



# Satyananda Satsang

with Paramahansa Niranjanananda Saraswati

SATSANG, FROM THE ROOT 'SAT' (ULTIMATE TRUTH), IS A GATHERING OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE IN THE COMPANY OF ONE WHO EMBODIES 'SAT', IN ORDER TO REALISE THIS STATE OF TRUTH WITHIN THEMSELVES.

SUCH A GATHERING TOOK PLACE AT MANGROVE MOUNTAIN IN MARCH THIS YEAR, WHEN THE REVERED YOGA MASTER, PARAMAHANSA NIRANJANANANDA SARASWATI, SHARED HIS INSIGHTS ABOUT THE SATYANANDA SYSTEM OF YOGA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO EVERYDAY AUSTRALIANS, THE IMPORTANCE OF A YOGA LINEAGE AND HIS PERCEPTION OF YOGA IN AUSTRALIA.

FOLLOWING IS AN EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN SWAMIJI AND RISHI NITYABODHA ON BEHALF OF AUSTRALIAN YOGA LIFE, DURING THE SATSANG.

**Swamiji, you have spent considerable time in Australia including a long period when you were a teenager. What are your fondest memories of Australia and what do you think are the distinguishing characteristics of yoga in Australia?**

I came to Australia for the first time in 1976 when I was sixteen years old and I lived here for about one year. The moment I landed here I liked Australians because I found that they were no-nonsense people. Of course there are some nonsensical traits but the character was very open, accepting and beautiful and during my stay here, I had the opportunity to go to Wagga Wagga and to establish the ashram there. Then I moved on to Bonny Hills, then to Lismore and Canberra. I travelled around Australia meeting yoga teachers and introducing the concepts of Satyananda Yoga.

The warm and accepting nature of the Australians made yoga into a way of life and not just something they practised in a classroom environment for one hour every week. Until then, although we had ashrams throughout the world, they were city ashrams where people would come, learn their yoga in a class once a week and then go. The introduction of yogic lifestyle in an ashram environment was first conceived of at Mangrove Mountain. This place thrived. In its peak days, there were about twenty-two ashrams throughout Australia and many yoga teachers, teaching the basic systems of Satyananda Yoga.

More recently we have taken this yogic understanding to another level (for example, by introducing Yogic Studies) and this has been very successful. In fact in my opinion, if there is a country, if there is a community in the world who knows yoga more than any other country and community, it is the Australian community. The depth of understanding of yoga which is here in this country, does not exist, even in America: it does not exist, even in Europe. It does not exist in any other part of the world and Paramahansa Satyananda has said, that although yoga took birth in India, it developed into a lifestyle in Australia and in this way, India and Australia share a very deep connection with each other... and even if we look around today at the Satyananda Yoga community throughout the world, we find that the majority of the teachers and

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practitioners, and even samnyasins\*, are Australians. My experience has been that the vibrant nature of Australians is the motivating factor in their life that enables them to take that bold first step. I hope we don't lose this trait and I am personally very happy because in my perception, India is my right arm, Australia is my left arm and from Paramahansa Satyananda's viewpoint, India is the head, Australia is the heart – nothing more to say beyond that.

\*Samnyasins (sannyasins) – devotees of a spiritual lineage who have initiated to the level of samnyasa, whereby they have taken vows to renounce the finite (material world) in favour of the infinite internal reality.

**You are the successor to Paramahansa Satyananda, who is in turn a disciple of Swami Sivananda. How important is this link to tradition for you?**

Without tradition there is no survival in yoga. Let me make it very clear because it is the tradition which transmits the energy. It is the tradition which conveys the vision of the previous acharyas\* or siddhas\* or saints and it is the tradition which becomes the pathway for the flow of that wisdom and therefore tradition can never be ignored... and another beautiful thing which I have noticed about tradition, is that there comes a time in the life of the teacher, the guru, when they withdraw from the normal day-to-day activities – when they stop being teachers and they become inspirers. If we disconnect with tradition, we will simply remain as yoga

teachers and there are already thousands throughout the world; but when we connect with the tradition, then that inspiration flows. Swami Sivananda was one of the great sages of the last century; Swami Satyananda is one of the last siddhas of the previous millennium. When we have these two power centres to guide us, to inspire us and to open up new dimensions of human experience through yoga, we can be sure we are never going to stagnate in our journey. As long as we remain connected to the true spirit of the tradition, it does not allow for stagnation of spirit, but when we move away from the tradition, stagnation of spirit, stagnation of idea, stagnation of belief, stagnation of performance, is visible. I see the vibrancy and vitality that we are following today, and, from my perspective, it is an integral part of our yogic journey.

\*Acharyas (acarya) – recognised authorities, teachers, in their field who lead by example e.g. guru.

\*Siddhas – accomplished masters, especially of tantra (those who have cultivated yogic siddhis and are known as adepts).

