

Kriya Yoga: synthesis of a personal experience

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First interest towards Pranayama

My spiritual search began when, spellbound in an inexplicable way when seeing people sitting in the "lotus position", I bought an introductory book to classical *Yoga*. The ability to do something significant without moving from my place and without the risks and dangers of sports, attracted me like the most perfect art, with no intrinsic limits.

A great expectation toward «certain oriental practices» rose when a schoolmate told me he possessed a detailed text about breathing exercises - *Pranayama* - adding: «these exercises can change a person inside... ». What did he mean? He could not be merely hinting to the attainment of particular conditions of relaxation and concentration; he definitely did not refer to sticking to some philosophy or changing one's vision of life, but to something more involving.

My friend would not make up his mind about lending me the book and after some days I was no longer thinking about it.

As for other readings, unlike my contemporaries, I had a preference for poetic texts, particularly those which dealt with themes that I could ideally put within the frame of the rural life in which I lived the greatest part of my spare time.

In the season of my life in which I lived an intense, challenging sentimental tie, toward which my rash emotionalism prompted me to take only destructive steps, I undertook the daily rite of listening to classical music, above all Beethoven.¹

During long walks in the middle of the nature, I heard his music resounding in my mind. The beauty of a landscape experienced together with that music was the only way of satisfying the yearning of my heart. Conforming to an ultimate ideal of perfection, the sublime which took quick and forcible possession of my soul became my religion.

¹ The study of his life was nourishment for my soul. He drew out the depths of his being an incomparable music, for his brothers and for the whole humanity. The tragedy of being deaf hit him at his creative peak. He reacted in a most honourable manner, deciding to carry on his artistic path in spite of his condition. The awful impact of his stout decision can be found in the *Heiligstadt Testament*.

Technique of mental void

Then, a simple text diverted my sight, *Yoga in 20 lessons*, which I bought at a news-stand in a rail station. In a corner of our school's gymnasium, during the lessons of Physical Education, after the preliminary group warm-up exercises, my teacher gave me permission to separate from my schoolmates - who were amusing themselves with some team games - and try to master some *Yoga* positions (*Asana*). (My teacher was amazed to observe how I succeeded in moving the abdominal muscles through the *Nauli* technique.)

Objectively speaking, my *Yoga* reference text was not a mediocre one; together with each position there was the explanation of the name that designated it, a brief note on the best mental attitude for the practice and several considerations on how each exercise stimulated particular physiological functions (important endocrine glands etc). It was clear to me that these positions were not to be seen as a simple "stretching work-out"; they were means to provide global stimulus to all the physical organs, in order to increase their vitality. The comfort perceived at the end of a session spoke in favor of the real utility of this practice.

A whole chapter was devoted to the "Corpse Position" - *Savasana* - the last to be practiced. Concerning the instructions, I think the author put in something he had learned in other contexts. The teaching, structured with great care, actually constituted an exercise of deep concentration. He also explained, definitely exaggerating, that in a twenty-minute interval it would provide the «mental rest of three hours of sleep».

The text did not lose its focus (as did the majority of books on similar topics drawing complicated discourses on different forms of energy within the body – *Prana*) but, through a typically western style, it simply introduced an interesting possibility, that of «stopping all mental functions and, without falling into a state of sleepiness, remain for some time in a state of pure awareness». It emphasized thus the possibility of putting to rest the faculties of thought and «recharge with fresh energy the whole psychophysical system».

I will briefly describe the exercise since it was essential to me for many reasons; thanks to it, which, then, became a daily habit, I could understand once and for all the fundamental difference between "mind" and "awareness", still crucial for my understanding of *Kriya Yoga*.

It recommended to lie down in the supine position keeping the arms extended alongside the body; the eyes are covered with a bandage to keep the light out. After having stayed still for two or three minutes, the exercise

begins with the mental statement: «I am relaxed, I am calm, I am not thinking of anything».

After this, to enter what the author called «mental void» it is necessary to carry out the following unique action: that of giving the thoughts a visual form pushing them away one by one, as if «an internal hand moved them gently from the mental-screen center toward its outskirts». All the thoughts, without exceptions, must be moved aside, even the thought itself of being practicing a technique.

To correctly perform this delicate process it is first essential "to see" each thought, even if its characteristics are abstract. At least in what was my way of doing the job, one should never refuse, do away with or censor the thoughts; what's important is to set the mental activity to a pause. Then, visualizing them as objects, one shifts them aside putting them in stand-by; in this way, the developing of an ulterior chain of thoughts is prevented.

When you push the first thought away, you must return to the center, to the region among the eyebrows - called *Kutastha* in *Yoga* - and relax in something which resembles a lake of peace. Then the power to push away the thoughts which are going to knock the door of your attention will increase!

When in some occasions – especially when you are emotively disturbed – the mechanism does not seem to work, then you can convert your concentration into a small needle which keeps on constantly touching the region among the eyebrows: at a certain point, the effort employed in such an act disappears and a relaxation similar to the state coming before sleep manifests.

In this way, after a few minutes, while a part of the being gathers in the *Kutastha* and enjoys a pleasant feeling of rest, another part, hiding in the outskirts of the former one, without disturbing, carries on a process of creation of indefinite images, all of them extremely "mild". For some more minutes, the awareness remains quiet there.

In my experience, this state lasts no more than 10 or 15 minutes and the exercise is never carried on for more than 25-30 minutes altogether, from the beginning to the end. The technique inevitably ends in a "curious" way; the state of deep calm is interrupted by the feeling that the exercise has not been done yet, to which the body reacts with a wince whereas the heart beats faster. Then, the awareness that the exercise has been perfectly carried off appears.

As a student, I used such a practice to rest in the afternoon, between a study session and the following one; I started to love it.

Decision to extend this technique's dynamics to practical life.

What I had been experiencing did not leave me cold; it was interesting to observe how the mental process could be momentarily arrested, its apparent consistence fade away, while a state of perfect awareness, independent from any content, would arise. That particular state beyond the mind was my truest essence: the Cartesian «I think, therefore I am» became «If I am not able to dominate the mechanism of the thought to the point to stop it at will, I cannot say I really exist».

Crucial was the moment when I tried to extend this technique's essential dynamics to practical life, applying the same discipline during the idle moments. Seeking the *mental silence* (as Sri Aurobindo called it), I entered a sort of devastating "void"; sometimes my life appeared to be emerging like an island from an ocean of sorrow. But what came out of it was pure gold. I received a fundamental lesson which I bring with me and live again every day of my life.

It is not easy to stand the challenge of the gloomy, dejected mood arising from this intention. Dispelling the smoke of thoughts, not only during the practice of a *Yoga* routine but throughout life, uncovers mercilessly the agony hidden under the tendency of perpetuating indefinitely many useless and dangerous habits. This perverted situation fosters an indefinite prosecution of our misery, is the main causes of so many human failures - particularly of those that did not seem inevitable at all – and of a continuous deployment of every source of vitality. The discipline of mental silence stops immediately all that waste of energy.

This vital action encounters a great resistance: our petty unchangeable habits function like a continuous injection of small, trite pleasures with which we fill our days. Our pleasure is wrapped, dignified by strong visceral emotions. They do not want to die and let the new life begin. When the practice of *mental silence* menaces their existence, an intolerable pain, as a protective subconscious reaction, ensues.

We have no alternative: we should sip any drop of this grief.

If we want to establish healthy human relationships, live authentic feelings, we must accept the anguish of a continuous internal death springing from abandoning situations which seems to have become one with our being.

I will die so that I can live!

In those days, when I felt a strong tendency to avoid the responsibility of taking new crucial decisions and was relentlessly slipping into the habit of feeding myself with countless memories of lost hopes, something came to my aid, infusing courage never to give up my tough discipline

Mahler's Symphony N.2 "*Resurrection*" almost instinctively attracted me. In the quietude of my room I would listen to it and try to penetrate its meaning by reading everything I could find about it. A continuous listening to this symphony, over and over, made it sound in my memory all day long while I was studying or doing other things. It would grow, it would amplify during the moments of quietude, expanding some elated states of my mind. The words «Sterben werd ich, um zu leben!» - I will die so that I can live! - written by Mahler himself and sung by a choir in the last symphonic movement, were a clear echo to my project; that music and those words became a thread around which my thought crystallized, while the charm of the whole work sharply restored a vision of childish beauty. In the final words «Was du geschlagen, zu Gott wird es dich tragen!» - What you have earned yourself, will lead you to God! - I understood: «A final immersion in an eternal dimension of bliss will be the final prize for the very fact that you incessantly kept on fighting».

Although I had read about Reincarnation, *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Maya* and the like, it was not possible to stick *ipso facto* to this oriental way of thinking; in that turning point of my life, I was helped by those words emerging from my own culture.

While dealing with the unreasonable darkness that seemed to lie at the foundation of my existence, I went on repeating in myself: « I will die so that I can live! ».

I was determined to refuse the "comfort" of thoughts, the "dim lights" of a mind flickering in the night of insecurity; I wanted to bring to an end everything that was not true, I wanted to meet the unmistakable truth, no matter what it was and was ready to cross with wide-open eyes a vast land of woe.

During a walk, through an indistinct path, I reached a place aloft: my fixed thought was what, in actual fact, I should do in my life in order to keep my ideals alive. Even if the university studies brought me toward a certain type of job, there was not the least uncertainty on the fact that I would have lived to experience internal and external Beauty (aesthetic rapture), a Reality beyond the common material objects. Thus far, I had never harboured the thought of following the spiritual path: in my opinion it was mixed with religion, tied up to a church, to certain doctrines..... and therefore it was not even taken into

consideration.

Some examples of great men I admired in the artistic field guided me to guess that my objectives would be better achieved by cultivating any demanding, lofty discipline. At least for the moment I could resume with much more earnestness the practice of *Hatha Yoga*. The university studies didn't grant me enough time to devote me to something else. Also thinking of health, of the development of the memory etc. the *Hatha Yoga* was perfect. Perhaps a thought crossed momentarily my mind that I would have, sooner or later tackled *Pranayama*. I purchased a book by B.K.S. Iyengar *The Illustrated Light on Yoga*; the practice of the *Asana* filled the grey of my afternoons with a great flow of hope. For about one month, more than half an hour a day flew by through a pleasant training.

In the last part of the book there was a short introduction to the bright power of *Pranayama*. Some prudential remarks instead of smothering my enthusiasm and guide me to an extreme carefulness, turned on an enormous will to practice it intensively.

I read that «Pneumatic tools can cut through the hardest rock. In *Pranayama* the yogi uses his lungs as pneumatic tools. If they are not used properly, they destroy both the tool and the person using it . The same is true of *Pranayama*.... Faulty practice puts undue stress on the lungs and diaphragm. The respiratory system suffers and the nervous system is adversely affected. The very foundation of a healthy body and sound mind is shaken by faulty practice of *Pranayama*.»

When I read those lines, a sudden blaze put silence and stillness into my being. This warning, brought my interest to exasperation, since all I was trying to achieve was that the things within me set into change. I needed some "explosive mixture" to win the internal resistances; an authentic inner earthquake was to be preferred to the current situation. Perhaps through this discipline I could have learned the secret of «dying to myself». A quotation from the *Bhagavad Gita* struck my imagination: «(The yogi) knows the joy eternal which is beyond the pale of the senses which his reason cannot grasp. He abides in this reality and moves not therefrom. He has found the treasure above all others. There is nothing higher than this. He who has achieved it, shall not be moved by the greatest sorrow. This is the real meaning of Yoga - a deliverance from contact with pain and sorrow.»

I was really excited, never I heard something truer! I remember that I often repeated this sentence to my friends whom I tried to transmit my enthusiasm to. Another complementary idea that matched perfectly to the preceding one derived from the study of Jolande Jacobi *The Psychology Of CG Jung* followed by Jung, Jaffé (1965) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. After having read such books, I could not but feel the great desire to begin the "process of

individualization", but it required to wait many years and gain quite a lot of money to pay that work! Thus I cultivated the hope that *Pranayama* could help me to clean my unconscious mind. I had trust in myself, I felt I could do this work.

Practice of Pranayama

(Now, I will carefully delineate how I practiced *Pranayama*, introducing the topic with some theoretic explanations. May the reader forgive me if this implies a change in the nature of my narration.)

It is not difficult a task to understand that the breathing exercises are not aimed to train the chest muscles, to strengthen the diaphragm or to create some peculiar conditions of blood oxygenation; they are to act on the energy - *Prana* - present in our psychophysical system.

During such practice, one should try to perceive the flows of energy through some subtle channels called *Nadi*. The principal *Nadis* are *Ida*, which flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column and is said to be of female nature, and *Pingala* - of masculine nature - which flows parallel to the former one. *Sushumna* flows in the middle, beyond the duality inherent to the two preceding *Nadis*.

It is not difficult to imagine that the *Nadis*, just like the water-conducting pipes in the houses, might be "rusty", "dirty", "obstructed", and that this fact is linked with the decrease of vitality in our body. The amount of "dirtiness" in the *Nadis* can be related to disharmony and conflicts inside of our disposition; thus, cleaning these channels through *Pranayama* techniques brings on a transformation in our personality.

There are moments of the day in which we feel more externalized, others in which we are more interiorised; in a healthy person this alternation is characterized by a balance between a life of positive relationships and a serene contact with his own depths. Unfortunately, a lot of people lack such a harmony. The too introvert person starts to actually lose contact with the external reality, to the point that this will exert, as a reaction, an excessive influence that will inevitably destroy his internal peace; the too extrovert person will soon provoke the coming up of all those symptoms commonly regarded as the beginning of a neurotic state.

Through the practice of *Pranayama*, specifically the alternate-nostrils variety, these two opposite tendencies are, at least temporarily, balanced.

As a result, a practitioner develops a greater emotional awareness, a more precise evaluating criteria and a wider range of abilities to elaborate information, i.e. greater operative intelligence. A more calibrated, intense,

precise and clearer logical process will rise from a more efficient synergy between thoughts and emotions. In this way, intuition can flow freely in order to face the moments of life for which important decisions are expected to be made. When the first good effects begin to be felt, the *yogi* is encouraged to keep on practicing and goes deeper and deeper into it, looking for "something more." This "something" is the *Sushumna* current, which begins to flow, creating an experience of joy, happiness, and elation. Here, the "mystic" venture begins; the practitioner might have no idea of what this experience means, and yet it would happen to him.

Basic routine

a...Nadi Sodhana

It is important to clean his nostrils before beginning the exercise, so that the breath can flow smoothly. This can be commonly done using water or inhaling eucalyptus essence and blowing the nose.

In some cases, there are complaints that one of the nostrils is permanently obstructed; that is a problem of medical solution. If the obstruction is caused by a severe cold, no *Pranayama* exercise should be practiced.

To begin this exercise, the mouth must be closed; the right nostril must be kept closed by the right thumb and air is slowly, uniformly and deeply inhaled through the left nostril. The inhalation lasts from six to ten seconds. It is important not to overdo it to the point of uneasiness. After having inhaled through the left nostril, a *yogi* closes the left nostril with the right little finger and the ring finger; then he exhales through the right nostril with the same slow, uniform and deep rhythm. At this point, the nostrils exchange their role; keeping the left nostril closed, air is slowly, uniformly and deeply inhaled through the right nostril. Then, closing the right nostril with the thumb the exhalation is made through the left nostril, once again slowly, uniformly and deeply. This corresponds to a cycle: in the beginning, six cycles can be made; later, twelve of them.

A *yogi* can use a mental count to make sure the time is the same for both the inhalation and the exhalation. A short pause, amounting to a mental count of three, is possible after each inhalation. The nostrils can be closed with the fingers in different ways; the choice depends on the practitioner only.²

b...Ujjayi

² A tradition suggests that the exhalation should last twice the time necessary for the inhalation and the pause after the inhalation should be four times as long. I have never applied such advice, finding it unnatural.

The technique consists in deeply breathing in and out through both the nostrils, producing a sound in the throat. During the exhalation the noise is not as loud as during the inhalation. After a few days' practice, the respiratory action is lengthened without effort. This exercise is normally practiced twelve times. A mental count makes sure that the inhalation and the exhalation have the same duration. It does good to focus not only on the process itself, but on the comfort and the induced calmness as well; in this way, the concentration becomes deeper.

c...*Bandha*

The neck and the throat are slightly contracted, while the chin tilts down toward the breast (*Jalandhara Bandha*). The abdominal muscles are slightly contracted to intensify the perception of energy inside the spinal column (*Uddiyana Bandha*). The perineal muscles - between the anus and the genital organs - are contracted in an attempt to lift the abdominal muscles in vertical way, while pressing back the inferior part of the abdomen (*Mula Bandha*).

The three *Bandhas* are applied simultaneously and held out for about four seconds to produce a vibration of the body; this is repeated 3 times.

In time, a sensation of energetic current sliding up along the spinal column - an almost ecstatic internal shiver - will be perceived.³

d...Final concentration

With a deep relaxation attitude, the attention is intensely focused on the *Kutastha* - the point between the eyebrows - for at least five minutes.

First effects

Through diligent application, I wanted to verify if *Pranayama* was really endowed with the afore hinted potentiality. I began to practice the afore described routine in an "absolute" way, with a steadfast concentration, nearly as if it had been my only reason of life. I remember with nostalgia this intensity, especially when, for some reasons, I lack the initial spontaneity. I practiced morning and evening with an empty stomach. I began with some stretching exercises - also with some simple *Asana* when I had more time. Finally, I assumed the half-lotus position, sitting on the edge of a pillow, keeping my back straight.

I concentrated on applying the instructions correctly; I enjoyed the alternate feelings of coolness and warmth, produced by the air on the hand I used to

³ These "contractions" bring the energy into the spinal column; in *Kriya Yoga* they are to be found in *Maha Mudra*.

open and close the nostrils; the pressure, the smooth flowing of the breath... every detail turned out to be very pleasant. Becoming aware of each peculiarity of the exercise helped me maintain a vigilant attention without getting stressed out.

Sometimes, in the first sunny days after the winter, when the skies were crystalline and as blue as they had never been, I sat in the open air. I would contemplate what was around; if in a bushy and ivy-covered ditch the sun shed its light upon some flowers, which a month before were blooming during the cold winter days and in that moment they were still lingering on, regardless of the mildest days, that spell-binding glory would inspire me. I was in seventh heaven; I felt as if my perception of things had changed. I looked around for the most intense colours being fascinated by them as if they were a material substance that I could touch and receive in myself. Never would I think that *Yoga* could also drive me toward the dimension of aesthetic enjoyment: its discipline seemed fit just to dissolve the crowd of my thoughts. I could guess that by the time an aesthetic stimulus came, *Yoga* could grant me a lasting base of clarity, thus helping me maintain its beautiful atmosphere during the daily life.

After some weeks of enthusiastic practice, during one quiet afternoon, just before sunset, I was walking amid some trees. Giving now and then a brief look to a comment on some *Upanishads* which I used to bring with me, a sentence struck my mind: «Thou are that»! I closed the book and started to repeat the words as entranced. I do not know if my intuition grasped the incommensurable implication of that statement, but yes... I was that light filtering through the leaves, which were of an unbelievably delicate green because spring had spread them all out. Moving my sight around, a landscape appeared among the leaves: a group of distant houses surrounding a bell-tower. I closed my eyes and rely on the inner radiance of that vision.

Back home, I did not even try to put down the numerous "moments of grace" I experienced on paper - I would not have been able to do it. My only wish was to go further and further into this new inner experience.

Only that sort of "light" could instil a superhuman poise into my being and save me from acting, as far as human relationships were concerned, driven by the destructive impulses born from giant, uncontrollable emotions fed by the darkish sap of my fears.

In different occasions I noticed a change in my mind's global functioning – memory, concentration, etc. I could especially see this during my exams. Before the test began, a little bit of *Pranayama* would endow me with a sudden calm and self-possession, no matter what the questions and the examiner's attitude were. I would not feel nervous at all. I was able to

maintain the necessary self-control to master my speech, often succeeding in expressing clearly not only what I knew, but also something more, which just then seemed to become evident for the first time.

As for me, the decision to begin the practice of *Pranayama* changed the course of my life. I planted its practice like a seed in the desolation of my soul and it grew into a limitless joy and an internal freedom. This discipline implied much more than a change in personality: it grasped my hope and brought it forward.

Kundalini awakening

Something new and radically different from what I had experienced before came about. It was a kind of "intimate" event. Nonetheless, since it is a well-defined outcome, reached through the practice of *Pranayama*, I think it is worthwhile to share it accurately.

One night, immersed in the reading of a biography of an Indian saint, I had a shiver similar to an electric current that spread itself in my whole body. The experience was not particularly special, however a thought flashed upon my mind announcing the coming of a deeper experience.

Minutes passed by but I was not able to go on with the reading; my restlessness turned into anxiety, and became fear, an intense fear of something unknown to me, threatening my existence. I definitely never experienced such a terror. Normally, in moments of danger, I would remain paralyzed, unable to think; now the anxiety was of a different quality: I perceived something alien to the common experience, definitely unpredictable. I felt the urgency to do something, even though I did not know what, while my mind could not help envisioning the worst hypotheses about what was going to happen. I set myself in the position of meditation and waited. The anguish increased: I was sure I was close to madness – or to death. A part of me, maybe the totality of that entity I call "myself", seemed at the point of melting away; the worst thoughts hung over me without a clear reason.⁴

⁴ In those days I had finished Gopi Krishna's *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks). Here the author described the splendid awakening experience he had had following an intense practice of concentration on the seventh *Chakra*, whereas – because his body was probably unprepared – he later met serious physical and, as a reflex, psychic problems as well. According to his description, inside of his body, energy was put in constant motion from the base of the backbone toward the brain. So strong was that energy to force him in bed and to prevent the accomplishment of the normal bodily functions. He literally felt as if he was burned by an inner fire, which he could not put out. Weeks later, he intuitively discovered the way to check out the phenomenon, which became a stout experience of internal realization.

During those moments, the spiritual world appeared to me as a sorrowful and horrible nightmare, able to annihilate and destroy one that had imprudently approached it. Ordinary life, on the contrary, seemed the dearest, healthiest reality. I was afraid I might not be able to get back to that condition anymore. I was absolutely convinced that a mental illness was tearing to pieces my inner being and the reason was that I had opened a door looking out on a reality far more immense than I had ever foreseen.

I was not in the mood of remaining in the meditation position; I decided to take a break and put off the fatal moment as long as possible. I felt I had to set myself up and get out of the room into the open air. It was night and there was nobody to whom I could communicate my panic!

At the center of the yard I was burdened, choked, almost crushed by a feeling of desperation, envying all those people who had never practiced *Yoga*, feeling guilty and ashamed for hurting through harsh words a friend who had been involved in a part of my search. Like so many others, he had shunned any practice, forgot lofty readings and bothered about working and enjoying life. Equipped with a juvenile boldness, I had addressed to him some words not affectionate at all, which then started to thunder inside of my head; I felt sorry I had thrown unjustified cruelty at him without really knowing what was in his mind and soul. I would have done anything to tell him how sorry I was to have brutally violated his right to live the way it was best for him. He simply preferred to pursue mental health rather than become unstable or insane through unsure practices.

Because of my great passion for classical music, I thought that listening to it might yield the positive effect of protecting me from anguish, maybe it could help me to get back to my usual mood. Why not try, then? It was Beethoven's *Concert for Violin and Orchestra* that I listened to with a pair of headphones in my room that soothed my soul and, after half an hour, eased my sleep.

The following morning I woke up with the same fear in my mind. The concept of spiritual path, of a vast divine intelligence present in men, gave me a feeling of horror!

I had a whole day before me and the sunlight was shining through the window. I went out to try to amuse myself hanging out with other people. I met some friends but did not let out the things I was experiencing. All the

As far as I am concerned, I was afraid to have come to the threshold of the same experience but since I did not live in India I was scared the people surrounding me might not understand; the experience would have been terrible! Nobody could make sure that, as it happened to Gopi Krishna, my experience would be channelled toward a positive upshot.

afternoon was spent cracking all sort of jokes and behaving like the people I had always considered lazy and dull; I succeeded in hiding my anguish. The first day went by - my mind was very worn out. After two days the fear diminished and I finally felt safe. Something had changed anyway, since I actually did not succeed in thinking about the spiritual path: I went around that idea!

A week later, I began, calmly and detachedly, to ponder on the meaning of what had happened. I understood the nature of my reaction to that episode: I had cowardly run away from the experience I had pursued for so long a time! In the depth of my soul, my dignity was leading me to continue my search, exactly from the point where I had quited. I was ready to accept all that was to happen and let things follow their course, even if this process implied the loss of my wholesomeness.

I began the practice of *Pranayama* again, intensely as before. A few days went by without detecting any form of fear. Then, I experienced something awfully beautiful - many readers will recognize in the following description their same experience.

It was night. I was relaxed in *Savasana* when I had a pleasant sensation, as if an electric wind was blowing in the external part of my body propagating itself, quickly and with a wavy motion, from my feet up to my head. My body was so tired that I could not move, even though my mind imparted the order to move. I had no fear: my composure was serene. The electric wind was replaced by another feeling, comparable to an enormous strength filling into the backbone and quickly climbing up to the brain. That experience was characterized by an indescribable and so far unknown sense of bliss; the perception of an intense brightness accompanied everything. My memory is condensed in one expression, «a clear and euphoric certainty of existing, like an unlimited ocean of awareness and beatitude ». In the work *God Exists. I have met Him* (London 1970) by A. Frossard, the author tries to give an idea of his spiritual experience. For that purpose he creates the concept of "inverse avalanche". The avalanche is something collapsing, running downhill, first slowly, then faster and violently at the same time. Frossard suggests that we imagine an "upside-down avalanche" which begins strengthening at the foot of the mountain and climbs up pushed by an increasing power; then, suddenly, it leaps up toward the sky. I do not know how long this experience lasted; its peak definitely held out only a few seconds.

The strangest thing is that in the instant in which I had it, my awareness found it familiar; it was perfectly at ease as it had already known it, lived it everyday, since time immemorial. All the temporary states of mind which constitute our life, all our moods, feelings were as excrescences grown from

that basis. When I returned to usual consciousness, I turned on my side and fall into a calm, uninterrupted sleep.

The following day, when I woke up, I did not think of it; it only came up some hours later, during a walk. I was caught by the beauty of that experience and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, for many minutes I was literally enthralled by the reverberation of this memory upon my soul.

The rational mind tried to gain confidence - impossible task - with an experience which was beyond it. All the things I had thought about *Yoga* until then did not have any importance at all. To me, the experience was like being stricken by a lightning. I did not even have the chance to find out which parts of me were still there and which ones had disappeared; I was not able to really understand what had happened to me, rather I was not sure that "something" had really happened.

CHAPTER I/2... A KRIYA ORGANIZATION

A certainty of eternity, a condition stretching out way over the limits of my awareness - a sort of memory hiding in the recesses of my awareness - began to appear before my eyes, as if a new area of my brain was stirred to a full awakening.

Later on, I could witness again the same experience a lot of times. Devoting myself to study up late, only granting myself short resting breaks every now and then, at the moment I laid down exhausted, this would invariably take place in a few minutes and the rush of the energy would occur many times.

Naturally, it appeared only on condition that, on the same day or the day before, I had practiced my *Kriya* deeply.

Later, I had a lot of opportunities of making some comparison talking with people who had the same experience. It happened, preferably, when one, pervaded by an intense spiritual aspiration, practiced *Yoga* or similar meditation exercises, being concentrated deeply in the *Kutastha* at least for twenty minutes, then was occupied in a work requiring unswerving concentration, without surrendering to the tendency of falling asleep.

My routine, indeed, always ended with a very intense concentration on the *Kutastha*, as if my life depended on the outcome of this action. Sometimes the tension grew and perhaps recalled the one which, in some oriental books it is described as yearning for the spiritual goal as «one who is drowning desires to breathe». The habit of studying till late created the most favorable condition, an intermediary dimension between a state of sleep and a state of vigilance.

I could not avoid utilizing the reality of the daily life as a field of observation: in my youthful boldness I was convinced I was seeing people as through a transparency. I made the mistake to try to discuss my opinions. Since to me human misery consisted entirely in one thing, the tyranny of thought, I tried to make my friends aware of this fact. Their way of acting and expressing themselves appeared to me accompanied by a kind of hysteria, embodying a mental deception; they wanted to create a totally false image of themselves. So often they gave the impression of "imploding"; they "disappeared" for some time, they could no longer bear up with those friends they had loved so much up to that time. In other words I assumed they were victims of uncontrollable emotions, nurtured against any logic by a thinking machine which was out of their control. I was convinced that *Pranayama* had the power to help them live a better, more sincere and coherent life and make them experience the blossoming out of the boundless joy which I believed was really just behind the self-torture of their existence. I spoke so much as to

generate a violent reaction.

Let us put aside the allegation of madness and of serious mental trouble that some murmured about, almost to avoid the task of listening attentively to me. It was odd to see that they did not discuss my theories but replied that I was unable to love, to respect and to show human sympathy toward others. Undoubtedly my analysis and remedy was "too simple and bare". The transparency of mind I spoke about was a meaningless void, something unnatural to them; it smacked of «death», of a painful and cold grasp and of a threat to the joys of their life.

Only a friend, a "Hippie" (we were in the '70s), showed me some empathy; the only inappropriate thing to him was my zeal in the discipline. All the other people kept harassing me rather bitterly.

There came a period of my life in which I felt so disoriented, wondering what was the meaning of the word "friendship" to me. I began suspecting that I was actually taking advantage of a friendship to just discuss my theories. I had to give up and admit that the ability of expressing true love belonged to others, not to me.

First information about Kriya

I kept following my way, determined to improve the art of breathing - unconcerned about any limit. After having bought the works of *Ramakrishna* and *Vivekananda* and a beautiful book with comments to *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* - the ancient work, fundamental to understand the foundations of *Yoga*, especially *Pranayama* - I finally decided to buy the autobiography of an Indian saint, a book I had already seen some years before without buying it.

I was fond only of practical manuals but then I thought I might find out useful information, such as the addresses of some good schools of *Yoga*. The author whom I will indicate by P.Y.⁵ was an expert of that kind of *Pranayama*, which was first taught by Lahiri Mahasaya and called *Kriya Yoga*.

He wrote that this technique had to be mastered through four stages. This

⁵ The reader will understand that I did not mention the full name of P.Y. - it is not difficult, however, to figure out his identity. There are many schools of *Yoga* spreading his teachings according to a specific legitimation. One of these, through its representatives, made me realize that not only won't they tolerate the least Copyright violation, but also they won't even appreciate their beloved Teacher's name to be mixed into discussions on *Kriya* on the Internet. The reason is that, in the past, some people used His name to mislead the search of a high number of practitioners who were trying to receive His original teachings. Moreover, I mean to underline that in the following pages I will only summarily linger upon my understanding of His legacy, without any pretension to give an objective account of it. An interested reader should not renounce the privilege of turning to the original texts!

sparked my curiosity. Lahiri Mahasaya was depicted as the incarnation of *Yoga*: surely there must have been something unique in his "way"! I loved *Pranayama*, and the idea of improving it through different steps sounded amazingly wondrous: if the breathing exercises I had already practiced had given me such incomparable results, it was obvious that the *Kriya* four-stage system would make them greater and greater!

I began to explore as much literature as I could find about *Pranayama* and I went on reading all the books by P.Y. . I was amazed by his personality, with unequalled will and an unexpected practical spirit. He would not excite me when he spoke on a purely devotional tone, but it did whenever he assumed a more technical one, making it possible for me to get at some aspects of the subtle art of *Kriya* - I considered it an art in continuous refinement, not a religious engagement.

What I could guess was that *Kriya* consisted in way of breathing slow and deep, while the awareness was focused on the spine. Somehow the inner energy was made rotate around the *Chakras*. The author highlighted the evolutionary value of such exercise, not just including a man's spiritual side but his physical and mental sides too. He explained that if we compare the human spinal column to a ferromagnetic substance constituted, as taught by Physics, of elementary magnets that turn toward the same direction when they are overlapped by a magnetic field, then, the action of *Pranayama* is akin to this process of magnetization.

By uniformly redirecting all the "subtle" parts of our spinal cord's physical and astral essence, *Pranayama* would burn the so-called "bad seeds" of *Karma*.

We allude to *Karma* whenever we stick to the common belief that a person inherits a baggage of latent tendencies from his previous lives and that, sooner or later, these tendencies are to come out in actual life. Of course *Kriya* is a practice that can be experimented without necessarily having to accept any creeds, however since it lies at the basis of Indian thought, that is why it is worth speaking freely of it. According to this belief, *Pranayama* burns out the effects of the "bad seeds" just before they become manifest in our lives. It is further explained that those people who are instinctively attracted by methods of spiritual development such as *Kriya*, have already practiced something similar in a "precedent incarnation". This is because such an action is never in vain and in the actual life they get back to it exactly where, in a remote past, they quit it.

I wondered if the four levels of *Kriya* consisted in a sequential process of refining the spinal cord or in the conquest, with the consequent awakening, of particular areas in the brain. My imagination played freely and my fervor grew.

My compelling problem was whether I had to leave or not for India and look for a teacher who would give me all the clarifications about the *Kriya* practice. At that time, planning to get through very soon with my university studies, I excluded a journey in the near future.

I rather chose to remain here and try to improve the already practiced exercises of *Pranayama*, using all the books I could find about *Yoga*, no matter in what language they were written.

Now I knew what to search for: *Kriya* should necessarily be a form of *Pranayama* which could produce the effect of rotating the inner energy around the *Chakras*. If this had to be - as stated by P.Y. - a universal process, I had good chances of tracing it through other sources.

There was something locked in a corner of my memory which became alive again. When I was a child, I used to read everything I came on to, especially books censored by the Church or considered strongly unsuited for my age anyway; I was proud to practice a total freedom of choice and I was not open to any advice. I wasted a lot of time on poor readings. In that great heap of books it was impossible to distinguish in advance between the valuable ones and the many other ones which, through tantalizing titles, contained but tall stories, impossible chimeras aimed at stunning people. In the end I felt I had travelled through an indistinct chaos. I had the bitter feeling that the most precious secrets were still hidden in some other esoteric books, which I was not lucky enough to find.

Now, I vaguely remembered seeing some drawings, somewhere, sketching out the profile of a person and different circuits of energy all the way through his body.

The idea came to seek the needed information in the esoteric books rather than in the classic books on *Yoga*.

I started going to a resale of used books; it was very well furnished, probably because it had once been the Theosophical Society's reference bookstore. I turned down those texts which dealt only with philosophical topics, while, in ecstasy and not concerned by the time, I kept on skimming through those which illustrated practical exercises with clarity.

Before purchasing a book I made sure it hinted at the possibility of driving the energy along certain internal channels, of creating a distinct action on the *Kundalini* energy and of arousing it.

Since my first visit, I had been very lucky; while reading the index of a text in three volumes, introducing the esoteric thought of a famous Brotherhood, I was attracted by an entry *Breathing exercise for the awakening of Kundalini*.

It was a variation of *Nadi Sodhana*; this was, according to the authors, the secret to wake the mysterious energy!

I'll try to reconstruct the technique by sheer memory, being no longer practicing it. During the inhalation through the left nostril, an energetic current is imagined coming in through the nose and down to the base of the spinal column. The sacred syllable *Om* is to be pronounced three times, thereby visualizing and striking the *Muladhar Chakra*.

Then, exhaling, a current starting from the *Muladhar* and going up into the body, and particularly into the spine, is to be felt.

Some notes warned not to exaggerate with the exercise, because of the risk of a premature *Kundalini* awakening. This was to be avoided by all means.

Definitely, this was not P.Y.'s *Kriya* because, according to several clues, *Kriya* was not to be done through the alternate-nostril breathing.

So, I went on haunting the bookstore; the owner was very nice with me and I felt almost obliged, also considering the cheap price and the perfect conditions of those second-hand books, to buy at least a book per each visit. But sometimes I got very disappointed; a lot of space was usually reserved to theories alien from concrete life, which tried to describe what cannot be seen and what cannot be experienced, the astral worlds, the subtle coverings of energy wrapping our body.

One day, after a tiresome selection, I went to the storekeeper holding a book in my hand; he must have realized that I was not convinced about buying it; so, while deciding the price, he remembered something that might interest me.

He led me to the rear, inviting me to rummage in a messy heap of notes within a carton box. Among a consistent quantity of miscellaneous material (complete series of the theosophical magazine issues, scattered notes from an old course of hypnosis, etc.) I came on a booklet, written in German by a certain K. Spiesberger, which illustrated some *Mantras* and some esoteric techniques: I ran onto the *Kundalini-breathing*.

I did not have much familiarity with the German language, but I immediately realized the extraordinary importance of that technique; I would undoubtedly decipher all of it at home, with the help of a good dictionary. ⁶

The description of the *Kundalini Breathing* still amazes me; the author, in fact, was not as close to Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* as to the version that P.Y. brought to the west.

During a deep inhalation, the air was to be imagined flowing up the spinal

⁶ I cannot help smiling when some half-hearted people insist that they are fond of *Kriya*, yet they will not study some crucial texts in English because they are afraid to misinterpret them. I am convinced that their interest is superficial and rather emotive. Such was my enthusiasm, that I would have studied Sanskrit or Chinese or any other language, if that had given me the chance to understand an essential text on *Pranayama*!

column, abandoning its habitual course; the visualization of this as an empty tube was therefore prescribed and, inhaling, the air was to be imagined streaming along it from its base all the way up to the area between the eyebrows; then, exhaling, the air had to go down back to the base, along the same route.

In another book, in English, there was an exhaustive description of the *Magic breath* - more or less the same exercise.

In it, the difference was in feeling the energy "around" the backbone, not inside it, following an elliptic path. Through the inhalation, the energy had to go up behind the spinal column, to the center of the head; exhaling, it had to go down along the front part of the body, just as in the "Microcosmic Orbit" technique which is described in the Internal Alchemy texts - the mystic tradition of ancient China.

I forgot about the other material. The smirk of satisfaction I wore before the storekeeper, as if I had found a treasure of unfathomable value, definitely caused an increase of their price.

Walking home, I could not help skimming through the pages; I was curious about some rough drawings illustrating techniques which were based on the movement of energy.

Something that I had read, on the value of the *Magic breath*, filled me with much higher enthusiasm; that was one of the most hidden secrets in the esoteric schools of all times. If practiced constantly, accompanied by the strength of visualization, it would produce a sort of internal substance allowing for the spiritual eye's vision.

Studying closely these two techniques at home, I convinced myself that the *Magic breath* technique must have surely been Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*. The results coming from this practice were not different from the already practiced *Pranayama*, namely the combination of *Nadi Sodhana* and *Ujjayi*.

While I was looking for all the ways to find the needed information, while reading again a text of P.Y. I came to know, with my great amazement, that he had written a whole set of lessons on *Kriya*, and that these could be received by correspondence. This would have saved me, at least for some years a trip to India. I applied quickly for this course.

Being a member of an organization and joining a group

While I was waiting for the written *Yoga* instructions sent by mail, a letter from the organization informed me about the existence of other people, living not far from my place, who were practicing *Kriya* and had formed a meditation group. I was enthusiastic of this and quivered with cheerful anticipation to meet them. That night I hardly succeeded in falling asleep.

I had the first contact with them through the *kriyaban* (one who practices *Kriya*) who organized their meetings. With great enthusiasm and a sort of euphoria, I approached him, hoping, among other things, to receive some more details about *Kriya*. I remember our meeting with excitement; that was a key event indeed - by no means positive.

«Too bright were our heavens, too far away, too frail their ethereal stuff», wrote *Sri Aurobindo*: I would never have thought that those words could be applied to the consequences of that meeting of mine!

With a sort of sour irony, I would dare to say that up to that moment, my existence had been too happy to last long. Life is made of short moments of calm and balance, in an alternation of vicissitudes; in them, people experience problems, limitations and deformations caused by the human mind through their own skin. Approaching this guy with a total and alarming sincerity, I could not realize what kind of hard shock I was about to receive.

He welcomed me with visible enthusiasm, sincerely eager to meet a person with whom he could share the fire of his passion. Since the very first moment of our meeting, standing on his house's doorstep, I told him how fascinated I was by the practice of *Kriya*! He asked me right away when I had been initiated in this practice, taking for granted that I had received the teaching from the same organization he was a member of. As I came to know, he was practicing *Kriya* since no more than a year, having being taught by a direct disciple of P.Y.. When he figured the way I had learned the technique, he got petrified, showing a bitter smile of disappointment. It was as if I had declared to be the executor of the greatest of all crimes.

He emphasized that *Kriya* cannot be learned through books. He began the tale - which, later on, I had the opportunity to hear plenty of times - of the Tibetan *yogi* Milarepa who, getting no positive results from the painstaking practice of his fraudulently-learned techniques, received the very same instructions kneeling at the feet of and with the benediction of his *Guru* - so that this time the results came out easily.

We all know how the human mind is more conditioned by an anecdote than by a logical inference! An anecdote - even if it is a total fancy with novelistic purposes - is endowed with a sort of internal "brightness" that conditions a person's common sense; stimulating the emotions and feelings, it is able to make people accept conclusions that are absurd to the faculties of reason. This story made me speechless; I just did not know what to reply.

There was only one way to learn *Kriya*: being initiated by a "Minister" authorized by the direction of his own organization! According to his words, nobody on earth was allowed to teach that technique. Staring right into my eyes, with an enormous emotive impact, he went on saying that a practice learned from any other source was «worth nothing, it will not be effective in

matters of spiritual purpose», and a possible effect might be «a dangerous illusion in which the ego remains trapped for a long time».

Inflamed by an absolute faith, he launched himself in a wide digression upon the value of the "*Guru*" - spiritual Teacher - a puzzling concept to me because it was attributed to a person that he had not known directly. In his opinion, having been initiated to *Kriya* through the legitimated channels, P.Y. was real and present in his life: was his *Guru*. The same thing was true for the people who belonged to that group. Their *Guru* was a special aid sent by God Himself, therefore such an event was «the greatest luck a human being can ever have».

The logical consequence - underlined with overflowing emphasis - was that, abandoning such form of aid or looking for a different spiritual path, amounted to «a hateful rejection of the Divine hand, stretched out to offer His benediction».

He smiled, led me in his room and asked me to demonstrate for him my self-learned *Kriya* technique.

He was naturally pushed by human curiosity and, I suppose, by the expectation to verify a well-rooted prejudice that the technique, learned through illegitimate channels, could not - because of a particular spiritual law - be but corrupted.

He felt relieved, intimately "reassured" when he saw me breathing through the nose instead of through the mouth, as he was told to; therefore my practice was evidently wrong to him. He asked me to explain more deeply what I was visualizing during my breathing and, while I was telling him, I saw an inner satisfaction spreading all over his face.

He was relishing the fact that in my guessing the technique I had gone very far astray from the real *Kriya*. The secret he was bound to had not been broken by any of the authors of my esoteric books!

The reader might remember that, according to my books, the way of transporting the energy while breathing could be done through a route around the *Chakras* or inside of the backbone. I tried both ways but, since P.Y. wrote that it was correct to move the energy «around» the *Chakras*, I mainly settled on the first one; therefore, this was the version I explained. Besides, having read in another book that during *Kriya Pranayama* the practitioner was supposed to sing *Om* mentally in the *Chakras*, I added this detail as well.

I could not imagine that P.Y. had decided to simplify the instructions and taught in the west the other variation (the breath moving inside of the spine), with the breathing done through the mouth and no mental singing of the *Om*. So, we were in a strange situation - I was telling him exactly what I would discover in the future to be the original *Pranayama* taught by Lahiri Mahasaya, and he had a sarcastic simper on, a hundred per cent sure that I

was talking nonsense! Pretending to feel sorry for my consequent disappointment, he informed me in an official tone that my technique had «nothing to do with *Kriya Pranayama*»!

Since my position was totally inconsistent, he recommended me to send a written account to the direction of the school, describing the details of my vicissitudes, hoping that they would accept me as a disciple. Only then would I start the practice under their guidance.

I was somewhat stunned by the tones our dialog was turning in to. In order to re-establish the initial agreeability of our meeting, I tried to reassure him about the positive effects that I had gained from my practice. My statement had the effect of worsening the whole matter, giving him the chance of a second scolding which was not totally unfair but, undoubtedly, out of place.

He made clear that I should never look for any tangible effects in the practice of *Kriya*; much less should I display them, because in this way I would «lose them».

That "poor, naive guy", had gotten straight into an obvious contradiction without even realizing it; he was saying that the results were too important to risk losing them by telling others, and a few seconds before he had underlined that they were of no value whatsoever, rather, «they might be negative and dangerous»!

I saw a strange metamorphosis in him, as if all of a sudden he had been invested of a sacred role; he promised that he would «pray for me »!

For that day, at least, I lost the "fight". I told my friend that I would follow his advice.

As a habit, the group practicing *Kriya* would meet twice a week to practice the techniques together. The room devoted to meditation was elemental but pleasant. Each member paid part of the rental, so that its fruition would not depend on the owner's whims; in this way we also had the privilege of consecrating it to an exclusively spiritual use.

My attendance started in a period that I remember nostalgically; listening to Indian songs translated and harmonized for westerners and, above all, meditating together was a true joy! Everything seemed paradisiac to me, even though little time was given to the practice - no more than 20 minutes; often, scanty 15 minutes. A particularly beautiful session of collective practice took place on Christmas Eve; it was enriched by devotional songs and it lasted a lot of hours. Since I had not received *Kriya* "officially" yet, they asked me to limit my practice to simply centering the awareness onto the point between the eyebrows. At the end of each meditation we were required to depart in silence, thus I began to know my new *kriyaban* friends more closely only during the monthly meetings.

Actually, once a month we had the "social" lunch. It was a beautiful chance to spend some time talking together and enjoying each other.

Since many of us had not their family approval and - much less - support to the practice of *Yoga*, the only occasion we had to spend time among people with the same ideas and interests had to be an experience of great serenity and relaxation.

Unfortunately, a distinct embarrassment in our behavior spoiled the pleasantries of our meeting. But those who directed the school from a distance, had requested not to talk about other spiritual paths and deal with specific details about *Kriya*. Authorized people only, could cover such a role; no one in our group could.

During our gatherings, since our conversations were strictly kept on well-defined tracks, we were not able to find a topic for our conversations which would be interesting and, at the same time, respect the given rules. It was not the right place for worldly gossips unsuitable for a spiritual group. So one single topic was left: the beauty of our spiritual path and our great fortune in having discovered it! No wonder that, after some meetings of mutual "exaltation", an almost frightening boredom started to reign in the group.

As a last resort, some risked entering the realm of jokes; they were no mean jokes, but such a light and innocent sense of humor had to live up to the devotional attitude kept by many of the members. Instead of that, it eventually gave in to the cold attitude of the larger part of them, who would not show a single inch of true joviality. If someone had tried to uphold the atmosphere of our get-together, he would have been left frozen for the rest of the day. As a matter of course, the group underwent a great recycling process; many members, who had joined in with enthusiasm, decided to quit after a few months, scraping the whole experience off their consciousness.

However my open temperament allowed me to near some person and to establish a bond which became a true friendship.

It was very difficult to find a true spiritual seeker. Even believing that I was among individuals akin to me - which means enthusiastic of *Kriya* - I had to admit that the reality was different! Some of them reacted to my enthusiasm with annoyance: they could not believe that I had no doubts or uncertainties at all regarding the *Kriya* path. They considered my euphoria being typical of an immature beginner.

Someone told me: «You will see when you will receive *Kriya* you will be disappointed». This is very strange: I don't know what they meant.

Trying to disguise my curiosity, in different occasions I tried to deepen the discourse, also quoting the details of my practice, in order to guess, at least in general terms, from their remarks the correct technique.

No "courting" could extract from them even a crumb of the coveted details.

Each one repeated he was «not authorized to give out any explanations»: this rule was strictly respected: they had received the technique, submitting a precise and solemn promise of secrecy.

Secrecy!

How odd this word sounded to me, what a strange appeal, what a mysterious fascination it exerted upon my being! Until then, I had always believed that it did not matter at all how a certain teaching was learned, or what book had been read or studied for it; the only important thing was to practice it correctly, always accompanied by the desire to go deeper and deeper into it.

I felt it was not an awkward idea to protect a precious lore from indiscreet eyes. Apparently, secrecy was advisable in this field; later, during an arc of many years, I witnessed an innumerable series of absurdities originating from this behest; dramatically, I had the evidence that it brought miserable repercussions into the life of thousands of people.

With the exception of one person (who harbored really strange ideas about the spiritual path, at the point that the thought he was mentally unstable, with emotional difficulties, crossed my mind) these new *kriyaban* friends seemed to censor my excessive interest in techniques, saying that devotion was much more important; often they referred to a concept that I could hardly link to the practice of *Yoga*: the paramount importance of loyalty towards P.Y. and his organization.

No meanness is intended here, but I had the impression they made a moderate effort at the practice of *Kriya* and strove to extract from the depths of their psyche any outer shell of devotion which was amplified by their sensitiveness. I remember a lady - it seems a joke but it is not - eating ice cream only if it had the same taste as the legend reported as P.Y.'s favorite. She was insuperable narrating stories on P.Y.'s life. In my sensibility I could never conceive the least idea to lean passively upon the protection of a saint who solves all the problems and let the practical intelligence to get lazy. This fact, together with others I had experienced in that school, was a cause of real conflict. It seemed that each of us had a different approach to the spiritual path, without any hope of reaching a point of contact.

Looking back to those times, I wonder what those people's opinion about me and my reckless attitude might have been. Definitely a real threat to their quietness and – if I can take the liberty of saying it – to their indolence.

Preliminary techniques to Kriya

Shortly after my admission to the group, I was introduced to an elderly lady who had corresponded with P.Y. himself. Thanks to her earnestness, sincerity and long-time loyal discipleship, she had been authorized to teach the *Kriya* preliminary techniques.

Her temperament was very sweet and more inclined to the understanding rather than to the censorship.

From what I could read in her face, when she referred to my *Kriya* technique - which had been guessed through my non-orthodox readings - I had the assurance that it was correct and effective. Nonetheless, she thought that learning the technique from official channels, maybe in the future, I would begin a more beautiful and satisfactory practice.

She taught me two preliminary techniques to *Kriya*, categorically inviting me to limit my practice to them only.⁷ The first one eases off the breath and the whole psychophysical system; it is called *Hong-So* because of the employed *Mantra*. The second one concerns the listening to internal (astral) sounds melting into the *Om* sound. She did not give me these instructions all at one time, but in two intervals of time, the second one four months after the first one. In this way I had the unique and splendid possibility to concentrate on the first technique for a long time; only then would the combination of the two techniques come, the first one in the morning and a total immersion in the second one in the night. Therefore, I could experiment the meaning and the beauty of each one.

The *Hong-so* technique is simple. It consists - after some deep breaths in oxygenating the blood and calming the system - in letting the breath free, repeating mentally the *Mantra* "*Hong-so*", the syllable *Hong* during the inhalation and *So* during the exhalation. The concentration, the inner gaze, is to be kept upon the third eye. The essential recommendation is not to influence the breath; it has to go on in a natural and spontaneous way.

These were the technique's practical details but, foreseeing the thought rising in my mind, she went on adding that the procedure was not easy at all, in spite of its apparent simplicity. She said that if the results had been disappointing, the cause would be some subtle mistakes in the practice.

⁷ In order to be precise, she also checked the so-called "Recharging Exercises" I had already learned from the lessons. These were physical exercises similar to the isometric gymnastic which were practised by standing and in which the strength of the concentration directed the energy in all the parts of the body.

She remained rather vague but, encouraging me with a smile, she concluded: «it is true that the technique calls for a great commitment, but it contains every tool to come into contact with the Divine essence».

I will be honest; my superficial beginner's attitude led me to think of the *Mantra* as a "magical formula", which would produce amazing results.

The school's theoretic teachings introduced the rather strange thesis that this technique had to be approached as the only "scientific" way to obtain a real effective concentration.

This is how I was induced to think that within some days, simply following these instructions, I would be able to develop a superhuman concentration.

As it is obvious, I came into a big disappointment: that was the most boring technique in the world. Its practice seemed useless and dull.

I carried on this *Mantra* for weeks, but most of the time I could not remain fully conscious of my breathing.

It was at that very moment that, supported by the same goodwill characterizing my way of learning, I started to observe attentively a couple of details which, in my opinion, were responsible of my failures.

[I]...The *Mantra Hong-so*, broadly quoted in the Indian spirituality classical texts, is really excellent to ease off the breathing rhythm gradually, without forcing it. By repeating it mentally over and over, it can easily and naturally conform to a hard-to-change rhythm. Once breathing follows this rhythm, as a consequence it never settles down. Once the rhythm has stabilized itself, inhalations and exhalations are made, even if the body "would like" to stay off-breath for some moments. At this point, short inhalations or exhalations are made without the body having a physiological need to breathe. Anybody can avoid this situation by keeping off from any established rhythm during the mental chanting of the *Mantra*. The pauses between a breath and another should be "allowed to exist"; therefore, they should be perceived and enjoyed, no matter if each lasts less than an instant. This simple fact is sufficient to ease the breath off, while a condition of total and almost perfect immobility stabilizes within the body.

[II]...Another detail is based upon the fact that during the inhalation the chest swells out and gets into elastic tension. When the lungs are distended, there is a force trying to bring them back into the previous shape. The pause between the inhalation and the exhalation is contrasted not only by the rhythm but by the chest elasticity as well. Maintaining the concentration on the chest and on its elastic strength is sufficient to make a more comfortable and freer pause after the inhalation; the exercise will then result more harmonious. Putting all this into practice, my breathing became subtler and subtler and a

"virtuous circle" between this growing calmness and a reduced necessity of oxygen brought me to a condition of breathing annihilation, while the movement of the air, outside and inside my lungs, was reduced to a throb. By respecting these simple details, the *Hong So* technique lost completely the aspect of a boring chore and became a wonderful, blissful break.

Trying to discuss my observations with those who were supposed to practice that technique, I realized how hard it was for them to talk about such things. Sometimes I noticed an enormous and unreasonable resistance.

People belonging to the group could be divided into two groups, those who were not satisfied with the practice but planned to try it again in the future with more attention (at that time they would not listen to my reasoning), and those who, on the contrary, could not understand what I was saying.

They sustained, without any conviction or wish to make the least experiment whatsoever, to be sure that what I had proposed was an alteration and a twisting of the original technique.

I remember that when I tried to explain carefully these details to a lady, she pretended to listen attentively to me; in the end, she came out with a dogmatism amounting to the direst violence, saying that she already had a *Guru* and did not feel the need for another one.

I was shocked and wounded, since I was perfectly aware that my explanation did not mean to be "another teaching" at all.

My attempt was not to control or guide the breathing. On the contrary, I used a particular care in order to preserve its spontaneity.

To pass by such episodes one after the other confirmed the idea that the apparent assiduousness of these people to their daily practice was the result of their superstition.

Lacking the sufficient attention to self observation, they went on performing mechanically what had become an empty ritual, a way to appease their conscience.

In order to introduce the second preliminary technique, the so called *Om* technique, that lady explained that her teacher, P.Y. (the same who had decided that this technique, among so many possible ones, should be a necessary rather than optional preparation to *Kriya*), had tried to explain the teaching of the Trinity in a new way.

Om is the "*Amen*" of the Bible - the **Holy Ghost**, the "witness", a sound; a proof of the vibration of energy sustaining the universe.

This technique, discovered by the mystics long ago, makes it possible to detect this vibration. Thanks to it, it is also possible to be guided toward such a deep state, which cannot be reached in other ways.

Through this experience, a *kriyaban* can achieve that of the "**Son**" - the Divine awareness that is present inside the above-mentioned energetic vibration.

At the end of his spiritual journey, he can reach the highest reality, the "**Father**" - the Divine awareness beyond every existing thing in the universe.

While the previous *Hong So* technique leads to the development of concentration (also characterized by peace and spontaneous joy), the latter allows for a direct contact with the spiritual Goal.⁸

Before beginning the *Om* technique, a *yogi* leans his elbows on a comfortable support that can be made for the purpose. The support can be a simple horizontal table of any material, covered with foam-rubber and settled on a vertical stake of adjustable height.

Practising in the evening or at night is best; it is preferable to lock oneself up in a room, so that nobody will disturb.

The practice consists in closing the ears with the thumbs and in listening to every internal sound, while chanting *Om* mentally, different times: *Om, Om Om...*

The attention, according to the instructions, is directed to the inner part of the right ear, since the subtle sounds can be realized more easily and more persistently there.

The *yogi's* intuition begins a long journey into his deepest memory, that of his Divine origin.

The *Om* can be heard in a lot of variations; it can be easily perceived after the ears have been closed, as soon as the least internal calm is created.

The right attitude is to focus upon the loudest of these variations. This is the secret to succeed in tuning with the real *Om* sound, like the roaring of the ocean.

Each mental repetition of the *Om*, keeping the attention alive, is essential; the awareness patiently follows any feeble inner sound like an "Ariadne's thread" out of the labyrinth of mind. Then, it approaches a vast region, the *Omkar* reality, which is the vibration of the primeval Energy.

The lady's explanation was characterized by such a sacred flavour that it accompanied me for the following weeks, helping me overcome the beginning

⁸ This technique does not belong to those included in the *Kriya Yoga*, where the internal sounds perception happens without closing the ears. It is not a secret invented by P.Y.. It had been plainly described in the books of classical *Yoga*, called *Nada Yoga* - "the *Yoga* of the sound." It is a good preparation for *Kriya* since instead of putting the accent on "to do" teaches the attitude of "perceiving." It does not foster imagination since *Om* cannot be misunderstood in any way, it is not ambiguous.

of the practice, where it seems impossible that the sounds will manifest. I remember nostalgically my time in that slightly illuminated room, where I confined myself like a hermit. One day, after a three-week practice, having just begun the exercises ten minutes before, so that my awareness was in a state of deep relaxation, I realized I could hear an inner sound. It did not happen abruptly, but I felt as if I had been hearing it for some minutes.

It reminded me of the humming of a mosquito, then it became a bell, heard from a distance; finally, my concentration detected the noise of running waters. The bell sound was a sweet embrace; it was a really ecstatic experience and it occurred so strangely that it grabbed my awareness and drove me into a sweet dimension, where I felt at ease. I have personally never had the opportunity to hear sounds such as that of a flute or a harp, which are largely quoted in the classical literature. Listening to the *Om* meant touching beauty itself. I could not imagine something similar making a person feel so fine; I felt I was surrounded by the wings of the ineffable.

The experience I was living was far greater than my little self. It was the quintessence of bliss and it went beyond any human hope, beyond any human desire.

All this happened in a very precise moment of my life, when for the first time I indirectly ran into the concept of "devotion". I remember that whenever that sense of bliss arose, I would say to myself: «This is what I have always desired. I do not want to lose it anymore».⁹

In the search of anything pertaining to the *Omkar* experience, I found the writings of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. The first gave a splendid description of his meeting with the "silent music", the "sounding solitude". There is no doubt he heard the *Omkar*'s typical rushing waters sound.

Recollections of my Kriya initiation ceremony

By studying the correspondence course, I learned different useful ways of creating healthy habits, from how to behave with a disturbed wife to how find a job that would not contrast with the spiritual path.

