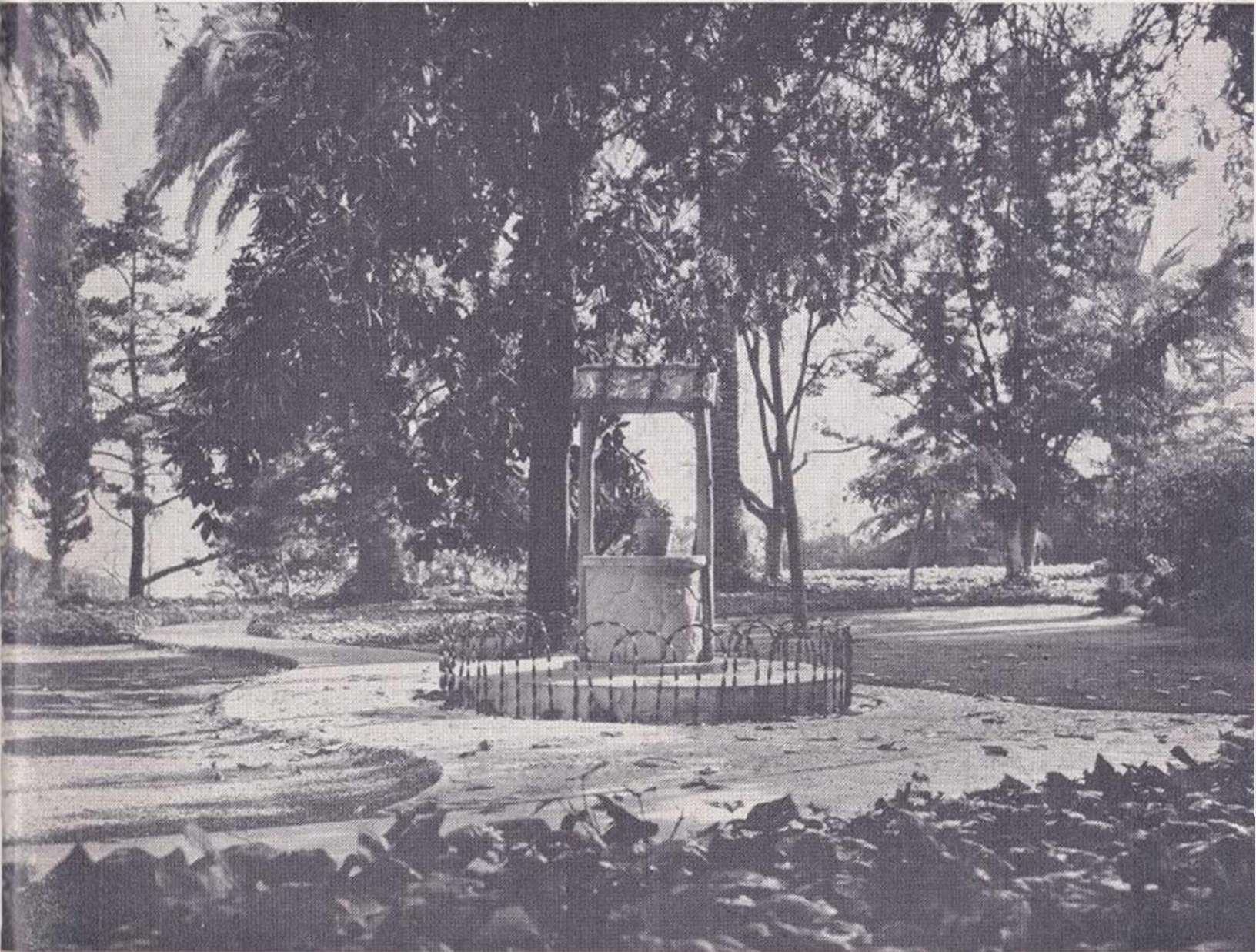


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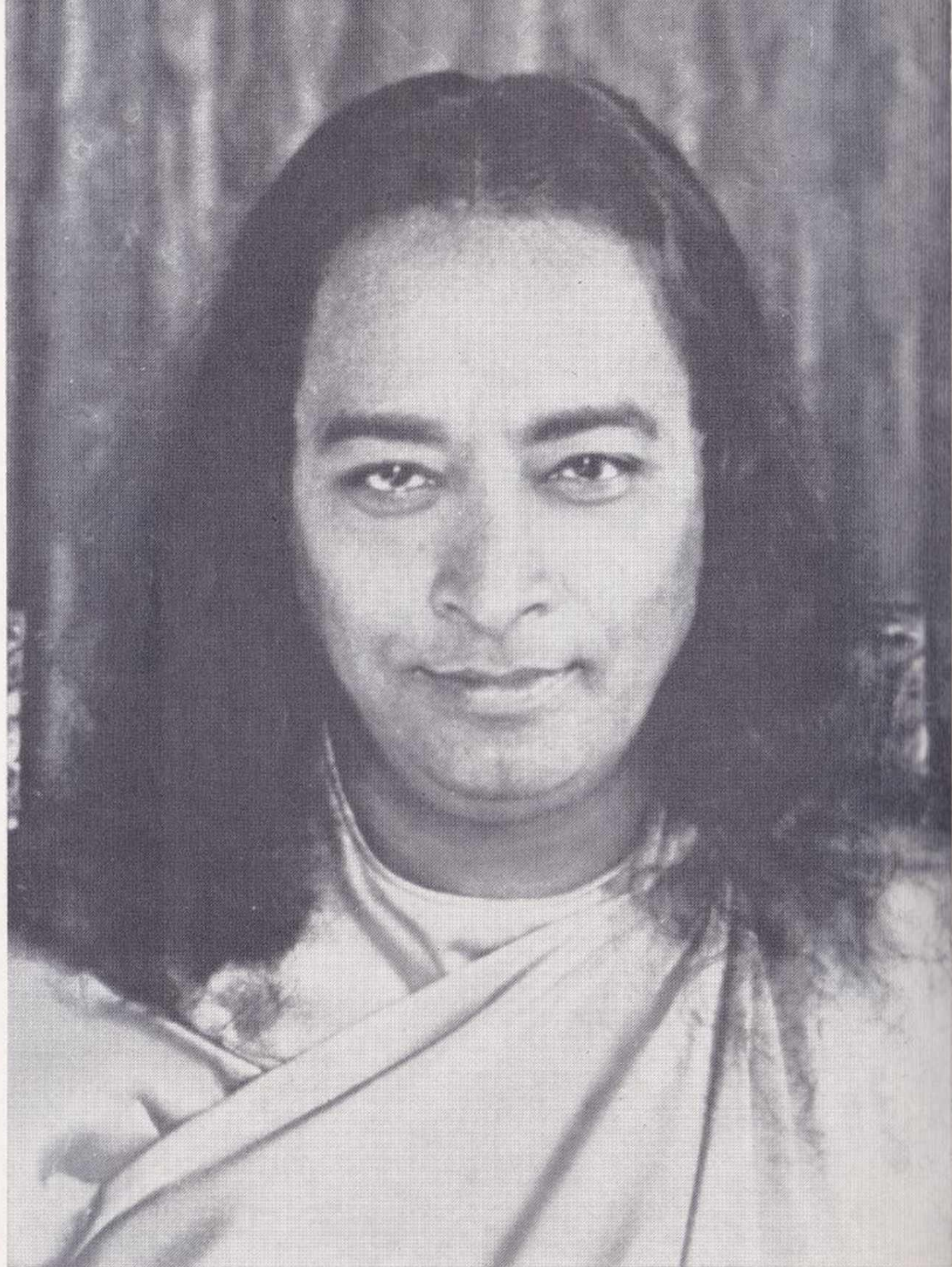
Self-Realization

MAGAZINE

FOUNDED IN 1925 BY PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



Rustic view on grounds of SRF Headquarters, Los Angeles, California



PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

Photograph taken in 1947 at Self-Realization Fellowship Hermitage,
Encinitas, California



"Heavenly Father,
inspirit us with generosity.
Thy Being
is an outpouring of bounty;
Let us, too,
know the joy of giving."

—*Paramahansa Yogananda*

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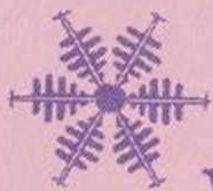
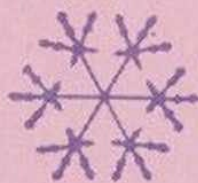
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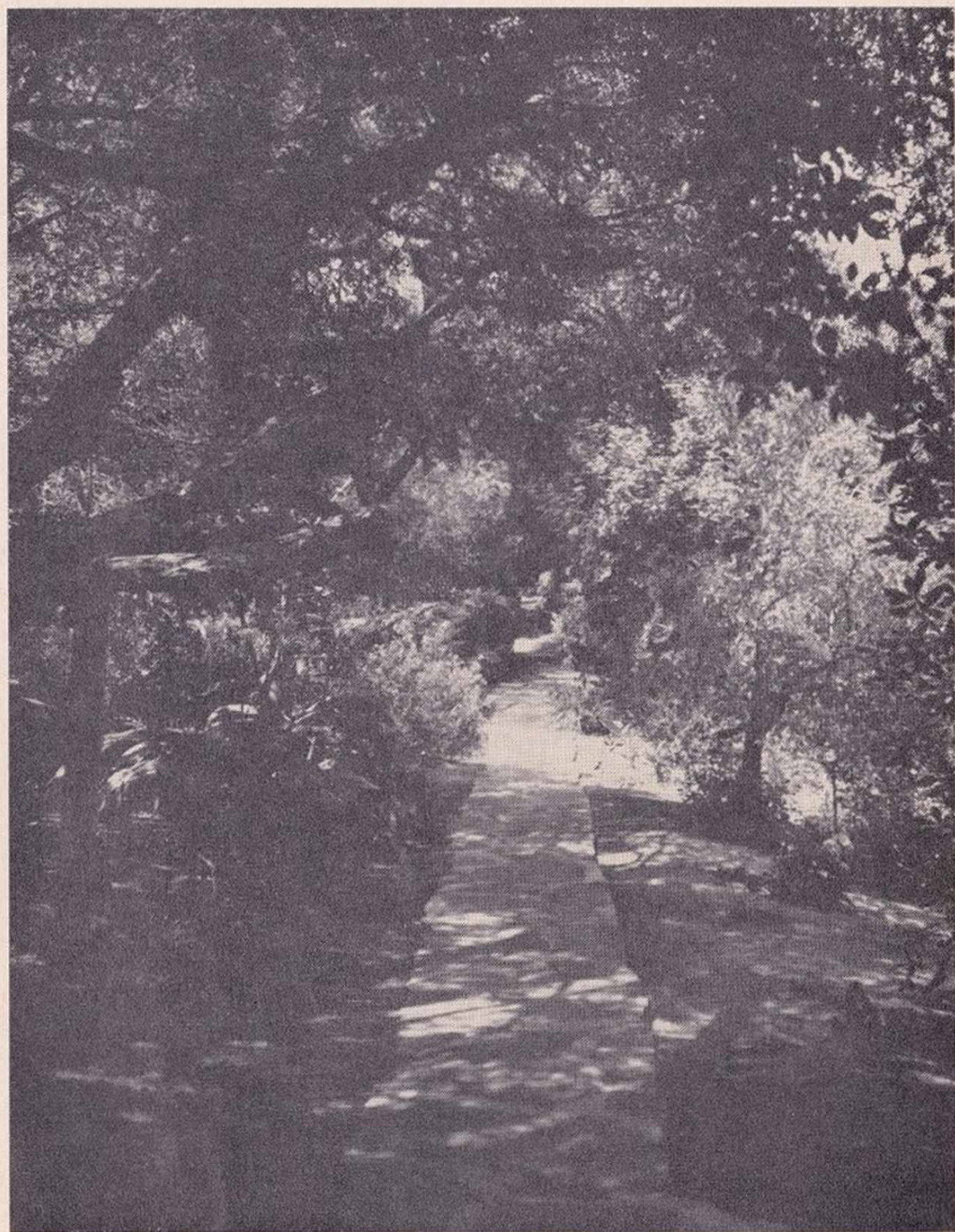
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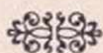
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A garden path on grounds of SRF Hermitage, Encinitas, California

The Way to God

By PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



The wisdom of the cosmos is knowledge of twenty-four principles of Nature in interplay with Spirit. All inference, perception, and understanding about creation are explained in *Sankhya* philosophy. *Yoga* is the science or techniques for practical realization of the philosophical truths of *Sankhya*.

The word *yoga* signifies "union," mergence. When the soul of man unites with Spirit, the union is described as *yoga*. This *yoga* is the goal of every truth seeker. Anyone who practices an effective technique to attain this supreme union is called a *yogi*.

The *yogi* "involves" creation (reverses the twenty-four evolutionary processes of Nature, as expounded in *Sankhya*), starting with matter (the grossest form of creation) and proceeding through the linked chain of the twenty-four primordial qualities, whose origin is Spirit.

By spinal ascent through the centers, the *yogi* learns the inner science of changing the consciousness of earth into the consciousness of water; the consciousness of water into that of fire; the consciousness of fire into that of air; the consciousness of air into that of ether; the consciousness of ether into that of mind (sense-consciousness or *manas*); the consciousness of mind into that of discrimination (*buddhi*); the consciousness of discrimination into that of ego (*ahamkara*); the consciousness of ego into that of feeling (*chittwa*); the consciousness of feeling into that of the cosmic vibratory force (*Aum*); the consciousness of *Aum* into Spirit. By thus dissolving these main divisions of the twenty-four principles successively into one another, the devotee reaches the Ultimate Unity — the One from whom have sprung the Many.

