

Yoga Education

Navodita Pande

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*For my Parents and Brother, whose
debt I can never repay. For Jagran
Group for giving me the time to
write books*

FOREWORD

Navodita has been a sincere student and has been associated with Dev Antarrashtriya Yog Kendra, Kanpur since a young age. I remember her when she was taught 'Rubber Neti' as her nasal catarrh was almost developing into sinusitis. She persevered and continued to practice netis and kriyas despite tough curriculum in school. I taught her Magnetic Therapy, too. She occasionally took Yoga classes from me and my wife, Ms. Poonam Rani. Later she learnt Basti Kriya due to her mild problems. Still later in life, due to several ups and downs in her life, including exam stress, she learnt Sakshi Dhyana and Reiki. She has continued to practice Yoga and meditation on her own but needs to improve and take more regular classes at the institute to be able to do better in Yoga and grasp the subject better.

Her good writing skills have made her write good columns for websites, while her performance of physical exercises or asanas helped her grab some limelight on television with her show 'Sehat ka Yog' on NDTV India.

I hope Navodita's next book will be on the cleaning process through Khatkarma, Shankh Prakshalan due to which one can cure oneself and family members without consuming harmful medicines of allopathy.

I wish her all the best and hope she will continue to take the art and science of Yoga to even better and higher levels of learning.



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PREFACE

As this book is intended for the general reader I have tried, as far as possible, to leave nothing unexplained. And as I believe, Yoga is more than learning, rote and mugging up lessons I have tried, however briefly, to cover all aspects of Yogic life and thought. Yet, some aspects are still unexplored in this book which I plan to do in my next one- diet, thoughtfulness, auto-suggestion- things that I have learnt in Reiki and Art of Living. I hope the book maybe of interest to young students of Yoga who are embarking on a course of Yoga in different forms.

For the ordinary reader, the work may sometimes feel cumbersome, therefore, I have tried to reduce the Sanskrit names of asanas to simpler names in English. A newcomer to Hindi and Sanskrit may find it difficult to learn up names of some asanas. I have made a concoction of different forms of Yoga and summed up different philosophies in this book. Though I lay no claim to some great work of extraordinary scholarship, I can vouch for the fact that this book has been a culmination of the last thirty years of my knowledge, practice and experience in the field of Yoga.

From Hatha Yoga of B.K.S. Iyengar to *Prakritik* Yoga of Anandji, from Buddhist meditation to chanting of Vedic hymns and *shlokas*, from Art of Living to Reiki, from acupuncture to even home remedies, I have included some basics of Yoga as a holistic healing art form to a creative art form which can be used in our everyday lives to make our lives better with an improved lifestyle. In all cases I have tried

to give an honest interpretation of the great Yogis of the past, as I understand them. Sometimes I have added my own interpretation of these Yogis.

In conclusion, I would again record my gratitude to those who assisted me in one way or another in the writing of this book: Mr. Rajiv & Ms. Swati Chanchani, Mr. B.K.S. Iyengar, Dr. Om Prakash Anand, Mrs. Bindu Verma, Ms. Poonam Rani, Mary Dunn, Padmasimha, Kunjo La and Nitin Tripathi. I am also grateful to *Different Truths*, some of whose suggestions have been adopted in this edition, and to many friends who have offered helpful advice and criticism.

Navodita Pande

Kanpur, 2018

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ABOUT THE BOOK

The book deals with some basic ways and methods of doing Yoga and asanas. It is divided into sections and sub-sections to assist the practitioner to follow the instructions and practice it on a day-to-day basis. The book deals with different aspects of Yoga in each different section.

Section I is about the basic asanas and how yoga is to be performed at the bodily level- healthy mind resides in a healthy body, in short. Section II deals with the other five limbs of yoga- Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. Section III deals with yoga and community living and how one cannot do good yoga or practice the tenets of yoga unless practiced in a 'community' setting. Community life, thus, forms the basis of this form of Yoga.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Navodita Pande has been doing Yoga since the age of nine. She taught Yoga at the age of fifteen to young Yoga practitioners in school. Later she began teaching yoga to ladies of Allahabad. She also taught Yoga at Hare Rama Hare Krishna Mandir in Lower Manhattan, New York and in Cardiff Yoga Studio in Cardiff. She is currently teaching Yoga to young children. She has also learnt Reiki and Art of Living.

Section I

BASIC ASANAS

Come Monday and with it the Monday morning blues. If you would like a thumping start to your week or get initiated into some power-packed moves to energize your senses for a fresh start, here's what you can do:

SURYA NAMASKAR

This set of 12 asanas can do wonders for your joints and muscles. It can give you a glowing skin and help you lose weight. It helps you cope with insomnia and get a regular menstrual cycle. It can help one detox and get blood sugar levels down. So let's get started with this beneficial cycle.

- Tada Asana or the Mountain Pose
- Urdhvahasta Asana
- Utkata Asana or the Chair Pose.
- Uttana Asana
- Adhomukhasvana Asana or Dog Pose I
- Urdhvamukhasvana Asana or Dog Pose II
- Chaturangadanda Asana
- Urdhvamukhasvana Asana or Dog Pose II
- Adhomukhasvana Asana or Dog Pose I
- Uttana Asana
- Urdhvahasta Asana
- Samasthiti or Namaskar

Tada Asana or the Mountain Pose is where you have to stand simply straight with your knee caps plugged in, back erect, head up and chin up. Take a deep breath and in and with the inhalation raise your hands up. This gets you into Urdhvahasta Asana. Keeping your hands raised up, bend down to sit on an imaginary chair. This is Utkata Asana or the Chair Pose. Exhale and bend down to touch the toes with the knees absolutely straight. The crown of the head should face the floor. Now keeping your hands on the floor, jump back about three feet away and place your feet shoulder-distance away from each other. Your buttocks are raised up facing the ceiling while the head is once again down. This is Adhomukhasvana Asana or Dog Pose I. Here you are supposed to stretch the back of the legs well. Keep the heels raised to start with and slowly get them down on the floor. Now inhale and while exhaling raise your head up stretching the arms and legs into Urdhamukhasvana Asana or Dog Pose II. Here the stretch is felt in the arms. This asana is good for the limbs. Now inhale and while exhaling touch your nose to the floor in Chaturangadanda Asana. Here the entire body should be straight.

Now the same asanas are to be repeated backwards- first Urdhvamukhasvana Asana, Adhomukhasvana Asana, Uttana Asana, Urdhvahasta Asana and Namaskar.

In order to get a good benefit of Surya Namaskar, this cycle must be repeated 10-15 times a day. Gradually as the practice gets better, more such cycles maybe done.

VRIKSHA ASANA

Surya Namaskar cycles maybe followed by Vriksha Asana or the Tree Pose. This improves balance and makes legs stronger. It strengthens the ligament and tendon of the feet. It strengthens and tones the entire left upto the buttocks. It helps in getting pelvic stability and is good for developing balance in other aspects of life as well.

Stand straight in Tada Asana or the Mountain Pose. Keeping your left leg straight bend your right leg upto the groin. Then raise

your hands up and join them overhead. Stay in this for about 20 seconds. Repeat this asana keeping the right leg straight with the left leg bent. Such standing poses keep you on your toes and are a sure way to start your day right.

GARUDA ASANA

Here you have to again stand straight in the Mountain Pose. Keep your left leg straight and entwine your right leg around your left one. Similarly entwine your right arm around your left one. Stay in this pose for about fifteen seconds and change sides. Keep your right leg straight and entwine the other leg and arm.

Garuda Asana or the Eagle Pose stretches the hip, thighs, shoulders and upper back. It improves balance, strengthens the calves, helps alleviate sciatica and rheumatism. It definitely makes legs and hips more flexible.

MEDITATION

After a heavy workout like this one its always good to end with Pranayama or a good meditation or Dhyana. Last time we discussed Sakshi Dhyana. This time we give you a lowdown on Panchatatva Dhyana. The idea is to think about the five elements our body is made up of.

Start by sitting in a cross-legged pose and close your eyes. The body is made up of five elements- Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Ether or Space. One by one you have to focus on these elements. Start with your legs. You have to imagine that your legs are buried deep down and have developed roots under the ground. These roots are keeping you anchored. Focus on these roots for five minutes. Then come upto the abdomen and feel that the abdomen has Water flowing through it. Focus on this flow of Water for another five minutes. For the next five minutes imagine that there is Fire inside your stomach and its burning up food and everything else inside. Then come up to your lungs and chest and imagine that Air or wind is blowing across your chest. Air element is keeping the flow of your

body in place. Wind is blowing across your chest lightly. Finally come up to your head and imagine Ether or space inside. There is Emptiness inside your mind where thoughts may freely come and go. Feel the null and void feeling inside your mind and create space for more thoughts and feelings inside. Try and get rid of the clutter and the 'brain chatter'.

Lastly some headers to work on:

- In the rat race never lose your inner voice and grip over your Conscience as that eventually will keep you grounded
- While at work its always good to take a break and meditate at your desk for five minutes
- If something is nibbling into your mind, close your eyes and think again about the situation from a fresh perspective. Everything has a solution that needs working on.

UTTHITA TRIKONASANA OR TRIANGLE POSE

This asana does well to tone your legs, muscles and ankles. It makes the calves, hamstrings, joints and hips stronger. It strengthens, back, neck and abdominal muscles too. It stimulates the region around the abdomen making digestion quicker and faster. It is also very good for the spine.

In order to get started keep a straight back and jump in a way that your feet are about three feet away from each other. Inhale and turn your right foot and left foot in. Keeping both your legs straight and arms stretched out, exhale and bend down sideways to touch the floor. Make sure your legs are not bent at any moment. Keep the stretch for about twenty seconds. Then get up and bend towards the left. Once again repeat for twenty seconds. Lo and behold you can feel the wonderful stretch that just rejuvenated your spine and muscles!

A variation of Trikonasana and an improvement on this one is the Ardachandrasana which helps you balance and affects your legs and spine more strongly.

ARDHACHANDRASANA OR HALF MOON POSE

Here you have to stand straight and then with the help of your right hand bend down, touch the floor and balance on your right leg with your body turned sideways. Cup your hands and place them on the floor and turn your right foot to the right while the left leg is suspended straight up in the air. Raise your left hand up and look straight ahead. Stay in this pose for twenty seconds and repeat this on the left hand side with your left leg.

Ardachandrasana opens your hips and chest, builds coordination and balance, improves digestion, is a good stress buster and is very therapeutic for anxiety, fatigue, menstrual pain, backache, fertility, sciatica, osteoporosis, gastritis and constipation.

UTTHITA PARSVAKONA ASANA OR EXTENDED SIDE ANGLE POSE

This is to be done along with the other standing poses to get their full benefit. Stand straight in Tada Asana once again. Spread your feet about five feet away from each other. Bend your right leg into a right-angle so that your thighs are parallel to the floor. Stretch to the right, place your hand on the floor and stretch the left arm overhead. Look up at the left arm and breathe normally. You will feel the full benefit of the pose if you stay in it for about twenty seconds and breathe completely in the pose.

Slowly release and repeat this pose on the left hand side bending your left leg and taking the right arm over. This posture stretches the groin and waist. The twisting of the spine helps cleanse and system and reduces the stress around the abdomen. Twisting and revolving also opens the chest and lungs and tones the muscles of the heart. It allows for deeper access and strengthening of the shoulders. Lastly by maintaining the balance and poise, this helps in increasing balance overall in the body.

After a heavy workout its time now for some relaxing Dhyana. This time you will learn more about the Chakras and Chakra Dhyana.

CHAKRA DHYAN

There are seven Chakras or energy centres in the psychic body, starting from the bottom:

- Muladhara or Root Chakra
- Swadhishtana or Sacral Chakra
- Manipura or Solar Plexus Chakra
- Anahata or Heart Chakra
- Vishuddha or Throat Chakra
- Ajna or Third Eye Chakra
- Sahasrara or Crown Chakra

In this form of Dhyana you have to focus on each Chakra to derive full benefit from it. You have to concentrate on each Chakra or energy centre so that you can feel rejuvenated and energized in just ten to fifteen minutes. It is a very powerful form of Sadhana known to the seers for over five thousand years. This Dhyana opens your doors to a very Divine existence in a short span of time. So here's how you get started:

Sit comfortably in Siddhasana, Sukhasana or Vajrasana to begin and let your hands face the ceiling. Close your eyes, deeply inhale and exhale and relax yourself completely. It will be best if you can play a shloka in the background to begin this Dhyana as that will help you focus better.

Start by meditating in the Muladhara Chakra, situated below your navel. It is also called the seat of basic trust and faith. Next is the Sacral Chakra, close to the sacrum around the navel. This is also called the seat of creativity. Come further up on your body to Solar Plexus Chakra or the region between your heart and navel. This is the seat of wisdom and power. Then to the Heart Chakra which is the seat of love and healing.

Meditating on the Throat Chakra means you have to focus on the epiglottis and think about all the communication aspects as this Chakra is the seat of communication. Focussing on the Third Eye Chakra you have to get your focus at the centre of your eyebrows and think about the awareness levels in yourself- awareness about your soul as part of the Paramatma. Finally the Crown Chakra- here you have to feel the Oneness in all the Chakras from top to bottom and feel the energy as a Whole. This last Chakra energizes you to the level of being united and one with the soul within.

As this ends your yoga workout for today, here's something for you to mull on:

- It's always good to be vibrant, dynamic and full of life with people around you. Keeping your energy levels high throughout the day can be a good start to healthy relationships.
- Learn to laugh at yourself often as that can help you tide over the little problems you may face adjusting with others or seeking too much perfection.
- Dreaming, sharing, loving are the three most important steps towards treating someone with utmost respect and care. Find out yourself how these can light up one's life.

So if you've been sitting idle most of last week and need to get your nerves moving, we bring you some more of those standing poses we have been teaching so far. On the physical level all standing poses integrate the body, balancing flexibility, strength, endurance and coordination. These poses work on all such things simultaneously giving you a chance to target individual weak points. A series of standing poses moves your body through a full range of motion in every major joint, nerve and muscle and

prepares the body for deeper poses, and teaches it to move in an even, integrated way. So today we begin with the Warrior Pose or Virabhadra Asana.

VIRABHADRA ASANA I OR WARRIOR POSE I

Start by standing straight in Tada Asana or the Mountain Pose. Spread your feet about three to five feet away from each other with your arms spread out on the side. Now turn your body to the right hand side and turn your waist completely to the right, too. Bend your leg into a right-angle raising your backfoot a little to get the grip. Keep your back leg absolutely straight. Take your arms up and join the hands overhead. Look up with your head and chin properly stretched. Feel the stretch running through the entire body and stay in the pose for about twenty seconds. Repeat this asana for about twenty seconds on the left with the left leg bent. Come back into Tada Asana and rest by standing straight for a while.

This strengthens your shoulders, arms, legs, ankles and back. It also opens up your hips, chest and lungs. It improves focus, balance and stability. It encourages good blood circulation and respiration. It stretches your belly, groins and back as well and energizes the entire body.

Now its time to get another stretch of the body with Virabhadra Asana II or Warrior Pose II.

VIRABHADRA ASANA II OR WARRIOR POSE II

After taking a few deep breaths in Tada Asana, spread your feet three to five feet away from each other. Turn your right foot out and left foot in and bend your right leg in ninety degree angle. Keep your arms stretched on the side. Turn your head to the right and look straight at the fingers of the right hand. Keep the left arm raised in line with your right arm. Hold the pose for twenty seconds. Repeat this pose on the left side for twenty seconds again.

This helps relieve backaches and develops balance and stability. This relieves any tension you may have at the back of your neck

as the neck gets a full swing to the right and left sides. It energizes tired limbs. It stimulates the abdominal organs and opens the chest and lungs. It also stretches hips and shoulders.

A third in this series of Warrior Poses is Virabhadra Asana III or Warrior Pose III which is more appropriate for balancing than the other two poses.

VIRABHADRA ASANA III OR WARRIOR POSE III

In order to get into this balancing pose you have to first get into Virabhadra Asana I and then keeping your hands raised, raise your left leg so that you may balance on your right foot. Extend both the arms well and the left leg is stretched back and suspended in the air, too. This gives a good stretch to the vertebrae.

This pose tones the leg muscles, improves posture, improves agility, contracts the abdominal organs and encourages good balancing. This asana, however, maybe tough to do if the hamstrings are tight or abdominal or spinal muscles are weak.

So after a power-packed morning of variations of Warrior Poses you can relax with a Shava Asana or a Yoga Nidra.

SHAVA ASANA AND YOGA NIDRA

Lie down on your Yoga mat with legs away from each other and hands away from your body. Your feet should be turned to either side and palms should face the ceiling. Loosen up your body with your eyes closed. Focus the mind on the breath. Feel the gradual inhalations and exhalations. After a few minutes, focus on the navel from inside the body. Keep the attention on the navel and imagine its passage inside.

Now one by one focus on stomach and then lungs, both the legs, hands, back, chest, both the ears, eyes and nose. Feel the breath as a separate part of your body. Slowly become aware of the environment around you and get up from the left hand side.

Get started for yet another day full of energy and enthusiasm with some mindful living.

MINDFUL LIVING

If you are caught up in the daily rigmarole of going to office, pleasing your boss, mundane household chores and late nights out then its time you get into some soulful thoughts and mindful living. This is exactly how:

- Never go into your comfort zone and always keep challenging yourself. The only thing you need to overcome for that is fear in the initial stage. Continue with courage because we can never change if we stay comfortable.
- Don't be a football of other person's opinions. You may stay neck deep into work with piles of office work to do but never lose that inner streak which each one of you has. As you sail through the journey of life, you will realize that the more you give in, the more timid you become. Keep your inner voice intact as you are a master of your own destiny.
- What goes around comes around. Never feel short of giving lots of kindness, warmth, respect and service to the other person in any form. If you can shower the positive attitude to the other person, it will come back to you in some way or another.
- Don't read intentions in other person's actions. Often in the day we do make mistakes. However more often than not it's easy to snap at the other person for whatever wrong has been done- by an office peon or a junior clerk, etc. Next time something like this happens, look inward. It will do wonders if you can just accept the other person's apologies and move on.

It's that time of the week when you have to get up and start your day with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. If it's lost somewhere then here's a Yoga workout to energize yourself.

PADANGUSHTHA ASANA

This asana is very good for reducing diabetes and for a good stretch in your hamstrings and calves. It improves flexibility and concentration power. It controls nervousness. It relives excess gas in the body. It relieves insomnia and headaches. It also cures high blood pressure.

Here you have to stand straight in Mountain Pose or Tada Asana. Inhale and take both your arms up to stretch them overhead. Exhale and bend down to touch your hands to the floor. Exhale further and hold your big toes. Try and dig your head deep within your knees. Breathe in this pose for about twenty seconds and feel the full benefit of the pose.

This may be combined with other few stretches.

PARSVOTTANA ASANA

Stand up straight and look in front in Tada Asana. Take a deep breath and exhale and jump into a position with your feet three feet away from each other. Take your arms behind your back and bend and fold your hands into a '*peechehhey namaste*'. Now turn to your right hand side, exhale and bend down to touch your head to your knee. Stay in this position for about twenty seconds. Now repeat this on the left side. Do remember that while bending down, you keep the stretch of your stomach.

This asana does wonders for your digestive system. It calms the brain. It stretches the spine, shoulders, wrists, hips and hamstrings. It also strengthens the legs. It stimulates the abdominal organs. It also improves a sense of balance and good posture.

PRASARITA PADOTTANA ASANA

After you have completed the bends on both sides, keep your legs stretched facing the front. Exhale and stretching your torso,

look up and bend down from the waist to touch your head to the ground. Make sure the crown of your head is placed on the floor. This sends instant blood flow to the brain and gives you the same effect as in the head stand.

It strengthens the inner and back of the legs. It also strengthens and stretches the spine. It tones the abdominal muscles. It heals mild headache. It relieves headache. It eliminates fatigue and helps combat mild depression.

BHRAMARI PRANAYAMA

It's time now to wind up the practice with a form of Pranayama, or meditative breathing. Keeping your elbows raised up in line with your shoulders gently touch your fingers against the skin on your face and place the fingers in a systematic manner. Plug your ears with your thumbs. Index fingers should gently be placed under the eyebrows on the above the eyelids. Brush the eyelashes down with the tap of your middle finger while the ring finger is gently touching the nostrils. Little finger should be placed on your upper lip. Keep the fingers on your face for about five minutes. Keep this Mudra for Bhramari Pranayama.

Now with each exhalation take out a humming sound from your throat. Inhale deeply and repeat this form of breathing for about five to ten minutes.

Bhramari Pranayama calms the nerves and reduces tension and anxiety. It helps to reduce anger and frustrations. It helps to reduce blood pressure. It helps cure migraine. It improves concentration and memory. It also builds a lot of confidence.

Finally time for some stocktaking and ruminating over life:

- Before starting out something new in life one is often overcome with fear. However its time to let go off that and face life in the face. Face the fears and you slowly tide over them with ease and confidence.
- You may often feel at times that you are tied up in a lot of ways and are bound by relationships. You may want to break free at times. The catch is to remain in the bondage and yet feel

the freedom. The more secure you feel in the relationship, more you strive for the freedom within. Freedom is a state of mind.

- Yoga teaches you to conserve energy. Its good to be busy in household chores or office jobs most of the time but remember- not always. Eneegy maybe conserved by simply sitting down, thinking of the good things from your past, living the pleasant memories and coming back to the present after a brief journey within. This rejuvenates you to work further in the day.

It's that time of the week again when you have to get energized for the whole week. Time to get up and start the much awaited Yoga workout to refresh your body and mind.

EK PADA ADHOMUKHASVANA ASANA

Stand straight in Tada Asana. Take a deep breath in and raise your arms up. Exhale and bend down to touch the floor with your legs absolutely straight. Inhale once again and walk back with your feet about five feet away from your hands. Raise the buttocks towards the ceiling and keep the crown of your head facing the floor. Lift the right leg and lift it up as much as you can. Do not bend the elbows or the other static leg. Repeat this with the left leg raised and right leg firmly placed on the ground. Feel the wonders it does to your body.

This pose increases the strength and flexibility of the shoulders. The hamstring muscles, calf muscles and the Achilles tendon are stretched. It also calms the mind and improves balance and concentration.

This could be followed by yet another standing pose.

UTTANA ASANA

Here you have to stand straight and exhale and bend down to touch the floor. Keep your legs straight and also your arms. With every exhalation try and dig your head deep into your knees. Stay there for about twenty seconds.

ARDHA UTTANA ASANA

Stay in Uttana Asana and as you exhale and come up, stop halfway keeping your arms well stretched in front. Your back should be parallel to the floor and legs should be absolutely straight. Breathe normally in this pose for about twenty seconds.

The two poses strengthen the hips, hamstrings and calves. They strengthen the thighs and knees. They help keep the spine strong and flexible. Both the poses also help reduce anxiety, depression, stress and fatigue. They relieve the tension in the back, neck and spine. They activate the abdominal muscles.

Another asana that may work wonders for the spine is the Ardha Chakra Asana.

ARDHA CHAKRA ASANA

Stand straight in Tada Asana. Inhale and raise your arms overhead into Urdhvahasta Asana. Separate your legs so that your feet are about shoulder distance away from each other. Raise your arms and look up. Exhale and stretch back with your arms raised. Try and curve your back and take your arms further back as much as you can. Stay in this pose for about ten seconds and slowly come back into Urdhvahasta Asana.

Ardha Chakra Asana strengthens the back and abdominal muscles. It tones other organs in the digestive system including excretory and reproductive organs. It gives a good shape to the body. It is good for those having back problems and postural defects.

This may now be wound up by a cycle of Anuloma Viloma Pranayama.

ANULOMA VILOMA PRANAYAMA

For Anuloma Viloma Pranayama, stay seated in simple cross-legged pose or Swastika Asana. Keep your back erect and chin up. Close your right nostril and inhale with your left nostril. Now close your left nostril and as you remove your finger from the right nostril, exhale from the right one. Inhale from the right nostril after complete exhalation and repeat this with the other nostril. Breathe like this for about five to ten minutes.

It helps to cure mental problems like anxiety, depression and tension. It is most beneficial for respiratory disorders like bronchitis and asthma. It improves the functioning of lungs.

Follow this with some mindful meditation and good, positive thoughts like these excerpts summarized from the Siva Sutra:

- If you really would like to get perfect in something then you have to learn to become detached to it. Attachment is important but only to a certain extent. If attachment stays within limits, it will bring success else misery. With victory over attachment, you find unlimited enjoyment, naturalness arises in you and you can succeed in any work or effort.
- In order to be fully successful in whatever you do, emotional detachment is of prime importance. Our sense organs are like spectators. All the happenings in the world is witnessed by our senses. You only need to nurture the seeds of tranquility, peace, pleasure and love.
- It is often seen we get lost in our search for truth and reality and the make believe. Two ways exist of searching the truth- one is that of male aggression, violence and the scramble for power. Another is that of female surrender and withdrawal. Science is the male path, aggressive; religion is a female path, bowing down and submissive. Learn to make the distinction.
- Always try to move ahead in life with full knowledge and lots of correct information about the world around you. Limited knowledge creates bondage. Without obtaining the knowledge

“Who am I” we seek to find out “What is this?” and this creates bondage. What you see is just a material manifestation. Try to understand the Soul.

- Always remember that mind training and mind controlling are the most important aspects of life as these help you attain a solution to most problems.

Its that time of the week when you have to get started with your work anew and afresh. So what are you waiting for ? Let’s start with some stretches and bends. So far we have focused on standing poses that energize your limbs but now it’s time for some sitting postures.

PASCHIMOTTANA ASANA OR SEATED FORWARD BEND POSE

Sit straight in Danda Asana which we will do with greater detail later. Keep your legs straight with knee caps plugged. Keep your back absolutely straight with your arms by your side and palms on the floor. Keeping the stretch of the side inhale and raise your arms. Watching over the extension of the back and the front, exhale and bend down to touch your toes. Keep your head buried between your knees. Breathe normally in this for about twenty seconds.

It acts as a wonderful stress reliever. This asana reduces fatty deposits in the abdomen. It removes anxiety, anger and irritability and calms the mind. It stretches the spine and brings flexibility. It is excellent for constipation and digestive disorder. It is also useful in increasing height.

JANUSIRSA ASANA OR HEAD-TO-KNEE POSE

This asana derives its name from its Sanskrit origins where Janu means knee and Sirsa means the head. Start by sitting straight in Danda Asana. Keeping your left leg straight bend your right leg so that the right toes touch the left thigh. The right heel is completely touching the right thigh itself. Raise both your arms overhead while

inhaling. Exhale and bend down to touch your left foot. Keep the stretch of your back and torso. Do not bend the knee. Breathe normally in this pose for twenty seconds. Repeat this asana with right leg straight and left leg bent.

It is the best exercise to reduce belly fat. This asana strengthens the hip bone. The stomach muscles also strengthen and small and large intestines are stretched. It can help you get rid of the constipation problem. While stretching the left leg the pancreas which is in the left side is accelerated and diabetes disease is overcome. While stretching the right leg, spleen and the gall bladder is strengthened. If Janusirsa Asana is practiced regularly, it can help you from fighting fever.

After getting the complete stretch and benefits of both these poses, its time now for some Sava Asana.

SAVA ASANA OR THE CORPSE POSE

Lie down with your feet away from each other. Let your hands be away from your body. Loosen up your body. Inhale and exhale normally for about five minutes and slowly focus on every part of your body. Focus on your breath and feel the breath running through each and every joint and muscle of your body. Feel the breath through every cell of your body. Although it looks easy Sava Asana is one of the most difficult poses to do as it demands more focus from you. This gives the body an opportunity to relax and unwind. It helps relieve stress and cures insomnia. It is excellent for stimulating blood circulation.

Now you may roll to your right-hand-side and sit up and open your eyes. It’s time now for some breathing exercises.

BHASTRIKA PRANAYAMA

In this you should first sit in Sukha Asana or simple cross-legged pose. You may also sit in Swastika Asana. Take a deep breath so that your stomach expands and protrudes out. Have a slow deep inhalation which goes on for about two seconds. Slowly exhale

with a force through your body. Exhalation should be powerful and strong so that your stomach goes in. Continue this form of inhalation and strong exhalation for about five minutes.

While breathing in imagine that you are taking in positivity and that you are being energized by them. While breathing out imagine that all the toxins of the body are coming out along with all the negativity.

This Pranayama gives strength to lungs, helps in allergies, Asthma, respiratory diseases. It helps in common cold and improves the immunity system. People suffering from High Blood Pressure and acute heart problems, however, should avoid doing this.

Practise these asanas and Pranayama until next time with some good thoughts to mull over:

- Do unto others as you would have others do unto you- Always know that when you empathise and put yourself in the other person's shoes, you behave a lot better than otherwise. If you expect kindness, politeness, love and warmth then its important you yourself first learn to be that way
- What goes around comes around- Always watch your actions. Actions are said to be of thought, word and deed not only of actions alone. Do some mindful thinking and watch your thoughts as thoughts can easily translate into deeds and actions which get accumulated for your future.
- Its better to lend a hand for help rather than be folded in prayer- True to some extent because if you help one person, you are doing good to someone else without the expectation of benefit or return from that person. This is the biggest form of giving- to help without expecting in return.
- Always contain anger and avoid it at important times- The first and foremost thing for a healthy relationship is to contain your anger and heal yourself through your best behavior before others. Avoid any altercation and put up your best by sometimes saying yes to the other person.

- If you want a smooth day ahead focus only on 'ordinary activities'- If you would like a smooth day then focus on your daily activities more than the bigger actions- by 'ordinary activities' is meant the four actions of eating, moving, thinking and relating. If you can do them right, you can set your day straight with healing and harmony.

Sitting poses have a lot of benefits, especially for the spine. These poses help to release tension and generate flexibility in the spine. A well-rounded practice helps improve the posture of the spine and improves alignment. So here are some more such asanas:

ARDHA BADDHA PADMA PASCHIMOTTANASANA

Sit straight in Danda Asana. Keep your left leg straight and bend your right leg in half Padma asana so that your entire heel is on your left thigh. Now raise your arms and exhale and touch your toes. Touch your head to the knee and breathe normally for twenty seconds. Repeat this asana with the right leg straight and the left leg bent.

This posture opens the hips and knees and stretches the spine. Here the abdominal organs are toned as circulation to the pelvis is increased. The position of the heel also benefits the digestive system.

MARICHYA ASANA I

This is yet another pose in the seated position. It is dedicated to a sage named Sage Marichi. In this asana you have to sit in Danda Asana. Bend your right leg so that the right knee faces the ceiling. Now wrap your right hand around the right knee and exhale and bend forward. Repeat this with the left knee bent for twenty seconds.

This pose stretches the hips, hamstrings and shoulders. It also activates the abdominal organs. It stimulates digestion and metabolism.

MARICHYA ASANA II

Here you are supposed to sit in Danda Asana. Bend the left leg in Padma Asana so that the left heel touches the right thigh. Then bend the right leg with the knee raised towards the ceiling as in Marichya Asana I. Wrap your arms around the right knee. Bend your head to touch your left knee. Do this asana for about twenty seconds and repeat with the right leg bent in Padma Asana and left knee raised towards the ceiling.

This asana is again a hip opener. The foot presses up against the internal organs which brings a contraction to the belly. It also opens up shoulders as you bind the arms around the other leg. This pose also helps build patience and greater balance.

