

# **Kriya Yoga: synthesis of a personal experience**

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## FIRST PART: SEARCH FOR KRIYA

### CHAPTER I/01... SELF-TEACHER

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

I was fifteen years old, attending high school, when a great expectation toward «certain oriental practices» arose in me. A schoolmate told me he possessed a detailed text about *Pranayama* adding: «these exercises can change a person inside... ». What did he mean? He could not be merely hinting at the attainment of particular conditions of relaxation and concentration; he definitely did not refer to sticking to some philosophy or changing one's vision of life, but to something more involving.

My friend would not make up his mind about lending me the book and after some days I was no longer thinking about it.

As for other readings, unlike my contemporaries, I had a preference for poetic texts, particularly those which dealt with themes that I could ideally put within the frame of the rural life in which I lived part of my spare time.

In those days, when I experienced an intense, challenging sentimental tie, toward which my rash emotionalism prompted me to take only destructive steps, I undertook the daily rite of listening to classical music, above all Beethoven.<sup>1</sup>

During long walks in the midst of nature, the sudden sight of a breathtaking landscape accompanied by a passage of Beethoven's music which had never ceased to resound in my mind, was now heard with greater intensity because of the fever of that aesthetic shock, caught hold of the yearnings of my heart, blotted out any image from my mind and granted me perfect enjoyment inside an intoxicated ideal of perfection.

My attitude towards that reality which took possession of my soul gradually assumed a profoundly reverent distinctive feature.

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<sup>1</sup> The study of his life was nourishment for my soul. He drew out the depths of his being an incomparable music, for his brothers and for the whole humanity. The tragedy of being deaf hit him at his creative peak. He reacted in a most honorable manner, deciding to carry on his artistic path in spite of his condition. The awful impact of his stout decision can be found in the *Heiligstadt Testament*.

## Technique of mental void

One day, at a news-stand in a rail station, a simple text diverted my sight: *Yoga in 20 lessons*. I bought it on impulse. In a corner of our school's gymnasium, during the lessons of Physical Education, after the preliminary group warm-up exercises, my teacher gave me permission to separate from my schoolmates - who were amusing themselves with some team games - and devote myself to mastering some *Yoga* positions (*Asana*). My teacher was amazed to observe how I succeeded in moving the abdominal muscles with the *Nauli* technique.

Objectively speaking, my *Yoga* reference text was not a mediocre one; with each position (*Asana*) it gave the explanation of its name, a brief note on the best mental attitude for the practice and several considerations about how each exercise stimulated certain physiological functions (important endocrine glands etc.). It was taken for granted that these positions were not to be seen as a simple "stretching work-out"; they were means of providing global stimulus to all the physical organs, in order to increase their vitality. The comfort perceived at the end of a session spoke in favor of their utility.

An entire chapter was devoted to the "Corpse Position", *Savasana*, the last to be practiced. This instruction proved that the author had added something he had learned in other contexts. Structured with great care, that explanation in fact became my first lesson in meditation.

The text did not lose its focus (as did the majority of books on similar topics drawing complicated discourses on different forms of energy within the body etc.) but, through a typically western style, it simply introduced an interesting possibility, that of *stopping all mental functions and, without falling into a state of sleepiness, remain for some time in a state of pure awareness*. It emphasized thus the possibility of putting to rest the faculties of thought and recharge with fresh energy the whole psychophysical system.

I was attracted by the over-exaggerated promise that in a twenty-minute interval it would provide *the mental rest of three hours of sleep*.

This exercise turned out to be, for different reasons, essential; thanks to it, I could verify once and for all the difference, still crucial for my understanding of *Kriya Yoga*, between "mind" and "awareness".

The instruction was to lie down in the supine position keeping the arms extended alongside the body; the eyes are covered with a bandage to keep the light out. After having stayed still for two or three minutes, the exercise begins with the mental statement: «I am relaxed, I am calm, I am not thinking of anything». Then, to enter what the author defines as «mental void» it is necessary to carry out the following unique action: that of giving the thoughts

a visual form, pushing them away one by one, as if «an internal hand moved them gently from the mental-screen center toward its outskirts». All the thoughts, without exceptions, must be moved aside, even the thought itself of being practicing a technique.

To correctly perform this delicate process, it is first essential "to see" each thought, even if its characteristics are abstract. One should never get annoyed over continuous new thoughts but, visualizing them as objects, one shifts them aside in stand-by state; in this way, the developing of an ulterior chain of thoughts is prevented. When one pushes any thought away, one must return to the center, to the region between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) and relax there, in that small spot which resembles a lake of peace. Then the power of pushing away other thoughts, which are going to knock at the door of your attention, will increase!

When in some occasions – especially if one is emotively disturbed – the mechanism does not seem to work, then one's concentration can be converted into a small needle which keeps on constantly touching the region between the eyebrows: at a certain point, the effort employed in such an act disappears and a relaxation similar to the state coming before sleep manifests.

After a few minutes, the situation is the following: while a part of the being, absorbed in *Kutastha*, enjoys a pleasant feeling of rest, another part, pacifically quivering at the outskirts of the former, observes passively a process of creation of indefinite images. For some minutes, the awareness as a whole remains quiet.

In my experience, this final state never lasted more than 10 or 15 minutes and the exercise was never carried on for more than 25-30 minutes altogether.

The technique inevitably ended in a weird way; the state of deep calmness was interrupted by the feeling that the exercise had not been done yet, to which my body reacted with a wince whereas the heart beat faster. Then, the awareness that the exercise had been perfectly executed appeared.

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

### **Decision to extend this technique's dynamics to practical life.**

What I had been experiencing did not leave me cold; it was interesting to observe how the mental process could be momentarily arrested, its apparent consistency faded away, while a state of perfect awareness (independent from any content) marked by a steady continuity would arise. I guessed that this particular state was my truest essence. The Cartesian «I think, therefore I am» became «If I am not able to dominate the mechanism of thought to the point to stop it at will, I cannot say I really exist».

I tried to extend this technique's essential dynamics to practical life, applying the same discipline to my thoughts especially during the idle moments. That was a crucial period of my life and what happened surprised me: seeking the *mental silence* (as Sri Aurobindo called it), I entered a sort of icy void. At times, my life appeared like an island emerging from an ocean of sorrow. It was not easy to withstand the challenge of that gloomy, dejected mood, but the lesson I received was pure gold.

Applying that discipline and constantly dispelling the smoke of our thoughts means not only getting into a state of silence, peace and relaxation, but also seeing with lucidity a fact which concerns ourselves closely.

We mercilessly uncover the perverted situation which characterizes our way of living and reveals itself as the primary cause of our misery.

If the mirror of our introspection is made flawless and undistorted, we begin to see the tremendous influence that the yearning for a continuous injection of petty, useless and dangerous pleasures has upon our life. We start to understand the degree of addiction we have to certain habits. We have dozens of them, from seemingly innocent habits such as drinking sugared drinks, which in time undermines our health, to more complicated, expensive and cerebral ones. Clinging stubbornly to the old habits is one of the causes that creates breakups of relationships or a marked deterioration of them.

When we are clear-headed enough to conceive of an alternative way of living and get rid of all this waste of energy, after breathing for some hours the limpid, sparkling, celestial euphoria of freedom, we encounter a significant resistance. To renounce a habit is like undergoing an internal death.

Each pleasure derived from our habits is wrapped, and unexpectedly dignified by a network of stubborn emotions. Our feelings seem to conspire to fool us into perpetuating, while boldly defending from any attack, the cause of our continuous impoverishment. The hypnotic charm of this force is great, but we have no alternative: unless we want to continually create all possible failures one after another, we must stop the agony of this perverted situation.

Life demands hard sacrifices, loosening our grip on certain situations can launch our heart into new patterns of living.

Although our discipline is perceived as a chilling, useless torture, if we accept its apparent grief, we discover it is indeed short lasting.

### **I will die so that I can live!**

During my first year at university, while I was relentlessly slipping into the habit of feeding myself with countless memories of lost hopes and went on giving up my scheduled time of study for reading Romantic classics,

something came to my aid, pushing me again towards the full application of that stern mental discipline.

A friend introduced me to Mahler's Symphony NO.2 *Resurrection*. Having tried to penetrate its meaning by reading everything I could find about it, in the quietude of my room, entranced, I would listen to it. After much integral, enthusiastic listening, the music resounded all day long in my memory. During the day it would grow and amplify during the moments of quietude, expanding certain elated states of my mind. The words, written by Mahler himself and sung by the choir in the last symphonic movement, «Sterben werd ich, um zu leben!» ( I will die so that I can live!) were a clear echo to my project. They became a thread around which my thought crystallized, while the charm of the whole work restored a vision of innocent beauty. «Was du geschlagen, zu Gott wird es dich tragen!» (What you have earned yourself, will lead you to God!): this was the conclusion of the poem. I understood it this way: «A final immersion in the eternal Bliss will be the final prize for the very fact that you incessantly kept on fighting».

Although I had read about Reincarnation, *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Maya* and the like, it was not possible to stick *ipso facto* to this oriental way of thinking; in that turning point of my life, I was helped instead by the fascination of that piece of music. I was determined to refuse the "comfort" of thoughts, dim lights of the mind, flickering in the night of insecurity; I wanted to bring everything that was not true to an end, I wanted to meet the absolute, plain truth - no matter what it was - and was ready to cross with wide-open eyes a vast land of woe. While intensifying my effort, I kept on repeating inside: « I will die so that I can live!».

One day, through a winding path, I reached a place on a hill: my fixed thought was what I should do during the years to come in order to keep my ideals alive. The idea arose to resume, with a greater commitment, the practice of *Hatha Yoga*. Considering its benefits for health, memory etc. I guessed it would be a great help to me.

I purchased B.K.S. Iyengar's *The Illustrated Light on Yoga*.

For one month, about an hour a day flew by through pleasant training sessions. In the last part of the book there was a short introduction to the bright power of *Pranayama*. Some prudential remarks, instead of smothering my enthusiasm and guiding me to an extreme carefulness, turned on an immoderate will to practice it intensively.

I found this passage: «Pneumatic tools can cut through the hardest rock. In *Pranayama* the *yogi* uses his lungs as pneumatic tools. If they are not used properly, they destroy both the tool and the person using it. Faulty practice puts undue stress on the lungs and diaphragm. The respiratory system suffers and the nervous system is adversely affected. The very foundation of a

healthy body and sound mind is shaken by faulty practice of *Pranayama*.»  
When I read those lines, a sudden blaze put silence and stillness into my being. This warning brought my interest to exasperation, since all I was trying to achieve was that things within me were set into motion for change. I needed some "explosive mixture" to win over my internal resistances; an authentic inner earthquake was to be preferred as opposed to the ongoing situation. Perhaps through this discipline I could learn the secret of «dying to myself».

A quotation from the *Bhagavad Gita* struck my imagination: «(The *yogi*) knows the joy eternal which is beyond the pale of the senses which his reason cannot grasp. He abides in this reality and moves not therefrom. He has found the treasure above all others. There is nothing higher than this. He who has achieved it, shall not be moved by the greatest sorrow. This is the real meaning of *Yoga* - a deliverance from contact with pain and sorrow.»

I was really excited, never had I heard something like that! I often repeated this sentence to those friends of mine whom I deemed fit to share my enthusiasm with.

## **Pranayama**

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

During such a practice, one should try to perceive the flow of energy through some subtle channels called *Nadis*. The principal *Nadis* are *Ida*, which flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column and is said to be of feminine nature, and *Pingala* - of masculine nature - which flows parallel to the former one. *Sushumna* flows in the middle, beyond the duality inherent to the two preceding *Nadis*.

It is not difficult to imagine that the *Nadis*, just like the water-pipes in the house, might be "rusty", "dirty" and "obstructed", and that the state of deterioration of these *Nadis* have a connection with the decrease of vitality in our body. The amount of "dirtiness" in the *Nadis* can be related to disharmony and conflicts inside of our disposition. Thus, cleaning these channels, through *Pranayama*, brings about a transformation in our personality.

There are moments of the day in which we feel more externalized, others in which we are more internalized; in a healthy person this alternation is characterized by a balance between a life of positive relationships and a serene contact with his/her own depths. Unfortunately, a lot of people lack such harmony.



The excessively introverted people tend to lose contact with the external reality. The consequence is that the ups and downs of life seem to gang up against them in order to undermine their peaceful composure. The excessively extroverted people betray frailty in tackling what comes up from the subconscious realm and may have to face unexpected distressing moments.

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

As a result, the practitioner develops a greater emotional awareness, a more precise evaluating criteria and a wider range of abilities to elaborate information, i.e. greater operative intelligence. A more calibrated, intense, precise and clearer logical process will rise from a more efficient synergy between thoughts and emotions. In this way, intuition can flow freely in order to face the moments of life for which important decisions are expected to be made. When the first good effects begin to be felt, the *yogi* is encouraged to keep on practicing and goes deeper and deeper into it, looking for "something more." This "something more" is the *Sushumna* current, which begins to flow, creating an experience of joy, happiness, and elation. Here, the "mystic" venture begins; the practitioner might have no idea of what this experience means, and yet it would happen to him.

### **The Basic Routine:**

#### a...*Nadi Sodhana*

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

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

To begin this exercise, the mouth must be closed; the right nostril must be kept closed by the right thumb and air is slowly, uniformly and deeply inhaled through the left nostril. The inhalation lasts from six to ten seconds. It is important not to overdo it to the point of discomfort. After having inhaled through the left nostril, the *yogi* closes the left nostril with the right little finger and the ring finger; then he exhales through the right nostril with the same slow, uniform and deep rhythm. At this point, the nostrils exchange their role; keeping the left nostril closed, air is slowly, uniformly and deeply inhaled through the right nostril. Then, closing the right nostril with the thumb, the exhalation is made through the left nostril, once again slowly, uniformly and deeply. This corresponds to a cycle: in the beginning, six cycles can be made; later, twelve of them. A *yogi* can use a mental count to

make sure the time is the same for both the inhalation and the exhalation. A short pause, amounting to a mental count of three, happens after each inhalation. The nostrils can be closed with the fingers in different ways; the choice depends on the preference of the practitioner only.<sup>2</sup>

#### b...Ujjayi

The technique consists of deeply breathing in and out through both the nostrils, producing a sound/noise in the throat. During the exhalation the noise is not as loud as during the inhalation. After a few days practice, the respiratory action is lengthened without effort. This exercise is normally practiced twelve times. A mental count makes sure that the inhalation and the exhalation have the same duration. It does good to focus not only on the process itself, but on the comfort and the induced calmness as well; in this way, the concentration becomes deeper.

#### c...Bandha

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

The three *Bandhas* are applied simultaneously and held for about four seconds to produce a vibration of the body; this is repeated 3 times. In time, a sensation of energetic current sliding up along the spinal column - an almost ecstatic internal shiver - will be perceived.

After two-three weeks of practice, the *Bandhas* are also done during *Nadi Sodhana* - after inhalation during the short pause of the breath.

#### d...Final concentration

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

### **First effects**

My plan was to verify, through diligent application, if *Pranayama* was really endowed with the aforementioned potentiality. I began to practice the previously described basic routine in an "absolute" way, with a steadfast concentration, nearly as if it had been my only reason to live. (I remember this intensity with nostalgia, especially when, for some reasons, I lack the initial

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<sup>2</sup> Tradition suggests that the exhalation should last twice the time necessary for the inhalation and the pause after the inhalation should be four times as long.

spontaneity for my practice.) I practiced morning and evening with an empty stomach. I began with some stretching exercises - also with some simple *Asana* when I had more time. Finally, I assumed the half-lotus position, sitting on the edge of a pillow, keeping my back straight.

I focused with zeal on applying the instructions flawlessly and with a creative spirit; I concentrated keenly on the alternate feelings of coolness and warmth, produced by the air felt on the hand utilized to open and close the nostrils. The pressure, the smooth flowing of the breath... every detail turned out to be very pleasant. Becoming aware of each peculiarity of the exercise helped me maintain a vigilant attention without getting stressed.

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

In a bushy and ivy-covered ditch, the sun shed its light upon some flowers.

A few weeks before, they were blooming during the cold winter days and now, heedless of the mildest days, were still lingering on in their spell-binding glory. I was deeply inspired. Never would I think that *Yoga* could also drive me toward the dimension of aesthetic enjoyment: at least I could guess that by the time an aesthetic stimulus came, *Yoga* could grant me a lasting base of clarity, thus helping me maintain its beautiful atmosphere during daily life.

But now I felt that my perception of things had changed; I looked around for the most intense colors, being fascinated by them as if they were a material substance that I could touch and receive into myself. Moving my sight around, a landscape appeared among the leaves and a group of distant houses surrounding a bell-tower. I closed my eyes and relied on an inner radiance.

After some weeks of enthusiastic practice, during one quiet afternoon, just before sunset, I was walking amid some trees. Now and then I would give a quick glance to a comment from one of the *Upanishads* which I carried with me, I would glimpse a sentence which awakened new, but at the same time very ancient realizations: «Thou are that»! I closed the book and started to repeat the words as if I were entranced. I do not know if my rational mind could grasp the incommensurable implication of that statement, but yes... I was that light filtering through the leaves which, bearing witness to the new-life bringing spring, were of an unbelievably delicate green.

Back home, I did not even try to put down on paper the numerous "moments of grace" I experienced - I would not have been able to do it. My only wish was to go further and further into this new inner source of understanding and enlightenment. Only that sort of "light" could instill a superhuman poise into my being and save me from being (as far as human relationships were concerned) driven by the destructive impulses born from giant, uncontrollable emotions fed by the dark sap of my fears.

On different occasions I noticed a change in my mind's global functioning – memory, concentration etc., I could especially see this during my exams. Before the test began, a little bit of *Pranayama* would endow me with a sudden calm and self-possession, no matter what the examiner's attitude was. I would not feel nervous at all. I was able to maintain the necessary self-control to master my speech, often succeeding in expressing clearly not only what I knew, but also something more, which just then seemed to become evident for the first time.

### **Kundalini awakening**

After having bought the works of *Ramakrishna*, *Vivekananda*, *Gopi Krishna* and *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* (a big volume with comments by I.K. Taimni), I finally decided to buy also the autobiography of an Indian saint, whom I will indicate by P.Y.<sup>3</sup>, a book I had already seen some years before without buying it since, skimming through it, I had observed that it didn't contain practical instructions. My hope now was that I would have been able to find out useful information such as the addresses of some good schools of *Yoga*. The reading of this autobiography enthralled me and originated a strong aspiration toward the mystical path: I found myself, in certain moments, almost burning of an internal fever. This situation provided a fertile ground for the happening of an event which was radically different from what I had experienced before. It was a kind of "intimate" spiritual experience, nonetheless, since I listened to the description of similar events from the lips of many researchers I have decided to share it. We can consider it a well-defined outcome, achieved through the practice of *Pranayama*.

The premises happened when one night, immersed in the reading of P.Y.'s autobiography, I had a shiver similar to an electric current that spread itself throughout my whole body. The experience was insignificant in itself, but the point was that it frightened me a lot. Knowing my temperament, this was rather strange. The thought flashed upon my mind that a deeper event was

<sup>3</sup> The reader will understand why I do not mention the full name of P.Y. - it is not difficult, however, to figure out his identity. There are many schools of *Yoga* spreading his teachings according to a 'specific legitimacy'. One of these, through its representatives, made me realize that not only won't they tolerate the smallest of Copyright violation, but they also won't even appreciate their beloved Teacher's name to be mixed into discussions on *Kriya* on the Internet. The reason is that, in the past, some people used His name to mislead the search of a high number of practitioners who were trying to receive His original teachings. Moreover, my desire is to inform the reader that in the following pages I will only summarily linger upon my understanding of His legacy, without any pretension to give an objective account of it. An interested reader should not renounce the privilege of turning to the original texts!

going to happen in the short and it was going to be strong, very strong and I would not be able to stop it in any way. It was as if my memory had an inexplicable familiarity with it and my instinct knew its inescapable power. I made up my mind to let things happen unimpeded and go ahead with the reading.

Minutes passed by and I was not able to go on with reading; my restlessness turned into anxiety, and became fear, an intense fear of something unknown to me, threatening my existence. I certainly never experienced such a terror. Normally, in moments of danger, I would remain paralyzed, unable to think; now the anxiety was of a different quality: I perceived something alien to the common experience approaching. I felt the urgency of doing something - even though I did not know what. My mind could not help envisioning the worst hypotheses about what was going to happen. I set myself in the position of meditation and waited. The anguish increased: I was sure I was close to madness – or death. A part of me, maybe the totality of that entity I call "myself", seemed at the point of melting away; the worst thoughts hung over me without a clear justification.<sup>4</sup>

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

I decided to take a break and put off the fatal moment as long as possible. I myself stood up and left the room, out to the open air.

It was night and there was nobody to whom I could communicate my panic!

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<sup>4</sup> In those days I had finished reading Gopi Krishna's *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks). Here the author described the splendid awakening experience he had had following an intense practice of concentration on the seventh *Chakra*, whereas – because his body was probably unprepared – he later met serious physical and, as a reflex, psychic problems as well. According to his description, inside of his body, energy was put in constant motion from the base of the backbone toward the brain. So strong was that energy to force him in bed and to prevent the accomplishment of the normal bodily functions. He literally felt as if he was burned by an inner fire, which he could not put out. Weeks later, he intuitively discovered the way to check out the phenomenon, which became a stout experience of internal realization.

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

At the center of the yard I was burdened, choked, almost crushed by a feeling of desperation, envying all those people who had never practiced *Yoga*.

I felt guilty and ashamed for having hurt through harsh words a friend who had been involved in a part of my search. Like so many others, he had shunned any practice, forgot lofty readings and engaged in working and enjoying life. Equipped with a juvenile boldness, I had addressed to him some words not affectionate at all, which then started to thunder inside of my head; I felt sorry that I had thrown unjustified cruelty at him without really knowing what was in his mind and soul. I would have done anything to tell him how sorry I was to have brutally violated his right to live the way that was best for him. I thought he preferred to protect his mental health rather than become unstable or insane through unsure practices.

Because of my great passion for classical music, I hoped that listening to it might yield the positive effect of protecting me from anguish and help me to get back to my usual mood. Why not try, then? It was Beethoven's *Concert for Violin and Orchestra* that I listened to with a pair of headphones in my room that soothed my soul and, after half an hour, eased my sleep. The following morning I woke up with the same fear in my mind.

Strange as it may seem, the two pivotal facts that today stir the most intense emotions of my life -- that there is a Divine Intelligence at the very basis of everything existing and that man can practice a definite discipline in order to tune with it -- conveyed to me a feeling of horror!

The sunlight poured into the room through the chinks in the shutters. I had a whole day before me. I went out to try to amuse myself hanging out with other people. I met some friends but did not talk about the things I was experiencing. The afternoon was spent cracking all sort of jokes and behaving like the people I had always considered lazy and dull; I succeeded in hiding my anguish. The first day went by - my mind was very worn out. After two days the fear diminished and I finally felt safe. Something had changed anyway, since I actually did not succeed in thinking about *Yoga*: I went around that idea!

A week later, I began, calmly and detachedly, to ponder on the meaning of what had happened. I understood the nature of my reaction to that episode: I had cowardly run away from the experience I had pursued for so long a time!

In the depth of my soul, my dignity was leading me to continue my search, exactly from the point where I had quit. I was ready to accept all that was to happen and let things follow their course, even if this process implied the loss of my wholesomeness. I began the practice of *Pranayama* again, intensely as before. A few days went by without detecting any form of fear. Then, I experienced something awfully beautiful. (Many readers will recognize, in the

following description, their similar experience.)

It was night. I was relaxed in *Savasana* when I had a pleasant sensation, as if an electric wind was blowing in the external part of my body propagating itself, quickly and with a wavy motion, from my feet up to my head. My body was so tired that I could not move, even though my mind imparted the order to move. I had no fear: my composure was serene. The electric wind was replaced by another feeling, comparable to an enormous strength filling into the backbone and quickly climbing up to the brain. That experience was characterized by an indescribable and so far unknown sense of bliss; the perception of an intense brightness accompanied everything. My memory of that moment was condensed into one expression, «a clear and euphoric certainty of existing, like an unlimited ocean of awareness and bliss».

In the work *God Exists. I have met Him* (London 1970) by A. Frossard, the author tries to give an idea of his spiritual experience. For that purpose he creates the concept of the "inverse avalanche". An avalanche is something collapsing, running downhill, first slowly, then faster and violently at the same time. Frossard suggests that we should imagine an "upside-down avalanche" which begins strengthening at the foot of the mountain and climbs up pushed by an increasing power; then, suddenly, it leaps up towards the sky. I do not know how long this experience lasted; its peak definitely held out only a few seconds.

The strangest thing is that in the instant in which I had it, I found it familiar. When it ended, I turned on my side and fell into a calm, uninterrupted sleep. The following day, when I woke up, I did not think of it; it only came up some hours later, during a walk. I was caught by the beauty of that experience and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, for many minutes I was literally enthralled by the reverberation of this memory upon my soul. The rational mind tried to gain an understanding and confidence of an experience which was beyond it – an impossible task. All the things I had thought about *Yoga* until then did not have any importance at all. To me, the experience was like being struck by a lightning. I did not even have the chance to find out which parts of me were still there and which ones had disappeared; I was not able to really understand what had happened to me, rather, I was not sure that "something" had really happened.

## CHAPTER I/02... A KRIYA ORGANIZATION

Undertaking the practice of *Pranayama* was like planting a seed in the desolation of my soul: it grew into a limitless joy and matchless internal freedom. The daily habit of enjoying the controlled flow of my breath changed the course of my life: this discipline implied much more than easing disharmonies and conflicts inside my disposition or refining the capacity for aesthetic enjoyment. It took care of my hopes and brought them forward.

A certainty of eternity, an elated condition stretching out way over the limits of my awareness - a sort of memory hiding in the recesses of my awareness - began to be revealed, as if a new area of my brain had been stirred to a full awakening.

As for the *Kundalini* experience, it appeared again during the following months. I devoted myself to study late, only granting myself short resting breaks every now and then. At the moment I laid down exhausted, it would invariably take place in a few minutes and the rush of energy would occur many times.

There are circumstances fostering it. It takes more than a lukewarm interest or aspiration toward contacting a superior reality: one's heart must be afire! Then one's chosen technique of meditation should include an intense concentration on *Kutastha* - better if followed by that on *Sahasrara* (Thousand-petal Lotus on top of the head).

Furthermore, the element that makes the event almost certain is that of being occupied with any kind of work or study requiring unswerving concentration. This has to be brought ahead without surrendering to the tendency of falling asleep. When one goes to bed, after few minutes, in a pacific dimension intermediary between being asleep and being awake, the experience happens.

Now, even if this experience had happened only one time in my life, my expectations of professional opportunity changed forever. Whatever profession I was looking at, it had to leave me all the time necessary for my meditative practices. A life devoted only to study or to work seemed me meaningless. Most people have the same aim, but are overcome by events and go ahead longing for a freedom that will never come.

As it regards the relationships with others, I could not avoid utilizing the reality of daily life as a field of observation: in my youthful boldness I was convinced I was seeing people as observed through a transparency. I made the mistake of discussing my opinions. Since to me human misery consisted entirely of one thing - the tyranny of uncontrolled thoughts and of instinctive, wild emotions - I tried to make my friends aware of this fact. Actually, their way of acting and expressing appeared to me as accompanied by a kind of



hysteria, embodying a mental deception: they wanted to create a totally false image of themselves.

The great amount of energy they squandered in this play, was counterbalanced by periods in which they gave the impression of "imploding". They disappeared for some time and, strange indeed, they could no longer bear up with those friends they allegedly loved so much.

I believed that *Pranayama* had the power of helping them live in a better way by disclosing a boundless background joy that lies behind the unnecessary self-torture of their performances. I mercilessly unmasked their behavior as to generate a violent reaction. In order to avoid the task of listening attentively to me, they replied that I was unable to love, to respect and to show human sympathy toward others. Besides, the transparency of mind I spoke about what resembled a meaningless void, something unnatural to them; it smacked of «death», it had a freezing grasp, it was the end of the joys of life. Only one friend, a "Hippie", showed me some empathy; the only inappropriate thing to him was my excessive enthusiasm for the power of *Pranayama*. All the other people kept revolting against me rather bitterly.

Then there came a period in my life during which I felt so disoriented, wondering what was the point of frankness and honesty in friendship.

I had to give up and admit that, at least for the present moment, I didn't succeed in talking with a genuine sense of respect and love.

Guilt-ridden, I convinced myself that I was actually taking advantage of my friend's admissions and stories to just find confirmation of my theories.

### **First information about Kriya**

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

In my reading of the autobiography of P.Y. I came to that point in which he introduces *Kriya Yoga*, that kind of *Pranayama*, which was first taught by Lahiri Mahasaya.

He wrote that this technique had to be mastered through four levels. This sparked my curiosity. Lahiri Mahasaya was depicted as the incarnation of *Yoga*: surely there must have been something unique in his "way"! I loved *Pranayama*, and the idea of improving it through different steps sounded amazingly wondrous: if the breathing exercises I had already practiced had given me such incomparable results, it was obvious that the *Kriya* four-stage system would make them greater and greater!

I began exploring as much literature as I could find about *Pranayama* and I went on reading the books by P.Y.. I was amazed by his personality, with unequalled will and an unexpected practical spirit. He would not excite me

when he spoke on a purely devotional tone, but it did whenever he assumed a more technical one, making it possible for me to get at some aspects of the subtle *art of Kriya* - I considered it an art in continuous refinement, not a religious engagement.

What I could guess was that the *Pranayama* taught in *Kriya Yoga* consisted in a way of slow and deep breathing, while the awareness was focused on the spine. Somehow the inner energy was made to rotate around the *Chakras*. The author highlighted the evolutionary value of such an exercise, not just including a man's spiritual side but his physical and mental sides too. He explained that if we compare the human spinal column to a ferromagnetic substance constituted, as taught by physics, of elementary magnets that turn toward the same direction when they are overlapped by a magnetic field, then, the action of *Pranayama* is akin to this process of magnetization.

By uniformly redirecting all the "subtle" parts of our spinal cord's physical and astral essence, the *Kriya Pranayama* burns the so-called "bad seeds" of *Karma*. We allude to *Karma* whenever we stick to the common belief that a person inherits a baggage of latent tendencies from his previous lives and that, sooner or later, these tendencies are to come out in actual life. Of course *Kriya* is a practice with which one can experiment, without necessarily having to accept any creeds. However, since the concept of *Karma* lies at the basis of Indian thought, it is worthwhile to understand and speak freely of it. According to this belief, *Pranayama* burns out the effects of the "bad seeds" just before they manifest in our lives. It is further explained that those people who are instinctively attracted by methods of spiritual development such as *Kriya*, have already practiced something similar in a "precedent incarnation". This is because such an action is never in vain and in actual life they get back to it exactly where, in a remote past, they quit it.

I wondered if the four levels of *Kriya* consisted of developing a deeper and deeper process of concentration on the spinal cord, including particular areas in the brain. My imagination played freely and my fervor grew.

My compelling problem was whether I had to leave or not for India to look for a teacher who would give me all the clarifications about the *Kriya* practice. At that time, planning to get through my university studies quickly, I excluded a journey to India for the near future.

I rather chose to improve the exercises I had already practiced, using all the books I could find about *Yoga*, regardless of what language in which they were written.

At least, now I knew what to search for: a type of *Pranayama* in which the energy had to be visualized rotating, in some way, around the *Chakras*. If this had to be - as stated by P.Y. - a universal process, I had good chances of tracing it through other sources.

There laid something dormant in the corner of my memory which became alive again. When I was a child, I used to read everything I came on to, especially books censored by the Church or considered strongly unsuited for my age anyway; I was proud to practice a total freedom of choice and I was not open to any persuasive advice. I wasted a lot of time on poor readings. In that great heap of books it was impossible to distinguish in advance between the valuable ones and the many other ones which, through tantalizing titles, contained nothing but tall stories, impossible chimeras designed essentially to stun people. In the end I felt I had traveled through an indistinct chaos. I had the bitter feeling that the most precious secrets were still hidden in some other esoteric books, which I had not been lucky enough to find.

Now, I vaguely remembered seeing some drawings, somewhere, sketching out the profile of a person and different circuits of energy all the way throughout the body. The idea came to seek only the essential information in the esoteric books rather than in the classic books on *Yoga* – like Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and similar books.

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

Before purchasing a book I made sure it hinted at the possibility of channeling the energy along certain internal passages, creating thus the prerequisite for awakening the *Kundalini*.

Since my first visit, I had been very lucky; while reading the index of a text which was in three volumes, introducing the esoteric thought of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, I was attracted by the entry: *Breathing exercise for the awakening of Kundalini*.

It was a variation of *Nadi Sodhana*; this was, according to the authors, the secret to wake the mysterious energy!

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

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

So, I went on haunting the bookstore; the owner was very nice to me and I almost felt obliged (considering the cheap price and the perfect conditions of those second-hand books) to buy at least a book per each visit. But sometimes I got very disappointed; a lot of space was usually reserved to theories alien from concrete life, which tried to describe what cannot be seen and what cannot be experienced – such as the astral worlds, the subtle

coverings of energy wrapping our body.

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

He led me to the rear, inviting me to rummage in a messy heap of papers within a carton box. Among a consistent quantity of miscellaneous material (complete series of the theosophical magazine issues, scattered notes from old course on hypnosis etc.), I came upon a booklet, written in German by a certain K. Spiesberger, which contained various esoteric techniques, among which included the *Kundalini-breathing*.

I did not have much familiarity with the German language, but I immediately realized the extraordinary importance of that technique; I would undoubtedly decipher all of it at home, with the help of a good dictionary.<sup>5</sup>

The description of this technique still amazes me; the author, in fact, was not as close to Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* as to the version of *Kriya Pranayama* that P.Y. brought to the west.

During a deep inhalation, the air was to be imagined flowing up the spinal column, abandoning its habitual course; the visualization of this as an empty tube was therefore prescribed and, while inhaling, the air was to be imagined streaming along it from its base all the way up to the area between the eyebrows; then, exhaling, the air had to go down back to the base, along the same route. There was also the description of two particular sounds that the air originated in the throat.

In another book, in English, there was an exhaustive description of the *Magic breath* - more or less the same exercise, but the difference was in visualizing/feeling the energy around the backbone, not inside it. Through the inhalation, the energy had to go up behind the spinal column, to the center of the head; exhaling, it had to go down along the front part of the body, just as in the "Microcosmic Orbit" technique which is described in the Internal Alchemy texts - the mystic tradition of ancient China.

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

Walking home, I could not help skimming through the pages; I was curious

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<sup>5</sup> I cannot help smiling when some half-hearted people insist that they are fond of *Kriya*, yet they will not study some crucial texts in English because they are afraid to misinterpret them. I am convinced that their interests are superficial and rather emotive. Such was my enthusiasm, that I would have studied Sanskrit or Chinese or any other language, if that had given me the chance to understand an essential text on *Pranayama*!

about some rough drawings illustrating techniques which were based on the movement of energy.

I read that the *Magic breath* was one of the most hidden secrets of all times: this filled me with higher enthusiasm; if practiced constantly, accompanied by the strength of visualization, it would produce a sort of internal substance allowing for the spiritual eye's vision.

I convinced myself that the *Magic breath* technique was Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*. I incorporated it in my daily routine: it replaced the practice of *Ujjayi Pranayama*. I was very satisfied although in the next few weeks I did not perceive any substantial changes in the effects.

While I was looking for all the ways of finding other valuable information, while again reading a text of P.Y., I came to know, with my great amazement, that he had written a whole set of lessons on *Kriya*, and that these could be received by correspondence. This would have saved me, at least for some years, a trip to India; I quickly applied for this course.

### **Being a member of an organization and joining a meditation group**

While I was waiting for the written *Kriya* instructions, a letter from the organization informed me about the existence of other people, living not far from my place, who were practicing *Kriya* and had formed a meditation group. I was enthusiastic about this and quivered with cheerful anticipation to meet them. That night I hardly succeeded in falling asleep.

I had the first contact with them through the *kriyaban* (one who practices *Kriya*) who organized their meetings. With great enthusiasm and a sort of euphoria, I approached him, hoping, among other things, to receive more details about the *Kriya* technique.

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

With a sort of sour irony, I would dare say that up to that moment, my existence had been too happy for it to last that long. Life is made of short moments of calm and balance, in an alternation of vicissitudes; during them, people experience problems, limitations and deformations caused by the human mind. Approaching this guy with a total sincerity, I could not have imagined what kind of a hard shock I was about to receive.

He welcomed me with visible enthusiasm, sincerely eager to meet a person with whom he could share the fire of his passion. Since the very first moment of our meeting, standing on his house's doorstep, I told him how fascinated I was by the practice of *Kriya*! He asked me right away when I had been initiated in this practice, taking for granted that I had received the teaching

from the same organization he was a member of. When he figured out the way how I had learned the technique, he was petrified, showing a bitter smile of disappointment. It was as if I had declared that I was the criminal mastermind behind one of the greatest crimes of all time.

He emphasized that *Kriya* cannot be learned through books. He began the tale - which, later on, I had the opportunity to hear plenty of times - of the Tibetan *yogi* Milarepa who, getting no positive results from the painstaking practice of his fraudulently-learned techniques, received the very same instructions kneeling at the feet of and with the benediction of his *Guru* - so that this time the results came out easily.

We all know how the human mind is more conditioned by an anecdote than by a logical inference! An anecdote - even if it is totally fanciful with fictional purpose - is endowed with a sort of internal "brightness" that conditions a person's common sense; stimulating emotions and feelings, it is able to cloud people's judgment in order for them to easily accept conclusions that are absurd. This story made me speechless; I just did not know what to reply.

There was only one way of learning *Kriya*: being initiated by a "Minister" authorized by the direction of his own organization! According to his words, no other person was allowed to teach that technique. Staring right into my eyes, with an enormous emotive impact, he went on saying that a practice learned from any other source was «worth nothing, it will not be effective in matters of spiritual purpose», and a possible effect might be «a dangerous illusion in which the ego remains trapped for a long time».

Inflamed by an absolute faith, he launched himself into a wide digression upon the value of the "*Guru*" - spiritual Teacher - a puzzling concept to me because it was attributed to a person that he had not known directly. In his opinion, having been initiated to *Kriya* through the legitimated channels, P.Y. was real and present in his life: was his *Guru*. The same thing was true for the people who belonged to that group. Their *Guru* was a special aid sent by God Himself, therefore such an event was «the greatest luck a human being can ever have». The logical consequence - underlined with overflowing emphasis - was that, abandoning such form of aid or looking for a different spiritual path amounted to «a hateful rejection of the Divine hand, stretched out in benediction».

He smiled, led me into his room and asked me to demonstrate for him my book-learned *Kriya* technique.

He was naturally intrigued by curiosity and, I suppose, by the expectation to verify a well-rooted prejudice that the technique, received through illegitimate channels, could not - because of a particular spiritual law - be anything but corrupted. He felt relieved, intimately "reassured" when he saw me breathing through the nose instead of through the mouth (as he was told to) that

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

The reader might remember that, according to the books I had read, the way of transporting the energy while breathing could be done through a route around the *Chakras* or inside of the backbone. I tried both ways but, since P.Y. wrote that it was correct to move the energy «around» the *Chakras*, I mainly settled on the first one; therefore, this was the version I explained. Besides, having read in another book that during *Kriya Pranayama* the practitioner was supposed to sing *Om* mentally in the *Chakras*, I added this detail as well.

I could not imagine that P.Y. had decided to simplify the instructions and taught in the west the other variation with no mental singing of *Om*.

While I was talking, my friend did not recognize his *Kriya*. The "secret" he was apparently bound to have not been broken by any of the authors of my esoteric books!

Thus, a bizarre situation was taking place: I was describing for him what by all accounts was indeed the original *Pranayama* taught by Lahiri Mahasaya while he was sarcastically smirking, one hundred per cent sure that I was talking nonsense! Pretending to feel sorry for my consequent disappointment, he informed me in an official tone that my technique had «nothing to do with *Kriya Pranayama*»!

Since my position was totally incompatible with his basic tenets, he recommended for me to send a written account to the direction of the organization, describing the details of my vicissitudes, hoping that they would accept me as a disciple. Only then could I legitimately be one of the great *Kriya* family and practice safely under their surveillance.

I was somewhat stunned by the tones to which our dialog was progressing. In order to re-establish the initial agreeability of our meeting, I tried to reassure him about the positive effects that I had gained from my practice. My statement actually had the effect of worsening the whole matter, giving him the chance of a second scolding, which was not totally unfair but, undoubtedly, out of place. He made clear that I should never look for any tangible effects in the practice of *Kriya*; much less should I display them, because in this way I would «lose them». That clever guy had gotten straight into an obvious contradiction without even realizing it; he was saying that the results were too important to risk losing them by telling others, and a few seconds before he had underlined that they were of no value whatsoever.

Realizing he had given too much of his time to me, a strange metamorphosis took place in his demeanor. It was as if all of a sudden he had been invested with a sacred role: he promised that he would pray for me! For that day, at

least, I had lost the "fight". I told my friend that I would follow his advice.

As a habit, the group practicing *Kriya* would meet twice a week to practice the techniques together. The room devoted to meditation was bare but pleasant. Each member paid part of the rental, so that its fruition would not depend on the owner's whims and it was consecrated to an exclusively spiritual use.

My attendance began in a period that I remember nostalgically; listening to Indian songs translated and harmonized for westerners and, above all, meditating together was a true joy! Everything seemed paradisiac to me, even though little time was given to the practice - no more than 20 minutes - often, scantily 15 minutes. A particularly inspiring session of collective practice took place on Christmas Eve; it was enriched by devotional songs and it lasted many hours. Since I had not received *Kriya* "officially" yet, they asked me to limit my practice to simply centering my awareness onto the point between the eyebrows. At the end of each meditation we were required to depart in silence, thus I began to know my new *kriyaban* friends more closely only during the monthly meetings.

Actually, once a month we had a "social" lunch. It was a beautiful chance to spend some time talking together and enjoying each other's company.

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

Unfortunately, a distinct embarrassment in our behavior spoiled the pleasantries of our meetings. The reason was that those who directed the school from a distance, had requested us not to talk about other spiritual paths or deal with specific details about *Kriya*. Authorized people only, could cover such a role; no one in our group could.

During our gatherings, since our conversations were strictly kept on well-defined tracks, we were not able to find a topic for our conversations which would be interesting and, at the same time, respected the given rules. It was not the right place for worldly gossips, unsuitable for a spiritual group discussion. So one single topic was left: the beauty of our spiritual path and our great fortune in having discovered it! No wonder that, after some meetings of mutual "exaltation", an almost frightening boredom started to reign in the group.

As a last resort, some risked entering the realm of jokes; they were not mean or insulting jokes, but a light and innocent use of some sense of humor.

Unfortunately, this also had to live up to the devotional attitude kept by many of the members and eventually succumbed to their cold attitude, unable to show a single inch of true joviality.



I cannot say that people were depressed, rather they seemed divinely happy, but when you tried to be agreeable you got a look and a hint of a smile that left you frozen for the rest of the day.

As a matter of course, the group underwent a great recycling process; many members who had joined in with enthusiasm decided to quit after a few months and then, oddly and without deep reasons, scraped the whole experience off their consciousness.

My open temperament allowed me to become close to one person and establish a bond which later became true friendship. However, it was not so easy to find what could be called a free spiritual seeker: many were emotionally charged "devotees" wearing blinkers.

Even trying to do my best in order to convince myself that I was among individuals akin to me – in other words enthusiastic about *Kriya* - I had to admit that the reality was different! Some of them reacted to my enthusiasm with annoyance: they could not believe that I had no doubts or uncertainties with respect to the *Kriya* path. They considered my euphoria being typical of an immature beginner. An old *kriyaban* told me: «When you receive *Kriya* you will be disappointed». I cannot understand what he meant, since when I received *Kriya*, I was enthusiastic.

With a barely concealed impatience of receiving some elucidation about the technique of *Kriya*, I tried on different occasions to discuss what had been my book-learned practice of it. I hoped that someone, making some remark about it, would ... let the cat out of the bag.

No "courting" could extract from them even a crumb of information. Each one repeated that he was «not authorized to give out any explanations»: this rule was strictly respected: they had received the technique, submitting a precise and solemn promise of "secrecy".

*Secrecy!* How odd this word sounded to me, what a strange appeal, what a mysterious fascination it exerted upon my being! Until then, I had always believed that it did not matter at all how a certain teaching was received, or what book had been read or studied in order to learn it; I thought that the only important thing was to practice it correctly, accompanied by the desire to go deeper and deeper into it.

The idea began to enter my mind that it was fine to protect a precious lore from indiscreet eyes. Later, during an arc of many years, I witnessed an innumerable series of absurdities originating from this behest; dramatically, I had the evidence that it brought miserable repercussions into the lives of thousands of people.

With the exception of one person (who harbored really strange ideas about the spiritual path, to the point that it crossed my mind that he was mentally unstable), these new *kriyaban* friends seemed to censor my excessive interest

in techniques, saying that devotion was much more important. Often they referred to a concept that I could hardly link to the practice of *Yoga*: the paramount importance of loyalty towards P.Y. and his organization.

While their effort in practicing the meditation techniques in a deep way was not remarkable, they tried with any external means (readings, devotional chanting, convocations...) to extract from the depths of their psyche any trace of religious attitude, any scrap of spiritual aspiration. They impregnated it with the natural heart's affection for their *Guru* - even if they had known him only from photos - obtaining thus the resolution of a lifelong commitment. They called the solidity of their surrender to such ideal: "*Bhakti*" – devotion.

Looking back to those times, I wonder what those people's opinion about my impatient attitude might have been, much too different from their quietness.

In my sensibility, I could not conceive the idea of leaning passively upon the protection of a saint who solved all one's problems. This fact, together with others I had experienced in that school, was a cause of real conflict. My approach to the spiritual path was really different from theirs and there was no hope of reaching a point of contact, a common ground.

## CHAPTER I/03... DIFFICULTIES WITH THE KRIYA CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Shortly after my admission to the group, I was introduced to an elderly lady who had corresponded with P.Y. himself. Thanks to her earnestness, sincerity and long-time loyal discipleship, she had been authorized to teach the *Kriya* preliminary techniques. Her temperament was very sweet and more inclined to understanding rather than to censorship.

She taught me two preliminary techniques to *Kriya*, categorically inviting me to limit my practice to them only.<sup>6</sup>

The first one eases off the breath and the whole psychophysical system; it is called *Hong-So* because of the employed *Mantra*. The second one concerns itself with the listening to internal (astral) sounds melting into the *Om* sound. She did not give me these instructions at one time, but after an interval, the latter technique four months after the first one. In this way I had the unique and splendid opportunity to concentrate on the first technique for a long time; only then would the combination of the two techniques come, the first in the morning and a total immersion in the second at night. Thus, I could experiment with the meaning and beauty of each one.

### **Preliminary techniques to Kriya**

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

[II] To practice **the *Om* technique**, a *yogi* leans his elbows on a comfortable support that can be used for the purpose. The support can be a simple horizontal table of any material, covered with foam-rubber and settled on a vertical stake of adjustable height. Practicing in the evening or at night is best; it is preferable to lock oneself up in a room, so that nobody will disturb the practice.

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<sup>6</sup> In order to be precise, she also checked my performance of the so-called "Recharging Exercises" which I had already learned from the written lessons. These were physical exercises similar to isometric stretches and were practised by standing. The strength of the concentration directed the *Prana* in all the parts of the body.

The technique consists of closing the ears with the thumbs and in listening to every internal sound, while repeating «*Om, Om, Om...*» mentally (settling into a slow rhythm of about one *Om* per second) throughout the practice.

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

The *yogi*'s intuition begins a long journey into his deepest memory, that of his divine origin. The *Om* can be heard in a lot of variations; it can be easily perceived after the ears have been closed, as soon as a minimum of internal calm is created. The right attitude is to focus upon the loudest of these variations. Each mental repetition of the *Om*, keeping the attention alive, is essential; the awareness patiently follows any feeble inner sound like an "Ariadne's thread" out of the labyrinth of mind.

Gradually it approaches a sublime dimension, the *Omkar* Reality, which is the vibration of the primeval Energy.

Foreseeing the thought rising in my mind, that lady went on clarifying that the *Hong So* technique was not easy at all, in spite of its apparent simplicity! She said that if the results had been disappointing, the cause would be some subtle mistakes in the practice.

She remained rather vague but, encouraging me with a smile, she concluded: «The technique contains all you need to come into contact with the Divine Essence».

I will be honest; my superficial beginner's attitude led me to regard the *Mantra* as a "magical formula" which could give me, within some days of practice, a superhuman concentration.

As is obvious, I became very disappointed: it was the most boring technique in the world. The practice seemed useless and dull.

One day, supported by the same goodwill characteristic of my way of learning, I started to attentively observe a couple of details which, in my opinion, were responsible for my failures.

[1]...By repeating the *Mantra* mentally over and over, it can easily and naturally conform to a hard-to-change rhythm. Once breathing follows this rhythm, it consequentially never settles down. Once the rhythm has stabilized itself, inhalations and exhalations are made, even if the body "would like" to stay off-breath for some moments.

Anybody can avoid this situation by not establishing any rhythm during the mental chanting of the *Mantra*. The pauses between a breath and another should be "allowed to exist"; therefore, they should be experienced, no matter if each lasts less than an instant. This simple fact is sufficient to ease the breath off, while a condition of total and almost perfect immobility stabilizes within the body.

[2]...During inhalation the chest swells out and gets into an elastic tension. While lungs and diaphragm are stretched, there is an elastic force trying to relax them. Therefore, the pause between inhalation and exhalation is contrasted not only by the rhythm but by the chest elasticity as well. It is fine to be aware of this elastic strength: this is sufficient to make a more comfortable and freer pause after the inhalation - the resulting exercise will then be executed and experienced with greater harmony.

Putting all this into practice - a "virtuous circle" between this growing calmness and a reduced necessity of oxygen - brought me to a nice condition in which the movement of air through the nose was so slight as to be totally imperceptible.

Trying to discuss my observations with those who practiced that technique, I realized how hard it was for them to talk about such things. Sometimes I noticed an enormous and unreasonable resistance towards such a discussion. There were those who were not satisfied with their practice but planned to try it again in the future (at that time they would postpone listening to my reasoning), while others were not able to understand what I was saying. I remember that when I tried to discuss these details with a lady who was a friend of our family for many years, she pretended to listen attentively to me; in the end, she brutally declared she already had a *Guru* and did not feel the need of another one.

Her remark cut me deeply, since it was not my intention to teach her anything: my purpose was to have a constructive talk which could be inspiring for both. Apart from this, what sort of friendship can exist between two persons when one uses that mode of expression?

To pass by such episodes one after the other confirmed the idea that not being encouraged to trust the limpidity of self observation, many of my friends went on mechanically performing what had become an empty ritual; which would appease their conscience.

In order to introduce the second preliminary technique, the so called *Om* technique, that lady explained that her *Guru* (he had decided that this technique, among so many possible ones, should be a necessary rather than optional preparation to *Kriya*), had tried to explain the teaching of the Trinity in a new way.

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

This *Om* technique I was going to learn, discovered by the mystics long ago, makes it possible to detect this vibration. Thanks to it, it is also possible to be guided towards the experience of the "**Son**" - the Divine awareness that is present inside the above-mentioned energetic vibration.

At the end of one's spiritual journey, one can reach the highest reality, the "Father" - the Divine awareness beyond every existing thing in the universe.<sup>7</sup> The lady's explanation was characterized by such a sacred flavor that it accompanied me for the following weeks, helping me overcome the beginning of the practice, where it seems impossible that the sounds will manifest. I remember nostalgically my time in that slightly illuminated room, where I confined myself like a hermit. After three weeks of zealous practice, one day, having just begun the exercises for ten minutes, I realized I could hear an inner sound. It did not happen abruptly, but I felt as if I had been hearing it for some minutes. I was in a state of deep relaxation, that sound reminded me of the humming of a mosquito, then it became a bell, heard from a distance, which was like an embrace of sweetness. It was a really ecstatic experience and it occurred so strangely that it enchanted me. Listening to the *Om* meant touching beauty itself. I can not imagine something similar making a person feel so fine. For the first time in my life I found that the concept of "devotion" had a meaning. I remember that whenever that sense of bliss arose, I would say to myself: «This is what I have always desired. I do not want to lose it anymore».<sup>8</sup>

### **Recollections of the Kriya initiation ceremony**

By studying the correspondence course, I learned different ways of creating healthy habits and how to behave in order not to disturb, rather to foster the blossoming of my spiritual experiences.

I tried my utmost to embrace the school's peculiar Hindu-Christian religious vision. It was easy for me to admire and cherish the figure of *Krishna*, imagining Him as the quintessence of every beauty; more difficult to become acquainted with that of the Divine Mother also, who was not the Madonna, but a sweetening of the idea of the goddess Kali. So much I did that I estranged me from myself. I read and reread only P.Y.'s writings. Sometimes I considered a particular thought of P.Y. so appealing and stunning that I

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<sup>7</sup> This technique does not belong to those included in the original *Kriya Yoga*, where the internal sounds perception happens without closing the ears. It is not an invention by P.Y.. It had been plainly described in the books of classical *Yoga*, called *Nada Yoga* - "the *Yoga* of the sound." It is a good preparation for *Kriya* since instead of putting the accent on "to do", it teaches the attitude of "perceiving."

<sup>8</sup> A lot of people start the *Kriya* path from a wrong attitude, as if seeking results that gratify the ego. They believe and hope that the *Kriya* is a path of "psychological growth", but they will not find a substitute for psychotherapy! The best thing is to relax and recreate through memory the atmosphere of the most beautiful experiences we have ever had in our life and feel a strong desire of finding them again in the *Om* vibration.

would write it down on a sheet of paper and hold it on my desk.

While I was continuously receiving unasked lessons of devotion, humility and loyalty, my interest for *Kriya* became a real craving, a burning fever. I could not understand the reason for which I had to wait for it for such a long time: my great anticipation turned, sometimes, into a fruitless anguish.

The real *Kriya* technique could be applied for, as a rule, after one year of study of the correspondence course. In my case, contingent reasons turned it into two years - the written material traveled by ship and the delay times were enormous.

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

I tried to be good; I waited and dreamed.

Eventually, the moment came to fill the application form to receive the *Kriya* instructions by mail. About four months passed by, every day I hoped to receive the coveted material, finally, an envelope arrived. I opened it with an expectation that I would not be able to describe: I remained deeply disappointed because it contained ulterior introduction material. From the first index page of the material, I understood it was the first of a weekly series, whereas the proper complete technique would be sent within five weeks. So, for another month, I would have to study just the usual nursery rhymes I already knew by heart.

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

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

Those who, like me, were ready to be initiated were about one hundred in number.

A beautiful room had been rented for the ceremony at a very high price and embellished for the occasion with lots of flowers, such as I have never seen in my life, nor even at the most extravagant weddings. The introduction to the ceremony happened in a magnificent way: about thirty people wearing a sober uniform entered the room, lining up with a solemn attitude and their hands joined in prayer.

It was explained to me that those people belonged to the local group whose leader was a stylist who had prepared the choreography of that triumphant entrance. The two teachers, who had just arrived from abroad, walked meekly and bewildered behind them. Then the ceremony began.

I accepted without objections their demand of swearing everlasting devotion not only to the *Guru* P.Y. but also to a six-master chain; of this chain Lahiri Mahasaya was an intermediary link while P.Y. was the so-called *Guru-preceptor*, namely the one who would partially bear the burden of our *Karma*. It would have been really strange if no one had doubts about this; I remember a lady wondering if P.Y. - definitely unable to give any confirmation, now being a long-time resident in the astral world - had really accepted her as a "disciple" and, consequently, to be laden with her *Karma*.

We had been assured that Christ was part of this chain because He had once appeared to Babaji (Lahiri Mahasaya's *Guru*) asking Him to send some emissaries to the West to spread the *Kriya* lore.

This story caused me no perplexity at all: perhaps I had no time to think about it. I was anxious to listen to the explanation of the technique that would have happened in a short time. On the other end, to consider the whole mission of *Kriya* diffusion as originated from Christ himself was a pleasant idea.

The *Kriya* technique embodied God's most effective blessing toward His privileged creature, the humans, which exclusively possessed an inner body with seven *Chakras*. The mystic seven-step ladder of the *Chakras* was the real highway to salvation, the fastest and safest way.

My mind was in great expectation for something I had so strongly desired and for which I had seriously been preparing myself for months. It was not what might be called a "sacrament" that I was submitting to, in order to safeguard a family tradition; it was the crowning of a definitive choice! My heart was immensely happy at the thought of the inner joy that I would gain through the practice of *Kriya*.

Finally, being taught the *Kriya Pranayama*, I found out that I already knew it: it was the *Kundalini-breathing* technique, which I had found a long time ago in my esoteric readings and which prescribes that the energetic current flows all the way inside the spinal column. I have already explained that I had not taken into serious consideration that procedure, owing to the fact that in P.Y.'s writings, which were the basis for my first glimpses of the mechanism of *Kriya Pranayama*, it was written that the energy had to be rotated «around the *Chakras*, along an elliptical circuit». I was not disappointed. Rather, the technique appeared perfect to me.

The explanation of the techniques *Maha Mudra* and *Jyoti Mudra* (they never used the more common term *Yoni*) concluded the technical instructions. Each technique's detail was explained in such a way that it would not allow for the smallest variation and, in addition, a specific routine was warmly recommended.

It was taken for granted that if the least amount of doubt on the correctness of a certain detail had arisen during the practice, nobody was encouraged – even



vaguely – to conduct an experiment and come to a conclusion by himself. The only "correct" action that was fair to do was to contact the management of the school, tell them the problem and receive further guidelines. This, in effect, was what I always did. I learned to interact with the "authorized" individuals only; I would instinctively look for their advice as if it were given by perfect beings that could never be wrong. I believed they were "channels" through which the blessings of the *Guru* flowed. Besides, I was quietly confident that - even if they would not admit it out of humility - they had already reached the highest level of spiritual realization.

I want to anticipate a problem here, which is fundamental to building a good *Kriya* routine. The first exercise to be practiced was the observation of the breath (the *Hong-So* technique) and this had to last ten to twenty minutes. The breathing was supposed to become more relaxed and create a good state of concentration.

Then, after putting the forearms on a support, the listening to the internal sounds began - this would require about the same time. Then there would follow another interruption because of the *Maha Mudra*.

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

In my practical experience, the two preliminary techniques were deeply sacrificed, while the time devoted to the final concentration was too short.

During the *Hong-So* technique, the thought that I should soon interrupt it to start the *Om* technique brought about a disturbing feeling, hampering my whole surrender to its beauty.

The same happened with the procedure of the second technique, interrupting it in order to practice the *Maha Mudra* and *Pranayama*.

The technique of listening to *Om* was a complete "universe" in itself and led to the mystic experience: that is why its interruption was something worse than a simple disturbance.

It was illogical; as if, recognizing a friend with joyous surprise among a crowd, one begins talking with him and suddenly goes away with the hope to meet, quite by chance, that friend again and get back to where the conversation had previously ended. The sound of *Om* was the mystic experience itself, the goal I sought, why should I interrupt that sublime tuning to regain it through another technique? Perhaps because *Kriya Pranayama* was a higher procedure? Higher? What on earth does that mean? It is complete nonsense!

I forced myself into such absurdity for an extremely long period. I am embarrassed to confess that it lasted no less than three years. I went on without changing the prescribed routine, hoping for a hypothetical future evolution of an unclear situation. Such was the power of that insanity that in our group it was called "loyalty".

I had become like one of those animals that, fed by man, tend to forget how to be self-sufficient. At that time, the idea of using my brain seemed to me an act of stupid arrogance.

### **Difficulties with the printed material related to the Higher Kriyas**

In my spiritual research, the *Second Kriya* technique had been sealed as a secret for a lot of years.<sup>9</sup>

Since P.Y. wrote that the *Second Kriya* enables the *Yogi* to leave his body consciously at will, to learn such a delicate mechanism was one of my dreams. I was sure that practicing with such a procedure would have a strong effect on my spiritual evolution.

Among the *kriyabans* in the meditation group, there was a lady, who received *Kriya* initiation many years ago and had once lived by our school's general offices. One day I asked if she had received the *Second Kriya*. She didn't seem to understand my question. So, with astonishment, I reminded her that Lahiri Mahasaya's disciple, Swami Pranabananda, accompanied the moment of his death with the practice of the *Second Kriya*. She became visibly nervous, saying that the quotation clearly referred to the technique of *Pranayama*: one breath, then a second one, and this had to be, in her opinion, the "*Second Kriya*"! I felt my legs give way; I looked at her with a meek and piercing look: unintentionally she had revealed to me the lowest place in which she had pushed all what P.Y. had written or said.

I had the impression that the idea itself of a further technique to be added in time to the too many already received and practiced daily, upset her. It was as if she felt she had made so great an effort in setting the habit of a daily practice of the *First Kriya*, that she could not bring forth a more engaging dedication. I know that, up to this day, she has remained fixed in her

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<sup>9</sup> If I consider what a lot of teachers said and are saying about this technique, I must also consider the idea of a sound jinx hovering over it! As if acting out a perverse will, they unleashed all their ability in generating the wildest of all transformations. One of them tried to convince me that the *Second Kriya* was similar to a Tibetan technique which consisted in boring a hole in the *Fontanelle* [top of the head]. The proof of its validity was the same as in the Tibetan tradition; a *kriyaban* should have been able to insert the stem of a flower into it! I do not want to burden the reader with all the nonsense I heard in all those years. The reason why I was completely spellbound by some of those absurdities is that my tendency was to favour complicated techniques.

conviction.

I don't know which was the worst example of what I call disrespect to *Kriya*, the one described above, or the example to follow.

One day an aristocratic-looking lady revealed to me that, a long time ago, she had received the initiation in the so-called *Higher Kriyas*. Full of enthusiasm, my eyes opened widely. She said she had felt so unworthy that she had put them aside and, after some time, she had forgotten them entirely. This last abomination was inconceivable to me. Her willing ignorance passed off for humbleness was really too much. When I expressed my objection that her behavior seemed an exhibition of indifference toward the higher teachings taught by her *Guru*, she looked at me in bewilderment as if my impertinence had violated an implicit law: do not impudently enter the intimate dimension of her *Sadhana*. She replied saying that what she had was enough; then briskly cut off discussion from that topic.

The school provided only written instructions about the *Higher Kriyas*. No direct initiations were ever given. The reader can guess how interested I was to learn those techniques correctly. They were explained in the last part of the correspondence course. Unfortunately, some details were ambiguous.

