

YOGA IN A NUTSHELL

by

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The mind is usually occupied with the world of objects. Our thoughts, right from morning till night when we enter into sleep, range over a variety of things in the world. Inasmuch as the objects are constituted differently and we cannot see a uniform arrangement of things in any considerable area of the world, it becomes necessary for the mind to adjust itself to the conditions under which these objects are placed and the characteristics which evoke a reaction from the mind.

This is to say that from morning onwards, every moment we place ourselves under a compulsion to adjust ourselves and adapt our psychological constitution to the nature of the phenomenon presented by this large area of the world of objects. It is a great strain on the part of the mind to be put to the necessity of tuning itself to conditions prevailing outside. Otherwise, the world will impinge upon it.

Nature and human society constitute, properly speaking, the world for us. The physical elements, known as the world of nature, and the world of people around us produce such an impact upon our existence and activity that for all practical purposes we may say that we are slaves of conditions imposed upon us by nature and human society.

Can this be called freedom? It is far from it. But freedom is the aim. It is the goal or the longing of every individual. We do not strive to continue as servants of somebody, not even of nature and human society. We wish to have mastery over

nature and control over social conditions so that we may be satisfactorily considered as free people. How could this be?

The onslaughts of the operations of nature and society are strong and hard enough to require an adaption by every human being, if survival is to be permitted. People who oppose nature and oppose human society may not be able even to survive, let alone be granted freedom.

There is something in the human individual which promises the possibility of the conquest of nature and the conquest of any kind of impediment that may be imposed upon it by external conditions. The very longing for freedom is a potentiality for the achievement of it. We cannot ask for a will o' the wisp or a phantasmagoria. How does the idea that we have to be finally free and ultimately liberated arise in the mind if it is impossible to achieve it?

The asking for the endless, in time as well as in space, in possession as well as in long life, is suggestive enough of a magazine of force that is scintillating, simmering, though under a stifling pressure, inside every person. To master the whole world is the desire of a person. Ordinarily, this is an impossibility.

To be supreme over all mankind, standing head and shoulders above all people, is the desire of a person. Ordinarily, this is also not possible. No man can be above all people in the world, and no one can be a master of nature. But there is a desire to achieve that. How does this desire arise? A desire that points to a nullity and a practically vacuous achievement cannot be planted in the heart of a person. This puny individual, this little frail physical personality of man seems also, at the same time, to be a temple of a power that seeks expression and wishes to manifest itself in all might and glory.

This methodology, so to say, of enabling this inner magazine of power to express itself in action and achieve that incipient longing for utter perfection is what is called the art of yoga. Yoga is supposed to be union, a word which is

commonplace, but union with what? Union practically and finally it is with that which seeks expression from within our own selves. It is in the end a kind of union with our own true potentiality and possibility. That which we are finally capable of, that which we are to achieve in the end is indicated even now, even in the humblest of our positions, in terms of our desire to be free, and endlessly free – unfettered for all times – and stand above all subversive forces and conditioning factors. This bringing out of the potentiality within us is the art of education on one side, and the science of yoga on the other side. To bring out the perfection that is present within us, by stages of psychological arrangement, is the course of education. And similarly, to bring out the divinity within us is the stage-wise arrangement of the practice of yoga.

The world, as I mentioned, is an arena of a medley of things of every kind of nature – sometimes visible, sometimes not visible. There are forces in the world which cannot be seen with the eyes, such as subatomic powers; but there are others which can be seen with the eyes, like the elements. These are the objects. Like the cutaneous and the subcutaneous layers of personality, we have these layers of physical nature also – the visible and the invisible. Nevertheless, they constitute matter.

The essence of an object is materiality – the necessity to be perceived. The yoga technique commences with the condition that immediately prevails at the present moment – namely, the necessity to be concerned with the variety of objects. Yoga is not merely an action, something that we do every day, but it is also a systematic operation of intelligence, an action of our understanding. While it is true that we are aware of the necessity to be engaged in the objects of the world that constitutes our so-called daily action, our intelligence will put a question as to why this situation has arisen at all. Where comes the need for us to be engaged in so many things in the world?

