

A CHRISTIAN YOGA (*concluded*)^{*}

P. R. RÉGAMEY, O.P.

III

The Means

AS for the means employed by classical yoga there can be no question of reviewing them here. We must, to begin with, insist on their extreme *seriousness*, which gives food for thought.

At their basis are 'curbs' and 'disciplines' such as non-violence (*ahimsa*) and chastity. In the logical scheme of yoga these are only the preliminary dispositions for entry upon the Royal Way itself.¹ It is generally said of them that they are not peculiar to yoga but common to all spiritual codes of conduct, that the equivalent is to be found in Christian asceticism. This is certainly true in principle. But why is it that, except for rare exceptions, they can scarcely be said to transform man in our Christian West, whereas they seem in general much more effective among the Indian adepts of yoga? It is to these simple 'curbs' and 'disciplines' that classical doctrine attributes the most extraordinary 'powers'. For instance the normal effect, perhaps topical enough, of *ahimsa* is to make a man so peaceful that animals, instead of running away from him or attacking him, feel the radiance of his goodwill and gentleness and come to him; the true practitioner of non-violence meditates quietly in the jungle. We take the conditions of our own temperament too much for granted, however disordered it may be; it is under its régime that we pretend to grow in virtue; we content ourselves with intentions, our aims are moral in an abstract sense, according to the conventional standards of good and evil, while the practice of yoga concerns itself always with ways of existence in which man is totally re-orientated, in which especially the psychological processes of his soul are purified and their energy set free.

^{*} Translated from *La Vie Spirituelle*. Cf. *THE LIFE*, February, 1956, pp. 356-64.

¹ Eliade, *Le Yoga*, pp. 61-65; *Yoga* (Cahiers du Sud), pp. 33-35.

One of the essential aspects of this *seriousness* is to allow no 'awareness' to a life which is not *lived* and lived even *physically*. As long as we do not go right on into physical patterns of behaviour nothing in us, who are in our 'carnal condition', is stable or humanly deep. It is right in the competent accounts of yoga to react against the vulgar conceptions which reduce it to the bodily feats of 'fakirs'; it is right to give major importance to the disciplines of 'Royal Yoga' which are spiritual. But these themselves are always sustained by disciplines of the body without which there could not be sufficient concentration for them. The yogi strives for the mastery of his whole organism. All is bound up together in man, whether it is bound in tumult or whether it is bound in peace. The yogi takes seriously the necessity of suppressing the eddies of thinking matter, those 'fluctuating actualizations' as Maryse Choisy translates the word *vritti*.² In this he goes to the deepest roots, bringing to light the contents of the unconscious.

With our habits of thinking hastily we risk making the objection that it is contradictory, when one is aiming at emancipation from bodily conditions to live everything in an excessively bodily way, giving enormous importance to posture and breathing. . . . In that we illustrate our lack of seriousness. Liberation is a mastery, *and one masters only what one assumes, what one takes upon oneself*. That is one of the primordial laws of human wisdom, and it is a law which is everywhere valid, in relation to the exterior world, to the body, to the subconscious, to imagination, to thought.

The seriousness of yoga is fearful. The existence of these disciplines on our planet is a recall to order, an appeal to heroism. There are no adaptations, no 'yoga for everybody', no 'yoga without tears'. It is true that these disciplines are rich in lessons from which everyone can profit, however mediocre the stage of his development may be. We are considering them here. But they are only crumbs which fall for us, the little dogs beneath, from a table to which one comes only by long courage, under the guidance of a qualified master.

