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## YOGA AND THE QUINTESSENTIAL SEARCH FOR HOLINESS

### The Purpose of Yoga

The very word *yoga* has to do with *holiness*. *Yoga* derives from the root *yuj* which means to unite, to integrate and to make whole. *Holiness*, on the other hand is also derived from wholeness. Neither *yoga* nor *holiness* has much to do with pious religiosity. Both are related to a search for right being and for a relationship with the whole. Partiality and fragmentation-inner and outer-are the cause of sorrow, illusion, violence and of sin. The search for wholeness itself is holy and sacred. However, the sacred attitude to life is constantly menaced by forgetfulness and has to be recovered again and again. All spiritual effort is for the purpose of that recovery, for re-membering the fragmented self and for abiding in the state of recollection.

It should be stressed right at the outset that the point of view underlying yoga theory and practice originates from above, that is to say, from the vision of the highest possible state of consciousness. Yoga is a supra-human (*apauruṣeya*) revelation - from the realm of the gods. Mythologically, it is said that the great God Śiva himself taught yoga to his beloved Pārvati for the sake of humanity. It is not something forged or devised, or even understood by the human mind, however intelligent such a mind may be. It is not validated or refuted by human reasoning; on the contrary, the relative sanity or health of a mind is measured by the extent to which it accords with what the accomplished sages, transformed by the practice of yoga, say. Yoga is based on a vision from the *third eye*, relative to whose clarity the two usual eyes see only shadows.

However, it is important to emphasize that no mere *faith*, certainly nothing opposed to *knowledge*, is needed in yoga; what is in fact required is the utmost exertion of the whole of the human being-mind,

heart, and body—for the practice which would lead to a total transformation of being, a change not less than in a species mutation. Thus, yoga not only brings the vision from the third eye of Śiva and of the sages for us to receive, but aims at helping us develop and open the third eye in ourselves so that in reality we may share the spiritual vision of Śiva and the sages. This is conveyed by the etymology of the word *yoga*: mentioned earlier. When a person's body-mind is harnessed to the Spirit (*Puruṣa*, *Ātman*, *Brahman*), which is as much within a human being as outside, the person is in yoga.

Yoga is religion as well as *science* and *art* since it is concerned with being (*sat*), knowing (*jñāna*), and doing (*karma*). The aim of yoga, however, is beyond these three, as well as beyond any opposites that they imply.<sup>1</sup> Yoga aims at *mokṣa*, which is unconditioned and uncaused freedom; by its very nature this state of freedom is beyond the dualities of being-nonbeing; knowledge-ignorance, and activity-passivity. The way to *mokṣa* is yoga, which serves as a path, a discipline, and integration.

Yoga requires the radical transformation of a human being from a natural and actual form to the perfect and real form. The *prākṛta* (literally, natural, vulgar, unrefined) state is one in which a person compulsively acts in reaction to the forces of *prakṛti* (nature, causality, materiality) which are active both outside a human being and inside. Thus the common human being, whose actions are determined by the *law of karma*—the law of action and reaction—is a slave of the mechanical forces of nature. Through yoga a person can become *saṁskṛta* (literally well-formed, cultured, refined), no longer wholly at the mercy of natural forces and inclinations. The procedure of yoga corresponds to the root meaning of the word *education*: it helps draw out what in fact already is in the person but was not perceivable in the unpolished form. The progressive bringing out of The Real Person (*Puruṣa*) within an aspirant is much like the releasing of a figure from an unshaped stone.

The undertaking of yoga concerns the entire person, resulting in the reshaping of the mind, the body, and the emotions; in short in a *new birth*. Unlike in sculpture, the remolding involved in yoga is

1. In this connection, see R. Ravindra, "Is Religion Psychotherapy?—An Indian View", *Religious Studies* 14, 1978, 389-397.

essentially from the inside out, for the yogi himself is the artist, the stone, and the tools. Lest this analogy be misunderstood to suggest that yoga leads to a rugged individualism in which a human being is the maker of his own destiny and there is nothing above him, it should be remarked that the freedom a yogi aspires to is less a freedom *for* himself, and more a freedom *from* himself.

From a strict metaphysical point of view, the yogi *himself* cannot be said to be the artist of his life; the real initiative belongs only to *Brahman* who is lodged in the heart of everyone. A person does not create the state of freedom; if one is properly prepared, and does not insist on possessing and controlling everything, that person can let surface, and be possessed by, what is deep within. A radical transformation of an aspirant cannot be brought about by any effort or practice, as the classical text of yoga, the *Yogasūtra* (4.2-3), reminds us. It is an unfolding of the person's potential tendency—just as a mango grows from a mango seed. The practice and discipline are needed only for removing the obstacles to this unfolding, just as the labour of a gardener removes the weeds for the sake of a healthy crop.

