

What is Yoga?

by

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Yoga [union] and vi-yoga [separation]

Nowadays I see a Sanskrit word used widely and that word is “yoga”. This word is getting popular not only in India but all over the world. The newspapers and magazines carry a lot of articles on “yoga”. So I thought of talking about *yoga* as discussed in our traditional scriptures. The word *yoga* is taken from the Sanskrit root “*yuj*” which means to unite, to combine, to come together etc., therefore the word “yoga” means union, merger. So the question arises: union between what and what? The scriptures point out it is the union between *jivatma*, the individual self, and *paramatma*, the universal self. So it means *jivatma-paramatma aikyam* [‘oneness’, i.e. non-different, identical]. The scripture points out that this ‘union’ between the individual self and universal self is the goal of a human life – *parama purushartha* [supreme human goal] or *mokshah* [liberation]. The scripture elaborates on this union but strangely, it points out in the end, that this union is not possible. Having presented this union as the goal initially, the scripture then negates it – saying the union is never possible. Why is it not possible? Because *jivatma* and *paramatma* are not two different things – only two different things can be joined when they are away (different and away things can be joined). The scriptures later reveal that *jivatma* and *paramatma* are two words and not two different things that are away from each other. ***Jivatma is paramatma and paramatma is jivatma.*** Then the question will naturally come: If *jivatma* and *paramatma* are one and the same and union is not possible then why should scriptures introduce “yoga” as a goal? Then the scriptures themselves reveal that the *yoga* is in fact a “*vi-yogah*”. What we really require is not *yoga* but “*vi-yogah*” or separation. Separation from our delusion or *mohah*. What delusion? The misconception that *jivatma* and *paramatma* are different. This is our misconception: *jivatma* is here and *paramatma* is there, *jivatma* is weak and *paramatma* is omnipotent and that we have to travel and travel and ultimately merge with the Lord. This is *pucca* [tip-top] delusion and what is required is to remove this delusion. I gain knowledge to remove this delusion. I come to realize that *jivatma* and *paramatma* are one and the same. Therefore *yoga* is *bheda-brahma viyogah*. As Lord Krishna in the sixth chapter says that *yogah* means separation from our delusion.

Words over a period of time differ from their original meaning. Brihaspathi in Sanskrit means a very intelligent person; sadly it is now reduced to mean a fool. Similarly the word “yoga” means *moksha* [liberation], *aikyam* [oneness] and *viyogah* [separation]. It means the essence of the microcosm is the same as the macrocosm, the essence of God is the same as the individual, the *jivatma* and *paramatma* are essentially the same. *Yoga*

therefore means the removal of this delusion that we are different from the Supreme. The scripture points out that every human being must discover this *moksha*. Only then the fundamental and universal quest and urge of every human being will end. Every human being has three fundamental quests which are natural to every thinking human: **Who am I? Why am I here? and What am I here for? – What is the meaning of life?** – often arises in the mind, especially when we confront problems. But if you are having New Year parties then these questions will be suppressed. But there is no escaping this question in one's life. As we grow older and older and our external activities come down, this feeble question –What is the meaning of life?– becomes bigger and bigger. Much like the ticking of the clock – in the day you don't hear it but in the night, if you are not able to sleep, then the ticks get louder and louder. This question is the subtlest form of *samsara*. This quest will come to an end only when I discover the truth through “*yogah*”. This is the primary goal of every human being which in Sanskrit is called “*sadhya yogah*” [the ultimate goal]. Of course there are other goals in life but they are subservient to this primary quest.