Are we, we men of the West, *serious* enough yet to work out the yoga which fits us? It would have a very different character from those which it has assumed in India, where it actually had, and has, many forms. The great psychologist Jung, one of the

² *Yogas et psychoanalyse*, p. 12.

men who, in his knowledge of mankind, owed most to yoga, gives us on this subject very grave warnings indeed.³

According to Jung, the European is so constituted that he would 'inevitably make bad use of yoga'. He is all 'will to rule'; he equips himself every day with more formidable powers; and for him 'the most imperative question' is 'in actual fact' not one of augmenting his capacity for realization, but one of 'learning not to do exactly what he wants . . . he does not know his own soul, risen now in rebellion against him to the point of annihilating him. Western man is already over-armed with techniques. *Everything that resembles a method presents for him a new danger or is doomed to become ineffectual.*'

I have underlined this declaration. There is a risk of seeing in it only a quip carried to excess, a risk of shrugging the shoulders. An arresting of technical progress, in the sense of the recourse to all sorts of methods, is obviously a chimera. So we take no notice. But if we consider in the very least what is implied, Jung's cry of alarm obliges us to further reflections. Faced with the scientific means which Western man has today at his disposal, and faced with their shocking violence, this cry comes from the same wisdom which demands preliminary 'curbs' to every action and which puts us on our guard against supernormal 'powers'. It teaches us that these powers are the greatest obstacle to 'realization', and yet, as I was saying, they are the normal outcome of a training in yoga. He who is endowed with them must exercise them as little as possible. Is it *inevitable* that the European will put yoga to bad use? Let us hope rather that its practice would carry with it for the European, if he could surrender himself seriously to it, 'curbs' which would be in proportion to his present folly. This exigency condemns *ipso facto* the airiness with which it occurs to certain men of the West to give themselves over to the exercises of *Hatha-yoga* (the yoga of the body) without the necessary 'curbs'.

But Jung's warning goes further still, goes deeper. The enigmatic alternative will have been observed: for Western man every method is ineffectual, if it is not excessively dangerous. And why? Because the unconscious of Western man is too *loaded*. It is a case of one of two things: either a method has no influence over this unconscious, and having recourse to it is merely rewhitewashing

3 'Yoga and the West', in *Approches de l'Inde*, edited by Cahiers du Sud, 1949, pp. 324-329. I am surprised that these vital pages are quoted so rarely.

a wall full of salt-petre, or else there is a great risk of aggravating this condition of mental fidget.

Dr Thérèse Brosse (in *Yoga*, p. 125) observes on his part how Western man is harassed by 'psychological problems', exposed to 'more or less underhand attacks on the part of the unconscious. Even by sticking to it for an hour a day for years he does not manage to succeed in the most elementary of the exercises in concentration (*Dharana*, 'the maintaining of mental attention on an object'). The Hindu yogi concentrates himself on the object of his choice 'with the integrity of his whole being'. The Western student must, in the course of the same exercise (which is only nominally the same), adopt with regard to himself a disciplinary attitude, driving back, second by second, the rising flood of emotional, intellectual, moral and practical problems which the conscious mind refuses to examine impartially. Any psychoanalyst would know that such exercises can only serve to aggravate the situation between the conscious mind and the subconscious; even any educationalist worth the name would protest energetically against a method of force and repression which is the very negation of the conditions necessary for spiritual self-education.'

Jung adds yet another point which can be put like this. The theory of yoga is essential to its practice. Now the concepts to which it appeals are not at all natural to Western man. It is in vain that they are *explained* to him; they constitute for him a system, a laborious mental construction. While the Indian yogi 'does not understand them, he feels them in his heart, his very entrails, his blood. The European who imitates, and learns notions by heart is not able to express his own subjective states through Hindu thought-forms.' If he were completely sincere, he would *think* quite differently the methods to which he has recourse. (Going geographically from one civilization to another constitutes the same sort of difficulty as Christians of today experience in realizing themselves in the ancient forms of Christianity itself; it is the difficulty of a liturgical renaissance and of transpositions of the spiritual life!)

Are we to think, then, asks Dr Brosse, that the practice of yoga, in the very essence of what it still has to say to us as men, is closed to modern man precisely in the hour when he turns eagerly towards it? The writer himself answers with the hope which he puts in the 'integral yoga' of Sri Aurobindo, 'an example of an harmonious integration of all the aspects of individual and social

life within the spiritual framework of yoga. The vital forms of this give unity to lives whose activities remain complex.⁴ I beware of having too positive an opinion on this point, where experience is law. But I fear that Aurobindo's synthesis lacks the necessary rigour.