I was doubtful about how *Kechari Mudra* had to be obtained (P.Y. wrote that it was an important technique, to be practiced regularly in order to awaken *Kundalini*), hesitant about how to perform the particular form of *Second Kriya* and also about how to master the technique of *Thokar* (the school called it *Third* and *Fourth Kriya*) which required particular movements of the head. I wrote to the school management to schedule an appointment with one of its representatives, a Minister who would soon come to our country. I hoped to clarify everything on that occasion and was looking forward to that appointment with great anticipation. When the Minister arrived I was introduced to him. He said he would clarify my doubts as soon as possible. I was tranquil and waited. I was left in dismay when I figured out that the Minister kept on postponing our meeting without valid reasons at all. Since I decided not to give up, we finally met. I went through something truly unpleasant. I was convinced that hypocrisy, bureaucracy, formality, hidden falsity and subtle violence to one's honesty were totally alien to one who devoted his life to practicing and teaching *Kriya*. Yet, the sensation I had was akin to meeting a business man, who had more important affairs in mind and who was very irritable. He was emphatic not to talk about *Kechari Mudra* and with regard to the head movements of *Thokar*, he advised me brutally to restrict my practice to the *First Kriya*.

I replied I would surely keep in consideration his advice; in spite of that I wanted to see how to move my head correctly in order to practice that

technique in a hypothetical future.

He declared that I was overexcited and this was not a good mark for a *kriyaban* (... I was only in a desperate and deeply disappointed mood); annoyed, he recommended me to write my questions to the school's head. In vain I replied that the movements of the head could not be shown through a letter: I was in front of a "wall" and the refusal was absolute.

I had trusted and respected the school; I had studied the whole reference literature as if preparing for a university exam. I was now consternated to bear witness to the senseless whims of a man on power. After the interview with that ill-disposed figure, I was in an atrocious mental and emotional state.

Those who saw me immediately after this meeting were shocked: they said I was unrecognizable. Having understood what had happened, a *kriyaban* friend with a honeyed voice suggested that I have just received an important lesson from *Gurudeva*: the necessity of being satisfied with the basic teachings. I could not accept any invitation to calm myself and drop the whole matter.

There are childish thoughts that emerge in difficult moments: I was afraid that this man, communicating back to the management of the school, might speak unfavorably of me, saying something that might have reduced the probability for me to obtain that coveted information in the future. I feared I could no longer rely on the heavenly relationship with that *Kriya* organization, which, for so many years, had represented my horizon.

At the same time, another part of myself, which the group's rules had not been able to stifle entirely, knew that this destructive experience would be turned into something crucial both for me and for other people's spiritual improvement. The self-learned enthusiast of *Pranayama*, awakened from too long a sleep by means of a healthy "kick in the butt", was intimately relishing the whole situation.

Some years later I came to know that a group of *kriyabans* living in an important European country, after having tried in vain to receive from the "authorized Ministers" explanations about the *Higher Kriyas*, invited an Indian master in their group. He accepted. At his arrival, after skimming through the written material, he said he was not able to decipher what was written there, since the *Kriya Yoga* that he had been practicing for so many years was quite different.

The written teachings provided by the school were indeed ambiguous; for example, the *Mantra* was presented in an unusual way; a pronunciation especially created for English speakers (Om naw maw bhaw....) was the substitute for its actual syllables. This explanation was not integrated by a note reporting the true and commonly adopted spelling of the *Mantra*. Apart from that, it was always written with twelve separated syllables, as if it was not a *Mantra* but twelve different ones. The average reader would not recognize the *Mantra*: *Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya* at all, thus trying in vain to imagine the origin and the meaning of each

syllables, as if each one was a strange *bija Mantra*. Being acquainted with Indians, I am quite sure that this *yogi* was familiar with what he was reading and that he was by all means able, to easily remove, in few seconds, every doubt. He was just pretending.

His performance was meant to give the impression that P.Y.'s teachings were totally wrong, deceitful and made-up. He aimed at appearing as the teacher who saved those people from an abysmal mistake. He advocated the necessity to start all over again: he was ready to give them initiation into the *First Kriya*. As a matter of course, he lost two thirds of the students on the spot. They, in fact, did not accept to be his formal "disciples", as required by the initiation ritual. Those who accepted his conditions were again initiated to the *First Kriya* and were given new techniques such as the *Kechari Mudra* and *Navi Kriya*. Incidentally, the absolute confidentiality was broken; in this way many other people in Europe received precious information. Later, the group received the *Higher Kriyas*. Some of those *kriyabans* followed the orbit of that Indian master and disappeared as if sucked into a black hole; some swung in and out of the school, bringing on, as a consequence, a practice characterized by a lot of dissatisfaction and changes of mind.

On second thoughts, perhaps that monk at least on one point was right: I was not calm at all, rather I would never be calm any more. I was determined to know *Kriya* inside out and nobody could stop me with any motivation. Rather, I found it strange that a similar passion didn't literally take over my *kriyaban* friend's life. Although remaining faithful to my *Kriya* organization, I didn't accept vetoes.

My interviewer was that elderly lady who taught me the preliminary techniques and was officially invested as a "Meditation Counselor". She blamed me of having made the interview with the Minister a troublesome event. She had learned the *Higher Kriyas* years ago and only in written form, just as I did. Strange to say - in my opinion, an unforgivable negligence - she had never had them checked by direct disciples of P.Y., having had plenty of opportunities to do so. Subsequently, she lost such written material and never asked a copy of it. In plain English, perhaps she knew less than me about that subject. Unable, as she was, to clarify my technical doubts, she finally said firmly, however in her sweet way, that the Minister's advice embodied God's will.

I tried to reason with her about my right and duty to explore all the possible sources. I discussed the project of leaving for India in order to improve my *Kriya*. She mumbled something about India, about so many people that according to her were disappointed or found just drugs or lost the grace of their *Guru*-disciple relationship. I didn't understand. She mentioned the fact that some students found in a well known *Kriya* Ashram a teacher who gave them *Kriya* initiation without any authorization and who combined it with techniques that had nothing to do with *Kriya*. It slipped out of my mouth a

very strong sentence of which I was then surprised: «Should I receive a *Kriya* teaching from the worse criminal in the world, I would be able of turning it into gold. Should it be polluted, I would have the intuition to separate the wheat from the chaff».

She was astonished, perhaps she thought that her many words and scolding proved useless. She said with a sigh that my logic was originated from a wounded ego.

I shifted my attention to a particular photograph of P.Y. shot on the day of his death. It was framed nicely, some flowers and a packets of incense were put before it. In those moments of silence, I had the sensation that some tears were going to form in his blissful eyes (it was not a bizarre feeling, other people told me they had the same impression). I related my impressions to her, in response to which she became so serious and, with her eyes pointed far off toward an indefinite spot, she soberly uttered: «You have to consider it a warning: the *Guru* is not content with you»! There was not the least doubt that she was not joking at all. At that time I realized how P.Y. was a "presence" in her life, although she never met him in person!

She spoke at length, uninterruptedly, for about an hour. She went on explaining that the intelligence is a double-edged weapon: it can be used to eliminate the swelling of ignorance and also to cut off abruptly the lifeblood that sustains the spiritual path. Then she spoke about a disciple of P.Y. which, had been formerly part of the direction of the organization, then had branched out on his own opening another *Kriya* school: a "traitor" to her. She compared him to the angel Lucifer, beautiful and intelligent. Then she lost herself talking about discipline, loyalty...

I remember particularly an anecdote that wanted to illustrate that everything the organization through its representatives asked me came directly from God. She told me what happened when one of his disciples decided to leave P.Y.'s *Ashram*. The *Guru*, aware of this, got in on the disciple's way to stop him, when he heard an inner voice - "the voice of God", she specified - ordering him not to interfere with the disciple's freedom.

The *Guru* obeyed and in a flash of intuition foresaw all the disciple's future incarnations, those in which he would be lost, in which he would keep on seeking – amid innumerable sufferings, jumping from one error to another – the path he was then relinquishing. Then, in the end, the disciple would return to the same path. The lady said that her *Guru* had been really accurate on the number of incarnations that the whole discouraging trip would have taken to be over – about thirty!

The moral of this story was clear, something from which one could not escape: I just had to follow what I had been advised and not to look for other «because that was God's will». If I had not done so, I would lose myself in a

labyrinth of enormous sufferings and who knows when I would be able to get back to the correct path.

Although she admired the earnestness with which I was making progress – unlike so many other tepid and half-hearted people who would go to her only to be reloaded with the motivation they could not find in themselves - she was dismayed, for her devotion toward the *Guru* was totally extraneous to me. By telling me that one or other episodes of P.Y.'s life, she tried to let me share her experiences. I am very thankful to her for all her sincere efforts and time spent with me, but how could she thwart my inner nature? She did only what was in her power: she could not relieve my immense thirst for knowledge of the art of *Kriya*. Looking to her beautiful but sad eyes, I had the clear impression that she was permanently expecting me to act in a somewhat "disloyal" way.

I didn't follow her suggestions. For a long time I hoped to find in some book clues which could help me to clarify my doubts concerning the practice of the *Higher Kriyas* - one was the praxis of *Kechari Mudra*, the second what were the psychophysical blows with which P.Y. assured it was possible to awaken the *Chakras*.

My search took a particular route: she herself told me three names of some direct disciples of P.Y. who had a clash with the school's board of directors and set up on their own. Without saying anything to her, I purchased all their published material, taped lectures and all. I was expecting that in order to show how they had become proficient with *Kriya*, they would come out with intriguing sentences, deeper than the material provided by the main school. A faint expectation lingered in me that they gave the reader (who neglected the principal source to listen to their voice of dissent) the present of a more accurate didactic material.

The first disciple seemed an expert in idle chatter and was mean with giving practical instructions; the second one was undoubtedly more professional, pedagogically gifted, but from of all his literature and tapes only one of his sentences shed a faint light upon one of the *Higher Kriyas*; in the literature of the third disciple - surprising and valuable since, having met the tragedy of mental illness, he recounted exhaustively his anguish - I found (save for an illumining sentence upon the role of *Kechari Mudra*) only a devastating banality.

The secrets, if they had some, were well guarded!

Months later, the lady that I had known, the meditation counselor came to know that I had read the "forbidden" books.

I had no doubt that in the third millennium a person can read whatever he considers more convenient and so I did; one of those books although clarified almost nothing was interesting: I made a present of it to some friends.

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

Her reaction had been so emphatic that *che non mi ferì affatto*; I felt a sort of tenderness toward her. I could sense that her actions were driven by waves of emotions and decades of steadfast conditioning affected irretrievably her commonsense.

Seeing her own expectations regarding my behavior coming true, I am sure that while typewriting that letter and pouring into it lots of other considerations to free all the accumulated tension, her countenance was at last tranquil and serene as if tasting a delicious, intimate satisfaction.

Some years later, when my relationship with that *Kriya* school was almost completely compromised, I met with another of its representatives: in a matter of five minutes that minister showed me (without reservation and hysteria) how to do the movements of the *Third* and *Fourth Kriya* and encouraged me in the practice of all the *Kriya* techniques. Had God changed His plans, or had I finally met a polite and judicious person?



## CHAPTER I/04.... THE BREATHLESS STATE

Overcoming a certain reluctance, I began reading some books written by Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples, who did not have any connection with P.Y.. My hesitation in dropping the literature linked with P.Y. resulted from the fact that, in my opinion, he was unique and I was confident that I would use only his teaching during all my life. I used to get annoyed about those people hinting at some *Kriya* secrets to be gained outside P.Y.'s legacy.

The books written by Lahiri Mahasaya's direct disciples (or by their disciples) were few: mainly commentaries on spiritual classics. They disappointed me and made me miss the clarity of P.Y.'s writing. They were but blank, meaningless words, with an endless number of repetitions in addition to continuous changes of topic, which I considered unbearable. The practical notes, presented as essential, were but scattered notes copied from classical books on *Yoga*. The lack of care in them made me suppose the author had not bothered about checking the original texts he had quoted. He most probably took those quotations from books which were also quoting from other quoting books, continuing a chain where each author would add something to mark his personal contribution.

I deceived myself into believing that from those sources I would not be able to draw anything useful. I decided to study again the whole material furnished by the organization and to dig deeper into it. I used to meet some *kriyaban* friends on Sundays, read crucial passages from those *Kriya* lessons and dwelt on them during a walk. Everyone embarked in a personal study of which those talks represented the peak. I shudder at the thought of how fruitless was our effort - like getting blood out of a stone - yet it's the way things went for about two years.

Then a profound crisis uprooted any scheme and dogma. It originated from the obstinate decision of coping with the problems connected with a delicate relationship in the *yogic* way. I chose, among all P.Y.'s writings, a sentence that matched those plans of behavior toward which my blind instinct drove me. I deceived myself by repeating it internally like a *Mantra* while acting in a way contrary to ordinary common sense. I could not see that this lethal approach prevented me from exerting watchfulness and discrimination. I was acting as supported from "above", imagining that the benedictions and the strength of the *Guru* were with me.

The failure came about and it was desolating and shameful. In a first moment, I could not accept it. I refused to believe that I had acted wrongly. I was convinced that the other person was unable to live up to my action. I believed that mine was an apparent failure, one day everything would resolve

in my favor. Then my illusory dream began to disintegrate, slowly but inexorably.

For some months I wasn't able to track down the thread of a coherent thought, then I succeeded in looking at the whole situation with the due detachment.

My first efforts in exploring my book-learned *Pranayama* were accompanied by intelligence and by a bit of courage too: I could rely only on my intuition. This discipline was for me an art to be perfected with the greatest concentration. While practicing, I dreamt about its unthinkable developments and was quietly excited during each instant of it. This disclosed a real heaven for me!

With regard to the way I tackled the preliminary techniques of *Hong So* and *Om*, I was stirred up by the idea (which revealed false) that they were not effective as *Kriya Pranayama*. I, therefore expressed a never-again-to-be-found commitment: the result rewarded me immensely.

Afterwards, having received *Kriya*, the idea of practicing «the fastest technique in the field of spiritual evolution» made the intensity of my effort lose its edge. Apart from other foolish thoughts, I had swallowed the childish idea that each *Kriya* breath could produce «the equivalent of a solar year of spiritual evolution» and that through a million of these breaths I would infallibly reach the Cosmic Consciousness. I tried just to perform the greatest possible number of *Pranayama* in order to complete quickly the above-mentioned number.

The hypnotic atmosphere of the "Guru's Blessings" made sure that I didn't realize in what situation I had relentlessly slipped and therefore I felt no shame and remorse. I felt myself a privileged being to whom an unexpected advantage had been granted. «Aren't you glad of having found a true *Guru*? - for years I heard this refrain from the organization - Aren't you enthusiastic that He has been chosen for you by God Himself?» «Oh yeess we are happy» we replied with tears of joy. This idea, more than any other factor, had lethal effects on me: it was the cradle in which my ego was fed and strengthened.

To remind myself that I entered the *Kriya* organization only to perfect my already good practice of *Pranayama* created a thorny pain: it was imperative to recreate the spirit of an authentic search. I had to stop behaving like a man who has found a treasure, hides and sleeps satisfied upon it; it was necessary from now on, if *Pranayama* was really a treasure, as I was convinced, to use my intelligence to perfect it. This implied accepting also the uneasiness of uncertainty and doubt.

## Patanjali

I studied Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* with the intention of finding a clue about how to plan a *Kriya* routine. Patanjali's was a pioneer in the art of handling rationally the mystical path, aiming at individualizing a universal, physiological direction of the inner events that explained why a certain phenomenon, inherent to the spiritual path, should be preceded and necessarily followed by other ones. His extreme synthesis may be criticized or, because of its temporal distance, may be hard to understand; however, his work is of extraordinary importance.

In the mystical path (*Yoga*), he pinpoints eight steps: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*.

There are different ways of translating the Sanskrit terms. *Yama*: self-control (non-violence, avoid lies, avoid stealing, avoid being lustful and seek non-attachment). *Niyama*: religious observances (cleanliness, contentment, discipline, study of the Self and surrender to the Supreme God).

About *Asana* (position of the body) Patanjali explains that it must be stable and comfortable.

The first meaningful action is *Pranayama*: regulation of the *Prana* mainly through regulation of the breath. A state of calmness and poise is created which becomes the foundation of the subsequent steps. The *Pranayama* phase leads to the lofty breathless state. *Pratyahara* (the awareness is disconnected from the external reality) requires the perfect immobility. *Dharana* is concentration (focusing the mind on a chosen object). *Dhyana* is meditation or contemplation (the persistence of a focusing action as a steady, uninterrupted flow of awareness, which fully explores all aspects of the chosen object) and *Samadhi* is perfect spiritual absorption (deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself).

As for *Dharana* and *Dhyana*, Patanjali goes on explaining that, after the breath's disappearance, a *Yogi* should look for a physical or abstract object on which he might turn his concentration and practice in a sort of contemplative meditation in a way as to lose himself in it.

In order to relate Patanjali's eight step path with *Kriya*, it appears clear that first two steps (the what-is-correct and the what-is-not-correct) should be taken for granted without being mentioned. The total uselessness of the moralizing "sermons" is manifest. This doesn't mean that a *kriyaban's* life can be licentious. But the necessity of accepting definite moral precepts, is something that is understood only after having tasted the honey of the spiritual experience.

To put it simply, it has been seen that people running a morally questionable life were successful in *Kriya*, coming spontaneously to the so-called virtuous life, while a lot of conformists failed.

A *Kriya* teacher is always inclined to pretending he does not notice some problematic delusive student's behavior. He lays his confidence in the transforming *Kriya* effect. On the other hand, it is obvious that if the eagerness to learn *Kriya* pushes a *kriyaban* to go to a teacher, being further proposed to swear on oath on Patanjali's moral rules (*Yama, Niyama*), the student will, almost surely, make the required promise, just to please the teacher.

As for *Asana*, the *Half-lotus* (seldom *Siddhasana*, hardly ever *Padmasana*) is commonly utilized in *Kriya*. Most of the *Kriya* teachers do not even dream of wasting time in giving personal detailed advice with regard to this point: they know that the earnest and resolute student will use his common sense to find an ideal and comfortable position, so that he can easily maintain his back straight during the *Kriya* practice. The practice of *Maha Mudra*, besides its important role in preparing the body for *Pranayama*, helps in maintaining the spine always supple.

*Pranayama* is the core of *Kriya Yoga*: *kriyabans* know this very well! What they, on the other hand, seem to forget is the fact that it is only a phase of the whole process.

*Kriya Pranayama*, above all if integrated with the *Higher Kriyas*, involves some so ample and delicate procedures that many *kriyabans* don't have the time to give the due attention to what comes afterwards. In a strict physical immobility *Pratyahara* happens, which, without interruption, flows into *Dharana* and therefore into *Dhyana*.

Those techniques which require movement should be ideally and practically situated inside the phase of *Pranayama*: as a whole they constitute a definite action on the breath and therefore on the energy contained in it. The *Prana* is guided, harnessed - hence the utility of certain movements - into definite parts of the body. The breath and the heart slow their pace.

During *Pratyahara* the awareness of the breath is put almost entirely aside: it goes on free, at his own rhythm. Intensifying the awareness of the spine and of the centers of the brain it calms down almost entirely. In this phase, and in those following, it is not possible to move a single muscle of the body.

Entering in an even more great immobility, the mental one, one meets with the *Omkar* Reality in the form of inner sound and spiritual light. This phase is *Dharana* that spontaneously becomes *Dhyana*: the borders between the two being in practice indistinguishable.

Thus it is unthinkable that after the *Kriya Pranayama* one's routine is completed by just waiting passively for five-ten minutes before getting up

from one's *Asana*.

It was not difficult to abide by this principle; its correctness appeared right from the profusion of inner joy. The concentration on the third eye - that "inward eye" which Wordsworth with appropriate words defines as "the bliss of solitude" - happened spontaneously.

I didn't practice anymore the technique *Hong So* before *Pranayama* but, in case, only after it. Some times, especially in the evenings, I replaced it with the *Om* technique.

This happy choice gave birth to one of the most beautiful periods of my life, but to tell about it, it is necessary to make some preliminary remarks about *Japa*.

## **The Mother**

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

«The world is not an unfortunate accident: it is a miracle moving towards its full expression» and «In matter, the Divine becomes perfect...» were her favorite sentences.

From 1958 to 1973 - the year when Mother left her body - she tried to find the passage to the next species, to discover a new mode of life in matter and narrated her extraordinary exploration to Satprem. Their talks are written out in *Mother's Agenda* [Institute for Evolutionary Research, New York.]<sup>10</sup>

She did not behave like a traditional *Guru*, even though she tried to extract from those disciples looking for inspiration at her feet all their hidden potential. «I belong to no nation, no civilization, no society, no race, but to the Divine. I obey no Master, no ruler, no law, no social convention, but the Divine», she affirmed.

Her presence in my life, evoked through close and passionate readings, acted like an inner pressure calling for the necessity of extracting a meaning from each part of my existence. According to her teaching, people become true

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<sup>10</sup> This huge document — 6000 pages in 13 volumes — is the account of twenty-two years of Mother's discoveries.

individuals only when, in a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge, they are perfectly and in a compact manner unified around their divine center.

She stressed the value of not trying to become pure in other people's eyes, but to behave according to the truth of one's being. To her, one should acknowledge one's dark side: in the depths of our being it stirs the same substance which, in a few, has developed in a way of living which is blamed by society. I do not remember where I found her statement that «the desire for purity is the greatest obstacle for one's spiritual path». «Do not try to be virtuous - she added - find out to what extent you are united with what is anti-divine.» I really cannot describe the explosion of joy and the feeling of freedom I felt reading such words which, in the spiritual field, were really revolutionary!

## **Japa**

I remained very impressed how Mother handled a theme that later became one of my favorite ones: *Mantra (Japa)*.

During the projection of a film she heard the Sanskrit *Mantra*: OM NAMO BHAGAVATEH. She wondered what would happen if she repeated that *Mantra* during her daily meditation. She did this and the result was extraordinary. She reported that: «It (the *Mantra*) coagulates something: all the cellular life becomes one solid, compact mass, in a tremendous concentration – with a single vibration. Instead of all the usual vibrations of the body, there is now only one single vibration. It becomes as hard as a diamond, a single massive concentration, as if all the cells of the body had ... I became stiff from it. I was so stiff that I was one single mass.» [This quotation, as well as the next ones, are drawn from *Mother's Agenda*.] The practice of *Japa* consolidated in a life-long habit.

When she sat for meditation, she always began with the repetition of the *Mantra* and there was a response in the cells of her body: they all start vibrating as «seized with an intensity of aspiration» and that vibration went on expanding

It is not the place here to dwell upon the subtle phases of her work in the body: she used the *Mantra* to hasten it. What was important for me was the fact that she dared to challenge Sri Aurobindo's authority. Actually, she said to Satprem: «Sri Aurobindo gave none [*Mantra*]; he said that one should be able to do all the work without having to resort to external means. Had he reached the point where we are now, he would have seen that the purely psychological method is inadequate and that a *Japa* is necessary, because only *Japa* has a direct action on the body. So I had to find the method all alone, to find my *Mantra* by myself. But now that things are ready, I have done ten

years of work in a few months.»

In many passages of *Mother's Agenda* they discussed how the *Mantra* calms the persons around by creating an atmosphere of such an intensity that disharmonies cease to exist.

Furthermore: «*Mantra* has a great action: it can prevent an accident. It simply springs forth in a flash, all of a sudden» but «It has to spring up without thinking, without calling: it should issue forth from the being spontaneously, like a reflex, exactly like a reflex.»

But the *Mantra* is also the sweetest of all the things: «On the days when I have no special preoccupations or difficulties (days I could call normal, when I am normal), everything I do, all the movements of this body, all, all the words I utter, all the gestures I make, are accompanied and upheld by or lined, as it were, with this mantra: OM NAMO BHAGAVATEH ... OM NAMO BHAGAVATEH ... all, all the time, all the time, all the time.»

A last amazing remark I quote is that she was able to notice the difference between those who have a *Mantra* and those who don't. «With those who have no *Mantra*, even if they have a strong habit of meditation or concentration, something around them remains hazy and vague, whereas *Japa* imparts to those who practice it a kind of precision, a kind of solidity: an armature. They become galvanized, as it were».

Useless to say that in those days one single idea rotated in my mind: I had to find my *Mantra*. I experimented with Mother's - Om Namo Bhagavate - but it did not work for me. In the meantime I stuck to the simplest routine of *Kriya* and tried to live in a more conscious way (continuously attentive of any perception, inner and outward).

I tried to carry out the well-known instruction to maintain resolutely a impartial attitude toward both pleasant and unpleasant events, being like a detached "witness". This discipline recommended in almost all the books dealing with oriental meditative practices. After three days, I felt myself under unbearable stress as if all was a pretense, an illusion.

It was at this time that I came across a book about the life and experiences of Swami Ramdas, the Indian saint who moved far and wide all over India unceasingly repeating the *Mantra Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*. This was indeed an important event; his photo - the almost childish simplicity of his smile - kindled my intuition and led me to try the same practice.

An event arose from this decision, which still remains in my heart as a peak experience. Helped by a *mala* (grain rosary), I started to practice *Japa* aloud during a walk for 108 times, then I tried to continue it mentally during the remaining part of that walk and during my daily chores.

(Even though the oriental traditions recommend to do *Japa* mentally, I am confident that it should be done aloud - at least during an initial set of a hundred repetitions. Furthermore, experience and common sense contradict the belief that a *Mantra* works only if it is given by a *Guru*; it is obvious that an expert helping us choose a *Mantra* and using all his persuasion to win our consent to use it relentlessly, represents the most precious service we can ever take advantage of, but that's all!)

The sound of the *Mantra*, which I had already listened to in a spiritual song recording, was very pleasant. Since the choice of my *Mantra* was born from an indubitable predilection, I loved to caress its vibration, prolong it on my lips, make it vibrate in my chest and invest it with my heart's aspiration. My attitude was not that of a supplicating and sobbing devotee, but that of a man one step away from his goal.

Even if sometimes I felt a bit dazed, I maintained the determination never to discard the practice. Since I observed, while doing it, an irresistible impulse to put everything in order, I thought that the *Mantra* could work in a similar way by cleaning my mental stuff and putting my "psychological furniture" in order. The practice was like a pneumatic hammer tearing asunder the concrete of the mind's conditionings, allowing me to cross uninjured its swamps and reach the dimension of pure awareness. I had the impression it annulled the mental background noise, of which presence I was aware only when I sat for *Kriya* - sometimes I felt desperate since it blocked definitively any attempt at concentration. There are some thoughts which we can visualize, identify and block, but a diffuse persistent background noise nullifies all our efforts. This is won when we practice *Japa*. This tool is unique, it can make "miracles" where our best intentions fail!

I was astonished in perceiving its considerable effect. There must be a reason why Continuous Prayer ("Inner Prayer", "Heart Prayer", *Dhikr*) was and is the basic technique used by a lot of mystics.

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

### **The breathless state**

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

One day, during *mental Pranayama*, while I was climbing up and down the *Chakras*, I distinctly perceived a fresh energy sustaining my body from inside. I entered a perfect immobility and, at a certain moment, I discovered I was



completely without breath. This condition lasted various minutes, without any feeling of uneasiness: there was neither the least quiver of surprise, or the thought: «Finally I have it!». The event was enjoyable beyond words: in a blue-painted profundity, it contained the skies of my childhood.

In the following days the same events happened again. I verified the perfect association between the practice of *Japa* and the attainment of this state. I was astonished that one of the simplest techniques in the world, such as *Japa* is, had brought such a valuable result!

Before starting my *Kriya* practice, I looked at the surrounding panorama wondering if I would experience that state once again: after about 35-40 minutes I had already completed the active part – the last breaths of *Pranayama* – and then, after no more than two or three minutes, during mental *Pranayama*, the miracle happened.

An incomparable sense of inner freedom - which is impossible to forget – accompanied the impression to be implacably crushed by the beauty of the nature and, at the same time, be situated above the whole world.

About the effects upon daily life, it reminded me what Sri Aurobindo wrote about the moment he stepped first on the Indian soil, after his long period of studies in England. He told how the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity descended, surrounded him and remained for long months afterwards.

Subsequently, I observed carefully, how the breathless state arose.

My awareness paused on each *Chakra* about ten seconds - as a bee drawn to the nectar in the flowers, hovering upon each in great delight - slightly "touching" its nucleus along an anticlockwise path. The more I relaxed during this inner action, the more I became aware of a fresh sensation of energy sustaining each part of my body. I was thus simultaneously aware both of the *Chakras* and of the body as a whole. A clear perception of an inner lightness and utter mental transparency was the mark that the breathless state was settling. The breathing, which in the meantime had become very very short, eventually came to immobility, like a pendulum gently reaching the equilibrium point.

In the course of three months I lived in this celestial dimension, perfectly at ease, still, without any desire to fulfill. A calm euphoria accompanied me: the certainty of having finally found something stable and immutable within the evanescent flux of existence which sometimes seems to have the consistence of an infinite sequence of reflexes on the water. Flashes of the ultimate stage of freedom touched my mind...

When I went out for a walk, if I met somebody and stopped to listen to him, no matter what he said, a sudden joy would explode in my chest and rise to my eyes to the point that I could barely hold back my tears. Looking at the distant mountains or at other details of the landscape, I would try to direct my feeling toward them in order to turn my paralysing joy into aesthetic rapture; only this could keep back the joy clutching my being, only this could hide it.

Absence of breath does not mean action; it is total lack of movement and of the least thought-caused throb; however it is from it that an action is born which changes one's destiny. Aurobindo wrote «The mind does not act; it simply releases an irresistible action from its recess».

Many outward changes in my life ensued; surely the luminosity that one day would have helped me to get rid of all my doubts about the decision of writing a book about *Kriya*, breaking thus the vow of secrecy, began to radiate since this enchanted epoch.

I thought: «I must not forget this experience ever, I want to have it again, every day of my life, because it is the most real thing which has been experienced ever»! It seemed impossible to lose it.

It lasted almost for one year, then I lost it. The world of the "traveling *Gurus*" was getting closer to my life, and with it an unbelievable confusion too.

#### A NOTE ABOUT JAPA

The literature concerning *Japa* is very vast and of great inspiration. My preferred books are: *In Quest of God* by Swami Ramdas and the *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, translated from Russian by R. M. French [S.P.C.K., London; there are other good translations]. They are two simple books, easily to be found, which explain with amazing simplicity everything essential about *Japa*.

**Swami Ramdas** was born in 1884 at Hosdrug, Kerala, India, and named Vittal Rao. He lived a normal life until he was thirty-six and experienced also the usual ups and downs of an householder's life.

Often he inquired about the true meaning of life and felt the necessity of pursuing the spiritual path in order to get the real "Peace".

At the right moment, his father initiated him into the *Ram Mantra*, assuring him that by repeating it unceasingly he would, in due time, achieved the divine happiness he was aspiring to.

It was then that he renounced the secular life and went forth in quest of God as a mendicant *Sadhu*. The first years of his new life are described in his aforesaid autobiography.

The Mantra "*Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*" was ever on his lips. Besides the practice of *Japa*, he adopted the discipline of looking upon other people as forms of *Ram* – God - and of accepting every happening as coming from the will of God.

In a short time the *Mantra* disappeared from his lips and entered his heart. He beheld a small circular light in the spot between his eyebrows, which yielded him thrills of delight. Then the dazzling light permeated and absorbed him. Lost in this inexpressible bliss he would sit for hours. The world appeared to him as a dim shadow. A stage was soon reached when this dwelling in the spirit became a permanent and unvarying experience. Ramdas attained *Mahasamadhi* in 1963. To meet the simplicity of his life and the greatness of his experience is very inspiring: one receives a fresh impetus to start with *Japa*.

The second book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, is tied with Hesychasm, a Christian Orthodox movement which has astonishing similarities with *Kriya Yoga* path (see further discussion in Chapter III/01).

The origin of this spiritual classic is in many ways a mystery. No one knows for certain if it is a true story about a particular pilgrim or a spiritual fiction created to propagate the mystical side of the Orthodox Christian faith.

We are stricken by the opening words: «By the grace of God I am a Christian man, by my actions a great sinner, and by calling a homeless wanderer of the humblest birth who roams from place to place. My worldly goods are a knapsack and some dried bread in it, and a Bible in my breast pocket. And that is all».

The wandering hermit's life is held before the reader for guidance and imitation. Those who would truly lead a spiritual life will surely feel a wave of attraction for this simple and courageous way of living and will draw benefit from the central idea of starting with a set number of *Mantra* repetitions and then increasing it until it becomes automatic.

In order to realize the ideal of "praying ceaselessly", the pilgrim is first instructed to repeated the Jesus Prayer 6000 times a day, then increase to 12000. Then he finds the Prayer at his lips and in his mind every waking hour, as spontaneous and effortless as the breath itself.

In this wonderful condition he comes to experience the effulgence of the divine light, the innermost "secret of the heart". In order to give the idea of what, from now onwards, his life has become, the pilgrim quotes the Gospel passage of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, identifying himself with them as completely dependent on God: whatever happens, it cannot separate him from God.

The importance of having these examples as reference is felt when moments are encountered in which the temptation to leave *Japa* aside is tremendous. Sometimes one might feel like a convalescent in a difficult process of recovery; sometimes the noise coming from the external world will reach one's ears as amplified, while the widened sensitivity gives one the impression of having become more fragile, vulnerable and defenseless.

At that moment, it is necessary to concentrate upon the chosen *Mantra* with an absolute fervor, to the point of exhaustion - a seeming exhaustion.

I adopted the term exhaustion after discussing *Japa* with a friend. He practiced it without getting any result. I had the impression that *Japa* was for him a cerebral act. His thoughts were repeating it, its vibration was not connected in any way with his body. I observed him carefully while he was practicing: I was witness of a lifeless

practice, a tired plea of God's mercy. Not for nothing he had put aside his initial beautiful Indian *Mantra* and chosen an expression in his mother tongue that was not anything else than a sigh of self-pity. There was nothing to be surprised that, after some time, he entirely abandoned the practice.

He did not know he was about to become the greatest supporter of *Japa*.

The turning came when he took part to a group pilgrimage. Someone began to recite the so-called *rosary* (a set number of repetitions of the same prayer), to this all the pilgrims united. Even if tired and almost gasping for breath, he did not withdraw himself from this pious activity. While walking and praying softly, murmuring under his breath, began to taste a state of unknown calmness. He looked with different eyes at the show of continuously changing landscape and had the impression of living a paradisiac situation. He went on repeating the Prayer unremittingly for all the path, forgetting completely he was tired and sleepy.

When the group rested for a pause he had the grace to be left alone —undisturbed; he slipped into an introspective state and was pervaded by something vibrating in his own heart, which he identified, definitely, with the *Spiritual Reality*. The ecstatic state assumed the consistency of reality, became almost unbearable, overwhelming him. This experience taught him the correct way of practicing *Japa*. He said that the secret was not only to reach but also to overcome the state of "exhaustion." After some experiments he returned to his Indian *Mantra* and, thanks to it, he reached the breathless state.

## CHAPTER I/05... KRIYA TEACHINGS OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

During a trip to Vienna (Austria), I found a book written by an Indian *Swami*, claiming he was teaching the original Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya - P.Y.*'s was mentioned as a slightly modified form of it. Obviously that book, like innumerable others which I would read in the future, had to serve as a bait, to make people interested in the *Kriya* school found by that *Swami* and it didn't include practical explanations.

I was positively excited when I read that the practice of *Pranayama* should be considered inaccurate and wrong if, after a settling-down fair number of breaths, the practitioner - without closing his ears - had not listened to the internal sound of *Om*.

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

Reading that book, I had the sensation that its author knew the whole processes of *Kriya Yoga* far better than many other teachers. In his conception, *Kriya* was divided into six levels. He said they were progressive steps of an enlightening process which would take place in the hollow cavity of the brain called "the cave of *Brahma*". In the frontal part of this region there is the pituitary gland (hypophysis), behind it we have the pineal gland: the seats of the sixth and of the seventh *Chakra* respectively. An emission of light, similar to a voltaic arc, would happen between the two "poles" and shed light in that area. This process was described as a "mystic union". The whole explanation was accompanied by a helping sketch, which had the psychological effect to eliminate all uncertainties on the validity and universality of this theory.

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

In the following months, my fixed idea was to guess what was the principle underlying the promised deepening of the *Pranayama* technique.

Sometimes an annoying doubt appeared: once this new teaching had been received, how could I understand whether it was really original or made up? My reservation stemmed from my conditioning according to which any *Kriya* information, obtained not directly from my school, could be an invention of those who pursued their personal interests, like earning money or exerting power over other people. However, thus I reasoned: whether this procedure was concocted or not, the listening to the *Om* sound with opened ears would surely be considered the proof of an optimal deepening of *Pranayama*.

I convinced myself that the key technical addition consisted in mentally chanting *Om* in the *Chakras* while exerting all the possible attention to the internal sounds.<sup>11</sup>

I can't remember how much of these breaths I used to practice each day: surely, I never went over the 48-60 units. Since from my *Kriya* school I had learned to practise *Pranayama* with open or half closed mouth, thus I did.

After these pleasing breaths I went on listening inwardly.

The best thing was to remain aware of the breath (a calm, short breath, almost imperceptible and on the verge of disappearing), linking each breath with a different *Chakra*.<sup>12</sup>

Recalling the wonderful period of my life when I received the deepest satisfaction from the *Om* technique learned inside the school, I anticipated a striking success in the new undertaking.

The inner sound appeared after just four days of painstaking practice. It was winter and I had a three weeks' vacation. I spent every morning wrapped in the warmth of my home, practicing as much as possible. I experienced a total contentment and ease, as if my *Kriya* path had come to its fulfilment.

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

I spent also some days in a beautiful location equipped for winter sport. Here I could wander the snow-white countryside aimlessly. While I was lazily getting about, the sun set early, painting the landscape with breathtaking colours; the small village, sunk in the snow, started to be all lights. My memory will always hold it as the splendid symbol of my contact with the *Omkar* experience.

The oddness was that I did not know the teacher yet; I had just read his book: it was the intensity of my practice that was extreme!

The winter vacations ended and I got back to my job. During my spare time, I would think about what a precious jewel was the *Kriya* technique, visualizing the possibility of a future deepening, with such a commitment, the *Higher Kriyas* too.

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<sup>11</sup> That teacher would have disappointed me. What I was guessing now was the original *Kriya* of Lahiri Mahasaya not the form taught by that *Swami*. Over the years, he had more and more simplified the original technique. The whole matter is faced in detail in the chapter II/3: what he taught before making so many corrections is reconstructed under the heading school [A].

<sup>12</sup> In the book I had found a deep detail: if we want to make a remarkable spiritual progress, we should engage ourselves in being aware of 1728 breaths a day.

One day, still at work, I was in a room from which I could glimpse, through a pane, the far-off mountains and contemplate the purely celestial sky above them. I was in ecstasy! That distant sky was the mirror of my future years, wholly dedicated to my *Kriya Yoga*. For the first time, the project of retiring and living with a minimal income, maintaining this state for the rest of my days, started to take real shape.

### **My first Kriya teacher**

Being about to undergo surgery in the United States, the author of the book was going to make a stop in Europe; I worked very hard to meet him and receive his *Kriya* initiation on that occasion. That moment came up at last! The introductory conference was for me of great emotional impact. He had a majestic and noble aspect, he was "handsomely" wrapped in his ochre clothes, his oldness, his long hair and beard marked the features of the typical sage. I took glimpses of him while he spoke, hidden by the front rows; I heard him talk of Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy according to his personal experience.

The theoretical concepts he introduced were absolutely new for me and created a beautiful consistent frame for a *Kriya* praxis conceived as a unique progressive process of tuning with the *Omkar* reality. Like a thread passing through all the pearls of a necklace, *Omkar* was coursing through all the different phases of *Kriya*. *Maha Mudra* was not separated from *Pranayama* which was not separated from *mental Pranayama*. Furthermore, the *Omkar* reality had to be perceived not only in the aspect of sound and light but also in the aspect of a "swinging sensation" (some other time he spoke about a feeling of pressure). His stupendous, appealing words were for me a revelation but, at certain moments, the inquisitiveness in learning the new technical details, made me unable to give the due attention to what he was saying and therefore I did not grasp at once all the implication of those concepts.

My obsession was: «What kind of throat sounds are to be produced in this original *Kriya*, to which center does the energy rise in the spine?»

To make the students understand the aspect of movement proper of *Omkar*, he touched some of them (their head and chest) making his hand vibrate, trying to transmit this quivering to their body. He was leading the auditorium into a wondrous dimension, he gave himself completely to us in order we could feel the flavour of this experience.

The initiation into the *First Kriya* thrilled and disappointed me at the same time: the forward bendings that preceded the *Maha Mudra* were really

precious and so it was the final meditation, improperly called *Paravastha*, but the *Pranayama* seemed to have disappeared and reduced to a short purely mental process.

His *Second Kriya*, which I learned months later was easy and enjoyable: it contained a beautiful form of breathing. It consisted primarily in blending the twelve-syllable *Mantra* (*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*) with a fragmented breath. The effect was to touch internally each *Chakra* with one syllable.<sup>13</sup> No one met difficulties in performing and making it a regular part of one's daily routine.

Yet, in spite of his strong power of persuasion, the soil he plowed and was cultivating began to get sterile, because he had made the fatal mistake of leaving out some of the techniques Lahiri Mahasaya had passed on - not only some part of the *Higher Kriyas*, but also some of the basic techniques such as *Kechari Mudra* and *Navi Kriya*.

Aware that the original *Kriya* spirit had been lost in other schools, he focused only in passing on its nucleus. He had tried all Lahiri Mahasaya's techniques, concluding that some of them were not essential, while others were rather too delicate and difficult to be learned. Inexpert attempts to make use of them could result in a useless distraction for the students and a waste of time for him as a teacher. He expressed himself adamantly: the request, by some people, to receive other advanced techniques implied a lack of engagement in the basic ones. What he said made definitely sense, but contributed to his isolation. He did not take into consideration how the human mind really works, through insatiable curiosity and the total rejection of any veto.

He really had all the necessary tools to attract the western world. The book he had written had been a smart strategic action which made him popular in the west, saving for him a place of crucial importance in the domain of *Kriya*. Moreover, his Indian-sage figure impressed the people. Hundreds of scholars were enthusiastic about him, they were ready to back his mission and treat him like a "divinity", being willing to show the same respect to possible collaborators and successors.

But his unlucky decision triggered an inexorable mechanism which pushed away the people who were most indispensable to him. Literally devoured by the thirst for obtaining the complete teachings, they started to turn to the search of other teachers. Disappointed by their defection, he stubbornly focused even more on the essence of the teaching simplifying further the *First Kriya* set of techniques.

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<sup>13</sup> This teaching is quite similar to the *Omkar Pranayama* which by many *Kriya* schools is today given as introduction to the *Second Kriya*. The particular way it was taught by this school is given in Chapter II/03 (see school [A])



I saw the sense of his solitude when, one day, on a *Kriya* reviewing lesson, he told his public that the real *Pranayama* could only take place in a state of calm breath; on the contrary the one, marked by a long deep breath (which many knew was the characteristic of Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy) could be «good only for kindergarten children»!

He closed his nostrils with his fingers and kept that position for some time. He hinted in this way that he had mastered the breathless state; it seemed he wanted to point out that the public was neither able to understand nor to practise *Kriya*.

I thought to myself how many disappointments must have convinced him to make such a peculiar demonstration. Perhaps he had met only people that had not been able to adopt the discipline of a regular meditation and therefore did not gain any benefit but the curiosity for who knows what other secrets of *Kriya*.

Many acknowledge this as a nasty comment to the fact that he was giving his explanations only out of kindness but the audience was not able to understand the deep meaning of what he was demonstrating.

The students were staring at him in loss; he must have been bizarre and peculiar to them. The result was that the beginners could only sense too big a distance to be bridged between them and the master.

Those who already had a good mastering of *Kriya* had the final confirmation that what he had taught up to that moment was a simple introduction to *Kriya* and did not provide the key to obtain the experiential acme.

It is true that a lot of people were contented with his *Kriya*, but they would never do something like organizing a seminar for their teacher. Frankly speaking, the faithfulness of the many was not enough to avoid the worst end. His commendable effort, all the marvellous subtleties by which he had enriched our *Kriya*, making this practice by far more beautiful, was not enough to prevent a shipwreck of his mission, at least here in Europe.

Those who tried to get this absurdity across to him and prevent it, found themselves facing a wall that would never break.

Using the same fliers and changing only the Master's name and photo, many of those people, who formerly organized his seminars, invited another teacher from India because they knew he was well-disposed to explain *Kriya* in its complete form. This invitation was very strange and made perhaps more out of desperation than of conviction because those who had already met him in India knew that his spiritual realization was almost non-existent.

It took two years before he could succeed in overcoming the problems with the visa and could land in Europe; when he arrived he found practically all the afore described teacher's disciples ready to welcome him as a God-sent messenger.

## New-Age-polluted Kriya Yoga

Meanwhile, I meet different groups of people who practised *Kriya Yoga*. I dived headlong into the dreary territory of the *New-Age-polluted Kriya Yoga*. I am reminded of this period of my life when I listen to the tape recordings of some devotional chants bought at that time. For someone of my friends who followed me in this trip, it turned to be the scene of bitter disappointments and marked the definitive abandoning of the spiritual pursuit. My heart, if only I had stopped to listen to it for a moment, would have told me that I was going adrift losing some essential attainments as the breathless state, the listening to *Om* sound.... Very strange to acknowledge: I had forgotten everything, I was like hypnotized. In that ambient I met many persons who – at least that was my first impression – had a trait in common. Bound to a very oriental lifestyle, they particularly loved an atmosphere, a way of behaving characterized by specific sensations that they would cultivate with care and, above all, innocent frenzies.<sup>14</sup>

I learned to relate myself to each of them - for example to those who would host me whenever the seminar was held in a distant city - the way an explorer deals with unknown animals, waiting for any eccentric revelation. At times I would react to their oddness ironically; it was something I just could not help, it came out so spontaneously.

While inside the group tied with my first organization, I met people whose enthusiasm toward *Kriya* was very moderate, and it seemed they practiced the few techniques they knew as if making a sacrifice to expiate the wrong they

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<sup>14</sup> New Age sensibility is marked by the perception of something "planetary" at work. Since distinguished men of science have contributed to the *New Age* sensibility, there is no need to dwell on the affirmation, irrelevant for our understanding, according to which such a progress coincided with the entry of the solar system in the sign of the Aquarium - from this belief it derived the term "Age of Aquarius" or "New Age." The essential thing is that people realized that the discoveries of Physics, of Alternative Medicine, the developments of the Depth Psychology, all converged towards one and the same understanding: the substantial interdependency among universe, body, psyche and spiritual dimension of human beings. The esoteric-initiatic societies, overcoming for a long time the differences of culture and religious vision, had already recognized this truth, which now, has become common heritage. During the twentieth century, the human thought made a strong step forward in a healthy direction. There are many grounds to believe that, in the future, such an epoch will be studied with the same respect with which nowadays Humanism, Renaissance, Enlightenment ages are studied. The New Age thought deserves a deep respect for so many reasons. If I hint at some "frenzies" I refer to the excessive use of alternative remedies for any type of real or imaginary troubles and to even more dangerous theories borrowed with a lot of superficiality from various esoteric currents, rather than to a depth progress in the understanding, in the expansion of the awareness out of the narrow fences of the small ego tied up obsessively to the maintenance of its petty conveniences.

had done: existing, in this new ambient, I met a lot of people who were yet "too passionate" of *Kriya* and oriental meditative practices, fostering too much faith in their alleged cathartic problem-solving potential.

Many focused their attention only on secondary aspects of the mystical path and had lost sight of their goal.

Often a vague sense of well-being perceived while practicing a certain technique for the first time was the proof of the excellence of the technique itself. They did not realize that, in this way, they had made their ego the compass needle of their spiritual journey.

In their meditation room, filled with multicolored posters and cushions, decorations, crystals and other objects, they were satisfied by the established beautiful atmosphere. There existed no other reality to be sought.

Sometimes this attitude was like preparing one's house for a distinguished guest, endlessly polishing and decorating it, delighted by entranced awareness of the different comforts their house allows - meanwhile, after having repeatedly rung the bell, the guest was sitting neglected on the doormat...

Research on alternative medicines, group therapies directed by eccentric guys devoid of academic formation, were expensive distractions to be added to *Kriya*.

Some had the dangerous and potentially destructive mania to explore without ceasing the mysteries inherent to the "human potential". They were able of doing any stupid action for this purpose. Some were lured to invest in expensive seminars where their energy channels would be opened and they would learn the secret how to make use of the *Universal Energy*. All this cost a lot, also because the seminars were not given nearby but abroad, in expensive residences. Some abandoned their genuine attitude and started losing contact with reality. When I dared to call into question the validity of the whole thing, annoyed, rebuked that there was no reason to be perplexed about their practices, without having tried them: «It is our *Karma* that is giving us the best of all the opportunities to grow in all the planes». «We are expected to answer in a positive way. We don't have to stay jammed against this beneficial current otherwise we could have ... to die and born again just to live those experiences that we are now shunning!» «The *Kriya* techniques are practiced with the energy present in the body – they said - well, if this is recharged by the flow of the *Universal Energy*, what appears as a long journey will become like a "stroll"».

With regard to *Kriya* proper, we received various initiations by so to speak "minor" teachers – namely those who once had been some illustrious *Guru*'s right-hand man, then had become independent by their own choice or because the latter disowned them.

Although I felt that ambient extraneous to me, I accepted as an inevitable

drawback to succeed in having the information I looked for with so much passion. Bringing flowers was recommended, some teachers asked for one flower, some others three or six; some fruit was required too - someone might also expect a coconut, forcing the students to desperately look for it store after store; at last, a donation was required, sometimes a free donation, sometimes a compulsory minimum amount of money was set. I would finish all those initiations repeating to myself how satisfied I was, making up my mind about abandoning all other practices and going down the line for the one I had just received. I shunned the awareness that the new initiation had only added something insignificant to what I already knew, that to restrict myself just to it would soon become a "cage" which I would sooner or later felt too much narrow and from which I would break loose.

These initiations were a true vice. There was the tendency of stocking up on techniques as for a famine. This habit created some splits in the personality.

Just to make an example, at almost all those initiation seminars a solemn pledge of secretiveness was the password to be accepted. Every one devotionally took this pledge and, as soon as the meeting was over, they shared, by cell-phone, the coveted news with other students who, in change, would take part in other initiations and would reciprocate the favour.

Generally speaking, after different rituals, the explanations were always quick and shallow; a destructive criticism was often raised against information coming from other sources. We agreed that our teachers were mostly mediocre persons with visible humane lacks; this might have been tolerable in common people, but strongly contrasting with the personality expected of people who called themselves "spiritual guides".

We were not able to find at least one of them who would prove to possess that mastery of *Kriya* which was crucial in such a delicate pedagogic work they were confident to do. Some trifling episodes confirmed our first impression of instability, improvisation and, in one case, even of mental instability. They knew little about *Kriya Yoga* and they taught it in an even more superficial way. How was it possible we endured this situation?

We were subjugated by the myth that *Kriya* is to be received by an "authorized" teacher. They said they were, this was enough. It is strange to think that it was this deep rooted suggestion received from P.Y.'s school that supported our deferential and tolerant attitude toward people we actually despised!

I found it strange that those who organized the meetings gave the impression of being honest researchers and it always guaranteed that no nonsense would ever slip out of their mouths. I was surprised when one of them, beyond simple exhibitionism, quoted by heart some lines from a work by P.Y.; the same, Sibylline lines which had been, once, the source of so many

uncertainties.

He read and read through those texts several times trying to make them out; he really strained upon those texts. I felt that those researchers were my real family; I learned to listen to them respectfully and silently whenever they would correct some of my fancy interpretations on *Kriya Yoga*. Our relationship was based on real affection and it never experienced disagreement, bitterness or formality.

They were always generous toward me and respectful of my personality. Never at all did they try to force something into my mind, sharing with passion everything they had learned, no matter if it cost them a great deal of time, effort and money.

### **Other disappointments from India**

Some friends of ours, coming back from India, showed on their face the excitement for having seen such an extraordinary land. At the same time, their disappointment for all the things they had not been able to learn started to show out. A couple happened to meet a boaster assuring them he knew *Kriya Yoga* and could initiate them. This could only happen as long as they had kept it a total secret without establishing any contact with other teachers. In this manner, the boaster made sure that they would not realize it was not *Kriya Yoga* what they were being taught.

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

Something different happened to a friend of mine who met a descendant of Lahiri Mahasaya. This was one of the master's nephews, a man with a great academic background and with a deep knowledge of *Kriya*, but my friend was not able to learn anything from him. I was taken aback when he told me "something bizarre". He told me that in Benares, and probably in the whole rest of India, *Kriya Yoga* was not practiced any longer.

I kept enough control not to interrupt or to challenge him, then by posing him apparently incidental questions, I tried to understand what it had happened.

My friend, as he usually did, began their talk with trivialities like asking some information on Indian habits, an *Ashram*'s address where he had planned to go, then almost at the end of the interview – he must have remembered he was in Lahiri Mahasaya's house – he asked if any of the disciples of Lahiri were still practicing *Kriya*.

His demeanor must have frozen the eminent listener, because his answer resulted in a sarcastically sour negative; in other words: «Definitely not, it is not practiced any longer. I dare say it is not in the whole Indian peninsula. Rather, you surely are the only one practicing it!».

At the end of his explanations, my friend's eyes were looking at me surprisingly. I am still not sure whether he was hoping to convince me or was just absorbed in bitter frustration. I did not pry into it. In my opinion, he did not realize how foolish he had been with that noble person.

A blow came for him one month later: he came to know that a man from his same town had recently been initiated to *Kriya Yoga* from the very personage he had met in Benares. He was so irritated by that news that he planned to get back to India to raise a protest to that *Kriya Acharya*.<sup>15</sup>

Another friend of mine remained for some days at an *Ashram*, in the hope he might receive *Kriya Yoga*. The leader of the *Ashram* was away, and my friend received the initiation to *Kriya Yoga* from one of his disciples. In the end, he acquired a big volume summarizing the techniques.

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

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

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

Since that material was very interesting, I would have liked to yield to the illusion that my quest had finally ended, since those notes contained what I was asking for. I simply had to convince myself that *Babaji* had but made a synthesis of Tantrism to obtain His *Kriya Yoga*. It was needed the impudence to think that *Thokar* could be considered no more than a variation of the *Jalandhara Bandha*!

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

With a bit of good will and application I could have closed the circle. Chance

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<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, this is something he did not have the chance to do; a serious illness got hold of his life. In spite of our huge character difference, I will always be grateful to this friend for all the things that he shared with me concerning his spiritual path.

made me listen to the recording of a conference of the author Swami S.. He told how he had found those techniques in some tantric texts which he had translated; he, then, made an accurate selection of them to form a coherent system which constituted his system of *Kriya*. How was it possible, then, to have a note saying that those teachings came directly from *Babaji*? Simple. As well as with the majority of Indian masters, he had the book written by his disciples would write the books; they had the brilliant idea to make it more interesting by hinting at a derivation from the mythical *Babaji*. The teacher, then, reflecting a classic Indian habit, never checked that material – he was taken aback later on, coming to know about those "supplementary notes". He tried, anyway, to defend his disciples' work stating that after all .... «*Babaji*'s *Kriya* had Tantric origins».

On top of all this confusion, some Forums appeared on the web devoted to *Kriya*. I found one, without moderator, where an unutterable vulgarity was unleashed and people feel free to insult coarsely those with different opinions. Of course, there were - and there are still - very genuine Forums; what annoys me is that there are always a few *kriyabans* who reply to legitimate and reasonable questions with an unacceptable tone.

With factious tenderness, betraying the lowest form of consideration, they go on labelling as a dangerous mania the seekers' desire of deepening the *Kriya* praxis. They have the audacity of counseling the bewildered student to improve the depth of the already received techniques and be contented with them. I wondered how could they dare, uninvited, enter a person's life, about whom they know nothing, treating that person as an incompetent and superficial beginner! Was it so damn difficult to answer: «I don't have that information»?

## **My second teacher**

When the moment came to meet the long waited for teacher from India - the one, I hoped, was going to explain *Kriya* in its complete form - I was not in the best mood. From some clues, I knew I was going to reckon with a radically new approach. I was afraid that this could upset the simple and adequately profitable routine I got settled in. The magical realm of *Omkar*, which my previous teacher had immersed me in a passionate way, could be neither left aside nor forgotten. I did not even dream about putting other principles as a foundation of my spiritual path. This is why I approached my new teacher with the idea of rejecting him if, somehow, he appeared to be trying to guide me away from such a reality. I met him in a *Yoga* center where he had been invited by some disciples. The synthesis of his introductory speech was that *Kriya* didn't mean to inflate the mind and the Ego moving

toward a hypothetical superior mind, but a journey beyond the mind, in an uncontaminated territory. From certain answers to people's questions, I came to know that he knew my former teacher and was aware of his choice not to teach the whole body of the *Kriya* techniques. He got clearly across to us that the reason of his tour to the West was to re-establish the original teachings. This was enough to overcome my initial wariness.

During the following initiation seminar, I indulgently observed some lacks in his behaviour which, instead, shocked other followers. He was hot-tempered. He exploded whenever he was addressed questions, even if they were legitimate; he would always sense, underneath the words, a veiled opposition, an intention of challenging his authority.

The technical explanation was reasonably clear but, in part, unusually synthetic. For instance, his instructions on *Pranayama* - formally correct - could be understood only by those who had already been practicing *Kriya Yoga* for a long time. He would dedicate a very short time to explain this technique. One day I decided to time him: the explanation was offered in no more than two minutes! He carried on that way for years, in spite of his close collaborators' polite complaints. He demonstrated *Pranayama* by means of an excessively loud vibratory sound. He knew that this sound was not correct, but he continued using it in order to be heard by the last rows of students too, sparing himself the annoyance of getting up and walking among them, as *Kriya* teachers usually do. In any case, he would not bother to say that the sound had to be smooth rather than vibrating. I know that many of the students, believing that this was the "secret" he had brought from India, tried to produce the same sound.

Some years later when he asked me to teach *Kriya* to those people who were interested in it, I rejoiced at this occasion because I could finally explain everything in a complete and exhaustive way. I wanted no student to feel the pain of seeing a legitimate question unconsidered.

After some months, I had the impression that everything was going on smoothly: about a dozen of people had received *Kriya* without any problems.

All of a sudden the situation seemed to get complicated.

This happened when, some months before his visit to our group, in order to prepare a beautiful event, I wrote a letter to him asking if it was possible, at the end of his *Kriya* initiation seminar, to check the students' comprehension through a guided group practice. This of course had never happened; as a matter of fact, the persons went away after the initiation with many doubts.

Incredibly, as a reply, he crossed me out of his list of disciples, communicating his decision to one of his close partners, not to me. Probably, my experience with that teacher would have ended that way - and it would



have been better – had I been informed about what was happening. Unaware of the situation, when I welcomed him back to Europe at his arrival, he hugged me as if nothing had happened. He probably interpreted my presence there as a move of repentance.

Later on, I got appalled when I came to know everything. For the benefit of the group's peace, I decided to go on without reacting but I deliberately began to control myself, without making any reasonable suggestion.

In order to explain the definitive crack of our relations, it is necessary to come back on the shallowness with which he explained the *Thokar* technique. It happened that from one year to another he demonstrated it in a visibly different way. When one among the listeners asked him a reason for the changes, he argued he had not changed anything and that, in the past seminars, a problem of translation might have occurred.

It was I who did that translation. Since his lie was too evident, I did not say anything: my friends remembered very well the head movements they had formerly seen with their own eyes. Although I spent weeks with him, it was not possible to find five minutes to discuss such technical detail.

Confronted with other minor changes, I had the impression that I was cooperating with an archaeologist who was deliberately altering some findings in order to justify them to the public in the theoretic framework he was accustomed to. I saw that so many things were not going along the right direction. My subconscious mind was beginning to rebel. I can vividly remember a dream in which I was swimming in the manure.

I felt that this man, whose every small whim I tried to satisfy, devoting myself to this task, as if I was doing a sacred deed, did not love *Kriya*; he used it, instead, only to conduct here in the West a life more beautiful compared with the wretched one, in India, he had often described to me.

I helped to organize his tours in a way so that he could spread *Kriya* in his rushed, superficial manner: behind my mask of fake delight hid a dry agony. There were moments in which, thinking of my meek beginning in the practice of *Yoga*, my heart felt an indefinite nostalgia for that period which was waiting for nothing but consistency and honesty on my side to rise again and blossom to the full.

Another year went by. As an answer to some friends abroad, I went on behalf of my teacher to their group to teach them *Kriya Yoga*. There I met a very serious student who was already familiar with my teacher's behaviour and was taking part to the initiation ceremony only as a revision. He asked me a lot of pertinent questions, always getting accurate answers. That was the point: «From whom have you learned all these details?» he asked me.

He knew well that my teacher was a total disaster from a didactic point of view. He perceived that I had learned many details from other sources.

How could I ever give *Kriya* initiation using a knowledge that did not originate from my teacher?

He could understand my predicament but was surprised that, since I was authorized to teach *Kriya*, I had never found the chance to talk freely with him about the *Kriya* details!

It was logical, befitting for me, to settle the matter as soon as possible.

Knowing how irascible the disposition of my teacher was, I hesitated a lot, but there was no other way out.

Through a friend, I sent him a fax where I mentioned the matter in hand and prayed him to arrange his time in a way that we could discuss it after his arrival in my group during his next tour. He was in Australia but within one week at the latest I would have received his answer.

## CHAPTER I/06... THE DECEIT OF SECRECY AND THE MISUSE OF THE CONCEPT OF GURU

During one of those crucial days, I went to the nearby mountains to ski. During the trip I was absorbed in my thoughts. My subconscious mind was ready to the cataclysm, in anticipation of an event I intuitively knew would come. Most probably my teacher would have become very angry and would have given in outbursts. If the whole situation slipped out of my hands and, as a result of our break, he would stop coming in our group, those people who loved him would suffer; few people, in fact, would be able to comprehend the reason for my action. I would have been the one who had disturbed a not perfect but however comfortable situation. My friends liked him; his annual visit was a powerful stimulus to their effort; they got themselves up for his visit with an intense practice of *Kriya*. Everybody appreciated his philosophy of life, which was not far from Krishnamurti's thinking.<sup>16</sup>

It was a good day for skiing. I found myself taking advantage of a break by looking at the mountains marking out the boundaries of the distant horizon in all directions. In less than half an hour the sun would paint them pink – of an intense hue on their eastern side and tinged with blue on the western side. I imagined India to be right behind them, the Himalayas being their continuation.

