

## **A Few Words to Sri S.S. Goswami's Lectures on Yama and Niyama.**

*Advanced Yoga (sâdhana) supposes a high personal moral order. The ten ethical disciplines of yama and niyama are the basis of all traditional practice of Yoga. They embrace all aspects of human life: physical, intellectual, moral, religious and spiritual. These rules constitute the foundation and the moral basis for an accomplished yogi (or any spiritual aspirant) whose ambitions aim higher than the benefits of health and wellbeing. This ancient yogic morality does not contradict civic or religious morality.*

*Endowed with the preliminary conditions of a serious spirit of mastery and the blessing of his guru (spiritual teacher), the yogi then strives to integrate these ethical rules relating to social behavior (yama) and self-realization (niyama) into his daily life. Far from being burdensome restrictions, these rules are supposed to lift the veil of life's illusions and dispel the ignorance inherent to human nature. To certain students, these rules also restrain vain ambitions such as the acquisition of superhuman powers.*

*As a non-denominational discipline, yama may easily be introduced into any layman's life, while niyama instructions are generally imparted on a personal and confidential basis. This explains the drastically different amounts of space dedicated below to these twin practices.*

*The practice of yama and niyama applies to every spiritually oriented person, regardless of the religion he or she may practice. These regulatory exercises are particularly intended for those who search for their divine nature - a reality that transcends life's common joys and worries, a timeless reality of truth and love.*

*Basile Catoméris*

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*Lecture by  
Shyam Sundar Goswami  
(II.43-45)*

## **Introduction to Yama and Niyama**

In order to control the thoughts, one must first learn to control the body. Control of thought is a complicated task, as it involves more than the intellect. Before discussing *yama* itself, the matter of thought control must be addressed.

Common thoughts are based on perception and one's contact with the sensible world. The intellect allows for the possibility of high levels of thinking, according to one's individual capacity. Undertaking a topic like philosophy, for example, generally requires a superior degree of intellectuality. When considering the process of thoughts and intellect, one must also take into account the modifying aspect of emotions (*vrittis*).

Emotions are usually linked, directly or indirectly, to the body. The removal of the physical factor reduces an emotion's influence on thinking, and so it has been assumed that emotion stems from the body. One first becomes aware about an emotion when the physical is reflected on the mind, therefore making emotion strictly physical. It is therefore legitimate to ask if it is possible to have emotions independently of the body.

At the physical level, the mind is essential in the process of sensory perception. It cannot function at the physical level without being connected to the brain. But what about intelligence? Does it emanate from the mind or from the body? Little is known about this matter, however it appears that both intelligence and consciousness may function independently of the body. This suggests that the mind is an independent entity, if not one of its crucial components, and that objects are actually located in the mind. As to emotions, once excited they seem to derive support from the sensory field.

Perceived emotions may be roughly divided as white (*aklishta vrittis*), black (*klishta vrittis*) and the mixture of them. The white ones represent positive sentiments like love, and the black stand for negative feelings such as hatred. For either kind of feeling, one needs a sensory support.

Attempts have been made to explain the emergence of emotions by invoking particular combinations of chemical reactions. However, a deeper analysis reveals something else. A sudden loud noise, for instance, will have a baby crying as the expressed symptom of fear. The origin of fear is a particular feeling, one mental emotion that is caused by the noise. This perception in the infant induces mental changes that result in the specific feeling of fear, which in turn stimulates the physical organs that will affect the crying.

Considering the mind as a purely intellectual entity counters this example. The feeling of fear occurs only through exposure to a patent or latent internal cause. It is only when a stimulus acts on the latent form that activation is performed. It applies to a single individual and not to others. Physicochemical changes cannot have any effect without the existence of a latent form of emotion. Being passionately loved by someone does not necessarily mean that others will also feel the same way. Some others may have a feeling of indifference or antipathy. Again, in most mothers, one child's death will usually provoke excessive grief, but this may not necessarily apply to all mothers. Kindhearted people in this case may show compassion while others will have no particular feeling. Should not all people react in the same way, if physicochemical processes caused these differences? Feelings expressed under similar conditions may be experienced differently according to individuals, while the physical exposure is identical. In thought-control there are different kinds of thoughts:

1. One general thought-pattern aimed at sensory perception.
2. The intellect as a source of mental influence through studies and interests.
3. The emotional with a variety of thoughts.
4. Ethics.

