

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

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PART I: MY SEARCH FOR ORIGINAL KRIYA

CHAPTER 1

DECISION TO DEVOTE MYSELF TO THE PRACTICE OF PRANAYAMA

My spiritual search began at age 15 after I bought an introductory book on classical *Yoga*. I don't remember the title of that first book, but 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 that 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 wasted a lot of time on worthless books and stacks of specialized esoteric magazines with tantalizing titles and idle fancies designed essentially to impress, and which were impossible to distinguish in advance between fact and fiction.

I also came into contact with the main themes of occidental esotericism with short digressions into phenomena like hypnosis and spiritualism. I continued these readings until I was about 11 years old. In the end, I felt I had traveled through an indistinct chaos and thought that perhaps the most precious secrets were hidden in other books which I had not been fortunate enough to find.

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 exercises are used to obtain inner transformation...." I was deeply intrigued by his words: what internal transformation 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 must be referring to some intense experience that left a lasting 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. Although I thought I was searching for physical and mental control, my spiritual search had in fact begun. This book had a long philosophical introduction that did not stir up anything spiritual. It was neither impressive nor thought provoking (Jiva, Prakriti, Purusha...). The author's goal seemed to be solely to give the reader the impression of serious authority. 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. I was sure that the ancient art of *Pranayama* was not intended simply to train the chest muscles, strengthen the diaphragm or create peculiar conditions of blood oxygenation, but was also meant to act on the energy present in our psycho-physical system. It was common knowledge that the inharmonious state of that energy could be related to conflicts and disharmonies within. I was frustrated about the lack of in-depth 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.

As for *Asanas*, the book 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"; but 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 to their effectiveness. I began doing yoga postures (*Asanas*) in a corner of our school gymnasium during physical education classes. I wasn't very good in sports anyway despite being well-conditioned by long walks. Moreover, being able to do something significant without the inherent risks of popular and common 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. To my amazement one day the teacher (whom I had assumed had an opinion of me close to zero) came over and inquired as to the secret of succeeding in moving the abdominal muscles in such curious way. I tried to explain how simple it was, provided that you had the constancy to work daily at it for a couple of weeks.

Exercise to rest the mind

In that unassuming but appreciable book, 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 very clearly given and the author did not lose his focus in useless philosophical embellishments. He explained that the purpose of the exercise was to quiet the mental faculties in order to recharge the whole psycho physical system with fresh energy. I was attracted by the grandiose 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 closed, covered with a cloth to keep the light out as much as possible. 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 by continuous new thoughts. Picture them as objects and shift them aside. In this way, new 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 seeds of new thoughts starting to take shape 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 20 minutes and the exercise itself never more than 25-30 minutes altogether. The technique inevitably ends in a peculiar way; the state of deep calmness is interrupted by the thought that the exercise had not yet begun; the body always reacts with a wince and a faster heartbeat. After a few seconds, confidence that the exercise had been perfectly executed appears.

Difference between mind and awareness

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. I think that the Cartesian deduction: "I think, therefore I am" is indefensible. It would be more correct to affirm: "Only in the silence of no thought lies the proof and the intimate certainty of existing."

The contemplation of Beauty as a natural religion

Besides the dimension of esoteric oriental meditative practices, I also had a passion for poetry and literature as well as a habit of daily seeking the contemplation of beauty in Nature.

When I was 9 years old, I borrowed a book of poetry from the school library and copied different short poems with naturalistic themes into a notebook. 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. Such event was sought every day and lived with the sacredness of a religious experience.

Instead, the discovery of the pain of which life is pervaded (including not only the animal kingdom but also the vegetable one) produced a rebellion to the concept of God as "Endless Goodness." I was never afraid to express my protest. Noticing how many illusions are propagated by religions and cults, I felt sorry for all those who, in the abyss of their tragedy, were not able to voice their sharp loud cry to God facing Him in protest but kept on imploring God (visualized as a omnipotent, supernatural being) not with a spirit of devotion and surrender, but with such a beseeching attitude as if they feared even worse calamities.

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 calm and total resolution, made him almost a hero and a saint in my eyes.

He wrote to a friend: "I have not a single friend; I must live alone. But well I know that God is nearer to me than to other artists; I associate with Him without fear; I have always recognized and understood him and have no fear for my music – it can meet no evil fate. Those who understand it must be freed by it from all the miseries which the others drag about with themselves."

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. Each day for the first three months after high school graduation, when I experienced a strong romantic crush whose fulfillment seemed impossible, I listened to Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. The more my emotionalism prompted me to act rashly, which proved to be destructive to my love affair, the more my desperate heart found refuge in that masterpiece.

During a walk in the country, sitting on a hill contemplating a far landscape bathed 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 by a sense of guilt. That was my first spiritual experience.

Academic studies

I chose to study math at university. While attending the first classes, I understood that a happy chapter of my life was concluded and there would be no time for distractions like enjoying classic literature. All my attention was focused on finding an effective method of study and a way to avoid wasting my energies. This meant focusing in a disciplined way both during study time and during my idle moments. For this purpose, I decided to utilize the dynamic of the previously described exercise to rest the mind.

One bad habit I had to conquer was a tendency to daydream and jump from one memory to another to extract moments of pleasure. I had formed 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, creates at times unreasonable fears that hinder the decisive action that life requires. On other occasions it fosters an optimistic imagination that unfortunately pushes the person toward inappropriate actions. I was convinced that disciplined thought was the most valuable trait I could develop, and would open the doors to fruitful achievements.

My decision filled me with euphoric enthusiasm. However, after breathing the limpid, sparkling, celestial state of thought restraint for a few hours I encountered a significant mental 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 concept 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, 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, sex, and generally overindulging. Whatever tragedy happened to their friend didn't concern them, they would have kept on sipping the daily pleasure of dawdling until misfortune hit them personally. I found it very sad and distressing.

At that moment I again resolved to concentrate on my studies, and passing my exams became my sole focus. I perceived that period of my life as a descent into an unfathomable night but I knew that 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 lament and without being tempted to turn on a light for momentary solace.

Inspiration from Beethoven and Mahler

The incident put me in a gloomy mood, but a sentence from Beethoven's Heiligenstadt testament came spontaneously to mind and evoked the bliss I had 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.

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 to all human enterprise. The music itself conveyed a sense of desolation which was sweet, as if death meant drifting off into a peaceful sleep. In a sorrowful voice of endless dignity, the words of the contralto communicated a childlike innocent vision:

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.

While listening, 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 high pitch of enthusiasm with the thought 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!

Resurrect, yes resurrect,

Will you, my dust,

After a brief rest!

Immortal life! Immortal life

Will He who called you, give you.

Next 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 that has not pierced eye!
I will die, so I can live!
Resurrect, yes resurrect,
Will you, my heart, in an instant!
What you have coveted and fought for,
Shall lead you to God!

In the following days, I tried to penetrate the meaning by reading everything I could on the symphony and listening to it entranced in the quietude of my own 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 thoughts crystallized.

Would I ever, now or before infertile old age, be able *to die to myself* – namely to die to my small self, my ego? Was it possible to cross the foggy curtain of thoughts, superficial emotions, sensations and instinct, and emerge into that pure Dimension for which I had yearned many years and which I felt was my Highest Good?

There was no doubt I was willing to perfect my self-imposed discipline to the extreme, 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.

From the desire of "dying to myself" to the practice of Pranayama

What I missed was the art of *Pranayama* – that *Pranayama* which I had dreamed so much about but had never actually practiced. A few weeks before, I had purchased B.K.S. Iyengar's *The Illustrated Light on Yoga*, and his description of *Pranayama* 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 ignited 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. Day after day, I could perceive *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. Learning *Pranayama* was like learning to play a musical instrument – I would not be obliged to spend money on the purchase of a musical instrument, canvas and colors, or whatever. The instrument was always with me. I couldn't understand how I had waited so much before taking on this commitment seriously. Now, at least, the moment had come.

From now on, I practiced daily the two breathing exercises called *Nadi Sodhana* and *Ujjayi* with *Bandhas* (muscle contraction) and *Kumbhaka* (breath retention.) I sat on the edge of a pillow, in the half-lotus position, 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.

First results

During the day, I found my perception of things had changed. My eyes searched for the most intense colors, fascinated by them as if they were close to revealing an unknown reality lying beyond the material. 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 my surroundings. 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 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 which I perceived as two dimensions having nothing in common. On one side were esoteric matters which had guided my search toward *Yoga* discipline, which I conceived to be 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 works, and listening to classical music. I never imagined that the first dimension could lead me to the second! It was reasonable to hope that *Pranayama* could give me a permanent base of mental clarity, helping me to not spoil the fragile miracle of an encounter with Beauty with a jumble of thoughts, 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 myself 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 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 text 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 not fully accept the incommensurable implication of the statement. It meant that it was I that was the unbelievably delicate green light filtering through the leaves, 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 from this realization, nor could I have. My only wish was to delve further and further into this new inner source of understanding and enlightenment.

Panning my sight around, a landscape would appear amongst the leaves and a group of distant houses surrounding a bell-tower. Only that sort of "light" could instill a superhuman poise into my being and give me the intuition that the traces of the ineffable "primeval cause" of all things was not to be sought in books, in reasoning but only in the realm of Beauty.

A strong 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 PY.¹ It was a book I had seen some years before but had not bought because it didn't 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 provided fertile ground for the coming of an event which was radically different from any I had experienced before. It was a kind of "intimate" experience. Nonetheless, since I have listened to similar descriptions from *Yoga* practitioners, I have decided to share it.

One night while reading PY'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. 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 some 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 again became fear, an intense fear of something unknown which was threatening my existence. Certainly, I had never experienced a similar state. In past moments of danger, I used to remain paralyzed, unable to think. Now my thoughts were stirring frantically,

¹ The reader will understand why I am not mentioning the full name of PY – 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 being mixed into discussions about *Kriya* on the Internet. The reason is that in the past some people used His name to mislead 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 of giving an objective account of it. An interested reader should not renounce the privilege of turning to the original texts!

picturing the worst results: loss of psychological balance, encounter with an evil entity, perhaps even death.

I felt the urgency to do something, even though I did not know what. I set myself in the position for 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.

I was well aware of what happened to Gopi Krishna, the author of *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness*. He described the awakening experience he had through a daily intense concentration on the seventh *Chakra*. Later on – because his body was probably unprepared – he met serious physical and, as a reflex, psychic problems as well. According to his description, a very strong energy began to flow inside his spine from the coccyx region toward the brain. So strong was the energy that 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 control the phenomenon: the upward flow of energy through the spine became a persistent experience of internal realization.

I was afraid I too had come to the threshold of that same experience but, since I did not live in India, perhaps people around me might not understand. The consequences would have been terrible! No one could have reassured me that my experience would be channeled toward a positive conclusion like it was for Gopi Krishna. In those terrible instants, the spiritual world appeared to me to be 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 again. I was convinced that through my intense practice of *Nadi Sodhana* and *Ujjayi Pranayama* I had opened a door I was not supposed to open, therefore I tried to stop the experience.

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 suddenly felt guilty and ashamed of the harsh words I had used against a friend who had been involved in part of my search. Like so many others, he had shunned any

practice, ignored lofty readings, and decided instead to enjoy life. Equipped with a juvenile boldness, I had addressed him with a tone far from affectionate, which now 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. Perhaps he had preferred to protect his mental health rather than become unstable or insane through practices he was unsure of.

After returning to my room, I hoped that, because of my great passion for classical music, 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*, which I listened to in my room with 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 – that Divine Intelligence is 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 gaps 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 felt changed anyway; I hadn't thought about *Yoga*, I 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 urged 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 resumed 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 perceived over the surface of my skin, 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 ordered it to. My composure was serene. I had no fear. Then the electric wind was replaced by another feeling, comparable to an enormous power pouring into the backbone and quickly climbing up to the brain. The experience was accompanied 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 a single 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. To that end, he creates the concept of an "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 joy. An elated condition stretching out far past the limits of my awareness – a sort of memory hiding in the recesses of my subconscious – 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 world surrounding me in which I lived.

A reflection about the above described experience

The first glimpse of the spiritual reality may manifest as a series of bliss waves rising through the spine and entering the brain. This experience usually lasts from few instants to a couple of minutes. Sometimes it is like having a volcano erupting inside, a "rocket" shooting up through the spine! Other times, it may appear like an intense bliss in the chest region – suddenly you are inside an immense joy and wake up with tears in your eyes. This experience may be heralded by an electric wind on the surface of the body, propagating from feet up to head. Rarely this experience lasts more than a couple of seconds. On that occasion, the point in the center of *Kutastha* expands into a tunnel. The awareness is pulled through it. It is like burning with endless joy for several seconds – you are filled with the

euphoria obtained by this short but unforgettable plunge into Eternity.

Frequently this experience is called "*Kundalini awakening*. *Kundalini*" is Sanskrit for "coiled". It is conceived as a particular energy coiled like a serpent in the root *Chakra*. The representation of being coiled like a spring conveys the idea of untapped potential energy having its seat at the base of the spine. The concept of *Kundalini* is very useful since it can be utilized to express what generally happens along the spiritual path. The concept of *Samadhi* (or religious ecstasy) is very akin to "*Kundalini awakening*".

