

Radio Interview with Basile Catoméris on Feb.26th 2013
Here's To Your Health – LA Talk Live

B.C.

Thank you for being with you and your listeners. I hope our conversation will not be interrupted. I'm calling far from L A. It's 9 pm and I'm sitting in Mandelieu, the French capital of mimosa.

Q. What is Yoga?

B.C.

This is really not easy to summarize during one short conversation like ours.

One word and two short sounds, four doctrines, eight disciplines, thousands of books and millions of practitioners, in the US, and in particular in California, and in the rest of the world as well.

You may also ask if Yoga is a religion, a philosophy, an ideology, a new science or just a modern lifestyle from India which was fully developed in the U.S.A.?

But before I answer this question, we could perhaps ask ourselves how is it that Yoga as a cultural phenomenon could live so long as 5,000 years? Yoga appears to have withstood so many crisis all over the world, natural disasters, the emergence of new religions and ideologies and other revolutions during the course of History - without apparently having any institutionalized support as is the case with most religions and sociopolitical systems...

The original Yoga is called Maha Yoga, and it is characterized by its eightfold structure. It consists then of eight distinct but interrelated limbs, and is therefore called Ashtanga Yoga.

Out of some hundred Yoga systems, only four are in practice nowadays. They are Mantra Yoga, Hatha Yoga which is the most known in the West, Laya Yoga or the science of the chakras, and Raja Yoga, which is also called the royal path. Raja Yoga has several subdivisions such as Jñana Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Kriya Yoga and so forth.

Yoga is not only a rare vision of Hindu origin and the means to

realize the union of an individual's Self with the Absolute, it is also an immense repository of empirical knowledge with multiple fields of applications. What we know of it today is only the top of the iceberg. Of course, one may say that all this is history, something that stands far away from our daily concerns, ambitions and needs. Today, the practice of Yoga in the West aims mostly at just recovering something lost in terms of health, personal harmony, or for getting rid of various frustrations from outside. In fact, in most cases Yoga is just practiced to fulfill a "feeling-good" ideal.

I am personally a typical representative of the Middle Way. By Middle Way I mean someone who has accepted to live a modern life with traditional Yoga. This in practice means living with one foot standing firmly anchored in the social business of family obligations, professional responsibilities and the like, and the other foot in a spiritual quest through the practice of Yoga.

Living the Middle Way with yogic lifestyle is open to anyone irrespective of gender, race, social status and so forth. Of course, it's often a challenge as regards what is to come first on one's agenda...

Open to everyone, the Middle Way of Yoga welcomes not only those people who only wish to learn how to relax and feel good. There are also people interested about its philosophic dimension, but often Yoga becomes like a beautiful car they keep in the garage without ever taking a ride. But there also those who like to enjoy the spiritual dimension of Yoga and aspire sincerely to undertake a great adventure of the discovery of the Self, the old challenge of Know Thyself.

In fact, Yoga is meant to everyone even those who feel frustrated with the results of their religious practice, for want of inspiration or because of lack of vitality to carry on.

Apart from its popular applications, I've noted that Yoga appeals particularly to the spiritually oriented, to all those who wish to reach beyond the realm of intellectual curiosity, and who are willing to include purity and self-mastery in their daily practice. It is to these people that Yoga will definitely open new vistas beyond the realm of the sensorial. However, to adhere to such a lifestyle one

should preferably seek the competent guidance of a selfless teacher. This is something very important and that has been taught from time immemorial by great spiritual thinkers.

Q. Have you had yourself a spiritual teacher to guide you along this Middle Way?

B.C.

The answer is yes. I'm privileged as I've had the great honor of becoming initiated by a remarkable spiritual guide and also become his assistant during more than 20 years. That man was a genuine Indian Yoga master, who was regarded by his pairs as the foremost exponent of sacred scriptures in modern times. He was not only a thinker but also a man of action. Sri Shyam Sundar Goswami is his name and The Lion of Bengal is how a maharaja of lore renamed him.

Unfortunately, Sri Goswami is less known in the USA, except among those who are especially interested in the science of the chakras. Sri Goswami is the author of an exhaustive exposition of the chakras in a book published by Inner Traditions and entitled *Layayoga*.

The genuine Yoga master with advanced holistic teachings is the main cause of my voluntary stay in Sweden, the country where he lived the last period of his life. Sri Goswami passed away there at the age of 87.

