

Yoga—Its Basis, Practice & Benefits

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Yogena Chittasya
Padena Vacham
Malam Sarirasya
Cha Vaidyakena |
Yopakarottam Pravaram
Muninam
Patanjalim Pranjali
Ranatosmi ||

The term Yoga is being used quite extensively these days to encompass a variety of practices for different ends. Physical exercises, meditation, certain kriyas, mental attitude towards work and results are some of them, widely propagated and practised. This series of articles is aimed at bringing the traditional concept and practice of Yoga as formulated by the great Patanjali.

Patanjali was a Rishi. A Rishi is one who expresses Truth as experienced by him (Rahasassatyavachasaha). The Vedas contain such expressions of various Rishis. Act-



PATANJALI

ally The Vaidic religion is known as Arsa, or those of Rishis. The scriptures, 'seen' or expressed by the Rishis are called Vedas.

The Vaidic revelations (Darsana) belonged to two categories. Pravritti Marga which enunciated the various religious rites (Karma) and associated Mantras, leading to worldly happiness and or-

derly life (dharma). There was the other group of Rishis who promulgated the Nivritti Marga, the way of salvation, a freedom from rebirth, sorrow, and suffering and attainment of peace at heart. Janaka, Yagnavalkya, Kapila and of course Patanjali are foremost among them, apart from the less known whose immortal words arising out of intense Samadhi are to be found in the vast Vaidic literature, especially the Upanisads.

THE TWO PATHS

Of the six Vaidic Darsanas, Yoga is perhaps the most comprehensive. Yoga, Samkya and Vedanta form a close group of Darsanas and reveal the height of Vaidic wisdom. Even though there are some minor differences among these systems, one with a deep study will be able to easily reconcile the apparent differ-

ences. There is no mistaking the general direction of these enquiries or the similarity of experiences, all arising out of immense absorption in Truth (Samadhi):

Human happiness is at its highest when the people have good health, express themselves well and have clear minds. Bhartruhari, the great philosopher and grammarian emphasises the need for the purity of three human activities (Trikaranasuddhi) and refers to three great Sastras, viz. Medicine (Vaidya or Chikitsa) Grammar (Pada or Vyakarana), and Yoga as the respective means for the purification of the three karanas, viz. of Body (kaya), Speech (vak) and Mind (Manas)

SUTRA LANGUAGE

And Maharishi Patanjali is believed to have written the treatise on these three subjects. Legend has it that when an ancient people suffering from the defilements of their activities, prayed Ishwara for guidance, Patanjali in the form of a serpent fell into their praying arms (Patam + Anjali) and wrote these Sastras, as is evident in the Dhyanasloka appearing in the beginning of this article. The Yogasastra itself is written in cryptic aphorisms (Sutra) in four Chapters. Being used by a grammarian, the Sutra language of Patan-

jali is of a very high order and the choice of words is admirable. The system is comprehensive, showing the place, practice and the benefits of many sub-systems of Yoga, such as Gnana, Bhakti, Karma, Kriya, Laya, Hatha, Mantra, Japa, Raja etc. The 195 Sutras have been commented upon (Bhashya) in detail by Rishi Vyasa and further elucidations (Vivarana) have been made by Vachaspati Misra. Another vivarana in the name of Sankaracharya also is available.

ON THE WORD 'YOGA'

The most common interpretation of the word yoga is integration, derived from the root Yuj (Yujir Yoge). Such an integration would require two separate things or principles (Tattwa) and a movement between each other, necessitating activity in at least either of the two principles. Yoga is, therefore, both the means and the actual merger of separate Tattwas. On this basis, many yoga systems have come into vogue—some Vaidic and some others non-Vaidic. The conjoining of Jivatma and Paramatma is Yoga, as per Srimad Bhagawata. There are other schools which proclaim that the conjoining of Prana with Apana, Sakthi in Muladhara and Siva in Sahasrara or mind and self as the goal of Yoga and enunciate the means for such

an integration.

However, suffice it to say that all systems basically recognize that activity is necessary for Yoga and all the constituent principles have a certain



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This is the first of a series of articles he is writing on the subject for the I R.

power (Sakthi) and there is no Tattwa without its distinguishing characteristics (gunas).

THE THREE PRINCIPLES

Patanjali, in the treatise on Yoga, recognizes three distinct principles (Tattwa). They are (i) Purusha, (ii) Prakriti (iii) Iswara. It is necessary to dilate on these three a little more.

