wise behavior to be adopted promptly when, after *Kriya* practice, we encounter unpleasant or negative or disturbing moods.

First of all we remember that a student who wants to be successful in *Kriya* as a self-taught person must be aware of the principles underlying the human psyche. For example, it is important that you know the principle of unconscious resistance to the methods that produce a strong internal cleansing process such as those foreseen in *Kriya Yoga*. He should understand the reasons for the alternating moods that appear when practicing *Kriya* techniques intensely. He should not be alarmed by encountering phenomena that come and go but should build a solid state of calm and mental silence. The *kriyabans* who best overcome any problem are those who have studied depth psychology.

Kriya is a spiritual path, nothing else, but its procedures can touch the unconscious sphere. Even if one practices in the best way, he can experience negative moods such as depression, unmotivated fear, anxiety ... Despite being close to a glorious experience, a *kriyaban* can feel overwhelmed by an unknown power and have a panic attack. What then is the best way to regain lost tranquility?

[1] First replace the *Kriya* practice with the following technique which is simple, pleasant and absolutely safe.

Guiding Kundalini

The breath is used to move *Kundalini* along an internal path that corresponds more or less to what in *Internal Alchemy* is called "*Microcosmic Orbit*." Practicing this procedure even once produces a fantastic result. Do not complicate this exercise: it should always remain natural and pleasant.

Take a deep inhalation of about 4 seconds through the nose. Through it, draw energy from the body and guide it towards the first *Chakra*. Feel

Kundalini in this place and exhale rapidly through the open mouth "huh." ¹ The length of the exhalation is about half a second.

Now take a deep inhalation – the length is about 3-4 seconds. Feel the energy rising from the first *Chakra* to the second. After feeling *Kundalini* in the second *Chakra* quickly exhale with your mouth open "huh." The length of the exhalation is about half a second. During this exhalation you feel *Kundalini* in the second *Chakra*.

Repeat the procedure guiding *Kundalini* from the base of the spine into the third *Chakra*. [It is not necessary to perceive *Kundalini* distinctly crossing the second *Chakra*.]

The procedure is repeated by guiding *Kundalini* from the base of the spine to the fourth *Chakra*. [It is not necessary to perceive *Kundalini* distinctly crossing the second and third *Chakras*.]

The procedure is repeated by guiding *Kundalini* from the base of the spine to the fifth *Chakra*. [It is not needed ...]

The procedure is repeated by guiding *Kundalini* from the base of the spine to the *medulla oblongata*. [It is not needed ...]

Note

Those who practice with the tongue in *Kechari Mudra*, will get the same effect upon the *Chakras* by using a slight push of the diaphragm for each of them.

Let's complete the procedure. Take a quick inhalation through your nose. The length is approximately 1 second. Simply feel that *Kundalini* is present in the seventh *Chakra* – the "Thousand Petal Lotus." Now take a subtle exhalation – the length is about 4 seconds. [This exhalation occurs through the nose.] Feel the *Kundalini* energy descend from the seventh *Chakra* to the spiritual eye, in the space between the eyebrows.

Take another quick inhalation through the nose – as in the previous breath. Feel that *Kundalini* is present in the seventh *Chakra*. Now, with another exhalation (the length is about 4 seconds) you feel that the *Kundalini* energy descends from the seventh *Chakra* to the front of the fifth *Chakra*: the Adam's apple.

The procedure is repeated by guiding *Kundalini* from the seventh *Chakra* to the front of the fourth *Chakra* – the central part of the sternum. Then it is repeated guiding – from the seventh *Chakra* to the front of the third *Chakra* – the navel. Then from the seventh *Chakra* to the front of the second *Chakra*. Then from the seventh *Chakra* to the base of the spine – or the seat of *Muladhara*.

This completes the first round. Make the second round thinner than the first and the third even thinner. The action on each *Chakra* must

¹ The sound is the same you produce with your mouth when you want to fog up a glass.

become more and more sweet and internalized. This procedure, made more and more gentle and subtle, should be repeated 3-4 times.

[2] *Nadi Sodhana possibly followed by Sitali*

Surely you know the *Nadi Sodhana* technique. Practice it every day, even several times a day.

The balancing effects of *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* relate to the currents of *Ida* and *Pingala* and are almost immediate to perceive. It is explained that the *Ida* current (of a female nature, linked to introversion and the state of rest) flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column, while the *Pingala* current (of a male nature linked to extroversion and physical activity) flows parallel to *Ida* on the right side. *Sushumna* flows in the middle and represents the ideal state to be obtained before entering the state of "*meditation*." An imbalance between *Ida* and *Pingala* is responsible for the lack of harmony between introversion and extroversion. When *Ida* exceeds in functioning we have an excess of introversion, when *Pingala* predominates we have an excess of extroversion.

There are times when we feel more externalized; others in which we are more internalized. In a healthy person, this alternation is characterized by the balance between a life of positive relationships with the outside world and a serene contact with one's inner life. The too introverted person tends to lose contact with external reality. The consequence is that the vicissitudes of life seem to join forces against him and this undermines the sense of control, of mastery of the facts of life. The too extroverted person betrays fragility in dealing with what arises from the subconscious realm and may find himself having to face unexpected moments of anguish. The exercise that we now illustrate favors a balance between the tendency to introversion and the tendency to extroversion.

For the problems we are dealing with, add *Sitali Pranayama*. (I remember that creating a feeling of coolness rising through the spine was exactly what *Gopi Krishna* did to get out of his terrible situation.)

To practice *Sitali*, sit with the spine straight and concentrate all mental strength at the point between the eyebrows. Use all your imagination to raise a fresh current within your spine. Breathe in through your mouth while holding your tongue in a particular way. Lift the edges of your tongue to form a "U" and let it protrude beyond your lips. Inhale deeply through your tongue and mouth. Feel a fresh sensation in the mouth, transfer it to the spine. Exhale through the nose, ideally directing the breath to all parts of the body. Repeat at least 12 times

[3] *Intense practice of Mula Bandha for 108 repetitions*

Forget the breath altogether, try to tune into the calm at the point between the eyebrows. Quietly but intensely practice 108 *Mula Bandha*. Contract the muscles at the base of the spine, hold the contraction for a couple of seconds and relax. Repeat ... Don't rush: each contraction and relaxation should last at least four seconds. You can, if it suits you, do several short sessions until you complete the 108 repetitions. The beneficial effect of this practice is almost immediate.

Note

In classical *Yoga* the three fundamental *Bandhas* are:

Mula Bandha: Contract the muscles at the base of the spine

Uddiyana Bandha: draws the abdominal muscles internally by contracting them

Jalandhara Bandha: Lower the chin to the chest

In the initial part of the *Kriya* path, the *yogi* has only an approximate understanding of the *Bandhas*, later he will come to a complete mastery of them and will be able to use them, with slight adaptations, in many *Kriya* techniques. Here we have introduced the *Maha Bandha* as it creates a sense of energetic current, an almost ecstatic internal thrill that moves up the spine. A positive mood is thus favored.

Completion of Mula Bandha with Japa rotating in Kutastha

We know how important the practice of *Japa* is. It calms the mind.

Inhale and then create a particular pause after inhaling. During this pause mentally chant the *Mantra* of your choice. Feel that this *Mantra* is something that rotates in the sphere of *Kutastha*.

What does "something that rotates" mean? You have surely seen those acrobats running their motorcycles within a metal sphere – which is a few meters in diameter. They move along the inside of the sphere in all directions. Well, pretend that your *Kutastha* is a sphere within which you rotate your *Mantra*. (More slowly, of course.) Do this until you feel a strong presence sensation in the center between the eyebrows. A good choice is to repeat some of these breaths.

[4] *Avoid long concentration in the Sahasrara*

We have remembered that a routine that is totally based on strong concentration in the *Sahasrara* is not appropriate for most people who are taking their first steps on the spiritual path.

For this reason we have explained that this form of concentration can be used only after having practiced 48 *Kriya* breaths. This practice stimulates the awakening of *Kundalini*. This implies acting on our Unconscious bringing into the sphere of our consciousness some contents

that we are not able to assimilate. The person experiencing all of this, especially if they are far from emotional maturity, could experience a whole range of negative moods.

Except for *Kutastha*, *Anahata* and *Manipura*, be very careful with the techniques that affect only one *Chakra*. If you want to unlock an energetic or psychic knot, remember that a knot (*Granti*) is not like we represent it, that is, like the knot of a rope. It has an interdependence with all the other nodes, they are subtly intertwined, one within the other. If you focus on one knot for a long time, you risk losing your peace of mind. Do not act like a surgeon who sets out to remove a gallstone stuck in an organ, without taking all necessary precautions to avoid destroying the organ and killing the patient.

If the result of your practice boils down to a grayish state of your mind, if you have the impression that your soul is 'scratched', this is a sign that you need to add the remedies we have described above. If you do this and live a normal life, your *Yoga* practice will never cause you problems.

CHAPTER 11

THE VALUE OF JAPA

In the previous chapter we reported the complaints of those who after practicing *Kriya* for years feel that they have not achieved anything. In this chapter I want to explain how to avert this nightmare for those who are willing to make a sacrifice to get something out of their practice. For this I will speak about *Japa*.

Japa (*Devotional Prayer, Inner Prayer*) especially if it becomes continuous and is supported by the practice of the "*Presence of the Divine*" is a wonderful spiritual discipline, a complete path in itself. This form of *Prayer* is not a plea to God for the purpose of obtaining something necessary for material existence. Mystics use *Prayer* to affirm their intention to worship and surrender completely to the Divine.

Let's try to understand why in this book dedicated to *Kriya Yoga* I intend to dedicate an entire chapter to *Japa*. The fact is that I know that for someone this tool could be decisive for having a direct experience of spiritual reality. In short: *Japa* can calm your mind to the point where you enter the breathless state after *Kriya Pranayama* and the experience of this state will mark your entry into spiritual reality.

In chapter 3 I describe how the idea of practicing *Japa* entered my life. In short, one day I found a book on the life and experiences of *Swami Ramdas* (1884-1963), the Indian saint who moved across India incessantly repeating the *Mantra* "*Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram.*" While I was still struck by the beauty of this book, I received a Catholic rosary as a gift. During a walk in the countryside I decided to use it to repeat this *Mantra*.

I practiced it in a low voice for about 108 repetitions. During my practice I tried to feel the vibration of the *Mantra* in my head and in all parts of my chest. In this repetition I placed all the aspiration of my heart. I completed my walk by letting the effects of this practice stay in my mind.

Well, after a few hours, that evening during my *Kriya* session, I had an experience that changed my life. During *Mental Pranayama* while my awareness lingered on each *Chakra* I perceived that a new state of consciousness was manifesting. My breathing went still, my mind completely quieted down. At some point I realized that I was completely out of breath. This condition lasted several minutes, without feeling any sense of discomfort, or excitement of surprise. I felt a great sense of freedom.

The next day the same experience happened again. I was surprised

that one of the simplest techniques in the world, like *Japa*, had produced such an amazing result! Where my best intentions failed, *Japa* had produced the miracle! In those days I verified the constant link between the practice of *Japa* and the attainment of the breathless state.

My first reflection was that the effect of *Japa* was to cancel out the "background noise" of the mind. In fact, I realized that the effects of this "noise" constantly ruin our meditation. There are some thoughts that can be visualized, identified and blocked during meditation practice, but a widespread and persistent background noise thwarts any effort to enjoy the main fruit of meditation: the breathless state.

