

Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons

By Paramahansa Yogananda



Lesson 4

The Hong-Sau Technique: Yoga Science of Concentration

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Self-Realization Fellowship
FOUNDED 1920 BY PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



To get the most from your spiritual study of these Lessons...

Remember: The awakening of one's intuitive faculties is necessary to fully grasp and absorb spiritual teachings. The best time for spiritual study is after practicing meditation, when one is calm and therefore more intuitively receptive. A restless mind, or a highly intellectual mind, cannot absorb truth.



Before you begin to read, select a quiet, restful place. Read every word carefully and inwardly digest the message. Do not allow yourself to be distracted. Permit each thought to filter through your mind slowly. In this way you will absorb the knowledge in these *Lessons* more thoroughly.

Sit upright. Take a deep breath and exhale. With the exhalation, breathe out all restless thoughts from your mind. Keep the body and mind motionless and now absorb everything I say unto your soul. I want you not only to listen with attention, but to absorb deeply the spirit behind my words.

"Thy Self-realization shall blossom forth from thy soulful study."

— *Paramahansa Yogananda*

O Love of Ages, Intoxicate Our Hearts and Souls!

An Invocation by Paramahansa Yogananda

God cannot be known without devotion and love — not a slavish devotion or one tinged by fear, but a devotion of equality and complete trust, for God is our Father, and we are His children. Love makes us one with God.

Heavenly Father, tear away the veil of our ignorance, our dark delusion! Be Thou the only ambition on the throne of our desires. Be Thou the only love on the throne of our craving. Father, Mother, Beloved Spirit, reveal Thyself unto us. Banish our indifference. O Endless Thrills of Intoxication! visit our souls; intoxicate our hearts with the wine of Thy love. O Love of All Ages, O Creator of Our Hearts! may the endless streams of our desires melt in Thy holy ocean and find fulfillment and satisfaction in Thee.

Father, twinkle through the stars, vibrate through the atoms, whisper through our thoughts, and love us through the love of our loved ones. Teach us not only to pray, but also to demand Thy love. It is our privilege to love Thee. We are a reflection of Thee. Father, wake us with the dawn, vitalize us in the sunlight; and as we enter the portals of the evening, receive the love of our hearts' devotion-flowers that bloom in the garden of the soul.

Father, forget us not, though we forget Thee; remember us, though we remember Thee not. Be not indifferent unto us, though we are indifferent unto Thee. Teach us to receive wisdom from Thy lips, and power from Thy concentration, and strength from Thy cosmic energy.

Come out of the blossoms, come out of the valley, come out through the windows of flowers and the souls of men, come out of the secret silence in the cave of our souls. Come, Father, dissolve the veils of space and mind, and show Thyself to us in all Thy glory.



"May the glory of Spirit abide with you. May His energy charge your body and mind, and His spirit awaken within your soul. Feel His glory registering His Infinite Immortality in your body, mind, and soul."

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The Hong-Sau Technique: Yoga Science of Concentration

A Self-Realization Fellowship Basic Technique

Part 1: How to Achieve Real Concentration

Concentration Is an Essential Prerequisite for Meditation

Many persons try to meditate, but find their efforts ineffective. They try to focus the mind on God or on reaching higher states of consciousness, inner peace, or joy, but they cannot rise above the distractions of their surroundings and their own inner restlessness of wandering thoughts. To achieve results in meditation, one must learn how to detach the attention from distracting thoughts and sensations and place it wholly upon God or one of His manifestations.¹ *Deep meditation is not possible without knowing the art of concentration.*

Difference Between Concentration and Meditation

The term “meditation” is sometimes used interchangeably with “concentration” in ordinary speech and writing. Self-Realization Fellowship teachings make this distinction between them:

- *Concentration* means withdrawal of the attention from all objects of distraction and placing it on one thing at a time. It consists in focusing the mind, through interest and determination, on any object or line of thought.
- *Meditation* means withdrawal of attention from all objects of distraction and placing it upon God alone. In other words, meditation is the application of concentration solely to know God.

When the attention is freed from distractions, it may be directed to focus with concentrated power on problems of business, family, or other matters; or upon God. It is all right to say that a person is concentrating on solving a problem, or on how to make more money in business, or on God; but you should not say, “He is meditating on his business problems.” Real meditation, as taught to Self-Realization students, is that specific form of concentration in which the attention, having been liberated from the restlessness of the body-conscious state by scientific techniques, is applied for the sole purpose of attaining Self-realization and God-communion.

The Hong-Sau Technique of Concentration that you will learn in this Lesson will help you to achieve the calmness and concentration necessary for real meditation. Through faithful practice you will soon experience glimpses of soul awareness and divine peace and joy.

The Aum Technique of Meditation that you will learn in a later Lesson is a method for applying the Hong-Sau concentrated mind on a particular aspect of God — as *Aum*, the Cosmic Sound or Holy Ghost — to experience definite realization of God’s presence in you and in all creation.

Every goal-directed activity requires concentration, and no effective action can be performed without it. In any vocation, knowledge and application of the art of concentration is a requirement for success. Businessmen, artists, students, as well as spiritual seekers,

Scientific and Unscientific Methods of Concentration

need to know how to focus all their powers of attention upon a single point. The degree of one's efficiency equals the extent of one's ability to concentrate.

There are two kinds of concentration — scientific and unscientific. Unscientific concentration develops more or less by diversion, when a person tries to get his mind off of a certain thing. The more he tries not to think about it, the more his thoughts usually will gravitate to it. This is not real concentration since it is not under the control of the will.

Scientific concentration, on the other hand, enables you to place your attention at will on the desired object of concentration and to hold it there uninterruptedly for as long as you wish. Self-Realization Fellowship teaches you a scientific method of doing this: the Hong-Sau Technique of Concentration.

Why Is Instruction in Concentration Necessary?

“Well,” you may say, “many people do succeed in concentrating on each problem as it arises. They know how to keep their minds on the subject at hand and shut out all extraneous thoughts, even though they were never taught to concentrate, and have never seen Self-Realization Fellowship instructions.”

This is true; all successful people have good powers of concentration. Then why should such persons bother with any “method” of concentration? Because they have acquired their power of concentration *indirectly* — by constant friction with difficult problems — in the past or in this life. By utilizing their previously developed ability scientifically, they can become even more successful. For instance, one can reason without learning logic; but clear-thinking persons who add logic to their mental tool-kit have an advantage over those who know nothing of the laws of reasoning.

The Latent Potentials of the Mind Awaken by Contact With the Soul

The average successful businessman uses only about twenty-five percent of his powers of concentration, but students of Self-Realization can develop their powers to one-hundred percent capability and exert them scientifically. In addition — and this is most important — they will learn the art of meditation and how to balance material success with spiritual success.

The Self-Realization Fellowship method of concentration enables those who practice it to center their thoughts upon God and to appeal successfully to Him to charge their concentration with His almighty power. The Self-Realization Technique of Concentration goes beyond mere psychological methods, because it teaches students how to expand the powers of the human mind with the all-creating supercharged consciousness of God latent in the soul. Only when scientifically developed human concentration is charged with the omnipotent concentration of Spirit can one achieve all things. This supreme level of concentration was known to Christ: “Ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”²

Everyone can benefit from applying scientific God-directed, God-charged concentration: the busy homemaker; the worry-burdened, harried business executive; the restless, aimless person whose uncontrolled thoughts make him go like a jumping jack; the religious devotee who is seeking greater spiritual knowledge; and the yogi who seeks direct communion with God.

There are two factors that must be applied for concentration to be complete: (a) the positive and (b) the negative. Negatively, concentration is the act of freeing attention from objects of distraction; and positively, it consists of focusing all attention on one thing at a

Two Factors Necessary for Complete Concentration

time. This is a psychologically sound and scientific definition of concentration.

Prayer, chanting, devotional singing, "going into the silence," and other ways of trying to reach God all become a

mockery without application of the positive and negative factors of concentration and meditation.

The Yoga of Concentration

Mastering the Breath and the Restless Mind

This SRF Lesson deals with the yoga approach to God: harmonizing breath, life force, and mind to achieve one-pointed concentration on Him. Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita urged mastery of this vital necessity for Self-realization:

“Whenever the fickle and restless mind wanders away — for whatever reason — let the yogi withdraw it from those distractions and return it to the sole control of the Self.”³

The great Hindu sage Patanjali said that union with God (yoga) is established by neutralizing the restless thought- and desire-waves of the consciousness.⁴ To illustrate: the image of the moon looks distorted if it is reflected in the waters of a lake whose surface is rippled by the wind; but if the wind subsides, the ripples vanish and the clear, undistorted, reflected perfection of the moon is seen. God is reflected as soul in the lakes of consciousness in myriads of human beings — just as the one moon may be reflected in a million lakes. But because the lakes of human attention are rippling with sensations and thoughts, the soul-image of God reflected there is distorted. These disturbances are caused by the storms of breath and of mental restlessness.

When the Self-Realization Fellowship Technique of Concentration is successfully practiced, the waves of breath cease, owing to the restfulness of the heart; then the ripples of sensations and of restless thoughts vanish from the lake of attention, and the undisturbed reflection of the soul is seen.

The primary factor in concentration consists in withdrawing the attention from all diverting objects. Hence, in the *sutra* cited above, Patanjali emphasizes the negative side of concentration: that as soon as the attention is free from the objects of distraction, it automatically reveals the soul, just as the removal of the hand from in front of the lens of a flashlight immediately reveals the things in front of it in the dark.

