

**Astrologer Evgeny Lukyanov's interview with  
Mr. Vladimir Afanasyev, the head of The Parashakti Yoga School**

Krasnodar, Russia, February 2001.  
Translated from the original Russian

**Lukyanov:** How was your way towards yoga developed? What gave you an impetus to go in the right direction?

**Afanasyev:** I was given an impetus to go “in the right direction” by my own destiny. I was destined to come to this world in a family interested in yoga and my father was my first teacher. So, my path towards yoga was predestined from my childhood. As early as the age of eight, I already had a certain notion about it and about unusual, mysterious men called yogis. When I was thirteen (in the early 60s of the last century), my father returned home from India where he had worked as a UN official and also studied yoga in Bombay. I started practicing some yoga exercises and focusing on luring limitless expanses that filled my soul with intuitive, joyful excitement. My heart was longing for some faraway realms and refused to get on with the reality of this onerous world. Father brought back some yoga books from India (“*Yogic Home Exercises*” by Swami Sivananda, among them) and mother and I used to spend time in the evening translating “very interesting things” from English into Russian. The actual translation was done, of course, by my mother who was an English teacher, same as father, and I wrote down the things mother told me to. I enjoyed “surfing” dictionaries helping mother to find a proper word. It used to be our favorite pastime.

I also liked to accompany father to his public lectures on yoga he would deliver after coming back from India. We then lived in the city of Pyatigorsk. His lectures at the Caucasus Mineral Waters Spas gained great popularity as the place was a major health resort to which people came for treatment from all over the Soviet Union. Our post office box used to get crammed with letters. Interesting people used to visit our house and I witnessed many unusual, sometimes amazing, meetings and conversations as father almost always invited me to take part. Fascinated by the unknown and attractive things that were discussed (mahatmas, levitation, maya, reincarnation, samadhi, kundalini, siddhi, Himalayas, etc.), I sucked it all in like a sponge both the spirit and letter of what I heard and afterwards was feeding on it for many days.

**Lukyanov:** And afterwards? What was your way in yoga?

**Afanasyev:** My further path, already *in yoga*, was formed no less luckily both in general and in particular. I easily found what I was looking

for, be it books, separate pieces of information or people. It is no exaggeration to say that access to the celestial, hard-to-get-to spheres was and fortunately is now open for me to a large extent. I believe in “a design from above”, and thus yoga and mysticism are well suited for me. You know, my mind has always been open. No information was ever denied me by my parents. They never put any ideological restrictions on their only child. And although my father was always a patriotic-minded person, which left a certain imprint on my mind, his patriotism never went beyond the limits of an intelligent, well educated man’s common sense. I am lucky to have such a parents. They played a tremendous role in my upbringing and I am infinitely grateful to them.

**Lukyanov:** How do you carry out your activity? What, to your mind, is its mission and meaning?

**Afanasyev:** If you mean my outer yogic activity, I have conducted yoga classes before, too. However, only since 2000, as soon as I received the blessing from my spiritual preceptor, Swami Jyotirmayananda, to teach yoga and a corresponding Certificate granting me an official right to teach it “in all its aspects”, i.e. hatha-yoga, integral yoga, philosophy and meditation – only then my yogic activities became professional.

The contemporary man is seriously ill: physically, mentally and spiritually. He is living in an insane world built up by his own hands. His body is weak, his mind is dimmed, his emotions suffer from “cardiac insufficiency”, and his soul leads a miserable existence a long way from God. His body needs proper training; his mind, a positive re-orientation; his emotions, control and refinement and his soul, a safe, peaceful refuge – an abode of blessing.

Yoga helps a man to deeply understand many things happening to and around him. Besides, yoga is a profoundly positive teaching in which the uppermost criterion is practice. And this is most important because nothing but practice, as is known, leads to success. Philosophy alone is insufficient.