By gradual steps the *yogi* converts all consciousness of matter into the consciousness of Spirit. This realization is not attainable through either reason or imagination but solely through intuitive experience. Such experience is, in nearly all cases, the result of practicing meditation and *yoga* techniques as taught by the great sages of ancient and modern India.

A poet or religious fanatic may imagine the cosmos to be only mind. But that imagination cannot help him overcome death and attain immortality. The yogi, on the other hand, wins an unshakable knowledge that all matter is Spirit by daily employing a technique that uproots from his mind all delusions implanted in it by *maya*, the cosmic delusive force. He thus beholds the universe as a dream of God—a dream from which one awakens only when he becomes conscious of the omnipresent Spirit.

Anyone who uses the yoga techniques is a yogi-practitioner, but he who attains the final union with Spirit is a perfected yogi. Self-realization consists in experiencing the different states of intuitive consciousness attained by meditation that lead to this ultimate union.

Sankhya-Yoga philosophy is not only an analytical and discriminative knowledge of the cosmos but includes definite methods for Self-realization. By *Sankhya-Yoga* the yogi perceives the exact nature of his body, mind, and soul, as well as of the cosmos in its entirety.

By *Karma Yoga* the devotee learns to destroy the seeds of karma of this life and of previous lives. Through scientific techniques the yogi also attains by gradual steps the knowledge of the ultimate substance of creation.

Yoga Bestows Deep Knowledge

Without yoga no devotee can know the true nature of all forces in creation, in cosmic vibration, and in Spirit. Yoga consists of moral discipline and the use of a technique of meditation by which the devotee gradually frees himself from experiencing, over and over again, the fruits of his past actions and stored-up tendencies. The devotee who knows the art of yoga, experiencing the pure joy of meditation, does not further involve himself in new desires and new karma. By yoga techniques the cosmic energy “cauterizes” the brain-cell grooves in which past tendencies are hidden. Yoga practice therefore not only prevents the formation of new karma-making desires but also scientifically frees the devotee from impending karma (nearly ripe fruits of past actions).

Every individual acts partly with free choice and partly under influences from past tendencies. The latter appear as psychological biases that modify and limit man’s power of free will. The predominating tendencies of good or evil in a child have their roots in his past life. Every truth seeker should analyze himself to discover the extent to which his free will is guided by the dictators of his

past tendencies, which appear now as octopuslike habits. The daily events of one's life tend to resurrect in man's subconscious mind his ancient habits of response, good or bad, to external stimuli.

Different individuals have different "fates." The sense-enslaved man is guided largely by his habits of the past; his free will is meager. He is permeated with desires (whether able or not to fulfill them). A spiritual man, on the other hand, has freed himself from all worldly desires springing from past-life seeds, and has thus redeemed from bondage his free will. The ordinary man eclipses his free will with dark shadows from the past. The spiritual man, ever watchful for freedom, safeguards it by meditation. When the will is free, it vibrates in harmony with the Infinite. Man's will is then God's will.

Blind renunciation of material objects does not insure freedom; it is by enjoying the bliss of Spirit in meditation and by comparing it with the lesser joy of the senses that the devotee becomes eager to follow the spiritual path.

Saints have declared that if a person, even once, really desires salvation, that desire is firmly planted in the superconscious mind;



Rustic shrine to St. Francis at SRF Lake Shrine, Pacific Palisades, Calif.

tunity arises, whether in this life or in a later incarnation.

Right methods of meditation can never produce untoward results. Wrong methods, of course, are not beneficial — whether in meditation or in anything else! Charlatans occasionally devise strange methods, which they prudently fail to practice themselves but which they recommend to their followers to impress and mystify them. Some misled or unbalanced persons, following wrong techniques such as violent breathing exercises, have found themselves in trouble. That is why uninformed people look with suspicion even on true, salvation-giving yoga techniques.

Great masters who have realized God have taught the spiritual methods and techniques that lead to liberation. As sugar can never taste bitter, so divine techniques of meditation can produce nothing but the sweetness of peace and infinite blessings.

The devotee should remember that even a momentary entry into the kingdom of meditation may ultimately mean his freedom from the karmic prison of births and deaths. Some day, some life, each man must take the first divine step.

If even the mere desire for liberation ultimately leads one to liberation, as the sages promise, it is obvious that determined, steady efforts at meditation must immensely quicken one's spiritual evolution.

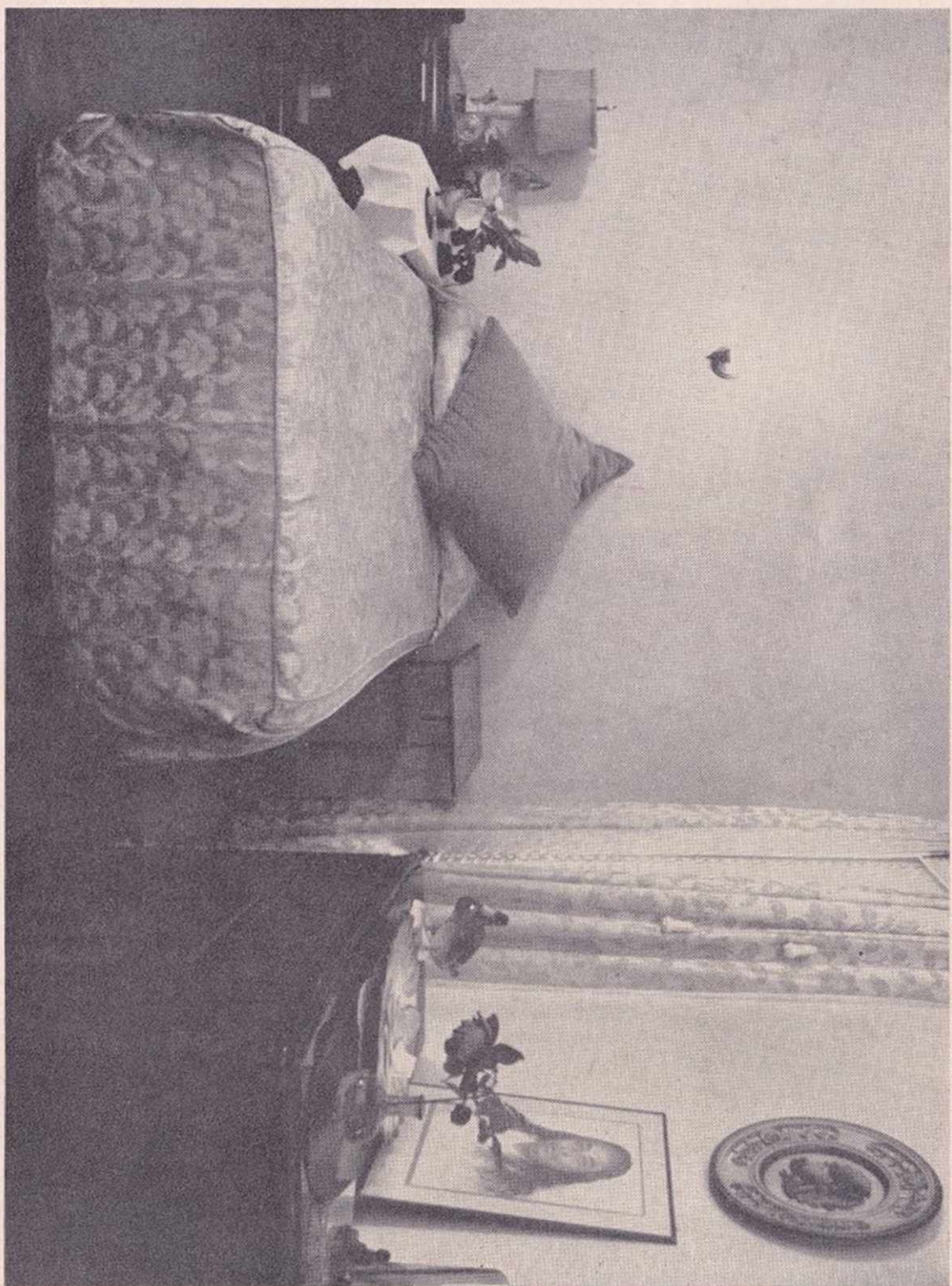
Until the desire for liberation is first awakened in the heart, and fulfilled by meditation, salvation is impossible even though one passes through innumerable incarnations.

Focus the Mind on One Thought — God

The yogi focuses his mind on one thought — God, and on naught else. Undecided dreamers dissipate the powers of their mind in unending, many-branched pathways of desires and thus end in confusion. The yogi gets to the great Goal of life. The restless person keeps going in and coming out of blind alleys of births and deaths, unable to find happiness.

A curiosity seeker pursues numerous paths of philosophy and religion, wandering unendingly in doubts and dissatisfactions. The discrimination and concentration of the true devotee, on the other hand, becomes fixed on a single goal — God-Bliss.

The Self-realized devotee finds that the thirst of his desires of many incarnations becomes quenched at once; he is released from



Paramahansa Yogananda's bedroom in SRF Hermitage, Encinitas, California. On this bed the great master had the experience of "the body as light" (see end chapter 30, *Autobiography of a Yogi*).

all reincarnation-making desires. But the curiosity seeker, undecided about the various paths of religion, wanders in a labyrinth of fancies and complex desires; fettered by karma, he is forced to incarnate again and again.

The spiritual aspirant should forsake indecision. Following one guru-preceptor and one definite path, he will save himself from endless roamings.

Many persons do not take religion seriously; they consider it a matter of intellectual speculation. New philosophical theories engage their interest; they ignore any practice of the ancient, the time-proven truths. He who considers a spiritual path of discipline to be outmoded and useless because it lacks the appeal of intellectual novelty will always be traveling in new lanes and strange bypaths, never arriving at the final destination of divine blessedness.

The real spiritual aspirant, seeking God alone, quickly recognizes the true guru-preceptor and the true path of Self-realization; he occupies his time with the preceptor-given technique of meditation. Thus, without difficulty, steadfast in his aim, he reaches the pinnacle of spiritual emancipation.



Golden lotus tower at SRF World Brotherhood Colony, Encinitas, Calif.

A chronic wanderer in the path of theologies is not searching for the pure divine waters. He craves only newly flavored ideational concoctions. This desire for untried novelties merely leads one into a desert tract of intellectual doubts. The God-thirsty man is busy drinking the nectar of joy in meditation.

Many delusions prevent men from tuning in with cosmic consciousness. As a radio may register the static of various atmospheric conditions and thus be prevented from clearly receiving a broadcasting program, so the man who is filled with the static of material desires cannot hear the immortal song of the soul.

The psychological static of various delusions hinders man in tuning his inner radio with God-consciousness. These delusions include attachment to power and sense pleasures; indiscriminating belief in the superficially convincing words of the unwise; desires for the astral heaven as the highest goal; and employment of scriptural rites and sacrificial rituals for material rewards.

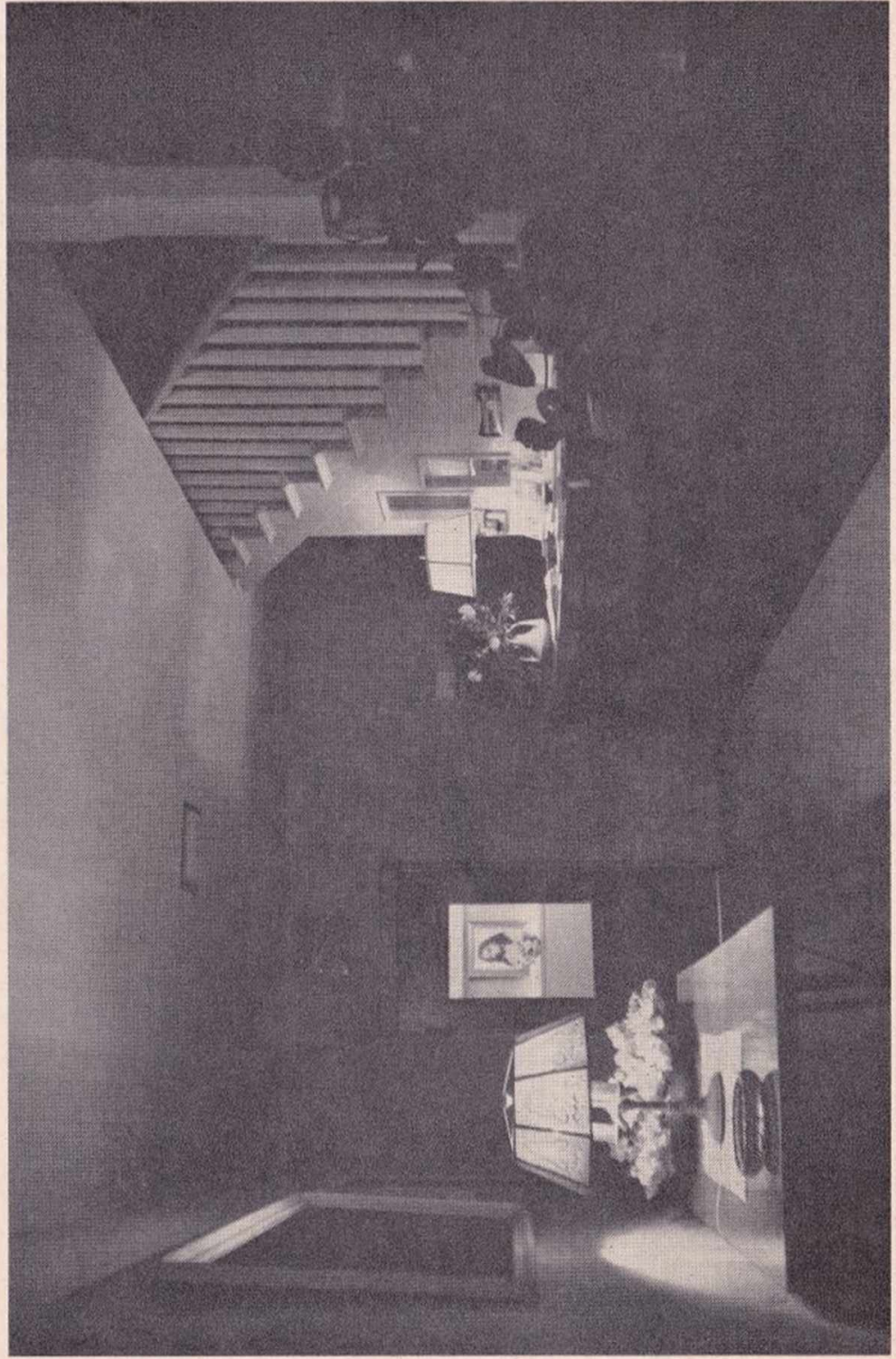
Knowledge is Power and Freedom

A man might foolishly reason thus: "Since I do not know what I was before this life nor what I shall be afterward, what is the use of fearing births and deaths?" It is true that man's ego is embodied only once under one personality and form. Though it successively relinquishes the individualities of its incarnations, it yet carries, within subconscious chambers, the pleasures and terrors of the experiences of all past lives. Each man feels within himself many subterranean fears that are rooted in dark experiences of lives long forgotten. By deep meditation the numerous forms of man's inexplicable fears are eradicated.

