

Kriya Yoga: synthesis of a personal experience

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CHAPTER I SELF-TEACHER

My spiritual search began when, spellbound in an inexplicable way when seeing people sitting in the "lotus position", I bought an introductory book to classical *Yoga*. The ability to do something significant without moving from my place and without the risks and dangers of sports, attracted me like the most perfect art, with no intrinsic limits.

A great expectation toward «certain oriental practices» rose when a schoolmate told me he possessed a detailed text about breathing exercises - *Pranayama* - adding: «these exercises can change a person inside... ». What did he mean? He could not be merely hinting to the attainment of particular conditions of relaxation and concentration; he definitely did not refer to sticking to some philosophy but to something more involving. Intuition suggested to me the attractive possibility of waking up some latent faculties.

My friend would not make up his mind about lending me the book and after some days I was no longer thinking about it. Then, a simple text diverted my sight, *Yoga in 20 lessons*, which I bought at a news-stand in a rail station.

In a corner of our school's gymnasium, during the lessons of Physical Education, after the preliminary group warm-up exercises, my teacher gave me permission to separate from my schoolmates - who were amusing themselves with some team games - and try to master some *Yoga* positions (*Asana*). [My teacher was amazed to observe how I succeeded in moving the abdominal muscles through the *Nauli* technique.]

Objectively speaking, it was no mediocre text; together with each position there was the explanation of the name that designated it, a brief note on the best mental attitude for the practice and several considerations on how each exercise stimulates particular physiological functions (important endocrine glands etc). It was clear to me that these positions were not to be seen as a simple "stretching work-out"; they were means to provide global stimulus to all the physical organs, in order to increase their vitality. The comfort perceived at the end of a session spoke in favor of the real utility of this practice.

MENTAL VOID EXERCISE

A whole chapter was devoted to the "Corpse Position" - *Savasana* - the last to be practiced.

Concerning the instructions, I think the author put in something that he had learned in other contexts.

The teaching, structured with great care, actually constituted an exercise of deep concentration. He also explained, definitely exaggerating, that in a twenty-minute interval it would provide the «mental rest of three hours of sleep».

The text did not lose its focus [as did the majority of books on similar topics that I had read, drawing complicated discourses on different forms of energy within the body - *Prana*] but, through a typically western style, it simply introduced an interesting possibility, that of «stopping all mental functions maintaining a full awareness, without falling into a state of sleepiness».

In other words, it provided the chance to put to rest the faculties of thought, in order to «recharge the whole psychophysical system with fresh energy».

I will briefly describe the exercise since it was essential to me for many reasons; thanks to it, which, then, became a daily habit, I could understand once and for all the fundamental difference between "mind" and "awareness", still crucial for my understanding of *Kriya Yoga*.

It recommended to lie down in the supine position keeping the arms extended alongside the body; the eyes are covered with a bandage to keep the light out. After having stayed still for two or three minutes, the exercise begins with the mental statement: «I am relaxed, I am calm, I am not thinking of anything»; after this, to enter what the author called «mental void» it is necessary to carry out the following unique action: that of giving the thoughts a visual form pushing them away one by one, as if «an internal hand moved them gently from the mental-screen center toward its outskirts». All the thoughts, without exceptions, must be moved aside, even the thought itself of being practicing a technique.

To correctly perform this delicate process it is first essential "to see" each thought, even if its characteristics are abstract. At least in what was my way of doing the job, one should never refuse, do away with or censor the

thoughts; what's important is to set the mental activity to a pause. Then, visualizing them as objects, shift them aside putting them in stand-by; in this way, the developing of an ulterior chain of thoughts is prevented.

After a few minutes, the following situation occurs; while a part of the being gathers in the area between the eyebrows - called *Kutastha* in *Yoga* - and enjoys a pleasant feeling of rest, another part is there, unnoticed, hiding in the outskirts of the former one. Here, a minimal mental activity, like the creation of indefinite images (all of them extremely "mild"), rises. A few minutes later, the awareness is all gathered in the eyebrows region, as if inside a "little, peaceful pond", and it remains there some more minutes. Despite the absence of thoughts, the awareness is always awake and it rejoices at an inimitable feeling of rest.

This state lasts no more than 10 or 15 minutes. The exercise is never carried on for more than 25-30 minutes altogether, from the beginning to the end. The technique inevitably ends in a "curious" way; the state of deep calm is interrupted by the feeling that the exercise has not been done yet, to which the body reacts with a wince whereas the heart beats faster. Then, the awareness that the exercise has been perfectly carried off appears.

NECESSITY OF A BROADER DISCIPLINE

As a student, I used such a practice to rest in the afternoon, between a study session and the following one; I started to love it.

What I had been experiencing during it did not leave me cold; it was interesting to observe how the mental process could be momentarily arrested and how its apparent consistence could fade away while the pure awareness, independent from the contents, would arise. The Cartesian «I think, therefore I am» gradually became «Thinking restlessly caused the risk for me of living without even realizing that I existed; instead of that, this consciousness rose as soon as I learned to think in a calm and orderly way».

Crucial was the moment when I experienced how to extend this technique's essential dynamics to practical life, applying the same discipline to the thoughts during the idle moments. The purpose was not actually to rest but to merge myself into that particular state above the mind, which was revealing itself as my truest essence.

While proceeding with it, I realized the negative effect that an undisciplined mind is able to exert upon the experiences of life. In my observations I was not conditioned by the belonging to such or such philosophical system.

I tried to comprehend the causes of so many human failures, particularly of those that did not seem inevitable at all.

The most important realization was that the mind, almost always hyperactive and chaotic, used up every source of vitality weaving a net of useless thoughts, a suffocating coat around the awareness and around life itself. Such a danger made it difficult to get an authentic and healthy relationship with all the beautiful experiences in life, along with those that can create an inner growth.

I was determined to create a mental discipline to put this situation to an end and to renew the internal strength, leaving behind the wrong habit of thinking disorderly. I wanted to avoid getting lost among different emotive forces, which alternately showed up in the awareness like different personalities.

Extending that exercise to life and practicing it during my time off, or even while I was studying, a peculiar and challenging mood was produced.

My state of mind would frequently produce an almost unbearable anxiety, even anguish at times. My life itself appeared to be emerging like an island from an ocean of sorrow.

This rather simple action of ceasing temporarily every thought was conceived as an act of total renouncement; the usual way of living was turned down, as if entering a sort of "internal death", a devastating "void".

Now I understand that all I had to do was to remain calm, cross this layer of negative emotion and go ahead; instead, I was deliberately cultivating small and useless, newer thoughts to flee from that sorrowful abyss that I indistinctly perceived underneath my psyche. The instinct was to keep feeding myself with countless, evanescent and small emotions; I hung onto them as if they were the only warmth able to spark my existence with meaning and to really protect it from any unpleasant revelation.

It was clear that the continuous nurturing of thoughts and consequent emotions was eating away at the possibility of experiencing authentic feelings. I could not carry on estranging me from myself because - now I am fully aware of it - I would not have succeeded in stabilizing any wholesome reality; on the contrary, I would have just caused the total

exhaustion of my energies and, eventually, I would have been completely trapped in a real pathological emptiness, something that I wanted to keep away from.

In this difficult moment, something came to my aid, infusing me with courage and determination not to give up; it was something that I found in my own culture, something that was not oriental but typically western.

The concepts of Reincarnation, *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Maya* and the like, never helped me in the great turning points of my life. It was not actually possible to solve any deep problem by sticking *ipso facto* to the oriental ways of thinking, simply grasped by reading some related books.

In that part of my life, Mahler's Symphony No.2 "*Resurrection*" almost instinctively attracted me. In the quietude of my room I would listen to it and try to penetrate its meaning by reading everything that I could find about it.

A continuous listening to this symphony, over and over, made it sound in my memory all day long while I was studying or doing other things. It would grow, it would amplify during the moments of quietude, expanding some elated states of my mind to turn them into a bliss that, despite the dismay of reason, gave me a temporary solace.

The words «Sterben werd ich, um zu leben!» - I will die so that I can live! - written by Mahler himself and sung by a choir in the last symphonic movement, were a clear echo to my project; that music and those words became a thread around which my thought crystallized, while the charm of the whole work sharply restored a vision of childish beauty. Mahler caressed with his sensitivity - to my perception without definitely believing in it - a "religious" solution.

In the final words «Was du geschlagen, zu Gott wird es dich tragen!» - what you have earned yourself, will lead you to God! - it seemed to me that he had meant: «a final immersion in the Light will be your final prize for the battle you incessantly kept on fighting».

While dealing with the unreasonable darkness that seemed to lie at the foundation of my existence, the inability of accepting the relief of religion led me to repeating inside « I will die so that I can live! ».

I was determined to refuse the "comfort" of thoughts, the "dim lights" of a mind flickering in the night of insecurity; I wanted to bring to an end everything that was not true, I wanted to cross with wide-open eyes a vast land of woe and meet the unmistakable truth, no matter what it was.

Obscurely, I realized that I also had to die to myself and that this was the greatest and noblest thing that I could do; I had to die to any attachment to mental life, of which I felt the potential danger and which proved to be a real poison to some people.

In that period as well, I lived in something sentimentally difficult. Problems never come alone: mental and affective lives are interdependent. What remained unsolved - toward which my emotionalism pushed me to make only destructive steps - was offered to a kind of internal altar: my usual daily rite - as necessary as the air - of listening to classical music.

I loved Beethoven also; studies on his life, in particular, were nourishment for my soul.

The tragedy of being deaf hit him at his creative peak. He reacted in a most honourable manner, deciding to carry on his artistic path in spite of his condition. The awful impact of his stout decision can be found in the *Heiligstadt Testament*.

He molded an incomparable music from the depths of his self, for his brothers and for the whole humanity.

My religion was the sublime speaking to me through his music.

It represented a calm climbing over the limits of real life and it appeased my longing.

Never would I think that *Yoga* could also drive me to such an ideal dimension: its discipline seemed fit just to cross the wall of thoughts, which were sucking up my vital energy.

It was also not difficult to guess that - by the time an aesthetical stimulus came - *Yoga* could grant me a lasting base of clarity, thus helping me maintain its beautiful atmosphere during the night fed by the darkish sap of my fears.

According to my sensitivity, a very good mental strength could be achieved by extending my discipline to the whole system of *Hatha Yoga*.

This idea filled my grey mood with a faint hope.

For some weeks, more than half an hour a day flew by through a pleasant training.

A book drew my attention upon the bright power of *Pranayama*; my physical exercises were the best preparation for it!

A sudden blaze put silence and stillness into my being; the first hints about *Pranayama* I had been given by that friend of mine stirred the shining intuition that through this discipline I could learn the secret of «dying to myself».

Some prudential remarks in the book - instead of smothering my enthusiasm and guide me to an extreme carefulness - turned on an enormous will to practice it intensively.

I read that «if this *Pranayama* is practiced in an exaggerated way, it will quake the bases of a normal way of living». This warning, brought my interest to exasperation, since all I was trying to achieve was that the things within me set in to change. I needed some "explosive mixture" to win the internal resistances; an authentic inner earthquake was to be preferred to the current stagnation.

The decision to begin the practice of *Pranayama* changed the course of my life. I planted its practice like a seed in the desolation of my soul and it grew into a limitless joy and an internal freedom.

A quotation from the *Bhagavad Gita* says: «*Yoga* is liberation from the contact with pain and misfortune. [He that practices] knows the eternal joy, that which is beyond the edge of our senses and cannot be held by the reason.»

Recalling my friend's words, which once had stirred my interest in *Pranayama*, I can say that this discipline implied much more than a vague internal change; it grasped my hope and brought it forward.

CHAPTER II PRANAYAMA

Now, I will carefully delineate how I practiced *Pranayama*, introducing the topic with some theoretic explanations. May the reader forgive me if this implies a change in the nature of my narration.

THEORY OF CLASSIC PRANAYAMA

It is not difficult a task to understand that the breathing exercises are not aimed to train the chest muscles, to strengthen the diaphragm or to create some peculiar conditions of blood oxygenation; they are to act on the energy - *Prana* - present in our psychophysical system.

During such practice, one should try to perceive the flows of energy through some subtle channels called *Nadi*. The principal *Nadis* are *Ida*, which flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column and is said to be of female nature, and *Pingala* - of masculine nature - which flows parallel to the former one.

Sushumna flows in the middle, beyond the duality inherent to the two preceding *Nadis*.

It is not difficult to imagine that the *Nadis*, just like the water-conducting pipes in the houses, might be "rusty", "dirty", "obstructed", and that this fact is linked with the decrease of vitality in our body. The amount of "dirtiness" in the *Nadis* can be related to disharmony and conflicts inside of our disposition; thus, cleaning these channels through *Pranayama* techniques brings on a transformation in our personality.

There are moments of the day in which we feel more exteriorised, others in which we are more interiorised; in a healthy person this alternation is characterized by a balance between a life of positive relationships and a serene contact with his own depths. Unfortunately, a lot of people lack such a harmony. The too introvert person starts to actually lose contact with the external reality, to the point that this will exert, as a reaction, an excessive influence that will inevitably destroy his internal peace; the too

extrovert person will soon provoke the coming up of all those symptoms commonly regarded as the beginning of a neurotic state.

Through the practice of *Pranayama*, specifically the alternate-nostrils variety, these two opposite tendencies are, at least temporarily, balanced.

As a result, a practitioner develops a greater emotional awareness, a more precise evaluating criteria and a wider range of abilities to elaborate information, i.e. greater operative intelligence. A more calibrated, intense, precise and clearer logical process will rise from a more efficient synergy between thoughts and emotions. In this way, intuition can flow freely in order to face the moments of life for which important decisions are expected to be made.

Of course, common sense suggests that *Pranayama* is not a trick to solve automatically people's psychological and existential problems. When the practice is set in, all the possible inner strength must be employed to achieve a better way of "living". Therefore, all the necessary measures should be considered, in order to challenge the internal barriers; only in this way will *Pranayama* support a stable inner renovation.

When the first good effects begin to be felt, the *yogi* is encouraged to keep on practicing and goes deeper and deeper into it, looking for "something more." This "something" is the *Sushumna* current, which begins to flow, creating an experience of joy, happiness, and elation. Here, the "mystic" venture begins; the practitioner might have no idea of what this experience means, and yet it would happen to him.

Of course, nothing that I mentioned is scientifically verifiable; as far as I am concerned, I decided to verify all these hypotheses. Through a serious practice, I wanted to see by myself if *Pranayama* was really endowed with such a strong potentiality.

I began to practice the following routine in an "absolute" way, with a steadfast concentration, nearly as if it had been my only reason of life. I remember with nostalgia this intensity, especially when, for some reasons, I lack the initial spontaneity.

BASIC ROUTINE

a...*Nadi Sodhana*

It is important to clean his nostrils before beginning the exercise, so that the breath can flow smoothly. This can be commonly done using water or inhaling eucalyptus essence and blowing the nose.

In some cases, there are complaints that one of the nostrils is permanently obstructed; that is a problem of medical solution. If the obstruction is caused by a severe cold, no *Pranayama* exercise should be practiced.

To begin this exercise, the mouth must be closed; the right nostril must be kept closed by the right thumb and air is slowly, uniformly and deeply inhaled through the left nostril. The inhalation lasts from six to ten seconds. It is important not to overdo it to the point of uneasiness.

After having inhaled through the left nostril, a *yogi* closes the left nostril with the right little finger and the ring finger; then he exhales through the right nostril with the same slow, uniform and deep rhythm.

At this point, the nostrils exchange their role; keeping the left nostril closed, air is slowly, uniformly and deeply inhaled through the right nostril. Then, closing the right nostril with the thumb the exhalation is made through the left nostril, once again slowly, uniformly and deeply.

This corresponds to a cycle: in the beginning, six cycles can be made; later, twelve of them.

A *yogi* can use a mental count to make sure the time is the same for both the inhalation and the exhalation. A short pause, amounting to a mental count of three, is possible after each inhalation. The nostrils can be closed with the fingers in different ways; the choice depends on the practitioner only.

[Note: a tradition suggests that the exhalation should last twice the time necessary for the inhalation and the pause after the inhalation should be four times as long. I have never applied such advice, finding it unnatural.]

b...Ujjayi

The technique consists in deeply breathing in and out through both the nostrils, producing a sound in the throat. During the exhalation the noise is not as loud as during the inhalation. After a few days' practice, the respiratory action is lengthened without effort. This exercise is normally practiced twelve times.

[A mental count makes sure that the inhalation and the exhalation have the same duration. It does good to focus not only on the process itself, but on the comfort and the induced calmness as well; in this way, our concentration becomes deeper.]

c...Bandha

The neck and the throat are slightly contracted, while the chin tilts down toward the breast (*Jalandhara Bandha*). The abdominal muscles are slightly contracted to intensify the perception of energy inside the spinal column (*Uddiyana Bandha*). The perineal muscles - between the anus and the genital organs - are contracted in an attempt to lift the abdominal muscles in vertical way, while pressing back the inferior part of the abdomen (*Mula Bandha*).

The three *Bandhas* are applied simultaneously and held out for about four seconds to produce a vibration of the body; this is repeated 3 times.

In time, a sensation of energetic current sliding up along the spinal column - an almost ecstatic internal shiver - will be perceived.

[These "contractions" bring the energy into the spinal column; in *Kriya Yoga* they are to be found in *Maha Mudra*].

d...Final state

With a deep relaxation attitude, the attention is intensely focused on the *Kutastha* - the point between the eyebrows - for at least five minutes.

I practiced this routine in the morning and in the evening with an empty stomach. It was usually preceded by some stretching exercises; also by some simple *Asana* when I had more time. I practiced the *Pranayama* session from the half-lotus position, sitting on the edge of a pillow and keeping my back straight.

Sometimes, in the first sunny days after the winter, when the skies were crystalline and as blue as they had never been, I sat in the open air.

I would contemplate what was around; if in a bushy and ivy-covered ditch the sun shed its light upon some flowers, which a month before were blooming during the cold winter days and in that moment they were still lingering on, regardless of the mildest days, that spell-binding glory would inspire me.

In that beautiful countryside, I concentrated on applying the instructions correctly; later on, the beauty of the alternate feelings of coolness and warmth, produced by the air on the hand I used to open and close the nostrils, captured me; then the pressure, the smooth flowing of the breath... Becoming aware of each peculiarity of the exercise helped me maintain a vigil attention without getting stressed out. In this way the practice turned out to be very pleasant.

KRIYA PRANAYAMA FROM BOOKS

It was during those months that, after having bought the works of *Ramakrishna* and *Vivekananda* and a beautiful book with comments to *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* – the ancient work, fundamental to understand the foundations of *Yoga*, especially *Pranayama* – I finally decided to buy the autobiography of an Indian saint, a book I had already seen some years before without buying it.

I was fond only of practical manuals but then I thought I might find out useful information, such as the addresses of some good schools of *Yoga*. The author whom I will indicate by P.Y. [see the note at the end of the chapter] was an expert of that kind of *Pranayama*, which was first taught by Lahiri Mahasaya and called *Kriya Yoga*.

He wrote that this technique could be mastered by gradually practicing four stages of it: this sparked my curiosity; I loved *Pranayama*, and just the idea of improving it sounded amazingly wondrous.

If the techniques I had already practiced gave me such incomparable results, it was obvious that that four-stage system would make them greater and greater; Lahiri Mahasaya was described as the incarnation of *Yoga*: this led me to think that there must have been something unique in his "way"!

On one side, I went on reading all the books I could find written by this Master [a few of them were in Italian, some in English]; on the other side I began to explore as much literature as I could find about *Yoga*.

Reading P.Y., I was amazed by a personality with unequalled will and an unexpected practical spirit. Studying his writings would not excite me when he spoke on a purely devotional tone, but it did whenever he assumed a more technical tone, making it possible for me to get at some aspects of the subtle art of *Kriya* - I considered it an art in continuous refinement, instead of a religious engagement.

