

# UNDERSTANDING THE HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA - ONE WOMAN'S QUEST

By

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Maharishi Swatmarama in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Light on Hatha Yoga) elaborates that *hatha* yoga far from being merely a physical practice, is a process of qualitative change from the smallest organisational or structural unit of the human body on the phenomenal plane to its subtle and then its divine plane of existence, so that it may be understood as the basis of all higher yogas. He elucidates the connection between *tantra* and *hatha* yoga, emphasises that *hatha* yoga leads to raja yoga, and clarifies that practised purely as a form of gymnastics, physical postures or *asanas* lose their spiritual dimension becoming mere forms of 'stretching' and strengthening.

In order to understand the text it may be helpful to place it in its historical context. Barely decipherable relics found in the (larger) cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro of the so-called Indus Valley Civilization which some scholars say peaked about 3000 BCE bear evidence to the widely prevalent worship of a form of feminine earth divinity as also of the male divinity Siva, the ascetic Lord of Yoga. Some components of the religious and cultural practices from the Indus period and other indigenous communities carried over into the subsequent Vedic phase around the second millennium BCE. The agrarian culture was mirrored in the repertory of hymns, the earliest of which the *Rg Veda* (*ved* meaning what is known) gradually grew into a huge canonical body of recited and memorized 'texts' that at once eulogise and appease the forces of nature and higher planes of being-hood. These verses were used in liturgical sacrifices aided by and added to by the chanting of sacred mantras or coded formulaic syllables. The Vedic tradition is one of the most ancient extant spiritual and mystical traditions on the planet. It advocates realisation of the divine as the ultimate truth while living a pious and virtuous life in the phenomenal world. To mention the Indus without mentioning also the *Saraswati*, *Kaveri*, *Narmada*, *Godawari* and *Gangetic* civilisations of India is to give a selective and therefore limited perception of the development and historic roots of Yogic science. Understandably, many of the paths interact and flow into each other. Language reflects the same ethos and in their spoken form Indian languages flow whereas, say, in English great emphasis is placed on diamond edged enunciation

and the 'finishing off' of words and a corresponding, compartmentalising and categorising mentality. Language is the coating of thought and Descartes famously showed us the connection between thinking and philosophy: *cogito ergo sum*.

The seminal theme of Vedic philosophy is that God or the Being is an omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent reality, whereas the individual only an actor who 'struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more'. In order to experience the qualities of the transcendental reality which are *satyam* (the truth), *shivam* (the auspicious) and *sundaram* (the beautiful), one needs to follow a way of life in which one is able to harmonise one's thoughts, behaviour and actions. Meditative contemplation, faith in God, trust in oneself, appreciation of living in harmony with the environment and nature, experiencing oneness in all interactions are some of the basic foundations of the Vedic tradition. Between 700 and 500 BCE the Vedas gave way to the Upanishads which gave the metaphysical knowledge primacy over and above the sacrificial and instrumental ritualism of the early Vedas. References to yogic postures or *asanas* are found in all Yoga literature dating back to 700 BCE. At that time *asanas* were for the purpose of meditation. The body was to be placed in a suitable seated posture so that meditation was practiced with a straight spine: lungs and stomach unrestricted, so the existence of the body could be subsumed. The classic posture has always been cross-legged - the best known being *padmasana* (one ancient seal shows a human form in *mulbandha asana*), with the hands in *jnana mudra*, eyes in *shambhavi* or *agochari mudra*. These early beginnings soon gave rise to other hand gestures, the range of breathing exercises through which the consciousness may be expanded increased, cleansing practices were introduced along with several neuro-muscular locks: *mudras*, *pranayama*, *kriyas* and *bandhas*. All these practices were however, considered ancillary to the main objective of sitting meditation with the aim of achieving *samadhi*. Traditionally the word yoga is defined as the union or integration of individual with universal consciousness. Through yoga the limitations of life can be transcended; greater skills and efficiency in action can be attained which results in the expression of higher levels of creativity and a positive attitude in life. During the classical period of yoga, these additional practices were not mentioned by *Patanjali* nor in the *Bhagavadgita*.