Not being hermits, when we take refuge in our room to practice *Kriya*, we cannot reach the ideal conditions of relaxation in twenty or thirty minutes. It takes longer to completely calm the mind. Therefore, even if the *Kriya* process is carried out with the utmost care, the strength of the background noise becomes an insurmountable obstacle. The only way to undo it is not in the tricks of some technique, but in *Japa*. When we practice *Japa* during the day then, in the last part of the *Kriya* routine, we find that the background noise of the mind has given way to stillness and transparency: the experience is unexpected. This tool is unique and can truly produce "miracles"!

A mind absorbed in the aspiration towards the Divine through the daily practice of *Japa* becomes capable of performing the greatest of miracles: interrupting the useless "internal dialogue" of the mind, the continuous source of energy expenditure, the main obstacle to reaching the state of meditation.

When the state of *Mental Silence* is reached, spiritual reality manifests naturally, without further effort. Otherwise, deprived of this state, we risk dragging our existence forward thinking with admiration about the lives of the saints, resigned to the false idea that mystical experience is fatally precluded to us.

Once the state of *Mental Silence* has been created, the main effect of *Kriya* will take place in our life. By going through all the layers that protect the Ego (thoughts, emotions, sensations ...) the experience of the breathless state will manifest itself. It is very wise therefore to accept the help of *Japa*.

I hope I was clear, I hope you took what I said seriously. I sincerely hope that what has worked for me and some of my friends will work for you as well.

The first part of this chapter will teach you how to practice *Japa*, the second part describes a meditation practice, always related to *Japa*, which is called "*Prayer of the heart*."

How to find your Mantra

Many books introducing the practice of *Japa* insist upon a heap of banalities. Often they are useless essays deprived of any intelligence and passion. For example when I read that the *mala* should be made of this or of that material, or that it should not be seen by others, or that the *Sumeru* bead (where the *mala* begins and ends) should never be passed [they say that if you want to practice the *mala* twice, you must turn it and make the last bead become the first bead of the second round] I know that these are first-class idiocies. Likewise when I read that the power of the *Prayer* lies not in your effort but in a "Grace" that comes only when you use a particular formula canonized by a traditional pattern of worship, I know that this is another falsehood. Yes there is a "Grace" but this is linked with the fervor you put in your practice.

Therefore choose a *Mantra* (*Prayer*) that appeals to you. Don't feel obliged to use Lahiri Mahasaya's favored *Vasudeva Mantra* ("*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*".) It is true that among different favorite prayers, you could prefer one that has (by adding, if necessary, *Om* or *Amen* at the beginning or at the end) twelve syllables. Twelve is a perfect number because you can utilize it during *Kriya Pranayama*, placing each of its syllables in a different *Chakra*. Various beautiful twelve-syllables *Mantras* can be taken out of spiritual chants or poems. As an example, from the well-known Adi Shankara's chant you can select the beautiful 12-syllable verse: *Chi-da-nan-da-ru-pah-shi-vo-ham-shi-vo-ham* [*That Form which is pure consciousness and bliss, I am that supreme Being!*]

One thing should be stated objectively: YOUR *Mantra* should express or evoke exactly what YOU want to achieve, and embody the attitude you want to express. For example, the attitude of surrender is expressed by *Mantras* beginning with *Om Namō*, other *Mantras* might express the absolute non-dual realization. Sometimes, the meaning is not as important as having in one's heart the example of a saint who used that *Mantra*.

Generally speaking, a good choice is that of a *Mantra* having both a strong and a soft tone. Be sensitive to the vibration that your *Mantra* arouses in your body and heart.

At the start of each session of *Prayer* it is important to feel a surge of passion in your heart. A nun living in a cloister revealed during an interview which *Prayer/Mantra* she chose: "Thy face, O LORD, will I seek!" Can we feel the surge of deep emotions that such words aroused in her bosom when she chose them (among the Psalms) and which intensity of love she infused in their repetition during all her life?

In literature you will see how beautiful *Mantras* have been built. Here you

have the *Krishna Mantra*: *Om Klim Krishnaya Govindaya Gopi-jana Vallabhaya Swaha*. Here you have the *Durga* (Divine Mother) *Mantra*: *Om Hrim Dhum Durgaye Namaha*. Here you have the *Shiva Mantra*: *Om Nama Shivaya Sing Vang Kim Am*.

If you study the concept of *Bija Mantra*, you can forge for yourself some good *Mantras*. To a pre-existing *Mantra*, after the initial *Om*, your teacher can add some "*Bija*" (seed) *Mantras* like: Aim, Dúm, Gam, Haum, Hoom, Hrim, Hrom, Krim, Shrim, Strim, Vang, ...

These sounds were chosen by ancient *yogis*, who felt their beauty and liked their vibration. They were not given by a divinity, they are a human discovery. These seed *Mantras* have no meaning but can enrich a *Mantra* who has a meaning. Don't choose a *Mantra* only because certain literature extols the power of this or of that *Bija Mantra*. Read your mood, feel your emotions after an intense practice of a certain *Mantra*.

Some make an unfortunate choice, through which they seem to punish themselves. The sentence they have chosen to repeat could have negative tones and emphasize unequivocally their limits and unworthiness. When this happens it is clear that after a short time, their practice of *Japa* falls apart – they find themselves repeating that *Mantra* once or twice during the day, like a sigh of dejection.

How to practice your Mantra

Although Eastern traditions recommend practicing *Japa* mentally, I have no doubt that it should be practiced with the voice – at least for an initial number of one hundred repetitions. Make a decision to complete at least one *Mala* (108-bead rosary) of repetitions in a normal tone of voice.²

In order not to disturb those around you, you can whisper the *Prayer* while maintaining a minimum of intensity such that you can listen to yourself. At the beginning of the practice try to feel the meaning of the words. Pronounce the syllables with a calm demeanor. Learn to make them resonate in your mouth, chest and various areas of the head.

If you practice walking back and forth in a room, you are likely to have an irresistible urge to put things around you in order. This makes you understand how the repetition of the *Prayer* produces a similar order in your mind as well. In fact, it cleanses your mental substance and puts in order all your "psychological furniture." The practice is like a jackhammer that shatters the concrete of the mind which is made up of the conditioning

² A teacher was adamant about the fact that a *Mantra* should be pronounced only mentally. I tried to follow his counsel but it didn't work. After various months I was fed up with my useless attempt: I dared to chant it vocally on my *Mala*. Before completing my 108 repetitions, a spring of happiness and mirth gushed from my heart.

of the mind: it allows you to cross its quicksand unscathed and reach the state of pure awareness.

A great obstacle, for many fatal, is that you may slip into a state of discouragement and have to confront the idea that *Japa* is a mind-numbing practice and therefore that it is better to collaborate with spiritual evolution using more powerful and effective. If this happens, appeal to your moral strength and turn your doubts into a calm euphoria. Strengthen your will. Break the wall of impossibility that life has placed before you. Whatever abyss of mental confusion and spiritual dryness you find yourself in, practice *Japa*, repeat your *Mantra* with superhuman calm and determination!

Complete the 108 repetitions, close your mouth and let the *Japa* effortlessly progress into the background of your consciousness. Feel the protective shell made of tangible peace surrounding your person. I am not asking you to adopt a certain visualization but to try to be aware of the subtle and peaceful "substance" in which you are immersed. Sometimes this substance will be also felt by those who come in contact with you.

A useful tip is to practice *Japa* at least one hour before the *Kriya* session. Remember that after the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*, there is space for a long phase of internalization where the senses become dead to the external reality and are totally open to the internal reality.

If you decide to practice the *Higher Kriyas* (which involve physical movement) then start your routine with 24 *Kriya* breaths, at this point do your *Higher Kriyas* and then resume the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* in order to recreate a state of stillness in your being. Then dedicate only to the practice of *mental Pranayama*.

Crossing the border of exhaustion

I tried to pass this experience on to other people. I remember a friend who practiced *Kriya* without getting any results. I told him about *Japa* but could not explain myself well. One day he showed me how he had interpreted my instruction and I witnessed a lifeless practice, a weary plea for mercy from God. I understood that for him *Japa* was only a brief emotional release. The *Mantra* he had chosen was nothing more than a sigh of self-pity. It was no wonder that, after a while, he gave up the practice.

Everything changed when he took part in a group pilgrimage. On that occasion someone began to recite the Catholic Rosary and all the pilgrims joined in this practice. Though tired and almost out of breath, my friend did not shy away from this act of devotion. Walking and whispering the *Prayer*, he began to enter a state of tranquility never known before. He looked at the spectacle of the landscapes that changed around him as he proceeded with different eyes and it seemed to him that he was living in a

heavenly situation. He continued to repeat the *Prayer* non-stop along the entire route (which exceeded 20 miles), completely forgetting that he was tired and sleepy. When the group stopped for a break he was lucky enough to be left alone, undisturbed. He entered an introspective state and was pervaded by something radiating from his heart that he identified with *Spiritual Reality*. The ecstatic state became solid as a rock, then it was almost unbearable, it overwhelmed him.

It is interesting to report how my friend summarized in a few words the correct way to practice *Japa*. In fact, he said that the secret consisted in reaching and overcoming the state of "exhaustion". After a few days he chose to repeat the same *Mantra* I had chosen and, thanks to it, he achieved the breathless state.

Well, perhaps it is not necessary to cross the border of exhaustion. Usually excellent effects are obtained by completing one *Mala* (a rosary of 108 beads) a day aloud and then letting the repetition of one's *Mantra* continue mentally and automatically. Nonetheless, the "law of exhaustion" is a precious resource for overcoming any possible internal resistance and thus experiencing, for the first time, the breathless state.

Consider *Lahiri Mahasaya's* motto "*Banat, Banat, ban jay!*" (doing, doing, one day done!) It gives you the idea of a person who, without ever getting discouraged, makes a great effort and then reaches the goal. The effort required of you is to remove the obstacles created by the mind. Practice *Japa* and the spiritual dimension will manifest without further effort on your part.

We look for God in books, but it is in Prayer that we find him. Prayer is the key that opens the door to God's heart for us. (*Padre Pio of Pietrelcina*)

A protest by some kriyabans

My enthusiasm for the practice of *Japa* was disturbed by an objection I received from some *kriyabans*. They told me that the *Kriya* techniques contain everything that is necessary for the spiritual path and that therefore we do not need other practices. They added, "Neither *Guruji* nor *Lahiri Mahasaya* taught *Japa* – *kriyabans* don't need it." They even seemed bothered by the thought that practicing *Japa* could pollute the purity of their spiritual path.

Now, I have good reason to believe that many of those who went to *Lahiri Mahasaya* not only already practiced *Japa*, but had taken the path of *Kriya Yoga* not to initiate something inherently different, but to deepen and intensify the practice of the *Continuous Prayer*, where they had

already poured their soul. Probably for some, receiving *Thokar* initiation represented the final crowning of their effort to attain the elevated state of the *Prayer of the heart*. There must be a reason why *Continuous Prayer* ("*Inner Prayer*", "*Prayer of the Heart*", "*Dhikr*") was and is the basic technique used by many mystics.

Perhaps the pride and arrogance of some have helped to spread the idea that *Japa* is an all too simple practice, suitable for simpletons – those who do not understand anything about *Prana* and *Chakra*.

It is a pity that *Kriya* schools do not officially give the teaching of *Devotional Prayer (Japa)*. The fact is that I saw the eyes filled with joy and sincere surrender to the Divine of those *kriyabans* who added – during the day, when they could be alone even for a few minutes – the practice of *Japa*.

Conclusion

Try to reflect for a moment: if all religions recommend *Prayer* as a fundamental act of their faith, will there be a valid reason? Or should we think that millions and millions of people are not very intelligent and it is we alone with our *Kriya* who know the right thing to do? I think we better humbly surrender to the evidence.

There are many reasons for practicing *Japa*. The project of giving up the pleasures of uncontrolled thinking during the day is a sacrifice that generates a new mind. Pursuing this goal, *Japa* transforms *Pranayama* from a simple exercise that aims to modify the state of some energetic currents in our body in cohabitation with a continuous state of bliss.