However that may be, we need plenty of pioneers, and *serious* ones, with a *seriousness* of which I have tried to show the degree and character from the point of view of a Christian, a Western psychologist and a yogi himself. We need to multiply 'experiences of truth' in the directions which seem proper for reflection on these experiences, reflection which is to throw light on a Christian interpretation of man and on depth psychology. I believe Jung's conclusion wise: 'Western civilization . . . must above all be set free from its barbarous narrowness. To succeed in that it is absolutely necessary to penetrate more deeply into what is properly human in man.'⁵ This knowledge cannot be acquired . . . by *imitating* the methods which took their birth in very different psychological conditions. In the course of centuries, the West will produce its own yoga, which will be built upon the foundations of Christianity.' '*In the course of centuries!*' Yes, it is certainly a work of time.

Its artisans must be Western: priests, religious, layfolk, whose faith is very strong and very enlightened. They will have to be as perfectly balanced and 'pacified' as possible.⁶ While still young—about thirty—they would put themselves to the school of India, some there, others here in the West if they could find a *gouru* worthy of their trust. *All* these conditions are necessary. Men of the West who catch only a vague reflection of India, or those who assimilate it and at the same time lose their original character retard the necessary work rather than advance it.⁷ As a compensation, with what gratitude and what hope do we turn to Père Monchanin and his *ashram*.⁸

4 cf. Aurobindo's book, *La Synthèse des Yogas*, Maisonneuve, 1939.

5 The French translation has: 'Dans la nature humaine de l'homme (into the human nature of man).'

6 Having, particularly, submitted to a serious 'analysis'.

7 As, inversely and on a cultural plane, those Asiatics and Africans who have not kept intact their own cultural values and have become mere reflections of the West have retarded and distorted Western culture. There again the arts cry out what would be less strikingly evident without them: 'mission art' has everywhere tended to compromise and to sugariness, and that has spoilt everything, *irremediably*. Cf. the 1951 number of *L'Art Sacré*: 'The grievous problem of missionary art'.

8 'Catholic India', four articles in *La France Catholique*, January-February, 1953.

APPENDIX

Three Books on Yoga

M. Mircea Eliade's recent book on *Yoga*⁹ deserves to become the classical work on this great subject. The historian has meditated it and matured it during the whole course of his career. After having studied for three years at the University of Calcutta, he stayed from September 1930 till March 1931 (p. 69, n. 1) in three *ashrams* (communities of ascetics) in the Himalayas, and worked on a first version which appeared in 1936. He put the work back on the block and published in 1948 *Techniques du Yoga*. What we are re-reading now is this book completely recast and grown from 260 to 400 pages.

The book is addressed to a vast cultivated public, for whom it is perfectly clear, as well as offering to enquirers, in notes assembled at the end, accounts of various points at issue and reference to sources. The wide synthetic surveys have the authority of twenty-five years work on this subject.

M. Eliade keeps by choice to the historian's point of view; he leaves us to make our own judgements on the religious or simply the human value of the different forms of yoga. Nevertheless one is always conscious in his work of the religious mind and the philosophical spirit, on the alert to ensure a right perception of the realities concerned. The great labour which must precede any appreciation of values appears from now on done, and it consisted in clearing a way in this leafy labyrinth, multiform to the point of being contradictory, this whole *ensemble* of realities to which in fact the name *yoga* is applied.