My thought went to all the *Kriya* enthusiasts who found, as I did, insurmountable obstacles in the understanding of their beloved discipline.<sup>17</sup>

For the first time I dared to contemplate a thought, lingering hesitantly long since in my subconscious: I visualized a book on *Kriya* explaining every technique in great detail. How often have I wondered what would have happened if Lahiri Mahasaya or one of his disciples had written it!

My imagination led me to fantasize about its cover, to skim its few pages – sober but very rich in content. If this book existed, we would have had a reliable manual of *Kriya* that would have restrained the so many small or heavy variations made up by various teachers.

Perhaps some annotator would try to force its meaning into his own theories. Nay, I'm sure that some pseudo-*guru* would say that the techniques described

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<sup>16</sup> Up to now, I have continued to read some of Krishnamurti works (like *The Only Revolution*) which convey an unmatched vision of the distinctive feature of the authentic spiritual mind.

<sup>17</sup> I am referring to those researchers who had learned the rudiments of the *First Kriya* and something of the *Higher Kriyas* from an organization or from a traveling teacher in the West. I am not referring to those people who had the fortune to meet a true Master.

in it were for beginners only, while there were much more complicated techniques which could only be passed on by an authorized teacher to chosen disciples. Some people would swallow the bait, contact the author and pay good money to be introduced to those techniques that, through fancy or borrowed from some esoteric book, he had devised. That happens, this is the human nature. But the true researchers would surely be able to recognize the strength, the self-sufficient intrinsic evidence of the original text without commentary. The problem lay in the fact that mine was only a day dream! I let my thoughts stray about what could have happened if I had written it.

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

No more rhetorical claims of legitimacy and riddle-like sentences to allow the reader to guess some technical detail and, at the same time, creating doubts anew! I was day dreaming of a book which proved its validity by incarnating Lahiri Mahasaya's thought, in the simplest and most logical way, in a complete, harmonious set of techniques. The model could be Theos Bernard's *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* (1943. Rider & Company).<sup>18</sup>

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

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

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<sup>18</sup> This extraordinary handbook, better than all the others, clarifies the teachings contained in the three fundamental texts of Tantrism: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*. [Many modern English translations of those three classic books are available. For example the translation by Brian Dana Akers for the first, by James Mallinson for the second, by Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu for the third one.] In spite of having being published many years ago and of several texts of *Hatha Yoga* appearing recently, that book is still one of the best ones. Dusty techniques became more than ever actual, feasible, clear in front of the eyes of our intuition. That is why I thought that a similar book on *Kriya* would be a real blessing for scholars and researchers.

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

Good teachers are and will be always requested, in any field, when a skill is to be transmitted.

But how could I highlight this to them, without being at odds with the rooted conditioning of their "cerebral chemistry"?

Other people for different reasons could not like the book, either because they are taken aback by the barrenness of an exposition deprived of frills, which hurts their convictions, or because their refined sensibility does not manage to catch that *vibration* which should characterize the authenticity of the author's experience.

Only those who love *Kriya* more than their whims would feel an enormous relief in finding it in an esoteric library. I was already living in their happiness. Thanks to them, the book would continue to circulate, and who knows how many times it would get back to the teacher who had decreed its unforgivable flaws. At times he would have to pretend not to notice that a student was browsing through its pages during his seminars, missing thus part of the conference...

Each part of this dream developed in the space of a few seconds, invaded my consciousness as a swollen torrent, as if every part of it had already been rehearsed and cherished innumerable times.

But how could I find the courage to violate the vow of secrecy I made in regard to the *Kriya* techniques, challenging coarsely the sacredness of the *Guru*-disciple relationship as the unique way to be instructed in it? Even if the up-to-now known *Gurus* (I am not referring to historical figures which I didn't know personally) did not have anything of sacredness, the *Kriya* was sacred. It had to be received from an "authorized" person not from books: this had been repeated to me a thousand of times. I began to see secrecy about *Kriya* procedures as mere dogma, unnecessary and sometimes harmful. Nevertheless, I was radically convinced that I could not write it. Yet looking around and watching the blue sky above the gilded mountain brims turning pink all seemed to tell me that the book had already been written, in some angle of my heart!

### **The end of a nightmare**

A harsh reply from my teacher came just a few days later. In a disdainful way, he did not address directly to me but pretended to answer back to the person that materially sent my letter through fax.

He wrote that my excessive attachment to the techniques would never let me out of the fences of my mind - I was like S. Thomas, too desirous to touch with my hand and verify the goodness of his teachings. He added that he would have satisfied my request but only for gratifying my ego.

Reading the term "gratification" I saw he had understood nothing.

We should have talked to each other long before! I wondered why he had never let me express. I didn't want to contest him, I didn't want to destroy him, the necessity that brought me to write him was to establish once and for all what I was supposed to tell and what not to tell to the *kriyabans* during initiation. Why did he always escape me? <sup>19</sup>

I decided to behave in a candid way as if I had not perceived his tone: I had the desire to see what he was capable to do. I neither apologized nor answered in a resentful tone. I wrote that, since I taught *Kriya* on his behalf, a mutual talk about some *Kriya* details was necessary. I added that at such event the other three people in Europe authorized by him to impart the *Kriya* initiation could also be present. I made him thus understand that he would have not wasted time and breath only for me.

I did not receive, neither then nor later, any answer.

Some weeks later I was shown that on his Internet site the plan of his visit in Italy had changed and the name of my town had been taken off; my second letter had brought about a definitive split.

The nightmare was over!

I took a one day vacation and had a long walk; I roamed a lot, tensely, imagining a hypothetical talk with him. All of a sudden I found myself crying with joy. It was too beautiful: I was free, I had been six years with him, and now all that really ended!

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

The next period was pleasant but not as euphoric as I had foreseen: the sense of all the time wasted - of all the silly things which had been carried out thoughtlessly - was weighing me down. I had not even a faint idea of what our

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<sup>19</sup> One day, during a three weeks tour with him, we were alone and he was seeking something in a room: I found the courage to put him a technical question about *Kriya* – it was a delicate question, an issue which set one *Kriya* school against another. He suddenly turned toward me with his eyes injected of such a hate as if he was in the act of killing me; he shouted that I should practice in the way I considered right: it was not his business. This, according to my memory, is the sole technical discourse I had with him in the course of some years.

group was to become without a teacher joining us in the near future. Some weeks later the wheel of good fortune seemed to be turning again; there was the possibility of inviting a new teacher to our group. As he was a well-regarded person, I accepted the proposal to bear the cost of his travel. Some days later, contacted by the teacher's secretary, she handled the financial side of the tour with a shocking earthiness, adding unacceptable conditions. I was really disgusted at the whole situation; I had enough of behaving like a compliant disciple who accepts everything in order to receive one more crumb of information regarding the *Kriya* practice. I declined the offer.

### **The deceit of secrecy**

With the thought of the book that pressed inside me, I reflected a lot on the situation of *Kriya* diffusion. It was very difficult for me to put the unanswered questions in a logic order.

Different conditionings, dogmas carved in my brain, acted as entities which had a life of their own. Each time I tried to think sequentially there was an automatic mechanism which took care to organize my vision in a coherent whole: but this, for one reason or another, appeared as a monstrosity.

According to the organization from which I learned the first rudiments of *Kriya*, secrecy was needed «to maintain the teachings pure»: the baffling fact was that this organization was the first to come up with significant *Kriya* alterations! Perhaps it would better say: «to maintain the modifications pure!» «The technique is effective only if it is obtained by authorized Ministers», repeated the organization. Sometimes I saw was the exact opposite.

He who had been initiated in a solemn way, was practicing with the illusion of being subtly and automatically helped by the *Guru*, while the humble self-taught student put in his practice all the possible prudence and creativeness, being always unsure that on the book from which he had learned *Kriya* or in the words of the friend who explained it to him, there were not all the necessary instructions.

The pressing, obsessing request of secrecy with the threat of possible calamities that would happen to whom infringes it, clearly clashes with everything we read in the biographies of the saints; it suits perfectly instead with the esoteric-magic dimension of certain societies – rather, secrecy is essential to their preservation.

*Kriya* organizations need the secrecy in order not to become modest institution devoted to publishing the works of the Master.

The myth of secrecy allows the myth of the divinity of their *Guru* (the

concept of *Avatar* – divine incarnation) to be kept alive. If there were no secrecy, the *Guru* would belong to everyone, would be inevitably more "human", a great renowned personage but surely not a God in human form. In this situation they could not carry on that subtle work of persuasion that *Guru* is God and thus the organization is the materialization of God's will.

Only in this last hypothesis they could maintain that a *kriyaban* cannot approach God if not through that *Guru* and that organization.

It is good to remind that great *Lahiri Mahasaya* refused to be worshiped as a God. This is a point that some among His followers seem to have forgotten. «God is not a person but a state of consciousness», He remarked! He said: «I am not the *Guru*, I don't maintain a barrier between the true *Guru* (the Divine) and the disciple». He added he wanted to be considered like «a mirror». When a *kriyaban* realizes that *Lahiri Mahasaya* is the personification of what resides potentially in himself, of what one day he will become, the mirror must be «thrown away». Whether one likes it or not, that is exactly what He wrote: thrown away.

People who have been raised with the usual dogmas about the *Guru*-disciple relationship are prevented from fully understanding the impact of these words, otherwise they would face a strong conflict. To face the truth, it takes the courage to abandon one's own illusions, those that are nice and gratifying and it takes also a good brain.

Organizations apart, many think that *Kriya* must be received from a *Guru* «because only the *Guru* knows what you really need!»

This may happen beyond the shadow of a doubt inside some very rare relationships, but usually a *Kriya Acharya* gives the same instructions to everyone and does not want to hear very intimate and personal questions to which he answers: «that is your life!» or «those are matters that you must resolve with your intuition».

Unfortunately those *kriyabans* who could be defined honest and competent *Kriya* Masters are based in India and do not travel. It was said that many know the critical condition of *Kriya* diffusion in the West. They don't appreciate that to learn some crumb of *Kriya* we go to persons they judge charlatans. They think we are irreparably stupid, but instead of meeting us halfway, and giving some of their students the permission to correct our performance of *Kriya*, blinded by dogmas, locked in their ivory towers, they act against common sense, demanding even more secrecy from their few westerner disciples.

A friend of mine, with whom I had shared everything of my spiritual path, accompanying me in my ventures with both the teachers and suffering the same



woes on his own skin, went to India for a vacation, where he visited a teacher whom I held in great esteem but never had the opportunity to meet personally. He explained to that Teacher the deplorable situation of the diffusion of the *Kriya* here in the West and particularly all the vicissitudes of our group; the Teacher said he felt sorry for us and that he was willing to help us. My friend had his *Pranayama* reviewed. When he got back to Italy, I met him; he was very happy and asked me to practice *Pranayama* in front of him. He told me that there was a mistake in my practice. I asked him what it was and his reply literally froze me: he could not tell me, since he promised the teacher he would not reveal anything.<sup>20</sup>

He clarified that he had asked indeed his teacher's permission to correct eventual mistakes in our practice: the answer had been negative, the teacher swore him to secrecy.

Was this teacher – who had manifested the intention to help us - concerned that we would not find any need to visit him after our mistake had been corrected? Was he really so petty and unkind?

I did not put pressure on my friend to tell me everything about his talk with the Master. I could not and would not enter the privacy of his experience, but how could he just let me go on with my mistake? I considered this to be absurd and reacted badly. My friend was taken aback when I cut our discussion and left. The only practical result was the break with that friend.

The "wise" Indian Acharyas have no "representatives" in the West and their students have not the permission to teach anything. Now, it is impossible to think that, each year, an innumerable series of charter flights will transport all those interested in *Kriya* - no matter if old or ill - to a remote Indian village, like a pilgrimage to Lourdes or Fatima!

Unfortunately, the gap between them and us is bound to grow.

### **The misuse of the concept of Guru**

One evening, after a long walk, subdued by a sudden tiredness, I dragged myself back home. Worn-out by my thoughts, the problem of the *Guru*-disciple relationship emerged, obscurely, more as a wound than as a theory unfolding its myths. In my room, I set the record player on "repeat" on Beethoven's second movement of the *Emperor Concert...*

Did anybody, after having haunted all the possible ceremonies of Initiation given by the legitimated channels, being stuffed with all the possible *Guru*'s blessings, ever practice *Kriya* with the same dignity and courage with which Beethoven challenged his fate?

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<sup>20</sup> Considering the episode later, I realized what this incorrect detail was: I had not made the abdominal breath in a particularly visible way. I am sure of this fact because it was the only thing my friend was able to see – we did not talk about inner details of the practice.

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

Sitting down from sleepiness; a strange image captured my attention, that of Vivekananda's "investiture" by his *Guru* Ramakrishna. I read that one day, toward the end of his life, Ramakrishna entered *Samadhi* while his disciple was near him. Vivekananda started to feel a strong current before fainting. Back to consciousness, his *Guru* whispered crying: «O my Naren [Vivekananda], everything I had I gave to you, today. I have become a poor fakir, I do not have anything; with these powers you will do the world an immense good». Later, Ramakrishna explained that the powers he passed onto him could not be used for his own spiritual fulfillment - one had to get to that by himself -, on the contrary, they would help him in his mission as a spiritual teacher.

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

It came spontaneous to read again the memorable, impressive discourse by Dostoevsky about the role of elders in Russian monasteries [*The Brothers Karamazov*].

«What was such an elder? An elder was one who took your soul, your will, into his soul and his will. When you choose an elder, you renounce your own will and yield it to him in complete submission, complete self-abnegation. This novitiate, this terrible school of abnegation, is undertaken voluntarily, in the hope of self-conquest, of self-mastery, in order, after a life of obedience, to attain perfect freedom, that is, from self; to escape the lot of those who have lived their whole life without finding their true selves in themselves. » [Translated by Constance Garnett]

My musings arrived just to that point and there they stopped - for months. I was not yet able to see that the problem did not lie in the concept of *Guru* - which deserved to be explored to the full - but in the fact that the organization made me believe that I found myself in a lucky condition, I had a *Guru* - whereas in fact I was light years distant from having one.

I was hypnotized and could not see that Vivekananda's story and Dostoevsky's extract depicted situations which were intrinsically, exceedingly different from mine.

It took time before the awareness dawned upon me that while the great examples of *Guru*-disciple relationship were based on a real physical meeting

between two persons, my relationship was purely ideal.

I don't know how it happened that I accepted the impudent assumption that *Guru* and God were the same Reality.

A chief of the most important Italian branch of my school had once instructed me: «Don't you understand that P.Y. is the Divine Mother Herself»? Many *kriyabans*, my dearest friends gave this identification for granted. One day, when I was able to unmask this insanity, I closed my eyes for various minutes and tried to have a dispassionate, unemotional discernment of the situation. It seemed to me an absurdity that wore the clothes of a nightmare – I felt an infinite rebellion.

Well, who is a *Guru*?

Let us consider the idea of a net; each individual is a junction from which a lot of links fan out, as from our brain's neurons. When a single individual takes an action - a significant one of course, like starting on a mystic path and making good progress on it - he shakes the surrounding net as well. A serious practitioner is never isolated; thus, he will be helped by other people's positive response and he will be slowed down by their indolence and apathy. In my opinion a real *Guru*-disciple relationship has its foundations in this phenomenon.

An enlightened Master is able to carry the disciple's evolution ahead, or rather foster his/her own spiritual progress, through a factual contact with his/her unconscious dimension. He is able to dive in the ocean of *Collective Unconscious*, track down the tiny vibration which is the ego of the disciple and crack it to a certain point, infusing it with light, with vastness.

Usually the permitted *Kriya Acharyas* (those who were officially allowed to bestow *Kriya* initiation) have not even an ounce of such a power.

Ramakrishna and Vivekananda had different personalities, but, considering the deepest and truest side of themselves, they were one thing.

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

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

Who claims to have legitimately received the power to initiate should reflect upon the fact that to accept a disciple doesn't mean to explain *Kriya* to him, but to accept lucidly and coherently the future tangles and complications that such a relationship might imply.

Those who had the fortune of being drawn to the spiritual path and guided along it by a true *Guru*, should not waste all their time and effort telling innumerable anecdotes, miraculous stories concerning the life of their *Guru*, whose grace rescued their life from insignificance.

It is true that some stories can help build confidence, inspire and transmit helpful lessons, but by going too far with them, useless myths and unjustified expectations might be build. It is quite understandable that generous souls would like to project to other students the blessing they received. It happens also that having an implicit humility, they hesitate in conveying a spiritual instruction when it is based only upon their own experiences.

But the spiritual seed their benefactor planted in them can blossom again in other souls only passing through the warmth of their imperfect but sincere and compassionate humanity.

*The sense of this book is to provide information about the technical aspects of Kriya to those who, for their personal reasons, are looking for it. A seeker will find in it material through which he/she will be able to enrich his/her search. This has nothing to do with Gurus or schools. After the digression on the Kriya techniques (every crumb of what I presently know) the third part of the book deals with the right, sound attitude with which tackle with Kriya. The very fact that it is so difficult to free ourselves from conditioning means that we have some inborn weaknesses which deserve to be studied.*

## SECOND PART: SHARING THE KRIYA TECHNIQUES

### CHAPTER II/01... BASIC FORM OF THE FIRST KRIYA

#### DISCLAIMER OF RESPONSIBILITY

The techniques described herein are exposed for study purposes only and should serve as a comparison with the works of other researchers. The author hopes this work will inspire intelligent feedback. Any remarks, criticism, corrections, and/or additions are welcome. Before you begin posing all kinds of questions to yourself, read through Part II and Part III of this book so you have a thorough understanding of the matter. You'll find that as you go through it many questions will be answered later on.

I wish to make clear that this book is not a Kriya manual! I may write one in the future and face the problem of dividing it into different lessons and giving all the necessary instructions for each level. However, certain techniques cannot be learned from a manual. There are delicate ones such as Maha Mudra, Pranayama, Thokar, and Yoni Mudra, which cannot reasonably be learned without the help of an expert to check their execution.

Each person is different so it is not possible to predict what effects an intensive practice might have on a particular individual.

The author disclaims any responsibility in case of negative results, especially if one decides to practice the techniques without having their execution checked first by an expert. Those who intend to carry on with this practice should do so with a due sense of sacredness and awareness of the wealth it can bring to their life. Although you should have the right and the duty to control your own destiny, securing expert counsel or guidance is indispensable.

**N.B.** When you go to an expert, please advise him if you have physical problems, such as high blood pressure, lung problems, or signs of hyperventilation .... If you have a particular physical problem an expert can lead you through a very mild form of Pranayama and the corresponding Mudras – and if necessary may recommend that you practice them only mentally.

## Introduction to the localization of the Chakras

The *Chakras* are subtle astral organs inside the spinal cord; ideal steps on a mystic ladder guiding one safely to the deepest ecstatic experience. Many believe they can apply what they have found in books on *Yoga to Kriya* but this won't work. Such books are usually filled with useless, misleading representations. While wasting time in visualizing all of it, a *kriyaban* runs the risk of losing the real meaning of the *Kriya* techniques or part of their riches.

*Kriya* is a natural process leading to beneficial results and it should not be distorted by the power of so called "creative" visualization, especially if it goes against the physiology of the body. *Kriya* is not based on creating an artificial condition in the body. When certain particular conditions are established - mental silence, relaxation, an intense desire of the soul - the Spiritual Reality manifests in a captivating way, absorbing all one's attention. Then, subtle movements of energy in the body - or a particular centering of the energy in some parts of the body - reveal the essence of the *Chakras*.

To start *Kriya* practice, *Yogis* (we will use the term *kriyaban*) simply visualize the spine as a hollow tube extending from the bottom of the spine to the brain: the *Sushumna Nadi*. With further practice, the spine is ideally perceived as divided into five parts (see Figure 1).

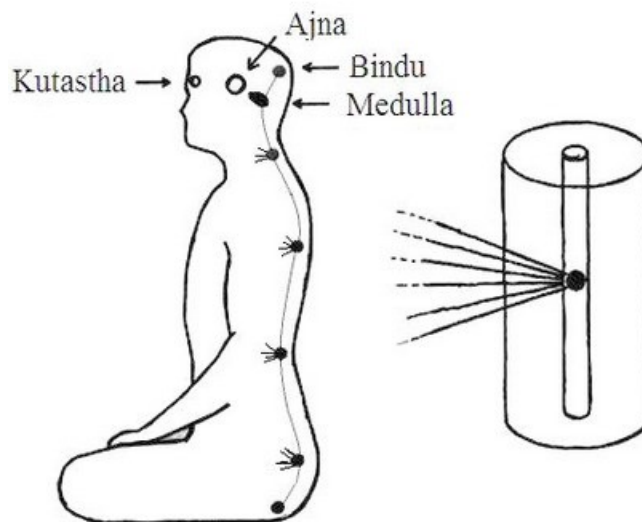


Figure 1. The Chakras and other associated energy centers located in the brain. The first *Chakra*, *Muladhar*, is located at the base of the spinal column just above the coccygeal (tailbone) region; the second *Chakra*, *Swadhisthana*, is at the first lumbar at the level of the sacrum (halfway between *Muladhar* and the

next *Manipura*); the third *Chakra*, ***Manipura***, is in the lumbar region, at the same level as the navel. The fourth *Chakra*, ***Anahata***, is in the dorsal region; its location can be felt by bringing the shoulder blades closer and concentrating on the area between them where the muscles are tensed. The fifth *Chakra*, ***Vishuddha***, is located where the neck joins the shoulders, just below the 7th cervical vertebra.

A *kriyaban* tries to feel the *Chakras* intuitively, even if vaguely. In time, you will be able to experience them as five subtle states of consciousness. Independent traditions situate the sixth, two-petalled, *Chakra*, ***Ajna***, in different places. According to *Kriya* tradition, its location is in the center of the brain. Since the ***Medulla Oblongata*** (under the brain and on top of the spinal cord, below the Pons Varolii, and anterior to the Cerebellum) is very close to it, the *Medulla* is often said to be the seat of the sixth *Chakra*. According to *Kriya*, it is to be visualized as shaped like the back of a turtle. Even a beginner can experience this by focusing his concentration there; restlessness disappears immediately and a tranquil state of consciousness settles in.

The ***Kutastha***, (between and slightly above the eyebrows) also known as the "third eye" or "spiritual eye", is a mirror image of the sixth *Chakra*. All *Kriya* techniques are practiced by focusing one's gaze on that spot. Converging all one's energy on that spot is the prerequisite for entering the innermost channel of the spine. Because it is human nature to have energy scattered throughout the body and to have the inner channels leading to *Kutastha* obstructed, this condition is very difficult to realize.

Unfortunately, some *Kriya* students attempt this with the same eager, impatient, and occasionally insensitive attitude they have in life — especially if they are full of esoteric and "magical" ways of thinking. Either they have been led astray by some text or they have not understood that some states need a certain amount of time before they can be reached. By visualizing too intensely, they force their *Prana* to rise directly from the fifth *Chakra* into the *Kutastha*. This results in tightening the channel rather than opening it. The more they strive, the more problems they will have. Therefore – to calmly and effectively reach the *Kutastha* – it is wise to concentrate first on the ***Bindu*** center which is connected to *Kutastha*. *Bindu* is located in the occipital region or where the hairline twists in a kind of vortex (where some Hindus with shaved heads wear a lock of hair).

In the final phase of *Kriya* where breathing is almost non-existent, the energy and awareness settle into the seventh *Chakra*, ***Sahasrara***. This is unlike any of the other *Chakras*; in fact, it is a superior reality, so we cannot concentrate on it in the same way as with the other *Chakras*. Although it is not difficult to "tune" into the state embodied by it, the only way of reaching it is

to cross the door of *Kutastha*.

New paragraph: It is not necessary to use excessive imagination to become aware of the *Chakras*, but one must understand that during any *Kriya* technique, they are perceived quite differently depending on whether you are focusing on them starting from *Muladhar* and going up the spine (as happens during *Pranayama* inhalation) or starting from *Ajna* and coming down (as during the exhalation of *Pranayama*).

The first six *Chakras* have a twofold nature.

When one's awareness travels up the spine, they are perceived as tiny "lights" illuminating the hollow tube which is visualized as being inside the spinal cord. When one's awareness comes down toward the base of the spine, they are internally felt as organs distributing energy into the body. In other words, during the descent of the awareness, one experiences the energy of each *Chakra* as luminous waves radiating from its location in the spine and thus enlivening that part of the body which is in front of it.

## **Basic techniques**

The ideal times for practicing the following techniques are before breakfast, before lunch at noon, late afternoon before dinner, and at night at least 2-3 hours after eating. *Talabya Kriya* and *Om Japa* can be practiced several hours before the specific *Kriya* techniques.

## **Talabya Kriya**

Starting with the tongue in a relaxed position, and with the tip of the tongue touching the back of the upper teeth, the *kriyaban* presses the body of the tongue against the upper palate to create a suction cup effect. While pressing the tongue against the roof of the mouth, the bottom jaw is lowered to stretch the *frenulum* (the small fold of tissue under the tongue that attaches it to the base of the mouth). This stretching effect should be felt clearly (see Figure 2). The tongue which has been pressed against the upper palate releases itself with a clicking sound and moves down into its natural position.

The tongue is then stuck out of the mouth and pointed toward the chin. At the beginning, do it no more than 10 times a day to avoid straining the frenulum! Eventually, you want to be able to do 50 repetitions. The entire procedure of 50 reps takes almost 2 minutes (110-120 seconds) to complete. Many practice *Talabya Kriya* incorrectly by instinctively turning their tongue backwards (or keeping it vertical) but this cancels the whole effect. It is very important to have the tongue tip touching the back of the upper teeth before pressing it



against the upper palate.<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 2

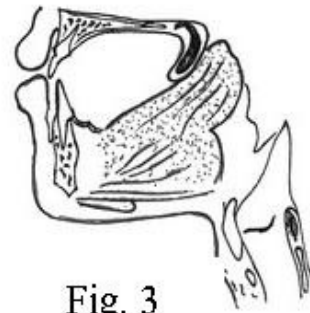


Fig. 3

## Kechari Mudra

After months of practicing *Talabya Kriya* regularly, it should be possible to insert the tongue into the nasal pharynx cavity: this is called *Kechari Mudra* (see Figure 3). When the time comes, the insertion of the tongue is attained using one or two fingers to push it back near its root so it touches the uvula. At that point, the root of the tongue is pushed further back until the tip glides behind the soft palate. Later the tongue tip can slip into the nasal pharynx. After a few more weeks, you should be able to reach the same position without using the fingers. Then you can practice the techniques with the

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<sup>21</sup> In *Hatha Yoga* books there are different suggestions for lengthening the *frenulum*. One well known one is wrapping a piece of cloth around the tongue and, with the help of the hands, gently pulling (relaxing and repeating different times) the cloth both horizontally and also up, towards the tip of the nose. Lahiri Mahasaya was absolutely against cutting the *frenulum* to obtain faster and easier results.

tongue fixed in that position. <sup>22</sup>

#### Note

Because *Talabya Kriya* creates a perceivable relaxing effect on the thinking process it should continue to be practiced even after you are able to do *Kechari Mudra*. It is not known why this stretching of the frenulum reduces thought production. However, anyone practicing this technique can readily verify this. Of course, *Kechari Mudra* will enormously amplify the effect.

### **Maha Mudra**

One starts by bending the left leg under the body so the left heel is as near as possible to the perineum (between the scrotum and anus for males and between the anus and cervical opening for females) with the right leg fully extended in front. Ideally, but not necessarily, you want the left heel exerting pressure on the perineum. This pressure is the best means of stimulating one's awareness of the *Muladhar Chakra* in the coccygeal region at the root of the spine. Through a deep inhalation, the energy is brought up the cerebrospinal tube to the center of the head (*Ajna Chakra*). This is a very simple and easily acquired sensation so there is no need to complicate it.

While holding the breath, stretch forward (in a relaxed way) and interlock hands so you can grasp your big toe. In this outstretched position, the chin is pressed naturally against the chest. Continue holding the breath and mentally chant *Om* <sup>23</sup> in the *Kutastha* 6 to 12 times.

While holding the breath, return to the starting position and with a long exhalation, visualize sending the warm energy down to the base of the spinal column.

Repeat the entire procedure with the leg positions reversed; right heel near the perineum and the left leg outstretched. Repeat the procedure a 3<sup>rd</sup> time with

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<sup>22</sup> Notice the difference in the pictures between *Talabya Kriya* and *Kechari Mudra*. By opening the mouth in front of a mirror, during the first part of *Talabya Kriya*, notice the hollow parts at the sides of the *frenulum*, which will appear as isolated from the body of the tongue; whereas during *Kechari Mudra* the *frenulum* is barely visible and it is the uvula that comes forward.

<sup>23</sup> The correct pronunciation for 'Om' is like the 'ong' in 'song' but drawn out and with the 'o' pronounced like its alphabet name. It must not be pronounced like the 'om' in Tom e.g. 'aum'. In this technique, "Om" is a pure vowel sound and the 'm' is silent. The 'm' is silent because the 'o' sound is prolonged. At the end, the mouth is not completely closed - thus creating the nasal sound "ng". When pronouncing Indian *Mantras*, like *Om namo bhagavate ...* or *Om namah Shivaya ...*, the consonant "m" in "Om" is heard.

both legs outstretched to complete one cycle of *Maha Mudra*. Repeat this three-movement cycle (requiring about 60-80 seconds) two more times for a total of 9 repetitions.

### **Key points**

[1] Some schools suggest drawing the knee (or both knees, before the third movement) against the body so the thigh is as close to the chest as possible during inhalation. The interlocked fingers are placed around the knee to exert pressure on it. This helps to keep the back straight and make the inner sound of the *Anahat Chakra* audible.

[2] *Maha Mudra* must be comfortable and it must not hurt! Initially, most *kriyabans* will not be able to do the forward stretch without risking back or knee injury. To avoid pain or injury, keep the outstretched leg bent at the knee until the position feels comfortable. While holding the breath in the outstretched position, contract the anal and the abdominal muscles and draw in slightly the latter so the navel is drawn toward the lumbar center.

[3] As we have seen, the big toe is grasped while one is in the outstretched position. Some schools insist on this detail and explain that by repeating this action on each leg the balance between the two channels of *Ida* and *Pingala* is increased. A variation is to squeeze the toenail of the big toe with the thumb of the right hand; the index and middle fingers are behind it and the left hand cups the sole of the foot. When the procedure is repeated with both legs outstretched, both toes are grasped with the interlocked hands. (A variation is that the thumbs of each hand press the respective toenails and the index and middle fingers hold the toe from behind).

[4] *Maha Mudra* incorporates all the three *Bandhas*.<sup>24</sup> When applied simultaneously with the body bent forward and without using excessive contraction, it helps one to be aware of both ends of *Sushumna* and produces the feeling of an energetic current moving up the spine. In due course, one will be able to perceive the whole *Sushumna Nadi* as a radiant channel.

### **Om Japa**

This exercise should be performed with concentration before beginning *Pranayama* because it will help "generate" *Pranayama*. Don't pay any attention to the breath. Starting with *Muladhar* (first *Chakra*), chant the *Mantra "Om"* while concentrating on it; then do the same with the second *Chakra* and so on up to the cervical *Chakra Vishuddha* and *Bindu*. During this

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<sup>24</sup> We have given the definition of *Bandhas* in Chapter I/01

ascent of awareness, do your best to intuitively touch the inner core of each *Chakra*.

Then chant "Om" in the *Medulla*, then in the cervical *Chakra* and so on, all the way down to *Muladhara*. During this descent of awareness, try to perceive the subtle radiation of each *Chakra*.

One ascent (*Chakras* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and *Bindu*) and one descent (*Medulla*, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1) represent one cycle that lasts about 30 seconds. Six to 12 cycles are performed. It is fine to chant the *Mantra* aloud during the first three cycles. In the remaining cycles, it can be chanted either aloud or mentally.

## **Pranayama**

*Pranayama* is the most important technique of *Kriya*. It is a breathing exercise which acts directly on the energy (*Prana*) present in the body. Every *kriyaban* practices it differently and each teacher has their own strategy. We are going to explain different details: it is not easy to show how they are integrated into a harmonious whole. The explanation is divided into two parts. At the end of the chapter, there are additional comments. Other variations of this technique will be added later (see chapter II/3).

### **First part: Basic Pranayama**

The eyes are closed and relaxed but focused on *Kutastha* and the mouth is closed. At this point, *Kechari Mudra* is applied for those who can do it. If not, the tongue tip is turned back to touch the middle of the upper palate at the point where the hard palate becomes soft. A deep inhalation through the nose, producing an unvoiced sound in the throat acts like a hydraulic pump to raise the energy from the base of the spinal column up to the *Medulla Oblongata* and the occipital region (*Bindu*). After a short 2-3-second pause, a deep exhalation through the nose brings the energy back to the base of the spinal column. Here another 2-3-second short pause is made. This is one *Kriya* breath.

During the deep breath, the inhaling air is felt as moderately cool whereas the exhaling air is felt as moderately warm. Reference literature says perfect *Pranayama* is 80 breaths per hour —about 45 seconds per breath. *Kriyabans* can only reach this rhythm during long sessions. Beginners should set a rhythm of about 18-20 seconds per *Kriya* breath and complete 12 breaths in a natural and unhurried way which will take them about 4 minutes.

## Key points

[1] During inhalation, the abdomen expands and the chest moves only slightly as a natural consequence of the abdominal expansion. It is incorrect to fill the chest cavity with air. During exhalation, the abdomen is drawn in and at the end of the exhalation there is a clear perception of the navel moving in toward the spine.

[2] In general, the sound in the throat while inhaling is like a quiet *schhhh* /ʃ/. The sound is similar to the amplified background noise of a loudspeaker and there is only a slight hiss during exhalation. Do not worry about whether you are doing this right or not. When *Kechari Mudra* is being done correctly, you will hear a particularly fine flute-like sound *Sheee Sheee* /ʃi:/

Schools that do not teach *Kechari Mudra* are very precise about the nature of the throat sounds: inhale deeply while making an "Awww" sound and exhale making an "Eeee" sound.

[3] In this basic *Pranayama*, the path taken by the energy gradually reveals itself during practice. No difficult visualization is required. The awareness rises from the *Muladhar* along the spinal column toward the second *Chakra*, the third, the fourth, the fifth *Chakra* and then to the curve of the occipital region until it reaches the *Medulla Oblongata* and *Bindu*. A two-second pause follows, during which the radiance of *Kutastha* appears as a blurred light or glow permeating the brain.<sup>25</sup> A deep, unhurried exhalation of the same length as the inhalation allows the energy to return to the base of the spinal column. The energy is visualized flowing down along the back of the spinal column. The reason for this detail is that although during the whole *Kriya* procedure one's gaze converges toward the point between the eyebrows, the center of the awareness is perceived as being "behind" the head. Thus, during exhalation, to perceive not only the flowing down of the current but also the subtle radiation of each *Chakra*, this will come easily when one is aware of the spine, one section at a time as if looking at it from the back.

[4] We have mentioned that the upward current is perceived as cool and the downward current as warm: although this is correct it should not be taken peremptorily. Some are not able to feel these sensations. Some *kriyabans* become dejected about "feeling nothing" during *Pranayama* i.e. they are unable to perceive the cold-warm currents in the spine. They obsess about this but it is only one minor aspect of *Pranayama* and not its essence. *Pranayama*

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<sup>25</sup> In this initial phase of *Pranayama* the energy cannot reach *Kutastha*; this will happen in higher stages. *Kutastha* comes indirectly into play not because of an act of visualization but because there is a particular diffuse light in the frontal part of the brain and one simply is aware of that brightness.

will develop on its own and will work even without **these** sensations.

[5] During the first *Pranayama* breaths (in order not to be distracted by all the aforesaid details) avoid chanting *Om* or another *Mantra* in each *Chakra*. If you have already practiced *Om Japa*, the awareness of the *Chakras* is present – this is enough.

[6] Some claim *Pranayama* practiced with an open (or semi closed) mouth is superior to nose-*Pranayama* because it brings the current into *Sushumna*. Others say only nose-breathing can activate *Sushumna*. In fact, only the breathless state succeeds in bringing and leading the energy into the subtle channel of the spine.

Practicing *Pranayama* with an open mouth is only for beginners. Nevertheless, mouth-*Pranayama* can give a wonderful sense of presence in the spine: some begin with it and then switch to nose breathing. *Kriyabans* who practice *Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra* cannot do it through the mouth anyway because the tongue is behind the uvula and is blocking the flow of air into the mouth.

## **Second part: excellent Pranayama**

[a] After the initial 12 - 24 breaths experienced as afore described, the same process deepens as follows: *Om* is mentally chanted (or more accurately "mentally placed") in each of the first five *Chakras* during inhalation. During the pause, *Om* is chanted in the *Medulla*, in *Kutastha*, and again in the *Medulla*. *Bindu* can be totally forgotten about because (although it is hard to believe) the awareness is always there. During exhalation, *Om* is mentally chanted in each *Chakra* as you return to *Muladhara*.

While coming down, each *Chakra* is gently "touched" from the back. The "horizontal" component of each is experienced at least for an instant; the effects of their vital radiating energy on the physical body are felt intuitively.

When *Shambhavi Mudra* (the state of calmness when the eyelids do not quiver and the gaze is perfectly steady) is naturally established, the mental force involved in performing *Pranayama* decreases. The sound of the breath is smooth and unbroken like the continuous pouring of oil from a bottle. The flow of energy is internally perceived like a fine silk thread and the subtle mechanism of the technique happens almost by itself. This does not imply that the technique is less effective, rather quite the opposite: it reaches its maximum power and it seems to have a life of its own.

[b] After a minimum of 36 *Pranayama* breaths, the following technical detail can be implemented: the eyebrows are gently raised, the eyelids are closed or half-closed, the eyes look upward as much as possible without any head movement. The light tension that is perceived in the muscles of the eyeballs

gradually disappears and the position can be maintained rather easily. All one's being seems to be contained in the *Fontanelle* (some claim this is the real *Shambhavi Mudra*).

By proceeding in this manner, a *kriyaban* will eventually have the impression of crossing a mental state which is like beginning to fall asleep, then suddenly full awareness returns and they realize they are basking in a spiritual light. It's like a plane emerging from the clouds into a clear transparent sky.

*Kriya Pranayama* in its two phases is usually enjoyed 24-60 times. Occasionally (once a week or during longer meditations), one can add more repetitions. These are always counted in groups of twelve. Those who have practiced *Kriya* for many years can easily manage 144 repetitions in each routine.

### **Navi Kriya**

Using the same method described in *Om Japa* and without attempting to control the breath, one's awareness slowly moves up along the spinal column. The *Mantra Om* (ohng) is placed in the first five *Chakras*, in the *Bindu*, and in the *Kutastha*. The chin is then tilted down toward the throat cavity. The hands are joined with the fingers interlocked and face downwards and the pads of both thumbs are touching. *Om* is chanted 75 times (a rough estimate is fine) in the navel /umbilicus either aloud or mentally. The thumbs lightly press the navel for each *Om*.

While doing the technique, a calm energy is perceived gathering in the lower-middle part of the abdomen (the *Prana* current there is called *Samana*). The chin is then raised without straining but the muscles at the back of the neck are contracted. The concentration shifts first to the *Bindu* and then to the third *Chakra* (moving downward in a straight line, outside the body). The hands are kept behind the back and joined by interlocking the fingers and the palms face upward with the pads of both thumbs touching. For every *Om*, the thumbs apply a light pressure to the lumbar vertebrae. *Om* is chanted—aloud or mentally—approximately 25 times in the third *Chakra*. By no means should the breath be synchronized with the chanting of *Om*. The chin's normal position is then resumed and *Om* is mentally chanted in reverse order from *Kutastha* to *Muladhar*. This is one *Navi Kriya* (it lasts between 140-160 seconds). A *kriyaban* repeats *Navi Kriya* four times.

## Mental Pranayama

To enter a perfect physical and mental stillness as easily as possible, the practitioner first draws three deep breaths, ending each with a fast sigh-like exhalation. The spine is visualized as a tube along which the awareness moves up and down pausing in each spinal center. *Om* (ohng) may be mentally chanted in the *Chakras*. Sometimes, it is more convenient to simply center your attention for 10-20 seconds on each *Chakra* starting with the first, moving to the second, third ... and so on.

The *Chakras* are like knots that can be untied if "touched" with one's concentration; the secret lies in maintaining the awareness in each of them until a sensation of sweetness is felt - as if the *Chakra* were "melting". After ascending to the *Bindu*, one begins the descent, pausing in each *Chakra*. Besides the melting sensation, one may also perceive the subtle radiation of each *Chakra* in the body. This is a matter of pure awareness; a natural feeling leading to the realization that the *Chakras* are sustaining each part of the body's vitality. Sometimes, a light is perceived in the upper part of the head and a *kriyaban* is able to keep his awareness there a long time without feeling any fatigue.

The process of rising and descending through the *Chakras* is carried on as long as it is comfortable. (One complete round lasts about 2-4 minutes.) This is the most pleasing part of the routine. *Kriyabans* do not feel they are practicing a technique but enjoying a few moments of soothing relaxation. This is the moment when a deep *mental silence* settles in the consciousness and in the body. Tranquility, "*Sthir Tattwa*" (calm, static *Prana*) is experienced in the seventh *Chakra*. Lahiri Mahasaya called this state *Paravastha* or *Kriyar Paravastha* - "the state that comes after the action of *Kriya*".

If, through sheer willpower, such a state were brought to awareness as often as possible amid one's daily activities, the results would be extraordinary.

## Yoni Mudra

At night, before going to bed, begin your practice by calming the whole psychophysical system with a short *Kriya* routine (a few *Pranayama* breaths as well as a short practice of *Navi Kriya*). After that, raise the energy with a deep inhalation into the central part of the head.

If you are able to do *Kechari Mudra*, press the tongue firmly on the highest point inside the nasal pharynx – otherwise leave the tongue in its normal relaxed position.

Close every "opening" in the head — the ears with the thumbs, the eyelids



with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, the lips with the ring and the little fingers— so all the energy "lights up" the *Kutastha*.

Throughout the practice, both elbows are parallel to the floor and point out to the side. Do not let them drop and prop them up somehow, if necessary.

During this special light-witnessing act, the index fingers must not put any pressure on the eyes — this would be harmful and serve no purpose! If a *kriyaban* is distracted by the pressure of the index fingers on the eyelids, he draws them down with the index fingers and applies pressure on the corners of the eyes - on the upper cheekbones.

By holding the breath and mentally repeating *Om* (Ohng) several times, one observes the light of the "spiritual eye" that is gathering and intensifying.

The light condenses into a golden ring. Hold the breath as long as is comfortable and until the necessity to breathe out distracts your attention. After bringing down the awareness along the spine, the practice is complete. *Yoni Mudra* is usually performed only once.

#### Important remark

Inhaling deeply and holding the breath usually causes discomfort after a few seconds. Here is a short suggestion on how to reduce the discomfort and make it possible to deepen the practice.

At the end of a moderate inhalation (not a typical *Pranayama* one but a shorter one), a *kriyaban* fully plugs all the head openings except the nostrils, exhales a very small quantity of air, then immediately closes the nostrils. The thoracic muscles are to be relaxed as if one intended to begin a new inhalation: this will open the epiglottis and give the sensation that the breath has become quiet in the area between the throat and the *Kutastha*.

In this situation, concentration on the *Kutastha* and the repetition of *Om* several times can be enjoyed to its fullest.

Traditional instruction advises increasing the number of *Om* repetitions by one per day up to a maximum of 200. Of course, forcing is always to be avoided.

#### **Complete routine**

A complete routine could be:

Talabya Kriya ► Om Japa ► Maha Mudra ► Pranayama [12-24] ► Navi Kriya ► mental Pranayama ► Yoni Mudra. Yoni Mudra concludes the routine when all are practiced at night.

If the routine is practiced at another time, the meditation session ends with mental Pranayama and another short meditation is added at night, right before bed after calming one's thoughts and relaxing with some deep breaths. Only Yoni Mudra is practiced. Then one remains concentrated as long as possible in

the Kutastha. Many kriyabans relate that it is in this very moment that their experience of the inner Omkar sound is the most beautiful, clear, and deep. There are many variations to this routine. Navi Kriya before Pranayama is very good. Yoni Mudra and Maha Mudra can also be practiced between Pranayama and mental Pranayama.

## APPENDIX: FURTHER INFORMATION

### The best position for meditation

According to Patanjali, the *Yogi's* posture [*Asana*] must be steady and pleasant. Most *kriyabans* are comfortable with the so-called **Half-lotus**.

This position has been used for meditation since time immemorial because it provides a comfortable and easily managed sitting position.

The secret is to maintain an erect spine by sitting on the edge of a thick cushion so the buttocks are slightly raised.

Sit cross legged with the knees resting on the floor. Lift the left foot and bring it toward the body so the sole is resting against the inside of the right thigh. Draw the heel of the left foot in toward the groin as much as possible. The right leg is bent at the knee and the right foot is placed over the fold of the left leg. Let the right knee drop as far as possible toward the floor. The best hand position is with fingers interlocked as in the well known photo of Lahiri Mahasaya. This balances the energy from the right hand to the left and vice versa. The shoulders are in a natural position. The head, neck, chest, and spine are in a straight line as if they were linked. When the legs get tired, reverse them to prolong the position.

For certain health or physical conditions, it may be beneficial to practice the half lotus on an armless chair provided it is large enough. In this way, one leg at a time can be lowered and the knee joint relaxed!

**Siddhasana** (Perfect Pose) is of medium difficulty: the sole of the left foot is placed against the right thigh while the heel presses on the Perineum. The right heel is against the pubic bone. This leg position combined with *Kechari Mudra* closes the pranic circuit and makes *Pranayama* easy and beneficial. It is said the position helps one to become aware of the movement of *Prana*.

In the difficult **Padmasana** position, the right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh with the soles of the feet turned up. It is explained that when this *Asana* is combined with *Kechari* and *Shambhavi Mudra*, it results in an energetic condition that produces the experience of the internal light coming from each *Chakra*. It helps keep the body from bending or falling over as it tends to do when deep *Pratyahara* is practiced. Sitting in *Padmasana* (lotus position) is uncomfortable for a beginner because the knees and the ankles become extremely painful.

I would not advise anyone to perform this difficult posture. There are *yogis* who have had to have knee cartilage removed after years of forcing themselves into the *Padmasana*.

## Maha Mudra

*Maha Mudra* is one of the basic techniques of *Kriya Yoga*. It is a physical position and a breathing exercise that is performed immediately before sitting for *Kriya* meditation. (Some advocate doing one additional *Maha Mudra* after *Kriya* to distribute the energy evenly into all parts of the body.) The *Prana* in the spinal column is raised up to the head which fills the body and mind with elation and vitality, stabilizes them for meditation, and helps balance the left and right brain hemispheres.

Some *Kriya Acharya* consider this technique the most useful of all *Kriya Yoga*. They claim the ideal goal (to be achieved very gradually!) is to practice 144 *Maha Mudra* daily in two sessions of 72 each. There are reports of *Yogis* having achieved fantastic experiences using only this technique. According to their accounts, the perception of the *Sushumna* path increased tremendously.

It is usually recommended that for every 12 *Pranayama*, one should perform one *Maha Mudra*. However, I dare say it would be a miracle if *kriyabans* regularly practiced the three required repetitions. Others believe they are practicing *Kriya* correctly without ever practicing one single *Maha Mudra*! It is obvious if you forsake this exercise and lead a sedentary life, the spinal column will lose its elasticity. One's physical condition deteriorates over the years and it becomes almost impossible to maintain the correct meditation position for more than a few minutes—that is why *Maha Mudra* is so important for *kriyabans*.

## Om Japa

Some do not understand the subtle difference between *Om Japa* and *mental Pranayama*. Practicing *Om Japa* before *Pranayama* is designed to stimulate each *Chakra*. One pauses only a short time in each *Chakra* to vibrate the *Mantra*. During *mental Pranayama*, one is more passive, more willing to perceive than to stimulate, and above all, pauses much longer in each *Chakra*.

## Remarks on Kechari Mudra

After months of regular practice of *Talabya Kriya*, a *kriyaban* may decide it's time to attempt *Kechari Mudra*. The test is whether the tip of the tongue can touch the uvula. If so, then for a few minutes a day, use the fingers to push the base of the tongue inward until the tip goes beyond the uvula and touches the hard palate above it. One day, on removing the fingers, the tip of the tongue will remain "trapped" in that position. This is possible because the soft palate (the part from which the uvula hangs) is soft and movable and when the tip of the tongue is able to enter a centimeter into the nasal pharynx, it creates a hook. This prevents the tongue from slipping out and returning to its usual flat position. This is the turning point. Henceforth, by striving each day to practice at least 6-12 *Pranayama* with the tongue in this position - despite some discomfort such as an increase in salivation,

swallowing, and consistent interruptions to reestablish the position - the real *Kechari* will be achieved.

After approximately two weeks of practicing in this way, and with the help of some physical and mental effort, the tongue will be able to insert itself into the nasal-pharynx cavity in the upper palate. In the cavity, there will still be enough space left to inhale and exhale through the nose. The sense of irritation and the increase in salivation are soon left behind and from then on the practice of *Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra* becomes easy and comfortable. After some months of tireless practice, one can further perfect this *Mudra*. In fact, at some point, the tongue will reach the junction of the nasal passage inside the hole in the palate. The soft tissue above the holes in the nose is alluded to in *Kriya* literature as the "uvula above the uvula". In time, the tip of the tongue is able to reach this small area and will remain "stuck" there comfortably.

*Kechari* is literally translated as "the state of those who fly in the sky, in the ether"; because it leads the practitioner into the meditative state by teaching them how to fly in "inner space." It can be compared to an electrical bypass of the mind's energy system. This so-called "knot of the tongue" consists in the physiological fact that our tongue is normally not able to touch the uvula and certain centers in the nasal pharynx. From an energy point of view, we are kept away from the reservoir of energy in the *Sahasrara* region. *Kechari Mudra* undoes this knot and makes the contact possible, changes the path of *Prana* flow, and causes the life force to be withdrawn from the thought process. At times during one's daily routine, moments of pure calmness and mental silence fill the practitioner's entire being and sometimes an unusual happiness is felt without any additional *yogic* practice.

### Pranayama with Kechari Mudra

During *Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra*, the exhalation arising in the nasal pharynx has a fine flute-like sound like a faint whistle. Some schools call it the *Shakti Mantra*.

Lahiri Mahasaya described it as «similar to blowing air through a keyhole». He described it as «a razor with which cuts off everything related to the mind». It has the power to cut out any external distracting factors including thoughts and comes at the maximal point of relaxation. Blowing gently on the edge of a sheet of paper approximates this sound. **Note:** If the smallest amount of anxiety, distraction, or unrest arises, the sound vanishes immediately.

Practicing *Pranayama* in this way and enjoying its aftereffects is an extraordinary meditation technique and an enchanting and astonishing experience. It represents one of the best moments in a *kriyaban's* life. Modesty is always welcome but when this result is achieved, the positive euphoria is so overwhelming that it cannot be contained (like finding Aladdin's magic lamp).

In *Kriya* literature it is said that if one realizes a perfect *Pranayama*, one can obtain everything through it. Well, if we want to think of a faultless *Pranayama*, *Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra* and the flute sound matches that principle.

## Navi Kriya

The following variation of *Navi Kriya* is very enjoyable.

All the details up to bending the head forward remain unchanged. The *Om Mantra* is chanted in alternation between *Kutastha* and the navel (*Om* in *Kutastha*, *Om* in the navel, *Om* in *Kutastha*, *Om* in the navel... and so on). Then *Om* is chanted in alternation between the *Bindu* and the third *Chakra*. As usual, it is best to do 4 cycles of *Navi Kriya*.

Another very important variation of *Navi Kriya* is introduced in Chapter II/3. In my opinion, an authentic *Navi Kriya* should include both concentration on the navel and on the third *Chakra*. Moreover, concentrating only on the third *Chakra* is not compatible with Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*. Rather, it is a result of the mania for eliminating any concentration outside the spine and head. Many devotees will not shift their awareness a single centimeter from the spinal column fearing their practice will become less "spiritual!"

Actually, the concentration on the navel is extremely important. The navel is the trigger point for stimulating the *Samana* current which has a balancing function that helps to transform the nature of the breath. This concentration is the door to the so-called "*Kriyas* of the calm breath".

This information is from Lahiri Mahasaya and it is useless to seek it in classic *Yoga* books like: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*.

Any attempt at justifying *Navi Kriya* by quoting Patanjali is awkward. In his *Yoga Sutras* it is written: *nābhicakre kāyavyūhajñānamḥ* [in some editions this is *Sutra* III/29 in others, III/30] which is translated: «by concentration on the navel, the seeker obtains knowledge about the different organs of the body and their location». Clearly this has nothing to do with *Kriya Yoga*.

## Mental Pranayama

One must never forget to give the highest importance to the soothing phase of *mental Pranayama*. A *Kriya* routine which does not end with *mental Pranayama* is like an orchestra tuning their instruments and then leaving the stage! It is the phase that brings everything together; the ripples in the mind's lake are stilled, the awareness becomes transparent, and the Last Reality is revealed.

It is a diffuse calmness; the mind is at rest and silent and gains the energy necessary to be more acutely alert. It is like a spiral which gradually and systematically takes care of all the levels of one's being: it is a healing process. Its value appears manifest during the difficult moments of life when important decisions have to be taken. One has the impression that nothing can get in the way and that even the greatest difficulties dissolve. Inside the perfect transparency of an inner order, all problems are solved.

## Yoni Mudra

Lahiri Mahasaya held *Yoni Mudra* in high esteem. Through it, one experiences the radiant *Omkar* light aspect that reveals the path to the spiritual dimension. *Kutastha* – the point between the eyebrows - is where the individual soul has its origin and where the Ego needs to be dissolved.

The fundamental objective of this *Mudra* is to see and know the light which enlightens the created world. It is said that by merging the mind in this light, the Self is realized.

There are three phases in *Yoni Mudra*. The first one is achieved when you are able to blend in with the radiant *Jyoti* (light) between the eyebrows.

In the second stage, the mind empties itself of the external world. An extraordinary dark dot is experienced. The mind settles down and goes deeper and deeper. The last stage is when there is no light and no darkness. What seemed dark previously has converted to Absolute Stillness. This is the last stage where a *kriyaban* experiences the prenatal quietude.

Some teachers believe *Yoni Mudra* should not be practiced during the day. In reality, it can be done anytime! However, the technique is best done in the deep calmness of the night and when one is totally and perfectly relaxed. *Yoni Mudra* generates such a concentration of energy in *Kutastha* that the quality of the ensuing sleep changes for the better. After crossing the subconscious layers, one's awareness may succeed in reaching the so-called "super conscious" state.

## CHAPTER II/02... HIGHER KRIYAS

The levels of the *Kriya* path we are about to deal with are of extraordinary importance: the subject is not difficult to understand, rather its practical application requires extreme care.

The *Higher Kriyas* should always co-operate to establish a foundation of harmony and calmness. The good effects of peace, inner joy, calmness of the breath and listening to inner sounds (a manifestation of the *Omkar* Reality) should always go on increasing. In the opposite situation, it simply means that one is not ready yet to proceed to this level of practice or that he is not following the instructions correctly! A mature frame of mind is necessary, as well as the ability to extend one's *Kriya* effort throughout the whole day. In the third part of the book one can find a concise digression about *Kriya*, ending with an emphasis about the necessity of ridding oneself from any wrong attitudes, and also practicing simple but essential techniques like *Japa*. Keeping the mind always attuned to a state of calmness which blooms (during free pauses from work) into an ecstatic *mental silence*, is the surest way to make the most of these teachings.

The practice of the *Higher Kriyas* always takes place after *Pranayama* and *Navi Kriya*, within a routine like the one outlined in the previous chapter. The only exception to this rule is when a *kriyaban* is an expert and is able to create, at will, deep interiorisation and enter in a smooth way the dimension of *Higher Kriyas*, while his breath remains calm and the feeling of bliss continues to increase.

As for the specific doses of these *Higher Kriyas* (in the way they have been handed down by different traditions) a *kriyaban* can deviate from them, choose to perform the quantity of repetitions he/she deems profitable, and achieve this way remarkable results. The *Kriya* path is an endeavour through which we gain more and more freedom and therefore it is always a joyful experience. It should never be forced into a stressful practice.

### **Second Kriya**

#### [First part] **Omkar Pranayama**

In this technique all the *Higher Kriyas* are potentially contained. Actually, each further *Kriya* can be considered an expansion of it. It is a real jewel, it represents the quintessence of beauty: while practicing this technique, time goes by without much notice and what could seem to be an exhausting task (reaching 108 or 144 repetitions for example) turns out to be as easy as a moment of rest.

At the beginning, it might seem a bit complicated. In the process of implementing the different technical details, wisdom and common sense are required. Each detail

should be introduced gradually, so that it doesn't disturb the harmony of the general picture.

[1] Inhalation and exhalation are divided into six + six parts. The syllables of the Sanskrit *Mantra* "*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*" are mentally chanted in the *Chakras*,<sup>26</sup> while making a short pause in each.

During the first "sip" of inhalation, the concentration is on the *Muladhar*, where the syllable *Om* is ideally placed; during the second "sip", the concentration is on the second *Chakra*, where the syllable *Na* is ideally placed ... and so on, until *Ba* is placed in the *Bindu* and the inhalation is completed.

In a similar way, the exhaling breath is divided into six punctuated parts like pulses: during the first of these parts, the syllable *Te* is placed in the *Medulla*; during the second one, the syllable *Va* is placed in the fifth *Chakra*... and so on ... *Su*... *De*... *Va*, until *Ya* is mentally chanted in the *Muladhar*.

At the end of the inhalation, the breath is held for 2-3 seconds. The awareness makes a complete, counter-clockwise turn along the crown of the head, inside the brain, starting from the occipital region and returning there. The head accompanies this inner movement with an almost imperceptible rotating movement (tilting back slightly, then to the right, the front, the left, and finally to the back). During a two second pause at the end of the exhalation, the awareness makes a complete, anticlockwise turn around inside the *Muladhar*.

The timing of one fragmented breath with pauses (aw-aw-aw-aw-aw-aw + eee-eee-eee-eee-eee-eee) depends on the individual: usually it is approximately 15-20 seconds, but can be longer.

[2] The hands with fingers intertwined rest on the abdomen. While coming up with the mental chant of *Om, Na, Mo*,... one has the feeling of traveling inside the spine. At the end of the up pause, one feels that the center of his awareness is ideally placed "behind" the head. After thinking *Te* in the *Medulla*, one feels that the descendant syllables *Va, Su, De, Va* and *Ya* are put in each *Chakra* from "behind". More simply put: the awareness comes up inside and goes down behind the backbone.

[3] During the inhalation the muscles at the base of the spinal column are slightly contracted. This contraction is held up to the end of inhalation and during the ensuing short pause, then is eased off and the exhalation begins.

*The aforementioned details may seem complicated but this is only a way to set the process in motion; the experience deepens by itself and all the*

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<sup>26</sup> I am sure the reader knows the correct pronunciation of the *Mantra*; that is why I will not add any phonetic symbols. Notice that in the *Bindu* we don't mentally verbalize *Va* but *Ba*: this convention has been established over the years.



*apparent intricacies vanish. From a certain moment onwards, all the physical details are lived in a very subtle way:*

The breath produces only a slight, weak sound in the throat (or from the nasal pharynx if one practices with *Kechari Mudra*) or it comes out soundless; the contraction of the muscles at the base of the spinal column is gradually replaced by a "mental pressure"; the movement of the head is only hinted and later disappears when perfect immobility is established; the anticlockwise turn of awareness around the crown of the head seems to sink inside and touch the *Medulla* too, winding around it.

*Om* sound emerges quite naturally and captivates the mind. The beauty of the bell sound is inexplicable; while listening to this sweet sound which, as light as a fall of petals, knocks softly on the doors of the intuition, there comes the realization that all the experiences of love are like splendid crystals blooming around its gilded thread. It embodies the deep feeling of hope that has warmed our heart innumerable times since infancy, the vast comforting smile surrounding us in misfortune.

[Second part] **Thokar**

*Thokar* means adding to *Omkar Pranayama* some particular movements of the head. With the chin resting on his chest, a *kriyaban* puts his mind in the *Sushumna*, draws the breath raising the awareness along the spinal column, touching each *Chakra* with the syllable of the *Mantra* (*Om* is placed in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second ...) - simultaneously, the chin is raised as if to follow the inner movement. During inhalation, the muscles at the base of the spinal column are contracted. When the chin is up and horizontal, the inhalation ends and the awareness is in the *Bindu*. The breath and the muscle contraction is held. Let us describe now how a complete anticlockwise rotation of the head, followed by a jerk through which the chin is drawn towards the center of the chest is done.

The head begins its round by moving to the left shoulder (left ear moves slightly towards the left shoulder, the face does not turn left or right and the movement is free of all bouncing) and *Te* is thought in the *Medulla*. The head tilts back a little and in a sweeping arc reaches the right shoulder, (the right ear coming near the right shoulder), the syllable *Va* is thought in the fifth *Chakra*. The rotation proceeds, the head bends forward just a little and moves left until the left ear is near the left shoulder (again, the face is not turned to the left). From this position, the chin is tilted down diagonally as if to strike the center of the chest, while simultaneously *Su* is thought in the heart *Chakra*.

Through this last movement, a kind of hitting is felt in the heart *Chakra*. With time, this will help to see the "true" *Bindu* which is the point or star inside the third eye. The awareness remains there for one or more seconds, enough either to perceive a "radiation" emanating from the heart *Chakra*. The mind is quiet in the contemplative state. With this *Kriya*, deep levels of the inner sound of *Om* will manifest and absorb the awareness.

The contraction at the base of the spinal column is eased off, the remaining syllables of the *Mantra* are "placed" in the first three *Chakras* via a very subtle exhalation. *De* into the third one, *Va* into the second one and *Ya* into the first one. While doing this, the head is usually kept down.

The duration of this process is about 24 seconds. For several weeks, the *kriyaban* is guided to perform this technique 12 times a day, then to gradually increase the number of repetitions. Each week he can add six more repetitions.

Oral tradition, handed down from teacher to disciple, is to increase the number of repetitions up to 200 (they can be divided into two or more sessions during the day). When increasing the number of repetitions, the afore described movement of the head is only hinted: the chin does not come close to the chest and the hitting of the fourth *Chakra* is mainly achieved by the sheer power of mental concentration. A very wise approach is to settle into 36 repetitions per day without increasing beyond this number.