Some authors foster the idea that this great concentration of energy has its seat in our entire body, not only at the base of the spine. It sleeps in our body, underneath the layers of our consciousness, waiting to be aroused by spiritual discipline.

Yoga teaches to harness this tremendous power through specific techniques (particular breathing patterns, *Bandhas*, *Mudras*, *Bija Mantra*...) and guide its rising from the *Muladhara* up through *Sushumna*, activating each *Chakra*. It has been explained that when *Kundalini* arrives at the *Sahasrara Chakra*, it bestows mystical illumination.

Sometimes the experience comes before any *Yoga* practice is done. It might happen when you open for the first time the biography of a Saint. It may spring from the vibratory shock produced when the idea of the vastness of the spiritual reality creates a sort of dizziness. You feel that this idea is capable of sweeping away all your certitudes.

Some were so elated by their experience that they wrote about it with perhaps too much grandeur, placing too much emphasis on it, discerning implications it has not. I remember an article in a specialized magazine in which the woman who had this experience attributed the event to an imaginary individual who, purportedly, granted her every intimate detail. You understand that it is the lady herself to write since it is highly improbable that another person had communicated her such profusion of details of the event. Her alleged act of humility was annihilated by the title she gave to her article: "Forerunners of a new race." She gave the impression of not having understood the teaching contained in the experience. In her description, *Kundalini* awakening happened in her body as a privilege obtained by divine intervention. We know it is no privilege at all. It is a natural event.

Final note: Pranayama learned from books

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 needs to 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.

After a couple of weeks, practice *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* adding *Mula Bandha* and *Jalandhara Bandha*, to it. [*Jalandhara Bandha* means that the neck and the throat are slightly contracted and the chin tilts down toward the breast.]

During *Nadi Sodhana*, after having inhaled (either through the left or through the right nostril) close both nostrils and practice the two *Bandhas* simultaneously. (You can also contract the abdominal muscles thereby applying a slight form of *Uddiyana Bandha*.) 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.

Let me add some more information about the importance of *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama*. Some books quote scientific research endorsing the benefit of *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama*. 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. Now, 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. Now, 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 FROM CLASSIC PRANAYAMA TO KRIYA YOGA

Undertaking the practice of *Pranayama* was like planting the seed of a mighty tree in the feverish season of my youth and contemplating its safe growth at other times of my life. *Pranayama* became my safe refuge when the trials of life conspired to wear away the basic joy which was my inherent nature. 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.

On different occasions I noticed a change in my mind's global functioning – memory, concentration... - I could especially observe this during my exams. Before the test began, a little bit of *Pranayama* would endow me with a sudden calm and self-possession, no matter what the examiner's attitude was. I would not feel a bit nervous. I was able to maintain the necessary self-control to master my speech, often succeeding in expressing clearly not only what I knew, but also something more, which just then seemed to become evident for the first time.

The *Kundalini* experience happened several times but never became constant. It took place especially when I devoted myself to study late at night and then lay exhausted on my bed. Whenever it appeared my heart bubbled with infinite gratefulness to something higher, beyond my capabilities of understanding.

Burning desire to learn Kriya Yoga

The immediate problem was to find other texts, nay, all the existing texts about *Pranayama*. I felt no immediate attraction for *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Sri Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda. Later I discovered that the author hinted at *Kriya Yoga*. This is a type of *Pranayama*, taught by Lahiri Mahasaya, to be mastered through four levels. Lahiri Mahasaya himself was depicted as the embodiment 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 wonderful. 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 ran wild and my fervor grew.

I went on reading books by PY, I was amazed by his personality, with unequalled will and an unexpected practical spirit. He did not excite me when he spoke on a purely devotional tone, but did whenever he assumed a more technical one, making it possible for me to fantasize about the glory of *Kriya*. What I could surmise was that *Kriya Yoga* consisted of slow and deep breathing with the awareness focused on the spine. During the *Kriya* process, the internal energy was made to "rotate" around the *Chakras*. What was the meaning of this? Whatever it meant, it was a too beautiful idea!

PY highlighted the evolutionary value of *Pranayama*. He explained that if we compare the human spinal column to a ferromagnetic substance constituted of elementary magnets that turn towards the same direction when they are overlapped by a magnetic field, as taught by physics, 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 off the so-called "bad seeds" of *Karma*.²

Now my question was whether or not I had to go to India to look for a teacher to guide me. I would have been very happy if one honest teacher had introduced me to this discipline! Since I planned to get through my university studies as quickly as possible, I rejected the idea of a journey to India for the near future.

One day while again reading a text of PY, I realized that he had written a whole set of lessons on *Kriya*, and that these could be received by correspondence. With great joy, I quickly applied for the course.

Meanwhile I decided to improve the exercises I already practiced, using all the books I could find. At least now I knew what to search for – no more the classic exercises (*Kapalabhati*, *Bhastrika*...) but a kind of *Pranayama*

² 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 will come out in actual life. Of course *Kriya* is a practice which one can experimentally use 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 had quit it.

in which the energy had to be visualized rotating, in some way, around the *Chakras*. If this is – as stated by PY – a universal process, I had a good chance of tracing it through traditions.

The meaning of the experience I was going through was sufficiently clear to me. I had no doubts that the Reality towards which I was directing my life was the "Self" as conceived by C.G. Jung. I believed that *Pranayama* would initiate a cleansing of the subconscious part of my psyche, guiding me along the "*Individuation Process*." In my dreamer's heart, I fancied I would face the archetypes of the *Collective Unconscious*. I knew that no man should undertake such a perilous venture without the guide of a trained psychologist but I had no fear as I relied upon my own enthusiasm, vigilance, and indomitable will to perfect my *Pranayama*.

Another thing had become adamantly clear: I would have to choose a profession that would not occupy my entire day nor all my energy. I had to live a simple life that did not betray my inner Self!

The enthusiasm for the art of *Pranayama* was constantly growing. In my beginner's zeal, I could not refrain from trying to convince other people of its benefits. I was convinced that it could help anyone to live in a better way. I declared that *Pranayama* would harness their energies towards a more balanced psyche. My friends were polite while listening, but did not share my enthusiasm. Rather they reacted affirming that mine was not at all a state of emotional equilibrium: closing myself in a room to practice *Yoga*, abstaining from many aspects of social life, was a road toward alienation.

I made a blunder by insisting on emphasizing some aspects of their behavior which I decided needed improvement. In short, I was telling them that their social life was a farce. 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 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 and even a real mental cruelty.

Guilt-ridden, I saw I had provoked only bitterness. I also realized that, for purposes of my disquisition, I had taken advantage of their past confidential admissions.

Only one friend, a "Hippie", understood perfectly what I was saying and showed me some empathy; to him, the only real problem was my excessive enthusiasm about the automatic benefits 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 its own reward, but an "amplifier" of

what I had inside, enhancing what I had already achieved. *Pranayama*, he said, could not create anything new.

In my opinion *Pranayama* was an action of "climbing" toward a lofty state of consciousness whereby you achieved something radically new. I felt disoriented in listening that it was only an "amplifier." I wasn't able to see that the two visions could coexist – I was young and I categorized everything as black or white.

Correspondence course

When, after four months from my application, I received the first lesson of the correspondence course, I came to know that I would have had to wait for at least one year before applying for the *Kriya Yoga* lessons. I felt desperate. The written material traveled by ship and the delay times were enormous.³

I could not wait so long. Something dormant in the corner of my memory awakened. I vaguely remembered having seen some drawings in a book about occultism which sketched out the different circuits of energy throughout the human body. The idea came to me to seek the essential information in *esoteric* books rather than in the classic books on *Yoga*.

I started going to a used books store which was very well stocked, 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, thus creating 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 the exercise because of the risk of a premature *Kundalini* awakening, which was to be avoided by all means. This was definitely not PY's *Kriya* because, according to several clues, *Kriya* was not to be done with 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

³ I can still consider myself as fortunate. I lived in North East Italy not far from the border with the former Yugoslavia. Those people who lived beyond the Iron Curtain could not receive such material.

second-hand books, to buy at least one book per each visit. Often a lot of space was dedicated 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 with which he must have realized I was not satisfied. While deciding the price, he thought of something that might interest me. He led me to the back of the store and invited me to rummage through a cardboard box filled with a messy heap of papers. Among a quantity of miscellaneous material (complete series of the theosophical magazine issues, scattered notes from old course on hypnosis etc.), I came upon a book written in German by a certain K. Spiesberger which contained various esoteric techniques, among them *Kundalini-breathing*. I did not have much familiarity with the German language, but I immediately realized the extraordinary importance of that technique. I would doubtlessly be able to decipher all of it at home with the help of a dictionary. ⁴ The description of this technique still amazes me. During a deep breath, the air is to be imagined flowing inside the spinal column. While inhaling, the air is rising; when exhaling, the air is flowing down. There was also the description of two particular sounds created by air originating in the throat.

In another book written in English there was an exhaustive description of the *Magic breath* – which consisted of 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 a particular channel in 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, and if practiced constantly, accompanied by the strength of visualization, it would open the spiritual eye. I convinced myself that this technique had to be Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* and

⁴ 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*!

incorporated it into my daily routine.

I meet a person with my own passion

A letter from the organization sending me the correspondence course informed me about other people living not far from my area, who were also 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 could hardly fall 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 my meeting those people! With a sort of sour irony, I would dare say that that phase of my life characterized by extreme enthusiasm for *Pranayama* had been too happy for it to last much longer. I now experienced firsthand the problems, limitations and distortions caused by the human mind when it has lost 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, alternating with times when all seems lost and the distortions of the ego reign supreme. While approaching the man in charge of that group with 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 that I had picked out a breathing technique in a book and fooled myself it was *Kriya Pranayama*, he was horrified and showed a bitter smile of disappointment. He thought I considered *Kriya Yoga* a child's play and had no idea how serious it was. Visibly confused I babbled something about currents and sound of the breath, but he didn't want to hear any more and ushered me to 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 reference! 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 left me speechless; I just did not know what to reply.

There was only one way, according to him, to learn *Kriya*: be initiated by a "Minister" authorized by PY's organization! He told me that *no other person* was allowed to teach the technique. He, and all the other devotees of his group, had received the technique, swearing a strict 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 in fact okay to protect precious lore from indiscreet eyes. In that occasion I had nothing to say against the vow of secrecy. Later, over a span 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.

Staring into my eyes, with an enormous emotional impact, he went on to say that a practice learned from any other source was "worth nothing, it will not be effective in matters of spiritual purpose", and a possible effect, 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 discourse on 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 PY's organization, PY was, to him, real and present in his life, and "his" *Guru*. The same thing was true for the other people belonging 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 expected, I suppose, 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 PY 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. Having also read in another book that during *Kriya Pranayama* the practitioner was supposed to chant "Om" mentally into each *Chakra*, I added this detail as well. I did not realize that PY had decided to simplify the instructions taught in the west, using 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 this gentleman was one hundred per cent sure that I was talking nonsense! However, since my position was totally incompatible with his basic tenets, he recommended that I send a written account to the headquarters of PY'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 tone in 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, while a few seconds before he had stressed 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.

Group meditation

The group practicing *Kriya* met 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 continuance would not depend on the owner's whims and could be dedicated to an exclusively spiritual use. I began attending these meetings and I remember it nostalgically – listening to Indian songs translated and harmonized for westerners and, above all, meditating together was a true joy! Everything seemed heavenly to me, even though little time was given to the practice of meditation – no more than 20 minutes, often barely 15 minutes. A particularly inspiring session of collective practice took place on Christmas Eve, enriched by devotional songs and lasting 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's approval, much less support, in the practice of *Yoga*, the only occasion we had to spend time among people with the same ideas and interests was an experience of serenity and relaxation. Unfortunately, the pleasantries of our meetings was partly spoiled because the directors of PY's organization had requested us not to talk about other spiritual paths or deal with specific details of *Kriya Yoga* techniques. Only authorized people 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 which would be interesting and at the same time respected the given rules. It was not the right place for gossip, unsuitable for a spiritual group discussion. So only one 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. As a last resort, some risked telling some 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. 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. They seemed to be unable to show a single inch of true joviality. Thinking over, perhaps they were naturally inclined toward depression. Actually, their enthusiasm towards *Kriya* was very moderate, and they gave the impression they were practicing the few techniques they knew as if they were accomplishing a sacrifice to atone for their "sin" of existing.

What struck me in an extremely unfavorable way in the behavior of some of them was the belief they were protected by their *Guru* and therefore don't mind putting themselves in dangerous situations, abdicating every prudence. Before the prospect of doing a very dangerous action in which there are fears for their safety, their mind was filled with a sort of hysterical joyous anticipation. I don't know if there could exist a worse way to belittle the spiritual teachings. In my opinion this attitude should be avoided like the plague, being actually a stupid superstition.

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 memory.

My open temperament allowed me to become close to one person and establish a bond which later became true friendship. It was not so easy to find what could be called a free spiritual seeker. Many made a display of emotionally-charged devotion, others, perhaps envisaging the prospect of expanding our group, seemed to have the sole aim of raising enough funds to provide our rented room with impressive signs of its sacred consecration; others seemed only social misfits.