The word *tantra* (from the root '*tan*' - to extend, continue, multiply) means 'that which extends knowledge'. Some Indian pundits argue that *tantra* constitutes the continuation of the original indigenous Indian, especially 'Dravidian' tradition. According to this theory, the ritualistic *Vedism* and the yogic-mystical tradition co-existed independently for some time before the two found common ground and became assimilated. The merger gave rise to the mystical Hinduism of the Upanishads. Growing out of this yogic tradition, *tantra* appears in

provinces that had not been strongly *Vedicised*: eg in The Northwest, Bengal, and the South in the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE. Within the space of a few centuries it had attained pan-Indian influence. A number of distinct and independent branches developed, so that one may speak of Mahayana Buddhist *tantrism*, (Tibetan *Vajrayana*, 'adamantine vehicle', and Japanese *Shingon* 'Mantra teaching'), *Shaivite tantrism* (in Kashmir, emphasising the monistic *Vedantic* perspective), *Natha tantrism* (a hybrid *Shaivite* yogic movement), *Shakta tantra* (in Bengal, emphasising the *chakras*, *kundalini*, and occult practices), cosmological *tantrism* (the *Pancharatra* movement), *Jain tantrism* and *Vaishnava tantrism* (among devotees of Vishnu and Krishna). This was the period of classical *Tantra* which lasted for some centuries. *Tantra* an umbrella title includes numerous practical teachings which encourage the expansion of human consciousness and the liberation of the so called primal energy (*kundalini*). The underlying hypothesis behind the diverse systems of *tantra* is that the material world and its experiences can be utilised to attain enlightenment. Many movements today describe *tantra* as sexual practices promising longer and better orgasms, increased stamina and ecstasy, but this is a shallow and paltry echo of the *tantric* tradition. Authentic *tantra* aims to awaken *kundalini*, the dormant potential force in the human personality. During the *Tantric* period (300 - 200 BCE) it was noticed that there could be an improvement in health and so the physical value of yoga practices gained validity. At the same time, according to *Swami Satyananda*, there was a Buddhist University near Munger, Bihar, teaching the path. Another group (circa 900 - 1100 CE) took the teaching and formed a University called Mahajhana. These 'liberal' Buddhists included *tantric* Yoga, which they wrongly interpreted giving rise to intense societal disapproval - resulting in the decline and banishment of Buddhism from India. Later in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries the noble parts of *tantra* were loosely classified.

Hence, albeit there are many branches of *tantra*, the practices common to all systems leading to transcendental awakening are: *mantras* (vibrational tuning through sounds), *yantras* (symbols to aid concentration in order to liberate the consciousness), *chakras* (realisation of psychic centres), *mandalas* (perception of macrocosmos in microcosmos), *tapasya* (practices of self-purification), Raja Yoga (integral yoga), *pranayama* (yogic breathing practices leading to an expansion of consciousness), self surrender, *shaktipat* (transference of energy) and *tantric* initiations (a process incorporating all of the above imparted by an appropriately accomplished *Guru* to a deserving disciple. *Tantra* advocates a pattern of life which integrates the faculties of the intellect and the heart. The former are perceived as discrimination and concentration, the latter perceiving the unseen, catching glimpses of the transcendental or cosmic consciousness beyond the phenomenal.

The *Nath Yogis* or *Nath Siddhas*, mentioned above, were a vigorous people devoted to physical fitness, austerity and the martial arts. They inhabited the area around *Gorakhpur* near Nepal, and developed the physical side of Yoga. Their founder *Goraknath* was the disciple of *Matsyendranath* mentioned in the list of *siddhas* (1.4 HYPD). They left notes on *asana*, *mudra*, *pranayama*, *kriya* and *bandha*, but not as a finished treatise. The sect that follows the original tradition founded by *Gorakhnatha* and *Matsyendranath* is known as the *Goraknathis* or the *Kanphata Yogis*. Their Yoga took the name of *Hatha Yoga*.

The notes left by the *Nath Yogis* were collated by *Swami Swatmarama*, but the Yoga Upanishads which date back to about 1000 or more years ago mention all the practices later mentioned in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. *Ha* stands for the sun breath or inhalation; *tha* the moon breath or exhalation and *yoga* the union of the two. This metaphor manifests itself repeatedly in Indian 'myths', legends, folk lore and culture from the high to the popular underling the unity of its people whatever the diversity of their state, status, dress, language, or food. The prefix *pra* translates as complete and *dipika* as light. So we have a treatise that enlightens us on the science of bringing into balance or union *prana* (inhalation) and *apana* (exhalation) to achieve *samadhi*. *Hatha* also means to be steadfast, to be ardent and to hold firm and or close. *Yoga* means to become one, to associate, to yoke and to join, to unite. It further carries nuances of being zealous, making endeavour, fixing the mind on one point, holding the body in a steady posture, contemplation and meditation. *Vidya* means knowledge, art and science.