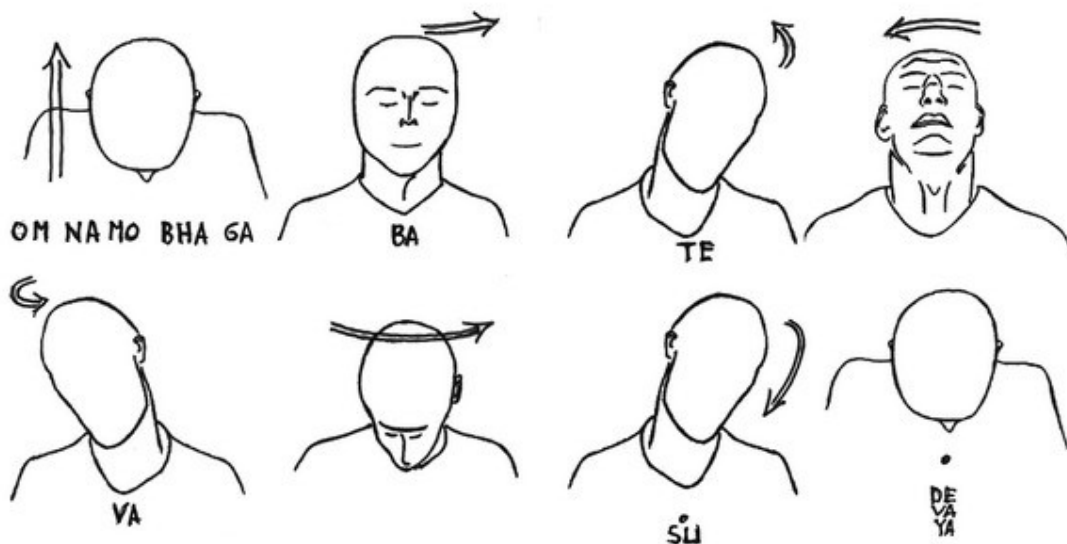


Figure 5. Movements of the head in the basic form of Thokar

Those who embark on this venture, should perform the movements of the head in a very delicate way. An expert *Kriya Acharya* checks that the physical strike is not forceful. One should not allow the weight of one's head to push the chin toward the

chest: in this condition, the physical movement is definitely too powerful and harmful for the head and neck. Hence, mindful physical effort is simultaneously aimed at lowering the chin, while resisting the force of gravity, concluding with a slight jolt which is intensely felt within the fourth *Chakra*. The presence of physical problems (the cervical vertebrae are vulnerable indeed!) may require that one stop the technique for a few days or practice on alternate days. It is better to add more cycles over time rather than face the prospect of experiencing continuous head and neck pain throughout the entire day!

### **The blossoming of the breathless state after Thokar**

I hope that recalling a theory which is often quoted in the *Kriya* literature is not disturbing; I am not sure it comes from Lahiri Mahasaya himself, however it is worthwhile at least quoting it.

Let us first remember that to Patanjali, *Pratyahara* is the withdrawal of the senses which happens when awareness is disconnected from the external reality; *Dharana* is concentration, focusing the mind on a chosen object; *Dhyana* is contemplation, the persistence of concentration as a steady, uninterrupted flow of awareness which fully explores all aspects of the chosen object; *Samadhi* is perfect spiritual absorption, a deeper contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself.

In the *Kriya*, where useless chatters and empty words are avoided at all costs, *Pratyahara* is identified as the state where the breath is very calm and internalization of awareness is marked too; *Dharana* is its outcome where the breath is almost nonexistent; *Dhyana* is associated with the breathless state; *Samadhi* with the slowing down of the cardiac heartbeat while the body appears like dead.

Well, according to a tradition, the repetition of 12 *Pranayamas* is sufficient to get to the state of *Pratyahara*; the repetition of 144 *Pranayamas* is sufficient to get to the state of *Dharana*; the repetition of 1728 *Pranayamas* (in one session!) is sufficient to get to the state of *Dhyana*; the repetition of 20736 *Pranayamas* (in one session!) is sufficient to get to the state of *Samadhi*.

It is explained (an attractive theory indeed; it comes to mind an Italian saying: "Se non é vero, é molto ben trovato", If is not true, it is a happy invention!) that the *Higher Kriyas* are taught to avoid sitting for such a long time and reach anyway the states of *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*.

If we restrict our analysis to the *Second Kriya* only, it is explained that the strong concentration obtained with *Omkar Pranayama* and *Thokar* promotes *Dhyana* and, consequently, the breathless state!

If, after having practiced 12 *Pranayama*, 12 *Omkar Pranayama* and 12

*Thokar*, such a state does not manifest spontaneously, then a *kriyaban*, after having taken some deep breaths and sought an absolute relaxation, utilizes the **mental *Pranayama*** to obtain such a state.<sup>27</sup>

Patience and an unflinching attention are two absolute rules, to be respected in order to succeed. Suddenly one will not feel the need to take in any breath at all and this will last a very long time, longer than what could be accepted by science. One will conceivably encounter the greatest surprise of one's life. From that moment, one will practice *Kriya* with greater intensity and try to live with a consciousness always watchful and calm.

The *Third Kriya* that we are now going to deal with should be practised only after having gotten this state, rather, after having enjoyed it for a long time.

### **Third Kriya**

A *kriyaban* inhales in the same way as in the *Second Kriya*. At the end of inhalation, the complete set of the head movements is done not once but several times - while holding the breath. The syllables *Te, Va, Su, Te, Va, Su, Te, Va, Su...* are placed in the locations previously described.

(*Te* always in *Medulla*, *Va* always in the cervical *Chakra* and *Su* always in the heart *Chakra Anahat*.)

This technique ends exactly like the preceding one: by exhaling and placing the syllables *De, Va* and *Ya* in the respective *Chakras*.

To give an idea of the speed of the movements, the entire process from inhalation to exhalation with 12 repetitions of the rotation of the head (each rotation concluding with the movement of the chin towards the chest) may last around 70-80 seconds.

With regard to the increase of the number of the head rotations, there are two schemes that apparently seem incompatible. Actually, in the course of time, *kriyabans* can jump from one to another according to their own experience and intuition.

#### First scheme

The technique is repeated 12 times: in each breath we have 3 repetitions of the movement of the head (after inhalation we have the movements related to *Te, Va, Su, Te, Va, Su, Te, Va, Su* then exhalation: this is one repetition of the technique). In the course of time, the number of the head rotations inside one single breath, is gradually increases up to twelve rotations.

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<sup>27</sup> Sometimes it is necessary to take back some *Pranayama* breaths for example 6 or 12 just to regain a deep calmness. It is obvious that only in such condition one can hope to reach the state of breathlessness.

### Second scheme

The technique is practiced only once but the whole set of head movements is gradually increased by one every day – always holding the breath! *Kriya* literature refers that some advanced *kriyaban* is able to practice 200 rotations (200 sets of head movements, each linked with the mental chanting of *Te, Va, Su*). Clearly 200 is the upper limit, never to be exceeded!

### **Key point**

Trying to get to a high number of rotations, at a high speed, obsessed with holding the breath, amounts to nothing but a mere violence against one's own body! The correct way of practicing this *Third Kriya* is a matter of inner realization - an instinct which is discovered with time.

The more one increases the number of rotations, the more movements are only hinted and the chin does not come close to the chest. But the crucial detail is that, while going on practicing the movements, a minimal quantity of air is let imperceptibly go out through the nose in a way that holding the breath is comfortable. The sensation that the breath is dissolved ensues. This pleasing experience coupled with the perception of an increase of energy in the fourth *Chakra*, leads the *kriyaban* to a state of light intoxication.

You have the feeling you can go on indefinitely without the necessity of breathing.

Those who have studied the phenomenon think that the afore described *Kumbhaka* is not a perfect one. They advance the hypothesis that an imperceptible exhalation happens whenever the chin is moved toward the chest and an imperceptible inhalation is produced whenever the chin is brought back up.

*Kriyabans* emphasize the fact that the gist of the technique lies in filling the upper part of one's the thorax and the head to the utmost possible extent with *Prana* - just as a pot may be filled with water to the brim.

A note.

Some schools teach to have different rotations of the head deprived of the stroke on the breast trying to feel the energy that is accumulated in the *Chakra* of the heart. Only after the last rotation, the final *Thokar* is given and the energy is even more intensified there.

## Fourth Kriya

The *Gayatri Mantra* is considered to be a supreme vehicle for gaining spiritual enlightenment. Its purest form is *Tat Savitur Varenyam Bhargho Devasya Dhimahi Dhiyo Yonaha Prachodayat.* (Oh, great Spiritual Light who has created the Universe we meditate upon Your glory. You are the embodiment of Knowledge. You are the remover of all Ignorance. May You enlighten our Intellect and awaken our Intuitional Consciousness.)

This *Mantra* is prefaced with either a short or a long invocation. The short invocation is: *Om Bhur, Om Bhuvah, Om Swaha.*

The terms *Bhur, Bhuvah, Swaha* are invocations to honour the three planes of existence (physical, astral and causal respectively) and to address their presiding deities. The long invocation is: *Om Bhur, Om Bhuvah, Om Swaha, Om Mahah, Om Janah, Om Tapah, Om Satyam.* This invocation is more complete since it recognizes that there are more planes of existence: the seven *Lokas*.

*Mahah* is the mental world, the plane of spiritual balance; *Janah* is the world of pure knowledge; *Tapah* is the world of intuition; *Satyam* is the world of Absolute, Ultimate Truth. We can be satisfied with the explanation that these sounds are utilized to activate the *Chakras* and connect them to the seven spiritual realms of existence.

In the *Fourth Kriya* technique we use just the opening long invocation, in the complete form, and not all the parts of the *Gayatri Mantra*.

The *Kriya* tradition we are here following ties *Manipur* with *Om Mahah* and *Anahat* with *Om Swaha*. The reason is that the world of thinking, evoked by *Om Mahah*, is more fit for the nature of the third *Chakra*, while the causal world of pure ideas, recalled by *Om Swaha*, is related to *Anahat Chakra*. In conclusion we associate a *Mantra* to each *Chakra* in this way: *Muladhar - Om Bhur; Swadhistan - Om Bhuvah; Manipur - Om Mahah; Anahat - Om Swaha; Vishuddhi - Om Janah; Medulla - Om Tapah; Bindu - Om Satyam.* (Regarding the pronunciation of the Sanskrit *Mantras*, the reader should be able to find this information on the web.)

Let us now learn how, after having raised the *Prana* into the *Kutastha*, upon fixing it there, it is possible to sense the «different rhythms of the *Chakras*».

### Procedure for beginners

After the practice of the *Third Kriya*, the awareness is totally settled in the light which is born in *Anahat Chakra* and glitters also between the eyebrows. From there, a part of the attention goes down towards the first *Chakra*. During a short inhalation this *Chakra* is imagined to be raised into the *Kutastha*, to be seen herein as a bright "moon". The lifting happens in few instants - not like the slow rising of energy experienced in the basic *Pranayama* technique.

A concentration of *Prana* is felt in the *Kutastha*. A minimal quantity of air is let imperceptibly go out through the nose, without disturbing the centering of the energy.

With the attention both in *Kutastha* and in the location of the first *Chakra*, the

Mantra *Om Bhur* is mentally vibrated three times. One has the clear sensation that the breath is dissolved, therefore during this event there is neither inhalation nor exhalation.

Something like a gentle touch - both in *Kutastha* and in the location of the *Chakra* - is perceived with each repetition of the *Mantra*.

Trying to perceive an internal rhythm, one can slight oscillate the head (not wider than an inch) from left to right and vice versa. Once this is done, one brings the attention on the next *Chakra* where the same procedure is repeated.

Using the Mantra *Om Bhuvah*, something takes place both in *Kutastha* and in the location of the second *Chakra*.

The same procedure is repeated for each *Chakra*.

For the third *Chakra*, *Om Mahah* is utilized; *Om Swaha* for *Anahat*; *Om Janah* for *Vishuddhi*; *Om Tapah* for *Bindu*. At this point one reverses the order but *Om Tapah* is not chanted again in the sixth *Chakra* (*Bindu* or *Ajna*), what happens is this: the energy contained in *Medulla* is projected into the golden light of the spiritual eye and *Om Satyam* is chanted there, three times.

Then it comes the turn of the cervical *Chakra* (with *Om Janah*) to be raised in the *Kutastha*, then of the fourth *Chakra* ..... lastly, of the *Muladhar* with *Om Bhur*. This is one cycle: we have 12 cycles.

The afore described oscillating action of the head is carried out optionally during the first one or two cycles, then the body settles in perfect immobility.

#### Fourth Kriya proper

This practice is for those who are able to achieve the breathless state and is spontaneously discovered after months of applying the afore described method.<sup>28</sup> The miracle of this procedure is that in each *Chakra* a heaven is revealed to the *kriyaban*!

The unique problem is to find a comfortable position of the body which permits to remain motionless for a long time and at the same time with the spine as upright as possible. A *kriyaban* who is facing this particular practice gives the impression to prepare himself for sleep: the first action is to lock the door, then to relax in a comfortable position.

As before, through a short inhalation the first *Chakra* is raised into the

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<sup>28</sup> The structure of the technique of this *Fourth Kriya* is well known in India and is considered the subtlest way of utilizing the *Gayatri Mantra*. With small variations and further ritual additions it is published in some booklets.

How to reckon with the famous affirmation (paralyzing for some *kriyabans*, stimulating for others) according to which the great Sri Yukteswar would have granted the initiation to this technique to very few disciples, so many to be counted on the fingers of one hand? The difference is that Lahiri Mahasaya's instructions require the state of breathlessness and this, as everyone can infer, is a completely different thing.

*Kutastha*. The elasticity of the thoracic cage is released and a very slight exhalation ensues. But all the energy remains in *Kutastha*.

The Mantra *Om Bhur* is mentally chanted in *Kutastha* and in the physical location of *Muladhar Chakra* also. Very slowly, without any hurry, this chanting goes on. All the ability of the *kriyaban* is to make the breathless state appear. If, as we have said, he is an expert, he knows how to summon it, what is the best mental attitude to assume. When that peculiar reflex is activated, a wonderful sensation is experienced. It is as if perfection explodes in the awareness. It is a sense of immobility and lightness, as if the body is made of air. This is accompanied by a unique calmness of the lungs and of the heart. One's awareness is fully situated in that *Chakra* which is felt like a great luminous sphere. About thirty six repetitions of that *Mantra* are carried out.

At a certain moment the awareness perceives that the time has come to move to the next *Chakra*, where all the procedure is repeated, with inhalation... disappearance of the breath... and so on.

There is one single "round" ( twelve very long pauses in the *Chakras*: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, *Bindu*, *Medulla*, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1).

## Remarks

# This practice should not be interrupted until the round is completed, otherwise a *kriyaban* will be disturbed at a *pranic* level and will hardly retrieve the breathless state during that session.

#About the *Mantra*, one is free to use any.

*Om, om, om...* in the first *Chakra*; *Na, na, na ...* in the second and so on, is often used. Some do not use any *Mantra* and prefer simply to create a sensation of mentally touching each *Chakra* different times by the sheer will/intuition.

# *Om Satyam* can be repeated in the *Kutastha* more than 36 times: 108 - 200 times.

# There is no ground of being annoyed if, being "lost throughout the way", one discovers having spent all the time in one *Chakra*, forgetting to move to the next.

# Usually, by going on, there manifests also the pulseless state, but the *kriyaban* is not aware of it except in an indirect way: an increase of joy and rigidity in all the body. One doesn't get excited by this, otherwise the experience ends.

# After a remarkable success, there are times where the experience does not happen, and it even seems impossible. One has to return to his own footsteps and practice this *Kriya* in the afore explained way (for beginners).



## CHAPTER II/03... DIFFERENT KRIYA SCHOOLS

Those who desire just to familiarize themselves with the elementary concepts of *Kriya* should ignore this chapter. It will describe the variations of the *Kriya* techniques. Nothing can be said about their origin. My criterion is to share what have been proved to be effective tools for deepening the concentration on the spine and *Chakras* or plunging into the *Omkar* reality.

It is possible that some among Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples taught the techniques received from him mixed with *tantric* additions. Some *Kriya Acharyas* (teachers) had a carefree relationship with the truth and did not clarify which was the original part of their teaching. Perhaps they did not disclose it because they thought that their techniques would be practiced with greater care if they would have been taken as the original *Kriya*.

I will divide the following variations into three groups; in each one of them a complete *Kriya* routine is outlined.

They show slightly different approaches to reach the same immersion in the *Omkar* reality; whatever be the chosen *Kriya* school, if one follows it honestly, then *Omkar*, the vibration of the Intelligence sustaining the universe, will grab one's awareness and guide it into the depths of the mystic experience, without any danger to be led astray.

In the first group [A] we outline the teachings of a particular *Kriya* school which can be defined moderate and cautious.<sup>29</sup> Its focal point of interest is how to enhance the tuning with the *Omkar* dimension in the aspect of sound vibration, light and movement sensation. The swinging sensation is not the same *Trivangamurari* movement which is described in section [C], but a simplified form of it.

In the second group [B] we shall describe a set of techniques which are really intense. They contain key details which force the energy up the spine into the *Kutastha*. While in the school [A] the work of concentration into the upper part of the head (*Sahasrara*) is seen as essential, in this school it is not even mentioned. The idea is that when the awareness enters the star of the spiritual eye, then *Sahasrara* is reached as well.

In the third group [C] we are going to deal with a teaching diverging decidedly from that of all the other schools: it is based - this is their unproved statement - upon a teaching that Lahiri Mahasaya would had developed in the last part of his life. The experience of *Omkar* as sound and internal light is not intentionally sought (not even mentioned by some *Acharyas* belonging to this school), whereas the perception of the internal movement *Trivangamurari* prevails over all the other aspects.

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<sup>29</sup> Prudence counsels me to avoid putting the name of the foremost of its teachers. I want to avoid polemics.

## SECTION [A]

### Forward bendings (bows)

After inhaling like in *Pranayama*, from the half-lotus position – or sitting on the heels – the body is bent forward; the head is placed in the region between the knees (refer to Figure 4).

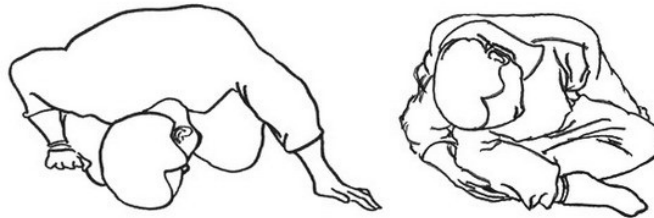


Figure 4. Forward bending starting from sitting on the heels or starting from the half-lotus

The hands may be used at will; however, the breath is retained. The face is turned towards the left knee, so that it is possible to perceive a pressure on the right side of the head; then the face is turned toward the right knee, so that a pressure on the left side of the head is perceived. Then the face is turned downward and a pressure on the forehead is felt.

After completing the three movements, the starting position with the head and spine erect is resumed. The energy is brought down from *Kutastha* to *Muladhar* with one long exhalation. This exercise should be repeated at least three times.

The technique can be practiced more slowly and without holding the breath. After inhaling, the body is bent forward; the head is placed in the region between the knees. The breath is not controlled or retained even though the energy is kept in the head as if the breath was being held - this skill develops with practice. The head is placed close to the right knee, the face is turned towards the left knee.

At this point there is a pause of several seconds (10-30) while trying to perceive not only a pressure in the right side of the head (which is easy), but also a movement sensation - an inner swinging perception.

Then the head is placed close to the left knee, and the face is turned towards the right knee perceiving pressure and a similar swinging sensation on the left side of the head. Then one places one's head between both knees: the same pressure and swinging sensations should be felt centrally on the forehead. After completing the three movements, the starting position with the head and spine erect is resumed. Then, to end one cycle of this exercise, the energy is brought down from the *Kutastha* to *Muladhar* with one long exhalation.

By a number of repetitions of this posture, the two parts of the brain become

equilibrated from the energetic point of view: this balances the *Ida* and the *Pingala* currents, whose imbalance is the main reason for the obstruction at the base of the spine.

#### Maha Mudra (variation)

As for *Maha Mudra* proper, let us refer to the basic instructions given in the previous chapter. When the right leg is extended, the right hand grabs the right foot's toes while the left hand grabs the inner side of the right foot (the arch of the foot); now the face is turned left while the breath is retained. An "inner pressure" on the right side of the head is felt. One should feel the same perception on the left side of the head, when practicing the opposite position. When both legs are extended, the pressure must be felt on the front part of the head. This technique also can be practiced more slowly and without holding the breath.

#### Navi Kriya (variation)

A *kriyaban's* awareness goes slowly up along the spinal column placing the syllable *Om* (ooong) in the six *Chakras*. The chin is brought down towards the throat cavity. A short inhalation is followed by a very long exhalation, during which, the energy is felt descending, along a path outside the body, from the frontal part of the brain to the navel, reaching through it the abdominal region, horizontally.<sup>30</sup>

During this exhalation, *Om* is chanted mentally, rapidly, from 10 to 15 times, accompanying the energy's descent throughout its path, as if applying some "soft pushes".

The head resumes its normal position and is followed by a short inhalation (two seconds maximum, without the concentration on any *Chakra*) which raises the energy again into the head.

The head bends toward the left shoulder, without turning the face. A long exhalation (with the same chanting of *Om, Om, Om...*) accompanies the downward movement of energy which starts from the brain's left side and moves along the body's left side (crossing the shoulder or the arm) down to the waist where it bends and moves horizontally toward the inside of the abdominal region.

The head moves back into its normal position; again a short inhalation follows (two seconds maximum, without the concentration on any *Chakra*) to raise

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<sup>30</sup> It is the part of the body where the Inner Alchemy locates the *Dan Tien*. In order to localize its position, one has to concentrate on the belly button, then move about one and a half inches behind and below to the same extent: it can be visualized as a ball about two and one-half inches in diameter.

the energy into the head.

The head now bends backwards. A long expiration (with the same chanting of *Om, Om, Om...*) accompanies the downward movement of energy which starts from the occipital region and moves (outside the body) down to the waist where bends, passes through the third *Manipura Chakra* and moves toward the inside of the abdominal region.

The procedure is repeated likewise on the right side, then on the forward, to the left... and so on.

The basic session of this particular form of *Navi Kriya* consists of 36 descents (there are  $36/4 = 9$  rotations of the head). It ends with *Om Japa* done from *Ajna Chakra* to *Muladhar*. (One session typically lasts 8-10 minutes and replaces the 4 repetitions of the canonical form of *Navi Kriya*.)

It is quite normal that, proceeding with the rotations, the movements of the head are less marked. One can have encouraging results also by gradually reaching immobility and completing the prescribed number by a sheer mental process.

#### Procedure preliminary to Pranayama

With the tongue turned backwards, with its tip touching the center of the palate, one's concentration is guided in the center of the brain.

One perceives a virtual horizontal line connecting the temples as well as a virtual line from the *Kutastha* back to the occipital region.

Gently (very softly!) swinging the head sideways and then back and forth it is possible to discern the two lines' intersecting point. This intersection is the seat of the *Ajna Chakra* and is the best place to concentrate in order to have the full experience of *Omkar*'s internal movement (oscillation) aspect.

The spine is compared to a well. One's awareness (like a bucket moving into it) goes up and down through the *Chakras*. While the center of one's attention remains always in *Ajna*, a part of it is placed in *Muladhar*. In it, the syllable *Om* is vibrated three times, trying to perceive there a swinging, fluctuating sensation. This happens for each *Chakra*, up the cervical *Chakra*, then *Ajna*, the the cervical again ... down to *Muladhar*. The procedure is repeated for 3-6 rounds. It is important to perceive the swinging sensation, at least for an instant, in each *Chakra*: therefore haste doesn't make any sense. For the present moment, the concentration on *Sahasrara* doesn't occur.

#### Pranayama (variation)

With the tongue turned backwards or in *Kechari Mudra*, the spine is visualized as a bright column extending from *Muladhar* to the *Fontanelle*.

With the help of a deep and slow breath, without any particular sound in the throat, one tries to perceive a swinging, fluctuating sensation coming up to the

head through the spine.

The visualization that is suggested doesn't resemble that of other schools, in which one is concentrated on the flow of energy going up and down through the *Chakras* like a thread through the pearls of a necklace. Here one concentrates rather upon what happens in each *Chakra*. They suggest to visualize a pendulum that has its pivot in *Ajna* and extends to the *Muladhar* - the oscillation perceived in the *Muladhar* departs from *Ajna* which is the origin of everything. During a complete breath, this perception happens in each *Chakra*.

Inhaling (as slowly as it is possible) the consciousness moves from the first one to the second *Chakra* and so on ... and in everyone perceives this oscillation: as if the length of the pendulum changed accordingly, always maintaining the pivot in *Ajna*.

By going up and down in this way along the spine, the breath becomes more and more subtle, imperceptible. The practice converges towards a full revelation of the *Omkar* Reality. One listens the internal sound while the region of the *Fontanelle* is illuminated by a crepuscular light.

If a *kriyaban* has the time to practice more than 12-24 breaths he/she will realize that *Ajna* and *Fontanelle* become a unique reality. In other words, from a certain moment onwards, the center of the awareness moves to the *Sahasrara* and there it remains up to the end of the routine.

Such a concentration, maintained also after the breath has calmed down entirely, when the *Chakras* don't exist anymore, and only a sweet light is there in the conscience, is called *Paravastha* (in this school).

### Second Kriya (variation)

Inhalation and exhalation are divided into six + six parts. The syllables of the Sanskrit *Mantra* "*Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*" are mentally chanted in the *Chakras*, while making a short pause in each.

During the first "sip" of inhalation, the concentration is on the *Muladhar*, where the syllable *Om* is ideally placed; during the second "sip", the concentration is on the second *Chakra*, where the syllable *Na* is ideally placed ... and so on, until *Ba* is placed in *Ajna* and the inhalation is completed.

Then the breath is held, the chin bends **forward**, towards the throat cavity: a kind of inner pressure is felt on the frontal part of the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The head bends slightly toward the **left** shoulder, without turning the face: a pressure is felt on the left part of the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The head now bends **backwards**: the same pressure is felt on the back of the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The head bends slightly toward the **right** shoulder, without turning the face: the pressure is felt on the right

part of the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The chin bends **forward**, towards the throat cavity... pressure is felt on the frontal part of the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position.

Then an exhalation leads the awareness through the *Chakras* to *Muladhar*.

It is divided into six punctuated parts like pulses: during the first of these parts, the syllable *Te* is placed in the *Medulla*; during the second one, the syllable *Va* is placed in the fifth *Chakra*... and so on ... *Su... De... Va*, until *Ya* is mentally chanted in the *Muladhar*.

The time employed depends on the individual; usually it is approximately 20-25 seconds, but it can be longer. The procedure is repeated at least 12 times.

During this technique when the head is in a downward position, (either forward, to the left, to the back or to the right) there is created an opening for the divine light to flow down from above the head (seat of the divine Tranquility) into the whole body. In this tradition one is taught as though the head movement were the movement of a lid of a pot which by moving allows the pot to be filled by a stream of energy.

### Third Kriya (variation)

The reader remembers how, in the previous chapter, dealing with the basic form of *Thokar*, we passed from the technique of the *Second Kriya* to that of the *Third Kriya* by inserting the variation of repeating the movements of the head within one single breath. The same event happens here. The increase of the number of the head rotations happens according to similar schemes. The same considerations about the problem of holding the breath are now valid.

A *kriyaban* inhales as in the previous *Second Kriya*. The breath is then partially held: a minimal quantity of air is let imperceptibly go out through the nose in a way that holding the breath is comfortable. The sensation that the breath is dissolved ensues.

The movements of the head are those described in the previous technique, save for the fact that they are more swift and there is no stop after the first round. During each bending of the head a pressure is felt upon the heart *Chakra*, in the frontal part of it, from the left, from backwards...

There are different rounds of the head: 3 rotations is a good number to begin with. Then an exhalation as in the *Second Kriya* leads the awareness through the *Chakras* to *Muladhar*.

The technique is repeated 12 times: in each breath we have 3 repetitions of the movement of the head (complete rotation). In the course of time, the number of the head rotations inside one single breath, is increased of one rotation, then two... up to twelve.

One can also receive instruction to practice the technique only once but

increase gradually the number of the rotatory movements up to 200 – always holding the breath! The standard instruction is starting with 12 rotations and increasing by one every day.

The breath seems to disappear and a person is drawn to continue indefinitely with the rotations.<sup>31</sup>

Something astonishing happens which enraptures a *kriyaban*: a never before experienced joy and a perfect feeling of freedom pour into his or her life. At a certain moment, one is in a state of ecstasy and feels that this is the correct moment to stop the movements and enjoy what happens in the immobile state.

#### Fourth Kriya (variation)

After the practice of the *Second* or of the *Third Kriya*, one perceives a particular sensation of physical immobility; it is so strong that the backbone seems like a steel bar. In this situation one concentrates only on the inner light and on the feeling of tranquility. This is the state of *Dhyana*. When there is time at disposal, this state can be dramatically deepened by adopting one or both of the two following procedures.

[a] Part of the attention is placed on the *Muladhar Chakra*. Thanks to a short inhalation, this *Chakra* is ideally raised into the center of the head: *Ajna Chakra*. A concentration of *Prana* is felt there. A minimal quantity of air is let imperceptibly go out through the nose, without disturbing the centering of the energy.

With the attention both in *Ajna* and in the location of the first *Chakra*, the movements of the *Second Kriya* technique are performed in a somehow more delicate way. When the chin bends forward, an inner pressure is felt on the frontal part of that *Chakra* ... then on its left part ... then on its back ... then on its right part and again on its frontal part. One has the clear sensation that the breath is dissolved, therefore during this event there is neither inhalation nor exhalation.

The same procedure is repeated for each *Chakra*! ... second, third, fourth and fifth. Then, thanks to a short inhalation, the concentration is increased in *Ajna Chakra*. The breath is held, the same movements are performed with the unique purpose of increasing the concentration in this *Chakra*. Then the procedure is repeated for the fifth, fourth, third, second and first *Chakra*. The

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<sup>31</sup> Since the cervical vertebrae are something very delicate, since one must not put them unwisely under stress, the movements of the head are just hinted but the internal stimuli on the fourth *Chakra* are always distinctly perceived. It is important to read again what we have written in the previous chapter in relation to the problem of holding the breath during the *Third Kriya* procedure.

whole process can be repeated 6-12 times. After having "touched" twice each *Chakra* (both in upward and downward sequence) the movements of the head become only hinted.

[b] Part of the attention is placed on the *Muladhar Chakra*. Thanks to a short inhalation, this *Chakra* is ideally raised into the crown of the head, over the occipital region, on the right (in the part "1" of figure 6).

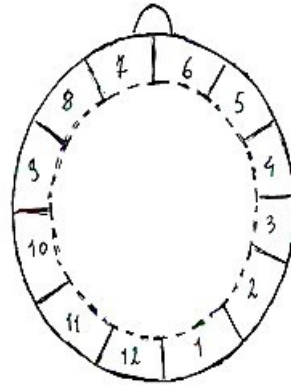


Figure 6. Crown of the head seen from above

The syllables of the Sanskrit *Mantra* "*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*" are utilized in this procedure. As we have seen in the previous exercise, one forgets the breath and repeats mentally the first syllable: *Om, Om, Om, Om ...* (many times: the ideal number is 36) in both places – crown of the head and seat of the *Chakra*.

While the awareness intensifies both up and down, the sensation of immobility is to be held at all costs. After about 10-40 seconds, the concentration moves to the second *Chakra*: in the same way as the previous one, this is raised into an adjacent part of the crown. The ellipse of the crown, seen from above, may be ideally divided into 12 parts. Starting over the occipital region and moving in a counter-clockwise direction along the crown, the first six parts are on the right side of the head, the remaining six are on the left side up to the starting point.

Similarly as before, one repeats mentally the associated syllable *Na, Na, Na, Na ...* and deepens the experience of immobility.

It is clear how the same procedure is repeated for the other *Chakras* (3, 4, 5, *Ajna*, again *Ajna*, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1) each one put in relation with a different part of the crown of the head (see figure 6). After one or two or three cycles (one cycle is the concentration in the twelve stations) a sudden bliss manifests and one is no more able to mentally chant anything. The procedure goes on in the



kingdom of pure awareness towards the ecstatic absorption.

## SECTION [B]

Maha Mudra & Navi Kriya [see chapter II/1]

Pranayama (variation)

The procedure of *Pranayama* – without and then with the chanting of *Om* in the *Chakras* - is intensified in the following way.

At the end of the inhalation, while holding the breath, a strong trusting action is done to draw the energy from the abdominal region and inject it into the *Kutastha*. Let us try to describe what happens.

While holding the breath, the awareness present in the occipital region "rotates" left, comes down a little bit and enters the *Medulla*, the eyebrows are raised, one becomes conscious of light in and over the *Medulla*.

At this point a strong *Mula Bandha* is applied thus providing a thrust to the energy contained in the body which is injected into the *Kutastha*.

A peculiar sensation like an ecstatic shiver ensues.

The tension is then released, the exhalation begins and the energy goes down to the *Muladhara*. Breath after breath, the power created in *Kutastha* will explode into the great golden-white light of the spiritual eye.

*Kechari Mudra*, if achieved, cooperates with this process: during the *Mula Bandha* thrust, the tongue is pushed upward and forward.

Second Kriya (variation)

[a] First part with long breath

The inhalation is that of the *Omkar Pranayama* (the breath is divided in six parts) but the process is intensified through the help of the movement of the head as follows:

Starting with one's chin on the chest, a *kriyaban* inhales and simultaneously raises the awareness along the spinal column; the chin moves up as if to follow millimeter after millimeter the inner movement of the awareness.

The movement is charged by the maximum possible mental intensity: like a squeezing with a nail an almost empty tube of toothpaste to get the last little bit out.

One touches the *Chakras* with the syllables (*Om* is placed mentally in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second one, *Mo* in the third one, *Bha* in the fourth one, *Ga* in the fifth one and *Ba* in the *Bindu*).

During inhalation, the muscles at the base of the spinal column remain contracted and the hands (with interlocked fingers) are placed upon the navel

area so as to push the abdominal region upward, thus creating a mental pressure on the first three *Chakras*. The breath produces only a slight, weak sound in the throat or it comes out soundless.

When the chin is up, horizontal, the inhalation ends and the perception is now at the *Bindu*. The breath and muscle contraction are held. Without turning the face, the head moves toward the left shoulder, then it returns to the starting position while at the same raising the chin up as much as possible; a contraction of the neck's rear muscles happens.

(It is like the normal rotation of the head in *Omkar Pranayama* but only half and with the addition of the upward chin movement. The finale position is that of the second part of the *Navi Kriya*, with the head fully back.)

During this movement, the energy in the *Bindu* descends to the left, curving and entering the *Medulla*. A *kriyaban* then practices the *Mula Bandha* intensely while chanting *Teeee* like an arrow injecting his consciousness into the *Kutastha*. (It is the same process, enhanced, which we have encountered in the particular form of *Pranayama* taught by this school, but now it happens with the chin up.)

From that chin-up position, the face turns to the right and then to the left (in this case the ear does not move towards the shoulder: one is only turning one's head); during this movement the fifth cervical *Chakra* is perceived and the syllable *Va* is mentally chanted in it. Then, from the left position, the chin strikes the middle of the chest along a diagonal (the head is now in the same position as in any other form of *Thokar*), and the syllable *Su* is chanted in the heart *Chakra*. The muscles at the base of the spinal column are relaxed and, while exhaling, the remaining syllables *De*, *Va* and *Ya* are placed in the third, the second and the first *Chakras* respectively. A *kriyaban* is guided to repeat this technique 6-12 times. (As always with *Thokar*, it should be remarked that in the presence of physical problems, mindful and delicate movements are crucial.)

#### [b] Second part: with calm breath.

A *kriyaban* is then guided to deepen the practice by forgetting the breath and slowing down the entire process: the result is far more powerful.

Starting with his chin on the chest, a *kriyaban* moves his awareness very, very slowly along the spinal column upwards, while simultaneously raising the chin as if to accompany and push the energy up. The energy is sensed like a substance in the thin channel of *Sushumna*, squeezed upward (very very slowly) by this movement of the chin. One has the sensation of traveling inside the spine and touching each *Chakra* in a very direct way.

The raising of the energy up to the head should last no less than 30 seconds! To obtain the greatest mental intensity, *Kechari Mudra* should be adopted.

As usual, the *Chakras* are touched with the syllables of the *Mantra*.

When the chin is horizontal, the perception is at the *Bindu*.

The following movements are like the afore described ones, just a little slower, but all happens in the state of *Kevala Kumbhaka*, namely with the breath completely immobile (breathing in and out at this point would destroy all the beauty of the process). What is important is not to be in a hurry, but to be totally relaxed and let the experience intensify naturally.

To this we add one detail: in the moment when *Su* is chanted in the heart *Chakra*, there is a short pause: the breath does not move in the nostrils and the mind is enraptured in the radiation of energy felt in the heart *Chakra*. The chin comes up a little bit and the breath is again free but ignored.

To conclude the round, while lowering very, very slowly the chin, the awareness touches deeply the third, the second and the first *Chakra*. A micro pause is made in each one of these *Chakras* when the syllable is placed. It cannot be overemphasized how important it is not to be in a hurry, to be relaxed and let the experience intensify by itself.

For some weeks, one is guided to repeat this technique 12 times, then to gradually increase the repetitions for a total (first part+second part) of 200 times.

### Third Kriya (variation)

The technique is the same as the just explained *Second Kriya*. Once the energy is brought to the head, while holding the breath, one rotates one's head counter-clockwise twelve times (the timing is normally less than three seconds per rotation).

During this rotation the awareness intensifies in the *Kutastha* and in the light perceived in the upper part of the head.

Then all happens as in the previous *Second Kriya*.

The increase of the number of the head rotations happens according to the schemes outlined in the previous descriptions of the procedure of the *Third Kriya*. According to the first, the technique is repeated 12 times: in each breath we have different rotations of the head. It is not difficult to have twelve rotations.

With the second scheme, the technique is practiced only once but one increases the number of the rotatory movements up to 200 – always holding the breath! The breath seems to disappear and a person is drawn to continue indefinitely with the rotations.

It is important to keep in mind what we have written in the previous chapter in relation to the problem of holding the breath during the *Third Kriya* procedure.

## Fourth Kriya (variation)

### [a] First part: Thokar on all the Chakras and climbing up of the Prana

The inhalation is that of the *Omkar Pranayama* (the breath is divided into six parts): starting with one's chin on the chest, a *kriyaban* inhales and simultaneously raises the awareness along the spinal column; the chin moves up as if to follow millimeter after millimeter the inner movement of the awareness.

One touches the *Chakras* with the syllables (*Om* is placed mentally in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second one, *Mo* in the third one, *Bha* in the fourth one, *Ga* in the fifth one and *Ba* in the *Bindu*).

During inhalation, the muscles at the base of the spinal column remain contracted and the hands (with interlocked fingers) are placed upon the navel area so as to push the abdominal region upward, thus creating a mental pressure on the first three *Chakras*. The breath produces only a slight, weak sound in the throat or it comes out soundless.

When the chin is up, horizontal, the inhalation ends and the perception is now at the *Bindu*. The breath and muscle contraction are held. Without turning the face, the head moves toward the left shoulder, then it returns to the starting position while at the same raising the chin up as much as possible; a contraction of the neck's rear muscles happens.

During this movement, the energy in the *Bindu* descends to the left, curving and entering the *Medulla*. A *kriyaban* then practices the *Mula Bandha* intensely while chanting *Teeee* like an arrow injecting his consciousness into the *Kutastha*.

From that chin-up position, the face turns to the right and then to the left (in this case the ear does not move towards the shoulder: one is only turning one's head); during this movement the fifth cervical *Chakra* is perceived and the syllable *Va* is mentally chanted in it. Then, from the left position, the chin strikes the middle of the chest along a diagonal and the syllable *Su* is chanted in the heart *Chakra*.

After the syllable *Su* is vibrated in the heart *Chakra*, holding the breath, another similar diagonal movement of the chin from the left to the chest is repeated and the energy is mentally directed toward the third *Chakra* where the syllable *De* is vibrated; another similar movement directs the energy and the syllable *Va* into the second *Chakra*; finally a last stroke directs the energy and the syllable *Ya* into *Muladhar*.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Some *Kriya Acharyas* teach at this point to lift the body just a few millimeters with the help of the hands and then let the buttocks touch the floor with a mild jolt. This action is called *Maha Veda Mudra*: *Veda* means perforation, obviously of the knot of the *Muladhar*. If the technique is practiced correctly, an ecstatic feeling is felt.

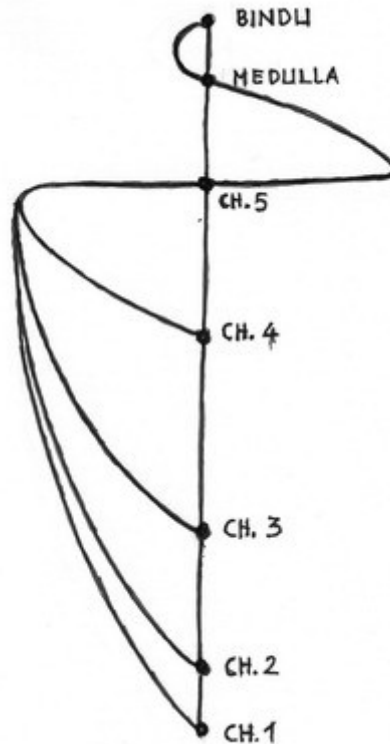


Figure 7. Thokar extended to the underlying Chakras

A very long exhalation accompanies the movement of the energy which, like a liquid light, climbs the spine, enters the *Kutastha* and, through it, flows out of the body. During this action, the chin moves up as if to follow the rising *Prana*.

This procedure (*Thokar* upon the first four *Chakras* and rising of the energy) can be repeated for a total of six-twelve times. Sometimes one repetition is more than enough. Only an expert *Acharya* can guide a *kriyaban* to increase the repetitions of this technique. Its effects are very difficult to assimilate!

[b] Second part: concentration on the Chakras

The breath is allowed to flow freely. A *kriyaban* concentrates his/her attention in perceiving the power spreading from the *Muladhar Chakra* into the spine and the whole body. He/she observes the rising of the energy which goes on happening even if more slowly. Sometimes it is felt like waves of a tide moving higher and higher, reaching a *Chakra*, then again falling down and moving from the base of the spine to a higher center... A practitioner tries to feel it in each *Chakra*, (according to the usual order: 1,2,3,4,5, *Ajna/Medulla*, *Kutastha*, 5,4,3,2,1) pausing in them at least a dozen of seconds. While a part of one's concentration is always in *Kutastha*, this is repeated 12 times.

## SECTION [C]

Numerous *kriyabans* affirm, with different motivations, that the following procedures did not originate from Lahiri Mahasaya. They observe that the only sentence about the *Trivangamurari* movement which can be reasonably attributed to him is: «To make this body *Trivangamurari*, "three bended", three centers are to be crossed, at *Muladhar*, at *Anahat*, and at *Vishnu* center at the root of the tongue». Obviously this is not enough to justify the existence of the following techniques.

I was told that some *kriyabans* received initiation from this school but soon neglected the *Trivangamurari* techniques believing them to be useless since – this is what they think - they lead the energy out of the *Sushumna*.

The truth is that these techniques can grant an ineffable experience. They are impossible to be grasped intellectually, as *Omkar* experience is. As far as I'm concerned, I am speechless in considering the beauty and power of them. For this reason (and also because they were and are practiced by wonderful souls) I share them with the reader.

Nothing positive or useful came from those who tried to give a personification of the *Trivangamurari* movement. Actually, some claimed that it appeared to them in the particular form of *Krishna* or *Shiva*. They implied that only one who had had this vision had achieved mastery of these techniques. Without disputing with them, we can think that it is correct to say that the shape of the prince *Krishna*, as depicted in the iconography, reminds us of the *Trivangamurari* form; his neck, legs and back are kept in a peculiar position clearly outlining these three curves, perhaps it implies the cutting of the three knots - but that's all there is to it.

Maha Mudra & Navi Kriya [like the basic ones, see chapter II/1]

Pranayama (variation)

At least 36 basic *Pranayamas* are performed.<sup>33</sup>

Then, going on with the same procedure, while the path of inhalation remains the same, during the exhalation, the awareness comes down in a particular way. The current flows from the *Bindu* into the *Medulla* moving slightly on the left side, crosses the *Medulla* and bends down in a way to reach the fourth *Chakra* from the right and cross it, bending down and reaching the *Muladhar* from the left. Inhalation and exhalation go on in this way.

In the beginning this perception doesn't happen in the exact way as it is shown in the picture: the whole perception is not so far from the central axis.

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<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, some schools affirm that the minimum number of basic Pranayama should be 200!

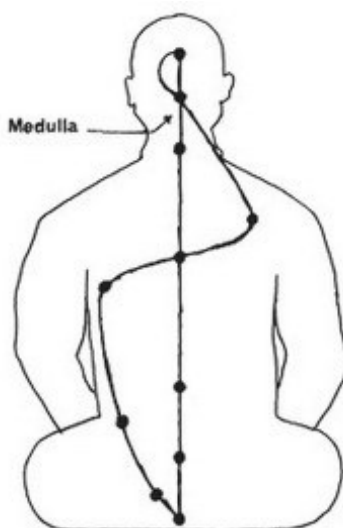


Figure 8. Trivangamurari movement

At a certain point, the intuition guides a *kriyaban* to forget the breath entirely. He raises his awareness along the spinal column up to touch the *Bindu*, more slowly than the way he has done with the help of the breath: half a minute is ideally required for raising the awareness; the same is required for the descent. A pause of about one second is made in the *Muladhar Chakra*. One round is equal to one minute, but if it turns out to be shorter, let us say 45/50 seconds, this does not mean that the procedure has been done incorrectly.

As soon as the concentration adheres totally to this movement, the path is perceived as similar to the one drawn in Figure 8. It is difficult to add more details to the explanation.

It must be remarked that the path of energy is not the effect of the imagination power, it is a reality of its own. The four new centers (one at the right side, three at the left) along the descending flux should not be considered new *Chakras*; they are only small "vortexes" of current within the main current.

Although a practitioner should not get upset in attempting to pin-point their location, the one on the right side is to be located in the back, about an inch above the right nipple's height, whereas the next one, on the left side of the body is situated in the back about an inch under the left nipple's height.

Let us also add that the entire *Trivangamurari* flow takes place on a virtual plane containing the spine (in other words, it does not come forward). The secret of these technique is found in good concentration skills, immobility and in the ability to bear the power resulting from it.

For two weeks, a *kriyaban* is guided to repeat this technique 25 times. Then for another two weeks he is guided to repeat it 50 times and so on up to 200 times. After the completion of this number one can move on to the technique of the *Second Kriya*. While the described technique is called *Amantrak* (without *Mantra*), the following *Second Kriya* is called *Samantrak* (with

*Mantra*).

### Second Kriya (variation)

The breath is calm and is totally forgotten.

The perception of the *Trivangamurari* movement is intensified through the twelve-syllable *Mantra*.

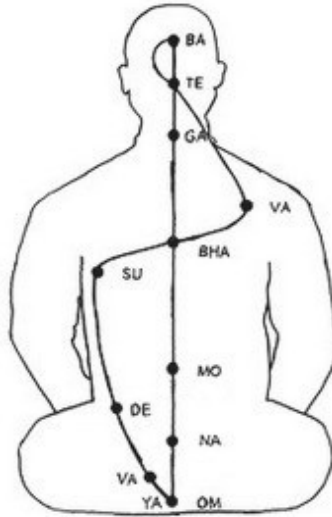


Figure 9. Particular form of Second Kriya

While the current rises, the syllables *Om*, *Na*, *Mo*, *Bha* and *Ga* are vibrated into the first five *Chakras*, the syllable *Ba* into the *Bindu*.

Then the current descends along the left side, curving until it reaches the *Medulla*; this is where the seventh syllable, *Teeee*, is vibrated. At this point the inner flux moves toward the right side of the body, reaching the next center where the eighth syllable, *Va*, is vibrated. It curves and diagonally crosses the heart *Chakra* and arrives at the next center to the left where the ninth syllable, *Su*, is vibrated. Then in turn the syllables *De*, *Va* are chanted which intensifies the perception of the last two "vortexes" of the current and finally *Ya* is chanted in the *Muladhar*.

Each syllable is a mental *Thokar* (hit) to each center's location.

Since the technique is performed slowly (half a minute for raising the awareness, the same for coming down) there is plenty of time to make this perception very accurate.

For two weeks, one repeats this technique 25 times. Then for another two weeks one repeats it 50 times and so on up to 200 times. After the completion of this number one may use this procedure with fair doses (24 – 36) on a regular basis at the place of *Mental Pranayama* or move on the practice of the *Third Kriya*.



### Third Kriya (variation)

Starting with the chin on the chest, a *kriyaban* moves the awareness very slowly along the spinal column: the chin comes slowly up following the inner movement; as usual the *Chakras* are touched with the syllables of the *Mantra*. Again, during this process the breath is forgotten.

When the chin is parallel to the ground, the perception is at the *Bindu*.

The movements of the head are similar to those we are acquainted with by the practice of the *Thokar* discussed in section [B], but they are far slower.

Without turning the face, the head moves very slowly toward the left, then it returns to the starting position while at the same time raising the chin up as much as possible; the neck's rear muscles are contracted.

During this movement, the *Trivangamurari* flow descends from the *Bindu* center to the left, bends, enters the *Medulla* where the seventh syllable, *Teeee*, is vibrated. From this raised-chin position, the face slowly turns to the right, the chin is calmly lowered until it reaches a position parallel to, and above the right shoulder. During this movement, the inner *Trivangamurari* flow reaches the eighth center.<sup>34</sup>

At this point the chin touches the right shoulder for an instant (this is the first of five strokes) and it is in this very instant that the syllable *Va* is vibrated in the eighth center. (The shoulder also makes a small motion upward to make contact with the chin easier.)

Right after this movement, the face turns left in a very, very slow motion, accompanying - millimeter by millimeter - the perception of the inner flux moving across the fourth *Chakra*.

The second stroke similarly takes place on the left side, when the syllable *Su* is chanted in the ninth center.

The chin, grazing the left side of the collarbone, slowly moves towards the position in the middle of the chest. During this movement - exactly when the syllables *De* and *Va* are thought in the tenth and eleventh centers - two light strokes are given to the collarbone in intermediate positions. In the end, when *Ya* is placed into *Muladhar*, the last chin stroke on the chest (central position) is carried out. A pause of about one second follows.

*Kriya* teachers say that one round should ideally last one minute, but from practical experience it lasts approximately 40/50 seconds.

This procedure is repeated 12-36 times.

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<sup>34</sup> Therefore there is no doubt about the speed of the movement of the head: the *Trivangamurari* flow goes on as in the previous *Second Kriya* and the head just accompanies it.

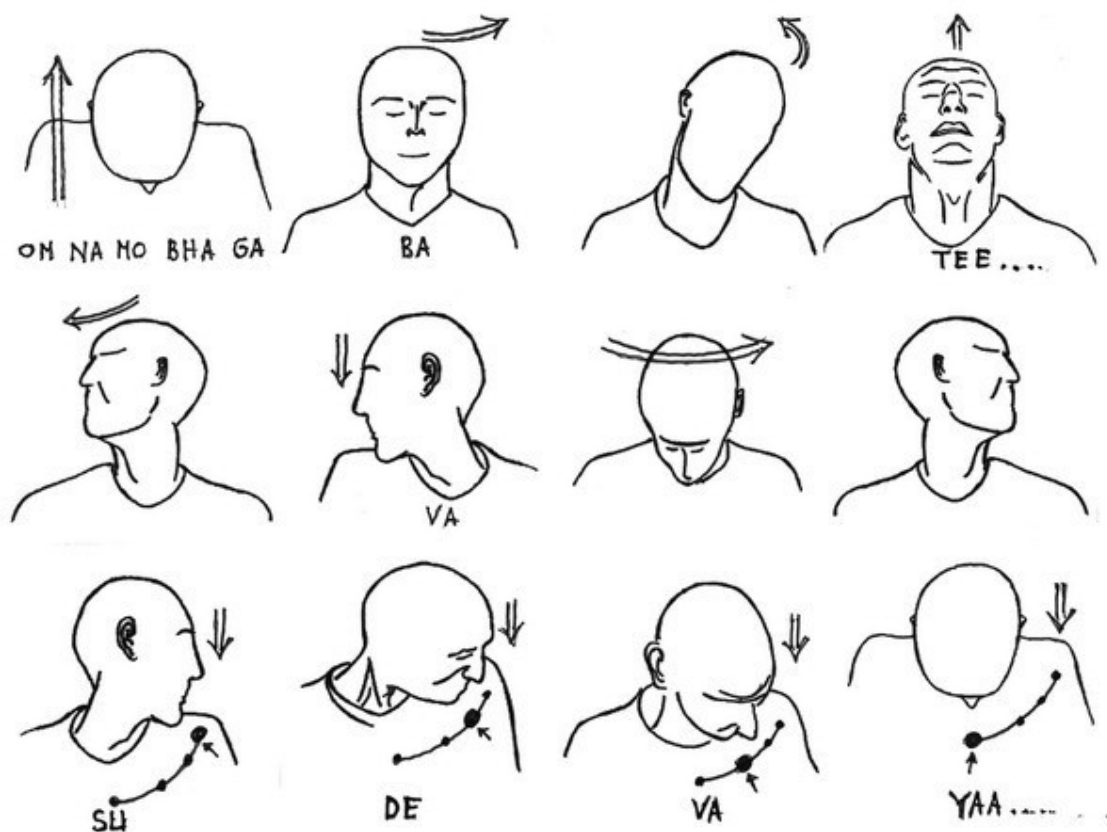


Figure 10. Thokar [ School C ]

The supervision of an expert helps to avoid problems – I am specifically referring to stress and pain in the cervical vertebrae and in the muscles of the neck. Abrupt movements should be avoided; it is thus possible to reach deep mental concentration when thinking of each of the five syllables in their respective centers. During the first weeks it is wise not to practice every day, but spread out the practice to every two or three days.

In the third part of the book we are going to describe how (differently from the already described forms of *Third Kriya*) it is possible to increase the repetitions of this technique.

#### Fourth Kriya (variation)

A *kriyaban* becomes aware of the *Muladhar Chakra* - which is visualized as a horizontal disk or coin with a diameter of approximately an inch.<sup>35</sup>

The breath is very calm and free. With the help of the afore quoted 12 letter *Mantra*, which is mentally chanted, in its completeness, inside the *Chakra*

<sup>35</sup> All the centers are visualized as horizontal disks: usually it comes spontaneous to visualize them as if viewing them from top. With time and experience, this visualization develops into a personal one, also because then the notion of dimension (of up and down) is lost.

itself, the *Trivangamurari* movement in reduced dimensions (micro) - similar to that already experienced in large-scale dimension - is perceived on the virtual coin's surface (Figure 11). The entire *Mantra* with its associated micro movement is repeated three times. The same procedure occurs in each of the twelve centers (the *Chakras* + *Medulla* + the four centers outside the spine + *Muladhar*).

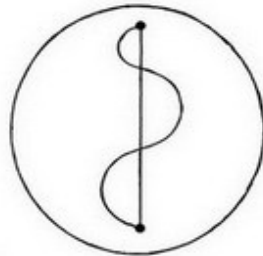


Figure 11. Trivangamurari micro-movement inside a Chakra

This is one *Fourth Kriya*. Usually twelve are practiced.<sup>36</sup> Its duration is determined by the speed of the chanting of the *Mantra*. For many people each chanting of the *Mantra* and consequently each micro-movement lasts about 10-12 seconds. Lahiri Mahasaya's recommendation was «Don't be in a hurry!».

The *Micro-movement* is the revelation of the *Omkar* reality inside each *Chakra*. The technique we have just discussed embodies in the safest of all the ways the process of *Muladhara Granti Veda*; the teachers who carry out this version of the *Fourth Kriya* maintain that many *yogic* actions having the purpose of untying the knot of the *Muladhar*, result only in producing an even tighter lock on it, which is noticed as a very annoying nervous state.

In all the *Kriya* schools, the *Fourth Kriya* is considered practicable only if the *Third Kriya* has been mastered, at least up to a certain level.

Under this ideal conditions, in whatever *Chakra* a *kriyaban* concentrates (as well as in one of the new introduced centers outside the spine) if he calmly utters mentally the syllables "*Om-Na-Mo-Bha-Ga-Ba-Te-Va-Su-De-Va-Ya*" he will perceive something stirring, swaying inside that *Chakra*.

#### Note

It is good to train oneself to perceive the micro-movement without the aid of the *Mantra*. The following procedure is suited for this purpose:

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<sup>36</sup> Even a small amount of 3- 4 rounds (experienced in complete relaxation and surrender) produces a great joy and an almost irresistible bliss.

a *kriyaban* raises the *Muladhar Chakra* into the *Kutastha* through a short inhalation. When the presence of the energy is clearly felt in the point between the eyebrows, a *kriyaban* "looks down" at the disk of the *Chakra* and draws there (as with a laser-pen) the form of the micro-movement by a faint forward, lateral, back swing of the spinal column - not wider than the resulting micro-movement.

This is repeated three times in each of the 12 centers. After one or two complete rounds, the syllables, like "little thrusts or pulsations", are introduced, which provide a remarkable stimulation and a more detailed perception of such phenomenon, while the body regains immobility.

## THIRD PART: DEEPENING THE EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING OF KRIYA

### CHAPTER III/01... IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION OF KRIYA

In the second part of the book I have tried to be useful to those readers who seek detailed information about the *Kriya* techniques. I have written down all I know about this subject and shared it freely. There remain, indeed, in my shorthand notebooks some variations and details, ready to be added to the book, but only in case I will receive other information corroborating and, at the same time, showing their intrinsic value in the light of Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy.

At the present moment I am not looking anymore frantically for information from any possible source, although I study carefully all what I happen to come across. I reflect deeply about the criticism that, now and then, I receive - which never leaves me cold. Nevertheless, drastic affirmations like: «The renowned teacher X who is disciple of Y who was direct disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya has affirmed that part of the techniques you describe are an invention» leave me calm and cheerful. This comes from the fact that I have touched with hand their value: they are marvelous and they will remain in my life! I am now about to complete the effort of sharing *Kriya* by tackling two fundamental themes: the first is to furnish a general theoretical outlook of *Kriya* that can help a person to conceive a correct routine; the second is the problem of the didactics of *Kriya*, namely some remarks about how it can be communicated to a student.

After I had gotten rid of all the *Gurus*, I was invited from the local university of the third age to give lessons about the history of the mystical paths. After completing the first cycle of lessons, I accepted the assignment for the following years which, in all, became five.

The mystical path was considered from different points of view and, during the last two years, there was also a practical introduction to elementary practices like *Japa*, *Pranayama* from classic *Yoga*...

I was delighted to prepare the lessons by studying the best available essays and textbooks. I mean books written by academics who didn't belong (or were so smart to hide their membership) to any particular mystical school and manifested a detached attitude towards the whole matter. This was an unclouded period of my life: I was very gratified to have time and opportunity to pursue such studies.

I appreciated those texts that were capable of grasping the essence of a religions movement, especially those flourished freely around the great

religions. The impact of certain readings, the liveliness of certain biographic stories, has the effect of melting away our faddiness born from strong conditioning, admitted innocently in our lives through the door of devotion. Such studies contributed to calm my recurrent torment to having violated the "sacred" rule of maintaining secrecy about the *Kriya* techniques.

How many times I repeated to myself: «Such rule is not *sacred*, it is *human*, it is the cause of disastrous effects, of excruciating conflicts and sufferings».

Nevertheless, a painful grip in my breast along with a general sense of uneasiness and unreality continued to linger. Of all my reasoning, this one helped me, almost instantly, to regain a light-hearted, self-assured mood: *Kriya* is a collection of introspective tools which, although perfectly integrated, were taken from different traditions. It is not possible, it is not fair to claim they belong to one organization or one teacher: no one can make claims of exclusive ownership.

At the onset of my *Yoga* practice, I didn't associate it with a spiritual path. My deep-rooted passion for *Pranayama* was nourished not only by the desire of «dying to myself» (and master thus the state of *mental silence*) but by my interest for Jung's fascinating writings. Having studied Jolande Jacobi *The Psychology Of CG Jung*, followed by Jung, Jaffé (1965) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, I could not but feel the great desire of beginning the "process of individualization". But it required to wait many years and gain quite a lot of money to pay my analysis sessions! In the meantime, after experimenting the first effects of *Pranayama*, I remained stunned: the predominant impression was that it was operating a cleaning process of my subconscious. I guessed that *Pranayama* could guide me along this path of *individualization*.

In my adolescent heart I dreamed I would face the archetypes of Collective Unconscious.... I had trust in myself, I felt I could do this work.

One who has a good knowledge of Jungian thought will find this idea an insanity. Nevertheless, it infused me with enthusiasm, great vigilance, meticulousness and indomitable will of leading my practice to perfection.

Entering a *Kriya*-founded organization meant to be ensnared and bewildered by many fairy tales. I was convinced that founding *Kriya* was like a stroke of luck, a gift from the Divine, thanks to I don't know what sort of merit. I began to look at people who belonged to the same path as shrewd persons who knew how to take the best from life; consequently I regarded those who refused it or, in spite of much talking, were still uncertain if they should take a decisive step and begin with it, as idiots who didn't know what they were losing.

My *Kriya Pranayama*, practiced with enthusiasm for some months, became a

tranquil good habit. The iron of my discipline softened inside the atmosphere of the "*Guru's blessings*".

My rational attitude to measure the territory of that school through the values instilled by my culture was gradually twisted. It was as if a large portion of my brain withdrew, while another one, which did its utmost in believing what it was convenient to believe, tried to usurp its function.

In the very beginning, my "spiritual-oriented" brain didn't know how to answer back to any censure from other persons and reacted by running away or reciprocating violently; subsequently it became so cunning that I started to behave normally in social life (people began to look at me as a man who chose a simple life trend, marked by lofty principles...) not revealing how my fairness of judgment was impaired, practically inexistent.

It is difficult to retrace the very slow process through which I was brought back to my senses. Decisive were the readings of Sri Aurobindo, Mother and Satprem's. Their appeal stemmed from the fact that they treated the themes of India's spirituality with a western language which was both lyric and rational, at the highest degree of excellence. Theirs were enlightening remarks where both the contemplation of the beauty in nature and the emotion arising from listening to classic music were considered a bridge to the spiritual experience. They were able expressed in an euphorically vivid way, my innermost convictions which I had no means to clarify so clear-headedly even to myself. In their aspiration for a full manifestation of the Divine in the atoms of inert matter, there was a fragrance which excited and moved me.

Sometimes, while I was reading them, I had the impression I had a fever.

