



# Advanced Yoga Practices

## Easy Lessons for Ecstatic Living

### Volume 2

More Original Internet Lessons with Additions by the Author

Yogani

# **Advanced Yoga Practices**

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### **Volume 2**

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This is for you who seek the truth within.  
The journey continues...



## Introduction

Since the first Advanced Yoga Practices (AYP) “Easy Lessons” book came out in late 2004, six years have passed, and thousands of practitioners have availed themselves of the open source lessons covering this baseline system of practices that is compatible with the modern lifestyle. Their evolving experiences, and the need for additional practices, led to many more online lessons, and finally to this second volume. This is a continuation of the lessons in the first book, beginning with Main Lesson 239 and Tantra Lesson T37.

It should be emphasized that Volume 2 does not stand alone. The first volume provides the core practices of AYP, and this second volume carries on from where the first volume leaves off. Here you will find enhancements and refinements for many of the practices provided in the first volume, and many new practices that are not covered in the first volume. The new practices include additional applications of samyama, yogic diet, shatkarmas, amaroli, self-inquiry (advaita/non-duality), bhakti, karma yoga, enhanced asanas, self-directed structuring of effective and safe practice routines, and many other measures for enhancing and refining the “cause and effect” of the process of human spiritual transformation. All of these additional lessons have evolved in direct support of the many practitioners around the world whose experiences have continued to advance over the years.

To facilitate worldwide communication among practitioners, the online AYP Support Forums were launched in 2005, and these have been instrumental for providing an open discussion on practices and experiences at all levels of application, from beginning to advanced. As the community of practitioners has advanced, so too have the lessons. As in the first book, this volume relies on actual Q&As on all aspects of practice, making this as much a chronicle of the paths of many as it is an instruction manual for individual practitioners. In supporting a wide cross-section of practitioners, many variations in the responses of individuals to the practices have been taken into account. This is an “experience-based” approach. With both volumes in hand, the serious self-directed practitioner will have sufficient information to complete the task at hand, which is the merging (union) of the inner and outer realities of life – the very definition of yoga.

The primary prerequisite for using these teachings is to have a human nervous system, which is the doorway between inner and outer life. That, and a sincere desire to do what is necessary to undergo the journey. The practices of yoga promote the opening of the doorway, our nervous system. In the first volume, detailed instructions are provided for yoga practices such as deep meditation, spinal breathing pranayama, samyama, asanas, mudras, and bandhas, all in a compact daily practice that can be maintained amidst the hustle and bustle of ordinary life. The results are found to be practical in ordinary life – more peace, creativity, energy and, ultimately, an endless flow of ecstatic bliss and outpouring of divine love. As time in daily practices accumulates, we find ourselves moving through life as an expression of stillness in action, serving the needs that arise, wherever we happen to be. Over time, the needs of others become our needs, and we spontaneously “do unto others as we would have others do unto us.” It is the rise of *Oneness*, which is living the joy of unity in everyday life.

As with the first volume, this second volume is about cultivating practical results in our daily life, and not so much about theory. It is about practices, and about furthering our spiritual evolution in the most efficient ways possible. There is no doubt that, over time, the quality of our life can be dramatically transformed by doing yoga practices. We become filled with lasting inner peace and

happiness. We come to know that enlightenment is real, and the ultimate destination of every human being. Self-directed spiritual practice provides verification of the great scriptures of the world. In time, we find the wisdom of the ages mirrored within ourselves, and this is all the proof we need. The source is within us.

Volume 2 also looks at the practical aspects of amplifying the effects of practice to benefit society. Group practice, teaching, retreats, research and other ways of inspiring and uplifting the society as a whole are covered. It always gets back to each person and their desire for progress. Therefore, the lessons never wander far from providing the support necessary for the individual practitioner, whether just beginning, or in the later stages of entering the unity experience of enlightenment. This is what the lessons are for. Volume 2 is particularly concerned with the cultivation of end stage development, because this is where many are finding themselves after years of daily practice.

Simplicity and effectiveness have continued to be primary objectives in the AYP lessons. For far too long, spiritual practice has been an arcane field, reserved for the few who have had the drive to penetrate the many barriers to entry. The goal in AYP has been to remove those barriers. In doing so with these simple yet powerful teachings, it has been found that many have sufficient desire and the ability to sustain a daily practice. In removing the man-made obstructions, we have found the inner barriers falling everywhere. As individual practitioners open, so too does the society as a whole. The journey of the individual is also the journey of the society. As we say in the lessons, “The *One* is the many and the many are the *One*.”

As always, the AYP lessons can be used as a stand-alone teaching, or to supplement any other path. The practitioner is in charge, which is how it should be in this modern scientific age. AYP is a non-sectarian resource that is open to everyone, while making a claim on no one. Because so many powerful methods of practice are provided and discussed in these lessons, all are encouraged to go at their own safe pace. As in the first volume, much attention in Volume 2 is devoted to developing skills in “self-pacing,” with the aim of assisting every practitioner to become self-sufficient in applying yoga practices for achieving maximum progress with good safety. Each is responsible for their own progress, and for the means applied.

As with the first volume, significant additions to the online lessons are provided in this volume. The additions can be found at the end of many of the lessons, and are indicated by asterisks (\*) in the table of contents and lesson titles. A summary of additions and illustrations is provided after the table of contents. The numbering of the lessons continues to be a little unusual. That is explained on a separate page.

As always, we owe much gratitude to the great spiritual masters and teachers who have researched, exemplified and generously shared the knowledge of spiritual practices with humanity over thousands of years. It is on their shoulders that we continue to stand today as we reach for the heights of ecstatic bliss and outpouring divine love – our destiny as human beings. We also owe our heartfelt thanks to the many yoga practitioners around the world who have stepped forward and contributed to the development of these lessons through their sincere sharing of experiences and questions. Without them, this second volume of the AYP lessons would not have happened.

May you find the AYP lessons to be a useful resource as you travel along your chosen path. Practice wisely, and enjoy!

The guru is in you.

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## Summary of Additions and Illustrations

The following list provides a summary of the additions that have been included in the designated lessons. These are also indicated by asterisks (\*) in the table of contents and in the lesson titles. If you are already familiar with the AYP online lessons, this page identifies what has been added in the book.

- Lesson 239 – Clarifications and Enhancements for Spinal Breathing Pranayama practice.
- Lesson 253 – Edited to cover the influence of Indian Advaita/non-duality teachers in the West.
- Lesson 302 – On conducting research with the Samyama Sutras of Patanjali.
- Lesson 304 – On utilizing Ayurveda dietary measures to aid in balancing kundalini energy.
- Lesson 355 – Pointers on recognizing inner silence and the witness in daily activity.
- Lesson 365 – More on sensitivity to deep meditation, and the role of open systems of practice.
- Lesson 367 – Considering Nadi Shodana (alternate nostril breathing) for over-sensitivity issues.
- Lesson 368 – Additional comments on Solar Centering, and a diagram to aid in practice.
- Lesson 383 – Instructions for an optional Enhanced Asana Routine, with diagrams for 22 postures.
- Lesson 385 – More discussion on building a practice routine, utilizing the AYP Practice Chart.
- Lesson 421 – Discussion on spirit masters and guides.
- Lesson 426 – Mapping the stages of enlightenment, utilizing an Enlightenment Bar Chart.
- Lesson 430 – Discussion on “ripeness” and the realization of non-duality in ordinary daily life.
- Lesson T75 – Edited to include consideration of the effect of hysterectomy on spiritual progress.
- Lesson T76 – The effect of vasectomy and tubal ligation on spiritual progress.

### Additional Resources Section –

- a. An updated Glossary of Sanskrit Terms, including additional terms added in this volume.
- b. A discussion on doing research with Patanjali’s Samyama Sutras from the *Yoga Sutras*, including simplified English versions for 30 sutras.
- c. Instructions on using Ayurveda diet measures and charts for balancing excessive kundalini energy. Can also be helpful for relieving chronic health conditions.

The following lessons have clarifying notes added at the end – 243, 244, 250, 256, 259, 300, 319, 330, 359, 367, 401, 410, T40

### Illustrations and Charts:

- Lesson 239 – Lateral view of the path for tracing the spinal nerve in Spinal Breathing Pranayama
- Lesson 313 – Neti pot usage for Jala Neti (nasal wash)
- Lesson 314 – Enema bag for Basti (colon cleansing)
- Lesson 365 – Meditation practitioner sensitivity distribution “Bell Curves” (three perspectives)
- Lesson 368 – Solar Centering technique diagram
- Lesson 383 – Enhanced Asana Routine diagrams (22 postures)
- Lesson 385 – AYP Practice Chart
- Lesson 426 – Enlightenment Bar Chart
- Additional Resources Section – Ayurveda Diet Charts for balancing Vata, Pitta, and Kapha

## About Those Unused Lesson Numbers

AYP Easy Lessons Volume 2 continues with the unusual numbering scheme that began in the first volume. There are two reasons for this.

First, in the original online forum, the format was not designed for editing of already posted messages. A posting needing correction could be deleted and then re-posted after editing, leaving an unused number in the overall series. Because some editing did occur using this method, there are some unused numbers in the lesson sequence, and they are marked “not used” in the table of contents.

The second reason for unused lesson numbers occurs only in the books. These were online postings pertaining to administrative matters relating only to the Internet lessons, and having no bearing on the actual content of the Advanced Yoga Practices lessons. Those postings have been left out of both of the AYP Easy Lessons volumes, and the numbers are marked “omitted” in the table of contents.

The reason the lessons have not been renumbered without omissions is because it is important to maintain consistency in numbering between the several versions of the lessons. So, Lesson 239 providing clarifications on spinal breathing pranayama will be Lesson 239 no matter which source of the lessons you are looking at. This is true of the actual content in the lessons also. The content is nearly the same in all venues, except that the books include “fine-tuning” of the original lessons, plus substantial new instructional material added (see list on previous page), going beyond what is available in the online lessons.

So the numbering of the lessons is the same in this book as it is on the Advanced Yoga Practices website, in the original online forums, and in the translations of the lessons to other languages. So, while the lesson numbering looks a bit unusual, it is practical. The lesson numbers will always be the same, no matter where you happen to be reading them.

The guru is in you.

## **Disclaimer**

“Each is responsible for his or her own spiritual progress, and for the methods applied. What you do with the information in these lessons is your call.”

This is what is posted in the introduction to the online Advanced Yoga Practices lessons. It applies to this book also. There is no one who can be responsible for the conduct of your yoga practices but you. All efforts have been made to render an accurate presentation and effective integration of the ancient methods of yoga. Additionally, safety measures (the methods of “self-pacing”) are discussed throughout the lessons for the purpose of facilitating good progress while maintaining stability. However, none of the methods in this book are guaranteed. You engage in these practices at your own risk.

The remarkable capabilities for higher functioning inherent in every human being are the touchstone for all the lessons in this book. The lessons are therefore experience-based. The practices discussed herein are intended to be applied in a flexible manner according to observed causes and effects, and managed responsibly by each individual practitioner.

These lessons do not represent the teachings of any other organization, school, or person, and should not be construed as such. They are the author’s best effort to integrate yogic knowledge from a variety of ancient traditions in a scientific manner. To that end, certain traditions and teachers of yoga are sometimes mentioned in the lessons to add perspective. While it is common for modern teachings to claim a connection to one tradition or another, these lessons claim no such connection. The lessons are an integrated approach to yoga, and must stand on their own merit. It is you, the reader, who will decide their value by how they resonate in both theory and practice.



The Main Lessons  
(continued from the first volume)



## Lesson 239\* – Spinal Breathing Pranayama (Enhancements) and Asanas

**Q:** I have read your lessons on Pranayama, and I have some questions. I have long since been practicing a different kind of Pranayama – we inhale deeply and slowly, and at the same time imagine that we are inhaling in from an energy pool of prana, then holding it for some time, then exhaling it slowly, and at the same time imagining that we are letting out all negative emotions, anger, worry, etc. We don't bring the spine into the picture at all. I read from your lesson that after some time we will also be holding the breath, so that part of my doubt is cleared. But my question is concerning the visualization we do as we inhale and exhale. Have you heard about the method of Pranayama I just talked about? If yes how does it compare to your method of Pranayama?

And another question: There are so many physical yoga asana exercises, aren't there? Do your Advanced Yoga Practices cover them all? Or do they cover only meditation, pranayama and a few sitting posture exercises? Maybe it is not necessary to practice them all to move on the spiritual path but they definitely keep the body fit and energetic don't they?

**A:** There are as many varieties of pranayama as there are teachers, it seems. The degree and kinds of visualizations are many. Underneath it all is the “restraint of breath” which is the engine inside that produces the majority of pranayama effects. The visualizations are often given the credit for what the basic restraint of breath (including slow breathing and kumbhaka) produces. Which is not to say visualizations are ineffective. There is no doubt that attention combined with pranayama will move prana. But to what end?

Spinal breathing is in a separate class from other visualization methods during pranayama. It comes from the tradition of kriya yoga, and other ancient sources, and is directly linked with the purification and opening of the sushumna, the main spiritual nerve in us (it is also the third eye on the upper end). Spinal breathing is, in fact, not a visualization once ecstatic conductivity begins to rise in the nervous system. It is the actual blending of rising and descending pranas. This blending is directly promoted with attention and observed as the joining of the shakti and shiva energies within us. So, rather than consciously manipulating impurities and human emotions, spinal breathing is about fostering the pranic (ecstatic) aspects of the process of enlightenment within us, and leaving the rest to that.

Deep meditation as taught in the lessons works in a similar way – going to samadhi straight away and letting that aspect of our nature (inner silence) do the work. Many forms of meditation don't do that, opting instead to micro-manage the contents of the subconscious mind. The latter is not deep yoga, which is found by bringing the mind repeatedly to natural stillness.

Even though spinal breathing, in its essence, is very simple and powerful, it is often embellished by cultures and traditions, sometimes to the point of distraction. There is a lesson on this (#206) that you might find interesting.

One of the best tests of spinal breathing is its known curing influence on kundalini imbalances. I have lost count of how many folks who have come here with kundalini imbalances (some very serious) and had them relieved almost immediately upon beginning spinal breathing. I had that experience myself many years ago, after having worked with many types of pranayama and kumbhaka. I have found that spinal breathing is by far the most advanced pranayama out there,

whether it be the basic version, or variations involving other elements of practice such as yoni mudra kumbhaka, chin pump (with or without kumbhaka), spinal bastrika, etc.

