

**Kriya Yoga:  
Synthesis of a Personal Experience**

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## **PART I: MY SEARCH OF THE ORIGINAL KRIYA**

The first part contains the story of the different phases of my spiritual search: self teaching of Yoga; Kriya Yoga received from an organization; Kriya Yoga received from traveling gurus; final decision of putting in a book all what I knew about Kriya Yoga techniques and go ahead alone.

### **Chapter 1 Yoga self-taught**

My spiritual search began soon enough. I considered Yoga a discipline capable of producing an internal change in my personality. I began with an exercise, to be done in Savasana, where the thinking process was disciplined to create a state of "mental void". I decided also to reinforce my discipline through the art of Pranayama. After three months of practice, I experienced what Yoga books call "Kundalini awakening." This experience was preceded by a couple of days of fear and anguish.

### **Chapter 2 Kriya Yoga from organizations**

As an enthusiast of Pranayama, I decided to devote my life to perfect it. I came to know of the existence of Kriya Yoga: a four-phased Pranayama path taught in our age by the great Lahiri Mahasaya. I would have done anything to have learned it immediately but this clashed with the rules of the organization spreading it: it was necessary to follow a correspondence course. Meekly, I accepted to put aside my already consolidated practice of classic Pranayama and abide only by the written teachings of the correspondence course. A year and a half later, I received the First Kriya set of techniques. I was blissfully happy but unable to conceive a working routine – the one I followed was neither functional nor rational.

### **Chapter 3 The inestimable value of Japa**

When I learned the so-called Higher Kriyas, the problem became more and more critical because they were not completely explained. Later, when one of the organization representatives refused to clarify my doubts, I reluctantly decided to address my search toward other sources. I had no concrete results but, thanks to some good readings, the practice of Japa entered my life and with it, the experience of the breathless state became part of my life.

### **Chapter 4 Meeting with some teachers outside the organization**

Possessed by an eager desire to learn the so-called "original Kriya", I made the great mistake of neglecting my routine based upon the union between Japa and Kriya. I followed three different teachers. Among many not very important details, I learned something valuable:

1. The importance of listening to the internal sounds during Kriya Pranayama;
2. The frenulum-stretching technique (Talabya Kriya) leading to mastery of Kechari Mudra;
3. The concept of Incremental Routine.

## **Chapter 5 A hard decision**

After the break with my third teacher, I avoided seeking others. I toyed with the vague idea of putting all I knew about Kriya in a book. I was hampered by the deep conditioning from my first Kriya organization: the promise of keeping all technical Kriya details secret. The mental clarity and stamina produced by the incremental routines helped me to erase all conditioning. I began the work of writing the book and posted it on the Web.

## **PART II: DEFINITION OF THE KRIYA YOGA TECHNIQUES**

The second part is devoted to share what I know about the theory and practice of Kriya Yoga.

### **Chapter 6 The basic techniques of Kriya Yoga**

The essence of First Kriya is given through eight techniques -- Talabya Kriya, Om Japa (in the Chakras), Kriya Pranayama (aka Pranayama), Navi Kriya, Maha Mudra, Kriya Pranayama with short breath, mental Pranayama and Yoni Mudra.

### **Chapter 7 Techniques of the Higher Kriyas**

The Higher Kriyas are here described as a six step system.

### **Chapter 8 Theoretical vision of Kriya Yoga. Introduction to its main variations**

After a theoretical digression upon the four levels of Kriya, each linked with the unfastening of a particular "knot" (obstacle) hindering the spiritual experience, some variations of the Kriya techniques are described.

## **PART III: KRIYA YOGA IN PRACTICE**

The third part dwells with the practical aspects of teaching Kriya Yoga. The main theme is how to assist students to coordinate and harness their efforts in a meaningful way.

### **Chapter 9 Building a solid basis for the practice of Kriya Yoga**

We discuss a teaching method to guide those who want to learn *Kriya Yoga*. After considering how to introduce the First Kriya in a gradual way, practical examples are given to utilize the formidable instrument of the Incremental Routines.

### **Chapter 10 Prayer [Japa]: the basic instrument of all the mystical paths**

We consider the different forms of Prayer and dwell upon Contemplative Prayer. Inspiration is drawn from Hesychasm, Sufi movements, St. Teresa of Avila and others....

### **Chapter 11 How to achieve the breathless state**

Two things are necessary to this purpose: creating with great stoutness of intention, the state of *mental Silence* and conceiving a good, rational routine. Both points are discussed here.

### **Chapter 12 Two ways of conceiving the perfection of Kriya Pranayama**

After achieving the breathless state, Pranayama is perfected in two ways. Each one of them needs a specific preparation.

**Appendix 1: About premature Kundalini awakening**

There are pages in the Web warning against the dangers of "premature awakening of *Kundalini*". The real problem is facing the fear of substantial changes in life. There are practices to be recommended that dissolve any acute states of inner tension.

**Appendix 2: Cleaning the Kriya path from all esoteric-magic manias**

We dwell here upon the theme of the wrong attitudes towards the *Kriya* path. Many forget that *Kriya* is not a psychological journey in the realm of our mind but a spiritual path.

**Appendix 3: Importance of studying the Radhasoami movement**

The literary material produced by this movement is very inspiring for all those who are seeking to be in tune with the *Omkar* Realty. Some schools of Kriya had their origin here.

**Appendix 4: Hidden treasures in P.Y.'s Kriya Yoga**

Something precise and useful is brought to light to those students who, being faithful to P.Y.'s teachings, are trying to find in this book a key to clarify their technical doubts

**Appendix 5: Practical instruction to approach the Prayer of the heart**

A wonderful procedure is here outlined to approach the "*Prayer of the heart*".

## PART I: MY SEARCH OF THE ORIGINAL KRIYA

### CHAPTER 1 YOGA SELF-TAUGHT

My spiritual search began at age 15 after I bought an introductory book on classical *Yoga*. My interest in *Yoga* had been fueled by a certain expectation of the effectiveness of the oriental forms of meditation that had slowly consolidated during my childhood and early adolescence. I don't remember the title of the first book. Books of B.K.S. Iyengar followed, and then finally the autobiography of an Indian saint where I found the term *Kriya Yoga*. But first things first...

In primary school, unlike my peers, I borrowed esoteric books from my parents' friends and I loved those books. I remember the first one I read from end to end was on occultism. Knowing the book was considered unsuitable for my age, I was proud to be able to read and understand it. I turned a deaf ear to any persuasive advice to dedicate myself to more formative readings. I continued these readings until I was about 11. I wasted a lot of time on worthless books and stacks of specialized esoteric magazines with tantalizing titles and impossible chimeras designed essentially to impress, and where it was impossible to distinguish in advance between fact and fiction. I came into contact with the main themes of occidental esotericism with short digressions into phenomena like hypnosis and spiritualism... In the end, I felt I had traveled through an indistinct chaos. Perhaps, the most precious secrets were hidden in other books I had not been fortunate enough to find.

During this period, when I was perhaps 10 or 11, I saw the word "*Yoga*" for the first time in a postal catalog of esoteric books among my father's correspondence. I was entranced and inexplicably spellbound by the person pictured on the cover sitting in the "lotus position." However, I couldn't persuade my father to buy the book for me.

When I was 15 and in high school, the esoteric flame was rekindled for a while in a particular way: a friend told me he had a detailed textbook containing different *Pranayama* techniques, and added: "These exercise are used to obtain inner transformation...."

I was deeply allured by his words: what internal changes was he talking about? Surely my friend didn't mean the attainment of a particular state of relaxation or concentration or how to integrate the oriental vision of existence with our lifestyle. He was surely referring to obtaining some intense experiences that left a psychological mark. *Pranayama* was something I had to learn as soon as possible.

But my friend would not lend me the book. A few days later at the train station newsstand, I spotted a simple *Hatha Yoga* manual and bought it forthwith and read it in its entirety. My spiritual search had begun but I was not aware of it. For me, it seemed more an exercise of physical and mental control.

Unfortunately, the philosophical introduction did not stir up anything

spiritual. It was neither impressive nor thought provoking (Jiva, Prakriti, Purusha...). It was there just to give the reader the impression of serious authenticity. Even concepts like Reincarnation, *Karma*, *Dharma*, and *Maya*, the understanding of which in the future would become so important in my life, remained unfathomable, hidden in a tangle of Sanskrit terms. *Pranayama* was only hinted at by explaining how to do a complete breath – dilating the abdomen, diaphragm, and upper chest during inhalation and contracting the same in reverse order for a calm exhalation. That was clearly an introduction, nothing else. It was not difficult to guess that the ancient art of *Pranayama* was not intended to train the chest muscles, strengthening the diaphragm or creating peculiar conditions of blood oxygenation, but to act on the energy present in our psycho physical system. It was also clear that the inharmonious state of that energy could be related to conflicts and disharmonies inside our disposition. I was frustrated about the lack of information about *Pranayama*. The author concluded by saying that *Pranayama* should be learned from an experienced teacher but instead of adding a precise indication (the title of a book, the name of a school...), he remained vague about exactly how to find him; maintaining that we find the Teacher when we are ready to learn.

I began doing yoga postures (*Asanas*) in a corner of our school gymnasium during physical education classes. I wasn't very good anyway in sports despite being well-conditioned by long walks. Moreover, being able to do something significant without having to move very far and without the inherent risks of school sports attracted me.

After the preliminary group warm-up exercises, when the teacher gave me permission to work out on my own, I devoted myself to mastering *Yoga* positions or moving the abdominal muscles with the *Nauli* technique. One day the teacher, that I had incorrectly assumed he had an opinion of me close to zero, with mine great amazement, drew near, and inquired about the secret of succeeding in moving the abdominal muscles in such curious way.

Objectively speaking, the *Yoga* text was not a mediocre one: it explained the name of each posture (*Asana*), gave a brief note on the best mental attitude for practicing it, and explained how each exercise stimulated certain physiological functions (important endocrine glands, etc.). It was taken for granted that these positions were not to be seen as simple "stretching work-outs"; they were a means of providing a global stimulus to all the physical organs to increase their vitality. The satisfaction I felt at the end of a session spoke for their effectiveness.

There was an entire chapter devoted to the "Corpse Pose" (*Savasana*), the last one to be practiced in the daily *Asana* routine. The instruction was structured with great care in typical western style but the author did not lose his focus in useless philosophical embellishments. He explained the purpose of the exercise was to put to rest the mental faculties in order to recharge the whole psycho physical system with fresh energy. I was attracted by the over-exaggerated promise that by stopping all mental functions – without falling into a state of sleep – and remaining for some time in a state of pure awareness, one could obtain within one hour, the equivalent of five hours sleep. I regret not having the

book anymore, but I will describe the exercise based upon what I remember:

"Lie in the supine position with arms extended alongside the body and with eyes covered to keep the light out. After staying still for two or three minutes, mentally repeat – I am relaxed, I am calm, I am not thinking of anything. Then, to enter the state of *mental void*, visualize your thoughts including those with abstract qualities and push them away one by one as if an internal hand were moving them gently from the center of a mental screen toward its outer edge. All thoughts, without exception, must be put aside; even the thought itself of practicing a technique. You should never become annoyed about continuous new thoughts but picture them as objects and shift them aside; in this way, ulterior chains of thought are prevented from coming out. After pushing a thought away, return your awareness to the small spot between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) which resembles a pond of peace, and relax therein. The ability to continuously push away thoughts that knock at the door of your attention will become almost automatic.

When, on some occasions – such as practicing immediately after a strong emotional incident – the mechanism does not seem to work, convert your concentration into a small *needle* which constantly touches the area between the eyebrows – just touching, without worrying about shifting thoughts aside. You will notice that, at a certain point, there is no more effort and any remaining restless emotion subsides. The thought seeds manifesting as indefinite images quivering at the edge of awareness cannot disturb your mental rest. Whichever of the two methods you choose, the exercise works perfectly and after 40 minutes you get up well-rested and recharged with new fresh energy."

In my experience, in spite of the 40 minutes promised by the book, the final state of relaxation lasted no more than 15 minutes and the exercise itself never more than 25-30 minutes altogether. The technique inevitably ended in a peculiar way; the state of deep calmness was interrupted by the thought that the exercise had not yet begun; my reaction was always a wince and a faster heartbeat. After a few seconds however, the confidence that the exercise had been perfectly executed appeared.

Thanks to this technique, which became a daily habit, I realized, once and for all, the difference between "mind" and "awareness".

When the mental process is eased off into perfect silence, pure awareness without content arises. Like a luminous point duplicating itself an unlimited amount of times, it remains unchanged for some minutes. You know you exist and that your existence is indestructible – this happens without thinking. You have the indisputable experience that thoughts are in essence ephemeral and instead of revealing the final truth, they cloud it. The Cartesian deduction: "I think, therefore I am" is indefensible. It would be more correct to affirm: "Only in the ability of obtaining the silence of thoughts, lies the proof and the intimate certainty of existing."

Besides the dimensions of esoteric, oriental meditative practices, there was also the passion for poetry and literature accompanied by habit of daily seeking the contemplation of Beauty in Nature.

This interest began when I was 9. I borrowed a book of poetry from the school library and copied in a notebook different short poems with naturalistic themes. By reading them frequently, I soon knew them all by heart. By recalling them, while contemplating the hilly surroundings beyond the outskirts of my village, I could intensify my emotions. As my high school years were drawing to a close, I developed a passion for classical music and Beethoven became my idol. Despite the tragedy of his deafness at his creative peak, he reacted in a most honorable manner and carried on creating works he had already composed in his heart. The Heiligenstadt Testament, where he reveals his critical condition and states his decision with pacific and total resolution, made him almost a hero and a saint in my eyes.

He wrote to a friend: "God is nearer to me than to others. I approach Him without fear, I have always known him. Neither am I anxious about my music, which no adverse fate can overtake, and which will free him who understands it from the misery which afflicts others." How could I remain indifferent? He was drawing incomparable music out of the depths of his being, and offering it to humanity. The triumph of this frail human creature over a nonsensical fate had a tremendous impact on me. The daily rite of retiring to my room to listen to that music consolidated my consecration to the Ideal – merging with Absolute Beauty.

Each day for the first 3 months after high school graduation, when I experienced a strong sentimental tie whose fulfillment seemed impossible, I listened to Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. The more my rash emotionalism prompted me to take steps which proved to be destructive to my love affair, the more my desperate heart found refuge in its pure beauty. During a walk in the country, sitting on a hill contemplating a far landscape basking in the warmth of the summer evening, his music rang out again in my memory. What my heart craved was before me; perfect and untarnished neither by fears nor a by sense of guilt. That was my first religious experience.

I chose to study maths at university. While attending the first courses, I understood that a happy chapter of my life was concluded and there would be no time for distractions – like enjoy reading pieces of classic literature.

All my attention was focused on finding an effective method of study and a way to avoid spilling my energies. This meant planning to think in a disciplined way both during study time and during my idle moments. For this purpose, I decided to utilize the dynamic of the technique of mental void.

One bad habit I had to conquer was the tendency to day-dream and jump from one memory to another to extract moments of pleasure. I had molded the unshakeable conviction that when thought becomes an uncontrollable vice – for many it is an utter addiction – it constitutes not only a waste of energy but is the main cause of almost all failures in our life. The frenzied whirl of the thought process, accompanied by alternating moods and strong emotions, create at times unreasonable fears that hinder the decisive action that life requires. On other occasions, it excessively fosters an optimistic imagination that unfortunately pushes the person toward wretched actions.

I was convinced that a disciplined thought was the most valuable trait I could develop, opening the doors to fruitful achievements. My decision filled me with euphoric enthusiasm. But after breathing the limpid, sparkling, celestial state of thought restraint for a few hours, I encountered a significant resistance. In the mirror of my introspection, I saw how other habits were wasting my mental energy. One of these, wrapped and unexpectedly dignified by the idea of socialization, was that of falling daily into nerve-wracking discussions with friends. It was time to renounce it. I abruptly avoided their company. Certainly, mine was not an impossible sacrifice: theirs was not my world.

One day, during a short afternoon walk, I saw them from afar sitting lazily and chatting in the usual bar. My heart gave a lurch. They were my friends and I loved each of them, yet seeing them together that day, they appeared to me like chickens cooped up in a narrow space. Mercilessly, I assumed they were completely governed by the instincts of eating, partying, having sex, and overindulging. Whatever tragedy happened to their mate, it didn't concern them, they would have kept on sipping the daily pleasure of dawdling until misfortune hit them. It was very sad and distressing. The incident put me in a gloomy mood. A sentence from Beethoven's Heiligenstadt testament came spontaneously to mind as an invocation to retrieve the lofty dimension I enjoyed during my high school years:

O Providence - grant me at least but *one day of pure joy* - it has been so long since real joy echoed in my heart - O when - O when, O Divine One - shall I find it again in the temple of nature and of men? - Never? No - O that would be too hard.

At that moment, I resolved to concentrate on my studies and passing my exams became my sole reason for living. I perceived that period of my life as a descent into an unfathomable night but I knew in order to shape my future the way I desired, tough sacrifices were necessary. To see the dawn of a "day of pure joy", I would have to endure momentarily a dark emptiness: I would savor it without a lament and without being tempted to turn on a light for momentary solace.

### *I Will Die So I Can Live!*

An event illuminated my life: a friend introduced me to Gustav Mahler's Symphony No.2 "*Resurrection*" and invited me to a live concert of this work. I read the information leaflet. Each part of the symphony had a precise meaning which Mahler himself had explained in a letter to the conductor, Bruno Walter. It was Mahler's intention to treat death as the inevitable end of all human enterprise. The music conveyed a sense of desolation which was sweet as if death meant drifting off into a pacific sleep. The words of the contralto communicated a childlike innocent vision in a sorrowful voice of endless dignity:

*O Röschen roth!  
Der Mensch liegt in größter Noth!  
Der Mensch liegt in größter Pein!  
Je lieber möchte ich im Himmel sein.*

O red rose!  
Man lies in direst need!  
Man lies in deepest pain!  
Oh, how I would rather be in heaven.

I fancied I was in the countryside during a light rain. But it was spring and a ray of sun pierced the clouds. Amid the vegetation, there was a beautiful red rose. That simple vision brought solace to my heart's inner ache and warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm: that Beauty would be with me forever, in all the places of my solitary wanderings.

Then the choir sang some verses from Klopstock's hymn:

*Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n  
Wirst du, Mein Staub,  
Nach kurzer Ruh'!  
Unsterblich Leben! Unsterblich Leben  
wird der dich rief dir geben!*

Rise again, yes, rise again,  
Will you, my dust,  
After a brief rest!  
Immortal life! Immortal life  
Will He who called you, give you.

Then Mahler's own verses were chanted: these ended with:

*Mit Flügeln, die ich mir errungen,  
In heißem Liebesstreben,  
Werd'ich entschweben  
Zum Licht, zu dem kein Aug'gedrungen!  
Sterben werd'ich, um zu leben!  
Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n  
wirst du, mein Herz, in einem Nu!  
Was du geschlagen  
zu Gott wird es dich tragen!*

With wings I have gained,  
in love's fierce striving,  
I shall soar aloft  
To the light no eye has pierced!  
I will die so I can live!  
Rise again, yes, rise again,  
Will you, my heart, in an instant!  
What you have earned yourself,  
Shall lead you to God!

In the following days, I tried to penetrate its meaning by reading everything I could on it and listening to it entranced and in the quietude of my room. After many integral and enthusiastic listening sessions, the words: "Sterben werde ich, um zu leben!" ("I will die so I can live!") resounded all day long in my mind like a thread around which my thought crystallized. Would I ever before barren old age, be able to "die in myself"? Was it possible to cross the foggy curtain of thoughts, superficial emotions, sensations and instinct, and emerge in that pure Dimension I had yearned for many years and what I felt was my sovereign good?

There was no doubt I would have perfected my self-imposed discipline to extremes, but by no means did I want to spend the rest of my life staring at the wall of my silenced mind and waiting for something to happen. "I will seize Fate by the *throat*", said Beethoven: so I too was prepared to act in a strong and decisive way.

What I missed was the art of *Pranayama* – that *Pranayama* which I had dreamed so much about but had never actually practiced. B.K.S. Iyengar's description in

his *The Illustrated Light on Yoga*, which I had purchased a few weeks before, had awakened in me an unshakeable desire to practice it intensively. In the last part of the book there was a prudent warning:

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

This sentence turned on my immoderate will to experience all its power, to the point of "dying" in it, figuratively speaking. What would have frightened others, emboldened me. If it provoked an authentic psychological earthquake, I was on the right track. Yes, some prudence was necessary: an intensive practice had to be reached gradually and each session had to be carried out with extreme care.

The *Pranayama* referred to was *Nadi Sodhana* and *Ujjayi* with *Bandha* and *Kumbhaka*. Day after day, I could verify *Pranayama's* potential acting on my psyche. I was certain my old school friend had told the truth – "these exercises can change a person inside". It had to be true!

*Pranayama* appeared to me the most perfect of all arts, with no intrinsic limits. To devote myself to it would cost nothing. I would not be obliged to spend money to purchase a musical instrument, canvas and colors, or whatever. The instrument was always with me and within me. I couldn't understand how I had wasted so much time not taking on this commitment seriously.

To abide by it was "the decision" of my life. I practiced morning and evening in an "absolute" way, with ferocious concentration, as if there were no tomorrow. I would start with stretching exercises -- and some simple *Asanas* when I had more time. <sup>1</sup>

I practiced in the half-lotus position, sitting on the edge of a pillow with my back straight. I focused with zeal on applying the instructions flawlessly but with a creative spirit. I concentrated keenly on the alternate feelings of coolness and warmth produced by the air on the fingers and on the palm of the right hand used to open and close the nostrils. The pressure, the smooth flowing of the breath... every detail was pleasant. Becoming aware of each peculiarity of the exercise helped me maintain vigilant attention without becoming stressed.

