AHAM BRAHMASMI

PATH TO SELF REALISATION

Yogi Shivan

A METRO MEDIA PUBLICATION

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ARIF MOHAMMED KHAN
GOVERNOR OF KERALA

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 099

08 December 2021

I am happy to know that **Yogi Shivan** has authored a book **Aham Bhahmasmi – Path to Self Realization,** based on many years of his experience as a **Siddhayogi.**

Many sages who have probed deeply into the inner nature of Man, have identified beneath the physical power, a subtle psychic energy system with infinite range.

The focus of this unique energy resource has been identified as the true self of the human being, namely Atman.

Sage Aruni tells Svetaketu in Chandogya Upanishad

स य एषोऽणिमैतदात्म्यमिदं सर्वं;
तत्सत्यं, स आत्मा, तत्त्वमसि, श्वेतकेतो ॥

"That which is the subtlest of all is the Self of all this. It is the Truth. It is the Self. That thou art, O Svetaketu.

Spiritual knowledge is not attained only through an intellectual process. This profound knowledge comes from deeper experiences in human life the selfless service to fellow – being one of them.

Yogi Sivan has been inspired by Guru Adi Sankara's saying **निश्चलतत्वं जीवन मुक्तिः** meaning liberation cannot be denied to one who is unwavering in his intention.

Seeing selfless service of Man as the way towards total communion with God, and in tune with the message of Sri Ramkrishna Paramahans that "**Every Jiva is Shiva**'' he endeavours to ensure an ailment free future for mankind.

I understand that Yogi Shivan's devotion to the welfare and health of others has helped him see the spark of the divine, first in others and then in himself, true to the dictum **Aham Brahmasmi.**

This book which lucidly explains the essence of Indian Culture, Hindu dharma, rituals, the discipline to be followed while visiting various temples and spirituality in general, is an effort to help readers to look within and seek ways of realizing the Brahman in them.

The path towards healthy living suggested in this book is based on the consideration of one's body as a Temple.

Yogi Shivan concludes the book by reminding us that nothing in nature is insignificant no one is weak and vulnerable and that the potential of each one of us is as great as the universe itself. It is when we realize the Brahman in ourselves that we experience our sublime transformation from a mere *Nara to Narayana.*

My hearty compliments to Yogi Shivan for this philosophical effort and my best wishes for the success of the book.

ARIF MOHAMMED KHAN

Agastya Muni

Swami Sivajyothi Dharmananda

(1924-2001)

ऋग्वेद
says..
"Prajnanam Brahma"
Higher consciousness is the Reality

yajur veda says..
"Aham Brahmasmi"
I (Self) am Brahmam

इहैव तद्
says..
"Tatwmasi" "Thou art that"
You (Self) are the reality

adharva veda
says..
"Ayamathma Brahma"
My Self is the Brahman

Dedication

I dedicate this book to the Lotus feet of the divine Masters of great lineage, who blessed us with the gift of the profound knowledge of the soul, the potential of the mind and its amazing possibilities for the well-being of mankind.

PROLOGUE

There are four commanding verses that proclaim the unity between life and The Absolute Truth in the scriptures. They are called *mahavakyams* (great verses) and they encompass the meaning of all the messages in the Scriptures. By understanding these *mahavakyams*, which are related to Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda, the universality of the *brahmam* (The Absolute Truth) and its grandeur will be revealed.

Let's see what those are:-

1. Prajnanam Brahma (Higher Consciousness is *brahmam* or The Absolute Truth: Aythareyopanishad 3.3) is known as *lakshanavakyam* or ideal verse and it is connected to the Rig Veda.

2. Aham Brahmasmi (I am *brahmam* or The Absolute: Bruhadaranyakopanishad 1.4.10) is known as the *sakshatkaravakyam* or the materialising verse and it is related to Yajur Veda. This verse is also referred to as *anubhavavakyam* or experiential verse.

3. Tat Twam Asi (You are that: Chandogyopanishad 6.8.7) is known as *upadeshavakyam* or advisory verse. It means *parabrahmam* or The Absolute Truth denoted by the term 'Tat' and Jeevathma or life force denoted by 'Twam' is one and the same. This *mahavakyam* was advised by Uddalakan to his son Shwethakethu and it is connected to Sama Veda.

4. Ayamathma Brahma (This life force is *brahmam* or The Absolute Truth itself). This verse is from Mandukyopanishad, which is related to Atharva Veda and is known as *anusandhanavakyam* or observational verse.

Many great men have researched these *mahavakyams*. Shri Shankaracharya wrote explanations of these verses in the book named Mahavakyarthavivaranam. Sri Narayana Guru composed a single verse connecting these four verses as given below:

Prajnanam Thwahamasmi Tatwamasi Tad
Brahmayamathmethi Sang-
Gayen Viprachara Prashanthamanasa
Twam Brahmabodhodayath

The book introduced here was written after experiencing the Bruhadaranyaka verse Aham Brahmasmi. A seeker's thirst for knowledge can be closely felt in this book.

Divided into two parts, this book discloses two types of thoughts. The first part speaks about the unity of life force and The Absolute Truth (Jeevabrahmaikyam). The second part looks into the real meaning behind God concepts. This work was not written after researching books. On the contrary, these are thoughts refined to perfection in the kiln of spiritual experiments. Though readers might beg to differ, the author wrote every word with a conviction towards truthfulness. The great verses were guiding lights.

It is the seeker's duty to travel in that path and to internalise the experience. The author has described the insights he acquired through his experiences and I believe this book will provide a new experience to the readers.

Dr N P Unni
Former Vice Chancellor
Shri Shankaracharya University
Kalady, Kerala

Dr George Onakkoor

I was living in an age when Yoga was considered a form of physical exercise; something limited to just another fitness concept. It took me years to understand that Yoga is the union between mind and body. Then I came to the realisation: to practice Yoga is to contemplate and comprehend the very essence of life itself.

The basic principle of Yoga is to concentrate, or to focus the mind to a single point. When light is passed through a lens and focussed on a single point, the temperature there starts to rise. Yoga raises the mind's Agnibalam (Power of Fire) and thereby raises body temperature. It causes incredible chemical reactions in the brain, which lead to the expansion of consciousness and result in absolute control over the whole body. With Yoga, a person overcomes the boundaries of the body and mind and attains an elevated state of consciousness (Brahma Sakshatkaram), which enables the practitioner to experience the oneness in everything. It is by mastering this core principle of the Yogic state that Yogi Shivan has named this seminal work "Aham Brahmasmi".

Shri Yogi Shivan is an exceptional personality. He practised martial arts, immersed himself in the rhythm and movement of classical dance and later experienced 'Samadhi' through four years of diligent practice of Yoga. From that blissfully sublime state, he chose to become a family man. Now, he is a yogacharya, master healer and above all, a guiding light of wisdom who shows the way to those who seek spiritual upliftment.

"Aham Brahmasmi" is the Moolamantra (core principle)

of a great civilisation. This phrase, borrowed from Brihadaranyakopanishad, can be considered as the foundation of self-realisation. "Tat Twam Asi" (You are that), the doctrine of enlightenment from Chandogyopanishad also stands alongside "Aham Brahmasmi". It is the spirit of Advaita (Non-duality) that extends Mother Nature's blessings to society, just as a tree having strong roots and standing tall, shares its shade, scent of its flowers and the sweetness of its fruits to all living beings.

We are living in an age where people are competing to attain more material gains through control over nature and traditions. So, learning Yogic practices and other methods for self-realisation has never been more important. Shri Yogi Shivan is presenting authentic and sublime thoughts about India, Sanatana Dharma and an all-encompassing sense of faith in this book. He has been able to prove the meaningfulness as well as meaninglessness of many religious practices too.

I got acquainted with Yogi Shivan recently, and I had a realisation that his thought process was something that has been accompanying my personal quest for ages. It gives me great joy that he has presented complex and intricate Vedic theories in such simple language. Yogi Shivan has written a book that is perfect for reading, studying and offers an enriching experience on many levels. I can say, without an iota of doubt, that in the quest for spiritual wisdom, "Shiva's way" will certainly spread happiness.

'Sudarshana'
Nalanchira
Thiruvananthapuram 695015

Note of Appreciation

Aham Brahmasmi

A perfect title for the first published book written by Shri Yogi Shivan. This yogic work, which is the product of the higher consciousness attained through constant meditation, incorporates everything that is essential for human life.

Contained in two sections, this small book encompasses the greatness of the great secrets which are as vast as the ocean. There is no doubt that readers will be eternally grateful to Yogi Shivan for incorporating the entirety of the universe in a simple book. This work encourages us to go beyond the known and dive into the depths of the unknown. This is where Yogi Shivan the writer, stands apart. This is a book that shows us why a yogi should also be a writer.

This book, which enables readers to swim through the depths of Sanatana Dharma, is not a work of knowledge but of enlightenment itself. Despite being a serious subject, the simplicity of its presentation will help people from all walks of life to enjoy and employ its teachings to the fullest. Yogi Shivan has revealed subjects, which were once considered unapproachable or were made inaccessible, with great ease and simplicity. It won't be an exaggeration to say that the ability to give such simple answers to complex questions is an ability possessed only by a few, like the writer. This book, that separates the essential from the inessential is being offered to the lineage of Gurus, and rightfully so.

As someone who experienced super consciousness through dedicated meditative practices that spanned over four years, Yogi Shivan found answers to every complicated question from within himself. This experience motivated him to combine material and spiritual attributes to create this essential guide. Yogi Shivan has been able to unravel the secrets shrouding the deities that we have been viewing as statues for all this while. Not only that, we can also find obscure quotes explained fully in this book.

In the last part of the book, Yogi Shivan advises to awaken the spirit that lies dormant in everyone to overcome the tensions and insecurities of the modern world and reinstall peace, tranquility and contentment in everybody's lives. This is the essence of Indian culture's core principle - know the universe by knowing yourself.

Those who journey through Yogi Shivan's 'Aham Brahmasmi', which transcends from the known to the unknown, will undoubtedly be rewarded with inexplicable spiritual experience.

With Love,

Dr. Venganoor Balakrishnan

Publishers' Note

A Companion for the Heart

The revised edition of Yogi Shivan's 'Aham Brahmasmi' is being published by us. Through this book, he answers the questions about the soul, emanating from this confused modern world. This is not just for reading but a guide for ensuing quests for meaning.

This book will provide a great experience to those in the journey for the extent of spiritual discoveries. As a work that purifies good words, we sincerely hope that it will become a companion for hearts rather than ending up as an adornment in shelves.

Publishers

Author's Note

The use of dialogue in ancient philosophy is a traditional and established form of imparting knowledge and developing abstract thought. This form is used in the *Vedas, Upanishads*, Epics and in almost all the scriptures - the reason why a dialogue form is adopted in this book. A question followed by the answer is the method used in the chapters to best express the thoughts. The questions we encounter in our daily life, questions that the spiritual seeker in you is facing, questions that may belong to you or me – through these questions, answers are sought. I have kept the dialogue as simple and straight as possible. I hope you enjoy reading this book and benefit from it.

Acknowledgement

I express my gratitude to my parents for giving me an opportunity to have this wonderful human life and to my brothers, sisters, teachers, friends and all other living and non-living beings who gave me meaningful support in my evolution from an ordinary man to a human being.

Though I had a strong intention to share my yogic experiences with society, I did not know how to structure a book. Being a science graduate, I was not good in literature. I express my sincere thanks to those who brought order to my scattered revelations and experiences and helped me to write this book. There are no words for expressing my gratitude to Mr. Shiv Nanda and Mrs. Madhu Nanda for their dedication in translating the book from Malayalam (my mother tongue) to English. I am very grateful to Mrs. Barbara Pidgeon for her meaningful support and intellectual interventions. My thanks too, to my editor Mr. Prasad G. Nair, whose valuable suggestions owed as much to his literary skills as to his intuitive understanding of the subject. I also thank Mr. Raju Mavila, who cheerfully typed countless drafts, and for his technical support. I also would like to thank my publisher Mr. Siji Nair, Metro Media for his great support in bringing out this book.

Despite the day to day challenges in our worldly life, my wife and children are very keen not to disturb my daily meditation. My gratitude to them is beyond words, and as a token of my deep appreciation, I thank them.

PREFACE

I was born in a village called Vakkom in Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala, a southern state of India. The village is surrounded by a lake from three sides, on which the morning sun reflects in its full glory. During the night the lake turns itself into a carpet of twinkling stars and the moon. Wind echoes the chirping of birds and chatter of people in the morning and at night, silence engulfs all, lying in steady embrace with the lake. With all its mystic beauty, the lake set the foundation of my childhood memories.

I was the sixth of seven children of my parents. My mother, an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, found me all coal-black when I was born! So she named me Shivadasan, servant of Lord Shiva, who is portrayed blue black. My father was a traditional Ayurveda practitioner, while my mother was a dutiful housewife, who also managed the coir making business.

Growing up, I was a hyperactive child. Though I was managed well at home by my mother and siblings, that was not the case when I started going to school. Complaints started reaching my father about his son's mischief, mostly involving fights with fellow school mates. That was when my father decided to send me to learn *Kalarippayattu*, the traditional martial art form of Kerala. It was his solution to my hyperactivity – learning to fight scientifically and in the process, getting disciplined.

As I advanced in *Kalarippayattu*, my father's intuition

proved to be true. My passion for *Kalarippayattu*, mother of all martial arts, increased on the outer level and in my inner core, I was becoming calm and more focussed.

I was making steady progress in *Kalarippayattu* and along with that I started learning modern martial art forms of karate and boxing. As a boy, accustomed to traditional and modern martial arts, I believed that a healthy body meant a body with strong yet flexible muscles, capable of fast and impressive movements to dominate others. From the age of fourteen to twenty six, I used to spend about six hours a day on exercise and practice. To avoid stiffness of the body due to rigorous practice, I began to learn South Indian dance forms of *Bharathanatyam* and *Kuchuppudi*. As a young man I wanted to achieve everything possible.

In addition to flexibility, I developed a natural rhythm through the practice of dance. These disciplines, along with flexibility, had made my martial arts movements both graceful and attractive. Noticing this, my martial arts teacher encouraged me to experiment further and I started practising yoga postures to the beat of *Carnatic* music.

I was successful and highly ranked as an artist in my field, yet I was not content within myself. Unanswered questions arose within me, questions about the real purpose of the arts and martial arts. The northern style of *Kalarippayattu* was introduced by a Sage called *Parasurama Maharshi*. The southern style was initiated by *Agastya Muni*. Why did these *Gurus*, who had renounced the world, and were supposed to be detached from material life, engage themselves in such an aggressive art? What

made them introduce such dangerous martial arts to society? Why did the great *Bharatha Muni*, supposed to be immersed in eternal silence, introduce *Bharathanatyam* – a dance form with myriad fast movements (*jathis*) and facial expressions (*bhaavas*)? All these *Gurus* were yogis, strictly following the idea, "*Nichala tatwe jeevanmukti*" (When all the functions of the body and mind become still, liberation is experienced). Though I tried to seek answers to the questions that arose within me, no one was there to give me any convincing answers.

While the curious seeker in me was caught in umpteen thoughts, the youth in me was chasing materialistic pleasures of life. During that phase, I believed success lay in becoming rich and famous. From the sleepy hamlet of Vakkom, I flew to the Middle East, chasing the luxuries of life. After doing menial jobs in Oman, I started my own venture teaching *Kalari* and therapeutic yoga. Slowly I found myself climbing the social ladder and becoming acquainted with new business and social groups which happened to be from various countries. The doors that usually remain closed to ordinary people began to open for me one by one. Soon, I was pitch-forked into the upper strata of society. I was in fact getting sucked into a whirlpool of rich soirees at an amazing speed.

While I was doing very well in this glitzy world, my first feeling of inadequacy came up when European customers, who were better informed than Indians on Indian philosophy, sought my opinion on the science behind yoga and meditation. All of them considered

Indians as experts in *mantra* and *tantra* - a reason, I think, made them treat me with high respect. Though I was good at my work, I could not explain the real science behind it. I began to feel uneasy and even ashamed at times. I realised that an average Indian knew nothing of his rich culture and history. Soon my other half, which was always curious about the real meaning of all traditional martial arts introduced by the great sages, started overpowering me. I also became aware of the limitations of possessions a man acquires in his lifetime. I saw how helpless a man is in front of diseases, however rich or powerful he may be.

These experiences changed my perception of life completely. I started to learn about spiritual science and became a serious reader of scholarly books. '*Raja Yoga*' written by Swami Vivekananda really impressed me and made me sit and think about the real purpose of my life. So I decided to surrender myself totally to the real masters - the sages. **From the study of ancient yogic texts I came to know that *Ateendriya Dhyanam* (meditation for higher consciousness) was the method that had been adopted by almost all Masters. Among the techniques of meditation, *Kundalini Yoga* or *Sree Vidya Yoga* was the most valued**. These texts also stated that the safe practice of *Sree Vidya Yoga* is possible only with the direct guidance of an experienced Master (Guru).

The thought of finding a Guru started to take a toll on me. Sleepless nights, loss of appetite, lack of focus on my work – I was fighting a new battle within me. One

morning in the scorching heat, I walked along the roads of Oman thinking about what destiny had in store for me and why everything that gave me joy till the other day failed to enthuse me at all. Coming back to my apartment, I took a strong and bold decision - to start my journey in search of the Truth. Stepping outside my comfort zone and leaving all luxuries of life behind, I returned to India and began my journey as a wandering monk in search of a Guru.

I visited many Yoga centres and monasteries across the length and breadth of India in search of a Guru to guide me in the practice of *Kundalini Yoga*. I met many masters, both little known and famous, and enquired about their teaching. But no convincing answers to my questions about enlightenment and God realisation were forthcoming. As one who liked complete freedom, I could not accept that surrendering to texts, beliefs and masters, or to traditional rituals, would be able to give me a rational explanation.

When I met *Swami Sivajyothi Dharmananda in Sree Kanthi Mutt*, I was tired and disappointed after long months of wandering in search of a genuine master. I approached him with the prejudice that all claims made about meditation and its possibilities were just pseudo-science and that men in saffron were not genuine.

"Is there a God?"

"If so, is it possible to see Him?"

"Have you ever seen God?"

These were my first questions to the master - questions

laden with my anger, disappointment and ego.

But looking directly into my eyes with a gentle smile, master replied in a bold and calm voice.

"Yes, there is God; everybody can see Him; I see God just as I see you, my child."

His confirmation of the existence of God, the force of his bold and vibrant answers fell like hammer blows on my egotistical and skeptical mind. Even though I was shaken by his spiritual presence, I was swept away by an inner joy at having found my master, my Guru.

Meeting my Guru from the Siddha Yoga tradition was the beginning of a new journey - the beginning of my evolution from Shivadasan to Yogi Shivan.

After receiving initiation (*deeksha*) from my Guru, I entered into seclusion and began a strenuous practice of meditation. Within two years of practice I felt significant improvements. As I continued my intense meditation under the guidance of *Swamiji*, I began to experience the truths underlying the rituals I had followed in my childhood. Though I had gone through these rituals unaware of their significance, slowly their inner meaning started to be revealed from within. When the mysterious doors of the mind opened one by one to the unlimited world of knowledge, I could not stop the tears of joy that flowed in gratitude towards the merciful masters who guided us to the ultimate reality.

Within five years of practice I could experience *Samadhi* (a state of super consciousness) and all my questions and

doubts were answered from within myself. I experienced the real state of God consciousness. I realised what immortality is – an evolution from man to *Mahadeva, naran* to *Narayana,* micro to macro. This gave me a new approach towards life. I experienced that contentment and self esteem should be developed from within the self and rituals and teachings are only guidelines. These experiences made me capable of entering into the ordinary world of life with a spiritual perspective. Through meditation it is possible for everyone to raise their level of consciousness to superconsciousness or God consciousness.

The founders of the Indian spiritual tradition were Self realised sages - like *Vyasadevan, Markandeyamuni, Valmiki Maharshi* and innumerable others. The lineage has no end. These people, who were as ordinary as we are, raised themselves to the venerable state of a Master (*Aachaarya*) through the practice of meditation. These merciful masters then wanted to introduce the divine subject of meditation to everyone. They knew that it was only through the practice of meditation that an ordinary person could protect himself from the illusory material world (Maya), however real it may appear to be. They were also aware that not everyone is capable of practising meditation directly. So they introduced the subject of meditation through the medium of performing arts and martial arts, which would give sensory enjoyment to the ordinary masses as well as convey the spiritual message encoded within - much as a sugarcoated pill conceals an

effective medicine. In this way, they kept meditation alive among the ordinary people, albeit unknown to them, giving everyone a chance to develop the inherent urge to get into more serious practice. This was the truth that was revealed to me through meditation.

All those steeped in spirituality have a chance to enter into serious practice for self-realisation - which is the ultimate goal of human life. The masters wrote many spiritual texts like the *Vedas, Upanishads* and *Puranas*, which clarified doubts and laid down guidelines for those who entered into these disciplines. The presence of these immortal souls (Gurus) can be experienced in deep meditation. This is the uniqueness of the Eastern spiritual tradition, which gives everyone the opportunity to embark on an unconditional search towards 'The Ultimate Truth – God'. The immortal masters will always give a helping hand to everyone who is serious in meditation.

