

## THE FIRST STEPS

RĀJA-YOGA IS DIVIDED into eight steps. The first is yama, which consists of non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-receiving of gifts. Next is niyama, consisting of cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study, and self-surrender to God. Then come āsana, or posture; prānāyāma, or control of the prāna; pratyāhāra, or restraint of the senses from their objects; dhāranā, or fixing the mind on a spot; dhyāna, or meditation; and samādhi, or superconscious experience. Yama and niyama are moral training, without which no practice of yoga will succeed. As the yogi becomes established in these, he will begin to realize the fruits of his practice; without them it will never bear fruit. A yogi must not injure anyone by thought, word, or deed. Mercy must not be for men alone, but must go beyond and embrace the whole world.

The next step is āsana, posture. A series of exercises, physical and mental, is to be gone through every day until certain higher states are reached. Therefore it is quite necessary that we should find a posture in which we can remain for a long time. That posture which is the easiest should be the one chosen. For thinking, a certain posture may be very easy for one man, while for another it may be very difficult. We shall find later on that during the study of these psychological matters a good deal of activity goes on in the body. Nerve

currents will have to be displaced and given a new channel. New sorts of vibrations will begin; the whole constitution will be remodelled, as it were. But the main part of the activity will lie along the spinal column; so the one thing necessary for the posture is to hold the spinal column free, sitting erect, holding the three parts—the chest, neck, and head—in a straight line. Let the whole weight of these three be supported by the ribs, and then you will have an easy, natural posture with the spine straight. You will easily see that you cannot think very high thoughts with the chest in.

This portion of yoga is a little similar to hatha-yoga, which deals entirely with the physical body, its aim being to make the physical body very strong. We have nothing to do with it here, because its practices are very difficult and cannot be learnt in a day, and, after all, do not lead to much spiritual growth. Many of these practices—such as placing the body in different postures—you will find in the teachings of Delsarte and others. The object in these is physical, not spiritual. There is not one muscle in the body over which a man cannot establish perfect control: the heart can be made to stop or go on at his bidding, and each part of the organism can be similarly controlled.

The result of hatha-yoga is simply to make men live long; health is the chief idea, the one goal of the hatha-yogi. He is determined not to fall sick, and he never does. He lives long. A hundred years is nothing to him; he is quite young and fresh when he is one hundred and fifty, without one hair turned grey. But