

YOGA, MEDITATION AND JAPA SADHANA

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PART 1

YOGA AND MEDITATION

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF YOGA

I shall endeavour to portray in simple terms what one may regard as the central objective of human life and the possible methodology that could be adopted in implementing this objective, and its realisation. You must have heard a lot about what is known as yoga. And many a textbook, many a discourse must have given you varied information on this mysterious technique known as the art of the practice of yoga. In simple terms, without involving technicalities, if yoga is to be defined, it can be called the system of harmony. What you call harmony in the English language, for example, yoga is in Sanskrit. It is nothing mystifying or beyond the conception of human understanding. But there is a great proviso in this simple definition of yoga as harmony. While it is true that harmony in every field of life is what we seek in our day-to-day existence, it is necessary to know what harmony, actually, means. And when the essential of that simple fact called harmony gets imbibed into our consciousness, our personality gets stabilised. Stability of personality, equilibrium of consciousness, harmony in the walks of life, is yoga.

Now, harmony implies an adjustment of oneself with an environment that is external to oneself. When there is no proper adjustment of one thing with another thing, we call it disharmony. When there is a proper adjustment, a smooth working of one principle, one fact, one object, one person with another, we regard it as harmony. Now, the question which may arise in our mind at the very outset is, why should harmony be the central objective; why should harmony be regarded as the essential of life.

The reason is the very structure of the universe. The universe is a system of harmony. We, as human individuals, form part of this universe. We form part of it in such a way that we are integrally related to it. Before proceeding further, it would be profitable to know what it is to be integrally related to anything in the world. I shall try to give you an example from common experience. You must have seen on the roadside heaps of stones. A heap of stones is a group of small units of inanimate matter put together in one place. In that heap of stones, perhaps, each stone is touching every other stone. Though each piece of inorganic matter called stone in that heap is connected by way of contact with every other stone in the heap, we cannot say that any particular stone is integrally related to every other stone in that heap. They are mechanically connected, not vitally related.

There is a difference between mechanical connection and vital, organic relationship. The contact of one stone with another stone in a heap is mechanical. There is no life in this connection. If you take one stone from that heap, the other stones will not be affected in any manner. They shall remain as they were. There shall not be any kind of harm done to the remaining stones or a diminution in their structure, if a few stones are removed from the heap. So, a mechanical group is that in which parts are so related to the whole that if some parts are removed from the whole, the remaining parts are not affected at all. That is what we mean by mechanical relationship. But organic relationship is something different. We can have the example of our body itself. You know very well

that our physical body is made up of minute organisms called cells. These cells are so connected to one another that they give the appearance of a single whole called the body, similar to a heap of stones on the roadside, you may say, in one way. But what is the difference? While the removal of a few stones from the heap does not affect the remaining stones vitally, removal of a few limbs of our body will vitally affect the whole body. You know what it would be to an individual, a human being, if the limbs are to be amputated, the legs or the arms removed. You remove a portion of the body of a person, --what a difference does it make! The very existence of the body is seriously affected. The harmony of the body is disturbed, to come to the point. That is why when a limb of the body is cut off, there is intense pain, agony and a dislike towards it. We dislike any kind of interference with the limbs or organs of our body, because the limbs are vitally connected as a living whole in the system of our personality.

So, now, you know the difference between mechanical relationship and vital relationship. What I mean to say is that we are vitally related to the cosmos, not mechanically connected. Our connection with the universe outside is not like the connection of a stone in a heap, so that we may do anything we like without affecting the world outside. That cannot be. Our connection, our relationship with the world outside is such that it can be compared to the relationship of the limbs of the body to the whole system of the body. Any meddling with the system is not warranted, nor called for. To conceive what the universe would be, you have to conceive what a human individual is. In Indian Vedic mythology, we have the concept of what is known as *purusha*, the Supreme Being. '*Purusha*' means man, the human individual. But when the Vedas speak of the *purusha* in the cosmos, they mean the concept of the universe as a single individual, a Cosmic Individual, whose relationship with the parts of the cosmos is similar to the relationship of an ordinary limited individual to the limbs of the body. Can you imagine, for a moment, what it would be to remain as a cosmic individual? Suppose you are the consciousness animating the universe, how would you conceive this possibility? For that, again, you have to bring the analogy of the human body. Do you know that you are an Intelligence, or a centre of consciousness? You may put me a question, how do I know this? It can be known by an experiment. You know that you are a complete whole called Mr. So-and-so, Mrs. So-and-so, and so on. When you say, 'I am such and such a person,' what do you actually mean? What do you refer to? To the hands, to the feet, to the nose or any part of the body, or all the parts put together? What do you mean by saying 'I', or the individual that you are? On a careful examination of the situation you realise that when you refer to yourself as so-and-so, you do not really take into consideration the limbs or the organs of the body. Because, if a hand is amputated, you do not say that a part of yourself has gone. You still remain a whole individual. If two legs are gone by any kind of medical operation, the individual is still whole. The individual never feels that a part of his personality has gone. He will say that a part of his body has gone, but a part of *himself* has not gone. He will still think as a whole being. Otherwise, if the limbs of the body were to be an essential part of the personality, then, when the legs are amputated, for example, a person would be thinking in a lesser percentage. There would be half-thinking, one-fourth thinking, thirty per cent thinking, and so on. But that does not happen. There is whole thinking, whole understanding, the entire consciousness is kept intact, in spite of the fact that the limbs are amputated or cut off. This shows that you are not the limbs of the body. You are something independent of these limbs that constitute your external form called the

body. You are an intelligence or a spiritual being. You are a centre of consciousness which animates this body on account of which the amputation of the limbs does not in any way affect your personality. You are essentially consciousness.