Three designs & five injunctions

The scriptures themselves talk of accomplishing this ultimate goal, *sadhya yogah*. Since we have a short life and so many distractions, how to design life in such a way that before death I will hit at the bull's eye. The scriptures prescribe three designs as a means, as a method, as a path to attain that goal, the three *sadhanas* [means to attain the *sadhya*, the end] of *karma yoga*, *upasana yoga* and *jnana yoga*. These three are called “*gaunya yoga*” or secondary *yoga*, for they lead one to the primary *yoga* of *sadhya yoga* (removing the delusion). Of the three, *karma yoga* is the most important for it lays the foundation for the other two. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna talks about all three *yogas*: *karma*, *upasana* and *jnana*, elaborately. In fact *karma yoga* is so important that Krishna devotes one chapter (3rd chapter) to its teaching. After elaborating it in one chapter HE condenses it in one beautiful cryptic verse (30th verse chp. 3):

*mayi sarvāni karmāni sannyasa adhyātma cetasā /
nirāsih nir-mamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigata jvarah // (BG3.30)*

*Therefore dedicating all actions to Me with your mind fixed on Me the Self of all,
freed from desire and the feeling of mine-ness, and cured of mental agitation,
fight.*

This is a very important *sloka* of the entire *Bhagavad Gita* in which Krishna presents five parts of *yoga*. It is nice to remember this exhortation of Krishna on the New Year day so that we can benefit by implementing it throughout the year. This is the instruction given by Krishna on New Year day

1. May you keep *moksha* as your primary goal of life

You may have any number of family, corporate goals but may you keep *moksha* as your primary and ultimate goal or destination. Which is *jivatma-paramatma aikyam* or *bheda-brahma vi-yogah* or freedom from delusion. This is the stage when a human being becomes a spiritual being. Don't be a materialistic person; then life becomes a greater

and greater burden. The old age will be a greater burden. So may you balance material goals with spiritual by having *moksha* as your primary goal. Then one becomes a spiritual seeker. ‘Spiritual’ has many meanings and don’t confuse it with New Year spirits! People attend so many parties and so many spirits, so take it in the right spirit. *Adhyātma cetesā bhava* – that is instruction number one.

2. Instruction two is: *mayi sarvani karmani sannyasa* [Dedicate all to God]

May you dedicate all your actions as an offering to the Lord. Whether it is small or big action, sacred or secular action, dedicate all your actions throughout the day and throughout life, convert it into worship by dedicating all your actions as an offering to the Lord. *Ishvara arpanam karma karu*. How do you dedicate your actions? This is done by invoking the relationship between you and God in the context of every *karma* [action]. This we will understand if we understand the concept of God in our scriptures. In our scriptures God is not a person sitting beyond the clouds, God is defined as the invisible, all pervading intelligent principle of the entire universe, it is the intelligent complex set of laws that maintain the creation and maintenance of the universe in rhythm and harmony. This infinite number of laws works both at the macrocosm and the microcosm. This works perfectly due to which the universe functions as one organism. This law that works at the cosmic level also works at the action-reaction levels of the microcosm – the law of *karma*. *Karma* includes both the physical laws and moral laws which are called *dharma*. These special laws govern the actions of the individual, both the *karma* and *karma-phalam* [fruit of *karma*], at the physical and moral level. The scientists study only the physical laws and not the moral laws, the cosmic laws and special law of *karma*, who is Bhagawan, who is invisible and all pervading. So each time I do a action (*karma*) it will produce a result *karma-phalam* which is determined by the laws of *karma*. When we say laws of *karma* gives the result, we change the laws to “Lord”. For every action, the Lord presiding over the laws of *karma* will give the result. The Bhagawan is *karma-phala datta* [giver of the fruit of action]. I am a *karma karta* [doer of action] while God is *karma-phala datta*. Shorten it I am *karta* and God is *datta* and so my relation to God is *karta-datta sambandamah*, doer-giver relationship. This relation is activated when I am involved in action. I keep on doing actions and God keeps on giving results. Generally, caught in *karma*, we ignore this fact; but a *karma yogi* is one who remembers this *karta-datta sambandam*. I am constantly aware of the doer-giver relationship and the invocation or dedication of my actions is called *Ishwara arpanam bhavana*. This is instruction two: **invoke the relation between you and God.**