5. Religion.

6. Spirituality.

It is often spirituality, religion or morality, which allow the accomplishment of great things. A high moral standard allows one to face all kinds of challenges. It is mind's mastery, which helps establish morality in everyday life. The cultural blend of religion and spirituality may help in the process of building up high-level thinking, and thus provide an easier avenue for achieving control of thought.

Thought-control occurs at different levels. A higher stage of control will never be possible without spiritual awakening and touch. Merely controlling one or several thoughts by will may be beneficial, even if only at a modest level, but only an intense effort holds the promise of emotional control. Bondage to the external world, such as family links, is usually strong and hard to deny except for higher minds. This superiority, however, does not mean the neglect of duties. Nevertheless, it is important to note that only deep emotional attachment yields a strong living spirituality.

Establishing thought-control in one's life takes time. However, an adjustment may occur when the mind integrates a higher mode of thinking. Mind is most often involved in the banalities of everyday life. Elevated, the mind can actually dispose of these contingencies.

There are several methods to control the mind. Yoga teaches that this control is easier if one incorporates a dose, however small, of morality and spirituality. This applies to Hatha Yoga where many practitioners often focus on the practice of *asanas* and *mudras*.

A must for any motivated student are the following ethical rules of *Yama* and *Niyama*.

## **Yama**

1. *Ahimsa* – The will not to harm either physically and verbally or even mentally.
2. *Satya* - Truthfulness; never to lie
3. *Asteya* – Refraining from stealing not even others' thoughts.
4. *Brahmachârya* - Continence sexual embracing the physical, emotional and mental aspects of sexuality.
5. *Aparigraha* - Refusal what is superfluous in everyday life.

## **Niyama**

6. *Saucha* – Cleanliness, inside and outside.
7. *Santosha* - Contentment with what life dispenses.
8. *Tapas* - asceticism, physical and mental, at different levels, and imbued with the spirit of sacrifice and devotion to the Divine.
9. *Svadhya* - The study of sacred texts, inspirational and emotional meditation; *mantra* practice.
10. *Ishvarapranidhâna* – To be in tune with God, which is the essence of spirituality.

Not only does the practice of *Yama* and *Niyama* teaches morality and spirituality but also the power of control at all levels of human potential. Sincere daily practice is not easy. However, anyone who can will find it helpful for the development of inner strength, and if desired the control of mind, a faculty which allows the progressive abolition of desire to give in to temptations, especially those of the senses.

The practice of *prânâyâma* is crucial for a successful mastery of the mind. However, to warrant success in this practice the physical must first be

purified which in turn implies some yogic preparation. The discipline of Hatha Yoga teaches these preliminary exercises to whoever ambitions a mindset change. Also, it is possible to control the mind through the practice of *ishvarapranidhâna* which in substance means the power to establish a real contact with the Divine.

To sum up, moral standard alone does not achieve thought-control. Such advanced control supposes the practice of *pranayama* and mental concentration, two methods that together are both rational and facilitate one's task.

## **Yama**

There are several methods to control the mind, but concentration is essential. The word *yuja* means to concentrate, to focus upon. In the context of the eightfold disciplines of *Ashtanga* Yoga, *yuja* must be employed so as to continue through all of the stages until eventually reaching the higher state of *samâdhi*. Yoga teaches that this process is easier if one incorporates a dose, however small, of morality and spirituality. This is the starting point for any motivated student of Yoga, the ethical rules of *yama* and *niyama*.

