

YOGA is an extremely complex spiritual tradition, having a history older than five thousand years. It possesses a very rich and extensive literature. YOGA is what we traditionally call "the knowledge of liberation". We all seek, consciously or not, to rise above the limited notion of what we are. More exactly, we seek to rise above what we usually think we are. Generally, we identify ourselves with our body, our mind, with our possessions or relationships, bringing all this together in what we normally call "my life". These mental habits do not contain anything but shadows of the truth inside ourselves, and they bury us more deeply in ignorance.

YOGA offers a path for deep introspection with the goal as Truth. We all desire to know ourselves, at least to some extent, but is this not an illusion? If we knew at least 50% of ourselves, do you think we would suffer due to work and family problems? On the contrary, we would find out that we are immortal; we are superconscious and omnipotent beings; and we would find the source of eternal happiness.

Genuine YOGA implies confrontation with the fascinating mysteries regarding the nature of our microcosmic self. It deals with the eternal questions: Why was I born? Where do I come from? What do I live for? What is going to happen to me after I die? Who am I actually? YOGA confers inner freedom and the understanding of the fact that everything is possible, though not all is allowed. Being liable to some unchangeable laws, as human beings we all feel limited and impotent when faced with the difficulties of life. YOGA induces the power and energy to handle these challenges in life. Moreover, YOGA enables us to overcome the human condition and to reveal our divine nature, the Divine Self within (JIVATMAN).

YOGA is a science of immortality. It contains the methods for becoming fully aware of the mysterious aspects of being human. It allows for the employment of all the hidden potentialities within ourselves, for elimination of limitations due to ego, for deepening of self-knowledge; and reaching immortality.

YOGA aims to gain direct, immediate knowledge of ultimate truth regarding man, existence, and the Universe.

YOGA leads to bliss (SAMADHI). Although this word exists and is common in every language, the word "samadhi" denotes a state accessible to only a small number of people. Experiencing this bliss means to be in full resonance with the beneficial energies of the Universe. By reaching the state of samadhi or full bliss, the yogi gets confirmation of "completion". This is where the ineffable fusion occurs between man's ultimate essence and the Supreme Macrocosmic Universal essence, God.

Usually known in the west in various popular "keep fit" varieties, yoga is in fact a rigorous spiritual discipline, a genuine science of the human being, a

complete system controlling all aspects of life. Beyond the obvious benefits like eliminating stress, healing various illnesses, improving memory and concentration, balancing our emotions, yoga is also about searching answers to existential questions which have been in peoples mind since time began: "For what reason was I born ?" "What is my life for?" "What will happen after death?", "Who am I ?". The original purpose of YOGA is therefore to teach us how to ask correctly and meaningfully the above mentioned questions and how to discover the ultimate truth about the human being, life and universe.

The oldest systematic description of the YOGA system is to be found in the YOGA-SUTRA of Patanjali (2nd century b.c.). It is a very brief guide which was used together with secret teachings. This is the reason why for the one who never practiced yoga it is still a text shrouded in mystery. However YOGA-SUTRA is still the most precise and scientific text ever written on YOGA. It describes the eight stages in YOGA:

**YAMA and NIYAMA**- inner and outer attitudes, whose aim is to harmonize our interactions with the outer world and with ourselves

**ASANA** - motionless physical postures for balancing the body's subtle energies

**PRANAYAMA** - the accumulation of cosmic energy (PRANA) through rhythmic breathing.

**PRATYAHARA** - the withdrawal of the senses' energy from their objects, with the purpose of focusing it towards our inner universe.

**DHARANA** - focusing the mind upon an unique object.

**DHYANA** - the unidirectional and continuous flow of mental processes around an object.

**SAMADHI** - telepathic identification of the object of meditation with the practitioner's being. SAMADHI is the highest state of expanded consciousness and a complete participation of the human being to the Cosmic Life. SAMADHI is the ultimate goal in YOGA, leading eventually to the state of spiritual enlightenment and total wisdom.

**MUKTI** or ultimate spiritual freedom, does not mean deliverance from the manifested world, but a close and permanent identity with the Supreme Consciousness, which is the true nature of one's own self. Ultimate freedom is therefore possible only by realizing one's own identity with the Universe.

**This ultimate spiritual state is NOT to be attained after death or in another dimension of Reality, but HERE and NOW - "Only liberation in this life (JIVANMUKTI) is authentic liberation" SPANDA PRADIPIKA.**