In the opening *slokas* of this treatise *Swami Swatmarama* specifically states that *Hatha Yoga* is a preparation for *Raja Yoga*. The word *raj* means both royal and to shine or illuminate so that the nuances bounce like reflected light to point out that this yoga or union is a journey on the royal road to spiritual enlightenment and freedom from the mesh, *maya*, *avidya* or ignorance of being bound in the dimensions of time and space which ties us to the physical world or 'reality' with its attendant emotional problematic relations, in essence the minutiae of everyday life as we know it. Having stated this final aim, *Swami Swatmaama* shows us how to begin our journey stage by stage explaining the mysteries and the wonders of our bodies and helping us along the journey that others have undertaken and mastered to attain *siddhis* that are not lightly used, misused and/or abused. The true masters are those who see the wheel of life and do not tamper with it.

Just as the various beads of a *mala* are linked together by one single thread, so all the various traditions of *Vedanta* and *Tantra* are linked by Yoga. Yoga is the underlying practical aspect of all spiritual traditions as it leads to enhanced awareness and realisation of personal belief. In essence then *Swami*

*Swatamarama* attempted to collate and define the vast cultural wisdom: yogic, vedantic and tantric of India from the early mists of time to roughly 1400 CE in the form of a series of short instructions: *slokas* (verses) and it is easy to appreciate that anomalies in interpretation may well creep in and the need for a teacher or guru to impart and expand upon the wisdom therein becomes essential. This quintessentially *Sanskritic* treatise which is at once one of the most important and comprehensive and by its very nature sometimes contradictory text presents sequentially in its four chapters the techniques of *hatha yoga*: *asana*, *pranayama*, *mudra* and *nada* (external and internal sound). It can be dated roughly between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and a compromise date of the 15<sup>th</sup> century is sometimes quoted.

The *Pradipika* is divided into four parts. The first explains *yamas* (restraints on behaviour), *niyamas* (observances), *asanas* (posture) and food. The second describes *pranayama*: control or restraint of energy, and the *shatkarmas*: internal cleansing practices. The third deals with *mudras* (seals) *bandhas* (locks), the *nadis* (channels of energy through which *prana* flows) and the *kundalini* power. The fourth expounds *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (absorption). In all the text contains 390 verses. Out of these, about forty deal with *asanas*, approximately one hundred and ten with *pranayama*, one hundred and fifty with *mudras*, *bandhas* and *shatkarmas* and the rest with *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*. *Asanas*, *pranayamas*, *bandhas*, *mudras* and *shatkarmas* are illustrated by examples to assist aspirants with their practice. *Dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi* are difficult to explain, but maybe experienced, once the earlier stages have been mastered.

In the *Yoga Sutra Patanjali* codified the eight limbs of yoga (*astanga yoga*), in the HYPD *Swami Swatmarama* presents *hatha yoga*. The former is a scholarly exposition encrusted with gems of wisdom; the latter has a direct, practical, workmanlike approach. The treatise incorporates concepts from the *Yoga Sutras*, the *Yoga Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, the *Bhagavadgita* and other scriptures. Hence assumptions are made with large tracts of information presupposed. For instance the book is concerned with questions like: what is yoga?, what is *prana*? So it seems that the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is a major treatise with a practical purpose giving guidelines which need extrapolation. Needless to say the book is geographically, culturally and historically appropriate so that common sense adjustments are necessary. It takes the practitioner from cultivating an awareness of the body towards cultivating an awareness of the (higher) self.