None of this is to say your practice is wrong or that you should change anything. Your experience is your best guide, and you should proceed accordingly. It is always good to keep our eyes open to possibilities that may enhance our results. That is good science.

On asanas, the primary focus in the lessons has been on sitting practices because there has not been much written on the development and integration of sitting practices. We have taken some good steps toward filling in the gaps on that in the lessons. It has really needed to be done. Asanas have not been ignored – only put in perspective in relation to the full range of yoga practices as summarized in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. What we are seeking is a balance of all the best methods to achieve maximum progress.

There are thousands of skilled instructors teaching asanas these days, and hundreds of excellent books and tapes on the subject. The subject seems to be well-covered. Even so, people keep asking here about asanas. So, the first AYP Easy Lessons volume includes a basic set of asanas to do before sitting practices to help get people started. This volume includes enhancements to the original “Asana Starter Kit” (see Lesson 383). In AYP, asanas are a warm up for sitting practices. In other systems of practice, asanas may be an end in themselves, even though they represent only one-eighth of the eight limbs of yoga. It is our culture, you know. It is changing, going more and more toward our inner divinity, and bringing it back out into the world. Physical activity is essential for yoga to fulfill its destiny. Asanas help us on the way in before we do our pranayama and deep meditation. When we are back out in the world, a healthy amount of physical activity and useful endeavors in our daily life are important. Both our sitting practices and daily activities in the world are what cultivate a steady condition of ecstatic bliss and divine love. Asanas have a special role to play in this – aiding the nervous system in its daily journey from outer activity inward to inner silence and ecstasy. In time, all of life becomes permeated with these divine qualities we cultivate first as an inner experience...

The guru is in you.

**Addition:** Over the years, many questions have come on how the spinal nerve is to be regarded, how to imagine it, where it is, what it actually is, etc.

AYP provides baseline approaches to practice that remove the “fluff” that is found in many other systems. Much of this is culturally based, with things added on to an original teaching over time, making the teaching more esoteric, more complex, and often less effective. In AYP, we remove as much of the cultural overlay as possible. So what we offer for spinal breathing, beginning in Lesson 41, is pretty simple. And because it is simple, it is very effective. In spiritual matters, the more complex a practice is, the less effective it will be. Some will argue otherwise. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, you know.

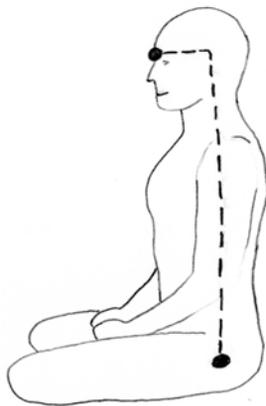
So what about this spinal nerve thing? Many people say they have trouble imagining it going up and down with the breath. Our answer to that has been, “Don’t worry about it. Just make sure you end up at the brow at the end of inhalation, and at the root at the end of exhalation. If you are getting stuck somewhere, just pass over that area and continue between root and brow.” It is fine to use a tactile sense (touch or feel) of the spinal nerve more so than a mental image, if that works for

you. When ecstatic conductivity arises, it becomes largely “feel,” so it is okay to start with feel if that is more natural.

That’s it. Very simple.

Those who can imagine the spinal nerve as a tiny tube or thread, will often ask about following the curve of the spinal, forward and back, and even from side to side in cases where there may be a medical condition affecting the alignment of the spine. Others have asked if spinal injuries involving paralysis will affect spinal breathing. In all of these cases, whether attempting to micro-manage the path of the spinal nerve, or wondering if the condition of the physical anatomy will reduce the effectiveness of our practice, the answer is always the same: Don’t worry about it. Just end up at the brow at the completion of inhalation, and at the root at the end of exhalation. The path in-between can be a straight line without any regard for the actual curvature of the spine, or whether there is any spine at all.

To this end the following diagram is offered, where the brow and root are emphasized, and the path in-between is direct, with the only conspicuous feature of the path being a right-angle turn at the center of the head forward toward the brow. Even that can be passed through as a smooth transitional curve, without any sharp angle to it.



The Path of Spinal Breathing

Now some purists will say, “But that isn’t exactly where the spinal column is, and you are missing the whole thing!”

It doesn’t matter. We can awaken the spinal nerve just as easily by this method as by any other more complicated path for tracing the sushumna. Easier, as a matter of fact, because we will not be getting bogged down in excessive visualization (mind stuff). Like with deep meditation, we just easily favor the path between root at brow, whatever that means for us. It will not be exact. Like the mantra in deep meditation, it will change within our session, and over time. Over the long run of daily practice, the spinal nerve will expand from a small thread-like line to become a vast column of luminous ecstatic energy. Where is the spinal nerve in that? Still up and down the center, like the diagram shows. So the thing is not to micro-manage too much. Just favor the path and let it happen naturally.

## **Enhancing the Effectiveness of Spinal Breathing**

By now you may have noticed that there is more to spinal breathing than meets the eye. Make no mistake about it. We are applying one of the world's most sophisticated technologies here. With one simple breathing technique, we are opening our vast inner cosmos, which has profound implications in our outer world. When cultivated correctly, the human nervous system can reveal great wonders and change the quality of our life dramatically. We are the doorway that joins the inner and outer realities of existence, and we can know this by direct experience.

The essence of spinal breathing pranayama is slow deep breathing while tracing the spinal nerve between root and brow, upward on inhalation and downward on exhalation. This is it, the simplest control lever for utilizing breath combined with attention to transform our presence in the human nervous system into an ongoing cosmic experience. Spinal breathing, followed by deep meditation, will take us surely along the path toward inner peace, creativity, boundless energy and happiness in our daily life.

Now we'd like to consider adding several new features to our spinal breathing that will help improve the effectiveness of the practice. Consider these to be optional, to be taken on or not as you see fit. Some of them have been covered in earlier lessons. But now we'd like to present them together for clarity. To an extent, this will be a review of methods covered in the early lessons on spinal breathing, but perhaps better organized here.

While basic spinal breathing as we present it in the AYP approach is quite simple and effective, a few other things can be done to enhance its influence in the nervous system. That is true of pranayama in general, so it is possible to find a lot of complexity in the many schools of pranayama. Here we will try and keep it simple. At the same time, we will not ignore some means that can be applied to enhance the effectiveness of our practice. We are always open to that, as long as we do not find ourselves running off on tangents that can dilute our practice.

Here we will look at four additional features that can be incorporated into our spinal breathing practice. There is still more that can be added to our spinal breathing routine as we advance, and these methods can be found in previous AYP writings covering mudras, bandhas and related topics. Adding the following four features will be more than enough to bring our spinal breathing practice up to near industrial strength. Don't take these on all at once. Once you are comfortable with basic spinal breathing, try one, find stability with it in your daily practice routine, and then add on another, if you are so inclined, and so on. It could be days, weeks or months between additions. Never is okay too. It is up to you. If it ever seems like too much, then just back off and stay at your comfortable level of practice, knowing that with slow deep breathing while tracing the spinal nerve, you have the essentials of the practice well in hand. Everything after that is the icing on the cake.

### *Full Yogic Breathing*

In some schools of pranayama, you don't get to learn how to do any pranayama until you learn how to breathe ... yogically, that is. That is a little unfair. After all, everyone knows how to breathe. If we did not, we would not be here, would we? So, for the sake of making immediate progress we jump right into spinal breathing pranayama at the beginning, no questions asked. If you can breathe and visualize (or feel) a bit, you are in. That is almost everyone, yes?

Once you are in, we can suggest full yogic breathing, so you can get the most out of your spinal breathing pranayama. What is full yogic breathing?

Put simply, it is healthy breathing. Not only that, it is breathing that goes up the body on inhalation, and then back down the body on exhalation, so it fits right in with spinal breathing pranayama. Let's describe it.

Due to the hurried nature of our lives and, sometimes, clothing restrictions, we often tend to be *chest breathers*, meaning that we do most of our breathing in the chest. Full yogic breathing begins lower than that, in the abdomen. Everyone has heard of *belly breathing*, yes? Yogic breathing begins there. When we inhale, we start in the abdomen. This is using the diaphragm to pull down on the lung cavity, expanding it to draw in air. As we do this, the belly goes out – hence the phrase, *belly breathing*. This is natural inhalation, and it is how we used to breathe as babies before we encountered the pressures of the external world.

To continue the full yogic breath, once the diaphragm has reached its comfortable limit in expanding and filling the lungs, we expand the chest cavity as we normally do in chest breathing. We began with the abdomen. Now we expand the chest to bring in more air. Once we have reached a comfortable limit with that, then, finally, we do a slight lift of the collar bones to fill the last small space in the top of our lungs with air. And all of that, going from abdomen, through the chest to the collar bones, is the inhalation stage of a full yogic breath.

Exhalation is a simple reversal of what has just been described. First we let go with the collar bones. Then we let the chest go to expel air. And finally, we let the diaphragm go up, enabling the lungs to move back to their minimum capacity. And then it begins again with the next inhalation.

With some practice, the entire full yogic breath can be done smoothly without effort, with one fluid motion on inhalation and another fluid motion on exhalation. It is easy to make a habit of it in our spinal breathing practice. It enables us to process more air, and this improves the efficiency of spinal breathing overall. Full yogic breathing will become something we do not even think about in spinal breathing, and our attention will be tracing the spinal nerve just as we have discussed already.

As mentioned, full yogic breathing is also healthy breathing and can bring us practical benefits in daily life. Not that we would go around consciously doing it all day long. That would not be very practical. But we do find that, as we develop the habit of full yogic breathing in our spinal breathing, over time, the habit of full yogic breathing will also be showing up automatically in our daily life without even thinking about it. This, in fact, is a fundamental principle in all yoga practice. We expand our inner presence and relaxation in spinal breathing, and, over time, we find more and more of that inner expansion and relaxation in daily life. The same is true of doing deep meditation (more inner silence in life), yoga postures (more flexibility in life) and other yoga practices on a daily basis. It all ends up enhancing our life outside the practices. This is the real benefit of doing yoga practices, and the primary reason for doing them. Using full yogic breathing in spinal breathing pranayama is part of this, and it will effortlessly migrate from our daily practice into our daily life as well, bringing more relaxation and better health along with it.

### *Opening on Inhalation – Restricting on Exhalation*

When we engage in spinal breathing, it is possible to regulate the passage of air through our throat in a way that enhances the process. This is done by opening the throat wider than usual during inhalation, and by restricting it using the epiglottis during exhalation. In doing so, we can achieve better control of the air flow, particularly during exhalation, and enhance the *restraint* aspect of our pranayama. Recall that pranayama means restraint of prana (breath).

As we are inhaling slowly and deeply, while tracing the spinal nerve upward from root to brow with our attention, we can let our throat relax and become larger than usual in the back. This is not an extreme thing – only a favoring of a wide open throat in the back. This produces a beneficial stimulating effect in the area behind the throat area in the upper spine and medulla oblongata (brain stem). It is only done during inhalation.

As we are exhaling slowly, while tracing the spinal nerve downward from brow to root with our attention, we can gently restrict the outward flow of air from our lungs by partially closing the epiglottis, the flap located at the base of our tongue. The epiglottis is used for closing the windpipe when we swallow, and for closing the windpipe when naturally holding our breath. When exhaling in spinal breathing, we close the epiglottis in a way that produces a slight hissing sound deep in our throat, and this is what regulates the exit of air from our lungs. This restriction enables us to extend our exhalation in time (it is okay for exhalation to take longer than inhalation), and also places some positive pressure in the lungs during exhalation, which stimulates the purifying and opening effects of our spinal breathing pranayama.

We do not use this sort of restriction during inhalation for two reasons: First, we want to take advantage of the benefit of the throat opening aspect of practice during inhalation and the stimulation of the brain stem it provides. And, second, restricting the air flow with the epiglottis during inhalation creates negative pressure in the lungs, which is not healthy for the lungs if done over an extended period of time in practices.

So, with these two maneuvers in the throat, which will smooth out to become one process as our practice becomes automatic, we are accomplishing several additional functions during spinal breathing which help in the regulation of the practice and enhance its results significantly.

#### *A Gentle Lifting of the Eyes (Sambhavi Mudra)*

In our daily practice, we are doing spinal breathing with our eyes closed, easily tracing the spinal nerve up and down as we breathe slowly and deeply in and out. The spinal nerve, which we are stimulating, is the central highway in the nervous system. By enlivening the spinal nerve with the combination of attention moving up and down, and the restraint of breath, we are stimulating the entire nervous system in a way that is both energizing and relaxing on a very deep level. As we advance in this through our daily practice over time, a gradual awakening will occur which we call *ecstatic conductivity*. This is first noticed as a pleasant sensation that seems instantly connected throughout the body. As it develops, what we find is that this rising experience of ecstatic conductivity is stimulated and regulated from the brain, which does, in fact, comprise the upper end of the spinal nerve. Of particular importance is the region from the point between the eyebrows going back behind it to the center of the brain. This area of the neurobiology in the brain has been called the *third eye*. It is stimulated as part of our normal spinal breathing. To enhance our spinal breathing, some additional stimulation can be provided in this area by developing the habit of a gentle lift of the eyes during spinal breathing. This is not anything extreme or heroic – only a slight lifting of the eyes. As we do this, we can also place a very slight furrowing intention on the center of the brow. Not enough to physically furrow the center of the brow. Only enough to feel some physical intention there. This gentle lifting of the eyes, combined with the slight furrowing intention, places extra stimulation in the area just described as the third eye – the upper end of the spinal nerve.

If you have followed these lessons since the beginning (hopefully), you will recognize this as sambhavi mudra, which was originally covered in Lesson 56.

It is important to note that this is a physical addition to spinal breathing, not a mental addition. As soon as the gentle lifting of the eyes with the slight furrowing becomes habit, we will be giving it no attention at all. It will just be a physical habit, and a slight one at that. Our attention is always for favoring the tracing of the spinal nerve during spinal breathing pranayama. Anything else we may be doing in spinal breathing is only given enough attention to cultivate it to become a physical habit. Then we do not think about it anymore. This goes for our full yogic breathing, opening and restricting in the throat, and the gentle lifting of the eyes. None of these are mental techniques, only a physical habit we are developing to provide particular effects while we are doing spinal breathing. Ultimately, when all of the physical aspects of spinal breathing have become automatic habits, then the only mental procedure we are doing in spinal breathing is the easy tracing of the spinal nerve up and down. This is very important.