Now, the concept of the *virat-purusha* or the Cosmic Being, which I mentioned as stated in the Vedas, is only an extension of this concept of the individual consciousness to the cosmos. Can you close your eyes for a few seconds and imagine that instead of your being a centre of consciousness animating this small body, you are a centre of consciousness animating the whole universe? Can you expand your imagination to this extent? How do you do this? It can be done with a little effort of the mind. I shall tell you the technique. The consciousness which you are, which animates every part of your body,-- hands, feet, fingers, nose, eyes, etc.,--this consciousness that you are, which indwells your individual body, is so uniformly present in every part of your body that you may be said to be present in every part of your body. You are present in your fingers, you are present in your toe, you are present in your nose, and so on. You, as a complete whole, are present in every part of your body. Now, can you extend this analogy, or comparison to the whole universe? Just imagine your consciousness is not merely in your finger or your toe, but it is also in this table that you see in front of you, it is also in the chair, it is in the mountain, in the sun and the moon, in the galaxy, etc.

If you can extend your imagination in this manner, if your consciousness can exceed the limits of your bodily personality, and if you extend this pervasive character of consciousness beyond the limitation of your bodily personality and concentrate it on every other object in the world, you become a Cosmic Individual. This is Yogic Contemplation, Meditation in the highest sense of the term. This is the apex which you reach after many stages of meditation

This is a difficult technique, because you will not be able, ordinarily, to extend your consciousness to other objects in the world. We have a prejudice, an old habit of thinking that the objects are *outside* us. But, do you know that your ten fingers are outside you? They are objects; you can see them as you see any other objects in the world. If these ten fingers (i.e. these objects) can become part of your personality, then why should not other objects in the world become part of your personality? They do not become, because you have limited your consciousness by an old prejudice of thought. Prejudice is irrational, it simply asserts itself, it is not amenable to reason. Why should you limit your consciousness to your small body? What do you gain? Why not extend it to other persons? Why not feel that all people seated here are part of a wider, social individual (just as you imagine you are a human individual)? Why limit your consciousness to people seated here, go further to the vaster world and imagine you are the world-individual! This world individual is what religion means by God.

People ask, "Does God exist?" This is a meaningless question. If the world exists, God must exist; because God is only a name that you give to the Consciousness that indwells the whole universe, just as consciousness indwells your own individual personality.

You may ask, "How do you know there is Consciousness everywhere?" I ask you, "How do you know your friend has consciousness?" You know you have consciousness, but you cannot see consciousness in your friend. But you infer from his intelligent activity that he has consciousness. Likewise, from the activity of the cosmos, we can infer the presence of a Cosmic Intelligence.

Now, this Cosmic Intelligence, immanent in all objects, is what is called God, the Supreme Being. You call it the Absolute, because it is Complete Consciousness, and there is nothing outside it. When there is something outside it, you call it relative consciousness. When there is nothing outside it, and it is All-in-All, all-pervading, you call it Absolute-Consciousness.

Now, you are a part of the Absolute-Consciousness, because you are a part of the universe. You are an organic part of the universe, not a mechanical part (like a stone in a heap). You are vitally related to the whole cosmos, so that you are an essential part of the cosmos.

From this analysis we come to the astounding conclusion that the whole universe may be compared to a vast individuality. This is what the Vedas call the *parama-purusha* or the Supreme Being. When they use such terms in the texts, what they mean is that our salvation lies in being friendly with the universe as a whole.

The health of a finger of your body depends upon the health of the whole body. Suppose the whole body is suffering from typhoid fever, can a finger be healthy? No, the finger also will be affected by the same illness, because it is vitally related to the whole body. Likewise, whatever the universe is, that you also are. The universe is a perfect balance of forces; and so, inasmuch as you are an integral part of this perfect balance of forces, which is the universe, you know how you have to conduct yourself in life. You cannot afford at any time in your life to violate the law of the universe. You have to abide by the law of the cosmos, which is *samatva*, or equal distribution of attitude. Yoga is defined in the Bhagavadgita as *samatva*. Harmony is yoga. Bhagavan Sri Krishna, the Superman of the East, says: *samatvam yoga uchyate* (Gita 2-48). This is a very simple, unambiguous and non-sectarian definition of yoga. Harmony, balance, equilibrium is yoga.

What is harmony? Harmony is nothing but your adjustment with the cosmos. If you are properly adjusted with the universe, you are said to be in harmony with the universe. But if there is maladjustment with the cosmos, you are thrown out as an individual. Now, the very fact that you are able to see objects outside with your senses as something cut off completely from your personality shows that you are not properly adjusted with the cosmos. You cannot see a cell of your body as something outside, because it is an essential part of your very existence. In this manner, if we are able, by dint of will and power of concentration, to visualise the world as essentially related to our consciousness, we would be automatically in a state of meditation.