The Eastern spiritual tradition has not been fully explored by modern man. There are many misinterpretations of the essence of this profound yogic tradition. Unfortunately, the day to day application of the essence of yoga, based on *Hindu dharma*, is not being practised among society in general. The study of history, practice of rituals and observations through the senses are not enough to experience this divine truth - beauty of the Self. To explore the spiritual kingdom, one should have the key to open the door to the mysterious secrets of the universe. That key is the technique of *kundalini yoga*.

This is rational spiritual knowledge, which gives happiness

and contentment in this very life. I feel it would be a sin if this joy is not discussed and shared with others who are searching for it.

This eternal joy has always been with the human race as a universal secret that is recorded as a code from the very beginning. To read that code there is a way – the application of the *Sree Vidya Moola Mantra*.

This truth has been declared by those who searched for and experienced eternal peace. This book is a collection of the interactions that I had with these enlightened masters on many occasions and my own experiences in Sree Vidya meditation practice.

This is a practical path we can follow to remove all the misery of the modern world. As I said in the beginning, this book was not a planned one. I don't have anything new to teach you. All I can do is to show you the path that was traversed by the great gurus of ancient India. This path leads to the discovery of the real Self. This path leads to *Aham Brahmasmi*, the God within each one of us.

YOGI SHIVAN

Sivadasan was born in Vakkom, a small village in Kerala in the deep South of India. The shaping influences of his early life were a deep awareness of the serenity and beauty of nature, the strong work ethic of his parents and a sense of values based on the ancient artistic and religious traditions of India. His father, a practitioner of Ayurveda, sensing Sivadasan's powerful and restless energy, directed him to Kalaripayattu, the mother of all martial arts. Sivadasan progressed quickly, exploring the boundaries of Kalaripayattu and India's traditional dance forms of Bharat Natyam and Kuchupudi. He also took up and excelled in karate and boxing, fulfilling the need to experience and express himself. A philosophical question then arose in his mind as to why did the ancient seers, immersed in peace and tranquillity, introduce such noisy, violent and dangerous art forms to society.

Young and ambitious, Sivadasan embarked on a journey for wealth and fame. Moving to Oman, he taught yoga and karate, and by dint of his abilities and presence, quickly gained access to the highest echelons of society.

There he found, in the endless pursuit of wealth and pleasure, the eternal questions still being asked, " Who am I, What is God, How do I live my life?"

To his dismay, as these questions were increasingly directed to the Yogi in the group, he found he had no answers, and turned to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda - a turning point in his life.

His mission was now clear - to find a guru and get answers to the three questions. Returning to India, he spent nine fruitless months, meeting many, in his search of a guru of the Siddha Yoga tradition. He asked just two questions:

"Is there a God?"

"Have you seen him?".

One day, he received his answer.

" Yes, my child. There is God, I see Him just as I see you; Everyone can see Him."

Receiving deeksha from Swami Shivajyothi Dharmananda was the beginning of a new journey, of his rebirth from Sivadasan to Yogishivan.

For the next four years, Yogishivan forsook the material world, and living in the forest in deep meditation, attained samadhi. He was now confronted with two choices, either to become an ascetic and retreat to a cave deep in the Himalayas, or else become a householder and help and guide others to find the answer to the three eternal questions.

He chose the latter, guiding others to discover the true potential within and to experience total well being through the integration of Ayurveda and Siddha Yoga. Towards this end, he established Indimasi Healing Village in Trivandrum.

Part I

Chapter 1

The Need for a dialogue

What a piece of work is Man! Supreme in all creation. Of Nature's millions of species, man is the crowning glory. The human brain alone has the ability to think, question, and find answers; to control and even destroy other beings.

Nature has conferred on man the remarkable human brain, using which he may realise all his desires and enjoy life to the fullest.

Yet, in spite of all of Nature's blessings, is man happy and contented? Is he grateful to Nature, which has provided him with everything? Is he aware of his responsibility in preserving the harmony of Nature?

The transformation of primitive man into his modern successor, with his spectacular achievements and truly amazing evolution is awe-inspiring. From the hunter-gatherer, who merely hunted all day and slept all night, to a being who is capable of blasting off into space for a holiday or even creating a whole new species, man's progress is phenomenal. The list of man's achievements is indeed long. Technology makes lives effortless and beautiful. Man is constantly scaling greater heights in scientific knowledge and inventions using the ropes of technology. At the same time however, is he not getting entangled by these very same ropes, making escape impossible?

The history of man is not only one of enquiry and discovery, but also of war, invasion and huge devastation. Primitive man learnt how to convert an ordinary stone into a tool to make his life easier. But he used that same tool as a weapon to kill or rule over his fellow men. Hence man's first invention brought pleasure and comfort to one and pain and loss to another. From the very beginning, all his visible achievements are like a double-edged sword, bringing often invisibly, discomfort, loss and destruction.

The discovery of atomic energy made mankind proud of such an awesome accomplishment. And yet this very achievement of modern technology fell on the heads of the Japanese as an atom bomb, killing nearly 220,000 people and maiming many for generations to come. Society still suffers from the radioactive fallout. Today, the industrial world is busy constructing plants that run on nuclear energy. Yet there is no effective strategy to dispose of nuclear waste, which causes severe health problems when it comes into contact with human beings. It pollutes the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink. Still we feverishly construct more plants, ignoring our vulnerability to mutating microbes and other diseases.

We strive for more industrialisation, yet the industrial waste already being discharged into nature is capable of wiping our civilisation right off the earth.

Scientists are busy making new species through genetic engineering. Yet so much of the world's population is suffering from diseases like hypertension, diabetes and cancer. Many are living in agony due to lack of effective

treatment. The medical community is engaged in eradication of diseases like polio and tuberculosis. At the same time, we find that supposedly eradicated diseases like the plague and malaria are coming back and along with that, new diseases such as Covid 19. The moment we announce that we have achieved something, Nature declares, through the comeback of these diseases, that we have not achieved anything.

Advanced telecommunication technology connects people to each other. Distance is no longer a problem. Yet couples sleeping on the same bed fail to understand each other. Divorce is becoming increasingly common in modern society.

Children live like orphans though their parents are alive. Lack of healthy interaction draws even close kith and kin into fights and lawsuits.

Countries are in an arms race, busy piling up modern weapons, spending billions in the name of the safety of their people. Yet, who is safe?

At the same time, some forty per cent of the world's children lack safe drinking water and food.

Ironically, some among the immensely rich, who seem to have everything, are facing an emptiness and even depression. Despite their wealth and material possessions, they cannot find any value in their lives or relationships. This often leads to disease, depression or even suicide.

The world has seen many wars. Many of them were in the name of religion. Religions were introduced to bring

peace and harmony. Instead, they often became the very cause of violence, unleashing wars in which millions were killed and thousands mercilessly tortured by their fellow men. Even today religious extremists, in the name of their ideology, kill innocent people. In the lounges of airports, in the shopping malls, in festival grounds where people gather to rejoice, even in prayer halls, through remote control, there is the presence of death. People are living in fear and uncertainty. Is this the wisdom we intend to gain through religion? Is this the message religions propagate? Why this contradiction? Now is the time to think about it.

I have recounted these facts in order to highlight that there are not only benefits from man's achievements but also drawbacks which are not always obvious. On the one hand, science is advancing with profound discoveries and inventions; on the other, we have to reckon with the destructive side of science.

Man has a natural urge to know everything. Science is the outcome of that. In the same way, man has the urge to acquire as much as he can. The feeling of possessing things is a good quality if it is based on a spiritual foundation. The ancient kings of India amassed wealth and power yet remained detached as they were guided by their spiritual gurus, like lord Rama was guided by his guru, sage Vasistha. In modern times, science allows man to amass power and possessions. Unless there is a strong spiritual foundation, he is in danger of losing himself. The harmony between renunciation and attachment to power and possessions can be established only through scientific

application of spiritual practice.

Scientists are devoted to the positive use of science, whereas political leaders often harness this knowledge to achieve their negative ends. The illogical decisions and destructive tendencies of some leaders are unleashing forces capable of eliminating mankind. This shocking prospect gives us sleepless nights.

Here, I wish to discuss the present condition of modern man and society.

Society is highly competitive; man is educated yet stressed. The contribution of science is substantial; society cannot progress without science. It is obvious however, that as we take one step forward, Nature pushes us one step back. This is the law of motion where every action has an equal and opposite reaction. If so, where, after each scientific advancement, are we being pushed back by Nature? When we gain something from Nature, what are we losing? What are the hidden losses of our modern technological gains? An unbiased analysis of this phenomenon may turn up many truths that are deliberately being ignored. When we unveil these truths, we may become disturbed. We must be patient and tolerant. It would be wise to acknowledge a problem and then solve it in a rational way, rather than run away from it.

As one of Nature's creations, every human being has the freedom and birthright to live in the kingdom of Nature. At the same time, we should be responsible, tolerant and cooperative and live in harmony with other mortals. From

this point of view, irrespective of religion, caste, race, language or nationality, we should treat the pleasure and pain of our fellow beings as our own. It is Nature that has given us life and we in return must protect and be grateful to Nature. We must seek a way of life that expresses this philosophy. You may well ask, "How can I practice this in my daily life with the help of traditional and modern science and practical experience?"

Before we start our journey there is a question you must ask yourself. "As a human being, am I happy and contented?" The answer may be:

"Yes, I am happy and contented" or

"No, the current state of the world and anxieties about my life are making me confused and stressed."

If the answer is yes, you are an enlightened person and you understand the cause and effect theory of Nature.

If the answer is no and you are disturbed by the problems of the world and seek a way out, let us begin the dialogue.

Chapter 2

EX ORIENTE LUX – Out of the East, Light!

In our pursuit of material comfort through modern technology, what have we lost? In our constant struggle to acquire more and more, what have we forgotten?

Modern technology now provides much comfort, happiness, entertainment and relaxation. But while we enjoy what we have, do we spare a thought for our fellow beings? Do they have enough to eat, do they have shelter? Today's comfort could be tomorrow's discomfort. For our comfort, we build a dam across a river that has flowed for thousands of years supplying precious water to land and people. By this action, we have cut the flow. We are unaware that the unnatural pressure on the earth of the stored water upsets the balance of Nature. We often lose sight of the long-term effect of our actions, forgetting our responsibility to future generations. No achievement in the material world lasts forever. Whatever we have today belonged to someone yesterday and will belong to someone else tomorrow. We are forgetting this law of Nature.

Isn't the development of humanity being blocked?

Yes, indeed. The crazy desire to achieve everything, though we don't know why, is a 'sickness' that has plagued mankind. Despite losing our health and peace of mind, we still run after material gains. The symptoms

of this sickness manifest in society on four levels. A certain group of people realise that all material gains are evanescent before the laws of Nature. They often plunge into the pit of despair. Others try to believe and argue that there is nothing beyond their intelligence even if they are convinced of the truth. The extremism of another group insists that their beliefs and needs are supreme and others should accept them. Yet another group of superstitious believers are wasting their lives in the belief that heavenly happiness would come after death. The impact of this sickness is thus impeding the development of humanity.

Then what is the remedy?

The real cause of this sickness is over dependence on the brain (intellect) and ignorance of the heart (intuition). As Albert Einstein said, "Unless we translate the achievements of modern science through the language of the heart, that science can be disastrous".

So, the technique of listening to the language of the heart and fostering development of the inner values is the remedy of this conflict and is available in Eastern philosophy and science.

What is the significance of Eastern philosophy and science?

From the dawn of history, there was an urge among western societies to travel towards the east, even though the cause of the quest was not clear. "EX ORIENTE LUX – Out of the East, Light!" was a favourite saying of the classical world, recognising the material and spiritual power of the East.

They dreamt that in the East there was a land of prosperity, knowledge and science. The adventurous journeys they undertook in search of this land named Hindustan or Bharat, now known to the world as India, are part of the history of the modern world. The explorers who set sail for India discovered other lands instead, which they mistakenly called India. Finally, they reached the real India. Trade followed, but also invasion, suppression and ruling by force.

In India, they were mesmerised by the enjoyment of the senses. They could not recognise what their hearts were really looking for – the spiritual wisdom of India. The history of the world would have been entirely different had they recognised this.

The colourful flower attracts the bumblebee from a long distance. Whatever the struggle, the bee will reach the flower and immerse itself in the abundance of nectar in the flower. As the bee sucks the nectar, Nature dusts its legs with pollen. It is being used, unknowingly, to deliver this pollen to other flowers for fertilisation in different places. The bee is unaware of its role in Nature's grand design.

Travellers, traders, invaders, robbers and seekers, like many others, came to Bharat. Each took away whatever he wanted. Unknowingly they also took away some spiritual seeds, following the quest of the heart. However, invasion and pursuit of wealth being paramount, the spiritual seeds could not flower fully. Therefore, the real strength of India could not be recognised by the world.

This is the winter before spring. Once again the

intellectual world is turning towards Eastern spriritual values. Modern man, who is tired of the comforts and discomforts of modern science, has started searching for his inner light.

In ancient India, spiritual scientists evolved a technique to develop inner strength and vitality to improve efficiency in all spheres of life - physical, mental, social and spiritual. This leads to contentment, happiness and knowledge of the Self. India is the motherland of this most practical knowledge.

Explain the insights of Indian culture.

Indian culture is rooted in the most pragmatic science, which will enable man to become contented, healthy and happy. The purpose of human life is not for attacking or capturing but for co-existence, not for becoming dependent but for becoming independent, not for grabbing for oneself but for sharing, not for destroying but for creating. These profound values of life can be experienced within the heart. The physical body and the world in which we live are perishable and the Self, the Reality, is imperishable. The Hindu philosophy explains this scientifically. The Masters encourage every human being to get into spiritual practice and experience eternal joy. In brief, this is the discipline that will uplift the person from the ordinary level of consciousness and install him in the unlimited world of spiritual wisdom. The person who reaches this state is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. The application of this science is the essence of Indian culture. The day to day application of this spiritual technology is

the remedy for all the problems faced by modern man.

Modern man, haunted by fear, inconsistency, dissatisfaction, depression and unhappiness can find a way out from all these negative emotions by exploring his inner strength. This exploration should be carried out with the mind, within the Self.

What is spiritual knowledge?

Whatever may be our achievements in the material world, some questions will remain unanswered. Who am I? What was I before birth? Where was I? Is this body mine or me? Why do I die? What is death? What comes after death? From where was this world created? Who created this world? Is there a creator behind this? There is no clear answer for these riddles in our intellect. As a product of the intellect, modern science cannot find the answers for these questions.

Since the intellect cannot find answers to these questions, it does not mean that these questions do not have any answers; of course there are answers. But they cannot be understood by our limited intellect. That means these answers cannot be found or understood through our ordinary consciousness. If we can uplift our mind from the conscious level to the superconscious level, the answers will be revealed from within ourselves. This profound method of finding answers from within is known as Atmajnana or knowledge of the Self.

Could you explain *Atmajnana* further?

The Self cannot be explained because it is not material. According to our ancient Yogic texts, it is the knowledge

of higher consciousness. It is an experience. Since the Self is only an experience, it is personal and relative to the surroundings of the practitioner. So when the time is right, the Atmajnana (enlightenment) will happen spontaneously.

As an example, we can take ourselves. I know that I am alive. I can say that I am alive. If I ask myself the question, "Am I this body?" the answer will come, "No, the body is mine, but I am not the body." If the body is mine, then who am I? I am the spirit. The spirit! What is that? There is no explanation. It is certain that the spirit is there. It can be experienced but cannot be expressed in words. The body, made of cells, tissues and organs can be described. Body is material and life is spiritual. So, spirit can only be experienced through the body.

What is the difference between *Atman* (the Self) and *Brahman* (the Cosmic Self)?

Both are the same. Microcosm and macrocosm. The spirit, when it manifests in a limited form (aakar) is called Atman (microcosm). The spirit which is manifesting as the visible universe is called Brahman or macrocosm. The state beyond both microcosm and macrocosm is called Parabrahmam or avyaktham (unmodified). This Brahman cannot be understood through ordinary consciousness. But if we can raise the mind from the normal conscious state to the superconscious state, any dimension of Brahman can be experienced. The experience of this state of being is called brahmajnanam or moksham (self realisation or liberation).

How can we attain liberation? (*Moksha Prapthi*)

The authentic texts on yoga say that a person who has been born will get a second birth by following a particular path or action. His name is Dwijan (twice-born). When a seeker gets the divine initiation (Deeksha) from a Guru, his second birth starts. As we receive the seed of life from the father which then develops in the mother's womb creating a new physical body, the seeker receives the spiritual energy from the Master and develops in the cosmic womb through practice (meditation). This state is called attainment of liberation. This process will be completed as self realisation dawns. The knowledge of the Self cannot be achieved through the senses. It is beyond the five senses and is called the sixth sense.

What do you mean by the sixth sense?

Before entering into an explanation of the sixth sense, we should know something about our existence.

What is personality or ego? The feeling of me and mine is called personality. This feeling of me and mine is developed in the mind based on the information from the sensory organs (*Panchendriyas*). But we know very well that the power of our organs is limited. Our eyes can recognise movements in the velocity range of 300,000 km per second, but there are many aspects of light below and above the frequency or wavelength of visible light. Our eyes cannot recognise them. Our ears can recognise only those sound waves between 20 to 20,000 Hz. Human beings are inferior to many other living beings in the

faculties of sight, smell, sound, taste and touch.

Our consciousness is developed based on the limited information collected through these limited organs. Limited knowledge will develop a narrow consciousness. Narrow consciousness will develop narrow thoughts. Narrow thoughts generate fear. Fear will generate all other negative feelings. Attainment of the unlimited knowledge is the only way to protect ourselves from negative feelings. Unlimited knowledge is the knowledge of the unlimited Self. The unlimited Self cannot be attained through limited organs. This is why there is the necessity of an unlimited organ or sixth sense. The practice of yoga is the only way to develop the sixth sense.

Chapter 3

Yoga & Hindu Consciousness

What is Yoga?

The word yoga means union or yoke - connecting the individual consciousness to the cosmic consciousness. There are many methods that have been developed for this purpose in ancient times. Among these methods, the thoughts of Patanjali Maharshi, codified as the text "*Yoga Sutra*" or "*Ashtanga Yoga*", are widely accepted. The book starts with this commentary, "*Yoga chithavrithi nirodhaha*". Yoga means arresting of thoughts. To stop thoughts, we should stop the functions of the sense organs. Breath control (*Pranayama*) is the method to control the sense organs. If we stop the functions of our five sense organs through breath control, there will be a need for a sixth organ for the survival of life. For example, a blind man's other senses will be more powerful than those of ordinary people. A person who is blind and deaf will have a greater capacity of smell and touch. Thus, when the five sense organs are blocked, a sixth one will be opened. The sixth sense is known as the third eye or "eye of knowledge", the "*jnana- chakshu*". Lord Shiva is the symbol of one who has activated the third eye.

Could you explain the third eye more scientifically?

The base of yoga is the improvement in concentration. Concentration means focussing the mind either on an object or a subject. As concentration improves, the practitioner will be able to fix the mind at one point. When the mind is fixed

at one point, what will happen there? Mental waves are usually scattered, just like light waves. When the diverging light waves are converged through a lens and fixed at one point, heat will be generated there. Likewise, when the mental waves are focussed at a point, tremendous heat will be generated. The functions of the brain are based on the quantity of heat and air in the body. As concentration increases, the bio heat (*yogagni*) also increases in the body. This increase of heat will develop paranormal functions in the brain and the practitioner will experience a different plane of consciousness. The process of increasing bio heat (*taapa*) in the body is called meditation (*dhyana* or *tapas*). Once the bio heat increases beyond certain limits, a new channel, the sixth sense, will open, through which the body and mind can interact directly with Nature.

At this time the conventional (ordinary) function of the body and mind becomes insignificant and a new awareness is developed. Instead of understanding a particular thing through the five senses, this new awareness will enable a person to experience the reality of the Self. The reality is the underlying factor, the substratum, for everything – the oneness. This oneness is called *Brahmam*. The state of developing *Brahma* consciousness is the superconscious state of the mind. What you know, you are that. When you know *Brahmam*, you become *Brahman*.

"Manomayamidam Sarvam"

(Darsana maala)

"Everything is pure consciousness."

A person who has attained *Brahma* consciousness is called *Brahmajnani*. Since he is liberated from the bondage of Nature, he is known as *Mumukshu* (eternally liberated). He usually immerses himself in silence (*mauna*), so he is known as a *Muni*. Since he experiences Hindu consciousness, he is known as a *Hindu*.

Hindu consciousness! What is that?

It is a state of consciousness where the practitioner is merging himself with The Ultimate Reality - God. Attainment of Hindu consciousness is the ultimate aim of life which is liberation or final emancipation. This state of mind is achieved only through intense meditation. The people who followed the teachings of Hindu sages, who taught that *moksham* is the ultimate goal of life, were known as Hindus. The land where they lived was known as Hindustan.

Is not India the real name of the territory?