As we advance in our practices, and if we are so inclined, there are additional physical means (mudras and bandhas) that can be added to our spinal breathing. See the first volume for a step-by-step approach for incorporating mudras and bandhas into our daily practice routine.

If we ever find ourselves in the position of being continually distracted from tracing the spinal nerve up and down during spinal breathing, then we may be trying to add too many elements on at one time. If we are trying to develop full yogic breathing, opening and restricting in the throat, adding the eye lift and other elements into our spinal breathing all at the same time, then it can become difficult to practice effectively. Better to take on each element one at a time letting each become a habit not requiring attention before taking on another. In this way we can gradually build up our spinal breathing practice without putting undue strain on the overall practice.

### *Cool and Warm Currents*

There is a natural tendency in spinal breathing for ascending energy to be cool and descending energy to be warm. When we are able to perceive this and incorporate it into the tracing of the spinal nerve with our attention, it can help us in perceiving the spinal nerve and in more effectively purifying and opening our neurobiology throughout the body.

There is a method we can use for enhancing this process of noticing the cool and warm currents in our spinal breathing.

If we purse our lips and inhale, we can notice the coolness of the air passing through them on the way into our throat and lungs. If we purse our lips and exhale, we can feel the warmth of the air passing out from our lungs through our throat and lips. Now if we do this without pursed lips, we can still notice the coolness and warmth of the air passing into and out of our lungs, yes? We can also notice this coolness and warmth if we close our mouth and breathe through our nose, can't we? Can you feel it now?

This is what we use in spinal breathing. It is a simple transference of sensation (coolness and warmth) felt in the throat and lungs to the path of our attention in spinal breathing – up and down the spinal nerve. It can be part of tracing the breathing up and down the spinal nerve. In addition to taking the breath along with us up and down the spinal nerve, we can also take the sensations of coolness and warmth with us on that journey to inner space. In doing so, we can enhance the effectiveness of our spinal breathing practice.

In time, this becomes a habit, just like the other additional features we have been discussing here. As always, the attention will be traversing the spinal nerve during our spinal breathing. The additional features, if added on prudently, step-by-step, will enhance the effectiveness of our practice.

Always take your time in developing new aspects of practice, whether it be adding on spinal breathing in front of deep meditation, or adding deep meditation after spinal breathing. Always be sure you are stable and comfortable in one practice before attempting to add on another. The same goes for enhancing one of our practices with additional features. If we try and take on too much at once, a simple practice like spinal breathing can quickly become unwieldy. And then we may lose our motivation to practice, which is not doing ourselves a service. So let's always pace the development of our practices to be as smooth and comfortable as possible, knowing that each new element we add will take some adjustment before it becomes an easy habit. If we do this, then there will be no limit to how far we can go with spinal breathing pranayama, or to how deep we can go on our journey to the ecstatic realms of inner space.

## Lesson 240 – Regarding One’s Highest Ideal

**Q:** Should one practice yoga only if the desire is for enlightenment? Enlightenment is definitely a difficult thing to understand for a layman in worldly life. Maybe more understanding about it and the desire to achieve it will develop as the yoga practices go on. But anyone will want to live a life with a healthy body and peaceful mind. Can they practice yoga if they have no desire of getting “enlightened?”

A student will want to overcome the pressures of daily commitments successfully and progress in his academics, and his immediate concern is not enlightenment – he may not even be aware that such a thing exists. Can’t he use yoga just to help him develop a sound body and mind?

Can one have their highest ideal as a happy life with healthy body and peaceful mind, instead of enlightenment? Can one practice yoga just for this, setting it as their highest ideal, not resisting the devotion for enlightenment though, if and when it develops?

**A:** Yes, any reason (ideal) for doing practices is a good reason. The result will be the same – purification and opening of the nervous system, and there are many practical benefits that come from that. All that is necessary is a desire to advance toward something we believe yoga can help with. Then daily practices can be sustained.

With practices such as deep meditation and spinal breathing pranayama, the nervous system opens to the light within, and the desires gradually become colored by that. Then bhakti evolves naturally toward a more divine longing. It is not something we can invent. It happens as we become a purer vehicle for the bliss that resides within us.

We start where we are, with whatever our aspirations may be, and go from there. As you point out, there are plenty of reasons to do yoga besides an ultimate objective of enlightenment. Saints, in fact, don’t aim for enlightenment at all. They constantly crave union with their Divine Beloved! The student craves a diploma, and the rest of us crave good health and success in our daily endeavors. All of these are good reasons to do yoga practices.

Everyone has their own ideal that can be used as inspiration for yoga. As the ideal is fulfilled, enlightenment is the by-product. We don’t even have to know what enlightenment is. With practices, it will come – more and more inner peace, creativity and happiness.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 241 – Smoothing Out Pranayama

**Q:** I wanted to ask your advice on meditation. I quit it a long time ago and I haven't been able to get a handle on it since then. Maybe I haven't been putting in enough effort. None the less, I have a question for you. I hope you have the time to answer.

I try breathing exercises where I breathe in and out slowly and deeply. After I am done I feel good and my breathing feels more free and deep but while I do the breathing exercises I have a hard time with it because of the energy I feel. I feel as if energy is building up around my heart and filling up my head and my mind. The feeling gets a little too much because I don't know what to do with this energy, how to channel it. You probably have experienced this and you probably have had people ask you about this. Can you give me any feedback and advice on this?

**A:** The slow deep breathing is very good pranayama. To smooth out the energy flow you just need to trace the spinal nerve between brow and perineum with your attention – up on the in-breath and down on the out-breath. Check the lesson series beginning at #39 for details. This procedure (spinal breathing) will balance the energies in your main nerve (sushumna) and thereby greatly reduce the tendency for jam-ups in the chest, head, and elsewhere. Many have experienced this balancing effect from spinal breathing, including those who came to AYP with serious kundalini problems. So the benefits are well known...

I should add that pranayama is best done as a preparation for easy deep meditation, for reasons given in the just-mentioned lessons. Pranayama is one thing. Meditation is something else. One is not a substitute for the other. Both are needed for optimal spiritual progress.

The time commitment is not very big – only 20-30 minutes twice per day. If you can make it a steady habit like brushing teeth, bathing and eating, the benefits will accumulate naturally over time. That is all there is to it.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 243 – Meditation and Powers (Siddhis)

**Q:** I have been experimenting with mantras and I am a firm believer that there is something beyond science, which is an actual part of science but will not be looked into by the modern western scientist, as it is beyond them. Sound is a vibration and certain sounds and vibrations can effect our surroundings and environments in the way that we may will. I believe myself to be a spiritual scientist (Rishi) using the power of the mind at its limits.

Now, I have a few questions regarding siddhis and samyama. It is said that whatever a yogi meditates on, he feels “like he is falling into that ... or becoming one with it.” Now I have been meditating on a small flame between my eyebrows and have a weird sensation of falling into it and I stop existing and so does the flame. Can I ask what effects this will have on me? Will I take on the personality of the flame?

Also, do you think it is possible to manipulate matter and energy and transform something into nothing using just “will” and also the possibility of moving something from one place to another? In Swami Rama’s book, “Living with the Himalayan Masters,” he said it was possible and he was taught it, but stopped after making a promise to his Guru. What exercises or meditations must one do to experiment with such siddhis? Patanjali has not mentioned this type of siddhi in his sutras.

Hoping for some guidance.

**A:** The role of science is to enter new frontiers of knowledge and apply what is learned in practical ways. The infinite inner realm of humanity is the next big frontier for science – yoga science!

The full range of yoga reaches beyond mind into pure bliss consciousness. Mind is the small tail on the big dog of infinite divine silent awareness, our essence. You are finding this already with your meditation experiments. So yoga is not mainly about increasing mind-power in the world for miracles, etc., though this is a side-effect. Better not to get too hung up on the side-effects – the “scenery.”

The process you experienced with attention on the inner flame is the last three limbs of Patanjali’s eight limbs of yoga – attention going from focus on an object (dharana on the flame), expanding beyond it (dhyana/meditation) to empty awareness with no object at all (inner silence/samadhi). If this process is repeated systematically on a daily basis, over time, the functioning of the nervous system will be opened to higher experience of unending ecstatic bliss and outpouring divine love. And, yes, you will have the siddhis too – any that your illuminated life may need to serve your self in the form of everyone else. That is how it works.

As Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God within and all will be added to you.” First things first, yes?

As for meditating daily on the flame instead of mantra or other object, I can’t say what will be the exact path of opening in your nervous system. From the AYP lessons, you know that different vibrations open the nervous system in different ways – some more comfortable and progressive than others. We will do best to settle in with a proven object of meditation (such as a mantra) and stay with it for the long haul. Digging deep in one place with a good shovel is usually the best way to strike water, rather than making small holes everywhere with lots of different shovels.

Once you have daily meditation in place, with some inner silence coming up, you can add systematic daily samyama practice right after meditation, if you wish. The series of lessons starting at #149 covers this. This is the application of samyama aiming for much more than some worldly powers. Enlightenment! This is the purpose of samyama practice, and what Patanjali encourages us to use it for. Then you will have everything, and will be a seer – a rishi.

Your experience is very good. I wish you all success on your chosen spiritual path. It is in your hands. Carry on wisely, and enjoy!

The guru is in you.

**Note:** In the Additional Resources at the back of the book, there is a section on doing research on the Samyama Sutras of Patanjali.

## Lesson 244 – Going for a Smooth Start in Meditation and Pranayama

**Q1:** I have scanned the Internet for much information and a way to start my devotion to the *One*. Something inside me keeps telling me that I have much more to do than what I am doing in this Maya-covered world. I am still not able to fall into a routine for my meditation, although every day I am getting firmer and try to do the routine for as much time as I can be it 5 min or 15 min.

I am facing two very odd problems that I am hoping you can give me some clue about. Firstly, whenever I try to do meditation I cannot feel my perineum and secondly when I try to visualize my breath going up my spine I realize that I just sort of glide along my spine. More like my mind is just skimming through the spine and I can't concentrate on a slow movement along the spine. On the way down my vision remains only until the end of the spine and I cannot go down to the perineum, as I cannot feel it. Secondly whenever I sit for meditation, be it spinal breathing or just a normal Ham-Sa, or no mind meditation, my heart beat becomes very rapid. I can almost feel the pounding strong and regular in every part of my body. My legs, which might be in siddhasana or Padmasana, can feel the throbbing of the heart in them.

What could be wrong, or is this normal? I can not feel any energy at all and it makes me wonder if it's there or not, or maybe something is wrong with me. My devotion tells me that I have much to work on and this is the time, but my mind keeps asking me if all is right. Can you please guide me in this?

**A1:** It sounds like you are going through “clunky” beginning stages there with your practice.

The first thing to do is set aside the time twice-daily and commit to do your sitting practice for a few months so it can settle in. Then a regular habit will be easy to sustain.

Next, if you are following the AYP lessons, you should first do easy mantra meditation, not taking on cross-legged sitting, spinal breathing or anything else. Just meditation sitting in a comfortable position. And, for the record, we do not use “ham-sa” as mantra in the AYP system. We begin with “I AM” (AYAM), with enhancements available later on.

It sounds like you may be taking on too much at once. Just do deep meditation for a few weeks or months and see how that goes. Your pulse should settle down naturally as you do meditation as instructed, easily using the mantra to go to stillness of mind and body (the heart will become quiet too) – review the lesson series on meditation beginning at #13.

Once you have a steady routine of meditation going for some weeks (or months), then you can think about crossed legs. Then, when that is getting easy, you can add spinal breathing. One step at a time, you know. Rome was not built in a day. When you get to it in a few months, the spinal breathing will be easy also. No strain or judgment about it. Just up and down with the breath – it is not an exact thing. As the nervous system begins to be cleared out a bit the route will become very easy and smooth. No heavy concentration is necessary – intense concentration is an obstruction to natural spinal breathing. A lot of effort is not necessary. Nothing has to be “felt” in the body at any particular time. The attention just goes easily up and down with breath between brow and root, like that. It is not a monumental task. If we drift off, we just easily come back to it. This is covered in the lessons.

You can go step-by-step through all the practices like that. It will take months (at least) to assimilate each practice, so the whole thing will take a long time to get into. It is all there for you, but you have to go step-by-step, or it can be messy, like you are experiencing now.

Energy experiences are not a measurement criteria for the success of meditation or pranayama. In fact, they are usually a distraction. So it is suggested you forget about energy experiences for now – they will be distracting you soon enough, and then it becomes a matter of easily letting them go in favor of the practice we are doing. The truest measure of right meditation and pranayama is in how we feel afterward during our daily activities. If we feel refreshed with more inner stability, energy and creativity, then that indicates our practice is correct.

Whatever happens in sitting practices is not to be judged as right or wrong, worthy or unworthy. We just follow the easy procedure and that is right practice. In meditation, when we realize we are off, we just easily come back to the mantra. It is like that in all the practices.

Beating yourself up over it is not encouraged. This is not a fundamentalist system of yoga!

It is also good to commit to one kind of practice and do it daily for a while. If it is good, then maybe for a lifetime. Then we are digging our well in one place, instead of making small unproductive holes all over the place. With one deep well, we are sure to find water. For that reason, using only one kind of meditation is advised.

Your divine desire is very good, and it will take you far. Just be patient and take it one step at a time.

**Q2:** Thank you for answering my questions. So if I understand completely I should first practice just to sit still and fixate my mind on the pranava or OM and steady the mind. Once I can sit for periods of time with this then I would be ready for the next steps that involve spinal breathing.

“Yama (restraint), Niyama (observance), Asana (posture), Pranayama (regulation of breath), Pratyahara (withholding of senses), Dharana (fixed attention), Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (perfect concentration) are the eight means of attaining Yoga.”

This is what the Patanjali says about Yoga and I find all that you say in line with this. My mind can see this very clearly. Even in my normal life I am restrained, calm and easy. In the back of my mind I am constantly observing what I am doing like a silent witness. I also am great at understanding emotions and understand what Samskara and this materialistic world is about. Its like I am looking at it through a hazy film. I am distantly aware of everything and so when I try to be a no mind thinking I tend to fall into it immediately because I am not even thinking of most things since they have to do with material nature. I don't know if I am making much sense. All the time I am contemplating the Lord and, yet, in some way these material ties won't let go of me. I know it's time I look inside me in more depth and the solution will present itself. Thank you for guiding me along this. I feel at much ease and you said the things I had wanted to know and hear. It's just like the Guru in me spoke to me and now I know what to do. I hope I have enough time in this lifetime to make it across...