A revolution, a reversal of values, was slowly but inevitably happening in me. Spellbound, I was contemplating the shimmering splendor of a new way of looking at the spiritual path: two seemingly opposite worlds, that of a rarefied paradisiac atmosphere, which we imagine is enjoyed by the ascetic souls, and that of the full enjoyment of the earthly beauty, so dear to artists, could unify in each *kriyaban's* consciousness through an atypical but genial use of *Kriya Pranayama*. It could be utilized not only in bringing the energy and the awareness in the spine, but also in the cells of the body!

My first attempts at that were like discovering *Kriya* for the first time. From that moment onwards, meditation was approached as if it were the prosecution of the experience of art, the search of a perfect Beauty unattainable through human means and abilities. The naïve conception of devotion as an hectic emotion arising from devotional *bhajan*, from certain pictures, from the scent of certain incenses... was left behind forever.

## Studies following the thread of Omkar's experience

Some years later, the first *Kriya* teacher I met out of the organization, connected tightly in my conception Beauty with *Omkar*. He brought me nearer to the multifaceted (sound, light and movement sensation) experience of *Omkar*: it became the unique focus of my concentration, a contact to be obtained during the practice of *Kriya* and preserved with the utmost care during the day. A simple idea like this was like a cascade of light in my life: I lived for some days in the sweetest reality. The sphere of my sentiments was touched in a stronger, more involving way than any of my past experiences. For the first time I had a clear perception that I was following not only an abstract ideal of perfection but also a state of inconceivable sweetness that I could taste every day, during the practice and in every moment when I rested, free from work. In that happy period of my life I tried tracking down in spiritual literature any movement or eminent figure who had something to do with that subject.

The first name that came to my mind was that of Saint John of the Cross. He gave a splendid description of his meeting with the "silent music", the "sounding solitude". There is no doubt he heard the *Omkar*'s sound as that of rushing waters. He inspired me to give more emphasis to the practice of *Japa* – Prayer. Together with Saint Teresa of Avila, he was convinced that perfection in the spiritual life can be reached only by expanding to the limit the practice of Prayer. He meant a Prayer which goes beyond supplication, beyond words themselves - a "Prayer of the heart".

Over the centuries, a great deal of misunderstanding and incomprehension deposited on this practice. For many devotees Prayer had - with rare exceptions - the meaning of a plea to God with the only purpose of obtaining personal favors or blessings on a suffering humanity. The concept of "Inner, intimate Prayer" risked an almost total eclipse.

The state of consciousness born during that lofty period inspired me to benefit also from the study of the lives of those saints whom I had no occasion before to be acquainted with. I read a book about the Orthodox St. Seraphim of Sarov and other literature about other Orthodox saints. It was easy to recognize in the explanation of the meaning of the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) the same *Omkar* Reality. I had been so proud of my *Kriya* practice and now I began discovering I was less than a novice.

They did not refer to their practices as "techniques", they had no redundant name, there wasn't any remark upon their "extraordinary" effects. They were described in a very simple way as a universal process happening naturally in any soul who treads sincerely the spiritual path. The idea of secretiveness was



either totally extraneous or was simply the effect of a natural, not institutionalized, instinct of decency and modesty which those humble souls had. But this reserve disappeared in their autobiographical writings.

Very interesting was the literary material relating to the *Hesychasm*, a Christian orthodox movement considering inner peace to be a necessity for every human being. The essence of this movement is to be found in the already quoted book *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*. Its main emphasis is upon the "uninterrupted, continuous Prayer".

The story is that of a pilgrim, coming back from the Holy Sepulcher, who stopped at Mount Athos and told about his lifelong search for the teaching how «to pray continually» - the way Saint Paul had recommended - to a monk. He was resolute about covering an infinite distance across the steppes - if he had to - in order to find a spiritual guide that would reveal him the secret of praying that way. One day, his ardor was awarded; he found a spiritual teacher who accepted him as a disciple and gradually clarified to him every detail of the practice of the "continuous Prayer". Very interesting is the fact that the *hesychastic* practice involves a breathing exercise with a tongue position, akin to that of *Kechari Mudra*.

After this initial step, one is encouraged to be tenacious in praying with the focus of concentration on the navel: «...(in this way) it is possible to find a joyless and lightless obscurity but, persisting, a limitless happiness will be reached». Once one gets over the obstacle of the navel, a whole path unfolds, leading to the heart. Unforgettable is the description of the Prayer entering the heart; the effects are strikingly similar to those of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Thokar*! The hitting of the heart *Chakra* is obtained blending the perception of the throbs of the heart with the syllables of the prayer. The consciousness slips into it and there contemplates the "Uncreated Light" (obviously the light aspect of *Omkar*), which is considered the highest of the mystical achievements.

The art of Prayer is developed in an astonishing way in the *Sufi* path. There is no doubt that *Thokar* is the same process which the *Sufis* call "*Dhikr*". Interesting is to learn that Lahiri Mahasaya gave the Islamic *Mantra* *Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh* to his Muslim disciples to be practiced during *Thokar*.

We have not the exact details of that procedure but it seems reasonable that the Prayer was lifted (with or without the help of the breath) from under the navel up to the brain; after reaching the brain, it moved from the brain to the one shoulder, then to the other shoulder and then it hit the heart. A modern *Sufi* confraternity practices in the following way: "*La*" is placed in the head, "*ilaha*" (with head bending to the right) in the right upper part of the chest, "*illaal*" (with head bending to the left) in

the left upper part of the chest, and "*lah*" (with head bending down) in the heart; then again "*La*" in the head, while raising it....

I think that if one wants to follow the *Sufi* path by using the *Kriya* techniques, will encounter no difficulties whatsoever. Of course one should be endowed with a strong self-teaching spirit. As for the number of repetitions of each technique, one may abide by the numbers given in the *Kriya* schools or one can go beyond them in a completely different dimension. As the chant increases its intensity, a deep intoxication is felt in the heart: one may reach numbers of repetitions which are inconceivable for a *kriyaban*.

In the *Sufi* literature, any comment about "*Dhikr*" is most inspiring. Instruction is given to avoid distraction, in such a way that the heart is occupied with neither "family" nor "money". One begins the practice by uttering the *Mantra* aloud – this is the *Dhikr* of the tongue. One continues until a great absorption makes it impossible to go on in this way. «The rust upon the heart is burnt, the darkness turns into day and the candle of the mind is put out by the sun of the divine light (Qur'an)».

The heart is continually applied to the *Dhikr*. One perseveres assiduously, until the syllables are effaced from the heart and only the meaning of the words remains present: a touch of divine recollection drives the mind crazy – the most intoxicating of the joys explodes.

I studied **Kabir** [1398 Benares - 1448/1494 Maghar] also, whose teachings and those of Lahiri Mahasaya's overlapped perfectly.

Illiterate weaver, Muslim of origin, he was a great mystic, open to the vedantic and yogic influence, an extraordinary singer of the Divine, conceived beyond name and form. The poems and sentences ascribed to him are expressed in a particularly effective language that remains permanently emblazoned in the reader's memory. In the last century, Rabindranath Tagore, the great mystic poet of Calcutta, rediscovered the reliability of his teachings, the power of his poetry and made a beautiful translation of his songs into English (New York, The Macmillan Company). Kabir was instructed to conceive Islam and Hinduism as two roads converging toward a unique goal: he was always convinced of the possibility of overcoming the barriers that separate these two great religions. He did not seem to base his teaching upon the authority of the holy writings; he shun the religious rituals. Kabir taught not to renounce to life and become a hermit, not to cultivate any extreme approach to the spiritual discipline, because it weakens the body and increases pride.

That God has to be recognized inside of one's own soul - like a fire fed by continuous care, burning all the resistances, dogmas and ignorance down - this beautifully appears in Kabir's saying: «One day my mind flew as a bird in

the sky, and entered the heavens. When I arrived, I saw that there was no God, since He resided in the Saints!» Hinduism gave Kabir the concept of reincarnation and the law of *Karma*; Islam gave him the absolute monotheism - the strength of fighting all the forms of idolatry and the caste system. I found the full meaning of the *yogic* practice in him; he says that there is a garden full of flowers in our body, the *Chakras*, and an endless beauty can be contemplated if the awareness is established into the "thousand-petal Lotus". Regarding his concept of *Shabda*, which can be translated as "Word" (the word of the Master), I thought I could relate this to the *Omkar* teaching. According to him this *Shabda-Om* dispels all doubts and difficulties, but it is vital to keep it constantly in our consciousness as a living presence. *Om*, the divine call present in each man's body, born in the silence of introspection, is the compass needle: by following it, *Kutastha* is revealed to us.

The study of Kabir brought me directly to consider the wonderful figure of **Guru Nanak** (1469 – 1539). The teaching was the same. He disapproved ascetic practices and taught instead to remain inwardly detached whilst living as a householder. «Asceticism doesn't consist in ascetic robes, or in walking staff, nor in visiting burial places. Asceticism is not mere words; asceticism is to remain pure amidst impurities!»

Traditionally, release from the bondage of the world was sought as the goal, therefore the householder's life was considered an impediment and an entanglement. In contrast, in Guru Nanak's teaching, the world became the arena of spiritual endeavor. He was bewitched by the beauty of the creation and considered the panorama of nature as the best lovely scene for worship of the Divine.

He expressed his teachings in Punjabi, the spoken language of Northern India. His disregard for Sanskrit suggested that his message was without reference to the existent Holy scriptures. He made a deliberate attempt to cut off his disciples completely from all the ritualistic practices, orthodox modes of worship and from the priestly class. His teaching demanded an entirely new approach. While a full understanding of God is beyond human beings, he described God as not wholly unknowable. God must be seen through "the inward eye", sought in the "heart": he emphasized the revelation through meditation. In his teachings there are hints on the possibility of listening to an ineffable internal melody (*Omkar*) and to taste the nectar (*Amrit*). One has the impression he gave a unique meaning to the concept of monotheism.

I studied also the basis of the **Sikh religion**, founded on the teachings of Guru Nanak and nine successive Gurus: the fifth-largest organized religion in the world. What I appreciated in particular was that the key distinctive feature

of *Sikhism* was a non-anthropomorphic concept of God, to the extent that one could interpret God as the Universe itself. But to dwell on this subject matter lies outside my intention. I got enthusiastic about the **Radhasoami** faith is considered a derivation of *Sikhism*. It is also referred to as *Sant Mat* (Path of the Saints).

Everything I read reminded me of the writings of P.Y. and of my first *Kriya* organization! I run through pages where the role of the *Guru* was extolled – there was the theory according to which a *Guru* takes on himself part of the *karma* of the disciple, appears to him/her at the moment of death in order to introduce him/her to God...

It was explained that a disciple could never break off the sacred connection with the *Guru* under any circumstances. Initiation in this path was to be received from the *Guru* or from an authorized representative... The need of attending the spiritual service or "*satsang*" was extolled...

My main interest was what they called *Surat Shabda Yoga*: the teaching how to listen to *Omkar* inner sound -- it was exactly the same teaching, with the same words that I received from my first *Kriya* organization!

*Surat* means "soul," *Shabda* means "word". The "word" is the "Sound Current", the "Audible Life Stream" or the "Essence of the Absolute Supreme Being".

With the same words of P.Y.'s organization, they affirmed that this *Shabda* was the Word referred in Bible: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

The Sound vibration, the dynamic force of creative energy that was sent out from the Supreme Being at the dawn of the universe's manifestation, and that is being sent forth, through the ages, molding all things animate and inanimate, can be listened to through *Surat Shabda Yoga*.

Meditation upon the sound, means also perceiving the inner Light whose intensity can range from a subtle glow to the brilliance of many millions of suns. During initiation the living *Satguru* (Sat - true, Guru - teacher) activates this *Shabda* which becomes the inner *Satguru* stationed at the third eye of the disciple. Through its inner Light one comes to "know God".

The *Om* technique is practiced by Radhasoami groups covering their ears and eyes, either using the classic squatting position, resting their elbows on the knees or using an arm prop. Some couple the listening to the inner sounds with the attempt to taste nectar (*Amrit*) by sticking the tongue to the roof of the mouth. Before listening to sound and seeing light, some groups move *Prana* up and down the spine...

I was reading with shivers of surprise what had been my life, my deeper convictions. It was the same *Kriya Yoga* I had always heard about. I could claim that, at all effects the organization and my first *Kriya* teacher gave me

light and sound initiation, just as *Radhasoami* groups do .

For all intents and purposes I had been member of a *Radhasoami* group.

When in some particular (perhaps non orthodox) *Radhasoami* literature I read strange theories on the role of the pineal gland, descriptions of six additional *Chakras* in the grey matter of the brain and six more in the white matter, which could be activated through meditation practices, I neatly see the origin of many *Kriya* modifications.

How many researchers wonder about the origin of certain variations of *Kriya*! They try to find all the good reasons to justify the behavior of this or that teacher - usually a direct disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya - who inserted them creating unending complications. What about the hypothesis that, in the first years of their formation, those teachers belonged to a *Radhasoami* group and, perhaps without even being fully aware of this, added to *Kriya* some elements of theory and practice which they had previously learned? Taking for example into account the afore quoted theory of different sets of *Chakras* present in our brain, I understand how came that some *Kriya Acharya* add to Lahiri Mahasaya's *Fourth Kriya* (in which the *Chakras* are raised into the *Kutastha*) other procedures (which they call *Fifth, Sixth... Kriya*) to stimulate these other hypothetic centers. Many techniques (not quite wrong or useless but surely not essential) could be concocted using the dynamics and the methods of *Kriya* (the power of visualization united to the breath awareness and to the use of some *Mantras*) for translating into practice a theory which was not Lahiri Mahasaya's.

Although the book *Puran Purush* (Yogiraj Publication. Calcutta) does not seem to respect a logical order in the topics and contains an endless number of repetitions and rhetorical sentences, its publication a few year ago was really an event! I think that studying it can help more than any other books, to understand Lahiri Mahasaya's personality - thus, the core of *Kriya* may be reached as fast as an arrow. *Puran Purush* is based on Lahiri Mahasaya's diaries. It came out in Bengali (then in French and in English), thanks to one of Lahiri Mahasaya's nephews, Satya Charan Lahiri (1902-1978), who had material access to those diaries. Helped by one of his disciples, a writer, he decided to make a selection of the main thoughts which might have been useful to those who practiced *Kriya*.

During summer I used to have it with me in the countryside; many times, after reading a part of it, I would raise my eyes to the distant mountaintops and repeat inside of me «At long last...! ». I looked at the photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya on the front cover; who knows what a state of bliss he was in while being photographed! I saw some horizontal lines on his forehead, his eyebrows raised like in the *Shambhavi Mudra*, where awareness is set upon

the head; a slight tension of his chin seemed to reveal he was practicing *Kechari Mudra*. During those days, his figure, with that blissful smile, was a sun in my heart; he was the symbol of the perfection I yearned after.

From the few words which are reasonably attributed to him emerged the great importance he gave to *Pranayama*, *Thokar* and *Yoni Mudra*. It strikes his skill in communicating complicated abstract concepts when he affirms that the whole course of *Kriya* is a great adventure beginning with a dynamic *Prana* and ending with a static *Prana*. One feels a thrill of delight by meeting sentences which have light in themselves: «*Kutastha* is God, he is the supreme *Brahma*».

I also eagerly read the comments on the sacred writings attributed to Lahiri Mahasaya. As a matter of fact, he commented verbally some sacred texts. Later, his disciple P. Bhattacharya printed these interpretations. These books were little known for a lot of time, as they were written in Bengali. They were later translated into English. A lot of people studied that material with enthusiasm, hoping to find there some useful information to the understanding of *Kriya*; yet, they were disappointed.

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

It almost seems to me impossible that they came really from him: I don't find the same practical wisdom and tremendous realization expresses in his diaries. I find rather a mind with an almost maniacal tendency to interpret each thing on the light of *Kriya*, as if centuries before, the authors of those spiritual works knew exactly one by one all the techniques of *Kriya*.

According to my discernment, it is possible to hypothesize that, reading the verses of those texts, Lahiri Mahasaya was transported from the force of his insight, forgot completely the writing of departure and, entranced, talked extensively and freely about the subtleties of *Kriya*. What he said on that occasion could have been taken as a specific comment to that text. Furthermore, it is possible that, in order to publish those hard-to-understand notes, the editor had them completed with his own philosophy.

## **A definition of Kriya**

Some authors waste their time in asserting that *Kriya* is a science. What's the use? Whom to lure? We can rationally expound its principles and discuss its effects in an analytical, practical way but we cannot bring the whole entirety of it on the table of a laboratory.

They maintain that *Kriya* helps in calming mind, breath and heart and promotes an holistic wellbeing... all these are secondary effects: many other disciplines, sports, pastimes bring about the same results.

There are books with pages and pages of pseudo scientific demonstrations of

how *Kriya* brings about a perfect state of concentration...

All that blather leads to nothing.

*Kriya Yoga* is a *mystical path* - nothing else. It is a process of refining, in successive stages, our tuning with *Omkar*.

Lahiri Mahasaya's thought gives us a matchless inspiration. *Kriya Yoga* is the Faith of Kabir and Guru Nanak: a monotheistic religion where the "single God" is substituted by *Omkar*! All the other names given to the Last Reality (also used by Lahiri Mahasaya in his diaries) are entirely useless words, ephemeral wraps imposed by the human mind.

*Omkar* is the final goal of *Kriya* and the unique essence which percolates through all its phases.

## CHAPTER III/02... MY PRACTICE OF KRIYA AND AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY

The years that followed the break-up with my second and last teacher were completely different from the previously described ones. Having sent him to hell, an enervating situation was over. I didn't have to go here and there to organize seminars for that rascal. While replying to those who called me to ask information about him, I was relieved of any constraint of wearing a mask of hypocrisy. I felt free inside.

At long last I enjoyed a quiet moment of my life experiencing the calmness and contentedness that comes to those who devote all their efforts to one single purpose. In my case it was *Kriya*: practicing it intensively and writing about it. I knew, without doubt, that my disposition wouldn't have allowed me to get lazy, that the approaching months had to mark a new birth to the path of *Kriya*: I had to retrieve my initial enthusiasm.

I purchased a computer and, as a voluntary prisoner, I reduced to the least my social life and began the work of writing the book. The time employed for reaching this last version of it has been indeed too long. My friends, while noticing the various editions of it, took fool of me and said that I'll never put the last word to the enterprise.

One of the reasons for my slowness in writing was not only the inexperience, but also the fact that I practiced a lot of *Kriya*, especially the so-called *vertical processes* preferably in the open air. I could thus dedicate a more constant attention to what, years before, had been embarked on in a superficial manner.

I must admit that, in the past, the towing impulse which led me to finish up the prescribed number of repetitions of each *Higher Kriya* as soon as possible was also the anxiety of obtaining the next initiation from my teacher. The ardent desire of "squeezing" anything he could teach me, was fed by a strange fear: as if, for some unfathomable reasons, I had not been able to contact him in the future.

A vertical routine is a particular feature of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* - the matter is taken back in Chapter III/04. It is a means of obtaining a stout inner transformation, both in the psyche and in the ability of entering deep introspective states.

It consists, once in a week, for a certain number of weeks (20 – 24 – 36 ...), in putting the usual routine aside and using only one technique, whose number of repetitions is gradually increased up to a certain amount that the tradition has handed down as optimal. The principals vertical procedures that I will describe in detail are that of *Navi Kriya*, *Pranayama* mixed with *Omkar Pranayama* and of *Thokar*.



About the vertical processes of *Navi Kriya* and *Pranayama*, reaching gradually the 720 repetitions of each one was not a straining task. Many times I had the opportunity to practice in the countryside and the experience was exceptional.

The only problem I met, was that sometimes the inner screen of my awareness was displaying a lot of images —of course, they were dreamlike visions. This is the reason why sometimes I was led to practice with half-opened eyes. This disturbance – it is indeed a physiological process - found no cure. No help came from practicing *Maha Mudra* several times; changing the position of the legs, as well as interrupting for a short pause the practice, it was all useless. In the already quoted book *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the protagonist describes how the cloud of his thoughts shrouded him any time he practiced his method of Prayer. He experienced «a great heaviness, a lethargy, a boredom and an invincible sleepiness».

I tried to remain fully aware, while being in that diffuse and irresistible stillness that comes before sleep. Some inner images, instead of originating an incessant chain of thoughts, transfigured into an endless beauty and disappeared as if their real substance was only bliss.

Those images let me cast a glance towards the misty sources from which my current trend of life originated. My heart was caught by the perception of something pure, enchantingly pure. I saw that an inner thread bound all my past actions; it was clear that, quest after quest, an inflexible intention was always guiding me towards the mystic goal.

About at the half of the vertical process of *Pranayama*, I had, at night, in the first phase of the sleep, a very intense experience of rising of the energy in the spine accompanied by the vision of three beautiful mountains. The central one, the highest, was black; its form reminded the point of an arrow made by obsidian; in the vision of this form, I was enraptured in ecstasy. My heart exulted, I was madly enamored of that image; when the experience ended I was crying with joy. No more supine, I leaned the back to a support. I remained as calm as possible and felt a particular strength and pressure that increased enormously tightening the whole region of the chest and crushing me with its grip of beatitude. The image of the mountain was strong, tremendously vivid in my inner vision. There could be nothing more beautiful: it made me mad in love.

When I practiced outdoors, towards evening, next to the completion of the planned number of repetitions, sudden experiences of mental silence reminded me Krishnamurti's words.

I started to become aware of the fresh air, I felt it winding around my body as a pleasant caress on the skin. The birds sang amid the near trees. I practiced with open eyes; from the chosen place I could admire a beautiful mountain which occupied the left part of the horizon.

One evening white clouds to heaps filled to the sky... and the silence came, a perfect silence that the song of the birds didn't upset and this silence was inside me, it was my mind... and the *Kriya* was not a work, an effort... it could continue for eternity... and it was beautiful, pleasant, natural. I didn't understand how, once, even a tenth of this *Kriya* would have given me nervousness. I didn't understand the miracle of this *Kriya*... because I was this *Kriya* and this *Kriya* was the caress of the air around me... and was the song of the birds, and was the mountain!

Beautiful days indeed! When I recall this days of outdoor practice – which in my memory melt in the consistency of the summer skies - I remind Sri Aurobindo's words: «Enough, enough I've had of the mind and all its phony stars, let's turn on the suns that are never off!»

The vertical processes revealed soon their great heuristic value. The essential core of each technique, deprived of any embellishment, appeared as something fixed, definite, inevitable, something that could not be but that way. If a certain variation of a *Kriya* technique was redundant or ineffective, it would fall down by itself.

When I began writing down the techniques, I tried to extract from my huge heaps of notes, collected during years with different teachers, the essential. There was the feeling as of working on a difficult puzzle, without having a preview of what was to be obtained in the end.

A fundamental criterion to judge a technique as essential was that it should appear as the simplest logic translation of Lahiri Mahasaya's words into practice. The vertical procedures applied to any technique, helped me greatly to develop a quality of discrimination. I discarded some redundant and ineffective variations; this was the end of a set of techniques which had been given to me as "*Dhyana Kriya*": their main tool was the power of visualization, brought to the extreme limit.

Eminent writers had already remarked that such practices did not have any right of citizenship in Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*; they had no similarities within any mystic tradition but had a strong, rather, perfect, connection with the esoteric or magic traditions.<sup>37</sup> They had nothing to do with the *Omkar* perception or with the ability to reach the breathless state. I experienced dramatically their uselessness and danger: it was a relief to polish up my *Kriya* path and my life forever from such a trash.

In the first layout of the techniques I didn't know if, in the final picture, four, six or more levels of *Kriya* had to be expected. In fact, I was not entirely sure if I had understood what these levels were.

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<sup>37</sup> We know that visualization is the principal ingredient - sometimes accompanied by an affirmation - of a boundless series of New Age methods.

Further, in case that just four stages should emerge as manifestly fundamental, I didn't know if these had to be put in a one-to-one correspondence with the process of unfastening the internal knots (tongue, navel, heart, coccyx).

In the first draft, the description of the *Higher Kriyas* was given as a chain of techniques (eleven), each one ideally preparing the next one. After second thoughts, I decided to describe all the techniques in the scheme of four *Kriyas* (avoiding thus the use of imaginative names as fifth, sixth *Kriya*) thus looking at any valid *Kriya* technique as pertaining to one of the four levels.

The best clarification came from writing, rewriting the book, studying, talking with other researches and experimenting. This process urged me to relinquish certain points of view and throw away parts of the book.

As for the experience of increasing *Thokar* (*Second Kriya*), the period in which I plunged headlong into this practice was really a magic one: what exalted days! I would lie if I do not affirm that I have an endless nostalgia of them! I believe I had really overworked by using too much this incomparable tool. The different variations of this procedure were more or less equal in giving the same strong experience: I moved around as if my heart bore a brazier within. I perceived that the center of my personality was not in the brain, but in my heart. This inner increase of energy in the heart *Chakra* region produced remarkable effects in all planes.

Later, I had the opportunity to see how other *kriyabans* reacted differently while doing the same procedure. It has been explained that *Thokar* has a direct action upon the heart knot. It is difficult to understand what this knot is. A keen desire to embrace people and the whole universe, to help suffering humanity originates from the heart *Chakra*. But when this *Chakra* is not opened, namely when the knot we are dealing with hinders its working, the tendency to be governed by emotions is, at all purposes, insurmountable.

The heart knot has the power to hamper the whole *Kriya* process: just think what happens by obeying to fleeting emotions and wild instinct rather than wisdom. Then there comes into play the destructive tendency to be influenced and deviated by other people, organizations, churches, to accept as truth only what is displayed within the frame of magnificence.

The practice of *mental Pranayama*, the tuning with *Omkar* and *Thokar* are the main remedies.

*Thokar*, coupled with self-analysis and will power, brings also to surface deeply rooted old wounds.

Lahiri Mahasaya wrote that a *kriyaban* is deeply transformed by it and learns to see «what others cannot or do not actually want to see».

In my case, it revealed how I was deeply affected by the human tendency to superstition. Noticing how many illusions are propagated by religions and cults, I felt sorry for all those people who - in the abyss of their tragedy -

were not able to voice their sharp loud cry to God facing Him in protest but keep on imploring God not in a spirit of devotion and surrender but with such a beseeching attitude, as if they feared even worse calamities. The sentiment of this devastating reality was experienced as a painful grip tearing my chest apart. As the months went by, something thawed and it came such an intensity of love that the same experience turned into a "blissful" pain.

The inner knots (*Grantis*) like those described in *Kriya* literature which are tied with the tongue, navel, heart *Chakra* and *Muladhar/Kutastha*, are the greatest obstacles in becoming aware of the indwelling Divinity. They are there to help the instinct of self preservation, to keep us rooted to the earth but are reinforced by the structure of the Ego.

In this way they are converted in seals protecting «our right to pain and suffering».

(This is an expression dear to Mother - disciple and successor of Sri Aurobindo - stigmatizing the fact that not all our pains are necessary and unavoidable, they are invited in our lives by our wrong patterns of thinking.)

The heart knot is very important because its unfastening helps tremendously the experience of *Omkar* sound and the achievement of the breathless state. Actually, Lahiri Mahasaya explained that when the cardiac plexus is struck, the *Prana* that is linked to the breathing is directed inward: «*Thokar* opens the doors of the inner temple. A spontaneous state of profound absorption catches the practitioner for a prolonged period of time».

## AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY

Once completed the period of these three vertical processes, I tried to take back a pacific horizontal routine without having well clear in mind the objectives to achieve.

The vertical procedures have shaped a stupendous period of my life. Now I had to move forward. This new phase of my life could not bear resemblance to that chaotic period in which, at the search of the original *Kriya*, I experimented with any variation of it, received by different teachers or revealed confidentially by some *kriyaban* friends.

At that time, I lived a really arid period in which the search was frantic and, sometimes it was not even possible to understand if the quest was for *Kriya* or for what.

Rather, I wished to "recapture" the magic of that distant period in which I reached for the first time the breathless state. I went back to the readings of that time: especially Mother. I could not say I had betrayed Aurobindo and Mother, but until now what had I realized of their teaching? Practically nothing, but the fact of having freed myself from all the *Gurus*.

Often I repeated like a *Mantra* the sentence of Aurobindo from Journey's End:  
"Now the wasteland, now the silence;  
A blank dark wall, and behind it heaven."

It was after having reread some pages of Mother's *Agenda* that I let happen freely an experience that revealed an unfathomable wealth: I baptized it the *Kriya of the cells*. Such a name derived from the fact that my *Pranayama* began to inject awareness into the cells of the body. These, according to Mother, acted as doors opening on a totally new dimension of the consciousness – the only one free from the labyrinths of the mind.

One day, while practicing *Kriya* outdoors, I felt an inexplicable repulsion to using *Kechari Mudra* and practiced *Pranayama* without it and with open eyes: I didn't want to abandon the beauty of the landscape that was before me. The nature was to me the source of inspiration from which I didn't want to detach. During inhalation, I filled my consciousness with a powerful *Vaaa* vibration: it departed from the sexual zone, absorbed the energy there and brought it into the head; exhaling, it was the vibration of *Sheee* that guided the energy down as a rain into the whole body. Gradually this going down was like an hypodermic needle which injected the awareness into the cells of the body. It came spontaneous to make exhalation last a lot more than inhalation: the sound of the breath came out more acute and it seemed easier to guide the energy into the cells.

Then, I reasoned in this way: why shouldn't this inner action of *Pranayama* continue, in the same way, when I have completed my scheduled number of long *Pranayama* breaths and the breath is let flow freely? Why this compulsion of doing other things, of guiding the energy into other parts of the body, physical or astral?

Something uplifting happened, in fact: there came a spontaneous rotation of energy, which took the place of the usual *mental Pranayama*.

It was like a miracle and gave me a feeling of infinite safety surrounded by a crystalline state of an immobile mind. It was like having crossed the barrier of matter and live in the body and in a measureless space, at the same time.

I emerged from that *Kriya* session overwhelmed by euphoria: it was as if all the problems at a psychological level were a nightmare which was dissolved forever, an illusion out of which I had emerged definitively. My life, which, so far, had been full of asperities, seemed to stretch out evenly towards the future. When I returned to my daily duties, the beauty of living, like wine from a full cup, seemed to overflow from every atom and fill my heart; I rejoiced in feeling an unfathomable clarity of mind.

Later, trying to find a way to ameliorate that experience, I discovered the role of *Thokar on all the Chakras* (see Chapter II/3 school [B]).

The best way to introduce it in the routine was to practice it after 12-24 *Pranayama* breaths. I tried different orders of hitting the first four *Chakras* and different quantities of strokes. The main point was to feel that the whole inferior region of the backbone, from *Muladhar* to *Anahat* had been strongly stimulated. After this strong action, it was necessary to resume the most simple form of *Pranayama* and create a very deep relaxed mood.

A power originated from the *Muladhar* was clearly perceived and the experience of free movement of energy came out more easily. The result was more intense. During the last moments of each exhalation an "impossible" orgasmic sensation was perceived. It was as if the breath was paralyzed within the lungs, couldn't go out and this created a sensation like that of a faint suffocation. But, strange to say, it was so blissful that I cried from joy. It was like pressing against the wall of a jail, which in itself would be unbearable, but the anticipation of the freedom outside the body shell, created bliss. The descent of the energy seemed to end in the navel, not in the *Muladhar*.

Unfortunately it was difficult to sustain a gloomy mood which appeared in the next days: it was as if my soul was scratched.

An obsessive thought took possession of my outlook on life: I saw men corralled up like animals in a narrow space, forced by their instincts to eat and reproduce; a man would appear suddenly, get at another one at random and cut his head off in front of all the others. I imagined the corral's members murmuring some circumstantial words such as: «Nothing will ever be the same now»... Then, with a vitreous eye, they would turn back to their normal activities.

The problem was slightly overcome by remaining a long time concentrated in between the eyebrows. I can now understand how came that many teachers recommend that the *Thokar on all the Chakras* is always followed by the process of lifting the *Chakras* into *Kutastha* (the process which is usually called *Fourth Kriya*).<sup>38</sup>

The main effect was to feel as "not having a skin anymore". This is a metaphoric way to indicate the impression of perceiving - not only through my awareness but, in a strange way, also through my body - what was passing in another person's consciousness (not each thought of course, but just one's mood) and, strange to say, to mistake it for my own. Let me quote a recurrent

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<sup>38</sup> In one commentary by Lahiri Mahasaya to the sacred writings, it is written: «Being tranquil at the coccygeal center, do not stay longer. If you stay longer at the coccygeal center, then negative *Samadhi* will take place. So after getting up again, you should start practicing *Kriya*.»

example.<sup>39</sup>

It happens that all of a sudden, a deep depression takes hold of my mood (I was never subject to depression), lasts several hours and then disappears; it is not a simple dissonance, a disharmony, but an agonizing pain in a moment in which there is no justification for it. Unfailingly I realize that a significant circumstance has happened: I have been introduced to a new acquaintance, we had shaken hands and talked with a sincere involvement. It is well known how good our mind is when it comes to clutching straws; but when a similar episode is observed with the due detachment and, as the days and the months go by, it repeats with mathematical precision, then the evidence of a phenomenon of tuning with another person's consciousness, cannot be denied. What one is and what others are, mixes.

### **Collective Unconscious**

My hypothesis is that this form of *Pranayama* with its sweet pressure on the cells of the body, succeeds in breaking the barrier of the mind and touches the psychological dimension which ties all human beings together: the vast ocean of the *Collective Unconscious*. This is not a poetic concept but a real widening of the sphere of our awareness. This explains its "borderline" trait and the substantial difficulty in describing it.

I believe that Jung's discoveries are precious for the understanding of the mystic path - perhaps more than many other concepts formulated during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even though his statements never lacked the necessary prudence, the scientific community never forgave him for dealing with matters that were not considered part of Psychiatry - such as Alchemy (deemed an absurdity), the realm of myths (considered the result of a senseless imagination) and, more than any other thing, the great value he attributed to the religious dimension; which he considered something universal and fundamentally sane, instead of a pathology. Nowadays, the enthusiasm for his writings remains, especially among those who study topics of a spiritual and esoteric nature. Jung introduced a terminology which permits one to probe an aspect of the mystical path which otherwise would risk being totally extraneous not only to our capability of expression but also to our comprehension.

In the esoteric literature there is the vast chapter of miracles and *Siddhis* (powers), namely the subtle laws that work in the life of a mystic. Those who write books on *Yoga* are not able to resist the temptation of copying some

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<sup>39</sup> Before writing this, I have hesitated a lot. The reader may be disappointed by it because it may evoke the *New Age* manias. It is only after listening to similar effects by other researchers and on account of my commitment to total sincerity, that I have made up my mind to write about it.

lines from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. It's typical to find the ridiculous warning of the danger coming from the abuse of the *Siddhis*. Quoting Patanjali (IV:1), they recount that *Siddhis* are the spiritual powers (psychic abilities) that may occur through rigorous austerities; they explain that they vary from relatively simple forms of clairvoyance, telepathy, to being able to levitate, to be present at various places at once, to become as small as an atom, to materialize objects and more. That's how they recommend their readers not to ever indulge in these powers since «they are a great hindrance to spiritual progress». *Indulge*: what a beautiful word! If you did see someone practicing *Pranayama* and indulging in a little bilocation for fun, would you tell?!

Perhaps they don't think enough about what they are writing because they let themselves be seduced by the dream of possessing those powers .... perhaps they already visualize all the fuss which will come out: interviews, taking part in talk shows etc.

Jung put a rational basis for the study of this subject in his *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*. (1973 2nd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press). The more we consider intelligent, fascinating and stimulating his thought, the more empty appear to us the nonsenses that we find on the books on *Yoga* when they deal with the *Siddhis*. Our body still remains a mystery. To guide the energy and therefore the conscience in it has effects that we cannot even imagine.

There are mystics who "think" their Prayers in the body. These Prayers are very short, to the point that sometimes they are reduced to a single vowel or syllable. Some make it vibrate in their feet and gradually bring it up inside different parts of the body. There is a small collection of written material which is published almost exclusively by some specialized publishers in the esoteric field; they can be found rummaging among occultism and magic texts. Kerning, Kolb, Lasario, Weinfurter, Peryt Shou, Spiesberger... these are just few of the names. These mystics - even though they were born within Christianity and felt completely in sync with its doctrines - have been confined in a corner as if they were exponents of the esoteric thought, or magicians whose aspirations were for the development of secret powers.

The reader who has the patience to research this written material, skimming through pages and pages full of trivial theories and practices whose only goal is to confuse and mislead one, shall find paragraphs of inimitable charm. The essence of this teachings is that any sound's vibration, if repeated with an unfaltering concentration in the body, can reach its atoms; so that the soul finds a direct link with the Divine Intelligence - «the whole body will be re-activated with new life and be reborn».



Satprem's pages describe Mother's adventure who descended in her body through a *Mantra*. The *Agenda* published by him is an amazing "log": in her body she stumbled upon a "new" Energy which embodied the key to the next species. Mother started repeating the *Mantra: Om Namó Bhagavateh* while walking to and fro in her room.

Recharged by her laser-like concentration, it easily made its way through the various layers of her consciousness (thoughts, emotions, instincts) until it lighted a negative layer as the base of all impossibilities - the origin of every feeling of desperation, deposited therein during the course of entire millennia. It took her a long time to cross it, but her awareness finally reached the cells and an incomparable experience "exploded". She found an eternity of perfection in it! What was very interesting, was that Mother, talking to Satprem, told him that by proceeding to bring her awareness into the cells of her body, a lot of people around started to react as if she had invaded their intimacy.

### **Encounter with the Internal Alchemy**

At that point of my search, a friend gave me a photocopy of a book on the Internal Alchemy - the philosophy at the base of Taoism.<sup>40</sup>

When I read the description of the basic procedure (*Microcosmic Orbit*) of this ancient discipline, I saw it was very similar to *Kriya Pranayama*. Various metaphors used to explain its mechanism (bagpipe turned upside-down, flute with no holes...) brought back to my mind with surprising similarity some weird explanation about *Pranayama* and *Kriya* in general, which I had once received from an eminent source. The description of the second phase of the Internal Alchemy (after a certain amount of rounds of the *Microcosmic Orbit*, the energy accumulated in the brain was guided from the head down into the *Dan Tien*) exemplified clearly the principle of *Navi Kriya*.

I was disoriented: this meant that *Kriya Yoga* didn't exist as an independent tradition but it was the Internal Alchemy, taught within an Indian context, with clear use of both purely Indian techniques and procedures (as *Navi Kriya*) that were Indian only in appearance.

*Kriya Yoga* turned out to be a discipline which can be described through the symbols of two different cultures but was markedly different from classic *Yoga*, *Hatha Yoga* or *tantric Kundalini Yoga*.

I thought that it was not a weird idea that the mythical Babaji was/is one of the "immortals" of the taoist tradition. Anyway, my attention had been considerably stirred up and I embarked on a more careful study. Conscious

<sup>40</sup> Lu Kuan Yü.(Charles Luk) *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality*. London: Rider & Co., 1970.

that the received book was worth studying with great attention, I cut out (I was handling with photocopies and I would never do anything similar to a book) various paragraphs, I put them in order according to an ideal logic sequence of exposition and glued them on four sheets of paper summarizing the four phases of Internal Alchemy respectively. On a different sheet I arranged a rudimentary Glossary, limited to the essential definitions.

I purchased the same book in order to relish reading everything anew, underlying the essential passages. Later I studied every title I could find on the subject (Taoism included). My enthusiastic response derived from the intuition that *Kriya Yoga* and *Internal Alchemy* shared a common foundation and by studying the latter, I could understand more clearly the working of some *Kriya* technique.

I had long, passionate talks with people who had studied and followed that path for decades. It was of great help to read some articles and essays written by **Michael Winn**.

This researcher studied *Kundalini Yoga* in the late 70's and *Kriya Yoga* afterwards with a renowned teacher. He observed that while through *Kundalini Yoga* one is just trying to climb up to the crown of their head to experience there divine ecstasy, in the Internal Alchemy one utilizes that state to reach the body, nurture and transform it. He noticed that, although *Kriya Yoga* has many parallels with the Internal Alchemy, it is substantially a "fire" path, a path of "ascent". But any energy movement upward has to be balanced by a movement downward, until one settles in the still point of no movement. In our body that point is the *Dan Tien*, the doorway to reach the prenatal state of blissful breathlessness.

Michael Winn devoted wholly to Internal Alchemy and Qigong (*Chi Kung*). According to him no tradition respects the whole mystery of human nature as deeply as the Internal Alchemy. One who wants to follow the spiritual path could avoid a wide range of problems by listening to the practical wisdom it embodies. He took the binding appointment of teaching only from direct personal experience. In his opinion, oral or written teachings may become traps: only the living experience promotes the true self-inquiry which leads to Self realization.

One should take the teachings received by the tradition into consideration, try them with a lot of respect and take also the courage to solve alone the problems that might arise. He reports that, in the many years of his own practice, he has evolved towards the simple - he is confident that somebody will take his refinements and improve on them.

Among the very interesting information that I found in his writings, I was surprised to learn that the annoying problem of secrecy concerns also the

Internal Alchemy. As usual it was claimed that secrecy was meant to protect the purity of the lineage and prevent corruption by selfish people who might abuse the spiritual power gained...

The author maintains that these are pretexts, not sincere and not sufficiently thought over. Actually, a taoist said to him: «We don't know why the ancients kept it so secret. We just imitate them». Michael Winn's noble definitive position is that if one feels spiritually attracted to some particular teaching and feels worthy to receive it, then he has the right to learn it without groveling at anyone's feet. No human being should be denied the opportunity of achieving true spiritual independence!

## APPENDIX

Let us summarize here the four phases of Internal Alchemy: this may help to clarify what the perfection of *Kriya*, the last state to be achieved, is.

**The first stage** is the basis of the whole internal alchemical process, it consists in activating the *Microcosmic Orbit*. Awareness and energy (Qi) are raised during inhalation along the *Governor* channel at the back of the spine and let flow down along the *Functional* channel during exhalation. The purpose of this action is "to bring Three to Two, Two to One". Let us see what this means.

The three are Jing (sexual energy), Qi (life energy) and Shen (spiritual energy). These energies are blended, mixed together.

They were originated by a fracture, a split at one's birth. The first aim of *Pranayama* is to create harmony among them and thus exert a permanent healing action upon the personality, laying the best foundations of the spiritual path.

The sexual energy (Jing) is not only what this name implies but also the agent that makes us rejoice of the sensory perceptions and gives us the strength, the determination, to fight the battle of life and to obtain all the necessary things to it (unfortunately, another reason why we fight is to obtain things which are superfluous to our living, but this is another problem...).

The energy of love (Qi) is a deep feeling toward another person, living creatures, life in general and also the joy felt before a work of art, the fuel of fair-minded actions born out of inner, noble instincts and ethic laws.

The spiritual energy (Shen) vibrates during the highest peaks of aesthetic contemplation, where the vast prophetic visions may manifest.

Often, in common religious traditions, a person is taught how to maintain, rather to cultivate as a virtue, the division of matter from spirit, fostering, thus, nerve wrecking conflicts among the afore hinted forms of energy. This causes excruciating sufferance. For many people, the word "Spirit" has become synonym of sacrifice and expiation.

The described process includes the end of each conflict, the full experience of life flowing naturally into the spiritual reality.

In *Pranayama*, the sexual energy is brought to the level of the heart and mixed with

that of love. Thus the energy of love acquires strength, the determination not to succumb to any obstacle. It is brought into the higher *Chakras* (*Vishuddhi*, *Ajna* and *Sahasrara*) where it is mixed with the energy of the Spirit.

What happens is that the aspiration to find out and enjoy Divinity in the outer reality, in our human relationships is created. Love with its irradiation, anchors the spiritual energy to the daily life.

Now, the substance resulting from the unification of the three energies is brought down into the body to permeate and revitalize it.

In *Kriya*, one uses Sanskrit terms like *Prana*, *Apana*, *Samana*... and not concepts like transmuting *Jing* into *Qi* and *Qi* into *Shen*....

One explains that *Prana* joins *Apana*...

Now, the Internal Alchemy reveals what happens before!

During the initial deep breaths of one's practice of *Pranayama*, often the mind is full of sexual thoughts - a sexual arousal is frequent. For many people this is very odd to be noticed; sometimes this fact creates disappointment and loss of self-esteem!

It is very comfortable to be reassured that this phenomenon is physiologic. Sexual energy is aroused, but then, if one goes ahead peacefully, the sexual thoughts turn into love thoughts, then in spiritual aspiration...

We may understand also the necessity - so many times underlined by Lahiri Mahasaya - of unfastening the knots of the tongue, navel, heart and coccyx. In fact the energy should move freely, unhampered. Just to give an idea, it is explained that if the tongue is not pressed against the palate, the refined energy put in motion is dispersed and cannot flow into the inner part of the abdomen (*Dan Tien*) clearing thus the ground for the second phase of the process.

Therefore one talks about the knot of the tongue. Similar obvious considerations happen for the other knots.

In **the second stage** (defined as the "cultivation of the spiritual embryo" or of the "elixir of immortality") the energy stored in the head (as a result of the Microcosmic Orbit), is conveyed into the *Dan Tien*, behind the navel, in the lower abdomen. The *Dan Tien* has the dimensions of a ball whose diameter is about two-and-a-half inches long. In order to localize its position, one has to concentrate on the belly button, to come about one and a half inches behind and below to the same extent. It is explained that to settle into this zone, means to be born to the spiritual life. This event is designated through expressions like: "Coming back to the center"; "The union of heaven and earth"; "The birth of the golden flower"; "The creation of the dazzling gem".

When the energy is guided into the *Dan Tien*, one experiences the "true serenity" and discovers a unique internal thread connecting all one's past actions with the forces that are currently bringing one's spiritual aspiration forward. The mind becomes pure, calm, empty. By deepening the practice, the vibration which is created in the *Dan Tien* ascends spontaneously into the heart region.

It illuminates the space of the heart (the middle *Dan Tien*) and reveals one's *fundamental nature*. The "true serenity" manifests there. The contemplation of light shining in the heart completes this second phase.

(In *Kriya* we increase the "heat" in the region of the navel first by *Pranayama* itself; then we bring this heat inside through *Navi Kriya* and, at last, in the heart through *Thokar*.)

In **the third stage**, *Prana* is increased in the *thrusting channel*. This channel runs like a tube from the perineum to the Fontanelle through the center of the body.

The purpose of increasing energy inside it, is to prepare the momentum necessary to set in motion the *Macrocosmic Orbit*. It is difficult to understand which procedures are prescribed by the Internal Alchemy because in the relating literature, some hints about this topic are abnormally embellished with a lot of evocative terms, metaphors which make almost impossible to have a clear idea of what they mean in practice.<sup>41</sup>

**The fourth stage**, is a great event which cannot be induced by visualization based methods. It is something which happens when the time is ripe through the full mastery of the third stage.

After having guided the energy from the lower to the middle *Dan Tien* (heart region), when the body is loaded with *static Prana*, the energy reaches the upper *Dan Tien* (*Kutastha*: the region between the eyebrows). By increasing the concentration at that spot the obstruction at the base of the spine can be perfectly removed. A spontaneous phenomenon of circulation of energy in the body, (the *Macrocosmic Orbit*) which has vast psychological implications, happens. A person enters spontaneously a state of well being and perceives a great infusion of energy coming down as a golden liquid outside and inside the body, in all its cells, particularly the skin. At the same time, one feels that something is raising up at the back, more around than inside the spine.

But from a certain moment onwards, the ascending movement does not attract the attention as the descending one does. The latter turns into an indefinite pressure on all the cells of the body. To experience how this event widens – in an unexpected way – the boundaries of the awareness means to have entered at the full the last part of the spiritual path.

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<sup>41</sup> To tell the truth, in *Kriya* the situation is worse since what should be the fourth step or the *Pranayama with internal breath* (a *Pranayama* that happens as pure movement of energy inside the body, without being accompanied by any control of the physical breath – in other words the *Macrocosmic Orbit*) is rarely mentioned. As a consequence, there is not even trace of this action of thrusting. The only procedure that I have learned, so to say in between Internal Alchemy and *Kriya*, which succeeds in setting in motion such phenomenon is the use of the fragmented breath. Such technique is grounded on a succession of short pushes created by a long fragmented exhalation: it is described in Chapter III/04, section D[VI]).

## CHAPTER III/03... WHAT HAPPENS IN A KRIYABAN'S LIFE

Trying to avoid, as much as possible, high-sounding phrases and giving all due attention to the practical side of the subject, we want to describe what happens in a *kriyaban's* life when they are able to keep their path always "clean" (without distortions) and practice conscientiously each one of its different techniques, passing thus - even if unaware - through *Kriya's* different stages.

We have already clarified that it is a mystical path which doesn't disdain borrowing different procedures from other traditions, as long as they are useful and not disturb or violate the inner peace and equilibrium of a person. Through practice one realizes that *Kriya* is far from being a collage, a mixture of heterogeneous procedures. It possesses a precise structure in four phases and this generate four ideal seasons of life.

We are not following the whim of giving a list of *spiritual* acquisitions but we shall try to take into consideration something which is far more concrete.

Let us put aside the idea of *growth* in an spiritual-esoteric acceptation and consider the emotive growth.

*Kriya* helps one to become more stable, able to keep superficial emotions at bay, able to have a control over the moods and the strength of instinct.

We take it for granted that we describe what happens to those persons who face *Kriya* with a right attitude, without manias, with sheer honesty. Perhaps the reader thinks that this clarification should have being placed at the first pages of this book. The reason we have here, just at the end, is that almost no one reads what stand in for preface. The reader may think it worthwhile to give it a glance only after a partial reading of the book. Sometimes a reader behaves like a timorous animal, roaming in unexplored territory, wondering whether to give a modicum of trust to what the author is communicating. They prefer to get a general idea of the author's motivations (...and obsessions) by lingering over some techniques, to see at which depth they are discussed. If all this seems to work, they may agree to pay attention to more serious themes, like this one.

### **First step**

Usually, people begin their practice of *Kriya* giving due care to different details such as physical condition, practicing on an empty stomach, adding stretching exercises like simple *Asana*... and with that sharp concentration that usually arises when one faces with enthusiasm something new in which they believe earnestly.

In this way, the first impression of *Kriya* is a discipline that makes us feel good - physically and psychologically. We discover how beautiful and enjoyable the practice of *Pranayama* can become, especially if intensified not only by the practice of *Maha Mudra*, but also through practices not officially taught like *Nadi Sodhana*, the use of various repetitions of *Mula Bandha* before *Pranayama*, the use of *Aswini Mudra* during *Pranayama*...

*Kriya* works like an amplifier of the best that there is in man: some rediscover an almost forgotten potentiality of aesthetic enjoyment of the environment in which they live, especially of nature; others seem to discover the wonder of their work and/or are deeply moved by the miracle which their family signifies for them. They are overcome with a feeling of love which they didn't think themselves capable of. Their perception of things changes, and they discover so many beautiful aspects of life. It is as if they had eyes for the first time.

There are other minor facts which people might be enthusiastic for: success in speaking to the public, be serenely indifferent to financial loss...

It is not easy being aware of more essential effects.

For example that the quality of silence and transparency begins to become the feature of one's consciousness. The mind works in a more restrained way: each thought is felt as more concrete, precise.

An explosion of inner joy, which has no concrete cause, may appear in an unpredictable way during unusual moments of life. Gradually, one has the impression that this joy solidifies and becomes a stable acquisition.

But let us dwell upon an important point: the personality of a *kriyaban* is destined to be ideally collected around a central point and all inner conflicts healed. At the onset of the *Yoga* path, there is always a clear split between this new spiritual interest and other well rooted social, intellectual and artistic customs. Sometimes, it is like having multiple personalities.

It is a fact that *Yoga* teachers, in order not to adopt censorial attitudes, pretend not to be aware of this situation. They know well that *Yoga* principles, like Patanjali's rules of conduct, do not find easily the way to be translated into practice. Paradoxically, it is easier that certain harmful habits receive a sharp turnabout thanks to certain ecologist fashions, rather than a *kriyaban* comes to the decision of deliberately cast them aside through a sheer act of will.

It is necessary a further progress on the path, in order one fully grasps in all its drama the lethal mechanism owing to which some habits enslave us.

However, although at a slow pace, the personality of a *kriyaban* starts its long journey to have all inner splits clarified in a balanced serene attitude.

In the beginning, the signs of this process are very subtle and instable. It really takes a good ability of detachment to be aware of them. All will be more perceptible during the next steps when there will be a harmonious work

with each *Chakra* and the deepest layers of the psyche will be harmoniously affected. The discovering of the *Omkar* reality will play an important role: life and spiritual experience will become one. The obstacles to achieve emotional maturity will be dramatically swept away by the action of *Thokar*.

Now one thing must be frankly expressed. There are some little quirks, faddiness that can ruin everything. They may arise and become virulent after reading some books, listening to friends' opinions, having received apparent delusions...

From the *New Age* world comes the idea that *Kriya* is not enough in itself, that other remedies and disciplines should be added. A great inquietude could come which encourages one to plan trips to contact this or that personage, embarking eagerly on vast esoteric studies, to do voluntary work, which is not negative in the least but in this phase of evolution could be very distracting.

After this waste of time, the heavenly harmony which was established at the beginning is soured and lost.

Another lethal danger is fear. Some cannot stand the mental silence produced by *Kriya* because they perceive it as an icy void. More intense effects such as *Kundalini awakening*, can reveal mercilessly how a *kriyaban's* mind can harbor the greatest confusion about existential themes. Having not taken into consideration a radical transformation, moved by the fear of having put in motion something unknown which is perceived as a menace to one's psychological stability, not only they abandon the *Kriya* path but they revolt against it as it was a play of the ego, the arch-enemy of the spiritual experience.

No wonder that, sooner or later, the *Kriya* practice interlinks with one's own ideals, conception of life and religious bent. Indeed, from the way the religious thought is influenced, it depends the future of all this undertaking.

The last chapter of this book deals with various typologies of *kriyabans* and how their mind is vulnerable to distorted religious conditioning. However *Kriya* has the potential to dispel any mental and emotive cloud.

In conclusion, this first *Kriya* step is not characterized by an inner transformation which is complete and stable, but by many very encouraging and concrete signals.

## Remarks

*Kriya* theory explains that the "knot of the navel" begins to be unfastened. To understand what this knot is, it is explained that the cutting of the umbilical cord creates a split of a unique reality into two parts: one's spiritual side, which manifests as joy and calmness, establishes itself in the higher



*Chakras* and in the head; one's material side, in the lower *Chakras*. That fracture between matter and spirit inside each human being is the permanent source of excruciating conflicts in the lives of many spiritual researchers.

When, thanks to the abdominal breathing of *Pranayama*, *Navi Kriya* and to a conscious effort, this fracture is affected, although in a totally harmonious way, there comes a particular effect which is interpreted negatively by others.

The healing action of those procedures fosters a virtually unknown feeling of confidence in one's abilities and decisions. The problem is that when one's rights and dignity are impudently crushed, the reaction could be quite bold. The intention to be angelic in practical life - which resembled indeed to an innocent farce - receives a brusque halt.

There are situations when, to the eyes of others, our good qualities seem impaired, lacking that human empathy which they are accustomed to. All settles with time, especially when they will learn how to act with more respect in our regards and we learn the art of not reacting at the slightest provocation.

#### A note about Kechari Mudra

Some identify the first step of *Kriya* with the attainment of *Kechari Mudra* – a condition which is defined as the untying of the knot of the tongue. Similar definition creates a sharp division among people: on the one hand we have very pride *kriyabans* deceived into believing they are more evolved than others, on the other hand those who are uselessly depressed for not having gotten what does not depend on their effort but only on their physical constitution.

Let us claim therefore, without any fear of being contradicted, that there are many people who practice *Kriya* with enthusiasm, with admirable commitment, who enjoy its remarkable effects, without having realized this *Mudra*. It is true that *Kechari* makes the above discussed attainments of the first *Kriya* step more stable, it is true that it prepares excellently the second step - and we shall explain why - but it is also true that a serious person succeeds in climbing all the *Kriya* steps without *Kechari*.

#### **Second step**

The second step represents the nucleus of the *Kriya* path; the third and the fourth step certainly mean the continuation of the work, but only when "the wheel is going round by itself".

This step is put in motion through different instruments – adding the chant of *Om* in the *Chakras* during *Pranayama*, the mechanism of *Omkar Pranayama* and *mental Pranayama*.

One loves having long sessions of meditation. The fact of focusing the attention on each single *Chakra* creates a very particular effect which is not easy to describe.

The *Chakras*, which are like jewel boxes containing the memory of one's whole life, give rise to the full splendor of lost reminiscences. Various past experiences resurface and this is a valuable event which has nothing to do with distraction. Sometimes the inner screen of awareness displays a lot of images: this is to be accepted as a physiologic fact. I believe that those who affirm they are exempt from such phenomenon it is because they do not have enough lucidity to notice it or the ability to remember it.

By going on with the practice, those who succeed in maintaining themselves on the narrow border between sleep and wakefulness, meet an endless beauty. The essence of past events (the gold contained in them and never fully appreciated) is lived again in the quiet pleasure of a restrained cry; the light of the Spirit twinkles in what seemed trite moments of life.

Then, an inner sound like a delicate, distant bell, clenches the soul in its grip of beatitude. The revelation that this sound is the Reality underlying any Beauty experienced in life arouses an up to now never experienced *Bhakti* (devotion). It seems that this comforting vibration takes the deepest yearning of one's heart in its golden hands and offers it to a vast, open blue.

Usually, the first time it is perceived is during *mental Pranayama*, then during *Pranayama* itself, then during the daily life when one is tranquil. One experiences a total contentment and ease, as if the path had come to its fulfillment.

Thus the "light" of *Omkar* crosses the wall of one's psychological life and makes life and spiritual experience indistinguishable. By day, everything seems surrounded by a padded coat reducing all dissonances. Everything is like transfigured.

#### Remarks

The experience of *Omkar* is lost when it is not understood and is mistaken for a simple corollary phenomenon. One needs reading inspiring literature, be confronted with biographies of saints, feel the necessity of practicing *Japa* during the day. One should feel the goal as the most near of the nearest, appealing as nothing else in the world, must be afire for it.

Let us explain why *Kechari* could be of great help in this and in the next *Kriya* steps. Thanks to it, in the region where the breath enters the nasal pharynx, a space begins to be created which the consciousness perceives as "void". Obviously it is not a physical void. The awareness, tuning in to it, is able to perceive the vibrational state, rhythm and astral location of each

*Chakra*. From that moment onwards, each practice requiring a calm breath and the awareness that pauses in a *Chakra* or moves from a *Chakra* to another, becomes easy and gives the maximum result.

### **Third step**

The breathless state happens after a long work with *Thokar*. It may be achieved also with a long concentration on the heart *Chakra* after *Navi Kriya* and *Omkar Pranayama*. The basic condition for its coming about is the establishing of a particular calm in the heart *Chakra* region. In this situation, a virtuous circle can be created and reinforced during *mental Pranayama*.

After *Thokar*, the nervous ganglia which regulate the heart pulse and the breathing rhythm are appeased markedly; this factor has a direct effect on one's state of consciousness. With a deep calmness and transparency, one will direct one's attention on the body becoming aware of the *Prana* contained in it. One will sense, almost immediately, a particular power of stopping any turmoil in this *Prana*. This has an immediate effect upon the afore quoted ganglia... Here the virtuous circle gains momentum and march in the direction of its acme. Going on in this way, after few minutes the breathless state is established.

There may be only one obstacle: the *Prana* cannot be appeased deeper than a certain level. A conscious effort of mental discipline through the so-called attitude of the "witness" (being a witness, during all the day, of any internal and external perception) coupled with the practice of *Japa* is needed. One is continually applied to repeat the chosen *Mantra* assiduously, until one has the clear perception of a powerful physical and *pranic* immobility.

One starts the *Kriya* routine having already achieved a particular state. Thus the routine develops in simple and natural way, like an act of prayer.

During *mental Pranayama*, while one is climbing up and down the spine, moving the awareness from one *Chakra* to another, one perceives a fresh energy sustaining the body from inside. A perfect, total immobility is established and, at a certain moment, the lungs do not move. This condition lasts some minutes, without any feeling of uneasiness: there is not the least quiver of surprise. That event is enjoyable beyond words: it contains much more than what one has dreamed. It is an unbelievable state - compared to it, the common way of living is suffocation. Through that achievement the mystical pursuit will go ahead unhampered.

As a consequence of it, there comes the achievement of emotional maturity: the ability of keeping superficial emotions at bay. This means being able of living passionate moments while remaining always calm when considering the decisions to take. It means also going ahead when the world tells you to

stop or to go back. Emotional maturity means to tame the tiger of pride and as far as a *kriyaban* is concerned .... that's saying a lot!

#### Remarks

In my opinion, a full mastery of this state requires two - three years of regular *Kriya* practice. I would say that it is not only a matter of cleaning the *Nadis*, or purifying the astral "shells" ... it is also a matter of getting over, and to this purpose time is required, any conflict in one's personality. Intelligence is needed to be paired up with constant self-observation.

When this stage begins to manifest, there is also the humility of returning to *First Kriya* and rebuild in a more sound way that foundation. One discovers also the need of *Nadi Sodhana*, the value of practicing a lot both *Maha Mudra* and *Navi Kriya*.

One is induced to do many experiments, for example one may notice how *Pranayama* practiced with *Aswini Mudra* - contracting repeatedly the muscles at the base of the spine with the rhythm of about two contractions per second – might facilitate the breathless state.

#### Fourth step

In the fourth *Kriya* step it is envisaged that the knot of the *Muladhara* - which is responsible of the difficulty of taking *Prana* away from the body and guiding it inside the subtle channel of the spine - is unfastened. Its main effect is to create an imbalance between the two lateral currents of *Ida* and *Pingala* which hinders the *kriyaban's* effort to see and maintain stable the vision of the spiritual eye. Anyone who practices a certain *yogic* discipline has some amount of control upon this blockage, otherwise meditation itself wouldn't be possible.

When the body is very tired and lies anesthetized at the border of the sleep state, if in one's consciousness there still lingers the perfume of a genuine spiritual aspiration, a condition of equilibrium between *Ida* and *Pingala* is created. The powerful obstruction at the base of the spine, blocking its entrance is removed for some instants and a touch of *Samadhi* happens to a *kriyaban*. The natural condition of the heart's nervous reflex makes one to perceive the paralyzing bliss of *Samadhi* as a form of death and stops it. This situation can evolve only after a physiological time marked by a long, unswerving attunement to the after effects of the *Kriya* techniques.