A man is also in delusion if he concentrates on the evanescent pleasures and powers that may be attained by the literal performance of the deeply symbolic Vedic or other scriptural rites, or if he desires a heaven that is nothing more than a glorified place for sense pleasures. Some religionists even believe that heaven is a "happy hunting ground," or a land where, without satiety, wine and women are enjoyed. He who desires any other heaven than oneness with God — the very Source of Bliss — is in delusion.

The devotee should also guard his discrimination, lest it be stolen by the specious eloquence of pleasure-mongers, the seekers of

(Continued on page 44)



Foyer of Self-Realization Fellowship Retreat, Encinitas, California

Sixty-Four Feminine Arts



In ancient India girls were taught sixty-four arts (*kalas*). The following enumeration appears in the *Kama Shastra* by Batsyayana:

Literary Accomplishments: Reading and elocution, lexicography and versification, exercises in enigmatic poetry, filling up of stanzas of which a portion is given, guessing unseen letters and things held in another person's closed hand, knowledge of languages, use of a secret language among intimates, solution of riddles, solution of verbal puzzles, mimicry.

Domestic Arts: Tailoring, making bows, sticks, and so on, with thread, bed making, prestidigitation, ornamental cookery, preparation of beverages.

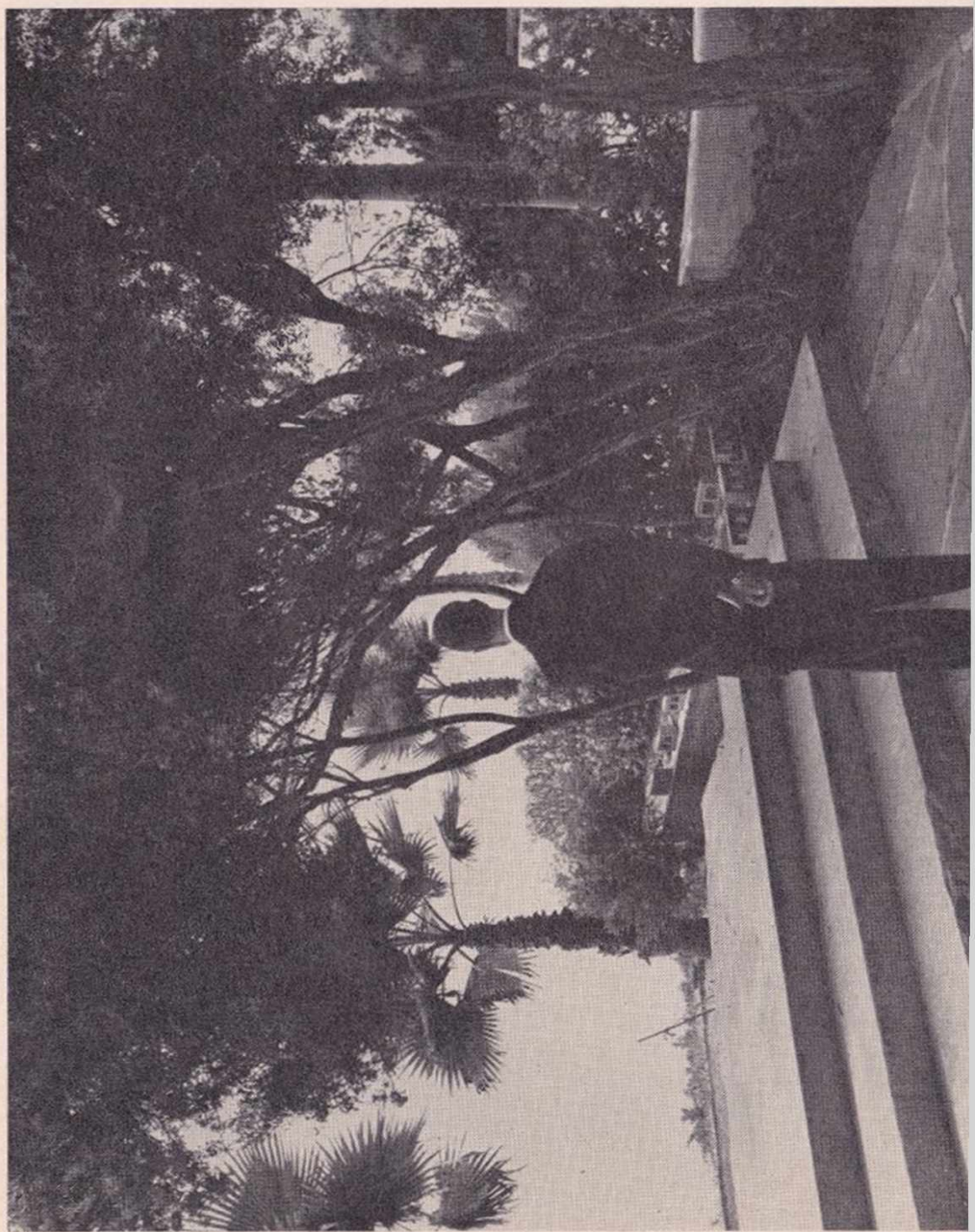
Toilet, Dress: Marking the cheeks near ears with sandal and other pastes, artistic display of jewelry on the person, perfumery, making of ornaments of flowers for the head, making of necklaces and garlands; staining, dyeing, and coloring of the teeth, cloths, and the body; use of pomades, coiffure, changing the appearance of fabrics.

Manual Work: Drawing, pictorial art, scenic representation, modeling, wood carving, making ornamental designs on the floor with rice-meal and flowers, making buds of flowers.

Recreative Arts: Making fountains, jugglery, making objects with a spindle; cockfighting, quail fighting, ram fighting, and so on; teaching parrots to talk, devising original methods for making things; tricks, dice playing, incantations, assuming various appearances, tricks as taught by Kuchumara.

Scientific Arts: Settings for jewels, decoration of houses, testing of silver and jewels, knowledge of metals, coloring of gems and beads, ascertaining the existence of mines from external appearances, gardening and botany, making of monograms, logographs, and diagrams, lapidary art.

Music and Miscellaneous: Vocal music, instrumental music, *jal-taranga* or playing on china cups containing varying quantities of water to regulate the tone, tattooing, drama, acting, etiquette, juvenile sports, physical exercise, dancing, art of self-defense.



My Conception of God

By RABINDRANATH TAGORE

*Answers by the Great Poet to Questions Asked
in 1924 by his friend Leonard Elmhirst*

You ask: How do you know there is a God?

This is a difficult question. Let me answer according to my own light. Because you have eyesight, you know what the physical world looks like, and because you have this organic sense, you can recognize what is called light. By sight you keep in direct touch with this physical world and thus your physical organism is in touch with something big and eternal in this universe around you.

If your physical organism had no such background it would be a mere bubble, a nothing. Your blood, too, has a physical element comparable to that of streams and rivers. Similar comparisons can be made with all the particles of your body: cells, atoms, and molecules. You know that the full realization of your own physical organism depends upon the degree of your realization of this great physical world and of your contact with it. Otherwise your body would have no meaning. Because there is light you can see that there is something solid in your body, and there is liquid in your body as there is also liquid in the world. If your body were unrelated to anything similar or permanent in the world then it would be *maya*, an illusion, a nothing.

But is the physical the most important aspect of your body? Is it not a fact that your body contains and gives expression to a personality that is essentially and uniquely your own? If then you have no doubt as to the reality of your physical body, because it is related to a wider eternal reality, this physical world, and if you have a personality which you recognize to be more real than your physical organism, do you mean to say that this personality of yours is a bubble, a *maya*, an illusion, and that it has no significant relationship to all other personalities or to a Total Personality?

Your eyes grope for light in a dark room. You are miserable because you cannot see. So, our personality seeks its own fulfillment in a world of reality where it can enjoy and possess a freedom of its own, a freedom of the kind most appropriate to its own individual

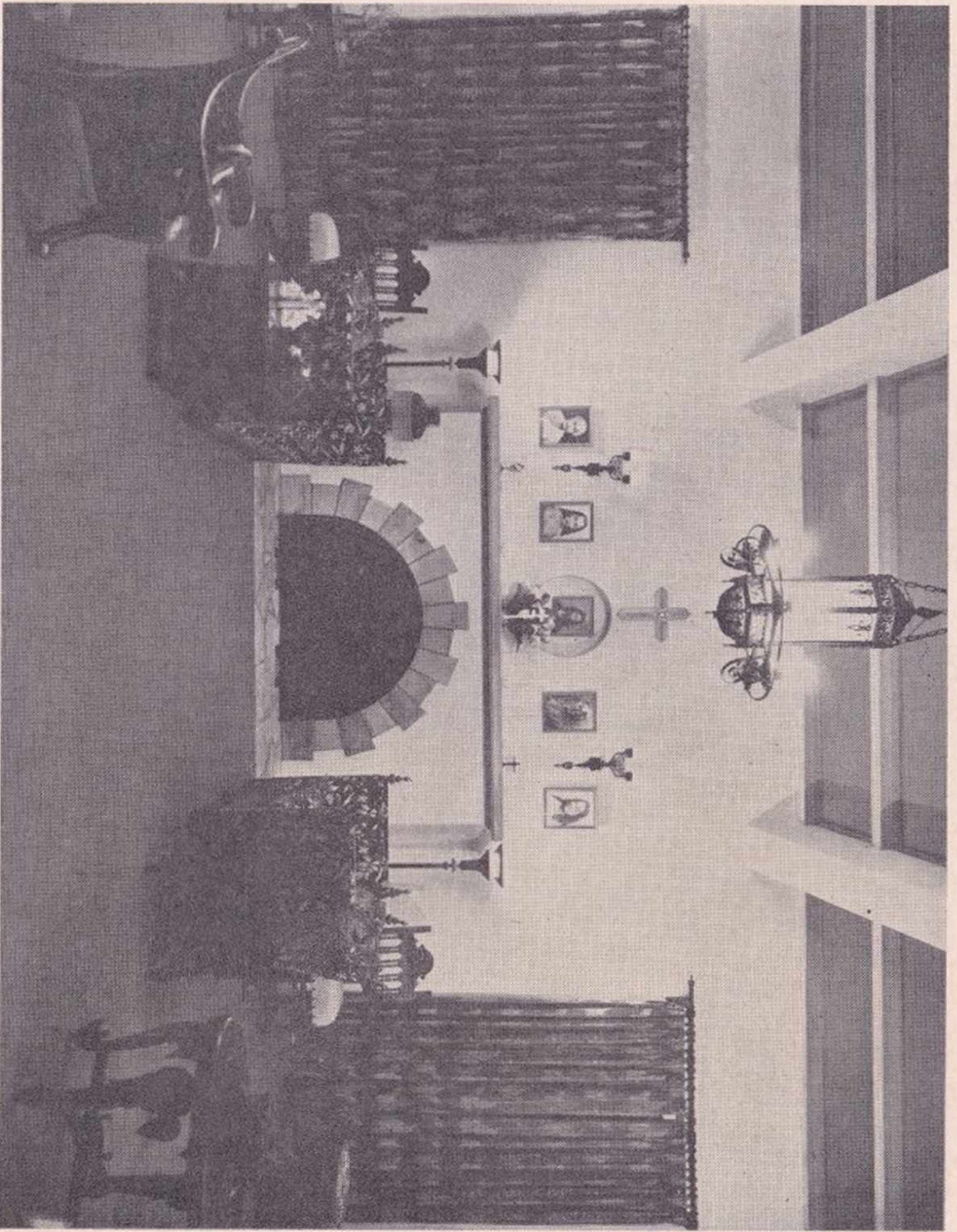
need and potential. This need for fulfillment it seeks through other personalities, in friendship, and in love. If your personality has never known father, mother, brothers, or friends, it remains unhappy, unfulfilled. As my body has a craving for other bodies, so I want to meet, to see, and to enjoy my friends.