During the day, I felt my perception of things had changed. I searched for the most intense colors, fascinated by them as if they were close to reveal an unknown reality under and beyond material reality. Sometimes, in the first sunny days after winter, when the skies were crystalline and as blue as they had ever been, I would sit in the open air and contemplate the environs. In a bushy ditch covered with ivy, the sun shed its light upon flowers that a few weeks before were blooming during the cold and now, heedless of the mildest days, still lingered in their spell-binding glory. I was deeply inspired. I would close my

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed description of this routine (*Nadi Sodhana*; *Ujjayi*; *Bandha* and final concentration in *Kutastha*) is given at the end of this chapter.

eyes and rely on an inner radiance accompanied by a sensation of pressure on my heart.

At that time, my internal life was still split between two interests. I perceived them as two dimensions having nothing in common. On one side were esoteric matters which had guided my search toward *Yoga* discipline – it was conceived as an *efficacious tool* for purifying and *controlling the mind*. On the other side, was the aspiration toward the ideal world of Beauty which I tried to evoke through the study of literary work, and listening to classical music. I could never have imagined that the first dimension could possibly lead me toward the second! It was reasonable to hope that *Pranayama* could give me a permanent base of mental clarity, helping me not to spoil by a mess of thoughts the fragile miracle of the encounter with Beauty. But I could never have imagined that *Pranayama* had the power of multiplying the experience of the Sublime or even make it spring up from nothing. I often repeated inside me and sometimes quoted to my friends, this verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

"(The *yogi*) knows the joy eternal beyond the pale of the senses which his reason cannot grasp. He abides in this reality and moves not thence. He has found the treasure above all others. There is nothing higher than this. He that has achieved it shall not be moved by the greatest sorrow. This is the real meaning of *Yoga* - a deliverance from contact with pain and sorrow".

While I was repeating it, I was actually savoring that Joy.

On a quiet afternoon walk among trees just before sunset, I quickly glanced, now and then, at a comment from one of the *Upanishads* [ancient Sanskrit sacred texts] that I had with me. One particular sentence awakened an instantaneous realization: "Thou art that"!

I closed the book and repeated the words as if in a trance. My rational mind was able to grasp, but could not fully accept the incommensurable implication of the statement. I was that unbelievably delicate green light filtering through the leaves which was bearing witness to the spring that brought new life. Back home, I did not even try to put down on paper the numerous "moments of grace" I experienced, nor could I have. My only wish was to go further and further into this new inner source of understanding and enlightenment.

### *Kundalini Experience*

After having bought the works of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Gopi Krishna and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (a big volume with comments by I.K. Taimni), I finally decided to buy the autobiography of an Indian saint, whom I will indicate by P.Y.<sup>2</sup>. It was a book I had seen some years before but had not bought since it didn't

<sup>2</sup> The reader will understand why I am not mentioning the full name of P.Y. – it is not difficult, however, to figure out his identity. There are many schools of *Yoga* spreading his teachings according to a 'specific legitimacy'. One of these, through its representatives, made me realize that not only won't they tolerate the smallest of the Copyright violations, but they won't even appreciate their beloved Teacher's name to be mixed into discussions about *Kriya* on the Internet. The reason is that,

contain practical instructions. My hope now was that I would be able to find useful information such as the addresses of some good Yoga schools. This autobiography enthralled me and created a strong aspiration toward the mystical path. In certain moments, I found myself almost burning from an internal fever. This situation provided a fertile ground for the coming of an event which was radically different than what I had experienced before. It was a kind of "intimate" experience, nonetheless, since I have listened to similar descriptions from some *Yoga* practitioners, I have decided to share it.

The premises to that experience happened one night while reading P.Y.'s Autobiography. I felt a shiver similar to an electric current spread itself throughout my whole body. A "shiver" was insignificant in itself, but it frightened me a lot. My reaction was rather strange since I had always believed I was immune from fear of all things related to transcendence. The thought flashed through my mind that a deeper event was going to happen soon; that it was going to be strong, very strong and I would not be able to stop it in any way. It was as if my memory had an inexplicable familiarity with it and my instinct knew its inescapable power. I made up my mind to let things happen unimpeded and go ahead with the reading. Minutes passed and I was not able to continue reading; my restlessness turned into anxiety. Then it became fear, an intense fear of something unknown which was threatening my existence. I had certainly never experienced a similar state. In moments of danger, I would remain paralyzed, unable to think. Now my thoughts were stirring frantically picturing the worst exits: loss of the psychological balance, encounter with an evil entity, death.

I felt the urgency of doing something, even though I did not know what. I set myself in the position of meditation and waited. The anguish increased. A part of me, maybe the totality of that entity I call "myself", seemed at the point of melting away. The worst thoughts hung over me without a clear reason.

In those days I had finished reading Gopi Krishna's *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness*. Here the author described the splendid awakening experience he had following an intense practice of concentration on the seventh *Chakra*, whereas – because his body was probably unprepared – he later met serious physical and, as a reflex, psychic problems as well. According to his description, inside his body energy was put in constant motion from the base of the backbone toward the brain. So strong was energy he was bedridden and could not accomplish normal bodily functions. He literally felt as if he was being burned by an inner fire, which he could not put out. Weeks later, he intuitively discovered the way to check out the phenomenon, which became a stout experience of internal realization. I too was afraid I had come to the threshold of the same experience but, since I did not live in India, I was scared the people

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in the past, some people used His name to mislead the search of a high number of practitioners who were trying to receive His original teachings. Moreover, my desire is to inform the reader that in the following pages I will only summarily linger upon my understanding of His legacy, without any pretension to give an objective account of it. An interested reader should not renounce the privilege of turning to the original texts!

around me might not understand. The experience would have been terrible! Nobody could make sure that, like for Gopi Krishna, my experience would be channeled toward a positive conclusion.

The spiritual world appeared to me as a sorrowful and horrible nightmare, able to annihilate and destroy whoever would imprudently approach it. Ordinary life, on the contrary, seemed the dearest and healthiest reality. I was afraid I might not be able to get back to that condition anymore. I was convinced I had opened a door I was not supposed to open. I decided to stop the experience and put off the fatal moment. I stood up and left the room, out to the open air. It was night and there was nobody to whom I could communicate my panic! At the center of the yard, I was burdened, choked, almost crushed by a feeling of desperation, envying all those people who had never practiced *Yoga*. I felt guilty and ashamed of the harsh words I had used against a friend who had been involved in a part of my search. Like so many others, he had shunned any practice, forgot lofty readings, and engaged in enjoying life. Equipped with a juvenile boldness, I addressed him with a tone far from affectionate, which then started to thunder inside my head. I was sorry I had thrown unjustified cruelty at him without really knowing what was in his mind and soul. I would have liked to tell him how sorry I was to have brutally violated his right to live the way he thought was best. He had preferred to protect his mental health rather than become unstable or insane through practices he was unsure of.

Because of my great passion for classical music, I hoped that listening to it might yield the positive effect of protecting me from anguish and help me get back my usual mood. It was Beethoven's *Concert for Violin and Orchestra* that I listened in my room with a pair of headphones that soothed my soul and, after half an hour, eased my sleep. But the following morning I awoke with the same fear. Strange as it may seem, the two pivotal facts that today stir my most intense emotions – Divine Intelligence is at the very basis of everything that exists and that man can practice a definite discipline in order to attune to it – conveyed to me a feeling of horror!

Sunlight poured into the room through the chinks in the shutters. I had a whole day before me. I went out to try and amuse myself by being with other people. I met some friends and spent the afternoon cracking jokes and behaving like the people I had always considered lazy and dull. In this way, I succeeded in hiding my anguish. The first day went by; my mind was totally worn out. After two days, the fear had diminished and I finally felt safe. Something had changed anyway, I hadn't thought about *Yoga* I had only thought around it.

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

I began the practice of *Pranayama* again, as intensely as before. A few days went by without detecting any form of fear. Then, I experienced something

very beautiful.

It was night. I was lying in a relaxed "corpse pose", when I had a pleasant sensation, as if an electric wind was blowing in the external part of my body, propagating itself quickly and with a wavy motion from my feet up to my head. My body was so tired I could not move – even if my mind had imparted it to. I felt the familiar sensation but had no fear. My composure was serene. The electric wind was replaced by another feeling, comparable to an enormous strength filling into the backbone and quickly climbing up to the brain. That experience was characterized by an indescribable, and so far unknown, sense of bliss. The perception of an intense brightness accompanied everything. My memory of that moment is condensed into one expression, "a clear and euphoric certainty of existing, like an unlimited ocean of awareness and bliss". The strangest thing was that in the very instant I had it, I found it familiar.

In *God Exists: I Have Met Him*, A. Frossard tries to give an idea of his spiritual experience. For that purpose, he creates the concept of the "inverse avalanche". An avalanche collapses, runs downhill, first slowly, then faster and violently at the same time. Frossard suggests we should imagine an "upside-down avalanche" which begins strengthening at the foot of the mountain and climbs up pushed by an increasing power; then, suddenly, it leaps up toward the sky. I do not know how long this experience lasted. It definitely peaked out at only a few seconds. When it ended, I turned on my side and fell into a calm, uninterrupted sleep.

The following day, when I awoke, I had forgotten it. It only came up some hours later, during a walk. Leaning against the trunk of a tree, I remained immobile for a couple minutes, enthralled by the reverberation of the memory. I was flooded with great mirth. It was as if I had woken up after a tormented dream; heavy limitations had been weighing my heart down for a long time, now they had dissolved. An elated condition stretching out far over the limits of my awareness – a sort of memory hiding in the recesses of my awareness – began to be revealed, as if a new area of my brain had been stirred to a full awakening. I found myself contemplating a dreamlike reality, still objectively indisputable; it had arisen in me with the naturalness of a primordial instinct although it had nothing to do with the life surrounding me and in which I liked to live.

## Appendix to chapter 1: description of my first Pranayama routine

Here are the practical instructions about the two types of *Pranayama* that I practiced at the very beginning of my search.

**I. Nadi Sodhana Pranayama.** It is important to clean the nostrils before beginning the exercise so the breath can flow smoothly. This can be done with water or inhaling eucalyptus essence and blowing the nose. If one of the nostrils is permanently obstructed; that is a problem that can be solved medically. If the obstruction is due to a severe cold, no *Pranayama* exercise should be practiced.

1. The mouth must be closed.
2. Close the right nostril with the right thumb and inhale through the left nostril slowly, uniformly, and deeply for 6-10 seconds.
3. Pause for a mental count of 3 after each inhalation.
4. Close the left nostril with the right little finger and ring finger - of the same hand.
5. Exhale through the right nostril with the same uniform and deep rhythm.
6. Change nostrils.
7. Keep the left nostril closed, inhale through the right nostril.
8. Close the right nostril with the right thumb and exhale through the left nostril slowly, uniformly, and deeply for 6-10 seconds.

This corresponds to one cycle. Begin with 6 cycles gradually working up to 12 cycles. Use a mental count to make sure the time is the same for both the inhalation and the exhalation. Do not overdo the breathing to the point of discomfort. The nostrils can be closed with the fingers in different ways depending on the preference of the practitioner.

**II. Ujjayi Pranayama.** The technique consists of breathing in and out deeply through both nostrils while producing a sound/noise in the throat. During the exhalation, the noise is not as loud as during the inhalation. After a few days practice, the respiratory action is lengthened without effort. This exercise is normally practiced 12 times. Mentally count to ensure the inhalation and the exhalation have the same duration. Concentration on the comfort and the induced calmness is important: this allows the concentration to become deeper.

**III. Concentration exercise.** Remain perfectly immobile and relaxed for at least 5 minutes. The breath is natural and calm, the attention intensely focused on the point between the eyebrows.

After an initial period of practice, the *Bandhas* are added during *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama*. Let us define the *Bandhas*: when the neck and the throat are slightly contracted, and the chin tilts down toward the breast, this is *Jalandhara Bandha*. *Uddiyana Bandha* (in a simplified form useful for this exercise) consists in slightly contracting the abdominal muscles – the perception of energy inside the

abdominal region and, in general, in the spinal column is intensified. During *Mula Bandha*, the perineum muscles – between the anus and the genital organs – are contracted in an attempt to lift the abdominal muscles in a vertical way, while pressing back the inferior part of the abdomen.

During *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama*, after having inhaled (either through the left or through the right nostril) the *yogi* closes both nostrils; during the ensuing short pause the three *Bandhas* are applied simultaneously. Practicing with intensity and strength of concentration, you'll feel a sensation of energetic current sliding up along the spinal column – an almost ecstatic internal shiver.

Later, if it is comfortable, one can vary the time ratio of inhalation, retention (*Kumbhaka*), and exhalation. The exhalation should last twice the time necessary for the inhalation and the pause after the inhalation should be four times as long. This scheme will be denoted as 1:4:2. During the long pause, the three *Bandhas* are applied simultaneously. Time can be measured through mental chanting of *Om*. Inhale for a slowly count of 3 *Om*. Hold the breath for a count of 12 *Om*. Exhale for a count of 6 *Om*.

#### *Remarks on Nadi Sodhana Pranayama*

Some books quote scientific research endorsing the benefit of this technique. They explain that *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* should be practiced first because it balances *Ida* and *Pingala* currents. *Ida* (feminine in nature, tied to introversion and to the state of rest) flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column, while *Pingala* (masculine in nature, tied to extroversion and to the state of physical activity) flows parallel to *Ida* on the right side. *Sushumna* flows in the middle and represents the experience halfway between the two: the ideal state to be achieved right before beginning the practice of meditation. An Imbalance between *Ida* and *Pingala* is responsible for a lack of introversion-extroversion harmony in many people. Over functioning of the *Ida* channel results in introversion, while predominance of the *Pingala* leads to a state of extroversion.

There are times when we feel more externalized; others when we are more internalized. In a healthy person, this alternation is characterized by a balance between a life of positive relationships and a serene contact with one's own depths. Excessively introverted persons tend to lose contact with external reality. The consequence is that the ups and downs of life seem to gang up against them in order to undermine their peaceful composure. Excessive extroverts betray frailty in dealing with their unconscious feelings and might face unexpected distressing moments. The author concluded the exercise fosters an equilibrium between *Ida* and *Pingala* and in due time, between a tendency to introversion and a tendency to extroversion.

There are four types of brain waves. During deep sleep, delta waves are predominant (1-4 oscillations per second), and in a doze, the theta waves (4-8 oscillations per sec.) dominate. The brain waves that interest us are the alpha waves (8-13 oscillations per sec.). They are mostly present when the person has closed eyes, is mentally relaxed, but still awake and able to experience. When the eyes are opened, or the person is distracted in some other way, the alpha waves

are weakened, and there is an increase of the faster beta waves (13-40 oscillations per sec.).

The amount of alpha waves shows to what degree the brain is in a state of relaxed awareness. EEG measurements prove that alpha waves increase during meditation and the amount of alpha waves in each brain half balance out. The more we practice Nadi Sodhana, the more the alpha waves tend to become equal. *Nadi Sodhana* creates that perfect balance which is the best condition to enter the meditation state.

CHAPTER 2  
**KRIYA YOGA FROM ORGANIZATIONS**

Undertaking the practice of *Pranayama* was like planting the seed of a mighty tree in the feverish season of my youth and contemplate its safe growth in the other times of my life. *Pranayama* became my sure refuge, when the sharp insults of life conspired to wear away the basic joy which was the natural feature of my personality.

By refining the ability for aesthetic enjoyment, it filled my days with the fruition of ideal Beauty, reinforcing my determination to seek only inside it the traces of the ineffable "*Primeval Cause*" of all things.

I had no doubts that the Reality I was directing my life towards was the Self as conceived by C.G. Jung. I believed that *Pranayama* would initiate a cleansing process of the subconscious part of my psyche, guiding me along the "*Individuation Process*" as described by Jung in his books. In my dreamer heart, I fancied I would face the archetypes of the Collective Unconscious....

I knew that no man can undertake such a perilous venture without the guide of a trained psychologist. I had no fear, I relied upon my enthusiasm, vigilance, and indomitable will to perfect my *Pranayama*. About my future, another thing was adamantly clear: I had to choose a profession that wouldn't occupy all my day and energies. I had to live a life without ever betraying my inner Self!

The *Kundalini* experience happened again but didn't become ever constant. It took place especially when I devoted myself to study late and then I laid exhausted on my bed. When it appeared, my heart bubbled with infinite gratefulness to Something higher, beyond my ability of understanding and of visualizing.

I believed *Pranayama* could help anyone to live in a better way. In my beginner's boldness, I could not abstain from trying to convince people to benefit from it. Since my friends, although replying with politeness, didn't share my enthusiasm, I insisted emphasizing with inoffensive but surely annoying words, some aspects of their behavior which I deemed susceptible of improvement. In my opinion, they were imbued with obsessive effort of appearing always cheerful and willing to help out. The point was that the great amount of energy they squandered in this debilitating hysteria was counterbalanced by periods in which they gave the impression of "imploding". They disappeared for some time and, strange indeed, they could no longer put up with anyone.

I dared to speak frankly to them because they had depicted me as an anti-social. In short, I was replying that their social life was a farce. I claimed that *Pranayama* would harness their energies towards a balanced condition. This generated a violent reaction. They replied that my words were deprived of a genuine sense of respect and love and that I was unable to show human sympathy toward others. The essence of what I had found in *Pranayama*, which I went on extolling unflinchingly, appeared to them as the pinnacle of egoism, leading to insulation and unhealthy detachment from reality.

Guilt-ridden, I saw I had provoked only bitterness. Furthermore, I had

been terribly dishonest, having, for my disquisition, taken advantage of my friend's past confidential admissions.

Only one friend, a "Hippie", understood perfectly what I was saying and showed me some empathy; to him, the only inappropriate thing was my excessive enthusiasm in the automatic effects of *Pranayama*. He had no doubts that my success in this practice depended wholly on me. In his opinion, *Pranayama* was not an art bringing in itself its own reward, but an "amplifier" of what you put inside, enhancing what you have already achieved. *Pranayama*, in his opinion, could not create anything new. Up to now I agreed that *Pranayama* could also be regarded as an internal cleaning process but I argued it was basically an action of "climbing" toward a lofty state of consciousness where you achieved something radically new. At that moment I felt disoriented; I wasn't able to see that the two visions could coexist – I was young and I categorized everything as "*black or white*".

The immediate problem was to find other texts, nay, all the existing texts upon *Pranayama*. P.Y. in his autobiography hints at *Kriya Yoga*, a kind of *Pranayama*, which was first taught by Lahiri Mahasaya. This technique had to be mastered through *four levels*. Lahiri Mahasaya was depicted as the incarnation of *Yoga*: surely there must have been something unique in his "way"! I loved *Pranayama*, and the idea of improving it through different steps sounded amazingly wondrous. If the breathing exercises I had already practiced had given me such incomparable results, it was obvious that the *Kriya* four-stage system would make them greater and greater! My imagination played freely and my fervor grew.

I went on reading books by P.Y. I was amazed by his personality, with unequalled will and an unexpected practical spirit. He would not excite me when he spoke on a purely devotional tone, but it did whenever he assumed a more technical one, making it possible for me to fantasize about the beauty of *Kriya*. What I could guess was that *Kriya Yoga* consisted in a way of slow and deep breathing, while the awareness was focused on the spine. Somehow the inner energy was made to rotate around the *Chakras*. The author highlighted the evolutionary value of *Pranayama*. He explained that if we compare the human spinal column to a ferromagnetic substance constituted, as taught by physics, of elementary magnets that turn toward the same direction when they are overlapped by a magnetic field, then, the action of *Pranayama* is akin to this process of magnetization. By uniformly redirecting all the "subtle" parts of our spinal cord's physical and astral essence, the *Kriya Pranayama* burns the so-called "bad seeds" of *Karma*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> We allude to *Karma* whenever we stick to the common belief that a person inherits a baggage of latent tendencies from his previous lives and that, sooner or later, these tendencies are to come out in actual life. Of course *Kriya* is a practice which one can experiment, without necessarily having to accept any creeds. However, since the concept of *Karma* lies at the basis of Indian thought, it is worthwhile to understand and speak freely of it. According to this belief, *Pranayama* burns out the effects of the "bad seeds" just before they manifest in our lives. It is further explained that those people who are instinctively attracted by methods of spiritual development such as *Kriya*, have already practiced something similar in a "precedent incarnation". This is because such an action is never in vain and in actual life they get back to it exactly where, in a remote past, they quit it.

My problem was whether I had to leave for India to look for a teacher who would give me all the necessary clarifications. Since I had planned to get through my university studies quickly, I excluded a journey to India for the near future. One day, while again reading a text of P.Y., I came to know, with my great amazement, that he had written a whole set of lessons on *Kriya*, and that these could be received by correspondence. I quickly applied for this course.

The written material traveled by ship and the delay times were enormous. When, after four months, I received the first lesson, I came to know that the *correspondence* course had to be continued for at least *one year* before applying for the *Kriya* lessons. <sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, I decided to improve the exercises I had already practiced, using all the books I could find – regardless of what language in which they were written. At least, now I knew what to search for: no more the classic exercises (*Kapalabhati*, *Bhastrika*...) but a kind of *Pranayama* in which the energy had to be visualized rotating, in some way, around the *Chakras*. If this had to be – as stated by P.Y. – a universal process, I had good chances of tracing it through other sources and traditions.

There laid something dormant in the corner of my memory which became alive again. I vaguely remembered having seen, in a book about occultism, some drawings sketching out the profile of a person and different circuits of energy all the way throughout the body. The idea came to seek only the essential information in the *esoteric* books rather than in the classic books on *Yoga*.

I started going to a used books store; it was very well furnished, probably because it had once been the Theosophical Society's reference bookstore. I turned down those texts which dealt only with philosophical topics, while, in ecstasy and not concerned by time, I kept on skimming through those which illustrated practical exercises with clarity. Before purchasing a book I made sure it hinted at the possibility of channeling the energy along certain internal passages, creating thus the prerequisite for awakening the *Kundalini*. While reading the index of a text which was in three volumes, introducing the esoteric thought of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, I was attracted by the entry: *Breathing exercise for the awakening of Kundalini*. It was a variation of *Nadi Sodhana*. Some notes warned not to exaggerate with the exercise, because of the risk of a premature *Kundalini* awakening. This was to be avoided by all means. This was definitely not P.Y.'s *Kriya* because, according to several clues, *Kriya* was not to be done through the alternate-nostril breathing.