### **The Body and the Embodied**

Yoga begins from a recognition of the human situation: from being aware of the human bondage to nature and the consequent suffering. Since our internal nature is assumed to follow the same principles as external nature, yoga proceeds by focusing on knowledge of oneself. Self-knowledge may be said to be both the essential method and the essential goal of yoga. Self-knowledge is clearly a relative matter, depending not only on the depth and clarity of insight, but also on what is seen as the *self* to be known. A progressive change from the identification of oneself as a body (including the heart and the mind) to the identification of oneself as inhabiting a body is the most crucial development in yoga. Ancient and modern Indian languages reflect this perspective in the expressions used to describe a person's death: in contrast to the usual English expression of *giving up the ghost*, one *gives up the body*. It is not the body that has the Spirit, but the Spirit that has the body. The yogi identifies himself less with the *body* and more with the *embodied*.

But this identification of the person in oneself with something other than the body-mind and the attendant freedom from the body-mind is possible only through a proper functioning and restructuring of the body and the mind. Here it is useful to retain the Sanskrit word *śarīra* in order to steer clear of the modern Western philosophic dilemma called the 'mind-body problem'. Although *śarīra* is usually translated as *body*, it means the whole psychosomatic complex of the body, mind, and heart.<sup>2</sup> *Śarīra* is both the instrument of transformation as well as the mirror indicating it. The way a person sits, walks, feels and thinks, can help in knowing the subtler self; the knowing of this self is then reflected in the way the person sits, walks, feels and thinks.

*Śarīra*, which is *prakṛti* at a microcosmic scale, is the medium necessary for the completion and manifestation of the inner spiritual being, which itself can be understood as microcosmic *Brahman* (literally, *The Vastness*) whose *body* is the whole of the cosmos, subtle as well as gross. There is a complete correspondence between the microcosmos which is a human being, and the megalo-cosmos; the more developed a person is, the more he can also correspond to the deeper and more subtle aspects of the cosmos. Only a fully developed human being (*mahāpuruṣa*) mirrors completely the entire creation. To view the *śarīra*, or the world, as a hindrance rather than an opportunity is akin to regarding the rough stone as an obstruction to the finished figure. *Śarīra* is the substance from which each one of us makes a work of art, according to our ability to respond to the inner spiritual (which is to say arising from the Spirit) urge and initiative. *Śarīra* belongs to *prakṛti* and includes what are ordinarily called psychic, organic, and inorganic processes. The higher the level of manifestation, the greater the freedom; ultimately the Spirit is totally free, and the spiritual impulse -which does not *arise* from the

2. *Śarīra* here has the same import as *flesh* in the *Gospel According to St. John*, for example in *John 1:14* where it is said that "The Word became flesh and dwelt in us". In this connection, see R. Ravindra, *The Yoga of the Christ in the Gospel According to St. John* (Shaftesbury, England: Element Books, 1990). The important point, both in the Indian context and in *John* is that the spiritual element, called, *Puruṣa*, *Ātman* or *Logos* (*Word*) is above the whole of the psychosomatic complex of a human being, and is not to be identified with *mind*.

individual but rather *descends* into the individual – is towards more and more freedom.

### **Seeing through the Organs of Perception**

Although there are many kinds of yogas, such as *karma yoga* (integration through action), *bhakti yoga* (union through love and devotion), *jñāna yoga* (yoking through knowledge) and others, the Indian tradition has in general maintained that there is only one central yoga, with one central aim of harnessing the entire body-mind to the purposes of the Spirit. Different yogas arise owing to the varying emphasis on the methods and procedures adopted by different teachers and schools. The most authoritative text of yoga is regarded to be the *Yogasūtra* -compiled by Patanjali sometime between the 2nd century B.C.E. and the 4th century C.E. from the material already long familiar to the gurus of Indian spirituality. It is clearly stated by Patanjali that clear seeing and knowing are functions of *Puruṣa* (The Person) and not of the mind. The mind is confined to the modes of judging, comparing, discursion, association, imagination, dreaming, memory through which it clings to the past and future dimensions of time. With these functions and qualities the mind is limited in scope and cannot know the objective truth about anything. The mind is not the true knower: it can calculate, make predictions in time, draw inferences, quote authority, make hypotheses or speculate about the nature of reality, but it cannot see objects directly, from the inside, as they really are in themselves.

