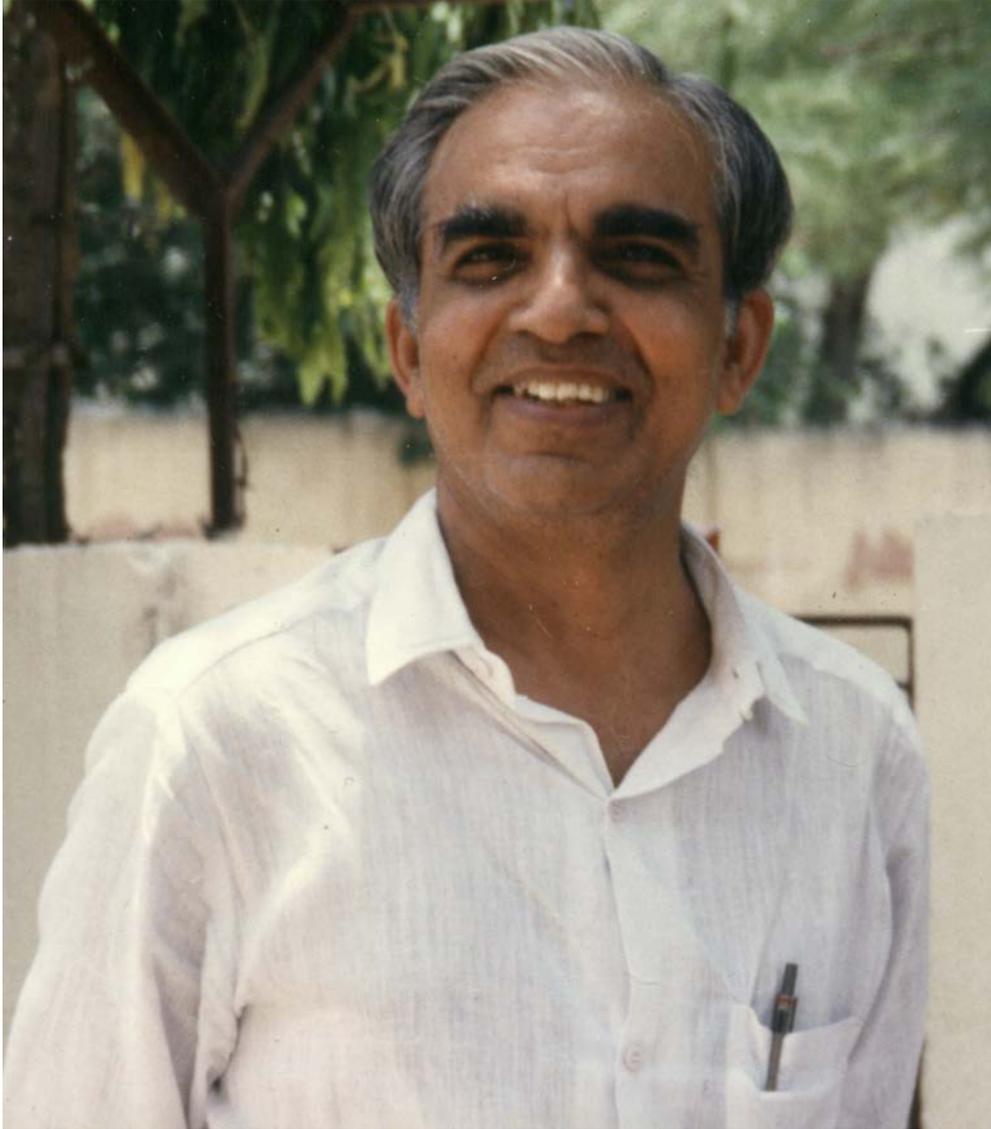


Śraddhā in the Yoga Sūtra



*"Śraddhā is essential for progress, whether in Yoga or any other endeavour.
It is a feeling that cannot be expressed or intellectually discussed.*

*It, however, is a feeling that is not always uncovered in every person.
When absent or weak, it is evident through the lack of stability and focus in a person.*

*Where present and strong, it is evident through the commitment, perseverance and
enthusiasm the person exhibits. For such a person, life is meaningful."*

TKV Desikachar talks on Śraddhā in the light of the Yoga Sūtra at the KYM and responds to questions.

The Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali deals with the mind. It examines the different functions of the mind and provides means to modify these functions so that it serves the person in a very constructive way.