But men's bodies have a need and attraction for other physical entities, not merely for human bodies but for the wonder and beauty of this physical world as well. My own body, for instance, has a very special need to enjoy this physical world. My eyes must see. Through them I constantly realize and fulfill my own intense hunger for reality. Yet the moment I feel physical pain in my cells, all this desire for communion with things, with beauty, or with other beings is cut off. A drastic separation occurs until I can achieve once more my sense of being one with people and with the world. My personality can also fall sick. I can lose all interest in the world around me and can even refuse any longer to seek out other human personalities. My personality too can change. My friends can become my enemies. I may have death to face. So my personality, in a state of normal health and not cut off by separation, needs a constant assurance of reality in its relation to other persons and to the world, as my body needs an assurance and a guarantee of health.

For a similar reason my personality craves the touch and guarantee of an Infinite Personality. To this Infinite Personality I give the name God.

As my physical body, in health, has its physical demands and relationships, so my personality has its personality demands and relationships. You and I have to breathe air. You and I are standing upon the floor. You and I have these things in common. But each of our personalities has qualities which make us as persons quite different from each other. Many of these qualities are not physical at all but find their highest joy in love, in the life of love, in fathers, in friends, in wives, in mothers, in children, in other human beings. My personality constantly seeks union with other personalities and, on the day when I realize a perfection of unity with them, it is glad and is filled with delight.

In discovering this special kind of unity with others my personality finds truth. If this craving of my personality for supreme satisfaction exists, my poetic imagination must invent, and my reason demand, a foundation of unity somewhere where my whole being can obtain permanent shelter, where I can feel happy, find contentment,



Drawing room of the Hermitage, SRF Colony, Encinitas, California

and be at peace. In this realm of thought, argument is no longer of much use. Men on this earth have from time to time procured or experienced direct evidence of God in and through their own personality. In the world of what they call the soul they have experienced the infinite touch of an Infinite Personality.

Supposing you are blind and I have eyesight. I describe the light to you, but you do not believe in it. You say that the idea of light is all my hallucination. You may even say that only the blind are wise, because they do not see. From the point of view of the blind perhaps you are right. But all the evidence we receive down the ages from our men of spiritual vision goes to signify that at the center of our existence lies this Infinite Personality, and as our own personality is directly related to this Infinite Personality in a bond of love in which there is no physical element at all, so man is related to God.

You ask me: Is it then a privilege for us to be alive and to be living on this earth?

My answer is: I have enjoyed human relations. I have enjoyed the sunrise. Poverty, fear, and disease there are. They may come and they may be driven out; but no one can take away from you light and beauty. You did not have to buy them. If you had had to buy sunlight in the marketplace you would have gone destitute to get it. We are the guests of a Great King who is lavish in His hospitality. Enjoy it therefore if you possess and can cultivate the power to enjoy. You are a miserable creature if you do not and if you spend all your time preparing for examinations.

You ask: What then is sin?

Sin, according to our Indian idea, has never been the breaking of a commandment, of a law, of some criminal code, which can be punished by king or government. We say in India that the end and aim of life is to find emancipation from the separateness of the self in order to realize communion with the Infinite Soul or Personality—that is, with God. Such communion is possible only through the realization of our own soul through all other souls in love.

In Buddhism there are two objectives. On the one side there is the need to emancipate our personality from the grip of forces that are selfish or self-centered and perhaps subconscious. This is the negative aspect. The positive aspect is the need of our personality to find its fullest expression in love of the Infinite, in compassion for all creatures, in love of beauty; to be absorbed in them, because only through

such absorption can the individual find and achieve ultimate truth.

Obstruction lies in the imprisonment of life and of the soul within all kinds of artificial limitations and boundaries, social, physical, economic, and psychological, thus denying to ourselves the chance to achieve our fullest potential, our perfect selfhood. When we break through the obstructions set up by the fearful and the possessive self we find a new freedom to communicate with others, but, more important still, freedom to come into more intimate touch with an Infinite Personality, with God.

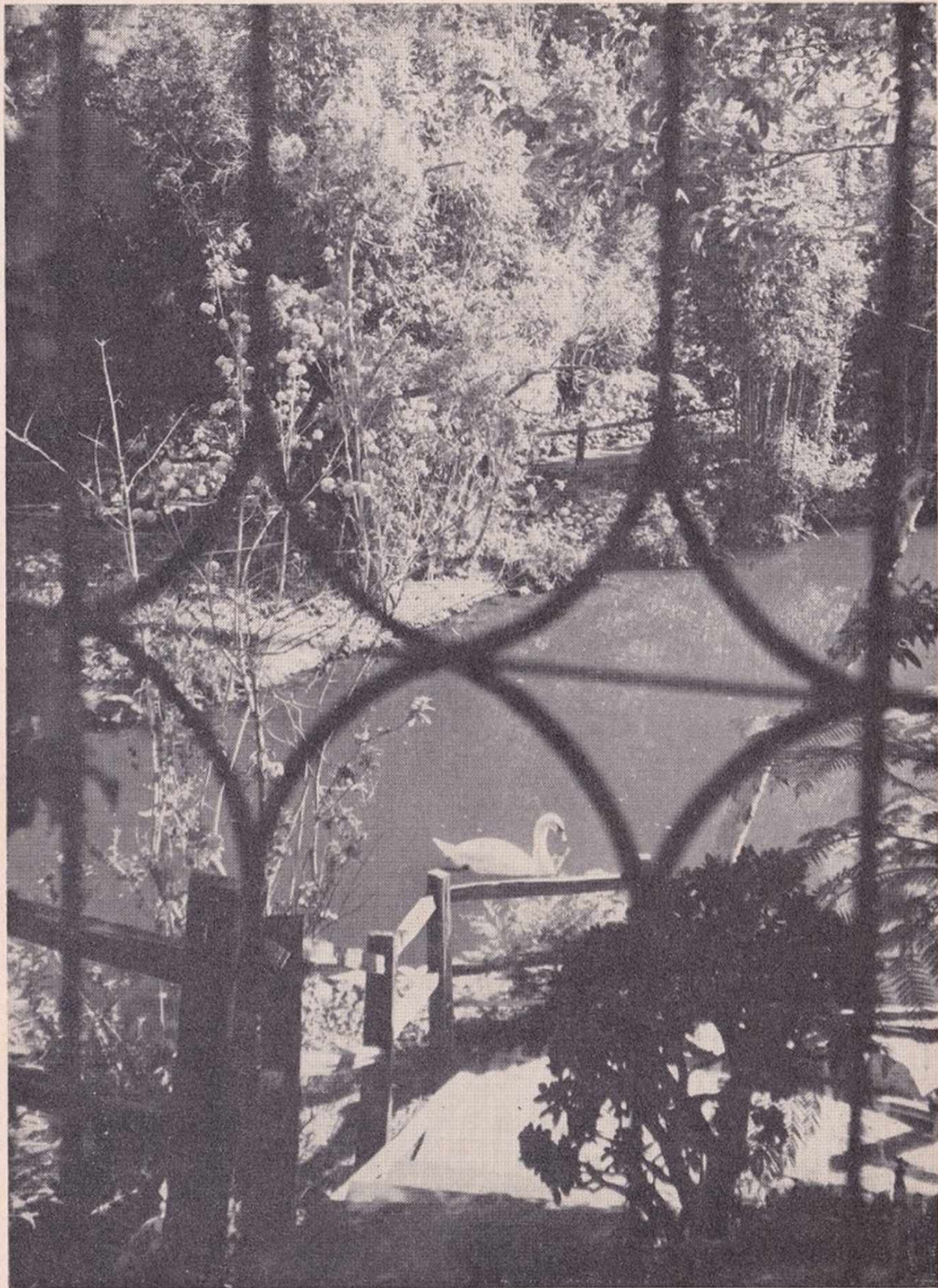
Sin is that which obstructs us in gaining our ultimate end: the fullest possible union with the universe around us and with the people in it. We are too occupied with the mainly material concerns of this life. We worry to death. This is a mistake, just as when, by breaking the laws of health or by eating or drinking or worrying too much, we suffer pain and the isolation of the sickroom.

Sin is that barrier by which we are so isolated as to be hampered in reaching our ultimate end, the realization of the supremacy of truth through love. Inordinate desire, passion, hatred, and jealousy are the greatest of hindrances, for they all accentuate the separate and isolated life of the self.

The one great faculty of the soul is sympathy or love. By exercise of this faculty we transcend the boundaries of the isolated self. Through love you come into intimate touch with others. Through love you can enter what we term "the All." Therefore love is the one medium which gives you access to the greatest unity we can imagine, the Universal Soul.

All passions which prevent the pursuit of this unifying love, of this universal sympathy, are sins. Through the hatred or the killing of a man, for instance, this truth of unity is clouded. In India some of us have also included the killing of animals and have advocated *ahimsa* or non-killing. If you deliberately kill an animal for fun or to perform some magic rite, it is a sin, we say, as it would be a sin, for the sake of mere sport, and not because you are hungry, to shoot a bird. What about shooting a tiger? you ask. Though I am almost a Buddhist I draw a line there. To save other lives I would be willing to shoot a tiger, for I should be killing the spirit of violence which is objective in the tiger and which would be entirely subjective in my passion.

(Continued on page 42)



A tranquil scene at SRF Lake Shrine, Pacific Palisades, California

Soul Whispers

By Paramahansa Yogananda



O Eternal Mother, forsake the busyness of Thy universal housework! I demand attention. I want no more playthings; I want Thee!



In deep meditation I hear the blissful sound of Thine approaching feet. Their soft tread banishes from my mind all memories of earth's noisy pleasures. My finiteness slumbers, cradled in the arms of my deep perceptions of Thee.



Loving Lord, with my hands help Thy children; speak Thou through my voice; use my mind to inspire others.

Breathe with my breath; for through the fragile flute of my being Thou alone canst blow the eternals of Thy song.



O Sleepless Seer of All! Thou dost behold me through the eyes of the constant sun and the moodful moon. With omnipresent gaze Thou art watching me through the myriad pores of space and through the twinkles of night-awakened stars.



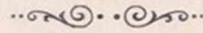
In the garden of soul awakening the dewdrops of my repentance gathered at Thy lotus feet. By those tears, precious to Thee, my heart was fully cleansed.



In the stillness of my soul, possess me; may I be conscious of Thine immortal presence in and around me. I yearn to know Thee, O Secondless, O True Unique!

Yoga Postures for Health

By B. TESNIÈRE, M.D.



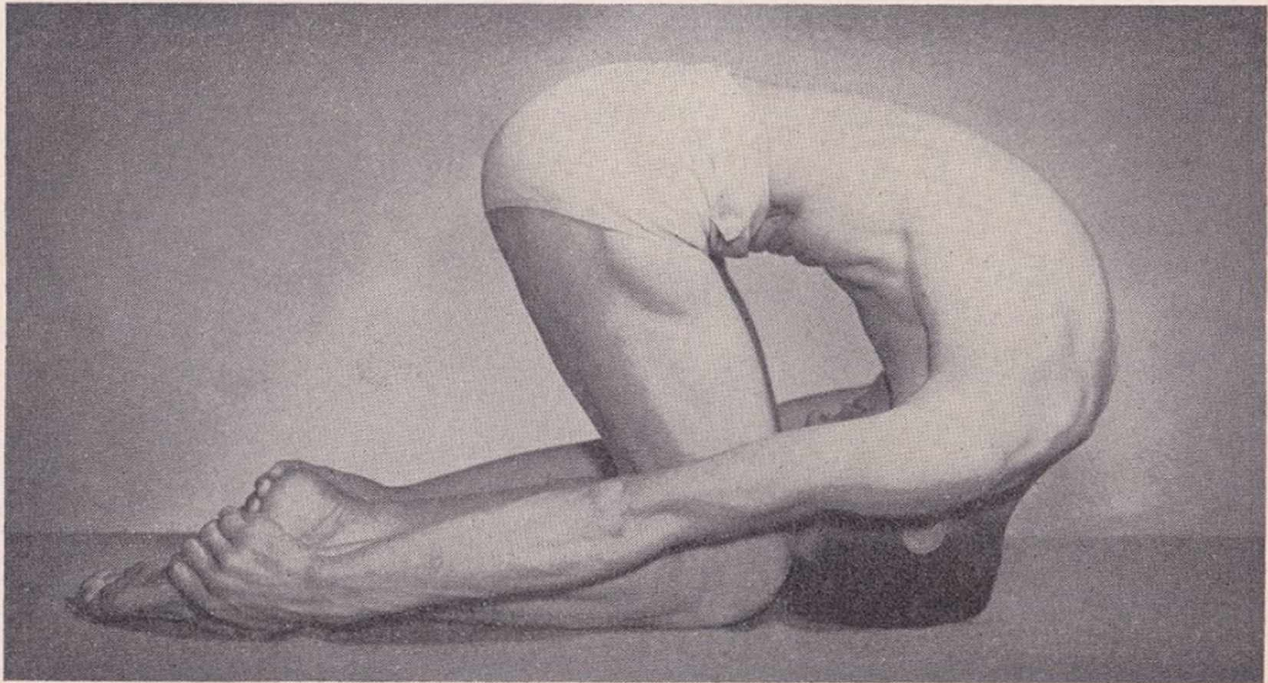
SASANGASANA — THE HARE POSE

(Continued from preceding issue)

To understand the benefits of *Sasangasana* it is necessary to study the body parts affected by its practice.