No, till a few hundred years ago, the country was known as Hindustan or Bharat. Then the Arabs, who had developed a flourishing trade with Hindustan referred to their trade in goods and services with Hindustan as al-Hindiya (of Hindustan). Europeans, hearing about this magnificent world through the Arabs, shortened Hindiya to India. In their quest for trade and conquest, the Europeans eventually attained control and power over Hindustan. As a means of destroying the underlying spiritual strength and cultural identity of Hindustan, the British renamed it India. The name 'India' became firmly established with the formation of the East India Company.

After independence, India's political leaders adopted the British practice and continued to use the name India. The Hindu community, who did not give much importance to material boundaries, accepted this because, in Hinduism it is postulated that the whole world is one family - *vasudhaiva kudumbakam*.Whereas the British could, for some time, obscure the name Hindustan, they could not destroy the Hindu culture. Before the British, invaders like Mahmud Gazni, Muhammed Ghori and the Mughals, in their conquest of Hindustan, tried their best to destroy that culture through countless atrocities, rumours and tempting offers. The invaders also failed to destroy the Hindu culture completely. Despite these historical setbacks, the Hindu culture continues even today to shine as a powerful beacon of hope.

What is the significance of Hindu culture?

Hindu culture is one of the world's ancient cultures. Its origins are not exactly known but they go beyond recorded history. Nevertheless, its ideas are still relevant to modern life. That is the main significance of Hindu culture. Other cultures as ancient as that of the Hindus were either destroyed or transformed beyond recognition.

Hindu Dharma (the essence of Hinduism) is the foundation of Hindu culture. It was not declared by any one single master or prophet. Any person who attains self realisation will become a master or a prophet. All healthy criticism is allowed. In the *Hindu Dharma*, there is no central authority or power and no set of instructions based on one single idea. Everyone is given complete freedom of thought and

belief. There is no religious framework or hierarchy or centralised control.

How many challenges has Hinduism faced over the centuries! Natural calamities like earthquakes and epidemics, destruction of whole civilisations built on river banks, imposition of other religions - often at the point of a sword or gun, atrocities committed by invaders, later, all the upheavals caused by the industrial revolution and the rapid change wrought by advancements in modern science and technology. Then came the temptations of western culture, the scientific inventions and discoveries that shook the foundation of world religions. This was coupled with the deliberate misinterpretation of Hindu beliefs and rituals. Faced with similar challenges, other world cultures were being destroyed, or else being propped up either by money power or muscle power.

Yet without the support of any one of these, a culture is being kept alive in the hearts of hundreds of millions of people. Just think about the strength and significance of this culture, which is the unifying factor in the vast diversity of the Hindu people. More than a thousand languages and dialects are in current use among Hindus. Distinct societies are found right across the country, in the hills, in the plains and valleys, in snow and desert, on the banks of rivers and the shores of the ocean. There is no common discipline like a uniform dress code or food habits or rituals to unify these people. Local political groups who developed ideas of separation in the name of caste for maintaining political power have, to a certain extent,

divided the Hindu community. In spite of all these adverse conditions and forces, the power unifying and holding the Indian community together is the Hindu culture. This is the spiritual sign of 'sharing and caring'.

The world has heard more about the mysterious rituals, superstition and black magic practised in India. But the truth, as you have explained, is quite different. Why then has this fact not been brought out?

The wider world learnt about Indian culture from the accounts of traders and tales told by travellers. Some saw the snake dance and deemed India to be a land of snake-charmers. Some saw magicians who threw a rope towards the sky, climbed it and vanished into thin air. They called India the land of the rope trick. Others remarked on the naked ascetics (*sadhus*). Each one saw India through the filter of his own mind, taste and interest. There is a common folk tale in India about four blind men who went to see an elephant. The first, who touched an ear, declared the elephant to be like a fan. The next, touching a leg, announced that the elephant is like a pillar. The third, who happened to touch the tail, exclaimed that the elephant is like a mop. And the last man, having touched its side, insisted the elephant is like a wall.

It is important to understand the essence of Hinduism, which is wholly different from the physical personification of the idols and rituals. A minimum awareness of modern science allows us to clearly analyse and establish the authenticity of *Hindu Dharma*, which is based on a set of universal laws. These laws are simple and easy to implement

in our daily lives. *Hindu Dharma* is a gift of Nature through which every human being can achieve eternal happiness and contentment.

What exactly is *Hindu Dharma*?

This question is slightly complicated. A person born and brought up in a culture other than Hindu, may find some difficulty in understanding its true essence. An openness and willingness to give up all preconceptions would be necessary.

> *Hindu Dharma* is the cosmic energy, which makes the heart beat in living beings. It is the experience of this cosmic energy when it converges through intense concentration into a single point – the *Bindu*, which is the state of divine enlightenment.

So-called scholars misunderstood *Hindu Dharma*, interpreting it as a religion. Over the centuries, this error became accepted as a fact.

What is the difference between *Hindu Dharma* and other religions of the world?

First of all, *Hindu Dharma* is not a religion as it is generally thought to be. Let us look at the similarities between religions. Most existing religions are the teachings of one person, with revelations, explanations and conclusions. As a result, they have a rigid structure of rituals, beliefs and ways of life. But these rigid patterns do not exist in *Hindu*

Dharma. Hindu Dharma is not based on any one person. It is the codified form of knowledge and experience derived from thousands of *seers* (spiritual masters) over thousands of years, experienced in their superconscious state of mind and subjected to many observations, verifications, experiments and critical analyses. Finally, these ideas were recorded in spiritual books (*Scriptures*) such as the *Vedas* and *Upanishads, Puranas, Samhitas, Ithihasas* and *Epics*. *Hindu Dharma* is not based on one master or one book. It exposes the limits of intellectual knowledge, which is based entirely on the five senses. At the same time, it emphasises that spiritual knowledge is internal and not external. It can be experienced even though it is beyond explanation. Yet, the Masters have not tried to impose a rigid conclusion about spiritual experience. They give total freedom to everyone in their search for the truth. Here the seeker is undertaking a clear and fearless search for the Creator - a journey that is not influenced by preconceptions or external influences. *Hindu Dharma*, through systematic spiritual practice, enables everyone to identify himself as the Creator.

What is the message given to the world by *Hindu Dharma*?

If we perceive this world through the limits of the sensory organs, we may think that the ultimate aim of life is the fulfillment of desires. In fact, fulfillment of material desires alone is an animal quality. The aim of human life is realisation of the Self. When man realises himself, he will come to know that his individual Self is not separated from the Cosmic Self and the visible universe is only a limited gross manifestation of the subtle Self.

Hindu Dharma prepares each one to raise himself to the superconscious state for experiencing the Self. The knowledge of the Self makes one capable of understanding the fact that, in essence, everything is one, i.e., the Self. This will develop the ability to experience unity in diversity. When people realise that they all have the same origin, a brotherly love will be developed. The teaching of Lord Jesus, "Love thy neighbour as thyself", is being brought into practical life. This love will lead us all to create a world where there is no hatred and war. Experiencing peace and love within the self as well as outside will help one to lead a contented life. Implementation of unconditional love is established here. Is not this practice of unconditional love being lost in the modern world? The practical knowledge needed to fulfill this aim is the message given to the world by *Hindu Dharma*.

This knowledge is not merely learnt through books. It is a practical method through which everyone can strive to ultimately experience the truth.

All seekers who have practised this method in their lives declared in one voice that they have experienced eternal peace. Here, one is experiencing himself within the fullness of life. He realises that he is an inevitable part of this cosmic existence and that this universe does not exist without him and he does not exist without the universe. In that moment, he becomes capable of experiencing the unifying energy (the Cosmic Self) in each and every thing. That means he recognises God.

The method of experiencing the unifying energy of microcosm and macrocosm is known as *Atmajnana* (knowledge of the Self) or *Brahmajnana* (knowledge of the Absolute). In essence, everything is one but manifests as many, "*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahuta Vadanthi*" (*Rig Veda*). Here, the seeker is transforming himself into the dharma itself. This is why I have said earlier that to understand *Hindu Dharma* in its real sense, you have to come out from the normal perspective of world religions.

The moment one realises that his own self is the only reality manifesting as the endless variety in this universe, the barriers of religion burn away. The pride in his own religion or the hatred of other religions or any other motives will not affect him. We see many who sit inside their caves, proud of the lantern they have, arguing with others about the brightness of their lantern. But the world of a person who has experienced the sunlight is entirely different.

The discipline of a Hindu is a search - a search without preconception or fear.

In the *Hindu Dharma*, there are no given commandments that must be obeyed without question. Here, everyone has the complete freedom to question and then accept or deny.

This discipline does not prepare you to look towards God and beg but trains you to look towards your own heart and realise God. Through this path, *Hindu Dharma* confirms to humanity that liberation can be achieved only through *Atmajnana* (knowledge of the Self).

You speak of Hindu consciousness as a state of mind that develops through meditation. But, according to popular belief, the word Hindu is derived from the river Indus or the Hindu Kush Mountains. How can this be?

So far there is no explanation of the origin of the word 'Hindu' that is definitively proven. Exaggerations, superstitions and rumours are confusing those who wish to know more about Hindu dharma. It is necessary, in these troubled times, to explain Hinduism in a scientific as well as practical way, because the understanding of true Hinduism is the only remedy for the problems faced by modern man.

Let us, therefore, examine the three theories regarding the origin of the word Hindu put forward by historians and spread through culture, literature and the social sciences.

The first theory states that the word Hindu is derived from the people who lived on the banks of the river Sindhu (Indus), known as *Sindhis*. The theory continues that when the Arabs arrived in India to trade, they called the Sindhis 'Hindis'. The explanation given was that as Arabs could not pronounce the syllable 'sa', and used 'ha' instead, they mispronounced Sindhis as 'Hindis'. Anyone familiar with Arabic knows this cannot be true, as the syllable 'sa' is common in both colloquial and classical Arabic. The use of the word 'Al Hind' by the Arabs is offered as further evidence that the derivation of the word Hindu has Arabic roots. 'Al Hind' refers to the produce of Hindustan just as the produce from Saudi Arabia is known as 'Al-Saudia'. In fact, the Arabic use of Al Hind was derived from the word

'Hindustan'. Hence this theory can be discarded.

The second theory is that it is the Hindu Kush Mountains that gave their name to the people who lived in the region. The civilisation near the Hindu Kush Mountains was known as Hindu. It is, however, because the Hindus lived there that the mountain range is called Hindu Kush and not the other way round. Hence the second theory also stands discarded.

The third theory is that the geographical territory connecting the Himalayas to the Indu Sarovaram (Indian Ocean) was known as Hindustan and the people who lived in Hindustan were known as Hindus. This theory is also wrong. In reality, the real Hindustan covered not only the territory from the Himalayas to the Indian ocean (present day India) but also Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Burma, Mauritius, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Indonesia and some parts of Iran and Tibet. Though the people had different languages, cultures and lifestyles, they were bound together by the teachings of the sages and Hindu dharma. This spiritual thread was the boundary of ancient Hindustan.

Unfortunately, these three theories are neither scientific nor logical. The word Hindu goes beyond recorded history. There were many deliberate efforts to minimise the importance and influence of Hindu culture among the people, giving rise to these wrong interpretations. If these so-called historians still harbour a desire to interpret the origin of Hinduism, they should find other explanations that satisfy our intellect.

The word Hindu conveys its own profound spiritual message, regardless of its geographical origin.

Then what is the actual meaning of the word Hindu? What is its origin?

I have already said that the state of superconsciousness developed through intense meditation is known as Hindu consciousness. Let us examine why that state of superconsciousnes is commonly known as Hindu consciousness.

Meditation happens due to retention of the naturally flowing prana through *nadis* (the channels through which prana flows). We have seventy-two thousand nadis. Of these seventy-two thousand, three nadis are very important. They are:

1. Solar nadi (Pingala)

2. Lunar nadi (Ida)

3. Agni nadi (Sushumna)

The ultimate goal of yoga is to restrain the functions of the mind through the union of the solar and lunar nadis. When this union takes place, the agni nadi will be activated and the mind will be concentrated and will gradually merge into a point (*bindu*). The point where the mind dissolves is as small as the microcosm and as big as the macrocosm. It cannot be understood at the ordinary level of consciousness. It is being revealed only in the superconscious state. For every being, the evolution and involution of his universe is

happening at this point. Experiencing the intricate functions of this mysterious point (*bindu*) is the object of meditation. By realising the secret of that profound function of nature (*Parasakhti*), the practitioner identifies himself with nature and becomes that. This union is the ultimate goal of yoga.

At this stage, if we observe the changes happening in the nervous system of the practitioner, we will come to know how the term 'Hindu' evolved.

Life manifests in the body by the action of *Mukhya Prana* or *Parasakthi*. It acts in many dimensions and is specific as well as rhythmic. The visible sign of prana in the body is the breath and that has a subtle sound also. All traditional teachings confirm this.

Hakarena bahiryathi sakarena vishetpuna:
Hamsa hamsethi manthroyam savairjeevaicha japyathe

(Yoga Shikhopanishad) (1: 130)

As breath (*Prana*) enters the body there will be a sound, *Ham* (pronounced as 'hum'), and as breath comes out (*Apana*) there will be a sound *Sa*.

As a natural function of the respiratory system, all living beings unknowingly recite the mantra *Ham-Sa* without a break. So long as *Ham-Sa* mantra is active, the mind and body will be engaged in and bound to material enjoyments.

Hakarena sooryasyad
Sakarenorinduruchyathe

Ham is solar energy and *Sa* is lunar energy.

Retention of breath (*kumbhakam*) is done for uniting the flow of solar and lunar *nadi* currents. The purpose of this union is to disconnect either the solar or lunar *nadi*. Technically, this process is known as *Suryabheda* (breaking of solar *nadi*) and *Chandrabheda* (breaking of lunar nadi). Here the practitioner needs the guidance of a Guru (Master).

Guruvaakyal sushumnayam
Vipareetho bhavejapa

The practitioner, with the guidance of the Guru, starts reciting *Ham-Sa* mantra in the opposite way, *Sa-Ham*.

Let us explain the significance of the guidance of the Guru (*Guruvakyam*). Among the different methods of yoga, the Siddhayoga (Kundalini Yoga) tradition is considered the highest. In that tradition, during the time of initiation, a mantra is passed on to the disciple from the Guru. That mantra is called '*siddhayogamahamantra*' or *Guruvakyam*. It has never been written down as a mantra, nor will it ever be. This mantra is not just a simple word, it is an extension of the life energy of the Guru.

Soham sohamithi proktho
Mantrayogasa uchyatha

Once *Sa-Ham* is recited with the help of *Guruvakyam*, it will be processed as *So-Ham*. When meditation intensifies, the practitioner becomes a mantrayogi.

Pratheethar mantrayogacha
Jayathe pachime pathi

In course of time, the mantrayogi's prana starts flowing

through the agni nadi (Spinal Cord). This process is known as kundalini awakening.

As Mantrayoga advances, the primary effect will be Chandrabheda. The lunar nadi (*Sa*) is disconnected. That means the flow of prana through lunar nadi (*apana*) is blocked. Only the Ham (solar nadi) and the Self remain.

> When the lunar nadi is blocked, all the functions of the body and mind will be arrested. It is like any machine. As we switch off the electricity, the machine stops. The prana, which had been flowing through 72,000 nadis, making the mind active and capable of enjoying all desires, will be withdrawn and be focussed on its source – the point (Bindu) from which it originally evolved. Here the prana (*Ham*) will merge into the Bindu. This merging of Ham and Bindu (Ham+Bindhu) is the origin of the term Hindu which is the state of God consciousness or Hinduthwam.

The present life of a person is the outcome of the inherited knowledge or impressions of his past lives (*poorva janma samskaras*). Nature, composed of dualities - the association of opposites (black x white, positive x negative, male x female, pleasure x pain, yin x yang, good x evil and so on), is a source of perpetual confusion. The practice of yoga is an escape from this confusion. In the fire of knowledge (*yogagni*), all past impressions will be burnt and he, the meditator, will become capable of realising his own Self. The underlying unity in all opposites, i.e. the middle path, evolves and emerges in front of him.

Once he realises his own Self, the mind will detach itself from the senses and merge into his heart (Hiranyagarbha). At this moment, he will be able to experience the whole universe as the beat of his heart (Hrudayaspanda) and he becomes a Hindu. By attaining Hindu consciousness, he becomes the primordial atom in which the Big Bang happened and he himself becomes the Big Bang (Brahmam).

This phenomenon, or the secret of nature, can be experienced only in the super conscious state. It cannot be explained at all. Ancient sciences called this state *Poornam*, the complete or the Whole.

Om poornamada: poornamidam
Poornaath poornamudachyathe
Poornasya poornamaadaaya
Poornamevaava shishyathe
Om Shanthi: Shanthi: Shanthi:

(Upanishad Shanthi Mantram)

"The Whole is created from the Whole. When the Whole is taken away from the Whole, the Whole remains."

Modern science has also tried to explain this fact. Scientists noticed that the minute molecule of matter shows a peculiarity that is beyond explanation. When they took out one molecule from a substance, that molecule showed a tendency to exist independently (self sustaining as a Whole) without dependence on the mother substance. But scientists cannot explain how the minute molecule acquires this power of independent existence (Paraphrased from 'Turning Point' by Dr. Fritjof Kapra).

Could you further explain Hindu consciousness?

In the beginning there was no matter – only an unmodified state of energy existed. According to yogic science everything evolved from this cosmic sound '*ham*', which is the vibration of the unmodified state of cosmic energy. From that state of oneness, ham divides itself into two opposite forces called *Prakriti* (the cosmic female) and *Purusha* (the cosmic male). From that cosmic male and female, each and every atom evolved. In this state, any visible manifestation will also have an invisible opposite, for example, the Big Bang (*Maha Visphotanam*) and the Black Hole (*Maha Sankhaatham*), the visible universe (*Maha Prapancham*) and the invisible universe (*Maya Prapancham*), the cosmic male (*Mahadevan*) and the cosmic female (*Mahamaya*). Like this, there are countless such creations in nature.

The mysterious union of two opposites forms a molecule and this is the way of nature which cannot be comprehended. Nobody knows how or when these opposites combine. For example, hydrogen and oxygen are gases. Hydrogen is combustible and oxygen supports fire. But when these two gases combine, water is produced which puts out fire. Fulfillment of desires stemming from the sense organs becomes counterproductive in the long run. Life is a combination of birth and death. All functions in nature exhibit this coexistence of opposites (Truth and Maya). That is why the ancient Masters declared that this visible universe is *Maya* which is not real, but merely an illusion.

Brahma sathyam jagat midhya
Jeevo brahmaiva napara

(*Viveka Choodamani*)

Only *Brahman* is the Truth, the visible universe is *Maya*.

> Maya (illusion) can be overcome only through the development of Hindu consciousness. That means the mind should be focussed in the heart itself. Learn to appreciate the language of the heart, learn to follow your intuition. Listening to your heart is the only way.

If you wish to call the process of developing Hindu consciousness by a different name, that too is freely permitted, because name and form are insignificant in Hindu consciousness. This state of mind emphasises the awareness of oneness. At the same time, it accepts different manifestations. Hindu consciousness unites man with all manifestations, the environment, nature and the universe through spirituality.

The person who has established himself in Hindu consciousness will depend more on insight even though he is intelligent. The centre of insights and emotions is the heart (*anaahata chakra*). So that person will know the language of the heart. He who understands well the feelings of his own heart will understand very well the feelings of his fellow beings. As a result, the prayer, "*loka samastha sukhino bhavanthu*" (let everybody live in peace and happiness) will arise by itself from the depth of his heart. The function of the heart (pulse) is a visible manifestation of the cosmic energy – *Viswaprana* – symbolised in the syllable 'ham'. A man who feels through his heart can be called human or a Hindu.

As meditation advances, *prana* and mind merge in a single point and the awareness of the Self alone exists. The Self (Brahman) is the oneness, which is the only reality. Countless visible and temporary manifestations of Brahman (which can be experienced through the senses) are known as material consciousness (*Jagathbodha*). Realisation of the link between spiritual consciousness (*Brahmabodha*) and material consciousness (*Jagathbodh*a) is the way to liberation. *Nanathvathil Ekathwam* (unity in diversity) and *Advaita Darsanam* (experiencing the oneness) are the different names of Hindu consciousness.

> The people who experienced the higher state of consciousness, who experienced the origin of this universe, who could read the language of the heart in a single point, who experienced the whole universe within the Self were called Hindus, the land in which they lived was Hindustan.

They were the true masters (Hindus), who showed the world the value of tolerance.

The Masters wanted to explain their experiences to society through different methods, at different times, in different places. The words of these Masters were known as *Aptavakyas* (*Apta* – a person who has experienced the truth, *vakya* – his words). Society wanted to preserve these teachings. They were therefore recorded, after having been critically and rigorously examined and verified, in thousands of spiritual books, such as the *Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Samhitas, Mahakavyas,* and *Smruthies*. Anyone who studies these scriptures, irrespective of nationality, religion,

race, caste and language can be known as a Hindu seeker. This person seeks the language of the heart and realises the value of humanity as a whole, disregarding all man-made barriers such as political borders, religion, language and race. This is the ultimate state of freedom, which can be experienced only by fixing the mind in the heart.

