

TEACHINGS BY CLAUDE MARECHAL

This article presents only a small fraction of the teaching of Professor Krishnamacharya; it is limited to yoga, to certain of its texts, to its technique and its transmission.

Professor Krishnamacharya possessed extraordinary understanding and experience in innumerable domains. He was the expert to whom others would come for consultation.

It is impossible for me to set forth the totality of his teaching; it covers a number of very important subjects that I, for the most part, have never studied: logic, rituals, commentaries on the *Brahma-Sutra* and the *Upanishads*, all the aspects of the various religious and philosophical currents of India, the subtleties of Sanskrit grammar, the art of composing texts in Sanskrit or in vernacular language, *ayur-veda*, reading the pulse, food etc.

I can only transmit here what T.K.V. Desikachar taught me of his father.

Yoga texts and their application

I. The Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali

According to Professor Krishnamacharya, the text *par excellence*, is that of Patanjali, the only work totally covering all the aspects of yoga.

It is perfectly written, its conciseness is exemplary.

In the *Yogavalli*¹ Professor Krishnamacharya completes the “classic” commentaries² very amply.

In particular he suggests a very original, strong and wise interpretation of the aphorisms which discuss the techniques of posture and breathing. With regard to the passages discussing the *asanas* and *pranayama* (*sutra* II.46 to II.48 and II.49 to II.53), the commentaries known as “classic” are, according to him, neither very clear nor sufficiently practical.

Professor Krishnamacharya formulates numerous and rich developments with respect to this section of Patanjali’s teaching. For example, his different interpretations of the terms “*prayatna*”, “*shaithilya*” and “*ananta*” of aphorism II.47 which give the principles for the technique of *asana* fully justify the use of controlled breathing in the execution of the postures. The word “*ananta*” is successively interpreted in the sense of “infinite, life, vital energy, breathing, infinity of possible combinations.” This term also represents the serpent Ananta, symbol of features associated with stability and comfort which define posture in the preceding aphorism (“*sthirasukham asanam*” II.46).

¹ The *Yogavalli* is the title of a commentary in Sanskrit on the *Yoga-Sutras* that Professor Krishnamacharya dictated to his son T.K.V. Desikachar.

² The classic commentators on the *Yoga-Sutras* of Patanjali number around twenty, among them Vyasa, Vacaspati Mishra, King Bhoja, Vijnana Bhikshu and Nagesha (Nagojibhatta).

Further, all the detailed explanations of the Professor on aphorism II.50 which treats the technique of *pranayama* are also enlightening. His commentaries, more concrete and more simple than those of the “classics,” seem to better integrate the real, practical conditions of experience combining the postures, the manipulation of the breath and mediation. Besides, his interpretations take account of the possibility, thanks to these exercises, of reestablishing and protecting physical and mental health.

The principles linking *asana* and *pranayama* are established in a way that is harmonious and tangible. In addition, the correlations between the psychosomatic exercises (*asana and pranayama*), the preliminary recommendations for a social and personal ethic (*yama and niyama*) and the concentration exercises (*samyama*) are similarly clarified. Thus yoga appears to us as a truly coherent system, where everything is related (in keeping with one of the meanings of the word yoga: union, junction).

Professor Krishnamacharya corrects certain passages of the celebrated commentary of Vyasa on the third chapter of the *Yoga-Sutras*. According to the master, the exegesis of the famous commentator is at times too theoretical, hardly comprehensible, indeed even responsible for confusion. Perhaps the most noteworthy example concerns the teaching of the great steps of maturation in yoga (third chapter, aphorisms 9 to 12). In his developments on these *sutras*, Professor Krishnamacharya appears very clear and establishes a hierarchy among these profound maturations:

- *nirodha-parinama* makes reference to the first transformation; the *yogin*, already liberated from the hold of his instinctive and emotional behaviours, progresses towards serenity.
- *samadhi-parinama* corresponds to the next step; the mind, having become more incisive in its relation to the object, succeeds at various realizations (*siddhi*)
- *ekagrata-parinama* indicates the ultimate metamorphosis, that which leads to the highest state, to the realm of peace and of eternal light, to the final liberation (*kaivalya*).

