

17th Arya Maha Sammelen
Dallas TX, July 19th-22nd, 2007

Workshop Summary

(Contributed by Ms. Kamini Pahuja)

Workshop Title: How to incorporate Yoga/Meditation in Satsang?

Yoga & Meditation Committee: Sh. Shekhar Agarwal, Dr. Harish Chandra, Dr. Usha Sethi, Kamini Pahuja

Goals & Objectives

Motivation to change the present practice of Havan & Satsang
Leveraging Swami Ji's teachings to attract the public, specially the youth
Relevance of Sandhya & Yoga/Meditation
standardizing the process
Training the teachers to teach Yoga/Meditation

Highlights

The Arya Samajs represented were California, Canada, New York, Texas and Virginia. We also had representation from Maharishi Dayanand University Rohtak, India. The workshop was attended by well over 25 distinguished guest and dignitaries from USA and India. The group was very well represented by scholars, Yoga & meditation teachers and practitioners alike. We thank Dr. Sudhir Anand for being the transcriber.

We were all in agreement that "Yoga & meditation " should be part and parcel of Arya Samaj satsang and that Swami ji made Pranayam practice and Meditation an integral part in Sandhya Upasana as outlined in his books Satyarth Prakash (chapter 3) or "The Five Great Daily Duties".

To begin with the two methods were illustrated by the committee members. One followed Swami Ramdev's method of intermittent Pranayam and Dhyana with Bhajans in the background. The second method recommended was incorporating some light stretches and 3 basic Pranayam while reciting the mantras for a total of 30 minutes as follows:

- 1) Sit comfortably and begin with 3 Om Chants,
- 2) Bhastrika with "Om Bhoo...." Mantra,
- 3) Neck rotation with "Manas Parikarmana mantra", acknowledging presence of Paramatma in all directions,
- 4) Kapal Bhati,

- 5) "Nadi Shodhana" with timing done by either Gayatri mantra or "any other mantra of choice.
- 6) Recitation of surrender "Atam Samarapan" Mantra "Hey Ishwar Dayanidhe..." followed by Om chant and taking the awareness within for 5-10 minutes of Dhyana. Sitting in silence and focusing on breath, sound or visual image of "Om"

This started the discussion going very quickly. Every one was given equal opportunity to express their views and counter arguments. There were no consensus on the method of practice as such but here were some points heavily debated and agreed:

- 1) Arya Samaj must promote Yoga & meditation.
- 2) Hatha Yoga practice and meditation should be separate.
- 3) Current Practice of chanting Sandhya Mantaras is "Samhuik Sandhya" - collective prayer.
- 4) Pranayam as outlined in Satyarth Prakash is not the same as "Therapeutic" practice as practiced or taught by Yoga Practitioners.
- 5) Sandhya is an individual practice and can't be practiced in group.
- 6) We should focus on teaching the method.
- 7) Each Arya Samaj should have a yoga teacher.
- 8) Pranayam can only be done "empty Stomach" whereas the timing for Satsang may or may not facilitate the prerequisite.
- 9) People may or may not come for Yoga classes as it is hard even to make Sunday Satsang.
- 10) Many Samaj's don't have resources whereas many other are already conducting similar programs.

Conclusions & Recommendations:

First of all an observation that Yoga is "Chitta Vriti Nirodha" then current format of Satsang is conducive to Yoga & meditation in various ways. Whether we are chanting Sandhya, performing Havan or listening to "Pravachan" or concluding with Shanti Path - all these are just different ways of controlling the mind and then focusing the mind on "absolute" if we are totally engrossed in the activity at hand. It is the "intention" or "focusing of the mind" that makes it meditative or not. Satsang as a whole is a peaceful and meditative experience but if we introduce a silent period or a pause for reflection after each separate part of our Satsang then some of us may be able to experience the peace that comes from meditation.

Same is true for Prananyam - Breath Control can be and is performed in various ways and yes all of it will benefit our physical being and hence can be classified as therapeutic but once again it is the "intention or focus" that makes it meditative or not. As for teaching of these techniques here are some key recommendations:

- a) Sandhya as an individual practice or as a collective (Samuhic) activity should be an integral part of our Satsang and therefore our objective is to teach the "Vedic Sandhya Method" with following key element:
 - 1) Meaning of Vedic Sandhya
 - 2) Preparation for Sandhya thru Achamana, stretches - Asanas and Breath Control - Prananyam etc.
 - 3) Practice including Chanting with focus on meaning, listening to the meaning or Sanskrit, focus on "OM" or Gaytri Mantra (Visualization of God), chanting "OM" (sound Cleaning) or a Mantra or simply sitting quietly and quieting the mind.
- b) Format for teaching should be thru demonstration and it can be a DVD or an individual trainer if available. DVD will help us to standardize the key elements as outlined in Satyarth Praksh or "The Five Great Daily Duties" which are as follows:
 - Prananyama: Burning off impurities of mind
 - Aghamarshana: Intense desire to stay away from sin (3 Mantras)
 - Manas Parikramana: Feeling presence of God in all directions (6)
 - Upasthana: Realization of God as source of Light, Knowledge and Life (4)
 - Stuti: Prayer (asking) and Upasana (communion) Listening

The prerequisite are clean body (no drowsiness, no irritation in throat), ability to sit quietly (Sukha Asana) and ability to focus the mind. DVD can also be used to train the trainer.

- c) The second goal of attracting youth and community at large can definitely be addressed by making Hatha Yoga Classes as an addition to the existing program as and wherever possible.

Last but not the least the current theory of Creation/ Intelligent design is under challenge by academician and that provides us as a window of opportunity to offer our youth a scientific aspect as described in Veda's. This can be done in Sunday school program with young adults or can be offered as evening "Vedic Study" offerings for general public.

These indeed are ambitious goals and require more resources and therefore present a lot of challenge but they must become part of our vision for growing our Arya Samajs in North America.