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

While I was continuously receiving unasked-for lessons of devotion, humility, and loyalty, my interest for *Kriya* became a real craving, a burning fever. A *kriyaban*, making fun of me with 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 pious disciple but deep down I awaited my initiation with unimagined eagerness. Even while doing my best to convince myself that I was among individuals with the same passions, I had to acknowledge that the reality of it was altogether different!

Hong So and Om techniques

I received the two preliminary to *Kriya* techniques: *Hong so* and *Om*. The first one slows down the breath and the mind; 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 with an interval of two months between. This gave me the splendid opportunity to concentrate on the first technique for many weeks; only then I could enjoy the combination of the two techniques. 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 PY. 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 while standing; peculiar to them, however, was that the *Prana* was directed to all the parts of the body through concentration.

Then she reviewed the *Hong-Sau* technique. She went on to clarify that the *Hong-Sau* 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".

Then she dwelt on the technique for listening to internal sounds (often called *Om* technique.)⁵ She explained that PY had tried to explain the

⁵ This technique does not belong to those included in the original *Kriya Yoga*, wherein the internal sound perception happens without closing the ears. It is not an invention by PY, it had been plainly described in the books of classical *Yoga*, called *Nada Yoga*

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. The Om technique, discovered by the mystics long ago, makes it possible to detect this vibration. Thanks to this technique 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 stayed with me for several months, helping me to overcome the beginning phase of the practice, when it seems unlikely that the sounds will manifest. Instead, the results obtained were very concrete. Now, while I am trying to recall my first contact with the sound of *Om*, I rediscover the memory of that ardent love for the Divine, that seemed so solid during those days and that subsequently disappeared for various years when I decided to do a research on the "Original Kriya."

But this will be described later. In those days I led a cloistered existence. I practiced my meditation in a slightly illuminated room. The rainy days and early-onset evenings of Winter helped my seclusion and strengthened my determination to turn on, through meditation, an internal sun. Some weeks of zealous practice passed without any result, but one day I became aware of a clear inner sound. It manifested after ten minutes of calm effort, just upon returning to my state of full awareness, after having been lost in some sweet reverie.

It was like the humming of a mosquito. By listening intently to it, it became the feeble sound of a musical instrument playing far away. Then it seemed like the tolling of a bell echoing at dusk from the deep green of woody hills. It reached me faintly from unfathomable distance. Light, soft as falling petals, it knocked gently on the doors of my heart, giving total contentment and ease, as if the spiritual path had come to its fulfillment. Recollections of my infancy were vibrating at the periphery of my awareness without disturbing my introverted mood.

In times of misfortune, there was always a feeling of protection like a vast, comforting smile surrounding me. The sound I was listening to, enchanted and thrilled, brought me now the same sweet feeling of relief. It had in

– "the *Yoga* of the sound." It is a good preparation for *Kriya* since instead of putting the accent on "doing", it teaches the attitude of "perceiving."

itself all the Beauty ever experienced. It was the gilded thread around which the experiences of love, the most involving, the most exalted ones grew like splendid crystals. The healing of old wounds was attained by real understanding. An azure, limitless immobility sweetly clasped my heart with fingers of bliss. What I thought impossible to accomplish, whose absence was so cruel to accept, materialized real and true before me.

In the following days I became totally absorbed in this new practice. A never experienced before devotion rose spontaneous, crossed the wall of the psychological sphere and made life and spiritual experience indistinguishable. Reality appeared me as transfigured – like in winter, when a soft mantle made of snow makes any asperity disappear.

Unfortunately, I learned *the hard way* that you should never detach yourself voluntarily from that state of grace. Some months later, during a moment in my life when I wanted to relax and enjoy life, I decided to interrupt this contact, 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 *Om* sound for a very long time. Incredibly, in a few days I felt hopelessly cut off from that sweet reality. Among people, I felt like one who had landed in another continent and had to live in surroundings that mean nothing to him. I struggled to retrieve the lost deep emotions originating from listening to internal sounds. This went on for months until my soul was again reminded of the motivations that had led me to the spiritual path: change my life forever. Now I saw clearly that my stupid decision of detaching from the contact with the *Om* vibration, had been a *monumental mistake*.

Initiation into Kriya Yoga

Eventually, the moment came to file the application form to receive the *Kriya* instructions by mail. About four months passed as every day I hoped to receive the coveted material. Finally, an envelope arrived. I opened it with heightened expectation, but was deeply disappointed because it contained nothing but more introductory material. From reading the index page I understood that the actual technique would be sent after four weeks. So for another month I would have to study just the usual nursery rhymes I already knew by heart. In the meantime, two ministers of PY'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 somber uniforms entered the room, and lined up with a solemn attitude and joined their hands in prayer. It was explained to me that these people belonged to the local group whose leader was a fashion designer and had choreographed that triumphant entrance. The two Ministers who had just arrived from abroad walked meekly and bewildered behind them. Then the ceremony began.

I accepted without objections their demand that I swear everlasting devotion not only to the *Guru* PY but also to a six-master chain of whom Lahiri Mahasaya was an intermediary link. PY 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 PY – 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*. In order to avoid that with such thoughts she weakened the enjoyment of the enticing ceremony, I reassured her that she was accepted without fail.

They explained us that Christ was also part of this chain because He had appeared to Babaji (Lahiri Mahasaya's *Guru*) asking Him to send emissaries to the West to spread *Kriya*. This story caused me no perplexity at all. Perhaps I had no desire 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 which was soon to take place to listen to anything else.

The introductory talk went ahead in a suggestive way. 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 same *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 that procedure into serious consideration, owing to the fact that in PY's writings where I had 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, 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 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 quite confident that – even if they would not admit it out of humility – they had already reached the highest level of spiritual realization.

I am unable to express the emotion and feeling of sacredness which characterized my practice of *Kriya Pranayama*. Yet looking back, having always kept alive that ardent belief, I must objectively admit that the results were not different from those obtained through the practice of the simple techniques of *Nadi Sodhana* and *Ujjayi Pranayama*. When I started practicing PY's teachings I did it believing in the theoretical vision that I had absorbed from reading his autobiography. I was enthusiastic at the idea to evolve myself of one year per breath; I was burning with the desire to do as many *Kriyas* as possible. However I was perplexed to observe that by practicing that form of *Kriya*, the experience of the energy rising spontaneously along the spine [described in the previous chapter] totally disappeared.

Higher Kriyas

A too much concise introduction to the so-called *Higher Kriyas* was the theme of the lessons closing the correspondence course. Unfortunately, the written lessons contained some ambiguous parts. Just to give an example, PY wrote that in order to awaken *Kundalini* it was important to regularly practice *Kechari Mudra*, but the instruction on how to perform it were nowhere to be found.

I contacted the elderly lady who was officially invested as a "Meditation Counselor." She could not help me. Just like everyone else, she had learned all the *Higher Kriyas* only in written form because, unfortunately, after PY's *Mahasamadhi* no direct initiations were ever given. Acknowledging her uncertainties about their correct execution, she admitted that she regretted not having had her *Higher Kriyas* checked by Ministers who were direct disciples of PY, despite having had plenty of opportunities to do so.

Among the *kriyabans* in the meditation group, there was a woman who had received *Kriya* initiation years ago 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, had 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. This had to be, in her opinion, the "*Second Kriya!*" I looked at her with a meek but piercing look; I felt my legs give way. I had the impression that the idea of a further technique to be added to the too many already received and practiced daily upset her. It was as if she felt she had made so great an effort to form the habit of daily practice of the *First Kriya* that she could not muster up even more dedication. I believe that, up to this day, she has remained fixed in her conviction.

I had still not recovered from this shock when an aristocratic-looking lady disclosed to me she had received initiation in the so-called *Higher Kriyas* years before. 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 as humility and 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 arena of her *Sadhana*. She replied that what she had was enough, and then briskly cut off any further discussion.

I wrote to the management of my *Kriya* school in order to schedule an appointment with one of its representative Ministers who would soon come to our country to impart initiation to *Kriya Yoga*. I asked for this interview because I really needed it. It is not in my temperament to disturb anyone on trivialities. I am sure that, in order to answer my questions, it would have taken the Minister just a couple of minutes. I looked forward to that date with great anticipation.

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 became dismayed when I realized that the Minister kept postponing our meeting without valid reasons. Since I had decided not to give up, at last we met.

Unfortunately I found this meeting to be truly disturbing. I was convinced that hypocrisy, bureaucracy, formality, and deception were totally alien to one who devoted his life to practicing and teaching *Kriya*, yet the sensation I had meeting him was akin to meeting a business man who had more important affairs in mind and who was very irritable. He was emphatic that we not talk about *Kechari Mudra*, and with regard to the *Third* and *Fourth Kriya* techniques, he advised me brusquely to restrict my practice to the *First Kriya*. He declared I was overexcited and that this was not a good sign for a *kriyaban*. I replied I would surely take his advice into consideration; nevertheless, I wanted to see how to move my head correctly in order to practice those techniques in the future.

Annoyed – taking my remark as insolence – he recommended that I send my questions to the school's head and stood up to leave as he said this. In vain I replied that the movements of the head (required for *Third* and *Fourth Kriya* techniques) could not be shown in a letter. I was speaking to a "wall" and the refusal was absolute.

I had always trusted and respected PY's organization and had studied the reference literature as if preparing for a university exam. After my interview with that ill-disposed figure, I was in an atrocious mental and emotional state. I wondered what role a school played that was not doing its very best to clarify each given teaching. For what purpose 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 I had dared to ask (firmly but politely) for a practical demonstration? I was not able to drop the whole matter and was quite agitated. Those who saw me immediately after the meeting said I was unrecognizable. Among them, a lady with a honeyed voice suggested that I had gotten an important lesson from our *Guru* – in her opinion, I had a too self-assured attitude and should learn to accept unquestioningly the word of a Minister. Strange as it might seem, a part of me was 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.

After some time, the feeling of having witnessed the senseless whims of a man in power yielded to a different consideration. Very probably that Minister had given 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. However, there are often childish thoughts that emerge when we are in an uncertain situation. I was afraid that this man, communicating back to the headquarters of PY's organization, might speak unfavorably of me, saying something that might have reduced the probability of my obtaining that coveted information in the future. I feared that my idyllic relationship with my *Kriya* organization – a bond that for so many years had represented my horizon – could be deteriorated.

The lady Meditation Counselor, who was not present on that occasion but had met the Minister in another town, blamed me for having turned the interview with him into 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 to her house to talk about the event. First of all I expressed to her my irrevocable determination to explore all possible sources in order to clarify my questions. I mentioned my idea of leaving for India, and she mumbled something about India not necessarily being any guarantee of authenticity. She told me that recently some *kriyabans* had found (in a well-known *Ashram* strictly tied to PY's life story) a *Swami* who gave them "pseudo *Kriya*" techniques that were, in her opinion, some meaningless, others dangerous. She said that there was nothing unusual about it; there were many unauthorized teachers introducing themselves as loyal disciples of

PY. With a vivid imagination, she compared them to spiders using the honey of the *Guru's* love to attract devotees who then became their prey.

She spoke about one disciple of PY who had formerly been one of the directors of the organization but then had branched out on his own, opening another *Kriya* school. This man was a "traitor" in her opinion.

This woman had enough material to go on with her stories indefinitely, but it was then that a very forceful sentence slipped out of my mouth which surprised me and froze her: "Should I receive *Kriya* teaching from the worst criminal in the world, I would still be able to turn it into gold. If it were polluted, I would have the intuition to reconstruct it to its original integrity." She replied with a sigh that I was moving dangerously close to losing the grace of my *Guru*-disciple relationship. In order to make 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*, PY, 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. PY 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 PY had been quite specific as to the number of incarnations that whole discouraging trip would take – about thirty!

The moral of this story was clear, something from which one could not escape: I had to avoid looking elsewhere or 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. I shifted my attention to her photograph of PY, taken on the day of his death. It was nicely framed, and some flowers and packets of incense were 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 had the same experience.) I related my impression to her, in response to which she became very serious and, with her eyes pointed far off toward an indefinite spot, 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 much PY was a "presence" in her life, although she had never met him! I let my gaze rest on the bouquet of May lilies which we had purchased at the train station immediately after my

arrival in town graciously arranged in a small vase before the photo of PY. She had then explained that she never skimmed on fresh flowers for her "Guru." I realized how full of sweet comfort must be her life! I knew that if I wanted to feel devotion with such intensity I had a lot of work to do, namely 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 halfhearted people who would go to her only to be reignited with the motivation they could not find in themselves – she was dismayed that her devotion toward the *Guru* was totally alien to me. She could not relieve 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 was at least right about one point: I was not calm at all. My search for technical explanations had made me as tense as a coiled spring. Although remaining faithful to my *Kriya* organization, I didn't accept vetoes and therefore I didn't take her advice. I was determined to know *Kriya* inside out and no one could stop me with any argument.

Final notes 1: Regret

I have asked to my *Kriya* school only one thing: that this so much craved jewel of *Kriya* was taught in its completeness, without simplifications. Others try to find in an organization something more: spiritually advanced people who would spur and assist them day after day in the practice *Kriya*.

