

PATHS PART 2**The physical path**

We look at paths and methods in which control of physical movement plays a prominent part, not because we necessarily wish to follow them but to learn from them anything that can be of use in our own path, or helpful in understanding it.

H.H. The ordinary man has no attention — or floating attention — one moment here, next moment there. Their attention is always diverted from one point to another, which gives them no result. Without attention, nothing can be done. This is a very, very important factor in the life of any aspirant or disciple. [*Record* 15.10.62]

H.H. The state of attention can only be reached by detachment. And you have to begin with the body. Make body attentive and then you will be able to make the mind attentive also. [*Record* 25.8.64]

Inevitably yoga has to be discussed. Yoga simply means union (same root as yoke). There are many different kinds of yoga: the classical yoga schools are described in the Bhagavad Gita, but now the main ones appear to be the physical path (Hatha Yoga), the devotional path (Bhakti Yoga) and one, more or less, corresponding to our way (Raja Yoga), though there are no strict definitions of or divisions between these paths.

In reply to a question about whether it would help us to take up physical yoga, the Shankaracharya sent the following message:

The Shankaracharya distinguishes ‘serious Yoga’ from ‘playing at Yoga’ (like the keep-fit so-called Hatha Yoga classes so prevalent nowadays in all countries).

Serious Yoga is a full time ‘way of life’ — one of the three traditional ‘Ways’ — Way of Knowledge (Yoga), Way of Devotion or Love and Way of Action — which are each given six chapters in the Bhagavad Gita. Traditional Yoga has 8 steps of which the first two involve codes of behaviour, incompatible with Western-style life today; and the next three steps require competent and individual instruction since they involve posture (Asana), breathing (Pranayama) and prolonged attention on one part of the body (Pratyahara). Only at the 6th step was a Yogi allowed to meditate (Dharana, Dhyana or Transcendental Meditation and Samadhi). There have always been variations of the same 8 fold System for different types of people such as Jnana-Yoga (Knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (Devotion), Karma Yoga for householders and Hatha Yoga for magical powers produced by severe physical disciplines.

Our Meditation System comes from Raja-Yoga (Yoga of Consciousness) the “King of the Yogas”. In addition there is a “Fourth Way” for which our meditation has been adapted and because there is very little of the original Yoga in it, it is

compatible with the ordinary life of a householder and eventually covers all those 8 steps. [*Letters* 21.2.20]

But he also said:

H.H. To create any permanent result, there must always be a system, and one must go through the system with proper steps to get the required result. Under Conscious authority the steps can be shortened to create the same result, but the system must be there . . . [In the Eightfold System of Yoga] the body and Buddhi [i.e. mind] are progressively trained for control over senses and Manas [i.e. mental machinery]. Thus one has to learn to regulate his activities and obey certain rules of conduct; learn to sit quietly and properly without making much movement, and regulate the breathing system; leave all worldly thoughts out, and learn to hold one idea in the mind; and only then is he allowed to meditate. This is a hard System and only the brave can take it, even under a worthy guide. The same System is to a great degree shortened in the way we give meditation; but in doing meditation all the same steps will have to be accomplished in the end. [*Record* 31.1.71]

*

So, what is our experience of physical methods? Many of us have at times taken part in the Mevlevi Turning or the 'Movements' and perhaps used other methods such as Tai Chi or Hatha Yoga. What was the result? If during the same period we were meditating, what was the effect on that? In particular, what kind of physical method most helped with meditation?

[Discussion]

*

Physical awareness. If we are going to make any progress we must make conscious efforts to wake up, and make these efforts on a regular basis – every day. For newcomers, the simplest step towards this is to become aware of one's body, and nothing else, for a short space of time. Find a time or times in the day, maybe when you wake up and just before sleeping, and 'come to yourself' like the prodigal son: just be aware of your body for one minute, becoming conscious of your body gradually from your toes to your head. For those who can attain a state of attention at will, finding still periods on a daily basis is the next step.

* * *