Hence understanding, or *viveka* as it is called, goes simultaneously with the actual practice. The intelligence, or

the analytical understanding, raises the question of the foundation of this need at all for getting occupied with this world. The question will be answered in various ways, according to the nature of the circumstances of society in which one is placed. An official will have one kind of answer. A labourer will have another answer. An academician will have a third answer. A businessman will have some other answer. And a seeker of God will have something else to say altogether. Why is it that we are so busy every day?

But whatever be the reply that comes from anybody as a response to this question, one essential point that will come out from all these answers is that it would be good not to be so much engaged in the things of the world, if it could be possible. That it is not possible is what makes us somehow get on with things and make the best of a bad bargain, as they say; we find a pleasure even in the sorrow of being involved in things.

Drudging every day is not a great pleasure; but it becomes a pleasure when it is unavoidable. So pain also can be mistaken for joy. The hard work that we put in, in the name of somebody or some cause, some purpose, is not a joy. But it is something that must be done. Therefore, it is a joy.

In this sense it is said that all the joys of life are only a masquerading pain. *Sarvam dukkham vivekinah* (YS 2.15). For an investigative mind, nothing is joy in this world. All the joys of ours seem to be a consequence that follows from utter subjection to conditions prevailing outside, and these so-called joys of ours are not an emanation of freedom that we enjoy. We have no freedom. But it is necessary to attain freedom – the final freedom being called immortal existence. People call it God-realisation.

The yoga technique is the application of understanding into the circumstance of being subject to the conditions of the objects outside, and then trying to find out ways and means of freeing oneself from this tangle of involvement. A simple and easy method prescribed by yoga teachers is that though there may be many things in which we are involved

every day in the world, it is not true that we are involved in the entire creation or the whole earth. The area of occupation may be large enough, wide enough; but how wide is it?

We, first of all, gauge the jurisdiction of our action: "This is the area of my performance, and all that worries me is only within this jurisdiction." This first step may be taken by any person, whether he is a businessman, a professor, an official, or whoever he is. An official is connected with his jurisdiction. It is not essential for him to be thinking of everybody's jurisdiction in all the parts of the country, because that is what we call purchasing trouble. Only when occurrences beyond one's jurisdiction have some connection with one's own jurisdiction, it may become part of one's concern. Otherwise, the jurisdiction is limited.

Now the yoga teacher, the yoga student, should also take into consideration two aspects of this matter. When a person is staying in an ashram, for instance, the jurisdiction of activity and concern is limited to the premises of the ashram. One may try to analyse the circumstances arising within the premises of an atmosphere of the ashram, for instance, and then tackle each item arising there. As I mentioned, it is not always that the ashram is so insulated that we are unconnected with the world. Sometimes it is connected with a wider atmosphere.

So when a jurisdiction is taken as the point of concentration and occupation, the possible external influences that may be exerted upon this limited area also may have to be taken into consideration because outside the premises of the ashram – external to the premises of our jurisdiction of work – something is existing, and something is happening. If that which exists there and something that happens there has no relevance at all to us, we need not bother about it. But it may have some relevance, especially in a modern world where we may say that humanity is interconnected in a variety of ways.

The reducing of the circumference of the jurisdiction of concern is the first step in yoga. Unnecessary things should

be avoided. Make a list of all the items of your concern in your daily life, within a set of conditions – whether a temple atmosphere, or a church, or a school of teaching. This list should be exhaustive enough to give an assurance that it is not necessary for the mind to bestow thought on anything else other than these items. Your needs are only this.

This is to limit the number of objects as far as the concentration of the mind is concerned. After that – when the list is made and everything is complete, and the concerns are restricted in their number – again a question has to be raised in the mind as to why these little things have become so important for us. What is it that is very important?

That which directly affects us is the important thing for us. A thing that has no connection with us and will have no impact upon us may not be important. We are hungry and thirsty. Food is an item of concern. We feel heat and cold. We require a house to stay in and some clothing to put on. These are what are called creature comforts. People struggle hard in this world, even to get creature comforts. Much of the time goes only in this.