The ability to enter this state with relative ease is the main characteristic of this *Kriya* step. This condition settles in one's being only when the heart reflex born from the fear of death is no more activated by the immobility of

### *Samadhi.*

While the pulse slows down up to the possible limit, internal beatitude and isolation from the external world ensues. It may happen that what has been inspiring in life, symbolized in the imagination, is internally perceived while lungs and heart are calmed. The point (*Bindu*) in the center of *Kutastha* gradually emerges and expands into a tunnel. The awareness is pulled through it and merges into Eternity.

Having in one's heart the reverberation of such an event, one learns to meditate without mental pollution, without imaginations. The only problem is to find the proper meditation position where the *Samadhi* state can verify without the body tips forward as it happens when being asleep on a chair. The position can be held through a physical support.

### Remarks

There is a fundamental lesson a *kriyaban* has to learn. Lahiri Mahasaya's motto «Banat, Banat, ban jay!» (doing and doing one day it is done) must be applied with intelligence. We must understand that, in tackling the problem of unfastening the knot of *Muladhar* and completing the already done work upon the heart knot, after days of practice without problems, one may get stuck and face a resistance which becomes more and more lacerating.

The "knots" we are talking about are not like the ordinary rope-knots. They have a kind of mutual dependence. They are involved, one in the other. The one is not outside the other, nor does a full opening of one happen before one witnesses the opening of the other. A knot is like a gallstone, embedded in an organ, that a doctor must remove with due care not to destroy the organ and kill the patient. The knots of *Muladhar* and heart cannot be unfastened in few months. If one has the opportunity of experimenting with different variations of the same procedure, one may find an approach which matches the peculiar stage of his evolution and does not create an excessive resistance.

If one version of the technique creates an insurmountable obstacle, another may supply the *Kriya* practice with new lymph. Having a good will to try and try again can be decisive. Unfortunately, many *kriyabans* consider the technique in which they were initiated as ideally sealed around the immutability of its rules: they have a considerable resistance in attempting a different approach.

### A note on the nature of Samadhi

In *Yoga* it is explained that the state of *Samadhi* is the state of union with God, a temporary union, while the state of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* consists in the

definitive union.

I am perplexed about this definition. God is the intelligence sustaining the Universe; in the *Samadhi* state we have the impression we are closer to that Reality: burning with joy, we start to intuit its incommensurable vastness while our mind is completely quiet. Returning to the normal condition, of those moments remains a radiant memory. Through *Samadhi* our Ego is not transformed in a "divine" Ego. Perhaps "union" is a too daring term.

In my opinion, *Samadhi* is like a "near death experience": no more than this. Perhaps lesser than this. After having had such an experience we take back our purely human cloths as one that, dead in appearance, has visited the afterworld and then has returned among us bringing with himself the memory of an ineffable experience.

As for the concept of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, the affirmation that a certain *Kriya Yogi* (or *Guru*) has achieved permanent union with God, seems to me a first-class silliness. Those who claim that make a meager impression: theirs is a colossal falsehood, an unpleasant and even comic utterance.

I accept the fact that *Kriya* produces extremely great experiences, which have an enormous impact on life; yet they happen to a being who remains perfectly *human*.

I think that showing the similarity between *Samadhi* and a near death experience does not mean diminishing its importance. The comparison sweeps away many improper ideas and helps us fostering the best conditions for its manifestation.

There are people who believe that *Samadhi* is like an acrobatic feat that happens in the kingdom of one's thoughts; that in order to achieve it, it is enough for one to be convinced one has it; that it is our idea of not having it that prevents us to get it. These are all ravings: *Samadhi* happens in the body not in our beliefs, visualizations and illusions. During it, the body is like a corpse, there is no breath, there is no pulse! By sophisticating you won't get it! Many *Kriya* books prefer to avoid the comparison between *Samadhi* and a NDE (near death experience). They want to avoid themes that could appear unpleasant (unpleasant to whom but to those who are not yet ready for the spiritual path?).

It is strange to think that when a mystic retires in a chamber for his devotions, he has actually an appointment with the life of the beyond. Still if he is able to have a trip there even for just a few instants, he will receive a priceless lesson: to flow with the current and not to row against it.

With the repetition of the experience, one starts to discern the emotional and egoistic drive that moves many human actions and prepare his way to become free from it.

## KRIYA OF DESCENT

The mystical experience does not end with the ecstatic trance: there is another vastness still to be explored. Like everything in the universe, *Kriya* reveals a dual nature: an uphill path towards indescribable heavens, which is the afore described four step path, and a radically new aspect which is linked to a particular use of *Pranayama*.

This special characteristic discloses us a new way of existing in the body and the merging one's awareness in that of other souls.

The teaching of Lahiri Mahasaya and that of the Internal Alchemy show us that *Pranayama* has the potentiality of expressing the extraordinary experience of the *Macrocosmic Orbit*: a free - not guided by breath - movement of energy in the body.

In my opinion, the experience that marked a divide in Lahiri Mahasaya's life is hinted by a sentence in his diaries: «Following an excellent *Pranayama*, the breath is wholly internally oriented. After a long period, today (the purpose of ) my descent (on earth) has been fulfilled»!

It is evident that he referred to an infinitely deeper experience than that of a *Kriya* novice: he was not describing a mere sensation but a real experience which matches the highest level of Internal Alchemy.

The sentence stating that the breath is «...wholly internally oriented» is a symbolic way of saying that breath, *Prana* and consciousness entered completely the cells of his body. His eyes had the full revelation of the stupendous mystery of our existing. From that moment onwards - like all the Great ones that achieved the fullness of the Self realization - he was in all things: the supreme ecstasy embraced the essence of the most sordid pain.

That Lahiri Mahasaya had gone out of the shell of his individual consciousness and had put his being into that of his disciples and also in that of so many other people that he didn't physically met, is a fact upon which I don't harbor the slightest doubt.

In the beginning of our spiritual quest we have no other goal than inner peace and happiness, but it comes a moment in which the contact with the Spirit, obtained through the *Samadhi* state, reveals its limits and the soul yearns after having an experience of that aspect of the Divine which is present in each atom of the universe.

At the height of their path, mystics feel as their own the echo of other men's desperation.

We are part of the Divine: in His dream, He dreams also stories of endless pain. The first part of the spiritual path is winning *Maya*, the illusion of matter, but if we go on just trying only to fly from this world, we would make our heart hard and resistant as a stone and penetrate our mind of the cold of a

steel blade. The mystical path cannot be reduced to a flight towards the heavens: there must be also the discovery of «the abysses of truth and the oceans of smile that lie beyond the narrow peaks of truth» (Sri Aurobindo).

Let us distinguish between the **Kriya of ascent** (the four step process happening in the spine) and the **Kriya of descent** (the work of leading the energy throughout the body touching the *Collective Consciousness*).

During the latter, a *kriyaban* discovers how the spiritual dimension encounters the material life and what is obscure and lethargic becomes transparent and finds its perfect position in the universal harmony.

In mystical literature it is difficult to find comments upon this event. In the writings of St. John of the Cross we have read, surprised, some hints at the "dark night of the soul". If we study the biographies of the saints we find an undeniable fact: they passed through suffering. The spiritual path is not a continuous banquet of joy. The mystics have used their body to dispel other person's mental and physical sufferings.<sup>42</sup>

We have explained that the last *Kriya* step is tied with the unfastening of the knot of the *Muladhar*. In order to understand this *Kriya of descent* we can recall a suggestive theory according to which the *Muladhar* exists in each cell of our body: there we find the door towards the experience of the *Collective Unconscious*. Unfastening this knot completely means to bring the light of the Spirit into the matter, into the impenetrable obscurity. From joy, comfort, light, the experience of *Omkar* turns into infinite love, a bright beam that pierces through the layers of the *Collective Consciousness* and meets humanity as a whole. In order to attain this, one has to live fully the impact with this obscurity as if one had lost all one's spiritual realizations. If compassion and true love cannot enter our soul, the whole "spiritual" venture risks a wreck.

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<sup>42</sup> It is usually said that they «burnt a part of their disciples' *Karma*». Unfortunately, nowadays this expression has been trivialized, especially by the New Age literature, as it were a painless feat. The sufferances of the mystic (a real one!) are always authentic and, like any ordinary human being, he/she does not seek foolishly any occasions to attract them.



## CHAPTER III/04... NOTES FOR INSTRUCTION ON KRIYA

I concerned myself with the problem of teaching *Kriya* when, on behalf of my second teacher I gave *Kriya* initiation following the fixed protocol he bid me to abide by.

After introducing the theme of no-mind, a summing up of Krishnamurti's strong point, which my teacher, improperly, called *Swadhyaya*, I reminded the initiates of the eight steps of Patanjali.

Sometimes my consciousness revolted at the idea of asking - as I had been requested to do - my male students to look at women as "mothers" and, correspondingly, women to look at men as "fathers". I was aware of the obvious impossibility of obeying to this precept. (My teacher gave a great emphasis to it - I remember how the public listened to his vain words with a sigh of ill-concealed nuisance.) Then I switched to the explanation of the basic techniques. While concluding by counseling a minimal routine, I sensed I had done a virtually useless work. I took leave of those students, well knowing that they would have practiced for some days, or weeks, then most of them would have left everything and pursued other esoteric interests.

After some days, usually it happened that one or two among the most tenacious students made some questions up and called me just to have the illusion of carrying on, from a distance, a relationship with a real person.

I answered kindly but succinctly and invited them to the next seminar where my teacher would be present.

Usually, they didn't "survive" such a meeting. Observing in my teacher the most total lack of human understanding, and perhaps of intelligence, they entered deep crisis. They doubted that *Kriya* worked and they had made the right choice in receiving initiation in it.

After posting the book on the web, I have been corresponding with different typologies of researchers. Almost everyone had already experienced some form of *Kriya*. We discussed freely about the techniques and the routine. It happened also the sharing of *Kriya* with people who was not experienced in it. Let us avoid discussing now the reason of their interest. By talking with them, when I felt I could trust them, I accepted to help them move the first steps. This was always done in person. Some were particularly skillful, with an intelligent and sound mind.

The responsibility of choosing a didactic plan was mine. To envisage it, I took as a departure point my past experiences. To correct and enrich it I considered the feedback from some students who have received *Kriya* from me. A didactic plan imposed itself as the most functional one: this is discussed in this Chapter.

## FIRST PHASE

For those who I suspect won't be able to carry on the discipline of *Kriya*, I have devised an alternate routine based on classic *Yoga Pranayama* - the one explained in Chapter I/01. It goes without saying that if beginners do not succeed in practicing regularly for at least 3 to 6 weeks, there is no point in introducing them to *Kriya*.

The routine consists of: *Nadi Sodhana* (with the three *Bandhas* after inhalation while holding the breath); *Ujjayi* with or without *Aswini Mudra*<sup>43</sup> and a deep concentration in *Kutastha*. It is a beautiful routine and those who pay due attention to it will begin to perceive the energy that flows up and down the backbone.

*Kriya Pranayama* can become such a joyous discovery of simplicity that it can eventually become an "addiction". This simple routine gives a sense of wellbeing so one will have no difficulty in finding time to do it daily. Even if all the other *Kriya* techniques were dropped, a minimal practice of *Pranayama* would remain in their daily routine.

In all the other cases – including those who have already learned and practiced a simplified form of *Kriya* – I avoid that particular frenzy that accompanies a traditional *Kriya* initiation where all the practical instructions are transmitted hastily in one single lesson.<sup>44</sup>

I have found that it is more natural and logical to teach the *Kriya* techniques a bit at a time and let one experience each without any tension.

Even when it's necessary to demonstrate all the techniques in *First Kriya* for reasons of expediency, I do not recommend starting out with a complete practice.

(Of course, I don't advise waiting for a "perfect" situation before starting to practice, otherwise the decision risks being postponed indefinitely!)

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<sup>43</sup> Contracting repeatedly the muscles at the base of the spine with the rhythm of about two contractions per second. *Kriya Pranayama* can be practiced with *Aswini Mudra* as well, especially in the first 12-24 *Pranayama* breaths – during inhalation, exhalation and pauses. After 10-15 minutes, the physical movement decreases in intensity, the procedure turns to be an inner event. It is then that the awareness is strongly brought into the spine, in a more intense way than with any other technical trick. This could come in useful to those who are not able to practice *Kechari Mudra*.

<sup>44</sup> Within a few days, almost all details are forgotten and one goes through a crisis. Of course, there are also exceptions: special and atypical people for whom things go differently. Some always remember the few words of their teacher exactly as they were uttered and with the same voice inflection that the teacher acquired from his own teacher – and after toilsome work, their full meaning is finally realized.

Some students are interested in techniques that promote relaxation and concentration and can be practiced before the *Kriya* routine.

It must be emphasized that there is no necessity to practice preliminary techniques other than *Talabya Kriya* and the chanting of *Om* in the *Chakras*. One should be encouraged to experience how beautiful a *Talabya Kriya* practice is and notice how it immediately calms the mind. Oddly enough, it doesn't require concentrating on anything. It is purely physical. After *Talabya*, chanting the *Om Mantra* aloud in each *Chakra* (as described in Chapter II/01), until the abdomen, the chest, and the spinal column vibrate, will lead a *kriyaban* to a state that is considered a "benediction".

After all the techniques have been introduced, I do not insist on the importance of achieving *Kechari* or on the value of *Yoni Mudra* - which, for a long time, is not understood. If I were to insist on one practice, it would be *mental Pranayama*.

One is born to *Kriya* through the engaging practice of mental *Pranayama*: it projects us into sheer heaven and its beauty overflows our lives.

«... it's hard to stay angry when there's so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel I'm seeing it all at once and I'm overwhelmed. My heart feels it's about to burst...until I remember to relax and stop trying to hold on to it. and then it flows through me like rain. And I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life. (slightly modified from *American Beauty*, film; 1999) »

### **About Kechari Mudra**

According to Lahiri Mahasaya «Any religious path consists of four stages characterized by the untying of four "knots": tongue, navel, heart, and coccyx». The breaking of the tongue-knot happens with the help of *Kechari Mudra*.

We have already described in detail how after months of practice of *Talabya Kriya*, one reaches this *Mudra*. What has not been mentioned is that during the first days of its performance, immediately after learning how to insert the tongue in the hollow of the nasal pharynx, one experiences a feeling of "dizziness" and the mental faculties seem to be fogged up. The student must be made aware of this fact even if after two weeks everything returns to normal.

In India, the way *Kechari Mudra* is performed is crucial for initiation into

the *Higher Kriyas*. *Acharyas* demand to see the actual execution because they want the student's mouth opened in front of them and to see the tongue disappear into the nasal pharynx.

There is no doubt that practicing the *Higher Kriyas* with the tongue placed in the nasal pharynx is different from practicing with the tongue in a normal position. The internal "pressure" produced by *Kechari*, makes *Omkar Pranayama* and *Thokar* work in the most effective way.

In my opinion, initiation into the *Higher Kriyas* should not be denied to those who are unable to practice *Kechari Mudra*. A sentence like «Until one is established in *Kechari Mudra*, one cannot achieve the state of Eternal Tranquility» is not true. Were it true, then many mystics, the majority of whom never heard of *Kechari Mudra*, would never have experienced the Divine.

I believe very good results can also be obtained by turning the tongue backwards towards the uvula and by listening to the *Omkar* vibration. This eliminates the gap (from the energetic point of view) between the brain and the body and lets the energy circulate (in a clearly perceivable way) inside the body. I am not saying that *Kechari* is not important. I simply choose to believe that Lahiri Mahasaya also gave Higher Initiation to those who could not assume the correct tongue position for *Kechari Mudra*. Both his attitude and his partaking of human suffering lead me to believe this.

*Kriya* literature affirms that the tongue can also be pushed further up so that its tip touches a higher center in the upper part of the pharynx. By extending the tongue to its limit, it is possible to experience a great attraction towards *Kutastha* along with the sensation of having reached, with the tip of the tongue, a higher position. As any good anatomy book will reveal, the tongue that fills up the nasal pharynx cannot reach any further. Lahiri Mahasaya's sentence can be read in a symbolical sense and it refers to the rising of the energy.

The same literature affirms also that one is able to perceive, through *Kechari*, the elixir of life, "Amrita", "Nectar". It is a fluid with a sweet taste coming down from the brain in the body through the tongue. As for the importance of sipping the nectar, I cannot comment since I haven't yet had the experience nor, I must admit, have I even tried to have it.

It is explained that in order to have this experience, the tip of the tongue should touch three specific points: the uvula, the bone protrusion, like a small asperity in the roof of the palate under the pituitary gland, and the hinted soft tissue above the nasal septum. The tip of the tongue should rotate on these spots for at least 20-30 seconds; then, in the manner of sipping a liquid, a flavor will be tasted on the surface of the tongue. This exercise can be

repeated several times during the day. When the real nectar sensation manifests, one focuses on it while keeping the tongue in contact with one of the centers described above.

A *kriyaban* is usually overly excited by these things and then forgets them without a care. So much for literature!

What matters is that *Kechari* stops the **internal chatter** and gives the mind an essential rest. Indeed, that's saying a lot!

### **Attitude to strive for**

Even if the diligence of beginning students is exemplary, this doesn't guarantee their success. Their attitude is more important. If, for example, they are not able to use common sense to slightly adapt the instructions to the contingencies of their own life and necessities, or they feel compelled to argue about unimportant details, or call every other day with questions that are overly intellectual, the chance of failure is enormous.

Many *kriyabans* are too insistent and at times obsessive in wanting to have all the possible and imaginable details of the *Kriya Pranayama* technique clarified. They will soon get tired of taking notes and will eventually abandon everything. It is as if their pencil and sheets are a shield preventing the genuine beauty of *Kriya* from entering their life. They do not understand how important it is first to relax and enjoy and then to work on refinements.

Many are convinced that one of the initial requirements for practicing *Kriya* is the ability to easily achieve a state of perfect concentration. This is the goal but not the first step! It is normal that the mind wanders constantly in dozens of opposite directions. When this happens, let it happen! Those who are successful in *Kriya* are those who rely on the sheer "naturalness" of the procedure and combine it with patience and the circumspection of a tedious task like peeling potatoes. Being too demanding with oneself will lead to excessive tension which is very hard to get rid of.

### **Attitude to be encouraged**

It is fine to consider *Pranayama* as a refined art suitable to be perfected up to levels that surpass our understanding and imagination. One loves *Pranayama* for the intrinsic perfection it encompasses. However, the religious, esoteric, and occult promises that accompany it should be avoided like the plague.

Although one's temperament can sometimes be "polluted" by sheer illusions borrowed from books, by pursuing unwaveringly the perfection of *Pranayama* and refining other details (to be discussed later), all inner

obstacles will be removed and the last shell of illusion will be shattered.

We understand that some illusions might be the result of serious psychological problems. Unfortunately, those who practice *Pranayama* in a state of depression and/or with the negativism of a sick person using it as wonder medication but not expecting any positive results from it, will have only headaches and nausea. *Pranayama* is a formidable tool for those with a solid personality and the mind of an artist that loves life and nature and is able to learn from them both.

## SECOND PHASE

### VERTICAL PROCEDURES

After the first phase of familiarization with *Kriya*, the most difficult moment of the whole path arrives unexpectedly: a *kriyaban* runs a risk of losing interest and passion for its practices, putting a definitive end to a unique experience. Although one has applied with great concentration and steadfastness the *Kriya* techniques, they reach a standstill state: any progress seems impossible.

The point is that one's subconsciousness and habits have been deeply touched and they react in a sometimes unexpected way. Besides, there is also to consider that nobody bears the same discipline indefinitely without seeing more substantial results. Nobody can escape this "law". What happens is that one's psychophysical system becomes accustomed to the practice and stops reacting, causing the routine either to become ineffective or not as effective as it was in the beginning.

The first thing that a *kriyaban* should consider is the practice of a couple of "vertical" routines. This is a very rewarding work which helps to overcome the most serious obstacles. Let us face this subject thoroughly, because it is really worth it.

#### Definition of vertical procedure

A **vertical** routine is a particular feature of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*.

One gets along in this way:

one day, the usual (complete and balanced) routine is put aside. At its place, after a short introduction, **one particular technique** is practiced, whose number of repetitions is about the double of the usual number.

The day after this intensive practice *kriyabans* may take a rest, forgetting any *Kriya* practice and enjoy instead a long walk calming the deep regions of their psyche with a tranquil *Japa*.

After resuming for some days the complete routine, there comes a day in which that particular technique is practiced three times the usual number. A day or rest follows...

Going on in this way, the increase happens by adding a preset number of repetitions each time until, after some months, a prearranged number of repetitions is reached. (In a few lines we give concrete examples.)

One can then choose another technique and the process begins again with it until the last of the *Higher Kriyas* is "vertically climbed".

Customarily, *kriyabans* practice the same set of techniques each day, changing neither the order of practice nor the number of their repetitions. A **horizontal** routine - whose length is constant in time as that of a fence's pegs (ie uniform) - is the only system of practice recommended by many organizations. We don't deny the fundamental role of the horizontal routine. For a beginner, this is the best thing to be recommended - but going on always in that way, might run into boredom and annihilate any enthusiasm.

An expert once wrote that the hope of obtaining a deep internal change through repeating during all one's life the same, identical set of techniques is comparable to the hope that hitting a piece of iron once a day might, after some years, release the atomic energy that it contains within. The intensity and the quality of the practice should somehow be increased.

This principle applies also to athletes who wish to achieve world class performance; they must do interval training where they push their physical and mental endurance beyond their normal everyday levels. In this way their bodies adapt slowly to what would be, otherwise, unachievable levels of performance.

In *Kriya* this is obtained through a vertical procedure. But these information is neither provided by organizations nor by most part of the teachers. Those who are facing this difficult test are advised to meditate more deeply with the insurance that everything will be resolved with time.

If, trying to understand what could be the cause of their problems, they disclose some doubts on the validity of some teaching or of the routine they are following, they get deeply involved in the issue of loyalty and devotion.

Sometimes they have to hear a really strange story: that of some loyal *kriyabans* who experienced the sought result only at the moment of death...

It is difficult to give up to those so encouraging and beautiful states of mind experimented at the beginning of the path. Some leave the practice and develop an attitude of aversion to *Kriya*.

Some are very impressed with the sites that deal with the dangers inherent in meditation and in premature *Kundalini* awakening. Such sites are both ridiculous and tragic. They put the guilt to healthy and harmless exercises and hint only secondarily to the true problem. Actually, any mystical practice can contribute to create harm to someone - if it is lived inside a non balanced life! The incentive to follow a mystical path can also be originated by a bent to avoid facing life's challenges. When, absentmindedly, we affirm that *Kriya* "has hurt" a person, we



refer to a person who was already physically and psychologically fragile and, finding in *Kriya* a pretext to avoid active life, has fed the condition of his/her alienation. Personally speaking, I am always taken aback to hear persons blame their spiritual practice for great damages to their psyche, while they don't say a single word about the drugs and all the junk they have taken! They go every year to India not to learn *Kriya* but to grant them what here in the West is not so easy to be obtained. After some years, having destroyed their brain, they maintain that with some *yogic* practices their *Kundalini* has prematurely awakened and therefore they feel ill! It is as if a certain artist began to give signs of mental unbalance and, being unable to work, put the blame of it on the premature awakening of the strength of the genius. However, it is better to draw a veil over all the issue because mental suffering is vast. I would not give the impression to mock anyone: I try to be realistic.

Others suffer qualms of guilt and develop all kinds of paranoia.

In the final chapter of this book, I relate about people who, because of their wrong attitude, are not able to draw anything from *Kriya*: but that's another matter. Now, I am talking about very honest people, who have accepted and respected all the required conditions and have faced each daily practice in a spirit of maximum seriousness.

To those who are living this state of crisis (which in some cases is a real "chaos") and to all those who have practiced the *First Kriya* for some months, I always recommend a vertical process. The results are a firm internal transformation both in the psyche and in the ability of reaching states of deep of introspection.

### **Key points**

[a] Any vertical process is always done in a gradual way and assimilated inside a regular active life. If one tries to be smart and abruptly decides to perform the final dose, it is like doing nothing because the inner channels close up. To make a trivial comparison, it would be like pouring a liquid too quickly from one bottle to another bottle which has a smaller opening: consequently all the liquid would be spilled. Our inner obstacles cannot be removed in one day, not just because our constitution could not bear it, but also because our inner force of dissolving them is initially weak and must be enhanced week after week.

[b] It is up to a *kriyaban's* intelligence making the practicing days as pleasant as possible. The long sessions of practice are not necessarily continuous; on the contrary, it is comfortable to divide them in two or three parts by introducing intermission. It is good to wake up early in the morning to do half

the work, carefully respecting every detail – in this way one sets the body up for the afternoon practice, when one could allow oneself the pleasure of sitting in the open air. Then one could have a short practice of mental *Pranayama* and lay down in *Savasana*.

After a light meal and a little nap, it is fine to go out, reach a beautiful place to sit down, reserve some time to contemplate nature. Then one would complete, perfectly at ease, the previously settled doses. Everything will proceed in harmony and become fantastic as daylight approaches twilight. The total number of repetitions prearranged for that day must be completed before going to sleep at night. Those who practice in their room, should afford themselves a tranquil walk in the evening. That is the moment in which the benediction of a blissful silence comes.

[c] In order to be a good *kriyaban* it is necessary to have a bit of general knowledge not only about different religious movements but also about depth psychology. It is important to be acquainted with our unconscious resistance to undergo changes: thus we could understand the deep reasons of the alternating moods that appear when we practice intensely a *Kriya* technique. One should sense if it is necessary to stop the practice for some weeks, guess how a technique can be softened and assimilated peacefully. After a beneficial pause of a couple of weeks.... the "warrior" is on the battlefield again, ready to bring the work to fruition.

### **[1] Vertical process of Navi Kriya**

After a short practice of *Maha Mudra*, *Talabya Kriya* and *Pranayama*, a *kriyaban* practices twice the standard quantity of *Navi Kriya*, which means 8 units. After two/three days, he/she practices three times the standard quantity: 12 units. After a week (it is useful from now on to have a week of rest before increasing) one can practice 16 units ... and so on up to  $4 \times 20 = 80$  units.

One can choose whatever variation of *Navi Kriya*: the best is surely the variation explained in Chapter II/3 (school [A]): it catches the attention in a way which is impossible to achieve with the basic form of *Navi Kriya*. Its smooth shifting of energy along the circumference of the head has an unparalleled effect.<sup>45</sup>

As for this variation, since one unit consists in 36 descents of energy, preceded and followed by chanting *Om* in the *Chakras*, the process begins

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<sup>45</sup> Those who bother to find which is the best way to concentrate the attention on the *Sahasrara Chakra* remain speechless when they experiment the strength of this technique.

with 36x2 descents.

The next steps are: 36x3, 36x4,....36x19, 36x20. It has been experimentally proved that there is no need to go beyond the 36x20 repetitions. As the process becomes gradually more intimate, the head movements can be just hinted.

After many repetitions of this variation of *Navi Kriya*, a very interesting phenomenon can be observed: at a certain moment the exhalation seems to become internal. It is not easy to describe what happens. In the very moment in which the order to exhale has been imparted by the mind, one feels an obstacle as if the lungs could not move. Some instants later the awareness of something subtle descending into the body accompanies a very pleasurable exhalation. The exhalation is a mental act, like an internal all-pervading pressure which brings about a peculiar feeling of well-being, harmony and freedom. One has the impression one can remain there for good. It is clear that the air moves out of the nose, yet one who is practicing would swear that this does not happen. This may be considered the first timid apparition of the *Pranayama with internal breath*.

The first notable effect of this process is a striking mental clarity - probably due to a strong action on the third *Chakra* which governs the thinking process – and the "unification" of one's personality. A total order gives birth to a coherent action.

This may remind Ahab's behavior in Melville's *Moby Dick*: «The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!» By the end of this process, one has the feeling that entire eons have passed by! One has really something concrete in one's hands and knows that it will last.

## [2] Vertical process of Pranayama

The best thing is to practice the vertical process of *Pranayama* when that of *Navi Kriya* is completed or, at least, half completed: the ensuing result can be defined crucial for getting the ability of enjoying, for a lifetime, an elevated form of *Pranayama*.

36x2, 36x3,....36x20 *Pranayamas* is a very good plan; 24x2, 24x3,.....24x24 is lighter but good anyway.

Some points are important to underline.

#When more than a hundred breaths are practiced, it is wise to make use of the twelve letter *Mantra*, which means, more or less, to shift to a quasi-*Omkar Pranayama* – I mean a simple form of *Omkar Pranayama*, without all the subtle details described in the Chapter II/02.

#During each stage of the process, up to the completion of the prescribed number, it is important to keep a slender thread of breath. In other words, the process should never become purely mental.

#After a minimum of 36 *Pranayama* breaths, a *kriyaban*'s inner gaze is raised at the top of the head. As we have already explained (see "excellent *Pranayama*" Chapter II/01) with the eyebrows raised, the eyelids closed or half-closed, the eyes look upwards with no movement of the head. One will have the impression that all his being is raised to the *Fontanelle*.

### **[3] Increasing of Thokar**

Let us consider one of the following techniques of *Thokar* (*Second Kriya*)

[I] The basic one described in Chapter II/02

[II] The one described in Chapter II/03: school [A]

[III] The other one described in Chapter II/03: school [B]

Let us consider a gradual increase of the repetitions of the technique departing from a dose of 12 breaths up to the maximum limit which is fixed at 200. One increases of six per week.

A difference from the afore described processes is that once a doses has been achieved, it is usually repeated in the following days, every day or every other day. Just to be clear: if one day a *kriyaban* increases from 36 to 42, then in the following days they can practice 42 *Thokar* breaths – provided they have all the time to enjoy a deep meditation afterwards.

(During a vertical process, after the day of intense practice, one doesn't even think of repeating such a feat, up to the next week when that record will be broken.)

As for the *Thokar* introduced as *Third Kriya* in Chapter II/02 and in Chapter II/03 - schools [A] & [B] - it makes sense to take one of them into consideration only after mastering the corresponding *Second Kriya*. Common sense and intuition are vitally needed to thoroughly grasp the authentic meaning of that instruction. The "Key point"/remark which accompanies that explanation is very important!

### **What is reasonable to expect from this practice**

[a] One learns to meditate everywhere being not disturbed by anything. While *Kriya* beginners are maniacal in preparing a good environment for their meditation and get nervous and worried about the slightest thing, one who has completed the vertical processes it is able to meditate in the most weird places and impossible situations - like traveling by train or when forced to watch a

theater piece or a movie which they are not interested in. Strange to say, those occasions may establish, by contrast, a particular attention - we say of "threshold" - eliminating radically the danger of falling asleep and bring to un hoped-for results.

[b] Very important, although harder to be developed is the quality of a self-teacher. After the season of the vertical processes, a *kriyaban* will have shaped a simple vision of *Kriya* which will be translated in the art of fending for oneself without feeling the necessity of discussing one's routine with other *Kriya* experts. Without this ability, one would remain forever a beginner. This fact is tied with the great *heuristic* value of the vertical processes. (See note at the end of this unity.)

[c] The main effect of *Thokar* is that of keeping superficial emotions at bay: this marks more than any other feature those who follow the spiritual path. Frantic and hysterical emotions often rise unexpectedly from one's inner self, to disappear after a while. They actually express a reality devoid of authentic profundity but their propulsive action inevitably results in hurried acts accompanied by a sort of cerebral fever, nourished by a narrow, visceral pleasure.

When passion is inflaming a person's whole being, it is not possible for this person to be guided by common sense; the consequence is that some challenging schemes of behavior - those which might guide one toward a more complete and evolved stage of existence - often withdraw to irrevocable halts. Sometimes, fatal decisions start taking shape in advance in one's imagination - just like, during the summer, hail stones are molded, condensed and enlarged in the air before falling down to the earth and causing disasters - especially whenever one squanders one's time away fancying over the change of some circumstances of life.

During those open-eyed dreams, absorbed in the idea of avoiding something difficult, one floats in an illusory happiness. This perspective throws false "light" on one's existence, so that what, in the past, would appear as an act of cowardice, now seems to glitter at the horizon of one's life, like the clear and transparent day hovering over the stream. Not only does one dream to flee from a difficult university exam, but one takes up, suddenly, the plan of abandoning one's whole course of study. The damage caused by emotions makes one blind; one cannot see that a envisaged sudden leap into a "new and happy condition" puts to a halt an irreplaceable chance to grow up.

The same thing happens whenever one decides to put abruptly a human relationship to an end. Sometimes one receives sincere and constructive criticism as if it was a useless and cruel violence. One believes that the other

counterpart provokes sadistically enervating discussions with inappropriate topics. The more the criticism is true and binds one to a definitive change of one's plans, the more one feels as if swallowing a black, sharp-edged rock.

A person who believes to be listening to the heart and who is actually just venting his or her most violent frustrations, can, on this occasion, reject any discussion and break off that relationship with an action of such "radiant" free will as to overwhelm all bystanders. In the following instants, especially when the risk of retracing one's steps appears, pride will prevail, driving the presently exciting pleasure to the top.

Existence seems to be as beautiful as ever; the person feels like reborn after a long and painful malady, enjoying every little action with uninterrupted voluptuousness, as if surrounded by flashes of blue. Is this the expression of true freedom? Is this "acting from the heart"?

How could one call happiness this act of walking on the ashes of what had been built on patience and sacrifices and for which one has trembled and even shed tears? Had one been totally blind in the past? Of course, by succumbing to one's disastrous emotion, one demonstrates to be blind now! The effect does not differ from that of an asteroid falling through the atmosphere on its way to fire and destruction.

Several days go by and the person's heart feels heavy; a blurred sadness hued with pessimism toward all human relationships reveals that this experience was all but a "leap toward the sky".

A good crumb of the person's self is lost forever, trapped in that very relationship which belongs to a past that can no longer be reached due to the person's fear to endure the full impact of a truthful and honest reminiscence. A subtle deception of one's mind makes it convenient to believe that one has had a relationship with a wrong person. Very seldom one reconsiders the truth contained in those criticism. One is convinced having acted from the heart and so how can there be regret?

Actually, during that hasty decision, one has heard only one's superficial, instinctive emotion.

The effect of *Thokar* is the power to stop for a second, to detach from wild emotions, and if we have acted wrongly, the humility to back off.

Very few are those who have the power to tame the tiger of pride. This is possible because through *Thokar* we dig a stream of inspiration out of the arid soil of our acquired indifference, where the waters of primitive aspiration can flow once again. Pride is not tamed by self-analysis. It is overcome by a burning aspiration.

To conclude, in those who have completed some vertical procedures I have seen unbelievable results, unimaginable for those who follow a routine which

remains always unvarying.

Perhaps I am exaggerated and merciless, but I have the impression that by following only the "horizontal" scheme of practice throughout one's life, the mentality of some *kriyaban*, when there are signals of fanaticism, fixations, and lack of logic and commonsense do not change of a iota.

Moreover, my opinion is that a student, incapable of completing at least one vertical process, will hardly proceed on this path. But of course, beginning this process is an act of courage, a very mature act of trust in *Kriya* and in oneself. This decision should not be inspired other than by one's intuition.

#### Note

Marked and unquestionable is the fact that the vertical procedures possess a *heuristic* value.

I refer to their power of detecting possible mistakes in the definition of a technique and providing with one or more methods to correct them. This is particularly valuable when, having received a too much concise explanation of a technique, we have a suspicion that we are abiding by a wrong interpretation of it. It is clear that the understanding gotten from the vertical procedures has to be verified subsequently in the calmness of a tranquil daily (horizontal) practice.

Let us consider a concrete example. Let's say that you are struck by the description of the technique of the *Microcosmic Orbit* found in a book of Taoism. As everyone knows, this technique is similar to *Pranayama*. Let us presume that your attention is attracted by one or more details that you judge intrinsically and significantly different from the practice of your *Pranayama*. It can be anything: for example a particular movement of the head to be performed when the energy has risen up to the brain, like lifting the chin to drive the energy into *Kutastha*, or an act of swallowing before beginning the exhalation....

Probably, while you are reading the description suddenly something clicks: «This could help me to resolve the problem of not being able to feel the energy when it is supposed to reach the *Kutastha!*» A part of yourself smothers the enthusiasm and suggests that those details could be there only for ornament or, still worse, totally made up: bullshit.

You can't come out of the puzzling situation by mental acrobatics and not even by practicing such details for some days within a horizontal routine. Surely you could receive some signs from it, but you cannot trust them. Perhaps it is the enthusiasm and the curiosity for something new that is aiding your practice but it will disappear after a few days. Contrarily, even an ordinary fact as the bad conditions of the weather can induce you to think that the technique is responsible of the state of dejection that you are feeling. You could get to the wrong conclusions; the technique that today, trusting a momentary state of mind, you discard, could have marked a turning point in your life! It is important to have a more reliable test.

A vertical procedure of such a technique will give you a more articulated and serious answer. While you are practicing, you are going to receive important clues, especially when you have experienced different stages of this process: certain details of the technique will become wearisome, others will disappear and you'll realize

they did a long time after; other details that seemed meaningless will be amplified and greatly enhanced. In the days following the long sessions of practice you will have a deeper understanding of that technique by perceiving intuitively its essence. Other aspects will also be revealed to you subsequently. Perhaps months or years after such vertical process you will be able to draw interesting connections, deductions and further correct your point of view.

This process requires months, this is certain, but one can and should do it, if the questions they ask are crucial. Let us consider, for example, the issues regarding *Pranayama* - if it has to be practiced with the open (or half shut) mouth or with the closed mouth, with *Kechari* or not, bringing the energy in *Ajna/Kutastha* or in *Sahasrara*... and, likewise, many other questions which have been going on for years in the Forums devoted to *Kriya*! Let's avoid abiding by a traveling *Guru's* authority: our life is too precious to put it in the hands of another person. At the very beginning of our path, it is correct to give a certain trust to a school or to a Teacher, but subsequently one should base upon an accurate experimentation. We don't have other tools to verify the value of a technique.



## INTRODUCTION TO THE NEXT PHASES

After the completion of the afore described vertical procedures, one needs to conceive an intelligent horizontal routine in which there can find place the practice of the *Higher Kriyas*. Their addition, apart the *Omkar Pranayama* which is a real delight, may create some problems. Strange as it may seem, this problem might sometimes drive *kriyabans* into a confusing situation which causes the drop of the enthusiasm towards *Kriya*; it is as if the propulsive strength and the determination to follow the spiritual path had become similar to any other trivial worldly interest. They are no more able to rekindle the initial spirit of amazed enchantment before a spiritual path which never missed to grant daily the deepest of the emotions.

Feeling the need of a comprehensive theoretical look that could reestablish a sense of rationality in my routine, long time ago I rested on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. The simple, elementary idea that after the active phase of *Pranayama* there comes *Pratyahara* in which the awareness is disconnected from the external reality and there can be no physical movement, represented a turning point: I arranged all the techniques which required movement (like *Thokar*) inside the phase of *Pranayama*. After the last deep breath, keeping a perfect immobility, I reserved a longer time to purely mental procedures obtaining a very deep centering of the energy and awareness in the spine and *Kutastha*.

What I have found recently thanks to the suggestion of a *kriyaban* is by far more clear and important. The theory I am going to outline is extraordinarily clear, concise and effective. It is based on a work that appeared on line years ago and then was removed. It is *Kriya Yoga Vigyan*, by Swami Nityananda Giri (English translation by Dr. Brijesh Kumar. Yoganiketan 1999).<sup>46</sup>

Most books about *Kriya* contain tedious rhetoric, innumerable repetitions, all soaked in useless references to philosophic abstruse theories - there are one or two interesting lines, while the rest is to throw. But in this book, many pages are really interesting. A point of view about the four levels of *Kriya* is introduced, which is unparalleled as far as practical implementation is concerned.

## THE ESSENCE OF THE FOUR STEPS OF KRIYA

### **Beginning of a routine: creating the best conditions**

During *Maha Mudra* when we are bent in the front holding the breath, the combined action of *Kechari Mudra* and *Om* chanting exert a strong action in stabilizing the mind. The result is the settling of a particular brightness in the mind. There is a particular joy (*Ananda*) which enhances the will to perfect *Kriya* during the following phases. When *Navi Kriya* is added to *Maha Mudra*, the subtle joy of *Maha Mudra* yields spiritual bliss. It is in this perfect condition of body and mind that *Pranayama* is performed.

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<sup>46</sup> I have noticed that the thread of the same ideas is to be found also in: *Kriya Yoga: Its mystery and performing art*, by Swami Sadhananda Giri ( West Bengal: Jujersa Yogashram, 1998).

### **First step: Pranayama**

In order to understand the essence of the first step of *Kriya* we consider the techniques *Talabya Kriya*, *Maha Mudra*, *Navi Kriya* and *Yoni Mudra* as corollary ones and concentrate only upon its main feature: *Pranayama*.

We do not consider the technicality of chanting *Om* in the *Chakras*: this detail is considered pertaining to the second level.

We know that some schools claim that *Pranayama* without *Japa* of *Om* in each *Chakra* is *tamasic*, negative. This is not correct - and there is no letter of Lahiri Mahasaya or of one of his disciples which will make us change our opinion. In order to enjoy the initial purity of *Pranayama* one should not be distracted by such mental action - which for many beginners is an authentic trouble.

It's as plain as a pikestaff that after a "basic" *Pranayama* without *Om* chanting, there should come a *Pranayama* with *Om* chanting, but that is another thing!

In order to understand the essence of *Pranayama*, let us put aside the worry if the energy coming up touches *Bindu* or *Ajna* or *Medulla Oblongata* or *Kutastha*. Let us think that the energy comes up and remains for some instants in the head. That's all.

Having made our position clear, let us put all the attention upon the value of the pauses – at the top and at the bottom of the spine: this the gist of the procedure.

A divine stillness is experienced during them and it is during these moments that one's awareness can slip into the *Tranquility state*.<sup>47</sup>

It is upon this detail that one has to work in order to squeeze all the bliss contained in the relatively simple technique of *Pranayama*. This does not mean that we do not give due attention to the rising and descending of the energy. Inhalation and exhalation happen vigorously with full concentration in order to be able to fully enjoy what happens when, for some instants, these two winds cease blowing.

It becomes natural to enjoy a cool sensation rising during inhalation and a warm one gliding down during exhalation. But what is essential is what happens after each one of them! The two short pauses are a space into which the breath (or the need the breathe) is momentarily dissolved. The more one puts his mind in these phases of stability, the more one's spiritual buried potential begins to awaken. An unswerving concentration upon them is going to lead, at its proper time, towards the full blossoming of the breathless state. During inhalation, mind and *Prana* come up to *Ajna* through the spinal column. Then, when by nature the air tries to go out through the nose, an act of will directs it downwards, inside the spine. *Prana* is sacrificed into *Apana*. When breath and awareness reach *Muladhara*, by nature the air tries to enter through the nose: an act of will obtains its entering and climbing up inside the spine. This is called the sacrifice of *Apana* into *Prana*.

It is explained that when *Apana* arrives down and moves expanding about 10-12 fingers under the body, it feels the attraction of *Prana* and enters the inner space and

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<sup>47</sup> *Tranquility*, *Sthir Tattwa*, *Stability*, static *Prana* are synonyms: they express the the quality or state or degree of being stable. Lahiri Mahasaya affirmed that the whole course of *Kriya* is a great adventure beginning with a dynamic *Prana* and ending with a static *Prana*. *Stability* is the quality of permanence, the strength to stand or endure without physical and mental alteration a state of consciousness for a long time. *Stability* in one or more centers and in different degrees is going to manifest in each phase of *Kriya*.

eats away *Prana*: at this point, for some instants which one day are going to become a very long period, the breath is annihilated. An ecstatic feeling ensues. This state is called a Solar Eclipse: the negative *Apana* has covered the positive bright *Prana*. The reverse happens in *Ajna* and it is called the Lunar Eclipse. During an eclipse the light is obstructed and that leads to darkness. These are beautiful images that serve to emphasize the concept.

### **Second step: Omkar**

The essence of *Omkar* procedure is, during *Pranayama*, to exert concentration in each *Chakra*. This is helped by placing *Om* - or one of the syllables of the Mantra *Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya* – in each *Chakra*. This can also happen - like for example during mental *Pranayama* – through the sheer use of concentration's strength.

While in *Pranayama*, breath and mind become stable twice - in *Ajna* and in *Muladhara* - now they find stability in each *Chakra*.

The flow of breath, which does not lose its quality of smoothness, is subtly paused in each *Chakra*. The syllables of the well know Mantra *Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya* foster the enjoying of the pauses and help the repetition of these breaths indefinitely. This action gives the mind the opportunity to taste a bit of rest and joy during each one of the micro pauses. This is the essence of the second step of *Kriya*: the listening to the inner sounds is the main indication that the practice is correct.

For some *kriyaban* there is no sharp transition between the first and the second stage of *Kriya*: once *Pranayama* begins to take the inward route, almost without noticing it, their practice is indeed *Omkar Pranayama*. Usually the *Pranayama* throat sounds diminish or become inaudible. The *Chakras*, whose location (either with the help of *Kechari* or without it) is fully imprinted in one's awareness, become the unique reality.

### **Third step: Thokar**

We have introduced different forms of *Thokar*: one rotation and one stroke, more than one rotation with one or more strokes; then the variations of other schools. In many *Thokar* variations a strong action on the *Medulla* and on the fifth *Chakra* is envisaged. The essence is that one's consciousness is established on the air element (the fourth of the five *Tattwas*<sup>48</sup>) tied up with the heart's *Chakra*.

<sup>48</sup> *Tattwa* is a Sanskrit word for denoting the 5 elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether (space). This is a philosophical theory that claims that everything in the universe can be broken down into five primal energies. To a *kriyaban* the *Tattwas* are not a useless speculation theme, but a set of states of consciousness each one tied with a different *Chakra*. The lights one perceives in *Kutastha* during the practice of the *Fourth Kriya* are *tattwic*, produced by the different energies present in each *Chakra*. Perceiving these elements, distinguishing them one from another is the ultimate step of the spiritual path. It is considered the definitive step to gain freedom from our ignorance. *Bija Mantras* are associated with each *Tattwa*, but we do not use them in *Kriya* (at least according to our present information). A *Bija Mantra* is a "seed sound" that manifests its potential when chanted audibly or mentally. The first element is **Earth**, which represents a solid foundation for any beginning; its *Bija Mantra* is "LAM." The second element is

When the mind unites with that vibration and melts away through it, the *Kundalini* energy dormant at the *Muladhara*, reaches the heart region and attains a state of stability. This event in its turn calms the nervous ganglia which regulate heart and lungs and the person enjoys for the first time the state of breathlessness.

#### **Fourth step: final Meditation**

Let us consider any variation of the *Fourth Kriya* whose essence is the perception of the different rhythms of the *Chakras*, both in *Kutastha* and in the location of each *Chakra*. The fourth step is born from the idea of experiencing in each one of the *Chakras* the same state of meditation achieved in the heart *Chakra*.

In the *Third Kriya*, an instruction is given to direct many times the procedure of *Thokar* towards the heart *Chakra* in order to experience the air *Tattwa*. In the *Fourth Kriya*, an instruction is given to contact all the *Tattwas*. After raising *Prana* up to the head, one focuses mind and *Prana* in one single center at a time. The mastery of the breathless state plays an important role in this procedure.

The set goal is to dissolve the mind in each one of them. This has a definite purpose. After a double series of dissolutions (from earth to ether and from ether to earth) when plunging into earth-*Muladhar*, one unveils the mystery of *Kutastha* and breaks thus the last shell of illusion.

Many experiences come and go: smell, taste, sight, touch, and hearing are extinguished. It is explained that after twelve rotations of this *Kriya* one is able to dwell in the *Paravastha* of *Kriya*. By repeating this experience, there comes a time where all the *Kriya* techniques are dropped: one no longer has the necessity of practicing a set procedure in order to reach the meditation state. Having attained it, no desire for anything remains, one receives all the necessary things.

#### **Remark**

The mystical path of *Kriya* envisages a continuous deepening of the *Omkar* experience. The afore exposed theory reveals when and how the *Prana* present in the body and in the spine undergoes a crucial pacifying process. It shows points out the subtle zones of stability where the *Omkar* tuning happens and deepens. In this way, the *Higher Kriyas* appear as a natural extension of the process put in motion by the *First Kriya*. The vision is absolutely splendid since there is no abysmal difference between a footstep and the next one. Everything is seen as a unique harmonious process leading to that Eternal Tranquility which Lahiri Mahasaya describes as the goal of the *Kriya* path.

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**Water**, which is the sphere of the Unconscious, emotions and intuition; its *Bija Mantra* is "VAM." The third element is **Fire** which rules the domain of passion, creativity and enthusiasm; its *Bija Mantra* is "RAM." The fourth element is **Air**, which influences emotional stability as well as creative imagination; its *Bija Mantra* is "YAM." The final element is **Ether**, controller of change and growth; its *Bija Mantra* is "HAM." [Anglophone writers usually give the afore mentioned sounds as: LUM, VUM, RUM, YUM and HUM in fact they are pronounced Lahm, Vahm, Rahm, Yahm, Hoom.]

## THIRD PHASE

### LISTENING TO INNER SOUNDS

In order to listen to the inner sounds, the recommended routine is the following:

*Maha Mudra, Talabya Kriya, Pranayama, Navi Kriya, Omkar Pranayama* with fragmented breath, mental *Omkar Pranayama*.

(*Navi Kriya* right before *Omkar Pranayama* helps to transform the nature of breath, make it possible to run so smoothly that the micro pauses in each *Chakra* happen comfortably.)

Since *Yoni Mudra* and *Maha Mudra* strongly lift the awareness into the *Kutastha*, this routine may be completed in the following way:

*Maha Mudra, Talabya Kriya, Pranayama, Yoni Mudra, Maha Mudra, Navi Kriya, Omkar Pranayama* with fragmented breath, mental *Omkar Pranayama*.

While keeping well printed in mind during *Pranayama* the importance of the two pauses, above and below, and taking the determination of having a micro pause in each *Chakra* during *Omkar Pranayama*, we can abide by this routine with well founded expectation of listening to internal sounds. If we rest on our experience, it seems clear to us that it is not optimal to be satisfied with the minimal dose of 12 *Omkar Pranayama* but to practice at least 48. It is better to eliminate the repetitions of *Yoni Mudra, Maha Mudra* and *Navi Kriya* envisaged between *Pranayama* and *Omkar Pranayama* rather than to skimp on the number of repetitions of *Omkar Pranayama*. If it had to be necessary, one should have no problem in eliminating all that comes before *Omkar Pranayama* provided that, once one entered the magic of it, the time will be sufficient to practice a lot of it and be dragged into its depths.

Knowing that the practice of the three described vertical procedures has created the basis for success - the listening to the internal sounds cannot but happen - let us consider which are the essential points to be remembered.

The first essential point is that, during the entire routine, from the beginning to its end, one brings forth a continuous will of internally listening. The routine, whatever it may be, is conceived as a unique progressive process of tuning with the *Omkar* reality. The *Maha Mudra* should not be considered as separated from *Pranayama* which in turn is not separated from *Omkar Pranayama*. The internal *Omkar* sound dwells in us all along: it is the foundation of our very life. Every mental chanting of the syllable *Om* or of the syllables of the Mantra *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, should be permeated by our will of tracking down the echo of such sound.

The second point is a reassuring concept: the looked for result is gotten not suddenly through the acuteness of a particular moment of concentration, but through the accumulation of the efforts expressed in the preceding sessions of *Kriya*. Therefore, if today I'm not able to hear any internal sound, I should not think that something is going wrong. It might happen that today I have done an enormous work whose fruits will be enjoyed during tomorrow's meditation.

A sign that one is going in the right direction is a sense of mild pressure, like a liquid peace above or around the head. A certain humming is also perceived: it doesn't serve to wonder if this is the *Omkar* or not. Probably, it is only a signal: patience and constancy is required to get along.

When a minimum result appears, one should not "betray" it. We have the tendency to chop off this tuning voluntarily, especially when meeting coarse pleasures. We don't know that this seemingly innocuous decision could make us losing the tuning with the *Omkar Reality* for a very, very long time. Not days, but years, lusters as if we had been transported into another continent and we had not only to start again but also to find again amid our confused thoughts the motivations and the enthusiasm to start again.

The *Omkar* sound is not only the basis of every subsequent attainment, but it is what saves us from all the anguish of life. When life's events seem to conspire to make us forget the meaning of the spiritual path, the splendid reality at which one day we landed with a heart full of enthusiasm, what will have the power to take us back to those moments (so beautiful that they don't fear comparison with any other period of life) but the embrace of *Omkar*? There are many pitfalls where a *kriyaban* may get stuck. Those who, instead, try hard to preserve this tuning, will always be able to come out of terrible situations.

## FOURTH PHASE

### BREATHLESS STATE

As I have explained at length in Chapter I/03, in order to get the state of breathlessness, it is essential to have achieved the state of deep *Mental Silence* before facing the *Kriya* routine. This can be gotten by practicing *Japa* during the day.

The first step is to take the determination to complete each day at least one *Mala* (a rosary of 108 beads) of one's chosen *Mantra* aloud, then let it automatically ring in one's mind. It is resumed whenever is possible, aloud or mentally, during the day.

A *kriyaban* should not feel obliged to use Lahiri Mahasaya's favored "*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*" *Mantra*. One can choose, among one's favorite set of Prayers, 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 one can utilize it during *Kriya*, placing one syllable in each different *Chakra*. Beautiful twelve syllables *Mantras* can be drawn out of *Bhajans* or of poems. As an example, from a famous Adi Shankara's chant we can relish the beautiful 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, I am that supreme Being!)

Positive results are tied also with the correct choice of a *Mantra*. It should express exactly what one wants to achieve. For example the attitude of surrender is expressed by those *Mantras* beginning with *Om Namō ...* other *Mantras* express the absolute non-dual realization.

There are people who make a really unhappy choice through which they seem to punish themselves: their chosen formula is an affirmation of one's limits, a sense of unworthiness or condemnation of one's behavior. After a short time, their practice disintegrates; sometimes they find themselves repeating it once or twice during the day, like a sigh of dejection. This has nothing to do with what we are describing here. The chosen *Mantra* should have both a strong and a soft tone. It is important to relish it. "Strong tone" means that it is incompatible with an attitude of supplication and complaint. The selected Prayer should imply the presentiment of an happiness which one is attracting through the very repetition of its syllables.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Those who have familiarity and experience with *Hatha Yoga* and with the concept of *Bija Mantra* can forge wonderful *Mantras*.

To a preexistent *Mantra*, after the initial *Om*, one can add some "*Bija*" (seed) *Mantra*: Aim, Dúm, Gam, Glamu, Glom, Haum, Hoom, Hreem, Hrom, Kleem, Kreem, Shreem, Stream, Vang, ...

After having chosen by oneself a *Mantra*, one makes use of it for some weeks and then realizes if one's body accepts it or not. To experience at first hand is the only thing that counts.

It happens some times that one person decides to recite a *Mantra*, starts it with enthusiasm and then, after a few minutes, realizes that he is reciting another. From this and from other signs, one can guess if one has found a good *Mantra* or if the search should continue.

In certain cases one must accept the use of two *Mantras*. Actually, there are people who, after years of experiments, have decided (also because they could not do otherwise) to adopt a *Mantra* (like: *Sri Ram Jay Ram Jay Jay Ram Om*) which can not, save to pervert irremediably it, be lengthened, and use it during the day and another with 12 syllables during the *Kriya* practice.

During *Japa*, one has only one duty: to make the sound of the *Mantra* resound in one's head and, if possible, to perceive its vibration extending to each part of our body. What is required is the adamant will to cut the mind into two, to clean it from any useless content. It leads us to touch the dimension of perfect mental silence. When this happens, this is fantastic and nothing more is demanded! It happens that one feels being surrounded by a protective shell made of tangible peace - this is not a pathetic visualization but a real experience.

If that *Mantra* represents the maximum aspiration of our heart, then it is uttered in a passionate way. Having the mind cleared like an spotless mirror, a spiritual "gold" is created within us: a moral strength which has the power of influencing our surroundings. The breathless state will be achieved by using that strength and it will be like a flower coming into existence in that dimension in a fairly natural way.

### **How one achieves the breathless state**

In order to experience the breathless state, the recommended routine is the following:

*Maha Mudra, Omkar Pranayama* with continuous breath, *Omkar Pranayama* with fragmented breath, *Thokar, Omkar Pranayama* with continuous breath, mental *Omkar Pranayama*.

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These are sounds who were chosen by ancient *yogis* who sensed their power and used them. They were not given by any divinity, they were a human discovery. Literature or an expert can help to make a good choice. Unfortunately, literature glorify excessively the virtue of any traditional *Mantra*, while experts tend to counsel their own beloved *Mantra*.



But any routine, however intelligent it might be, is not enough for yielding the breathless state: what matters is the attitude, the inspiration, one's melting away in the Prayer (*Mantra*), fully seizing its secret and drawing that power which almost all the mystics emphasized beyond dispute.

Surely not all: let us acknowledge that there were mystics who achieved their Enlightenment spontaneously and taught different tools to their students. Let me say that their instruments seems to me like mental sophisms.

I feel attracted to those mystics who found their freedom in Spirit through a certain discipline: theirs was the irreplaceable tool of the Prayer (eventually coupled with breath control like in the *Kriya*).

I leave to the first ones their Nirvana and to their disciples the joy of a path without effort: I have neither envy nor attraction for their spontaneous Enlightenment experience.

Let us consider therefore a *kriyaban* who has had the opportunity of chanting, either aloud or mentally, his/her *Mantra* during a considerable part of his/her busy day. At noon or sunset, after practicing *Maha Mudra*, he/she sits with the back upright, ready to touch the fullness of silence and the peace of immobility. The eyes are closed, implying an intention of detaching from the surrounding world. The mood is deeply serene.

At that moment, there is the discovery that the same *Mantra* utilized during the day is going on by itself.

How naturally comes the idea of taking a long breath and chanting the *Mantra* during the inhalation and repeat it (or complete it) during exhalation!

Let us suppose that one enjoys the beauty of this action, for a long time, in large quantities, overdoing it...

Above, I called it: *Omkar Pranayama* with continuous breath.

It is quite normal that the mind gives its last signs of activity. It is physiological to meet various distractions. At times one's inner look turns, tenderly, to some image that appears on the mental screen. It may be something symbolic, a remnant of a memory, transfigured by the meditation-born joy. No disturbance comes from it. Sometimes one slips in the state of sleep but *Japa*, in time, helps one to settle in the intermediate area between the perceptions of the external reality and the allure of enjoying some fantasy. With extreme calmness one brings back the attention upon only one action: merging the inner chanting of a *Mantra* with a slow, even-paced breath.

*Meditation becomes the action of amplifying and engraving in the totality of one's being the devoted practice of Prayer.*

Now, one begins the practice of *Omkar Pranayama* with fragmented breath. For twelve times the technique is practiced just as we have explained (see Chapter II/02), then the breath seems to change its nature, becoming more and more subtle, to disappear....

At this point one introduces the "Prayer of the heart", namely *Thokar*.

(There are different *Thokar* procedures: we have described them in detail.)

It is important, after completing a minimal number such as 12, to take back the practice of *Omkar Pranayama* with continuous breath until the whole system is deeply calmed.

Now we enter the sweetest phase: one has a repetition of the whole Prayer in each *Chakra*, while coming up and down the spine, letting the breath subside completely. One focuses us on one *Chakra* at a time. The order is always: *Chakra* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and occipital region; *Medulla*, *Chakra* 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

One can remain in each *Chakra* the time necessary to think the Prayer slowly once or one might prefer to think it two, three times. The way one thinks the Prayer in the *Chakra* is suggested by one's intuition. What is important is to continue, more and more in a subtle way, while one's consciousness settles in a dimension of blue extending behind and over the *Bindu*. One hasn't the slightest intention of *stimulating* the *Chakras*: one just surrenders to this overpowering process of interiorisation.

During this phase of the practice, one's isolation has to be defended by all means. For no reason other people should have the occasion of unintentionally disturbing one – if it happens, one will receive an internal wound. One must put in the following procedure all of one's creativeness and sensibility. The striving for perfection is not a blind, stubborn will for hitting the target, it implies the respect for the beauty and the importance of each detail.

[I] The first experience is that of *a total immobility and feeling of comfort*. Body and mind sink in a complete immobility, absorption envelops one sweetly. The eyes, if they were open or half shut, would close by themselves. If they were hold open - for instance to avoid drowsiness - one wouldn't see anything. Life around is momentarily extraneous. The Prayer gives the power to "see", "touch" each thought and therefore to "stop" it.

[II] Normally, it follows the experience of the inner light which may appear in the spot between the eyebrows and above the head; it varies from a diffused intensity to the brilliant light of the so-called spiritual eye. It gives the idea that one's being is constituted by an intensity of gilded light. One's mood is cheered up. The reality of the *Chakras* is experienced intensively but the experience is very subjective. The sound of a far-off bell or of rushing waters will be, most probably, heard.

[III] At this point the practice of the Prayer (**Mantra**), as mental repetition

of words, starts to be lost along the way. The spiritual journey comes near its end. One has a foretaste of the shocking harmony existing in one's heart. The experience comes to be in contact with an *Endless Goodness* (I do not know another way to describe it, I borrow an expression of S. Teresa of Avila). One feels to be invaded by something that has, so to say, the taste of Eternity. The consciousness is transported a far greater distance than any known territory. This is a state that makes death indifferent; from it an incommensurable Good is born. The experience is the quintessence of love, solace and accomplishment. Surely the reaction is: «I won't lose it, under no circumstances!». After this meditation, every object will appear as transfigured, the external reality as the embodiment of Spirit. One will have the perception of having calmed down the inner movements of the body, even at a molecular level. Of course this is only a sensation - however when one has it, the breathless and the *Samadhi* state wait for their appropriate moment to spill an unparalleled experience of divine bliss into one's being. The heart thrills in welcoming that state; one sips the celestial honey of a radiation of sweetness which annihilates every desire and fills the soul with ineffable Beauty.

Our mind is devoured by the illusion of adopting more constructive, concrete tools of "evolution". It will try to diminish in every way the value of *Japa*. It gives the idea of being a scarcely productive tool - but this is only a false impression. Neglecting *Japa* means relinquishing a formidable instrument – an unpardonable mistake!

It is clear that a *kriyaban* must do any possible effort to think in a clear way, one thing at a time, when it is necessary to think, otherwise remain in the vibration of the mental silence. There is no place of having, besides one's job, another one or two and cultivate demanding hobbies. One must be wise and choose the simplest life, apt to his temperament and put everything in order, starting from the desk drawers. This order is to be extended to all the facets of one's life. The heart should be turned only towards one direction.

During heated discussions after expressing one's indignation, one recovers the lost composure through Prayer - those who practice *Japa* are always able to pass through life with a smile. One succeeds in maintaining a mental silence even when talks to other people: instead of being involved in the images arising from the words, one can be on the alert not to lose the feeling of unchangeable calmness in the center of one's being.