MARICHYA ASANA III

Start by sitting in Danda Asana. Keep your left leg straight and bend your right leg so that the right knee faces the ceiling. Take your left arm, exhale and place your elbow around the right knee. Twist and push your elbow into the knee. Stay in this pose for twenty seconds. Repeat this asana with the right leg straight bending the left leg so that left knee faces the ceiling.

This asana tones the belly organs such as the liver and intestines and helps relieve lower back stiffness. It aids digestion and cures stomach ailments.

Its time now for some pranayama and breathing to end the yoga workout.

UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

This technique of breathing is very simple. Sit in Vir Asana with palms facing the ceiling on your knees. Take a deep breath in through the roof of your palate taking out a slight nasal sound.

Exhale in the same way taking out a nasal sound from the roof of your palate. Inhale and exhale around thirty times.

In Ujjayi many forms of Pranayama are done. One of them is Kapalbhatai Pranayama.

KAPALBHATI PRANAYAMA

The name of this Pranayama literally means 'skull' and 'shining' also called the 'Skull Shining Pranayama'. Here each breath has to be taken in Ujjayi. First sit in Padma Asana, close your eyes and keep the spine straight. Now take a deep breath through both your nostrils until your lungs are filled with air. Now exhale through both the nostrils forcefully, so that your stomach goes deep inside. As you exhale you feel some pressure in your stomach. While the process of exhaling is on, there is a hissing sound. Imagine that your disorders are being exhaled from your nose.

Repeat this cycle of inhalation and exhalation for five minutes to start with and slowly depending upon your capacity, increase the time to fifteen minutes.

This completes an entire Yoga regimen for the day but here's something to ponder over:

- Understand yourself and you will understand the world better- What is your Nature? Your nature is to move towards something life-supporting. The nature of life is to evolve. So whatever is not conducive to evolution is poison. Of all the objects of your senses, whichever is pulling you back is like poison; whichever is creating the boredom in you and giving a momentary sense of something is poison. Just drop them.
- It is easier said than done to actually forgive- When a wrong happens towards you or you are aware that you have erred, the hardest thing is to forgive yourself. You are unable to excuse yourself. The thing disturbs you and bothers you. Learn to forgive yourself. Some impressions were responsible for your actions. You have to free yourself from the past and how can you do it if you can't forgive.

- Living in the present- The toughest thing is to live in the present moment but that alone can give you bliss. Nobody has control over the past nor the future. The only thing that is in our hands is the present day. The best you can do with your present will determine how your future will be.

As it's that time of the week to again get your adrenalin rush going, here are some of the asanas to keep your poise and calm simultaneously. Continuing with the sitting poses reap some more benefits of these by doing the Baddhakona Asana, Vir Asana and Padma Asana.

BADDHAKONA ASANA

- Sit straight in Danda Asana. Bend your knees and sit with your knees close to your chest. Then relax your knees out to either side, and gently press the bottoms of your feet together. Hold your feet or your ankles. Lean forward slightly so you can feel your side bones on the ground. You can round over your feet to open up your back and relax your neck, or stay more upright, and breathe with your chest.
- The asana is very good for opening up the hips and calming and soothing the mind. The asana can be done with many variations. Inhale and raise your arms overhead. Exhale and bend forward to touch your head to the floor. Stay bent for the next twenty seconds.
- Yet another variation of this asana is crossing your arms overhead and lying back on the floor. This posture in Baddhakona Asana aids digestion.

VIR ASANA

- This word is derived from the Sanskrit term 'Vira' which means hero or a warrior. This pose increases the flexibility of the legs as it stretches the knees, thighs, ankles and feet. This asana is similar in a lot of ways to Vajra Asana. In Vajra Asana, however, you are supposed to sit on your calves and the feet are supposed

to touch each other whereas in Vir Asana there is a gap between your feet and you have to put your hips in between your toes. This asana is very easy to do.

- First kneel down and parallel your hip girth separately. Bend forward and twist the plump a part of calves external with the hands. Sit on the ground among the feet and breathe out. If you can't sit on the ground, use a prop sort of a blanket or a stool. Place your hands on top of thighs just near to knees, your palms facing down. Now relax your upper body and shoulders, your spine should be straight and tall. The crown of your head should face the ceiling and look straight ahead. During the process assume that you are hero or warrior, who sits tall and proud. Hold this pose for thirty seconds to one minute. In the process take normal breathing. After that relieve your feet, ankles, knees and shake your legs.
- This pose is useful in meditation. It improves blood circulation in legs. It improves digestion and is beneficial in gas problems. It cures symptoms of menopause. It improves your posture. If done during pregnancy, it helps to reduce swelling of the legs. It is also useful in asthma and high blood pressure. It relaxes the legs.
- There are many variations to this pose too. Inhale and raise your head to face the ceiling. Stretching your torso exhale and bend down so that you bury your head into your knees. Hold the sides of your legs and this is called Shashank Asana.
- Yet another variation is cross your arms overhead and lie down on your back. Stay in this pose for about five minutes and this can work wonders for digestion.

PADMA ASANA OR THE LOTUS POSE

- This is a cross-legged yoga posture which helps deepen meditation by calming the mind and alleviating various physical ailments. Sit on the floor or on a mat with legs stretched out in front of you in Danda Asana. Keep the spine erect. Bend the right knee

and place it on the left thigh. Make sure that the sole of the feet point upward and the heel is close to the abdomen. Now repeat the same step with the other leg. With both legs crossed and feet placed on opposite thighs, place your hands on the knees in mudra position. Keep the head straight and spine erect. Hold and continue with gentle long breaths in and out.

- This improves digestion and reduces muscular tension and brings blood pressure under control. It relaxes the mind. It helps pregnant ladies during childbirth. It reduces menstrual discomfort.
- A variation in this asana is cross your arms overhead while sitting in Padma Asana. Lie down on the floor. Arch your back and slowly unlock your arms and hold your big toes. Keep the arch of the back for about twenty seconds. This is Matsya Asana and works wonders for the lower back.
- Sit back in Padma Asana and meditate or breathe deeply for about five minutes. While you enjoy these poses, get ready for some more twisting ones and sitting ones next time.

It's time for a rigorous workout to kickstart your week with a punch and some adrenalin rush. Yoga gives you the perfect mind and body balance to get you started on a fresh boost to the week. Once again it's time for some sitting and twisting poses to tone your belly, fix your digestion and relieve you of some lower back tension.

BHARADWAJ ASANA

- Sit straight in Danda Asana. Shift over onto your right buttock, bend your knees and swing your legs to the left. Lay your feet on the floor outside the left hip with the left ankle resting in

your right arch. Inhale and lift through the top of the sternum to lengthen the full torso. Then exhale and twist your torso to the right keeping the left buttock firmly placed on the floor. Lengthen your tailbone towards the floor to keep the lower back long. Stretch your belly. Tuck your left hand under the right knee and place your right hand close to the right buttock on the floor. Pull your left shoulder back slightly, pressing your shoulder blades firmly against the back even as you turn your chest to the right. You can turn your head to the right along with the twist of the back. Stay in this pose for about twenty seconds. Repeat this asana to the left for the same time. With each inhalation lift a little more through the sternum and twist with the exhalation.

- This asana stretches the spine, shoulders and hips. It massages the abdominal organs, relieves lower backache, neck pain and sciatica. It helps relieve stress and improves digestion.
- One more asana that works wonders for your belly is the Nava Asana.

PARIPURNA NAVA ASANA OR BOAT POSE

- Here you have to lie down on the floor. Exhale and keeping your legs stretched and back straight lift your back and feet off the floor. Lengthen your tailbone into the floor and lift your pubis towards your navel. Keep your knees straight raising the tips of your toes slightly above the levels of your eyes. Stretch your arms alongside the legs, parallel to each other and the floor. In the beginning stay in the pose for about twenty seconds. Gradually increase the time to about one minute. Release the legs with an exhalation and sit upright on an inhalation.
- It strengthens the abdomen and spine. It stimulates the kidney, thyroid and prostate glands and intestines.
- One more asana that can work wonders in a seated posture is the Gomukha Asana.

GOMUKHA ASANA OR COW FACE POSE

- Sit straight in Danda Asana. Bend your knees and put your feet on the floor. Slide your left foot under the right knee to the outside of your right hip. Then cross your right leg over your left, so that the right knee is stacked up on the left one, and the right foot is slid around the left hip. Inhale and stretch your right arm, rotate your arm inward, then point toward the wall behind you and tuck the arm behind your torso to touch the shoulder. The right elbow is completely facing downward. Now inhale and take your left arm behind your back, left elbow facing the ceiling, take your left hand down to hold the right hand and hook the right and left fingers. The left elbow is completely facing the ceiling. Stay in this pose for about twenty seconds after which you can repeat with the opposite arms and legs.
- This stretches the ankles, thighs, hips, shoulders, armpits, triceps and chest.
- Now its time for some more twisting that can work wonders for your pancreas- the Ardha Matsyendra Asana.

ARDHA MATSYENDRA ASANA

- Sit straight in Danda Asana. Bend your knees, put your feet on the floor, then slide your left foot under your right knee to place it close to your right hip. Place the outside of your right leg on the floor across and over your left knee. Step the right foot close to your left hip. The right knee will point directly up to the ceiling. Exhale and twist toward the inside of your right thigh. Press the right hand against the floor just behind your right buttock and set your left upper arm on the outside of your right thigh near the knee. Push the right knee with your left elbow. Lean the upper torso back slightly, against the shoulder blades, and continue to lengthen the tailbone into the floor. Continue turning your head towards the twist of your

torso. Stay in this pose for about thirty seconds. Repeat with the opposite legs bent in different ways. With every inhalation twist a little more, lift a little more through the sternum and push your fingers onto the floor.

- It stimulates the liver, kidneys and pancreas. It stretches the shoulders, hips and neck. It energizes the spine. It relieves menstrual discomfort, fatigue, sciatica and backache. It is therapeutic for asthma. It increases appetite and cures most deadly diseases.
- If you would now like to get into some more forward stretches, Krounch Asana is here for you.

KROUNCHA ASANA OR THE HERON POSE

- Sit in Danda Asana. Bend your left leg into Vir Asana. Firm the shoulder blades against your back to help maintain the lift of the chest. Inhale and raise the other leg diagonally above the floor. Stretch your arms and entwine them around your right foot. Stretch the sternum and touch the front to the knee. Hold this position for about thirty seconds. Exhale and release the stretched leg and repeat with the other leg in Vir Asana.
- This pose stretches the hamstrings and stimulates the abdominal organs and heart.
- So here was a tough and hard workout for you with some powerful sittings, forward stretches and twistings. Next week we will be back with some more of the same.

It's that time of the week to flex your muscles, tone your body and zone in to some meditative action. Staying with some more rigorous sitting postures to get your blood pumping, here's a lowdown on a good workout to get you going for the whole week.

PARVATA ASANA

- Parvata means a mountain. This is a variation of the Padma Asana. In this first get seated into a good Padma Asana. Now interlock the fingers, and stretch the hands vertically up over the head. Keep the head bent forward with the chin on the breastbone. Stretch the arms up from the latissimus dorsi (near the floating ribs at the back) and the shoulder-blades. The palms should face upwards. Hold the pose for about thirty seconds with deep and even breathing. Change the crossing of the legs and the interlock of the fingers and repeat the pose, keeping the back erect.
- The asana relieves rheumatic pains and stiffness in the shoulders. It helps free movement and to develop the chest. The abdominal organs are drawn in and the chest expands fully.
- Its time now to do some more intense variations of Padma Asana- Tola Asana and Simha Asana.

TOLA ASANA

- Tola means a pair of scales. This pose resembles one pan of the scales hence the name. Here's how to do it.
- Remain seated in Padma Asana. Rest the palms on the floor beside the hips. Exhale, raise the trunk and balance only on the hands, stretching out the arms. Rest on the floor, uncross the legs, recross them the other way and again balance on the hands. Balance for as long as possible.
- This asana strengthens the wrists, hands and abdominal walls.

SIMHA ASANA I

- Simha means a lion. This asana is dedicated to Narasimha, the Man-Lion incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This asana has two main variations. While the first one is simple to do, the second variation is more strenuous and has greater benefits.
- Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front in Danda Asana. Raise the seat, bend the right knee and place the right foot under the left buttock. Then bend the left knee and place the left foot under the right buttock. The left ankle should be kept under the right one. Sit on the heels with the toes pointing back. Then bring the weight of the body on the thighs and knees. Stretch the trunk forward and keep the back erect. Place the right palm on the right knee and the left palm on the left knee. Stretch the arms straight and keep them stiff. Spread the fingers and press them against the knees. Open the jaws wide and stretch the tongue out towards the chin as far as you can. Gaze at the centre of the eyebrows or at the tip of the nose. Stay in the pose for about thirty seconds, breathing through the mouth. Withdraw the tongue and stretch the legs out. Repeat the pose, first placing the left foot under the right buttock and then the right foot under the left buttock.
- The posture cures foul breath and cleans the tongue. It is good as a speech therapy. It also helps one to master the three Bandhas.

SIMHA ASANA II

- Sit in Padma Asana. Extend the arms in front and place the palms on the floor, fingers pointing forward. Stand on the knees and then push the pelvic region to the floor. Stretch the back by contracting the buttocks, keeping the arms fully stretched. The weight of the body rests on the palms and knees only. Open the mouth and stretch the tongue towards the chin as far as you can. Gaze at the centre of the eyebrows or at the tip

of the nose and keep the pose for about 30 seconds. Breathe through the mouth. Repeat the pose after interchanging the position of the legs. Repeat the pose for about thirty seconds in each position.

- The pose exercises the liver and controls the flow of bile. The asana relieves a displaced coccyx.
- Another variation of Padma Asana is the Kukkuta Asana which helps in strengthening the wrists and abdomen.

KUKKUTA ASANA

- Kukkuta means a cock, which this posture resembles.
- Sit in Padma Asana. Insert the hands in the space between the thigh and calf near the knees. Start with the fingers and gradually push the hands down up to the elbows. Exhale, raise the body off the floor and balance on the palms keeping the thumbs together. Maintain the balance as long as you can with normal breathing. Rest on the floor, release the hands, change the crossing of the legs and repeat the pose.
- This asana works wonders for wrists and abdomen.

GORAKSHA ASANA

- Goraksha means a cowherd. It is a difficult balancing pose and you will feel good even if you balance only for a second in this.
- Perform Padma Asana, stretch the arms forward and place them on the floor. Rest on the hands and raise the hips from the floor. Stretch the trunk up vertically and stand on your knees. Stretch the thighs and balance gradually by lifting the hands one by one from the floor. When balance is secured, fold the hands in front of the chest and hold the position as long as you can. Gently release the legs,
- In this asana you can achieve a sense of balance. The coccyx gets elasticity with the practice of the pose.

BADDHA PADMA ASANA

- Here you have to again sit in Padma Asana. Exhale, swing the left arm back from the shoulders and bring the hand near the right hip. Catch the left big toe, hold the position and inhale. Similarly, with an exhalation swing the right arm back bringing it near the left hip and catching the right big toe. Look up keeping the neck stretched.
- Crossing the hands behind the back expands the chest and increases the range of shoulder movements. It also increases the peristaltic activity and relieves constipation.
- Enjoy performing these sitting postures until we come back with a few more next time.

Yoga binds the body to the mind and to the soul. In order to get a full concentration and focus in your life it is important to do Yoga. Yoga helps you focus on the now and present and it fills your life with complete bliss helping you breathe and seize the moment. So far we helped you energize your joints with some twistings and sitting, here are some more sitting postures to help you become a little more flexible:

UPAVISHTAKONA ASANA

- Upavishta means seated and 'Kona' means angle. Sit on the floor in Danda Asana. Move the legs sideways one by one and widen the distance between them as far as you can. Keep the legs extended throughout and see that the back of the entire legs rests on the floor. Catch the big toes between the respective thumbs and index and middle fingers. Keep the spine erect and extend the ribs. Pull the diaphragm up and hold the pose for a

few seconds with deep breaths. Exhale, bend forward and rest the head on the floor. Then extend the neck and place the chin on the floor. Then, clasp the feet with the hands and try to rest the chest on the floor. Stay in this position from 30 to 60 seconds with normal breathing. Inhale, raise the trunk off the floor and release the hold on the feet. Hold the left foot with both hands, exhale and rest the chin on the left knee. Inhale and raise the head and trunk. Now catch the right foot and with an exhalation rest the chin on the right knee. Inhale, raise the head and trunk, release the hands, bring the feet together and relax.

- This asana stretches the hamstrings and helps the blood to circulate properly in the pelvic region and keeps it healthy. It prevents the development of hernia of which it can cure mild cases and relieves sciatica. This asana is a boon to women as the asana controls and regularizes the menstrual flow and also stimulates the ovaries.
- There is yet another variation of Paschimottana Asana.

URDHVA MUKHA PASCHIMOTTANASANA I

- Urdhva means upwards and ‘Mukha’ means face, mouth. When used together it means having the face upwards. Paschimottanasana is the intense posterior stretch, a massage for the back.
- Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. Flex the knees and bring the feet closer to the buttocks. Catch the toes with the hands, exhale and stretch the legs up in the air, straighten them at the knees, pull the knee-caps towards the thighs and balance on the buttocks, keeping the spine as concave as you can. This position is called Ubhaya Padangushthasana (Ubhaya means both, Padangushtha means ‘big toe’).
- To start with you roll over backwards the floor, and it takes some time to learn to balance on the buttocks alone. Stay in the pose

from 30 to 60 seconds with normal breathing. After securing the balance, release the toes and hold the heels. Later interlock the fingers behind the extended feet and balance. Stretch the neck up and with an exhalation rest the forehead on the knees. Hold the pose for about 30 seconds with normal breathing.

URDHVA MUKHA PASCHIMOTTANASANA II

- This is yet another variation of Paschimottana Asana. Lie flat on the floor and place the hands straight over the head. Stretch the legs straight, tighten the knees and take a few deep breaths. Exhale and slowly raise the legs together and bring them over the head. Interlock the fingers, clasp the soles and stretch the legs straight up with the knees keep tight. Rest the entire back on the floor. Take three deep breaths. Exhale, lower the legs towards the floor beyond the head by widening the elbows. Try and keep the pelvis as near the floor as possible. Keep the legs tightened at the knees throughout. Rest the chin on the knees. Stay in the position for 30 to 60 seconds, breathing evenly.
- The pose helps balance and poise. The legs stretch fully which makes the thighs and calves shapely. The benefits are the same as those of Paschimottanasana, and in addition this pose prevents hernia and relieves severe backaches.
- Yet one more asana good for an extended stretch is the Purvottanasana.

PURVOTTANASANA

- Purva literally means the East. It means the front of the whole body from the forehead to the toes. Uttana means an intense stretch. In this posture, the front of the body is stretched intensely.
- Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. Place the palms on the floor by the hips, with the fingers pointing in the direction of the feet. Bend the knees and place the soles and

heels on the floor. Take the pressure of the body on the hands and feet, exhale and lift the body off the floor. Straighten the arms and the legs and keep the knees and elbows tightened. The arms will be perpendicular to the floor from the wrists to the shoulders. From the shoulders to the pelvis, the trunk will be parallel to the floor. Stretch the neck and throw the head as far back as possible. Stay in this posture for one minute, breathing normally.

- This posture strengthens the wrists and ankles, improves the movement of the shoulder joints and expands the chest fully. It gives relief from the fatigue caused by doing other strenuous asanas in the workout.
- These asanas can help you rejuvenate and make you focus better in work or the activity that you are currently doing. Yoga can work wonders in making you let go off the past, stay in the present and be welcoming towards your future with enthusiasm and optimism.

After a good forward stretch with the forward bends and twistings to energize your spine it's time for some supine poses where you can work on your abdomen and lower back. In order to begin with some basic ones, you could balance into the Nava Asana or the Boat Pose and lie down in Jatar Parivartana Asana.

PARIPURNA NAVA ASANA

- Paripurna means entire or complete. The posture here resembles that of a boat with oars, hence the name. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. Place the palms on the floor by the hips, the fingers pointing to the feet. Stretch the hands straight and keep the back erect. This position is called Danda Asana. Exhale, recline the trunk slightly back and simultaneously raise the legs from the floor and keep them stiff with the knees tight and toes pointing forward. Balance is maintained only on the buttocks and no part of the spine should be allowed to touch the floor, from which the legs should be kept at an angle

of 60 to 65 degrees. The feet are higher than the head and not level with it. Remove the hands from the floor and stretch the arms forward, keeping them parallel to the floor and near the thighs. The shoulders and the palms should be on one level and the palms should face each other. Stay in this pose for about fifteen seconds with normal breathing.

- This asana gives relief to persons who feel a bloating sensation in the abdomen due to gas and also to those suffering from gastric complaints. It reduces fat around waistline and tones the kidneys.

ARDHA NAVA ASANA

- Sit in Danda Asana. Interlock the fingers and place them on the back of the head above the neck. Exhale, recline the trunk back and simultaneously raise the legs from the floor, keeping the knees tight and the toes pointed. The balance of the body rests on the buttocks and no part of the spine should be allowed to touch the floor. One feels the grip on the muscles of the abdomen and the lower back. Keep the legs at an angle of about 30 to 35 degrees from the floor and the crown of the head in line with the toes. Hold this pose for about 30 to 35 seconds. Do not hold the breath in this asana, instead do normal breathing.
- The effect of Ardha Nava Asana is felt strongly on the improvement of the liver, gall bladder and spleen. The two asanas can help strengthen the back.
- One pose which is good for the stomach and can work wonders for the waistline too is the Jatar Parivartana Asana.

JATARA PARIVARTANA ASANA

- Jathara means the stomach, the belly. Parivartana means turning or rolling about, turning around. Lie flat on the back on the floor. Stretch out both arms sideways in line with the shoulders, so that the body resembles a cross. Exhale, raise both legs together until

they are perpendicular to the floor. They should remain stiff so do not bend them at the knees. Remain in this position for a few breaths. Exhale, and move both the legs sideways down towards the floor to the left until the toes of the left foot almost touch the finger-tips of the outstretched left hand. Try and keep the back on the floor. Try not to lift the right shoulder off the floor. Both the legs should go down together, the knees being kept tight throughout. Turn the legs only from the hips. Stay in this pose for about twenty seconds. Remain with the legs perpendicular for a few breaths and then repeat the movements by lowering the legs to the right and turning the abdomen to the left.

- This asana is good for reducing excess fat. It tones and eradicates sluggishness of the liver, spleen and pancreas. It also cures gastritis and strengthens the intestines. Its good for all the abdominal organs and keeps them well-massaged. It helps to relieve sprains and catches in the lower back and in the hip region.
- These supine poses maybe accompanied by Bandhas which are essential along with Pranayama.

BANDHAS- JALANDHARA, UDDIYANA AND MULA

- Bandha means bondage, joining together, fettering or catching hold of. It is a posture in which you hold or contract certain organs and parts of the body.
- The first Bandha is Jalandhara where Jala means a web or a net and a mesh. In this the neck and throat are contracted and the chin is made to rest on the chest in the notch between the collar-bones and at the top of the breast bone. It is practiced well while doing the Sarvanga Asana as one can easily do the neck-lock then. This Bandha regulates the flow of blood and prana to the heart, the glands in the neck and the head together with the brain.
- Uddiyana means flying up. The process here is to lift the diaphragm high up the thorax and to pull in the abdominal organs against the back towards the spine. You do this by sucking in

breath and holding the stomach in. It exercises the diaphragm and abdominal organs. The cavity created by the lift of the diaphragm gives a gentle massage to the muscles of the heart, thereby toning it.

- Mula means root, source, origin or cause, basis and foundation. Here the region of the lower abdomen between the navel and the anus is contracted towards the spine and pulled up towards the diaphragm. The practice of contracting the anal sphincter muscles helps one to master Mula Bandha.
- It is said that by the practice of these bandhas the sixteen vital parts are closed. The sixteen vital parts are the thumbs, ankles, knees, thighs, organs of reproduction, navel, heart, neck, throat, palate, nose, the middle of the eyebrows, forehead, head and Brahmarandhra (the aperture in the crown of the head through which the soul is said to escape on leaving the body).
- Try out these Bandhas and poses until we are back with more next time.

Supine poses are generally done in a very relaxed manner. Each pose is done by lying down on your back, massaging your lower back and rubbing your shoulders and upper back against the floor. Sarvanga Asana is one such pose which does wonders for every part of the body. Sirsa Asana, too, energizes the Self with good concentration and focus. Here's how to do these poses:

SALAMBA SIRSA ASANA

- Salamba means with support. Sirsa means the head. This is the head stand pose, one of the most important Yogic asanas. Its mastery gives you balance, poise, both physically and mentally.

Here the details are given for a first-time practitioner and beginner. This asana may be done by placing a folded blanket or mat against a wall. Kneel near the blanket. Rest the forearms on the centre of the blanket. While doing so take care that the distance between the elbows on the floor is not wider than the shoulders. Interlock the fingers right up to the finger-tips so that the palms form a cup. Place the sides of the palms near the little fingers on the blanket. While going up on your head or balancing, the fingers should be kept tightly locked. If they are left loose, the weight of the body falls on them and the arms ache. So remember to lock them well. Rest the crown of the head only on the blanket so that the back of the head touches the palms which are cupped. Do not rest the forehead nor the back but only the crown of the head on the blanket. In order to do this, move the knees towards the head. Raise the knees from the floor by moving the toes closer to the head. Exhale, take a gentle push and a swing from the floor and stand on the head keeping the whole body perpendicular to the floor.

- While practicing against a wall, the distance between it and the head should not be more than two or three inches. While doing the head stand against a wall, the beginner should exhale, swing the legs up, support the hips against the side of the wall and move the feet up. You should then stretch the back vertically up, gradually leave the support of the wall and learn to master the balance. When once balance is secured, it is advisable to come down to the floor with the legs straight and with a backward action of the hips. The best way to overcome fear of a fall is to face the situation with equanimity if you are afraid of it. There is a variation in this pose- Urdhva Danda Asana.

URDHVA DANDA ASANA

- After securing the head position, stretch the legs straight by raising the knees from the floor. Move the toes nearer to the

head and try to press the heels to the floor, keeping the back erect. Raise the heels and take the toes off the floor with a backward movement of the hips. Raise both legs simultaneously keeping them poker stiff. Again move the legs up until they are parallel to the floor. This position is called Urdhva Danda Asana.

- The ancient books have called this asana the 'king of all asanas'. When we are born, normally the head comes out first and then the limbs. The skull encases the brain, which controls the nervous system and the organs of sense. The brain is the seat of intelligence, knowledge, discrimination, wisdom and power. Regular practice makes healthy pure blood flow through the brain cells. This rejuvenates them so that thinking power increases and thoughts become clearer. It ensures proper blood supply to pituitary and pineal glands in the brain. Our growth, health and vitality depend on the proper functioning of these two glands. People suffering from loss of sleep, memory and vitality have recovered by its regular practice. Regular practice of this asana shows improvement in haemoglobin content of the blood. Coupled with Sarvanga Asana, it can do wonders for stomach ailments, particularly constipation. Regular practice also develops the body, disciplines the mind and widens the horizons of the spirit.
- While you do these poses to get some poise and good health, here are some pointers for the mind and relationships. Dwell on these to improve and never give up on yourself:
- Knowledge alone is not enough. Having knowledge is not sufficient. Love is needed. Knowledge is reading the menu card, love is experiencing it. Those who are desirous of liberation or freedom should only go for Divine Love. Have Knowledge but immerse in Love.
- The word bhajan means sharing. Constantly share all that you have with the trees, the mountains, the sky, with people, with

animals. Sharing your life is bhajan. Predominant of all this is the Grace of the Master, of the Guru, even that you can only get when you have some Divine Grace.

- Shun bad company. The company which fuels negativity is bad company. Those people who make your negative feelings and frustrations grow more and more is bad company. You need the skill to put down their negativity. Bad company brings ambition, desire, frustration, anger and delusion. Good company is that which cheers and elevates you, which brings a pleasant attitude and feeling.

Last time we made you do the Salamba Sirsasana and taught you how to do the three Bandhas. Practise these asanas carefully and with precision. Today we will be telling you about more such asanas including the Sarvanga Asana and its variations.

SALAMBA SARVANGA ASANA

Salamba means supported or propped up. Sarvanga means the entire body or all the limbs. In this asana the whole body benefits from the exercise, hence the name.

Lie flat on the back on the carpet keeping the legs stretched out, tightened at the knees. Place the hands by the side of the legs, palms down. Take a few deep breaths. Exhale, bend the knees and move the legs towards the stomach till the thighs press it. Take two breaths. Raise the hips from the floor with an exhalation and rest the hands on them by bending the arms at the elbows. Take two breaths. Exhale, raise the trunk up perpendicularly supported by the hands until the chest touches the chin. Only the back of the head and the neck, the shoulders and the backs of the arms up to the elbows should rest on the floor. Place the hands in the middle of the spine and take two breaths. Exhale and stretch the legs straight

with the toes pointing up. Stay in this position for about five minutes with even breathing. Exhale and gradually slide down, release the hands, lie flat and relax.

Sarvanga Asana is also called the Mother of asanas. It is a panacea for most common ailments. This asana has a direct effect on the glands and helps them to function properly. Sarvanga Asana does this for the thyroid and parathyroid glands which are situated in the neck region, since due to the firm chinlock their blood supply is increased. Further, since the body is inverted the venous blood flows to the heart without any strain by force of gravity. Healthy blood is allowed to circulate around the neck and chest. As a result, persons suffering from breathlessness, palpitation, asthma, bronchitis and throat ailments get relief. Continued practice of this asana removes common colds and other nasal disturbances. Due to the soothing effect of the pose, those suffering from hypertension, irritation, shortness of temper, nervous breakdown and insomnia are relieved.

Sarvanga Asana maybe followed by some of its variations like the Hala Asana.

HALA ASANA

Hala means a plough, the shape of which this posture resembles, hence the name.

Do Salamba Sarvanga Asana with a firm chinlock. Release the chinlock, lower the trunk slightly, moving the arms and legs over the head and resting the toes on the floor. Tighten the knees by pulling up the hamstring muscles at the back of the thighs and raise the trunk. Place the hands in the middle of the back and press it to keep the trunk perpendicular to the floor. Stretch the arms on the floor in the direction opposite to that of the legs. Hook the thumbs and stretch the arms and legs. Interlock the fingers and turn the wrists so that the thumbs rest on the floor. Stretch the palms along with the fingers, tighten the arms at the elbows and pull them from the shoulders. The legs and the hands are stretched in opposite directions and this

stretches the spine completely. While interlocking the fingers, it is advisable to change the interlock. Remain in the attainable pose from one to five minutes with normal breathing.

An important effect of Hala Asana is that the abdominal organs are rejuvenated due to contraction. The spine receives an extra supply of blood due to the forward bend and this helps to relieve backache. Cramps in the hands are cured due to interlocking and stretching the palms and fingers. People suffering from stiff shoulders and elbows, lumbago and arthritis of the back find relief in this asana. Pain in the stomach due to wind is also relieved and lightness is felt immediately. The pose is good for people with a tendency for high blood pressure. If they perform Hala Asana first and then Sarvanga Asana, they will not feel the rush of blood or the sensation of fullness in the head.

Yet another asana that helps one relieve of headaches is Supta Kona Asana.