Om Tat Sat

**A2:** Yes, the suggestion is to take it easy, and one step at a time.

OM may not be the best mantra to use right now, as it can tear up the nervous system if prerequisite purification is not done. As mentioned, in AYP we start with “I AM” (AYAM) for

mantra, using it in the specific easy way discussed in the lessons – no intense concentration. Later on, OM is incorporated in a mantra enhancement.

Your inner silence is good. You just need to find a steady routine of practice and then you can build on it. If you have any more internal restlessness (fast pulse, etc.), check Lessons 160 and 200 for discussions on dealing with high sensitivity to meditation. We all have to learn “self-pacing” – how to regulate our practices in accordance with our experiences. You can find lots of lessons on “self-pacing” in the Topic Index.

Yes, it is your time, and you can move quickly with a good daily routine of practice. It is an honor to have you here.

The guru is in you.

**Note:** Also see Lessons 365-367 for a systematic approach for addressing sensitivity issues in deep meditation. Over time, we have gotten better at dealing with both under-sensitivity and over-sensitivity issues in the community of practitioners.

## Lesson 246 – Intelligence, Bhakti and Genius

**Q:** Is it really possible to increase the intelligence doing Yoga? What is the technique?

**A:** There is so much intelligence manifesting everywhere in nature. For the most part it is automatic. We can see complex tasks being performed constantly in the plant and animal kingdoms, not to mention the sustenance of our own complex human bodies. The intelligence inherent in all things seems infinite, limited only by the ability of an earthly plant or creature to manifest it. Some say that the earth itself is alive and oozing with intelligence.

If we take the point of view that intelligence is an infinite reservoir residing within all of creation, then the answer to your question is easy. Yoga opens our nervous system to what lies within us. Here in the lessons we call it inner silence, pure bliss consciousness, the witness, and many other things. It can be called infinite intelligence also – the very thing that animates all of life. So, can yoga increase intelligence? Theoretically it seems to be so. Not only that, experientially it seems to happen. Over the years, there have been numerous studies on meditation that demonstrate an increase in IQ. The Transcendental Meditation organization has done a lot of work in this kind of research, focused on how meditation can improve the quality of life.

But there is much more to this intelligence thing than simply increasing IQ. Intelligence is everywhere in everyone. But of what use is it if it is not applied to a useful purpose? Intelligence unapplied to a useful purpose is reduced to the level of parlor tricks – reciting the numbers in the phone book from memory, or being able to count cards at the blackjack table. We are designed for far more than that. What it takes is desire – focused desire, and this is the province of yoga also. Without the benefit of a high ideal and focused desire (bhakti) leading us to daily practice of effective yoga methods, we will not go far anyway, not far beyond the parlor tricks. So the desire for a higher purpose comes first. Then we can have it all – the infinite intelligence within us, and the fruit of bhakti combined with intelligence, which is genius. By surrendering to our higher purpose, we go to a new level that is beyond raw intelligence.

Thomas Edison said, “Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.”

This means that genius is more about relentless devotion to one’s ideal than about one’s inherent intelligence. Genius is about more than IQ. It is about constant devotion to our highest ideal.

I think few of us expect to be writing symphonies out of thin air like Mozart could. Or single-handedly deriving the next level of physics like Einstein did. Yet, each of us has within us the ability to be a genius in something – something that resonates deep in us. We each have a gift to share, and if we commit to that, we can do it. Our effort may not be seen and applauded by the world at large. It will not necessarily be on the evening news. But it will surely be seen by those we love and care for, and everyone on this earth will benefit greatly. Love, cultivated to its heights through daily yoga practices, and shared in everyday life, is genius. A very special kind of genius. It is the genius of enlightenment – the genius of God – pure intelligence openly shared as overflowing love. It is ours for the asking.

You know, a funny thing happened a few weeks ago. I opened a fortune cookie at dinner one night, and it made me weep. Here is what it said:

“Intelligence does what it can. Genius does what it must.”

Why would a simple saying like that make me weep? Perhaps it touched a nerve. Clearly intelligence alone isn't the prerequisite for finding happiness in this world. To be devoted to a high ideal is. That is the purpose of yoga – to open us to the highest purpose within us, to aid us in doing what we must.

So, yoga does much more than simply increase intelligence. It cultivates genius in us – intelligence applied relentlessly toward our highest purpose – ecstatic bliss and outpouring divine love...

With the methods of meditation, pranayama, and the other practices in these lessons, we can make the journey.

Thank you for your inspiring question. May your yoga carry you beyond intelligence to genius...

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 247 – Nausea

**Q:** I have been practicing now for just over two months and I am at the stage of adding Mulabandha and Sambhavi to my spinal breathing. Over the last week or so I have noticed a slight feeling of nausea during meditation, in some cases this has persisted for some time after. Is this normal? Or am I doing something wrong?

**A:** Queasy feelings during or after meditation are rare, but do happen sometimes. Usually it will pass after a few sessions. If it doesn't, then maybe back off on meditation time a bit until comfort returns. But first, back off mulabandha and sambhavi to see if they are the cause of the discomfort in meditation. If so, you may want to slow down with making those additions to your practice. If you do back off on meditation time, once you have found stability, you can creep the time back gradually, as desired. This is a simple application of self-pacing.

Of course, it could be a bug in your body too, in which case it will pass as your immune system deals with it. The procedure in sitting practices will be the same. We don't force our practices when there is excessive discomfort.

I wish you all success on your chosen spiritual path.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 248 – Culture, Samadhi and Snow

**Q:** At the face of it, AYP seems a very simple practice to reach the ultimate goal of human existence. Then I wonder why did the Indian seers bog it down in so many esoteric practices, tantra procedures, yantras, rituals, etc.

Also I was reading Raja Yoga by Swami Vivekananda in which he quotes Patanjali mentioning many levels of Samadhi, and talks about Prakritilayas (sadhakas who don't reach the ultimate samadhi).

Can you please throw some light on the above two things.

**A:** Very good questions. I think the add-ons occur as a result of cultural factors, and humankind's propensity to create institutions. Not that these things are bad. It just takes some extra vision to separate what will make a difference in practice and what will not. That is the whole idea behind AYP – sticking with the simplest, most powerful methods that actually do something to promote spiritual transformation in the human nervous system. It is pretty obvious that we are on to something here from all the feedback we have been getting from practitioners all over the world. I am very happy to be finding some enthusiastic company in what has become obvious – keeping it simple and effective works!

The general rise in consciousness around the world is bringing more clarity to the situation every day, so we owe much to the work of the many great sages who have come and shared the practical details of yoga in the West over the last century or so. The blend of their ancient knowledge with modern scientific approaches is making a huge difference.

Another thing that institutions often do is segment knowledge into pieces for “ownership” by that institution, and then expend great energy to preserve and protect that piece of the whole, to the exclusion of everything else. The result is often scattered, petrified knowledge, with little chance in that kind of institution for adjusting and integrating multiple sources of knowledge to fit changing times.

Science, on the other hand, constantly seeks to adjust and integrate knowledge into the most effective practical applications. Modern institutions that become devoted to that end will still preserve knowledge, but it will not be in their best interest to complicate or segment knowledge the way it has been done in the past. I believe that we are beginning a revolution in yoga that will compel institutions to integrate knowledge, rather than segment it. In this new age, institutions will survive only if they innovate, based on the rising spiritual desires of the people, by distilling and optimizing what has been learned before, rather than by further complicating and isolating segments of yogic knowledge. AYP is about this important shift in priority – one of the early shots fired in the new yoga science revolution.

On grades of samadhi, you know, the Eskimos have many words for snow. Why? Because they see so much of it, and have come to know its many grades of manifestation. Do all these different words for snow mean anything to a Hawaiian? Not much – not until the Hawaiian goes and lives with the Eskimos for a while. Then the words for snow begin to make sense. Samadhi is like that. When it becomes the common experience, then conversation about the different grades of samadhi begins to make sense. Until then, to study all that is an academic exercise. Does this promote

enlightenment? Not really. Well, maybe it can motivate one to do practices. That is the real value of intellectual knowledge – its ability to inspire action!

Having said that, there are certain traditions that rely on determining the level of samadhi one is experiencing to decide which style of meditation to do. For them, this is very important, and it is to be respected. In AYP we use one style of meditation that covers the full scope of mind from the surface to the silent depths, so making all the samadhi distinctions is not necessary for effective practice. They are “under the hood” as we drive the car of our nervous system along with the easy-to-use meditation controls. It is just the same as chakras, which have been discussed as being “under the hood” in the early lessons (see #47). When we have a simple, effective practice, delving too much into the inner workings can be a distraction.

So, in AYP we avoid going too far off into all those tempting tangents, whether they be intellectual tidbits or flashy experiences. We are interested in going deep into inner silence in meditation. Then we cultivate silence into dynamic manifestation throughout our nervous system with pranayama, samyama and many other means, until finally we see our *Self*, our inner silence, as being the essence of everything. Then we can appreciate all the grades of experience as manifestations of inner silence. And then we will be able to understand all those words for samadhi, and probably come up with a few of our own, because we will be living in it every day. It is much better to be cultivating our nervous system to live in samadhi than to be intellectualizing about it too much. That is the AYP approach.

Prakritilayas are yogis/yoginis who are distracted by experiences and don't finish their journey in this life, so it continues elsewhere. The fruit of yoga is not lost. There is evidence of this in seeing the many different levels of spiritual attainment (or lack of it) that people are born with. The important thing is to be doing what we can today to advance along our own road to enlightenment. When we arrive will be in this life, or somewhere further down the road. All we know is that we can do much to advance our progress here and now. And it should be done in such a way so as to be enjoyable. The journey can and should have the flavor of the destination in it – pervading peace and rising ecstatic bliss. Otherwise, why bother with it?

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 250 – Balancing Practices with Advancing Experiences

**Q:** I've been practicing Integral Yoga, off and on, for 35 years and your teachings have helped me tie up all those loose ends of how the various practices blend together and help in the rise of bliss consciousness. Especially on how to tie the Pranayama and Kundalini with deep meditation. Spinal breathing is a powerful exercise. I'm 51 and I'm disabled with neurological damage and I'm on my own as far as therapy goes. That's one of the reasons I started practicing yoga again. I gave the western doctors a chance and they shrugged. I get around physically all right. I just don't have the stamina or memory I used too. What this also means is, I have all the time to devote to my practice as I can handle.

I have been doing 1 1/2 hours of Hatha, followed by about a half hour of Kundalini/Pranayama exercises and then 30 minutes of meditating on samadhi. In the evening I just do a Kundalini warm up and then go right into my sitting. I also work my philosophy into my life, Karma Yoga, and do walking meditations, witness to people and read uplifting scriptures.

About two weeks ago I decided to take my sitting meditation past the half hour mark because my body was spontaneously coming out of trance after about 20 minutes and I wanted to break that compulsion. I loved it and I started meditating for a hour or more at a time. The silence became absolutely profound and my brain started giving up trying to interrupt me. I was getting so into the "Now" that I couldn't tell how long I was sitting once I got past the 30 minute mark. Then I had this experience: My whole consciousness, not just my focus, traveled down my spine and came out the bottom of my root chakra. I was trying not to put any words to the experience but I had a vision of these intertwined dancing figures unfolding towards me kaleidoscopically. Then I was in this field of wildly dancing Shiva's, then I gained some distance and I saw my whole root chakra lit up and covered with these waving cilia like things. (I think they were nerves radiating off the root chakra.) I was moving back up the sympathetic system and the whole root was lit with a yellow light with a blue aura around it. I slowly drifted back up my spine and as I entered the brain I could see my whole cerebral cortex lit up with the same light. It was quite awesome. I wasn't able to sleep at all that night but didn't feel that fatigued either.

I am making very good progress, I think, and I've backed off a bit because of a couple of problems. My sleep patterns have become completely erratic, my mind is so stimulated I don't sleep for more than an hour at a time. I go into the dreamless state and its like as soon as I start to dream I wake up. But if I get up and start moving around I still feel fatigued. It's like part of my mind is active and part wants to sleep. Breaking ingrained habits upsets the flesh. I get up for an hour then go back to sleep for an hour.

I was just going to accept the change in sleep patterns but then my crown chakra started to open. I've had it open before so I knew when I started feeling dizzy all day and I started to feel it tingle that I was overcharging myself. I've read your discussion on crown chakra and have had those Revelatory explosions before too. I've also been involved with what one could call, shamanistic ecstatic practices, and my nervous system is proving very sensitive to this process.

My question is mainly about pacing and the effect of meditation on sleep patterns though. I have friends that have lucid sleep and are aware of themselves sleeping and dreaming. Their awareness is a witness to them sleeping. How or when should someone lengthen the amount of time spent in samadhi? Is it too unsettling to the system to meditate for an hour one time and a

half hour the next? I feel consistency is preferable and have gone back to half hour sits. Should one expect to develop that lucid sleep?

I know I am on the right path, I've always felt that a balance between the ecstatic and ascetic was the best path. This system works extremely well for me and I can feel the rising ecstasy inside me. Part of me feels I should just sit until I attain nirvana, but the other 95% says, "You'll be pushing yourself too hard again."

Thank you for your teaching and advice. You are truly a blessing to us all. Ahimsa Om

**A:** Thank you for your kind note and sharing of your wonderful experiences of growing enlightenment. I'm very happy you have found the lessons to be helpful.

No matter how far along we are in yoga, we have to consider the principles of self-pacing. I always knew this was true for me. Since the AYP lessons and correspondences have been going on, it has become clear that self-pacing applies to everyone. Yoga practice is a balancing act between the desire/bhakti that drives us to do more practice and the ability of the nervous system to purify and acclimate to ever-increasing levels of energy. Since these lessons have been underway, practitioners at all levels of experience have confirmed this many times over. Prudent self-pacing is a necessity for everyone.

I certainly don't blame you for wanting to forge ahead. Challenging circumstances have a way of spurring us to new heights. If we have the time, we would like to do practices all day. But, contrary to the stereotype of the yogi meditating in his cave for months and years on end, it doesn't work quite like that. The nervous system needs to cycle between practices, activity and sleep to achieve the most efficient transformation to higher functioning. It is a lot like athletic conditioning. If we are a runner, we can't expect to improve our running ability if we run 24 hours a day, with no periods for rest and rejuvenation – integrating the effect of our workouts into our bodily functioning in a stable way. It is like that in yoga. If we are doing practices all the time, or even just a bit too much, the nervous system can get out of balance. The result will be too much energy running around inside, which can take a toll on sleep and other aspects of our life. Then our ecstatic bliss can get a bit frazzled. It will be time to slow down, as you have done.