I was impressed by the strength with which the author highlighted the evolutionary value of *Pranayama*, not just including a man's spiritual side but his physical and mental sides too.

He explained that if we compare the human spinal column to a ferromagnetic substance constituted, as taught by Physics, of elementary magnets that turn toward the same direction when they are overlapped by a magnetic field, then, the action of *Pranayama* is akin to this process of magnetization. It was implicit, during this practice, to concentrate on the inner energy and make it rotate, somehow, around the *Chakras*.

By uniformly redirecting all the "subtle" parts of our spinal cord's physical and astral essence, *Pranayama* would burn the so-called "bad seeds" of *Karma*.

[It is good to remember that the concepts of Reincarnation and *Karma* are the bases of the Indian thought and of Lahiri Mahasaya himself; that is why it is worth speaking freely of it, even if *Kriya* is a practice that can be experimented without necessarily having to accept any creeds. It is important to underline this last fact whenever we stick to the common belief that a person inherits a baggage of latent tendencies from his previous lives and that, sooner or later, these tendencies are to come out in actual life. According to this belief, *Pranayama* burns out the effects of the "bad seeds" just before they become 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 the actual life they get back to it exactly where, in a remote past, they quit it.]

Now, my compelling problem was whether I had to leave or not for India and look for a Teacher who would give me all the clarifications about *Kriya*. At that time, planning to get through very soon with my university studies, I excluded a journey in the near future.

I rather chose to remain here and try to improve my *Pranayama*, using all the books I could find about *Yoga*, no matter what language they would be written in.

The question was, how could I transform my practice so that it could have the power to move and rotate the inner energy around the *Chakras*?

If this had to be - as stated by P.Y. - a universal process, there was no doubt that I would find traces of it through other sources and perhaps I would be able to discern the whole system of *Kriya* in its subtle four phases.

There was something locked in a corner of my memory which became alive again. When I was a child, I used to read everything I came on to, especially books censored by the Church or considered strongly unsuited for my age anyway; I was proud to practice a total freedom of choice and I was not open to any advice. I wasted a lot of time on poor readings. In that great heap of books it was impossible to distinguish in advance between the valuable ones and the many other ones which, through tantalizing titles, contained but tall stories, impossible chimeras aimed at stunning people. In the end I felt I had travelled through an indistinct chaos. I had the bitter feeling that the most precious secrets were still hidden in some other esoteric books, which I was not lucky enough to find.

Now, I vaguely remembered seeing some drawings, somewhere, sketching out the profile of a person and the different circuits of energetic movement through his body. The idea came to seek the needed information in the esoteric books rather than in the classic books on *Yoga*.

I started going to a resale of used books; it was very well furnished, probably because it had once been the Theosophical Society's reference bookstore. I turned down the texts dealing only with philosophical topics, while, in ecstasy and not concerned by the time, I kept on skimming through the books which clearly illustrated practical exercises.

Before purchasing a book I made sure it hinted at the possibility of driving the energy along certain internal channels, of creating a distinct action on the *Kundalini* energy and of arousing it.

Since my first visit, I had been very lucky; while reading the index of a text in three volumes, introducing the esoteric thought of a famous

Brotherhood, I was attracted by the title *Breathing exercise for the awakening of Kundalini*.

Of the more than one thousand pages, only two or three of them were worth reading. They contained a variation of *Nadi Sodhana*; this was, according to the authors, the secret to wake the mysterious energy!

I'll try to reconstruct the technique by sheer memory, being no longer practicing it. During the inhalation through the left nostril, an energetic current is imagined coming in through the nose and down to the base of the spinal column. The sacred syllable *Om* is to be pronounced three times, thereby visualizing and striking the *Muladhar Chakra*.

Then, exhaling, a current starting from the *Muladhar* and going up into the body, and particularly into the spine, is to be felt.

Some notes warned not to exaggerate with the exercise, because of the risk of a premature *Kundalini's* awakening. This was to be avoided by all means.

Definitely, this was not P.Y.'s *Kriya* because, according to several clues, *Kriya* was not to be done through the alternate-nostril breathing.

So, I went on haunting the bookstore; the owner was very nice with me and I felt almost obliged, also considering the cheap price and the perfect conditions of those second-hand books, to buy at least a book per each visit. But sometimes I got very disappointed; a lot of space was usually reserved to theories alien from concrete life, which tried to describe what cannot be seen and what cannot be experienced, the astral worlds, the subtle coverings of energy wrapping our body, whereas precise practical instructions were put in an appendix.

Among these theories, some had hypnotic names but they were only visualization exercises; through them, practitioners hoped to materialize their desires and projects.

One day, after a tiresome selection, I went to the storekeeper holding a book in my hand; he must have realized that I was not convinced about buying it; so, while deciding the price, he remembered something that might interest me.

He led me to the rear, inviting me to rummage in a messy heap of notes within a carton box. Among a consistent quantity of miscellaneous material (complete series of the theosophical magazine issues, scattered notes from an old course of hypnosis, etc.) I came on a booklet, written in German by a certain K. Spiesberger, which illustrated some *Mantras* and

some esoteric techniques. In the beginning I ran onto the *Kundalini-breathing*.

I did not have much familiarity with the German language, but I immediately realized the extraordinary importance of that technique; I would undoubtedly decipher all of it at home, with the help of a good dictionary.

[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 interest is 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*!

The description of the *Kundalini Breathing* still amazes me; the author, in fact, was not as close to Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* as to the version that P.Y. brought west. During a deep inhalation, the air was to be imagined flowing up the spinal column, abandoning its habitual course; the visualization of this as an empty tube was therefore prescribed and, inhaling, the air was to be imagined streaming along it from its base all the way up to the area between the eyebrows; then, exhaling, the air had to go down back to the base, along the same route.]

In another book, in English, there was an exhaustive description of the *Magic breath* - more or less the same exercise.

[In it, the difference was in feeling the energy "around" the backbone, not inside of it, following an elliptic path. Through the inhalation, the energy had to go up behind the spinal column, to the center of the head; exhaling, it had to go down along the front part of the body, just as in the "Microcosmic Orbit" technique which is described in the Internal Alchemy texts - the mystic tradition of ancient China.]

I forgot about the other material. The smirk of satisfaction I wore before the storekeeper, as if I had found a treasure of unfathomable value, definitely caused an increase of 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.

Something that I had read, on the value of the *Magic breath*, filled me with much higher enthusiasm; that was one of the most hidden secrets in the

esoteric schools of all times. If practiced constantly, accompanied by the strength of visualization, it would produce a sort of internal substance allowing for the spiritual eye's vision.

Studying closely these two techniques at home, I convinced myself that the *Magic breath* technique must have surely been Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*, while the *Kundalini Breathing* was a variation of it. I just practiced it for some months.

I was in seventh heaven, because the practice began to give me some extremely beautiful moments; I felt as if my perception of things had changed. Looking around, at the leaves and at some flowers, I tried to enjoy the warmth of the most intense colours, as if they had reflected my inner radiance.

The practice of *Yoga* was gradually coming into my life as an integration. More and more often I had the chance to notice a change in my mind's global functioning – memory, concentration, etc. I could especially see this during my exams. A few minutes before an examination, a little bit of *Pranayama* would endow me with a sudden calm and self-possession, no matter what the questions and the examiner's attitude were.

I would not feel nervous at all. 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.

With this experience, a new era began. In the meantime, spring returned and, with it, the habit to practise, especially towards sunset, in the open country.

At the end of the practice, moving my sight around, a landscape might appear among the leaves: a group of distant houses surrounding a bell-tower. I would close my eyes and rely on an inner radiance. I was merged in ecstasy!

Through that "light" I could easily cross the wall of my psychological life.

I recall how, during one quiet afternoon amid some trees, just before sunset, the words of a book, a philosophical comment to some *Upanishads*, came up my mind and I started to repeat them: «Thou are that».

I do not know if my intuition grasped the incommensurable implication of that statement, but yes... I was that light filtering through the leaves, which were of an unbelievably delicate green because spring had spread them all out.

Back home, I did not even try to put down the numerous "moments of grace" I experienced on paper - I would not have been able to do it. My only wish was to go further and further into this new inner experience.

EXPERIENCE IN THE SPINE

One night, something new and radically different from what I had experienced before came about.

This is a kind of "intimate" event. Nonetheless, to share the experience of *Kriya* through a book, I need to talk accurately about things that cannot be considered a vague spiritual phenomenon but a well-defined outcome, reached through the practice of *Pranayama*.

There is no doubt to me that the routine, in the way it was conceived - with a deep *Ujjayi*, an intense practice of the *Bandhas* and an almost ardent concentration on the *Kutastha* - produced it.

Many readers will recognize their own experience in the following description.

One night, absorbed by the reading, I had a shiver similar to an electric current that spread itself in my whole body. The experience was not particularly special, however a thought flashed upon my mind announcing the coming of a deeper experience.

Minutes passed by, but I was not able to go on with the reading; I perceived that my restlessness turned into anxiety, and then it became fear, an intense fear of something unknown to me, threatening my existence.

I definitely never experienced such a terror.

Normally, in moments of danger, I would remain paralysed, unable to think. But now the anxiety was of a different quality; it was a scare of something alien to the common experience, something absolutely unpredictable.

While my mind could not help envisioning the worst hypotheses about what was going to happen, I felt the urgency to do something, even though I did not know what. I set myself in the position of meditation and waited.

I was sure I was close to madness – or to death. A part of me, maybe the totality of that entity I call "myself", seemed at the point of melting away; the worst thoughts hung over me without a clear reason.

In those days I had finished Gopi Krishna's *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks).

Here the author described the splendid awakening experience he had had following an intense practice of concentration on the seventh *Chakra*, whereas – because his body was probably unprepared – he later met serious physical and, as a reflex, psychic problems as well.

According to his description, inside of his body, energy was put in constant motion from the base of the backbone toward the brain. So strong was that energy to force him in bed and to prevent the accomplishment of the normal bodily functions. He literally felt as if he was burned by an inner fire, which he could not put out.

Weeks later, he intuitively discovered the way to check out the phenomenon, which became a stout experience of internal realization.

As far as I am concerned, I was afraid to have come to the threshold of the same experience but since I did not live in India I was scared the people surrounding me might not understand; the experience would have been terrible! Nobody could make sure that, as it happened to Gopi Krishna, my experience would be channelled toward a positive upshot.

During those moments, the spiritual world appeared to me as a sorrowful and horrible nightmare, able to annihilate and destroy him that had imprudently approached it. Ordinary life, on the contrary, seemed to me the dearest, healthier reality. I was afraid I might not be able to get back to that condition anymore. I was absolutely convinced that a mental illness was tearing to pieces my inner being and the reason was that I had opened a door looking out on the infinity, being this far more immense than I had ever foreseen.

I decided to take a break and to put off the fatal moment as long as possible. I was not in the mood to remain in the meditation position. I felt I had to set myself up and get out of the room into the open air. It was night and there was nobody to share a word with!

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*, feeling guilty and ashamed for hurting through harsh words a friend who had been involved in a part of my search.

He, like so many others, gave up his practice and only bothered about working and enjoying life. Equipped with a juvenile boldness, I had addressed to him some words not affectionate at all, which then started to thunder inside of my head; I felt sorry I had thrown unjustified cruelty at him without really knowing what was in his mind and soul.

At that time, I would have done anything to tell him how sorry I was, because I felt I had brutally violated his right to live the way it was best to him; he simply wanted to pursue mental health rather than become unstable or insane through those practices.

Because of my great passion for classical music, I thought that listening to it might yield a positive effect, maybe a protection from anguish, maybe a help to get back. Why not try, then?

It has been Beethoven's music - his *Concert for Violin and Orchestra* - that calmed me and, after half an hour, eased my sleep.

The following morning I woke up with the same fear in my mind. Nevertheless, I had a whole day before me and the sunlight was shining through the window. I would amuse myself hanging out with other people. I went out and met some friends. I did not let out the things I was experiencing; I spent the afternoon cracking all sort of jokes and behaving like the people I had always considered lazy and dull; I was trying to hide my anguish away.

The first day went by - my mind was very worn out; after two days, nevertheless, the fear diminished and I finally felt safe.

Something had changed anyway, and I actually did not succeed in thinking about the spiritual path.

I went around that idea! The exercises of *Yoga* caused me to feel both sick and scared. The notion itself of "Divine" gave me a feeling of horror!

A week later, I began, calmly and detachedly, to ponder on the meaning of what had happened; I understood the nature of my reaction to that episode.

I had cowardly ignored the experience I had pursued for so long a time!

The dignity in the depth of my soul was leading me to continue my search, exactly from the point where I had quitted. I was ready to accept all that

was to happen and to let things follow their course, even if this process implied the loss of my wholesomeness.

I began to practice *Pranayama* again, pursuing what I had not been able to accept previously; but this time I had the determination not to flee from it.

A few days went by without detecting any form of fear. Then, I experienced something awfully beautiful: I took part in a phenomenon which, from that time on, would re-happen several times.

It was night. I was relaxed in *Savasana* when I had a pleasant sensation, as if an electric wind was blowing in the external part of my body propagating itself, quickly and with a wavy motion, from my feet up to my head. My body was so tired that I could not move, even though my mind had imparted this order.

The tranquillity in my mind was so deep that I did not have any fear. I was absolutely able to maintain the totality of my being composed and serene.

Consequently, the electric wind was replaced by another feeling, comparable to an enormous strength filling into the backbone and quickly climbing up to the brain.

That experience was characterized by an indescribable and so far unknown sense of bliss; the perception of an intense brightness accompanied everything. My memory is condensed in one expression, «a clear and euphoric certainty of existing, like an unlimited ocean of awareness and beatitude ».

In the work *God Exists. I have met Him* (London 1970) by A. Frossard, the author tries to give an idea of his spiritual experience. For that purpose he creates the concept of "inverse avalanche".

The avalanche is something collapsing, running downhill, first slowly, then faster and violently at the same time. Frossard suggests that we 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; its peak definitely held out only a few seconds, after which I left everything behind to just fall into a calm and uninterrupted sleep.

Strangely, the following day, when I woke up, I did not think of it; it only came up some hours later, when I was in the open air.

I was caught by the beauty of that experience and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, for many minutes I was literally enthralled by its memory and by its reverberation in my soul.

The thought tried to gain confidence - impossible task - with an experience which was beyond it.

All the things I had thought about *Yoga* until then did not have any importance at all. To me, the experience was like being stricken by a lightning. I did not even have the chance to find out which parts of me were still there and which ones had disappeared forever; I was not able to really understand what had happened to me, rather I was not sure that "something" had really happened.

Beautiful days went by. Then, gradually, a certainty of eternity, a condition stretching out way over the limits of my awareness - a sort of memory hiding in the recesses of my awareness - began to appear before my eyes, as if a new area of my brain was stirred to a full awakening.

I had discovered something which belonged to me, and sooner or later I would master it and bring it up beyond any borders!

Later on, I could witness it again a lot of times. Devoting myself to study up late, only granting myself short resting breaks every now and then, at the moment I laid down exhausted, this would invariably take place in a few minutes and the rush of the energy would occur many times. In the following years I had a lot of opportunities to verify that there were some things in common among those people who had the same experience: firstly, a practice of some form of meditation characterized by a deep concentration in the *Kutastha*; secondly, the presence of a painstaking determination toward what is considered a spiritual destination; finally, a very intense mental job, which would not give up to the natural tendency to fall asleep.

This event guaranteed both the correctness of my practice and a strong yearning for the spiritual goal.

It was necessary that the practice ended with a very intense concentration on the *Kutastha*, almost desperately craving for the experience of the Spirit, as if my life depended on this event. It was to be desired like – using an expression I had found in some oriental texts – «one who is drowning desires to breathe».

I noticed that the awakening would only happen when this great tension was off. The awareness had to be placed first in the most favourable

condition, an intermediary dimension between a state of sleep and a state of vigilance. Sometimes, a few instants before emerging, a wondrous, unreal landscape appeared to my inner vision.

I made the mistake to try to pass onto others my discoveries and to tell about my experience. I spoke so much as to generate a violent reaction. Let us put aside the allegation of madness and of serious mental trouble that some murmured about, almost to avoid the task of listening attentively to me. To them not only was I the victim of an illusion, but also I was unable to love, to respect and to show human sympathy toward others.

The conflict burst out because of my persistence. By that time, it seemed to me so easy to wise them up, to set them free from the mental and emotional prison cell in which I assumed they were living.

To me, human misery consisted entirely in one thing, the tyranny of thought. Therefore I tried to make them aware of something which was like a screen - made of useless thoughts and restless emotions - stopping the immense spiritual experience of boundless joy which was really just behind the anguish and agony of their existence.

I was too convinced that the *Pranayama* had the power to jump over those obstacles and make one to experience the blossoming out of pure, eternal joy! That was, to me, the secret of life - undoubtedly "too simple and bare" according to them!

Only one friend, a "Hippie" [we were in the '70s], showed me some empathy; the only inappropriate thing to him was my zeal in the discipline. All the other people kept harassing me rather bitterly.

There came a period of my life in which I felt so disoriented, wondering what was the meaning of the word "friendship" to me. I began suspecting that I was actually taking advantage of a friendship to just discuss my theories. I had to give up and admit that the ability of expressing true love belonged to others, not to me.

It seemed to me I saw people as through a transparency. Their way of acting and expressing themselves appeared to me accompanied by a kind of hysteria, which seemed to embody a mental deception; they wanted to create a totally false image of themselves. So often, after distressing arguments, fragile expressions of self-torture, they gave the impression of "imploding"; they "disappeared" for some time, going around the same

people they had loved so much up to that time; they could no longer bear up with them.

Perhaps sometimes they could understand my points, but they could not stop for a moment so to have a real dialog with me. Our ways of thinking were very divergent. That transparency of mind I spoke about was a meaningless void, something unnatural to them; it smacked of «death», of a painful and cold grasp and of a threat to the joys of their life.

Imperturbable, I kept following my way, determined to improve the art of breathing - unconcerned about any limit.

While I was looking for all the ways to find the needed information, a letter of the organization founded by P.Y. informed me about the existence of other people, next to me, who practised *Kriya Yoga*.

I was enthusiastic of it, I quivered with some cheerful anticipation to meet them. That night I hardly succeeded in falling asleep.

Note.

The reader will understand that I did not mention the full name of P.Y. - it is not difficult, however, to figure out his identity.

There are many schools of *Yoga* spreading his teachings according to a specific legitimation. One of these, through its representatives, made me realize that not only won't they tolerate the least Copyright violation, but also they won't even appreciate their beloved Teacher's name to be mixed into discussions on *Kriya* on the Internet. The reason is that, in the past, some people used His name to mislead the search of a high number of practitioners who were trying to receive His original teachings. Moreover, I mean to underline that in the following pages I will only summarily linger upon my understanding of His legacy, without any pretension to give an objective account of it. An interested reader should not renounce the privilege of turning to the original texts!

CHAPTER III A KRIYA ORGANIZATION

I came to know that, not far from my place, there was a group of people linked with the school founded by P.Y., and even though he had been dead for many years, they considered him "their *Guru*".

As a habit, they would meet twice a week to practice the *Kriya* techniques together; I had the first contact with them through the *kriyaban* [a person who practices *Kriya*] who used to organize their meetings.

With great enthusiasm and a sort of euphoria fostered by my experiences, I approached him, hoping to share some opinions about our practice.

I remember our meeting with excitement; that was a key event indeed.

He was of about my age, he knew and practiced *Kriya*, having being taught by a direct disciple of P.Y..

I would never have thought that the following words by *Sri Aurobindo* could be applied to the consequences of our meeting: «Too bright were our heavens, too far away, too frail their ethereal stuff».

With a sort of sour irony, I would dare to say that the current phase of my existence was too happy to last long.

