

Divya Prabhâ,
from Oxford to Benares:
a practice, a life.

By Jacques Vigne

I met Divya Prabhâ ('divine light') at a yoga conference in February 2016 in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala. I was impressed by the intensity of her practice and her authenticity, and I promised myself that, when I came to Benares, I would visit her in the school that she had founded with her ashram team in a tiny alleyway a stone's throw from the main Kashi temple, Vishwanath. Despite the small size of the access road, the school houses 25 boarders, most of whom are orphans or have very precarious family situations. During the day, it takes in around a hundred more children. The five-storey building is built high up, with a beautiful view of old Benares from the terrace. From up there, you really get the feeling of being "at the centre of the action", so to speak. I thought the content of this meeting would be of interest to readers of Infos-Yoga and others, so I've written it down carefully and made it available in the following pages.

Part One: An itinerary

Vigyânânand: Were you attracted to the inner life and spiritual phenomena as a child?

Divya Prabhâ: When I was a child, I had intuitions, visions and memories, and this seemed normal to me. For example, I remember that when I was seven or eight, my parents went on holiday and left me with some good friends of theirs, who lived in a very natural setting in the forest. They were hippies. I remember one evening, when there was very little light, I heard a voice coming from behind me, describing what my life was going to be like and giving me instructions. For me, this was normal, and I followed them. Then, when I became a teenager, I tried to tell my friends at least some of these experiences, but they seemed very strange to them, so I didn't insist. As a child, I had very clear intuitions. For example, I had told my grandparents that I would study at Oxford and not get married. My grandfather exclaimed: "How can you say that when you don't even know what marriage or university is! In fact, both these intuitions came true. At Oxford, I was in science, I became a specialist in super-conductivity, but my favourite subject was still mathematics. I loved the world of differential equations, for example, because it was a clear and pure universe.

V: Did you have any religious training?

DP: I was born in 1970, and around the age of 12 I went to catechism school to prepare for my confirmation. The sister who was teaching us told us that it was a sin not to go to Mass on Sundays. In the spirit of discussion, I asked her if it was also a sin to go on Thursday instead of Sunday? She replied that it was! At that moment, I realised clearly that these rigid rules couldn't be issued by God, and that he was inside anyway. I told my parents that I wasn't going to do Confirmation, and I dropped all that Catholic stuff.

I often felt I was on parallel planets, watching what was going on in the world as if I were looking from the outside in at a doll's house. I felt that there was a force, an energy above, but I certainly didn't call it God, because it was too far removed from the image I had been given. When I was still young, I found myself on a rather deserted beach in Thailand, but there was someone there who had the book *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Yogânanda Paramahansa. When I saw his photo on the cover, looking like neither a man nor a woman, I identified with him. The same happened when I read a biography of Vivekananda and saw his photos. Still in Thailand, I looked for a centre that combined body, mind and spirit. However, I already knew full well that it wasn't in this kind of centre that I would find the true spirit. I knew that the people who taught there didn't know it. I also had the intuition that I had to be active in the world before I was thirty, earning money, developing a career, because after that, everything would be different. In my mind at the time, I didn't understand the meaning of it all and I was afraid that maybe I'd even die at 30.

At the age of 19, as I had intuited as a child, I started to study at Oxford, mainly in the field of materials physics and metallurgy. At the time, the great professor there was Richard Dawkins, whose first books were interesting, but who later became a militant atheist and ended up fighting against everything. He went too far in that direction.

In fact, I was successful in all the areas I chose to work in, but in 1998, a turning point came in my life. I remember walking into an Italian fashion boutique - I didn't have much money at the time - and saying to myself: "I can buy anything I want! The result was immediate: I wanted for nothing. I realised for good that nothing external could give me happiness. It had to come from within.

I then spent years preparing for a change of career direction, so to speak, by taking an interest in all sorts of alternative healing methods, such as kinesiology. At the end of this period of research, a friend said to me: "I think you might find something interesting if you come to one of my guru's meditations". He was a Russian-Polish Jew who had fled to England at the time of the Second World War. He led meditation groups in a solitary place, in a wooden room. The evening, we went there, there was just a small light in the middle. It was very dark, you couldn't even see if the participants were men or women. We'd been given very few instructions; in the Taoist way, we'd only been advised to straighten the tongue by making it touch the roof of the mouth and to raise the energy. I had certain specific visions that appeared to me during the session. At the end of the session, two unusual things happened: firstly, when everyone was asked to give their testimony, my neighbour described exactly the visions I'd had, even though we hadn't exchanged anything. I was disturbed by this, especially as I knew it was going to be my turn, and if I said what I'd seen, everyone would think I was copying what my neighbour had just said. It came as a complete shock.

Especially for a person with a purely scientific background, these phenomena of direct and obvious telepathy took me completely by surprise.