The substance of the world is not matter or inorganic stuff. There is a misconception among most people that the world is made up of non-intelligent dead matter. This is not so. You cannot see consciousness with your eyes. You cannot see the consciousness or intelligence in another person. How can you see the Consciousness in the world outside? But, inasmuch as it is possible to infer the presence of consciousness in another individual by his activity, you can also infer the presence of Consciousness in the universe by an analysis of a peculiar activity called perception.

The analysis of the process of perception of objects will give you an indication that the world is made up of Consciousness, and not matter. It is only by inference that you can come to this conclusion, not by direct, visible, sensory perception.

You look at an object, a mountain which is a mile off, in front of you, and say, "I see it." I

ask you, "What do you mean when you say that you see it?" You will reply, "Eyes are open, light rays which fall on the mountain travel from the mountain and impinge on the retina of the eyes, and then I am given a picture of the existence of the mountain." But I ask you, "Is light intelligent or non-intelligent?" You know very well that light rays have no consciousness, they are inert; and the mountain is inert. A non-intelligent principle cannot create intelligence; because the principle of logic demands that the cause must be at least as rich as the effect. The perception of the mountain is a conscious, intelligent activity (i.e. effect). So, the cause, the movement of light rays, must contain Consciousness inherently, otherwise, it would be inferior to the effect and consciousness cannot be produced by the inferior effect which is the light rays.

Also, take another aspect of this very problem. The mountain which is outside you does not jump into your eyes. It is far off. How do you come to know that there is a mountain in front of you? Your eyes do not touch the mountain and the mountain does not touch your eyes. Both are far from each other. There is a connecting link between the mountain and your eyes. That is the reason why you are able to know that there is a mountain. But what is the connecting link? You may say, light-rays. No. Light-rays are inert. Inasmuch as inertness cannot produce an intelligent perception, we cannot accede that the light-rays which are inert can be the connecting link, really. The connecting link between an object and the seeing consciousness can be only one of two things, because there are only two things in this world, consciousness and matter, there is nothing else. Now, the connecting link between the mountain and the perceiving consciousness would be one of the two either it is consciousness or it is matter. If you say that matter or any thing material is the connecting link between the mountain and your consciousness, there will be a gap between consciousness and the object. Because consciousness cannot become matter and matter cannot become consciousness, they being characterised differently, just as milk cannot become stone and stone cannot become milk. Thus, if the connecting link is matter, there would be a gap between matter and consciousness and there would be no connection between the two, and you cannot know that there is mountain in front of you. So, that cannot be. And, naturally, the other alternative is that the connecting link is consciousness. Consciousness can mix with Consciousness. By this inference we come to the conclusion that consciousness must be hidden behind even material objects; otherwise perception itself would be impossible. Just as we infer the presence of intelligence by the activity of people outside, we infer the presence of intelligence in the world by the analysis of the activity of the individual known as perception.

What we are driving at with all this analysis is that world is ultimately Consciousness in its nature, it is not matter. You are also not matter, because your whole personality remains unaffected even though the limbs are cut off. You are Consciousness. You are not a body. You are something far more than a body. Likewise, there is an immanent principle of Consciousness in the whole cosmos. This immanent Consciousness is what is called the Absolute, or Brahman, or the *Atman*. We call it the Self (i.e. the *Atman*), because it always remains hidden in the individual as the seeing principle, and not the seen object (because Consciousness cannot become an object which you can see with your senses). So, the Universal Consciousness, being incapable of being converted into an object, remains ever as a subject, as the Self. The Supreme Consciousness, which is the Absolute, is the Self of everyone.

If you can retain this state of mind for a few minutes, that the universe is a sea of Consciousness and you are like waves in this sea of Consciousness, and that there is nothing like matter or inorganic stuff in the world,--this is universality of perception, as different from individual perception of objects. This is Meditation.

PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

What I have told you up to this time is the philosophical background. Now I shall give you some practical hints, in stages, to attain the state of Meditation. Otherwise, the mind will jump from one object to another, because it is used to think of objects only. To bring the mind to this state of awareness of meditation, stability or harmony has to be practised in every walk of life. Harmony is of various grades.

1. You must be harmonious in your relationship with other people in the world. You should be friendly; you should have no hatred towards anyone. You should not harm or deceive anyone. You should not steal or appropriate what does not belong to you. You should have no disgust for any person or thing; you should have affection for all persons and things. All this constitutes harmony in outer relationship with the society and the world. You should not take from the world more than what you have given to it by your service.

2. You must be harmonious within your own personality. The human individual is often out of balance with himself. You should take care of the minimal needs of the body: e.g. cleanliness, a bath regularly, to eat only when you are hungry--i.e. eat only if your tongue waters when you see a dish of food. Treat your body as your friend. Live in ventilated places; breathe fresh air; spend at least two hours a day in open air. Adopt simple living and high thinking.

3. You must have harmony of muscles and the nervous system. We are generally in a state of restless activity and agitation. So we are asked to practise *asanas* or physical postures, for the stability of the body. Though for the health of the body you may practise many *asanas*, you should sit in one *asana* alone for meditation. By staying in one, single, steady, comfortable posture, you bring about a harmony in the nervous system and the muscles.