3. The third instruction is: *nir-asih* [Have no expectations]

Asih means expectation with regard to future, expectation to *karma-phalam*. Expectation is natural to every human being. Expectation is useful when you are planning an action. Suppose if you plan today’s programme, *puja* to begin at 6:30 and my talk to end at 8:15 (I keep a clock) and you expect to leave this place. All our plannings are based on expectation. It is useful at the planning stage, Krishna says, but when the action happens, set aside all your expectation, *nir-asih*. Never keep any expectation or don’t dwell on the expectation. Dwelling on expectation has many disadvantages and adverse fallout. The first disadvantage is that the mind gets preoccupied with the expectation and is not available in the present for the task at

hand. If you keep on watching your watch, maybe that is why it is called watch, you don't listen. And therefore dwelling on expectation makes the pre-occupied mind lose its efficiency, a recipe for the wrong result. Therefore expectations are obstacles during the implementation of plans, not at the planning stage. Don't think of the result. The second disadvantage of keeping the expectation in the mind all the time is: we are looking at the world, people, events – and we are looking with spectacles. Most of the people and events will not measure up to our expectation. So if I look at the world, events, people through the goggles of expectation I will develop a negative attitude to creation. A pessimistic and cynical attitude and we will conclude that everyone is selfish. Our judgment will be everyone is ungrateful. We make a list of what we give to others and then complain that they don't reciprocate. Later we will extend it to Bhagawan also. We have divided the world into good or bad. I am good always (laughter) and therefore I should never suffer. We have our own expectation and we find that God is not doing it. Even God comes down in the face of our expectation. We conclude that God is unfair and unjust and so even question whether God really exists. The way our politicians and scamsters thrive, we will become negative about everything – cynical and pessimistic and our lives will become miserable. Therefore Krishna says don't have expectation to the result, for it is *jiva shristi* [individual projection] – you are living in private world. Remove the expectation and learn to live without labeling – as God *shristi* [projection, creation]

4. The fourth instruction is: *nir-mamo* [Have no mine-ness]

Each instruction is profound, worth meditating for the rest of the life. This one means: “without claiming ownership with regard to anything in creation.” Our scriptures say that everything belongs to Bhagawan (remember not someone sitting above the clouds but an intelligent all-pervading invisible principle) and I as an individual do not own anything. Legally for the sake of convenience we can own a flat, first they have ownership then they become flat! At the end of the class you can claim your chappals – ownership is only for convenience of transaction. It is very superficial, for Vedanta says don't take ownership seriously. May you remember that you don't own anything but use all things temporarily, as gifts from the Lord. I am a user of few things gifted by the Lord according to the law of karma. I must use these gifts in the pursuance of my primary goal, I should never try to cling to anything for it can be snatched anytime, including our closest and most valuable possession, our body. The God does not ask our permission before snuffing out life. He takes it without giving advance notice or appointment. He gives and He takes, not on a whim or fancy, but according to the law of karma. Remember this and only then you will have detachment. Ownership and attachment are synonymous and these will create a lot of problems. Because I don't own anything I don't have control over anything – ownership and controllership are two sides of the same coin. Therefore “*nir-mamo*” [no-mineness] means I don't own anything and hence no control over anything including my own body. It should not make us fatalistic, that everything is decided by God and what should I do? We do have “freewill” – we don't have controlling freewill but we have contributing freewill. We contribute our share to the totality. I am humble; that outcome or result is something I cannot control. Remembering this fact is *nir-mamo* (my freewill is only contributory). You go to gym every day and that's your contribution. How it will be or will it be there after five years,

is Bhagawan's edict. So keep on contributing keeping expectations out.

