



Yoga for You and I

Swami Venkatesananda



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Mr Lincoln N. Astley, who is the father of Yoga in New Zealand, organised the most important public meeting for me in Auckland, and this took place on the 8th March 1971. The Mercury Theater was filled with an eager audience, not only of those who were already students of Yoga, but others who were eager to know what it is all about. Many of them were Mr Astley's own students : The Mt. Albert Hatha Yoga Group established by him has already brought Hatha Yoga to thousands of Aucklanders. He is a remarkable Yoga-teacher himself and is loved and admired by all.

The program consisted of an introductory talk by Mr Astley followed by mine; and, after a brief interval, a Yoga Asana demonstration by a wonderful group - composed of people of both sexes, of different age-groups and physical features, questions-answers, and meditation.

Mrs Allison Salter recorded my talk and Mrs Margaret Haliday very kindly typed it out. Thanks to all of them, here it is :

We do not have to go round the world to discover the problem of one's life, because the problem does not spring from outside; the problem is self-created. I create a problem for myself and, to solve it, I go from one place to another. One piece of earth is called New Zealand, another piece of earth is called Australia, and another piece of earth United States of America. Just this morning I was looking at a map of Europe published about 30 or 40 years ago. Today's map of Europe looks completely different. It doesn't matter at all what a particular piece of land is called; it doesn't matter at all whether I am called an Indian and you are called New Zealanders. Even these distinctions are created by us for our own headache. In the beginning it seems to be interesting, it seems to be entertaining, but sooner or later they become problems because what is self-created as a matter of convenience, expediency, soon comes to be believed as truth.

A few years ago when I was in South Africa, in Cape Town, a friend of mine took me to what is called the Cape Point, the final tip of the African continent. We were standing there nearly blown off by the gale, and then this gentleman said, "Swami, can you see?" "Yes, of course I can see." "Can you see there?" I turned to him and asked, "What do you want me to see?" He said, "Can't you see that line? This is the Indian Ocean and that is the Atlantic Ocean." He was a very educated man, brilliant and intelligent, but a terribly unwise man, and his un wisdom consisted of not only learning but believing the bluff that was probably convenient when he was at school. A school boy needs an atlas to study geography, and an atlas needs to have all these names printed on it - Indian Ocean Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean. I don't know why it was called "Pacific Ocean" - it has drowned too many people and too many wars have been fought on it for it to be called pacific. It is Pacific when you get underneath!

These are probably problems which are far fetched. But no, we have made our own life a problem. Everything concerned with our life is a problem. It is not as though all our problems spring from politics. Politics itself is a problem created by you and me. What is the problem of you and me? That itself is the problem. Instead of saying "you and me", we soon begin to say "you OR me". You and I cannot live together. You and I don't know that "you AND I" is the fact of existence - not 'you versus I' or 'you or I'. That is no good. This fragmentation of existence of everything that you and I touch, from this basic "you"- "I" - from there on everything is a problem. You can substitute anything for this 'you'. It may be a neighbor, a wife or a husband, it may be an employer or an employee, it may be a person of another race, nationality cult or religion. "I" and "you", and then the trouble starts.

Is there an end to it? Can we end this trouble? Or is there a possibility of our not creating this problem, since "I" is the one that creates all this? Because, if the possibility does not exist, then people "give up" - believing either, as some Indians say, "It is my Karma, it is fate, it is the Lord's Will". Whenever I hear this "Lord's Will", I am reminded of my grandfather. Just a couple of years before he died; he drew up his will, and when people say "God's will", I ask, "Is God about to die?" Otherwise why would he have to draw up his will? These are all rationalisations invented by us again because we seem to be determined to carry on creating this problem, determined not to solve it, not to cease from creating this problem. Of course we always blame somebody else. The religious man brings in God, or Karma, or some theory, and the politician brings some other person in. "I am such a good man and when he rolled up his sleeve I knocked him down." He might have rolled up his sleeve in order to scratch himself!

