

A Short Description of Maha Yoga

The Simple, Easy and Free Path to
Self-Realization

- What is Maha Yoga?

All human beings have three distinct elements – body, mind and spirit. All of us are aware of our bodies, and most of us are aware of our minds. However, far too many of us are unaware of the spirit that resides in each one of us. Our normal awareness often extends only to our bodies and to our minds. Only rarely do some of us get the experience of being actually aware of our own spiritual existence. The objective of Yoga is to extend our Awareness beyond our bodies and our minds to the spirit (Prana), the Universal Life Energy (Chaitanya Shakti) that lies dormant in each and every one of us. When our Awareness merges with the Chaitanya we get happiness and satisfaction in all aspects of our lives, eventually leading to eternal bliss. This union of our Awareness with the Chaitanya is the true meaning of the term Yoga, which means “union” in Sanskrit.

The dormant sliver of Chaitanya Shakti, which resides in all of us, is referred to in Yoga terminology as the Kundalini Shakti (Kundalini Energy). Since our brains are usually chockfull of the physical and mental clutter of our day-to-day lives, the Kundalini in most of us gets pushed to the opposite end of our nervous system, the base of our spine (Mooladhara Chakra). There it lies dormant in its subtle form leaving most of us completely unaware of its existence throughout our lives. It is, however, our very own portion of the Chaitanya, which, if activated/awakened/enabled, will eventually find its way to our spiritual center in the brain (Sahasrara Chakra), leading to our own Awareness merging with the Chaitanya – i.e. achieving self-realization.

Over the centuries, philosophers, seers and yogis in India have developed several Yoga approaches to achieving this union. For example, Hatha Yoga, with its emphasis on physical postures (asanas), besides making the body worry-free and supple, was primarily developed to get the mind focused on the slow and deliberate execution of those postures, thereby reducing brain clutter and enabling the yogi’s Awareness to unite with the Chaitanya. Mantra Yoga, which involves chanting a mantra, is intended to achieve the same result by having the mind focus on the chanting and the sound associated with the mantra, thus letting the chanter’s Awareness merge with the Chaitanya. In Bhakti Yoga, or the Yoga of Devotion, the devotee gets so immersed in the object of his devotion that it enables his Awareness eventually to merge completely with the Chaitanya, which the devotee sees manifest as the object of his devotion. Raja Yoga involves getting the Kundalini activated by living a virtuous life and with the diligent practice of Asanas, Pranayam

(regulated breathing) and transcendental meditation. Other Yogas also involve similar themes to clear the brain of the physical and mental clutter that usually inhabits it so as to enable our Awareness to merge with the Chaitanya.

While it is possible to have one's Kundalini be awakened, and for our Awareness to get merged eventually with the Chaitanya, solely through the rigorous practice of one or more Yogas or other spiritual/religious paths, it is a very difficult and arduous undertaking. Most of us do not have the patience and the diligence required, nor do we have the appropriate Gurus (teachers) to guide us along those paths. As a result, in this day and age, very few of us are able to achieve the happiness and the eternal bliss of having our Awareness be merged with the Chaitanya.

There is, however, another Yoga path available, the easy and simple path of Maha/Siddha Yoga. Under this approach a Siddha Guru (Spiritual Master) through his grace and through the sheer power of his will, absorbs all the negative Karma (results of past actions) of his disciple, and during initiation awakens the dormant Kundalini Shakti in his disciple. Anyone desirous of such an initiation (deeksha) does not have to do anything other than pray and request, in all earnestness, for such a favor from a Siddha Guru, have faith in the Siddha Guru, and follow the Guru's simple instructions at the time of initiation. Once the Kundalini is awakened during initiation, the intrinsic power of the Kundalini begins its work, which through regular meditation (sadhan) will lead the initiated (sadhak) through amazing spiritual experiences and eventually to Self-Realization, i.e. the merger of his Awareness with the Chaitanya.