I became acquainted with an elderly *kriyaban*, worthy of maximum respect and admiration, who had begun the *Kriya* path many years before. We met each other in the last years of his life. He was totally alone and I felt very bad when I could not see him for months at a time; for various reasons this was inevitable. We always met for short and fleeting afternoons, walking and speaking quietly. I was witness to an inexorable process that brought him to the point of living solely for the memory of the warm rays of a glance and simple nod once received from the woman who was head of the *Kriya* organization and the spiritual successor of PY. His dream was to form a friendship with that divine being, whom he felt was the epitome of perfection. He firmly believed that his supreme Good depended on a loving benignity from that person he thought divine! I tried to convince him that to deify this inspiring figure could constitute the end of his spiritual adventure.

The problem was that this fixed mindset had already corrupted the innocence of his spiritual disposition. He expressed something that years before he would not have even dared to think: the presumed spiritual evolution of the individual through *Kriya* was undeniable, but so slow as to be practically negligible. The *Kriya* technique was for him like a religious ritual which had to be performed scrupulously just to give proof of loyalty. He had given his full approval to the idea that on this planet there were on the one end special people, Self realized, forever free from *Maya* whereas, on the other end, there were irreparably common ones who had to wait many incarnations in order to receive a spark of enlightenment. Unfortunately, this view was the framework upon which he had been interweaving his thought.

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 inside an ashram near a Self Realized Master. To this situation he already had his heart set on.

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 idea of the transforming power of *Kriya* that eased and sustained the first years of his path, was gradually erased from his mind by the human tendency to emphasize (and sustain through a constant barrage of anecdotes) the greatness of certain persons who were "impudently" saintly, perfect, majestic. My friend had made the unfortunate mistake of believing that the eternal spiritual Source in the center of his being would wither when he was contemned to live far from a divine being, similar to the one toward whom he had directed the warm aspirations of his heart.

Final notes 2: Clarification about Kriya Pranayama

I have written that after receiving the technique of *Kriya Pranayama*, I realized it was the same *Kundalini-breathing* technique which I had found time ago in my esoteric readings (it prescribes that the energetic current always flows inside the spinal column.) I found it strange that it didn't fit the description given by PY in his writings (he wrote that the energy had to be rotated "around the *Chakras*, along an elliptical circuit.")

Many years later I came to know that PY during the thirties had taught a different variation of his *Kriya Pranayama* where the energy actually rotates along an elliptical path. For unknown reasons that variation was replaced with the present one. Well, I think that this was a great loss for all serious students. After much experimenting 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 "old way" I would have obtained better results. That technique is indeed a

masterpiece, far more beautiful than what certain schools now offer as "Original *Kriya*." If I had received it instead of the modified version, I could have touched the sky with one finger. Sometimes I bitterly ask myself: "Why did PY yield to the temptation of changing it"?

I think that *Kriya* teachers are not fully aware of what happens when their disciples discover they have received a simplification or a modification and not the procedure taught since the beginning. Having received a different procedure the student asks himself: "Which one is the original *Kriya* as taught by *Lahiri Mahasaya*?" The student often fantasizes idly about the reason of this modification. "Perhaps this suits the needs of the mass? Ok, there is no problem, a teacher has the full right to do this, but please let me know of this modification!"

Without this clarification the student feels he/she had been deceived. To many *kriyabans*, this fact produces a wound not able to be healed. Indeed there is no reason of practical opportunity that justifies such situation. Certainly it is true that there are so many superficial *kriyabans* who don't pay attention to matters of modifications, they will soon forget the whole issue and beautifully affirm that what has been decided is for their own good. But the best *kriyabans*, those who know what "earnestness" means, won't never forgive such teacher. The esteem for their teacher is diminished or reduced to zero. The same concept of *Guru* is put in discussion. This creates conflicts that remain incurable even after decades of sincere reflection.

CHAPTER 3
FROM THE MENTAL SILENCE TO THE BREATHLESS STATE

The will to have a deeper understanding of PY's written words about *Kriya Yoga* took a particular route. I knew three names of direct disciples of PY who had had a clash with the school's board of directors and set out on their own. I hoped to find clues in their writings which could help me clear my doubts. I purchased all their published material, taped lectures and all. I was expecting that in order to prove their high level of Self realization, they had elaborated PY's thought through direct experience of the different phases of *Kriya* and were willing to prepare a more accurate didactic material for those devotees who would turn to them, neglecting the main source.

Well then, the first disciple seemed to be an expert in remembering even the most insignificant episodes of the life of his *Guru* while he was reluctant in giving practical instructions; the second one was undoubtedly more professional, pedagogically gifted, but out of the material he gave, almost nothing new emerged. In the literature of the third disciple – surprising and valuable since, having suffered the tragedy of mental illness which he recounted exhaustively – I found only an illuminating sentence upon the role of *Kechari Mudra*: all the rest was a devastating banality. The secrets, if these three disciples had any, were well guarded!

Months later, the lady (many *kriyabans* addressed to her as "Meditation Counselor") who helped me with the *Hong so* and *Om* techniques found out that I had read the "forbidden books." Not only that, I had made a present of one of those books to a couple of friends! A friend of mine showed me a letter in which the Counselor referred to me as "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 abruptly cut off the lifeblood that sustains the spiritual path!"

Her reaction was so exaggerated that I wasn't hurt at all. Her actions were obviously driven by waves of unabashed emotion. Decades of steadfast conditioning had irretrievably affected 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 first serious and then, at

last, tranquil and serene as if tasting a delicious, intimate satisfaction. She could well say she had predicted my ... "betrayal."

Overcoming certain reluctance, I began reading some books written by Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples rather than those of PY. These few books (at that time books like *Puran Purush* by Yogacharya Dr. Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee had not yet been published) disappointed me. They were nothing but bland meaningless words endlessly repeated, together with continuous changes in topic, which I considered unbearable. The practical notes, presented as essential, were only scattered bits copied from classical books on *Yoga*. The lack of care in their presentation made me suppose that the author had not bothered checking the original texts he had quoted but had most likely taken those quotations from other books which were also quoting from other reference books, continuing a chain wherein each author would add a little something just to mark his personal contribution.

I decided to study again all the material furnished by my organization, trying to delve deeper into it. I would meet some *kriyaban* friends on Sundays, and together read crucial passages from the correspondence course and discuss them during a walk. The correspondence course contained also esoteric teachings that could not be considered essential to the practice of *Kriya Yoga* but – I want to maintain an optimistic outlook – could help students to develop their intuition of the subtle laws governing human lives.

I must recognize that my study was not balanced: I had too much interest about the the esoteric teachings. I was especially interested in mastering two skills in particular: how to recognize friends from previous lives and how to project energy for *pranic healing*.

The teachings were clearly given with all the necessary cautionary remarks, but my approach was devoid of caution and discrimination. I acted as if I were supported from "above", imagining that the benedictions and the strength of the *Guru* were with me. I paid attention only to some aspects of the teachings, choosing those particular patterns of behavior that appealed to my emotions.

Then failure came inexorably. At first I could not accept it. I refused to believe I had acted wrongly. I wanted to believe that mine was only an apparent failure. As time went by, all evidence suggested that I had neither cured nor helped any person in any way. Furthermore I had made a fool of myself disturbing the peace and privacy of other people. In the unprovable territory of the "previous lives", it was so obvious, it seemed so evident

and sensible to me that instead of using my meditation-born intuition (which the received instruction aimed at developing) I simply took figments of my imagination to create various mind films, convincing myself I had lived them in a far distant past. My reveries embodied only the fulfillment of my desires and were indicators of my likings and preferences. The realization of all this was too acute. Slipping into a state of dismay, I was unable to think a single coherent thought for some months.

I discover the extraordinary figure of Mère (The Mother)

In this period I started reading *Mother, or the Divine Materialism*, a book about The Mother (Mère) written by her beloved disciple, Satprem. The Mother was a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and, after his death in 1951 continued his research. The Mother gave substance to Sri Aurobindo's belief that the Divine – the basic intelligent and evolutionary force behind everything in existence– could perfectly manifest on this planet! "The world is not an unfortunate accident: it is a miracle moving toward its full expression", she declared. "In matter, the Divine becomes perfect..." she wrote. From 1958 until her death in 1973, the Mother recounted her extraordinary exploration to her disciple Satprem. Their talks are written out in *Mother's Agenda* (6000 pages in 13 volumes)

How come I am writing about The Mother, since I am interested only in Kriya Yoga? Her words helped me to rediscover the beauty of the spiritual path and retrieve in me a serious commitment to perfect Pranayama. By trying to behave as a good disciple inside the organization from which I had received the *Kriya Yoga* I had unconsciously betrayed the values my culture instilled in me. I deviated from the common way of reasoning and feeling, embracing as final truth a set of speculative ideas wholly unsupported by facts. My judgment was impaired and practically non-existent. Obviously, responsibility was mine alone. As a matter of fact, I have known so many people in the organization that had nourished in such dimension the best tracts of their personality, having grown in rationality and sensibility.

I felt intense love for the Mother. Her thought had nothing to do with philosophy: it was new, something never heard before. It was, I would say, "debunking." What impressed me at first glance and gave me a liberating emotion was her comment on Sri Aurobindo's aphorisms. I felt an explosion of joy reading her comment to aphorism No. 70: "Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitying 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.

Naturally, by daring to say that: "Morality is the great obstacle on the spiritual path", she simply stressed the value of not trying at any cost to appear pure in other people's eyes, but instead behaving according to the truth of one's being. She believed that each person should acknowledge their dark side, accept the fact that in the depths of their being there stirs the same substance that in some had developed into a way of living shunned by society.

The Mother gave voice to my own innermost convictions in an euphorically vivid way. She did not behave like a traditional *Guru*, she was able to extract from all persons going to her all the hidden potentialities. She said that one becomes a true individual only when, in constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony and knowledge, become perfectly and compactly integrated with their divine center.

The Mother reasoned like a westerner and treated the themes of India's spirituality with a western language which was both lyrical and rational, and at the highest degree of excellence. Sometimes I had the impression to discover in her writings a sort of revolution, a reversal of values. Just to give an example, the contemplation of Beauty in nature and in some forms of art was not to be considered a fleeting emotion but had to be lived with an indomitable striving toward 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-before-met idea. It excited and moved me. There were moments in which my head felt hot as if I were feverish.

Now she was no more in this physical dimension, I could not meet her but in the dimension of the love I felt. This love brought a great blessing in my life. It happened that I gradually began to examine with limpid eyes my way of practicing *Kriya Yoga* and realized the complexity of my self-deception. My approach and attitude towards the spiritual path was

improper. Unfortunately, entering a *Kriya* founded organization had not meant finding new means to perfect my preexisting practice of *Pranayama*. My commitment to *Pranayama*, had been unimpressive.

Instead of focusing upon the joy of perfecting such art, I relaxed my effort lulled into the false sense that finding *Kriya* had been a stroke of luck. This idea, coupled with the childish idea that each *Kriya* breath produced "the equivalent of a solar year of spiritual evolution" and that through a million of these breaths I would infallibly reach the Cosmic Consciousness, made my *Kriya* routine become a habit lived with a lazy mind. Actually, I tried to perform the greatest possible number of *Pranayama* and I felt no shame nor remorse for the way I was practicing.

My first efforts in exploring my book-learned *Pranayama* were accompanied by constant striving for perfection. In the beginning my intuition was alive, constantly stimulated; while practicing, I anticipated its inevitable progression and was quietly excited during each moment of it. I constantly felt myself as one who is pursuing his ideal of perfection, nay his ideal of Beauty. 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.

I was not able to perceive that my iron-willed discipline was softened by the hypnotic promise of the "*Guru's Blessings*". "Aren't you glad to have 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, with an exhibition of excessive enthusiasm. This idea, more than any other factor, had lethal effects on me; it was the cradle in which my ego was fed and strengthened.

The Mother utilizes the tool of Japa

I was very impressed with how she dealt with the theme of *Japa*. To start the repetition of a *Mantra* was for her the most simple and natural spiritual action: first of all let us remark that there was no solemn initiation into it. She recounted how during the screening of a film in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram she heard a devotional chant: *Om Namō Bhagavateh Narayanaya*. She was attracted only by the first part: *Om Namō Bhagavateh* and she wondered what would happen if she repeated that *Mantra* during her daily meditation. She did 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. At the place 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 is drawn from *Mother's Agenda*.]

During the day the *Mantra* became a sweet presence: "On the days when I have no special preoccupations or difficulties (days I could call normal, when I am normal), everything I do, all the movements of this body, all, all the words I utter, all the gestures I make, are accompanied and upheld by or lined, as it were, with this *Mantra*: *Om Namō Bhagavateh... Om Namō Bhagavateh...* , all the time, all the time, all the time."

In many passages of *Mother's Agenda*, Satprem and Mère discuss how the *Mantra* calms the persons in surrounding areas by creating an atmosphere of such an intensity that disharmonies cease to exist. Furthermore: "*Mantra* has a great action: it can prevent an accident. It simply springs forth in a flash, all of a sudden: "It has to spring up without thinking, without calling: it should issue forth from the being spontaneously, like a reflex, exactly like a reflex."

