

Hamsa Yoga: The Elixir of Self-Realization

(Soham Sāadhanā)

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PREFACE

The *haṁsa yoga* or *soaḥaṁ sādhanā* is crowned in the Indian scriptures as the paramount spiritual endeavor that enables natural conjunction of the individual consciousness and the *Brahm*. Despite being superior in terms of its culminated effects, this *sādhanā* is easiest and free from the ascetic disciplines and difficult practices of yoga that are associated with other higher level spiritual *sādhanās*. The treatise of *Śabda Brahm* – *Nāda Brahm* (volume 19 of “Pt. Shriram Sharma Acharya Vangmaya” Series) devotes one full chapter to this important topic. The present book is compiled from the English translation of this invaluable text.

Meditation on the sounds of “*soa*” and “*haṁ*” – produced continuously by the harmonized inhalation and exhalation in each breathing cycle during a *prāṇāyāma* – is practised in the initial phase of the *haṁsa yoga*. The *hakāra* (sound of “*ha*”) is regarded as a manifestation of God Shiva in the cosmic energy currents of *prāṇa* and *sakāra* (the sound of “*sa*”) represents the existence of the eternal power of *thy* super consciousness in the spiritual impulse of *prāṇa*. The *sūrya swara* (through the solar nerve) is awakened by *hakāra* and the *candra swara* (through the lunar nerve) by *sakāra*. These *swaras* are harmonized in the higher level *prāṇāyāma* of the *haṁsa yoga*. The contemplation phase of this *sādhanā* involves total sacrifice of the ego and dissolution of the identity of the “Self” in the supreme consciousness – expression of the *Brahm*.

The *soaḥaṁ sādhanā* enables realization of the *Nāda Yoga* through *Prāṇa Yoga*. The science and philosophy of this *sādhanā* is also discussed here in the special context of the *ajapā japa* of the *Gāyatrī Mantra* and the *Kuṇḍalinī Sādhanā*. The author has been thorough, yet lucid in discussing this esoteric field of the science of spirituality and yoga. He also provides trenchant guidance for practising this *prāṇa-yoga* in day-to-day life. The fundamental importance of the subject and the detailed and authentic knowledge presented in a perspicuous style make this book a precious asset in the scholarly disciplines and a milestone for all aspirants of the realization and illumination of the individual Self.

The Philosophical Basis of Soham Sādhana

Every student of science knows that oxygen is essential for the maintenance of life on this earth. Infact its presence is more crucial for the survival of the human body as compared to the availability of water and food. Oxygen regulates the redness (healthy content of haemoglobin) in the blood. It is the fuel of this gas, which keeps the engine of the body warm enough and energizes all components of the body-machine. Its regular and substantial supply is vital for the maintenance and activation of physical strength.

The word *prāṇa* refers to the sublime form of vital energy, which at the gross level is manifested in the power regulating the physico-chemical functions of the body. The extent of one's *prāṇa* is reflected in his zeal, alertness, enthusiasm and talents. The physical exercises of jogging, brisk walking, deep breathing etc are performed to increase the intake of oxygen. The *yoga*-exercises of *prāṇāyāma* are performed to gain more *prāṇa* – the source and power of the vital force and consciousness.

A variety of *prāṇāyāmas* are described in the scriptures on *yoga*. Of which the *sūryavedhana* and *anuloma-viloma* are regarded as integral parts of the *prāṇa yoga* of the *sāadhanās* of *Brahma Varchas*. The physical exercises energize the components of the gross body and *prāṇāyāmas* help increase the internal power and the eminence of personality. *Prāṇāyāma* is essentially an exercise to upkeep the health of the subtle body.

The gross component (oxygen in this case) of *prāṇā* is supplied to the body by physical exercises and the subtle component is extracted (from the omnipresent ocean of consciousness) for the subtle body by the *prāṇāyāmas*. Like the gross and subtle bodies, the causal body of an individual also needs some vital energy or *prāṇā* – this is the culmination of the force of spiritually refined *prāṇa*, the sublime current of cosmic, divine energy, called the *mahāprāṇa*. The *mahāprāṇa* required by the causal body of the soul, emanates from the *Brahm* (Cosmic *Prāṇa*). This eternal *prāṇa* is received by the practice of *Haṁsa Yoga*. The *sāadhanā* (spiritual exercise) of this *yoga* is also called the *Soham Sāadhanā*, which, with reference to the science of *Gāyatrī Upāsanā* is defined as the *ajapā japa* of *Gāyatrī*.

In this *sādhana* of *hamsa yoga*, the devotee has to link his mind with the cosmic level of consciousness – the Supreme Consciousness. He has to awaken the inner feelings in order to realize his existence as a soul – above the level of the body and the mind. The vital energy, the *prāṇa* and the divine ‘magnetism’ (power of attraction) of the inner self, all are applied with focused concentration, zeal and immense *śraddhā* towards the conditioning of the body, mind and the innermost emotional center to reach this state. Once this state is attained, even the usual action of breathing becomes so powerful that it can attract the *mahāprāṇa* from the cosmic domains and send it to the deeper layers of the inner self. Along with the inhalation of oxygen by the physical body and *prāṇa* by the mind, a subtle absorption of the divine energy by the causal body also takes place during this process. The spiritual endeavor of this unique kind of *prāṇāyāma* is – the *soham sādhana*.

The phase of breathing-in during a *prāṇāyāma* is called a *pūraka* and that of breathing out is called a *recaka*; the intermediate phases of holding the breath in and out are called the *antaḥ kumbhaka* and *bāhya kumbhaka* respectively. In *hamsa yoga*, one concentrates on the sound of ‘*soa...*’ during the *pūraka*. This sound should not be heard only as that of the flow of air, rather, it should be acquired as a manifestation of the *Śabda* – the supreme cosmic sound. This subtle sound could be ‘perceived’ with the help of strong willpower, deep mental concentration and the pious emotions of *śraddhā*. The sound should be felt like that of the *vanśī* (flute) of Lord Krishna. This sound then appears to convey the divine messages and blessings. This flow of *Śabda* enters the body along with the breath and educes the inner domain of the self with the sublime current of its eternal energy.

During the *antaḥ kumbhaka* of the *soham prāṇāyāma* the *sādhaka* should feel that the entire existence of his own self has been devoted to the power of ‘*Soa*’ – that *Parabrahmā*. At the time of *recaka*, he has to concentrate on the sound of ‘*Ham*’ and feel through the heart that with this out-flow (of air) his own *aham* (the ego) is being expelled forever. Then he should hold the breath out (during the *bāhya kumbhaka*) for few seconds and ensure himself that – “now there is no place for ego and related illusions; whatever is now inside, is only a reflection of the *Brahmā*”. This state of the living

being (*jīva*) is equivalent to that of – realizing the *vedānt* principle of ‘*Śivoahm- Sacchidānandoaham*’, etc.

By performing the *ajapā japa* of *soaham* as in the aforesaid *prāṇāyāma*, the individual self constantly recalls its own divine origin and this way remains in touch with *thee*. This *sāadhanā* of *soaham* therefore offers the boon of realization of the *Brahm*. The spiritual benefits of this *sāadhanā* are enormous – it indeed effectuates the linkage of the soul with the *Parabrahm*. Because of its capability of pulling the individual self from the state of incompleteness and ignorance to the ultimate state of uniting with the *Brahm*, the *soaham sāadhanā* has been recommended as the principal *yoga sāadhanā* of *Brahm Varchas* – the *sāadhanā* aimed at the absolute evolution.

The higher level spiritual *sāadhanās* do have the potential to exalt the *sādhaka*'s life up to the divine realms at a fast pace as compared to the ordinary *upāsānās* practised in daily life. However, the practice of these *sāadhanas* is not totally risk-less. Some of these are so sensitive, as for instance, the experiments on nuclear fusion. A scientist knows that the latter if performed accurately would provide enormous energy but little mistake or perturbation might lead to disastrous consequences. Madam Curie had died in an accident during such a scientific experiment of high complexity.

In view of the precautions and disciplines associated with the high level *sāadhanās*, the ancient experts of the Indian science of spirituality had devised the *āranyaka* tradition. In this system the aspirants of specific advanced spiritual experiments used to learn and perform associated *sāadhanās* in the *āranyakas* under adept supervision and guidance of the eminent experts. Although the *āranyaka* system is not existing in the modern times, its relevance and importance in spiritual training remains unaltered.

Today there are practically no *āranyaks* existing on the earth. Finding an authentic spiritual guide (*gurū*) is also an almost impossible task in the present circumstances. Even if such a *gurū* is available for teaching a specific *sāadhanā* of high spiritual level, the disciples would not have the devotion, zeal, motivation and above all, the time

necessary for staying away from home and practising the prescribed *sāadhanā* under ascetic disciplines. In the present circumstances, the simple and risk-less *sāadhanās* appear to be the best solutions. These *sāadhanās*, because of their direct linkage with the *sādhak*'s intrinsic sentiments, do offer great spiritual benefits – equivalent to those of the higher level, difficult spiritual endeavors. Some such *sāadhanās* – as described below, are so simple that with initial training of first few weeks, any aspirant could easily practise them in his house along with fulfilling all his social responsibilities.

Three types of *prāṇāyāmas* are described in the scriptures for the *panca kośīya sāadhanā* of *Gāyatrī*. Whether it is the *Sāadhanā* of *Kuṇḍalinī*, *Gāyatrī* or the awakening of the *panca kośa*, the basic practices in each deal with the *sāadhanās* of refinement and elevation of the *prāṇa*. The *Sāvitṛī Sāadhanā* is also similar. The knowledge of these *sāadhanās* of *mahāprāṇa* is defined in the Upanishads under the name of *pancāgni vidyā*. Practising of *prāṇāyāmas* is an essential component of these *sāadhanās*. Mostly, the following five steps are involved in these preeminent spiritual experiments. Each of these could be practised at home by anybody who has received intensive guidance and demonstrative training.

These fundamental steps are – (i) the *ajapā japa* of *Gāyatrī* that is, the *soham sāadhanā*; (ii) *khecarī mudrā*; (iii) *śakti cālīni mudrā*; (iv) *trātaka* and (v) *nāda yoga*. Of these, the *soham sāadhanā* is supposed to be most facile. It can be performed all the twenty-four hours of the day and is equivalent to the paramount spiritual *sāadhanās* in terms of its super natural attainments.

In general, a *prāṇāyāma* is based on two crucial features – (i) controlled breathing to harmonize the system in a measured way and churning of the *prāṇa* so inhaled and (ii) attracting the *mahā prāṇa* by a *samkalpa* – determination with strong will power and intrinsic urge. The attraction of the (maha) *prāṇa* and its circulation inside the body together make one complete cycle of *prāṇa yoga*. Only one of the above activities would not serve the real purpose. Because, deep breathing alone would remain just a good exercise of the lungs, which can also be performed by many other exercises of the

body recommended by the physiologists such as – jogging, up and down stretching, *sūrya namaskāra* etc. On the other hand, only the determined attempts to attract the *(mahā)prāṇa* would be like a meditation. This alone will not be so effective unless coupled with the controlled breathing and churning of the *(mahā)prāṇa* in the body and the inner self.

There are about sixty-four types of methods for controlled breathing as described in the Indian *śāstras* on *yoga sādhanās*. Several other types of breathing exercises are also popular outside India. The specific breathing activities associated with the *yoga sādhanās* of *prāṇāyāmas* do offer the positive effects of physical health along with rousing mental alertness and inner strength.

The *saṃkalpa* part of the *prāṇāyāma* largely depends upon the *sādhaka*'s willpower and mental concentration. A variety of *mantras* and pictorial patterns or images for meditation are prescribed for this purpose. The *japa* (repeated enunciation) of these *mantras* and focussed imagination of the specific objects helps develop the mental engrossment necessary for the initial training of meditation. The *sādhaka* should feel as though he is immersed in the ocean of divine *prāṇa* and attempt to consistently suck this subtle energy through each breath.

The 'magnetic' power of *viśwāsa* and *śraddhā* and the potential of determination are not mere imaginations. Indeed they are conscious streams of immense power. The unlimited power of emotions and strong will has also been well recognized and experienced in the present era of scientific developments. The philosophers, psychologists and the experts of the science of spirituality know that the limitless world of the mind and the sentimental core – the *mana* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *citta* (subconscious mind) and *ahamkāra* (sense of self existence), works on the basis of this sublime power of the *cetan* (consciousness). The vital energy and hence all the functions of the (gross) body also materialize with the help of this power only. It is the basic source of liveliness, charm and glory of one's personality.

The inner desires and experiences linked with the power of *samkalpa* induce the corresponding thought waves (in the mind) and impulses (in the brain) and give rise to the associated actions of the body and the 'visible' self. Thus, a collective effort of the body and the mind along with the eternal power of faith and determination becomes the cause of any good or bad deed and its consequences; the results of which might be cheering or tragic, beneficial or insidious...., depending upon the quality of the mental and emotional inspirations behind it. In essence, what all is being conducted by an individual is directly or indirectly a consequence of his *samkalpa* – intrinsic motivation and mental resolution.

The strength and level of the *samkalpa* is the principal regulator of the decline or elevation of one's life. Every human being is free to shape his own life by using this power. Collective resolution of the people with strong willpower can trigger revolutions...., change the destiny of the entire nation....; and, if motivated by divinely pious inspirations of the soul, can effectuate creation of an ideal environment for the welfare of all living beings. It is said that the Nature, the existence, limitless expansion and activities of the universe emanate from the absolute determination of the eternal creator – God Brahmā. Divine incarnations and the cosmic changes, which are necessary for balancing the universal cycle, also take place as per *thy* will.

Śraddhā and *viśwāsa*, affirmed to be crucial for the *yoga sādhanā*s of spiritual transmutation are derived from the emotionally charged determination of the inner self. In fact, the rituals and the physical and mental activities associated with a *sādhanā* process contribute hardly one fourth of the share in the success of the latter. The major part – the remaining three-fourth or more, depends upon the heartiest desire, sincere and strong willpower of the devotee. If the *sādhaka*'s determination or faith were weak or shaky, he would never achieve success in a spiritual *sādhanā*. (In fact the same is true about the success of any plan or activity in the materialist domains too).

