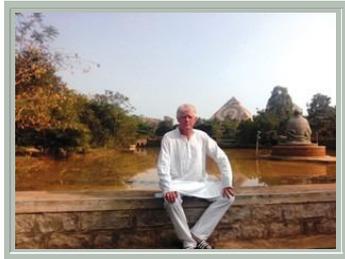


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By Nandini Sarkar

The search for meditative silence led Nandini Sarkar to the Pyramid Valley of Bangalore where she met Per Wibe, a Norwegian yogi and a realised Master of the Kriya Yoga tradition



In the past few months, I have felt very drawn to silence. I have longed to merge in meditative silence and experience the great peace. Sadly, on my own, I did not succeed. Since the Internet god can give us anything, I did an online search and found www.kriyabanservice.com and Master Per Wibe, a Norwegian yogi. Coincidentally, Master Wibe turned out to be a teacher in the Kriya Yoga tradition, which I have followed for long, so I was interested to explore further. Master Per wrote about how the Kriya Yoga technique, when successfully practised, takes one into silence. He also offered a retreat in Bangalore, to experience the silence. Reading about his journey from successful businessman to yogi and his deep emphasis on entering the silence, resonated with me. I decided to sign up for his Bangalore retreat and persuaded my family to come along.

At Pyramid Valley

We arrived late night at PY, a day before the retreat. We couldn't see much in the darkness. However, Aum resounded in the Valley; it boomed naturally, without the aid of music players, sweeping across the Valley, inviting all who could enter it, to do so. We were led to our pagoda, which was named, Milarepa, and had a huge laughing Buddha statue placed on its lawns, to welcome us. There was lush greenery all around the pagoda and it was beautifully done up on the inside as well, with all amenities for modern yogis, who do not believe too much in austerity.

In the morning, when I drew the long curtains, I gasped in delight. Bang in front of us was the great, central Pyramid. The grand, imposing, stone Pyramid, held its own against the bright morning sunlight. We discovered the open-air cafeteria, a stone's throw away from our Pagoda and enjoyed masala tea along with a delicious South Indian breakfast, served piping hot, by smiling volunteers. There was a cool, refreshing breeze to lift our spirits further and we could see all around the beautifully landscaped Valley. Suddenly, I noticed Master Per. He had entered the cafeteria quietly, on his own, without any followers, and sat down at a table for breakfast. Master was wearing a white T-shirt; he had a ruddy complexion and large, bright eyes. I found him to be natural and unself-conscious. I like low profile Masters, so the first impression about him was favourable. On our way out of the cafeteria, we briefly offered namaskars to him, not wishing to disturb him with small talk, which he acknowledged.

Kriya Yoga initiation and practice

The Bangalore organisers, Gururaj and Anil, received everyone at the Kabir Pyramid, where the entire retreat programme was held. A single large picture of Mahavatar Babaji was placed on one side of the pyramid, with smaller pictures of Lahiri Mahasaya, Sri Yukteshwar and Paramahansa Yogananda (all part of the Kriya Yoga parampara), embedded at the bottom. Anil was decorating the table with offerings of fruits and flowers that the participants had carried. Master came in shortly and, in a simple, no-nonsense manner, explained that six Kriya techniques would be taught over the next two days and there would be four practice sessions a day during the four-day retreat. At the end of the retreat, an audio clip of the six techniques to be practised daily, would be provided.

Master offered a rose and blessings individually to all the initiates, then plunged into teaching the first Kriya technique. Again, it was done quietly, without any fanfare or stirring oratory or soothing background music. Nothing to lull the senses into false serenity; you had to be alert and awake to receive what he was giving. Master's retreat required previous knowledge of the seven chakras since the entire set of six Kriya techniques taught by him focus on chakra centre practice to calm the breath and then to plunge into silence. Teachings throughout the day were punctuated with hot coffee, snacks and delicious meals and these were much-needed breaks from the intense practice sessions. I noticed a full house during all four sessions during each day. During one of the sessions, I got talking to Soumya, a young IT professional from Bangalore, who had parked her two young children with her parents to attend the retreat. I asked Soumya what her motivation for attending the retreat was. She told me that though she had a happy life, she constantly felt a vacuum and the need to be connected to her spiritual self. She had read *Autobiography of a Yogi*, the famous classic by Paramahansa Yogananda, and wanted to learn Kriya Yoga from a personal Master. Somebody told her about the PY retreat and she immediately signed up for it, having no hesitation in learning from a Norwegian Master.