In order to allow direct seeing to take place, the mind which by its very nature attempts to mediate between the object and the subject has to be quietened. When the mind is totally silent and totally alert, both the real subject (*Puruṣa*) and the real object (*prakṛti*) are simultaneously present to it: the seer is there, what is to be seen is there, and seeing takes place without distortion. Then there is no comparing or judging, no misunderstanding, no fantasizing about things displaced in space and time, no dozing off in heedlessness and no clinging to past knowledge or experience; in short, there are no distortions introduced by the organs of perception, namely the mind, the feelings, and the senses. There is simply the *seeing* in the present living moment in the eternal now. That is the state of perfect and free attention, *kaivalya*. *Kaivalya* is an aloneness

of seeing and not an aloneness of the seer separated from the seen. This it is often misunderstood by the interpreters of the theory of yoga. In *kaivalya*, there is only the *seeing*, in its purity, without any fluctuations of attention, and without any fear or desire. In this state, the Seer sees *through* the organs of perception (including the mind) rather than *with* them just as a person sees through an instrument such as a microscope; the instrument does not see.<sup>3</sup>

It is of utmost importance from the point of view of yoga to distinguish clearly between the mind (*chitta*) and the real Seer (*Puruṣa*). *Chitta* pretends to know, but *chitta* is what can be known and seen. In other words, *chitta* is an *object* rather than a *subject*. However, it can be an instrument of knowledge. This misidentification of the seer and the seen, of the person with the organs of perception, is the fundamental error from which all other problems and sufferings arise (*Yogasūtra* 2:3-17). It is from this fundamental ignorance that *asmitā* (*I-am-this-ness, egoism*) arises, creating a limitation by particularization. *Asmitā* says 'I am this', or 'I am that' thus identifying itself with a limited being and cutting itself from the vast reservoir of Being, of *Puruṣa* who says 'I AM'. From this isolation and egoimportance comes the strong desire to perpetuate the specialization of oneself and the resulting wish to control all else. The sort of 'knowledge' which is based on this basic misidentification is always coloured with pride, a tendency to control and fear.

The means for freedom from the fundamental sorrow-causing ignorance is an unceasing vision of discernment (*viveka khyāti*); such vision alone can permit transcendental insight (*prajñā*) to arise. Nothing can force the appearance of this insight; all one can do is to prepare the ground for it; it is the very purpose of *prakṛti* to lead to such insight, as that of a seed is to produce fruit. As already mentioned, what an aspirant needs to do in preparing the garden is to remove the weeds which choke the full development of the plant. The ground to be prepared is the entire psychosomatic organism, for it is through that *Puruṣa* sees and *prajñā* arises. The insight needs the whole organism and in its turn touches the whole

3. Some readers may recall a remark of William Blake in which he said, "We see not with the eyes but through the eyes".

organism. The mind alone will not do, nor the heart alone, nor the physical body by itself. One with dulled senses has as little possibility of coming to *prajñā* as the one with a stupid mind or hardened feelings. Agitation in any part of the entire organism causes fluctuations in attention and muddies the seeing. This is the reason why in yoga there is so much emphasis on the preparation of the body for coming to true knowledge. It is by a reversal of the usual tendencies of the organism that its agitations can be quietened, and the mind can know its right and proper place with respect to *Puruṣa*-that it is a part of the *known* rather than the *knower* (*Yogasūtra* 2:10; 4:18-20).<sup>4</sup>

### Samyama Attention and Participation in Holiness

In classical Yoga, there are eight limbs: the first five are basically concerned with a purification and preparation of the body, emotions, and breathing and acquiring the right attitude; the last three limbs are called inner limbs compared with the first five which are relatively outer. One parenthetical remark may be made about the general intellectual tendency to translate *chitta* as *consciousness*. This is not wrong; but it is partial-largely owing to the separation of *consciousness* from *conscience* in English usage. Suffice it to say here-and this is evident from the emphasis placed in the *Yogasūtra* on the first five limbs of Yoga-that there is no possibility of coming to higher consciousness without coming to higher conscience. Consciousness appears to be more connected with the mind whereas conscience is more connected with the heart. However, higher mind (*buddhi* or *nous*), which alone can apprehend higher reality, consists of elements both of a clear mind and of a compassionate heart.<sup>5</sup>

The three inner limbs of Yoga are *Dhāraṇā*, *Dhyāna*, and *Samādhi*. *Dhāraṇā* is concentration in which attention is bound to a single spot.