The second astonishing thing at the end of this session was that the meditation teacher came to prostrate himself before me and said: "I've been waiting for you for a long time", even though I didn't know him from Eve or Adam. To introduce him further, let's say that his name was Vigyandev, that he was about sixty years old and that he was a disciple of Brahmarishi Vishwatma Bawraji of Varanasi. *Bawra* means something like 'fool of God', and the *-ji* as usual is there to express respect. For several weeks after that first experience, I felt uncovered, unprotected, but also completely connected. It gave me an intense desire to find out who I really was, because I told myself that only with a deep answer to this question would I be able to understand what was happening to me. So, I started looking into astrologers and 'soul readers'. One time I made an appointment with a lady who was quite well known in the field, but as soon as she opened the door I could feel very negative vibes coming from her. She must also have sensed that things weren't right between us and she immediately slammed the door in my face! It was disappointing, I cried in the car, but I remembered this Vigyandev and after all, I thought he might have an answer for me about who I was, because he seemed to have recognised me from the first time.

I asked my friend to take me back there, but he said, "No! I went with you once to introduce you, now if you decide to go back, it's your responsibility, so you have to go on your own!" That's what I did, and the experience I had there was very powerful, as if a light were descending through me, burning and consuming many things in the process. I felt completely changed, a great bliss awoke in me, it's not useful for me to give all the details but it really was a 'transforming' experience. I knew that this was what I'd been looking for until now. All this happened without words, discussions or questions. It just happened, like a matter of course. After several weeks of this particularly happy mental calm, the only question that arose in me, comparing myself to the other members of the group who were all more or less therapists, was what I should do with my life. Finally, I went to ask Vigyandev, and he answered with another question: "What *do you want to do with your life?* The answer that came spontaneously to me was: "I want to meditate! He concluded: "There, you've found the answer yourself!

At the time, a friend teased me that I had an addiction to meditation. It didn't shock me at all, it was something I readily acknowledged, and I was perfectly happy with it. So, I became a disciple of Swami Vigyandev, but I didn't yet know his own master, Brahmarishi. However, I became familiar with spiritual personalities from the Râmânanda order, to which this Brahmarishi belonged. We used to invite them to London to give us teachings. Surprisingly, I only once heard Brahmarishi mention the fact that he belonged to this order. The essential thing for him was to connect directly to the divine through the mantra, with the associated practices of prânâyâma and âsana, and the question of belonging to this lineage, however ancient and reputed, seemed to him to be completely secondary. It was nothing to become fixated on.

At one point, Vigyandev and I went to the United States to help set up a centre. However, after a few days, I suddenly started crying and said: "I want to go back to England now! In fact, I found out a little later that Brahmarishi had arrived in London that very day. So, we went back there with Vigyandev, and came straight from the airport to the ashram to meet the master. It was in a fairly

large room, with us at the back. At that moment, something very strange happened: as soon as I closed my eyes, I could feel Brahmarishi's face right in front of me, as if it were only 3 cm from mine. I found this very strange, so I opened my eyes and saw that the master was at the other end of the room, but as soon as I closed my eyes, the same thing happened again. I had read that this was a sign that the person was the spiritual teacher you were destined to meet. However, I already thought that Vigyandev was my guru, so I was rather confused. He had given me a rosary, which I used, with one of the seeds dedicated to the guru. One day, on both sides of this seed, the thread broke and the seed fell. I saw this as a sign, and Vigyandev also recognised that an important change was afoot.

We spoke to him about the possibility of opening a meditation centre in Sri Lanka. He said to me: "Wait till I see! He went inside himself for a few minutes, then came out of his state and exclaimed: "It's all seen, organise things so that we can go there! Later, we were there and I was introducing Vigyandev to a lady from Sri Lanka who looked like she might be able to help us set up the centre. She looked at me in surprise, as if I were a complete idiot, and said: "Why are you trying so hard to introduce me to this person I met three months ago? So, three months earlier, when Swamiji had said "I'll go and see", he really had gone there in subtle form...

During our stay in Sri Lanka, Vigyandev suddenly fell in the bathroom. He woke up from his discomfort, but he was completely different, as if we couldn't get him back. I took him to hospital, he was diagnosed with a heart attack and was kept there. I stayed with him, as he had made me promise never to leave him alone in hospital. Things got worse and I told his son and his family, but I still thought he was going to be OK. Then, one night, I felt that he was sitting above me in luminous form in his sick room where I was watching over him, while his body was normally lying on the bed. I realised that the end was near, and indeed he died the next morning. Well, the machine was keeping him alive artificially, but in the night the medical team asked my permission to disconnect it. I did, however, ask his son to call me so that he could take on the serious responsibility of giving this permission.