Is there a possibility of the problem-creating ghost being laid? Yes. How do you know? The Sage of India - I am not talking about the Hindu, but the wonderful Sage of India - the Vedanti - having a message for us. If you go there to an orthodox Pandit or Swami, to one of these special Gurus, he will tell you that the Vedanta is a book. It is not. "Vedanta" is a Sanskrit word. Just as "Bible", it has a meaning. What does it mean? Bible means a book. Your geography book also is a bible. Veda is a Sanskrit word which means "knowledge", not a certain set of books. "Veda" means knowledge and "anta" means end. We are very clever at interpreting or misinterpreting. Therefore if you ask the orthodox Pandits or Swamis, they will tell you that the Veda is a big thick book and the last chapter of the Veda is Vedanta. Nonsense. Repeat these two words and see what the indweller tells you. Veda is knowledge and anta is end - knowledge, end; knowledge, end; knowledge, end. A simple message is given here. When what you call knowledge comes to an end, there you have Vedanta. In order to get this message, in other words, you don't have to look into a book or listen to a talk. When your knowledge ends, when all

your pre-conceived ideas and notions end, then Vedanta is born in you. That is precisely what Lord Jesus said: "Unless ye be like little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

And there was one other person who said nearly the same thing - he belongs to a very different category of human beings - Lord Bertrand Russell. The picture is still vivid and clear in my mind's eye. I saw an interview on television long ago in Perth. I don't know if you have seen Lord Russell in person or on the television screen. You know he has sharp cut features. Here was a big man sitting in front of him who filled three-quarters of the television screen. Interviewing this great man, Lord Russell, he asked, "What, Lord Russell, according to you, is the root cause of the present mess that prevails in the world?" I can still visualise Lord Russell grinding his teeth and chewing his words: "Do you want it? Two main causes - one, literacy and secondly, nationalism."

Look at that child, look at that baby. When I say "child", I am sure that is what Lord Jesus meant - an untaught baby, a baby six weeks old, who has not even been socialised, who has not even been toilet trained, who is pure and natural - look at it. To me that baby is God. I don't know if you share that view, that little baby is God - pure, the purest possible. That baby's mind is unpolluted by what you and I have unfortunately come to regard as knowledge. And since you and I have been polluted by this knowledge, that knowledge has to come to an end - Vedanta. When that knowledge comes to an end, you see the whole thing differently. You see the whole life becomes different.

Is there a possibility? Yes, there is a possibility. When is it, in our daily life, are we most truthful? When are we scrupulously honest? When are we absolutely non-violent, when we don't even entertain a thought of hate? Isn't there a period in our daily life when we are all this, when we observe the ten commandments, the 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th commandments too, 100 %? Isn't there a period in our daily life when this happens? No? Yes, madam. This is a daily occurrence. This is what the sage in the Himalayas says, and you are not willing to study your own life because you are too busy searching elsewhere in the library. That is just garbage. Look at your own life.

During the past 24 hours I have told many lies, I have been dishonest, I have been cheating, I have been rude, crude and cruel. But I have also been very honest, I have been very truthful, I did not tell a single lie, I did not hurt anybody in thought, word or deed. When was it? When I was asleep! Oh God, is that our fate, that we can scrupulously observe the ten commandments and all the teachings of these great ones only when we sleep? Is that our destiny? Possibly that is why God has so ordained that whatever else we do or don't do, this shall be a daily feature. More than one-third of our life is spent in bed sleeping.

Look at that cruel husband or nagging wife sleeping. How lovely. What a charming man, what a wonderful woman. Let that person stir and the whole thing, Pandora's Box, is opened. Look at that person again, because you are unable to look at yourself asleep, look at another person and you understand. If you are actually looking, if you are alive to this lesson, if you are alive to this message of sleep, you won't need to go to a saviour, to a priest or a swami or a great holy man. The person sleeping next to you teaches this message, this great lesson. There is total harmony, there is complete homogeneity, there is no Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde fragmentation there, there is no schizophrenia - complete relaxation. If you lift the arm it just collapses - complete relaxation, total harmony, total peace of mind.

That is why Yoga values all this relaxation, harmony, peace of mind, integration, homogeneity. All these are valued by Yoga because the Yogi learns this from the sleeping man. It is possible. I have to make this possible. You and I have to make this possible. If we can discover for ourselves, within ourselves, by our own - I may call it so, non-effort. It is not a thing that can be acquired. It is not a thing which we can strive for. It is not a thing which we can feverishly chase. Like sleep! Sleep has to come; sleep has to happen. Yoga also has to happen. When you are able to look within yourself and see the tensions, and not just imagine they are there and imagine they are gone - when you are able to look within yourself and see hate and see jealousy and see all this Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde fragmentation within, it is then that you drop it. You see that it is poison. So, drop it.

