

## Yogic Arts

Yoga is a practical path to self-realization, a means of attaining enlightenment by purifying the entire being, so that the mind-body can experience the absolute reality underlying the illusions of everyday life. It is one of the most famous of Hinduism's philosophical traditions, now practised by Hindus, Christians, agnostics and atheists alike.

Yoga is less a religion than a mode of spiritual progress, in which bodily discipline influences consciousness, and concentrating the mind gives the adept mastery over matter. Simple exercises are said to lend the adept "yogic powers", such as levitation, for which yoga is renowned. Advanced yogis claim to possess extraordinary powers, such as the ability to disappear at will, but they do not generally use them in public.

Whereas Raja Yoga rejects the body as an illusion, Hatha Yoga uses it as a method of liberation. Hatha yogis practise "the yoga of force" to discipline and purify the body so that they can construct a new "subtle" body that is immune to *karma* and disease. Once purified, the subtle body-mind attains the ecstatic state of *samadhi*, and intensive meditation then leads it to release. Kundalini Yoga seeks the union of Shiva and Shakti within the adept's subtle body by drawing the "serpent" of immanent female power up to the energy centre at the top of the head, the location of transcendent godhead.

*Yoga has different methods of uniting the self with the godhead (brahman). An adept of Raja Yoga — which emphasizes knowledge (jñana) and devotion (bhakti) as paths to release — is depicted in this 16th-century miniature.*



## Yoga



A 7th-century relief at Mamallapuram shows the god Shiva granting a boon to the sage Bhagvathi, who is standing in a yoga position on one leg.

Yoga is the science and praxis of obtaining liberation (*moksha*) from the material world. Like Buddhism and Jainism, it not only points the way to release, but offers a practical means of arriving there. The yoga that is famous in the West today is the Hatha Yoga (see pp.88-9) of bodily positions (*asanas*); this is only a small branch of yoga, however, whose diverse philosophies and forms of liberation constitute one of the traditional six systems of Indian thought. Bodily *asanas* are a means of purifying and then recreating the body so that it can be used as a tool to achieve release from *maya*, the world of illusion (see pp.130-31).

Although yoga is most often taken to mean "union", a more literal equiva-

blown by the wind. When the wind is stilled, the broken images and continual flux on the surface of the lake are shown in fact to reveal true forms, solid and constant like the permanence of absolute godhead. Similarly, yoga aims to still the wandering and flux of consciousness that fills the mind with continually changing perceptions and thoughts. When a beginner attempts even the most basic yogic exercise, such as concentrating on a single point or on the breath, the mind soon begins to wander, distracting the practitioner with imaginary conversations, memories and random thoughts.

Yoga emerges from a dualistic philosophy which postulates that matter (*praktiti*) and spirit (*purusha*) are fundamentally separate entities, and that the spirit is bound in matter, and thus in *maya*, by the moral history of its individual *karma* (past actions). Accordingly, we are continually reborn in the endless round of *samsara* (rebirth) because we have to experience the consequences of our *karma*. Desire is the cause of every action, and it is the desire to act and live fruitfully in this world that the yogi must first eliminate if he or she is to eradicate the consequences of past actions and prevent new *karma* from accumulating.

The more esoteric types of yogic thought are possibly derived from the Indian shamanism that predated the coming of the Aryans (see pp.12-13). Yoga can use shamanistic techniques to induce trance and possession, and believes in an "inner heat" (*tapas*) that can "burn off" the coils of worldly reality. But whereas shamanism aims always to gain control over the powers or deities of the universe, the yogi strives to transcend these powers and reach a reality beyond even the gods.

## SHIVA, LORD OF YOGA



A modern print showing Shiva seated in a yoga posture in the mountain heights of Kailasa.

Shiva is Hinduism's Lord of Yoga. He is often depicted seated in the *padmasana* (lotus), *siddhasana* (master) or *sukhasana* (comfortable) yogic postures, his concentration (*dharana*) fixed in meditation upon the experience of "pure consciousness".

Central to Shaivite philosophy is his paradoxical nature as an erotic ascetic: the greatest of all ascetics, he is at the same time the god of the *linga* (phallus). His image thus embodies the Tantric (see pp.110-11) and Hatha Yogic synthesis of yoga and *bhoga* (sexual enjoyment) that aims to transcend the limits of the material world. Shiva Yoga is therefore non-dualist: it does not postulate an absolute distinction between soul and body, but attempts to generate a yogic "inner heat" within the physical body to transform it into a subtle body capable of enlightenment. In the *Shiva-Purana*, yoga is defined as the restraint of all activity other than meditation upon Shiva as "pure consciousness".

The first Vedic mention of yoga is in the *Katha Upanishad*, where it is likened to a chariot in which the reasoning consciousness is the driver, and the body is the cart. Mastery of the body is thus achieved by control of the senses. This text is an early example of the basic yogic belief that the mind and body are not inherently separate but linked — that bodily austerity can influence consciousness, and that control over the senses can give mastery over *prakriti* (matter). This idea was developed by Hatha Yoga and by yogic methods involving the concept of Kundalini (see pp.94–5) in the technique of *pranayama* (breath control), whereby the higher and lower consciousnesses were said to be animated by the same vital force (*prana*).