Physiology of Sasangasana

First of all, there are certain regions in the human body that are vitally important to proper posture and alignment. One such region is the muscular belt formed by the abdominal muscles. Another key area is that of the upper back, between the shoulder blades. The muscles and bones of this second region are responsible for the proper carriage of the head and trunk, and for holding the shoulders and arms in position. It has been called the "thankless zone" (Dr. A. de Sambucy), because once the spine has become bent there, any attempt to straighten it again usually proves futile.



SASANGASANA — THE HARE POSE

In this "thankless zone" is a conjunction of three important postural muscles (*Fig. 1*):

(1) The *erectores spinae*. These are vertical, deeply situated muscles along each side of the spinal column. Their role is to hold the spine erect.

(2) The rhomboidei. These are oblique, rather superficial muscles, which anchor the inner edge of the shoulder blades to the spinal column.

(3) The trapezius muscles. These are two triangular, flat superficial muscles. Together they form a trapeziform muscular mass that enwraps the bones of the neck, shoulders, and upper back. The trapezius muscles attach the outer angle and back of the shoulder blades to the spine, reinforcing the support of the rhomboid muscles, and supplementing also the function of the *erectores spinae* in keeping the head and neck erect.

MUSCLES	SPINE	SHOULDER BLADES
<i>Erectores spinae</i>	+	○
Rhomboidei	○	+
Trapezius	+	+

Fig. 1. Role of three main muscles of the back in keeping the trunk straight

Shoulder Girdle is Only as Strong as its Weakest Link

Anatomically, a girdle is a ring of bones attached at one point to the spine to carry the weight of the extremities. The lower limbs are suspended from the pelvic girdle, which is formed by the two hip bones in front and the sacral bone (a part of the spinal column) in back. The pelvic girdle is a complete ring, massive and comparatively rigid, except for the joints that unite its constituent bones.

The shoulder girdle, from which the upper limbs are suspended, is by contrast incomplete, light, and mobile. It has twice as many

(6) bones in it: two clavicles, two shoulder blades, the breastbone, and the spine; and more joints (4 instead of 3). Skeletally, the shoulder girdle is an imperfect ring, being open at the back. Here the trapezius and rhomboid muscles have to suffice as a connecting link. Lacking the rigid strength of bones, and being subject to prolonged stretch in certain occupational positions, as noted below, the trapezius and rhomboid muscles tend to weaken and become deficient in their functioning. Thus by their very nature the trapezius and rhomboid muscles, which serve to complete the otherwise bony ring of the shoulder girdle, are its weakest link.

Occupations that call for continuously holding the arms in front of the trunk and for seeing the work closely, such as writing, reading, drawing, sewing, and so on, stretch and weaken the trapezius and rhomboid muscles, resulting in "round shoulders." This condition is usually associated with "round back" (kyphosis) and "dropping head," which are attributable to the weakening of the *erectores spinae* and the trapezius muscles (Bowen).

The trouble is not only in the ungraceful physical appearance and the "spineless" air that round shoulders give to an individual; the resulting compression of the thorax and the organs it contains is harmful, and the forward bending of the dorsal vertebrae impairs the flow of life force to the viscera. To correct such defects, measures that straighten the back at shoulder-blade level are required, and yoga postures constitute one such remedy.

Sasangasana Helps in Straightening the Spine

It may seem paradoxical to speak of *Sasangasana* as an aid in straightening a forward-bent spine, inasmuch as its manifest action on the spine is to bend it forward. However, experience shows that the Hare Pose is an excellent preparation for back straightening.

The reason is that the spine of round-backed persons is stiff. It forms a solid block which is very hard to loosen up. If exercises are

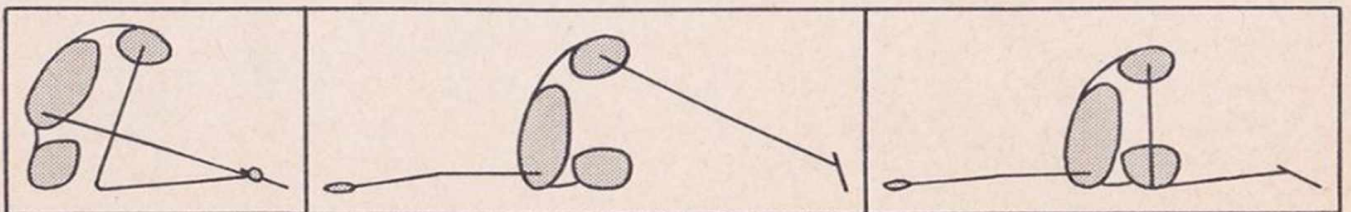


Fig. 2. *Sasangasana*, *Halasana*, and *Karnapidhasana*

undertaken with a view to strengthening the deficient rhomboid, trapezius, and *erector spinae* muscles and thus (theoretically at least) to straightening the curvature of the back, the results are unsatisfactory. The muscles become stronger and bigger, mainly in the neck and lumbar regions, but the dorsal curvature remains the same (Dr. A. de Sambucy).

The principle behind the use of *Sasangasana* as a preparatory measure in back straightening is twofold: first, loosening the vertebrae one way (forward) makes it easier to loosen them up in the other direction (backward); second, the elimination, through stretch, of any tension in the back muscles makes it easier to put them effectively to work.

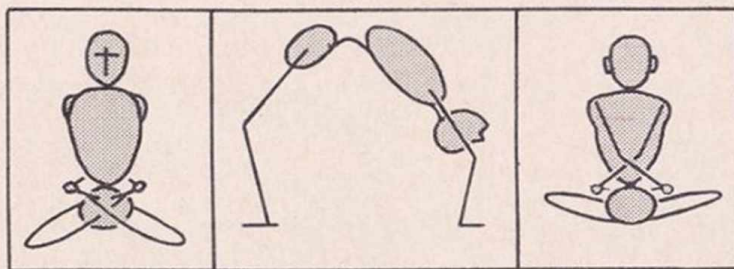


Fig. 3. Two remarkable straightening-up poses: (center) *Chakrasana*, the Circle Pose, and (left and right) *Baddha Padmasana*, the Bound Lotus Pose.

There are other yogic postures that exercise a forward action on the spine, for example, *Halasana* and *Karnapidhasana* (Fig. 2). But these poses exercise the whole length of the spinal column, the cervical region particularly. *Sasangasana* is the only pose that acts selectively on the upper back region between the shoulder blades. Through the arm pull it stretches the rhomboid and trapezius muscles; through the back bend it stretches the *erectores spinae*. Finally, the Hare Pose deeply stimulates the blood and life-force circulation in the muscles and spine between the 3rd and 8th dorsal vertebrae. This stimulation is especially noticeable in the subsequent Relaxation Pose as a feeling of soothing warmth and indescribable well-being.

When some proficiency in *Sasangasana* has been attained, the second phase of the back-straightening program may be started: the practice of poses that bend the spine backward and straighten up the shoulders. *Hatha Yoga* offers several postures to this end. Some

of them, for example, *Chakrasana* (Circle Pose) and *Baddha Padmasana* (Bound Lotus Pose), are remarkable straightening-up agents (Fig. 3). Others, such as *Bhujangasana* (Cobra Pose) and *Gomukhasana* (Bracing-Up Pose), are perhaps less effective, but they are more easily accomplished by the beginner (Fig. 4).

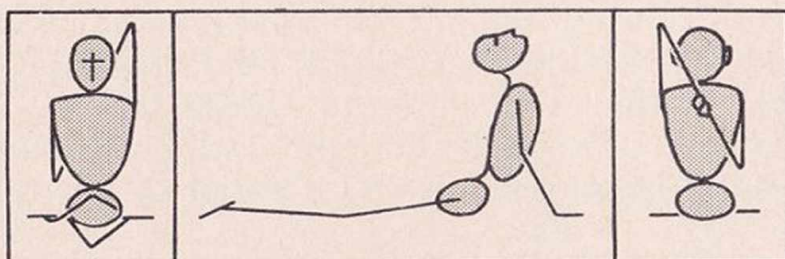


Fig. 4. Two straightening-up poses of medium difficulty: (center) *Bhujangasana*, the Cobra Pose, and (left and right) *Gomukhasana*, the Bracing-up Pose.

Sasangasana thus represents an indispensable complementary pose for straightening the back. In addition it has the virtue of being, like all other yoga postures, a simple, natural, costless, do-it-yourself performance.

Sasangasana Benefits the Inner Organs

Practice of the Hare Pose benefits the inner organs of the trunk and abdomen in several ways. First of all, it strengthens the abdominal muscles, especially the *rectus abdominis*, when the head is brought downward as close to the knees as possible and the buttocks as far forward as possible.

Through the forward bending of the spine *Sasangasana* also exerts on the viscera a direct compression which is completely eliminated in the subsequent practice of the Relaxation Pose. Alternating practice of the Hare Pose and the Relaxation Pose thus improves the blood circulation in the inner organs.

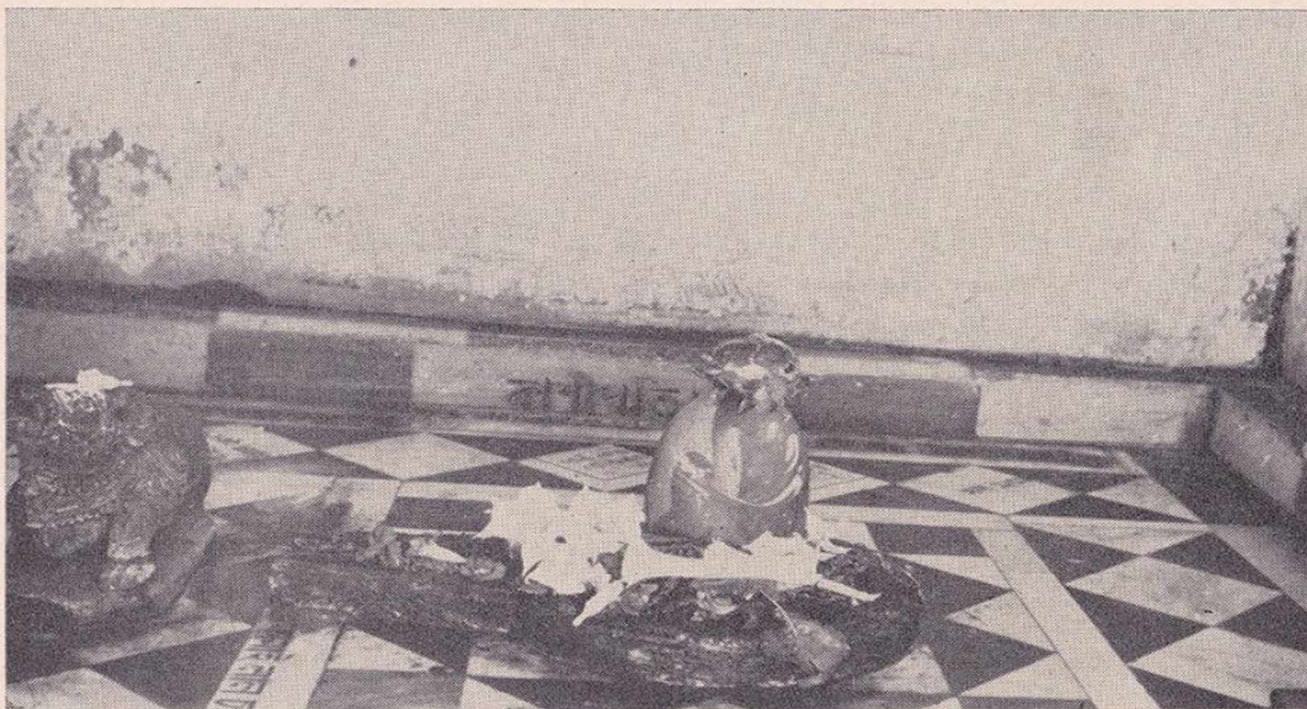
The main action of *Sasangasana*, however, seems to be on the dorsal vertebrae through their intimate contact with the sympathetic ganglia and nerve branches that innervate the inner organs. The sympathetic nerves issuing from the upper thoracic sympathetic ganglia supply the heart plexus and the pulmonary plexus; those issuing from the middle thoracic ganglia supply the solar plexus in the ab-

domen and, through it, the stomach, liver, spleen, and other organs of the abdominal cavity.

From a yogic standpoint, the cosmic life force enters the body through the gate of the medulla oblongata and circulates within the cerebrospinal axis (Paramahansa Yogananda). As the dorsal sympathetic ganglia are connected with the spinal cord through communicating branches called *rami communicantes*, these branches may be thought of as "electrical wires" through which the life force flows into and sustains the inner organs of the trunk.

Yogis have long realized the importance of these nervous connections between the spinal column and the viscera. This explains why their program of physical health places so much importance on poses that exercise the spine in various ways.

(Continued on page 48)



This sacred relic, a Shiva *lingam*, a symbol of the infinite creative power of the Lord, is preserved at Gowardhan Math, Puri, India. The *lingam* was installed by Swami Shankaracharya himself when he founded the Math 1100 years ago.

Photo was taken in 1959 when Sri Daya Mata visited Gowardhan Math as a guest of the late Sri Jagadguru Shankaracharya Bharati Krishna Tirtha, head of the monastery. His unprecedented visit to America in 1958 was sponsored by Self-Realization Fellowship.

Extracts From Mira Behn's Autobiography



The following extracts are from "The Spirit's Pilgrimage" by Madeleine Slade (Mira Behn), devoted disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. The book is published by Coward-McCann, New York, \$5.75.

"I had by now got well into my reading. The effect on me of the *Upanishads*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata* was profound; for here I discovered things that seemed to be part of my inmost self, part of something I had known long before and since lost. Here there was no nightmare of the unanswerable; but instead a vast illumination of the Unknown, making its contemplation an infinite inspiration.