My master, Swami Sivananda, often used to give this example. Give an extremely thirsty man who is nearly dying of thirst a glass of first-class milk and he grabs it eagerly and anxiously and then, you look at your daughter or somebody and say, "What is it I am seeing there? Did you drop acid into that?" "Yes, Mummy." Will he drink it? I dropped some nitric acid into it by mistake. Will he drink it? Without a moment's thought he will drop that glass, no matter how thirsty he may be.

When I see that this fragmentation within me, this disharmony within me, this restlessness within me is making a hell of my life, I will drop it immediately, and immediately it is dropped there is peace and harmony. That is where Yoga leads us. Yoga means harmony. Yoga means integration of personality.

Again you look at that man who is sleeping. "Hey, how are you able to perform this magic? You are a stupid man, you are tense and nervous and shaky but you are not shaking any more. You are a silly brute and bully, but you are snoring peacefully." He is not able to answer that. He doesn't know

the difference between you and him. His mind is at rest. He has gone beyond thought; his mind is at rest.

Why should this devil of a mind wake up and manifest all this nonsense as soon as I woke up in the morning! Can I not in the waking state, working, functioning in this world, have the same mind of a sleeping person? Don't say it is impossible to work in this world in such a mental state. The moment you have told yourself it is impossible, you have ruined yourself. I am sorry to use such harsh words. Usually when anybody tells me "it is not possible" I tell him he must be a prophet, a 16th prophet! How does he know it is not possible without doing? Can I lift this glass or not? Nobody else can answer that question. Only I can, and after lifting it.

The person who says it is impossible pretends that he is a prophet - that he knows. So don't say it is not possible and invent a reason. Look at that sleeping man again. He is breathing, isn't he? He is living, isn't he? All the chicken is being digested in his stomach, isn't it? The blood is circulating, isn't it? If the essential functions of life can be carried on without your bothering about them, without your thinking about them, why should not the non-essential things of your life, like combing your hair - even when you are bald, putting on a wig and taking off a moustache - can these things not be done without your ego interfering in it, without the thoughts coming in and disturbing them?

We have never tried this. We have never tried to live egolessly, and we have brought in all sorts of rationalisations to convince ourselves that it is not possible to live egolessly, that it is not possible to live without the interference of thought all the time. Thought also can be used. Just as in sleep a person breathes, in the daily life one may be able to think without thought interfering in our life and creating the fragmentation.

How is that done? The Yogi asks, "How do you know what thought is?" I am sure if I ask you how many pounds of moon rocks have been brought back by the astronauts, at least 80 per cent of you will be able to answer. We are up to date in such knowledge. When asked "What makes you think? What is thought?" - "Ah, who cares?" We are concerned about the rocks on the moon, but we do not know the most intimate fact of our own existence - thought.

Then comes feeling. When a thought becomes mixed up with a lot of emotion, sentiment, it becomes feeling. So one who is not interested in what thought is does not even care what a feeling is. The Yogi says, "Sit down, first do this. As soon as you wake up in the morning, devote a few minutes to discovering yourself." That is Yoga. Self-discovery is Yoga, not self-knowledge. We do use the word "Self-knowledge", but then the moment somebody hears the word "self-knowledge" he says, "I know - this is my nose, these are my ears, these

are my eyes, I have got self-knowledge." That is not self-knowledge. That is skin knowledge.

Self-discovery - here again it is not as though the Yogi suggests that as soon as you wake up in the morning, you must sit cross-legged, looking at the tip of your nose, as if self-knowledge will somehow appear there. Why do they insist upon this 'morning' meditation? Because you have just got up from sleep and therefore the message of sleep - not the message of the sages or these great ones - is fresh within you. You are asked to look within. What is a thought? How is a thought formed, and how does it get transformed into an emotion, and how do these thoughts and emotions affect me? Who is me?