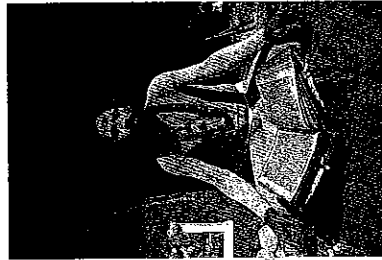
The *Bhagavad Gita* (see pp.60–61) is sometimes described as being in some sense a book of yoga. It emphasizes self-discipline and control over the senses as essential techniques of a yoga that it defines as the “balance” of the individual and universal consciousness. “The wavering, restless mind goes wandering on,” Krishna advises the despondent Arjuna: “you must draw it back, and have it focused every time on the soul ... Yoga is a harmony,” he later continues, “a harmony in eating and resting, in sleeping and keeping awake: a perfection in whatever one does.”

The yoga that Krishna expounds in the *Bhagavad Gita* is the *karma* (action) yoga of self-control, and *bhakti* yoga — the way of “devotion”. *Bhakti* (see pp.58–9) is essentially a theistic doc-

trine, imagining a separate, personal and active deity who can be reached by the power of the devotee’s love and yearning. Rather than striving to escape from the illusory world of ordinary reality, the *bhakti* yogis embraced it, seeing everywhere the manifest glory of the god they worship. Krishna makes *bhakti* the highest form of yogic discipline. “Of all the yogis, those who worship me fervently, self-lost in love, come closest to my heart, attuned to me.”

The form of yoga that is known in the West today was first elaborated in the *Yoga Sutra* attributed to Patanjali. Some scholars maintain that this text was written as early as the 2nd century BC, but it was probably formulated at a later date. The original text comprises only 195 brief sentences or aphorisms; a mass of later commentaries has been added through the centuries. Of these, the *Yoga-bhashya* (*Elucidation of Yoga*) is said to have been composed by the legendary sage Vyasa in c.AD500, and the *Taittiriya-vaishtaradi* (*Science of Reality*) of Vahaspati Mishra was probably added as late as c.AD850.

The system of thought in the *Yoga Sutra* is dualistic, with Patanjali outlining a path to a liberation (*kaivalya*) that involves a fundamental detachment of the individual soul from the world of matter, and also from other souls. His method of escape is mental concentration — the gradual withdrawal of attention from worldly experience, and its diversion toward a permanent non-illusory consciousness (*purusha*) within.



An adept practising yoga on the banks of the sacred river Ganges at Varanasi.

## EIGHT LIMBS OF RAJA YOGA

There are eight “limbs” to Patanjali’s Raja Yoga (Royal Yoga). The first five deal with training the body and the last three teach the perfection of the self. *Yama* and *niyama* form the ethical core of the discipline.

*Yama* (self-control or restraint) regulates the yogi’s external activities, and is based upon the five moral rules of non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, chastity and non-acquisitiveness.

*Niyama* (observance) lists five regulations governing personal behaviour: purity, contentment, austerity, the study of scripture and devotion.

*Asana* (posture) suggests that the yogi should be seated in certain positions when meditating. The many *asanas* that are familiar to Western practitioners of yoga are not mentioned in the *Yoga Sutra*, which simply advises the yogi to find a suitable position so that he or she remains comfortable and is not disturbed.

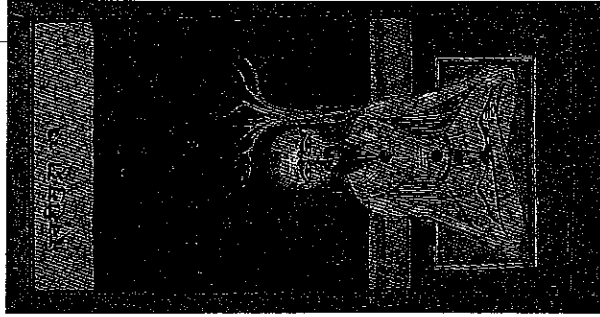
*Pranayama* (breath control) is the most basic yogic technique. It is said that by controlling the breath the yogi can control both the body and the mind.

*Pratyahara* (inhibition) is the withdrawal of the senses from their objects, thus eliminating contact with the material world that binds the individual soul to *samsara* (rebirth). “As the tortoise retracts its limbs into the fuddle of the body,” says one yoga text, “so the yogi should withdraw the senses in to himself”.

*Dharana* (concentration) is thought without the aid of the senses; it precedes meditation and involves the gathering of psychic energy through intense concentration upon an internal image, whether this be a deity, *mandala*, or any other object.

*Dhyana* (meditation) is a deepening of concentration until consciousness becomes a “one-directional flow” toward a single inner object.

*Samadhi* (ecstasy) is a trance in which the yogi is no longer even conscious of meditating. It is “the perfect forgetting of [the] meditation” that precedes it. In this ecstatic state the distinction between the meditating subject and the object is lost; the individual consciousness being transformed into full awareness of the universal Self.



This miniature painting illustrates the principal asana (posture) of Raja Yoga.