I tried my utmost to embrace the school's peculiar Indian-Christian religious vision, even though it was radically extraneous to me. I was natural to admire and cherish the figure of *Krishna*, imagining Him as the quintessence of every

⁹ A lot of people start the *Kriya* path from a wrong attitude, as if seeking results that gratify the ego. They believe and hope that the *Kriya* is a path of "psychological growth", but they will not find a substitute for psychotherapy! We are human beings and need a path that has a "heart." We should relax by recreating the memory and the atmosphere of the most beautiful experiences we have ever had in our life and feel a strong desire of finding them again in the *Om* vibration, which is the Beauty itself.

beauty; more difficult become acquainted with that of the Divine Mother also, who was not the Madonna, but a sweetening of the idea of the goddess Kali. So much I did that I estranged from myself. I read and reread only P.Y.'s writings. Sometimes I considered a particular thought of P.Y. so beautiful and perfect that I would write it down on a sheet of paper to hold it in front of me while studying at my desk. While I was continuously receiving unmasked lessons of devotion, humility and loyalty, my interest for *Kriya* became a real craving, a burning fever.

I could not understand the reason for which I had to wait for it for so long a time: my great anticipation turned, sometimes, into a fruitless anguish. The real *Kriya* technique could be applied for, as a rule, after one year of study of the correspondence course. In my case, contingent reasons turned it into two years - the written material traveled by ship and the delay times were enormous.

During this long waiting time, now and then those who already had received the *Kriya* initiation made fun of me with an unconcealed cruelty and told me: «They won't give you the *Kriya* at all; a devotee should not desire a technique with such intensity: that's neither good nor wise. God is to be mostly found through devotion and surrender». I tried to be good; I waited and dreamed.

Eventually, the moment came to fill the application form to receive the *Kriya* instructions by mail. About four months passed by, every day I hoped to receive the coveted material, finally, an envelope arrived. I opened it with an expectation that I would not be able to describe: I remained deeply disappointed because it contained ulterior introduction material. From the first page index of the material, I understood it was the first of a weekly series, whereas the proper complete technique would be sent within five weeks. So, for another month, I would have to study just the usual nursery rhymes I already knew by heart.

In the meantime, it happened that a Minister of that organization visited our country and I could take part in the ceremony of initiation.

After waiting for months, it was high time that I came «to an eternal agreement with the *Guru*, to be taught the *Kriya* techniques in the only legitimate way, together with his benediction».

Those who, like me, were ready to be initiated were about one hundred.

A beautiful room had been rented for the ceremony at a very high price and embellished for the occasion with lots of flowers, as I have never seen in my life, nor even in the most extravagant weddings. The introduction to the ceremony happened in a magnificent way: about thirty people wearing a sober uniform, entered the room lining up with a solemn attitude and their hands

joined in prayer.¹⁰ The two teachers, who had just arrived from abroad, walked meekly, bewildered, behind them. Then the ceremony began.

I accepted without objections their demand of swearing everlasting devotion not only to the *Guru* P.Y. but also to a six-master chain; of this chain, Lahiri Mahasaya was an intermediary link of the chain, while P.Y. was the so-called *Guru-preceptor*, namely the one who would partially bear the burden of our *Karma*.

It would have been really strange if no one had doubts about this; I remember a friend of mine wondering if P.Y. - definitely unable to give any confirmation, being now long resident in the astral world - had really accepted her as a "disciple" and, consequently, to be laden with her *Karma*.

We had been assured that Christ was part of this chain because He had once appeared to Babaji (Lahiri Mahasaya's *Guru*) asking Him to send some emissaries in the West to spread the *Kriya* lore.

This story caused me no perplexity at all: I was eager to listen to the explanation of the technique that would have happened in a short time. On the other end, to consider the whole mission of *Kriya* diffusion as originated from Christ himself was a pleasant idea. It was explained that the mystic seven-step ladder (*Chakras*), revealed through the practice of *Kriya*, is the real highway to salvation; it is not the only way though, since religions offer many other valid tools, but it is definitely the fastest and safest way. The *Kriya* technique embodied God's most effective blessing toward His privileged creature, the humans, which exclusively possessed an inner body with seven *Chakras*. My mind was in great expectation for something I had so strongly desired and for which I had seriously been preparing myself for months. It was not what might be called a "sacrament" that I was submitting to, in order to safeguard a family tradition; it was the crowning of a definitive choice! My heart was immensely happy at the thought of the inner joy that I would gain through the practice of *Kriya*.

Finally, being taught the *Kriya Pranayama*, I found out that I already knew it: it was the *Kundalini-breathing* technique, which I had found time ago in my esoteric readings and which prescribes that the energetic current flows all the way inside the spinal column. I have already explained that I had not taken in serious consideration that procedure owing to the fact that in P.Y.'s writings, which were my basis for my first glimpsing of the mechanism of *Kriya Pranayama*, it was written that the energy had to be rotated «around the *Chakras*, along an elliptic circuit». I was not disappointed. Rather, the technique appeared perfect to me.

¹⁰ I was explained that those people belonged to the local group whose leader was a stylist who had prepared the choreography of that triumphal entrance.

The explanation of the techniques *Maha Mudra* and *Jyoti Mudra* (they never used the more common term *Yoni*) concluded the explanation. Each technique's detail was explained in such a way that it would not allow for the least variation and, in addition, it prescribed a routine from which one could not derogate.

It was taken for granted that if any least doubt on the correctness of a certain detail had risen during the practice, nobody was encouraged – even vaguely – to conduct an experiment and come to a conclusion by himself. The thing to do was to contact the direction of the school, tell the problem and receive guidelines. This, in effects, was what I always did. I learned to interact with the "authorized" individuals only; I would instinctively look for their advice as if it were given by perfect beings that could never be wrong. I believed they were "channels" through which the blessings of the *Guru* flowed. Besides, I inevitably thought that - even if they would not admit it out of humility - they had already reached the highest level of spiritual realization.

A problem with the recommended routine

My desire to deal with some problems faced by me (and, as I would know later, by many other *kriyabans*) is not moved by acidity or ungratefulness toward that *Kriya* school. My intention is, instead, that of discussing a general problem, which will be fundamental in building a good routine inside Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Yoga* – which contains a greater number of techniques.

The first exercise to be practiced was the observation of the breath (the *Hong-So* technique) and this had to last ten to twenty minutes. The breathing was supposed to become more relaxed and create a good state of concentration.

Then, after putting the forearms on a support, the listening to the internal sounds began - this would require about the same time. Then there would follow another interruption because of the *Maha Mudra*.

Eventually, setting back in a still and stiff position to restore the feeling of sacredness, the *Kriya Pranayama* began in the rigorous respect of all the instructions. The *Kriya* routine would be concluded with a full ten-minute concentration on the *Kutastha*, to absorb the results of the whole job.

Now, the two preliminary techniques were deeply sacrificed, while the time devoted to the final concentration was too short.

During the *Hong-So* technique, the thought that one should soon interrupt it to start the second one brought to a disturbing feeling, a sort of internal constraint.

The inappropriate decision was to suspend the second technique (*Om* technique) to get up and practice the *Maha Mudra*.

(I know that some people, to avoid, partially at least, this feeling of

discomfort, use to begin with the *Maha Mudra*, but the break has to be done anyway in order to practice *Pranayama*.)

The technique of listening was a complete "universe" in itself and led to the mystic experience; that is why its interruption was a great disturbance.

This action was a paradox; just as if, recognizing a friend with joyous surprise among a crowd, I began talking with him. Then, I went suddenly away, lost among the people, hoping to meet that friend again, unexpectedly, so that I could get back to where our conversation had been quited. This stupid and absurd thing is exactly what I did. The sound *Om* was the mystic experience itself, the only goal I sought, why should I have interrupted it to regain the mystic contact through another technique? I forced myself into such absurdity for an extremely long period. I am embarrassed to confess that it lasted no less than three years. I went on without changing the prescribed routine, hoping for a hypothetical future evolution that would allow me to practice with more satisfaction and have more tangible results. Such was the power of that folly that in our group was called "loyalty".

I had become like one of those animals that, fed by man, tend to forget how to be self-sufficient. At that time, the idea of using my brain seemed to me an act of stupid arrogance. I believed that the organization of which I was part knew what was the best.

Difficulties with the printed material about the Higher Kriyas

Actually, the school provided only a written form of P.Y.'s version of the *Higher Kriyas*. No direct initiations were ever given.

The reader can guess how much curious was I to learn those techniques. In my spiritual research, the *Second Kriya* technique had been sealed as a secret for a lot of years.¹¹ Since P.Y. wrote that the *Second Kriya* enables the *Yogi* to leave his body consciously at will, I looked for someone who knew the technique, hoping that one could give me a general idea of it, at least. Such a technique, which Lahiri Mahasaya had given to elect people only, could not but stir my imagination. To take

¹¹ If I consider what a lot of teachers said and are saying of this technique, I must also consider the idea of a sound jinx hovering over it! As if acting out a perverse will, they unleashed all their ability in generating the wildest of all transformations. One of them tried to convince me that the *Second Kriya* was similar to a Tibetan technique which consisted in boring a hole in the *Fontanelle* [top of the head]. The proof of its validity was the same as in the Tibetan tradition; a *kriyaban* should have been able to insert the stem of a flower into it (!). I do not want to oppress the reader with all the nonsense I heard in all those years. The reason why I was completely spellbound by some of those absurdities is that my tendency was to favour complicated techniques. I shared the belief - of a quite common nature in the esoteric world - that the more artificial and strange the technique, the more powerful would it be.

one day advantage of its delicate mechanism was one of my dreams. I was sure that working with such a procedure would have a strong effect on my spiritual evolution. Among the *kriyabans* in the meditation group, there was a lady, who had been practicing *Kriya* for years and had once lived by our school's general offices. One day I asked if she received and practiced it. She seemed not to understand my question. So I summed up the concept with astonishment, recalling the episode of Lahiri Mahasaya's disciple Swami Pranabananda who accompanied the moment of his death with the practice of the *Second Kriya*. She got visibly nervous, saying that the quotation clearly referred to the technique of *Pranayama*, one breath, then another, and this last one to be (!) the "*Second Kriya*". I know that, up to today, she has remained fixed in her conviction. I had the impression that the idea itself that a similar technique might exist upset her; it was as if she had made so great an effort in setting the habit of a daily practice of the *First Kriya*, that she felt as if she had already done the maximum possible effort; in other words, she could not bring forth a more engaging dedication. To give an idea of what mold were made those people that were giving me pressing behavioral suggestions, I tell another episode. A lady with an aristocratic aspect called me aside and revealed that, a long time before, she had received the initiation in the so-called *Higher Kriyas*. Full of enthusiasm I opened my eyes wide. She said she had felt so unworthy that she had put them aside and, after some years, she had almost forgotten them. This last abomination was inconceivable to me. Her willing ignorance passed off for humbleness was really too much. When I expressed my objection that her behavior seemed an exhibition of indifference toward the higher teachings taught by her *Guru*, she looked at me in bewilderment as if my statement had violated an implicit law; never criticize or insinuate doubts about a person's intimate choices on the spiritual field. She replied saying that what she had was enough; then briskly got off that topic. I was disappointed in seeing such a high level of ignorance in those people. Instead of been dishearten, I became adamant in using all my energies to learn and perfect *Kriya* – *Higher Kriyas* included.

Some details in the lessons were indefinite, partly ambiguous.

I was doubtful about how *Kechari Mudra* had to be obtained, hesitant about how to perform P.Y.'s particular form of *Second Kriya* and, finally, how to master the technique of *Thokar* (the school called it *Third* and *Fourth Kriya*) which required particular movements of the head. I wrote to the school direction to fix an appointment with one of its representatives, a Minister who would soon join us to hold classes for our group. I hoped to clarify everything on that occasion, especially to be shown how the head movements had to be carried through. I was looking forward to it, with great anticipation. When the Minister arrived I was introduced to him. He said he knew my situation and he would have clarified my doubts. I was tranquil and waited. I was left in dismay when I figured out that the Minister kept on postponing our meeting without valid reasons at all.

Since I decided not to give up, we finally met.

I went through something truly unpleasant. I was convinced that hypocrisy, bureaucracy, formality, hidden falsity and subtle violence to one's honesty were totally alien to each representative of that school. Yet, the sensation I had was akin to meeting a business man, who had more important affairs in mind, who was irritable and unwilling to clarify anything.

He refused to show me either *Kechari Mudra* or how the head had to be moved in *Thokar*. He advised me brutally to restrict my practice to the *First Kriya*. I replied I would surely keep in consideration his advice; in spite of that I wanted to see how to move my head correctly in order to practice that technique in a hypothetical future. He declared that I was overexcited and this was not a good mark for a *kriyaban* (actually I was desperate); annoyed he recommended to write my questions to the school's head. In vain I replied that the movements of the head could not be shown through a letter: I was in front of a wall and the refusal was absolute.

I had trusted and respected the school; I had studied the whole reference literature as if preparing for a university exam. I was now consternated to bear witness to the senseless whims of a man on power.

After the interview with the Minister, I was in an awful mental and emotive condition. In all of us there are some child-like characteristics that might emerge in difficult moments. I was afraid that this gentleman, back to the school, might talk on my back with the direction of the school saying something that in the future might reduce the probability of obtaining the coveted information. I feared I could no longer rely on the heavenly relationship with that *Kriya* organization, which, for so many years, had represented my horizon.

Strangely enough, one part of myself knew that I would be able to turn this destructive experience into something crucial both for me and for other people's spiritual improvement. A hidden part of me, which the group's rules had not been able to stifle entirely, was intimately relishing the whole situation; that man had wakened it up by means of a healthy "kick in the butt"; the old self-learned student of *Pranayama* through books was awakening again.

Some years later I came to know that a group of people living in an important European country, being fond of *Kriya Yoga* had tried in vain to be given some explanations on the same doubts by the "authorized Ministers". To obtain this from other sources, they invited an Indian master in their group. The master came and, after skimming through the written material, he said he was not able to decipher what was written there, since the *Kriya Yoga* that he had been practicing for so many years was quite different.

The written teachings provided by the school were indeed ambiguous; for example, the *Mantra* was presented in an unusual way; a pronunciation especially created for English speakers (Om naw maw bhaw....) was the substitute for its actual syllables.

It is clear that I respect this choice, but only as long as it is integrated by a note reporting the true and commonly adopted spelling of the *Mantra* – which is: Om na mo bha... Apart from that, the absurd thing was its being always written with twelve separated syllables, as if it was not a *Mantra* but twelve different ones. The average reader would not recognize the *Mantra* Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya at all, thus trying in vain to imagine the origin and the meaning of each syllables, as if each one was a strange *bija Mantra*. Discussions, even on the Internet, are still going on concerning aspects of this technique.

Being acquainted with Indians, I am quite sure that this *yogi* from India was familiar with what he was reading and that he was definitely able, anyway, to remove easily, with few words, every doubt. He was just pretending.

His performance was meant to give the impression that P.Y.'s teachings were totally wrong, deceitful and made-up. This is how his effort in advising them would appear essential. He aimed at appearing as the teacher who saved those people from an abysmal mistake. He advocated the necessity to start all over again: he was ready to give them initiation into the *First Kriya*.

As a matter of course, he lost two thirds of the students on the spot. They, in fact, did not accept to be his formal "disciples", as required by the initiation ritual. Those who accepted his conditions were again initiated to the *First Kriya* and were given new techniques such as the *Kechari Mudra* and the *Navi Kriya*.

Incidentally, the absolute confidentiality was broken; in this way I have been able to get some precious information.

Later, the group received the *Higher Kriyas*. Many of them disappeared, as if sucked into a black hole, following the orbit of that Indian master; some others swung in and out of the school, bringing on, as a consequence, a practice characterized by a lot of dissatisfaction and changes of mind.

My interlocutor was that elderly lady who taught me the preliminary techniques and was officially invested as a "Meditation Counselor". She blamed me of having made the interview with the Minister stormy. Unable, as she was, to clarify my technical doubts, she finally said that the initial Minister's advice (to practice only the *First Kriya* set of techniques) embodied God's will and the only thing I was supposed to do was to surrender to it.

She said that my logic was of no value since it was originated from a wounded ego: it was not even worth listening to. Among other things, she said that intelligence is a double-edged weapon; it can be used to eliminate the swelling ignorance but also to cut off abruptly the lifeblood that sustains the spiritual path. While we were talking, I shifted my attention to a particular

photograph of P.Y. shot on the day of his death, I had the sensation that some tears were going to well up from his blissful eyes (it was not a bizarre feeling, other people told me they had the same impression); I told her this, she became so serious and, with her eyes pointed far off toward an indefinite spot, she soberly uttered: «You have to consider it a warning: the *Guru* is not content with you.» I kept silent, puzzled.

Beginning from that remark, she spoke at length, uninterruptedly for about an hour. Of all those concepts I remember only an episode about P.Y.'s life.

She told me what happened when one of his disciples decided to leave P.Y.'s *Ashram*. The *Guru*, noticing this, got in on the disciple's way to stop him and warn him, when he heard an inner voice - "the voice of God", she specified - ordering him not to interfere with the disciple's freedom.

The *Guru* obeyed and in a flash of intuition he foresaw all the disciple's future incarnations, those in which he would be lost, in which he would keep on seeking – amid innumerable sufferings, jumping from one error to another – the path he was then relinquishing.

Then, in the end, the disciple would return to the same path. The lady said that her *Guru* had been really accurate on the number of incarnations that the whole trip would have taken to be over – about thirty (!).

The moral of this story was clear, something from which one could not escape: I just had to follow the Minister's advice, «because that was God's will».

If I had not done so, I would lose myself in a labyrinth of enormous sufferings and who knows when I would be able to get back to the correct path.

Although she admired the earnestness with which I was making progress – unlike so many other tepid and half-hearted people who would go to her only to be reloaded with the motivation they could not find in themselves - she was dismayed, for her devotion toward the *Guru* was totally extraneous to me.

By telling me that one or other episodes of P.Y.'s life, she tried to let me share her experiences. I am very thankful to her for all the sincere efforts and time spent with me, but how could she thwart my inner nature? She did only what was in her power: she could not relieve my immense thirst for knowledge of the art of *Kriya*.

Looking to her beautiful but sad eyes, I had the clear impression that she was permanently expecting me to act in a somewhat "disloyal" way.

Months later, she came to know that I had read a book, which our school members were strongly dissuaded from reading. It was written by a man (D.W.) who had been formerly bound to the organization, and was now a "traitor" to her. I had no doubt that in the third millennium a person can read whatever he considers more convenient and so did I, finding that book so fascinating that I started distributing it to other friends.

After some months, a friend of mine showed me a letter in which she had called me «a man who stabs his *Guru*'s back, handing out daggers to other people as well, so that they can do the same».

Her reaction had been so emphatic that I felt a sort of tenderness toward her. I could sense that her actions were driven by waves of emotions and decades of steadfast conditioning.

Seeing her own fears molding, I am sure that while typewriting that letter and pouring into it lots of other considerations to free all the tension she had accumulated, her countenance was at last tranquil, as if tasting a delicious, intimate satisfaction.

Some years later, when my relationship with that *Kriya* school was almost completely compromised, I met with another of its representatives: in a matter of five minutes, the same doubts were resolved without any hysteria. Had God changed His plans, or had I finally met a practical, judicious person?

CHAPTER I/3.... THE BREATHLESS STATE

For a long time I hoped to find in some book those suggestions which could clarify my doubts about the *Higher Kriyas*. In the written material that I had studied there was a lesson hinting to the *Kechari Mudra*, which was considered essential to the *Kundalini* awakening, but there were no indications on how it had to be carried out.

My research took a particular direction: I knew there had been some direct disciples of P.Y. hassling with the school's direction and who, later on, parted from it. Well, I hoped that, for revenge, they had written all the technical details I was interested in. There were two or three names of such direct disciples: I purchased all their published material, taped lectures and all. What I found was a devastating banality; the secrets, if they had some, were well guarded!

It was hard for me to drop the literature linked with P.Y.; I have already said that, in my opinion, He was unique. As a matter of fact I was keen on taking an hypothesis introduced by my group mates: P.Y. allegedly met *Babaji* some years after Lahiri Mahasaya's initiation. In simple words, He might have received some fresher and more effective teaching than those which had been given to Lahiri Mahasaya. I was confident that the things He wrote contained the totality of information I would use during my life; I used to get annoyed about those people hinting at some *Kriya* secrets to be gained out of His school. Overcoming a certain resistance, I began reading some books written by Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples, who did not have any connection with P.Y. This happened when some friends of mine, back from a trip to India, brought them to me. These books disappointed me and made me miss the clarity of P.Y.'s writing. They were but blank, meaningless words, with an endless number of repetitions in addition to continuous changes of topic, which I considered unbearable. The practical notes, presented as essential, were but scattered notes copied from classical books on *Yoga*.

The lack of care in them made me suppose the author had not bothered about checking the original texts. He most probably took those quotations from books which were also quoting from other quoting books, continuing a chain where each author would add something to mark his personal contribution.

I proceeded without changing the prescribed routine, I just added the *Higher Kriyas*, obviously that part of them I had succeeded in understanding. I hoped in a hypothetical future evolution that allowed me to practise with more satisfaction, to have more tangible results.

The things went on in this way, until a profound crisis uprooted any scheme and dogma. It originated from the problem how to deal in a *yogic* way with a

vulnerable relationship. The ordinary common sense would have probably been enough to find a correct pattern of action, but I was a *kriyaban*: therefore I tried to apply the teachings of P.Y. integrally or, rather, literally.

I chose, among all his writings, those that matched my mental plans of behavior. Thus I acted as supported from "above" imagining that the benedictions and the strength of the *Guru* were with me. This thought had penetrated my awareness, awakening deep emotions in my mind, which prevented me from exerting watchfulness and discrimination toward the common things of life. I could not see it, but this lethal approach made my ego the compass needle of my spiritual journey.

The failure came about, it was evident. In a first moment, I could not accept it. I refused to believe that I had acted wrongly. I was convinced that the other person was unable to live up to my action. I believed that mine was an apparent failure, one day everything would resolve in my favor. Inner laziness and intelligence paralysis resulted.

Then my illusory dream began to disintegrate, slowly but inexorably.

I undertook a systematic practice of recalling the events of my spiritual path, starting from the very beginning. The purpose was to draft a synthesis of my experiences and learn some lesson from it.

Thus, I vividly remembered the first sessions of the *Pranayama* learned through books: this discipline was for me an art to be perfected with the greatest concentration, intelligence and with a bit of courage too. I had no pseudo-scientific certainties: *Pranayama* was the tool I guessed could tear apart my internal obscurity.

I became member of a *Kriya* organization only to perfect it.

While I have no reason to express my grief about the way I tackled the practice of *Hong So* and *Om* techniques (I was helped by the thought that they were preliminary techniques and, in order to have results, I had to use my intuition at the greatest degree), I faced *Kriya Pranayama* with the worst possible attitude. Apart from other foolish thoughts, I had accepted the childish idea that each *Pranayama* breath could produce «the equivalent of a solar year of spiritual evolution» and that through a million of *Kriya* breaths I would infallibly reach the Cosmic Consciousness. When I sat down to practice, I tried to perform the greatest possible number of *Pranayama* breaths in order to approach more quickly the moment in which I would complete the above-mentioned number. Even if I was practicing the authentic *Kriya Pranayama* - received with all the *Guru's* blessings - I was not practicing it any longer with the primal intensity and with the full dignity of my soul.

Since I felt to be a privileged being and *Kriya* was a blessing received as an unexpected fortune, inner laziness and intellectual paralysis were the results.

For years in our meetings I heard this refrain: «Aren't you glad of having

found a true *Guru*? Aren't you enthusiastic that He has been chosen for you by God Himself?» «Oh yeess we are happy» we replied with tears of joy. I saw how lethal was the pernicious idea of belonging to a privileged group and of practicing «the fastest technique in the field of spiritual evolution». It was evident that I had totally lost the initial motivation, the spirit of pursuit, the joy of the discovery. No genuine growth could have happened in me. I was practicing a shallow *Kriya Pranayama* confident in the automatism of my path. The hypnotic atmosphere of the "*Guru's Blessings*" had been, in my case, the cradle in which my ego was fed and strengthened. The thorny pain from the present situation mixed with the elation for a past that had not gone away forever.

The necessity of recreating a spirit of authentic search became imperative. It was necessary to feel again the blessing of sufferings and doubts. It was necessary to behave not as a man who has found a treasure, hidden it and sleeping satisfied upon it, but as a researcher who develops and makes his finding broader.

Patanjali

I studied Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* with the intention of finding a clue about how to build a rational *Kriya* routine.

Patanjali's was a pioneer in the art of handling rationally the mystical path, aiming at individualizing a universal, physiological direction of the inner events that explained why a certain phenomenon, inherent to the spiritual path, should be preceded and necessarily followed by other ones. His extreme synthesis may be criticized or, because of its temporal distance, may be hard to understand; however, it is of extraordinary importance. In the mystical path (*Yoga*), he pinpoints eight steps: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*.

It was evident that the comparison between my path and Patanjali's required not to rely only on interpretations or commentaries, each conveying a different mystic or esoteric point of view, but also on my experience.

There are different ways of translating the Sanskrit terms. *Yama*: self-control (non-violence, avoid lies, avoid stealing, avoid being lustful and seek non-attachment). *Niyama*: religious observances (cleanliness, contentment, discipline, study of the Self and surrender to the Supreme God).

In order to relate Patanjali's eight step path with *Kriya*, it appears clear that first two steps (the what-is-correct and the what-is-not-correct) should be taken for granted without being mentioned. The total uselessness of the moralizing "sermons" is manifest. This doesn't mean that a *kriyaban's* life can be licentious: to put it simply, it has been seen that people running a morally

questionable life were successful in *Kriya*, coming spontaneously to the so-called "virtuous" life, while a lot of conformists failed.

The necessity of accepting definite moral precepts, is something that is understood only after having tasted the honey of the spiritual experience.

A *Kriya* teacher is always inclined to let a student's wrong behavior pass, pretending he does not notice it. He simply does not mind it, laying his confidence in the transforming *Kriya* effect. On the other hand, it is obvious that if the eagerness to learn *Kriya* and to put into practice its technical instructions pushes a *kriyaban* to go to a teacher, being further proposed to swear on oath on Patanjali's moral rules [*Yama, Niyama*], the student will, almost surely, make the required promise, just to please the teacher.

The analysis of Patanjali's scheme begins with *Asana*: posture, or physical exercise (the *Yogi*'s posture must be stable and comfortable). In *Kriya* the *Half-lotus* (seldom *Siddhasana*, hardly ever *Padmasana*) is commonly utilized. Most of the *Kriya* teachers do not even dream of wasting time in giving personal detailed advice with regard to this point: they know that the earnest and resolute student will use his common sense to find an ideal and comfortable position, so that he can easily maintain his back straight during the *Kriya* practice. The practice of *Maha Mudra*, besides its important role in preparing the body for *Pranayama*, helps in maintaining the spine always supple.

The first meaningful action is *Pranayama*: breath regulation (it is explained that from this discipline, the regulation of the *Prana* and, then, the natural inhibition of the breath ensues). This basic practice creates a state of calmness and *Equilibrium*, which becomes the foundation of all the subsequent steps.

Since the next step *Pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses where the awareness is disconnected from the external reality) requires the perfect immobility, it means that in an ideal *Kriya* routine, the techniques requiring movement had to be practiced at the beginning. *Maha Mudra* and those *Higher Kriyas* which require physical movement had to take place during this initial phase, not resumed near the end of the routine.

In my *Kriya* effort, in order to achieve *Pratyahara*, I made different experiments.

Hong So seemed perfect for this purpose. The *Om* technique could be done in the evening as an alternative. What was called *Second Kriya* (that particular form given by P.Y. which included a strong concentration on the *Chakras*) could also be practiced by remaining immobile (eliminating the prescribed movement of the hands). It was not difficult to adhere to this principle: its correctness appeared right from the profusion of inner joy that came after a few minutes of it.

The beauty of dwelling on each *Chakra*, trying to perceive some light or hear

some inner sound was manifest.

The natural ensuing concentration in the *Kutastha* happened spontaneously. Obviously it had something to do with the three last stages *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*.

Patanjali explains that *Dharana* is concentration (focusing the mind on a chosen object). *Dhyana* is meditation or contemplation (the persistence of a focusing action as a steady, uninterrupted flow of awareness, which fully explores all aspects of the chosen object) and *Samadhi* is perfect spiritual absorption (deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself).

As for *Dharana* and *Dhyana*, Patanjali apparently gives an instruction which is useless for a *kriyaban*. Actually, he goes on explaining that, after the breath's disappearance, a *Yogi* should look for a physical or abstract object on which he might turn his concentration and practice in a sort of contemplative meditation in a way as to lose himself in it.

We know that a *kriyaban* is guided to encounter the manifestation of the spiritual light in the *Kutastha* or listening to inner sounds. This internal sound grabs his conscience and leads it to the depths, without any danger of getting lost. His conscience is filled with such a delight that he has no reason for discarding this perception and choosing another one, which cannot but belong to the kingdom of mind.

At the end of my routine, the concentration on the third eye - that "inward eye" which Wordsworth with appropriate words defines as "the bliss of solitude" – embodied the phases of *Dharana* and *Dhyana*.

In short, a *Kriya* routine begins with an action on the breath (*Pranayama*), which is guided, harnessed, checked and, although long and deep, essentially transformed in a movement of energy. The spine is magnetized; this creates a situation of deep calmness and tranquility, a sensation of expansion and of internal solace. The breath and the heart slow their pace. A stage follows where the awareness of the breath is put aside, and a process begins in which the breath goes on free, at his own rhythm and is very, very calm. The concentration on the *Chakras* given by an intuition-suggested rhythm, increasingly enriches the perception of the *Omkar* reality.

As soon as the level of consciousness raises into the highest *Chakras*, in particular into *Kutastha*, the consciousness melts with *Om*. In a total immobility, when the relaxation reaches a state of perfection, there is the experience of light.

Bringing ahead for various months this routine, I restored the lost serenity. Later I will describe how the discovery of *Japa* created a perfect ambient where the fundamental event of the breathlessness took place.

Mère (the Mother)

Overcoming my natural resistance of reading works that did not concern *Kriya Yoga*, I also read Mère's works. The great fascination for this eminent figure started when I was introduced to the thought of Sri Aurobindo - his *Aphorisms* and his epic poem *Savitri* [Collected works of Sri Aurobindo by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust] had deeply impressed me.

After Aurobindo's death, in 1951, Mère was the one continuing his research and giving ground to his dream that the Divine - the intelligent and evolutive force at the base of any existing thing - could come to a perfect manifestation on this planet! «The world is not an unfortunate accident: it is a miracle moving towards its expression» and «In matter, the Divine becomes perfect...» were her favourite sentences.

From 1958 to 1973, the year of her leaving the body, she tried to find the passage to the next species, to discover a new mode of life in matter and narrated her extraordinary exploration to Satprem. Their talks are related in *Mother's Agenda* [Institute for Evolutionary Research, New York.]¹²

She did not behave as a traditional *Guru*, even though she tried to extract from those disciples looking for inspiration at her feet all their hidden potential.

«I belong to no nation, no civilization, no society, no race, but to the Divine. I obey no Master, no ruler, no law, no social convention, but the Divine», she affirmed.

Her presence in my life, evoked through close and passionate readings, acted like an inner pressure calling for the necessity of extracting a meaning from each part of my being - even if apparently incomprehensible. According to her teaching, one becomes a true individual when, in a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge, one unifies oneself around his/her divine center.

She stressed the value of not trying to become pure in other people's eyes, but to behave according the truth of one's being. To her, one should acknowledge one's dark side: in the depths of our being it stirs the same substance which, in a few, has developed in a way of living which is blamed by society. I do not remember where I found her statement that «the desire for purity is the greatest obstacle for one's spiritual path». «Do not try to be virtuous - she added - find out to what extent you are united with what is anti-divine.» I really cannot describe the explosion of joy and the feeling of freedom I felt

¹² This huge document — 6000 pages in 13 volumes — is the account of twenty-two years of Mother's discoveries.

reading such words which, in the spiritual field, were really revolutionary!

With a desperate need of peace and tranquillity, I chose to stick to the simplest routine of *Kriya* and to live in a more introverted way.

I stubbornly grabbed the well-known instruction to maintain resolutely, during the day, a smooth attitude toward both pleasant and unpleasant events, while sincerely feeling like a detached "witness". Sustained by the enthusiasm for this new "trick", described in such an alluring way in almost all the books dealing with oriental meditative practices, I succeeded in attaining an almost ideal state but, after some days, I felt under stress as if all was a pretence, an illusion.

Japa

It was at this time that I came across a book about the life and experiences of Swami Ramdas, the Indian saint who moved far and wide all over India unceasingly repeating the *Mantra Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*. This was indeed an important event; his photo - the almost childish simplicity of his smile - kindled my intuition and led me to try the same practice. From this decision something came that still remains in my heart as a peak experience.

I started to practice *Japa* aloud during some walks; then I tried to continue it mentally during my daily chores. The sound of the *Mantra*, which I had already listened to in a spiritual song recording, gave me the idea of a strong and, at the same, time sweet vibration; the use of a 108-grain rosary made the practice very pleasant. I put a lot of force into that practice.

My attitude was never that of a supplicating and sobbing devotee, but that of a man one step away from his goal. Since the choice of my *Mantra* was born from an indubitable predilection, I loved to caress its vibration, prolong it on my lips, make it vibrate in my chest and invest it with my heart's aspiration.

Even if sometimes I felt a bit dazed, I maintained the determination never to discard the practice. Since I observed, while doing it, an irresistible impulse to put everything in order, I thought that the *Mantra* could work in a similar way by cleaning my mental stuff and putting my "psychological furniture" in order.

This order turned almost automatically into a state of *mental silence*.

Japa is like a pneumatic hammer tearing asunder one's complicated mental structures, allowing one to cross uninjured its swamps and reach the dimension of pure awareness.

It annuls the mental background noise by which our consciousness is always surrounded. We are not aware of this noise but when we practice our *Kriya* we begin to perceive it and we may feel desperate since it blocks definitively our effort of transcending the mind. There are some thoughts which we can

visualize, identify and block, but a diffuse persistent background noise nullifies all our efforts.

This does not happen when we practice *Japa*: this tool is unique, it can make "miracles" where our best intentions fail!

We are astonished in perceiving its dramatic effect. There must be a reason why Continuous Prayer ("Inner Prayer", "Heart Prayer", *Dhikr*) was and is the basic technique used by a lot of mystics. Being no hermits, it is not possible for us to reach a deep relaxation in the few minutes of our daily *Kriya*. More effort is needed to calm one's body until a never before experienced state of calmness of the breath is experienced.

I know that some *kriyabans* do not use *Japa* not because they do not like it but because they state that Lahiri Mahasaya did not recommend that practice. We can reply that almost all his disciples, Hindus and Muslims, used that practice since it was, at that time and in that place, very ordinary. I'm convinced that *Japa*

Before narrating my experience, let me say that even though the oriental traditions recommend to do *Japa* mentally, I am confident that it should be done aloud - at least during an initial set of a hundred repetitions. Experience and common sense contradict the belief that a *Mantra* works only if it is given by a *Guru*; it is obvious that an expert helping us choose a *Mantra* and using all his persuasion to win our consent to use it relentlessly, represents the most precious service we can ever take advantage of, but that's all!

The breathless state

Summer came; I practiced *Japa* every day in the morning and *Kriya* at noon in the open countryside.

One day, during *mental Pranayama*, while I was climbing up and down the *Chakras*, I distinctly perceived a fresh energy sustaining my body from inside. I entered a perfect immobility and, at a certain moment, I discovered I was completely without breath. This condition lasted various minutes, without any feeling of uneasiness: there was neither the least quiver of surprise, or the thought: «Finally I have it!». The event was enjoyable beyond words: in a blue-painted profundity, it contained the skies of my childhood.

In the following days, I observed the same mechanism repeating again; I verified the perfect association between the practice of *Japa* during the day and the attainment of this state. I was astonished that one of the simplest techniques in the world, such as *Japa* is, had brought such a valuable result!

Before starting my *Kriya* practice, I looked at the surrounding panorama wondering if I would experience that wonderful state once again: after about 40 minutes I had already completed the active part – the last breaths of

Pranayama – and then, after no more than two or three minutes, during mental *Pranayama*, the miracle happened. An incomparable sense of inner freedom - which is impossible to forget - ensued. It was like to be implacably crushed by the beauty of the nature and, at the same time, be situated above the whole world.

About the effects upon daily life, it reminded me what Sri Aurobindo wrote about the moment he stepped first on the Indian soil, after his long period of studies in England. He told how the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity descended, surrounded him and remained for long months afterwards.

Subsequently, I observed that, during mental *Pranayama*, an excellent detail was to go ahead simultaneously aware both of the *Chakras* and of the body as a whole. The awareness paused on each *Chakra* about ten seconds - as a bee drawn to the nectar in the flowers hovering upon each in great delight - slightly "touching" it in an anticlockwise rotation. The more I relaxed during this inner action, the more I became aware of a fresh sensation of energy sustaining each part of my body. A striking perception of an inner lightness and utter mental transparency was the mark that the breathless state was settling. The breathing, which in the meantime had become very very short, eventually came to immobility, like a pendulum gently reaching the equilibrium point.

In the course of three months I lived in this celestial dimension, perfectly at ease, still, without any desire to fulfil. A calm euphoria accompanied me: the certainty of having finally found something stable and immutable within the evanescent flux of existence which sometimes seems to have the consistence of an infinite sequence of reflexes on the water. Flashes of the ultimate stage of freedom touched my mind...

When I went out for a walk, if I met somebody and stopped to listen to him, no matter what he said, a sudden joy would explode in my chest and rise to my eyes to the point that I could barely hold back my tears. Looking at the distant mountains or at other details of the landscape, I would try to direct my feeling toward them in order to turn my paralysing joy into aesthetic rapture; only this could keep back the joy clutching my being, only this could hide it.

Absence of breath does not mean action; it is total lack of movement and of the least thought-caused throb; however it is from it that an action is born which changes one's destiny. Aurobindo wrote «The mind does not act; it simply releases an irresistible action from its recess».

Many outward changes in my life ensued; surely the luminosity that one day would have helped me to get rid of all my doubts about the decision of writing a book about *Kriya*, breaking thus the vow of secrecy, derived from this experience.

I thought: «I must not forget this experience ever, I want to have it again, every day of my life, because it is the most real thing which has been experienced ever»! It seemed impossible to lose it.

It lasted almost for one year, then I lost it. The world of the "travelling *Gurus*" was getting closer to my life, and with it an unbelievable confusion too.

CHAPTER I/4... SEARCH OF KRIYA

First teacher

During a trip abroad I found a book written by an Indian *Kriya* teacher, extolling his method as the original Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*, whereas P.Y.'s was mentioned as a slightly modified form of *Kriya*. Obviously that book, like innumerable others which I would read in the future, had to serve as a bait, to make people interested in that particular form of *Kriya* and it didn't include practical explanations.

I was excited when I read that the practice of *Pranayama* should be considered inaccurate and wrong if, after a settling-down fair number of breaths, the practitioner - without closing his ears and listen intentionally as in the quoted *Om* technique - had not listened to the *Om* sound.

The statement was worthy to be taken into consideration; it was surely relative to a very deep practice of *Pranayama*.¹³

I had no idea of when and where I could have the opportunity to encounter this teacher, but I could almost touch the marvellous possibility of deepening my *Pranayama*, clarifying - likely - my doubts regarding *Kechari Mudra* and *Higher Kriyas* too: I was excited like a child receiving the most beautiful of all gifts.

In the following months, my fixed idea was to guess how he taught the deepening of the *Pranayama* technique. Sometimes an annoying doubt appeared: once this new teaching had been received, how could I understand whether it was really original or an invention? My reservation stemmed from my conditioning according to which any *Kriya* information, obtained outside my school, could be an invention of those who pursued their personal interests, like earning money or exerting power over other people.

However, the listening to the *Om* sound with opened ears would surely be considered the proof of an optimal deepening of *Pranayama*.

I convinced myself that the key technical addition consisted in mentally

¹³ Reading that book, I had the sensation that its author knew the whole processes of *Kriya Yoga* far better than many other teachers. In his conception, *Kriya* was divided in six levels. The author said that this levels were progressive steps of an enlightening process which would take place in a hollow cavity of the brain, called "the cave of *Brahma*". In the front part of this region there is the pituitary gland (hypophysis), behind it we have the pineal gland: the seats of the sixth and of the seventh *Chakra* respectively. An emission of light, similar to a voltaic arc, would happen between the two "poles" and shed light in that area. This process was described as a "mystic union". The whole explanation was accompanied by a helping sketch, which had the psychological effect to eliminate all uncertainties on the validity and universality of this experience.

chanting *Om* in the *Chakras*, while going up and down in the spine and, at the same time, in exerting all the possible attention on the internal sounds.¹⁴

Since the *Om* technique learned inside the school had given me the deepest satisfaction, rather it had marked an unparalleled period of my life, I anticipated a striking success in this new undertaking.

I don't remember how much of these breaths I used to practice each day: surely, I never went over the 48-60 units. After them, never relaxing my attention on the internal sounds, I would enjoy observing the breath in the *Chakras*, namely I linked each breath with a different *Chakra*.¹⁵

In the book I had found a deep recommendation: if we want to make a remarkable spiritual progress, we should engage ourselves in being aware of 1728 breaths a day by following that procedure. I restricted my practice to a quarter of that number; anyway the time devoted to it was considerable.

The inner sound appeared after just four days of painstaking practice.

It was winter. For about three weeks I have been able to stay away from reality. I chose to spend every morning wrapped in the warmth of my home, practicing as much as possible. Looking back to this experience, it has been for me a sort of vacation, away from life and all its problems and anxieties - I experienced a total contentment and ease, as if my *Kriya* path had come to its fulfilment.

By day, everything seemed surrounded by a padded coat reducing all dissonances. Everything was like transfigured; I was like living in a perfect reality and the whole world was smiling ecstatically at me; every pain took flight, off my sight.

I had the chance to spend some days in a beautiful location equipped for winter sport. Here I could wander the snow-white countryside aimlessly. While I was lazily getting about, the sun set early, painting the landscape with breathtaking colours; the small village, sunk in the snow, started to be all lights. My memory will always hold it as the splendid symbol of my contact with the *Omkar* experience.

The oddness was that I did not know the teacher yet; I had just read his book: it was the intensity of my practice that was extreme!

The winter vacations ended and I got back to my job.

During my spare time, I would think about what a precious jewel was the

¹⁴ Some previous readings had given me the idea to put the syllable *Om* in each *Chakra* as a seed, but I had never thought of accompanying this action with the listening of the internal sounds - without closing the ears.

¹⁵ We are going to clarify this procedure in detail both in the second and in the third part of the book.

Kriya technique, visualizing the possibility of a future deepening, with such a commitment, the *Higher Kriyas* too.

One day, still at work, I was in a room from which I could glimpse, through a pane, the far-off mountains and contemplate the purely celestial sky above them. I was in ecstasy! That distant sky was the mirror of my future years, wholly dedicated to my *Kriya Yoga*. For the first time, the project to retire and to live with a minimal income, maintaining this state for the rest of my days, came upon me.

Being about to undergo surgery in the United States, the author of the book was going to make a stop in Europe; I worked very hard to meet him and receive the *Kriya* initiation from him. That moment came up at last!

The introductory conference was for me of great emotional impact. He had a majestic and noble aspect, he was "handsomely" wrapped in his ochre clothes, his oldness, his long hair and beard marked the features of the typical sage. I took glimpses of him while he spoke, hidden by the front rows; I heard him talk of Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy according to his personal experience. I found no objection to his words, even if sometimes they fell into a devotional tone. The things he said were marvellous, absolutely new for me.

At certain moments however, the inquisitiveness in learning the new technical details, made me unable to really grasp the meaning and the implication of certain concepts of his; my obsession was: «What kind of throat sounds are expected in the original *Kriya*, what kind of sensations are to be felt in the spine, to which center does the energy rise in the spine?» My strong desire for finding the original *Kriya* "formula" blinded my capacity of receiving something intrinsically new and be enriched by his particular approach. I was inclined to compare minor details.

To him, *Kriya Yoga* was not merely a set of separated techniques where *Maha Mudra* was one thing, *Pranayama* another and *mental Pranayama* still another, but a unique progressive process of tuning with the *Omkar* reality. Like the thread uniting all the pearls, *Omkar* goes through all the different phases of *Kriya*.

Furthermore, the *Omkar* reality had to be perceived not only in the aspect of sound and light but also in the aspect of a "swinging sensation" (some other time he spoke about a feeling of pressure). He was leading me into a wondrous dimension, which I had only caught a glimpse of. All the *Kriya Yoga* techniques had to be practiced with that goal in mind.

He gave himself completely to us in order we could feel the flavour of this experience - for example when he "touched" the students and made their bodies vibrate.

In *Kriya* explanation he did not emphasize what he called "long-breath

Pranayama", but the following part, where the breath is subtle and faint and it sometimes seems about to vanish.

During a separate session (although pertaining to *First Kriya* he called that detail *Second Kriya*) he taught us how to introduce the twelve-syllable *Mantra (Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya)* into *Pranayama*, "touching the inner part" of each *Chakra* with each syllable.

Yet, the soil he had tilled and was cultivating with such power of persuasion began to get sterile, since he chose to leave out some of the techniques Lahiri Mahasaya had passed on - not only the *Higher Kriyas*, but also some of the basic techniques such as *Navi Kriya* and *Kechari Mudra*.

Aware that the original *Kriya* spirit had been lost in other schools, he focused only in having us approaching the *Kriya* nucleus. He had tried all Lahiri Mahasaya's techniques, concluding that some of them were not essential, that other were rather too delicate and difficult to be learned. Inexpert attempts to make us of them could result in a useless distraction for the students and a waste of time for him as a teacher.

He expressed himself adamantly: the request, by some people, to receive the *Higher Kriyas* implied a lack of engagement in the basic techniques.

All what he said made definitely sense, but it also contributed to his isolation. He did not take into consideration how the human mind really works, through insatiable curiosity and the total rejection of any veto.

The book he had written had been a smart strategic action which made him popular in the west, saving for him a place of crucial importance in the realm of *Kriya*.

Moreover, his Indian-sage figure impressed the people. He really had all the necessary tools to attract the western world. Hundreds of scholars were enthusiastic about him, they were ready to back his mission and treat him like a "divinity", being willing to show the same respect to possible collaborators or successors.

I saw the sense of his solitude when, one day, on a *Kriya* reviewing lesson, he told his public that the real *Pranayama* could only take place in total absence of breath; the one, marked by long breaths, could only be good for «kindergarten children»!

He closed his nostrils with his fingers and kept that position for some time. He hinted in this way at the breathless state he had mastered; it seemed he wanted to point out that the public was not able neither to understand neither to practise *Kriya*.

I thought to myself how many disappointments must have convinced him to make such a peculiar demonstration. Perhaps he had met only people that had

not been able to adopt the discipline of a regular meditation and therefore did not gain any benefit but the curiosity for who knows what other secrets of *Kriya*; he perhaps wanted to let us understand that he was giving his explanations only out of kindness but that we were not able to really understand the deep meaning of what he was demonstrating to us.

The students were staring at him in loss; he must have been bizarre and peculiar to them. The result was that the beginners could only sense too big a distance to be bridged between them and the master; those who already had a good mastering of *Kriya* had the final confirmation that the teacher would never reveal the secret procedures he was an expert of.

It seemed to them that all what he had taught was a simple introduction to *Kriya* and did not provide the key to the experiential acme. So, literally devoured by the thirst for obtaining the complete teachings, they already started to turn to the search of other teachers, without enjoying fully what they had received.

Some might contend that a lot of people were contented with his *Kriya* - this is actually true - but that kind of people would never do something like organizing a seminar for their teacher.

Disappointed by their defection, the more he stubbornly focused on the essence of *Kriya Yoga*, the less he was able to catch the attention of new people.

Those who tried to get this absurdity across to him, found themselves facing a wall that would never break.

Frankly speaking, the faithfulness of the many was not enough to avoid the worst end. His unhappy choice triggered an inexorable mechanism which pushed away the people who were most indispensable to him. The honest aim of his effort, all the marvellous subtleties by which he had enriched our *Kriya*, making this practice by far more beautiful, was not enough to prevent a shipwreck of his mission, at least here in Europe.

Using the same flyers and changing only the Master's name and photo, some people, who formerly organized his seminars, called another teacher who would substitute him.

Although his spiritual realization were almost non-existent – and the most part of the persons knew that - some *kriyabans* who had already met him in India said he was willing to explain *Kriya* in its complete form.

It took two years before he could succeed in overcoming the problems with the visa and could land in Europe but when he arrived he found practically all the afore described teacher's disciples ready to welcome him.

A mess

Since the moment in which I understood that from my first teacher I would have never learned his famous six *Kriyas* levels, I decided to meet different groups of people who practised *Kriya Yoga*.

I dived headlong into the dreary territory of the *New-Age*-polluted *Kriya Yoga*.

For someone of my friends who followed me in this enterprise, it turned to be a no-way-out prison, for some other it was the scene of bitter disappointments and marked the definitive abandoning of the spiritual pursuit.

I am reminded of this period of my life when I listen to the tape recordings of those devotional chants I bought on those occasions.

Haunting seminars on *Kriya Yoga*, I met a lot of people with just as heterogeneous behaviours, whose interests ranged from esoteric philosophies to "New Age" tendencies, in which they floated in loss. I spent with them one of the strangest and disordered periods of my life.

In my first school of *Kriya*, I met people whose enthusiasm toward *Kriya Yoga* was very moderate, and it seemed they practiced the few techniques they knew as if making a sacrifice to tame a fickle mind and to expiate the wrong they had done: existing.

"New Age" people on the other hand were yet too passionate about a particular form of *Yoga* or oriental meditative practice, fostering too much faith in its alleged cathartic problem-solving potential.

Bound to a very oriental lifestyle, they particularly loved one characterized by specific sensations that they would cultivate with care and, above all, innocent frenzies.

I learned to relate myself to each of them - for example to those who would host me whenever the seminar was held in a distant city - the way an explorer deals with unknown animals, waiting for any eccentric revelation... alleged thaumaturgy powers, prophecies of imminent catastrophes and possibly tips on how to escape them. At times, without realizing the way they felt, I would react to their oddness ironically; it was something I just could not help, it came out so spontaneously. At times, I even thought I might have embittered them; in spite of that, they were always generous toward me and respectful of my personality. Never at all did they try to force something into my mind, sharing with passion everything they had learned, no matter if what they learned cost them a great deal of time, effort and money. Our relationship was based on real affection and it never experienced disagreement, bitterness or formality.

I was getting used to "initiating" rituals by so to speak "minor" teachers –

namely those who once had been some illustrious *Guru's* right-hand man, then had become independent by their own choice or because the latter disowned them. I was absorbed in something extraneous which however was accepted as an inevitable drawback to succeed in having the information I looked for with so much passion. Bringing flowers was recommended, some teachers asked for one flower, some others three or six; some fruit was required too - someone might also expect a coconut, forcing the students to desperately look for it store after store; at last, a donation was required, sometimes a free donation, sometimes a compulsory minimum amount of money was set.

Besides the pledge for secrecy about the techniques, one asked us to promise that we would look at the opposite sex - except for our partner - without being physically attracted. To this purpose, he recommended men to look at women as "mothers" and, correspondingly, women to look at men as "fathers". With a sigh of ill-concealed nuisance the public waited for him to get through with his delirium and went on with the remaining part of his conference, coming at last to the explanation of the techniques. Generally speaking, after different rituals, the explanations were always quick and shallow; a destructive criticism was often raised against information coming from other sources.

I would finish all those initiations repeating to myself how satisfied I was, making up my mind about abandoning all other practices and going down the line for the one I had just received.

My heart would surely have advised me to listen to it, if only I had stopped to think for a moment; it would have told me that I was putting myself on, that the new initiation had only added something insignificant to what I already knew, that the teacher's strict requests would soon become a "cage" which I would sooner or later feel too much narrow and from which I would break loose.

Quite another affair was to meet another variety of seekers: those who stocked up on techniques as for a famine. They affirmed boldly their loyalty to a certain Teacher (not necessarily the one from whom they had just received initiation) but were on the alert about every new rumour on technical details appearing in books or in websites. A state of despair brought them to take part in a lot of initiation seminars, where a begging devotional attitude and the solemn pledge of secretiveness was the password to be accepted. As soon as the meeting was over, they shared, by cell-phone, the coveted news with other students who, in change, would take part in other initiations and would reciprocate the favour.

Those who organized the meetings gave always the impression of being trustworthy scholars and it always guaranteed that no nonsense would ever slip out of their mouths. I was surprised when one of them, beyond simple

exhibitionism, quoted by heart some lines from a work by P.Y.; the same, sibylline lines which had been, once, the source of so many uncertainties. He read and read through those texts several times trying to make them out; he really strained upon those texts. I felt that those researchers were my real family; I learned to listen to them respectfully and silently whenever they would correct some of my fancy interpretations on *Kriya Yoga*. They provided good fuel for my brain. Among us there was the acquiescence that our teachers were mostly mediocre persons with visible humane lacks; this might have been tolerable in common people, but strongly contrasting with the personality expected of people who called themselves "spiritual guides". We were not able to find at least one of them who would prove to possess that mastery of *Kriya* which was crucial in such a delicate pedagogic work they were confident to do. Some trifling episodes confirmed our first impression of instability, improvisation and, in one case, even of mental instability. They knew little about *Kriya Yoga* and they taught it in an even more superficial way. In spite of that, those little bits of notions were enough to satisfy us. We were honest researchers hypnotized by the mythical *Guru*-disciple relationship, whose influence we had received from P.Y.'s school. It is strange to realize how the organization instilled in us the only thing that kept us stoutly devoted to people we actually despised.

Some friends of ours, coming back from India, showed on their face the excitement for having seen such an extraordinary land. At the same time, their disappointment for all the things they had not been able to learn started to show out.

Some friends happened to meet a boaster assuring them to know *Kriya Yoga* and to be able to initiate them. This could only happen as long as they had kept it a total secret without establishing any contact with other teachers. In this manner, the boaster made sure that they would not realize it was not *Kriya Yoga* what they were being taught.

I could only realize this when, overcoming some people's inner opposition, I had this technique explained to me as well; mostly, it was nothing more than the mere repetition of a *Mantra*! What made me feel sorry about it was not so much the great advantage gained by those braggers (which for them meant a real fortune at my friends' expense) as their missing the chance of learning *Kriya* from safer sources.

Something different happened to a friend of mine who met a descendant of Lahiri Mahasaya. This was one of the master's nephews, a man with a great academic background and with a deep knowledge of *Kriya*, but my friend was not able to learn anything from him.

I was taken aback when he told me "something bizarre". He told me that in Benares, and probably in the whole rest of India, *Kriya Yoga* was not practiced any longer. Even the disciples of Lahiri Mahasaya did not know it! I kept enough control not to interrupt him, then I imagined what had happened.

My friend most probably led the discussion toward very small talks. He actually asked him some information on Indian habits, an *Ashram*'s address and, only at the end of the interview – he must have remembered he was in Lahiri Mahasaya's house – he asked if any of the disciples of Lahiri were still practicing *Kriya*.

His demeanour must have frozen the eminent listener, because his answer resulted in a sarcastically sour negative; in other words: «Definitely not, it is not practiced any longer. I dare say it is not in the whole Indian peninsula. Rather, you surely are the only one practicing it!».

My friend's eyes were looking at me surprisingly. I am still not sure whether he was hoping to convince me or was just absorbed in bitter frustration. I did not pry into it. I am not sure – I do not think so anyway – that he realized how foolish he had been with that master.

A blow came for him one month later; he came to know that a man from his same town had recently been initiated to *Kriya Yoga* from the very person he had met in Benares. He was so irritated by that news that he planned to get back to India to raise a protest to that man.¹⁶

To conclude this picture, one episode is worth being quoted.

Another friend of mine remained for some days at an *Ashram*, in the hope he might receive *Kriya Yoga*. The leader of the *Ashram* was away, and my friend received the initiation to *Kriya Yoga* from one of his disciples. In the end, he was given some written material summarizing its techniques.

At the end of his trip, visibly content, he showed me the written material; the techniques did not differ that much from those I already knew, but there were many more details.

Nothing there was, though, that could do away with all my doubts; not a single hint to *Kechari Mudra*, nothing on *Thokar* either. On the contrary, I can remember a very complicated technique based on the visualization of the *Chakras* like they are described in Tantric texts.

Each technique was preceded by a theoretic introduction with quotations from ancient books and an illustration which eliminated any possible doubt. To

¹⁶ Unfortunately, this is something he did not have the chance to do; a serious illness got hold of his life. In spite of our huge character difference, I will always be grateful to this friend for all the things that he shared with me concerning his spiritual path.

conclude, a precise gradual routine was given. Of course, there was a note guaranteeing that all the mentioned techniques constituted *Kriya Yoga* taught by *Babaji*, Lahiri Mahasaya's mythical *Guru*.

Since that material was very interesting, I would have liked to yield to the illusion that my quest had finally ended, since those notes contained what I was asking for. I simply had to convince myself that *Babaji* had but made a synthesis of Tantrism to obtain His *Kriya Yoga*. It was needed the impudence to think that *Thokar* could be considered no more than a variation of the *Jalandhara Bandha*!

If the instructions to *Kechari Mudra* were not there, never mind, it probably just meant that ... *Kechari* was not really so important!

With a bit of good will and application I could have closed the circle. Chance made me listen to the recording of a conference, in which the author of those notes said he had found those techniques in some tantric texts which he had translated; he, then, made an accurate selection of them to form a coherent system which constituted his system of *Kriya*. How was it possible, then, to have a note saying that those teachings came directly from *Babaji*?

Simple. As well as with the majority of Indian masters, he had the book written by his disciples would write the books; they had the beautiful idea to make it more interesting by talking of a hypothetical derivation from the mythical *Babaji*.

The teacher, then, reflecting a classic Indian habit, never checked that material – he was taken aback later on, coming to know about those "supplementary notes". He tried, anyway, to defend his disciples' work stating that after all « *Babaji*'s *Kriya* had Tantric origins.»

Second teacher

When the moment came to meet the long waited for teacher from India – the one, I hoped, was going to explain *Kriya* in its complete form - I was not in the best mood. From some clues, I knew I was going to be acquainted with a radically new approach. I was afraid that this could upset the simple and adequately profitable routine I got settled in.

The magical realm of *Omkar*, which I had partially experienced since the far-off days of my first *Kriya* school and in which my previous teacher had immersed me in a deeper and passionate way, could be neither left aside nor forgotten. I did not even dream about putting other principles as a foundation of my spiritual path; this is why I approached my new teacher with the idea of rejecting him if, somehow, he appeared to be trying to guide me away from such a reality.

I met him in a *Yoga* center where he had been invited by some disciples.

The synthesis of his introductory speech was that *Kriya* didn't mean to inflate the mind and the Ego moving toward a hypothetical superior mind, but a journey beyond the mind, in an uncontaminated territory. From certain answers to people's questions, I came to know that he knew my former teacher and was aware of his choice not to teach the whole body of the *Kriya* techniques. He got clearly across to us that the reason of his tour to the West was to re-establish the original teachings. This was enough to overcome my initial wariness.

During the following initiation seminar, I indulgently observed some lacks in his behaviour which, instead, shocked other followers. He was hot-tempered. He exploded whenever he was addressed too many questions, even if they were legitimate; he would always sense, underneath the words, a veiled opposition, an intention of challenging his authority.