The Mother was able to notice the difference between those who have a *Mantra* and those who don't. "With those who have no *Mantra*, even if they have a strong habit of meditation or concentration, something around them remains hazy and vague, whereas *Japa* imparts to those who practice it with a kind of precision, a kind of solidity: an armature. They become galvanized, as it were".

Turning point

What the Mother said was too much important. I solemnly took two decisions:

[I] I would start seriously the practice of *Japa* during the day and live thus in the dimension of *Mental Silence*. Only with a mind deeply permeated by that *Silence* I would face my daily exercises of *Kriya Yoga*.

[II] After the practice of *Kriya* techniques, I would make room for a long phase of internalization where the senses could become dead to the external reality and become totally open to the internal reality. Perfect physical and mental immobility would be an unavoidable condition. I felt that only in that dimension something good would come and make me again alive along my Spiritual Path.

Comment to the first decision

The Mother said: "Sri Aurobindo gave no *Mantra*; he said that one should be able to do all the work without having to resort to external means. Had he reached the point where we are now, he would have seen that the purely psychological method is inadequate and that a *Mantra* is necessary, because only the repetition of a *Mantra* has a direct action on the body. So I had to find the method all alone, to find my *Mantra* by myself. But now that things are ready, I have done 10 years of work in a few months."

I totally agreed with Mother's statement of the. Yes it was adamantly clear that *Japa* was the right tool (frankly I don't think you can find a similar valid one) to pacify all the layers of your being: thoughts, emotions, sensations.... Only in that state (sharp concentration and calm *Prana* in the body) it is proper to approach the practice of *Kriya*. After so many years, now it was clear how I could get back on my feet again along the Spiritual Path.

I made different attempts to utilize the *Mantra Om Namo Bhagavate*. I discovered it was not suitable for me. I had the intuition to adopt the *Mantra* taught by Swami Ramdas: *Sri Ram jay Ram jay jay Ram Om*.

It worked splendidly. The sound of that *Mantra*, which I had already heard in different recordings, was very pleasant. I loved to prolong its vibration in my chest and infuse it with my heart's aspiration. Helped by a *mala* (rosary beads), I started to recite that *Mantra* aloud 108 times (the number of beads in a *mala*) during a walk, and let it go ahead mentally (automatically) for some time.

Since I observed that while doing it an irresistible impulse to put everything in order, emerged, I thought that the *Mantra* could work in a similar way by cleaning out my mental stuff, putting my "psychological furniture" in order. Therefore, even though sometimes I felt a bit dazed by its action, I practiced it constantly.

Comment to the second decision

My *Kriya* routine was: *Hong So*, *Om technique*, *Maha Mudra*, *Kriya proper*, *Jyoti Mudra*, *Higher Kriyas*, concentration on *Kutastha* for about 6-10 minutes. This routine seemed perfect but it was not. It took years to understand that few minutes of concentration upon *Kutastha* were not enough. It was necessary to enter a longer phase of immobility in which I could experience the real state of *Pratyahara* – as Patanjali explains. My duty was to wisely find the time to allow the process of internalization unwind under the ideal conditions. Too many *Kriya* techniques before this final phase had not been a good choice. I decided to give up making a great number of *Kriya* breaths and renounced to *Om* meditation technique. Often I

gave up the *Higher Kriyas*.

The experience of the breathless state

After some days I met the breathless state. The event gave me the certitude of being nourished by pure energy. In a blue-painted profundity, I felt to be free from the physical law of depending on the breath. The lungs were immobile, the body like a rock.

The wind dies down,
the waves disappear,
the ocean becomes calm.
In the evening the flower closes,
people leave;
then the peace of the mountain becomes deep.

(from a poem by Taisen Deshimaru Roshi)

This event happened every day – only when I practiced *Japa* aloud, at least one *mala*, a couple of hours before my *Kriya* session. There was a perfect association between the practice of *Japa* and the attainment of the breathless state. Every day I could verify this. Often, before starting my practice, I wondered if I would experience again that divine state. It seemed almost impossible to reach so easily that state. Yet it punctually happened.

Where my best intentions had failed, *Japa* had produced the miracle! Even today, after many years, I am astonished by this association: *Japa* and breathless state. Compared to the results obtained through *Japa*, my past experiences of calming the breath through other procedures seemed elusive, vanishing, like luminous reflections on the water.

All this happened during Spring. Then Summer came and I practiced outdoors. The most beautiful period of my life begun. I look upon it as the dawn of the true understanding, and I hope to never forget the lesson it contains.

Remarks

[1] Description of the routine followed

My *Kriya* routine begun with *Maha Mudra*. Then there was the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* (no more than 48 breaths), then the technique called *Third Kriya* (later I called this technique more properly: "*Elementary form of Thokar*." Then, with great sweetness, I resumed the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* – no more than 12-24 *Kriya* breaths. At this point the *Pratyahara* phase started: I guided my awareness to rest upon each *Chakra*

(up and down the spine.) I paused on each *Chakra* for a dozen of seconds like a bee drawn to the nectar in flowers hovers over each in great delight. One part of my attention was always on the third eye, that "inward eye" which Wordsworth appropriately defines as "the bliss of solitude."

As soon as my awareness was absorbed by a vast sweetness and the breath was on the verge of disappearing, I called to mind my own conception of the Divine, experiencing a calm emotion in my heart. This helped me to let go of any resistance and be open to the experience that was starting to occur. The breathing process eventually reached immobility, like a pendulum gently reaching the equilibrium point. Then I perceived distinctly a fresh energy sustaining my body from inside. It was as if my cells were breathing pure energy which didn't originate from the inhaled air. I was aware of the body as a whole. I felt it immobile and firm like a rock but, at the same time, transparent as the air. This condition lasted a good number of minutes (10-20 or more) without any feeling of uneasiness; there was neither the least thrill of surprise nor the thought, "Finally I have it!"

[2] Definition of the terms utilized by Patanjali

Patanjali was a pioneer in the art of rationally handling the mystical path, aiming at individualizing a universal, physiological direction of 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. There are different ways of translating the Sanskrit terms summarizing Patanjali's eight steps of *Yoga: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi*.

Boring and useless from the practical point of view is the definition of *Yama* and *Niyama*. *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).

To clarify why I have written "useless", how can a beginner understand what "Study of the Self" means? In my opinion the moral rules are not to be put as premises to be respected in order to begin *Yoga*, but are the consequences of a serious spiritual effort.

As for *Asana* (position of the body), Patanjali explains it must be stable and comfortable. There is no hint of preliminary exercises of concentration and meditation after *Asana*, before *Pranayama*.

The two interesting and enlightening concepts for those who practice *Kriya* are *Pranayama* and *Pratyahara*. They refer respectively to the regulation of the *Prana* by repetition of particular breathing patterns and to

the internalization process of the awareness which is disconnected from external reality.

The three further phases, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*, respectively mean: concentration upon a physical or abstract object, contemplation of the essential nature of such object, lengthening of such contemplation in a constant flow of awareness up the point of being lost in it. A *kriyaban* understands "concentration upon an object" as the concentration on the *Chakras*; the "contemplation of the essential nature of such object" as to become absorbed in the sweetness originating from them; "being lost in it" as the unending happiness while achieving the final ecstatic state. This is in my opinion the essence of Patanjali.

[3] Hint to Kriya Pranayama in the Bhagavad Gita

Let us consider, just for the enjoyment of the reader, the definition of *Pranayama* and consequent *Pratyahara* that we find in the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is surprising to find such a soul stirring definition of *Pranayama* and Meditation coupled in a very natural way. *Patanjali* was mysterious about *Pranayama*. He defined it as a regulation of the *Prana* by repetition of particular breathing patterns. Which were these "breathing patterns?" The *Bhagavad Gita* clarifies this point in a simple beautiful way: "Offering inhaling breath into the outgoing breath, and offering the outgoing breath into the inhaling breath, the yogi neutralizes both these breaths; he thus releases the life force from the heart and brings it under his control." [*Bhagavad Gita* IV 29] A clearer translation is: " By inviting *Prana* [*Prana* is present in the inhaling breath] to flow into the region of *Apana* [lower part of the spine] and inviting *Apana* [*Apana* is present in the exhaling breath] to flow into the region of *Prana* [upper part of the thoracic region] the *yogi* neutralizes both these breaths...."

The nucleus of *Kriya Pranayama* is to experience *Prana* rising upwards from the base of the spine to the chest region during inhalation and *Apana* going down from the region of the chest to the base of the spine during exhalation. The *Bhagavad Gita* explains that through the repetition of this action a yogi reaches the complete restraint of the breath. By annihilating the breath you reach the control of *Prana*. At this point you enter a state of meditation: with a pure heart you remain longer and longer turned towards the revealing internal Beauty.

Steadfast a lamp burns sheltered from the wind;
Such is the likeness of the Yogi's mind
Shut from sense-storms and burning bright to Heaven...
[*Bhagavad Gita* VI 19]

[4] Japa can be practiced in the body

Many of the great experiences of the Mother happened during the practice of the *Mantra* "thought" throughout the body. The *Agenda* is an amazing "log" of Mirra's attempt to descend into her body – crossing various layers of consciousness like thoughts, emotions, sensations – trying to contact the *Consciousness of the Cells*. Walking back and forth in her room, unremittingly concentrated on her body, she repeated her *Mantra* for hours with endless devotion and total "surrender". Each syllable was recharged with her laser-like will and aspiration. The luminous vibration of the Prayer easily made its way through her body and reach an unexplored territory: "... perfect, eternal, outside time, outside space, outside movement ... beyond everything, in ... I don't know, in an ecstasy, a beatitude, something ineffable." The experience she describes is like a breath of the whole body that bypasses the lungs.

Mère discovered that when she sat for meditation, as soon as she began the repetition of the *Mantra*, there was an immediate response in the cells of her body: they all started vibrating as "seized with an intensity of aspiration" and that vibration went on expanding. It was like merging the totality of her being in the vaster manifestation of the Divine inside matter. The cells had their own consciousness, they acted as doors opening on a totally new dimension of consciousness

[5] Swami Ramdas

Swami Ramdas was born in 1884 in Hosdrug, Kerala, India, and named Vittal Rao. He lived a normal life and experienced the usual ups and downs of a householder's life. Often he inquired about the true meaning of life and felt the desire to pursue the spiritual path in order to feel genuine "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, achieve the divine happiness he desired. It was then that Ramdas renounced the secular life and went forth in quest of God as a mendicant *Sadhu*. The *Mantra* "*Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*" was ever on his lips. The saint Ramdas moved far and wide all over India unceasingly repeating this *Mantra*. 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. A stage was soon reached when this dwelling in the spirit became a permanent and unvarying experience. Besides the practice of *Japa*, he adopted the discipline of looking upon all other people as forms of *Ram* (God), and of accepting every happening as coming from the will of God. He stuck to this attitude and was always rolling in a sea of indescribable happiness. Swami Ramdas attained *Mahasamadhi* in 1963.

CHAPTER 4 SEARCH FOR "ORIGINAL KRIYA"

After many years, when I was feeling quite distant from my initial *Kriya* organization, but I still respected it, I took part in a review class of *Kriya* when two female Ministers of that organization visited our country. During an interval between two conferences, something wonderful and sweet happened. What I had hoped for so ardently in the past and yet had negated in such a brutal way, materialized easily. I had a private talk with one of the two Ministers wherein all my doubts were clarified. She was intelligent, kind and talked from direct experience.

Regarding *Kechari Mudra*, she said that it comes with time, especially by persisting in touching the uvula with the tip of the tongue. I also inquired about one of PY's remarks, namely "The *Chakras* can be awakened by psycho-physical blows given at their different locations." The Minister clarified its meaning by explaining it referred to the use of a *Mantra* coupled with breath. No other hypothetical technique other than that which was fully described in the written material was being hinted at. She explained that if a syllable is mentally chanted in a *Chakra's* location with real intensity, it creates a "psycho-physical blow".

This clarification inspired my practice. Returning home, I had the impression of again living the best time of my life. I discovered a way of perfecting the final part of my *Kriya* routine: while projecting in each *Chakra* the mental chant of the *Mantra*, I realized I had the power to touch the core of each one with an almost physical intensity. A great sweetness sprang from this procedure; my body seemed to become stiff as a statue and the breathless state made my mind transparent as crystal. I was willing to put an end to my search of the *Original Kriya* and prolong this state for the rest of my life but the eagerness to get information about *Kriya* had already caused devastation and poured a mortal poison in my soul.

First teacher: the three qualities of the Divine

After many wonderful experiences and clear states of introspection, the year in which I achieved the breathless state, quietly came to an end. The following year was not equally shining because something happened that created total chaos in my mind and emotions.

During a trip to Vienna (Austria), I found a book written by the Indian *Yogi Swami Hariharananda*, claiming he was teaching the original Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* and PY's was mentioned as a slightly modified version of it. Devoured by the obsession of finding the original *Kriya*, tormented by my suspicion that PY had taught a simplified form of *Kriya* in order to meet the constraints of his westerner disciples, I studied that book hoping to unearth the original *Kriya Pranayama*.