The practice of the twin disciplines *yama* and *niyama* aims primarily at a thorough purification of the physical, the vital and the mental. The precise meaning of 'purification' as used here is too often ignored or misunderstood in Yoga literature and commentaries. Purification differs in accordance with the pupil's level of spiritual elevation and with which of the eight disciplines

the pupil is currently working upon. Some specific practice may prevail at one level, but not necessarily later. This applies to each of the sub-disciplines within the eightfold yogic path (*Ashtanga Yoga*). The very first step of the eightfold yogic practice is adherence to the five ethical rules of *yama*.

### **The Five Rules of Yama:**

#### **Ahimsa**

Strictly speaking, *ahimsa* means to refrain from killing. However, in reality, the deeper practice of *ahimsa* requires one to keep a general attitude of non-violence, in thoughts as well as in deeds. This requires a sincere self-analysis, particularly as regards becoming conscious of and then releasing latent aggressiveness or animosity. The challenge of finding the right attitude towards other people is often symptomatic of a low moral standard and the lack of character.

The people around us may roughly be classified as being: a) happy; b) unhappy; c) helpful and generous; or d) likely to harm physically, verbally, or in thought. (It is desirable, as regards the people who find pleasure in various forms of evil, to avoid being involved in their wrongdoings or talks. Instead, one should adopt an attitude of indifference, thus eluding a descent into the spiral of negative criticisms or thoughts.) There are of course many variants and hybrids to these categories.

Introspection can give an edifying glimpse into one's reactions in encountering these different sorts of people. When one comes into contact with happy people, does one tend to respond positively (with empathy) or negatively (with envy or jealousy)? Does interaction with those who are unhappy or dissatisfied give rise to indifference or compassion? It is our

own nature, generous or mean-spirited, which determines our behavioral attitude toward other people.

### **Satya**

The practice of *satya* means being sincere, truthful. Oftentimes, the very notion of truth becomes lost in a mixture of truths, semi-truths and untruths. The practice of *satya* suggests the adoption of an ideal of truth, striving to never alter facts intentionally. This may prove very difficult, granted that any kind of expression is always endowed with the potential of possible errors. Just as with sensory experiences, the modifications of the mind add to the many *vrittis* already stored in the subliminal field, as an internal, novel and unverifiable mental creation.

The thoughts created within (and in dreams), whose material existence cannot be proven, are called *vikalpa*; they mostly stand at a high spiritual level. These thoughts usually have no counterpart in the physical world. Thinking of a rose, or evidence of someone's kindness is rather easy to verify. Not so with abstract thoughts, whether philosophical or otherwise. By truth is here meant the creation of a new type of thinking that does not betray the authenticity of an experience. Overall adherence to the practice of *ahimsa* demands the prevention of unfounded thoughts so as to avoid negative influence on the conscious and the unconscious, as well as in our future behavior.

### **Asteya**

This is the practice of non-stealing, not only with regards to physical merchandise, but also including intangible concepts such as other people's ideas and mental creations. In order to develop a real mental independence, one should refrain from coveting whatever does not truly

belong to one. This exercise is purifying, insofar as it protects from the intrusion of others' thoughts and thus provides one with a means to get rid of what should be discarded.

### **Brahmacharya**

This practice is usually defined as sexual control, celibacy or continence. More correctly, though, it also includes sexual control in thoughts, emotions and actions. By securing the propagation of the human species and at the same time being an easily available source of pleasure, sexuality is deeply rooted in mind, besides being inextricably connected with philosophy, spirituality and morality. This subject is easy to talk about, but far more difficult to control.

Sexual control falls into two categories: general control and super control.

The first form of sexual control relates to social life—moral rules of conduct, freedom of expression (be it verbal or written) and how to act decently in public. This rather superficial form of control can never become deeply rooted in the mind, as evidenced by the frequent and widespread societal lapses of general sexual control whenever circumstances allow.

Also, general control affords no particular consideration to the fact that internal energy is needed for the continuation of an organism's biological functions. One's energy capital is consumed in the sexual act and its three components—thought, emotion and action—and immediately followed by the need for quickly recovering lost energies to enable sufficient stores of energy for future expenditure.

