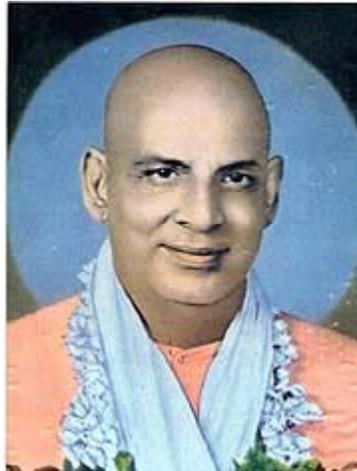


PRACTICAL LESSONS IN YOGA

By

SRI SWAMI SIVANANDA



**Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society**



**SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE
So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda**

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TO
STUDENTS OF YOGA
IN
THE EAST AND THE WEST

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

His Holiness Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati is, as it were, an ornament of not only the glorious Himalayas and India but of the entire world. From the cool heights of his Himalayan Ashram, "Ananda Kutir," the great Yogi stood as a mighty dynamo radiating Divine Love, Joy and Peace to millions upon millions of bleeding hearts all over the world, a Yogi, who shines as a brilliant pole-star in the spiritual firmament of the universe, guiding the tired and restless traveller towards the haven of Peace, Bliss and Knowledge.

As a great saint and philosopher, his spotless purity, saintliness of life, magnetic and voluminous writings were unparalleled in record; he was not only an eminent and popular author of Hindu religious and philosophical subjects, but is an authority on those subjects. He was not only a man of letters and vast erudition, but also one who had in a full measure realised the incalculable benefits of Yogic practices in the course of a strenuous struggle of over fifteen years of intense dispassion and rigorous austerities in the holy regions of the Himalayas. Moreover, his priceless writings through the medium of some of the well-known and influential newspapers, magazines and journals not only in India but also abroad and in America coupled with his own unique and powerful personality and realisation have won for him an enviable place of honour in every spiritually, religiously and philosophically inclined home in India. In fact, if the political India of the present day can be proud of at least one Gandhi, the spiritual India can be reasonably proud of at least one Sivananda!

The object with which this book is published is twofold. Year in and year out large numbers of Europeans and Americans, men and women, came out to India to learn Yoga under an Adept and practice the same in India itself. In the course of their endless wanderings and searches for such Adepts in Yoga, these people had no other alternative but to resort to the Himalayan Ashram of Swami Sivananda. But unfortunately owing to several causes these travellers could not remain long in this country. They went back home learning something here and something there, in bits, but nothing from one Yogi only, which alone could be said to be of some solid and practical utility to them.

The Westerners, interested in Yogic practices, had naturally to take resort to books and other literature on the subject, which were either unintelligible to them or, as was more often than not, had been written by persons whose aim in writing books was, in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, to show off their learning rather than to teach Yoga and make the subject intelligible and interesting to the public. This is the difference between books written by most writers and those by Swami Sivananda. Moreover, unlike several others, Swami Sivananda Saraswati was a practical Yogi, who fully realised the fruits of Yoga and was therefore best suited to write books on the subject from his own practical experience. The present book has been specially designed by the author keeping in mind the needs of the students of Yoga in Europe and America, who need a practical but non-technical presentation of the subject in a language which is accessible to the beginner in the path. We hope the book will amply serve this most sacred purpose in view.

May the unfailing blessings of Swami Sivananda pour forth in profusion over the heads of all the readers in the West and East, nay, North and South, and lead them on to Satchidananda which every one is seeking at heart!

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

PREFACE

This book entitled “Practical Lessons in Yoga” consists of twelve easy and interesting Lessons. The First Lesson deals with Yoga and Its Objects. The Second Lesson treats of Yoga Sadhana or the practice of Yoga and contains a clear and lucid description of the four important paths viz., Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga. One can easily choose for himself a path according to his particular taste, temperament and capacity by a close study of this Lesson. I firmly hold that no one wishing to become a perfect Yogi can realise his wish, if he does not begin his Yogic practices with Karma Yoga or doing actions for actions’ sake, without the idea of agency and without expectation of the fruits of his actions. I have also made passing references to the various other forms of Yoga such as Hatha Yoga, Mantra Yoga and Kundalini Yoga.

