

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

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CONTENTS

PART I: "PART I: MY SEARCH FOR THE ORIGINAL KRIYAS"	
1 Decision to Undertake the Pranayama Practice	3
2 From Ujjayi to Kriya Pranayama	18
3 The Value of Japa: The Breathless State	34
4 Meeting With Two New Kriya Teachers	50
5 Decision to Write a Book	72
 PART II: LAHIRI MAHASAYA'S KRIYA YOGA TECHNIQUES	
6 Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga: Part 1	85
7 Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga: Part 2	98
8 Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga: Higher Kriyas as Explained by Major Schools	112
9 Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga: Second Part of the Higher Kriyas as Taught by Satya Charan Lahiri	121
 PART III: HOW TO AVOID FAILURE ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH	
10 An Important Understanding - Part 1	139
An Important Understanding - Part 2: Practical Advice	158
11 The Value of Japa	167
12 Techniques in Other Spiritual Traditions Similar to Those Found in Kriya Yoga	184
13 Incremental Routines	203
 PART IV: TEACHINGS OF OTHER KRIYA TRADITIONS	
14 Kriya Yoga as Taught by Swami Hariharananda	209
15 A Very Simple Form of Kriya Yoga	232
16 How I Conceived My Kriya Routine	243
17 The Kriya of the Cells	255
18 Discussions with Students of PY's Correspondence Course	265
 Appendix	 278
Glossary	293
Bibliography	309

PART I: "MY SEARCH FOR THE ORIGINAL KRIYAS"

CHAPTER 1

DECISION TO UNDERTAKE THE PRANAYAMA PRACTICE

My interest in classical *Yoga* began at age 15 after purchasing an introductory book to it. I don't remember the title of that first book but it was followed by the writings of B.K.S. *Iyengar*, and then finally the autobiography of an Indian master, where I found the term *Kriya Yoga*. But let's go in order ...

During my elementary school years, unlike my peers, I borrowed a couple of esoteric books from my parents' friends. The first book I read from start to finish was about occultism. Knowing that it was not suitable for my age, I was still proud to be able to read and understand it. I did not listen to any advice to devote myself to other more formative readings. I wasted a lot of time on worthless books and on a large pile of specialized esoteric journals with tantalizing titles designed essentially to astound the reader, where it was impossible to distinguish between fiction and reality in advance.

I came into contact with the main themes of Western esoteric thought, with brief excursions into phenomena such as hypnosis, mediumship. I continued with these readings until I was 11 years old. In the end, I felt I had made a journey in an indistinct chaos, persuaded that many very precious secrets were hidden in other books which I had temporarily not been able to access.

FIRST INTEREST IN YOGA

I saw the term "*Yoga*" for the first time in a catalog of esoteric books received in the mail from my father. Enthusiastic, inexplicably enthralled, I observed on the cover a person sitting in the "lotus position". In vain did I try to persuade my father to get that book.

At fifteen, when I was attending high school, my interest in *Yoga* was rekindled when a friend told me he had a *Yoga* textbook where various *Pranayama* techniques were explained, adding: "These exercises create an inner transformation in you ...". I was fascinated by his words: what inner changes were he referring to? My friend certainly could not refer to the achievement of particular conditions of relaxation or even to vague concepts such as integrating the Eastern vision of existence with the Western lifestyle. He had to refer to some intense experience that left a

lasting mark on the psyche. *Pranayama* was something that I had to learn and practice as soon as possible. But the friend didn't make up his mind to lend me the book.

A few days later, a simple manual of *Hatha Yoga*, exhibited at the newsstand of the train station, caught my attention, I bought it without further delay and read it in its entirety.

This book had a long philosophical introduction that failed to stimulate my interest. It did not create any emotional participation in me, nor did it embody elements that stimulated reflection (*Jiva, Prakriti, Purusha* ...). It seemed that the author was only aiming to give authority to the book. Even some concepts that would later become fundamental to my life such as Reincarnation, *Karma, Dharma* and *Maya*, remained vague, buried in the tangle of Sanskrit terms. The explanation that was given of *Pranayama* was very trivial – in practice it was described as a "complete breathing": inhale by dilating the abdomen, then the middle part, then the upper part of the chest, then, during exhalation, relax these three parts of the body in reverse order. That was clearly just an introduction, nothing more.

I was sure that the ancient art of *Pranayama* was not only used to train the muscles of the chest, to fortify the diaphragm or create particular conditions for oxygenating the blood, but had as its main objective to act on the energy present in our psycho-physical system. It was also clear that the restless state of this energy was directly connected to conflicts and disharmonies in our mood.

I was disappointed with the paucity of information on *Pranayama*. The author concluded by saying that *Pranayama* had to be learned from an expert teacher. Instead of adding a precise indication (the title of a book, the name of a school ...), he vaguely concluded by stating that we will find the Master automatically as soon as we are ready to learn.

As for the *Asanas* (positions of the body) he explained the meaning of their specific name by adding a short note on the best mental attitude to practice each one of them. It was clear that these positions were not meant to be simply "*stretching* work"; they were a means of providing an overall stimulus to all internal organs in order to increase their vitality. The sense of satisfaction felt at the end of my sessions spoke in favor of their effectiveness.

I started practicing the main *Asanas* in a corner of the school gymnasium, during the Physical Education classes and I abandoned the idea of doing further research on *Pranayama*. Among the various exercises I devoted myself to mastering *Yoga* positions or moving the abdominal muscles using the *Nauli* technique. One day the teacher, who I was mistakenly convinced had a consideration of me equal to zero, to my amazement, approached, and wanted to know the secret to being able to

move the abdominal muscles in such a curious way. I tried to explain to him how simple it was, as long as you have the consistency to work daily for a few weeks.

STUDYING LITERARY WORKS AND LISTENING TO CLASSICAL MUSIC

At that time, I had no clear idea of what the term "spiritual" meant. For me this term meant the enchantment produced by Beauty, a dimension that I tried to evoke through the study of literary works and, subsequently, listening to some pieces of classical music. I could never have imagined that the practice of *Yoga* could nourish and amplify my contact with Beauty.

In the very early years of my life, even before I attended kindergarten, I had made a pact with my mother. This agreement stipulated that when she would have to go with my father to the fields to work, she would leave me all alone in the house and therefore she would accept my request not to take me with her. This request of mine arose from the fact that in the fields, where I would have had to remain sitting on the ground in the grass, I was afraid of all the small insects which in my imagination were all potentially deadly. Only with time did I understand that they were harmless. Well this pact worked perfectly: on such occasions I remained sitting on a blanket placed on the floor without ever leaving that small space. When my mother returned, even after many hours, I was still there, practically immobile.

Once I was old enough to leave the house on my own, I started trying to immerse myself in the Beauty in Nature with quiet walks in the countryside.

At nine years old, I borrowed a book of poems from my school library and began to copy several short poems that spoke about nature and life in the fields into a notebook. By reading them frequently, I soon learned them by heart. By recalling them to mind as I contemplated the hilly landscape surrounding the town where I lived, I was able to intensify my emotions. This event was sought after almost every day and experienced with an indefinable inner joy.

In the last years of high school I developed a passion for classical music and Beethoven became my idol. In spite of the tragedy of deafness that struck him in the height of the creative season, he reacted in the most dignified way and carried on the creation of the works that he felt already present in his heart.

He wrote:

"I do not have a single friend; I must live alone. But I know that God is

closer to me than to other artists; I approach Him without fear; I have always known and understood him and I am not afraid for my music – no adverse fate can touch it. Whoever understands it will be freed from it from all the miseries that others carry around."

How could these words not touch me? He drew from the depths of his being an incomparable music that he offered to humanity. The triumph of this frail human being over a stupid and senseless fate had a tremendous impact on me. The daily ritual of retiring to my room to listen to his music strengthened my consecration to the Ideal.

Every day for the entire 3-month period at the end of high school, when I lived a sentimental story whose realization seemed impossible, I listened to Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. The more my uncontrollable emotions pushed me to take steps that proved destructive to my romantic relationship, the more my desperate heart found refuge in listening to this masterpiece.

The Heiligenstadt Testament, where Beethoven reveals his health conditions and affirms his choice with peaceful total determination, made him a hero and a saint in my eyes. I often repeated within myself a phrase taken from his testament as an invocation to a brighter way of living life:

O Providence, make it appear for me at least one day of pure joy. For a long time now the intimate echo of true joy has been foreign to me. When, oh when, Almighty God, will I still see it shine in the temple of nature and men? Never? No – that would be too cruel!

During the walks in the countryside, sitting on a hill contemplating a distant landscape enjoying the warm heat of the summer evenings, that music resumed playing from the regions of my memory. What my heart craved seemed to become real before me, perfect and untouched by fear and guilt. The spiritual reality, which I did not yet know, was drawing me to itself.

PRACTICE TO REST THE MIND

During this period I purchased a book containing exercises to develop memory. The author also presented an exercise that served to put the thinking faculties to rest the thinking faculties in order to recharge our psycho-physical system with fresh energy. I was drawn to the undoubtedly exaggerated promise that by stopping all mental functions – without falling into the state of sleep – and remaining for some time in a state of pure awareness, mental rest equivalent to several hours could be achieved in less than an hour. I'm sorry I don't have that book anymore, but I'll describe this exercise based on what I can remember:

Lie on your back, arms placed along the sides of your body and a blindfold to cover your eyes. After two or three minutes of stillness, mentally repeat – "I'm relaxed, I'm calm, I don't think about anything." Then, to enter the *blank state of mind*, visualize your thoughts, including those with abstract qualities, and push them away one at a time, as if an inner hand gently carried them from the center of the mental screen to the periphery. All thoughts, without exception, must be put aside; even the very thought of practicing a technique. You must never get nervous when new thoughts come up. Visualize them as objects and move them aside. This will prevent other thoughts from developing as well. After pushing each thought away, always bring awareness back to the point between the eyebrows which looks like a small lake of peace and learn to rest there. The ability to continually push away any thought that knocks on the door of your attention will become almost automatic.

When, on certain occasions – such as practicing immediately after a strong emotional disturbance – you find that the mechanism does not work, transform your concentration into a small *needle* that continuously touches the area between the eyebrows – just touch, without worrying about pushing thoughts away. At some point you will find that there is no more effort and any restless emotion will subside. The seeds of new thoughts manifesting as indefinite vibrant images on the periphery of awareness will fail to disturb mental rest. By following one or the other of the two methods, the exercise works perfectly and after 40 minutes you get up rested and recharged with new, fresh energy.

In my experience, instead of the 40 minutes promised by the book, the exercise never lasted more than 25-30 minutes.

My practice always ended in a particular way: the state of profound calm was invariably interrupted by the thought that the actual exercise had yet to begin; to which the body reacted with a jolt and the heart began to beat fast. After a few seconds the certainty came that the exercise had instead been completed, perfectly.

Thanks to this technique, which became a daily habit, I understood once and for all the difference between "mind" and "awareness", that is, between being aware of the activity of the mind and simply being aware of existing.

When the mental process is stilled and becomes perfect silence, then a state of perfect awareness arises without any content. Like a bright spot that duplicates itself an unlimited number of times, it remains unchanged for a few minutes. You feel that you exist and understand that your existence is indestructible – this happens without formulating any thoughts.

You have the certain experience that thoughts are an ephemeral reality, and that instead of revealing the ultimate truth, they cloud it. I think the Cartesian deduction: "I think therefore I am" is unsustainable. It would

be more correct to say: "Only in the ability to obtain the silence of thoughts lies the proof and the intimate certainty of existing."

I used the technique to cancel thoughts during my university studies

At the university I chose Mathematics. By attending the first courses, I realized that a happy chapter in my life was over and there would be no time for distractions such as enjoying the masterpieces of classical literature. All the attention was focused on finding an effective study method in order to avoid wasting my energy. This also meant thinking in a disciplined way both during study and during free time. For this purpose I decided to use the dynamics of the technique previously described to rest the mind.

A bad habit to fight was the tendency to fantasize and jump from one fragment of memory to another in order to extract moments of pleasure. I had created the firm belief that when thinking becomes an uncontrollable vice – for many people it is a real addiction – it is not only a waste of energy but is the root cause of many failures in life. The whirlwind of the thought process, accompanied by alternating moods and strong emotions, sometimes creates unreasonable fears that hinder the decisive action that life requires. At times, however, it nurtures an optimistic imagination which unfortunately pushes the person toward inappropriate actions. I became convinced that disciplined thinking was the most precious quality I could develop, which would open the doors to fruitful achievement. The decision filled me with enthusiasm.

But after a few hours of breathing in clear, sparkling, celestial peace of mind, I encountered significant resistance. In the mirror of my introspection I saw how other habits were wasting my mental energy. One of these, wrapped and made dignified in an unassailable way by the idea of socialization, was that of letting myself go to exhausting discussions with friends. Suddenly I changed my attitude towards them. Certainly, mine was not a particularly difficult sacrifice – theirs was not my world.

One day while I was taking a walk in the afternoon, I saw them sitting lazily talking in the usual bar from afar. My heart sank. They were my friends and I loved them, yet seeing them together, they seemed like chickens fenced in a confined space. Mercilessly, I assumed that they were totally governed by their instincts: eat, reproduce, let go during the holidays. Whatever tragedy had happened to their mates, it did not concern them, they would continue to sip the daily pleasure of wasting time until the misfortune fell to them. This was a bitter, distressing way of thinking.

At that moment I resumed my resolve to focus on my studies and passing the exams became my only goal. Living that period seemed to me like coming down on a cold night; I knew that in order to forge my future I had to accept that heavy sacrifice. To see the dawn of "a day of pure joy", I

would have to momentarily endure a dark emptiness: I would have to savor it without a moan, resisting the temptation to turn on useless lights for momentary comfort.

DECISION TO UNDERTAKE THE DISCIPLINE OF PRANAYAMA

I have been reflecting for some time on how useful it would be to follow very seriously any discipline in addition to my university studies. In fact, I had noticed how people who had been engaging in a demanding discipline for years had noble traits in their personality that distinguished them from all other people. There was in them an air of sweetness, of intimate serenity. By demanding discipline I refer, for example, to the daily effort, undertaken since childhood, to practice the ability to play a musical instrument, or to practice any sport – even a martial art.

I happened that a friend introduced me to Mahler's second symphony "*Resurrection*" and invited me to a performance of this work. I read the presentation sheet of the concert. Each part of the symphony had a precise meaning that Mahler himself had made clear in a letter to the conductor Bruno Walter. It was the author's intention to touch upon the theme of death as the inevitable end of all human adventures. The music conveyed a sense of desolation, but sweet, as if death were akin to abandoning oneself to a peaceful sleep. With a song full of pain, which revealed an infinite dignity, the words of the contralto conveyed a childish innocent vision:

<i>O Röschen roth!</i>	O red rose!
<i>Der Mensch liegt in größter Noth!</i>	Man lies in direst need!
<i>Der Mensch liegt in größter Pein!</i>	Man lies in deepest pain!
<i>Je lieber möchte ich im Himmel sein.</i>	Oh, how I would rather be in heaven.

Listening, I imagined I was in the countryside while a light rain was falling. But it was spring and a ray of sunshine was breaking through the clouds. Among the vegetation was a beautiful red rose. That simple vision brought relief to the inner pain of my heart by lighting the flame of pure enthusiasm: Beauty would be with me forever, in all the places of my lonely wanderings. Then the choir sang lines from a Klopstock hymn:

<i>Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n</i>	Resurrect, yes resurrect,
<i>Wirst du, Mein Staub,</i>	Will you, my dust,
<i>Nach kurzer Ruh'!</i>	After a brief rest!
<i>Unsterblich Leben! Unsterblich Leben</i>	Immortal life! Immortal life
<i>wird der dich rief dir geben!</i>	He who called you will grant you!

Then Mahler added lines of his own that ended with:

<i>Mit Flügeln, die ich mir errungen,</i>	With wings I have gained,
<i>In heißem Liebesstreben,</i>	in love's fierce striving,
<i>Werd'ich entschweben</i>	I shall soar aloft
<i>Zum Licht, zu dem kein Aug'gedrungen!</i>	To the light that has not pierced eye!
<i>Sterben werd'ich, um zu leben!</i>	I will die, so I can live!
<i>Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n</i>	Resurrect, yes resurrect,
<i>wirst du, mein Herz, in einem Nu!</i>	Will you, my heart, in an instant!
<i>Was du geschlagen</i>	What you have coveted and fought for,
<i>zu Gott wird es dich tragen!</i>	Shall lead you to God!

In the following days I tried to further penetrate the meaning of this symphony by reading everything I could find about it and listening to it enraptured in the quiet of my room.

And here is the power of a sentence in the midst of those words that made me sense a radiant possibility. The words: "Sterben werde ich, um zu leben!" ("I will die to live!") resounded all day in my mind like a thread around which my thoughts were crystallizing.

Would I have been able, now or during any day before sterile old age, to die to myself – or to die to my little self, to my Ego?

There was no doubt that I would continue to practice the discipline of creating the silence in my thoughts that had become a habit by now, but I was not willing to just look at the wall of my silent mind waiting for something to happen. I had to commit myself to something stronger: I had to be able to cross the misty curtain of thoughts, superficial emotions, sensations and instincts and emerge into the Pure Dimension of existence, into true life beyond the world of thoughts.

In those days I had purchased *Iyengar's* book *The Illustrated Light on Yoga*. His description of *Pranayama* contained a prudential admonition which ignited my intuition:

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

This sentence ignited an insatiable will to experience all its power, to the point of "dying" in it, figuratively speaking. What would have scared others encouraged me. If the practice of *Pranayama* would bring about an authentic psychological earthquake, well this was just what I was looking for. It was then that I made the decision that changed my life forever: to

dedicate the necessary time to the practice of *Pranayama* every day. I chose to intensively practice the two breathing exercises called *Nadi Sodhana* and *Ujjayi* with *Bandhas* (muscle contractions) and *Kumbhaka* (breath retention.)

I sat on the edge of a pillow, in the half-lotus position, with my back straight. I zealously concentrated on applying the instructions correctly while maintaining a creative spirit, that is, looking for every opportunity to improve my practice.

I concentrated keenly on the alternating sensations of coolness and warmth produced by the air on the fingers and palm of the right hand that I used to open and close each nostril. The pressure, the smooth, even flow of the breath... every detail was pleasant. By becoming aware of each technical detail I was able to maintain a vigilant attention without being stressed.

FIRST EFFECTS OF PRANAYAMA PRACTICE

Day after day I could verify the potential of *Pranayama* to act on my psyche. Now I was sure my old school friend had been telling the truth – "...these exercises change you inside". It had to be like that!

First of all, practicing *Pranayama* was a very beautiful activity: like learning to play a musical instrument and this instrument was my breath. *Pranayama* appeared to me as the most perfect of all the arts, also because it did not present intrinsic limits. I did not understand how I could have waited so long to seriously engage in this activity. Now that moment had finally come.

Furthermore during the day, I felt that the perception of things had changed. My eyes sought the most intense colors, fascinated by them as if they could reveal an essence that was beyond the material reality. Sometimes in the first sunny days after winter, when the skies were crystal clear, blue as they had never been, I often practiced outdoors contemplating my surroundings. In a pit full of bushes covered with ivy, the sun poured its light on some flowers that a few weeks earlier had blossomed during the cold winter days and now, regardless of the milder days, prolonged their existence, still lingering in their spell-binding glory. I was deeply inspired.

I closed my eyes and relied on an internal radiance accompanied by a sensation of pressure at the level of the heart.

Panning my sight around, a group of houses that surrounded a bell tower appear among the trees. Only that kind of "light" was able to create a superhuman peace in my being creating the certainty that the ineffable "Primeval Cause" of all things could not be found in books or even in reasoning but only in the realm of Beauty.

It was reasonable to hope that *Pranayama* could give me a

permanent basis of mental clarity, helping me not to spoil the fragile miracle of the encounter with Beauty with a jumble of thoughts, but now it seemed that *Pranayama* had the power to amplify the experience of the Sublime or even to make it arise out of nowhere! I often repeated within myself (and sometimes I couldn't stop myself from quoting it to friends) a passage from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

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

I repeated those lines and I was already immersed in that Joy. During a quiet afternoon I walked among the trees just before sunset, occasionally peeked at a commentary on some *Upanishads*, [Sanskrit sacred texts] that I was carrying with me. One particular phrase awakened an instant realization: "Thou art That"!

I closed the book and began ecstatically repeating those words. My rational mind grasped, but could not fully accept, the immeasurable implication of that statement. It meant that I was really that light of a delicate green that filtered through the leaves, which embodied the spring that brought new life.