Q. Do you have a specific message to our listeners?

B.C.

Being online with you today, I would like to call your listeners' attention to one important part of the rich teachings of Sri Goswami and that is - the important issue of health, in particular the importance yogis have always attached to building up a sound basis to their mental lives.

And what is better for enjoying a clear and efficient thinking than a healthy, vital, disease-resistant body, which fully enjoys its potentialities and the beauty of life?

The rapid popularization of Yoga that has swept over the West during the last decades has had very positive effects, especially in terms of popularizing the techniques for relaxation, and the culture of wellbeing. Yoga is today practiced mainly as a method for relaxation with a beneficial break from the turmoil of social pressures, and releasing the positive feeling of wellbeing and improved concentration. Yoga has found its way at all levels of modern societies inclusive in high schools or business management.

But the broad popularization of Yoga has also had detrimental consequences, for example the impoverishment of an ancient sacred tradition beside shameful traits of exploitation. Most often, it is serving merely mercantile ends or purely selfish purposes. Such a popularization of Yoga has also had the negative effect of generating new misunderstandings, sectarian conflicts and highly questionable issues, as for example when self-appointed Yoga teachers like apply to the US Patent Office for being granted the exclusive right of variants of postures that have been widely known and practiced for centuries...

So, traditionally Yoga is directed to people who are looking for peace of mind, something basic called shanti in India. In the West, the practice of Yoga is often offered to people who are in need of help, disappointed about medical treatment or destabilized and confused. The outlooks on life of these confused minds are pathetically questioned, re-examined and in want of adjustment.

In a constantly changing world where crisis too often seem to predominate, we are all subject to negative influences. In the depth of our heart, we search something we like to define as wellbeing and happiness. Today, it is these two factors, wellbeing and the futile and an illusory happiness that motivate most people to undertake the practice of Yoga. Yoga has then become everyone's daily workout in search of a quick recovery of something apparently lost, a basic harmony of body and soul, or perhaps simply the meaning of life.

Q. Would you like to say a few words about health in Yoga?

B.C.

Health is not merely the reflection of certain freedom from disease or ailment.

Today's wide promotion of health focuses exclusively on finding the right diet and taking exercise in unpolluted environment.

But from yogic point of view, health is something more than so. Health is found in a human organism that displays a smooth symbiosis of its different systems. It emphasizes not only diet and right exercise, but also the eliminative function and more particularly the intestinal peristalsis.

Day and night, our body and mind work in a most intimate manner. Yoga recommends its practitioners therefore, to always adopt a positive attitude besides dedicating some time to moments of reflection or prayer. Through the practice of Yoga one may expect to acquire a better self-control over impulses or excesses of all kinds.

This is why according to Hatha Yoga one should never neglect the mental health. This is also the reason for Yoga to underline the importance of practicing ten ethical rules that are classified under two groups of five, *yama* and *niyama*. These rules are directed outward and inward respectively. They are intended to restrain and stabilize the mind's wild impulses. Traditionally these ethic rules are proposed as a prerequisite to the practice of other yogic exercises such as *asanas*, the yogic postures. Such rules are in no way antagonistic to the moral rules prescribed in various religions, they are rather complementary.

Under such conditions, the combined physical wellbeing and mental health is expected to release a natural disease resisting power, what we call immunity, with the feeling of cheerfulness, and what I like to call, virtue. By virtue I mean here the sentiment of fully enjoying one's potential faculties with respect to the physical, vitality and mental life. This description of a holistic health, is what has been consistently taught in the Goswami Yoga Institute, arguably the oldest Yoga school in Europe.

You may find much more on the important issue of health in the manual *Advanced Hatha Yoga* written by my late teacher, Sri Shyam Sundar Goswami. The classic book has recently been revised and published in the US by Inner

Traditions.

I should like to take this opportunity to also mention the book I wrote, that is *Foundations of Yoga*. This book aims at becoming an enriching supplement to the manual *Advanced Hatha Yoga*. It is especially intended especially for Westerners. I should add that *Foundations of Yoga* deals with various aspects of Yoga that are rarely described in Yoga books or Yoga studios.

The title *Foundations of Yoga* was launched soon after the third edition of *Advanced Hatha Yoga*. Both were recently published by the Vermont-based firm Inner Traditions.