Indeed, you will never find such a precious practice as *Japa* to improve your *Kriya*. *Japa* works on the subconscious mind. One cannot practice *Kriya* with pure and simple willpower, it is necessary to obtain a state of deep relaxation.

So decide to "touch" this celestial dimension every day while remaining faithful to your practice of *Japa*. The magic of your bright, shimmering *Mantra* will spread to every aspect of your life.

Only in this dimension will you feel alive along the Spiritual Path. When you then have the experience of the breathless state, you will never be able to forget it and you will try to experience it every day of your life.

GOOD READINGS

The way of a Pilgrim

I recommend that you read the book "*The way of a pilgrim*." This is a novel written by an anonymous person in the mid-nineteenth century, translated into English in 1930, and it constitutes the best introduction to the spiritual

current of *Hesychasm*.

As for the story contained in the book, no one knows for sure whether it is a true story about a particular pilgrim, or a spiritual novel created to spread the mystical dimension of the Christian Orthodox faith. Some, on the basis of certain testimonies, identify the author as the Russian Orthodox monk Archimandrite Mikhail Kozlov. Whatever the historical truth, such a pilgrim is the ideal representative of all those who spend their lives visiting sanctuaries, churches, monasteries, Mount Athos, the Holy Land, seeking God through *Continuous Prayer*.

The story is of a pilgrim who was returning from the Holy Sepulcher and who stopped at Mount Athos. One is struck by the opening words: "By the grace of God, I am a Christian, by my actions, a great sinner, and by calling, a homeless wanderer of the humblest birth roaming from place to place. My worldly goods are a knapsack with some dried bread in it, and in my breast pocket a Bible. And that is all". Below is a description of how the pilgrim was determined to travel the steppes to infinity in order to find a spiritual guide who would reveal the secret of the *Continuous Prayer*. The novel is therefore a story of his own research on how to be able to "pray continuously" – as St. Paul had recommended.

One day the pilgrim's ardor was rewarded when a spiritual master accepted him as a disciple and clarified every detail of the practice. The pilgrim was instructed to repeat the *Jesus Prayer* 3000 times a day, then 6000, then 12000. Following this advice, one day the pilgrim discovered that the *Prayer* had reached the secret and mysterious area of the heart. It happens spontaneously that the syllables of the *Prayer* were pronounced in synchrony with the beating of the heart. From then on, no matter what happened, the pilgrim would never be separated from God again.

The main reason for the attraction of the book *The Way of a Pilgrim* is the presentation of the life of a pilgrim as a model of life for those who wish to lead a spiritual life.

Of course, we *kriyabans* are "pilgrims", worn out and exasperated, moving from one pseudo guru to another – each frighteningly ignorant, faithful to one belief: that we Westerners are gullible who enjoy being deceived.

Thanks to the inspiration that comes from *The Way of a Pilgrim* we can decide to try the practice of *Japa*, or to mentally whisper the *Prayer* we have chosen for a couple of hours a day. Instead of indulging in idleness, let's taste the divine honey of *Contemplative Prayer*. This leads us to a sincere act of opening our hearts to the Divine. We gradually discover that the goal that the Russian pilgrim has set for himself – reaching the state of *Continuous Prayer*, a real Heaven on earth, a state of unparalleled beauty – is not a myth, it can be achieved in our life.

Saint Teresa of Avila

Very much inspiring is the reading of the works of Teresa of Avila who emphasizes the importance of the "Interior Prayer". Let us treasure her teachings.³

To those who have not yet approached interior prayer, she begs them not to deprive themselves of such a good. She teaches that expecting to enter the spirit world without first entering ourselves is madness. Interior prayer is the means given by the Divine to acquire perfection. Each person has been given the opportunity to reach the true purpose of their existence: each is required to grasp their life with resolve and undertake a path of movement towards the center of their being. On this journey "souls without interior prayer are like a crippled and paralyzed body that has hands and feet, but cannot move them."

She explains that the practice of interior prayer begins with the voice, that is, using a certain formula without reciting it quickly and without attention. You choose a single formula, not several formulas.

A memorized prayer is often used. It must be simple but it must involve the soul and the body. Fidelity to it is important. It is clear that this internal prayer must not be reduced to a monotonous and distracted recitation of words, without thinking about what is being said and without participating with the heart.

If involuntary distractions occur there is no need to worry, it is worth the attention with which we began to pray, which in a certain sense continues to act, orienting us towards the Divine, unless we voluntarily withdraw the desire to enter communion with the Divine. It is useless to pray if it does not lead us to get in touch with God, and this happens when one enters into confidence and surrender. We must bring our whole life and our own pains and limitations into prayer with the trust of those who believe in the healing power of the love of the Divine.

Having clarified how to begin, it is interesting to see how according to Teresa of Avila we get to the heart of the practice. The core of the internal prayer is constituted by the overwhelming experience of loving the Divine to which one is addressed. Prayer is no longer a repeated, mechanical, mnemonic verbal recitation, but the intimate expression to the Divine of

³ Saint Teresa of Ávila (March 28, 1515 – October 4, 1582) was a Carmelite nun. Her teaching flows from her own experience and not from books. She saw that with a simple *Prayer*, to be repeated without cease, a soul can cross all the different levels of the spiritual path up to the union with God.

our personal feeling of love! Prayer becomes an intimate relationship of friendship, a frequent entertainment alone with the One by whom we know we are loved. It becomes the realization of being in company with the one we know we are loved by! Teresa of Avila repeats this concept in her writings: "Prayer does not consist in thinking a lot, but in loving a lot". This sincere transport towards the Divine is an attitude that must last a lifetime. Prayer should not be done sometimes and then postponed to who knows when, waiting for it to give then who knows what fruit! It is a good thing during the day to recall the resolution we formulated during prayer, to continue the day in His presence.

God can lead souls to Himself through many paths, but prayer is the "sure way". Leaving it means getting lost.

She thinks that if we pass a period without prayer, the Divine welcomes us as before. The word of God is immutable: God does not change, it is we who change. God is not afraid if we have forgotten about Him. He's afraid we won't look for Him! He fears that we will lose our confidence in Him. Sometimes He gives us greater graces after we have abandoned Him for a while!

As for the Divine, no one has ever taken Him in vain as a friend. Let us remember that it is He who pushes us to pray! And it is He who listens and responds. No one doubts that the best friend does not listen to him when he speaks to him or confides in him. Sometimes we don't hear His answers because we talk, we talk. Let's try to be silent. Sooner or later we will listen to that "voice" without sound yet so talkative!

She explained that with the Prayer:

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

Sometimes her words may seem obscure to people – however with the practice of *Kriya* they become clear. Let's consider this example:

The soul is wounded with love for the Divine. Body and Spirit are in the throes of a sweet, happy pain, alternating between a fearful fiery glow, a complete impotence, unconsciousness, and a feeling of *suffocation*, sometimes intermixed with such an ecstatic flight that the body is literally lifted into space. There are moments in which you feel like an arrow has deeply penetrated your heart. One laments with such a vivid and intense pain, but at the same time the experience is so delicious you never want it to end.

She is explaining what happens when spiritual energy enters the heart. This description is true, profoundly true. When you experience that such a force arises, no other reaction can occur, other than a gigantic wave of love towards the Divine, the force of which intensifies in the heart center, as if a powerful hand were gripping it. When you return to the normal state of consciousness, you cannot stop the tears of devotion.

Let nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you, all things are passing, God is unchanging. Patience gains all; nothing is lacking to those who have God: God alone is sufficient.

In conclusion, according to Teresa, Prayer is EVERYTHING in the mystical path. She firmly believed that the soul that does not create the habit of *Prayer* will not reach the mystical goal. There is no other exercise on which she insist so much in all her writings and which she attach so much importance to.

You can do nothing without *Prayer* and you can do miracles with it.

Let us stop at this point and reflect: " The soul that does not create the habit of *Prayer* will not reach the mystical goal! " This statement is like an arrow that comes from the Divine itself. It gives me chills.

I wonder what a person who has only the "scientific method of *Kriya*" in hand can do when he does not also have *Prayer*. Teresa says that that soul will not reach the mystical goal. I think we can now understand the reason for the failure of so many people.

A note on Tibetan Buddhism

I must admit that Tibetan Buddhism insists so much on the value of the *Mantra* that I could not fail to mention this source of inspiration.

Their teaching is to repeat: "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" (I greet the jewel in the lotus) over and over again until the chaos of thoughts subsides. We rarely encounter technical observations, practical teachings, but you can find them if you keep looking.

Amid an enormous amount of tedious rhetoric, I found a beautiful lesson. I try to summarize it: by repeating a *Mantra*, the pulse of the heart becomes clearly perceptible and the attention turns to the simple movement of the breath through the nostrils in and out ... in and out. You are no longer lost in thoughts. You are no longer upset. You are in the state of meditation. The layers that cover your true being reveal your true nature which is love and compassion.

If Tibetan Buddhism stopped there, everything would be perfect. Unfortunately they attempt a childish demonstration of how all the Buddha's teachings are contained in the *Mantra*: "*Om Mani Padme Hum.*" You also find blatant exaggerations such as the fact that if any animal or insect should hear this *Mantra* before dying, it would be reborn in the pure land of *Amitabha* Another story is that by reciting the *Mantra* with participation and correct understanding, all suffering will dissolve and up to seven generations of that person's descendants will not be reborn in the lower realms. ..

A little annoyed we read that seeing the written form of the *Mantra* has the same effect as reciting it ... or that the fact of rotating the written form of the *Mantra* around a wheel gives the same benefit as saying the *Mantra* ... We are used to such nonsense and we know for sure that the beauty, purity and value of the practice of the *Mantra* said with our voice and heart has no substitutes.

THE PRAYER OF THE HEART

In the book "*The way of a pilgrim*" there is the description of how the pilgrim, following the instructions of his Master, discovers one day that the *Prayer* is on his lips and in his mind every moment he is awake – as spontaneously and effortlessly as the breath itself. In this wonderful condition he is able to experience the effulgence of divine light, the intimate "secret of the heart".

"Like a person enjoying the beauty of a chilly winter near the fireside, one who practices continuous prayer contemplates either the sad or the joyous spectacle of life having found the infinity of the skies residing in their heart! Prayer is a marvelous gem whose glitter warms up life. Its magic spreads into each facet of life, like walking out of a dark room into fresh air and sunlight.

We now want to talk about this interior "secret of the heart". Many think that the *Prayer of the heart* is a *Prayer* pronounced with sincere devotion, reflecting on the meaning of the words of which it is composed ... In reality it is much more! It is the *Prayer* chanted in sync with the beats of the heart. Each beat coincides with a syllable of the *Prayer*. To explain how to do this, I will describe two preliminary steps.

[First preliminary step] *Merging the Prayer with the breath*

Sit comfortably with your spine as straight as possible and try to lengthen the rhythm of your breathing. Breathe in and out through the nostrils so that the breath makes a slight noise in the throat. As soon as the breath

reaches a steady and regular rhythm, combine the *Prayer* with the movement of the breath. If the *Prayer* is short, repeat it mentally as you inhale and again as you exhale. If the *Prayer* is long, mentally repeat half as you inhale and half as you exhale. If you are unable to complete the *Prayer* during a full breath, this means that the *Prayer* you have chosen is too long.

After a few breaths combined with the *Prayer*, proceed as follows. Breathe in. As you exhale, let your chin touch your chest and feel the *Prayer* reach the heart *Chakra*. Remain motionless in this position with your eyes closed for a few moments perceiving a radiance. Repeat and repeat. By this practice you are emptying the contents of your mind. It is difficult to think of a single thought: the state of *Mental Silence* appears very strong. Subtle happiness pervades your soul. Stay in this dimension as long as possible.