I took his body back to England, and Brahmarishi happened to be in London at the time. I'd never really spoken to him, but when we got together with the group of Vigyandev disciples, who were rather in mourning, he said to us: "You're invited to come to my ashram in India, you're all welcome to stay, lodged and fed, as much as you like!" I felt that he was saying this especially for me, even though we had never once spoken to each other. He left for Hardwar, and two days later I flew back to join him. Once in Delhi, I went straight north to his ashram in Hardwar on the banks of the Ganges, at the foot of the Himalayas. I went maybe once a day to his teaching on the Bhagavâd-Gîtâ, the yoga-sutras of Patanjali or other texts, but otherwise I could meditate as much as I wanted in my room. It was like a dream. Before I left England, Brahmarishi asked me how long I wanted to stay at the ashram, and I replied: "One year, and then I'll see! But when I arrived at Hardwar, he asked me the same question again, and what spontaneously came up in me was to say, "Ten years, and then we'll see!" At first, he was surprised, but in the end he seemed to appreciate the intensity of my commitment.

In fact, there were two gurus working together in this ashram, Brahmarishi whom we called *bari guruji*, the big guru, and Vivekananda who was *choti guruji*, the little guru. The two had been

friends for a long time and had travelled a lot together. They had also practised profound sâdhanas side by side. Things worked out so that one or other of them was always teaching me. Thus, many happy years passed, and I deepened my knowledge of the Gîtâ and Patanjali's sutras thanks to the commentaries of these two masters. I was particularly struck by the sutra that speaks of the "colourless crystal of the intellect"; I had the feeling that it corresponded to the intellectual realisation I had had about "Who am I? two years earlier. This experience is an initial experience on the path, because it's all about the intellect. One of the things I realised at that time was that meditation wasn't just for a few people who didn't include me. It was for me too, and basically it was for everyone.

One inner experience made a particular impression on me: it was a few months after meeting Brahmarishi, I was still in London, and I went to practise yoga at a Shivânanda centre. When I was doing *sarvangâsana* (the candle), I had a vision in my body, more at the level of the *vishuddha chakra*, of a very beautiful lotus of light, accompanied by a sound of perfect crystalline purity. I won't go into further detail, because in this area it's best for each person to make their own experiences. In this sense, I didn't want to read any books on the chakras until I'd had a good experience of them. My guru told me I had to do it, but I said no, I wanted to have the experience first. In fact, there was a turning point in my life about reading when I started meditation seriously. Before that, I had an avidity for knowledge that could make me swallow a book a day, I would literally devour it. I studied the classical Sanskrit texts related to this tradition of meditative yoga, but it was in a very different state of mind, there was no longer this greed of wanting to know everything about everything.

One day, Brahmarishi left for Madhya Pradesh. At the time, I was very attached to him and found it difficult to imagine not being in his physical presence. So, I asked to follow him, but he refused, telling me: "Choti Guruji will teach you! I later realised that he was preparing to leave this world. In fact, even before his death, I had realised that I was 'one' with him and that it was he who was seeing through my eyes. So, his teachings continued to nourish me from within.

After his death, Choti guruji taught me for a while, but soon enough he said to me: "Now you teach! I was surprised and frightened by this proposal, because in addition to my lack of skills in yoga and meditation, I had to give the explanations in Hindi, a language I knew very little about at the time. But Vivekanandji insisted, saying: "When we teach, the flower of experience blooms". So, I set about giving these basic instructions on meditation, prânâyâmas and asanas. My audience was the local community and visitors who might come from far and wide. The way in which we practised the âsanas was not the same as in the usual yoga classrooms. We took up a given posture and went completely inside ourselves, often for a really long time. In any case, this powerful experience I had doing candlelight in a Shivânanda group in London was a lesson for me, confirming that the âsanas really did help to have new and deeper experiences on this path of yoga.

In the year 2000, my sleep changed, and I began to sleep still lying down, but with my legs in the lotus position. What's more, each of my two hands was holding a *mâlâ* (rosary), and the recitation with the scrolling of the beads continued even when I was asleep. I'm pleased to learn from what you say that in REM sleep, i.e. dream sleep, the two muscle groups in the body that can still move are those of the eyes and the hands with the fingers. This is in line with what I've

experienced. Then, from 2002 and for six years, I began to sleep sitting in the lotus position. For three hours a night, my head would tilt a little without me needing to lean on a wall or any other support, and I'd drift off to sleep for maybe three hours, then I'd continue meditating normally. I practised in Benares, and also in another ashram of our order north-west of Delhi at the foot of the Himalayas. Then I had an accident and damaged two vertebrae. I had to stop practising the lotus, but I'm gradually getting back into it. I meditate well without the lotus posture, but I want to be able to do it completely again.