The first *sloka*, reads: "Reverence to Siva the Lord of Yoga who taught *Parvati hatha* wisdom as the first step to the pinnacle of raja yoga" And at the end we

are reminded that "all *hatha* practices serve only for the attainment of raja yoga" 4.103. The HYPD presents Lord Siva (the lord of the yogis) as the founder of *Hatha Yoga*. We learn he taught all the 84,000 *asanas* to his consort, *Parvati*, who wished for guidance in order to ease the suffering of humanity. On receiving this knowledge *Parvati* taught it to *Brahma*, who imparted it to his children born of his own will: the sages such as *Naranda*, *Sanaka* and *Sanatkumara*, who passed it on to *Vasista* and others. Throughout the centuries this great science has been passed down in disciplic succession. *Matsyendranth*, another initiate, in turn taught his disciple, *Gorakshanath*. *Swatmarama* was part of the long unbroken line of sages or *rishis*, descended from *Brahma*, by whom *hatha vidya* was passed down through the ages. At the very beginning of his treatise, in verses 4-9, *Swatmarama* invokes the names of many of these sages who came before him listing 35 masters or *siddhas*. A consideration of this list of names leads to the conclusion that the yoga described by *Swatmarama* is contemporary with that of *Patanjali* whose *Yoga Sutras* were also a codification of long established theory and practice. As time went by the many thousands of *asanas* were greatly reduced and modified, until there were no more than a few hundred of which 84 are generally known and are of importance. Out of these only 32 are thought to be commonly useful today. The text begins with *asanas* as the first step in *hatha* yoga. For this reason it has been referred to as six limbed yoga or *sadanga* yoga as opposed to the eight limbed *Patanjala* yoga which includes, as its foundation, the first two limbs, *yama* and *niyama*. However, *hatha* yoga does not overlook the *yamas* and *niyamas*. Possibly *Swami Swatamarama* takes the ethical disciplines for granted. He does speak of non-violence, truthfulness, non-covetousness, continence, forbearance, fortitude, compassion, straightforwardness, moderation in food and cleanliness as *yama* and zeal in yoga, contentment, faith, charity, worship of God, study of spiritual scriptures, modesty, discriminative power of mind, prayers and rituals as *niyama*. The ethical disciplines of what to do and what not to do are given within the text. It is said that there are as many *asanas* as there are living species: 840,000 That means the muscles and joints can flex extend and rotate in several thousand ways. The *Pradipika*, however describes only sixteen *asanas*. Similarly *Vyasa* names only eleven *asanas* in his yoga sutra, and there are thirty two in the *Gheranda Samhita*. It is possible that *yogasana* practices were such a regular daily routine that it was necessary only to touch on the subject without going into depth. In view of these figures to claim that *hatha* yoga is merely physical yoga is misleading and mislead. Yogis were in constant contact with nature and they were searching for natural remedies to combat afflictions. In their search, they discovered hundreds of *asanas* to increase the life-giving force and restore it to its optimum level.

*Swami Swatmarama* says that practice has to be done without thinking of its fruits, but with steadfast attention, living a chaste life and moderation in one's intake of food. One should avoid "bad company, proximity to fire, sexual relations, long trips, cold baths in the early morning, fasting and heavy physical work" (1.61) In 1.66 he says that yoga cannot be experienced "by wearing yoga garments, or by conversations about yoga, but only through tireless practice". Earlier, in 1.16 he says "Success depends on a cheerful disposition, perseverance, courage, self-knowledge, unshakeable faith in the word of the guru and the avoidance of all superfluous company." *Patanjali* echoes this when he says, "faith, vigour, sharp memory, absorption and total awareness are the key to success." Through the practice of *hatha* yoga, the body and mind are refined and purified, and the pupil becomes worthy of acceptance by the master, to be uplifted towards spiritual emancipation. *Hatha* yoga practices bring certain powers (such as clairvoyance and clairaudience) called *siddhis*, about which *Swami Swatmarama* cautions the aspirant. If he does not practice with the right attitude, there is the danger that he will misuse these powers. (*Patanjali* in his sutras calls the *siddhis* worthless and a hindrance to the true goal of Self-realization).

The *Pradipika* touches on Ayurveda when it says those who are of a flabby and phlegmatic constitution and who wish to practise yoga should first practice the *shatkarmas*. This is particularly important before beginning the practice of intense *pranayama*. The reason being that there are three 'humours' or *doshas* in the body *kaph* (mucus or water) *pitta* (bile or heat) and *vata* (wind or air). In *Ayurveda* the science of life and healing, health is a state of dynamic equilibrium of the three body elements, or the *tridoshas*. When any of these three *doshas* becomes excessively agitated or there is an excess of one and shortage of another, the healthy balance is lost and ailments or disease develop due to excess heat or dissipation of heat in the body. So before starting *pranayama*, any imbalance in the *doshas* needs to be addressed. The practices are powerful and are impossible to learn effectively from a book. One must be personally instructed in how to perform them and how often, according to individual need.