It is the earnest spirit coupled with faith and *śraddhā* that gives him the adequate strength and support to follow the necessary disciplines and

perform the *sādhana* successfully. In a *prāṇāyāma sādhana* too, it is indeed the conscious power of the *sādhaka's saṁkalpa* that draws the subtle energy of *prāṇa* along with the air (oxygen) through breathing.

Many types of *prāṇāyāmas* are suitable for the overall development of the individual self. Here, we shall discuss only two, which appear to be the best in terms of their simplicity and universality. Of these *prāṇāyāmas* the easiest is the one which is incorporated among the *ṣaṭkarmas* (six rituals) performed at the beginning of the daily *upāsana*s. It is essential for controlling the activity of breathing and harmonizing it with the help of mental concentration. It is so simple to perform this *prāṇāyāma*, that even school going children could perform it without much difficulty.

The procedure of performing the above *prāṇāyāma* is as follows: The *sādhaka* should sit in a posture of *sukhāsana* keeping his spinal cord erect and maintain a calm mood; he should take a deep breath at a slow and steady pace (the normal duration of this *pūraka* is about four seconds). The inhaled air should be retained (*antaḥ kumbhaka*) in the lungs for few seconds (about sixteen seconds, if possible without any difficulty). Then the air should be breathed out (*recaka*) at a slow and steady pace. After this, the breathing should be stopped (*bāhya kumbhaka*) for few seconds. This completes one cycle. Several such cycles (about four to five in the beginning) are completed in one sitting in the daily practice. The total duration of this practice (of *prāṇāyāma*) may range between five minutes (for the beginners) to thirty minutes (for the trained *sādhakas*).

By sincere practice and mental engrossment, the breathing is so controlled that the duration of the *antaḥ* and *bāhya kumbhaka* and those of the *pūraka* and *recaka* be equal and the speed of inhalation would be the same as that of exhalation in each cycle. During each cycle of this *prāṇāyāma* the *sādhaka* should attempt (with his natural determination) to feel that in the *pūraka* phase an illuminating current of *prāṇa* enters along with the breath which expands and gets absorbed in the body during the *antaḥ kumbhaka*. He should also feel that – because of his strong willpower and the stored *prāṇas*, the ‘filth’ of the *kusamskāras* (evil tendencies and weaknesses) is being repudi-

ated during a *recaka* and is firmly prevented from re-entering the body because of the control of the *bāhya kumbhaka*.

In the natural function of breathing, the lungs draw air from the atmosphere to supply energy to the body via the blood. The blood corpuscles take their food – the oxygen content from this supply and by circulation distribute the required quota of energy to the brain and other components of the body. During a *prāṇāyāma* this activity also gets systematized because of harmonized breathing. More importantly, in this process, the determined will and emotional urge of the *sādhaka* also attract the omnipresent power of consciousness – the *prāṇa*, subtly indwelling in the atmosphere.

The strength of the *sādhaka's* internal will and determination is directly associated with his own consciousness and therefore accounts for the amount and level of *prāṇa* drawn by it. The *sādhaka's* controlled *saṁkalpa*, attraction and absorption of the *prāṇa* all create collective impact during a *prāṇāyāma*. The physical, subtle as well as the causal body could benefit from the coherent currents of the supreme consciousness, if the *sādhaka* steadily realizes the glow and energy of the attracted cosmic *prāṇa* of divine quality as being absorbed by each of his three bodies.

If the *sādhaka's saṁkalpa* is weak and unstable or his emotional attachment and faith in this activity is superficial then he would only gain the healthy effects of deep and controlled breathing from this *prāṇāyāma*. The conscious charge and strength of the *saṁkalpa* can be enhanced by sincere faith and dedicated experiments of practising it at regularly increasing pace. The *sādhaka* must concentrate on the feeling – that the divine energy of *prāṇa* is reaching him with each breath and is entering his body without any obstacles; that his body is full of this energy and is being electrified from within.

This *prāṇāyāma*, which is a part of the *ṣaṭ karmas* of the daily *sandhyā-vandan*, is essential for every aspirant of spiritual development. Even the mental concentration would not be attained without practising the *prāṇāyāma* and the *sādhaka* would also find it difficult to perform the successive steps – namely, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā* and *dhyāna*, of a (*rāja*)yoga *sādhana*.

Among the higher level *prāṇāyāmas*, the *Soham Sādhana* is regarded as supreme because the *saṁkalpa* associated with it has the potential to evolve the individual consciousness up to the ultimate divine form and to connect the individual self with the *Brahm*. No other kind of *prāṇāyāma* involves this level of emotional sacrifice and *saṁkalpa* as the *soham sādhanā* does. Perhaps this is the reason why it has been given a special name – the *Hamsa Yoga* rather than categorizing it within the nomenclature of the other *prāṇāyāmas*. The scriptures of spiritual *sādhana*s have mentioned so much about the *hamsa yoga* that if compiled collectively, these descriptions would appear like an independent branch of the *yoga śāstras*.

The sounds of – ‘so’ while breathing in, ‘a’ while retaining it, and ‘ham’ while breathing out, are not loud and clear like other audible sounds. One can hear them only by the ‘subtle ears’ (i.e. through experiencing the extrasensory vibrations) with unperturbed mental concentration. Nobody can really perceive them in the continuous breathing cycles unless one concentrates on the subtle sounds made by the flow of air in and out of the nostril during the natural process of respiration.

The sound of ‘soham’ is an *anāhata nāda*. In the practice of *Nāda Yoga* one has to meditate upon the sublime sounds (of the *āhata* and *anāhata* category successively) inside the body, which are perceived under a state of absolute silence. In *Hamsa Yoga* the nose provides extra support and the two senses (the functions of nose and the ears) together with deep mental engrossment help realize the latent sound of ‘soham’.

As described in context of the *nāda yoga*, varieties of subtle sounds – including those perceived during the gradual progress in the long term practice of *nāda yoga* – result from the vibrations created by the *sat*, *raj* and *tam* tendencies of the nature immanent in the five basic elements. These, like the internal sounds of the nerves and muscles in the body, are *āhata nādas* because they are generated by

some kinds of vibrations only. Even the silent and *mānasika japas* produce *āhata nāda* because some movement, though of subtle dimension, of the vocal cord and the components of the nervous system, is always associated with such *japas* too. It is only the *ajapā japa* that continues naturally like the eternal flow of the self-existing *anāhata nāda* of *Omkāra*.

The *āhata nādas* are expressions of the manifestations of *Śabda* in nature, but the *anāhata nādas* are the expressions of the subliminal *Śabda* of the *Brahm* – the eternal Creator, the origin of nature, the cosmic *thyself*. Whence the latter are of paramount importance; they are conceptualized as the ultimate expressions of *Śabda*.

The savants of spiritual knowledge opine that in the innermost centre of the soul, its sense of self-recognition – as a fraction of the *Parabrahm* – is eternally reflected and gives rise to the continuous cycles of the self-existing (*ajapā*) *japa* of *Soaham* (meaning ‘I am “That” – the *Brahm*’). While discussing the meaning of ‘*soaham*’ one should not be confused with respect to the precision of the liaisons in this Sanskrit word (according to the Sanskrit grammar: *saḥ* (that) + *aham* = *soaham*). Because, *soaham* has not been a word derived from the Sanskrit grammar, rather, it is a *nāda* that is self-existing because of the eternal linkage of ‘*so*’ (that, the supreme consciousness) and ‘*aham*’ (the consciousness of the individual self).

Soaham represents the oneness of the soul and the *Brahm*. The *haṁsa yoga prāṇāyāma* of the *soaham sādhanā* aims at awakening of this feeling of oneness in the *jīva* (the individual self). Without this realization an individual believes his body and mind to be his “Self” *in toto*. His aspirations, concerns and activities remain confined to the domain of the body and mind. His thoughts and emotions circulate within this self-conceited, limited periphery and only the things and people falling within this domain – of having some relationship with the body or the conscious mind – appear to him as his own. He does not feel any sense of responsibility or affection with others except perhaps for his near relatives and friends. Not only that, at times, he does not even hesitate in harming others in order to secure the benefits of his ‘own’ people or to preserve the things in his ‘own’ possession.

This ignorance is what is called *māyā*, which becomes the cause of materialistic attachments and binding of the *jīva* in selfish affairs. These bonds make him indulge in the unnecessary activities and sins which hinder the possibilities of his spiritual development and put him into the dark tunnel of an unending journey in the world of ignorance, weaknesses, sufferings and agony of unlimited desires.... The whole lot of spiritual *sādhanās* aims at emancipating the individual self from this bondage of illusions and ignorance and uplifting towards the righteous path worth his dignity as a soul.

The knowledge of *soham* is termed as *Sadjñāna*, *Tatvajñāna* or *Brahmjñāna* – the divine knowledge that enlightens the inner self and awakens the soul so that it could realize its eternal origin. By the effect of *soham sādhanā*, the individual self begins to recognize its true identity as a reflection of the *Brahm*. The knowledge of *soham* contains the key for liberation from ignorance and the worldly thralldom. It indeed leads to the state of realization of – ‘*Tatvamasi*, *Śuddhosi*, *Buddhosi*, *Niranjanosi*’ in terms of the attainment of absolute piety, ultimate knowledge and limitless beatitude.

The word meaning of *soham* – ‘I am *Brahm*’ should not be interpreted as an expression of arrogance. Because, here ‘I’ does not correspond to the body or what a selfish, ignorant and a possessive person thinks himself to be.... Such misinterpretations would imply what the devil like giants, Ravana, Kansa and Hiranyakshyapu, used to impose themselves to be. These characters, because of their mad-denying ego, suppressive might and blind superiority complex used to regard themselves as equivalent to God and used to even impose such impressions upon others. But the history stands by the fact that such illusions of extreme atrocities finally became the cause of their disdainful destruction.

It should be remembered that in the meaning of ‘*soham*’ the word ‘I’ does not refer to this body or mind which are made up of the *panca tatvas* (five basic elements) and the three natural tendencies of the *jada* and *cetan* components of nature. This ‘I’ truly corresponds to the soul. Thus ‘*soham*’ is a divine message which re-

minds that the soul is a part of the *Brahm*. The spiritual scholars of all times have described the unity of the soul with the *Brahm* as that of – a wave with the ocean; light with the sun; an atom with the universe; a spark with fire... etc. The only hindrance in the realization by the soul of its originality is the smog of ignorance (*māyā*) when the soul exists in a body as a livingbeing (*jīva*) in this world.

The assimilation of illusions, misdeeds and the associated impact of the *kusamskāras* of the previous birth and the thralldom of ego, avarice and attachment block the active linkage of the individual self with its divine source. That is why an individual, despite being a part of that Omniscient Almighty continues to live a dissatisfied, effete, purposeless and even sinful life. The spiritual *sāadhanās* aim at removing these untoward shrouds and wiping off the latent imprints of the *kusamskāras* and untoward habits and refining the mind and the entire inner self of the *sādhaka*. It is only in a clean and serene mind and pious heart that the divine inspirations could be educed that would enlighten the soul. The *soham sāadhanā* also results in such an illumination of the intellect and spiritual transmutation of the individual self.

The religious scriptures repeatedly convey that '*Īśwara Anśa Jīva Avināśī*' – every living being is a fraction of the Almighty, Omnipresent *Thee*. Most of the people hear and accept it in principle but that is not all. Acceptance of this fact or belief in it would not serve any purpose unless it is inculcated in the innermost layers of the mind and the emotional center. Internal faith and emotional depth and sincerity only can awaken the *śraddhā* that enlightens and edifies the inner self. It is this inspiration which can control the thoughts and deeds of the individual.

If one's *śraddhā* is educed and enlightened by the spiritual essence of '*soham*' then its realization would certainly bring divine transformation in his life. In this elevated state the individual should think according to the divine inspirations, his deeds should be angelic like those of the incarnations of God. Only then the individual self would be able to unite with its origin... When the water of a gutter falls into the

holy Ganges it gets merged in the latter and becomes one with the holy water of the Ganges.... A small droplet of water when falls in a sea, it loses its identity but becomes an integral component of the sea water...., and thus becomes the sea itself.... Similarly, after the realization of 'soham' the soul gets immersed into the *Brahm* and thereby attains the latter's omnipresent form. The successful *sādhakas* of this *sāadhanā* therefore appear like perfect beings – angels, because of the divinity of their thoughts, saintly sentiments and altruist deeds that are dedicated for the welfare and happiness of all living beings. The *soham sāadhanā*, when used for the purpose of stimulating and arousing the *Kuṇḍalinī* and its practice according to the science and methodology of the *sāadhanā* of *ajapā japa* of *Gāyatrī* – is called the *Haṁsa Yoga*. The experts of *yoga sāadhanās* have written a great deal about the *haṁsa yoga*. Some such excerpts are listed below.

Haṁsasyākṛati Vistā raṁ Bhuktimukti Phalapradamḥ |
Sarveṣu Deheṣu Vyāptam Vartate Yathā Hyagniḥ,
Kāṣṭheṣu Tileṣu Tailamiva | Tadviditwā Na Mratyumeti |
Agnīṣīmau Pakṣāvankāraḥ Śira Ukāro Bindustrīnetram
Mukhm Rudro Rudrāṇi |
Caraṇau Dvididham Kamṭhataḥ, Kuryādity-
unmanāḥ Ajapopasamhāra Ityabhidhīyate |
Tasmānmano Vilīne Manasi Gate Saṁkalpvikalpe
Dagdhe Purīya Pāpe |
Sadāśivaḥ Śaktyātmā Sarvatrāvasthitaḥ Swayam Jyoti,
Śuddho, Buddho, Nityo Nirānjanah |
Śāntatamaḥ Prakāś ayatī ta Vedanuvacanm Bhavatī tyutpaniṣat |
 – Hamsopanishad

Meaning: The eternal form and expansion of 'Haṁsa' offers both – ultimate satisfaction and liberation. As the fire resides in wood, or oil in the sesamum seeds, similarly, this absolute element of the *Brahm* is contained in all living beings. One who knows it gets liberated from the bondages of death. *Agni* and *Soma* (the eternal sources of life and creativity) are the wings of this *haṁsa*. *Omkāra* is its head, *bindu* (the divine glow-point) makes its eyes, *Rudra* (God Shiva's

manifestation) exists in its mouth and *Rudrāṇī* (the power of *Rudra*) in its feet. The endless dimensions of time are its arms, *agni* (as the divine source of energy) rests in its armpits and the *saguṇa* (manifested) and *nirguṇa* (sublime, omnipresent) forms of the *Brahm* are its two sides.