Now, 'creature comforts' is also a vague term, practically. Our basic needs – house, shelter, clothing and food – though they appear to be simple enough to understand, their definition may vary from person to person according to the position one occupies in society, the work that one does, etc. A motorcar may not be necessary for everybody, but under certain conditions it may be a necessity.

So here again, we have to apply the understanding to go deep into the very structure of this requirement and limit the objects of concern to the minimum. But the human being is not merely a physical body. We are not satisfied merely with eating food, living in a cosy house or having good clothing. There is what is called social recognition. This is the bane of the yoga student.

The yoga student should be cautious about certain impulses arising from himself. The asking for the

psychological fulfilments other than the physical needs mentioned raise very poignant questions in the world of psychology; and the whole of the yoga system may be said to be an analysis of this large field of mental operations. We affirm ourselves in two ways: physically as well as mentally. The physical affirmation is manifest every day in terms of hunger and thirst. These pressures – hunger for food and thirst for drinking – make us feel and remind us moment to moment that we should exist in the body. It is necessary for us to exist in this body. It is not proper for us to ignore the existence of this body. The whip that is lashed upon us to remind us of this necessity to continue with this body is manifest in hunger and thirst, and heat and cold also combined.

But the mind says, "I also should exist." It is not enough that the body exists and the mind dies. A healthy body but an empty mind is not what one aspires for. So the psychological affirmation is as equally strong as the physical affirmation.

There is something else also attached to this affirmation. Very difficult indeed is this problem that arises in us. The physical body not only wants to exist, it wants to exist forever, for as long as possible. The desire to exist in the physical body goes together with the desire to perpetuate this physical body, because existing implies existing for a lengthy period of time. It does not mean existing for a moment, and then passing away.

Now, common sense knows that it is not possible to exist for a long time. The inner impulses, which are mortal, know at the same time that the physical body cannot exist eternally. So it creates a ruse of its own accord in order to falsely satisfy itself that its physical existence can be assured perpetually by the reproduction of its own constitution.

So the impulse of self-preservation goes together with the impulse of self-reproduction. Both are actually manifestations of a single impulse of the desire to physically continue for as long a time as possible – a dreaded disease, indeed.

Psychologically also, there is a similar desire to perpetually exist, to exist for endless time. Here again, the difficulty is known very well that no one can exist perpetually in this world, even with a particular way of thinking, so people perpetuate their names in some form or the other under the impression that it is equal to perpetuating their mental existence.

Name and fame are the forms in which the mind, which is otherwise incapable of eternal existence, tries to perpetuate itself in a very foolish manner. It does not mean that a dead man who is known to us is really perpetuated psychologically. Nor is it true that a child born to a person is actually the person who physically represents the existence of that person. A kind of confusion, a kind of chaos in thinking takes possession of the human psychophysical individuality; self-preservation and self-reproduction physically, and name, fame, power and authority on the other side harass the individual day in and day out. This is mortal existence. This is human history, in short. But this is hell, rather than a worthwhile way of living.

Yoga tries to straighten this crooked way of thinking into a straightened operation of consciousness by the elimination of the entanglements that are at the back of this kind of thinking. And this it does by what is called concentration of the mind. Yoga is concentration. It is meditation.

The earlier stages of concentration consist in, as I mentioned a few minutes before, delimiting the circumference of the objects in which one has to get engaged. Consider your position in society, in your ashram, in your temple, in your office. In the circumstance of your placement in that particular type of society, what are the unavoidable? Concern yourself with only those things, and totally abrogate connection with avoidables. A thing with which you have to exist, and without which you cannot exist at all, is a necessity and an unavoidable. A thing without which you can be comfortably living, and no problem will arise, is an avoidable.

So, a yoga student has to be very intelligent, especially in psychology: "Is it possible for me to reasonably exist comfortably without it? That which is not necessary for me, I shall have no connection with it. That which is actually essential for my survival is permitted." After that, the mind gets concentrated on the lessening of the number of these items into basic needs which concern just the existence of a person.