[Second preliminary step] *Prayer in the form of a cross*

Practice a few breaths as follows. As you inhale, you feel a movement of energy going from the left side of the body to the right side. As you exhale, feel a movement of energy from the right side of the body to the left. With this breath, another breath follows creating a cross. The energy, perceived in the abdominal region, moves upward through the dorsal region during inhalation and returns downward during exhalation. As in the previous practice, combine the *Prayer* with the movements of the breath.

Continue alternating between the two ways of breathing. Feel how concentration on the heart *Chakra* naturally intensifies. It only takes 6 pairs of breaths to make this breathing automatic and effortless.

Drawing this "cross" using two full breaths constitutes a cycle. The breathing is very calm. Inhalation and exhalation last approximately 3 seconds each. Do this for at least 10 minutes.

By repeating this practice in the following days you will notice how the procedure is internalized. In other words, you will begin to feel the energetic movement as the breath becomes shorter and shorter, almost non-existent. You will be impressed with the effectiveness of this procedure. 108 unhurried cycles take no more than 30 minutes.

This way of praying can be a decisive, providential help for a person who experiences a rift between the sphere of the mind and that of the heart. I can assure you that the deepest and most lasting results will not only be perceived by you but those who have known you for some time will see them. They will notice (with sincere amazement) your transformation.

Prayer of the heart

After many days of practicing the "*Prayer in the form of a cross*" you are ready to practice the actual *Prayer of the heart*. You will need to have at

least 20 minutes of free time.

Feel the "*place of the heart*", turn all your attention to it, forget the breath. Try to feel the heartbeat. The perception need not be very clear. Just a little. If you persist, the perception will become clearer and clearer by the day.

In the meditation position, with the chin slightly lowered, make each beat coincide with a syllable of the *Prayer*. This is also difficult, but don't give up. With this new criterion, applied constantly, you will reach the stage where the breath first and the heartbeat then tend to slow down. Finally you will understand what it means to pray no longer with "*the mind in the head*", but with "*the mind in the heart*."

Transformation happening in your life

The *devotional Prayer* which becomes a daily habit and is deepened in the *Prayer of the heart* represents the most direct way of "straightening" one's spiritual path. It has the power to make every effort made in the past in the spiritual field converge in the right direction. Your mind will always remain the same but you will have the impression of having access to a completely new perception of reality. This is because the heart plays a decisive role.

The study of the literature on the concept that the heart mysteriously functions as a brain in its own right is very inspiring.

We stay away from controversy: we have no scientific proof that the heart has its own "brain." Nevertheless a serious and sensitive person will have evidence that this "brain of the heart" affects our consciousness. It is clear that creating a relationship of harmony with it is a very important step for what concerns our evolution.

It is like following an "internal teacher" whose suggestions guide you to manifest a more subtle and creative intelligence. A great revolution happens in your life. You will be aware of the filter, built by the conditioning, that has distorted your perception of reality. You will see the flowering of the best qualities in your personality (deep gratification, feelings of gratitude towards every little beautiful thing that happens in our life, unconditional love towards the Divine.)

When the *Prayer of the heart* is practiced seriously, the *Prayer* becomes continuous. In every possible moment of silence you will be aware of the *Prayer* which gently and comfortably continues to repeat itself, like music in the background of your consciousness. When silence is not possible you will keep silence in your heart. You will feel like a burning brazier located in the chest region. This first mild sensation can turn into a feeling of

solidification of the heart that feels like a point surrounded by infinite pressure.⁴ In this way you live, always remembering God. This harmony is not lost during sleep.

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

The soul is aware of a deep satisfaction. Something that tastes like eternal life invades your being. The soul feels that it is in contact with an *Infinite Goodness*. The intensity of this state grows and grows. You realize that you are not in a position to resist this all-consuming emotion: you realize that behind it is the Divine.

Unheard of Light is born from this ineffably,
And thence, beyond all telling, the heart's illumination.
Last comes – a step that has no limit
Though compassed in a single line –
Perfection that is endless.

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

SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH JAPA

Japa on a pilgrimage

After many years of my first experiences with *Japa*, I decided to have a more intense experience with it. Beginning with Monday, I decided to only practice *Japa* in my routine until Saturday when I would take part in a pilgrimage, praying "incessantly."

During the days of preparation I went to the countryside not to practice my *Kriya* routine but only to practice *Japa*. It was a clear day and looking up at the blue sky I could contemplate a couple of clouds floating in the golden light. I sat down and began to repeat the *Prayer*. The session lasted longer than I had anticipated. I felt supported by a calm euphoria.

After ten minutes I began to chant the *Prayer* mentally. I observed that the *Prayer* was repeated in the spine in sync with the breath. This was irresistible, it was impossible for me to act differently. I mentally sang half of the *Prayer* during the inhalation and half during the exhalation.

It came spontaneously to me to move my chin up and down following the movement of the *Prayer* in the spine. The passion that warmed my heart intensified when, descending with the *Prayer*, I reached

⁴ St Theresa also explains the same concept: "From this pressure comes a strange experience of pain. We perceive the Divine, the endless Light and we burn of love. We realize the moment has not yet come to become one with that endless Light and Bliss: hence tears of intense longing.

the heart *Chakra*. There was a tendency to prolong the exhalation. At the end of the exhalation I remained with my chin down and with my eyes closed for a few moments, perceiving the annihilation of my mind.

As I wrote, Saturday was the day of the pilgrimage. The plan was to walk all night to be able to reach a beautiful shrine the following morning. As I walked mentally repeating my *Mantra*, I had the sweet intuition that my friends' lives were enveloped in love. I moved around as if my heart contained a brazier. The center of what I call "myself" was not in the brain but in my heart. And in my heart I felt like a tension of tenderness. The vision increased in power. I was pervaded by the perception that my peers could not instinctively avoid loving or taking care of someone – their children for example. Each had the power to perform great and incredible deeds. As a result, no one was sure that he was protected from painful experiences. Their life, being immersed in love was also immersed in pain and tragedy. Duality is implicit in earthly existence, intertwined with our being. The sense of this reality that no one can escape was experienced as a painful squeeze that broke my chest.

While I was immersed in these thoughts, the sun rose on our path and the sanctuary appeared on a hill, something melted in my depths and an intensity of love was born that the same experience turned into a pain filled with bliss.

I went back to the countryside many times to focus on plain *Japa*. I increased the length of my practice. Summer came with long sunsets and evenings that seemed to have no end. Living those long sessions in the countryside, in total freedom and in a state of mystical "intoxication" was an unforgettable event. I am so nostalgic for that period. The devotion I felt then was not the classic feeling that we call *Bhakti*. It was the sense of being shattered, annihilated by something that in my journals I call "Unbearable Beauty." Then, lost in my innocent exaltation, I compared this state with the meditative experience that St. Teresa of Avila called "Infused Recollection. "

A glorious delirium, a celestial folly, a state of unspeakable delights. It is an inebriation of love in which the soul doesn't know what to do, whether to speak or to keep silent, whether to cry or to laugh. The soul is conscious of a deep satisfaction. The soul feels invaded by something that has the taste of eternal life and feels as if coming into contact with an *Endless Goodness*. Hence comes the feeling that there is nothing on the earth worthy of your desire or attention. (*S. Therese*)

Experience with Micro Tribhangamurari

At some point in my life the time came when I decided to complete the incremental routine of the *Tribhangamurari Micro movement* using the *Prayer* given by Lahiri Mahasaya: *Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya* [see chapter 9].

As I explained then I had discovered how useful it was not to proceed by chanting the syllables only mentally, but by whispering them softly and this I did on such occasions.

Often an invincible drowsiness won over my every effort. On the inner screen of awareness many images appeared as daydreams. Changing the position of the legs, practicing *Maha Mudra* frequently, or interrupting for a short break didn't help. After some rest, my problem was not solved – the sleepiness reappeared immediately as soon as I resumed the practice. There was no way (coffee, a lot of sleep ...) to guard against sleepiness; there was nothing to do but accept the situation and get used to practicing while constantly feeling half sleepy.

One day I practiced on the beach, among the people who did not bother me but whom I could hear walking nearby. If I sensed that they were looking at me, I pretended to read a little book that I always kept open on my lap. The bliss was enormous.

At sunset I leaned my back against a rock and practiced with my eyes open. The sky was an indestructible crystal of infinite transparency and the waves constantly changed their color. Behind the dark lenses of my sunglasses my eyes were filled with tears. I cannot describe what I perceived except in poetic form.

There is an Indian chant (in the final part of the film *Mahabharata*) whose words are taken from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*: "I know this Great Spirit, radiant like the sun, transcending any material conception of darkness. Only those who know Him can transcend the limits of birth and death. There is no other way to achieve liberation than to know this Great Spirit. " When I listen to the beautiful voice of the Indian singer repeating "There is no other way", my heart knows that nothing will have the power to keep me away from this state and from this fantastically beautiful practice that will accompany me until the end of my days.

WHAT THE PATH OF KRIYA YOGA REALLY IS

When we begin the path of *Kriya*, we are almost always naive. We would like to find a book that explains in detail the techniques of *Kriya*, that has beautiful pictures, understandable diagrams, that is a concrete help to our efforts. We buy what we find on the market. Almost always, leafing through these books, we are disappointed. We do not find what we were looking for: there is no practical information. The first reaction is to throw the book in the trash can. Many people, myself, have done this.

Unfortunately, many books on *Kriya* contain tedious rhetoric, endless repetitions, all immersed in useless references to abstruse philosophical theories so much so that with the exception of one or two interesting lines, everything else is to be thrown away. Let me be clear: I do not advise anyone to avoid reading a book because everyone must have their experiences.

I also read avidly the commentaries on some holy scriptures attributed to *Lahiri Mahasaya*. *P. Bhattacharya* famous disciple of *Lahiri Mahasaya*, printed those interpretations. These books have recently been translated into English.

I studied these books with enthusiasm, hoping to find some useful keys to my understanding of *Kriya*. I was disappointed. Their value, from the exegetical point of view, is almost nil. It seemed almost impossible to me that those interpretations really came from *Lahiri Mahasaya*: I could not glimpse the same practical wisdom and enormous achievement that he expressed in his diaries and letters. Rather, I found an almost manic tendency to interpret everything in the light of *Kriya*, as if millennia or centuries ago the authors of those spiritual works knew exactly, one by one, all the techniques of *Kriya*.

I gained an insight upon an idea: *Lahiri Mahasaya* commented aloud on certain Indian sacred texts. Perhaps, reading those verses, he was carried away by the strength of his acumen, he completely forgot the original scripture and, inspired, he spoke widely and freely on the subtleties of *Kriya*. Most likely what he said on that occasion was taken as a specific comment on that text. It is possible that in publishing those comments, the publisher supplemented them by adding parts born of his own understanding.

In addition to these readings, I found it very inspiring and useful to search for the origins of *Kriya* in other mystical traditions. Forget the classical tradition of *Yoga* which I believe is well known to the reader. I avoid

talking about *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, the three classics: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*. Instead I will bring four precise examples of mystical paths where clear traces of *Kriya Yoga* are found. I invite the reader to study and deepen them. I am sure that such studies can inspire us, intuitively guiding us to deepen the *Kriya* discipline.

We do not know what *Lahiri Mahasaya* exactly taught, what advice he gave to his disciples. It is not correct to live in the hope that someone can rebuild that world for us. Let us instead be inspired by what can be found in the nucleus of great mystical paths.

They will guide us to understand what *Kriya Yoga* really is: a wonderful synthesis of tools used by the mystics of the greatest spiritual traditions aimed at achieving spiritual experience.

