



HOW TO BE A YOGI

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capacity to any organ without a purpose; and we are sure that, if every one were to use the full capacity of his lungs, weak or diseased lungs would be a thing of the past. If we understand the science of breathing, we can develop our lung power to its utmost capacity; then by well-regulated breathing exercises we can purify every particle of matter in the cells of the organs, and with the help of the current of Prâna can ultimately drive out all physical weakness.

Faith-healers, mental-healers, and Christian Scientists cure disease without giving drugs; the Yogis of India do the same, but in a more scientific manner. Faith-healers and Christian Scientists ask us to believe in a certain thing and to declare that we are not suffering. A Yogi says that we can get better and surer results if through breathing exercises we can control the Prâna, increase the vital current, and fill the whole system with the healing power of Prâna. By polarizing the activity of the cells, and removing the obstacles that prevent the proper manifestation of the vital current in those cells, we shall get rid of the disease. If mental-healers and faith-healers knew the secret of controlling the Prâna, they would have been undoubtedly more successful in their attempts. Some among them are now beginning to take up breathing exercises, and perhaps in time they will learn the truths contained in the wonderful science of breathing.

Generally people who know nothing of this science think that it teaches merely the mechanical process of breathing in and out; but its province is much more extended, for it likewise shows how to control the Prâna, how to increase the vitality of the system by generating new nerve currents of a higher order, how to polarize the vibration of the cells, and how to awaken those powers which lie dormant on the sub-conscious plane as well as in the nerve centers of the spine. It also tells us that when the powers begin to manifest, we rise above the influences and changes to which ordinary mortals are subject. India is the only country where from ancient times this science of breathing has been carefully studied in all its aspects by the Yogis. Through centuries of investigation they discovered different methods of regulating the breath, following which marvellous results, both mental and physical, could be obtained. Out of these various discoveries grew up the science of breathing, which, besides the control of the breath, also explains

what relation the process of respiration bears to Prâna, and how, by harmonizing the vibrations of nerve cells with the higher laws of life force, one gains mastery over Prâna. This control of Prâna brings complete subjugation of all the forces which govern the mind and body.

The aim of a Yogi is to establish absolute harmony between his vital actions and his mental functions, to transcend all laws, to rise above the influence of all environmental conditions, and to be the supreme ruler of the mind and of the entire system. According to the Yogi, this perfect self-mastery and consequent freedom do not come to one who has not learned the secret of regulating the vital energy, and who has not acquired the power to direct it wherever it is needed. Before anyone can control this invisible vital force, he must know its principal seat in the body; he must learn where this unseen king of physical activities is enthroned, who are his attendants, and how he governs his kingdom.

A Yogi says that the king or Prâna resides with his attendants in the nerve centers of the spinal column. These centers are the main stations where this vital force is stored. There are many centers in the spinal cord out of which proceed the motor and sensory nerves which cover the whole body, including its organs. All sensations and motions of the limbs depend upon these nerve centers in the spinal column and the brain. There are two currents which flow in and out of the brain through the spinal column and nerves; they are called afferent and efferent currents--in Sanskrit, "Idâ" and "Pingalâ." They run through the anterior and posterior channels of the spinal cord, and these furnish the two paths over which the currents of Prâna travel. The nervous energy itself being scattered throughout the system, the only means of regulating it is by controlling the principal centers or stations in the spinal column. If, therefore, any one wishes to control the Prâna, he must first learn to govern the chief stations through which it works. After studying the relation of these different centers the Yogis found that there were six of primary importance. Those who wish to know their names can refer to the volume on "Râja Yoga" by the Swâmi Vivekananda.