At home, I did not even try to write down on paper the various "moments of grace" that arose from this realization, I would not have been able to do it. My only desire was to immerse myself more and more in this new inner source of understanding and enlightenment.

CONCRETE CONTACT WITH SPIRITUAL REALITY

I was approaching that "reality" which was beyond material reality. I aspired with all of myself to reach this dimension: what I did not know was that this reality is commonly reached after experiencing moments of fear.

The first glimmer of Spiritual Reality can manifest as a series of waves of bliss that rise through the spine and enter the brain. This experience usually lasts from a few moments to a couple of minutes. Sometimes these waves resemble the emissions of an inner volcano, a "rocket" in which your consciousness rises out of the body. Sometimes they are not waves but an intense bliss that gathers in the thoracic region – suddenly you find yourself overwhelmed by immense joy and then you return to reality with tears in your eyes trying to keep in memory this brief but unforgettable dip into Eternity .

Often this experience is called "*Kundalini Awakening*." The term *Kundalini* refers to an energy coiled like a snake in the center which is

located at the base of the spine. It is explained that *Yoga* teaches to guide the ascent of this energy through the spinal canal up to the spiritual center located in the upper part of the head: this, it is explained, corresponds to mystical enlightenment.

Sometimes this experience comes before any *Yoga* practice, sometimes it happens at the same time. It can arise from the emotional shock produced by reading a religious text such as a saint's biography, when the idea of the vastness of Spiritual Reality creates a kind of "vertigo." In fact, one feels that this idea is able to sweep away all one's certainties.

Not long ago I had bought the autobiography of an Indian master, which I will indicate with the initials PY.¹ It was a book that I had already seen years before but that I had not purchased because, looking through it, I saw that it did not contain practical instructions. My hope now was to find in it some good *Yoga* School addresses. Reading this autobiography fascinated me a lot and led me to a phase of great aspiration towards the mystical path. At certain moments, I literally burned with an inner fire.

One night, absorbed in reading this book, I felt a shiver, like an electric current running through my body. A "shiver" meant nothing, yet it scared me. My reaction was rather strange as I had always believed I was immune from any fear of things related to transcendence.

The thought crossed my mind that a much deeper event was going to happen shortly and it would be overwhelming to the point that there was no way I could stop it. It was as if my memory had an inexplicable familiarity with it and my instincts knew its inexorable power. I decided to let the experience happen unhindered and to continue reading.

The minutes passed, but I was unable to read a single line more; my restlessness turned to anxiety. Then it became fear, an intense fear of something unknown that threatened my existence. I had never experienced anything like this. In moments of danger, I happened to be paralyzed, unable to think. Instead now my thoughts were moving frantically

¹ The reader will understand why I am not mentioning the full name of PY – it is not difficult however to figure out his identity. There are many schools of *Yoga* spreading his teachings according to a 'specific legitimacy'. One of these, through its representatives, made me realize that not only won't they tolerate the smallest of the Copyright violations, but they won't even appreciate their beloved Teacher's name being mixed into discussions about *Kriya* on the Internet. The reason is that in the past some people used His name to mislead a high number of practitioners who were trying to receive His original teachings. Moreover, my desire is to inform the reader that in the following pages I will only summarily linger upon my understanding of His legacy, without any pretension of giving an objective account of it. An interested reader should not renounce the privilege of turning to the original texts!

foreshadowing the most terrible outcomes: loss of psychological balance, encounter with an evil entity, perhaps even death.

I felt the urge to do something, even if I didn't know what. I assumed the meditation position and waited. The anguish grew. A part of me, perhaps the totality of that entity that I call "myself", seemed close to disappearing altogether. The worst, threatening thoughts hung over me for no clear reason.

I knew well what had happened to *Gopi Krishna*, the author of *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness*. He described the experience of spiritual awakening he had had following an intense practice of concentration on the seventh *Chakra*. Later – since his body was probably unprepared – he encountered serious physical and, consequently, psychic problems. According to his description, a very strong energy began to flow in his spine from the coccyx region towards the brain.

The flow was so strong that it forced him to bed and prevented him from completing normal physical functions. He had the impression that he was literally burning with an internal fire, which he could not quench in any way. Weeks later, he intuitively discovered how to control the phenomenon: the upward movement of energy through the spine became a persistent experience of inner realization.

I was afraid I had reached the threshold of the same experience but, as I did not live in India, perhaps the people around me might not understand. The consequences would have been terrible! No one could have assured me, as happened to *Gopi Krishna*, that my experience would be directed towards a beneficial outcome.

In those terrible moments, the spiritual world seemed to me a horrible nightmare, capable of destroying, annihilating the person who had imprudently approached it. Ordinary life, on the contrary, seemed to me the dearest, healthiest reality. I was afraid of not being able to return to that condition anymore. I was convinced that through my intense practice of two simple breathing exercises I had opened a door that I shouldn't have opened, so I tried to stop the experience.

I got up and went out into the fresh air. It was night and there was no one to communicate my terror to! In the center of the courtyard I found myself oppressed, suffocated, crushed by a feeling of despair, envying those people who had never practiced *Yoga*.

All of a sudden I felt a sense of guilt and shame for the harsh words I had addressed to a friend who had once taken part in my research. Like so many others, he had then abandoned all practice and had instead made the decision to "enjoy life." With my youthful boldness, I had addressed him with words that were not at all affectionate, and these now thundered in my head. I felt pain for having manifested unjustified cruelty towards him without knowing what really was in his mind and soul. I wanted to tell him

how sorry I was that I brutally violated his right to live as he saw fit. Perhaps he had tried to protect his mental health rather than alienating himself from reality and losing his mind due to practices that he felt insecure about.

Back home, considering my great passion for classical music, I hoped that listening to good music would have the positive effect of protecting me from anguish and helping me to regain my usual state of mind. It was Beethoven's music – his *Concerto for violin and orchestra* – that I listened to with a pair of headphones in my room that soothed my soul and, half an hour later, made me fall asleep.

The next morning I woke up with the same fear. Strange as it may seem, the idea that every day of my present life arouses in me a joyful emotion in my heart, at that moment communicated to me a sense of horror! I am referring to the belief that man can practice a precise discipline to tune into the Divine Intelligence underlying everything that exists.

Sunlight entered the room through the cracks in the shutters. I had a whole day to spend. I left the house to try to distract myself among other people. I met some friends but said nothing about what I was experiencing. I spent the afternoon joking about various things and behaved just like people I had always considered lazy and intellectually dull. In this way I was able to hide my anguish. The first day passed like this; my mind was worn out. After two days, the fear had subsided and I finally felt safe. Something had changed however.

A week later, detached and calm, I began to reflect on the significance of what had happened. I understood the nature of my reaction to that episode: I had, as a coward, turned my back on the very experience I had pursued for so long! The dignity present in the depths of my soul told me that I had to continue my search right from the point where I had abandoned it. I was ready to accept everything that would happen, to let everything take its course, even if it involved the loss of my psycho-physical balance. I resumed the practice of *Pranayama*, intensely as before. A few days passed and I did not perceive any form of fear. Then I experienced something very beautiful.

It was night. I was lying on my back and relaxing in the position of the "corpse", when I perceived a pleasant sensation, as if an electric wind was blowing on the outside of the body, spreading rapidly, in a wave motion, from the feet to the head. The body was so tired that I could not move – even though my mind had given the order to assume the meditative position. I was intimately serene. I was not afraid. Then the electric wind was replaced by another sensation, comparable to an enormous force that entered the spine and rapidly rose to the brain. The experience was

characterized by an indescribable and hitherto unknown sense of bliss. All this was accompanied by the perception of intense brightness. I can condense everything I can remember with an expression, "a clear and euphoric certainty of existing as an unlimited ocean of awareness and bliss". The strange thing is that when the experience happened, I found it familiar.

In the work *God exists, I have met him*, the author, A. Frossard, tries to give the reader an idea of his spiritual experience. To this end, he creates the concept of "reverse avalanche". The avalanche is something that collapses, that goes down, first slowly, then faster and more violently at the same time. Frossard suggests imagining a "reverse avalanche" that begins by gathering strength at the foot of the mountain and rises upward pushed by an increasing power and then, suddenly, leaps skyward. I don't know how long this experience lasted, but its climax was only a few seconds, after which I turned sideways and fell into a calm, uninterrupted sleep.

The next day, when I woke up, I didn't think about it. I remembered it only a few hours later, during a walk. Leaning against a tree, I remained motionless for a few minutes, fascinated by the reverberation of that memory. I was filled with intimate joy. An euphoric condition that stretched beyond the confines of my awareness – like a kind of memory lurking in the recesses of consciousness – began to reveal itself as if a new region of my brain had been stirred into a fully awakened state. I found myself contemplating a reality that seemed a dream, yet objectively indisputable; it had arisen in me with the naturalness of a primordial instinct, yet it had nothing to do with the life that surrounded me and in which I lived.

The sense of the experience I was going through was clear enough to me. I had no doubts that the Reality towards which I was directing my life was the "Self." This is a concept I had learned from studying the works of C.G. Jung. I was no longer afraid perhaps because I had trained my conscience to live by contemplating Beauty. Another thought appeared: I should have chosen a profession that did not occupy all my life energy. I set out to choose a simple existence, without ever betraying my inner Self.

SO WHAT IS SPIRITUAL REALITY?

During my adolescence I had sometimes reflected on the meaning of religious doctrines that I had learned in childhood but, like others, I had always encountered an insuperable obstacle: that of the reality of pain that pervaded life (including not only the animal kingdom but also the vegetable one). This awareness had generated a rebellion against the concept of God as "Infinite goodness." I was never afraid to create an absolute protest in my thoughts and heart. My reasoning was clear. Noting

how many illusions were propagated by religions and sects, I felt sorry for those who, in the abyss of tragedy, were unable to voice their rebellion, indeed continued to pray to the Divine not with a spirit of devotion and sincere surrender but only out of fear of even worse evils.

Reflecting on the teaching imparted by a religion therefore resulted in visualizing the Divine as the master of the universe, a supernatural, omnipotent being who thought like us human beings, who judged like us, who did nothing to relieve us from the experience of pain. This was what religion hinted at but which I absolutely could not accept. I kept looking in my own way for the pure dimension of the Spirit. I could never have imagined that the practice of *Yoga* could lead my consciousness to concretely experience that reality.

Now, after what I had experienced, I could clearly understand that spiritual reality was a dimension of existence reachable only with direct experience but inaccessible to investigations made with thought, to the various theological theories erected as grandiose cathedrals in the realm of the mind. It could only be achieved with an extraordinary event of direct perception. The means to achieve this experience could be many, for sure they could not consist in purely mental work. In my life this contact took place after a few months of intense practice of *Pranayama*. I had not followed any teacher but only applied with determination a few instructions found in a *Yoga* manual.

I had practiced *Pranayama* morning and evening in a way I would say "absolute", with a ferocious concentration, as if there was no tomorrow. Putting myself into that discipline had been the best decision of my life.

CHAPTER 2

FROM UJJAYI TO KRIYA PRANAYAMA

[I]

The enthusiasm for the art of *Pranayama* grew continuously. Undertaking this practice was like planting the seed of a mighty tree in the feverish season of my youth and contemplating its healthy growth in the other seasons of my life.

The *Kundalini* experience repeated itself several more times, but it never became a constant. It occurred when I devoted myself to studying late and then lay down exhausted on the bed. When it appeared, my heart overflowed with gratitude towards a higher Reality, located in a dimension beyond my comprehension.

As a beginner, I couldn't help but try to convince people of the beneficial effects of *Pranayama*. I was convinced that it could help anyone to live in a better way. I claimed that *Pranayama* would channel their energies towards a more balanced temperament. Friends responded kindly but without sharing my enthusiasm. Some reacted by saying that closing oneself in a room practicing *Yoga* exercises, abstaining from many aspects of social life, was, according to them, a road to alienation.

I made a huge mistake by insisting on pointing out aspects of their behavior that I thought needed improvement. In short, I claimed that their sociability was a farce. This generated a violent reaction. They replied that my words lacked a genuine sense of respect and love and that I was unable to show human willingness towards others. The essence of what I had found in *Pranayama*, which I continued to praise incessantly, appeared to them as the apotheosis of selfishness and even of a real mental cruelty.

With a sense of guilt I saw that I had only caused bitterness. Only a "Hippy" friend understood perfectly what I was saying and showed me some empathy; however, he censured my excessive enthusiasm for the automatic effects of *Pranayama*. He had no doubt that my success in this practice depended entirely on me. In his opinion, *Pranayama* was not an art that carried its own reward in itself, but was an "amplifier" of what I had inside, something that favored and enhanced what was already in my possession. *Pranayama*, according to him, had no power to create anything new.

For me, *Pranayama* was the action of "rising" towards an elevated state of consciousness. In that state you reached something radically new. I

was disoriented to hear that it was just an "amplifier." I was unable to see that the two visions could coexist – I was young and I divided everything into black or white.

KRIYA YOGA

In the many pages of PY's *Autobiography of a Yogi* I did not find a single practical instruction. The author mentioned a particular form of *Pranayama* (*Kriya Yoga*) which had been taught by a famous *yogi*, *Lahiri Mahasaya*. When I read that this technique had to be mastered in four levels, I thought there had to be something unique in this discipline. I loved the *Ujjayi Pranayama* technique and the idea of deepening a *Pranayama* technique through different steps seemed to me something very interesting. If the very common techniques that I had already practiced had given me such beautiful results, it was clear that the *Kriya Yoga* system made up of four levels would have produced even greater results!

The technique was secret, it had to be learned through a direct initiation by a Master. Where could I have learned it? I was not in a position to leave for India. Was it possible to learn the technique from books?

I had good reasons to think that *Kriya Pranayama* consisted of a slow and deep way of breathing with awareness focused on the spine. During the *Kriya* procedure, the inner energy should have been "rotated" around the *Chakras*. As PY wrote that the *Kriya* technique was mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* I easily found this quote and tried to understand it in a practical sense:

"Offering inhaling breath into the outgoing breath, and offering the outgoing breath into the inhaling breath, the yogi neutralizes both these breaths; he thus releases the life force from the heart and brings it under his control." [*Bhagavad Gita* IV 29]

The *Bhagavad Gita* explains that by repeating this action, the *yogi* achieves a perceptible slowing of the breath and enters the state of meditation: with a pure heart he remains immersed in a state of peace for longer and longer.

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

I must admit that when I read the verse [IV 29], I was unable to understand its meaning. How can a person offer "the inhaling breath in the exhaling breath" and offer "the exhaling breath in the inhaling breath"?

PY emphasized the evolutionary value of *Pranayama*. He explained that if we compare the spine to a ferromagnetic substance, made up of

elementary magnets that turn in the same direction when a magnetic field is superimposed on them, then the action of *Pranayama* is analogous to this process of magnetization. By creating a uniform orientation of all the "subtle" parts of the physical and astral essence of our spine, *Kriya Pranayama* burns the so-called "bad seeds" of our *Karma*.² I would later understand that this was indeed a central idea in the PY's teachings.

RESEARCH IN THE BOOKS OF ESOTERISM

I learned from his Autobiography that PY had created an organization that published a whole set of lessons on *Kriya Yoga*, to be received by mail. With great joy, I immediately applied for this course.

When, after four months of my application, I received the first lesson of this course, I learned that I would have to wait for at least one year before being able to apply for the lessons on *Kriya Yoga*. I felt a sense of despair.

Written material traveled by ship and the delays were enormous. I couldn't wait that long.³ I decided to discover the technique of *Kriya Pranayama* looking for something similar in the best *Yoga* treatises or to trace it in the esoteric traditions.

I should have tracked down a *Pranayama* technique in which one visualizes the energy that "rotates" in some way around the *Chakras*. If this is – as PY put it – a universal process, I had a good chance of finding its description.

Something tucked away in a corner of my memory woke up. I remembered, without distinction, having seen, in an occult book, drawings showing different energy circuits in the human body. The idea was born to consult those esoteric texts that contained similar illustrations.

I started going to a used book store; it was very well stocked, probably because it had once been the reference library of the Theosophical Society. I neglected the texts that dealt only with philosophical themes,

² We allude to *Karma* whenever we stick to the common belief that a person inherits a baggage of latent tendencies from his previous lives and that, sooner or later, these tendencies will come out in actual life. Of course *Kriya* is a practice which one can experimentally use without necessarily having to accept any creeds. However, since the concept of *Karma* lies at the basis of Indian thought, it is worthwhile to understand and speak freely of it. According to this belief, *Pranayama* burns out the effects of the "bad seeds" just before they manifest in our lives. It is further explained that those people who are instinctively attracted by methods of spiritual development such as *Kriya*, have already practiced something similar in a "precedent incarnation". This is because such an action is never in vain and in actual life they get back to it exactly where, in a remote past, they had quit it.

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

while, ecstatic and regardless of the time, I leafed through those that clearly illustrated the practical exercises. Before buying a book I made sure that it mentioned the possibility of guiding energy along certain subtle channels of the astral body, creating the conditions for the awakening of *Kundalini* energy. Reading the index of a three-volume text, which presented the magical thinking of the Rosicrucian brotherhood, I was drawn to the title of one chapter, "*Breathing Exercise for Awakening Kundalini*." It was a variant of *Nadi Sodhana*.

For sure, this could not be PY's *Kriya*, because, according to some clues, it did not involve breathing alternately through the nostrils.

I went on haunting the bookshop. The owner was very kind and I felt almost obliged, also in consideration of the affordable price of the books, second hand but in perfect condition, to buy at least one at each visit. Often too much space was devoted to theories far from simple concepts concerning human life, but tried to imagine what no one has seen, what cannot be experienced – such as the astral worlds, the various subtle shells of energy that envelop our physical body.

One day, after a laborious selection, I approached the owner holding a book in my hand. As he watched it deciding the price, he remembered something that might have sparked my interest. He took me to a hidden corner of his shop and invited me to rummage through a messy pile of papers contained in a cardboard box. Among a substantial amount of miscellaneous material (complete series of the Theosophical magazine, scattered notes of an old hypnosis course, etc.) I found a book, written in German by a certain K. Spiesberger, which illustrated various esoteric techniques including the *Kundalini-breathing*.

I was not quite familiar with the German language at the time, but I was able to immediately understand the extraordinary importance of that technique; at home, with the help of a dictionary, I would undoubtedly be able to decipher it.⁴ The description of this technique still amazes me. During a deep breath, air was imagined flowing inside the spinal column. Breathing in the air rose; exhaling, it went down. There was also the description of two particular sounds that the air originated in the throat.

I bought another book where there was an exhaustive description of the *Magical Breath* – which consisted of visualizing the energy moving around the spine. Through the inhalation, the energy went up behind the spinal column, up to the center of the head; exhaling, it went down the

⁴ I cannot help smiling when some half-hearted people insist that they are fond of *Kriya*, yet they will not study some crucial texts in English because they are afraid to misinterpret them. I am convinced that their interests are superficial and rather emotive. Such was my enthusiasm that I would have studied Sanskrit or Chinese or any other language, if that had given me the chance to understand an essential text on *Pranayama*!

front of the body.

Returning home, I could not refrain from leafing through those pages, very curious about some drawings that illustrated other techniques based on the movement of inner energy. I read that the *Magic Breath* was one of the most precious secrets of all time: if practiced constantly, with force of visualization, it would collaborate to build a kind of internal substance that would then lead to the vision of the spiritual eye. I became convinced that this technique had to be PY's *Kriya* and incorporated it into my daily routine.

[III]

A letter from the organization that was sending me the correspondence course informed me of the existence of people who practiced *Kriya Yoga* and who lived near my city. They had formed a meditation group. I was enthusiastic; I was thrilled with the joyful anticipation of meeting them. That night I could hardly fall asleep.

"Too bright were our heavens, too far away, too frail their ethereal stuff" wrote *Sri Aurobindo*. I never thought such words would apply to the consequences of my encounter with such a group! With bitter irony, I dare to say that that phase of my existence was too happy to last that long. It was time to touch the problems, limitations and deformations caused by the human mind when it loses its innocence and the habit of rational thinking. Many times in the future I would have experienced how life is made up of brief moments of inspiration and serenity, alternating with vicissitudes where everything seems lost and the distortions created by the human mind reign supreme. Approaching the young man in charge of this group, with total and disarming sincerity, I could never have imagined what a hard blow I was about to receive.