According to Professor Krishnamacharya, each chapter of Patanjali's work constitutes a teaching in itself, an individual instruction given to an individual disciple. This idea reflects well the importance that the Professor gives to personalized yoga teaching. The four *yogin* to whom respectively each of the chapters of the *Yoga-Sutras* is addressed are Kritanjali, Baddhanjali, Mastakanjali, and Purnanjali.

-Kritanjali is the disciple already advanced (*krita*) in yoga who has already overcome many obstacles and knows the methods of yoga well. The *samadhi-pada* (first chapter) is intended for him in order that he will continue to clarify his ideas and bring order and coherence to his conduct... and perhaps arrive at the aim of yoga.

-Baddhanjali is caught (*baddha*), dominated by the *kleshas*. With humility, he prays to the Lord to aid him to end his suffering. The yoga of action (*kriya-yoga*) as well as the four first limbs of *ashtanga-yoga* - attention to one's neighbor (*yama*) and to oneself (*niyama*), posture (*asana*) and

breathing (*pranayama*) techniques - elements presented in the second chapter of the *Yoga-Sutras*, suit him better.

Mastakanjali possesses a well balanced and oriented mind which he uses with a view to attaining certain powers. He has arrived at the summit (*mastaka*) of mastery of the mind. Patanjali chose to teach him the third chapter so as to aid him to become situated still more clearly in the right path, and particularly to put him on guard against the real danger of acquiring superior faculties (*siddhi*).

As for Purnanjali, he has accomplished his work (*purna* signifies complete, satisfied, accomplished). His detachment is total. Patanjali discloses to him the precious teaching of the fourth chapter which develops the different aspects of the realization of the state of yoga (*kaivalya*) while indicating the role and responsibility of a true guide.

In his last commentary on the *Yoga-Sutras*, the *Yogavalli*, the Professor gives an entirely devotional interpretation to the whole text. For example, he attributes to the word “*va*” from *sutra* 23, chapter 1 (“*ishvarapranidhanat-va*”) the sense of “only”³ whereas most other commentators translate it as “or”. To be sure, all is in accord with presenting devotion as a method for attaining the state of yoga but for Professor Krishnamacharya, this means is the only valid one, while for the “classics” it concerns only one possible path amongst other equally effective ones. Other passages of the *Yogavalli*, notably those on the third chapter of the *Yoga-Sutras*, reflect this same vision: “One may obtain one or another particular realisation if one has accomplished the exercise of *samyama*⁴ in the correct direction, but only on the condition of having received the grace of God, who alone finally decides to confer the expected fruits of this practice.”

II. The legend of the Yoga-Rahasya

The *Yoga-Rahasya* contains the chief ideas of Krishnamacharya’s teaching on the subject of techniques such as *asana* and *pranayama*. We will return to this in the second part of the article, but let us first report the strange circumstances by which the Professor received this foundational text.

³ Professor Krishnamacharya thought that the term “*va*” is used, in the context of the twenty-third aphorism of the first chapter of the *Yoga-Sutras*, in place of the word “*eva*” (only, precisely, exactly). In *Yogavalli*, he justifies his point of view with solid argument, notably citing Nathamuni, and interpreting the last *sutras* of the first chapter in a way that supports his point of view.

⁴ *Samyama* signifies these three successive experiences:

- effort of attention on an object (*dharana*).
- meditation (*dhyana*) and
- total, perfect fusion of the mind with the support of concentration (*samadhi*).

This exercise, repeated in one same direction, develops a wholly exceptional degree of intuitive knowledge (*prajna*) of the object under consideration. Consequently, a power (*siddhi*) appears that can progress considerably (*vibhuti*) according to Patanjali.

In his youth, Krishnamacharya dreamt one night that he was brought by Nathamuni⁵ to Alvar Thirunagarai.

Then, some days later, he decided to go there himself. Once having arrived at Alvar Thirunagarai, the young man went into the temple of Shri Nammalvar and asked an old man seated under a tamarind tree where to find Shri Nathamuni. With a head gesture, the old man showed him the direction. Without hesitation, Krishnamacharya followed the recommended route. But after having sought the great sage Nathamuni in vain for a long time, the young traveller decided to retrace his steps. Full of courage and hope, Krishnamacharya continued to walk along the river Tamaraparni until he reached a mango grove, against which, weakened by lack of food, he finished by dozing off.