What are the factors that stand in the way of this self-discovery? First and foremost, ignorance of one's own physical functioning, and therefore the Yogi starts with something physical. First discover your physical potentiality - not as gymnastics and not in order to develop your muscles - that is just a waste of time. I believe it was Pope John who said, "The fatter I become, the more troublesome it will be for the people who have to carry this body away at the end." He must have been a fantastic person. There is a lovely little book called, "The Wit and Wisdom of Pope John" which you must all read.

Why must I accumulate all this stuff and nonsense in order that the worms may eat? Oh no, no, no. The Yoga asanas and postures are not done in order that you may have a fantastic body-build. Even here, our life seems to be so full of contradictions, we do not know where to start and where to end. A young man comes along and he wants to practise Yoga in order that he may build everything up, and a young lady comes along and wants to build everything down. If this Yoga is going to build everything out - i.e., make the body bulge out, then the young girls get out; if Yoga is going to make everybody slim, then the young man should not be here. It does nothing of that sort. Done properly, it enables you to make a fantastic discovery of what a magnificent thing the body is. We are awarding prizes, and Nobel prizes, ignoble prizes on people who put up some building and invent some electronic gadgets, and call them our saviors. If only we realise what wonderful lights these eyes are, what wonderful things these lungs are! We are all clamoring here for a four day week and three days holiday. There is somebody who does not say that. Twenty four hours a day, 365 days a year and (perhaps the doctors may be able to tell me - I am not quite sure when the stomach starts functioning) from birth until death, never grumbling, never complaining, no strikes, no problems at all, no ultimatums - the stomach functions, nourishing us. How marvelous!

The Yogi doing his round of Yoga Asanas is not exercising his body as much as discovering his body, learning its language - called sensations, pleasurable or painful, and understanding its marvels, offers them and their careful

preservation at the feet of the Indwelling Creator. The Yogi practising Pranayama discovers that in health, the flow of Prana throughout his body is in perfect harmony - absence of that harmony constitutes disease! Disease is a great disturbance of the inner vision. But disease is not synonymous with the condition that drives you to the doctor. Disease is when you cannot see within clearly, when the 'inside' is in a disturbed state. It is like a pond. When the surface is clean we are able to look underneath, but when the surface itself is full of dried and dead leaves, you do not know what is underneath. So when the body is not in a state of ease and therefore in a state of disease, the thing that is lying underneath, mind, is not visible at all. The moment this dross is removed, the body functions properly, almost spontaneously. Automatically I am looking within. When the body is in a state of health, ease, relaxation, I sit down and then I wonder what is a thought, what is this mind, what makes me restless, what makes me crave. It is only a man who is relaxed who even realises that he sometimes gets upset, that he is subject to lust and greed and jealousy. It is only a man who is sensitive. Yoga makes you sensitive. Not sensitive in the negative sense - that if I am scolded I am upset, but sensitive in a positive sense. When I become sensitive and I am called a fool I hear it and wonder, "Is that my name?" A non-sensitive man will jump. A sensitive man is so transparent within himself that he will think, "Ah! Fool! Is that your name? No, my name is Swami Venkatesananda. No, he did not say Swami Venkatesananda - forget it." Why must I respond at all if I am called a fool, unless I 'am' one? If I am a fool and he says, "You are a fool", that is right, isn't it? I do not have to react.

A man becomes sensitive within himself and therefore he doesn't react - he acts. He is able to look within, he is able to see himself, to see his mind; and when he sees his mind and all these wonderful sources of thought, sources of emotion, they come under his control. The Yogi does not have to control his mind - his thoughts come under his control, his emotions come under his control, his senses come under his control, and then as he goes on and on, he has discovered the body, the mind and the emotions, and then suddenly he asks himself, "All these are wonderful, but who am I?" When he asks himself that question seriously, he enters into meditation. Self-discovery leads him to the discovery of the truth - that you and I are one. Who am I? "I" is you, "I" is he, "I" is everything. Therefore "I" does not exist, and this is the goal of Yoga.

QUESTION: Can the life span be increased by practising Yoga?

ANSWER: What do we mean by the life span? Those of you who have studied psychology probably know that there are psychological, biological age and chronological age, and so on. How exactly is the life span determined, and by whom is it determined? The Yoga theory is that the slower the breathing rhythm the longer you live chronologically. If you are breathing too fast, like a dog, your life span is short. Then if somebody asks, "Supposing I hold my

breath and not breathe at all?" For a silly question, a silly answer is good enough. I answer, 'You will die immediately - you will live very long in your next birth.'