As for the meaning of my activity as a teacher of yoga or tutor of yoga, you name it, I see it, first of all, in helping those people who approach me and seek to learn the reasons of the unsatisfactory state they are in, offering them means with which they could change the situation for the better and radically at that. Naturally, those means are effective only provided a man observes certain conditions. Yoga, I would like to say, is not a pill for diarrhea that you swallow and... you are okay until the next spasm. Peace of mind and sound health cannot be obtained all at once. You need to work thoroughly on a raw diamond in order to make a precious jewel out of it. You see what I mean, don’t you?

**Lukyanov:** What are the prospects and possibilities of development of your activities?

**Afanasyev:** It has become clear no serious development of my activity is possible without separate facilities of my own for yoga classes. There are no such facilities at the moment. I'd call it problem number one. Besides, the development of publishing activity to issue yogic literature needs financial resources. I mean for literature of high standard, very high. Some literature pieces have never been published in Russian translation before. They are waiting for their turn. These are the books by my Teachers: Indian Yogis, Swami Narayanananda, who left his mortal frame in 1988 and Swami Jyotirmayananda. These are primary sources, the masterpieces of contemporary yogic literature. You just cannot imagine what it is – every book is a priceless treasure. [...] Yoga is no easy science and there are always things which require clarification. I can also say that I was given “carte blanche” in my actions – no regulations, requirements or obligations. “Do as you deem reasonable and expedient. The only wish is: don't burden your students' minds with cumbersome terminology. As for the rest of it – you know yourself what and how to do.” This is what Swami Jyotirmayananda once recommended to me. Moreover, recently I was offered, in the most correct form, to build up a yoga center of my own, “so that you would not depend on anybody or anything – on any other yoga centers.” This is precisely what was said in the message.

I also have to mention the trend of Siddha-yoga, particularly the books by Swami Muktananda and talks by brilliant Gurumayi. This tradition is very close to me and I know it quite well.

All over the world for decades, there have existed well-equipped, contemporary yoga centers which help people stand on their own feet both literally and figuratively. We, in this country, just don't know about them. Would you really hear such things over the radio or TV or read about them in a newspaper? Alas, here in Russia, we lag behind in this aspect, too. By the way, abroad it is considered to be good form among private people to render support for various projects directed towards the spiritual development of society. In this land such gestures are just not done, perhaps with rare exceptions. Is my case going to be such an exception? Are there going to be people interested in my project? People who would help me realize it? Yes, I don't doubt it. Such people will come. They will take an active part in the common cause and thus improve their karmic condition.

**Lukyanov:** Yoga-ratna. What, actually, does the trial or initiation consist of and how did it proceed in your case?

**Afanasyev:** I guess my answer is going to disappoint you. I wasn't walled up in any burial vault for 3 days without water and air. Nor was I left without food for 40 days. I wasn't forced to sit up all by myself during a full moon night on some grave in an old, ill-reputed cemetery. Finally, I was not, thank God!, provoked by well-qualified seducers of the gentle sex who might have tortured my masculinity with a super-erotic shows. "When the student is ready, the Master appears", an esoteric saying goes. "The asking shall get what they ask for. The striving to see shall see. The longing to know shall know." These are also, as old as the world, truths. And I was asking, striving and longing.

The "Disciple – Master" relationship is a profoundly mystical and intimate bond. A master knows *whom* to give and *what* to give and for sure, *when* to give because time is a crucial factor. I have received several initiations in the yogic line from the masters of very high spiritual status. Initiation ("*diksha*" in Sanskrit) occupies the central place practically in all boughs of the mighty tree of Yogic tradition. All Schools share the opinion that without the passing on of spiritual knowledge (*jnana*) and spiritual power (*shakti*) from a master to a disciple, it is impossible to attain enlightenment and liberation.

As for the "trial", the word you used in your question, in the final run our entire life here on the Earth is the Trial, sometimes extremely hard. Life is a proving ground where our soul's strength is tested by innumerable temptations of this world.

You are interested by the term "*yoga-ratna*", aren't you? Yes, indeed, when I was granted the status of a teacher of yoga I was also given a spiritual title "*yoga-ratna*". "*Ratna*" is a Sanskrit word meaning "*a jewel*". So, *yoga-ratna* is understood as "*a jewel of yoga*". As Swami Jyotirmayananda explained to me, this "honorary title" is granted "as an acknowledgement of special merits and high skills in a disciple." This is a life-long title. It is not a rank when today you are a colonel and tomorrow a general. Why I was chosen to be honored with such a high evaluation, I don't know. And, quite frankly, I don't feel much like talking about it.