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

One day, after browsing through a tiresome selection of books, I went to the storekeeper with a book he must have realized I was not satisfied with. While

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<sup>4</sup> I can still consider myself as fortunate. Those people who lived beyond the Iron Curtain (the nearby Yugoslavia for example) could not receive such material.

deciding the price, he remembered something that might interest me. He led me to the back of the store and invited me to rummage in a cardboard box through a messy heap of papers. Among a consistent quantity of miscellaneous material (complete series of the theosophical magazine issues, scattered notes from old course on hypnosis etc.), I came upon a booklet, written in German by a certain K. Spiesberger, which contained various esoteric techniques, among which included the *Kundalini-breathing*. I did not have much familiarity with the German language, but I immediately realized the extraordinary importance of that technique; I would undoubtedly decipher all of it at home, with the help of a dictionary. <sup>5</sup> The description of this technique still amazes me. During a deep breath, the air was to be imagined flowing inside the spinal column. While inhaling, the air was rising; when exhaling, the air was flowing down. There was also the description of two particular sounds that the air originated in the throat.

In another book, written in English, there was an exhaustive description of the *Magic breath* – which consisted in visualizing the energy flowing *around* the backbone, not *inside* it. Through the inhalation, the energy had to go up behind the spinal column, to the center of the head; exhaling, it had to go down along the front part of the body. I completely forgot about the other material. The smirk of satisfaction I wore before the storekeeper holding the two books, as if I had found a treasure of unfathomable value, definitely caused an increase in their price. Walking home, I could not help skimming through the pages; I was curious about some rough drawings illustrating techniques which were based on the movement of energy.

I read that the *Magic breath* was one of the most valuable secrets of all times: if practiced constantly, accompanied by the strength of visualization, it would produce a sort of internal substance allowing for the spiritual eye's vision. I convinced myself that this technique had to be Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*. I incorporated it in my daily routine – it replaced the practice of *Ujjayi Pranayama*.

### *I meet other kriyabans*

A letter from the organization informed me about the existence of other people, living not far from my place, who were practicing *Kriya Yoga*. They had formed a group in order to practice that discipline together. I was enthusiastic and quivered with cheerful anticipation to meet them. That night I hardly succeeded in falling asleep.

"Too bright were our heavens, too far away, too frail their ethereal stuff", wrote *Sri Aurobindo*: I would never have thought that those words could be applied to the consequences of that meeting of mine! With a sort of sour irony, I would dare say that that phase of my life characterized by extreme enthusiasm

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<sup>5</sup> I cannot help smiling when some half-hearted people insist that they are fond of *Kriya*, yet they will not study some crucial texts in English because they are afraid to misinterpret them. I am convinced that their interests are superficial and rather emotive. Such was my enthusiasm, that I would have studied Sanskrit or Chinese or any other language, if that had given me the chance to understand an essential text on *Pranayama*!

for *Pranayama* had been too happy for it to last that long. It was now my time to experience with first hand the problems, limitations and deformations caused by the human mind when it has lost its innocence and the habit of rational thinking. Many times in the future I would have to experience how life is made of short moments of inspiration and serenity, in an alternation of vicissitudes where all seems lost and the perversion of the mind reigns sovereign. Approaching the guy in charge of that group with a total sincerity, I could not have imagined what kind of a hard shock I was about to receive.

He welcomed me with visible enthusiasm, sincerely eager to meet a person with whom he could share the fire of his passion. Since the very first moment of our meeting, standing on his doorstep, I told him how fascinated I was by the practice of *Kriya*! He asked me right away when I had been initiated in this practice, taking for granted that I had received the teaching from the same organization he was a member of. When he figured out how I got busy picking out a breathing technique in a book and fooling myself it was *Kriya Pranayama*, he was petrified, showing a bitter smile of disappointment. He thought I considered *Kriya Yoga* a child's play and had no idea of what seriousness was. Visibly confused I babbled something about currents, sound of the breath, but he didn't want to hear anymore and ushered me in his study. He emphasized that *Kriya* cannot be learned through books. He began the tale – which, later on, I had the opportunity to hear plenty of times – of the Tibetan *yogi* Milarepa who, getting no positive results from the painstaking practice of his fraudulently-learned techniques, received the very same instructions kneeling at the feet of and with the benediction of his *Guru* – so that this time the results came out easily.

We all know how the human mind is more conditioned by an anecdote than by a logical inference! An anecdote, even if it is totally fanciful with fictional purpose, is endowed with a sort of internal "brightness" that conditions a person's common sense; stimulating emotions and feelings, it is able to cloud people's judgment in order for them to easily accept conclusions that are absurd. This story made me speechless; I just did not know what to reply.

There was only one way of learning *Kriya*: being initiated by a "Minister" authorized by P.Y.'s organization! According to his words, *no other person* was allowed to teach the technique. He, and all the other devotees of his group, had received the technique, submitting a precise and solemn promise of secrecy.

"*Secrecy!*" How odd this word sounded, what a strange appeal, what a mysterious fascination it exerted upon my being! Until then, I had always believed it did not matter at all how a certain teaching was received, or what book had been read or studied in order to learn it; I thought that the only important thing was to practice it correctly, accompanied by the desire to go deeper and deeper into it. The idea began to enter my mind that it was fine to protect a precious lore from indiscreet eyes. <sup>6</sup>

Staring into my eyes, with an enormous emotive impact, he went on to say that a practice learned from any other source was "worth nothing, it will not be

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<sup>6</sup> Later, during an arc of many years, I changed my opinion because I witnessed an innumerable series of absurdities originating from this behest; dramatically, I had the evidence that it brought miserable repercussions into the lives of thousands of people.

effective in matters of spiritual purpose", and a possible effect, only apparently encouraging, might be "a dangerous illusion in which the ego remains trapped for a long time".

Inflamed by an absolute faith, he launched himself into a wide digression upon the value of the "*Guru*" (spiritual Teacher) a puzzling concept to me because it was attributed to a person that he had not known directly. Having been initiated into *Kriya* through the legitimated channels of P.Y.'s organization, P.Y. was, in the feeling of his heart, real and present in his life: was "his" *Guru*. The same thing was true for the people who belonged to that group. Their *Guru* was a special aid sent by God Himself, therefore such an event was "the greatest luck a human being can ever have". The logical consequence – underlined with overflowing emphasis – was that, abandoning such form of aid or looking for a different spiritual path amounted to "a hateful rejection of the Divine hand, stretched out in benediction".

He asked me to demonstrate for him my book-learned *Kriya* technique. He was naturally intrigued by curiosity and, I suppose, by the expectation to verify a well-rooted prejudice that the technique, received through illegitimate channels, could not – because of a particular spiritual law – be anything but corrupted. He smiled when he saw me breathing through the nose. Then he asked me to explain if there was something upon which I was focusing my attention during my breathing. According to the books I had read, the energy could be visualized both flowing inside the spine and around the spine. Since P.Y. wrote that a *kriyaban* "mentally directs his life energy to revolve, upward and downward, around the six spinal centers", I chose the second of the two possibilities and this was the version I explained. Besides, having read in another book that during *Kriya Pranayama* the practitioner was supposed to sing *Om* mentally in each *Chakras*, I added this detail as well. I could not imagine that P.Y. had decided to simplify the instructions and taught in the west the other variation with no mental chanting of *Om*.

While telling him these details, I saw an inner satisfaction spreading over his face. Clearly he didn't identify my practice with the technique of *Kriya Pranayama* he had learned. The "secret" he was bound to had not been broken by the author of my esoteric book! Pretending to feel sorry for my consequent disappointment, he informed me in an official tone that my technique had "nothing to do with *Kriya Pranayama*"!

A really bizarre situation was taking place: I was describing for him a technique very similar to *Kriya Pranayama* taught by Lahiri Mahasaya while he was sarcastically simpering, one hundred per cent sure that I was talking nonsense! However, since my position was totally incompatible with his basic tenets, he recommended me to send a written account to the headquarters of P.Y.'s organization, describing the details of my vicissitudes, hoping that they would accept me as a disciple and, in due time, grant me the sacred Initiation to *Kriya Yoga*.

I was somewhat stunned by the tones to which our dialog was progressing. In order to re-establish the initial agreeability of our meeting, I tried to reassure him about the positive effects I had gained from my practice. My statement

actually had the effect of worsening the whole matter, giving him the chance to scold me a second time, which was not totally unfair but undoubtedly out of place. He made it clear I should never look for any tangible effects in the practice of *Kriya*; much less should I display them, because in this way I would "lose them". That clever guy had talked himself straight into an obvious contradiction without even realizing it; he was saying that the results were too important to risk losing them by telling others, and a few seconds before he had underlined that they were of no value whatsoever.

Realizing he had given too much of his time to me, a strange metamorphosis took place in his demeanor. It was as if all of a sudden he had been invested with a sacred role: he promised he would pray for me! On that day, I had lost the "fight". I told him I would follow his advice. As a matter of fact, from that moment, I abandoned *Pranayama* entirely and restricted my practice to simply centering my attention between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) – just as he had suggested to me.

### *Acting the part of a devotee*

As a habit, the group practicing *Kriya* would meet twice a week to practice the techniques together. The room devoted to meditation was bare but pleasant. Each member paid part of the rental, so that its fruition would not depend on the owner's whims and it was dedicated to an exclusively spiritual use. My attendance began in a period that I remember nostalgically; listening to Indian songs translated and harmonized for westerners and, above all, meditating together was a true joy! Everything seemed paradisiac to me, even though little time was given to the practice – no more than 20 minutes – often, scantily 15 minutes. A particularly inspiring session of collective practice took place on Christmas Eve; it was enriched by devotional songs and it lasted many hours. At the end of each meditation we were required to depart in silence, thus I began to know my new friends more closely only during the monthly "social" lunch.

It was a beautiful chance to spend some hours talking and enjoying each other's company. Since many of us did not have their family approval and – much less – support to the practice of *Yoga*, the only occasion we had to spend time among people with the same ideas and interests had to be an experience of great serenity and relaxation. Unfortunately, a distinct embarrassment in our behavior spoiled the pleasantries of our meetings. The reason was that those specially appointed persons in P.Y.'s organization to direct the groups, had requested us not to talk about other spiritual paths or deal with specific details about *Kriya*. Authorized people only, could cover such a role. No one in our group could.

During our gatherings, since our conversations were strictly kept on well-defined tracks, we were not able to find a topic for our conversations which would be interesting and, at the same time, respected the given rules. It was not the right place for worldly gossips, unsuitable for a spiritual group discussion. So one single topic was left: the beauty of our spiritual path and our great fortune in

having discovered it! No wonder that, after some meetings of mutual "exaltation", an almost frightening boredom started to reign in the group. As a last resort, some risked entering the realm of jokes; they were not mean or insulting jokes, but a light and innocent use of humor. Unfortunately, this also had to live up to the devotional attitude kept by many of the members and eventually succumbed to their cold attitude, unable to show a single inch of true joviality. I cannot say that people were depressed, rather they seemed divinely happy, but when you tried to be agreeable you got a look and a hint of a smile that left you frozen for the rest of the day.

As a matter of course, the group underwent a great recycling process; many members who had joined with enthusiasm quit after a few months and then, oddly and without deep reasons, scraped the whole experience off their consciousness.

My open temperament allowed me to become close to one person and establish a bond which later became true friendship. However, it was not so easy to find what could be called a free spiritual seeker: many made a display of too much emotionally charged devotion, others, dreaming a future of solemn pageantry for our modest group, revealed attraction for religious ceremonial, others seemed only social misfits.

Some of them could not believe that I had no doubts or uncertainties about the *Kriya* path and reacted to my enthusiasm with annoyance. They considered my euphoria the typical attitude of an immature beginner. Even trying to do my best in order to convince myself that I was among individuals with the same passions, I had to acknowledge that the reality was different!

With a barely concealed impatience of receiving some elucidation about the technique of *Kriya*, I tried on different occasions to discuss what had been my book-learned practice of it. I hoped that someone, making some oblique remark about it, would help me to guess the exact *Kriya Pranayama* technique. No "courting" could extract from them even a crumb of information. Each one repeated that he was "not authorized to give out any explanations": this rule was strictly respected.

An old *kriyaban* told me: "When you receive *Kriya*, you will be disappointed". Even today I still don't know what he meant. While I was continuously receiving unasked lessons of devotion, humility, and loyalty, my interest for *Kriya* became a real craving, a burning fever. I could not understand why I had to wait such a long time: my great anticipation turned, sometimes, into a fruitless anguish. A *kriyaban* making fun of me with an unconcealed cruelty, told me: "They won't give you the *Kriya* at all; a devotee should not desire a technique with such intensity: God is to be mostly found through devotion and surrender". I tried to behave like a good disciple but deep down, I awaited it with unimagined eagerness.

## *Preliminary Techniques to Kriya*

By studying the correspondence course, I learned different ways of creating healthy habits in order not to disturb, rather to foster the blossoming of my spiritual experiences. I tried my utmost to embrace the school's peculiar Hindu-Christian religious vision. It was easy for me to admire and cherish the figure of *Krishna*, imagining Him as the quintessence of every beauty; later I became acquainted with the figure of the Divine Mother, who was not the Madonna, but a sweetening of the idea of the goddess Kali. My affection for P.Y.'s writings was genuine. Sometimes I considered a particular thought of P.Y. so appealing and perfect that I would write it down on a sheet of paper and keep it on my desk.

I received then the two techniques *Hong So* and *Om*. The first one (called *Hong-So* because of the employed *Mantra*) eases off the breath and the whole psychophysical system; the second one concerns itself with listening to internal (astral) sounds melting into the *Om* sound. I didn't receive these instructions at the same time, but after an interval of two months and one month. This gave me the unique and splendid opportunity to concentrate on the first technique for many weeks; only then would the combination of the two techniques come, the first in the morning and a total immersion in the second at night. Thus, I could experiment with the meaning and beauty of each.

Our group received the visit of an elderly lady who had personally corresponded with P.Y. Thanks to her earnestness, sincerity, and long-time loyal discipleship she had been authorized to help us with meditation. Her temperament was very sweet and more inclined to understanding rather than to censorship. She demonstrated the so-called "*Recharging Exercises*" (I had already learned them from the written lessons). These exercises were similar to isometric stretches and were practiced standing; peculiar to them was that the strength of concentration directed the *Prana* to all the parts of the body.

Then she reviewed the *Hong So* technique. She went on to clarify that the *Hong So* technique was not easy at all, in spite of its apparent simplicity; but, encouraging us with a smile, she concluded: "The technique contains all you need to come into contact with the Divine Essence".<sup>7</sup>

Then she dwelt on the *Om* technique.<sup>8</sup> She explained that P.Y. had tried to explain the teaching of the Trinity in a new way. *Om* is the "*Amen*" of the Bible – the "**Holy Ghost**", the "witness", a sound; a proof of the vibration of energy sustaining the universe. This *Om* technique I was going to learn, discovered by the mystics long ago, makes it possible to detect this vibration.

<sup>7</sup> Later on, this technique was destined to give me excellent results by ideally establishing a connection between each breath and a different *Chakra* – but I write about this in Appendix 2 to the third part of the book.

<sup>8</sup> This technique does not belong to those included in the original *Kriya Yoga*, where the internal sounds perception happens without closing the ears. It is not an invention by P.Y.. It had been plainly described in the books of classical *Yoga*, called *Nada Yoga* – "the *Yoga* of the sound." It is a good preparation for *Kriya* since instead of putting the accent on "to do", it teaches the attitude of "perceiving."

Thanks to it, it is also possible to be guided toward the experience of the "**Son**" – the Divine awareness that is present inside the above-mentioned energetic vibration. At the end of one's spiritual journey, one can reach the highest reality, the "**Father**" – the Divine awareness beyond every existing thing in the universe.

The lady's explanation was characterized by such a sacred flavor that it accompanied me for the following weeks, helping me overcome the starting phase of the practice, where it seems unlikely that the sounds will manifest. The results obtained through the intensive practice of the *Om* technique were very sound. I remember nostalgically my time in that slightly illuminated room where I led a cloistered existence. The rainy days of the last part of the year, the evening coming early helped my seclusion and strengthened my determination of turning on, through meditation, an internal sun. Some weeks of zealous practice passed off *without* a single result. One day I became aware of a clear inner sound. It happened after ten minutes of calm effort, just when I returned to my state of full awareness after having been lost into some sweet reverie. This sound was going on during my mental roaming but only now I was realizing its nature. It was like the humming of a mosquito. By listening to it, it became the feeble sound of a musical instrument playing far away. When my breath almost disappeared, it seemed like the tolling of a bell echoing at dusk from the deep green of woody hills. One day I believed I was listening to the *Om* internal sound. I cannot define it but it was like nearing Beauty itself. I couldn't imagine anything being able make a person feel so fine. For the first time in my life the concept of "devotion" had a meaning.

In that happy period of my life I tried tracking down in spiritual literature any movement or eminent figure who had a link with the subject: "Om." There is no doubt that Saint John of the cross heard the typical rushing water sound of the *Om* vibration. He gave a splendid description of his meeting with the "resounding rivers", the "silent music", the "sounding solitude". Teresa of Avila in her book "The Interior Castle" wrote: "It roars like many big rivers with waterfalls, there are flutes, and a host of little birds seem to be whistling, not in the ears, but in the upper part of the head, where the soul is said to have its special seat."

"Seek the Sound that never ceases, seek the sun that never sets", wrote the great mystic Rumi. "The universe was manifested out of the Divine Sound; from It came into being the Light." (Shams-i Tabrizi).

Regarding his concept of *Shabda*, in Kabir's writings, which can be translated as "Word" (the word of the Master), we can relate it to the *Omkar* teaching. According to him this *Shabda-Om* dispels all doubts and difficulties, but it is vital to keep it constantly in our consciousness as a living presence.

The literature about Kabir (1398 Benares - 1448/1494 Maghar) and Guru Nanak (1469 Nankana Sahib - 1539 Kartarpur) is very inspiring. There were deep similarities with the experiences and thought of Lahiri Mahasaya. Their teachings overlapped perfectly. Kabir, an illiterate weaver, Muslim of origin, was a great mystic, open to the vedantic and *yogic* influence; an extraordinary singer of the Divine, conceived beyond name and form. The poems and sentences ascribed to him are expressed in a

particularly effective language that remains permanently emblazoned in the reader's memory. In the last century, Rabindranath Tagore, the great mystic poet of Calcutta, rediscovered the reliability of his teachings, the power of his poetry and made beautiful translations of his songs into English. Kabir conceived Islam and Hinduism as two roads converging toward a unique goal: he was always convinced of the possibility of overcoming the barriers that separate these two great religions. He did not seem to base his teaching upon the authority of the holy writings; he shunned the religious rituals. Kabir taught not to renounce to life and become a hermit, not to cultivate any extreme approach to the spiritual discipline, because it weakens the body and increases pride. That God has to be recognized inside of one's own soul - like a fire fed by continuous care, burning all the resistances, dogmas and ignorance - this beautifully appears in Kabir's saying: "One day my mind flew as a bird in the sky, and entered the heavens. When I arrived, I saw that there was no God, since He resided in the Saints!" Hinduism gave Kabir the concept of reincarnation and the law of *Karma*; Islam gave him the absolute monotheism - the strength of fighting all the forms of idolatry and the caste system. I found the full meaning of the *yogic* practice in him; he says that there is a garden full of flowers in our body, the *Chakras*, and an endless beauty can be contemplated if the awareness is established into the "thousand-petal Lotus".

"Who is there playing upon a flute in the middle of the sky? The flute is being played in trikuti (eyebrows center), the confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna. The sound emanates from the north! Cowherd girl, hear the sound of the flute and lo, they are all hypnotized by the nada." "It is a music without strings which plays in the body. It penetrates the inner and the outer and leads you away from illusion." (Kabir).

Beloved Guru Nanak gave the same teaching. He disapproved of ascetic practices and taught instead to remain inwardly detached whilst living as a householder. "Asceticism doesn't consist in ascetic robes, or in having a walking staff, nor in visiting burial places. Asceticism is not mere words; asceticism is to remain pure amidst impurities!" Traditionally, release from the bondage of the world was sought as the goal, therefore the householder's life was considered an impediment and an entanglement. In contrast, in Guru Nanak's teaching, the world became the arena of spiritual endeavor. He was bewitched by the beauty of creation and considered the panorama of nature as the loveliest scene for worship of the Divine. He expressed his teachings in Punjabi, the spoken language of northern India. His disregard for Sanskrit suggested that his message was without reference to the existent Holy Scriptures. He made a deliberate attempt to completely cut off his disciples from all the ritualistic practices, orthodox modes of worship, and from the priestly class. His teaching demanded an entirely new approach. While a full understanding of God is beyond human beings, he described God as not wholly unknowable. God must be seen through "the inward eye", sought in the "heart": he emphasized the revelation of this to be achieved through meditation. In his teachings there are hints on the possibility of listening to an ineffable internal melody (*Omkar*) and to taste the nectar (*Amrit*).

"The Sound is inside us. It is invisible. Wherever I look I find it." (Guru Nanak).

Unfortunately, I learned *the hard way* that you should never detach yourself voluntarily from that contact. There was a time in my life, while I was relaxing and enjoying life, when I decided to interrupt this state of grace, as if it were a drawback to being fully sociable. I didn't realize that this seemingly innocuous

and instinctive "betrayal" would make me unable to tune with the *Omkar* reality for a very long time. Incredulous, in a few days I felt hopelessly extraneous to that sweet reality. I was like one who has landed in another continent and has to live in environments that mean nothing to him. I struggled for the purpose of retrieving the lost deep emotions. This went ahead for months until my soul confronted again with the motivations that led me to the spiritual path and saw clearly that my stupid decision had been a *monumental mistake*.

