TIMELESS KRIYA YOGA

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The Yogoda Satsanga Society (YSS) founded by Paramahansa Yogananda in 1917, celebrates its centenary this year beginning January 5, his birthday. Rewatching the biopic Awake on the life of Yogananda, took me back to a time when the seeker in me had been awakened by reading the Autobiography Of A Yogi. The enigmatic and elusive search for the meaning of life seemed to acquire practical dimensions suddenly, as one was introduced to the world of the hidden sage Babaji and the science of Kriya Yoga.

Yogananda detailed practical step-by-step methods, breaking down and demystifying the ancient Sanskrit-lore of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras. These scientific techniques, he said, were capable of reversing the ordinary outward flow of energy and consciousness so that the mind becomes a dynamic centre of direct perception — dependent no longer on the fallible senses but capable of actually experiencing Truth. His Kriya exercises were aimed at the practitioner’s ability to consciously draw energy from the cosmic source, purify and strengthen the body, and to prepare it for meditation. Kriya Yoga as a method of meditation was capable of reinforcing and revitalising the subtle currents of life energy in the body. Consciousness is drawn to higher levels of awareness, gradually bringing about an inner awaken-

ing, and we come to know our oneness with the infinite intelligence, which gives life to all, and which is the essence of our Self.

Patanjali details the eight steps towards samadhi, starting from the ethical-moral imperatives to virtuous habits and observances to be cultivated through discussion of asana or correct posture to pratyahara — training of the mind to withdraw from the sensual world, and from dharana — concentration to dhyana — meditation, and finally to samadhi state where the mind loses its identity to merge into the Self. Similarly, Yogananda designed Kriya lessons, taking the practitioner step-by-step, from creating an outer conducive ambience of quietness and discipline to exploring inner dimensions of mind, which would lead one to the cause of the turbulence of thoughts. Yogananda’s method and legacy of disseminating these techniques was, and has been, unique as well. Under Yogananda’s directions, classes and lectures he gave on this art of balanced spiritual living were compiled to form the Yogoda Satsanga lessons, making them accessible to all who are seekers.