### **Lukyanov: How do you define the notion of yoga?**

**Afanasyev:** Sanskrit is a polysemantic language. "*Yoga*" is a Sanskrit word and it has quite a number of meanings and interpretations. It is widely used in science, psychology, philosophy, religion, art, grammar, astronomy, medicine, arithmetic, etc. In its basis lies the root "*yuj*" which means "*to connect*", "*to unite*". So, the general meaning of this term is the connection of two things. I have no definition of the term "*yoga*" of my own (pl. see *Note 1*). I define it in the way it was defined by traditional teachings: "*Raja Yoga Sutras*" by Patanjali, "*Bhagavad Gita*", *Puranas*, *Upanishadas*. There are quite a number of definitions. Besides, the

contemporary authors vary them, thus demonstrating how capacious this notion is. I will give here several of the most well-known definitions:

“Yoga is the cessation of the thought-waves (modifications) of the mind-stuff”. This definition is given by the Sage Patanjali in his “*Yoga Sutras*”. In the “*Bhagavad Gita*”, yoga is understood as “an art to act with a balanced mind”, “a psychic balance”, “a state of complete disconnection (of man) with the source of suffering” (there is such a definition too!). In “*Yoga-bhasya*”, the oldest of commentaries on “*Yoga Sutras*” (approx. XV cent. a. d.) it is stated that “*yoga is samadhi* (spiritual ecstasy).” And so on.

Anyhow, among all these multitude of definitions, it is certainly worthwhile to point out the following: “Yoga is a union of an individual soul with the Transcendental Soul [i.e. God]”. We come across this definition in “*Yoga-Yajnavalkya*”. And everything that facilitates such union is also called yoga. So the practical aspect of a religion is called not otherwise than yoga. That’s what we mean when we say, “Buddhist yoga”, “Tibetan yoga”, “Christian yoga”, “Taoist yoga”. These word combinations shouldn’t shock one. Everything is right and correct here. One should only understand clearly what is implied.

**Lukyanov:** “Integral yoga”... One of the interpretations of the term “yoga” is “unity”, “a path towards unity”. “Integral” means “unifying”. What is this tautology for?

**Afanasyev:** Well, here everything is simple. The word “integral” in respect to yoga refers to the *means* or *methods* which are used to attain the goal, i.e. unification. There are several kinds or branches of yoga, if I may say so. Four of them, on account of tradition, are considered to be the main ones: yoga of wisdom, yoga of love for God, yoga of action and yoga of spiritual contemplation (meditation). Each kind of yoga has its specific technology by which the process of ascent up the God-established stairway to heaven is carried out. There is a view according to which these kinds of yoga were formed and exist on their own without direct interrelations with one another. That view should be considered wrong. It is disproved both by the “*Bhagavad Gita*” and the *Upanishads* provided you read these scriptures attentively. Satya Sai Baba, a currently living omniscient God-man, calls those yogas “the different paths of the common way” thereby stressing the integral nature of the spiritual path.

There also exists an opinion that Integral Yoga is a creation of Sri Aurobindo. But, excuse me, Mme. Blavatsky is not a founder of Theosophy either, contrary to what many people believe. Of the Theosophical Society, yes, but not of Theosophy as such. The latter had existed long before Mme. Blavatsky. Jacob Bohme, Svedenborg... they also were Theosophists. Likewise, Aurobindo Ghosh is not a founder of Integral Yoga. An

apologist, an adept, yes. And a giant one, unique in his kind. There can be no argument about that.

What are the characteristic features of Integral Yoga? Man is primordially endowed by God with mind and emotions, will and ability to act. These vitally important elements are the boughs of one and the same tree, i.e. the man. It is these elements that the different, above mentioned, kinds of yoga correspond to. But can–man really get along having only mind or only emotions? Can man live without will or without actions? That is why the division into different kinds or forms of yoga is not a matter of principle. A genius of philosophy, a brilliant thinker of old times, Shankaracharya, was a deeply religious person. Try to make a fool say his prayers and he will smash his head against the floor while doing deep bowing! What spiritual heights can we talk about in this case?!