### *Recollections of the Kriya Initiation Ceremony*

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

In the meantime, a Minister of P.Y.'s organization visited our country and I took part in the initiation ceremony. After waiting for months, it was high time "to make an eternal pact with the *Guru* and to be taught the *Kriya* techniques in the only legitimate way, and receive his benediction".

There were about 100 of us who were to be initiated. A beautiful room had been rented for the ceremony at a very high price and embellished for the occasion with lots of flowers, such as I have never seen even at the most extravagant weddings! The introduction to the ceremony was magnificent: about 30 people wearing a sober uniform entered the room, lining up with a solemn attitude and joined their hands in prayer. It was explained to me that those people belonged to the local group whose leader was a stylist and he had choreographed that triumphant entrance. The two teachers, who had just arrived from abroad, walked meekly and bewildered behind them. Then the ceremony began. I accepted without objections their demand of swearing everlasting devotion not only to the *Guru* P.Y. but also to a six-master chain; of whom Lahiri Mahasaya was an intermediary link. P.Y. was the so-called *Guru-preceptor*, namely the one who would partially bear the burden of our *Karma*.

It would have been strange if no one had had doubts about this; I remember a lady wondering if P.Y. – definitely unable to give any confirmation, now being a long-time resident in the astral world – had really accepted her as a "disciple" and, consequently, to be laden with her *Karma*. Obviously I reassured her, if it were not for avoiding that with such thoughts she spoiled with her hands the subtle enjoyment of so many positive emotions.

They assured us that Christ was part of this chain because He had appeared to Babaji (Lahiri Mahasaya's *Guru*) asking Him to send emissaries to the West to spread the *Kriya* lore. This story caused me no perplexity at all:

perhaps I had no time to think about it. To consider the whole mission of *Kriya* diffusion as originating from Christ Himself was a pleasant idea. On the other hand, I was too anxious to hear the explanation of the technique was soon to take place.

The *Kriya* technique embodied God's most effective blessing toward His privileged creatures, humans, which exclusively possessed an inner body with seven *Chakras*. The mystic seven-step ladder of the *Chakras* was the real highway to salvation, the fastest and safest. My mind was in great expectation for something I had so strongly desired and for which I had seriously been preparing for months. It was not what might be called a "sacrament" that I was submitting to, in order to safeguard a family tradition; it was the crowning of a definitive choice! My heart was immensely happy at the thought of the inner joy that I would gain through the practice of *Kriya*.

Finally, after being taught the *Kriya Pranayama*, I realized I already knew it: it was the *Kundalini-breathing* technique, which I had found a long time ago in my esoteric readings and which prescribes that the energetic current flows all the way inside the spinal column. I have already explained that I had not taken into serious consideration that procedure, owing to the fact that in P.Y.'s writings, which were the basis for my first glimpses of the mechanism of *Kriya Pranayama*, it was written that the energy had to be rotated "around the *Chakras*, along an elliptical circuit". I was not disappointed, as someone had prophesied, rather, the technique appeared perfect to me. The explanation of the techniques *Maha Mudra* and *Jyoti Mudra* (they never used the more common term *Yoni*) concluded the technical instructions. Each technique's detail was explained in such a way that it would not allow for the smallest variation and, in addition, a specific routine was warmly recommended. If the least amount of doubt on the correctness of a certain detail had arisen during the practice, nobody was encouraged – even vaguely – to conduct an experiment and come to a conclusion by himself. The only "correct" action that was fair to do was to contact the headquarters of our *Kriya* organization, tell them the problem and receive further guidelines. This, in effect, was what I always did. I learned to interact only with them; I would instinctively look for their advice as if it were given by perfect beings that could never be wrong. I believed they were "channels" through which the blessings of the *Guru* flowed. Besides, I was quietly confident that – even if they would not admit it out of humility – they had already reached the highest level of spiritual realization.

### *Problems with the Routine*

I am not able to express the emotion and feeling of sacredness which characterized my practice of *Kriya Pranayama*. During the day or before sitting down to practice it, I often repeated to myself the sentence (quoted in AOY) by Lalla Yogiswari:

"What acid of sorrow have I not drunk? Countless my rounds of birth and death. Lo! naught but nectar in my cup quaffed by the art of breath."

This intensified my enthusiasm, strengthening my determination to perfect unceasingly my *Kriya* path. Yet, looking back, having always kept alive that ardent belief, I must objectively admit that the results were not different from those gotten through the practice of the simpler technique of *Ujjayi Pranayama*.<sup>9</sup> I had some problems which I am going now to discuss. (I have no doubts that these problems could have been easily resolved if I had used common sense.)

The first exercise to be practiced was the *Hong-So* technique – this had to last 10 to 15 minutes. The breathing was supposed to become more relaxed and create a good state of concentration. Then, after putting the forearms on a support, the listening to the internal sounds began – this would require about the same time. Then there would follow another interruption because of the *Maha Mudra*. Eventually, setting back in a still and stiff position to restore the feeling of sacredness, the *Kriya Pranayama* began with rigorous respect to all the instructions. After *Jyoti Mudra*, the *Kriya* routine would be concluded with a full ten-minute concentration on the *Kutastha*, to absorb the results of the whole endeavor.

In my practical experience, the two preliminary techniques did not receive the attention they deserved, while the time devoted to the final concentration was too short. During the *Hong-So* technique, the thought that I should soon interrupt it to start the *Om* technique brought about a disturbing feeling, hampering my whole surrender to its beauty. The same happened with the procedure of the second technique, interrupting it in order to practice *Maha Mudra*.

The technique of listening to *Om* was a complete "universe" in itself and led to the mystic experience: that is why its interruption was something worse than a simple disturbance. It was illogical: as if, recognizing a friend with joyous surprise among a crowd, one begins talking with him then suddenly goes away with the hope to meet, quite by chance, that friend again and get back to where the conversation had previously ended. The sound of *Om* was the mystic experience itself, the Goal I sought, why should I interrupt that sublime attunement to regain it through another technique? Perhaps because *Kriya Pranayama* was a higher procedure? Higher? What on earth does that mean? I forced myself into such absurdity for an extremely long period. I hoped for a hypothetical future evolution of such unclear situation. At that time, the idea of using my brain and change radically the routine seemed to me an act of stupid arrogance. Such was the power of that insanity that in our group was called "loyalty". I must acknowledge that unfortunately I had become like one of those

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<sup>9</sup> After much experimenting which happened in the following years and considering also the reports of some sincere friends who tried out different forms of *Kriya Pranayama*, I am sure that if I had practiced *Kriya* in the way P.Y. taught during the thirties (adding the chanting of *Om* in the *Chakras*) I would have obtained better results – I am referring to being able to listen to astral sounds (and *Om* sound) without closing the ears, which *Ujjayi Pranayama* cannot give. The received technique was very good for, let us say, 14-24 breaths. But if you want to go beyond that number, it is so fine to add the mental chanting of *Om* in the *Chakras*. *Kriya Pranayama* as PY taught it in the years 1930s is indeed a masterpiece, far more beautiful than what certain schools now offer as "original *Kriya*." If I had received that teaching instead of the simplified version, I would have touched the sky with one finger. Sometimes I bitterly ask myself: "Why P.Y. yielded to the temptation of simplifying it"? A simpler technique can be a delight for most people but, when it is cruelly and foolishly private of vital points, could become a limitation for those who are able to practice a great number of *Kriya* breaths.

animals that, fed by man, tend to forget how to be self-sufficient.

When I tried to discuss this problem with other *kriyabans*, I noticed an enormous and unreasonable resistance. There were those who were not satisfied with their practice but planned to try it again in the future, while others were not able to understand what I was saying.

Talking with a lady who was a longtime friend of our family, she pretended to listen attentively but in the end, she bluntly declared she already had a *Guru* and did not need another. Her remark cut me deeply since my intention was only to have a rational talk which could be inspiring for both of us. Apart from this, what sort of friendship can exist between two persons when one uses that mode of expression?

To pass by such episodes one after the other confirmed the idea that not being encouraged to trust the limpidity of self-observation, many friends went on mechanically performing what many times had become an empty ritual; which would appease their conscience.

With the exception of one person (who harbored really strange ideas about the spiritual path, to the point that it crossed my mind that he was mentally unstable), these new *kriyaban* friends seemed to censor my excessive interest in techniques, claiming that devotion was much more important. Often they referred to concepts I could hardly link to the practice of *Yoga* i.e. the paramount importance was loyalty toward P.Y. and his organization.

While their effort in practicing the meditation techniques in a deep way was not remarkable, they tried with any external means (readings, devotional chanting, convocations...) to extract from the depths of their psyche any trace of religious attitude, any scrap of spiritual aspiration. They impregnated it with the natural heart's affection for their *Guru* – even if they had known him only from photos – obtaining thus the resolution of a lifelong commitment. Looking back at those times, I wonder what their opinion about my impatient attitude was in contrast to their passiveness. In my reasoning, I could not conceive of the idea of leaning passively under the protection of a saint who solved all our problems. This fact, together with others I had experienced in that school, was a cause of real conflict. My approach to the spiritual path was so different from theirs that there was no hope of reaching a point of contact or common ground.

### *My remembrance of a friend*

I became acquainted with an elderly *kriyaban*, worthy of the maximum respect and admiration, who had begun the *Kriya* path many years before. We met each other in the last years of his life. There were moments in which, knowing the total loneliness in which he lived, it broke my heart to remain months without seeing him. For various reasons this was inevitable; we always met for short and transient afternoons, walking and speaking quietly. I was witness to an inexorable process that brought him to the point of living only from the memory of the warm rays of a glance and a simple nod once received from the woman who was head of the *Kriya organization* and the spiritual successor of P.Y.. His

supreme dream was always to create a friendly tie with that divine being, whom he felt was the epitome of his ideal of perfection. I tried to convince him that to slip into an uncritical personality cult, into the deification process of this inspiring figure, could constitute the death of his spiritual adventure. But my companion seemed irremediably spellbound by the idea of "transmission of power". He explained that in all great mystical traditions the strength of the great Teachers of the past, their subtle vibration, is still present in their descendants – not because of consanguinity, but through the transmission of their "power", as a non-stop chain. He was convinced that spiritual progress cannot happen except through receiving this "power". It was normal that he felt the highest respect for that human channel who was officially invested by the mission for transmitting their particular "benediction". It was reasonable then that he had tried to achieve a place of importance in their heart.

The problem was that perhaps this attainment had become more important than meditation. He expressed something that years before he would not have even dared to think: the presumed evolution of the individual, achieved through *Kriya*, was undeniable, but so slow as to be practically negligible. Nevertheless, the *Kriya* techniques were, for him, like a religious ritual which had to be performed scrupulously just to give proof of loyalty.

Unfortunately, this axiom was the frame-work upon which he had been interweaving his thought. He had given his full approval to the idea that on this planet there were special people, "Self realized", and irreparably common ones. In a dimension of utter authenticity, one day he vented all of his gloom. Looking at how superficially – so he said – he had practiced the techniques of meditation, he had no doubts that, in this life, he had certainly missed the "target". He was already dreaming of future incarnations in which he could practice with great engagement. To this he was sweetly resigned. I felt a giant wave of inexplicable nostalgia which was ready to overwhelm me, but it remained curbed, as if suspended around us.

Now that he is no longer alive, I wonder if the intuition of the transforming power of *Kriya* he had over forty years ago (this idea lightened up and sustained the first years of his path) was gradually erased from his consciousness by the tendency of the organization to emphasize, through constant barrage of anecdotes, the greatness of certain persons who were "impudently" saintly, perfect, majestic. How wretched it had been for my friend, the belief that his *supreme good* depended on a loving glance from the person he felt as divine! He had made the unfortunate mistake to believe that the eternal spiritual source in the center of his being would dry out when he was far from the blessings of the one person toward whom he had directed the warm aspiration of his heart.

CHAPTER 3  
THE INESTIMABLE VALUE OF JAPA

P.Y. wrote that the *Second Kriya Yoga* enables the *yogi* to leave his body consciously at will. To be instructed in such a delicate mechanism was now my primary dream. I was sure that the simple fact of exercising with such a procedure would have a strong effect on my spiritual evolution. After I received the last lesson of the correspondence course, I could finally apply to receive that instruction.

I was very happy to study the longed for lessons on *Second Kriya*. Despite my serious and conscientious practice, no promised results, like perceiving the color of each *Chakra* on the screen of *Kutastha*, ever took place. I went ahead, utilizing all my endurance and stamina built up with the *Om technique*. Some "strong" experiences began to occur in the spine. They appeared hours later or when lying down immediately after the practice. This brought such intensity of devotion! It was a surprise discovering it inside my personality.

Unfortunately, the written lessons contained some ambiguous pieces. Just to give an example, P.Y. wrote that in order to awaken *Kundalini* it was important to practice regularly *Kechari Mudra*. But the instruction how to achieve it were nowhere to be found.

I contacted the elderly lady who was officially invested as a "Meditation Counselor". She could not help me. She had learned the *Higher Kriyas* only in written form many years before. Unfortunately no direct initiations were ever given. Strange to say, having had plenty of opportunities to do so, she had never had them checked by direct disciples of P.Y.. Since I knew she had spent much time talking with direct disciples of P.Y., I wondered what more important matters they had to discussing.

Among the *kriyabans* in the meditation group, there was a lady, who had received *Kriya* initiation many years before and had once lived near our school's general offices. I asked if she had received the *Second Kriya*. She didn't seem to understand the question. So, with astonishment, I reminded her that Lahiri Mahasaya's disciple, Swami Pranabananda, accompanied the moment of his death with the practice of the *Second Kriya*. She became visibly nervous, saying that the quotation clearly referred to the technique of *Kriya Pranayama*: one breath, then a second one, and this had to be, in her opinion, the "*Second Kriya*!" I looked at her with a meek and piercing look; I felt my legs give way. I had the impression that the idea itself of a further technique to be added in time to the too many already received and practiced daily, upset her. It was as if she felt she had made so great an effort in setting the habit of a daily practice of the *First Kriya*, that she could not bring forth a more engaging dedication. I believe that, up to this day, she has remained fixed in her conviction.

I had still not recovered from the "shock", when an aristocratic-looking lady disclosed to me she had received initiation in the so-called *Higher Kriyas* since many years ago. Full of enthusiasm, my eyes opened wide. She said she had felt so unworthy that she had put them aside and, after some time, she had forgotten them entirely. "Forgotten!" I couldn't believe my ears. This last

abomination was inconceivable to me. Her self-satisfied ignorance passed off for humbleness and for who knows what kind of overabundant devotion, crossed the bounds of decency. When I expressed my objection that her behavior seemed an exhibition of indifference toward the higher teachings taught by her *Guru*, she looked at me in bewilderment as if my impertinence had violated an implicit law: do not impudently enter the intimate dimension of her *Sadhana*. She replied saying that what she had was enough; then briskly cut off any discussion.

### *Difficulties with the Printed Material Related to the Higher Kriyas*

After one year I received the lessons on the *Third* and the *Fourth Kriya*. Reading that these techniques led to the experience of *Astral Samadhi*, I was enthusiast. There were also instructions about the routine to be followed, but they were a little bit hazy. I had the impression that practicing those new techniques at the end of my daily routine was the right thing. Unfortunately that didn't work. A fundamental lesson in *Kriya* is never end a routine with techniques requiring movement!

Such procedures, in order to express the fullness of their potential, had to be internalized either by following specific instructions or simply one's intuition that however should be well accustomed to express freely, without being paralyzed by the conditioning of absolute obedience, loyalty etc. "Internalized" means that the main action of a procedure is repeated again and again by pure use of concentration and *Mantra*. This way *Prana* tends to subside in all the body and the subtle meaning of the procedure is deciphered, its essence factually appreciated.

I would have understood all this in the future: at that time I didn't dare to make any thing that went over the scant written instructions that I had received.

I didn't even attempt to clarify my doubts by addressing old *kriyabans*. I wrote to the management of my *Kriya* school to schedule an appointment with one of its representative Ministers who would soon come to our country. I hoped to clarify everything on that occasion and I looked forward with great anticipation to that date.

When the Minister arrived, my "Meditation Counselor" introduced me to him. He said he would clarify my doubts as soon as possible. In the following days, I was dismayed when I realized that the Minister kept on postponing our meeting without valid reasons. Since I decided not to give up, at last we met. I went through something truly unpleasant.

I was convinced that hypocrisy, bureaucracy, formality, hidden falsity and subtle violence to one's honesty were totally alien to one who devoted his life to practicing and teaching *Kriya*. Yet, the sensation I had was akin to meeting a business man, who had more important affairs in mind and who was very irritable. He was emphatic not to talk about *Kechari Mudra* and with regard to the head movements of the *Third* and *Fourth Kriya* techniques, he advised me brutally to restrict my practice to the *First Kriya*. He declared I was overexcited

and this was not a good sign for a *kriyaban*. I replied I would surely keep in consideration his advice, nevertheless, I wanted to see how to move my head correctly in order to practice those techniques in a hypothetical future.

Annoyed – taking my remark as an insolence – he recommended me to write my questions to the school's head and stood up as he said this, as if leaving. In vain I replied that the movements of the head (required from *Third* and *Fourth Kriya* techniques) could not be shown through a letter; I was in front of a "wall" and the refusal was absolute.

I had always trusted and respected P.Y.'s organization; I had studied the whole reference literature as if preparing for a university exam. After the interview with that ill-disposed figure, I was in an atrocious mental and emotional state. I wondered what role played a school that was not doing its very best to clarify each given teaching. For what reason were our ministers traveling around the world, if not to directly show students how to practice what they have learned through the correspondence course? Why should I feel guilty and unsuitable for the *Kriya* path, only because of my daring to ask (firmly but politely) a practical demonstration? I was not able to drop the whole matter.

Among my friends, a bit dazed by what had happened, a lady with a honeyed voice suggested that I got an important earful from *Gurudeva* – up to that time, I had a too much self-assured attitude. I could not understand what she meant. Those who saw me immediately after the meeting said I was unrecognizable.

After some days, the feeling of having witnessed the senseless whims of a man in power, yielded to a different consideration. Very probably that Minister gave me the same discipline he received during his postulant years. A lady who had known him at that time, depicted him as a very curious *kriyaban* who usually put many technical questions to elder Ministers. Knowing the rules of monastic discipline, I was sure that his queries weren't always answered promptly.

This made me more calm and cheerful. But, there are childish thoughts that emerge when we are in an uncertain situation. I was afraid that this man, communicating back to the headquarters of P.Y.'s organization, might speak unfavorably of me, saying something that might have reduced the probability for me to obtain that coveted information in the future. I feared I could no longer rely on the heavenly relationship with that *Kriya* organization, which, for so many years, had represented my horizon.

Strange as it might seem, a part of me, was intimately relishing the whole situation. I knew for certain that this destructive experience would somehow be turned into something positive, crucial for my path. I was too much in love with the *Kriya* path to be daunted by any difficulty.

The lady "Meditation Counselor", who was not present on that occasion but met the Minister in another town, blamed me for having made the interview with the Minister a troublesome event. I wrote her a bitter letter, insulting her indirectly. She replied very firmly implying that my letter ended our friendship.

Later she toned down her attitude and invited me in her house to talk

about the happening. First of all, I expressed her my irrevocable determination to explore all the possible sources to have my queries clarified exhaustively. I discussed the project of leaving for India. She mumbled something that I could not grasp. She mentioned the fact that India was not guarantee of authenticity. Recently, some *kriyabans* had found in a well known *Ashram* strictly tied with P.Y. life story, a *Swami* who gave them "pseudo *Kriya*" techniques that were, in her opinion, dangerous. She said that there was nothing unusual about it; there were many unauthorized teachers introducing themselves as loyal disciples of P.Y.. With a vivid imagination, she compared them with spiders spreading the honey of the *Guru's* love to attract devotees who became their preys. She spoke about a disciple of P.Y., who had been formerly part of the direction of the organization, then had branched out on his own opening another *Kriya* school. A "traitor" to her.

The lady had material to go ahead with her stories indefinitely, but it was then that it slipped out of my mouth a very strong sentence which surprised me and froze her: "Should I receive a *Kriya* teaching from the worse criminal in the world, I would be able to turn it into gold. Should it be polluted, I would have the intuition to reconstruct it in its integrity as it was in origin". She replied with a sigh that I was moving dangerously close to losing the grace of my *Guru*-disciple relationship.

In order to let me understand the value of receiving the instructions from a true *Guru*, she told me what happened when one *kriyaban* decided to leave the *Ashram* of his *Guru* P.Y. and seek another teacher. The *Guru*, aware of this, got in the disciple's way to stop him, when he heard an inner voice – "the voice of God", she specified – ordering him not to interfere with the disciple's freedom. P.Y. obeyed and in a flash of intuition foresaw all the disciple's future incarnations, those in which he would be lost, in which he would keep on seeking – amid innumerable sufferings, jumping from one error to another – the path he was then relinquishing. Then, in the end, the disciple would return to the same path. The lady said that P.Y. had been really accurate on the number of incarnations that the whole discouraging trip would have taken to – about thirty! The moral of this story was clear, something from which one could not escape: I had to avoid looking elsewhere otherwise I would lose myself in a labyrinth of enormous sufferings and who knows when I would be able to get back on the correct path.

It was then that I shifted my attention to the photograph of P.Y., taken on the day of his death. It was framed nicely; some flowers and packets of incense were put before it. In those moments of silence, I had the sensation that tears were going to form in his blissful eyes (it was not a bizarre feeling, other people told me they had the same impression). I related my impressions to her, in response to which she became so serious and, with her eyes pointed far off toward an indefinite spot, she soberly uttered: "You have to consider it a warning: the *Guru* is not content with you"! There was not the least doubt that she was not joking at all.