The continuous *japa* of 'Rama-Rama...' sounds like 'Mara - Mara...'. Similarly, if the sound of '*soham*' is enunciated repeatedly without a pause, it generates a cycle and echoes in the reverse order as '*hamsoa.... hamsoa..*' and thus sounds like '*hamṣa - hamṣa...*' because of its continuity. This is why the *soham sādhanā* is also called *hamṣa yoga sādhanā*.

Hamso Hamsohamityevam Punarāvarttanakrmāt |
Soham Soham Bhavennūnamitiyogavidō Viduḥ ||

—Yoga Rasāyanam

Meaning: The repetition of '*hamsoaahamsoa....*' would be heard as a '*japa*' of '*soham -soham....*'. The experts of *yoga* know this fact very well.

Abhyāsānantaram Kuryād Gacchmstiṣṭ hanswapannapi |
Cintanam Hamṣa Mantrasya Yogasiddhikarm Param ||

—Yog. Rasā. | 303

Meaning: Even before (or after) the regular practice (of *hamṣa yoga*), the reflection of the '*soham*' sound (produced by the breaths) should be continuously felt while walking, sitting or even sleeping... This leads to ultimate success. This *soham mantra* is also known as *hamsoa* or *hamṣa*.

When the mind gets immersed in that omnipresent element of '*hamṣa*' (*Brahm*), all its sins, ego, desires and related emotions, thoughts and reflections are totally waned out. And then the glow of the absolutely pious, eminent and beatitudeous eternal power of the *Brahm* illuminates the inner mind.

Prāṇnām Dehamadhye Tu Sthito Hamsaḥ Sadāacyut |
Haṁsa Eva Paraṁ Satyaṁ, Haṁsa Eva Tu Śaktikaṁ ||
Haṁsa Eva Paraṁ Vākyam, Haṁsa Eva Tu Vādikaṁ |
Haṁsa Eva Paro Rudro, Haṁsa Eva Parātparam ||
Sarvadevasya Madhyastho, Haṁsa Eva Maheśwaraḥ |
Haṁsajyotiranūpamyam Devamadhye Vyavasthitam ||
 – *Brahm Vidyopaniṣad | 60-65*

Meaning: The divine power resides in the form of ‘*haṁsa*’ in every creature. *Haṁsa* only is the ultimate truth. *Haṁsa* alone is the absolute power. *Haṁsa* is the supreme form of God. *Haṁsa* is the eternally complete sentence. *Haṁsa* is the essence of all Vedas. *Haṁsa* is the greatest *Rudra* – Śiva of the trinity Gods. *Haṁsa* is the *Parabrahm*.

Haṁsa is immanent like the unique glow among the ‘spectrum’ of the divine powers. Each one of us should always do the *japa* of this *haṁsa mantra* with mental concentration and emotional devotion focused at the sacred glow.

Nabhasṭhaṁ Niṣkalaṁ Dhyatwā Mucyate Vibandhanāt |
Anāhatadhwaniyutam Haṁsam Yo Veda Hṛdgataṁ ||
Swaprakāśacidānandaṁ Sa Haṁsa Iti Gīyate |
Nābhikande Samau Kṛatwā Praṇāpānau Samāhitaḥ ||
Mastakashāmṛtāsṇwādaṁ Pītwā Dhyāyena Sādaram |
Haṁsavidyāmṛte Loke Nāsti Nityatwasāadhanam ||
Yo Dadāti Mahavidyām Haṁsākhyām Pārmeśwarīm |
Haṁsahamseti Yo Brūyādhdaṁso Brahmāhariḥ Śivaḥ |
Gurūvaktrāttu Labhyet Pratyakṣam Sarvatomukham ||
 – *Brahma Vidyopaniṣad | 20-34*

Meaning: One, who has realized the eternally glowing, absolutely blissful element of the *haṁsa* that resides in the inner self with its *anāhata nāda*, such an ascetic person alone is given the title of “*haṁsa*”. One who showers the nectar (of emotional sanctity and *śraddhā*) along with the *japa* of ‘*haṁsa*’ attains supernatural powers and talents.

There is no support better than the knowledge of *haṁsa*. The expert who teaches and distributes this knowledge is indeed honorable and worthy of being treated respectfully. One who successfully performs the *sādhana* of *haṁsa* realizes the powers of the trinity Gods existing in himself and attains the ultimate knowledge of the *Brahm*.

Manaso Haṁsaḥ Soham Haṁsa Iti Tanmayam Yajño Nādanusaṁdhānam |

— Pāśupata Brahmopaniṣad

Meaning: The *haṁsa* is a manifestation of the *Brahm* in the inner self. This is what is expressed by ‘soham’. This *haṁsa* expands outside and also resides inside (the body). It is a form of God. The (*soham*) *yajña* performed by its contemplation and realization is equivalent to the *nādayoga sādhana*.

Haṁsātmaṁlikā Varṇabrahmakālapracoditā |
Paramātmā Pumāniti Brahmasaṁpattikāriṇī ||

— Pāśupata Brahmopaniṣad

Meaning: *Haṁsa* is a reflection of the *Brahm*. One can find (link the Self with) Lord *Brahmā* by its *sādhana*. It is the Supreme Self and the *Purūṣa*.

Haṁsavidyāṁavijñāya Muktau Yatram Karoti Yaḥ |
Sa Nabhobhakṣaṇenaiva Kṣunnivṛattim Kariṣyati ||

— Sūtra Saṁhitā

Meaning: One who attempts (after knowing its secret...) the *haṁsa yoga*, enjoys complete liberation from all ambitions and desires.

Pāśāna Chittwā Yathā Haṁso Nirviśaṁkakhāmutkramet |
Chinnapāśastavathā Jī vaḥ Samsāraṁ Tarate Tadā ||

— Kśrikopaniṣad | 20

Meaning: As the *haṁsa* (swan) flies freely in the sky, similarly, the *sādhaka* of the *haṁsa yoga* becomes free from all the ties of worldly attachments.

Several ancient scholars have also analyzed the syllables ‘ha’ and ‘sa’ (of ‘hamsa’) separately. The two letters also have multiple implications and the combinations of the two (in ‘hamsa’) give appropriate directions to the *sādhaka*.

Hakāro Nirgame Proktaḥ Sakāreṇa Praveśanam

Hakaraḥ Śivarūpeṇa Sakāraḥ Śaktirūcyate |

– Śiva Swarodaya

Meaning: The outflow of a breath produces ‘hakāra’ (the sound of ‘ha’) and its inflow produces ‘sakāra’ (the sound of ‘sa’) *Hakāra* represents a manifestation of God Śiva and *Sakāra* corresponds to that of Śakti (Goddess Pārvati).

Hakāreṇa Tu Sūryaḥ Syātsakāreṇendurūcyate |

Sūryacandramosaraikyaṁ Haṭha Ityabhidhīyate ||

Haṭhena Grasyate Jādñam Sarvadoṣasamudbhav |

Kṣetrajñaḥ Paramātmā Ca Tayoraikyaṁ Yadābhavet ||

– Yoga Śikhopaniṣad | 133-134

Meaning: *Hakāra* is related with the *sūrya-svara* (the *swara* produced by the flow of the *prāṇa* through the right *nāḍī*, connected with the right nostril). *Sakāra* corresponds to the *candra-svara* (the *swara* of the left *nāḍī*). Harmonizing the two *swaras* is aimed in the *Haṭha Yoga*. By such *yogas*, the *sādhaka*’s ignorance and inertia – which is the cause of all flaws, is eradicated so that the *sādhaka* could unite with the Omniscient Thee.

By the process of breathing, each *jīva* naturally performs the silent ‘japa’ (enunciation) of *soham* although, without realizing it. The average number of such ‘unnoticed’ (latent) *japas* is around 21600 per day.

Hakāreṇa Bahiryāti Sakāreṇa Viśetpunah |

Haṁsa Haṁsetyum Mantram Jī vo Japati Sarvadā ||

Ṣaṭa Śatāni Twahorātre Sahastrānyekavinaśatīḥ |

Etatsamkhyānvitam Mantram Jīvo Japati Sarvadā ||

– Gorakṣa Saṁhitā 1 | 41 - 42

Meaning: The conscious energy of the *jīva*. This way it continuously utters 'hamsa - hamsa...'. Thus, a *jīva* normally recites the (*hamsa*) *mantra* around twenty-one thousands six hundred times during each cycle of a day and night.

By certain principles of the Sanskrit grammar, an abridged form of 'soham' becomes 'Oham' which sounds like *Oam* (*Om*) in general.

Sakāram Ca Hakāram Ca Lopayitwā Prayojayet |
Sandhim Ca Purvarūpākhyām Tatoasaupraṇavo Bhavet ||

Meaning: If the syllables associated with 'hakāra' and 'sakāra' are eliminated from the word *soham* then the liaison of the remaining vowels produces the sound of *Oam*.

The *sādhana* of *hamsa yoga* is of foremost importance in the spiritual practices of higher complexities. It has been regarded as an integral part of the *sādhana*s aimed at awakening the *Kuṇḍalinī* (the serpentine fire).

Vibharti Kuṇḍaliśaktirātmānam Hamsayāsritā |
 — Tantra Sā ra

Meaning: The *Kuṇḍalinī* power rides on the *hamsa* to pierce into the subtle centers of the conscious body.

In the idols and visual descriptions of the Goddess *Gāyatrī*, she is shown as sitting on a *hamsa* (swan). This depiction implies that the power of *Gāyatrī* is realized through the medium and support of *hamsa* (*yoga*).

As such the *hamsa* (swan) is regarded as a clean and sacred bird which is wise in selecting proper and pure meal even from a melange of rubbish in its food. Because of these qualities, the word *hamsa* is also used in the Sanskrit literature to represent discerning intellect, purity, fairness and reasoned discreteness. By these literary interpretations, the representation of *hamsa* as a vehicle of *Gāyatrī*, indicates that – for a successful *upāsana* of *Gāyatrī* the *sādhaka's* life should be pure, balanced and endowed with moral values, prudent

thinking and righteous conduct. However, in the context of the *sāadhanās* of spiritual elevation, the representation of *Gāyatrī* as riding on a *haṁsa* most appropriately implies the role of *haṁsa yoga* for the realization of the preeminent power of *Gāyatrī*.

The ancient Indian scriptures also mention a story in which Goddess *Pārvatī* once asks Lord *Śiva* about a *yoga* that could offer all kinds of *siddhis* (attainment of supernatural faculties and talents). Then God *Śiva* replies –

Ajapa Nāma Gāyatrī Yoginām Mokśadāyini |
Asyāḥ Saṁkalpa Mātreṇa Sarvepāpaiḥ Pramucyate ||

Meaning: *Ajapa* (*ajapā japa*) of *Gāyatrī* bestows *mokśa* on the *yogis*. A determined commencement of this *sādhana* itself can eradicate the evils in the *sādhaka*'s character.

Hearing the above, Goddess *Pārvatī* expressed her desire to know the methods of performing this unique *yoga*. God *Śiva* told her that—

Deho Devālayo Devi, Jī vo Devaḥ Sadāśivaḥ |
Tyajedajñānanirmālya, Sohaṁ Bhāvena Pūjayet ||

Meaning: ‘O’, Devi! (addressing to *Pārvatī*) – “The body of an individual is itself a temple in which the God resides in the form of the *jīva*. After cleaning this temple externally and internally – by removing the smog of ignorance and evil conduct, the internal God should be worshiped by the *saṁkalpa* of *sohaṁ*”.

The *sohaṁ sādhana* is a *Yoga Sādhana* of *Gāyatrī*. This can be performed continuously along with each breath throughout the life.

Śvānsaniṣkā sakāle Hi Hakāraṁ Parikī rtyate |
Punaḥ Praveśa Kāle Ca Sakāraḥ Procyate Budhaiḥ ||

Meaning: *Hakāra* is pronounced when we breathe out and *sakāra* when breathe in. Concentration on this continuous flow of *nāda* is the *sohaṁ sādhana*.

The scholars of *śāstras* mention that the eternal sense of self- recognition of the soul in the deepest inner center of the *jīva* triggers the *ajapā japa* of 'soham' on its own. (This latent *japa* is manifested in the sound of *soham*, in each breath throughout the life of the *jīva*).

God Shiva is described (in the scriptures) to have said that – repeated cycle of *hamsaḥ*.... (*hamso*...., *hamso*...) appears as *soham* *soham* in the continuous flow of *Prāṇa*.

Ham So Ham sohamityevam Punarā vartanam Kramā |
Soham Soham Bhavennūnamiti Yogavidoviduḥ ||

Meaning: The repeated pronunciation of 'ham - saḥ' 'ham - saḥ' in a continuous manner is heard in the reverse cyclic order as 'soham' 'soham' – this is what the *yogis* have experienced.

Dissolving the individual self in the cosmic self – sacrificing self interests for the divine welfare of others; experiencing the presence of *thee* in each and every reflection of one's own being – is the great *sāadhanā* of *soham*. As the *sādhaka* progresses in the determined practice of evacuating the ego and selfishness with the 'ham' sound of each breath and inscribing the divine virtues with its 'so' sound, he experiences the enlightenment of his intellect and expansion and elevation of his attitude towards life. A corresponding development of his personality takes place as a consequence. This way he attains the ideal goal of any spiritual *sādhana*, which is – the refinement of personality to endow it with divine qualities. The *sādhaka* thereby gains all round success in the physical as well as the spiritual domains of his life as a human being.