Visibly surprised, he welcomed me, genuinely excited to meet someone with whom to share his passion. From the very first moment of our meeting, having not yet crossed the threshold of his house, I told him how enthusiastic I was about the practice of *Kriya*. In return he asked me when I had been initiated into *Kriya*, assuming that I had received it from the same organization of which he was a member.

When he realized how I had managed to choose a breathing technique in a book and I had deluded myself it was *Kriya Pranayama*, he was petrified, showing a bitter smile of despair. He thought that I considered *Kriya Yoga* as a game for children and had no idea what seriousness was. Visibly confused, I babbled something about the currents, about the sound of breathing: he didn't want to hear anything anymore and took me to his study.

He told me emphatically that *Kriya* could not be learned through books. He began the story – which I would later have the opportunity to hear so many times ad nauseam – of the Tibetan *yogi Milarepa* who, having acquired spiritual techniques without the blessings of his *Guru*, did not obtain encouraging results even if these had been practiced with great intensity, he finally received the same instructions from his *Guru's* mouth and the results this time came.

We know that the human mind is conditioned more by history than by logical inference! An anecdote like this, even if completely imaginary, just to build the plot of a novel, has a kind of "internal brightness" that conditions a person's common sense. By arousing a strong emotion, it can make acceptable conclusions that would appear absurd to the reasoning faculty. In fact, this story had silenced me and I didn't know what to answer.

There was only one way, he said, to learn *Kriya*: to be initiated by a "Minister" authorized by the PY organization! He told me that no other person was authorized to teach that technique. He, and all the other people in the group, had received the technique, signing a precise and solemn promise of secrecy.

"*Secrecy!*" How odd this word sounded to my ears! What a mysterious fascination it exercised over my being! Up until that moment I had always believed that it was of little or no value how a certain teaching was learned, about what kind of books it was studied. I thought the only important thing was that it should be practiced correctly. I began to think that it was natural to protect a precious teaching from prying eyes. So then I had nothing to complain about the request for secrecy. Later, after several years, I would change my mind by observing some nonsense that arose from this injunction.

Staring me in the eye, with enormous emotional impact he began to tell me that a practice learned from any other source "was worth nothing, would not be effective as far as spiritual achievements are concerned", while other effects would be "just a dangerous illusion in which the ego would be trapped for a long time. "

Inflamed by an absolute faith, he launched into a digression on the value of the "*Guru*" (spiritual Master) a concept that for me remained enigmatic, also because it was attributed to a person whom he had not known directly. Having been initiated into *Kriya* by the legitimate representatives of the organization founded by PY, this teacher was, in the feeling of his heart, a real presence in his life: he was his *Guru*. The same thing happened to those who belonged to his group. Their *Guru* was seen

as the help that God Himself had sent them, so such an event was "the greatest luck that could happen to a human being." The logical consequence – and the friend noted this with great emphasis – was that abandoning this Master, seeking a different spiritual path, was equivalent to "a hateful rejection of the Divine hand, stretched out in benediction."

He asked me to practice my *Kriya* technique in front of him, the one learned from books. He was obviously driven by curiosity and, I suppose, by the hope of verifying a well-rooted prejudice according to which the technique, learned outside the legitimate channels, could not be – due to a particular spiritual law – other than corrupt. He smiled when he saw that I was breathing through my nose. Then he asked me to explain if there was anything I was focusing my attention on during my breath. According to the books read, the energy could be visualized flowing both within the spine or around it. Since PY wrote that a *kriyaban* "mentally directs his life energy to rotate up and down around the six spinal centers", I chose the latter of the two possibilities and this was the version I explained. Moreover, having read in another book that during *Kriya Pranayama* one had to mentally chant *Om* in each *Chakra*, I also added this detail. I could not imagine that PY had decided to simplify the instructions and had taught the other variant in the West by omitting the mental chant of *Om*.

As I explained these details, I saw an intimate satisfaction spread over his face. He evidently did not identify my practice with the *Kriya Pranayama* technique he had learned. The "secret" to which he was bound had therefore not been violated by the authors of the books I had read! Pretending to feel sorry for my natural disillusionment, he informed me in an official tone, that my technique "had nothing to do with *Kriya Pranayama*"!

The situation was really bizarre: now I know that I had just exhibited a technique very similar to *Kriya Pranayama* as taught by *Lahiri Mahasaya*, while he was smiling with a sarcastic expression, one hundred percent sure that I was talking nonsense! He recommended that I send a written description, precise and detailed, of my vicissitudes to the direction of the school, in the hope that they would accept me as a student and one day grant me the sacred initiation into *Kriya Yoga*.

I was dumbfounded by the tone our dialogue was assuming; to reactivate the initial amiability of the meeting I tried to reassure him by talking about the positive effects I had obtained with my practice. This statement had the effect of worsening the situation, giving him the opportunity for a second reprimand, really not completely wrong, but in any case out of place. He made it clear to me that, in the practice of *Kriya*, I should never seek tangible effects; even less bragging about it, because then "I would have lost them". That clever guy, without realizing it, had thrown himself into a clear contradiction: if the results were too important

to risk losing them by telling them, it meant that the technique worked!

Realizing that he had devoted too much of his time to me, a strange metamorphosis occurred in his behavior. It was as if, all of a sudden, he had been invested with a sacred role: he said he would pray for me! For that day, I had lost the game. I promised him that I would follow his advice. In fact, from that moment I gave up my *Pranayama* routine altogether and limited my practice to simple concentration at the point between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) – as he had suggested.

GROUP MEDITATION

The group of people who practiced *Kriya* in his city met twice a week to practice together. The room dedicated to this activity had basic but pleasant furnishings. Each member contributed to pay the rent so that its use did not depend on the whims of the owner and was devoted exclusively to a spiritual use. I began to take part in these meetings. Listening to Indian spiritual songs, translated and harmonized in Western style and, above all, meditating together was a real joy! Everything seemed heavenly to me – even if the amount of time dedicated to the practice of the techniques was really short: no more than 20 minutes, often only 15. A session of collective practice, of particular inspiration, enriched by devotional songs, took place on the eve of Christmas and lasted for many hours.

At the end of each meditation session we were expected to leave in silence, so I only began to get to know my new friends more closely during the monthly "social" lunch. This was a really nice opportunity to spend a few hours together talking and enjoying each other's company.

Since many of us did not enjoy the approval and even less the support in the practice of *Yoga* techniques from their family, the unique opportunity to be among people with the same ideas and interests should have been an experience of serenity and relaxation. Unfortunately, the pleasantness of the encounters was partly marred by the fact that in such a group one could not talk about anything that came to mind. Those in charge of the organization had strongly recommended not to talk about other spiritual paths or discuss specific details of *Kriya Yoga* techniques. This task was to be reserved only for specially authorized persons and no one in our group was. The need to direct the contents of the conversations on well-defined tracks made it difficult to find a topic of conversation that respected the rules, being, at the same time, interesting. This was certainly not the place for worldly gossip, unsuitable for a spiritual group. So only one topic remained: the beauty of the *Kriya* path and the great luck of having found it!

As can be assumed, after a few "mutual exaltation" meetings, an almost hallucinating boredom began to reign in the group. As a last resort, someone took the risk of making some innocent joke; it was certainly not a

matter of jokes that could offend anyone, but of a moderate use of a sense of humor. Unfortunately this clashed with the devotional attitude held by most of the members and capitulated to their cold reaction.

When you tried to look nice, you got an embarrassed look and a smile that left you cold for the rest of the day. These people seemed unable to show a single shred of true joviality. Remembering those episodes, perhaps they were naturally inclined to depression. In fact their enthusiasm for *Kriya* was lukewarm, and they seemed to be practicing the few techniques they knew as if they were making a sacrifice to atone for the "guilt" of existing.

What struck me negatively in the behavior of some of them was the belief that they were protected by their "*Guru*" and that they experienced dangerous situations with complete tranquility, abandoning all prudence. In my opinion this attitude was really nothing more than a silly superstition.

It was a fact that a consistent recycling process was observed in the group; many members who had enthusiastically been part of it abandoned it with visible relief trying to remove this experience from their memory.

My open temperament allowed me to approach some people and establish a bond that later became true friendship. It was not that easy to find what one might call a free seeker in the spiritual field. Many displayed a devotion that was too charged from an emotional point of view, others, perhaps dreaming of the possibility of expanding our group, seemed to have the sole purpose of raising funds to provide the room for something that eloquently communicated the meaning of its sacred consecration; others just looked like social misfits.

With the ill-concealed purpose of receiving some elucidation on the technique of *Kriya*, on several occasions I tried to discuss what had been my practice of it as I had learned it from books. I was hoping that someone, making some oblique observations on it, would help me to guess what the exact technique of *Kriya Pranayama* consisted of. No "courtship" was able to extract even a crumb of information from them.

While I continued to receive from anyone, even without asking them, lessons in devotion, humility and loyalty, my interest in *Kriya* became a real craving, a fever that consumed me. A *kriyaban* made fun of me and, with undisguised cruelty, said to me: "You will see that they won't even give you *Kriya*, because a devotee does not have to desire a technique with such intensity: God is to be found first of all with devotion and surrender to His will".

I tried to behave like a devoted disciple but deep down I awaited my initiation with unimaginable impatience. Even if I tried my best to convince myself that I was among individuals with the same passions as I

did, I had to admit that the reality was very different!

AN IMPORTANT VISIT IN OUR GROUP

Our group received a visit from an elderly lady who had been in correspondence with PY himself. Thanks to her seriousness, sincerity and loyal behavior, she had received the authorization to help us in the practice of meditation. Her temper was very sweet and she seemed more prone to understanding than censorship.

She showed us how she performed the so-called "*Recharging Exercises*." These exercises were similar to isometric contractions and were practiced while standing; characteristic of them was the fact that the *Prana* was directed in all parts of the body through the force of concentration.

By the will of PY the technique of *Kriya Pranayama* should always have been combined with two introductory techniques: *Hong So* and *Om*. The first calms the breath and the mind; the second concerns listening to the inner sounds produced by the *Chakras* that merge into the sound of *Om*.

This lady explained the *Hong So* technique to us. She pointed out that, despite its apparent simplicity, it was not at all easy; but, with an encouraging smile, she added: "The technique contains everything you need to get in touch with the Divine."

She then dwelt on the technique of listening to inner sounds (called the *Om technique*.)⁵ She explained to us that *Om* is the "Amen" of the Bible, the sound of the vibration of energy that sustains the universe. The *Om* technique makes it possible to perceive this vibration.

The clarification received by the lady was characterized by such a feeling of sacredness that it stayed with me in the following months and helped me to get through the initial phase of the practice where it seemed unlikely that the inner sounds would appear. Instead the results obtained were very concrete.

Now, as I try to recall my first contact with the sound of *Om*, I rediscover the memory of that ardent love for the Divine, which seemed so solid in those days and which later disappeared for several years when I decided to do a research on the "*Original Kriya*." But we will talk about this later.

In those days I lived like a hermit. I practiced meditation in a cold, dimly lit room. The rainy days and early winter evenings encouraged me to seek this isolation by strengthening the resolve to kindle an inner sun

⁵ This technique does not belong to those included in the original *Kriya Yoga*, wherein the internal sound perception happens without closing the ears. It is not an invention by PY, it had been plainly described in the books of classical *Yoga*, called *Nada Yoga* – "the *Yoga* of the sound." It is a good preparation for *Kriya* since it teaches the importance of passive attitude ("perceiving") versus active attitude ("to do".)

through meditation. A few weeks of assiduous practice passed without any result, until one day I became aware of a clear inner sound. It happened after ten minutes of calm effort, just as, after having lost myself in some sweet reverie, I was returning to full awareness. ⁶

It was like the hum of a mosquito. Listening carefully, it turned into the faint sound of many small tinkling bells. Then it became the tolling of a distant bell that echoed in the sunset from the deep green of wooded hills. It reached me weakly from unfathomable distances. Light, sweet as a shower of petals, it knocked softly on the doors of my heart, giving me total satisfaction and a sense of relief, as if the spiritual path had come to its fulfillment. Memories of my childhood vibrated on the periphery of my awareness without disturbing that state of deep recollection.

In difficult and unfortunate times in my life, I had always felt a sense of protection, like a broad, comfortable smile surrounding me. The sound I was hearing now brought me the same sweet feeling of comfort. It contained within itself every Beauty encountered in life. It was the golden thread around which all the experiences of love, the most involving, the most exalting, had blossomed like splendid crystals. The healing of old wounds came with true understanding. A blue, boundless stillness softly gripped my heart with fingers of bliss. What had been impossible to accomplish and the lack of which it was so cruel to accept, materialized real and true before me.

In the following days I became totally absorbed in this new practice. A devotion never experienced before arose spontaneously, crossed the wall of the psychological sphere and made life and spiritual experience indistinguishable. Reality seemed transfigured to me – like when in Winter a soft blanket of snow makes all roughness disappear.

Unfortunately, I learned the hard way that one must never voluntarily detach oneself from this state of grace. Months later, in fact, during a period in which I wanted to relax and enjoy life, I decided to voluntarily interrupt that state of grace, as if it constituted an impediment to being fully sociable. I did not realize that this apparently harmless and instinctive "betrayal" would make me unable to tune into that dimension for a very long time. Incredulous, after a few days I felt desperately alienated from that sweet reality. Among the people I felt like someone who has landed on another continent and is in the midst of environments that signify nothing. I tried in vain to rediscover the great emotion that arises from listening to inner sounds. I sought that attunement for several months until my soul agreed to sincerely reflect on the reasons that had led me to the spiritual path: to change my life forever. Now I saw that my stupid decision to detach myself from contact with the *Om* vibration had been a huge

⁶ To be lost in a "reverie" state and to return suddenly to the awareness that I was losing time, happened often.

mistake.

KRIYA YOGA INITIATION

Finally, the time came when I was able to formally request the Initiation Technique of *Kriya* by correspondence. Four months passed, every day I hoped to receive the much desired material, finally an envelope arrived. I opened it with an expectation that I cannot describe: I was deeply disappointed because it only contained introductory material. From the index of this material I understood that the actual technique would come after four weeks. So, for another month, I would have to study the usual nursery rhymes I knew by heart.

Instead, it happened that, in the meantime, two ministers from the PY organization visited our country and I was able to participate in an Initiation ceremony.

Those who, like me, were ready to receive Initiation, were about a hundred. We found ourselves in a beautiful room, rented for the occasion at a very high cost, decorated with many flowers, how many I've never seen in my life, not even in the most sumptuous weddings! The introduction to the ceremony took place in a sumptuous way. About thirty people, wearing a sober uniform, entered the room in a row, with a solemn attitude and hands folded in prayer. It was explained to me that those people were part of the local group whose group leader was a stylist who had prepared the choreography for that triumphal entry. The two Ministers who had recently arrived from overseas advanced with a modest and disoriented air behind the procession. The actual ceremony began.

I accepted without objection that a promise of eternal fidelity was required not only to the *Guru* PY but also to a chain formed by five other Masters: Lahiri Mahasaya was an intermediate link while PY was the so-called *Guru-preceptor*, or the one who would partially assume the weight of our *Karma*.

It would have been really strange if no one had doubts about this latest event. I remember that a friend asked me if PY – not being able to confirm it, being a resident in the astral worlds – had really accepted her as a "disciple", consequently also taking the burden of her *Karma*. To avoid that she impoverished the enjoyment of this fascinating ceremony with such thoughts, I reassured her that she was undoubtedly accepted.

They explained to us that Christ belonged to this chain of Masters and that he had once appeared to *Babaji* (Lahiri Mahasaya's *Guru*) asking him to send some emissaries to the West to spread the teaching of *Kriya*.

This story did not cause me any perplexity. Maybe I didn't want to think about it. Considering that the mission of spreading *Kriya* originated from Christ himself was a very nice idea for me. On the other hand, I was too

eager to hear the explanation of the technique that would soon take place to pay attention to this fact.

The introductory speech went on in a suggestive way. The *Kriya* technique embodied the most effective blessings of God to His privileged creature, the human being, endowed, unlike animals, with seven *Chakras*. My mind was in a state of enormous expectation for what I had desired with my whole being and for which I had been seriously preparing for months. It was not what could be called a 'sacrament' that I had decided to receive to safeguard a family tradition; what was about to happen represented the crowning of a definitive choice! My heart was immensely and perfectly happy anticipating the joy that would come from the practice of *Kriya*.

When we came to the explanation of *Kriya Pranayama*, I discovered that I already knew the technique! It consisted of a deepening of *Ujjayi Pranayama*. It was the technique of the *Kundalini Breath* that I had found long ago in my esoteric readings and which prescribes that the energetic current flow, with the help of the breath, inside the spine.

I have already explained that I had not seriously considered this procedure since PY in his writings had written that in *Kriya* the energy revolved "around the *Chakras*, along an elliptical circuit". Now I saw that the term 'around' was inappropriate and that there was no elliptical circuit. Furthermore, why had so many people absolutely insisted that entering the organization I should abandon all other procedures and practice only the techniques received from this last source? The practice of *Ujjayi* had brought so many blessings in my life, why had I been so strongly conditioned in my choices that I had agreed to abandon it?

The explanation of the *Maha Mudra* and *Jyoti Mudra* techniques (this school did not use the more common term *Yoni*) concluded the technical instructions. Every detail of the techniques was explained in such a way that it did not admit the slightest variation and, in addition, a specific routine was strongly recommended. If the slightest doubt arose as to the correctness of a certain detail, no one was encouraged – not even vaguely – to attempt an experiment on their own and draw conclusions. The only "correct" action was to contact the school management, expose the problem, and receive appropriate advice. This, in fact, was what I always did. I learned to interact only with "authorized" people; I was looking very seriously for their judgment as if it were given by perfect beings who could not be wrong. I believed that they were "channels" through which the blessings of the *Guru* flowed. Furthermore, I was deeply convinced that – even if they did not admit it out of humility – they had already reached the highest level of spiritual realization.

[III]

After initiation into *Kriya*, I followed the advice of my organization to practice the two techniques *Hong So* and *Om* before *Kriya Pranayama*.

With the first technique the breath would have calmed down and this would have created a good level of concentration. Then we moved on to listening to the inner sounds. Then there was the *Maha Mudra*. Finally, returning to the immobile position and trying to restore the state of sacredness, *Kriya Pranayama* began in strict compliance with all the instructions. After *Jyoti Mudra*, the *Kriya* routine would end with ten minutes of pure concentration in *Kutastha*.

In my practical experience, the two preliminary techniques did not receive the attention they deserved. During the execution of the *Hong-so* technique, the thought that I would soon have to interrupt it to switch to the *Om* technique created a feeling of disturbance, limiting my total abandonment to its beauty. The same happened with the *Om* technique, which was interrupted to practice *Maha Mudra*.

The *Om* listening technique was in itself a "complete" universe and led to mystical experience, so the act of interrupting it was something worse than a simple disturbance. This interruption was incompatible with all logic. It was as if, having recognized with pleasant surprise a friend in the crowd, I entertained myself with him, then, suddenly, I turned my back to him, I mingled with the crowd in the hope of experiencing the surprise of meeting him again in a short time to return to the suspended conversation.

The sound of *Om* represented the mystical experience itself, the Goal I was looking for. Why would I have to interrupt that sublime tuning and then regain it through another technique that, however, did not give me immediate and tangible results like the *Om* technique? Was it because *Kriya Pranayama* was a higher procedure? I did not understand why it should be considered "higher."

Certainly *Pranayama* had given me a great result: before the *Kundalini awakening* experience it was the only thing I had practiced. But now the *Om* listening technique made me enter the spiritual dimension. It was not a rational choice to interrupt it to practice *Pranayama*!

I forced myself to this absurd choice for an extremely long period. Back then, the thought of using logic and radically changing the routine seemed to me an act of stupid arrogance. Such was the power of that madness which in our group was called "loyalty"! Unfortunately, I must admit that I had become like one of those animals fed by man who lose the power to be self-sufficient.

When I tried to discuss this problem with other *kriyabans*, I encountered enormous and unreasonable resistance. There were some who were not satisfied with their practice but planned to improve it in the future, while others could not understand what I was saying.

A lady who had almost become part of my family pretended to listen to me attentively; in the end she said brutally that she already had a *Guru* and did not feel the need for another. Her remark hurt me deeply as my intention was only to have a rational interview. What friendship can exist between two people when one is expressed so abruptly?

