

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov

# Bringing Symbols to Life

*The gymnastic  
exercises*



PROSVETA

*Translated from the French*

*Original title:*

**Donner vie à des symboles**

*Exercices de gymnastique*

*By the same author*

*in the same collection*

**De la terre au Ciel**

*Le sens de la prière*

**Une pensée en éveil**

*La voie de la méditation*

**La Messe et les sacrements**

*des rites solaires*

Original edition:

© 2012, Éditions Prosveta S.A., ISBN 978-2-8184-0031-9

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*Prosveta S.A – CS30012 – 83601 Fréjus CEDEX (France)*

*ISBN 978-2-8184-0450-8*

*Digital edition: 978-2-8184-0489-8*

## **Part One**

### **Embodying spiritual truths**

# **1**

## **The treasures hidden in very simple exercises**

**Y**ou all hope to live a life rich in revelation, inspiration and blessings, and for that to happen you think you need someone to come and reveal extraordinary secrets to you. If I tell you that these secrets you are waiting for consist of a few very simple exercises, you will think, ‘Oh, is that all?’ Well, yes, the greatest secrets that will show you how to live every day in harmony, peace, joy and hope lie in very simple exercises, and if you leave them out, you will never know the benefits of doing them.

Just take our gymnastic exercises. Do you sense just how useful they are for keeping your body flexible, energized and in balance? You do them for a few days and then you drop them, and when you want to take them up again you find you are already stiff, heavy and clumsy. You have to do them regularly, like dancers; they don’t let a single day go by without training. The exercises only take ten or so minutes, so don’t say they take too much time.

Let’s suppose you do these exercises every day. As they are easy to do, you can do them correctly even if you are thinking of something else or nothing at all. But the only way you will really benefit from them is if you pay close attention to what you are doing. Don’t simply raise your arms and legs mechanically left and right; try to get into a

rhythm. In this way, all the cells in your legs, arms, solar plexus, brain and the whole of your body will gradually begin to vibrate, and one day you will sense that you are sending out fluid energy currents, which will spread harmoniously out into space.

So, as you begin these exercises, be conscious that you will be sending out waves, releasing energy currents. Also, watch your breathing, because in doing so you will help to make your body suppler, and you will rejuvenate your cells and keep your nervous system balanced and healthy.\*

People usually associate the idea of gymnastics with keeping their body in good shape and developing muscles, when for good health and energy it is principally the nervous system that needs to be supported, strengthened and stimulated. Athletes can have very strong muscles, but if their nervous system is weak and exhausted they will not be able to lift even a bottle of water. Observe yourself, and ask yourself why some days you can be active from morning to night and walk for ten kilometres without tiring, and other days you are crawling along pitifully: you still have the same muscles, but you have less nervous energy. So, in our gymnastic exercises, it is our nervous system that we seek to strengthen first, since even our muscle function depends on it.

And what strengthens and nourishes the nervous system? The awareness, faith and fervour with which we set about the task in hand. When we do the exercises together, I certainly sense your presence behind me, but I do not always sense a conscious presence. If, from now on, you try to perform all these movements with the conviction that you are carrying out something good and beautiful, it will have a positive effect on your whole day. You will have created

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\* See Breathing in Part Four, p 87.

an inner harmony, which will also be reflected in your behaviour towards those around you: your family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and everyone you happen to come into contact with.

Our Teaching offers numerous methods, and the gymnastic exercises are only one among many others. These include prayer, meditation, singing, surya yoga (the yoga of the sun), hrani yoga (the yoga of nutrition), breathing exercises and the paneurhythmy dance. For each of these practices, I have explained to you how to direct your thoughts to obtain the best results. Of itself a method is not so important; it is only a tool. A repeated word or gesture will only release its power if we provide it with content by adding a thought and even a feeling.

You have inner resources you are not aware of, and you must learn to exploit them by being present with everything you do. Often, if you are tired, it is not because you have worked too hard, but because you do not know what efforts you need to make or, more importantly, how to make them. When, eventually, you no longer think of our gymnastic exercises only as physical effort, but also as a psychological and spiritual activity, you will sense waves of pure energy flowing towards you from the whole universe.

As we execute each movement, we silently say a formula, a prayer.\* These formulas, these prayers, not only help us to become aware of the importance and meaning of each gesture, they also send out vibrations that penetrate the very substance of our being. One day I will show you how each of these movements can be linked to a symbol, a geometric figure.\*\*

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\* See Part Two, p. 31.

\*\* See Part Two, p. 31.