5. The fifth instruction – the most powerful and most difficult – is: *vigata jvarah*. [Have no anxiety]

Jvarah literally means fever. Here Krishna talks about mental fever. Mental fever is the anxiety over the result of the action that I am undertaking or going to undertake. The anxiety is *jvarah* and it is very very natural. Krishna advises: **may you neutralize this anxiety, for it reduces one's efficiency**. Actually if you follow the first four instructions properly, anxiety will be less only. And we can neutralize this further by an appropriate prayer. Most people pray, but the prayers are inappropriate. General prayer is: "O God, give me success". This is an inappropriate prayer for I will not get what I pray for, I will only get what I deserve from the law of *karma*. So praying for success is a wrong kind of prayer. Secondly in the vision of the Lord, there is no success but only *karma-phalam*. In creation only *karma-phalam* exists, success and failure are our private, our own judgement. It is our subjective interpretation; objectively there is nothing called success or failure. In God's dictionary there is nothing called success or failure, and if you pray for success HE will not understand, for these are *jiva shrusti*. Then one may ask: Can I ask for *karma-phalam*? I don't ask for success but how about asking for *karma-phalam*? It is also an inappropriate prayer for it is HIS job to give *karma-phalam*. If He keeps *karma-phalam* to himself HE will not have place to keep. The entire Vaikundam [heaven] will be stacked. Therefore HE will distribute and HE will disburse *karma-phalam*. So asking for success or *karma-phalam* is an inappropriate prayer, the only proper prayer is: **give me courage**. It is important to make these two important statements and mean them: First is, I am **willing** to undergo any *karma-phalam* that you want me to go through **cheerfully** according to the law of *karma*. Second, I am **confident** to go through any *karma-phalam* that you made me to go through. I must mean these statements not at the level of lip service but from the innermost heart. This requires a lot of courage, especially in duress circumstances. I pray for that courage and according to scripture having that courage is success. That I am willing to go through and I am confident of facing any situation in front of me. How long? As long as I am tossed around by *karma-phalam*. And when I build this courage in the mind, my anxiety will come down. Anxiety is inversely proportional to courage – lesser the courage greater the anxiety and greater the courage lesser the anxiety. Therefore I develop courage in the mind before the result comes. Once *karma-phalam* comes then this courage will be converted into mental strength to face the result. It is courage before result and mental strength after the result comes in. A *karma* yogi does not have anxiety, there is always *samatvam* [equanimity] and no anxiety. There is no labeling of the creation. I don't say life is terrible, I have a wonderful smile or a neutral attitude. This is equanimity or poise.

To summarize, these are the five principles:

1. – Keep *moksha* as primary goal.
2. – Dedicate every action to the Lord by invoking doer-giver relationship.
3. – Keep OFF all the expectation from the mind.
4. – I am not the owner or controller, I am only the user and contributor.
5. – Learn to say from your heart, you are willing and confident of going through

every experience – any *karma-phalam* [fruit of *karma*].

If these five injunctions are followed then one is called a *karma yogi*. *Upasana yoga* is mental rehearsal of *karma yoga*. *Upasana* means “mentally being in the presence of the Lord” – the Lord in any form we like. In the prayer I recollect all the five principles and resolve that I will implement them throughout the day. “O God, I seek your grace to follow. Above all I seek courage from you so that I am ready to face any blessed thing.” This courageous life I invoke in *upasana* (remaining mentally near the Lord).

If I practice *karma yoga* and *upasana yoga* then I am ready for *jñana yoga* which is nothing but a spiritual education programme under the guidance of a *guru*. Then my delusion goes away, *jivatma-paramatma* delusion goes away. *Jiva-paramatma aikyam*. *Sadhana yoga* will lead to *sadhya yoga* which is the ultimate success of life. It is this success we seek on this auspicious New Year day.

With this I conclude my talk and wish you all a happy, healthy, prosperous, yogic new year 2013.



Posted by A.Sathyannarayanan at 10:58 PM Saturday, January 5, 2013



Welcome Message

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Please note that there is no substitute for Guru Mukha Dvara Shravanam and this is the best way to appreciate the beauty of the topics and relish the clarity of delivery.

But for the benefit of others, these lectures are available in text format. Every attempt has been made to transcribe the lecture as accurately as possible. Any inadvertent errors are purely attributable to the blog owner.

Hari Om

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I am a student of Vedanta. Through this blog, I want everyone to benefit from the wonderful teachings of Swāmi Paramārthānanda.

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