## Hatha Yoga

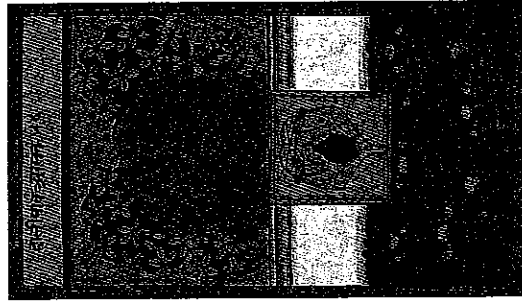
The aim of Hatha Yoga ("Yoga of Force") is to make the body a worthwhile receptacle for self-realization. For this reason, it is the most physical of all the yogic paths. Rather than rejecting the body as a useless tool of *maya* (illusion; see pp.130-31), Hatha Yoga embraces it as the instrument of release. Hatha yogis see no distinction between lower and higher consciousness, or between the body and the mind, but perceive them all as manifestations of the same "life force" (*prana*).

The physical prowess vital to all yogic disciplines becomes paramount in Hatha Yoga, which employs an astonishing array of physical exercises to harness and manipulate the life force. These primarily involve the use of bodily postures (*asanas*), mental concentration and breath control (*pranayama*). The discipline has generally been rejected by the more orthodox schools of Hinduism, which point to its "body magic" and the apparent acquisition of supernatural powers as evidence of spiritual decadence. This has not lessened its influence, however, and the practical bodily exercises and methods of mental training it employs have in recent years become by far the most popular yogic techniques in the West.

Hatha Yoga was first propagated by the Kampatha sect whose founder was

the 10th-century ascetic Goraknatha, also the most important guru of the Natha *sadhus* (see pp.70-71). The Kampatha and Natha *siddhas* (yogic masters) sought liberation by alchemically transforming the body into a "subtle" yogic body immune to *karma* and disease, and endowed with supernatural powers. Physical exercises such as breath control were utilized to encourage the flow of vital energy into the "central channel" (*sushumna nadi*) that leads from the bottom *chakra* (see p.95) at the base of the pelvis all the way up to the Thousand-petalled Lotus at the top of the head, the seat of Shiva, who is "pure consciousness".

Hatha Yoga places great emphasis on purificatory processes. The first level of attainment is the removal of disease in the body, after which the adept eliminates the *dosha* (impurities) that limit his or her further progress. A new "perfect" body is then made from the *soma* or *amrita* (nectar of immortality) that fills the top *chakra*. This divine elixir is said to drip down from the top *chakra* to be burnt away by the "flaming sun" at the bottom of the *sushumna* channel; by reversing this flow, adepts can burn away their ordinary body instead, and build a new immortal one from the overflowing nectar. The yogi then transforms his or her



A page from an 18th-century yogic textbook illustrating various asanas (postures) and mudras (gestures).

"perfect" body into a divine one, and thereby attains the state of godhead. He or she may then delight in the *lila* (play) of the creative power of *maya* (world illusion), changing shape at will while moving through the manifold forms of creation.

Practitioners of Hatha Yoga claim that their methods are the only way to achieve immortality. They believe that it is only through a "perfect" body that the individual soul can find release, and they reject not only the sacred Hindu scriptures but also the mind-orientated techniques of Raja Yoga (see pp.86-7).

### ASANAS

The most widely used manual on Hatha Yoga is the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, composed by Swatmarama in the 14th century AD. The *Pradipika* is essentially a practical guide to Hatha Yoga's core techniques, and it describes sixteen *asanas* (postures) suitable for meditation, most of which are based on the

cross-legged "lotus position". *Asana* literally means "seat" and probably first referred to the surface on which a yogi sits to meditate. It has now come to mean the many positions outlined in modern yogic texts. The *Pradipika* describes the *asanas* in considerable detail, since they not only aid mental concentration but also cure a number of physical ailments and keep the body in good health.

### CHRIST AS A YOGI

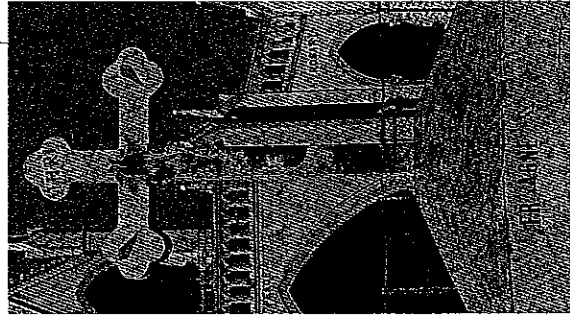
Legend has it that the missing years in the Biblical account of Christ's life were spent in Kashmir learning the arts of Hatha Yoga. Some Hindus, most of them Shaivite *sadhus*, maintain that Christ's mastery of illusion and apparently occult power derived from his training as a yogi. They cite his ability to walk on water and perform minor miracles, such as turning water into wine, as proof of his yogic prowess, seeing in his powers the *siddhis* (accomplishments) that are a by-product of yogic discipline (see pp.90-91). Above all it is the story of the crucifixion that has fuelled the myth of

Christ as *siddha* (yogic master). The legend relates that Christ did not die on the cross, but (through breath control) stopped his heartbeat to simulate the physical condition of death. As in Hatha Yoga, he used his body as a metaphor for spiritual advancement, taking on it the sins of his devotees, which could then be burnt off by austerity. According to the legend, Christ re-animated himself after three days in deep trance and, after appearing briefly to his disciples, returned to Kashmir, where he later died.