His explanation of the techniques was reasonably clear but, in part, unusually synthetic.¹⁷

Some years later when he asked me to teach *Kriya* to those people who were interested in it, I rejoiced at this occasion because I could finally explain everything in a complete and exhaustive way. I wanted no student to feel the pain of seeing a legitimate question unconsidered. I had the impression that everything was going on smoothly; all of a sudden the situation started to get complicated. This happened when I wrote a letter to him, some months before his return, to advise him to check the students' comprehension, after the initiation classes, through a guided group practice.

Incredibly, as a reply, he crossed me out of his list of disciples, communicating his official decision to one of his close partners but not to me. Probably, my experience with that teacher would have ended that way - and it would have been better – had I been informed about what was happening. Unaware of the situation, when I welcomed him back to Europe at his arrival, he hugged me as if nothing had happened. He probably interpreted my presence there as a move of repentance.

¹⁷ For instance, his instructions on *Pranayama*, which were formally correct, could be understood only by those who had already been practicing *Kriya Yoga* for a long time. He would dedicate a very short time to explain this technique - one day I decided to time him: the explanation was offered in no more than two minutes! He carried on that way for years, in spite of his close collaborators' polite complaints. He demonstrated *Pranayama* by means of an excessively loud vibratory sound. He knew that this sound was not correct, but he continued using it to be heard by the last rows of students too, sparing himself the annoyance of getting up and walking among them, as *Kriya* teachers usually do. In any case, he would not bother to say that the sound had to be smooth rather than vibrating. I know that many of the students, believing it was the "secret" that this teacher had brought from India, tried to produce the same sound for months.

Later on, I got appalled when I realized everything. For the benefit of the group's peace, I decided to go on without reacting but I deliberately began to control myself, without making any reasonable suggestion.

In order to explain the definitive crack of our relations, it is necessary to come back on the shallowness with which he taught the *Kriya* techniques.

It happened that from one year to another he explained a very important technique in a visibly different way. He changed the procedure of the movements of a particular form of *Thokar*. When one among the listeners asked him a reason for the changes, he pretended not to understand, arguing, later on, that he had not changed anything and that, in the past seminars, a problem of translation might have occurred.

It was I who did that translation. Since his lie was too evident, I did not say anything: my friends remembered very well the head movements they had formerly seen with their own eyes.

Although I spent weeks with him it was not possible to find five minutes to discuss such technical detail.

Confronted with other changes, I had the impression that I was cooperating with an archaeologist who was deliberately altering some findings in order to justify them to the public in the theoretic framework he was accustomed to.

I saw that so many things were not going along the right direction.

My subconscious mind was beginning to rebel. I can vividly remember a dream in which I was swimming in the manure.

I felt that this man, whose every small whim I tried to satisfy, devoting myself to this task, as if I was doing a sacred deed, did not love *Kriya*; he used it, instead, only to conduct here in the West a life more beautiful compared with the wretched one, in India, he had often described to me.

I helped to organize his tours in a way so that he could spread *Kriya* in his rushed, superficial manner: behind my mask of fake delight hid a dry agony. There were moments in which, thinking of my meek beginning in the practice of *Yoga*, my heart felt an indefinite nostalgia for that period which was waiting for nothing but consistency and honesty on my side to rise again and blossom to the full.

Another year went by. As an answer to some friends abroad, I went on behalf of my teacher to their group to teach them *Kriya Yoga*. There I met a very serious student who was already familiar with my teacher's behaviour and was taking part to the initiation ceremony only as a revision. He asked me a lot of pertinent questions, always getting accurate answers. That was the point: - from whom have you learned all these details? - he asked me.

He knew well that my teacher was a total disaster from a didactic point of view. He had the suspicion that I had learned many details from other sources.

How could I ever give *Kriya* initiation using a knowledge that did not originate from my teacher?

He could understand my predicament but was surprised that, since I was authorized to teach *Kriya*, I had never found the chance to talk freely about *Kriya* details with my teacher!

It was logical, rather rightful to me, to settle the matter as soon as possible.

Knowing how irascible the disposition of my teacher was, I knew that if I had addressed him to discuss *Kriya* details he would have become very angry, and would have given in outbursts. If the whole situation slipped out of my hands and, as a result of our break, he stopped coming in our group, those people who loved him would suffer; few people, in fact, would be able to comprehend the reason for my action.

My friends felt comfortable with him; his annual visit was a powerful stimulus; they got themselves up for his visit with an intense practice of *Kriya Yoga*, as if they had to be tested.

Everybody appreciated his philosophy, which reminded in part that of Krishnamurti, and I shared this admiration too.

I sent him a fax where I mentioned the matter in hand and prayed him to arrange his time in a way that we could discuss it after his arrival in my group during his next tour. He was in Australia but within one week at the latest I would have received his answer.

The project of a book about *Kriya*

My subconscious mind was ready to the cataclysm. The next day I found myself taking advantage of a break, while I was skiing, by looking at the mountains marking out the boundaries of the distant horizon in all directions. In half an hour the sun would paint them pink – of an intense hue on their eastern side and tinged with blue on the western side. I imagined India to be right behind them, the Himalayas being their continuation. My thought concerned all the *Kriya* enthusiasts who found, as I did, insurmountable obstacles in the understanding of their beloved discipline.

For the first time I dared to contemplate a thought, lingering hesitantly long since in my subconscious; a book on *Kriya* explaining every technique in great detail.

How often have I wondered what would happen if Lahiri Mahasaya had written such a book. My imagination led me to visualize the colour of its cover, to skim its pages - not so many, like Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

Perhaps some annotator would try to force its meaning into his own theories. Nay, I'm sure that some pseudo-*guru* would say that the techniques described in it were for beginners only, while there were much more complicated

techniques which could only be passed on by authorized people to chosen disciples. Some people would swallow the bait, contact the author and pay good money to be introduced to those techniques that, through fancy or borrowed from some esoteric book, he had made up!

But that happens, this is the human nature: the book in question did not exist! I dared to dream what could have happened if I had written it.

It was hard, yet possible to summarize the totality of my knowledge of *Kriya* into a book, welding together techniques and theories through a clean, rational vision. Surely the intention was not to celebrate myself or to lay the foundations for a new school of *Kriya*. If I had hinted at my experiences, this would only be with the purpose of being clearer in the theoretic and technical explanations. No more rhetorical claims of legitimacy and riddle-like sentences to allow the reader to guess some technical detail and, at the same time, creating doubts anew! I dreamed of a book which proved its validity by incarnating Lahiri Mahasaya's thought, in the simplest and most logical way, in a complete, harmonious set of techniques.

The model could be Theos Bernard's *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* (1943. Rider & Company). This extraordinary handbook, better than all the others, clarifies the teachings contained in the three fundamental texts of Tantrism: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*. [Many modern English translations of those three classic books are available. For example the translation by Brian Dana Akers for the first, by James Mallinson for the second, by Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu for the third one.] In spite of having been published many years ago and of several texts of *Hatha Yoga* appearing recently, that book is still one of the best ones. Dusty techniques became more than ever actual, feasible, clear in front of the eyes of our intuition. That is why I thought that a similar book on *Kriya* would be a real blessing for scholars and researchers.

Of course, many teachers of *Kriya* - those who get by on donations received during rituals of initiation and who exert power on people thanks to the pledge of secrecy - would consider my book as a real threat. Maybe what was virtually eternal for them (living like a lord, surrounded by people who have to meet all their needs with the hope of getting the crumbs of their "secrets") might change, and they were scared of that.

They would try to destroy its credibility by means of a pitiless censorship. I anticipated their scornful comments uttered while skimming its pages: «It contains but stories that have nothing to do with Babaji's and Lahiri Mahasaya's teachings. It spreads a false teaching!»

Actually, a book like mine could not be a threat to any honest *Kriya Acharya's* activity, especially if he had accepted to teach the whole *Kriya* - gradually, of course, with the required care - without keeping anything for

himself, as a matter of personal power.

But how could I guarantee this to them, without being at odds with the rooted conditioning of their "cerebral chemistry"? I feel so sorry that they might become disappointed. Because it is in my temperament to be pleased in seeing everyone happy!

"New Age" people - lovers of texts enriched with illustrations from Indian folklore - would definitely be disappointed in its sobriety, tossing it aside because it «does not have good vibrations».

Only to those who love practicing *Kriya*, discovering the existence of my book would be a magic touch dissolving a nightmare.

I was already living in that happiness.

Thanks to them, the book would continue to circulate, and who knows how many times it would get back to the teacher who had torn it to crumbs. At times he would have to pretend not to notice that a student was browsing through its pages during his seminars, missing thus part of the conference...

The book didn't exist and the various received conditionings (secrecy about the techniques) made me think it could never be written. I closed my eyes for various minutes and tried to have a dispassionate, unemotional discernment of the situation. This seemed to me an absurdity that wore the clothes of a nightmare – I felt an infinite rebellion. Looking around and watching the blue sky above the gilded mountain brims turning pink all seemed to tell me that the book had already been written in some angle of my heart!

A harsh reply from my teacher came just a few days later. In a disdainful way, he wrote that my excessive attachment to the techniques would never let me out of the fences of my mind; I was like S. Thomas, too desirous to touch with my hand and verify the goodness of his teachings.

He could not understand the honest reason of my request, nor it was possible for me to be clearer by letter. We should have talked to each other long before: but why did he always escape me?¹⁸

The tone of his answer was that of one who is expecting a letter of excuses on my part, a humble step back; then perhaps he would be so generous to forget my fax.

I realized I had arrived at a turning point, I decided to behave in a candid way

¹⁸ One day, during a three weeks tour with him, we were alone and he was seeking something in a room: I found the courage to put him a technical question about *Kriya* – it was a delicate question, an issue which set one *Kriya* school against another. He suddenly turned toward me with his eyes injected of such a hate as if he was in the act of killing me; he shouted that I should practice in the way I considered right: it was not his business. This, according to my memory, is the sole technical discourse in the course of some years.

as if I had not understood his tone: I really wanted to see what he would do. Neither I apologized nor I answered in a resentful tone. I wrote that a talk on the *Kriya* techniques was necessary, since I taught *Kriya* on his behalf. I added that at such event the other three people in Europe authorized by him to impart the *Kriya* initiation could also be present. I did not receive, neither then nor later, any answer.

Some weeks later I was shown that on his Internet site the plan of his visit in Italy had changed and the name of my town had been taken off; my second letter had brought about a definitive split. The nightmare was over!

I took a one day vacation and had a long walk; I roamed a lot, tensely, imagining a hypothetical talk with him. All of a sudden I found myself crying with joy: it was too beautiful, I was free, I had been six years with him, and now all that really ended!

Such break was perceived with bewilderment by my friends. Like a domino effect, some coordinators belonging to other groups in Europe, who had been hardly tolerating his bad manners, took advantage of that episode to break any contact with him. They felt the time was ripe to enjoy this liberation.

The following period was pleasant but not as euphoric as I had foreseen: the sense of all the time wasted, of all the silly things which had been carried out thoughtlessly was weighing me down.

I had not even a faint idea of what our group was to become without a teacher joining us in the near future.

I thought different times to undertake the writing of the book: but how to find the courage to publish it, violating thus the dogma of the secretiveness in the field of *Kriya*? Even if the up-to-now known *Gurus*¹⁹ did not have anything of sacredness, the *Kriya* was sacred.

It had to be received from an "authorized" person. It was for such a reason that our group, disappointed by the first organization, had turned to other Indian teachers. The *Kriya* could not be learned from a book; this had been repeated to me for a whole life, reasons included: «only the *Guru* knows what your really need!» Besides, secretiveness is needed «to maintain the teachings pure»!

Yet I never saw these principles take concrete form in reality: the *Guru* gave the same instructions to everyone and never wanted to hear personal questions concerning the techniques to which he always answered: «that is your life!» and «those are things that you must resolve with your intuition».

It was said that it is dangerous to give advanced techniques to people who are

¹⁹ My remark is directed at the afore sketched travelling *Gurus* not to other historical figures which I didn't known personally.

not ready to bear their power: but this was exactly what organizations and teachers were doing during mass-initiation, where there is no personal contact between teacher and student.

As regards keeping the teachings pure, the baffling facts were that just from that organization that went on repeating this concept insistently, it was inaugurated an endless chain of *Kriya* alterations!

If there had been no secrecy, for a long time we would have had some reliable manual of *Kriya* that would have restrained the so many small variations invented by various teachers, just to distinguish one from another.

In the end, it was not true that those who had received the techniques from authorized teachers, practised them better than those who had not. The exact opposite was more likely: he who had been initiated in a solemn way practised them with the pride and the intimate satisfaction of owning them, with the illusion to be subtly and automatically helped by a *Guru*, while the humble self-taught student put in them all the possible prudence and creativeness, being always unsure that on the book from which he had learned them or in the words of the friend that had explained them to him, there were not all the necessary instructions.

The pressing, obsessing request of secrecy with the threat of possible calamities that would happen to whom infringes it, clearly clashes with everything we read in the biographies of the saints; it suits perfectly instead with the esoteric-magic dimension of certain societies – rather, secrecy is essential to their preservation.

It is true that we cannot accuse the *Kriya* organizations of leading people toward magic. Even if they fill the mind of the researchers with excessive hopes (see the theory of the automatic effect of *Kriya* on one's evolution) their goal is clearly the Spirit. But they need the secrecy to go on: this is physiological. Without it, they would disappear in a short time or reduce to be a modest institution constituted by a honorary president and by few secretaries busy with the publishing of the works of the Master.

The myth of secrecy allows the myth of the "ascended" *Guru* to be kept alive: they are indissolubly tied up. If there were no secrecy, the *Guru* would belong to everyone, would be more "human" and they could not carry on that subtle work of persuasion through which, in the end, the *Guru* is identified with God and the organization becomes the materialization of God's will.

A *kriyaban* cannot approach God if not through that *Guru* and that organization. And therefore *Kriya* must be received from that source: there is no other way.

For those who find such an idea a monstrous one and are determined to learn *Kriya* without accepting the bonds of those organizations, the situation

in which they are carrying on their search (books and web Forums) is desolating. Sometimes in a *Kriya* Forum, frenzy, anger, wounded egos are hiding behind a mask of kindness; often, unutterable vulgarity unleash when there is no moderator and people feel free to insult coarsely those with different opinions.²⁰

Not everyone can go to India. The "wise" Indian Acharyas have no "representatives" in the West and their students have not the permission to teach anything. Now, it is impossible to think that, each year, an innumerable series of charter flights will transport all those interested in *Kriya* - no matter if old or ill - to a remote Indian village, like a pilgrimage to Lourdes or Fatima!

Instead of meeting us halfway, the more we busy ourselves here - even going to listen, just to learn some crumb of *Kriya*, guys unworthy to be called *Kriya* teachers - the more they close in themselves. The gap between them and us grows. Blinded by dogmas, locked in their ivory towers, they act against common sense, demanding even more secrecy from their disciples.

Here is an example of what it commonly happens.

A friend of mine, with whom I had shared everything of my spiritual path, accompanying me in my ventures with both the teachers and suffering the same woes on his own skin, went to India for a vacation, where he visited a teacher whom I held in great esteem but never had the opportunity to meet him personally. He explained to that Teacher the deplorable situation of the diffusion of the *Kriya* here in the West and particularly all the vicissitudes of our group; the Teacher said he felt sorry for us and that he was willing to help us. My friend had his *Pranayama* reviewed. When he got back to Italy, I met him; he was very happy and asked me to practice *Pranayama* in front of him. He told me that there was a mistake in my practice. I asked him what it was and his reply literally froze me: he could not tell me, since he promised the teacher he would not reveal anything.²¹

²⁰ But what mostly exasperates one are the answers given to honest people who look for technical clarifications. There are always *kriyabans* who reply with an unacceptable tone: with factious tenderness, betraying the lowest form of consideration - smashing as a dangerous mania the seekers' desire of deepening the *Kriya* subject - they counsel to improve the depth of the already received techniques and be contented with them. How can they dare, uninvited, enter a person's life, about whom they know nothing, treating that person as an incompetent and superficial beginner? Is it so damn difficult to answer: «I do not know the subject matter»? When a researcher asks information about *Kechari Mudra*, frequently the answer is: «it is not important or essential at all!», adding trivialities.

²¹ Considering the episode later, I realized what this incorrect detail was: I had not made the abdominal breath in a particularly visible way. I am sure of this fact because it was the only thing my friend was able to see - we did not talk about inner details of the

He had asked indeed his teacher's permission to correct eventual mistakes of our practice: the answer had been negative, moreover the teacher swore him to secrecy.

Was this teacher - who manifested the intention to help us - concerned that we would not find any need to visit him after our mistake was revealed?

Was he really so mean?

I did not put pressure on my friend to tell me everything about his talks with the Master. I could not and would not enter the privacy of his experience, but how could he just let me go on with my mistake? I considered this to be absurd and reacted badly. My friend was taken aback when I cut our discussion and left. The only practical result was the break with that friend.

Some weeks later the wheel of good fortune seemed to be turning again; a new teacher could come to our group. As he was a well-regarded person, I accepted the proposal to bear the cost of his travel.

Some days later, contacted by the teacher's secretary, she handled the financial side of the trip with such brutality and harshness that I decided to decline the offer. I was really sick and tired of the whole situation; I had enough of behaving like a compliant disciple who begs for crumbs of the "original *Kriya*".

However in the meantime some reflections on the essence of *Kriya* and on the role of a teacher started to take more and more the consistence of a serene truth which was definitely freeing me from the dogma of secretiveness. First of all it was by now clear that the *Kriya* was not invented by Lahiri Mahasaya: it is the best of what humanity discovered in the field of the mystical practice. There is an unusual kinship among *Kriya Yoga*, *Hesychasm*, the path of the *Sufi* and the Internal Alchemy of ancient China. Of course it was impossible to break the secrecy of *Kriya* without challenging the idea of the *Guru*-disciple relationship.

One evening, after a long walk, subdued by a sudden tiredness, I dragged myself back home. Worn-out by my thoughts, the problem of the *Guru*-disciple relationship emerged, obscurely, more as a wound than as a theory unfolding its myths. In my room, I set the record player on "repeat" on Beethoven's second movement of the *Emperor Concert*. Did anybody, after having haunted all the possible ceremonies of Initiation given by the legitimated channels, being stuffed with all the possible *Guru*'s blessings, ever practice *Kriya* with the same dignity and courage with which Beethoven challenged his fate?

I turned down the light and watched the sun go down behind some trees on

practice.

the top of a hill. The shape of a cypress covered a part of that great, blood-red circle. That was the eternal beauty! That was the norm by which I would be inspired.

Sitting down from sleepiness, a strange image captured my attention, that of Vivekananda's "investiture" by his *Guru* Ramakrishna. I read that one day, toward the end of his life, Ramakrishna entered *Samadhi* while his disciple was near him. Vivekananda started to feel a strong current before fainting. Back to consciousness, his *Guru* whispered crying: «O my Naren [Vivekananda], everything I had I gave to you, today. I have become a poor fakir, I do not have anything; with these powers you will do the world an immense good». Later, Ramakrishna explained that the powers he passed onto him could not be used for his own spiritual fulfilment - one had to get to that by himself -, on the contrary, they would help him in his mission as a spiritual teacher.

I think my subconscious came up with such a flash as a warning not to yield to the temptation of throwing something valid and precious away. Now, if we say that Ramakrishna was Vivekananda's *Guru*, we are saying something true and unquestionable.

It came spontaneous to read again the memorable, impressive discourse by Dostoevsky about the role of elders in Russian monasteries [*The Brothers Karamazov*].

«What was such an elder? An elder was one who took your soul, your will, into his soul and his will. When you choose an elder, you renounce your own will and yield it to him in complete submission, complete self-abnegation. This novitiate, this terrible school of abnegation, is undertaken voluntarily, in the hope of self-conquest, of self-mastery, in order, after a life of obedience, to attain perfect freedom, that is, from self; to escape the lot of those who have lived their whole life without finding their true selves in themselves. » [Translated by Constance Garnett]

This reality could not be debated! But I was not yet able to see that the problem did not lie in the concept of *Guru*, which however deserved to be explored to the full, but in what some people had done with such a concept and how they led me to think in the same way. I was not stupid to receive such conditioning but weak, because of my excessive love toward *Kriya*. This was the real deformation from which all the problems had arisen. Therefore it was clear that Vivekananda' story and Dostoevsky's extract depicted situations which were intrinsically, exceedingly different from mine. But my musings arrived just to that point and there they stopped - for months.

It took time before the awareness dawned upon me that the problem was that while a *Guru* is a man, since years I had been strongly pressed to identify the

Guru with God. A chief of the most important Italian branch of my school once told me: «Don't you understand yet that P.Y. is the Divine Mother Herself»? Many *kriyabans*, my dearest friends gave this identification for granted.

In the second place, while the great examples of *Guru*-disciple relationship were based on a real physical meeting between two person, my relationship was purely ideal, built by others trough heavy conditioning

To my mind came, surely suggested by past reflections, the idea of a net; each individual was a junction from which a lot of links fanned out, as from our brain's neurons. When a single individual took an action - a significant one of course, like starting on a mystic path and making good progress on it - he shook the surrounding net as well. A serious practitioner never isolates himself; thus, he will feel other people's positive response, but he will also be slowed down by their indolence and apathy. It is important to understand that if x draws y , it will also inevitably happen that y draws x .

I saw that the *Guru*-disciple relationship had its foundations in this concept. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda had different personalities, but, considering the deepest and truest side of themselves, they were one thing: a great love bound them together.

A person might carry another person, foster his spiritual progress if and only if he has earned, through his own effort, a particular power. It does not come out because someone else officially bestowed on him any particular role like allowing him to initiate.

As the reader definitely knows, Jung talked of a deeper level than the subconscious, which does not have a similar origin but is «inherited with our cerebral structure» and consists of «the human systems of reacting» to the most intense events that can happen in one's lifetime: rise, death, illness, family, war...

We, as human beings, are linked through this *Collective Unconscious*. If to Freud the Unconscious was a part of the psyche similar to a depot full of old, removed things refused by a nearly automatic act of the will - a heap of things that we cannot recall to consciousness - this Collective Unconscious binds all human beings by the deepest layers of their conscience.

Who claims to have legitimately received the power to initiate may wonder if a similar bond exists between him and the disciple who is going to be initiated.

To accept a disciple doesn't mean to go into a lot of trouble in order to explain *Kriya* to him, but it means to accept lucidly and coherently the future tangles and sufferings that such a relationship might imply. Although we feel sheltered by our fervent aspiration for the Divine, it is wise to admit our

frailty and vulnerability.

In Lahiri Mahasaya's writings I never found a conflict with such a way of thinking. The great *Yoga-Avatar* refused to be worshipped as a God. This is a point that some among His followers seem to have forgotten.

He said: «I am not the *Guru*, I don't maintain a barrier between the true *Guru* (the Divine) and the disciple». He added he wanted to be considered like «a mirror». When a *kriyaban* realizes that Lahiri Mahasaya is the personification of what resides potentially in himself, of what one day he will become, the mirror must be «thrown away». Whether one likes it or not, that is exactly what He wrote: thrown away.

People who have been raised with the usual dogmas about the *Guru*-disciple relationship are prevented from fully understanding the impact of these words, otherwise they would face a strong conflict. To face the truth, it takes the courage to abandon one's own illusions, those that are nice and gratifying and it takes also a good brain.

«God is not a person but a state of consciousness», He remarked!

I knew how often Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples were already familiar with the techniques they were going to receive from Him. He asked an overall discretion, namely a tendency towards silence on the whole matter.

He saw that, especially at the beginning of a *kriyaban*'s endeavour, there was the latent tendency to waste a lot of time and energy in communicating to friends the new object of interest. This created a disturbing situation: the *kriyaban* was involved, in fact, in reacting to criticism and sarcasm or, sometimes, he was lured to pose as a spiritual guide.

Lahiri Mahasaya did not fear the free diffusion of *Kriya* - a similar idea cannot agree with any of His ideals. He gave a disciple who was proficient and strong enough the demanding assignment of being a spiritual guide and of sharing *Kriya* freely.

A *Kriya* seeker yearns to find an expert of his beloved discipline, one who accepts to help by passing all his experience on him, without keeping any secret for himself. He who plays the role of the *Guru* is, at the same time, the best friend: love and respect between the two develops in a wonderful way. This event cannot be prolonged to anyone through any ceremony or speech. Rather, if the disciple would one day tell the most touching anecdotes of his experience, narrating the wonder of his life rescued from insignificance by the grace of his *Guru*, he would build a myth which could raise the enthusiasm in a lot of people and even stimulate their intention of practicing *Kriya*.

In those earnest seekers who will keep up with their practice till to the end of their life such a myth however is destined to withdraw and function as a

symbol, while something of personal, of really lived will inevitably take its place.

In the afore mentioned hypotheses, it didn't seem to me there existed reasons, not silly, that were contrary to a free sharing, among serious researchers, of the technical *Kriya* details. The plan of the book could have been the following: a first part in which I would mainly show how this path, perhaps for its intrinsic amplexness and different degrees of subtlety, has always risked to be drastically reduced by those people who were fond only of some aspects of it; a second part in which I would have provided a seeker with a certain material from which he could start his search or enrich it; a third part in which I would face a new theme: the study of the researcher himself. If, like other people, I had needed so much time freeing myself from the conditionings - and if others friends went on clinging to them - it meant that in the human being there is a congenital weakness which deserves to be studied, perhaps even before considering the *Kriya* praxis itself.

SECOND PART: SHARING THE KRIYA TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER II/1... BASIC FORM OF THE FIRST KRIYA

DISCLAIMER OF RESPONSIBILITY

The techniques described herein are exposed for study purposes only and serve as a comparison with the works of other researchers. The author hopes this work will inspire intelligent feedback; any remarks, criticism, corrections and additions are welcome.

I wish to make clear that this book is not a manual of Kriya!

I may write one in the future and face the problem of how to divide the whole matter into different lessons, and try, for each level of learning, to give all the necessary indications. However, certain techniques cannot be learned by means of a manual. An expert has to check their execution. There are delicate techniques such as Maha Mudra, Pranayama, Thokar and Yoni Mudra, which cannot reasonably be learned only with the help of some written material.

It is also necessary that an expert check the impact of the techniques on the practitioner. Each person is an individual for whom no one can predict the effects of a particular technique, especially if practiced intensively.

The author is disclaimed from all responsibilities in case of negative results, especially in the case that one decides to practice the techniques without having their execution checked by an expert first. Those who mean to go through with this practice, should do it with a due sense of sacredness, being aware of the wealth that it can bring to their life. They should reserve the right and the duty to control their own destiny, securing for themselves expert counsel or guidance.

N.B. When you go to an expert, please advise him if you have any kind of physical problems, such as high blood pressure, lung problems or signs of hyperventilation In that case, surely he will guide you through a very mild form of Pranayama, with correlated Mudras – if need be only a mental practice of them and further counselling if required.

Introduction to the localization of the Chakras

The *Chakras* are subtle astral organs inside the spinal cord, ideal steps of a mystic ladder guiding one safely to the deepest ecstatic experience.

A lot of people believe in the possibility of applying to *Kriya* what they find in the books on *Yoga*, but this is not the way it works. They are filled with useless, misleading representations. While wasting time in visualizing all that stuff, a *kriyaban* can run the risk of losing the real meaning of the *Kriya* techniques, or part of their riches.

Kriya is a natural process, not an artificial condition achieved by the sheer power of the creative visualisation.

When some particular conditions are established - mental silence, relaxation of the body, intense aspiration of the soul - the inner reality manifests in a captivating way, absorbing all the attention. Then, subtle movements of energy in the body - or a particular centering of the energy in some parts of the body - reveal the essence of the *Chakras*.

To start with *Kriya* practice, a *Yogi* (we shall use the term *kriyaban*) simply visualises the spine as a hollow tube extending from the bottom of the spine to the brain: the *Sushumna Nadi*. With further practice, he perceives his spine as ideally divided in five parts (refer to the Figure 1).

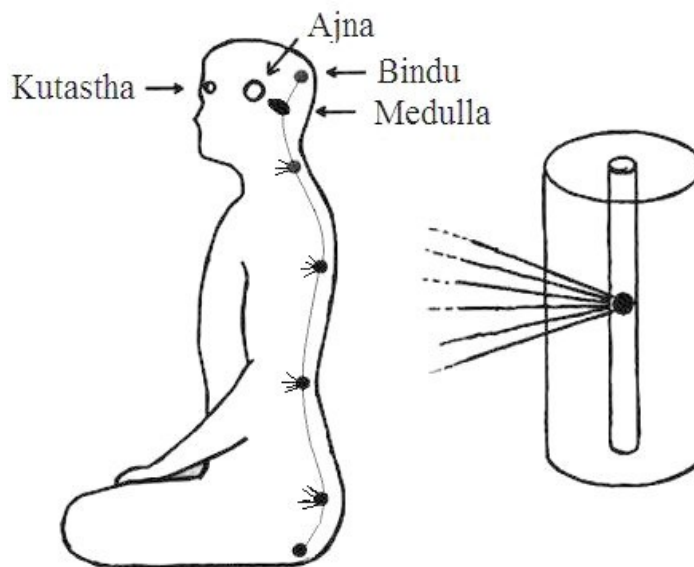


Figure 1. The Chakras and other associated energy centers located in the brain.

The first *Chakra*, *Muladhar*, is located at the coccygeal region; the second *Chakra*, *Swadhisthana*, finds its place at sacrum's height; the third *Chakra*, *Manipura*, is in the lumbar region, at navel's height; the fourth *Chakra*,

Anahata, is in the dorsal region, at heart's height; the fifth *Chakra*, *Vishuddha*, is placed at the base of the cervical vertebrae.

A *kriyaban* tries to feel intuitively, even if in a vague way, these parts: in time, he or she will be able to experience them as five subtle states of consciousness.

Independent traditions situate the location of the sixth, two-petalled, *Chakra*, *Ajna*, in different places. According to *Kriya* tradition its location is in the center of the brain. Since the *Medulla Oblongata* (under the brain and on top of the spinal cord, below the Pons Varolii, and anterior to the Cerebellum) is very close its location, it is normally said that *Medulla* is the seat of the sixth *Chakra*. According to the same tradition, it is to be visualised having the shape of the back of a tortoise. Even a beginner experiences that by focusing his concentration in that place, then restlessness disappears immediately and a tranquil state of consciousness settles.

The *Kutastha*, between the eyebrows, also known as the "third eye" or "spiritual eye", is a mirror image of the sixth *Chakra*. All the *Kriya* techniques are practiced by focusing one's gaze on that spot. Converging all the energy there is the condition to enter the *Sushumna*.

Since it is in the human nature that the energy is scattered throughout the body and the inner channels leading to *Kutastha* are obstructed, it is very difficult to realize that condition.

Unfortunately, attempting this, some students of *Kriya* bring into their practice the same eager, impatient and occasionally insensitive attitude they have in life — especially if they are full of esoteric and "magical" ways of thinking. They are lead astray by some text and do not comprehend that some events can be verified only in due time. Applying a strong visualisation effort, they impose their *Prana* to rise directly from the fifth *Chakra* into the *Kutastha*.

This creates a tightening of the channel which, had they acted in a different way, could have opened; the more they strive the more headaches they gain.

It is for this reason – to calmly and effectively reach the *Kutastha* – that it is wise to concentrate first on the *Bindu* center which has a connection with the *Kutastha*. *Bindu* is located in the occipital region, where the hairline twists in a kind of vortex. (It is there that some Hindus, with their shaved head, wear a lock of hair.)

In the final phase of *Kriya*, where breath is almost non-existent, the energy and awareness settle into the seventh *Chakra*. This is not to be considered like the other *Chakras*; it is in fact a superior reality, and we cannot concentrate on it in the way we are used to with the other *Chakras*. Although it is not difficult to "tune" into the state embodied by it, the real,

unique way of reaching it is to cross the door of the *Kutastha*.

It is not necessary to use excessive imagination to become aware of the *Chakras*, but it is important to get through to the reader that the way they are felt while going up through the spine is different from the way they are perceived while coming down.

The first five *Chakras* have a twofold nature: they are "lights" illuminating the *Sushumna* passage and, at the same time, subtle organs distributing the energy, flowing down from the *Medulla*, to the body.

This last aspect of the *Chakras* (we can call the "external" or "horizontal" component) is tied with the physical nerves departing from the spine, connecting it with the internal organs.

To make it easier, while coming down, each *Chakras* is visualized as a beam of luminous rays departing from its location in *Sushumna* piercing the internal part of the body enlivening the vital organs.

The traditional instruction is that, during the descent, a *kriyaban* touches them gently from the back, experiencing, at least for an instant, their enlivening. One can also equally have the same effect by bringing one's awareness in the front of the body and following the awareness towards the spine until one feels that one has "touched" them.

Basic techniques

The ideal times for practice are morning before breakfast, noon before lunch, late afternoon before dinner, and at night at least 2-3 hours after eating. The first two techniques (*Talabya Kriya* and *Om Japa*) can be practiced several hours before the subsequent *Kriya* techniques.

Talabya Kriya

Starting from a relaxed position of the tongue, the *kriyaban* sticks it to the palate, creating a suction cup effect, while always maintaining the position of the tip of the tongue pointing towards the teeth. Having thus pressed the tongue to the roof of the mouth, the bottom jaw is lowered to stretch the *frenulum* (the tissue that joins the tongue to the base of the mouth). The stretching effect should be clearly felt. The tongue, which for some moments has been pressed to the palate, releases itself by moving into its natural position with a clicking sound (refer to Figure 2).

The tongue is then pushed out of the mouth toward the chin. This procedure is repeated 50 times (No more than 10 times in the beginning! It takes 110-120 seconds to complete the 50 movements). A lot of people practice the *Talabya Kriya* incorrectly because they instinctively turn their tongue backwards (or

keep it vertical), cancelling the whole effect. It is very important that the tongue is kept pointing forward touching the teeth before sticking it to the palate.²²

After months of regular practice of *Talabya Kriya*, it is possible to insert the tongue into the nasal pharynx cavity: this is called *Kechari Mudra* (refer to Figure 3). When the time is ripe, the insertion of the tongue is attained first with the help of one or two fingers pushing the tongue near its root. A *kriyaban* is thus able to touch the uvula, and then push the root of one's tongue further until its tip glides behind the soft palate; later the tongue can slip into the nasal pharynx. After some weeks the same position is achieved without the aid of the fingers. Then a *kriyaban* can practice his techniques with his tongue stable in that position.²³

Talabya Kriya creates a perceivable relaxing effect on the thinking process; that is why it will never be left aside once the *Kechari Mudra* is achieved. It is unknown why this action on the *frenulum* is capable of reducing thought production. However, anyone practising this technique can readily verify this effect. Of course *Kechari Mudra* will enormously amplify this introverting effect.

[For other information about *Kechari Mudra* see next Chapter]

²² In the *Hatha Yoga* books there are different suggestions to lengthen the *frenulum*: a) By pulling the tongue past the tip of the nose with the help of a piece of cloth around it. b) By pushing the tongue back with an index or middle finger, and keeping it there.

²³ In the picture we notice the difference between *Talabya Kriya* and *Kechari Mudra*. While doing the first, by opening the mouth in front of a mirror, we notice that the frenulum comes forward; in the second we notice just the root of the tongue: it is the uvula which comes forward. While waiting to achieve the *Kechari Mudra*, one can practice the *Kriya* techniques with one's tongue turned backwards. Lahiri Mahasaya was absolutely against cutting the *frenulum* to obtain faster and easier results.

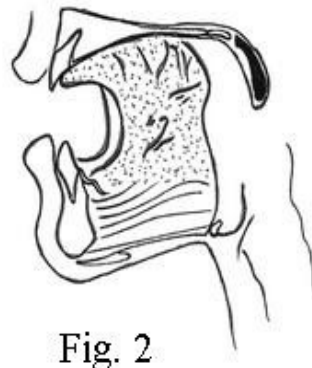


Fig. 2

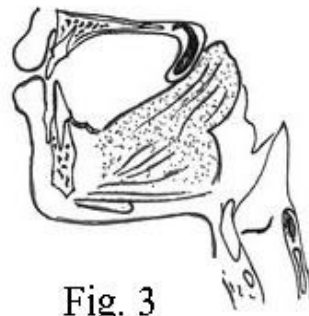


Fig. 3

Maha Mudra

Maha Mudra is one of the basic techniques of *Kriya Yoga*. It is a physical position coupled with a breathing exercise to be performed immediately before taking up *Asana* to perform *Kriya*. (Some advocate doing *Maha Mudra* an additional time before giving up *Asana* after completing *Kriya*, which distributes evenly the energy into all parts of the body.) The *Prana* located in the spinal column has to be raised up to the head, then the body and the mind are filled with elation and vitality. It helps to balance the activities of the left and right hemispheres of the brain and make body and mind more stable in meditation.

The importance of *Maha Mudra* becomes clear since it incorporates all the three *Bandhas*. Applied simultaneously, when the body is bent forward, they produce the feeling of an energetic current moving up the spine. Since the heel is on the perineum, while the attention is in the *Kutastha*, one is aware of the places where the *Sushumna* begins and ends: in due course of time a *kriyaban* can have the perception of the whole *Sushumna Nadi* as a radiant channel.

There are a few *Kriya Acharya* who give a unique importance to this technique. They consider it the most useful practice of all the *Kriya Yoga* and claim that the

ideal goal to be achieved gradually is to practice 144 *Maha Mudra* daily, in two sessions of 72 each. There are reports of *Yogis* having achieved fantastic experiences through this technique alone. According to their accounts, the experience of the *Sushumna* path was increased tremendously: all the highest experiences came consequently.

Usually it is taught that there should be a ratio between the number of *Maha Mudra* repetitions and the number of *Pranayama* breaths — it is recommended that for each twelve *Pranayama*, one should perform one *Maha Mudra*. However, after talking with many *kriyabans*, I dare say that it is a miracle to find a person who regularly practices its three canonical repetitions. There are people who believe they are practicing their *Kriya* correctly without ever practicing one single *Maha Mudra*! It is clear that, forsaking this exercise and living a sedentary life, the spinal column loses its elasticity. The physical conditions get worse as the years go by and it becomes almost impossible to maintain the correct meditation position for more than a few minutes —that is why *Maha Mudra* is so important for the *kriyaban*.

One starts by placing the left heel at the perineum (located between the scrotum and anus for males and between the anus and cervical opening for females) with the right leg fully extended in front. By doing this, the left heel exerts some pressure on the perineum.

This pressure is the best means of stimulating one's awareness of the *Muladhar Chakra* at the coccygeal region at the root of the spine. Through a deep inhalation the energy is raised into the head. This is a very simple and easily gained sensation, there is no need to make it too complicated.

Then, holding the breath, one stretches forward (in a relaxed way) so that the interlocked hands can grab the big toe and lock in. In the outstretched position (the chin is pressed against the chest naturally), while holding the breath, *Om (Onnnng)* is mentally chanted in the *Kutastha*, from six to twelve times.

Returning to the starting position, with a long exhalation, the energy descends to the base of the spinal column.

The entire procedure is repeated with the right heel on the *Muladhar* and left leg outstretched in front – the aforementioned instructions are reversed.

The procedure is then repeated once more with both legs outstretched to complete one cycle of *Maha Mudra*. This three-movement cycle is repeated two more times for a total of nine extensions (it lasts about 60-80 seconds).

Key points

[1] Some schools teach, during inhalation, to draw the knee of the about-to-be-outstretched leg (or both the knees, before the third movement) against the body, so that the upper part of the leg is as close to the chest as possible. The

hands, with fingers interlocked, are placed around the knee and exert pressure upon the knee. It is explained that it serves to straighten the back, others say that the *Anahat Chakra*'s inner sound becomes audible.

[2] As for the stretch forward, initially the vast majority of the *kriyabans* are not able to achieve such a pose without certain back or knee injury. They should by no means try to keep the leg straight, but should bend the knee a bit in the most suitable manner to achieve a comfortable position! This *Mudra* must be comfortable, it must not hurt!

In the outstretched position, while holding the breath, a muscle contraction at the base of the spine is maintained while the abdominal muscles draw back slightly. The sensation is that of the navel being squeezed toward the lumbar center.

[3] The big toe should be held tightly (firmly but not uncomfortably) in this *Mudra*. This is an important detail as it opens some inner channels where *Prana* can flow. A variation is the following: the toenail of the big toe is squeezed using the thumb of the right hand while the index and middle fingers are behind the big toe and the left hand cups the sole of the foot.

When the procedure is repeated with both legs outstretched, both toes are grabbed with the interlocked hands. (A variation is that the thumbs of each hand grab the respective toenails and the index and middle fingers hold the toe from behind).

4 It should be mentioned that one need not use excessive or uncomfortable contractions to perform the three *Bandhas*. The movement forward in itself already inherently contains the three *Bandhas*. One need only to gently intensify them (without strain) to create a gentle stretching sensation of the spine. It is this gentle lengthening of the spine which helps create the sensation of energy flowing.

Asana

According to Patanjali, the *Yogi*'s posture [*Asana*] must be steady and pleasant. To sit in *Padmasana* or *Siddhasana* ²⁴ is uncomfortable to a

²⁴ In *Padmasana* (position in which the lotuses - the *Chakras* - are seen) the right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh with the soles of the feet turned up. It is explained that, combined with *Kechari* and *Shambhavi Mudra*, this *Asana* creates an energetic condition in the body, suitable to producing the experience of the internal light coming from each *Chakra*. It helps in keeping the body remain seated when, with the achievement of *Pratyahara*, it tends to bend down or fall. Personally, I do not counsel anyone to perform this difficult posture. There are *yogis* who had to have their cartilage removed from their knees after years of forcing themselves into lotus. In *Kriya Yoga*, at least for those living in the west and not used to assuming it since infancy, it is much wiser, healthier and comfortable to practice either

beginner, the knees and the ankles giving intense pain.

The most part of the *kriyabans* are comfortable with the so-called Half-lotus. This position has been used for meditation since time immemorial because it provides a comfortable, very easily obtained, sitting position.

The left leg is bent at the knee, brought toward the body and the sole of the left foot is made rests against the inside of the right thigh. The heel of the left foot should be drawn in as far as possible.

The right leg is bent at the knee and the right foot is placed over the fold of the left leg. The right knee is dropped as far as possible toward the floor. The hands rest on the knees. The secret is to maintain an erect spine: this can be obtained only by sitting on a on the edge of a thick cushion, with the buttocks towards the front half of the cushion. In this way the buttocks are slightly raised, while the knees are resting on the floor.

When the legs grow tired, the position is prolonged by reversing the legs.

In certain delicate situations, it may be providential to do it on a chair, provided it has no arms and is large enough. In this way, one leg at a time can be lowered and the knee articulation relaxed!

The shoulders will stay in a natural position, the torso, spine, chest, neck, and head will rest erect in a straight line as if they are all one and cannot move in any manner. By adopting this posture, the *Yogi* should fix the sight and the mind steadily between the eyebrows. The best position of the hands is with fingers intertwined as one can observe in Lahiri Mahasaya's well known photo - this creates a good balance of energies from the right hand to the left and vice versa.

Om Japa in the Chakras

Rising along the spine, the *Mantra "Om"* is chanted in each *Chakra* in such a manner so as to generate a sensation of vibration. The mind is employed in trying to subtly touch the inner component of each *Chakra*, starting with *Muladhar*, climbing up to the cervical *Chakra*, *Vishuddha*, and then terminating on the *Bindu*.

Then, while coming down (first *Medulla*, then the other *Chakras*, all the way to *Muladhar*), each time *Om* is chanted, the subtle radiation of each *Chakra* towards the body is perceived. One ascent (*Chakras* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and *Bindu*) and one descent (*Medulla*, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1) represent one complete cycle - it lasts

the Half lotus or the *Siddhasana* position. In *Siddhasana* (Perfect Pose), the sole of the left foot is placed against the right thigh so that the heel presses on the Perineum. The right heel is placed against the pubic bone. This position of the legs, combined with *Kechari Mudra*, closes the pranic circuit and makes *Pranayama* easy and profitable. It is explained that this position helps to become aware of the movement of *Prana*.

about 30 seconds. A total of six to twelve cycles are performed; the first three should be performed while chanting the *Mantra* aloud, while the rest can be chanted either aloud or mentally.

During this practice the breath is completely forgotten. The correct pronunciation for the *Mantra* should not be "ommm" like in "Tom" but "ooooong" like in "song", with a long-drawn "o" like "tone". In this technique, "Om" is a pure vowel sound. When pronouncing Indian Mantras, like *Om namo bhagavate ...* or *Om namah Shivaya ...*, the consonant "m" in "Om" is heard. Here it is *not* heard because the "o" is very long and, at the end, the mouth is not completely closed - thus creating the nasal sound "ng". Chanting "aum" is by no means correct. Chanting *Om* in the *Chakras*, before beginning *Pranayama* properly is very wise action: this exercise acts like a flywheel and makes the *Pranayama* happen very easily.

Pranayama

Pranayama is the basic technique of *Kriya* and since it is made of different details which need to be gradually integrated into a harmonious whole, it is not easy to write about it. In this chapter the explanation is divided in two parts. Every *kriyaban* lives his practice in a different way and each teacher has his own strategy. At the end of this chapter there will be some comments; other variations of the *Pranayama* technique will be added later (see chapter II/3).

First part: basic Pranayama

The eyes are closed and relaxed, as if looking into the distance through *Kutastha*. (A *kriyaban* who can perform the *Kechari Mudra* assumes this *Mudra* at this stage.)

A deep inhalation through the nose, producing an unvoiced sound in the throat acts like a hydraulic pump to raise the energy from the foot of the spinal column to the *Bindu* in the occipital region. A deep exhalation through the nose brings the energy back to the base of the spinal column. The inhaling air is felt as moderately cool, the exhaling air is felt as moderately warm. The beginner has a rhythm of about 18-20 seconds per breath. The associated literature points out that the perfect *Pranayama* is made of 80 breaths per hour—about 45 seconds per breath. Only during long sessions can a *kriyaban* try to reach this rhythm. A beginner should ignore the above mentioned rhythm; instead one should attempt (in a natural, untroubled way) to complete 12 or 24 breaths, regardless of timing.

Key points

[1] During the inhalation, the abdomen expands and the chest moves slightly as a natural consequence of the abdominal expansion. During the exhalation, the abdomen retreats and, at the end of the exhalation, there is a clear perception of the navel drifting toward the spine. It is incorrect practice to fill the chest with air by bringing the breath up high, as if it had to literally touch the higher *Chakras*.

[2] A smooth sound is produced in the throat while breathing. Some teach to listen to it with the subtle intention of producing an "Awww" sound during inhalation; while during the exhalation one should have the subtle intention to produce an "Eeee" sound. Other variations of these sounds depend upon the decision to teach *Kechari Mudra* or omit it.

In my opinion it is sufficient to say that during the exhalation only a slight hiss is produced, during the inhalation a dull sound schhhh... similar to that produced by a loudspeaker sending an amplified background noise is heard.

[3] In this basic *Pranayama*, the path taken by the energy reveals itself in a gradual way while the practice goes on: no difficult visualization is required. The awareness rises from the *Muladhar* along the spinal column, approaching the second *Chakra*, then the third, the fourth and the fifth *Chakra*; then, following the curve of the occipital region, reaches the *Bindu*. A two-second pause follows, during which the radiance of the *Kutastha* taps at the awareness —as a blurred presence of light, a glow permeating the brain.

A deep, unhurried exhalation, of the same length as the inhalation, lets the energy return to the base of the spinal column. The energy is visualized flowing down along the back of the spinal column. The reason of this detail is that when the *Prana* is pacified, the awareness turns toward the Spirit and is naturally centered "behind", where the *Omkar* reality manifests. Although his gaze converges toward the point between the eyebrows, a *kriyaban* perceives the center of his awareness "behind" his head. Thus, during exhalation, he becomes aware of spine, one piece at a time, as from "behind".

[4] One becomes aware of the two pauses of the breath, between inhalation and exhalation and between exhalation and inhalation. Divine Stillness is experienced during these pauses.

It is during the moments between inhalation and exhalation, at the top and the bottom of the spine, when everything hangs in balance, that one' awareness can slip into the tranquility state. In the due course of time, a *kriyaban* realizes that such moments are the fundamental secret of *Pranayama*.

[5] We have mentioned that the path of the inhalation is cool, and that the downward path is felt as warm: this is correct, although it should not be taken peremptorily. Some *kriyabans* assume a dejected, resigned expression when

they avow they "feel nothing" during *Pranayama*. For them "to feel nothing" means to be unable to perceive the cold-warm currents in the spine, as they were taught. They consider this minor detail to be the essence of *Pranayama*. Unfortunately, some find that those sensations are really difficult to be perceived, but *Pranayama* works even without them. *Pranayama* develops by the very fact of enjoying its different aspects. One can get stuck by being obsessed by this one detail.

[6] During the first *Pranayama* breaths, in order not to divert the attention from all the aforesaid details, one avoids chanting *Om* or another *Mantra* in each *Chakra*. Having already practiced *Om Japa*, the awareness of the *Chakras* is present – this is enough.

[7] Some claim that *Pranayama* should be practiced with an open (semi-closed) mouth: they affirm that mouth-*Pranayama* is superior to nose-*Pranayama* because it brings the current into *Sushumna*. Others have the opposite opinion, that only with nose-breathing is it possible to activate *Sushumna* breathing.

In fact, only the breathless state can succeed in bringing and leading the energy into *Sushumna*.

Practically speaking, for a beginner mouth-*Pranayama* can give a wonderful sense of presence in the spine: some begin with it and then switch to nose breathing.

It is important to note that true *Pranayama* performed with *Kechari Mudra* cannot be done through the mouth. The tongue, being behind the uvula, blocks the flow of air into the mouth. It is for this reason that *Pranayama* with the open mouth is only for beginners.

Second part: excellent Pranayama

At this point (after 12 – 24 initial breaths) during inhalation, *Om* is mentally chanted in each one of the first five *Chakras*; during the pause, *Om* is chanted in the *Medulla*, in *Kutastha* and again in the *Medulla*. During exhalation, *Om* is mentally chanted in each one of the *Chakras* returning to *Muladhar*.

While coming down, each *Chakra* is gently touched from the back. Their "horizontal" component is experienced at least for an instant; their radiating vital energy toward the physical body is intuitively felt.

To place *Om* in *Kutastha*, a *kriyaban* no longer needs the springboard of the *Bindu*. When *Shambhavi Mudra* (the state of calmness in which the eyelids do not blink and the gaze is perfectly steady) is naturally established, one dwells effortlessly in the point between the eyebrows.

When this is achieved, the mental force necessary to perform *Pranayama*

decreases. A *kriyaban* lets the subtle mechanism of the technique happen almost by itself. This does not imply that the technique is less effective: quite the opposite. When the flow of energy becomes thin like a silken thread and seems to have a life of its own, it displays the maximum of the power. The sign of a good *Pranayama* is that its sound becomes smooth and unbroken like the continuous pouring of oil from a bottle.

Navi Kriya

By the same method described in the technique of *Om Japa*, without attempting to control the breath, one's awareness slowly moves up along the spinal column, placing the syllable *Om* (ooong) in the first five *Chakras*, in the *Bindu* and into the *Kutastha*. The chin is then tilted towards the throat cavity. The hands, with the palms facing downward, are joined together cross-fingered; the pads of both thumbs conjoined. *Om* is chanted — either aloud or mentally — in the navel (umbilicus) approximately 75 times (a rough estimate is fine). The thumbs touch the navel with a very light pressure for every single *Om*.

Going along with the technique, a calm energy is perceived gathering in the middle-lower part of the abdomen (the *Prana* current which resides there is called *Samana*). This will help dissolve the process of breathing. The chin is then raised (without strain but feeling the contraction of the muscles at the base of the neck); the concentration drifts first to the *Bindu* and then to the third *Chakra* (moving downward in a straight line, outside the body). The hands, with the palms facing upward and the fingers crossed, are kept behind the back and, for every *Om*, the thumbs conjoined apply a light pressure on the lumbar vertebrae. *Om* is chanted—either aloud or mentally—approximately 25 times in the third *Chakra*. The breath should by no means be coordinated with the *Om* chanting. The chin's normal position is then resumed and *Om* is thought in an inverse order from *Kutastha* to *Muladhar*. This is one *Navi Kriya* (it lasts about 140-160 seconds). A *kriyaban* repeats *Navi Kriya* four times.

The following variation is very enjoyable.

While all the other details up to the act of bending the head forward, remain unchanged, the *Om Mantra* is chanted in alternation between *Kutastha* and the navel. (*Om* in *Kutastha*, *Om* in the navel, *Om* in *Kutastha*, *Om* in the navel... and so on.) Then, correspondingly, *Om* is chanted in alternation between the *Bindu* and the third *Chakra*. As per usual, 4 cycles of *Navi Kriya* are excellent.

In Chapter II/3, another, very important variation of *Navi Kriya* is introduced. The reader won't find in this book those variations which entirely avoid the concentration on the navel. They are originated by the mania for eliminating, considering it a spurious instruction, any concentration outside the spine. A lot of devotees do not move their awareness a single inch from the spinal column, fearing the practice become less "spiritual"! They want to conform to the schemes of the *tantric Yoga* (see *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*). As a prerequisite to receive initiation into *Kriya Yoga*, some teachers prescribe the study of these books. They are convinced that one can find there the theoretical foundations of *Kriya* and a concise description of its techniques as well. They consider *Navi Kriya* a development of *Uddiyana Bandha*.

Other *Kriya* authors make an awkward attempt of justifying *Navi Kriya* by making recourse to Patanjali: they quote a *Yoga Sutra* [in some editions it is the *Sutra* III/29 in others the III/30] *nābhicakre kāyavyūhajñānamḥ*. In different commentaries this *Sutra* is translated in this way: «by making *Samyama* (long absorbing concentration) on the navel, the seeker obtains knowledge about the different organs of the body and their (dis)positions». Clearly this has nothing to do with *Navi Kriya*! By reading the third part of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, there is no doubt upon the fact that he had not in mind the same aim of *Navi Kriya*.

Actually *Navi Kriya* originates from spiritual traditions developed outside India: Inner Alchemy is the best example. In my opinion to investigate the origins and the essence of *Kriya Yoga* it is necessary to study all the great mystic paths and not just *Yoga*. It is not true – as many affirm - that Lahiri Mahasaya did not bring anything new, that each part of his *Kriya* can be found in the *tantric Yoga*. Lahiri Mahasaya used the best methods at his disposal; each phase of *Kriya* is exactly what it should be and when it is different from classic *Yoga* or *Tantrism*, it must be accepted just as it is. *Navi Kriya* should not be impoverished by restricting it to the sheer concentration on the third *Chakra Manipur*. Such effort, in case enriched with other details may be useful, I do not dispute, but it serves another purpose.

Mental Pranayama

In order to enter a perfect physical and mental stillness as easily as possible, the practitioner first draws three deep breaths, each of them ending with a fast and complete an exhalation, like a sigh. The spine is visualised as a tube where the mind is allowed to move up and down, pausing in each spinal center. One may chant *Om* (ooong) mentally in the *Chakras*; however, sometimes it is more convenient to simply pay attention to each one of them. Starting with the first *Chakra*, then after 10-20 seconds passing to the second, third ... and so on. The *Chakras* are like knots that can be untied if "touched" with our concentration; the secret lies in maintaining the awareness in each of them until a particular sensation of sweetness is felt - as if that *Chakra* were

"melting". After ascending to the *Bindu*, one begins descending down along the back side of the spine; besides the melting sensations, one can also perceive the subtle radiation of each *Chakra* towards the body. This is only a matter of pure awareness, a natural feeling leading to the realization that the *Chakras* are sustaining each part of the body's vitality. Sometimes, a light is perceived in the head's upper part and the *kriyaban* is able to keep his awareness there for a long time without feeling any fatigue.

The process of rising and descending through the *Chakras* is carried on as long as it is comfortable. (One complete round lasts about 2-4 minutes.) This is the most pleasing part of the routine. A *kriyaban* does not feel he is practicing a technique, he enjoys moments of soothing relaxation. This is the moment in which a deep *mental silence* settles in the consciousness and in the body. Lahiri Mahasaya called this state simply *Paravastha* — "state after *Kriya*". This word is linked with the concept of *Tranquillity*, "*Sthir Tattwa*" (calm, static *Prana*) which is experienced in the seventh *Chakra*.

If such a state is resumed as much as possible (through will and *Japa*) during daily life the results will be fantastic.

Some do not understand the subtle difference between *Om Japa* and this *mental Pranayama*. *Om Japa*, before *Pranayama*, is designed to give a stimulus to each *Chakra*. One pauses in each *Chakra* only a short time to vibrate the *Mantra*. During *mental Pranayama* one is more passive, more willing to perceive than to stimulate and, above all, remains there much longer.

Yoni Mudra

Lahiri Mahasaya held *Yoni Mudra* in a highly important position. The potential of this technique includes, in all effects, the realization of the last *Kriya* step. *Kutastha* - between the eyebrows - is the place where the individual soul had its origin and it is there that the Ego needs to be dissolved. At night, before lying down to sleep, one begins his practice by calming the whole psychophysical system with a short *Kriya* routine (not only some *Pranayama* breaths but also a short practice of *Navi Kriya* would be the ideal preparation). After that, one raises the energy into the central part of the head through a deep inhalation.

(If one has achieved *Kechari Mudra*, he should firmly press the tongue upon the highest point inside the nasal pharynx – otherwise the tongue should be in the normal position, relaxed.)

The head's "openings" are closed—the ears with the thumbs, the eyelids with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, the lips with the ring and the little fingers— so that all the energy may light up the *Kutastha*.

Throughout the practice, each elbow should be pointed outwards, one should not let them drop. One could prop them up with some support, if necessary.

During this special light-witnessing act, the index fingers should under no circumstances apply pressure on the eyes — this would be harmful and of no use! If a *kriyaban* feels his eyeballs are disturbed by the pressure of the finger on the eyelids, he draws the eyelids down with the index fingers and applies pressure on the corner of the eyes - on the cheekbone.

Holding the breath and repeating *Om* (Ooong) mentally several times, one observes the light of the "spiritual eye" that gathers and increases in intensity.

The light condenses into a golden ring. The breath is held as long as comfortable, until the necessity to breathe out draws the attention. After bringing down the awareness along the spine, the practice is complete. *Yoni Mudra* is usually performed only once.

Advanced practice

Usually, inhaling deeply and then holding the breath causes discomfort after a few seconds. A small detail, which reduces the discomfort and makes it possible to deepen the practice, is introduced.

At the end of a moderate inhalation (not the typical one of the *Pranayama*, but a shorter one), a *kriyaban* closes the head openings but not the nostrils fully, then starts a slight exhalation and immediately closes his nostrils. He relaxes the thoracic muscles and creates the intention of beginning a new inhalation: this opens the epiglottis and gives the sensation that the breath has become quiet in the region between the throat and the *Kutastha*.

In this situation, the concentration on the *Kutastha* and the repetition of *Om* several times can be enjoyed at its fullest.

The traditional instruction is to increase the number of the repetitions of *Om* one per day, up to a maximum of 200; of course, forcing is always to be avoided. One experiences the radiant *Jyoti* which reveals the path to the spiritual dimension.

One should not get captivated in this experience but must go on with all the other parts of the *Kriya* path in order to achieve the Void beyond physical dimension and become established in the Vastness beyond the external world.