The young man then had a new dream... The *brahmins* appeared before him. Shri Nathamuni, who stood in the centre, began to expound the *Yoga-Rahasya* (“The Secrets of Yoga”).

Several hours later the fortunate dreamer reopened his eyes. He was alone by the river. The mango grove had disappeared. Krishnamacharya realised then that an extraordinary event had just occurred: thanks to the teaching he received at that instant from his ancestor, he now knew all the “Secrets of Yoga”.

III. The Bhagavad-Gita

The *Bhagavad-Gita*⁶ is one of the monuments of universal literature. It constitutes for the religious Hindu and the *yogin* a reference text. Professor Krishnamacharya knows this work by heart and likes to cite certain passages to support his teaching.

He is capable, on occasion, of critiquing and comparing the different commentators of this famous work. More than this, the master himself proposes very original ideas that he develops fully. For example, he insists more than his predecessors on the importance of the relationship between the Krishna and Arjuna and on the evolution of their relationship through the story. According to him, the *Bhagavad-Gita* is a reference text for the *yogacarya* (the guide) who can learn from it all the subtleties of his role as instructor through taking inspiration from the example given by the behaviour of Krishna towards his disciple.

Professor Krishnamacharya points out as well an unusual sense of the word “*sannyasin*” which appears in numerous reprises in the *Bhagavad-Gita*: this term does not necessarily indicate the errant monk, the solitary mendicant but rather the person really capable of adjusting his/her action in society, understanding clearly his/her life in order, leaves that which should be

⁵ Nathamuni was a famous *yogin* and a great Vaishnavite saint who lived in the VIIIth century C.C. at Viranarayanapuram, in the south of India. He consecrated his life to the study and the practice of yoga, to instructing his disciples and to the adoration of Lord Krishna. Professor Krishnamacharya attributes the *Yoga-Rahasya* (“The Secrets of Yoga”) to him.

⁶ The Bhagavad-Gita (“The Song of the Lord”), a veritable Hindu Bible, sixth book of the Mahabharata (one of the great epics of India, along with the Ramayana) is a long epic poem and at the same time a yoga treatise. The poem contains the essence of an entire stream of thought shown up through the intermediary of its two protagonists, Krishna and Arjuna, in a dialogue bearing principally on the philosophy of action, discrimination, knowledge and devotion (bhakti).

abandoned (*vairagya*) in order to take the best direction (*svadharmā*) at the most appropriate moment. In conclusion, the *sannyasin* is the person who positions him/herself correctly in the face of reality.

Thus, Krishnamacharya is inscribed in the lineage of great commentators Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vedantadeshika⁷. His ideas on the *Gita* are substantially close to those of Ramanuja and Vedantadeshika who firmly believe in Vishnu.

IV. *The Yoga-Yajnavalkya*

Yajnavalkya is a legendary *rishi*. Tradition attributes to him numerous vedic texts and a treatise on law. His contribution in the domain of yoga is much less known, which is why very few masters of yoga make reference to his work these days, even in India.

Professor Krishnamacharya, however, allots him an important place in the written tradition of yoga and draws abundant inspiration from the *Yoga-Yajnavalkya* in his teaching.

This text presents an instruction lavished by Yajnavalkya himself on several disciples, among them his wife Gargi. The author proclaims that all the content of his teaching was revealed to him by the Creator. One finds quite systematically again this same affirmation in the mouth of Professor Krishnamacharya who explains and develops similarly the ideas contained in the work of Yajnavalkya, among others on the degree of dispersion of *prana* relative to the state of health: health improves when *prana* concentrates, gathers at the interior of bodily limits.

As for the correct regulation of the breath, Professor Krishnamacharya's prescriptions are supported by the definition of *pranayama* given by Yajnavalkya: "*Prana-apanā samayoga pranayamah iti iritah*" (*Yoga-Yajnavalkya VI.2*).

As the text indicates, the inhaled breath must be brought to meet with the exhaled breath. Krishnamacharya stipulates how to correctly use the thoracic, dorsal and diaphragm musculature in the work of inhalation in order to feel it as a movement descending towards the epigastric

⁷ Shankaracharya, a very celebrated philosopher in the VIIIth or IXth century C.E. leads an errant life preaching advaitist *Vedānta*, "absolute non-dualism", according to which the only reality is *Brahman*. He is the author of several works, among them a famous commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

- *Ramanuja*, younger by around two centuries, expounds vishishtadvaitist *Vedānta*, "differentiated monism" by posing the existence of three distinct entities: *Brahman*, individual consciousness, and the material world, a doctrine to which Professor Krishnamacharya adheres.