*Asanas* are not just physical exercises: they have biochemical, psycho-physiological and psycho-spiritual effects. The cells of the body have their own intelligence and memory. Through practice of different *asanas* blood circulation is improved, the endocrine system balanced, the nervous system stimulated, and waste matter eliminated, so that the cells, fascia and nerves are kept at their peak level. Physical, mental and spiritual health and harmony are achievable. The commentary *Jyotsna* of *Sri Brahmananda* speaks of the effect of *asanas*. He says, "the body is full of inertia (*tamsic*), the mind vibrant (*rajasic*) and the Self serene and luminous (*sattvic*). By perfection in *asanas* the lazy body is

transformed to the level of the vibrant mind and together awareness is raised so they may reach the level of the serenity of the Self."

Part two is devoted mainly to *pranayama* and its techniques. In common with other yoga texts the *Pradipika* states the importance of mastering asana before *pranayama*. *Asanas*, important though they are for the health and balance of the body, have a deeper purpose: to diffuse the consciousness uniformly throughout the body, so that duality between senses, nerves, cells, mind, intelligence and consciousness are eradicated and the whole being is in harmony. When the nervous, circulatory, respiratory, digestive, endocrine and genito-excretory systems are cleansed through *asanas*, *prana* moves unobstructed to the remotest cells and feeds them with a copious supply of energy. Thus rejuvenated and revitalised, the body - the instrument of the Self - moves towards the goal of Self-realisation. In 2.4, *Swami Swatmarama* says, 'When the *nadis* are impure, breath cannot penetrate into the *sushumna*. Then the yogi achieves nothing....' And in 2.5, 'Only when all the *nadis* which are still impure are purified can the yogi practice *pranayama* successfully.' The importance of asana as a cleansing practise before *pranayama* takes on a deeper meaning. *Pranayama* means *prana vritti nirodha* or restraint of the breath, which is by nature unsteady. According to *Swami Swatmarama*, "when the breath wanders the mind is unsteady. But when the breath is calmed, the mind too will be still." 2.2 *Prana* is an self-energising force. The in breath fans and fuses the two opposing elements of nature: fire and water so that a nascent bioelectrical energy called *prana* is produced. *Prana* neutralises the fluctuations of the mind and acts as a spring-board towards emancipation. *Pranayama* stores *prana* in the seven energy chambers or *chakras*, of the spine, so it can be discharged as and when necessary to deal with the upheavals of life. *Swami Swatmarama* explains various types of *pranayamas* and their effects. He covers eight forms: *suryabhedana*, *ujjayi*, *sitkari*, *sitali*, *bhastrika*, *bhramari*, *murccha* and *plavini*. *Nadi Shodana* with a key instruction on slow exhalation, exhibits a *sattvic* quality (which helps to store energy - a quick exhalation dissipates energy). *Pranayama* flushes away toxins and rectifies disturbances of the humours; *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. We are however cautioned: "By the faulty practice of *pranayama* the yogi invites all kinds of ailments." (2.16) just as a trainer of lions, tigers or elephants studies their habits and moods and treats them with kindness and compassion and then puts them through their paces slowly and steadily, the practitioner of *pranayama* should study the capacity of his lungs and make the mind passive in order to tame the incoming and outgoing breath. If the animal trainer is careless the animals will maim him. In the same way the wrong practice of *pranayama* will sap the energy of the practitioner.

*Bandhas* and *Mudras* are dealt with in part three. Broadly speaking, *bandha* means lock and *mudra* means seal. The human system has many apertures or