Getting familiar with the First Kriya

In the field of *Kriya*, a particular sort of frenzy exists - envisaging that its practical knowledge should be given hastily all at one time. I think that there is no need and no wisdom in conveying all the details of the *First Kriya* to a person in one single lesson. Some days after the charming initiation ceremony, many details are forgotten and the person is in crisis.

Of course to some rare people things go differently: the few words uttered by their teacher, go on ringing for years - often in the same way, with the same inflection of the voice that the teacher once received from his own teacher - and, after toilsome work, their full meaning is finally realized.

However, it is more natural, logic, to learn it a bit at a time and experience it without any tension. When one shows somebody the *First Kriya* set of techniques, one should recommend not to start right out with its complete practice; there is no need to feel guilty if, for some months, part of the techniques are omitted. Of course, it's another thing to wait for the "ideal situation" before starting the practice - like changing job or moving out - otherwise the decision will be postponed for an infinite amount of time!

In my opinion, there is no necessity of preparing people for *Kriya* initiation through particular techniques different from those which are found in the *First Kriya* set of techniques. Concerning this, some schools, in their didactic effort to bring *Kriya Yoga* near to people having a genuine desire for it but not a sound experience of meditative techniques, have picked out some useful techniques from classic *Yoga* as a preparation. Well, in Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* the preliminary techniques are just *Talabya Kriya* and *Om Japa*.

It is very important to experience how beautiful it is to practice a short session of just the quoted ones. Whoever will experience a sense of wonder in observing how the *Talabya Kriya* can right away calm one's mind. An odd fact is that it doesn't require concentration on anything, just a pure physical action. Then, chanting the *Om Mantra* in the way it was previously described, until the abdomen, the chest and the spinal column vibrate, brings a *kriyaban* to obtaining a state which is a real "benediction".

When it comes the turn of introducing *Kriya Pranayama*, a teacher might prefer first to lead one to the simple practice of *Ujjayi Pranayama* without hinting at the mechanism of *Kriya* proper.

By the sheer concentration on the throat sound, a *kriyaban* might perceive the movement of energy in the spine: thus *Kriya Pranayama* will be a joyous discovery deprived of any artfulness.

It is good never push people to creating some expectations through pure fantasy. Many *kriyabans* ask with too much insistence, at times obsessively, that all the possible and imaginable details of the *Kriya Pranayama* technique be clarified to them. They will get tired very soon. After having filled their notebooks with notes and drawings, they will abandon everything. It is as if their pencil and sheets of paper were a shield preventing the genuine beauty of *Kriya* from entering their life. They do not understand how important it is for the mind to be calm, and that it does not obstruct the flow of energy in the spine with its tension.

One should not be too demanding at the beginning of the *Pranayama* session; that would lead to disregarding the techniques' "naturalness" developing an excessive tension, which will be very hard to get rid of. A lot of people are convinced that one of the requirements to practice *Kriya* is the ability in performing a state of perfect concentration; but this is one of the final results, it is not one of the first steps! It is normal for the mind to float continuously toward a thousand, opposite directions, as if the practitioner's daily activities were carried on.

No one should face his practice as doing acrobatics; patience and trust are needed. In *Kriya* the success is of those who rely on the sheer "naturalness" of the procedure and practice with the relaxation but at the same time with the care and patience of a housewife "peeling potatoes"!

A strange thing happens: by going on in this way, one is going to discover a natural way of applying the fullest concentration when executing the *Pranayama* technique, in the same way a virtuoso plays his instrument.

Through a gradual progress, one is able to comprehend more and more the meaning of each one of the other techniques.

A complete routine could be: Talabya Kriya; Om Japa; Maha Mudra; Pranayama [12-24]; Navi Kriya; mental Pranayama; then, at night, Yoni Mudra. [Navi Kriya before Pranayama is also good.]

An interesting variation is: Talabya Kriya; Om Japa; Pranayama [12-24]; Maha Mudra; Navi Kriya; Yoni Mudra and mental Pranayama. Repeat Yoni Mudra at night.

Some teachers think that one should not practice *Yoni Mudra* during the day. Actually, one can do it, by all means! However, after the practice of *Yoni Mudra*, in the deep calmness of the night, in a total and perfect relaxation, this technique is practised at its best and creates such a concentration of energy in *Kutastha* that it changes the quality of the ensuing sleep. After crossing the subconscious layers, the awareness may succeed in touching the so-called "super conscious" state.

Since *Ujjayi Pranayama* is often taught with *Aswini Mudra* - contracting repeatedly the muscles at the base of the spine with the rhythm of about two contractions per second - *Kriya Pranayama* can be practiced with *Aswini Mudra* as well. Any *kriyaban* can practice it in the first 12-24 *Pranayama* breaths – during inhalation, exhalation and pauses. After 10-15 minutes, the physical movement decreases in intensity, the procedure turns to be an inner event. It is then that the awareness is strongly brought into the spine, in a more intense way than with any other technical trick. This is valuable to those who are not able to practice *Kechari Mudra*.

The most important thing is to never forget giving the maximum of importance to the soothing phase of the *mental Pranayama*. A practice without it is like a band tuning their instruments and then saying goodnight to the audience! It is the phase of one's practice where it all comes together, where the ripples in the mind's lake quiet down and the awareness becomes transparent to reveal the Last Reality. After this practice, the tranquil state after *Kriya* - *Kriyar Paravastha* - reveals itself. *Kriyar Paravastha* simply means: "the state that comes after the action of *Kriya*".

It is a diffuse calmness: the mind, appeased, stops quivering, rests and gains the energy necessary to be more acutely alert in life. It is like a spiral, which gradually and systematically takes care of all the levels of one's being: it is a recovering process. Its value appears manifest during the difficult moments of life, when an important decision has to be taken. Then one will have the impression that nothing can get in the way, and that even the greatest difficulties dissolve. Inside the perfect transparency of an inner order, all the problems are dissolved.

CHAPTER II/2... HIGHER KRIYAS

The phase of the *Kriya* path we are about to deal with is of extraordinary importance: the subject is not difficult to understand, rather its practical application requires extreme care.

The *Higher Kriyas* should always co-operate to establish a foundation of harmony and calmness. The good effects of peace, inner joy and the manifestation of inner sounds should always go on increasing. In the opposite situation, it simply means that one is not ready yet to proceed to this level of practice or that he is not following the instructions correctly!

In the third part of the book one can find a concise digression about *Kriya*, ending with an emphasis about the necessity of ridding oneself from any wrong attitudes, and also practicing simple but essential techniques like *Japa*. A mature frame of mind is necessary, as well as the ability to extend one's *Kriya* effort throughout the whole day. Keeping the mind always attuned to a state of calmness which blooms (during free pauses from work) into an ecstatic *mental silence*, is the surest way to make the most of these teachings.

The practice of the *Higher Kriyas* always takes place after *Navi Kriya* and *Pranayama*, within a routine like those described in the previous chapters. The only exception to this rule is when a *kriyaban* is an expert and is able to create, at will, deep interiorisation and enter in a smooth way the dimension of *Higher Kriyas*, while his breath remains calm and the feeling of bliss continues to increase.

As for the specific doses of these *Higher Kriyas* (since they have been handed down by tradition) a *kriyaban* can deviate from them, choose to perform the quantity of repetitions considered necessary, and nevertheless achieve remarkable results. The *Kriya* path is an endeavour through which we gain more and more freedom and therefore it is always a joyful experience. It should never be forced into a stressful practice.

Second Kriya

[Kechari Mudra; Omkar Pranayama and the basic form of Thokar]

[a] Kechari Mudra

It is explained that advancement on the *Kriya* path consists of breaking the tongue-knot by the aid of *Kechari Mudra*, breaking the heart-knot by the aid of listening to *Pranava (Om)* and breaking the *Muladhar*-knot by the bursting spring of inner Light.

Maybe the reader has already found Lahiri Mahasaya's sentence: «Any religious path consists of four stages characterized by the untying of four "knots": tongue, navel, heart and coccyx».

It is a fact that in India, the way in which a practitioner performs *Kechari Mudra* is crucial for initiation into the *Higher Kriyas*. *Acharyas* demand to see the actual execution of the *Kechari*; they want the student's mouth to be opened in front of them and his or her tongue disappear in the nasal pharynx.

Kechari is literally translated to "the state of those who fly in the sky, in the ether"; it drags the practitioner into the meditation state, by teaching him how to fly in the "inner space".

It is compared to an electrical bypass of the mind's energetic system. The so-called "knot of the tongue" consist in the physiological fact that our tongue does not normally touch the uvula and/or certain centers in the nasal pharynx. From the energetic point of view, this is expressed by the fact that we are kept apart from the reservoir of energy in the *Sahasrara* region.

Kechari Mudra pierces this knot, makes the contact possible, changes the path of *Prana* flow, causing the life force to be withdrawn from the thinking process.

After months of regular practice of *Talabya Kriya*, a *kriyaban* may deem the situation mature for achieving *Kechari Mudra*. For some minutes a day he pushes (with the fingers) the base of the tongue inward, thus reaching the uvula with its tip. One day, removing the fingers, he has the surprise that the tip of the tongue remains "trapped" in that position. The soft palate acts like an elastic tape, as it maintains the tongue's position preventing it from slipping out and getting back to the normal position.

This is a turning point since, while holding the tongue in this position, a number of *Kriya* breaths may be performed. By repeating this process daily, *Kechari Mudra* is improved. After approximately ten days of practice, with the help of some physical and mental effort, the tongue can be inserted into the hole in the upper palate, the nasal-pharynx cavity, keeping it there for a couple of minutes. Gradually, there is advancement of this condition. The sense of irritation and the increase of salivation are soon left behind; from then onwards, the practice of *Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra* will be easy and comfortable. The tongue arrives at the junction point of the nasal passage inside the hole in the palate; there is a soft tissue above the holes in the nose, hinted in the *Kriya* literature, as an "uvula above the uvula": the tip of the tongue will go beyond that -- gradually.

About its effects here is what literature (unburden of useless rhetoric) affirms, and we have no reason to entertain doubts about it.

Kechari is an unfailing aid in clarifying any desire, in living it with more detachment. At times during daily life, moments of pure calmness and mental silence fill the practitioner's whole being! Sometimes an unusual happiness is

felt without doing any additional yogic practice.

This happens in particular if one is able to perceive, through *Kechari*, the elixir of life, "Amrita", "Nectar". It is a fluid with a sweet taste coming down from the brain in the body through the tongue. In order to foster this experience one should touch, with the tip of the tongue, three specific points: the uvula, the bone protrusion, like a small asperity in the roof of the palate under the pituitary gland and the hinted soft tissue above the nasal septum. The tip of the tongue should rotate on these spots at least for 20-30 seconds; then, in the manner of sipping a liquid, some flavor will be tasted on the surface of the tongue. This exercise can be repeated several times during the day. When the real nectar sensation manifests, one focuses on it while keeping the tongue in contact with one of the centers describe above. Literature explains that the pernicious way of exhausting all one's vitality is restrained.

Last but not least, during *Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra*, the exhalation has a very fine flute-like sound. It is like a faint whistle arising in the nasal pharynx. Some schools call it the *Shakti Mantra*. Lahiri Mahasaya described it as something «similar to when one blows air through a keyhole». He says it is like «a razor by which everything - that is: the mind - is cut off». It has the power to cut off any external disturbing factor, thoughts included (one can get an idea of this sound by holding the edge of a piece of paper to ones lips and gently blowing). It comes at the maximum point of relaxation: the smallest amount of anxiety or unrest has the result of losing it. It represents an enchanting, an extraordinary meditation experience: it marks one of the best moments of a *kriyaban's* life. He realizes that he has in his hands not a common meditation technique but something extraordinary. Modesty is always welcome, but when this result is achieved, a positive euphoria (as if one had found Aladdin's magic lamp) cannot be kept at bay.

In the *Kriya* literature there is a sentence which describes that if one has realized a perfect *Pranayama*, one can obtain everything through it. Well, if we want to think of an ideal, faultless *Pranayama*, it should not be too far away from this one.

It is thanks to all these results that *Kechari Mudra* is considered the king of all *yogic Mudras*.

In my opinion, the practice of the *Higher Kriyas* should not be avoided by those who find impossible to practice *Kechari Mudra*. I don't like sentences like «Until one is established in *Kechari Mudra*, one cannot achieve the state of Eternal Tranquility». This is untrue!

Were it true, then many mystics (the most part of them never heard about *Kechari Mudra*) would have never had a fully experience of the Divine. On

the other side there are persons who have realized *Kechari* but who have understood nothing about either *Kriya* or the spiritual path in general and had the least result from it.

I take the liberty of believing that very good results can also be obtained by turning the tongue backwards towards the uvula and by listening to the *Omkar* vibration. This simple fact eliminates the gap (from the energetic point of view) between the brain and the body and lets the energy circulate (in a clearly perceivable way) inside the body. I am not saying that *Kechari* is not important. There is no doubt that practicing the *Higher Kriyas* with one's tongue placed in the nasal pharynx is different from practicing with the tongue in a normal position. The internal "pressure" produced by *Kechari*, makes *Omkar Pranayama* and *Thokar* work in the most effective way.

At the same time I know that through regular practice of *Talabya Kriya* — prior to *Pranayama* or at any time during the day— it is possible to get some of *Kechari's* typical effects. Besides, a lot of people are able to maintain the tip of their tongue on the uvula, but are not able to stick it completely into the nasal pharynx or touch a particular area in the palate upper part. Undoubtedly very good results can be achieved by touching for ten-twenty minutes a day the uvula.

Another opinion of mine, is that Lahiri Mahasaya certainly asked for the regular effort of *Talabya*, but he also gave Higher Initiation to those who could not perform the correct tongue positioning of *Kechari Mudra*. Both his attitude and his partaking of human suffering leads me to believe this.

[b] Omkar Pranayama

In this technique all the *Higher Kriyas* are potentially contained. Actually, each further *Kriya* can be considered an expansion of it, a well-aimed development of some of its details. To me, this *Omkar Pranayama* is a real jewel, it represents the quintessence of beauty. It is essentially a *Pranayama* (the breath is raised from the base of the spinal column to the head centers and then brought back down to the starting point) where the breath is stilled not only at the two extremes of the spine, but along the different "stations" of the spine: the *Chakras*. Aided by the power of *Kechari Mudra*, a *kriyaban* has the opportunity to touch each *Chakra* in a really effective way: the *Vasudeva Mantra*: "Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya" is utilized. The location of each *Chakra* is astrally discovered.

While practicing this technique, time goes by without much notice: what could seem to be an exhausting task (reaching 108 or 144 repetitions for example) turns out to be as easy as a moment of rest. The only drawback of this procedure is that, at the beginning, it might seem a bit complicated. In the process of implementing the different technical details, wisdom and common sense are required. Each detail should be introduced gradually, so that it doesn't disturb the harmony of the general picture.

[1] In *Omkar Pranayama* the hands with fingers intertwined rest on the abdomen. After a minimum of 12 basic *Pranayama*, the procedure begins by mentally chanting one syllable of the Sanskrit *Mantra* "Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya" at a *Chakra*,²⁵ while making a short pause. This is accomplished by dividing the inhalation and exhalation into six + six parts.

During the first "sip" of inhalation, the concentration is on the *Muladhar*, where the syllable *Om* is ideally placed; during the second "sip", the concentration is on the second *Chakra*, where the syllable *Na* is ideally placed ... and so on, until *Ba* is placed in the *Bindu* and the inhalation is completed.

In a similar way, the exhaling breath is divided into six punctuated parts like pulses. During the first of these parts, the syllable *Te* is placed in the *Medulla*; during the second one, the syllable *Va* is placed in the fifth *Chakra*... and so on ... *Su*... *De*... *Va*, until *Ya* is mentally chanted in the *Muladhar*.

At the end of the inhalation, the breath is held for 2-3 seconds. The awareness makes a complete, anticlockwise turn along the crown of the head, inside the brain, starting from the occipital region and returning there. The head accompanies this inner movement with a very slight rotating movement (tilting back slightly, then to the right, the front, the left, and finally to the back). During a two second pause at the end of the exhalation, the awareness makes a complete, anticlockwise turn around inside the *Muladhar*.

The timing of one fragmented breath with pauses (aw-aw-aw-aw-aw-aw + eee-eee-eee-eee-eee-eee) depends on the individual: usually it is approximately 15-20 seconds, but can be longer.

[2] While coming up with the mental chant of *Om*, *Na*, *Mo*,... one has the feeling of traveling inside the spine. At the end of the up pause, one feels that the center of his awareness is ideally placed "behind" the head. After thinking *Te* in the *Medulla*, one feels that the descendant syllables *Va*, *Su*, *De*, *Va* and *Ya* are put in each *Chakra* from "behind". More simply put: the awareness comes up inside and goes down behind the backbone.

[3] During the inhalation the muscles at the base of the spinal column are slightly contracted. This contraction is held up to the end of inhalation and during the ensuing short pause, then is eased off and the exhalation begins.

The aforementioned details may seem complicated but this is only a way to set the process in motion; the experience deepens by itself and all the apparent intricacies vanish. From a certain moment onwards, all the physical details are lived in a very subtle way:

²⁵ I am sure the reader knows the correct pronunciation of the *Mantra*; that is why I will not add any phonetic symbols. Notice that in the *Bindu* we don't mentally verbalize *Va* but *Ba*: this convention has been established over the years.

[4] The smooth breath produces only a slight, weak sound in the throat (or from the nasal pharynx with *Kechari Mudra*) or it comes out soundless; the contraction of the muscles at the base of the spinal column is gradually replaced by a "mental pressure"; the movement of the head is only hinted and later disappears when perfect immobility is established; the anticlockwise turn of awareness around the crown of the head seems to sink inside and touch the *Medulla* too, winding around it.

[5] The syllables are always placed with great accuracy in the respective *Chakras*. The pauses in each *Chakra* are experienced with keen concentration. Sometimes one has the impression to slip into each *Chakra*, other times feels that one's awareness winds gently around each one of them. This action is the nucleus of the technique. What is important is not be in a hurry, but to be totally relaxed and let the experience happen, otherwise the practice will be *tamasic* - not effective or negative. To avoid the risk of slipping into a hurried attitude, a *kriyaban* commits himself to placing the syllables in the respective *Chakras*, while each time intentionally waiting for a peculiar feeling of enjoyment which springs out from each *Chakra*.

[6] A *kriyaban* is constantly open to any subtle perception that comes out of this procedure – in the first place, listening to any inner sound (without closing the ears).

Om sound emerges quite naturally and captivates the mind. The beauty of the bell sound is inexplicable; while listening to this sweet sound which, as light as a fall of petals, knocks softly on the doors of the intuition, there comes the realization that all the experiences of love are like splendid crystals blooming around its gilded thread. It embodies the deep feeling of hope that has warmed our heart innumerable times since infancy, the vast comforting smile surrounding us in misfortune.

[c] The basic form of Thokar

Thokar means adding to *Omkar Pranayama* some particular movements of the head: a complete anticlockwise rotation, followed by a jerk through which the chin is drawn towards the center of the chest. A kind of hitting is felt in the heart *Chakra*. This helps to see the *Bindu* (point or star) inside the third eye. Further *Higher Kriyas* will help to open *Muladhara* to reach *Sahasrara* (top of the head). With this *Kriya*, deep levels of the inner sound of *Om* will manifest and absorb the awareness.

With the chin resting on his chest, a *kriyaban* puts his mind in the *Sushumna*, draws the breath raising the awareness along the spinal column, touching each *Chakra* with the syllable of the *Mantra* in the same way described in *Omkar Pranayama*: the syllable *Om* is placed in the first *Chakra*,

Na in the second one, *Mo* in the third one, *Bha* in the fourth one...

Simultaneously, the chin is raised as if to follow the inner movement. During inhalation, the muscles at the base of the spinal column are contracted. When the chin is up and horizontal, the inhalation ends and the awareness is in the *Bindu*. The breath and the muscle contraction is held. The head begins its round by moving to the left shoulder (left ear moves slightly towards the left shoulder, the face does not turn left or right and the movement is free of all bouncing) and *Te* is thought in the *Medulla*. The head tilts back a little and in a sweeping arc reaches the right shoulder, (the right ear coming near the right shoulder), the syllable *Va* is thought in the fifth *Chakra*. The rotation proceeds, the head bends forward just a little and moves left until the left ear is near the left shoulder (again, the face is not turned to the left). From this position, the chin is tilted down diagonally as if to strike the center of the chest, while simultaneously *Su* is placed in the heart *Chakra* by intense concentration. The awareness remains there for one or more seconds, enough to perceive a "radiation" emanating from the heart *Chakra*. The mind is quiet in the contemplative state.

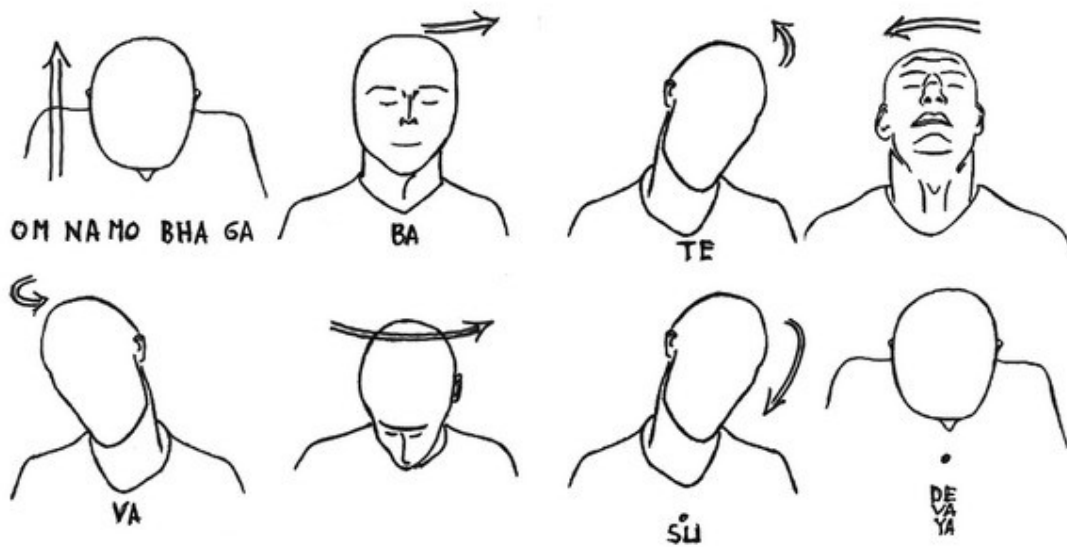


Figure 5. Movements of the head in the basic form of Thokar

The head is kept down and the contraction at the base of the spinal column is eased off; via a very subtle exhalation the remaining syllables are "placed" in the first three *Chakras*: *De* into the third one, *Va* into the second one and *Ya* into the first one. The duration of this process is about 24 seconds.

For several weeks, the *kriyaban* is guided to perform this technique 12 times a day, then to gradually increase the number of repetitions. Each week he can add six more repetitions. The presence of physical problems (the cervical vertebrae are vulnerable indeed!) may require that one stop the technique for a

few days or practice on alternate days. It is better to add more cycles over time rather than face the prospect of experiencing continuous head and neck pain throughout the entire day! A very wise approach is to settle into 36 repetitions per day without ever increasing beyond this number.

Key points

[1] Those who embark on this venture, should perform the movements of the head in a very delicate way. An expert *Kriya Acharya* checks that the physical strike is not forceful. One should not allow the weight of one's head to push the chin toward the chest: in this condition, the physical movement is definitely too powerful and harmful for the head and neck. Hence, mindful physical effort is simultaneously aimed at lowering the chin, while resisting the force of gravity, concluding with a slight jolt which is intensely felt within the fourth *Chakra*.

[2] Oral tradition, handed down from teacher to disciple, is to increase the number of repetitions up to 200 (they can be divided into two or more sessions during the day). When increasing the number of repetitions, the afore described movement of the head is only hinted: the chin does not come close to the chest and the hitting of the fourth *Chakra* is mainly achieved by the sheer power of mental concentration.

Third Kriya

This kind of *Thokar*, with many repetitions of the head movement within one single long breath, is a tremendous intensification of the work of opening the "door" of the heart. The procedure creates an increase of power and energy in the fourth *Chakra*, thus producing an intoxicating experience of joy.

A *kriyaban* inhales in the same way as in the *Second Kriya*. While holding the breath at the end of the inhalation - when the energy is in the head - he repeats the complete set of head movements. Accordingly, the syllables *Te, Va, Su* are placed in the locations previously described, several times. The technique, which is performed only once, ends exactly as the preceding one: by exhaling and placing the syllables *De, Va* and *Ya* in the respective *Chakras*.

Usually, in the first days of practice, a *kriyaban* is guided to repeat the whole set of movements no more than 12 times. The entire process may last around 70-80 seconds from inhalation to exhalation. Then, one is guided to gradually increase the number of the rotatory movements. Each week, one can add six more rotations. It is wise to not exceed the 36 sets of movements per day.

But tradition reports of 200 repetitions (holding one's breath) which are reachable by starting with 12 rotations and increasing by one every day! How is it possible?

Undoubtedly, common sense is needed to thoroughly grasp the authentic meaning of this instruction! Trying to get to a high number of rotations repeating exactly the same movements we have described (not only the rotation but the stroke also), at a high speed, obsessed with holding the breath, amounts to nothing but a mere violence against one's own body!

The correct way of practicing this *Third Kriya* is a matter of inner realization - an instinct which is discovered with time. A very particular condition should manifest itself: the so called "*Kriya state*". The energy is distributed equally in the whole system, the mind is calm in an unparalleled way. A *kriyaban* has the feeling he is practicing the whole set of rotations without breathing and without the necessity to breathe.

The more one increases the number of rotations, the more movements are only hinted and the chin does not come close to the chest. It is possible to have different rotations deprived of the stroke which is practised only at the end of the last rotation. While rotating, one thinks *Te* in the *Medulla* (when the head is to the left), *Va* in the cervical (when the head is to the right) and *Su* in the heart *Chakra* when the head goes past the heart center.

The purpose of the rotations is to uniformly direct the energy into the higher *Chakras*. With the last rotation, when the chin draws close to the chest and the final stroke is given, the energy accumulated in the head is directed towards the heart *Chakra*.

The natural and pleasing experience, together with the sensations of warmth and of exciting joy in the fourth *Chakra*, brings the *kriyaban* to an exalted state. The impression is that the breath is compressed in the space from the throat to the *Kutastha*. The feeling that the breath is dissolved is completely different from that of holding it. Instead of trying to win some apnoea record, a *kriyaban* learns to fill his or her system to the utmost possible extent with *Prana*; just as a pot may be filled with water to the brim. What is discovered is a non-forced *Kumbhaka*. No one can tell if a minimal quantity of air flows in and out of the body unconsciously. Perhaps an imperceptible exhalation happens whenever the chin is moved toward the chest and an imperceptible inhalation is produced whenever the chin is brought back up – but, of course, mine is only an opinion.

Fourth Kriya

There are different versions of the *Fourth Kriya* technique: here I share a very simple one. Others are described in the next Chapter. By raising the *Prana* into the *Kutastha*, upon fixing it there, a directive is given to practice *Japa* from the *Kutastha* into the location of each *Chakra*. A *kriyaban* learns to sense the «different rhythms of the *Chakras*». He becomes intuitively aware of the *Chakras*' true location - which are not in the physical body, but in the *Kutastha*.

By experiencing the six zones of rhythm and vibration in the point between the eyebrows, the *Muladhar*-knot is unfastened. While in the *Third Kriya*, a *kriyaban* establishes himself in the heart *Chakra*, in this *Fourth Kriya*, a similar stability is achieved in each one of the *Chakras*.

A prolonged concentration on the *Muladhar* cannot achieve the same effect.

To open the last knot, it is necessary to travel in the spine and experiment each of the *Chakras* different times. It is explained that *Sushumna* is not divided just top, middle, and bottom, but one field! After prolonged practice of the *Fourth Kriya* technique, one goes beyond the realms of the stability so far achieved, and the shell is broken.

About the Mantra utilized in this technique

The *Gayatri Mantra* is considered to be a supreme vehicle for gaining spiritual enlightenment. Its purest form is *Tat Savitur Varenyam Bhargho Devasya Dhimahi Dhiyo Yonaha Prachodayat*. (Oh, great Spiritual Light who has created the Universe we meditate upon Your glory. You are the embodiment of Knowledge. You are the remover of all Ignorance. May You enlighten our Intellect and awaken our Intuitional Consciousness.)

This *Mantra* is prefaced with either a short or a long invocation. The short invocation is: *Om Bhur, Om Bhuvah, Om Swaha*.

The terms *Bhur, Bhuvaha, Swaha* are invocations to honour the three planes of existence (physical, astral and causal respectively) and to address their presiding deities. The long invocation is: *Om Bhur, Om Bhuvah, Om Swaha, Om Mahah, Om Janah, Om Tapah, Om Satyam*. This invocation is more complete since it recognizes that there are more planes of existence: the seven *Lokas*.

Mahah is the mental world, the plane of spiritual balance; *Janah* is the world of pure knowledge; *Tapah* is the world of intuition; *Satyam* is the world of Absolute, Ultimate Truth. We can be satisfied with the explanation that these are the seven sounds which activate our *Chakras* and connect them to the seven great spiritual realms of existence. Through this procedure, a spiritual light is infused in each *Chakra* which reveals itself as a vibrational rhythm in the *Kutastha*.

In the *Fourth Kriya* technique we use only the complete opening long invocation, not all the parts of the *Gayatri Mantra*. The tradition [see *Lahiri Gita* and *Pranab Gita*] ties Manipur with *Om Mahah* and Anahat with *Om Swaha*. The reason is that the world of thinking, evoked by *Om Mahah*, is more fit for the nature of the third *Chakra*, while the causal world of pure ideas, recalled by *Om Swaha*, is related to

Anahat *Chakra*. In conclusion we associate a *Mantra* to each *Chakra* in this way: Muladhar - *Om Bhur*; Swadhistan - *Om Bhuvah*; Manipur - *Om Mahah*; Anahat - *Om Swaha*; Vishuddhi - *Om Janah*; Medulla - *Om Tapah*; Bindu - *Om Satyam*. (Regarding the pronunciation of the Sanskrit *Mantras*, the reader should be able to find this information on the internet.)

Technique

After a short practice of the *Third Kriya*, the breath is softly calmed down, and the internal light perceived in the heart *Chakra* illuminates/reveals the *Kutastha*. The conscience is totally settled in that light. From there, a part of the attention goes down towards the first *Chakra*. During a short inhalation (of one or two seconds) this *Chakra* is imagined to be raised into *Kutastha*, to be seen herein (precisely, rediscovered there) as a bright "moon".

The lifting happens in an instant - it is not a movement of energy like in *Pranayama*.

A *kriyaban* chants mentally there *Om Bhur* different times blending this sound with the intuitive perception of the vibrational rhythm of the *Muladhar Chakra*. (Later we shall clarify the number of the repetitions.) The breath is almost non existent or perfectly absent. Once the repetitions are completed, one inhales shortly and, with a calm exhalation, brings the *Chakra* back down, in the spine. The same procedure is repeated for each *Chakra* up to the *Medulla*. (For the second *Chakra*, the *Mantra Om Bhuvah* is utilized; *Om Mahah* for *Manipur*; *Om Swaha* for *Anahat*; *Om Janah* for *Vishuddhi*; *Om Tapah* for the *Medulla*). Then in the golden light of the spiritual eye, *Om Satyam* is chanted - different times. At this point the procedure is reversed by raising again the cervical *Chakra*, the heart *Chakra* lastly, the *Muladhar Chakra*.

First scheme of practice. *Om Bhur* is mentally chanted three times in the *Muladhar*. The other syllables of the *Gayatri Mantra* are chanted three times in the respective *Chakras*. *Om Satyam* is repeated three times in the *Kutastha*. The descent begins with tree times *Om Janah* in *Vishuddhi* ...). The whole "round" is repeated 12 times for a total of $3 \times 12 \times 12 = 432$ repetitions of the *Mantra*.

Second scheme of practice. With reference to the same instructions, thirty six repetitions of the *Mantra* are carried out for each *Chakra*, up and down one single time. To give an estimate, the whole process (up and down there are $36 \times 12 = 432$ chants of a *Mantra*) lasts 24 - 30 minutes. *Om Satyam* in the *Kutastha* can be repeated more than 36 times: 108 - 200 times.

Key points

[1] One must be able to feel the *Prana* always in *Kutastha*. If *Prana* is falling very slowly and deeply below the throat one must raise it again to *Kutastha* through an inhalation.

[2] Besides the perception of the six *Chakras* as six moons, it is also possible to visualize the *Kutastha* like a tunnel starting from the point between the eyebrows and protruding forward like a horizontal proboscis in the space in front of the body; its opening is the light of the *Muladhar*, then, moving forward, there are the lights of the other *Chakras*.

[3] While chanting the *Mantra*, a slight oscillating movement of the head, from left to right and vice versa can be carried out. In this eventuality the swing is not wider than an inch. This action is done only at the very beginning of the procedure, then the body achieves perfect immobility.

[4] With reference to the second scheme of practice, some affirm that a *kriyaban* holds the breath for the 36 repetitions of the *Mantra*. I feel more realistic to affirm that a *kriyaban* discovers that his breath is almost non-existent or perfectly absent. The intuitive perception of the light in the space between the eyebrows makes the breath dissolve.

Deep meditation after the Higher Kriyas

I hope that recalling a theory which is often quoted in the *Kriya* literature is not disturbing; I am not sure it comes from Lahiri Mahasaya himself, however it is worthwhile at least quoting it.

Let us first remember that to Patanjali, *Pratyahara* is the withdrawal of the senses which happens when awareness is disconnected from the external reality; *Dharana* is concentration, focusing the mind on a chosen object; *Dhyana* is contemplation, the persistence of concentration as a steady, uninterrupted flow of awareness which fully explores all aspects of the chosen object; *Samadhi* is perfect spiritual absorption, a deeper contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself.

Well, according to a diffuse tradition, the repetition of 12 excellent *Kriya Pranayamas* is sufficient to get to the state of *Pratyahara*; the repetition of 144 excellent *Pranayamas* is sufficient to get to the state of *Dharana*; the repetition of 1728 excellent *Pranayamas* (in one session!) is sufficient to get to the state of *Dhyana*; the repetition of 20736 excellent *Pranayamas* (in one session!) is sufficient to get to the state of *Samadhi*. It was explained (an attractive theory indeed – if not completely true, however well imagined!) that the *Higher Kriyas* are taught to avoid sitting for such a long time and reach

anyway the higher states of *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*. It was explained that *Omkar Pranayama* and *Thokar* were specifically designed to promote *Dharana* – perfect concentration on the *Omkar* sound and on the heart *Chakra* respectively. By increasing the rotations of *Thokar*, *Dhyana* is achieved: the mind is indeed lost in the bliss and light emerging from the heart *Chakra*. When this experience is extended to each one of the *Chakras* (as in *Fourth Kriya*) the final experience of *Samadhi* is attained.

In a few words, at the conclusion of a Kriya routine, including an attentive practice of the Higher Kriyas, one is ready for Samadhi. In particular, if the divine absorption does not manifest spontaneously, then the practice of mental Pranayama (with no further procedures other than those up to here described) will let that state blossom.

The technique of mental *Pranayama* which concludes any *Kriya* routine has its foundation in the total physical and mental immobility. A *kriyaban* is aware of each one of the *Chakras*, touches them with his sheer awareness (or with the help of a *Mantra*). This produces wonderful effects and gives a soothing sensation of inner freedom.

[I]... **Introversion** (Pratyahara and Dharana)

The mind is naturally absorbed by the blossoming of *Jyoti* – inner light. The practice of *Pranayama*, intensified by higher procedures, succeeds in focusing the scattered *Prana* in the forehead into a round circular light known as the Spiritual Eye or "Single Eye". Whilst before, the revelation of the spiritual eye happened suddenly and disappeared, like the sun radiating for an instant from behind the clouds, now it is lasting. One lives an outburst of joy and - this is crucial - one's mind does not shudder - is able to endure it peacefully.

[II]... **Breathless state** (Dharana and Dhyana)

The state without breath embodies *Dhyana*, the state of effortless meditation, of pure enjoyment. It should not be necessary to remark that it has nothing to do with forcefully holding the breath; furthermore, it does not simply mean that the breath becomes more and more quiet. One simply does not feel the need to take in any breath at all and this lasts a very long time, longer than what could be accepted by science.

It is clear that physical immobility accompanies it, however it must be said that if one moves gently (as when it is necessary to change the position of the legs) and loses that state, it won't take a minute to regain it. As regards the attainment of the state of *Samadhi*, the situation is different: when, unfortunately, this state is interrupted, it is very difficult (of course never

impossible) to regain it, in the same *Kriya* session.

[III]...**Tunnel experience** (Dhyana and Samadhi)

Usually *Samadhi* announces with a sense of immobility united to tremendous joy. What has been inspiring in life, appears to the inner eye as intensified. The awareness spontaneously settles upon some inner image. It can be that of a holy person or something beautiful discovered in the memory (a wondrous, unreal landscape for example) and also an indefinite light.

The "unbearable" bliss is accompanied by a unique calmness of the lungs and of the heart.

Expertise in *Kriya Yoga* means to be able to intensify this experience inside a perfect physical, mental and emotional stillness. *Samadhi* ensues through relaxation power: one doesn't get excited in the usual physiological way!

The position – as far as I know – can be held through a physical support (lying at the pavement, lying against a wall) otherwise one drops off as one who falls asleep or has a faint.

The consciousness is isolated from the outside - there is no breathing any more and the pulse is practically non existent.

Then the scattered lights in the forehead region condense into the round circular light of the "Single Eye". The point (*Bindu*) in its center, gradually emerges: indescribable and so far unknown sense of bliss follows; the perception of an intense brightness accompanied by «a clear and euphoric certainty of existing, like an unlimited ocean of awareness and beatitude ».

The awareness is pulled through this light, which expands into a tunnel and merges into that circular light; it follows the progressive movement on the road of the six *Chakras* up to *Sahasrara*. The various sounds of the *Chakras* are heard. This is leading to a total cessation of the heart beat – of course a *kriyaban* is usually unaware of this detail. With the experience of greater Light, the way to *Sahasrar* is open. The thousand petalled lotus is revealed in full bloom. Perfectly at ease, a *kriyaban* is lost in the *Omkar*'s deepest aspect, until he goes beyond the essence of Time. The awareness enjoys perfect peace.

Kriya "retirement" (Par Paravastha)

It is said that after an average of eighty experiences of the *Samadhi* state, one enjoys the pension of *Kriya*. Apart the quoted number, which I am not in the condition of making any comment upon, a spiritual dividends signifies that, from a certain moment onwards, all the *Kriya* techniques are dropped: one no longer has the necessity of practicing a set procedure in order to be in the highest state of divine recollection. This is an unexplainable stage. Having attained it, a separate identity of the *kriyaban* and the divine light no longer

exists. No desire for anything remains, one receives all the necessary things. *Atman* (the Self) contemplates *Atman*. This is *Par Paravastha*.

Note

In my opinion, *Samadhi* does not mean that one become one with God. Through this experience, the Ego is not transformed in a "divine" Ego. Those who claim having achieved once and for all the perfection and be one with God make a meager impression. This is a colossal falsehood, an unpleasant and even comic utterance. Of course, when one repeats the *Mantra* "I am That", one affirms one's divine nature and declares one's shining aspiration toward perfection.

The experience of *Samadhi* is very similar to a near death experience (NDE). Many *Kriya* books abound of rhetoric because they want to shun this aspect of the mystical path. They want to attract people to *Kriya* avoiding to say things that could appear unpleasant (unpleasant to whom but to those who are not yet ready for the path?).

In recent times the NDE experience has become quite well known, especially through the development of the techniques of cardiac resuscitation. Raymond Moody popularized such experiences with his book *Life beyond Life* (1975). Some surveys following the book's publication revealed that thousand of people in the U.S.A. have claimed to have had similar experiences.

The descriptions — up not only by that author but from other researches also — confirms the feeling of being dead, of floating above one's own body and seeing the surrounding area. The whole experience is lived within a feeling of endless love and peace. Many have also had the feeling of moving upward, through a tunnel or a narrow corridor, while the synthesis of their life was passing in front of the mirror of their own consciousness. Some divergent accounts follow about meetings with deceased relatives, and with spiritual figures (beings of light). Each one interpreters such meeting according to his own culture and of his own expectations. Then the feeling of having arrived at a threshold and being sent back to one's body —often with deep reluctance to return there— seems to conclude the experience. It is awe-inspiring to meet and to receive the confidences of those people who, as a result of a serious accident, had a near death experience. This event brought them over the edge of the abyss, offering a unique opportunity to glimpse at the beyond, letting them almost touch the Eternal Light. For them it remained the most real experience and, paradoxically, the most "alive" of their existence.

Back to our theme, the famous affirmation according to which *Kriya* is "the airplane route to God realization" must be reinterpreted considering *Kriya* not as a magic tool with which to grasp God, but as an instrument that works with psychological and physiological mechanisms which bring us towards a state of inconceivable relaxation: our aspiration opens the door of the *Samadhi* state looking out on the infinity. The spiritual path turns into a succession of openings onto this dimension beyond the normal earthly life; the purpose is that, through those

experiences, one is able to live with a different awareness. A *kriyaban* just need this: failure happens when one does not flow with the current but rows against it.

Generally speaking, when a mystic retires in a chamber for his devotions, perhaps he doesn't know that he has an appointment with the life of the beyond. If he is able to touch that state, he will touch an indescribable joy and his practice could be considered as perfect.

Unfortunately, many times his practice won't bring him to such result and he will torture himself with reasoning, reflections, intentions, senses of guilt. He will come out of his chamber exhausted and will be depressed for the rest of the day unless he doesn't succeed in filling it with small pleasant uselessness. To feel separate from what is the most true and real state of one's being, to be unable to reach it, is very sad; eventually, it becomes intolerable.

CHAPTER II/3... DIFFERENT KRIYA SCHOOLS

Those who desire just to familiarize with the elementary concepts of *Kriya* will do the right thing if they ignore this chapter where different variations of the *Kriya* techniques are described. Nothing can be said about their origin. My criterion is to share what have been proved to be effective tools for deepening the concentration on the spine and *Chakras* or plunging into the *Omkar* reality.

It is possible that some among Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples taught the teachings received from him mixed with *tantric* additions. Some *Kriya Acharyas* (teachers) had a carefree relationship with the truth and not clarified which was the original part of their teaching. Perhaps they did not disclose it because they thought that their techniques would be practised with greater care if they would have been taken as the original *Kriya*.

I will divide the following variations into three groups; in each one of them a complete *Kriya* routine is outlined.²⁶

They show slightly different approaches to reach the same immersion in the *Omkar* reality; whatever be the chosen *Kriya* method, if one follows honestly it, then *Omkar*, the vibration of the Intelligence sustaining the universe, will grab his or her awareness and guide it into the depths of the mystic experience, without any danger he or she is led astray.

In each school we shall consider eventual modifications of Maha Mudra, Navi Kriya, Pranayama, Second Kriya (Omkar e Thokar), Third Kriya (Thokar) and Fourth Kriya (development of the Third Kriya).

In the first group [A] we summarize the teachings of a particular *Kriya* school which can be defined "moderate" and "cautious".²⁷ The focal point of interest is how to enhance the tuning with the *Omkar* dimension in the aspect of sound vibration, light and movement sensation. The swinging sensation is not the well defined *Trivangamurari* movement which is described in section [C], but a simpler one.

In the second group [B] we shall describe a set of techniques which are really intense. They contain key details which force the energy up the spine into the *Kutastha*. While in the school [A] the work of concentration into the upper part of the head (*Sahasrara*) is essential, in this school it is not even mentioned.

In the third group [C] we are going to deal with a teaching diverging decidedly from that of all the other schools: it is based - this is their unproved statement - upon a teaching that Lahiri Mahasaya developed in the last part of his life. The experience of *Omkar* as sound and internal light are not intentionally sought (not even mentioned by some *Acharyas* belonging to this school), whereas the perception of the internal movement *Trivangamurari* prevails over all the other aspects.

²⁶ In the next chapter we shall discuss the benefit that a *kriyaban* can receive by considering these different approaches to *Kriya*.

²⁷ Prudence counsels me to avoid putting the name of the foremost of its teachers. I want to avoid polemics.

SECTION [A]

Maha Mudra [Variation A]

[a] After inhaling like in *Pranayama*, the half-lotus position is maintained – sitting on the heels is also OK – the body is bent forward; the head is placed in the region between the knees (refer to Figure 4).

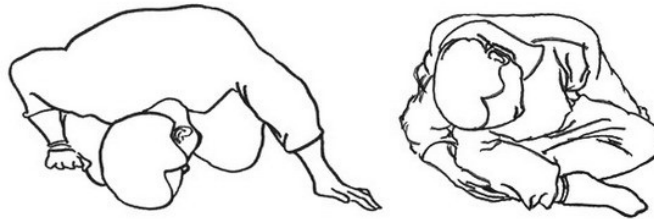


Figure 4. Forward bending starting from sitting on the heels or starting from the half-lotus

The hands may be used at will; however, the breath is retained. The face is turned towards the left knee, so that it is possible to perceive a pressure on the right side of the head; then the face is turned toward the right knee: now a pressure on the left side of the head should be perceived. Then the face is turned downward and a pressure on the forehead should be felt.

After completing the three movements, the starting position with the head and spine erect is resumed. The energy is brought down from *Kutastha* to *Muladhar* with one long exhalation. This exercise should be repeated at least three times.

The technique can be practiced more slowly and without holding the breath. After inhaling, the body is bent forward; the head is placed in the region between the knees. The breath is not controlled or retained even though the energy is kept in the head as if the breath was being held - this skill will develop with practice. The head is placed close to the right knee, the face is turned towards the left knee.

At this point there is a pause of several seconds (10-30) while trying to perceive not only a pressure in the right side of the head (which is easy), but also a movement sensation - an inner swinging perception.

Then the head is placed close to the left knee, and the face is turned towards the right knee perceiving pressure and a similar swinging sensation on the left side of the head. Then one places one's head between both knees: the same pressure and swinging sensations should be felt centrally on the forehead. After completing the three movements, the starting position with the head and spine erect is resumed. Then, to end one cycle of this exercise, the energy is brought down from the *Kutastha* to *Muladhar* with one long exhalation.

[b] As for *Maha Mudra* proper, let us consider the instructions given in the previous chapter, but when the right leg is extended, the right hand grabs the right foot's toes while the left hand grabs the inner side of the right foot (the arch of the foot); now the face is turned left while the breath is retained. An "inner pressure" on the right side of the head is felt. One should feel the same perception on the left side of the head, when practicing the opposite position. When both legs are extended, the pressure must be felt on the front part of the head. This technique also can be practiced more slowly and without holding the breath.

It may seem odd, but I'm convinced that it is more profitable to limit one's daily *Kriya* practice just to the forward bows and to the *Maha Mudra* and then sitting peacefully attuned to the *Omkar* dimension; rather than having an isolated *Pranayama* practice. I don't know if the forward bows came from Lahiri Mahasaya, but it is sure that some of his major disciples taught them.

It is very useful to turn the head left and right and rest there for some seconds, while the object of concentration is the vibration and the feeling of pressure in the lower side of the head. By a number of repetitions of this posture, the two parts of the brain become equilibrated from the energetic point of view: this balances the *Ida* and the *Pingala* currents, whose imbalance is the main reason for the obstruction at the base of the spine.

Navi Kriya [Variation A]

A *kriyaban's* awareness goes slowly up along the spinal column placing the syllable *Om* (ooong) in the six *Chakras*. The chin is brought down towards the throat cavity. A short inhalation is followed by a very long exhalation: during which, the energy is felt descending, along a path outside the body, from the frontal part of the brain to the navel, reaching through it the abdominal region, horizontally.²⁸

During this exhalation, *Om* is chanted mentally, very rapidly, from 10 to 15 times, accompanying the energy's descent throughout its path, as if applying some "soft pushes".

The head resumes its normal position and is followed by a short inhalation (two seconds maximum, without the concentration on any *Chakra*) which raises the energy again into the head.

²⁸ It is the part of the body where the Inner Alchemy locates the *Dan Tien*. In order to localize its position, one has to concentrate on the belly button, then move about one and a half inches behind and below to the same extent: it can be visualized as a ball about two and one-half inches in diameter.

The head bends toward the left shoulder, without turning the face. A long exhalation (with the same chanting of *Om, Om, Om...*) accompanies the downward movement of energy which starts from the brain's left side and moves along the body's left side (crossing the shoulder or the arm) down to the waist where it bends and moves horizontally toward the inside of the abdominal region.

The head moves back into its normal position; again a short inhalation follows (two seconds maximum, without the concentration on any *Chakra*) to raise the energy into the head.

The head now bends backwards. A long expiration (with the same chanting of *Om, Om, Om...*) accompanies the downward movement of energy which starts from the occipital region and moves along the body's back side down to the waist where bends, passes through the third *Manipura Chakra* and moves toward the inside of the abdominal region.

The procedure is repeated likewise on the right side, then on the forward, to the left, backwards.... and so on.

The basic session of this variation of *Navi Kriya* consists of 36 descents (there are $36/4 = 9$ rotations of the head). It ends with *Om Japa* done from *Ajna Chakra* to *Muladhar*. (One session typically lasts 8-10 minutes and replaces the 4 repetitions of the canonical form of *Navi Kriya*.)

It is quite normal that, proceeding with the rotations, the movements of the head are less marked. One can have encouraging results also by gradually reaching immobility and completing the prescribed number by a sheer mental process.

Pranayama [Variation A]

Let us first consider a variation of *Om Japa* - with breath free. The spine is compared to a well. One's awareness (like a bucket moving into the well) goes up and down, and in each *Chakra* one mentally verbalizes the syllable *Om* from one to three times, trying to perceive in each *Chakra*'s location a swinging, fluctuating sensation. After coming up from *Muladhar* to *Vishuddha*, something particular happens.

A *kriyaban* perceives a virtual horizontal line connecting the temples as well as a virtual line from the *Kutastha* back to the occipital region.

Gently (very softly!) swinging the head sideways and then back and forth may foster the perception of the two lines' intersecting point. This intersection is the seat of the *Ajna Chakra* and is the best place to concentrate (chanting *Om* very very softly) in order to have the full experience of *Omkar*'s internal movement aspect.

Then, in the same way, the awareness begins the descent by chanting *Om* in *Vishuddha*...down to *Muladhar*. It is important to perceive the swinging

sensation, at least for an instant, in each *Chakra*.

After 3-6 rounds, the *kriyaban* is ready to enjoy and intensify the same perception with the help of the breath.

The breathing is very deep and slow - usually without sound in the throat – while part of the awareness does not move from the *Ajna Chakra*. One way to think about it is to visualise a pendulum from *Ajna* to each *Chakra*, and as one moves up and down the length of the pendulum changes accordingly.

The process becomes more and more subtle. The breath goes on in an imperceptible way: all the attention is focused only on the swinging sensation in each *Chakra*.

Second Kriya [Variation A]

One inhales as in *Omkar Pranayama* (see chapter II/2). Then the breath is held, the chin bends **forward**, towards the throat cavity: a kind of inner pressure is felt in the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The head bends slightly toward the **left** shoulder, without turning the face: a kind of inner pressure is felt in the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The head now bends **backwards**: a kind of inner pressure is felt in the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The head bends slightly toward the **right** shoulder, without turning the face: a kind of inner pressure is felt in the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. The chin bends **forward**, towards the throat cavity: a kind of inner pressure is felt in the heart *Chakra*. The head then resumes its normal position. Then an exhalation as in *Omkar Pranayama* leads the awareness through the *Chakras* to *Muladhar*. The time employed depends on the individual; usually it is approximately 20-25 seconds, but it can be longer. The procedure is repeated at least 12 times.

During this technique when the head is in a downward position, (either forward, to the left, to the right or to the back) there is created an opening for the divine light to flow down from above the head where it normally is into the whole body. In this tradition one is taught as though the head movement were the movement of a lid of a pot which by moving allows the pot to be filled by a stream of energy.

Third Kriya [Variation A]

The reader remembers how, in the previous chapter, dealing with the basic form of *Thokar*, we passed from the technique of the *Second Kriya* to that of the *Third Kriya* by inserting the variation of repeating the movements of the head within one single breath. The same event happens here. The same considerations about the problem of holding back the breath should be remembered.

A *kriyaban* inhales as in *Omkar Pranayama*. The breath is then held. The movements of the head are those described in the previous *Second Kriya* [Variation A], save for the fact that they are more swift and there is no stop after the first round. There are different rounds of the head: 6 rotations is a good number to begin with. Then an exhalation as in *Omkar Pranayama* leads the awareness through the *Chakras* to *Muladhar*.

One can increase the number of rotations by six each week. The limit of 200 repetitions is not exceeded even if it happens that the breath seems to disappear and a person is drawn to continue indefinitely with the rotations.²⁹ Something astonishing happens which enraptures a *kriyaban*: a never before experienced joy and a perfect feeling of freedom pour into his or her life. At a certain moment, one is in a state of ecstasy and feels that this is the correct moment to stop the movements and drift into the next part.

Fourth Kriya [Variation A]

A *kriyaban* perceives a particular sensation of physical immobility; it is so strong that the backbone seems like a steel bar which extends from the *Muladhar* to the *Fontanelle*. The crown of the head brightens with a crepuscular light. In this situation a *kriyaban* concentrates only on the light. This is perfect *Dhyana*. Nothing else is required.

If light is not spontaneously revealed, the meditative state is obtained through the following procedure.

The attention is placed on each *Chakra*, as in mental *Pranayama*, going up and down - the breath is wholly forgotten. The perception of inner light and the listening to the inner sounds is fostered by the mental repetitions of each one of the syllables of the twelve syllable *Mantra*.³⁰

(One stops at each *Chakra* for one or two minutes.)

Om, Om, Om, Om ...(many times) is repeated in the first *Chakra*; *Na, Na, Na, Na* ... in the second one...*Mo, Mo, Mo, Mo*... in the third one etc.

The speed of chanting is about twice per second. The specific spontaneous "rhythm" of each *Chakra* manifests and one does not chant anymore – one

²⁹ Since the cervical vertebrae are something very delicate, since one must not put them unwisely under stress, the movements of the head are just hinted but the hits, the stimuli on the fourth *Chakra* are always precise and distinctly perceived.

³⁰ Some close the ears with the thumbs by pressing the tragus and rest the elbows on a support. This method is described clearly in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* 4:68. «Sitting with the *Shambhavi Mudra*, one should close the ears, eyes, nostrils and mouth. Then by listening to the inner sound - inside his or her right ear - one should explore the crystalline passage of the *Sushumna* which has been cleansed of all its impurities»

moves from Japa to Ajapa. The procedure is repeated for at least three rounds (one round is the concentration in the twelve stations).

A further refinement of the perception of the rhythm of the *Chakras* is to discover these very vibrations simultaneously in the *Chakras* and in the crown of the head. This is a deepening of what has just been described, and in school [A] is taught to lead one to the *Paravastha* state.

Let us now describe how one connects the vibrating *Chakras* to the crown of the head.

First one *ideally* divides the crown of the head into 12 parts like a clock.

Starting at the *Bindu* and moving in a counter-clockwise direction, the first six parts are on the right side of the head, from the *Bindu* to the front of the crown; the remaining six are on the left side from the front back to the *Bindu*.

A *kriyaban* concentrates on the *Muladhar Chakra*. Thanks to a mental act or to a very short and subtle inhalation (about one - two seconds), this *Chakra* is ideally raised into the first of these twelve parts. The concentration is simultaneously placed there and on the physical seat of the *Muladhar*. An inner swinging sensation, accompanied by the mental repetition of *Om Om Om Om ...*, is perceived in both places. Then the concentration moves to the second *Chakra* in the spine. In the same way as the previous one, this *Chakra* is raised into the second part of the crown.

A *kriyaban* perceives an inner swinging sensation in both places, while mentally chanting *Na Na Na Na ...*

The same procedure is repeated for the other *Chakras* (3, 4, 5, *Ajna*, again *Ajna*, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1) each one put in relation with a different part of the crown of the head.

Therefore, essentially, a *kriyaban* explores the passage of *Sushumna* by perceiving light in each *Chakra*'s location, and linking it with the light at the crown of the head.

SECTION [B]

Maha Mudra & Navi Kriya [see chapter II/1]

Pranayama [Variation B]

After some rounds of the basic form of *Pranayama* - it can be either with or without the chanting of *Mantra* in the *Chakras* - the procedure is intensified in the following way.

As usual, the inhalation guides the breath and the awareness from *Muladhar* to the occipital region (*Bindu*). At the end of the inhalation, while holding the breath, the awareness "rotates" left, comes down a little bit and enters the *Medulla*.

During a short pause (about one second) the eyebrows are raised: then one becomes conscious of the illumined portion of the head over the *Medulla*.

While the breath is held, *Mula Bandha* is applied thus providing a thrust to the energy present in the lower abdominal region bringing it to the *Medulla* and, from there, injecting it into the *Kutastha*. Through the power of concentration, a peculiar sensation like an ecstatic shiver manifests.

The tension is then released, the exhalation begins and the energy goes down through its own way to the *Muladhar*. No effort is required, the energy will come down naturally.

Breath after breath, the power created in *Kutastha* will explode into the great golden-white light of the spiritual eye.

Kechari Mudra cooperates with this process: the tongue is also pushed upward and forward as a thrust to enter the *Kutastha*.

Second Kriya [Variation B]

[a] First part with breath

The inhalation is that of the canonical *Omkar Pranayama* and the process is intensified through the help of the movement of the head as follows:

Starting with one's chin on the chest, a *kriyaban* inhales and simultaneously raises the awareness along the spinal column; the chin moves up as if to follow and, at the same time, to enhance the inner movement of the awareness.

It's as if the movement was like a squeezing of an almost empty tube of toothpaste to get the last little bit out.

One touches the *Chakras* with the syllables (*Om* is placed mentally in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second one, *Mo* in the third one, *Bha* in the fourth one, *Ga* in the fifth one and *Ba* in the *Bindu*) and makes a micro pause in each one.

During inhalation, the muscles at the base of the spinal column remain contracted and the hands (with interlocked fingers) are placed upon the navel area so as to push the abdominal region upward, thus creating a mental pressure on the first three *Chakras*. The breath produces only a slight, weak sound in the throat or it comes out soundless.

When the chin is up, horizontal, the inhalation ends and the perception is now at the *Bindu*. The breath and muscle contraction are held. Without turning the face, the head moves toward the left shoulder, then it returns to the starting position while at the same raising the chin up as much as possible; a contraction of the neck's rear muscles happens.

(It is like the normal rotation of the head in *Omkar Pranayama* but only half and with the addition of the upward chin movement. The finale position is that of the second part of the *Navi Kriya*, with the head fully back.)

During this movement, the energy in the *Bindu* descends to the left, curving and entering the *Medulla*. A *kriyaban* then practices the *Mula Bandha* intensely while chanting *Teeee* like an arrow injecting his consciousness into the *Kutastha*.

From that chin-up position, the face turns to the right and then to the left (in this case the ear does not move towards the shoulder: one is only turning one's head); during this movement the fifth cervical *Chakra* is perceived and the syllable *Va* is mentally chanted in it. Then, from the left position, the chin strikes the middle of the chest along a diagonal (the head is now in the same position as in any other form of *Thokar*), and the syllable *Su* is chanted in the heart *Chakra*.