Perhaps less famous than the commentary on the *Gita* by Shankaracharya, that of Ramanuja is nonetheless often cited as a contrast, particularly to the exegesis of his predecessor advaitist.

- Vedantadeshika, disciple of Ramanuja, develops in his exegesis of the *Gita* analogous ideas to those of his master but with interesting nuances that Krishnamacharya recaptures in his teaching.

- Madhva (XIIIth-XIVth century C.E.) conceives of a dvaitist *Vedānta*, "realistic dualism" where a difference is permitted between Vishnu - singular and omnipresent divinity - individual consciousness and the material world, as much as it is the creation of God. According to this opponent of monism, one can only understand the texts by studying them under the direction of a competent *guru* and one must "lose oneself in the essence of the divinity" through a meditation that uses, if needed, the techniques of yoga. His commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita* based on devotion is likewise well regarded.

region. Likewise for exhalation, the Professor explains how to employ the abdominals with a view to instigating the sensation of an ascending movement towards the epigastric region. Beginning from these principles, all the technology of *pranayama* is designed, ordered, justified, and acquires its coherence. In this perfect edifice, the *bandhas* naturally find their place in serving the union of the *prana* and *apana* vayus. The famous notion of *kundali* is similarly clarified. The coiled serpent sleeping at the entrance to the path of liberation (middle path or *shushumna nadi*) symbolizes the inertia of the mind troubled by ignorance (*avidya*).

Professor Krishnamacharya thus develops the great ideas proposed by his predecessor Yajnavalkya throughout the twelve chapters of this remarkable work on yoga.

V. The Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika and other texts of the same scope

The reflections of Professor Krishnamacharya on the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*⁸ proves once again the fantastic mental clarity of the master. The positions he takes in relation to this work are courageous and unambiguous.

Sometimes he rejects certain parts of the text which, according to him, are ill-adapted, inadequate, even fanciful, and sometimes he uses others to support his teaching.

For example, the Professor explains that the six purificatory actions (*shatkarma*) presented in the second chapter of the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika* can be replaced to advantage by suitable practices of postures executed with deep breathing (notably long exhalations) and by some dietary adjustments. According to him, the cleansing practices proposed in this text are aggressive to the organism and risk, in many cases, causing more harm than good, especially if they are not applied with the necessary prudence. These methods belong, in fact, to the ayurvedic medical tradition and should only be used with regard for this tradition: wittingly, that is to say in properly determined cases at the right time and always accompanied with multiple precautions, the same as with all very strong therapies.

Indeed, for Professor Krishnamacharya a well constructed practice of *asana* adapted to each case, in conjunction with mental attitudes that reinforce its efficacy, constitute a veritable “surgery without instruments” (*ashastra-shastra-cikitsa*); breathing would serve the function of “a scalpel” in bringing about a more harmonious redistribution of vital fluid for establishing better health.

Professor Krishnamacharya similarly rejects unsparingly the usefulness of five of the ten *mudra* in the third chapter of the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*: in his view, *mahavedha*, *khecari*, *vajroli*, and *shakti-calana*⁹ are no longer of interest.

⁸ The *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika* (“The Small Lamp of *Hatha-Yoga*”) composed by Svātāmarama around the XVth century C.E. constitutes one of the most important and complete texts on *Hatha-Yoga*. It presents in the order of its four chapters the techniques of *asana* (postures), of *pranayama* (breathing exercises), of *mudra* (gestures intended to seal the vital energy inside the body’s limits) and of *nada* (the production of sounds).

⁹ - *Mahavedha* consists of gently striking the buttocks on the ground to wake the *kundalini*.