Integral Yoga is a means of harmonizing bodily activity, emotions, mind, and will. And it offers us a means to consciously, in equal measure, use all our tools: mind, emotions, will, and action. Viewing and understanding them not as separate, autonomous tools, but as deeply interconnected and actively influencing different aspects of one and the same system comprising a human being.

Can you really enter a state of prayer without proper concentration on the object of prayer? I assure you, this will be anything but prayer. And take a heartless intellectual. Let him even have a strong mind and extensive knowledge – who needs him after all? Will God really let such an egg-head get close to Him? If in a man's heart there is no love, magnanimity, good will, mercy, benevolence, tenderness and compassion – such a man cannot count on friendship with God.

Integral Yoga is prayer and service to people. It is a study of sacred scriptures and praising the Name of God. This is keeping one's body healthy and clean and, above all, this is control of the emotions and mind. Integral Yoga widely uses psychophysical techniques (dynamic, static, mixed, breathing exercises, deep relaxation, etc.) and mystical formulas called *mantras*. It also includes devotional singing where unconditional preference is given to the contents of the words.

**Lukyanov:** What can yoga mean in the life of a contemporary man?

**Afanasyev:** It can mean everything and it can mean nothing. It also can mean the infinite versatility lying between these two extremes. An old friend of mine long back, in the 60s, once said, “Here, in the Soviet Union, the way to yoga goes through illness.” To my mind this is close to the truth. The contemporary man is too weak spiritually to be able to practice yoga seriously, except perhaps when some malady clamps down on him or circumstances ruin him and force him to try the occult sciences just in order to survive. There are exceptions, though, and I know such men, but they are

very few. And even they experienced problems of a technical nature which they eventually could not resolve. No, they did not “leave the game”. Having found themselves in a truly difficult, dramatic situation, having faced the phenomena of their own inner world, full of unexpected, sometimes heart-rending “surprises”, they simply started to play, figuratively speaking, different cards with different pictures on them. Some players even had to change the table. As far as I know, they continue playing now (some have a high ecclesiastical rank in the Russian Orthodox Church). And do you know, with whom in fact they are playing? With the very enchantress Maya, the Cosmic Illusion, the most experienced and cunning of players. And the interesting thing, you know, is that they don’t seem to comprehend who they are playing with. And even more incomprehensible to them is the fact that they are but mere ‘pawns’ in the game. It is She who is playing with them making them change card packs or even tables – in other words changing one God for another. An ordinary man has not but the slightest notion about all that. Yet these fellows are true heroes, believe me. They have put everything at stake. And under all circumstances, they play with dignity and with absolute honesty and sincerity. Despite the fact that we are now going along different paths (I wouldn’t change my cards or table), I still remember them with love and admiration and still consider them to be my spiritual brothers.

Or I could say in a different way, they live so because they cannot live otherwise. A “born writer” writes because he cannot help writing. An invisible force draws a composer to a musical instrument. And tell me, what makes a girl, an unfolding flower, seclude herself in a nunnery? Although who can guarantee that behind the nunnery walls the whole complex of her problems, plus a new and powerful physiological one, will find their resolution? One may argue that with God everything is possible. Yes, of course, I know that. But I also know that prayers alone are not enough for Him.

A pretty lady, an owner of a beauty parlor, having read in a fashionable magazine an article about yoga suddenly felt a violent urge to practice it, “to attend yoga classes”. She even offered for me to rent the premises she owned, “Since *such* magazines publish praising articles about yoga then this yoga must be something not only good but fashionable as well.” I had just a single class with her. And you know why? Because I told her that she would have to practice it at home, too. “What? And at home, too? Oh, no, it’s not for me!” Her interest to yoga instantly vanished into thin air along with the interest in me. In a week, we had to change the location for yoga classes.