But still, we can and should increase our practices if we are called to from within, if we have the time in our life to do it without shortchanging our responsibilities.

The best way to increase practices is in small steps – baby steps. With each new step we look to find a stable platform of practice that we can sustain over the long haul. Jumping back and forth between long and short practice routines is not usually conducive to long term progress. The nervous system likes a steady diet of whatever we are feeding it practice-wise, and it can get used to a very large diet of practices if we train it up gradually. The athlete analogy applies in this case as well.

So, if you are wanting to increase your time of meditation, try adding on 5 minutes at a time, and wait a week or more before stepping up again. The same goes for other practices. With each step, the best measure will be in how we feel in daily activity. If activity is smooth and radiant, well, that is just right. Give it a week or two to be sure you are stable, and then think about taking practice up another notch. If you go too far, it is not the end of the world. You can step back a step or two in practices and wait for things to settle down. In that way you can gradually find your maximum comfortable routine.

I should also add that in “retreat” mode it is possible to increase practices beyond our norm for days, weeks or months, and bring them back down when we are coming off retreat mode. In retreat mode we don’t increase our practice times in each sitting. Rather, we do more sittings during the day with light activity in-between. See Lessons 193 and 387 for more on this.

Samadhi is something we are gradually cultivating as a full-time experience. It is promoted primarily by meditation and samyama, and secondarily by pranayama and other methods. As inner silence (samadhi) comes up, we become more a silent witness to our other three states of consciousness – waking state, dream sleep state and deep sleep state. It happens as our nervous system becomes more purified and we find our “self” to be inner silence present at all times. Then the “lucid sleep” you mention becomes a normal part of life. It is also called “yoga nidra.” In the early stages, witnessing during sleep might feel like sleeplessness, because we are always awake (aware) inside. Too much energy running around in the head from overdoing practices, or doing them too close to bedtime, can also feel like lucid sleep. The difference between witnessing sleep and too much energy in sleep will be felt in daily activity. With witnessing, we will feel refreshed during the day. With too much energy running around, we will feel a bit tired and frazzled, even as the energy keeps going on – time to ease up on the gas pedal in that case. Of course, it is possible to have a mixture of inner silence and energy excess during sleep also. Regardless of the reason, if we are getting behind on our rest due to our yoga, self-pacing in practices should be applied.

The witnessing experience will come up naturally with daily practices over time, and there is not much more to do about it in the AYP approach. Some traditions focus on developing lucid (witnessing in) sleep. In AYP we just let it come up naturally over time as part of the overall rise of inner silence. Then we have it all the time, and it is no big deal. It is the first stage of enlightenment. See Lessons 35 and 85 for a review of enlightenment milestones.

These are some of the fine points on dealing with advanced experiences of inner silence and ecstatic bliss. When it comes to optimizing our practices, it boils down to good self-pacing whether it is “day 1” of our practices, or “day 10,001.” That is how we keep going forward along the road to enlightenment. Our nervous system is the car, the methods of yoga are the easy-to-use controls, and we are the driver.

An unmistakable indication of our rising enlightenment is when we get up from practices and forget about our luminous inner experiences altogether because we are too busy helping others. That is when the energy is pouring out from us in the form of pure divine love. Then, for us, all the world is illuminated with ecstatic bliss, and we know ourselves and everyone to be *That*. Then the journey we are on as an individual has become the same journey humankind is on, and it is about love, love, love! That is coming into unity, the third stage of enlightenment.

It is a great honor to have you here. I wish you continuing success on your chosen spiritual path.

The guru is in you.

**Note:** Lessons like this one are responding to experience questions coming from practitioners who are using other approaches to spiritual practice. In such cases, we can see the generic nature of the symptoms of overdoing, and that the principles of self-pacing will always apply, no matter what

practices are in use. But we cannot verify the overall effectiveness of variations in practice from the AYP approach that are discussed. See Lesson 384 for more discussion on this.

Also, more lessons in this volume on “enlightenment milestones” can be found by checking the Topic Index. There is considerable refinement in discussions on the enlightenment process in the later lessons, particularly as it relates to self-inquiry and the realization of unity/non-duality.

## Lesson 251 – Visions and Nodding off in Meditation

**Q:** It's the 50th day since I started meditation practice, strictly following all the guidelines as explained in the lessons (#13 onward). Now I am getting lesser and lesser thoughts and can easily go back to my meditation state if any thoughts come. Many times, I get a scene of its own on my mental screen (Believe me, I do not create this mental visualization at all! ) without any effort from my side while in meditation. These scenes may be related to past events, or unknown to me, and I start participating in the scene (I can even hear the character's speech or talk!) whatever it may be, and my head falls of its own from vertical position. Usually I get this type of synchronizing to some events before I get a normal sleep. However, in this case I realize soon and get back to my business of meditation, otherwise I may fall asleep (afraid). I request your guidance please.

**A:** Sounds like you are settling in with your meditation very well. It is okay to nod off if that is what your nervous system needs. No need to be concerned about it. It is a normal part of the cycle of purification that happens over time, as are the various visions that occur. We treat them all just the same, easing back to the mantra when we realize we have been off somewhere. If sleep happens to come, we don't fight it. It is okay.

If you look up "sleep" in the Topic Index, you will find several lessons linked on this subject. Take a look, and you will find that your experience is normal, and part of the journey to enlightenment. If it happens, it happens. When we become aware we have drifted off the mantra into sleep, or anything else, we just easily come back to it. No strain, no hanging on, and no fear about it. Just easy management of our awareness of the mantra in relation to experiences like that. Every part of the experience is part of the meditation process, and we include all of it in our time measurement of meditation – 20 minutes, or whatever period we are using in our twice-daily sittings. Over time, the various manifestations of purification (drowsiness, visions, sensations) will change as inner obstructions dissolve, and permanent inner silence will be coming up. It is the "screen" of silent awareness (witness) you noticed. The witness will be there increasingly in daily activity too. It is a natural result of deep meditation.

You are doing just right. Carry on ... I wish you continuing success on your chosen spiritual path.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 252 – Self-Pacing, Surrender and Enlightenment

**Q:** As regards the self-pacing of Yoga and Meditation practices, please clarify if there is any limit regarding the pacing of the practices. Is it physical or mental limitations, or restricted by the past “Karmas?”

Is it not possible to get the liberation within one’s present life? Because Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that any amount of sin is pardonable if one is surrendered to Him. What exactly is total surrender to God? Please explain.

**A:** In AYP we look at yoga from the point of view of the nervous system being purified and opened. The condition of the neurobiology is related to mind, body and karma. All of these are involved. Yoga helps the nervous system to purify and open in a natural way, which it wants to do. Then karma (samskara – latent impressions) is dissolved and the quality of mind and body are improved at the same time. It is all tied together like that – all are aspects of the same thing, the condition of our nervous system.

Self-pacing in practices is an important part of this, because each person has a unique capacity for purification. Self-pacing is for determining how much practice is enough, and how much is too much. So we find our own balance in practices with self-pacing. Very important, and it is discussed in the AYP lessons a lot. The limits have to do with our capacity to “conduct” divine energy. The more the obstructions are removed in our nervous system, the more we can conduct divine energy. When the energy moving inside becomes ecstatic, we call it “ecstatic conductivity.” That is the safe and enjoyable rise of kundalini. It is a gradual process of inner cleansing, leading to steadily more inner realization, ecstatic bliss and divine love pouring out. That is what yoga is for.

The concept of “sin” is a human invention, and often used by organized religion to subjugate followers. See Lesson 132 on that. I am not for the concept of sin, which can hold people back from pursuing their divine destiny. Obstructions can be removed in the nervous system, and, yes, it can all be done in one lifetime. Even if not, huge progress can be accomplished with daily yoga practices, so the next life will be much closer to enlightenment than this one (see Lesson 74). It is up to each person. In the Gita, Krishna says even a little yoga removes many lifetimes of karma. It is true. If we open the door of our nervous system just a little with a few months of daily deep meditation, the divine light will come streaming in. It is definitely worth doing. In the Gita, Krishna encourages us to get on with it, yes? Surrendering to Him (or whoever/whatever our chosen ideal is) is to undertake the daily disciplines of yoga. Then our heart overflows more each day with love and surrender to God in and around us.

Total surrender to God is to become the divine, which is our essential nature. It is a gradual development. It does not happen in one day. It goes by degrees. First we surrender to the ideal of becoming more – maybe just to the question, “Who am I, and why am I here?” With this thread of surrender we can be inspired to begin daily practice of meditation. Then, with some inner silence coming up, we can surrender to adding pranayama. Then this can lead to other practices, etc. At some point the divine ecstasy rises in us, and then we become sold out to the ecstatic energies visibly transforming us from within. Total surrender comes step-by-step with our advancing experiences. To have advancing experiences we need to be doing daily practices. So surrender and daily practice go hand in hand. This is why desire becoming devotion to an ideal is discussed from

the beginning in the AYP lessons. We cultivate direct experience every step along the way, and surrender comes along with it through the connectedness of yoga. See Lesson 149 on how the different aspects of yoga connect through our nervous system. Eventually our experience rises to the level of unshakable inner silence, ecstatic bliss and outpouring divine love. By then we have become that which we have been surrendering to. Total surrender is enlightenment. It is immutable, beyond all affirmations and strategies of the mind. Total surrender is a heart constantly overflowing with divine love.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 253\* – Spiritual Study and the Rise of Yoga in the West

The urge to study spiritual literature is built into us all. Once we begin daily deep meditation, this urge tends to increase, sometimes dramatically. Why is this?

It gets back to what we have been experiencing and discussing all along in the AYP lessons. Just a little purification and opening in our nervous system releases a stream of divine light from within us. As soon as this happens, we begin to feel the connectedness of yoga. Suddenly, we become more aware. If we have been meditating, we find more desire to read scriptures and spiritual books. We want to know more. Then we want to take on more practices: spinal breathing pranayama, asanas, mudras, bandhas, samyama, and so on.

The rise of the desire to study is found in the second limb of yoga, the *niyamas*. You will recall from Lesson 149 that we rely mainly on meditation, pranayama and other practices near the root of the eight-limbed tree of yoga to stimulate the *yamas* (restraints) and *niyamas* (observances). These are the codes of conduct that we find in all religions. Spiritual study is “*svadhyaya*,” one of the five *niyamas*. Spiritual study is actually study of the *Self*, our divine *Self*, which is the real meaning of the word *svadhyaya*. The higher we go in purification and opening of our nervous system, the more we see scriptures as an extension of the knowledge bubbling up within us. We identify with spiritual writings more and more because they are a mirror to us. In the end, we don’t need any books at all. We become “the book,” and then we are reading the divine knowledge of our divine *Self* directly all the time, within and all around us. Until we reach that stage, books made of paper (and digital, these days) come in very handy. So thank goodness great sages and teachers over the centuries took the time to write down their experiences and methods.

As part of the overall AYP effort, a book list has been compiled, based on reading over four decades here. The list ended up being about 500 titles, which is more than can be included in this volume. It can be found on the AYP website, linked from the lesson corresponding to this one (#253), or from the website Links Section.

As it says in the introduction to the book list on the website, this is not a recommended reading list. Reading 500 books is not a prerequisite for enlightenment. With direct teachings, inspired daily practice, and some good common sense, it can be done with very few books. But we all have different needs and appetites for reading, so it was decided to create a broad list that has something on it for just about everyone. The book list is a place you can go and browse for inspiring and useful information relating to your chosen path. Links are provided on the book list to locations on the Internet where you can find further information on specific titles listed, and on related ones. So, the book list, with its many links, is a spiritual library of sorts – a broad resource. The list itself is not all-inclusive, and is not intended to be. It is only a few drops in the bucket of the total of spiritual literature out there. If you use the book list links, you can find hundreds more titles. The AYP book list can be a starting point for new discoveries in spiritual reading, if that is what you are being called to on your path. And if you are not, then just keep up your daily practices. As mentioned, ultimately, you are “the book.”

### Yoga in the West

There is another benefit to be found in reviewing the book list. Because it is a record of English translations and writings on Eastern philosophy and spiritual methods, it draws a sketch for us of how yoga has risen in the West over the past 150 years, or so. It is fascinating how it happened.

This history was touched on back in Lesson 93, “Changing Times.” Now let’s fill in more details, naming some titles from the book list as references.

Back in the mid-1800s, India was under colonial rule by the British Empire. This is where the migration of yoga westward began. English translations of the Bhagavad Gita, a few key Upanishads and other scriptures found their way into the hands of Western thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and others. While yoga practices were not part of that transmission, these intellectuals were deeply affected philosophically. The Eastern writings played a key role in the rise of “Transcendentalism” in New England during that time. It became clear to them that there was something beyond the reach of the senses that is the source of our external world. The Transcendentalists resolved to live from that level of “the oversoul,” as Emerson called it. He was talking about pure bliss consciousness, the animator of all existence. From their point of view, the call was for a simpler, more ethical life, lived closer to nature, and this is reflected in the inspired writings of that period.

Around 1875, a group was formed in New York City called the “Theosophical Society,” devoted to unraveling the mysteries of the occult. Back in those days, the word “occult” meant simply what could not be seen with the outer senses. Seances and the supernatural were all the rage in those days, and Theosophy capitalized on that popular interest and took it far beyond. Founded by Helena Blavatsky and William Judge, and carried forward by Annie Besant after the turn of the century, the Theosophical Society took the lead in opening up the doorway to Eastern philosophy. They excelled in providing glimpses of the inner life, inner worlds, the evolution of consciousness, and the divine possibilities of humanity through the writings of Blavatsky, Judge, Besant, Charles Leadbeater, Arthur Powell and others.

More importantly, the Theosophical Society soon set up its headquarters near Madras, India and established contacts with advanced yogis who advised them through direct meetings and letters. So, the Theosophical Society became a pipeline of yogic knowledge to the West early on, mainly through its writings, and has continued in that role through the publication of hundreds of books since the late 1800s. Many of these books are direct translations of Indian scriptures. Even so, the Theosophical Society has rarely ventured beyond the purely philosophical, and never did lead an effective expansion of Western awareness from philosophy/theory to direct participation in the processes of human spiritual transformation through organized systems of yoga practice. This was done by others.