In that moment, I realized how P.Y. was a "presence" in her life, although she never met him! I let my gaze rest on the flower bouquet of May Lilies

graciously arranged in a small vase before the photo of P.Y.. We had purchased them at the train station immediately after my arrival in her town. She had then explained that she never skimmed on fresh flowers for her "Guru." Although extraneous to all this, I was enchanted by their idyll. How full of sweet comfort had to be her life! I knew that if I wanted to feel devotion with such intensity, I had a lot of work to do: develop stable internal tranquility, bow to my favorite form of the Divine and repeat this action of surrender with total sincerity every day of my life.

Although she admired the earnestness with which I was making progress – unlike so many other tepid and half-hearted people who would go to her only to be reloaded with the motivation they could not find in themselves – she was dismayed, because her devotion toward the *Guru* was totally alien to me. She could not relieve either my immense thirst for knowledge of the art of *Kriya*.

Looking into her beautiful eyes, I had the clear impression that she was permanently expecting me to act in a somewhat "disloyal" way either toward the *Guru* or toward the organization.

The Minister of my organization at least on one point was right: I was not calm at all. The search for technical explanations made me tense like a coiled spring. Although remaining faithful to my *Kriya* organization, I didn't accept vetoes and therefore I didn't take her advices. I was determined to know *Kriya* inside out and no one could stop me, with any argument.

My search took a particular route: I knew three names of direct disciples of P.Y. who had a clash with the school's board of directors and set up on their own. I hoped to find clues in some book which could help me to clarify my doubts. I purchased all their published material, taped lectures and all. I was expecting that in order to show how they had become proficient with *Kriya*, they would come out with intriguing sentences, deeper than the material provided by the main organization. I hoped they gave the reader (who was neglecting the principal source to listen to their voice of dissent) a more accurate didactic material.

The first disciple seemed an expert in idle chatter and was reluctant with giving practical instructions; the second one was undoubtedly more professional, pedagogically gifted, but from of all his literature and tapes only one of his sentences shed a faint light upon one of the *Higher Kriyas*; in the literature of the third disciple – surprising and valuable since, having met the tragedy of mental illness, he recounted exhaustively his anguish – I found (save for an illumining sentence upon the role of *Kechari Mudra*) only a devastating banality. The secrets, if they had some, were well guarded!

Months later, the Meditation Counselor came to know that I had read the "forbidden" books. Not only that, I made a present of one of them to a couple of friends! A friend of mine showed me a letter in which she had called me "a man who stabs his *Guru's* back, handing out daggers to other people as well, so they can do the same"! She concluded by writing that "intelligence is a double-edged weapon: it can be used to eliminate the swelling of ignorance and also to cut off abruptly the lifeblood that sustains the spiritual path."

Her reaction had been so emphatic that I wasn't hurt at all. Her actions

were driven by waves of unabashed emotion; decades of steadfast conditioning, irretrievably affecting her common sense. I felt a sort of tenderness toward her and I smiled picturing the moment in which she had written that letter – seeing her own expectations regarding my behavior coming true, I am sure that her countenance was at last tranquil and serene as if tasting a delicious, intimate satisfaction.

Overcoming a certain reluctance, I began reading some books written no more by disciples of P.Y. but by Lahiri Mahasaya's. My hesitation in dropping the literature linked with P.Y. resulted from the fact that, in my opinion, it was unique as far as clarity.

These few books (at that time books like *Puran Purush* had not yet been published) disappointed me. They were but blank, meaningless words, with an endless number of repetitions in addition to continuous changes of topic, which I considered unbearable. The practical notes, presented as essential, were but scattered notes copied from classical books on *Yoga*. The lack of care in them made me suppose that the author had not bothered checking the original texts he had quoted. He most probably took those quotations from books which were also quoting from other reference books, continuing a chain where each author would add something to mark his personal contribution.

I decided to study again all the material furnished by my organization and to delve deeper into it. I used to meet some *kriyaban* friends on Sundays, read crucial passages from the correspondence course and dwell on them during a walk. Everyone embarked in a personal study of which those talks represented the peak. Actually our main interest was how to perfect the practice of *Kriya*. But our efforts was barren – like drawing blood from a stone.

I decided that each detail of my life should be lived applying integrally P.Y.'s thought. In actual fact, I chose those patterns of behavior toward which my emotions drove me. My approach was devoid of watchfulness and discrimination. I was acting as if I were supported from "above", imagining that the benedictions and the strength of the *Guru* were with me.

The failure came and it was desolating and shameful. At first, I could not accept it. I refused to believe I had acted wrongly. I believed that mine was an apparent failure. Then my illusory dream began to disintegrate, slowly but inexorably. For some months I wasn't able to track down the thread of a single coherent thought.

## *Inspiration from the Works of Mère and Sri Aurobindo*

That was the situation when I started reading *Mother, or the Divine Materialism*, a book about the Mother (Mère) written by her beloved disciple: Satprem. Two years before, I was introduced to the thought of Sri Aurobindo. His *Aphorisms* and his epic poem *Savitri* had deeply impressed me. After Sri Aurobindo's death, in 1951, the Mother was the one continuing his research and giving ground to his dream that the Divine – the intelligent and evolutive force at the base of any existing thing – could come to a perfect manifestation on this planet! "The world is not an unfortunate accident: it is a miracle moving toward its full expression"; "In matter, the Divine becomes perfect..." she wrote. From 1958 to her death in 1973, the Mother tried to find the passage to the next species, to discover a new mode of life in matter and narrated her extraordinary exploration to Satprem. Their talks are written out in Mother's Agenda. This huge document — 6000 pages in 13 volumes — is the account of twenty-two years of Mother's discoveries.

By approaching Mère's comment to Sri Aurobindo's aphorisms, I was prepared to read the usual elementary explanations of Indian philosophy. But Mère's thought had nothing to do with philosophy. It was new, something never heard, dissolving any myth. I felt an explosion of joy reading her comment to aphorism n.70: "Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitiful to others." Annotating it, she wrote:

"The need to be virtuous is the great obstacle to true self-giving. This is the origin of Falsehood and even more the very source of hypocrisy -- the refusal to accept to take upon oneself one's own share of the burden of difficulties. Do not try to appear virtuous. See how much you are united, one with everything that is anti-divine. Take your share of the burden, accept yourselves to be impure and false and in that way you will be able to take up the Shadow and offer it. And in so far as you are capable of taking it and offering it, then things will change. Do not try to be among the pure. Accept to be with those who are in darkness and give it all with total love."

By saying on another occasion: "Morality is the great obstacle on the spiritual path", she stressed the value of not trying to become pure in other people's eyes, but to behave according to the truth of one's being. To her, one should acknowledge one's dark side: in the depths of our being it stirs the same substance which, in a few, has developed into a way of living which is shunned by society. According to her teaching, people become true individuals only when, in a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge, they are perfectly and in a compact manner unified around their divine center. Mère did not behave like a traditional *Guru*, even though she tried to extract from her disciples looking for inspiration all their hidden potential.

I was very impressed with how she dealt with the theme of *Japa*. She recounted how during the screening of a film she heard the Sanskrit *Mantra*: OM NAMO BHAGAVATEH. She wondered what would happen if she repeated that

*Mantra* during her daily meditation. She did this and the result was extraordinary. She reported that: "It (the *Mantra*) coagulates something: all the cellular life becomes one solid, compact mass, in a tremendous concentration – with a single vibration. Instead of all the usual vibrations of the body, there is now only one single vibration. It becomes as hard as a diamond, a single massive concentration, as if all the cells of the body had ... I became stiff from it. I was so stiff that I was one single mass." [This quotation, as well as the next ones, are drawn from *Mother's Agenda*.]

And yet in that period, *Japa* did not enter my life. I experimented with Mother's - *Om Namō Bhagavate* - but it did not work for me. I tried to live in a more conscious way (continuously attentive to any inward and outward perceptions). I tried to carry out the well-known instruction to resolutely maintain an impartial attitude toward both pleasant and unpleasant events, being like a detached "witness". (This discipline is recommended in almost all books dealing with oriental meditative practices.) After three days, I felt myself under unbearable stress as if it all was a pretense, an illusion. I ceased to practice either *Japa* or the discipline of being a detached "witness" and forgot the matter.

Meanwhile, my mind was devoured by the illusion of adopting more advanced tools of "evolution". Months went by with useless attempts to ameliorate my *Kriya* routine. One year later, resuming the reading of *The Divine Materialism*, I was astonished that *Mère* was able to express, in a euphorically vivid way, my own innermost convictions for which I had no means to express nor clarify even to myself.

She reasoned like a westerner and treated the themes of India's spirituality with a western language which was both lyrical and rational, at the highest degree of excellence. In *Mère* there was a revolution, a reversal of values. The contemplation of Beauty in nature and in some forms of art like music, was not to be considered a fleeting emotion feeding a lazy nostalgia for an indefinite spiritual experience. It was lived with an indomitable aspiration for a divinization of life. Spellbound, I contemplated the shimmering splendor of a full manifestation of the Divine in the atoms of inert matter. There was a fragrance in this never-met-before idea, which excited and moved me. There were moments in which my head felt hot as if I was feverish.

I gradually began to open my eyes on the actual situation of my way of practicing *Kriya Yoga* and revealed the complexity of my self-deception. Entering a *Kriya*-founded organization meant to be ensnared and bewildered by many fairy tales. I was convinced that finding *Kriya* was like a stroke of luck, a gift from the Divine, thanks to a certain merit of which I was unaware. My personal commitment had been unimpressive. I also realized that the desire to abide by the values instilled in me by my culture was gradually twisted. It was as if a large portion of my brain withdrew, while another one, which did its utmost in believing what was convenient to believe, tried to usurp its function. If in the very beginning, my "spiritually-oriented" brain didn't know how to answer back to any censure from others, subsequently, it became so cunning that I started to behave "normally" in social life; people began to look at me as a man who chose

a simple life trend, marked by lofty principles - not revealing how my fairness of judgment was impaired, and practically non-existent.

My first efforts in exploring my book-learned *Pranayama* were accompanied by intelligence and constant striving for perfection. I could only rely on my intuition. While practicing, I dreamt about its unthinkable progression and was quietly excited during each instant of it. This disclosed a real heaven for me!

Afterward, having received *Kriya*, the idea of practicing "the fastest technique in the field of spiritual evolution" made the intensity of my effort lose its edge. My *Kriya Pranayama*, practiced with enthusiasm for some months, became a tranquil good habit. Apart from other foolish thoughts, I had swallowed the childish idea that each *Kriya* breath could produce "the equivalent of a solar year of spiritual evolution" and that through a million of these breaths I would infallibly reach Cosmic Consciousness. I tried just to perform the greatest possible number of *Pranayama* in order to complete quickly the above-mentioned number. I didn't realize into what situation I had relentlessly slipped and therefore I felt no shame or remorse. I felt myself a privileged being to whom an unexpected advantage had been granted.

The iron will of my discipline was softened by the hypnotic atmosphere of the "Guru's Blessings". "Aren't you glad of having found a true *Guru*?" – for years I heard this refrain from my *Kriya* organization – "Aren't you enthusiastic that He has been chosen for you by God Himself?" "Oh yes we are happy" we replied with tears of joy. This idea, more than any other factor, had lethal effects on me: it was the cradle in which my ego was fed and strengthened. To remind myself that I entered the *Kriya* organization only to perfect my already good practice of *Pranayama* created a thorny pain. It was imperative to recreate the spirit of an authentic search. I had to stop behaving like a man who had found a treasure, hides and sleeps satisfied upon it.

### *Two Important Decisions*

What I am about to describe was the most rewarding period of my life: I look at it as a sun and I hope to never forget the lesson it contains.

After reading Sri Aurobindo and Mère, I found the courage to be again a self-taught person. During the season of my first interest in esoteric matters and oriental practice of meditation, I found easy-to-follow instructions in an unassuming book. The instructions were simple, but I put all my passion in them, especially the wish to pursue, through *Yoga*, my idea of Beauty. Day after day, when other distractions and doubts came, when the initial enthusiasm diminished, I carried on my ideals and my discipline tenaciously. The result was the *Kundalini* experience. Now, about 12 years later, I found myself in the same situation. I was ready to carry on tenaciously, despite criticisms and doubts, two basic ideas:

1. The *Kriya* routine I had practiced until then had to be reconsidered applying Patanjali's principles.
2. I had the moral duty to achieve the state of *mental silence* by using *Japa*

during my daily life.

An event arose from this decision, which still remains in my heart as a peak experience: the breathless state.

### *Kriya Routine Abiding by Patanjali's Principles*

In the mystical path (*Yoga*), Patanjali pinpoints eight steps: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*.<sup>10</sup> There are different ways of translating these Sanskrit terms. *Yama*: self-control (non-violence, avoid lies, avoid stealing, avoid being lustful and seek non-attachment). *Niyama*: religious observances (cleanliness, contentment, discipline, study of the Self and surrender to the Supreme God). As for *Asana* (position of the body), Patanjali explains it must be stable and comfortable.

There is nothing remarkable up to this point. The first interesting concept is *Pranayama*, defined as regulation of the *Prana* by repetition of particular breathing patterns. Therefore *there is no hint* about particular preliminary exercises of concentration and much less of meditation. From *Pranayama* a state of calmness and poise is created which becomes the foundation of the subsequent step: *Pratyahara* where the awareness is disconnected from external reality; all our five senses have thus been turned inward. You understand the techniques which require movement should be completed before this phase: the breath and the heart should have all the necessary time to slow down. The so called *Higher Kriyas* (each required movement) had to be ideally practiced inside the *Pranayama* phase. To them a long phase of internalization of consciousness and energy in perfect immobility should follow.

What comes after *Pratyahara*? Patanjali explains that after the breath's disappearance, a *yogi* should look for a physical or abstract object onto which he might turn his concentration and practice in a sort of contemplative meditation in such a way as to lose himself in it. *Dharana* is concentration (focusing the mind on it). *Dhyana* is the persistence of a focusing action – meditation or contemplation as a steady, uninterrupted flow of awareness, which fully explores all aspects of the chosen object). *Samadhi* is perfect spiritual absorption (deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself).

From many years' experience and from readings, I had no doubt that these suggestions had to be understood as concentration on the *Chakras*.

*Dharana* is the act of focusing our attention; *Dharana* spontaneously becomes *Dhyana*, the borders between the two being indistinguishable in practice: you begin to concentrate on each *Chakra* and forget yourself. *Samadhi*

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<sup>10</sup> Patanjali was a pioneer in the art of rationally handling the mystical path, aiming at individualizing a universal, physiological direction of the inner events that explained why a certain phenomenon, inherent to the spiritual path, should be preceded and necessarily followed by other ones. His extreme synthesis may be criticized or, because of its temporal distance, may be hard to understand; however, his work is of extraordinary importance. Many authors of *Kriya Yoga* say that the theory expressed by Patanjali is the same as *Kriya Yoga*, that Patanjali and Lahiri Mahasaya substantially dealt with the same practice. I believe that this is partly true. Patanjali's is far from clarifying all the aspects of *Kriya* and there is a remarkable difference between the final steps of his *Yoga* (especially *Dharana* and *Dhyana*) and the related phases of *Kriya Yoga*.

is the sudden burning with joy that sometimes appears. This was my basic understanding in those days. In a few days, after an intense practice of *Japa*, I would have realized that *Dhyana* is not only self-oblivion but achieving the breathless state as well; *Samadhi* is not only boundless joy but also the slowing down of the cardiac heartbeat while the body appears like dead.

From that moment onwards, I began to end my routine with a procedure that up till today I call "*mental Pranayama*". My awareness paused on each *Chakra* about 10 seconds – as a bee drawn to the nectar in flowers, hovering upon each in great delight – slightly "touching" their nucleus along an anticlockwise (as viewed from above) path. This procedure embodied my way of living the *Pratyahara* phase, trying to approach the phases of *Dharana* and *Dhyana*. During them I was absorbed by a great delight where I lost my space and time references. The concentration on the third eye – that "inward eye" which Wordsworth with appropriate words defines as "the bliss of solitude" – happened spontaneously.

### *Mental Silence and Japa*

In those days I read the biography of Swami Ramdas. He moved far and wide all over India unceasingly repeating the *Mantra*: *Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*. To meet the simplicity of his life and the greatness of his experience was very inspiring: his photo and the childlike simplicity of his smile kindled my intuition and inspired me to "adopt" his *Mantra*.

Swami Ramdas was born in 1884 at Hosdrug, Kerala, India, and named Vittal Rao. He lived a normal life until he was thirty-six and experienced the usual ups and downs of a householder's life. Often he inquired about the true meaning of life and felt the necessity of pursuing the spiritual path in order to get the real "Peace." At the right moment, his father initiated him into the *Ram Mantra*, assuring him that by repeating it unceasingly he would, in due time, achieved the divine happiness he was aspiring to. It was then that he renounced the secular life and went forth in quest of God as a mendicant *Sadhu*. The first years of his newly found life are described in his aforesaid autobiography. The *Mantra* "*Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*" was ever on his lips. Besides the practice of *Japa*, he adopted the discipline of looking upon other people as forms of *Ram* – God - and of accepting every happening as coming from the will of God. In a short time the *Mantra* disappeared from his lips and entered his heart. He beheld a small circular light in the spot between his eyebrows, which yielded him thrills of delight. Then the dazzling light permeated and absorbed him. Lost in this inexpressible bliss he would sit for hours. The world appeared to him as a dim shadow. A stage was soon reached when this dwelling in the spirit became a permanent and unvarying experience. Ramdas attained *Mahasamadhi* in 1963.

The teaching of Swami Ramdas about how to practice *Japa* is extremely simple. You utter Rama's name ( *Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*) any time, amid all of life's distractions, when there is a momentary return of your

consciousness to Self awareness. When this happens you feel the ensuing joy and you concentrate on it as long as possible – while repeating your Prayer. In this way you perfect your surrender to God. This is to be achieved facing any event, every day and in every circumstance. At Night, which is free from worldly duties, you devote yourself to intense practice of *Japa*. You will be able to live with two hours' rest.

Swami Ramdas stuck to that and was actually rolling in a sea of indescribable happiness.

"Repeat the one name 'Ram' at all times of the day and at nights when you are awake. You may be sure that you will not feel lonely or miserable as long as you are uttering that glorious name. Where this name is sounded, or meditated upon, there resides no sorrow, no anxiety – nay, not even death." (Ramdas)

Helped by a *mala* (rosary beads), I started to practice *Japa* aloud during a walk for 108 times – during the remaining part of the walk I continued it mentally.

Even though the oriental traditions recommend to do *Japa* mentally, I knew for certain that it should be done aloud – at least for about a hundred times. The sound of that *Mantra*, which I had already heard in a spiritual song recording, was very pleasant. I loved to prolong its vibration, make it vibrate in my chest and invest it with my heart's aspiration. My attitude was not that of a supplicating and sobbing devotee, but that of a man who rejoices, being one step away from his goal.

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

### *The Breathless State*

I practiced *Japa* every morning and *Kriya* at noon in the open countryside. One day, during my *Kriya* session, while relaxing with the *mental Pranayama* (placing my awareness in each *Chakra* for 10-20 seconds each), I distinctly perceived a fresh energy sustaining my body from inside. I realized my cells were breathing pure energy which didn't originate from the inhaled air. The more I relaxed, the more I became simultaneously aware both of the *Chakras* and of the body as a whole. The breath, which in the meantime had become very short, eventually reached immobility, like a pendulum gently reaching the equilibrium point. My mind settled down. This condition lasted a few minutes without any feeling of uneasiness: there was neither the least quiver of surprise, or the thought: "Finally I have it!" The event was enjoyable beyond words: in a blue-painted profundity, I was implacably crushed by the beauty of nature and, at the same time, situated above the whole world. All was incredibly beautiful,

beyond imagination! I was not breathing and I didn't feel any necessity to.

In the following days the same event happened again – always during *mental Pranayama*, after my daily number of *Kriya* breaths (never exceeded 36 repetitions.)

Before starting my *Kriya* practice, I looked at the surrounding panorama wondering if also on that day I would experience again that state. I was astonished, it seemed impossible that *Japa*, one of the simplest techniques in the world, could produce *infallibly* such a valuable result! My past experiences during *Kriya* practice, compared to the breathless state (which was the "solidity" itself), seemed vanishing, elusive, like luminous reflexes upon the water. Where my best intentions failed, *Japa* had produced the miracle!

There was a perfect association between the practice of *Japa* and the attainment of the breathless state. Every day I experienced it.

This reliable result created a moral strength which turned into a calm euphoria that permeated all my day. When talking to others, I remained effortlessly centered on the feeling of unchangeable calmness, without being involved in the images arising from the words. This new way of living was like walking out of a dark stuffy room into sunlight and fresh air. The magic of this bright, dazzling Prayer which spread in each facet of my life confirmed me in the belief that *Japa* was the only tool capable of extracting "something perfect and sublime" from my life.

I plunged with enthusiasm into *Japa* literature and studied the subject of *Mantra* and Prayer in different mystical paths. The most simple explanation was that *Japa* annihilates the mental background noise. We can put it in this way: when we try to concentrate, many disturbing thought can be visualized, isolate and blocked, but a diffuse persistent background noise nullifies all our efforts. Now, if we practice *Japa* not immediately before starting our meditation routine but at least one hour before, that noise won't be anymore and the results will be fantastic.

Many books introducing the practice of *Japa* (Prayer) do not explain this precious concept but insist only upon a heap of banalities. When I read in oriental books that the *mala* (rosary) for *Japa* should be made of this or of that material; or that it should not be seen by others; or that the *Sumeru* bead should never be passed (if you do the *mala* twice, you should turn it and make the last bead become the first bead of the second round) ... I know that these are monster idiocies. Swami Ramdas' simple autobiography, is worth a thousand times more than those useless essays, deprived of any intelligence or passion.

Likewise when I read western books that insist on the fact that the power of the *Japa* (Prayer) lies not in your effort but in the "Divine Grace" that comes only when you use a particular formula canonized by the traditional pattern of worship, this is another falsehood.

Rarely the books hint at our main resistance to the practice of *Japa*. Often a delusion arises in us in the form of a scruple: " By repeating my *Mantra* mechanically, all day long, like a parrot, am I doing the most mind-numbing activity in the word? Perhaps the faculties of my mind get lazy, becoming dull

tools?" On the contrary! You discover that through *Japa*, the mind rests and becomes more acute.