The inspiration of *soham sāadhanā* describes the unification of the *jīvātmā* with the *Brahmā* – of the individual consciousness with the supreme omnipresent, eternal consciousness. It helps the *sādhaka* realize 'soham' (*so + aham*) that is 'Thou is I' and 'I am (the soul is) Thou – the Almighty, Omniscient *Brahm*'. The *sādhaka*'s ideals of life, his beliefs, convictions, thoughts and emotions are edified by this realization. All living beings appear to him as his near and dear ones and his own self transmutes into angelic one by his noble deeds oriented towards the divine welfare of all.

The *soham sādhanā* liberates the devotee from the worldly concerns and sorrows by illuminating his mind and heart with the glow of self-recognition and by awakening the latent strength of his inner self. The basic causes of the decline of humane ideals, shattering of mutual trust and love and increase in crimes, exploitations and agonies seen in the world today, lie in – the egotism, unending row of passions, ambitions and cravings, and the selfish and possessive attitude of the people in general. In view of this fact, the practice of *soham sādhanā*, because of its potential of limitless expansion of the self – by cultivating the altruist attitude and rousing the divinity of the character – indeed promises a boon of happy, progressive and peaceful life for the entire world.

In the *soham sādhanā*, as stated earlier, the *nāda* of the *mantra* 'soham' is 'heard' (experienced) within each breath by the 'ears' of the subtle body without performing any *japa*. Hence it is also defined as the *ajapā japa* of *Gāyatrī* – that, which arouses and liberates the *prāṇa* (in the ocean of *mahāprāṇa*). This is also called a *sādhanā* of *Prāṇa Gāyatrī*.

Even the self-inspired, continuous *ajapā japa* of *Gāyatrī* performed naturally (along with each respiration cycle) without any effort is said to provide complete protection to the *prāṇa* and offer spiritual knowledge and *siddhis* equivalent to that of the other *yoga sādhanās*. Then, think about the impact of this *ajapā japa* if it is performed as a *sādhanā* with ascetic disciplines, *saṃkalpa* and *śraddhā*! Indeed, this *sādhanā* (of *soham*) then becomes the highest kind of spiritual *sādhanās* because no branch of knowledge and science is found superior to the *Gāyatrī-vidyā* and no *japa* better than the *japa* of the *Gāyatrī* (*Mantra*). The *śāstras* therefore sing great paens on the *soham sādhanā*.

According to the *ślokas* of *Devi Bhagawata*, the *hamsa yoga* also incorporates the *upāsana* of all the divine powers. For instance, consider the following *Śloka* –

Haṃso Gaṇeśo Vidhirevaṃ Haṃso, Haṃso Harirmayaśca Śambhu |
Haṃso Hi Jī vo Gurūdeva Haṃso, Haṃso Mamātmā Paramātm Haṃsaḥ ||
Ha Kā reṇa Vahiryāti, Sakā reṇa Viśet Punaḥ |
Haṃsātmikāṃ Bhāgavatī Jī vo Japati Sarvadā ||

Meaning: *Hamsa* yoga consists of attracting the power of the trinity Gods – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and of Lord Ganeśa. The *Hamsa* is the ideal guide, *hamsa* alone is the *jīva* as well as the *Brahm* – the soul as well as the Omnipresent Supreme expression of *thee*.

The *jīva* subconsciously performs the *ajapā japa* of *Gāyatrī*. The eternal energy of *Gāyatrī* enters with the *sakāra* and its reciprocating power comes out with *hakāra* during the continuous cycle of life. The following *śloka* in Sharda Tilaka states a similar implication—

Hamsaḥ Param Pareśani Pratyamha Japate Naraḥ |
Mohandho Yo Na Jā nāti, Mokśa Tasya Na Vidyate |
Ajapā Nāma Gāyatrī, Yoginām Mokśa Dāyinī ||
Tasyā Vijñāna Mātrena Naraḥ Pāpai Pramuccayate |
Anayā Sā draśī Vidyā Cā nayo Sā draśo Japaḥ |
Anayā Sadraśam Puṇyam Na Bhūtam Na Bhaviṣyati ||

Meaning: Every human performs a *japa* of *soham* in each cycle of breathing. One who does not realize this is like a blind because he lives in the darkness of worldly illusions and he can never get *mokśa*. *Ajapā Gāyatrī* bestows *mokśa* on the *yogis*. Anybody can get rid of all the sins and evils by attaining its knowledge and realizing its power. There is no knowledge equivalent to it. No *punya* comparable with the prodigious benefits of this *sāadhanā* has ever existed in the past or is likely to exist any time in the future.

God – the eternal father, always wants to uplift its children – the *jīvas*. But the *jīva*, because of its ignorance, tries to shroud or malign the glow of God existing in its inner self. Thus, there always exists a ‘tug-of-war’ between the two. God is not satisfied without finding the righteous movement of the *jīva*’s life. *Thou* shall remain consistent in *thy* absolute fairness and firm in *thy* system of creating destiny as per the *jīva*’s actions at physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. God has to often punish the *jīva* to remind the latter of *thy* eternal disciplines.

The *jīva*, pervaded by *māyā*, thinks that by becoming a ‘devotee’ (worshiper) of God he would receive the boons to fulfill all his just or unjust desires. He begs and thus ‘insists’ (by means of prayers) that God should bless him without testing whether he deserves it or not. If both (the God and the *jīva*) remain firm in their attitude and approach,

how would they come closer? How would the devotee feel *thou* presence? How would the *jīva* meet his divine parent?

The philosophy of *soham sādhanā* contains a solution to the above problem. It naturally inspires the *sādhaka* to devote himself completely by sacrificing his ego and desires and dissolving his identity in the divine affection of *thee*. He should purify his mind by the sacred shower of *śraddhā* and let his mind and inner self fully under the control of the inspirations of God. He should discipline his life as per the rules of life set by the Almighty in terms of truth and honesty and compassion, love and respect for everybody. Once the *jīva* devotes himself to the Omniscient, it gets linked with the source of divinity and the latent presence of God in his own inner self begins to be felt and expressed....

Total sacrifice, even if it is from one side alone, is bound to result in unification because there no longer remains any distance between the two ends, no separation or dissociation is possible thereafter. This is indeed the secret of true love and the same principle applies to the perfection of the *sādhaka*'s devotion. When the fuel of wood is sacrificed in the fire, it no longer remains a fuel but becomes fire itself. When a drop of water falls in an ocean, the tiny existence of the former instantly acquires grand expansion. If salt is dissolved in water, or sugar in milk, the two lose their separate identities and unify with the respective solvents to become one with them.

The above kind of unity between the *jīva* and the *Brahm* is described in the *Vedānta* teachings as the ultimate goal of the journey of life – the goal of absolute existence. This is what is regarded as the state of *advaita*. In this state of the inner self, the *sādhaka* realizes his true identity as – *Śivoham*, *Saccidānandoham*, *Tatwāmasi*, *Ayamātmā Brahm* – ‘my soul is everything...; it is the absolute good; it is a reflection of the *Brahm*.....’. This realization is termed in spiritual literature as – ‘self-recognition’, ‘uniting with *thee*’ or ‘*Brahm Nirvāṇa*’, ...etc.

Soaham Sādhana: First Step Towards Self- Realization

Soaham sādhanā or *hamṣa yoga* is purely a spiritual type of *prāṇāyāma*. This *yoga* incorporates *prāṇāyāma* along with some kind of *nāda yoga* and *dhyāna yoga*.

The *prāṇāyāma* phase consists of – sitting in a stable posture of *sukhāsana* or *padmāsana*; in a physically and mentally calm condition; keeping the spinal cord in an erect position and taking deep breaths in a consistent manner. The erect position of the spinal column supports straight flow of the *prāṇa*. Like for the other *prāṇāyāmas*, breathing at a slow pace is supposed to be the best for this one too. Breathing should be so deep that the lungs would be totally filled with oxygen after inhalation. The duration of either kind of *kumbhaka* should not be more than half that of the *recaka* or *pūraka*.

While breathing in, the concentration should be focussed at the subtle sound (of ‘*so*’) produced by the air-flow through the nostril. During the *antaḥ kumbhaka* it should be centered inside the body. Meditating on the flow of the ‘inhaled’ *prāṇa* through the endocrine centers like the *śaṭacakras* or the *granthis* along the spinal column is extremely useful because it helps focussing the consciousness at these specific extrasensory nodal points and thus accelerating the vibrations of latent energy currents.

While breathing out, the *sādhaka* should concentrate on the subtle sound of *ham* (produced by the outflow of the air) and expel the ego, selfishness, vices and infirmities with it. In order to make this activity more effective than mere imagination, the *sādhaka* has to be very careful in his day-to-day life too. All the glamour and passions associated with ‘*ham*’ (‘I’– the ego) and its narrow perspectives are to be left despite the intense pressures of worldly benefits and fears. When an oil-lamp is kindled, its flame assumes predominance and the oil slowly loses its own identity and transfers its existence in the form of light through the medium of the flame. Similarly, in the *soaham prāṇāyāma*, the existence of *ham* (the ego) is immersed in *so* (that, the omnipresent *Brahm*) through the medium of controlled breathing and support of mental *saṁkalpa*.

Perception of the subtle sounds – of ‘So’ and ‘Ham’ which are ‘dissolved’ in the in and out flows of the breaths – corresponds to a practice similar to the *nāda yoga*. Meditation upon these sounds and the associated paramount feelings of attracting the *mahāprāṇa* and releasing the ego and ignorance is indeed a superior type of *dhyāna yoga* too.

The inherent unity between the soul and the *Brahm* is described in the scriptures of Vedanta as the principle of *advaita*. The *śāstras* like the Panchadashi present the details on the philosophy and implementation of this principle. The *haṁsa yoga* is a *sādhana*, a spiritual experiment for the realization of this theory.

The *Gāyatrī Mantra* consists of twenty-four Sanskrit letters compiled in the three *vyāhṛtis* after “*Oam*”. The continuous *japa* of this *mantra* by the subconscious mind is a *sādhana* of the *prāṇa*, which results in the merging of the individual consciousness with the *mahāprāṇa*. This effectuates the linkage of the individual self with its Omnipresent *thy* origin and thus leads to the realization of the *Brahm*. The subtle but spontaneous *japa* of *soaham* occurring with each breath is the same type of *sādhana* of *prāṇa* and gives equivalent spiritual benefits. Therefore, the *soaham sādhana* is called the *ajapā japa* of *Gāyatrī*.

Every *sādhaka* of *Gāyatrī* has to perform the *soaham sādhana* (*haṁsa yoga*) before entering into the highest phase of the spiritual *sādhana* of *Gāyatrī*. Thus ‘*soaham*’ is the *bīja* (essence) of the *Gāyatrī Mantra* and its *sādhana* is said to be essential for the ultimate success in the *sādhana* of *Gāyatrī*.

Among the twenty-four incarnations (*avatāras*) – of God Viṣṇu – as described in the *purāṇas*, one is the *Haṁsāvatāra*. The *haṁsa yoga* may also be regarded as the *upāsana* of this manifestation of the Almighty. Success of this *yoga* elevates the *sādhaka* up to the states of – ‘*Raja Haṁsa*’ and ‘*Parama Haṁsa*’, which represent the highest realm of spiritual illumination and sainthood.

As mentioned earlier, the *haṁsa* (swan) is regarded as a symbol of sanctity, fairness and discreteness. It is described in the *śāstras* that

if a *hamsa* is given a mixture of milk and water, it would suck only milk and leave back the water content. That means, it has a natural tendency to recognize and select the noblest, the supreme. When a *sādhaka* develops a prudent acumen to adopt the righteous tendency in all aspects of life, he is said to have reached the level of a '*hamsa*'.

The bird *hamsa* (swan) is spotless white. The rhetoric representations associated with it's name imply that the lives of the *sādhakas* who attain the title of (that is, who reach the state of) '*hamsa*' should also become absolutely clean and sacred in all dimensions of life.... The personality of such a *sādhaka* fits well in the simile given by saint Kabira: "*Dāsa Kabira Jatana Se Odhī, Jyon Kī Tyon Rakha Dinī Cunariyā*" which implies – "A saintly *jīva* wears the 'sheet' of life with scrupulous care and leaves it as it is (that is, naturally pure) in the end.....".

It is said in the *śāstras* about the *Rā ahamṣa* (king swan) that it lives in the Mānasarovara and selects only real beads from the waters of this holy pond and leaves out the sea-animals and insects. This description symbolizes the character of the *sādhakas* who are spiritually enlightened up to the '*Rājahamsa*' level. As such, in the world around, we might sometimes find the bird swan eating the insects and rubbish; but we should note that the descriptions in the *śāstras* are rhetoric, so these should be interpreted in the right perspective. The above qualities in fact imply that – an ideal '*hamsa*' would prefer to die but he would not eat anything except the pure beads. Similarly, a spiritually refined person, who has reached the status of '*rājahamsa*' would always choose the righteous path of absolute truth and stand by the noble ideals of morality even if he has to face challenging difficulties and adversities in his life....

The 'sound' of *soham* is said to have originated from the combination of *prakṛati* (the eternal power of creation) and *puruṣa* (the Supreme Creator). The *purāṇas* describe that the inspiration – to become many from the lonely state of being just one, generated within the *Brahm*, gave rise to the existence of the *prakṛati* and *puruṣa*. The *prakṛati* was *jaḍa* and the *puruṣa* was *cetan*. Combination of the two resulted in the creation of the universe, the Nature and the

manifestation of life.... The commingling of the *prakṛati* and *puruṣa* resulted in the expression of *Śabda Brahm̐*. The *nāda* produced by this cosmic impulse was reflected in the *Nāda Brahm̐* as the eternal sublime vibrations of *Om̐kāra*.

When the unity of the *prakṛati* and *puruṣa* generated the sentient *cetan* components – the *jīvas*, then its *jaḍa* component (the *prakṛati*) disappeared. Only the ‘*Saḥ*’ – the *Para Brahm̐*, the *puruṣa*, the eternal source of *cetan*, and the ‘*Ham*’ – the *jīva*, an expression of the *Para Brahm̐* in *thy* creation, remained there after.... The ‘*saḥ*’ and the ‘*aḥam*’ are recognized separately under the *dvaita* philosophy. The *advaita* theory defines their conjugation as eternal because, according to this philosophy, the *jīva* is nothing but a reflection of the multiple manifestations of the *Para Brahm̐*. This absolute unity is represented in ‘*soaham*’ (*saḥ* + *aḥam*). Thus, the *soaham* has originated and is eternally existing along with the omnipresent *nāda* of *Om̐kāra*.