He retains however the five others that he considers very valuable:

- *Mahamudra*. “the great gesture”, is a seated asymmetric pose, combining flexion of the front trunk with extension and straightening of the dorsal spine. On the borderline between the main types of *asana* and *pranayama*, this *mudra* constitutes the central pillar of his teaching of technique.
- *Uddiyana-bandha, mula –bandha, jalandhara-bandha* are very specific manoeuvres; more than all others, they must be correctly taught. In the teaching of Professor Krishnamacharya, these “locks” play a very important role; we will come back to them a little further on.
- *Viparita-karani* represents the action of inversion. The Professor includes here all the inverted positions, the main ones being *sarvangasana* and *shirshasana*. For all these positions, he proposes order and method in their application.

Concerning the reference works on technique Krishnamacharya is intransigent; he condemns all he judges to be inadequate and dangerous, including current popular literature when it repeats without subtlety certain ideas of texts like the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*.

In fact, this extraordinary instructor always gives priority to oral transmission, to the direct relationship between the teacher and student over all that can be written or presented before a large public. In his view, it is essential that the teaching is not fixed, but is adapted to the present, to the situation, to the student and that the teacher strives in all circumstances to be an example for the disciple.

Professor Krishnamacharya also considers that a good number of texts on *hatha-yoga* composed around the same period as the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*, like the *Gheranda-Samhita* and the *Shiva-Samhita*, risk inducing error in insufficiently cautioned practitioners. These works were written at a time when the techniques of *asana* and *pranayama* were completely separated from each other, though they were so fundamentally linked in the most ancient tradition, and when expedients that were generally poorly mastered for lack of technical rigour were often resorted to.

Professor Krishnamacharya thus appears as much as a master who knew perfectly the most ancient traditions as an audacious renovator. He actualized notions of practice that were progressively altered or lost in India.

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- *Khecari*, to turn the tongue back towards the back palate after having lengthened and cut it longitudinally to the point of being able to block of nasal passages.
 - *Vajroli* (a male practice), to practice contracting the genito-urinary tract after having purified it by sucking air into it through a fine tube.
 - *Shakticalana*, to “rouse” the *kundalini* by rapid breathing, seated in *vajrasana*, hands holding the feet.

Some elements of his practical teaching

The following principles characterize the yoga teaching reformulated by Professor Krishnamacharya.

I. Asana

Vinyasa (body poses)

The postures are poses where the different parts of the body are arranged one to another in a particular, ideal, very precise relation, with a view to producing very favourable health effects¹⁰.

Vinyasa-krama (gradual approach)

For each posture, one or sometimes several codified techniques:

- the starting position,
- the way to come into the posture, through precise gestures synchronized with breathing.
- the return to the starting position, classically by reversing the procedure.

Vinyasa-krama likewise indicates gradual progression in the construction of an *asana* course:

- warm-up then,
- more precise preparation,
- a stage comprising the most intense and specific actions,
- compensation and finally,
- return to a calm state that naturally prepares for the practice of breath control which requires, for good effects, a still posture, symmetrical, stable, seated, or even lying down in certain cases.

Vinyasa-krama represents also preparation over the long term for a posture that one is unable as yet to master. This progression can be thought of as progressively intense courses over several weeks, even several months.

¹⁰ Example of *vinyasa*: *utthita trikonasana* (in twist)

The different parts of the body are arranged one to another in precisely codified poses:

- the lower limbs spread from the front.
- the feet parallel,
- the trunk in the same vertical plane as the spread lower limbs,
- the arms extended cross-wise,
- one hand placed on the ground, fingers turned ahead, outside the foot on the opposite side of the twist,
- gaze directed towards the hand in the air.

These different instructions induce a twist articulated at multiple levels, from the ankles to the cervical spine.

Pratikriyasana

This term indicates compensatory action. It pertains to an application of one posture that is most often modified, symmetric and dynamic. Its goal is to reestablish equilibrium, that is to say, to neutralize the possible undesirable effects of the preceding posture and hence to accentuate its favourable effects.

Professor Krishnamacharya proposes a precise codification of these compensatory postures according to different classical postural concepts.

Variations, intensifications, modifications

There are a very great number of postures of which most are comprised of multiple variations, intensifications and modifications.

- variations are different ways of doing the same *asana* (which makes it possible to diversify the practice),
- intensifications are the possibilities of reinforcing the action of a posture by using, for example, a well-placed support, breathing rhythms, or a particular static application,
- modifications are arrangements brought to a position so as to adapt it to the needs and possibilities of the person.