Here I will give some simple hints on the following mystical paths: Hesychasm, Inner Alchemy (Nei Dan), Radhasoami and Sufi.

[I] HESICASM

As I wrote in the previous chapter, an easy way to approach the teachings of *Hesychasm* is to read *The way of the Pilgrim*.

The term *Hesychasm* comes from the Greek word "*hesychia*" which means internal stillness, tranquility and calm: without this condition, meditation is not possible. The discipline that underlies this mystical path is the continual repetition of the *Jesus Prayer* ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me".) This spiritual practice begins by whispering the *Prayer* and then moving on to mental repetition. It was already used by the early Church Fathers in the fourth and fifth centuries.

There were hermits who dwelt in the desert, seeking inner peace and spiritual introspection by practicing contemplation and self-discipline: they had no doubts that knowledge of God could only be obtained through purity of soul and *Prayer*, not by mere study or pure mental pleasures in the field of philosophy. Later, their ascetic method began to reveal itself as a concrete set of psycho physical techniques: this is, effectively, the core of *Hesychasm*. It was Simeon, "the new theologian" (1025-1092), who developed the quietist theory with such precision that he could be considered the father of this movement. The practice, which involved specific body positions and precise breathing patterns, was intended to perceive the *Uncreated Light of God*.

Practical teachings

"Glorify God in your body," said St. Paul (1 Cor. 6:19). But how does this happen in practice? How can we make our body an active participant in the work of *Prayer*? Here we can face one of the most fascinating attempts in the history of Christian spirituality: that of giving the body an effective role during *Prayer*. So let's try to understand how the *Hesychast* tradition teaches to achieve this.

First part: breath control and repetition of the Prayer

To begin with, it is recommended to do several forward prostrations (bowing from the waist area.) Twelve prostrations suffice. *Hesychasm* explains that such prostrations warm the body and strengthen the fervor of the *Prayer*.

Then a particular body position is adopted. "Sit in a quiet cell, remaining alone in a corner", says Pseudo-Simeon. Gregorio of Sinai is more precise: "Sit on a seat a span high", that is, about nine inches. Evidently he was not thinking of a normal chair but of a low, backless banquet. This in itself is an innovation. Such advice would have seemed far more unusual to a thirteenth or fourteenth century reader than it appears to us. In ancient times the normal position for *Christian Prayer* was surely standing.

In this position one begins to control the breath. Pseudo-Simeon explains that the rhythm of the breath must be deliberately slowed down: "Restrict the entry of the breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily." This means that one breathes through the nostrils so that the breath produces a noise in the throat. [We recognize in this detail the starting point of *Kriya Pranayama*.] This breath control is a preliminary exercise which precedes the repetition of the *Jesus Prayer* or which accompanies it.

As soon as the breath reaches a steady and regular rhythm, *Prayer* is associated with the breath. In ancient times we do not find an indication as to exactly how the rhythm of the breathing and the words of the *Prayer* are to be coordinated. Such teachings remained vague – perhaps intentionally. In modern practice it is common to mentally say the first half of the *Prayer*, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God", as you breathe in, and the second half, "have mercy on me", as you breathe out. This is the procedure that is recommended in the book *The Way of a Pilgrim*. There is no difficulty, even without expert guidance, in using this simple breathing technique.

Proceed for a minimum of 15 minutes; after a couple of weeks it goes to 30 minutes. It is very useful to count the number of repetitions on the beads of a rosary.

Finally pass to a purely mental repetition, leaving the breath free to

flow spontaneously. It is important to note that true discipline must be internal, not external; a physical technique can aid in concentration, but it can never be a substitute for the inner alertness of the intellect.

This *Prayer* is a *Prayer* like all the others. There is nothing special about itself, but it receives all its power from the state of mind in which it is made. There is only one recommendation that every *Hesychast* must apply: keep attention in the heart. Every effort one makes in *Prayer* must be directed towards this result. This eliminates distractions, clears the mind of images, and thus helps to achieve inner calm. It is recommended to turn to the Lord so that he can give His blessing: this is the hidden treasure in the field, the pearl that is priceless.

Second part: discover the place of the heart

As you sit comfortably with your head bowed forward and your eyes directed towards the abdomen, focus your physical gaze, along with the fullness of your intellect, on the center of your belly or *navel*. In this way, do not look to either side, but fix the gaze on the navel as a point of support. [This is what happens in *Navi Kriya*.]

With the concentration on the *navel*, try to enter it, as if the navel were a "door." Search within yourself with your intellect as to find the place in the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside. *Hesychasm* states that what you will find there is nothing more than a kind of joyless darkness but if you, undeterred, continue with this practice, you will achieve limitless happiness. You will see the open space within the heart and contemplate the "*Uncreated Light*." Your heart will be filled with love-filled bliss! This extraordinary experience will lead you to understand that "what you experienced before that experience was nothing!"

When the *Hesychast* texts speak of "finding the place of the heart", they mean that at first our attention is on the region of the physical heart. But, since the heart is at the same time the spiritual center of the totality of the human being, through this concentration on the physical heart we become able to enter the relationship with our deep self and thus we discover the true dimension of our personality in the Divine. Making the intellect "descend from the head to the heart" thus means reaching an integration, realizing oneself as a unified whole formed in the divine image.

The *Hesychasts* explain that the center between the eyebrows is not suitable for all phases of meditation. If the energy of thoughts descends to the level of the throat – as it normally happens when reciting the *Prayer* – it acquires an evocative power recharged with emotional values. As a

consequence, there is a tendency to get lost in mental associations. But if we bring the center of awareness into the heart, then the attention reaches a complete cohesion. It is sustained by a higher intensity and nothing extraneous can disturb it.

Lahiri Mahasaya's teachings lead, through the practice of *Thokar*, in the same direction. In *Hesychasm*, one enters the space of the heart starting from the navel region by means of a long, persistent effort, trying to open the door of the inner temple. In both paths the door finally opens and one rejoices in the fruit of his efforts.

Historical note

The monks of Athos could have quietly continued to contemplate this *Uncreated Light* (which they considered to be the highest goal in life) had their methods not been denounced as superstitious and absurd. The objection was mainly based on an energetic rejection of the possibility that their *Uncreated Light* constituted the Divine essence. Around the year 1337, *Hesychasm* attracted the attention of a learned member of the Orthodox Church, Barlaam of Seminara, a Calabrian monk (later became Petrarch's Greek teacher) who was abbot in a monastery in Constantinople and who visited Mount Athos. There he met the *Hesychasts* and heard descriptions of their practices. Barlaam, trained in Western Scholastic theology, was scandalized and began to fight him both verbally and in his writings. The associated practice of *Hesychasm* was characterized as "magic". He called the *Hesychasts* "omphalopsychoi" – people who have their souls in their navels (due to the long time they spent focusing their concentration on the umbilical region). Barlaam proposed a more intellectual approach to knowledge of God than what the *Hesychasts* taught: he asserted that this knowledge could only be obtained through investigative work carried out by the mind and translated into discrimination between true and false. He argued that no part of God could ever be seen by humans.

The practice of the *Hesychasts* was defended by San Gregorio Palamas. He was well educated in Greek philosophy and defended *Hesychasm* in 1340, in three different synods in Constantinople, and also wrote a number of works in its defense.

Palamas rejected the Barlaam controversy. His main concern was not with physical technique as such but with the more fundamental doctrinal issues concerning the controversy: the character of the *Divine Light* which according to him was uncreated (in other words it had not appeared with the creation of the Universe but existed before) and which was knowable to man.

He used a distinction, already formulated in the fourth century in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers, between God's inaccessible essence and

the energies or works of God through which the devotee can share divine life. In short, the essence of God is unknowable while His energies can be known both in this and the next life; they illuminate the *Hesychast* who has been granted the experience of the *Uncreated Light* through which he receives the true spiritual knowledge of God.

But, while he did not give a central meaning to the method concerning physical practice, Palamas nevertheless believed that it could be defended from the theological point of view. It was based, and he was convinced of it, on a solid biblical theology concerning the human person. He considered this method, when used prudently and wisely, to be a practical aid.

In 1341 the dispute was settled: Barlaam was condemned and returned to Calabria, later became bishop in the Roman Catholic Church. At last, the *Hesychast* doctrine was established as the doctrine of the Orthodox Church. Until now, the Roman Catholic Church has never fully accepted *Hesychasm*: the essence of God can be known, but only in the next life; there can be no distinction between the energy and the essence of God. Today Mount Athos is the well-known center of the practice of *Hesychasm*.

Similarities with Yoga

There are striking similarities between *Hesychast* practices and Indian *Yoga*. As an aid in meditation, the *yogi* repeats a *Mantra*. His aim is *Samadhi* and he can experience a vision of light.

However, if there are obvious similarities, there are also differences. The techniques of *Yoga* concerning the breath are much more elaborate. In *Yoga* the inner exploration is extended to the regions below the heart, furthermore there is not only a descent movement but also a corresponding ascent movement starting from the *Muladhara Chakra* up through the spine to the *Kutastha* center between the eyebrows. The *Hesychast*, having once descended into the place of the heart, always remains there and does not return to ascend. *Lahiri Mahasaya* clarifies that the final ascent occurs with the opening of the door of the *Sushumna* and not with subsidiary techniques of ascension. In my opinion the teaching is basically the same.

Similarities with the Dhikr

The practice of *Dhikr* among the *Sufis* implies: [1] Physical positions (touching the chest with the chin.) [2] Breath control (connecting invocation with the movement of breathing.) [3] Movement of the head towards the center of the chest. This involves the descent of the *Prayer* from the lips down to the heart.

Muslim teachers agree with Orthodox teachers in insisting that there can be no external techniques that automatically lead to union with God.

For both traditions, what matters is the inner attention to the heart and the understanding that the encounter with the One who is invoked is a *pure gift* on his part.

[III] INNER ALCHEMY (NEI DAN)

Taoist Internal Alchemy is a spiritual discipline, the esoteric core of Taoism, the mystical tradition of ancient China. My first reference book was *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality* by Charles Luk & Lu Kuan. Reading took me totally inside; I photocopied many pages, cut out the most important pieces, put them in order according to an ideal logical sequence of exposure and glued them on four sheets of paper that summarized respectively the four phases of the *Inner Alchemy*. I am sure that the study of *Inner Alchemy* is absolutely profitable for a *kriyaban*.

When I read the description of the basic procedure (*Microcosmic Orbit*) of this ancient discipline, I saw that it was very similar to *Kriya Pranayama* – but not exactly the same! However, the various metaphors used to explain the mechanism of the *Microcosmic Orbit* (the inverted bagpipe, the flute without holes ...) brought to mind with surprising analogy some explanations relating to *Kriya Pranayama*, difficult to understand, which I had received many years earlier from an illustrious source.

The difference between the *Microcosmic Orbit* and *Kriya Pranayama* is that in the first the energy descends down into the body touching not the *Chakras* but the points on the surface of the body that are connected with the *Chakras*: Adam's apple, the central region of the sternum, the navel, the pubic region and the *Perineum*. Proceeding with the practice, the difference between the two procedures fades, as the result produced on the energy of the body is the same.

I was surprised: perhaps *Kriya Yoga* was *Taoist Internal Alchemy* taught within an Indian context, with blatant use of both purely Indian techniques and procedures (such as *Navi Kriya*) that were Indian only in appearance? Indeed, *Kriya Yoga* turned out to be a discipline that could be described through the symbols of two different cultures. Perhaps due to this relationship with the *Internal Alchemy*, *Kriya Yoga* is decidedly deeper and richer than *Tantric Kundalini Yoga*.

I thought it was not a bizarre idea that the mythical *Babaji* is one of the "immortals" of the *Taoist* tradition.