Therefore, the student who wishes to achieve real concentration should begin by learning two things: (1) what the distractions are; (2) how to detach the attention from them scientifically.

Three Kinds of Distractions That Obstruct Concentration

Most distractions penetrate the mind through the medium of the senses. Every time your attention seeks to concentrate upon a problem, upon business, or upon God, it encounters many distractions caused by sensations of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. These sensations, in turn, give rise to thoughts that lure the attention away from its pursuit of concentration. Lastly, new thoughts stimulated by sensations may then rouse associated thoughts stored in the memory-vault of your subconscious mind.

Distractions born of the senses — the greatest enemies of concentration — are therefore threefold:

1. sensations;
2. thoughts aroused by sensations;
3. past memories aroused by present thoughts.

The moment your attention wishes to march along the pathway of concentration toward a definite goal, it is waylaid by these invisible bandits of distraction.

The scientific way to remove sensory distractions is by learning to control the life force (prana) that

***Control of Life
Force to Free the
Mind From
Distractions***

feeds the senses. You have already learned [in Lesson 2] the meaning of *pranayama*, life-force control, the fourth of the eight limbs of *Raja Yoga* outlined by the sage Patanjali. Several techniques of *pranayama* are taught in the *Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons*, of which the Hong-Sau Technique given in this current Lesson is one. (The Kriya Yoga technique is the highest form of *pranayama*.)

Life force — *prana*, the body's vital energy — is transmitted from a repository in the brain to the heart, lungs, and every cell in the body. Life force is also the electric power in the sensory and motor nerves⁵ that enables the ego and the intelligence to receive messages of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell through the sensory nerves and to transmit activating messages through the motor nerves.

The sensory and motor nerves are like telephones that receive and transmit messages. Through these telephones we maintain contact with the world. Control of the life force enables the ego to switch off the electric energy from the nerve telephones, thus preventing intrusions by restlessness-creating, attention-enslaving sensations. To control the life force in the five sensory telephones is to practice concentration scientifically. When energy is switched off from the nerve telephones, sensations are unable to distract the attention from its concentration upon a particular goal. That is what the Hong-Sau Technique accomplishes.

Scientific Concentration Taught by Krishna and Jesus

Jesus said:

“If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.”⁶

These words are obviously not a dictum to maim oneself; rather, they contain a Biblical definition of *concentration*. Jesus urged every devotee to learn how to concentrate and to banish all sensory distractions, such as touch (“thy hand”) and sight (“thine eye”), by recalling the life force from the nerves, which are the conductors of disturbing sensations. Thus the devotee will know how to enter the eternal life: the ever-conscious, ever-existing, ever-new bliss of the soul.

The life force coursing through the nerves bombards the soul with disruptive messages from the eyes, ears, hands, and other sensory receivers of the body. By yoga methods of *pranayama*, the life force (*prana*) is “plucked” from the eyes, and “cut off” from the hands and from all consciousness of the body, thus freeing the soul’s attention from the distracting messages of the senses. The soul then becomes cognizant of its transcendent nature and of its divine kingdom. Only when the soul is thus freed from the senses can one attain the state of complete concentration in the progressive stages of *samadhi*.⁷

Bhagavan Krishna also advised scientific control of the senses:

“When the yogi, like a tortoise withdrawing its limbs, can fully retire his senses from the objects of perception, his wisdom manifests steadiness.”⁸

An adept yogi can withdraw his mind from all sensations of the material world and can unite his mind and energy with the intoxicating joy of inner ecstasy or *samadhi*.

The Spiritual Science Behind the Hong-Sau Technique

Unconscious and Conscious Control of the Senses

During slumber, the life force is switched off from the sensory receivers: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin. A deeply sleeping person may not hear the doorbell ring because the sound does not reach his brain: The “operator” of the sense telephones, intelligence, has unconsciously switched off the auditory nerve relay, along with all the other sensory receivers. One who can sleep

at will, therefore, can produce at will unconscious sensory relaxation, or the switching off of the life force from the sense telephones, and thus prevent distractions from entering the brain.

Though sleep is a good way to escape the constant noises borne by the auditory nerves, still it is an unconscious, passive method. One should not be obliged to sleep every time he wishes to achieve inner silence; and in any case, what value is that state if the conscious mind’s faculties of intelligence and attention are asleep? What is desirable is a distraction-free state in which one remains fully conscious and alert.

The method of concentration taught by Self-Realization Fellowship is a simple but scientific technique by which the meditator can disconnect the life force from all five sense telephones — without going into the subconscious state — so that stimuli and their resulting sensations cannot reach the brain.

The electrically powered telephone receives and transmits messages through one instrument. But the body has two sets of telephones, each quite distinct in its functions. Through the sensory “wires” of the nerves, or receiving telephones, tactual, gustatory, auditory, olfactory, and optical impressions are admitted into the brain by the operator, intelligence. Another operator, will power, transmits through the motor “wires” of the nerves, or sending telephones, messages of eye movement, nostril inflation, and movements of the tongue or other bodily muscles. For real inner calmness, the life force must be withdrawn from *both* sets of nerve-wires.

By complete muscular relaxation, which necessitates lying supine and perfectly still so that no muscles are tense, one can easily withdraw the life energy from the muscles and their connecting motor nerves. But this does not produce sensory relaxation, for the sense telephones are not shut off: One still can see, taste, hear, smell, and be conscious of touch sensations, even when one is muscularly relaxed.

Controlling Sensations by Controlling the Heart

How then can one switch off the life force not only from the motor nerves but also from the senses, scientifically and consciously? By quieting the dynamo of the heart, which controls the life force in the sense telephones.

The astral center in the medulla oblongata at the base of the brain is the principal point where life energy from the cosmos enters the body. The medulla, therefore, is the main switch that controls the inflow of life force and distributes it throughout the body. The medulla center controls the heart. The heart, in turn, is the switch that controls the five sense telephones of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell.

When the life force retires from the heart, automatically the energy is also switched off from the sense telephones. In sleep the heart action slows, and this helps withdraw the life force from the five sensory telephones, as well as from the motor nerves. The heart is the dynamo, or life, of the muscles, the cells, and the five sensory telephones. As long as the heart supplies *prana* (life energy) to the senses, they will continue to report sensations to the brain.

Complete and Incomplete Relaxation

In sleep we experience sensory relaxation. But even that relaxation is not complete, because the heart, breath, and internal organs continue their incessant work. In death, complete relaxation involuntarily takes place, owing to the stopping of the heart's action. When the heart involuntarily stops, we die. But the yogis of ancient India found that it is possible at will, by perfect calmness, to switch off the energy from the heart without causing death: that one can "die" or live at will and conquer death.

When the average human being dies, his body becomes permanently inert; he cannot recall to it the life force that has fled. But St. Paul, like the Hindu yogis, knew that by learning to control the heart one can "die" daily: "I protest by our rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily."⁹

If one can learn to control the heartbeat, he can experience *voluntary* complete relaxation, or conscious (temporary) death, as did St. Paul — and also many yogis of India who, practicing the same Hong-Sau Technique taught in this Lesson, achieved mastery over the action of the heart.¹⁰

The Yoga Art of Pranayama

The yoga art of *pranayama*, described above as being the scientific way of switching the life force off from the sense telephones, must here be explained further.

First, it should be remembered that in the ordinary human state of consciousness the life force has forgotten its divine origin and capabilities. It has surrendered its freedom and independence and formed the bad habit of depending on material sources of energy — food and oxygen — to maintain its presence in the body and to carry on its work of sustaining life there.

In mortal existence, therefore, it is the function of the breath and the heart to keep the cells of the body supplied with energy. Breath indirectly supplies energy to the body through the intake of *prana*, which is highly concentrated in oxygen. Oxygen passes from the lungs into the bloodstream and is carried to the cells by the pumping action of the heart (along with the food elements needed by the cells). By the "explosion" of oxygen atoms into life force through the action of the subtle vital forces in the body — a process intensified during the practice of *pranayama* — the body becomes vitally recharged. As long as one is alive, the heart and lungs must work ceaselessly, day and night, to supply oxygen to the cells and to purify the venous blood by removing carbon dioxide.

The more one's body learns to live by life force drawn directly from the cosmic source through the medulla, the less one needs to rely upon food and oxygen. The purpose of *pranayama* (scientific techniques of life-force control) is to make the *prana* independent of material sources of food and breath, and to keep the life energy in the body constantly connected with and charged by the all-pervading Cosmic Energy of God. When this is achieved, all the cells in the body can be sustained directly by the life energy stored in the brain and spinal centers. Food and breath — and heartbeat to circulate food and oxygen to the cells through the blood — are then unnecessary.

How the Hong-Sau Technique Produces the Breathless State

The life force in the bodies of most people is constantly engaged in the physical processes of cellular growth, activity, and decay. The body is never truly at rest. In the process of metabolism to generate energy, the cells give off waste products, "decay." One such product is carbon dioxide excreted by the cells into the blood stream. The blood must be constantly purified to remove the accumulation of this "decay," or death would soon occur.

The greater the restlessness of physical activity, the greater the production of carbon

dioxide. This causes the heart to work harder to pump the dark venous blood to the lungs to be cleansed of carbon dioxide, which increases the breath rate as well. Faster, heavier breathing in turn produces faster heartbeat and greater bodily restlessness, causing further decay in the internal organs, and more venous blood. So it is a vicious circle.