Life is made of short moments of calm and balance, in an alternation of vicissitudes; in them, people experience problems, limitations and deformations caused by the human mind through their own skin.

Approaching this man with a total and alarming sincerity, I could not realize what kind of hard shock I was to receive.

He welcomed me with visible enthusiasm, sincerely eager to meet a person with whom he could share his "passion". Since the very first moment of our meeting, standing on his house's doorstep, I told him how fascinated I was by the practice of *Kriya*.

He asked me right away when I had been initiated in the practice of *Kriya*, taking for granted that I had received the teaching from the same organization he was a member of.

When he figured the way I had learned the technique, he got petrified, showing a bitter smile of disappointment.

It was as if I had declared to be the executor of the greatest of all crimes. Setting himself back from the disappointment, he emphasized how *Kriya* cannot be learned through books. There is only one way to receive it: being initiated by a "Minister" of his own organization!

Staring right into my eyes, with an enormous emotive impact, he went on saying 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 might be «a dangerous illusion in which the ego remains trapped for a long time».

According to his words, nobody on earth was allowed to teach that technique, except the few people who were purposely authorized by the direction of the school.

This rule was strictly respected by the components of the group; this was actually the way they had taken in the technique, submitting a precise and solemn promise of secrecy.

Secrecy!

How odd this word sounded to me, what a strange appeal, what a mysterious fascination it exerted upon my being!

Until then, I had always believed that it did not matter at all how a certain teaching was learned, or what book had been read or studied for it; the only important thing was to practice it correctly, always accompanied by the desire to go deeper and deeper into it.

I felt it was not an awkward idea to protect a precious lore from indiscrete eyes. Apparently, secrecy was advisable in this field. Later, during an arc of many years, I witnessed an innumerable series of absurdities originating from this behest; dramatically, I had the evidence that it brought miserable repercussions into the life of thousands of people.

Before any verbal description, he would ask me to practice the technique in front of him. He was naturally pushed by human curiosity and, I suppose, also by the hope that I had gone very far astray from the real *Kriya* in my guessing the technique.

He felt relieved, intimately "reassured" when he saw me breathing through the nose instead of through the mouth, as he was told to; therefore my practice was evidently wrong to him.

He asked me to explain more deeply what I was visualizing during my breathing and, while I was telling him, I saw an inner satisfaction spreading all over his face.

He judged my technique incorrect, thereby verifying a well-rooted prejudice that the technique, learned through illegitimate channels, could not - because of a particular spiritual law - be but corrupted.

The secret he was bound to had not been broken by any of the authors of my esoteric books.

The reader might remember that, according to the given instructions, the way of transporting the energy while breathing could be done through a route around the *Chakras* or inside of the backbone.

I tried both ways but, since P.Y. wrote that it was correct to move the energy «around» the *Chakras*, I mainly settled on the first one; therefore, this was the version I explained.

Besides, having read in another book that during *Kriya Pranayama* the practitioner was supposed to sing *Om* mentally in the *Chakras*, I added this detail as well.

I could not imagine that P.Y. taught the variation of the breath moving inside of the spine, with the breathing done through the mouth and no mental singing of the *Om*.

So, we were in a strange situation - I was telling him exactly what I would discover in the future to be the *Pranayama* taught by Lahiri Mahasaya, and he had a sarcastic simper on, a hundred per cent sure that I was talking nonsense!

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*»!

Questioned with dismay about my mistake, at least in general terms, he did not accept to report any detail; he was «not authorized to give out any explanations».

Of course, I felt a strong interest in the correct procedure and subsequently, in some occasions, I "courted" him with the hope of receiving some crumbs of information; but he was a good weasel.

HEAVY CONDITIONING

On that occasion, enflamed by an absolute confidence, he launched himself in a wide digression upon the value of the "*Guru*" [affirming that P.Y. was his *Guru*], or "spiritual Teacher", a puzzling concept to me because it was attributed to a person that he had not known directly.

In his opinion, having been initiated to *Kriya* through the legitimated channels, P.Y. was real and present in his life.

The people who belonged to that group were convinced that the *Guru* - they had not personally known him either - was a special aid sent by God Himself; he had gotten hold of a part of their *Karma* in order to "burn" it in his body.

Such an event [the creation of such kind of relationship with the *Guru*] was, thus, «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's hand, stretched out to offer His benediction».

Since my position was totally inconsistent, he recommended me to send a written account to the direction of the school, describing the details of my vicissitudes, hoping that they would accept me as a disciple. Only then would I start the practice under their guidance.

I saw a strange metamorphosis in him, as if all of a sudden he had been invested of a sacred role; he promised that he would « pray for me »!

I was somewhat stunned by the tones our dialog was turning in to. In order to re-establish the initial agreeability of our meeting, I tried to reassure him about the positive effects that I had gained from my practice. My statement had the effect of worsening the whole matter, giving him the chance of a second scolding which was not totally unfair but, undoubtedly, out of place.

He made clear that 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 "poor, naïve guy", had gotten straight into an obvious contradiction without even realizing it; he was saying that the results were too important to risk losing them by telling others, and a few seconds before he had underlined that they were of no value whatsoever, rather, «they might be negative and dangerous»!

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 self-learned techniques, received the same instructions kneeling at the feet of and with the benediction of his *Guru* - so that this time the results came out easily.

We all know how the human mind is more conditioned by an anecdote than by a logical inference!

An anecdote - even if it is a total fancy with novelistic purposes - is endowed with a sort of internal "brightness" that conditions a person's common sense; stimulating the emotions and feelings, it is able to make people accept conclusions that are absurd to the faculties of reason.

This story made me speechless; I just did not know how to reply. For that day, at least, I lost the "fight".

I told my friend that I would follow his advice.

A KRIYA GROUP

The room where the group met was elemental but pleasant. Each member paid part of the rental, so that its fruition would not depend on the owner's whims; in this way we also had the privilege of consecrating it to an exclusively spiritual use.

My attendance started in a period that I remember nostalgically; listening to Indian songs translated and harmonized for westerners and, above all, meditating together was a true joy! Everything seemed paradisiacal to me, even though little time was given to the practice - no more than 20 minutes; often, scantily 15 minutes.

Since I had not received *Kriya* "officially" yet, they asked me to limit my practice to simply centering the awareness onto the point between the eyebrows.

A particularly beautiful session of collective practice took place on Christmas Eve; it was enriched by devotional songs and it lasted a lot of hours.

Once a month we had the "social" lunch.

On that occasion I began to know my new *kriyaban* friends more closely. It was a beautiful chance to spend some time talking together and enjoying each other.

Unfortunately, a distinct embarrassment in our behavior spoiled the pleasantries of our meeting.

Since many of us could not enjoy their family approval and - much less - support to the practice of *Yoga*, the only occasion we had to spend time among people with the same ideas and interests had to be an experience of great serenity and relaxation.

But those who directed the school from a distance, had requested not to talk about other spiritual paths and deal with specific details about *Kriya*. Authorized people only could cover such a role; no one in our group could. These prohibitions distorted and mortified our behavior.

During our gatherings, since our conversations were strictly kept on well-defined tracks, we were not able to find a topic for our conversations which would respect the given rules and be, at the same time, interesting.

It was not the right place for worldly gossips unsuitable for a spiritual group. So one single topic was left: the beauty of our spiritual path and our great fortune in having discovered it.

Many of them were convinced that our school was the embodiment of a Divine plan to save humankind from disaster.

No wonder that, after some meetings of mutual "exaltation", an almost frightening boredom started to reign in the group.

As a last resort, some risked entering the realm of jokes; they were no mean jokes, but such a light and innocent sense of humor had to live up to the devotional attitude kept by many of the members. Instead of that, it eventually gave in to the cold attitude of the larger part of them, who would not show a single inch of true joviality.

If someone had tried to uphold the atmosphere of our get-together, he would have been left frozen for the rest of the day.

As a matter of course, the group underwent a great recycling process; many members, who had joined in with enthusiasm, decided to quit after a few months, scraping the whole experience off their consciousness.

Among the people I had met there in those days, I did not manage to find a true spiritual seeker. Even believing that I was among individuals akin to me - which means enthusiastic of *Kriya* - I had to admit that the reality was different.

Some of them reacted to my enthusiasm with annoyance; they could not believe that I had no doubts or uncertainties at all. They considered my euphoria being typical of an immature beginner.

They seemed to censor my excessive interest in the *Kriya* techniques, saying that devotion was much more important and - introducing a concept that I could hardly link to the practice of *Yoga* - loyalty was much more important too.

Looking back to those times, I wonder what those people's opinion about me and my reckless attitude might have been. Definitely a real threat to their dull existence.

They made a moderate effort at the practice of *Kriya* and strived to extract any outer shell of devotion from the depths of their psyche; on the contrary, I made use of the totality of my energy for the improvement of the techniques, in order to have a natural flow of devotion springing from my inner realization.

Each of us had two different approaches to the spiritual aim, without any hope of reaching a point of contact.

Let me say this; I have often seen how a devotional display mostly hides people's own insincerity and negligence. Sometimes, though, it might also disguise the presence of mental troubles. I do not mean to lack respect to people's sufferings, being also unable to put myself in their shoes; but I am fully aware that a true mystic aspiration can make miracles. Playing the part of the perfect devotee cannot.

Since P.Y. wrote that the *Second Kriya* enables the *Yogi* to leave his body consciously at will, I looked for someone who knew the technique, hoping that he could give me a general idea of it at least.

A lady, who had been practicing *Kriya* for years and had once lived by our school's general offices, seemed not to understand my question.

So I summed up the concept with astonishment, recalling the episode of Lahiri Mahasaya's disciple Swami Pranabananda who accompanied the moment of his death with the practice of the *Second Kriya*.

She got visibly nervous, saying that the quotation clearly referred to the technique of *Pranayama*, one breath, then another, and this last one to be (!) the "*Second Kriya*". I know that, up to today, she has remained fixed in her conviction.

I had the impression that the idea itself that a similar technique might exist upset her; it was as if she had made so great an effort in setting the habit of a daily practice of the *First Kriya*, that she felt as if she had «already given out everything she had»; in other words, she could not accept any other technique to bring forth a more engaging dedication.

Anyway, another abomination went far beyond her "willing" ignorance.

An aged lady, perhaps trying to impart me an important lesson of humbleness, called me aside to reveal me that a long time before she had

received the initiation in the so-called *Higher Kriyas*, but she had come to the final decision not to practice them for a matter of (!) «humbleness». She said she had felt so unworthy that she had put them aside and, after some years, she had almost forgotten them – this last point was inconceivable to me!

There had been other people eligible to receive these teachings; they just refused them. When I asked the reason for that apparent exhibition of indifference toward the higher teachings taught by their *Guru*, they looked at me in bewilderment as if my question had violated an implicit law; never criticize or insinuate doubts about a person's intimate choices on the spiritual field.

They replied saying that what they had was enough; then, they briskly got off that topic.

This fact, together with others I had experienced in that school, was a cause of real suffering. It seemed to me I was the only one who loved *Kriya* in a visceral way.

I was disappointed in seeing such a high level of ignorance in those people or, even worse, indifference toward the art of *Kriya*.

Shortly after my admission to the group, I was introduced to an elderly lady who had corresponded with P.Y. himself.

Thanks to her earnestness, sincerity and long-time loyal discipleship, she had been authorized to teach the *Kriya* preliminary techniques.

Her temperament was very sweet and more inclined to the understanding rather than to the censorship.

From what I could read in her face, when she referred to my *Kriya* technique - which had been guessed through my non-orthodox readings - I had the assurance that it was correct and effective.

Nonetheless, she thought that learning the technique from official channels, maybe in the future, I would begin a more beautiful and satisfactory practice. That is why she taught me two preliminary techniques to *Kriya*, categorically inviting me to limit my practice to them only.

The first one eases off the breath and the whole psychophysical system; it is called *Hong-So* because of the employed *Mantra*. The second one concerns the listening to internal [astral] sounds melting into the *Om* sound.

She did not give me these instructions all at one time, but in two intervals of time, the second one four months after the first one.

In this way I had the unique and splendid possibility to concentrate on the first technique for a long time; only then would the combination of the two techniques come, the first one in the morning and a total immersion in the second one in the night. Therefore, I could experiment the meaning and the beauty of each one.

[A note about Second Kriya

In my spiritual research, the *Second Kriya* technique had been sealed as a secret for a lot of years. Practicing it one day was one of my dreams, to take advantage of its delicate mechanism. I was sure that working with such a procedure without feeling a general healthy effect for my spiritual evolution was unlikely to happen. Such a technique, which Lahiri Mahasaya had given to elect people only, could not but stir my imagination. If I consider what a lot of teachers said and are saying of this technique, I must also consider the idea of a sound jinx hovering over it! As if acting out a perverse will, they unleashed all their ability in generating the wildest of all transformations. One of them tried to convince me that the *Second Kriya* was similar to a Tibetan technique which consisted in boring a hole in the *Fontanella* [top of the head]. The proof of its validity was the same as in the Tibetan tradition; a *kriyaban* should have been able to insert the stem of a flower into it (!). I do not want to oppress the reader with all the nonsense I heard in all those years. The reason why I was completely spellbound by some of those absurdities is that my tendency was to favor complicated techniques. I shared the belief - of a quite common nature in the esoteric world - that the more artificial and strange the technique, the more powerful would it be. The deepest side of me has suffered for years, because I did not have a complete knowledge of the *Higher Kriyas* - I would not be given a lot of parts of them; that is why I feared it could be impossible for me to master the various stages of *Kriya*. The thought of being limited in my personal experience of this mystic path by someone else's will made me furious. I definitely risked losing my way with the possibility that I would never know the correct technique. Nowadays, in the *Kriya* world, there is no doubt that Lahiri Mahasaya's *Second Kriya* is the process of the *Thokar* - in one or another of its different variations - where an abrupt movement toward the chest is made with one's chin and the heart *Chakra* receives a great stimulus. When I had clearly printed in my mind the mechanism of this *Kriya*, I plunged thoroughly into it.]

HONG-SO AND OM TECHNIQUES

The *Hong-so* technique is simple. It consists - after some deep breaths in oxygenating the blood and calming the system - in letting the breath free, repeating mentally the *Mantra "Hong-so"*, the syllable *Hong* during the inhalation and *So* during the exhalation. The concentration, the inner gaze, is to be kept upon the third eye. The essential recommendation is not to influence the breath; it has to go on in a natural and spontaneous way.

These were the technique's practical details but, foreseeing the thought rising in my mind, she went on adding that the procedure was not easy at all, in spite of its apparent simplicity. She said that if the results had been disappointing, the cause would be some subtle mistakes in the practice.

She remained rather vague but, encouraging me with a smile, she concluded: «it is true that the technique calls for a great commitment, but it contains every tool to come into contact with the Divine essence».

I will be honest; my superficial beginner's attitude led me to think of the *Mantra* as a "magical formula", which would produce amazing results.

The school's theoretic teachings introduced the rather strange thesis that this technique had to be approached as the only "scientific" way to obtain a real effective concentration.

This is how I was induced to think that within some days, simply following these instructions, I would be able to develop a superhuman concentration.

As is obvious, I came into a big disappointment; that was the most boring technique in the world. Its practice seemed useless and dull.

I carried on this *Mantra* for weeks, but most of the time I could not remain fully conscious of my breathing.

It was at that very moment that, supported by the same goodwill characterizing my way of learning, I started to observe attentively a couple of details which, in my opinion, were responsible of my failures.

The *Mantra Hong-so*, broadly quoted in the Indian spirituality classical texts, is really excellent to ease off the breathing rhythm gradually, without forcing it. By repeating it mentally over and over, it can easily and naturally conform to a hard-to-change rhythm. Once breathing follows this rhythm, as a consequence it never settles down. Once the rhythm has stabilized itself, inhalations and exhalations are made, even if the body "would like" to stay off-breath for some moments. At this point, short

inhalations or exhalations are made without the body having a physiological need to breathe.

Anybody can avoid this situation by keeping off from any established rhythm during the mental chanting of the *Mantra*. The pauses between a breath and another should be "allowed to exist"; therefore, they should be perceived and enjoyed, no matter if each lasts less than an instant.

This simple fact is sufficient to ease the breath off, while a condition of total and almost perfect immobility stabilizes within the body.

Another detail is based upon the fact that during the inhalation the chest swells out and gets into elastic tension. When the lungs are distended, there is a force trying to bring them back into the previous shape. The pause between the inhalation and the exhalation is contrasted not only by the rhythm but by the chest elasticity as well. Maintaining the concentration on the chest and on its elastic strength is sufficient to make a more comfortable and freer pause after the inhalation; the exercise will then result more harmonious.

Putting all this into practice, my breathing became subtler and subtler and a "virtuous circle" between this growing calmness and a reduced necessity of oxygen brought me to a condition of breathing annihilation, while the movement of the air, outside and inside my lungs, was reduced to a throb. By respecting these simple details, the *Hong So* technique lost completely the aspect of a boring chore and became a wonderful, blissful break.

Trying to discuss my observations with those who were supposed to practice that technique, I realized how hard it was for them to talk about such things. Sometimes I noticed an enormous and unreasonable resistance.

People belonging to the group could be divided into two groups, those who were not satisfied with the practice but planned to try it again in the future with more attention (at that time they would not listen to my reasoning); and those who, on the contrary, could not understand what I was saying.

They sustained, without any conviction or wish to make the least experiment whatsoever, to be sure that what I had proposed was an alteration and a twisting of the original technique.

I remember that when I tried to explain carefully these things to a lady, she pretended to listen attentively to me; in the end, she came out with a dogmatism amounting to the direst violence, saying that she already had a *Guru* and did not feel the need for another one and for further teachings.

I was shocked and wounded, since I was perfectly aware that my explanation did not mean to be "another teaching" at all.

My attempt was not to control or guide the breathing. On the contrary, I used a particular care in order to preserve its spontaneity.

To pass by such episodes one after the other confirmed the idea that the apparent assiduousness of these people to their daily practice was the result of their superstition.

Lacking the sufficient attention to and the concern for the results, they went on performing mechanically what had become an empty ritual, a way to appease their conscience.

Om technique.... Before beginning the *Om* technique, a *yogi* leans his elbows on a comfortable support that can be made for the purpose. The support can be a simple horizontal table of any material, covered with foam-rubber and settled on a vertical stake of adjustable height.

Practicing in the evening or at night is best; it is preferable to lock oneself up in a room, so that nobody will disturb.

The practice consists in closing the ears with the thumbs and in listening to every internal sound, while chanting the *Om* mentally.

The attention, according to the instructions, is directed to the inner part of the right ear, since the subtle sounds can be realized more easily and more persistently there.

The *yogi's* intuition begins a long journey into his deepest memory, that of his Divine origin.

The *Om* can be heard in a lot of variations; it can be easily perceived after the ears have been closed, as soon as the least internal calm is created.

The right attitude is to focus upon the loudest of these variations. This is the secret to succeed in tuning with the real *Om* sound, like the roaring of the ocean.

Each mental repetition of the *Om*, keeping the attention alive, is essential; the awareness patiently follows any feeble inner sound like an "Ariadne's thread" out of the labyrinth of mind. Then, it approaches a vast region, the *Omkar* reality, which is the vibration of the primeval Energy.

That lady explained that her teacher, P.Y. (the same who had decided that this technique, among so many possible ones, should be a necessary

rather than optional preparation to *Kriya*), had tried to explain the teaching of the Trinity in a new way.

Om is the "Amen" of the Bible - the **Holy Ghost**, the "witness", a sound; a proof of the vibration of energy sustaining the universe.

This technique, discovered by the mystics long ago, makes it possible to detect this vibration. Thanks to it, it is also possible to be guided toward such a deep state, which cannot be reached in other ways.