Between our two meetings, which provided the basis for this interview, Divya Prabhâ left her ashram in the back streets of Benares, barefoot, to catch a taxi for the long journey to the airport. There, she was going to take part in a meeting with government officials to draw up the programme and choose the teachers to be invited for the 'yoga mela' to be organised just before the half-kumbha-mela in Allahabad, which attracts several million people. Around the same time, there will also be a major three-day meeting of non-resident Indians, chaired by the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, who happens to have his constituency in Benares itself. It's an astonishing fate for an Oxford-educated Englishwoman to find herself in a position of responsibility in this traditional Indian yoga milieu.

Part two: Divya Prabhâ's answers

Why did you and your organisation launch this ashram school in the middle of the backstreets of Benares?

DP: When he died, my master had a network of 40 ashrams around the world, but he didn't want to establish one in Benares, a city near which he himself was born. He felt that there were enough ashrams in this holy city, and preferred to establish one in less favoured regions from the Hindu point of view, such as Haryana, Punjab or the United States. On the other hand, four years ago, the 'divine' saw to it that the need was felt for an institution in Benares itself, to take in children who, for the most part, were orphans. To this was added the attendance of children from the local community, including a number of physically handicapped children. Initially we thought in terms of two storeys, but during the building work, things developed into 3, 4 and then 5 storeys. This was not planned in advance, but was a natural development of the project with divine help.

One of the 25 boarders at this small school run by Divya Prabhâ, a boy of 7 or 8, was on the verge of tears because he had lost the key to his locker. As she could see that he was having trouble remembering where he had left it, she advised him to go and pray at the feet of the large photo of the guru, which was 2 meters from her. The child went to do so, obviously with a certain intensity, but after a few tens of seconds, he was suddenly inspired to go and look for his key in a room where he could have lost it, but he came back after five minutes disappointed, the key wasn't there! At that moment, Divya Prabhâ took the child's head in her hands, brought it to within 2 cm of his nose and told him, looking him in the eye, that the key thing was really nothing serious. The child was visibly reassured.

During the second afternoon that we had agreed for our interviews, the children were unexpectedly on holiday. They took the opportunity to give us a demonstration of hatha yoga on the terrace of the school building, which doubles as an open-air meditation area with a small temple. They had just come back from an inter-school yoga competition the same morning, and one of the little children from the school, who was only nine years old, had come third in his age group for Uttar Pradesh. Remember that this province has a population of 200 million, and the child was ranked ninth in the whole of India. Even if yoga competitions are not very common in the West, it is very likely that such a showcase for a young child would have a good influence on encouraging the practice of yoga by him. Most people need recognition, and children in particular. The children's daily programme is well regulated, half an hour of *japa* in the morning and the same in the evening, then in the morning 90 minutes of practice, including 50 minutes of hatha yoga, 20 of *prânâyâma* and 20 of meditation. It's clear that in this ashram, hatha yoga is practised not for competitions but for spiritual development; however, as the children do the postures beautifully, and are very stimulated by going to competitions, the teachers take them there.

In between answering my questions, Divya Prabhâ speaks to the children, often in Sanskrit. If they don't understand, instead of translating into Hindi, she repeats in Sanskrit in a different way, until the message gets through.

Mantra is your main practice: how would you explain its effectiveness?

DP: Mantra means *manasam trayate*, "that which takes the mind through". It allows us to connect directly to a level beyond thought. I go back to the West from time to time. I found that over there, even the meditation teachers were too entangled in their thoughts, or in their traumatic past. I know it's a well-known method of psychology to delve into that past, but in our yoga tradition, we try to go as directly as possible beyond the mind, and for that the mantra is a great help. We work as much as we can on the expansion of consciousness, which is an important process because it allows us to go beyond attachment in a natural way, without it being a frustration or an artificial mental posture.

In modern life, people are very attached to little things, you could even say they focus on details, and this wastes their energy and makes them lose sight of the big picture. Thanks to the mantra, even if you do your job properly, right down to the details of everyday life, you keep a broad mind. It's like riding a bike: when you're learning, you have to concentrate on your riding and your balance, but when you know how to ride, you can ride with your friends and talk to them without thinking about riding at all. So, your awareness expands.

At the beginning, reciting the mantra represents a certain effort, but then you reach the level of *ajapa-japa*: it is no longer you who is reciting the mantra, but it is the mantra that is being recited within you. This indicates a very important turning point in the practice: you move beyond the ego, you are no longer the actor in the recitation of the mantra, because it happens spontaneously. In this state, you do what you have to do, according to your karma and your dharma, but your mind is immersed at the level of the mantra, which represents a much wider energy of consciousness. You can even reach the level of the deep sound of silence, which tradition usually refers to as *pranava*.