It was the succession of similar episodes that confirmed the idea that, having not been encouraged to trust the clarity of self-observation, many of my *kriyaban* friends did nothing but mechanically perform the daily ritual of the *Kriya* session almost as if to put in peace their conscience. With the exception of one person (who really harbored some strange ideas about the spiritual path, to the point that one day I thought that he might be mentally unstable) these new *kriyaban* friends seemed to censor my excessive interest in how to use the techniques in the best way, stating that devotion was far more important. Often they referred to a concept that in my opinion was out of place in the field of *Yoga*: the supreme value of loyalty towards P.Y. and its organization.

Well, one day I decided to use my brain and change the routine. This routine was inspired by Patanjali's teaching. I decided that the two techniques *Hong So* and *Om* should be practiced either in the final part of the routine or never.

Having made the spine more sensitive with the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*, I practiced *Hong So* in the spine. [This means 'observing' the breath as if it were moving not in and out of the lungs but up and down along the spine.]

I cannot describe the emotion and the sense of sacredness that characterized my practice of *Kriya Pranayama* from that moment on. During the day or before sitting down to practice, I often repeated as a *Mantra* the phrase (quoted in PY's Autobiography) by Lalla Yogiswari:

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

This beautiful image intensified my enthusiasm, strengthening the determination to ceaselessly perfect my *Kriya* practice.

Note on Patanjali's teaching

Patanjali was a pioneer in the art of rationally considering the mystical path, trying to identify a universal, physiological direction to events that would explain why a certain phenomenon inherent in the spiritual path precedes another and

necessarily follows another. Its extreme synthesis could be criticized, or, due to its temporal distance, be difficult to understand; in any case, it is of extraordinary importance. Patanjali made a synthesis of the spiritual path by identifying eight steps in it: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*. Practically useless is the definition of *Yama* and *Niyama*. *Yama*: self-control (non-violence, non-lying, non-stealing, non-lust and non-attachment). *Niyama*: religious observances (cleansing, contentment, discipline, study of the Self, and surrender to the Supreme God).

How can a beginner understand what the "Study of the Self" is? It seems clear to me that moral rules are not to be interpreted as premises for starting the practice of *Yoga*, but are the consequences of serious spiritual effort.

Regarding *Asana* (body position) *Patanjali* explains that it must be stable and comfortable. Nothing else says about it. What is important is that there is no mention of preliminary concentration and meditation exercises before *Pranayama*.

The two interesting concepts for those who practice *Kriya* are *Pranayama* and *Pratyahara*. They are respectively: the regulation of *Prana* obtained through the repetition of particular breathing patterns and the process of internalization of awareness that disconnects from external reality. The three further phases, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*, mean respectively: concentration on a physical or abstract object, contemplation of the essential nature of that object, prolongation of this contemplation in a constant stream of consciousness until getting lost in it.

Those who practice *Kriya Yoga* interpret "concentration on an object" as concentration on the *Chakras*; the "contemplation of the essential nature of such an object" as immersing oneself in the sweetness that comes from them; the "getting lost in it" as the unlimited happiness that comes from reaching the final ecstatic state. For me the teaching of *Patanjali* lies in this.

CHAPTER 3

THE VALUE OF JAPA: THE BREATHLESS STATE

A couple of years passed by. The time came to receive the *Higher Kriyas* through the correspondence course. I ran into some difficulties with them.

Among the *kriyabans* of the meditation group I did not see a great interest in such techniques. I asked a friend of mine, a devout *kriyaban* who had received *Kriya* initiation many years ago and had once lived at the headquarters of our organization, if she had received the *Second Kriya*. She didn't seem to understand the question. Therefore I reminded her that a disciple of *Lahiri Mahasaya*, *Swami Pranabananda*, had accompanied the moment of his death with the practice of the *Second Kriya*. She was visibly altered, saying that the quotation clearly referred to the technique of *Kriya Pranayama*: one breath, then another and this "second breath" was, according to her, the "*Second Kriya*"! I felt faint: I looked at her in a mild but intense way. I had the impression that the very idea of another technique to be added to those already received and practiced daily, bothered her. It was as if she felt that she had made such a great effort in getting used to the daily practice of *First Kriya* that she did not feel like facing an even greater effort. I believe that to this day she has remained firm in her conviction.

Unfortunately, the lessons with the *Higher Kriyas* contained ambiguous pieces. Just to give an example, PY wrote that in order to awaken *Kundalini* it was important to practice *Kechari Mudra* regularly. But the instruction on how to make such a *Mudra* was nowhere to be found.

I contacted the elderly lady who was officially invested with the role of "Meditation counselor", the same kind lady who had taught me the *Om* meditation technique. She was unable to help me clear up my doubts. She too had learned these techniques in writing since, unfortunately, after PY's Mahasamadhi, direct initiations were never given. Recognizing that she had some doubts about their correct execution, she regretted not having her *Higher Kriyas* checked by Ministers who were direct disciples of PY, despite having had many opportunities to do so.

An aristocratic-looking lady revealed to me that she had received initiation into the so-called *Higher Kriyas* a long time ago. Full of enthusiasm, I widened my eyes. She said that she had felt so unworthy that she had put them aside and, after some time, had forgotten them.

"*Forgotten!*" I didn't believe my ears. This abomination was inconceivable to me. Her self-satisfied ignorance, passed off as humility or who knows what form of overabundant devotion, passed the limits of decency. When I objected that her behavior seemed a manifestation of indifference to the lofty teachings of her *Guru*, she looked at me as if my impertinence had violated an inviolable prohibition: never enter the intimate dimension of a person's *Sadhana*. She replied by saying that what she had was enough for her, then abruptly broke off the conversation.

I wrote to my *Kriya* school management to arrange an appointment with one of its representatives, a Minister who would soon be visiting my country to give *Kriya Yoga* initiation. I asked for this interview because I really needed it. It is not in my character to disturb anyone for trivial matters. I'm sure it would have taken the Minister a couple of minutes at the most to answer me. I was looking forward to that appointment with great anticipation.

A SAD EPISODE

Introduced to him by the "Meditation counselor", the Minister assured me that he would clarify my doubts as soon as possible. Over the next few days, I was dismayed when I realized that he kept postponing our meeting for no valid reason. Since I had decided not to give up, we finally met.

I went through a truly unpleasant experience. I believed that hypocrisy, bureaucracy, formalities, small falsehoods and subtle violence against the honesty of others were totally alien to those who dedicated their lives to practicing and teaching *Kriya*, instead I had the impression of meeting a manager who had other more important things in his head and he was very irritable. He was adamant not to tell me about *Kechari Mudra*, furthermore he abruptly advised me to avoid the practice of the *Third* and the *Fourth Kriyas* and restrict my practice to the *First Kriya* technique alone. He stated that I was too agitated and this showed that I did not practice *Kriya* well. I replied that I would definitely take his advice into consideration, nevertheless, I wanted to see how to move my head correctly in order to practice these techniques in the hypothetical future.

Annoyed – considering my answer an insolence – he hastily showed me these movements and invited me to address my questions, in written form, to the school management and, as he said this, he got up, making the act of leaving. I found myself in front of a "wall" and the refusal to continue the interview was absolute.

I had always faith and respect for PY's organization; I had studied all the related literature as if I had to prepare for a university exam. Finally I had asked this organization only one thing: that this, so much loved, jewel that

is *Kriya*, be explained to me in its entirety. Why had the Minister reacted in such a way?

I found myself in an atrocious mental and emotional condition. I wondered what good was a school that didn't do its best to clarify every teaching given. Why did our ministers travel around the world, if not to show students directly how to practice what was learned only by correspondence?

Why should I have felt guilty and unsuitable for the *Kriya* path, just for having dared to ask (firmly but kindly) for a practical demonstration? I couldn't let the whole thing go and I was clearly upset. Those who saw me immediately after this meeting said I was unrecognizable. Among my friends, a lady with a honeyed voice commented that I got a real strafing from our *Guru* – in her opinion, until then I had had the attitude of one who feels too confident, now I had to learn to accept without discussing the words of a minister.

Yet part of me was enjoying the whole situation. I knew for a fact that this destructive experience would somehow turn into something positive, crucial to my path. I was too in love with the *Kriya* path to be discouraged by any difficulty.

This made me calmer and more serene. But there are also childish thoughts that arise in us when we find ourselves in a confused and difficult to accept situation. The dark thought occurred to me that this man, having returned to the management of the PY organization, might speak unfavorably of me, saying something that could decrease the likelihood for me to receive those much desired clarifications in the future. I was afraid that my idyllic relationship with my *Kriya* organization had been compromised.

The lady "Meditation counselor", who was not present on that occasion but met the Minister in another city, blamed me for disturbing the Minister's peace of mind. I wrote her a letter full of bitterness, indirectly insulting her. She replied very firmly that this letter had ended our friendship. Later she toned down her attitude and she invited me to her house to talk about what had happened.

First, I expressed my irrevocable determination to explore all possible sources to clarify my doubts. I talked about my plan to leave for India and she started mumbling something about India being no guarantee of authenticity. She told me that recently some *kriyabans* had met (in a well known *Ashram* closely connected with PY's life story) a *Swami* who gave them "pseudo *Kriya*" techniques which were, in his opinion, some meaningless, others dangerous.

She said there were many unauthorized teachers who presented themselves as loyal disciples of PY. With fervent imagination she

compared them to spiders who smeared the honey of the *Guru's* love to attract devotees to themselves who became their prey.

She spoke to me in particular of a disciple of PY who had been part of the management of the organization, then he had started his own business by opening a new school of *Kriya*. She considered him a "traitor."

The lady could have continued to talk practically indefinitely when with a sentence that came out of my instinct I froze her: "If I were to receive a teaching on *Kriya* from the worst criminal in the world, I would be able to transform it into gold. And if this teaching were adulterated, I would have the intuition to rebuild it in its integrity as it was originally."

She said, sighing, that I was dangerously going to lose the grace of my *Guru*-disciple relationship. To make me understand what it means to receive instructions from a real *Guru*, she told me what happened when a *kriyaban* decided to leave his *Guru* PY's *Ashram* and look for another Master. The *Guru* moved to stop him when he heard a voice internally – that of God himself, she added – urging him not to interfere with the disciple's freedom. PY obeyed and in a flash of intuition he foresaw all the future incarnations of his disciple, those in which he would be lost, in which he would continue to search – in the midst of innumerable and unspeakable sufferings, passing from one error to another – the same spiritual path that he was now leaving. Eventually, he would necessarily return to the same path. The lady said that PY specified to some close disciples the number of incarnations that this immense and desolate "journey" would last – approximately thirty!

The moral of this story was clear, something no one could escape from: I didn't have to look elsewhere or I would have lost myself in a labyrinth of enormous suffering and who knows when I would have found the right path again. It was then that I turned my attention to PY's photo, taken on the same day as his death. It had been framed with great care; flowers and a packet of incense were placed in front of it. In those moments of silence, I seemed to see as if a tear was about to form in PY's sweet eyes (it wasn't a weird feeling, other people reported the same impression to me). I related this remark to her, she became serious, and looking into the distance towards an indefinite point, she sighed heavily: "This impression, take it as a warning; the *Guru* is not happy with you"! There was no doubt that she wasn't joking at all.

In that moment, I realized how PY was a "presence" in her life, even though she had never met him physically! I let my gaze rest on the bunch of lilies of the valley neatly arranged in a small vase in front of PY's photo. We had bought them at the train station right after I arrived in her city. She had explained to me that she never skimped on fresh flowers to her "*Guru*." Although a stranger to all this, I was enchanted by this idyll. How her life must have been filled with sweet comfort! I knew that if I wanted to feel

devotion with such intensity, I would have a great job to do: develop a stable inner tranquility, bow to my favored form of the Divine, and repeat this action of inner surrender with total sincerity every day of my life.

Although she admired the seriousness with which I walked down the path – unlike other lukewarm and hesitant people who came to her solely to be recharged with a motivation they could not find in themselves – she was disappointed that the devotion she felt for her *Guru* was totally alien to me. She could not even relieve my immense thirst for knowledge of the art of *Kriya*. Looking into her beautiful sad eyes, I had the clear impression that she was in permanent anticipation that I was acting "disloyal" to the *Guru* or the organization in some way.

The Minister of my organization with whom I had clashed on at least one point was right: I was by no means calm. The search for technical explanations made me as tense as a coiled spring. While I wanted to remain faithful to my *Kriya* organization, I did not accept vetoes. I wanted to know *Kriya* to perfection and no one could hold me back anymore, with no argument.

After a few days, the feeling of having witnessed the senseless whim of a man in a position of power gave way to a different consideration. Most likely that Minister gave me the same discipline that he had received during his years as a postulant. A lady who had known him in that distant period described him to me as a very curious *kriyaban* who often asked senior Ministers technical questions. Knowing the rules of monastic discipline, I was sure that his questions had not always been answered promptly.

MY REACTION: STUDYING ALL THE MATERIALS I COULD FIND

The desire to gain a deeper understanding of PY's writings on *Kriya Yoga* took a particular direction. I knew three names of his direct disciples who had quarreled with the school management and who later set out on their own. I was hoping to find keys in their writings that would help me clarify my doubts. I bought all the material published by them, including recordings of lectures given by one of them. I hoped that to prove their level of Self-realization, they had elaborated the thought of PY through the direct experience of the various phases of *Kriya* and had prepared a good quality didactic material for those who turned to them while neglecting the main source.

Well, the first disciple seemed an expert in remembering even the most insignificant episodes of his *Guru's* life while in the didactic material he shared there was no mention of the *higher Kriyas*; the second gave a more professional idea, he was gifted with a didactic spirit, but from the material he provided almost nothing new emerged. In the literature of the

third disciple – surprising and precious in that, having encountered the tragedy of mental illness, he was able to give an impressive account of it – I found an enlightened sentence on the role of *Kechari Mudra*: everything else was devastatingly banal. The secrets, if these three disciples ever had any, were well guarded!

I also tackled the reading of some books written no longer by PY disciples but by *Lahiri Mahasaya* disciples.⁷ These were commentaries on some sacred scriptures attributed to *Lahiri Mahasaya*. P. *Bhattacharya* his disciple, printed those interpretations. These books had recently been translated into English. These texts disappointed me a lot.

Their value, from an exegetical point of view, was almost nil. It seemed almost impossible to me that those interpretations really came from *Lahiri Mahasaya*: I could not see the same practical wisdom and enormous realization that he expressed in his journals and letters.

I formed this idea: *Lahiri Mahasaya* had verbally annotated certain sacred texts of the *Indian* tradition. Perhaps, reading those verses, he was transported by the strength of his acumen, completely forgot the texts to comment and, inspired, spoke widely and freely on the subtleties of *Kriya*. Most likely what he said on that occasion was taken as a specific commentary on those texts. It is possible that in publishing those comments, the editor complemented them by adding portions born of his own understanding.

Months later, Mrs "*Meditation counselor*" learned that I had read a "*forbidden book*" one written by a disciple of PY who had left the organization. Not only that, I had given this book to a couple of friends! Well in a letter to a friend of mine, she referred to me as "one who stabs his *Guru* in the back and distributes daggers for others to do the same"! She concluded by writing that "intelligence is a double-edged sword: it can be used to eliminate the bubo of ignorance but also to brutally block the lifeblood that sustains the spiritual path!"

Her reaction was so flustered that it didn't hurt me at all. She had acted on the wave of an unstoppable emotion. Decades of conditioning had affected her common sense. I felt a sense of tenderness for her and made me smile as I imagined what her mood might have been when she wrote that letter. Seeing that her unfortunate expectations of me had materialized, I believe that her expression was first serious and then, in the end, calm and serene like that of one who savors a sweet, intimate satisfaction. She could well say that she had foreseen all this, or that she had sensed my ... "betrayal. "

⁷ The very interesting book *Purana Purusha* by Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee was not yet published.

STUDY THE LESSONS AGAIN

I then decided to study once more the correspondence course received by the organization. I made it a habit to meet up with some *kriyaban* friends, read some crucial pieces of these lessons with them, and walk around discussing the various topics they covered. Our main interest was to find inspiration there that could help us perfect our *Kriya* practice. Our attempt was in vain – it was like getting blood out of a stone.

In addition to the instructions on the meditation techniques of *Kriya Yoga*, other topics were extensively covered in these lessons: how to behave with friends, how to manage a relationship as a couple, how to choose a job that does not hinder one's spiritual development, how to organize a good vegetarian diet... There were also some esoteric teachings which could not be considered necessary for the practice of *Kriya Yoga* but for some reason they were taken into consideration.

I realized that I had focused too much on these latter topics such as how to develop telepathy, how to be able to send energy to obtain *pranic* healing, how to recognize friends from previous lives... These teachings were accompanied by an invitation to prudence and caution. Yet I realized that I had put them into practice with an attitude devoid of all caution and discrimination. I had chosen those particular patterns of behavior towards which my emotions guided me. I acted believing myself supported by "Above", imagining that the blessings and strength of the *Guru* were with me.

Slowly my delusional dream began to disintegrate and I now perceived a clear failure. This was a big blow to me. I was struggling to accept it; I wanted to believe that mine was an apparent failure, but as time went on the evidence told me that I had neither cured nor helped anyone, in any way. I had made a fool of myself and, moreover, disturbed other people's peace and privacy.

Right in the very vacuous field of "past lives", it seemed to me that I had done nothing but use my imagination to create various mental films, convincing myself that I had lived them in the distant past.

Slipping into a state of bewilderment, I was unable for months to trace the thread of a single coherent thought.

Very slowly came the understanding that everything in the material studied that did not concern the explanation of meditation techniques or advice on how to practice such techniques was confined to the realm of body and mind. So from a spiritual point of view those teachings were, for me, USELESS. Although harmless to many people, I perceived them as a heavy material that had confused my being. I began to desire with all my

heart a clean spiritual path that had nothing to do with strengthening the realm of the mind, a path that would lead, without unnecessary frills, to calm the thought process and bring it to a state of silence and transparency. It was with this desire that I approached *Japa*, or that practice which religions call *Prayer*.

THE IDEA OF JAPA ENTERS MY LIFE

With a desperate need for tranquility, I tried to rely on the simplest possible *Kriya* routine and to live with an internalized consciousness. I tried to carry out the well-known instruction of resolutely maintaining an impartial attitude towards pleasant and unpleasant events, keeping myself as a detached "witness". Supported by the enthusiasm for this new purpose, I managed to achieve a state that seemed ideal, good, but after a few days I felt unbearably stressed as if everything were a fiction, a miserable play. In fact, this teaching was impossible to carry out. Only an "enlightened" person can in fact live in such a high state of consciousness.

It was then that the writings of *Mère (The Mother)* and *Satprem* entered my life. *The Mother* was a disciple of *Sri Aurobindo* and, after his death in 1951, continued his research. From 1958 until her death in 1973, *The Mother* recounted her extraordinary exploration to *Satprem*. Their interviews are transcribed in *Mother's Agenda* (6000 pages in 13 volumes). I studied not only her *Agenda* but also *Sri Aurobindo, the Adventure of Consciousness* and *Mother or the Divine Materialism* both written by *Satprem*. It was a revelation!

I would like to clarify how it happened that *The Mother* aroused my enthusiasm by helping me to make *Japa* a constant reality in my life. I also want to communicate how *The Mother* exercised an action in my life which is like what in India is called "Initiation."

Mother's thought had nothing to do with philosophy. It was new, totally new. It was something never heard before, I dare say "irreverent". *The Mother* reasoned like a Westerner and treated the themes of Indian spirituality in a language that was both lyrical and rational, and beautiful to the highest degree of excellence. *The Mother* voiced my most intimate convictions in an euphorically vivid way. Sometimes I discovered her writings as a kind of revolution, an inversion of values.

There were two most fascinating concepts that shocked me and saved me from the condition I was in.

The first concept concerned her commentary on Sri Aurobindo's aphorism n.70: "Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitying to others." Commenting on it she wrote:

The need to be virtuous is the great obstacle to true self-giving. This is the origin of Falsehood and even more the very source of hypocrisy – the refusal to accept to take upon oneself one's own share of the burden of difficulties.

Do not try to appear virtuous. See how much you are united, one with everything, that is anti-divine. Take your share of the burden, accept yourselves to be impure and false and in that way you will be able to take up the Shadow and offer it. And in so far as you are capable of taking it and offering it, then things will change. Do not try to be among the pure. Accept to be with those who are in darkness and give it all with total love.

I felt a burst of joy reading this comment. Saying, on another occasion: "Morality is the great obstacle on the spiritual path", she emphasized the value of not trying at any cost to become pure in the eyes of others, but to behave in harmony with the truth of one's being. According to her, everyone should recognize their dark side, accept the fact that in the depths of their being there is stirring the same substance that in some has developed into a way of life judged to be deplorable or criminal by society.