4. In this connection, see R. Ravindra, "Yoga: The Royal Path to Freedom", in *Hindu Spirituality: Vedas Through Vedanta*, ed. K. Sivaraman, Vol. 6 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York: Crossroads Publ., 1989) pp. 177-191.
5. In this connection, see A. H. Armstrong and R. Ravindra, "The Dimensions of the Self: *Buddhi* in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Psyche* in Plotinus," *Religious Studies* 15, 1979, pp. 327-42. (Reprinted in *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought*, edited by R. Baine Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).)

*Dhyāna*, from which is derived the Japanese *Zen* through the Chinese *Ch'an*, is contemplation or meditative absorption in which there is an uninterrupted flow of attention from the observer to the observed. In these two states, the observer acts as the center of consciousness which sees. When that center is removed, that is to say when the observing is done by *Puruṣa*, through the mind emptied of itself, that state is called *Samādhi*— a state of silence, settled intelligence, and emptied mind, in which the mind becomes that to which it attends, and reflects it truly, as it is.

The insight obtained in the state of *Samādhi* is truth-bearing *ṛtambharā*: the scope and nature of this knowledge is different from the knowledge gained otherwise, by the mind or the senses. Unlike the latter, the insight of *prajñā* reveals the unique particularity, rather than an abstract generality, of an object. Unlike the mental knowledge, in which there is an opposition between the object and the subjectivity of the mind, an opposition that inevitably leads to sorrow, the insight of *prajñā*, born of sustained vision of discernment, is said to be the *deliverer*. This insight can pertain to any object, large or small, far or near; and any time, past, present, or future. Since it is without time-sequence, it can be present everywhere at once.<sup>6</sup>

The three inner limbs of Yoga, namely, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* together constitute what is called *saṁyama* (discipline, constraint, gathering). With *saṁyama* any object can be directly perceived, because in that state the mind is like a transparent jewel which takes on the true color of the object (*Yogasūtra* 1:41). The special attention which prevails in the state of *saṁyama* can be brought to bear on any aspect of *prakṛti* which encompasses all that can be an object of perception, however subtle.

The basic research method of the science of nature according to Yoga is to bring a completely quiet mind and to wait without agitation or projection, letting the object reveal itself in its own true nature, by coloring the transparent mind with its color. This science is further extended by the principle of analogy and isomorphism between the megalocosmos and the microcosmos which is the human

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6. Light, as understood in contemporary Physics, provides a very good example of an entity which is everywhere at once.



organism, so that self-knowledge is at the same time a knowledge of the cosmos.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, at the level of the Real, what is, is equally truly subjective as well as truly objective. Thus we see through a study of classical Yoga another approach to the affirmation of the Upanishads that *Ātman* is identically the same as *Brahman*. It is wrong to suggest that Yoga is not interested in the knowledge of nature and is occupied only with self-knowledge. From the perspective of Yoga, this is an erroneous distinction to start with, simply because any self, however subtle, that can be known is a part of nature and is not distinct from it in substance or laws or principles. And the deepest self, to which true seeing and knowing belong, cannot be known; but it can be identified with. One can become that Self (*Ātman*, *Puruṣa*) and know with it, from its level, with its clarity. *Prakṛti* is not considered unreal or merely a mental projection; she is very real, and though she can overwhelm the mind with her dynamism and charms and veil the truth from it, yet in her proper place and function she exists in order to serve the Real Person (*Puruṣa*).

The procedures, methods, attitudes, and perceptions involved in Yoga are radically different from those in modern science, as are the aims of the two types of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> In a summary way, one can say that in contradistinction to modern science the knowledge in Yoga is a third eye knowledge, transformational, without violence to the object of its investigation; it is a knowledge by participation, rather than by standing apart or against the object and is ultimately for the sake of true seeing and the corresponding freedom. Such a knowledge is sacred or holy knowledge; and any action which results from this is sacred and holy action. It is important to emphasize that holiness is not merely a subjective quality; it is a property of the cosmos. It is only in the state of consciousness and conscience in which the dismembering into the subjective and objective is healed and the Real is re-membered that holiness is recalled and participated in. Any path that leads to holiness is *yoga*.

7. In this connection, see R. Ravindra, "Yoga and Knowledge", chapter 15 of *Science and Spirit*, edited by R. Ravindra (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1991).

8. In this connection, see R. Ravindra, "Perception in Physics and Yoga", *Re-Vision: Journal of Knowledge and Consciousness*, 3, 1980, 36-42.