The muscles at the base of the spinal column are relaxed and, while exhaling, the remaining syllables *De*, *Va* and *Ya* are placed in the third, the second and the first *Chakras* respectively. A *kriyaban* is guided to repeat this technique 6-12 times. (As always with *Thokar*, it should be remarked that in the presence of physical problems, mindful and delicate movements are crucial.)

[b] Second part: with calm breath.

A *kriyaban* is then guided to deepen the practice by forgetting the breath and slowing down the entire process: the result is far more powerful.

Starting with his chin on the chest, a *kriyaban* moves his awareness very, very slowly along the spinal column upwards, while simultaneously raising the chin as if to accompany and push the energy up. The energy is sensed like a substance in the thin channel of *Sushumna*, squeezed upward (very very slowly) by this movement of the chin. One has the sensation of traveling inside the spine and touching each *Chakra* in a very direct way.

The raising of the energy up to the head should last no less than 30 seconds! To obtain the greatest mental intensity, *Kechari Mudra* should be adopted.

As usual, the *Chakras* are touched with the syllables of the *Mantra*.

When the chin is up, the perception is at the *Bindu*.

The following movements are like the afore described ones, just a little slower, but all happens in the state of *Kevala Kumbhaka*, namely with the breath completely immobile (breathing in and out at this point would destroy all the beauty of the process). As in other techniques with the calm breath the breath must not be artificially held. What is important is not to be in a hurry, but to be totally relaxed and let the experience happen naturally.

At the point where the head moves to the chest and *Su* is chanted in the heart *Chakra*, as described above, a pause is made there: the breath does not move in the nostrils and the mind is enraptured in the radiation of energy felt in the heart *Chakra*. The chin comes up a little bit and the breath is again free but ignored.

While lowering very, very slowly the chin, the awareness touches deeply the third *Chakra*, where *De* is put, the second where *Va* is put, and finally the *Muladhar* where *Ya* is put. A micro pause is made in each one of these *Chakras*.

To summarize, in this part of the technique the head movements happen more or less at the same speed but the movement of the energy up and down along with the movement of the chin is done considerably more slowly: it cannot be overemphasized how important it is not to be in a hurry, to be relaxed and let the experience happen.

For some weeks, the *kriyaban* is guided to repeat this technique 12 times. Then he is guided to gradually increase the repetitions for a total (first part+second part) of 200 times.

Third Kriya [Variation B]

This *Third Kriya* is essentially an extension of the [b] phase of the *Second Kriya* as described above. As in [b] it is very slow and involves a tranquil breath. It comes after having practiced the *Second Kriya* when the body is in a state of profound relaxation.

As one might expect, most of this technique is identical to [b]. The movement of the energy upward is the same and occurs with the same speed, and the head movements are performed identically. The difference is as follows:

Once the energy is brought to the head, a *kriyaban* holds the breath while rotating his head counter-clockwise twelve times. The timing is normally about three seconds per rotation. During each rotation, which is slightly more pronounced than the movement of *Omkar Pranayama*, one's awareness completes a counter-clockwise circular path inside the crown of the head; that is to say, we have a circular movement within a circular movement like an orbit within an orbit happening simultaneously.

The rest is the same as the Second Kriya [b]: without interrupting *Kumbhaka* the movements of the head are done with the chanting of *Teeee* in *Kutastha*, of *Va* in the cervical center and of *Su* in the heart center. While breathing normally, there follows the same slow coming down of the awareness in the lower *Chakras*, with the chanting of *De*, *Va* and *Ya*.

A *kriyabans* is guided to gradually increase the number of rotations of the head: each week he can add six more repetitions... (for the discussion about holding the breath, see the description of the basic procedure of the *Third Kriya* in chapter II/2.) As always, only one *Third Kriya* is practiced.

Fourth Kriya [Variation B]

This *Fourth Kriya* is essentially a variation of the *Second Kriya* procedure. Again it extends the tranquil breath phase. The main difference is that the final diagonal head movement is repeated and the *Thokar* blows are performed on the heart, lumbar, sacral and coccygeal *Chakras*.

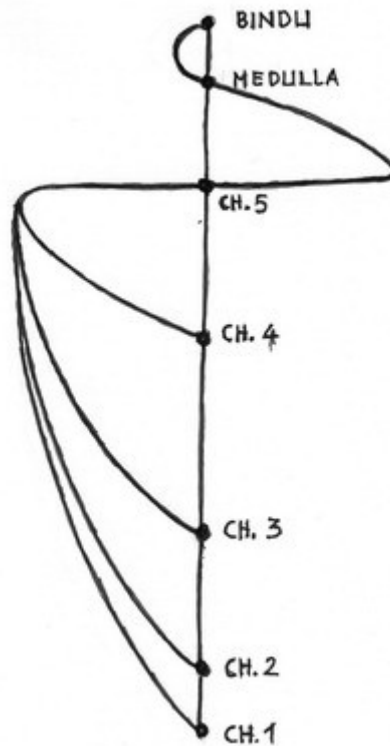


Figure 6. How Thokar can strike the underlying Chakras

After the syllable *Su* is vibrated in the heart *Chakra*, without interrupting *Kumbhaka* another similar diagonal movement of the chin from the left to the chest is repeated while the energy is mentally directed toward the third *Chakra*, where the syllable *De* is vibrated; another similar movement directs

the energy into the second *Chakra* where the syllable *Va* is vibrated; finally with a last hit the energy is directed towards the first *Chakra* where the syllable *Ya* is vibrated. At this point the breath is allowed to flow freely and the *kriyaban* rests some instants to perceive the power originating and spreading from the *Muladhar Chakra* into all the body, including the spine.

Then, something very particular happens. One raises or feels to be following, (or both) the energy from the *Muladhar* into the head. Sometimes one performs a smooth breath, sometimes the breath is felt as fragmented and sometimes there is no breathing at all. The energy coming up feels like waves of a tide moving higher and higher, pausing in each *Chakra* and then again moving from the base of the spine to a higher center.

The practice is repeated for a total of twelve times and is always concluded by the raising of the energy and resting in the *Kutastha*. Only an expert *Acharya* can guide a *kriyaban* to increase the repetitions of this technique. Its effects are very difficult to assimilate!

Optional addition

At the end of the practice of the twelve runs, a *kriyaban* lifts his body just a few millimetres with the help of his hands and then lets the buttocks touch the floor with a mild jolt. This action is called *Maha Veda Mudra*: *Veda* means perforation, obviously of the knot of the *Muladhar*. If the technique is practiced correctly, an ecstatic feeling is felt.

SECTION [C]

There are numerous *kriyabans* affirming, with different motivations, that the following procedures did not originate from Lahiri Mahasaya. They observe that the only sentence which can be reasonably attributed to him is: «To make this body *Trivangamurari*, "three bended", three centers are to be crossed, at *Muladhar*, at *Anahat*, and at *Vishnu* center at the root of the tongue». Obviously this is not enough to justify the existence of a series of techniques which are based on perceiving in one's own body that particular form.

I was told that some *kriyabans* received initiation from this school but soon neglected the *Trivangamurari* techniques believing them to be useless since they lead the energy out of the *Sushumna*. The opposite is true: these techniques can be performed only as long as a *kriyaban* is tuned with the inner channel of *Sushumna*. In any other case, he would perceive nothing. When a *kriyaban*'s awareness is in the spinal column, he perceives his own body not through his senses, but through *Kutastha*. The experience is that the spine is not straight but bent in the *Trivangamurari* way. In other words, astrally speaking, *Trivangamurari* is the internal perception of our spine.

Since this movement (I am not alluding to the form in itself but to the flow of something which is perceived moving in it or through it) is perceived as movement and stillness coexisting in the same place and at the same time, many misunderstandings are created when one tries to explain it, especially when there is an attempt to grasp it intellectually.

Nothing positive or useful came from those teachers who tried to give a personification of it. Actually, some claimed that the *Trivangamurari* movement appeared to them in the particular form of *Krishna* or *Shiva*. They implied that only one who had had this vision had achieved mastery of these techniques. Without disputing with them, we can think that it is correct to say that the shape of the prince *Krishna*, as depicted in the iconography, reminds us of the *Trivangamurari* form; his neck, legs and back are kept in a peculiar position clearly outlining these three curves, perhaps it implies the cutting of the three knots - but that's all there is to it.

As far as I'm concerned, I am speechless in considering the beauty and power of these procedures. For this reason (and also because they were and are practiced by wonderful souls) I share them with the reader.

Maha Mudra & Navi Kriya [see chapter II/1]

From Pranayama to Second Kriya [Variation C]

At least 36 basic *Pranayamas* are performed.³¹

Then, going on with the same procedure, while the path of inhalation remains the same, during the exhalation, the awareness comes down in a particular way. The current flows from the *Bindu* into the *Medulla* moving slightly on

³¹ Some schools affirm that the minimum number of basic Pranayama should be 200!

the left side, crosses the *Medulla* and bends down in a way to reach the fourth *Chakra* from the right and cross it, bending down and reaching the *Muladhar* from the left. Inhalation and exhalation go on in this way.

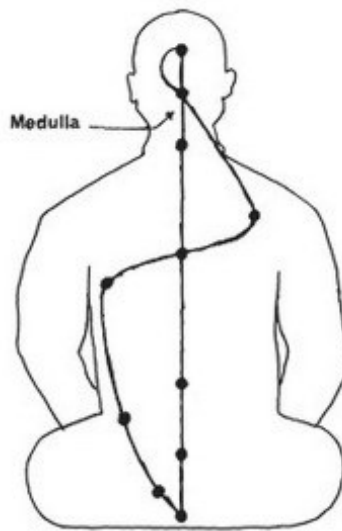


Figure 7. Trivangamurari movement

At a certain point, the intuition guides a *kriyaban* to forget the breath entirely. He raises his awareness along the spinal column up to touch the *Bindu*, more slowly than the way he has done with the help of the breath: half a minute is ideally required for raising the awareness; the same is required for the descent. A pause of about one second is made in the *Muladhar Chakra*. One round is equal to one minute, but if it turns out to be shorter, let us say 45/50 seconds, this does not mean that the procedure has been done incorrectly.

In the beginning this perception doesn't happen in the exact way as it is shown in the picture: the whole thing is not so far from the central axis.

Then, as soon as the concentration adheres totally to this movement, the path is perceived as similar to the one drawn in Figure 7. It is difficult to add more details to the explanation: we are dealing with the deepest and most paradoxical aspect of the *Omkar* reality.

It must be remarked that the path of energy is not a visualization of the imagination, it is a reality of its own. The four new centers (one at the right side, three at the left) along the descending flux should not be considered new *Chakras*; they are only small "vortices" of current within the main current.

Although a practitioner should not get upset in attempting to pin-point their location, let us specify that the one on the right side is to be located in the back, about an inch above the right nipple's height, whereas the next one, on the left side of the body is situated in the back about an inch under the left nipple's height.

Let us also add that the entire *Trivangamurari* flow takes place on a virtual

plane containing the spine (in other words, it does not come forward). The secret of these technique is found in good concentration skills, immobility and in the ability to bear the power resulting from it.

For two weeks, a *kriyaban* is guided to repeat this technique 25 times. Then for another two weeks he is guided to repeat it 50 times and so on up to 200 times. After the completion of this number he can move on to the technique of the *Second Kriya*. While the described technique is called *Amantrak* (without *Mantra*), the following *Second Kriya* is called *Samantrak* (with *Mantra*).

Second Kriya [Variation C]

The breath is calm and is totally forgotten.

The perception of the *Trivangamurari* movement is intensified through the twelve-syllable *Mantra*.

While the current rises, the syllables *Om*, *Na*, *Mo*, *Bha* and *Ga* are vibrated into the first five *Chakras*, the syllable *Ba* into the *Bindu*.

Then the current descends along the left side, curving until it reaches the *Medulla*; this is where the seventh syllable, *Teeee*, is vibrated. At this point the inner flux moves toward the right side of the body, reaching the next center where the eighth syllable, *Va*, is vibrated. It curves and diagonally crosses the heart *Chakra* and arrives at the next center to the left where the ninth syllable, *Su*, is vibrated. Then in turn the syllables *De*, *Va* are chanted which intensifies the perception of the last two "vortexes" of the current and finally *Ya* is chanted in the *Muladhara*.

Each syllable is a mental *Thokar* (hit) to each center's location.

Since the technique is performed slowly (half a minute for raising the awareness, the same for coming down) there is plenty of time to make this perception very accurate.

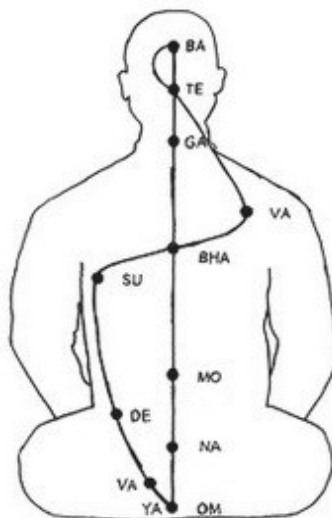


Figure 8. Particular form of Second Kriya

The *Second Kriya*, as it is taught by this school, consists both in the perception of the *Trivangamurari* movement and in these stimulations which are given to these 12 points (the first and the last coincide with *Muladhar*).

For two weeks, a *kriyaban* is guided to repeat this technique 25 times.

Then for another two weeks he is guided to repeat it 50 times and so on up to 200 times. After the completion of this number he may use this procedure on a regular basis in the routine, instead of the *Mental Pranayama* (with fair doses: 24 – 36) or move on the practice of the *Third Kriya*.

Third Kriya [Variation C]

Again, during this process the breath is forgotten. With the chin on the chest, a *kriyaban* raises the awareness very slowly along the spinal column and touches its respective *Chakras* with the syllables while raising the chin as if to follow the inner movement.

When the chin is parallel to the ground, the perception is at the *Bindu*.

The movements of the head are similar to those we are acquainted with by the practice of the *Thokar* discussed in section [B], but they are far slower and this time there are five "strokes".

Without turning the face, the head moves very slowly toward the left, then it returns to the starting position while at the same time raising the chin up as much as possible; a contraction of the neck's rear muscles follows.

During this movement, the *Trivangamurari* flow descends from the *Bindu* center to the left, bends, enters the *Medulla* where the seventh syllable, *Teeee*, is vibrated. From this raised chin position, the face slowly turns to the right, the chin is calmly lowered until it reaches a position parallel to, and above the right shoulder. During this movement, the inner *Trivangamurari* flow reaches the eighth center.³²

At this point the chin touches the right shoulder for an instant (this is the first of five strokes) and it is in this very instant that the syllable *Va* is vibrated in the eighth center. (The shoulder also makes a small motion upward to make contact with the chin easier.)

Right after this movement, the face turns left in a very slow motion, accompanying - millimetre by millimetre - the perception of the inner flux moving across the fourth *Chakra*.

The second stroke similarly takes place on the left side, when the syllable *Su* is chanted in the ninth center.

³² Therefore there is no doubt about the speed of the movement of the head: the *Trivangamurari* flow goes on as in the previous *Second Kriya* and the head just accompanies it.

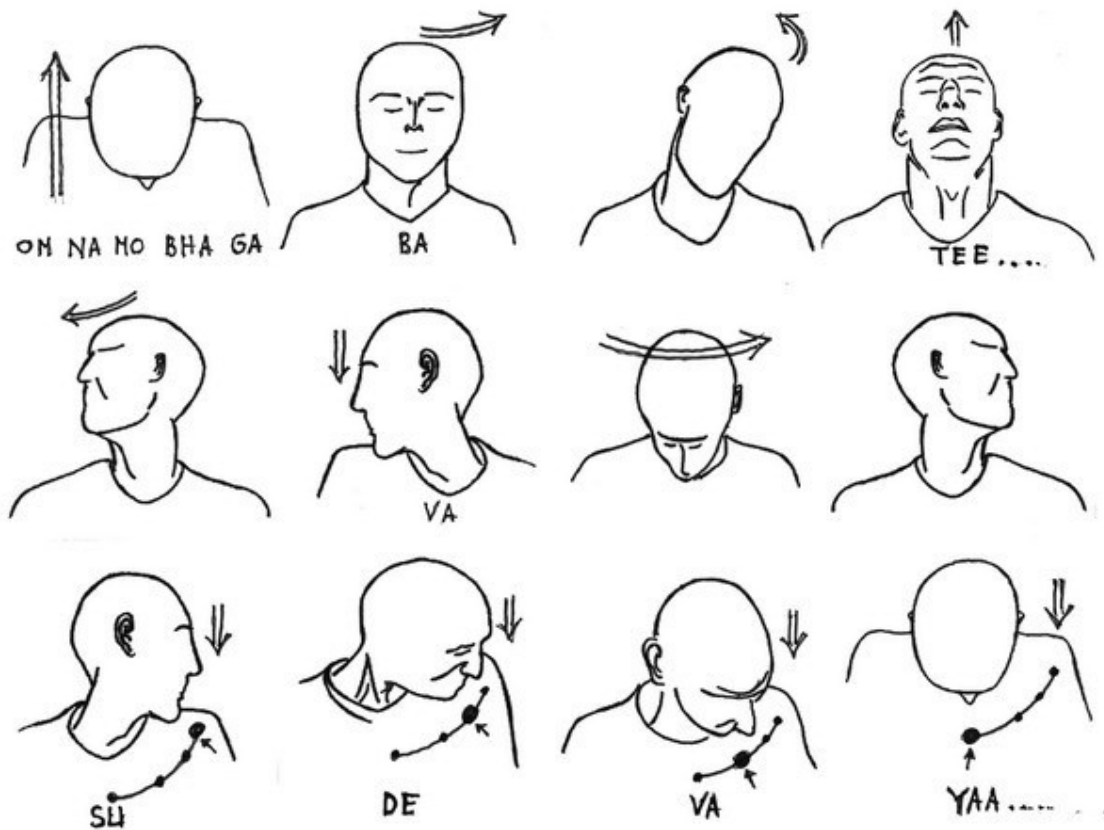


Figure 9. Thokar [Variation C]

The chin, grazing the left side of the collarbone, slowly moves towards the position in the middle of the chest. During this movement - exactly when the syllables *De* and *Va* are thought in the tenth and eleventh centers - two light strokes are given to the collarbone in intermediate positions. In the end, when *Ya* is placed into *Muladhar*, the last chin stroke on the chest (central position) is carried out. A pause of about one second follows.

Kriya teachers say that one round should ideally last one minute, but from practical experience it lasts approximately 40/50 seconds.

This procedure is repeated 12-36 times.

The supervision of an expert helps to avoid problems – I am specifically referring to stress and pain in the cervical vertebrae and in the muscles of the neck. Abrupt movements should be avoided; it is thus possible to reach deep mental concentration when thinking of each of the five syllables in their respective centers. During the first weeks it is wise not to practice every day, but spread out the practice to every two or three days.

Fourth Kriya [Variation C]

A *kriyaban* becomes aware of the *Muladhar Chakra* - which is visualized as a **horizontal** disk or coin with a diameter of approximately an inch.³³

The breath is very calm and free. With the help of the afore quoted 12 letter *Mantra*, which is mentally chanted, in its completeness, inside the *Chakra* itself, the *Trivangamurari* movement in reduced dimensions (micro) - similar to that already experienced in large-scale dimension - is perceived on the virtual coin's surface (Figure 10). The entire *Mantra* with its associated micro movement is repeated three times. The same procedure occurs in each *Chakra* (and of course in the four centers outside the spine).

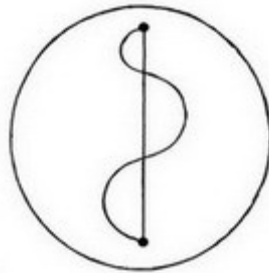


Figure 10. Trivangamurari micro-movement inside a Chakra

This is one *Fourth Kriya*. Usually twelve are practiced.³⁴ Its duration is determined by the speed of the chanting of the *Mantra*. Obviously, the number of times the *Mantra* is chanted [$3 \times 12 \times 12 = 432$] in its entirety is equal to the number of times the micro-movement is perceived. For many people each micro-movement lasts about 10-12 seconds. Lahiri Mahasaya's recommendation was «Don't be in a hurry!».

The *Micro-movement* is the revelation of the *Omkar* reality inside each *Chakra*.

The technique we have just discussed embodies in the safest of all the ways the process of *Muladhara Granti Veda*; the teachers who carry out this version of the *Fourth Kriya* maintain that many *yogic* actions having the purpose of untying the knot of the *Muladhar*, result only in producing an even tighter lock on it, which is noticed as a very annoying nervous state. In all the *Kriya* schools, the *Fourth Kriya* is considered practicable only if the *Third Kriya* has been mastered, at least up to a

³³ All the centers are visualized as horizontal disks: usually it comes spontaneous to visualize them as if viewing them from top. With time and experience, this visualization develops into a personal one, also because then the notion of dimension (of up and down) is lost.

³⁴ Even a small amount of 3- 4 rounds (lived in a complete relaxation and surrender) produces a great joy and an almost irresistible bliss.

certain level.³⁵ Under this ideal conditions, in whatever *Chakra* a *kriyaban* concentrates (as well as in one of the new introduced centers outside the spine) if he calmly utters mentally the syllables "*Om-Na-Mo-Bha-Ga-Ba-Te-Va-Su-De-Va-Ya*" he will perceive something stirring, swaying inside that *Chakra*. After a long practice of the *Second* and *Third Kriya*, the 12 letter *Mantra* and the *Trivangamurari* movement becomes one and the same reality: the gist of the following procedure is mainly based upon this.

Note

It is good to train oneself to perceive the micro-movement without the aid of the *Mantra*. The following procedure is suited for this purpose. (This process is akin to the one described in the basic form of the *Fourth Kriya* – see chapter II/2). A *kriyaban* raises the *Muladhar Chakra* into the *Kutastha* through a short inhalation. When the presence of the energy is clearly felt in the point between the eyebrows, a *kriyaban* "looks down" at the disk of the *Chakra* and draws there (as with a laser-pen) the form of the micro-movement by a faint forward, lateral, back swing of the spinal column - not wider than the resulting micro-movement.

This is repeated three times in each of the 12 centers. After one or two complete rounds, the syllables, like "little thrusts or pulsations", are introduced, which provide a remarkable stimulation and a more detailed perception of such phenomenon, while the body regains immobility.

³⁵ We don't say "perfectly mastered" as this would signify having obtained Self realization, in which case the *Fourth Kriya* would be superfluous. In the next chapter, after having explained the concept of vertical routine, we shall have the opportunity to explain what is considered the minimal work with the *Third Kriya* that it is needed before considering the practice of the *Fourth Kriya*.

CHAPTER II/4... TO WAYS OF UTILIZING THE KRIYA TECHNIQUES

The following scheme is a synthetic index of the so far exposed *Kriya* techniques - many of them were given in different variations.

I... Preparation (To create the best conditions in mind and spine for the best execution of the following procedures)

#Talabya Kriya

#Maha Mudra

#Om Japa in the Chakras

#Navi Kriya (this technique may be utilized both as a preparation and as the final part of Pranayama)

II... Satchakra Kriya (Kriya of the six Chakras using the tools of breath, Mantra and physical movement – Mudras included)

Pranayama (Basic Pranayama; excellent Pranayama; Navi Kriya)

Omkar Pranayama

#Thokar (Basic form; development of it with strenuous Kumbhaka and extension of its action to all the Chakras)

III... Bridge techniques between Satchakra Kriya and Sahasrara Kriya (Techniques which utilize the instruments of the second part but aim at transcending the six Chakra plane and settle one's awareness in the Kutastha or Sahasrara plane)

#Yoni Mudra

#Raising the Chakras into the Kutastha

#Mental Pranayama - first part

[1]... Introversion (Pratyahara and Dharana)

IV... Sahasrar Kriya

(Spontaneous experience happening on the Kutastha and Sahasrar plane, to which only a mental practice in perfect immobility can lead)

#Mental Pranayama - second and third part

[2]... Breathless state (Dharana and Dhyana)

[3]... Tunnel experience (Dhyana and Samadhi)

Now it is necessary to share new information in order to show an alternative way of how some *kriyabans* use these procedures in a very profitable way.

Although the greatest part of the schools guide one to envisage a simple routine with just the basic techniques in it, and then gradually to widen it including more and more techniques, a few teach to alternate such scheme with the practice of the so-called **vertical** procedures.

What this means, we are going now to clarify. It is one of the most precious

information I have ever received: the value of such procedures is inestimable. In my opinion they are the strongest means to be able, with time, to realize what above has been indicated as [2] Breathless state and [3] Tunnel experience which is the *Samadhi* state.

Introduction to the vertical processes

A **horizontal routine** - whose length is constant in time as that of a fence's pegs (ie a constant series) - is the only system of practice recommended by many organizations and by a limited number of *Kriya* teachers. It consists in a daily practice of the same set of techniques, changing neither the order of practice nor the number of their repetitions.

A **vertical routine** is a particular feature of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*. It consists of, once a week, putting the usual routine aside and instead using just one technique, whose number of repetitions is gradually increased - just like how the pipes of an organ gradually increase in length.

During the other days the practitioner can enjoy a minimal practice of the *First Kriya* techniques, as well as let some days go by without doing any *Kriya* and instead enjoying long walks and the simple practice of *Japa*.

Once a week, or every other week, one incrementally adds a preset number of repetitions to the chosen technique until, in a certain amount of time, a total number of repetitions is reached. Then the process begins again with another *Kriya* until the last of the *Higher Kriyas* is "vertically climbed".

This process is always done in a gradual way and assimilated, bit by bit, amid a regular active life. If one tries to be smart and abruptly decides to perform the final dose, it is like doing nothing because the inner channels close up.

To make a trivial comparison, it would be like pouring a liquid too quickly from one bottle to another bottle which has a smaller opening: consequently all the liquid would be spilled. Our inner obstacles cannot be removed in one day, not just because our constitution could not bear it, but also because our clearing force initially is weak and must be enhanced week after week.

It is clear that we don't deny the fundamental role of the praxis of a horizontal routine. For a beginner it is recommended as a prudent way of familiarizing with the basic techniques. But going on always practicing the same horizontal routine, a *kriyaban* might run into boredom and annihilate any enthusiasm for further practice.

The human being cannot bear the continual repetition of the same, identical routine for an indefinite period, and nobody can escape this "law". What happens is that one's psychophysical system becomes accustomed to the practice and stops reacting, causing the routine either to become ineffective or

not as effective as in the beginning.

An expert once wrote that the hope of obtaining a deep internal change through such a practice is comparable to the hope that hitting a piece of iron once a day might, after some years, release the atomic energy that it contains within. The intensity of the practice should somehow be increased.

This principle applies also to athletes who wish to achieve world class performance; they must do interval training where they push their physical and mental endurance beyond their normal everyday levels. In this way their bodies adapt slowly to what would otherwise be unachievable levels of performance. By means of a vertical process, a *kriyaban* will discover a stout inner transformation, both in his psyche and in his ability to enter deep introspective states.

My opinion is that a student, incapable of completing at least one of the main vertical processes, will hardly proceed on this path. Beginning this process is an act of courage, a very mature act of trust in *Kriya* and in oneself.

Let us now clarify another point. The abundance of the variations of the *Kriya* techniques may finally be understood and looked at as providential.

Let us consider a matter of fact: in the middle of the execution of a vertical routine, one may get stuck. One may face a resistance which becomes more and more lacerating. One's inner knots are not like the ordinary rope-knots. They have a kind of mutual dependence. They are involved, one in the other. The one is not outside the other, nor does a full opening of one happen before one witnesses the opening of the other.

A knot is like a gallstone, embedded in an organ, that a doctor must remove with due care not to destroy the organ or kill the patient. Inner psychological knots cannot be blasted in one day.

Now, if a *kriyaban* has the opportunity of experimenting with different variations of the same procedure, he may find an approach which matches the peculiar stage of his evolution and does not create any resistance at all.

Having at one's disposal a couple of variations - during a vertical process or while enjoying the traditional horizontal routine - may be decisive: from it can depend success or failure.

One version of the technique creates and insurmountable obstacle, another supplies the *Kriya* practice with new lymph. What seemed to be mortally boring and hurting also, becomes living: a door to deeper experiences. Unfortunately, there is a considerable resistance in applying this principle: many *kriyabans* consider a technique in which they were initiated as ideally sealed around the immutability of its rules.

The three basic vertical procedures

[1] Vertical process of Navi Kriya

After a short practice of *Maha Mudra*, *Talabya Kriya* and *Pranayama*, a *kriyaban* practices twice the standard quantity of *Navi Kriya* (one of the two basic variations), which means 8 units. After some days a *kriyaban* is ready to practice 12 units. After a week's rest – it is useful to absorb the practice's effects - he can practice $4 \times 4 = 16$ units and so on up to $4 \times 20 = 80$ units.

By experience, the advanced variation of *Navi Kriya*, explained in the previous chapter (see Chapter II/3 *Navi Kriya* [Variation A]) is preferred.

In this case, remembering that one unit consists in 36 descents of energy, preceded and followed by chanting *Om* in the *Chakras*, the process begins with 36×2 descents.

The next steps are: 36×3 , 36×4 , ..., 36×19 , 36×20 .

As the process becomes gradually more intimate, the head movements are just hinted. This variation is preferred because it catches the attention in a way which is impossible to achieve with the previous variations.

The long sessions of practice are not necessarily continuous; on the contrary, it is fine to divide them in two or three parts by introducing intermission. One can end each part with mental *Pranayama* or simply rest in *Savasana*. However, the total number of repetitions prearranged for that day must be completed before going to sleep at night: this is vital to open the navel knot.

It is up to a *kriyaban's* intelligence making the practicing days as pleasant as possible. It is good to wake up early in the morning to do half the work and take a little rest right after the practice; lunch can be followed by a short walk in the open air, while the last part of the practice should be completed in the afternoon. In the evening, when one can afford a walk at full ease, a powerful calmness will fill the sphere of his thoughts. That is the moment in which the benediction of a blissful silence comes.

The psychological effect that is typical of this practice, is that of "unification". It is just as if all the different aspects of one's personality unite and consolidate into something new and, at the same time, something very ancient. By the end of this process, one has the feeling that entire eons have passed by!

This routine has helped many *kriyabans* to overcome the most serious of their internal obstacles. Although having applied with great concentration the best *Kriya* techniques, they had reached a standstill state where all progress seemed impossible and yearlong efforts seemed to have succeed only in making their Ego more cunning.

By choosing the advanced variation, the gradual shifting of energy along the circumference of the head has an unparalleled effect in distributing the calm *Prana* equally in the upper part of the head. The students of *yoga* who bother to find which is the best *Mantra* to be mentally verbalized in the *Sahasrara Chakra* - in order to stimulate or awaken it - would remain speechless if they experimented the strength of this technique.

Lastly, after many repetitions of this process, a new phenomenon may be observed: at a certain moment the exhalation seems to become internal. In the very moment in which the order to exhale has been imparted by the mind, one has the impression that the air finds an insurmountable obstacle to flow through the nose, as if the lungs could not move. Some instants later the awareness of something subtle descending into one's body accompanies a very pleasurable exhalation. It is like a internal all-pervading pressure which brings about a peculiar feeling of well-being, harmony and freedom. One has the impression that one could remain there for good. It is clear that the air moves out of the nose, yet one who is practicing would swear that this does not happen. This may be considered the first timid apparition of the *Pranayama with internal breath* which will be the subject of Chapter III/4.

[2] Vertical of Pranayama – Omkar Pranayama

The best thing is to practice the vertical process of *Pranayama* after that of the *Navi Kriya*: the importance of the two processes is beyond words!

36x1, 36x2,....36x20 *Pranayamas* is a very good plan; 24x1, 24x2,.....24x24 is lighter but good anyway.

Since this process is of primary importance, it is worth discussing it in more detail. First of all: when more than a hundred breaths are practiced, it is wise to make use of the twelve letter *Mantra*, which means to shift to *Omkar Pranayama*.

During each stage of the process, up to the completion of the prescribed number, it is important to keep a slender thread of breath. In other words, the process should never become purely mental.

From a certain point onwards one should utilize the *Shambhavi Mudra*.

Up to now, a *kriyaban's* inner gaze was directed either on the *Kutastha* or on the *Ajna Chakra*. When intuition guides him to do that, he should raise the eyebrows. With the eyelids closed or half-closed, the eyes look up to the roof with no movement of the head. In the beginning, a light tension is perceived in the eyeballs' muscles, but the position is maintained rather easily once you get over that tension. He will have the impression that all his being is raised to the *Fontanelle* – or is floating in the sky above the body.

If all the recommendations are followed, the consciousness will find itself floating in a state of infinite softness, in a great and soothing spiritual light.

By proceeding in this manner, a *kriyaban*, sooner or later, has the impression of crossing a mental state which resembles a loss of awareness and emerge in a limpid perfect awareness; it is as when by air plane we cross the clouds and suddenly emerge into the clear sky and perceive the light.

[3] Experiences of increasing the Thokar

Let us dwell upon a distinctive moments in one's *Sadhana*: the one which is marked by the use of *Thokar*.

We refer to any of the aforementioned variations. Lahiri Mahasaya wrote in his diaries that when the cardiac plexus is struck - by means of the *Thokar* technique - the *Prana* that is linked to the breathing is «directed inward; a spontaneous state of profound absorption catches the practitioner, bringing him or her into a condition of stability and quiet for a prolonged period of time. *Thokar* opens the doors of the inner temple».

He wrote that a *kriyaban* will be touched deeply and will learn to see what others cannot or do not actually want to see.

The heart knot tends to hamper the whole *Kriya* process nourishing the root cause of our miseries. It is like a seal protecting «our right to pain and suffering» (an expression dear to Mére, the faithful disciple and successor of Sri Aurobindo). It is the main cause for people's tendency to be influenced by others, churches and by organizations in general, to accept as truth only what is displayed within the frame of magnificence.

We acknowledge the fact that from the heart a keen desire to help suffering humanity originates, but also it comes man's destructive tendency to be influenced and deviated by other people originates.

Like a hammer, the *Thokar* clarifies some complex psychological mechanisms which normally lead one to taking wrong decisions and to a daily violence towards one's necessities. It destroys the grey walls of the prison one has built around oneself.

Life is hard; when the moral fibre of a man is wounded, this fundamental contact is not possible via the normal means of self-analysis. The healing does not occur through intelligence and comprehension but through a limitless burning intoxication which can be obtained only through the *Thokar*. The impact of *Thokar* performed with passion can disentangle one from oneself and from one's present life circumstances, and offer a higher way to a new life.

Every session of *Thokar* amounts to digging a stream of inspiration out of the arid soil of one's acquired indifference, where the waters of primitive aspiration can flow once again.

The experience of the breathless state

After some months of practice of *Thokar*, the breathless state waits for its appropriate moment to spill an unparalleled experience of freedom into one's being. Since I'm writing from experience, not from books, I cannot but underly how it is important to prepare that moment by the practice of *Japa*. As I have tried to point out (see chapter I/3), the ceaseless repetition of a *Mantra* during the day, is the best support for that achievement. *Japa* wins the persistent background noise constituted by useless thoughts, which elaborate, in endless variations, our own fancies and fears: a great sense of harmony and peace, surrounding like a shell the body, settles.

When it is practiced with an increasing aspiration, one has the sensation of having calmed down the inner movements of the body, even at a molecular level. Of course this is only a sensation, however when one has it, the blossoming of the breathless state is very near.

In the first phase of a *Kriya* routine, during each *Pranayama* exhalation, it is convenient to perceive the irradiation of each *Chakra* that shrouds the body's internal organs. After that, a minimal dose of *Omkar Pranayama* followed by the favourite form of *Thokar* and by at least six *Omkar Pranayama* breaths (to calm the whole system) prepares the closing part of a *Kriya* routine.

Mental *Pranayama* comes after all other techniques: the mind melts in each *Chakra* and blends with the spiritual light, then, in a serene depth, like a blue sky, the breathless state blooms.

It is an unbelievable state - compared to it, the common way of living is suffocation. Through that achievement the mystical pursuit will go ahead unhampered. If one experiences it different times, one is going to achieve an unsurpassed freedom from any psychological apparently unavoidable law. He will discern the emotional and egoistic drive that moves all human actions but will become definitively free from them. This requirement embodies the characteristics of the authentic "religious" life.

Taking up again the vertical processes to complete the work on the knot of the heart and open that of the Muladhara

[4] The first impact with any form of the Fourth Kriya

Let us consider those months characterized by the employment of one of those procedures operating in the high centers of the brain – usually denoted as *Fourth Kriya*.

This procedure leaves its mark from any point of view. A *kriyaban* discovers that even with lesser doses than those prescribed one can obtain astonishing results. The strong concentration applied on the higher centers in the brain

creates a great psychological order extending to all the aspects of life, from any point of view. This process touches those regions of one's psyche where one never focuses one's awareness; a *kriyaban* develops the ability to see one's life as it really is and realizes the reason for many wrong decisions.

The ego is not just a function that needs be made transparent and destroyed; rather, it is the ego that sets up a complicated mental structure based on incorrect ways of reacting to certain stimuli. It can be destroyed with the work in the higher centers. As days go by, the ego's more subtle tricks suddenly become noticeable.

Leaving aside the psychological effects and concentrating upon the subtle, esoteric ones, this technique's most delicate aspect - the ability to distinguish in the mirror of the *Kutastha* the *Chakras*' different rhythms - enriches the *Omkar* experience in a way that is impossible to grasp intellectually. If, up to now, a sort of "veil" prevented contemplation of the Spiritual Eye, via the use of these techniques this obstacle will suddenly disappear.

A stable transformation is perceived while performing the daily practice of *Pranayama*. This technique becomes more beautiful: one seems to have a laser in the *Kutastha*. *Pranayama* happens without any effort; the stimulus to breathe in is naturally accompanied by the sensation of energy climbing up. *Kutastha* is the unique motor of this movement of energy, which becomes stronger and stronger; strong experiences take place in the spine.

[5] 20736 Omkar Pranayama

Akin to the vertical procedure is the plan of completing, regardless of time, a certain amount of repetitions of a particular technique. Usually the set number is a multiple of 12, such as 1728 or 20736: the way of distributing this number during consecutive days is a personal choice which may vary in the course of time. The most important among all these potential projects is that of completing 20736 *Omkar Pranayama*. (In 144 days, by practicing 144 *Omkar Pranayama* each day, this task can be accomplished.)

Obviously, each session of practice may begin with some preliminary technique -*Talabya Kriya*, *Maha Mudra* and *Om Japa*. Although this is not a vertical process such as the aforementioned processes, its effects are tremendous!

During daily life, he who has a devotional attitude will experience a dramatic increase of his heart's love, as if he was basking in an ocean of tenderness and bliss. Sometimes a burst of bliss in his heart will make him cry of divine transport; he will have the impression of being divided into a thousand parts and each of them will be on the verge of exploding from an abundance of joy and love. The memory of those experiences may save one when life's events seem to conspire to make one forget his spiritual involvement.

There are many pitfalls where a *kriyaban* may get stuck. What will have the power to take him back to his *Kriya* but the memory of *Omkar*'s embrace of love and beauty?

There is a resistance in recognizing that the continuous tuning with *Om*, since its first emergence during *Pranayama* up to the circumstances in which one is with other people, is the surest way to reach in short time the *Samadhi* state. Many frantically seek impossible surrogates for it. When the *Omkar* tuning is gained inside the *Kriya* routine, the best thing to do is to find it again during the day: in other words, the effort of tuning with *Om* has to be recalled during every aspect of life. During the day the effects upon one's mood are striking: any difficulty seems to be resolved easily and a heavenly harmony reigns undisputedly. Thinking incorrectly that in order to enjoy more freely the pleasures of living it is normal to chop off this tuning, some lose that Reality for a very, very long time, as if they had been transported into another continent.

[6] Vertical of Thokar as it is taught by the [C] school

While the basic form of *Thokar* and the forms taught by the [A] and [B] schools are limited in the number of its repetitions by the limit of 200, the classic form of the vertical process is applied to *Thokar* as it is taught by the [C] school. One practices (strictly no more than one day a week) the following doses: 36x1, 36x2, 36x3,..... 36x35, 36x36. At least 9 months are required to complete it. After hearing this simple formula from the lips of his teacher, a *kriyaban* is left alone to be guided by his intuition in order to face this colossal venture.³⁶

[7] Last vertical process for those who have retired

This process is reserved to those who are no longer working. This is by far the most challenging of all the vertical processes. On the first day, the micro-movement is perceived 36 times in each of the 12 centers. There is only one round to perform: a total of 36x12 perceptions of the micro movement.

After some days one perceives 36x2 = 72 times (72 times in the first Chakra, 72 in the second...and so on). After some days one perceives 36x3, then 36x4... At a certain point, an entire day is not sufficient to complete the round. That is why the work-load must be divided into two days.³⁷

³⁶ A reference to my experience – which gives me the opportunity to insert further considerations – is found in chapter III/1

³⁷ On the morning of the second day, the technique is resumed exactly where it had been interrupted the previous night.

As per usual, between one stage and the next, some weeks go by. When proceeding further, a single stage may require three days, then four, and so on, until the final 36x36 - which might require a week or longer to be completed! During each stage, it is wise to keep silent, avoiding any opportunity for conversation. However, the use of common sense should always prevail; if addressed, a polite reply is always imperative.

THIRD PART: FURTHER SEARCH IN KRIYA

CHAPTER III/1... SPLENDID YEARS WITHOUT ANY GURU

The years that followed the break-up with my second teacher were completely different from the previously described ones. It was a quiet moment in which I experimented the serenity that comes by devoting all one's efforts to one single purpose: *Kriya* - practicing intensively and writing about it. Having sent to hell that teacher, an enervating situation was over. I didn't have to go here and there to organize seminars for that rascal. I was relieved of any constraint of wearing a mask of hypocrisy replying to those who asked me information about him and, above all, I felt free inside.

I purchased a computer and, as a voluntary prisoner, I reduced to the least my social life and began the work of writing my book. The time employed for reaching this last version of it has been indeed too long. My friends, while noticing the various editions of the book, took fool of me and said that I'll never put the last word to the enterprise.

When I began writing down the techniques, I tried to extract from my huge heaps of notes, collected during years with different teachers, the essential. There was the feeling as of working on a difficult puzzle, without having a preview of what was to be obtained in the end.

A fundamental criterion to judge a technique as essential was that it should appear as the simplest possible logic translation of Lahiri Mahasaya's words into practice.

When it proved its effectiveness in the practical application – and this beyond any doubt – the feeling of having in the hands something valid was overt.

Thus, I discarded some redundant and ineffective variations, retaining the core of each technique, deprived of any embellishment.

I didn't know if, in the final picture, four, six or more levels of *Kriya* had to be expected. In fact, I was not entirely sure to have understood what these levels were. In case that just four stages should emerge as manifestly fundamental, I didn't know if these had to be put in a one-to-one correspondence with the process of unfastening the internal knots (tongue, navel, heart, coccyx).

In the first draft, the description of the *Higher Kriyas* was given as a chain of techniques (eleven), each one ideally preparing the next one. After second thoughts, I decided to describe all the techniques in the scheme of four *Kriyas* (avoiding thus the use of imaginative names as fifth, sixth *Kriya*) and look at any other valid *Kriya* technique as pertaining to one of the four levels.

The four *Kriyas* went to make up an harmonious whole. In that conception, the first level rotated around the technique of *Pranayama*, which calms the breath and brings the energy in the spine, the second centered this energy in

the heart while *Kutastha* began revealing. With the help of the third level, the *kriyaban* became able to enter the *Kutastha*. The fourth embodied the full and stable achievement of the third stable. (Subsequently I mulled over this definition and arrived - as I will show in the final chapter – at a slightly different scheme.)

A treat to my peacefulness was the continuously renewing thought that I was violating a sacred rule: secrecy. This thought appeared, sometimes, as a painful hold in the breast and a general sense of uneasiness and unreality. Of all the reasoning which I followed at that time, one helped me, almost instantly, to regain a cheerful mood: *Kriya* is a wonderful, perfectly integrated collection of introspective tools taken from different traditions. Since the fundamental principles upon which it is based are universal, no one can advance pretensions of exclusive ownership.

This firm belief ensued from the study of some *Sufi* material, Christian mystical path, Internal Alchemy and, of course, all the existing *Kriya* books. Reading about the life of saints and their religious practices, it was as living in another dimension, deprived of paranoias, where not only secretiveness was not in demand, but it had no sense.

It was easy to recognize in their practices the nucleus, the working process of *Kriya Yoga*. Each practice was presented not as a particular technique with redundant name, followed by a list of extraordinary effects, but as an account by self learned individuals who observed simple, essential mechanisms happening in their body. Except in rare cases, in this description there were no division in different stages of practice, although it was easy to identify them.

By thinking of Lahiri Mahasaya in the same context, he appeared not as one who had invented a new system and required secrecy in order to receive profit from his invention, but as one who did all the possible to approach straightforward his disciples to the wonderful universal mystical discipline and expected only sincere commitment from them.³⁸

Secretiveness failed also because those disciples, once having had an explanation and an initial push, had to found on their intuition to continue on the spiritual path: thus the different procedures gradually received small modifications and became a personal thing.

In order to find secrecy plausible, I had to figure an esoteric, magic ambient.

³⁸ We can accept the story of Babaji: at the beginning of his adventure of *Kriya* there was the initiation to the *Pranayama* and no other things. Once that he returned to Benares, he began practicing more and more it in an intense way and, observing the effects that it internally produced, he annotated his progress on the diaries. Subsequently, especially when the problem of the sharing was set, Lahiri has experimented other techniques and therefore he synthesized all that could be found useful.

Thokar is the same process the *Sufis* call "*Dhikr*". Lahiri Mahasaya gave the Islamic *Mantra Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh* to his Muslim disciples. We have not the exact details of the procedure but it seems reasonable that the Prayer was lifted (with or without the help of the breath) from under the navel up to the brain; after reaching the brain, it moved from the brain to the right shoulder, then to the left shoulder and then it hit the heart. A modern *Sufi* confraternity practices in the following way: "*La*" is placed in the head, "*ilaha*" (with head bending to the right) in the right upper part of the chest, "*illaal*" (with head bending to the left) in the left upper part of the chest, and "*lah*" (with head bending down) in the heart; then again "*La*" in the head, while raising it....

Any explanation of *Dhikr* in the *Sufi* literature is most inspiring. Instruction is given of avoiding distraction, in such a way that the heart is occupied with neither "family or money". One begins the practice by uttering the *Mantra* aloud – this is the *Dhikr* of the tongue. One continues until a great absorption makes it impossible to go on in this way. «The rust upon the heart is burnt, the darkness turns into day and the candle of the mind is put out by the sun of the divine light.»

The heart is continually applied to the *Dhikr*. One perseveres assiduously, until the syllables are effaced from the heart and only the meaning of the words remains present: a touch of divine recollection drives the mind crazy – the most intoxicating of the joys explodes.

Very interesting is the literary material relating to the *Hesychasm*, a Christian orthodox movement considering the inner peace to be a necessity for every human being; its main spiritual tool is the "uninterrupted, continuous Prayer".

The essence of this movement can be found in the book *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, translated from Russian by R. M. French [S.P.C.K., London; there are other good translations].

The story is that of a pilgrim, coming back from the Holy Sepulcher, who stopped at Mount Athos and told about his lifelong search for the teaching how «to pray continually» - the way Saint Paul had recommended - to a monk. He was resolute about covering an infinite distance across the steppes, if he had to, in order to find a spiritual guide that would reveal him the secret of praying that way. One day, his ardor was awarded; he found a spiritual teacher who accepted him as a disciple and gradually clarified to him every detail of the practice of the "continuous Prayer". Very interesting is the fact that the *hesychastic* practice involves a breathing exercise with a tongue position, akin to *Kechari Mudra*.

After this initial step, one is encouraged to be tenacious in praying with the focus of concentration on the navel: «it is possible to find in ourselves a joyless and lightless obscurity but, persisting, a limitless happiness will be reached». Once one gets over the obstacle of the navel, a whole path unfolds, leading to the heart. Unforgettable is the description of the Prayer entering the heart; the effects are strikingly similar to those of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Thokar*! The hitting of the heart *Chakra* is obtained blending the perception of the throbs of the heart with the syllables of the prayer.

The consciousness slips into the sacred spot of the heart and there it contemplates the "Uncreated Light", which is considered the highest of the mystical achievements.

There are other descriptions of mystics who "thought" their Prayer in the body. I have a lot of reasons to believe that this practice is still being used today. Their prayers were very short, to the point that they would reduce it to a single syllable. The majority of them preferred the use of a vowel, making it vibrate mostly in their feet; some others would begin from their feet and gradually bring their conscience up along their entire body.

The small collection of written material they left is published almost exclusively by some specialized publishers in the esoteric field; they can be found rummaging among occultism and magic texts. Kerning, Kolb, Lasario, Weinfurter, Peryt Shou, Spiesberger... these are just few of the names I can remember. These mystics - even though they were born within Christianity and felt completely in sync with its doctrines - have been confined in a corner as if they were exponents of the esoteric thought, or magicians whose aspirations were for the development of secret powers. The reader who has the patience to research this written material, skimming through pages and pages full of trivial theories and practices whose only goal is to confuse and mislead him; will eventually find paragraphs of inimitable charm. The essence of their teachings is that any sound's vibration, if repeated with an unfaltering concentration in the body, can reach its atoms; so that the soul will find a direct link with the Divine Intelligence - « the whole body will be re-activated with new life and be reborn».

I came upon an important book: *Puran Purush* (Yogiraj Publication. Calcutta) based on Lahiri Mahasaya's diaries. It came out in Bengali, thanks to one of Lahiri Mahasaya's nephews, Satya Charan Lahiri (1902-1978), who had material access to those diaries. Helped by one of his disciples, a writer, he decided to make a selection of the main thoughts which might have been useful to those who practiced *Kriya*.

Even though this book did not seem to respect a logical order in the topics and contained an endless mixture of repetitions and rhetorical sentences, it was a source of great inspiration. I was lucky to find in this book Lahiri Mahasaya's thoughts expressed in a very solid form.

The characteristic trait of the few words which are reasonably attributed to him was the great importance given to *Pranayama* first, and to *Thokar* secondly. It strikes his skill in synthesizing concepts whenever he affirms that the whole course of *Kriya* is a great adventure beginning with the *dynamic Prana* and ending with the *static Prana*.

I felt a thrill of delight by meeting sentences which had light in themselves: «*Kutastha* is God, he is the supreme *Brahma*» or «A *yogi* who has cut the

three knots becomes *Trivangamurari* himself. He becomes *Krishna*».

During summer I used to bring it along with me to the countryside; many times, after reading a part of it, I would raise my eyes to the distant mountaintops and repeat inside of me «I finally have it... » as in a long-lasting state of trance. I looked at the photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya on the front cover; who knows what a state of bliss he was in while being photographed! I saw some horizontal lines on his forehead, his eyebrows raised like in the *Shambhavi Mudra*, where awareness is set upon the head; his chin seemed to maintain the *Kechari Mudra* position. During those days, his figure, with that blissful smile, was a sun in my heart; he was the symbol of the level of perfection, knowledge and love that I was trying to grasp.

Apart from this book and the letters to his disciples, the other *Kriya* literature is 99% pure rhetoric; publicity on the argument, something of messy and confused picked to instil the desire to practise *Kriya* after having received it from a particular source.

I consulted also the comments to the sacred writings attributed to Lahiri. It almost seems to me impossible that they came really from him: I don't find the same practical wisdom and tremendous realization expresses in the diaries. I find rather a mind with an almost maniacal tendency to interpret each thing on the light of *Kriya*, as if centuries before, the authors of those spiritual works knew exactly one by one all the techniques of *Kriya*.

Such comments are years light distant from what we commonly understand for exegetical comment. To my discern it is possible to hypothesize that, reading the verses of the analyzed text, Lahiri was transported from the force of his insight and what he said on that occasion was taken as a specific comment to that text.

Furthermore, it is possible that, in order to publish those meager notes his disciples completed them with their own philosophy without caring of Lahiri's thought.

I read also some material about Kabir [1398 Benares - 1448/1494 Maghar]. Illiterate weaver, Muslim of origin, he was a great mystic, open to the vedantic and yogic influence, an extraordinary singer of the Divine, conceived beyond name and form. The poems and sentences ascribed to him are expressed in a particularly effective language that remains permanently emblazoned in the reader's memory.

In the last century, Rabindranath Tagore, the great mystic poet of Calcutta, rediscovered the reliability of his teachings, the power of his poetry and made a beautiful translation of his songs into English (New York, The Macmillan Company). Kabir was instructed to conceive Islam and Hinduism as two roads converging toward a unique goal: he was always convinced of the

possibility to overcome the barriers that separate these two great religions. He did not seem to appreciate the holy writings, the religious rituals and dogmas. That God has to be recognized inside of one's own soul - like a fire fed by continuous care, burning all the resistances, dogmas and ignorance down - this beautifully appears in Kabir's saying: «One day my mind flew as a bird in the sky, and it entered the heavens. When I arrived, I saw that there was no God, since He resided in the Saints!» Hinduism gave Kabir the concept of reincarnation and the law of *Karma*; Islam gave him the absolute monotheism - the strength to fight all the forms of idolatry and the caste system. I found the full meaning of the yogic practice in him; he says that there is a garden full of flowers in our body, the *Chakras*, and an endless beauty can be contemplated if the awareness is established into the "thousand-petal Lotus". Regarding his concept of *Shabda*, which can be translated as "Word" [the word of the Master], we can relate this to the *Omkar* teaching - the *Om* vibration. According to him this *Shabda-Om* dispels all doubts and difficulties, but it is vital to keep it constantly in our consciousness as a living presence. *Om*, the divine call present in each man's body, born in the silence of a sweet *Kriya*, is the compass needle. By following it, *Kutastha* is revealed to us.

I think that studying Kabir's thought may help more than other subjects of research, to understand Lahiri Mahasaya's personality; thus, the core of *Kriya* may be reached as fast as an arrow. In Kabir's sobriety and simplicity we can perceive, as a reflex, the full radiance of Lahiri Mahasaya's light, nowadays veiled by the too-complicated literature related to him. It came spontaneous the idea of overlapping the teachings of them both, helping me to conceive a fascinating idea about *Kriya*. I conceived it as a monotheistic religion where *Om* had substituted the "single God"; all the various names given to Divinity (also used by Lahiri Mahasaya in his diaries) became entirely useless words, since it was clear that the ultimate reality was *Omkar*!

Now, I realize that a lot of people will turn up their nose at hearing the word "religion". Many people start the *Kriya* path from a wrong attitude, that pseudo-scientific attitude according to which, by performing certain techniques, a person automatically obtains certain results. I know that, unfortunately, many teachers have trumpeted this incomplete and diverting truth, while some attract people to *Kriya* by promising results that gratify the ego. These teachers would be more honest if they only stressed the mystic nature of *Kriya*! It is now to any researcher to free himself from this whole heritage, because if he thinks that Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* is a path of "psychological growth", seeking results in the psychological field only, then, sooner or later, his original mainspring will exhaust.

Kriya cannot become a substitute for psychotherapy, and even if it creates an inimitable internal cleaning, it will not clear up the problems which are to be solved through wise behavior in the practical matters of life.

Moreover, each *kriyaban* needs a path that has a "heart."

Of course, the practice of *Kriya* should be started without expecting a gain; rather, one should relax by recreating the memory and the atmosphere of the most beautiful experiences one has ever had in one's life. Possessing the intelligence to do this, one can pick into the arid ground and find a fresh source of power: the spiritual instinct's driving power, the strongest power man has.

The vertical routines

I practiced all the techniques in high quantities. I could dedicate a more constant attention to what, years before, had been embarked on in a superficial manner. I must admit that, in the past, the towing impulse which led me to finish up the prescribed number of repetitions of each *Higher Kriya* as soon as possible was also the anxiety to obtain the next initiation from my teacher. The ardent desire of "squeezing" everything he could teach me was because of my fear not to be able to contact him in the future for any reason whatsoever.

The vertical processes revealed their great heuristic value. In the light of this practice, the essential core of each technique, deprived of any embellishment, appeared as something inevitable, something that could not be but that way. If a certain variation of a *Kriya* technique - which I was taught in the past - was redundant or ineffective, it would fall down by itself. To write and rewrite the book was in itself a process of internal cleaning. I clearly perceived this fact every time I abandoned certain points of view and throw away parts of the book.

This was the end of a set of techniques which had been given to me as Dhyana Kriya: their main tool was the power of visualization, brought to the extreme limit. Eminent writers remark that such practices do not have any right of citizenship in Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*; they have no similarities within any mystic tradition but have a strong, rather, perfect, connection with the esoteric or magic traditions. They have nothing to do with the Omkar perception or with the ability to reach the breathless state. I experienced dramatically their uselessness and danger: it was a relief to polish up my *Kriya* path and my life forever from such a trash. Here I summarize what I remember of that period.

Kechari Mudra

During the first days, just immediately after I learned how to insert the tongue in the nasal pharynx hollow, a very uncomfortable sensation was felt in the pharynx accompanied by an increase in salivation resulting in frequent swallowing. The real problem was a feeling of "dizziness": the mental faculties felt fogged up but, after two weeks, everything returned to normal.

When *Kechari Mudra* in its correct form (with the tongue behind the soft palate) was practiced for a many hours, an unusual happiness would be felt during the next day, even without doing any *Kriya* practice. Inspired by Lahiri Mahasaya's advice that the tongue can also be pushed further up so that its tip touches a higher center in the upper part of the pharynx, I extended the tongue to its limit. As a result, I experienced a great attraction toward the *Kutastha*, along with the sensation of having reached, with the tip of the tongue, a higher position. As any anatomy book reveals, the tongue, being totally contained in the nasal pharynx, cannot reach any upper part of it: Lahiri Mahasaya's sentence has to be read in a symbolical sense and should be applied to the lifting of the energetic level.

Kechari is a really valuable technique: at times I think that it exhaust a complete, independent spiritual path. I have no doubts that by spending hours in trying to perceive the nectar, and at the same time maintaining the conscience in *Kutastha*, the state of *Samadhi* can be induced.

Since our birth, our energy kept flowing outward making us unable to get in touch with our inner supply of energy. The main purpose of *Kechari Mudra* is to restore this ability: to perceive the nectar, means the contact is restored. In fact we do not realize the amount of energy we squander when we indulge in imaginary thought conversations or scenarios. This "inner activity" is like a battle between our timid and uncertain will and the crowd of external conditionings: a pernicious way of depleting our vitality.

Kechari Mudra can turn this tendency into its opposite. We may develop the habit of considering our personal experiences, activities and projects through the mirror of intuition, understand their deep motivations and gain deeper and deeper freedom from all spurious stimulus.

Vertical process of Navi Kriya

The first effects of my practice reminded me Ahab's behavior in Melville's *Moby Dick*: «The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!» Notable was the gotten mental clarity - probably this was due to a strong action on the third *Chakra* which governs the thinking process – but the effect of unification of different aspects of my personality was striking. A total order, giving birth to a coherent action, settled.