That is the usual explanation, that the Yogi, by promoting relaxation, calmness, reduces the number of breaths per minute, and thus he increases the life span in terms of the calendar, because God or whoever it is who controls life and death, does not have the same kind of calendar as you and I use. So the Yogi says that your life span is fixed, not in terms of years, months, and days, but in terms of the number of breaths allotted to you.

QUESTION: What must I eat?

ANSWER: Food - and not dead bodies. When I am dead, either I am cremated or buried. When an animal is killed, it is eaten. Why is that? Is the question clear? If I am dead, or if I am killed, I am cremated or buried. You kill an animal and eat it. How is that? I don't know. I am not dogmatising but thinking aloud. I cannot call this food. I do eat food. Whereas, if I am killed, or if I am dead, I am buried under the ground in a grave or cremated. When an animal is killed, I put it here, in my stomach. This is not a grave, is it? It is a stomach. Why should I convert this into a grave? I don't know. These are problems for you to think about.

But the Yogi has a golden rule when it comes to food. He merely says, "Eat to live, and therefore eat as little as you need." I think this Yogi is very clever. Do you know why? One Yogi explained to me why he was so healthy - he was always hungry. If you adopt this rule of eating as little as you need, and therefore you are always hungry, food tastes delicious.

QUESTION: What makes the grass green?

ANSWER: Two years it took him and still he asks the question! - laughter. For those of you who did not understand the exchange, I may say he and I asked ourselves this question two years ago. I will give you the answer now, Sir, but that is not the answer. Both "grass" and "green" are in your mind.

QUESTION: Do you consider that a Yogi is in conflict with society, and as a consequence will the practice of Yoga render us less efficient to earn a living?

ANSWER: I am sure our friend is not asking on his own behalf. Probably he is asking on behalf of many people who look upon the whole thing with a prejudice, who look upon life as contradiction. To them life means trouble, life means conflict. Again, the law that governs the world is survival of the fittest. And how do you know that this fellow is fitter than the other one?

Because he survived. Conflict, struggle - survival is important. I can prove my fitness only

by surviving, and since you and I cannot survive together, I must kill you, and therefore I survive and prove to history that I am fitter than the other fellow. He might have been fitter than me - he got "there" quicker.

Yoga does not involve conflict and Yoga is not in conflict with anything. Yoga is cessation of conflict. I am not in conflict with life, I am not in conflict with society.

The second part of the question is another tragedy of modern life. Must I earn a living? In New Zealand you are so lucky that you have the answer in every back yard. Mr Astley mentioned that we have an ashram in Mauritius. There is a sort of unwritten rule at the ashram. There is no gate and no fence, and we have some fruit trees and vegetables planted there, and the law is: walk into the garden and help yourself. If you find there is a pawpaw fruit which is nice, take it and eat. I have never ceased to be amazed. Do I earn a living there? Often we do not even plant a seed properly. I was sitting on the veranda eating some fruit one day and I must have absentmindedly thrown the seed on to the ground. It started germinating. I look at that. Good heavens, did I earn this? Is earning a living so important? Can I not live? And how can I live? How must I live? Just live.

I should live a full life. I have some talents, I have some faculties, I have some abilities. If this young girl is a nurse, she has healing faculties. She is useless unless I become sick and she nurses me. In nursing me, she is merely fulfilling herself - living. We do not have to earn a living - we need merely to live, live fully. Immediately we realise that; and when I live fully, you are served; and when you live fully, I am looked after. Must we earn a living? This is what Yoga enables us to do. Each one is made to live. I have some rose plants and I look at them - how beautiful. Without intending to please me, by just being a rose, it pleases me. It demands nothing at all in return. It does not ask a question. It does not ask for my credentials - nothing. You have this blessing in your own back yard. Tomorrow morning, when you look at those vegetables and flowers, please remember the whole of nature exists, lives, in order that you and I may live too.

QUESTION: When I really live, I get into trouble.