Why is this posture prescribed? Because some energy, you may call it electric power, is generated in the body when the mind is concentrated in meditation. Now, if the extremities of the body are left open, the electricity that is produced in meditation will leak out. So, the purpose of posture is to lock up the fingers and the toes so that there is a circulation of energy throughout the body, and there is no leakage of energy outside. Also, to prevent leakage, you are asked to sit on some nonconductor of electricity, e.g. deerskin or mat, not an iron seat (that will give you a shock). Sit there, locking the fingers and toes, and keeping the spine, neck and head erect, in one straight line. If you cannot sit straight in the beginning, sit straight leaning your back against a wall.

4. Bring the breathing process, *prana*, into harmony. *Pranayama* is a normal state of breathing. Usually we are not in a normal state of breathing. And we are not happy when we breathe disharmoniously. The *pranas* are disturbed because you long for objects in the world. And to desire an object is to be out of tune with the law of the universe, because the object is not outside the law of the universe; the object is an integral, vital part of the cosmos. So, when you imagine anything is outside, consciousness is

disturbed, agitated, unhappy. So, this harmony is achieved not merely by control of breathing through the nose, but by reduction of desires. If you entertain too many desires in your mind, *pranayama* will be useless, or may be even harmful. A person with no control over desires should not practise *pranayama*. First, you must be ethical and moral in your conduct.

In the beginning, do not practise technical methods (like alternate breathing); just practise normal inhalation and exhalation. Take in a slow, full, deep breath and exhale slowly. Generally, you do not take a slow, deep breath, you take a fast, shallow breath.

The purpose of *pranayama* is to reduce the rate of breathing. And, when the *prana* becomes calm by this process of slow breathing, the mind also becomes calm. The *prana* is connected with the mind. When the *prana* is reduced in its activity, the mind is also reduced in its activity. Between the *prana* and the mind are the senses. The senses are the meeting point between the *prana* and the mind. The senses become active, whether the *prana* works or the mind works.

5. So, the fifth harmony is the control of the activity of the senses. The senses cannot be controlled so long as you live in the midst of attractive objects. So, in the beginning stages of yoga practice, you should try to live for at least some time in a year in such places where objects are not tempting to the senses. This is the reason why seekers of Truth try to live in *ashrams*, monasteries or secluded places. When you try gradually to abstain from sense indulgence, by living in such holy atmospheres, the senses get automatically subdued. As the senses are in contact with the mind, control of the senses also involves a little control of the mind.

When the mind is accustomed to a life of seclusion and solitariness, and the senses do not ask for tempting objects, you are ready for concentration and meditation. This is really the field of yoga. All the stages earlier are only preparatory. From concentration onwards is proper yoga.

6. Now, concentration is of three forms:

A. Concentration on external points:

The mind is accustomed to think of external objects only; so, it would be dangerous to suddenly cut off the mind from external objects. You should not try to concentrate on internal centres in the beginning of your practice.

You must pick an external object that you have an interest in, that you have a love for. Believers in God usually try to concentrate on an external picture or symbol of God. You may keep a portrait of Lord Krishna or Jesus Christ in front of you, and gaze at the picture with open eyes. Where the eyes are, there the mind also is. You are not looking merely at a painted picture, but at a symbol of a living personality. So, when you gaze at a picture of Christ or Krishna, you immediately feel in your mind the qualities that these personalities were endowed with.

After three or four minutes of gazing at the picture, close your eyes and mentally imagine the picture. Concentrate on the form you saw. Continue this internal concentration as long as your mind is not disturbed. If, after a few minutes of closed-eyes meditation, you feel that the mind is wandering, then again open the eyes and look at the picture. After, again, gazing the picture for a few minutes, close the eyes again to

habituate the mind to internal meditation.

Practise this process for a few months until you can concentrate without a picture. When you can concentrate, merely by closing the eyes, on the form of the portrait, without the external support of a painted picture, you have achieved the first success in meditation.

Feel that this internal picture is not merely in one place, but is in every place. When you begin to feel a uniform presence in all places, the mind ceases from all distraction. The other method to bring about this harmony of mental perception is to think of the vast space. Inasmuch as space is everywhere, you try to concentrate on all directions at one time. You can also concentrate on the light of the sun pervading the whole space. Or you can concentrate on the vast ocean which is everywhere. You can gaze at the flame of a candle or a dot on the wall.

When you gain success in this, you can change your object of concentration; you will have such mastery of mind that you can concentrate on any object. The purpose of this concentration is to make the mind think only of one thing, and not think anything else. So, ultimately, it matters little what object you choose for concentration if the purpose is served, i.e. to think only of that thing and nothing else.

When you are accustomed to this external meditation, you can turn to internal meditation.

B. Concentration on internal points:

Internal meditation means concentration on certain centres (*chakras*) of the body. The most important and most favourable *chakras* (for beginners) in meditation are the *chakra* between the eyebrows, and the *chakra* in the heart.