The science underlying this spiritual experience is complete, comprising both the spiritual and the sensory. With the guidance of a Guru, anyone can practice this art and verify its authenticity. Modern scientific concepts go hand in hand with this traditional science. However, modern science, which relies on the sensory organs and on instruments, can never explain the profound experience of spiritual science. This is the difference between modern science and spiritual science.

If spiritual science leads to liberation, then what is the role of religion?

Religion is the realisation of the ultimate reality of the Self through meditation. It is an evolution from mortality to immortality. This evolution is happening through four steps. From subtle energy through morphogenesis, life manifests as matter in the form of cells. That state of manifestation is referred to in Sanskrit as '*Janthu*'. Janthu means, '*Jeeva*' (life) that manifests in '*Thanthu*' (fibre). Our body is a combination of trillions of muscle fibres produced from cells. In those thanthus, when jeeva manifests and vibrates, it will be called as a janthu, otherwise it is just a dead body. All are born as janthus (creatures). This is the first phase in evolution.

Human beings are also nothing else but janthus walking on two legs. What is the difference between animals and human beings? We differ from animals in intellect and instinct. Let us see what this difference is. Supposing we put a man, a tiger and a bird in separate cages, and make them starve for three or four days and after this, open the cages and provide them sufficient food according to their nature – meat to the tiger, seeds to the bird and rice to the human being. Naturally all three will try to eat. But, the probable difference that could happen is, the human being may start to think, "Anyway, I have been starving for a few days. What will happen if I continue to starve?" whereas, the tiger and the bird would have already started eating their food. The human being tends to ask a lot of questions such as what will happen if I don't eat? What will happen if I don't breathe? What will happen if I do not drink water? Why is my heart beating? It is only this two legged animal species who will ask such questions. This process of asking questions challenging the laws of nature is called '*Manana*'. So, the janthu who does manana becomes 'Manushya'(Man). This is the second phase in evolution – Janthu to Manushya.

If you keep asking these questions, you will start getting the answers from nature. Why do you have to get sunlight, why do you have to breathe 21,600 times a day, why is your heart beating 72 times per minute? These kinds of questions will be answered by nature and you will establish a link between the laws of nature and your existence. That process is called '*Yoga*'- union between the laws of nature

and our own individual existence, which is the third phase in evolution – Manushya to Yogi.

Once you understand this, you will feel that you are not a simple living being but you are connected to the universal existence. Slowly, the mind can be focussed on a single point. When our mind is focussed on a single point from where our universe explodes, where the big bang happens, that point cannot be comfortably fixed in our brain because the brain is too subtle and tender to withstand this energy. It may be burnt out. Only in our '*Hiranyagarbha*', the depth of our heart can that point be comfortably fixed. It is stated in the Gita as:

Sarva-dvarani samyamya mano hridi-nirudhyaja,
murdhnyadhayatmanah pranamasthito yoga-dharanam.

When the nine holes in our body are blocked, and the mind is fixed in the depth of our heart (*hiranyagarbha*), the inner awareness is directed towards the crown chakra. Remaining in this state of higher consciousness is called *yoga-dharanam*.

At this point, we will become one with reality which is the ultimate yoga. This state is called *hindu consciousness*. This is so because the mind will vibrate as a Bindu in the depth of the heart – *hridaya*. So, when the bindu merges into the hridaya, it starts spinning and vibrating. That state is called *Hindu-Twam*. *Twam* means you. Meaning, you are the ultimate vibration. When this transformation from *Yogi* to *Hindu* happens it would be the fulfillment of our life mission or the fourth phase in evolution.

In this state of Hindu Consciousness, one can declare 'aham brahmasmi', which literally means I am God. If one declares that he is God, another can ask, then who am I? The answer is Tat Twam Asi - you too are That (Tat -you, Twam - that, Asi - are). In essence, nothing is present here other than God.

So, the four phases of our evolution are 'Janthu' to 'Manushya' to 'Yogi' to 'Hindu'.

These four phases of evolution are symbolised by the four heads of Lord Brahma, one of the trinity of gods in Indian mythology - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

This is why, unlike other faiths, it will be difficult to trace the roots of Hinduism. It is in our own heart! There is no single Master who introduced Hindu consciousness. Scriptures are only guidelines that drive our attention back to the seeker's inner existence or the reality of the seeker.

Chapter 4

The Future of Humanity

If Hindu Dharma is pure spiritual unity, why did the classification of society into different castes arise?

The caste system was developed by the Masters for a good reason. A person's caste is not determined by birth. It is determined by his ability and aptitude.

As the *Bhagavad Gita* says,

Chaaturvarnyam mayaa srishtam
gunakarma vibhaagasha

Krishna declares, "I introduced the four classifications according to the qualities of the individual."

There are four main sections of society in Hinduism - *Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and *Shudra*. *Brahmana* (scientist) shows intutive as well as intellectual abilities, *Kshatriya* (warrior) shows intellectual and physical strength, *Vaishya* (trader) shows business acumen and *Shudra* (the providers of service) are adept at following instructions of their superiors.

There are many subdivisions of this caste system depending on necessity, region, language and culture.

The caste system was introduced into society based on specialisation depending on the aptitude of the individual, thereby leading to better organisation and higher productivity. The right man for the right job and overall

co-ordination are fundamental principles of management.

The human body may be considered as an example of the perfect implementation of the caste system by nature. In the body, the head, being the seat of the intellect, represents the *Brahmana*. The heart, lungs and arms, which provide knowledge and protection represent the *Kshatriya*. The abdominal area perfoms the same functions as *Vaishya* in the management and conversion of energy and resources. The legs, which support the system, represent the *Shudra*. Each of these has its specific function, yet they complement each other and work together as a whole.

To explain this in today's scenario, think of an organisation where people are employed at various levels - from the Office Attendant to the CEO. The CEO represents Brahmana, Managers represent Kshatriya, Clerical staff represent Vaishya and last but not least, office attendants are the legs who run around completing errands and represent Shudra. These employees function in their roles or titles that are commensurate with their quality, talent and efficiency. Each of these functions complements the other in the effective functioning of the organisation.

Similarly, the caste system was introduced by the sages for efficiency and productivity of society. Yet this structure has been misused by a narrow section of society for its own benefit.

We have come across different terms like Hindu, Hindu seeker and follower of Hindu dharma. Could you explain the difference between these?

If a person wishes to be considered a Hindu, he must experience the higher state of consciousness (*Samadhi*) through the practice of Yoga. By following any path of yoga that appeals to him, every human being can aim to reach that state. Until he attains Hindu consciousness, he will be categorised as a Hindu seeker. However, for those who are unable to follow any yogic path, our enlightened masters designed certain symbols, i.e. idols and images of God called *murthis* or *vigrahas*, which contain the idea of the Infinite (*Brahman*). The masters advised them to worship these symbols till they were ready for the practice of yoga. People in this category are called Hindu 'followers', often incorrectly described as Hindus. We can, if needed, and to an extent, compare this section of society with the followers of other religions.

What is the future of Indian culture?

The immense potential of the great culture and tradition of India is yet to be fulfilled.

When we call it *Arsha Bharat*, one is able to understand its depth. The word Arsha means beyond history, beyond comprehension.

No one should have any doubt about Bharat. The future of Bharat is assured. It is going to be a guiding light. If we want to understand the essence of India the approach should be with an open mind.

Then contented human beings with the power of spiritual

knowledge will come forward and enter into administration and governance. Their positive energy will take the world forward and this message will spread to future generations.

What about the survival of humanity?

Many people have aired their doubts regarding the existence and future of the human race. But this fear is unfounded. Nature is not driven by mundane or limited knowledge as humans are. Nature has sublime intelligence. If you look around, you will be able to get an idea of her profound workings. From a dew drop on a morning flower to the vast ocean, this supreme intelligence is at play. The consciousness of nature is creative and is necessary for the existence of the human race.

So what should modern man do?

The working of Nature is always in the right direction. The notion that it is otherwise is a figment of our imagination or *Maya*. Man is unable to understand this reality. Modern man who leads a cosy life needs to understand this reality through meditation.

For this path, what is the ideal environment?

In order to go within oneself, the ideal environment would be greenery, fresh air and silence. But in today's world of urbanisation it is difficult to find even a green patch. So, one should try to find some greenery in one's daily life. If it is a place in harmony with Nature and where one can meditate, then it is ideal.

What about health?

Each person should be conscious about his or her health.

When a human being lives in harmony and follows the laws of nature, then life will become a good experience. This is a state of complete health. But if you live opposing the laws of nature, then life will become a futile exercise.

How can one become a complete or contented human being?

Everyone wants to become a complete or a contented human being. But they are not ready to take those extra steps to reach that state they so dearly desire. To become complete or contented is not at all a difficult task. But people are reluctant to try. When one opens up the inner eye, completeness can be reached. A person needs to receive energy during his journey towards completeness. Once this happens, the inner eye will open. A person who sets out for such a journey should do Yoga and eat natural food.

You spoke about receiving energy. Can you further explain energy transmission?

Energy is transmitted regularly in nature. It is a blessing to receive this energy and transmit it to other people for their wellbeing. Sages reflect the spiritual light, leading people out of the darkness of ignorance. This energy is omnipresent. All we need to do to recognise this energy is to remove the blocks within ourselves. Though Nature is full of greatness, those who cannot open the third eye cannot experience that energy. Since there is no light, there is darkness. That darkness is the darkness of ignorance (*Maya*).

We need to receive the light from the gurus who have become self realised and have transformed themselves into the light, just as one candle is lit by another. This transformation is only possible through regular meditation. All real gurus or masters aim for the wellbeing of mankind and peace for all. Such enlightened beings become vehicles for transmission of this energy.

Is all this knowledge available in books written by the ancient sages of India?

Yes, indeed. The books written by the ancient sages of India are a treasure for mankind. One should read them properly and try to understand the real essence of these books. It is no use if you buy and keep them on your bookshelf. A reader should be able to understand what the great lineage of gurus actually handed over to mankind for their wellbeing. It is vast universal knowledge. Nowadays, learning and sharing of such knowledge has become a mere fashion statement. For example, take reading of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Reading the *Gita* is an experience in itself. One cannot be taught the *Gita*, it can only be experienced.

What about the new finding that you can achieve whatever your mind wants?

This is not at all a new finding. It is actually a revelation made by the great Gurus of India centuries ago and presented as a gift to mankind.

Yadrugachecha Bhavathum
Thadrugh Bavathi Purusha:

This comes in Vidura Neeti or Vidura's Justice in the

Mahabharata. The meaning of the above sloka is that, 'your life is what you think'. New age scholars proclaim, 'your life becomes what you think.' This is exactly what was written centuries ago.

Does it really happen?

There should be no doubt about it. Repeatedly thinking about a particular instance will soon make it happen in your life. After a certain time you will be surprised to find that it is actually working. Good thoughts always produce good results. Anyone can try this. Even the quantum healing of modern science is based on this. Mind manifests as matter.

Part II

Temples, Rituals and Gods

Chapter 5

Temples and Rituals

Rituals, temples and Gods are an interesting facet of Hindu culture. But how do these fit in with the ultimate idea of Hinduism, i.e. oneness?

The ultimate aim of Hindu dharma is the realisation of the soul, or the spiritual energy inherent in every being. It is an experience that can be attained only through yoga practice. Any dedicated seeker can achieve it. But this state of attainment is beyond explanation. It cannot be arrived at through reason. It is a superconscious experience. Since it requires intense practice, the attainment of spiritual experience could be difficult for ordinary people. The merciful spiritual masters were not ready to leave this section of society in a world where there is no spiritual light. This, they accomplished by creating different means of channelising spiritual energy through technical symbols, i.e. *vigrahas* (idols) installed in temples and the use of *mantras* (techniques of receiving cosmic energy through sound energy). An ordinary person who visits a temple and attends the rituals receives energy unknowingly and progresses in spiritual awareness. This is the special benefit received from visiting temples.

Temple visits, worship of God and practice of rituals are the technical disciplines for the day to day life of a person. One who observes these disciplines will definitely be curious and anxious to know more. This divine path of spiritual practice is rational as well as scientific.

A person who is involved in material life is advised to follow the daily discipline of Hindu culture. At any time, he can enter into the practice of yoga for higher experience. The disciplines he has followed will support his meditation.

A person who is already established in a particular discipline has the freedom to change his path or even stop the practice altogether. The ultimate freedom given to the practitioner is a special characteristic of Hindu culture.

The masters introduced the cosmic soul, which is beyond comprehension, through different symbols and *murthis*, images and icons of gods. These symbols and *murthis* are known as *Devas* or divine beings in Hindu mythology. The infinite soul is the background of the existence of this universe. This means that the apparent universe is a temporary manifestation in the infinite reality. Birth, life and death are temporary phenomena occurring in the infinite soul. This infinite soul is everything (*Ekam Sat*). All beliefs and Gods are derived from this infinite reality. Knowingly or unknowingly, everyone uses, understands or defines these words in different ways. Some see God in a particular form, some in a formless state, others believe that these ideas of God have not been arrived at through reason and so are mere superstitions. In their different ways, each is thinking about a truth that is beyond comprehension.

Based on these different ways, society can be classified into three categories.

1. People who experience their soul as the Cosmic Self – sages, seers, masters, Gurus, *advaitis* and Hindus.

2. People who are practising to attain the ultimate state – seekers (*sadhakas*).

3. Those who believe in and practise the instructions of the masters – followers.

Among these three categories, Gurus are people who have had direct experience, in other words, have identified themselves with the cosmic consciousness. Seekers are engaged in meditation to attain higher consciousness. Followers perform rituals as a preparation for meditation.

Temple visits and rituals are specially prepared disciplines for followers. Even though the concept of God and belief in god seem to be two separate things, they are in fact two different manifestations of the One, complementing each other to express the ultimate reality. This can be verified through an analysis of how the mind and body function.

The functions of the body and mind are taking place through three levels of manifestation of the ultimate reality.

1. Intuition
2. Instinct
3. Intellect

An urge or desire originates in the intuition. The manifestation of cosmic energy in the body at the level of intuition is generally known as *atman* (the soul) - a limited expression of the unlimited cosmic energy. *Brahma* consciousness and unconditional love are different names for intuition. The seat of intuition is the heart (*Hiranya Garbha*). The intuitive power originating from *Hiranya Garbha* is being converted into *nadi* currents. This converted intuitive power is known as instinct. The functioning of body and mind depends on instinct. These *nadi* currents reach the brain and are converted into thoughts and

desires. This level of functioning is known as intellect. The organs, prompted by the intellect to fulfill a desire, move into action. All functions in the body, visible and invisible are taking place through these three planes.

Take for example thirst, a vibration (*prerana* – intuition) starts in the heart. This vibration is converted into nerve currents (instinct), which produce a certain dryness in the throat. This uneasiness will be noticed by the brain, which identifies it as thirst. The brain then instructs the eyes to look for water. When the eyes find water, the body moves to bring it to the organs. This level of action is the intellect. This action has satisfied the thirst which originated as a *prerana* in the heart.

It is not difficult to understand the functions of the intellect and the sense organs that are connected with it. Knowledge acquired through the senses is known in Sanskrit as *bahyajnana* (sensory knowledge). Sensory knowledge about a particular subject is common to everyone. But the development of sensory knowledge involves a combination of the intuitive and instinctive functions. As we know, intuition and instinct are beyond comprehension and control. Also, even though we are certain that intuition and instinct are active functions in the body, there is no way to prove it. There is clearly a mystery behind this manifestation, which is beyond comprehension. The term mysterious means that the subject is not clear (covered in darkness or *andhakara*). To remove the darkness, we need light. The light that removes the darkness of ignorance is called *Daiva* (God). The word *Daiva* literally means

'luminous' or 'shining one.' This is the significance of the Hindu mythological concept of God. Gods are the inherent sources within the body and mind of a person through which he can enlighten himself.

We know that the existence of life and consciousness is based on inner functions such as intuition and instinct. But we do not have control over these. The curiosity to know more about the mystery of life is alive in each one of us. But the intensity of that curiosity will vary from person to person. This curiosity has existed from the dawn of creation. The sages, through their intense meditation, focussed their mind on the inner self and identified themselves with it. This is what the seekers are trying to do. The followers believe in the existence of god and worship Him through idols and rituals.

The Gurus are complete. They have realised the Self or God. So they are Gods. They do not have doubts or questions. They have only experience. But the seekers are looking for explanations. The disciplines designed for seekers are called *yogacharas* (yogic disciplines). The limited forms and names of Gods, which are called *sankalpas* (images), are part of these. An image (*murthi*) made for worship represents the unlimited reality. The worshipper can open a door to the unlimited with the help of a limited image. The infinite cannot be experienced through the limited sense organs. Therefore the limited images of God can be a support in the journey towards the infinite. Actually, the God forms in Hindu mythology symbolise the different dimensions of consciousness through which the seeker passes. With the

guidance of an experienced master, everyone can conceive and experience these mythological forms. In effect, the practitioner is transforming himself into these forms. Through this process he realises the secret of the nature of creation. He realises the secret behind different forms in Nature. Gradually he reaches a state where there are no names and forms (*naama roopa atheetha*).

The daily disciplines of temple visits and rituals are called *nityaacharas* and are meant for householders. Daily disciplines and yogic disciplines complement each other. Nithyacharas are meant for householders as an essential part of their spiritual development. This gives them access to higher planes of spiritual practice in the future. If we analyse this, it is obvious that the concepts of temples and their rituals are the most practical and effective methods for the maintenance of health.

What happens in the body and mind when we visit a temple?

First, this requires a little explanation of the background first. Actually, our brain and mind have infinite capacity. If you know the proper practice, you can explore the complete potential of the brain. To do so, the power of the mind should be focussed and directed through certain *nadi* channels. This is the function that takes place in meditation.

The basic lesson of meditation is the practice of renunciation. The giving up of the feeling of me and mine and establishing the feeling that everything belongs to Nature is renunciation. A person who renounces (*thyaga*) is

known as *thyagi* and in the course of time he will become a *yogi* (enlightened). When one renounces the feeling of me and mine (*mamata* or possessiveness), the mind becomes calm and strong (the yogic state of mind). A mind that is disturbed or depressed due to possessiveness will be weak and stressed. A mind that has acquired infinite capacity through renunciation (yogic state of mind) will become capable of experiencing infinite strength and happiness.

A person who visits the temple feels the presence of the omnipotent and omnipresent God who is and owns everything in the universe. This awareness of the God leads to a certain renunciation in the mind. As God owns everything, the devotee has nothing to possess. This empty state of mind of the devotee is the same as the renounced state of a yogi. Here the devotee is exploring, in an indirect way, the potential of his own mind through renunciation. The symbol of God in the temple is a means for that purpose.

The narrowness and weakness of the mind, produced through possessiveness, are removed through renunciation. The renounced state of mind is strong and bright. When the devotee, with his mind in a state of renunciation, eats the food distributed from the temple as a gift of God (*prasadam*), it works like a strong vaccination against all negatives.

Some patients feel great relief from their disease even with vitamin tablets alone, if given to them by a doctor in whom they have great trust. In this case it is the belief in the physician that cures. The vitamin tablet shows results because the feeling of disease is already removed from the mind through faith in the doctor. This is known as the

placebo effect. Here the strength of mind is reflected in the body. In fact, the patient is cured of the disease with the help of his own inner strength. The doctor is being used as a tool.

Increasing anxiety, fear, mistrust and lack of self-esteem are the root causes of all the problems in modern society. These causes are due to the lack of self-confidence. For the betterment of the individual and society everyone must achieve self-confidence.

Can you explain the relationship between disease and attitude of the mind?

A medicine for a particular disease can show different results in different people. That medicine may cure some yet not work at all in others, even though they live in the same environment. This is one of the main challenges confronting modern physicians. We often see diseases that are beyond control. While the modern medical system becomes helpless against these mysterious diseases, the ancient eastern medical system is becoming more effective and successful. The modern medical community has started realising the importance of ancient medical techniques.

One of the founders of Ayurveda (the ancient Indian medical system), Sage Susrutha, described health as follows:

Sareera manaso yogo
Paraspara manuvrajeth
Adhara adheya bhavena
Thathajyat Khadayoriva

…… *(Susrutha Samhita)*

(The body and mind are linked to each other and complement each other. A function taking place in the body will be reflected in the mind and the functions of the mind will be reflected in the body).

This means the disease of the body will influence the mind and the attitude of the mind will definitely influence the body. If the mind is kept fresh and strong the body also will remain fresh and strong and the reverse is also true. So when we treat the body for a particular disease, the attitude of the person should be taken into consideration. The condition of the mind will have a significant influence on the functions of the body. That is why, in people who have different mental frequencies, a particular medicine has different effects, even though these people are living in the same environment. Sometimes the medicine will not work at all in some people who are highly stressed or not focussed. When the treatment becomes ineffective in such people, the modern medical community describes the disorder as psychosomatic. No medicines are effective in a person who does not have physical and mental immunity. This lack of immunity is an outcome of stress. Stress and stress related diseases are going out of control in modern society.

What is the cause of stress?