The *soaham sādhanā* provides an answer to the natural quest of the *ī va* – “what am I?”, as – “I am *Para Brahm̐*, I am *thee*, I exist in everything...”. The in-depth understanding and insightful analysis of this fact by the *ṛiṣis* had given rise to the philosophies of ‘*Brahm̐ Darśana*’, ‘*Ātma Jñāna*’, ‘*Tatra Jñāna*’, ‘*Ātra Jñāna*’, ‘*Vyavahāra Jñāna*’, etc and hence to the gamut of the ancient scriptures of Indian Philosophy and Culture.

Without self-recognition, a human being does not really understand the origin and purpose of his life, its dignity and duties. Like a child gets attracted towards every toy and every new scene and remains engrossed in unnecessary activities, a grownup person also, throughout his life, remains involved in the aspirations and actions which are triggered by the agile mind and the passions of the other sense organs. Life of a human largely remains confined to his body, physical comforts and the affections of people associated (as relatives and friends) with it. His thoughts and emotions also emanate from and move around within the domains of – these limited aspects of life and the knowledge of the world within the peripheries of his gross perceptions and illusive imaginations in general.

If one pays little attention to what happens to a dead body one would definitely feel that there is some thing else – the *prāṇa*, without which, the body cannot survive even for a tiny part of a second. The biodegradation of the body begins soon after death. The same ‘body’, which was so dear to the people around when it was recognized as ‘so and so person’, becomes ‘untouchable’ moments after death. Unless processed chemically, buried or cremated, this body starts stinking and deteriorates fast. If left open, it would be eaten away in a short while by the germs within it or by the vultures, jackals, kites etc from the outside....

What is that which exists as the *prāṇa*, the source of consciousness, which keeps the body alive and gives it the identity of a person? Few of us really pay serious attention to this question. Most of the time we remain occupied in the activities associated with the worldly pleasures, cravings and worries and the fulfillment of the emotional, mental and sensual desires generated by materialistic attachments and ego. Those inclined towards religion and spirituality although know that they are souls and not just the physical body..., their knowledge often remains a bookish one or as an abstract concept or theory unless it is contemplated thoroughly, inscribed in the deeper domains of faith and realized in practice....

The religious and spiritual scriptures always preach that – “Know yourself”, “Do what is your real duty towards the soul”...etc. Without adept understanding of the answers and their implementation in conduct, one can not recognize the path of his own welfare and the true goal of his life. For a practical implementation of the teachings of the *śāstras*, one has to bear in mind and thoroughly comprehend that the soul and the body are two different entities of a living being. The relation between the two is that of – a rider and a vehicle, or a craftsman and his tools. The body is only a medium for the expression and activities of the soul.

The requirements of the body and the soul are quite different. The body needs comforts, luxuries..., and respectful attention of others. Its pleasures tend towards the self-obsessive activities. But the soul is neither affected by any material or worldly possessions and com-

forts, nor by scarcity and hardship... It is the body and the mind, attached with the desires and passions that experience the pleasures or pains. The feelings of content of the sense organs and the mind are momentary. Once the desired things or pleasures are attained, the charm of the same disappears soon; the enthusiasm ceases and the thirst for novel taste, newer achievements... begin to grow up....; and so on....; the vicious cycle continues throughout the life...., and eventually the life ends in a 'yet to be satisfied state'.

Most people do not realize that human life is the best creation of the God and it is bestowed on a *jīva* with very specific purpose. Even those who are attracted towards evolution of the inner self often do it at a superficial level. Some people think reading or listening to the religious scriptures and performing some rituals of worshiping is sufficient for spiritual elevation. They should note that such actions are only symbolic and supportive and do not lead to the 'visualization' of the existence of the soul as different from the body and the mind.

The process of spiritual awakening and inner contentment of the soul begins only when the peity, generous attitude, compassion and altruist activities of social welfare become natural part of one's thinking and routine cores. The door of the ecstatic beatitude of our soul opens only when our life, rather than being confined to the material attainments, comforts and sentient pleasures..., enjoys – helping others, sharing love and compassion with everybody around, and working for a noble cause of enlightening the society by the righteous knowledge and excelled expansion of moral ideals.

The science of spirituality and the *yoga sādhanās* cannot be understood or employed just by some physical actions or oral recitations. The incorporation of the associated principles in one's deeds and corresponding changes in one's intrinsic tendencies, emotions and thoughts is essential. Without the latter, the so-called spiritual and religious activities will be nothing more than engrossment of the mind and the body in a novel 'play' or activity....

The natural interests of the soul are rooted in compassion, generosity and altruist deeds of selfless service for the betterment of all. These

cannot be fulfilled without sacrificing the selfish interests of the body. One has to learn limit and restrain the needs and desires of the body before proceeding towards the evolution of his true “self”. One could attempt it in gradual steps so that the body could easily adopt the new life style. The training of the mind to face the ‘hardships’ of austerity and asceticity is the most difficult task. This could be achieved only if one has sincere faith, aspirations and strong will to become a better human, an ideal child of divinity... One’s convictions and *samskāras* as per their nature, are predominant in either supporting the spiritual conditioning of mind or, suppressing and diverting it from self-restrain and altruist way of life.

Dedicated meditation on the separate existence of the soul and the mind, the *prāṇa* and the body helps refining the *samskāras* and righteous conditioning of the mind and body for accepting the guidance of the soul. The *soham sādhanā* is supposed to be the best for this purpose. It can easily be performed with other kinds of *upāsana*s and *sāadhanā*s and essential activities of a normal routine. This special *prāṇāyāma* can be practised at any free time (of about 20 to 30 minutes at a stretch) during the day. However, it is most fruitful if performed at a neat and quiet place, at regular intervals of time every day, in a relaxed and fresh state of the body and the mind. The larger the duration of this practice with thorough mental concentration, the faster will be its effect.

The gross body, *prāṇik* or the subtle body and the soul, each is given due importance in this *sāadhanā*. As stated earlier, this *sāadhanā* is beneficial for the body, mind and the soul because the oxygen, *prāṇa* and the *mahāprāṇa* acquired with each breath in this practice is an ideal food for the gross, subtle and causal bodies respectively. The combination of these sources induces energy and courage, enlightens the intellect with the understanding of the ideals of humane life and inspires the inner self with the nectar of *śraddhā* and the spiritual charge of absolute truth.

The *sāadhanā* of *soham* is very simple and risk-less. If the feelings of – ‘my soul is a creation of divinity...., a part of the *Brahm...*’,

become natural like the sound of '*soham*' generated with each breath, and, if the hearty inspirations for austere and altruist life become stronger, one might rest assured that his practice is no longer a 'mere physical exercise' or a 'ritual', rather, it has become a proper *sāadhanā* and has begun the process of spiritual elevation.

The above state could be reached and the *sādhaka* may progress towards its *siddhī* if he disciplines his daily routine by self-restraint and assiduity and broadens his domain of love, compassion, cooperation and sacrifices. Once his selfishness – confined to his body, family and near and dear ones – expands up to the level of selflessness, and this transition begins to show up in his character and deeds, his *soham sāadhanā* may be regarded as having matured in the right direction, ensuring ultimate success.

Soaḥaṁ Sāḍhanā: High Realms of Prāṇa Yoga

When the air blows through small holes, its friction gives rise to specific sounds. The musical sound of a flute is also generated by the same effect. When stormy breeze flows through the bamboo-forest, it sounds like a sharp *swara* of a flute. When high-speed winds pass through thick field of trees, their friction with the latter also produces such sounds. The nostrils in a human body are like the holes in a narrow tube – as in a flute for instance.

The in and out flow of air through these tiny holes of the nose produces typical sounds. Deep breathing at a slow pace intensifies this sound produced by the friction of the air with the nasal walls. This sound resembles that of the word ‘*so*’ during inhalation and as that of ‘*ham*’ during exhalation. These sounds are subtle and cannot be heard loudly by the ears. Nevertheless, these specific sounds can be ‘perceived’ through harmonizing the breaths and meditating on each breath in an otherwise silent atmosphere.

As described earlier, the practice of *soaḥaṁ sāḍhanā* (or *haṁsa yoga*) involves a *prāṇāyāma* in which the *sādhaka* takes deep breathing at a slow and consistent pace and concentrates on the above mentioned sounds. The stability of meditation, strength of will power and emotional intensity of the *sādhaka* – in attracting the omnipresent current of divine *prāṇa* and throwing away the self-obsession and weaknesses – play the major role to make it a high level *prāṇāyāma sāḍhanā*. As it involves the perception (realization) of the sublime and self-generated sounds, this *sāḍhanā* is equivalent to *nāda yoga*. The internal feelings of unification of the self with the *Brahm* enable a great spiritual practice – *ajapā japa* of *Gāyatrī*.

While performing this superior *prāṇāyāma*, the *sādhaka* should first sit quietly and experience (not just imagine) that a glowing ocean of the divine *prāṇas* is spread all around him. This is the first phase of meditation. With all his willpower he should then begin the *sāḍhanā* by taking a deep breath and feeling that with the subtle sound of ‘*so*’, *thy* power of the supreme source of consciousness has infused deep inside in the form of the divine *prāṇa*. The *sādhaka* should retain the

breath for a while and feel that with the subtle sound of 'a' this *mahāprāṇa* has been absorbed by the inner centers of his body and is illuminating and energizing the whole body, mind and the heart (emotional center). Then, while breathing out, the *sādhaka* should again use all his willpower to expel his entire ego, anger, lust, jealousy, selfishness and other vices and infirmities along with the sound of 'ham'.... Stopping the breath for a few seconds, he should then feel that all the discarded malign assimilation have been waned out in the surroundings and will never return to him... He should repeat this cycle several times. Continuous practice with zeal trains the *sādhaka* in performing this *sādhana* with perfection.

Initially, the *sādhaka* should perform this *sādhana* for about 5 to 10 minutes everyday. This should be preceded by a meditation (as described above) of about 15 minutes duration and followed by a contemplation phase of about the same duration. In this last phase, the *sādhaka* should feel that the divine power has blessed him with *thy* grace and that the supreme consciousness has bestowed divine qualities and potentials on him. He should concentrate upon different components and inner cores of the body and feel that each element is illuminated by absorption of the divine energy. He should also contemplate that he has devoted himself to the God and that all his sense organs, mind and the intellect are now in the hands of that Almighty.

Each of his five organs of perceptions and the five organs of external activities will now be controlled according to the divine disciplines. The activities of vision, hearing, smelling and tasting will be processed as per the directions of the soul. The mouth will not eat or say anything that is not worth the austere discipline. The genitals will not be misused for mere carnal pleasure, instead, these organs will be involved in sexual activities only when the reproduction of the offspring becomes necessary to fulfil the need of some noble purpose. The limbs would not indulge in any activity that goes against the altruist duties of a responsible person. The thoughts and emotions would always be inspired by the grace of God...

The mind will not allow any thought, which is away from virtuous ideals; the intellect will not take any unfair, selfish, hasty, superficial or immature decision. The heart (emotional core) will not generate worldly ambitions or desires below the dignity of human being as a beloved child of *thee*.

The meditation and contemplation phases attached with the *prāṇāyāma* of *soham* are most important parts of this *sādhana*. The *sādhaka*'s *śraddhā* and *viśwāsa* should be so intense that these will not become mere mental exercises or entertaining activities; rather, these would 'shake' and 'stir' the entire personality. The positive effects of proper performance of these parts of the *soham sādhana* would certainly be reflected in the *sādhaka*'s behavior and actions in daily life... The *sādhaka* living in the same physical body would then become a divine being instead of remaining an ordinary mortal being or a social and intelligent animal.

The *soham prāṇāyāma* is an excellent auto-suggestive experiment of psychology. After making an attempt to exhale all the weaknesses and sins with each breath, the *sādhaka* indeed feels extremely relaxed and gets peace of mind. The feeling of receiving the *mahāprāṇa* with a breath increases his inner strength and deepens his *śraddhā* and self-confidence, which in turn become the motive force for the ascetic control of his body and mind and the source for his psychological and spiritual enlightenment. The inherent principle of *soham* gets inscribed in the inner self of the *sādhaka* as his *śraddhā* deepens. This successively takes his life to the levels of that of the great personalities, sages and angels...

As stated earlier, ordinary *prāṇāyāmas* offer the benefits of increasing the vital energy and mental creativity. The higher level *prāṇāyāmas* are associated with meditation and willpower and thus result in – enhancing the internal motive force, spiritually refining the mental and emotional status and awakening some extraordinary potentials. The *soham sādhana* is a *prāṇāyāma* of supreme level as it also involves *śraddhā* and *saṁkalpa* of the *sādhaka* and therefore gives rise to the 'stirring' of the reservoir of the individual consciousness and leads to 'merging' the latter in the ocean of divine consciousness.

The supernatural effects of *soham* are also highest among those of the other spiritual experiments of *prāṇāyamas*. Ten major and fifty-four minor – total sixty-four *prāṇāyamas* are described as the *sādhana*s of *prāṇa yoga*. Of these, the *soham* is supposed to be paramount. The penetration and awakening of the *ṣaṭ cakras* becomes possible by this *sādhana*.

When the (*mahā*)*prāṇa* is 'inhaled' through a breath during the *soham sādhana* it first reaches the *ājñā cakra* and gets divided into two components – one in the form of a divine emotional charge and the other as vital energy. The first one reaches the heart – the emotional core and from there flows towards the different nuclei of conscious perception inside the body. It illuminates every corner of the inner body with the eternal glow of *sat* (absolute truth) and removes the *asat* (the darkness of ignorance and falsehood). The sublime currents of *prāṇa* reach the backside of the brain from the *ājñā cakra* and enter the spinal column, which subtly contains the flow of the *Brahm Nāḍī*.