Conversely, the less carbon dioxide in the venous blood, the less the necessity for breath and heartbeat.¹¹ The yogis since ancient times have employed this knowledge to aid the achievement of the breathless, pulseless state of *samadhi* meditation.

Practice of Hong-Sau naturally slows the breathing, which in turn makes the heart calmer and calmer. Even a little calming of the heart allows some of the immense quantity of life force required for its work — moving twelve tons of blood or more a day! — to withdraw into the spine and brain. The energy thus freed gradually awakens (according to the degree of life-force withdrawal from the muscles and senses) the divine centers of life and consciousness in the cerebrospinal axis — especially the medulla center, causing it to pull into the body an increased supply of cosmic energy from the Divine Source. The energy freed from the heart and bodily activity, combined with the incoming charge of life force from the cosmos, is distributed from the cerebrospinal centers to the billions of cells that constitute the bodily tissues and organs — arresting their decay and growth, and making them vitally self-sustained, independent of breath or any external source of life.

This is what is meant by ecstatic “suspended animation.” The yogi in *samadhi* meditation consciously suspends the activity of change in the muscles, blood, nerve force, and all tissues, and supports the body by the changeless power of Cosmic Energy from Cosmic Consciousness.

Charging the cells with energy from oxygen is the function of the *inhaling* breath. This activity is rendered unnecessary during periods of deep calmness, for the reasons described above. The second function of the breath, which is to remove the carbon dioxide waste material from the blood by *exhalation*, can likewise be made unnecessary. By proper eating, right exercise, good living habits,¹² and especially by practice of scientific spiritual methods of promoting calmness (such as the Self-Realization Energization Exercises and concentration and meditation techniques), one decreases the causes of the impurities in the venous blood. This, combined with the prevention of decay in the tissues by the quieting of all muscular and other physiological activity through *pranayama* techniques, means that the heart has no need to pump impurities-laden venous blood into the lungs and other organs for cleansing. Thus, as the process of physiological decay is slowed and then halted, the heart becomes completely quieted.

When the foregoing mental and physical stillness has been attained (in any of the progressive stages of *samadhi*), breathing simply becomes unnecessary. The absence of venous blood in the lungs and the suspended animation of the bodily tissues (in which the cells of the body are directly sustained by cosmic energy flowing into the body through the medulla) make superfluous the absorption of oxygen from the air into the bloodstream. This is the yogic state of breathlessness.

Breath Is the Cord That Ties the Soul to the Body

Under the spell of *maya* — cosmic delusion — you identify yourself with the physical body, which lives in and requires the atmosphere of air, just as a fish needs the environment of water. When you learn to rise above the need for breath, you ascend into the celestial realms of angels.

For this reason the Hindu yogis taught control of the life force in the heart by stopping decay in the body to produce the non-breathing state. *Breath is the cord that ties the soul to the physical body.* One who can live without breath, as demonstrated by God-realized mas-

ters of yoga and by such Christian yogis as St. Paul, can free his soul from slavery to the breath, and hence from slavery to the body.

Real Meaning of Pranayama

The mortal breath that binds the soul to the body cannot be stilled by forcibly holding it in the lungs, though some misguided teachers erroneously call this dangerous practice *pranayama*, or yogic breath-control. But by stopping decay in the system through the development of calmness and practicing the true spiritual art of *pranayama*, life-force control, the yogi achieves the breathless state in a natural way.

Holding the breath for a little while is all right because you oxygenate the system and purify your blood, but that is not control over your breath. *Pranayama* does not mean holding the breath in the lungs; it means control of the life force that activates the lungs and the heart. If you can control the heart by *pranayama*, you can switch off the energy from any body function at will. If you know how to do this, you can practice deep silence. Without that, you cannot know God. You must have life-force control over your breath and heart.

No strenuous, unnatural method of holding the breath should be used to try to control the heartbeat. It is impossible to still the heart this way. But by practice of the Hong-Sau Technique described in this Lesson, the heart becomes so relaxed and the venous blood so free from carbon dioxide that it becomes unnecessary for the heart and lungs to work. This deep calmness rests the heart, producing the desired withdrawal of life-force from the five sense telephones.

This, then, is the real meaning of *pranayama*, as expounded in Yoga: control of the life force, *prana*, that governs the action of the heart, sensory and motor nerves, breath, and all other functions of the body. All bodily processes are brought under the yogi's conscious direction when he learns the art of controlling the life force, or *prana*.

Breathlessness Is Deathlessness

One cannot attain Self-realization without breath mastery. Only by practicing *pranayama*, not by suppressing the breath or forcibly holding it in the lungs, can one solve the mystery of breath and learn to do away with it. If you can attain the superconscious breathless state while living, you can control bodily life, prolong it, and rise above it to soul awareness. *Breathlessness is deathlessness.*

The advantages attained by the ability to enter the breathless state are:

1. The noise of the bodily machinery is stopped.
2. The decay of the internal organs ceases.
3. The heart calms down and switches off energy from the five sensory telephones, thus aiding concentration.
4. One realizes that the body does not live by breath, but by cosmic energy entering through the medulla oblongata. By drawing life energy directly from this infinite source, one learns to live by Cosmic Consciousness and not by "bread (i.e., material sustenance provided by food and breath) alone."¹³
5. The soul is released from breath slavery and bodily bondage.

The higher you go in the study and practice of Self-Realization teachings, the more calm your breath will become. An advanced yogi is able to enter the breathless state at will and to remain in this state as long as he wishes. Breathlessness and the consequent calming of the heart and senses take the devotee to the altar of perfect concentration — free from inner and outer distractions, surcharged with the omnipotence of God's spiritual

power.

Interrelated Forces of Breath, Prana, Mind, and Vital Fluid

In the practice of concentration, the relationship of four interrelated forces should be known even to the spiritual beginner. They are:

1. breath
2. life force (*prana*)
3. mind
4. vital fluid (sex energy)

A balanced control of these four bodily forces brings rapid spiritual results without setback or hindrance. Even by the single, separate control of any of these four bodily factors, the spiritual devotee can attain great powers of concentration. For example, by strict celibacy alone, monastic yogis have been able to gain superior mental force. But it is very difficult to master one of these factors without corresponding control of the other three.

Control of Vital Fluid

The vital essence is formed of the most precious tissue and energy of the body. The chemistry of every drop of creative fluid is said to include the concentrated essence of eight drops of blood, and the electric energy contained in their thousands of corpuscles. Each cell of the creative fluid is a condensed electric battery, containing a microscopic intelligence. To discharge foolishly these stores of mental and physical creative power from the body weakens the vitality of both mind and body and makes the breath extremely restless.

Myriads of life-atoms and atoms of intelligence are lodged, like encamped soldiers, in the creative chemical compound. To drive them out of the body promiscuously (lured by the temptation of sensual pleasure) is to lose these soldiers of mental and physical powers and to become prey to the army of delusion, disease, weakness, fear, worry, and even premature death.

Loss of vitality — from living too much on the physical plane — produces in both men and women mental dissatisfaction, melancholia, peevishness, nervousness, and heavy, restless breath.

Control of the Mind

Mind is the operator that controls breath, life force, vital power, and all functions of the body. Without its guiding control, all functions of the body would cease to operate. Mind-control leads to control of all the bodily functions. If the mind is restless, the life force grows restless through mentally created nervousness and physical desire. Mental calmness usually is attended by calm nerves, controlled bodily energy, and a well-regulated moral life. By mental concentration and self-control, as in meditation, for example, the breath and the life force automatically become calm; thus one attains stability. But mind cannot control all of the functions of the body until it knows its own powers and those of breath, life force, and vital essence relative to itself. The person who strives toward mind-control by harmonizing all four related factors succeeds more quickly than one who seeks to attain mental control without the aid of controlled breath, energy, and vital essence. Students who meditate regularly without striving to calm the breath or control the life force and vital essence often encounter insurmountable difficulties in the restlessness of the mind.

If your life force is restless, you are nervous and keep your body in constant motion; the mind is restless, the sexual nature is restless, the breath is restless, and the eyes are always

Control of the Life Force

restlessly blinking and shifting here and there. But if you control the life force by spiritual exercises and practicing calmness through meditation, then all physical and mental processes remain within your control. By control of the life force in the sensory and motor nerves — *pranayama*, as taught in the *Self-Realization Lessons* — you can withdraw the currents from the senses and prevent disturbing sensations from reaching the brain. You thus calm the mind and other life-functions affected by the mind.

Control of the Breath

If your breath is restless, your life force, mind, and creative urge are made restless. However, if breath is made calm and rhythmic by practice of the principles set forth in these *Lessons*, your life force, mind, and sexual instincts will be under your control. Thus, by proper breathing exercises and by attaining control of the breath, you can achieve a state of deep concentration.

[More on the importance of proper breathing will be given in Lesson 14. In the interim, remember the following points:]

1. Do not practice any violent breathing exercises. They are unnecessary and can be harmful. The simple breathing exercises taught in the *Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons* are totally safe and adequate. The use of other kinds of techniques is neither advisable nor necessary.
2. When practicing the breathing exercises detailed in these *Lessons*, heed this instruction: Never hold the breath in the lungs to the point of discomfort.
3. Breathe properly at all times by keeping the spine straight; never stand, sit, or walk with a caved-in chest. If you always keep the spine straight, the chest out, and the abdomen in, you will find it natural to breathe properly.
4. Practice regularly the simple breathing exercises in these *Lessons*, especially the deep breathing that is part of the Energization Exercises [taught in Lesson 6].