The master proclaims that all those who reduce the *asanas* to a few seated positions totally ignore the precise action of the practice of postures in the domain of physical and mental health.

Bhaga

Professor Krishnamacharya insists a great deal on the notion of adaptation of postures to individual needs and limitations. This method consists of reducing certain more secondary characteristics of the posture so as to conserve the essential at less risk.

Standing postures

A great number of postures, notably most of the standing postures, come to us without doubt directly from Professor Krishnamacharya who adjusted them in order to respond to modern-day needs. Among these standing postures, *uttanasana*, *parshva-uttanasana*, *utthita-trikonasana*, and *utthita-parshva-konasana* are examples of poses codified by Professor Krishnamacharya himself.

Breathing and bandhas

According to precise codification, the phases of breathing are associated with movements for going into and out of each posture.

- One exhales while doing a forward bend, a twist, a lateral bend or any other movement that brings the limbs and trunk together.

- One inhales while doing a backbend (spinal extension) or any other movement that takes the limbs away from the body.

Ideally, breathing - of the *ujjayi* type¹¹ - is slow, fine, regular, counted and measured consciously by the practitioner.

- The systematic use of this type of breathing during the execution of the postures is one of the specific traits of Krishnamacharya's teaching. This practice amplifies the thoracic and abdominal action and facilitates an increasingly fine awareness of the deep musculature of the spine and its mobility (especially in the dorsal region.)
- Varied and very precise breathing rhythms and certain contractions (*bandhas*) intensify the effects of the postures practiced.
- *Jalandhara-bandha* is an elementary action that necessarily precedes the other controls and breath retentions and that aids the positioning of the back. This *bandha* systematically accompanies all the forward bends.
- The practice of the other *bandhas* - *uddiyana* and *mula-bandha* - although very useful, can only be attempted when sufficient retention of breath, particularly with empty lungs, is well mastered.

II. Pranayama

Relationship to posture

The practice of asanas prepares the body and the mind naturally for *pranayama*.

- The position chosen for *pranayama* is a very comfortable seated posture that facilitates straightening the dorsal spine.
- Crossing the legs in classical seated postures like *padmasana* (lotus posture) is recommended; in effect folding the legs permits the circulation of energy and blood in the upper body that encourages breadth and depth of breathing. However, the choice of posture must not diminish the qualities of straightness and comfort in the pose. In certain cases, a simpler adapted position is to be preferred to the classical postures.

¹¹ This type of breathing produces a sound in the glottis (produced by the throat) which, if one listens attentively, allows for controlling at each instant the quality of one's breathing (long, fine and regular), itself proof of the harmony of the bodily exercise.

Definitions and techniques

- *Pranayama* is essentially an exercise of total attention to the breathing that one seeks to control.
- The quality of exhalation must not under any circumstances be affected by the other components of *pranayama* - inhalation, retentions with full or empty lungs - because it is this exhalation before anything else that facilitates the calming of the mind.
- The different parts of *pranayama* scrupulously respect the teaching of Patanjali: exhalation, inhalation, retentions, place, duration and number are all taken into consideration in order to allow the breath to become long and fine (*Yoga-Sutra* II-50).
- Professor Krishnamacharya specifies and organizes the technique and the teaching of *pranayama* as a means of uniting *prana* and *apana*. His technical specifications with regard to the direction of movement of the breath correct many errors of interpretation.

Bandhas

Already mentioned with regard to postures, the *bandhas* are most significant when associated with the practice of *pranayama*. They have an essential role in moving the *prana* towards the *apana* and vice-versa.

The word “bandha” is a technical term in yoga that means “the act of joining”, “link”, “lock”. There are four principal *bandhas*, namely: *jalandhara*, *uddiyana*, *mula* and *jivha-bandha*.¹²

Mantra

According to Professor Krishnamacharya, the association of *mantras* with *pranayama* constitutes the best preparation for the *yogin* who wishes to unite with the Lord.

This technique reinforces devotional meditation and can lead to the highest spiritual realizations. The interpretation given by Professor Krishnamacharya of aphorism 51 of chapter II of Patanjali¹³ concerning the fourth *pranayama* is very explicit in this regard.

¹² - *Jalandhara-bandha*: To take up this position, straighten the upper back and stretch neck in bringing the chin towards the jugular notch (above the sternum).