The means by which certain qualitative changes in the mind are brought about is called Sādhanā. There is also the possibility that certain individuals may develop such a mind without effort. That is, the qualities are inherent in that individual and mature on their own to manifest one day in the form of some extraordinary capacities. However, such persons are few.

For the rest of us, the same changes are possible but it is a question of time and practice. The end result is the same, it is only the time taken to achieve it that will differ.

Patañjali calls the first way, where the change occurs without effort, Bhava Pratyaya and the second way, the Upāya Pratyaya. Upāya is to go near, by following the instructions of the teacher. Śraddhā is the fundamental Upāya.

In this context, Śraddhā is conviction. The strong conviction that one will be helped by following the means specified. When there is Śraddhā, the person is not disappointed on failing to get immediate benefits. He is sure that it is only a question of time and so the failures on the path do not reduce his enthusiasm or his efforts. On the contrary, where the Śraddhā is total, the person doubles his efforts and tries again. When difficulties arise, it is Śraddhā which provides the energy to pursue. The energy or Vīrya, as it is called 'in the Yoga Sūtra, comes from within and has Śraddhā as its source.

Vyāsa, in his commentary to the Yoga Sūtra, says that Śraddhā is like the mother. Śraddhā will protect the person who has it, just as the mother protects her child. It will ensure that the person does not go astray. As long as the mother is near, the child is safe. Quite often, in life, we are in situations where we think we are acting in the right manner but this is actually not so. So we need something to protect us. It is Śraddhā that will protect.

Through Śraddhā we get the Vīrya to pursue to the end and if we hold firm to this Śraddhā we always have the Smṛti, the memory of our original goal. This is very important as with progress on the path to the goal, we get distracted by or satisfied with some of the gains made that were previously not within our capacity. It is through Śraddhā that we have the Smṛti, the memory of the original goal, that prevents us from being satisfied with anything less than what we started out for.

The importance of the role of Smṛti can be seen from the fact that Patañjali has devoted an entire chapter to the various powers, called Siddhi in the Yoga Sūtra, that can be acquired on the way to the goal. These can divert the person from the original goal, namely, freedom from repeated Duḥkha.

*The Sūtra on Śraddhā is Chapter One verse 20
śraddhā vīrya smṛti samādhi prajñā pūrvakaḥ itareṣām !*

Śraddhā leads to Vīrya. If with the Vīrya there is also the Smṛti, then Samādhi is only a matter of time. Samādhi is a state of clarity where the understanding is without any distortion. When there is this clarity there is no Duḥkha. This is the goal of Yoga and Patañjali has stated that the first step to this goal is Śraddhā, firm conviction.

Patañjali also discusses the different levels of Śraddhā in:

*Chapter One verse 21
tīvra saṃvegānām āsannaḥ !*

*Chapter One verse 22
mṛdu madhya adhimātratvāt tataḥ api viśeṣaḥ !*

The level of Śraddhā in every person is not the same. In the case of a person who has very strong Śraddhā, Tīvra Śraddhā, very little time is lost in the progress to the goal. In cases where the Śraddhā is moderate, weak or lacking, the hurdles are more difficult to surmount and the goal will be correspondingly difficult to reach.

Sometimes the Śraddhā is there but circumstances prevent the person from pursuing the chosen line. The responsibilities of caring for a family may prevent a person from devoting more time to the study of Yoga or any other subject. It is important to know that Śraddhā is not measured by the time spent. It is the quality of the time spent that is important.

Where does Śraddhā sit in a human being? Is it a part of the mind?

No. It is beyond the mind. It is Śraddhā which instructs the mind. It comes from the hidden depths of the Saṃskāra and Vāsana to influence one's actions.

In the Brahmānandavallī of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, Puruṣa is described as having five aspects: Annamaya, Prāṇamaya, Manomaya, Vijñānamaya and Ānandamaya. In this order, at a higher level than the mind is the Vijñānamaya. Śraddhā is the crown of the Vijñānamaya. It can even be said to be the same nature as Puruṣa.

In the Yogavallī, T Krishnamacharya's commentary on the Yoga Sūtra, Śraddhā has been seen in a different, very interesting way. In it, he has said that Śraddhā is a symbol for a special meditation and he calls this meditation, Ahaṃ Graha Upāsana. Aham is the I, Graha is to grasp and Upāsana is to stay near. Where a person wants to grasp the true nature of the I, it is called Ahaṃ Graha Upāsana.