As with all spiritual exercises, it is better to be able to do these gymnastic exercises in silence, surrounded by silence, but also and above all in inner silence. So, before you begin, take a look inside yourself, and allow this silence – this expression of peace, harmony and light – to fill you. It is useless aspiring to any kind of spiritual realization while you cannot manage to interrupt the noisy, uncontrolled flow of your thoughts and feelings. When you manage to achieve this silence, you will communicate a subtle grace and rhythm to your gestures, which will be transmitted to all your cells and will also have a positive effect on all the beings around you. I have often said to you that even animals and plants are sensitive to the atmosphere we emanate.

Once silence has been established, you can begin the exercises, saying the formulas in your mind at the same time. This inner speech is what is called the Word. The Word is speech that has not yet come down to the physical level. It is there, real and alive but inaudible, and it manifests in the invisible world as shapes, colours and vibrations. It is thanks to the Word that you can make yourself heard in the different kingdoms of nature. This is because the Word can always find an immediate appropriate expression that all creatures, even the angels and the archangels, understand; yes, the Word is the universal language.

At the end of each formula, we add ‘for the glory of God’. Why? Because in the spiritual life it is essential that we know who we are serving. We must see even the gymnastic exercises as an opportunity to glorify the Lord.

I will say a few more words about this. Instead of saying ‘for the glory of God’, we can also say ‘for the glory of our heavenly Father’ or ‘for the glory of my heavenly Father’. With this formula, we are seeking to contact our higher self, our divine self, more directly. For the truth is that, on high, in the divine world, we are a spark of the same nature, the



same quintessence, as God, our heavenly Father. All human beings are sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father, and when we say 'our heavenly Father' or 'my heavenly Father', each one of us is emphasizing this filiation, this identity, even more strongly. We awaken an inner awareness of our divine origin, and we create a connection with the Lord so that, eventually, we will merge with him. For we are predestined one day to say, as Jesus said, *'My Father and I are one'*.

## 2

### From movement to light

The spiritual life does not require us to accumulate lots of knowledge. The most important thing in the spiritual life is practice. It is good to read and study but not without ever trying to achieve what you have studied and make it concrete. Obviously, without sufficient knowledge, practice is poor and empty. But once certain ideas have been acquired, it is necessary to focus on a few exercises and repeat them every day. Our Teaching teaches us how to work with the spirit, soul, mind and heart, but also with the will. And the will is developed through the practice of movements that are the result of the activities of the spirit, soul, mind and heart.

You come across people in life who are very simple and possess just a few sheets of paper, on which they have written a small number of essential truths; they do their best to apply these truths, and you can feel they are full of spirit and light. And you meet others, scholars, who have all of humanity's sacred books in their library, which they quote from, but there is nothing spiritual emanating from them. The most important thing is to have a certain amount of knowledge and build something with it. We can call this act of building 'our future' or 'our temple'. It is this temple that St Paul was thinking of when he wrote in

the second letter to the *Corinthians*: ‘We are the temple of the living God’.

I offer you lots of methods so that you can carry out this building work, for as an educator I have to think of you all. You do not all have the same temperament, the same needs, the same qualities, the same capacity for work, which is why I have to suggest numerous different methods. I do not tell you to apply them all, as that would be dangerous. It is up to you to see which ones suit you best. You must, of course, always bear in mind the essential rules I have given you concerning how to behave in daily life, but when it comes to the exercises, choose a few and focus on them, so that you go deeply into them. Later, you will be able to leave them and practise others, but do not dissipate your energies, as that would not be good for your balance.

Many disciples of spiritual teachings still do not understand that they ought to be practising simple methods. They dive into works on the Cabbalah, astrology, magic, alchemy, Hinduism or other kinds of spirituality without having learned humility, purity, patience, kindness or gratitude. They do not know how to be in harmony with other people and the whole of creation, and so they are disturbed and made ill by the least thing; reading indiscriminately has taken them to the edge of an abyss. They had imagined they were going to gain access to great mysteries, solve the enigma of the universe and receive initiation. They thought that, because they were busy with these grandiose plans, they could neglect certain activities in daily life that were unworthy of them, as well as all the elementary truths that could have shed light on their path. But it is these elementary truths that are the most important, and if they had applied them they would have found the right attitude and been protected as they continued their studies.

So, I will say to you too: from now on, have the humility to do some small movements every day with attention and sincerity. Beings of light will come to protect you and divert any energy currents that might disturb or harm you. You will sense when this is happening. Make an effort each day to do at least one exercise. Do you at least say a prayer? Do you read from the *Daily Meditations*? To make any progress you need to be constantly bringing a few essential truths to mind, and you need to be making an effort and doing exercises, so that these truths become a part of everything you do. That is how the *Daily Meditations* that are prepared each year can help you. And don't read all the passages in one go, as some people have admitted to doing, but one a day, and meditate on them. Each and every day, you must reignite a taste for these truths in your soul.

