

cannot attain perfection in yoga” (Hariharananda Aranya 1983,113). As with any approach, the fruits of the practice are a clear, calm mental state alongside an energized state of mind and body. When the mind, body and emotions are integrated in this way they are prepared for the next stage of the journey.

### **Svadhyaya: the need for self-reflection and study**

The *niyama* of *svadhyaya* refers to the practice of spiritual study and self-reflection. Study is referred to as the “the highest austerity” in the Upanishads (Klostermaier 1994, 77). The reading of scripture is a necessary corollary of embodied practices, and the two are mutually constitutive of practice. From the yogic perspective, there is a recognition that study is itself part of the larger practice of self-discipline and *tapas*.

*Svadhaya* also contributes to the lifting of the veil of ignorance (*avidya*) and providing right knowledge. Scripture offers a condensed form of the wisdom developed within the religious tradition. Through self-reflection, the text is brought into daily life. Iyengar (1991) makes clear that the sacred books of all traditions have the same purifying and positive impact (39).

An uncultivated mind can be harmful both to the self and others. As Jung (1968) writes with dry wit, it is the “insufficiently cultivated” mind that is most sure of itself: “once this petty reasoning mind, which cannot endure any paradoxes, is awakened no sermon on earth can keep it down” (16). It is the mark of the developed intellect to recognize the vastness of knowledge and as a result to have a sense of humility. It is also the mark of the developed consciousness to be able to hold paradox and not fall into

rigid forms of thought and simplistic black and white approaches to problems.

*Svadyaya* is not an intellectual exercise or a set of facts to be memorized. Scripture serves as a repository of wisdom that leads the student to the goal of transformation. In the early stages of development, this must be taken on faith. It is for this reason that scripture is passed on from generation to generation with the understanding that it holds the highest values and teachings of a culture. With practice, eventually the truth of its teachings can be experienced.

The interplay between study and practice is an intrinsic aspect of the eight limbs of Yoga, and no part can be left out. The reading of scripture and related texts is meant to be a starting point for self-reflection and paying attention to how the teachings apply in one's life. Study involves not merely the act of reading the yoga scriptures but also contemplation on their relevance to us personally, including a plan for practical implementation. Throughout Iyengar's writing, he points to the integration of study, reflection and embodied purification practice: "Giving attention to and reflecting in practice is essential to develop skilfulness in *sadhana* so that the hidden impurities clouding the intelligence are eradicated" (Iyengar 2012, 114).

### **Ishvara Pranidhana: devotion and submission to higher law**

The final *niyama*, *Ishvara Pranidhana*, refers to the process of self-surrender and devotion to god. The yoga tradition does not dictate what form of the divine is to be worshipped. The important element is the recognition of a higher power beyond the ego-based self.

# YOGA AND ALIGNMENT

FROM THE UPANISHADS TO B.K.S. IYENGAR



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