The profound mechanism that receives information from the senses and reports to the ego (the self) is known as the mind (mainly the brain, the nervous system and the heart). The mind is always engaged in action (that is why the heart sends 80% of the blood directly to the brain). The mind is

keen to analyze information from the sense organs and is busy reporting to the ego. It has to come to a conclusion almost instantly, and therefore, when the mind comes across a problem it cannot immediately solve, it becomes disturbed or tense. In search of a solution the mind has to dive into the depths of the brain's storehouse - the memory. To penetrate deeply it needs more strength. The penetrative power of the mind can be improved through concentration. As it becomes more concentrated, the mind becomes capable of exploring the depths of the brain and of finding, effortlessly, a solution for any problem. But a mind that is not concentrated will fail to find solutions. Due to this failure of the mind, confusion and uneasiness result. This uneasiness of the brain is the cause of stress.

How can we improve concentration and release stress?

Let us compare the functions of the mind to a computer. A computer has a hard disc, of a certain capacity, to store information. The data fed into the computer is properly labelled and kept in the memory storage. The next time we need the stored information, we apply the signal code and the data is retrieved. The mind functions in the same way. The information collected through the senses is stored in the memory and will be retrieved when it is needed. If you feed data without proper labels and beyond the capacity of the computer, it will overheat and its performance will become slow. In the same way, modern man is engaged in many activities beyond the existing capacity of the brain and he experiences uneasiness. As we upgrade the capacity of a computer for better performance, we can increase the

capacity of the brain through practice. If we know the right technique of this process it is possible to achieve infinite capacity for the mind and brain. The upgrading of the mind and brain is known as meditation (*dhyanam*).

Through meditation, when we upgrade the capacity of the mind, prevailing problems will become insignificant and the uneasiness that was felt in the body will vanish. This is how we banish stress and stress related problems. Everyone may not be able to practice meditation in a scientific way. Our ancient masters did not want to restrict the benefits of meditation only to an enlightened section of society. They wanted to make the benefits available to all. With this in mind, temples and idols were designed for everyone to become beneficiaries of spiritual vibrations. For a devotee who visits the temple with the belief that god exists in an idol, the energy from the idol (which has already been infused by the master) enters into his body without him knowing it, and awakens his latent power. At that point, the spiritual spark is kindled which in turn will lead to meditation.

How can the material man, who cannot practice advanced yoga, develop himself?

Temple visits along with simple yogic disciplines are advised for material people. The temple rituals are scientifically designed methods through which a person can develop confidence in himself despite all the problems of the material world. The person visits the temple with a clean body after a shower and on an empty stomach, touches both palms together and holds them close to his

heart (*anjali mudra*). In this position he closes his eyes and listens with attention to the chanting of *mantras* and ringing of bells. Now, all his five senses are focussed on the image of God. This focussed state of mind will be capable of activating his dormant inner energy. Ordinary people perform these rituals as a belief and do not bother about the science behind them. In modern scientific language we can compare these practices to autosuggestion and self motivation techniques.

Chapter 6

Temples and their impact on health

Could you explain the link between temples and maintaining good health?

Idam sareeram kountheya
Kshetramithyabhideeyathe
……. (Gita 13:1)

The Bhagavad Gita says the body is a temple. Let us verify the depth of this statement. The World Health Organisation defines health as physical, mental and social wellbeing. If there is deterioration in any one of these planes, a person cannot be called healthy. This modern explanation also reinforces the ancient Indian concept of health.

Ayurveda says,

Prassannatme indriya manah swastha ithyabhideeyathe

A joyful state of spirit, body and mind is described as complete health.

Our ancient masters designed the temples as storehouses of energy for attaining complete health.

Energy (*Shakti* or power) is needed for any type of activity in nature. In temples, the distribution of six types of energies, which are essential for the maintenance of the body and mind, takes place. They are:

1. Cosmic energy
2. Sound energy
3. Air energy
4. Fire energy
5. Water energy
6. Earth energy

These six varieties of energy are the real life forces.

The body is formed by a combination of five subtle energies called five elements (*Pancha bhoothas*). These five elements are combined in a particular ratio and the process of combining is called *pancheekarna*. If the correct ratio is maintained, the body will be at ease. When the ratio is disturbed, the body loses its immunity and gradually becomes diseased.

What are the five elements?

a. Space (sound) – the energy obtained from Nature during sleep

b. Air (gas) – the air we breathe

c. Fire (heat) – the heat from the sun and the heat which should be maintained in the body through exercise

d. Water (liquid) – the water we drink

e. Earth (soil) – the food we eat

The energisation, harmonisation and preservation of the five elements are the foundation of perfect health. In reality, temples endow society with these.

Let us look into this in detail.

Temple visits and rituals must be undertaken after cleaning the body.

There will always be germs in the environment. Germs can

enter the body through some soft membranes (*marmas*) in the skin. These are the soft membranes in the feet between the toes, the membrane between the fingers, both temples, both sides of the nose and the membrane behind the ears (the spot where we apply balm when we get a headache). The body receives rays of divine energy from the temple through the soft membranes. The absorption of this energy will be more efficient if these parts are clean and moist. That is why it is imperative that the temple visit is made only after a dip in the temple pond.

As you approach the temple, the sound of bells or recitation of *mantras* can be heard from a distance. The bells in the temples are made to ring at a certain frequency. This particular frequency of sound has the capacity to calm the mind and activate certain *nadi* centres in the brain. Through this activation of the brain, the sound energy absorption during sleep will be improved. This will help the person to sleep soundly. The sound of bells and *mantras* produce equal effects. Here, the energisation of the sound element is done.

You will receive fresh air from the surroundings of the temple. There are well-maintained medicinal plants and trees in the temple courtyard and the surroundings, which purify the air. Incense and other fragrances are used for the same purpose. Thus, energisation of air energy is accomplished.

The lamps (flames) that you see in the temples represent the energisation of the element fire. The flame (*diya*) in temples has a significance. It is very bright and yellow in

colour. To light these lamps, coconut oil, sesame seed oil or ghee are generally used. The light beams produced by these flames have a laser effect. This laser power acts like a natural disinfectant. It cleans the devotee's outer and inner body. When he bows down in front of the *murthi* in a specific way (*danda namaskaram*), there will be a production of heat in the body, the same as the heat energy produced by any kind of physical exercise. Here, activation of the fire element is accomplished.

There is a clear instruction that the temple visit must be made on an empty stomach. We know that 'you are what you eat.' This is absolutely true. Special water (*theertham*) given to you from the temple by the *pandit* (the priest who performs the rituals in the temple) is prepared in a traditional way. The drinking water (usually well water), sterilised by soaking certain medicinal herbs in it, is poured on the murthi and collected back. When water is poured on the *murthi*, that water is charged by the energy from the *murthi*. As water has memory, it will absorb the sound energy of the *mantras* chanted by the priest. When this water is taken on an empty stomach, the *theertham* could have the effect of a powerful vaccination against all diseases. This is the energisation of the water element.

The food served from the temple (*prasadam*) will be fresh, sweet and soft. *Prasadam* is usually fruits, vegetables or sweets. These items are kept near the *murthi* and some rituals are performed such as *mantra* recitation and ringing of the bell in different rhythms. Through these rituals (*pooja*), the ultrasonic energy is infused in the food. This

prasadam has the capacity to rejuvenate each and every cell in the body. This is the energisation of the earth element.

Here, the cleansing of the five elements is done. This discipline is known as *Pancha Bhootha upasana* or *Bhootha Shuddhi* (cleansing of the five elements). These cleansed molecules must be brought in tune with *Viswaprana* (cosmic energy) for the right functioning of body and mind. For this purpose, the latent form of cosmic energy in these five elements must be ignited. The *murthis* perform this duty of ignition – the activation of cosmic energy.

To explain this external ignition further, we can compare the body with gunpowder. Within gunpowder, the potential to catch fire lies in a dormant state. This fire in the gunpowder would be released only by igniting it with fire from outside. Similarly, the *murthis* in the temples are igniting the dormant spiritual energy in the body from outside.

Can you explain the power of murthis or idols?

We know an ordinary piece of iron is converted into steel through many processes. This steel can be converted into a magnet with the help of another magnet.

The idol is made from either stone or metals in which the molecules are combined in a specific ratio. In this specially prepared idol (*Bimbam*), the Guru (enlightened master) infuses his spiritual energy. This process of energising the idol is known as *pranaprathishta*. Through *pranaprathishta*, the idol is converted into a *murthi*, a powerful symbol of God, which will emit cosmic energy. In accordance with

the quality of energy infused in the idol, the master will explain the procedure of daily rituals and method of mantra recitation. Through these daily rituals, the power of the *murthi* is maintained. The person who follows the basic instructions on personal hygiene and temple rituals will be ignited by the power in the *murthi*. When the dormant energy within the body is activated in the temple, the devotee will experience infinite energy and happiness within the Self, in other words, the experience of God. This experience of infinite power and happiness will remain in the mind for many hours. This quality of spiritual experience is the underlying force that moulds the character of a person.

A person who cannot attain the higher level of yoga discipline can benefit through temple visits. At the same time, it is the responsibility of society to maintain temples that are capable of giving spiritual ignition. We must ensure that the temples are maintained as spiritual power sources, not business centres.

Here, the science behind the body's creation, maintenance and divinity is explained and symbolised in various God forms. Masters encouraged society to engage in these temple rituals as a way of life for the betterment of physical, mental and spiritual health.

There are scientific and practical definitions given not only for the temples and rituals but also for the God forms that are being worshipped. These God forms have very significant and scientific meanings.

All the God concepts in Indian mythology have been introduced by ancient Gurus. There is no idol of God that does not have a scientific definition. There is not a single God form that is worshipped based on superstition and blind faith, as some people believe. These forms of God were experienced by our ancient masters within themselves, as stages in the journey to enlightenment. These experienced forms were explained to society with the help of symbols such as snakes, elephants and monkeys, which were familiar and common in Nature.

As a result of intense meditation, there is a transformation from the limited self consciousness (*vyashti*), to the cosmic consciousness (*samashti*). It is a long journey. During this period, countless changes take place in the inner structure of the practitioner, especially in the functions of the brain and nervous system. All real practitioners have to pass through these structural changes. These changes are symbolised as God forms. When these changes take place in the nervous system the practitioner will come face to face with the secret of the creation of all things, animate and inanimate (*sarvacharaacharam*).

At this stage he acquires the knowledge of creation and the Creator. Here the seeker is not only realising the Creator but he is also transforming himself into the Creator state. At the end, in the maturity of meditation, he overcomes all structures, all limited forms of creation whether small or big, visible or invisible. He goes beyond the limit of intellect.

The *sadhaka* experiences the ultimate, the infinite reality (*Brahmam*), which is beyond comprehension. In yoga

practice, this state is called *Samadhi* (superconsciousness). In the journey from the ordinary state of consciousness (*Jagrat*) to Samadhi, these worshipped God forms will act as road signs for the practitioner for his safe advancement to the destination.

Chapter 7

Different God Forms

There are those who believe that the worship of idols in India originated from fear. It is said that the primitive Indian was frightened of everything he saw in Nature - the sun, moon, lightning, thunder, clouds, rain, mountains, oceans, snakes, monkeys etc. So he created countless Gods to worship. It is not clear from where this idea came, perhaps from so-called masters or historians. Of course, even some educated people propagate equally incorrect stories of the origin of Indian God forms.

Indian mythology is established on the basis that God is one (Ekam sat). It declares that God is present in everything (Omnipresent - sarvavyaapi). God gives energy for everything (Omnipotent - sarvashaktan). God conceives everything (Omniscient - sarvamsahan). This is the philosophy of unity in diversity. This apparent universe is a very limited projection in the infinite reality - God.

In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna declares to Arjuna

Adhava bahunaithena kim jnathena thavarjuna
Vishtabyahamidam krisnamekamsena sthito jagat – Bhagavad Gita:10 (42)

But, of what avail to thee is the knowledge of all these details, O Arjuna? I exist, supporting this whole world by one part of Myself.

The sages saw the presence of God in everything not because of fear, but because they could really experience His presence. They dared to declare, "I am the Cosmos"

(*Aham Brahmasmi*). "You are That" (*Tat Twam Asi*). "Everything is God" (*Sarvam khalwidam Brahma*). Is it at all possible for these gigantic personalities to feel fear?

The sages who introduced Indian mythology are immortal. They are the people who conquered death. Through the practice of retention of breath (*stambhana kriya*), they experienced the secret of death. They explained their experiences to the ordinary masses with the help of symbols and models of living and non living things that are common in nature. The masses kept these thoughts alive through worship of these models and symbols. This is the origin of the worship of Gods through idols in India.

In the spiritual journey there is a sequence in experiencing the different God forms. The very first among these profound experiences is the Elephant God (Gajamukhan or Ganapathi). As these God forms are very important for the serious practitioner, let us discuss them in detail.

Ganapathi or the Elephant God

The Worshipped Form

Before entering into the explanation of this God concept, we must have some preliminary information about the different methods in meditation.

In Indian tradition, there are mainly two schools of thought called *paramparas* (lineage of sages) - Siddha and Veda.

The concept of the Elephant God is derived from the Siddha School. The method of Yoga practice in Siddha parampara is known by different names i.e., Kundalini yoga, Shiva yoga, Siddha yoga, Raja yoga, Sreevidyopasana, Vaashi yoga etc. The mantra (sacred word) adopted for meditation is *Sreevidya Tripura Sundari* mantra (Ajapa Gayathri). This mantra cannot be recited verbally. The method of application of this mantra is not recorded or discussed in public. The mantra will be passed on to the disciple by the master only during initiation (pranaprathishta or sakthi path). The process of initiation is known as attainment of *Deeksha*. The disciple who has been given Deeksha will enter into the serious practice of mantra and into the spiritual world. This is the tradition of the Siddha school.

To know more about the Elephant God, we must have a general idea about the Siddha yoga technique and its application in the body and mind.

Normally, a person has an average of 21,600 breaths a day (24 hours). All functions of the body and mind depend on breath. Breath (pranavayu) is a combination of prana (vital force) and vayu (air). It is because of the action of prana that the lungs expand, allowing the air to flow in. Again, it is the prana that contracts the lungs when we exhale,

allowing the air to flow out. Technically, while acting to contract the lungs, this form of prana is called apana. Let us understand how breath functions in the body through a yogic perspective.

During one inhalation, the air (vayu) and vital force (prana) enter the body together. After entering, the air goes directly to the lungs and the prana enters the spinal cord through a subtle opening in the neck and flows down to the coccyx (mooladhara). Here, this prana is known as *Parashakthi* (the Supreme Power). From mooladhara, this energy splits itself into two and flows upwards through the nadis. When this energy reaches the genital chakra (swadhistana) and the navel chakra (manipoorakam), it produces hunger, thirst, lust, etc., and is called *Pashyanthi*. When it reaches the heart chakra (anahata) and produces love, ego, passion, mercy, etc, it is called *Madhyama*. Then it reaches the throat chakra, is converted into words and jumps out through the mouth. This state is known as *Vaikhari*. In this way, every breath functions through four levels, generating body consciousness and engaging the life force in the world of the senses.

In Siddha yoga practice, the control of breath (pranayama) begins from the fourth level of prana (vaikhari). When the prana (vital force) reaches the throat, the practitioner observes silence and will not allow the prana to convert itself into words. In the beginning, the sadhaka (practitioner) will be silent externally. As meditation advances, words will not be produced even in the mind. So the prana is blocked in the throat and instead of going to the vocal cords, it is forcefully redirected to the centre of the eyebrows (Ajna

chakra). The Ajna chakra is the region of the fifth element, space (ether), known as 'khe' in Sanskrit.

The redirection of prana from the throat (visuddhi) to the centre of the eyebrows (Ajna) is the divine technique of yoga – *khechari mudra*. This can be practised only by listening to the sound of silence.

The technique applied for converting vaikhari to kechari is *Jalandhara bandhanam*. Bandhanam means block. After the inhalation, a block will be produced in the throat and the throat will be pulled towards the brain by practice (Jalandhara bandhanam). Once the throat is blocked and pulled up there will be a corresponding traction in the rectum, which is also pulled up and blocked naturally. This process is called *Moolabandhanam*. Once the throat and anus are blocked, the prana, which entered the body through inhalation, finds difficulty in transforming itself into pashyanthi, madhyama and vaikhari and will tend to be transformed into spiritual energy. This stage is known as *Uddiyana bandhanam*. The stage when Jalandhara bandhanam (throat block), Moolabandhanam (rectum block) and Uddiyana bandhanam (abdominal block) occur together, the *Mahabandhanam* (the supreme block) happens spontaneously. Once the life energy, which was manifesting as body consciousness, is blocked by Mahabandhanam, that energy will start manifesting as spiritual consciousness. As we know from modern physics, if one form of energy changes, it appears in another form (law of conservation of energy).

Let us come to the explanation of Lord Gajamukhan. This God form has different names. They are:

1. Aadiguru (The First Master)
2. Vigneshwaran (Remover of all Obstacles)
3. Mahaganapati (The Controller of Everything)
4. Nitya Brahmachari (Permanently Celibate)
5. Gajamukhan (Elephant-headed)
6. Mooshikavahanan (Having a mouse as his vehicle)
7. Ekadantan (One-tusked)

There are many other names for Ganapathi also in use, based on the geographical region and on the different stages of meditation. For our analysis, the names we have used are sufficient.

Now we can verify how the yoga practitioner transforms himself into Lord Ganapathi

Starting Meditation

The beginning of Siddha yoga practice is Jalandhara bandhanam, Moolabandhanam and Uddiyana bandhanam. Due to the throat block, the throat is dragged inward and as a result of that traction, both ears are extended downward and the outer ends of the eyebrows are pulled up. Because of Moolabandhanam, the inhaled air gets stuck in the lungs

and the belly will start bulging. As the practice advances, the three blocks will become more intense and effortless. Here, Mahabandhanam takes place.

At this stage of meditation, the practitioner will experience a very significant change in his shape. (See picture.)

When the Mahabandhanam (the supreme block) happens, the sadhaka's mind will be focussed on a single point, the pupils will be fixed in the centre of the eyebrows (Ajna) and the upper end of the tongue will be pulled towards the inner palate. This stage of meditation is called *Khechari mudra*.

Kapalavivare jihwapravishta vipareethaga
Bhruvoranthargatha dhrishtir mudrabhavathi khechari
Yogashikhopanishad (5:40)

Now the practitioner is experiencing Khechari mudra. Mudra means the sealing. The breath is blocked through Mahabandhanam and sealed through Khechari mudra. This stage is known as *Kevala kumbhakam*. Kumbhakam means holding or maintaining in an expanded (bulging) shape. In Sanskrit the word *kumbha* means pot.

The comfortable state of blocking prana (kumbhakam) irrespective of poorakam (inhalation) and rechakam (exhalation) is called Kevala kumbhakam.

Now, because of Mahabandhanam and Kevala kumbhakam, the prana is trapped in the body and it begins to be focussed in the region of the navel chakra (manipoorakam), and begins to spin. At this time, the practitioner experiences a state of trance, the beginning of a higher state of consciousness.

Unless the prana (breath) travels in and out of the body at certain intervals, the soul cannot exist in the body. The body is kept alive because the cosmic prana is manifesting in the body as the individual soul (atma) and keeping all the organs active. There are eighteen means through which this manifestation of cosmic prana takes place. They are the five sensory organs (eyes, nose, ears, tongue and skin), ten vital forces governing the functions of the body (prana, apana, samana, udana, vyana, krikela, dhananjaya, devadethan, varuni, koorman), mind, intellect and ego. Through these eighteen planes, the cosmic soul (Paramatma), the macrocosm, is manifesting as an individual (Jeevatma), the microcosm.

If we look at Indian traditional teaching, it is interesting to note that almost all mythological teachings are based on 18 planes. For example:

1. The *puranas* are 18 in number
2. The epic *Mahabharatha* has 18 chapters (parvas)
3. The *Mahabaratha* war lasted 18 days
4. The number of armies that took part in the war was 18 (*akshowni*)
5. The *Bhagavad Gita* is narrated in 18 chapters
6. The *Ramayana* war lasted 18 days
7. The famous *Ayyappa* temple has 18 steps
8. The traditional martial art of India, *Kalaripayattu*, which is linked with yoga, has 18 steps

Like these, we can find many examples of the significance of 18 factors (*tattwas*).

Actually, these 18 planes comprise the veil of possessiveness (maya), which keeps us away from the knowledge of our real state, which is the cosmic spirit (Paramatma). Therefore, our ultimate aim is to overcome, through yoga practice, the eighteen planes, one by one, and reach the ultimate reality, God (Paramatma).

This means the world we experience is only an expansion of our own Self.

Now let us come back to the state of meditation.

Once the flow of prana is blocked, the functions of the eighteen planes will be arrested. Now the soul cannot survive in that body, which is almost dead, or the soul (atma) is not interested in remaining in that body which has no use. So the soul will tend to leave that body. Here the Kundalini power (dormant cosmic energy) starts awakening from the Mooladharam (root chakra situated in the coccyx region). This is symbolised as an energy that is like a coiled snake. This is only a symbol of stored energy, introduced by the masters thousands of years ago. Now this concept can be expressed through other scientific symbols like the tightened spring of a clock or the coil in a dynamo, in which you can see spiral forms of the stored energy. In Sanskrit, the word Kundalini means coiled or stored.