A practical way of becoming aware of this type of meditation is to place your hand on the top of your head, feel the little pulsations there and connect with them. We then imagine that these pulsations are themselves repeating the mantra Om, or Râm, or another mantra that we practise. At this point, the recitation quickly becomes as natural, continuous and regular as the heartbeat itself. The next stage is to hear all external sounds as the mantra. This is a practice that anyone can adopt; it is not difficult. On a practical level, you can use the rosary or even your fingers. One way is to start by touching with the thumb the proximal phalanx (closest to the palm) of the index finger, then the middle finger, the ring finger and the little finger, and then move on to the distal phalanxes, those at fingernail level, in the opposite direction from the little finger to the index finger, finishing with the middle row from the index finger to the little finger. This zigzag-like path through the fingers of the hand helps to focus attention. It is important to understand that *japa* is not only linked to the formal sitting meditation session, for example in the morning, but should be done as often as possible. The mantra is an offering of our thoughts to the divine at all times and in all our actions. In the Bhagavâd-Gîtâ, Krishna says to Arjouna: "Of all the *yajña-s*, the fire sacrifices, I am the mantra". When you constantly offer your mind to the divine in this way, you become hyperconscious, you reach the cause of existence and the fundamental sound, *pranava*.

From a practical point of view, it's a good idea to have a specific place and time to practise. Go ahead, even if you don't feel well. One day, because of the power of this *samskâra*, this conditioning, things will "take off". You are planting the seed of a good habit. It will eventually germinate.

Practising the mantra regularly reminds me of ice-skating championships. When there are major competitions, we pass between each candidate to smooth out the ice, so that the next is not influenced by the grooves made by his predecessor. The mantra represents a flattening out of the grooves of the past in our mind, it allows us to have a regularly renewed, always fresh consciousness. You then create your own groove, which will help you to channel your thoughts, words and actions in the right way. This will help you to react in the present, not according to the conditioning or traumas of the past, but on the contrary by seeing things as they are, without prejudice.

In the Indian tradition, it is said that the best time to practise is before sunrise, the two hours known as *brahma muhurt* [remember that in traditional environments, until recently, there was no electricity, so people tended to go to bed early and wake up very early]. There is a physical correlation to this traditional recommendation of favourable time for practice: ozone is at its highest in the two hours before sunrise, and is then dissipated by the rising sun. [It should also be noted that cortisone is at its peak before sunrise, and has a stimulating, even euphoric effect that encourages more dynamic meditation]. Generally speaking, human beings are particularly attracted to the time of sunrise and sunset. They easily come into contact with the sacred during these periods, whatever the words and concepts with which they express this sacredness.

Can we say, as the great Benares pandit Gopinath Kaviraj maintained, that ajapa-japa, the continuous and spontaneous recitation of the mantra, is equivalent to the awakening of kundalinî?

DP: Absolutely. At the beginning, our mantra is like an irregular stone, a coarse crystal: practice tends to polish it and make it a perfect, transparent sphere. I like the expression "*well-rounded personality*", which I find full of traditional wisdom. There's something intuitively deep and true in that expression.¹

Of course, the mantra is much more powerful when it is given by a master who has realised its power. When we find a teacher who is unlimited and without ego, who knows the eternal truth, he or she helps us to transcend our limitations in a direct and natural way. That said, it's normal to have different teachers for different personalities of disciples. It is in the nature of nature to have teachers of all levels. We need them, and even when we reach a relatively high level, it's very important to respect the path of others. Everyone has their own speed. So, we need to concentrate on what we have to do and not judge others.

In the West, we often speak of seven chakras, but in the Hindu tradition, we often add an eighth, *lalana*, which is synonymous with *talū*, and which corresponds roughly to the place where we place the tip of the tongue on the roof of the mouth when we verticalise it. There are nine orifices for the senses, these are the doors of the body, to which we can add the 10^e door, which is the third eye, and the *brahma-chakra* is above all that. In our tradition, we start working directly on the *brahma-chakra*, and we quickly move beyond it. This doesn't stop us from doing *âsanas* and *prânâyâma*, but when the time comes for meditation, we tend to quickly go beyond the body.

From a practical point of view, when you're sitting down, you start by closing off the places where energy might leak. This can be done quite simply by placing the two ankles one on top of the other, with the heel underneath going towards the perineum and closing off the anus area. This is sufficient for beginners. For more advanced practitioners, it is useful to distinguish between the retraction of the anus, *ashwinî mûdrâ*, and the contraction of the perineum just in front, *mûlâ-bandha*. In the hands, to prevent loss of energy, the thumb can be closed by touching the outer part of the index finger nail, with the back of the hand on the corresponding knee and the palms facing upwards. From a symbolic point of view, the thumb represents the *bodhi*, spiritual intelligence, and it controls the index finger, which is the accusing finger, linked to malice and the ego. The two hands can also be placed one on top of the other with the thumbs touching; they can even move slightly upwards and forwards in their point of contact, which is not a problem. This hand position is often called *dhyana-mûdrâ*, the meditation attitude, but in our tradition, we also like to call it *brahma-mûdrâ*, the Brahma attitude, which emphasises the reflexive link between this gesture of convergence at the top of the hands and *Brahma-randhra* or *Brahma-chakra*, the place where the energy channels converge at the top of the head.