Inside this dimension of living, it is possible to achieve the dimension of *Continuous Prayer*: a stupefying and intoxicating merger with a celestial state of bliss. The Prayers goes on effortlessly, it takes hold of those who are whispering it. It is the Prayer which "pronounces" the devotee, instead of the devotee pronouncing the Prayer. Its magic spreads in each facet of one's life, it will be like walking out of

a dark room into the fresh air, into the sunlight. Prayer is a marvelous gem whose glitter warms up one's life.

There will be no more problems of aridity, lack of motivation and difficulty in concentration. Like a person near the fireside enjoying the beauty of a chilly and windy winter to build his nest in, so will one who practices *Japa* (continuous Prayer) contemplate either the sad or the joyous spectacle of life having found the infinity of the skies residing in one's heart!

The "Prayer of the heart", which some mystical traditions hint to is the *Thokar* of *Kriya*. The radiance brought about by this procedure will become the gold of one's first experience of the Divine. On certain occasions, one feels the simultaneous presence of a mild form of pain mixed with the perception of a *sweet goodness*, which cannot to be compared with any pleasure of life. When one tries to receive fully and prolong the strength of such an experience, tears of joy stream down one's cheeks.

The memory of the Divine which it reminds, will remain, even when the vicissitudes of life will attempt to destroy the very idea of the mystical dimension. It will remain when one's *Sadhana* will seem to break down in different clumsy attempts, each one frail and vulnerable.

## FIFTH PHASE

### SAMADHI

After reaching the breathless state, it is fine to spend some months employing with unfailing regularity a substantial amount of one of those procedures usually denoted as *Fourth Kriya*.

We saw that in order to obtain the experience of *Omkar*, the recommended routine revolved around *Omkar Pranayama* which was practiced employing a continuous effort of internally listening. To experience the breathless state, this routine was expanded by adding *Thokar* and by employing *Omkar Pranayama* both with continuous and fragmented breath. If we are now going to add the practice of *Fourth Kriya*, the result is a really overloaded routine.

Ideally we have to practice:

*Maha Mudra, Pranayama, Yoni Mudra, Maha Mudra, Navi Kriya, Omkar Pranayama, Thokar, Yoni Mudra, Maha Mudra, Fourth Kriya.*

But we can wisely and comfortably be contented with: *Maha Mudra, Pranayama, Omkar Pranayama, Thokar, Fourth Kriya* - where *Pranayama, Omkar Pranayama* and *Thokar* are practiced in minimal doses (such as 12-12-6).

In the practice of the *Fourth Kriya* (personally, I like the variation of school [A] in which the head bends in for directions) we can apply any *Mantra* or we can simply create a feeling of mentally touching each *Chakra* various times through a meditation-revealed power, without employing any *Mantra*.

This effort leaves its mark from any point of view: a stable transformation is perceived during any session of *Kriya* practice. We feel having a laser in our *Kutastha*, which moves the energy anywhere the focus of concentration is directed. As for the psychological effects, they converge to the establishment of a great psychological order, extending to all the aspects of life, from any point of view.

By the work in *Kutastha* (realizing a definite connection between it and each *Chakra* in the spine), as days go by, the ego's more subtle tricks suddenly become noticeable. The ego is a function that does not need to be destroyed, but made transparent; it sets up a complicated mental structure based on incorrect ways of reacting to certain stimuli. Now, the ability of seeing the reason for many past wrong decisions is increased. Our life appears as it really is.

But let us deal with the experience of *Samadhi*. It may "explode" in different ways. At night, while lying down after our *Kriya* session, we can experience an increase of our heart's natural devotional yearning. Remaining

immobile and relaxed, we might have the strong inexplicable feeling of being divided into thousand parts - each one of them on the verge of exploding from bliss.

In certain conditions of deep relaxation of body and mind, a deeper experience can happen. Preceded sometimes by an electric wind on the surface of the body, propagating from feet up to head, a luminous and joyous power runs through the spinal cord and enters the brain. For some instants, appearing as an eternity, we shall burn with infinite spiritual emotion. At that moment we feel we belong, for Eternity, to that heavenly dimension.

Some delicious moments are experienced during the practice of the *Fourth Kriya* itself. When we dwell for a long time, without any hurry, on a *Chakra*, a sense of vastness pervades our conscience. Since it assumes a slightly different tone in each *Chakras*, we have the impression we are flying across different regions of our inner heaven.

From this event a burning devotion is born - even to those *kriyabans* who never, or very rarely, experienced what is denoted as *Bhakti* attitude. Inspired by this new condition, comparing it with that of the mystics, we realize how difficult it is to live, carrying out our worldly duties, without being paralyzed by such a bliss!

We wonder how is it possible that those who never had a taste of this bliss, are able to find the strength of practicing *Kriya* for years. Perhaps we may thank certain diffused illusions on *Kriya*, certain ungrounded beliefs: at least, they hold one tied to such a practice until the real experience happens.

Then, stunned by the experimented amplitude and sublimity, one does not need to listen to stories and *Satsangas* (sermons) but will be indefinitely sustained by a perennial joy peeping out from behind one's thoughts and manifesting at the full in the moments of quietness.

#### Note

Samadhi resembles a "near death experience". In recent times the NDE has become quite well known, especially through the development of the techniques of cardiac resuscitation. Raymond Moody popularized such experiences with his book *Life beyond Life* (1975). Some surveys following the book's publication revealed that thousands of people in the U.S.A. have claimed they had similar experiences. The descriptions — according to this author as well as many other researches — confirm the feeling of being dead, of floating above one's own body and seeing the surrounding area. The whole experience is lived within a feeling of endless love and peace. Many have also had the feeling of moving upward, through a tunnel or a narrow corridor, while the synthesis of their life was passing in front of the mirror of their own consciousness. Some divergent accounts follow about meetings with

deceased relatives, and with spiritual figures (beings of light). Each one interpreters such meeting according to his own culture and of his own expectations. Then the feeling of having arrived at a threshold and being sent back to one's body —often with deep reluctance to return there— seems to conclude the experience.

It is awe-inspiring to meet and to receive the confidences of those people who, as a result of a serious accident, had a NDE (near death experience). This event brought them over the edge of the Eternity, offering a unique opportunity to glimpse at it. For them it remained the most real experience, paradoxically the most "alive" of their existence.

## SIXTH PHASE

### KRIYA OF DESCENT

The purpose of the following routine is to distill from the basic technique of *Pranayama* all its power and use it to the extreme to create a particular *pranic* event in the body. We are moving away from the theoretical frame used in the previous three unities (third, fourth and fifth).

The condition we want to settle in the body corresponds to the *Macrocosmic Orbit* of Internal Alchemy. We saw how in that path they never cease to seek the equilibrium between matter and Spirit ("heaven" and "earth"): the obtained experiences are balanced, pragmatic, not eccentric.

The definition of *Pranayama* we gave in Chapter II/01 (sufficient to bring the student to obtain the calmness of the breath and to listening to the inner sounds) is now completed including the crucial detail of feeling a calm energy spreading not only in the spine but also throughout the body. This is going to complete our path of **ascent** (moving towards the kingdom of the Spirit through the awareness of the *Chakras*) with a path of **descent** (moving towards the dimension of the Universal Intelligence present in matter through an intense awareness of the cells of the body).

We are going to discover how, during the exhalation of *Pranayama*, part of the energy reaches the internal organs of the body, in particular the frontal part of it up to the skin. This is particularly felt when, flowing down, the energy touches one *Chakra* after another and each reacts radiating in the front, infusing the body with more vitality.

Most of the schools overlook this detail: *kriyabans* discover it by themselves when they approach the breathless state and realize how important this circumstance is.

A whole life is not enough to explore the wonder contained in the following procedure. There is nothing that makes one feel more intensely the uncontrollable beauty of living than working tirelessly for attracting the Divine on earth, mixing the bright transparency of the skies with the grayish inertia of the matter. When the idea of God and Creation as different realities and in perpetual conflict becomes unbearable and meaningless, a *kriyaban*, through this form of *Pranayama*, is able to place his/her heart beyond the thick wall of collective opacity and perceives the scent and the immensity of the purest dimension of existence. The divine light crumbles the mind-rock revealing the skies in the earth's clay. «Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth and the undying suns here burn.» (Sri Aurobindo, *A God's labor*.)



This routine cannot be followed as a recipe fixed once and for all. Inappropriate seems the choice of repeating it without inventiveness waiting passively that one day it produces the coveted result. It is necessary we listen to our subconscious mind and to the voice of our meditation-born intuition. We shall receive important, vital clues. What to the earnest spiritual researcher seems chimeric like the philosopher's stone will become manifest in our life.

The routine I am about to introduce is unsuitable for beginners, those who want thorough instructions. Their attempt would become sterile. They would be overwhelmed either by the seemingly aridity of the technique or, if the beginner's luck will help them, by its effects which to them would seem more like a threat to their peace of mind than a valuable achievement.

### **SOME USEFUL BUT NOT ESSENTIAL INTRODUCTORY PRACTICES**

This preparation is like manufacturing the bricks for building a house. It can be skipped of course or it may be realized through other *yogic* or *taoist* means or simply by *Japa* thought in the body. Sometimes meditating outdoors and getting lost in the beauty of a landscape is far more effective than any preparation. It is of paramount importance the adamant, unswerving will of becoming one with that beauty.

#### [1] Circulation of light

One begins by stimulating the "frontal" components of the *Chakras*. This concept - rarely quoted in *Kriya* literature - has not been introduced so far.

By lifting the eyebrows, one is particularly sensitive to inner light which is perceived in *Kutastha*. Then the light starts to flow down into the frontal component of each *Chakra*. "Frontal" means on the anterior part of the body. Thus, after *Kutastha*, the awareness comes down through the tongue into the upper front part of the throat, which is linked to the fifth *Chakra*. The perception of the inner light happens at that spot for few seconds. The awareness comes down in the central region of the sternum ... inner light is perceived there ... then in the navel ... then in the pubic region and finally in the perineum. Then the concentration moves up along the back of the spinal column, and the same light perception happens in the second *Chakra*; then in the third ... and so on up to the *Medulla*, the occipital region, the Fontanelle, ending in *Kutastha* again, where one remains as much as possible.

#### [2] Maha Mudra

Any variation is all right.

### [3] Pranayama with particular emphasis on guiding the Prana in all the body

One begins with open eyes, rather it is fine to look at something that inspires us (like a beautiful landscape) with the firm intention of touching its beauty through the cells of our body. Better trying without any form of *Kechari Mudra* (when the routine begins to work, one can have all the kinds of experiments, with or without *Kechari*).

One begins a tranquil *Pranayama* (through the nose) giving the right emphasis to the listening to the sound of breath. The sound of inhalation is "Awww", that of exhalation is "Eeee". One tries to feel how *Pranayama* transforms the breath made of molecules of air in pure energy. The abdomen expands and the chest moves only *slightly*, after inhalation, during the instants in which you don't breathe the intention to go down in the body is created, finding an internal way so that to permeate it with awareness; the exhalation begins and the energy pervades the body, zone after zone, from top down (the region of the neck, chest, belt, low abdomen, legs).

In the last seconds of the exhalation, a sense of comfort is felt, which becomes drunkenness in the final instants, while the navel drifts towards the spine.

Considering the next demanding phases of this routine, I might say that 12 breaths of this *Pranayama* are enough.

### [4] Kapalabhati Pranayama

Exhalation and inhalation alternate with equal length and occur about two times per second. Exhalation is active, inhalation passive. The navel acts as a pump, almost like using abdomen as bellows.

Let us describe the nature of these short breaths. A sudden contraction of the abdominal muscles raises the diaphragm and a quantity of air is forced out of the lungs. The sound is like that of a slight blowing one's nose. As soon as the air is thrown out, the abdominal muscles are relaxed, which allows the same volume of air rush in: inhalation comes automatically. During each exhalation one mentally chants *Om* in the navel. After 15-20 short exhalations like that, there is a pause and the breath takes back its normal rhythm for some seconds. Then another 15-20 of this short breath and so on for about 100 counts of *Om*.

### [5] Stimulation of the Manipur

One concentrates on the *Manipura Chakra* in the spine, inhales through the nose and feels that the breath enters that *Chakra*, heating it. Then, while holding the breath, one performs the three *Bandhas*: (*Mula Bandha*, *Uddiyana Bandha* and *Jalandhara Bandha*) and keeps the focus of concentration on the *Manipur*. *Om* is mentally chanted 12 times on that spot exerting a mental form of pressure upon that center. Then one relaxes the *Bandhas* and exhales gently and slowly distinctly feeling the warm energy

from the *Manipur*, rising in the subtle spine into the head.

[Many find it useful to repeat the exercises [4] and [5] four times. I think it is superfluous to underline how they represent a really stronger form of *Navi Kriya*.]

#### [6] Stimulation of the Anahat

This method contains the same principle of the *Third Kriya* of school [A].

During a deep inhalation, one concentrates on the heart *Chakra* and feels that the breath enters that *Chakra*, expanding it like a globe of light. Then the breath is held, the chin is bent forward just for an instant, towards the throat cavity creating pressure and a warm sensation on the frontal part of the heart *Chakra*. The head resumes its normal position, then it bends slightly toward the left shoulder, without turning the face: a pressure and a warm sensation is felt on the left part of the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The procedure is repeated backwards, on the right shoulder, forward again, on the left shoulder.... going on and on while holding the breath. When it comes the necessity of resuming breathing, one stops and has a long exhalation pushing the energy from the fourth up to the fifth *Chakra*, to the *Kutastha* entering there. One perceives very strong sensation of physical immobility.

#### [7] Stimulation of the Muladhar

One creates the maximum relaxation possible and begins listening to the sound of one's breath. One hears "*Hahm*" during the inhalation and "*Sah*" during the exhalation. During inhalation one visualizes the light that enters through the nose, touches the region of the *Kutastha* and flows down through lungs and abdomen toward the region of the *Muladhar*. The breath is held as long as comfortable, then the exhalation pushes up the light which was inhaled. Then, after inhaling with "*Hahm*", once the energy is down, there is only a short pause and then, using the diaphragm muscles, one releases the breath in very short pulses, hearing "*sah, sah, sah, sah, sah...*" as many times as it takes before one's lungs are empty. The lips are united in their central part: the air goes out through the angles of the lips and consists of many s: "*s-s-s-s...*".

A warm sensation is created on the lips, which is mentally transferred to the base of the spine, from this region it starts to climb inside the backbone.

In the last seconds of this fragmented exhalation, a particular phenomenon happens: while the navel moves closer the spine, the chin is tilted slowly down, not completely like in *Navi Kriya* but halfway. At that moment an intense joy is felt both in the head and in the navel. The more the breath is

subtly fragmented, the more the experience becomes strong. There are at least 12 fragment breaths.

## **PRANAYAMA WITH INTERNAL BREATH**

One inhales drawing the energy from navel to *Manipur* and up inside the spine. The time of the inhalation is limited to six seconds; that of the exhalation begins to be lengthened indefinitely. One tries to feel with more and more intensity that the energy comes down as a gilded liquid outside and inside the body, in its cells. One repeats this for 3-6 breaths.

Then the same process goes on with a subtly fragmented exhalation. (Differently from the previous exercise n.7, the exhalation happens through the nose). The fractions of the breath tend to become microscopic. Their main effect is to inject energy in the body, in particular in the skin. The perception of an inner light entering the cells of the body during these series of long fragmented exhalations becomes very clear.

Only if it is quite necessary, one can ... "cheat" a little bit - provided one does this with a lot of delicacy. *To cheat* means to interrupt, when necessary, the exhalation for an instant, to grant oneself a short inhalation in order to get a small intake of oxygen, then take back the exhalation and the downward movement of the energy. Being able of doing this without disturbing the delicacy of the phenomenon is an art.

One discovers that the exhalation lengthens as for a miracle and the fragments of the breath there are practically dissolved! The expiration seems to become endless. An intoxicating bliss accompanies it and is felt in the region of the navel, in the heart and in the head. The joy is unbearable: tears trickle down one's cheeks.

With the chin slightly lowered (this comes spontaneous, one is attracted to the navel as if it were a magnet and is not aware of losing the upright position) one is crazy of joy. Once in a while, one is aware of a short inhalation that makes *Prana* climb from the navel and accumulate in the brain and then enjoys a very long exhalation (which more than an exhalation seems a pressure upon all the skin of the body). One goes on in this way until there is no more physical breath and everything is brought ahead by the strength of the consciousness.

### Remarks

Considering my personal experience and some discussions had with a pair of *kriyabans*, the most difficult question we have tried to answer is if it is plausible that

this particular phenomenon has the power to affect somehow the events of our practical life.

One thing is to affirm that it leads one to perceive the reality in a different way - this is easily verified since the first practices of any form of *Pranayama* - quite another thing is to assume that something that has happened within me can have an effect on the surrounding world, in the sense that it makes happen what would not otherwise happen or what would have happened anyway, but in the future. This idea has all the appearance of an illusion of ours. Those who are tied up to the concept of cause-effect, practically all the judicious people, think that this is a real insanity, about whose power to lead to self-damaging actions there is cause for concern.

Yet it seems that those who obtain such an experience have to deal, more than ever, with thorny problems that ask for fundamental renuncements, radical changes of one's attitude and therefore of one's own point of view. It is as if the external world would cooperate with their evolution by setting before their eyes demanding challenges and important questions to unravel.

The image of an anthill comes to mind: when a person bumps against it, crowds of ants immediately appear to begin the operations of repair, in the same way, after this experience so many events start to happen and they touch you directly, force you to have some reactions, to maintain your cold blood and to put in practice all your ideals.

Those who are not up to refusing the idea that an individual's practice of *Kriya* can change the world around cannot but resort to the Principle of Synchronicity implicated by Jung. Their reason is pleasantly amazed by this vision and appeases itself, but only because it is lost and renounces to go ahead.

Another debating point is if it is better to begin the practice with eyes open and the sensibility turned toward all that is around. The strangest thing is that the best experiences happen under conditions unfavorable to one's concentration, like, for example, to practice in a waiting room, while traveling by train. In such occasions the joy becomes so great to literally cry of joy and do one's utmost to hide it from other's gaze. Well, *Kechari Mudra* seems **not** to cooperate with this experience. Strange to say, it seems to hinder it.

## CHAPTER III/05... KRIYA PRACTICE FOR ONE WHO HAS A LOT OF TIME AT DISPOSAL

In Chapter III/01 I have recounted how it came up my definition of *Kriya* as a process of refining, in successive stages, one's tuning with *Omkar*.

Later, I have explained how that definition was expanded to include the so-called process of "descent" (*Pranayama with internal breath*). "Expanded" is correct because the definition was not emended since this last process is in itself a particular form of *Omkar* tuning.

Anyway, when I formulated this first simple definition, I was so enthusiastic that I plunged into a particular enterprise: that of completing 20736 *Omkar Pranayama*.

At its conclusion I tackled – I was fortunate to have the required time at disposal – the most binding vertical processes: those tied up to the *Trivangamurari* perception (see school [C] in chapter II/03).

### **20736 Omkar Pranayama**

This procedure, a great feat indeed, consist in completing 20736 repetitions of *Omkar Pranayama* preferably during consecutive days. In 144 days, by practicing 144 *Omkar Pranayama* each day, the task can be comfortably accomplished. The effect is tremendous!

But of course, the way of distributing that number is a personal choice which may vary in the course of time. Obviously, it is wise to begin each session of practice with some preliminary technique -*Talabya Kriya*, *Maha Mudra* and *Om Japa* - however this strenuous work, implies that one practically neglects (or has not a constant practice of them) any other basic technique.

This is one of those enterprises that while absorbed in it, although perceiving enormously its good effects, one feels so unworthy that decides to bring it ahead anyhow, but redo it again, more seriously, in the future.

Allow me to say that this process makes a person "old", in wisdom and temperament, of many lustrum. Needless to say that it does not remove the physical vigor, but that of the superficial emotions, with all the troubles that proceed from them – completing splendidly the work of the *Thokar* technique. The tendency to have one's desires satisfied immediately and the excitement of deciding at once about one's projects, are appeased. The effects upon one's mood are striking: any difficulty seems to be resolved easily and a heavenly harmony reigns undisputedly.

The *Omkar* experience is enriched in a way that is impossible to grasp intellectually.

I have only one remark to add. I developed a way of practice, let me say at "helix". I perceived that the circulation of the energy round the crown of the head began gradually to enfold the *Medulla*. When each exhalation began and I mentally chanted *Teeee*, I was already in the *Medulla* and used the starting instants of my exhalation to tighten the "helix". Thus I intensified the concentration in such a center. This perception was extended in a natural way to the other *Chakras* and particularly to the *Muladhar*. In other words, the path of descent was no more linear but similar to a helix that surrounded and caressed each *Chakra*. I must have read from some part that, in the *Pranayama*, the breath (or the energy) crosses the *Chakras* as a thread crosses the pearls. This image is different from what I experienced: the thread didn't pierce the pearls, it enveloped them.

### **Vertical of Thokar - as it is taught by the [C] school**

In Chapter II/3, section [C] we have introduced some techniques based upon the *Trivangamurari* movement. If we have related about them it is because they have a priceless value.

We remarked also that before boosting the intensity of our perception of this inner three-bended movement through the *Thokar* procedure, it is necessary to perceive it many times while remaining perfectly immobile. A tradition was handed on to gradually reach 200 rounds of this perception both without the use of the *Mantra* (*Amantrak*) and with it (*Samantrak*).

Only after this demanding effort, which may last one year or more, one begins the vertical of *Thokar* by practicing (strictly no more than one day a week!) the doses : 36x1, 36x2, 36x3,..... 36x35, 36x36. This is really a colossal venture. At least 9 months are required to complete it; but usually the time required is longer.

I remember clearly that during the months of practice of *Amantrak*, divergent moods alternated. One of my teachers, introduced this technique saying that through it, the inner *Trivangamurari* flux passes through the heart *Chakra* cleaning a lot of dirt; that is the reason of its peculiar effect of separating one momentarily from reality. The action of this technique decreases the hectic condition caused by superficial emotions, fed by certain energies springing from the lower *Chakras*. This leads to a total modification of the perspectives through which we see life.

After the first weeks of *Amantrak*, when I was practicing about fifty rounds, I felt I was about to explode! This would happen anytime the energy, going down from the spinal column's left side, reached *Muladhar*. Waking up in the

morning, I would linger for a short while in the aura of very involving dreams, as if I had lived a deeply intriguing and captivating adventure.

Later I found myself in a very strange mood: during the day I lacked enthusiasm; in no place would I feel at ease and no activity would produce any satisfaction. In the past, whenever wandering about the countryside, I was used to take in the beauty that seemed to spread from everything surrounding me; now there was nothing, I was alien to everything. For a whole month I spent much of my time at home, as if in a state of convalescence. Eventually, playing on my will power, I was able to finish the prescribed doses of this technique.

I started the practice of *Samantrak* just when a fantastic March, a blue, cloud-free sky and pure air invited me to practice in the outside; the habit of digesting great quantities of *Trivangamurari* made me able to experience this process as a pleasing engagement, with no need to confront any particular problem.

The *Mantra*'s syllables, which I would carefully place into each center, would warm me up, the way the sun warms up the nature. Whenever the first effects took life in me, I reconsidered the best literature on Prayer in different religious contexts. These readings were nourishment for my soul.

A particular reminiscence is impressed in my heart. I took part to a pilgrimage with a group of people and walked a full night in order to reach a beautiful sanctuary the following morning. Walking on, I would murmur the syllables trying to visualize the twelve centers, as much as possible. I was perfectly aware that mine was not a canonical way of practicing, but I could not help it. Something started to be perceived in my heart, a sort of tension of tenderness; then I realized that my mates' life was wrapped up in love. I understood that the reality of love was the most intense force of life, corrupted only by the pollution of mind.

Thinking of humanity as a single thing, I felt that a man cannot by instinct avoid loving or taking care of somebody - like his own children; as a consequence, he cannot avoid painful experiences. I had a feeling that even the most egoistical person is able to give his life away for his children; even he can find in himself the power for great and incredible actions. The warmth of that night's feelings lingers on in my heart!

I began and completed the vertical process of this special form of *Thokar* during the following summer - in the beginning I would work two days per week, then one day per week.

In the morning I would not focus too much on the strokes, rather concentrating on the *Trivangamurari* flux, until it seemed to be carved into my flesh.

In the afternoon, towards the end of the practice, it came spontaneous



whispering - not just thinking – the syllables of the *Mantra*. After each syllable, there was a short pause, isolated and protected from any haste; an instant was enough to perceive the sweet irradiation springing out from each center. This amplified the experience of joy - limitlessly.

A new way of living the spiritual path took hold of my self. I learned to re-awake an intense aesthetic rapture for the beauty of nature and to take advantage of this technique to amplify such an ecstasy. The classic idea of using *Kriya* to go beyond the mind was substituted by the more captivating idea of using it to burn my mind in the flame of Beauty itself!

One evening, a sound of tolling bells came from a distant village - it was like a cascade of light! So unexpected was it, that my heart throbbed with joy; I opened my eyes, which did not focus on anything in particular. It was a delicious miracle; the intensity of such a beauty was really impossible to bear! A part of my mind - ravished behind - continued to repeat: «A human being has never been granted so much joy!»

My thought went to some researchers with whom I had shared *Kriya*; in those days they had given me the evidence they were progressing in a way worthy of admiration. A few years before I would stake my head that it was not possible to practice *Kriya* without begging and obtaining it from an organization or from a living *Guru*. Now, the contrary had been proved. I had reasons to feel satisfied. I perceived for the first time the goodness of all of my choices. This was my supreme joy! I felt free, incommensurably free.

### **The last vertical process based on the Trivangamurari micro movement - as it is taught by the [C] school**

This is by far the most challenging of all the vertical processes and is reserved to those who have retired and are no longer working.

On the first day, the micro-movement is perceived 36 times in each of the 12 centers. One has a total of  $36 \times 12$  perceptions of the micro movement – one round. After some days one perceives  $36 \times 2 = 72$  times (72 times in the first Chakra, 72 in the second...and so on). After some days the amount is  $36 \times 3$  in each *Chakra*....

At a certain point, an entire day is not sufficient to complete the round. That is why the work-load must be divided into two days. On the morning of the second day, the technique is resumed exactly where it had been interrupted the previous night. After these two days of practice and the next stage, not only some days but even weeks may go by.

At a certain point, a single stage will require three days, then four, and so on. The final  $36 \times 36$  will require a week or even longer to be completed! To

complete this process is really a giant achievement, however a *kriyaban* should grant himself the joy, the privilege of going on slowly. Slipping into a hurried attitude leads to nothing.

One should intentionally wait for a peculiar feeling of enjoyment after each chanting of the *Mantra*. This joy springs out of the *Chakra* in which one has put one's awareness. During each stage, it is wise to keep silent, avoiding any opportunity for conversation. However, the use of common sense should always prevail; if addressed, a polite reply is always imperative.<sup>50</sup>

Those who have no option but to drop for the moment the idea of enjoying this vertical process can, nevertheless, enjoy the following shorter one.

On the first day, the micro-movement is perceived 12 times in each of the 12 centers; there is always only one complete round. The increase is of 12 in 12, up to the last number 12x12x12, which is feasible in one day. This means that on the second day of the vertical process the micro-movement is perceived 12x2 times in the *Muladhara*, the same number in the second *Chakra* and so on, until the round has been completed. Then 12x3, and so on.

The years in which I was absorbed in this process occur to my memory as enveloped by a dreamy aura; it is actually very difficult for me to refer to specific details regarding them.

I was lucky that pension age came early in my life. I was actually proposed a job even more engaging than the previous one. I had waited for years and ravenously desired to face the impossible doses of this final vertical process; there was no other job for me!

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<sup>50</sup> This vertical process is a good preparation for the conscious exit out of the body at death (*Mahasamadhi*). It is explained that it burns forever the necessity of reincarnating. As the *Yoni Mudra* marks the last moment of the day when, having concluded all activities, a *kriyaban* withdraws his awareness from the body and from the physical world - a "small death", so to speak – the afore described intensive procedure is like a *Yoni Mudra* in greater dimensions, a farewell to life, a return to the origin. In this way one «dies forever»: dies to one's desires, to one's ignorance. According to this tradition, death's mechanism is to be invited (when the right moment comes) by calming the heart and by merging deeply with the *Omkar* reality.

In the months preceding that moment – intuition guides the advanced *kriyaban* to guess when such a moment is approaching – one should practice this technique extensively. It is recommended to perceive the micro movement in *Kutastha* 36x48 for each center. This means perceiving a total of 20736 micro-movements. Since it is possible to complete this with reasonable ease in a period of 24 days, one can assume that this process is supposed to be repeated more than one time. It is not sure that, in the moment of death, a *kriyaban* performs the technique of *Thokar*. We may reasonably assume that it is not always possible to perform the physical movement of *Thokar*. To be aware of *Kutastha* may be the only thing possible: it is possible that one vibrates there one's beloved *Mantra* and merges with the Infinite. To experience that, is our ardent hope and determination.

I have always loved this technique: even a little practice was always a miracle of sweetness.

To tackle with the vertical process I spent a lot of time in the open. I used to carry along a seat made of a plastic and a wool layer, something to drink and a thirty-six-grain rosary. I would sit down, breathe deeply and proceeded with the *Mantra* and the consequent Micro movement. At the end of each cycle, I would move an object, a little stone, from one side of my body to the other to keep track of the approximate number of 36 cycles. Often I was caught by a strong, overpowering sleepiness. After interrupting the practice to get some rest, I found out, however, that such did not solve my problem: this sleepiness came back as soon as I resumed the practice. There was no way (coffee, a lot of rest...) to find some relief from it; there was nothing else to do but accepting this situation. More than once I found my back slightly bent forward; I learned not to straighten it with a sudden movement, because that would interrupt the condition of absorption and quiet.

After many hours of practice, at the end of my day, occasionally, I was caught by such an euphoria that I felt the irresistible instinct to swing the body. It was like dancing from a sitting stance, accompanying the dance with a subtle form of *Thokar*. Whenever I pronounced the seventh syllable, my trunk swung left, thinking of the following one it swung right... and then left again. When I thought the last syllable, my trunk quivered a little giving such a profusion of bliss!

Concerning the effects, something peculiar took place. Many psychological fetters —conditioning that seemed immovable— started to crumble. There was the tendency of going deeper, inexorably, up to touching the unpolluted truth. My thinking became compact, of a solidity that other people's suggestions were not capable to undermine. I could not tolerate the least deformation of truth. I tried to go inexorably and all the way into any problem, until I was able to find the truth. But truth is total truth: it touched the reality of life and zeroed my diplomatic mask.

Unfortunately the difficulty in bearing other's superficial behavior became the cause of some break-ups. Nature hates vacuum, so other people came into my life to keep the flame of friendship alive.

I learned to practice without finding any disturbance in what was around: in this way, the technique embarked in my life and blended with it. One day I was in a cliffy place not far from a beach, where a not high number of people used to go for a walk and stop for a little rest in the surroundings.

During daytime I would take shelter from the sun under a tree; at dusk I would go to the beach, lean my back against a rock and stay there, pretending to stare at a distant object. I practiced keeping my eyes open; the sky was an indestructible crystal of infinite transparency, the waves were continually

changing their color, having in itself an unsustainable charm. I was trying to hide my tears behind the black lenses of my sunglasses. I cannot describe what I felt, unless in poetic form.

There is an Indian song (in the final part of the movie *Mahabharata*) whose lyrics are taken from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* - «I have met this Great Spirit, as radiant as the sun, transcending any material conception of obscurity. Only the one who knows Him can transcend the limits of birth and death. There is no other way to reach liberation but meeting this Great Spirit». When I listened to the beautiful voice of the Indian singer repeating «There is no other way», my heart was inflamed. Nothing would have the power to keep me away from this state and this terrifically beautiful practice, which I would enjoy for the rest of my life.

I know that some researchers deny that this *Kriya* is original, they say it was made up. People who have practiced it, think with a heart aflame: "Blessed the one who invented it!"

## CHAPTER III/06... THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE'S ATTITUDE

My coming across different groups of people who practiced *Kriya* (since the days of my affiliation to a *Kriya* organization and later in different parts of the world following this or that *Guru*) was like meeting my vast family. I have already explained that the interest of great part of them ranged from esoteric philosophies to "New Age" holistic methods of self healing, while a few proved to be trustworthy scholars whom I learned to listen respectfully. In that period I was very happy: I fell in love with an Indian *bhajan* and I sang it within of me the whole blessed day. For me it had the consistence of food; rather I had really the impression of eating that music since after some days of singing I realized I had exhausted it and was looking for another song to plunge me in it as if it were the only one worthy of to be sung. Swimming in this state of happiness I didn't understand anything of other people and it seemed to me that even if they had so many interests, they lived a very beautiful life, did very beautiful jobs and I dreamed to live like them for good. Later on, I had different occasions to meet and to approach more intimately various typologies of researchers.

As I have already told, at the local university of the third age I gave lessons on the history of the mystical paths.

During the first year I proposed adding to our study some information about the most known esoteric movements. My purpose was to compare them with the New Age tendencies and show where, inside them, the boundary line between the genuine mystical quest and the cultivation of magic ambitions lay.

It was not difficult to see the devastating theoretical inconsistency of many esoteric movements, widely recognized as demanding and elitist. An incredible amount of magnificent terms, which would have once allured me, filled me with nausea as if they were an obscenity brought forth by a monster. I was more and more stricken by the weakness of the mind of the so called researchers of truth up to the point of feeling a pessimistic sense of discouragement about their potential of dissolving glaring deceptions and fallacies.

I was inevitably drifted into the most interesting field of studies: the human psyche, its suggestibility and vulnerability when it deals with approaching the spiritual path.

A few years later, I tried to introduce this theme in my lessons but saw the interest of my students diminish. I was aghast at realizing that the most part of them came to my lessons in order to receive support and fuel for their illusions.

Despite all my explanations they had not yet understood in a practical sense what a mystical path really is and above all what an infinite amount of joy and meaning it could have brought into their own existence. It was on that occasion that I developed a keen awareness of how improper was the attitude towards *Kriya* which many researchers cling stubbornly to, on whose account it is no surprise that the results are scarce or practically nonexistent.

Later, as soon as the first edition of the book appeared, an interesting experiences of teaching *Kriya* to some researcher happened.

It was not difficult to put myself in their shoes, wondering, often without answer, whether the confusion and uneasiness that I found in some, were due to temperamental or physical reasons. It was evident that many had started the *Kriya* path with a not proper attitude.

Following the flickering of their moods and the drastic change of their frame of mind, I tried to understand the reason of their failures especially when I was convinced that they were not inevitable. Some had an entirely childish idea of *Kriya*. They were unyielding in bringing ahead their false hopes, supposing a complicity from my part. Some poured into *Kriya* a remarkable commitment but, however, got nothing. Sometimes I felt myself inclined to discuss with them up to exhaustion, forgetting the time. I saw they were adamant in practicing *Kriya* with wrong modalities, doing plain mistakes.

(For instance, one neglected the normal rules of health, refused, during meditation, to assume the correct position of the backbone, didn't even mind to maintain the immobility in the final part of his routine.) It was impossible to correct them. They behave towards me in a very cordial way but, when it dealt with defending their choices, showed a dialectical gift that made me feel like an idiot. To their sophism I would prefer a hundred-fold times more to listen to a funny guy shouting to me: «I leave *Kriya* to idiots like you: I like to eat, to drink and to enjoy life!».

The wrong thinking of someone succeeded in bringing me in a state of alienation. I remember one who sought the total harmony with life, at the same time utilizing any means to develop his hidden psychic potential. He went on paying attention to the revelations coming from a healer *channeler* (to whom he went in order that the spirits revealed him the karmic reason of an illness, as well as the attitudes to be changed in order that his problem was astrally destroyed) but, at the same time, haunted a church where he pretended a genuine devotion while asking a "particular" benediction as a bland form of exorcism.

One day, after talking with him, gasping in order to find "myself" again, I felt the need to walk in the open air and practice *Japa*. The feeling of alienation seemed to stretch out as far as the horizon and touch the rim of the sky. I had a thought, luminous and warm: even if all my friends, all the people I know

would leave *Kriya*, I would stand fast anyway, not because I have faith in obtaining one day the coveted good effects from it, but because *Kriya* has already given me something incomparable. I don't need a recharge of motivation by turning back to the old readings of spiritual fiction: it is the radiance of my memory that saves me each time, each day.

An irrepressible joy spread like a thrill through my skin: I saw clearly that *Kriya* has the potential to dispel the clouds in any person's mind. We float on an ocean of bliss but – this is the power of illusion - we feel separated from it, like oil on water; we need only a change of perspective to turn our life into a heaven.

*If the reader has some interest in it, here there is a list of attitudes that, in my opinion, lead to nothing.*

#### **# To look at a spiritual tradition as something to exploit in order to obtain recovery from one's psychological disorders**

This is the dramatic situation of those who have not a genuine spiritual interest (who have often received warnings not to lose their time in trying to practice mystical disciplines) but cling to one or two of them, tenaciously and desperately, since their expectations are very great and pressing.

There are individuals with psychological troubles, who practice meditation, allured by some advertising about its alleged therapeutic value.

Let us consider *Kriya Yoga*. Many insist on the fact that it is scientific and its results are granted. Now, let us try to use our reason. Although there are physical states (breath, pulse, cerebral waves) that can be influenced almost automatically by meditation, others cannot be neither measured nor granted.

Who is able I will not say to grant but not even to define what awareness expansion is, or think of producing in all the *kriyabans* the ebrious decision of dropping useless habits and plunging courageously into the new? All this cannot be obtained automatically: an enthusiastically honest heart is needed.

In my opinion the publicity about *Kriya* is a colossal deception.

Once I believed in that. The expectation that *Kriya* could work as a psychological therapy began to take shape in my mind after reading a book by a physician who described how he cured some cases of mental disturbances through *Yoga*. This led me to encourage some suffering persons to embark on this enterprise. The results were practically non-existent.

Generally speaking, the decision to apply practices like *Yoga* and in particular *Kriya Yoga* in one's life by one who suffers of mental disturbances might have been taken by mutual consent with the therapist (Psychologist or Psychiatrist) or can represent one's independent choice. In any case, its

original mainspring is going to be exhausted soon. The spiritual path has an impact in our personality and in all the facets of our life only when it becomes an integral part of our life. It cannot be like a graft of a foreign organ and not even looked at with suspicion - «does it really work»? No human can ever touch the *supreme Good* unless one places it above all the other achievements of the world.

But those persons whom I am referring to, do not want to listen to this: the pressing desire in their consciousness, an emergency that permeates their thinking and behavior, is to come out from suffering as soon as possible. Now, once clarified that I do not recommend *Kriya* to those having psychological problems, I don't want to be hopelessly negative: who can, actually, deny that some good can come out of one's effort, if done under the guidance of one who is doctor and friend at the same time?

A friend who went around with me some years ago was in this condition. He demonstrated a great seriousness and dedication which excited my admiration but had the tendency to observe himself too much, was always anxious of seeing results and get discouraged very easily. I supported his effort; often we quarreled with infinite discussions and reciprocal charges; our illusion lasted different years. He met moments of deepest despair but kept on with his effort because he felt he had no alternatives. His obsessive self-observation could never be changed in surrender. Besides, he did not know how to cope with small contrarities coming into his practice, as well as into his life; he gave too much importance to facts that could be ignored or resolved with common sense. I was stricken by a trait of his temperament which appeared as a giant *opportunism* - the tendency to exploit people. Without realizing it, he tended to squeeze me, slowly but unrelentingly, up to a point when - as Carlos Castaneda would say - there remains *nothing*.<sup>51</sup>

In the same way he exasperated and then eliminated definitively the few friends that were still close to him, by making use of a lethal mechanism. He used to "wring" from a friend accurate and detailed counsels regarding a meditative or a healing practice; then, by applying it, he hurt himself. He tried to make his friend feel guilty, with the hope of obtaining greater attention from him. He stated he had applied that counsel to the letter. Instead of getting closer, he lost his friend, inevitably: the latter took an oath not to help him

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<sup>51</sup> I wonder if these individuals are the primary cause of the deterioration of the *Kriya* organizations. They think they never receive enough, they are always complaining about something and often threaten to sue those who dispassionately tried to help them. I believe that if those organizations have, with time, become full of prohibitions and of what seem to us an absurd bureaucracy, this was also due to a reaction to the idle pleas and menaces of people like the ones we are considering here.



anymore in any way. Often, seized with blind fury and - forgetting any past custom of courtesy and kindness – that friend annihilated him with merciless words, of whose hardness and inflexibility he would have, for a lot of time, grounds for regret.

As in the fable of Bluebeard, there were some "rooms" where he wouldn't let me enter. I'm not referring to intimate matters but to facts about which it is acceptable to discuss - for example to maintain a double work when it is not necessary.

When I went straight to the point, he grew darker and roughly broke off the conversation. When I reflected about what could help him, I felt I was not free to consider the complete picture of his life. I sensed that in his life there was a region where he preserved and nourished a "malefic mushroom" from which he extracted the elixir of his suffering. Other times I was lost in a reverie: it was as if they had two personalities. The first was a façade personality with which I was talking, and another, deep, with which I could not communicate, free from all suffering, clean and serene, which was scorning me. In those instants I had the impression that if I disappeared from his life, he would be completely and perfectly happy.

It was him who disappeared from my life the same day in which, after a bitter delusion, I talk to him with sincerity and with all my care announcing a changing of my attitude towards him and his requests.

### **# Believing that the spiritual path finds in the addition of alternative healing processes a substantial aid**

Here we are dealing with people who have no psychological problems but just a small confusion in their head.

Once, I attended a *Kriya* group which was under the influence of a cunning fellow who, according to the needs, assumed the role of the psychotherapist, of the spiritual teacher, of the alternative physician who, with a pendulum in his hand, was able to diagnose everything, from the slightest indispositions to the most serious illnesses, as well as to suggest remedies. Harmless methods like aromatherapy, crystal therapy, color therapy... aroused great enthusiasm, seemed to intensify our experience of *Kriya*: they worked for some time, afterwards they were forsaken.

It was also typical for us to take part in various forms of alternative psychotherapy during weekend seminars. Those methods recalled the traditional ones, giving great importance to report publicly one's childhood traumas. From the legal point of view, such activities had to be camouflaged as social games, cultural or religious activities. I remember vividly how, sitting on the ground in circle, we formed work groups and, overcoming inner

resistances, shared, sometimes with acute suffering, experiences that we had never told before. There were also those who tried to find again, through hypnotic regression, their past lives in order to revive and then understand the deeper traumas ...

It seemed - and idea was not so bad - that this process of removal of the internal blocks could help the energy flow better in the body during *Kriya*; this process, in turn, becoming more intense could give the decisive help in the most delicate phases of the process of global cleaning.

The idea to put in motion this virtuous circle fascinated us without limit, unfortunately some went a lot away from *Kriya* up to lose it entirely.

A few were ensnared by the claim that the classical meditative practices - the sober methods adopted for a long time by the mystics of various religions - were not valid for our time - they were all right up to 50 years ago, but with the *new era* man had evolved and should employ faster tools. They were seduced by the temptation of applying faster means. They became enthusiastic of expensive techniques shared over the weekend, which in 20 minutes a day produce regeneration of the DNA, expansion of conscience ever gotten with other means, final liberation etc....

For one friend in particular, the events took a very bad turn. He intuitively understood the difference between mystical and magic dimension, nevertheless, he didn't stop dreaming that in the esoteric field there were secret techniques, known only to few elects, which constituted a short cut to Self realization.

For some time he tried to "improve" *Kriya* by incorporating various esoteric techniques, even those described in the rituals of *ceremonial magic*. He was convinced that only by using certain rituals, formulas and initiatic symbols it was possible to complete the evolutionary jump conducive to the liberation.

He met a self-named expert in occult matters who purported to know the secrets of an almost disappeared esoteric path and, in particular, a spiritual technique - far more advanced than those known today - which was practiced centuries or millennia ago, from few privileged ones.

This friend got into a situation in which the same economic bases, essential to his living, risked to be swept away, destroyed to shambles.

The pseudo expert, who created the impression of being a dreamer but was not so naïve as it seemed, easily bewitched him. «Now that humanity is different from before, such teachings are not revealed to anyone» he started off; then after a pause, finally, with a sigh, concluded: «The actual researchers would not know how to appreciate them and, in their hands, they could be dangerous.»

He used an enchanting terminology similar to that of the Kabbalah (mystical movement within the Judaism) but talked effortlessly about the original

Christianity also, whose texts (canonical and apocryphal) he was able to interpret in a non-conventional way.

My friend tried to captivate the teacher in order to receive more information. Confiding he was willing to accept whatever toll and deprivation, consent to whatever behest provided that this extraordinary secret will be revealed to him, he actually fell into the trap.

After having expressed some reservations, our smart teacher at long last he capitulated murmuring: «Only for you, only because I feel I am *guided* to make an exception».

My friend, a poor victim quivering with emotion, lived the best moment of his life, convinced that the meeting with the expert had been decided in the higher spheres. The donation he offered during the initiation - united to the promise of keeping the absolute secrecy - was conspicuous since in that way he would have confirmed the great value attributed to that event.

The donation would serve to the teacher to carry on good works... obviously! (Such teachers affirm invariably they give the donations to a certain monk—curiously not a priest— which takes care of an orphanage.)

While my friend, completely satisfied, was preparing to receive such an incomparable *gift* (our occult expert underlined with emphasis that it was a gift and that nothing could adequately compensate the benedictions that such an initiation would bring in his life) the teacher distractedly decided what kind of trash-stuff he was going to demonstrate with glaring solemnity. As soon as the new technique was acquired and tested with indescribable emotion, my friend spent two days of sheer fervor.

Later, imprisoned in his chimera, he witnesses the rekindling of his passion and the comedy repeated. He heard about other incomparably valuable "revelations". This illusion is, in effect, indomitable.

After having received his drug, continued his inexorable run towards the abyss. After having covered a vast round, all the roads, one after the other, would close in front of him.

I cannot predict if, one day, he will realize that the techniques for which he paid a fortune had been taken from some books and altered in order that he would not to guess their origin.

The spiritual path is for those who, even if they have done all what human folly can conceive and wasted years in exhausting their vital energy, from a certain moment onwards decide to turn over a new leaf and seek no "powers" anymore, but the peace and comfort which are revealed by the process of interiorisation.

**# Being unable to accept the power a real spiritual experience and from then onwards privilege only the study of books. Kriya is conceived as a philosophy having in itself a power of redemption.**

Some people love to cultivate purely esoteric-occult knowledge. They are familiar with some methods of spiritual investigation, but as far as the concrete use of the techniques is concerned, they bring ahead only a timorous, hasty experimentation. Usually they give a great emphasis on ethics.

It is difficult to find a plausible reason that clarifies how an endless wealth is waiting to manifest behind the screen of their mental revolutions, still they don't make the least step to seize it or to allow its radiance to clean the dusty cellar where they prefer living.

They spend all their time reading spiritual books and getting involved in endless discussions with some friend of similar interests. There are good books from which they could draw benefit, but it seems that they prefer to keep them at a distance; they state they have already read them all, but it is a lie. The books they warmly recommend surprise us for the quantity of information they contain. While reading it we enter an almost hypnotic state and don't immediately realize that each chain of ideas herein contained is without support, is the offspring of the unbridled imagination of the author. We are amazed to see how, through an intoxication of words, the author's imagination dares to develop free from the relationship with the reality and from the rules of logic. The whole thing seems to us a pure fun - comparable to that of reading thrillers. We wonder how a researcher can think, by studying such a junk, to evolve somehow. At least in one case, I understood the reason accountable for this behavior.

I suppose that it was an unresolved *guilt complex* that stopped the *Kriya* efforts of a friend of mine and turned him into a lazy reader. He was really a good person; in his youth he lived passionately the intention of doing some good to humanity. He was full of a sincere respect toward all people. Sometimes he was embittered in seeing how his disinterested actions clashed with the ignorance and the coarseness of people.

He ardently aspired to follow the path of Enlightenment. We shared the passion for esoteric and for books. Actually we read too many junk literature: instead of feeling a repulsion for all those deformations, we let being enthralled by the imaginations of the most varied authors. It is hard to believe what enormous impact had on us a book when the title or the four lines of introduction made us guess that it contained the key of the hidden mysteries!

Together we shared the enthusiasm for the discovery of *Kriya*. While waiting

to be initiated in it, he practiced some form of *Pranayama*. One or two weeks were enough for having a spiritual awakening experience whose intensity deeply disturbed him: the Spiritual Reality manifested to him as *Immutability* itself. He used these very words, talking with me. As the days went by, I saw dismayed that he was scared that the practice, putting before his eyes the dark side of his personality, might jeopardize his *psychic poise*. His religious ideals caused him not accept what could emerge from the depths of his personality. Well enough disguised, a unhealed wound held him back. Extolling the value of the ethical principles and making me sick by insisting that no one should practice any technique of meditation without having first achieved a perfectly moral life, he was indeed addressing only himself.

«It is better that I don't start practicing techniques whose effect I am not sure» - he said to me - «it is better I wait I am totally sure of what I am about to handle». He adopted such an extreme prudence that he seemed prematurely aged - even his walk appeared trembling.

Assuming that he was sincere, many times I tried to open his eyes, making him aware that his objection was absurd. At last I acknowledge my failure. It was not correct to waste my time forcing him to build complicated pretexts to consolidate his decision. I stopped "tormenting" him and made our usual banquets of words cease. The duty toward my soul had to prevail over that of courtesy. The force of mutual excitement born from our lofty interests was a sort of aspiration toward an ideal soul-friendship; but through it I wouldn't get to anything, rather, in a dangerous way, I would be estranged from my soul.

After years of separation we met again, he seemed the quintessence of the sage. In his beautiful eyes I read the joy of our meeting and a warm message: «As you see, I have not yielded to the common way of living!»

He had the past enthusiasm, intact, but perhaps either his mind was opaque or he did not permit me to enter it. He went on reproducing, with varied words, old basic beliefs – I admired the widening of his lexicon.

Observing the sunset and talking peacefully, I was sitting with him when, at a certain point, it dawned on me that he was doing nothing but defending himself from me. He guided the talk in such a cunning way, that it was impossible that I could remind his past and that great experience.

He promise he would call on me, but he did not come and it is unlikely he will come.

### **# The use of spiritism to contact the Kriya masters**

There are persons who claim they have the privilege ... to communicate directly with the historical Masters of *Kriya*.

If spiritism kept its promises, it would be the most valid mine of information -

a direct connection with the beyond, far more accurate than any other source! Indeed, those who practice it feel they are infinitely more fortunate than any other spiritual researcher. Those among them who firmly believe that a great worldly upheaval (cataclysm) is round the corner, seem always optimistic and walk on air, having received the assurance that they will be saved.

Many came to spiritism dreaming to contact a deceased relative or friend, some were moved by the sheer thirst of occult knowledge.

The classical mediumship - characterized by a person (medium) who enters a trance state and a desk which answers the questions put by the bystanders through a code of loud raps - has handed over its place to more modern methods such as those where all the participants, putting their hands on the upside-down glass move it among the letters of the alphabet stamped on a comfortable flexible tablet. Many prefer the more accessible revelations of a *Channeler*, who lets the invoked entity express through the flood of his own eloquence. It is curious to see how the *Channeler's* biographies trace a common scheme.

All tell that once they were skeptic of their own faculties and would not accept to yield to the higher Will who had decided to entrust them the mission to serve as medium between spirits and humanity. Once they mission was accepted, from the same ultra mundane source came the inspiration to mix the flow of the various revelations with the diagnosis of unlikely illnesses, with prescription of expensive alternative remedies.

What I witnessed, with a sadness sharpened by the particular situations which at that time took place, was the mental fragility of the most part of people practicing spiritism. They puzzled me not only on account of their statements but also of what appeared through their eyes. It was as if, from behind the mask of their face, another personality appeared, extremely self-confident, who allowed others to defraud them in the worst of the ways. How strange is the whole matter! Apart from the *automatic writing* in which the one who asks is the same person that gives the answer, the Medium knows in advance the preferences and anticipations of the person who addresses him. Therefore all becomes as a closed circuit: question and answer reverberate in an endless loop like the feedback whistle of a microphone set next to its loud speaker. As anyone can observe, the messages are always agreeable. Every adept, even of limited intelligence, receives the message that the Divine has assigned him *an important mission...*

To be entangled in this activity is an amazingly easy way of destroying, in short time, years of genuine spiritual effort. I have some grounds to believe that the untrustworthy soil of spiritism is one of the best areas to cultivate splits inside one's personality. I knew some *kriyabans* who plunged into situations of such a narrowness of vision that their life style appeared

grotesque. Their original desire to find total freedom, spiritual realization, ended giving all their possessions, and their life, to a person who was an authentic scoundrel.

As I have announced there are those who claim they communicate directly with the main historical Masters of *Kriya*. It is pathetic and even amusing being told their message coming from the hereafter: «In this epoch, the *Kriya* is old-fashioned and useless. Devotion is enough!».

### # Conflict with one's native religion

During our childhood, almost all of us received a spiritual formation inside a structured religion. Great was the strength with which some religious myths were inculcated in our consciousness. Introduced through tales and made more real by some pleasant depictions, those myths were invested with a particular soundness especially if they contained a vivid description of some ideal character that was missing or weak in our family constellation.

Although during our adolescence those myths were questioned, at full maturity we felt again their enchanting charm - they embody a part of our past.

The perfume of those old tales is like an incense of nostalgia, like a balm of infantile joy spreading on the never-healed wounds of our existence. If we take part in religious rites, a chain of memories of lost times and of disappeared dear ones starts ... the heart is affected, deep feelings are involved as hardly as ever before.

For some people, infancy's conditioning obtain an unassailable solidity and turns into a set of fixed elements in one's way of thinking. In our subconsciousness an iron intention takes shape: «The dimension of the faith which I received from my parents is distilling for me the perfume of the most beautiful time of my life. I have to defend it at any cost».

Now, let us understand what happens when a person, who is living this experience decides to learn a discipline like *Kriya*.

At the very beginning, one is elated by its efficacy. One has the feeling that one's religious life has received a powerful recharging of enthusiasm and has become *one-pointed*.

Even if it is difficult to conceive the idea that the "strange" exercises are in themselves a self-sufficient mystical path, one will start to look at them with increasing attention and growing respect.

The problem occurs when one deems it necessary to relate about his or her choice and efforts with a spiritual director. The risk of yielding to restricting and narrow suggestions, received from those to whom one addresses naïvely,

is very strong. It is a pity that this event may create a total shipwreck of one's venture with *Kriya*.

Ministers of a religion might not be even informed about the practices of the mystics of their own religion. They might not grasp the genuine meaning of a meditative practice. The vice of studying too many books could have choked their instinctive innocence; there are books that dirty the conscience and burn the intellect.

The continuous cerebral effort of replying with clever answers to other people's existential questions and sighs — answers so nice to stun the same person who pronounced them — wears out one's sense of proportion. Receiving the confidences of a *kriyaban*, a Minister might articulate utter absurdities: that our desire to proceed along the mystical path is a dangerous fixation born from unresolved psychological problems; that the Prayer has a worth only if it is done in community; that the only valid form of meditation consists mainly in studying and meditating upon the Holy Writings...

They are inclined to judge spiritual experiences as self-produced hysterical imaginations. It is sad to see that the most part of the so-called religious persons are convinced that the mystics were men chosen by God, to whom a particular *grace* was granted - «we should by no means try to follow their footsteps, unless we become mentally unstable!» some think.

The emotional implication of their words, can overcome the wisdom's reasons and burn to ashes the aspiration of a researcher. A devotee can be thus convinced that his/her main duty is to achieve a solid doctrinal formation. Obviously there is nothing to say against the study of the tenets of a religion, provided that it is integrated with the study of the works of the great mystics. A merely rational study of theological truths may not harmonize to the sensibility a researcher is laboriously developing. Probably one will be thrown into crisis and will experience guilt. We know that the strength with which one can withstand any contrary suggestion is directly proportional to the experiences of divine joy met in meditation - but here we are considering a beginner. The anguish of being on the wrong path, doomed to eternal damnation, not appeased by the strength of the contrary idea, creates a hardening of one's heart: the splendid adventure may come to a standstill.

I knew persons who were *kriyabans* since years (and were really dogmatic) who turned against *Kriya* as if it was a demoniac product. It was not a pretty sight to observe their behavior and listen to their words, where surely equilibrium and objectivity was lacking. One wondered if their emotionalism was polluted by superstition or by a spine-chilling intellectual dishonesty.

Who might say if, during a sunny day, in the middle of nature (which is, indeed, a great teacher – perhaps more than books), in front of a boundlessly extending panorama, they can feel the desire of practicing a meditation



technique once again. Goodness knows if the naturalness of such a practice will succeed in melting the choking hold of their fear, and if the splendid adventure will be rekindled again!

### # Not recognizing the real value of Kriya

This is a very common situation especially among those *kriyabans* who received the teachings from an organization (or from a renowned teacher). Actually there is no trace of self teaching attitude in them; they would not be able to learn *Kriya* by themselves through a written material and would never accept to learn it from a friend. Not having had a crumble of a spiritual experience, their intuition is blunt. They feel they are unworthy: they apply conscientiously the *Kriya* techniques but are convinced that they have to carry on a formidable work on the mental, psychological plan in order to "grow" on the spiritual plane.

They brood over one single worry: «What can I do in the domain of my mind, of my habits in order to ameliorate myself?» Their basic idea is that the Divine resides outside our human beings and that an individual can come closer to It only if he/she has gained some merit. They are convinced that by working very hard through self discipline and hard renunciations it is possible to destroy in their consciousness the roots of iniquity and egoism. They don't trust the sheer employment of a technique unless it is coupled with a toilsome effort of tormenting and torturing their psychological structure. *Kriya* is only a corollary of this pivotal work. They want to build brick by brick, fatiguing at the extreme, just as if it were a complex construction, their Redemption.

Such an attitude makes, on principle, any progress on the spiritual path virtually impossible. The mystical experience happens when one is totally relaxed and at peace with oneself. Only then something of tremendously vast, beyond the mind, manifests itself suddenly and overwhelms the dichotomy of worthy or unworthy. Now, if during one's own meditative practices, breath and heart pulse seem to disappear, these researchers, being always on the alert, instead of relaxing, block the experience. There may be only one way out: that the spiritual experience may emerge when they are too much tired or sleepy to react, and sweep their resistances away. If this doesn't happen, in time they get tired of their efforts and *Kriya* disappears from their life without regret and afterthought. This disappearance is perceived as a rebirth and they live happy from now on.

## # Attaching to Kriya a magic value

*Kriya* has nothing to do with paranormal studies, or fruitless attempts in developing the latent powers of the mind.

If in some context the word *mystic* evokes a relationship with the mystery, with the concept of initiation (from the Greek μυστικός [mustikos], an initiate) into secret religious rituals (also this from the Greek μύω, to conceal), a *mystic* is one who tries sincerely (adopting any form of mental and bodily discipline) to surrender himself/herself to *something* which lays beyond the territories of the mind, unattainable by the sheer power of will and imagination, which is the quintessence of supreme comfort.

Unfortunately many harbor the attitude the illusion that *Kriya* is a series of secrets (of growing effectiveness as soon as one moves towards the *Higher Kriyas*) to be exploited in the most cunning possible way – while remaining virtually the same *Ego*. They practice very little, while they pretend to practice a lot. They have often heard that *Kriya* is «the supreme among all the spiritual techniques, the air plane route to God realization».

This idea embodies their universe: it has filled at the full the small space of their brain. They go on losing contact with the reality. They fantasize about what does not exist. They believe they are able to help others, to change their destiny, to burn their *Karma*.

They are tied to a magic-esoteric conception of *Kriya* which is obviously a caricature of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*.

This frenzy may last forever or disappear suddenly for reasons of a chilling banality, like meeting a *kriyaban* who suffers from a serious ailment. «How is such a thing possible! *Kriya* has no value!» They substitute it with another practice - not necessarily something noble (Buddhist meditation, Chi Kung..) but something that when you listen to its name or definition from their lips, it is a miracle that you don't explode with laughter (however you cannot avoid collapsing into giggles for the rest of the day).

## # Attachment to persons, not to the path

Everyone agrees that the esoteric knowledge is best transmitted through a strong human relationship. It is also self-evident that to slip into an uncritical personality cult, in the deification process of the figure of the teacher, is the death of the spiritual search. Sometimes, a disciple is spellbound by the idea of "transmission of power". We know that a lot of esoteric brotherhoods and great mystical traditions teach that the strength of the great Teachers of the

past, their subtle vibration is still present in their descendants —not because of consanguinity, but through the transmission of their "power", as a non-stop chain. Their tenet is that the spiritual progress cannot happen but through receiving it. A few people are authorized to act like channels of this transmission. The great financial means that an organization possesses don't serve only to maintain the beauty of their buildings but also to provide luster and surround with a divine aura their Ministers and representatives.<sup>52</sup>

It is normal that one feels the highest respect for that human channel who is officially invested by the mission of transmitting this particular "benediction". It is reasonable then that one tries to conquer a place in his/her heart. The problem is that sometimes this attainment becomes more important than the same meditation. The emotional impact of this conditioning is strong and it turns, with time, into unreasonable claims: one wants to be accepted, to be loved and looks for any occasion to have private interviews with that beloved person. Even if one has no doubts about the techniques, one makes up some questions, just for the satisfaction of entertaining a useless, emotive-toned, correspondence.

I became acquainted with an elder *kriyaban*, worthy of the maximum respect and admiration, who began the *Kriya* path a lot of years before me. We saw each other in the last years of his life. There were moments in which, knowing the total loneliness in which he lived, it broke my heart to remain months without seeing him. For various reasons this was inevitable; I always met him for short and transient afternoons, walking and quietly speaking. I rejoiced at his company, yet I felt as if a giant wave of inexplicable nostalgia was ready to overwhelm me but remained as if suspended. I was witness to an inexorable process that brought him to the point of living only on the warm rays coming from the memory of an embrace, or a glance, or even a simple nod once received from a person (the epitome of his ideal of perfection) belonging to the executive board of his *Kriya* organization. His supreme delight was the illusion of having created a privileged bond with that person. He had given his full approval to the idea that on this planet there were special people, like the aforementioned "Self realized" one, and irreparably common people. In a dimension of utter authenticity, one day he vented all of his despondency. Looking at how superficially—so he said—he had practiced the

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<sup>52</sup> People forget easily how important is to proceed without ever giving another person or institution the right to abuse them. However discussing the theme of cults, where the dignity of the individual is crushed, lies outside our main theme. For a researcher who would invest his time in studying this matter, there are so many sources from which he can draw precious material. Undoubtedly striking is the material supplied by the institutions that aim at defending people from cults. Shocking are the web sites created by ex-adepts of a cult.

techniques of meditation, he had no doubts that, in this life, he had certainly missed the "target". He was already dreaming of a future incarnation in which he could have practiced with great engagement. He expressed what, years before he would not have even dared to think: the idea that a presumed evolution of the individual, achieved through *Kriya*, was so slow, to be practically negligible.