Most often, the sexual factor predominates in the mind. Thought is often

imbued with emotions tinged with sexuality. It is difficult to detach mind from desire; such a challenge demands the application of considerable time and energy. If the organism is not specifically disabled, desire, emotions and sexual thoughts do not necessarily disappear as a result of biological aging. Even when the sexual force begins to decline and disappear, it will persist and be unwilling to accept any kind of control.

Yoga does not instruct to damage or destroy the sexual force. Rather, Yoga promotes the full development of sexual power through the application of an efficient control. What really is the sexual power? In medical terms, the sexual force is merely a natural instinct, an emotion with the faculty for man to satisfy it whenever it emerges.

However, some of the great athletes of the Western world have observed an additional measure of the fullness of sexual power with the idea that restricting the frequency of sexual acts is crucial to reach a high level of physical performance. Thus, elite athletes such as Sandow in Great Britain, Hackenschmidt in the former Soviet Union and the world champion boxer, Floyd Patterson, in the US, all were in favor of moderation and control of sexual energy. Their experience showed that the retention of sexual energy did improve their performances. Also, India's champion wrestlers, who have long been notorious for their strength, attach a great importance to the issue of sexual energy. In their experience, sexual control has always been helpful in the building up of strength.

When fully developed, sex glands are constantly producing secretions. The male sexual glands have the capacity to concentrate into a final transformation—blood's "quintessence"—which may ultimately be utilized for the purpose of procreation. The seminal fluid is then received and

developed in the female's genital organ during the pregnancy process. However, if sexual energy expenditure is stopped and the hormone production continues, how does the body adapt to the surfeit of secretions? It is precisely this question, which leads into the role of a deeper sexual control offered by Yoga.

The second (and vastly more desirable) category of sexual control is super control, or *vajroli*. Through the mastery of *vajroli*, which is essentially a physical technique, the peristaltic movement and flow of seminal fluids may be halted and reversed. This makes it truly possible to change one's mental state and, along with it, to control all sexual thoughts and emotions.

This control is achieved by inducing the seminal fluid, which may be destined to procreation or pleasure, toward a reverse flow (understood in the physical meaning of the term), instead of being extracted from the genital glands. Initially, the secretions from male sex glands are transported from their point of origin downward by a peristaltic pressure.

This occurs during a mental state, which is saturated with libidinal emotions. It is this mental state (phase a) which triggers the excretion of the seminal fluids to the urethral orifice (phase b). To stop phase b requires the cessation of all activities in phase a, by controlling thoughts and emotions involved in the process and thus preventing the peristaltic movement downward. To control such a physical process mentally is extremely difficult.

Hatha Yoga teaches that one must learn how to reverse phase b into a new peristalsis (phase c), which is intended to transform the initial mental state (phase a) into a new mode of thinking (phase d). In summary, by halting the peristaltic movement and reversing it, it is possible to change one's mental state and along with it all sexual thoughts and emotions. This

method, which is essentially physical, is called *vajroli*. (Female practitioners of Hatha Yoga may utilize the same principle, although in a modified variant. Excellent results can be derived from the correct application of special pelvic exercises. Indeed, women generally possess a superior self-control, and female anatomy and physiology allows a far simpler conservation and transformation of refined sexual energy. The difficulty for females, however, lies with the possibility that emotional intensity may adversely affect the nervous system.)

The large quantity of precious energy, which is hard to detect, accumulates over time. Its role in procreation is marginal while being thoroughly dissipated in lascivious pleasures. Subject to this special yogic transformation, it can be transformed into a higher energy called *urdhvaretas*, which can be used at both the physical and mental levels or for higher purposes.

Anyone who has the experience of sexual control through *vajroli* knows that not only does it release a general positive feeling, but also a profound sense of one's individuality, inner strength and effectiveness. Imposed by nobody, this technique may be used at one's discretion and provides far greater satisfaction than the delights of salacious pleasures. It is in this control that one may find the greatest source of inner joy and contentment.