SUPTA KONA ASANA

Supta means lying down and kona an angle. It is a variation of Hala Asana in which the legs are spread apart.

Stay in Hala Asana, stretch the legs straight and spread the legs as far apart as you can. Pull the trunk up and tighten the knees. Hold the right toe with the right hand and the left toe with the left one. Keep the heels up. After gripping the toes, move the dorsal region of the spine further up and extend the hamstring muscles. Stay in the pose for about 20 to 30 seconds with normal breathing.

This pose tones the legs and helps to contract the abdominal organs.

After such a tough Yoga workout, end with some basic pranayama techniques like the Nadi Shodhana. End your day's workout with Sakshi Dhyana and positive thoughts:

- The natural desire of every life is to have comfort, to get into a place where there is no misery, no sorrow. The goal of human

life is to move towards such perfection. That can be achieved if one improves oneself as a part of the larger Cosmos.

- The five senses have limited capacity but the mind has unlimited desires. There is an imbalance between the desire to enjoy and capability of the senses to enjoy. Then conflict arises. You feel miserable. There is nothing wrong to enjoy the five senses, to enjoy the pleasures of life but to give it more importance than life itself is disastrous.
- The beauty of spirituality is that you don't condemn. Don't dismiss the believer and don't dismiss the atheists either. It is people in extremes who keep condemning each other. Experience is the best educator. When you are encountering death, what else can be more powerful than death itself educating you.

Supine poses are there to energize your tummy and other parts of the lower body. These positions are versatile, calming and great for all body type. If someone has a problem in the knees, supine poses can be a wonderful way to relieve the force of gravity and help one stay fit. While variations in the Sarvanga Asana helped you get rid of some of the problems, here are more to warm you up:

UTTANAPADA ASANA

In order to get into the asana you need to lie back flat on your back with ankles together and arms at your side with palms facing down. Inhale as you extend and lengthen your spine.. Imagine that a string is pulling the top of your head and legs in different directions. Exhale as you lift your legs simultaneously. They can be raised up to a 45 degree angle or a 90 degree angle. Breathe and hold this pose for five deep breaths or twenty seconds.

After first twenty seconds slowly lower your legs so that the stomach muscles may feel the contraction.

This asana is beneficial for all stomach-related ailments and is also good for weight loss and obesity. A condition called ‘navel displacement’ can also be cured by this pose.

Another supine pose that can do wonders for your core is Pawanmukta Asana.

PAWANMUKTA ASANA

In order to get into this pose lie down face up with legs absolutely straight. With an exhale bend the legs and move it up to the chest so that the knees touch your chest. Wrap your arms around your knees getting them closer to your chest. Bring your forehead onto or close to your knees. Be careful not to strain your neck.

This asana stretches the neck and back. The abdominal muscles are tensed and the internal organs are compressed which increases the blood circulation and stimulates the nerves, increasing the efficiency of the internal organs. The pressure on the abdomen releases any trapped gases in the intestine.

Yet another supine asana which can work wonders for your back is Setubandha Sarvangasana.

SETUBANDHA SARVANGA ASANA

In order to get complete benefit of Setubandha Asana it is important to do it the proper way. Lie down on your back, bend your legs and place your feet under the knees. Hold your feet around the ankles. Exhale, push with your waist and lift your sternum and waist off the floor. Let your shoulders be firmly placed on the floor. Use the muscles in your leg as support and bring your chest towards your chin. If you feel the pressure then instead of holding the ankles you can place your hands under the waist. Keep your elbows close together. Inhale and exhale normally for about twenty seconds. While exhaling relax your legs and waist and rest on the floor.

The asana stretches the chest, neck, spine and hips. It strengthens the back, buttocks and hamstrings. It also improves circulation of blood. It helps alleviate stress and mild depression. It calms the brain and central nervous system. It stimulates the lungs, thyroid glands and abdominal organs and improves digestion.

Another supine pose which is good for calming the mind and relaxing is the Shava Asana.

SHAVA ASANA OR THE CORPSE POSE

Lie down face up with your feet on the corners of your mat. Drop your feet and point them sideward. Place your arms out at your side with your palms facing upward. Close your eyes and let your body relax. Release all tension from every muscle, every organ, every pore, every cell of your body. Feel the inhalation and exhalation affecting every joint and corner of your body.

It relaxes your whole body. It releases stress, fatigue, depression and tension. It helps improve concentration and cures insomnia. It relaxes your muscles and calms the mind and improves mental health. It is an excellent asana for stimulating blood circulation.

After this relaxing yoga workout you can mull on some thoughts from the Katho Upanishad before finally calling it a day:

- Your spirit is innocence, deep inside you are innocent. Don't mind what is happening in the mind, never mind. Believe in the innocence of the spirit that is in the present moment.
- What does 'Maya' mean? It is that which is temporary, that doesn't stay, it is impermanent. Maya comes and tries to grab you. You need to swim above that. When you are in the ocean, waves come gushing- you can't stop waves, but with the surfboard, you go over it.
- Everything has its purpose. A skillful teacher doesn't need to take a stick and beat people, blame people, though it may work sometimes, though it is needed sometimes. But they go by saying- the gates of joy are already opening for you. A little more patience is necessary and that's it.

Supine poses are great for your back and offer restorative effect on the body, mind and soul. Its direct effect maybe felt in the lower back, spine, shoulders and joints which works wonders also for the core. Here are some more such poses which can help you relieve your stress and mental fatigue:

SUPTA PADANGUSHTHA ASANA

- Lie down straight on your back. Raise the right leg first straight up and hold and entwine your thumb around the right toe. Left leg is on the floor and straight with your left leg placed on your left thigh. Breathe normally for twenty seconds in this pose.
- This pose may also be done by supporting the back of your right leg by holding the back of the knee and lending it some support with the hands interlocked behind the knee.
- Another way of getting full effect of the asana is by taking a belt or a string and holding it around the raised foot. Stretch against the string and pull the string towards yourself. Keep the right leg stretched and feel the stretch at the back of the leg.
- Repeat this with the left leg raised and breathe normally in this pose.
- This asana is good for the stretch of the hips, thighs, hamstrings, groins and calves. It strengthens the knees. It stimulates the prostate glands. It improves digestion and relieves backache, sciatica and menstrual discomfort. This is therapeutic for high blood pressure, flat feet and infertility.

Yet another asana which is good for a good back stretch is Supta Vir Asana.

SUPTA VIR ASANA

- In this asana you have to first sit in Vir Asana. Then exhale and lie back and let the back arch a bit. Another way of doing this pose is to stack up a few bolsters or cushions right behind your

back and then lie back on the floor. Cross your elbows over the shoulders and stay there for about twenty seconds.

- It gives a good stretch to your thighs, knees, ankles, abdomen and hips. It helps relieve tired legs and assists in digestion. It relieves menstrual discomfort and strengthens the arches of the feet. It helps cure arthritis, asthma, diarrhea, digestive problems, high blood pressure, infertility, insomnia and varicose veins.

One other good asana for digestive system and obesity is another variation of Jatar Parivartana.

JATARA PARIVARTAN VARIATION I

This is also called King Asana by a few yoga experts. Here you have to lie down and bend your knees. Turn to the right hand side without turning the chest and shoulders. Bend to the right such that left knee touches the right heel. Bend both your legs to the right and then to the left. On the left hand side your right knee should touch the left heel. Repeat this cycle for about five minutes.

JATARA PARIVARTAN VARIATION II

This asana is also known as the Queen Asana. Here you have to lie on your back and bend your knees. Hold your knees upto your stomach. Keeping the bend turn to the right. As you turn your legs to the right, turn your head to the left. Let your arms be stretched to the sides. Keep both the knees together while turning. Repeat this on the left hand side. Turn to the left and right for about five minutes.

This belly twist stretches the back muscles, realigns and lengthens the spine, and energizes the spinal discs.

Yet another asana good for relaxing during the menstrual cycle is Viparitkarni.

VIPARITAKARANI

This restorative pose does wonders for anyone who would like to destress and relax. Here one can put up the legs against the wall.

Start by lying on the back. The arms are straight beside the body. Inhaling bend the knees and raise the legs and buttocks. Bring the hands under the buttocks to support the back. Elbows remain on the floor. Straighten the legs vertically upwards. Relax the muscles of the feet, legs and hips. Breathing normally, remain in this position as long as you are comfortable. Exhale, bend the knees towards the forehead, slowly lower the buttocks and legs and return to the starting position.

This invigorates the whole body and regulates glandular activity thereby reducing states of stress and depression. Lymphatic and venous return is increased which is beneficial for swollen legs and diseases of the veins. This relaxes the abdominal and pelvic regions and improves blood supply to these areas. It is beneficial for low blood pressure.

After such a relaxing workout of Yoga what can work wonders is some food for thought from Ashtavakra Gita:

- Janaka says that one should drop the illusion. One has to dissolve in the Divinity; in the Infinity; in the past.
- Ashtavakra said there is nothing to be given, nothing to be surrendered, nothing to be dropped. The sense of giving up comes when you have the sense of ownership, of possession which should not be there in the first place.
- A sense of doer-ship comes to you as a big weight or cloud. Any time you feel a big weight or cloud know you have come into the sense of doer-ship. Just sit back and relax. You will see it vanishes. This very knowledge, 'I'm not the doer', lets you relax.

Supine poses are restorative ones which rejuvenate the body, specifically the spine and the organs around it. Today some of the supine poses we will discuss are Ananta Asana and Chakra Asana.

ANANTA ASANA

- 'Ananta' is another name for Vishnu. This pose reflects the sleeping pose of Vishnu on his serpent. In order to derive full benefit of the pose, lie down on the floor on your back, legs extended and hands by the side. Turn to the left, fold your left hand at the elbow. Place the elbow on the ground. Raise your head and support it with the left palm. Place your right hand in front of the chest. Breathe normally. Fold the right leg at the knee and place the toes of right foot on the upper left thigh. Keep the right leg straight keeping the toes pointed up. Hold the big toe of the right leg with your right hand. Breathing normally, hold this posture for about a minute. Release the right leg and slowly return to the supine position. Turn on the other side and repeat by alternating legs.
- This asana has several benefits. It can improve blood circulation. It also helps stretch hamstring muscles and calves. It helps to tone your abdominal muscles. It strengthens shoulder muscles. It helps with digestive problems, too. This asana helps in relieving mental anxiety and stress. It is helpful in treating disorders related to the urinary bladder, uterus, prostate, testes and ovaries. It is also beneficial in correcting menstrual disorders and edema of the arms and legs.
- This asana can be followed by the Chakra Asana.

CHAKRA ASANA

- 'Chakra' means wheel in Sanskrit. In the final posture of this pose the arched body resembles the rim of a wheel. Hence the name Chakra Asana or Wheel Pose.

- Lie down on your back with both legs apart. Stretch both arms on either side with palms facing downward. Bend both the knees and draw the legs back. The heels should be touching the respective buttocks. Both soles should be touching the ground. Bring your hand backwards and place the hands beside the head. The palms should be facing downwards ready to push down against the floor. The palm and heels of each side should be in one straight line. Inhale slowly. Continue inhaling and press the palms and hand on the ground. Taking the support of the hands and legs, raise your shoulder, chest, abdomen, hips and thighs to the optimum level. Your head should be hanging in between your shoulders. Make sure the elbows are not bent once in the position. Try to arch the body as much as possible. Hold your breath and stay in this position for about ten seconds. Repeat this asana five-six times.
- The pose benefits the pelvic bones and abdominal muscles. It benefits all parts of the body. The posture also helps strengthen the neck, arms, wrists, fingers, spine, back, thighs, knees, ankles and feet.
- Yet another asana very good for the spine and the back is Hala Asana or the Plough Pose.

HALA ASANA

- ‘Hala’ means plough in Sanskrit. In this posture the practitioner’s body is akin to a plough used by the farmers.
- Lie down on the floor on your back and come down into Ardha Halasana posture. Exhale slowly and press the palms on the floor. Raise your posterior, hips and lower back off the ground. While raising the lower part of your body, bring the feet closer down to the ground near the head. Keep your knees straight. Try to touch the ground with your feet. Inhale and breathe normally. Walk out with your toes away from the head with further curvature of your spine. Assume a steady posture and

- exhale completely. Breathe deeply. Form a chin-lock with your chin. Make sure your lower thighs lie just above the forehead. Form a finger-lock encircling your head. Hold this posture as long as you comfortably can. Maintain normal breathing. Bring the hands back to the side. Inhale and bring the legs back to the vertical position. Exhale and bring the legs back on the ground. Resume normal breathing. Relax with Shava Asana.
- The pose helps in treatment of rheumatism. It relieves tension from the neck and back, by stretching the muscles of the region. It cures slouching and helps in attaining a straight standing posture. It helps attain a slimmer waist as well as makes the hips suppler. It exercises the entire spinal column and provides flexibility. This pose should be practiced by those wanting to lose weight and get a flat tummy. It helps remove laziness and fatigue. Your heart is strengthened.
- After this heavy Yoga workout time for some meditation and Mudra.

SANMUKHI MUDRA

- Sit in Sukha Asana with a straight back and eyes closed. Keeping your neck and chin up, raise your elbows in line with your shoulders and get your hands gently down on your face. Place your fingers gently on the face such that the index finger and middle finger covers your eyes and gently pushes down your eyelids down. Place your ring finger on your nostril and little finger on your upper lip. Plug your ears with your thumbs. Be careful not to be hard on your face and let the touch be gentle. Focus on the word ‘Om’ and at the centre of your eyebrows. After five minutes of deep breathing and meditation, gently release your fingers and relax.

So far we have trained you in doing forward-bends, twisting poses, supine, few types of Pranayama, getting into Bandhas and Mudras and relaxing and meditating in various ways. Now we will tell you how to bend your back and get some agility. Few basic backbends to begin with which may be more like a warmup for the lower back and spine are Shalabh Asana, Dhanur Asana, Bhujanga Asana and Urdhva Mukhasvana Asana.

SHALABH ASANA

Shalabh means a locust. The pose resembles a locust resting on the ground, hence the name.

In order to get into the pose, you have to lie full length on the floor on your stomach, facing downwards. Stretch both your arms back. Exhale, lift the head, chest and legs off the floor simultaneously as high as possible. The hands should not be placed and the ribs should not rest on the floor. Only the abdominal front portion of the body rests on the floor and bears the weight of the body. Contract the buttocks and stretch the thigh muscles. Keep both legs fully extended and straight, touching at the thighs, knees and ankles. Do not bear the weight of the body on the hands but stretch them back to exercise the upper portion of the back muscles. Stay in this pose as long as you can with normal breathing. In the beginning it is difficult to lift the chest and the legs off the floor, but this becomes easier as the abdominal muscles grow stronger.

SHALABH ASANA VARIATION I

A variation of the pose may also be tried to relieve aches in the lower part of the back. Here the legs are bent at the knees and the thighs are kept apart while the shins are kept perpendicular to the floor. Then with an exhalation, the thighs are lifted off the floor and brought closer together until the knees touch, the shins still being kept perpendicular.

SHALABH ASANA VARIATION II

Yet another variation is that you lie down on the floor on your stomach. Place your arms by the side. Now exhale and lift one leg, the right leg first, off the floor from the thighs. Keep it straight as the other leg is firmly placed on the floor. Stay in this pose for about twenty seconds. Lift the other leg, the left leg off the floor from the thigh upwards. Exhale and get into this pose keeping the other leg firmly placed on the floor. Arms will be on the floor by your side. Keep your leg suspended in the air for about twenty seconds. Now form a fist with your hands and place it around your groins. Exhale and lift both your legs simultaneously. Legs should be lifted straight up and be kept in that position for about twenty seconds. Breathe normally in the pose.

This pose aids digestion and relieves gastric troubles and flatulence. Since the spine is stretched back it becomes elastic and the pose relieves pain in the sacral and lumbar regions. Persons suffering from slip discs have benefitted greatly from this pose without recourse to enforced rest or surgical treatment. The bladder and the prostate gland also benefit from the exercise and remain healthy.

This pose paves way for the practice of other backbends that can be even better for the flexibility of the spine and lower back, Dhanur Asana being one.

DHANUR ASANA

Dhanu means a bow. The hands are used like a bow-string to pull the head, trunk and legs up and the posture resembles a bent bow.

- Lie full length on the floor on the stomach, face downwards. Exhale and bend the knees. Stretch the arms back and hold the left ankle with the left hand and the right ankle with the right hand. Take two breaths. Now exhale completely and pull the legs up by raising the knees above the floor, and simultaneously lift the chest off the floor. The arms and hands act like a bow-string

to tauten the body like a bent bow. Lift up the head and pull it as far back as possible. Hold this pose for about twenty to thirty seconds. Then with an exhalation release the ankles, stretch the legs straight, bring the head and the legs back to the floor and relax.

PARSVA DHANUR ASANA

Parsva means sideways. In this variation of Dhanurasana, one performs the posture lying on one's side.

Here you have to perform Dhanur Asana, then roll onto the right side and stretch the legs and chest. Inhale and come to the original position. Then exhale and roll over to the left side. Both these postures benefit the spine and ankles.

The spine is stretched back. This asana brings elasticity to the spine and tones the abdominal organs. The sideways roll further massages the abdominal organs by pressing them against the floor.

This strenuous workout of Shalabh Asana and Dhanur Asana may be followed by Shava Asana or the Corpse Pose with deep breathing while lying down. Time now for some lowdown on holistic living with powerful positive thoughts:

- The four steps to the 'Self' are- objects of knowing, knowledge, the knowingness, the knower. You can never make the Divine an object of knowing.
- It is in death that the knowingness is not there, just like in sleeping your knowingness is absent.
- What is important is the Bodh Mantra or the state of being awake. You simply have to shake your head and get out of that cycle of the thought process.
- Bodh means that there is knowingness, awareness, not knowledge. Wisdom is just the knowingness which is a quality of the Self.

Getting down with backbends is a Herculean task as it requires certain amount of agility to the body and the back, of course. However it is full of benefits- correcting rounded shoulders being one, increasing mobility of the spine, improving posture in general and boosting the mind and relieving the stress. Today we are back with a few more backbends- Bhujanga Asana, Urdhva Mukha Svanasana and others.

BHUJANGA ASANA

Bhujanga means a serpent. In this posture, lie flat on the floor, face downwards, lift the body up from the trunk and throw the head back like a serpent about to strike.

Lie on the floor face downwards. Extend the legs, keeping the feet together. Keep the knees tight and the toes pointing. Rest the palms by the side of the pelvic region. Inhale, press the palms firmly on the floor and pull the trunk up. Take two breaths. Inhale, lift the body up from the trunk until the pubis is in contact with the floor and stay in this position with the weight on the legs and palms. Contract the buttocks, tighten the thighs. Maintain the pose for about twenty seconds. Exhale, bend the elbows and rest the trunk on the floor. Repeat the pose two or three times, then relax.

The posture is a panacea for an injured spine and in cases of slight displacement of spinal discs the practice of this pose replaces the discs in their original position. The spinal region is toned and the chest fully expanded.

This could be followed by the upward facing dog or Urdhva Mukha Svana Asana.

URDHVA MUKHA SVANASANA

Urdhva Mukha means having the face upwards. Svana means a dog. Hence this pose resembles a dog stretching itself with the head up in the air.

Lie on the floor on the stomach, face downwards. Keep the feet about one foot apart. The toes should point straight back. Place the

palms on the floor by the side of the waist, the fingers pointing to the head. Inhale, raise the head and trunk, stretch the arms completely and push the head and trunk as far back as possible, without resting the knees on the floor. Keep the legs straight and tightened at the knees, but do not rest the knees on the floor. The weight of the body rests on the palms and toes only. The spine, thighs and calves should be fully stretched, and the buttocks contracted tight. Push the chest forward, stretch the neck fully and throw the head fully as far back as possible. Stretch also the back portions of the arms. Stay in the pose for about a minute with deep breathing. Bend the elbows, release the stretch and rest on the floor.

The pose rejuvenates the spine and is specially recommended for those with a stiff back. The movement is good for persons with lumbago, sciatica and those suffering from slipped or prolapsed discs of the spine. The pose strengthens the spine and cures backaches. Due to chest expansion, the lungs gain elasticity. The blood circulates properly in the pelvic region and keeps it healthy.

Another dynamic backbend is the Urdhva Dhanur Asana which can work wonders for a hunch back and a droopy slouchy back, too.

URDHVA DHANUR ASANA

Urdhva means upwards. Dhanu means a bow. In this posture the body is arched back and supported on the palms and soles.

Lie flat on the back on the floor. Bend and raise the elbows over the head, and place the palms under the shoulders. The distance between the palms should not be wider than the shoulders and the fingers should point towards the feet. Bend and raise the knees, then bring the feet nearer until they touch the hips. Exhale, raise the trunk and rest the crown of the head on the floor. Take two breaths, now exhale, lift the trunk and head and arch the back so that its weight is taken on the palms and the soles. Stretch the arms from the shoulders until the elbows are straightened, at the same time pulling the thigh muscles up. Remain in this position from half a minute to a minute, with normal breathing.

EK PADA URDHVA DHANURASANA

Eka means one. Pada is a leg. After performing Urdhva Dhanurasana, exhale and raise the right leg off the floor. Stretch the right leg straight, and keep it at an angle of about forty five degrees from the floor. Repeat the pose by lifting the left leg off the floor. Maintain the pose on this side for twenty seconds.

The asanas tone the spine by stretching it fully and keeps the body alert and supple. The back feels strong and full of life. It strengthens the arms and wrists and has a very soothing effect on the head. It gives one great vitality, energy and a feeling of lightness.

End this yoga workout with some relaxing poses like the Shava Asana or the Corpse Pose, mulling on some food for thought:

- Contentment, perfection and siddhi dawns on that person who is happy and contented with whatever has come, who does not hanker for something more.
- Be contented with what you have and you will see perfection dawning in you. If you hanker for siddhi you will not attain it. You may think you will be fulfilled and satisfied when you have siddhi but it's the other way round.
- When you are satisfied, you will get siddhi. You may think that achievements follow siddhi, i.e. when you get fulfilled then you will achieve. Or when you achieve something, then you will be fulfilled.
- But Ashtavakra Gita says, 'Be satisfied now'. Achievements will dawn on you. Siddhi will dawn on you.
- Be satisfied and perfection will dawn. You will become a siddha. You cannot ever achieve siddhi by your hankering, your restlessness. Be happy with what you have.

Having bent your body into some of the basic warm up poses, let's get started with an intense workout for the back with the Kapota Asana and the Viparita Dandasana.

KAPOTA ASANA

Kapota means a dove or a pigeon. In this pose the chest expands and puffs out like that of a pouter pigeon, hence the name.

Sit in Vir Asana on a folded blanket. Stand on your knees and sit down on the floor. Recline back on the blanket and do Supta Vir Asana. Stretch the arms over the head, bend the elbows and place the palms near the ears, the fingers pointing to the shoulders. Bear the weight on the palms and exhale. Stretch the arms and raise the whole body from the knees by stretching the thighs and then join the knees. Contract the buttocks, stretch the entire spine, bend the elbows and hold the toes behind your head. Then rest the elbows on the floor. Breathing will be very fast and labored as the diaphragm is fully contracted. Take a few quick breaths, exhale, raise the pelvic region by tightening the muscles of the thighs. Gradually bring the hands near the heels and catch them by bringing the head towards the feet. Now place the crown of the head on the soles of the feet.

Stay in this pose for about twenty seconds. The pose tones up the entire spinal region as the blood is made to circulate well round the spinal column. Since the pelvic region is stretched, the genital organs keep healthy. The diaphragm is lifted up and this massages the heart gently and helps to strengthen it. The chest expands fully. It is essential to master the Kapota Asana before mastering the more difficult back-bending poses.

Now yet another warm up pose for the backbends- the Viparita Dandasana.

DWI PADA VIPARITA DANDASANA

Dwi Pada means both feet. Viparita means reverse or inverted. Danda means staff or rod, a symbol or authority or punishment

as well as the body and its prostration. The Yogi prostrates himself before the Lord in this graceful inverted arch described below.

Lie flat on the back. Extend the arms over the head, bend the elbows and place the palms underneath the shoulders, fingers pointing to the feet. Also bend and raise the knees, bring the feet near the hips and rest them on the floor. Exhale and at the same time lift up the head and trunk and rest the crown of the head on the floor. Take a few breaths. Exhale, extend the legs, straighten them one by one bearing the weight on the hands, head and neck. Take both the hands behind the head, one by one, first the left, then the right one. Interlock the fingers and rest the cupped hands against the back of the head. This is the final position. The diaphragm being contracted, breathing will be fast and short. Take a few breaths, exhale and raise the shoulders as high as you can above the floor, as also the chest, trunk, hips, thighs and calves. Stretch the legs straight from the pelvis to the ankles. Dig the heels into the floor and stay in this position to your capacity from one to two minutes. Move the feet towards the head, bend the knees, release the fingerlock, raise the head from the floor, lower the trunk and relax.

EK PADA VIPARITA DANDASANA

Eka means one and Pada a leg or foot. This is an advanced movement of the previous pose. After going into Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana, exhale and lift the leg up vertically while keeping the right leg on the floor. Stay in this pose for about ten to twenty seconds. Then with an exhalation, repeat the pose, keeping the right leg perpendicular to the floor.

Come back to Viparita Dandasana and then relax on the floor. The pose tones the spine and extends the chest fully. The abdominal muscles are exercised and this exhilarating pose soothes the mind.

After this strenuous yoga workout, relax and do some meditative breathing or simple Pranayama. Follow it up with some mindful Dhyana focusing on life positive:

- Lord Krishna said in Bhagwad Gita, ‘This world is temporary, changing; there is no joy in it.’
- Having attained this world, turn towards me. Don’t keep looking for joy there. Be in it and yet not be immersed in it. One should live like the lotus leaf. The leaf is in water, untouched, unattached. Live like the leaf in the world which is miserable, with a smile.
- How can you be smiling in a so-called miserable world? When you are not attached to things around you., when you don’t take the world inside your head. You can be in the world but the world should not be inside you.
- There are people who just get frustrated and run away from the world. They don’t get any bliss. Many recluses do that, but no. the real skill of yoga is being in it and yet not be affected by it. This is the skill that one has to learn.
- You have to get rid of cravings and aversions one by one. There is a tradition in India, that when you make a pilgrimage to Banaras, you have to leave something that you love, you do this when you are above fifty years of age, so that you don’t carry those impressions till your head. If you are so fond of eggplant, you may land up inside an eggplant, so give it up as that is the path of liberation. This is just a worldly way of achieving detachment.

Since you have started with some good, rigorous backbends, time to do some more of these to get agility to your back. Here are some more to add to the backbends like Kapotasana- the Ek Pada Rajakapotasana and Valakhilyasana. Follow these up with some rigorous pranayama and mindful meditation, chanting and good reading. You will definitely notice a sea change in your behavior and your attitude towards life, what’s more it even adds productivity to your life. Let’s start with Rajakapotasana.

EKA PADA RAJAKAPOTASANA I

Eka means one, pada the leg or foot and kapota a dove or pigeon. Rajakapota means the king of pigeons. In this asana, the chest is pushed forward like that of a pouter pigeon, hence the name of the pose.

Start by sitting on the floor, with legs stretched straight in front. Bend the right knee and place the right foot on the floor so that the right heel touches the left groin. Keep the right knee on the floor. Take the left leg back and rest its entire length straight on the floor. The front of the left thigh, knee and shin and the upper part of the toes of the left foot will then touch the floor. Place the palms on the waist, push the chest forward, stretch the neck, throw the head as far back as possible and balance for some time in this preparatory movement of the pose. Now rest the hands on the floor, bend the left knee and lift the left foot up near the head. Tighten the muscles of the left thigh. With an exhalation, take the right arm over the head and grip the left foot with the right hand. Rest the head against the left foot. Stay in the pose for about ten seconds. Repeat the pose on the other hand for the same length of time.

This helps in curing disorders of the urinary system. The neck and shoulder muscles are exercised fully. The thyroids, parathyroids, adrenals and gonads receive a rich supply of blood and this increases one’s vitality.

Now let’s move onto the next asana which is similar but with different effects- Valakhilyasana.

VALAKHILYASANA

The Valakhilyas were heavenly spirits the size of a thumb, produced from the Creator's body. They were said to precede the Sun's chariot and to number sixty thousand. They are referred to in Kalidasa's epic poem *Raghuvamsa*. This difficult asana is a continuation of Ek Pada Rajakapotasana and must be performed once this has been mastered.

Perform Ek Pada Rajakapotasana. After gripping the left ankle firmly with both the hands, contract the hips and move the coccyx up. Without releasing the ankle, stretch the left leg back and take a few breaths. Exhale, extend the arms further and push the leg down until it lies flat on the floor. The entire front of the leg from the thighs to the toes should touch the floor. Stay in the pose for a few seconds. As the chest is fully extended while the abdominal organs are contracted, breathing will be fast and labored. Repeat the same pose on the other side for the same length of time.

The pose is a counter movement of Janusirsa Asana and it rejuvenates the lower region of the spine. In it more blood circulates round the pubic region, keeping it in a healthy condition.

This can be followed by some cycles of Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:

Empty the lungs completely through the right nostril. Control the aperture of the right nostril with the inner side of the right thumb, away from the nail. Now inhale slowly, steadily and deeply through the right nostril, controlling the aperture with the tip of the right thumb near the nail. Fill the lungs to the brim (also called puraka). During this inhalation the left nostril is completely blocked by the ring and little fingers. After full inhalation, block the right nostril completely with the pressure of the thumb and release the pressure of the ring and little fingers on the left nostril. Readjust them on the outer edge of the left nostril and keep it parallel to the septum. Exhale slowly, steadily and deeply through the left nostril. Empty

the lungs completely. The pressure should be exerted from the inner sides of the tips of the ring and little fingers (away from the nails) (also called rechaka).

After full exhalation through the left nostril, inhale through the left nostril slowly, steadily and deeply, filling the lungs to the brim (puraka). Then block it, and exhale through the right nostril (rechaka). This completes one cycle of Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and the rhythm of breathing is as follows:

- Exhale through the right nostril
- Inhale through the right nostril
- Exhale through the left nostril
- Inhale through the left nostril
- Exhale through the right nostril
- Inhale through the left nostril...and so on

As blood circulates faster in the body it rejuvenates and refreshes the body, mind and soul. Follow this up with soulful chanting mulling over some good thoughts:

- If you have not embarked on the voyage inside of you, you have no idea what you are missing. The suffering of most people is that though they may be good and believe in God, they have failed to develop the competence to live life, which can be done with a bit of spirituality.
- Are we decent and balanced even when we are not under a radar? That's the question we must ask ourselves. For self-discipline is the toughest thing and the most important for one to feel good about the work you have done.
- The body has come into existence through the parents; they made this body for you and this body will go back to and remain in the world. When you have an eye on this reality, the energy, and the consciousness feels itself separate from the body, and

experiences the body as a third factor- as something separate, as the second thing, as an object.

- Ashtavakra says that the awareness that you are not this body will be like enlightenment. Even being aware of this will give you a glimpse of what is Being, is just your Self. Walk as though you are already enlightened. You will not think about the things you have done, or things you will have or want to do.

