

CHAPTER XV

ASHTANGA YOGA

- Q. To get the fortune of escaping birth and death, elders say that Yoga is very important. What is that Yoga of which they speak?
- A. Yoga Sastra declares that certain Asanas have to be utilised in order to remove the ever-widening circles of mental agitations and purify the mind; also to steady faith, to establish Jnana and arouse the *Kundalini Sakthi* (vital energy) latent in man.
- Q. It is said that Yoga has certain *Angas* or auxiliaries. How many are they and what are their names?
- A. They are eight in all, *Ashtanga*, in fact: Yama (giving up attachment to the body), Niyama (purity), Asana, Pranayama, *Prathyaharma*, (withdrawing senses from external objective world), *Dhaarana* (concentration), Dhyana, Samadhi—these are the names of the eight.

- Q. If Mukthi is to be attained, have all these to be practised to perfection, or is any one of them enough?
- A. Oh, Mukthi can be won if the first two, Yama and Niyama, are mastered. Why, the universe is maintained by just these two, Yama and Niyama!
- Q. When we speak of Yoga, do we mean only this particular Yoga with the Ashtanga, or have we many other Yogas too?
- A. Yoga is not just this one; there are four in all.
- Q. Which are they? What are their names?
- A. Their names are popularly given as Manthra Yoga, Raja Yoga, Laya Yoga and Hatha Yoga.
- Q. What Angas or auxiliaries have these four, in their turn?
- A. Silly fellow, for all the millions of humans, the two eyes are the instruments of vision, are they not? So too, for all the Yogas, Yama and Niyama are the eyes; without them, nothing can be visualised. Purity of mind is essential for every Yogi. And for that, Yama and Niyama are indispensable.
- Q. What do you mean by Yama and Niyama? Have these also, by any chance, auxiliaries, Angas, or characteristics which mark them out?
- A. Of course. Each of them has ten such. It is only when

- you are well-established in all these that you are liberated.
- Q. Tell me the ten included under Yama.
- A. Ahimsa, Sathya, Astheya, Brahmacharya, Daya, Aarjavam, Kshama, Dhrthi, Mithaahaaram, Soucham; all these ten are included in Yama.
- Q. May I know the ten included in Niyama?
- A. Thapas, Santhosha, Aasthikyabuddhi, Daana, Easwara Puja, Vedanthavaakyasravana, Lajja, Mathi, Japam, Vratham—these ten form Niyama. These are the very foundations of the Mansion of Moksha. All Yogis must be well established in these; in Yama as well as Niyama.
- Q. Yoga insists on asana also, you said. What exactly does that mean?
- A. They are very helpful for Atma Jnanis and Yogis.
- Q. Asana too must have many varieties, is it not?
- A. Yes, they too are many. But the chief are *Sidhasana*, *Baddhapadmasana*, *Sarvangasana*. Besides, there are Asanas like *Mayura* and *Paschimothasana*.
- Q. What are the benefits that result from these Asanas?
- A. They give hardihood to the body and enable the mind to concentrate for long.

- Q. Swami! Now tell me about Pranayama also. How many types of Pranayama are there?
- A. There are many types but since in this present world most types are impossible in practice, only those that help Dhyaana have to be adopted. They are *Laghupranayama* or Simplified Systems of Breath Control.
- Q. Simplified systems? How are they beneficial?
- A. Like metals purified over fire in the crucible, the slag of Karma is removed by Pranayama and the Mind is freed from contamination. This and *Kaya Suddhi* are both brought about. The mind and the body are both rendered pure. There are two types of Pranayama: the one with manthra and the other without it. Without manthra, it can at best transform the body only, but with manthra, it transforms the mind also.
- Q. Swami! How are we to practise it?
- A. Two seconds long *Purakam* (inhaling), four seconds long *Rechakam* (exhaling), eight seconds long *Kumbhakam* (holding the breath). Pranayama has to be practised carefully for three months. Later, the duration of *Purakam*, *Rechakam* and *Kumbhakam* can be doubled. When six months are spent in this steady practice, the activities of the senses are laid low. If practised with faith and feeling, Pranayama will tame the agitations of the mind. Otherwise, it becomes mere

- physical exercise, improving just physical health. Pure food, Brahmacharya, living in solitude, moderate speech—these conditions too have to be strictly observed.
- Q. Swami! The next one you mentioned is Prathyahara. How many are the methods of Prathyahara?
- A. Three: *Saakaara*, *Niraakaara* and *Atmabhava*, depending on the purpose for which the senses are controlled and the mind concentrated. If it is for Saguna Upasana, it is *Saakaara*; if for Nirguna Upasana, it is *Niraakaara*; if for realising the Sathyam-Jnanam-Anantham Paramatma, then, it is *Atmabhava*.
- Q. And, Dhaarana? Swami! What is meant by that? How many types of Dhaarana are there?
- A. My boy, Dhaarana is of only one type. The wise man steadily established in the awareness of his *Ishtadevatha* or Brahma-consciousness, like the earth carrying a mountain—that is Dhaarana.
- Q. The next one is Dhyaana, I believe. That must be of many varieties.
- A. No, no. This also is one and only one. Whether of the Formful or the Formless, if it is one-pointed, devoid of deviations, it is entitled to be called Dhyaana.
- Q. Lastly, there is Samadhi. What does that mean?
- A. Samadhi means the fixing of the mind, free from all

impulses and agitations, on the Lord, or on one's own Reality. It indicates the state in which one is in one's own real nature. Samadhi is when one is free from all duality. The mind will be unshaken by dual experiences. It will shine like a flame in the windless room. It is *nischala*, unmoved, unmovable.

Q. Swami! That type of mind, how will it behave? Make it clearer, please, by some examples.

A. My dear fellow, when you have to thread a needle, you have to be intent on the job and the end of the thread has to be kept straight and pointed, is it not? Similarly, to enter the Grace of God, which is subtler than the subtlest, the mind has to be steady and the eye and the senses have to be concentrated on the same process.