Through this experience, a *kriyaban* can achieve that of the "**Son**" - the Divine awareness that is present inside the above-mentioned energetic vibration.

At the end of his spiritual journey, he can reach the highest reality, the "**Father**" - the Divine awareness beyond every existing thing in the universe.

While the previous *Hong So* technique leads to the development of concentration (also characterized by peace and spontaneous joy), the latter allows for a direct contact with the spiritual Goal.

The lady's explanation was characterized by such a sacred flavor that it accompanied me for the following weeks, helping me overcome the beginning of the practice, where it seems impossible that the sounds will manifest.

I remember nostalgically my time in that slightly illuminated room, where I confined myself like a hermit.

One day, after a three-week practice, having just begun the exercises ten minutes before, so that my awareness was in a state of deep relaxation, I realized I could hear an inner sound. It did not happen abruptly, but I felt as if I had been hearing it for some minutes.

It reminded me of the humming of a mosquito, then it became a bell, heard from a distance; finally, my concentration detected the noise of running waters.

The bell sound was a sweet embrace; it was a really ecstatic experience and it occurred so strangely that it grabbed my awareness and drove me into a sweet dimension, where I felt at ease.

I have personally never had the opportunity to hear sounds such as that of a flute or a harp, which are largely quoted in the classical literature.

Listening to the *Om* meant touching beauty itself.

I could not imagine something similar making a person feel so fine; I felt I was surrounded by the wings of the ineffable.

The experience I was living was far greater than my little self. It was the quintessence of bliss and it went beyond any human hope, beyond any human desire.

All this happened in a very precise moment of my life, when for the first time I indirectly ran into the concept of "devotion". I remember that whenever that sense of bliss arose, I would say to myself: «This is what I have always desired. I do not want to lose it anymore».

Note

The reader might be interested in knowing that this technique does not belong to those included in the *Kriya Yoga*, whenever the internal sounds perception happens without closing the ears. It is not a secret invented by P.Y.. It had been plainly described in the books of classical *Yoga*, called *Nada Yoga* - "the *Yoga* of the sound."

By practicing this technique for months, a *yogi* can obtain a better attitude toward the practice of *Kriya*.

Thanks to this technique a person is able to put aside any anxiety and get to very strong results.

DIFFICULTIES WITH THE KRIYA TEACHINGS

The real *Kriya* technique should be waited, as a rule, for at least a six-month period while, in my case, contingent reasons turned it into two years - the written material traveled by ship and the delay times were enormous.

During this long waiting time I tried to embrace the school's religious vision in every way, even though it was radically extraneous to me.

It was not just a search of the *yogic* way of eating - convinced that it was the best foundation for the practice of *Kriya*-, of finding the methods to prevent a bad health or of finding a job that would not contrast with my spiritual path; I also tried to tune to the school's peculiar Indian-Christian religious atmosphere.

I tried to approach the figure of *Krishna*, imagining Him as the quintessence of every beauty; of the Divine Mother also, who was not the Madonna, but a sweetening of the idea of the goddess Kali. I read and reread only P.Y.'s writings. Sometimes I considered a particular thought of P.Y. so beautiful and perfect that I would write it down on a sheet of paper to hold it in front of me while studying at my desk.

By going on with this trend, I grew away from my real nature. The other members of the group had the tendency to build a veneration for P.Y., as if he were God in human body. A chief of the most important Italian branch of our school told us: «didn't you understand yet that P.Y. is the Divine Mother Herself»?

I remember a lady - it seems a joke but it is not - eating ice cream only if it had the same taste as the legend reported as P.Y.'s favorite.

Most of them believed, through such petty tricks, to increase the devotion for their *Guru*; may it be, I cannot tell, but the risk to lean passively upon the protection of a saint and less upon their practical intelligence was also evident.

While I was continuously receiving unasked lessons of devotion, humility and loyalty, my interest for *Kriya* became a real craving, a burning fever.

I could not understand the reason for which I had to wait for it for so long a time: my great anticipation turned, sometimes, into a useless anguish.

Those who already had received the *Kriya* initiation made fun of me with an unconcealed cruelty and told me: «they won't give you the *Kriya* initiation at all; a devotee should not desire a technique with such intensity: that's neither good nor wise. God is to be mostly found through devotion and surrender».

I tried to be good; I waited and dreamt.

Eventually, the moment came to fill the application form to receive the *Kriya* instructions by mail.

About four months passed by, every day I hoped to receive the coveted material, finally, an envelope arrived. I opened it with an expectation that I am not able to express: I remained deeply disappointed because it contained ulterior introduction material. From the first page index of the material, I understood it was the first of a weekly series, whereas the proper complete technique would be sent within five weeks.

So, for another month, I would have to study just the usual nursery rhymes I already knew by heart.

It happened, instead, that in the meantime a Minister of that organization visited our country and I could take part in the ceremony of initiation.

After waiting for months, it was high time that I came «to an eternal agreement with the *Guru*, to be taught the *Kriya* techniques in the only legitimate way, together with his benediction».

Those who, like me, were ready to be initiated were about a hundred. A beautiful room had been rented for the ceremony at a very high price and embellished for the occasion with lots of flowers, as I have never seen in my life.

Something unique and odd happened; about thirty people from the local group, dressed as if they were the Ministers of a new religion, entered the room lining up with a solemn attitude and their hands joined in prayer.

The two teachers, who had just arrived from abroad, walked meekly and inelegantly, behind them.

Then the ceremony began.

I accepted without objections their demand of swearing everlasting devotion not only to the *Guru* P.Y. but also to a six-master chain; of this chain, Lahiri Mahasaya was an intermediary ring, while P.Y. was the so-called *Guru-preceptor*, or the one who would partially bear the burden of our *Karma* [such was the consequence of a well-known spiritual law].

It would have been really strange if no one had doubts about this; I remember a friend of mine wondering if P.Y. - definitely unable to give any confirmation, being now long resident in the astral world - had really accepted her as a "disciple", to be consequently laden with her *Karma*.

We had been told that Christ was part of this chain because He had once showed up to Babaji [Lahiri Mahasaya's *Guru*] asking Him to send some emissaries in the West to spread the *Kriya*.

This story caused no perplexity at all; rather, perhaps this assurance helped those people whose conscience was a little thwarted (upset they might betray Jesus through this initiation-baptism) when considering the whole mission and teachings as originated from Christ himself.

To receive the initiation to *Kriya* meant being taught, in the context of that ceremony, three techniques, *Kriya Pranayama*, *Maha Mudra* and *Yoti Mudra* [they never used the proper term *Yoni*].

These techniques - they said - embodied God's most effective blessing toward His privileged creature, the humans, which exclusively possessed an inner body with seven *Chakras*.

The secret and mystic seven-step ladder, revealed through the practice of *Kriya*, is the real speedway to salvation; it is not the only way though, since religions offer many other valid tools.

But it is definitely the fastest and safest way.

My mind was in great expectation for something I had so strongly desired and for which I had seriously been preparing myself 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, being taught the *Kriya Pranayama*, I found out that I already knew it: it was the *Kundalini-breathing* technique, which I had found 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 in serious consideration that procedure owing to the fact that in P.Y.'s writings, which were my basis for my first glimpsing of the mechanism of *Kriya Pranayama*, it was written that the energy had to be rotated «around the *Chakras*, along an elliptic circuit».

I was not disappointed. Rather, the technique appeared perfect to me.

The school taught each technique's detail in such a way that it would not allow for the least variation and, in addition, it prescribed a routine from which one could not derogate.

Subsequently, if during the practice any least doubt had risen on the correctness of a certain detail, nobody was – even vaguely – encouraged to conduct an experiment and to come to a conclusion by himself. The thing to do was to contact the direction of the school, tell the problem and receive some guidelines, to be accepted as "The Word".

I learned to interact with the "authorized" individuals only, in order to receive some guidance. I trusted their suggestions.

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 and I inevitably thought that - even if they would not admit it out of humility - they had already reached the highest level of spiritual realization.

My desire to deal, in this chapter, with the reasons of my inexorable crisis is not moved by a groundless acidity toward the school.

My aim is, instead, that of discussing a general problem, which will be fundamental in building a good routine inside Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Yoga* – which contains, besides, a far greater number of techniques.

The recommended routine caused me rather big problems.

The first exercise to be practiced was the observation of the breath [the *Hong-So* technique] and this had to last ten to twenty minutes. The breathing was supposed to become more relaxed and to create a good state of concentration in order to facilitate the listening to the internal sounds.

After putting the forearms on a support, the listening to the internal sounds - which would require about the same time - began. There would follow an interruption in the meditation because of the *Maha Mudra*.

Eventually, setting back in a still and stiff position to restore the feeling of sacredness, the *Kriya Pranayama* began in the rigorous respect of all the instructions. The *Yoti Mudra* would be concluded with a full ten-minute concentration on the *Kutastha*, to absorb the results of the whole job.

Now, the two preliminary techniques were deeply sacrificed.

While the first one was carried off, the practitioner felt he should soon interrupt it to start the second one. This brought to a disturbing feeling, a sort of internal constraint resulting in the following technique.

The unhappiest decision was to suspend the technique of listening to the inner sounds to get up and practice the *Maha Mudra*.

[I know that some people, to avoid, partially at least, this feeling of discomfort, used to begin with the *Maha Mudra*, but the break had to be done anyway in order to practice *Pranayama*.]

The technique of listening was a complete "universe" in itself and it led to the mystic experience; that is why its interruption was a great disturbance.

It was a paradox; just as if, recognizing a friend with joyous surprise among a crowd, I began talking with him. Then, I went suddenly away, lost among the people, hoping to meet that friend again, unexpectedly, so that I could get back to where our conversation had been quitted. This stupid and absurd thing is exactly what I used to do in this routine; the sound *Om* was the mystic experience itself, the only goal I sought.

Why should I have interrupted the listening to the inner sound to regain the mystic contact through another technique?

I forced myself into such absurdity for an extremely long period. I am embarrassed to confess that it lasted no less than three years. Such was the power of that folly that in our group was called "loyalty".

Therefore, I went on without changing the prescribed routine, hoping for a hypothetical future evolution that would allow me to practice with more satisfaction and to have more tangible results.

Through all this conditioning I had become like one of those animals that, fed by man, tend to forget how to be self-sufficient; I carried on for a really long time the tendency to depend on the school's judgment for everything, even for the matters of practical life.

By that time, even under such peculiar circumstances, it would never occur to me to leave the school and start a path on my own. I was convinced that such a choice was impossible, that school being the best one existing. I felt as if it were my second family and P.Y. the best and sole authority in the field of *Kriya Yoga*. I was not aware yet of the simplification to which he reduced Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya*, until some sad but providential episodes bailed me out of that delicate situation.

Actually, the school had only provided a written form of the so-called "Higher teachings". Something was there which I just could not fully understand; I wanted to master to the full the technique of *Thokar* [the school called it *Third* and *Fourth Kriya*] based on the unification of the twelve-syllable *Mantra Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya* with some movements of the head.

All I was asking for was to be shown how the head movements had to be carried through. I wrote to the school direction to fix an appointment with one of its representatives, a Minister who would soon join us to hold classes for our group. I was asking for a favor which should be considered obvious by a rational mind, unaware that it was highly improbable; the school could hardly change its tradition to meet my desire. Probably, I had actually asked something which was a source of embarrassment either for the school or the Minister. There could be many possible explanations for that. The Minister might have had doubts himself on that technique, which P.Y. had written many years before - actually, P.Y. did teach it only to a few students living in the school's headquarters.

By that time I could not understand all that and I was left in dismay when I figured out that the Minister kept on postponing our meeting without valid reasons at all. When we finally met, after I had insisted and insisted, I went through something truly unpleasant.

I was convinced that hypocrisy, bureaucracy, formality, hidden falsity and subtle violence to one's honesty were totally alien to each representative of that school. The feeling I had was akin to meeting an agent of one of the many institutions involved in our social life.

Cruelty was that the Minister refused to show me precisely how the head had to be moved. He tried to convince me instead that I had to practice only what I had been taught in the past, that means the preliminary techniques and those of the *First Kriya*. I replied I would surely keep in consideration his advice; in spite of that I wanted to see how to move my head correctly, to practice them in a hypothetical future.

My insistence turned him nervous, to the point that he rudely recommended me to enclose my questions in a letter to the school's head.

In vain I replied that the movements of the head could not be shown through a letter. That had been his last word!

I had trusted and respected the school; I had studied the whole reference literature as if preparing for a university exam. I was now consternated to bear witness to the senseless whims of a man on power. This situation brought up a doubt - was the organization acting like that toward everybody? If that was so, that was really terrible! After the interview with the Minister, I was in a strange mental and emotive condition. A part of me was truly desperate and that cruelty was not the only reason.

In all of us there are some child-like characteristics that might emerge in difficult moments.

I was afraid that this gentleman, back to the school, might talk on my back saying something that in the future might reduce the probability of obtaining that information. I knew that my relationship with the school had gone through a big quake at its very roots. After that I could no longer rely on the heavenly relationship that for so many years had represented my horizon.

In spite of that, I had a feeling I would get over every hardship, clarifying all my doubts. Moreover, I knew I would be able to turn this destructive experience into something crucial both for my and other people's spiritual improvement. The self-teaching part of me, which I could not suppress to adapt it to the group's rules, was intimately enjoying the whole situation; the school had somehow waken me up by means of a healthy "kick in the butt"; the old me was living again.

My Italian interlocutor was that elderly lady who taught me the preliminary techniques and who was officially invested as a "Meditation Counsellor".

After I had reported to her my sorrow and desperation, she recommended an absolute obedience, saying that my logics was of no value since it originated in the ego and it was not even worth listening to. She said that intelligence is a double-edged weapon; it can be used to eliminate the swelling ignorance but also to cut off abruptly the lifeblood that sustains the spiritual path.

[Allow me to dwell a little more on this, not because I like to report a justification to my stupid attitude, but simply because I wish to describe an almost unreal situation that, thought over with a hindsight, seems to me a matter of psychiatry rather than of spirituality.]

Observing a particular photograph of P.Y. shot on the day of his death, I had the sensation that some tears were going to well up from his blissful eyes [it was not a bizarre feeling, other people told me they had the same impression]; I told her this, simply to have something to say; she became so serious and, with her eyes pointed far off toward an indefinite spot, she soberly uttered: «you have to consider it a warning; the *Guru* is not content with you!».

I kept silent, puzzled.

Then she quoted an episode that proved that her *Guru* was in direct contact with God.

She told me what happened when one of his disciples chose to continue his own spiritual search through other spiritual traditions, deciding to leave P.Y.'s *Ashram*.

The *Guru*, noticing this, got in on the disciple's way to stop him and warn him, when he heard an inner voice - "the voice of God", she specified - ordering him not to interfere with the disciple's freedom.

The *Guru* obeyed and in a flash of intuition he 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 her *Guru* had been really accurate on the number of incarnations that the whole trip would have taken to be over – about thirty (!).

The moral of this story was clear, something from which one could not escape - even if I had some difficulties I just had to follow the school's advice, «because that is God's will».

If I had not done so, I would lose myself in a labyrinth of enormous sufferings and who knows when I would be able to get back to the correct path.

Although she admired the earnestness with which I was making progress – unlike so many other tepid and half-hearted people who would go to her only to be reloaded with the motivation they could not find in themselves - she was dismayed, for her devotion toward the *Guru* was totally extraneous to me.

By telling me that or other episodes of P.Y.'s life, she tried to let me share her experiences. I am very thankful to her for all the sincere efforts and time spent with me, but how could she thwart my inner nature?

She did only what was in her power; she could not relieve my immense thirst for knowledge of the art of *Kriya*. Unable, as she was, to clarify my technical doubts, she finally said that the Minister's advice was correct; it embodied God's will and the only thing I should have learned was how to wholly surrender to it.

I had the impression that she was permanently expecting me to act in a somewhat "disloyal" way.

Months later she came to know that I had read a book, which our school members were strongly dissuaded from reading.

It was written by a man [D.W.] who had been formerly bound to the organization, and was now a "traitor" to her.

I had no doubt that in the third millennium a person can read whatever he considers more convenient and so did I, finding that book so fascinating that I started distributing it to other friends.

A friend of mine showed me a letter in which she had called me «a man who stabs his *Guru*'s back, handing out daggers to other people as well, so that they can do the same».

Her reaction had been so emphatic that it did not hurt me at all; on the contrary, I felt a sort of tenderness toward her.

I could sense that her actions were driven by waves of emotions and decades of steadfast conditioning.

Seeing her own fears molding, I am sure that while typewriting that letter and pouring into it lots of other considerations to free all the tension she had accumulated, her countenance was serene, as if tasting a delicious, intimate satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV JAPA AND THE BREATHLESS STATE

The Minister and the Meditation counsellor were not down on me. Perhaps they took a liking to me and the problem was inside them. I was informed that both, at the times of their first steps on this spiritual path, had been rather demanding researchers. They suffered a conflict with the rather concisely written description of the techniques left by P.Y.. Doing certain violence to their intimate nature, they came to agreement with a non-definite understanding of the techniques. The meditation counsellor told me about her training in the school and how she received many scoldings. They saw in me their juvenile naivety and found again a conflict, evidently not entirely cured.

The direction of the school, to which I wrote, was, instead, very kind: the reply I was given emanated a hidden goodwill as a vast consoling smile. Later I had the joy of meeting with another representative who resolved the matter without any hysteria.

For a while I relied on some books' advice, to understand what the school could not or did not want to teach me: P.Y.'s complete and unabridged teachings. I have already said that He was unique to me; as a matter of fact I was keen on taking in some tall stories introduced by my group mates: P.Y. allegedly met *Babaji* some years after Lahiri Mahasaya's initiation. In simple words, He might have received some fresher and more effective teachings than the ones which had been given to Lahiri Mahasaya.

I was confident that the things He wrote had in them the totality of information I would use during my life; I used to get annoyed about those hinting at some *Kriya* secrets to be gained out of His school.

The question was, how could I decipher his writings without the school's help? In the written material that I had studied there was a lesson hinting to the *Kechari Mudra*, which was considered essential to the *Kundalini's* awakening, but there were no indications on how it had to be carried out.

It seemed to me that the school worked as a censorship aimed at keeping me from flying too high.

I was informed that a group of people living in an important European country, being fond of *Kriya Yoga* had tried in vain to be given some explanations on the same technique by the "authorized Ministers". For this purpose, they called an Indian master. The master came and, after

skimming through the written material, he did not acknowledge what he had just read as the *Kriya Yoga* that he had been practicing for so many years.

The written teachings provided by the school were indeed ambiguous; for example, the *Mantra* was presented in an unusual way; a pronunciation especially created for English speakers (om naw maw bhaw....) was the substitute for its actual words.

[It is clear that I respect this choice, but only as long as it is integrated by a note reporting the true and commonly adopted spelling of the *Mantra*.]

Apart from that, the absurd thing was its being always written with twelve separated syllables, as if it was not a *Mantra* but twelve different ones. The average reader would not recognize the *Mantra* at all, thus trying in vain to imagine the origin and the meaning of each of those syllables.

[Other people that I had met in that period ran into the same problem. Discussions, even on the Internet, are still going on concerning aspects of this technique.]

Being acquainted with Indians, I am quite sure that the master was familiar with what he was reading and that he was definitely able, anyway, to remove easily, with few words, every doubt. He was just pretending.

His performance was meant to give the impression that P.Y.'s teachings were totally wrong, deceitful and made-up. This is how his effort in advising them would appear essential. He aimed at appearing as the teacher who saved those people from an abysmal mistake. He advocated the necessity to start all over again and to receive from him the initiation to the *First Kriya*.

As a matter of course, he lost two thirds of the students on the spot. They, in fact, did not accept to be his formal "disciples", as required by the initiation ritual. Those who accepted his conditions were again initiated to the *First Kriya* and were given new techniques such as the *Kechari Mudra* and the *Navi Kriya*.