Like Hindu deities, images of Christ, such as this one outside a church in Bombay, are garlanded with flowers.



This Hatha yogi is assuming the knikkuta (cock) posture to harness the flow of prana (life force) in his "subtle" body.



## Yogic Powers



Female adepts prepare to undertake the celebrated yogic art of walking on fire.

Hindu, Buddhist and Jain myth abounds with tales of holy men who have acquired the most extraordinary supernatural powers by the practice of asceticism. Ascetics have always been feared as much as respected in India for their seemingly magical powers, their ability to change shape, and the sureness of their curses.

*Siddhis* are "accomplishments" in the yogic arts, an adept of which is known as a *siddha* — a master not only of his or her own body and mind but also of the forces of nature. *Siddhis* are said to be by-products of yoga, and may appear after a relatively short time. The yogi should not strive to attain supernatural powers, but should accept them as a natural consequence of asceticism, and

as signs of "success". By recognizing that the world is *maya* (illusion), the yogi gains the creative power to manipulate it on the way to *mahasiddhi*, the "great accomplishment" that is *moksha* (release). "He who has conquered the senses", declares the *Yoga-Bija*, a well-known text, "... can, by his own will, assume various shapes and make them vanish again."

The *Yoga Upanishads* acknowledge two classes of yogic powers: the *kalpita* (artificial) and the *akalpita* (non-artificial) *siddhis*. "Artificial" *siddhis* are transient, having only a temporary effect, and may be attained with relative ease, by using herbs, ritual, magic, *mantras*, or "elixirs". *Akalpita siddhis*, on the other hand, are derived from *svatantrya* (self-reliance): they are permanent and are recognized as the mark of a true adept.

A host of Indian stories describes determined yogis who can perform almost any feat. Legends have them prophesying the future, growing to the size of a mountain or shrinking to a grain of dust, producing fire from their bodies, assuming any form, even dissolving the universe with their power. Popular religion in India often associates yogis more with their powers than with their spiritual quest, but yogic texts themselves warn against the "temptation" of allowing *siddhis* to

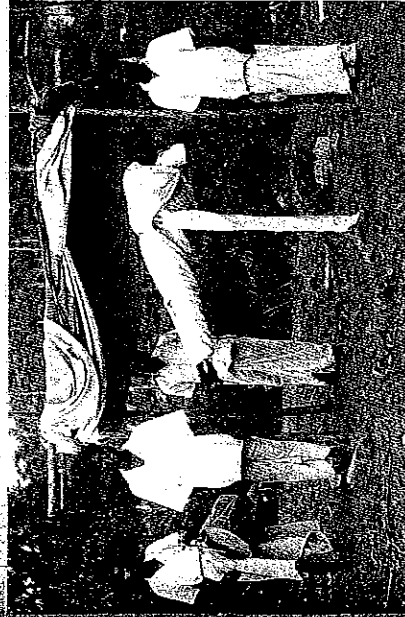
Levitation exercises are part of yogic instruction at the Maharishi's ashram in the USA.



divert the adept from his or her path. Just as *maya* must be transcended, so must the powers of creative illusion. The *Yoga Upanishads* advise ascetics to keep their *siddhis* secret, because public display would disrupt a life of quietude, and may fill the individual self with a pride that could only bring *karmic* entanglement.

A legend relates that as the Buddha was walking by a river he met an ascetic performing austerities. The ascetic declared that by standing on one leg for forty years he had attained the power to walk on water, and so set off across the

river. The Buddha was unimpressed and asked him what the purpose was of wasting forty years to walk on water when a ferry was moored at the bank. Like the Jain Fordmaker Mahavira (see p.42-3), the Buddha advised against the practice of yogic powers, declaring that rather than being an aid to contemplation, such *siddhis* were an obstacle in the renunciant's path. He did not condemn them outright, accepting that they may be useful as aids to concentration, but he condoned their use only if they led to "compassion" and to the alleviation of suffering.



A levitation demonstration in Sri Lanka: the chief performer is supported on a thin stick draped in white cloth.

### LEVITATION

A levitating yogi is perhaps one of the most enduring images that the West has of India. *Laghiman* (levitation) is one of the eight "great powers", but yogic texts insist that its practice should remain secret so as to avoid corruption. It is described as the ability to become airborne like the tuft of a reed, and usually accompanies intensive exercises in breath control (*pranayama*).

### THE MAHASIDDHIS

There are generally believed to be eight *mahasiddhis* (great powers) that accompany the path to release, which may be attained by a life of austerity and penances. The *mahasiddhis* are: the power to become small or invisible; the power to grow large (as large as the universe); the

power to become light and so walk on water or levitate; the power to become as heavy as the world; the power of irresistible will; the power of "mastery"; the power of subjugating nature; and the power of fulfillment of all desires.