Purusha literally means the 'indwelling principle'. It is also known as the observer (Drasta), the experienter (Bhokta), the owner (Swami or Atma), the living entity (Jiva), intelligence energy (Chithi Sakthi) etc. According to Patanjali, the self or Atman is total intelligence (Drisimatra) pure (Suddha) and nonchanging; however, is constrained to oversee the presentation of the mind (Chitta Vrithi). In normal existence, therefore, even though Purusha is different from the engulfing mind, it is not entirely free of it.

Prakriti or created principle is the second. Drishyam, Bhogyam, are the other words used to express this principle. It includes everything the observer (Drashta) experiences. It is the phenomenal world, made up of its five basic gross aspects (Panchabhuta) of Space (Akasa), and matter

in the form of energy (Agni), air (Vayu) fluid (ap) and solid (Prithvi). It includes the five instruments of perception (Gnanendriyas) and the five instruments of action (Karmendriyas) and the mind (Chitta) which is ever-changing with three qualities which are clarity (Prakasa), activity (kriya) and inertia (Sthithi) It could be observed that even the mind, which could be mistaken for one's self is actually part of the observed as all the mental modification (Chittavrihi) including the 'I - exist - feeling' (Asmita) are overseen by the indwelling Purusha. Prakriti can be of no use except to the Atman and the individual soul (Jiva) makes use of this principle either for experiences (Bhoga) or renunciation (Apavarga). The dichotomy (Viveka) of Atmic power (chitisakthi) and mental power (chittasakthi) is the greatest revelation of the Upanisadic philosophies, and is of immense practical use to the spiritual aspirant.

WARA

Unlike Sankya, especially the Niriswara Samkya philosophers, Yoga recognizes the principle "Iswara" or the Universal Lord. The Isawasa Upanisad describes Iswara, even though to get a hang of the term is beyond the comprehension of many minds. According to Patanjali, Iswara is one special Purusha (Purusha

vishesha), unaffected by afflictions (klesa), deed (karma), result of action (vipaka) or the desire for action (Asaya). In him are contained all potential knowledge or omniscience (Sarvagna Bijam). He is the first teacher (Purveshanguru) but unlimited by time. He is known by the repetition (Japa) of His sacred word Pranava, the japa being done by contemplating on the meaning of the mystic syllable. Such contemplation removes all interferences (antaraya) in the path of Yoga.

FIVE MENTAL LEVELS

Vvasa, the commentator on the Sutras, classifies mental levels of humanity into five. At one extreme is the Kshipta or demented condition, which group lacks concentration. There are then those who are in the covered or totally infatuated stage (Muda). Such people do not admit even the separate existence of the distinct indwelling intelligence principle (Purusha) or the all - pervading unlimited cosmic principle, Iswara. They live by the dictates of the senses and the undifferentiating mind and are afflicted. The third, the restless stage (vikshipta) is one in which the individual leans towards realizing his true nature, but is constantly distracted by the senses and a mind afflicted by acquired habits (Samskara) arising out of

beginningless previous karmas. They alternate between several experiences (Bhoga) and renunciation (Apavarga). This spiritual restlessness is discernible in all who are dissatisfied with mundane and phenomenal existence. Such people do occasionally get into a state of total absorption in a higher principle or a state of Samadhi. but such experiences are few and far between and according to Vyasa will not come under the term Yoga. Without the grace of Ishwara and practice of renunciation, they continue to be

in a state of restlessness. However, when they take up the practice of Yoga, they are known as Yogaruda, those wanting to tread the path of Yoga.

SAMADHI : TWO KINDS

Two other levels, which fall into Yoga are called focussed (Ekagra) and unaffected or protected (Nirodha). These actually lead to two kinds of samadhi, one in which the mental energies are absorbed in a single item or object. The other Samadhi is one in which the mental energy (Chittasakthi)

remains undisturbed by senses or samskaras. This is called



Nirodha stage and is the ultimate objective of Yogasastras as propounded by Patanjali. This Nirodha is beyond the five animate mental states (Ckittavrithi) in which the mind exists all through life. What are those normal mental states, which the Yog transcends to reach Nirodha? What then happens to Chitta and Purusha? Are there Yoga benefits other than the transcendental?