Backbends are the best way to rejuvenate your body, give it suppleness and strength and start your day afresh. Moreover they are invigorating, uplifting and heart-opening. Backbends stimulate the proper functioning of the digestive system, help preserve the health of the spinal disks, and open the body to deep diaphragmatic breathing. It is, therefore, an important of any Hatha Yoga routine.

Having done a few major ones, let us introduce you to some simple poses good for the spine:

USHTRA ASANA

It is also called the Camel Pose. It is a very deep backward bend performed in a kneeling position. Here's how to get into the pose:

Kneel on the floor, keeping the thighs and feet together, toes pointing back and resting on the floor. Rest the palms on the hips. Stretch the thighs, curve the spine back and extend the ribs. Exhale, place the right palm over the right heel and the left palm over the left heel. If possible, place the palms on the soles of the feet. Press the feet with the palms, throw the head back and push the spine towards the thighs, which should be kept perpendicular to the floor. Contract the buttocks and stretch the dorsal and the coccyx regions of the spine still further, keeping the neck stretched back. Remain

in this position for about thirty seconds. Release the hands one by one and rest them on the hips. Then sit on the floor and relax.

People with drooping shoulders and a hunch back will benefit greatly by this asana. The whole spine is stretched back and is toned. This pose can be tried conveniently even by people with a minor spinal injury.

BHEKA ASANA

Bheka means a frog. The action in this asana resembles that of a frog, hence the name.

Lie full length on the floor on the stomach, face downwards. Stretch the arms back. Exhale, bend the knees and move the heels towards the hips. Hold the sole of the right foot with the right hand and the sole of the left foot with the left hand. Take two breaths, exhale, lift the head and trunk from the floor and look up. Now turn the hands so that the palms touch the upper part of the feet and the toes and fingers point to the head. Push the hands further down and bring the toes and heels closer to the ground. Keep the arms from the wrists to the elbows perpendicular. When the knees and ankles become flexible, the heels can be made to touch the floor. Remain in this pose for about thirty seconds.

The abdominal organs benefit greatly from this asana as these are pressed against the floor. The knees become firmer and the pose relieves pain in the knee joints due to rheumatism and gout. It also gives relief when there is any internal derangement of the knee joints. The pressure of the hands on the feet creates a proper arch and so cures flat feet. It helps sprained ankles and strengthens them. The pose also relieves pain in the heels. By continued practice of this asana, heels become softer. Persons suffering from calcaneal spurs benefit greatly from this asana as well as with Virasana, along with it.

These asanas can be followed by some good breathing or pranayama- Ujjayi pranayama could be a good starting point.

Sit in Vir Asana. Place your hands on the sides touching your stomach from the sides. Inhale deeply by taking out a nasal sound

from the roof of your palate. Take about six to ten seconds to inhale. While exhaling, again take out the nasal sound from the roof of your palate and take about ten to twelve seconds to completely exhale. Repeat this five to six times. After a few cycles of breathing in this pose, relax. Then place your hands under your armpits. Keep your back straight. Inhale deeply, in the same manner in about ten seconds, taking out the nasal sound. Exhale in about twelve seconds. Repeat seven cycles in this posture, then relax. Now place your hands behind your head, over the shoulders. Repeat the cycles of breathing, with the nasal sound while inhaling and exhaling. End this with five normal breaths.

Now close your eyes and meditate over some positive thoughts:

- As long as the karma is there, the body and your mind, the glow sticks to it. Your soul sticks onto it. By feeling that you are a glow, you will see every cell of your body becomes alive. It is an uplifting experience. So when you sleep, do not be somebody, be the glow, the light.
- Anybody or anything that you hate is going to bug you. If a rat hates a cat, it will be born as a cat. If a cat hates a dog, it will be born as a dog. It is best not to hate anything. Drop all your hates now. Throw out all your anger and hatred. This is a place to be in love and joy.
- All the Upanishad and all the Enlightened Masters have declared that the joy of Self uniting with the Self, with the Inner Being is a hundred times more than any other joy. The joy of the Self being with the Self is more than the joy of being in a relationship. This is how we go, step-by-step to our Self.

It's time yet again for another workout of Yoga with backbends, followed by Sakshi Dhyana. Some common backbends that one may do with ease are Bhujanga Asana or Cobra Pose, Dhanur Asana or Bow Pose and Shalabh Asana or Grasshopper Pose.

BHUJANGA ASANA OR COBRA POSE

The word is derived from Sanskrit word 'Bhujanga' which means a snake. Here you have to lie on your stomach with your toes flat on the floor and forehead resting on the ground. Keep your legs close together, with your feet and heels lightly touching each other. Place your hands (palm downwards) under your shoulders, keeping your elbows parallel, and close to your torso. Taking a deep breath in, slowly lift your head, chest and abdomen while keeping your navel on the floor. Pull your torso back and off the floor with the help of your palms. Check whether you are putting equal pressure on both your palms.

Keep breathing with awareness as you curve your spine vertebrae by vertebrae. If possible, straighten your arms by arching your back as much as possible; tilt your head back and look up. Ensure that your shoulders are away from your ears, keep your shoulders relaxed, even if it means bending your elbows. With regular practice you will be able to deepen the stretch by straightening the elbows. Ensure that your feet are still close to each other. Keep smiling and breathing. Don't overdo the stretch or over-stress yourself. Breathing out, gently bring your abdomen, chest and head back to the floor.

A major benefit of this pose is that it opens up the shoulders and neck. It tones the abdomen. It strengthens the entire back and shoulders. It improves flexibility of the upper and middle back. It expands the chest. It improves blood circulation. It reduces fatigue and stress. It is useful for people with respiratory disorders such as asthma.

Its time now to get your energy into the back with Dhanur Asana or Bow Pose.

DHANUR ASANA OR BOW POSE

Dhanur Asana is very effective in weight loss programmes. In this the pose looks like a bow, hence the name Dhanur Asana.

Here you need to start by lying down on the floor facing downwards. Relax completely with 2-3 breaths. Inhale slowly and start bending your legs backwards and catch the ankles with the hands. You will notice that your body is now in the shape of a bow. In this position your whole weight will come on your abdomen. Only your stomach and pelvic area will touch the ground. Hold this position for fifteen to twenty seconds and continue taking a deep breath. Now slowly exhale, and come back to the starting position.

This pose improves digestion and appetite, gives flexibility to the back, cures menstrual disorders, it improves the function of liver, pancreas, small intestine and large intestine and helps cure diabetes, too.

One more pose which can be done lying down on the stomach and is beneficial for the spine is the Superman Pose.

INVERTED SHALABH ASANA OR SUPERMAN POSE

Lie on your stomach with your toes flat on the floor, chin resting on the ground. Keep your legs close together with your feet lightly touching each other. Now stretch your arms in the front as much as you can. Take a deep breath in and lift your chest, arms, legs and thighs off the floor. You resemble a flying superhero- Superman! Hence the name. Rather than making an effort to raise your hands and legs more, make a gentle effort to stretch your arms and legs away from your torso. Feel the pull occurring at both the ends. Ensure that your elbows and knees are straight and not bent. After twenty counts, slowly exhale and lower your chest and legs.

This asana stretches and strengthens the muscles of the chest, shoulders, arms, legs, abdomen and the lower back. It tones the abdomen and lower back. It massages the spine and keeps the back

supple. It helps stretch the chest. It improves blood circulation. It can be a great workout for abs and stomach.

You may end this workout schedule with a bit of meditation. Always stay positive with these thoughts from Kena Upanishad:

- Any talent you have, you think it is yours? But, no. it is a gift. It is all a blessing- money, talent and progeny. It's all done on the subtle level. Angels, the subtle beings do the whole job and what you are doing is only a reflection. You don't have a vision of what's happening out there and who is in control. Do you think you are doing or controlling things in the short span of time you are embodied on this planet? No.
- 'Loka Samasta Sukhina Bhavantu' - May everybody be happy, you all bring peace to everybody. I want nothing. What do I want? But you give everybody everything. The power of blessings works!
- The lesson here is also that never underestimate anybody. Even if a child speaks there maybe something in it. Don't think you are the only intelligent one. Do not underestimate when the challenge comes from someone under you. This can be learnt from the story of the Yaksha mentioned in this Upanishad.

Backbends can seem intimidating as you may have been trying out some of the ones we have talked about; yet you don't have to be a contortionist or drop into a Full Wheel from standing to reap the heart and chest opening benefits these poses deliver. The hardest part is that they go against the natural way we hold and move our bodies- while we slouch forward and move forward, backbends take us the opposite direction. So here are some more of these- Uttana Shishoasana, Utkatasana and Catuspadapitham

UTTANA SHISHOASANA, UTTANA SHVANA ASANA OR EXTENDED PUPPY POSE

This pose gets its name from the young one of a dog, puppy. Here you have to come into a tabletop-on all fours, with your hips stacked directly over your knees, and your shoulders over your wrists. Rest the tops of your feet on the mat, toes pointing straight back. Keep your feet parallel and hip-width apart. On an exhalation, begin to walk your hands out in front of you. Allow your chest to melt toward the floor as you slowly release your forehead to the mat. Spread your fingers and press firmly into the thumb and index fingers. Activate the handlock by rooting into your finger pads and creating a lifting action like a suction cup in your palms. Roll your upper arm bones outward away from your ears to broaden the shoulders. Feel your triceps wrapping down toward the outer edges of the mat as your biceps spin up toward the ceiling. Lift your elbows slightly off the mat. On your next inhalation, deepen into the stretch by raising your hips up and back toward the wall behind you, meanwhile getting your chest down toward the floor. Breathe deeply into the stretch and hold for five to ten breaths. Release the pose by walking back into the tabletop position.

It stretches the upper back, spine and shoulders; opens the chest and helps release chronic tension in the shoulders and neck.

UTKATASANA OR CHAIR POSE

In this asana you start by standing up straight in the mountain pose. In this pose with the feet together, inhale the arms forward parallel to the floor with the palms facing down. Exhale and bend the knees, squatting down. Reach the hips down and back as if you were going to sit on the edge of a chair, bringing your weight to the heels of the feet. Do not bring the hips lower than the level of the knees. Make sure the knees are pointing straight ahead. Press the shoulders down and back trying to arch the spine. Relax the shoulders down and back and reach out through the finger tips. Stare at a point on the wall or on the floor in front of you for balance.

Breathe and hold for three to six breaths. Inhale and press down into the feet and inhale the arms up toward the ceiling. Exhale and release the arms down.

This pose strongly strengthens the lower body while stretching the upper back. This posture invigorates and energizes the whole body.

CATUSPADAPITHAM OR CRAB POSE

In this pose you have to inhale and get into a seated posture on the floor. Then again inhale, lean back into the arms and lift the hips up towards the ceiling. Make sure the toes and knees are pointing straight ahead. Look straight ahead, up at the ceiling or carefully drop the head back. Press into the feet, squeezing the thighs and buttocks and engaging Mula Bandha to lift the hips high. Press into the hands and draw the shoulder blades towards each other to lift the sternum or the breast bone higher up. Breathe and hold for two to six breaths. Slowly exhale the hips back down to the floor.

This pose opens the chest and tones the low back to stimulate the respiratory and endocrine systems. Crab pose also builds arm, leg and core body strength.

So this was the easy workout for the back for beginners. Time to meditate and build on a positive energy through thoughts:

- Samadhi means equanimity. “Dhi” is the intellect- the faculty that sustains you; faculty of Consciousness.
- Life is ever changing. Everything is changing. They are bound to change; to dissolve and disappear. The feeling of “I”, the Consciousness is all that is.
- Everything is empty. Everything is in a state of fluidity. The whole world is just a quantum mechanical field. This is Vitarka. This is Samadhi.

Backbends are often associated with the sunrise as these are also called the ‘heart-opening poses’. These open the front of the body including muscles that surround the heart and lungs and expands both breath capacity and emotional openness as more space opens in the chest. We have done some of the classical poses so far. Today we will be telling you about some of the more contemporary ones like the Cat Pose, Sphinx Pose and Half Bhikasana.

CAT POSE

Here you have to first get on all fours with hands and knees firmly touching the floor. Now keeping the back caving in towards the floor, raise your head and on the other end raise your buttocks. Maintain the concavity of the back. Exhale and cave in your back a little more. Inhale and lower your head and look at the floor, simultaneously taking your stomach inward and making your back convex. Contract your back in and contract your shoulders. Repeat this five six times.

This pose loosens the spine, and the muscles in the hip and shoulder joints. Aligning the wrists directly under the shoulders will give maximum range of motion. Try not to sink onto the arms but stay light through shoulder girdle and relaxed at the base of the skull. Working with the eyes closed will help you focus as you move with your breath, inhaling as you extend and exhaling as you arch back.

SPHINX POSE

Here you have to lie down on your stomach. Exhale and raise your head off the floor and place your arms straight ahead with fingers well spread on the floor. Push the floor with your elbows so that back straightens up and almost becomes perpendicular to the floor. Look straight in front. Stay in this pose for twenty counts. Repeat this three to four times.

Sphinx is a bit more supported than the Cobra Pose and easier on the lower back. The forearms stay on the floor with the elbows bent to 90 degrees directly under the shoulders. The tops of the

thighbones are grounded and the legs lengthen backwards as the spine moves forward. Use the arms to draw the spine out of the pelvis. Take care to stay relaxed at the base of the skull, emphasizing the forward rather than the upward movement.

HALF BHEKASANA

This is to enable you to get into full backbends more easily. From sphinx, support your torso on your right arm, bend your left knee and catch your foot with your left hand, bringing it toward your left hip. Try to keep the weight evenly distributed on both your hip bones. To complete the pose, turn your head and chest forward, continuing to lengthen the spine away from the legs. Repeat on the other side. If this doesn’t feel good for your lower back, do just the thigh stretch and keep your head down, resting on your opposite arm.

RECLINED TWIST

Then the reclined twist does wonders to balance out the backbend. These are neutral poses, great for bringing the spine back to its natural alignment by balancing both sides. These are essential after backbends. The reclined twist helps to relax the muscles of the back after contracting to extend the spine.

SHAVASANA OR THE CORPSE POSE

It is good to relax the body and end the yoga workout with a relaxing pose like the Corpse Pose. Lie down straight with legs and feet relaxed and arms on the side of your body. After backbends where the lower back is a bit strained it is always a good treat to place a rolled up blanket under your knees. It is soothing for the lower back to have your knees elevated. After five minutes, roll to your right-hand side and gently get up with the support of your hands.

Now get into a meditative sitting posture and mull over these thoughts from Patanjali Yoga Sutra:

- There are four types of Karmas. One is the Karma which will give merits. You may do something good for somebody, and

they feel good about it and may thank you for it. They thank from their heart and that brings you good Karma.

- There is another type of Karma- action which brings you demerits. You may do something bad to somebody and they suffer because of it and are miserable. That brings you Karma of demerit.
- There are certain Karmas which have the combination of merit and demerit. This is third type of Karma.
- The fourth type of Karma is devoid of both merit and demerit- a walk in the evening or vacuum-cleaning the hall. These actions have no merit or demerit. They are just actions.
- But if you are doing it for somebody, for example, you are helping someone in kitchen, then that is an action of merit. If you are cutting the vegetables and cooking the food for everybody, then it is an action of merit.
- Yoga is more than just asanas and much more to do with the action of being and living in reality, hence positive thoughts are equally important to nurture.

We have been doing a few backbends which are crucial for a healthy spine. However it is important to practice a basic warm-up before starting backbends. If you sit in front of a computer or a laptop all day, or have a long commute everyday, backbends are your answer to a healthy spine. Today we will look at some basic ones like Ardha Ushtrasana, Ardha Vyaghrasana and Ek Pada Setubandhasana.

ARDHA USHTRASANA OR HALF CAMEL POSE

As you stand on your knees, stand width apart. place the palms of the hands on the sacrum with the fingers pointed down. Inhale and

press the knees down reaching the crown of the head upto lengthen the spine. Exhale and press the hips forward squeezing the buttocks and thighs and supporting your weight with the arms as you bend backwards. Very carefully reach the right hand down to the right heel. If you cannot reach the heel, keep the hand on the sacrum. Inhale and reach the left hand up and back towards the back wall. If it feels safe drop the head back all the way. Breathe and hold the breath for twenty counts. In order to release, with both hands on the sacrum, slowly inhale up, letting the head and neck be the last to come vertical.

Half camel opens and stretches the shoulder and upper arm, and opens the chest. Half camel is also beneficial for the kidneys and stimulates the respiratory, digestive and endocrine systems.

Similarly Ek Hasta Vyaghrasana is yet another pose that can make your back more supple.

EK HASTA VYAGHRASANA

Bend down and form a table on all fours with your back, hands and legs. From the table, exhale, reach the right foot up towards the ceiling with the knee bent and the spine gently arching. Staring at a point straight ahead, shift your weight into your right hand and carefully reach the left hand to hold onto the inside of the right ankle. With both arms straight, gently kick the right foot into the left arm to lift the leg higher. Breathe and hold for about twenty counts. In order to release, exhale the arm and leg back down to the table pose.

This asana is very good for the shoulder and the front of the thigh, strengthening the arms and working wonders for the kidneys. This posture increases energy and stimulates the endocrine system.

Ek Pada Setubandhasana has similar benefits for the back, so let's see how to do it.

EK PADA SETUBANDHASANA OR ONE LEG BRIDGE POSE

Lie down on your back with your head on the floor while neck and back are on the mat. Exhale and raise your lower back and

legs off the floor so that your feet are placed on the floor with toes pointed down. Start by keeping your heels off the floor and slowly get your heels down. Breathe normally in the pose and interlock your fingers behind your back. Now exhale and raise one foot off the floor. Raise the foot in the air straight up without bending at the knees. Holding your hands at the back, breathe in the pose for about twenty seconds. After a strenuous Setubandhasana with one foot raised, lift the opposite leg and breathe normally.

An important benefit of the pose relates to the spine and the lower back. It builds core and lower body strength, lengthens and strengthens the spine, energizes the body, and stimulates the endocrine and nervous systems.

Yet another pose to energize the spine is the Anuvittasana or the Standing Backbend.

ANUVITTASANA OR THE STANDING BACKBEND

This asana, too, is simple to do and can be done with ease and care. Stand straight in Tada Asana or the Mountain Pose. Keep your head straight, back straight, neck up and chin up. Place both your palms on your buttocks. Get your elbows close to each other. Spread your fingers on your buttocks. Press your hands hard against your back and look up and bend backwards. Keep your knee caps plugged, drawing your thighs inwards, pulling your upper body from the chest and sternum upwards. Further, release your hands and if you feel safe, touch your hands down to your calves and back of the knees. Feel the stretch on the shoulder and the legs.

This asana opens the body and strengthens the respiratory, endocrine and cardiovascular system in the body.

It's time now to end the Yoga workout with some positive thought to mull over, excerpts from the Patanjali Yoga Sutra:

- There are many obstacles to proper progress of a Yogic body. First one is the illness of the body and then illness of the mind- the

inability to comprehend, to listen, to understand, to follow and to practice.

- Second is the obstacle of doubt. There are three types of doubts- one is a doubt about oneself. You wonder if you are good enough. You feel that you cannot do something that is required to be done.
- Then doubts arise about the techniques. You may feel that they may not do you any good or that you should try out some other technique. Next, doubts about the teacher arise. These three types of doubts can hamper progress. Your doubt is mostly about something that is good, rarely the negative.

It's that time of the week when you need to get down to exercising your muscles and nerves. Backbends are favourites of many practitioners especially as working at the computer may have some bad effects on posture, backbends are basically the ultimate countermovement to what many of us do on a daily basis. Three more backbends which we will be looking at today are Dandayamana, Yoga Mudrasana, Vyaghrasana and Urdhva Mukhasvanasana.

DANDAYAMANA YOGA MUDRASANA OR STANDING YOGA SEAL

Here start by standing straight in Tada Asana or the Mountain Pose. Take your feet about 3-4 feet apart from each other. Inhale the arms behind you and interlock the fingers together. Draw the shoulder blades towards each other. Lift the chest and gaze up towards the ceiling. Exhale and hinge at the hips coming forward with the chest, reaching the arms up and forward. Let the head hang relaxed from the neck. Keep the arms and legs straight. If you

feel the weight back in the heels, try and shift the weight forward slightly. Breathe and hold for 4-8 breaths. In order to release keep the shoulder blades squeezed together as you inhale back up, taking a deep breath into the belly and chest.

A benefit of the pose is that it improves mental functions, harmonizes the connection between the heart and mind, opens the shoulders, stretches the upper back and legs.

VYAGHRASANA OR TIGER POSE

Here you can start by getting down on your hands and knees. Inhale the right knee to the forehead, rounding the spine. Exhale, reach the right foot up towards the ceiling, arching the spine and looking up at the ceiling. Inhale the forehead to the knee and exhale the foot up 4-8 times. Exhale with a 'haa' sound out from your mouth. In order to release, exhale the knee back down to the floor into Table Pose on all fours. Repeat this on the other side with the other leg.

Tiger pose warms and stretches the back muscles and spine. It strengthens the core body and stimulates the nervous system, lymphatic and reproductive systems, too.

URDHVA MUKHASVANASANA OR UPWARD FACING DOG

Lie down on your stomach and exhale and raise your head and upper body off the floor. Press your palms down into the floor, drop the shoulders down and back, press the chest forward and reach the crown of the head up towards the ceiling. Inhale and lift thighs and legs off the floor by pressing the tops of the feet down and engaging Mula Bandha. Breathe and hold for 1-3 breaths. In order to release bend the knees and lift the hips into the table position on all fours.

Upward Facing Dog opens the chest and strengthens the whole body. It aligns the spine and invigorates the kidneys and nervous system.

It can also be done by placing blocks under the palms for support, by tucking the toes under to lift the legs higher off the floor or even

by facing the wall and pushing your chin and back against the wall to lift up.

Relax now in Savasana, do some light cycles of breathing or intense Nadi Shodhana Pranayama. End the yoga workout with some good positive thoughts from the Patanjali Yoga Sutra:

- 'Jyotishmati pragya, Jyotishmati pragya' goes a saying. This says- consider your mind as a light, as a flame. Your consciousness is a flame. Your mind is a flame. You may forget this. Your entire body is functioning because of the presence of mind as a flame in you. Otherwise, you will be like an unlit candle.
- Life is also the same. It uses oxygen and lives on some matter, like the flame of the candle. The air is like the oxygen and exhibits its activities in the body just as the flame exhibits its activity. The Consciousness exhibits Life.
- Life and light are very similar. The body functions just like a wick. If you put more wax into the wick, it will burn longer. If you put more food into the body, it will last longer. This body is holding onto the Jyotishmati pragya. Hence 'Vishoka va Jyotishmati' or get rid of unhappiness and be happy. At the same time know that your mind is made up of light. It is not matter. Your mind is energy, you are energy, Jyotishmati!!

It's that time of the week when you need to flex your muscles and strain your body to get into some yogic positions beneficial for the back and the waist. We have dealt with a few backbends to get you started, something to provide you agility and flexibility of movement.

Some asanas which are good for you are Ardha Naukasana and its variations and Dhanurasana and its variations.

ARDHA NAUKASANA

Here lie down on the floor on your stomach, bend the left arm and take it behind your back with the palm facing up. Stretch the right arm above the head. Exhale and while inhaling raise the right hand, head, chest and right leg above the ground. Breathe normally while you maintain the asana.

Inhale and while exhaling slowly release the shoulder, forehead, right arm and leg on the floor. Return both hands on the side of the body and place the chin on the ground. Now repeat this with the left hand side.

This asana works wonders for neck pain, asthma and chest pain. It focuses on lower back, buttocks and shoulders. It is also good for the entire spine.

TRIYAK NAUKASANA

This asana is good for those having a weak back as it stimulates the nerves. There is a strong diagonal stretch of the body which works wonders for the spine.

Once again lie down on the floor facing the floor. Bend the left arm and place it behind the back, palm facing up. Stretch the right arm above the head. Exhale and while inhaling raise the right arm, head, chest and left leg above the ground. Breathe normally while you maintain the asana.

Inhale and while exhaling lower the shoulder, forehead, right arm and left leg onto the floor. Return both hands to the side of the body and place the chin on the ground, returning to the normal position.

This asana works wonders for a stiff back and the spine.

ARDHA DHANURASANA

This asana is good for an easy way to do the Dhanurasana and assists an obese person.

You have to start by lying down on the floor, face down. Bend the left leg and hold the ankle with the left hand. Stretch the right

arm above the head. Exhale and while inhaling raise the left thigh, right arm, shoulder, head and chest above the ground.

Inhale and while exhaling lower the left knee, shoulders and chin slowly to the ground. Release the ankle and bring the hands beside the body. Straighten the bent leg to the ground returning to the normal position. Now repeat this on the opposite side.

This asana is beneficial for the entire spine, buttocks and shoulders. This helps one focus on chest, abdomen and lower back, too.

Similarly, Triyak Dhanurasana assists in keeping the back healthy.

TRIYAK DHANURASANA

Start by bending the left leg and holding the ankle with the right hand. Stretch the left arm above the head. Exhale and while inhaling raise the left thigh, left arm, head, shoulders and chest off the ground. Breathe normally.

Slowly come back into the usual position. While exhaling lower the chest, knee, shoulders and chin. Release the ankle and bring the hands to the side of the body. Straighten the bent leg to the ground. Now practise this by lifting the right leg, holding the right leg with your left hand. Stay in that pose for about twenty seconds.

This works wonders for buttocks, shoulders and spine.

At the end, lie down in Shava Asana. Breathe normally. Meditate while staying in the pose by focussing between your eyebrows.

Lastly dwell on such positive thoughts that may lead you to peace, harmony and success, here are some tips from the Patanjali Yoga Sutra:

- For a few moments keep your body and eyes steady and you will see immediately, the mind will become so steady. If you stand still, the mind will become still and the breath will become steady. This is when the time stops, death stops and immortality begins. This is Samadhi.

- Samadhi is that state where you feel you can stay like that for a million years. It is a state where the mind freezes. It is the secret of youthfulness, the secret of bubbling enthusiasm and the secret of renewal of life.
- When you are in Samadhi, every experience of your senses becomes bright, colourful and complete. When you are happy, you feel expanded. You feel an expansion is taking place. Samadhi is being sensitive to other's feelings, too. Nature listens to you.
- Patanjali says, "Ksheena Vritti." When these five activities that we have dealt with before, when these Vrittis, the activities are subdued.

Section II

BEYOND THE BODY AND ASANAS

Yoga is so much more than just asana. This path can take you on an inner journey of the Self. First and foremost, Yoga is for the mind, not the body. It is said that most diseases, too, are psychosomatic. Hence, when you do yoga the asanas actually work on the mind and then show results on the body.

- According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, there are Eight Limbs of Yoga or Ashtanga Yoga, which when followed take you a step towards peace and tranquillity. The steps are- Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. However few of these can be discussed in the following ways:
- "*Aparigrahasthaiye Janmakathayanta Sambhodhaha*"- this means that when you do not accumulate then you get knowledge of previous births and knowledge of different species. The communication in you improves. When a person wants more and more, he just thinks of himself and is obsessed with fear. He does not know the eternal value of life. Life has been there from ages and will continue for ages to come. Non-accumulation means confidence in one's existence and in one's ability, and having knowledge of one's Self. If you know how to make bread, then you will not go on making bread for a week and then store it in your room. It will become stale and inedible.

- In China, there is a proverb, “What you give, you gain more. Whatever you scatter, you will have it all. You lose what you hold on to.” When you scatter it all comes back to you. Everything is yours and you are all over. A person who is very afraid of himself and who has no idea of his strength is very stingy. A person who is very selfish and stingy stores and stores, he accumulates.
- Patanjali says- “Janmakathayamta Sambodhaha”- when you give things to people, it brings back something to you. There are some good vibrations and this makes you happy. If you are very unhappy one day, then give away something or give some gifts to somebody. Then your Consciousness will change, shift. Sometimes when you accept gifts from someone, you will feel unhappy. In the ancient days, they knew this science very well. They used to call wise people to their homes and give them food and gifts. When they accepted, they would give one more offering. This was to show thankfulness to the wise people for having accepted their offering. This was then called *Dakshina*.
- So, if someone accepts a gift, then the giver should be thankful. The giver is thankful because they are not just taking something. The acceptors are giving back their mind and taking away certain impressions or Karmas from the past from the giver’s mind. Non-acceptance or non-accumulation of objects, or things from people is called *Aparigraha*.
- *Parigraha* is always receiving and wondering what will be received. If you do not accept anything from anybody, you will feel different. This is practically not possible in the world. There are people who practice this to the extreme. You do not have to go to the extreme but being aware of this fact is useful.
- There are five *Mahavratas*- the great rules, the great vows. You will get results according to the extent of your practice. There are the five *Yamas* and five *Niyamas*. The *Niyamas* are- “*Shaucha*,

- Santosha, Tapah, Swadhyaya, Eshwar Pranidhana Niyamah*”- *Shaucha* is physical purity or keeping oneself clean. Water is the greatest purifier for this physical body. There needs to be cleanliness in the atmosphere and in the environment. *Santosha* means contentment and happiness. Happiness is an attitude. If you are used to being unhappy, you will grumble and be unhappy even in the best of situations. Unconditional happiness is a practice.
- One of the limbs is *Santosha*-being content and happy. What could make you unhappy? Losing a lot of money? Could that make you unhappy? So what! Anyway you are going to lose this body, which is going to enjoy those millions of dollars. It has to happen. So many people had millions of dollars and they died. What else are you unhappy about? Is your friend leaving you? Your own body is going to desert you. Why are you so unhappy about your friend deserting you? Sometimes people lose things one by one and sometimes they lose everything together. This is the only chance. Either you lose everything at one time, or you keep losing them one by one. So when you lose your friend, you should think that you may have lost one friend. And that the body is going to be lost after sometime. So it does not matter.
 - Hence its important to keep in mind what worse situation you could have been in and how better off you are from others in a lot of ways. A lot of times we fret over situations which may seemingly be depressing but in reality, when viewed objectively, maybe not so bad after all. It is best to maintain equipoise and equanimity in all situations- very sad or very happy ones, too.

Spirituality does not mean any particular practice. If you cultivate your body, mind, emotions and energies to a certain level of maturity, something else blossoms within you- that is spirituality. When your rationale is immature, it doubts everything. When your rationale matures, it sees everything in a completely different light.

HUMILITY IS THE WAY TO FREEDOM

- An atheist cannot be spiritual. It is also difficult for a theist to be spiritual, too. The difference is that one believes in God and the other doesn't. Both of them are believing something they do not know. You are not sincere enough to admit that you do not know. That is the problem. So theists and atheists are not different. They are the same people putting up an act of being different. A spiritual seeker is neither theist nor atheist. He has realized that he does not know, he is seeking.
- Ishya Yoga Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev says, "The moment you believe something, you become blind to everything else. The whole conflict on the planet is not between good and evil as they are trying to project it."
- It is always one man's belief versus another man's belief. The need for belief is more psychological than spiritual. You want to cling to something, you want to feel secure, you want to feel like you know it all. That is coming from a very immature mind. What is the problem if you don't know anything about this existence. You actually don't know anything. It's beautiful! You see how to make yourself beautiful and joyful within yourself, which is within your hands.
- It is thus important to understand that one should not always have a preconceived notion about life. The joy is in exploring life and experiencing its unpredictability- what it can do to you while you have to be your best all the time and celebrate its abundance. The 'Unknowingness' within life brings within

you a sense of humility where you learn to let go and still work towards the goal, celebrating every moment.