The tradition of Siddha Yoga is an ancient one, having been passed down over the centuries in India by Siddha Gurus to their disciples. It is described in the ancient Indian texts - the Vedas and the Puranas, in Lord Shri Krishna's Bhagwad Geeta, and even in more recent (13th century) works of Shri Jnaneshwar Maharaj. The sage Shri Vasishtha is known to have initiated Lord Shri Rama into this path as did Lord Shri Krishna initiate Arjuna as stated in the Mahabharata. Shri Jnaneshwar Maharaj was also thus initiated by his spiritual master, Shri Nivruttinath Maharaj. Likewise, Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, by a mere touch, graced Swami Vivekananda with the spiritual power that eventually led him to Self-Realization. This ancient tradition continues to this day through a few Siddha Gurus primarily situated in India, but has been made available in recent years to initiates all over the world.

As mentioned earlier, the important difference between Siddha/Maha Yoga and other Yoga paths is that while followers of other approaches have to make strenuous efforts under the careful direction of appropriate Gurus in order to achieve Self-Realization, followers of Maha Yoga, once initiated, do not need to undertake such arduous efforts. During sadhan, a Maha Yoga initiate will automatically experience the physical and mental practices of other Yoga or spiritual paths depending on the specific requirements of his body, mind and the accumulated impressions of his past deeds (Karma). If an initiate needs specific Asanas and Pranayam (regulated breathing) to purify his body, mind and spirit (Prana), these Yogic practices will happen automatically. If the initiate needs a mantra, he will receive it in a dream or through divine utterances during sadhan. The initiate will also find his spiritual progress getting accelerated and he will be able to attain deeper meditative stages than he had experienced before. Like-wise it is also observed that initiates automatically give up bad habits and addictions, and their eating and sleeping habits also change for the better. In other words, once awakened by a Siddha Guru, the awakened Kundalini Shakti becomes the initiate's Guru, and during his sadhan and otherwise, helps direct his actions and practices to enable him to make rapid and significant progress toward Self-Realization.

- How Can I Get Started on Maha Yoga?

The key to Maha/Siddha Yoga is to have one's dormant Kundalini Energy be awakened by a Siddha Guru. This is usually done during an Initiation (Deeksha) when the Siddha Guru transmits his spiritual energy to the disciple either through touch, word (mantra), glance, or simply through sheer will power. The basic principle underlying these four ways is ultimately the will of the Siddha Guru, with the first three being nothing more than different modes for manifesting the Guru's will. The transmission of spiritual power by the Siddha Guru to the person being initiated is also called Shaktipat, or the descent of spiritual energy – i.e. the descent of spiritual energy from the Guru to the initiated.

In addition to having a Siddha Guru willing to initiate an aspirant into Siddha/Maha Yoga, it is very important for the aspirant himself to have an earnest desire to get initiated and have faith in the Siddha Guru. When these elements are present, an aspirant can get initiated in his/her own home, even without being in the physical presence of a Siddha Guru. By making an earnest request for initiation through a letter/fax/e-mail and fixing a date and time for initiation, an aspirant can get initiated half-way across the world. Some aspirants even get initiated simply by participating in spiritual congregations of initiates during their meditation sessions (sadhan). Others have been known to have received initiation just by reading books on Siddha/Maha Yoga.

Formal Maha Yoga initiation is available to all aspirants without regard to age, sex, religion, race, caste or creed. The aspirant should have an intense desire to obtain direct and actual spiritual experiences that will lead him/her to enlightenment. The aspirant should also be willing to follow certain dietary rules and other restrictions that are intended to ensure rapid and ongoing spiritual progress. The consumption of mind-altering items such as alcohol, drugs and tobacco and non-vegetarian foods (meat and eggs) and enhancers such as onions and garlic are considered to retard spiritual growth and should therefore be avoided following initiation. The aspirant should also be willing to devote one hour every day for spiritual practice/meditation (sadhan). Those aspirants meeting the above criteria should send a request for initiation by letter/fax/e-mail to the Siddha Guru P. P. Narayan Kaka Dhekane Maharaj. They will receive from Kaka Maharaj an initiation letter setting a date and time for initiation with instructions for preparing for initiation.