The only problem I met, was that sometimes the inner screen of my awareness was displaying a lot of images —of course, they were dreamlike visions. And this is the reason why sometimes I was lead to practice with half-opened eyes. This disturbance - as I perceived it then, while now I consider it a physiological process - found no cure. No help came from practicing *Maha Mudra* several times; changing the position of the legs, as well as interrupting for a short pause the practice, it was all useless. In the already quoted book *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the protagonist describes how the cloud of his thoughts shrouded him any time he practiced his method of Prayer; he experienced «a great heaviness, a lethargy, a boredom and an invincible sleepiness». This is a universal phenomenon: a *kriyaban* should become able to remain fully aware, while remaining in that diffuse and irresistible stillness that seems to come before one's sleep.

When I fully accepted that condition and ceased fighting them in an impossible attempt to stop them, a charming state manifested: instead of originating an incessant chain of thoughts, those images transfigured into an endless beauty, they disappeared as if their real substance was only bliss. I realized that an inner thread bound all my past actions; it was clear that, quest after quest, an inflexible intention was always guiding me towards the mystic realization. Those images invited me to cast a glance towards the misty sources from which my current trend of life originated. My heart was caught by the perception that something pure, enchantingly pure— which had been part of my past— was again emerging in my life.

Vertical process of Pranayama

As for the *Pranayama*, reaching gradually 720 repetitions was not a straining task. Many times I had the opportunity to practice in the countryside and the experience was exceptional. About at the half of the path (36x10) I had, at night, in the first phase of the sleep, a very intense experience of raising of the energy in the spine accompanied by the vision of three beautiful mountains. The central one, the highest, was black; its form reminded the point of an arrow made by obsidian: in the vision of this form, I was enraptured in ecstasy. My heart exulted, I was madly enamoured of that abstract thing; when the experience ended I was crying with joy. No more supine, I leaned the back to a support. I remained as calm as possible to feel that particular strength and pressure that increased enormously and tighten the whole region of the chest and crushed me with its hold of beatitude. The image of the mountain was strong, tremendously strongly before me. There was nothing more beautiful, it made me vibrate of love.

I believe, one evening, I touched that state to which Krishnamurti alludes so many times in his best books, among which, *The only revolution*.

In a beautiful scenery, next to the completion of the required number of *Pranayama*, I was aware of the fresh air, I felt it winding around my body as a pleasant caress on the skin. The birds sang amid the near trees. I decided to practice with open eyes; a beautiful mountain occupied the left part of the horizon, white clouds to heaps filled to the sky... and the silence came, a perfect silence that the song of the birds didn't upset and this silence was inside me, it was my mind... and the *Kriya* was not a work, an effort... it could continue for eternity... and it was beautiful, pleasant, natural. I didn't understand how, once, even a tenth of this *Kriya* would have given me nervousness. I didn't understand the miracle of this *Kriya*... because I was this *Kriya* and this *Kriya* was the caress of the air around me... and was the song of the birds, and was the mountain!

Beautiful days indeed! When I recall that kind of practicing *Pranayama*, which would assume the consistency of the summer sky, I remind Sri Aurobindo's words: «Enough, enough I've had of the mind and all its phoney stars, let's turn on the suns that are never off!»

Different forms of Thokar

The period in which I plunged headlong into this practice was really a magic one. What exalted days! I would lie if I do not affirm that I have an endless nostalgia of them! I believe I had really overworked by using too much this incomparable tool.

I didn't practice only the described variations but others too (that I have not described in order to avoid confusion) and, with all sincerity, I must say they are equivalent. The nucleus of the practice is the stroke, not so much a physical but an internal one, directed towards the heart *Chakra* – this action is perceived as an intensification of energy in the that region.

This technique marked one of the most beautiful moments in my life. I felt a really appeasing presence in my heart and moved around as if my heart bore a brazier within.

I perceived that the center of my personality was not in the brain, but in my heart; a different way of seeing life manifested. I felt the assurance of a definitive belonging to the heavenly dimension of the Beyond. Intoxicated by this new condition, comparing it with that of the mystics, I wondered if it was possible for me to go on playing my worldly role without being paralysed by such a bliss!

As the months went by, the effects were sometimes more difficult to bear. Noticing how many illusions religions and cults propagated, my participation in other people's sorrow grew. I felt sorry for all those people who - in the abyss of a tragedy - keep on imploring their God, not with a true genuine religious spirit but with a beseeching attitude in order to avoid even worse

calamities. At times, the sentiment of this devastating reality was experienced as a painful grip tearing my chest apart.

Other times, it came such a high intensity of love that the same experience turned into an experience of "blissful" pain.

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This is one of those enterprises that while one embarks on it, although perceiving enormously its good effects, one feels so unworthy and so incapable of practicing it that thinks whether to bring it ahead anyhow, conclude it in a way to set one's conscience at rest, and take it back again, seriously, in the future.

Allow me to say, hoping not to be misunderstood, that this process (which could not be called properly a vertical routine) makes a person "old", in wisdom and temperament, of about twenty years.

Of course it does not remove the vigor of the physic, but that of the superficial emotions, with all the troubles that proceed from them - in the same way as the *Thokar* technique does.

The tendency to have one's desires satisfied immediately and the excitement to decide at once about one's projects, are appeased; one learns to enjoy life, because one learns to live and to move in the *Omkar* flow - even if its vibration is not perceived continually.

From a technical point of view, I developed a way of practicing, let me say at "helix". All began while I internalized the round of the head by feeling it winding the *Medulla*. When each exhalation began and I mentally chanted *Teeeee*, since some instants I was already in the *Medulla* and used the starting instants of my exhalation to tighten the "helix". Thus I intensified the concentration in such a center in a way unknown before. All this was extended in a natural way to the underlying *Chakras* – during the exhalation it was easier - and particularly to the *Muladhar*. In other words, the path of descent was no more linear but similar to a helix that surrounded and caressed each *Chakra*. I must have read from some part that, in the *Pranayama*, the breath (or the energy) crosses the *Chakras* as a thread crosses some pearls. Well this image, very nice, was very different from what it happened: the thread didn't pierce the pearls, it unwound and enveloped them.

Second Kriya as taught by the school [C]

One of my teachers, introduced this technique saying that the inner *Trivangamurari* flux passes through the heart *Chakra* cleaning a lot of dirt; that is the reason of its peculiar effect of cutting oneself off from reality.

During the months of practice, divergent moods might alternate and hinder the process; intuition will advise on how to maintain overall control.

The action of this technique decreases indeed the hectic condition caused by our superficial emotions - fed by certain energies springing from the lower *Chakras* - substituting them with the vibration, with the touch of *Omkar*. This leads to a total modification of the perspectives through which we see life.

As for my experience, after the first weeks of *Amantrak*, when I was practicing about fifty rounds, I felt I was about to explode! This would happen anytime the energy, going down from the spinal column's left side, reached *Muladhar*. Waking up in the morning, I would linger for a short while in the aura of very involving dreams, as if I had lived a deeply intriguing and captivating adventure.

Later I found myself in a very strange mood: during the day I lacked enthusiasm; in no place would I feel at ease and no activity would produce any satisfaction. In the past, whenever wandering about the countryside, I was used to take in the beauty that seemed to spread from everything surrounding me; now there was nothing, I was alien to everything.

For a whole month I spent much of my time at home, as if in a state of convalescence. Eventually, playing on my will power, I was able to finish the prescribed doses of this technique.

I started the *Samantrak* technique³⁹ just when a fantastic March, a blue, cloud-free sky and pure air invited me to practice in the outside; the habit of digesting great quantities of *Trivangamurari* made me able to experience this process as a pleasing engagement, with no need to confront any particular problem. The *Mantra*'s syllables, which I would carefully place into each center, would warm me up, the way the sun warms up the nature. Whenever the first effects took life in me, I reconsidered the best literature on Prayer in different religious contexts. These readings were flannel for my soul.

A particular reminiscence is impressed in my heart. I took part to a pilgrimage with a group of people and walked a full night in order to reach a beautiful sanctuary the following morning. Walking on, I would murmur the syllables trying to visualize the twelve centers, as much as possible. I was perfectly aware that that was not a canonical way of practicing, but I could not help it.

Something started to be perceived in my heart, a sort of tension of tenderness; then I realized that my mates' life was wrapped up in love. I understood that the reality of love was the most intense force of life, corrupted only by the pollution of mind.

Thinking of humanity as a single thing, I felt that a man cannot by instinct avoid loving or taking care of somebody - like his own children; as a consequence, he cannot avoid painful experiences. I had a feeling that even

³⁹ This is considered by the [C] school as the Second Kriya proper.

the most egoistical person is able to give his life away for his children; even he can find in himself the power for great and incredible actions. The warmth of that night's feelings lingers on in my heart!

Third Kriya as taught by the school [C]

I completed the vertical process of this special form of *Thokar* during the following summer; in the beginning I would work two days per week, then one day per week.

A new way of living the spiritual path took hold of my self. I learned to re-awake an intense aesthetic rapture for the beauty of nature and to take advantage of this technique to amplify such an ecstasy. The classic idea of using *Kriya* to go beyond mind was substituted by the more captivating idea of using it to burn my mind with the flame of beauty itself!

I would practice for two hours in the morning in my room, carefully respecting every detail; I would set my body up for the afternoon practice, when I could allow myself the pleasure of sitting in the open air. I would not focus too much on the strokes, rather concentrating on the *Trivangamurari* flux, until it seemed to be carved into my flesh.

I was happy to go out after a light meal and a little nap; as soon as I reached a beautiful place to sit down, I would reserve some time to contemplate nature. Then I would complete the set doses perfectly at ease.

Everything proceeded in harmony and became fantastic as daylight approached twilight.

In those moments it came spontaneous murmur the *Mantra*.

After each syllable, there was a brief pause, isolated and protected from any haste; an instant was enough to perceive a sweet irradiation springing out from each center. This would amplify the experience of joy - limitlessly. One evening, a sound of tolling bells came to me from a distant village - it was like a cascade of light! This surprise was so unexpected that my heart throbbed with joy; I opened my eyes, which did not focus on anything in particular. It was a delicious miracle; the intensity of such beauty was really impossible to bear! A recessed part of my mind continued to repeat: «A human being has never been granted so much joy!»

The thought went to some researchers with whom I had shared *Kriya*; in those days they had given me the evidence that they were progressing in a way worthy of admiration

A few years before I would stake my head that it was not possible to practice *Kriya* without begging and obtaining it from an organization. Now, the contrary had been proved. This was my supreme joy!

It is true that a solemn ritual impresses the rarity of the event into a person's mind, but it is also true that somebody - in the west at least - feels a bit

embarrassed at any kind of ceremony and prefers a more sombre way to learn it. In my life, being able, then, to practice in the open country, surrounded by a beautiful scenario, has always been far better for me than any ceremony whatsoever.

Fourth Kriya as taught by the school [C]

The years during which I was absorbed in the vertical processes of this technique occurred to my memory as enveloped by a dreamy aura; it is actually very difficult for me to refer to specific details regarding them. Even a little practice was always a miracle of sweetness.

I was lucky that pension age came early in my life. I was actually proposed an even more engaging job than the previous one. I had waited for years and ravenously desired to face the impossible doses of the final micro movement vertical process (up to 36x36!); there was no other job for me!

I spent a lot of time in the open. I used to carry along a seat made of a plastic and a wool layer, something to drink and a thirty-six-grain rosary. I would sit down, breathe deeply and proceeded with the *Mantra* and the consequent Micro movement.

At the end of each cycle, I would move an object, a little stone, from one side of my body to the other to keep track of the approximate number of 36 cycles. Often I was caught by a strong, overpowering sleepiness. After interrupting the practice to get some rest, I found out, however, that such did not solve my problem, since this sleepiness came back as soon as I resumed the practice. There was no way (coffee, a lot of rest...) to find some relief from it; there was nothing else to do but accepting this situation. More than once I found my back slightly bent forward; I learned not to straighten it with a sudden movement, because that would interrupt the condition of absorption and quiet.⁴⁰

Concerning the effects, something peculiar took place. I underwent a tangible psychological transformation. Many fetters —conditioning that seemed immovable— started to crumble. There was the tendency of going deeper, inexorably, up to touching the unpolluted truth. My thinking became compact, of a solidity that other people's suggestions didn't succeed in upsetting. I could not tolerate the least deformation of truth. I tried to go inexorably and all the way into any problem, until I was able to find the truth.

⁴⁰ Occasionally, I was caught by such an euphoria that I felt the irresistible instinct to swing the body. It was like dancing from a sitting stance, accompanying the dance with a subtle form of *Thokar*. Whenever I pronounced the seventh syllable, my trunk swung left, it swung right thinking of the following one, and then left again. When I thought the last syllable, my trunk quivered a little giving such a profusion of bliss!

But truth is total truth: it touched the reality of life and zeroed my diplomatic mask.

Unfortunately the difficulty in bearing other's superficial behaviour became the cause of some break-ups. Nature hates vacuum, so other people came into my life to keep the flame of friendship alive.

I learned to practice without finding any disturbance in what was around; in this way, the technique embarked in my life and blended with it. One day I was in a cliffy place not far from a beach, where a not high number of people used to go for a walk and stop for a little rest in the surroundings.

During daytime I would take shelter from the sun under a tree; at dusk I would go to the beach, lean my back against a rock and stay there, pretending to stare at a distant object. I practiced keeping my eyes open; the sky was an indestructible crystal of infinite transparency, the waves were continually changing their colour, having in itself an unsustainable charm. I was trying to hide my tears behind the black lenses of my sunglasses. I cannot describe what I felt, unless in poetic form.

There is an Indian song (in the final part of the movie *Mahabharata*) whose lyrics are taken from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* - «I have met this Great Spirit, as radiant as the sun, transcending any material conception of obscurity. Only the one who knows Him can transcend the limits of birth and death. There is no other way to reach liberation but meeting this Great Spirit». When I listened to the beautiful voice of this Indian singer repeating "There is no other way", my heart was inflamed. Nothing would have the power to keep me from this state and this terrifically beautiful practice, which I would enjoy for the rest of my life.

I know that some researchers deny that this *Kriya* is original, they say it was made up by someone. Not only I, but all those people who have practiced it think with the heart aflame: "Blessed him who has invented it!"

A note about Mahasamadhi

Tied with the *Fourth Kriya* as taught by the school [C], the notion of *Mahasamadhi* comes to my mind. One day I had a conversation with a *kriyaban* who was practicing intensely this technique. Practically, he had inserted that perception in every possibly imaginable part of his routine. Very vividly he explained me that a great work in *Kutastha* - and he was using the micro movement patiently along days and months for that purpose - burns forever the necessity of reincarnating. He went on explaining that in the months preceding one's death – intuition guides the *yogi* to understand when the right moment comes – this should be the only practice left to a *kriyaban* to prepare himself to «die forever»: to die at one's desires, at one's ignorance and not to be reborn again. For him the conscious exit out of the body at death implied not only a technical detail, a secret act

(probably a *Thokar* stroke) but a particular preparation. He had received the instruction of how to carry out this preparation.

The core of this process was to have the perception of the micro movement, repeated in *Kutastha* 36x48 for each center. This meant to perceive a total of 20736 micro-movements.

Since it is possible to complete that with reasonable ease in a period from 12 to 24 days, I assume that this process was supposed to be repeated different times.

Of course neither him nor I had experience of that practice - I am giving it now only as an information.

What I find nice is the idea of bringing all the centers in the *Kutastha* and, through the micro movement take one's leave from this universe forever.

Attractive was the explanation that as *Yoni Mudra* marks the last moment of the day when, having concluded all activities, a *kriyaban* withdraws his awareness from the body and from the physical world - a "small death", so to speak – the afore described intensive practice of the micro movement, was like a *Yoni Mudra* in greater dimensions. The last *Yoni Mudra*, so to say, a farewell to life, a return to the origin.

We must accept that during this phase of life a *kriyaban* should peacefully accept the natural decadence of his body, including some physical disturbances together with their consequent pains. For this reason the final moment should be prepared as soon as possible, when the physical conditions are still good. It is amazing to think that when the right moment comes, death's mechanism (usually shunned by our most rooted instinct) is to be invited by calming the heart and by merging deeply with the *Omkar* reality. According to this point of view, there exists no further technique. Controlling all the nine gates of the body, focusing the mind on the heart center and bringing *Prana* in the head (*Kutastha* or *Sahasrar*), represent everything which is to be done.

Some say that in the moment of death, a *kriyaban* leaves his body by performing *Thokar Kriya*. It might happen that, during the last instants of a *kriyaban*'s life, he will be lucky enough to be practicing *Thokar*. He will perform just one *Thokar* and stop the heart: he will apply so much mental strength to the stroke, that he will withdraw the very energy that keeps the heart throbbing.

But we should reasonably assume that it will not be possible to perform the physical movement of *Thokar*. To be aware of *Kutastha* may be the only thing possible: at that spot utter the beloved *Mantra* and merge with the micro movement

To experience that, is our ardent hope and determination.

As soon as I completed the vertical processes, I went through a moment of uncertainty about what to do or upon which new enterprise I could focus.

I wanted to experience something that could arouse my passion, not inferior, as far as the effects were concerned, to what I had recently enjoyed.

I wanted to include the ability gotten through the vertical procedures within a not too much complicated routine.

Only one goal was resplendent far and away all the others. It was to resurrect the period in which, through a simple routine preceded by an intense practice of *Japa*, I had achieved mastery over the breathless state.

That phase was characterized not only by joy, but was - I don't know how to say - infinitely more "poetic" than any other season of my life.

It was characterized by an aesthetic abduction, a formidable feeling of liberty.

In order to recreate it again I worked hard with *Japa*, trying, at the same time, to plan a routine as simple as possible. The idea of "a clean path" which will be discussed later (chapter III/3) is born from this attempt.

Now, dealing with wrong attitudes towards *Kriya*, I'm going to open a parenthesis which justifies all the more the necessity of "cleaning" one's path.

CHAPTER III/2... MEETING WITH DIFFERENT SORTS OF RESEARCHERS

One day I was invited to give lessons about the history of the mystical paths at the local university of the third age. I accepted. I proposed to add to our study some short notes about the main esoteric paths - the purpose was to show where the demarcation line between the mystical path and the magic or modern New Age movements laid.

After a complete cycle of lessons I accepted the assignment for the following years, which, with an interruption, became five.

The mystical path was considered from different points of view, up to come to a practical introduction to the mystical procedures - prayer, control of the breath, in other words something similar to *Kriya*.

I was delighted to prepare myself by studying the best available essays and textbooks. They were written by scholars who didn't belong (or were so smart to hide their membership) to any particular mystical school and manifested an attitude of a scientific detachment towards the whole matter.

This was a serene period of my life: I was delighted at the beauty of that vast matter and felt very lucky for the opportunity of having the time to pursue such studies. I began experiencing a totally new feeling of critical attitude towards what I considered the weaknesses of the human mind.

So many magnificent terms, found in esoteric schools, some trends, amply recognized as serious and elitist, which once would have hypnotized and allured me, made me smile by considering their devastating inconsistency.

I was inevitably drifted into the most interesting field of studies: the human psyche, its suggestibility and vulnerability when it deals with approaching the spiritual path.

I tried to introduce this theme in my lessons but saw the interest of people diminish. The most part of them came to my lessons in order that I supported their dreams, their illusions. They were not prepared to understand what a mystical path really is and how much joy it could have brought into their lives. From my musings and meeting with other researchers later, the following descriptions took shape.

First part: attitudes that keep one at the periphery of the spiritual path

[a]... Immoderate love for esoteric and spiritual books

Some people like to cultivate purely esoteric-occult knowledge. They might be quite familiar with some methods of spiritual investigation, but as far as the concrete use of the techniques is concerned, they bring ahead only a hasty experimentation.

Usually they give a great emphasis on ethics. There is nothing to say about this: I just try to find a plausible reason that clarifies how an endless wealth is waiting to manifest behind the screen of their mental revolutions, still they don't make the least step to seize it or to allow its radiance to clean the dusty cellar where they prefer to live.

They spend all their time reading spiritual books and getting involved in endless discussions with some friend of similar interests. There are good books from which they could draw benefit, but it seems that they prefer to keep them at a distance; they state they have already read them all, but it is a lie.

The books that they warmly recommend strike us for the quantity of information that they contain. While reading them we enter an almost hypnotic state and, perhaps, we don't immediately realize that each chain of ideas is without support, is the offspring of the unbridled imagination of the author. We are amazed to see how, through an intoxication of words, his imagination unfolded free from the relationship with the reality and from the rules of logic. We wonder how the reader can think, with such junk, he or she can evolve somehow. The whole thing seems to us a pure fun —comparable to that of reading thrillers.

Some among those seekers end up in *spiritism* [mediumship]. While some came to this reality dreaming to contact a deceased relative or friend, some were moved by the sheer thirst of occult knowledge.

If spiritism kept its promises, it would be the most valid mine of information - a direct connection with the beyond, far more accurate than any other source! Those who practice it feel they were infinitely more fortunate than any other spiritual researcher. Although they firmly believe that a great worldly upheaval (cataclysm) is round the corner, they are always quiet and optimistic, having received the assurance that they will be saved. They walk on air. They stated they had the privilege ... to communicate directly with the historical Masters of *Kriya*. It is pathetic and even amusing to hear their

solemn message: «In this epoch, the *Kriya* is old-fashioned and useless. Devotion is enough!».

To be entangled in this activity is an amazingly easy way of destroying, in short time, years of genuine spiritual effort. I have some grounds to believe that the untrustworthy soil of spiritism is one of the best areas to cultivate splits inside the personality.

The classical spiritualism - characterized by a medium who enters a trance state and a desk which answers the questions put by the bystanders through a code of loud raps - has handed over its place to more modern methods such as the easy one where all the participants, putting their hands on the upside-down glass that so easily moves among the letters of the alphabet stamped on a comfortable flexible tablet, are mediums themselves. Many prefer the more accessible revelations of a *Channeler*. This is a person who, without so many complications, lets the invoked entity express through the flood of his own eloquence. It is curious to see how the *Channeler's* biographies trace a common scheme. Once they were sceptic of their own faculties and would not accept to yield to the higher Will who had decided to entrust them the mission to serve as medium between spirits and humanity. Once they mission was accepted, from the same ultra mundane source came the inspiration to mix the flow of the various revelations with the diagnosis of unlikely illnesses, with prescription of expensive alternative remedies. What I witnessed, with a sadness sharpened by the particular situations which at that time took place, was the mental fragility (feebleness; I don't know how to call it) of the most part of those practicing spiritism. They puzzled me not only on account of their statements but also of what appeared through their eyes. It was as if, from behind the mask of their face, another personality appeared, extremely self-confident, but who actually allowed others to deceive and defraud them in the worst of the ways. How strange is the whole matter! Apart from the *automatic writing* in which the one who asks is the same person that gives the answer, the Medium knows in advance the preferences and anticipations of the person who addresses him. Therefore all becomes as a closed circuit: question and answer reverberate in an endless loop like the feedback whistle of a microphone set next to its loud speaker. As anyone can observe, the messages are always agreeable. Every adept, even of limited intelligence, receives the message that the Divine has assigned him *an important mission...* Some friends plunged into situations of such a narrowness of vision that they appeared grotesque. Their original desire to find the total freedom, the spiritual realization, ended in the worst of all the prisons. They gave all their possessions, and their life, to a person who was an authentic scoundrel.

It was odd to find an unworthiness complex in a friend's disposition. He was a really good person; in his youth he lived passionately the intention of doing some good to humanity. He was full of a sincere respect toward all people. Sometimes he was embittered in seeing how his disinterested actions clashed with the ignorance and the coarseness of people. In his peculiar life-choices I always read one message: «Do not think that I am yielding to the common way of living!»

He ardently aspired to follow the path of the Great Ones.

We shared the passion for esoteric and for books. Actually we read too many junk literature: instead of feeling a repulsion for all the deformations originated from the human mind, we let being enthralled by the imaginations of the most varied authors. It was unbelievable what enormous impact could have on us a book when the title or the four lines of introduction made us to guess that it contained the key of the hidden mysteries!

Together we shared the enthusiasm for the discovery of *Kriya*. The friend began to be interested in it and to read all the related books with eagerness. «It is better that I don't start practicing techniques whose effect I am not sure- he said to me - it is better to wait for a thorough understanding of the spiritual dimension. Only when I am totally sure of what I am about to handle, I will begin the practical work. In the meantime I will live by strictly conforming to the highest ethical principles, as recommended by the great teachers of the past». Actually he practiced something and I conjectured that the intensity of that experience could have disturbed him by putting before his eyes the dark side of his personality. His extreme prudence (it resembled that of a senior, with a trembling walk) actually gave the idea that his behaviour was caused by the *fear* that some mystical practices might cause such an inner jolt so as to jeopardize his *psychic poise*. He was like one who keeps on planning over a wonderful journey yet, being afraid of the air plane, decides not to leave.

Extolling the value of the ethical principles and making me sick by insisting that no one should practice any technique of meditation without having first achieved a perfectly moral life, he was indeed addressing only himself.

Well enough disguised, a unhealed wound held him back.

During his adolescence, a cloud began to thicken over his consciousness: his religious ideals caused him not accept what emerged from the depths of his personality; he wasn't able to realize that what he was experiencing was universally common and healthy.

Many times I tried to open his eyes; at last I was obliged to acknowledge my failure. The duty toward my soul had to prevail over that of courtesy. I let him alone, living his life, without "tormenting" him anymore. Why should I waste my time helping him consolidate his decision?

The force of mutual excitement born from our banquets of words was a sort of projection toward an ideal of soul-friendship; but through it I wouldn't get to anything, rather, in a dangerous way, I would be estranged from my soul.

As years went by, he went on reproducing, with varied words, the same beliefs; his only evolution was the widening of his lexicon. Sometimes he made himself ridiculous with the inflexibility of his conjectures and generalizations (as for example when he affirmed that all the inhabitants of a certain country were not fit for the spiritual path or when he maintained that a certain personage, could not be self-realized because once he was caught smoking or eating meat....) As a superb ruin, he became a recluse losing contact with real life. A sympathetic and enduring neighbour saved him from the total solitude. As for a subtle retribution, the latter was ignorant about the matters of Spirit; but this was not a problem: my friend needed only a human face in which to fix his gaze.

[b]... Tendency to not trust completely its action (or not to surrender to it).

Some follow the spiritual path, for example *Kriya Yoga*, work conscientiously with its techniques but go on brooding over one single worry: «What can I do, in order to ameliorate myself?» Their basic idea is that the Infinite Self resides outside human beings and that an individual can come closer to that reality only if he or she has some merit. For this reason they work so hard: to be worthy of having success in *Kriya*. Unless it is coupled with a toilsome effort inside the territory of their psychological life, they don't trust the sheer power of *Kriya*.

They think *Kriya* techniques are only a frame that must be integrated with unremitting effort. They are convinced that by working very hard it is possible to destroy in their consciousness the roots of iniquity and egoism. Their favourite tool is an unfair and distorted self-analysis with consequent growth of their ancient inferiority complex and the intensification of a tension for an ideal, regularly postponed radical change of their habits. They practise the techniques working desperately at building brick by brick, as a complex construction, the mystical experience. Such an undertaking is, on principle, an impossible task. This attitude makes any progress on the spiritual path virtually impossible. Any mystical path works in this way: when one relaxes, suddenly something manifests and the personality's inner core receives a strong shock. This is the beauty of the process: you cannot tell when it will happen. Now, if during one's devotions, breath and heart seems to disappear, this kind of persons, being always on the alert, instead of relaxing, they block the experience. There may be only just one solution: that a genuine spiritual

experience may suddenly emerge and sweep their fears away.

[c]... To look at it as something to exploit in order to obtain recovery from one's psychological disorders

There are individuals who cling to the oriental meditation techniques, being allured by the advertising surrounding them, since they have serious psychological troubles diagnosed by one or more doctors.

The decision to apply those practices in their life (many practice *Kriya* for that reason) could have been taken by mutual consent with the therapist (Psychologist or Psychiatrist) or could represent their independent choice. Coming out from a devastating situation and living normally as any other human being, is the most pressing desire in their consciousness, an emergency that permeates their thinking and behaviour.⁴¹

Some may give the impression of a great seriousness and dedication but has the tendency to observe himself too much, is always anxious of seeing results and gets discouraged very easily.

It is difficult to make him understand that the spiritual path has to become an integral part of his one's life, accepted as one's own body; otherwise it is better to drop it immediately. It cannot be a graft of a foreign organ, looked at with suspicion - «does it really work»? No human can ever touch the *supreme Good* unless one places it above all the other achievements of the world.

A friend who went around with me some years ago was in this condition. I was stricken by a trait of his temperament which appeared as a giant *opportunism* - the tendency to exploit people. Without realizing it, he tended to squeeze me, slowly but unrelentingly, up to a point where, as Carlos Castaneda writes, there remains *nothing*. In the same way he exasperated and then eliminated definitively the few friends that were still close to him, by making use of a lethal mechanism. He used to "wring" an accurate and detailed counsel regarding no matter what (physical and mental health, meditative routine...) then, by applying it, he hurt himself. He tried to make his friend feel guilty, with the hope of obtaining greater attention from him: he stated he had applied that counsel to the letter. Instead of getting closer, he lost his counsel, inevitably. The friend took an oath not to help him anymore in any way. Rather, seized with blind fury and - forgetting any past custom of

⁴¹ It goes without saying that I do not recommend *Kriya* to those having psychological problems. This is my intention. But I don't want to be hopelessly negative: who can, actually, deny that some good can come out of one's effort, if done under the guidance of one who is doctor and friend at the same time ?

courtesy and kindness - annihilated him with a merciless judgment, of whose hardness and inflexibility he would have, for a lot of time, grounds for regret.⁴²

As in the fable of Bluebeard, there were some "rooms" where he wouldn't let me enter. I'm not referring to intimate matters but to facts about which it is acceptable to discuss - for example to maintain a double life when it is not essential and it is extremely wearing...

When I went straight to the point, he grew darker and roughly broke off the conversation. When I reflected about what could help him, I felt I was not free to consider the complete picture of his life. I sensed that in his life there was a region where he preserved and nourished a malefic mushroom from which he extracted the elixir of his suffering. Other times I was lost in a reverie: it was as if they had two personalities. The first was a façade personality with which I was talking, and another, deep, with which I could not communicate, free from all suffering, clean and serene, which was scorning me. In those instants I had the impression that if I disappeared from his life, he would be completely and perfectly happy.

[d]... Conflict with one's native religion

Those who believe in the validity of their own religion can, for the most disparate reasons, undertake the path of some eastern meditation practice too. Their effort is not inevitably destined to be shipwrecked, however the risk to surrender to restricting and narrow suggestions received by rigid spiritual directors and by some friends is very strong.

At the very beginning, they will surely be excited by the effectiveness of some technique: not only shall they experience a physical and mental well-being but have the feeling that their religious life has received a powerful recharging of enthusiasm and has become one-pointed.

Even if it will be difficult for them to accept that the "strange" exercises could be considered a mystical path, that could be self-sufficient, independently from any religion, they will start to look at them with increasing attention and growing respect.

The problem is born when one deems it necessary to speak about his or her choice and efforts with a spiritual director. A representative of a religion

⁴² I wonder if these individuals were the primary cause of the deterioration of the *Kriya* organizations. They think they never received enough, they are always complaining about something and often threaten to sue those who dispassionately tried to help them. I believe that if those organizations have, with time, become full of prohibitions and of what seem to us an absurd bureaucracy, this was also due to a reaction to the pleas and menaces of people like the ones we are considering here.

could not grasp the meaning of that practice (probably nobody has informed him about the similarity between eastern procedures and the spiritual exercises of some mystics of his religion) or could be perplexed about the same concept of mystical path. The vice of studying too many books and to stick too much to the doctrinal aspect of a religion can have choked his spiritual aspiration. There are books that dirty the conscience and burn the intellect. Churches are very tolerant and allow that one acts as a spiritual director although he entertains some doubts and lives a mild existential crisis - the hope is that, through coping with other people's doubts, he may gradually come out of his dilemmas.

But, the continuous cerebral effort of replying with clever answers — sometimes so nice or strange to stun— other people's existential questions and sighs, wears out his capacity of listen to and understand.

He can repeat some some common religious absurdities - that our desire to proceed along the mystical path is a dangerous fixation, born from unresolved psychological problems, that religion consists only in studying and meditating upon the Holy Writings, that Prayer has a worth but only if it is done in community...

He will judge any spiritual experience as a dangerous hallucinations.

I think that the most part of the so-called religious persons are convinced that the mystics were men which were chosen by God, to whom a particular *grace* was granted: «we should by no means try to follow their footsteps, unless we become mentally unstable!».

The emotional implication of these words, can overcome the wisdom's reasons and burn to ashes the aspiration of a researcher. He could be convinced that his main duty is to make his doctrinal formation solid and therefore he joins some lessons of catechism. Obviously there is nothing to say against catechism and the study of the dogmas of a religion, provided that it is integrated with the study of the works of the great mystics.

A merely rational study of dogmas and of theological truths may not harmonize to the sensibility our person is now laboriously developing. Easily he will be thrown into crisis and will experience guilt. We know that the strength with which he or she can withstand any contrary suggestion is directly proportional to the experiences of divine joy met in meditation - but we must not forget that we are considering a beginner.

But not only the certified guides may be misleading; sometimes a friend of the same church, upset by the world of such things as apparitions and prophecies can frighten our researcher, choke his or her throat with fear, stamping out as contrary to religion the up to now practiced techniques.

The anguish to be on the wrong path, doomed to eternal damnation, not appeased by the strength of the contrary idea, creates a hardening of his heart:

the splendid adventure now comes to a standstill.

I have seen some *kriyabans* turn against *Kriya* as if it were a demoniac thing. They manifested an unpleasant dogmatic attitude and gave the impression that they are governed by primordial and childish emotions. They created embarrassment and silence all around. Sometimes the non-existent consistency between the religious tenets and their life is maintained with a bewildering spine-chilling intellectual dishonesty; this caused the break up of the old-time friends and a total renewal of their acquaintances —this is what perhaps they subconsciously desired.

What we can wish to them, is that, during a sunny day, in the middle of nature (which is, indeed, a great teacher – perhaps more than books), in front of a boundlessly extending panorama, they find themselves practising the most banal and simple technique of meditation. Goodness knows if the warmth of a contemplative state will succeed in melting the choking hold of their fears, if their splendid adventure can be rekindled again!

During our childhood, almost all of us received a spiritual formation inside a well-structured religion. Great was the strength with which some religious myths were inculcated in our consciousness. Introduced through tales and made more real by some pleasant depictions, those myths were invested with a particular soundness especially if they extolled some ideal character that was missing in our family constellation. Although during our adolescence those myths were put aside, a throb of love remained for that part of the past which they reminded us of. At full maturity, we felt their enchanting charm.

The perfume of those old tales is like an incense of nostalgia, like a balm of infantile joy spreading on the never-healed wounds of our existence. When we took part in religious rites, a chain of memories of lost times and of disappeared dear ones started ... the heart was affected, deep feelings were involved as hardly as ever before.

We can understand this; it is a beautiful event. But it may happen that infancy's conditioning obtains for some people, an unassailable solidity and turns into a set of fixed elements in one's way of thinking. In their subconsciousness an iron intention takes shape: «The dimension of the faith which I received from my parents is distilling for me the perfume of the most beautiful time of my life. I cannot but defend it at any cost». It is a pity that a similar attitude creates insurmountable difficulties to the practice of a spiritual path which is independent from any religion.

Second part: attitudes that lead astray a seeker, even though he has already undertaken, in a proper way, and has already begun to perceive its intrinsic beauty, the spiritual path

[e]... The New Age search of an "holistic" wellbeing

Often the pleasures and benefits derived from the spiritual path change into a real dependence on them. This attitude is striking in the *New Age* environment.⁴³ The greater the immediate gratification derived from the practice of the techniques is, the more favourable is the self diagnosis of the correct execution of them. This is a situation in which one drifts without realizing one has betrayed the purpose of one's research.

A researcher who focus his attention only on secondary aspects of the mystical path, cannot fool oneself by claiming to be pursuing the Divine Goal, when he is, in fact, only interested in his well-being.

Actually he resembles one of those people who goes on preparing their house for a distinguished guest, endlessly polishing and decorating it - meanwhile,

⁴³ During the twentieth century, the human thought made a strong step forward in a healthy direction. There are many grounds to believe that, in the future, such an epoch will be studied with the same respect with which nowadays Humanism, Renaissance, Enlightenment ages are studied. Since distinguished men of science have contributed to the *New Age* sensibility, there is no need to dwell on the affirmation, irrelevant for our understanding, according to which such a progress coincided with the entry of the solar system in the sign of the Aquarium - from this belief it derived the term "Age of Aquarius" or "New Age." The character of that age was marked by the perception of something "planetary" at work. People realized that the discoveries of Physics, of Alternative Medicine, the developments of the Depth Psychology, all converged towards one and the same understanding: the substantial interdependency among universe, body, psyche and spiritual dimension of human beings. The esoteric-initiatic societies, overcoming for a long time the differences of culture and religious vision, had already recognized this truth, which now, has become common heritage. Among other things, it was accepted that evil really exists, that it is an intrinsic factor pertaining to the instinctual dimension of man. It is tied with all forms of egoism, cruelty, ruthlessness and with the tendency of exploitation of the environment. It can blind someone to such a point that they become the instrument of the ruin of the Earth and of the disappearance of the conditions which are indispensable to his life. Far-off is the theological vision implying a despotic role of man, put in the center of a creation, which seems to have no other purpose than that to satisfy his or her needs and whims. Dependent as we are upon everything surrounding us, humanity has the duty of taking decisive steps to protect the environment. The longing for a lifestyle that takes into account our spiritual dimension, grows harmoniously with a political-ecological sensitivity and engagement.

after ringing the bell, their guest sits neglected on the doormat...

Research on alternative medicines, group therapies directed by eccentric guys devoid of academic formation, are expensive distractions which may enthrall one for years and make him forget that they have nothing to do with the spiritual path that, at his time, he decided to follow. It is clear that I don't have anything against these researches provided that they are not confused with the mystical search.

In a room, in which he sits in *meditation*, plentiful with multicoloured posters and cushions, decorations, crystals or other objects, he may be wholly satisfied by the established beautiful atmosphere, which has become the surrogate of the tuning with the spiritual dimension.

I had two types of contact with such dimension, one folk and another very negative.

As for the first, I was part of a group which was under the influence of a cunning fellow who, according to the needs, assumed the role of the psychotherapist, of the spiritual teacher, of the alternative physician who, with a pendulum in his hand, was able to diagnose everything, from the slightest indispositions to the most serious illnesses, as well as to suggest remedies. Harmless methods like aromatherapy, crystal therapy, colour therapy... aroused great enthusiasm, seemed to work for some time, afterwards they were forsaken. It was typical for us to take part in various forms of alternative psychotherapy during weekend seminars. Those methods recalled the traditional ones, giving great importance to public personal reports about common childhood traumas. From the legal point of view, such activities had to be camouflaged as social games, cultural or religious activities. I remember vividly how, sitting on the ground and placed in circle face to face with others, we formed work groups and, overcoming inner resistances, shared, sometimes with acute suffering, experiences that we had never told before. There were also those who tried to find again, through hypnotic regression, their past lives in order to revive and understand deeper traumas ...

Some friends ended enmeshed in a multi-level marketing system where they learned modern methods of spiritual healing. They were lured to invest in expensive seminars where their energy channels would be opened and they would learn the secret how to heal others with the use of the *Universal Energy*. All this cost a lot, also because the seminars were not given nearby but abroad, in expensive residences. Many abandoned their genuine attitude and started losing the contact with the reality. When I dared to call into question the validity of the whole thing, annoyed, rebuked that there was no reason to be perplexed about their practices, without having tried them: «It is our *Karma* that is giving us the best of all the opportunities to grow in all the planes». «We are expected to answer in a positive way. We don't have to stay

jammed against this beneficial current otherwise we could have ... to die and born again just to live those experiences that we are now shunning!» «Any mystical technique is practiced with the energy present in the body – they said - Well, if this is recharged by the flow of the *Universal Energy*, even the most complicated technique would become a "stroll"».

Unfortunately, for some the events took a bad turn.

In someone there was the dangerous and potentially destructive mania to look without ceasing for techniques of spiritual illumination-evolution. They were able of to do any stupid action for this purpose. They loved to explore the mysteries inherent to the "human potential".

They had landed to the *Kriya* territory, in consequence of inner experiences, which left them amazed, astonished and they had not understood or they had not succeeded in assimilating completely.

It seemed that *Kriya* had begun to circular in their mind (and in the dusty library which was their life) a new air that amplified their experiences; in the ensuing deep calmness it almost seemed that their search had landed to something stable; the Spiritual Reality was intuitively revealed to them as *Immutability* itself. Yet they thought that they came across *Kriya* by chance; they fantasize about what could happen if they encountered a higher technique.

Hence they were ensnared by the claim that the classical meditative practices - the sober methods adopted for a long time by the mystics of various religions - are not valid for our time - they were all right up to 50 years ago, but with the *new era* man has evolved and is ready to employ faster tools. They are seduced by the temptation of reaching at little cost, with faster means, a higher consciousness. They became enthusiastic of expensive techniques shared over the weekend at some beauty resort, spa, vacation... which in 20 minutes a day produce regeneration of the DNA, expansion of conscience ever gotten with other means, final liberation etc.

They intuitively understood the difference between magic and mystical dimension, nevertheless, they didn't stop dreaming that in the esoteric field one could find the deepest secrets of the mystical path.

These researchers cannot but going on daydreaming about improbable secrets known to few elects. This idea is charming, appealing... but for a real mystic it is *bullshit*.

For a long time, a friend was trying to "improve" the mystical techniques by incorporating various esoteric techniques, even those described in the rituals of *ceremonial magic*. He was convinced that only by using certain rituals, formulas and initiatic symbols it was possible to complete the evolutionary jump conducive to the liberation. There are circumstances in which the same economic bases, essential to the living of an individual, can be swept away,

destroyed to shambles.

A typical situation is when a self-named expert in occult matters purports to know the secrets of an almost disappeared esoteric path and, in particular, a spiritual technique - far more advanced than those known today - which was practiced centuries or millennia ago, from few privileged ones. This rascal, a dreamer, not so naïve as it seems, will easily bewitch our researcher; he is going to worm a lot of money out of him.

«Now that humanity is different from before, such teachings are not revealed to anyone» he will start off; then he will pause and finally, with a sigh, conclude: «The actual researchers would not know how to appreciate them and, in their hands, they could be dangerous.»

He will use an enchanting terminology similar to that of the Kabbalah (mystical movement within the Judaism) or he will talk of the original Christianity, about whose well known sacred texts he will be able to offer a non-conventional interpretation.

Our victim will try to get around the teacher, while in reality falling into the trap. He or she will confide that they are prepared sacrifice to whatever, provided that this extraordinary secret will be revealed to them.

After having expressed some reservations, at long last the teacher will capitulate but.... «Only for you, only because I feel I am *guided* to make an exception.»

Our adept, quivering with emotion, will live the best moment of his life, convinced that the meeting with the expert was decided in the higher spheres.

The donation he or she is going to offer during the initiation - united to the promise to maintain the absolute secrecy - will be conspicuous since in that way he or she will confirm the great value attributed to that event.

The donation will serve to the teacher to carry on good works—obviously.

(Such teachers affirm invariably to give the donations to a certain monk—curiously not a priest— which takes care of an orphanage.)

While the adept, completely satisfied, is preparing to receive such an incomparable *gift* (our occult expert underlines with emphasis that it is a gift and that nothing could adequately compensate the benedictions that such an initiation will bring in his or life) the teacher is distractedly deciding what kind of trash-stuff he is going to demonstrate with glaring solemnity.

As soon as the new technique is acquired and tested with indescribable emotion, our researcher will spend one or two days of sheer fervour.

In the future he will still hear about other incomparably valuable "revelations". Imprisoned in his or her chimeras, they will witness the rekindling of this passion and the comedy will repeat. The illusion is, in effect, indomitable. After having received this drug, he or she will continue

this inexorable run towards the abyss. After having covered a vast round, all the roads, one after the other, will begin to close in front of them.

We cannot predict if, one day, they will realize that the techniques for which they paid a fortune for had been taken from some books and altered in order that one would not to guess their origin.

Certainly this episode represents an extreme case.

The spiritual path is for those who, even if they have done all what the human folly could conceive and wasted years in exhausting their vital energy, from a certain moment onwards know how to turn over a new leaf and seek no more the power to dominate life, but the vast *Tranquillity* of living one's eternal dimension.

[f]... Tendency to dream perfection instead of working for it

I have myself experimented and relished this dream. The ideas propagated by a *Kriya* organization seem to foster this trap of the ego. Usually two main illusions stifle the honest spiritual aspiration: one is the idea of being privileged for the very fact of having found *Kriya*, the other is to feel oneself intrinsically different from some divine personages.

[1] I was fed on the pernicious idea of belonging to a privileged group and of practicing «the supreme among all the spiritual techniques, the air plane route to God realization». The self-satisfied pleasure coming from this idea contribute to thicken the armor of the ego and cloud the intelligence. Many dogmas are accepted blindly. Some pose as those who have been blessed by a superior destiny; they disguise complexes - enormous as abysses - of intellectual inferiority and reveal to be individuals not yet emotionally mature. This can lead to an unpleasant attitude towards those who don't accept the same set of dogmas, intolerant up to the point of brutality.

The risk is to conceive *Kriya* not as a comprehensive mystical discipline to be used for a thorough transformation of an individual, but rather as a collection of secrets to be exploited in the most cunning possible way.

By recalling this lethal attitude of mine, I acknowledge that when I met the first person who was linked with the *Kriya* school, I permitted him to abuse me because I was fanatically interested in learning all the details of *Kriya*. In spite of the hard shock I was receiving, I wasn't able to cut off his rambling speech and return entirely in my own dimension, because I feared to spoil my relation with him and with his group. I reasoned in a way which had nothing of spiritual: «I have had beautiful experiences with *Pranayama*, why should I not run faster with the help of the so extolled *Kriya Yoga*?» By not having this tool right away I became desperate (see chapter I/2). It was simple *inconceivable* that other persons kept the key of my Supreme Good hidden:

for me it was a sort of mental cruelty. Eventually, after a process of thwarting of my nature, I received the teachings, but was not able to make them work properly because I was no more free of applying my instinct and intelligence to them. Having betrayed the dignity of my soul, I was bound to end my journey in this way.

[2] The second pernicious idea was extraneous to me. Some *kriyabans* instead of adoring the techniques, adored the persons. Their supreme delight was the illusion of having created a privileged bond with a person who represent the ideal figure of their *Guru*.

We know that a lot of esoteric brotherhoods and great mystical traditions teach that the strength of the great Teachers of the past, their subtle vibration is still present in their descendants —not because of consanguinity, but through the transmission of this power, as a non-stop chain. Their tenet is that the spiritual progress cannot happen but through receiving that particular *power*. A few people are authorized to act like channels of this transmission.

The great financial means that an organization possesses don't serve only to maintain the beauty of their buildings but also to provide luster and surround with a divine aura their ministers, representatives.

People forget easily how important is to proceed without ever giving another person or institution the right to abuse them. However discussing the theme of cults, where the dignity of the individual is crushed, lies outside our main theme. For a researcher who would invest his time in studying this matter, there are so many sources from which he can draw precious material. Undoubtedly striking is the material supplied by the institutions that aim at defending people from cults. Shocking are the web sites created by the ex-adepts of a cult.

Those who believe that one can advance on the spiritual path only if receives the particular benediction and infusion of power from some person, feel the highest respect for those people who were officially invested by the mission to transmit this power. It is normal they try, in every way, to conquer a place in their heart. This becomes far more important than working with *Kriya*.

The emotional impact of this conditioning is strong and it turns, with time, into unreasonable claims: they want to be loved by them and look for any occasion to have private interviews with them. Even if they have no doubts about the techniques, they invent some questions, just for the satisfaction of entertaining a useless, emotive-toned, correspondence.

I became acquainted with an elder *kriyaban*, worthy of the maximum respect and admiration, who began to follow the *Kriya* path a lot of years before me. We saw each other in the last years of his life. There were moments in which, knowing the total loneliness in which he lived, it broke

my heart to remain months without seeing him. For various reasons this was inevitable; I always met him for brief and transient afternoons, walking and quietly speaking. I rejoiced at his company, yet I felt as if a giant wave of nostalgia was ready to overwhelm me but remained as if suspended. I was witness to an inexorable process that brought him to the point of losing sight completely of the meaning of spiritual practice and living only on the warm rays coming from the memory of an embrace, or a glance, or even a simple nod once received from a person - in his opinion very evolved or, better still, self realized - belonging to the direction of the *Kriya* organization to which he always felt to be tied. This person remained in his heart as the epitome of perfection. In a dimension of utter authenticity, one day he vented all of his despondency. Looking at how superficially—so he said—he had practiced the techniques of meditation, he had no doubts that, in this life, he had certainly missed the "target". He was already dreaming of a future incarnation in which he could have practiced with great engagement. He expressed what, years before he would not have even dared to think: the idea that a presumed evolution of the individual, determined by iron mathematic laws, achieved through techniques of meditation, was an illusion. Such an idea of automatic evolution—which remained in him as an instinctive reflex up to the point that he would continue to repeat it while addressing to people inquiring about *Kriya*—had been abandoned by him for many years. Looking at me with a smile as if I were a child, he told me again about his meeting with that afore hinted personage. He had given his full approval to the idea that on this planet there were special people, like the aforementioned one, and irreparably common people like us. The value of the *Kriya* techniques was, for him, negligible; it was only a religious practice, a ritual which had to be performed scrupulously just to give proof of one's loyalty. The practice of *Kriya* left people, after decades, in the same condition in which they had started to practice it. This ineluctable division among human beings was the axiom which held the loom upon which he had been interweaving his thought. I felt myself drifting in his state of sweet resignation. He lived in the certainty of something beautiful that existed in the beyond; his being was already projected in that dimension.

Now he is no more and I wonder if the diffusion of *Kriya* here in the West had served only to that, to spread the cult of certain persons who are "impudently" saint, perfect, majestic.

How wretched it had been for him to believe that his *supreme good* depended on a human loving glance coming from the person he felt as divine! He had made the unforgivable mistake to believe that the divine spring in the center of his being, dried up when far from the blessings of the one person towards whom he directed the whole aspiration of his heart.

CHAPTER III/3... A CLEAN PATH

I was delighted at writing the previous gallery of characters, since I felt I was describing something which belonged to my intimate life. It was like snatching parts of my life from oblivion and feel them actual again. It is easy for me to tune with each one of the psychological types described before and with their manias. Some fixation, like a black hole, still threatens to ensnare me.

While writing I felt intensely that *Kriya Yoga* has the potential to turn our life into a heaven but we stubbornly and on purpose clutch to our fixations.

The more I disrobed a deformation, the more irrepressible joy blazed in my conscience. Individual consciousness is a bubble floating over an ocean of bliss: it suffices a nothing to merge in that ocean. There is an infinite happiness lying under our life experiences.

In several *kriyaban* friends, whom I met recently, I found, more or less, the same typology. They shared opinions and *Kriya* technical details (which were not crucial but however important and valuable) with me; I always respond to their kindness by sharing all my knowledge.

The problem is that while I try to have a deep discussion with them, I noticed that very few of them are able to listen to me: many are unyielding in bringing ahead their false hopes and fancy a complicity from my part, just to feel comfortable in their illusions.

Some have the power of emptying me of every sense of natural joy and put me in a state of conflict. Instinctively, I would like to eliminate them at once from my life, but, at the same time, I feel inclined to discuss with them up to exhaustion, owing to the pressing need of understanding the basic reason accountable of their internal chaos. I am referring to people that apparently pour into *Kriya* a remarkable commitment but, however, get nothing. They are adamant in practicing *Kriya* with wrong modalities, doing plain mistakes. (For instance, they neglect the normal rules of health, refuse, during meditation, to assume the correct position of the backbone, didn't even mind to maintain the immobility in the final part of their practice.)

After talking with them, I need to walk and to practice a lot of *Japa*. I am touched by the power of their delusion, observing with dismay how they look at *Kriya Yoga* with superior air, convinced they are advanced researchers.

They always behave towards me in a very cordial way and, when it deals with defending their choices, show a dialectical gift that make me feel like an idiot. To their sophism I would prefer a hundred-fold times more to listen to a funny guy shouting: «I leave *Kriya* to the simpleton: I like to eat, to drink and to have sex».

The *Kriya* path is extremely delicate. When I consider the garbage of esoteric-magic thought, I think that only an unremitting *Japa* (continuous Prayer), loaded with sincere aspiration, can create a safe shield protecting us from the destructive tendencies of our mind: any other mystical exercise is not immune from the risk of turning into a fuel that nurtures them.

Other mystical basically "sound" methods are few: the control of breath, the action of guiding the awareness into spine and *Chakras* and the contact with the *Omkar* reality. In the initial phase of their employment, these methods can give the idea of being scarcely productive, but this is only a false impression: by persisting, sooner or later one reaps an unexpectedly great reward.

The mystical path is the crystallization of centuries of experimentation, the result of what men has found effective in calming the mind, the breath, the heart. Any technique came to light through a fatiguing search that implicated overcoming many difficulties and required a boundless amount of time. I do not trust modern New Age methods created at one's desk.

In my opinion *Japa* (continuous Prayer) is the safest harbour affording protection to anyone: it is recommended not only in Hinduism and Islam but also in Christianity.

In Catholicism the concept of "Inner Prayer" suffered an almost total eclipse: over the centuries, a great deal of misunderstanding and incomprehension deposited on it. For all those still practicing it, it seems to have - with the exception of some monasteries - the meaning of a plea to God with the only purpose of obtaining personal favors or blessings on a suffering humanity. This tendency goes against the classic texts of ascetics and mysticism, where the Prayer is not aimed at changing the so-called "Godly plans" and obtaining anything at all, but at surrendering and accepting His "eternal plan". Saint John of the cross and saint Teresa of Avila have explained that perfection in spiritual life cannot be reached without that kind of Prayer.

To cry out to God, to bring before Him all one's sorrows, joys, thankfulness and needs, is quite another form of Prayer, which argument lies outside our theme. We are considering that kind of Prayer which goes beyond mere adoration, beyond supplication, beyond words themselves.

In literature it is written that it is obtained by repeating the Prayer "with the heart". Unfortunately this statement can be mistaken for a vague poetical expression.

In the following lines I will try to show how, and in what conditions, the Prayer enters the heart. Those who have read the second part of the book, will recognize concepts already dealt with, which will now be expressed in simpler form.

As I have told, I gave different cycles of lessons about the various forms of spiritual path: the last series of lessons was devoted to develop in strict sense

the concept of *Prayer of the heart*.

Most of my students didn't have any intention to start from the classic *Yoga*: for them the concluding routine in this Chapter became the gold of their first experience of the Divine.

A clean path

«Which is the best Prayer or *Mantra* for me?», almost any *yogi* puts this question. One can adapt a short Prayer, by adding *Om* or *Amen* at the beginning or at the end of it and obtain a 12 syllables Prayer. (Twelve is a perfect number since that *Mantra* can be chanted in the spine, placing one syllable in each different Chakra).

It may be useful to remember that *Japa* refers also to the repetition of whatever pure sound [*Mantra*: from "*Manas*", mind and "*Tra*", protection] that doesn't have a precise meaning; it may not be a Prayer in the common accepted meaning of the term. The mystics experimented with the power inherent in certain sounds—which came to them through their intuition—to penetrate the various planes of their being, even the physical, and bring great peace and harmony everywhere.

Well known are the "bija" (seed) *Mantras*: HROM, KLIM, STRIM, VANG, DÚM, GLOM... Shorter *Mantras*, constituted by two letters like YAM, RAM, LAM, or by one letter as OM, TA, VA, MA... are not frequently used for *Japa* (during the daily life) whereas are thoroughly used during the meditation session.

The chosen Prayer/*Mantra* should have both a strong and a soft tone. It is important to relish it. "Strong tone" means that it is incompatible with an attitude of supplication and complaint. The selected Prayer should not be an affirmation of our limits: it must imply the presentiment of an happiness which we are going to attract to us trough our repetition. Our intuition guides us to realize whether an initial difficulty with *Japa*—a dark mood during the day— means that the chosen Prayer is inappropriate.

One should take the determination to complete each day at least one *Mala* (a rosary of 108 beads) aloud, then leave that it automatically proceeds for a certain time mentally, at least for half an hour. Some repetitions of it are done, aloud or mentally, during the day - whenever this is possible.

During *Japa*, one shouldn't try to dominate his thoughts or create the mental void, but simply make the sound resound in one's head as to fill it completely with that vibration. One practices this during his daily chores - worried about nothing. The goal is to be able to maintain the mental silence where it is more difficult. In the background of his consciousness, one tries to go ahead,

obstinately, with the repetition of the *Mantra*, even when he is reading. When one talks to other people, instead of being involved in the images arising from the words, one can be on the alert not to lose the feeling of unchangeable calmness in the center of one's being.

Besides this, we must underline the necessity of the discipline to think in a clear way, one thing at a time, when it is necessary to think, otherwise remain in the mental silence, where to summon up the strength to prepare the future action.

This way of existing cannot be obtained by those people who try to do too much things at one time. It is better that a *kriyaban* does not try to be Superman and having, besides his job, another one or two and cultivate demanding hobbies. One must be wise and choose the simplest life, apt to his temperament and put everything in order, starting from the desk drawers. This order is to be extended to all the facets of one's life. So many conflicts will disappear and the heart will turn only towards one direction. It is necessary to read just one book at a time, be inspired by it, realize its teaching before beginning with another one.

Now to deeper remarks: each seeker encounters moments in which the temptation to leave *Japa* aside is tremendous. This simple practice cannot physiologically go ahead unhampered. Sometimes it is necessary to concentrate upon the chosen *Mantra* with an absolute fervour, to the point of exhaustion - a seeming exhaustion, originated by the resistances of the mind. The mind has gotten used to more complicated things - it will try to diminish in every way the value of this action.

Sometimes one might feel like a convalescent in a difficult process of recovery; sometimes the noise coming from the external world will reach his ears as amplified, while the widened sensitivity gives one the impression of having become more fragile, vulnerable and defenceless. It will remain, even when the vicissitudes of life attempt to destroy the very idea of the mystical dimension and the enthusiasm to tread the spiritual path. There are difficult moments in life; one must endure the farces that life involves. After giving vent to one's indignation, one recovers the lost composure through Prayer and is able to pass through life with a smile.

When one encounters moments in which the spiritual path seems to break down in different clumsy attempts, each one frail and vulnerable, one starts again from *Japa*. Prayer is the red thread that crosses all the phases of the spiritual path: neglecting its use means relinquishing a formidable instrument - an unpardonable mistake!

Those who wont leave it, will discover that all the parts of their existence, usually characterized by the daily preoccupations, become a continuous flow

of experience of the Divine. This is the dimension of *Continuous Prayer*: a unique way of living with intensity and beauty.

Prayer will mark the stupefying and intoxicating merger with a continuous and celestial state of bliss. Prayer is a marvellous gem whose glitter warms up our life. Prayer takes hold of those who are whispering it: it is written that it is the Prayer which "pronounces" the devotee, instead of the devotee pronouncing the Prayer. Its Magic will spread in each facet of life, it will be like walking out of a dark room into the fresh air, into the sunlight. There will be no more problems of aridity, lack of motivation and difficulty in concentration. Like a person near the fireside enjoying the beauty of a chilly and windy winter to build his nest in, so will one who practices *Japa* (continuous Prayer) contemplate either the sad or the joyous spectacle of life having found the infinity of the skies residing in one's heart!