In the meantime my daily application of *Japa* decreased. Often I formulated the thought, "I must never lose the enjoyment of the breathless state, even for a single minute. It is the most real thing I have ever experienced!" But my frenzied search for the original *Kriya* made me go crazy. I had opened a door that couldn't be closed easily. The most intense feelings of joy and satisfaction came from reading and rereading that book, finely underlining some sentences. I was excited about reading that *Pranayama* should be considered inaccurate and wrong if, during its practice, the practitioner had not heard the internal sound of *Om* without closing the ears.

That sentence wouldn't let me sleep. It left *dangerous* doubts that an unimaginably deep and rich technique of spiritual realization had been taken away from me and all westerners only because PY had found it difficult to teach to his first American disciples. Was this 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 elapsed before the heavenly condition brought to my life by the breathless state would return to me again. Putting aside the problem of the simplifications of the *Kriya Yoga* by PY, my mind was full of cheerful anticipation about the improvements that I could bring to each technique that I was daily practicing.

The book written by the Indian *Kriya* teacher *Swami Hariharananda*, like innumerable others I later read, was only bait to create interest in the *Kriya* school founded by the author, therefore it did not include practical explanations. However the statements it contained were worthy of consideration; they were surely from a very deep practice of *Pranayama*. The theoretical concepts he introduced were absolutely new to me and created a beautiful consistent framework for a *Kriya* praxis based on a unique progressive process of tuning into the *Omkar* reality.

Like a thread passing through all the pearls of a necklace, *Omkar* was coursing through all the different phases of *Kriya*. Furthermore, the *Omkar*

reality had to be perceived not only in the aspects of sound and light but also as a "swinging sensation" or "pressure."

Recalling a phrase which had escaped the lips of my "Meditation Counselor" about a variation of the *Kriya Pranayama* procedure, taught to some disciples by PY, I convinced myself that the details characterizing the *Original Kriya* were two:

1. Mental chanting of *Om* in each *Chakra* during *Kriya Pranayama*
2. During *Kriya Pranayama*, directing all attention possible to the internal sounds, the so called "astral sounds."

Recalling the period when I had practiced the "*Om* technique" (received from my school) I knew perfectly that any effort toward listening to the internal sounds was very well rewarded. The increase of devotion toward the Divine, the blissful rapture in a spiritual passion arising from my heart, experienced in that period had not been surpassed by any other event. The idea of living it again through the practice of a richer form of *Kriya Pranayama* charmed me.

After a few days the ancient well known sweetness again entered my life and I gratefully welcomed it with open heart. I can't remember how many *Kriya* breaths I practiced each day, surely never more than 48-60. The daily contact with the *Om* vibration was my Heaven on earth for many weeks. I can't imagine anything being able to make a person feel so blissful. 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 such experience became the sole focus of my *Kriya* practices. Before undergoing surgery in the United States, the author of the book, *Swami Hariharananda*, was stopping over in Europe. I worked very hard to meet him and receive his *Kriya* initiation on that occasion.

For me, his introductory conference was of great emotional impact. He had a majestic and noble bearing. 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.

His stupendous, appealing words were for me a revelation, but at certain moments my focus on technical detail 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 clear the proper swinging aspect of *Omkar*, he touched some of the students (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, giving himself completely to us so that we could feel the core essence of the *Omkar* experience.

I will give only a hint of what I have received from this school. Complete details are to be found in chapter 11 – see *Maha Mudra*.

Since its beginning, this school has taught three main ways of practicing *Kriya Pranayama*. I did not receive everything during the initiation session. Talking with some longtime disciples of *Swami Hariharananda* was very important.

They have taught *Kriya Pranayama* with long breath, with short breath and with a very short breath on the verge of disappearing. Recently they tend to teach only the second type – very simple to be taught and to be practiced. In my opinion it is important to practice them according to all the three modalities, in the correct succession and with the sufficient number of repetitions. This is the most direct way to enter the breathless state and achieve a deep syntony with the *Omkar* vibration.

As for *Kriya Pranayama* with long breath my intuition was perfect: it was done by mentally chanting *Om* in each *Chakra* from *Muladhara* to *Fontanelle*, inhaling along the back part of the spine and from *Fontanelle* to *Muladhara* exhaling along the frontal part of the spine. The purpose of this *Pranayama* is to find stability in the still breath state. This state is called *Sahaja Kumbhaka* (natural way of internalizing the breath.)

Kriya Pranayama with short breath is a process of raising each of the first five *Chakras* into *Ajna* by linking each breath with a different *Chakra*. *Ajna* is then raised to *Fontanelle* by a further short breath. Then everything is done in reverse and so on...

The goal of *Kriya Pranayama* with very short breath is to become aware of 1728 breaths each day. Since this requires about three hour, people can practice it only once in a week or in special occasions.

When I returned home I lived an unforgettable experience. 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 Swamiji emphasized so much. 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 roaming 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 this wonderful period in my life.

After one year, I received their form of *Second Kriya*.

I was entranced by assisting to the initiation into the *Second Kriya*: the explanations were given live and not through written material as happened in the past with my first organization. I was so happy!

The purpose of the *Second Kriya* is to transcend the six *Chakras*. *Prana* is intensified and distributed equally among all the *Chakras*. After many repetitions of the whole procedure (contemplating also particular movements of the head) you feel that your awareness is separated from the physical body – like a cloud floating in a sky of peace. They say that the *Second Kriya* ends in "cracking the coconut." The coconut is a symbol of the human head, whose upper part is becomes full of calm *Prana*.

While I was walking in the city that hosted *Swamiji*, after receiving initiation, all seemed more beautiful than ever. It was a sunny day and the bells were ringing out in the splendor of noon. I lived in heaven. I experienced a total contentment and ease, as if my *Kriya* path had come to its fulfillment.

After returning home, I practiced intensively. 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.

Unfortunately the following year I received a great disappointment. I asked to Swamiji a private interview. A few days later I was in his room. My purpose was to get information about that part of the *Second Kriya* I knew existed but of which nothing there had been said during my initiation. In

that part all the syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet were used. ⁶ He said that nothing of this was to be practiced by me. Instead he took the strong initiative to guide me in the practice of the "Forward bendings." This was a true benediction! He gave everything of himself to repeat all the main concepts of his teaching as if he wanted to engrave them even more in my mind.

While talking about *Kriya*, he said that its original spirit had been lost in this epoch. He told me that he wanted me to perceive and live in that spirit. To have that it was essential that I utilized only what I had received and no more. He asked me to place a bulky folder of his on the bed next to us. He opened it and let me see some drawings related to different phases of *Kriya*. He smiled as he skimmed through them. I got the feeling that he wanted to show me that he knew everything about *Kriya* and that he guaranteed that what I had learned was enough for my life, now and in the future. My quest of knowing other techniques implied my lack of engagement in the essential techniques. With that our meeting came to an end. The same evening I meditated with other devotees at his feet.

I was inspired to be there but the decision of the *Swamiji* instead of confirming me in the practice of the *First* and the *Second Kriya* brought me out of my peace and well-being: how and where could I learn the *Higher Kriyas* from this school?

The awareness of this situation fizzled out the enthusiasm of many and contributed to his isolation. He did not take into consideration the insatiable curiosity of the majority of *kriyabans* who accepted no interference in their quest. His unfortunate decision triggered an automatic reflex which pushed away the people most indispensable to him. Consumed by a thirst for the complete teachings, they began to search for other teachers. Disappointed by their defection, he stubbornly focused even more pointedly on his decision. Those who tried to get this absurdity across to him and thereby prevent it found themselves facing a stone wall.

The soil he plowed and was cultivating started to become sterile. He had all the tools necessary to attract the western world. The book he had written had been a smart strategic move which made him popular in the West, saving for himself 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", and were willing to show the same respect to possible collaborators and successors.

⁶ I got this information some years later. You can read every detail in chapter 11.

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* and made this practice far more beautiful, was not enough to prevent a shipwreck of his mission – at least here in Europe. ⁷

Using the same fliers and changing only the Master's name and photo, many of the 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. Those who had already met him in India knew his own spiritual realization was almost non-existent. This invitation was perhaps made more out of desperation than of conviction. Because of visa problems, it took two years before he finally landed in Europe, and when he arrived practically all the before-described teacher's disciples were ready to welcome this new guru as their God-sent messenger. This new teacher did in fact give us the very craved key to achieve *Kechari Mudra*, the *Navi Kriya* and others.

But let me first describe the most disappointing meeting of my life. I came in contact with a *Kriya* school very far from Lahiri Mahasaya's teachings. I just want to drop a quick note on this school (I don't want to even mention its name) where I touched the lowest point of my spiritual path.

Second teacher: fictional Kriya

The *Kriya Yoga* they taught was based upon the teachings of an Indian personage who claimed he was a direct disciple of *Babaji*. The school offered three levels of *Kriya*, easy to obtain in about three years if you showed enough commitment. The idea of having found a source from which I could learn everything about *Kriya* excited me tremendously.

The introductory book to this school was very strange: its illustrations gave the impression of a fairytale. In this book there was no mention of techniques like *Talabya Kriya*, *Kechari Mudra*, *Navi Kriya*, *Omkar Pranayama*, *Thokar*... The main technique was called *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama*. It was coupled with many other teachings grouped under four main headings: *Hatha Yoga*, *Dhyana Yoga*, *Mantra Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*.

The first instructions I received didn't disappoint me, but did leave me a bit perplexed. The teacher was obsessed with the precept of not holding one's breath, therefore the technique of *Yoni Mudra*, which is fundamental for

⁷ Something remains indeed, but very scanty compared to what he could have realized if only he had been more conciliatory!

Lahiri Mahasaya, was considered dangerous and thus banned. Their *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama* was indeed beautiful. The most annoying thing was that once you had completed the prescribed number of breaths, the process you had put into motion had to suddenly be relinquished and switched to *Dhyana Kriya*, a meditation which had nothing to do with spine, *Chakras* etc.

There is a principle that is always valid in any form of *Kriya Pranayama*: what you have done, or tried to do, utilizing your breath, you must be able to bring it ahead by utilizing a subtler breath and finally without caring about breath, only through mental effort. For example, if during *Kriya Pranayama*, you produce a particular throat sound, you must train yourself to make it become mental substance, pure astral vibration without physical component. Similarly the energy should be moved only through mental poweretc etc Your effort will then have a tremendous effect. This will be the highest achievement. And this of course requires time, at least 10-20 minutes after the exercise done utilizing a deep breath. It is clear then how stupid is to avoid this marvel and practice an exercise trying to realize quite another thing with our imagination?

Before receiving instruction from this school, I had mixed what I had learned from PY's organization with *Swami Hariharananda's* teaching and had created a very pleasant routine whose final part (concentration on the *Chakras*) was pure delight. Seriously practicing this new routine, there grew within me a marked longing for what I had relinquished. [I had the heavy sensation of gaining nothing substantial.]

The central core of the *Second Level* was initiation into Indian *Mantras*. This subject was more appealing to me. The day of initiation into a *Mantra* was preceded by a day of silence; entranced we listened a splendid lesson upon the utility of practicing *Japa*. There were other teachings that left me perplexed. Since I had placed much hope on the upcoming third level, I endured it all.

The third final level was an atrocious delusion. There were no proper *Higher Kriyas* but instead 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 variation of the *Hong Sau* 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 had received from my first *Kriya* organization. The variations of the *Hong Sau* technique, as well as of the *Om* technique, seemed devised by a lazy mind whose only

purpose in modifying them was to avoid the accusation of having copied from PY's organization, with no concern as to whether the resulting techniques were devoid of their power. For example, in the first technique, the "*Hong Sau*" *Mantra* was replaced by "*Om Babaji*" forgetting that *Hong Sau* is a universal *Mantra* whose syllables were specifically chosen for their power of calming the breath, with which they have a vibratory connection. The three techniques of visualization were of a genre one could find in any book on concentration and meditation. For many of us who had yearlong experience with the preliminary-to-*Kriya* techniques offered by PY's organization, being re-taught those techniques, disguised and passed off as *Samadhi* techniques, was actually like 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 about 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 this teacher's 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.

New Age groups

The mindset I developed in following this second school led me to meet people and groups where *Kriya Yoga* was polluted by "New-Age" themes. For some of my friends who followed me in this trip, it turned to be the scene of bitter disappointments and marked the definitive abandonment of the spiritual pursuit.

Coming across different groups of people who practiced *Kriya*, was like meeting a family a little bit more vast and varied than my first *Kriya* group who strictly followed PY's teachings. I am reminded of those days whenever I listen to the tape recordings of devotional chants which I bought at that time. Usually I fell in love with an Indian *bhajan* and sang it within me all through the day. For me it had much the same nature of food; I really had the impression of eating that music.

In that ambiance I met many people who had some traits in common. Bound to a very oriental lifestyle, they particularly loved a way of behaving characterized by innocent frenzies, but some among them had the dangerous and potentially destructive mania to explore unceasingly the mysteries inherent to the "human potential". Some were lured to invest in

expensive seminars where their energy channels would be opened and they would learn the secret of how to make use of the *Universal Energy*.