Humans know many things, but what use is it to them to know these things if they do nothing with them? Choose a virtue like stability, for example, or patience, or kindness or gratitude, and see whether you are able to put it into practice. You come to the Brotherhood – and what a place it is for exercises! There is none better. When you live the collective, fraternal life, you are constantly asked to pay attention to others so as not to disturb or shock them. Just because they are different from you does not mean you have the right to ignore them or clash with them; it is more worthwhile to try to understand them. In this way, you will form a habit that is positive, one that will protect you later from many dangers.

There are some people who are so proud of their social standing and consider themselves so great and important that they think they needn't make any effort with the little ants. But if one day they find themselves having to pick over thousands of grains of wheat, barley or rice in just a few hours, they will be very happy for these ants to come and

help them. Or if they find themselves tied up tight with a rope, a mouse will start gnawing at the rope and free them. You will say, 'But that's just myths and children's fairy tales!' Maybe... These mice and ants are the people you mix with but have little consideration for: who knows whether the small gestures you try to make for them today might not save you later on?

And suppose you are walking along a path, and you move some stones that could have tripped someone up, or some pieces of glass that could have cut them. You do not know what you are gaining inwardly by doing so: perhaps these acts of foresight will also save you one day, because by then foresight will have become a habit. Believe me, people never have enough good habits like these; they seem insignificant, yes, but that is only how they seem.

Do not be surprised if our Teaching insists so much on practice: it is thanks to practice that you will one day have light. I have often reminded you of how primitive peoples lit a fire, and you can try the same thing. One way is to take two pieces of wood and rub them together: the rubbing produces heat, and eventually the heat will suddenly produce a flame and light. The three stages of movement, heat and light have an equivalent in our psychic life: movement (will and action) produces heat (love and feeling), and heat produces light (thought and understanding). So, to arrive at light, we have to activate the will until it produces heat – love – and until this heat, this love, becomes light. When you really apply yourself to doing exercises, you will eventually not be able to do without them, and then one day the light will burst forth.

If you have the willpower to do some exercises every day, you will gradually get the taste for them and love them, and thanks to your love the light will burst forth and their deeper meaning will become real to you. Going to the sunrise early

in the morning, eating in silence while concentrating on your food, doing the breathing and gymnastic exercises, meditating, praying and singing – you may not find all these things very inspiring to begin with, but persevere. By doing these exercises, you trigger an internal mechanism, and one day, because of them, you will feel the forces of nature supporting you in your work.

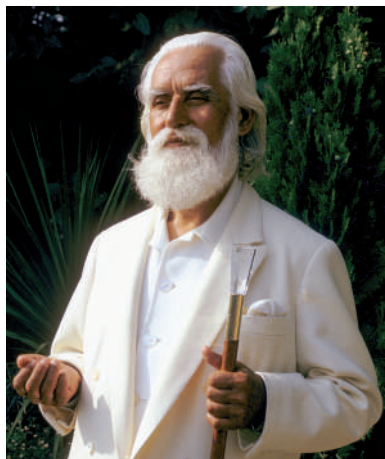
Now, don't tell me that you do not have enough time to devote to exercises, because in the morning you have to go to work, and before you leave you have lots to do, and the same in the evening when you get home... I will reply that if you do not have time to be in harmony and light, you will always have enough time for troubles, disorders and darkness. If there is one thing in life that is guaranteed, it is that everyone will experience being sad, weak and discouraged. It is less certain that they will be happy, strong and peaceful. Why? Because they keep saying, 'I haven't got time!' It's a convenient way of justifying laziness and inertia. They've got no time to meditate, pray or do exercises to become more robust and more enlightened... What kind of destiny are they preparing for themselves by being like that?

And don't tell me either that you find it boring doing the same exercises all the time, because I will ask you why you don't find it boring eating the same bread and drinking the same water three times a day. Every day, you have more or less the same food to give you strength, so that you can learn, work and love. Each day, you have an appetite for earthly food, so why do you not have the same appetite for spiritual food, which is just as necessary for living?



The gymnastics at the Bonfin, Fréjus





The spiritual philosopher and teacher, Master Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov (1900-1986), emigrated to France from Bulgaria in 1937. His work touches on numerous aspects of Initiatic Science, but he summed it up by saying, 'Through my teaching, I wish to pass on to you the essence of what it is to be human: what constitutes a human being, our relationship to nature, and the best way to communicate with others and with the universe if we want to drink at the springs of divine life.'

'In order to channel water, we dig ditches and furrows, and to light our houses we install electrical circuits. These examples are analogies: if we want to be able to pick up the spiritual energies passing through the atmosphere and make them circulate, we must install channels and circuits within ourselves as well. The gymnastic exercises we do each morning are a way of capturing these energies and making them circulate. This is because the geometric figures that correspond to the different movements relate to spiritual forces and entities. When we trace these figures in space, we are attracting the forces and entities to which they are linked, so that they can work in us.'

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ISBN 978-2-8184-0450-8



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