**What are some of the key characteristics that distinguish Satyananda Yoga from other systems of yoga?**

There are many gurus in the world who teach what they believe in and their teaching becomes their philosophy and that philosophy is based on their personal experience, but it does not necessarily happen that everybody is accommodated or fits in the framework of one



## Evolution is not recognized in yoga as a linear process, rather as a circular process where we begin with the potential, we fulfil and we go through the process of growth and realise our own true potential.

personal experience. Therefore, many yoga teachers and many yoga gurus have tried to develop their system to its maximum potential and they have not been successful. Eventually they have come back to the basic principles of yoga, by teaching either only hatha yoga or by speaking only about bhakti yoga or by teaching and speaking about raja yoga and sometimes kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. When a guru is able to put aside his personal

experiences and create a practical system which allows everybody to discover their own nature, according to their state of evolution, without imposing his own philosophy on the person (on the follower), then this allows the individual to grow from the point where they are in this life. Paramahansa Satyananda has been very clear in these matters. Those of you who have known him in the past, when he was working as a teacher, would have noticed a

particular trait – that he never spoke on any personal philosophy. He was totally focused on how to develop yoga. Now, whenever he talks about his experiences, his achievements, he says: 'This has been my understanding, you develop your own, in your own way. I have connected with people, with God, with the universe, with yoga. In this manner, connect with God, with other people, with the universe, with yourself, with yoga but you have to discover your own way of connecting – don't go as per my understanding, don't go as per my experience. Remember that the aim is connection but how I connected was appropriate for me, how you will connect will be appropriate way for you.'

**Yoga has become very popular in western countries. What do you think are the reasons for this?**

I think the reason for this is many people have come to realise they have difficulty managing the confusing, and conflicting situations in life by living in what is regarded as a normal way. People have not been able to provide us with solutions and answers to this challenge.

You know it is a kind of basic belief in many countries of the world, that the Indians that go to other countries to teach, have all the solutions to the meaning of life – it is not true. I believe out of one billion people in India, only ten are the real gurus. Yet, out of the one billion, thousands establish themselves as the master of this and the master of that and they try to provide solutions to all of our problems in life. We have never tried to do that. In fact to many people, when they come to me and say – 'Swamiji, I am having this problem, what can I do for it?' – I say to them – 'don't come to me with problems, come to me with solutions. You know how you are facing your problem. Think what are the ways you can find solutions. Find ten options, think then about which is the appropriate one and if you are confused then come to me and I'll tell you which solution might be better. Don't tell me your problems, tell me what the solutions are to your problems.'

Yoga is being accepted throughout the world (even in places like Iran and Morocco). The previous perception that yoga is part of religion or it contradicts one belief and it converts a person to Hinduism, or this or that

'ism', is all finished. Yoga has now been established as a science of life which promotes health, peace and tranquillity, human creativity, self understanding and teaches us how to adjust with life. This helps free us from the negative influences of our environment and is one of the reasons why yoga is now being accepted throughout the world – not as a spiritual subject, or a philosophical subject but as a science of life.

**If you separate yoga from Indian culture what remains?**

Only yoga will remain. You know, when God was creating the universe he worked very hard. He parted the waters, brought forth the solid matter; with a lot of hard work, he separated day from night and the angel who was watching God do this hard work exclaimed – "wow, that's beautiful. What will you call it?" – and God said – "I'll call it a day."

So if in the same spirit, in the same vein, you separate Indian-ness from yoga, it is only yoga which will remain and yoga is not Indian: no, that is a misconception. Five to six thousand years ago BC, yoga was practised as it is practised by us today. There is ample evidence that forms of meditation, including trataka, the ideas of yantras, mandalas, asanas, pranayamas and shatkarmas, were practised in South America, in Scandinavian countries, in Egypt, in many of the African countries, and in many of the eastern countries. But in the course of time yoga went into the background and slowly disappeared – faded away from the other civilisations. The credit goes to India for preserving the subject, the science of yoga. Yoga itself is the heritage of humanity and Indian-ness has nothing to do with yoga, just as Australian-ness has nothing to do with yoga: they are two different things. I am an Indian, you are an Australian. We come together because of yoga. If it were not for yoga, we would not be here. If I was talking religion, you would not be here. If you were talking religion, I would not be here. Yoga stands alone... and when all our national identities dissolve, yoga will still be the same and if there is an increase in national identities, still it will not make any difference – yoga will still stand out alone and therefore, only yoga will remain.

**So, how relevant are orange robes, red dots, Hindu gods etc., in western countries?**

Not relevant at all. You have to understand one thing – orange robes or red dots – they do not form part of yoga, or yogic experience. Yoga is a different subject altogether: it's a subject that deals with the development of human nature and personality. Orange robes or red dots or other forms of what we can call 'sect' or 'tradition' – they are totally separate to yoga.

**If you could paint a picture of Satyananda Yoga for Australia or perhaps create it on the computer what would this picture contain?**

Only a circle. I'll give you an example. You have a seed in your hands. You plant that seed. It flowers into a tree. The tree has leaves. The tree has flowers. The tree has branches. The tree has a trunk. Is that the death of the seed? When the fruits come out, inside the fruit is again the seed, with the same potential as the first one. Evolution is not recognized in yoga as a linear process, rather as a circular process where we begin with the potential, we fulfil and we go through the process of growth and realise our own true potential. Evolution is from seed to seed, not from tree to fruit and it is for this reason that a circle is enough to define the concept of yoga.



Paramahansa Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Paramahansa Niranjanananda is the successor to Swami Satyananda, founder of Satyananda Yoga and the Bihar Yoga Bharati in India – the world's first and only yoga university. He is the current chancellor of the Bihar Yoga Bharati and has inspired many yoga practitioners throughout the world through his accessible teaching style, his wonderful sense of humour and his gentle, openhearted nature. For a full transcript of this interview go to [www.satyananda.net/satsang](http://www.satyananda.net/satsang).*