EQUANIMITY AND EQUIPOISE ARE IMPORTANT

- If you come to do yoga looking for joy and pleasure, yoga will eventually disappoint you. If you instead learn to train the mind to be present, focussed and equanimous regardless of the inevitable vicissitudes of life, then you will gain your freedom and spirituality will come knocking at your door. There are traditionally three important things for further grounding in yoga- you have to commit to the practice for an entire lifetime not just a few years or months or weeks, you have to practise both on and off the mat, thirdly, your intention and sincerity matter.
- These practices remove the ego's attachment to getting anywhere fast in the practice, as much as you are willing to put in the effort, the practice will give back to you, and you have to set your intention on the spiritual journey of yoga. If you know that your reason of doing yoga is to be more joyful, peaceful and happy person, then all the necessary lessons that lead to that result will become evident through the vehicle of that practice.
- Yoga is not about getting rid of any external situations and circumstances that maybe troubling you and controlling your environment. Yoga is about keeping your peace of mind regardless of whether you experience ease and flow, stuckness or difficulty. Changing external situations is a losing battle, but gaining control of your own nervous system is something that you can truly master.
- Hence Yoga helps you steer through all sorts of situations with ease- you just have to be constant in your practice and effort to achieve excellence and equanimity. Yoga can make you strong from inside when your external situations may not be perfect. This is indeed a major challenge you have to face and tide over

while doing Yoga- battling odds to somehow practice it daily with a degree of faith and sincerity.

- More than just physical yoga taking a tad closer to yourself, let us dwell on the signs that can help you gauge whether you are doing Yoga superficially or holistically. Practising ahimsa (non-violence), practising Yoga ‘spiritually’, feeling compassion for your fellow practitioner are all such instances where you need to get a deeper understanding while practicing Yoga. Violence does not mean only having a vegan diet, but it can manifest in myriad ways-it usually comes in the form of verbal and mental slashes against ourselves and one another. We shouldn’t forget that our service to others is just as important as any service we give to ourselves. Yoga, partially makes us too involved with ourselves and we should constantly make an effort to give off our time to others, too. Spirituality should come with Yoga not just with religion.
- Yoga then is a greater mental exercise and less a physical exercise. It needs to be understood in its full context and complete form else we will only be scraping the surface.

Yoga implies harmony and complete focus of the body, mind and spirit in accomplishing your goals. Hence it requires a lot of self-discipline and immense self-control to follow certain moral and ethical precepts. If these are followed, life becomes easier to manage and live.

- Last time we discussed *Yamas*, the moral disciplines to be followed. Today we will go through *Niyamas*, some aspects of self-restraint and personal observances. Some major *Niyamas* are- Saucha, Santosha, Tapa, Svadhyaya and Ishvara Pranidhan.

- Let’s begin with *Saucha*- this means purity and cleanliness. Outer cleanliness simply means keeping your lives orderly and uncluttered. Inner cleanliness has much to do with healthy functioning of the body organs as much as with the clarity of your mind. Practicing asanas and pranayama are means of reaching the stage of inner *Saucha*. *Asanas* tone the body and remove the toxins from the body while *Pranayama* cleanses our lungs, oxygenates your body and purifies the nerves. More important than the physical cleansing of the body is cleansing the mind of disturbing emotions like hatred, passion, anger, greed, lust, delusion and pride. When you clear the clutter from your personal environment and your mind, you are more freely able to focus on higher aspects of living consciously; you are even less distracted by outside stimulations that take you away from being centred and grounded in your loving nature.
- *Santosha* is the next step of *Niyama*. It implies contentment with what you have. It also means acceptance of the fact that there is a purpose for everything. True inner peace comes with fostering contentment in your life, even while accepting its challenges. When you accept that life is a process for growth all of the circumstances and experiences you create for yourselves become valid teachers and vehicles for expressing your highest nature. It is important to accept that there is a purpose for everything- yoga calls it *Karma*- you can cultivate contentment and compassion, for yourselves and others. *Santosha* means being happy with what you have rather than being unhappy about what you don’t have.
- *Tapa* implies disciplined use of your energy and a burning desire to reach Self-realization. It refers to the burning enthusiasm to learn and understand how all facets of life are tools for Self-realization. Literally, it means to heat the body and thus to cleanse it. Behind the notion of *Tapas* lies the idea that

you can direct your energy to enthusiastically engage life and achieve your ultimate goal of creating union with the Divine. *Tapa* helps you burn up all the desires that stand in your way of this goal. Another form of *Tapa* is paying attention to your body posture, eating habits, breathing patterns and honoring the body as a vehicle that contains life force and makes your human existence possible.

- *Svadhya* means self-study and observation and cultivating self-reflective Consciousness. It means inquiry or examination. It means to intentionally find self-awareness in all your activities and efforts, even to the point of welcoming and accepting your limitations. It teaches you to be centred and non-reactive to the dualities of being both human and spirit at the same time, to burn out unwanted and self-destructive tendencies so you can live in balance with all aspects of your being.
- *Ishvar Pranidhana* means to lay all your actions ‘at the feet of God’ and offer it to Him like a prayer. It implies contemplation on God so you can become attuned to the natural expression of love and heartfulness in all your relations. This practice simply requires that you accept some omnipresent, larger, Energy or Force that exists which is directing and guiding your lives.
- So after *Yamas* and *Niyamas*, what is *Asana*? ‘*Sthira Sukham Asanam*’- or *Asana* is that which is steady and comfortable. ‘*Prayatna Shaitalya Ananta Samaapattibhyaam*’- or letting go the effort. The main point of this is feeling the body, letting go off the effort and experiencing the infinity- harmonizing oneself with the infinity- is *Asana*. ‘*Tato Dwandwa Anabhighataah*’- or it strikes at the duality or the conflicts in you. It roots them out. You should do *Asana* whenever you are confused and your mind is in conflict. Sit in an *Asana* and there will be clarity right away. The effect of an *Asana* is clearing out all conflicts and dualities.
- Similarly *Pranayama* has propound effects- it thins down the curtain around the light. You are the light, but you don’t know

this because there is a thick curtain around you; *Pranayama* thins down that curtain and makes you more transparent so you are able to see that light. Then there is another benefit- ‘*Dhaaranaasu Cha Yogyataa Manasaha*’ – the mind develops this ability to stay at one point in the body; to stay on any one thing. It gains the ability to end; until then there had been no intention. You were like a moving cloud. You had no intention at all. Now with *Pranayama* there is clarity and you are able to have an intention and a direction. That is why after a good *Pranayama*, your mind is clearer, steadier and calmer. You are able to feel your body and even meditate. ‘*Parama Vashyataa*’- after *Pranayama* you will feel much contentment, much peace and much joy. You will feel such elevation and such completeness.

- It is thus observed that *Yoga* and its various parts or limbs assist in the upliftment of the Self and helps in realizing that you are one with the Divine. Its continuous practice elevates your moods and senses which stays with you for a long time unlike the momentary pleasures you get after a joyous occasion or a party. *Yoga* helps you build that inner strength so required to fight the daily rigmaroles of life. Its time you take your practice more seriously and move toward greater happiness and bliss.

According to Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, man’s purpose on earth is to know himself at his deepest level. So far we finished discussing the eight limbs of *Yoga* which are the moral and ethical precepts of *Yoga*. As we found out, *Yoga* is more than just a workout. The physical practice serves one purpose only- getting to your truest core. *Yoga* is deep-rooted in ancient Indian philosophy and the philosophy of *Upanishads*, *Puranas* and even the *Bhagvad Gita*.

- These texts of wisdom may not speak to the person who is full of mind chatter, but rather the conscious person, who has the ability to become aware of his thinking. Everything that we use to define or identify us, usually as a result of thought, is referred to in the Patanjali Yoga Sutra as '*Vritti*' or whirlings of the mind. The term includes all thoughts that label you or the world around you. The suffering that you experience from a personal point of view is always connected with a certain identification with one of these labels, which ultimately arises from mind chatter. When in your sub-consciousness you can't see this. This kind of self-inquiry can increasingly lead to somewhat disturbing but at the same time liberating realization that the real problem is only myself. This problem, which is regarded as the real and only cause of human suffering in the Indian wisdom texts, is in Sanskrit called '*Avidya*' or ignorance.
- On the one hand, it does sound disturbing that you are the problem for your own suffering because you can no longer blame anyone for it. It is also unpleasant because this means that now you have to question your ideas and beliefs about yourself and the world. If because of this you are getting sleepless nights, it only means that the knowledge is working in you. The awareness that the real problem lies within you opens up completely new options: the possibilities to create solutions to external problems are very limited. You cannot change other people or create a just and peaceful world. But when you become aware of your inner confusion, or a negative emotion like anger, you can work with the help of tools like yoga. You have a place within you where all possibilities are open to you and you are limited by nothing more than yourself. This is what is called 'freedom' in this context. Deliberate actions which arise from your own subjective value system will add to this state of ignorance further. If you can be aware of your ignorance instead of being proud of what is 'known', then you have taken the first step towards inner wisdom. It is difficult to do away with ignorance which usually occurs because

- you have a subjective value system in which you justify your actions. That is why the first step towards inner wisdom is – be aware of your ignorance rather than presuming you know better.
- In yogic texts, inner speeds is regarded as a demonic force while slowness as divine strength. When you have a negative emotion, things around you move very quickly and there is a feeling of tightness and being closed. During an experience such as embodied yoga practice, you feel that things are moving slowly and you feel expansiveness and openness. When you are angry, your full attention is directed outward. Instead if you can rein in unbridled reaction to your feelings by consciously slowing down the movements of your mind in everyday life, you might start to make your own realization and see your own confusion or misunderstanding, as opposed to bringing your focus directly on the external reasons for your anger. This gives you the opportunity to put your problem into perspective and once you have acknowledged your own confusion, you might even notice that you had overreacted.
- One important thing to remember in yoga and assimilating its tenets into your life is that 'you have the choice not be upset'. The wisdom texts maintain that the only thing that stands between you and your happiness is your ignorance and in order to be happy you have to develop more clarity. You are not supposed to use your intellect to justify your suffering, but rather to liberate it. That is why it is called 'wisdom' instead of 'intelligence'.
- Studying the yogic texts can be a potent way to realizing the Self and finding true contentment and happiness. Many times you feel the external circumstances- like finding a good spouse, getting a better job, buying a new flat, getting a salary raise or a promotion- will bring you joy and happiness but these are things you can only aim for and try to achieve. These don't give you lasting happiness. That is achieved by looking inward and improving the 'Self' and taming the soul.

We discussed Yama and Niyama and the importance of following Ashtanga Yoga for a healthy body, life and spirit. The philosophy of Yoga puts forward, in non-technical or metaphysical terms, the view that you are essentially an all-perfect entity totally free from any imperfection and not subject to any undesirable, imperfect, negative experience whatsoever.

- Various sentiments and emotions bother you and disturb you, throw you out of gear and make you restless. They have the power to agitate you, to make you feel distressed. Unfulfilled desire, anger, a little failure on the part of someone to show respect to you, unkindness from someone, some sharp word from someone, or the failure on the part of someone to recognize your presence- all these immediately put you in a turmoil. Thus, physically you are subject to the afflictions of hunger pangs, thirst and fatigue, heat and cold while mentally, emotionally and sentimentally, you are always subject to the affliction of varying states of mind. Yoga philosophy says that this is an unnatural condition. You are not a creature subject to such afflictions. You are not a being who is supposed to have any such distressing conditions. You are above them, you are beyond them, you are really free from them. They do not actually form a part of your actual, true nature. However your experience contradicts the possible validity or truth of this fine philosophy. Your experience is directly the contrary of what Yoga philosophy says about you.
- Yoga philosophy says that you are free from all these things. You have no afflictions- no hunger, no thirst, no sleep, no fatigue. You are a being full of perfection, complete in yourself, lacking nothing, full of joy, full of peace, full of bliss. The only way of putting an end to this problem, of bringing about a cessation of this hotchpotch of everchanging experience- pleasant, unpleasant and neutral- is once again to regain your isolation, to go back to your normal, native, pristine position, where you are not associated with any other factor, where you are independent. In

that pristine state, you are yourself as you are, you eternally are, independent of any other factor, grandly isolated, free from any other association. If you regain that state which is your normal state, native state- now you are in an abnormal state- then all problems vanish. So when this association with the daily mundane troubles you, to put an end to it, there is only one way and that is the right royal way- stop this association, terminate this association with the imperfect world, and be yourself. Establish yourself in your pristine position once again. This is the philosophical thesis which is at the basis of science of Yoga.

- That is what the science of Yoga is concerned about- how to give back to you your independence, how to give back to you once again that pristine state in which you are always there- that is the real subject-matter of Yoga. Most human beings are constantly engaged in an endless struggle of warding off painful experiences, of keeping at bay experiences that are distressing, that cause discomfort and inconvenience. We cannot say that human activity is in a large measure anything creative, anything gainful. It is mostly negative. It is neither constructive nor creative, neither gainful nor really meaningful. But it is seen to be petty, Alpa. The Upanishad calls it Alpa. Constantly you are engaged in a never-ending process of trying to ward off painful experiences, try to get rid of suffering and pain, that which it does not want. “*Dukham Ma Bhuyat*”- Let no sorrow befall.
- When you consider this aspect of human activity and endeavor, you find that it is not so much an original activity, due to human will or human initiative, but something forced upon the human individual. Advaita Vedanta uses the term ‘Maya’ also with reference to this phenomenal nature and the Gita gives a certain extent of information, a certain hint that this Prakriti is made out of three *Gun*as- qualities- *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. An urge to activity, a constant restlessness, a tendency to movement, was the effect of the *Rajas* in the human being. Everything

ugly, negative, anti-social and destructive was the result of the manifestation of *Tamas* inside us. Everything beautiful, sublime, elevating, refined and subtle was seen to be the effect of the manifestation of the *Sattva*. Bhagavad Gita, which is both Brahma Vidya and Yoga Shastra, says that sometimes Sattva predominates overriding Tamas and Rajas, sometimes Rajas dominates overriding Tamas and Sattva, and sometimes Tamas predominates overriding Sattva and Rajas.

- Along with these there is yet another factor that is important factor that plays a significant role in shaping one's life- the pre-acquired condition or '*Swabhava*'. Swabhava will never change in a person. The foundation will never change. One can go on altering the building, the superstructure, demolishing and remodeling on all that, but the foundation is unalterably there, upon which only remodeling will have to be done. So the foundational aspect of your involvement in Self is primary.
- When you meditate you actually dig in deep inside your true nature so you may find yourself at peace with yourself and thus your surroundings. So the end result of all forms of meditation is to find yourself and rejuvenate your own inner being, your independent entity.

Just as '*Swabhav*' defines the quintessential personality that a person has, it is equally important for the person to have the right combination of obedience and ego, Prakriti and Purush, Rajas, Sattva and Tamas. There is yet another important element to the dimension of inner life- that the submission and denial of the ego is the greatest good for an individual. An individual's knowledge of the inner spiritual aspect of one's life made him realize that the so-called normal state of always expressing one's ego is a state

of slavery. Ego often serves as a tyrannical force. Ego seems to become a dominating factor day by day. Where lies the solution?

- A Yogi often says, "This Ego is not I. This expression of my ego is not really my self-expression. It is some other thing that is ruling the roost, shoving me aside. Therefore, I must regain my real place, role and status in my own sphere, within the sphere of my own inner personality. The killing of the Ego would do the greatest good for me."
- Killing the Ego is the beginning of liberation. Yogis say when you make up your mind to deny the Ego and submit it to the law or the Sangha or the organization, or the rules of the system, or the Guru, you do it voluntarily, and willingly and in this act, the true You, the spiritual Self, is asserting itself, is expressing what it wants. The mechanics of such obedience, subservience, surrender, is clear if you have the right perception and right vision of what you are doing. Then, by submitting the Ego, you feel a sense of freedom, a sense of lightness.
- So the first part of Yoga is not just practice of Sadhana, but a vow which you must take and adhere to like a hero, making yourself an embodiment of kindness, compassion, universal love, softness and forgiveness. Patanjali starts with the greatest danger that exists and that is violence, and to counter that he advocates the vow of Ahimsa.
- The second great vow to take is the vow of truthfulness. There are Sanskrit sayings which praise the two vows of Satya and Ahimsa as among the highest principles of Dharma or righteousness. "*Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah*" or non-injury is the highest form of righteousness. There is yet another saying, "*Satyam Nasti Paramo Dharmah*" or higher than truth there is no other Dharma. You can be cruel through your speech. You can be cruel through your expression in which you frighten a child by getting angry at it and widening your eyes, the child's soul may tremble. You can just terrify in that way someone lesser

than you by your expression. Likewise, can you be truthful? Speaking falsehood is not the only way of being untruthful. Concealing a thing is also a falsehood. Trying to exaggerate a thing is also a falsehood. Trying to reveal something partially and keeping something back is also a sort of dishonesty. You must reflect over all possible ways in which one can contradict truth in one's dealings with others everyday. Thinking something inside and appearing something else to be outside- that is also a contradiction of truth. But on occasion, being something inside and appearing to be something else outside, could be an act of kindness also, an act of compassion.

- In order to uphold Ahimsa, temporarily you may have to have a slight deviation from truthfulness. Supposing you see a loathsome beggar or a leper. You are revolted inside, but for fear that you might hurt his feelings if you turn away in disgust, you put on a calm appearance as though it is a quite a normal thing. You ask him what he wants and quickly dispose of him. Thus you avoid hurting his feelings by not manifesting your revulsion in your exterior. Therefore the detailed implications of these vows are subtle and intricate.
- Therefore the role of Yama and Niyama has ever been highlighted in Yoga and its philosophical texts. More important than that Yoga is about the liberation of the individual from bondage. There are several steps to be understood in it, each one with its own intricacies. They need to be understood- the importance of Tapas, Swadhyaya, and de-programming (a concept to be understood in detail later).

Yoga is about equanimity and poise and harmony. If something is disturbed or in a state of constant flux, yoga tries to resolve that by getting stability to the situation. Infact often a personal crisis can be a gift on the path to spiritual maturity. Learn to accept this gift, even if it sounds negative, and move on slowly with it. Only then will you feel reborn. Its human nature to avoid the emotional roadblocks that pepper the path to spiritual maturity, to seek instead the slow and steady pace of the ordinary traveller. Yet reaching higher spiritual ground requires an extraordinary traveller. It demands the kind of sea change that arrives at key junctures and can transport you to a higher level of spiritual functioning.

- A spiritual initiation is just this sort of sea change. It's an opportunity disguised as loss; a chance to strengthen the thread of awareness that connects the outer part of your being to the inner, to descend deeper into the soul. Yoga, which helps reveal the workings of the mind, provides tools to help you navigate an initiation and jump-start your progress on the spiritual path. Spiritual initiations are transitional; they leave you between worlds. You're neither your old self nor a new one. This amorphous, transitional feeling can be challenging- and it can manifest itself in all areas of your life.
- The feeling that your life is coming undone is the call to awakening that begins an initiation. The call can take many forms- illness, accident, betrayal by spouse, death of a loved one, urge to enter psychotherapy or the recognition of an unhealthy situation or a relationship. This is an opportunity to transcend over questions like, 'why is this happening to me?' and to seek a greater purpose behind the crisis. During this phase, you'll most likely experience a klesha called 'asmita' which is a disruption of the ego, or sense of 'I am' and a tendency to cling to old definitions of the Self: the Provider, the Responsible one, the Caretaker, the Black Sheep, the Boss, the Martyr, and so on.

- This can often be countered by centering yourself with restorative Yoga and by connecting with your breath, either through formal pranayama (breath control) or by simply focusing on the inflow and outflow of breath. Always imagine positive energy flowing in with each long inhalation and impurities and negative thoughts going out with each exhalation. Imagine that thread of awareness connecting your outer mind with your deepest inner Self; with each exhalation descend further down your deepest Self. This will help you awaken difficult parts of your body.
- As you leave your unhealthy world behind, you may experience a profound sense of separation. This letting go has a parallel in your yoga practice; you may need to temporarily give up your usual form of yoga in exchange for a more grounded practice which is more internally reflective. This is where another klesha (dvesha) comes into play. Your challenge now is to take a good look at the way you've been living and to weed out old habits and beliefs that once fortified your ego but no longer serve you; an abusive or lifeless relationship, an addiction, a history of powerlessness, overwork, or the glare of self-hatred. As you do this you're left with great mass of emptiness that lies underneath. While it can be frightening, facing this inner void clears the slate, making way for change and regeneration..
- In order to renew and conserve energy, you can practice pratyahara (drawing inward of the senses). Pratyahara helps you sit with pain without being consumed by it or overidentifying with it. You simultaneously suffer the death of who you thought you were and encounter your shadow side: the parts you keep hidden, the qualities, behaviours, and motivations that maybe difficult for you to acknowledge. The tasks of facing the underworld and your shadow provoke the klesha called abhinivesha, which is a fear of death and the tendency to cling to life. Though painful, the death of ego is essential

- so that you can rise from the ashes, like a phoenix, and come to life again in a more mature form.
- Suffering and death break through the defensive structures that frame your personalities, so you can get closer to your souls. While you mull on these three kleshas (ways of being) let us take you through more kleshas next time.

You go through different emotions in different phases of your life. Yoga helps just put that in place with the help of meditation and mindful thinking. Every time you work on yourself, you are actually working to kill your ego. One of the most richest paths of your awakening is the contraction and suffering felt with the death of the ego. You may feel dry, barren and exiled to begin with, the death of the ego can begin to open new avenues for you. Although you might not see it, the seeds of your new self are sprouting beneath the soil of your awareness.

- This is the time when often the klesha *avidya* (ignorance and delusion) is stimulated; you usually can't see what you'll grow into. You sometimes have trouble recognizing the stage of your transition from the egoful self to the egoless self. Often the klesha *avidya* propels you to restructure your life, build a new ego, and this seemingly endless period of waiting. You need to develop patience for your egoless life to take shape. After all the waiting, the klesha called *raga* (attachment) gets stirred up. A spiritual initiation is like a carved knife that pierces and cuts through the soul. Initiations allow you to reinvent yourself completely, to give yourself over to something greater. They are windows through which you can glimpse who you really are. As you learn to recognize and accept the extraordinary power

of change and develop the art of surrender, you'll be rewarded with an awakening of the natural alignment within body, mind and soul that exists within you.

- So we can identify five *kleshas* or afflictions that can knock you off balance or sidetrack you in your quest for spiritual evolution:
- *Avidya*- your inability to see things for what they are; this causes you to mistake ego-related matters as permanent ones.
- *Asmita*- the tendency to overidentify with your ego; this keeps you from connecting you with your soul.
- *Raga*- the flame of desire that causes addiction to pleasure; this discourages you from leaving your comfort zone for more evolved territory.
- *Dvesha*- aversion to pain; this creates a quicksand-like cycle of misery and self-hatred that sucks you under and suffocates your will to evolve.
- *Abhinivesha*- the fear of death or a clinging to life; this dilutes your focus and interferes with your ability to experience the spiritual freedom that is the goal of yoga.
- The first stage of working with the *kleshas* is to just acknowledge that they exist and observe them. Reflection promotes self-awareness, wisdom, self-knowledge to unleash what lies inside you. By ridding ourselves of the *kleshas* you can see the reality of the world and your own true nature. Thus these five afflictions of ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion and clinging to bodily life maybe so ingrained in us that we cannot even see these exist. One way to get rid of these five afflictions, according to most yoga sages is allow, acknowledge, pay attention and accept. You should try not to struggle with it too much. Imagine that your mind has an in-door and out-door and keep both doors open for these to come and go. The idea is not so much to be free of them as to coexist with them and yet not let them control or define you.

- The *Yoga Sutras* explain in detail how can such thoughts and negative perceptions be overcome. The mind field is bubbling with activity and that activity is 'thoughts'. Our thoughts range from direct perception of information, to inference and logical reasoning to misconceptions. Our thoughts also consist of our conceptual frameworks and imaginations as well as thoughts that operate during dreamless sleep. The key to gaining control over the mind is not to try to figure out what kind of thought we are having. Rather, it is to understand that regardless of what kind of thought might be rolling around, what lies underneath is what matters.
- According to the *Sutras*, *kleshas* are the driving force behind our thoughts. The most important tool in getting rid of *kleshas* is *dhyana* or meditation. The concentration on one thought, one image, one point literally transforms the mind by allowing it to flow undisturbed from the last thought to the next.
- Understanding one's afflictions may help you get a better understanding of the self which in turn takes you a step closer to self-awareness, which is what yoga is all about. Looking beyond the physical asanas is the true form of practicing yoga.

Yoga has many schools these days. It is such a wide subject and philosophy that many schools of thought have emerged. One of them is Anusara Yoga. Anusara Yoga believes that you are a part of the Divine and the Supreme Consciousness. The art of Anusara Yoga is a co-participation with the Supreme- not of domination, subjugation or control of Nature. The poses are considered to be heart-oriented, meaning that they are expressed from inside-out. Instead of trying to control the body and mind from the outside,

the poses originate from a deep creative and devotional feeling inside. Once on the mat, in Anusar Yoga you have to feel the joy or Sat-Chit-Ananda or the highest intention of practicing Yoga, reconnecting with your innate Goodness and expressing yourselves from that Divine place.

- ‘My body is my temple while Asanas are my prayers’, is what Yoga exponent B.K.S. Iyengar said. Likewise, the physical body is considered to be the manifestation of the Spirit, not simply an inferior metal vessel. Similarly, your thoughts, desires, passions and emotions are considered to be the God-given means of expanding your experience with the Supreme. Ultimately the body-mind is a Divine gift to help you discover your glory, your greatness and help you realize how good you are in your material pursuits. The main belief of this form of Yoga is that life is good.
- Goodness is the absolute nature of the Universe. There is no intrinsic or absolute Evil in the universe is its basic premise. As you are born free to choose your own experience, you are free and capable of moving out of alignment with the Divine in the way that creates suffering and harm. Anusara Yoga practice offers you the ability to cultivate your understanding of what is life-enhancing and what is not. You then use your power of discrimination and judgement to align with the good in order to reduce suffering, diminish division, dissolve hatred and conversely to enjoy life with peace and equanimity.
- Spiritual awakening is the ever expanding process of recognizing that your true nature is perfect, full, lacking nothing and interconnected to everything else that exists. Spiritual freedom or enlightenment is not a fixed state of things. It is an ever-evolving process of unfolding goodness, balance and perfection. Progress on the path of awakening is reflected in an increase in one’s spiritual centredness, wisdom, trust in Divine play,

ability to honour the Divine in others and ability to honour the Divine grandeur in your life.

- The theme of most Anusara yoga classes are virtue-centric. The theme provides an attitude that is reflected through all of the elements including asana and pranayama. A set of principles, aptly titled ‘Universal Principles of Alignment’ must be applied to each pose. These include the three As- Attitude, Alignment and Action. This is a foundational concept where every asana is ‘infused with a meaningful intention connected to the grand purposes of yoga, awareness of the posture, and balanced action between stability and freedom. Two forces balance out each pose- Muscular Energy and Organic Energy. Muscular energy is inward-turning, contracting and centering while Organic energy is outward-turning, expansive, expressive and creative.
- At the heart of this form of Yoga thus lies an inspiration- a feeling, an attitude or a ‘bhavana’. This is what fills the practice with life, so that your yoga becomes a force that transforms your life in line with your own highest intentions- and in line with the intention of the Divine for you. Yoga begins with your choice to participate, your own intention- *pravritti*- which from the Sanskrit word truly means a ‘turning’ of your heart towards your own inner good. Yet Yoga is not simply an affair of human intentions but more inclusive divine intention by which we are all united.
- Yoga, according to Anusar School, is the practice of recollecting and returning to the perfect state- the state at its most immediate means to be fully in the present moment as the true and eternal reality. It is in this moment- Now- that Consciousness is present in its fullness, undiminished by the mental ideas and impressions of past and future, and fully potent to realize its creative freedom, *Svatantrya*. A yogic asana or a practice thus holds the experience of stillness and movement, one inside the other, one constantly transforming the other.

- Thus the experience of being in ‘the flow of grace’ in your practice of yoga- is the literal meaning of the Sanskrit word ‘Anusara’. Yoga is the unfolding of emotions from your heart, the poses coming out in its best form through the heart, not the head. While you enjoy doing all poses from the deepest emotion within, we will take you through to the other schools of yoga and their philosophies next time.

Yoga, as we have been discussing, comes with many benefits for all- the most important being good health, physically, mentally and emotionally. The highest good we seek to experience through Yoga is the abiding experience of our innermost Self. This ‘Self’ is not the limited ‘I’ that we experience as doing, thinking, feeling and sensing. The Self is the abiding, expansive experience of ‘I’ that we have in moments of calm and peace or in moments of mental focus, heartfelt compassion and service, and in the experience of unconditional love. The experience of the Self is always present and is at the root of our natural state of awareness; yet we are generally unaware of the presence of this expanded awareness as our minds become busied in the details of daily life. Our own awareness literally contracts as it adapts to and embraces our finite affairs, and we forget that we can step back and experience the glory and peace of our natural awareness even in the midst of our affairs. Yoga is the practice of ‘recollecting’ and returning to this state again and again until we become once again settled in it as our home.

Yoga this plays the role of the leveler- in leveling the mind to a state of equanimity whenever it is disturbed or gets uprooted from its original ‘state of being’. This state at its most immediate means to be fully in the present moment as the true and eternal reality. It is in this moment- the ‘Now’- that Consciousness is present in its fullness,

undiminished by the mental ideas and impressions of past and future, and fully potent to realize its creative freedom, the *swatantrya*. The inner state of Yoga is not static; it is a state of being in the flow of the freedom of universal consciousness. There is a lot of quietude and you have to realize and focus on the stillness inside. There has to be stillness in movement and movement in stillness, both are equally important. A yogic asana or a posture, or a yogic breath, a yogic mind or heart, holds the experience of stillness and movement, one inside the other, one constantly transforming into the other.

The experience of being in the flow of grace in your practice of yoga- is the literal meaning of ‘Anusara’- and is a direct outcome of your own experience rather than some form of bookish knowledge. Yoga thus is an unfolding from your heart, from the fullness of your inner feeling, rather than from your head. It can be an exercise from the heart- from the inspiration to become whole, to participate in the higher energy, awareness and purpose of life. This is the deepest desire of the heart. Your feeling or highest wish is the true power behind your alignment, expression and experience of the pose, and your experience of the highest Self through Yoga. In order to realize, experience and express that Divine Self in one’s own life, and to become established in that awareness, now and always, is the fulfillment of the heart.

Anusara Yoga looks to three elements of practice that are distinctive of Yoga, each of which has its own set of principles. Attitude is the element of intention and will that is guided according to the teachings- both ethical and philosophical- of yoga philosophy. Yoga as a practice of self-awareness begins with intention. Intention requires what is known as ‘*Sankalpa*’. Sankalpa is the purest form of will. It is a pure wish for a positive good. An intention introduces focus, and it should awaken you and open you to the possibility of revelation and surprises. Alignment in the pose refers to the placement of the body in the pose. Instructions regarding alignment express relationships and set the shape of the pose, the vessel within which the alchemy of yogic action takes place.