Life is very sacred. It cannot be destroyed. We have to live somehow or the other. Under no circumstance can one annihilate life, because what we call life, whether in the body or in the mind, is a necessary result that has followed from the pressures exerted by certain karmas of the past which hunger for expression, fulfilment and satisfaction; and as long as the hunger of those impulses is not appeased, this body cannot be given up.

If by any kind of mistaken thinking one neglects to give sufficient attention to the existence of this body and mind, the impulses that caused the birth of this body will revolt and wreak revenge in the next birth and, as the scriptures say, the condition of life will then be worse. Incidentally, suicide is a sin and it cannot be permitted. Nobody can kill oneself, as no one can kill another person. No killing is permitted, either of oneself or others. Otherwise, the natural forces will react in such a violent manner that one can hang as a ghost or a *preta* in the astral regions. This should not be allowed.

The physical body is a hindrance. It is well known. But it is also a vehicle through which we have to move onward. The vehicle is not ourselves, but it is an essential. The yoga student limits himself to the basic necessities of the survival of the body for the purpose of the concentration that is required to be performed in the manner prescribed in the sections of yoga.

The main question is how, with the aid of this body and with the facilities provided by the mind, we can go ahead. Desires are, here again, obstacles before us. There are desires which pull the mind in different directions. The reason for

the pull in different directions is that the mind is not aware that finally no desires can be fulfilled in this world, and any attempt to fulfil desires would only be sowing seeds for further desire. No desire can be extinguished by the fulfilment of it, because the fulfilment of a particular sensory desire will only fan up the desire for further ingratiating, as ghee poured over flames will only increase the might of the flames.

Desires cannot be overcome by the fulfilment of desires. They can be controlled only by the analysis of the very root itself. Desire is a disease, and we cannot perpetuate a disease by pampering it. The origin of it has to be found out and its digressions should become the precondition for its cure. All desires are the seeking of the mind to find freedom, perfection, unlimited happiness and eternal existence. Wrong is the way it adopts for the achievement of this purpose.

Desires arise on account of the perception of varieties of things in the world through the sense organs, and the insufficiency that one feels in one's own self becomes the proportion in which the desire darts upon other objects. The more is the insufficiency that we feel in ourselves, the stronger is the desire that we have for things, so that a person who is hunting for hundreds of things in the world for material comfort is the poorest of persons psychologically, intellectually, spiritually. The more adequate we feel in ourselves, the lesser is the need to contact things outside. The contact of the sense organs in terms of objects is a way attempted by the mind and the sense organs in this way or that way to patch up the lacuna that is felt in oneself.

Desires vary. It does not mean that everybody has the same desire, because the vacuum that one feels in oneself is of a different category in different persons. Each person has some kind of peculiar want, and the peculiarity of the want is the reason behind the peculiarity of the desire that is manifested by that person. And because of the variety of these peculiarities, there is clash of purposes. Wars take place in the world because the individual is uniquely

constituted psychophysically. Yoga goes into the depths of this psychophysical predicament and proclaims once and for all that the obstacle to the achievement of spiritual freedom is the projection of consciousness in terms of objects outside. Freedom is attained in consciousness.

Where is the freedom that we are asking for? It is in us. It is an experience. Freedom is an experience – an experience in a state of consciousness. So finally, freedom is a condition attained by consciousness, which is our essential nature. We are essentially consciousness. The body is not us. The consciousness that is permeating the body makes us feel that we are the body; and the consciousness that projects itself outside in terms of pleasurable objects also sometimes makes us feel that we are connected with those things.

We love objects. We hug things, and feel it is impossible to live without certain things on account of the consciousness projecting itself outside through the sense organs in terms of those things which are wrongly felt to be a part of one's own self. So it is necessary for the yoga student to see that consciousness does not leak out through the apertures of the sense organs. Conservation of energy is the basic condition of yoga.