M. Eliade begins by devoting a hundred pages to the doctrines and techniques of 'classical yoga'. In the whole of the rest of the book we assist at the phenomena of 'osmosis and coalescence' by which this coherent and very definite core, while at the same time itself remaining indubitably intact, by the combined effect of traditions and of the 'theory' fixed about the fifth century A.D. by Patanjali, enters into composition with Brahmanism and Bhuddism, begins, from the sixth century onwards, a new 'mode' called 'Tantrism', submits to devotional currents popular in origin (*Bhakti*), goes astray in quest of magic powers and erotic

⁹ *Le Yoga, Immortalité et Liberté*, Payot, 1954, 427 pp.

practices, and dabbles in alchemy (this is quite another thing than a 'pre-chemistry'; it is the art of transmuting matter, just as yoga 'extracts' 'from the obscure and enslaved psycho-mental life the free and autonomous spirit of the same nature as gold'); we see in short 'the pressure exercised by the immemorial magico-religious substratum which preceded the constitution of yoga in the strict sense, a pressure which, from a certain time onwards, succeeded in bringing to the surface and integrating with 'yoga', elements of an extremely ancient, aboriginal 'spirituality' (p. 337). In several 'revivals' M. Eliade also finds marks of this in non-Indian spiritualities.

So we can see where we are in this astonishing complexity, can place in every respect (both in relation to the internal logic of yoga and in their historical contexts) a quantity of disparate facts and even opposed fashions, from disciplines of authentic spiritual value to the exploits of *fakirs*. At the same time we see better how indifferent are the approximations of contemporary syncretists like Vivekananda—so curiously over-rated—and of so many Europeans.

A short time before M. Eliade's big book there appeared the brief initiation of the collection, 'Que-sais je?' It is the work of M. Paul Masson-Oursel,¹⁰ and it has just the quality which one would expect from this eminent Indian scholar. It is an extremely *intelligent* little book. It illuminates in every sense, abounds in living formulas which throw light on their immediate objects but which also extend much further. After taking his bearings M. Masson-Oursel retraces the history of yoga—that is the principal part—and then compares it with 'non-Indian techniques' which resemble it: sufism (the mysticism of Islam), hesychasm (of Mount Athos), and taoism (of China). There follow texts relating to different important points, particularly from O. Lacombe, from L. Renon, and from Dr Filliozat.

These two books do not take away the usefulness of a remarkable symposium published by *Cahiers du Sud* in 1953.¹¹ This volume can also serve as an initiation, chiefly thanks to Masson-Oursel's study, 'Yoga, what it is, what it is not, what it can become'; Mircea Eliade's study, 'The problem of the origins of

¹⁰ *Le Yoga*, Presses Universitaires de France, 128 pp.

¹¹ *Yoga, science de l'homme integral*, texts and studies edited by Jacques Masuy, *Cahiers du Sud*, 366 pp.

Yoga'; J. Masuy's study, 'The different forms of Yoga and their ends', a very useful tabulation; R. Guénon's 'Kundalini Yoga'; Dr André Migot's 'Bhuddistic Yoga and Tantristic Techniques'.

Three other sorts of study in this symposium are complementary to Eliade's and Masson-Oursel's two books:

(1) Articles which are, to tell the truth, inadmissible from the Christian point of view, but which reveal a certain climate of thought from which it is a question of knowing (as I was asking in my first article) whether one can today extricate yoga. Such are G. Schuon's 'Yoga as a Spiritual Principle', Alain Daniélou's 'Yoga in the Age of Conflicts', and Hubert Benoit's 'Progressive Doctrines and the Doctrine of the Abrupt' (according to Japanese Zen-Buddhism).

(2) Studies on two points of primary importance, that of Dr Thérèse Brosse, 'The Psycho-physiology of Yoga and Problems of Mental Health' (a contribution of the first order with an immense range), and that of Dr W. Bischler on 'Voluntary Respiration'.

(3) Comparative studies. Unfortunately the one whose subject interested me most, 'The Raja-Yoga of St John of the Cross', is deceptive; it has all the long-windedness and vagueness which one frequently gets from the pens of swammis. In compensation there is much to learn from A. Bloom on 'Hesychasm', from Emile Dermengham on 'The Techniques of Extasy in Islam', and from Roger Godel on 'Contemporary Sciences in the face of liberating experience'.