With the awakening of the Kundalini, the five elements (pancha bhootas) come under the control of the Sadhaka. He becomes the master (*Pathi*) of the collection of elements (*bhoota ganas*). Here he gets the name Ganapathi (*Gananam pathi*). As he has attained this state through the basic practice of Mahabandhanam, he is also known as Maha Ganapathi.

This is the stage of meditation in which the secret of how the soul leaves the body is revealed to the seeker. In other words, he experiences the secret of death.

I think the question "what is death" is relevant here. To understand the phenomenon of death, we must know how the soul exists in the body. However, the science of existence of the soul in the body can be explained only in a limited way. The soul has two planes of function – gross and subtle. The gross function can be understood and explained. The subtle function can only be experienced.

According to yogic science, the original form of the manifested soul is like a flame. In this flame, all the information and functions of the individual's life, past, present and future, are codified. All the data, right from evolution to involution, is recorded in it. It is a cosmically designed programme. Birth, life and death will all happen according to this design alone. That is why we call it destiny and it cannot be changed. The kernel that contains all the information about a soul is known as Jeevan or Jeevatma in yogic science.

The subtle soul needs a medium to manifest. This medium is the body. What does the soul do? First, it selects the parents for the creation of the body and enters the father's body through his crown chakra (*Brahmarandra*). From the crown chakra, it comes to the heart chakra and stays there for some time. When the appropriate time comes, it enters the mother's body through the semen. The womb and body of the mother is like a very sophisticated factory. From the mother's body, the soul collects the molecules of earth, water, fire, air and space (the five elements) and creates a

body. Within nine months and a few days, the creation is complete and comes out from the mother's body and immediately starts consuming energy directly from nature for survival and growth.

There is a specific system in the body for the consumption of energy from nature and it has a particular rhythm. Any fluctuation or disturbance in the rhythm causes disease. If the adequate consumption of energy from nature stops, due to disease or any other serious causes like accidents, the soul leaves the body. This is called death.

How does the soul function in the body?

The five elements are combined in a particular ratio (pancheekarana) to produce the body. The ten types of life energy (dasapranas) flow all over the body through 72,000 nadis and keep the body active. Through these nadis, the soul enjoys sensory experiences. The soul manifests in the body through five planes or five sheaths (pancha kosam) - annamaya kosham (physical body), pranamaya kosham (astral body), manomaya kosham (mental body), vijnanamaya kosham (intellectual body) and anandamaya kosham (spiritual body). All these functions are coordinated through the nervous system and its five activation points. These activation points are called adharas or chakras and these chakras are linked directly with the five elements.

Chakra	Elements
Swadhistana	Earth
Manipoorakam	Water
Anahatam	Fire
Vishuddhi	Air
Ajna	Space

These five chakras are energised by the consumption of the five elements and the sensory organs are activated. The activated organs will bring sensory experiences. When the soul is linked with the sensory experiences, it is known as *Kamadevan* or *Panchabanan* (the God with five arrows). Because of the powerful influence of sensory enjoyments, the soul forgets its actual state of purity and omnipotence and identifies itself with the limited, polluted sensory planes. Here, the soul feels that it is limited, weak and mortal. But actually, the soul is eternal bliss, omnipotent and immortal. The consciousness in which the soul identifies itself as mortal and limited is called the influence of maya (illusion) or *ajnana andhakaram* (the darkness of ignorance). In yogic language, the visible world is only maya, the invisible world alone is real (Brahmam). We all are under the spell of maya in the conscious state of mind. In the superconscious state, we are one with the cosmic soul (God or Brahmam).

The spell of maya or body consciousness is active through the functions of the five chakras. There are two more chakras in the body through which the cosmic soul transforms itself into the individual soul – Sahasraram (crown chakra) and Mooladharam (root chakra). The transformation of cosmic soul (Paramatma) into individual soul (Jeevatma) is beyond explanation. It is a superconscious experience. Through Mooladharam and Sahasraram, cosmic energy enters the body and the five chakras are activated. Once the five chakras are active, the jeevabodham (the body consciousness) is active and experiences the world.

How do these seven chakras function in the body?

The cosmic energy from Mooladharam flows towards Sahasraram as two nadi currents, interlinking in five places. These nadis are known as solar nadi and lunar nadi or *ida* (female) and *pingala* (male), and the five places where they interlink are called the five chakras. The person is bound to sensory enjoyments as a result of the functions of the chakras. As long as these chakras are in action, the person will be under the spell of maya and there is no possibility of a union (yoga) between Mooladharam and Sahasraram. That is why these chakras are called *vignas* (obstacles) in meditation. Without removing these obstacles, the Parashakthi (the supreme mother) in Mooladharam will not have a union with Parashivan (the supreme father) in Sahasraram. To make this union (yoga) possible, the seeker adopts a yoga technique called Hatha yoga. "Ha" means sun (solar nadi), "tha" means moon (lunar nadi). That means connecting the solar and lunar nadis with each other through the practice of meditation. As meditation advances, Khechari mudra and Mahabandhanam take place spontaneously and the obstacles of the five chakras are removed.

To illustrate this function we can take the example of electricity from the power station. Electricity flows through two channels (phase and neutral) and reaches the bulb and lights it. But if, instead of being connected to a bulb, these two wires are connected to each other, there will be a spark (light and sound will manifest together) and the fuse will

burn out. If there is no fuse, this spark could burn out the transformer and then in turn, the power station. This spark can be considered as a *JyothirBindu* – a point where light and sound are generated together.

As we join the two wires to get the spark in the earlier example, the solar and lunar nadis in the body unite at the centre of the eyebrows (brumadhyam). At this moment the activation of Ajna chakra or the third eye occurs. This is the time the sadhaka experiences the reality of his existence as a JyothirBindu – the point of infinity. Simultaneously, there will be an explosion in the Mooladharam (Kundalini awakening), which is like the transformer catching fire. This fire then merges into the cosmic energy (Parasakthi) which is known as revelation.

Kapala kuhare madhye
Chathurdhwarasya madhyame
Nadatmarajathe tatra
Yatha vyomni divakara

(Hathayoga Pradeepika)

The above has also been described by Sree Narayana Guru in his famous book 'Atmopadesa Satakam'.

"*Orupathinayiramaadideyaronnay varuvathupole varum vivekavruthi*"

The ultimate knowledge (the knowledge of the Self) would then be revealed to you as thousands of suns rising together.

Here, the five chakras are made inactive and the obstacles between the supreme father (Shivan) and supreme mother

(Shakthi) are removed. A new channel is now opened from Mooladharam (root chakra) to Sahasraram (crown chakra) and the union of Shivan and Shakthi (*Shivasakthi yogam*) takes place. At this stage, the practitioner gets the vision of Lord Ganapathi or in other words, the sadhaka transforms into the Lord himself.

When this function takes place during intense meditation, the soul comes out from the body and merges with the cosmic energy (cosmic soul). Here, the sadhaka identifies himself with the cosmic self and experiences his immortal reality – the ultimate truth. After a comfortable time in meditation, when he releases the Mahabandhanam, the mind shifts from the superconscious level (Samadhi) to the conscious level (Jagrath). Here, the prana will start flowing through the solar and lunar nadis and the practitioner comes back to normal awareness of life. This profound technique of shifting the mind from the conscious state to the superconscious state and vice versa is known as *Mahadeva Vidya* or *Maha Yoga Vidya* – the great yoga technique to defeat death.

This function will happen in every living being in a natural way, but with one difference. It will happen naturally only once. That is death. The person has no control over it. The soul that comes out of the body is not coming back or it cannot come back. It leaves the body forever. But in the practice of yoga, the sadhaka is creating a situation of death and after experiencing it he comes back to life safely. This is how he defeats death.

Now let us observe the changes that are taking place in the practitioner from the beginning to the end of meditation and we will come to know the significance of Lord Ganapathi – the Elephant God.

Throat pulled inside through Jalandhara bandhanam, ears extended downwards (big ears), eyebrows pulled upwards, eyes becoming small due to inner observation, belly bulging due to the practice of Jalandhara bandhanam and Moolabandhanam – All these changes happening together will make *Lambodharan* (The God with a big belly). Once these functions take place, the sense organs (pancha indriyas) will come under the control of the practitioner. This is why he gets the name Ganapathi and since the ultimate practice is Mahabandhanam, he is known as Maha Ganapathi (the great master).

Then, he becomes the Lord Vigneswaran (The God who removes all obstacles). The logic behind this concept is that the union between the Parashivan (supreme father situated in the crown chakra) and Parashakthi (supreme mother situated in Mooladharam) was not taking place because of the power of the five chakras in between. As a result of intense mediation and Mahabandhanam, the chakras are pierced and a channel is opened from Mooladharam to Sahasraram and the union between father and mother (the great union) happens. This process of piercing of the chakras is the removal of the obstacles (Vignas), which is why he is known as *Vigneswaran*. The new channel opened for the great union is like the trunk of an elephant and

hence the name *Gaja Mukhan* (lord with an elephant face).

At this stage, every practitioner has the opportunity to achieve the supreme knowledge (Atmajnanam). Hence he is called the supreme master (*Aadi Guru*).

In the maturation of Mahabandhanam practice, the function of the solar or lunar nadis is cut off. In that process, the lunar nadi is cut first. The broken tusk represents this blocking of the lunar nadi (Chandrabhedanam). This is why he is called *Ekadantan*, the God with one tusk.

During Mahayoga practice, celibacy (brahmacharyam) is one of the strict disciplines imposed on the sadhaka. Here he is given the name of *Nitya Brahmachari* (always celibate).

The advancement of Mahayoga practice is slow and sharp. As a mouse makes holes in a great mountain, the practitioner makes a hole in the cosmic veil of Maya (illusion) with a sharpened mind and enters the depths of the secrets of Nature. Here, he gets the name *Mooshika Vahanan* (the God who has a mouse as his vehicle).

During the period of meditation, the sadhaka will be interested only in simple and sweet foods. Therefore he is known as *Modhakapriyan* (the God who likes sweets and is joyful).

Why do you have a ritual of breaking a coconut in front of Lord Ganapathi?

A coconut has three eyes. Of the three, two are dormant and one is active. The active eye represents the third eye (yogic eye or sixth sense). We also have three eyes. Two of them are active and give us material visions. The actual eye, the third eye, which would give spiritual vision, is dormant in us. Since the third eye is active in the coconut, it is considered a symbol of spiritual knowledge. The breaking of a coconut represents the breaking of the strong shell of our ego. This breaking of our ego detaches us from the material world. The coconut that is broken in front of God does not have an owner. Anyone can have it. In the same way, the detached person does not own anything and nobody owns him. He is only a part of nature. This complete detachment or renunciation is represented by the ritual of breaking a coconut in front of the deity. Renunciation is a stepping-stone to yoga practice. Since Ganapthi is the symbol of the Supreme Master of yoga, this ritual of breaking the coconut is performed in front of Lord Ganapathi.

Why is the idol of Ganapathi immersed in water during the festival (Ganesha Nimanjjanam)?

In South India, people break a coconut in front of Lord Ganapathi as a ritual. As I said before, this ritual keeps alive a profound spiritual message among the people. In central and northern India, coconuts were not easily available, so this spiritual message was kept alive through Ganesha nimanjjanam. The meaning behind both rituals is the same. Once a year, or once in two years, a Ganapathi idol is made from clay and prayers are performed in front of it. Then the

idol is immersed in the ocean, or in a river or a lake.

The soul (Atman) existing in a subtle state of light (chaitanya) takes on a gross body (sthoola sharira) through water. According to modern science, life first manifested in the ocean as a unicellular organism. The first cell in the human body is also produced in the fluid inside the mother's womb. Since water is the original medium for creation of a body, the body, after fulfilling its purpose, should go back to its origin, completing the cycle. Immersing the idol in water (nimanjjanam) symbolises this law of nature.

When a person becomes spiritually aware, he loses possessiveness of the body (mamatha). In nature, nothing is stable. There is no permanent creation or destruction. Losing the body only means that it goes back to its origin, from where it was created. One ready for spiritual discipline gives up possessiveness of his body (renunciation) as a start. As a symbol of this spiritual idea, the idol of Ganapathi is placed in the water representing the discarding of the body. Something produced from water is going back to its origin. Since this spiritual message is essential, it is followed as a ritual and celebrated as a festival. This is just one among many rituals in India, symbolising and keeping alive very useful spiritual messages among ordinary people in the form of God worship and festivals. One doubt, however, remains. Are those who perform the rituals aware of the spiritual message behind these activities?

Naga or the Snake God

Worship of the snake God, like that of the elephant God, is also very significant in India. Does this also have a scientific meaning?

Snake worship gives rise to very important rituals in Dravidian culture (Dravida samskaram). Snake worship and snake temples play a vital role in maintaining the health of an individual, of society and of nature. If we had understood the essence of snake worship and the maintenance of snake temples in the way they were designed, we would not have been facing such a health crisis today.

Two snakes, with one head and two intertwining bodies is the true symbol (moolaroopam) of the snake murthi. Later, other murthis were made without proper understanding. Many superstitions exist in snake worship, but in the traditional scientific view only the actual symbol is accepted.

Snake (naga) represents the energy that travels in a wave pattern. The relation between energy and naga is nothing but the similarity in the shape (wave pattern).

In modern physics also we see wave symbols used to explain the movement of energy.

The two nadi channels (Ida and Pingala) starting from the Mooladharam (coccyx) and extending to Sahasraram (crown of head) are symbolised as a snake. The rhythmic flow of energy through these two nadis will harmonise and enhance the functions of the five chakras (Swadhistana to Ajna) and maintain the body in a healthy state. The harmonious functioning of these five chakras depends on five disciplines.

1. The discipline of food depends on quantity and quality
2. The discipline of water depends on quantity and quality
3. Exercise (heat in the body) depends on quantity, variety (type) and timing
4. The discipline of air (breath) depends on quantity, quality and rhythm
5. The discipline of sound (absorbed during sleep) depends on timing, quality and duration

Fluctuation in any one of these disciplines will cause a disturbance in the rhythmic flow of energy through the nadis and the chakras will lose their alignments. This affects the immunity of the body and leads to disease. The fluctuation that occurs in the rhythmic flow of energy is called 'sarpadosham' (the disturbed snake).

Healthy **Diseased**

In India, there is a belief that the cause of disease is the curse of the snake god (sarpashaapam). This belief originates in

the science of energy flow in the body, symbolised as a snake. It has nothing to do with the actual snake. There is hardly anyone who recognises that the actual sarpadosham (the disturbed snake) is within the body. In the traditional health care system, words such as kopam (anger), shapam (curse) and dosham (defect) mean disharmony.

To rectify sarpadosham, there are many rituals to please the snake god. These rituals are known as *sarpapooj*a or *nagarootu*. Let us examine the science behind these rituals.

The order (ceremony sequence) of snake worship is as follows:

1. The snake murthi is cleaned (jala abhishekam) with water
2. Then the murthi is cleaned with medicated water (panineer abhishekam)
3. Tender coconut water is poured over the murthi (ilaneer abhishekam)
4. Honey is poured over it (thenabhishekam)
5. Milk is poured over it (pal abhishekam)
6. Turmeric powder is sprinkled over it (manjal nivedyam)
7. Rice powder and baked rice are offered (malar nivedyam)
8. Sesame seeds are offered (ellu nivedyam)

The ritual of snake worship is the symbolisation of the most advanced and effective health care system. Let us see how significant this ritual is in the day to day life of modern man.

When we are ill, medical science advises either giving up

food or eating as little as possible. Why do we give up food? Once digestion is not required, the body has time and energy to enhance the immune system in a natural way.

Next, the patient's body and surroundings should be kept clean and germ free. The cleaning of the murthi with water and medicated water represents these steps.

The patient who has given up solid food needs liquid food to survive. Tender coconut water represents this. Coconut water is accepted by traditional and modern medical systems as one of the best natural drinks with high nutritional value. The next liquid food the patient can depend on is honey. Honey contains many minerals and antibacterial elements. Pouring of honey represents this. Gradually the patient can drink milk. As we know, milk is a complete food. Pouring of milk represents this. Turmeric powder comes next as solid food and medicine. Turmeric has the power to kill all the germs connected with disease. This shows the importance of sprinkling turmeric. Once the body is protected from germs, the patient can eat solid food. Rice powder (carbohydrates) represents this.

When the body starts accepting solid food, the patient has recovered from the disease. Through strict disciplines the body has gained immunity against the disease. The fluctuation that occurred in the nadi current is rectified. The problem in the snake symbol (sarpadosham) has gone. Now the patient can eat any type of solid food and come back to normal routine. The offering of sesame seeds (proteins) represents this.

If we study the rituals of snake temples such as the snake sacrifice (sarpabali) and conservation of the temple, we will

come to know that there is an interesting logic behind them which unifies these rituals and our lives.

Let us look at the general design of these snake temples. The temple is inside a small jungle. A wall, one to two feet high, separates the temple and the forest. Adjacent to the temple is a pond. Traditional prayer songs are sung every day to produce positive thoughts. Either once a month or once a year, the snake sacrifice (sarpabali) is performed. A very large picture of a snake is drawn on the floor using different natural powders of various colours. This is called *sarpa kolam*. After the completion of the picture, the prayer (pooja) starts. This pooja is accompanied by fast drumbeats and other traditional music forms. At the end of the prayer, the custodian (karmikan) of the prayers enters into a trance and rolls over the colourful snake picture and rubs it out. The ritual ends with this. The sacrifice of the snake is completed.

The message behind this sacrifice is very clear.

The colourful snake picture represents our colourful life, which is active due to the functions of the solar and lunar nadis (the snake symbol). This life is not stable. It is perishable. When a person becomes spiritually aware, he loses the attraction towards the colourful material life. The karmikan who is in the trance represents a person who has attained spiritual awareness. By wiping away the snake picture, the message is given that the spiritually aware person will be protected from the entanglements of possessions.

The importance of snake temples

The UN, recognising the underlying value of these temples, is giving financial aid to preserve snake temples in India and make people aware of the necessity of maintaining these temples.

Snake temples are the best examples of scientific preservation of the harmony of nature. Here, all living beings co-exist in natural environmental balance. Human beings are not allowed to enter the forest. That is why the temple is separated from the jungle by a low wall. Nobody is allowed to enter the forest even to sweep or clean. The falling leaves decay and, in the course of time, form a thick layer over the soil. This layer of decayed leaves has the capacity to absorb water. When it rains, this layer absorbs most of the rainwater like a sponge. Only a little flows away. The absorbed water slowly permeates the soil, the ground remains wet and the ground water level is maintained. This also balances the summer water level in ponds and canals.

The pond adjacent to the temple plays the role of a small water reservoir. In maintaining the water level in the nearby wells, this pond has a very significant role. It is also a shelter for creatures that live in the water.

The lush green forest encircling the temple purifies the air in the locality. In this way the snake temple and its rituals are applied symbols of the maintenance of health of individuals, societies and nature. However, we should examine whether modern society is exploring the benefits of this traditional wisdom.

Lord Shanmughan

Shanmughan, known by different names such as Murugan, Karthikeyan, Skandan and Velayudhan, is widely worshipped in South India.

In the puranas it is said that Lord Shiva has two sons, Lord Ganapathi, the elder son and Lord Murugan, the younger. Ganapathi is the symbol of spiritual knowledge and Murugan represents both material and spiritual life.

The functioning of the soul in the body depends mainly on three nadis. They are ida (lunar), pingala (solar) and sushumna (spinal cord). If sushumna is activated, spiritual consciousness will dominate. The trunk of Lord Ganapathi symbolises this. If the solar and lunar nadis are in action, material consciousness will dominate. Lord Murugan's two wives, Goddess Valli and Goddess Devayani represent these activated solar and lunar nadis.

Due to the activation of solar and lunar nadis, sensory knowledge (indriyabodham) will become powerful and

six types of influences will be seen in the behaviour of the person. They are:

1. *Kamam* (desire)
2. *Krodham* (anger) - if the desire is not fulfilled, anger is produced
3. *Lobham* (greed) - if desire is fulfilled, there is a craving for more
4. *Moham* (illusion) - when a person is fully occupied in fulfilling material desires, he is under the spell of illusion
5. *Madam* (pride) - the person under illusion has an inflated ego and pride
6. *Matsaryam* (competition) - the person who has an inflated ego and pride will compare himself with others and involuntarily, compete with them

In yogic literature, these six personality traits are called *shadvairies* (shad means six, vairi means enemy). These egotistic feelings are obstacles to spiritual development. That is why they are called enemies. But in the material world they are the foundation stones of prosperity. This is the paradox. These six feelings are symbolised as the six faces of the God Murugan, hence he is known as Shanmughan (God with six faces). There is a common belief that Lord Murugan is known as Shanmughan because he is well versed in the *Veda angas* – Shiksha, Niruktam, Vyakaranam, Chandashastram, Kalpashastram and Jyothisham. However, in the Siddha yoga tradition, Lord Murugan is the perfect symbolisation of the integration of spiritual awareness and material prosperity.