Aham is the true identity of each one of us, which is never affected by all the errors in life and the defects we are exposed to. It is pure and free from influence. Now, if a person can touch this, nothing can happen to him.

So, when a person begins this meditation, Ahaṃ Graha Upāsana, he will gradually move away from the defects of his system and reach that which is pure and free from defects. Such a person will experience Ānanda and will be untouched by all other experience.

So, my father, using the Upaniṣad has presented Śraddhā to be a type of meditation where a person tries to find their centre, the Aham.

He has also said that this meditation is very difficult, especially in modern times. A simpler solution is required and this is offered by Patañjali in the Sūtra following those on Śraddhā.

*Chapter One verse 23
īśvara praṇidhānāt vā !*

Instead of meditating on the I, have faith in Īśvara and offer everything you do to Īśvara. Have Śraddhā in Īśvara. Then, nothing the person does will affect him as he does nothing for himself and he even sees Īśvara as the doer of all his actions.

Question One:

Is Śraddhā in the chosen direction arrived at through reason?

Response from TKV Desikachar:

There must be logic but more than logic there must be feeling. This feeling is difficult to explain. The feeling is for an idea, an activity or a person. Through it, the person is convinced that he can count on this and he follows the direction it leads him in, with enthusiasm.

In ancient days, Śraddhā was the basis for marriage and the choice of the partner. There is a risk involved as there is in every decision we take. But the greater the Śraddhā, the less the risk.

So, I would not equate Śraddhā to logic. Logic may be a part of the decision making process but it is not Śraddhā. It, Śraddhā is a feeling, that this is the best for me. This feeling may develop in a person at any time and may even result in a total change of direction.

Something like my decision to learn under my father. Till that time, I had never shown any interest in learning from him. I was not interested in religion, rituals or Indian philosophy and culture. I was trained as an engineer and had a successful career ahead of me.

But one day I saw something which opened my eyes to the fact that he possessed some extraordinary capabilities and I was inspired to learn under him.

Question Two:

There is this incident you are aware of; of a foreigner who came to India, studied Vaiṣṇavism and even became a Vaiṣṇavite, adopting all its practices faithfully. But a few years later, he gave it up to follow another Indian tradition. Is there a flaw in this or is it necessary to go deep into a chosen direction before knowing that it is not appropriate for oneself?

Response from TKV Desikachar:

Here, we are talking about somebody seeking something without knowing what he is seeking; and also seeking without examining his own roots. Today in the West, they reject their roots. They have their reasons for doing so. At the same time they feel that they cannot be nothing. They need some spiritual support and so they come to the East. They are attracted to one of the many traditions they see. There is Rāga here. This is not Śraddhā. When the mind is unstable and dominated by Rāga and Dveṣa it will follow that which attracts it till something else comes along that seems, now, more attractive.

There is an old saying,

avyavasthita cittānām prasādo 'pi bhayankaraḥ |

This means that for persons of unstable mind, even the presence of God can be disturbing.

I had said that Śraddhā is a feeling. But this feeling should not be based on excitement but on Prasanna, a feeling of calmness and tranquility.

Question Three:

Does the absence of progress necessarily indicate absence of Śraddhā?

Response from TKV Desikachar:

Yes. As Jiddhu Krishnamurti would say:

"If the person is hungry he will find the food.

If he has not found the food it is because he is not hungry enough."

Śraddhā is the source of motivation. If a person has not progressed in what he or she has set out to do, it means that the motivation is weak and that the Śraddhā behind the motivation is weak.

Question Four:

The Yoga Sutra is about the mind. Śraddhā is something more than the mind. What is the effect of Śraddhā on the mind'!

Response from TKV Desikachar:

The greater the Śraddhā, the more stable the mind.

Śraddhā brings about automatically, a state of mind which remains steady even when provoked strongly. So if I want to have a state of mind called Yoga, all that is required is Śraddhā.

To reach the Yoga state of Citta Vṛtti Nirodha we are either born with a mind that on its own, without the person's effort, evolves to this state. Or, we follow the Upāya Pratyaya, where the person consciously makes the effort and follows certain practices.

The first step of this process is Śraddhā. Anything that strengthens the Śraddhā: the association with the teacher. the environment - **will** assure progress in yoga. And anything that weakens the Śraddhā: Rāga, Dveṣa, Abhiniveśā - **will** take one away from Citta Vṛtti Nirodha.

There is a common enough situation where a person wants to learn and goes to a teacher. Upset by the moods or occasional odd behaviour of the teacher, he loses interest in the learning and goes away. Here the Śraddhā to learn is weak and is further weakened by their inability to distinguish between the person and his teaching.