- *Uddiyana-bandha*: maintaining *jalandhara-bandha* on an empty retention following a deep exhalation, protract the contraction of the abdominal muscles as if pulling the navel toward the vertebral column and towards the diaphragm (back and up).

- *Mula-bandha*: at the moment of inhaling, release the region above the umbilical retracted for *uddiyana-bandha* but hold the lower abdomen in. One feels then a drawing up of all the pelvic structures.

- *Jivha-bandha*: keep the point of the tongue fixed upward and backward against the palate. Less known than the other three *bandhas*, this last is used, according to this teaching, during exhalation, in the *pranayama* named *shitali*.

¹³ “*Bahya abhyantara vishayakshepi caturthah:*” *The fourth type of pranayama transcends the level of the consciousness.*

III. Viniyoga

Asana-pranayama

Adaptation of practice necessitates great attention to the content, the rhythm and the harmony of the whole course.

Yama, niyama

It is difficult, indeed impossible to derive real and sustained profit from the regular practice of *asana* and *pranayama* without respect or intelligent attention towards the rules of morality (*yama*) and personal discipline (*niyama*).

For Professor Krishnamacharya, the two first elements of *ashtanga-yoga* are in strict relationship with the two following limbs, *asana* and *pranayama*. For him, the “eight-limbed yoga” constitutes a very coherent whole in which the different parts are inseparable.

Bhavana

- Bhavana is a mental attitude, the intention that allows the student to maintain his/her attention during the execution of postures and of *pranayama*. This psychological orientation stops the practice from becoming mechanical, it amplifies its effects and improves self-knowledge.
- Bhavana aims to make the mind very clear, very calm, to improve physical and mental health and to induce a state of meditation or of prayer.

Dhyana is asana

The state of concentration arising from the practice of *asana* and *pranayama* is presented by Professor Krishnamacharya as a unifying movement between the body, the breath, the senses and the mind (*kaya prana indriya citta samgati*). This idea of junction, of connection, is an essential aspect of the teaching of the master

This aphorism indicates that there is a fourth dimension to *pranayama* which transcends the triple technique of inhalation-exhalation-retention. According to the teaching of Professor Krishnamacharya, the “fourth dimensional *pranayama*” coincides with a state of complete union with the Lord.

Bheda

- It is indispensable that the teacher adapts his/her instructions to each person, carefully respecting different parameters: constitution, place, sex, time, age, capacities, aspirations and activities (respectively: *deha, desha, linga, kala, vayas, shakti, marga* and *vritti*.)
- According to Professor Krishnamacharya, the adaptation of the practice to the individual and not the inverse is the essence of yoga itself.

In order to demonstrate this, Professor Krishnamacharya specially uses three models showing three different aspects of the application of yoga techniques:

1. Srishti, sthiti, antya

Here he divides the teaching of techniques in terms of age and aspirations.

- *Srishti*: practice for young people must emphasize expansion and develop strength and agility.
- *Sthiti*: that of adults respects the necessity of action, protects health and establishes equilibrium.
- *Antya*: that of older people is in harmony with the natural movement of interiorisation.

2. Shakti, cikitsa, adhyatmika

This other division takes account of the objectives, the aspirations of the student. According to Professor Krishnamacharya:

- *Shakti-krama* indicates the mode of practice for the person who wants to develop certain potentials like strength, agility, concentration, who wants to master, for example, difficult postures.
- *Adhyatmika-krama* refers to the practice of the person who wants to go beyond the sensory domain and who would like to know him/herself deeply or approach God.
- *Cikitsa-krama* comprises all those practices in which the objective is to eliminate bodily impurities accumulated in the systems and organs (*koshas*), in the anatomical canals (vessels, nerves...) and in the subtle canals (*nadis*).

3. Shikshana, rakshana and cikitsa

A third model close to the preceding one has also become classic thanks to Professor Krishnamacharya:

- *Shikshana*: techniques intended to be integrated into training, to study. They constitute an object of *samyama* (see footnote 4) and lead to mastery in a specific domain.
- *Rakshana*: techniques aimed at protecting health through preventing illness.
- *Cikitsa*: techniques having a therapeutic objective; that is to say of establishing better health in a person who is sick or impaired.