Your question about what yoga can mean in the life of a contemporary man is very interesting. This is “virgin land”, so to say, both for discussion and for a separate research. But this subject is too broad to dwell on here at length.

**Lukyanov:** What is yoga? Philosophy? Religion? Path? Instrument?

**Afanasyev:** “All life is yoga.” Do you know to whom these words belong? Aurobindo Ghosh. Everything, one way or another, is directed forward to the future. There is no way backwards, as that is known. Man is predestined to find his consummation in God and all those hard to understand theological “revelations” about eternal hell for sinners are nothing but silly conjectures which, by the way, totally and categorically deny the Great Mercy of God. If God is Love, then how could He, the Ruler of Destinies and the Ruler of the Universe, create this world in such a manner that He has to allow every now and then the delivery of his *beloved* creatures in large shipments (billions of souls!) to a place too horrible to imagine, from which there is no return. Moreover, if we understand God as the Soul of our soul, then in fact it turns out that He has to agree to sending Himself to the nether world together with lots of poor souls created by Him – with every “untrue soul” – a true particle of Himself. Can it, indeed, be so, for God’s sake!? But what for, I ask? What kind of dark irrationality is that, I wonder? Or, maybe I fail to understand something? I believe that the sinners’ lot is to burn in the purifying “fire” of the nether world for some time. I believe in the punitive fire of hell – but a temporary one, though maybe very long. I believe in those awful and fearsome places in the next world for grave sinners (murderers, tyrants, incorrigible scoundrels with overburdened souls). But I don’t believe in eternal hell for “the untrue”. Tell me, Evgeny, could you really call this world a paradise, the world where we live, where our Lord with His Eternal Peace and Indescribable Bliss is so little manifested, where the Diabolic Force rules practically absolutely? I don’t know about your life experience, but mine witnesses unequivocally in favor of the fact that God pays much more attention to suffering in this world than to happiness. For that reason, sages don’t call this world other than “the valley of sorrow”, “the system of death”, “the grave full of horrors”, “the world of darkness and illusion”, “the widely set death trap”. And recall the first of the four noble truths of Buddha lying at the base of his teaching, “Life is nothing but dukkha (suffering, sadness, pain, dissatisfaction)”! And, in addition to those “earthly delights”, the eternal hell in the next world? No, such eschatology is above my modest understanding.

On the other hand, yoga and spiritual teachings of India don’t much favor eschatological problems, although this subject, of course, was developed. Take for instance “*Bardo Thodol*” (“*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*”) and “*Garuda Purana*” (the Hindu book of death). They are more interested in another aspect. “Rather not you in the Universe, but the Universe within you” (Meher Baba). Consider these words. They alone can turn upside down your idea of yourself. Here is some more, “In every heart

there is an inexhaustible source of power and a boundless ocean of freedom because in your essence you are a spirit.” (Swami Jyotirmayananda). And further, “The law says that a beggar gets only a beggar’s portion which he begs for and which is given to him by sheer luck. But the son of God is given his right of kinship for the entire God’s Kingdom with all its treasures.” (Paramahansa Yogananda). There are thousands of such positive extracts “from yoga”.

Is yoga a philosophy? It certainly is. But it is not simply a “philosophy”. It is an exceptionally spiritual and profoundly optimistic philosophy. A philosophy of man’s way towards God with a predetermined end – the happy-ending. But yoga reaches far beyond the limits of philosophy because it is primarily a practical teaching on how one should live in order to enjoy life. What should be done in order to obtain a healthy, strong body, a stable, fine mentality, and to develop spiritual powers dwelling in the holy of holies of the heart. Yoga teaches also how to become a worthy member of a community, a citizen, how to further its prosperity, how to learn to be compassionate to your neighbors. And lots of other things that can improve an individual and transform his mind.

Can yoga be called a religion? I believe, the answer is “yes”. But yoga is not simply “a religion”, one kind of religion. It is a universal religion that leaves no place for fanaticism and obscurantism, intolerance and haughtiness. It is a religion of faith in Oneself as a spiritual being. It is a religion of man’s love for God and Mother Nature with all her living “props”. A yogi is wise in understanding a high goal of his life and he doesn’t try to change the world without having changed himself before.