[I] Microcosmic Orbit

The first stage is the basis of the whole internal alchemical process: it is about activating the *Microcosmic Orbit*.

Let your breath free. With eyebrows raised, become sensitive to the inner light. Try now to intuitively perceive this light in the "front" part of each Chakra. "Frontal" means that it is located on the front of the body. Coming down from *Kutastha*, awareness descends through the tongue into the laryngeal prominence (here is the frontal component of the fifth *Chakra*.) The perception of the internal light at that point occurs for a few seconds. Then the awareness descends in the central region of the sternum ... also here the perception of the inner light occurs for the same time ... then in the navel ... then in the pubic region and finally in the perineum. Then the concentration moves up, behind the spine. The perception of the inner light takes place in the second *Chakra*; then in the third ... and so on up to *Medulla*, the occipital region, the *fontanel*, ending again in *Kutastha* where the attention stops for a longer time. Do this only mentally for weeks, then use a deep breath.

As you inhale, awareness and energy (Qi) are lifted along the *Control* channel (behind the spine) and let flow downwards as you exhale along the *Function* channel (in the front of the body). The purpose of this action is "Bring Three to Two, Two to One". What does this enigmatic phrase mean?

"Three" is a reference to the three energies: **Jing** = Sexual Energy, **Qi** = Love Energy and **Shen** = Spiritual Energy.

Sexual energy is not only what the name implies but it is the agent that makes us enjoy sensory perceptions and gives us the strength, the determination to fight the battle of life and get all the things necessary for it (unfortunately we struggle also to obtain things that are superfluous to our life, but this is another problem ...).

The energy of love is a deep feeling towards another person, towards living creatures, towards life in general and it is also the joy that we feel in front of an artistic expression. It is the fuel of just and impartial actions originating from noble instincts and ethical laws.

The spiritual energy vibrates during the highest moments of aesthetic contemplation, where vast prophetic visions can manifest.

It has been explained that these three energies derive from a single reality, being their division originated at the moment of our birth and strengthened by the education received and social life. Well, the *Microcosmic Orbit* recreates the very original harmony. Breath by breath, sexual thoughts (which seem to have strengthened) turn into thoughts of love. The energy of love acquires strength, determination not to succumb to any obstacle; it is then raised into the head where it mixes with the energy of the Spirit. It is only in this way that any fracture in our personality disappears: our life

full of contradictions begins to flow naturally, unhindered towards the Spirit. We understand that the *Microcosmic Orbit* involves a "permanent healing action on the whole personality."

While through *Kundalini Yoga* one is simply trying to rise to the crown of the head to experience divine ecstasy there, in *Taoist Internal Alchemy* one uses that state to reach the body, nourish it and transform it.

Well, *Kriya Pranayama* should work exactly like the *Microcosmic Orbit* by recreating the original harmony, thus healing us from the fractures that exist in our personality. We can practice *Kriya Pranayama* more consciously and deeply!

If we conceive of *Kriya Yoga* only as a path of "ascent", this means that it is incomplete and must be balanced by a descending movement.

This fact should continue steadily until one settles into a calm point of balance and harmony.

Many religious paths teach to maintain, indeed to cultivate as a virtue, the division between matter and spirit, and sexuality is repressed as impure. We know that this is the main cause of exhausting conflicts in people who tend to be spiritual.⁵

No tradition respects the whole mystery of human nature like the *Taoist Internal Alchemy*. One who wants to follow the spiritual path should listen to the practical wisdom that this path embodies. Doing so could avoid a wide range of problems. Only common sense, love for natural laws and the intuition that comes from meditation promotes the true inner search that leads to Self Realization. One should consider the teachings received from tradition, feel any heavy conditioning, see all potential limitations and dangers, and take the courageous responsibility of correcting them.

[III] Guiding the energy in the lower Dantian

We know that *Dantian* (referred to here as "*Lower Dantian*") is the size of a ball whose diameter is approximately two-and-a-half inches long. To locate its position one must concentrate on the navel, coming approximately one and a half inches back and below for the same extent.

⁵ Some *kriyabans* develop sexual thoughts and become sexually aroused during the initial deep breaths of their *Kriya Pranayama*. We will never get tired of repeating: this is perfectly normal! Those who assume *Kechari Mudra*, either proper or a simplified form of it, and concentrate, during exhalation, on the flow of *Prana* in the body (it is very beneficial to visualize it passing through the tip of the tongue into the throat and into the body, each part of the body, as a beatific, healing rain restoring life in each cell) will immediately experience how sexual thoughts disappear and become pure love. This great energy of love will gradually turn into pure aspiration for the spiritual goal.

A deep inhalation guides the energy into the *Dantian*. The breath is held here with *Jalandhara Bandha* and *Mula Bandha*. A quiet exhalation follows. This action is repeated many, many times – visualization helps compress the energy in the *Dantian* to the size of a pearl. Inner heat increases.

Spiritual energy stored in the head as a result of the *Microcosmic Orbit* is carried into the *Dantian*.

We *kriyabans* say that after mixing *Prana* and *Apana* by means of *Kriya Pranayama*, the *Samana* current comes into play. *Internal Alchemy* has expressions that inspire us much more, for example: "Return to the center"; "The union of heaven and earth"; "The birth of the golden flower"; "The Creation of the Resplendent Gem"; "The creation of the elixir of immortality. "

What we need to understand is that finding stability in this unfathomably deep *Dantian* region means being born into the spiritual life.

[III] Push the energy towards the Middle Dantian and the Upper Dantian

It is difficult to understand which procedures are prescribed at this stage because in the related literature, some suggestions on this subject are embellished in an abnormal way by means of many evocative terms, metaphors that make it almost impossible to have a clear practical understanding.

What I have been trying to read beyond the metaphors is this: You focus on the vibration created in the *lower Dantian* and breathe in the way I am describing you now and which is called *Reverse Breath*. Basically, inhale deeply by pulling the abdomen inwards, contracting and keeping the anal region contracted. Breathe out calmly and then breathe in several more times in the way I have described. The breath becomes more and more subtle. The energy found in the abdomen condenses more and more and is invited to rise to the region of the heart. This vibration spontaneously ascends into the heart region and illuminates the "*heart space*." [The *heart space* is the *Middle Dantian*.] Contemplation of the Light shining in that region presides over the manifestation of "*true serenity*". This reveals the *fundamental nature* of the one who practices.

Continue with this way of breathing, making the energy rise further up to the *Fontanel* along the central axis of the body in front of the spine. This path that does not coincide with the spine is called the *Thrusting Channel*. In this way, the energy necessary to set the *Macrocosmic Orbit* in motion is prepared.

[IV] Macrocosmic Orbit

The *Fourth Stage* is a great event that occurs when the time is ripe after having achieved complete mastery of the *Third Stage*.

When the energy is increased in the *Thrusting Channel* and reaches the *Upper Dantian (Kutastha)* a spontaneous phenomenon of circulation of energy in the body (*Macrocosmic Orbit*) which has enormous implications is set in motion.

The three energies (sexual, love and spirit) are harmoniously mixed, they have created the *elixir of immortality*. It trickles down into the body and nourishes each cell. This occurs in a state called "*prenatal breathing*" which is a movement of internal energy that gives perceptions similar to those obtained with the *Microcosmic Orbit* but is now experienced in the breathless state (*Kevala Kumbhaka*). This subtle experience makes the spiritual path complete: The Divine is infused into our body. The spiritual path does not end with an out-of-body flight into the rarefied dimensions of Spirit. The *Macrocosmic Orbit* reveals scenarios of perfect Beauty that one did not even dare to dream of.

From a certain moment on, the downward movement turns into an indefinite pressure on all the cells of the body. This event expands – unexpectedly – the boundaries of awareness. Experiencing this means having fully reached the last part of the spiritual path.

We have every reason to believe that this is the same experience that we call in *Kriya Yoga: Pranayama with internal breathing*. This is a very peculiar phenomenon of energy circulation in the body. The breath is absent, the body is charged with *static Prana*. The obstruction at the base of the spine is perfectly removed. The circulation of energy is perceived as an "internal breath." A person spontaneously enters a state of perfect peace and well-being and perceives a great infusion of energy that descends like a golden liquid in the body, in all its cells. Let's say then that the breath is completely oriented inwards.

[III] RADHASOAMI

The *Radhasoami* (Radha Swami) movement also has many similarities to the *Kriya* path. It is reasonable to consider the fact that some disciples of *Lahiri Mahasaya* could have belonged to this movement and perhaps, without being perfectly aware of it, had added to *Kriya* some elements of theory and practice that belonged to it. *Sri Yukteswar* and P.Y. they were part of this movement.

Radhasoami is a monotheistic religion which has the *Omkar* reality as the "One God." We know that the *Kriya* path is a process of refining, in

progressive stages, of attunement with the *Omkar* vibration. *Omkar* is the final goal of *Kriya*, the only essence that permeates each of its phases. Well this is the same goal that we find in the *Radhasoami* path.

The *Radhasoami* spiritual organization was formally founded in the 19th century in India and is also known as *Sant Mat* (Path of the Saints). It is considered a derivation of *Sikhism*. In fact, this tradition is much older and goes back to the teachings of *Kabir* and *Guru Nanak*.

There was also a group of teachers who assumed prominence in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent around the thirteenth century. Their teachings are distinguished theologically by inner devotion to a divine principle, and socially by an egalitarianism opposed to the qualitative distinctions of the Hindu caste hierarchy and the religious differences between Hindus and Muslims. In modern times the first name to report is that of *Param Sant Shiv Dayal Singh ji* who in January 1861 (the same year in which *Lahiri Mahasaya* said he received initiation into *Kriya Yoga*) created the *Radhasoami* movement. The founder died in 1878 in Agra, India. He did not appoint a successor, resulting in a succession crisis after his death. Some disciples were considered to be his successors, which led to divisions within the group. These fractures led to the propagation of *Radhasoami* teachings to a wider audience albeit with slightly different interpretations.

Practical teachings: how to get started

Meditation takes place in the quiet of the early morning (before breakfast) and before going to sleep. Meditation begins by relaxing the body and making it quiet. The position is comfortable whether sitting in a chair or in a cross-legged position with the spine straight. It is important to gradually develop the ability to sit relaxed and without any physical tension.

The teacher gives the disciple a *Mantra*: its repetition helps the mind to come to complete rest. Repeating the *Mantra* internally in *Kutastha* helps to raise the consciousness of the Ego into higher regions. This is the key that helps to transcend thought (time and space) and to open the door of the inner being. Disciples are invited to use the "5 Names of God":

Jot Nirinjan, Ongkar, Rarankar, Sohang, Sat Nam.

We sit quietly, eyes closed, mentally repeating the *Mantra* and looking into the central part of the darkness that lies ahead. If you perceive the inner light, the concentration is on it. Breath is natural and free flowing. This process automatically draws the spiritual currents, which are normally dispersed and dissipated throughout the body, towards the spiritual center.

It is explained that the seat of the Spirit is located at the point between the eyebrows. It is on it that the disciple having closed his eyes

must focus his attention.

In *Radhasoami* we do not find the exercise of *Talabya Kriya* but only the following instruction: "Turn your tongue back to touch the roof of the palate. Get the tongue to touch the uvula and contact *Amrita* (the divine nectar) which is constantly flowing through the body. Go further and enter the nasal passage. Nectar is usually experienced only after a lot of practice." This nectar is said to be the "living water", the "bread of life" that Jesus spoke of.

Listening to inner sounds

The *Radhasoami* teaching is easier than various spiritual teachings described in the ancient scriptures: it requires nothing more than sitting quietly looking and listening within. It is explained that no other system leads so easily to the higher regions of mystical experience. It is taught that there is no other means of spiritual liberation, such as the *Omkar* experience. No one can ever escape the web of *Karma* and reincarnation, or ever become free and happy without this real participation in the current of life that is heard internally.