A yogi buries his head in the sand as a form of penance.



## Prana

The literal meaning of *prana* is "breathing forth", but it is commonly taken to mean "life force" or a "vital energy" that permeates all beings. The practice of *pranayama* (breath control) attempts to "expand" this life energy and is said to rejuvenate the body-mind. It is believed that, ultimately, *pranayama* can lead to bodily immortality.

In texts of the *Vedas*, the word *prana* is used to denote a "universal life force" or "vibratory power", linking it to the Hindu idea that sound preceded the creation of the universe and that reality is held together by the vibration of the sacred syllable *Om* (see pp. 108-9). In the *Upanishads*, *prana* is one of the most frequently used epithets for the *atman* (soul). Several passages examine the relationships between *prana* and the five organs of the "self" — speech, breath, sight, hearing and thought, which in turn correspond to the five natural forces — fire, wind, sun, moon and the four points of the compass.

Just as the *atman* is an inner spark of the outer *brahman* (godhead), with which it is identical, so *prana* is the life force both within and without. *Prana* is said to have five aspects variously located within the human body: the *prana* (ascending breath) pervades the region from the throat to the heart, and includes both inhalation and exhalation; the *apana* is located below the navel, strengthening the large intestine and helping with the excretion of waste; the *samana* is located between the heart and the navel, and controls digestion; the *udana* (up-breath) is between the throat and the brain, and is responsible for the face, eyes, ears, speech and brain, controlling access to higher

states of consciousness; the *vyana* pervades the entire human body, coordinating energy flows and facilitating basic functions such as movement. *Prana* and *apana* sometimes refer to inhalation and exhalation respectively.

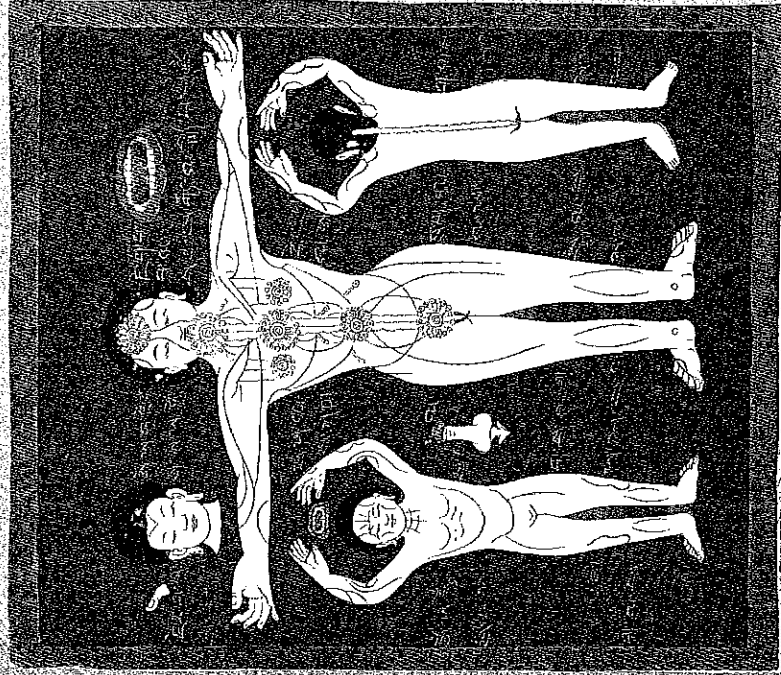
"Breath expansion" (*pranayama*) is the "fourth limb" of Patanjali's eight limbs of Raja Yoga which is laid out in the *Yoga Sutra* from the 2nd century BC (see p. 86). It works by breath control specifically by prolonging the duration of the withheld breath, which is said to prolong life. *Pranayama* is that which arouses the *kundalini* serpent (see pp. 94-5), and it is said to strengthen and rejuvenate the body. Its most important function is to create a method through which the mind can be controlled. It is the most essential yogic technique — yoga without breath control is often likened to attempting to cross the ocean in an unbaked earthenware vessel.

There are three phases of *pranayama* — inhalation, retention and exhalation of breath through the left and right "channels" (*nadi*) in the nose. The left channel is the *ida nadi*. It is linked with the female, the moon, the colour red and death, and is thought to be "cooling". It influences the left side of the body and controls thought. The flow of breath through the right nostril is drawn through the *pingala nadi*. It is linked with the male, the colour white, the sun and life, and is believed to be "warming". It controls the right side of the body and regulates its *shakti* (energy) flows. The aim of *pranayama* is to balance the left and right channels. If this is achieved, it is thought to engender spiritual enlightenment and produce health, strength and longevity.

## ENERGY CHANNELS

Each phase of breath stimulates a particular energy cluster within the human body. Once awakened, each cluster is said to transmit its own energy which may transform the body-

mind of the adept. Destructive energy may be produced by over-concentration upon the *apana* breath. However, by diverting this energy "upward" to the heart and throat clusters, the negative and positive forces are united, and the body-mind made whole.



Figures in this modern painting based on a Tibetan original, show the body's veins and centres of breath control. Harnessing the flow of energy through the breath channels is said to lead to four stages of yogic attainment: "perspiration", "trembling", "jumping like a frog" and "lightness" or "levitation".