Can yoga be called a way? Yes, yoga is a road leading to the goal. But it is a mountain road, a road to the peak – to the very heights of spirit, a road by no means easy, especially for those who try to go on their own without a guide knowing secret paths. It is a reliable way provided “a pupil is ready”. The Teacher (God Himself in the final analysis) will not let him perish in the mouth of some lurking predator. God may tolerate *some* rather serious things but He will never let a prepared pupil get into the paws of a beast. Every mature soul is too dear to Him to be treated like that because it has gone such a long way to Him.

You can set particular goals and try to reach them with the help of yoga: improve your general physical and mental state; lose excessive weight; learn to relieve a psychological stress; control your emotions; improve your memory, ability to work, concentration, etc. This is also a way. A way of changing yourself for the better: healthier, more reliable, more perfect. If you use yogic means to this end, then this way may well be called the way of yoga, why not?

Is yoga an instrument? If by the word “instrument” you imply a means, a tool used to attain a goal, i.e. a certain technique, discipline or practice – then the answer is positively “yes”. The arsenal of yoga includes

all those. Is, for instance, a mantra an instrument? It certainly is. It is just one of those stones that strike sparks of divine energy of this or that quality which are capable of kindling the flame of the soul up to gigantic dimensions and highest degrees and in this flame burn many of our faults and imperfections. Naturally, this requires work and discipline. Prayers, mental contemplation, *pranayama* (special breathing exercises with stopping of breath) and other methods are also instruments.

**Lukyanov:** Yoga and world religions. The Russian Orthodox Church condemns and denies yoga practically everywhere. What is the essence of the problem?

**Afanasyev:** And where, actually speaking, do you see a problem? Yoga does not interfere with religious affairs. It does not carry out any missionary activities. It does not impose its ideology on anyone, let alone being engaged in criticism. Therefore we, too, will not criticize the Orthodox Church for its super-tough position in respect to yoga as well as to everything else that does not agree with the Orthodox faith. The notorious principle, “those who are not with us are against us”, that stands out in all its splendor on the banners of the unholy fanatics, various ideologists and preachers – no matter, political or religious – has brought to catastrophe even such a mighty and seemingly eternal political system as communism. Yoga as a science of learning the nature of God existed long before Christ. And if yoga proclaims the primordial unity of an individual soul with the Divine Soul and points out at the presence in an individual of divine nature, which must be recognized, discovered in oneself and be given an opportunity to wholly manifest itself – then it does not contradict in any way to the teaching of Christ. Isn't it said in the holy Gospel from Luke (17:21) that, “The kingdom of God is within you?” And didn't saint Gregory the Theologian write in his “Word on the Human Virtue” that, “if you think low of yourself I'll remind you that you are God's creation?”

As is known, to err is human. And not less human is to distort the truth. Many religious figures, especially of the Christian faith, commit a sin against Truth trying to defame yoga, to present it in a false light, to belittle its merits. You know what, in spite of all the barking sounds, the caravan keeps on moving on. It carries life-saving water and will reach its destination regardless of events.

**Lukyanov:** I cannot but ask you the following question about yoga and astrology. Is there anything in common between them? How does yoga relate to astrology?

**Afanasyev:** As far as I understand, astrology traditionally deals with the study of the influence of the planets in the Solar system on a man. I

would call such astrology rather a doctrine than a science. However, contemporary astrology has gone much farther. Now the sphere of its interests encompasses diagnostics and prognostication for the entire ecological system: “human beings – environment”, “organic life and environment” and even “non-organic forms of existence and environment”, i.e. the influence of the nearest celestial bodies on the life of our planet as a whole and on man in particular. In this advanced state, it can, in my opinion, claim the status of science. But, in any case, astrology deals with *influence*, and its methods are to study the *mechanism* and *results* of influence; whereas yoga is a path of *liberation from influence*, that of planets included and its methods in this or that way are directed to this goal.

