

**Lectures by Sri Shyam Sundar Goswami  
(I.40)**

## **Karmendriyas**

If we analyze all of our voluntary bodily actions, we find them to be downwardly directed from the mind to the body, from the subtle to the gross, from the centre to the circumference. By will or desire, we can alter or stop the voluntary activities, but not all are voluntary and therefore not all originate from the mind. The mind does not take part in involuntary organic and muscular activities such as the functioning of the internal organs.

The external, skeletal muscles are instruments for carrying out the will of the mind. These voluntary muscles are utilized in assuming *asanas* (yogic postures), taking their instructions from the downward motion-impulses from the mind. To assume a particular *asana* is thus a downward motion. The mind wills it, the nerves carry the impulse from the mind to the muscles, and the muscles then try to assume the desired *asana* and practice it. The *asana* itself is the effect of the downward motion. As soon as the *asana* is assumed, the downward motion is absorbed and ceases to exist. The mind cannot make the body move again unless this *asana* is broken, but the *asana* does not exert a direct influence on the mind and so the mind itself remains free even while the *asana* is assumed. Thoughts continue to come into the restless mind.

If we analyze our thoughts we will find that a large portion of them involve our principle organs of action, which are separated into 5 categories called the *karmendriyas*. These are:

- 1) the upper, prehensile extremities (the arms and hands);
- 2) the lower, locomotive extremities (legs and feet);
- 3) the organs of speech (throat, mouth and tongue);
- 4) the organs of elimination (rectum, bladder, skin and lungs), and;

5) the organs of reproduction.

In each action we take, our thoughts are the intermixture and cooperation of sensory input involving these 5 *karmendriyas*. Moreover, our thoughts are frequently mixed up with other associations. In our thoughts is also the action-portion, and in order to make it complete there must be downward-motional waves. We cannot think anything in which this downward pattern is not involved.

Here it is the specific contribution of Hatha Yoga to say that it is not possible to control our everyday thoughts unless a condition is created in which a reverse pattern is incorporated. But how can that be done? Hatha Yoga teaches reverse wave-motions of the 5 fundamental patterns in which the 5 *karmendriyas* are involved.

In various *asanas*, we may achieve a voluntary arresting of the organs involved with the *karmendriyas*. For example, arm- and leg postures may stop the usual actions of these parts, but this is not yet the reverse motion because thoughts will continue to come to the mind even while the *asana* is held. Here we must take a closer examination of the faculty of will.

The will to move the external muscles according to their anatomical possibilities acts in two stages – as the will itself and as *kriti* (conation), or voluntary action-capacity. *Kriti*, this faculty of free volition, may also be inhibited when the nervous system no longer conveys the impulses. When the *asana* is assumed, we can control the actions up to the conation-point. Though this is not the will itself, by reaching as far as this with the control, the will then cannot operate. That is the reverse action.

We are not conscious of that which happens between the willing and the end-point, or action, but when this conation is controlled then the will cannot start the movement. Thus, up to the conation-point, the *asana* itself can be said to be a reversed movement. Yet when the thinking is still free and the conation not under control, it is only a posture. Therefore we need the motionlessness (towards which *sthira* – steadiness and *sukha* – ease, are

helpful to us), because the reverse action of the *asana* will then be extended to the conation-point, making this point disjointed from the will and thus preventing movement.