Incidentally, the absolute confidentiality was broken; in this way I have been able to get some precious information.

Later, the group received the *Higher Kriyas*. Many of them disappeared, as if sucked into a black hole, following the orbit of that Indian master; some others swung in and out of the school, bringing on, as a consequence, a practice characterized by a lot of dissatisfaction and changes of mind.

My personal research took a particular direction. I knew there had been some direct disciples of P.Y. hassling with the school's direction and who, later on, parted from it. I cannot deny I hoped that, for revenge, they had let in the details I needed in some essay about *Kriya Yoga* or in some book of memoirs. There were two or three names of such direct disciples. I purchased all their published material, taped lectures and all. What I found was a devastating banality; the secrets, if they had some, were well guarded.

I continued the quest on books from India dealing with similar topics, no matter if they were not directly related with *Kriya Yoga*. I hoped I might get some correct intuitions through them.

In the meantime, I came across some books written by Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples, who did not have any connection with P.Y. This happened when some friends of mine, back from a trip to India, brought them to me. These books disappointed me and made me miss the clarity of P.Y.'s writing. They were but blank, meaningless words, with an endless number of repetitions in addition to continuous changes of topic, which I considered unbearable. The practical notes, presented as essential, were but scattered notes copied from classical books on *Yoga*.

The lack of care in them made me suppose the author had not bothered about checking the original texts. He most probably took those quotations from books which were also quoting from other quoting books, continuing a chain where each author would add something to mark his personal contribution.

Things went on this way until a profound crisis uprooted every apparent certainty. An event took place which put me in a state I was not able to flee from, unless with a decisive realization and a consequent inner change of convictions. The episode occurred in relation to a delicate human relationship. The ordinary common sense would have probably been enough to find a correct pattern of action, but I was a *kriyaban* [a practitioner of *Kriya Yoga*!], that is why I tried to apply integrally the teachings of P.Y. - I had studied all his writings with the utmost sincerity and earnestness - above all those that had a reference to concrete life.

The problem of the "rules of behavior" was further explored studying the *Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali, since I took for granted that they were the basis of both classical *Yoga* and *Kriya Yoga*.

In order to decide how to behave I chose, among all the writings, those that matched my mental plans, sentences that seemed to confirm my ideas and in this way I fostered the belief that my way of acting was supported from above and that the benedictions and the strength of the *Guru* were with me. The failure came about. It was evident, but I could not accept it in a first moment. I refused to believe that I had acted wrongly; I liked to foster the thought that the other people were unable to live up to my decisions.

It was as if I were "too spiritual" to carry on a life in this world; therefore, mine was a temporary condition that I had to bear with patience for an indefinite - but certainly finite - time. One day everything would resolve in my favor.

Like an unwholesome-minded person, I had lost every contact with reality, until my illusory dream began to disintegrate, slowly but inexorably. This happened when I tried to draft a synthesis of my experiences and I began to recall the events of my spiritual path, starting from the very beginning.

I vividly remembered the first sessions of *Pranayama* and all I had then experimented. In a state of rapture created by the beauty of my past, the thorny pain from the present situation mixed with the elation for a past that had not gone away and that might possibly be retrieved through a simple act of will. The real evil dominating those years of my life became clearer and clearer.

I saw how lethal was the pernicious idea of belonging to a privileged group and of practicing «the fastest technique in the field of spiritual evolution ». This thought had penetrated my awareness, awakening deep emotions in my mind - which prevented me from exerting watchfulness and discrimination toward the common things of life - creating, thus, a big devastation.

Inner laziness and intellectual paralysis resulted.

Now it was no longer possible to avoid the realization that my practice of *Kriya* was shallow. Apart from other foolish thoughts, I accepted the distorted idea that each *Pranayama* technique produced, almost automatically, «the equivalent of a solar year of spiritual evolution» and that through a million *Kriya* breathings I would infallibly reach the Cosmic Consciousness.

Every time I sat down to practice, I tried to perform the greatest possible number of *Pranayama* breathings in order to approach with more and more

hurry and eagerness the moment in which I would complete the above-mentioned number.

In the early years, when my spiritual adventure began, I nurtured no certainties and I faced with courage the feeling of desperation hidden in the depths of myself. *Pranayama* was the tool that would tear apart my internal obscurity.

Now, even if my *Pranayama* was the authentic *Kriya Pranayama* received with all the blessings of a hypothetical *Guru* residing in the astral realms, I was not practicing it any longer with the primal intensity and with the full dignity of the soul, which can arouse only from an intimate necessity.

It was evident that I had totally lost the initial motivation, the spirit of pursuit, the joy of the discovery.

No genuine growth had happened in me; I felt I was barren, hollow.

I was practicing with an arrogant attitude of supremacy, confident in the automatism of my path. It was necessary to return to that stadium of work free from all this mental and passively accumulated junk; it was necessary to feel again the blessing of sufferings and doubts.

It was necessary to behave not as a man who has found a treasure, hidden it and sleeping satisfied upon it, but as a researcher who develops and makes his finding broader.

The hypnotic atmosphere of the "*Guru's Blessings*" had been, in my case, the cradle through which my ego was fed and strengthened. The necessity of recreating a spirit of authentic search became imperative.

PATANJALI: HOW TO BUILD A KRIYA ROUTINE

At that time I studied Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* where I found many good tips to build a rational *Kriya* routine.

Patanjali's approach to *Yoga* is well known. He was a pioneer in the art of handling rationally the mystic path, aiming to individualize a universal, physiological direction of the inner events. This 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, it is of extraordinary importance.

Patanjali pinpoints eight steps in the *Yoga* path: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*.

There are different ways of translating these Sanskrit terms. I use to interpret them as follows:

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.]

Asana: posture, or physical exercise. The Yogi's posture must be steady and pleasant.

Pranayama: breath regulation. The consequence of the breath regulation is the regulation of the Prana and, then, the natural inhibition of the breath.

Pratyahara: withdrawal of the senses. Awareness is disconnected from the external reality.

Dharana: concentration. Focusing the mind on a chosen object.

Dhyana: meditation or contemplation. The persistence of a focusing action as a steady, uninterrupted flow of awareness, which fully explores all aspects of the chosen object.

Samadhi: perfect spiritual absorption. Deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator himself.

The comparison between the *Kriya* path and Patanjali's path requires to put every book aside and to rely only on one's personal experience. It is of no use to waste time on interpretations of commentaries, each conveying a

different mystic or esoteric point of view; in such an effort the original message would be distorted and the value of Patanjali's approach drastically reduced.

What I saw at a first glance was that Patanjali's first three steps could be taken for granted without being mentioned.

The moral precepts, the what-is-correct and the what-is-not-correct or, simply, the ethical foundation of the spiritual path, is something that should rather not be taken on with strength as an absolute prerequisite to *Kriya*. To put it simply, it has been seen that people running a morally questionable life were successful in *Kriya*, coming spontaneously to the so-called "virtuous" life, while a lot of conformists failed. A *Kriya* teacher is always inclined to let a student's wrong behavior pass, pretending he does not notice it. He simply does not mind it, laying his confidence in the transforming *Kriya* effect.

On the other hand, it is obvious that if the eagerness to learn *Kriya* and to put into practice its technical instructions pushes a *kriyaban* to go to a teacher, being further proposed to swear on oath on Patanjali's moral rules [*Yama, Niyama*], the student will almost surely do as required.

[In the next chapter I will tell about my association with two *Kriya* teachers. I remember how annoyed I was when my second teacher asked to his audiences a pledge which I knew for a certainty he himself was not able to respect. Before each *Kriya* initiation he used to make his students promise that they would look at the opposite sex - except for their partner - without being physically attracted. To this purpose, he recommended men to look at women as "mothers" and, correspondingly, women to look at men as "fathers". With a sigh of ill-concealed nuisance I waited for him to get through with his delirium and went on with the remaining part of his conference, coming at last to the explanation of the techniques.]

Regarding the "stable and comfortable" meditating position, a good *Kriya* teacher allows a student to choose between the *Half-lotus, Siddhasana* or *Padmasana*; he does not even dream of wasting time on these details, since he knows that the earnest and resolute student will use his common sense to find an ideal and comfortable position, so that he can easily maintain his back straight during the *Kriya* practice.

The *Kriya*'s first meaningful action is obviously Patanjali's fourth step, *Pranayama*.

Pranayama's action on the breath and on the energy in the body creates a state of calmness and *Equilibrium*, which becomes the foundation of the following steps. Patanjali, however, is evasive while dealing with *Pratyahara*: in this state, the energy in the body turns toward the inside and there follows a state where the breath is perfectly absent.

Indeed, this event does not consist of a single but of two steps; first, some specific techniques [*Maha Mudra*, *Navi Kriya* and a large part of the *Higher Kriyas*] requiring physical movement are prescribed; then, a perfect immobility is required and the concentration is directed on the spine [on the *Chakras*] in order to increase the perception of the *Omkar* reality; it is not directed on an abstract or physical object, as it happens in Patanjali's *Dharana*.

Very peculiarly indeed, Patanjali wrote that, after the breath's disappearance, a *Yogi* should look for a physical or abstract object on which he might turn his concentration and practice in a kind of contemplative meditation in a way as to lose himself in it.

It is interesting, for those who practice *Kriya*, to realize that Patanjali's definition of *Dharana* has nothing to do with Lahiri Mahasaya's ideas and intents.

A *kriyaban* encounters the manifestation of the *Omkar* reality – the vibration sustaining the universe, the internal sound that grabs his conscience and leads it to the depths, without any danger of getting lost. His conscience is filled with such a delight that he has no reason for discarding the *Om* perception and choosing another one, which cannot but belong to the kingdom of the mind.

The distinction between *Dharana* and *Dhyana* – to turn the concentration to an object and to start exploring it through a contemplative meditation – is of little account for a *kriyaban*. Whereas it is clear that an ideal *Kriya* session should end with Patanjali's eighth step: *Samadhi*.

Summary

1...A *Kriya* routine begins with an action on the breath [*Pranayama*], which is guided, harnessed, checked and, although long and deep, essentially transformed in a movement of energy.

2.... The spine is magnetized; this creates a situation of deep calmness and tranquility, a sensation of expansion and of internal comfort. The breath and the heart slow their pace.

3... The awareness of the breath is put aside, to "transcend" it thanks to a purely mental process.

A keen perception of *Om*, in the aspect of inner sound and light, happens in perfect immobility.

The concentration on the *Chakras*, either inside or outside of the spine, given by an intuition-suggested rhythm, increasingly enriches the perception of the *Omkar* reality.

4... The constant concern in raising the level of consciousness into the highest *Chakras*, in particular into the *Kutastha*, ends by melting with the *Om*. In total immobility, when relaxation reaches a state of perfection, the energy gets into the spine; the awareness melts into the light, a light that is "as bright as a million suns".

By keeping in mind the foregoing scheme, I could mostly appreciate the *Hong So* and *Om* techniques and I could get a different idea of them. They may embody a complete experience of *Kriya*. Each of them, in its apparent simplicity, reveals to contain different stages, which possess the potential to replace the complete routine.

JAPA AND THE BREATHLESS STATE

I succeeded in overcoming my natural resistance of reading works that did not concern *Kriya Yoga* and I also read Mère's works.

The great fascination for this eminent figure started when I was introduced to the thought of Sri Aurobindo - his *Aphorisms* and his epic poem *Savitri* [Collected works of Sri Aurobindo by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust] were my favorite. After Aurobindo's death, in 1951, Mère was the one continuing his research and giving ground to his dream that the Divine, the intelligent and evolutive form at the base of any existing thing, could come to a perfect manifestation on this planet!

«In matter, the Divine becomes perfect...» Mère said. What I am sure of is that she did not behave as a traditional Guru, even though she tried to extract from every human being looking for inspiration at her feet all his hidden potential. The story of her research is related in *Mother's Agenda* [Institute for Evolutionary Research, New York.]

Her presence in my life, evoked through close and passionate readings, acted like an inner pressure calling for a meaning from each part of my life. She stressed the value of not trying to become pure in other people's

eyes, but to behave in a natural way. To her, we should accept what we are, acknowledging our dark side and the fact that we are basically similar to «those living in obscurity»! I do not remember where I found her statement that «the desire for purity is the greatest obstacle for one's spiritual path». «Do not try to be virtuous - She added - find out to what extent you are united with what is anti-divine.»!

I really cannot describe the explosion of joy and the feeling of freedom I felt reading such revolutionary words! When I went out for a walk, if I met somebody and stopped to listen to him, no matter what he said, a sudden joy would explode in my chest and rise to my eyes 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 esthetic rapture; only this could keep back the joy clutching my being, only this could hide it.

With a desperate need of peace and tranquility, I chose to stick to the simplest routine of *Kriya* and to live in a more introverted way.

I stubbornly grabbed the well-known instruction to maintain resolutely, during the day, a smooth attitude toward both pleasant and unpleasant events, while sincerely feeling like a detached "witness". Sustained by the enthusiasm for this new "trick", described in such an alluring way in almost all the books dealing with oriental meditative practices, I succeeded in attaining an almost ideal state but, after some days, I felt under stress as if all was a pretence, an illusion.

It was at this time that I came across a book about the life and experiences of Swami Ramdas, the Indian saint who moved far and wide all over India unceasingly repeating the *Mantra Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*.

This was indeed an important event; his photo - the almost childish simplicity of his smile - kindled my intuition and led me to try the same practice; from this decision something came that still remains in my heart as a peak experience.

I started to practice it aloud during some walks, and then I tried to continue it mentally during my daily chores.

The sound of the *Mantra*, which I had already listened to in a spiritual song recording, gave me the idea of a strong and, at the same, time sweet vibration; the use of a 108-grain rosary made the practice very pleasant.

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

As I have written, the choice of my *Mantra* was born from an undoubtable predilection - I shivered with joy at the vibration it created in my awareness. That is why I loved to caress this vibration, prolong it on my lips, make it vibrate in my chest and invest it with my heart's aspiration. I put a lot of force into that practice; my attitude was never that of a supplicating and sobbing devotee, but that of a man one step away from his goal.

When summer came, I practiced my *Japa* every day in the morning and *Kriya* at noon in the open countryside.

One day, after *Pranayama*, while mentally climbing up and down the *Chakras*, I distinctly perceived a fresh energy sustaining my body from inside. I entered a perfect immobility and, at a certain moment, I discovered to be completely without breath. This condition lasted various minutes, without any feeling of uneasiness. There was neither the least quiver of surprise, or the thought: «Finally I have it».

In the following days, before starting with *Pranayama* I looked at the surrounding panorama wondering if I would experience the breathless state again; after 40-50 minutes I had already completed the active part – the last breaths of *Pranayama* – and then, after no more than two or three minutes, while I was moving up and down along the spine, the miracle happened.

It reminded me what Sri Aurobindo wrote about the moment he stepped on the Indian soil, after his long period of studies in England. With a poetical spirit, He told how a vast calm descended, surrounded and remained with him.

Since I verified the perfect association between the practice of *Japa* during the day and the obtainment of this state, I was astonished that one of the simplest techniques in the world, such as *Japa* is, had brought such a valuable result. It was a strange event indeed and it contained a fundamental lesson for me.

Here are my considerations about the subject.

Being no hermits, it is not possible for us to reach the ideal conditions of relaxation in barely an hour. More time is needed to calm one's body until

the state of breathlessness is reached. There are some thoughts which we can visualize, identify and block, but a diffuse persistent background noise nullifies all our efforts.

So, no matter if the *Kriya* process is carried out with maximum care; this background noise will become an unsurmountable obstacle. The only possible way to annul it is not through technical tricks, but through *Japa*; only that, performed during the daily activities, is a successful tool.

There must be definitely a reason why *Japa* ["Continuous Prayer", "Inner Prayer", "Heart Prayer", *Dhikr*] was the basic technique used by a lot of mystics. Even though the oriental traditions recommend to perform *Japa* mentally, I am confident that it should be done aloud - at least during an initial set of a hundred repetitions.

Experience and common sense contradict the belief that a *Mantra* works only if it is given by a *Guru*; it is obvious that an expert helping us choose a *Mantra* and using all his persuasion to win our consent to use it relentlessly, represents the most precious service we can ever take advantage of!

I know that some kriyabans do not use *Japa* during the daytime; they state that Lahiri Mahasaya did not recommend that practice. We can reply that almost all his disciples, Hindus and Muslims, used that practice since it was, at that time and in that place, very ordinary.

I'm convinced that *Japa* can make "miracles", even where our will fails!

In the course of three months I lived in this celestial dimension, perfectly at ease, still, without any other desire of fulfillment. Almost every day I thought: «Do not forget a single instant of this experience; take down every detail of it, have it again, every day of your life, because this is the most real experience which has been experienced ever»! In a blue-colored profundity, it contained the skies of my childhood. It seemed impossible to lose it.

But I lost it. The world of the "traveling *Gurus*" was getting closer to my life, and with it an unbelievable confusion too.

CHAPTER V THE OMKAR DIMENSION OF KRIYA YOGA

During a tour abroad I found a text written by an Indian teacher of *Kriya Yoga*, extolling his method as the original Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Pranayama*, whereas P.Y.'s was mentioned as a slightly modified form of *Kriya*.

I was excited when I read that *Pranayama* would not be correct if the practitioner - without closing his ears - had not felt the *Om* sound.

The statement was worthy to be taken into consideration; it was surely relative to a very deep practice of *Pranayama*.

Reading that book, I had the sensation that its author knew the whole processes of *Kriya Yoga* far better than many other teachers.

Among other theoretic parts, the author said that the final part of the enlightening process would take place in a hollow cavity of the brain, called "the cave of *Brahma*". In its front part there is the pituitary gland (hypophysis), behind it we have the pineal gland. [According to him, these two glands were the seats of the sixth and of the seventh *Chakra* respectively.]

In such cavity, enlightenment can take place not simply metaphorically but in the very literal meaning of this word. An emission of light, similar to a voltaic arc, would happen between the two "poles" and shed light in that area. This process was described as a "mystic union". The whole explanation was accompanied by a helping sketch, which had the psychological effect to eliminate all uncertainties on the validity and universality of this experience.

I had no idea of when and where I could have the opportunity to encounter this teacher, but I was excited like a child receiving the most beautiful of all gifts. I could almost touch the marvelous possibility of deepening my *Pranayama*, clarifying - likely - my doubts regarding routines, *Kechari Mudra* and *Higher Kriyas* too.

In the following months, my fixed idea was to guess how he taught the deepening of the *Pranayama* technique. Sometimes an annoying doubt appeared: once this new teaching had been received, how could I understand whether it was really original or an invention? My reservation stemmed from my conditioning according to which any *Kriya* information, obtained outside my school, could be an invention of those who pursued

their personal interests, like earning money or exerting power over other people.

However, the listening to the *Om* sound with opened ears [unlike in the *Om* technique] could surely be considered the proof of an optimal deepening of *Pranayama*.

I convinced myself that the key technical addition consisted in mentally chanting *Om* in the *Chakras*, while going up and down in the spine and, at the same time, in exerting all the possible attention on the internal sounds.

Pranayama with mental *Japa* was familiar to me, but I had never tried to combine it with the inner listening. The technique of listening to the internal sounds, learned inside the school, had given me the deepest satisfaction. Thanks to that unparalleled experience, I anticipated a striking success in this new undertaking.

I ignored I was approaching indeed not Lahiri Mahasaya's basic *Pranayama* but His *Omkar Pranayama*.

I don't remember how much of these breaths I used to practice each day: surely, I never went over the 48-60 units. After them, I would enjoy observing the breath in the *Chakras*, never relaxing my attention on the internal sounds.

In the book I had found a deep recommendation: if we wanted to make a remarkable spiritual progress, we should engage ourselves in being aware of 1728 breaths a day, placing our attention on each *Chakra* with each different breath. I restricted my practice to a quarter of that number; anyway the time devoted to it was considerable.