Balanced Way to Attain Self-realization

The real spiritual teacher realizes the effects of these four related forces — breath, life force, mind, and vital essence — upon one another, and upon the body. He knows that the safest, quickest, and best spiritual method for the beginner is the harmonization of these four factors. An approach to God by trying to control only one of these forces is limited and one-sided, and can be fraught with many difficulties. Some people perform breathing exercises without realizing their spiritual significance. They may grow into good athletes with abundant lung power, but that is all. Others try to approach God by controlling the life force in the body; but, losing sight of the divine purpose of the *pranayama* technique, they satisfy themselves with attaining certain mental and astral powers, forgetting God entirely. Some try to know God by mind-bound concentration, by imagination only. They see false visions, for the most part, and are impressed by subconsciously produced hallucinations, frozen images of their own fancy. Others try to follow the path of celibacy without the knowledge and power of mind and life-force control necessary to sublimate the strong creative urge; the result is often unhealthy, unhappy suppression with no positive purpose or beneficial result.

The balanced way to Self-realization is to practice the exercises and principles that simultaneously control and harmonize breath, life force, mind, and vital power. Therefore every spiritual aspirant should practice specific breathing exercises; *pranayama* techniques for controlling energy flow in the sensory and motor nerves; methods of mental concentration; and principles of sexual moderation (if married) or calmness-producing

celibacy (if unmarried).¹⁴

Part 2:

The Technique of Hong-Sau

A Self-Realization Fellowship Basic Technique

[To be eligible for Kriya Yoga initiation, the student devotee must have practiced regularly for a period of several months the other Self-Realization Fellowship Basic Techniques. These include the Hong-Sau Technique in this Lesson, the Energization Exercises (Lesson 6), and the Aum Technique of Meditation (Lesson 8). The mailing of the Lessons explaining these techniques is timed to allow for the required minimum period of practice before an invitation to apply for Kriya Yoga is extended at the end of the Lessons in the basic series. The student devotee who wishes to qualify for Kriya Yoga at that time should begin daily practice of each Basic Technique as soon as it is received.]

Overview of the Technique

The Hong-Sau Technique is a highly effective method, handed down by the *rishis* of ancient India, of using the science of breath, life force, and *mantra* to still the mind, so that it can be focused one-pointedly on any subject, or upon God in meditation.

The purpose of practicing the Hong-Sau Technique is to gain conscious passivity — not mental blankness, but a state of heightened awareness and concentration free from sense entanglements, breath, and other bodily motions. It is a state of deep peace or perfect inner calm. This peace is the first proof of God's presence within.

Always remember: Breath is the cord that binds the soul to the body. As you learn to untie that cord by calming your breath and ultimately transcending it, you enter successively higher states of consciousness.

Watching the breath is a preliminary step toward controlling it; by this action, the consciousness separates itself from the involuntary bodily function of breathing and gradually realizes its distinct, independent existence. One may then recognize the truth that consciousness is the only thing that is real.

By training your consciousness according to the method described in this Lesson, you learn to transfer your sense of "I-ness" away from the body and to become, like the soul, a silent witness to bodily activities. You begin to realize that your life is not connected with or dependent upon bodily functions and that your real nature is spiritual and immortal. Thus you understand the delusive nature of ego consciousness, which causes us erroneously to identify ourselves with the body instead of realizing the divine nature of our being: *Satchitananda* — eternal existence (*sat*), eternal consciousness (*chit*), eternal joy (*ananda*).

As you sit in meditation posture with the eyes upturned to the point between the eyebrows, and watch the incoming and outgoing breath while repeating the Hong-Sau *mantra*, you find that your breathing slows naturally, and that the action of the heart, lungs, and diaphragm subsides correspondingly. When the heart rests, life energy then withdraws from the sensory nerves into the spine and brain. This disconnects the telephones of the five senses, whose incessant messages from the outside world ordinarily keep the ego continually disturbed and distract the attention from its march toward the Divine Goal.

Through sensory disconnection by practice of Hong-Sau, sensations cease to arouse thoughts, which in turn cease to arouse the subconscious mind by associated memory thoughts. The attention thus becomes scientifically free from all distractions. The meditator has then understood the real meaning of *pranayama* on the Eightfold Path of Yoga. In this state of inward recollectedness, the student is ready to use the calmed and focused mind for real meditation: concentration upon God.

Meaning of "Hong-Sau"

Hong and *Sau* are not meaningless invented words. They are an exact vibratory expression of a profound cosmic idea. The literal translation is "I am He." The *Isha Upanishad* says: "That absolute Self abiding in the transcendental effulgence, verily, I am He." Elsewhere in the Upanishads we also find similar sacred truth-affirmations, such as "I am Brahman — Spirit," and "This Self is Spirit." The scriptural mantra *Aham-Sa* or '*Ham-sa* (pronounced "Hong-Sau"; literally, "I am He") consists of potent Sanskrit syllables that possess a vibratory connection with the incoming and the outgoing breath. Thus with his every breath man unconsciously asserts the truth of his identity with Spirit: *I am He!*¹⁵

Each sound in the universe has a singular mental correspondence and effect. This is the

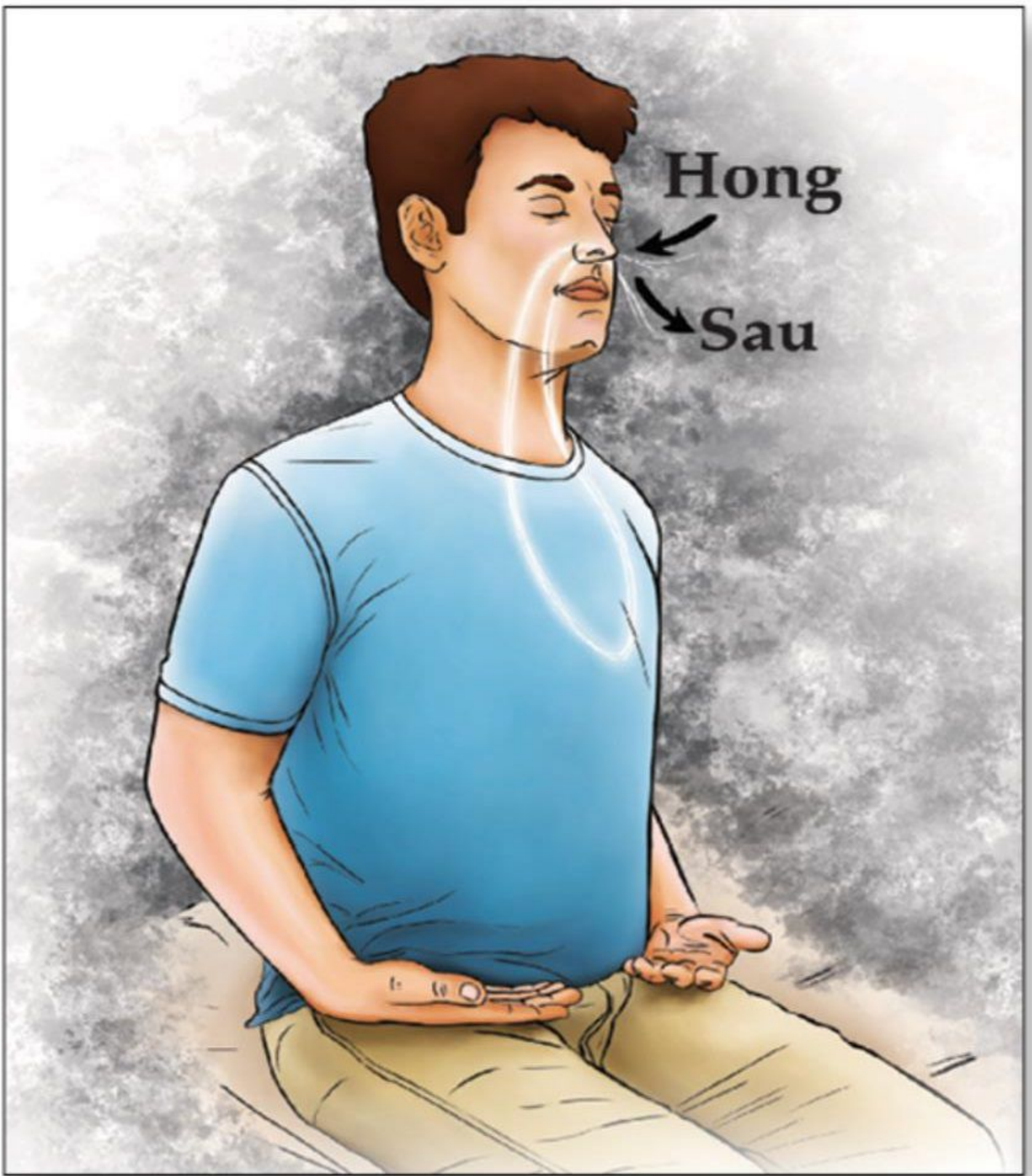
basis of India's science of *Mantra Yoga*, the method of uniting soul and Spirit by chanting and concentrating on root word sounds (*mantras*) that are vibrating in the physical world and in the astral world, and thus have a correspondence with vibrations of life and consciousness in the physical and astral bodies of man.