ANSWER: I suppose so, just as a rose has thorns, too. But the trouble is usually made by ourselves, Sir. For instance, people often say, "You see, I am so alone, nobody loves me." They do not look within and see that there is no love in their heart. If you are full of love, it is impossible that people should not love you. There is another thing. We should learn to give. I am not

advocating that we should go back to primitive society. When we were leading a sort of rural life and there were not these wonderful drainage systems and sanitation and that sort of thing, the reciprocal cycle between man and plant was beautifully maintained. He took something, he ate, and then he gave something back to the earth. But now we are so civilised that we dump the whole thing into the sea - the sea is polluted, the land is drained. That is the point. What I take from you, I must give back in some way or another. I must be more eager to give, knowing that it will come back to me. What I give you, returned to me. Again, it is not a Yogi's cranky theory. Jesus said so in the Bible -give and it shall be given back to you, pressed down. We are giving stuff and nonsense and it comes back to us pressed down a hundred fold.

QUESTION: Would you define God?

ANSWER: What can we define? We can only define that which can be grasped by our mind and intellect and therefore whatever is finite. The infinite cannot be defined. Therefore we are struggling. For instance, "God is love" means nothing because I cannot define "God" and I cannot define what "love" is. Therefore it is an absurd mathematical equation, $X = X$, where I do not know this or that.

These wonderful truths cannot be defined; they have to be discovered. Let us drop God for a moment! Let us take love. I love. I 'fall' in love. That is the most correct expression, I think. Why must I not rise in love? We are trying to define something which is infinite. Love is infinite. Like meditation, love has to happen, and love happens only when the I is absent, or when I and you become one - an absurd statement which only means that either of us must cease to exist as an independent entity. These things cannot be defined, and to define God, to define love, is mischief. Immediately I am going to say, "This is your God" and "my God" and "this is the Christian God" or the "Jewish God". It is mischief. God is, or what is is God. Trying to define it is useless. When I say, "What is God" I am trying to suggest that there is some thing that is not, and that therefore it is not God. How absurd.

Therefore, like the Buddha said, it would be more fruitful to get hold of ourselves and come face to face with the only truth we are conscious of, that our whole life is full of sorrow, unhappiness, conflict, contradiction, disharmony. Yoga shows us the way to end this disharmony. When this disharmony is ended, my personality is integrated, I and me become one. When there is harmony between you and me, we become one; and when there is harmony between him and me, then I know that God 'is'.

QUESTION: The expression that it is in the mind - "grass" and "green" - how can I apply it in relation to pain?

ANSWER: That is quite simple, sir. Again, if we get back to our old friend sleep. When a person suffering from all sorts of aches and pains sleeps, there is no pain and there are no aches, and the aches and pains were felt only when the mind was functioning. Minus the mind, what you call aches and pains are merely changes in the physical body. What you call pain, what you call an ulcer, what you call a cancer - all these are mere changes taking place in the physical body, because it is the mind that interprets them as pain, aches and suffering, etc.

MEDITATION

I will give you a simple trick. The first thing we need is a way to turn one's attention within.

For the next three minutes please keep looking straight in front of you, without turning your face. Now please keep looking straight, and for the next three minutes, whatever you may do, try not to turn your head, nod or turn your eyeballs. Please keep your eyes open. Can you, looking straight in front of you, adjust your back in such a way that you are straight? In order to do that, you will have to see your back without turning your head. Now we utter the sacred word "Om".

As you listen, try to tune in to the vibration. Om ... Om ... Om ... From there on your mind is naturally flowing within yourself. Listen to your breathing. As you listen to the breathing, your incoming breath and your outgoing breath, both sound "Om" to you

You hear Om within yourself. You hear Om within yourself as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Can you locate the sound? If you want to sit for a little longer, you can possibly visualise some image of God which you have, or a light in the region of your heart. At the same time locate the sound "Om". From where does it come? Om

May there be peace and harmony in the hearts of all. May God bless you. Thank you.

That is an extremely simple trick, and I think those of you who participated in it have discovered something. You will find that the attention wanders. If you try to look at these thoughts - find out: from where did they come? How did they arise? What is the source of those thoughts? Very soon you will learn to watch your mind. You will know what your mind is, what thoughts are, what feelings are, and ultimately what 'you' are.

Thank you.