### **Aparigraha**

The last of the five disciplines of Yama is the refusal of gifts. The tendency to accept gifts goes against the rule of *aparigraha*. Of course, there are gifts whose acceptance is fairly justified. These are gifts donated mainly for one's survival. It is not always easy to determine the nature of one's personal needs, as there are so many artificial needs competing for one's attention.

Roughly speaking, the real needs of the human species fall into three categories: food and other essential needs, items intended for our personal protection and sexual needs.

Accepting superfluous gifts, which fall outside of these three categories, may affect or weaken one's health condition. The *aparigha* practice supposes a lucid apprehension of what is strictly necessary in life and the determination not to fall into the trap of what is not really necessary. However, when one is freely offered the gift of love, it should always be accepted, lest its refusal harm the sentiments of those who offer it.

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## ***Niyama***

***Excerpt from the book « Foundations of Yoga » (Inner Traditions) by Basile P Catoméris***

The practice of *yama* and *niyama* primarily attracts religious people, regardless of denomination—men and women who have glimpsed, in one way or another, the shadow of their divine nature—but the practice of these ethical rules actually applies to all those who, while aspiring to a healthy, joyful life, realize deep inside that they are already en route, seeking a reality that transcends everyday joys and worries, a timeless reality of truth and love.

While *yama* presents itself as a discipline of behavioral control through its “abstentions,” *niyama* concerns the spiritual development of the individual. *Niyama* covers five “observances” directed toward oneself; in other words, they regulate a practitioner's personal conduct.

## ***Śauca***

Cleanliness is strongly related to purity, especially in the different disciplines of Yoga. Careful about the elimination of all external and internal body wastes, *śauca* constitutes an important rule in the practice of Haṭha Yoga. External cleanliness of the body is achieved with a hot or cold

shower or bath, sweating, exposure to the sun or simply the air, and with massage or friction. Internal cleanliness in Haṭha Yoga is the subject of chapter 9, “*Ṣaṭ Karman—Purifications.*”

### ***Santosha***

Involving a quality of inner equilibrium, *santoṣa* reflects an attitude of contentment that superficially can give the impression of laziness or indeed self-satisfaction, which can be perceived as self-importance, arrogance, or disdain. However, the sought-after state of *santoṣa* is sometimes an extremely positive and dynamic feeling. It is synonymous with inner balance, peace, and imperturbability—not to be confused with passivity. It is an attitude that generates unconditional joy, which is a state of soul that is manifested independently of any external circumstance that the ego views as good news.

### ***Tapas***

In Yoga (unlike in the cognitive sciences), especially in the context of Haṭha Yoga, a good understanding of the aims and applications of *tapas* comes from practical experience. The Sanskrit term *tapas* has several meanings and is understood differently according to the practitioner. There being no truly equivalent term, *tapas* is generally translated by “asceticism,” a word whose Greek origin denotes exercise. However, the occasionally ambiguous use of the term in yogic doctrine should be noted, as it at times refers to exercise and at other times results. The present account does not pretend to go into depth about the origin of yogic asceticism or into its different applications over the centuries. It cannot be exhaustive in the viewpoints and experiences alluded to here.

For the yogi and yogini, *tapas* involves a discipline of austerity as much as purification. In the practice of Haṭha Yoga, this rule aims specifically at mental purification, the development of strength of thought, and endurance. *Tapas* is practiced at three different levels—gentle, medium, and intense. While the first level is relatively accessible to any serious student, the second and third require the guidance of a competent and experienced guru.