Mantra means "instrument of thought" or "instrument of mind." *Mantras* are seed-sounds that have definite psychophysical power. The sacred Sanskrit chant words "Hong-Sau" are a *bija* or "seed" *mantra* corresponding to the vibrations of the astral life-currents that activate the inhalations and exhalations of breath. The adepts anciently found, by deep meditation, that the ingoing breath astrally vibrates as "Hong" and the outgoing breath astrally vibrates as "Sau." Mental repetition of Hong-Sau has a pronounced calming effect on the mind and the breath. It helps you to center your attention as you practice the following method of watching the incoming and outgoing breath. By mentally chanting these sounds with the corresponding breath, you find that the breath becomes still; thus you realize that you are the soul, whose life does not depend on breath; and that even your body lives not by breath, but by cosmic energy. When you sleep you do not feel the body, and you feel no breath. Breath is identified with body consciousness. Breathlessness develops soul consciousness.

How to Practice the Hong-Sau Technique

Practice the Hong-Sau Technique, and all instructions and techniques in the *Lessons*, exactly as taught. Do not introduce your own variations, in the belief that you are improving on them. The techniques have been scientifically perfected by the Gurus.

1. Sit erect in the correct meditation posture, with spine straight and body relaxed. Close or half close your eyes, and focus your gaze at the Christ (*Kutastha*) center at the point between the eyebrows. Consciously relax all the bodily muscles.
2. Take a deep breath and exhale quickly in a double exhalation; then remain without breath as long as you feel no discomfort. Mentally wait for the breath to come in.
3. As the breath comes in, mentally chant "Hong" (as in "song"). As the breath goes out, mentally chant "Sau" (as in "saw"). (There should be no corresponding movement of the lips or tongue when you mentally chant these words.)
4. Then, with the greatest calmness, go on feeling the natural in-and-out flow of your breath, chanting "Hong" with each incoming breath and "Sau" with each outgoing breath. Mentally watch, i.e., become aware of, the flowing in and out of the breath, with the same detachment you would feel if observing another's breathing. Do not attempt to regulate the flow of the breath in any way; merely be aware of it.
5. If you have difficulty in coordinating the correct word with the in- or out-going breath, the following practice may be helpful: As the breath comes in, move the index finger of the right hand *inward* toward the palm as you mentally chant "Hong"; and as you exhale, move the index finger *outward* from the palm as you mentally chant "Sau." When words and breath are coordinated correctly, discontinue the finger movement, which is not a part of the technique.



6. The mental chanting of “Hong” and “Sau” should correspond to the length of the incoming and outgoing breath, respectively. The mental chanting of “Hong” should begin when the breath starts to flow in and end when that inhalation ceases. The word is mentally chanted only once during an inhalation, but the sound is held for the duration, thus: “Hooonng.” Similarly, the mental chanting of “Sau” begins with the outflowing of the breath and lasts to the end of exhalation. The word is mentally chanted only once, but its sound is held throughout the exhalation, thus: “Saaaau.”
7. *Do not use mental will or physical force to in any way control inhalation or exhalation. Breathe naturally.* While practicing, hold the calm attitude that you are a silent observer of the natural inward and outward flow of your breath, a rhythmic movement of which one is not usually conscious.
8. As often as the mind wanders away from concentration on the breath, gently but firmly bring it back. Be calmly persistent in this.

After Practicing the Technique

After deeply practicing the Hong-Sau Technique for ten to thirty minutes,¹⁶ exhale slowly and completely: In a double exhalation through the mouth, expel from the lungs all the breath you possibly can. Enjoy the breathless state as long as you can do so without discomfort. When you feel the need to breathe, inhale naturally; then

exhale again as described. *Repeat three times.* Then forget the breath.

Sit in silence, enjoying the peace of the meditative state — keeping the eyes uplifted and the attention concentrated at the Christ center. To get up immediately after practicing this or any other Self-Realization concentration or meditation technique is like kicking over a pail you have just filled with milk. Remain as long as you can in the stillness produced by your practice of the technique, keeping your consciousness riveted at the spiritual eye. “Be still, and know that I am God.”¹⁷

After a time, pray with deep devotion to God. Talk to God in the language of your heart. Or you may practice an affirmation or a Self-Realization visualization technique.

When to Practice

Include the practice of the Hong-Sau Technique in your regular morning and evening meditation. But do not limit your practice to these periods only. In addition, you may also practice it during leisure periods, or when you are traveling in a bus or streetcar, or whenever you are sitting anywhere doing nothing else. When practicing Hong-Sau in public, you need not close the eyes or fix the gaze upward between the eyebrows if doing so would attract unwanted attention from people around you; just watch the breath and mentally chant “Hong” with each inhalation and “Sau” with each exhalation. Keep the eyes open, gazing calmly ahead at some particular point. Restless movements of the eyes reflect the restlessness of the thoughts in the mind; and if the eyes are gazing about taking in various objects or scenes, these sight perceptions give rise to further restless thoughts.

In leisure moments, you may even lie down on your back, if you wish, and practice Hong-Sau; though in the supine position one is more susceptible to falling asleep, which is counterproductive to real meditation. As a general rule, therefore, Hong-Sau should be practiced in the correct upright meditation posture.

The more you practice Hong-Sau meditation, the better will be the results. Utilize this technique “overtime” and you will gain increasingly greater effects.

Remember, as you learned earlier [in Lesson 1], there are four periods during each day that have a vibratory correspondence with the four seasons of the year; early morning is spring, noon is summer, early evening is autumn, and midnight is winter. Four changes take place in the body during these four magnetic seasons of the day. The SRF exercises and techniques neutralize the effects on the body of the four changing periods by vitalizing and magnetizing the body with life currents and with Cosmic Consciousness. These currents arrest change and suspend the decaying process in the cells. Therefore it is particularly good to practice the changelessness-producing technique of Hong-Sau at these four periods of the day.

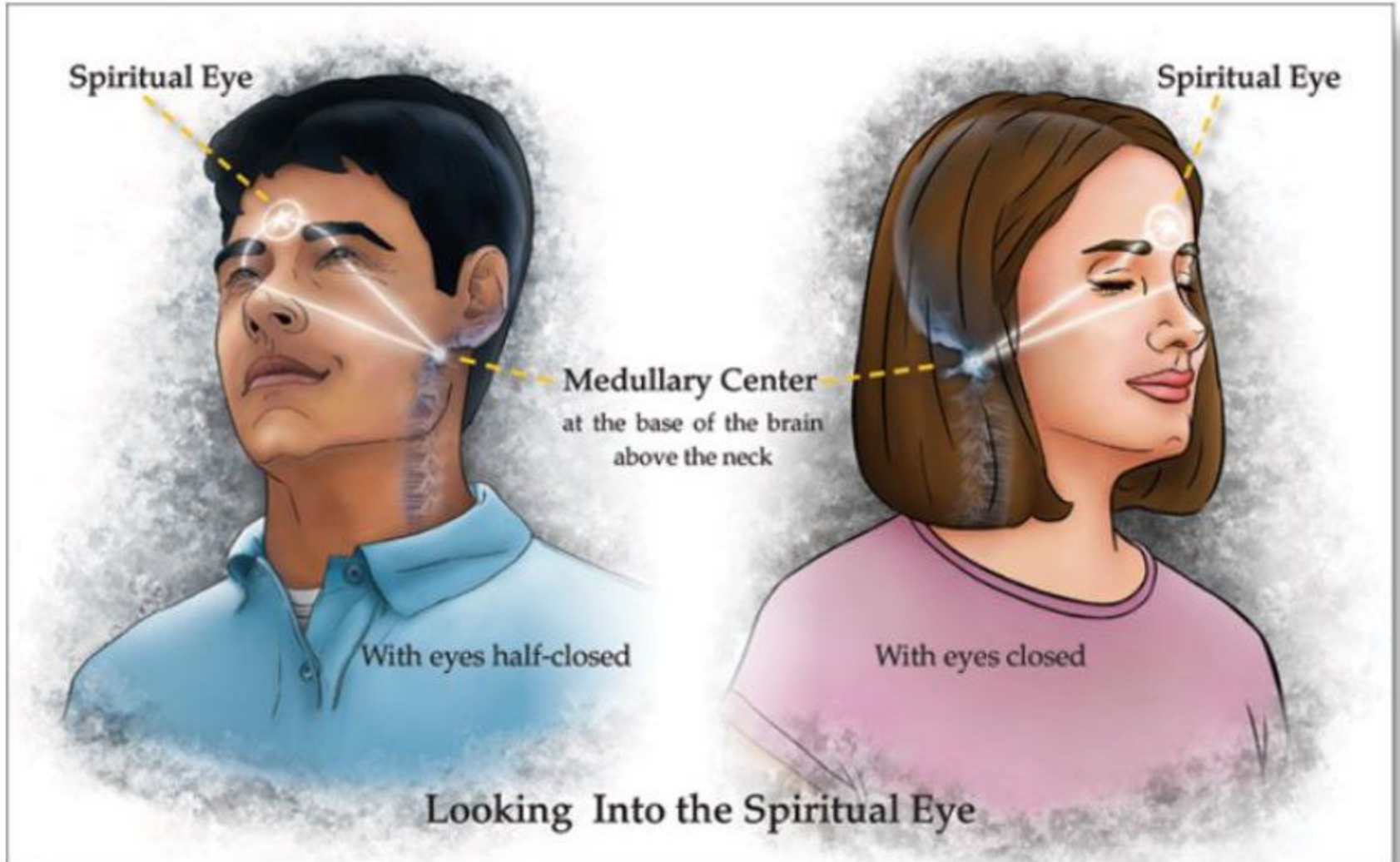
By continued correct practice you will feel a great calmness that will remain with you in activity as well as in meditation. Gradually you will begin to realize yourself as the soul: superior to and existing independently of the physical body.