In the Third Lesson on Yogic Discipline I have clearly and expressly stated that the practice of Yoga is rooted in the cultivation of virtues and the eradication of negative qualities, and have also stated in detail what virtues should of necessity be cultivated and what vices are to be eradicated, and through what means.

Yogic Diet forms the subject-matter of the Fourth Lesson. It should be distinctly borne in mind that mind is made up of the fine particles of food that we take, and we are what we eat. If the student of Yoga who is a neophyte desires to lay a firm, sure and sound foundation in his practices, he should take care to eat only such foods that are conducive to his spiritual advancement and progress, and avoid all others. A list of the various articles of diet, prescribed and prohibited, is also given.

In the Fifth Lesson I have taken all care to collect the various stumbling blocks in the way of the aspirant and the various means of overcoming them. I strongly advise the student to read and re-read this Lesson a number of times in order that he may be cautious in moments of temptation.

Then in the Sixth Lesson I have dealt with Yogasanas or Yogic postures. It is very necessary for the would-be Yogi to maintain a sound and vigorous body and mind to achieve success in his undertaking, and in order that he might achieve this end, a number of simple and easy exercises, physical and consequently mental, have been prescribed. These exercises were practiced by Yogins and Rishis of yore and are still being practiced in India and other countries with astonishing results.

The Seventh Lesson treats of Pranayama or regulation of breath. Simple and practical exercises have been prescribed for the regulation and control of breath. which will ultimately result in the control of the mind. These exercises in breath-control are not merely for enhancing the soundness and control of the mind, but they also play a vital part in ensuring a sound body. The student of Pranayama who attains perfection in it will have various psychic powers.

Regulation of breath and control of mind lead to concentration. So concentration is the topic of the next lesson. I have dealt at length with the nature of the mind and the methods through which it can be controlled. Some practical exercises are given to attain success in concentration.

The Ninth Lesson deals with Meditation because the fruit of concentration is meditation. A number of easy and interesting exercises have been described. The fruit of meditation is Samadhi and this forms the subject-matter of the next lesson. Samadhi is superconscious state, wherein the Yogi gets superintuitional or supersensual knowledge and supersensual bliss. In Samadhi the Yogi communes with the Lord and enjoys Absolute Independence. He has reached the Goal now.

In the Eleventh Lesson I have dealt with the Serpentine Power or the mighty pristine Force underlying all organic and inorganic matter. This Force is in a dormant state and is sleeping a sleep-trance in almost all persons in the basal Muladhara Chakra. When this sleeping Force is roused to action, it pierces through the various centres of spiritual energy in the human body and reaches the crown of the head or the Sahasrara Chakra where She is united with Her Consort, Lord Siva. That Yogi who has taken the sleeping Kundalini to the Sahasrara Chakra and united Her with Lord Siva alone has attained the Goal, not others. The process by which this sleeping Power can be roused to action and taken to the top of the head has also been described with beautiful illustrations. The Yogi who has succeeded in achieving this union becomes the Lord of all powers and knowledge.

In the last Lesson on Spiritual Vibrations and Aura I have stated what vibration and aura mean and various means of producing vibrations of love, joy, peace, mercy sympathy and purity, and developing the spiritual aura. I have also stated in brief that the human aura has various colours according to the growth and development of a person physically, mentally, morally and spiritually, and that each colour has got its own significance and meaning. The would-be Yogi should dispel all other colours and develop the particular spiritual aura, the colour of which is yellow.