The second concept concerned her way of approaching the subject of *Japa*. She said that undertaking the repetition of a *Mantra* was a spontaneous and natural action for her: she did not receive a solemn initiation. She related how during the screening of a film in *Sri Aurobindo's Ashram* she listened to a devotional chant: *Om Namō Bhagavateh* and wondered what would happen if she repeated it during her daily meditation. She did so and the result was extraordinary. She reported that:

"It (the *Mantra*) coagulates something: all the cellular life becomes one solid, compact mass, in a tremendous concentration – with a single vibration. At the place of all the usual vibrations of the body, there is now only one single vibration. It becomes as hard as a diamond, a single massive concentration, as if all the cells of the body had ... I became stiff from it. I was so stiff that I was one single mass." [This quotation is drawn from *Mother's Agenda*.]

During the day the *Mantra* became a sweet presence:

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

In many parts of *The Mother's Agenda*, *Satprem* and *The Mother* discuss how the *Mantra* calms the people around the one who practices it, creating an atmosphere of such intensity that disharmonies cease to exist:

"*Mantra* has a great action: it can prevent an accident. It simply springs forth in a flash, all of a sudden: "It has to spring up without thinking, without calling: it should issue forth from the being spontaneously, like a reflex, exactly like a reflex."

The Mother was able to notice the difference between those who have a *Mantra* and those who don't.

"With those who have no *Mantra*, even if they have a strong habit of meditation or concentration, something around them remains hazy and vague, whereas *Japa* imparts to those who practice it with a kind of precision, a kind of solidity: an armature. They become galvanized, as it were".

HOW I FOUND MY MANTRA

It was then that I leafed through a book that dealt with the life and, in particular, the spiritual experiences of *Swami Ramdas* (1884-1963), the Indian saint who traveled the length and breadth of India incessantly repeating the *Mantra* "*Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*." Discovering the simplicity of his life and the grandeur of his experience was very inspiring; his photo and the almost childlike simplicity of his smile kindled in my heart a great admiration for this person.

He lived a completely normal life, experiencing the ups and downs of the life of a householder. He researched what the true meaning of life was and felt the need to embark on the spiritual path. His father initiated him into the *Ram Mantra*, explaining that repeating it relentlessly would achieve the perfect peace he aspired to. It was then that Ramdas gave up the householder life and went in search of God as a beggar *Sadhu*. The *Mantra* "*Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*" was always on his lips. In addition to the practice of *Japa*, he adopted the discipline of looking at all people as forms of *Ram* (God) and accepting every event as coming from the will of God.

In a short time the *Mantra* disappeared from his lips and entered his heart. He clearly perceived the Spiritual Eye at the point between the eyebrows. He soon reached the stage where abiding in the light of the Spirit became a permanent experience. *Swami Ramdas* obtained the *Mahasamadhi* in 1963. His teaching was extremely simple:

"Repeat the one name 'Ram' at all times of the day and at nights when you

are awake. You may be sure that you will not feel lonely or miserable as long as you are uttering that glorious name. Where this name is sounded, or meditated upon, there resides no sorrow, no anxiety – nay, not even death.

Utter Rama's name any time, amid all of life's distractions, whenever there is a momentary return of your consciousness to Self-awareness. When this happens, feel the ensuing joy and concentrate on it as long as possible. Perfect your surrender to God, when facing every event. At night, when free from worldly duties, devote yourself to intense practice of *Japa*. "

Well, why couldn't I also use his method, passing through it the various stages of internalization which are universally well defined?

I tried to imitate his example. I spent three very beautiful days. I remember moments of ecstasy that filled me with delight. I had tears of joy as I sat on a bench in the public park whispering my *Mantra*. However, I stopped practicing because the effort was too great. By aiming too high (staying constant in *Continuous Prayer*) I ran the risk of developing an aversion to this practice, losing it for a long time. It was necessary to use some wisdom and recharge myself with inspiration.

THE CORRECT WAY TO PRACTICE A MANTRA

One day I received a Catholic rosary from a colleague of mine who had just returned from a pilgrimage to *Medjugorje*. I took it with me on a walk in the countryside and decided to use it; the *Mantra* I chose to repeat was that of Swami Ramdas: *Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*.

I practiced it aloud for about 108 repetitions, using the rosary twice [A Catholic rosary is made of 60 beads; I later bought a 108 grain *Mala*.]

The sound of the *Mantra*, which I had already heard in a recording of spiritual chants, was very pleasant. Since the choice of my *Mantra* was born of a clear predilection, I loved to caress its vibration, prolong it on my lips, make it vibrate in my chest and charge it with all the aspiration of my heart. My attitude was not that of a devotee begging the Divine for something, but that of a man who knows he is close to his goal.

In this way, a sincere act of 'devotion' was born from my heart. 'Devotion' understood as thanks to a reality superior to my ego towards whose beauty I remained as if enchanted.

Even though I felt a little lightheaded at times, I kept my resolve to complete my 108 reps in a low tone of voice.

Nothing in particular was done during the rest of the day: there were no spiritual readings, no devotional songs ... In the evening I retired to my room to practice my *Kriya* session. I felt a great calm in me and around me

but nothing suggested that after a few minutes I would experience something capable of changing my life.

During *mental Pranayama*, as I moved up and down along the spine, I distinctly felt that the life of my cells was supported by fresh energy which did not come from the inhaled air. This sensation was calmly enjoyable and I continued undisturbed in my practice. My awareness remained stationary for a while on each *Chakra* like a bee attracted to the nectar of flowers, hovering upon each in great delight. The more I relaxed, the more I became simultaneously aware of the *Chakras* and the physical body. The perception of an inner light and total mental transparency was the sign that a new state of consciousness was establishing itself.

The breath, which in the meantime had become very, very short, finally reached stillness, like a pendulum gently reaching the point of equilibrium. My mind had calmed down completely. I had achieved perfect stillness and, at a certain moment, I found that I was completely breathless. This condition lasted several minutes, without any feeling of discomfort: there was not even a throb of surprise, or the thought: "Finally I have it!"

A calm euphoria could be felt beyond the confines of the mind: the certainty of finally having found something stable and immutable within the evanescent flow of existence – which sometimes seems to have the consistency of an infinite sequence of reflections on the water.

A memory emerged. Some time ago I had read *Mother's* experience when she met *Sri Aurobindo*. *The Mother* related that she sat next to *Sri Aurobindo* (on the floor.) Suddenly she felt a great Force, made of massive Peace and Silence, coming down from above, clearing the mind, removing all contents and stopping in the region of the heart. *The Mother* remained seated for some time while *Sri Aurobindo* was talking to another person, then, silent, without disturbing, she got up and went away. She could do nothing but this: thank the Divine and *Sri Aurobindo*.

Something similar had now happened in my life. I was struck by the fact that one of the simplest techniques in the world, like *Japa*, had produced such a valuable result! Where my best intentions failed, *Japa* had produced the miracle!

In the following days the same event happened again – always during *mental Pranayama*, after my daily number of *Kriya* breaths (I never went beyond 36 repetitions.) There was a perfect association between the practice of *Japa* and the attainment of the state of breathlessness. Compared to the results obtained through *Japa*, my past experiences of stilling the mind seemed elusive, short-lived, superficial, illusory.

This event happened every day, but only when I met the following

conditions:

[1] *Japa* had to be practiced with the voice and not mentally for at least one *Mala* (108 times).

[2] It should not have been practiced immediately before the *Kriya* session: a couple of hours before was the ideal time.

[3] From the moment the 108 repetitions occurred, the *Japa* had to proceed mentally, effortlessly, regardless of whether the mind was concentrated or not.

[4] The routine had to contain all the techniques with the *higher Kriyas* preceded by the practice of *Pranayama*, a practice that was eventually resumed to achieve a total calmness.

[5] The breathlessness occurred by letting the breath free and gently concentrating a little on the first three *Chakras* and then settling in the heart *Chakra*. I have never, I say never, managed to go beyond this *Chakra*. In it I found the ideal state, the perfection! ⁸

During the following Summer, *Japa* was practiced in the morning and *Kriya* at noon in the open countryside. When I reached the breathless state, I used to open my eyes, keeping my gaze fixed. Well, that state instantly deepened as a sense of inner freedom settled into my consciousness. The resistance of my Ego disappeared and I was seized by a real experience of the Divine.

I think that, keeping my eyes open, the awareness that my body lived with inner energy became more acute, most likely it was the contemplation of Beauty that was the decisive factor: I realized that the essence of that Beauty was the Divine itself.

The Mother had said that the contemplation of Beauty in nature and in some forms of art should not be considered a fleeting emotion, but should be experienced as an indomitable search for the divinization of life.

Enchanted, I contemplated the glittering splendor of a full manifestation of the Divine in the atoms of inert matter: there was a purity in this idea that I had never considered before, which excited and moved me. I remember moments when I felt a heat in my head and went into an almost feverish state.

My overall reaction was an intense love for *The Mother*. Beauty in nature was the Divine and the Divine was *The Mother*. The more I felt love for Her, the more the Divine was in front of me. *The Mother* was now no

⁸ Only many years later I was able to understand why I could not go beyond the fourth *Chakra*. In fact, I understood that focusing on the first three *Chakras* is the procedure for contacting the *Samana* current located in the navel area. This current helps to enter *Sushumna* and establish consciousness in the fourth *Chakra*, which makes it possible to attain the breathless state.

longer in this physical dimension, she had abandoned her body for years. I could not physically meet her: every night I began to dream of her.

Often during the day, as I walked, my eyes filled with tears. These were born of my love for Her and this love brought a great blessing in my life.

IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDING

Ishta Devata indicates the preferred form of conceiving the divine Essence. I explained that my instinctive way of conceiving the Divine was to contemplate the Beauty of Nature. Now my *Ishta Devata* was *The Mother*.

Often, practicing *Kriya* in the open countryside, I had the impression of being relentlessly crushed by her vibration. Winter came; in my warm room, during meditation, I tried to recover the memory of my experiences during the past summer. The landscape that I had contemplated so many times in the final moments of my *Kriya* routine was now an image frozen in a transparent purity; even now my breath was gone in less than a second. This winter season was the time to understand what had happened in my life.

It is commonly explained that the spiritual path of *Kriya* begins with the event of Initiation by a Master, a *Guru*. Well in my case the initiation was not a ceremony in which I learned a technique and then passed in front of a teacher and received his touch at the point between the eyebrows. This is something that can happen but it seems to me a symbolic fact only useful to produce a certain emotion. A much, much deeper event had happened to me.

My initiation was a happy coincidence. That is, as I cultivated a burning desire to explore the spiritual path, at the same time the presence of a great soul like *The Mother* became real in my life. I understood that she was helping me: then immediately my inner transformation began. My heart radiated love towards her. The love I gave to *The Mother* changed me forever. Through this love something that was beyond human life flowed into me.

She was no longer here on the physical plane: she had left her body. I could not physically kneel in front of her: I could only practice one technique and, through it, increase my spiritual transport. In such a situation I intuitively felt that person as my *Guru*.

When I first read about *The Mother*, I did not expect her to be my *Guru*. But the reality was that she acted in my life as a *Guru*.

I knew that *The Mother* had never behaved like a traditional *Guru*.

She was able to extract all the hidden potentials from the people who

turned to her. She said that one becomes a true individual only when, in the constant search for greater beauty, harmony and knowledge, these potentials are perfectly and compactly integrated with the divine center that burns eternally in the pure heart of the seeker. I fully understood that this had happened in my life.

Finding PY's organization had been a preparation stage. Finding *The Mother* was meeting a teaching characterized by very high levels of subtlety that dragged me towards the Divine.

If I examine with clear eyes my way of practicing *Kriya Yoga* in my *Kriya* organization, I see that my attitude was improper. Unfortunately, joining that organization did not mean for me to find new means to perfect my previous practice of *Pranayama*.

Within the organization, I had subconsciously betrayed the values my culture had instilled in me. I had deviated from my personal way of thinking and feeling, embracing as truth a set of ideas extraneous to my nature. My judgment was compromised, it practically no longer existed. Obviously the responsibility was mine. In fact, I met many people in the organization who, unlike me, had nourished, while remaining faithful to it, the best traits of their personality, growing in rationality, intuition and sensitivity.

Instead of focusing on the joy of perfecting the art of *Pranayama*, I relaxed my effort, lulled into the false sense that finding *Kriya* was a stroke of luck. This idea, combined with the infantile concept that each *Kriya* breath produced "the equivalent of a solar year of spiritual evolution" and that through a million of these breaths I would infallibly reach Cosmic Consciousness, had made my *Kriya* routine become nothing but a habit lived with a lazy mind.

The first efforts in learning the *Pranayama* that at the beginning I had learned from a book were instead accompanied by a constant search for improvement. My intuition was alive, constantly stimulated; as I practiced, I anticipated a refinement that would inevitably take place and I was excited, albeit quietly, during every moment of my practice. I constantly felt like one who is pursuing his own ideal of perfection, of Beauty.

Later, having received *Kriya*, the idea of practicing "the fastest technique in the field of spiritual evolution" made me lose the intensity of my effort. I did not realize that my iron discipline was softened by the hypnotic promise of the "blessings of the Guru." "Aren't you glad you found a real Guru?" For years I have heard this refrain from my *Kriya* organization. "Aren't you thrilled that He was chosen for you by God himself?" Oh yes I'm happy, I thought with almost hysterical excitement. This idea, more than any other factor, had lethal effects on me, it was the

cradle where my ego fed and became stronger.

My fundamental mistake was to let *Kriya* (reinforced by selfish motivations) be practiced by my overactive mind. The teaching I had received from *Sri Ramdas* and *The Mother* was that I first had to create the state of **Mental Silence** by erasing all ideas, plans and distractions born of the ego. Through Mental Silence the Divine would have descended into my life, would have crossed all the layers that protect the ego: thoughts, emotions, sensations ... Only then would the intuition become my one and only guide again.

Sri Ramana Maharshi wrote:

"Hearken! It stands as an insentient hill. Its action is mysterious, past human understanding. From the age of innocence it had shone in my mind that Arunachala was something of surpassing grandeur, but even when I came to know through another that it was the same as Tiruvannamalai I did not realize its meaning. When it drew me up to it, stilling the mind, and I came close I saw IT STAND UNMOVABLE."

Well, the experience of the breathlessness of which I spoke, lived with the image of *The Mother* in my heart, was for me the "Unmovable"!

CHAPTER 4

MEETING WITH TWO NEW KRIYA TEACHERS

The idea of the existence of an *original Kriya* by *Lahiri Mahasaya*, different from the one taught by my organization, was ignited by a book I found in Vienna. It was written by an Indian *Yogi: Swami Hariharananda* who claimed to teach this *original Kriya*.

Tormented by the suspicion (suspicion then amply confirmed) that PY had taught a simplified form of *Kriya* to suit the needs of his Western disciples, I studied that book dreaming of guessing the form of *Kriya* he was teaching.

Meanwhile my daily application of *Japa* lost its bite. Less time was devoted to deepening the breathless state, while more time was devoted to experimenting with variants of the *Kriya Pranayama* technique.

Months earlier I had formulated the following thought: "I must never lose the joy of the breathless state, even for a single minute, every day of my life. This is the most real thing ever experienced"!

But the frantic search for *original Kriya* made me lose my mind. I had opened a door that couldn't be closed that easily. An intense satisfaction arose from reading and rereading the book I had just found, also underlining a few sentences.

I was struck by reading that the practice of *Pranayama* had to be considered wrong if, after an appropriate number of breaths, the practitioner did not listen to the inner sound of the *Om*, without the need to close the ears. That sentence didn't let me sleep. It "dangerously" suggested that an unimaginably deep and rich technique of spiritual realization had been stolen from me, as well as from all of us Westerners, only because PY found it difficult to teach it to his first American disciples.

MEETING WITH SWAMI HARIHARANANDA

Due to the need to undergo surgery in the United States, this *Swami* would soon be staying in Europe. I gave myself a lot to do to meet him and receive his initiation into this *Original Kriya*.

That time soon came. The introductory lecture was of great emotional impact. He had a majestic and noble appearance, he was "handsome" in his ochre robe, an elder with long hair, pure beard – he was the personification of the sage. I peeked at him hidden behind some lines of people; I felt that his speech was based on direct experience.

My soul was filled with joyful anticipation for the improvements that I could bring to each of the *Kriya* techniques that I had practiced without interruption for many years.

At certain moments in the conference, being enormously curious to guess new technical details, I was unable to pay him due attention. My obsession was: "What kind of sounds must be produced in the throat in this *Original Kriya*; to which center does the energy rise during inhalation?"

I finally received this long-awaited initiation from him: the technique was very different from what I was used to. I merged this teaching with what I already knew well. I made countless experiments to make this fusion.

I really appreciated his fantastic "*Forward bends*" and his particular *Maha Mudra*. In *Kriya Pranayama* the most important thing was to add a continuous will to listen to the inner sounds.

According to his teaching, the breath always had to be subtle, not necessarily long. The sounds made in the throat when breathing through the nose disappeared or were very subtle. Withdrawing strength from the breath led to great mental relaxation.

This practice was accompanied by a second whose basic idea was to visualize the spine as a well. You went down and then up along this well, using a ladder whose steps were the *Chakras*. The first breath helped you to reach *Ajna* with awareness starting from the *Fontanel*, the second breath helped you to reach the fifth *Chakra* ... and so on ... reaching all the remaining *Chakras* ... ⁹ After a few full rounds you found yourself immersed in a state of bliss.

I do not think that his *Kriya* could be defined as the "*Original Kriya*." There can in fact be different ways of practicing *Kriya* and all of them have valid and effective methods to get to bring the consciousness inside the spine. However the decision to apply the principle of listening to the sound of *Om*, without the need to close the ears, during *Kriya Pranayama* helped me to deepen my meditation in a fantastic way.

The stupendous and fascinating words of this master were an important revelation for me. What is certain is that the concepts that I had absorbed during the conference and then during the initiation had ignited in me a new way of conceiving *Kriya Yoga*.

He had insisted a lot on the concept that *Kriya* was used to enter the *Omkar reality*, specifying that this had to be perceived not only in the aspect of sound and light but also as a "sensation of oscillation, movement or inner pressure."

In order for the students to understand these three aspects, he touched (head and chest) some students who were in the front row vibrating his hand, trying to transmit like a tremor to their body. He was

⁹ Much later I realized that *Swami Hariharananda's* teaching had been influenced by the *Radhasoami* movement. I hint to this movement in chapter 12 while *Swami Hariharananda's* teachings are explained in detail in chapter 14.

introducing us to a wonderful dimension, giving himself completely to us, so that we could intuit the essence of the *Omkar* experience.

The conception that he had passed on to us created an understanding of the whole *Kriya* practice as a single progressive process of being in tune with the *Omkar reality*. Like a thread in which pearls are strung, the *Omkar* perception had to go through all the different phases of *Kriya*.

Attending my first *Kriya* school I thought that the *Omkar reality* only concerned the technique (preliminary to *Kriya*) of listening to the inner sounds by closing the ears. Now I realized that the *Omkar reality* possessed several aspects and involved every practice of *Kriya Yoga*. This was one of the most important discoveries along my spiritual path.

EFFECTS

Remembering the period in which I had practiced the "*Om* technique" (received from my school) I knew well that every effort towards listening to the internal sounds was very well rewarded. The increase in devotion to the Divine, the blissful rapture into a spiritual passion arising from my heart, experienced at that time has never been surpassed by other events. The idea of rediscovering and then reliving that period through the practice of a much richer form of *Kriya Pranayama* fascinated me.

Trying to realize this ideal, the old well-known sweetness entered my life again and I welcomed it with much gratitude and with an open heart. Daily contact with the *Om* vibration was my heaven on earth for many weeks. I can't imagine anything that can make a person feel so blissful.

I had the clear perception that a state of inconceivable sweetness was now mine, that I could enjoy it every day, not only during meditation but also when, free from work or various commitments, I relaxed. Maintaining this experience became the only goal of my *Kriya* practices.

In the winter of that year I had an unforgettable experience. I had a three-week vacation. I spent every morning wrapped in the warmth of my home, practicing as much as possible and applying the fundamental concepts that *Swamiji* had insisted so much on. I also spent a few days in a beautiful winter sports resort, where I was free to walk in the snow-white countryside without a fixed destination. As I idly walked aimlessly, the sunset came early and marvelous colors tinged the landscape; the small village sunk in the snow reflected in those few seconds of glory all the possible colors of the spectrum. That will forever remain the splendid symbol of this wonderful period of my life.