Ideally, we should adopt the lotus posture, so that nothing impure can harm our spiritual intelligence, just as no mud can defile the lotus itself.

- 1) Once these characteristics of the posture have been established, we begin to work on the mantra with the breath: we begin by inhaling through the *mûlâdhâra*, exhaling through the *Brahma-chakra*, and then moving up the starting chakra level by level, always starting at the bottom on the inhale and ending at the top of the head on the exhale. When we do these practices, we imagine that our body expands, first to the size of the room, then to the size

of the village or town, the country, the planet and finally the universe. Our body becomes the entire space. This leads to an intimate experience of dissolving the body in space, and even to out-of-body experiences. There's no need to be afraid of this, in fact it's what we're looking for, it's just important to hold on tightly to the string of the mantra that allows us to go through all sorts of unexpected experiences. It prevents us from wandering off down side paths, fascinated for example by one energy or another, without really knowing where they are leading us.

- 2) In another technique, we begin our session by bringing the tip of our tongue into contact with the roof of the mouth, in other words, by beginning *khecharî-mûdrâ*. After this, a kind of reverse gravity naturally occurs, which pulls the tongue upwards. The tongue is sucked up behind the uvula and blocks the back of the nasal passage. You practise gradually, and at first you get tired of being sucked from front to back, but then it happens naturally: all you have to do is let it happen.
- 3) The third technique is to bring the energy back to the base of the body by superimposing the ankles and contracting the *mûlâdhâra*. You can then continue to ascend from chakra to chakra, breathing in and out through the *brahma-chakra*. And from there, we carry out a progressive association by step, with each inhalation, we go as far as possible, we remain on the exhalation where we have reached, and on the next inhalation, we climb to a higher degree on the ladder above our head. This defines an axis of light that extends the spinal column. It is a luminescent line linked to the breath, and its upper limit is carried further and further up the ascending vertical.
- 4) A fourth way of meditating is to imagine that we are sitting on a globe, which may correspond to the planet we are visualising, and that we are surrounded by divine light. As we inhale, this divine light penetrates us through the *brahma-chakra*, although it is not a question, as it is in *shavasana* for example, of bringing the light down into the body to cleanse away tensions, obscurities and impurities. Instead, we engage in meditation directly away from the body, in a sort of abstract way, starting directly from the chakra in space. If breathing, for example, is reduced and becomes very superficial, *prâna* and mental activity will also tend to be reduced and become minimal. Breath suspensions are important for stopping the mind; they can be of two kinds, i.e. stopping when the lungs are empty or stopping when the lungs are full. In my experience, I'm simply not aware that my breath has stopped until it starts again. In any case, it's very important to remain calm when you realise that you're not aware of which breath you'll need after stopping breathing: will it be a deeper exhalation or, on the contrary, a re-breathing? In any case, when our breath starts again, we are strongly advised to continue in the direction of expansion. We don't need to fear or worry about this expansion beyond the body, because in the end it's what we want. So let's be happy about it. When people start to experience these long pauses in breathing and these out-of-body experiences, they may be afraid, and so the mantra becomes very important in order to continue to progress anyway, and not to get lost in secondary energies that scatter here and there.
- 5) From a practical point of view, even if the ideal is to be able to meditate quietly in the middle of the traffic of Piccadilly Place, it is still important to have a very quiet place at the beginning, and to be sure not to be disturbed by sudden external disturbances, such as

someone coming to tell you urgent news, etc. If you are connected to a good teacher who has given you a mantra that he or she has practised and therefore 'charged', you will have the right expansion of consciousness and your progress will be rapid. In our tradition, we don't talk about staying 'rooted', as some meditation practices advise. We seek to be constantly, and as immediately as possible, 'one' with this expanding consciousness, and to bring this breadth of mind down into our daily lives in the present moment. We invite into the confines of our daily lives a knowledge that encompasses everything. When we emerge from these states of expanded consciousness, it's also important not to force ourselves to speak. The energy of this expanding silence is strong and precious, and we mustn't waste it by going back to chattering. Nothing harmful can come from this energy. However, to keep it justly, it's important to avoid useless words and chatter. By doing so, we are saving what is most precious to us - even a million euros won't buy the breath. So, it's important to guard it carefully and not to waste it by pointing it in useless directions: the way we use both our breath and our words must be the result of a very conscious choice. We need to know how to respect and sustain this state of silence in which we are immersed. We need to come back from these situations very gently, and those around us need to be aware of this in order to respect these states. I remember first-hand the case of a person who was brought out of this state abruptly, because someone wanted to tell her that her brother had been in a car accident, which triggered a permanent tremor in her. The doctors didn't understand and thought it was Parkinson's, but in my opinion it was more the trauma of having been taken out of this state too quickly.