In order to begin an upward journey, a devotee must learn to "withdraw within." The procedure involves focusing on the primal vibration that sustains the Universe, the so-called "Music of the Spheres." To hear the "divine sound", novices are asked to block their ears with their thumbs in order to block out external sounds. This technique is practiced using an arm support.

You can hear the inner sounds – the same ones described in the *Kriya* literature. The inner sounds are heard starting with those coming from the right side of the head and then from the top of the head. At some point, they begin to enchant the devotee by drawing him upward with an increasing power. Then this sound becomes like that of a bell. One listens to it with rapt attention and deep delight, completely absorbed in it. One would never want to give up listening to this sound.

Use the breath to intensify the Omkar experience.

There are many variations of this procedure adopted by different *Radhasoami* groups. Here I mention a variant that represents, in my opinion, the most effective and efficient way to immerse yourself in the *Omkar* dimension.

Inhale slowly, deeply, through your nose, and then slowly exhale, but before all the air is out start breathing in again, and continue like this, never letting all the air out. Feel two currents in the right and left lobe of the brain, respectively. The current linked to the inhalation rises to the right, the one linked to the exhalation goes down to the left. You can actually hear the sound of the breath coming in and out as "*So Ham*": "*So*"

inhaling and "Ham" exhaling. The Divine Word is the sound produced by the breath. This technique, in the classical literature of *Yoga*, is known as *Kewali Kumbhaka* due to the fact that if one is constantly aware of the breath and of *So Ham*, he reaches the breathless state.

This perception, if repeated for a long time, will help you to perceive the astral sounds in the inner part of each ear. You will hear the inner sounds in the right ear, then in the left as well.

By means of a long practice of this breathing, you will hear a ringing about an inch above the right ear. Then you will also hear it above the left one. It will take you about five minutes to hear both sounds at the same time.

Each breath should give more energy to this circular motion. Feel a counterclockwise movement within the central part of the brain (when viewed from behind.) When the energy is balanced, a circular force field is formed. Hear both sound vibrations coming from the ears in the center of the brain, where they meet and merge into a slightly different sound. At the climax of this procedure you will get the revelation of the spiritual eye. When the breath disappears, the movement proceeds only by the power of concentration. The white spiritual light appears in the central part of the head. Get absorbed in it. A deep sound of Bell will guide you in the state of *Samadhi*. This is the culmination of this particular practice.

The Chakras

The *Radhasoami* movement believes that in addition to the 6 *Chakras* in the physical body, there are 6 *Chakras* in the gray matter of the brain and 6 in the white matter. The 6 spinal *Chakras* are materialistic in nature and therefore they should not be stimulated (particular *Bija Mantra* are not used to activate them as in *Kundalini Yoga*) but only astrally localized. Strange as it may seem, the long meditations on the *Chakras* are not the correct action to take to achieve "*Mukti*" (liberation.) Instead, by astrally locating them we acquire the ability to leave the body at will – a practice sometimes referred to as "dying while living."

The technique consists in assuming the *Kechari Mudra*, in focusing the inner gaze in *Kutastha*, while part of the attention identifies the seat of a *Chakra* until its particular luminous vibration begins to appear. When this happens, we don't focus on that *Chakra*, but we focus on the location of the next *Chakra*, and so on. In other words, the pause on a *Chakra* therefore lasts just long enough to have a subtle perception of it.

The location of the other 12 *Chakras* in the brain is gradually revealed by moving the *Prana* in a circular fashion in the brain. A very subtle breath can only be used at the beginning of this procedure, then the breath is forgotten and pure willpower is used only.

[This is, in other words, *Swami Hariharananda's* teaching of the *Third* and

Fourth Kriya (see chapter 14).]

After completing a large number of these rounds, the soul has sufficient strength to penetrate the eighteenth "*Portal*": this is the highest *Chakra* whose seat is in the white part of the brain. This *Portal* opens onto the true, indestructible ocean of the Spirit. This is the ultimate goal to be achieved through meditation practices.

Kabir and Guru Nanak inspired the Radhasoami movement

The teachings of *Kabir* [1398 Benares - 1448/1494 Maghar] bear a profound resemblance to the *Radhasoami* teaching. The concept of "*Shabda*" that we find in the writings of *Kabir* and which can be translated as "Word" (the word of the Master) can be related to the *Omkar* teaching. According to *Kabir* this *Shabda Om* removes all doubts and difficulties: it is vital to keep it continuously, as a living presence, in our awareness.

The literature on *Kabir* and *Guru Nanak* (1469 Nankana Sahib - 1539 Kartarpur) is of great inspiration. Their teachings can be perfectly overlapped.

Kabir

Illiterate weaver, Muslim by origin, *Kabir* was a great mystic, open to Vedantic and yogic influence, he sang the Divine in an extraordinary way conceiving it beyond any name and form. The poems and sayings attributed to him are expressed in a particularly effective language that remains etched forever in the reader's memory.

In the last century *Rabindranath Tagore*, the great mystical poet of Calcutta, rediscovered the validity of his teachings and the strength of his poetry and made a beautiful English translation of his songs.

Kabir conceived Islam and Hinduism as two converging paths towards a single goal. He was always convinced of the possibility of overcoming the barriers that divide these two great religions. He did not seem to base his teaching on the authority of the holy scriptures; he shunned religious rituals. He taught not to give up life to become a hermit, not to cultivate any extreme approach to spiritual discipline, as it weakens the body and increases pride. God must be recognized internally, in one's soul – as a fire which, if nourished with continuous care, burns, transforming all resistances, dogmas, ignorance into ashes. This appears very well in his saying: "One day my consciousness, like a bird, flew to heaven and entered heaven. When I arrived, I saw that there was no God: in fact, I realized that He was dwelling in the hearts of the Saints!"

From Hinduism *Kabir* received the concept of reincarnation and the law of *Karma*, from Islam he took absolute monotheism and the strength to fight the concept of caste and all forms of idolatry. I found in him the full meaning of the *yogic* experience; he affirms that in our body there is a

garden full of flowers, the *Chakras*, and invites us to establish consciousness in the *thousand petal Lotus* from which to contemplate infinite beauty.

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

Guru Nanak

Beloved *Guru Nanak* gave the same teaching. He disapproved of ascetic practices and instead taught to remain internally detached by living the life of the householder. "Asceticism is not in the clothes of an ascetic, or in the walking stick, nor in visiting burial places. Asceticism is not in mere words; asceticism is remaining pure in the midst of impurities!"

Traditionally, liberation from worldly slavery was the goal, so the life of the landlord was considered a hindrance and an obstacle. In contrast, in *Guru Nanak's* teaching, the world became the arena of spiritual endeavor. He was enchanted by the beauty of creation and regarded the landscape of nature as the most beautiful setting for the worship of the Divine. He wrote his teachings in *Punjabi*, the spoken language of Northern India. His disregard for *Sanskrit* suggested that his message made no reference to existing scriptures. He strove to totally free his disciples from all ritual practices, orthodox ways of worship and the priestly class.

His teaching required a completely new approach. While a full understanding of the Divine is beyond human beings, he described God as not completely unknowable. God must be seen through the "inner eye", sought in the "heart": he emphasized revelation through meditation. In his teachings there are hints to the possibility of listening to an ineffable Inner melody (*Omkar*) and of tasting the nectar (*Amrit*).

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

In conclusion, the *Radhasoami* movement deserves our respect: there are teachings in it that beautifully complement *Lahiri Mahasaya's* legacy.

[IV] SUFI

We *kriyabans* have so much to learn from the *Sufis*! Their favorite *Prayer* is "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*". *Lahiri Mahasaya* gave this *Mantra* to his Muslim

disciples. ⁶ Many *Sufis* use this *Mantra* to practice what they call *Dhikr*, which is exactly the same procedure as in *Kriya* we call *Thokar* but is also what in *Yoga* we call *Japa*.

Practice Dhikr without head movements

Many *Sufis* practice an intimate and silent form of *Prayer* in a state of stillness of the body or while walking: this is called *Dhikr*. This term is commonly translated as "remembrance." It is a form of *Prayer* in which the Muslim expresses his remembrance of God and this remembrance becomes pure *Adoration*. When you open your heart to *Allah* and speak words in His praise, *Allah* fills you with strength and inner peace:

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

By means of the *Dhikr* the seed of remembrance is planted in the heart and nourished daily, until the tree of the *Dhikr* becomes deeply rooted and produces its fruit. The *Sufis* explain to us that the purpose of *Dhikr* is to purify heart and soul so that we can move towards the light of the Divine without being diverted from anything. *Dhikr* is something of tremendous importance.

The practice of *Dhikr* begins by repeating the *Prayer* audibly (*Dhikr* of the tongue) until a state of great absorption makes it impossible to continue in this way. At this point the mental practice begins. Carrying it out assiduously, putting passion and concentration into it, even the syllables pronounced mentally are canceled from the conscience and only the meaning of the *Prayer* remains. The mind becomes so calm that it cannot think, while the deepest feelings are awakened instead – the touch of the Divine Remembrance drives the mind crazy: then the most intoxicating of joys explodes.

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

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

The simplest way to practice turns out to be the best.

"When a servant of *Allah* utters the words "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*" (There is none worthy of worship except Allah) sincerely, the doors of heaven open up for these words until they reach the Throne of *Allah*."

⁶ If you prefer to utilize a 12 syllable Mantra you can consider: Allahu la ilaha illa huwal hayyul qayyum (Allah—there is no god except He—is the Living One, the All-sustainer.) A good division into 12 parts is: 1- AL 2- LA 3-HU 4-LA 5-ILAHA 6- ILLA 7- HU 8-WAL 9-HAY 10-YUL 11-QAY 12-YUM

Practice of Dhikr accompanied by head movements

Let us consider those procedures in which the chanting of "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*" is accompanied by the movements of the head.

We do not have the exact details of this procedure but it seems reasonable that the *Prayer* and the head be raised (with or without the aid of the breath) from below the navel up to the brain; after reaching the brain, the *Prayer* is moved from the brain to one shoulder, then to the other and then strike the heart.

Some *Sufi* order explains that whoever wants to guide the *Prayer* in the heart, must first keep the tongue pressed against the palate, lips and teeth firmly clenched and hold the breath. Then starting with the syllable with "*Lâ*", the *Prayer* rises with the inhalation from the navel to the brain.

After "*Lâ*" is placed in the head, holding the breath, "*Ilaha*" is placed in the right shoulder (and in the upper right part of the chest under the right shoulder) with the head bending to the right; "*Illaal*" is placed in the left shoulder (and in the upper left chest under the left shoulder) with the head bending to the left. Then "*lâh*" is driven strongly into the heart with the head bending forward. As you lift your chin you exhale. Then you hold back, "*La*" is again placed in the head. The movements and the *Mantra* are repeated again and again for many many times. As the number of repetitions of the technique increases in intensity, a deep intoxication is felt in the heart.

At the end of the chosen number of repetitions, the phrase *Muhammad Rasool Allah* is done by moving the head from the left to the right side, and finally it is said: "*My God, Thou art my goal and satisfying Thee is my aim.*"

If you want to follow the *Sufi* path and at the same time use the *Kriya* techniques, you will not encounter any difficulties. Clearly you must have a strong self-taught spirit.

You can respect the repetition numbers given in *Kriya* schools or you can go beyond them in a completely different dimension. *Sufis* practice a number of repetitions which is inconceivable for a *kriyaban*.

For a good practice of this *Dhikr* it is recommended to adopt the correct attitude: it is not a question of preparing to experience something tremendously powerful but that of getting lost in the beauty of the *Prayer*, of the *Mantra*. This is what the *Sufis* do!