In the waking state, the mind functions in the brain, in the dream state it works near the throat, and in deep sleep it goes to the heart. In deep, objectless meditation also the mind goes to the heart. So, the ultimate purpose of internal meditation is to bring the mind to the heart. This is done in three stages: the mind comes from the external object to the head (i.e. the centre between the eyebrows), then the mind comes to the heart. Meditation on the point between the eyebrows is in two stages: (1) external gaze at the centre of eyebrows, and (2) to close the eyes and think of the spot alone (as a spot of light). Slowly, you begin to feel that the mind descends from the head through the throat to the heart. When you do this, you will fall asleep if you are careless. You must do this with caution and alertness; otherwise you will sleep and mistake it for meditation.

The other method of internal meditation is to directly meditate on the heart. You can imagine a blossoming lotus in the heart, or the light of the rising sun in the heart. The best form of meditation on the heart is to feel consciousness as seated there. From this internal point of meditation on consciousness in the heart, you can slowly proceed to the universal.

C. Concentration on the Universal:

Just as Consciousness is in your heart, it is in the heart of everybody. Try to meditate on this Consciousness as present everywhere, in everything (outside and inside) uniformly. This is the absolute form of meditation, i.e. the Supreme State.

To help achieve this Universal State of Meditation, you can chant OM (*Pranava*) in a

methodical manner. There are three types of OM chanting: (1) Short--about one second, i.e. 30 in 30 seconds; (2) Middle--each chant for five seconds, i.e. 6 chants in 30 seconds; (3) Long--each chant for fifteen seconds, i.e. 2 chants in 30 seconds. The elongated process is the best form of chanting. It makes the cells of the body subside in their activities; the nervous system becomes calm. You need not take any tranquillisers. If you are disturbed, chant this elongated way for fifteen minutes. The whole system will become calm and quiet. When you chant like this, feel also that you are expanding slowly in to the Cosmos.

OM is not merely a sound that we make, but a symbol of a Universal Vibration. This is really the Vibration that was made at the beginning of the creation of the world. This Universal Vibration (of creation) is the controlling force behind everything in the world. So, when you chant OM and create this Vibration in your system, you set yourself in tune with the Vibration of the Cosmos. The Forces of the Universe begin to enter into your body; you will feel strong and energetic; your hunger and thirst will decrease; you will feel absolute happiness even if you have nothing (i.e. no material possessions) and are absolutely alone, unknown and unseen by people. You will have no desire for anything in the world, because you have become one with all things.

When you become the friend of the Universal Forces, then the world will take care of you in times of difficulty, and you will have no fear from anywhere. Then it is that you become a Saint or a Sage. In this state, if you have any desire, it will be immediately fulfilled, because you have become the friend of all Forces in the world. In this state of Ecstasy or Bliss, great Saints sing and dance (because they possess everything in the world). Here it is that you will realise that you are a Child of God. God Himself will perpetually take care of you and you will have no fear, just as the son of a King has no fear because the King protects him always and everywhere in the kingdom.

DAY-TO-DAY PRACTICES

This is almost a complete outline of the essentials of the practice of yoga. But, when you actually begin to practise it, you will find it is very difficult. So, you have to be very honest in your pursuit. Swami Sivananda taught us that *sadhana* has three prongs, like a *trisula*:

1. A Daily Routine of Practice: Have a fixed procedure of practice every day. One must keep fixed hours and discipline his personality. In daily routine, three items should be very important: (a) JAPA--chanting some *mantra* over and over to maintain the same consciousness (this is often useful when meditation is difficult); (b) STUDY--reading Scriptures or texts on yoga, e.g. Upanishads, Bhagavadgita, The sermon on the Mount, The Imitation of Christ; (c) MEDITATION--should be performed at a fixed time and in a fixed place every day (you should not change the place); face the same direction daily (either the East or the North) and sit in the same Asana (i.e. posture) every day.

2. An Annual Resolve: Vow to give up bad habits like harming or hurting others, telling lies, and incontinence; these three must be given up (slowly) by degrees. *Ahimsa, satya, brahmacharya* are to be practised. If you break this resolve, you should fast one day. Because of the fear of fasting, you will be careful not to break the vow.

3. A Spiritual Diary: When you go to bed every night, you should review what you have done since morning. This diary may consist of questions you may ask yourself, e.g. "How

many times have I forgotten God today?” “Did I get angry today?” etc.

With these methods you can take to serious *sadhana*, or practice of yoga. And when your efforts are followed with earnestness of purpose, you shall achieve success in this very life.

PART 2

JAPA SADHANA

The world of experience may be said to be constituted of three important factors: 'thought', 'name' and 'form'. These three are internally connected with one another. This relationship that obtains among thought, name and form is taken notice of in a very important aspect of spiritual practice, or *sadhana*, known as Japa-Yoga. This is a term with which you are all familiar, the yoga of *japa*. In the Bhagavadgita, the Lord has referred to this aspect of spiritual *sadhana* as perhaps the best among the known methods of approach to God: *yajnanam japayajnosmi*—"among all the sacrifices, *Sadhanas*, austerities or forms of *tapas*, I am represented by *japa*," says Bhagavan Sri Krishna. *Japa* is regarded as the most efficacious method of spiritual practice. Because, it is intimately connected with the immediate realities of life which are intelligible to our understanding, and at the same time it is also inwardly connected with a secret silken thread to the ultimate goal of yoga. The terms, name and form, to which we have made reference here, mean much more than what we are likely to make out from them. The name is not merely an epithet or an appellation that we casually attach to a physical form.