After a year I received from *Swami Hariharananda* his particular form of *Second Kriya*. I was ecstatic: the explanations were given live and not through written material. I was so happy!

The purpose of the *Second Kriya* was to have a profound experience of the six *Chakras* and then to transcend their essence. The *Prana* was intensified and distributed equally among all the *Chakras*. After many repetitions of the whole procedure (which also involved particular movements of the head), one felt that one's awareness was separated from the physical body – like a cloud floating in a sky of peace. It was explained that the *Second Kriya* was able to "break the coconut." The "coconut" was the symbol of the human head whose upper part was filled with calm *Prana*.

After initiation into *Second Kriya*, while I was walking around the city where *Swamiji* was staying, everything seemed more beautiful than ever. It was a sunny day and the bells rang in the splendor of noon. I lived like in a paradise.

This was a moment in my life when I experienced total fulfillment as if the *Kriya* path had come to an end. After returning home, I practiced intensively. One day, at my place of work, I was in a room from which, through a glass door, I could see the mountains from afar and contemplate a layer of snow on their top and, above this, a sky of a pure celestial. I was ecstatic! That distant sky symbolized my future years, totally dedicated to *Kriya Yoga*. For the first time, the idea of living in this state for the rest of my days took hold of me.

DISAPPOINTMENT

Unfortunately the following year I received a great disappointment. I asked *Swamiji* for a private interview. A few days later I was in his room. My aim was to obtain information on that part of the *Second Kriya* that I knew existed but about which nothing was told to me during the initiation. In this part all the syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet were used.¹⁰ He said I shouldn't practice any of this. Instead he took the strong initiative to guide me in the practice of "*Forward Bends*." This was a real blessing! He gave all of himself in repeating all the main concepts of his teaching as if he wanted to impress them even more in my mind.

Speaking of *Kriya*, he said that the original spirit of this had been lost in this age. He told me he wanted me to feel and live in this spirit. To have this it was essential to practice only what I had received, nothing more. Looking at a shelf in his room, he pointed to a bulky document folder and asked me to bring it to him. He opened it and showed me many drawings representing various phases of *Kriya*. He smiled as he leafed through them. I had the impression that he wanted to show me that he knew everything about *Kriya* but that he guaranteed me that what I had learned was sufficient for my life, now and in the future.

¹⁰ I got this information some years later. You can read every detail in chapter 14.

He saw my curiosity but made me realize that my quest to learn about other techniques meant little commitment to essential techniques. And with this statement he ended the meeting. That same evening I meditated at his feet along with other devotees.

I felt inspired by being there but *Swamiji's* decision instead of making me more serious in the decision to practice the *First* and *Second Kriya* seriously created anguish: how and where could I learn the *Higher Kriyas* from this school?

His decision was known to every person who had known him for a long time. Everyone knew that only the few chosen disciples who followed him on his travels could receive higher teachings. Awareness of this situation froze the enthusiasm of many and contributed to his isolation.

This *Swami* did not seem to take into consideration the insatiable curiosity of the majority of *kriyabans* who did not accept any interference in their search. His unfortunate decision triggered an automatic reflex that alienated the people most indispensable to him. Unfortunately these people, consumed by the thirst for complete teachings, began to look for other teachers.

Disappointed by their defection, he remained even more firm in his decision. Those who tried to make him understand the absurdity of the situation and then remedy it, found themselves in front of a wall.

The soil he plowed and was cultivating began to become barren. He had all the means necessary to attract the Western world. The book he had written had constituted a perfect strategic action that had made him very popular, creating for him a place of crucial importance in the field of *Kriya*. In addition there was also his Indian sage figure who impressed people. There were hundreds of researchers who were enthusiastic about him, who were ready to support his mission, who would always treat him as a "god" and would behave equally respectfully with any of his collaborators or successors.

It is true that some people were happy with his *Kriya*, but they were not very motivated individuals who would have tended to never go out of their way to organize seminars for him. To put it bluntly, the loyalty of various students was not enough to avoid the worst outcome. His admirable effort, all the wonderful subtleties with which he had enriched our *Kriya*, making this practice much more beautiful, was not enough to prevent him from encountering the shipwreck of his mission – at least here in Europe. ¹¹

Using the same leaflets, just changing photos and names, many of those people who had been busy organizing his seminars invited another teacher

¹¹ Something remains indeed, but very scanty compared to what he could have realized if only he had been more conciliatory!

from India because they knew that he was in favor of explaining *Kriya* in its complete form. It must be said that those who had already met this new teacher in India realized that his spiritual realization was almost non-existent. This invitation was perhaps made more out of desperation than out of conviction.

How my search for the complete form of Swami Hariharananda's Kriya continued several years later.

A couple of years after the first publication of this book, I was contacted by a French researcher. He introduced himself as a former disciple of a disciple of *Swami Hariharananda* and thanked me for posting *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* online. We talked about what he was interested in and then the talk turned to *Swami Hariharananda's Kriya*. He was happy to complete my knowledge of the *Second Kriya* and he also explained the *Third Kriya*, hinting at the introduction of the *Fourth Kriya*.

Years later an American researcher shared with me a document that made me fully understand the *Fourth Kriya*. With the help of these researchers it was possible for me to prepare the recent edition of chapter 14.

DIFFICULT PERIOD

An unsuccessful period of my life occurred when some friends and I received a couple of initiations from some "minor" teachers who had once been the right hand of some illustrious *Guru* and then went on their own as their teacher had taken away their power to initiate. We formed the idea that such teachers were mediocre, sometimes uneducated and immoral.

Some episodes also confirmed the impression of mental instability. They knew little about *Kriya Yoga* and taught it superficially, yet we believed that they taught " *Original Kriya* " and this made us blind. For this reason alone we treated them with a respectful or tolerant attitude, forgiving them when they betrayed our trust.

We accepted the farce that initiations were an inevitable inconvenience to acquire the information we were so passionately seeking.

Generally speaking, after a few ceremonies the explanations were always quick and superficial.

At the end of each initiation I tried to convince myself that I had found something valuable. Often a vague sense of well-being perceived by practicing a new technique for the first time was proof of the excellence of the technique itself. I did not realize that in doing so I had made my ego the compass needle of my spiritual journey. I did not realize that my previous achievements – listening to the *Om* vibration, the breathless state ... – were no longer with me: I had forgotten them! It was like I was hypnotized.

I did not want to accept that the new initiation had only added something insignificant to what I already knew and was getting used to

living in a new "cage" from which I would soon be escaping.

For many of us, collecting new techniques was like a vice. At almost all initiation seminars a solemn promise of secrecy was the password to be accepted. Each made this promise but as soon as the session was over, some communicated the news gained to other students via mobile phones who, in turn, would take part in other initiations and return the favor.

The way of thinking that I developed following these teachers led me to meet a particular school where *Kriya Yoga* was radically deprived of the classic *Higher Kriyas* and combined with various teachings of the classic forms of *Yoga*. I want to leave a brief note on this school where I touched the poorest point of my research but which allowed me to have a first intuition of the *Kriya of the cells*.

For some friends who followed me on this path, this became the occasion of a bitter disappointment and marked the definitive abandonment of the spiritual search. This school was very far from the teachings of *Lahiri Mahasaya*. The *Kriya Yoga* that was taught was based on the teachings of an Indian figure who claimed to be a direct disciple of *Babaji*. The school presented three levels of *Kriya* that could be received within three years, sometimes even just two. The prospect of having found a source from which to learn all about *Kriya* excited me enormously.

The book that served as an introduction to this school was very strange: its illustrations made one think of being in front of a fairy tale. In this book there was no mention of techniques such as *Talabya Kriya*, *Kechari Mudra*, *Navi Kriya*, *Omkar Pranayama*, *Thokar* The main technique was called *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama*. It was combined with many other teachings grouped under four main denominations: *Hatha Yoga*, *Dhyana Yoga*, *Mantra Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*.

The *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama* of this school was undoubtedly a beautiful technique. The core of the *Second Level* was the initiation into Indian *Mantras*. The day of initiation was preceded by a day of silence; enraptured, we listened to a splendid lesson on the usefulness of practicing *Japa*. There were other teachings that left me perplexed but I endured everything as I placed all my hope in the third level.

The final *Third Level* was an excruciating disappointment. There were no actual *Higher Kriyas* but classical *Yoga* techniques, appropriate for a *Kriya* preparatory course. The six techniques of *Samadhi*, given as a conclusion to a nerve-wracking and boring course, consisted of a variation of the *Hong So* technique, three fairly common visualization techniques, the classic instruction to maintain continuous awareness throughout the day, and finally a variation of the *Om* technique that I had once learned from my

first *Kriya* organization.

The variants of the *Hong So* technique, as well as the *Om* technique, seemed conceived by a lazy mind whose only concern in adulterating them was to avoid the accusation of copying from PY's organization, without worrying that the resulting techniques might have lost some of their power.

For example, in the first technique the "*Hong-So*" *Mantra* was replaced by "*Om-Babaji*" forgetting that *Hong-So* is a universal *Mantra* whose syllables have been specifically chosen for their power to calm the breath, with which they have a vibrational connection.

The three techniques of visualization were of a kind to what is found in any concentration or meditation book. For many of us who had a lifetime experience with the preliminary *Kriya* techniques offered by the PY organization, receiving such techniques again, somehow disguised and passed off as *Samadhi* techniques, was truly a cold shower.

It was clear that this path was not what I was looking for. My trust in this teacher dropped dramatically especially when he described his hypothetical meeting with *Babaji*. I was amazed hearing the disconcerting platitudes that this *Babaji* would have said him: for example that the one who at the time was the teacher's wife would have done a very good job writing a book of vegetarian recipes.

Of this path I considered interesting only the technique of *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama* of which I appreciated two details in particular. The first concerned the importance of perceiving the energy of sexuality and concentrating on lifting it above the brain and perceiving its transformation that had to be distributed throughout the body during exhalation. The second aspect was that the exhalation was to last twice as long as the inhalation.

The most annoying thing about the recommended routine was that, once the prescribed number of breaths were completed, the process set in motion had to be abruptly abandoned to practice the so-called *Dhyana Kriya*, a meditation technique that no longer concerned the spine and the control of the energy but was based on the visualization of a fantasy chosen at will. It seemed very stupid to me to go from an exercise that aimed to achieve a certain very beautiful and important goal to an exercise that aimed to achieve something else through the imagination.

A beautiful event

Remember the episode when I was looking for clarification on the *Higher Kriyas* received through the correspondence course – the Minister refused to give me any clarification. Instead, he recommended that I mail my

questions to my organization's headquarters. Nine years had passed.

I felt quite distant from this organization but nevertheless I respected it and when two women ministers visited my country, I took part in a *Kriya* review class. During a break between classes, what I had once hoped for and which was denied me so brutally, happened naturally and with absolute ease. I had a private interview with one of the two ministers and all my doubts were cleared up.

I was lucky enough to meet a kind person who spoke from direct experience. As for *Kechari Mudra* I was told that it occurs over time, especially by insisting on touching the uvula with the tip of the tongue. I could also clarify PY's sentence according to which: "The *Chakras* can be awakened by psycho-physical blows directed towards their locations." I was reassured of its meaning: the phrase referred to the use of the *Mantra* associated with the breath. So he was not referring to another hypothetical technique, other than what was comprehensively described in the written material. She explained that if a syllable is mentally chanted with intensity in the seat of a *Chakra*, it creates a "psycho-physical blow".

This clarification inspired my practice. Back home, I felt like I was reliving the best time of my life. I discovered unthinkable ways of perfecting the final part of my *Kriya* routine: by projecting the mental chanting of the *Mantra* into each *Chakra*, I realized the power to touch the core of each one with an almost physical intensity. A great sweetness arose from this procedure; the body seemed to stiffen like a statue and the breathless state made the mind transparent like a crystal. I would have liked to abandon my search for *Original Kriya* and consider my current *Kriya* routine as definitive. My routine was a wonderful amalgamation of what I had been taught by my organization and *Swami Hariharananda*, but by then the eagerness to find information about *Kriya* had already wreaked havoc and poured a deadly poison into my soul.

MY SECOND AND LAST TEACHER

It took two years for this new teacher who had been invited to Europe to overcome the visa problems, but when he arrived he found practically all of *Swami Hariharananda*'s disciples ready to welcome him as a messenger sent from God.

And this teacher in fact gave us the long-awaited key to obtain *Kechari Mudra*, taught *Navi Kriya* and gave us other precious teachings such as the *Higher Kriyas*.¹²

When the time came to meet him, I was not in the best mood. From some

¹² I will talk about *Kechari Mudra* and *Navi Kriya* in chapter 7 and the other teachings in chapter 9.

clues, I knew that I was about to embrace a radically new approach. I was afraid this might upset the beautiful routine in which I had settled. The magical dimension of *Omkar*, in which *Swami Hariharananda* had immersed me in such a passionate way, could not be cast aside or forgotten. I approached the new teacher, determined to reject him if he somehow seemed to take me away from this reality. I agreed to meet him for one reason only: to have what *Swami Hariharananda* had decided not to give me.

I met this new teacher in a *Yoga* center. The synthesis of his introductory speech was that *Kriya* did not mean to inflate the mind and Ego but it was to undertake a journey beyond the mind. In time, I realized that *Sri Krishnamurti's* thought was the source on which this teacher based his way of thinking.

I observed in him indulgently some defects of behavior that instead negatively impressed other people. For example, he was short-tempered. When it came to teaching simple and mundane things that even kindergarten children understood, there was a great profusion of words and concepts were repeated ad nauseam. When in the audience there was someone who gently but firmly asked for a precise explanation on some practical difficulty, he seemed to come out of a hypnotic state and, visibly vexed, threw up insults on him to humiliate him and shut his mouth. He often had outbursts of anger when he believed he perceived, underneath legitimate questions, a veiled form of opposition, a hidden intention to challenge his authority.

I concentrated all my attention on learning his form of *Kriya* and I did not care about his obvious shortcomings. I believed that the reason for his trip to the West was to restore the original teachings: this was enough to overcome my initial discomfort.

In the following initiation seminar, the explanation of the techniques was reasonably clear even if, in some parts, it was unusually synthetic. For example, the instructions on *Kriya Pranayama* – formally correct – could only be understood by those who had already practiced *Kriya Yoga* for a long time. However, I realized that my search for the original *Kriya* was continuing. I followed this teacher for several years. Below I explain why I later broke off all relations with him.

KECHARI MUDRA

Returning home after the initiation seminar, in the time of three months I reached *Kechari Mudra*.¹³ For a couple of weeks the effects of the *Kechari*

¹³ I believe it is legitimate to ask why do *Kriya* organizations not teach such a simple technique as *Talabya Kriya* that helps us to reach *Kechari Mudra*.

were a sense of "grogginess." My mental faculties seemed clouded but when it all ceased, I learned to live in a constant state of serenity.

Some days I was so happy that when I went out for a walk, if I met someone and stopped to listen to them, no matter what they said, a sudden joy burst in my chest, it rose up to my eyes, so much so that it was difficult to hold back the tears. Looking at distant mountains or other parts of the landscape, I tried to direct what I felt towards them, in order to transform the paralyzing joy into an aesthetic rapture; this was holding back the joy that locked my being and hid it. Inspired by this new condition, comparing it with that of the mystics, I realized how difficult it was to live, carry on daily and worldly duties, without being paralyzed by an ever-present feeling of intoxication!

A regrettable feature of this teacher was the haste and superficiality with which he explained the *Kriya* techniques. The introductory lecture to *Kriya* (which was usually held the day before initiation) and much of the time of the initiation seminar was devoted to a pure philosophical discourse which did not concern the basics of *Kriya Yoga* but was a summary of the fundamental points of the *Krishnamurti's* thought – mainly the theme of no-mind, which he improperly called *Swadhyaya*. There was not a single word that could be criticized, everything he was saying was correct, but many students, sitting uncomfortably on the floor, with their backs and knees starting to ache, only waited for the explanation of the techniques, enduring a hardly that colossal hassle.

Traditional offerings (he also requested a coconut, which in our places was very difficult to find, forcing the students to search desperately from shop to shop) lay in a messy pile in front of a scruffy altar. Since he arrived very late compared to the agreed time, those who came from other cities saw all their plans for the return journey go to pieces and were very agitated. When someone had already left the room, just in time to catch the last train, despite the fact that it was late and the people were tired, he still loved to linger on Patanjali's *Yama* and *Niyama*, taking his time to ask bystanders to take a solemn vow: that from then on male students look upon women (except their own wives) as mothers and, likewise, women should look upon males (except their husbands) as fathers. The audience listened to his ravings with a sigh of ill-concealed annoyance.¹⁴

¹⁴ I respect of course *Yama-Niyama* (the what-is-correct and the what-is-not-correct) but, in my opinion, requiring people who are anxious for learning *Kriya Yoga* techniques to take an oath to obey them is only a farce and a waste of time. My teacher's request in particular was impossible, an oath that no one would ever respect. Why not put confidence in the transforming power of *Kriya*? Why think that without oaths, a *kriyaban's* life would be licentious? The necessity of adopting specific ways of behavior is something that appears spontaneously after having tasted the honey of the spiritual experience. Perhaps in the beginning the best thing

Only then did he move on to a hasty explanation of the basic techniques. On one occasion I timed him and saw that he had not spent more than two minutes explaining the fundamental technique of *Kriya Pranayama*! He demonstrated this procedure by making an exaggeratedly loud, vibrato sound. He knew that this sound was not correct but he continued to use it in order to be heard even by the people sitting in the back rows, saving himself the trouble of moving near them, as *Kriya* teachers usually do. Unfortunately, he did not take the trouble to clarify that the sound had to be clean and not vibrated. I know that many people, thinking it was the "secret" he brought us from India, were trying to make the same noise. He continued like this for years, despite the kind complaints of his close collaborators. Given his character, even when I worked with him I never dreamed of protesting.

REASONS THAT LED ME TO ABANDON THIS TEACHER

One day I received a visit from the couple of students initiated into *Kriya Yoga* by *Swami Hariharananda* who organized the tours of this new teacher in Germany. As they spoke, they emphasized the need to make a proposal to our teacher. It was about adding a guided group practice to his *Kriya* initiation seminars. It would serve as a refresher for both new initiates and those who were already practicing. I took care of getting this request to the teacher through a friend who was going to India. I gave him a letter to deliver to him in person, with my regards and a warm hug.

The master's reaction was inexplicable. He took my letter as a form of criticism of his methods. In response, he removed me from the list of those who organized his seminars in Europe. His decision was forwarded to the Italian coordinator who did not deign to inform me. A few months passed.

My adventure with this teacher would probably have ended there if I hadn't gone to welcome him on his arrival in Europe. We hugged as if nothing had happened. He probably interpreted my presence as a move to repent. A few hours later, while the master was resting, his collaborator, with a slight, indecipherable hint of embarrassment, explained to me what had happened behind the scenes, that is, of the fact that he no longer considered me his disciple. I was dismayed and disoriented. The first impulse was to give up everything and close any relationship with this teacher.

In order not to disturb the peace of all the people who were my

is not to cry shame because of a problematic student's behavior. To put it simply, it has been seen that people living a morally questionable life were successful in *Kriya* and spontaneously came to the so-called virtuous life, while a lot of conformists failed.

friends and had followed me in this adventure, I decided to pretend that nothing had happened, to continue to collaborate with him and to let go of the topic covered in the letter I had forwarded to him. If I had gone I would have disturbed the initiation into the *Higher Kriya* procedures based on the *Tribhangamurari* movement. This initiation was scheduled for the following day.

That was a beautiful moment in which *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* revealed (to those who had the sensitivity to perceive it) all its hidden beauty. My role was to be a translator. I knew how to carry out this function well, reporting every little detail while whoever replaced me in this task was based on what they had already heard in the past and, as usual, would have neglected to translate 80% of the speech.

It happened, however, that during the initiation he showed the movements of the head in *Thokar (Higher Kriya)* in a significantly different way from those of the previous year. When one of those present asked for clarification on the change, he claimed not to have changed anything, adding that certainly in the previous year there had been a translation problem. His lie was obvious. That *kriyaban* remembered well the head movements he had seen earlier. I knew, but could not tell, that the previous year he had shown some movements that did not correspond to the correct ones.

Considering other changes, I had the impression of being the collaborator of an archaeologist who intentionally alters some finds to present them to the public within his usual theoretical frame of reference.