I am reminded of a friend who practiced *Kriya* without getting any result. I talked to him about *Japa* but nothing changed. I observed him carefully while he was practicing: I was witness of a lifeless practice, a tired plea for God's mercy. I had the impression that he took this activity as cerebral act. His thoughts were repeating it, its vibration was not connected in any way to his body. His chosen *Mantra* was an expression in his mother tongue - which was nothing else than a sigh of self-pity. There was nothing to be surprised at when, after some time, he entirely abandoned the practice. He did not realize he was about to become the greatest supporter of *Japa*. The turning point came when he took part in a group pilgrimage. Someone began to recite the so-called rosary (a set number of repetitions of the same prayer), to which all the pilgrims united. Even if tired and almost gasping for breath, he did not withdraw himself from this pious activity. While walking and praying softly, murmuring under his breath, he began to taste a state of unknown calmness. He looked with different eyes at the show of continuously changing landscape and had the impression of living in a paradisiac situation. He went on repeating the Prayer unremittingly for the entire path, completely forgetting he was tired and sleepy. When the group paused to rest, he had the grace to be left alone – undisturbed; he slipped into an introspective state and was pervaded by something vibrating in his own heart, which he definitely identified with the Spiritual Reality. The ecstatic state assumed the consistency of reality, became almost unbearable, overwhelming him. This experience taught him the correct way of practicing *Japa*. He said that the secret was not only to reach, but also to go beyond the state of "exhaustion." After some experiments he chose to repeat a beautiful Indian *Mantra* and, thanks to it, he reached the breathless state. I will always remember his conclusion: the power of *Japa* lies in going beyond the frontier of "EXHAUSTION".

For less than one year I lived every day that bright experience, then something happened that created a total chaos within me. During a trip to Vienna (Austria), I found a book written by an Indian *Swami*, claiming he was teaching the original Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* – P.Y.'s was mentioned as a slightly modified version of it. Devoured by the demon of finding the original *Kriya*, tormented by my suspicion that P.Y., in order to meet the exigences of his westerner disciples, taught a simplified form of *Kriya*, I studied that book dreaming of guessing the original *Kriya Pranayama*.

In the meantime the daily effort for *Japa* decreased. Often I formulate the following thought: "I must never lose the enjoyment of the breathless state, even for a single minute, every day of my life. It is the most real thing I had ever experienced!" But from my doubts a frenzy search of the original *Kriya* began and that search made me go crazy. I had opened a door that couldn't be closed so easily and I lost the simplicity of *Japa* coupled with the before described *Kriya* routine.

My joy became reading and rereading that book underlining elegantly

some sentences. I was excited to read that *Pranayama* should be considered inaccurate and wrong if, settling down after fair number of breaths, the practitioner – without closing his ears – had not heard the internal sound of *Om*. That sentence won't let me sleep. It left *dangerously* guess that an unimaginably deep and rich technique of spiritual realization, had been subtracted to me and to all us westerners, only because P.Y. found difficult to teach it to his first American disciples. Was it true, was it false? The issue is controversial, but as far as my life was concerned, the world of the "traveling *Gurus*" with all their hysterical claims and innumerable contradictions took the place of what I had patiently built. Several years passed before the celestial condition brought in my life by the breathless state would recreate again.

## MEETING SOME TEACHERS OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

The book written by the Indian *Kriya* teacher S.H., like innumerable others I later read, was only bait to create interest in the *Kriya* school founded by the author and never included practical explanations. The statements it contained were worthy to be taken into consideration; it was surely from a very deep practice of *Pranayama*. I had no idea of when and where I would have the opportunity to meet this teacher, but I foretasted the possibility to deepen my *Kriya Pranayama* and, perhaps, to clarify the other doubts concerning *Kechari Mudra* and the *Higher Kriyas*.

Recalling a phrase escaped from the lips of the lady meditation counselor about a variation of *Kriya Pranayama* taught to some disciples by P.Y., I convinced myself that the key technical addition consisted in mentally chanting *Om* in the *Chakras* while exerting all the possible attention to the internal sounds.

Any effort toward listening to the internal sounds is very well rewarded. The beauty of that period when I practiced the "*Om* technique" (received from my school) had never been since surpassed by any other event. It's hard to convey an idea of how incredibly comforting and liberating that experience was.

Now, by applying the above described conjecture, I could listen again to the astral sounds and retrieve that Beauty. So I kept on listening and listening inwardly not only to the sound of the breath but to any other internal sound feebly manifesting during *Kriya Pranayama*. I can't remember how many *Kriya* breaths I practiced each day, surely never more than 48-60. After few days, the ancient well known sweetness entered again my life and I gratefully welcome it with open heart.

The strange part was I hadn't even met the teacher yet, I had only read his book. It was the intensity of my practice that was extreme! I had a clear perception that a state of inconceivable sweetness was mine, that I could taste it every day, during the practice and in every moment when I rested, free from work. To preserve with the utmost care the *Omkar* perception during the day, became the unique focus of my concentration.

*First Teacher outside the Organization*

Before undergoing surgery in the United States, the author of the book was stopping over in Europe; I worked very hard to meet him and receive his *Kriya* initiation on that occasion. That moment came at last! His introductory conference was for me of great emotional impact. He had a majestic and noble aspect, he was "handsomely" wrapped in his ocher clothes, his old age, and long hair and beard marked the features of the typical sage. I caught glimpses of him while he spoke, hidden by the front rows; I felt he was talking about Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy from direct experience.

The theoretical concepts he introduced were absolutely new for me and

created a beautiful consistent frame for a *Kriya* praxis conceived as a unique progressive process of tuning with the *Omkar* reality. Like a thread passing through all the pearls of a necklace, *Omkar* was coursing through all the different phases of *Kriya*. *Maha Mudra* was not separated from his peculiar form of *Pranayama* which was not separated from *mental Pranayama*. Furthermore, the *Omkar* reality had to be perceived not only in the aspect of sound and light but also in the aspect of a "swinging sensation" (another time he spoke about a feeling of pressure). His stupendous, appealing words were for me a revelation but, at certain moments, the inquisitiveness in learning the new technical details made me unable to give due attention to what he was saying. My obsession was: "What kind of throat sound is to be produced in this original *Kriya*, to which center does the energy rise in the spine?"

To make the students understand the proper aspect of the movement of *Omkar*, he touched some of them (their head and chest) making his hand vibrate, trying to transmit this quivering to their body. He was leading the auditorium into a wondrous dimension, he gave himself completely to us so we could feel the flavor of that experience.

The initiation into the *First Kriya* thrilled and disappointed me at the same time: the forward bendings that preceded the *Maha Mudra* were really precious and so was the final meditation (improperly called *Paravastha*) but the *Kriya Pranayama* seemed to have disappeared and reduced to a process of raising the *Chakras* in *Ajna* or *Sahasrara* through a way of breathing which was less long and less intense than then the one used up to now during *Kriya Pranayama*. Having fresh in my mind what he wrote years ago on his book, it was a plain fact to me that this teacher too, over the course of the years, had simplified the original technique.

Among the people who attended his seminars for a long time, there was no mystery about the many technical details of *Kriya Yoga* he kept on changing, year after year. One of his intimate disciples confirmed to me that in the past the *Swami* had taught *Kriya Pranayama* proper enriched by chanting *Om* in each *Chakra*. For this reason I decided to never exclude my old but good *Kriya Pranayama* with long breath from my practice. To it I would have now added what he was teaching.

It was winter and I had a three week vacation. I spent every morning wrapped in the warmth of my home, practicing as much as possible, applying the fundamental concepts he emphasized so much. I made a particular effort to remain aware of the breath (a calm short breath, almost imperceptible and on the verge of disappearing), for about three hours, linking each breath with a different *Chakra*. He had explained that to make a remarkable spiritual progress, you should engage yourselves in becoming aware of at least 1728 breaths a day.

I experienced a total contentment and ease, as if my *Kriya* path had come to its fulfillment. By day, everything seemed surrounded by a 'padded coating', reducing all dissonances. Everything was as if transfigured; it was like living in a perfect reality and all worries took flight, gone from my sight.

I also spent some days in a beautiful location equipped for winter sport,

where I could wander aimlessly around the snow-white countryside. While I was lazily getting about, the sun set early, painting the landscape with breathtaking colors; the small village, sunk in the snow, started to radiate in a few seconds of glory all the colors of the spectrum of light. My memory will always hold it as the splendid symbol of my contact with the *Omkar* experience.

The winter vacation ended and I returned to my job. During my spare time, I would think about what a precious jewel the *Kriya* technique was; visualizing the possibility of a future deepening, with such a commitment to the *Higher Kriyas* also.

One day while still at work, I was in a room from which I could see the distant mountains through a window pane, and contemplate the pure celestial sky above them. I was in ecstasy! That distant sky was the mirror of my future years, wholly dedicated to *Kriya Yoga*. For the first time, the prospect of retiring and living on a minimal income, maintaining this state for the rest of my days, started to take real shape.

This teacher taught also a simplified form of *Second Kriya*, which I learned months later. As for receiving other advanced techniques, he expressed himself adamantly: the request of being initiated in them implied a lack of engagement in the basic techniques. Being aware that the original *Kriya* spirit had been lost in other schools, he focused only in passing on its nucleus. He had tried all Lahiri Mahasaya's techniques, concluding that some of them were not essential, while others were rather too delicate and difficult to be learned. Attempts made by inexperienced students – in order to effectively use these techniques – could result in a useless distraction for the students and a waste of time for him as a teacher.

What he said made definite sense, but contributed to his isolation. He did not take into consideration how the human mind really works, through insatiable curiosity and the total rejection of any veto. His unfortunate decision to leave out some of the Lahiri Mahasaya's techniques (not only parts of the *Higher Kriyas*, but also basic techniques such as *Kechari Mudra* and *Navi Kriya*) triggered an inexorable mechanism which pushed away the people most indispensable to him. Devoured by the thirst for obtaining the complete teachings, they began to search for other teachers. Disappointed by their defection, he stubbornly focused even more on the essence of teaching and further simplifying of the *First Kriya* techniques. Those who tried to get this absurdity across to him and prevent it, found themselves facing a wall that would never break.

He really had all the necessary tools to attract the western world. The book he had written had been a smart strategic action which made him popular in the West, saving for him a place of crucial importance in the domain of *Kriya*. Moreover, his Indian-sage figure impressed people. Hundreds of scholars were ready to back his mission and treat him as a "divinity", being willing to show the same respect to possible collaborators and successors.

Yet the soil he plowed and was cultivating began to become sterile. I saw the sense of his isolation when, one day, on a *Kriya* review lesson, he told his public that the real *Kriya Pranayama* could only take place in a state of calm

breath. On the contrary, the one marked by a long deep breath (which many knew was the characteristic of Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy), was good, in his opinion, only for "kindergarten children"! He closed his nostrils with his fingers and kept that position for some time. He hinted in this way that he had mastered the breathless state; it seemed he wanted to point out that the public was neither able to understand nor practice *Kriya*.

I thought how many disappointments must have convinced him to make such a peculiar demonstration. Perhaps he had only met people who had not been able to adopt the discipline of a regular meditation practice and therefore did not gain any benefit. Unfortunately, many acknowledged his behavior as a nasty comment that the audience was not able to understand the deep meaning of what he was describing. The students staring at him were completely at a loss; he must have seemed bizarre and peculiar to them. The result was that the beginners could only sense too large a distance to be bridged between them and the Master. Those who already had a good mastering of *Kriya* had the final confirmation that what he had taught up to that moment was a simple introduction to *Kriya* and did not provide the key to obtain the experiential acme.

It is true that a lot of people were content with his *Kriya*, but they would never organize a seminar for their teacher. Frankly speaking, the faithfulness of the many was not enough to avoid the worst. His commendable effort, all the marvelous subtleties by which he had enriched our *Kriya*, making this practice by far more beautiful, was not enough to prevent a shipwreck of his mission – at least here in Europe. <sup>11</sup>

Using the same fliers and changing only the Master's name and photo, many of those people, who formerly organized his seminars, invited another teacher from India because they knew he was well-disposed to explain *Kriya* in its complete form. This invitation was perhaps made more out of desperation than of conviction because those who had already met him in India knew his spiritual realization was almost non-existent. Because of visa problems, it took two years before he finally landed in Europe; when he arrived practically all the before described teacher's disciples were ready to welcome him as their God-sent messenger.

And this teacher in fact gave us the very craved *Kechari Mudra*, the *Navi Kriya* and other. But let me first describe the most inauspicious meeting of my life.

### *Second Teacher outside the Organization*

While waiting that the awaited new teacher from India obtained a visa on his passport granting permission to enter Europe, I came in contact with a *Kriya* school totally separate from all the others. The *Kriya Yoga* they taught was called *Babaji's Kriya Yoga* and was based upon the teachings of an Indian personage who claimed he was a direct disciple of *Babaji*. In this school the main technique was called *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama* – a breathing technique. Other teachings

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<sup>11</sup> Something remains indeed, but very scanty compared to what he could have realized if only he had been more conciliating.

were grouped under four main headings: *Kriya Hatha Yoga*, *Kriya Dhyana Yoga*, *Kriya Mantra Yoga* and *Kriya Bhakti Yoga*. They rotated around the central teaching of *Pranayama*, extending its sphere of action on all the aspects of human life. The idea of having found a source, from which I could learn everything about *Kriya*, excited me tremendously.

I came in contact with this school through a strange book whose illustrations gave the impression of reading a fairytale book. I was confident, although in this book there was no mention of techniques like *Talabya Kriya*, *Kechari Mudra*, *Navi Kriya*, *Omkar Pranayama*, *Thokar*...

This school offered three levels of *Kriya* easy to obtain in about three years, if you showed enough commitment. The first level didn't disappoint me, yet left me a bit perplexed. The teacher was obsessed by the precept of not holding one's breath: in this way the technique of *Yoni Mudra*, which is fundamental for Lahiri, was considered dangerous and thus banned. *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama* seemed a beautiful technique. The most annoying thing was that once you had completed 16 *Kriya* breaths, the process you had put in motion had to be suddenly relinquished and you had to practice *Dhyana Kriya*, a meditation which had nothing to do with spine, *Chakras* etc.

Before receiving instruction from this school, mixing what I had learned from P.Y.'s organization with S.H.'s teaching, I had conceived a very sweet routine, whose final part (concentration on the *Chakras*), was pure delight. Practicing seriously this new routine, there grew within me a marked nostalgia for what I had relinquished. Changing every day the technique of meditation (there were seven different techniques, one for each different day of the week) I had the heavy sensation of obtaining nothing substantial.

The central point of the *Second Level* was initiation into Indian *Mantras*. This subject was more congenial to me than *Dhyana Kriya*. Unfortunately, we had to repeat the course two or three times in order to receive the complete set of the *Chakra Mantras*. The odd thing was that the teacher gave the impression of being lost in the New Age dimension and didn't realize of how badly his teaching was organized. He gave his wife the role of pontificating about many topics (macrobiotics, how to see aura, how to make Ayurveda diagnosis and other amenities). He made a fool of himself by explaining the technique of "dispersing the clouds": fixing a cloud in the sky with the purpose of dissolving it! I endured everything since I had put all my hope in the third level.

This event was an atrocious delusion, beyond the worse expectations. There were no *Higher Kriyas* but classic *Yoga* techniques, suitable for a preparatory course to *Kriya*. The six *Samadhi* techniques, given at the conclusion of that enervating and boring course, were: a new reading of *Hong So* technique; three fairly common techniques of visualization; the classic instruction of continuous awareness during the day and, at the end, a variation of the same *Om* meditation technique I received from my first *Kriya* organization. The variations of the *Hong So* technique, as well as of the *Om* technique, seemed devised by a lazy mind whose only preoccupation in modifying them was to avoid the accusation of having copied from P.Y.'s organization, with no care if the resulting techniques were spoiled of their power. For example, in the first technique, the

"*Hong-So*" *Mantra* was replaced by "*Om-Babaji*" forgetting that *Hong-So* is a universal *Mantra* whose syllables were specifically chosen for their power of calming the breath, with whom they have a vibratory connection. The three techniques of visualization were of a genre one could find in any book of concentration and meditation techniques. For many of us who had yearlong experience with the preliminary-to-*Kriya* techniques offered by P.Y.'s organization, being retaught those techniques somehow disguised and passed off as *Samadhi* techniques, was actually a cold shower.

Some of us dared to ask the teacher's opinion about Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*. At first, he was reticent and did not seem glad of our interest, then he took courage and shared his views. He believed that Lahiri Mahasaya had not practiced with total commitment all the teachings he received from Babaji, therefore he ... died. Astounded, we realized that since Lahiri Mahasaya had not obtained immortality (as, in his opinion, should happen to those who give their all to applying *Kriya* integrally), our teacher was dismissive of him. But let me end talking about all this and get back to other considerations.

#### *Intermezzo: New-Age-Polluted Kriya Yoga*

The mindset developed following such a school led me to meet persons and groups where *Kriya Yoga* was polluted with "*New-Age*" themes. I am reminded of those days when I listen to the tape recordings of some devotional chants which I had bought at that time. Usually, I fell in love with an Indian *bhajan* and sang it within of me the whole blessed day. For me it had much the nature of food; rather I really had the impression of eating that music.

Coming across different groups of people who practiced *Kriya*, I had the feeling of meeting a family in some sense more vast and variegated in respect to my first *Kriya* group strictly following the P.Y.'s teachings.

Swimming in my state of elation, I didn't understand much about their real life. The only odd personality trait was the strict abidance by the rules of an oriental lifestyle who narrowed often to the cultivation of a few innocent frenzies. I learned to relate to each of them – for example, to those who would host me whenever a seminar was held in a distant city – the way an explorer deals with unknown animals, waiting for any eccentric revelation. At times I would react to their oddness ironically; it was something I just could not help, it came out so spontaneously.

Later on, I had different occasions to meet and to approach more intimately those who organized the *Kriya Yoga* initiation seminars for our traveling *Gurus*. They gave the impression of being honest researchers and always guaranteed that no nonsense would ever slip out of their mouths. I learned to listen to them respectfully and silently whenever they would correct some of my fancy interpretations of *Kriya Yoga*. I was surprised when one of them, beyond simple exhibitionism, quoted by heart some lines from a work by P.Y. – the same, prophetic lines which had once been the source of so many

uncertainties. He read and re-read through those texts several times trying to decode them; he really strained in studying those texts.

My relationship with those researchers was based on real affection and it never came to disagreement, bitterness or formality. They were always generous toward me and respectful of my personality. Never did they try to force something into my mind, passionately sharing everything they had learned, no matter if it cost them a great deal of time, effort and money.

At that epoch of my life, besides the three main teachers described in this chapter, I received a couple of initiations by other "minor" teachers – they once had been some illustrious *Guru's* right-hand man, had then become independent because the latter disowned them.

We agreed our teachers were mostly mediocre, sometimes impolite, and unethical. Some trifling episodes confirmed our first impression of improvisation and, in one case, of mental instability. This was strongly in contrast with the personality expected of those who called themselves "spiritual guides". They knew little about *Kriya Yoga* and they taught it in a superficial way. But they claimed they were authorized to initiate and this blinded us. Just for this reason we treated them with a deferential and tolerant attitude forgiving them when they abused our trust and confidence. It is strange and dolorous to think that it was a deep rooted suggestion received from P.Y.'s school that supported the worst of our illusions.

I accepted the farce of the initiations as an inevitable drawback to succeed in acquiring the information I was searching with so much passion. Generally speaking, after attending many different rituals, the explanations were always quick and shallow; a destructive criticism was often raised against information coming from other sources.

I would finish every initiation thinking how satisfied I was and make up my mind to abandon all the previous practices for the one I had just received. I ignored the awareness that the new initiation had only added something insignificant to that which I already knew; that it was confining me to a "cage" from which I would sooner or later feel an unbearable suffocation – from which I would eventually have to break loose.

To many among us, those initiations were a true vice. We stocked up on techniques like food for a famine. Just to give an example, at almost all initiation seminars a solemn pledge of secrecy was the password to be accepted. Every one took this pledge but, as soon as the meeting was over, some shared, by cell-phone, the coveted news with other students who, in turn, would take part in other initiations and would reciprocate the favor.

Some friends, coming back from India, showed their excitement for such an extraordinary land. But at the end of their, their remarks, disappointment in all the things they had not been able to learn emerged. Often some person met a boaster who assured them he knew original *Kriya Yoga* and could initiate them as long as they had kept it a total secret without establishing any contact with other teachers. In this manner, the boaster could ensure they would not realize it was

not *Kriya Yoga* they were being taught. I could realize this only when, overcoming their hesitation, I convinced them to tell me confidentially a rough description of that technique; usually it was either P.Y.'s *Kriya* or nothing more than the mere repetition of a *Mantra*! What made me feel sorry was not so much the great advantage gained by those braggers (the *Gurudakshina* – donation – they received meant a real fortune at my friends' expense) as for our friends missing the opportunity of learning *Kriya* from other sources, in other places.

Something different happened to a friend who met B.L. a descendant of Lahiri Mahasaya. This was one of the master's nephews, a man with a great academic background and with a deep knowledge of *Kriya*, but my friend was not able to learn anything from him. I was taken aback when he told me that in Benares, and probably throughout rest of India, *Kriya Yoga* was not practiced any longer. I kept enough control not to interrupt or challenge him, then by posing him apparently incidental questions, I tried to understand what had happened. My friend, as he usually did, began the discussion with trivialities like asking some information on Indian habits, an *Ashram*'s address where he planned to go, then almost at the end of the interview – he must have suddenly remembered he was in Lahiri Mahasaya's house – he asked if any of the disciples of Lahiri were still practicing *Kriya*... His demeanor must have frozen the eminent listener, because his answer resulted in a sarcastically sour, negative response; in other words: "Definitely not, it is not practiced any longer. I dare say it is not practiced throughout the whole Indian peninsula. Rather, you surely must be the only one still practicing it!"