According to the science of breath, the King of these six leading nerve centers in the spinal cord is enthroned in the center opposite the thorax; it is the respiratory center and in Sanskrit bears the name "Anâhata." It moves

the lungs, causes respiration, and gives activity to all the other centers, which are dependent on it. If the royal center is disturbed or vibrates abnormally, those which are subject to it, and through them the whole system will act in a corresponding manner; and the result will be disease, organic trouble, or continued ill-health. So long, however, as the royal center is in a normal condition, the movement of the lungs which causes inspiration and expiration will be regular. Therefore the Yogi who desires to subjugate the nerve centers first strives to gain control over the respiratory center. The science of breathing teaches that, by regulating the breath, the motion of the lungs and the functions of the whole nervous system can be regulated. It also says that, by controlling the nerve centers in the spinal column, mastery over the currents flowing throughout the system, and ultimately over the mind itself, with its various dormant powers, can be easily gained. If the mental powers that are now latent on the subconscious plane can be aroused, all the experiences of past incarnations, and the impressions gathered during previous lives, will come up on the conscious plane and we shall remember them all.

The Yogis say that the great majority of people breathe irregularly and that there are differences in the breathings of men and women. The causes of this irregular breathing are many--food, drink, fear, sickness, sorrow, nervous excitement, passion, anxiety. These do not affect the breath directly, but they do influence it indirectly by producing abnormal activity of Prâna, first in the nerve centers, then in the movement of the lungs, which expresses outwardly as irregular breathing. Hence irregularity of the breath is the external sign of abnormal action of the respiratory center in the spine.

A Yogi whose respiratory center functions regularly and is under perfect control is free from weakness, ill-health, and all disease. As, by controlling the activity of Prâna in the nerve centers, the movement of the lungs and the respiration are regulated, so, conversely, by regulating the breath, the lungs and nerve centers will be controlled, for they work simultaneously. Those who are suffering from ill-health should devote especial attention to the study of the science of breathing, as it is absolutely necessary to the building up of a healthy mind and a healthy body.

The chief aim of a Yogi is to observe his own nature closely and to learn clearly what forces are operating in his system, and what relation they bear to one another; for by gaining a complete knowledge of his own nature he will gain correct knowledge of the whole universe, since the laws that govern the human body are universal. All these laws are nothing but the modes in which Prâna operates in nature. Therefore a Yogi seeks first to understand the individual Prâna and the vital laws which govern his own system.

In India this fact was recognized and the science of breathing was carefully studied by the sages, who had no other ambition or purpose in life than to acquire knowledge for its own sake. They explained this science, practiced breathing exercises (noting the results), and instructed their pupils, but not to make a profession of it, or to earn money, or to gain fame in society. On the contrary, they refused to teach those who came to learn for professional ends; and it is because of this disinterestedness on their part that the knowledge of the Yogis is so pure and unadulterated by ambition or selfish motives. They also realized the dangers which might arise from ignorant practice of these exercises. Those who are studying under inexperienced teachers should be on their guard, for there is great risk in letting the nerve currents flow in a wrong direction. It may produce abnormal results and may even end in mental disorder. Right breathing, on the contrary, brings the greatest benefits to mankind when properly practiced; but if it is abused it must do a corresponding amount of harm, just as any medicine will when improperly applied. As by studying *Materia Medica* a man cannot cure himself without the aid of a trained physician, so the mere study of Yoga cannot bring about truly good results unless it is carried on under the guidance of an experienced Yogi. It should be remembered, furthermore, that in a written book everything is not given, that each constitution is different from every other, and that that which is helpful to one may not be so to another.

Anyone who practices faithfully, according to the instructions of an experienced living teacher, will surely gain highly beneficial results both in mind and body. He will learn how to manufacture vital force and to increase the vitality of his whole organism. He will be able to remove all impurities

from his system and to overcome all abnormal and diseased conditions, that is, where decomposition and disorganization have not advanced too far. He will likewise no longer be a victim to cold, chills, Grip, fever, rheumatism, stiffness of the joints or muscles, paralysis, and other ills; for he knows how he can remove them by increasing the vibrations of Prâna and thus giving new life to the cells of the organs.