Key Points and Supplementary Instructions

- *Breathe naturally.* Do not use mental or physical force to hold the breath, or to inhale or exhale.
- *Be aware of the in-out flow of the breath.* In watching the breath, do not concentrate on the movements of the chest or other bodily areas; just be aware of the breath as it flows into and out of the body.
- *Do not regulate the breath to conform with the chant.* One often does this unconsciously. Let the chant *follow* the natural impulse of the breath to flow in and out.
- *Calmly watch the breath; have no care whether it flows in or out or not at all.*
- *As you practice, you will become aware of intervals between the incoming and outgoing breath during which the breath ceases to flow.* When this occurs, do not attempt to regulate or control your breathing; just let the breath flow as it will. The purpose of the Hong-Sau Technique is to increase naturally the intervals when the breath does not flow. Therefore, if as you mentally chant “Hong” the breath goes in naturally and does not flow out immediately, wait and enjoy the state of inner stillness. When it comes out again, mentally chant “Sau.” If the breath goes out and stays out, wait and enjoy that period of calmness and peace until the breath wants to flow in again. Then chant “Hong” as it does so.
- *Enjoy particularly the inner peace and quietude during the intervals between each in-out flow of breath.*
- *Never force breathlessness or attempt to extend it by exerting the will.*
- *Keep the mind calm, and do not let it wander when practicing Hong-Sau.* As often as the mind strays or becomes restless, gently but firmly bring it back to its point of concentration: the breath. Inattention produces sleep; concentrated attention kindles a tingling sense of divine life in every body cell.
- *Be keenly attentive to what you are doing.* Concentrate on the breath, the chant, and the feeling of peace that permeates the body, mind, and emotions through the correct practice of this exercise. Avoid lapsing into a blank or passive state of mind while practicing. Keeping the eyes uplifted to the Christ center will help you avoid going into the passive subconscious state or falling asleep, which brings no spiritual benefit during meditation.
- *Anytime you feel sleepy during meditation, tense the whole body and relax it, three to six times, or as many times as needed to restore alertness.*¹⁸
- *The chanting of “Hong” and “Sau” should be done mentally only.* Take care that you do not unconsciously move the lips, tongue, or throat.
- *Sit very still during Hong-Sau practice.* Do not move a muscle. Before beginning Hong-Sau, consciously relax each part of the body. If you become restless or feel you are not going deep into your practice, make a mental check to be sure the body is fully relaxed. It is an excellent practice to periodically check yourself to be sure you are not unconsciously tensing any part of the body. Every now and then during meditation, mentally scan your body and relax any parts that may be holding tension (not including, of course, the muscles needed to hold the body in the meditation posture).
- *Keep the eyes gently focused at the point between the eyebrows — the Christ Consciousness (Kutastha) center.* The lids may be closed or half open. The eyes have a tendency to lower their gaze after a time, so be certain that they remain focused at the point be-

tween the eyebrows, and that the gaze is steady and unblinking. Do not strain the eyes, however. If you are not used to holding the eyes in this position, practice some of the time with eyes half open, but most of the time with eyes closed.

The correct position of the eyes, described above, is important for the success of the technique. In later Lessons you will learn about the connection of the spiritual eye to the subtle anatomy of the astral spine and the progressively higher states of consciousness experienced therein. Keep in mind that directing the gaze to the point between the eyebrows helps the bodily energy that is withdrawn from the muscles and senses to enter the inner astral spine (*sushumna*); and strengthens one's connection with the all-pervading Cosmic Energy through the medulla, with which the spiritual eye is connected by polarity. As explained later in this Lesson, the inflow of cosmic energy during meditation is one of the factors that enables the breath and heartbeat to slow down.



There is a correspondence between the position of the eyes and the mental state. Turning the eyes downward tends to induce the subconscious state of sleep; turning them upward and concentrating on the point between the eyebrows helps to produce the superconscious state. This position of the eyes is therefore a powerful help in lifting the consciousness to a higher state, where one more easily realizes the truth affirmed by repetition of the Hong-Sau *mantra*: "I am He!" "I am not the body; I am Spirit!"

- Practice a long time for best results.
- Precede Hong-Sau practice with Self-Realization preliminary breathing exercises. [See "Meditation Routine" on page 33]. This is a wonderful preparation for the practice of the Hong-Sau Concentration Technique. It is always a good plan to drive out toxins and waste matter before beginning Hong-Sau practice. By first practicing the inhalation and exhalation exercises, the yogi oxygenates the system and helps to remove the carbon in the venous blood. Cellular decay is partially stopped. You will notice that after deeply practicing this technique of inhalation and exhalation for a long time, when you throw the breath out you have no desire to breathe in again for some time. You can then remain longer in the breathless state than if you tried breathlessness immediately after restlessness.

In addition, tensing and relaxing all the bodily muscles, as in Preliminary Breath-

ing Exercise 1 will help to free the body of inharmonies and local tensions. This is a vital aid in achieving interiorization of the consciousness through Hong-Sau.

- Long periods of meditation and concentration — including your regular morning and evening practice of the Hong-Sau Technique of Concentration — should be preceded by practice of the Energization Exercises [Lesson 6].
- Environment is an extremely important factor in gaining the best results from concentration and meditation. There are two kinds of environment: inner and outer. Outer environment consists of one's physical surroundings (noisy, quiet, and so forth). Inner environment is one's state of mind. Quiet places are naturally conducive to inner calmness. But with determination you can be inwardly calm even in noisy surroundings. Conversely, one can be mentally restless even while in a very silent place, with the body motionless and relaxed. Do not postpone or abandon concentration or meditation because you cannot find a quiet place. It is necessary to become inwardly still first, whether in quiet or noisy surroundings. If you are calm within, despite outer noises and disturbances, you have achieved the inner environment essential to concentration and meditation.
- Remember: Practice of concentration is not an end in itself. Do not be so engrossed in practice of technique that you lose sight of the purpose for which you are practicing: to contact God. In the stillness and inner silence that come after Hong-Sau practice, go deeper and deeper in your love for God and yearning to know Him. Pray and affirm until you feel divine response. Remember that devotion as well as technique is necessary.

Deepening Your Practice of Hong-Sau

How You Live Affects Your Hong-Sau Practice

Calmness is essential to the control of the heart. Normally the heart pumps, on average, twelve tons or more of blood a day. If you indulge in restlessness, or in worry or other emotions, you agitate the heart, and it beats faster.

The heart of a mouse caught in a mousetrap beats at twice its normal rate because of intense fear. The hearts of the calm Napoleon and Duke of Wellington are said to have beat only fifty times per minute. The heartbeats of children are much faster than those of adults because children are more restless. The sense telephones of the young are always busy with outer stimuli; but as one attains adulthood, one usually becomes calmer, and the heart beats less rapidly.

It also is important to remember that if you are to attain the necessary calmness by which you can learn to “die daily,” you must learn to live daily in the consciousness of God; your living habits must conform to the laws of spiritual advancement. You must live a life that is moderate and self-controlled, and avoid those thoughts and actions that are not conducive to calmness in body and mind. You must particularly avoid emotionalism, overindulging the senses, and improper diet (too much meat and other waste-producing foods, and insufficient fresh raw fruits and vegetables).

The poor overworked heart, which cannot rest even while its owner sleeps, is a much-abused slave. Therefore, when it has done enough, it says: “You have been a bad master. Now I quit my job.” When your heart refuses to function, you must relinquish the whole machinery of your body.

Through practice of the Hong-Sau Technique, you can learn to quiet the heart consciously and give it a much-needed rest.

Do not be frightened, thinking that you are going to stop your heartbeat permanently when you practice these instructions. Hong-Sau is neither dangerous nor a convenient means of suicide. It brings about the calmness and interiorization natural to the soul.

By resting the heart, the Hong-Sau Technique increases longevity and liberates a tremendous amount of life current. This liberated energy then withdraws into the spine and brain, energizing the astral centers of life and consciousness and magnetically pulling into the body, through the medulla center, a greater supply of life force from the Divine Source. That abundance of energy is distributed throughout the body, recharging, revitalizing, and renewing the myriad body cells and preventing their deterioration. The marvelous Hong-Sau Technique is one of the greatest contributions of India’s spiritual science to the world: it presents the means for lengthening the life span; above all, it is a practical method of rising above body consciousness and realizing one’s Self as immortal Spirit.

Remember the Goal of Hong-Sau

The Hong-Sau Technique is a method for producing a state of perfect concentration and for generally developing one’s powers of concentration. By training the restless attention to isolate and focus upon the hitherto unconscious act of breathing, the attention is trained in the art of one-pointedness, or concentration.

Those who attain even a small degree of success in one-pointing the mind during the practice of Hong-Sau find their ability to concentrate on the various duties and problems of the day immensely increased.

Further, during the practice of the technique a state of increasing calmness is attained. Intuition, with its unerring guidance, manifests through the receptivity of calmness.