"In the *Ramayana*, and in the tale of Nala and Damayanti in the *Mahabharata*, I was deeply moved by the conception of woman's devotion to her beloved. My idea of marriage had always been something very sacred, which I had silently cherished in my heart: an ideal of utter dedication, and self-expression through oneness with the beloved. And in Sita [wife of Sri Rama] and Damayanti I found wonderful pictures of that very ideal.

"The next reading I took up was the *Koran*. I wrote my impressions to Bapu [Mahatma Gandhi]. He replied: 'You will find many more gems in the *Koran*; some of them are penetrating'....

"The meetings [in America, where Mira went for two weeks in 1934] were much bigger than in England, and everywhere extraordinary interest was shown in Bapu as a person. Every sort of question was asked about him, while the political aspect, so much to the fore in England, was of secondary importance to these American audiences. Gandhi the man, the teacher, the apostle of truth, was what they sought, and with such thirst and earnestness!....

"In spite of the daily packed routine [at Gandhi's ashram in Wardha], Bapu found time also for visitors, of whom there was a large number from various parts of the world. At this distance of time I cannot recall many of them, but two remain clearly in my mind: Halide Edib Hanum, the celebrated woman writer of Turkey; and Swami Yogananda, founder of Self-Realization Fellowship of America."

A SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE *BHAGAVAD - GITA*

(India's greatest scripture, a part of the "Mahabharata" epic)

By PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



Chapter XIV, Stanza 10

Sometimes sattwa is predominant, overpowering rajas and tamas; sometimes rajas prevails, not sattwa or tamas; and sometimes tamas obscures sattwa and rajas.

In this stanza each mortal wryly recognizes his own portrait. Sometimes he is good, sometimes he is bad, and on other occasions his state is that of armed neutrality—neither good nor bad. The human condition!

Though all mortals, that is, unenlightened men, are subject to the three modes of *Prakriti*, each person betrays by his life which of the three *gunas* is habitually dominant in him.

Chapter XIV, Stanza 11

One may know that sattwa is prevalent when the light of intelligence shines through all the sense gates of the body.

The spiritual man is master of his senses and uses them constructively. He perceives only good. All that he sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches reminds him of God, the Supreme Good.

Chapter XIV, Stanza 12

Preponderance of rajas causes greed, activity, undertaking of works, restlessness, and desire.

The activity and the undertaking of works of the average man are ego-tainted and hence accompanied by various griefs and disillusionments. He is engrossed in fears of loss and in expectations of gain. As his desires increase, so does his state of unrest. He is beset by worries; tranquillity and true happiness elude him.

However, a man who labors only for himself and his relatives is nevertheless maintaining a portion of God's family. A selfish businessman, imbued with *rajas*, is therefore far superior to the indolent, *tamasic* type of person who is unwilling to support himself or to make any kind of contribution to society.

Chapter XIV, Stanza 13

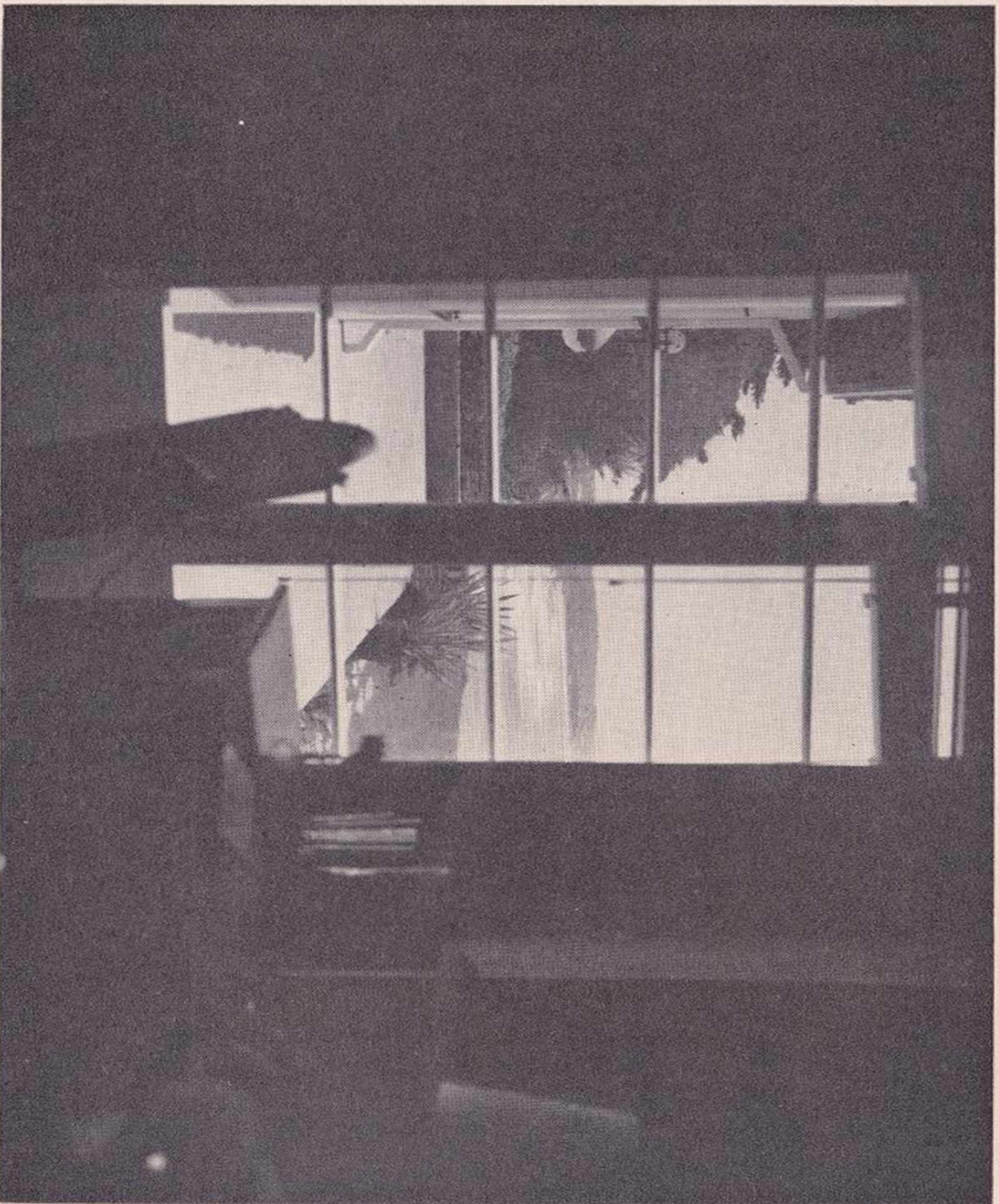
Tamas as the ruling guna produces darkness, sloth, neglect (of duties), and delusion.

Through over-indulgence of the senses, the *tamasic* man becomes exhausted and inactive. Failing to develop his intelligence by performance of his proper duties, he exists in stagnation and bewilderment.

Sensually inclined persons should therefore cease to live for eating, sex, and so on. Man, made in the image of God, should not act like an animal or sink into uselessness. Human sense slaves are worse than the animals, few of which overeat or engage constantly in sex activities. By over-use, man loses sense power and the ability to enjoy any sensory experience. A drug addict, an alcoholic, and a sex-obsessed man fall lower and lower in the scale of evolution.

The person who is mentally befogged owing to sensory over-indulgence is incapable of understanding the difference between right and wrong actions. He is spent in body, mind, and soul, feeling no real physical, mental, or spiritual pleasure. An evil man races continuously toward misery-making actions, without the power to initiate good changes in his life.

A restless active man bakes himself slowly in the oven of worries about himself and others. But a *tamasic* man, as though ossified, is not roused even by the sizzling process of worries. He exists like an inert, lifeless stone.



View from Paramahansa Yogananda's study in Self-Realization Fellowship Hermitage, Encinitas, showing curving shoreline of Pacific Ocean

News of SRF Centers

Encinitas, California

On September 28th-30th eighty members of the Los Angeles SRF Lay Disciple Group visited the Self-Realization Fellowship Colony in Encinitas for a spiritual retreat.

Sri Meera Mata, Brother Anandamoy, and Mr. Eugene Benvau, leader of the Lay Group, welcomed the visitors on Friday evening, September 28th. Meera Mata spoke about her earlier days in Encinitas when Paramahansa Yogananda was developing the colony.

The following morning Brother Bhaktananda conducted exercises and meditation for the group and Brother Anandamoy gave a class on "Keys to Success on the Spiritual Path." After lunch Sri Daya Mata, president of SRF, conducted an informal *satsang* — discussion of spiritual subjects, chanting, and meditation. That evening the group met for a showing of colored slides taken during Sri Daya Mata's visit to SRF-YSS ashrams in India in 1961.

On Sunday morning Brother Bhaktananda again led the group in exercises and meditation. At eleven o'clock the devotees attended the inspiring *Kriya Yoga* initiation conducted by Sri Daya Mata.

In her talk on September 29th, the SRF President said:

"It is wonderful to see all of you here in Encinitas. I've dreamed of this kind of *satsang* with the American disciples ever since my last visit to India, where we had such meetings frequently with the devotees. *Satsang* means that devotees gather like this to talk about God, to think of God, to sing to God, and to meditate upon God. It is one of the loveliest aspects of religious life in India. We learned this kind of worship at the feet of Paramahansa Yogananda here in Encinitas many years ago. He used to say, 'There should be no formality in one's approach to God.' That is, we should approach our Creator with childlike confidence and freedom.

"When we are together like this, we enjoy the spiritual company of one another; but the real temple of worship is within ourselves. When we sit to meditate the whole mind should be within — not thinking about any subject except our own direct and personal, sweet and intimate relationship with God. The only purpose of a church, as Guruji often pointed out, should be to draw people together 'to sip the honey of God-communion.'"

BOOK REVIEWS

THE THIRD MYSTIC OF AVILA, The self-revelation of María Vela, a sixteenth century Spanish nun. Foreword and translation by Frances Parkinson Keyes. 300 pp., cloth, 1960, \$4.75. Order from publisher: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 19 Union Square W., New York.

"O give thanks to the Lord of lords . . . to him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever" (*Psalms 136: 3,4*).

For four centuries the body of the Venerable María Vela has lain, incorrupt, in a niche in the chapel of the Convent of Santa Ana in Avila, Spain. During all these years the story of her remarkable life has remained hidden in the archives of Santa Ana. Now published for the first time, this detailed diary of María Vela's spiritual life was written by the nun under obedience to her confessor. God chose through her to perform many great wonders, for the benefit of her own soul, for the edification of the spiritual community, and now for the inspiration of mankind.

The Strong Woman of Santa Ana, as María Vela came to be known, was so ill prior to her entrance to the convent that she had to be carried there in a chair. She was just fifteen years old. Throughout the rest of her life she was subject to respiratory and other ailments. There were mental forms of suffering too. María was accused of having a "penchant for austerities" and of making herself ill thereby, of imagining and pretending spiritual favors (though how one could pretend levitations that took place before the whole community is hard to imagine!), and of being possessed by devils. She bore her trials patiently, seeking refuge in her beloved Spouse.

Many saints have yearned to know and to do God's will for them, and María Vela was extremely conscientious on this point. Indeed, most of her spiritual and physical struggles were centered in confusions that arose over just what *was* God's will for her. The Lord Himself placed her under obedience to the Rule of her Order (Cistercian), but He frequently bestowed His favors (raptures in which María's sense perceptions usually were suspended and her limbs immobile) in such circumstances as to render her unable to

obey. Sometimes her jaws would become locked so that she could not eat, although she had been ordered to do so; or she would become ill to the point of death. The Lord might then make known to her that she could recover only by practicing certain austerities forbidden her by her superiors. On other occasions there would be disagreement among her superiors as to the proper course of conduct. Such conflicts of duty were tormenting to María's sensitive spirit and increased her natural indecision as to the right thing she should do.

But by these means the Lord taught her perfect resignation to His will and complete indifference to the opinions of men. One is reminded of a prayer of Thomas à Kempis: "I am in Thy hand: turn me round, and turn me back again, as Thou shalt please."

A woman of noble birth—a fact which in those days would have entitled her to preferential treatment even in a convent—María Vela shunned all attentions and creature comforts. Her face swelled with the cold in the unheated stone buildings, but she took a vow "not to go near the fire in wintertime, unless it was absolutely necessary; not to wear a shawl; not to have a warm kerchief attached to my blanket with which to protect my face."

María was well versed in Latin and embellished her diary with scriptural quotations in that language. She made exquisite embroidery and artificial flowers, was an accomplished musician and singer, and served "with great tact and tenderness" as Mistress of Novices.

St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, both of Avila, are famous. In naming this book *The Third Mystic of Avila*, the distinguished translator implies a hope that María Vela will now be recognized as spiritually worthy to stand beside her two towering contemporaries.

In the following selections from her diary María Vela tells of experiences with God, of His revelations to her of various truths, and of her life as a religious. Her remarks are generally addressed to her confessor ("Your Reverence") although she sometimes speaks of him in the third person in writing of her talks with God regarding him.

One day, just after Communion, I began to desire ardently that all souls should come to the fount of living waters, which always remains full and overflowing, no matter how many partake of it. I recalled the words of St. John, "Adore God" (*Apocal.* 22). And those words came to mind, "All you that thirst, come to the waters" (*Isai.* 55, v.1). And it seemed to me that these waters became an ocean in God's immensity, and that just as one drop of water cast into the ocean and mingled with the rest loses the

name of drop and acquires the name of ocean, so our souls, cast into immensity and commingled with God, acquire a new form without losing their identity. It is as if they were deified, in accordance with the text, "You may be made partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1, v.4).