The Theosophical Society was also responsible for finding and attempting to elevate J. Krishnamurti to the status of a “world teacher,” though eventually he refused both the sponsorship and title, going on to lecture and write from a base in the USA from the 1920s until his death in the 1980s. His books are numerous, with most being compiled from his lectures. His denial of guruship included a denial of all structured practice, which led to him sometimes being labeled as the “do nothing” guru (see Lesson 84). Nevertheless, his influence in the West has been huge. He could be regarded to be the first non-duality (advaita-vedanta) teacher to come to the West, though he no doubt would have denied that distinction also.

Meanwhile, advanced yogis in India connected with their British occupiers in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Notable among them was a colonial magistrate, Sir John Woodroffe, who became deeply involved in the then obscure cult of tantra, and wrote about a dozen books on its philosophy and practices under the pen-name, “Arthur Avalon.” Woodroffe’s books are so lucid and thorough that they have inspired a revival of tantra in India. His crowning achievement was “The Serpent

Power” in 1919, which, more than any other English language book from that era, details the methods of yoga, tantra and kundalini awakening. It is still a useful resource for yogis and yoginis today, both East and West.

While some good initial writings were appearing both before and after the dawn of the 20th century, yoga needed real yogis coming to the West in order to take firm root. And so they came...

Ramakrishna was one of the greatest sages of late 1800s India. He demonstrated how a human being can achieve enlightenment by both Eastern and Western methods. He is said to be one of the greatest bhakti yogis ever. From his intense devotion to the divine, all the rest of yoga sprung out of him like a fountain. Several years after Ramakrishna’s death in 1886, his leading disciple, Swami Vivekananda, came to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He was an instant sensation, and spent the next seven years traveling and speaking throughout the USA and Europe. As a result of Vivekananda’s work, a worldwide organization sprung up called the “Vedanta Society,” and one called the “Ramakrishna Order” in India. But Vivekananda did not live to see the growth of these. He passed on in 1902. Decades later, his essays and lectures were published in a series of popular books on the main branches of yoga – karma, bhakti, jnana and raja. Besides being a worldwide religious organization with facilities and practitioners, the Vedanta Society has also served a similar role as the Theosophical Society in publishing Eastern literature. It has done so with more authority, being founded by disciples of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Some famous books from Vedanta include the writings of Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood in the 1940s and 1950s on the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Shankara, Pantanjali’s Yoga Sutras, Jesus and others. But, like the Theosophical Society, the Vedanta Society has done little to bring actual yoga practices to the average Westerner. This fell to others who were willing to part the veil of secrecy that has surrounded the knowledge of yoga practices for centuries.

Sir John Woodroffe did a lot to help open things up with his “Serpent Power” in 1919. There was some writing on direct yoga practices in the West even before that. In the first decade of the 20th century, a series of books were published under the name “Yogi Ramacharaka.” This was a collaboration between an American, William Atkinson, and Baba Bharata, a yogi who also spoke at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The background on Baba Bharata is fuzzy. It is believed he was a disciple of an Indian Yogi Ramacharaka who lived in South Africa. At any rate, the books were written and contain more detail on yoga practices than had been seen in the West before (Vivekananda’s books were not published until decades later). Ramacharaka’s book called “Science of Breath” is especially significant. It is a good primer on pranayama, even by today’s standards. His “Fourteen Lessons in Yoga Philosophy,” “Advance Course in Yoga Philosophy” and other books, are equally inspiring.

So, around 1900 we had two yogis making a significant impact in America, and Vivekananda went to Europe also. In Europe, Eastern wisdom had an influence on the unique intellect-based styles of several noted European spiritual teachers of the early 20th century, including Rudolf Steiner (a former Theosophist), GI Gurdjieff and PD Ouspensky. Later on, the Indian-style yoga systems would come to Europe from both the USA and India.

In 1920 the West welcomed its first long-term yoga master in the form of Paramahansa Yogananda, of the Kriya Yoga lineage. He resided in Los Angeles for over 30 years until his death in 1952. He traveled extensively throughout the USA and Europe, initiating disciples everywhere in the methods of Kriya Yoga. Yogananda was a powerful spiritual personality and profoundly

influenced the thousands he met. Through his popular book, “Autobiography of a Yogi,” published in 1946, he has continued to open the lives of millions to the realms of their inner spirit.

In 1958 the West saw the arrival of another great yogi when Maharishi Mahesh Yogi landed in Los Angeles. Ten years later, after the Beatles and other Western celebrities had joined him, the Maharishi’s teaching of Transcendental Meditation became a worldwide phenomenon. The Maharishi has been responsible for millions finding their way to inner silence on a daily basis. He has founded teaching centers, universities, and numerous other organizations and institutions worldwide, all based on the simplicity and power of pure bliss consciousness, the silent source within us all. In the 1980s, the Maharishi launched Ayurveda (the yoga-based Indian system of medicine) in the West, which has had a huge impact on millions more. Deepak Chopra and others who are working to bring Ayurveda and yogic methods into the mainstream of Western society found their beginnings with the Maharishi. His landmark book, “The Science of Being and Art of Living,” published in 1963, is a classic.

Thanks to the work of “the big three,” Vivekananda, Yogananda and the Maharishi, the West has experienced a virtual explosion of yoga since the 1960s. Certainly there were other teachers and threads of yogic knowledge before then, and hundreds have appeared since the 1960s as more and more Indian yogis and teachers have written books in English and/or come to the West. It is not possible to cover them all in this brief history. However, we should mention a few who, through their writings, have played important roles in helping make the knowledge of yoga methods more open to aspiring practitioners:

Swami Satyananda – A leading disciple of the great Swami Sivananda of India, and founder of the Bihar School of Yoga. His books are among the most revealing on practices in yoga, tantra, kriya and kundalini. His most famous one is “Kundalini Tantra,” published in 1984.

Swami Rama – A former Shankaracharya (a high religious post in India), and something of a maverick, he came to the USA in 1971 and demonstrated “super-normal” abilities under scientific conditions. He then founded the Himalayan Institute in Pennsylvania, taught many students, and wrote some of the best books on yoga anyone has ever seen, making a huge contribution to the literature. A couple of favorites are his spiritual autobiography, “Living with the Himalayan Masters,” and his classic on kundalini/tantra yoga, “Path of Fire and Light.” Swami Rama also translated several Upanishads, expounding the essence of Vedanta, the non-dual philosophy of India.

Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj – Two Advaita-Vedanta giants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not associated with each other. While not traveling from India, these two have had a major influence on western thinking, and the practice of “self-inquiry” on the non-dual nature of existence. Ramana was “discovered” in the early part of the century by British journalist, Paul Brunton, and introduced to the West in his famous book, “A Search in Secret India.” Many of Ramana Maharshi’s talks are available in book form. Nisargadatta became prominent in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, popularized in the West by baby-boomers who sat at his feet in India, and by his large book on Advaita and self-inquiry, “I Am That.”

BKS Iyengar – Perhaps the greatest (and certainly the most tireless) hatha yogi of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His 1965 book “Light on Yoga” is still a leading textbook for hatha yoga practitioners around the globe.

Swami Sivananda – This physician turned yogi was one of the most prolific writers on yoga ever, having written several hundred books. Unfortunately only a few are available in the West. All

of them can be found on the website of the Divine Life Society in India, which he founded in 1936. Though he is still relatively little-known in the West, Swami Sivananda has influenced the rise of yoga around the world tremendously.

Swami Narayanananda – Another leading disciple of Sivananda who traveled to the West and wrote revealing books on yoga practices, including “The Primal Power in Man or The Kundalini Shakti” and “The Secrets of Prana, Pranayama and Yoga Asanas.”

Gopi Krishna – While this self-professed ordinary Indian man made no great contribution in the form of advanced yoga practices, he certainly has left a lasting impression on us with the chronicles of his hair-raising journey of kundalini awakening that lasted many years. He wrote several books on the subject and several more were written about him. One of the best known is “Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man,” published in 1967. While we are on the subject of hair-raising kundalini, you might also want to check out Lee Sannella’s “Kundalini – Psychosis or Transcendence?” a 1976 study of kundalini case histories. We know much more about kundalini now than we did then. These days, most of the unpleasant kundalini experiences recorded by Gopi Krishna and others can be avoided without sacrificing progress. In fact, progress can be much faster without the excessive symptoms, because we do not have to be constantly on the defensive with incorrectly channeled inner energies. In this case, we have turned the popular “No pain, no gain” maxim on its head to read: “Less pain, more gain.”

Osho (formerly known as Rajneesh) – Self-described as “a spiritually incorrect mystic.” He really shook things up in the West in the 1970s, introducing baby-boomers to the principles and practices of tantra. He covered the full gamut, including endorsing long pre-orgasmic sex sessions. His followers went a little crazy, which eventually forced him to retreat from Oregon to Pune, India, where he passed on in 1990. His teachings are still thriving in Pune, and his influence continues to be felt through his writings by many around the world. His flagship work is “The Book of Secrets,” a vast commentary on the 4000 year-old Vigyan Bhairava scripture, which covers just about everything there is in yoga and tantra from the point of view of practices. If you are interested in the Vigyan Bhairava (also known as the 112 practices), an easy-to-read translation can be found in the small book, “Zen Flesh Zen Bones” by Paul Reps. Osho managed to fill up 1,000 pages commenting on this short scripture. It is worth the attention.

Swami Muktananda – Another yogi who came to the USA in the 1970s, making a big impression with his “shaktipat” approach to yoga. One touch or glance and you were lit up with kundalini, and guaranteed enlightenment. How easy! Well, there was more to it than that, and Muktananda offered a follow-up program of yoga practices to use after the initial jolt. His most well known book is his spiritual autobiography, “Play of Consciousness,” published in 1974, which gives a fascinating account of the enlightenment process.

Norman Paulsen – One of the few books that goes into detail on the main method of Kriya Yoga (spinal breathing pranayama) is his “Sacred Science” published in 2000. Mr. Paulsen was a direct disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda. Satyananda’s “Kundalini Tantra,” mentioned above, also covers the details of spinal (“kriya”) breathing, though it is a different form coming from the Sivananda tradition.

The yogis/authors mentioned above are some of the main ones who have greatly influenced the rise of yoga in the West.

It should also be mentioned that other traditions have had a major influence on the rise of hands-on spiritual practice in the West – especially Buddhism (Tibetan, Southeast Asian, Chinese and Japanese), Chinese Taoism (general and martial-arts based), mystical Christianity and Judaism, Islamic Sufism (especially Rumi), the native traditions of Shamanism (from all the continents), and many other teachings on spiritual practice from both East and West.

These additional inputs into the process of yoga help enrich it, sometimes in essential ways. For example, the effective grounding of inner energies and the principles and methods of tantric sex would be much more difficult to comprehend and apply were it not for the clear and pragmatic perspective that the Taoists brought to the West in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While a bit over-complicated at times, ancient Buddhist teachings and literature go a long way toward clarifying many aspects of the journey of human spiritual transformation, from basic purification and opening to advanced self-inquiry and non-dual realization. There is no doubt that Buddhist methods are having a huge impact on Western spiritual seekers. So yoga has not been the only useful teaching coming to the West over the past century. Together, these diverse sources have given us the clearest picture of effective methods for human spiritual transformation in all of history.

Yoga is an incredible system for aiding the human nervous system to open to its full spiritual potential. Yet, yoga has been around for so many centuries that it has become fragmented a bit, resulting in a few holes here and there. By bringing the various Indian traditions together, and then adding perspective from traditions throughout world, the whole picture begins to come together with crystal clarity. What we see then is our nervous system experiencing synergistic opportunities to purify and open that we could not imagine before. As has been said in the AYP lessons more than once, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.” With a good scientific method for gauging the causes and effects as we integrate the most effective yoga practices, we can make the pudding just right.

The AYP lessons are an attempt to pull it all together from the standpoint of practices, so that anyone can engage daily in the process of human spiritual transformation. The spiritual movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries did a wonderful job of identifying the philosophical aspects of human spiritual evolution, giving the West a good education on the subject. This was preparatory work. Since the mid-20th century, or so, it has become clear that we must move beyond philosophy into the direct experience of divine transformation. The next step has been to identify and integrate the most effective practices for propelling us steadily homeward to abiding inner silence, ecstatic bliss and outpouring divine love. The writings of many over the past century clearly show the trend moving from philosophy/theory to direct practices. The AYP writings are part of this move toward focusing directly on practices – purifying and opening the human nervous system to the infinite wellspring of divine consciousness within us.

Enlightenment is our destiny as human beings. The integration of yoga methods into easy-to-do routines of daily practice is an ongoing process that will continue to evolve. The AYP lessons are another stepping stone on the way to finding the ideal integration of practices. These days, there can be little doubt that we are moving forward as a species, transitioning to a higher stage of evolution. As we continue to go through this transformation, the world will be illuminated. These are exciting times!

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 254 – The One is the Many and the Many are the One

**Q:** If we reach samadhi, we are the God. My question is, because there is only one soul, and if I realize that I am God, everybody in the world should know automatically that he is God.

How come that's not happening? If Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa realizes, shouldn't I also realize?

**A:** Yes, you are right. As one person becomes enlightened, the many do experience the opening also. Full enlightenment comes as each soul turns and looks directly inward upon the divine *Self*. In other words, to complete the process, each must choose. It is individual karma, the residual effects of past actions, that delays the opening of individual souls to the inner light. These lingering obstructions in each nervous system can be removed through the methods of yoga.

Consider the one great inner light of pure bliss consciousness animating everyone. This is also described in the unified field theory of modern physics. The *One* is the many and the many are the *One*. Each of us can experience and express the fullness of the *One*. The human nervous system has this ability.

We are like windows – billions of windows to the great inner light. We are in need of some karmic cleaning so the glory of pure bliss consciousness can shine out through us into the world. If one window is being cleaned through daily yoga practices, then the light comes up, and this has a corresponding effect on all other windows. This inspires a conscious turning in toward Self-awareness by each individual window. Then there is the individual desire to clean the window, and it will be done through engagement in practices. Each person/window will choose according to the stirring of the inner desire, which is determined by the light coming up due to the practices of others, and the individual karmic obstructions still to be cleaned out.

There can be no doubt that more windows choosing to engage in self-cleaning will affect many more windows. So you are right that one window can facilitate the cleaning of many windows. So too do many windows being cleaned affect many more. And so on it goes like an expanding snowball rolling down a hill. That is the scenario occurring in this new era, with more and more people engaging in yoga practices. In that way, Ramakrishna's enlightenment is gradually becoming everyone's enlightenment, as is the enlightenment of all the saints and sages. Today, ordinary people meditating everywhere are cleaning the windows of everyone. It is a mass phenomenon that has been steadily rising on the planet over the last century.