## THE FOUR REQUISITES

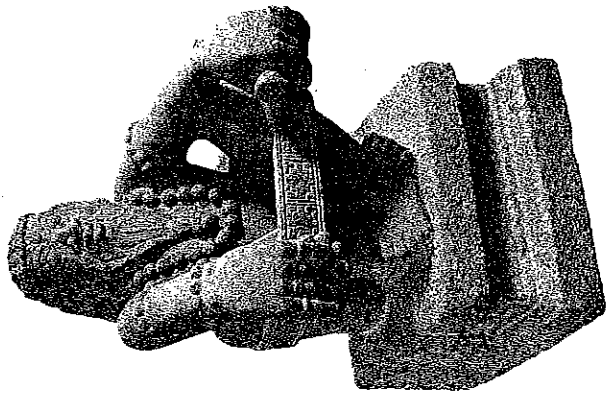
There are four requisites of successful *pranayama*. The first is "right place" (*sthanam*), preferably somewhere quiet and cool, away from distractions; secondly, it must be the "right time" (*kala*), ideally the hours before dawn when the stomach is neither

full nor empty. A beginner should only practise *pranayama* for five to ten minutes at a time, but a more advanced practitioner may take up to an hour. The third requisite is *mita-ahara* (right diet); this also includes "right posture" which should be the *padmasana* or *siddhasana* position. The seated body

should be held erect with hands placed on the knees and the eyes should be closed. The practitioner should start with "normal" breath and a thought-free mind. Lastly is *nadi-shuddhi*, the purity of the energy "channels" (*nadi*) through which the breath is "filled in" and "thrown out".



## Meditation



This 16th-century figure from Tamil Nadu shows a bearded sage seated in meditation.

Meditation (*dhyana*) is the means by which the purified body-mind reaches the deepest concentration or ecstasy (*samadhi*) and thence release to the ultimate goal and final limb of Raja Yoga (see p.87) in which the individual self is totally absorbed in the godhead. In Buddhism, intense visualization techniques, which are fundamental to all forms of yoga, have been raised to an unsurpassed level of sophistication. Only by "one-directional" concentration upon a single object is the mind stilled and the self annihilated.

*Dhyana*, the yoga of meditation, is the seventh of Patanjali's eight limbs of Raja Yoga. Through meditation, the body is first "perfected" and freed from the binds of *karma* (see pp.24-5) that

hold it in the cycle of rebirth. Once mastered, it ceases to distract the mind, which can then be fixed in meditation on the Absolute. The *Bhagavad Gita* (see pp.60-61) places the yoga of meditation above the scriptures and knowledge (*jnana*) as a path to liberation. "When your mind, which may be wavering in the contradictions of many scriptures, shall rest unshaken in divine contemplation," Krishna teaches, "then the goal of yoga is yours." The mind must first be stilled so that pure consciousness can "burn unflinching in a windless place". Here is Patanjali's sixth limb - concentration (*dharana*) - which must itself be transcended if the meditator is to lose awareness of the individual self.

Yogic texts dating from the 1st millennium AD differentiate between formal (*saguna*) and formless (*nirguna*) meditation. Formless meditation, the total absorption of the meditator into him- or herself, was considered too difficult for most practitioners. They were consequently taught the way of formal meditation, in which the adept focuses his or her attention on a specific object. This may either be an object of particular sacred significance such as a deity, a *mandala* or a *yantra* (see p.101), or it may be a simple object such as a stone or a leaf. The only objects which cannot be chosen as a focus for meditation are those which may arouse feelings of desire in the meditator.

The Bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism (see pp. 38-9) are not gods, despite the worship their great images often receive, but resplendent objects of meditation, whose every detail is remembered and then visualized in the

mind's eye. By deepening his or her concentration the adept then internalizes this object by visualizing it. The more complex Mahayana techniques take this to its greatest possible intensity, imagining every hair on a Bodhisattva's head until the inner image is as lucid as if it were seen with the outer eyes. When all distinction between the subject and object has gone, and the adept is no longer aware that he or she is meditating, the ecstatic state of *samadhi* is attained.



The peace and tranquility of Gangotri on the upper Ganges make it a favoured site for meditation.

Tantric diagrams, such as this coloured mandala, from an 18th-century manuscript, are used as aids in mind-focusing.

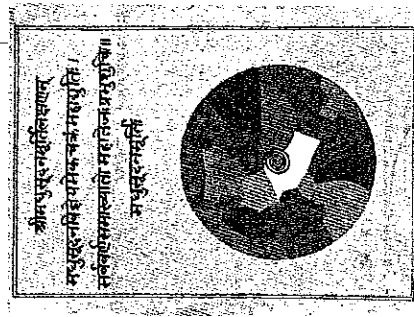
## THE THREE OBSTACLES

There are said to be three kinds of thought that arise in the mind as "obstacles" to concentration.

Firstly is *Vichara*, the existential pondering in which the self poses unanswerable yet seemingly crucial questions such as "Who am I?" or "What is reality?". Secondly are *Vitarka*, the myriad negative thoughts that arise from experience. Patanjali recommended that these could be countered with "positive" states of mind such as compassion. Finally is *Viveka*, an awareness of and attachment to the dual nature of the world.