The bioelectrical currents of the *idā* and *pingalā nāḍīs* flow along the two sides of the *brahm nāḍī* and, starting from the pituitary and pineal glands, they reach the *mūlādhāra cakra*. These currents flow back from this bottom *cakra* after their coherence in the *suśumnā*. The six extrasensory energy centers – the *ṣaṭ cakras*, are like eddy currents in the flow of the *brahm nāḍī*. These *crakras* are said to be the sources through which the individual self can traverse beyond the limits of time and space. These contain the sublime ocean of supernatural powers.

The *Kuṇḍalinī*, which is affirmed in the spiritual sciences of *yoga* as the source of all physical and spiritual potentials, can be reached only by penetrating the *ṣaṭ cakras*. The straight flow of the *prāṇa* through these *cakras* is essential for 'electrifying' the latent 'coil' of the *kuṇḍalinī*. This requires immense pressure of *prāṇa* under adept control. The flow of the vital energy component of *prāṇa* generated during the *soham prāṇāyama* and the *saṃkalpa* of the *sādhaka* associated with this *sādhana* provide the right combination for straight traversing through the *ṣaṭ cakras*, penetrating the three *granthis* and eventually activating the *kuṇḍalinī*.

Another spiritual benefit of the *soham prāṇāyama* is the perception of sublime and divine fragrances. Smelling is a *tanmātrā* (power of perception) associated with the basic element of air. Therefore, the practice for control and attainment of extraordinary potential of this (the *gandha*-) *tanmātrā* fall under the *sāadhanās* of higher level *prāṇāyamas*. The *soham sāadhanā* can expand the *gandha tanmātrā* so much that the *sādhaka* may smell the infra-subtle and long distant fragrances. This power then becomes a medium to recognize and experience the divine elements by their unique fragrance. When the *sādhaka* is progressing well in the *soham sāadhanā*, he often smells some divinely soothing fragrances. This is an indication of supernatural developments.

Shrines and the place of *upāsanā* and *sāadhanā* are often endowed with some incenses (like *dhūpa* or *agarbatti*) or flowers. Their aroma induces a soothing feeling in mind and helps its focused concentration. Such fragrances also support rapid development of the *gandha tanmātrā* during the initial stages of the *prāṇāyamas*. If the *sādhaka* meditates on the fragrance along with the exercise of deep breathing then after a little practice with determination he would be able to smell the same pleasant aroma even when he comes out and goes away from the room of *upāsanā*. Eventually, he would begin to smell it during his regular *sāadhanā* even without having any external means or arrangement of creating such incense. This is an indication of the awakening of the latent potential of the *gandha tanmātrā*. Performing a higher level *prāṇāyama* like *soham* at this stage boosts this development and gradually gives rise to a supernatural power of extrasensory smell.

The importance of *gandha tanmātrā* is well experienced in nature. Many animals and insects possess refined power of smelling. This potential is indeed an essential mode of communication, search for food, sensing an enemy's presence and transmitting or receiving the signals for mating (to or from the opposite sex)...., etc in many birds, animals and insects. Many creatures also use this sense to know the weather conditions in advance. The trained dogs use this faculty to trace the criminals or the lost things or persons. In human beings, this

faculty normally stands much below in the order of importance as compared to the faculties of thinking, vision, speech and hearing. Once the hidden power of smelling is activated, this dominates over all other normal faculties and it can be focused by the *sādhaka* for sensing the supernatural signals and experiencing the unknown, which exists far beyond the grasp of human intelligence.... The evoked *tanmātrā* of *gandha* enables the *sādhaka* to feel the presence of the divine powers and receive their messages. Success of the *soaham sādhanā* also bestows such extrasensory potentials of the *gandha tanmātrā* on the *sādhaka*.

As the *soaham sādhanā* also deals with the *swaras* (*nāda*) produced in breathing; so, it can give the benefits of a *swara sādhanā* too. The states of the human body and mind are governed by the extent of the positive and negative biochemical currents, which flow through the *iḍā* and *pingalā nāḍis* with the *sūrya* and *candra swaras*. By harmonizing the breathing patterns in a *prāṇāyāma*, one can control his *sūrya* and *candra swaras* and hence the functioning of the body and the mind.

The higher level *prāṇāyāmas* like the *soaham sādhanā* induce the power of *mahāprāṇa* in this activity and thus help the *sādhaka* know the latent condition of his inner self. This in turn help him decide—‘what should be done and when’ in order to get the best results. The otherwise unknown or latent information also becomes accessible by such a *yoga sādhanā* of the *swaras* of *prāṇa*.

Emotional Elevation by Soaham Japa

No *upāsana* could be complete without incorporating *japa*, *dhyāna* (meditation) and *bhāvanā* – emotional sincerity and linkage with the divine goal of *upāsana*. Literally speaking, *upāsana* means – sitting near by. Sitting near an idol or picture or any other symbol of God, worshiping it with the help of flowers, sacred water, *candan*, *akṣata* etc and uttering some prayers and *mantras* in front of it might be useful for conditioning the mind for an *upāsana*. But, this alone does not serve the real purpose. Faith in the divine disciplines, thorough pondering over the latter and adopting them in all aspects of life..., and development of the personality so as to nurture the virtues that uplift it towards the ideals of morality, near the level of an angelic being – are essential for performing an *upāsana*.

Faith in God becomes meaningful only when *thy* disciplines and the duties assigned by *thou* materialize in the devotee's life. Gradual elevation of the devotee's behavior, qualities, thoughts, emotions and deeds is an indication of his proximity with his ideal (the deity, whose *upāsana* is being attempted by the devotee). This is indeed the criterion for judging the sincere performance of his *upāsana*.

Reading religious or morally inspiring literature, visiting the shrines and *tīrthas* and recalling their memories – these practices give support in restraining the agility of the mind and focussing it for meditation during an *upāsana*. Different methods of *japa* and *dhyāna* are taught under different religious and spiritual schools. But, the *sādhana* of *soaham* can be regarded as a universal *upāsana*. Every human being can perform it.

As mentioned earlier, this universal *sādhana* involves *japa* (of *soaham* through the breaths), *dhyāna* (meditation on the subtle sounds of 'so', 'a' and 'ham') along with emotional depth (to contemplate and feel that 'I am an expression of the *Brahm*'). This is indeed an *upāsana* of the limitless eternal expression of the *Brahm*. No rituals, no other methodology, need be performed with this *sādhana*. In this *sādhana*, the devotee realizes his closest link with *thee* by experiencing *thy* presence in the inner self. There could be

no *upāsanā* as complete as this experience is. By sincere practice and strength of internal faith and *śraddhā* such a realization becomes easy and it intensifies as the *soaham sādhanā* progresses.

Worshipping God's idols with the feelings like that of – “*Twameva mātā ca pitā twameva, Twameva bandhuḥ casakhā twameva...* – regarding *thou* as the mother, father, friend, the most near and dear one...”, is an ideal example of the *dvaita bhāva* in *upāsanā*. *Thyself* and the individual self are regarded as two and the latter devotes him self under the divine shelter of *thy* grace. The *soaham sādhanā* is an *upāsanā* of *advaita bhāva*. Here, the devotee's self and the God are regarded as one – both being the integral reflections, manifestations, of the *Brahm*.

If the *swaras* of ‘*so*’ and ‘*ham*’ are recognized separately and the existence of the divine powers of the *Brahm* and the conscious form of the individual self is experienced differently then the *prāṇāyāma* of *soaham sādhanā* would correspond to a ‘*dvaita upāsanā*’. Moreover, if the presence of air – a *jada* element of nature, is also felt along with the sounds of breathing then this would be a *traite bhāva*. A *sādhaka* is free to select any ‘*bhāva*’ suitable to him during the initial practice and gradually reach the *advait* one – the state of total sacrifice and complete unification in sublimity.

The soul remains a *jīvātmā* only till it is asleep under the illusions of *māyā*. The *jīvātmā* recognizes itself only as the body and the mind in ordinary humans. The spiritual charge of *upāsanā* and *sādhanā* removes the mists of ignorance that shrouded it. The inner self is then purified and enlightened as an eternal reflection of divinity. The emotional power of the *sādhaka* used in the *advaita bhāva* of the *soaham sādhanā* awakens and elevates the state of the soul to revive its original glory and its unity with the *Brahm* begins to reflect in the *sādhaka*'s personality.

Without the emotional depth, motivation and mental concentration, the feelings and meditations associated with the *soaham sādhanā* would be like ‘mere imaginations’ or ‘mental-amusement and diversion’ or ‘day dreaming’, and would not show any sign of progress.

Attracting the *mahāprāṇa* is not a physical or mental exercise. It can't be attained without the warmth and the urge of the innermost sentiments. The voice of the inner emotions could be powerful enough to be 'heard' by (to reach) the cosmic centers of *thy* expression only if the *sādhaka*'s external and internal personalities are purified, disciplined and indeed devoted towards his *śraddhā* in the divine disciplines. Similar strength of the inner self and the willpower of the *sādhaka* are required in the later phase of the *soham prāṇāyāma*. The *sādhaka* has to firmly uproot his viles, weaknesses and ego that are deeply rooted in his instincts as a *jīva*.

If one sincerely performs the contemplation phase of the *sāadhanā* of *soham*, the corresponding thoughts and emotions would be gradually assimilated in his memory and subconscious mind. His integrity of character and duty-bound righteous activities will support rapid conditioning to accelerate the spiritual effects. Such a person would live the life of a true *karma yogī*. His actions will be inspired and controlled by the divine will. In worldly terms, he may be a farmer, a gardener, a laborer, a businessman, a doctor, a scientist etc, may have a lower, medium, high or no status in the socio-economic system and live an utterly ordinary life. In either case, his spiritual refinement would excel progressively. All his deeds would be selfless and duty-bound and hence estimable like those of the great personalities, saints and sages.

King Janaka used to live a duty-bound life of an emperor and was seen busy in related worldly affairs. But, because of his selfless, enlightened attitude, fair and discerning intellect and piety of emotions, he was considered a *karma yogī*. His knowledge was honored as equivalent to that of a scholar of the *brahm vidyā*.

If the *soham sāadhanā* is being performed adeptly, its effects on enlightening the *sādhaka*'s emotions would be reflected in different facets of his life in terms of his righteous thinking, broad outlook and cooperating behavior etc. Because of its direct connection with the emotional center and the inner self, the *soham sāadhanā* becomes a principal *sāadhanā* for peerless spiritual evolution.

The Soaham Sādhana of Saint Kabira

The history of the *Bhakti* Age of the Indian literature highlights two major streams of development of devotional poesy and literature: (i) *nirguṇa* (*nirākāra*) – in which the God is realized as absolute, formless and omnipresent; and (ii) *saguṇa* (*sākāra*) – where the devotion is focussed at a specific form (idol) of a manifestation of God. Chronologically, the period of *nirguṇa* is supposed to be earlier.

This was around 1500 A.D., when the saintly poet Kabira had propagated religious reforms under the *nirguṇa* philosophy of *bhakti* (devotion). About one century later, the saintly poets like *Sūrdāsa*, *Tulsidāsa*, *Mīrā* etc had inspired the flow of *saguṇa bhakti* in the form of *vaiṣṇava bhakti* (devotion of God Vishnu). This had so firmly established the devotion of God Ram and Krishna in the hearts of the people that even today a vast majority of the people of Indian origin is influenced by it. The *saguṇa bhakti* of Ram or Krishna is an integral part of these people's religious life.

The propagation of the *nirguṇa* philosophy has the *Nātha* School of asceticity in the background. Parallel to its line of devotion is the *advaita* principle of Shankaracharya as taught by Swami Ramananda and, in slightly different form – having a characteristic affection of *saguṇa bhakti*, by some Sufi philosophers. Saint Kabira's preaching are mostly inspired by the *advaita* theory of Acharya Ramanand. The importance he gave to *yoga* and divine love may be attributed to the *Nātha* and the Sufi schools respectively. The symbolic representation in his poetry is different from those of the *saguṇa bhakti*. In this context his creations appear to be similar to those used by the Sufi Saints.

According to the *advaita* principle, *Brahm* is the only truth – the absolute existence. It is because of ignorance and illusions that the visible world appears to be a truth. This lack of knowledge is described as the influence of *māyā* in the above theory. It is because of *māyā* that the *jīva* feels the bliss and the pains of life and death. Whatever distinction one feels between the soul and the Omnipresent *Brahm* is only a mist of *māyā*. The knowledge of the soul – self-

realization is a must to eradicate the influence of *māyā*. The absolute realization of the fact that the soul and the *Brahm* are one (*advaita*) – liberates the *jīva* from the bonds of *māyā*.

Only the knowledge of the self – as a manifestation of the *Brahm* leads to the perfect realization of the self. Attainment of this is essential for reaching the absolute state of *soham*. Saint Kabira has given specific importance to this aspect of *soham* with a devotional touch. He has described the realization of this state through *yoga* and mysticism. For instance, review his following verse –

Aradha Uradadha Mukhi Lāgo Kāsu |

Suna Maṇḍala Māhi Kari Paragāsu ||

Uhān Sūraja Nāhin Canda |

Ādi Niramjanu Kare Ananda ||

So Brahmāṇḍi Piṇḍ i So Jānu |

Mānasarovari Kari Isanānu ||

Soham So Jā Kau Hai Jāpa |

Dhākala Lipata Na Hoī Puna Arū Pāpa ||

Avarana Varana Dhāma Nahin Chāma |

Avarana Pāia Gurū Kā Sāya ||

Ṭārī Ne Ṭarai Āvai Na Jāi |

Suna Sahaja Mahi Rahio Samāi ||

Mana Madhe Jaun Je Koi |

Jō Bolai So Āpai Hoi ||

Joti Mantra Mani Asathirū Karai |

Kahi Kabīra So Prāṇī Tarai ||

Meaning: In that absolute void (*śūnya*) horizon, which is surrounded only by *ākāśa*, *thou* (the *Brahm*) brilliance is kindled eternally. There is no sun or moon (or any source of light) but that source of absolute bliss is illuminated in its own glow. That *śūnya* is the entire cosmos and that alone is a *piṇḍa*. You should take a dip in that Mānasarovara (holy pond in the Himalayas) and perform the *japa* of *soham*. The *japa* of *soham* is beyond the limits of sins or sacred virtues. The *śūnya* of its expansion contains no colors nor blanks; neither sunlight nor shadow (or ‘no sunlight’).....