Ultimately, perfect concentration is attained when by Hong-Sau practice the life force is switched off from the internal body-functions and the senses. The attention or consciousness then is freed completely from all distractions to contemplate God or any object or problem. In this perfectly recollected state the intuition is fully awake and ready to guide the devotee to communion with God or to the right solution to all problems.

When you tense and relax the body and throw out the breath before Hong-Sau practice, you halt motion and the resulting process of decay in the cells of the muscles, but not in those of the internal organs — the heart, lungs, diaphragm, and so on. As you watch the breath during Hong-Sau practice, breathing becomes rhythmic and calm; the heart is quieted. A restless and worried mind increases heart action; a quiet mind calms the heart action. Any flare of feeling increases heart action. A heaving breath also increases heart action, while quiet breathing calms the heart.

By watching the breath calmly, you cause both the breath and the mind to become calm. A calm mind and breath slow down and quiet the motion of the heart, diaphragm, and lungs. Even a slight quieting of the heart, without stopping it entirely, partially disconnects the life force from the five sense telephones, freeing the attention to concentrate on God. From the very beginning of your efforts with this technique, you will feel the benefits of resting your attention in the peace of God within.

Practice with greatest reverence and attention. By watching the breath, you separate your ego from it and know that your body is sustained only partially by breath. By watching the breath and practice of Hong-Sau, you erase metaphysically the identification of the soul with the breath and the body. Ultimately, Hong-Sau practice frees the soul, which is individualized Spirit, to realize its essential undivided relation with Spirit — “I am He!” Then it is able to manifest ceaselessly the inherent quality of Spirit: ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new Bliss.

With this lesson on Hong-Sau *pranayama* you have taken a significant step along the yoga path. In future Lessons [Lessons 6, 7, 8, and Kriya Initiation], you will learn to apply this and other *pranayama* techniques more and more effectively. Do not be impatient, or expect that the further steps — *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi* — will be attained all at once. Persevere, day after day, year after year, and your perceptions will gradually but steadily deepen. Advancement on the path is a gradual step-by-step process, and depends entirely on the devotee’s dedication to practicing the techniques, not just reading about them.

Thoughts to Live By

Inner concentration on the soul produces unending joy. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna taught:

“Whenever the fickle and restless mind wanders away — for whatever reason — let the yogi withdraw it from those distractions and return it to the sole control of the Self.”¹⁹

Gradually identifying himself with his “witnessing” intuitive discrimination, adroitly bypassing the intruders of restless thoughts, the yogi attains the unshakable divine tranquility.

— Paramahansa Yogananda

Hong-Sau: Integral Part of Kriya Yoga Science

Hong-Sau is vitally related to the practice of Kriya Yoga, the highest Self-Realization Fellowship technique of meditation. Kriya Yoga is a science, the foundation of which is the specific technique called Kriya Yoga.²⁰ Every SRF student should remember, however, that the basic and supplementary techniques and principles of the Self-Realization teachings advance one's practice of the Kriya Yoga technique and are a necessary part of the Kriya science.

Faithful practice of Hong-Sau greatly augments the good effects derived from the practice of the Kriya Yoga technique; mastery of Hong-Sau accelerates the student's ability to master Kriya.

The effect of practicing Hong-Sau is the same as in practicing Kriya Yoga: the attainment of the interiorization necessary to experience God. Hong-Sau produces the same divine ecstasy that deep practice of Kriya Yoga yields. Patanjali's words in the *Yoga Sutras* apply to Hong-Sau as well as to Kriya Yoga: "Liberation can be attained by that *pranayama* which is accomplished by disjoining the course of inspiration and expiration."²¹ Patanjali was referring to cessation of inhalation and exhalation — i.e., entering the blissful stillness of yoga-quieted breath — which is the sign of successful life-force control, whether produced by Kriya or Hong-Sau.

The sole difference between Hong-Sau and Kriya Yoga lies in the degree of speed with which the effects are produced. Relatively speaking, twenty-four hours of Hong-Sau practice would produce the same spiritual results that could be attained in one hour's practice of Kriya Yoga. But even twenty-four hours of prayer or meditation by any other technique (other than Kriya Yoga) will not produce as much spiritual advancement as one hour of Hong-Sau. For this reason, I often refer to the Hong-Sau Technique as the "baby" Kriya.

Students should strive to attain some degree of success with the Hong-Sau Technique if they wish to apply for Kriya Yoga. Just as it is necessary to complete high school in order to enter college, so Hong-Sau is a necessary preparation for the higher practice of Kriya Yoga.

The importance of Hong-Sau is such that its practice should never be forsaken, not even after one has received the specific technique called Kriya Yoga. When a student passes from high school into college, he does not abandon that which he learned in high school; he takes this knowledge with him and expands it in his college training. Similarly, Self-Realization students should establish as part of their daily spiritual routine the practice of the Hong-Sau Technique, along with the technique of listening to the Cosmic Sound of *Aum*²² and the practice of Kriya Yoga (when they become eligible to receive it) if they want to attain realization of the Infinite.

Students should not erroneously think that they have nothing effective to work with until they have Kriya Yoga. Hong-Sau may be called the silent Kriya Yoga. One advantage of the Hong-Sau Technique over Kriya is this: Whereas Kriya Yoga should be practiced only in privacy and silence and when the stomach is empty or partially empty, Hong-Sau may be practiced anytime, anywhere, without restriction, after dinner or before dinner, in silence or among crowds — whenever the mind is not engaged in outward activity and is therefore free to be interiorized.²³ Therefore, one should practice it often, during leisure periods as well as during one's regular meditations.

Meditation Routine

1. *Practice the Technique of Energization:* Your morning and evening meditations should be preceded by practice of the SRF Energization Exercises [after you receive them in Lesson 6].
2. *Correct Posture:* Establish yourself in the correct upright meditation posture: Sit on a straight armless chair, or cross-legged on a cushion or mat, with spine straight, shoulders back, abdomen drawn in comfortably. The hands, with palms upturned, should be put at the juncture of the thighs and abdomen to prevent the body from leaning forward. The chin should be parallel to the ground. The eyes should be turned upward so that their gaze converges at the Christ (*Kutastha*) center between the eyebrows.

Remember, when practicing the *pranayama* technique of Hong-Sau, that *asana* (correct posture) precedes *pranayama* in the Eightfold Path of *Raja Yoga* set forth by Patanjali. That is why the foregoing instructions are vitally important.

3. *Preliminary Breathing Exercise 1:*²⁴ Exhale. Then take a deep breath through the nostrils, tensing the whole body. Hold the breath and the tension to the mental count of six. Relax the tension, and expel the breath through the mouth in a double exhalation, "huh, huhhh." Repeat three to six times.
4. *Prayer:* Offer to God a spiritually awakening prayer that coincides with the purpose of your meditation. For example, for wisdom, peace, and contentment, repeat the following invocation and prayer:

"Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, Bhagavan Krishna, Mahavatar Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Swami Sri Yuktswar, Paramahansa Yogananda, saints of all religions, I bow to you all.

"Lead me from desires to contentment, from restlessness to peace, from ignorance to wisdom."

5. *Chanting:* If you wish, you may chant mentally or aloud one of the Cosmic Chants to help awaken your devotion and concentrate the thoughts on God.
6. *Preliminary Breathing Exercise 2:* Inhale slowly through the nostrils, counting to twenty; hold the breath to twenty; then exhale through the mouth, counting to twenty. Repeat this six to twelve times.

[If you cannot hold the breath comfortably for a count of twenty, reduce the number of the count accordingly. Use this revised count (whatever may be comfortable for you) during inhalation, holding of the breath, and exhalation. This breathing exercise should be practiced at the rate of approximately two counts per second.]

7. *Hong-Sau:* Take a deep breath, and exhale quickly in a double exhalation, then remain without breath as long as you feel no discomfort. Mentally wait for the breath to come in. Then begin the actual Hong-Sau Technique. When the breath comes in of itself, mentally say "Hong"; when the breath goes out of itself, mentally say "Sau."

At the end of Hong-Sau practice, expel all breath from the lungs in a double exhalation, and enjoy the breathless state for as long as you can without strain or discomfort. When you feel the need to breathe, inhale; then exhale as described. Repeat this three times.

8. *Mental Prayer, Affirmation, or Other Self-Realization Fellowship Techniques:* Sit for a long time after finishing Hong-Sau practice, going deep in meditation to expand your awakened awareness of God's presence, or engage the mind in mental prayer or in the practice of affirmation or a Self-Realization visualization technique.

9. *Closing Prayer*: Always end your meditation with a prayer, such as: “Heavenly Father, make my soul Thy temple; make my heart Thine altar; and make my love Thy home.”

Spiritual Progress

In time, you will find you have made real progress on the path if you do the following:

- Faithfully practice the Hong-Sau Technique along with the other essential Self-Realization techniques: the Energization Exercises, Aum Technique, and Kriya Yoga [taught in future Lessons].
- Meditate regularly every morning and night, and increase the length of your meditation as you are able to do so. Once a week have a still longer meditation period (gradually increasing up to three to six hours as you are able).
- Study your *Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons* for thirty minutes each day.
- At the end of each day, spend a little time in introspective self-analysis, reviewing your activities of the day and the progress you are making toward your spiritual goals.
- Keep in touch with the Self-Realization Fellowship Mother Center, through which I will guide your spiritual progress.
- Participate in group meditation at a Self-Realization Fellowship temple, center, or meditation group regularly if you have the opportunity to do so.²⁵ Meditation in groups reinforces the efforts of each meditator with an invisible combined vibration of spiritual power.
- Tune in to the guidance and blessings of God and the Self-Realization Fellowship Gurus by prayer, meditation, study of the teachings, and steadfastness on the path.