Like that, our individual commitment to daily practices benefits everyone in the world. If you feel the inner desire, you don't have to wait for others to finish the job for you. You can clean your window yourself. Then everyone will be moving much faster toward the wonderful ideal you suggest.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 255 – Everyone Can Teach Yoga

**Q:** I can clearly say that your book/discussions are the single, most informative, helpful, to the point advice I have ever come across in my entire life. You single-handedly have added a dimension to my spiritual practice by encouraging me to resume twice-daily meditation. Before, when I practiced meditation, I somehow never got very far, not past alpha relaxation. But you taught me what meditation is. I plan to put your books on the table in my yoga classroom, to spread the teaching.

**A:** Glad to hear you find the lessons to be good stuff. You know, it has not been developed in the lessons yet, but I think the subject of everyone being able to teach yoga from their own level of experience, using the AYP lessons to assist, will be discussed one of these days (it did happen – see Lesson 388).

It is true, you know. Anyone who has become grounded in deep meditation, spinal breathing, etc., to whatever level, can pass that experience on to others. The lessons are of sufficient specificity so anyone can take their direct experience and discuss it, using the corresponding lessons as an aid and stimulus. So feel free to do that to the degree you are comfortable within your own inner silence. You know, the teacher always learns the most...

There have been reservations expressed over the years by traditional gurus on the hazards of people teaching yoga beyond their level of attainment. Indeed, this is a hazard with any teacher, even the advanced ones who are expressing the concern. To hold everyone back for the sake of this concern is fool-hearty. A title or a certification does not guarantee complete, integrated teachings. Most often, such credentials are certifications of a sectarian approach, which, of course, is much better than no teachings.

What we really need is many more people rising independently in inner silence and divine ecstasy from within, and sharing that in daily life by all means that suit the situation and culture. As we move forward in this new era, the teachings will come from within like that.

If we are sharing a pragmatic integration of knowledge based on the direct experience happening within ourselves, then that will be title and certification enough to teach anyone. If we keep coming back to the fundamental principles and practices inherent in the human nervous system, how can we go wrong? That is the reason why the AYP writings are being put out there. Not to create a following, a movement, or an organization. Not to stand as a monolithic body of writing either. But to be a resource that can be woven into daily considerations of spiritual transformation in many ways – a touchstone of truth that can help anyone become a beacon of light to themselves and to many others. The AYP teachings do not come from any specific lineage. They come from the broad (and often ancient) multi-national knowledge of humankind. And, most importantly, from verifications of the practices through direct experience in the human nervous system.

It is my desire for the AYP writings and self-directed spiritual practice to come much more into the public awareness. The AYP books have a long shelf life and will not wear out. In time, this kind of knowledge will bring a broader view to the field of yoga, which is rising everywhere around the world. In silence, the field of yoga will evolve to become based on individual self-sufficiency in the

overall process of human spiritual transformation. To the extent enlightenment has been occurring in the world over the centuries, it has always been based on individual self-sufficiency.

These days, spiritual transformation is rising in millions. It is something new, accelerating over the past century, a revival of yoga – a global phenomenon. In this situation, just a little bit of the right information will go a long way. Individual desire/bhakti and daily practice will take care of the rest.

So, do what your inner silence moves you to do in your practices and your teaching. I can ask for no more, or no less. And, by all means, have fun!

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 256 – Yoga for Our Children

**Q:** I need a clarification related to sharing of the meditation exercises with younger members of my family. Could you please let me know if there is a minimum age to take up these exercises? Though kids might not really understand the purpose, I feel it could help them learn and react better to various situations in life. Are there particular exercises we can teach them, and some that we should not, or should we wait for them to grow up (to around 20) before suggesting any of these practices?

**A:** It is wonderful that you want to share yoga with your children. There can be great benefits. Here is an overview that looks at the full scope of yoga practices in relation to age:

Easy “I AM” meditation can be practiced upon reaching 12-13. The suggestion is to start out with 10 minutes maximum per twice-daily sitting. If there is an undesirable result, too much purification, then less time, or none, should be used until a year or two later, and then try again. Too much purification is usually noticeable as irritability and/or dullness in daily activity. Of course, with teenagers and new hormones flowing, that may be happening anyway. Daily meditation in the right dosage can be a help.

Once age 18 is reached, the time of meditation can be inched up 5 minutes at a time over several months to 20 minutes, as comfortable. By this time, the young practitioner will have an established interest, or not, depending on individual karma and desire. Don’t force it. At this stage, it will be as much the inner condition of the young practitioner that will determine the path as what the parent can offer. Many children will drop meditation for a variety of reasons. But the seed is planted. The rest will be up to individual desire in relation to the flow of nature and karma. This is true for all of us, yes? The good news is that the spiritual tide is rising everywhere. Everyone is becoming more attuned to their inner transformation. So, any seeds that are planted these days are certain to germinate and grow to full blossom – if not here and now, then somewhere along the glimmering road of this life, or perhaps the next one. Our gift will not be wasted.

Light nadi shodana pranayama (alternate nostril breathing) can be used by teenagers before meditation for 5 minutes, or so. It is a common practice that can be learned almost anywhere – it is also covered in an addition to Lesson 41. Nadi shodana can also be used in short sessions by pre-teens (without meditation) if emotions need some soothing influence. Alternate nostril breathing of 5-10 minutes several times per day is good for that.

At age 18, nadi shodana can be replaced with spinal breathing pranayama, inching the time up to 5-10 minutes as appropriate, as discussed in the lessons. Advanced pranayama-related methods (including spinal breathing, kumbhaka, mudras, bandhas, chin pump, spinal bastrika, etc.) are for expanding the sexual function upward into higher manifestation in the nervous system, and that is why techniques beyond easy meditation and light nadi shodana should not be used until puberty is ending. Spiritual transformation in the nervous system, expanding neurobiological functioning to express divine ecstasy, is like a second puberty in many respects. One puberty at a time is enough! For some, taking on full practices may be best much later than 18 years old. For others sooner may be okay. Everyone is different, and you should use your best judgment in making suggestions on this. Once spinal breathing and meditation are progressive and stable, then going step-by-step

through the full range of practices can be undertaken according to one's desire (bhakti) and capacity (self-pacing). This is the adult stage, of course.

Light asanas can be undertaken, using good common sense, at any age. Once sitting practice/meditation is begun, then asanas can be done right before that. Asanas can be learned almost anywhere these days, with children's classes becoming quite common. An "Asana Starter Kit" is included in Lesson 71, and an enhanced routine is offered in Lesson 383.

Regarding our youngest children, sharing our own rising inner silence in the form of overflowing loving service is the ideal yoga for them. They will benefit greatly, and be ready for practices when the time comes, according to their own inclinations. Obviously, we cannot dictate what another's inclinations will be – even our own children's. Everyone has their own journey to make. We can help a lot, but we can't do it all for them. Let's be careful not to hem our kids into a practice routine that is not natural for them. Remember, it is their inner silence that will ultimately determine their path more than anything else.

One thing is for sure. The more we can progress in our own practices, the better it will be for our loved ones. That is how we can stimulate inner silence in everyone.

Wishing you and all your family success on your chosen paths.

The guru is in you.

**Note:** Excessive purification can happen if the nervous system is very sensitive to meditation, which indicates a high spiritual sensitivity – a good thing, but it should be handled carefully using the principles of "self-pacing" covered in the lessons. Such extreme sensitivity is uncommon, but it does happen, so the caution flag is here for that. See Lessons 160 and 200 for an example of extreme sensitivity, and the utilization of self-pacing to handle it. Also see Lessons 365-367 for further measures for dealing with under-sensitivity or over-sensitivity to deep meditation with mantra.

## Lesson 258 – Divine Ecstasy – Is That All There Is?

**Q:** I've got to be frank with you. Please don't deem disrespectful the following wail of disappointment!

I've been following your instructions and I've achieved ignition. I am indeed feeling the waves of ecstasy you promised, like a full body orgasm. My question is: Why is this good? How does this make me more perceptive or insightful, more aware of each moment, more creative in my art, more available to my friends and loved ones and empathic to others?

I've managed an excellent high without drugs ... nice trick! And I must admit it is a lot nicer "buzz" than any drug. But I don't feel at all clear or in the moment. I feel like someone sucking on an opium pipe, enthralled by dreamy creamy waves. Sure, it feels great, but masturbation feels at least half this good, and I don't live with my hand on my organ 24/7!

I've been reading page after page of your promises of crashing waves of ecstasy, so I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that at the end of the rainbow there is nothing more than crashing waves of ecstasy. My desire centers (which I've been trying to yoke via years of yoga) want nothing but more of this buzz, but my deeper self is patiently waiting for these distracting waves of high-class rarified maya to pass so it can continue to pursue its path with sober clarity.

I've had fleeting feelings of merging with all here and there in my life. It felt great, but much deeper than mere bliss. This, by contrast, is just a high. I don't want to be high, I want to be stone cold present and hyper-aware in the moment. Working on myself and extinguishing ego, anger, etc.

There's no compassion in this! Please tell me that this is not what the great yogis are doing in caves – sucking on cosmic opium pipes and enjoying their buzz!

**A:** It is a great question, one that all serious yogis and yoginis ask when the ecstasy starts to flow abundantly.

Divine ecstasy is one half of the enlightenment equation. Depending on one's point of view, it may be seen as the greater half or the lesser half. The other half is abiding inner silence, which is cultivated mainly through deep meditation and samyama. Divine ecstasy is cultivated mainly through pranayama, kumbhaka, mudras, bandhas, asanas and tantric sexual methods. In the end, inner silence and ecstasy merge to create enlightenment, which is not an introverted addictive state. Rather, it is an overflowing of profound peace, stability and divine love into the surrounding environment. So, we become a channel like that.

The great 19th century kriya yogi, Lahiri Mahasaya described the process of enlightenment as "a merging of emptiness with euphoria." This is the process of inner silence and ecstasy merging.

So, at this stage, you need to be sure your ecstatic "addiction" is not disrupting your deep meditation and samyama. Also, engaging in the world according to your tendency to help others is good. All of that will aid in the evolution of your ecstatic states to a higher manifestation. If you feel you are off balance in your practices, then ease off the ecstasy-producing ones and favor deep meditation more for a while, until you can bring your practices into balance. This is "self-pacing," which you have no doubt seen discussed in the lessons. Getting carried away with ecstatic states is one of the signals to begin applying self-pacing. Uncomfortable energy excesses are another signal. You seem to be in the former category.

Ecstasy on the neurobiological level is inner energy coursing through neurological obstructions. In fact, ecstasy is the pleasant version of kundalini awakening, as opposed to the unpleasant version, which is too much energy going through too much obstruction.

It should also be emphasized that divine ecstasy is progressive, leading to higher states, and ultimately to enlightenment as the merging with inner silence occurs. This is the merging described in the metaphors of the religions – shiva and shakti, father and holy ghost, yin and yang, etc.

So with good yoga practices, it all moves forward, and in time we go far beyond an opium-like addictive state like you describe. Accounts of this journey are readily available in the spiritual literature. For example, see “The Gospel of Ramakrishna,” and the writings of St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa of Avila, St. Francis of Assisi, Rumi, and Martin Buber’s “Ecstatic Confessions,” which contains numerous written accounts of divine ecstasy, western and eastern, going back over the centuries. They all had the same issue you have brought up here, and all had their ways of dealing with it. A common thread you will find in the lives of the ecstatic mystics is their intense devotion to their chosen ideal (bhakti), which contributed greatly to their ecstatic states and enabled them to weather them through to fruition in enlightenment.

Drug and orgasmic sex-induced states are short-lived and can be degenerative. If you are using yogic methods, the resulting ecstasy will be a very different thing – long-lived and regenerative. And, as mentioned, if ecstatic states are balanced with deep meditation, a sure path to enlightenment will be in the offing.

So, there is much more than divine ecstasy. Just keep going, and you will find the whole thing refining and expanding. You will have the sobriety you seek, and the essence of all creation as well, which is unshakable inner silence, ecstatic bliss and outpouring divine love.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 259 – Fear and Enlightenment

**Q:** I have chronic persistent anxiety, fear and negative thought patterns. I am doing a lot of meditations, chi gong and yoga. All of them have helped to lessen it, but I am not able to get rid of it completely. I am trying the meditation you have suggested. Are there any techniques in your lesson list that are more beneficial than others to remedy this condition? I assume that the meditation is the key here.

A lot of practices suggest constant remembrance, being in the now, placing some consciousness on a part of the body, belly breathing, etc., for 24 hours. Is there any similar practice in the AYP lessons that we can try to do all the time.

**A:** Cultivating inner silence over time will reduce our tendency to be ruled by fear. So you are on the right track with daily deep meditation. But the solution does not come overnight, as you are seeing. It takes some persistence over time. Gradually adding additional practices from the lessons (spinal breathing pranayama is next) will help deepen the flow of pure bliss consciousness in our nervous system, and progressively reduce the bite of fear. The idea is not to eliminate fear. Rather, we are to systematically move our center of awareness beyond it.

What is fear anyway? It is a product of the deep-rooted perception that we will lose something – possessions, our health, our life. Can we ever get rid of fear? No, I don't think so. It is a natural biological function that actually serves a purpose – it causes us to act in ways that are in the interest of our preservation. Fear is one of nature's ways of preserving the species.

If we cannot get rid of fear, what is the best way to relate to it? The way is to cultivate our ability to live beyond it in pure bliss consciousness. Then we can use fear in a rational way. When the truck is coming straight at us, we step out of the way. Like that. Will we sit around wringing our hands because the bills are due and there is not enough money? Not if we are steady in our inner silence. We will still feel fear, just as we will every emotion, but we will act more rationally to find solutions to our challenges. So fear will be a voice that says, "Better do something about that." For example, I have some fear about the AYP lessons disappearing from the web in a mishap. So what do I do? I see about ways to back them up. That is a rational use of fear, yes?

Irrational fear is the product of a nervous system out of balance. We can be born with it, or be cultivating it with our conduct in this life. Often it is both – one leads to the other in a cycle of causes and effects – behaviors carried over from life to life. Yoga can break the cycle. In fact, fear, like every emotion, can be converted into pure bhakti. Fear can become a great friend on the spiritual path. We can modify our response so the more fear we have, the more we will want to act to move forward toward enlightenment. This is the highest use of fear. See Lesson 67 for more on the method of bhakti.