At the end of his explanation, my friend was looking at me surprisingly. I am still not sure whether he was hoping to convince me or whether he was just absorbed in bitter frustration. I did not pry. In my opinion, he did not realize how foolish his discussion had been with that noble person. A certain blow came for him one month later: he came to know that a man from the same town had recently been initiated into *Kriya Yoga* from the very personage he had met in Benares. He was so irritated he planned to go back to India to raise a protest to that noble man. Unfortunately, he did not have that chance; a serious disease killed him. In spite of our huge character difference, I will always be grateful for all the things he shared with me concerning his spiritual path.

Another friend remained for some days at an *Ashram* in the hope he might receive initiation into *Kriya Yoga*. The leader of the *Ashram* was away, and my friend received the initiation from one of his disciples. In the end, he acquired a large volume summarizing the techniques. At the end of his trip, visibly content, he showed me the book; the techniques did not differ that much from those I already knew, but there were many more details. However, there was nothing in that book that could remove all my doubts; not a single hint about how to obtain *Kechari Mudra*, nothing on *Thokar* either. On the contrary, I can remember a very complicated technique based on the visualization of the *Chakras* like they are described in Tantric texts. Each technique was preceded by a theoretic introduction with quotations from ancient books and an illustration which eliminated any possible doubt. In the last part of the book a precise gradual routine was given. Of course, there was a note guaranteeing that all the

mentioned techniques constituted *Kriya Yoga* as taught by *Babaji*, Lahiri Mahasaya's mythical *Guru*.

Since that material was very interesting, I would have liked to yield to the illusion that my quest had finally ended, since those notes contained what I was asking for. I simply had to convince myself that *Babaji* had but made a synthesis of Tantrism to obtain His *Kriya Yoga*. It was impudent to think that *Thokar* could be considered no more than a variation of the *Jalandhara Bandha*! If the instructions for *Kechari Mudra* were not there, never mind, it probably just meant that ... *Kechari* was not really so important! With a bit of good will and application, I could have closed the circle. Chance made me listen to the recording of a conference of the author Swami S.S.. He discussed how he had found those techniques in some tantric texts which he had translated; he then made an accurate selection from them to form a coherent system which constituted his system of *Kriya*. How was it possible, then, to have a note saying that those teachings came directly from *Babaji*? Simple – as is the case with the majority of Indian masters, he had the book written by his disciples; they had the brilliant idea of making it more interesting by hinting that the techniques were derived from the mythical *Babaji*. The teacher, reflecting another classic Indian habit, never checked that material – he was taken aback later on, coming to know about those "supplementary notes". He then tried to defend his disciples' work stating that after all .... " *Babaji's Kriya* had Tantric origins".

By now I was feeling quite a lot distant from my initial *Kriya* organization but I respected it. I took part to a review class of *Kriya* when two female Ministers of this organization visited again our country. During an interval between two conferences, something wonderful and sweet, happened. What I had hoped for so ardently in the past and negated in such a brutal way, materialized easily. I had a private talk with one Minister. All my doubts were clarified: the person was intelligent, kind and talked from direct experience. About *Kechari Mudra*, she said it comes with time, especially by insisting in touching the uvula with the tip of the tongue. I could also inquire about a sentence by P.Y. according to which: "The *Chakras* can be awakened by psycho-physical blows given at their different locations." The Minister reassured me about its meaning: no other hypothetical technique, besides what was fully described in the written material, was hinted at. It referred to the use of a *Mantra* coupled with breath. She explained that if a syllable is mentally chanted in a *Chakra's* location with real intensity, while inhaling or exhaling, it creates a "psycho-physical blow".

This clarification inspired my practice; returned home, I had the impression of living again the best time of my life. I discovered unthinkable ways of perfecting the final part of my *Kriya* routine: *mental Pranayama*. While projecting in each *Chakra* the mental chant of the *Mantra*, I realized I had the power to touch with an almost physically intensity the core of each one: a great sweetness sprang from this procedure, the body seemed to become stiff as a statue and the state without breath made my mind transparent as a crystal. I would have wanted to put an end to my search and to prolong this state for the whole life but the teacher we have invited from India, arrived in Europe.

### *Third Teacher outside the Organization*

When the moment came to meet him, I was not in the best mood. Certain clues had already told me I would have to reckon with a radically new approach. I was afraid this could upset the simple and adequately profitable routine into which I had settled. The magical realm of *Omkar*, into which my previous teacher had immersed me in a passionate way, could be neither left aside nor forgotten. I did not even dream about putting other principles in place as a foundation for my spiritual path. This is why I approached my new teacher with the idea of rejecting him if, somehow, he appeared to dissuade me from such a reality.

I met this *Kriya* teacher in a *Yoga* center. The synthesis of his introductory speech was that *Kriya* didn't mean to inflate the mind and the ego moving toward a hypothetical superior mind, but a journey beyond the mind, into an uncontaminated territory. I realized that Sri Krishnamurti's thought was the source from which my third teacher drew his ideas about the damages caused by the vices of the human mind.

I indulgently observed some inadequacies in his behavior which shocked other students. He was hot-tempered. He exploded with rage whenever he sensed that underneath legitimate questions there was a veiled opposition or an intention to challenge his authority.

But I focused all my attention on learning his form of *Kriya* and ignored his patent faults. He clearly communicated to us the reason for his tour to the West was to reestablish the original teachings. This was enough to overcome my initial wariness.

In the following initiation seminar, the technical explanation was reasonably clear even if, in some part, unusually synthetic. For instance, his instructions on *Pranayama* – formally correct – could be understood only by those who had already been practicing *Kriya Yoga* for a long time.

When after three months of serious practice I achieved *Kechari Mudra*, I realized that my chaotic search of the original *Kriya* had come to an end. I followed this teacher for six years. Here under I summarize the reasons of my enthusiasm and why later I broke up with him.

Returned home after the seminar of initiation, it began a very much positive period even if, because of the internal changes that came unexpectedly, it cannot be defined of great calmness.

*Kechari Mudra* brought me a feeling of "dizziness" that lasted some days: my mental faculties seemed to be fogged up. When all this ceased, my *Kriya* flew high. The best thing was to witness an increase of the *Omkar* experience. Why didn't *Kriya* organizations teach such a simple technique like *Talabya Kriya*, preferring to endure endless polemics and speculations that continue up to our present day?

I started a systematic study of the works of *Sri Krishnamurti*; I put my heart and my soul into it. The odd thing was that Krishnaji's thought contained the crucial and conclusive boost that would assist me, after many years of controversial but loyal discipleship, to break any dependence toward my third teacher. Krishnamurti said what was then difficult to fully agree with: "What is the need of a *Guru*? [...] You have to walk by yourself, you have to take the journey alone, and on that journey you have to be your own teacher and pupil." While I was reading these lines, I felt undoubtedly they expressed a deep truth but my logic suggested peremptorily: "This is a sophism: even Krishnaji acted as a *Guru* and acts upon me just now through his writings". Could not actualize his words: fear held me back. Many mistakes had to be conceived, carry out and digested.

I studied many books by this author but I was literally overcome by the beauty of *The only revolution*. I walked in the country looking at all things with my senses fully awake, but without a single thought in my mind. How difficult it was! But it was not impossible. How right was Krishnaji when he said: "life begins where thought ends." I needed to recreate silence around me, to return to simplicity, to find the time to contemplate Beauty again. Walking with this attitude became pure and constant Bliss! Beauty was always around me but I didn't notice because I was lost in my mental constructions based on New Age fantasies, on pseudo spiritual literature which was actually trash. I was not able to see that Beauty for I was lost – as Krishnaji would say – in the "Beauty of my own making." The more I read Krishnaji, the more I felt I had recently crossed a hell. The obsession for finding the techniques of the "Original *Kriya*" didn't emanate from a heightened form of tension toward the Divine One but was no different to the desire for material things. Actually, it was with this poor attitude that, partially unaware, I was living my hectic search. It was distracting, preventing myself from enjoying what I already had, and impoverished me, draining me of the flow of genuine aspiration toward the Divine.

The effort to create mental silence brought me to the very beginning of my spiritual path when I decided to conquer the tendency to day-dream and jump from one memory to another during idle moments. At that time, I knew perfectly that unbridled thought was an addiction, a vice giving moments of pleasure but being the primary cause of much misery. It was to discipline myself that I considered studying the art of *Pranayama* and discovered *Kriya Yoga*.

In that period I also read *Puran Purush* by Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee based on Lahiri Mahasaya's diaries. During summer I had this book with me in the countryside; many times, after reading a part of it, I would raise my eyes to the distant mountain tops and repeat internally "At long last...!". I looked at the photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya on the front cover; who knows what a state of bliss he was in while being photographed! I saw some horizontal lines on his forehead, his eyebrows raised like in the *Shambhavi Mudra*, where awareness is set upon the head; a slight tension of his chin seemed to reveal he was practicing *Kechari Mudra*. During those days, his figure, with that blissful smile, was a sun in my heart; he was the symbol of the perfection I yearned after.

While trying to explore the meaning of *Navi Kriya* I discovered the importance of studying the Taoist Internal Alchemy. My first reference book was: *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality* by Charles Luk & Lu Kuan. My attention was considerably stirred up; I photocopied many pages, cut out the most important pieces, put them in order and glued them on four sheets of paper highlighting the four phases of Taoist Internal Alchemy. The similarity with *Kriya Yoga* was impressive.

When I had enough confidence to relate my discovery to my third teacher, he reacted annoyed claiming that *Navi Kriya* was pure *Yoga* and was quoted by Patanjali too. Patanjali (*Sutra* III/29) simply states: "nābhicakre kāyavyūhajñānamḥ" which is translated: "by concentration on the navel, the seeker obtains knowledge about the different organs of the body and their location". In my own small way, I saw that this *Sutra* had nothing to do with *Navi Kriya's* aim.

### *Incremental Routines*

It was in that period that I became familiar with the concept of *Incremental Routine* which I immediately considered heaven-sent. This was undoubtedly the most important instruction I received from this last teacher.

An unvarying scheme which consists in a daily practice of the same set of techniques, changing neither their order of practice nor the number of their repetitions, is typical of a *kriyaban* who practices since many years. In contrast to this scheme, an *Incremental Routine* consists in using only one technique, whose number of repetitions is gradually increased. This happens once a week and for a certain number of weeks (usually 36) after a minimal use of the basic techniques like *Maha Mudra* and *Kriya Pranayama*. (The accurate details of how different incremental routines are structured is to be found in the third part of the book – Chapter 09.)

This scheme of practice is the very remunerative because it leads to mastery of the technique whose number of repetitions is increased. This procedure can be applied to each *Kriya* technique but especially to the *Higher Kriyas*. It has also a positive effect on one's personality, releasing it from many inner obstacles. It rescues a *kriyaban* from boredom and loss of enthusiasm. Unfortunately many "meditation counselors" had never been exposed to this possibility. How many times, in fact, when we complained about a period of absolute aridity, they came up with the necessity of loyalty! How many times, we were told outlandish stories about that loyal *kriyaban* who had his first intense spiritual experience only on his death bed! "A loyal disciple doesn't lament working for years or for an entire life without getting any result!" -- this is the reproach.

There is no doubt that one should continue to practice through seemingly unproductive phases. Instinctively many succeed in rekindling their enthusiasm,

but only partly and for a short time, by reading spiritual books, listening to taped spiritual talks ...

Practical experience teaches that one reaches a standstill where further progress appears impossible. The idea of practicing one's routine daily for one's entire life because of a promise done at the moment of initiation appears as a nightmare. This is the danger point where interest and passion for *Kriya* is very close to waning completely. Few know how to get out of this unexpected situation.

*Incremental routines* are the definite answer. Through this scheme of practice, the essential core of each technique, deprived of any embellishment, appears as something fixed, definite, inevitable – something that could not be but that way. If a certain variation of a *Kriya* technique is redundant or ineffective, it would fall away by itself. What remains is just the simplest logical translation of Lahiri Mahasaya's words into practice.

### *An Unavoidable Break*

In order to explain the definitive crack in our relationship, it is necessary to refer again to the haste and shallowness with which he explained the *Kriya* techniques.

The introductory lecture to the *Kriya* (which was usually held the evening before initiation) and a big part of the seminar of initiation was devoted to a pure philosophical talk which didn't touch the bases of *Kriya Yoga* but was a summing up of Krishnamurti's strong points, mainly the theme of no-mind, which he improperly called *Swadhyaya*. There was no part of it that could be criticized, all he said was correct, but many students, being uncomfortable sitting on the floor, with aching back and knees, waited just for the explanation of the techniques, enduring its length as a giant bummer.

The traditional offerings (he required also a coconut, which in our place was very difficult to find, forcing the students to desperately look for it store after store) laid heaped up disorderly before a scruffy altar. Since he usually arrived with great delay relative to the agreed time, those who came from other cities saw all their plans for the return journey falling through and were very anxious.

When, just in time to catch the last train, someone had already left the room, despite it being late and people being tired, he loved to linger on Patanjali's *Yama* and *Niyama*, taking all the necessary time to ask the audience to take a solemn vow: that, from now onwards, the male students would look at women (except their wife) as mothers and, correspondingly, women would look at men (except their husband) as fathers. The public listened to his vain words with a sigh of ill-concealed nuisance. Everyone gave an assent with a nod, just to stop his ravings.<sup>12</sup> Only then he switched to a hurried explanation of the basic

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<sup>12</sup> I respect of course *Yama-Niyama* (the what-is-correct and the what-is-not-correct) but, in my opinion, requiring people who are anxious for learning *Kriya Yoga* techniques to take an oath to obey them is only a farce and a waste of time. My teacher's request in particular was impossible, an oath that no one would ever respect. Why not put confidence in the transforming power of *Kriya*? Why thinking that without oaths, a *kriyaban's* life would be licentious? The necessity of accepting definite ways of

techniques. One day, I decided to time him: the explanation of the fundamental technique of *Pranayama* was offered in no more than two minutes! He demonstrated *Kriya Pranayama* by means of an excessively loud vibratory sound. He knew this sound was not correct, but he continued using it to so the last rows of students could hear it, sparing himself the annoyance of getting up and walking among them, as *Kriya* teachers usually do. In any case, he would not bother to say the sound had to be smooth rather than vibrating. I know that many of the students, believed this was the "secret" he had brought from India and tried to reproduce the same noise. He carried on that way for years, in spite of his close collaborators' polite complaints.

By this time I had accepted everything and I would never have dreamed of complaining. Nevertheless one day I had a visit from the couple that organized the master's tours in Germany. I had become acquainted with those kind friends during the seminars of my previous teacher S.H.. While talking together, they emphasized the necessity of making a particular proposal to our teacher: to organize, at the end of his *Kriya* initiation seminars, a guided group practice which served as a review both for the new initiates and for those who were already practicing. I occupied myself with making this proposal reach the teacher through a friend who went to India. I gave him a letter to deliver to the teacher with my regards and a warm embrace. I forgot the whole matter.

Master's reaction was inexplicable. He interpreted my letter as an oblique criticism. As a reply, he crossed me off his list of those who organized his European tours. His decision was transmitted to the Italian coordinator, who did not even inform me. Some months went by; probably my experience with that teacher would have ended that way, had I not gone to welcome him back to Europe. We exchanged hugs as if nothing had happened. He probably interpreted my presence as a move of repentance. Some hours later, when he was resting, his collaborator, with a slight indecipherable hint of embarrassment, explained to me what happened behind the scenes. I was appalled and disoriented. The first impulse was to abandon everything and sever any connection with him. But in order not to disturb the peace of all the persons who were my friends and who had followed me in this adventure, I decided to pretend nothing happened, keep on collaborating with him and drop the theme of my letter.

If I had gone I would have disturbed next day's initiation to the *Higher Kriyas*. That was a beautiful moment in which Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* revealed (to whom had the sensibility to perceive it) all its hidden beauty. My role was to serve as translator. I knew how to dispatch well such function reporting every least detail while he who would have replaced me in such assignment was an old knowledge that as of habit would have neglected to translate the 80% of the talk.

During that initiation, he demonstrated *Thokar* in a visibly different way in respect to the previous year. When one among the listeners asked him about the reason for the changes, he replied he had not changed anything and argued

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behavior, is something that appears spontaneously after having tasted the honey of the spiritual experience. Perhaps in the beginning the best thing is not to cry shame because of a problematic student's behavior. To put it simply, it has been seen that people living a morally questionable life were successful in *Kriya*, coming spontaneously to the so-called virtuous life, while a lot of conformists failed.

that, in the past seminars, a problem of translation might have occurred. His lie was evident. That *kriyaban* remembered well the head movements he had formerly seen.

Confronted with other minor changes from one year to the next, I had the impression I was cooperating with an archaeologist who was deliberately altering certain findings to justify them to the public in the theoretical framework to which he was accustomed.

Months later, during another tour, when we were alone and he was seeking something in a room, I found the courage to drop a hint about a technical issue, which set one *Kriya* school against another. He suddenly turned toward me with his eyes showing such a hate as if he was in the act of killing me; he shouted that my practice was not his business. This, according to what I'm able to remember, was the sole technical "discourse" I had with him in the course of my six years with him.

From that moment onwards all was distorted: I deliberately began to control myself and took the resolution to always agree with him.

Probably I acted so well that one day he asked me to teach *Kriya* to those who were interested and who couldn't meet him on his tours. I rejoiced at the opportunity because I dreamed I could finally explain *Kriya* in a complete and exhaustive way. I wanted none of my students would ever feel the pain of seeing a legitimate question unconsidered.

A year passed by, when I sensed I was doing virtually useless work. I gave *Kriya* initiation following a fixed protocol by which he bid me to abide. After introducing the theme of no-mind, I switched to the explanation of the basic techniques. I took leave of those students, by counseling a minimal routine, well knowing they would practice at maximum for ten days, then most would leave everything and pursue other esoteric interests. Usually, one or two among the most tenacious students made up questions and called me just to have the illusion of carrying on, from a distance, a relationship with a real person.

When master came to our country I invited all the new initiates to the seminar where my teacher would be present. Unfortunately, many didn't "survive" such a meeting. Accustomed by me to put any question and to always receive some precise answer, they tried to do the same with the teacher. Observing in my teacher the most total lack of human understanding while being kicked about by him, they entered a deep crisis.

Too many things were not going in the right direction. I felt that this man, whose every small whim I tried to satisfy as if I carrying out a sacred deed, did not love *Kriya*. Instead, he used it only to create a more beautiful life for himself in the West compared to the wretched one in India he had often described to me.

Another year went by. On a request from friends abroad, I went on behalf of my teacher to their group to teach them *Kriya Yoga*. There I met a very serious student who was already familiar with my teacher's behavior and was taking part in the initiation seminar only as a revision. He asked me a lot of pertinent questions and I gave him accurate answers. That was the point when he asked: "From whom have you learned all these details?" He well knew that my teacher

was a total disaster from a didactic point of view. He perceived that I had learned many details from other sources. How could I give *Kriya* initiation using knowledge that did not originate from my teacher? He understood my predicament and was surprised that since I was authorized to teach *Kriya*, I had never had the chance to talk freely with my teacher about *Kriya* details! It was logical and befitting for me to settle the matter as soon as possible.

Knowing the irascible disposition of my teacher, I hesitated a long time but there was no other way out. Through a friend, I sent him a fax mentioning the matter at hand and prayed him to adjust his schedule so we could discuss it after his arrival in my group during his next tour. He was in Australia, but within one week at the latest I would have received an answer. My subconscious was ready for the cataclysm, in anticipation of an event I intuitively knew would come. The most probable situation was that he would become very angry and fly into a rage. If the whole situation slipped out of my hands and, as a result of our break, he would stop coming to our group, those who loved him would suffer. Few people, in fact, would be able to comprehend the reason for my action. I would be the one who had disturbed an imperfect, yet comfortable, situation. My friends liked him; his annual visit was a powerful stimulus to their effort and motivated them to practice *Kriya* intensely.

A harsh reply came a few days later. In a disdainful way, he did not address it directly to me but pretended to answer the 'persona' that had materially sent my letter via fax. He wrote that my excessive attachment to the techniques would never let me out of the fences of my mind – I was like S. Thomas, too desirous to touch with my hand and verify the goodness of his teachings. He added that if he satisfied my request, it would be only to gratify my ego. Reading the term "gratification," I knew he had understood nothing.

We should have talked to each other long before it came to this! I wondered why he had never allowed me to express my concerns. I didn't want to contest him, I didn't want to destroy him; the necessity that brought me to write him was to establish once and for all what I was supposed to communicate and what not to communicate to the *kriyabans* during initiation. Why had he always evaded me?

I decided to behave candidly, as if I had not perceived his tone: I wanted to see what he was capable of. I neither apologized nor answered in a resentful tone. I wrote that, since I taught *Kriya* on his behalf, a mutual discussion about certain *Kriya* details was necessary. I added that at such an event the other three people in Europe, authorized by him to impart *Kriya* initiation, could also be present. I thus made him understand that he would not have wasted his time and breath only for me. I never received an answer, neither then or later. A few weeks later, I saw on his Internet site that the name of my town had been taken off his visit to Italy. My second letter had brought about a definitive split. The nightmare was over!

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

CHAPTER 5  
**A HARD DECISION**

The break in our relationship was perceived with bewilderment by my *kriyaban* friends who were naturally affectionate to him. In time, they understood the deep-seated reasons of my decision and showed their solidarity. Like a domino effect, other coordinators in Europe, who barely tolerated his bad manners, took advantage of that episode to break contact with him. They were fed up with the dullness of his philosophical discourses followed by scanty technical explanations, which didn't quench their desire for a good understanding of *Kriya*. When it came to teaching simple and banal things that even kindergarten children could understand, he flaunted great profusion of words, and concepts were repeated ad nauseam. When anyone in public, politely but with determination, asked for a precise explanation of some difficult practical detail, he came out of his hypnotic state and, visibly vexed, tried to humiliate and silence the unfortunate listener.