The vehicle of this God is the peacock. The peacock represents a colourful and vibrant material life. A snake can be seen under the feet of the peacock. The snake represents spiritual consciousness. The overall picture shows a dominant material prosperity, yet awareness of spiritual consciousness.

The God symbol conveys the message of a successful material life with a foundation of spiritual consistency.

At the same time, this God symbol shows us how the most practical yoga discipline (Mahayoga) can be applied in the middle of a busy material life.

The weapon of Lord Muruga is the spear (vel). This is the symbol of a powerful meditation technique. In yoga philosophy, weapons are used to conquer our own ignorance, not to fight with others.

When the *sushumna* (spinal cord) is activated, the solar and lunar nadis become powerless. So, sushumna is represented as the stem of the vel. Then, from the throat, the nadi currents will be united as a flame of light. This represents vel.

It is believed that the *Siddha yoga* tradition originated from Lord Shiva. It was then taught to Murugan and from Murugan it was given to Sage Agastyar. From Agastyar, the traditional lineage began and exists as Siddha parampara (Siddha lineage).

Lord Ayyappan

The name Ayyappan is very familiar in South India. It is not widely known in the North. There are many reasons for this, which we need not discuss here. Let us analyse the symbol.

There are many ongoing arguments about the origin of this God. Some say that he is the manifestation (avatar) of the Supreme God, Shiva. Others say he is only an exaggeration based on a historical character. But from a scientific viewpoint, it is obvious that this concept is the symbolisation of one of the powerful yoga techniques for self realisation. When we analyse the science behind the method of worship (pooja) and rituals (Acharas) this is clearly revealed.

One of the popular beliefs about Lord Ayyappan's origin is as follows:

There was a time when the Gods (Devas or divine powers) became lazy and just spent their time in sensual enjoyment. Gradually, they became weak and confused. Taking advantage of this opportunity the Asuras (evil powers) defeated the devas and captured Devalokam (heaven). To regain power, the Deva Guru (Master of the Devas) prescribed a special medicine called Amruth (nectar). Amruth was kept under the ocean of milk (Paalazhi) where Lord Vishnu resides. With the guidance of Vishnu, the Devas decided to churn the Paalazhi. They called the Asuras for help with an understanding that both parties would share the nectar. Then, both started churning the ocean of milk. This is known as "Paalazhi Madhanam'' or "Samudra madhanam". At the end of Paalazhi madhanam, the nectar rose to the top. Immediately the Asuras snatched the nectar away from the devas and hid it in Paathal (hell). The downhearted Devas prayed to Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu assured the Devas that he would bring back the nectar to them.

Lord Vishnu transformed himself into a beautiful woman – *Mohini* (the woman who put everyone under her spell) and reached Paathal. The Asuras, entranced by Mohini, started fighting each other to have her. Mohini offered a solution. Each had to close his eyes and wait, Mohini would marry the one who opened his eyes last. All the Asuras closed their eyes and sat down, each resolved to be the last to open his eyes. In the meantime, Mohini left for heaven with the

nectar. The Devas, by drinking the nectar, were revitalised and ecstatic and all their problems were solved. Now, while the Devas were restored to happiness, Lord Shiva fell into trouble. How? Lord Shiva fell under the spell of Mohini's beauty. Since Lord Shiva is very powerful, Mohini could not deny him. Finally, Mohini delivered a baby. The child who was born as a union of the power of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu is known as Lord Ayyappan. The Gods were not sure what to do with the child because it was not born in a natural way.

Lord Shiva then remembered that one of his devotees, the King of Pandalam, did not have a child. So it was decided to give the child to the King. A precious diamond (mani) was tied to the neck of the child, and the child was left in the forest where the king was hunting. The king found the baby in the middle of the forest and was very happy. As the baby was found with a divine stone (mani) round his neck, he was called Manikanta Kumaran. Kanta means neck and Kumaran means boy. Manikanta Kumaran was courageous, helpful and had a very attractive personality. Everyone liked him very much. Sometime later, the Queen delivered a baby boy. When the two boys had grown up, the king decided to hand over power to the elder son, prince Manikantan. But the Queen wanted to make her own son king. So she decided to eliminate Manikantan with the help of Rajavaidyan (the court physician). As a part of their plan, the Queen began to scream as though she had a severe stomach ache. The physician declared the disease extremely dangerous and asked for the milk

of a leopard to prepare a special medicine. According to custom, the elder son was responsible for the family. Thus it was the responsibility (dharma) of Manikantan to get the leopard milk to save his mother. The queen and the physician calculated that Manikantan, in search of leopard milk, would be killed by wild animals in the forest. Manikantan understood this conspiracy through his inner eye and pretended that he did not know anything. He went into the forest in search of leopard milk. Using his magical powers, he mounted a leopard and rode back to the palace. He asked the physician to milk the leopard as required. The queen and physician were terrified and realised their mistake. They begged Manikantan's forgiveness in front of the gathered assembly. **

Then, Prince Manikantan declared that his duty on earth was over and he was going back to the forest to meditate (tapas). From that day onwards he would be known as Lord Ayyappan. He asked the king to build a temple for him in the middle of the forest. His temple, Sabarimala, would be open to people for only 41 days a year. This period is called Mandalakalam. Women between the ages of ten and fifty or those with an active menstrual cycle are not allowed to enter his temple. It is believed that if they did enter, he might lose his power of celibacy (brahmacharyam). Now let us understand the message behind the story.

According to the Siddha yoga tradition, we are all limited manifestations of the unlimited reality - Brahmam or the

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** Many stories are told, of *Manikantan* killing the powerful evil demon called *Mahishi*, of his defeating a robber called '*Vavar*', and several others.

Almighty Lord Shiva. This is expressed in the mantra, *Shivoham* (I, myself, am Lord Shiva). When the unmodified Almighty God unites with Maya (illusion) he takes a limited form with limited self consciousness. This form is known as Jeevabodham. In the story of Lord Ayyappan, the disguised form of Lord Vishnu represents illusionary nature – Mohini. When the Almighty Spirit (Shiva) unites with nature (Mohini), self consciousness evolves. That limited self consciousness represents Lord Ayyappan. The Self develops into mind, senses and body. We are all created in this manner. Here the father, Lord Shiva represents the unmodified state of energy (Paramatman) and Lord Ayyappan represents the limited manifested state of energy (Jeevatman).

As we acquire body consciousness (Ayyappan), the limited mind and senses gain control over the Self and we feel that we are limited perishable living beings and forget our real state of immortality. In yogic terms, this state is known as the forest of life (Samsara kodumkadu). In the story, the forest where the newborn Ayyappan is placed represents our life. In life, as in the forest, though we meet all types of danger, we also find shelter.

The despondency of ordinary man is caused by the limited self consciousness. The Master reminds us that you are not limited, you are not the body, you are the unlimited cosmic soul (Tat Twam Asi). This truth must be emphasised in the mind through daily contemplation or meditation. Anyone can follow this practice and lead a contented life. Lord Ayyappan symbolises this spiritual practice.

Ayyappan is a Malayalam word derived from Tamil. In Tamil, 'Aiynth' means Five, 'Appan' means controller or god or something beyond the five senses. It is rendered in Malayalam as Ayyappan. In reality, we all have the potential to control and master the five senses. Ayyappan means the one who has gone beyond his five senses and established himself in higher consciousness.

What is Sabarimala?

Sabarimala is a hill in the thickly forested Sahya Mountains. 'Sabari' is the name of a woman and 'mala' means hill. There is a story behind this name, which we need not recount here. Technically, Sabari should be called 'Sabali'('Sa' is the syllable from 'Hamsa' mantra, 'Bali' means sacrifice). Here, the syllable 'Sa' is being sacrificed. This has been explained as 'Chandrabhedanam' under the topic **'Then what is the actual meaning of the word Hindu? What is its origin?'**

The Ayyappa temple stands on top of this hill. Devotees are allowed to visit the temple only during a specified period of 41 days in a year. The journey to the temple follows a steep and narrow pathway through a thick forest and represents our strenuous life journey. The journey starts by breaking a coconut in front of the murthi of Lord Ganapathi, which stands at the very beginning of the path. As explained in the chapter on Lord Ganapathi, the breaking of a coconut in front of the murthi symbolises renunciation of the fruits of action (karma) with a detached mind. This is known as *nishkama karma*. The advancement along the path, which is full of stones and thorns, symbolises the progress of life. To gain sufficient strength to face the obstacles, we should

tell ourselves, "I am not the body, I am the soul (Aham Brahmasmi)". That is why it is advised that we chant the mantra Ayyappa, Ayyappa all through the journey. As we walk along the path, we come across delectable fruits and beautiful streams in the forest. These represent the pleasures and comforts we experience in our lives. But as a wise man, fix the mind in the Truth so as not to be carried away by the comforts. On the way, we may fall or be attacked by wild animals. These are the dangers we face in life. Even in these extreme situations we must remind ourselves, "I am not the body, I am the soul." The soul cannot be affected by anything. At the end of the journey, having finished the climb, we reach level ground, called 'Sannidhanam', which means the place of God.

The path, from the beginning of the hill (Pampa) to the end (Sannidhanam), represents our material life (Grahastasramam). When we reach Sannidhanam, we have arrived at the stage of detachment (Vanaprastham). Here, we see the eighteen steps that lead to the sanctum sanctorum.

The eighteen steps (*pathinettaampadi*) represent the totality of life as described in the chapter, "Ganapathi".

From the practical point of view, climbing these steps to the temple symbolises the method of pranayama. By practising pranayama, we have to overcome the eighteen tattwas, through which the ego manifests. The ultimate aim of yoga is to conquer the ego. As we know, breath control and meditation are the ways to liberate ourselves from the bondage of Nature.

These steps, which are steep and slippery with a narrow tread, remind us that we must be extremely careful as we progress in meditation.

The climbing of these steps represents *sanyasasramam* (total renunciation from life). Before stepping on to the stairway, we have to crack open the *neythenga* (sealed coconut filled with ghee), collect the ghee in a container and discard the kernels in the *aazhi* (sacrificial fire) next to the stairway. This ritual shows the importance of giving up all bodily attachments and keeping the spiritual essence (ghee).

After the renunciation of bodily attachments, we should overcome the eighteen planes of life functions through systematic meditation and come face to face with the ultimate reality – God. That is what is called enlightenment. This final step in the journey to enlightenment is symbolised as *Ayyappa darshanam* (seeing the murthi of Lord Ayyappan). Having climbed the eighteenth step, we see a small temple (garbagraha) with only one door, above which is written "Tatwamasi" (Thou art that – you are what you are looking for). When the door is open, the golden murthi of Lord Ayyappan is visible. The *garbagraham* symbolises the cave of the heart and the murthi is our own Self.

What is the essence of the disciplines (vratas) followed by a person who makes a pilgrimage to this temple?

It is said that before going to Sabarimala, a person should give up non-vegetarian food and sexual activity for 41 days (Mandala kaalam). Once a year these strict disciplines will help to rejuvenate him. An ordinary person may not take

seriously the rules of health and maintenance of the body. If these were to be followed in the name of God, that person would be even more serious about his practice. Whatever may be the ways, however, the masters were focussed only on the results. Lord Ayyappan and the rituals symbolise Kundalini yoga which is one of the major paths for self realisation.

There are two sections in the practice of *Kundalini* yoga.

1. *Saumya Sadhana* (gentle practice)
2. *Teevra Sadhana* (aggressive practice)

Of these, Saumya Sadhana (gentle practice) is symbolised as the temple visit to any Ayyappa temple any time round the year. This section of the practice is not so rigid in its disciplines. Usually the devotees of Ayyappan follow this section.

The other, aggressive and fast, is very strict in its rules and regulations. In this section of practice, there will be immediate results. The result achieved by a gentle practitioner within 18 years would be possible for a practitioner of the aggressive method within 41 days.

The posture in which Lord Ayyappan sits is Bhadrasanam (Baddhakonasanam). This posture is usually used for aggressive practice. The hand mudra (symbol) shown is "chinmudra", which indicates the blocking of breath (prana). Authentic texts and experienced practitioners declare that if one sits in Bhadrasana and performs successfully the Mahabandhanam (the great block), the serpent power (Kundalini shakthi) would be awakened

like a snake that is beaten. On the 41st day of meditation, the third eye will be activated. *Makarajyothi* represents this activation.

At the end of *mandalakaalam*, as the evening rituals come to a close, the door of the sanctum sanctorum opens. At the same time, a star rises in the night sky, as though it were coming to pay homage to Lord Ayyappan. At the end of 41 days of intense meditation, in the *chidakasha* (inner mental space of the practitioner), the flame of knowledge is illumined (third eye activation). This is represented by the light of the rising star (Makarajyothi). This star is visible on only one night in a year.

In *Teevra sadhana*, though the result is quick, even a simple mistake can lead the practitioner into mental imbalance or even death. That is why seclusion, celibacy and silence are necessary for aggressive practitioners. Lord Ayyappan in Sabarimala symbolises these strict disciplines.

Through simple and interesting stories, the Masters of yoga always tried to keep alive the messages of advanced spiritual lessons among the ordinary masses. They often used historical incidents and scientific discoveries for this purpose. The time of the rising of the *makara star* was pure astronomical calculation. This time was connected with the rituals of the Ayyappa temple to impress and attract the ordinary people to this yogic message. The eagle that appears above the temple during *makara samkranthi* also gives an ecstatic experience for the devotees.

Many stories exist about this eagle and its link with God.

Taking a pragmatic view, we can see that the instinctual responses of the birds and animals towards nature are carefully observed and these are connected with the rituals to make them attractive. On the last day of the rituals a flame is lit deep in the forest. This light is called *makara deepam* (makara flame). This conveys the message that the spiritually enlightened person will always be guided by his inner light on his journey through the forest. The forest, as we said earlier, represents our life.

Why are women between the ages of ten and fifty not permitted to visit this temple?

Lord Ayyappan in Sabarimala represents the aggressive practice of kundalini yoga. Among the many disciplines of this practice, brahmacharyam (celibacy) is very important. Celibacy must be maintained for 41 days. The first step of kundalini yoga is to awaken the kundalini power from the root chakra (mooladharam). That means, through mahabandhanam (blocking of breath) all functions cease and kundalini will be awakened within eighteen days. At the next stage the awakened power should be guided towards the crown chakra (sahasraram) by piercing the chakras between mooladharam and sahasraram one by one. The centre just above the root chakra is the genital chakra (swadhisthanam). Swadhistanam is the centre for sexual desires and menstruation. During aggressive meditation, no activity of any kind is permitted in swadhisthanam.

Men can suspend the functions of swadhistanam temporarily by leading a secluded life, detachment and breath control. All functions of the body can be arrested

through breath control except menstruation. Women cannot control their menstruation for 41 days. This biological difference is a limitation for women to enter into aggressive meditation. That is why women with active menstrual cycle are not allowed to visit Sabarimala Ayyapan. This is not discrimination against women, but a message for the safety of women practitioners of Teevra sadhana. There are no such restrictions in other Ayyappa temples, meaning, Saumya sadhana can be practised by anyone, anywhere and at anytime.

Some people believe that if they could go to Sabarimala once a year, their sins would be removed by the blessings of Lord Ayyappan. Of course, Lord Ayyappan's blessings are always there. But it is necessary to understand the meaning and truth behind the concept of Ayyappan and apply these in our life. Otherwise the temple visit would be no more than just sightseeing. Lord Ayyappan is our own soul. Every individual must be aware of this and through practice, experience it for himself. Lord Ayyappan and the Sabarimala temple are symbols of this message.

Lord Hanuman the Monkey God

Hanuman is one of the deeply profound concepts of God in Bhakthi Yoga (Yoga of devotion). But this concept has also been much misinterpreted.

Like all other concepts of God, Lord Hanuman is also kept alive in the minds of people through many interesting stories. In Hanuman purana, (the epic about Lord Hanuman) it is said that Hanuman was born as a monkey. His parents are Anjana and Lord Shiva (Mahadevan). Though the story is very mysterious, it has a practical spiritual message. According to the story, Lord Shiva became excited, and his energy was carried by Vayubhagavan (the God of Air) and deposited in Anjana, who then bore a son, Hanuman. So Hanuman is generally known as the son of Vayubhagavan. This epic is a step-by-step narration of the progress of life from a monkey to a spiritual practitioner and from a practitioner to a complete being. In essence it is an allegory of a person who is as restless as a monkey reaching a higher state of consciousness (God consciousness) through systematic meditation.

As explained before, the unmodified cosmic consciousness (Lord Shiva) unites with the illusionary power (opposite to cosmic consciousness – Goddess Shakthi) to create a life (soul + body). Even though life is pure consciousness, due to its association with illusion it is bound by a limited body consciousness. In yogic language this state of mind is called "*Ajnana* or maya" (ignorance). This is the symbolic meaning of Hanuman being born of Anjana, ignorance. The ignorant mind is unstable and restless. The external appearance of Hanuman – a monkey - represents this state of mind, which is that of an ordinary person.

As he begins to meditate, the practitioner enters a second life (Dwijan). This second life in the spiritual world unfolds through the practice of pranayama (breathing exercise). Since the external sign of breath is air, the new life we get through practising the breathing exercise is considered an endowment of the Air God. That is why Hanuman is known as the son of the Air God. In Kundalini yoga practice, disciplines such as seclusion, silence and chastity are essential. Hence Hanuman is called *nityabrahmachari* (lifelong celibate). Through rigorous practice the practitioner acquires eight different types of extraordinary powers (Ashtaiswarya siddhis). He can now become as small as an ant and as big as an elephant. He can vanish like the wind and become visible again like a mountain. Thus he is called magical.

Once he has understood the secret of death through yoga, he actually conquers death. Therefore, he is given the name *Chiranjeevi* (immortal).

Hanuman is famous for his devotion to Lord Rama. He constantly recites the mantra 'Ram'. The recitation of the Ram mantra is the mahabandhanam practice. We cannot pronounce the letter 'Ra' without contracting the throat and the letter 'm' can be pronounced only by closing the lips. So recitation of the 'Ram' mantra will create, as a natural effect, the Jalandhara Bandhanam (throat lock), which is the initial practice of Mahabandhanam (the great lock).

Kantamakunchya hrudaye
Stapayechimbukam drudam

(Hata yoga Pradeepika)

Contract the throat, keep the chin down and then hold the position steady.

With the guidance of the Guru, when the Hamsa mantra (the pulse of life) is reversed and becomes soham through Mahabandhanam, the practitioner becomes capable of breaking the solar and lunar nadis. Among these nadis, the lunar nadi is broken first. Once, the 'sa' is cut from 'Hamsa', ham remains. Meditation then progresses as contemplation on the sound 'ham'. Contemplation of either a subject or an object is known as mananam in Sanskrit. The practitioner who does mananam on the sound Ham is called Hanuman. Through intense meditation Hanuman overcomes his monkey consciousness and attains his real state of pure cosmic consciousness – the Mahadevan.

Male OM

Female OM

The two divisions of Mahadevan (male and female) unite to form a body. When the practitioner comes face to face with this secret of nature he is known as *Kapaleeswaran* (*Kapal* means the skull and *Eswara* means God). That means he raises himself to the state of the creator of the skull. Symbolically this is explained in the figure of Lord Hanuman.

The essence behind this God concept explains how an ordinary man can come out from his monkey state of mind and raise himself to the ultimate state of God consciousness.

Lord Shiva (Mahadevan)

According to modern science, energy can neither be created nor be destroyed. If one form of energy changes, it will appear in another form. In ancient science, this is described as reincarnation. The soul (atman) can neither be created nor be destroyed, it is eternal.

Naasato vidyate bhavo, nabhavo vidyate satah (Gita 2.16)

The changeless, homogeneous Self always exists. It is the only Reality.

But it manifests itself through different bodies.

Vasamsi jeernaani yathaa vihaaya
navani gruhnaadi naroparani
tatha sareeraani vihaayajeernani
nyaani samyathi navani dehi

Birth and death are only a change in the state of energy. According to the Gita, just as we take off our old shirt and put on a new one, the soul (atman) gives up one body (death) and takes a new one (birth).

Through the scientific practice of yoga, anyone can experience this truth.

We have seen that death is only a change in the state of matter. Change is inevitable in nature. The combination of five elements is the basis of nature. This is known as *pancheekarana*. Lord Shiva in the physical state is the symbolisation of this pancheekarana. Hence he has another name - *panchamukha*. Pancha means five and mukha means face. The ratio of combination of elements in nature will keep changing. Birth leads to death and death leads to another birth. This process of change is symbolised as the God of death, Lord Shiva. This is why ordinary people have a fear of Lord Shiva. But this fear has no basis, because change occurs within everybody. All molecules in nature are subject to change. So in essence we all are nothing but manifestations of Lord Shiva – The God of death and birth. The mantra "Shivoham" means "I, myself, am Shiva".

Let us consider Lord Shiva in detail. He is clothed in the bark of a tree or the skin of an animal and has a garland

of rudraksha beads round his neck. These are the symbols of renunciation. The snake around his neck, worn as an ornament, represents the nervous system that has been controlled through meditation. The third eye symbolises the activated sixth sense. The crescent moon on his head shows the mantra for transcendental meditation, *Ajapa gayatri* (Sreevidya moola mantra). This symbol is thus also called the *anu-svara*, or the primordial atom - sound of creation.