Months later, on another tour, when we were alone and he was looking for something in a room, I found the courage to mention that, in fact, he had changed the movements of the *Thokar*.

He suddenly turned to me with hate in his eyes, yelling at me that my practice was none of his business. This, according to what I remember, was the only technical "discourse" I had with him during the years I followed him.

From that moment on, everything changed. Deliberately I began to control myself and made up my mind to always agree with him. I acted so well that one day he asked me to teach *Kriya* to those people who showed interest and who could not meet him during his tours. I was happy with this opportunity because I dreamed of finally being able to explain *Kriya* in a complete and exhaustive form. I wanted none of my students to ever feel the pain of seeing a legitimate question go unanswered.

About a year passed when I realized I was doing useless work. I

granted *Kriya* initiation respecting the fixed protocol that the master had told me to follow. When I took leave of those students I knew that most of them would practice for a maximum of ten days and then abandon everything to pursue other esoteric interests. Usually, one or two of the most persistent students would have come up with questions and phoned me if only to have the illusion of carrying on a relationship with a real person from a distance.

When the teacher came to our country I invited all the new initiates to the seminars where this teacher would be present. Unfortunately, many did not "survive" this encounter. Accustomed by me to asking any question and always receiving precise answers, they tried to do the same with the teacher. Good heavens! He mocked most of the questions, suggesting that they were a sign of a sick way of thinking. He often let himself get angry. Observing my teacher for a total lack of human understanding as they were being mistreated, many entered into a profound crisis.

A lot of things weren't going well at all. I felt that this man, whom I tried to satisfy every little whim as if I were performing a sacred act, did not love *Kriya*. Instead, he only used it to lead a much more beautiful life here in the West than his wretched life in India as he had often described to me.

Another year passed. In response to the request of some friends abroad, I went to their group to teach *Kriya Yoga*. In that group I met a very serious student who knew my teacher's ways well and who attended the initiation seminar only as an opportunity to review. He asked me some very pertinent questions and always found precise answers. The problem was just that: "Who did you learn all these details from?" he asked me. He knew very well that my teacher was a total disaster from a didactic point of view. He felt that I had learned many details from other sources. How could I then initiate *Kriya* using knowledge that did not come from my teacher?

He could understand my embarrassment and was perplexed that, precisely because he had authorized me to teach *Kriya*, I had never had the opportunity to speak openly to him about technical details! It was my duty to resolve the matter as soon as possible.

Knowing my teacher's short temper, I hesitated a lot, but there was no alternative. Through a friend I sent him a fax mentioning the problem in question and begging him to arrange his time so that we could discuss it after he arrived in my group on his next tour. He was in Australia but I would have the answer within a week at the latest. My unconscious was ready for cataclysm, anticipating an event that I intuitively knew would happen. The most likely situation was that he would get very angry and freak out. If the whole situation got out of hand and, as a result of our

breakup, he no longer joined our group, those who loved him would suffer. Few could have understood the reasons for my action. I would have been the one who disturbed an imperfect but still comfortable situation. In fact, my friends liked him; the fact that he visited our group every year was very stimulating and in fact they prepared for those occasions with an intense practice of *Kriya*.

A somewhat stern response came a few days later. In a contemptuous tone, he did not address me directly but pretended to answer the person who had actually sent him the fax. He wrote that my excessive attachment to techniques would never allow me to step outside the enclosures of my mind – I was like St. Thomas, too eager to touch and verify the goodness of his teachings. He added that he would fulfill my request but only to gratify my ego.

Reading the term "gratification" I saw that he did not understand anything. We should have talked to each other a long time ago! I wondered why he had never let me talk about these problems. I didn't want to contest it, I didn't want to destroy it; I had written to him only to establish once and for all what I should say and what not to say to the *kriyabans* during initiation. Why had it always escaped me?

I decided to act as plainly as if I hadn't caught his tone. I just wanted to see what he would do. I didn't apologize, nor did I respond resentfully. I wrote that I was teaching *Kriya* on his own and that therefore a discussion on certain details of *Kriya* was necessary. I added that the other three persons in Europe similarly authorized by him to give initiation into *Kriya Yoga* could also take part in this event. So I made him understand that he would not waste his time and breath just for me. I had no answer, neither then nor ever again. Weeks later they pointed out to me that on his website, the plan for his visit to Italy had been changed and the name of my village no longer appeared. My second letter had made the definitive break. The nightmare was over!

I took a day off and went for a long walk; I walked a lot, nervously, imagining a hypothetical conversation with him. At one point I found myself crying with joy. It was too good – I was free. I had been with this guy for too many years, and now it was truly over!

The question I would ask myself for years was why I had followed him for so long. Certainly I had not sacrificed my dignity just to receive information on *Kriya*! In fact, all of his techniques had been anticipated to me by a friend who was a disciple of one of his father's disciples. The reason for my conflicting behavior was my keen interest in the spread of *Kriya* here in Europe. I appreciated the fact that he traveled extensively across the USA and here in Europe to spread his *Kriya* without asking a

penny for his initiations (except a free offer and a fair share of the costs of renting the seminar room.) For my part, the will to cooperate with him was always constant. I met all the expenses necessary to permanently set up a room in my house, where *Kriya* initiation seminars could be held during his visits.

When I saw that he continued to teach in his hasty and superficial way, taking advantage of us as if we were totally jerks, my unconscious began to rebel. A dream in which I was swimming in manure is still alive in my memory. I must admit that behind my mask of fake delight, there was an agony of aridity. At times, recalling the naivety of my *Yoga* beginnings, I felt in my heart a vague nostalgia for those times; now they existed in my memory and seemed to wait for a simple sign of coherence and integrity from my part to rise again and blossom undisturbed.

When I received his rude and completely out of place response to my legitimate request, I realized that my inner truth was now at stake and I said to myself – "Now or never!"

I could not then tolerate the slightest distortion of the truth. I removed all diplomatic masks and caused a break with this third teacher.

This created bewilderment among my *kriyaban* friends who had spontaneously grown fond of him. Over time they understood my reasons and were in solidarity with me.

With a "domino" effect, other coordinators in Europe, who did not tolerate his ways, took the opportunity to cut ties with him. They were fed up with the heaviness of his philosophical discourses followed by poor technical explanations, which did not satisfy their desire for a good understanding of *Kriya*.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER OUR SEPARATION

The following months were lived in a state of peace and relaxation, nothing to compare with the restless years I have previously described. Having dismissed that mean individual, a nerve-wracking situation had found an end. I no longer had to go here and there to organize *Kriya* seminars for him; I was relieved of the need to put on a mask of hypocrisy and to respond with mock enthusiasm to those who called me to ask about him.

I did not have the faintest idea of what the fate of the newly formed *Kriya* groups – which he had visited regularly until then – would be. There was every reason to celebrate this release but the weight of all the wasted time, all the silly things that had been done without thinking, weighed on me.

Another reality that I must sadly take note of was that the magical period in which I had only deeply experienced *Swami Hariharananda's Kriya* had slowly dissolved. My tenacity in learning this *Original Kriya* had given me other realizations but made me forget the magic of that period. That magic, as I explained, was based on accompanying each breath of *Kriya Pranayama* with the constant intent of listening to the inner sounds including the sound of *Om*. It took a long time to fully recover that all-important detail.

If I ask myself which are the teachings that I keep with me after the experience with this second teacher, I realize that his contribution was to guide me into a new realm for me that of *Tribhangamurari*, to be explored with great patience, a work that I am still carrying on now.

Another merit was that of having introduced and guided me with great care to *Krishnamurti's* thought.

J. Krishnamurti

As I have written, it was my last *Kriya* teacher who advised me to start studying *Krishnamurti*. The strange fact is that thanks to this study I found the crucial and conclusive push that would help me, after many years of controversial but loyal discipleship, to break my addiction to him.

Krishnamurti said what it was difficult to fully agree with at the time: "What need is there to have a *Guru*? [...] You must walk alone, you must begin the journey alone, and during that journey you must be both your own teacher and student." As I read those words I felt no doubt that they expressed a profound truth but my logic suggested firmly: "This is a sophism; even *Krishnamurti* himself had acted as a *Guru*." I could not make this wise admonition real; fear and conditioning held me back. How many mistakes I still had to make, how many slaps I still had to take before I could assert my freedom from the *Gurus*!

I studied many books by this author but none have the beauty of *The Only Revolution*. It is not easy to immediately understand its meaning. You only need to read one chapter at a time and read it again in the following days.

Only repeated exposure to sunlight can produce a tan; similarly it is necessary to expose our mind many times to its teaching before realizing its meaning. Take this little book with you on walks until you understand why this teaching is so important in your lives!

The Only Revolution is a perfect synthesis of poetry and wisdom. "Life begins where thought ends" writes *Krishnamurti*. Do you want to make this teaching your own? Take your time. The practice of *Kriya* will inexplicably

become deeper.

Other events

- A friend stayed for a few days at an *Ashram* in India where he knew that *Kriya Yoga* could be received. The monk who led this *Ashram* (*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*) was not present, but the friend received *Kriya* initiation from one of his disciples. He bought a large volume where there was a concise description of the techniques. On my return from India, my friend, visibly satisfied, showed me this book. The techniques weren't very different from the ones I knew, but there were many more details.

There was nothing, however, to clarify my doubts, not a hint of how to get *Kechari Mudra*, nothing about *Thokar*. Instead, I remember a very complicated technique based on the visualization of the *Chakras* as they are described in the Tantric texts. Each technique was preceded by a theoretical introduction with quotations from ancient books and accompanied by an illustration that eliminated any possible doubt. At the end of the book a very precise gradual routine was given. There was of course the claim that all these techniques constituted *Kriya* as explained by *Babaji*, the mythical *Guru* of *Lahiri Mahasaya*.

The material was very interesting, I would have liked to delude myself that my research was finally over and that those notes contained what I was looking for! It was enough to believe that *Babaji*, in order to create *Kriya Yoga*, had done nothing but make a synthesis of the numerous spiritual practices of *Tantrism*. It also took the audacity to think that *Thokar* could be considered nothing more than a banal variant of *Jalandhara Bandha*! And if there were no instructions for *Kechari Mudra*, patience, that meant.... that such *Mudra* was not important! With a little good will and application I would have been able to square the circle!

It so happened that I listened to a recording of a lecture by the author *Swami S. S.* .. He told of having found such techniques in some *tantric* texts and having made a careful selection of them to form a coherent system of *Kriya*. How then could the claim that these teachings came from *Babaji* be explained?

Simple – like many other Indian teachers, it was his disciples, not him, who compiled that material; they had the good idea of making it more interesting by hinting at the derivation from the mythical *Babaji*. The teacher, always reflecting a typical Indian custom, had never checked those notes and was, in fact, bewildered when he learned of that addition. However, he defended the work of his disciples by stating that, after all ... "*Babaji's Kriya* had *Tantric* origins."

- An event of a different nature happened to a friend who met *Sri Banamali Lahiri*, a direct grandson of the great *Lahiri Mahasaya*, a man of

great academic education and also of direct experience of *Kriya*. Various spiritual seekers that I later met, consider him as a saint wearing the habit of humility.

My friend was not able to learn anything from this teacher, on the contrary he came back to me very confused. Speaking briefly about his experience, he made me understand how we, eager to learn something new, are unable to listen to the words of a wise man.

He told me that in Varanasi, and probably everywhere in India, *Kriya* was no longer practiced. I kept enough control not to interrupt or challenge him. Then by asking him some seemingly marginal questions, I tried to understand what had happened. My friend, as he used to do, opened the conversation by introducing futile topics and then, towards the end of the interview – almost suddenly remembering that he was in *Lahiri Mahasaya's* house – he asked if by chance any of *Lahiri Mahasaya's* descendants still practiced *Kriya*. His attitude must have frozen the illustrious listener because the answer, which hid a bitter sarcasm, was negative; in other words: "Of course not, no one here practices it anymore. In India it is no longer practiced. You are the only one left to practice it!"

At the end of his story, the friend looked at me with amazed eyes. I still don't know if he was hoping to convince me or if, more than anything else, he was immersed in his bitterness and frustration. I didn't say anything. I think he didn't realize how stupid he had been with that noble person. One month later he learned that an old acquaintance of his had received *Kriya* initiation from that very same person. He was very upset, offended by the news and made a plan to return to India and protest against that noble and austere personage. Unfortunately he never returned, because a serious illness briefly led to his death. Despite the abysmal diversity of our character, I will always be grateful to him for everything he wanted to share with me on the *Yoga* path.

- In those days I learned that there was the possibility of inviting a new *Kriya Yoga* master to Europe. Since he was a respected person, I was quite inclined to collaborate with this project by pledging to bear part of the expenses for his travel. A close friend went to India to meet him and speak to him personally. After about a month, back in Italy, he phoned me. A few hours later, we were sitting in my room. He had had a private interview with the new teacher and had good news. I was all ears. They had talked about the deplorable situation of the spread of *Kriya* here in the West; the teacher was saddened and said he was willing to help us. At the end of that meeting, the friend had his *Kriya Pranayama* checked by that expert himself.

To my surprise this friend asked me to practice *Kriya Pranayama* in front of him. I did: he claimed that he found there was a fault in my

practice. I asked him what it was and his answer froze me: he said he could not say it because he had solemnly promised the teacher not to reveal anything.¹⁵ He specified that, in reference to our group, he had asked the teacher for permission to correct eventual mistakes in our practice but the answer had been negative, indeed the teacher had demanded a real oath not to reveal anything.

So I have to think that that teacher – who had expressed his intention to help us – was afraid that, once the error was clarified, we would no longer invite him to us? Was he really that mean? I certainly did not expect my friend to tell me in detail all the things he and the teacher had said to each other. I could not and did not want to enter the intimacy of that experience, but how could he let us carry on the practice that he considered incorrect?

The fact that upset me was to see a friend with whom I had shared everything on the spiritual path, who had accompanied me in all the vicissitudes related to my previous teachers and suffered on his skin for the same reasons, almost satisfied in having found my mistake. It was as if that justified his trip to India, the money and time he had spent there. I didn't fight, but I reacted very badly. I got up and went away leaving my friend alone.

A few days later, contacted by that master's secretary, I was disgusted by how she handled the financial aspect of the trip. I declined the offer. Actually, I didn't feel like embarking on a huge organizational job all over again. As for going to him, I didn't even think about it. I was sure that the first thing he would ask of me would be the classic oath not to reveal anything to my friends. Back to them, what was I supposed to say? Maybe: "Dear friends, I can't tell you anything, you too have to go to India." We had arrived at an absurd situation: if I wanted my friends to get some crumbs of information about *Kriya*, I would have to put them on a charter flight. and send them to India. Otherwise they would have had to live without this information.

If that had been the case, each year, an innumerable series of charter flights would have had to transport those interested in *Kriya* – no matter if old or sick – to a distant Indian city, such as a pilgrimage to Lourdes or Fatima! This farce was not even worthy of consideration. I felt a sense of anger and despair.

¹⁵ Considering the episode later, I realized what this incorrect detail was: I had not made an abdominal breath in a particularly visible way. I am sure of this fact because it was the only thing my friend was able to see – we did not talk about inner details of the practice.

SELF-TAUGHT

Slowly the awareness emerged in me that a long period of my life was over. I had started my self-taught spiritual path and now I was inexorably back to go ahead in the same way. Of course, by attending teachers, I had obtained a lot of information but now I had to make it a part of my being and I had to decide how to do it myself.

Personally, I no longer had any personal guidance other than my experience, my ability to observe the effect of the techniques learned and my ability to design serious experimentation processes. I have often heard the acid-filled statement: "Those who do not have a *Guru* have their Ego as their *Guru*!" Sure, that may be true. Yet I am firmly convinced that the human mind, even within its limits, can help us to conceive a good *Kriya* routine, to verify, without the advice of others, if this works!

A famous spiritual chant by *Sri Yukteswar* says: "*Pranayama* be thy religion" – well, this, from now on, was to be my way of existing on the spiritual path. I had to trust only in myself and in the unrivaled power of *Pranayama*.

I thought about when, after learning *Pranayama* from a book, I had wonderful experiences and there was no one to control me! This created the foundation for self-confidence. After many years of *Kriya* I discovered, always on my own, the value of the *Mantra* and, through the practice of *Japa* – combined with the *Kriya* routine – I obtained the state of breathlessness. It is true that I received some *Mantras* from a *Kriya Acharya* but they had no effect on me. A profound experience of hearing the sound of *Om* during *Pranayama* came simply after reading a sentence from *Swami Hariharananda's* book and working intensely for a few days.

I met some "authorized" *Kriya* teachers but they did nothing but hastily repeat what I already knew. After a question or two, they got annoyed. As I wrote, the organizations disappointed me. I felt that I was in a sect, a religion, a new form of *New Age* Christianity. But now the traps I had passed through as part of an organization had become a distant memory.

How I perfected, several years later, the understanding of the complete form of Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya

The one who was my second teacher of *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* had left me some doubts concerning the *Higher Kriyas*. They were clarified to me years after the publication of this book. I briefly explain that while for the techniques of *First Kriya* there is an almost unanimous agreement among all the teachers, as regards the *Higher Kriyas* there are mainly two different ways of conceiving the techniques. There is the common one that makes extensive use of breath holding and the one that totally ignores this detail. While the first branch was mainly

spread by *Panchanan Bhattacharya*, the second was spread by *Satya Charan Lahiri*.

It was this latter teaching that I received from my second teacher. Unfortunately, I was aware that my teacher had been somewhat superficial in his explanations. I have already talked about the changes he made in the *Thokar* movement. These originated from his misunderstanding of the *Tribhangamurari* movement. Well, the correct movement was clarified to me shortly after the publication of this book by a direct disciple of *Satya Charan Lahiri* who lived in Germany and had contacted this great teacher in 1978 in Varanasi. The correct teaching is now found in my chapter 9. I will tell about how I got the information regarding the other way of introducing *the Higher Kriyas* in chapter 8.

CHAPTER 5

DECISION TO WRITE A BOOK

One winter day I went skiing in the nearby mountains with a couple of friends. Everything went beautifully. During a break in the afternoon, I managed to find time alone. I stopped to look at the distant mountains that marked the horizon in all directions. In less than half an hour the sun would have painted them pink – more those in the east, a pink that faded into blue those in the west. I imagined that India was back there, that the Himalayas were the extension of those mountains. My thoughts went to all *Kriya* enthusiasts who, like me, found insuperable obstacles in understanding their beloved discipline.

I want to clarify that by now I refer only to the *original Kriya Yoga* as taught by *Lahiri Mahasaya* and not to the slightly simplified one of my first PY *Kriya* organization where I had taken my first steps.

The various obstacles to understanding are those mentioned in the previous chapter. They seemed like an absurdity in the guise of a nightmare – I felt an endless rebellion.

I visualized a book on *Kriya* where each technique was explained in detail. So many times I had wondered what would happen if *Lahiri Mahasaya* or one of his disciples wrote it! I did not dare to think that *Lahiri Mahasaya* had made a mistake in not writing his techniques, yet I felt inside that this decision had brought suffering to people and an infinite waste of time and energy.

But let's go back to the dream of a book. My imagination even led me to get an idea of the color of the cover. I imagined leafing through its meager pages – sober, but rich in content. If this book had existed, we would have had a reliable *Kriya* manual that would have limited the many small or large variations made up by different teachers. Perhaps some commentators would have tried to "force" its meaning to fit their theories. Indeed, I am sure that some pseudo-*gurus* would have suggested that the techniques included were intended for beginners, that there were more "advanced" techniques, which only "authorized" people could communicate to qualified disciples. Some would have taken the bait, made contact with the author, paid huge sums to receive techniques that he had put together either by using their imagination or by copying them from some esoteric book ... These are things that happen, this is human nature. However, the real researchers would surely have been able to recognize the strength, the inherent self-sufficient evidence of the original text. ¹⁶

¹⁶ Such a book will be useful to review what was explained during Initiation. There is

It was a misfortune that no one had written such a book! For the first time I dared to let my thoughts dwell on what would have happened if I had written such a book. The purpose of the book would have been to summarize the totality of what I knew about *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* by harmonizing theory and techniques in a clean, rational vision.