At the end of the book an Appendix has been added and a Glossary of Sanskrit terms given. In Appendix I a daily routine for aspirants has been chalked out, one for the beginner, another for the intermediate student and a third for the advanced Yogi. I believe that if a similar routine chalked out according to one's own necessity and convenience is followed regularly and systematically, nothing would stand in the way of the aspiring Yogi to achieve success in Yoga. Moreover, he should also maintain a Spiritual Diary similar to the one given in the Appendix realising the importance and benefits of such a discipline. In Appendix II an interesting article on Yoga and Science has also been added in the belief that it would be read with considerable interest.

I appeal to the students of Yoga in the East and the West to start doing some spiritual and Yogic practice in right earnest after digesting and assimilating the truths and ideals inculcated herein and I hope they would be immensely benefited by this book.

Sivananda

THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER

Thou art, O Lord! the Creator of this universe. Thou art the Protector of this world. Thou art in the grass and the rose. Thou art in the sun and the stars. Salutations unto Thee, O Destroyer of the cycle of births and deaths! Salutations unto Thee, O Bestower of Bliss and immortality!

O sweet Lord! May I be free from the bonds of Death. May I never again forget my immortal nature. May I be able to look upon all with equal vision. May I attain the Supreme Seat of Brahman. May I be free from impurity and sin. May I know my real essential nature.

Adorations to the Supreme Being who dwells in the hearts of all beings, who is in the fire and water who is in the plants, herbs and trees, who is in the stones, bricks and iron-bars and who has pervaded the whole universe.

I bow to Thee, O Secret of secrets! I bow to Thee, O Indweller of our hearts! I bow to Thee, O Silent Witness of all activities of all minds! I bow to Thee, O Inner Ruler of all beings! I bow to Thee, O Thread-Soul who connects all beings, who pervades and permeates and interpenetrates all things of this universe!

Salutations to Thee, the Supreme Lord. Thou art without beginning and end. Thou art the flower; Thou art the bee; Thou art woman; Thou art man; Thou art the sea; Thou art the waves; Thou art the old man tottering with a stick; Thou art the saint; and Thou art the rogue.

Thou art Light Divine. Thou art Light of Knowledge. Thou art the Dispeller of darkness. Thou art the Supreme Guru. Thou art beyond the reach of mind and speech. Thou art beyond any kind of limitation. Thou art the Oversoul. Thou art the Self of this universe.

Thou art Self-luminous. Thou art without parts, without actions, without limbs, without any taint of fault, without birth and death. Thou art our Father, Mother, Brother, Friend, Guru, Relative and sole Refuge. Thou art the embodiment of Peace, Bliss, Knowledge, Power, Strength and Beauty.

O All-merciful Lord! Through Thy Grace, may I realise Truth. May I always entertain sublime thoughts. May I realise myself as the Light Divine. May I behold the one sweet immortal Self in all beings. May I realise Brahman with pure understanding.

May that Light of lights ever guide me. May He cleanse my mind of all impurities. May He inspire me. May He bestow on me Power, Courage and Strength. May He remove the veil in the mind. May He remove all obstacles in the Spiritual Path. May He make my life happy and fruitful. I bow to Thee O Lord of lords, O God of gods, O Deva of devas, O Brahman of the Upanishads, the Support for Maya and Isvara, the Supreme Bridge to Immortality!

Om Peace! Peace! Peace!

INTRODUCTION

The Religion of the Vedanta and Yoga stands forth as a brilliant guiding star to the student of Yoga Philosophy and Occultism, inviting him to the mysterious unknown world, which he would gladly explore, and encouraging him to march onward until he reaches a stage, when all powers dear to every human heart lie at his command, and all earthly attractions cease to influence him any more. It is a truism that it is in the nature of every human being to strive for happiness, but the happiness he gains by his actions, he finds to his utter dissatisfaction and sorrow, is only of a limited duration. The enjoyments of the senses are transient, and the senses themselves are worn out by excessive enjoyment. Further sin generally accompanies these enjoyments and makes him unhappy beyond comparison. Even if the pleasures of the world are enjoyed as much as their nature would permit, even if they are as intense, as various, as uninterrupted as possible, yet old age in all its hideous shape threatens him with death and destruction. It should be remembered that the enjoyments of heaven itself are not in reality more enviable than these pleasures of the senses; they are of the same nature though more unmixed and durable. Moreover they also come to an end as they are gained by actions; and as actions are finite their effect must also be finite. In a word, there is necessarily an end to all these enjoyments.