The inner sound appeared after just four days of painstaking practice. It was winter. For about three weeks I have been able to stay away from reality. I chose to spend every morning wrapped in the warmth of my home, practicing as much as possible. I entered a season of life in which I experienced a total contentment and ease, as if my *Kriya* path had come to its fulfillment.

Looking back to this experience, it has been for me a sort of vacation, away from life and all its problems and anxieties.

By day, everything seemed surrounded by a padded coat reducing all dissonances. Everything was like transfigured; I was like living in a perfect reality and the whole world was smiling ecstatically at me; every pain took flight, off my sight.

I had the chance to spend some days in a beautiful location equipped for winter sport. Here I could wander the snow-white countryside aimlessly. In the afternoon, while I was lazily getting about, the sun set its way down, painting the landscape with breathtaking colors; the little village, sunk in the snow, started to be all lights. My memory will always hold it as the splendid symbol of my contact with the *Omkar* experience.

The oddness was that I did not know the teacher yet; I had just read his book, but the intensity of my practice was extreme! The winter vacations ended and I got back to my job.

During my spare time, I would think about the precious jewel I had found, visualizing the possibility of a future deepening; such a commitment would be applied to my *Higher Kriyas* too.

One day, still at work, I was in a room from which I could glimpse, through a pane, the far-off mountains and contemplate the purely celestial sky above them. I was in ecstasy! That distant sky was the mirror of my future years, wholly dedicated to my *Kriya Yoga*.

For the first time, the project to retire and to live with a minimal income, maintaining this state for the rest of my days, came upon me.

MY FIRST TEACHER OF KRIYA

Being about to undergo surgery in the United States, that Indian teacher was going to make a stop in Europe; I worked very hard to take part in one of his seminars.

His classes were for me of great emotional impact; he had a majestic and noble aspect, he was "handsomely" wrapped in his ochre clothes, his oldness, his long hair and beard marked the features of the typical sage. I took glimpses of him while he spoke, hidden by the front rows; I heard him talk of Lahiri Mahasaya's legacy according to his personal experience. I found no objection to his words, even if sometimes they fell into a devotional tone. The things he said were marvelous, absolutely new for me.

To him, *Kriya Yoga* was not merely a set of separated techniques but a unique progressive process of tuning with the *Omkar* reality; like the thread uniting all the pearls, *Omkar* goes through all the different phases of *Kriya*.

It had to be perceived not only in the aspect of sound and light but also in the aspect of a "sensation of movement" (some other time he spoke about a feeling of pressure or heaviness).

All the *Kriya Yoga* techniques should be practiced to get to that perception; the *Maha Mudra*, for instance, had to be preceded by a bend forward of the body.

The object of his explanations was not on what he called "long-breath *Pranayama*", but on the following part, where the breath is subtle and faint and it sometimes seems about to stop. He applied an enormous emphasis to this practice.

He was leading me into a wondrous dimension, which I had only caught a glimpse of. He tried his best - "touching" the students and making their bodies vibrate - to make us feel its flavor.

During a separate session he taught us how to introduce the twelve-syllable *Mantra (Om Namo Bhagabate Vasudevaya)* into *Pranayama*, "touching the inner part" of each *Chakra* with each syllable.

[What I learned from him, will be shared in the next chapters.]

The soil my teacher was cultivating began to get sterile, since he chose to leave out some of the techniques Lahiri Mahasaya had passed on - not only those belonging to the *Higher Kriyas*, but also to the *First Kriya* - making his teachings incomplete.

Aware that the original *Kriya* spirit had been lost in other schools, he wanted us to approach the real meaning of it.

He had tried all Lahiri Mahasaya's techniques, concluding that the majority of them were not essential; some of them were rather too delicate and difficult to be learned. Attempts to understand them would, then, result in a useless distraction for the students and a waste of time for him as a teacher. He expressed himself adamantly: the request, by some people, to receive the *Higher Kriyas* implied a lack of engagement in the basic techniques.

All what he said made definitely sense, but it also contributed to his isolation. He did not take into consideration how the human mind really works, through insatiable curiosity and the total rejection of any veto.

I saw the sense of his solitude when, one day, on a *Kriya* reviewing lesson, he told his public that the real *Pranayama* could only take place in total

absence of breath; the one, marked by long breaths, could only be good for «kindergarten children».

He closed his nostrils with his fingers and kept that position for some time; he was simply illustrating a concept without keeping himself from breathing. In spite of that the students were staring at him in loss; he must have been bizarre and peculiar to them.

I could not help thinking how many disappointments must have convinced him to make such a peculiar demonstration. Perhaps he had met people who, after years of long-breath *Pranayama*, did not gain any benefit. Truly, he wanted to share with us the discovery of a life; yet, the beginners could only sense too big a distance to be bridged between them and the master.

Those who already had a good mastering of *Kriya* had the final confirmation that the teacher would never reveal the secret procedures he was an expert of. It seemed to them that all what he had taught was a simple introduction to *Kriya*, but it had not provided the key to the experiential acme. So, literally devoured by the thirst for the complete teachings, they could not concentrate peacefully on what they had already received.

Some might contend that a lot of people obeyed him, and this is actually true; but that kind of people would never do something like organizing a seminar for their teacher. Frankly speaking, their faithfulness was not enough to avoid the worst end. The honest aim of his effort, all the marvelous subtleties that he had applied to *Kriya*, making this practice livelier and by far more beautiful for a lot of practitioners, was not enough to prevent the shipwreck of his whole mission.

The book he had written had been a smart strategic action which made him popular in the west, saving for him a place of crucial importance in the realm of *Kriya*.

Moreover, his Indian-sage figure impressed the people. He really had all the necessary tools to attract the western world. Hundreds of scholars were enthusiastic about him, they were ready to back his mission and treat him like a divinity, being willing to show the same respect to a possible successor.

Yet, after an overwhelming initial enthusiasm, his unhappy choice triggered an inexorable mechanism which pushed away the people who were most indispensable to him. Disappointed by their defection, the more

he stubbornly focused on the essence of *Kriya Yoga*, the less he was able to catch the attention of new people.

If someone had tried to get this absurdity across to him, he would have found himself facing a wall that would never break.

Using the same flyers and changing only the Master's name, some people, who formerly organized his seminars, called another teacher who would substitute him.

He was to become my second teacher. Although his spiritual achievements were almost inexistent, some *kriyabans* who had already met him in India said he was more willing to explain *Kriya* in its complete form.

MY SECOND TEACHER

The magical realm of *Omkar*, which I had partially experienced since I was a young student and which I had been introduced to by the passion of my former teacher, could be neither left aside nor forgotten.

I did not even dream about changing my spiritual path's foundations; this is why I approached my new teacher with the idea of rejecting him if, somehow, he appeared to be trying to guide me away from such a reality.

I met him in Italy, in a *Yoga* center where he had been invited by some disciples; from an informal speech, followed by a question-and-answer section, I came to know that he knew my former teacher and was aware of his choice not to teach the whole body of the *Kriya* techniques. He got clearly across to us that the reason of his trip west was to re-establish the original teachings into a complete form. This was enough to overcome my initial wariness and stir my enthusiasm.

During the following initiation seminar, I indulgently observed some lacks in his behavior which, instead, shocked the other followers. He revealed a real temper. He exploded whenever he was addressed an innocent and legitimate question; he would always sense a hidden purpose or a veiled opposition in the student's words, instead of an excess of curiosity or a care for details. To him, they were challenging his authority.

His explanation of the techniques was reasonably clear but in part unusually synthetic. For instance, his instructions on *Pranayama*, which were formally correct, could be understood only by those who had already been practicing *Kriya Yoga* for a long time.

He would dedicate very little time to this technique, so that one day I decided to time him: the explanation was offered in no more than two minutes!

He carried on that way for years, in spite of his close collaborators' polite complaints. He demonstrated *Pranayama* by means of an excessively loud vibratory sound, made through his epiglottis. He knew that this sound was not correct, but he continued using it to be heard by the last rows of students too, sparing himself the annoyance of getting up and walking among them, as *Kriya* teachers usually do. In any case, he would not bother to say that the sound had to be smooth rather than vibrating. I know that many of the students, believing it was the "secret" that this teacher had brought from India, tried to produce the same sound for months.

Some years later when he asked me to teach *Kriya Yoga* - since he was away - to those people who were interested in it, I rejoiced at this occasion because I could finally explain everything in a complete and exhaustive way. I wanted my students to forget the shame of being refused and of seeing a legitimate question unconsidered.

I had the impression that everything was going on smoothly; all of a sudden the situation started to get complicated. This happened when I wrote a letter to him, some months before his return, to advise him to check the students' comprehension, after the initiation classes, through a guided group practice.

Incredibly, as a reply, he crossed me out of his list of disciples, communicating his official decision to one of his close partners. Probably, my experience with that teacher would have ended that way - and it would have been better - if I had been informed about what was happening. Unaware of the situation, when I welcomed him back to Europe at his arrival, he hugged me as if nothing had happened. He probably interpreted my presence there as an attitude of repentance.

Later on, I got appalled when I realized everything. It was too late to react though. For the benefit of the group's peace, I decided to go on without reacting but I deliberately began to control myself, without making any reasonable suggestion.

In order to be able to tell the definitive crack of our relations, it is necessary to dwell for a while on Lahiri Mahasaya's *Higher Kriyas*. There

is confusion on this topic since there are a lot of schools - each of them created by one of Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples - teaching the techniques in different ways, with omissions of this or that.

This teacher belonged to a particular school which had eliminated all the *Kriyas* presenting the delicate problem of holding one's breath. This is a very important detail in Lahiri Mahasaya's *Thokar* technique.

It is not actually easy to explain how these techniques work; a practitioner has to raise the energy to the lungs' higher level and breathe in a particular way, his breath being so subtle as to become imperceptible.

The teaching methodology becomes problematic when a teacher decides to initiate a whole public instead of a small number of followers. This is the reason that my new teacher used to leave out a whole sequence of techniques which were connected to this delicate point.

I knew them all - I had learned them from other sources - and I kept them away for my future.

A further problem was that the techniques he taught us were not well-explained at all. I tried to be tolerating when it came to some secondary details, but I could scarcely stand that the same technique changed from one year to another. One of them included some precise head movements - it was not Lahiri Mahasaya's *Thokar* on the heart, but a different one. Actually, the last year he came to our group he changed the basic procedure of the movements. When some of the students asked him for a reason for the changes, he pretended not to understand, arguing, later on, that he had not changed anything and that, in the past seminars, a problem of translation might have occurred.

It was I who did that translation. I did not say anything since his lie was too evident: my friends remembered very well the head movements they had formerly seen with their own eyes.

Confronted with other changes, I had the impression that I was cooperating with an archaeologist who was deliberately altering some findings in order to justify them to the public in the theoretic framework he was accustomed to.

Absorbed in these preoccupations, I did not realize that I had almost completely lost contact with the *Omkar* reality. My subconscious mind was beginning to rebel. I can vividly remember a dream in which I was swimming in manure. While the diffusion of *Kriya* touched a lot of people in a superficial manner, attracted by a shallow publicity, behind my mask

of fake delight hid a dry agony. There were moments in which, thinking of my meek beginning in the practice of *Yoga*, my heart felt an indefinite nostalgia for that period, which was ready to rise again and blossom to the full, now that I knew every part of *Kriya Yoga*.

As an answer to some friends abroad, I went to their group to teach them *Kriya Yoga* - on behalf of my teacher. In that group I met a very serious student who asked me a lot of questions. He proved to know from *Kriya Yoga* and we discussed the fact that my teacher had never taught a whole part of the *Higher Kriyas*.

He could understand my embarrassment and he was surprised that I had never talked freely about it to my teacher, since he had chosen me as a *Kriya* teacher! It was absurd for me not to open my heart with him; being aware of his temper, I knew that he would not accept this and that the whole situation might collapse. Yet my duty was to face his reaction.

I knew very well that everybody in my group would suffer if our relationship had come to a final break; just a few friends, in fact, would be able to comprehend the reason for my action.

They felt comfortable with him, and his annual visit was a powerful stimulus; we got ourselves up for his visit with an intense practice of *Kriya Yoga*, as if we had to be tested. Everybody appreciated his philosophy, and I shared this appreciation too.

This was to all of us the best remedy against New Age deformations; it was a solid understanding that *Kriya Yoga* is not meant as an increase of one's mind and ego toward a hypothetically superior mind, but a trip beyond the mind through an uncontaminated territory.

I wrote a letter to him where I mentioned the problems in question, which we would discuss at his arrival. A harsh reply came just a few days later.

He wrote that my excessive attachment to the techniques would never let me out of the fences of my mind; I was like S. Thomas, too desirous to touch with my hand every detail of *Kriya*, whereas I should have tried to spend my time a little better, practicing the techniques I already had. I admit he was right. Lahiri Mahasaya himself used to say that everything could be obtained through the *First Kriya*. Nonetheless, I thought that an informal talk about this issue would not do harm to anybody. I replied to my teacher's letter insisting with my request.

Some weeks later I realized that my name and that of my group had been taken off from his Internet site; my letter brought about a definitive split.

My friends reacted badly to this news. Like a domino effect, some coordinators belonging to other groups in Europe, who had been hardly tolerating his bad manners, took advantage of that episode to break any contact with him. They felt the time was ripe to enjoy this liberation.

I had not even a faint idea of what our group was to become without a teacher joining us in the near future. Without him, in fact, it would remain close, sterile, doomed to die away because no newcomers would bring their enthusiasm in anymore. There would be no new students to be initiated to *Kriya Yoga*.

After some months the wheel of good fortune seemed to be turning again; a new teacher would probably come to the group in one or two years. I accepted the proposal to invite him, as he was a well-regarded person.

Some days later, contacted by the teacher's secretary, she handled the financial side of the trip with such brutality and harshness that I decided to decline the offer. I was really sick and tired of the whole situation; I had enough of behaving like a compliant disciple who begs for crumbs of the "original *Kriya*".

REACHING THE BOTTOM

From then on, I went through a very specific period of my life because I finally decided to move, to travel in various parts of the world and know more groups of people, practicing Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya Yoga*; my hope was to meet a real expert of *Kriya*. I was very disappointed from my previous experiences, but I was diving headlong and defenseless into the dreary territory of the *New-Age-polluted Kriya Yoga*. For one person it is like a no-way-out prison, for another one it is the prelude to bitter disappointments and finally abandoning the spiritual pursuit in general.

Haunting seminars on *Kriya Yoga*, I met a lot of people with just as heterogeneous behaviors, whose interests ranged from esoteric philosophies to "New Age" tendencies, in which they floated in loss.

I spent with them one of the strangest and disordered periods of my life. I particularly remember these times of my life whenever I listen to the tape recordings of some devotional chants I bought on those occasions. I was getting used to the "initiating" rituals. Bringing flowers was recommended, some teachers asked for one flower, some others three or six; some fruit was required too - someone might also expect a coconut, forcing the

students to desperately look for it store after store; at last, a donation was required, sometimes a free donation, sometimes a compulsory minimum amount of money was set.

After so many rituals, the explanations were always quick and shallow; a destructive criticism was often raised against information coming from other sources.

I would finish all those initiations repeating to myself how grateful I was, making up my mind about abandoning all other practices and to go down the line for the one I had just received.

My heart would surely have advised me to listen to it, if only I had stopped to think for a moment; it would have told me that I was putting myself on, that the new initiation had only added something insignificant to what I already knew, that the teacher's strict requests would soon become a "cage" from which I would sooner or later break loose.

Those who organized the meetings always gave the impression of being trustworthy scholars and it always guaranteed that no nonsense would ever slip out of their mouths. I was surprised when one of them, beyond simple exhibitionism, quoted by heart some lines from a work by P.Y.; the same, sibylline lines which had been, once, the source of so many uncertainties. He read and read through those texts several times trying to make them out; he really strained upon those texts. I felt that those researchers were my real family; I learned to listen to them respectfully and silently whenever they would correct some of my fancy interpretations on *Kriya Yoga*. They provided good fuel for my brain. Among us there was the acquiescence that our teachers were mostly mediocre persons with visible humane lacks; this might have been tolerable in common people, but strongly contrasting with the personality expected of people who called themselves "spiritual guides". We were not able to find at least one of them who would prove to possess that mastery of *Kriya* which was crucial in such a delicate pedagogic work they were confident to do. Some trifling episodes confirmed our first impression of instability, improvisation and, in one case, even of mental instability. They knew little about *Kriya Yoga* and they taught it in an even more superficial way. In spite of that, those little bits of notions were enough to satisfy us. We were honest researchers hypnotized by the mythical *Guru-disciple* relationship, whose influence we had received from P.Y.'s school. It is strange to realize how the

organization instilled in us the only thing that kept us stoutly devoted to people we actually depreciated.

I also met those I call "New Age" people: how to describe them? In my first school of *Kriya*, I met people whose enthusiasm toward *Kriya Yoga* was very moderate, and it seemed they practiced the few techniques they knew as if making a sacrifice to tame a fickle mind and to expiate the wrong they had done: existing.

"New Age" people on the other hand were yet too passionate about a particular form of *Yoga* or oriental meditative practice, fostering too much faith in its alleged cathartic problem-solving potential.

Bound to a very oriental lifestyle, they particularly loved one characterized by specific sensations that they would cultivate with care and, above all, innocent frenzies. I learned to relate myself to each of them - for example to those who would host me whenever the seminar was held in a distant city - the way an explorer deals with unknown animals, getting up for any eccentric revelation... alleged thaumaturgic powers, prophecies of imminent catastrophes and possibly tips on how to escape them. Some of them - no meanness intended here - seemed to be mentally unstable, sometimes had emotional difficulties. At times, without realizing the way they felt, I would react to their oddness ironically; it was something I just could not help, it came out so spontaneously.

At times, I even thought I might have embittered them; in spite of that, they were always generous toward me and respectful of my personality. Never at all did they try to force something into my mind, sharing with passion everything they had learned, no matter if what they learned cost them a great deal of time, effort and money. Our relationship was based on real affection and it never experienced disagreement, bitterness or formality.

Quite another affair was to meet another variety of seekers: those who stocked up on techniques as for a famine. They affirmed boldly their loyalty to their *Guru* but were on the alert about every new rumour on technical details appearing in books or in websites. A state of despair brought them to take part in a lot of initiation seminars, where a begging devotional attitude and the solemn pledge of secretiveness was the password to be accepted. As soon as the meeting was over, they shared, by cell-phone, the coveted news with other students who, in change, would take part in other initiations and would reciprocate the favour.

Now and then, those who had come back from India, showed on their face the excitement for having seen such an extraordinary land. At the same time, their disappointment for all the things they had not been able to learn started to show out.

Some friends happened to meet a boaster assuring them to know *Kriya Yoga* and to be able to initiate them. This could only happen as long as they had kept it a total secret without establishing any contact with other teachers. In this manner, the boaster made sure that they would not realize it was not *Kriya Yoga* what they were being taught.

I could only realize this when, overcoming some people's inner opposition, I had this technique explained to me as well; mostly, it was nothing more than the mere repetition of a *Mantra*! What made me feel sorry about it was not so much the great advantage gained by those braggers (which for them meant a real fortune at my friends' expense) as their missing the chance to learn *Kriya Yoga* from safer sources.

Something different happened to a friend of mine who met a descendant of Lahiri Mahasaya. This was one of the master's nephews, a man with a great academic background and of a deep knowledge of *Kriya Yoga*, but my friend was not able to learn anything from him.

I was taken aback when my friend told me "something bizarre". He told me that in Benares, and probably in the whole rest of India, *Kriya Yoga* was not practiced any longer. Even the disciples of Lahiri Mahasaya did not know it.