In addition to the formal Maha Yoga initiation, there is also an introductory approach (precursor) available to those who are interested in Maha Yoga, but for whatever reasons, are not yet desirous of getting formally initiated. This approach can be performed by anyone desirous of getting a taste for what Maha Yoga can help them achieve without making the commitments needed for a formal initiation. It is as follows:

- Sit comfortably, preferably on a padded/carpeted floor or yoga-mat, and close your eyes. Feel a wave of subtle energy rise up along your spine.
- Keep the body completely relaxed.
- Breathe normally and keep the mind engaged in observing your involuntary breathing.
- Think that you are not the body but only the pure air which is the gross manifestation of Prana (Life Energy)
- Let your body be relaxed and free to do whatever happens, just observe your involuntary breathing or any physical or mental activities (kriyas)
- If you find yourself getting distracted by random thoughts do not try to suppress them, instead, direct your attention back to your involuntary breathing or kriyas if they are occurring
- Try this daily for 3 to 18 minutes or more. Do not open your eyes unless you feel the urge to.

Diligent daily practice of this approach, even without getting formally initiated, will lead to a diminishing of the normal clutter in one's brain, providing the practitioner glimpses of Chaitanya Shakti (Universal Life Energy). This is the preliminary stage of the path leading to supreme bliss.

▪ What Happens During Initiation (Deeksha)?

The day of initiation is a special day in the aspirant's life, the day on which he launches on a certain path of spiritual progress and enlightenment. On that day he needs to do a number of things to get ready and get initiated:

- Before the appointed time, an aspirant should get up early, perform his morning routine, take a bath and worship his own Deity (God) as appropriate.
- He should dress in loose garments and sit comfortably (cross-legged or otherwise), all alone in a room at home, on a padded carpet covered by a clean white cloth. Doors and windows to the meditation room should be kept closed for privacy and to reduce any interruptions/distractions.
- He should sit facing East or North, close his eyes at the stipulated time of initiation and contemplate on the image/presence of the Siddha Guru.
- He should inhale rapidly and exhale slowly seven or eight times and then relax his body completely and observe his automatic/normal breathing.
- He should not willfully make any bodily/physical movements, but to the extent that physical movements arise from within he should give such movement absolute freedom.
- Keeping his eyes closed he should devote one hour or more for the meditation.
- During the meditation the aspirant can change his posture for convenience/comfort.
- After the meditation, when his eyes open he should thank his Deity (God) and the Siddha Guru in whatever way his tradition suggests

The experience of each aspirant during initiation is likely to be unique. Experiences of physical feelings and movements and intense mental concentration or even calmness are fairly common. Some aspirants have been known to have automatically put their bodies in yoga postures (Asanas) and conducted various types of rhythmic breathing movements (Pranayam), all without ever having done so before the initiation. Others have experienced soothing sounds, sensations of heat and throbbing along the spine and even seen visions of God as indicated in their belief-systems or religions. Still others have had

feelings of mental calmness, and even bliss. These experiences are referred to as Kriyas.

It is important not to get too concerned about whether one has a specific experience but not another. All these experiences are valid, and specific experiences will depend on the accumulated impressions of an aspirant's past deeds (Karma) and his receptivity to the initiation (Deeksha). The aspirant should just observe the various experiences and enjoy those that are blissful.

After the initiation, the aspirant should follow these instructions:

- Sit for meditation (Sadhan) every day for about an hour at a convenient time (following the above instructions for the initiation day).
- Observe dietary and other restrictions indicated by the Siddha Guru.
- Not sit for meditation for at least four hours after a meal.
- Not narrate one's experiences to others without permission from the Siddha Guru.
- Having performed Sadhan every day, at the end of a month, inform the Siddha Guru of one's spiritual progress.

Regular and diligent practice of Sadhan after initiation will result in the aspirant making rapid spiritual progress. He will continue to experience automatically many of the Kriyas he experienced during the initiation and will gradually begin to experience new ones as his Kundalini energy, with the grace of the Siddha Guru, begins the needed spiritual purification of his body and mind. He will also find himself not experiencing many of the Kriyas he had earlier as they will have done their job of spiritual purification and will not be needed any more. In this manner, the aspirant will gradually reach higher Yogic states to where he will begin to actually experience the presence of Prana/Chaitanya in himself and in everything around him. In those advanced stages he will not have a need to observe any of the restrictions and his Kriyas will also stop automatically. He will then have achieved Self-Realization and will be in a state of constant bliss ready for liberation.