* * *

When I entreated the Lord to enlighten my confessor as to what His Majesty desired, and not to lead us into such confusion, the Voices told me, "That is not fitting; by these very means thou art to be tried on the forge of My love, whereon are tested faith, hope and charity, patience, humility and obedience." They said that I should be strong as a rock amidst the tempests of the sea, and that even though my hopes were apparently shattered, I should believe that the Lord would fulfill His promises.

* * *

On the occasion of another suspension, a great light revealed to me the abyss of baseness which is attachment to earthly creatures. Because of my unworthiness, I felt abashed that anyone should care for me and esteem me. It was clearly evident to me that lack of this self-knowledge is the source of our resentment for insult or injury. As a matter of fact, we do no wrong in despising one who deserves nothing but contempt; instead, we do justice by giving him what he deserves. This truth was engraved deeply on my mind. I am far from attributing to myself any good quality, even in earthly matters, because I perceive very clearly that whatever is mine was bestowed as a gift. I am happy in my poverty and in the hand of God, from Whose bounty I expect all gifts. It seems to me impossible that, in this light, there could be vain complacency in the soul; if it rejoices at all, it must rejoice in God, to Whom all its gifts belong. I was made to understand several things with respect to self-denial and poverty of spirit; among them, that this poverty consists in a total renunciation of our personal freedom to God's Will, in such degree as to think or desire nothing, however good in itself, without first ascertaining whether Our Lord wishes us to think it or desire it. We should regard ourselves as God's chattel for Him to expend and distribute at His pleasure. I hardly know how to express this: feeling something is very different from saying it.

* * *

On the occasion of the death of a religious, I asked of the Lord, since I was not worthy to die in the martyrdom of fire, to grant me the grace of dying consumed by His love. At this very instant, I felt that fire blazing in my soul, inflaming my will and enlightening my mind. I felt that longing for God and that sorrow because of not yet having enjoyed Him; that desire for solitude and that eagerness to receive Him in the Holy Sacrament, that ambition to accomplish great things and suffer a thousand deaths, if possible, for love of Our Lord and salvation of all men; that yearning for the Creator to be beloved of His creatures and, above all, I desired that God be known

and loved for His Own sake; these emotions and desires spring from the love of God. But they are of little worth in comparison with that void which the soul makes of itself, renouncing and stripping itself of its desires, affections and self-love. Upon that foundation of its nothingness, God will build, shaping and enlarging as He wills in accordance with His design for that soul and His other creatures. This is the meaning of "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (*Psalms 81, v.10*). When the soul unites its own pleasures and desires with those of God, it is filled with a joy and satisfaction, a fullness and completion which can be compared only with the rejoicing of the saints and gives the greatest glory that His creatures can offer God; since thereby the soul, forgetful of itself, partakes of the heavenly bliss; and that, after all, is what the blessed do.

* * *

It was irresistibly borne in upon me that God loves me greatly, and I felt wholly confident that I could ask for Mercies, especially from the Saviour Himself. Furthermore, I saw that this favor had already been granted me; in the words of St. Paul, "He that spared not even his own Son... how hath he not also, with him, given us all things?" (*Rom. 8, v.32*). This so pleased me that I said to the Lord, "Undoubtedly, Lord, I must come to You with small matters as well as great, since You can help me better than any earthly friend." His Majesty replied, "So I wish it to be. Who else can grant thee thy heart's desire?"

* * *

Tonight I told *Doña María* something that I had resolved not to tell her. Later, realizing I had not possessed the power to resist doing this, I was so remorseful that my entire morning prayer was an entreaty for the Lord's pardon. Though grieved to receive Communion so ill prepared for it, I finally approached the altar and received. Afterward, I besought His Majesty to forgive me and not to hide His countenance from me. I firmly proposed, with His help, not to suggest the favor of ecstasy; but I was enraptured for an hour. I seemed to be tenderly held in the arms of God, and He said to me, "I am sufficient for thee, since I am sufficient for Myself. Seek neither well-being nor consolation from anyone but Me." I replied, "My Lord, do with me what You will, and let all my joy and pleasure be from You, in You and through You." Again, I heard the Lord saying, "Stay with Me, for I have come to thee." I told Him this was my desire: to be at His feet, listening to His Divine words. Then He said, "That is what Mary Magdalene used to do when she received Me in her house: 'Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her' (*Luke 10, v.42*)." Here I said, "Nor from me, Lord!" He responded, "Nor from thee, either." All this occurred in the hidden recess of my soul, where my spirit blazed with inner ardor.

(Continued on page 50)

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"I am ever grateful to the Divine Beloved for guiding my footsteps to SRF. I am deeply thankful for the spiritual help of the blessed Masters. By virtue of the SRF Lessons, I am starting on the greatest adventure of my life — the discovery of the Self. Thank you!" — *H.T., Santa Rosa, California.*

"I am fully convinced that Yoga is the very greatest discipline known to man; that of all disciplines it is the only one which teaches development and control of all four major aspects of the human personality, in their logical order and without bias, in realistic proportion; neglecting none and overemphasizing none." — *J.H., Washington, Michigan.*

"Self-Realization Lessons have been a constant source of peace and strength. It would be impossible to list all the benefits flowing into my daily activities from these beautiful teachings." — *V.R., Strathmore, California.*

"I have received two copies of *Self-Realization Magazine* and have read and reread them until they are dog-eared. This is the first teaching I have found that has real warmth in it, at least for me. In it is a feeling of divine love and closeness to God." — *T.K., Saginaw, Michigan.*

"The Horn of Plenty Bank has been literally a horn of plenty for me! Since I started using it I have had everything I need." — *R.Y.K., Dublin, Ireland.*

"With my study of the SRF Lessons I started a climb uphill, a climb that to me is sacred and loving, a climb that has so enriched my life that there is no comparison. I realize I was only half alive before, and how 'wide awake' my mind now is. My prayer is that I may serve Master to my fullest capacity, and gratefully and humbly try to help all others, be they begrimed by ignorance or awake in

realization. Thanks to Gurudev's teaching, I now fully appreciate Christ's words, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone.' — *S.P., Bronx, New York.*

"I have just finished reading *Whispers from Eternity*. Never before have I read anything that expressed such beauty of soul."—*R.R., Inglewood, California.*

"The period of the 1962 SRF Summer Classes was the most peaceful in my life. It is easy to keep one's thoughts on God and the Master when one is surrounded by spiritual vibrations. And what refreshing conversation — always God-centered! And all our questions answered! It was such a pleasure talking to the Brahmacharis and Brothers. We had the added blessing of seeing, hearing, and greeting Sri Daya Mata. She set the pattern for the week that was to follow, a week that set the course of our lives: to seek God through the help of Master." — *A.B., Canoga Park, California.*

"One day after reading a few pages in *The Master Said* and afterward studying his picture on the jacket of the book, I prayed for help in my practice of the SRF Lessons and particularly of the techniques of meditation and concentration. I thought about this deeply for some time until I felt a strong desire to meditate. I could hear Master saying in my inner consciousness, 'Come and meditate; I will help you.' And truly he did, for I had a very deep and joyful meditation that day. It was a precious experience for me and a constant reminder of the nearness of Master in time of need." — *J.M.B., Cicero, Illinois.*

"The record *Chants and Prayers* is alive with the personality of Paramahansa Yogananda; at last I begin to understand him person to person. His voice brings inspiration, peace, and the love of God." — *W.B.A., St. Petersburg, Florida.*

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To the Friends of SRF

Self-Realization Fellowship gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance received from members and other friends in carrying on its manifold activities in America, India, and other parts of the world. The work founded by Paramahansa Yogananda is continuously expanding; and with it the need to apply SRF resources to new projects as well as to long-established activities.

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Comments on "Autobiography of a Yogi"



"Persons here who have read the *Autobiography* have received a spiritual shock, as if their eyes had been suddenly opened. Yogananda talks in a very simple and illuminating way about matters that till now seemed to us to lie in the sphere of miracles. He has inculcated in us a logical conviction that 'miracles' are the natural and inevitable result of man's spiritual evolution. That is the great 'shock' which compels us to undertake exertions of our own in this matter. Never before, nowhere, and by nobody else, have human capabilities and possibilities been so much stirred up and aroused in the reader as by Paramahansa Yogananda in *Autobiography of a Yogi*." — S.K., Warsaw, Poland.

"I was led to join Self-Realization Fellowship through my persistent searching and longing to know God more fully. Spending many years delving into various religious beliefs did not satisfy my cravings; some essential element was usually lacking. God must have wished it that way because as a last resort (I had never previously considered Yoga) I was led to *Autobiography of a Yogi*. When I called the public library to ask what books it had on Yoga, the librarian offered me the *Autobiography* and a volume on Hatha Yoga.

"I have never read anything to compare with Yogananda's *Autobiography*. It is one of the most outstanding, soul-inspiring books ever written. The answer to every question can be found in Yogananda's writings. I feel confident that all he offers is God-inspired. I know that by following his teachings I will attain my infinite Goal. I feel humble and grateful to be even a small part of this beautiful SRF movement to apprise all humanity of the possibility of God-communion." — W.F., Sacramento, California.

"The greatest book I have ever read. It left me tingling and pulsing with new life, and a hope that I could become a yogi. Best of all was the knowledge that I had found what I had been looking for, for so long." — D.D., Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada.

"I am reading the wonderful *Autobiography of a Yogi* for the second time. It is an inspiration to me. Being a busy housewife, and mother of five children, my leisure is limited, but I stop and take

time to read this precious book. Sometimes as I read it I feel deep within me the joy of God's Spirit." — *G.M., Detroit, Michigan.*

"I am not given to effusive praise; but out of a few thousand books I have read, *Autobiography of a Yogi* is by far the most interesting and far-reaching in its effect." — *H.G., Ottawa, Ontario, Can.*

"This book has given me a wonderful intimation of the Infinite." — *M.R., Huntersville, North Carolina.*

"I believe every word in the book. Reading it has left me with a feeling of peace and happiness." — *G.B., Los Angeles, California.*

"Everything in the *Autobiography* has such a deep and lasting appeal that one can reread it indefinitely with the same perennial interest. I am delighted that a copy has been transcribed into Braille. What a wonderful new world it will open up for many persons!" — *R.C., Hartford, Connecticut.*

"Recently I read Paramahansa Yogananda's book about his life; it deeply moved me as no other religious book ever has. He answered all my questions. I wept for joy to have found at last a spiritual guide to God. I know instinctively and completely that this is the path for me. Since this opening has been shown me deep inner changes have taken place. I no longer fear death, whereas it used to be a thing of terror for me. I feel much more humble before God, and greater compassion and love toward all persons. I love our Lord and wish to serve Him; I used to resent Him and wanted only to serve myself. I no longer am sunk in self-pity and envy of other persons' good fortune, but feel great gratitude for what I have." — *B.H., Byfield, Massachusetts.*

(Continued from page 17)

Love is the goal. The feeling of being free to love is the means. All of us are imprisoned in the prison house of self, in the grip of our own fears and separateness. Until we learn how to be more free within ourselves, how can we love? You say this sounds like the imaginative reasoning of a poet. But to what end is the power to imagine granted to man or to poets if not to dream and to meditate on issues that are ultimate and eternal? — *From "Visvabharati Quarterly," Santiniketan, West Bengal, India.*

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psychic and astral powers. He should concentrate on no miracles or powers, but only on the attainment of joy in God.

One should understand the spiritual inefficacy of the practice, however perfect and austere, of merely external rites mentioned in the scriptures. Nothing but the cleansing of man's inner being has the power to free him from the trifold reincarnation-making qualities of human nature — the *sattwic* (elevating), the *rajasic* (activating), and the *tamasic* (degrading).

Many Vedic scriptures, profoundly symbolic and carrying hidden meanings not apparent to the superficial scholar, also possess external significance as rites and rituals for merely worldly purposes. Some Vedic stanzas, on the surface, are concerned with methods for developing the rajasic or activating qualities of man for definite results, such as victory in battle over one's enemies. Other Vedic verses tell of the development of tamasic or demonic qualities; still others deal with the culture of sattwic qualities, those that sweeten and ennoble a man.

The ordinary devotee who understands only the surface import of the *Vedas* and who blindly follows the literal instruction is unaware of the truth that any man who concerns himself primarily with the phenomenal world of the three qualities is thereby subject to reincarnation through the strength of associated desires. If, for instance, a devotee employs certain Vedic chants in order to triumph over an enemy, his success in that aim will establish in his consciousness a desire for future victories. This subconscious desire for victory leads to the development of the activating (rajasic) quality in the

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devotee, and is the direct cause of another rebirth in which he must work out the unfulfilled desire. Any desire develops in man one or more of the three qualities — elevating, activating, or degrading — and ties him to the wheel of reincarnation.

The word *Veda* signifies knowledge. The highest Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*, are books of wisdom both material and spiritual. A book of true wisdom is primarily meant for the liberation of the soul from the bondage of rebirth and secondarily for teaching the art of success in material life. Certain classes of people blindly worship the *Vedas* and think that *all* its injunctions refer to liberation. The ancient writers were wise enough to stimulate the people's interest in the scriptures by showing the ways of material success, and then to try to lead them on to follow those self-disciplinary rules that end in spiritual liberation.

Develop the Desireless Intuitive State

The devotee should free himself from any activities that rouse the reincarnation-making threefold human qualities, and should develop, instead, the desireless intuitive state by divine meditation.