O little man of little faith! Why do you vainly strive for pleasures, which you know cannot satisfy you beyond the moment of enjoyment? Look out for an unchangeable, infinite and supreme happiness which must come from a Being in whom there is no change. Search and find out such a Being, and if you could only succeed in your quest, then you can get that unaltered happiness from Him.

All the great religions of the world proclaim in one unanimous voice that there is One Being as mentioned above. This Being, believe me, is not very far from you. He is quite close to you. He resides in the body-temple of yours, in the innermost recesses of your heart. He is the silent Witness of your mind, the Watcher of all the activities of your intellect. He is the Supreme Being of the Scriptures so highly eulogised by Saints, Sages, Yogins, Philosophers and Prophets. This Being can be realised by all through the practice of Yoga.

It is a well-known fact that any number of zeros have no intrinsic value unless the No. 1 is placed before them. Even so the wealth of all the three worlds is nothing, if you do not lead a spiritual life, if you do not try to acquire the Spiritual Wealth, if you do not strive for Self-realisation. You will have to live in the Soul or the Self within. You will have to add Atman to the life here. That is the reason why Lord Jesus says: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Every one of you is a power in yourself. You can influence others. You can radiate Joy and Peace to millions upon millions of people far and near. You can elevate others even from a long distance. You can transmit your powerful, soul-stirring, beneficial thoughts to others, because you are an image of God, nay, you are God Himself the moment the veil of ignorance enshrouding you is rent asunder.

This world is a great school. This world is for your education. You learn several valuable lessons daily. If you are wise enough to utilise all opportunities to the best possible advantage in the

spirit of Yoga, your capacities and will-power will develop to an astonishing degree. You will grow. You will evolve. You will expand. There will be integral development. You will march forward towards the goal. All veils will drop down one by one. All limitations or barriers will be annihilated. All shackles or fetters will be torn asunder. You will receive more and more Divine Light Knowledge, Purity, Peace and Spiritual Strength.

You are the author of your own fate. You yourself have created this. You yourself are entirely responsible for this. You are the architect of your joys and sorrows. Just as the spider or the silkworm creates a web or cocoon for its own destruction, so also you have created this cage of flesh by your own actions, attractions, repulsions and false egoism. You have become the slave of the flesh, slave of your body and mind, slave of countless desires. You are sunk in the quagmire of deepest ignorance.

Weep not, my child! Sorrow not! A glorious brilliant future is awaiting you! Strive to come out of this false cage of illusion right now, this very second. If your attempt is true and sincere, if you endeavour with all your might and main to achieve this end, then by the ready Grace of the Lord thou shalt drive away these dark clouds of ignorance and shine in your true divine colours, in your native, pristine glory.

Cast aside the erroneous idea: “I am the body.” Develop the consciousness and realisation of the real “I” within you. This real “I” is Sat-Chit-Ananda or Atman or the Self, the one common Consciousness, the spiritual thread that links all hearts.

Awaken yourself to the conscious realisation of your actual oneness with the Supreme Self. Think of the Self continuously. As Tennyson says: “Let thy voice rise like a fountain for me night and day.” This is the real spiritual practice (Brahma-abhyasa). This will eventually lead to Self-realisation. Let the struggle be keen. Let your endeavour be sincere. Let your motive be pure. There must be iron discipline, iron determination, iron will and iron Sadhana (spiritual practice). Then there will be no difficulty in the attainment of the final beatitude of life—a life sublime in its nature, resplendent with spiritual light, radiant with splendour, vibrant with ecstasy and replete with Peace.