▪ What will I Experience as a Maha Yogi?

Once a person is initiated into Maha/Siddha Yoga by a Siddha Guru, he/she will begin a process of spiritual purification which will eventually lead to Self Realization. The initiate's dormant Kundalini Shakti will have been awakened by the Siddha Guru during the initiation (Deeksha), and depending on the accumulated impressions of his past deeds (his Karma) and the diligence with which he practices meditation (Sadhan) he will likely have amazing spiritual experiences on his way to Self Realization.

Throughout this journey, although the Siddha Guru will always be there for specific guidance, the initiate will be guided automatically by his own awakened Kundalini energy, especially during the conduct of his Sadhan. Diligent practice of Sadhan will gradually result in the opening and cleansing of the spiritual pathways needed for the Kundalini to eventually find its way to the spiritual center in the brain (Sahasrara Chakra) resulting in the aspirant's Awareness merging with the Chaitanya, i.e. the aspirant achieving Self-Realization, and eventually, liberation.

While no two initiates will have the same set of spiritual experiences on the road to Self Realization, most aspirants will go through four stages. While each stage has unique characteristics that define it, the transitions between consecutive stages are not distinct or abrupt, with one stage gradually blending into the next:

1) The Initial Stage (Arambha-avastha):

Arambha-avastha means the beginning state. In this Initial Stage, the Kundalini energy begins her work with physical movements and sensations, which an aspirant will experience involuntarily during his Sadhana. These might include Yogic Asanas (physical postures), Bandhas (locking of limbs/abdomen to prevent the movement of breath), Pranayam (breath-control/rhythmic breathing), etc., which help to regularize flow of the Universal Life Energy (Chaitanya/Prana) throughout the body. Yogic Asanas will bring the needed steadiness to the body while the Bandhas and Pranayam will bring on a feeling of lightness in the body.

During this stage the initiate is also likely to experience during Sadhan some of the characteristic symptoms of the awakened Kundalini. These might include, but not be limited to, these illustrative experiences (kriyas):

- a) Sensations of throbbing at the base of the spine (Mooladhara chakra), the Universal Life Energy (Prana) rising from the Mooladhara to the cerebrum (Sahasrara) and movement of Prana in different parts of the body, leading to a feeling of ecstasy.
- b) Posture becoming steady resulting in a loss of body-awareness and an immersion into a trance-like state.
- c) Feeling that the Kundalini Shakti has taken control of the body and is making the initiate perform various Asanas, Bandhas and Pranayams.
- d) Seeing divine visions, hearing divine sounds, experiencing divine tastes, touch, etc.
- e) Sight getting attracted to the space between the eyebrows during meditation, breathing stops temporarily and it becomes difficult to open one's eyes, while feeling a sense of bliss.
- f) Body begins to shake as soon as the initiate sits for meditation, followed by a sense of happiness.
- g) Feeling a sensation of intoxication (without having taken any intoxicant) like being drunk on Divinity.

Each aspirant's experience during this stage will be unique, and will depend to a large extent on his Karma and the diligence with which he sits for Sadhan. There is a tendency at this initial stage for aspirants to dwell on what experiences they are having and which ones they aren't, and being concerned that they are not making appropriate progress if they are not experiencing all the ones they have read about or have heard their co-aspirants talk about. This is a very counter-productive exercise because it is not at all necessary for an initiate to get all or any of the experiences stated above. These experiences are not ends in themselves but are only the means to achieve the specific type of spiritual purification needed by each aspirant at this stage. So the initiate will only experience those activities/feelings/sensations that are uniquely essential to his spiritual progress. Focusing on the experiences themselves will only lead to enhancing one's ego or to an unnecessary feeling of despair, both of which will detract from making further spiritual progress. It is important at this stage to be aware of what one is experiencing, enjoy those experiences that are pleasant or blissful, but not dwell too much on the experiences per se. Rest assured that if the aspirant (Sadhak) is diligent in sitting for Sadhan regularly, the awakened Kundalini Shakti will also be doing its job of spiritual purification with great diligence. When the Universal Life Energy (Prana/Chaitanya) moves freely and regularly throughout the Sadhak's body and he begins to feel its divine presence in him, the

Kundalini Shakti will have helped him achieve the results of the Arambha-avastha.