The first level may involve different exercises: activating the faculty of empathy, observing strict silence (*mauna*), enduring bad weather of all sorts, experiencing intense heat and cold, and submitting stoically to hunger, thirst, and sleep deprivation. At this level, intense muscular training is proposed, particularly maintaining appropriate postures (*āsanas*) up to the

limit of what is tolerable. In the practice of *tapas*, sexual continence can play a significant role, even if at first it is limited to simple control, which consists of abstaining from all sexual thoughts or comments that are out of context. This rule may be accompanied by cutting in half the frequency of sexual activity. \*

The path taken (of Yoga *sādhana*) can be favorable for the acquisition of *siddhis*, the superhuman powers to which knowledge and superior states of consciousness are intimately linked. But the *siddhis* a person can acquire on a spiritual journey are still only steps toward the realization of the Self. When the *siddhis* appear, at the end of a long quest, the tenacious illusion of the world is set aside, after the practitioner has conscientiously applied the sublime negation of *neti neti* (not this, not that) in each phase of development. Through numerous experiences, the mental world is enriched with new dimensions, notably that of a Reality that eludes the grasp of the mind and the senses. Thenceforth, the perception of the realities of the transitory world only reinforces the practitioners' asceticism and clarifies heightened awareness of the pain and cosmic illusion that surrounds them.

At the end of their spiritual journey, yogis and yoginis are liberated from all the experiences and powers they have acquired during their present lifetime and at the end of numerous past reincarnations. Their liberation, which is for the sole benefit of the Ultimate Reality that is the final objective of all their births, will not exclude the fact of having to immolate what was most sacred to them in the world—the ultimate sacrifice of a spiritual hero—the personal divinity that followed them throughout their quest and to which they were organically attached. Such freedom will be emblematic of the final discharge of all the streams, tributaries, and rivers into the immensity of a vast ocean.

\*Also see *brahmacarya* in the previous chapter on “*Yama*.”

*Tapas* is emblematic of the spirit of sacrifice, an archetype that is found in many civilizations—a sacrifice that not only allows humans to communicate or commune with the occult forces of nature, but also has allowed us to survive during our long evolution on our planet. Dating back to ancient times, the term *tapas* figures in hymn X.129 of the *Rigveda*, which in its metaphysical description of Creation refers to a heat (*tapas*) emanating from nothing and permitting the appearance of the primordial Being, unmanifested but latent, outside time and space. This term also appears in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (IV.1), in which he describes one of the

paths leading to the acquisition of extraordinary powers (*siddhis*), along with four other considerations (birth, certain herbal beverages, *mantras*, and *samādhi*). The text lists about thirty such powers.

These superhuman powers are acquired by beings who live for the most part in great destitution and near absolute anonymity. In India they are considered as enduring heroes and, for a long time, have constituted the spiritual leaders of an elite asceticism. Their mental universe is located beyond the noisy world, the newsworthy events in society, far from the gaze of the ephemeral protagonists in political or social power, in sport or show business. Extreme practices rest on an unshakeable faith, anchored in a cultural environment that seems to defy the laws of time. Anonymous champions of determination and psychic force, this spiritual elite demonstrates an exceptional will and stamina. Their powers are often accompanied by universal compassion and immeasurable patience, which are the conditions for grace to descend and crown these unconditional lovers of God.

The most visible superhuman exploits are seen among the *sādhus* and the *naga nagas* or *naga babas*, whose principal feature is total nudity; they pour regularly out of the four corners of India, principally the Himalayas where they live as hermits or anchorites. They come down from their hermitages or lonely huts to the banks of the Ganges to participate in great traditional gatherings (*melas*), which in India take place every four years in rotation in four different towns: Nasik, Ujjain, Allahabad, and Hardwar. Received everywhere with reverence and devotion, those who possess *siddhi* powers enjoy great respect from their peers, from Indian civil and military dignitaries, as well as from the mass of pilgrims who sometimes number in the millions. This highly colorful crowd is united in contemplation and meditation and also in what it considers to be the privilege of *darśana*, the vision of these exemplary beings who bear a universal blessing. For this multitude, composed of ethnic groups with very different languages and coming from diverse social milieus and castes, the *naga nagas* become a living source of emulation, a model of the faith that moves mountains and orients the hearts of the believers toward Heaven.