These days we are accustomed to any kind of name according to our whim and fancy in relation to a form, without taking into consideration the relationship between the name and the form. In ancient days, especially in our country, the naming of a particular form was based on a well-established, scientific fact. The name represents a form and the form is symbolised or indicated by a name. In a famous system of spiritual thought known as *tantra* or *agama*, we are pointed out that the expression of a particular name in a recognised manner automatically projects a particular form. This form is usually known in the Agama Sastras as the *yantra*. The *yantra* is not merely a geometrical drawing or a formation, but a shape that a name is supposed to take when it is made manifest through expression. Thus, the name and the form are intimately related to each other. Not only this, the name and the form are related to the thought that is behind the expression of the name and the form.

In common parlance we can take the instance of any name for the matter of that, a 'tree'. A 'tree' is a name, a sound symbol that is supposed to indicate or point to a form which we know as the physical existence of the object known as the tree. You know also very well how the expression of the name 'tree' evokes a corresponding idea also in our mind. The idea, the name and the form seem to rise simultaneously in consciousness, so that the one is not easily distinguishable from the other. The perception of an object may evoke the idea of its name; and the utterance of a name may evoke the idea of the object or the form. Or even a thought, a mere idea may manifest itself as the form together with the name which symbolises it.

Now, in *sadhana*, which, in the present context, is spiritual practice, this inner secret of nature is well borne in mind. Inasmuch as every name is correspondingly related to a form and the world is made up of forms and nothing but forms, we are required to evoke in our minds that particular form alone which is supposed to rouse in us the particular form of Reality or degree of Truth which is higher than the one in which we are placed at

present, so that we may be enabled to rise from one degree of Truth to another degree in its higher and higher progressive forms of manifestation, until we reach the highest form of it, the last or the ultimate expression of Truth which we know as God, *Ishvara*. And our scriptures tell us that as we can evoke a particular form in our consciousness by the utterance of a corresponding name, we can also invoke in our mind, in our consciousness, the form of God, the Supreme Being Himself, by the recitation of the Name which is the sacred expression of that ultimate form of Reality or Existence, God the Almighty.

In one of the aphorisms, or *Sutras*, of a famous system of spiritual practice known as Raja-yoga, the author thereof, Patanjali Maharshi, tells us, in a cryptic expression, *tajjapastadartha-bhavanam*. He defines *japa* in this *sutra*. What do you mean by *japa sadhana*? The contemplation of the implied meaning of a particular symbolic expression, the utterance of a Name--that is *japa*. So *japa*, according to this definition of Patanjali at least, is not merely a mechanical recitation of a Name or a formula, but includes also a simultaneous contemplation on the meaning thereof, though many protagonists of this form of yoga tell us that even a mechanical repetition of the Name has its own beneficial effect. There are certain medicines which have their own effect on the system; they act on the system in the manner required, whether or not you know what medicine you have taken, notwithstanding the fact that a knowledge of the contents of the medicine may help you in creating the necessary psychological atmosphere in yourself, so that the action may be accelerated. Knowingly or unknowingly, God's Name can be taken, whether you know the meaning of the Name, whether you can appreciate the implication of the Name, or not. The Name of God is compared to fire that burns. Knowingly or unknowingly, you may touch fire; it shall burn, it shall have its own effect. Likewise, this potency of the Name of God has its action upon our entire system, bodily as well as psychological, so that it purifies us. The process of purification is that action which takes place in ourselves, which transforms the baser metal of crude thinking engendered by *rajas* and *tamas* into that form of expression known as *sattvaguna*. The recitation of a *mantra*, therefore, accelerates the process of the revelation of the *sattva* in us, transforming the *rajas* and the *tamas* in our nature. It is not so much a destruction of *rajas* and *tamas* as a complete transfiguration of the constituents that we know as *rajas* and *tamas*. Inertia, distraction and equilibrium are termed *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*.

In fact, these three qualities, or properties, known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, are not extraneous toxic matter that have entered into our system, like a thorn that has struck our feet, but they are forms of our mind itself. The *gunas* of *prakriti*, known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are not outside the mind, like dirt or dust that covers a mirror on its surface. While the dust on the mirror is different from the mirror and you can wipe out the surface of the mirror and the dust can be eliminated, not so is the case of the transformation of *rajas* and *tamas* into *sattva*. The mind itself is the substance out of which these *gunas* of *prakriti* manifest themselves. What is the relation between the mind and the three *gunas*, viz., *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*? The quality of a substance is generally distinguished from the substance. The redness of a rose is generally regarded to be different from the rose itself. We do not say that redness itself is the rose. The rose is the substance in which the character or the quality of redness inheres. Not so is the case with the mind in its relationship with the *gunas*. The *gunas* of *prakriti*, the

qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, in relation to the mind, are related to the mind as the three strands of a rope are related to the rope. You know what are the strands of a rope. Three thinner ropes make a thicker rope. And the three thinner ropes are not outside the thick rope. They themselves form the thick rope. The threads themselves form the cloth. We do not have a cloth outside the threads, though we use two different epithets,--threads and cloth. You will find it is only a way of naming two different circumstances of one and the same substance. The threads are the cloth, and the cloth is the threads, though when we purchase a cloth-piece we do not say that we purchase threads. It is a way of expression, but, actually, substantially, they mean one and the same thing. Likewise, the mind are the *gunas*, and the *gunas* themselves constitute the mind-stuff. So, in the transformation that takes place from the condition of *rajas* and *tamas* to the state of *sattva*, what happens is an inner reconstitution of the elements of the mind into an inner set up of circumstances known as *sattva*. May I say it is something like the transformation of the constituents of milk when it becomes another substance known as curds, though the analogy is not wholly appropriate here. I cite this instance only to tell you that the constitution is inwardly reshaped and an external element does not introduce itself. We ourselves become another thing in this process of transformation.