I have a friend with whom I discussed *Japa*. He practiced without getting any result because, for him, this was a cerebral act. He let me watch him carefully while he was practicing: I was witness of a lifeless practice, a tired plea of God's mercy. Not for nothing he had put aside the *Mantra* we had discussed together and chosen an expression in his mother tongue that was not anything else than a sigh of self-pity. There was nothing to be surprised that, after some days, he abandoned entirely the practice.

One day he took part to a group pilgrimage. Someone began to recite the so-called *rosary* - a set number of repetitions of the same Prayer: to this all the pilgrims united. Even if tired and almost gasping for breath, he did not withdraw himself from this pious activity. While walking and praying softly, murmuring under his breath, began to taste a state of unknown calmness. He looked with different eyes at the show of continuously changing landscape and had the impression of living a paradisaical situation. When the group rested for an intermediate pause he had the grace to be left alone —undisturbed; he slipped into an introspective state and was pervaded by something vibrating in his own heart, which he identified, definitely, with the *Spiritual Reality*. The ecstatic state assumed the consistency of reality, became almost unbearable, overwhelming him. This experience taught him the correct way of practicing *Japa*. He said that the secret was to reach and overcome the state of "exhaustion." After some trials he chose with decision an Indian *Mantra* and, thank to it, he reached the breathless state.

Kriya can be considered the discipline developed from the fundamental idea (discovered independently by mystics born in different cultures) of merging the inner chanting of Prayer with a paced long breath.

One might not be ready to see *Kriya* in this light, especially if, conditioned by fascinating theories, one is used to looking at *Pranayama* as an

exceptionally smart tool - half-magic, half-scientific - to guide the awakened *Kundalini* serpent along the innermost channel of the spine, thus "refining the chemical composition of the molecules of the spine".

Let us suppose that our devotee has chanted his *Mantra* during the daily chores and when all activity has ceased, he sits with the back upright ready to begin his *Kriya* session. He has just closed his eyes, implying his detachment from the surrounding world, that he is absorbed by the same Prayer he has chanted during all the day, which is now reverberating, spontaneously, in his consciousness.

His heart thrills in welcoming, and thus caressing with the aspiration of his heart, that uninterrupted internal music; he sips the celestial honey of a radiation of sweetness, warmth and love which annihilates every desire and fill his soul with ineffable Beauty.

How naturally comes the idea of taking a long breath and chanting the Prayer entirely during the inhalation, or half during inhalation and the remaining part during the exhalation!

Not only *Omkar Pranayama*, but the basic *Pranayama* also can be considered a form of Prayer: in the first, the sweet Mantra *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya* is repeated again and again enlivening with its syllables each *Chakra*, in the latter, the two sounds Aaawwww and Eeeeeeee absorb the awareness.

Without recurring to the theory that they are a remnant of Vaaaaaaa Sheeeee which is *Shi-va*, they are pure sounds to which one's mind adheres meekly: they have the power of bringing about the movement of energy, which will be felt after a while, clear and definite.

Routine: Prayer and breath

[I] At noon or sunset⁴⁴ one sits in a place where one is not disturbed, surrounded by a comfortable environment, with a deeply serene mood. The instructions are conceived so as not to disturb that calm introverted state and encourage its development in a natural way. The body is relaxed; the spinal column is kept straight and free of all tensions. With calmness and sensibility, *Japa* is blended harmoniously with breath.

With mouth closed and right thumb closing the right nostril, one inhales slowly through his left nostril. During this inhalation one thinks of the first half of the chosen Prayer (*Mantra*). The *Chakras* are not thought of. Then

⁴⁴ The introductory part can also be performed in the morning. Then, during the day, when it is possible to withdraw from work, one takes back shortly the [II] or [IV] procedure and practices the second part.

one's left nostril is closed with the little finger and ring finger - of the same hand, or with the thumb of the left hand - and the exhalation happens through the right nostril while thinking the second half of the Prayer. Then, the nostrils exchange their role: keeping the left nostril closed, the air is slowly inhaled through the right nostril, thinking the first half of the Prayer. Then, closing the right nostril with the thumb, the exhalation happens through the left nostril thinking the second half of the Prayer. This corresponds to a cycle: one performs six cycles. The concentration is on the breath, on the quality of each breath; it adheres to the coolness or the warmth of the breath (inhalation – exhalation) and learns to fully rejoice of each single breath.

[II] One inhales deeply through both nostrils, producing a slight sound in the throat and visualizing the first half of the Prayer that raises from the base of the spinal column to the occipital region; then one exhales while thinking the second half of the Prayer that goes back to the base of the spinal column. After several days one succeeds in thinking the syllables of the Prayer each in a different *Chakra*: the first half while going up (*Chakra* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and occipital region) and the second half while going down (*Medulla Oblongata* region and *Chakra* 5, 4, 3, 2, 1). This exercise is repeated a minimum of 6 times (between 12-24 is the ideal dose).

[III] After having inhaled and placed the first six syllables in the *Chakras*, while holding shortly the breath, one moves his head slightly toward left; the seventh syllable is thought in the *Medulla*; then one moves his head slightly toward right and the eighth syllable is thought in the cervical *Chakra*. Then one nears the head diagonally to the breast, from the right, as to touch it with the chin; one thinks the ninth syllable in the heart *Chakra*. With the head down, the exhalation begins and the remaining three syllables are placed in the lower *Chakras*. (During the subsequent inhalation the chin gradually returns to its normal horizontal position.) The procedure is repeated 3 (or 6, or 12) times. Then one shortly resumes the procedure [II]. Six breaths are enough to recreate the state of calmness, which the movements of the head may have upset.

[IV] Through a short inhalation, thinking the first half the Prayer, one lifts the energy from the first to the second *Chakra*; a very short pause follows (less than one second); then, with a short exhalation, thinking the second half of the Prayer, one lowers the energy from the second to the first *Chakra*. Through an inhalation (always of the same length of time), thinking the first half the Prayer, one lifts the energy from the first to the third *Chakra*; a very short pause follows (less than one second); then, with a short exhalation,

thinking the second half of the Prayer, one lowers the energy from the third to the first *Chakra*. (During this second breath it is as if the second *Chakra* did not exist)...

Now it should be clear how the practice goes ahead.

... the energy is lifted from the first to the fourth *Chakra* and then it is lowered.

(In this phase it is as if the second and the third *Chakra* did not exist.)

... same thing from the first to the fifth one...

... same thing from the first to the occipital region...

... same thing from the first to the *Medulla*...

... same thing from the first to the fifth one...

... same thing from the first to the fourth one...

... same thing from the first to the third one...

... same thing from the first to the second one.

This is one cycle. It consists in 10 breaths and lasts about 40/60 seconds.

To prevent some doubts let me clarify that the various breaths have the same length of time even if the paths of the energy measure differently. After two, three cycles, a great sense of interiorisation is perceived.⁴⁵

Final part: only Prayer

During the following phase of the practice, one's isolation has to be defended by all means. For no reason other people should be let disturb it – if it happens, one will receive an internal wound.

After having drawn three deep breaths, each of them ending with a fast and as complete an exhalation as a sigh, and after having forgotten the breath entirely, one whispers the whole Prayer, in a calm way, while placing his awareness in the first *Chakra* - the coccyx region.

The required quality is a perfect balance between the tension for the technical perfection and the spiritual aspiration.

Then one goes to the zone at sacrum's height where, inside the backbone the second *Chakra* is located, then to the third one in the lumbar region at navel's height, then to the fourth one in the dorsal region, at heart's height, then to the fifth one at the foot of the cervical vertebrae, then to the occipital region where the hairline twists in a kind of vortex. Then, without any hurry, one

⁴⁵ The described procedure is a wonderful way of guiding the strength, born from the three previous procedures, which is felt particularly radiating from the heart *Chakra*, in all the other *Chakras*. Furthermore, it is providential to those individuals whose health condition (mental or physical or both) makes the basic Pranayama procedure [II] impracticable.

descends with his awareness in the *Medulla Oblongata* and whispers gently the Prayer there, goes down to the cervical *Chakra*, to the dorsal etc.. to the first *Chakra*.

This is one round: at this point, very probably one feels the urge to keep quiet and go on repeating the Prayer mentally.

One thinks it once again in the first *Chakra*, then in the second and so on... then down ...and one goes on in this way (up and down) until time allows. Different phases are crossed.⁴⁶

(a) The first is that of ***total immobility***.

The awareness of one's existence is increased. Life around is momentarily extraneous. There is a great resistance to interrupt the physical immobility. The eyes, if they were eventually open or half shut, would close by themselves. If they are hold open - for instance to avoid drowsiness - one wouldn't see anything. The Prayer gives the power "to see", "to touch" each thought and therefore to "stop it."

The way we think the Prayer in each *Chakra* should be suitable to our needs. There are obviously different forms to do it; here we have pointed out the simplest, that is, to stay in each *Chakra* the time necessary to think the complete Prayer slowly once. One can think it two, three times. Experience will show how it is not profitable to stay in one *Chakra* for less than 10 seconds and not to exceed the minute.⁴⁷

(b) The second phase is that of the perception of ***inner light*** (or sound, or movement sensation).

By continuing with the mental Prayer, a light is perceived in the *Kutastha* and above the head; it varies from a diffused intensity to the brilliant light of the so-called spiritual eye. A feeling of internal light gives the idea that one's being is constituted by an intensity of gilded light. One can hear some inner sounds or perceive, in each *Chakra*, the sensation of an inner movement. Almost originating in the syllables of the Prayer, it is a paradoxical feeling of a movement in the most total immobility. This phenomenon is described in different ways in the various mystical paths (in the Christian mystical path we

⁴⁶ Eminent mystics have explained that this "Internal Prayer" path develops through several steps; it is necessary to start with this simple practice and to gradually rise to the most elevated one. Prayer starts in action, gradually becomes a condition, a state of consciousness.

⁴⁷ The striving for perfection is not a blind, stubborn will for hitting the target, it implies the respect for the beauty and the importance of each detail. The *Kriya* path is not just a blessing which appears out of the blue: it is a vast, inclusive effort (intuition and creativity at the first place) which we accept to embark on.

find some reports of "being touched by the Divine").

When one starts the practice, it is physiological he meets various distractions. These are to be accepted without bothering and without creating complexes; sometimes one slips in the state of sleep. To avoid it, he who practices learns to settle in the intermediate area between the perceptions of the external reality and the allure of internal Bliss.

The awareness assumes that alert detachment which allows to remain fully awake in the incoming travel toward the experience of existing beyond body, in the eternity.

Moving through the *Chakras*, the vibration of the *Mantra* crosses all the planes of one's being. The *Chakras* are perceived as different levels of awareness. One's mood is cheered up.

When the head movements accompany the Prayer, the syllables "glide" in and enter the heart. A great strength of love penetrates one's being. Prayer is no longer a deed but a state of ecstasy in which the ego-mind stops existing. On certain occasions this feeling is paradoxical: it consists of the simultaneous presence of a mild form of pain mixed with the perception of a *sweet goodness*, which cannot to be compared with any pleasure of life. When one indulges in enjoying it, some tears of joy pour out of his eyes - sustaining the strength of such an experience is a difficult task.

(c) The third phase is ***the contact with the spiritual joy***.

At this point the practice of the Prayer, as mental repetition of words, starts to be lost along the way. One feels to be invaded by something that has, so to say, the taste of Eternity. The consciousness is transported a far greater distance than any known territory. This is a state that makes death indifferent; from it an incommensurable good is born. The soul feels to be in contact with an *endless goodness* (I do not know another way to describe it, I borrow an expression of S. Teresa of Avila).

While experiencing it and enjoying all the sweetness that springs out of it, it is quite normal that mind gives its last signs of activity. At times one's inner look turns, tenderly, to some image that appears on the mental screen. It may be something symbolic, a remnant of a memory, transfigured by the meditation-born joy. No disturbance comes from it.

(d) The fourth phase is the **ceasing of the breath**.

By continuing with the mental Prayer, it is easy to reach that middle zone between Prayer and breath, where both disappear and become pure mental strength (a power of internally touching each cell of the body).

One feels a fresh and bright energy sustaining his body from inside. One

discovers that breath is annihilated. The conscience is beyond the body, in a dimension of blue in the head extending behind the *Bindu* and also just more a little over.

(e) The fifth phase is *the state of ecstasy (Samadhi)*. This is a state where the consciousness is totally isolated from the outside - there is no breathing any more and the pulse is practically non-existent. It comes by itself when the time is ripe.

(f) The sixth phase is the emergence in order to return to normal living. Before getting up from the position adopted for meditation and returning to full activity, one repeats, at least three times, the Prayer in the point between the eyebrows (Kutastha). By intensifying the concentration, the syllables are perceived like the action of a chick which tries to perforate, with the beak, the shell that contains it. By intensely practicing the Prayer in that point one has the impression that everything goes into place and the routine concludes in the best of the ways.

CHAPTER III/4.... ANOTHER ASPECT OF PRANAYAMA: SIMILARITIES WITH INTERNAL ALCHEMY

The *Kriya* literature mentions, but does not describe entirely, the four progressive stadiums of *Pranayama*. Progress in *Pranayama* develops from the sound base of a state which Lahiri Mahasaya called *Equilibrium* (*Prana* distributed evenly in the body, manifesting a thoroughly wholesome effect in the psychophysical system, from the state of very calm breath and mental silence to the equanimity in the personality) obtained with the techniques of the *First Kriya*, flourish, usually with the application of other techniques, in the breathless state (second stadium) and in the pulseless *Samadhi* state (third stadium).

The existence of a fourth state means that the mystical experience does not end with the ecstatic trance. There is another Beauty and vastness to be explored. By pondering upon the essence of this last stage, we are stunned by the breadth and loftiness of its implicit level of consciousness. This explains the substantial difficulty in describing it, its "borderline" character.

In fact it consists in the expansion of the awareness up to include that of the whole humanity: it is a state where the spiritual dimension encounters the material life with all its sorrows and limitations. It does not match the common idea that the spiritual path represents a definitive fly away from *Maya*, from the illusion of matter.

In one's life it corresponds to the moment in which the contact with the Spirit obtained through the *Samadhi* state reveals its limits and the soul yearns after reaching a deeper tuning with the Divine by merging one's awareness in the needs and the pains of other souls, in what is apparently anti divine and realize the Divine there.

Practically speaking, a mystic intuitively knows how to use his/her body to dispel another person's darkness – one's mental and physical ailments. (I don't like the expression "burning the *Karma*" because, nowadays, especially in the New Age world, it seems too much a matter of routine, as it were a normal feat by a super hero saint. The sufferance of the saint is always authentic; like any human being, he or she does not seek foolishly different occasions to attract it.)

As literature doesn't unequivocally clarify the nature of this fourth level of *Kriya* and my affirmations are nothing but hypothesis, I will now try to clarify from where they are born.

Some years ago a friend made for me a photocopy of a book about the

Internal Alchemy - the philosophy at the base of Taoism.⁴⁸ When I read the description of its basic procedure (*microcosmic orbit*) I saw it was very similar to *Kriya Pranayama* and the first thought was if, in remote times, mystics from India or from China had communicated together. When I came to the description of the second phase of the Internal Alchemy (the energy accumulated in the brain, after a certain amount of rounds of the micro orbit, was guided down from the head into the *Dan Tien*) I clearly saw that the principle of *Navi Kriya* was involved.

My attention was stirred up and I embarked on a more careful study. Conscious that the book was worth studying carefully, I cut out (I was handling with photocopies and I would never do anything similar to a book) various paragraphs or sections of the book, I put them in order, according to an ideal logic sequence of exposition of the four phases of the Internal Alchemy (obviously I engaged myself in a substantial work of simplification) and glued them on four sheets of paper.

On a different sheet I arranged a rudimentary Glossary, limited to the essential terms.

Here is the cream of my study, enriched by some ideas borrowed from successive studies. The teaching is extremely concise, different to what is found in the specialized literature where the techniques are abnormally embellished and a lot of evocative terms, beautiful metaphors, are utilized.

First stage

This stage is the basis of all the process, it consists in activating the Microcosmic Orbit. Its purpose is "to bring Three to Two, Two to One". The three are Jing (sexual energy), Qi (life energy) and Shen (spiritual energy). One learns to transmute Jing into Qi and Qi into Shen. An alchemy of these three energies is created: the result is a well-balanced state of consciousness.

Preparation [a]: circulation of light

In order to circulate the light/energy one has to open two channels in his body and connect them together. The tongue touches the roof of the mouth, mouth is closed without clenching the teeth, eyelids are lowered until almost closed. The breath is completely free - this first part of this process is purely mental. One feels (and sometimes really *senses*) the energy in the center between the eyebrows. By lifting the eyebrows one is particularly sensitive to inner light. At least two minutes are spent in *Kutastha*. Then the frontal component of each *Chakra* is activated. "Frontal" means on the anterior part of the body. Each component is visualized as situated along the *Functional Channel* which runs from the tip of the tongue down

⁴⁸ Lu Kuan Yü.(Charles Luk) *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality*. London: Rider & Co., 1970.

to Adam's apple, sternum, navel, sexual organs, perineum.

Thus, after *Kutastha*, the awareness comes down through the tongue into the Adam's apple, which is linked to the fifth Chakra. The perception of the inner light happens at that spot for the same time as in the *Kutastha*. The awareness comes down in the central region of the sternum ... inner light is perceived there ... then in the navel ... then in the pubic region and finally in the perineum. Then the concentration moves up along the back of the spinal column, along the so-called *Governor Channel* (which runs from the perineum up over the head down to the third eye.) The same light perception happens in the second *Chakra*; then in the third ... and so on up to the *Medulla*, the back of the brain, the Fontanelle, ending in *Kutastha* again, where one remains as much as possible. Very little importance is placed on the nature of each *Chakra*: one cares only of the free flowing of light through the just described *microcosmic orbit*.

Preparation [b]: breath awareness

One breathes naturally through the nose, drawing the air deep down into the abdomen and making the exhalation long and smooth.

As the breaths become longer, the attention is focused on two sensations, one above and the other below. Above, the concentration is on the gentle breeze of air flowing in and out of the nostrils. Below, the focus is on the navel and the entire abdomen, expanding and contracting like a balloon with each inhalation and exhalation. Sometimes it helps to count either inhalations or exhalations, until mind is stably focused. This is a very simple practice, yet it creates a great reservoir of energy in the navel region, which is the fuel to put the microcosmic orbit in motion.

Microcosmic orbit proper

The technique is based on raising awareness and energy (Qi) up the *Governor Channel* at the back of the spine during inhalation, and letting it flow down along the *Functional channel* during exhalation.

One acts directly upon Qi because it is tied to air, and indirectly upon Jing and Shen, which are dragged by the movement of Qi. The tongue touches the roof of the mouth.

Inhaling, the energy is visualized as being like a small snake gradually passing through the coccyx, rising up to the back of the brain; it reaches the region under Fontanelle; the head should move forward and tilt slightly upwards to help Qi go forward over the forehead.

At the end of inhalation, the attention has reached the center between the eyebrows. Exhalation starts and energy sinks down through the palate and tongue into the Adam's apple, chest, past the navel down into the genitals, then to the root of the spine. One may feel as though there was water going down. Then another cycle is begun. The breathing through the nose is mainly abdominal - as in the preparation phase.

Second stage

This stage happens when the "spiritual embryo" or the "elixir of immortality" is cultivated. This happens after Jing is transmuted into Qi and Qi into Shen. To this purpose, Shen is guided into the lower abdomen (inferior Dan Tien) where it is progressively refined till it illuminates the space of the heart (the middle Dan Tien) and reveals one's *fundamental nature*.

Technique proper

With a series of long and subtle exhalations, the energy stored in the head as a result of the previous technique, is conveyed into the Dan Tien, behind the navel, in the lower abdomen. This process is brought ahead unswervingly, the mind becomes pure, calm, empty: a vibration is produced. By deepening the practice, it ascends spontaneously into the heart and the "true serenity" manifests. The contemplation of light shining in the heart and behind the eyebrows completes this second phase.

Third stage

This stage consists in increasing the Qi inside the *Thrusting Channel* with the purpose of putting in motion the Macrocosmic Orbit. The *Thrusting Channel* runs like a tube from the perineum to the Fontanelle through the center of the body.

Technique proper

During a long, calm inhalation, one focuses on a beam of energy entering the crown of the head through the Fontanelle and visualizes it flowing down through the *Central Thrusting Channel* to the base of the spine.

Then exhalation begins which is fragmented in innumerable punctuated parts like pulses. The lips are united in their central part: air comes out through the corners of the lips and it consists of many "sss", "sss", "sss".... .

A warm sensation is created on the lips, which is mentally transferred to the base of the spine. The important thing is to feel something which tends to go upwards inside the body. It is felt in front of the spine, in the core of the body but it does not rise higher than the thoracic region.

This is the only part of the *Thrusting Channel* which is perceived during exhalation. Repeating inhalation and exhalation in this way for a considerable number of times is the gist of the procedure. A warming of the navel region is produced by the little jerks of the navel that this way of exhaling automatically produces: it gives the sensation of an increase of energy.

This technique has in itself a very tangible effect of uplifting the mood and overcomes, almost instantly, any negative state. While doing it, one experiences a pleasant sensation but the best effect is felt hours later while relaxing, when pure bliss explodes unexpectedly.

The fourth stage

This stage is a great event which cannot be induced by visualization based methods, like those described in many taoist books. The fourth stage is not a technique, but

something which happens in due time through an indomitable work with the third step. The body must be loaded with Qi and the channels must be perfectly open. It does not happen in any other situation.

A person enters spontaneously a state of well being and perceives a great infusion of energy coming down as a golden liquid outside and inside the body, in all its cells, particularly the skin. At the same time, with a part of his awareness, one feels that something is raising up at the back, more around than inside the spine. These two movements are not perfectly synchronized. Either one of the currents begins. While one's awareness is enjoying it fully, the other current in turn appears.

From a certain moment onwards the ascending movement does not attract the attention, one is totally aware only of the descending one, enchanted by its power of widening the boundaries of consciousness. The descending movement becomes static and turns into a indefinite pressure on all the cells of the body.

I purchased the same book in order to grant me the pleasure of reading it again, underlying it. I read every title that I could find on the subject (Internal Alchemy and Taoism); I had long, passionate talks with people practicing that path. It required time to probe into its extreme details. My enthusiastic response derived from the firm belief that in those notes I was discerning authentic details about the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*.

Various metaphors used to explain the mechanism of the *Microcosmic Orbit* (bagpipe turned upside-down, flute with no holes...) reminded with stunning precision the explanations that I had received in *Kriya*.

When, later, the energy is guided into the Dan Tien, (behind the navel, in the lower abdomen) the description portrays a calm mind experiencing the "true serenity". The *Macrocosmic Orbit*, represents the last stage: it is depicted as a spontaneous phenomenon of circulation of energy in the body, which has vast psychological implications. Since *Internal Alchemy* and *Kriya Yoga* seemed to be in fact a copy of each other, I wondered if this last stage could and should be achieved also in *Kriya Yoga*.

In *Puran Purush* Lahiri Mahasaya wrote: «Following an excellent *Pranayama*, the breath is wholly internally oriented. After a long period, today my descent has been fulfilled»!

It is evident that he referred to a deeper experience than that of a *Kriya* novice: he is describing the spontaneous circulation of energy, very likely the same as the last stage of Internal Alchemy. Who can exclude that Lahiri Mahasaya's teaching upon this point was clear, unequivocal but later was censored in order to suit the main philosophic and mystical tendency prevalent in the countries in which *Kriya* was spread?

It is fascinating to think that the perfection of *Kriya* is achieved when a *kriyaban's Pranayama* becomes «...wholly internally oriented».

A particular experience

It was perhaps because of a subconscious receptivity towards Internal Alchemy descriptions that I prepared the ground, and let it happen freely, an experience that revealed an unfathomable wealth - I baptized it the *Kriya of the cells*. Such a name derived by the impression that the cells of the body could be considered doors opening on a totally new dimension of the consciousness.

(I) One day, during my *Kriya* routine at noon, I felt an inexplicable repulsion to use *Kechari Mudra* and began the practice of *Pranayama* with open eyes: I didn't want to abandon the beauty of the landscape that was before me. That day the nature was the Divine from which I didn't want to detach. During the inhalation, I filled my consciousness with the powerful *Vaaa* vibration: it departed from the sexual zone, absorbed the energy there and brought it into the head; exhaling, it was the vibration of *Sheee* that guided the energy down as a rain in the whole body. Gradually this going down was like a hypodermic needle which injected the awareness into the cells. It came spontaneous to make exhalation last a lot more than inhalation: the sound of the breath came out more acute and it seemed easier to guide the energy into the cells.

Then, I reasoned in this way: why shouldn't the inner action of *Pranayama* continue, exactly in the same way, even if there is no breath - I mean during the following *mental Pranayama*? I had an uplifting experience: something indefinite happened, in fact. There was a spontaneous rotation of energy, which took the place of the usual *mental Pranayama*. A crystalline state of joy and a feeling of infinite safety originated. It was like having crossed a barrier in the atoms of this physical universe and live in the body and in a measureless space, at the same time.

At the end I emerged overwhelmed by euphoria: I had a clear perception that all the problems at a psychological level were a nightmare which was dissolved forever, an illusion out of which I had emerged definitively. My life, which, so far, had been full of asperities, seemed to stretch out evenly toward the future. When I returned to my daily duties, the beauty of living, like wine from a full cup, seemed to overflow from every atom and fill my heart; I rejoiced of an unfathomable clarity of mind.

(II) In the following weeks I tried to refine the experience.

[a] The routine began always with a strong *Pranayama* (without mental chanting of *Om* in each *Chakra*'s location) where the movement of energy in the body during exhalation was intensified by constant concentration. During

inhalation, I felt the energy rising somehow, in or around the spine and trunk. At the same time, I tried my utmost to be aware of the *Prana* coming in through the nose, mingled with the air. I felt the cold sensation produced by the air in the nostrils and in the throat. The awareness of the typical *Kriya Pranayama* sound was unswerving: this sound functioned as transformer of air into *Prana*. The two movements of energy (in the spine and through the nostrils) were perceived simultaneously.

[b] After some rounds of this Pranayama (no more than 12-24) the breath (beginning with exhalation and then extending to inhalation) was fragmented in a succession of micro parts. I divided the breath into as much as possible fragments of breath. In the technique of *Omkar Pranayama* we saw how to fragment the breath in six + six parts. I always started from this breathing pattern – forgetting the use of any *Mantra*. Then the breath was divided into more and more short sips. It was not difficult to divide inhalation into twelve, then in eighteen sips... - in other words two, three... per *Chakra*. This procedure seemed to be more direct in obtaining the effect of entering the cells: the short fragments of the exhaled air became soft injections of energy in the body, in particular in the skin. The perception of an inner light sustaining each cell of the body was very clear, the body was filled with awareness.

[c] During each exhalation the intense awareness of the navel reloaded with subtle strength the whole process. The action of the diaphragmatic muscles was distinctively felt: each time the navel moved towards the spine, a power sensation was felt increasing behind it. It was like a *Navi Kriya* embedded in the *Pranayama*.

This detail produced a strange effect: during the last moments of each exhalation an "impossible" orgasmic sensation was perceived. It was as if the breath was paralysed within the lungs, couldn't go out and this created a sensation like that of a faint suffocation. But, strange to tell, it was so blissful to cry from joy. It was like pressing against the wall of a cell, which in itself would be unbearable, but the anticipation of the freedom outside the body shell, created bliss. At a certain moment the breath seemed to disappear. I forgot everything and concentrate only on the free rotation of the energy.

(III) After some years I discovered the role of *Thokar*, in particular its variation on all the *Chakras*.

The scheme was always the same: a deep breathing pattern turned gradually into the strong action of guiding the energy into the cells of the body but, at a certain moment, I introduced (after at least 12 *Pranayama*) the technique of *Thokar on all the Chakras* (see school [B] as described in chapter II/3).

In this procedure, surely more simply to be experienced than to be described,

a clear perception of the power originating from the *Muladhar Chakra* into all parts of the body, just after the syllable *Ya* was vibrated, gave rise to the coveted experience.

I followed the energy from the *Muladhar* into the head. Sometimes a smooth inhalation happened, sometimes it came out spontaneously fragmented and sometimes there was no breathing at all. Only a repeated practice could guide me to understand in each occasion how and if it was good to accompany the rising of the energy with a particular inhalation. Immediately after the rising of the energy, there came its coming down in the body.

I repeated the whole procedure (*Thokar* on all the *Chakras* plus particular inhalation) different times (no more than 6-12). Then I felt it was absurd to make other movements: I enjoyed only the pure flow of energy, climbing up and coming down wonderfully.

Usually, in this situation, I perceived the sound of *Om* in a distinct way.

The effects during the practice were surely pleasant but it was difficult to sustain a gloomy mood which appeared in the next days: it was as if my very soul was scratched. An obsessive thought took possession of my outlook on life: the physical and psychological fragility of the human being hit me with an unusual strength. A vision constantly appeared as a symbol: men corralled up like animals in a narrow space, forced by their instincts to eat and reproduce; a man would appear suddenly, get at another one at random and cut his head off in front of all the others. I imagined the corral's members murmuring some circumstantial words such as: «Nothing will ever be the same now»... Then, with a vitreous eye, they would turn back to their normal activities. The problem was slightly overcome by remaining a long time concentrated in between the eyebrows.

No other technicalities gave me similar result. I tried the procedure (explained in ancient Internal Alchemy treatises) of doing the act of gulping of the breath at the end of inhalation and visualizing the breath immobilized (frozen) in the body, transforming in inner light. This was good, but after a limited period of days I felt the need to abandon it and go ahead freely. I experimented also with *Kapalabhati*⁴⁹ and *Bhastrika Pranayama*.

⁴⁹ In *Kapalabhati* there is an abdominal breathing pattern - diaphragmatic, not chest breathing. A sudden contraction of the abdominal muscles raises the diaphragm and a volume of air is forced out of the lungs. As soon as the air is thrown out, the abdominal muscles are relaxed, which allows the diaphragm to come down and a volume of air automatically rushes in. Here, inhalation is passive and exhalation active. A *yogi* goes ahead in this way for ten to fifteen expulsions. Then he takes a deep inhalation and holds the air as long as possible. There are different methods for increasing the set of repetitions. It is interesting to notice how in the literature it is emphasized to concentrate on the solar plexus since this will bathe every tissue of the body with

There are books where one finds a remark that they could be taken as the basis of *Kriya Pranayama*. I think that such forms of breathing, although they can produce very strong sensations, may have substantial contraindications. If they were really useful in unblocking our inner obstacles, Lahiri Mahasaya would surely have talked about them, at least to those disciples whom he considered eligible for the *Higher Kriyas*.

Remarks

Before writing the following lines, I have hesitated a lot. The reader may be disappointed by what I am going to report because it may evoke the *New Age* manias. It is only after listening similar effects by other researchers and on account of my commitment to total sincerity, that I have made up my mind to write about it.

After having repeated so many times the experience of guiding the energy in the cells of the body, I began to feel as "not having a skin anymore." This is a metaphoric way to indicate the impression of perceiving - not only through my awareness but, in a strange way, also through my body - what was passing in another person's consciousness (not each thought of course, but his mood: to feel it as my own).

To be clear, I quote a recurrent example.

It happened that all of a sudden, a deep depression took hold of my mood, last several hours and then disappeared; it was not a simple dissonance, a disharmony, but an agonizing pain in a moment in which there was no justification for it. Then I realized that a significant circumstance had happened: I had been introduced to a new acquaintance, had shaken hands and talked with a sincere involvement. Of course we all know how good our mind is when it comes to clutching straws; but when a similar episode is observed with the due detachment and, as the days and the months go by, it repeats with mathematical precision, then the evidence of a phenomenon of tuning with another person's consciousness, cannot be denied. What I was and what the others were, mixed.

My hypothesis is that, during the afore described form of *Pranayama*, its sweet pressure on the cells of the body succeeds in breaking the barrier of the ego and touching the psychological dimension which ties all human beings together: the vast ocean of the *Collective Unconscious*. This idea, although seems a fable, is consistent. I have no proof, but I am sipping the beauty of this idea. By letting my mind free of receiving hints for reflection from the past readings, I tried to search if there was something which could spread

energy.

light upon my experience. Two names emerged: Mére and Jung.

About Mére, I recalled her descent in the body through the Mantra: *Om Namo Bhagavate*. Satprem's pages full of beauty came gradually to my memory. The *Agenda* published by him is an amazing "log" containing Mére's "impossible" adventure. Many years ago it had a deep impact upon my way of considering *Kriya*. *Kriya Pranayama* was a means of injecting consciousness in the body. It was a fascinating idea to encounter the Divine not in the heavens but in the dimension of matter.

The beauty of Mére's account is tremendous: in her body she stumbled upon the mechanism of death and upon a "new" Energy which embodied the key to the next species.

She started repeating the *Mantra* while walking to and fro in her room. Recharged by her laser-like concentration, it easily made its way through the various layers of her consciousness (thoughts, emotions, instincts) until it lighted a negative layer as the base of all impossibilities - the origin of every feeling of desperation, deposited therein during the course of entire millennia. It took her a long time to cross it, but her awareness finally reached the cells and an incomparable experience "exploded". She found an eternity of perfection in it!

What was very interesting, was that Mére, talking to Satprem, told him that by proceeding to bring her awareness into the cells of her body, a lot of people around started to react as if she had invaded their intimacy.

I thought that *Pranayama* could give rise to the same result.

The legacy of Jung is another thing, it is more rational.⁵⁰

The bright beam of a *kriyaban*'s effort in guiding his awareness in all the cells of the body is able to pass through the layers of the *Collective Consciousness*, allowing what is obscure, lethargic and dark to become transparent and find its perfect position in the universal harmony. The stage of reaching

⁵⁰ I believe that Jung's discoveries are precious for the understanding of the mystic path - perhaps more than many other concept formulated during the 20th century. Jung is difficult to be read. It seems he wants to be rigorous and demanding.

Even though his statements never lacked the necessary prudence, the scientific community never forgave him for dealing with matters that were not considered part of Psychiatry - such as Alchemy (deemed an absurdity), the realm of myths (considered the result of a senseless imagination) and, more than any other thing, the great value he attributed to the religious dimension; which he considered something universal and fundamentally sane, instead of a pathology. Nowadays, the enthusiasm for his writings remains especially with those who deal with topics of a spiritual and esoteric nature.

Jung gives us a terminology which permits us to dare to probe an aspect of the mystical path which otherwise would risk to be totally extraneous not only to our capability of expression but also to our comprehension.

(contacting somehow or at least feeling on our skin the effects of such contact) the *Collective Unconscious* can explain the suffering of the mystics which otherwise would seem unjustified or an impossible product of their own ignorance.

What is Kriya

Perhaps the reader thinks that the question about the definition of *Kriya Yoga* should have been tackled in the first pages of this book. In my opinion, almost no one reads the introductory pages. The reader may think it worthwhile to give it a glance only after a partial reading of the book. He or she prefers to get a general idea of the author's motivations (...and obsessions) by lingering over some techniques, to see at which depth they are discussed. Sometimes a reader behaves like a timorous animal, roaming in unexplored territory, wondering whether to give a modicum of trust to what the author is communicating. The techniques which the reader actually bothers to read carefully are likely familiar to him, at least to a certain extent. He or she may discover new aspects of them and decide to test them by combining them - perhaps in the strangest of the ways - with others he or she is already accustomed to. If all this seems to work, the reader may take into account the author's preface, skipping definitively those parts which have even a slightest rhetorical tone. One wants to listen to the author's opinions after having tested the value of the book.

All of us agree that vague esoteric pursuits (daydreaming about the power of *Kriya* to awake some not well-specified latent faculties, boost our mental powers...) have nothing to do with *Kriya*. It is a spiritual path, a way leading towards the mystical experience. Unfortunately the same word *mystic* evokes a relationship with the mystery, with the concept of initiation (from the Greek μυστικός [mustikos], an initiate) into secret religious rituals (also this from the Greek μύω, to conceal). But it is a firm point that a *mystic* is not a fan of paranormal studies, of reading philosophy, he is not a simple curious, a lazy dabbler. A concrete process is going on in his life: the employment of specific procedures to calm the mind, to obtain a total gift of himself to *something* laying beyond the territories of his Ego. Now, what is this *something*?

What is the real basic trait of the spiritual experience, beyond any empty word - the ephemeral wrap imposed by the human mind. Even if someone maintains that, because of the ineffability of the experience, we should not pretend to be able to fully grasp its essence, I think that a *kriyaban* has the duty to ask himself such a question and distill from his/her reflections a clear point of view.

Almost no person approaches *Kriya Yoga* knowing exactly what it is.

My childish attraction for esotericism turned into the fascination for the Beauty in nature, which I referred as "poetry" and was the basis for my interest in *Yoga*.

Since the traditional religion didn't have any meaning for me - I saw its contradictions - I didn't associated *Yoga* with the spiritual path. The first exercises were done just to create a state of mental void.

Later, my obstinate passion for *Pranayama* was nourished not by my desire to «dye to myself» but also by my interest for Jungian psychology.

After studying Jung's fascinating writings, I dreamed of beginning one day the "process of individualization".

When I had the first great experiences with *Pranayama* I remained so stunned by its effects that I guessed it could help me (of course with a strong active cooperation from my part) to do a great part of that work and clean my unconscious from all acquired complexes and even get near to the archetypes of Collective Unconscious. Those who have studied Jung will find this idea an insanity. But I received a great enthusiasm from it. One day I had an experience that gave me the exact perception of what the spiritual dimension was. The first devotional readings (*Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*) created no substantial change in my temperament and attitude. I was a mystic who sought the impersonal Beauty and found full support in them.

To enter a school of *Kriya* meant to be swallowed up and bewildered by thousand and one beautiful fairy stories. *Kriya* became a good habit, a small contribute of my own effort, disappearing inside the tide of the *Guru's* blessings.

My rational attitude to measure the territory of that school through the values instilled by my culture was gradually thwarted; it was as if a large portion of my brain closed, while another one, which found pleasure in believing what it was convenient to believe, tried to usurp its function. At the beginning this "oriental-oriented" brain didn't know how to answer back to any censure and reacted by running away or reciprocating violently, subsequently it became cunning and was compatible with social life (others would look at me as a wise man who loved a natural life, marked by lofty principles of morality...) not revealing how the freedom of judgment was impaired, practically inexistent.

I came to my senses through the readings of Aurobindo, Mére and Satprem's. In Mére's aspiration I found my old striving.

Each one has its own illusions; each one enters the *Kriya* path pushed by different reasons: none is really serious, none is totally stupid.

In time, one takes in that *Kriya* is not a trick to solve automatically one's psychological and existential problems. All the possible inner strength and intelligence must be added. All the necessary measures should be considered, in order to challenge the internal barriers; *Pranayama* just supports one's effort. *Kriya* cannot change one's personality: it is by establishing healthy human relationship, by living authentic feelings, that the "light" of *Kriya* crosses the wall of one's psychological life and help one to lose many

asperities in his temperament.

Then, is Kriya all an illusion? No, it is great thing. It is a cascade of light in our lives. *Kriya* is a discipline bringing one not to a single, well defined state of consciousness, but to different states which gradually reveal one after the other. *Kriya*, as I see it, is a way of opening our eyes towards life – its meaning and our role in it. This happens in four steps.

First

One has taken the first *Kriya* step when one has learned to put his heart willingly in the practice of *Pranayama* and has perceived its concrete power to establish balance and tranquility in one's personality.

This first step is fully enjoyed when one discovers, during mental *Pranayama*, the reality of the *Chakras* and, concentrating on them, is thrilled by a feeling of sweetness.

During the daily chores or during moments of inactivity, *mental silence* is experienced. After stillness has settled in, an explosion of inner joy, which has no cause, appears at times. *Kriya* is an amplifier and the degree of this joy depends also by a preexisting sensibility which is boosted by the inner fuel. *Kriya* takes our yearning in its golden hands and offers it to a vaster, open blue.

Second

The second stage is obtained by crossing the "door" of the navel and by calming the breath altogether. Each individual is born with the trauma of cutting the umbilical cord. A singular, unique reality is split into two parts: one's spiritual side, which manifests as joy and calmness, establishes itself in the higher *Chakras* and in the head; one's material side, in the lower *Chakras*. Even those who do not accept this theory, can acknowledge the split, the fracture between matter and spirit inside each human being. Undoubtedly, that split is the permanent source of excruciating conflicts in the lives of many spiritual researchers. By bringing the consciousness in the navel region one begins to feel not only the settling of a deep calmness (as in the first stage) but a new kind of harmony which works as a healing process of one's conflicts – of course nothing is to be taken as automatic, it requires one's active participation in taking crucial decisions.

In Chinese mystical literature the process of entering the navel region is designated through wonderful expressions like: «Coming back to the center»; «The union of heaven and earth»; «The birth of the golden flower»; «The creation of the dazzling gem».

In *Kriya* we simply say that, by means of the abdominal breathing of *Pranayama* and the various forms of *Navi Kriya*, the seat of the *Samana* current, in the lower-medium part of the abdomen is reached. This leads to an experience of a particular harmony inside one's being and ends in the listening to the astral sounds - especially bell sound.

In the second stage, during the practice of mental *Pranayama*, the *Chakras* reveal their nature. They are like jewel boxes containing the memory of one's whole life. In fact, they are connected with the brain and all the memories are there. This means that while the energy enters the spine, one is going to enjoy the full splendor of wonderful reminiscences. Various past experiences resurface, their essence (the gold contained in them and never appreciated) is lived in an instant of joy, transfigured in light.

This creates great and deep harmony between all the components of one's personality: they unify and create the serene joy of actuating one's peculiar individuality in life.

There is a kind of mutual dependence between the navel and the heart region: gradually the harmony found in the navel region is raised into the heart region. This leads to a permanent change of one's attitude towards *Kriya*. One will no more practice with the childish attitude that *Kriya* is a secret to be utilized only one hour a day and then living as any other human being. One adheres sincerely, thoroughly to the spiritual path and is able to live the unique "miracle" of *Kriya*. (We know that, unfortunately, for some devotees, *Kriya* is a parody of what it could be.)

In practical life there is no room for hasty decisions, one is not going to be governed by emotionality.

Violent, frantic and hysterical emotions often rise unexpectedly from our inner self, to disappear after a while. They actually express a reality devoid of authentic profundity but their propulsive action inevitably results in hurried acts accompanied by a sort of cerebral fever, nourished by a narrow, visceral pleasure.

When passion is inflaming a person's whole being, it is not possible for this person to be guided by common sense; the consequence is that some challenging schemes of behavior - those which might guide him toward a more complete and evolved stage of existence - often withdraw to irrevocable halts. Sometimes, fatal decisions start taking shape in advance in our imagination - just like, during the summer, hail stones are molded, condensed and enlarged in the air before falling down to the earth and causing disasters - especially whenever we squander our time away fancying over the change of some circumstances of our life.

During those open-eyed dreams, absorbed in the idea of avoiding something difficult, we float in an illusory happiness. This perspective throws false "light" on our existence, so that what, in the past, would appear as an act of cowardice, now seems to glitter at the horizon of our life, like the clear and transparent day hovering over the stream.

Not only does a person dream to flee from a difficult university exam, but he takes up, suddenly, the plan of abandoning his whole course of study.

The damage caused by emotions is making us blind; we cannot see that our ideal and sudden leap into a "new and happy condition" puts to a halt an irreplaceable chance to grow up.

The same thing happens whenever we decide to put a difficult human relationship to an end. Sometimes we believe that an important relationship of ours will never take a different course; turning to relaxation in such a situation, we cannot accept the idea that something might threaten our childish fantasy, our perfect synthesis with another human being. As soon as, from the other person, the tiniest hint comes that something in this relationship should be reconsidered, rebuilt in a different way or at least discussed with quietude and with due concern, we react as if hurt in our soul by a useless and cruel violence. We feel as if our counterpart did not appreciate the present peace to such an extent that she/he would sadistically fuel enervating discussions with useless topics; discussions which could be postponed to the future or rather never be engaged in, since our intuition says they are of no value.

If, in the end, we actually acknowledge the necessity of resuming a boring and unpleasant discussion of old, we feel as if swallowing a black, sharp-edged rock.

A person who believes to be listening to his heart and who is actually just venting his or her most violent frustrations, can, on this occasion, reject any discussion and break off that relationship with an action of such "radiant" free will as to overwhelm all bystanders. In the following instants, especially when the risk of retracing one's steps appears, pride will prevail, driving the presently exciting pleasure to the top.

Existence seems to be as beautiful as ever; the person feels like reborn after a long and painful malady, enjoying every little action with uninterrupted voluptuousness, maybe even surrounded by flashes of blue. Is this the expression of true freedom? Is this "acting from the heart"?

How could we call happiness this act of walking on the ashes of what had been built on patience and sacrifices and for which we have trembled and even shed tears? Have we been totally blind in the past? Of course, by succumbing to our disastrous emotion, we demonstrate to be blind now! The effect does not differ from that of an asteroid falling through the atmosphere on its way to fire and destruction.

Several days go by and the person's heart feels heavy; a blurred sadness hued with pessimism toward all human relationships reveals that this experience was all but a "leap toward the sky".

A good crumb of the person's self is lost forever, trapped in that very relationship which belongs to a past that can no longer be reached due to the person's fear to endure the full impact of a truthful and honest reminiscence. A subtle deception of our mind makes it more convenient to believe that we had accepted a relationship with a wrong person and this will be what we are going to repeat inside, hastily and sharply, just to silence the conscience which invites us to see the episode in its true light.

We are going to say: «I acted from the heart». Nonetheless, how could we have listened to it during our hasty decision? The heart calls for true silence to make its voice audible among a choir of commonplaces. He that abides by the laws of the heart has no haste; he knows that his "heartfelt" perspective is unshakable and will survive to the fleeting glimpses of the momentary deceptions.

Let us consider what is going to happen to a *kriyaban*, who is not controlled by superficial drives and who makes a hundred percent commitment to seek only the mystic goal - not the chimera of self-growth - when he/she learns how to protect the state of mental silence as an absolute necessity. He/she will undoubtedly experience the breathless state, which is the core characteristic of the second stage.

Different factors cooperate with this extraordinary event. It is achieved in time as soon as the *kriyaban's* inner conflicts disappear. It is like a second birth. In my opinion, during one's first year of practice, one should not expect at reaching this state: it can only come after there has been a considerable change in one's emotional sphere. It is for this reason that the importance of the vertical processes has been stressed. I would say that it is not only a matter of cleaning the *Nadis*, or purifying some astral "shells"... it is also a matter of intelligence. From intelligence comes the spirit of constant self-observation, which is the indispensable requisite of the *Kriya* path.

After coming back to the normal state of consciousness, one wonders about how one is able and where can find the strength of practicing *Kriya* for years, he who has never had the smallest taste of it. Perhaps we may thank certain diffused illusions on *Kriya*, certain wrong beliefs, because, at least, they hold one tied to such a practice until the real experience happens; then, stunned by the experimented amplitude and sublimity, one does not need to listen to stories and *Satsangas* (sermons) and will go on sustained by a perennial joy peeping out of his thoughts and manifesting at the full in the moments of quietness.

Third

The third level is tied with the experience of *Samadhi*. Rather it pivots around the problem of finding the proper position in order that such a state is verified without creating physical problems.

Short moments of *Samadhi* happen since the beginning of the path, when the body is anesthetized by the state of sleep, whereas the state of *Samadhi* appears inside the meditative practice only when the heart reflex born from the fear of death does not destroy the calmness which has been gained with so hard application. The normal condition of human beings is to perceive the paralyzing bliss of *Samadhi* as a form of death and stop it. This situation may change only after the completion of unfastening the knot of the heart.

The knot of the heart begins to be unfastened in the second level of *Kriya*, while in the third it is completed. From this ensues the possibility of creating the deep calmness that lets to the pulseless state. In *Kriya* this is achieved by prolonging for hours the breathless state, by deep immersion into the *Omkar* experience or by perfecting the advanced form of *Thokar* - usually called *Third Kriya* technique.

This process is hard and one has to return to his own footsteps many times to recuperate an exalted state which erroneously was deemed as permanent.

However, this is only a stage preparing to sustain the real mystical experience which happens through the fourth stage.

Fourth

It is taught that the fourth stage is tied with the unfastening of the knot of the *Muladhar*. This knot embodies the impossibility (or difficulty) of taking away energy from the body and guiding it inside the subtle channel of the spine. The action of the two unbalanced lateral currents of *Ida* and *Pingala* creates a powerful obstruction at the base of the spine, blocking the entrance to the subtle *Sushumna* channel. Anyone who practices a certain meditation discipline has some amount of control upon these currents, otherwise meditation itself wouldn't be possible. These two forces deviate and delude a *kriyaban's* effort to see and maintain stable the vision of the spiritual eye - this means that the door of the spine is inaccessible.

After a long application of particular spiritual procedures (unfortunately they are totally unknown to many mystics; this explains the abundance of physical problems they meet while approaching without the due preparation, this unavoidable phase of their path) the *Chakra Muladhar* at the base of the spine

lets the energy, from all the body, flow inside the spine. This creates easiness in obtaining the wonderful experience of the *Internal Pranayama*.

In the *Kriya* literature it is difficult to find comments upon this event: if we want to read something interesting we must turn to the treatises about Internal Alchemy. There it is written that one's body becomes «as light as if one is walking on air»; the whole experience is described as: «flying up in broad daylight».

This experience of unthinkable beauty is a spontaneous movement of energy which comes up from the *Muladhar* to the brain and moves down through the body to bring vital energy to each of its cells.

By repeating this experience and by increasing the effort devoted to inject the consciousness in the cells of the body, the knot of the *Muladhar* is unfastened not only in the spine but in the cells. According to a particular, not widespread way of mystic thinking, *Muladhar* exists in each cell. If we open it, we can touch everything - including other people's consciousness! We dig a tunnel through that mind-rock, until the purest dimension of existence appears.

Few mystics are able to cross this last stage through a sincere indomitable aspiration. By placing their heart beyond the thick wall of collective opacity, they perceive the scent and the immensity of an undreamed of perfection.

Subtle laws begin to work in their lives: it happens what appears to be out of the ordinary, what we might call "paranormal" or phenomenon like the so called *Siddhis* or miracles.

Eminent personalities had tried to describe this. Jung tried to express it in a scientific way in his *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*. (1973 2nd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press).

Those who write books on *Yoga* seem not to be able to resist the temptation of copying some lines from the most common *Yoga* books, among these, the warning of the danger coming from the abuse of the *Siddhis*. Quoting *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* (IV:1), they recount that *Siddhis* are the spiritual powers (psychic abilities) that may occur through rigorous austerities; they explain that they vary from relatively simple forms of clairvoyance, telepathy, to being able to levitate, to be present at various places at once, to become as small as an atom, to materialize objects and more. As in a hypnotic trance, in a very diligent way, they go ahead and recommend their readers not to ever *indulge* in these powers since «they are a great hindrance to spiritual progress». Have you ever seen a person who reads some *Yoga* books, enjoys for some weeks different forms of *Pranayama* and then indulges in bilocation? Perhaps they write such nonsense because they are dreaming, visualizing themselves to be possessing all the types of *Siddhis*; with all the fuss which will come out in interviews, taking part in talk shows etc.

There are subtle laws that begin to work more openly in their life. In short, they discover to be not men amid others, but humanity itself. The contact with this reality usually make a cruel anguish to emerge. A mystic perceives the echo of another's desperation - of the Divine that they are and that, in His dream, vaster than millions of galaxies, dreams also stories of endless, immense pain. This explains the mystery of the "dark night of the soul" which recurs in the writings of St. John of the Cross. The spiritual path is not a continuous basking in joy. If we study the biographies of saints we find an undeniable fact: they passed through suffering. In the beginning of our spiritual quest we have no other goal than reaching Self realization; this manifests, usually, as an instinct of seeking the maximum possible amount of bliss. By going on with this up to the last phase of our life we would make our heart hard and resistant as a stone and imbue our mind of the cold of a steel blade. If compassion and true love go away, the whole "spiritual" venture risks a wreck.

A mystic perceives in his consciousness and in his body the sorrows and pains of the people that, for some particular reason, are intimately united with him. We can use terms like clairvoyance and telepathy, but the matter is unfathomably deeper. *Kriya Yoga* is not only a flight towards the heavens, but also the discovery of «the abysses of truth and the oceans of smile that lie beyond the narrow peaks of truth» (Sri Aurobindo).

GLOSSARY

This glossary is not a parroting of what can be found in books dealing with Kriya Yoga or simply Yoga; it is not a collage of someone else's writings, put together with a bit of imagination. It had been added for those who already know the meaning of the most common terms used in Kriya but do not wish to retain uncertainties about the way they are utilized in this book.

Alchemy [internal - Nei Dan] The Internal Alchemy is the mystical tradition of ancient China. It reminds us of the techniques of First Kriya with such precision that we have all the reasons to assume that it consists in the same universal process.

The airy-fairy hypothesis that the techniques of the Internal Alchemy had been brought from India to China during the ancient times, reveals the tendency to consider India as the only possible land where men guessed - or received - the secrets of the mystical path.

The consideration of an independent development of the two paths leads to a very fruitful idea of the universality of the mystical tools. Lahiri Mahasaya expressed his certainty that if, for whichever reason, the Kriya techniques disappeared from the tradition, they would, in any case be rediscovered by those mystics who had a pure heart and therefore a discerning vision.

To study Kriya in the light of other mystical traditions can yield an unexpected deepening of its essence and foster a respect for each of its original techniques – even if they do not seem properly Indian or yogic.

The tendency to remove from the Kriya praxis anything which may seem non Yogic is dangerous. Just to make an example, there are some teachers who have twisted Navi Kriya - either eliminating it entirely or erasing the concentration on the navel, thus reducing the technique to a pure concentration on the third Chakra.

Lahiri Mahasaya wrote unambiguously about the deep, irreplaceable action of unfastening the knot of the navel – not of the Manipur!

On the other hand, with a similar attitude toward destroying the wealth of a tradition—without being in a position of complete understanding—there are teachers of Inner Alchemy who have spoiled their discipline by removing from it anything relating to the breath; they have thus subtracted from the treasure of their art the very factor giving it the main reason to be considered a real alchemy - namely a chemical transformation of the breath into a more refined substance.

About Internal Alchemy we observe that:

a...The micro cosmic orbit technique resembles the Kriya Pranayama.

The difference is that the energy goes down in the body touching not the Chakras but the points on the surface of the body which are connected with the Chakras: Adam's apple, the central region of the sternum, the navel, the pubic region and the perineum. By going ahead with the practice, the difference fades away, as the result produced upon the body's energy is just the same.

b...The subsequent phase of descent into the Dan Tien resembles Navi Kriya to such an extent that it isn't even worth noting the differences.

c...The procedure of lifting the Dan Tien into the heart's region (middle Dan Tien) by focusing on the vibration produced in the first one recalls Lahiri Mahasaya's instruction to reach the knot of the heart by tuning first with the Equilibrium state in the Samana region in the abdomen.

d...The final raising of the middle Dan Tien into the superior Dan Tien resembles Yoni

Mudra.

e...The concept of the macro cosmic orbit (macro cosmic orbit is different from micro cosmic orbit) resembles that of the Pranayama with internal breath.

Apana Apana is one of the five forms of energy in the body (called collectively Prana). Associated with the lower abdominal region, it is responsible for all the bodily functions (elimination for example) that take place there.

Kriya Pranayama, in its initial phase, is essentially the movement of Prana (not in the global sense, but as the particular form or energy present in the upper part of the trunk – lungs and heart) into Apana and the movement of Apana into Prana.

When we inhale, the Prana from outside the body is brought within and meets Apana in the lower abdomen; during exhalation, the Apana moves from its seat up and mingles with Prana.

During the deep Pranayama practice this event generates an increase of heat in the navel region: this calms the breath in a way which is impossible to do otherwise. It is this heat (Agni) that kindles the light of the spiritual eye.

Asana Physical postures fit for meditation. According to Patanjali, the Yogi's posture must be steady and pleasant. The most part of the kriyabans are comfortable with the so-called Half-lotus [see]: this, indeed, avoids some physical problems. For the average kriyaban, Siddhasana [see] is considered superior to any other Asana.

If we take finally into account those kriyabans who are expert of Hatha-Yoga, who have become very flexible, the perfect position is undoubtedly Padmasana [see].

Aswini (Ashwini) Mudra "Ashwa" means "horse"; "Aswini Mudra" means "Mudra of the female horse" because the anal contraction resembles the movement a horse makes with its sphincter immediately after evacuation of the bowels.

There may be slightly different definitions of it and, sometimes, it is confused with Mula Bandha [see].

The basic definition is to repeatedly contract the muscles at the base of the spine (sphincter) with the rhythm of about two contractions per second.

This Mudra is a direct way of getting in touch with the locked and stagnant energy at the base of the spine and to pump it up.

While learning the technique, a yogi contracts the buttock muscles, perineum or even the entire pelvic region also; with time, the contraction involves only the sphincter muscles, thus stimulating the energy at its correct location.

The purpose of this Mudra is accomplished when the yogi feels waves of energy in the lower region of the spine or a strong presence of energy on the surface of the entire body.

This technique is not a standard Kriya one, nevertheless some teachers counsel it especially to those who are unable to practice Kechari Mudra; they recommend to practice it during the first 12-24 Pranayama breaths - during inhalation and exhalation. Subsequently, the physical movement decreases naturally in intensity, while the awareness is strongly brought into the spine. When this technique is done separately it produces good effects but nothing in comparison with those obtained when it is practiced during Kriya Pranayama.

Bandha In Yoga no practice of Pranayama is considered complete without the Bandhas.

They are energy valves as much as locks, not simple muscle contractions, which

prevent the energy from being dissipated and redirect it inside the spine.

In Jalandhara Bandha the neck and the throat are slightly contracted, while the chin is pressed against the breast.

In Uddiyana Bandha the abdominal muscles are slightly contracted to intensify the perception of energy in the spinal column.

In Mula Bandha the perineal muscles - between the anus and the genital organs - are slightly contracted while a mental pressure is exerted on the lower part of the spine.

(Differently from Aswini Mudra, one does not simply tighten the sphincter muscles; in Mula Bandha the perineum seems to fold upward as the pelvic diaphragm is drawn upward through the motion of the pubic bone.) The three Bandhas, applied simultaneously, create an almost ecstatic inner shiver, a feeling of energy current moving up the spine.

In the very beginning of the Kriya path, a yogi has only an approximate understanding of the Bandhas, later one will come to a complete command and will be able to use them, with slight adaptations, in most of the Kriya techniques.

Bindu A spiritual center located in the occipital region where the hairline twists into a kind of vortex. Until the energy, scattered in the body, reaches the Bindu, a sort of shroud prevents the soul from contemplating the Spiritual Eye. Bringing all one's force there, in that tiny place, is not an easy task because the deeper roots of the Ego are to be found right there; they must be faced and eradicated.

Breathless state There is a halo of mystery that surrounds the description of this state; some authors openly affirm that it is impossible and that any affirmation about its occurrence is false.

Actually, it is possible, even if it is experienced only after years of Kriya practice.

Breathlessness has nothing to do with holding the breath forcefully. It does not simply mean that the breath becomes more and more quiet. It is the state where the breath is entirely non-existent, with the subsequent dissolution of the mind. When it manifests, a kriyaban does not feel the need to take in any breath at all or one takes in a very short breath but doesn't feel the need to exhale for a very long time. (Longer than the time which medicine considers as possible.)