The sincere devotee must free himself from the sway of the pairs of opposite qualities: good and bad, virtue and vice, happiness and sorrow, heat and cold, like and dislike, and so forth. When man develops one quality, he is automatically required to experience its opposite. One who has pain looks for happiness, and one who has happiness is afraid of losing it!

The tranquil, evenly balanced state of mind that cannot be disturbed by pain or happiness leads the devotee to the unchangeable ever new joy hidden in the soul. Materially minded people do not wish to rise above sorrow and joy because they are afraid of a tasteless, colorless existence. They do not know that real unending joy lies in communing with the soul by meditation and in thus preventing the mind from riding on the crests of sorrow and happiness or from sinking into the depths of indifference.

The gain of temporary happiness is followed by its loss, thus increasing one's misery. Therefore the devotee should liberate himself from all exciting qualities and should concentrate on the bliss-nature of the soul.

One should become anchored on the ever balanced rock of cosmic consciousness where no waves of change make any impression.

The devotee should remove all forms of conditioned existence that stimulate the desires of getting and keeping objects; his goal should be unconditioned Existence in God.

Great yogis give a spiritual interpretation of the *Vedas* and their injunctions. They say that the meditating devotee on his way to the perception of the Self rises above the consciousness of the world, the senses, and the body and becomes concentrated on the spinal region and its plexuses, the centers of consciousness and vital energy. The devotee is counseled to rise above the perceptions of the coccygeal, sacral, and lumbar regions (corresponding to the three *Vedas* that deal with the material side of life) and to concentrate on the regions of the dorsal, cervical, medullary and cerebral plexuses (corresponding to the *Rig* or the highest and most spiritual *Veda*).*

The Fullness of Direct Experience

The man who has become one with the ocean of Spirit finds needless any study of descriptions of God that appear in the scriptures. Even as a reservoir is unnecessary when a flood spreads everywhere, so formal scriptures are superfluous to one who is merged in the Infinite Sea.

Perceiving the Supreme Wisdom of Spirit, the yogi finds all other forms of knowledge of little consequence.

Jesus said: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."† Expansion of human consciousness into cosmic consciousness by the art of concentration brings to the devotee a joy far greater than the slight happiness resulting from study of books. That devotee is like a man who has been trying all his life to get one thousand dollars, and who suddenly finds himself a billionaire!

The yogi who goes into the depths of silence finds that as his consciousness and life force begin to withdraw from body consciousness he soars through the tunnel of the spine into the God-contact perceptible in the brain as ever new Bliss. Finding this palace of joy, the yogi never yearns again for the suffocating slums of sense pleasures.

**Atharva Veda* deals with exorcism of spirits, *Sama Veda* with chants, *Yajur Veda* with religious ceremonies for material gain.

†*Matthew 6:33*.

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(Continued from page 25)

Certain medical schools, for example, the osteopathic, have recognized the importance of the vertebral-organic relationship. In a well-documented study published in the *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*, 1961, Dr. Richard S. Koch reports that in 150 cases of heart disease of various types, 93% of the functional cases and 92% of the organic cases showed X-ray and palpatory evidence of spinal aberration in the area of the 2nd through the 6th dorsal vertebrae. "Corrective spinal treatment was consistently followed by varying degrees of relief involving both spinal and cardiac symptoms, and these subjective results were reflected in objective clinical and laboratory evidence of improvement. Discontinuance of such treatment was usually followed by signs of regression in both spinal and cardiac conditions."

The experience of its practitioners has shown that *Sasangasana* is beneficial to the proper functioning of the heart, the stomach, and the liver.

Sasangasana, a Convenient Substitute for the Headstand

The inversion of the trunk in *Sasangasana* produces, as in other topsy-turvy poses, a shifting of the blood mass toward the head. Many benefits of the Headstand (*Sirshasana*) are thus to be expected from *Sasangasana*, physiologically as well as psychologically.

Yogis state that the increased supply of blood to the neck and head in the Hare Pose improves the eyesight and hearing, gives a healthy appearance to the scalp and hair, and enhances the functioning of the thyroid, parathyroid, and pituitary glands. Memory and sharpness of mind improve also.

An advantage of the Hare Pose over the Headstand is that it can be practiced with benefit in cases where the Headstand should not be used; for example, in arthrosis of the neck vertebrae, when it is important not to place any extra load on them, or in certain heart diseases, when excessive dilatation of the cavities should be avoided.

Sasangasana, a Help on the Spiritual Path

Spiritual aspirants may profitably practice *Sasangasana* not only to improve their power of concentration but also and mainly to better their meditation posture. *Sasangasana* together with its complementary back-building poses develops a strong back.

The performance of the Hare Pose before meditation will be found to help one in sitting with spine straight, chin parallel to the floor, shoulders back, chest out, and abdomen in, as required in all meditation postures.

After a while, if pains in the region between the shoulder blades set in because of the sustained contraction of the back-straightening muscles, practice of the Hare Pose followed by that of backward-bending spinal asanas will aid in removing the pains and in conditioning the body for continuing the meditation.

Noting the physiology and benefits of *Sasangasana*, we can see why the proper position of the hands (palms upward, at the junction of the thighs and abdomen) is an important factor in maintaining the spine erect in any meditation posture. When the hands are placed in any other position (interlocked in front of the body, or turned palms down, or placed on the knees), they do not assist the upper back muscles in keeping the shoulder blades back. These muscles (rhomboides and trapezius) tend to "give" and invite the *erectores spinae* to "give" too. It is easy then to slip into a round-backed position, and the performer must then make a conscious effort to straighten his spine. On the contrary, when the hands are held in the proper position one finds that he can maintain a straight posture without moving for an incredible length of time.

To improve physically, mentally, and spiritually, why not try *Sasangasana*?

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Asanas mentioned in this article are described in previous issues of *Self-Realization Magazine*, as follows:

Bhujangasana, Cobra Pose, November 1958.

Chakrasana, Circle Pose, December 1960 and January 1961.

Gomukhasana, Bracing-Up Pose, September 1960.

Halasana, Plow Pose, September 1958.

Sirshasana, Headstand, July, September, November 1959; January 1960.

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When I received the Lord on Sunday, this thought came to me, "Christ lives and works in me." I kept these words in mind, giving thanks. Then I was seized with such bodily agony that I could not have remained on my knees if it had persisted. I entreated the Lord to alleviate this suffering, since I could not be with Him if it continued. He took away the pain, and I was enabled to kneel two hours longer. Then I became almost overwhelmed by sleep. I begged His Majesty to keep me awake, even if it were by despair, since I would rather suffer than sink into oblivion. Then He brought my sins to my mind, and made me reflect on my effrontery in breaking His Divine law. I shed many remorseful tears even while my heart burned with love for Him to Whom I owe so much. He said, "Mark how I have waked thee."

* * *

On Saturday, when I commended a lady (*Doña María Hervas*) of this city to God, and was wondering how He could permit passion to take such hold on a heart so filled with love of His Majesty, I was given to understand, "There is no reason for surprise, since her heart belongs only partially to God." I meditated on this and prayed over it, grieving that there are so few, even among those choosing virtue for their part, who give all their heart to God and love Him purely. It was clear to me that, for souls not wholly detached and freed from all human and sensual love of friends and relatives, and from consideration of their own comfort, ease and pleasure, even in quite normal ways, it is impossible to progress in divine spiritual love, no matter how much these souls seem to strive toward virtue. This is "Denial of one's self," which Christ Our Lord set in first place for those who wish to achieve perfection in following Him (*Matt. 16, v.24*).

* * *

Then it seemed as if He were inviting me to enter through His Divine Heart, urging, "Come in! Come in!" over and over again, until my heart was afire with love and longing; but I knew not the how nor the where. My emotion was so vehement that my faculties were suspended and my head and my hands benumbed. Then I asked, "Lord, what is this conflict into which You plunge me?" The answer came, "Enter into the dark and secret place." Next it seemed to me that I was lifted up and set in a place wherein I was given the utmost appreciation of that Incomprehensible Being. Nevertheless, my soul could see nothing, but was as one who warms himself at a great fire behind a curtain, so that, although he can see neither its size nor its flame, he perceives it to be a fire with a mighty blaze, for he feels its scorching heat. Thus the soul, though it sees nothing, needs must believe this is God, by virtue of the awe and reverence inspired by that Majesty with Whom he seems to be in contact, even though in darkness

and beyond a curtain. It also came to me that divinity is a mirror in which all creatures see themselves; and that it is like the sea whence all rivers flow and whither all return.

As I was wondering whether the Lord would approve some questions I had discussed with Father Domingo Bañez, I understood Him to say, "I am thy Teacher and thou hast no need of another; I show thee the way and enable thee to walk therein. I command thee in accordance with My Will and make it possible for thee to obey My commands." Thereupon, I became even more deeply absorbed, and felt as if Christ Our Lord was as near me as if we were speaking face to face. Then He assured me, "I am remaining with thee," and I asked, "Even when I do not feel Your Presence, My Beloved?" I understood the answer to be, "Even then, for when thou art unaware of My Presence, it is to give scope to thy faith and trust."

* * *

I reflected that, in order to carve a saint from stone, it is necessary to cut the stone here and there with the aid of compasses and gauges; it is by dint of hard blows that the eyes and other features come into being. I remembered what efforts a master workman puts forth, and how often the stone resists, almost as if it had feeling. It is the same in the life of the spirit. In order to transform stones into the children of Abraham, all excesses must be cut away and the hammer of mortification is needful to bring forth the eyes and other features of a saint, humble, simple and chaste, with a saint's characteristic composure and modesty. Consequently, even as the stone, we must submit to the artisan's hands, though he seem to rend us into fragments and destroy us, for if we fend off the blows and flee from them, the image will never come to light.

* * *

With respect to the order of Your Reverence that I should burn certain papers, this is what I was given to understand: "Why shouldst thou wish to burn them? Thou keepest the words of men; why not keep Mine? My doctrine is worthy of being written in letters of gold on the hearts of men, and the Mercies I grant thee will serve to inspire confidence in those who know of them; since, doing so much for thee who deservest it not, what will I do for one who is ready to receive My words and merit them?"

* * *

Furthermore, I was made to understand that God had granted me these Mercies, so that the person to whom I was to transmit these meditations would understand clearly that many high mysteries are revealed and many admirable concepts developed through the medium of prayer without the labor of study. Truths are thus consumed with a savor unlike that in books. Considering this fact, he should devote more time to prayer, placing his whole trust in God and not in his own work.

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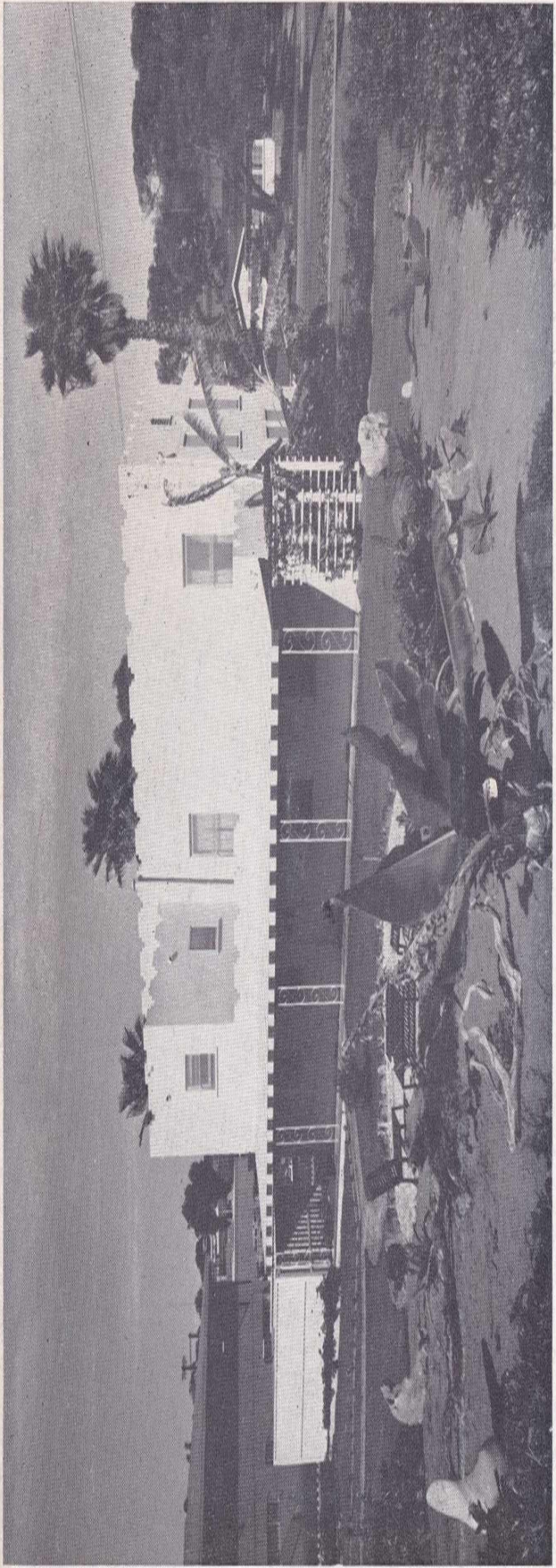
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The trident, ascetic's waterpot, and Nandi, the bull, are all associated with Shiva; the discus and conch with Vishnu; and the rosary and lotus with Brahma. The Great Hunter's four dogs represent the four *Vedas*, the original Hindu scriptures, as faithful watchdogs of Truth.



Monks' ashram, seen from garden area at rear, Self-Realization Fellowship World Brotherhood Colony, Encinitas, Calif.