In this process, you see your transformation, with your mind perceiving increasingly subtle music and sounds. You learn to link your mantra with the sound of silence. You direct your consciousness in an ascension that goes higher and higher, and you reach the source of the mantra itself, which is none other than the *pranava*, the fundamental sound. You then learn to recognise the mantra and the fundamental sound in all the ordinary sounds of life, and you develop an increasingly subtle perception. This experience of inner sound is in fact directly linked to the sense of the present.

(At this point, Divya Prabhâ takes out her mobile, connects to YouTube and shows us a NASA video of the sound of the sun, which sounds like a continuous Om. An Indian working with NASA, Om Prakash Pandey, is trying to link the form of the vibrations of the Vedic mantras with images of the universe. Based on these mantras, he predicts shapes that were then, it seems, discovered by NASA, which is astonishing. Divya Prabhâ noted that he was a person who had his dose of ego, but whose lectures were interesting).

Through all these practices, our spiritual intelligence becomes crystal clear. You go beyond the notion of ego, of individual inner states, and draw inspiration from a higher source. My first master, Vigyandev, said: "If you are psychologically balanced, you can live with anyone! Meditation should not be an excuse to run away from people with problems. On the contrary, we learn not to take their aggression towards us personally, but to understand that it stems from their problems. We develop a greater acceptance of them. As you say, the ego is like a tight drumhead that creates a fairly loud sound as soon as you touch it. On the other hand, if the

drumhead is loose, it's like a relaxed ego that doesn't produce a reactionary sound, even when it's hit hard...

Again, all these meditation practices are there first and foremost to get to know ourselves, with those aspects of ourselves that we like and those that we don't like. Once we've developed this objectivity about ourselves, it's much easier to apply it to others. We develop a kind of "colourlessness" that allows us to see the outside world without glasses. When the purity of the mind develops, the parapsychological phenomena of clairvoyance, etc. arise as secondary effects. We must be careful not to become entangled with them, because this would be a fixation that could "flatten our batteries", which we have charged, not without difficulty, through our meditation practices. We don't worry about it, but we keep going up and up and up. These parapsychological abilities are not things to be shown to others. When consciousness progresses, we become aware of many things, but it's important not to get involved. Furthermore, one of the signs of progress on this path is the realisation of unity in diversity. It corresponds to spontaneous love, which is just there, without the need to preach about it, or to engage in special training to impose it on our unconscious.

In a sense, ascending from one chakra to the higher chakra can take a lifetime, so it's as if you had to spend six lifetimes to ascend all seven chakras. But this process can also go very quickly. In any case, it's entirely our responsibility to choose to ascend or, on the contrary, to fall back down. When I began this work with the help of my master, I felt that he had cleared a path in the forest by cutting down certain trees, and that all I had to do was go to the other end. Another image could be that of the motorway, you choose to go through the tollbooth and then you go straight on, without any obstacles, or you choose to take the secondary roads, to visit your friends or family, you'll no doubt reach your destination, but much later. So, you have a complete choice of how fast you want to go, to reach that goal where, basically, you already are, but you don't know it.

I often tell people that if you are a practitioner who really wants to progress, simply avoid wasting time with these thoughts which, as Patanjali says, are fixed on suffering and the absence of suffering (*klisha* and *a-klisha*). It could also be translated as distortion of the mind, or absence of distortion, *klisha* being the past participle of *klesha*, which means distortion of the mind rather than disruptive negative emotion, as it is often translated. In fact, the list of *klesha-s* begins with ignorance, which is not an emotion but rather a cognitive disorder of the mind.

At the beginning of the *samâdhi-pada*, i.e. the first part of Patanjali's sutras, after defining yoga as the stopping of *vrittis*, these are defined by the following list: after the pair we have seen, *klisha* and *aklisha*, we have five others, *pramana*, proof, *viparaya*, opposition, *vikalpa*, choice, option, *nîdrâ*, sleep, and *smriti*, memory. The latter brings back previous emotions into the present, leading us into vicious circles of reproduction of the past. Faced with this, there are two possible reactions: either to go along with the reliving of what has been remembered, as most people do with their memories, or to take control of one's mind. What Patanjali is telling us is that there is no need to bring back memories of the past, even positive memories. This is different from, for example, the marriage counsellor, who suggests to the quarrelling

couple that they bring up the good memories of the past. Experienced practitioners cannot be forced by anyone to do things they do not wish to do.