I kept enough control not to interrupt him, then I imagined what had happened; my friend most probably led the discussion toward very small talks. He actually asked him some information on Indian habits, an *Ashram's* address and, only at the end of the interview – he must have remembered he was in Lahiri Mahasaya's house – he asked if any of the disciples of Lahiri were still practicing *Kriya*.

His demeanour must have lacked the proper respect, because the master's answer resulted in a sarcastically sour negative; in other words: «Definitely not, it is not practiced any longer in here. I dare say it is not in the whole Indian peninsula. Rather, you surely are the only one practicing it!».

My friend's eyes were looking at me surprisingly. I am still not sure whether he was hoping to convince me or was just absorbed in bitter frustration. I did not pry into it. I am not sure – I do not think so anyway – that he realized how foolish he had been with that master.

An answer came for him one month later; he came to know that a man from his same town had recently been initiated to *Kriya Yoga* from the very person he had met in Benares. He was so irritated by that news that he planned to get back to India to raise a protest to that man.

[Unfortunately, this is something he did not have the chance to do; a serious illness got hold of his life. In spite of our huge character difference, I will always be grateful to this friend for all the things that he shared with me concerning his spiritual path.]

To conclude this picture, one episode is worth being quoted.

Another friend of mine remained for some days at an *Ashram*, in the hope he might receive *Kriya Yoga*. The monk running the *Ashram* was away, and my friend received the initiation to *Kriya Yoga* from one of his disciples. In the end, he was given some written material summarizing its techniques.

At the end of his trip, visibly content, he showed me the written material; the techniques did not differ that much from those I already knew, but there were many more details.

Nothing there was, though, that could do away with all my doubts; not a single hint to the *Kechari Mudra*, nothing on the *Thokar* either. On the contrary, I can remember a very complicated technique based on the visualization of the *Chakras* like they are described in Tantric texts.

Each technique was preceded by a theoretic introduction with quotations from ancient books and an illustration which eliminated any possible doubt. To conclude, a precise gradual routine was given. Of course, there was a note guaranteeing that all the mentioned techniques constituted *Kriya Yoga* taught by *Babaji*, Lahiri Mahasaya's mythical *Guru*.

Since that material was very interesting, I would have liked to yield to the illusion that my quest had finally ended, since those notes contained what I was asking for. I simply had to convince myself that *Babaji* had but taken the classical *Yoga* and mixed it with Tantrism to obtain His *Kriya Yoga*.

Ci voleva inoltre l'audacia di pensare che il *Thokar* potesse essere visto come una banale variante dello *Jalandhara Bandha*!

Moreover, the *Thokar* might have been seen as a variation of the *Jalandhara Bandha*!

If the instructions to *Kechari Mudra* were not there, never mind, it probably just meant that it was not 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, in which the author of those notes said he had found those techniques in some tantric texts which he had translated; he, then, made an accurate selection of them to form a coherent system which constituted his system of *Kriya*. How was it possible, then, to have a note saying that those teachings came directly from *Babaji*?

Simple. As well as with the majority of Indian masters, their disciples would write the books; these people had the beautiful idea to make it more interesting by talking of a hypothetical derivation from the mythical *Babaji*.

The teacher, then, reflecting a classic Indian habit, never checked that material – he was taken aback later on, coming to know about those "supplementary notes". He tried, anyway, to defend his disciples' work stating that after all ... *Babaji's Kriya Yoga* had Tantric origins too.

During that time I studied a history of the western esoteric thought. The reading was tiresome but I found the spirit of my youth in it. Instead of feeling horror at the deformations provoked by the human mind in its occasionally tragic weakness, I understood very well the inquisitiveness of the people involved; I fancied their joy and their exaltation when a new esoteric book, long after being announced to the market, finally came into their hands.

While acquiring familiarity with the main initiating movements, I saw what an enormous impact upon the seekers a book could have, what power, if it gave the impression of containing the key of the esoteric and occult mysteries!

My sympathetic, emotive approach acted as a purgative and kept me from wasting time on new esoterical searches: I felt perfectly satisfied by now, as if this world, my old dear world, was forever effaced from this earth and confined to the dimension of a fable.

Today, if I meet a researcher absorbed in such matters, I feel very near to him and react much better than in the presence of a man lost in pure religious deliriums.

The vice of esotericism can be maniacal too, this is true, but curable, while there is no medicine for the religious manias!

THE MYSTIC DIMENSION OF KRIYA

Of great inspiration was the study of a biography of Kabir [1398 Benares – 1448/1494 Maghar].

Illiterate weaver, Muslim of origin, he was a great mystic, open to the vedantic and yogic influence, an extraordinary singer of the Divine, conceived beyond name and form.

The poems and sentences ascribed to him are expressed in a particularly effective language that remains permanently emblazoned in the reader's memory.

In the last century, Rabindranath Tagore, the great mystic poet of Calcutta, rediscovered the reliability of his teachings, the power of his poetry and made a beautiful translation of his songs into English (New York, The Macmillan Company).

Kabir had as a teacher a Brahmin [Ramananda] and was therefore instructed to conceive Islam and Hinduism as two roads converging toward a unique goal: he was always convinced of the possibility to overcome the barriers that separate these two great religions.

He did not seem to appreciate the holy writings, the religious rituals and dogmas.

That God has to be recognized inside of one's own soul - like a fire fed by continuous care, burning all the resistances, dogmas and ignorance down - this beautifully appears in Kabir's saying: «One day my mind flew as a bird in the sky, and it entered the heavens. When I arrived, I saw that there was no God, since He resided in the Saints!»

Hinduism gave Kabir the concept of reincarnation and the law of *Karma*; Islam gave him the absolute monotheism - the strength to fight all the forms of idolatry and the caste system.

I found the full meaning of the yogic practice in him; he says that there is a garden full of flowers in our body, the *Chakras*, and an endless beauty can be contemplated if the awareness is established into the "thousand-petal Lotus".

Regarding his concept of *Shabda*, which can be translated as "Word" [the word of the Master], we can relate this to the *Omkar* teaching - the *Om* vibration.

According to him this *Shabda-Om* dispels all doubts and difficulties, but it is vital to keep it constantly in our consciousness as a living presence. He taught not to renounce to life and become a hermit, not to cultivate any extreme approach to the spiritual discipline, because it weakens the body and increases pride. He keenly planned to die in Maghar, near Benares - with a last sneer, since who died there, according to the current beliefs, would surely be reborn in the features of a donkey!

I think that studying Kabir's thought may help more than other subjects of research, to understand Lahiri Mahasaya's personality; thus, the core of *Kriya* may be reached as fast as an arrow. In Kabir's sobriety and simplicity we can perceive, as a reflex, the full radiance of Lahiri Mahasaya's light, nowadays veiled by the too-complicated literature related to him.

Part of Lahiri Mahasaya's writings - letters and diaries - reminds us of Kabir, even though another part diverges in a dramatic way.

Lahiri Mahasaya commented verbally some sacred texts. His disciple P. Bhattacharya later printed these interpretations. These books were little known for a long time, as they were written in Bengali. They were later translated into English.

Many people studied that material with enthusiasm, hoping to find some information useful to the understanding of *Kriya*; yet, they were disappointed.

By examining them we remain bewildered since we are not able to extract anything useful; we dare not say they are adulterated but we recognize that their value - from an exegetic point of view - is almost null.

Two hypotheses come out quite spontaneously; the first is that people who compiled such books mixed their philosophy with that of Lahiri Mahasaya; the second is that His thought just started from those sacred texts and then developed on its own, abandoning completely the starting point so that, these notes could not be considered a commentary at all.

I came upon an important book: *Puran Purush* (Yogiraj Publication. Calcutta) based on Lahiri Mahasaya's diaries. It came out in Bengali, thanks to one of Lahiri Mahasaya's nephews, Satya Charan Lahiri (1902-

1978), who had material access to those diaries. Helped by one of his disciples, a writer, he decided to make a selection of the main thoughts which might have been useful to those who practiced *Kriya*.

Even though this book did not seem to respect a logical order in the topics and contained an endless mixture of repetitions and rhetorical sentences, it was a source of great inspiration. I was lucky to find in this book Lahiri Mahasaya's thoughts expressed in a very solid form.

During the summer I used to bring it along with me to the countryside; many times, after reading a part of it, I would raise my eyes to the distant mountaintops and repeat inside of me «I finally have it... » as in a long-lasting state of trance. 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; his chin seemed to maintain the *Kechari Mudra* position. During those days, his figure, with that blissful smile, was a sun in my heart; he was the symbol of the level of perfection, knowledge and love that I was trying to grasp. The characteristic trait of the book was the great importance given to *Pranayama* first, and to *Thokar* secondly.

It strikes his skill in synthesizing concepts whenever he affirms that the whole course of *Kriya* is a great adventure beginning with the *dynamic Prana* and ending with the *static Prana*; I feel a thrill of delight when I read some of the sentences carrying an unimaginable light; «*Kutastha* is God, he is the supreme *Brahma*» or «A *yogi* who has cut the three knots becomes *Trivangamurari* himself. He becomes *Krishna*».

Kabir's essentiality comes to my mind, together with the idea of overlapping the teachings of them both, getting, thereby, a miracle of simplicity.

Lahiri Mahasaya's and Kabir's thoughts are of a monotheistic religion where the *Omkar* reality has substituted the "single God".

All the various names given to Divinity, also used by Lahiri Mahasaya in his diaries, disappear; they become entirely useless words, since it becomes clear that the ultimate reality is *Omkar*!

Now, I realize that a lot of people will turn up their nose at hearing the word "religion". Many people start the *Kriya* path from a wrong attitude, that pseudo-scientific attitude according to which, by performing certain techniques, a person automatically obtains certain results. I know that,

unfortunately, many teachers have trumpeted this incomplete and diverting truth, while some attract people to *Kriya* by promising results that gratify the ego. These teachers would be more honest if they only stressed the mystic nature of *Kriya*!

It is now to any researcher to free himself from this whole heritage, because if he thinks that Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* is a path of "psychological growth", seeking results in the psychological field only, then, sooner or later, his original mainspring will exhaust.

Kriya cannot become a substitute for psychotherapy, and even if it creates an inimitable internal cleaning, it will not clear up the problems which are to be solved through wise behavior in the practical matters of life.

Moreover, we, as human beings, the most rational species of the world, need a path that has a "heart."

In *Kriya Yoga*, we should conceive of our destination as *Omkar* - Love, Comfort and Beauty itself.

Of course, we should face the practice of *Kriya* without expecting to gain back something from it; rather, we should relax by recreating the memory and the atmosphere of the most beautiful, esthetical, sentimental and highest experiences we have ever had in our life. Possessing the intelligence to do this, we could pick into arid ground and find a fresh source of power: the spiritual instinct's driving power, the strongest power man has.

In this way, we can enter a passive but vigilant state, where the "door" begins to open up, letting us into the *Omkar*'s clutch of ecstasy!

CHAPTER VI A DIFFICULT DECISION

In the search of anything pertaining to the *Omkar* experience, I found the writings of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. The first gave a splendid description of his meeting with the "silent music", the "sounding solitude". There is no doubt he heard the *Omkar*'s typical rushing waters sound.

INNER PRAYER AND KRIYA

These two towering figures clarify that perfection in spiritual life cannot be reached without "Internal Prayer",.

The writings by Teresa of Avila explain that a prayer develops through several steps; it is necessary to start with a humble prayer and to gradually rise to the most elevated one, a process she calls «the transforming Union with God». Prayer starting in action, gradually becomes a condition, a state of consciousness.

We can observe that in Catholicism the concept of "Inner Prayer" suffered an almost total eclipse: over the centuries, a great deal of misunderstanding and incomprehension deposited on it.

For all those still practicing it, it seems to have - with the exception of some monasteries - the meaning of a plea to God with the only purpose of obtaining personal favors or blessings on a suffering humanity.

This tendency goes against the classic texts of ascetics and mysticism, where the Prayer is not aimed at changing the so-called "Godly plans" and obtaining anything at all, but at surrendering and accepting His "eternal plan".

I ran into the literary material relating to the *Hesychasm*, a spiritual movement considering the inner peace to be a basic necessity for every human being; its main spiritual tool is the "uninterrupted, continuous Prayer".

The essence of this movement has its place in the book *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, translated from Russian by R. M. French [S.P.C.K., London; there are other good translations].

The story is that of a pilgrim coming back from the Holy Sepulchee who stopped at Mount Athos and told a monk about his lifelong search for the spiritual teaching «to pray continually» - the way Saint Paul had

recommended. He was resolute about covering an infinite distance across the steppes, if he had to, in order to find a spiritual guide that would reveal to him the secret of praying that way. One day, his ardour was awarded; he found a spiritual teacher who accepted him as a disciple and gradually clarified to him every detail of that spiritual path.

Traces of this "esicist" practice date back to 250-355 A.D. by hermits such as Anthony of the desert; it found its greatest development from the XI through the XIV century, in the monasteries of Mount Athos.

We can notice a singular kinship between *Hesychasm* and *Kriya Yoga*. There are hints to a breathing exercise which is similar to our *Pranayama* with an indication of the recommended tongue position, akin to that of *Kechari Mudra*. The way of praying in solitude and immobility results quite similar to our *Navi Kriya*: we are encouraged to be tenacious in praying with the focus of concentration on the navel. It is written: «it is possible to find in ourselves a joyless and lightless obscurity but, persisting, a limitless happiness will be reached».

Once we get over the obstacle of the navel, a whole path unfolds before us, leading to the heart.

Sublime, unforgettable is the description of the moment of the Prayer entering the heart; the effects are strikingly similar to those of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Thokar*!

The link between *Kriya Yoga* and the various forms of Prayer is very interesting and useful; it may fill us with inspiration and cause a revolution in the way we conceive our *Kriya* practice.

The reader might not be ready yet to see this link, especially if, conditioned by the traditional theories of *Yoga*, he is used to looking at *Pranayama* as a mere breathing exercise aiming at the modification of the energetic state of the body, useful only to prepare for the real state of meditation, of introspection.

Let us reflect on this: whenever we chant "Om" in the *Chakras*, before *Pranayama*, whenever we practice *Omkar Pranayama* repeating the twelve-syllable *Mantra*, is it not our form of "Internal Prayer"?

The movement of the energy has an unquestionable role in *Pranayama*; let us try, though, to forget about it for a few days. Let us dive into deep breathing and just think of the syllables in the indicated spots: the flow of

energy will be felt after a while, clear and definite. It will appear spontaneously, as strong as ever.

It might happen to those who have never correctly felt the typical energetic flux of *Pranayama*, that they come to feel it right now!

When we decide to use the *Thokar*'s procedure, we are moving step by step toward the highest pinnacle of the "Heart Prayer", a priceless mystic treasure. It is like knocking on the inner temple's door with the certitude of opening it.

Let us then do all our *Kriya* techniques with this in mind and see what happens!

Thokar is the same process the *Sufis* call "*Dhikr*".

It begins exactly like any Prayer. When the head movements accompany it, the syllables "glide" in and then enter the heart.

The Prayer takes hold of those who are whispering it: it is written that it is the Prayer which "pronounces" the devotee, instead of the devotee pronouncing the Prayer.

This kind of Prayer is no longer a deed but a state of ecstasy in which the ego-mind stops existing.

During the day, after the exercise, we can choose to go on with the uninterrupted Prayer or to remain merged in its after-effects.

As it happened to the pilgrim, it will mark our stupefying and intoxicating merger with a continuous and celestial state of bliss.

This is an intimate perception of a divine presence absorbing every desire and filling our soul with an ineffable beauty enabling us to taste on earth the celestial honey! In this way, the Prayer becomes a living presence, a marvellous gem whose glitter protects one's body and wins all hearts.

Like a person near the fireside enjoying the beauty of a chilly and windy winter to build his nest in, so will we contemplate either the sad or the joyous spectacle of life having found the infinity of the skies residing in our heart!

The experience of this highest form of Prayer will, later, prepare the ground for our meeting with the overpowering and vast experience of the breathless state.

THE FIRST IDEA OF WRITING A BOOK ABOUT KRIYA

Equipped with renewed enthusiasm for the austere but, at the same time, warm path of *Kriya*, I found myself taking advantage of a break, while I was skiing on a winter's day, by looking at the mountains marking out the boundaries of the distant horizon in all directions. In half an hour the sun would paint them pink – of 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 concerned all *Kriya* enthusiasts who found, as I did, insurmountable obstacles in the understanding of their beloved discipline.

For the first time I dared to contemplate a thought, lingering hesitantly long since in my subconsciousness; a book on *Kriya* explaining every technique in great detail.

How often have I wondered what would happen if Lahiri Mahasaya had written such a book. My imagination led me to visualize the color of its cover, to skim its pages - not so many, like Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

Perhaps some editor would try to force its meaning into his own theories. Nay, I'm sure that some pseudo-*guru* would say that the techniques described in it were for beginners only, while there were much more complicated techniques which could only be passed on by authorized people to chosen disciples. Some people would swallow the bait, contact the author and pay good money to be introduced to those techniques that, through fancy or borrowed from some esoteric book, he had made up!

The book in question did not exist. What could have happened if I had written it?

It was hard, yet possible to summarize the totality of my knowledge of *Kriya* into a book, welding together techniques and theories through a clean, rational vision. Surely the intention was not to celebrate myself or to lay the foundations for a new school of *Kriya*. If it was necessary to talk about my experiences too, this would only be with the purpose of being clearer in the theoretic and technical explanations.

The model could be Theos Bernard's *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* (1943. Rider & Company).

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*. [Many modern English translations of those three classic books are available. For example the translation by Brian Dana Akers for the first, by James Mallinson for the second, by Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu for the third one.]

In spite of having being published many years ago and of several texts of *Hatha Yoga* appearing recently, that book is still one of the best ones.

That is why I thought that a similar book on *Kriya* would be a real blessing for scholars and researchers.

No more rhetorical claims of legitimacy and riddle-like sentences to allow the reader to guess some technical detail and, at the same time, creating doubts anew! I dreamed of a book which proved its validity by incarnating Lahiri Mahasaya's thought, in the simplest and most logical way, in a complete, harmonious set of techniques.

Of course, many teachers of *Kriya* - those who get by on donations received during rituals of initiation and who exert power on people thanks to the pledge of secrecy - would consider my book as 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 were scared of that.

They would try to destroy its credibility by means of a pitiless censorship. I anticipated their scornful comments uttered while skimming its pages: «It contains but stories that have nothing to do with Babaji's and Lahiri Mahasaya's teachings. It spreads a false teaching!»

Actually, a book like mine could not be a threat to any honest *Kriya Acharya's* activity, especially if he had accepted to teach the whole *Kriya* - gradually, of course, with the required care - without keeping anything for himself, as a matter of personal power.

But how could I guarantee this to them, without being at odds with the rooted conditioning of their "cerebral chemistry"? I feel so sorry that they might become disappointed. Because it is in my temperament to be pleased in seeing everyone happy!

"New Age" people - lovers of texts enriched with illustrations from Indian folklore - would definitely be disappointed in its sobriety, tossing it aside because it «does not have good vibrations».

Only to those who love practicing *Kriya*, discovering the existence of my book would be a magic touch dissolving a nightmare.

I was already living in that happiness.

Thanks to them, the book would continue to circulate, and who knows how many times it would get back to the teacher who had torn it to crumbs. At times he would have to pretend not to notice that a student was browsing through its pages during his seminars, missing thus part of the conference...

For some minutes I was lost in this kind of reveries; then, the whole sense of the current situation about the spreading of *Kriya Yoga* came brutally back to me.

The request of secrecy had given momentum to a vicious circle. The "wise" Indian Acharyas had no "representatives" in the West and their students did not have permission to teach anything. It was impossible to think that, each year, an innumerable series of charter flights would transport all those interested in *Kriya* - no matter if old or ill - to a remote Indian village, like a pilgrimage to Lourdes or Fatima!