The principle of God is not wholly outside our nature. The Supreme Being, whom we are invoking through *mantra japa*, is not entirely disconnected with our inner constitution, or make-up. We are not importing God from outside, like an external element unconnected with our nature. God is not brought into our nature from outside, from the seventh heaven. The element of God, the principle of Reality, is manifest from within. This fact could be clear to us when we contemplate on the fact of the Immanence of God, as our scriptures proclaim. God is not merely transcendent to our nature, though He is also that, for He is at the same time immanent in us, which means to say that the nature of God is not only superior to the baser nature of *rajas* and *tamas* in us, which is the meaning of transcendence, but also that the principle of God is hiddenly present, secretly permeating in our own personality, in our own mind, intellect, in our very *Atman* itself. In fact, the *Atman* in us is the Brahman of the cosmos. This is what the ancients have declared. The Self is the Absolute. The internal is at once the Universal-All.

The invocation of *ishvara-shakti* through *mantra japa* is, therefore, not so much an attempt at bringing some higher face of reality from outside into our inward constitution as a manifestation of what is within us in a greater degree of its expression. So we play a very important role in the practice of *japa*. We, as *sadhakas*, seekers, are as important an element in the practice of *japa sadhana* as the principle of God, the Deity, and the constitution of the letters of the *mantra*. In fact, *japa* involves three important elements or *shaktis*, or powers, viz., *mantra-shakti*, *devata-shakti* and *sadhana-shakti*. The *sadhana-shakti* is the power that is within our own selves; the *mantra-shakti* is the power that is hidden in the peculiar combination or juxtaposition of the letters of the formula; and the *devata-shakti* is, again, the power of the immanence of a higher principle in the *mantra*.

Now we have to take into consideration all these three aspects when we take to *japa sadhana*, so that it becomes a complete spiritual practice by itself. *Japa* is a complete *sadhana* and it does not need any external addition from outside to make it more

complete. *Tajjapastadarthabhavanam*, to repeat what Sage Patanjali has told us. The Name of God is a little different from the ordinary names connected with particular objects in the world. It is not like calling out a tree or a cow that grazes in the field. While the temporal names which we attach to particular physical objects of the world rouse or evoke in our mind the form of that particular object alone which is by convention connected with the particular name, the Name of God rouses in our mind the idea not merely of any particular isolated object of the world, any temporal event or thing, but invokes in our mind the notion or concept of a wider reality than we are likely to conceive in our minds in terms of earthly relations.

The Name of God, especially when it is given to us in the form of what is known as a *mantra*, is a power by itself. It has a Shakti of its own, and this is the reason why *bhaktas*, sages and saints have told us that even a mere repetition of the Name of God has the capacity to produce an effect of its own, though you may not be really meditating, though you may not be in a position to contemplate the actual meaning hidden behind it. The *mantra-shakti*, or the power of the *mantra*, arises on account of the fact that is beautifully and scientifically described in a science known as *mantra-shastra*, which is akin to the science of chemistry in our own ordinary life. Chemical elements act and react upon each other. You know the action between an acid and alkali, for instance. Different chemical combinations are supposed to produce different effects. Sometimes the chemical reaction is such that it can produce a tremendous effect. Mantras produce such effect, similar to the reaction of chemical elements, because of the peculiar combination of letters. The *mantra-shastra* is a secret which tells us that every letter of the alphabet is a condensed form of energy. Sounds are really energy manifest. The sound is not merely an empty form of verbal manifestation, but energy that is made to express itself in a particular shape. And this packet of energy, this tied up form of force, which is a particular letter of the alphabet, is made to come in contact with another packet of energy called another letter, they collide with each other, or, we may say, they act upon each other or fuse into each other, whatever be the thing that takes place there, so that the utterance of a group of letters, which is the *mantra*, produces, by the process of permutation and combination of these letters, a new form of energy which gets infused into our system, because it has arisen from our own mind, thought and the recesses of our being. We get charged with that force, as if we have touched a live electric wire. There is special name given to this science, as *gana-shastra*, in *tantrik* parlance. Words are forces, thoughts are things, so they tell us. They are not empty sounds that we make when we speak words or utter a name or give expression to an idea. It is because of the fact that thoughts and expressions are powers by themselves, that the words of saints take immediate effect. The words that a saint or a sage utters are not empty sounds that he makes. They are forces that are released like atom bombs, and they can manifest themselves in the physical world, and events can take place. That is why people go to a Mahatma for *asirvada*, or blessings. His words are forces, power that he releases to take immediate effect, or even a remote effect, as the case may be.