In practice, you can't force yourself to be detached, but letting go comes naturally. It's as if you're being sucked upwards: your senses are like the pulp of an octopus's arms, and you bring them back towards the centre. There's no need to cultivate detachment, or to force it on yourself, but there are times when you naturally feel that you no longer have the desire to feel, to desire, even to breathe, etc. This happens spontaneously. It's as if you're being sucked into your mantra. This rise in energy also allows you to live a celibacy that is natural and non-confrontational. We could say that this characteristic of a happy life is achieved by a practice that makes you less and less attached. Your love will become stable and you will be much less expectant of reciprocation.

If I had to go to a desert island and keep only four verses of the Bhagavâd-Gîtâ, I would choose those around verse 50 of chapter two, where Arjouna asks Krishna what are the signs of one who has complete knowledge, the *jñâni*. Other fundamental verses come just after, towards verse 60, where the seven stages are described which, at the beginning only, bring one into contact with the objects of the senses, *sparsha*, but which ultimately lead to the self-destruction of the mind by itself. The message of the Gîtâ encourages even those who lead a family life to become yoguis, i.e. stable people, and sannyâsi, i.e. detached people. These are the two secrets to a happy life. The practice of yoga is a way of life, and is not limited to meditation practice sessions. It is a very precious, very conscious attitude of mind; no money can buy it, but it is capable of giving us everything. As you are in this yogic state, you see the perfection of all things, and you accept them as they are. The incentive to take the right action at that moment no longer comes from you, from your ego, but from the higher dimension of the divine. There is no longer any notion of the actor. Fully conscious action then becomes part of this global perfection. Sharing the divine knowledge that inspires you also becomes natural. You no longer force yourself into a detachment that is ultimately artificial, by trying to reduce yourself to inactivity whether you like it or not. You can continue to act according to your life path, your karma and your dharma, but you no longer desire the fruits of your action. Through meditation, you can dissolve your previous karmas. You act, but no longer as judge and jury: "Why, when I did this, did I not get what I expected?" These kinds of questions simply disappear. You're no longer resentful that you didn't get the reward you thought you deserved.

We notice that when we place the hands in the form of the mudras of knowledge (the thumbs touching the index fingers) on the knees with the palms facing upwards, the energy rises quite spontaneously to the top of the head. You suggest that this may be due to an analogy of form between the bony round of the knee, which is covered only by the skin without muscles, and the same bony round of the skull, which is also covered only by the skin. This is certainly one way of analysing, but in your meditation practice, it's important to go beyond analysis.

Another important thing I wanted to add is that we should never underestimate the power of the *Om* to pull us upwards. In practice, you can feel the *a* in the throat, the *o* in the lips, and the *m* closed, more like a kind of upward movement, towards the root of the nose or indirectly towards the top of the head. This opens the energy channels.

In Vedic texts and in the first chapter of the Chandogya Upanishad, *Om* is referred to as *udgîthâ*, which could be translated as "the sound that naturally lifts you up". It is a sound that is at once magical, mystical and uplifting. It is even more powerful if you learn to perform it silently, mentally, because then its energy transforms the subtle world within us. At first, we recite it, then we hear it being recited within us, and at that moment, it's a sign that we are in the process of moving beyond our ego and our individuality. If we are disturbed, anxious or depressed, even just listening to a cassette that regularly recites this *Om* will have an effect on us. Of course, at the beginning, we'll have to force ourselves a little because, when our mood is black, we don't want to do anything to get better, but if we can make this experience of *Om* a continuous one, it will work within us. It will pierce through our moods, our ego and our very sensations. We'll feel much lighter.

Our attention is highly unstable, but when it is focused to a minimum, we already feel much more efficient. The absorption of attention does not make us vaporous or floating in mid-air; on the contrary, it corresponds to hyperconsciousness and the fourth inner state, *turiya* (in Sanskrit, *turiya* means 'fourth'). In this state, we have a sense of completeness and the sensation of being a receptacle of divine light.

Divya Prabhâ plans to organise retreats lasting a week or two, in collaboration with a yoga teacher from the Geneva area whom she has known for a long time. You can keep up to date with her programme at www.chandramauli.org. However, like the buildings of the Chandramauli school itself, it is still under construction, so only the main part is accessible. You can also write to her directly and visit her if you are visiting Benares, as Jacques Vigne did to write this article: : <https://yogamission.uk/> et www.chandramauli.org

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¹ In French, there is also the phrase "Il touche sa bille dans ce domaine"(literally "he has got his marbles in this field", to say that someone is very competent in a given field (note of Jacques Vigne). Again in French, "il est poli" means at the same time "He is polite" and "He is polished", i.e., well rounded as a marble...