Yoga thus is not just about physical bending, twisting, turning or jumping but also about the meditative practice of each pose to derive full benefit of the same. You have to focus and think about its different aspects, of alignment, attitude, purity of thought while performing the pose. Hatha Yoga as a science and art of well-being recognizes the power of time, unconscious habit and environment to wear us down. As strange the poses of Yoga may seem, they work to reestablish the flow of energies and physical processes according to their proper balance, as well as assist the body in its task of cleansing and refreshing the body.

Next time we will deal with more philosophies of east, south and west India in the field of Yogic practices.

We discussed the philosophy behind Anusara Yoga last time. This time let us take a deep look into what Shivananda Yoga is all about. Swami Shivananda lived from 1887-1963. His teaching for physical and mental well-being are the spiritual strength behind Shivananda Yoga centres around the world. Swami Vishnudevananda of Shivananda Yoga stresses on five easy ways to live a healthy and prosperous life: asanas, pranayama, Savasana, vegetarian and Vedanta and Dhyana. These five things are important sources of life energy.

Asanas enhance the flexibility of the joints, muscles, tendons and ligaments. The asanas improve circulation, massage the internal organs and improve organ function. A flexible and strong spine enhances blood circulation and keeps the body young and powerful.

Pranayama connects the body to its battery, the solar plexus, which is an enormous reservoir of energy. Deep, conscious breathing boosts our daily energy reserves- stress and many diseases (for example, depression) can be alleviated in this way.

If the body and mind are subjected to constant overload, their performance suffers. A few minutes of physical, mental and spiritual relaxation counteract worry and fatigue more effectively than several hours of uneasy sleep. Proper relaxation is an excellent cooling system. In a modern day world many people find it difficult to stay relaxed. By keeping our muscles in a constant state of readiness, we expend a lot more energy than we would if we used only those muscles needed for the job at hand. Unnecessary physical and mental tension uses up great amounts of energy, even in periods of rest, and wastes a huge amount of our vital energy. The problem is also that negative emotions like anger or irritability can deplete these energy stores in just a few minutes. In 'Savasana' however, only a very small amount of life energy (prana) is used, just enough to maintain vital metabolic activities. The rest of the energy is stored. This deep relaxation includes three levels: physical, mental and spiritual relaxation.

Vegetarianism is yet another example through which one can increase the energy levels inside one's body. It is one that is simple, natural and health promoting, and can be easily digested and assimilated by the body. It consists of food products that have the most positive effects on the body and mind, while having the fewest negative effects on the environment and on other creatures.

Finally positive thinking and meditation (Vedanta and Dhyana) are the keys to peace of mind. By controlling the movements of the mind, we can eliminate negative thought patterns and experience deep inner peace. Meditation is the method used to calm and focus the mind. Regular practice promotes not only mental equanimity, but physical and spiritual well-being as well. Before we can meditate, though, we need to create the mind through concentration techniques and positive thinking. A mind full of negative thoughts and feelings is hard to calm down.

By controlling the movements of the mind, we can eliminate negative thought patterns and reach the meditative super-conscious state (Samadhi). Samadhi is the blissful union with the Supreme Self

and leads to direct, intuitive experience of the Infinite. It is a deep spiritual experience that cannot be put into words or even grasped by the mind. In Samadhi, the senses, the mind and the intellect cease to function. The consciousness expands, going beyond time, space and causality. One realizes the Divine presence pervading all life forms and experiences profound peace and joy and a feeling of oneness with the universe.

Siva Samhita says, “Let the yogi eat moderately and abstemiously, otherwise, however clever, he cannot gain success.”

Shivananda Yoga also believes that a Yogi should have a balanced diet full of nutrients. The human body needs food for two reasons— as fuel for energy and as raw material to regenerate the body and continuously renew the tissues. A pure and natural diet is the best way to support our body’s two basic needs. Since all energy comes from the Sun, the closer our food is to this source, the more energy it has. Human beings can only draw Vitamin D and life energy (prana) directly from the Sun, whereas plants use photosynthesis to convert sun energy into matter. Therefore, a vegetarian diet delivers nutrients directly from the ‘source’. Meat or fish, by contrast, contains only ‘second-hand nutrients’— the natural energy of the plants has already been metabolized in the body of the animal. We are what we eat. This is true in most respects. Food also has more subtle effects: it forms the substance of our mind and can thus influence the mind in a very subtle way. This is another reason why we should eat natural foods. Fresh, light and nutritious food keeps the body trim and flexible, the mind clear and sharp and makes both body and mind receptive for the yoga practice.

Shivananda Yoga follows their intensive Sadhana classes where they introduce the practitioner to the concept of Yoga, Vedanta, Pranayama and Mouna. Some texts they strongly recommend reading for this are: *Viveka Chudamani* by Shankaracharya. This is a basic text on Vedanta philosophy which describes the practical methods towards realizing the Self and the necessary preparations for it. Another text is *Srimad Bhagavatam* by Vyasa Maharishi. This is

one of the most important works on Bhakti Yoga. Listening to these stories fills the mind with universal love and opens the heart, which is the key to experiencing the deepest levels of Hatha Yoga. Finally *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Yogi Swatmaram is highly recommended, too. This classical text explains in detail the asanas, pranayama, Mudras, Bandhas and the process of awakening the Kundalini.

Swami Shivananda says, “All life is one....the world is one home. All are members of one human family. No man is independent of that whole. Man makes himself miserable by separating himself from others. Destroy all barriers that separate man from man...let all life be sacred.”

Shivananda philosophy revolves around certain key terms which one needs to understand to go deep into their beliefs and teachings—the Self. The Self, or the Supreme Soul, is the essential nature of man, the common consciousness in all beings. Full awareness of the Self, which can be attained through yoga, is bliss itself. Similarly one should stay away from ignorance. It is due to ignorance that we perceive diversity rather than unity. The apparent difference between the individual, the world and the Self is only an illusion. This illusion works at great speed by the fluctuations and imaginations of the mind. However real time and space may appear they are nothing but mental creations, as unreal as dreams. The timeless, spaceless Self is the only reality. By breaking down the barriers of separate existence, the unity of the Self can be experienced. It is not attainment of liberation from an actual state of bondage, but it is the realization of the liberation that already exists. It is freedom from a false notion of bondage.

Swami Shivananda says that the cause of ignorance mentioned above is desire. Desire creates thoughts that veil the true nature of the Soul, which is blissful and eternal. When desires are reduced and finally transcended through self-discipline, intuitive knowledge of the Self dawns in the individual. Knowledge of the Self is the intuitive, non-dual exercise while reason and intellect are realms of dualistic knowledge of objects through mind and is more a

knowledge of appearances. Intuition dawns like a flash. Intuitive knowledge is imperishable knowledge of the Truth. Without developing intuition, the intellectual man remains imperfect. Meditation leads to intuition. The world is neither good nor bad; to a good person the world is full of good, but to the bad, the world is full of evil. The evil is not in the world, but its in the mind. By seeing the Self everywhere, good can be seen everywhere. This philosophy strongly believes in the power of religion. The main purpose of religion, he believes, is the unfolding of the Divinity within man. Religion is living, not speaking or showing. Real religion is religion of the heart.

Shivananda Yoga also believes in the concept and philosophy of the 'Vedanta'. Vedanta literally means 'the end of the Vedas'. The Vedas are mankind's oldest scriptures, containing the wisdom of all ages. The last part of the Vedas is made up of Upanishads, which have strongly influenced some Westerners like Arthur Schopenhauer. Vedanta is one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy. Its beliefs are non-dualistic. It declares that liberation cannot be reached by means of rituals, actions or charity. The goal of Vedanta is knowledge of Brahman (Absolute Existence) which is beyond the illusion (Maya) of the world and of one's own mind. This ultimate reality lies beyond the realms of the limited intellect and the manifest world. Vedanta says that we and the Supreme Self are one. It reminds us of our true nature. A common Self or Consciousness dwells in each one of us. Thus Vedanta tells us to overcome the feeling of individuality, the belief in 'me' and 'mine'. Instead, we should identify with the eternal essence, to see the Self within us and in all beings. Vedanta teaches the unity of life and the unity of Consciousness.

This school of Yoga believes in the cycle of Karma and the law of Life- the law of Karma means the law of causation. This grand law includes the law of action and reaction, the law of compensation and the law of retribution. This is what Swami Shivananda believed. Karma means action and it refers to any physical or mental action

as well as to the consequences of these actions. It is equivalent to the scientific law of cause and effect, or action and reaction. The world runs according to this vital, fundamental law. The law of karma says that there is a specific cause behind everything that happens. Desire creates karma. You work hard to gain what you desire. The fruit of karma is pleasure or pain. Man is reborn again and again to recollect the fruits of his karma.

They have also recommended some specific types of meditative techniques- Trataka, concentration on a flower, concentration on a sound and a twelve-step meditation. In twelve-step meditation you have to look for an appropriate place and time of the day to do it everyday. Regulate your breathing- start with five minutes' deep breathing, then slow it down. Establish a rhythmic breathing pattern. At first let your mind wander. Now bring the mind to rest on the focal point of your choice- Ajna Chakra (between your eyebrows) or Anahata Chakra (in the middle of your chest). Hold your object of concentration at this focal point through the session. Meditation comes when you reach a state of pure thought, but still retain your awareness of duality. After long practice, duality disappears and Samadhi, the superconscious state is attained.

Next time we will go deep into the philosophies of a few other schools of Yoga.

While Anusara Yoga and Shivananda Yoga focus on asanas and meditation and inward-process of the body, Bihar school of Yoga has functions at an integrated level which incorporates practical philosophy and a holistic lifestyle. Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati is said to be a great visionary associated with this form of Yoga. He has brought to light certain yogic teachings from sacred scriptures and lost traditions.

He has framed them in a modern language which incorporates both traditional and scientific understandings. If the head, the heart and the hand, says Swami Satyanandaji, do not function in harmony, there is restlessness in life. This restlessness may be on the mental, emotional, physical or spiritual level. Though its manifestation is large, it always results in the shattering of inner peace. Yoga practices developed by Sri Swami Satyanandaji and Bihar School of Yoga aim to harmonise life at all levels and experience through practical means. This system is known as Satyananda Yoga.

Satyananda Yoga focuses on Asanas, Pranayama, Mudra and Bandhas. Asanas work on both the body and mind. These are not separate entities although there is a tendency to think and act as though they are. The gross form of the body is the mind. Practising asanas integrates and harmonises the two.

Satyananda Yoga also believes in certain Hindu traditions- Tantric tradition, for example being one. Tantra is a collective title that covers a vast range of practical teachings leading to the expansion of human consciousness and the liberation of primal energy (Kundalini). The unifying principles behind the diverse systems of tantra is that the material world and its experiences can be utilized to attain enlightenment.

Although there are many branches of Tantra, the practices common to all systems leading to transcendental awakening are mantras (vibrational tuning through sounds), yantras (concentration symbols to liberate the consciousness), chakras (realization of psychic centres), mandalas (perceptions of the macrocosms), tapasya (practices of self-purification), Raja Yoga (integral yoga), pranayama (yogic breathing practice), self-surrender, shaktipat (transmission of energy), and tantric initiations (a process incorporating all the above). These elements are all a part of Tantric practices. Tantra believes in integrating the faculties of the intellect and the heart. The faculties of the intellect are discrimination and concentration, and those of the heart are seeing the unseen, glimpses of the transcendental and cosmic consciousness.

Then they also believe in the Vedic tradition and work towards promoting it among students. Vedic tradition is one of the most ancient surviving spiritual and mystic traditions of the past. It advocates realization of the divine as the ultimate truth and living a pious and virtuous life in the material world. The central theme of the Vedic philosophy is that God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent reality, whereas the individual is only an actor who plays his part on the 'stage of life' and then is no more. One has to be able to harmonise the thoughts, behavior and actions. Meditative contemplation, faith in God, trust in oneself, appreciation of and living in harmony with the environment and nature, experiencing oneness in all interactions are some of the basic foundations of the Vedic tradition.

Finally you have the Yogic tradition which means basically the union or integration of individual with universal consciousness. On a practical level, it is the way to balance and harmonise the body, mind and emotions. This is achieved by practicing asana (physical postures), pranayama (breathing practices), mudra and bandha (psycho-physiological energy release techniques), shatkarma (internal cleansing practices) and a wide variety of meditation techniques. Through yoga, the limitations of life can be transcended, as Satyananda Yoga believes, and efficiency in action can be attained which results in higher expression of higher levels of creativity and positivity in life.

Finally one of the most important components of Satyananda Yoga is the Satyananda Yoga Nidra devised by Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati from traditional Tantric practices and has left a major impact on all practitioners. It is a pratyahara technique in which the distractions of the mind are contained and the mind is allowed to relax. It is the state of dynamic sleep. It is a systematic method of inducing complete, physical, mental and emotional relaxation. During the practice, one appears to be asleep, but the consciousness is functioning at a deeper level of awareness, as Swami Satyananda mentions in his book *Yoga Nidra*.

Similarly, many meditation and concentration techniques have been developed by Satyanand Yoga- Antar Mouna, Ajapa Japa, Trataka among others. The practices of pratyahara (stilling the mind), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and laya yoga techniques, derived from the Upanishads, the Tantras and other traditions have also been classified, taught and published. All techniques have different levels and stages of practice as clarified by the Satyananda Yoga tradition. More about such techniques maybe found in the books *Meditations from the Tantras* and *Dharana Darshan*.

Next time we will be back with more on other traditions of Yoga.

Bihar School of Yoga believes in training young minds for not just holistic living but preparing them for a tough world keeping a positive attitude and understanding selfless service. In order to promote such living, they have set up ashrams with a set ashram routine. An ashram is an embodiment of simple living, a place of inspiration because it does not teach or preach; it exhibits and the yogi imbibes what is applicable. Some of the activities which are encouraged in the ashram are Mahamrityunjay Havan, Bhagvad Gita Paath, Sundarkand Paath, Guru Bhakti Yoga and Akhand Ramayana Paath. They practice an austere lifestyle considering today's day and age- starting with a rouser at 4 am, breakfast at 6, lunch at 11:30 am, and dinner served at 5:30 pm. These are interspersed with sessions of sewa, kirtans, private study or sadhana and observance of Mauna (silence).

Along with ashram living, Bihar School of Yoga also propagates certain other forms of Yoga like Living Yoga propounded by Swami Niranjananda Saraswati, the spiritual successor of Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati. Living Yoga spells out a certain vision of

Sannyasa- to uplift the human society from their grief, pain and suffering, whether social, spiritual, mental or physical, in whatever form it may be. Sri Swamiji often said, "I do not want emancipation. My only intention is to serve. My destination is to serve. My aim is to serve."

He gave a vision of Sannyasa Peeth that it should bring hope, luminosity, happiness and joy, by living a life in which one can be selfless, committed and sincere, endowed with faith and conviction. That is the life of Sannyasa, and those people who live this life become selfless. Sri Swamiji served to prepare the sannyasins to be selfless- those who are dedicated and devoted and who have the strength, courage and conviction to move away from selfish awareness, selfish needs and selfish life. Usually those who want to follow the path of sannyasa recommit themselves again and again and be re-initiated. They make a commitment to live a certain life of sannyasa to the fullest. They spread the message of yogis to make people more aware about the ways and lifestyle of yogis. They also impart knowledge and education to the seekers to know more about the art, science and philosophy that yoga is. They have, from time to time, held conventions to spread what yoga is all about- quality life, sattvic life and 'divine' life.

Since ashram is a place where one can try to become aware of the inner strength that can be cultivated to make life easier and better, we often get entangled with our own minds, with our own likes and dislikes, ambitions and needs and desires, so much so that the focus of the aim is lost. Swamiji asks- where is the sincerity in that? The commitment? The seriousness? The three most important words that allow an individual to grow in spiritual life are sincerity, seriousness and commitment. This school of Yoga believes that just as when we are born, family members welcome the newborn baby, prakriti or Nature has identified six people who will welcome the newborn baby- kama or passion, desire and likes; krodha or anger, the aggressive nature; lobha or greed, moha or infatuation and attachment; mada or arrogance;

matsarya or jealousy and envy, competitiveness. Everything is processed by these six friends- the relationship between husband and wife, the interaction in society and even the relationship between disciple and guru. These first friends have expectations, because they are made to give you happiness and pleasure that you expect from them. They begin to expect support and comfort, happiness and contentment from all of your associations, because you have been told that by your vasana, your kama that you can fulfill your desires through the people you meet.

As life progresses, you begin to realize that the six friends who have lived with you all your life are not your well-wishers. They have motivated you to achieve greater things in life, but in the process they have removed the feelings of contentment, pleasure and happiness. There is more strife, conflict, struggle and suffering. You realize that all the efforts, ideas, mentalities and perceptions that you have had until now are misleading you. When this awareness arises, it makes you move towards your spiritual self. It is guru who teaches you how to connect with the positive emotions and positive thoughts. Therefore, the role of guru in the life of a spiritual aspirant is to teach the person how to overcome the influences of the six friends who have been with us until today and who are now restricting and opposing our advancement in spiritual life.

Thus they promote the ashram life so that such gurus can be groomed and nurtured from the very start to benefit the society at large. The one feeling that is promoted among all gurus is the joy of service and giving. Next time we will be back with more knowledge about diverse forms of yoga forms and their teachings.

Among many schools of Yoga, Parmarth Niketan in Rishikesh is one such place where one can learn the intricacies of yoga and such lifestyle. The daily activities at Parmarth Niketan include morning universal prayers, daily yoga and meditation classes, daily satsang and lectures, *kirtan*, the well-known *Arti* at sunset, as well as nature cure and ayurvedic treatment.

The main proponent of this school of Yoga is His Holiness Pujya Swami Chidananda Saraswati. He is President and spiritual head of Parmarth Niketan Ashram. Under his inspiration and leadership, the ashram is not only a spiritual haven but also provides education, training and healthcare to all who come here. This school believes in Yoga being a way of life and making one's life into a prayer to God. Hence they believe a devout person should follow daily yogic practice, sanskaras and satsangs as a way of life.

They, too, focus on the Vedic tradition of austere living from a very young age itself. They believe that '*sanskaras*' are the 'rites of passage' that a person passes through in life- from conception to death. A closer word to describe this would be 'sacrament' which implies an outward celebration or ceremony symbolic of an inward growth, change or grace. The sanskaras refer to the main religious/spiritual purificatory rites and rituals for sanctifying the body and mind, such that growth is progressively smooth. There are 16 main sanskaras, four of which are performed with great piety and devotion, on the banks of the River Ganga. These are- Chudakaran Sanskara (Mundan ceremony) or the first haircut, Upanayana Sanskara (Yagnopavit ceremony) or the sacred thread ceremony, Vivaha Sanskara or marriage and Antim Sanskara (Asthi Visarjan) or ash immersion at the time of death of a person.

Parmarth Niketan, besides spiritual healing and exercises also believes in children's education and provides free education to children under its Divine Shakti Foundation. The school is called Prakash Bharti. They don't only believe in Yoga but focus more on making the environment free of problems and believes in service to people, too. They run a Parmarth Gurukul which is full of children

who have either been orphaned or whose parents can't afford to keep them. Gurukul believes that there are lot of children which need not only to be fed and sheltered- they need to be educated and trained so they can be productive members of society. They need to be inculcated with values, ethics and spirituality which will make them torchbearers of Indian culture.

The Gurukul provides education which includes the following essential elements- a full, standard academic education, training in the ancient Vedic knowledge and traditions, moral and value-based education. Once the children are adopted in the Gurukul, their identity is changed from an 'orphan' or 'poor' to 'Rishikumars'. With this simple change, entire identities of these children have changed. Looks of hopelessness transform into one of hope and optimism. Destitution and despair is replaced with pride, faith and enthusiasm. Besides the Gurukul, Parmarth Niketan runs clinic services on a regular basis- surgical eye camps to camps in cardiology, urology, internal medicine, Ayurveda, homeopathy, Nature Cure, pediatrics, prosthetic limbs, acupuncture and much more. Dedicated teams of doctors come from across the country and the world to hold such camps for residents of the Ashram and local residents. The ashram also organizes programmes for conserving the environment on a regular basis- tree plantation programmes, sanitation awareness programmes, organic farming programmes, environmental cleanup programmes and Tirth Conservation and Development programmes. Parmarth is also actively engaged in cow welfare programmes- which include cow sheds, cow care, etc. including getting stray cows from streets to the barns in the ashram. Parmarth believes in holding *bhandaras* everyday for rishikumars, brahmacharis, sadhus and others in need. After performing a sacred puja and celebrating auspicious ceremonies, hundreds are fed on the banks of the Ganga. Bhandaras are thus a regular feature of the ashram. Parmarth also provides yoga teacher training courses on a regular basis. Yoga at the ashram is holistic, spiritually oriented and focused on the deep and sublime traditional ancient yogic discipline as taught by rishis

and sages. Expertise in yoga is attained by devotion, patience and sincerity, and uninterrupted regular practice. In 2-5 weeks, students are healthier, stronger and feel more confident to commit to the yoga way of life.

Parmarth believes that Yoga, according to Bhagwad Gita, has various definitions:

- Equanimity of mind in success and failure
- Discretion in work
- Remover of misery and destroyer of pain
- Serenity
- Giver of infinite happiness

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras define yoga as 'complete control over patterns or modifications of the mind' or *yogashchittavrittinirodhaha*.

The various branches of Yoga could be classified into five basic groups for all practical purposes:

- Jnana Yoga: Yoga committed to inquiry
- Karma Yoga: Yoga committed to selfless service and Dharma
- Bhakti Yoga: Yoga devoted to love and devotion to God
- Raja Yoga: Yoga committed to introspection and contemplation
- Hatha Yoga: Yoga devoted to discipline of the body and the balance of the mental, physical and subtle forces of the body through practice of asana and pranayama

Parmarth Niketan, thus has many services to offer and works around a philosophy and yoga and active service to preserve humanity and nature. This is different from just practicing a kind of yoga based on scriptures and educational component. Here they believe in living a yogic lifestyle in a practical manner so that society may become a better place to live.

Of all the schools of Yoga, there's yet another school of Yoga called Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga codified and popularized by K. Pattabhi Jois during the 20th century and is often promoted as modern-day form of classical Yoga. Sri K. Pattabhi Jois began his yoga studies in 1927 at the age of 12 and by 1948, he had established the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute for teaching Ashtanga Yoga.

Initially Ashtanga Yoga was taught by Vamana Rishi in the *Yoga Karunta*. The text was imparted to Sri T. Krishnamacharya in the early 1900s by his Guru Rama Mohan Brahmachari, and was later passed down to Pattabhi Jois during his studies with Sri Krishnamacharya. According to Guruji, Ashtanga Yoga comprises the following:

- Vinyasa: It means breathing and movement system, which is helpful in cleansing the body.
- Tristhana: Here thrust is given on posture, breathing system and looking place, which purifies the body, nervous system and mind.
- Six poisons: These six poisons are Kama, Krodha, Moha, Lobha, Matsarya and Mada. These surround the heart and are represented by desire, anger, delusion, greed, envy and sloth.

Each class of Ashtanga Yoga begins with a chant or a prayer:

*Vande gurunam charanarvinde sandarsita svatma sukhava bodhe
Nih-sreyase jangali-kayamane samsara-halahala moha-santyai
Abahu purusakaram sankha-chakr-asi-dharinam
Sahasra sirasam svetam pranamami patanjalin*

This mantra connects with the ancient tradition of the eight-limbed path (Ashtanga Yoga). A track that leads out of the jungle of conditioning, prejudices and illusion to a more clear realization of the Self. Patanjali formulated the philosophical concepts of the tradition. He symbolizes the clear realization of the Self (a thousand radiant heads) and mastery (sword, distinctiveness) of origin (conch, primordial sound) and finitude (discus, time).

This prayer is usually followed by the Sun Salutation poses. It forms the basis of the Astanga Yoga practice. Here the steadiness of breath (Ujjayi), energy control (Bandha), and concentration (Drishti) are established. This creates the powerful flow of a dynamic meditation, where you count the movements (Vinyasa) like beads on a rosary and stay in certain positions for five breaths (Asana). After the opening mantra, three to five rounds of Surya Namaskar can lead directly to a brief finishing sequence. This results in a short, yet still complete, and balanced practice. Once this has been established, the fundamental positions can then be included in between.

The fundamental positions (Asanas) tune the physical and energetic body to balance (Alignment). The dynamic of the Sun Salutations transform to new forms of movement. Just as before each sequence begins and ends in a standing position. Counting every movement from there, you will arrive in certain positions after much strenuous task and exercise. However, once the rhythm is familiar, the sequences partially merge with each other. Once in a while, you will still pass through Samisthitih. Nevertheless, the number of times you do individual movements are not changed.

Whenever you pass through the standing position, it is an opportunity, especially for beginners, to obtain the warmth and dynamics of the practice through a connecting sequence of movements. You may add these six fundamental positions after Surya Namaskar once you are well-familiarized with their practice-Padangushthasana, Pada Hastasana, Utthita Trikonasana, Parivritta Trikonasana, Utthita Parsvakonasana, Parivritta Parsvakonasana.

The finishing sequence guides the practitioner in Ashtanga Yoga to an energetic culmination. The breathing calms down, muscle contractions become subtle, and concentration turns inward. This sequence consists of only one sitting posture (Padmasana), followed by the closing mantra and finally a relaxation posture (Savasana) until attention and breathing subside, and the last drop of sweat evaporates. With cumulative experience in practice, further tranquil positions (Asanas) are gradually added to complete the sequence.

Only a few movement sequences through a plank pose (Vinyasa) or backwards roll (Chakrasana) hold the underlying dynamics of the practice up.

Then for regular practitioners, Ashtanga Yoga recommends primary series, intermediate series and advanced series. Primary series require more flexibility, power and endurance. Some of these include Utthita Hasta Padangushthasana, Utthita Parsvasahita, Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana, Utkatasana, Virbhadrasana, Dandasana, Paschimottanasana, Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottanasana, Janusirsasana, etc. After about two years of constant practice, you start doing the Nadi Shodhana Pranayama, which assists in cleansing of the energy channels. Breath, energy control, and focus become more deep in experience. Sometimes at this point the physical body is so flexible and powerful that the series is no longer adequate as a field of learning. You have to the second series and then the advanced series. The advanced sequence of the Ashtanga Yoga demands a high degree of strength and flexibility. A lot of practice and endurance is required to learn it.

Thus we saw how Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga has a set of routine exercises and asanas to steer you to peace, health and prosperity. Next time we will be back with a new routine of asanas propounded by another school.

Yoga, it is said, is as old as the Vedas. However, no physical evidence supports the claim that Yoga is as old as civilization. Earliest archaeological evidence of yoga is stone seals of around 3000 B.C. depicting yoga poses. We can today divide the history of Yoga into four periods:

Vedic period- Vedas are the sacred scriptures of Brahmanism, modern day Hinduism's basis. The Vedas contain the oldest known Yogic teaching; hence such teachings are called Vedic Yoga.

Pre-classical Yoga- The creation of two hundred numbers of Upanishads marks the pre-classical Yoga. The Upanishads describe the inner vision of reality resulting from devotion to Brahman.

These explain the teachings of Vedas further. Around 500 B.C. Bhagvad Gita came up. Currently scholars take this as the oldest known yoga scripture.

Classical period- is the one in which Lord Patanjali scripted the 'Yoga Sutras of Patanjali'.

Post-classical period- Post-classical Yoga differs from those of previous periods since it focuses more in the present. It no longer strives to liberate a person from reality but rather one to accept it and live at the moment. Isha Yoga, etc. fall under this category.

Today there are six main schools of Yoga:

- Hatha Yoga or Yoga of postures
- Raja Yoga or Yoga of self-control
- Kundalini Yoga or Yoga of energy
- Karma Yoga or Yoga of action
- Jnana Yoga or Yoga of mind
- Bhakti Yoga or Yoga of devotion

The yoga, as stated by Patanjali is enumerated through Sanskrit and hence contains only the main and the important thoughts. The first aphorism of the first part introduces Yoga as:

ATHAYOGANUSHASANAM

This means the discipline of Yoga is stated hence forth. That is to be understood and followed. The next aphorism states the nature of Yoga.

YOGA CHITTAVRITTINIRODHAH

This means that Yoga is all about controlling the thought waves of the mind. The thoughts, feelings, emotions arising in the mind are vrittis, which should be controlled. This is called Yoga. The broader perspective is expected and the word chitta here means individual consciousness, which cover all states of conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious.

While trying to control the vrittis (thoughts, emotions, feelings), certain disturbances are created which stop or divert the growth. Patanjali has addressed them as antary (disturbances) creating chittavikshepa.

- Vyadhi- disease
- Styan- danger
- Samshay- doubt
- Pramad- carelessness
- Alasya- laziness
- Bhranti- hallucinations
- Alabdhabhoomikatva- non achievement of stage
- Anavasthitattva- instability

Thus a traditional school of Yoga follows one of the above-mentioned Yogic paths or traditions. There are different paths of Yoga explained in different ancient texts.

The Yoga Vashishtha, for example, is one of the finest gnostic texts of India. The Yoga Vashishtha is part of the great Indian epic Ramayana. The Ramayana tells the tale of Lord Rama, rightful heir to the throne of Ayodhya who is forced into a fourteen-year exile in the jungles. The Sage Vashishtha is preceptor and spiritual guide of Lord Rama. The Yoga Vashishtha is a dialogue between Lord Rama and his spiritual guide Vashishtha. Vashishtha answers the questions of the young Prince Rama, who has been on travels in his kingdom and returns weary and disinterested in life. Prince Rama asks about human existence, the fleeting nature of life and relationships. He asks deep and direct questions regarding the creation of the Universe, the nature of existence and the Self.

Vashishtha, the master of the Self responds with mind-boggling tales and direct insights. Cutting through all frills and fancies, Vashishtha gets to the heart of the matter. The Self only is, all else is ignorance and illusion.

Stories within stories within stories make this text unique. The complex structure of storytelling combined with the highest philosophical truths leaves an indelible impression in your mind. Yoga Vashishtha is also considered to have a strong Buddhist influence.

It is divided into six parts:

- Vairagya Prakaranam- About dispassion
- Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakaranam- About the behavior of the Seeker
- Utpatti Prakaranam- About creation
- Sthiti Prakaranam- About existence
- Upasama Prakaranam- About dissolution
- Nirvana Prakaranam- About liberation

The core philosophy of this text is – the world never existed in the past, nor exists now, nor will exist hereafter.

The very essence of the teachings, is often repeated in the following verse:

This world appearance is a confusion,
Even as the blueness of the Sky is an optical illusion,
I think it is better not to let the mind dwell on it, but to ignore it. (1.3.2).

Another oft-appearing expression is ‘kakataliya’. A crow alights on a coconut tree and in that very moment a ripe coconut falls. The two unrelated events seem to be related though there is no causal relationship. Such is life. Thus the universe was just an ‘accident’.

Next time we will be back with more on different schools of Yoga, texts and different Yogic thoughts.

Yoga Vashishtha continues from last time as we discuss the importance and significance of the text and see what it has to offer to the spiritual development of the human being. Yoga Vashishtha revolves around a central theme that the soul is undergoing a dream from which it must awake. This dream represents our identification and association with the world.