When I dared to call into question the validity of the whole thing, they, feeling annoyed, rebuked that there was no reason to be perplexed about their practices, without having tried them. They would comment: "It is our *Karma* that is giving us the best of all the opportunities to grow in all the planes". "We are expected to answer in a positive way. We don't have to stay jammed against this beneficial current otherwise we could have ... why die and born again just to live those experiences that we are now shunning!" "The *Kriya* techniques are practiced with the energy present in the body – they said – well, if this is recharged by the flow of the *Universal Energy*, what appears as a long journey will become like a stroll."

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. While passionately sharing everything they had learned, no matter if it cost them a great deal of time, effort and money, they never did they try to force something on me.

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 that had once been the right-hand man of one or another illustrious *Guru* but then became independent because the *Guru* disowned them. We agreed our teachers were mostly mediocre, sometimes impolite and unethical. Some trifling episodes confirmed our first impressions of mental instability. They knew little about *Kriya Yoga* and they taught it in a superficial way, but we believed they taught the "*Original Kriya*" and this blinded us. Just for this reason we treated them with a deferential and tolerant attitude, forgiving them when they betrayed our trust.

We accepted the farce of the initiations as an inevitable drawback to success in acquiring the information we were searching for 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 I had found the keys of *Original Kriya*. Often a vague sense of well-being perceived while practicing a certain technique for the first time was the proof of the excellence of the technique itself. I did not realize that, in this way, I had made my ego the compass needle of my spiritual journey. I could not realize that my past achievements – listening to the *Om* vibration, breathless state... – were no

more with me, were forgotten. It was like I had been hypnotized.

I ignored any awareness that the new initiation had only added something insignificant to what I already knew and I was confining myself to a "cage" from which I would sooner or later 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 the coveted news with other students by cell-phone who, in turn, would take part in other initiations and reciprocate the favor.

Some "*Gurus*" were genius in the art of pretense and in isolating their disciples from all other *kriyabans* in the world practicing a different form of *Kriya*. I remember an interesting episode. To one of these teachers it was submitted – not by me – part of the written material published by our *Kriya* organization related to the *Higher Kriya* techniques. He skimmed through the material and pretended not to be able to link it with the *Kriya Yoga* he practiced. He shouted that what he was reading had nothing to do – with a smirk of commiseration he emphasized "nothing" – with Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Yoga*. To those who were present to such a farce, he advocated the necessity of starting all over again, from initiation into *First Kriya*.

Many refused to create a bond of formal "discipleship" with him, thus he lost two thirds of the students on the spot. Those who accepted his conditions disappeared from our group as sucked into a black hole. Later, I was able to take a look at what was happening in their group and was shocked by the adoration they addressed to their teacher, as if he were a new Lahiri Mahasaya.

Third teacher

When the moment came to meet him, I was not in the best of moods. Certain clues had warned 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 first teacher *Swami Hariharananda* had immersed me in a passionate way, could be neither left aside nor forgotten. I did not even dream of putting other principles in place as the foundation for my spiritual path, and so 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 teacher in a *Yoga* center. The essence of his introductory speech was that *Kriya* was not intended to inflate the mind and the ego toward a hypothetical superior mind, but was a journey beyond the mind, into uncontaminated territory. I realized that Sri Krishnamurti's concept 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. When it came to teaching simple and banal things that even kindergarten children could understand, he flaunted a great profusion of words, and concepts were repeated ad nauseam. When anyone in public politely but determinedly 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. Sometimes he exploded with rage whenever he sensed that underneath legitimate questions there was a veiled opposition or an intention to challenge his authority.

I focused all my attention on learning his form of *Kriya* and ignoring his obvious faults. He clearly communicated to us that the reason for his tour to the West was to reestablish the original teachings, and this was enough to overcome my initial wariness.

In the following initiation seminar the technical explanation was reasonably clear, even if in some parts were 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. However I realized that my exhaustive search for the original *Kriya* had started to go in the right direction. I followed this teacher for six years. Hereafter I summarize the reasons for my enthusiasm and why I later broke off with him.

Returning home after the seminar of initiation, unexpected internal changes created a very positive period. After three months of intensive practice I achieved *Kechari Mudra*. It brought me a feeling of "dizziness" that lasted some days; my mental faculties seemed to be fogged up, but when all that ceased, my *Kriya* flew high.

Some days I was so happy that when I went out for a walk, if I met someone and stopped to listen to him, no matter what he said, a sudden joy would expand in my chest to the point that I could barely hold back my tears. Looking at the distant mountains or at other details of the landscape,

I would try to direct my feeling toward them in order to turn my paralyzing joy into aesthetic rapture; only this could keep back the joy clutching my being, only this could hide it. Inspired by this new condition, comparing it to that of the mystics, I realized how difficult it is to live, carrying out daily worldly duties, without being paralyzed by such bliss! I believe it is legitimate to ask why do *Kriya* organizations not teach such a simple technique as *Talabya Kriya*, preferring to perpetuate endless political arguments and speculations that continue up to the present day.

A couple of months marked by calmness and introspection followed: the only noteworthy event was the issue of the book *Puran Purush* – surely the most beautiful biography of Lahiri Mahasaya. It was written by the renowned *Kriya* master Dr. Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee who consulted Lahiri Mahasaya's diaries and benefited from the personal assistance of Sri Satya Charan Lahiri (jan 1905 - jan 1987), one of Lahiri Mahasaya's grandsons, who had access to those diaries. The book came out in Bengali (then in French and English.) It contains a selection of the most important entries in Lahiri Mahasaya diaries.

Although this text does not seem to respect a logical order in the topics and contains an endless number of repetitions and rhetorical sentences, it help us to understand Lahiri Mahasaya's personality – thus, the core of *Kriya* may be reached as fast as an arrow. 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 radiant sun in my heart; he was the symbol of the perfection I yearned after.

It strikes his skill in communicating complicated abstract concepts when he affirms that the whole course of *Kriya* is a great adventure beginning with a *dynamic Prana* and ending with a *static Prana*. One feels a thrill of delight by reading sentences which have light in themselves: "*Kutastha* is God, he is the supreme *Brahma*". Remarkable is the great importance given to *Pranayama*, *Thokar*, and *Yoni Mudra*.

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 as "a mirror." In other words, each *kriyaban* should see 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 that 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."

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.

Reasons of conflict with my third teacher

In order to explain the definitive crack in our relationship, it is necessary to refer again to the haste and shallowness with which my third Master explained the *Kriya* techniques. The introductory lecture to *Kriya* (which was usually held the evening before initiation) and a big part of the seminar of initiation was devoted to pure philosophical talk which didn't touch the basis 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 only for the explanation of the techniques, enduring this long talk as a giant bummer.

The traditional offerings (he also required a coconut, which was very difficult to find, forcing the students to desperately look in store after store) lay in disarray before a scruffy altar. Since he usually arrived very late, those who came from other cities pictured all their plans for the return journey falling through and were very anxious. Despite it being late, people being tired, and some already leaving to catch their train, 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 on, 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. ⁸ Only then did he switch to a hurried explanation of the basic 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 so that 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 did 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 accepted everything and I would never have dreamed of complaining. Nevertheless one day I had a visit from the couple who organized the master's tours in Germany. I had become acquainted with those kind friends during the seminars of my first teacher *Swami Hariharananda*. 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 having 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 response, 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.

⁸ 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 think that without oaths, a *kriyaban's* life would be licentious? The necessity of adopting specific ways of 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 who were successful in *Kriya* spontaneously came to the so-called virtuous life, while a lot of conformists failed.

My experience with that teacher probably would have ended that way, had I not gone to welcome him back to Europe. We exchanged hugs as if nothing had happened. He apparently 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 had happened behind the scenes. I was appalled and disoriented. My first impulse was to abandon everything and sever any connection with him.

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 had 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 into the *Higher Kriyas*. That was a beautiful moment in which Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* revealed (to those who had the sensibility to perceive it) all its hidden beauty. My role was to serve as translator. I knew well how to perform such a function, reporting every last detail, while the man who would have replaced me was filled with old knowledge and out of habit would have neglected to translate 80% of the talk.

During that initiation, Master demonstrated *Thokar* in a way visibly different from the previous year. When one of the listeners asked him about the reason for the changes, he replied he had not changed anything and argued that in the past seminars a problem of translation might have occurred. His lie was obvious. The questioning *kriyaban* remembered well the head movements he had previously been shown.

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 within the theoretical framework to which he was accustomed.

Months later during another tour, when we were alone and he was searching for something in a room, I found the courage to drop a hint about a technical issue which had set one *Kriya* school against another. He suddenly turned toward me with hate in his eyes, shouting 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 entire course of my six years with him.

From that moment onward all was changed. I deliberately began to control myself and made the resolution to always agree with him. 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 comprehensive way. I wanted none of my students to ever feel the pain of seeing a legitimate question go unconsidered.

A year passed by, and I sensed I was doing virtually useless work. I gave *Kriya* initiation following a mandatory fixed protocol. When I took leave of the students I knew that most would practice for few days and then leave *Kriya* to pursue other esoteric interests. Usually one or two among the most tenacious students made up questions and called me just to carry on the pretense of continuing, from a distance, our relationship.

When Master came to our country I invited all the new initiates to the seminar where he was present. Unfortunately, many didn't "survive" such a meeting. Accustomed by me to put forth any question, receiving always precise answer, they tried to do the same with the teacher. Good heavens! He censured most of the questions, implying that they were the sign of a insane way of thinking. Often exploded with rage. Many entered a deep crisis after observing his almost total lack of human understanding while simultaneously being kicked around by him.

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 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 to teach *Kriya Yoga* to their group. 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 refresher. He asked me a lot of pertinent questions and I gave him accurate answers. At that point 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 fitting 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 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 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 a disaster, anticipating 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 stopped 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 a comfortable though imperfect 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 St. 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 only be 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 I taught *Kriya* on his behalf and therefore 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 for only me. I never received an answer, neither then nor ever. A few weeks later I saw on his Internet site that the name of my town had been taken off the list for 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 with

him too many years, and now all that had really ended!

The question that I would ask myself in the years to come was why I had followed him for so long. Surely I had not sacrificed my dignity for the sake of receiving *Kriya* information! Actually, all of his techniques had been revealed to me by a friend who was disciple of one of his father's disciples. The reason for my behavior was concern for the diffusion of *Kriya* here in Europe. I appreciated the fact that he traveled extensively throughout USA and Europe to spread his *Kriya* without charging a penny for his Initiations (save for a free donation and a fair share of the expense for renting the seminar room). I covered all the necessary expenses to permanently fit out a room in my house where *Kriya* Initiations seminars could be held during my teacher's visits. My willingness to cooperate with him was always constant in order 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 the peace of that initial period, a peace which was waiting for nothing more than consistency and honesty on my part to rise again and blossom unimpeded. On 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 people 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 for clarification and realized that my internal truth was at stake, I said to myself – Now or never!

CHAPTER 5
A DECISION BORN OF DESPERATION

At that time I could not tolerate the least deformation of truth. I zeroed my diplomatic mask and provoked the breaking-off with my third teacher. This bewildered my *kriyaban* friends who were naturally affectionate toward him. In time they understood the deep-seated reasons for 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*.

The following months were lived in a peaceful and relaxed mood, nothing to compare with the restlessness of my 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 the constraint of wearing a mask of hypocrisy while responding to those who called me to get information about him.

I had not even a faint idea of the destiny of the recently formed *Kriya* groups, up until then regularly visited by him. There were 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. In this atmosphere of uncertainty few noteworthy things happened.

- A friend remained for some days at an *Ashram* in India 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. At the conclusion he acquired a large volume summarizing the techniques, and at the end of his trip, visibly content, he showed me the book. The techniques did not differ much from those I already knew, but there were many more details.

There was nothing in that book, however, that could remove all my questions; 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* as 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*.

The material was very interesting, and I would have liked to yield to the illusion that my quest had finally ended since those notes contained what I was searching for. I simply had to convince myself that *Babaji* had made a synthesis of the innumerable spiritual practices of Tantrism to create 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 with 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 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 his disciples write the book; they had the brilliant idea of making it more interesting by hinting that the techniques were derived from the mythical *Babaji*. The teacher, exhibiting another classic Indian habit, never checked the material and was taken aback later on when he became aware of those "supplementary notes". He then tried to defend his disciples' work stating that after all ... "*Babaji's Kriya* had Tantric origins."

- Some friends returning from India expressed their excitement over such an extraordinary land. But at the end of their tales, disappointment in all the things they had not been able to learn emerged. Often they would meet a boaster who assured them he knew original *Kriya Yoga* and could initiate them all as long as they kept it a total secret without establishing any contact with other teachers. In this way the boaster could ensure the disciples would not recognize that it was not *Kriya Yoga* they were being taught. I realized this only when, overcoming their hesitation, I convinced them to confidentially give me a rough description of that technique.

It was nothing more than the mere repetition of a *Mantra*! What made me feel sad was not so much the great advantage gained by those braggers (the

Gurudakshina [donation] they received meant a real fortune at my friends' expense) but that my friends missed the opportunity of learning *Kriya* from other sources in other places.