Mere intellectual conception of this identity or oneness will not serve your purpose. You must actually feel and experience the truth of the same through intuition. You must become fully aware of the Real Self, the basis or substratum or bed-rock of this world, body, mind, Prana and the senses. You must enter into a consciousness in which the realisation becomes part and parcel of your daily life. You must live this ideal spiritual life daily. Let your neighbours actually feel how entirely a changed being you are—a superman. Let them smell the Divine Fragrance from you. A full-blown Yogi can never be concealed. Just as fragrant fumes emanate from scented sticks so also sweet spiritual fragrance will emanate from your body, the moment you attain perfection in Yoga, even though you may shut yourself up in a cave of the far-off Himalayas.

A Yoga-Bhrashta (one who had fallen from Yogic practices), who did rigorous spiritual Sadhana in his previous birth, but was unable to get Self-realisation on account of some cause or other, gets Self-realisation in this birth like a flash of lightning in the twinkling of an eye. He is a born adept. He does no spiritual practice. He has no spiritual preceptor (Guru). He had his initiation

in his previous birth. Ashtavakra and Rishi Vamadeva, the two Yoga-Bhrashtas of yore, attained Knowledge of the Self even while they were in the wombs of their mothers. Jnanadeva of Alandi (a place near Poona, India), author of Jnanesvari-Gita, was a born adept. He exhibited several Siddhis (psychic powers) even when he was a small boy. He touched a buffalo and the buffalo repeated the Vedas. He created fire on his own back and his sister baked bread over it. But such instances are very rare. The vast majority of people should do intense Sadhana before they attain Self-realisation.

The Hindu Sastras assert with astonishing emphasis: “This world of names and forms is unreal; God alone is Real.” The objects a man of the world considers precious a Yogi shuns as worthless. This world with all its variegated pleasures, its pains, its joys, its sorrows, its rivers, mountains, sky, sun, moon, and the stars; with its dukes and beggars exists only in order that the fragments of the one Self embodied in so many forms may regain their lost Divine Consciousness and realise the true pristine glory and manifest the powers of the Self through the matter that envelops them.

There is no such thing as inanimate matter. There is life in every thing. Life is involved in a piece of stone. Matter is vibrant with life. This has been conclusively proved by modern science. Smile with the flowers and the green grass. Play with the butterflies and the cobras. Shake hands with the shrubs, ferns and twigs. Talk to the rainbow, wind, stars and sun. Converse with the running brooks and the turbulent waves of the sea. Keep company with your walking stick and enjoy its sweet company. Develop friendship with all your neighbours, dogs, cats, cows, human beings, trees, in fact, with all nature’s creation. Then you will have a wide, perfect, rich, full life. Then you will realise God. Then you will achieve success in Yoga. This state can hardly be described in finite words. It should be felt and experienced by you by unfolding the divinity within.

This remarkable unfolding from the stone to the God goes on through millions of years, through aeons of time. But in the individual this unfolding takes place more rapidly and quickly with all the force of its past behind it. These forces that manifest and unveil themselves in evolution are cumulative in their power. Embodied in the stone, in the mineral world, they grow and put out a little more strength, and in the mineral world accomplish their unfolding. Then they become too strong for the mineral and press on into the vegetable world. There they unfold more and more of their divinity, until they become too mighty for the vegetable, and become animal. Expanding within and gaining experiences from the animal, they again overflow the limits of the animal and appear as the human. In the human being they still grow and accumulate with ever-increasing force, and exert greater pressure against the barrier, and then out of the human, they press into the superhuman. This last process of evolution is called Yoga.” Therefore Yoga, when it is definitely begun, is not something new, as is often imagined.

If you begin to view Yoga in this light, then this Yoga which looked so foreign and so strange, will appear to wear a familiar face, and come to you in a garb not altogether strange. It will not look so strange that from the man you should pass on to superman, from mortality to immortality, and enter a region where divinity becomes more manifest.

When you begin to learn that there is one Self in all these names and forms, that He is the same in a king or a peasant, in a bird or a beast, in a man or a woman, in a stone or a piece of wood, that all powers seen throughout the world are latent in “inorganic” substances also, that this Self is

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