The fact that it is a dream means that whatever in it is false. Nothing in a dream can be true. Waking up from that dream is the Ultimate Goal- Self-Realization. When all the desires are destroyed, the extinction of the Mind where mind becomes 'No-Mind' is Moksha. If the illusory I-ness or Ego perishes, the end of thoughts to the Maya is Moksha. Extinction of all psychological conditioning constitutes eternal liberation of the Self. Self Knowledge is the realization that the Self is in reality not bound, but always pure and free. Realize that you are the immortal all pervading Self and become free.

There are supposedly four gatekeepers at the Realm of Freedom. They are Santi (self-control or quietness of mind); Vichara (spirit of enquiry); Santosha (contentment) and Satsanga (good company).

When the mind is at peace, pure, tranquil, free from delusion or hallucination, untangled and free from cravings, it does not long for anything nor does it reject anything. This is self-control or conquest of mind.

He who even while hearing, touching, seeing, smelling and tasting what is regarded as pleasant and unpleasant, is neither elated nor depressed- he is self-controlled. He who looks upon all beings with equal vision, having brought under control the sensations of pleasure and pain, is self-controlled. He who though living amongst all is unaffected by them, neither feels elated nor hates, even as one is during sleep-he is self-controlled.

Valmiki says that the wise man regards strength, intellect, efficiency and timely action as the fruits of inquiry. When the mind has been rendered dull by the absence of inquiry, the worst can happen. The non-inquiring fool is really a storehouse of sorrow. It

is the absence of inquiry that gives rise to actions that are harmful to oneself and to others, and to numerous psychosomatic illnesses. Valmiki tells Lord Rama that in the light of inquiry there is realization of the eternal and unchanging reality; this is the Supreme. Knowledge of Truth arises from such inquiry; from such knowledge there follows tranquility in oneself; and then there arises peace in the world and ending of all sorrow.

Contentment is another gatekeeper to liberation. It means to renounce all craving for what is not obtained unsought and to be satisfied with what comes unsought, without being elated or depressed even by them- this is contentment. As long as one is not satisfied in the self, he will be subjected to sorrow. With the rise of contentment the purity of one's heart blooms. The contented man who possesses nothing owns the world.

Satsang is yet another gatekeeper to liberation. It enlarges one's intelligence, destroys one's ignorance and one's psychological distress. Whatever be the cost, however difficult it may be, whatever obstacles may stand in its way, satsanga should never be neglected. Satsang is superior to all other forms of religious practices like charity, austerity, pilgrimages and the performance of religious rites.

When the mind is at peace and the heart leaps to Supreme Truth, when all the disturbing thought-waves in the mind-stuff have subsided and there is unbroken flow of peace and the heart is filled with the bliss of the Absolute, when thus the Truth has been seen in the heart, then this very world becomes an abode of bliss.

King Janaka says in the Yoga Vashishtha, addressing the unsteady mind- this worldly life is not conducive to your true happiness. Hence, reach the state of equanimity. It is in such equanimity that you will experience truth, bliss and peace. Rooted in equanimity, doing whatever happens to be the appropriate action in each given situation, and not ever thinking about what has thus befallen you unsought, live non-volitionally- doing yet not doing what has to be done.

Similarly Bhakta Prahlad says to Lord Vishnu in Yoga Vashishtha- whatever comes, let it come; whatever goes, let it go. Let notions of diverse experiences either arise or set in the body: I am neither in them nor they in me. Freed from dependency, from habits of thought, from desire and cravings, from deluded belief in the existence of the ego, from the colouring of pleasure-seeking tendency and from revelry- my mind has reached a state of utter quiescence. With this all sorrow has come to an end and the light of supreme bliss has dawned.

Thus Yoga Vashishtha is a divine conversation between different enlightened beings. It brings to light some of the important teachings by the ancient sages. Let us discuss more of this and other texts in the follow-ups.

Yoga Vashishtha is full of words of wisdom that succinctly explain the meaning of life, its purpose, its value and possibly shows the way to a better living. It deals with Death, incarnation, Karma, life, birth and old age and disease. It also talks about material pleasures and the true meaning of contentment and virtuosity.

It is said here that in enjoyment there is fear of disease; in social position, fear of falling off; in wealth, the fear of (hostile) governments; in honour, the fear of humiliation; in power, the fear of enemies; in beauty, the fear of old age; in body, the fear of death. The text believed that all the things of this world pertaining to human beings are attended with fear; renunciation alone stands for fearlessness.

Then some verses from the Bhagvad Gita are discussed to explain what entails the best form of living and the best attitude to have towards life. In the Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 71 it is said, '*vihaya kaman yah sarvan, pumams karati nihspah, nirmamo*

nirahankarah, sa santim adhigachhati' or a person who has given up all desires for sense gratification, who lives free from desires, who has given up all sense of proprietorship, and is devoid of false ego- he alone can attain real peace.

Similarly, Bhagwad Gita, Chapter 9, Verse 27, says, '*yat karosi yat asnasi, yaj juhosi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya, tat kurusva mad-arpanam*' or addressing Arjuna as son of Kunti, it is said all that you do, all that you eat, all that you offer and give away as well as all austerities that you may perform, should be done as an offering unto Lord. Thus, it is the duty of everyone to mould his life in such a way that he will not forget Supreme God under any circumstance. Everyone has to work for maintenance of body and soul together, and God recommends herein that one should work for Him.

The above verse of course promotes atheism, nevertheless, it is helpful in keeping the faith even in the most adverse of circumstances. Offering to the Divine simply means doing your duty, taking actions and not wondering about the result. The result is achieved as and how the action is performed. Therefore, the sages often say actions should be performed with the best intention.

The text goes on to say- when the truth is known, all descriptions cease, and silence alone remains. It goes on to add that- first destroy the mental conditioning by renouncing cravings; and then remove from your mind even the concept of bondage and liberation. Be totally free of conditioning.

Ideas and thoughts, the text mentions, are bondage; and their coming to an end is liberation. Therefore, be free of them and do whatever has to be done spontaneously. That mind is pure in which all cravings are in a state of quiescence. Whatever that pure mind wishes, that materializes. It is of course easier said than done. Yet it can work wonders if practiced deeply.

Bondage is none other than the notion of an object. The notions of I and the world are but shadows, not truth. Such notions alone create objects; these objects are neither true nor false. Therefore

abandon the notions of I and this and remain established in the truth. The truth, here implying a sense of relativity, not absoluteness.

In yet another verse it is written that it is only when the mind has become devoid of all attachment, when it is not swayed by pairs of opposites, when it is not attracted by objects, and when it is totally independent of all supports, that it is freed from the cage of delusion. Bondage is the craving for pleasure; and its abandonment is liberation.

Yet another verse in the text explains, in a dialogic form from Sage Vashishtha to Lord Rama that one should perceive themselves in the following way- I am disturbed neither by prosperity nor by adversity when they are granted to me, as I regard them with equal vision (even as I look upon both my arms as arms). Whatever I do is untainted by desire or the mud of ego-sense; thus I do not lose my head when I am powerful or go begging when I am poor; I do not let hopes and expectations touch me and even when a thing is old and worn out I look upon it with fresh eyes as if it were new. I rejoice with the happy ones and share the grief of the grief-stricken, for I am the friend of all, knowing I belong to none and none belongs to me. I know that I am the world, all the activities in it and its intelligence. This is the secret of my longevity.

Thus the words spoken above depict and generate a sense of equanimity within an individual. And it seems Lord Rama truly imbibed its meaning, as none could be more composed than him when the exile period was announced on the day he was to be anointed King. Lord Rama in Hindu philosophy epitomizes this ideal man who exists in life, one to be emulated for his innate human qualities which are nurtured from a very young age. Yoga Vashishtha, thus, is a good text to learn the 'ideal' virtues and qualities that can help one not only sustain a good life but live it to its fullest.

A branch of potent and effective form of Yoga is Kripalu Yoga started by its proponent Sri Amrit Desai born in the village of Halol in India. Desai was inspired by his guru, Swami Kripalvananda. Swami Kripalvananda was born in Dabhoi, Gujarat. He started a Kripalu centre in the United States of America which is still flourishing as Kripalu Yoga.

It is an approach to Hatha Yoga which is rooted in the ancient Vedic scriptures, teachings of Patanjali Yoga including its concept on Ashtanga Yoga. Kripalu Yoga integrates various Yogic practices and heals the body, mind and emotions through intense meditative practices. Kripalu means compassion and acknowledges each and every human being as a unique individual. The practice teaches us how to look inwards and get used to the inner wisdom in order to understand your own bodies well. It teaches self-acceptance by being present in the moment.

Kripalu Yoga says, "The goal of traditional yoga is to bring a practitioner to the highest spiritual state called self-realization. The goal of Kripalu Yoga is to develop a healthy and strong body, an open and caring heart, and a peaceful and clear mind. Kripalu Yoga recognizes that we are born divine and are inherently capable of accessing our spiritual nature."

Kripalu offers more than 750 educational programmes and spiritual retreats attended by thousands of individuals. Kripalu also provides professional teacher training through 3 schools: Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training, Kripalu School of Massage and Kripalu School of Ayurveda. Kripalu also includes several institutes: Institute for Integrated Leadership for college students, Institute for Extraordinary Living which has projects in sports, music performance and work attention and Institute for Integrated Healing which is a research unit for medical purposes.

Kripalu Yoga puts a great emphasis on breath and proper alignment. Students, it is said in Kripalu Yoga, should honour the wisdom of the body and work according to the limits of their flexibility and strength. It is a tool for self-empowerment and personal

growth, as taught in all other forms of Yoga, too. The practice teaches you to tap into your inner knowledge rather than being dependent upon external authorities for guidance and support. You learn to be open to what others have to offer without giving away your powers to reason, and to discriminate and make your own decisions. At the same time, you are also establishing and nurturing your relationship with your body.

Kripalu Yoga is a challenging practice to follow in the sense that there has to be the right coordination between breathwork, meditation and spiritual attunement. This form of Yoga uses classical asanas, pranayama but with a contemporary rigour and development of a quiet mind and relaxation. It adapts itself to all body types, ages, fitness levels and interests. While practicing this, the whole emotional and mental tension is released, mind calms its restless nature and inner, ever-present spirit is experienced more fully. After this practice one becomes spiritually awake and mentally present in the body.

This Yoga consists of three stages of practice:

Body and breath awareness- Focusing the mind on the flow of breath and the details of alignment develops concentration and prepares the practitioner for deeper practice. Postures are held for only a short time which encourages relaxation in every pose. The goal is to allow a strong prana throughout the body and to develop mental concentration.

Holding the posture- This stage guides you to look inward as you learn to hold the postures for longer periods of time while witnessing all that arises. The purpose of this stage is to become attuned to the presence of the life force *Prana* through the entire body. The prolonged holding of poses and postures helps to strengthen the muscles and develop concentration and ability to recognize and release deep-seated emotional and mental tensions. Gradually the heart opens creating an increased capacity for learning and growth.

Meditation-in-Motion- This is a unique and personal aspect of Kripalu Yoga. As practice deepens, prana awakens more and

energy flows freely where the body moves spontaneously and the ability of the mind to witness its activity increases. The truth is realized in the process. The essence of meditation is a state of inner absorption that can occur in moments of stillness and flow. Hence meditation in motion and sitting meditations are seen as valid and complimentary practices.

These yoga classes are thus more gentle, moderate or vigorous depending on the intensity of the practice. This follows some tenets of classical yoga and modifies it to suit contemporary fast times. This is yet another form of yoga that keeps the classical old form and focuses on the relevant practices of relaxation and meditation, sitting or in motion. This is something unique about Kripalu Yoga. We will delve deeply on the subject of meditation soon.

India has been the land of birth of several religions. Even Buddhism and Jainism are said to have found their roots in Hinduism, the religion of the majority of Indians. Ancient Indian texts are full of several ways of meditating, exercising and chanting mantras. Meditation has scientifically been explained as an awareness training which produces permanent changes in perception, attention and cognition. Meditation, more than yoga, is associated with mental calmness and alertness. Here we talk about a form of meditation called cyclic meditation.

It is a technique derived on the basis of combining the two practices which have a 'stimulating' and 'calming' effect. The yoga postures in this form of meditation are practiced slower than usual. In the activating phase, yoga postures are practiced about four times slower than the usual practice. The awareness is maintained throughout the practice with closed eyes observing changes which occur in the body, such as respiratory rate, heart rate, blood flow

and contraction and relaxation of muscles. This form of meditation is developed at the Vivekananda Kendra. It is inspired by a verse found in the *Mandukya Upanishad*:

*Laye sambodhayet cittam vikseptam samayet punah
Sakasayam vijaniyat samapraptam na calayet*

It means stimulate and awaken the sleeping mind, calm down the distractions, recognize the innate stagnation and stay in steadiness without disturbing it.

In cyclic meditation you are supposed to stretch consciously and systematically and then relax using standing postures like Pada Hastasana, etc. This form of meditation begins with IRT or Instant Relaxation Technique and then you move on towards QRT or Quick Relaxation Technique. In Instant Relaxation Technique you have to lie down on your back in Shavasana, tighten all the muscles from top to toes, part by part, and after tightening and stretching whole body, relaxing entire body in one go by loosening all the muscles at a time. This can be practiced separately also sitting on a chair to get quick relaxation. It hardly takes five minutes to practice one round. After this, you have to perform the Quick Relaxation Technique. In this again, you have to lie down in Shavasana. Observe the movement of abdominal muscles. Stay aware of the rhythmic heaving up and down of the abdominal wall. With inhalation the abdominal wall rises up. Feel energized with each inhalation. With exhalation the abdominal wall collapses. Feel relaxed with each exhalation. Merge in deep silence by chanting one akara (Aaaaa sound). After gently coming up from Q.R.T., perform the Shashankasana and Ushtrasana. Now lie down for a long Shavasana, also called DRT or Deep Relaxation Technique. Part by part, relax your whole body by moving the consciousness from one body part to another. This may take another ten minutes. Slowly sit down in deep silence. Later we shall discuss the use of sound and visual stimulations to go deeper in meditation.

There is yet another form of meditation based on the Oriental principles of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism known as Tai

Chi Chuan form of meditation, also called 'moving meditation'. It is a way of harmonizing body and mind dynamically where the mind should be still and should still be able to actively circulate 'Chi'. Some basic form of Tai Chi steps are discussed here:

- First stand with your feet shoulder-width apart with your toes pointing straight ahead and your knees slightly bent.
- With your hips tucked slightly forward, keep your shoulders down and head and chin up.
- Slowly inhale and exhale deep breaths through your nose. You should now continue this meditation with your eyes closed, partly closed or half-shut.
- Focus on your feet and their connection with the earth.
- While performing slow meditative actions, follow this breathing pattern- as you inhale, imagine that you are pulling energy into your feet from the ground or earth. As you exhale, you return the energy to the ground.
- Repeat this numerous times, then let the energy from the ground travel up your legs and into the centre of your inner strength, which is located right at the centre of your body around the belly button. Exhale, getting rid of any negative, impure energy.

In this meditative form, you are supposed to focus on your breathing as explained above and also involve opening and closing movements. With opening movements like pulling your hands apart or opening them, you are supposed to breathe in. When your hands come together or close, you are supposed to exhale. Similarly, when you move your hands up, you breathe in and when you move them down, you breathe out slowly and consciously.

Some important dos and don'ts for all forms of meditation are:

- Avoid eating for atleast half an hour before meditation
- Find a quiet place to meditate
- Rest your hands lightly on your lap

- Keep your spine straight
- Relax your gaze

Tai Chi is also supposed to have many health benefits and is sometimes referred to as ‘meditation in motion’. It is said to unblock and channelize proper flow of qi- an energy flow thought to circulate throughout the body. It is said that Tai Chi is supposed to keep the balance of ‘yin’ and ‘yang’ - opposing elements thought to make up the universe.

Practice Tai Chi and cyclic meditation as we go deep into similar forms of meditative techniques soon.

Meditation is the underlying philosophy of Hindu ritualism, puja and prayer. It is the deep-seated idea behind knowing oneself and drawing inward in that quest. In this one withdraws one’s senses and mind from distractions and contemplates on the chosen subject of concentration. It brings harmony within the body and the mind. With the help of meditation, you can overcome your mental blocks, negative thinking, fears, restlessness and anxiety.

There are several kinds of meditation, few of them are Vipasaana, Tantric, Transcendental, Kundalini, and Zen. Let’s discuss the Vipassana meditative technique today. Broadly, ‘mindfulness’ defines any sort of meditation. Vipassana means ‘to see things as they really are’. It is a logical process through self-observation. This form of meditation was discovered by Gautam Buddha, more than 2500 years ago. For several years, he used to heal people through simply Vipassana meditation. Such practitioners usually maintain no contact with the outside world refraining from any sort of reading, writing, religious practice or daily routine. They follow a demanding daily schedule of at least ten to twelve hours of sitting meditation daily.

It is suggested that for meditation a quiet place should be chosen, either under a tree or in a room. The meditator should sit quietly with legs crossed. Close your eyes. Then pay attention to your belly. Breathe normally. The mind should be attentive to the entirety of each process. Maintain a steady attention through the beginning and end of the rising. One has to be aware of the sensations of the abdomen. Pay attention to the whole process which has a beginning, middle and the end. Abdomen is supposed to rise in the beginning when you breathe in, and fall when you exhale. Focus on the rising and the falling for some time. Then watch the mind and be aware that you are thinking.

While sitting in meditation, if you lose concentration, you should focus on the object causing the distraction. For sometime take your attention away from the abdomen and its rising and falling, and focus on the object. Be aware and conscious about it. If and when the sound of distraction fades, again get your attention back to the abdomen. This is the simple way of doing sitting meditation. You should also note sensations in the body as and when they arise- warmth, pressure, hardness or motion. Similarly, whenever there is a mind distraction related to thinking, imagining, planning, visualizing and memorizing, it must be taken care of, too. Each time a distraction comes up, be careful to think of a verbal label which defines the distraction. This just helps give a quality to the distraction without getting absorbed into its content. The label maybe words like ‘seeing’ for a visual distraction, ‘hearing’ for a noise distraction and ‘smelling’, and so on. This direct awareness about the various distractions help you get a good hold of your thinking and mental processes.

Lastly, revise the label of ‘intending’, ‘opening’ for wanting to open your eyes. Continue to note it carefully and precisely until the moment you have stood up and start walking. This form of meditation is done not only just sitting down but can be done throughout the day. While walking, brushing your teeth, wearing your clothes, eating meals be aware and mindful. All these activities maybe noted with consciousness and with a label.

This form of meditation can also be done walking. Be mindful and aware of your body and the Self while taking a stroll in the garden, terrace or by the beach or even in the park. You should choose a lane of about twenty steps and slowly walk back and forth along it. A walking meditation assists in keeping the focus when you do the sitting one after ten minutes. If you are walking rapidly, you should notice the placing of the feet and label 'left', 'right', etc. While doing slow walking, just notice the lifting, moving and placing of each foot. When you walk, the sensation should be felt through your body. The main sensations to note in walking meditation are lifting, placing and movement and be conscious of each one. In 'lifting', for example, be aware of the downward movement of the foot. If our effort to be aware of the lifting process is too strong, it will overshoot the sensation. The sensation, thus, has to be balanced. Thus in each effort and movement, just precise and exact awareness is the key to a good focus, neither too much, nor too little.

Meditation has to be done with insight and concentration. 'Insight' is a mental factor and gets better with quality of consciousness. The nearer insight comes, the clearer the true nature of the lifting process can be seen. Insight is accompanied by physical and awareness sensations that go deep down into the mental consciousness. The insight into cause and effect can take a great variety of forms. Mere observance of the phenomenon of 'lifting' for example in walking takes you to a deeper level of concentration. There is no one behind what is happening; the phenomena arise and pass away as an empty process; according to the law of cause and effect. The illusion of movement and solidity is like that in a movie.

Thus it becomes important to practice such mindful meditation couple of times a week, if not everyday. Next time, we will be back with more meditative techniques.

Let us focus more on the Vipassana form of meditation and other forms of Buddhist meditation. In Pali, the original language of Theravada literature, it is mentioned that there are two main types of Buddhist meditation- one is Vipassana and the other is Samatha.

Vipassana is also called the 'Insight Meditation', a clear awareness of exactly what is happening as it happens. While Samatha can be translated as 'concentration' or 'tranquility'. It is a state of mind in which it is brought to rest. Most systems of meditation lay emphasis upon the 'Samatha' component. In this the meditator focuses on either a prayer or any such item like a box, a candle, a chant, a religious image or any other object. The result is a state of bliss which lasts until the meditator wants to continue sitting. There are many types of Samatha meditation: one is based on attention to the breath.

By regular daily practice of the Samatha, unruly mind gradually becomes calmer and clearer. The way our mind works becomes less confusing to you and you begin to understand the habits of mind that hold you back from freedom and happiness. You become kinder to yourself and to those around you.

Buddhist monk, Thrangu Rinpoche says, when you perform a physical action, the action can have either a negative or a positive result. When you say something, it can either be good or bad. With words and actions, you can see tangible results but with thoughts there is no concrete action expressed. The mind determines your physical and verbal actions as whatever you say or do, there is a thought behind it. When the thought is positive, it is followed by good actions and whenever the thoughts are negative, actions that follow are negative. Hence the starting point to feeling good is to change the way you think. Whatever is troubling the mind can usually be set right with a good session of meditation. While changing a mental disposition it is important to change habits. When you manage to change your mental habits, you can change your physical actions and verbal behavior. Once you have changed these, it is easy to achieve Buddhahood.

However, while doing this sort of meditation, you need to pay attention to the posture you are sitting in. It is important to keep the body straight so that the subtle channels of the body will be straight, too. If these subtle channels are straight, then the subtle energies will circulate freely. The neck should be slightly bent downwards towards the stomach. The legs should be crossed in simple cross-legged pose. The body should be kept composed and ‘together’ for a long time so sit comfortably. Lastly, keep the body and mind focused.

It is said by well-known Buddhist monks that meditation should be done for a short duration but repeated several times. Awareness is knowing exactly what you are doing and why you are doing it. Hence it's important to focus on the state of your mind in meditation. While meditating, you should not follow a thought about the past, nor should you anticipate the future and you should not be involved with thoughts of the present, too. You should just relax and then leave them all alone. You should not follow the thread of these thoughts and you will notice that the mind quiets on its own quite naturally. Meditation is simply leaving things as they are without being too relaxed or too tense.

It is also added that there are two main obstacles to good meditation- either being too relaxed or being too tense. When you become too relaxed, you start to follow your thoughts and become absorbed in them. When you are too tense, you are too absorbed in concentrating and in being tranquil so that in the end the mind cannot remain tranquil and becomes distracted. You have to constantly try to find a balance between being too relaxed and too tense. One Buddhist nun, Saraha, said that your mind should be like that of a person spinning the thread. If he puts too much tension on it, it breaks and if it's too loose, it won't be strong enough.

Finally, once you have watched your posture and your mind, you can now start working on your meditation. There are three main techniques of meditation: focusing on an outer object, concentrating on an inner object, and concentrating on no object. While focusing

on an outer object, it is useful to meditate on an object like a statue or an idol. You have to simply remain aware of the statue in front of you and not remain distracted by the thoughts. When looking at the statue, you should not strain your eyes and should just register the picture of the Buddha in your mind. If other thoughts arise, you should try to become aware of these thoughts as quickly as possible and immediately drop them and return your awareness to the statue. This meditation is difficult to do for a very long time as you become lost in your thoughts very easily. When you look at the statue, don't think ‘statue, statue, statue’. Instead look at it and try not to let the image drift out of your mind. If you start having an important thought, then try to get your attention back to the statue, else one thought chain will usher in a number of other thoughts. Hence you should always focus on the ‘support’ of the meditation which is the statue.

Hence your power of concentration improves with every session of meditation. Next time, we will bring more such meditative techniques.

Buddhist meditation functions on the basic premise that the mind is the most powerful tool- if you are sad, morose and dejected, it is your mind alone that can uplift you and bring you back into the fold of life. This form of meditation can be your answer to finding peace and enthusiasm. This form of meditation takes the name from the teachings of Gautam Buddha. Mind training is at the core of the teachings of this great saint and philosopher.

The key components of Buddhist meditation are concentration and awareness. You have to start meditation by sitting in Padmasana. You should wear clean and comfortable clothes. You should choose a clean and airy place to sit in a comfortable place. The first step is

‘mindful breathing’. Here the breath is the object of concentration. Focus on your breath and be aware of the tendency of the mind to hop from one thing to another. Enjoy the experience of staying in the moment. This technique is good for the holistic development of the psyche. The following steps may be followed:

- Start by counting your breaths you inhale and exhale. Count from one to ten by counting one entire round of an inhalation and exhalation as one. Count till ten and repeat the breaths. First count after you exhale.
- In the next round, count again but before you inhale, count till the number ten and repeat the cycles of breathing.
- Now in this step, simply watch your breath and observe the pattern skipping the counting as you breathe.

This mindful breathing brings you to a state of equanimity where nothing outside can bother you much and you learn take every step in your stride without much stress and without tensing your nerve cells.

There is yet another form of Buddhist meditation, called ‘loving-kindness meditation’ which can be practiced by dwelling on the ‘positive thoughts’ of love, warmth, serenity, calmness and kindness. Here’s what you have to do:

- Become aware of your being and inner peace and serenity and think about it. Feel inside the love for yourself. If required, mutter to yourself, “May I feel the goodness inside me’ or imagine a positive light full of energy and enthusiasm passing through your body.
- Now think of a good and ‘best friend’ and light up the good moments you might have shared with him or her. Imagine the good times in the past you have shared with the person and say to yourself, “May my friend be well and good.’ Think of the reasons you bond well with those good friends and imagine a light connecting you both in a positive way.

- Think of the people you meet everyday and those with whom you share most of your day at work- colleagues or relatives, and try to get such persons into the love-aura you have created with your good memories. Reflect on their human nature, style, mannerisms, gait and appearance. Have a neutral outlook but include them in your ‘circle of love’.
- Now think of a person you don’t get along with. Remember the person who you feel maybe giving you a difficult time, whose presence just makes you loathe him or her. Now try to develop a positivity towards this person, too, and try to get these people into your ‘love-fold’ in your mind. Repeat the thought pattern that such a person also exists within your ‘circle of love’ and try to get rid of the negativity with that person, atleast in thought.
- Lastly, think of all the people together- you, your good friend, your neutral friend, the enemy. Now feel the ‘feeling of love’ to your extended communities and groups- your family, your neighbours, your relatives, your colleagues, your customers, your clients, everybody around you. Try and send ripples of love to everybody around yourself. You will feel elated simply by the goodness of this act in your mind. Your mind becomes more flexible and accepting of diverse people from different backgrounds.

Slowly come out of this meditative process and relax. Practice the above-mentioned meditative practice with a couple of minutes in the beginning and can go upto a few hours as you progress in meditating well. Gradually you will be able to hold your attention span for a longer time with greater awareness and concentration.

There are many benefits of such a meditative technique- it helps you to look at and assess your life objectively. It enables self-discovery and self-inquiry. It helps you to slow down and enjoy each moment because you are not rushing into an emotion or a thought. Clarity and inner ability increases which increases efficiency and

makes you a better and more productive worker. It opens your heart and garners better trust, support, warmth and friendliness with others around you which help gets inclusiveness into your fold. It assists you in making every decision with thoughtfulness and lot of time.

Try this while we get more practices to you for better and more holistic living.

Today let us dwell on mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness is a concept closely related to being aware and conscious about your surroundings and feeling a harmonious part of the whole system. Hence the practice affects you not just internally but helps you become a part of the larger community around you in an inclusive sort of way. Here's how to get started:

- Sit, preferably on the floor, on a cushion or a mat.
- Close your eyes.
- Relax your throat and breathe normally and observe it.
- Make no effort to control the breath.
- Simply breathe naturally.
- Focus your attention on the breath and how your body moves with each breathing movement.

If your mind seems to loose focus and wander, then you simply have to try and get the attention back to your breath. This is simple mindfulness meditation which can be done for about fifteen minutes to half-an-hour.

Mindfulness has a lot of benefits:

- It helps relieve stress
- It treats heart disease

- It lowers blood pressure
- It reduces chronic pain
- It improves sleep
- It helps you get rid of gastrointestinal problems

Above all, mindfulness practice involves accepting whatever arises in your awareness at each moment. It involves being kind and forgiving towards yourself. By practicing acceptance in your experience during your meditation, you become more receptive and easily accept whatever comes your way during the rest of the day.

Mindfulness, Buddhists often say, is the power of now. It teaches you not to regret what has happened in the past or worry about what's going to happen in the future. A meditation practitioner describes mindfulness as the art of paying attention on purpose, without judgement, to the present moment. It is the development of a life philosophy, 'we are what we are. It is what it is.'

Another yoga practitioner talks about the presence of chi, Ki or chakra energy as being the energy of the universe. This energy is everywhere and surrounds us when we wake up and we all are one because of this energy that binds us all together. The kind of meditation based on the right balance of chi around us is a bit different from mindful meditation; nevertheless it brings lot of relief and destresses the mind for a more harmonious living. It can also help you defend against sickness.

The main aim of this meditation exercise is to unify the body and mind and build a strong level of chi energy and awareness in your body. This one too requires the natural rhythm of the breath.

- Sit down straight
- Focus your eyes on a point directly in front of you and at eye level. The distance between you and the object should be around six feet. This step should last three to five minutes.

- Now shift your eyes to a point 45 degree angle down in front of you at a distance of around three feet. This step should last three to five minutes.
- Continue natural breathing while shifting your eye-gaze to a point directly between your feet; only tilt your head slightly. This should again last three to five minutes.
- Continue natural breathing and focus on a point on the tip of your nose; the aim is to get the eyes look at the same unified point. Looking at your nose can make your eyes hurt sometimes, so move the gaze away for sometime and get back after a few seconds.
- Now allow your eyes to close, still maintaining your closed eyes on the position at the tip of your nose. Continue breathing naturally and feel the air enter the nose and descend into your lower abdomen. The air should feel cool with each inhalation and warm with each exhalation.
- This step, too, should last three to five minutes.
- Continue natural breathing rhythm and listen to the sound of the air as it flows in and out.
- Continue breathing and shift your focus to your lower abdomen. Now with your eyes closed, imagine as if you are looking inward into your lower abdomen.

Keep still and do not move to avoid scattering the welled up chi energy. Now imagine the impurities leaving you as you exhale, and fresh oxygen and positivity entering with each inhalation. Now rub your hands and place the warm hands over your eyes. Bring your hand down to your lower abdomen. Do this three times and open your eyes slowly. Wait for the body to cool down before moving. This completes one cycle of the Chi meditation.

Practice this and we will be back with more forms of meditation next time.

We have been working on training in Buddhist meditation techniques which can be numerous and varied. However there are other meditative techniques, too, like the Tantric meditation. There's a technique called the 'nyasa'. In this technique focus is done on different parts of the body. In this form of meditation, it is done in a very light way. The main purpose of this is to make you aware of the subtle nature of the body, which Tantrikas call a form of divine light and a kind of divine sound vibration.

Let us begin this form of exercise to get more focus and energy into the body. Sit in a comfortable, upright posture for meditation. Close in to yourself and get yourself closer inside by getting your awareness to your physical body and the breath. Now focus your awareness on your right foot and make sure that there is a golden light emanating from the foot. Try and visualize it and say to yourself, "My right foot has become golden light." After a while, focus on your left foot, and repeat the same thing- golden light filling up each part of your foot including the sole, toes and arch. Be aware of the right ankle and then the left ankle and feel each part becoming filled up with light. Now the right calf- bone, muscle and skin and then the left calf can be imagined to fill up with a golden light. Similarly move up the leg and now imagine that the right thigh has filled up with golden light and then the left thigh. Further up, imagine the golden light reaching up the pelvis, buttocks, reproductive organs and up towards the waist.