In *Sufi* literature we find ardent sentiment of the soul and sincerity. The celebration of the Creator of the universe shines with unparalleled strength and breadth. The *Sufis* tell us of their love for the Beauty that is found on this earth, letting you guess how their ardent form of *Prayer* takes them from the contemplation of this Beauty to the direct experience of the

Divine.

Consider how great the inspiration we get from these verses of Rumi:

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

Conclusion

We have considered four mystical paths. Now, suppose we find ourselves in trouble with our *Kriya* path. This difficulty can arise from different causes: having little time to practice, being able to practice only *First Kriya*, believing that you have obtained few results ... Well let's focus on our difficulty, keep it in mind and with this awareness let's reread one by one slowly the four paths described.

I have no doubt that in at least one of these we will find a clue, a clarification that will become a bright intuition on how to overcome the problem you have. We will feel the reality of the concrete experience of one or more saints who followed that tradition and their example will inspire us to behave like them. Let us choose the path that most inspires us and let us be guided in a research on that theme, tackled with the means that progress in the current dissemination of knowledge offers us. Let's light the flame that had brought us on the path of *Kriya* again in our heart.

CHAPTER 13

INCREMENTAL ROUTINE

Chapters 10 to 13 of this third part of the book have the following overall title: *How to Avoid Failure on the Spiritual Path*. This is a problem that has always struck me having seen some very serious and motivated people who after a few years of practice have abandoned *Kriya*.

In order to avoid this situation, I talked about *Japa* which is a concrete help to obtain a great satisfaction from *Pranayama*: the breathless state. If you who are reading these lines have decided to abandon your *Kriya* practice for various reasons, wait a moment and consider what I propose to you in this chapter.

I would like to talk to you about the usefulness of practicing an incremental routine of any *Kriya* technique. This is an experience through which you can take a big step towards a new vision of the *Kriya* path.

We have already encountered an incremental routine in chapter 9: the one that concerns the practice of *Tribhangamurari Thokar* – but this practice requires preparation (*Amantrak* and *Samantrak*) that few feel like going through. I want to offer you something simpler here.

Let's first clarify what an incremental routine is. It is certainly not what is proposed to one who begins to practice *Kriya*. The beginner is advised to practice the same set of techniques daily, without changing their order of practice and the number of repetitions. At least in the first three months they are taught to proceed in this way.

But, if after a couple of years of applying the same routine, you find that your efforts have been totally ineffective and that the initial enthusiasm has been lost, I propose that you use your time in a different way. I offer you the chance to be reborn on the spiritual path by practicing intensely but only one day a week.

Theoretically one should continue the practice of *Kriya* while going through apparently unproductive phases. But what to say to all those *kriyabans* who reach a stalemate where further progress seems impossible? For them the idea of having to practice *Kriya* daily for a lifetime becomes a nightmare, a cage from which they want to escape. This is easily understood.

The dogmatic *kriyabans* would pronounce: "You are too attached to the results. Even if it seems to you that *Kriya* does not work, be loyal to it and continue undeterred as you have done up to now." Perhaps they would tell the story of that loyal *kriyaban* who had his first spiritual experience only towards the end of his life, just hours before leaving the body!

Now, an *Incremental Routine* consists in mainly using a single technique whose number of repetitions is gradually increased until reaching a large number of repetitions whose amount has been handed down to us by the *Kriya* tradition. Each step of this demanding practice takes place only one day a week.

I open a parenthesis: think about what happens in athletics. There are points in common between *Kriya* and the essence of athletics. Both shun the use of brute force, both take advantage of setting specific goals and diligently channeling their strength towards achieving them. Both require you to evaluate your own way of performing in order to learn from experience.

Now, what happens in athletics gives us a good example that I ask you to reflect on. Athletes who wish to achieve noteworthy goals must somehow increase the intensity and quality of their practice. Only through very intense sessions, where they push their degree of physical and mental resistance to the maximum, can they provide otherwise unattainable performance. This is a "law" that no one escapes. Of course, each session must be followed by several days of rest in order to achieve total recovery.

Please consider the two examples of incremental routines that I am going to comment on.

[I] Incremental routine of Navi Kriya

Choose any day off and after a very short practice of *Maha Mudra* and *Kriya Pranayama*, practice double the repetitions of *Navi Kriya*. Choose the variant of *Navi Kriya* you prefer.

Start by practicing $4 \times 2 = 8$ repetitions of *Navi Kriya*. The next steps will be 4×3 , 4×4 ... 4×19 , 4×20 . There is no need to go beyond 4×20 repetitions. You will do these milestones once a week. And what will you do during the other days of the week? The answer will surprise you: "Do not practice any *Kriya* technique or be satisfied with a very short practice of it or indulge in the balm of a long and quiet *Japa*."

The increase of this technique must be gradual. If you think you are smart and immediately do many repetitions all in one go, know that it is like doing nothing, because the inner channels are closed. Our inner obstacles cannot be eliminated in one day; our inner strength is not strong enough to dissolve them. This inner power is weak at first and needs to be increased week after week. Furthermore, this process should be integrated with a regular active life.

If you always practice in your room, make sure you enjoy a long walk in the evening. Everything will proceed harmoniously and you will

surely experience the blessing of an inner silence charged with bliss.

It's up to you to make your practice day as enjoyable as possible. I advise you to divide the long sessions into two parts – everything must obviously be completed before going to sleep. You can close each part by lying on a mat in *Savasana* (the corpse pose) for a few minutes. You can start part of the practice in the morning but without rushing, respecting every detail. In the afternoon, after a light meal and a little nap, go out if you can, reach a beautiful place where you can sit and contemplate nature. Then, absorbed in the practice and perfectly at ease, complete the number of repetitions that are missing. You will see how the effects increase as the day approaches twilight.

For the incremental practice of Navi Kriya consider alternatively the variant of it that you find in Appendix n.2

To begin with, you start with 36 descents in the *Dantian*, then $36 \times 2 = 72$ descents. The next steps will be 36×3 , 36×4 ... 36×19 , 36×20 . This is the method that I chose and that I will never stop blessing for its extraordinary power.

Specific effects of the incremental routine of Navi Kriya

Let us remember that *Pranayama* leads to the state where *Prana* and *Apana* meet in the navel and awaken the *Samana* current, the only form of energy that can enter *Sushumna*. We know that *Samadhi* only happens when all the energy enters the *Sushumna*. *Navi Kriya* is primarily designed to lead to this event.

You need to know that with this incremental routine you may experience some tension and doubt that you are doing any useful work. I hope you do not decide to abandon this practice on the pretext that it is not suitable for your physiology.

To understand the meaning of this work, let's try to understand what it means to "cut" the navel knot. It is explained that cutting the umbilical cord at the moment of birth creates a division of a single reality into two parts: the spiritual and the material. The spiritual part, which manifests itself as joy and calm, is located in the higher *Chakras* and in the head; the material part settles in the lower *Chakras*. This separation between "spirit" and "matter" within each human being is a permanent source of tearing conflicts. By means of this *Incremental Routine of Navi Kriya*, the healing of this fracture takes place. Although healing is a harmonious event, what transpires on the outside can be interpreted negatively by others.

The problem is that sometimes harshness may appear in your temperament. You will find yourself saying some things that others find offensive and cutting but that for you, in that moment, are the expression of sincerity. Backed by a bright inner intuition, you could verbally hurt

your friends and only hours later, alone and detached, observe how inappropriate those words were.

Whatever the judgment of others, know that your personality is destined to ideally gather around a central point and all inner conflicts will be healed. In practical life an interior order is established in an ineluctable way; each action seems to be surrounded by a halo of calm and seems to go straight towards the goal. This is reminiscent of Achab's attitude in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*:

"Swerve me? ye cannot swerve me, ... The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. ... Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!"

A good effect of this practice is to discover a notable increase in mental clarity, perhaps due to a strong action on the third *Chakra* that governs the thinking process. A more calibrated, precise and clear logical process will arise from this more efficient synergy between thoughts and emotions. Intuition will flow freely and cope with those moments in life when important decisions must be made.

This practice can help you face important and decisive challenges that life places before you. For example, you may feel the need to aim for something that looks like a utopia, something that seems impossible according to common reasoning. Well, the described practice will provide you with the energy potential to achieve this ideal.

Other effects in the field of understanding the spiritual path may indeed be momentous.

[III] Incremental routine of Kriya Pranayama

Let's first answer an obvious question: "Why should I practice the incremental routine of *Navi Kriya* before that of *Kriya Pranayama*? The reason is that *Navi Kriya* creates that solidity which allows one to face the very demanding practice of the *incremental Kriya Pranayama Routine*.

36x1, 36x2, 36x3,... .36x 20 breaths *Kriya* is the best plan. A lighter but still valid plan is: 24x1, 24x2, 24x3,... ..24x 24.

In chapter 6 we have shown 6 different aspects of *Kriya Pranayama*, make sure they are all present. Start with the simpler details and, after a while, introduce the others. When the practice is split into two or three parts – for example between morning and afternoon – it always begins by reconsidering the simpler details.

Go ahead carefully. Respect the rhythm of breathing that suits your constitution. If at certain moments you realize that the breath is actually quite short, don't worry about it! However, during each phase of the

process, it is important to always keep a minimum of breath, until the completion of the number that you have decided to practice on that day. In other words, the process should never become purely mental.

Note 1

During this very delicate period, you can practice *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* both during the week and on the day of the Incremental Routine practice. Through it you will receive a dramatic transformation – various patterns of energy imbalance disappear. Without this balancing action it is not easy to obtain an *attentive but calm readiness* which is the very basis of the meditative state of *Kriya*. It is a common experience that after a long practice of *Nadi Sodhana*, without adding any other technique, one finds oneself in a meditative state, which arose naturally.

Note 2

Don't be surprised if, at certain moments, this routine becomes an extraordinary journey into memory. In fact, it happens that, by concentrating one's attention on the *Chakras*, a particular effect is obtained: the inner screen of our consciousness begins to show many images. This is a physiological fact and we have every reason to suspect that those who say they are exempt probably do not have enough clarity to notice it.

The *Chakras* are like caskets containing the memory of one's entire life: they give rise to the full splendor of lost reminiscences. The essence of past events (the beauty contained in them and never fully appreciated) is relived in the quiet pleasure of contemplation while the heart is sometimes pervaded by a restrained cry. It is a revelation: the light of the Spirit seems to shine in what seem trivial moments of our life.

Other incremental routines

You can devise several *Incremental Routines*. Each technique practiced intensively will bring about specific effects – perceived particularly in the day following the practice. Some effects can sometimes be a cause for concern. [As I have already pointed out, a *kriyaban* should be familiar with the basic laws of the human psyche.]

If you want to practice an *Incremental Routine* of any technique and you do not have an expert next to you to help you in planning in number of repetitions, remember the following criterion: the first step should work for 15-20 minutes, then, with the following weeks, continue to increase the number of repetitions up to about six hours. If you want to proceed more cautiously and get to a maximum of four hours, that's okay.

Small remark

Through the incremental routines you will have the opportunity to catch errors in your understanding of it and to guess how to correct the error. An incremental routine will give you the strength to abandon the childish attitude of always turning to others for advice and clarification. As you practice, you will receive important clues, especially when you have gone through different stages of the incremental process: certain details of the technique will seem heavy, unbearable, unnatural and therefore you will eliminate them; others will disappear on their own without you even noticing; instead others that seemed non-essential to you will be amplified and deepened with good effects that you could never have imagined. In the days following the long practice sessions, you will intuitively perceive the essence of the chosen technique and gain a deeper understanding of it. You may even significantly change your view on why to practice *Kriya Yoga*.