

*(Excerpt from Basile Catoméris "Hatha Yoga according to the Traditional Teaching of Sri Goswami")*

## **Sri Goswami's Teaching**

It is not always easy with Sri Goswami to distinguish the teaching from the teacher, to understand someone who dispenses knowledge and wisdom in measured doses and, in the company of his own students, is a living example of the metaphysical synthesis of all knowledge.

This is why, before looking at his teachings, it is perhaps instructive for the reader to enter into the world inhabited by this exceptional being.

From the outset, a person visiting this Hindu sage would be impressed by the silence and the tranquil atmosphere that reigned in his study, which was filled with an impressive quantity of books and manuscripts and was located in his modest apartment in a quiet neighborhood in the Swedish capital.

The visitor would first see him from the back, seated in his armchair, his upper body always absolutely straight, his build athletic, and a shock of white hair crowning his tilted head. The scratching sound of a Parker pen would give away the fact that he was writing on one of the lined pages in his notebook.

At the beginning of his stay in Sweden, Sri Goswami gave three theory lessons a week, reduced later to two lessons when he began organizing his bi-weekly co-ed practical classes.

His lessons followed faithfully the rhythm of university courses, with two breaks, one in the summer and the other at the end of the year. The theme of each of these biweekly lessons was different and they continued in parallel throughout the year. He always approached the subjects under discussion in a methodical and scientifically rigorous manner. His discourses, which were for the most part instructional, were sprinkled with anecdotes, digressions, or comparisons arising from recent discoveries in the fields of neurology or nuclear physics. He could be impenetrable and

even appear obscure; sometimes the new perspectives he suggested were exciting, and sometimes the depth or originality of the concept he introduced was baffling. The teacher's language was always articulate and allowed moments of silence in which to choose the perfect word. With a respectful audience – in spite of his arguments or assertions which, could at first glance sometimes appear iconoclastic to scientists or professors of medicine – he also made room for a request for clarification, unless it was a question of satisfying a typist who was anxious to transcribe a Sanskrit term accurately. Sri Goswami's courses included the central themes of human sciences, and gave equal consideration to physical education, diet, advanced hygiene, fasting, mastery of the mind, the application of Yoga's ethical rules, and erudite commentaries on classical Hindu writings.

Retaining the pragmatism that characterizes the nature of a thinker and a man of action, while remaining faithful to the tradition of Yoga, Sri Goswami's teaching was essentially oriented towards a mastery of the mind and the body, which led the adept to the sublime ideal of *deva deha*. His teaching included the basic subject matters that relate to the study of the fundamental questions of our existence, human ontology, eschatology with (in the context of Hinduism) the underlying theory of rebirth, as well yogic soteriology, which is traditionally a theistic liberation.

This *Yoga* master taught at three related but distinct levels, according to the leanings and maturity of the pupil. For certain students, renewed physical and mental well-being were their primary motivation; for others, it was the philosophical aspect of the discourse that awakened their intellectual curiosity. In a restricted circle of ambitious pupils, these two complementary aspects were not sufficient ; such students needed the fulfillment of profound study, probing into the mysteries of the mind. For others, religious feeling stimulated an unquestioning adherence to the spiritual ideal presented by this remarkable representative of Yoga, whom, while still remaining true to their own beliefs, they asked to assume the role of their spiritual guide.

If one had to summarize the lessons of this master of Hindu wisdom, one would recall the pains he took to emphasize the link Yoga creates between science and philosophy, one would recall an ancient culture that in fact constitutes the incontrovertible essence of every religion, and one would remember not to consider a human being solely in the light of his personality—his qualities, virtues, apparent limitations, ethnic origin, social standing, or any aspect of his personality whatsoever. From this broad perspective, an integrated man who is aware of his potential and true nature must evolve in all the conscious levels of his being: the body, *prana* (vital life force), mind (meaning here, the intellect, will, feeling, and aesthetic sense), morality, religion, and the spiritual life.

From this point of view, a human declares himself a being of both reflection and action. It is his duty not only to succeed in his own life, but also to exhibit compassion, altruism, determination, and faith. A lover of truth, he is magnanimous and capable of abandoning his own convictions in favor of ones surpassing his. Thus will he be able to free himself of the prejudices and limitations that block him from a transcendent realization of Self.

During two world tours, Professor Shyam Sundar Goswami introduced the discipline of Yoga in scientific terms, thus building a lasting bridge between India and the West. Wherever he lectured (primarily medical establishments), accompanied by his close student, Dr D. Pramanick, he gave demonstrations of muscle and organ control, until then considered impossible. These demonstrations elicited considerable interest in the United States as well as in Europe.

He knew how to extract and present to modern man an understandable and practical version of the ancient science of Yoga, purged of all ritual (*puja* and *bajan*) or religion, while maintaining great respect for the sensitivities of his new followers.

As a result, in the years following World War II, a doctrine that had often been considered abstruse was transmitted in terms that were

understandable in spite of inherent cultural differences. Often faced with many challenges in translating Sanskrit terms, the Indian master drew from books on anatomy, human physiology, neurology, or physics in order to make himself understood. Gifted with a brilliant mind, that was both methodical and creative, he never hesitated to enrich the language of Yoga with neologisms when he wished to describe profound potentialities.

Always rational, his teaching was able to take into account the recurring problem for every Westerner: remaining seated with legs crossed and the back perfectly straight and immobile, which is a basic posture for the fundamental exercise of mental concentration.

Sri Goswami did not hesitate to reveal the oral tradition of *tchâranâ*, an ancient form of yogic bodybuilding that remains undocumented to this day. The secret of this method of physical education is still jealously guarded by its practitioners, notably amongst those yogis who appear only every four years, on the occasion of traditional *kumbamelas* — popular gatherings that are much esteemed in Indian spirituality.

In addition to the importance of diet and the necessity of physical training suited to modern life, Sri Goswami emphasized the importance of a good elimination of intestinal waste, something that is too often neglected in our sedentary societies. Peerless teacher that he was, he insisted moreover on the necessity of remembering, as part of one's Yoga plan, to maintain optimal vitality in the organs, which results in the retardation of the undesirable effects of aging.

Aware of the difficulties non-Hindus encounter with the correct pronunciation of mantras (phonemes derived from the 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet), Sri Goswami, pure teacher that he was, confined his teaching of Laya Yoga (the ultimate science of the *chakras*, in which he excelled<sup>1</sup>) to theory only.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Layayoga* by Shyam Sundar Goswami – Inner Traditions