The water flowing from the hair (ganga) represents amruth or nectar. In the language of physiology, it is called the cerebrospinal fluid. This fluid in the head is the medium of maintaining the 'ojas' (vitality). Through intense yoga practice, one can make this fluid flow down from the head to the lower chakras and revitalise them. The water flow from Shiva's head symbolises this practice. It is believed that the impressions and memories of one's past life (poorva janma samskaras) still exist in our body in a dormant state. They are called 'pithrukkal' (forefathers). They live in the lower chakras. According to the science of yoga, a person is bound to reincarnate through countless bodies until he practices intense yoga and makes the nectar (amrutha ganga) flow down from the head to the lower chakras and gives a chance for the inherited impressions for final emancipation (moksham). Once this is done, the person becomes eternally free from the bondage of nature (kala chakram).

This is also taught to society through the interesting story of the King Bhageeratha. According to the story, King Bhageeratha did strenuous meditation (tapas) on Lord

Shiva, in order to make him happy and be given a boon. Shiva was impressed with his determination and agreed to grant him a boon. Bhageeratha prayed to Lord Shiva to ask the Goddess Ganga to flow from Shiva's head to the earth and liberate Bhageeratha's forefathers. Fulfilling Shiva's request, Goddess Ganga flowed down from the heavens to earth for Bhageeratha. People believe that the river Ganga (Ganges) originated for this reason. This is why Indians consider the river Ganga a divine river. The effort made by King Bhageeratha is known as Bhageeratha prayatnam (Bhageeratha's task). Even now Indians express the seriousness of a task by saying that "it is a Bhageeratha prayatnam". In practical terms it signifies the physical and mental practice undertaken by a person for attaining a higher state of consciousness.

There is a small serpent on Shiva's hair. This represents the Kundalini shakthi (serpent power) in the root chakra. An expert in Kundalini yoga would awaken the serpent power from the root chakra and guide it to the crown chakra through practice. The symbol of Lord Shiva is the completion of all yogas.

Shiva's weapon is the trident (trishul). A weapon here means a tool to conquer our own ignorance. Meditation is based on the solar nadi, lunar nadi and spinal cord (sushumna). The three prongs of the trident represent these three. The main rod represents the backbone. A small drum tied to the trident is the symbol of the cosmic sound (Om).

The symbol of Shiva, who is in meditation, represents the passive state of consciousness (nirguna brahmam). In

this state his wife, Parvati and his vehicle or vahana, the bull Nandi are not visible. But the Nataraja or dancing Shiva symbolises the active state of consciousness (saguna brahmam). Here, with wife Parvati (Nature) and Nandi (body consciousness) the self is engaged in the material plane of consciousness. These two expressions are our own states of consciousness – spiritual and physical.

The functioning of the microcosm (Anu) and the macrocosm (*Andakadaham*) is based on an eternal law of nature. The path towards this law is through meditation. Swami Vivekananda said that a person who knows one grain of sand would know all the grains in the universe.

In the same way, a person who knows himself would come to know the cosmic Self. Shiva lingam symbolises this message. The practitioner's mind should be focussed within his own body and its functions. For safe advancement in meditation *nirakara dhyanam* (meditation on the Self) is advised.

When we withdraw our mental waves from external objects and focus them on a single point, tremendous heat energy is produced at that point. We know that heat causes changes; for example, water can be changed into steam by heating it. When matter changes from one state to another, a gigantic amount of energy is liberated. The shape that is able to withstand these types of energy explosions is the *shivalinga* form. If we look at atomic reactors all over the world, it will be seen that they are all huge shivalingams.

Due to concentration of the mind, the mind and body go through many mysterious changes. Unless we monitor and

control the subtle functions of the mind, it may go beyond control and lead the practitioner into mental disorder. To avoid this risk, the mind should be focussed inside the head rather than fixing it on objects outside the body.

Our head is a reactor made by nature. It can withstand any kind of energy explosion during meditation. This energy explosion due to intense meditation is called 'murthi darsanam' (vision of Gods). If the practitioner (sadhaka) is not scientifically trained, after having a vision of a God it may be difficult or impossible for him to come back from that frame of mind to the normal state. If the mind is fixed within the head, this danger can be avoided.

Let us look at the shivalingam in our own body. In the meditation posture, when the sense organs are withdrawn during meditation, a stone like state is produced.

After that, the four states of mind - jaagrath (conscious state), swapna (subconscious state), sushupti (unconscious state) and tureeyam (superconscious state) remain. The first three are marked by three horizontal lines and the fourth is marked as a vermilion spot. When this is made into a murthi, the head shape is retained.

Meditation on shivalingam is a safe, simple and flexible method of meditation. All other forms of meditation are complex and strict in their timings and rituals. Whatever method we use, it will eventually lead to meditation on shivalingam. The text Hatayoga pradeepika says:

"Na poojayeth lingam ratrau
Na poojayeth lingam diva
Poojayeth lingam sarvada"

Do not meditate on shivalingam at night
Do not meditate on shivalingam at day
Meditate on shivalingam always.

This shlokam cannot be taken literally. It is only a profound method of meditation and is not about the external ritual (bahya pooja). The shlokam refers to a very simple and practical method of reciting a root mantra (*moola mantra japam*). This mantra is linked with the respiratory system of the practitioner at the time of initiation. Meditation will then become, with practice, effortless and natural. All these explanations are meant only for those who are serious in meditation.

Now, let us see how an ordinary person could benefit from visiting a Shiva temple.

The Master who establishes a temple infuses his spiritual power into the idol (prana prathista) and instructs that daily rituals be performed to maintain that energy. Shiva temples are usually established by very powerful Gurus. The shape of the shivalingam can conserve an enormous amount of energy, hence it is known as jyothirlingam. The energy emitted from these lingams will influence even

the surroundings of the temple. Everyone who visits the temple will receive the benefit of this energy. The devotee also receives energy by drinking the water, milk and honey energised by being poured onto the lingam (abhishekam) and collected back as theertham (divine liquid). For collecting these liquids a channel is made on the lingam. This type of lingam is kept in temples.

When a person visits these temples and attends the rituals, he unknowingly gets the benefits of spiritual energy.

Lord Vishnu

We have spoken about Lord Maheshwara (Lord Shiva), who is the ultimate symbol of creation and destruction. Now you may be interested in knowing about Lord Vishnu – the God of preservation. But all through our discussion, do not forget that all these God concepts are symbols of

spiritual revelations and they are within everyone.

> The search for God must be within the self. If you go out in search of Lord Shiva or Lord Vishnu or any other God, finally you will come back to your own self. This truth should be kept alive in the mind.

Now let us consider Lord Vishnu, the God who reclines on a snake with five heads lying in an ocean of milk (Palazhi).

The bright and powerful cosmic consciousness is symbolised as Palazhi. Each individual's mind is a part of this cosmic consciousness. The snake with five heads represents our body, which is made by a combination of the five elements. Lord Vishnu, symbolising the discriminative faculty of the mind – intellect (vivekam) - lies on the snake as a superior being or observer.

On either side of Lord Vishnu stand the Devas (Gods) and Asuras (demons). They are our positive and negative thoughts respectively. Actually, these thoughts complement each other. But externally they seem to be opposites. Because of the competition between positive and negative thoughts, the mind will always be confused or disturbed. The ocean of milk will be rough. Whenever the demons dominate over the Gods, Vishnu intervenes to suppress the demons and bring up the Devas. This shows how our intellect acts in the mind to eliminate negative thoughts and maintain positive thoughts. Whenever Lord Vishnu is not available to support the Devas, destruction happens.

This is why the Gurus advised us to engage with *Vishnu pooja* (worship of Lord Vishnu). This ritual propagates the message that we should find intellectual solutions for our problems within ourselves, rather than externalising these into conflicts, because the root cause of the conflict is within us. Recognising this and implementing this idea in our lives is the real Vishnu pooja.

Sometimes problems come up where the intellect cannot find a solution. We can solve these riddles only within our inner domain. For that we have to go into the depths of our mind. This process is called *Palazhi madhanam* (churning of the ocean of milk). We find many stories in our epics based on Palazhi madhanam.

During the churning, Kalakooda Visha (the most powerful poison) comes out as the first product. This represents the hidden destructive tendency of our mind. Then as the churning progresses, all things, both good and bad, come out from the Palazhi. They are the Goddess Lakshmi (the Goddess of prosperity), Goddess Mayalakshmi (the Goddess of poverty), Airavatham (the celestial elephant), Uchaisravas (the celestial horse), Aswini devas (celestial physician twins) etc.

This shows that our mind contains everything. If we keep verifying to find out which things are useful and which are not, we can protect ourselves from falling into trouble. This is the duty of Lord Vishnu (*vivekam* or intellect). If the churning of mind (contemplation) continues, finally the Amruth (nectar) will come out. If anybody drinks nectar they will become immortal. This nectar symbolises spiritual

enlightenment. An enlightened person is immortal. This immortality also comes from our own mind.

Sree Krishnan

The concept of Lord Krishna is extraordinary. This is one of the most comprehensive God concepts in Eastern spiritual wisdom. The Masters, who experienced the science of life as a whole, introduced this concept as a person with different personalities. Everyone can conceive this idea of Krishna through his own perspective. Krishna may be seen as a son, lover, husband, friend, father, protector, guru, or in any other form. He is available to everyone according to their wish. The devotion to Krishna begins as a devotee-God relationship, but slowly it develops into a spiritual unification through yoga.

Krishna is introduced as Lord Vishnu's ninth incarnation (Avatar) in the epics. He is the symbol of cosmic consciousness, which is inherent in all beings. He is present in the stories as a mediator. He is the symbol of intellectual power and shows the importance of using it at the right time and in the right way.

The Krishna concept is expressed with its complete beauty and sublime power in the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita, which discusses the depth of yoga philosophy, cannot be fully understood through the intellect. Its message can only be experienced. Since it is another subject, there is no need to go into further detail. If we analyse the picture of Lord Krishna who removes Arjuna's despondency by his powerful words and energises him to fight successfully in the **Mahabharata war, we will come to know how significant Krishna's role is in our day to day life.

** The Mahabharata War - The Mahabharata epic is the story of two families, the *Kauravas* and *Pandavas*, descended from one grandfather. The central theme of the story is the war between these two. The battlefield is *Kurukshetra*. Among the *Pandavas*, Arjuna, the legendary archer, is the key to winning the war. As the war is about to begin, Arjuna wanted to survey the two armies. Krishna, his charioteer, drove Arjuna's chariot to the centre of the battlefield and stopped in the middle of the two armies. Seeing his kith and kin amassed on the opposite side, ready to kill or be killed, Arjuna became despondent, and his bow, the mighty *Gandiva*, slipped from his trembling hand. The nervous Arjuna sat down and declared, "I will not fight". Here, Krishna, his charioteer, becomes his guru and delivers his discourse, the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Krishna is the charioteer of Arjuna. Victory in war depends on strategic control of the chariot. Here, the chariot represents the body. The charioteer, Krishna, represents the cosmic intelligence (vivekam) and Arjuna is Atman (the soul). The five horses in the chariot are the five sense organs. The battlefield, Kurukshetra, is our life. The armies on both sides, the Pandavas and Kauravas, are our positive and negative thoughts.

Arjuna, the Atman or soul, is winning the war (the war of life) only because he has taken Krishna (cosmic consciousness) as his charioteer. In other words, Arjuna is the symbol of a person who surrenders the selfish ego to cosmic intelligence and completes the journey of life successfully.

The literal meaning of the word Krishna is the energy which attracts everything towards its centre.

Karshyathe anena ithi krishna

This means the energy that binds molecules to create different forms. For example, water has its own state of existence because a force is holding the water molecules together. That cohesiveness is called Krishna. If water molecules lose their cohesiveness, they will be transformed into vapour which has a different level of cohesiveness. Water molecules can also be converted to ice which has yet a different level of cohesiveness. Anything in the universe having a shape has this power of cohesiveness in action. Now in our body, why do the body parts not fall apart? A certain power holds it together. That mysterious power of cohesiveness is called Krishna. This power is directly in

contact or linked with the cosmic energy which we may call cosmic intelligence. If our intellect can be connected with that inner energy or Krishna consciousness, that person will transform himself into cosmic intelligence or cosmic consciousness through which he can overcome the challenges of life. This is called Krishna consciousness.

Goddesses

Are only male Gods relevant in the discipline of Yoga?

Certainly not! There are many Goddesses in this tradition. The ultimate form of energy (Cosmic Consciousness) is also represented as *Tripura Sundari*, the ultimate Goddess. All God forms and prayers are derived from this energy, commonly known as Parashakti (The ultimate energy).

The first manifestation of Parashakti is the Goddess Durga (the visible universe). From Durga, many other forms are derived - Lakshmi (Goddess of prosperity), Saraswati (Goddess of knowledge), Kali (Goddess of destruction) and others.

Is not the Navaratri festival based on the Goddesses? What is the message behind this festival?

As we have seen before, in every festival there is a message for the benefit of the individual. Let us see what this ritual involves.

The word nava means nine and ratri means night (the darkness of ignorance). During navaratri, the individual removes the darkness of ignorance and awakens the light (spiritual energy) within himself. The festival is celebrated

for nine nights. The first three nights are for the worship of Goddess Durga, the next three are for Goddess Saraswati and the last three for Goddess Lakshmi.

The unmodified state of energy is Parasakhti. For our life, we need to have a modified form of energy. That is what is called Durga. This process is called Durga pooja. That Durga power should be converted into the power of knowledge – Saraswati. That process is called Saraswathi pooja. For attaining material wealth, the power of knowledge needs to be converted to power of wealth – Lakshmi. That process is called Lakshmi pooja. These poojas collectively are called the Navarathri pooja.

A person has basically nine emotions (Nava rasas) which are Shringara (love/beauty), Hasya (laughter), Karuna (sorrow), Raudra (anger), Veera (heroism/courage), Bhayanaka (terror/fear), Bibhatsya (disgust), Adbutha (surprise/wonder) and Shantha (peace or tranquillity). These nine emotions are influenced by the nine planets (Navagrahas). Each and every cell in our body is aligned with the power of these planets and other celestial bodies.

Navarathri is only a message given by the masters for a successful life. This should be adopted in each and every breath. Do these poojas every moment not as a ritual, but as part of our awareness.

Chapter 8

The Essence of AUM (Nadabrahman)

OMKAR (AUM)

This spiritual symbol has been much discussed as well as much misinterpreted. Let us look at it from a yogic point of view - *"Omitheytaksharamidam sarvam"* (Mandookyopanishath).

Everything evolves from AUM, exists in AUM and dissolves in AUM.

The Bible says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Modern science says there was a big bang that produced a field of electromagnetic radiation from which light evolved, from light, sound evolved, and from sound, matter evolved.

The essence of these three statements is the concluding point of spiritual and material sciences.

In any branch of science, the inventions and discoveries take place in the scientist's mind. In search of new ideas, modern science depends on methods that can be verified externally by the sensory organs and other equipments. But in spiritual science, the *sadhaka* (scientist) considers his body as a miniature universe and the search for universal secrets is carried out within the self. Through that inner search, the truth that is revealed to him about his own Self is the ultimate truth about the cosmic Self. By realising his own Self, he realises everything in this universe as himself - Aham Brahmasmi.

The method of understanding the ultimate truth through inner contemplation is meditation. A particular stage in meditation, where the practitioner comes face to face with the secret of the formation of matter, is symbolised as *Omkaram* (AUM).

To form a molecule in nature, there must be a combination of two flows of energy. In effect, they would be opposite but linked with each other. Only then would creation be possible.

Let us take an example. Electricity is the joint effect of positive and negative. One day is a combination of day and night. When male and female unite a new life is created.

Like this, there must be a combination of the flow of opposite forces for any kind of creation in nature. In yogic language, these opposite forces are known as *Purusha* (male) and *Prakriti* (female), *Iswara* (God) and *Maya* (Goddess), Yin and Yang etc.

Male AUM **Female AUM**

A **B**

Among these, if A is considered as male, B is the mirror image of A, that is female or the illusion of A. If B is considered as male, A would be the opposite. Creation is possible only when 'A' and 'B' unite.

A practitioner who establishes himself in meditation will start experiencing an altered state of consciousness (*Samadhi*). From the basic level of the *Samadhi* state, he has to go through four more states to experience the ultimate, which is known as *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. These four states are:

1. *Kapaleeswaran*
2. *Rudran*
3. *Bhairavan*
4. *Mahadevan*

These four states are symbolised as the four incarnations of Lord Shiva. Though there are many sub forms, in serious practice, only these four are considered.

When the *Sadhaka* reaches the state of *kapaleeswaran*, he will experience the method through which he created his own skull (*kapalam*) in the mother's womb. Experiencing this cosmic phenomenon in meditation is known as *Kapaleeswara darshanam*. This experience is not possible in normal

consciousness. It is only a super conscious experience. One who experiences this secret of nature – secret of creating the first form of matter (*Dravyam*) from cosmic sound is known as *Dravidan*. Matter is the visible form of cosmic sound. When he understands the technique of creation of his own skull, he will come to know the technique of creation of all skulls in the world. The sages who experienced this state drew the symbol (Fig C) and left it to society for the benefit of other practitioners. Anyone can verify this by looking at his own face in the mirror.

Fig C

We can see the combination of AUM to form different types of skulls– Fig D.

Fig D

These are the explanations about the creation of matter from the cosmic sound AUM. Our masters use this symbol to explain the three planes of existence of matter. From the unmodified state of energy, the sound 'A' evolved. 'A' (*Aakaar* or birth) represents the manifested form of cosmic sound. The second syllable 'U' (*Ulkaar* or life) represents the meaning of the manifestation. The third syllable 'M' (*Maranam* or death) shows change from this form. The subtle cosmic energy will manifest as a form (A), fulfil its divine purpose (U) and dissolve back into its source (M). This law of nature is symbolised as AUM. These are the three levels of existence of all beings in the universe.

Conclusion

It is necessary for every individual to explore the potential of his or her mind and acquire knowledge of the Self. This is, in order to eliminate the problems that exist in society, such as tension, stress, greed, unhealthy competition and the tendency to cause destruction. To establish peace and serenity, every individual must be self realised. When, through self-realisation, the individual comes out from the influence of the illusory material world, peace and harmony will be established within the self. The change in individuals will bring about change in society and when societies change, the world will change. Quoting history, Swami Vivekananda says, "The rise of a nation begins with the increase in the number of people who are spiritual and the fall begins with the decrease of such people".

It does not mean that all the problems of the world will be solved and a heaven will be established on earth through spirituality. It means that we can be realistic and balanced. Without injustice, justice cannot be recognised. Without falsehood, truth has no significance. Without night, day is not relevant.

For anything to exist in nature, it must be a combination of two opposites. This is the law of nature. Nothing can exist in nature as wholly good or wholly bad. In order to establish harmony among people around the world, a system that would appreciate and accept these opposites should be established. It could be called the middle path. This middle path, which comprises both material and spiritual wisdom, is the remedy for the problems faced by modern man. Everyone is familiar with material wisdom. But spiritual wisdom can be achieved only through meditation. Daily practice of meditation would bring inner contentment. A contented person will have self-esteem and will love himself. Such a person can love others too. This love and mutual esteem, much needed these days, would be reflected in society.

To achieve this aim every individual must understand the scientific message underlying the spiritual traditions of the East, especially Indian yogic sciences. This effort is made to explain the science and its benefits hidden in the God concepts and rituals, which are the traditionally established truths of meditation. To explore this wisdom, one should understand it in detail. That is why I have tried to explain these facts with the support of modern science and personal experience. I have not spoken of any form that has not been my direct experience.

Nothing in nature is insignificant. No one is weak or vulnerable. The potential of each one of us is as great as

the universe itself. The problem faced by modern man is ignorance of his true potential. The remedy is removing the veil of ignorance and experiencing within himself the omnipotence of the Self. This is possible only through the journey towards the Self – the journey from ordinary consciousness of man to cosmic consciousness. For making this profound experience available to everyone, I have tried to explain the method of transformation from man to *Mahadeva*, from *naran* to *Narayana*. The Bible says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." Yogic tradition declares, "*Aham Brahmasmi*" – I myself am this universe.

If this narration helps to ignite spiritual awareness among people and inspires a feeling from the heart for establishing humanity and love, this effort will have been fruitful.

Ending note

In my book *Aham Brahmasmi*, "I am God", I have described the process of *Mahayoga* (*Kundalini Yoga, Vaashi yogam*). A word of caution is necessary. The practice of the technique of *Mahayoga* should be undertaken only under the guidance of an experienced Master. This book is the first of three initiatives to explore *Kundalini* Yoga. For those who wish to know more, the second initiative, a website has been developed. In this website, there is a platform for discussion; questions can be raised to which I will reply. There will be some who will want to actively practice the technique. For this purpose, as a third initiative, one-on-one interaction would be offered at designated ashrams, which would be identified in the website *www.indimasi.com.*