I had a model in mind: Theos Bernard *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* [1943] With this text, very ancient techniques become current, feasible, clear before the eyes of intuition.¹⁷ My intention was certainly not to lay the foundations of a new school of *Kriya*. I wanted to stay away from rhetorical claims of legitimacy and, above all, from enigmatic phrases intended to seduce the reader and arouse curiosity in his mind!¹⁸

The book I imagined would not be a threat to the activity of honest *Kriya* teachers. Good teachers are and will always be in demand, in any field. But how to explain this to them without colliding with the conditioning ingrained in their own "brain chemistry"? Certainly, some *Kriya* teachers – those who live by means of the donations received during initiations and, thanks to the bond of secrecy, exercise their power over people – would have considered the book a threat to their activities. Perhaps what seemed virtually eternal to some (living like a lord, surrounded by people ready to satisfy all their whims in the hope of receiving the crumbs of hypothetical "secrets") could change, and they would fear this.

They would have tried to destroy the reliability of this book with merciless censorship. I could already imagine their scornful comments as they quickly leafed through it: "It contains only fantasies that have nothing to do with the teaching of *Babaji* and *Lahiri Mahasaya*. It spreads a false

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

¹⁷ This extraordinary handbook, better than all the others, clarifies the teachings contained in the three fundamental texts of Tantrism: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*. Despite having been published many years ago and several texts of *Hatha Yoga* appearing recently, that book is still one of the best.

¹⁸ Some authors give only a hint to some procedures (either part of authentic *Kriya* or often concocted through imagination) and let the reader unsatisfied, compelled to go to the author in order to receive the secret let only glimpse.

teaching!" Some researchers might not have liked the book, baffled by the sobriety of a no-frills exposition. They would have rejected it, claiming that it did not contain "good vibrations".

It was necessary to write in a way that readers could feel my story as their story, so I tried so hard to rethink my approach. I would have written for people like myself: disillusioned with organizations and traveling *gurus*. They would have felt immense relief to come across such a book. I was already living in their happiness. Thanks to them, the book would continue to circulate, and who knows how many times it would come back before the eyes of those teachers who had condemned it. Sometimes these would have had to pretend not to notice that, during their seminars, some were going through it, leafing through it, thereby losing part of the conference ...

Plunging my gaze into the blue of the sky above the golden peaks of the mountains, I saw that strange situation as poignantly real. Each part of this dream developed in the space of a few seconds, invaded my consciousness like a torrent in flood, as if every part of it had already been tried and contemplated countless times.

A STRONG CONDITIONING HAD TO BE CONQUERED

In the following days I confronted myself with the strong conditioning that I had received from my first *Kriya* school. Violating the dogma of secrecy and describing the techniques of *Kriya Yoga* was unthinkable for me. Today you can find on the net, as long as you know how to look for them, various sources where you can read various technical details about *Kriya*. At that time this did not exist and secrecy was strictly respected.

It was evident that the organization's justifications for demanding secrecy were wavering in the face of rational analysis. They claimed that secrecy helps "to maintain the purity of the teachings." Since PY slightly modified the *Kriya* technique from that originally taught by *Lahiri Mahasaya*, it would be better to state, "... to maintain the purity of the modifications."

But now I don't want to discuss these modifications but the concept of general secrecy regarding the techniques of *Kriya Yoga*.

I knew that sometimes the strict injunction had been ignored by common sense. Some people who were otherwise loyal to the organization had, under exceptional circumstances, broken this rule. I think of what happened when a Catholic priest, who sincerely wanted to learn *Kriya*, was unable to receive it due to a question of conscience that involved signing the application form for lessons. That form included a promise for him that was incompatible with his faith. Fortunately, that priest nevertheless found a *kriyaban* who explained the technique to him and shared his lessons with

him (this action that the kriyaban was strictly forbidden to do.)¹⁹

Also how could I crudely challenge the sacredness of the *Guru-disciple* relationship as the only way to receive the *Kriya* teachings? However I tried to think, my heart was in great conflict.

One evening I recalled the episode of the "investiture" of *Vivekananda (Naren)* by his *Guru Ramakrishna*. I had read that one day, towards the end of his earthly existence, *Ramakrishna* entered *Samadhi* while his disciple was near him. *Vivekananda* began to feel a strong current, then passed out. When he came to his senses, his *Guru*, crying, whispered to him: "O my *Naren*, today I have given you everything, now I have become a poor fakir, I have nothing; with this power you will do immense good in the world". *Ramakrishna* later explained that the powers he had passed on to *Vivekananda* could not be used by his disciple to accelerate his own spiritual realization – because each one has to bear this toil alone; they would help him in his future mission as a spiritual teacher.

With this image my unconscious clearly warned me not to question something valid and precious. The *Guru-disciple* relationship, when created, is something great that could neither be questioned nor diminished.

I read again Dostoevsky's unforgettable, extraordinary speech on the role of elderly fathers – Starec – in Russian monasteries (*The Brothers Karamazov*):

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

This excerpt is fantastic, truly inspiring!

My reflections reached an impasse that remained untouched for months. It was very difficult to put all the essential points of my reasoning in a logical order. I tried to think sequentially but either the mental and physical fatigue had weakened my ability to reason or various conditioning engraved in my brain acted as entities that had a life of their own. Whenever I tried to organize my vision into a well integrated and coherent whole, it appeared to me, for one reason or another, like a monstrosity.

¹⁹ I am not advocating breaking a vow made to an organization that is sustained by the proceeds of the sales of didactic material. To those persons who can become students, let them pay the little money required and receive their set of lessons.

IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDING

In those days I resumed the practice of the so-called "Incremental routines."

²⁰ I dwelt in particular on those techniques that deal with untying the knot of the heart. This knot is also called *Vishnu Granthi*. The *Vishnu* Deity is the Lord of conservation: the knot of the heart supports the desire to place one's trust in religious traditions and authorities, especially when their teachings and dogmas are presented in the suggestive setting of a solemn ceremony. An incremental routine that acts strongly on the knot of the heart makes you discover your inner dignity and no one deceives you anymore. It acts as a gigantic injection of courage. Your thinking becomes compact, with a solidity that the suggestions of other people are not able to affect or corrupt. It was the effect of these routines that helped me bring more clarity to my thoughts.

The first thing that became clear to me was that in my life I had never really experienced the *Guru-disciple* relationship. My first *Kriya* organization had made me believe that I had a *Guru* – while in fact I was light years away from having one. While the great examples of the *Guru-disciple* relationship were based on a true physical encounter between two people, my relationship was purely ideal. I had lived for years among people who claimed to humbly follow their *Guru*, yet, like me, they had never met him physically. We all loved believing in something that comforted us and encouraged us to move forward.

We were told that: "It is the *Guru* who introduces you to God. There is no other way to achieve salvation." They also convinced us that the *Guru* was a special helper chosen by God Himself even before we started looking for the spiritual path: he would burn part of our *Karma*.

Having been initiated into *Kriya* by legitimate channels (authorized disciples), we tried to make the *Guru*, no longer present on this physical plane, a real presence in our life. We lived in this fascinating conviction which now appeared to me as a real illusion, a deception of my mind.

For many people in my organization, God and the *Guru* were the same entity. A representative of my organization said to me, "Don't you understand that *Guruji* and the Divine Mother are the same reality"? I had easily accepted this fact, now it no longer seemed to me an indisputable truth.

From believing that the *Guru* and God are the same reality came the idea that the organization founded by the *Guru* was not just an institution

²⁰ Incremental routine means to utilize one single technique at a time, increasing gradually the number of its repetitions up to reach a great amount of them. I will describe this opportunity in chapter 13.

that dealt with spreading the teachings of the Master but was the only link between God and those who want to progress spiritually through *Kriya Yoga*.

Since according to them the *Kriya* learned outside the organization had no value, the demand for secrecy follows in an obvious way. This request allowed the myth of the irreplaceable role of the organization to be kept alive.

My organization was really like a church. PY's teaching was absolutely religious in nature. But, I reflected, in every religion there is discretion, not secrecy. Discretion comes naturally to intelligent and sensitive people, secrecy is irrational, unnatural, and therefore requires a solemn vow. The threat of possible calamities that would happen to those who violate the dogma of secrecy clashes with everything we read in the biographies of the saints. It fits perfectly with the esoteric-magical dimension of certain brotherhoods – indeed, secrecy is indispensable to their existence. The oath of secrecy has nothing to do with the spiritual dimension.

One evening while I was practicing *Kriya Pranayama* with my tongue in *Kechari Mudra* I had the inner vision of three beautiful mountains. The central one, the tallest, was black and shaped like an arrowhead made of obsidian. My heart exulted, I was madly in love with that image; I found myself crying for joy. I remained as calm as possible while I felt a particular force and pressure that increased and tightened the entire area of my chest with a squeeze of bliss.

That image was strong, very vivid in front of me. There was nothing more beautiful; it made me vibrate with love. I had the impression that I had cast a glance at the indistinct sources from which my present course of life originated. It was as if an inner thread tied all my past actions to that image, receiving sense and meaning from it.

That mountain was for me the symbol of the universal mystical path. It spoke to my intuition: "A Master who grants you initiation may be very important to your spiritual development, but your personal effort when you remain alone is much more important. In every *Guru-disciple* relationship there comes a time when you remain alone. You awaken to the realization that your path is a lonely flight between you and your inner Self. The *Guru-disciple* relationship is an illusion – useful and comfortable – that appears real as long as you are not annihilated by what goes beyond your own mind."

This experience freed me from the illusion of the *Guru-disciple* relationship as something definitive, which remains eternally

unchangeable.

Undoubtedly, I recognized that I had been helped, inspired by several human beings who had lived on this planet.

I visualized a network: each spiritual seeker was like a junction of that network and from this junction various connections departed, such as those between the neurons of the brain. When a single individual strives to advance to a state located beyond the common dimension of living, the state of his consciousness reverberates along the threads of that network in immediate proximity. That soul will be helped by the positive response of others and, of course, will be slowed down by the indolence and apathy of others. I believe that those who follow the spiritual path carry forward the evolution of many other people. This network that connects us all is the *Collective Unconscious*.²¹

For example, Beethoven's life and works gave direction to my search for meaning in life. Yes, I was alone, but not totally alone. What Beethoven did, his life, his music, influenced my existence and dragged it forward, towards Infinity. I have already described the enormous influence on my spiritual path that the figure of *Mère* (disciple of *Sri Aurobindo*) had.

One evening, after a long walk, dulled by sudden fatigue, I dragged myself home. Worn out of my thoughts, the problem of the *Guru-disciple* relationship began to emerge obscurely, more as a wound than as a theory that unfolds its myths. I set the CD player with the "repeat" function on the second movement of Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* ... Has it ever happened that someone, laden with the blessings of the *Guru* received from attending all possible initiation ceremonies held by "legitimate" channels, had he ever practiced *Kriya* with that dignity and courage with which Beethoven had challenged his destiny?

I turned off the light and watched the sun set in the distance behind the trees on top of a hill. The silhouette of a cypress partly eclipsed the large disc of the sun, red as blood. That was the eternal beauty! That was the reality that had always guided me in my search. During this time the book *Purana Purusha* came as a blessing in my life.

²¹ To Freud the Unconscious was similar to a depot full of old "removed" things that we cannot recall to consciousness - refused by a nearly automatic act of the will. Jung discovered a deeper level of it: the Collective Unconscious which links all human beings by the deepest layers of their psyche. The Collective Unconscious is "inherited with our cerebral structure" and consists of "the human systems of reacting" to the most intense events that can happen in one's lifetime: the birth of a child, marriage, death of a loved one, serious illness, family crisis, true love, natural disasters, war...

Purana Purusha

This book is certainly the most beautiful biography of *Lahiri Mahasaya*. It was written by the emeritus *Kriya Master Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee* who relied on the diaries of *Lahiri Mahasaya* and the personal assistance of one of *Lahiri Mahasaya's* grandsons, *Satya Charan Lahiri* (1905 - 1978) who physically owned those diaries. The book came out in Bengali (later in French and English.) It contains a selection of the most important parts of *Lahiri Mahasaya's* diaries.

Although this text does not seem to respect any logical order in the arrangement of the arguments and contains an infinite number of repetitions and rhetorical phrases, it helps us to understand the personality of *Lahiri Mahasaya* – with this, the core of *Kriya* can be intuited with the rapidity of a arrow. I read this book in the Summer taking it with me to the country; many times, after having read a part of it, I looked at the distant mountains and repeated to myself "Oh, finally ...!". I was looking at the photograph of *Lahiri Mahasaya* on the cover. Who knows what high state he was in when that photo was taken! I observed horizontal lines on his forehead, eyebrows raised as in *Shambhavi Mudra*, where awareness is established at the top of the head; a slight tension in his chin seemed to reveal that he was practicing *Kechari Mudra*. During those days his figure, with that slight smile full of bliss, was a shining sun in my heart; it was the symbol of the perfection I wanted to achieve.

This book impresses with its ability to communicate abstract concepts in very few words. For example, it stated that the whole path of *Kriya* was nothing but a great adventure which begins with *dynamic Prana* and ends with *static Prana*. A thrill of delight occurs when one encounters phrases that have a light in them, for example "*Kutastha* is God, he is the supreme *Brahma*." Remarkable is the great importance that *Lahiri* attached to *Pranayama*, *Thokar* and *Yoni Mudra*. *Lahiri Mahasaya* refused to be worshiped as a God. In fact he said that the *Guru* cannot be considered identical with God. This is a fact that some of His followers seem to have forgotten. In fact, he said: "I do not maintain a barrier between the true *Guru* (the Divine) and the disciple."

In fact, he added that he wanted to be considered as a "mirror". In other words, each *kriyaban* would have to look to Him not as an unattainable ideal, but as the personification of all the wisdom and spiritual realization that, in due time, the practice of *Kriya* would be able to bring out. When the *kriyaban* realizes that his *Guru* is the personification of what potentially resides in him, of what he himself will one day become, then the mirror can be "thrown away".

Yes, like it or not, it says just like that: *thrown away*. People who have been instructed with the usual dogmas about the *Guru-disciple* relationship cannot fully understand the impact of these words, if they did they would encounter an intimate contradiction. To meet the truth, it takes courage combined with an intelligent, discriminating approach that helps to abandon one's illusions, especially those that are pleasant and comfortable. In addition to courage, a good brain is also needed to overcome the tendency to suggestibility.

HOW CAN A PERSON LEARN THE ORIGINAL KRIYA IF HE IS NOT LUCKY TO MEET AN AUTHENTIC MASTER?

Every now and then I consulted a couple of Forums dedicated to *Kriya Yoga*. My wish was to see if other *kriyabans* had the same problems as me in seeking free information on unmodified *Kriya*. Many people were looking for information on *Kechari Mudra*: if I had had their email, I would have immediately sent them all possible information.

I was hurt by the pedantic tone of some users of the Forum who censored the legitimate curiosity of other researchers. With a biased tenderness, betraying the lowest form of respect, they continued to consider the desire to deepen the practice of *Kriya* as a "dangerous mania." They tended to silence the seekers by advising them to continue practicing what they had received and not look for anything else.

They spoke in the same tone used by my old "Ministers". Although I felt distant from that world, that period of my life wasn't that far off. It was my world of yesterday.

I wondered how those wise and expert "advisers" of the Forum dared to enter (uninvited) the intimate dimension of the spiritual journey of a *kriyaban* they knew nothing about, treating him as a superficial beginner! Was it just so difficult to answer honestly, "I don't have the information you're looking for"?

I happened to come across an extremely unpleasant discussion (in the same Forum) at the memory of which I feel my stomach turning. A person claimed to have had access to the *original Kriya*. He explained that authentic *original Kriya* masters still exist today but he did not consider it appropriate to share their names and addresses with others. I found this very stupid. I imagined that the petty idea of possessing a secret knowledge, not transferable to others, was the only thing that kept the disconnected pieces of his childish mind standing, avoiding him the sadness of realizing the nothingness that he was. Why should the beauty of *Original Kriya* belong only to him?

The latter person released a document which had been written by a *Kriya* practitioner living in India. The name of the document was: "Truth and False behind *Kriya Yoga*." The author explains that it took him twenty years to understand the history of the *Kriya* path.

He describes the process of valid initiation. He explains that disciple and *Guru* must meet personally; the *Guru* tests that person and, if he decides to give this initiation, fixes the time and place for the initiation. The event normally takes place at the *Guru's* house. A true *Guru* never travels to initiate people. The author of the document states that only if these rules are respected and only if the *Guru* has been authorized to give this initiation, does *Kriya* work, otherwise it is completely useless.

He explains that the authorization to teach *Kriya Yoga* was initially given by *Lahiri Mahasaya* to only a few people. That number decreased after his death. *Lahiri Mahasaya's* main disciple was *Panchanan Bhattacharya* who was appointed as his successor. He only passed this authorization to five people. Over time, the situation became uncertain. Some new people were allowed to teach, some were not. Some taught correctly without modification, others with modifications. Some lineages are now closed.

This is the summary of that document. Now I ask the reader a careful consideration on one point: is it to be believed that if one receives a correct technique from a competent teacher, it will not work if the teacher has not been authorized? What sense would this fact have? I wonder if such a thing could be true in the field of spirituality.

I am convinced that this statement is an example of "magical, occult and esoteric thinking" which has nothing to do with the spiritual path. I know that the spiritual path is something inherently different from magical practices. The latter are based on empowering, modifying, extending the realm of the mind. The spiritual path is something else.

Think of the simplest spiritual act which is *Prayer*. Should we believe that it is valid only if it has been taught to us by an authorized minister? Is it not valid when it is uttered with sincere aspiration, when it comes from the heart?

I have witnessed the fact that some people who were not initiated by "authorized disciples" and who learned the techniques of *Kriya* in other ways, fully experienced its effectiveness. The foundation of the spiritual path is sincerity of heart and a commitment that knows no obstacles.

FINAL CONSIDERATION THAT ENCOURAGED ME TO WRITE THE BOOK

I explained how in my reflections the first thing that became clear to me was that in my life I had not really experienced the *Guru-disciple* relationship. Now let's face a second truth that now became clear to me.

In chapter 12 *Techniques in Other Spiritual Traditions Similar to Those Found in Kriya Yoga* I will discuss how we can find in certain practices of different spiritual paths clear references to procedures similar to those of *Kriya Yoga*. I will give the example of four mystical paths: *Inner Alchemy (Nei Dan)*, *Hesychasm*, the practice of *Dhikr* or *Zikr* in *Sufi* brotherhoods and the *Radhasoami* movement.

If we study these movements carefully, the idea arises that *Lahiri Mahasaya's* work was to create a formidable synthesis of methods used centuries earlier by various mystics. In this perspective, the awe of revealing secrets that belong to a specific person disappears. Certainly we cannot speak of the personal advice that *Lahiri Mahasaya* gave to his disciples and not even guess his reflections that led him to make small variations to his teachings, focusing on some procedures rather than others.

A quiet confidence was born in me that I was not doing a wrong to this great Master by speaking openly, in the present age, of these spiritual procedures on which he based his admirable synthesis. Certainly we cannot resign ourselves, in order to learn *Kriya*, to the inevitable decision to leave for India to look for an authorized *Guru*!

In the following days I had improved the writing of my notes on the different *Kriya* techniques that I had learned during various seminars and I printed some copies for friends who had not received all the levels of *Kriya*. I bought a computer and, as a voluntary prisoner, reduced my social life to a minimum to devote all of myself to writing. It was not easy to extract the essential core of *Kriya Yoga* from my substantial files of notes, drawn by different teachers. I had the impression of finding myself reassembling a large puzzle, without having any preview of what would appear in the end.

In the first part of the book I summarized the story of my spiritual quest while I devoted the second part to sharing what I knew about the theory and practice of *Kriya Yoga*. Other parts were devoted to studying a good plan for practicing *Kriya* and therefore to face a difficult problem: what a *kriyaban* should have done to keep his initial enthusiasm and resist the corrosion of time. It is well known that many *kriyabans* fail to keep their interest and dedication to the practice alive.

The time it took to write the book was much longer than expected. My friends who were informed of my intent were perplexed and said that I

would never put an end to the undertaking. Yet I did not feel any urgency, I wanted to live that quiet period of my life, appreciating the sense of calm and fulfillment that comes to those who dedicate all their efforts to a single purpose. One day the book was ready and with the help of a friend, put online with total tranquility.

After a couple of months came the reaction of the one who had been my second teacher. During a seminar he had commented on my action as that of one who wants to do business with *Kriya*. He called me an "intellectual prostitute." My reaction was strange: that night I was unable to sleep, yet I was deeply satisfied. Finally there was a book on *Kriya* easily accessible to all.

Was entstanden ist, das muß vergehen! What was created, must perish!

Was vergangen, auferstehen!

What perished, revive!

Hör auf zu beben!

Cease from trembling!

Bereite dich zu leben!

Prepare yourself to live!

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)