Ancient masters would therefore test a student's Śraddhā by putting obstacles in the path, being indifferent to their aspirations and assigning them work far removed from what they had come to learn. Once sure of the Śraddhā they would begin the teaching. For, without it no progress can be made.

Question Five:

When a person begins to do something with Śraddhā, with conviction, why does this very often dissipate?

Response from TKV Desikachar:

Because Śraddhā influences the mind from within. But the mind has also to continually interact with the external. In the course of these interactions, the mind will often come in contact with situations that evoke other responses that are contrary to the original conviction. When the Śraddhā, conviction, is not strong enough, the mind will follow the contrary response. Over time the original conviction may even be forgotten.

A person may want to keep his voice in good shape and for this reason decide to stop having ice-cream. He may even faithfully follow this for a while. Then somebody brings home a carton of a new ice-cream recently introduced, of a quality never eaten in India before. His interest is aroused and he finds many reasons why the ice-cream can be had: 'the friend has gone through so much difficulty to get it for me', 'it is a special occasion and the whole atmosphere of the occasion will be spoilt if I refuse', 'I will just sample it once to know what its like' and so on. The voice is forgotten, and the person eats the ice-cream thereby strengthening the contrary response and weakening the Śraddhā.

Question Six:

The Yoga Sūtra gives many techniques to discipline the mind. But Śraddhā is something other than the mind. How does Yoga help one develop Śraddhā?

Response from TKV Desikachar:

I would like to place the horse and the cart in the right order. Śraddhā will give life to all the means that are in the Yoga Sutra. The greater the Śraddhā, the more meaning there is in the techniques such as Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, Dhyānam, Bhāvana and all the others. Without Śraddhā, these techniques have little effect on the state of the mind and the progress to Citta Vṛtti Nirodha.

However, sometimes some minor benefits that we get through Āsana or Prāṇāyāma practice, open up the Śraddhā within us. Śraddhā is within each of us but is covered. It could be any experience that uncovers it.

Once it is there, Śraddhā can be strengthened by seeing for oneself the benefits of practice or by the validation of the teacher's words through one's own experience. When my father would tell me that a particular Prāṇāyāma would slow my pulse or that another would quicken it, I would practice and find that my pulse actually became slower or faster. This strengthened my conviction that he was an authentic teacher and knew what he was talking about.

Question Seven:

T Krishnamacharya has also interpreted Śraddhā to be Ahaṃ Graha Upāsana, meditation on the true nature of the I. Can Smṛti be the memory of the true I, the Ahaṃ that T Krishnamacharya refers to?

Response from TKV Desikachar:

Here I would consider the Smṛti to be the Smṛti of the Upadeśa.

Let us consider the case of a person who wants to have the Upāsana of the Aham. He has no experience of the Aham. It is beyond the mind. At the same time, he wants to make a beginning. What should he do?

They go to a master who will give them a procedure appropriate to them. The master will tell them where to start and what to do. They will begin with things that the person is familiar with and has some understanding of. Slowly, step-by-step, the master will lead them to deeper and deeper levels of understanding of themselves till finally they have the contact with the true I.

A beautiful example of this progression is found in the Bhṛguvallī of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad where in answer to the student's question of 'who am I', the master begins the student on the meditation: Aham Annam, I am food. The student meditates and finds that this is not the whole truth. He is then asked to meditate on: Aham Prāṇam, I am breath. He meditates and finds that this too is not entirely true. He is led to meditate on more and more subtle aspects of the Self till he finally realizes the truth.

At each stage, the student meditates on what the master has instructed him in. The Smṛti must therefore be the Smṛti of the Upadeśa. It cannot be the Smṛti of the Aham. The person is initially too far removed from the Aham and meditation on it will only be on what he imagines the Aham to be. What he imagines may have nothing to do with the true Aham and so could have negative consequences.

Question Eight:

The Svadharma of the mother is to look after her children. And she does this with Śraddhā, a deep instinct to love and protect. Can we therefore say that Śraddhā will tell us where our svadharma lies?

Response from TKV Desikachar:

There is a mutuality in the relationship between Svadharma and Śraddhā. Each influence the other. When a person is clear about their Svadharma and acts accordingly, their Śraddhā is strengthened. On the other hand, Śraddhā will reveal one's Svadharma.

- Originally published by the KYM Darśanam August 1995