## DHYANA ASANA

According to the teachers of *dhyana asana*, the place of meditation should be quiet, cool and free from distractions. After finding a comfortable spot, the adept should assume a basic sitting posture (*asana*): cross-legged with both knees touching the floor and with the spine held in a vertical position. The hands are then placed in the *dhyana mudra* ("seal of meditation") position in which the left hand is rested palm up on the folded legs and the right hand is placed on top, also palm up, with the thumb tips touching.



श्रीमत्पुस्तकशिल्लिसणम्  
संस्कृतलिङ्गयोगिककर्मपरुषि।  
सर्ववैश्यास्यातो महानेनप्ररुषि।  
संस्कृतसूक्ति

## Mantras



"Om mani padme hum" ("Om! The jewel is in the lotus") is Buddhism's most powerful mantra, seen here painted on a wall in a Kathmandu street.

The word *mantra* can be variously explained, but the root is in the Sanskrit verb *man* (to think). A *mantra* is a thought manifest in, or encapsulated by, a sacred utterance that possesses profound spiritual significance. Sound holds a key place in Hindu thought. Some writers believe that it preceded the creation of the universe, and its vibrations are thought to bind the atoms of the world. *Mantras* are sacred syllables that encapsulate particular forms of cosmic power (*shakti*). There are different forms of *mantra*, such as the "seed" (*bija*) *mantra*, which is thought to be an energy pervading both the human body and the universe. The deities are believed to be manifestations of *bija mantras*: Shiva, for example, is

linked with the mantra "hrim" and Kali is associated with the syllable "krim". A *mantra* need not possess verbal meaning; what is important is its sound. Complex *mantras*, which are built up from a series of sacred syllables, are often recited without an exact knowledge of what they signify. Many sacred Hindu texts, such as the *Vedas*, have been passed from generation to generation, at times orally, although not everyone understands the archaic Sanskrit in which they were composed. A devotee reciting the sacred syllables "absorbs" the power incorporated in the sound of the words. For example, the "root" *mantra* "Om" (see pp.108-9) is said to be the sound of vibration from which the universe was created.

## SOUND

There are generally believed to be four classes of sound (*shabda*): supreme sound (*para shabda*) is the most subtle of the four, and is the sound made by the base *chakra*, visible sound (*pashyanti shabda*) is associated with the heart and is manifested as the prime syllable *Om*; middle sound (*madhyama shabda*) incorporates the basic sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet and is the source of secondary *mantras*; manifest sound (*vaikhari shabda*) is the sound of human speech, and is considered the lowest of the four classes.



Walking to the right of a mani wall, inscribed with a "jewel" mantra, is thought to generate the same power as reciting it.

By reciting it, the devotee partakes of the power of creation. *Om shakti* pervades the universe and, consequently, its sound as a *mantra* incorporates the entire range of human intonation, starting at the back of the mouth with the first element "A", passing through the sacred "humming" of the middle element, and ending in closed lips with the final "M".

If a guru feels that a devotee lacks the spiritual knowledge to attempt Hatha and Raja Yoga, he may suggest that the devotee first spend twelve years reciting sacred *mantras*. Mantra Yoga is said to be a gradual path to wisdom, on which the yogi can accumulate a host of *siddhis* (accomplishments). Many orthodox Hindus still see Mantra Yoga as a magical system which has origins in the intonations chanted by Vedic priests during sacrifices. These *brahmin* priests derived much authority from their claims to be able to summon the gods by uttering the correct sounds, thereby becoming more powerful than the gods themselves. Similarly, in Hinduism, the guru possesses knowledge of Mantra Yoga, and a *mantra* is useless to a student until a guru has ritually endowed it with power.

## JAIN MANTRAS

The most famous Jain *mantra* is the *panchamaskara* (the "five homages"), which is recited at almost every Jain ritual and spiritual event. Like the Jain universe, it is said to have no origin in time, and to possess no human author, but modern scholars generally attribute it to the 2nd century AD.

Unlike many of the Hindu *mantras*, the "five homages"

has a specific meaning. It takes the form of five statements addressed to the five principal Jain ascetics, the *parameshthias* ("those who are situated on the highest plane"). The statements are: "Homage to the omniscient ones. Homage to the liberated. Homage to the teachers. Homage to the preceptors. Homage to all the monks of the world." This *mantra* is thought to produce extraordinary accomplish-

ments (*siddhis*) - such as the ability to levitate and to fly - and to provide immunity from human and supernatural attack. Its recitation is believed to grant worldly success, to destroy pride and also to undermine the dominance of the self. Due to its capacity to "burn away" past *karma*, the *panchamaskara* is believed to have a power equal to that gained by performing ascetic practices.