- Something different happened to a friend who met Sri Banamali Lahiri, one of the master's great-grandsons, a man with a great academic background and with a direct experience of *Kriya*. Various testimonies described him as a saint that wore the suit of the humility.

My friend was not able to learn anything from him, returned rather to me very confused. I tell only shortly such experience to show that when we are very desirous to find techniques we are not able of to listen to a saint that could see in us what doesn't go in the right direction and correct it. We could receive therefore the greatest possible help.

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, but then by posing apparently incidental questions, I tried to understand what had happened. My friend had, as he usually did, began the discussion with trivialities like asking some information on Indian habits and about 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*, and received a sarcastically sour, negative response of, more or less, "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 narration, my friend was looking at me questioningly. 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 heard that a man from his 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 differences, I will always be grateful for all the things he shared with me concerning the path of *Yoga*.

I dream to write a book explaining Kriya Yoga

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 find time alone. I found myself looking at the mountains that marked 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 to 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! I didn't dare think that Lahiri Mahasaya had made a mistake by not writing his techniques, yet I felt that this decision had brought so much suffering and endless losses of time and energies.

As for my dream of an ideal book about *Kriya*, 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 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 that the techniques described in it were for beginners only, while there were much more complicated techniques that 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. ⁹

It is a misfortune that no one had written that book! For the first time I

⁹ Such a book will be useful to review what was explained during Initiation. There is in fact a frenzy that accompanies a traditional *Kriya* initiation where all the practical instructions are transmitted hastily in one single lesson! This is what happens with mass initiations. Within a few days, almost all details are forgotten and one goes through a crisis. The teacher is no longer there and the other fellow *kriyabans* dismiss their fraternal duties by stating they are not authorized to give counsels.

dared to let my thoughts stray toward what could happen if I wrote it. The purpose of the book was to summarize the totality of my knowledge of *Kriya* welding together techniques and theories through a clean, rational vision. I would not describe the set of the modified *Kriya* techniques received by my first *Kriya* school.

I had a model in my mind: T. Bernard's *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* ¹⁰ The intention was definitely not to lay the foundations for yet another new school of *Kriya*. There would be no rhetorical claims of legitimacy and riddle-like sentences to seduce the reader and arouse curiosity in their mind! ¹¹

Such a book as I imagined would not be a threat to any honest *Kriya Acharya's* activity. Good teachers will always be needed in any field where 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 for 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 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 might not like the book, either because they are taken aback by the barrenness of descriptions of techniques deprived of frills, which doesn't match their expectations, or because they do not manage to get "good vibrations" from it.

¹⁰ 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*. Despite having been published many years ago and 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.

¹¹ Some authors give only a hint to some procedures (either part of authentic *Kriya* or often concocted through imagination) and let the reader unsatisfied, compelled to go to the author in order to receive the secret let only glimpse.

It was necessary to write in a way that readers could feel my story as their own story, therefore I tried so many times to rethink my approach. I would write for people like myself: disillusioned by organizations and traveling Gurus. They would feel an enormous relief in finding that book in an esoteric library. I was already sensing their happiness. Thanks to them, the book would continue to circulate, and who knows how many times it would echo back to the teacher who had decreed its unforgivable flaws. 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.

A strong conditioning breaks down

The experience that I had in the following months, revealed a great conditioning present in my subconscious and received by my first *Kriya* school. Violating the dogma of the secretiveness was unthinkable. Perhaps the reader cannot understand the reasons for my strong resistance: today you can find online many sources where you can read various technical *Kriya* details. At that time this did not exist and the secrecy was respected rigorously.

It was evident that the organization's justifications for the request of secrecy could not stand any rational analysis. They claimed that secrecy helps "to maintain the purity of the teachings." Since they gave some alterations in the practice of *Kriya* as originally taught by Lahiri Mahasaya, it would be better to affirm, "to maintain the purity of the modifications."

However, my heart was torn apart. How could I coarsely challenge the sacredness of the *Guru-disciple* relationship as the only way to be instructed in *Kriya*?

I tried to summon up my courage thinking that such dogma had some tracts of cruelty. I recalled what happened 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 some 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. For example, a Catholic priest sincerely desired to learn *Kriya* but could not receive it from the right channels because of an issue of conscience regarding the act of signing the application form of the lessons; he found a *kriyaban* who explained the technique to him and shared with him his lessons (an action he was strictly forbidden to do).¹²

My thoughts about secrecy arrived just to that point and there they stopped – for months. It was very difficult to put all the crucial points into a logical order. I tried to think sequentially but either mental and physical fatigue was impairing my reasoning ability or conditioning carved into my brain acted as an entity which had a life of its own. Each time I tried to organize my vision into a well-integrated and coherent whole, for one reason or another it appeared to me as a monstrosity.

I resumed the practice of the so called "Incremental Routines."¹³ I stopped particularly on those techniques that deal with to loosen the knot of the heart. Such knot is also called Vishnu Granthi. The Divinity Vishnu is the Lord of the maintenance: the knot of the heart sustains the desire to put to put our own trust in the traditions and in religious authorities, especially when their teachings and dogmas are introduced in the suggestive frame of a solemn ceremony. An incremental routine that strongly acts on the knot of the heart makes you discover your internal dignity and nobody deceives you any more. It acts as a gigantic injection of courage, it recovers you from an evil that it stops us fragile human beings when we decide to risk us in the paths of the Spirit. Your thinking process becomes compact, of a solidity that the other people's suggestions were not capable to undermine and to contaminate. It was the effect of these routines that helped me to put more clarity in my thoughts.

¹² I am not advocating breaking a vow made to an organization that is sustained by the proceeds of the sales of didactic material. To those persons who can become students, let them pay the little money required and receive their set of lessons.

¹³ Incremental routine means to utilize one Kriya technique at a time, increasing gradually the number of its repetitions up to reach a great amount of them – I will clarify this concept in Chapter 8.

One evening, after thinking it over about the Guru-disciple relationship, I remembered the episode of Swami Vivekananda's "investiture" by his *Guru* Ramakrishna. I read that one day toward the end of his life Ramakrishna entered *Samadhi* while his disciple Vivekananda was near him. Vivekananda started to feel a strong current before fainting. Having returned to consciousness, his *Guru* cried and 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.

With this image my subconscious mind revealed itself to admonish me not to surrender to the temptation of throwing away something valid and precious. The concept of *Guru*-disciple relationship was not to be challenged.

I read again 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)

Great, very great! However this did not happen in my life. My first *Kriya* 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 souls, my relationship was purely ideal. I was surrounded by persons who said they humbly followed their *Guru*, yet they had never met him physically. They imagined to have a *Guru*. To me they were as children of kindergarten that loved to ideally believe in something comforting.

They were required to swear their everlasting devotion not only to this person called *Guru*-preceptor but also to a chain of Masters, no one directly accessible to them. They receive this affirmation: "It is the *Guru*-preceptor that introduces you to God. There is no other way to achieve

salvation." Once the students are initiated into *Kriya* by the Ministers or the organization, the departed *Guru* becomes a real presence in their life. They are taught that their *Guru*-preceptor is a special aid chosen by God Himself even before they began to seek the spiritual path: he will somehow burn a part of their *Karma* and protect them evermore. This was a wonderful vision, obviously. But it was a fairly tale!

To many persons of my organization God and *Guru* are one and the same reality. A representative of my organization instructed me: "Have you not realized that *Guruji* is the Divine Mother Herself?" From the belief that *Guru* and God are one and the same reality comes the idea that the organization founded by the *Guru* be not just an institution devoted to spreading his teachings but be the sole intermediary between God and those who want to progress spiritually through *Kriya Yoga*. Since *Kriya* learned outside the organization has no value, the dogma of secrecy ensues obviously. The myth of secrecy allows the myth of the irreplaceable role of the organization to be kept alive.

My organization could, in certain situations, be similar to a church. The teaching of PY was religious par excellence. In any religion there is discretion not secretiveness. The discretion comes spontaneous to the intelligent and sensitive people. Secretiveness is irrational, unnatural, and therefore it asks for a solemn vote. The threat of possible calamities that would happen to whoever infringes the dogma of secrecy clashes with everything we read in the biographies of the saints. It fits perfectly with the magic dimension of certain esoteric confraternities – secrecy is indispensable to their existence. The oath of secrecy has nothing to do with the spiritual dimension. I might be wrong, but I feel that the unique benefit of secrecy to an individual is to feel the pleasure of possessing something exclusive.

One evening, while I was practicing *Kriya Pranayama*, with 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 while I felt a particular pressure (like a grip of beatitude) that was intensifying in the chest region. The image was strong, tremendously vivid before me. There could be nothing more beautiful; it made me mad with love. I had the impression of having cast a glance at the source from which my current trend of life originated. It was as if an internal thread tied all of my actions passed to that image receiving sense and meaning from it. That mountain was to me the symbol of the universal spiritual path. It talked to

my intuition: "A *Teacher* who gives initiation 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. 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 overcome by what surpasses your mind.

I visualized a net: each individual was a junction from which a lot of threads fanned out, like the network of our brain's neurons. When a soul toils to go beyond the common way of living, the state of their consciousness reverberates along the surrounding threads of the net. That soul will be helped by others' positive response and, of course, will be slowed down by others' indolence and apathy. In my opinion those who follow the spiritual path carry other people's evolution ahead with them. This net connecting every one of us is the *Collective Unconscious*.¹⁴

For example, Beethoven's life and works gave a direction to my quest of a meaning in life. Yes, I was alone, but not totally alone. What Beethoven did, his life, his music, influenced my existence and dragged it ahead, toward the endless one.

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 anyone, after having haunted all the possible ceremonies of Initiation given by the "legitimate" channels, and 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 model by which I would

¹⁴ 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...

be inspired. I closed my eyes to have a dispassionate, unemotional assessment of the situation.

The birth of the book

Between-times I consulted a few Forums for devotees of *Kriya Yoga*. My desire was to see if other *kriyabans* had similar problems. Many were seeking information about *Kechari Mudra* and, more in general, about unmodified *Kriya*. If I had had their email addresses, I would have immediately sent them the instructions.

I was struck by the pedantic and conceited tone of some Forum users that abused genuine and honest curiosity. With facetious tenderness betraying their low form of concern, they labeled the seekers' desire to deepen their *Kriya* practice as a "dangerous mania." They had the audacity to hush the humble student by counseling him to stay with what they had and not to seek more. They spoke in the same tone used by my old "Ministers".

Although I felt myself aeons distant from that world, objectively speaking the period of my life when I would have never addressed to any other person to ask a counsel, was not so far. Actually it was my yesterday's world. I wondered how those Forum users 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 stumbled upon an extremely unpleasant discussion, the thought of it turns my stomach. One personage claimed he had access to the original *Kriya*. He 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. I imagined that the petty idea of possessing this secret knowledge and not conveying it to others was the only thing keeping the pieces of his scattered childish mind together, avoiding him the sadness of realizing the nothingness he was. Why should the beauty of *Original Kriya* belong only to him?

At last, an event that caused an uproar in my soul happened. I came to know that there was the possibility of inviting a new *Kriya* teacher to Europe. Since he was well qualified in his role, I was on the verge of cooperating in this project and bearing part of its cost. A dear friend went to India to meet him for a private interview. After about one month he returned home and called me. Some hours later, we were sitting in my room. He had had a private interview with him and had good news. 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 this friend asked me to practice *Kriya Pranayama* in front of him, and then 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.¹⁵ He clarified that in relation to our group, he had indeed asked for his teacher's permission to correct eventual mistakes in our practice but 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 details 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 part was to see a friend with whom I had shared everything along my spiritual path, accompanying me in my ventures with all my previous teachers and suffering the same woes, satisfied only with having noticed my 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 left, leaving the friend alone.

Some days later, contacted by the teacher's secretary, I was further disgusted by how she handled the financial side of the tour. I declined the offer. Actually I was not in the mood to undertake the 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 of me the customary oath of secrecy. Once returned to 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 have to live without this information.

If the events would take place in this way, each year an innumerable series of charter flights would transport all those interested in *Kriya* – no matter if

¹⁵ Considering the episode later, I realized what this incorrect detail was: I had not made an 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.

old or ill – to a remote Indian village, like a pilgrimage to Lourdes or Fatima! The farce was not even worthy of being considered. Here I sensed the grip of desperation.

In the following days I cleaned up 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 to 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 the essential core of *Kriya Yoga* from the huge piles of notes collected during seminars with different teachers. There was the feeling of working on a difficult puzzle, without a preview of what was to be obtained in the end.

In the first part of the book I summarized the story of my spiritual search while I devoted the second part to share what I knew about the theory and practice of Kriya Yoga. The last part is devoted to consider how a kriyaban should coordinate and harness their efforts in withstanding the corrosion of time. We know that many kriyabans fail in keeping their enthusiasm alive standing the test of time. My answer deals with the *Devotional Prayer* – or *Japa*.

The time employed in this activity 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 strange: that night I could not sleep – I was intimately satisfied. 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, revive!
Cease from trembling!
Prepare yourself to live!