Every individual, whether old or young, man or woman, is bound to get some result if the breathing exercises be practiced faithfully for six months. By breathing exercises, however, is not meant here merely deep breathing, such as is taught by teachers of music, Delsarte, or physical culture. Deep breathing is very good for drawing a full supply of oxygen into the system, and undoubtedly has its value, especially for women who wear tight dresses. Many of the diseases from which they suffer are directly traceable to a lack of the adequate quantity of oxygen necessary for organic combustion and for the maintenance of the activity of the organs. The organs of many people in this country are undeveloped, or abnormally developed, because of the unnatural clothes worn; and for all such deep breathing will be exceedingly beneficial. But too much of it is injurious, as it inflates and strains the lungs, and, if continued, the increased development of the tissues will after a time decay and produce various troubles. Those who are taking lessons in deep breathing from inexperienced teachers should stop to consider this. By breathing exercises we mean that process by which control over the motion of the lungs and of the nerve centers, as also, in the end, over the Prâna or vital energy can be acquired.

A Yogi declares that the practice of breathing will bring whatever result is desired, whether physical, psychical, or spiritual. He who has gained perfect control over his breath can suspend it for hours, and through this generate a power in the system which will levitate the body, even counteracting the tremendous force of gravitation. A Yogi conquers death by the control of Prâna. There are many Yogis in India who can tell the exact moment when they will leave their bodies. They say, "I am going to depart on such a day at such an hour," and at the appointed time consciously give up their bodies in the presence of many. There are some again who can prolong life

indefinitely, and can subsist for long periods without taking any kind of solid or liquid food.

When so much can be accomplished through the control of the vital energy of Prâna, it is not strange that these Masters say to the world:

"Oh, ye mortals, study the science of breathing; learn the secret of controlling Prâna or the vital energy; strive diligently to regulate the breath; for the control of Prâna will bring all happiness, earthly and spiritual, and through it will come perfect health, mastery of the body, and that Supreme Bliss which is eternal and everlasting.

Like the great Râja Yogis in India, Jesus knew the secret of separating His soul from His physical shell, and He showed this at the time of His death, while His body was suffering from extreme pain, by saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is quite an unusual event to see one imploring forgiveness for his persecutors while dying on the cross, but from a Yogi's point of view it is both possible and natural. Râmakrishna, the greatest Yogi of the nineteenth century, whose life and sayings have been written by Max Müller, was once asked, "How could Jesus pray for His persecutors when He was in agony on the cross?" Râmakrishna answered by an illustration: "When the shell of an ordinary green cocoanut is pierced through, the nail enters the kernel of the nut too. But in the case of the dry nut the kernel becomes separate from the shell, and so when the shell is pierced, the kernel is not touched. Jesus was like the dry nut, i.e., His inner soul was separate from His physical shell, and consequently the sufferings of the body did not affect him."¹ Therefore He could pray for the forgiveness of His persecutors even when His body was suffering; and all true Yogis are able to do the same. There have been many instances of Yogis whose bodies have been cut into pieces, but their souls never for a moment lost that peace and equanimity which enabled Jesus to forgive and bless His persecutors. By this Christ proved that, like other Yogis, His soul was completely emancipated from the bondage of the body and of the feelings. Therefore Christ was a Yogi.

Through the path of devotion and love Jesus attained to the realization of the oneness of the individual soul with the Father or the Universal Spirit, which is the ideal of a Jnâna Yogi as well as the ultimate goal of all religions. A Jnâna Yogi says: "I am He"; "I am Brahman"; "I am the Absolute Truth"; "I am one with the Supreme Deity." By good works, by devotion, love, concentration, contemplation, long fasting, and prayer, Jesus the Christ realized that His soul was one with God, therefore He may be said to have attained the ideal of Jnâna Yoga.

¹ See "The Life and Sayings of Râmakrishna," by Prof. F. Max Müller. Published by Charles Scribners' Sons, New York. P. 111.
will be enabled to say with the great Yogi Jesus the Christ, "I and my Father are one," and reach salvation in this life.