## Mandalas

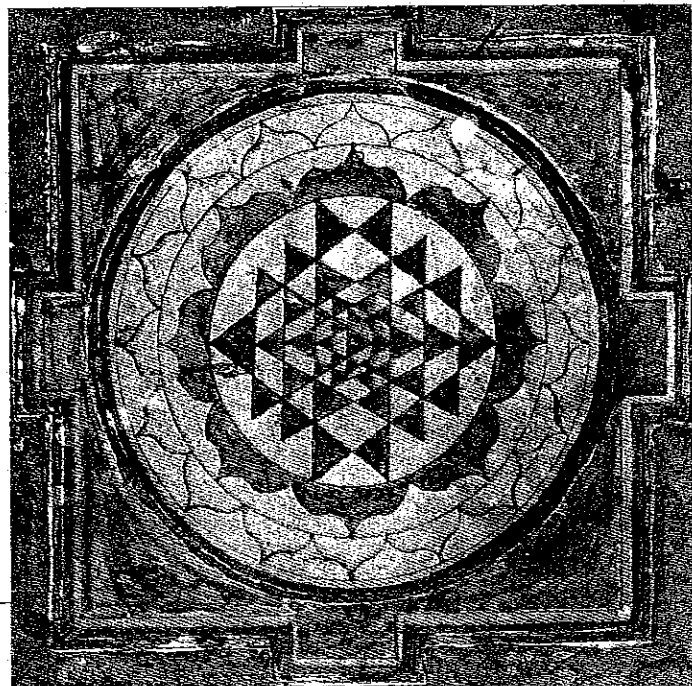
*Mandalas* are diagrammatic representations of the universe used in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions as aids to meditation and as part of sacred rituals. *Mandalas* may be painted on cloth or paper, fashioned out of wood or bronze, or drawn on the ground with coloured powders or threads, sometimes taking months to complete.

In Sanskrit, *mandala* means "circle", and the most important symbolic function of *mandalas* is as circular containers of "sacred space". At the centre of a *mandala* is a dot, or *bindu*, that represents Mount Meru (the mythical mountain at the centre of the universe)

toward which the meditator "travels" on his or her path to enlightenment.

In Hindu thought, cosmic space is divided by a network of "power lines" that travel from north to south and west to east, charging the universe with the energy of godhead. These are represented within *mandalas* by intersecting triangles or squares, and the points of intersection, or spots, are considered to be particularly powerful. Hindu temples are built according to the structure of a *mandala*, with grid networks of intersecting architectural lines representing the cosmic power lines that create numerous architectural power spots.

To a Tantrist the most important and complex yantra is the Sri Yantra mandala. Inside the outer square there are six concentric circles, enclosing nine intersecting triangles that symbolize the male and female divine energies. Five of the triangles point downward and are female, while the other four are male. The resulting pattern creates forty-three interlocking triangles, each of which is said to be the "house" of a Hindu or Tantric deity. There are usually two outer concentric circles of eight and sixteen lotus petals, and around the outside is a protective square known as the "world house". This painted example dating from the 18th century comes from Rajasthan.



Symbolically, the "sacred space" within a *mandala* is a microcosm of the universe. By encircling that space, an adept aims to enclose the power (*shakti*) of the gods that it contains. It is also associated with the conscious space within, so that by meditating upon a *mandala* the individual may become merged with the cosmos.

Advanced yogis concentrate upon a *mandala* until they are able to internalize it. Once this has been achieved, they can visualize the *mandala* in their minds and merge with the cosmos that it represents. The yogi should then enter the *mandala*, following the lines of power that lead toward Mount Meru. On entering the sacred space within the *mandala*, the individual self

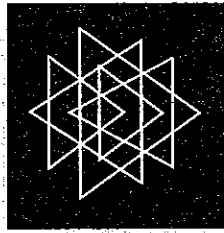
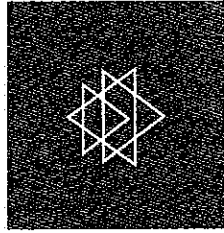
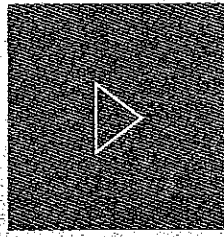
is dissolved into the greater self, and then reintegrated into consciousness.

The Tantric movement (see pp.110-12) developed forms of the *mandala* called *yantras*. The *yantra* is a condensed symbol of the cosmos, an abstract pattern of lines and colours used for meditation. Enclosed in a square with four gates, like a wall surrounding a temple, there is a pictograph of the Tantric universe peopled by demons and deities whose multiplicity represents the subdivided *shakti* of the goddess. The goddess is symbolized by the triangles that in turn represent the *yoni* (vulva). The *yantra's bindu*, from which it "moves", stands for the goddess Tripura - the base of the universe - and for *bijā*, the sacred seed.

## JUNG

Jung wrote extensively about *mandalas*, and published several studies of the *mandala*-like patterns that emerged from the dreams and doodles of his patients. His interest led him to

India, where he saw in the Tantric practice of the dissolution and reintegration of the self a process similar to his own theory of "individuation", in which the individual consciousness is united with the mythic content of the "collective unconscious".



ABOVE Three of the stages in the development of the intricate Sri Yantra mandala showing the positioning of three downward and two upward pointing triangles which create a core for the final diagram.



LEFT A village woman preparing a mandala with nine seated goddesses arranged in lotus formation.