It cannot be traversed without the grace of a noble *Gurū*. There, it (the power of awakened mind) cannot evade; it (the mind) cannot even move anywhere; it just remains absorbed in the *śūnya*. The words of the one who knows this *śūnya* existing in the inner self, would, even if uttered casually, become the expressions of his inner voice. One who focuses his mind in deciphering the latent knowledge of this eternal sublime glow (of *śūnya*) could, according to poet Kabira, be blessed by absolute liberation from the worldly bounds.

In the above paragraph saint Kabira has defined '*soaham*' as – "The feeling of '*soaham*' is supposed to be realized when nothing else remains (in the domain of cognition) except the *Brahm*; even self-identity echoes as 'I am (the *jīva* is) the *Brahm*'.... Then the *jīva* unites with his cosmic eternal source, the *Brahm*'".

In his descriptions of the *soaham japa* Kabira has simplified the philosophical abstractions so that even common people could understand the principles of this *sā dhanā* and attempt adopting them in practice. Instead of using the basis of *advaita* philosophy he has explained the unity between the *jīva* and the *Brahm* in the light of mysticism as – the reflection of the cosmic soul in the individual soul. Here, the linkage between the *Brahm* and the *jīva* is described as oneness instead of the unification (of the *advaita* principle) by total non-existence of the latter. This approach of mysticism expresses the sense of eternal affection contained in the meaning of '*soaham*'. The *advaita* theory does not imply the absolute rejoice contained in the reunion of the soul with its own eternal form. In mysticism, the soul is said to be totally immersed in the eternal bliss of this commingling after the realization of '*soaham*'.

A total sacrifice – like that of a raindrop in an ocean, of the soul is implied in the *advaita* theory. Whereas the mysticism of Kabira allows the soul to also enjoy the feeling that – "I am (the soul is) meeting my eternal origin". In these rhetoric representations, the soul is described as conveying the cosmic-soul that – "wherever I see your glow I find you and whenever I see this glow I also start glowing...".

Here, the soul and the *Brahm* despite being identified as one are also expressed as two; the absolute enjoyment of the soul in uniting with the *Brahm* cannot be explained otherwise.

If the soul loses its existence (as implied in the *advaita* philosophy) then 'who' would have the beatitude after meeting with the *Brahm* – the source of ultimate bliss? This doubt (of a common mind) does not have any place, if the *soham sādhanā* is described in the style of mystical representations. Here 'soham' is realized as the absolute ecstatic state (of the soul) of ultimate bliss and divine peace.....

The above kind of sense of absolute love (the linkage between the individual self and the divine self) may be inculcated by the *nirguṇa* as well as *sagūṇa upāsanā*. The realization and expression of such a feeling of love becomes very easy if the devotee and the God 'exist' in some form which can be visualized by the conscious mind. It is indeed easier in the *sagūṇa* devotion because here the object of reverence is usually viewed in an ideal human like incarnation.

The songs sung in the devotion of Gods Ram and Krishna can carry the (inner self of) devotee to a higher level of beatitude, which could be compared to that described in mysticism as the commingling of the soul with its eternal origin. For instance, consider the following verse of the saintly poet Tulasidasa —

Prabhu Guna Suni Mana Haripihai, Nira Nayanana dharihai |
Tulasidā sa Bhayo Rā ma Ko, Viśwāsa Prem Sakhi Ānanda, ||
Umagi Ura Bhari Hai |

Or, read the stanza of a song written by Meerabai —

Jinake Piyā Pradeśa Basata Hain, Likhi Likhi Bheje Pātī |
Mere Piyā Mo Mānhin Basata Hain, Gūnja Karūn Dina Rātī ||

The above devotional songs also generate the same feelings in the hearts of the devotees as those described in mysticism as the feelings of beatified bliss — *ānanada*.

There is no place for *thy* description in the *nirguṇa* philosophy, as no form or manifestation of the *Brahm* is defined here. Then, what could be the basis of the divine love of the soul? In order to reflect this eternal affection in his verses of *nirguṇa* devotion, Kabira has used some mystical linkages and intimate analogies. He has described the reverence and intimacy of the *jīva* with the *Brahm* as that of a disciple with his Guru, king (master), parents, friends, spouse... etc, as can be seen in the following stanzas of his poesy —

Govinda (God) in a *Guru*:

Gurū Govinda To Eka Hai, Dūjā Yahu Ākāra |
Āpā Meṭi Jivata Marai, To Pavai Karatāra ||

Hari (God) in a mother:

Hari Jananī Main Bālika Torā,
Kahena Auguna Bakasahu Morā |

Hari (God) in a husband:

Hari Bhorā Pī va, Bhāi Hari Morā Pīva |
Hari Binu Rahi Na Sakai Merā Jīva ||

God in a revered master:

Kabarī Prem Na Cākhiyā, Cakhi Nā Līyā Sāva |
Sūne Ghara Kā Pahuṇā, Jyūn Āyā Tyūn Jāva ||

Kabira had realized the *Brahm* in the form of boundless universal love. This is how he could reach the highest level of mysticism in his simple, easy to grasp poems of *nirguṇa bhakti* and could also represent in them the deep aspects of the ultimate state of *soham*.

The Bindu Yoga

Bindu Yoga is an important and simple *sādhana* like the *Hamsa Yoga* and it also serves as a supplement to the latter and to many other spiritual practices because it deals with meditation upon the sacred glow of the supreme consciousness existing in the soul. In this *yoga*, the *sādhaka* first concentrates on the visible light through *trātaka* and by deepening his meditation gradually experiences the illumination of the inner body to visualize the manifestation of divine spark in it.

In the initial stages of this *yoga* the practice of *trātaka* is repeated. After sufficient progress in *trātaka* the meditation on the spot of light becomes possible even without the help of any external source of light such as a candle or a lamp.

The *bindu yoga* is a high level *sādhana* which falls next to the *soaham sādhana* in terms of the simplicity of practising in daily life. Likewise the *soaham sādhana*, everybody can perform it without any risk or difficulties of strict disciplines.

In the daily practice of the *bindu yoga*, the *sādhaka* sits in a *dhyāna mudrā* (posture of meditation) in a calm state of the body and the mind with erect spinal cord and closed eyes. His legs are cross folded so as to make a posture of *sukhāsana* or *padmāsana* and both the hands are kept on the lap with the right palm above the left (Lord Buddha is often depicted in this posture in his idols and pictures). The *sādhaka* then concentrates to 'perceive' a bright spot in the central portion of the forehead right above the gap between the eyebrows. Deeper core behind this center is defined to be the location of the *ājñā cakra*. The *sādhaka* should initially practise the *trātaka* in order to perform this meditation properly.

In the practice of a *trātaka*, the *sādhaka* keeps a lamp (of oil or *ghee*) or a candle in front of the eyes – at a distance of about 3 to 4ft and keeps the eyes half-open. The position of the lamp is set up to the height of the *sādhaka's* chest when he is sitting in the posture as described above, so that he could look at the tip of the flame without

bending his head. The *sādhaka*'s eyes gaze steadily at the bright spot without blinking for few seconds. He then closes the eyes to visualize the image of this glow at the position of the *ājñā cakra*.

After few seconds, he again opens the eyes slightly and looks at the flame. The above process is repeated successively at increased stretched of times – ranging from two to twenty minutes per day. Initially the light spot appears to be blurred and unstable once the eyes are closed. But, as the *sādhaka*'s concentration improves, it becomes as bright and stable as the flame (or the object of light) kept in front of the *sādhaka*.

The morning times are usually recommended for performing a *trātaka* because the mind and the body are both fresh during this period. The atmosphere is relatively cool during these hours of the day and thus prevents the possibility of 'heating up' of the head due to deep engrossment and direct and continuous vision of light.

Once the practice of *trātaka* is perfected, the *sādhaka* begins to see a bright spot inside the center of his forehead without the help of a lamp or any other source of light.... Upon reaching this state, the *sādhaka* should concentrate on this bright spot seen in the *ājñā cakra* and feel that its glow is gradually expanding and illuminating the surrounding portion of the brain.

In an electric lamp, the central filament radiates first and its glow spreads in the surrounding gas and illuminates the entire globe of the bulb and the outside too. Vision (by closed eyes) of a similar spark and expansion of this 'mental radiance' is striven in this second phase (after *trātaka*) of the *bindu yoga*. The duration of this phase should be kept about 5 to 10 minutes initially which may be extended gradually along with the consecutive (third) phase to about 30 minutes.

In the third and the final phase of the daily practice of *bindu yoga* the *sādhaka* meditates on the feeling that the brain is fully illuminated and that the divine luminescence is slowly pervading the entire body. No corner, no portion, inside the body is left unilluminated.

The gentle effulgence of the bright spot focused in the domain of the *ājñā cakra* intensifies with the *sādhaka*'s mental engrossment and willpower. The duration of its consistent appearance and the domain of its light (aura) also increase correspondingly. The *ājñā cakra* is described in the *yoga śāstras* as the sixth sense, the third eye or the divine eye. A third eye is usually depicted at this spot on the forehead in the pictures of the human like manifestations of God Śaṁkara (Śiva) and Goddess Durgā. According to a story in the *purāṇas*, Lord Śiva had generated divine spark with immense effulgence by opening his third eye and had thereby 'charred' the prankish, erotic power of Kāmadeva into ashes.

In anatomical terms the *ājñā cakra* encompasses the pituitary and pineal glands. It has a subtle structure similar to that of an eye. This *cakra* is an eye of the subtle body. By awakening of this latent center of subtle perceptions one can visualize the otherwise invisible or hidden entities, the scenarios of the past events and those of the future happenings anywhere in the space...

With the help of the X-rays we can photograph the internal parts of the gross body and also 'see' the belongings inside a closed metal box.... etc. The signals emitted from (or received by) the 'subtle eye' are much more powerful. If this 'eye' is opened (or enlightened by *thy* luminescence) then one can use it for television without the help of any external or materialistic means. Sanjay is described in the Mahābhārata to have been endowed with this power of supernatural vision. This 'third eye' shows the world that can never be seen by the ordinary eyes (of the gross body).

Apart from having the potential of supernatural vision, the awakened *ājñā cakra* also has the latent capacity to transmit the glow of its aura as a powerful spark. This radiant force can burn (diminish) all the illusions and evil assimilation that prevent the refinement of the subtle body (thoughts and sentiments) of the *sādhaka*. Thus, by successful practices of *bindu yoga* all the *kusamskāras* and weaknesses can be destroyed completely with the help of the immense power of the spiritual effulgence emanated from the *ājñā cakra*.

Philosophically speaking, the awakening of the ‘third eye’ means arousing of the *viveka* – pure and discerning intellect and prudent foresightedness, which exists in every human brain but in a dormant state and largely remains latent and unrealized by most of the people. The activation of the hidden wisdom eliminates all ignorance and thus helps restrain and remove the blemishes of avarice, selfishness, possessive attachment, ego, jealousy and the agonies of the unlimited desires and mental complexities caused by them.

The *purāṇas* mention that when the world became disorderly and the misdeeds of evil mentality severely disturbed the harmony of nature then God Śiva performed his *Tāṇḍawa*... When he was engrossed in this ‘temblor’ dance, he opened his third eye. The opening of this eye generated the devastating spark of the grand disaster. The complete destruction of the world was then followed by the creation of a new, orderly world of divine disciplines.

In personal and social life too it sometimes becomes essential to destroy (discard or cleanse) the irrelevant, unmindful and untoward traditions or systems. Such a revolution turns out to be successful and leads to the betterment of life if it is guided by the foresighted prudence (the power of the subtle eye). The above story of the *Purāṇas* implies the essence of this fact in a rhetoric style. The present ailing state of humanity can be cured by transforming the mentality and attitude of the people upside down and by destroying the root causes – of unethical thinking – viz, the passions of selfishness, avarice, lust and ego. This great revolution (*vicāra krānti*) could be originated and driven up to ultimate success only by the trenchant power of righteous *viveka*.

In the *soham sādhanā*, the meditation and contemplation phase consist of a determined feeling that each component of the body is being filled and energized by the *prāṇa*. Similarly, in a *bindu yoga*, the last phase of meditation corresponds to visualizing the glow of the divine flame (*jyoti*) successively in the brain, heart, lungs and intestines etc, followed by the feeling that this brilliance has enlightened every constituent of the body from within. Every cell, every tendril is seen as sparkling with a reflection of this unique glow.

The Indian science of spirituality affirms four layers of the mind – *mana* (conscious mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *citta* (subconscious and unconscious mind) and *ahamkāra* (the sense of ‘being’ in the individual self). In the final contemplation phase of the *bindu yoga*, all these four components of the inner self are meditated upon as – fully absorbed in an ocean of *thy* light.

This feeling of illuminating the entire body and the inner self by the glow of the *jyoti* inspired in the *ājñā cakra* results in an effect similar to that of the sunrise. The glow of the rising sun breaks the darkness of the night and spreads brightness in all directions; soon the world leaves the drowsiness, rouses up and begins to work with a fresh charge of energy and enthusiasm in the bright morning. The *sādhana* of *bindu yoga* enlightens and purifies the gross, subtle and the causal bodies of the *sādhaka* and results in activating each instinct, each impulse of the self by the unique spark of the divine energy.

The word ‘light’ used in the science of spirituality corresponds not only to the glow and brightness of *prāṇa* but, it also implies an aura of knowledge and intellect and the energy of the enthusiasm of creativity..... In the terminology of the physical science, the effect of light naturally generates illumination and heat. In spiritual sense, the term *tāpa* (heat) means asceticity and creative use of *prāṇa* and the term *prakāśa* (illumination) deals with in-depth knowledge, sound reasoning, prudence and foresighted intellect.

The use of ‘bright spot’ as an object of concentration in *bindu yoga* is indeed related with the aforesaid spiritual impact. As stated earlier, the physical light produced by fire or electricity is used only in the elementary training phase of *trātaka*. The use of an oil (or *ghee*) lamp or a candle is most common in this practice. If one wants to use an electric bulb in place of a lamp then a low power bulb emitting dim light would be recommended to avoid strain on the eyes. A blue colored bulb should be arranged in this case, as its light would have a calm and cooling effect on the *sādhaka*’s mind.