Driven by karmic determination into the maze of earthly life, a human being is subject to an infinite multitude of the most varied kinds of influence, mostly negative: external and internal, direct and indirect which now and again drive him into a dead-end. On choosing the path of yoga, a spiritual seeker, first of all, tries to weaken the influence of his own negative forces, i.e. evil qualities, inclinations, habits and faults. Exercising control over his speech, emotions, thoughts and acts, he methodically, patiently “muffles”, deters them, and doesn’t let them break loose. This, over the course of time, leads to the changes in character of a man, in the manner of his behavior and pattern of thinking. He becomes more calm, reasonable, patient, gentle, pleasant, etc. He simultaneously works on both the internal and external influences generated, as the yogic teaching asserts, by himself. To this end, thousands of years ago, a code of special, first of all moral, -observances for yoga disciples was worked out by Hindu sages and intended for disciplining a spiritual seeker and guarding him from any untoward events that could be provoked by wrong, from the yogic point of view, acts, words or even thoughts. What these observances are is a separate topic.

Without such systematic and purposive work, the full-fledged evolution of a man is impossible. Why do I use the adjective “full-fledged”? Because many people believe that the evolution of man and the development of his intellect are one and the same thing. They confuse evolution with intellectualization. Yes, a well-developed intellect is a wonderful thing, indeed. We can hardly build a paradise on earth with half-wits around. But the so-called “patent intellectuals”, princes, barons and dukes of the refined intellectual kingdom of their own, for whom intellect is an alpha and omega – those are a pretty dangerous lot. Given the opportunity, they are apt to lead the world to a catastrophe due to their pretty well developed egotism and scholastic pride rather than benefit it.

Yoga is a way or means of attaining liberation. Liberation of what and from what? In the most general way, liberation of spirit from matter, or, in other words, liberation of mind, consciousness or soul from the

chains of this world. Reverend Swami Jyotirmayananda says, “*The world-process is an overgrowth in one’s consciousness caused by Maya, and by shaking it, one attains Liberation. The whole project consists of shaking, uprooting, and finally removing it.*” Every successful step on this way can and should be regarded as *liberation*. In Christianity we observe the same thing. Its chief goal is the salvation of the soul. And such salvation is possible only under the condition of liberation of the soul of a believer from the enslaving influence of the Prince of this world. Or, simply, from this world which practically is one and the same thing, i.e. from the same old, die-hard and enduring in the mind of man – *materiality*. Actually the mission of religion, as far as I understand it, is just *to weaken the influence of this materiality, this notorious handsome monster (Satan) on man*. It cannot directly lead one to God. But as for re-orientating a man from the mundane to the divine and thus destroying or at least *weakening the influence* of the negative force of this world on him, this it can do in general as age-old experience shows. To tell the truth, often while trying to liberate a man from one kind of chains, the institute of religion manages to put on him other kinds – the doctrinal and theological ones.

Let us take the Bible, the holy of holies of Christianity. What does it appeal for? – For *separation* from this world. What does it teach? – That this world and everything in it deserve contempt, “*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the world of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.*” (1 John 2:15-16). Yes, just like that: “*Do not love the world or anything in the world.*» “*The lust*” and “*the boasting*”. Here they are, the devils pestering our lives! And this viewpoint is hard to contest. In reality everything in this world turns around that and almost everything comes down to that. And Christianity is not alone in its fair, on the whole, assessment of this world.

So, astrology studies *external* influences on man and in a very short range at that, determined exclusively by celestial bodies.

But *in reality* planetary influence is only a secondary factor! It’s a *consequence* but not a *cause*. The primary or determining factor is the *inner one* and its name is *karma*. It is the karma of a given individual that determines the optimal time for his birth, the optimal alignment and positions of the celestial bodies. The historical context is what really governs the situation. It’s easy to guess that under “historical context”, I imply *reincarnation*, the so-called metempsychosis, and the above arguments rest entirely on the basis of the mystic doctrine of reincarnation of which I am a supporter.