Meeting the master

In an informal chat, the young organisers, Gururaj and Anil, who were friends from college and now business partners as well as Guru-bhais, spoke about how they had found Master during a similar retreat some years ago in Bangalore. Gururaj had been practising meditation from boyhood and had been initiated into Kundalini Yoga but he was still searching for that something else in his practice when he attended a retreat with Master and found his true path. Anil told me Master had also blessed their office and business and that they felt a palpable blessing in their lives due to the association with him. I also learnt that Gururaj had been initiated by Master into the higher Kriya techniques, up to the third level.

The most inspiring story, however, was Sridha's (Pan). Sridhar had gone to the Rishikesh Kriya Yoga ashram some years back, hoping to be initiated by Swami Shankarananda Giri but found to his disappointment, that a foreign yogi would conduct the initiation. Just when he was thinking of chucking the whole idea of getting initiated, he saw Master. He told me it was love at first sight. He felt tremendous love for Master, a powerful attraction, as though between a girlfriend and a boyfriend. For the first few days, he would silently and discreetly follow Master as he went for walks by the Ganges and for coffee to a small shop in town. Soon, he summoned the courage to talk to Master and seek his acquaintance.

Close to the breath, close to silence

Personally, I found Master Per's method of teaching Kriya Yoga to be extremely effective and soul-satisfying. I felt tremendous movement of energy in my spine and deep centredness. Master's mantra is: if you are close to your breath, you are close to the silence. He repeats this several times during his guided meditation, until it becomes the DNA of the meditation. He reminds us that each breath comes directly from the Divine. By focussing on the chakras and doing Kriya at each chakra, we can calm the breath and enter the silence.

Now, each morning, I look forward to meditating with Master's audio clip. Master Per however emphasises, that more important than the technique is our desire, our efforts and the inner experience of Silence. There exist levels of Silence, says Master Per, which we can experience in deep meditation. The mind encounters the source of creation where love, infinity, stability and creativity rule. When the mind is bright, then the whole world is bright. When the mind is dark, then the whole world is dark. When Silence penetrates the consciousness, we experience who we are and are guided by the true Master, the Self. The body exists through prana, which is also received through the breath. Every inhalation is a new creation, a new birth, coming directly from Life.

Is it possible to prove these statements? The practical proof, Master says, is Life itself. When a human body emerges from the mother's womb, the breath with the prana (the life force) enters the baby's body, and a new individual life begins. Prana comes from the void, from Life, from that which creates and penetrates everything. Prana brings life to the body and makes its physical existence possible. When the body dies, the prana leaves the body. The breath brings us into and out of the physical world. This is happening all the time; we are born and we die. In between we exist in the void, in the emptiness, in the silence, in the field of non-duality. These realities are central aspects of Kriya meditation practice. The breath is life, one with silence. When we are established in the breath, we spontaneously experience the level of non-duality. We then recognise a deep inner silence and a state of blissful peace.

Kriya Yoga takes us to silence

The practice of Kriya, writes Master Per in his book, *Yearning of the soul* (available free on the website), using the breath and the attention, dissolves difficulties or hindrances in specific energy centres in the spine. It is said that each centre or chakra carries different general human problems. The purpose of the practice is to dissolve knots and hindrances so that the life-force can freely move upwards and downwards in the spine. The consciousness is lifted to higher levels as it simultaneously descends and enriches all parts of our lives. In this way silence and dynamic activity are integrated into oneness and duality, in a state of total consciousness unity. If there is a water pipe that is blocked, then we need to remove the blockage with a stick or something similar. The stick is the breath and the attention, the water pipe is the spine and the hindrances energetic blocks.

Yearning of the Soul

According to Master, the most useful aid in life is to improve from inside. We then create a stable foundation for happiness and peace, even when there are storms around us. Meditation is unique for this purpose. It takes us to subtle silent areas inside that renew, stabilise and

purify. He said his interest in spirituality started with such questions, combined with suffering and a strong desire for a good and harmonious life: What is it that prevents the mind from being permanently happy? Can meditation be of any help? What about my lifestyle in general? He realised that to improve the quality of the mind, efforts and sincerity were needed.

Master also writes in his book about the beautiful light and visions he saw in his early meditations. When he sat down to meditate, he sought and hoped to have these experiences again. If they did not occur, he felt disappointed. Then he learnt never to search for these experiences anymore. He learnt he could summon these experiences anytime at will but the experience of silence is the great nirvana. In this nirvana, even silence seems to be lost! Where is it? You are That. So, Master says, just be in the breath, be the breath, live in the prana, in life, enjoy the journey. This is the joyous duty of human beings