Coming from a very ancient spiritual school, reputedly atypical because of its adepts' heterodox behavior, these extreme ascetics have renounced all worldly goods. In the vast Indian continent, one is used to hearing: "If it doesn't exist in India, it doesn't exist anywhere." It is therefore not a paradox to see men, for the most part entirely nude, move around freely, without risk of opprobrium for indecency, while Bharata (India), "the largest democracy in the world,"

typically displays, even today, a Victorian sense of modesty and fear of promiscuity. Still, with the exception of a minority of Hindu purists who are strictly faithful to the precept according to which the yogi must never make a display of his spirituality, and who thus scarcely appreciate these public events, the *naga naga* elicit amazement and admiration. They are exceptional beings who are treated with respect mixed with fear because, according to popular legend, those who possess *siddhis* can be dangerous when angered.

It is equally possible to witness the demonstration of certain forms of *siddhis* in public places in India. These are “fallen” yogis who deliberately ignore the fact that it is attachment to extraordinary powers that precipitates their fall, and that only the condition of non-attachment will allow them to attain the ultimate Reality. These Yoga renegades are victims in the grip of an extraordinary power, who have renounced the path of a challenging spiritual quest, preferring instead to attract crowds by virtue of their “magical” powers. From the strict point of view of the *sādhana*, the status of yogi is then replaced by that of *fakir*, an Arabic word meaning “poor person” (beggar).

### ***Svādhyāya***

Quite as important at the level of knowledge is the rule designated by the term *svādhyāya*, which recommends the study of sacred texts. If it is indispensable to acquire basic training in the practical study of any science, it is all the more desirable for every believer to study the foundations of his or her own religion. In the same way, the atheist, who does not deny the necessity of rules to manage life in society and who thus adheres to its values, will have everything to gain by knowing the rules that this same society imposes while granting freedom of thought.

Without study of sacred writings and, of course, putting them into practice, religion risks becoming the source of intolerance and, alas, bloody conflicts. Dogmatic practices can also result in the cult of superstition, robotic orthodoxy, and isolation of the individual in a cultural and social no-man’s land. In the spirit of Haṭha Yoga, recommended study includes the sacred texts belonging to each person’s confession, whether it is the Gospels, the Qur’an, or the Torah, or Indian sacred scriptures. More than a source of strictly theological or philosophical knowledge, the study aimed at in the practice of *svādhyāya* is, for the Haṭha yogi, a source of emotional inspiration and meditation.

Nevertheless, in a universal context of a spirituality excluding prejudice and narrow-mindedness, the yogi can just as easily find refuge and emulation at the heart of other sources of spiritual inspiration. Thus it is that the yogi Sri Ramakrishna experienced repeated unions with the Divine triggered by sublime inspirations found as much in the reading of the Qur'an or the Bible as in the writings of his own tradition. The study required by *svādhyāya* also includes *japa*, repetition of the *mantra* that usually completes the traditional initiation of the *cela* (student) by his or her guru.

### ***Īśvaraprandhāna***

The last of the ten fundamental rules of Haṭha Yoga, the highly religious *īśvaraprandhāna* is not the least important. In fact, it presupposes a sincere and intense devotion, a reorientation of thought and feeling toward the Absolute, the goal of all spirituality. From the technical point of view, it consists of a state of divinely inspired mental concentration directed exclusively toward the Divine, Īśvara, the Lord who is none other than the supreme awareness of the Self. Īśvara is different than the Creator God of the Judeo-Christian tradition in so far as Īśvara is the transcendent awareness of the Self, free from ontological illusion and, consequently, of all spatiotemporal or cognitive dependency.

The yogi's progress on the long spiritual journey that leads to a determined return to the source involves deliberately abandoning the self to the Beloved, to the Divine, and to the unknown designs of immanent Will, with the hope of one day becoming its very humble instrument. This done, the yogi places himself or herself at the heart of Bhakti Yoga (the Yoga of devotion), at the heart of Divine love.