The utterance of a *mantra* is the release of an energy, not only inside our own personalities, but also in the outer atmosphere of which we form contents. *Japa sadhana* not only brings a transformation in your own inward personality, but also sympathetically produces an equal effect in the society of which you are a part. So *japa*

sadhana is also a social service. It is not merely a personal *sadhana*, inwardly practised by your own self in your *puja* room, but it is a great *seva* that you do to mankind also. An aura is produced around that *sadhaka* who takes to *japa sadhana* honestly and sincerely. You purify not only your nature inwardly but also you purify the atmosphere outside. You become a source of inspiration to people when you actually take to *japa sadhana* with concentration of mind and with real faith in the efficacy of the practice. God's Name is a wonder. It is a miracle by itself. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," said the poet. The prayers that you offer to God are definitely capable of producing the desired result.

I had occasion to meet one humble *sadhaka* some years back, a householder. He was a votary of prayer, a very honest person. He came to me to discuss about a certain difficulty that he was experiencing during the time of his offering of prayers. Incidentally, he mentioned to me his *sadhana*. He said, "Swamiji, my *sadhana* is only prayer to God. And with this *sadhana* of prayer, I try to do the little bit of service to people outside also. The people may be very far from me, they may be even in London, it makes no difference. I might not have even seen that person whom I want to help. I might not have even heard of his name." I asked him, "My dear friend, how do you direct your thoughts to a place or to a person whose name you do not know, whose location also is not known to you?" He said, "Swamiji, I have got that much of faith, by the grace of God, that the wonder is worked not by the prayer of my thought but by a medium which my prayer seems to contact, which works in its own omniscient manner." I was glad to see such a *sadhaka*, because he understood the secret of prayer and *japa*. What works is not your personal strength or your individual thought, but that which your thought is able to rouse into activity and which is omniscient.

I can give you an illustration to explain what this perhaps means. You know a broadcasting station. People sing a song or send a message through the broadcasting station. The message is in the form of sounds. You say something before a mike in the station. Now, what happens is that the sound that you make there in the form of a song, a *bhajan*, or a *kirtan*, or a lecture, or a discourse, is not really conveyed to the receiving sets, the radios, or the transistors. The radios, in their internal mechanism, are not directly connected with the sounds that people make in the broadcasting station. What happens is that the sound is converted into energy. What travels through space or ether is not the sound that is made in the broadcasting station, but that into which the sound is cast or moulded or transformed. An impersonal form of energy which travels through ether has an impact on the receiving sets, gets recharged or reshaped or retransformed into the sound which was originally made in the broadcasting station. That which is midway between the two instruments, the broadcasting set and the receiving set, is not the sound. Energy can be converted into sound through the receiving set, and sound can be converted into energy through the broadcasting set. This is the secret of radio as well as television, and this is the secret of nature as a whole. Prayers can work wonders in this manner. Your prayers or the invocations that you make through *mantra sadhana* or *japa* are converted into an impersonal force, which is the power of God, and the miracle is worked by God Himself. You cease to be the ultimate agent of the action. Your agency is only incidental. What really works is something higher than yourself. So the credit must go to God, finally, even when *japa* takes effect. God Himself seems to be doing *sadhana* for ourselves. Who can do things in this world other than God? We cannot

even lift our fingers without His will. As they say, even a dry leaf cannot move in the wind unless the Father wills it. The whole universe is divinity, resplendent, gorgeous in its glory and abundance. We have forgotten that we are an integral part of it. And in *japa sadhana*, particularly, we try to attune ourselves, attune our inner psychological constitution with that Omnipresent structure of the cosmos which is Ishvara-Shakti, or Divine Will operating. You can appreciate how important *japa yoga* is. In the Mahabharata, in the Shanti Parva an entire chapter is devoted to this exposition of *japa sadhana*. *Japaka Upakhyana* is worth reading: it says how a person, a sage was devoted to *japa* entirely, Gayatri *japa* especially, and he could defy the intrusion of even the higher *devatas*, like Indra and Yama, and he attained *moksha* through *japa* alone. No wonder that Bhagavan refers to this system of yoga as the best, in the Bhagavadgita “*Yajnanam japayajnosmi.*”

May I request you, brothers and sisters in the spiritual field, to take to this *sadhana* sincerely, wholeheartedly and stick to it tenaciously. You will see for yourself, that it makes you a different person. Small wonders and miracles will begin to take place around you. You will be surprised how things take shape without your knowing what happens. The atmosphere will slowly change. Prayers are powers, please remember this. And these powers which are generated by prayer are endowed with greater strength than even bombs. It would not be an exaggeration if I say that you will be doing the greatest service to mankind, if you honestly offer prayers to God from the bottom of your heart. God will hear your prayer through His All-pervading ears: *sarvatah panipadam tat sarvatokshi-siromukham.*—“Everywhere It has ears, everywhere It has eyes.” It can see what you do even in the remotest corner of this world, and It can hear what you say wherever you are. Your prayers will be heard, and this would be a service that you do to your own *Atman*, your soul, for its salvation. Not only that, it will be a great service that you do to humanity itself. May I repeat the request once again, that you take to this *sadhana* honestly, with intense faith, and you will see wonders, miracles manifesting themselves.