2) The Second Stage (Ghata-avastha):

In this second stage, which usually overlaps with the first, the aspirant gradually begins to lose interest in material desires and begins to develop a sense of detachment from worldly attractions. This does not mean that he has to, or will, give up on all things material. He may continue to live in the material world, if he so chooses, but he will begin to develop a sense of non-attachment to material things.

As his sense of non-attachment to the material world begins to develop, the aspirant will gradually find himself becoming more and more immersed in the Universal Life Energy (Prana/Chaitanya). He will begin to observe Prana/Chaitanya in everything he sees with his eyes. He will feel Prana/Chaitanya in everything he touches with his skin. He will get a whiff of Prana/Chaitanya in everything he smells with his nose. He will sense Prana/Chaitanya in everything he tastes with his tongue. And he will hear the sound of Prana/Chaitanya in everything he hears with his ears. In other words, he will begin to sense the entire material universe as manifestations of Prana/Chaitanya. While the First Stage results in the aspirant feeling Prana/Chaitanya within himself, the Second Stage leads the aspirant to sense Prana/Chaitanya in everything. It is at this stage that he truly experiences the all-pervading universality of Prana/Chaitanya.

It is important for the aspirant to continue to practice meditation (Sadhan) during the Second Stage. As the first two stages overlap to some extent, the aspirant may continue to experience during Sadhan some of the kriyas described in the First Stage. However, by this time, many of the physical experiences will have been attenuated/diminished and the aspirant will find himself sensing Prana/Chaitanya within and outside himself, not just during Sadhan but at all times. The spiritual path for the Kundalini Shakti to find its way toward the spiritual center in the brain (Sahasrara Chakra) will have been opened and cleansed, and as a result it will be able to move freely along this path. This will result in the aspirant gaining control over the flow of Prana within himself and achieving a certain stability of mind.

3) The Third Stage (Parichaya-avastha):

Having opened and cleansed the spiritual pathways during the Second Stage for the Kundalini energy to move freely within the aspirant,

during the Third Stage the Kundalini Shakti moves to his Sahasrara Chakra (spiritual center in the brain) and merges with it. This results in the aspirant's Awareness merging with the Chaitanya, or the Universal Life Energy, and the aspirant begins to achieve complete serenity of mind. His perspective of the universe changes to where he constantly sees the universe as nothing but a manifestation of Prana/Chaitanya. He sees that oneness in everyone and everything.

At this stage not only does the aspirant experience the universality of Prana/Chaitanya but he is also able to begin to exert control over it. He develops an ability to exhaust all the accumulated Karma of his previous lives without having the necessity to be reborn again and again. As a result he reaches the status of Siddha which enables him to gain extraordinary powers including the ability to awaken the dormant Kundalini Shakti in others. He achieves his goal of Self-Realization, and having done so, can choose to continue to live in this world as long as he desires or to liberate himself from it at will. He is no longer an "aspirant" but is now a true "yogi". Some yogis choose to dwell in this state for extended periods with the goal of helping others achieve Self-Realization. Others move on to the next stage of Liberation.

4) The Fourth Stage (Nishpatti-avastha):

This is the final stage, where the yogi, having achieved Self-Realization liberates himself from the cycle of birth and death. He achieves a state of bliss (Samadhi) where he is completely beyond the physical confines of this universe. He feels neither hunger nor thirst, nor heat nor cold. His Awareness no longer dwells in the material, but constantly resides in Prana/Chaitanya. When he chooses to depart from his body he does not need to be reborn and his Spirit/Awareness stays merged with the Chaitanya forever.