outlets. By locking and sealing these, the divine energy known as *kundalini* is awakened and finds its union with *purusa* in *sahasrara chakra*. *Mudras* and *bandhas* act as safety valves and/or encourage the formation of conduits for energy in the human system. *Asanas* act in a similar way. All three help to suspend the fluctuations of the mind, intellect and ego, so that attention is drawn in towards the Witnessing Self. The union of the divine force with the divine Self is the essence of part three. Early on in part three (3.2-3) we are told '...the *kundalini* ....will be aroused ....Then all the *chakras* and knots are pierced and *prana* flows through the royal road of *sushumna*. Ten *mudra* are enumerated: *mahamudra*, *mahabandha*, *mahavedha*, *kechari*, *uddiyana bandha*, *mula bandha* and *jalandhara bandha*; *viparitakarani*, *vajroli*, and *shakticalana* in 3.6-9 and then further explained; the main purpose being to stimulate the base of the *sushumna*. *Pranayama* together with *mudras* and *bandhas* manipulates the various forces within the body: *prana* (the in-breath, *Ha* or the sun) and *apana* (the exhalation, *tha* or the moon) eliminate toxins, increase the absorption of oxygen, or if appropriate the retention of *CO2* and consequently vaso-dilation to encourage the free flow of blood and that which it transports: endocrine secretions. Modern science is not yet aware of all of the endocrine secretions in the body. Yoga speaks of the *manipura* energy centre or *chakra* of the fire element at the solar plexus. *Prana*, the in breath fans the flame downwards. *Apana* the out breath, moves the flame upwards. As the fire burns, ash (waste matter) is deposited in the lower belly. Neuro-muscular locks together with retention and extension of (the out) breath help to eliminate this waste matter and enhance the circulation of energy, *shakti* or life giving forces. The discussion of the *mul*, *uddiyana* and *jalandhara bandhas* is then undertaken in a new light and with a deeper meaning. Following on from this *shakti calana kriya* and its aim to raise the *shakti* is dealt with. With the description and explanation of *kechari mudra* we have the nectar of life theory which incorporates the sun, moon and fire: the moon (area stimulated by *kechari mudra*) produces the *amrit* (elixir of life) which drops down to the solar plexus or sun and is consumed by it producing ash (toxins) deposited in the lower abdomen. Various ways of skirting this aging process are discussed. We are reminded though that 'useless are all *mudras* without raja yoga.' The need for caution and 'secrecy' are a leitmotiv that runs through most yoga literature as does an emphasis on a person's character. Yogis of yore no doubt understood that the weak-minded individual who was unable to keep his own counsel or use knowledge with discrimination would misuse and abuse these powerful practices so that they would as it were 'turn upon him and strike him with misfortune.'

*Samadhi*, the subject of part four, is the experiential science of liberation, known as unalloyed bliss. It is useful here to consider consciousness (*citta*). Consciousness has been likened to a shoot from the Self like a tender sprout

from a seed. As the branch of a tree is covered by bark, so consciousness is enveloped by the mind. It has many facets and channels which move in various directions simultaneously. Breath on the other hand, once it has been steadied, flows rhythmically in and out in a single channel. *Swami Swatmarama*, after watchful study of the mind and breath says that whether the mind is sleepy, dreaming or awake, the breath moves in a single rhythmic way.

Just as water mixed with milk appears as milk, energy (*prana*) united with consciousness becomes consciousness. So *hatha* yoga texts emphasise the restraint of energy, which can be more easily achieved than the restraint of the fluctuations of the mind. A steady mindful in breath and out breath minimises the fluctuations and helps to stabilise the mind. Once this steadiness has been established through *pranayama*, the senses can be withdrawn from their objects. This is *pratyahara*. *Pratyahara* must be established before *dhyana* (concentration) can take place. *Dhyana* flows into *dharna* (meditation), *dharna* into *samadhi*. The last three are beyond description and can only be experienced.

*Swami Swatmarama* says that through *samadhi*, the mind dissolves in consciousness; consciousness in cosmic intelligence; cosmic intelligence in nature and nature in the Universal Spirit (*Brahman*). The moment the consciousness, the ego, the intelligence and the mind are quietened, the Self, which is the king of these, surfaces and reflects on its own. This is *samadhi*.

*Nada* means vibration or sound, *bindu* is a dot or a seed (heat, compressed energy) and *kala* means a sprout, or to shine or glitter (light). All three are vibrations of different intensity. Here, *bindu* represents the Self; *kala*, the sprout of the Self, that is, consciousness; and *nada* the sound of the inner consciousness. A return journey from *nada* to *kala*, *kala* to *bindu* is the ultimate in *hatha* yoga. *Swami Swatmarama* says that if the consciousness is the seed, *hatha* yoga is the field. He enjoins the student of yoga to water the field with the help of yogic practice and renunciation so that the consciousness becomes stainless and the Self shines forth.