Story: Madame Butterfly's Attempts at Concentration

This story illustrates what happens when a person with an untrained mind sits down to concentrate. Though the principal in the story is called Madame Butterfly, male students just as often have such experiences in their unrewarding efforts at concentration.

The scene is Madame Butterfly's living room. The time, the middle of a cold winter afternoon. Since all the housework is done, and it's too dismal to go any place, our friend has some of that "spare time" she's always looking for in order to practice meditation.

She sits down in a straight-backed chair. No sooner has her body touched the chair than she exclaims, "This seat is too hard. I should have a pillow." She finds one the right size and sinks down upon it. Then Madame Butterfly discovers that the chair squeaks. Transferring pillow and body to another chair she notices a draft, and closes the window. Next she develops a tendency to sneeze. But her handkerchief had dropped near the first chair. Her handkerchief reclaimed, Madame contentedly thinks, "Now for a delightful dip into the depths of concentration."

A few moments pass, and her mind is just beginning to settle when the boiling radiator begins to bubble. In disgust, she jumps up and roughly chokes the radiator's voice.

Once more she settles herself, righteous indignation increasing the determination to meditate. Then, in the apartment next door, someone starts to play the piano, accompanied by laughter and loud talking.

Now Madame Butterfly is both mad and disgusted. She considers pounding on the wall, but after all, it is the middle of the afternoon, so the neighbors have a right to play if they wish. She begins to listen, and to think: "That's really a good piano." Our friend then recalls other pianos she has heard. She remembers the pleasant days when she was a child and used to dance while her dear old grandmother played rustic airs popular in her own youth. She thinks of some of her grandmother's escapades as an attractive young belle.

And so on and on, until suddenly Madame Butterfly remembers her original purpose of concentration and jerks herself from her sweet reveries. She tries to assume the saintly dignity of a veteran yogi, rebuking her body and mind for their restlessness.

She makes a desperate effort to regather the battered fragments of her self-control. Her eyes have hardly closed again when the telephone crows out with impudent, patience-piercing pertinacity. "I will not answer it!" But the impertinent bell continues. Madame Butterfly begins to doubt her wisdom. "It might be an important call," she thinks. So she gets up and answers the phone only to find that someone has dialed the wrong number.

This ordeal over, she musters up courage to begin again. But now her head begins to nod. Her sense of shame at this is shoved aside by self-pity for her exhausted condition. But forcing herself to sit straight, Madame tries again.

This effort is diverted by the clamorous ringing of the hoarse-voiced doorbell. She remains still for a few moments, but the patience-breaking jangle goes on until she begins to think again, "It must be something important." Once at the door, however, Madame Butterfly assumes a galvanized smile as she greets three feminine acquaintances, all of whom have a master's degree in the art of gossiping. Behind the artificial flower of her forced smile our friend hides the stinging wasp of petulance, as she thinks: "Oh you pests, why couldn't you have stayed away and let me meditate?"

Happily oblivious to this, the three visitors enter and busy themselves raking and prodding in everyone else's dirt heaps — secure in the knowledge that for the moment there is a "keep off" sign on their own. Madame Butterfly laughs pleasantly, and three hours slip away before she has the relief of closing the door behind these inordinate

gossips.

Automatically she resumes her attempts at concentration. But now her attention is mobbed by memories of leaky radiators, piano-pounding, telephone bells, raucous doorbells, and gossipy tidbits. Guiltily she halts this mental resumé. "What time is it anyway?" Madame looks at her watch, and with a resigned sigh, rises and starts to the kitchen to get supper.

The living room is empty again. And it might just as well have remained so all afternoon, so far as Madame Butterfly's efforts at concentration are concerned.

The above experience is not an exaggeration. It is only a sample of what happens to most people when they attempt to concentrate.

The average mind is like a water-soaked matchstick. Scratch it and it won't light. A concentrated mind is like a good dry match. Strike it with meditation and it is immediately aflame with burning love of God.

An Affirmation to Practice

I will help myself that I may bring into proper use all my God-given powers.

I will do everything with deep attention: my work at home, in the office, in the world — all duties, small and great, I will perform well, with deepest attention.

I will acquire divinely deep concentration and then use its unlimited power to meet the God-given demands of my life.

Heavenly Father, I will reason, I will will, I will act; but guide Thou my reason, will, and activity to the right thing that I should do in everything.

Keys to Practice of Affirmation

Remember: An affirmation should be repeated several times in succession during meditation, as well as several times during the day, with deep concentration and faith in its materialization, until it manifests as a reality in your life.

Supplement: Further Information About the Hong-Sau Mantra

(Editor's Note)

Spelling of Sanskrit Words "Hong-Sau"

The words *Hong-Sau* are often transliterated *Hansa* or *Hamsa*; the *n* or *m* is nasalized when pronounced. Using the limited English alphabet of twenty-six characters to spell Sanskrit words is often difficult. In the Sanskrit alphabet (Devanagari), there are fifty characters, which make it possible to represent the full range of sounds made by the human voice. In the spelling of "*hansa*" or "*hamsa*," the middle letter in Sanskrit spelling is actually the nasalized consonant "*m̐*" which in English is sometimes transliterated as "*m*" and sometimes as "*n*," but is pronounced "*ng*" — hence, *ham̐* = *hong*.

Hong-Sau or So-Ham?

In some scriptural texts of India the Hong-Sau *mantra* is given as Sau-Hong (more commonly transliterated *So-Ham*). Paramahansa Yogananda explained the subtle difference between Sau-Hong and Hong-Sau. "In the neutral state, the emphasis is on *Hong*, 'I am,' or the ego; from which consciousness *Sau*, 'He,' or God, is to be perceived. In *samadhi*, when the breath is still and delusion disappears, the *mantra* transposes itself into the superconscious chanting of Sau-Hong, 'He I am'; the emphasis is shifted from ego to Spirit. To attain the state wherein the consciousness becomes 'He I am' is impossible unless breath is still and the soul is free from the bondage of the body and realizes itself one with Spirit." Therefore the correct *mantra* for the practice of the technique in this Lesson is "Hong-Sau." The consciousness of Sau-Hong referred to by Paramahansa Yogananda manifests automatically when one enters an exalted state of *samadhi*.

The Hong-Sau Technique: Yoga Science of Concentration

Summary

Part 1: How to Achieve Real Concentration

- *Concentration* means withdrawal of the attention from all objects of distraction and placing it on one thing at a time. *Meditation* is the application of concentration solely to know God.
- Deep meditation is not possible without knowing the art of concentration.

The Yoga of Concentration

- To achieve one-pointed concentration on God, you must learn to master the breath and the restless mind.
- Three kinds of distractions obstruct concentration: (1) sensations; (2) thoughts aroused by sensations; (3) past memories aroused by present thoughts.
- The scientific way to remove distractions is by learning to control the life force (*prana*) that feeds the senses. That is what the Hong-Sau Technique accomplishes.

The Spiritual Science Behind the Hong-Sau Technique

- In sleep, the life force is unconsciously switched off from the senses. By the yoga art of *pranayama*, that interiorized state of withdrawal from all outer distractions is produced consciously.
- Breath is the cord that ties the soul to the physical body. Deep and successful practice of the Hong-Sau Technique produces a state of complete calmness in which breathing is unnecessary.
- In the breathless state, the heart is quieted and life force is automatically withdrawn from the senses. This enables the meditator to achieve perfect concentration on God — free from inner and outer distractions.

Interrelated Forces of Breath, Prana, Mind, and Vital Fluid

- Learning to control the above four related forces is the quickest and most balanced way to attain depth in meditation and ultimately, Self-realization.

Part 2: The Technique of Hong-Sau

- Include the practice of Hong-Sau in your regular morning and evening meditation.

Key Points and Supplementary Instructions

- In the stillness and inner silence that come after Hong-Sau practice, go deeper and deeper in your love for God and yearning to know Him. Pray and affirm until you feel divine response.
- Conform your life to the laws of spiritual advancement. Avoid emotionalism, overindulging the senses, and improper diet.
- Those who attain even a small degree of success in practice of Hong-Sau find their ability to concentrate on duties and problems of the day immensely increased.

Meditation Routine

Story: Madame Butterfly's Attempts at Concentration

An Affirmation to Practice

Optional Auxiliary Material for This Lesson (Online)

Auxiliary audio, video, and written content for this Lesson is available in your Lessons app and member portal.

- Study and Introspection Guide for Lesson 4
- Audio recording: The Voice of Paramahansa Yogananda: "Self-Realization Is a Science"
- Video and Audio: Classes on the Hong-Sau Technique of Concentration
- "Alertness in Meditation," (leaflet—recommended for all new meditators)
- Audio: "Guided Meditation With Introduction to Hong-Sau"

Note: The above items may change from time to time, and new material may be added. See Lessons app or member portal for currently available items.

Caption for page 4: *Digitally colored image of Paramahansa Yogananda, produced by Self-Realization Fellowship in 2018 from an original black-and-white photo in SRF's archives, which was taken in New York City, 1923.*

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*The Spiritual Legacy of
Paramahansa Yogananda*