The following months were lived in a peaceful and relaxed mood; nothing to compare with the restlessness of the previously described years. Having dismissed that mean individual from my life, an enervating situation ended. I no longer had to go here and there to organize *Kriya* seminars for him; I had been relieved of any constraint of wearing a mask of hypocrisy while responding to those who called me to get information about him.

The questions that I would ask myself in the years to come was why for such a long I followed him. Surely I had not sacrificed my dignity for the sake of receiving *Kriya* information. Actually, all his techniques had been anticipated to me by a friend who was disciple of one of his father's disciples. The reason of my conflicting behavior was the concern for the diffusion of *Kriya* here in Europe. I appreciated the fact that he travelled extensively throughout USA and Europe to spread his *Kriya* without charging a penny for his Initiations (save a free donation and a fair sharing of the expense for renting the seminar room.) I covered all the necessary expenses to fit out permanently a room in my house, where *Kriya* Initiations seminars could be held during my teacher's visits. Constant was always my willingness to cooperate with him so that he could carry out his task.

When I saw that he continued to teach in his rushed, superficial manner, taking advantage of us as if we were complete idiots, my subconscious began to rebel. I vividly remember a dream in which I was swimming in manure. I must admit that behind my mask of fake delight hid a dry agony. There had been moments in which, thinking of my meek beginning in the practice of *Yoga*, my heart felt an indefinite nostalgia for that initial period which was waiting for nothing but consistency and honesty on my side to rise again and blossom unimpeded. In more than one occasion I had the impulse to abandon everything and sever any connection with him. But I didn't want to disturb the peace of all the persons who were my friends and who had followed me in this adventure. Only when I received his rude and improper answer to my legitimate request of clarification and realized that it was at stake my internal truth, I said to myself –

Now or never!

Well, in this new situation, there were all the reasons to celebrate but the sense of all the time wasted, of all the silly things which had been carried out thoughtlessly, was weighing me down.

I had not even a faint idea of what was the destiny of the recently formed *Kriya* groups – until then regularly visited by that *Kriya* teacher.

Some months later the wheel of good fortune seemed to be turning again; there was the possibility of inviting a new *Kriya Acharya* to Europe. Since he was well qualified for his role, I was on the verge of cooperating in this project and bear part of its cost. A dear friend went to India to meet him for a private interview.

### *The strength of a dream*

It was winter. One day I went skiing in the nearby mountains with a couple of friends. All went magnificently. During a break in the afternoon, I managed to remain alone. I found myself looking at the mountains marking out the boundaries of the distant horizon in all directions. In less than half an hour the sun would paint them pink – with an intense hue on their eastern side and tinged with blue on the western side. I imagined India to be right behind them, the Himalayas being their continuation. My thought went to all the *Kriya* enthusiasts who found, as I did, insurmountable obstacles in the understanding of that beloved discipline. All those obstacles seemed to me an absurdity that wore the clothes of a nightmare – I felt an infinite rebellion.

I visualized a book on *Kriya* explaining every technique in great detail. How often had I wondered what would have happened if Lahiri Mahasaya or one of his disciples had written it! My imagination led me to fantasize about its cover, to skim its few pages – sober, yet rich in content. If this book existed, we would have a reliable manual of *Kriya* that would have restrained the many small or large variations made up by various teachers. Perhaps some annotator would try to force its meaning into his own theories. Nay, I was positive that some pseudo-*guru* would say the techniques described in it were for beginners only, while there were much more complicated techniques which could only be passed on by an authorized teacher to chosen disciples. Some would swallow the bait, contact the author, and pay good money to be introduced to rubbish that he had assembled either through fancy or borrowed from some esoteric book...

This happens, it's part of our human nature. However, sincere researchers would surely be able to recognize the strength and self-sufficient intrinsic evidence of the original text.

It is a shame that no one had written that book! For the first time I dared to let my thoughts stray toward what could happen if I wrote it. It would be hard, yet possible, to summarize the totality of my knowledge of *Kriya* into a book – welding together techniques and theories through a clean, rational vision. The intention was definitely not to celebrate myself or lay the foundations for yet

another new school of *Kriya*. If I was to describe my experiences, it would only be for the purpose of clarifying theoretic and technical explanations. There would be no more rhetorical claims of legitimacy and riddle-like sentences to confuse readers or have them guess at technical details or create further doubts in them! How beautiful was to dream a book which would prove its validity by reproducing Lahiri Mahasaya's thought in the simplest and most logical way, in a complete, harmonious set of techniques!

A book devoted to *Kriya*, unpretending but clear, similar to T. Bernard's *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* would be a real blessing for scholars and researchers.<sup>13</sup>

It could not be a threat to any honest *Kriya Acharya's* activity. Good teachers will always be needed in any field when a skill is to be transmitted. But how could one highlight this to them, without being at odds with the deeply-rooted conditioning of their "cerebral chemistry"? Of course, some teachers of *Kriya* – those who live from donations during rituals of initiation and who exert power over people thanks to the pledge of secrecy – would consider my book a real threat. Maybe what was virtually eternal for them (living like a lord, surrounded by people who have to meet all their needs with the hope of getting the crumbs of their "secrets") might change, and they would be fearful of that. They would try to destroy its credibility by means of a pitiless censorship. I anticipated their scornful comments uttered while skimming its pages: "It contains only stories that have nothing to do with Babaji's and Lahiri Mahasaya's teachings. It spreads a false teaching!" Other people for different reasons could not like the book, either because they are taken aback by the barrenness of an exposition deprived of frills, which hurts their convictions, or because their refined sensibility does not manage to catch that "vibration" which should characterize the authenticity of the author's experience.

Only those who love *Kriya* more than their whims would feel an enormous relief in finding it in an esoteric library. I was already living in their happiness. Thanks to them, the book would continue to circulate, and who knows how many times it would get back to the teacher who had decreed its unforgivable flaws. At times he would have to pretend not to notice that a student was browsing through its pages during his seminars, thus missing a part of the conference...

By staring into the blue of the sky above the gilded mountain brims, I saw that bizarre situation as poignantly real. Each part of my dream had developed in the space of a few seconds, and invaded my consciousness as a swollen torrent, as if every part of it had already been rehearsed and cherished innumerable times.

But how could I find the courage to violate the vow of secrecy, coarsely challenging the sacredness of the *Guru-disciple* relationship as the unique way to

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<sup>13</sup> This extraordinary handbook, better than all the others, clarifies the teachings contained in the three fundamental texts of Tantrism: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*. In spite of having been published many years ago and of the several texts of *Hatha Yoga* appearing recently, that book is still one of the best. Old, 'dusty' techniques once again became relevant, feasible, comprehensible in front of the eyes of our intuition.

be instructed in *Kriya*? For sure, an innumerable amount of times I had thought: "Such a rule is the cause of disastrous effects, of excruciating conflicts and sufferings; they say it is sacred, but it cannot be: it is human, the outcome of petty calculations". I had no doubts that secrecy about *Kriya* procedures was a blind dogma, insensitive to the suffering of many researchers. I recalled what happened many, many times when some friends of mine who didn't understand English, asked to receive initiation into the *Higher Kriyas* (such instruction was given only in written form to those who had completed the study of the complete set of lessons which existed only in English, German and Spanish); the answer was always an inflexible no. I had always perceived this as a cruel form of discrimination.

I remembered a couple of cases in which the rigid injunction had been broken by common sense. People who were otherwise faithful to the organization had, under exceptional conditions, broken that rule. A *kriyaban* explained the dynamics of *Kriya Pranayama* to his mother who was invalid, but willing and capable to practice it. In another case that made me uneasy, a Catholic priest sincerely desired to learn *Kriya* but could not receive it from the right channels because of an issue of conscience in the act of signing the application form of the lessons; he found a *kriyaban* who explained to him the technique and shared with him his lessons (that was an action he was strictly forbidden to do.)

However, it was clear that writing a book was another thing: this very idea created a painful grip in my breast along with a general sense of uneasiness and unreality. I understood that in order to be at peace with myself, I had first to analyze in depth the concept of *Guru*.

Certainly the *Guru* cannot be considered identical to God. Lahiri Mahasaya refused to be worshiped as a God. This is a point that some of his followers seem to have forgotten. Actually he said: "I am not the *Guru*, I don't maintain a barrier between the true *Guru* (the Divine) and the disciple". He added he wanted to be considered like "a mirror". In other words, each *kriyaban* should look at him not as an unreachable ideal, but as the personification of all the wisdom and spiritual realization which, in due time, the *Kriya* practice will produce. When *kriyabans* realize their *Guru* is the personification of what resides potentially inside themselves, of what one day they will become, then that mirror must be "thrown away".<sup>14</sup>

Some years before, I was perplexed when representatives of P.Y.'s organization suggested that *Guru* and God were one and the same reality. A chief of the most important Italian branch of my school had once instructed me: "Don't you understand that P.Y. is the Divine Mother Herself"? Only now I was able to see how extraneous this teaching was from my sensitivity.

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<sup>14</sup> Whether one likes it or not, that is exactly what He wrote: *thrown away*. People who have been raised with the usual dogmas about the *Guru*-disciple relationship are prevented from fully understanding the impact of these words, otherwise they would face a strong conflict within themselves. To face the truth, it takes courage and an intelligent, discriminating approach to abandon one's own illusions, especially those that are nice and gratifying. Besides courage, it takes also a good brain capable of overcoming the tendency to be easily swayed.

From the idea that *Guru* and God are the same reality, comes the idea that the organization is the materialization of God's will. Now, if there were no request of secrecy, the *Guru*-God would belong to everyone, would inevitably become more "human". A *Kriya* organization would become just an institution devoted to publishing the works of its founder. Only through the dogma of secrecy could they hope to claim that a *kriyaban* cannot approach God, but through their *Guru* and their organization. The myth of secrecy allows the myths of the irreplaceable role of the organization to be kept alive.

Other justifications for this myth appear fragile. They claim secrecy helps "to maintain the purity of the teachings". Now, knowing some minor but however important alterations in the practice of *Kriya* supported by organizations, it would be better to affirm: "to maintain the purity of the modifications!" I might be wrong, but I feel that the unique benefit of secrecy for an individual is to have one's pleasure of possessing something exclusive reach a fever pitch.<sup>15</sup> I am aware that this individual may truly feel that the spiritual vibrations received through formal Initiation brought his practice to a "higher octave". I won't dare to contradict him. But if one day he dismisses the practice, rejecting all the *Kriya* matter as an overcome obsession, no one will deprive me of the pleasure of asking where all those spiritual vibrations have gone and ... what "octave" is he now attuned to.

Again my thought had turned to a minor point. The weird thing was that the word *Guru* was attributed to a person whom the disciples had not known directly. Students were required to swear their everlasting devotion not only to one person but also to a chain of Masters, even if only one of them had to be regarded as the *Guru*-preceptor. "It is the *Guru*-preceptor that introduces you to God. There is no other way to achieve Self realization." Once the students were initiated into a spiritual discipline by the "legitimate channels" (authorized disciples), the departed *Guru* was said to be real and present in their life. They were taught that their *Guru* would burn somehow a part of their *Karma* and protect them evermore; he was a special aid chosen by God Himself even before they began to seek the spiritual path. Looking for a different spiritual teaching amounted to "a hateful rejection of the Divine's hand, stretched out to offer benediction".

My thoughts began to revolve again around the situation of the diffusion of *Kriya*. It was very difficult to put all the crucial points in a logic order. I tried to think sequentially but either the mental and physical fatigue was impairing my reasoning ability or different conditioning carved in my brain acted as entities which had a life of their own. Each time I tried to organize my vision in a well-integrated and coherent whole, for one reason or another, it appeared to me as a monstrosity.

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<sup>15</sup> It is strange to remark that only in the world of *initiatic magic* a method is deprived of its value if it is learned in non-conventional ways. The threat of possible calamities that would happen to whom infringes the dogma of secrecy clashes with everything we read in the biographies of the saints; it instead perfectly suits those of the esoteric-magic dimension of certain societies – rather, secrecy is essential to their preservation.

One evening, while I practiced *Kriya Pranayama* with the awareness totally centered in *Sahasrara* and the tongue in *Kechari Mudra*, I had the inner vision of three beautiful mountains. The central mountain, the highest, was black; its form reminded me of the point of an arrow made of obsidian. My heart exulted, I was madly enamored of that image; I found myself crying for joy. I remained as calm as possible to feel that particular strength and pressure that increased tightening the whole region of my chest with its grip of beatitude. That image was strong, tremendously vivid in my inner vision. There could be nothing more beautiful: it made me mad with love. I had the impression of having cast a glance toward the misty sources from which my current trend of life originated. It was as if an inner thread linked all my past actions to that image, receiving meaning and significance from it.

That mountain was the symbol of the universal spiritual path. It spoke to my intuition: "A *Guru* might be very important to your spiritual development, but your personal effort when you remain alone is far more important. In any *Guru*-disciple relationship there comes a moment when you remain alone and you awaken to the realization that your path is a solitary flight between you and your indwelling Self. The *Guru*-disciple relationship is an illusion – useful and comfortable – appearing real until you are not overcome by what surpasses your mind."

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

I turned down the lights and watched the sun set behind the trees on the top of a hill. The shape of a cypress covered a part of that great, blood-red circle. That was the eternal beauty! That was the norm by which I would be inspired. I closed my eyes to have a dispassionate, unemotional discernment of the situation. A strange image captured my attention: that of Vivekananda's "investiture" by his *Guru* Ramakrishna. I read that one day, toward the end of his life, Ramakrishna entered *Samadhi* while his disciple was near him. Vivekananda started to feel a strong current before fainting. Having returned to consciousness, his *Guru*, crying, whispered: "O my Naren (Vivekananda), everything I had I gave to you, today. I have become a poor fakir, I do not have anything; with these powers you will do the world an immense good". Later, Ramakrishna explained that the powers he passed onto him could not be used for his own spiritual fulfillment – one had to get to that by himself – on the contrary, they would help him in his mission as a spiritual teacher.

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

*and unquestionable.*

It came to me spontaneously to reread the memorable, impressive discourse by Dostoevsky about the role of elders in Russian monasteries in his *The Brothers Karamazov*:

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

Eventually the awareness dawned on me that Vivekananda's story and Dostoevsky's extract depicted situations which were intrinsically, exceedingly different from mine. The organization had made me believe I had a *Guru* – whereas in fact, I was light years away from having one. While the great examples of *Guru*-disciple relationship were based on a real physical meeting between two persons, my relationship was purely ideal. There was no other *Guru* in which I could mirror myself but the mystic fire burning in my heart.

Should I accept the idea of a marked separation of spiritual researchers into two classes? On one side, those who have a *Guru* and follow him humbly; on the other side, those without a *Guru* who can follow only their intuition and reasoning. How many times have I heard the acid remark that those who have no *Guru* have their Ego as their *Guru*! Yet, there is not such a sharp division, because there exists not a single researcher who is really *alone*.

Visualize a net: each individual is a junction from which a lot of other links fan out, like the network of our brain's neurons. When single individuals take an action – a significant one of course, like starting on a mystic path and making good progress on it – they touch the surrounding threads of the net. Serious practitioners are never isolated: they will be helped by other's positive response and vice versa they will be slowed down by their indolence and apathy. In my opinion, those who follow the spiritual path carry other people's evolution ahead. This net connecting every one of us is the *Collective Unconscious*.<sup>16</sup> My musings arrived just to that point and there they stopped – for months.

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<sup>16</sup> To Freud the Unconscious was similar to a depot full of old, "removed" things that we cannot recall to consciousness - refused by a nearly automatic act of the will. Jung discovered a deeper level of it: the Collective Unconscious which links all human beings by the deepest layers of their psyche. The Collective Unconscious is "inherited with our cerebral structure" and consists of "the human systems of reacting" to the most intense events that can happen in one's lifetime: the birth of a child, marriage, death of a loved one, serious illness, family crisis, true love, natural disasters, war...

### *A fruitful shock*

The *kriyaban* friend who had gone to India to meet the teacher we were planning to invite to Europe, returned home and called me: he had a private interview with him and had good news. Some hours later, we were sitting in my room. I was all ears. He was enthusiastic. They had talked about the deplorable situation of the diffusion of *Kriya* in the West: the teacher was sorry for that and manifested his willingness to help us. At the end of that meeting, my friend had his *Kriya Pranayama* checked by that expert.

Much to my surprise, he asked me to practice *Kriya Pranayama* in front of him. He remarked that there was a fault in my practice. I asked him what it was and his reply literally froze me: he could not tell me, since he had promised the teacher he would not reveal anything.<sup>17</sup> He clarified that, in relation to our group, he had indeed asked for his teacher's permission to correct eventual mistakes in our practice: the answer had been negative and the teacher swore him to secrecy. Was this teacher – who had manifested the intention to help us – concerned that we would not find any need to invite him to Europe, or visit him, after our mistake had been corrected? Was he really so petty and unkind? I did not put pressure on my friend to disclose other detail about his talk with the teacher. I could not and would not enter the privacy of his experience, but how could he just let me and our group go on with an incorrect practice? The shattering fact was to see a friend with whom I had shared everything along my spiritual path, accompanying me in my ventures with the two teachers and suffering the same woes, satisfied only with having noticed our mistake.

It was as if this justified his trip to India, the cost, and the time he spent on this venture. I didn't start quarreling, but I reacted very badly. I got up and went away, leaving the friend alone.

Some days later, contacted by the teacher's secretary, I remained disgusted by how she handled the financial side of the tour. I declined the offer. Actually I was not in the mood to undertake an enormous work of organizing. As for the idea of visiting him, nothing could be farther from my mind. I was certain that he would have required me the customary oath of secrecy. Once returned by my friends, what would I have had to tell them? "Dear friends, I can tell nothing, you too must go to India." We had reached an absurd situation: if the friends in my group wanted one more crumb of information regarding the *Kriya* practice, they would have to be put on a plane and packed off to India. Otherwise, they would die without this information.

If the events would be went in this way, each year, an innumerable series of charter flights would transport all those interested in *Kriya* – no matter if old or ill – to a remote Indian village, like a pilgrimage to Lourdes or Fatima! The farce was not even worthy of being considered.

With my thinking faculties almost paralyzed by this sudden turn of events,

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<sup>17</sup> Considering the episode later, I realized what this incorrect detail was: I had not made the abdominal breath in a particularly visible way. I am sure of this fact because it was the only thing my friend was able to see – we did not talk about inner details of the practice.

I improved the compilation of my notes about different *Kriya* techniques jotted down during different seminars, and passed them on to friends who had already received initiation but not in all levels of *Kriya*. I purchased a computer and, like a voluntary prisoner, I reduced my social life to an absolute minimum in order to give my all to writing the book.

It was not easy to extract from my huge piles of notes collected during years with different teachers, the essential core of *Kriya Yoga*. There was the feeling of working on a difficult puzzle, without a preview of what was to be obtained in the end. I didn't know if, in the final completed picture, four, six or more levels of *Kriya* would result. In fact, I was not entirely sure how to define the levels. I wondered if they would have to be put in some kind of one-to-one correspondence with the process of unfastening the internal knots mentioned in *Yoga* tradition (*Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* located in the first, fourth and sixth *Chakra* respectively) to which two secondary knots (tongue, navel) were added by Lahiri Mahasaya.

After overcoming the uncertainties and difficulties of choosing a definite scheme, I decided to describe the *Kriya* system as made of *First Kriya* with eight techniques followed by the *Higher Kriyas* – called *Omkar Kriyas* or *Kriyas of Sthir* (static) *Prana* – in six steps.

I wrote all I knew about the *Kriya* techniques. Some variations remain in my shorthand notebooks, ready to be added to the book, but only in case I receive new information corroborating them and showing their intrinsic value in light of Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy.

I occasionally consulted a couple of Forums for devotees of *Kriya Yoga*. My desire was to see if other *kriyabans* had similar problems. Many were seeking information about *Kechari Mudra*. If I had had their email, I would have sent them immediately these instructions.

I was struck with the pedantic and conceited tone of some that abused genuine and honest curiosity. With factious tenderness, betraying the lowest form of consideration, they label the seekers' desire for deepening the *Kriya* practice as a "dangerous mania". They have the audacity to hush the humble student by counseling them to improve the depth of what they already have received. They talk in the same tone used by my old "Ministers", old fogeys, bearing witness to an era which I believed much more distant in time than it was in reality. I wondered how they dared to enter (uninvited) a person's life and personal space, about whom they knew nothing, treating them as incompetent and superficial beginners! Was it so difficult to simply answer truthfully: "I don't have that information"?

I remember a discussion with one who claimed he had access to the original *Kriya*. Unfortunately, that person was very secretive and exclusive. He said there were a number of true *Kriya* teachers around but was unwilling to share any names or addresses. I found this stupid. In a rush of anger, I imagined that the petty idea of possessing secret knowledge, not conveyable to others, was the only thing keeping together the pieces of his scattered mind, camouflaging

with a semblance of spiritual advancement the nothingness that he was from a human point of view. Why should *Kriya* belong to him? *Kriya* is a collection of introspective tools taken from different traditions. It is absurd to claim they belong to one person (especially such a nasty one.)

The time employed in writing the book had been much longer than expected. Friends said I would never finish it. I had not felt any urgency, I enjoyed that quiet moment of my life, experiencing the calmness and contentedness that comes to those who devote all their efforts to a single purpose. At long last, the book was ready and was posted on the Web.

After a couple of months there was a reaction from my former third teacher. During a seminar he explained my actions as those of one who wants to make a business of *Kriya*. He defined me an "intellectual prostitute". My reaction was amusement and satisfaction. But that night I could not sleep. Only then, did I begin to realize that my longtime intention had been accomplished and that finally there was a *Kriya* book readily accessible to everyone.

*Was entstanden ist, das muß  
vergehen!*

*Was vergangen, auferstehen!*

*Hör auf zu beben!*

*Bereite dich zu leben!*

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

What was created, must perish!

What perished, must rise again!

Cease from trembling!

Prepare yourself to live!