Concentration on the reddish yellow glow of the rising sun is excellent for *trātaka*. Full moon may also be tried as an object for meditation in this early phase of the *bindu yoga*. Regular practice with

sincerity enables the *sādhaka* to perform *trātaka* without the help of any external source of light. The glow of the bright spot (*jyoti*) of light begins to appear on its own in the *ājñā cakra* after practising the *trātaka* for substantial amount of time with firm determination, devotion and mental engrossment. Initially this *jyoti* appears to be oscillating and shows different shades of light but gradually it becomes stable and glows with a unique color (usually silver white or like the glow of the interior of the rising sun) as this phase progresses steadily.

During the contemplation phase of the *bindu yoga*, the *sādhaka* has to control the flow of his thoughts and sentiments in a single direction, namely, that the divine glow is pervading from the *ājñā cakra* and eliminating the darkness of ignorance, infirmities, illusions, fears and vices. Some people often doubt that this type of contemplation may disturb the concentration that ought to be maintained during a meditation-based *sādhana* like the *bindu yoga*. These people should note that total thoughtlessness is required only in the practice of *samādhi* or the *laya yoga*. In other spiritual *sādhana*s it is sufficient to control the thoughts within the domain of the focus and purpose of the *sādhana*.

The holy river Ganges originates from the Himalayas and ultimately reaches its goal in the Ganga Sagara because, despite several turns, hurdles, drastic variations in its currents and disturbances due to the merging of other rivers etc, its flow does not lose its original direction. This example illustrates that it is not always the 'sharply focussed concentration', rather, the consistency of the direction of the flow of thoughts which is important in an effective meditation.

The amazing performances of the artists in a circus becomes possible only by their dedicated practices with deep mental concentration. These experts have significant willpower but they are not *yogis*. On the contrary, the saints like Meera, Chaitanya, Suradasa, Kabira, Ramakrishna Paramahansa etc, who used to be in an emotionally charged state of devotion and used to sing and even dance in *bhakti*, were equivalent to the *yogis*, although, they had not practiced any specific *yogāsana* or steady meditation... This is because the flow of the emotions of these saints and every activity of their life was naturally dedicated to the devotion of the Omnipresent God.

In the *sāadhanās* like the *prāṇa yoga*, *haṁsa yoga* (*soaham*) and *bindu yoga*, although the initial phase involves meditation, the more important and effective component is – contemplation and realization of the goal of the *sāadhanā*. The prescribed domain for the flow of thoughts and emotions is quite wide here. The *sādhaka* has to think and feel within this domain instead of focusing upon a single point. This flow churns the ocean of consciousness in the inner self and purifies its hidden core.

The *saguṇa upāsanā* is performed with emotional linkage with God. It involves worshipping *thou* manifestations, chanting of the prayers and devotional songs. There is no need of specific mental engrossment or meditation in such modes of *upāsanās*. In fact, it is the *sādhaka's* *śraddhā* and the depth of his devotional love that takes him to those high realms of spiritual attainments, which other *yogis* might reach *via* the successful practice of deep trance (*samādhi*).

While pondering through the heart during the (last phases of) *sāadhanās* like *soaham* and *bindu yoga*, the *sādhakas* often attain a state of *yoga nidrā*. Although physically it appears like a sleeping or an unconscious state, it is indeed a state of trance. It should be noted that the spiritual *sāadhanās*, if performed in a disciplined manner and with purity of heart (sentiments), mind (thoughts) and body (deeds), would never cause the extreme effects of excitations or dullness (or sleep). The *yoga nidrā* is a state of immersion of the individual consciousness in the supreme, eternal consciousness. Even if it is experienced for a few seconds, it brings enormous grace of that Almighty and excels the *sādhaka* towards the goal of divinity.

The *soaham sāadhanā* and the *bindu yoga* are simple, riskless and easy to perform. The *sādhaka's* willpower, emotional strength and piety of character ensure that – if these *sāadhanās* are performed according to the guidelines laid above, the *sādhaka* would receive immense bliss during the final phases of contemplation and realization and gradually reach the ultimate state of evoking the divinity indwelling in himself.

Glossary of Words used from the Shastrik Literature¹

Ākāśa: The *ākāśa tatva* is the most evolved and subliminal of the five basic elements (*panca tatvas*) that makes possible the sentient existence and experience of Nature.

Āranyaks: Places in forests where the *ṛiṣis* used to run their schools in order to offer adept training in the laboratory of life.

Cetan: The sentient manifestation of Nature and consciousness.

Granthis: Three latent knots along the *brahm nāḍī* are named the *Brahm Granthi*, *Vishnu Granthi* and *Rudra Granthi*.

Haṁsa: A swan also is called *haṁsa* in Sanskrit; this simile is used here in a rhetoric style. .

Jaḍa: The material or physical manifestation of Nature.

Jīva: Manifestation of the soul as a living being is called a *jīva*.

Kuṇḍalinī: (Also known as the serpentine power or cosmic electricity of *prāṇa*) symbolizes the subliminal core of absolute vital force.

Mahāprāṇa: The omnipresent, cosmic force of *prāṇa*.

Mokśa: Absolute salvation of the *jīva* from worldly attachments and the cycles of birth and death is called *mokśa*.

Nāda: The rhythmic flow of musical sound. *Āhata Nāda* refers to the *nāda* generated by vibrations in some medium. *Ānāhata Nāda* is the self-existent, subliminal *nāda* of *Śabda*.

1The English letters and special symbols used here for the Sanskrit Script are in accordance with the international transliteration standards.

Naḍis: The *Brahm Nāḍī* (cosmic nerve) or *suṣumnā naḍī* is an extra-

sensory canal in the inner most core of the endocrine (or spinal) column. The *iḍā nāḍī* is supposed to be an extrasensory canal on the left of the *suṣumnā nāḍī* in the lunar nerve hidden inside the endocrine (spinal) column. The *pingalā nāḍī* is supposed to be an extrasensory canal on the right of the *suṣumnā nāḍī* in the solar nerve hidden in the endocrine (spinal) column. These are functionally connected with the *pituitary* and *pineal* glands.

Panca tatvas: The five basic elements of manifestation of Nature and Life. Namely, *prathvī* (solid matter on or inside the earth), *jala* (water and fluids), *vāyū* (air), *Agni* (fire or other sources of energy), and *ākāsha* (the subliminal expansion of ether).

Prakṛati: Nature.

Prāṇa: Vital spiritual energy.

Piṇḍa: Any particle or body existing in the universe is called a *piṇḍa*.

Punya: Consequence of altruist service and equivalent actions of humane dignity is called *punya* – the source of happiness, peace, divine grace and liberation.

Purūṣa: The eternal creator of existence is referred as *Purūṣa* in the Shastrik Literature.

Recaka, Purak, Kumbhakas: The phase of breathing-in during a *prāṇāyāma* is called a *pūraka* and that of breathing out is called a *recaka*; the intermediate phases of holding the breath in and out are called the *antaḥ kumbhaka* and *bāhya kumbhaka* respectively.

Samkalpa: Determination with strong will power and intrinsic urge.

Samskāras: Intrinsic and inherent tendencies and habits. *Kusamskāra* means an evil *samskāra* and *Susamskāra* means a virtuous one.

Sandhyā-vandan: The daily *upāsana* and *japa* of the *Gāyatrī Mantra* performed in the morning – around the time of dawn, and in the evening – around sunset time, is referred as *sandhyā-vandan*.

Sāadhanā: Spiritual endeavor of self-refinement and inner elevation.

Sādhaka: Who sincerely performs a *sāadhanā*.

Siddhis-Riddhis: Supernatural powers and supramental talents and virtues.

Sūrya and Candra Swara: When the breath flows naturally through the right nostril then the *sūryaswara* (in the solar nerve) is said to be 'on'. When it flows through the left nostril then the *candra swara* (in the lunar nerve) is active.

Śabda: The eternal element of cosmic sound.

Śraddhā refers to one's intrinsic faith in divine values and associated inner emotional force.

Tirthas: A Pilgrimage Destination.

Traite bhāva: Experiencing the existence of three — the divine consciousness, the self-consciousness and the *jaḍa* elements of Nature is termed as *traite bhāva*.

Upāsana: Devout worship or devotional practice to enable the devotee recall and experience *thy*-presence within and around him.

Viśwāsa: Firm belief, serene confidence.

This book is compiled (from "Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya Vangmaya" Vol 19) and translated by Dr. Rajani Joshi.

EVOLUTION OF A DIVINE MISSION:

Chronological Compendium

The divine soul of Pt. Shriram Sharma Acharya descended on September 20, 1911 as the son of Pt. Roopkishor Sharma and Mata Dankunvari Devi in Anvalkheda (Dist. Agra). That his saintly heart breathed for the welfare of all living beings was clearly expressed, since his childhood, by his altruist service of the poor, weaker and down trodden ones around him. Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya bestowed the initiation of Gāyatrī Mantra on him when he was 9 years old. January 18, 1926, on the auspicious day of Vasant Panchami, the sacred flame of the dīpaka (lamp) flashed the subtle body of his Guru – a great yogi of the rishi age – during his Gāyatrī Sādhana. This had sparked the unfolding of the divine origin and purpose of his life and enlightened it with the grace and guidance of his Guru. [This akhand dīpaka is kindled since then and is enshrined at Shantikunj, Hardwar.]

The next 24 years of his life were devoted to ascetic endeavors of 24 Mahāpuraścaraṇas — each of 24 lacs Gāyatrī Mantra Japa (the highest kind of spiritual sādhanās of Gāyatrī). He had also sincerely participated in the freedom movement of India¹ under the noble guidance of Mahatma Gandhi during this period while continuing with his altruist services to the society and attending to the familial duties too.

The unique experiment of Vicāra Krānti — gradual refinement of thoughts, righteous transformation of attitude and sublime transmutation of human psychology up to the high realms of spirituality — was initiated by Acharya Sharma from the day he wrote the first issue of Akhand Jyoti in 1937. The subscriptions of this magazine (in Hindi and translations in English and tens of regional languages) have expanded exponentially since then....

His wife, Smt. Bhagavati Devi Sharma was also born in 1926 – the year, when the afflatus of his Guru was realized and the year, which is described by Sri Aurobindo as that of the renaissance of divine force on this earth. Ever since their marriage in 1943, this rishi couple dedicatedly pursued the noble mission for arousal of human glory and revival of divine culture.

Pt. Sriram Sharma had established the Gayatri Tapobhumi at Vrindavan Road, Mathura and performed the purṇāhuti of his

mahāpuraścaraṇas there in 1953. He had organized a grand Gāyatrī Yagya in 1958. This Gāyatrī Yagya was a unique experiment towards renaissance of spirituality in human life. This also initiated propagation of the knowledge of Gāyatrī Mantra and Yagya in scientific light and laid the foundation of Yug Nirman Yojna — architecturing of a bright era of moral, cultural, intellectual and spiritual evolution. In another couple of years he had translated the entire Vedika Literature in Hindi and presented the first ever, comprehensive volume on the science and philosophy of Gāyatrī Mantra and Gāyatrī Sādhana. Savants like Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Acharya Vinoba Bhave had honored his contributions as historical and recognized him as Vedaniṣṭha.

The saintly lives of Acharya Sharma and his wife, the spiritual charge of their personalities and the inner power of their sacred love for all beings, had attracted all the readers of Akhand Jyoti, and all those, who had attended this yagya, to work for the noble cause of his great mission. This is how the “larger family” kind of organization — called “Gayatri Pariwar”, came into existence. This has now expanded across the globe beyond the barriers of religion, creed, caste, sex, socioeconomic status or educational background.

Acharya Sharma — the rishi of this age, had projected the Yug Nirman Yojna in 1962 as determined plans of his divine mission of ushering into a bright era. The period of 1971-1990 has witnessed remarkable accomplishments of his life on multiple facets. He had climbed the arduous and mystic heights of the Himalayas several times and stayed there for specific sādhanās as per the guidance of his Guru. He pioneered the resurrection of the rishi culture by simultaneous renaissance and expansion of the reformatory and constructive endeavors of all the rishis of the vedik age.

He instituted the mission’s fraternity at Shantikunj, Hardwar as an academy for moral and spiritual awakening and training and its research wing Brahm Varchas as a center for creative integration of the modern science with spirituality, in 1971 and 1979 respectively. Regular short-term and long-term interactive training programs for — personality development, spiritual refinement through Gāyatrī Sādhana and perfection in the art of living, commenced at Shantikunj in the early eighties. The 2400 Shaktipithas spread across the country

also became functional as distributed centers for social reforms and training of Pragyā Yoga under the banner of the mission with this advancement.

Around the same time, Gurudev Shriram Sharma wrote the Pragyā Purana as the 19th in the series of the eighteen Puranas of the Vedika Age. This was another remarkable addition to his monumental contribution of over 3000 books and volumes on the gamut of topics concerning human life. Mass education from religious platform and efforts for uplifting the status of women in India gave revolutionary boost to the reformatory and constructive programs of the Yug Nirman Yojna in this period.

During 1984-1986, he endeavored the unique spiritual experiment of sukṣmīkaraṇ —subtization and sublimation of vital force and physical, mental and spiritual powers. He authored a special set of 24 books (Krāntidharmī Sāhitya) highlighting the future of the world and conveying the message of time to prepare us for the realities stored in the distant depths of the 21st Century..... On the 2nd June, 1990, he left the physical sheath of his being and magnified his sublime powers up to the higher realms of divinity in order to enlighten the subtle world of people's thoughts and sentiments.....

There after, Mata Bhagavati Devi had guided the series of Ashwamedha Yagyās, which accelerated the global expansion of the mission with great impact, in the critical juncture of the decade of change of a millennium and change of an era. She too joined Acharya Sharma in the subliminal domains of divinity after leaving the physical body on the 19th September 1994.

The light of righteous knowledge and human glory kindled by them continues to illuminate the excelling path of their great mission and promises the descent of “The Age of Truth” in the years to come.....

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¹ A postal stamp was released by the Govt. of India in 1992 to honor his great services to the nation.

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