It has been said that a hero is a coward who has learned to use his fear to inspire great acts. So, like everyone, you have that huge emotional energy that can be converted into great things – even into enlightenment. You are doing that now with your practices, yes? Your fear is driving you to a very high path.

As for doing practices all day, remembrance, etc., in AYP we go for a balance between sitting practices and normal daily activity. This provides for a deep merging with pure bliss consciousness and the rise of ecstatic conductivity in our twice-daily sittings, and then going out into our daily

activity in a spirit of doing good in the world, no matter what our job or station in life may be. With inner silence cultivated in the morning, we don't have to be thinking about it all day to integrate it into our nervous system. We just go and be active. That is good enough.

Remembrance is something that will come up naturally as our perception gradually changes over time. In the AYP approach, remembrance is an effect more than a cause. It is an experience that rises naturally in our life of doing our daily sitting practices, and then going out and being in the world without pretense one way or the other. We just go into silence, let it go, and go out and act according to our heart's desires. That's all. The rest is automatic. The nervous system will be changed dramatically over time by that cycle of going in and coming out. If we want to do more, the best thing to do is work on building up our twice-daily sitting practices, applying the principles of self-pacing as we do. Then our nervous system will be charged with more and more inner silence and ecstatic bliss, and we will be integrating those qualities in our normal daily activities. Our activity will become worship of the divine within and all around us. It is not a belabored practice, this worship. It is a joyful, natural outcome of deeply cultivating the divine in our sitting practices every day.

Obviously, we make many decisions every day. Over time, our decisions become colored by inner steadiness, ecstatic bliss and rising divine love. Even our fears become colored by the divine, and we act accordingly. That is how things change. So, be easy in your practices, and be easy in daily life. Be tolerant of your negative emotions. Do not judge yourself too harshly. Just gently turn your emotional energy toward cultivating your yoga practices. Everything is going to be all right. Just stay the course with twice-daily practices, and the rest will come along naturally.

The guru is in you.

**Note:** See Lesson 340 for additional discussion on transforming negative emotional energy into bhakti for enlightenment.

## Lesson 260 – The Difference Between Enlightenment and Perfection

**Q:** A question comes up about “enlightenment,” and this particular one is a topic I find interesting.

Some years ago I would have said that certain gurus were not “enlightened” because they held such a prejudice against the other castes. But I may have been confusing “enlightened” with “perfect” and “always right.”

My newer approach is not to assume that they were not enlightened, but rather, just to see that they were making a big mistake, discuss the mistake, point it out, and evaluate the level of enlightenment separately for people who would wish to discuss such gurus.

So much wrong stuff follows from confusing “enlightened” with “perfect and always right.” This mistake has an impact on how we see enlightenment, what we are looking for when we look for it, what our expectations are, how we see “gurus” and how we relate to them, and all the stuff which has gone on with gurus, fallen gurus, cults and all that over the years.

**A:** You are bringing up a key issue in how we consider our spiritual teachers. The enlightenment/perfection issue is one of several reasons why I choose to remain an anonymous non-guru – to focus attention on the knowledge of practices instead of on the channel of transmission.

Of course, many popular teachers (and celebrities in general) encourage the expectation of perfection. It is human nature to do so. The guru system is a glaring example of this, and it is ultimately self-defeating in these modern times with the free flow of information, where little can remain hidden for long. We have seen the imperfections of “enlightened” gurus exposed again and again.

There is a difference between enlightenment (in the light) and perfection (always right). The first is real. The second is an illusion.

Is there a relationship between enlightenment and rightness of vision? Absolutely. But the act of perfect expression of the divine is a process that can involve missteps along the way. If we are following the light, we may not walk in a straight line. Even if the light is bright, we can trip and fall, sometimes because of the light itself. Ramakrishna was famous for falling down and hurting himself while in his ecstatic reveries. Other gurus have made much bigger mistakes, in some cases limiting spiritual opportunities for millions.

Acolytes will defend the imperfections of the guru as being part of the perfect plan, while those prone to judgment will run the other way. Neither is right. In this earth life, everything is a mixture of light and shadow. Recognizing this fact is the key to learning and sustaining effective yoga practices over the long term. Such recognition allows us to draw close to those with knowledge and spiritual energy without being trapped in the illusion of their perfection, which will only hold us back. In the AYP lessons, that is why so much emphasis is placed on the inner guru and developing self-sufficiency in practices. With that, we are constantly reducing the influence of illusion in our lives, including the illusion of a guru’s perfection.

Enlightened gurus make mistakes. As long as we expect perfection from the enlightened, the transmission of knowledge from them will be retarded, and that helps no one. There is a divine paradox here. By recognizing the earthly imperfections of enlightened ones we can gain the most

from them, because we are neither defending them or being repelled by them. AYP is a direct result of this way of relating to gurus.

Your inner wisdom is shining through on this one, and that is the perfection.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 261 – Kundalini Surge

**Q:** I recently came across your AYP site and I found the lessons to be absolutely mind blowing. I have been practicing meditation off and on for the past 22 years but, till recently, have never been able to sustain it on a regular basis. But not long ago I had an experience that has frankly left me quite shaken. I desperately need your advice on the matter before I proceed further.

I have never had any remarkable experiences through meditation till about a couple of months back. I was meditating as usual when suddenly I felt something rushing through my body and my whole body started buzzing like I was attached to a high voltage power cable. I felt it throughout my body and mainly in my head. It was like some powerful vibration had hold of me. I was fully conscious throughout, though my eyes were closed. The feeling was a bit like I was being sucked under through general anesthesia. My eyelids started throbbing madly, my breathing became deep and tortured like a bellows and my heart started speeding up and pounding like I had just run 15 miles. The blood was rushing in my veins like it was flush with intoxicating spirits. Despite all this, I wasn't scared and actually felt totally alive and invigorated. For about a week after that my eyes felt heavy and sometimes started burning also. Can you please explain to me just what happened to me on that day? I have never been able to get that experience again though I feel that vibration very, very mildly. But I desperately want to have that feeling again. I have written to many learned people since then but none have favored me with a reply. Maybe they felt it was too foolish and beneath their capabilities.

Can you please, please help me and possibly guide me in my future endeavors in the spiritual world?

**A:** What you have experienced is a kundalini surge. It is one step on your journey to enlightenment. The sensory symptoms are caused by increased inner energy going through obstructions in your nervous system. As the obstructions dissolve and the energy flow balances out, the contrasting experience will seem less. That is a good thing, because excessive kundalini energy flowing through obstructions, while exhilarating, can be exhausting and unsettling (as you have noticed already). With effective yoga practices done over the long term, experiences can be managed and will gradually refine to be celestial. Even that will not be "It." The final destination will be found rising in our everyday living and relationships, which become permeated with unshakable inner silence, ecstatic bliss and outpouring divine love. That is our destiny. That is the full union of our inner and outer life.

It should be noted that a dramatic kundalini surge like you experienced is not a prerequisite for a full awakening of the ecstatic aspect of our inner life. It can begin very quietly and build gradually over time as our nervous system becomes more purified through daily yoga practices. In fact, this is a prudent course for all to pursue, even those who have had a dramatic awakening. In AYP we have a name for this gentle, well-regulated kind of kundalini growth. We call it the rise of "ecstatic conductivity." It is the same energy, progressing steadily in a natural and sustainable way. We don't always have a choice on how our kundalini first manifests. In a few cases, it can be problematic for some time after. It is a matter of karmic tendencies we have in us, which are related to the kinds of practices we have been doing both recently and in the distant past (including previous lives).

In AYP we endeavor to keep it all going forward on an even keel, without shrinking from the necessity of promoting our spiritual evolution. This steady, stability-oriented approach is aimed at giving us the best opportunity to complete our spiritual transformation in this lifetime, even as we continue to live a normal life in society. Even if we do not complete the journey in this life, we can make huge progress that will bring us much joy. We are also building the habit of stable growth into our subtle nervous system, so we can pick up where we left off more easily the next time around, wherever and whenever that may be. None of our effort is ever lost on the path of yoga.

There is a ways to go, and we'd all like to make the journey as swiftly, enjoyably and safely as possible. It is important to keep things in balance, to keep moving forward, while not getting too carried away with the energy experiences for their own sake. The practices in AYP are designed for promoting and managing this process. Spinal breathing pranayama, practiced right before deep meditation, is especially useful for promoting and balancing the inner energies. It is the second practice introduced in AYP, right after deep meditation. You will see it returned to again and again throughout the lessons in relation to cultivating the inner energies in a balanced way. Deep meditation and spinal breathing are the essential core practices of AYP. The many additional practices covered in the lessons greatly enhance the results that come from these two.

If you continue through the lessons you will find much material that is relevant to your experience. If questions arise that are not covered, feel free to post them in the AYP Support Forums. Make sure to review the Topic Index for many lessons on “kundalini” and “ecstatic conductivity” These will provide additional perspectives on your recent experience. The AYP open, integrated system of practices is a progression – a step-by-step approach that is designed to navigate all the way through to enlightenment.

For some reason, many traditional teachers avoid discussing the kundalini process and related experiences – sweeping it all under the rug. That is like not telling our children about sexual reproduction when they are approaching biological maturity. Kundalini is the spiritual equivalent of sexual reproduction. It is the same energy operating with an expanded purpose in our nervous system. It is spiritual reproduction within us, and everyone should be informed.

It is hoped that the AYP lessons will provide some good perspective on what has been happening, and useful practices to apply as you travel along your chosen spiritual path. Practice wisely, and enjoy!

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 262 – Beyond the Cycle of Birth and Death

**Q:** I wonder if you could explain when it is that the cycle of rebirths ends. How does one know? Is a full kundalini experience the end?

**A:** It has been said that we can leave this realm when we have grown to love it unconditionally. That is not a mental construct, but a state of being arrived at through purification and opening – evolution.

“Full kundalini experience” is subjective, and not really indicative of much. A lot of energy flowing through inner obstructions can be a huge experience that is only a beginning stage. Advanced kundalini is experienced as pure joy without energy upheavals at all, because there is no friction (obstruction) left in the nervous system. So what is “full kundalini experience?”

It would be better to say that “full love of life” is experienced finally as unshakable inner silence, ecstatic bliss and outpouring divine love. Maybe then we will not have to come back, but what will be the need to leave? The need will be for everyone else, and that is why sages are here – for everyone’s sake, for the sake of the *One* we are all an expression of. Personal need is transcended – that is what “getting off the wheel of birth and death” really is. Then we are driven by compassion, not a need to escape from the temporal realms. On the contrary, in enlightenment, we will be more inclined to stay and help others find their freedom. Liberation is beyond incarnation, reincarnation, or not being here at all. Liberation is an endless flow of divine love in unity – *Oneness*.

The guru is in you.

## Lesson 263 – The Secret of Yogic Concentration

**Q:** I am determined to make my connection and commune with God. It seems like the harder I try the harder it gets. My main quest at this point is to stop the mindless chatter while doing my daily meditation. I tell my ego: “I’ll listen to you when I’m done,” or, “It’s OK, I’m still here for you.” But it never stops. I’ll be able to concentrate for a minute or two but I always seem to find myself back listening to my ego nonsense. I’ve heard it can take many years to make the connection I’m seeking, maybe even lifetimes. It does not matter, I will continue. I’m just stuck at the moment. I’m not going to stop my practice. At this point, I’m wondering if you can you give any suggestion for my situation?

**A:** There is a funny thing about “concentration.” In order to achieve it we have to learn to let go. It is just the opposite of what most people think. Letting go is, of course, the essence of deep meditation, and it is also a primary factor in all the other AYP practices. We just pick something up, and that’s it. When we realize we are off it, we easily pick it up again. Like that. We don’t hang on to it. How does this cultivate concentration in the yogic sense? It is because, through this process of letting go, we become gradually more quiet inside, and then we are becoming a witness to all that is going on around us. Then when we want to put our attention on something, there is no question about concentration, because our awareness has become so all-encompassing that it totally penetrates whatever we put our attention on – and it stays like that until we move our attention somewhere else. We instantly become that which we put our attention on. That is concentration. It is all in the letting go into inner silence we have been cultivating in our practices. Once the nervous system becomes a mirror of silence, concentration is an automatic side effect.

As for the mental chatter in meditation, the mind can do that. But we don’t have to fight against it. And we don’t have to have an inner dialog with it. We have the means to go beyond it. We always have the choice to easily come back to the mantra in meditation, or to our spinal breathing, or our work, or whatever. The mind will always be doing something. Stopping it impossible. But we can move beyond it into abiding inner silence, the witness. Then we lose attachment to the mind, even as it may be chattering in the background.

In meditation, if the chatter keeps coming back to the forefront, that’s okay. We just keep doing the procedure of meditation. The procedure is what it is – no negotiations with thought streams are necessary. We just go on with the procedure of easily favoring the mantra whenever we realize our attention has gone off it, and we become a little more silent inside (behind the thoughts) each day. Eventually all of life is lived in that easy way of inner silence. Silence and real concentration are not acts of the mind. They are born in the systematic practice of letting go on a daily basis, beyond the mind. That is the secret. By developing the habit of letting go, we gain everything.

Someone said to me recently, “All the questions disappear during meditation.” That really captures the essence of it. If we are doing the procedure of meditation, we will lose track of all the questions, whether we are having thoughts or not. Remember, thoughts are objects. We can focus on them like any other objects, or just shift our attention back to the mantra.

There can be no failure in following this procedure. Relax and take it one day at a time.

The guru is in you.

This is the end of the reading sample. Thank you for taking a look. To obtain a complete copy of “Advanced Yoga Practices, Volume 2,” please visit:

<http://www.aypsite.com/books-ayp2.html>

A list of other books by Yogani can be found on the next page...

## **Also by the Author**

Yogani is an American spiritual scientist who, for nearly forty years, has been integrating ancient techniques from around the world which cultivate human spiritual transformation. The approach is non-sectarian, and open to all. His books include:

### ***Advanced Yoga Practices – Easy Lessons for Ecstatic Living (Two Volumes)***

Two large user-friendly textbooks providing over 400 detailed lessons on the AYP integrated system of practices.

### ***The Secrets of Wilder – A Story of Inner Silence, Ecstasy and Enlightenment***

This modern novel was written before AYP, helping inspire the extensive practical writings on self-directed spiritual practice that became the AYP system.

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