*Hathayoga* or *hatha vidya* is commonly misunderstood and misrepresented as being simply a physical practice, divorced from spiritual goals. Changes take place through the practice of *hatha* yoga in the practitioner's body, mind and self. There is a subjective transformation that occurs as the consciousness penetrates inwards towards the Self, and as the Self diffuses outwards. *Swamiji* shows that *hatha* yoga is not just physical exercise, but an integrated science leading towards spiritual evolution. We are caught up in emotions like lust (*kama*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), infatuation (*moha*), pride (*garva*) and malice (*matsarya*). *Hatha* yoga helps us to overcome these obstacles and hindrances to spiritual development. It is a biochemical, psycho-physiological

and psycho-spiritual science which deals with the moral, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspects of man, as well as the physical and physiological. We can clarify our understanding of *hatha* yoga by first examining five important underlying concepts: mind, knowledge, aims of life, health and afflictions.

**Mind.** Man is known as *manava* (human) as he is descended from *manu*, the father of mankind who is said to be the son of *Brahma*, the Creator of the world. The word *mana* or *manas* (mind) comes from the root *man*, meaning to think. Man is one who possesses a mind. *Manas* means mind, intellect, thought, design, purpose and will. It is the internal organiser of the senses of perception and the organs of action, and the external organiser of intelligence, consciousness and the Self. In the *Brihadaranayak Upanishad* (1.5.3) it says, 'For it is through the mind one sees and hears. Desire, decision, doubt, faith and lack of faith, steadfastness and lack of steadfastness, shame, reflection, and fear - all these are simply the mind. Therefore even when someone touches us on the back, we perceive it through the mind.' Man is graced with this special sense so that he can enjoy the pleasures of the world, or seek emancipation and freedom (*moksa*) from worldly objects.

**Knowledge.** Knowledge means acquaintance with facts, truth or principles by study or investigation. The mind, which is endowed with the faculty of discrimination, desires the achievement of certain aims in life. Knowledge (*jnana*) is of two types: *laukika jnana*, which concerns matters of the world, and *vaidika jnana*, the knowledge of the Self (relating to the Vedas, or spiritual knowledge). Both are essential for living in the world, as well as for spiritual evolution. Through yogic practice, the two kinds of knowledge encourage development of a balanced frame of mind in all circumstances.

**Aims of life.** The sages of old discovered the means for the betterment of life and called them aims or *purusarthas*. They are duty (*dharma*), the acquisition of wealth (*artha*) - necessary to free oneself from dependence on others, the gratification of desires (*kama*) and emancipation or final beatitude (*moksa*). *Moksa* is the deliverance of the Self from its entanglement with the material world: freedom from body, senses, vital energy, mind, intellect and consciousness. *Dharma*, *artha* and *kama* are important in matters of worldly life. *Dharma* and *moksa* should be followed judiciously if they are to lead to Self-realisation. *Patanjali* at the end of the Yoga Sutras concludes that the practice of yoga frees a yogi from the aims of life and the qualities of nature (*gunas*) so that he can reach the final destination - *kaivalaya* or *moksa*.

**Health and harmony.** To acquire knowledge whether mundane or spiritual - bodily health, mental poise, clarity and maturity of intelligence are essential. Health begets happiness and inspires one to further one's knowledge of the world and of the Self. Health means perfect harmony in our respiratory,

circulatory, digestive, endocrine, nervous and genito-excretory systems and peace of mind. *Hatha* yoga practices are designed to bring about such harmony.

**Afflictions.** Human beings are subject to afflictions of three types: physical, mental and spiritual: *adhyatmika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhidaivika*. Self inflicted afflictions are *adhyatmika*. Physical and organic diseases are caused by an imbalance of the elements in the body: earth, water, fire, air and ether, which disturb its correct functioning. These are called *adhibhautika* diseases. Misfortunes such as bites and stings are also classified as *adhibautika*. *Adhibautika* may also be described as those caused by an outside agency. Genetic and allergic diseases or diseases arising from one's past deeds (*karma*) are known as *adhidaivika*. The practice of *hatha* yoga helps to overcome all three types of affliction.

*Hatha* means willpower, resoluteness, and perseverance; and *hatha yoga* is the path that develops these qualities and leads one towards emancipation. The two syllables *ha* and *tha* also stand for: *Ha* the witnesser, the Self, the soul (*purusa*), the sun (*surya*) and the in breath (*prana*). *Tha* represents nature (*prakriti*), consciousness (*citta*), the moon (*chandra*) and the out breath (*apana*). Yoga as already noted means union. *Hatha* yoga therefore, means the union of *purusa* with *prakriti*, consciousness with the soul, the sun with the moon, and *prana* with *apana*.

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