Let your awareness rise up to the lower abdomen, bringing light to the whole area, flesh and abdominal organs. you should imagine that your abdomen has become light and that the golden light has seeped into your spine. You can say to yourself, "Let the golden light enter my spine." Now you should imagine the light in your upper abdomen and back, in your chest and ribcage. Feel your heart and lungs expand with the light. Feel it entering your back ribs and spine. Then feel it in your right arm, from the upper arm all the way down to your fingertips. Now feel it in your left arm.

Slowly imagine the golden light travelling up your neck, throat, palate and tongue. Feel the golden light into your brain and your

skull, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, nose and your cheeks. Imagine that your mouth has turned into a flood of golden light. Feel your brain completely illuminated by the golden light. Imagine the whole body illuminated by the golden light.

Before ending this session of mindful meditation, a few takeaways:

- A person without emotions is like wood without any juice. You need to make your life interesting to make people be with you. This will happen when you nurture yourself with music, prayer and service.
- The way to expand from individual to universal consciousness is to share others' sorrow and joy. As you grow, your consciousness should also grow. When you expand your knowledge with time, then depression is not possible. The way to overcome personal misery is to share universal misery. The way to expand personal joy is to share universal joy. Instead of thinking, 'what can I gain from this world?', think, 'what can I do for this world?'
- Silence heals and rejuvenates. Silence gives you depth and stability and brings creativity.
- Service leads to the dynamic experience of heart. It creates a sense of belongingness.
- Lack of service can land a person in depression. Pain is physical. Suffering is mental. If you are not sensitive to others' pain, then you are not a human-being. That is why you need to serve. Service alone can bring contentment to life but service without silence tires you. Service without spirituality will be shallow, and cannot be sustained for a long period. The deeper the silence, the more dynamic the outer activity. Both are essential in life.
- When you bring some relief or freedom to someone through seva, good vibrations and blessings come to you. Seva brings merit; merit allows you to go deep in meditation, meditation brings back your smile. When you sing and pray from your heart, your emotions are nourished and you become 'lively'.

There is yet another form of meditation practiced by Brahmakumaris. Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya (also called Brahmakumaris) is a spiritual body based in Rajasthan. They are focused on self-transformation through spiritual education and reflective practices. They work to provide a deep understanding of self, God and human existence.

The primary teachings at Brahma Kumaris is Raj Yoga meditation. It is considered to be one of the most effective forms of meditation to enthuse life with new energy to create new attitudes and responses to life. It empowers individuals with a clear spiritual understanding of self and connection with the Supreme Soul. Brahmakumaris have their own idea about the existence of the world in its present form.

They believe that the world came into existence since eternity and will be eternal. The world was neither created anytime before nor will it get destroyed anytime in future because matter can neither be created nor destroyed. It only undergoes transformation from one form to another. Similarly this world also undergoes changes in its characteristics, but world was not created out of nothing nor will there be a total annihilation.

The cycle of time is best understood by the Wheel of Time which is divided into four parts with Swastika in the middle. The first part is marked with a Golden Age. Here the arm of the Swastika is pointed to the right because the right arm symbolizes what is good or what brings about goodness. In these early times, when the cycle started, people of the deity religion (Sanatan Dharma) were possessed of divine qualities and nature and they enjoyed complete purity, 100% peace and complete prosperity.

Then came the Silver Age. In this era, too, people possessed high purity and peace but they had divinity to a lesser degree. Therefore the arm of Swastika that indicates this epoch is bent downwards because souls in this era had deteriorated from super-righteousness to just righteous.

Next came Copper Age. Here the arm of the Swastika is reversed to the left as the world now turned to the path of vices

and unrighteousness. Mankind is now divided in various religions, strifes and disputes. The five vices brought the world into disarray and disquiet at home which also takes us to the Iron Age.

Resulting peacelessness increased rapidly in frequency and intensity in this era. Therefore the fourth of the Swastika is shown as raising up due to the rise in conflicts, clashes and calamities. Then a stage comes which is full of ignorance, stupor, moral degradation, theft, robbery and loot. People become demonish in nature and religion is also utterly degenerate.

The present times, according to the Brahmakumaris, we are undergoing a critical phase in the history of mankind as it is the confluence of the Iron Age and returning back to the Golden Age. This is also called the Confluence Age. Here, they believe God descends in this world to meet the human-beings. The world will soon be free of all miseries and the paradise, which is full of happiness, and will be established again.

The cycle of five epochs repeats itself. Each soul will act the same part in every cycle since, in the soul itself, it is indelibly ingrained that the cycle has to repeat one after another. The soul replays the part once every 5000 years because each one of the four eras of the world-drama being equal to 1250 years. The duration of one World Cycle is 5000 years. This school recommends a form of meditation which is simple and easy to follow.

- Keep ten or twenty minutes aside every morning or evening
- Find a quiet place and relax your mind
- Sit upright on a chair and you could put on some soft music
- Keep your eyes open and, without staring, rest them on a chosen point in front of you
- Gently withdraw your attention from all sights and sounds and become the observer of your thoughts
- Don't try to stop thinking; just be the observer, not judging or being carried away by your thoughts

- Gradually, the thoughts will slow down and you will begin to feel more peaceful
- Create one thought about yourself, for example, "I'm a peaceful soul."
- Hold that thought on the screen of your mind and visualize yourself as being peaceful
- Stay as long as you can in the awareness of this thought. Do not try to fight off or suppress any thoughts.
- Just watch your thoughts pass by and be an observer. Each time return to the thought, "I'm a peaceful soul."
- Now think of the Supreme Soul, who is the ocean of peace
- Acknowledge and appreciate the positive feelings and positive thoughts which may emerge from this thought
- Be stable in these feelings for a few minutes
- Be aware of unrelated thoughts
- Finish the meditation by closing your eyes and remaining in silence for a minute

Thus Brahmakumaris meditation is unique in that it is done with the eyes open. The focus and concentration levels increase manifold. This form of meditation can help reduce stress levels, work better, have greater productivity in life and have a general peaceful nature throughout.

Last time we discussed the form of meditation practiced by the Brahmakumaris. Let us discuss that form of meditation in more detail. Meditation, as we all know, is the journey inwards, a journey of self-discovery, in fact, re-discovery. It is the time taken for quiet reflection and silence. Taking some time out to do this enables us to get centred within our own inner self. When we no longer feel grounded, we can feel pushed and pulled in various directions. It is at this point that we start to experience stress and a feeling of being a victim or trapped. Gradually such feelings manifest themselves in the form of an illness or leads to mental, physical and emotional health thrown out of balance.

Thus Raja Yoga meditation is yet another form of meditation that assists you in being grounded. It is a form of meditation that is accessible to people of all backgrounds. It is a meditation without rituals or tantras and mantras and can be practiced anywhere. Raja Yoga meditation is practiced with open eyes. Spiritual awareness gives you the power to choose good and positive thoughts over those which are negative and wasteful. You begin to respond to situations rather than reacting to them. You live in harmony and create healthier and happier relationships around you. The five steps involved in this form of meditation are- relaxation, concentration, contemplation, realization and meditation.

Relaxation is about letting go off stress and bringing the mind and the body in a state of calm and peace. There is a need for relaxation of the muscles, relaxation with the breath and building a relaxation connection with the self. Then follows concentration which includes a certain flow of the breath, concentration on a point, concentration on the word 'peace', concentration counting backwards. Concentration allows you to use your time wisely and more productively; once you have relaxed, you have to focus on the thoughts you choose to have. Then comes contemplation. Contemplation happens for eternity and always helps you realize the true self. Here you have to contemplate on your core quality and look for the light within. Contemplation is reflecting deeply on yourself, your inner world and your values. When you have crossed these stages of meditation, then comes the realisation that you are one with God and eternity. Realization is when your understanding and feelings combine and you experience a more profound, more meaningful reality. Finally you meditate to the source and meditate beyond the self to know the truth about the Cosmos. Meditation is focusing on a thought and remembering your eternal identity and re-awakening a wonderful state of well-being.

Additionally, there is a benefit for the soul which every meditative practice must be able to offer to the practitioner. Meditation is done for the soul and with it for your mind, body and holistic well-being.

It is said that personality is not the real you. It is non-physical. The real you is spirit. Your body, too, belongs to you but is not the real you. A heart transplant recipient who receives a donated organ does not take on the donor's character. The memorial of the soul is found in the 'Indian tilak' or the Buddhist 'third eye' located in the centre of the forehead. Although invisible to the eye, a moment's meditation can re-open an awareness of this energy. The soul energy can keep you going for centuries. This is therefore an important part of nurturing and caring for yourself.

A part of caring for yourself includes spending time each day to recharge your energy reserves with meditation. Meditation links you to a source of power beyond yourselves. A lot of people fuel each day with prayer, reflection and affirmations to empower positive change and hope. Therefore the choice is yours to practice.

Life is made of action and reaction- nothing more nothing less. Whatever you practice will bear fruit and show results accordingly. Our universe is a hall of mirrors; each moment a reflection of an earlier scene or interaction; each love, a reflection of self-respect. This means of course that each moment is a unique opportunity to avoid doing anything that will bring you future pain. Instead you should sow a seed that will bear the sweetest fruit. Law of Karma acts like an echo. If you speak about anyone's defects or anyone's mistakes, even if you consider yourself to be sensible and responsible, this wasteful speaking will echo back to you. The powerful law of action says that today if you defame anyone, tomorrow someone else will defame you twice as much.

Since you all want to get ahead in life, it is important to be a good manager. It is time to pack what is not necessary in your life. It has been part of your nature to complicate things. Its important to keep it simple. If you have anything in abundance and is 'extra', you have to make sure you use it in a worthwhile way. You have to realize the importance of this present time. You have to stop the give and take of sorrow and only give and take happiness; this is possible only through the spiritual power.

Meditation is an important technique to get you grounded in yourself and find inner peace and salvation which can help you focus better on your work and daily busy lives. Yet another form of meditation we discuss here is the Zen meditation or Buddhist meditation.

‘Zazen’ means ‘seated Zen’ or ‘seated meditation’ in Japanese. It has its roots in the Chinese Zen Buddhism (Ch’an) tradition, tracing back to Indian monk Bodhidharma (6th century CE). In the West its most popular form comes from Dogen Zenji (1200-1253), the founder of Soto Zen movement in Japan. Similar modalities are practiced in the *Rinzai* school of Zen, in Japan and Korea. Here’s how you can practice this form of meditation:

It is generally practiced seated on the floor over a mat and a cushion, with crossed legs. Traditionally it was done in lotus or half-lotus pose. This is, however, hardly necessary as most practitioners can even do it in simple Swastika asana or cross-legged pose. The most important aspect is keeping the back straight, from the pelvis to the neck. Mouth is kept close and eyes are kept lowered, with your gaze resting on the ground about two or three feet in front of you. As far as mind training is done, it can be done in two ways:

Focussing on breath- focus all your attention on the movement of the breath going in and out through the nose. This maybe assisted by counting the breath in your mind. Each time you inhale, you count one number, starting with ten, and then moving backward to nine, eight, seven, etc. when you arrive at one, then resume ten again. If you get distracted and lose your count, gently bring back the attention to ten and resume from there. Another way is ‘*Shikantaza*’.

‘Shikantaza’ - which means ‘just sitting’. In this form the practitioner does not use any specific object of meditation; rather practitioners remain as much as possible in the present moment, aware of and observing what passes through their minds and around them, without dwelling on anything in particular. It’s a type of ‘effortless presence’ meditation and should be practiced at all times- while walking, talking and performing various tasks at home or at your workplace.

Zazen is a very sober meditation style, and you can easily find a lot of strong communities practicing it. There is a lot of focus on keeping the posture right. Right posture is a major aid for ‘good concentration’. It is usually practiced in Zen Buddhist centers (*Sangha*), with a strong community support. In many of these, you will find it coupled with other elements of Buddhist practices: prostrations, a bit of ritualism, chanting and group readings of Buddha teachings and so on. Some people will like this while others won’t.

Mindfulness, simply put, lies at the heart of Buddhist meditation. Mindfulness is the English translation of the Sanskrit word ‘*Sati*’. *Sati* is an activity. What exactly is that? There can be no precise answer. Words are devised by the symbolic levels of the mind, and they describe those realities with which symbolic thinking deals. Mindfulness is a subtle process that you are using at this very moment. Mindfulness is the reality that gives rise to words- the words that follow are simply pale shadows of reality. Everything that follows here is thus analogy.

When you first become aware of something, there is a fleeting instant of pure awareness just before you conceptualise the thing, before you identify it. That is a state of awareness. Ordinarily, this state is short-lived. It is that flashing split second just as you focus your eyes on the thing, just as you focus your mind on the thing, just before you objectify it, clamp down on it mentally, and segregate it from the rest of the existence.

It takes place just before you start thinking about it- before your mind says, for example, ‘Oh! I’m a leader.’ That flowing, soft-focused moment of pure awareness is mindfulness. In that brief flashing mind-moment you experience a thing as an un-thing. You experience a softly flowing moment of pure experience that is interlocked with the rest of reality, not separate from it. Mindfulness is very much like what you see with your peripheral vision as opposed to the hard focus of normal or central vision. Yet this moment of soft, unfocused awareness contains a very deep sort of knowing that is lost as soon as you focus your mind and objectify the object

into a thing. In the process of ordinary perception, mindfulness is so fleeting a thing as to be unobservable. When this mindfulness is prolonged by using proper techniques, you find that this experience is profound and that it changes your entire view of the universe.

Mindfulness, thus, has a number of characteristics. It is a lot of things including mirror-thought, selflessness, unsatisfactoriness, impermanence, nonconceptual awareness among other concepts. It registers experiences, without comparing them. Mindfulness also registers experiences but does not compare them. More on mindfulness and such related concepts in the next lesson.

Last time we discussed what exactly is ‘mindfulness’ and meditation practiced under this head. Today we discuss this more at length and how it can lead to a more fulfilling and happy life.

For most of us the idea of perfect happiness would be to have everything we wanted and be in control of everything, playing Caesar, making the whole world dance a jig according to our every whim. Once again it does not work that way. Take a look at the people in history who have actually held this type of power. They were not happy people. Certainly they were not at peace with themselves. Why not? Because they were driven to control the world totally and absolutely, and they could not. They wanted to control all people, yet there remained people who refused to be controlled. These powerful people could not control the stars. They still got sick. They still had to die.

You can’t ever get everything you want. It is impossible. Luckily, there is another option. You can learn to control your mind, to step outside the endless cycle of desire and aversion. You can learn not to want what you want, to recognize desires but not be controlled by

them. This does not mean that you lie down on the road and invite everybody to walk all over you. It means that you continue to live a very normal-looking life, but live from a whole new viewpoint. You do the things that a person must do but you are free from that compulsive, obsessiveness drivenness of your own desires. You want something, but you don’t need to chase it. You fear something, but you don’t need to stand there quaking in your boots. This sort of mental cultivation is very difficult. It takes years. But trying to control everything is impossible; the difficult is preferable to the impossible. Civilization is all about peace and happiness. Even the best of developmental tasks are undertaken for the sake of ‘happiness’ and its maximization. Even the big industrialists and businessmen are of the opinion that we are just beginning to realize that we have overdeveloped the material aspects of existence at the expense of the deeper emotional and spiritual aspects, and we are paying the price for that error.

It is one thing to talk about degeneration of moral and spiritual fiber and another thing to actually do something about it. The place to start is within ourselves. Instead of looking carefully inside yourself and blaming yourself that, “I couldn’t do this,” or ‘I couldn’t do that’, you should think about your achievements which create a positive feeling and self-image. You can’t make radical changes in yourself until you begin to see yourself exactly as you are now. As soon as you do that, changes will flow naturally. You don’t have to force anything, struggle or obey rules dictated to you by some authority. It is automatic, you just change. But arriving at that initial insight is quite a task. You have to see who you are and how you are without illusion, judgement, or resistance of any kind. You have to see your place in society and function as a social being. You have to see your duties and obligations to your fellow human beings, and above all, your responsibility to yourself as an individual living with other individuals. Mental cultivation through meditation is definitely helpful in achieving this sort of understanding and serenity and happiness.

The *Dhammapada*, an ancient Buddhist text says, ‘What you are now is the result of what you were. What you will be tomorrow will be the result of what you are now. The consequences of an evil mind will follow you like your own shadow. No one can do more for you than your own purified mind- no parent, no relative, no friend, no one. A well-disciplined mind brings happiness.

Meditation is intended to purify the mind. It cleanses the thought process of what can be called psychic irritants, things like greed, hatred and jealousy which keep you snarled up in bondage. Meditation brings the mind to a state of tranquility and awareness, a state of consciousness and insight.

Meditation is called ‘the great teacher’. It is the cleansing crucible fire that works slowly but surely. The greater your understanding, the more flexible and tolerant, the more compassionate you can be. You become like a perfect parent or an ideal teacher. You are ready to forgive and forget. You feel love towards others because you understand them, and you understood others because you understand yourself. You have looked deeply inside and seen self-illusion and your own human failings, seen your own humanity and learned to forgive and to love. When you have learned compassion for yourself, compassion for others is automatic. An accomplished meditator has achieved a profound understanding of life, and he or she inevitably relates to the world with a deep and uncritical love.

Hence it can be noticed through meditation that it alone is the way towards ‘personal transformation’. The ‘self’ that goes into meditation is not the same ‘self’ that comes out of this magnificent experience. Your arrogance evaporates and you seem to become your own leader and for those around you an example to follow. Next time we will be back with more on meditative techniques.

Meditation can be studied from various perspectives in various forms. The purpose of meditation is personal transformation. It reduces your tension, your worry, fear and restlessness. It sharpens your concentration and your thinking power. Your intuition sharpens, the precision of your thought increases and gradually you come to a direct knowledge of things as they really are, without prejudice and without illusion.

There are some key components of meditation to be kept in mind. Relaxation lies at the heart of it. All meditation procedures stress on concentration of the mind, bringing the mind to rest on one item or one piece of thought. Do it strongly and thoroughly enough and you achieve a deep and blissful relaxation, called *jhana*. It is a state of such supreme tranquility that it amounts to rapture, a form of pleasure that lies above and beyond anything that can be experienced in the normal state of consciousness. *Jhana* is the goal and when you attain that, you simply repeat the experience forever. This is different from Vipassana as Vipassana seeks only awareness. It is aimed at nothing less than the purification and transformation of your everyday life. If you find that you are becoming unconscious in meditating, then you aren’t meditating well.

Meditation deals with levels of consciousness that lie deeper than conceptual thought. There are deeper ways to understand things than just words. For example, you understand how to walk. You probably can’t describe the exact order in which your nerve fibres and your muscles contract during that process. But you know how to do it. Meditation needs to be understood that same way- by doing it. It is not something you can learn in abstract terms or something to be talked about. Meditation is not a mindless formula that gives automatic and predictable results; you can never really predict what exactly will come up during a particular session. It is an investigation and an experiment; an adventure every time.

Another important to note is that meditation is only to increase awareness. Levitation is not the goal. The goal is liberation. There is a link between psychic phenomenon and meditation, but the

relationship is complex. You should only concentrate on more and more awareness. If voices and visions pop up, just notice them and let them go. Don't get involved. While meditating, you will also dredge up various nasty things from your past. The suppressed material that has been buried for quite some time can be scary. But exploring it is also highly profitable. However properly done, meditation can be a gentle and gradual process. Take it slow and easy, and the development of your practice will occur very naturally. Nothing should be forced.

In Buddhist meditation, there are three integral factors—morality, concentration and wisdom. These three factors grow together as your practice deepens. Each one influences the other, so you cultivate the three of them at once. When you have the wisdom to truly understand a situation, compassion towards all parties involved is automatic and compassion means that you automatically restrain yourself from any thought, word or deed that might harm yourself or others; thus your behavior is automatically 'moral'. It is only when you don't understand things deeply that you create 'problems'. If you fail to see the consequences of your actions, you will blunder. The person who waits to become totally moral before he begins to meditate is waiting for a situation that will never arise. The next level of morality consists of obeying the same rules even in the absence of somebody who will smack you. This level requires a bit of mind control. The third level of morality is 'ethics'. Here the practitioner doesn't follow hard and fast rules dictated by authority.

Luckily, a deeper level of consciousness can do this sort of processing with ease. Meditation teaches you how to disentangle yourself from the meditative process. It is the mental art of stepping out of your own way, and that's a pretty useful skill in everyday life. Meditation is certainly not an irrelevant practice strictly for ascetics and hermits. It is a practical skill that focuses on everyday events and has immediate applications in everyday life. Meditation is not 'other-worldly'.

Meditation, including Vipassana, is not an attempt to forget you or cover up your troubles. It is learning to look at yourself exactly as you are to see what is there and accept it fully. Meditation also helps you achieve bliss, something you can experience only when you don't chase after it. Through meditation, we become aware of ourselves exactly as we are, by waking up to the numerous subtle ways that we act our own selfishness. That's when we truly begin to be genuinely selfless. Cleansing yourself of selfishness is not a selfish activity.

Thus meditation, it can be said, is the activity that goes on within the body and its effects can be manifest outside. It is a practice which can enhance your personality like nothing else does. You can learn to be more at peace and calm with yourself. You don't feel the need for external factors to make you feel complete within yourself. Instead you feel like a fulfilled being of the Universe ready to help others and be a solution and offer solutions for those around you.

Meditation can, on the one hand, help you in increasing concentration and awareness, on the other hand it can help you in living your life more peacefully and with love and care. Meditation is all about increasing awareness, especially Buddhist meditation. Within the Buddhist tradition, concentration is also highly valued. But a new element is added and more highly stressed: the element of awareness. All Buddhist meditation aims at the development of awareness, using concentration as a tool toward that end. The Buddhist tradition is very wide, however, and there are several diverse routes to this goal.

Zen meditation uses two different tacks: the first is the direct plunge into awareness by sheer will. You sit down and just sit, meaning that you toss out of your mind everything except pure

awareness of sitting. This sounds very simple. It is not. The second Zen approach, used in the Rinzai school, is that of tricking the mind out of conscious thought and into pure awareness. This is done by giving a student an unsolvable riddle; which he must solve nonetheless, and by placing him in a horrendous training situation. Since he cannot escape from the pain of the situation, he must flee into a pure experience of the moment: there is nowhere else to go. Zen is tough; it is effective for most people but it is tough to follow.

Another stratagem, Tantric Buddhism, is nearly the reverse. Conscious thought, at least the way we usually do it, is the manifestation of ‘ego’, the ‘you’ that you usually think you are. Conscious thought is tightly connected with self-concept. The self-concept or ego, is nothing more than a set of reactions and mental images that are artificially pasted to the flowing process of pure awareness. Tantra seeks to obtain pure awareness by destroying the ego image. This is accomplished by a process of visualization. The student is given a particularly religious image to meditate upon, for example, one of the deities from the tantric pantheon. She does this in so thorough a fashion that she becomes that entity. She takes off her own identity and puts on another. This takes a while, as you may imagine, but it works. During the process she is able to watch the way in which the ego is constructed and put in place. She comes to recognize the arbitrary nature of all egos, including her own, and she escapes from bondage to the ego. She is left in a state where she may have an ego if she chooses- either her own or whichever other she might wish- or she can do without one. Result: pure awareness. Tantra is not that easy either.

Vipassana is the oldest of Buddhist practices. It is direct and gradual cultivation of mindfulness and awareness. One’s attention is carefully directed to an intense examination of certain aspects of one’s own existence. The meditator is trained more and more to notice the flow of life experience. Vipassana is a gentle technique, but is also very thorough. It is an ancient and codified system of training your mind, a set of exercises dedicated to the purpose of becoming

more and more aware of your own life experience. It is attentive listening, mindful seeing and careful testing. We learn to smell acutely, touch fully, and really pay attention to the changes taking place in all these experiences. The object of Vipassana practice is to learn to see the truths of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of phenomenon. Vipassana is a set of training procedures that gradually opens us to this new view of reality that it truly is. Your attitude has to be right while practicing: “I want it done and have a positive impact on my life. I need to surrender. Only when I surrender can there be a positive change in me.”

One popular human strategy for dealing with difficulty is auto-suggestion: when something nasty pops up, you convince yourself it is not there or you convince yourself it is pleasant rather than unpleasant. The Buddha’s tactic is quite the reverse. Rather than hide it or disguise it, the Buddha’s teaching urges you to examine it to death. When you are having a bad time, observe it squarely, examine that experience and observe it mindfully, study the phenomenon and learn its mechanics. The way out of a trap is to study the trap itself. The trap can’t trap you if it has been taken to pieces. You get out of it by removing it from pieces to pieces. The result of this is freedom.

Buddhist philosophy survives on the thought- pain is inevitable, suffering is not. Pain and suffering are two different animals. A bit of time spent in learning alternatives to those habit patterns is time well invested. Buddhism does advise you to invest time and energy in learning to deal with unpleasantness.

Next time you sit with your cross-legged, do try the Buddhist meditation. We will talk more about the Buddhist philosophy and elimination of pain and suffering in relationships next week.

Section III

YOGA AND COMMUNITY LIVING

Yoga thus is more importantly about leading a community life full of happiness, joy and contentment. While Asanas and meditation contribute to a healthy body and mind, a good holistic lifestyle and living contribute to a life full of Artha, Dharma, Kama and Moksha. In this section we discuss how Yoga as an art, science and philosophy has become a million-dollar industry and how it needs a revision of its fundamental values associated with the ancient Indian art form.

Yoga cannot be understood through medicine- the fact is that medicine will never understand Yoga within the framework of medicine's perspective and tools, hence trying to understand Yoga through medical eyes is like following a blind person. Medical science is materialistic in nature and believes only in experimental validation. This implies that it only understands measurable tangible entities. While Yoga, on the other hand, is based mainly on subtle principles, which are often not only intangible but also not accepted by medical science. A classic example is 'Prana', often termed as 'life force energy' which is so fundamental to Yogic understanding, but something that medical community cannot accept or certify as it is not a measurable phenomena.

Modern medicine as we know it did not exist in India, or anywhere in the world for that matter when Yogins were developing these practices. Yogins understood the human body within their own framework and evolved tools based on that understanding. Developed through careful and constant observation and extraordinary intuition,

the tools of Yoga use more than just the musculoskeletal framework of the body, unlike physical therapy which focuses on body mechanics. Yoga's tools involve all aspects of our being, taken into account our breathing patterns, emotions and intellect as well.

Yoga differs from medical science in many ways, and infact ventures into the arena of the subtle that is not recognized, let alone understood by modern science. But using modern medicine to try and understand Yoga and the science behind it is inappropriate, an approach destined for misinterpretation and a limited perspective.

Yoga stands up for a sort of community living, too, in which an individual becomes a positive member of society. The aim of most religions is to make an individual's life productive and fruitful for the society in which they live. Most studies of communities focus on the indigenous social benefits that religion provides. Yoga provides a path towards one such harmonious life.

According to Sri Aurobindo, by Yoga we mean a methodized effort towards self-perfection by the expression of secret potentialities latent in the being and – highest condition of victory in that effort- a union of the human individual with the transcendent and universal existence we see partially in man and in the Cosmos. All life, when we look behind its appearances, is a vast Yoga of Nature, who attempts in the conscious and the sub-conscious to realize her perfection in an ever-increasing expression of her yet unrealized potentialities and to unite herself with her own divine reality. Yoga, as Swami Vivekananda said, may be regarded as a means of compressing one's evolution into a single life or a few years or even a few months of bodily existence.

In one respect, Yoga exceeds the normal operation of cosmic Nature and climbs beyond Her. For the aim of the Universal Mother is to embrace the Divine in her own play and creations and there to realize it. But in the highest flights of Yoga she reaches beyond herself and realizes the Divine in itself exceeding the Universe and even standing apart from the cosmic play. Hathayoga aims at the conquest of the life and the body whose combination in the food sheath and the vital vehicle constitutes, as we have seen, the gross body and

whose equilibrium is the foundation of all Nature's workings in the human being. The chief processes of Hatha Yoga are *Asanas* and *Pranayama* which first cures the body giving to it an extraordinary health, force and suppleness and seeks to liberate it from the habits by which it is subjected to ordinary physical Nature and kept within the narrow bounds of her normal operations. *Pranayama* serves a double purpose- first it completes the perfection of the body, the vitality is liberated from many of the ordinary necessities of physical Nature, robust health, prolonged youth often an extraordinary longevity are attained. On the other hand, *Pranayama* awakens the coiled-up serpent of the Pranic dynamism in the vital sheath and opens to the Yogin fields of consciousness, ranges of experience, abnormal faculties denied to the ordinary human life while it intensifies such normal powers and faculties as he normally possesses.

Raja Yoga takes a higher flight. It aims at the perfection and liberation not of the bodily, but of the mental being, the control of the emotional and sensational life, the mastery of the whole apparatus of thought and consciousness. It fixes its eyes on the *citta*. Karma Yoga is used to lead to liberation from phenomenal existence and a departure into the Supreme. The method we have to pursue, then, is to put our whole conscious being into the Divine and to call Him in to transform our entire being into His. Thus in a sense God himself, the real person in us, becomes the sadhaka of the sadhana as well as the Master of the Yoga by whom the lower personality is used as the centre of a divine transfiguration and the instrument of its own perfection.

However, an individual's success even as a Yogi lies in his or her ability to be able to deal with and live within a community. In the conflict of the claims of the society with the claims of the individual two ideal and absolute solutions confront one another. There is the demand of the group that the individual should subordinate himself more or less completely or even lose his independent existence in the community- the smaller must be immolated or self-offered to the larger unit. He must accept the need of the society as his own

need, the desire of the society as his own desire; he must live not for himself but for the tribe, clan, commune or nation of which he is a member. The ideal and absolute solution from the individual's standpoint would be a society that existed not for itself, but for the good of the individual and his fulfillment, for the greater and more perfect life of all its members. Representing as far as possible his best self and helping him to realize it, it would respect the freedom of each of its members and maintain itself not by law and force but by the free and spontaneous consent of its constituent persons.

An ideal society of either kind does not exist anywhere and would be most difficult to create, more difficult still to keep in precarious existence so long as individual man clings to his egoism as the primary motive of existence. A general but not complete domination of the society over the individual is the easier way and it is the system that Nature from the first instinctively adopts and keeps in equilibrium by rigorous law, compelling custom and a careful indoctrination of the still subservient and ill-developed intelligence of the human creature. Overall, all sages have discussed the importance of good 'community life' and its importance in harmonious living.

It is said the 'aim of education' is to bring about peace in the world. Hence even if one attains 'Nirvana' which is a remote possibility, the idea is not to continue to implement it in isolation but share the fruits of such hard penance with people at large. This alone was the mantra of Lord Buddha who through his 'Middle Path' tried to explain to everybody that one should not lead a life of austerity or extreme-ness but adapt a life more suited to 'moderation'. Even though Prince Siddharth or Gautam Buddha went into renunciation and realized the importance of the 'Middle Path', moderation as opposed to austerity has been advocated by quite a few sages and saints.

The real penance lies in simplicity, community-life and meditation.