Yoga and ayur-veda

The contribution of Professor Krishnamacharya to treatment through yoga is very important. His knowledge of practical methods belonging to the ancient medicine of India and his immense experience of different aspects of yoga led him to propose scientific, varied and original remedies. Adapted exercises sometimes associated with “medical” treatment (decoctions, herbs, various medicines, massages...), Vedic chanting, prayer, a mental attitude in certain life situations, attention to food, confidence in the teaching given, are so many elements which, together or separately, play an essential role in the recovery of health.

Langhana, Brimhana

The transposition into the practice of yoga (*yogabhyasa*) of certain ayurvedic therapeutic actions¹⁴ like the action which “reduces” (*langhana*) and the action which “nourishes” (*brimhana*) is an example of the original contribution of the master.

- *Langhana*: courses in which forward-bending postures, twists, long exhalation and recitation in a very low and soft register predominate go in the direction of restriction, of contraction. Instructions of this sort can be given, for example, to an individual who wants to lose weight.
- *Brimhana*: courses in which backbends, long inhalations and strong recitation in a high tone prevail are capable of leading to physical and psychological expansion, which can prove useful in certain cases.

The professor fills in these notions by insisting on the fact that *langhana* and *brimhana* indicate the nature of what happens, which depends first of all on the interaction between the teacher and the student. If the instructor guides with a gentle, modest, unobtrusive voice, the course has every chance of leading to more *langhana* effects on the student. Conversely, if he/she is very present, if he/she supports and encourages the student’s efforts in a lively way, the consequences will most likely be of the *brimhana* type.

Examination of the Patient

Before proposing any treatment, Professor Krishnamacharya believes it necessary to meet the patient and observe him/her (*darshana*), to examine through palpation certain parts of his/her body (*sparshana*) and to question him/her (*prashna*). The master developed great skill in taking the pulse (*nadipariksha*) which aided him in determining the most appropriate type of yoga practice or ayurvedic treatment.

¹⁴ These two notions are developed in the famous treatise on Ayur-veda, the Caraka-Samhita, in chapter twenty-two (called “*langhana-brimhaniya*”).

IV. The genius of Professor Krishnamacharya

Traditionally, certain teachings in Vedic chanting are for brahmins exclusively. Faithful to these principles at the beginning of his career, Professor Krishnamacharya adopted later a radically different attitude, new in India: he decided to teach Vedic chanting to members of other castes, to women and finally to foreigners while encouraging his own disciples to do the same.

Professor Krishnamacharya especially insists on the importance for women of a regular practice of different aspects of yoga, whereas in India these techniques were earlier reserved for men. According to the Master, the pregnant woman especially should take up an adapted practice for herself and for her child.

He is capable of respecting the essence of the tradition while innovating in a way that is at times radical. He thus points out the depth, whether directly or indirectly, of all the content of yoga teaching as much in India as in the West.

His teaching evolved throughout the duration of his long career at times very distinctly following his practice, his experience and his attentive and profound reflection.

In the last years of his life, the Professor relativised the importance of the techniques of yoga, which he recognized principally as methods serving physical health and emotional equilibrium. By contrast, he emphasized surrender to the Lord, the royal path, allowing the approach to death in the best conditions...and perhaps the attainment of final liberation.



From 1957-1964 Claude Marechal, studied medicine at the University of Leuven and obtained a degree in physical education, University of Liege. In 1958, using only the help of books, discovered yoga and started practicing every day. After graduating, he became an assistant at the Physics Institute of Higher Education, University of Liège and at this time, began teaching yoga to some groups.

Intrigued and attracted to the teaching of this discipline, decided in 1969 to travel to India, to discover the source. In Madras met with Sri Krishnamacharya's son, TKV Desikachar, who was his only instructor for thirty-five years. In 1966 he left his job at the University of Liege in Belgium, to devote himself entirely to teaching yoga, visiting Madras every year to study. Between 1969 and 2002, over forty visits took place, totaling more than six years in India.

With his strong background in sports medicine and great capacity, is Claude Marechal from over thirty years ago one of the great introducers of the Teachings of Prof. TKV Desikachar and Krishnamacharya in Europe. Directs Schools Yoga Teacher Training ETY and is founder and editor of Viniyoga and founding member of the International Association Viniyoga.