Yes, everything has an impact on us, the planets included, *but it is* we who by means of our thoughts, words and acts bring all these influences to life. *It is we who determine* when and under what planets we are to be

born. A good psychologist can give you a pretty accurate analysis or summary of yourself after studying your background and environment. In a similar way, a good astrologer can quite accurately describe the milestones of your life and predict the most likely variants of development of your personality and of your worldly activities. To my mind, astrology can serve as a good auxiliary means, but it would be a grave mistake to rely on it entirely, putting aside your own efforts. Once, a long time ago, in one of esoteric books I came across the following phrase, “A fool complies with the stars, a wise man governs them.”

Who to be? The choice is ours.

**Lukyanov:** Astrology, I understand that you agree with it, can prognosticate, i.e. predict the future. What about yoga? Can it predict anything? What is your own attitude to predictions?

**Afanasyev:** A well-known yogic scripture “*Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*” says, “Whether young or old, sick or gaunt – everyone who casts laziness aside attains success if he practices yoga. Success comes to him who performs practice; simply reading books doesn’t lead to success. Success doesn’t come from putting on special garments. It cannot be achieved by telling stories. Practice alone is the means of success. This is the truth and there can be no doubt about it.” I regard the quoted extract as a concrete and at the same time universal forecast. Success is guaranteed if there is practice. No practice – no success. And practice is work – laziness must be cast aside. Besides, God, as is known, helps those who help themselves, i.e. displays perseverance in pursuing their goal. In another classic text, the “*Yoga Sutra*” by Patanjali, the same idea is expressed as follows, “Success (*samadhi*) quickly comes to those who impassively and purposefully go (towards the goal).” Pay attention to the adverbs “impassively and purposefully”. This is the spirit of yoga. This is its secret.

As for my personal attitude to all sorts of forecasts, predictions and prophecies, for some time now it has been rather quiet. I just don’t pay much attention to them. Yes, of course, they are intriguing, but my personal experience of direct and indirect communication with them witnesses that they don’t have much practical value. And again, everything depends on who predicts. If the forecaster is Satya Sai Baba, then to me it is a very serious argument that I should listen to the prediction because everything He says is for a reason. A year ago, January 1, 2000 to be precise, in His New Year’s speech to a vast audience, Sai Baba said literally the following, “*In a very short time all the people of the world are going to be united. Today you consider America, Russia, Japan, China, Pakistan, India as separate from each other. Very soon there will be unity amongst all these countries. Even those whom you consider as your worst enemies are going to become your best friends.*” (“*Sanathana Sarathi*”, February 2000, p. 51).

What do these “in a very short time” and “very soon” mean? What do you think as an astrologer? A year? Two years? It isn’t easy to believe, is it? What so special must happen for those countries to suddenly become allies?

And a couple of weeks ago, February 5, I saw Sai Baba in a dream. There were just the two of us and we were strolling slowly somewhere talking. He was on my left and was telling me something. I seemed to understand Him completely somehow, though I didn’t hear a single word and didn’t know what he was talking about. And suddenly He uttered the following phrase in perfect Russian, “In seven months there will be changes.” Only one phrase – nothing more. Immediately thereupon my dream ended and I woke up. The dream had a strong impression on me. Everything seemed absolutely real, as if I were awake. I have no idea whom or what these changes will affect in seven months – myself, my family, Russia, the world... but I don’t doubt that some changes will take place and that they will be important to me (otherwise Sai Baba would not have come and told me that). It might relate to His New Year’s declaration about the global unification. Or might not. Let us not resort to guessing. Let’s live until September (pl. see *Note 2*).

---

***Note 1. August 15, 2018***

Years later, in the process of writing a book on yoga, I expressed my attitude to yoga – as I understand and feel it – in the following words,

“Yoga is a tradition and what lies outside the scope of it.

It is a method and what transcends it.

It is knowledge within and beyond intellectual comprehension.

It is a philosophy leading to the end of philosophy.

It is a path leading to the end of the path.

It is the joy of exploring one’s own self which is the worthiest and greatest endeavour of all human undertakings.”

***Note. August 25, 2002***

September 11, 2001 events that took place in the U.S.A. shook the world and initiated the unification of the world community against a common enemy – international terrorism. Starting from August 2001 considerable changes took place in the life of Vladimir Afanasyev and his family.