(Strange to say, the idea of an automatic evolution determined by iron mathematic laws, remained in him as an instinctive reflex and he would continue to repeat it while addressing to people inquiring about *Kriya*.)

The *Kriya* techniques was, for him, like a religious ritual which had to be performed scrupulously just to give proof of loyalty. Unfortunately, this ineluctable axiom was the loom upon which he had been interweaving his thought. Sometimes, I felt myself drifting in his state of sweet resignation but could not accept that the practice of *Kriya* left people, after decades, in the same condition in which they had started to practice it. My friend lived in the certainty of something beautiful that existed in the beyond; his being was already projected in that dimension. Now that he left us, I wonder if the diffusion of *Kriya* here in the West had served only to that, to spread the cult of certain persons who are "impudently" saint, perfect, majestic. How wretched it had been for him the belief that his *supreme good* depended on a human loving glance coming from the person he felt as divine! He had made the unforgivable mistake to believe that the eternal spiritual source in the center of his being, dried up when far from the blessings of the one person towards whom he directed the warm love of his heart.

## GLOSSARY

This glossary has been added for those who already know the meaning of the most common terms used in Kriya but do not wish to retain uncertainties about the way they are utilized in this book.

**Alchemy** [internal - Nei Dan]      The Internal Alchemy is the mystical tradition of ancient China. It reminds us of the techniques of First Kriya with such precision that we have all the reasons to assume that it consists in the same process.

The airy-fairy hypothesis that the techniques of the Internal Alchemy had been brought from India to China during the ancient times, reveals the tendency to consider India as the only possible land where men guessed - or received - the secrets of the mystical path.

The consideration of an independent development of the two paths leads to a very fruitful idea of the universality of the mystical tools. Lahiri Mahasaya expressed his certainty that if, for whichever reason, the Kriya techniques disappeared from the tradition, they would, in any case be rediscovered by those mystics who had a pure heart and therefore a discerning vision.

To study Kriya in the light of other mystical traditions can yield an unexpected deepening of its essence and foster a respect for each of its original techniques – even if they do not seem properly Indian or yogic.

The tendency to remove from the Kriya praxis anything which may seem non yogic is dangerous. Just to make an example, there are some teachers who have twisted Navi Kriya - either eliminating it entirely or erasing the concentration on the navel, thus reducing the technique to a pure concentration on the third Chakra.

Lahiri Mahasaya wrote unambiguously about the deep, irreplaceable action of unfastening the knot of the navel – not of the Manipur!

On the other hand, with a similar attitude toward destroying the wealth of a tradition—without being in a position of complete understanding—there are teachers of Inner Alchemy who have spoiled their discipline by removing from it anything relating to the breath; they have thus subtracted from the treasure of their art the very factor giving it the main reason to be considered a real alchemy - namely a chemical transformation of the breath into a more refined substance.

About Internal Alchemy we observe that:

a... The micro cosmic orbit technique resembles the Kriya Pranayama.

The difference is that the energy goes down in the body touching not the Chakras but the points on the surface of the body which are connected with the Chakras: Adam's apple, the central region of the sternum, the navel, the pubic region and the perineum. By going ahead with the practice, the difference fades away, as the result produced upon the body's energy is just the same.

b... The subsequent phase of descent into the Dan Tien resembles Navi Kriya to such an extent that it isn't even worth noting the differences.

c... The procedure of lifting the Dan Tien into the heart's region (middle Dan Tien) by focusing on the vibration produced in the first one recalls Lahiri Mahasaya's instruction to reach the knot of the heart by tuning first with the Equilibrium state in the Samana region in the abdomen.

d... The final raising of the middle Dan Tien into the superior Dan Tien resembles Yoni Mudra.

e... The concept of the macro cosmic orbit (which is different from micro cosmic orbit)

resembles that of the Pranayama with internal breath.

**Apana** Apana is one of the five forms of energy in the body. Associated with the lower abdominal region, it is responsible for all the bodily functions (elimination for example) that take place there.

Kriya Pranayama, in its initial phase, is essentially the movement of Prana (the particular form of energy present in the upper part of the trunk – lungs and heart) into Apana and the movement of Apana into Prana.

When we inhale, the energy from outside the body is brought within and meets Apana in the lower abdomen; during exhalation, the Apana moves from its seat up and mingles with Prana.

The continuous repetition of this event generates an increase of heat in the navel region: this calms the breath and kindles the light of the Spiritual Eye.

**Asana** Physical postures fit for meditation. According to Patanjali, the Yogi's posture must be steady and pleasant. The most part of the kriyabans are comfortable with the so-called Half-lotus [see]: this, indeed, avoids some physical problems. For the average kriyaban, Siddhasana [see] is considered superior to any other Asana.

If we take finally into account those kriyabans who are expert of Hatha-Yoga, who have become very flexible, the perfect position is undoubtedly Padmasana [see].

**Aswini (Ashwini) Mudra** "Ashwa" means "horse"; "Aswini Mudra" means "Mudra of the female horse" because the anal contraction resembles the movement a horse makes with its sphincter immediately after evacuation of the bowels.

There may be slightly different definitions of it and, sometimes, it is confused with Mula Bandha [see].

The basic definition is to repeatedly contract the muscles at the base of the spine (sphincter) with the rhythm of about two contractions per second.

This Mudra is a direct way of getting in touch with the locked and stagnant energy at the base of the spine and to pump it up.

While learning the technique, a yogi contracts the buttock muscles, perineum or even the entire pelvic region also; with time, the contraction involves only the sphincter muscles, thus stimulating the energy at its correct location.

The purpose of this Mudra is accomplished when the yogi feels waves of energy in the lower region of the spine or a strong presence of energy on the surface of the entire body.

This technique is not a standard Kriya one, nevertheless some teachers counsel it especially to those who are unable to practice Kechari Mudra; they recommend to practice it during the first 12-24 Pranayama breaths - during inhalation and exhalation. Subsequently, the physical movement decreases naturally in intensity, while the awareness is strongly brought into the spine. When this technique is done separately it produces good effects but nothing in comparison with those obtained when it is practiced during Kriya Pranayama.

**Bandha** In Yoga no practice of Pranayama is considered complete without the Bandhas. They are energy valves as much as locks, not simple muscle contractions, which prevent the energy from being dissipated and redirect it inside the spine.

In Jalandhara Bandha the neck and the throat are slightly contracted, while the chin is pressed against the breast. In Uddiyana Bandha the abdominal muscles are slightly contracted to intensify the perception of energy in the spinal column. In Mula Bandha

the perineal muscles - between the anus and the genital organs - are slightly contracted while a mental pressure is exerted on the lower part of the spine.

(Differently from Aswini Mudra, one does not simply tighten the sphincter muscles; in Mula Bandha the perineum seems to fold upward as the pelvic diaphragm is drawn upward through the motion of the pubic bone.) The three Bandhas, applied simultaneously, create an almost ecstatic inner shiver, a feeling of energy current moving up the spine. In the very beginning of the Kriya path, a yogi has only an approximate understanding of the Bandhas, later one will come to a complete command and will be able to use them, with slight adaptations, in most of the Kriya techniques.

**Bindu** A spiritual center located in the occipital region where the hairline twists into a kind of vortex. Until the energy, scattered in the body, reaches the Bindu, a sort of shroud prevents the yogi from contemplating the Spiritual Eye. Bringing all one's force there, in that tiny place, is not an easy task because the deeper roots of the Ego are to be found right there; they must be faced and eradicated.

**Breathless state** There is a halo of mystery that surrounds the description of this state; people think it is impossible and that any affirmation about its occurrence is false. Nevertheless, it is possible, even if it is experienced only after years of Kriya practice. It has nothing to do with holding the breath forcefully. It does not simply mean that the breath becomes more and more quiet. It is the state where the breath is entirely non-existent, with the subsequent dissolution of the mind. When it manifests, a kriyaban does not feel the need to take in any breath at all or one takes in a very short breath but doesn't feel the need to exhale for a very long time. (Longer than the time which medicine considers as possible.)

The breath becomes so calm that the practitioner has the factual perception that one is not breathing at all; one feels a fresh energy in the body, sustaining its life from inside, without the necessity of oxygen. It is fantastic! Without any feeling of uneasiness, this condition lasts various minutes. There is not the least quiver of surprise, or the thought: «Finally I have it!». This does not mean that the person is unaware: he or she is perfectly aware, but in a calm, very detached way. One is as carried away, far away from any known territory and is aware enough to understand that this is the key experience of his/her life; an elation, which nothing in life can give, is experienced.

According to the Kriya theory, this state is the result of having completed the work of cutting of the heart knot. It embodies the characteristics of the authentic "religious" life. In order to obtain it, it is necessary to live in an active but also introverted way. By maintaining, during the activities of the day, the after effects of Kriya, the Prana in the body loses any restlessness; deep calmness pervades each part of the psychophysical constitution. Then, cessation of the breath, during Kriya sessions, begin to happen.

**Chakra** During centuries men developed tools aiming at traveling, while in perfect immobility, with one's awareness in the depths of their soul: at a certain point they discovered the reality of the Chakras. By tuning with them, they reached the highest possible level while residing in a human body, the full activation of the Sahasrara Chakra. During this journey various spiritual experiences, described in the specialized literature, would occur. Today, almost any student of Yoga has been enchanted by the beautiful image of the Divine Mother Kali, which is Kundalini, who finds union with her beloved husband, the supreme Shiva, who resides in eternal bliss at the top of the skull. This is a symbol of the supreme adventure that a soul can experience.

The word Chakra comes from the Sanskrit *cakra* meaning "wheel" or "circle". The

Chakras are the "wheels" of our spiritual life; they are described in the tantric texts as emanations from the Spirit, whose essence gradually have expanded in more and more gross levels of manifestation, reaching eventually the dimension of the base Chakra, the Muladhara, embodying the physical world. The descended energy-consciousness, lies coiled and sleeping at the base of the spine and is called, Kundalini - she who is coiled. The soul comes from the womb of eternity: Kundalini awakens it to the full memory of its origin.

No author has ever "proven" the existence of the Chakras – as no man has ever proven the existence of the soul. It is difficult to describe them: we cannot bring them on a table of a laboratory. In any Yoga book we find descriptions which lean over a translation of two Indian texts, the Sat-Cakra-Nirupana, and the Padaka-Pancaka, by Sir John Woodroffe, alias Arthur Avalon, in a book entitled The Serpent Power. The matter depicted there seems to be unnaturally complicated, almost impossible to be utilized. These concepts had been further polluted by theosophy and similar esoteric literature. The controversial C. W. Leadbeater's book The Chakras, is in large part the result of the mental elaboration of his own experiences.

Through the practice of Kriya, we can have an experience of the Chakras. Located over the anus at the very base of the spinal column, in the lower part of the coccyx, we encounter the root Chakra Muladhar, a center which distributes energy to the legs, to the lowest part of the pelvis, irradiating especially the Gonads (testes in men, ovaries in women).

Attributing some psychological effects to the stimulation of this or of that Chakra is a difficult task. I don't want to parrot some New Age rubbish but just provide a general idea of what a kriyaban may experience. The Kriya techniques arouse specific effects (especially perceived in the day following the practice) in many ways: moods, fancies, memories and suddenly-arising desires. All this is beneficial. To vividly live long forgotten parts of our life through our excited memory is a cleansing process. This process has within itself an equilibrating mechanism which will prevent one from being overwhelmed by sudden storms of grey moods.

Now, with this in mind, we read that Muladhar symbolizes the objective consciousness, the awareness of the physical universe. It is related to instinct, security, to our ability to ground ourselves in the physical world, to the desire for material goods and also the building of a good self-image. If this Chakra is in a harmonious state, we are centered and have a strong will to live.

The second sacral Chakra Swadhasthan is placed inside the spine between the last lumbar vertebrae and the beginning of the sacrum. It is said that its area of energetic projection is the area of the sexual organs - in part it intersects the region of Muladhar's influence.

Since it is related to base emotion, sexuality vitality, creativity, and to the deepest part of the subconscious realms, a deep stimulus of it produces deep involving dreams; its action may be perceived as a feeling of living a fable, whose nature is sweet and alluring.

The Manipur, navel or solar plexus, is placed in the spine at the same level of the Navel, near the end of the dorsal vertebrae and the beginning of the lumbar ones. It is said to influence pancreas and the adrenal glands on top of the kidneys. This connection gives fuel to the idea that this Chakra has the same role played by those glands: higher emotion and energy - just like the role played by adrenalin. It is said that it fosters a sense of personal power, secure feeling of "I Am.". Grounded and comfortable with our place in the universe, we are able to affirm with determination the purpose of our life.

The Anahat, heart Chakra, located in the spine at the height of the middle part of the



dorsal vertebrae, is said to influence the thymus, which is part of the immune system. There is a universal agreement that it is related to higher emotion, compassion, love and intuitiveness. When a person concentrates on it, feelings of profound tenderness and compassion will start to develop. A healthy and fully open heart Chakra means to be able to see the inner beauty in others—in spite of their apparent faults. One is able to love everyone, even the strangers we meet on the street. There is a progression from the instinctual "gut emotions" of the lower Chakras to the higher emotions and feelings of the heart Chakra. What is of great interest for us, is that opening this center means to see life in a more neutral manner and see what others cannot see. It ends the predisposition to being influenced by other people, by churches and by organizations in general.

Vishuddha, throat Chakra, exactly amid the last cervical vertebrae and the first dorsal vertebrae, is said to influence Thyroid and Parathyroid. Since it controls the activity of the vocal cords as well, it is said that it has something to do with the capacity to express our ideas in the world. It seems to be related with the capacity for communication and with taking personal responsibility for our actions. The person is no longer blaming others for his or her problems and can carry on with life with full responsibility. Many authors state it awakens artistic inspiration, the ability to develop superior aesthetic perception.

Ajna, third eye Chakra, located in the central part of the brain, influences the pituitary gland [hypophysis] and the small brain. The hypophysis has a vital role in organism, in the sense that together with the hypothalamus it acts as a command system of all other endocrine glands. In Sanskrit, "Ajna" translates to "command," which means it has the command or control of our lives: through controlled action, it brings to reality the fruit of our desires. Consequently, it is said that Ajna Chakra has a vital role in the spiritual awakening of a person. It is the seat of the intuition.

The supreme Chakra is the Sahasrara, crown Chakra, right above the top of the head. It is said that it influences, or is bound with, the pineal gland. It allows detachment from illusion and is related to one's overall expansion of awareness and degree of tuning with the Divine Reality. It is a superior reality and we can experience it only in the state of breathlessness. It is possible to "tune" into it by utilizing the Bindu as a doorway.

A kriyaban does not need to use the power of visualization in order to perceive the reality of the Chakras. In some Yoga schools it is counseled to visualize their specific color (red, orange, yellow...like the sequence of the rainbow's colors). They may be also visualized as lotuses, each one of which has a particular number of petals with a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet on each petal.

In Kriya, while calming the storm of the breath by letting the energy flow through them, one chants Om or other harmonious Mantras at their location. When the awareness, coming up from Muladhar to Sahasrara and vice versa, stays for at least half minute upon each one of them, the perception of a pleasurable sweet sensation is almost immediate. Some inner sounds as well as hues of light pouring forth from their locations deepens the contact with the Omkar dimension. In time a kriyaban gains ability to single out the different rates of vibration of each Chakra, which is crucial to reach the final liberation from all the suffering and limitations mixed up with our life.

Let us consider the question: can we receive negative results from Kriya because one or more Chakras are blocked?

The answer cannot but be no. Surely we can experience particular emotions.

It is said that any feeling of insecurity, of being out of touch with daily life is due to blockages in Muladhar. The same is when we desire to avoid any physical activity.

In a similar way all the mood swings originated by blocks in Chakra Swadhisthana are

going to disappear, also thanks to the great help by mental clarity coming from Manipura. Manipura's blocks may result in irritation and manifestations of anger. By working with Navi Kriya, they are going to disappear.

By working with Thokar, some problems in Anahat may become visible (feelings of unworthiness, self-pity, fear of rejection, or being afraid to let new things manifest). They are the result of possible traumas in childhood and adolescence.

It is said that any disharmony situated in Vishuddha is tied with problems of communication, the inability to find one's place in the society and to let one's potentialities turn into concrete action.

At the end let us hint to the "Frontal Chakras".

Teachings pertaining to them are to be found by some kriyabans coming from Sri Yukteswar's disciple lineage. The perineum is the first one, the genitals region is the second one, the navel is the third, the central part of the sternum region is the fourth, the Adam's apple is the fifth and the Kutastha may be considered as the sixth.

The core of the Kriya teaching regarding them, is that when these points are touched with concentration, the energy around the correspondent Chakra in the spine is revived.

**Dan Tien** Although pertaining to the ancient Chinese Internal Alchemical framework, by keeping clear in one's mind its location, a kriyaban can deepen the mechanism of Pranayama and of Navi Kriya.

According to Taoist philosophy, we have three Dan Tien, one in the lower abdomen (lower Dan Tien), one in the heart (middle Dan Tien) and one in the third eye (upper Dan Tien). Well, pacifying Prana at these precise locations is the very nucleus of the action of Kriya – hence our interest in this subject matter.

The lower Dan Tien or "The field of cinnabar" is the place where the practitioner "gathers, blends and cooks" his sexual, love, and spiritual energies. In order to localize its position, one has to concentrate on the belly button, then come about one and a half inches behind and below to the same extent: it can be visualized as a rubber ball about two and one-half inches in diameter.

It contains our peculiar vibration, the "note" which embodies our will to live in the physical body. It is the force which clears the way to the experience of the breathless state.

**Dharana** According to Patanjali, Dharana is the concentration on a physical or abstract object. In Kriya, Dharana consist in directing the focus of our attention towards the revelation of Spirit: Omkar's inner sound, light and movement sensation. This happens just after having calmed the breath.

**Dhyana** According to Patanjali, Dhyana ensues from contemplating the essential nature of the chosen object as a steady, uninterrupted flow of consciousness. In Kriya, the awareness, dwelling upon the Omkar reality, is soon lost in Samadhi.

**Flute sound** (during Pranayama) During Pranayama, a slight hiss is produced in the throat; when a kriyaban succeeds in assuming the position of Kechari Mudra, then the frequency of the sound of exhalation increases. It has been likened to the "flute of Krishna".

Lahiri Mahasaya describes it: «as if someone blew through a keyhole».

This highly enjoyable sound cuts to pieces any distraction, enables the mind to grow in calmness and transparency and helps to prolong effortlessly the practice of Pranayama. One day the flute sound turns into the Om sound. In other words, it gives rise to the Om

sound, whose vibration will be so strong as to overwhelm the flute sound. During this event, a strong movement of energy climbs up the spine.

Granti [see knot]

**Guru** The importance of finding a Guru (teacher) who supervises the spiritual training of the disciple is one of the tenets of many spiritual paths. One of the main Hindu texts, the Bhagavad Gita, is a dialog between God in the form of Krishna and the warrior prince Arjuna. Their dialog summarizes many of the ideals of Hinduism; the discussion and the relationship between the two is considered to be an expression of the ideal Guru - disciple relationship.

A Guru is a teacher, a guide and much more. The scriptures declare that the Guru is God and God is the Guru. There is a saying that if the devotee were presented to the Guru and God, first he would pay respect to the Guru, since the Guru had been instrumental in leading him to God. We are accustomed to explaining the term "Guru" on a metaphorical interplay between darkness and light, in which the Guru is seen as the dispeller of darkness: "Gu" stands for darkness and "Ru" for one who removes it. Some scholars dismiss that etymology; according to them "Gu" stands for "beyond the qualities" and "Ru" for "devoid of form".

In order to gain all the benefits from the contact with the Guru, a disciple has to be humble, sincere, pure in body and mind and ready to surrender to his Guru's will and instructions.

The criteria for choosing a Guru are complex: if he or she is not married they should be chaste, they should exhibit lack of interest in money, ability to sit in meditation for hours without any movement or disturbance. The lineage of the Guru is also sometimes given great importance. Is he initiated and by whom? Is there evidence that he was actually given initiation by the person he claims has initiated him?

It is commonly believed that such a chain of Gurus conveys the essential ingredient for the working of the Diksha - bestowing the esoteric knowledge upon the disciple, through which he will progress along the path to Self realization.

At times, it is accompanied by Shaktipat: the procedure of awakening the dormant spiritual knowledge within the disciple.

A formal recognition of this relationship, which usually assumes the form of a somewhat structured initiation ceremony, includes the Gurudakshina: the disciple bestows a valuable sign of gratitude to his Guru.

This is what the literature says. Now, let us face up the facts.

During the 1960s and 1970s, as an alternative to established religions, some people in Europe and in the USA looked up to spiritual guides from India, eager to receive from them the answers to the meaning of life. Many people turned to Gurus because they wanted to get high without the drugs that had opened for them the existence of the world beyond grasp. Many Gurus (not only from India) traveled mainly to the USA where they got groups of young followers. The word "Guru" was widely accepted to indicate not only a spiritual teacher but also someone who knows a lot about a particular subject.

Regretfully it acquired also very negative connotations to indicate a sort of charlatan or businessman pretending to be a saint. The revelations by ex-followers played an important part in recognizing that some Gurus had actually abused their status.

Within some Kriya organizations, the word Guru took on a weird meaning because it was attributed to a person whom the disciples had not known directly. They were

required to swear their everlasting devotion not only to one person but also to a chain of Masters, even if only one of them was to be regarded as the Guru-preceptor. Having been initiated into a spiritual discipline by the legitimate channels (authorized disciples), the departed Guru was said to be real and present in their life. They were taught that their Guru would burn somehow a part of their Karma and protect them evermore; he was a special aid chosen by God Himself even before they began to seek the spiritual path. Looking for a different spiritual teaching amounted to «a hateful rejection of the Divine's hand, stretched out to offer benediction».

A spiritual researcher with a balanced rational-devotional approach has some good reasons to be baffled by this.

Lahiri Mahasaya once said: «I am not the Guru, I don't maintain a barrier between the true Guru (the Divine) and the disciple». He added that he wanted to be considered a "mirror". In other words, each kriyaban should look at him not as an unreachable ideal, but as the personification of all the wisdom and spiritual realization which, in due time, the Kriya practice will be able to produce.

Now the question is: do the Kriya techniques work outside the Guru-disciple relationship? There is of course no scientifically proven answer. In this matter we can use either faith or reason. Many kriyabans are confident they are able to transform the no-matter-how-received instruction into "gold". They think: «Beyond either reasonable or improbable expectations of finding a Kriya expert at my disposal, let me roll my sleeves up and move on!»

**Half-lotus** This asana has been used for meditation since time immemorial because it provides a comfortable, very easily obtained, sitting position.

The left leg is bent at the knee, brought toward the body and the sole of the left foot is made rests against the inside of the right thigh. The heel of the left foot should be drawn in as far as possible. The right leg is bent at the knee and the right foot is placed over the fold of the left leg. The right knee is dropped as far as possible toward the floor. The hands rest on the knees. The secret is to maintain an erect spine: this can be obtained only by sitting on a cushion, thick enough, with the buttocks towards the front half of the cushion.

In this way the buttocks are slightly raised, while the knees are resting on the floor.

When the legs grow tired, the position is prolonged by reversing the legs.

In certain delicate situations, it may be providential to do it on a chair, provided it has no arms and is large enough. In this way, one leg at a time can be lowered and the knee articulation relaxed!

Note. The pressure of a tennis ball (or of a folded towel) on the Perineum can give the benefits of the Siddhasana position.

**Hesychasm** Many western seekers look to the East for learning some thoroughly experience-oriented techniques of meditation. Often they ignore the fact that a Christian tradition, methodical and precise, exists and is available in the Hesychast tradition.

As far as Kriya is concerned, in the fascinating world of Hesychasm we might have the opportunity to meet souls who know more than us about Pranayama and Thokar - although they have never heard the word Kriya!

The word Hesychasm derives from the Greek word "hesychia" meaning inner quietness, tranquility and stillness: outside this condition, meditation is not possible. It is a discipline integrating the continual repetition of the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner". It was already used by the early

Church Fathers in the 4th and 5th centuries) with the practice of asceticism.

There were hermits dwelling in the desert, seeking inner peace and spiritual insight, while practicing contemplation and self-discipline: they had no doubts about the fact that knowledge of God could be obtained only by purity of soul and prayer and not by study or mental amusements in the field of philosophy.

Later, their method of asceticism came to the fore as a concrete set of psychophysical techniques: this is properly the core of Hesychasm.

It was Simeon, "the new theologian" (1025-1092), who developed the quietist theory which such detail that he may be called the father of this movement.

The practice, which involved specific body postures and deliberate breathing patterns, was intended to perceive the *Uncreated Light of God*.

The monks of Athos might have kept on contemplating peacefully this Uncreated Light (they considered it to be the highest goal of earthy life) had not their methods been denounced as superstitious and absurd. The objection was mainly based on a vigorous denial of the possibility that this Uncreated Light was God's essence.

In approximately the year 1337, Hesychasm attracted the attention of a learned member of the Orthodox Church, Barlaam of Seminara, a Calabrian monk who held the office of abbot in a Monastery of Constantinople and who visited Mount Athos.

There he encountered the hesychasts and heard the descriptions of their practices. Barlaam, trained in Western Scholastic theology, was scandalized and began to combat it both orally and in his writings. He called the hesychasts "omphalopsychoi" - people having their souls in their navels (owing to the long time they spent concentrating on the navel region).

Barlaam propounded a more intellectual approach to the knowledge of God than the one taught by the hesychast: he asserted that the spiritual knowledge could be only a work of inquiry, brought ahead by one's mind and translated in discrimination between truth and untruth. He held that no part of God, whatsoever, could be viewed by humans.

The practice of the hesychasts was defended by St. Gregory Palamas. He was well educated in Greek philosophy and defended Hesychasm in the 1340 at three different synods in Constantinople, and he also wrote a number of works in its defense.

He used a distinction, already articulated in the 4th Century in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers, between the energies or operations of God and the essence of God: while the essence of God can never be known by his creatures, His energies or operations can be known both in this life and in the next; they convey to the Hesychast the truest spiritual knowledge of God.

In Palamite theology, it is the uncreated energies of God that illuminate the Hesychast who has been vouchsafed an experience of the Uncreated Light.

In 1341 the dispute was settled: Barlaam was condemned and returned to Calabria, afterwards becoming bishop in the Roman Catholic Church.

Later, Hesychast doctrine was established as the doctrine of the Orthodox Church.

Up to this day, 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 energies and the essence of God.

Today Mount Athos is the well-known center of the practice of Hesychasm. Books used by the Hesychasts include the *Philokalia*, a collection of texts on prayer and asceticism written from the 4th to the 15th Centuries [first published in the Greek language in 1782].

(This is a tedious text showing the attitude of the mind, obsessed by sin and temptations, to complicate the simplest things. Much more captivating is the book "*The Way of a Pilgrim*" which is one of the most widely read examples of Russian spiritual

literature [first published in English language in 1954]. The author, who is a devotee of the Jesus Prayer, has been identified on the basis of other witnesses as Russian Orthodox monk Archimandrite Mikhail Kozlov. The main reason for the work's attraction is the presentation of a wandering hermit's life as the model existence for those who would truly lead a spiritual life.

«By the grace of God I am a Christian man, by my actions a great sinner, and by calling a homeless wanderer of the humblest birth who roams from place to place. My worldly goods are a knapsack with some dried bread in it on my back, and in my breast pocket a Bible. And that is all.» It is a simple, edifying book, of universal spiritual appeal. It is imminently practical in its advice to not dither in starting the Jesus Prayer.)

Now let us consider the technical aspects of the hesychasts' practice: the teaching for finding quietness and perceiving the Uncreated Light.

The first characteristic is that they restrict their external activities, striving to the best of their abilities to ignore the physical senses. They interpret Christ's injunction in the Gospel of Matthew which says to "go into your closet to pray", to mean that their first duty is to withdraw inward. They affirm that the first step is that their body is to be held immovable for a long time.

Then they engage in mental asceticism, namely the rejection of tempting thoughts. Much of their literature is occupied with the psychological analysis of such tempting thoughts. They watch those thoughts and courageously fight them. The Hesychast is to pay extreme attention to the consciousness of his inner world while repeating the words of the Jesus Prayer: thus he will not let his mind wander in any way.

The Prayer is said "with the heart" - with meaning, with intent. Such Prayer involves the entire human being - soul, mind and body.

(Some tourists at Mount Athos received a refusal when asked information upon the Jesus Prayer; this was probably due to their superficial and hasty attitude.)

The method of breath control is considered even more sacred. The chanting of the Prayer was synchronized with one's breathing. Hesychast tradition wrote: «Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of the Hesychia.»

St. Symeon writes: «Sit down in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you: close the door, and withdraw your intellect from everything worthless and transient. Rest your beard on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the center of your belly or your navel. Restrain the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily, and search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside. To start with, you will find there a darkness and an impenetrable density. Later, when you persist and practice this task day and night, you will find, as though miraculously, an unceasing joy. For as soon as the intellect attains the place of the heart, at once it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees the open space within the heart and it beholds itself entirely luminous and full of discrimination.» Pseudo-Simeon, "The Three Methods of Prayer," in: *The Philokalia* (5 vols.; tr. G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware; London: Faber and Faber, 1995) 4.72-3.

The comparison with the Navi Kriya technique is impressive.

Of course, while counseling these practices, the authors place great emphasis on humility: disaster will befall if one proceeds with pride, arrogance or conceit.

The most secret part is what happens in the space within the heart. The person is led through darkness and "an impenetrable density" to the depth of his heart. This descent is quite literally taken and is not at all considered to be a metaphorical expression.

This is an advanced stage of the spiritual practice and attempting to accomplish it

prematurely can cause very serious emotional harm.

The instruction is to feel one's head moving and dwelling into the chest, then to "open" his eyes there and look at the world from his chest. The world is perceived in a totally different way: not as rough and hostile, but as delicate, warm and responsive to the emotions of love!

The heart is filled with the most loving and subtle Bliss! In this state one becomes "entirely" luminous. The illumination comes from inside, proceeding from the open space within the heart.

The Hesychast, when he has been granted such an experience, returns wholly transformed to normal life. The "inner dialog", which prevents the meditation, is under control: one can live permanently in a state called "the guard of the mind". It is the most sound and natural state of the mind. One's consciousness is no longer encumbered by the spontaneous inception of images - this is the main attribute of a religious life.

All these instructions may help a kriyaban to reconsider the technique of Japa and of Thokar from a new perspective. To draw some conclusions, we understand that in order to settle ourselves in a continuous tuning with the Omkar Reality, the surest way is to establish ourselves in a vigorous practice of a fervent Japa.

The Mantra we use in Kriya should be lived as a bright, dazzling Prayer: in this way it is possible to fall in love with it. Its Divine Magic will spread in each facet of our life, it will be like walking out of a dark room into the fresh air, into the sunlight. There will be no more problems of aridity, lack of motivation and difficulty in concentration.

As when we are in the fresh air we don't concentrate upon it but we breathe it, in the same way our path will be an experience of pure enjoyment.

Ida [see Nadi]

Japa [See Prayer]

**Kechari Mudra** This Mudra is carried in one of the two following ways:

[a] By placing the tongue in contact with the uvula at the back of the soft palate.

[b] By slipping the tongue into the nasal pharynx touching, if possible, the nasal septum.

According to Lahiri Mahasaya a kriyaban should achieve it not by cutting the tongue Fraenum but by means of Talabya Kriya [see].

Kechari is literally translated as "the state of those who fly in the sky", in the "inner space". Kechari is compared to an electrical bypass of the mind's energetic system. It changes the path of Prana flow causing the life force to be withdrawn from the thinking process. Instead of allowing the thoughts to jump like frogs here and there, it causes the mind to be quiet and allows to focus it on the goal of meditation. We do not realize the quantity of energy we squander away when we get lost in our thoughts, in our plans. Kechari turns this pernicious way of exhausting all of our vitality into its opposite. The mind begins to lose its despotic role: the "inner activity" happens no more by the thinking process but by the effortless development of the intuition. Coupled with Kriya it is a substantial aid in clarify one's complicated psychological structures.

A more elusive claim is the experience of the elixir of life, "Amrita", the "Nectar".

This is a fluid with sweet taste perceived by the kriyaban when the tip of his tongue touches either the uvula or the bone protrusion in the roof of the palate under the hypophysis. The Yoga tradition explains that there is a Nadi going through the center of the tongue; energy radiates through its tip and when it touches that bone protrusion, its radiation reaches and stimulates the Ajna Chakra in the center of the brain.

Kevala Kumbhaka [see Breathless state]

**Knot** The traditional definition of the Grantis identifies three knots: the Brahma Granti at the Muladhara Chakra; the Vishnu Granti at the heart Chakra and the Rudra Granti at the Kutastha. Those are the places where Ida, Pingala and Sushumna Nadi meet. The knots are the root cause of our miseries because they nourish the exhausting world of superficial emotions and thoughts.

Lahiri Mahasaya's definition of the knots is different from the traditional one. He writes: «Any religious path, consists of four stages characterized by the untying of four internal knots: tongue, navel, heart and Muladhar».

Brahma Granti (located in Muladhar) is the first knot. It is related to our physical body: it preserves the ignorance of our infinite nature and is the first obstacle in the spiritual search, since it obstructs the Kundalini's path as she begins to move toward the higher centres. The world of names and forms creates restlessness and prevents the mind from becoming one pointed. Ambitions and desires trap the mind. Until one unties this knot, one cannot meditate effectively.

Vishnu Granti is located in the area of the heart Chakra, Anahat, and is related to the astral body and to the world of emotions. Lord Vishnu is the lord of preservation. This knot creates the desire to preserve ancient knowledge, traditions, institutions, and religious orders. It produces "compassion", a keen desire to help suffering humanity. Discriminating knowledge combined with Yoga effort can unfasten the Knot of Vishnu and obtain deliverance from the traditional bonds, deep deeply rooted in our genetic code.

Rudra Granti is related to the causal body and to the world of ideas, visions, and intuitions. In the eyebrows spot, the Ida and Pingala Nadis cross over and then come down in the left and right nostrils, respectively. Ida and Pingala are time bound; after crossing the Rudra knot, the time bound consciousness dissolves - the yogi establishes himself in the Kutastha, beyond the Tattwas (elements: earth, water, fire, air and akasha). With a further effort, Kundalini unites with the supreme Atman in the Sahasrara Chakra and the yogi achieves perfect emancipation.

In Lahiri Mahasaya's definition of the Grantis, the first knot is that of the tongue. It cuts us off from the reservoir of energy in the Sahasrara region. It is pierced by way of Kechari Mudra [see]. The mind loses its despotic role! The consciousness is filled by unbelievable moments of pure calmness and mental silence. The second knot is that of the navel. It originates from the trauma of cutting the umbilical cord.

The third knot is that of the heart. Its definition matches perfectly the classic one.

The definition of the fourth knot is that of Muladhar and Kutastha knots considered as one and the same reality. The reason is that the action of the two unbalanced lateral currents of Ida and Pingala create a powerful obstruction at the base of the spine blocking our efforts to enter the subtle channel of Sushumna; but if we cross it, we perceive the Spiritual eye in the Kutastha and have the experience of entering it.

**Kriya Yoga** If we want to understand the essence of Kriya Yoga it is necessary to put aside some definitions found on the web.

"Kriya Yoga is the science of controlling life energy [Prana]."

"...a technique that activates the astral cerebrospinal centres."

".... hastens the practitioner's spiritual development and helps to bring about a profound state of tranquillity and God-communion."



"....creates the stillness of the sensory input. "

I don't want to contest them, but I think that Kriya is broader than what is implied. There are definitions which say nothing: they make a misleading synthesis of its methods and list its effects in the same way one would describe the Hatha or Raja Yoga practice.

Patanjali refers once to Kriya Yoga: "Kriya consists of body discipline, mental control, and meditating on Iswara." [Yoga sutras II:1] This is definitely correct, but by following the further evolution of his thought, we are led astray. Although he states that by remembering that Sound we can achieve the removal of all the obstacles that block our spiritual evolution, he does not develop this method. He is far from describing the same spiritual discipline taught by Lahiri Mahasaya.

Kriya is a "mystic path" utilizing the best tools used by the mystics of all religions. It consists of control of breath [Pranayama], Prayer [Japa, Mantra] and pure effort of tuning with the Omkar Reality.

The soothing process of Pranayama, followed by the Thokar procedure, guides the bodily energy into the heart Chakra, holding thus, as in a grip of calmness, the unceasing reflex originating the breath. When a perfect stillness is established, when all the inner and outer movements cease, the kriyaban perceives a radiation of fresh energy sustaining each cell from inside; then the breathless state settles in.

When the physical breath is totally transcended and a circulation of energy happens in the body – the breath is said to have become "Internal" – a feeling of infinite safety, solidity and reliance originates. It is like having crossed a barrier and move into a measureless space: Kriya yoga is a miracle of beauty.

**Kumbhaka** Kumbhaka means holding the breath. It is such an important phase in Pranayama that some Yoga teachers doubt whether a modified way of breathing which does not include any Kumbhaka can be called Pranayama at all.

It is observed that when we are about to do something which requires our total attention, our breath is automatically held. We are not deliberately doing Pranayama, but our breath is suspended of its own accord; this demonstrates how natural this fact is. In Pranayama the inhalation is called Puraka, which literally means "the act of filling"; the exhalation is called Rechaka, meaning "the act of emptying". Retention of breath is called Kumbhaka, meaning "holding". Kumbha is a pot: just as a water pot holds water when it is filled with it, so in Kumbhaka the breath and the Prana is held in the body.

In the classic Yoga literature there are described four types of Kumbhaka.

I... We breathe out deeply and hold the breath for a few seconds. This is known as "Bahya Kumbhaka" (External Kumbhaka).

II....The second, "Abhyantar Kumbhaka" (Internal Kumbhaka), is holding the breath after a deep inhalation. Usually this kind of Kumbhaka is accompanied by the use of the three Bandhas.

III....The third type is that practised by alternate breathing - breathing in deeply through the left nostril, then holding the breath and then exhaling through the right... It is considered the easiest form of Kumbhaka.

IV...The fourth one is the most important of all, the peak of Pranayama. It is called Kevala Kumbhaka or automatic suspension of breath: it is the breathless state where there is no inhalation or exhalation, the slightest desire to breathe.

In the Kriya praxis, the underlying principle of [I] is present in some variations of Navi Kriya and in all those procedures involving a series of very long and calm exhalations which seem to end in a sweet nothing, where the breath process finds its

quietness.

Internal Kumbhaka [II] happens in different Kriya techniques; particularly in Yoni Mudra. Maha Mudra, with its balancing action on the right and on the left side of the spine, contains – in a broader sense - the principles of [III] alternating breathing.

**Kundalini** The concept of Kundalini and, particularly, of its awakening, provides a framework which is convenient to express what is happening along the spiritual path. Most of the spiritual traditions have some awareness of Kundalini; not all are equally open in exposing the practical details of the process.

Kundalini is Sanskrit for "coiled": it is conceived as a particular energy coiled like a serpent in the root Chakra Muladhar. The representation of being coiled like a spring conveys the idea of untapped potential energy. It sleeps in our body and underneath the layers of our consciousness, waiting to be aroused either by spiritual discipline or by other means - like particular experiences of life. It is depicted as rising from the Muladhar up through the Sushumna, activating each Chakra; when it arrives at the crown Chakra (Sahasrara), it bestows infinite bliss, mystical illumination etc.

It is only through repeatedly raising of the Kundalini, that the yogi succeeds in obtaining Self realization.

Its rising is not a mild sense of energy flowing inside the spine. Its movement is like having a "volcano erupting" inside, a "rocket missile" shot through the spine!

Its nature is beneficial; there is an evident resistance in trusting the reports of Kundalini awakening accompanied by troubles such as patently disturbed breathing patterns, distortion of thought processes, unusual or extremes strengthening of emotions...

We are rather inclined in thinking that a dormant malady, brought to open manifestation by thoughtless practice of violent exercises or drugs is the cause of those phenomena.

Insomnia, hypersensitivity to environment may indeed follow the authentic experience. In a "true awakening" the force of Kundalini eclipses the ego altogether and the individual feels disoriented for some time. All is absorbed in a short time, without problems. Alas, the search for a repetition of the episode may lead to disorderly and careless practice of strange techniques, without ever establishing a minimal foundation of mental silence.

Each book warns against the risk of a premature awakening of Kundalini and asserts that the body must be prepared for the event. Almost any yogi thinks he or she is capable of sustaining this premature awakening and the warning excites them more than ever: the problem is that many do not have (or have lost) a genuine spiritual approach and nourish a fairly egotistical one.

In the Kriya theoretical framework we consider Kundalini to be the same energy existing in the body and not specifically residing in the Muladhar Chakra. We seldom use the term "Kundalini awakening" and try to avoid what could give the impression that such an experience has an alien nature: Kundalini is our own energy; it is the purest layer of our consciousness.

Let us consider the harmonious junction of Prana and Apana. When there is an absolute calmness and immobility in the body, these two currents, united as one, can open the door of Sushumna. This happens after Pranayama and Navi Kriya through a further strong concentration in Kutastha.

Let us conclude with hinting at a very fascinating theory. It affirms that Kundalini resides in each cell. This particular viewpoint goes hand in hand with the belief that our body isn't simply the wrapping of the soul - a machine designed for going here and there in this physical world. By tuning with the pure energy present in its cells, man discovers the tool to contact the consciousness of the whole of mankind.

**Kutastha** Kutastha, the "third eye" or "spiritual eye" is the organ of inner vision (the unified astral counterpart of the two physical eyes), the place in our body where the spiritual Light manifests. By concentrating between the eyebrows, a formless darkness is first perceived, then a small crepuscular light, then other lights; eventually we have the experience of a golden ring surrounding a dark stain with a blazing tiny white point inside.

There is a connection between Kutastha and Muladhara: what we are observing in the space between the eyebrows is nothing but the opening of the spinal door, which is located at the root Chakra.

Some Kriya teachers affirm that the condition for entering the last and the highest Kriya stage is that the vision of the spiritual eye has become constant; others identify it with the condition in which the energy is perfectly calm at the base of the spine. Therefore both affirmations are one and the same thing.

**Maha Mudra** Maha Mudra is a particular stretching position of the body. The importance of this technique becomes clear as soon as we observe how it incorporates the three main Bandhas of Hatha Yoga. There are indeed thousand and one reasons to practice Maha Mudra with firmness.

There is a ratio between the number of its repetitions and the number of the breaths: it is recommended that for each 12 Pranayama, one should perform one Maha Mudra.

Mahasamadhi [see Second Kriya]

Mantra [See Prayer]

**Nada Yoga** According to the esoteric teaching, the Divine essence sustains this universe through the Om vibration. God is not the universe but the universe is part of Him. Whatever is manifest in the physical, astral or causal world, animate or inanimate, it is made and sustained by God's vibration. This vibration is referred to as "Om", "Omkar", "Pranava", "Shabda", "Nada Brahman". A great Sufi teacher said: "Creation is the music of God". Sound plays a vital role in all the mystical traditions, since it is the bridge between the physical and the astral world, the unconscious and the conscious, the form and the formless. Om sound is the "unstruck" sound (Anahat) - not made as a result of two or more objects striking one another. It is, in fact, a sound not coming to the human ear from outside of the body but, rather, from within.

"Seek the Sound that never ceases, seek the sun that never sets." (Rumi). "The universe was manifested out of the Divine Sound; from It came into being the Light." (Shamas-i-Tabriz). "Who is there playing upon a flute in the middle of the sky? The flute is being played in trikuti (eyebrows centre), 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). "The Sound is inside us. It is invisible. Wherever I look I find it." (Guru Nanak).

"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God" (St. John's Gospel); "And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters" (Revelation 1:15).

Saint John of the cross gave a splendid description of his meeting with the "resounding rivers", the "silent music", the "sounding solitude". There is no doubt he heard the

typical rushing waters sound of the Om vibration.

Teresa of Avila in her book "The Interior Castle" wrote: "It roars like many big rivers with waterfalls, there are flutes, and a host of little birds seem to be whistling, not in the ears, but in the upper part of the head, where the soul is said to have its special seat."

Nada Yoga is the path of union with the Divine through listening to inner sounds. Surat-Shabda-Yoga is another name for Nada Yoga. It is a highly enjoyable form of meditation; anyone can be involved in this even without having fully understood it. One's listening skills will improve and one will become more sensitive.

Nada Yoga is not just an intellectual pursuit but rather an experiential one. It has its basis in the fact that once we can quiet the mind and reach a condition of great stillness and silence deep within our hearts, we can hear the astral sounds that lay beneath the outer sounds.

Its first step is simply to sit quietly and focus all one's attention on subtle sounds that come from within, rather than the audible sounds from outside. One may use a particular position of the body— a squatting position with the elbows resting on the knees, just to give an example—to plug both the ears. It is recommended to repeat mentally, unremittingly, one's favorite Mantra. Awareness of inner sound must happen, sooner or later. There are different levels of development in the experience of inner sounds: one will hear a bumblebee, the drum, the lute, the flute, the harp, the clapping of thunder or a hum like an electrical transformer. Some of these sounds are actually just the sounds of one's own body, especially the blood pumping. Other sounds are actually the "sounds behind the audible sound". It is into this deeper realm that, while over time gently easing the mind into relaxed concentration, one's awareness is drawn. After some weeks of dedicated practice one will tune in with a sound deeper than all the above-quoted astral sounds. This is the cosmic sound of Om. Yogic tradition connects this inner sound with Kundalini itself. When it reaches its maximum height and speed, it becomes still. It reveals its nature as a movement within a perfect stillness – which is impossible to be intellectually grasped. This experience is the surest way towards the realization of the Self. Unfortunately, many seek frantically impossible surrogates of it!

**Nadi** Subtle channels through which the energy flows throughout the body.

The most important are Ida, which flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column (it is said to be of female nature), and Pingala (of masculine nature) which flows parallel to the former one on the right side; Sushumna flows in the middle and represents the experience that is beyond duality.

**Nadi Sodhana** Alternate nostril breathing exercise, it is not properly part of Kriya Yoga. Yet, because of its effect of appeasing and cheering up the mind (especially if it is practiced in the morning) are unmatched, some kriyabans make it a regular part of their routine.

**Navi Kriya** The essence of this technique is to dissolve inhalation and exhalation at the state of equilibrium in the navel, the seat of the Samana current.

It is coupled in various ways with the practice of Pranayama.

Some schools which do not specifically teach it, provide some substitutes of it – a particularly remarkable instruction, brought forward by one Kriya institution, is to draw very intensely the navel inside (creating a hollow in the abdomen as in the Uddiyana Bandha) during the Pranayama exhalation.

Nirvikalpa Samadhi [see Paravastha]

**Omkar** Omkar is Om, the Divine Reality sustaining the universe, whose nature is vibration with specific aspects of sound, light and inner movement.

One who follows the mystical path infallibly meets this manifestation of Spirit - whatever may be their preparation and their convictions.

The sound is perceived in different variations; Lahiri Mahasaya describes it as «produced by a lot of people who keep on striking the disk of a bell». It is continuous «as the oil that flows out of a container».

From the very beginning of the Kriya path, as soon as the mind is sufficiently calm, the inner sweet sound of Om grabs the kriyaban's awareness and leads it in depth without any danger of it getting lost.

As for the movement sensation, only few schools disclose its importance and mystery. A particular swinging sensation is easily perceived in the heart Chakra during the physical movements of the Thokar technique. In the beginning it seems to be stirred from the movements of the head, projected from outside to inside. Concentrating on it at length, has a tremendous impact on the kriyaban's capability of melting his little individuality into the greater Self. To realize that this movement is without cause, autonomous, emanating from the Eternity itself, is an incommensurably important event. This marks the last part of the Kriya path.

**Padmasana** In this asana the right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh with the soles of the feet turned up.

The name means the "position in which the lotuses (the Chakras) are seen"; it is explained that, combined with Kechari and Shambhavi Mudra, this Asana creates an energetic condition in the body, suitable to producing the experience of the internal light coming from each Chakra.

Personally, I do not counsel anyone to perform this difficult posture. There are yogis who had to have their cartilage removed from their knees after years of forcing themselves into lotus. In Kriya Yoga, at least for those living in the west and not used to assuming it since infancy, it is much wiser, healthier and comfortable to practice either the Half lotus or the Siddhasana position.

**Paravastha** This concept is linked with that of "Sthir Tattwa (Tranquillity)".

Coined by Lahiri Mahasaya, it designates the state that comes by holding onto the after-effect of Kriya. It is not just joy and peace but something deeper, vital for us as a healing.

From our initial efforts directed at mastering the techniques, we perceive moments of deep peace and harmony with the rest of the world, which extend during the day. Paravastha comes after years of discipline, when the breathless state is familiar: the tranquility state lasts forever, it is no longer to be sought with care. Flashes of the ending state of freedom comfort the mind while coping with life's battles.

Pingala [see Nadi]

**Prana** The energy inside our psychophysical system.

The Prana is divided in Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana and Vijana, which have their location respectively in the chest, in the low abdomen, in the region of the belt, in the head and in the remaining part of the body - arms and legs. That the term Prana is interpreted in two ways should not create confusion – provided that one considers the context in which the word is used.

In the initial phases of Pranayama we are mainly interested in Prana, Apana and Samana. When we use Shambhavi Mudra and during mental Pranayama we contact Udana. Through many techniques (like Maha Mudra) and by the experience of Pranayama with Internal Breath we experience the fresh vitalizing nature of Vijana.

**Pranayama** [Kriya Pranayama] This term is comprised of two roots: Prana is the first; Ayama (expansion) or Yama (control) is the second. Thus, the word Pranayama can be understood either as the "Expansion of Prana" or as the "Control of Prana". I would prefer the first but I think that the correct one is the second.

In other words, Pranayama is the control of the energy in the whole psychophysical system by using the breathing process with the purpose to receive a beneficial effect or to prepare the experience of meditation.

The common Pranayama exercises - although if they do not involve the perception of any energetic current - can create a remarkable experience of energy rising in the spine. This is not negligible since this experience causes the skeptical practitioner the discovery of the spiritual dimension and pushes him or her to seek something deeper.

In Kriya Pranayama the breathing process is coordinated with the attention of the mind up and down along the spinal column.

While the breathing is deep and slow, with the tongue either flat or turned back, the awareness accompanies the movement of the energy around the six Chakras.

By deepening the process, the current flows in the deepest channel in the spine: Sushumna. When by a long practice a subtle form of energy circulates (in a clearly perceivable way) inside the body while the physical breath is totally settled down, the kriyaban has an experience of unthinkable beauty.

**Pranayama mental** In mental Pranayama a kriyaban controls the energy in his body by forgetting the breathing process and focusing only upon Prana in the Chakras and in the body. His awareness dwells on both the inner and the external component of each Chakra until he feels a radiation of fresh energy vitalizing each part of the body and sustaining it from inside. This action is marked by the end of all the physical movements, by a perfect physical and mental stillness. At times, the breath becomes so calm that the practitioner has the absolute perception they are not breathing at all.

**Prayer** [Japa, Mantra] Prayer is an act of communion with the Higher Reality that allows a person to make a reverent plead, to seek guidance, to offer praise or simply to express their thoughts and emotions. The sequence of words used in a Prayer may either be a set formula or a spontaneous expression in the praying person's own words. Whatever be the appeal to God, this act presupposes a belief in the Divine Will to interfere in our life. "Ask, and ye shall receive" (Matt. 7:7, 8; 21:22)

Prayer is a subject of wide range and scope; here I will restrict it to the repetitive Prayer. In India, the repetition of the Name of the Divine is known as Japa.

This word is derived from the root Jap - meaning: "to utter in a low voice, repeat internally". Japa is a spiritual discipline involving both a thoughtful contemplative and an automatic mechanical repetition. Japa is also the repetition of whatever Mantra, which is a broader term than Prayer. Mantra can be a name of the Divine but also a pure sound without a meaning. A certain number of sounds were chosen by ancient yogis who sensed their power and used them greatly. (Some believe that the repetition of a Mantra has the mysterious power of bringing about the manifestation of the Divinity "just as the splitting of an atom manifests the tremendous forces latent in it").

The term Mantra derives from the words "Manas" (mind) and "Tra" (protection): we

protect our mind by repeating unrelentingly the same healthy vibration.

Usually a Mantra is repeated verbally for sometime, then in a whisper and mentally for sometime. In most forms of Japa, the repetitions are counted using a string of beads known as a Japa Mala. The number of beads in it is generally 108 or 100. The Mala is used so that a devotee is free of enjoying the practice and doesn't mind about counting the repetitions. It may be performed whilst sitting in a meditation posture or while performing other activities, preferably walking.

**Preliminary techniques to Kriya Yoga** Some organizations, in their didactic effort to bring Kriya Yoga to people, picked out some easy techniques as a preparation. The first - called Hong-So - calms the breath and the psychophysical system. The second one concerns the listening to the internal (astral) sounds, and Om sound. In Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya, the preliminary techniques are Talabya Kriya [see] and chanting of Om in the Chakras.

**Sahasrara** The seventh Chakra extends from the crown of the head up to the Fontanelle and over it. It cannot be considered of the same nature of the others but a superior reality, which can be experienced only in the breathless state. It is not easy therefore to concentrate upon it as we do with the others. Only after a deep practice of Pranayama, when the breath is very calm, the "tuning " with it is possible; a particular pressure over the head may be felt.

**Samadhi** According to Patanjali's Ashtanga (eight steps) Yoga, Samadhi is the state of deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself: it results naturally from Dharana and Dhyana.

In Kriya literature there is no a definite agreement about its definition.

Our language is strongly hampered: some magniloquent words risk meaning nothing. What does it mean for example union with God? To become one and the same thing or to awaken to the realization we are just a part of That One? Words deceive our comprehension and kindle egoist expectations. One is thrilled by words such as: absolute, eternal, infinite, supreme, everlasting, celestial, divine....

I have half a mind to suggest a sober definition of Samadhi, which may foster an action of mental cleanness and stimulate a reflection upon the meaning of the spiritual path. Let me therefore define Samadhi as independent from any accident, beatific, near death experience (NDE).

The descriptions of Samadhi and of NDE follow the same pattern: actually the nature of the phenomenon which takes place in the body is almost the same.

This opinion may disappoint those who smell a restrictive and limiting shade of meaning in it; however I prefer to think in this way and .... discover much more during the actual Samadhi experience than to thrive in rhetoric.

Even if the Samadhi were no more than a NDE experience, however it would have a superlative value.

In both the experiences, the awareness can shed a glimpse to the Eternity beyond mind; then (this happens to the trained yogi) that lofty awareness blends, integrates with the customary life, which is totally transformed for the better.

To those who wonder if it is fair to diminish the worth of the Kriya ecstatic state reducing it to a process of contacting for some time the after life dimension, we could reply that this genuine experience is unmatched in fostering in a clean way the Kriya Yoga ideals of a balanced spiritual life.

**Shambhavi Mudra** A Mudra in which the ocular bulbs and the eyebrows are upturned as much as possible; often the inferior eyelids relax and a bystander can observe the white of the cornea under the iris. All the visual force of the ocular nerves is gathered on the top of the head. Lahiri Mahasaya in his well known portrait is showing this Mudra.

**Second Kriya** It seems that by using the Second Kriya technique, Swami Pranabananda, an eminent disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya, left his body consciously (this feat is called Mahasamadhi - the conscious exit out of the body, at death). There was no violence to the body; the feat happened only in the most proper moment, according to a Karmic point of view when the moment was right.

Now the debate is: what procedure did he make use of?

a... Many claim it was Thokar. It is possible that he arrested the movement of the heart and therefore left his body. He might have done one single Thokar and stopped his heart; this means he put so much mental strength in this act as to block the energy which kept his heart throbbing. The same Thokar technique he had applied for years, was applied during this final moment of his life.

b... Some believe that this supreme calming of the heart was achieved only by a mental action of immersion in the Kutastha. They say that those who were around him did not notice any head movement. Similarly when other great ones left their body there was no movement.

c... In my opinion, Mahasamadhi is not a "shrewd esoteric trick" to master the mechanics of a painless suicide, surely each great master relies upon his already built ability to enter Samadhi. By creating a total peace in his being, the soul's natural desire to regain union with the Infinite Source puts in action a natural mechanism of appeasing the cardiac plexus.

**Siddhasana** The Sanskrit name means "Perfect Pose". In this Asana, the sole of the left foot is placed against the right thigh so that the heel presses on the Perineum. The right heel is placed against the pubic bone. This position of the legs, combined with Kechari Mudra, closes the pranic circuit and makes Pranayama easy and profitable.

Sushumna [see Nadi]

**Talabya Kriya** It is a stretching exercise of the muscles of the tongue, and particularly of the Fraenulum, whose purpose is to attain Kechari Mudra [see]. This practice creates a distinct calming effect on the thoughts and, for this reason, it is never put aside, even after Kechari Mudra is achieved.

**Thokar** A Kriya technique based on directing the calm Prana - collected in the head through Pranayama - towards the location of one (usually the 4th) or more Chakras, by a particular movement of the head (jerk).

By guiding Prana into the Anahat Chakra, a light grows in Kutastha. This fosters the breathless state. By increasing the concentration on the spiritual light, the lights of all the other Chakras are revealed.

The practice of Thokar is to be deepened throughout the years in order to get the ability to enter the state of Samadhi with just one stroke.

Studying the practices of the Sufis, (see the studies conducted by Gardet and M. M. Anawati, esp. Gardet in *Revue Thomiste* (1952-3)), we discover that Thokar is a variant of the Sufi's Dhikr.



Dhikr is the practice of the "memory" of the Divine, which is brought about by repeating a particular short prayer during the day and by guiding it, during moments of seclusion or group devotional practice, into particular centers of the body through specific head movements.

It might have happened that Lahiri knew this technique since youth; it was His genius to develop it to the utmost perfection.

**Trivangamurari [Tribhangamurari]** Trivangamurari is the highest manifestation of the Omkar reality. In the last part of His life, Lahiri Mahasaya drew with extreme precision the three-bends form [Tri-vanga-murari = three-bend-form] which is perceived by deepening the after-Pranayama meditation. Trivangamurari may be experienced in one's own physical body either in great or in micro dimensions.

**Yama – Niyama** Yama is Self-control: non-violence, avoiding lies, avoiding stealing, avoiding being lustful and non-attachment. Niyama is religious observances: cleanliness, contentment, discipline, study of the Self and surrender to the Supreme God. While in most Kriya schools these rules are put as premises to be respected in order to receive initiation, a discriminating researcher understands that they are to be considered really as the consequences of a correct Yoga practice.

A beginner cannot even understand what "Study of the Self" means. Some teacher repeats, parrot fashion, the necessity of observing those rules and, after having given absurd clarifications of some of the above points (in particular which mental trick to utilize in order to ... avoid being lustful), passes on to explain the techniques.

Why utter empty words? Whom is he trying to fool? The mystic path, when followed honestly, cannot compromise itself with any rhetoric. When an affirmation is made, it is that. Yama and Niyama are a good topic to study, an ideal to bear in mind but not a vow. Only through practice it is possible to understand their real meaning and, consequently, see them flourish in one's life.

**Yoga Sutra** (by Patanjali) The Yoga Sutras are an extremely influential text on Yoga philosophy and practice: over fifty different English translations are the testimony of its importance. Although we are not sure of the exact time when their author Patanjali lived, we can set it between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D.

The Yoga Sutras are made up by a collection of 195 aphorisms dealing with the philosophical aspects of mind and awareness, thus establishing a sound theoretical basis of Raja Yoga - the Yoga of self discipline and meditation. Yoga is described as an eight stage (Ashtanga) path which are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. The first five steps build the psycho physical foundation for having a true spiritual experience; the last three are concerned with disciplining the mind up to its dissolution in the ecstatic experience. They define also some esoteric concepts, common to all the traditions of the Indian thought, such as Karma.

Although, at times, Patanjali is called "the father of Yoga", his work is actually a compendium of pre-existing oral Yoga traditions, an inhomogeneous whole of practices betraying an indistinct and contradictory theoretical background.

However its importance is beyond discussion: he clarified what others had taught; what was abstract he made practical! He was a genial thinker, not just a compiler of rules.

His equilibrium between theism and atheism is very appreciable. We do not find the least suggestion of worshipping idols, deities, gurus, or sacred books - at the same time we do not find any atheistic doctrine either.

We know that "Yoga" besides being a rigorous system of meditation practice implies devotion to the Eternal Intelligence or Self. Patanjali affirms the importance of directing our heart's aspiration toward Om.

**Yoni Mudra**        The potential of this technique includes, in all effects, the final realization of the Kriya path. Kutastha - between the eyebrows - is the place where the individual soul had its origin: the delusive Ego needs to be dissolved there.

Its core component is to bring all the energy into the Kutastha center and hinder its scattering by closing the head openings – the breath is quieted in the region from throat to Kutastha. If a deep relaxation state is established in the body, this practice succeeds in generating a very intense ecstatic state, which spreads throughout one's being. About its practical implementation, there are minor differences among the schools: some give a greater importance to the vision of the Light and less to the dissolution of breath and mind. Among the first, there are those who teach, while keeping more or less the same position of the fingers, to focus upon each Chakra and to perceive their different colors. One satisfactory remark, found in the traditional Yoga literature, is that this technique gets its name "Yoni", meaning "uterus", because like the baby in the uterus, the practitioner has no contact with the external world, and therefore, no externalization of consciousness.

**Vertical routine**        When we think of the Kriya practice we imagine the classic horizontal scheme which consists in a daily practice of the same set of techniques, changing neither their order of practice nor the number of their repetitions.

A vertical routine is a particular feature of Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya. It consists, once in a week, for a certain number of weeks (20 – 24 – 36 ...), in putting the usual routine aside and using only one technique, whose number of repetitions is gradually increased up to a certain amount that the tradition has handed down as optimal.

This is the most remunerative Kriya praxis because leads to the mastery (unimaginable with any other scheme of practice) of the techniques which are utilized for such procedure; it has also a positive effect on one's personality, releasing it from many inner obstacles.

Akin to this procedure is the plan of completing a certain amount (usually a multiple of 12, such as 1728 or 20736) of repetitions of a particular technique, employing of course a specified number of days.