The breath becomes so calm that the practitioner has the factual perception that one is not breathing at all; one feels a fresh energy in the body, sustaining its life from inside, without the necessity of oxygen. It is fantastic! Without any feeling of uneasiness, this condition lasts various minutes. There is not the least quiver of surprise, or the thought: «Finally I have it!». This does not mean that the person is unaware: he or she is perfectly aware, but in a calm, very detached way. One is as carried away, far away from any known territory and is aware enough to understand that this is the key experience of their life; an elation, which nothing in life can give, is experienced.

According to Kriya theory, this state is the result of having completed the work of cutting of the heart knot. It embodies the characteristics of the authentic "religious" life.

In order to obtain it, it is necessary to live in an active but also introverted way. By maintaining, during the activities of the day, the after effects of Kriya, the Prana in the body loses any restlessness; deep calmness pervades each part of the psychophysical constitution. Then, cessation of the breath, during Kriya sessions, begin to happen.

Chakra During centuries men developed tools aiming at travelling, while in perfect immobility, with one's awareness in the depths of their soul: at a certain point they discovered the reality of the Chakras. By tuning with them, they reached the highest

possible level while residing in a human body, the full activation of the Sahasrara Chakra. During this journey various spiritual experiences, described in the specialized literature, would occur. Today, almost any student of Yoga has been enchanted by the beautiful image of the Divine Mother Kali, which is Kundalini, who finds union with her beloved husband, the supreme Shiva, who resides in eternal bliss at the top of the skull. This is a symbol of the supreme adventure that a soul can experience.

The word Chakra comes from the Sanskrit *cakra* meaning "wheel" or "circle". The Chakras are the "wheels" of our spiritual life; they are described in the tantric texts as emanations from the Spirit, whose essence gradually have expanded in more and more gross levels of manifestation, reaching eventually the dimension of the base Chakra, the Muladhara, embodying the physical world. The descended energy-consciousness, lies coiled and sleeping at the base of the spine and is called, Kundalini - she who is coiled. The soul comes from the womb of eternity: Kundalini awakens it to the full memory of its origin.

No author has ever "proven" the existence of the Chakras – as no man has ever proven the existence of the soul. It is difficult to describe them: we cannot bring them on a table of a laboratory. In any Yoga book we find descriptions which lean over a translation of two Indian texts, the *Sat-Cakra-Nirupana*, and the *Padaka-Pancaka*, by Sir John Woodroffe, alias Arthur Avalon, in a book entitled *The Serpent Power*. The matter depicted there seems to be unnaturally complicated, almost impossible to be utilized. These concepts had been further polluted by theosophy and similar high-level esoteric literature. The controversial C. W. Leadbeater's book *The Chakras*, is in large part the result of the mental elaboration of his own experiences.

Through the practice of Kriya, we can have an experience of the Chakras. Starting from Muladhar, the root Chakra, located over the anus at the very base of the spinal column, in the lower part of the coccyx, we encounter a centre which distributes energy to the legs, to the lowest part of the pelvis, irradiating especially the Gonads (testes in men, ovaries in women).

Attributing some psychological effects to the stimulation of this or of that Chakra is a difficult task. I don't want to parrot some New Age rubbish but just provide a general idea of what a kriyaban may experience. The Kriya techniques arouse specific effects, especially perceived in the day following the practice, in many ways: moods, fancies, memories and suddenly-arising desires.

All this is beneficial. To vividly live long forgotten parts of our life through our excited memory is a cleansing process. This process has within itself an equilibrating mechanism which will prevent one from being overwhelmed by sudden storms of grey moods. With this in mind, we read that Muladhar symbolizes the objective consciousness, the awareness of the physical universe. It is related to instinct, security, from our ability to ground ourselves in the physical world, to the desire for material goods and also the building of a good self-image. If this Chakra is in a harmonious state, we are centred and have a strong will to live.

The second (sacral) Chakra Swadhisthan, is placed inside the spine between the last lumbar vertebrae and the beginning of the sacrum. It is said that its area of energetic projection is the area of the sexual organs - in part it intersects the region of Muladhar's influence.

Since it is related to base emotion, sexuality vitality, creativity, and to the deepest part of the subconscious realms, a deep stimulus of it produces deep involving dreams; its action may be perceived as a feeling of living a fable, whose nature is sweet and alluring.

The Manipur, navel or solar plexus, is placed in the spine at the same level of the Navel,

near the end of the dorsal vertebrae and the beginning of the lumbar ones. It is said to influence pancreas and the adrenal glands on top of the kidneys. This connection gives fuel to the idea of a Chakra whose influence is said to correspond to the roles played by those glands: higher emotion and energy - just like the role played by adrenalin. It is said that it fosters a sense of personal power, secure feeling of "I Am.". Grounded and comfortable with our place in the universe, we are able to affirm with determination the purpose of our life.

The Anahat, heart Chakra, located in the spine at the height of the middle part of the dorsal vertebrae, is said to influence the thymus, which is part of the immune system, as well as part of the endocrine system. There is a universal agreement that it is related to higher emotion, compassion, love, and intuitiveness. When a person concentrates on it, feelings of profound tenderness and compassion will start to develop. A healthy and fully open heart Chakra means to be able to see the inner beauty in others—in spite of their apparent faults. One is able to love everyone, even the strangers we meet on the street. There is a progression from the instinctual "gut emotions" of the lower Chakras to the higher emotions and feelings of the heart Chakra. What is of great interest for us, is that opening this center means to see life in a more neutral manner and see what others cannot see. It ends the predisposition to being influenced by other people, by churches and by organizations in general.

Vishuddha, throat Chakra, exactly amid the last cervical vertebrae and the first dorsal vertebrae, is said to influence Thyroid and Parathyroid. Since it controls the activity of the vocal cords as well, it is said that it has something to do with the capacity to express our ideas in the world. It seems to be related with the capacity for communication and with taking personal responsibility for our actions. The person is no longer blaming others for his or her problems and can carry on with life with full responsibility. Many authors state it awakens artistic inspiration, the ability to develop superior aesthetic perception.

Ajna, third eye Chakra, located in the central part of the brain, influences the pituitary gland [hypophysis] and the small brain. The hypophysis has a vital role in organism, in the sense that together with the hypothalamus it acts as a command system of all other endocrine glands. In Sanskrit, "Ajna" translates to "command," which means it has the command or control of our lives: through controlled action, it brings to reality the fruit of our desires. Consequently, it is said that Ajna Chakra has a vital role in the spiritual awakening of a person. It is the seat of the intuition.

The supreme Chakra is the Sahasrara, crown Chakra, right above the top of the head. It is said that it influences, or is bound with, the pineal gland. It allows detachment from illusion and is related to one's overall expansion of awareness and degree of tuning with the Divine Reality. It is a superior reality and we can experience it only in the state of breathlessness. It is possible to "tune" into it by utilizing the Bindu as a doorway.

A kriyaban does not need to use the power of visualization in order to perceive the reality of the Chakras. In Yoga it is counselled to visualize their specific colour (red, orange, yellow...like the sequence of the rainbow's colours). They may be visualized as lotuses, each one of which has a particular number of petals with a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet on each petal. In Kriya, while calming the storm of the breath by letting the energy flow through them, one chants Om or other harmonious Mantras at their location. When the awareness, coming up from Muladhar to Sahasrara and vice versa, stays for at least half minute upon each one of them, the perception of a pleasurable sweet sensation is almost immediate. Some inner sounds as well as hues of light pouring forth from their locations deepens the contact with the Omkar dimension. In time a kriyaban gains ability to single out the different rates of vibration of each

Chakra, which is crucial to reach the final liberation from all the suffering and limitations mixed up with our life.

Let us consider a question: can we receive negative results from Kriya because one or more Chakras are blocked?

The answer cannot but be no. Surely we can experience particular emotions.

It is said that any feeling of insecurity, of being out of touch with daily life is due to blockages in Muladhara. The same is when we desire to avoid any physical activity.

In a similar way all the mood swings originated by blocks in Chakra Swadhisthana are going to disappear, also thanks to the great help by mental clarity coming from Manipura. Manipura's blocks may result in irritation and manifestations of anger. By working with Navi Kriya, they are going to disappear.

By working with Thokar, some problems in Anahat may become visible (feelings of unworthiness, self-pity, fear of rejection, or being afraid to let new things manifest). They are the result of possible traumas in childhood and adolescence.

It is said that any disharmony situated in Vishuddha is tied with problems of communication, the inability to find one's place in the society and to let one's potentialities turn into concrete action.

At the end let us hint to the "frontal Chakras".

There are various models of Chakras in other traditions, teachings pertaining to the "frontal Chakra" are to be found by some kriyabans coming from Sri Yukteswar's disciple lineage. The perineum is the first one, the genitals region is the second one, the navel is the third, the central part of the sternum region is the fourth, the Adam's apple is the fifth and the Kutastha may be considered as the sixth. The core of the Kriya teaching regarding them, is that when these points are touched with concentration, the energy around the correspondent Chakra in the spine is revived.

Dan Tien Although pertaining to the ancient Chinese Internal Alchemical framework, by keeping clear in one's mind its location, a kriyaban can deepen the mechanism of Pranayama and of Navi Kriya.

According to Taoistic philosophy, we have three Dan Tien, one in the lower abdomen (lower Dan Tien), one in the heart (middle Dan Tien) and one in the third eye (upper Dan Tien). Well, pacifying Prana at these precise locations is the very nucleus of the action of Kriya – hence our interest in this subject matter.

The lower Dan Tien or "The field of cinnabar" is also called the "Cauldron" because it is the place where the practitioner "gathers, blends and cooks" his sexual, love, and spiritual energies. In order to localize its position, one has to concentrate on the belly button, then come about one and a half inches behind and below to the same extent: it can be visualized as a rubber ball about two and one-half inches in diameter.

It is believed it contains our peculiar vibration, the "note" which embodies our will to live in the physical body. It is the force which clears the way to the experience of the breathless state.

Dharana According to Patanjali, Dharana is the concentration on a physical or abstract object. In Kriya, Dharana consist in directing the focus of our attention towards the revelation of Spirit: Omkar's inner sound, light and movement sensation. This happens just after having calmed the breath.

Dhyana According to Patanjali, Dhyana ensues from contemplating the essential nature of the chosen object as a steady, uninterrupted flow of consciousness. In Kriya, the awareness, dwelling upon the Omkar reality, is soon lost in Samadhi.

Flute sound (during Pranayama) During Pranayama, a slight hiss is produced in the throat; when a kriyaban succeeds in assuming the position of Kechari Mudra, then the frequency of the sound of exhalation increases. It has been likened to the "flute of Krishna".

Lahiri Mahasaya describes it: «as if someone blew through a keyhole».

This highly enjoyable sound cuts to pieces any distraction, enables the mind to grow in calmness and transparency and helps to prolong effortlessly the practice of Pranayama.

This is the basis for achieving the highest Kriya stage: that of Samadhi. One day the flute sound will be transformed into the Om sound. In other words, it will give rise to the Om sound, whose vibration is so strong as to overwhelm the flute sound. During this event, a strong movement of energy climbs up the spine.

Granti [see knot]

Guru The importance of finding a Guru (teacher) who supervises the spiritual training of the disciple is one of the tenets of many spiritual paths. One of the main Hindu texts, the Bhagavad Gita, is a dialogue between God in the form of Krishna and the warrior prince Arjuna. Their dialogue summarizes many of the ideals of Hinduism; the discussion and the relationship between the two is considered to be an expression of the ideal Guru - disciple relationship.

A Guru is a teacher, a guide and much more. The scriptures declare that the Guru is God and God is the Guru. There is a saying that if the devotee were presented to the Guru and God, first he would pay respect to the Guru, since the Guru had been instrumental in leading him to God. We are accustomed to explaining the term "Guru" on a metaphorical interplay between darkness and light, in which the Guru is seen as the dispeller of darkness: "Gu" stands for darkness and "Ru" for one who removes it. Some scholars dismiss that etymology; according to them "Gu" stands for "beyond the qualities" and "Ru" for "devoid of form".

In order to gain all the benefits from the contact with the Guru, a disciple has to be humble, sincere, pure in body and mind and ready to surrender to his Guru's will and instructions.

The criteria for choosing a Guru are complex: if he or she is not married they should be chaste, they should exhibit lack of interest in money, ability to sit in meditation for hours without any movement or disturbance. The lineage of the Guru is also sometimes given great importance. Is he initiated and by whom? Is there evidence that he was actually given initiation by the person he claims has initiated him?

It is commonly believed that such a chain of Gurus conveys the essential ingredient for the working of the Diksha - bestowing the esoteric knowledge upon the disciple, through which he will progress along the path to Self realization.

At times, it is accompanied by Shaktipat: the procedure of awakening the dormant spiritual knowledge within the disciple.

A formal recognition of this relationship, which usually assumes the form of a somewhat structured initiation ceremony, includes the Gurudakshina: the disciple bestows a valuable sign of gratitude to his Guru.

This is what the literature says. Now, let us face up the facts. During the 1960s and 1970s, as an alternative to established religions, some people in Europe and in the USA looked up to spiritual guides from India, eager to receive from them the answers to the meaning of life. Many people turned to Gurus because they

wanted to get high without the drugs that had opened for them the existence of the world beyond grasp. Many Gurus (not only from India) travelled mainly to the USA where they got groups of young followers. The word "Guru" was widely accepted to indicate not only a spiritual teacher but also someone who knows a lot about a particular subject.

Regretfully it acquired also very negative connotations to indicate a sort of charlatan or businessman pretending to be a saint. The revelations by ex-followers played an important part in recognizing that some Gurus had actually abused their status.

Within some Kriya organizations, the word Guru took on a weird meaning because it was attributed to a person whom the disciples had not known directly. They were required to swear their everlasting devotion not only to one person but also to a chain of Masters, even if only one of them was to be regarded as the Guru-preceptor. Having been initiated into a spiritual discipline by the legitimate channels (authorized disciples), the departed Guru was said to be real and present in their life. They were taught that their Guru would burn somehow a part of their Karma and protect them evermore; he was a special aid chosen by God Himself even before they began to seek the spiritual path. Looking for a different spiritual teaching amounted to «a hateful rejection of the Divine's hand, stretched out to offer benediction».

The spiritual researchers with a balanced rational-devotional approach had some good reasons to be perplexed. Lahiri Mahasaya once said: «I am not the Guru, I don't maintain a barrier between the true Guru (the Divine) and the disciple». He added that he wanted to be considered a "mirror". In other words, each kriyaban should look at him not as an unreachable ideal, but as the personification of all the wisdom and spiritual realization which, in due time, the Kriya practice will be able to produce.

Now the question is: do the Kriya techniques work outside the Guru-disciple relationship? There is of course no scientifically proven answer. In this matter we can use either faith or reason. Many kriyabans realize that the Divine resides in their heart and are confident they are able to transform the no-matter-how-received instruction into "gold". They think: "Beyond either reasonable or improbable expectations of finding a Kriya expert at my disposal, let me roll my sleeves up and move on"!

Half-lotus This asana [position] has been used for meditation since time immemorial because it provides a comfortable, very easily obtained, sitting position.

The left leg is bent at the knee, brought toward the body and the sole of the left foot is made rests against the inside of the right thigh. The heel of the left foot should be drawn in as far as possible.

The right leg is bent at the knee and the right foot is placed over the fold of the left leg. The right knee is dropped as far as possible toward the floor. The hands rest on the knees. The secret is to maintain an erect spine: this can be obtained only by sitting on a cushion, thick enough, with the buttocks towards the front half of the cushion.

In this way the buttocks are slightly raised, while the knees are resting on the floor.

When the legs grow tired, the position is prolonged by reversing the legs.

In certain delicate situations, it may be providential to do it on a chair, provided it has no arms and is large enough. In this way, one leg at a time can be lowered and the knee articulation relaxed!

Note. The pressure of a tennis ball (or of a folded towel) on the Perineum can give the benefits of the Siddhasana's position.

Hesychasm Many western seekers look to the East for learning some thoroughly experience-oriented techniques of meditation. Often they ignore the fact that a Christian tradition, methodical and precise, exists and is available in the Hesychast tradition. As far as Kriya is concerned, in the fascinating world of Hesychasm we might have the opportunity to meet souls who know more than us about Pranayama and Thokar - although they have never heard the word Kriya!

The word Hesychasm derives from the Greek word "hesychia" meaning inner quietness, tranquillity and stillness: outside this condition, meditation is not possible. It is a discipline integrating the continual repetition of the Jesus Prayer (already used by the early Church Fathers in the 4th and 5th centuries) with the practice of asceticism.

There were hermits dwelling in the desert, seeking inner peace and spiritual insight, while practicing contemplation and self-discipline; they had no doubts about the fact that knowledge of God could be obtained only by purity of soul and prayer and not by study or mental amusements in the field of philosophy.

Later, their method of asceticism came to the fore as a concrete set of psychophysical techniques: this is properly the core of Hesychasm.

It was Simeon, "the new theologian" (1025-1092), who developed the quietist theory which such detail that he may be called the father of this movement.

The practice, which involved specific body postures and deliberate breathing patterns, was intended to perceive the Uncreated Light of God.

The monks of Athos might have kept on contemplating peacefully this Uncreated Light (they considered it to be the highest goal of earthy life) had not their methods been denounced as superstitious and absurd. The objection was mainly based on a vigorous denial of the possibility that this Uncreated Light was God's essence.

In approximately the year 1337, Hesychasm attracted the attention of a learned member of the Orthodox Church, Barlaam of Seminara, a Calabrian monk (later Petrarch's Greek teacher) who held the office of abbot in a Monastery of Constantinople and who visited Mount Athos.

There he encountered the hesychasts and heard the descriptions of their practices. Barlaam, trained in Western Scholastic theology, was scandalized by Hesychasm and began to combat it both orally and in his writings. He called the hesychasts "omphalopsychoi" - people having their souls in their navels (owing to the long time they spent concentrating on the navel region).

Barlaam propounded a more intellectual approach to the knowledge of God than the one taught by the hesychast: he asserted that the spiritual knowledge could be only a work of inquiry, brought ahead by one's mind and translated in discrimination between truth and untruth. He held that no part of God, whatsoever, could be viewed by humans. The practice of the hesychasts was defended by St. Gregory Palamas. He was well educated in Greek philosophy and defended Hesychasm in the 1340 at three different synods in Constantinople, and he also wrote a number of works in its defence.

He used a distinction, already articulated in the 4th Century in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers, between the energies or operations of God and the essence of God: while the essence of God can never be known by his creatures, His energies or operations can be known both in this life and in the next; they convey to the hesychast the truest spiritual knowledge of God.

In Palamite theology, it is the uncreated energies of God that illuminate the hesychast who has been vouchsafed an experience of the Uncreated Light.

In 1341 the dispute was settled: Barlaam was condemned and returned to Calabria,

afterwards becoming bishop in the Roman Catholic Church.

Later, hesychast doctrine was established as the doctrine of the Orthodox Church.

Up to this day, the Roman Catholic Church has never fully accepted Hesychasm: the essence of God can be known, but only in the next life; there can be no distinction between the energies and the essence of God.

Today Mount Athos is the well-known centre of the practice of Hesychasm. Books used by the hesychast include the Philokalia, a collection of texts on prayer and asceticism written from the 4th to the 15th Centuries [first published in the Greek language in 1782].

(This is a tedious text showing the attitude of the mind, obsessed by sin and temptations, to complicate the simplest things. Much more captivating is the book "The Way of a Pilgrim" which is one of the most widely read examples of Russian spiritual literature [first published in English language in 1954]. The author, who is a devotee of the Jesus Prayer, has been identified on the basis of other witnesses as Russian Orthodox monk Archimandrite Mikhail Kozlov. The main reason for the work's attraction is the presentation of a wandering hermit's life as the model existence for those who would truly lead a spiritual life.

«By the grace of God I am a Christian man, by my actions a great sinner, and by calling a homeless wanderer of the humblest birth who roams from place to place. My worldly goods are a knapsack with some dried bread in it on my back, and in my breast pocket a Bible. And that is all.» It is a simple, edifying book, of universal spiritual appeal. It is imminently practical in its advice to not dither in starting the Jesus Prayer.)

Now let us consider the technical aspects of the hesychasts' practice: the teaching for finding quietness and perceiving the Uncreated Light.

The first characteristic is that they restrict their external activities, striving to the best of their abilities to ignore the physical senses. They interpret Christ's injunction in the Gospel of Matthew which says to "go into your closet to pray", to mean that their first duty is to withdraw inward. They affirm that the first step is that their body is to be held immovable for a long time.

Then they engage in mental asceticism, namely the rejection of tempting thoughts. Much of their literature is occupied with the psychological analysis of such tempting thoughts.

They watch those thoughts and courageously fight them. The hesychast is to pay extreme attention to the consciousness of his inner world while repeating the words of the Jesus Prayer: thus he will not let his mind wander in any way.

The Jesus Prayer is: "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" Its formulas may be different: from "Jesus Christ have mercy on me!" to the most simple and perfect version: "Jesus! Jesus!..." simply an appeal-entreaty to beloved Jesus, through humble repetition of His name.

They say it "with the heart" - with meaning, with intent. Such Prayer involves the entire human being - soul, mind and body.

(Some tourists at Mount Athos received a refusal when asked information upon the Jesus Prayer; this was probably due to their superficial and hasty attitude.)

The method of breath control is considered even more sacred. The chanting of the Prayer was synchronized with one's breathing. Hesychast tradition wrote: «Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of the Hesychia.»

The method is akin to our Kriya Pranayama.

St. Symeon writes: «Then sit down in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you: Close the door, and withdraw your intellect from everything worthless and transient. Rest your beard on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the centre of your belly or your navel. Restrain the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily, and search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside. To start with, you will find there a darkness and an impenetrable density. Later, when you persist and practice this task day and night, you will find, as though miraculously, an unceasing joy. For as soon as the intellect attains the place of the heart, at once it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees the open space within the heart and it beholds itself entirely luminous and full of discrimination.»

Pseudo-Simeon, "The Three Methods of Prayer," in: *The Philokalia* (5 vols.; tr. G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware; London: Faber and Faber, 1995) 4.72-3.

(The comparison with the Navi Kriya technique is impressive.)

Of course, while counselling these practices, the authors place great emphasis on humility: disaster will befall if one proceeds with pride, arrogance or conceit.

The most secret part is what happens in the space within the heart. The person is led through darkness and "an impenetrable density" to the depth of his heart. This descent is quite literally taken and is not at all considered to be a metaphorical expression. This is an advanced stage of the spiritual practice and attempting to accomplish it prematurely can cause very serious emotional harm.

The instruction is to feel one's head moving and dwelling into the chest, then to "open" his eyes there and look at the world from his chest. The world is perceived in a totally different way: not as rough and hostile, but as delicate, warm and responsive to the emotions of love!

The heart is filled with the most loving and subtle Bliss! In this state one becomes "entirely" luminous. The illumination comes from inside, proceeding from the open space within the heart. (This instruction may help a kriyaban to reconsider the technique of Thokar from a new perspective.)

The hesychast, when he has been granted such an experience, returns wholly transformed to normal life. The "inner dialog", which prevents the meditation, is under control: one can live permanently in a state called "the guard of the mind". It is the most sound and natural state of the mind. One's consciousness is no longer encumbered by the spontaneous inception of images - this is the main attribute of a religious life.

To draw some conclusions, we understand that in order to settle ourselves in a continuous tuning with the Omkar Reality, the surest way is to establish ourselves in a vigorous practice of a fervent Japa.

The Mantra we use in Kriya should be lived as a bright, dazzling Prayer: in this way it is possible to fall in love with it. Its Divine Magic will spread in each facet of our life, it will be like walking out of a dark room into the fresh air, into the sunlight. There will be no more problems of aridity, lack of motivation and difficulty in concentration.

As when we are in the fresh air we don't concentrate upon it but we breathe it, in the same way our path will be an experience of pure enjoyment.

Ida [see Nadi]

Japa [See Prayer]

Kechari Mudra This Mudra is carried in one of the two following ways:
a... by placing the tongue in contact with the uvula at the back of the soft palate;
b... by slipping the tongue into the nasal pharynx touching, if possible, the nasal septum.

According to Lahiri Mahasaya a kriyaban should achieve it not by cutting the tongue fraenulum but by means of Talabya Kriya [see].

Kechari is literally translated as "the state of those who fly in the sky", in the "inner space".

Kechari is compared to an electrical bypass of the mind's energetic system. It changes the path of Prana flow causing the life force to be withdrawn from the thinking process. Instead of allowing the thoughts to jump like frogs here and there, it causes the mind to be quiet and allows to focus it on the goal of meditation. Coupled with Kriya it is a consistent aid in clarify any desire and in cleansing many subconscious stuff.

It is thanks to these very easily verifiable effects that it is quite appropriate to consider it the king of all yogic Mudras.

A more elusive claim is the experience of the elixir of life, "Amrita", the "Nectar".

This is a fluid with sweet taste perceived by the kriyaban when the tip of his tongue touches either the uvula or the bone protrusion in the roof of the palate under the hypophysis. There is a Nadi going through the center of the tongue. Energy radiates through its tip and when it touches that bone protrusion, its radiation reaches and stimulates the Ajna Chakra in the center of the brain.

It is explained that there is a gap between the spinal channel and the medulla oblongata. As a consequence there is a gap with the spine and the whole brain. (Of course from the energetic point of view.) This circumstance is created at our birth and sustained by our common way of life. Now, by attracting magnetically different forces to unite in the central region of the brain, Kechari bridges this gap; a wonderful condition of union and recollection of our origin is restored in our being.

We do not realize the quantity of energy we squander away when we get lost in our thoughts, in our plans. Kechari turns this pernicious way of exhausting all of our vitality into its opposite. The mind begins to lose its despotic role: the "inner activity" happens no more by the thinking process but by the effortless development of the intuition.

While some other effects of Kechari, outlined in the literature, seem to be an exaggeration, this achievement is effective and really important!

Kevala Kumbhaka [see Breathless state]

Knot The traditional definition of the Grantis identifies three knots: the Brahma Granti at the Muladhara Chakra; the Vishnu Granti at the heart Chakra and the Rudra Granti at the Kutastha. Those are the places where Ida, Pingala and Sushumna Nadi meet. The knots are the root cause of our miseries because they cut us off from the infinite reservoir of energy all around us and nourish the exhausting world of superficial emotions and thoughts.

Lahiri Mahasaya's definition of the knots is different from the traditional one. He writes: «Any religious path, consists of four stages characterized by the untying of four internal knots: tongue, navel, heart and Muladhar».

Brahma Granti (located in Muladhar) is the first knot. It is related to our physical body: it preserves the ignorance of our infinite nature and is the first obstacle in the spiritual search, since it obstructs the Kundalini's path as she begins to move toward the higher centres. The world of names and forms creates restlessness and prevents the

mind from becoming one pointed. Ambitions and desires trap the mind. Until one unties this knot, one cannot meditate effectively.

Vishnu Granti is located in the area of the heart Chakra, Anahat, and is related to the astral body and to the world of emotions. Lord Vishnu is the lord of preservation. This knot creates the desire to preserve ancient knowledge, traditions, institutions, and religious orders. It produces "compassion", a keen desire to help suffering humanity. Discriminating knowledge combined with Yoga effort can unfasten the Knot of Vishnu and obtain deliverance from the traditional bonds, deep deeply rooted in our genetic code.

Rudra Granti is related to the causal body and to the world of ideas, visions, and intuitions. In the eyebrows spot, the Ida and Pingala Nadis cross over and then come down in the left and right nostrils, respectively. Ida and Pingala are time bound; after crossing the Rudra knot, the time bound consciousness dissolves - the yogi establishes himself in the Kutastha, beyond the Tattwas (elements: earth, water, fire, air and akasha). With a further effort, Kundalini unites with the supreme Atman in the Sahasrara Chakra and the yogi achieves perfect emancipation.

In Lahiri Mahasaya's definition of the Grantis, the first knot is that of the tongue. It cuts us off from the reservoir of energy in the Sahasrara region. It is pierced by way of Kechari Mudra [see]. The mind loses its despotic role! The consciousness is filled by unbelievable moments of pure calmness and mental silence. The second knot is that of the navel. It originates from the trauma of cutting the umbilical cord.

The third knot is that of the heart. Its definition matches perfectly the classic one.

The definition of the fourth knot is that of Muladhar and Kutastha knots considered as one and the same reality. The reason is that the action of the two unbalanced lateral currents of Ida and Pingala create a powerful obstruction at the base of the spine blocking our efforts to enter the subtle channel of Sushumna; but if we cross it, we perceive the Spiritual eye in the Kutastha and have the experience of entering it.

Kriya Yoga If we want to understand the essence of Kriya Yoga it is necessary to put aside some definitions found on the web.

"Kriya Yoga is the science of controlling life energy [Prana]."

"...a technique that activates the astral cerebrospinal centres."

".... hastens the practitioner's spiritual development and helps to bring about a profound state of tranquillity and God-communion."

"....creates the stillness of the sensory input. "

I don't want to contest them, but I think that Kriya is broader than what is implied. There are definitions which say nothing: they make a misleading synthesis of its methods and list its effects in the same way one would describe the Hatha or Raja Yoga practice.

Patanjali refers once to Kriya Yoga: "Kriya consists of body discipline, mental control, and meditating on Iswara." [Yoga sutras II:1] This is definitely correct, but by following the further evolution of his thought, we are led astray. Although he states that by remembering that Sound we can achieve the removal of all the obstacles that block our spiritual evolution, he does not develop this method. He is far from describing the same spiritual discipline taught by Lahiri Mahasaya.

Kriya is a "mystic path" utilizing the best tools used by the mystics of all religions. It consists of control of breath [Pranayama], Prayer [Japa, Mantra] and pure effort of tuning with the Omkar reality.

The soothing process of Pranayama, followed by the Thokar procedure, guides the bodily energy into the heart Chakra, holding thus, as in a grip of calmness, the unceasing reflex originating the breath. When a perfect stillness is established, when all the inner and outer movements cease, the kriyaban perceives a radiation of fresh energy sustaining each cell from inside; then the breathless state settles in.

When the physical breath is totally transcended and a circulation of energy happens in the body – the breath is said to have become "Internal" – a feeling of infinite safety, solidity and reliance originates. It is like having crossed a barrier and move into a measureless space: Kriya yoga is a miracle of beauty.

Kumbhaka Kumbhaka means holding the breath. It is such an important phase in Pranayama that some Yoga teachers doubt whether a modified way of breathing which does not include any Kumbhaka can be called Pranayama at all.

It is observed that when we are about to do something which requires our total attention, our breath is automatically held. We are not deliberately doing *Pranayama*, but our breath is suspended of its own accord; this demonstrates how natural this fact is. In *Pranayama* the inhalation is called *Puraka*, which literally means "the act of filling"; the exhalation is called *Rechaka*, meaning "the act of emptying". Retention of breath is called *Kumbhaka*, meaning "holding". *Kumbha* is a pot: just as a water pot holds water when it is filled with it, so in *Kumbhaka* the breath and the *Prana* is held in the body.

In the classic *Yoga* literature there are described four types of *Kumbhaka*.

I... We breathe out deeply and hold the breath for a few seconds. This is known as "Bahya Kumbhaka" (External Kumbhaka).

II...The second, "*Abhyantar Kumbhaka*" (Internal Kumbhaka), is holding the breath after a deep inhalation. Usually this kind of *Kumbhaka* is accompanied by the use of the three *Bandhas*.

III...The third type is that practised by alternate breathing - breathing in deeply through the left nostril, then holding the breath and then exhaling through the right... It is considered the easiest form of *Kumbhaka*.

IV...The fourth one is the most important of all, the peak of Pranayama. It is called Kevala Kumbhaka or automatic suspension of breath: it is the breathless state where there is no inhalation or exhalation, the slightest desire to breathe.

In the Kriya praxis, the underlying principle of [I] is present in the advanced form of Navi Kriya - this consists in fact in a series of very long and calm exhalations which seem to end in a sweet nothing, where the breath process finds its quietness.

Internal Kumbhaka [II] happens in different Kriya techniques; particularly in Yoni Mudra. Maha Mudra, with its balancing action on the right and on the left side of the spine, contains – in a broader sense - the principles of [III] alternating breathing.

Kundalini The concept of Kundalini and, particularly, of its awakening, provides a framework which is convenient to express what is happening along the spiritual path. Most of the spiritual traditions have some awareness of Kundalini; not all are equally open in exposing the practical details of the process.

Kundalini is Sanskrit for "coiled": it is conceived as a particular energy coiled like a serpent in the root Chakra Muladhar. The representation of being coiled like a spring conveys the idea of untapped potential energy. It sleeps in our body and underneath the layers of our consciousness, waiting to be aroused either by spiritual discipline or by other means - like particular experiences of life. It is depicted as rising from the Muladhar up through the Sushumna, activating each Chakra; when it arrives at the

crown Chakra (Sahasrara), it bestows infinite bliss, mystical illumination etc. It is only through repeatedly raising of the Kundalini, that the yogi succeeds in obtaining Self realization.

Its rising is not a mild sense of energy flowing inside the spine. Its movement is like having a "volcano erupting" inside, a "rocket missile" shot through the spine!

Its nature is beneficial; there is an evident resistance in trusting the reports of Kundalini awakening accompanied by troubles such as patently disturbed breathing patterns, distortion of thought processes, unusual or extremes strengthening of emotions...

We are rather inclined in thinking that a dormant malady, brought to open manifestation by thoughtless practice of violent exercises or drugs is the cause of those phenomena.

Insomnia, hypersensitivity to environment may indeed follow the authentic experience. In a "true awakening" the force of Kundalini eclipses the ego altogether and the individual feels disoriented for some time. All is absorbed in a short time, without problems. Alas, after a certain time, the ego is found intact and the reminiscence of the occurrence may be even interpreted no more than a pleasurable sensation.

The search for a repetition of the episode may lead to disorderly and careless practice of strange techniques, without ever establishing a minimal foundation of mental silence. Kundalini may be sought also for its vague supernatural implications, for the unlimited powers it is presumed to bestow.

Each book warns against the risk of a premature awakening of Kundalini and asserts that the body must be prepared for the event. Almost any yogi thinks he or she is capable of sustaining this premature awakening and the warning excites them more than ever: the problem is that many do not have (or have lost) a genuine spiritual approach and nourish a fairly egotistical one.

In the Kriya theoretical framework we consider Kundalini to be the same energy existing in the body and not specifically residing in the Muladhar Chakra.

Kundalini is the harmonious junction of Prana and Apana. When there is an absolute calmness and immobility in the body, these two currents, united as one, can open the door of Sushumna. This happens after Pranayama and Navi Kriya through a further strong concentration in Kutastha. We seldom use the term "Kundalini awakening" and try to avoid what could give the impression that such an experience has an alien nature: Kundalini is our own energy; it is the purest layer of our consciousness.

Let us conclude with hinting at a very fascinating theory. It affirms that Kundalini resides in each cell. This particular viewpoint goes hand in hand with the belief that our body isn't simply the involucre of the soul - a machine designed for going here and there in this physical world. By tuning with the pure energy present in its cells, man discovers the tool to contact the consciousness of the whole of mankind.

Kutastha Kutastha, the "third eye" or "spiritual eye" is the organ of inner vision (the unified astral counterpart of the two physical eyes), the place in our body where the spiritual Light manifests. By concentrating between the eyebrows, a formless darkness is first perceived, then a small crepuscular light, then other lights; eventually we have the experience of a golden ring surrounding a dark stain with a blazing tiny white point inside.

There is a connection between Kutastha and Muladhar: what we are observing in the space between the eyebrows is nothing but the opening of the spinal door, which is located at the root Chakra.

Some Kriya teachers affirm that the condition for entering the last and the highest Kriya stage is that the vision of the spiritual eye has become constant; others identify it with

the condition in which the energy is perfectly calm at the base of the spine. Therefore both affirmations are one and the same thing.

Maha Mudra Maha Mudra is a particular stretching position of the body. The importance of this technique becomes clear as soon as we observe how it incorporates the three main Bandhas of Hatha Yoga. There are indeed thousand and one reasons to practice Maha Mudra with firmness.

There is a ratio between the number of its repetitions and the number of the breaths: it is recommended that for each 12 Pranayama, one should perform one Maha Mudra.

Mahasamadhi [see Second Kriya]

Mantra [See Prayer]

Nada Yoga According to the esoteric teaching, the Divine essence sustains this universe through the Om vibration. God is not the universe but the universe is part of Him. Whatever is manifest in the physical, astral or causal world, animate or inanimate, it is made and sustained by God's vibration. This vibration is referred to as "Om", "Omkar", "Pranava", "Shabda", "Nada Brahman". A great Sufi teacher said: "Creation is the music of God". Sound plays a vital role in all the mystical traditions, since it is the bridge between the physical and the astral world, the unconscious and the conscious, the form and the formless. Om sound is the "unstruck" sound (Anahat) - not made as a result of two or more objects striking one another. It is, in fact, a sound not coming to the human ear from outside of the body but, rather, from within.

"Seek the Sound that never ceases, seek the sun that never sets." (Rumi). "The universe was manifested out of the Divine Sound; from It came into being the Light." (Shamas-i-Tabriz). "Who is there playing upon a flute in the middle of the sky? The flute is being played in trikuti (eyebrows centre), the confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna. The sound emanates from the north! Cowherd girl, hear the sound of the flute and lo, they are all hypnotized by the nada." "It is a music without strings which plays in the body. It penetrates the inner and the outer and leads you away from illusion." (Kabir). "The Sound is inside us. It is invisible. Wherever I look I find it." (Guru Nanak).

"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God" (St. John's Gospel); "And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters" (Revelation 1:15).

Saint John of the cross gave a splendid description of his meeting with the "resounding rivers", the "silent music", the "sounding solitude". There is no doubt he heard the typical rushing waters sound of the Om vibration.

Teresa of Avila in her book "The Interior Castle" wrote: "It roars like many big rivers with waterfalls, there are flutes, and a host of little birds seem to be whistling, not in the ears, but in the upper part of the head, where the soul is said to have its special seat."

Nada Yoga is the path of union with the Divine through listening to inner sounds. Surat-Shabda-Yoga is another name for Nada Yoga. It is a highly enjoyable form of meditation; anyone can be involved in this even without having fully understood it. One's listening skills will improve and one will become more sensitive.

Nada Yoga is not just an intellectual pursuit but rather an experiential one. It has its basis in the fact that once we can quiet the mind and reach a condition of great stillness and silence deep within our hearts, we can hear the astral sounds that lay beneath the outer sounds.

Its first step is simply to sit quietly and focus all one's attention on subtle sounds that come from within, rather than the audible sounds from outside. One may use a particular position of the body— a squatting position with the elbows resting on the knees, just to give an example—to plug both the ears. It is recommended to repeat mentally, unremittingly, one's favourite Mantra. Awareness of inner sound must happen, sooner or later. There are different levels of development in the experience of inner sounds: one will hear a bumblebee, the drum, the lute, the flute, the harp, the clapping of thunder or a hum like an electrical transformer. Some of these sounds are actually just the sounds of one's own body, especially the blood pumping. Other sounds are actually the "sounds behind the audible sound". It is into this deeper realm that, while over time gently easing the mind into relaxed concentration, one's awareness is drawn. After some weeks of dedicated practice one will tune in with a sound deeper than all the above-quoted astral sounds. This is the cosmic sound of Om. Yogic tradition connects this inner sound with Kundalini itself. When it reaches its maximum height and speed, it becomes still. It reveals its nature as a movement within a perfect stillness – which is impossible to be intellectually grasped. This experience is the surest way towards the realization of the Self. Unfortunately, many seek frantically impossible surrogates of it!

Nadi Subtle channels through which the energy flows throughout the body. The most important are Ida, which flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column (it is said to be of female nature), and Pingala (of masculine nature) which flows parallel to the former one on the right side; Sushumna flows in the middle and represents the experience that is beyond duality.

Nadi Sodhana Alternate nostril breathing exercise, it is not properly part of Kriya Yoga. Yet, because of its effect of appeasing and cheering up the mind (especially if it is practiced in the morning) are unmatched, some kriyabans make it a regular part of their routine.

Navi Kriya The essence of this technique is to dissolve inhalation and exhalation at the state of equilibrium in the navel, the seat of the Samana current. It is coupled in various ways (before or after) with the practice of Pranayama. Some schools which do not specifically teach it, provide some substitutes of it – a particularly remarkable instruction, brought forward by one Kriya institution, is to draw very intensely the navel inside (creating a hollow in the abdomen as in the Uddiyana Bandha) during the Pranayama exhalation.

Nirvikalpa Samadhi [see Paravastha]

Omkar Omkar is Om, the Divine Reality sustaining the universe, whose nature is vibration with specific aspects of sound, light and inner movement. One who follows the mystical path infallibly meets this manifestation of Spirit - whatever may be their preparation and their convictions. The sound is perceived in different variations; Lahiri Mahasaya describes it as «produced by a lot of people who keep on striking the disk of a bell». It is continuous «as the oil that flows out of a container». From the very beginning of the Kriya path, as soon as the mind is sufficiently calm, the inner sweet sound of Om grabs the kriyaban's awareness and leads it in depth without any danger of it getting lost. As for the movement sensation, only few schools disclose

its importance and mystery. A particular swinging sensation is easily perceived in the heart Chakra during the physical movements of the Thokar technique. In the beginning it seems to be stirred from the movements of the head, projected from outside to inside. Concentrating on it at length, has a tremendous impact on the Kriyaban's capability of melting his little individuality into the greater Self. To realize that this movement is without cause, autonomous, emanating from the Eternity itself, is an incommensurably important event. After a committed practice of the so-called Kriyas of the calm breath, when the awareness of the Kutastha is turned on, it can manifest. This marks the last part of the Kriya path.

Padmasana In this asana the right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh with the soles of the feet turned up.

The name means the "position in which the lotuses (the Chakras) are seen"; it is explained that, combined with Kechari and Shambhavi Mudra, this Asana creates an energetic condition in the body, suitable to producing the experience of the internal light coming from each Chakra.

Personally, I do not counsel anyone to perform this difficult posture. There are yogis who had to have their cartilage removed from their knees after years of forcing themselves into lotus. In Kriya Yoga, at least for those living in the west and not used to assuming it since infancy, it is much wiser, healthier and comfortable to practice either the Half lotus or the Siddhasana position.

Paravastha This concept is linked with that of "Sthir Tattwa (Tranquillity)".

Coined by Lahiri Mahasaya, it designates the state that comes by holding onto the after-effect of Kriya. It is not just joy and peace but something deeper, vital for us as a healing.

From our initial efforts directed at mastering the techniques, we perceive moments of deep peace and harmony with the rest of the world, which extend during the day. Paravastha comes after years of discipline, when the familiarity with the breathless state destroys any restricting anthropomorphic concept of the Divine: the tranquillity state lasts forever, it is no longer to be sought with care. Flashes of the ending state of freedom comfort the mind while coping with life's battles.

Pingala [see Nadi]

Prana The energy inside our psychophysical system.

The Prana is divided in Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana and Vijana, which have their location respectively in the chest, in the low abdomen, in the region of the belt, in the head and in the remaining part of the body - arms and legs. That the term Prana is interpreted in two ways should not create confusion – provided that one considers the context in which the word is used.

In the initial phases of Pranayama we are mainly interested in Prana, Apana and Samana. When we use Shambhavi Mudra and during mental Pranayama we contact Udana. Through many techniques (like Maha Mudra) and by the experience of Pranayama with Internal Breath we experience the fresh vitalizing nature of Vijana.

Pranayama [Kriya Pranayama] This term is comprised of two roots: Prana is the first; Ayama (expansion) or Yama (control) is the second. Thus, the word Pranayama can be understood either as the "Expansion of Prana" or as the "Control of Prana". I would prefer the first but I think that the correct one is the second.

In other words, Pranayama is the control of the energy in the whole psychophysical system by using the breathing process with the purpose to receive a beneficial effect or spiritual realization.

The common Pranayama exercises - although if they do not involve the perception of any energetic current - can create a remarkable experience of energy spontaneously rising in the spine.

This is not negligible since this experience causes the sceptical practitioner the discovery of the spiritual dimension and pushes him or her to seek something deeper.

In Kriya Pranayama the breathing process is coordinated with the attention of the mind up and down along the spinal column.

While the breathing is deep and slow, with the tongue either flat or turned back, the awareness accompanies the movement of the energy around the six Chakras. The three energies of sex, love and spirit are thus mixed together. By achieving Kechari Mudra, the sound of a flute [see] appears in the throat during exhalation. Such a penetrating sound absorbs the concentration, cuts off external disturbances and, leading beyond the mind, dissolves many illusions at their root. A sense of levitation, as if flying, is born and the process of breathing is refined.

Then the current flows in the deepest channel in the spine: Sushumna. The energy, like a bright golden substance, goes up and down inside the Chakras (no longer around them). When by a long practice a subtle form of energy circulates (in a clearly perceivable way) inside the body and the physical breath is totally settled down, the kriyaban has an experience of unthinkable beauty.

Pranayama mental In mental Pranayama a kriyaban controls the energy in his body by forgetting the breathing process and focusing only upon Prana in the Chakras and in the body. His awareness dwells on both the inner and the external component of each Chakra until he feels a radiation of fresh energy vitalizing each part of the body and sustaining it from inside. This action is marked by the end of all the physical movements, by a perfect physical and mental stillness. At times, the breath becomes so calm that the practitioner has the absolute perception they are not breathing at all.

Prayer [Japa, Mantra] Prayer is an act of communion with the Higher Reality that allows a person to make a reverent plea, to seek guidance, to offer praise or simply to express their thoughts and emotions. The sequence of words used in a Prayer may either be a set formula or a spontaneous expression in the praying person's own words. Whatever be the appeal to God, this act presupposes a belief in the Divine Will to interfere in our life. "Ask, and ye shall receive" (Matt. 7:7, 8; 21:22)

Prayer is a subject of wide range and scope; here I will restrict it to the repetitive Prayer. In India, the repetition of the Name of the Divine is known as Japa. Some Catholic and Eastern Orthodox pious devotional practices involve repetition of prayers. It is also widespread in the Sufi mystic path.

The Sanskrit word Japa is derived from the root Jap - meaning: "to utter in a low voice, repeat internally". Japa is a spiritual discipline involving both a thoughtful contemplative and an automatic mechanical repetition. Japa is also the repetition of whatever Mantra, which is a broader term than Prayer. Mantra can be a name of the Divine but also a pure sound without a meaning. A certain number of sounds were chosen by ancient yogis who sensed their power and used them greatly. (Some believe that the repetition of a Mantra has the mysterious power of bringing about the manifestation of the Divinity "just as the splitting of an atom manifests the tremendous forces latent in it").

Let us confine to those sounds who create a soft vibration in the physical body, astral body and mind and ignore those sounds which are used in other practices like magic. Regarding the Mantras utilized in devotional disciplines, the explanation that the term Mantra derives from the words "Manas" (mind) and "Tra" (protection) is appropriate: we protect our mind by repeating unrelentingly the same healthy vibration.

In most forms of Japa, the repetitions are counted using a string of beads known as a Japa Mala. The number of beads in it is generally 108 or 100. The Mala is used so that a devotee is free of enjoying the practice and doesn't mind about counting the repetitions. Usually a Mantra is repeated verbally for sometime, then in a whisper and mentally for sometime. It may be performed whilst sitting in a meditation posture or while performing other activities, preferably walking. It is essential to add to our Japa a feeling of reverence, but it is not necessary to dissect its meaning and try to keep it in mind all the time. By repeating it, a devotee draws closer to their ideal form of Divinity and the mind is set for enjoying a higher contemplative state.

While practicing Japa during their daily chores and concerns, the devotee's life becomes a constant flow of Divine recollection.

This creates a permanent mental silence which is the condition for the miracle of Kriya to blossom.

In Omkar Pranayama the twelve letter Mantra Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya plays an important role. Lahiri Mahasaya wrote: "Many do not do Japa in each center. When this does not happen the results are negative. Therefore, during Pranayama, one must put attention in each center and practice Japa in each of them".

Each of its syllables strengthens the concentration on the relative Chakra. Coupled with the movements of the head during Thokar, the mental uttering of the syllables helps to direct the flow of energy inside each Chakra.

The repetition of the Mantra is very effective in inducing the tuning with the internal sounds, like that of the tolling of a bell.

Preliminary techniques to Kriya Yoga Some organizations, in their didactic effort to bring Kriya Yoga to people, picked out some easy techniques as a preparation.

The first - called Hong-So - calms the breath and the psychophysical system. The second one concerns the listening to the internal (astral) sounds, and Om sound.

In Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya, the preliminary techniques are Talabya Kriya [see] and chanting of Om in the Chakras.

Sahasrara The seventh Chakra extends from the crown of the head up to the Fontanelle and over it. It cannot be considered of the same nature of the others but a superior reality, which can be experienced only in the breathless state. It is not easy therefore to concentrate upon it as we do with the others. Only after a deep practice of Pranayama, when the breath is very calm, the "tuning " with it is possible; a particular pressure over the head may be felt.

Samadhi According to Patanjali's Ashtanga (eight steps) Yoga, Samadhi is the state of deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself: it results naturally from Dharana and Dhyana.

In Kriya literature there is no a definite agreement about its definition. Since Samadhi represents something we cannot rationally understand, most kriyabans envisage its nature as the apex of bliss and do not speculate about its essence.

Our language is strongly hampered: some magniloquent words risk meaning nothing.

What does it mean for example union with God? To become one and the same thing or to awaken to the realization we are just a part of That One? Words deceive our comprehension and kindle egoist expectations. One is thrilled by words such as: absolute, eternal, infinite, supreme, everlasting, celestial, divine....

I have half a mind to suggest a sober definition of Samadhi, which may foster an action of mental cleanness and stimulate a reflection upon the meaning of the spiritual path. Let me therefore define Samadhi as independent from any accident, beatific, near death experience (NDE).

The descriptions of Samadhi and of NDE follow the same pattern: actually the nature of the phenomenon which takes place in the body is almost the same.

This opinion may disappoint those who smell a restrictive and limiting shade of meaning in it; however I prefer to think in this way and discover much more during the actual Samadhi experience than to thrive in rhetoric.

Even if the Samadhi were no more than a NDE experience, however it would have a superlative value.

In both the experiences, the awareness can shed a glimpse to the Eternity beyond mind; then (this happens to the trained yogi) that lofty awareness blends, integrates with the customary life, which is totally transformed for the better.

To those who wonder if it is fair to diminish the worth of the Kriya ecstatic state reducing it to a process of contacting for some time the after life dimension, we could reply that this genuine experience is unmatched in fostering in a clean way the Kriya Yoga ideals of a balanced spiritual life.

Shambhavi Mudra A Mudra in which the ocular bulbs and the eyebrows are upturned as much as possible; often the inferior eyelids relax and a bystander can observe the white of the cornea under the iris. All the visual force of the ocular nerves is gathered on the top of the head. Lahiri Mahasaya in his well known portrait is showing this Mudra.

Second Kriya It seems that by using the Second Kriya technique, Swami Pranabananda, an eminent disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya, left his body consciously (this feat is called Mahasamadhi - the conscious exit out of the body, at death). There was no violence to the body; the feat happened only in the most proper moment, according to a Karmic point of view when the moment was right.

Now the debate is: what procedure did he make use of?

a... Many claim it was Thokar. It is possible that he arrested the movement of the heart and therefore left his body. He might have done one single Thokar and stopped his heart; this means he put so much mental strength in this act as to block the energy which kept his heart throbbing. The same Thokar technique he had applied for years, was applied during this final moment of his life.

b... Some believe that this supreme calming of the heart was achieved only by a mental action of immersion in the Kutastha. They say that those who were around him did not notice any head movement. Similarly when other great ones left their body there was no movement.

c... In my opinion, Mahasamadhi is not a "shrewd esoteric trick" to master the mechanics of a painless suicide, surely each great master relies upon his already built ability to enter Samadhi. By creating a total peace in his being, the soul's natural desire to regain union with the Infinite Source puts in action a natural mechanism of appeasing the cardiac plexus.

Siddhasana The Sanskrit name means "Perfect Pose". In this Asana, the sole of the left foot is placed against the right thigh so that the heel presses on the Perineum. The right heel is placed against the pubic bone. This position of the legs, combined with Kechari Mudra, closes the pranic circuit and makes Pranayama easy and profitable.

Sushumna [see Nadi]

Talabya Kriya It is a stretching exercise of the muscles of the tongue, and particularly of the Fraenulum, whose purpose is to attain Kechari Mudra [see]. This practice creates a distinct calming effect on the thoughts and, for this reason, it is never put aside, even after Kechari Mudra is achieved.

Thokar A Kriya technique based on directing the calm Prana - collected in the head through Pranayama - towards the location of one (usually the 4th) or more Chakras, by a particular movement of the head (jerk).

In Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya, the "Thokar" (to strike, blow, stroke) procedure is usually called Second Kriya – the following other Higher Kriyas are seen as a development of this one. The practice of Thokar is to be deepened throughout the years in order to get the ability to enter the state of Samadhi with just one stroke.

Studying the practices of the Sufis, (see the studies conducted by Gardet and M. M. Anawati, esp. Gardet in *Revue Thomiste* (1952-3)), we discover that Thokar is a variant of the Sufi's Dhikr.

Dhikr is the practice of the "memory" of the Divine, which is brought about by repeating a particular short prayer during the day and by guiding it, during moments of seclusion or group devotional practice, into particular centers of the body through specific head movements.

(While some details may vary from one Sufi brotherhood to another, the essence does not change. Sufis teach to stick the tongue to the roof of the mouth and hold the breath. The prayer is *Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*; it means: there is no God but Allâh. This prayer is lifted from under the navel up to the brain. After reaching the brain, it moves from the brain to the right shoulder, then to left shoulder, then it hits the heart. Its energy and heat spreads to all the parts of the body. According to the meaning of this Prayer, the seeker who has denied all that exists in this world is annihilated in the Divine Presence. The formula which Lahiri Mahasaya chose was *Om Namô Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, but he gave the Islamic Mantra *Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh* to his Muslim disciples.)

It might have happened that Lahiri knew this technique since youth; it was His genius to develop it to the utmost perfection.

Some teachers give nothing past the Second Kriya and affirm that one who practices it, divines out the others. It is self-evident that, while doing the Second Kriya, if a kriyaban tries to intensify the experience of bliss perceived in the heart, he guesses inevitably the secret detail of the Third (repeating, inebriated, the hitting on the heart Chakra). While doing it, he listens to the inner astral sounds, especially that of the tolling of a distant bell; by thus guiding Prana into the Anahat Chakra, a light grows in Kutastha. This fosters the breathless state. By increasing the concentration on the spiritual light, the lights of all the other Chakras are revealed, thereby opening the road to the perceptions which characterize the Fourth Kriya.

Trivangamurari [Tribhangamurari] Trivangamurari is the highest manifestation of the Omkar reality. In the last part of His life, Lahiri Mahasaya drew with extreme precision the three-bends form [Tri-vanga-murari = three-bend-form] which is

perceived by deepening the after-Pranayama meditation. Trivangamurari may be experienced in one's own physical body either in great or in micro dimensions.

Yama – Niyama Yama is Self-control: non-violence, avoiding lies, avoiding stealing, avoiding being lustful and non-attachment. Niyama is religious observances: cleanliness, contentment, discipline, study of the Self and surrender to the Supreme God.

While in most Kriya schools these rules are put as premises to be respected in order to receive initiation, a discriminating researcher understands that they are to be considered really as the consequences of a correct Yoga practice.

A beginner cannot even understand what "Study of the Self" means. Some teacher repeats, parrot fashion, the necessity of observing those rules and, after having given absurd clarifications of some of the above points (in particular which mental trick to utilize in order to ... avoid being lustful), passes on to explain the techniques.

Why utter empty words? Whom is he trying to fool? The mystic path, when followed honestly, cannot compromise itself with any rhetoric. When an affirmation is made, it is that.

Yama and Niyama are a good topic to study, an ideal to bear in mind but not a vow. Only through practice it is possible to understand their real meaning and, consequently, see them flourish in one's life.

Yoga Sutra (by Patanjali) The Yoga Sutras are an extremely influential text on Yoga philosophy and practice: over fifty different English translations are the testimony of its importance. Although we are not sure of the exact time when their author Patanjali lived, we can set it between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D.

The Yoga Sutras are made up by a collection of 195 aphorisms dealing with the philosophical aspects of mind and awareness, thus establishing a sound theoretical basis of Raja Yoga - the Yoga of self discipline and meditation. Yoga is described as an eight stage (Ashtanga) path which are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. The first five steps build the psycho physical foundation for having a true spiritual experience; the last three are concerned with disciplining the mind up to its dissolution in the ecstatic experience. They define also some esoteric concepts, common to all the traditions of the Indian thought, such as Karma.

Although, at times, Patanjali is called "the father of Yoga", his work is actually a compendium of pre-existing oral Yoga traditions, an unhomogeneous whole of practices betraying an indistinct and contradictory theoretical background.

However its importance is beyond discussion: he clarified what others had taught; what was abstract he made practical! He was a genial thinker, not just a compiler of rules.

His equilibrium between theism and atheism is very appreciable. We do not find the least suggestion of worshipping idols, deities, gurus, or sacred books - at the same time we do not find any atheistic doctrine either.

We know that "Yoga" besides being a rigorous system of meditation practice implies devotion to the Eternal Intelligence or Self. Patanjali affirms the importance of directing our heart's aspiration toward Om. This is really inspiring for a kriyaban, however the last phases of the Kriya praxis do not follow the pattern of Patanjali's explanations.

Yoni Mudra The potential of this technique includes, in all effects, the final realization of the Kriya path. Kutastha - between the eyebrows - is the place where the individual soul had its origin: the delusory Ego needs to be dissolved there.

Its core component is to bring all the energy into the Kutastha center and hinder its scattering by closing the head openings – the breath is quieted in the region from throat to Kutastha. If a deep relaxation state is established in the body, this practice succeeds in generating a very intense ecstatic state, which spreads throughout one's being.

About its practical implementation, there are minor differences among the schools: some give a greater importance to the vision of the Light and less to the dissolution of breath and mind. Among the first, there are those who teach, while keeping more or less the same position of the fingers, to focus upon each Chakra and to perceive their different colours.

One satisfactory remark, found in the traditional Yoga literature, is that this technique gets its name "Yoni", meaning "uterus", because like the baby in the uterus, the practitioner has no contact with the external world, and therefore, no externalisation of consciousness.

Vertical routine When we think of the Kriya practice we imagine the classic horizontal scheme which consists in a daily practice of the same set of techniques, changing neither their order of practice nor the number of their repetitions.

A vertical routine is a particular feature of Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya. It consists, once in a week, for a certain number of weeks (20 – 24 – 36 ...), in putting the usual routine aside and using only one technique, whose number of repetitions is gradually increased up to a certain amount that the tradition has handed down as optimal.

This is the most remunerative Kriya praxis because leads to the mastery (unimaginable with any other scheme of practice) of the techniques which are utilized for such procedure; it has also a positive effect on one's personality, releasing it from many inner obstacles.

Akin to this procedure is the plan of completing a certain amount (usually a multiple of 12, such as 1728 or 20736) of repetitions of a particular technique, employing of course a specified number of days.