Many researchers, unable to leave for India, went to some teachers who lived in the West. Everyone had been warned that they were superficial and shallow but the thought of receiving, anyway, something useful was predominant.

The Indian teachers had been notified about the situation of our group and had become convinced that, stupid as we were, we did not deserve a better, authentic *Kriya* master. The gap between them and us grew and became definitive. Blinded by dogmas, they decided to remain locked in their ebony towers and went on acting against common sense, demanding even more secrecy from their disciples.

To deteriorate the situation, rumours about *Kriya* modifications unleashed panic: even *Navi Kriya* and *Thokar* were, in some *Kriya* Forums, put in doubt. A *kriyaban* could not but feel **desperate** indulging there with the hope of finding out some technical elucidations.

Sometimes in a *Kriya* Forum, frenzy, anger, wounded egos were hiding behind a mask of kindness; often, unutterable vulgarity unleashed when there was no moderator and people felt free to insult coarsely those with different opinions. But what mostly exasperated me were the answers given to honest people who looked for technical clarifications or enquired

about reliable sources from which to receive them. There were always *kriyabans* who replied with an unacceptable tone - with factious tenderness, betraying the lowest form of consideration - smashing as a dangerous mania the seekers' desire of deepening the *Kriya* subject.

When a researcher asked information about *Kechari Mudra*, frequently the answer was: «it is not important or essential at all!», adding trivialities such as the unwanted advice to improve the depth of the already received techniques and be contented with them.

With what presumptuous attitude dared the writer - in a Forum devoted to the theory and the practice of *Kriya* - affirm the opposite of what all the teachers of *Kriya* are saying?

How could he dare, uninvitedly, enter a person's life, about whom he knew nothing, treating that person as an incompetent and superficial beginner? Was it so damn difficult to answer: «I do not know the subject matter and I don't even know a source to which you can apply»?

I closed my eyes. The present situation seemed to me an absurdity that, unfortunately, wore the clothes of a nightmare - my soul was torn to pieces. Watching the blue sky above the gilded mountain brims turning pink, I realized that the book should have been written.

Of course it was impossible to break the secrecy of *Kriya* without challenging the idea of the *Guru*-disciple relationship. I should have fought a battle within myself and clarified the truth of it amid heavy conditionings. Subdued by a sudden tiredness, I dragged myself back home.

In the evening, I was surprisingly unexcited about my project. I stayed down on my knees in front of the sofa for a while. My head was sinking into the pillows. I set the record player on "repeat" on Beethoven's second movement of the *Emperor Concert*.

Did anybody, loaded with the *Guru*'s blessings received by haunting all the available ceremonies of Initiation led by the legitimated channels, ever practice *Kriya Yoga* with the same dignity and courage with which Beethoven challenged his fate?

I turned down the light and watched the sun go down behind some 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!

Sitting down from sleepiness, a strange image captured my attention, that of Vivekananda's "investiture" by his *Guru* Ramakrishna. I read that one day, toward the end of his life, Ramakrishna entered *Samadhi* while his

disciple was near him. Vivekananda started to feel a strong current before fainting. Back to consciousness, his *Guru* whispered crying: «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 fulfilment - one had to get to that by himself -, on the contrary, they would help him in his mission as a spiritual teacher.

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

The awareness dawned upon me that the problem was not in the concept of *Guru*, which however deserved to be explored to the full, but in what we westerners have done with such a concept.

THE CONCEPT OF GURU

Since years, I had been strongly pressed to identify the *Guru* with God; at the same time the organization - which advocated the role of extending in time and space the *Guru's* action - must have been considered the materialization of God's blessings. Then, I had accepted secrecy as an inviolable dogma started off by God Himself and not as a human choice.

Still my heart and intuition did not lead me to attach great importance to secrecy; I knew how often Lahiri Mahasay's disciples were already familiar with the techniques they were going to receive from Him.

There is no evidence that He was uncompromising about secrecy, intended as sharing technical details. He asked an overall **discretion**, namely a tendency towards silence on the whole matter, and this is a different thing!

He saw that, especially at the beginning of a *kriyaban's* endeavor, there was the latent tendency to waste a lot of time and energy in communicating to friends the new object of interest. This created a disturbing situation: the *kriyaban* was involved, in fact, in reacting to criticism and sarcasm or, sometimes, he was lured to pose as a spiritual guide.

Lahiri Mahasaya did not fear the free diffusion of *Kriya* - a similar idea cannot agree with any of His ideals - as much as the dangerous, useless, dissipation of energy. He gave a disciple who was proficient and strong

enough the demanding assignment of being a spiritual guide and of sharing *Kriya* freely.

Nowadays, organizations and Acharyas by no means stress discretion rather than keeping the *Kriya* procedures secret. Who is receiving benefit from secrecy?

The organizations affirm that this rule is meant «to keep the teachings pure», but the baffling facts are that they inaugurated an endless chain of *Kriya* alterations!

Acharyas affirm that it is dangerous to give advanced techniques to people who are not ready to bear their power - and quote some of Lahiri Mahasay's sentences about the subject - but isn't this exactly what they are doing during mass-initiation, where there is no personal contact between teacher and student?

Up to here my musings arrived and here they stopped - for months.

It was during this time that I met new researchers and learned from them other *Kriya* techniques; I responded to their kindness by sharing my knowledge. To preserve every detail of the learned techniques fortified and amplified by the new information, I began spending part of the day writing a sort of memo. It started to assume gradually the aspect of a book.

As I went ahead, the problem of the *Guru*-disciple relationship emerged, obscurely, more as a wound than as a theory unfolding its myths. A solution started to take shape, but my heart was reluctant in accepting it.

The concept of *Guru* is not odd: he is the spiritual teacher who permanently removes ignorance in those who lamb-like follow him. [Gu = darkness, obscurity Ru = remove].

Thinking of the memorable, impressive discourse by Dostojevsky about the role of elders in Russian monasteries [*The Brothers Karamazov*], I would never dream of disputing it.

«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]

But by obeying the *Kriya* organizations, the role of the *Guru* was attributed to a person that one has not necessarily known directly! As long as the *Guru* is described as a person assigned by God to each disciple, entrusted with the task to partially bear the burden of the disciple's *Karma* and to burn part of it, there are no problems at all. But how does it work when such a *Guru* is not present, because since many years he has left the body and resides now ... in the so-called astral realms? Yet, the relationship between Him and the disciple should work anyway!

The concept that the *Guru*, while living, knew already those disciples that would come after his physical departure is prudently introduced by the organizations; this means that he was already working and suffering for them. It is clear that they would establish the contact with Him through the organization.

I remember that when I was told this, it was for me a delightful disclosure; I felt I was very fortunate and wondered how a similar luck had really come my way! My meditation counsellor took any opportunity to underline how such an event - the disciple-*Guru* bond - was «the greatest good fortune a human being can ever have».

By studying the material furnished by the organization, I tried to persuade myself that the *Guru* was a real presence in my life. After the ceremony, of great emotive impact, of Initiation into *Kriya*, fostering such an idea transformed gradually from an act of faith into a rooted conviction. I knew how the organization considered such confidence, more than any ability to practice *Kriya*, the mark of the student's own successful ripening into a real disciple.

No. Definitely, I could not accept these childish tales anymore; I had to restore the use of my brain and reckon with what I perceived as odd, in contrast with the Indian tradition, as well as with other mystical traditions.

To my mind came, surely suggested by past reflections, the idea of a net; each individual was a junction from which a lot of links fanned out, as from our brain's neurons. When a single individual took an action - a significant one of course, like starting on a mystic path and making good progress on it - he shook the surrounding net as well. A serious practitioner never isolates himself; thus, he will feel other people's positive response,

but he will also be slowed down by their indolence and apathy. It is important to understand that if x draws y , it will also inevitably happen that y draws x .

I saw that the *Guru*-disciple relationship had its foundations in this concept. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda had different personalities, but, considering the deepest and truest side of themselves, they were one thing: a great love bound them together.

A person might carry another person, foster his spiritual progress if and only if he has earned, through his own effort, a particular power. It does not come out because someone else officially bestowed on him any particular role like allowing him to initiate.

As the reader definitely knows, Jung talked of a deeper level than the subconscious, which does not have a similar origin but 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: rise, death, illness, family, war...

We, as human beings, are linked through this **Collective Unconscious**. If to Freud the Unconscious was a part of the psyche similar to a depot full of old, removed things refused by a nearly automatic act of the will - a heap of things that we cannot recall to consciousness - this Collective Unconscious binds all human beings by the deepest layers of their conscience.

Who claims to have legitimately received the power to initiate may wonder if a similar bond exists between him and the disciple who is going to be initiated.

To accept a disciple doesn't mean to go into a lot of trouble in order to explain *Kriya* to him, but it means to accept lucidly and coherently the future tangles and sufferings that such a relationship might imply. Although we feel sheltered by our fervent aspiration for the Divine, it is wise to admit our frailty and vulnerability.

In Lahiri Mahasaya's writings I never found a conflict with such a way of thinking. The great *Yoga-Avatar* refused to be worshipped as a God. This is a point that some among His followers seem to have forgotten.

He said: «I am not the *Guru*, I don't maintain a barrier between the true *Guru* (the Divine) and the disciple». He added he wanted to be considered like «a mirror».

When a *kriyaban* realizes that Lahiri Mahasaya is the personification of what resides potentially in himself, of what one day he will become, the mirror must be «thrown away».

Whether one likes it or not, that is exactly what He wrote: thrown away.

The people that have been raised in an organization of *Kriya* cannot fully understand the impact of these words; if they understood, they would find a strong conflict with what they have been taught.

To find the truth, it takes the courage to abandon one's own illusions, those that are gratifying and nice and it also takes a good brain.

«God is not a person but a state of consciousness», He remarked!

If that's the case, we can do just one thing: take the decision to do our very best to tune with this Reality, which is beyond our grasp; that's all!

Why then do many feel the exigency to worship some human beings as if they were God?

As long as a student goes to a Teacher to learn *Kriya*, everything is as it should be - on condition that such a teacher is an authentic expert - but when the *Kriya* praxis begins to work and the *Omkar* reality reveals, then the scenery changes: something intimate between the *Kriyaban* and the Divine has started to develop.

Those who find themselves walking alone down the path of their life and have learned *Kriya Yoga*, no matter how, and have the interest, the enthusiasm, the will to stick to it, should be contented with that. The *Omkar* experience will put all the needed "blessings" into their practice.

Those, instead, who have created a bond made of love and respect with an honest *Kriya* expert, who played the role of the *Guru*, possess something which is solely theirs; something which cannot be communicated to someone else, even if they would go on forever narrating the most touching anecdotes of their experience, the wonder of a life rescued from insignificance by the grace of that authentic Master. On the other hand, if their stories contribute to build a legend which doesn't allow for the Master's human nature, their endeavour wouldn't be simply a useless pursuit but could exert a disastrous influence upon the spiritual evolution of other people.

THE WORK

The realization that the mystic path of *Kriya* was universal, that nobody could argue ownership of it, helped me go on writing the book, relieving my resistances, which during some days gripped my chest painfully and produced an overall feeling of awkwardness.

I needed to extract from my huge heaps of notes, collected during years with different teachers, the essential theory. Then, I would have had to get down to a painstaking and earnest practice, experimenting again with each part of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* from the very beginning.

I started to work in stern isolation, like a voluntary prisoner, reducing my social life to the minimum. Years went by without almost realizing it. I practiced all the techniques in high quantities; in this way I could dedicate a more constant attention to what, years before, had been done in a superficial manner. I must admit that, in the past, the towing impulse which led me to finish up the prescribed number of repetitions of each *Higher Kriya* as soon as possible was also the anxiety to obtain the next initiation from my teacher. The ardent desire of "squeezing" everything out of my *Kriya* teachers was because of my fear not to be able to contact them in the future for any reason whatsoever.

Now this enervating situation was over. I was living a quiet moment of my life, free from haste and from any constraint of wearing a mask of hypocrisy; at the long last, I could take my time to concentrate on my techniques, find their essence and write down my own impressions.

Actually, these years have been completely different than the rest of my life. The multitude of experiments I conducted had just one purpose: if a certain variation of a *Kriya* technique - which I was taught in the past - was redundant and ineffective, it would fall down by itself.

In the light of the practice, the essential core of each technique, deprived of any embellishment, appeared as something inevitable, something that could not be but that way.

Still there was a feeling as of working on a difficult puzzle, without having a preview of what was to be obtained in the end.

I proceeded putting everything in the correct order; some techniques pertained to the *First Kriya* in its simplest form, some other ones to the advanced *First Kriya*; some techniques appeared as an arbitrary

simplification of other techniques and they should not be quoted in the book; again others were a justifiable variation and they should be quoted instead.

After the deluding experience with my first *Kriya* school, nothing of what had been received was taken as gospel truth. We lost our innocence when our first teacher, in whom we put all our trust, disappointed us, when we had the proof that they lied to us - even though many voices were shouting that it was for our own good; therefore we couldn't believe blindly in anybody anymore!

A great disturbance came from a set of techniques, which had been given to me as *Dhyana Kriya*: they had something odd in themselves. Their main tool was the power of visualization, brought to the extreme limit. Eminent writers remark [see *Puran Purush*] that such practices do not have any right of citizenship in Lahiri Mahasay's *Kriya*; they have no similarities within any mystic tradition but have a strong, rather, perfect, connection with the esoteric or magic traditions. They had nothing to do with the *Omkar* perception or with the breathless state. It was a relief to polish up my *Kriya* path and my life forever from such a trash.

Now the overall picture seemed harmonious and complete: all the techniques, from the first to the last, cooperated perfectly with each other. In this way the puzzle appeared as completed.

The first basic techniques contained, potentially, the following ones, which were their deepening.

There was the tangible evidence that from the very first moment technical details prepared the *kriyaban* for the evolved phases of the path.

How stupid it would be - as some schools maintain - to work for some months to familiarize with a certain path of energy, to, then, be taught that it was not the definite one, that a better one should be received only by a *Higher Kriya* initiation!

But this was not my case.

The whole picture could be considered complex only because it contained different degrees of refinement and not for any other reasons.

While I didn't meet any difficulties in the description of my first experiences as a self-teacher or of the times of my first school of *Kriya*, when it came to write my personal remarks about the *Kriya* techniques,

those that I had all the reasons to consider Lahiri Mahasaya's, I ran into a considerable impediment.

My writings about the first experiences were intended to prove to the reader how deep my attraction toward *Kriya* was and how desperate and chaotic my research had been; while dealing with the authentic experiences of Lahiri Mahasaya's *Kriya* I would have liked the reader to meet *Kriya Yoga* for what it was, without being filtered any more through my experience.

Nevertheless I knew well that the pure account of the techniques didn't do justice to *Kriya*; they would appear lifeless, put into the book just to satisfy some reader's superficial and insatiable curiosity. It was vital to show what a technique comes to be in our lives.

I recalled the first idea related to my book, that to consider Theos Bernard's work [*Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience*] as an example to follow.

Dusty techniques became more than ever actual, feasible, clear in front of the eyes of our intuition.

The problem could only be solved by maintaining a personal tone while discussing the effects of the techniques, and integrating these into a broader vision of reflections about the teaching methodology. Of course these remarks would be added at the end of each chapter, after a clean enunciation of the techniques, in a way that the reader might skip them if he wished.

To understand the reasons for a last predicament I found myself in, an excursion is necessary.

In Lahiri Mahasaya's self-experience, it took some time before a lot of details were systematized in a definite theoretic framework. What Lahiri Mahasaya taught at the very beginning of his diffusion of *Kriya*, was somehow different from what He had in mind at the end of His earthly life. The differences among the various schools of *Kriya* were not always caused by the tendency to simplify the original techniques or to embellish them with spurious material, but rather by the different epochs in which Lahiri Mahasaya's disciples learned *Kriya* from Him.

This does not mean to accept the extreme vision according to which Lahiri Mahasaya gave each disciple a different, "personal" technique - to accept that would be to sanction the annihilation of *Kriya Yoga*!

We understand that when a disciple appeared a second time before Lahiri Mahasaya, he could receive the *Thokar* as "Second Initiation" or "*Second Kriya*" or be instructed, instead, about how to tune more deeply with the *Omkar* reality, how to better perceive the reality of the *Chakras*, how to discover their location in the spinal column and in the *Kutastha*....and this would be his "*Second Kriya*".

In my description then, I could not and should not depend, once and for all, on what any renowned *Kriya* teacher, opposing other traditions, was holding; I had to find the courage to settle on a system that represented my – therefore **subjective** hence questionable - attempt to define a synthesis.

The more I thought of a way out of this uneasy situation, the more I would find that my thought, which I believed to be clear, was really uncertain and contradictory. Driven by an inclination both to annoyance and exasperation, whenever I succeeded in phrasing an idea I would scantily be satisfied with it the next day.

Finally, practical decisions were taken regarding the order of presenting the techniques. As for the *Higher Kriyas*, it seemed logical to start with the *Thokar* and to end with the subtleties of the *Omkar* perception.

I felt relieved and, with this principle in mind, I was able to complete the book.

Of course, if a person now asks me for a proof, for evidence of the techniques' authenticity, he could not but remain disappointed.

I can only say that the set of techniques shared in my book does not take origins just from a single source. Different teachers, spiritual researchers who studied with other teachers and my personal study contributed to define it.

Any seeker of authentic *Kriya*, after reading my book, should go ahead with his search; if something useful can be drawn from my search, it is fine.

As it happened in my life, no researcher will ever be satisfied until he takes to the field and gets his hands dirty.

If he made a hundred percent commitment to seek only the mystic goal and not the chimera of self-growth, then the Intelligence inside the *Omkar* vibration would be his guide.

Since our tie with my second teacher was broken, a lot of people asked me information about *Kriya* - whom to learn it from or whom to receive

the *Higher Kriyas* from. Obviously, they did not belong to the organization, in whose eyes I was a traitor, one who, long ago, «had fallen from the path».

As for me, to any earnest researcher I was in contact with, I gave a copy of the first draft of the book.

Caught as by an obsession of precision, I continually improved it and I felt it was never ready to be posted on the web.

In the meantime, my friends were making fun of me; it seemed that I could never set the word "end" to my work.

One suggested that it was a myth I had created... giving me the strength to live and therefore, my book, would never be completed.

I didn't feel any internal pressure to put it on the web until I received the decisive push!

An episode happened, which in the past I would not have given importance to. In the present situation, it caused a violent reaction in me.

A friend of mine, with whom I had shared everything of my spiritual path, accompanying me in my ventures with both the teachers and suffering the same woes on his own skin, went to India for a vacation, where he visited a teacher whom I held in great esteem but never had the opportunity to meet him personally.

My friend explained to that Teacher the deplorable situation of the diffusion of the *Kriya* here in the West and particularly all the vicissitudes of our group; the Teacher said he felt sorry for us and that he was willing to help us.

My friend had his *Pranayama* reviewed.

When he got back to Italy, I met him; he was very happy and asked me to practice *Pranayama* in front of him. He told me there was a mistake in my practice. When I asked him what it was, his reply literally froze me: he could not tell me, since he promised the teacher he would not reveal anything.

He had asked indeed his teacher's permission to correct eventual mistakes of our practice: the answer had been negative, moreover the teacher swore him to secrecy.

Was this teacher - who manifested the intention to help us - concerned that we would not find any need to visit him after our mistake was revealed?

Was he really so mean?

I did not put pressure on my friend to tell me everything about his talks with the Master. I could not and would not enter the privacy of his experience, but how could he just let me go on with my mistake?

I considered this to be absurd and reacted badly. My friend was taken aback when I cut our discussion and left.

Considering the episode later, I realized what this incorrect detail was: I had not made the abdominal breath in a particularly visible way, I was 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.

By now every hesitation was defeated; I asked a friend for help in giving a brief check on my English translation and published the book on the web.