Shakti – we have to develop *shakti*. Strength has to be generated inside. The strength is already there. As the possibility of attaining utter ultimate freedom is in us, all the necessary appurtenances for the achievement of that is also inside us. We have the hope of attaining it. We have the assurance of it, and we also have the instruments necessary for it. We don't require any help from outside. No material object is required in the practice of yoga. We don't require anything except our own selves. We are the medium that is required for the practice of yoga; and we are nothing but our mind and consciousness.

The adjustment of consciousness in a harmonious manner is yoga, finally. The harmony is disturbed by its moving outward in terms of external objects. An imbalance is created at once as long as the consciousness is thinking of

external things, and the imbalance increases and the weight sometimes is more on the other side when the desire is very intense. People who love intensely become the objects of their love. They do not anymore exist, and sometimes they would like to perish for the sake of that which they love. This is a tragedy to which a person can reach when concentration on objects becomes very extreme.

The more we love things outside, the less are we alive spiritually. In order to be alive in terms of objects of affection, we have to die inside to that extent. A part of ourselves, or a part of the soul, has to die in order that we may live in the objects of sense.

Thus, love is not a good thing, nor is hatred, because love and hatred mean one and the same thing. They are not two different things. They are only two shapes taken by a single impulse to tear the personality into pieces in terms of objects and subjects. By the methods of *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* – these prescribed, well-known terms in yoga practice – the consciousness is withdrawn and centred in itself. The centring of consciousness itself is called yoga, and the centring of consciousness in objects is called *bhoga*. The result is *rhoga*, and disease will result.

All this sounds very good. But we will find that it is very difficult to prevent the mind from contemplating on desirable objects, and from concentrating on objects which it hates. Never will it permit us to have it centred in its own self. The power of the sense organs is so overwhelming, like the waves of the ocean. Terrible is the impulse of the sense organs. Even the waves of the ocean may sometimes subside, but the waves of sense impulses will not subside. It is a perpetual anguish of consciousness to run out of itself and become another.

It is said that in creation, consciousness attempted to become other than itself in a cosmical way. God became another, as it were, in creation; this is what we hear. This so-called otherness of consciousness originally felt cosmically now becomes the great sorrow of all mortals, where the

impulse to become another – to become other than one's own self – has become the very meaning of existence itself.

Originally, during the creative process of the Almighty, it is supposed to be a great joy. An abundance of the bliss of God manifested itself as this variety of creation; so the scriptures tell us. As long as one is conscious of having become many, it is a great bliss indeed. But if the consciousness of the One having become many is absent, and the concentration of this manifoldness becomes intense, it takes possession of the consciousness. The cart is put before the horse. The object controls the subject. Matter buries consciousness inside. And this has happened to us. Our mind and consciousness are practically dead under the pressure of the heavy body which is lumbering in the form of this personality, Mr. So and so, and so on. It has to be gradually brought out of this shackle of the physical encasement.

Pratyahara is the withdrawal of consciousness from entwinement, entanglement in objects of sense. *Dharana* is concentration on one given object only. The one given object later, in a highly advanced stage, becomes a universal object. In the beginning, it is many things. Later, it becomes only certain things. Afterward, certain things also vanish and only one thing remains.

The area of the operation of the mind should get gradually delimited in circumference until its object is fully achieved in concentration on one thing. You may be wondering how it is possible for a person to achieve all things by concentrating on one thing. The reason is that the whole universe is one single object.

It is not true that there are many things in this world. As many organs constitute only one person – a multitude of anatomical parts do not make many persons – the many things apparently visible in the world are not actually many things. They are the fingers and the noses and the ears and the eyes and the limbs of one single entity which is the object proper. The object that God perhaps created, the universe as we call it, is one single thing. Therefore, to concentrate on

any part of this universe would be to concentrate on the universe itself, just as to touch any part of the body of a person is to touch the whole body due to the organic connection of the parts.

We do not usually realise that it is so because of the harassment caused by the sense organs which multiply these desires in terms of the ramification of consciousness in a fivefold manner. Fortunately, we have only five organs. Otherwise, if we had more organs, we would have been thinking in a hundred ways.

The world is only one object; it is not a bundle of many things. Hence, yoga succeeds in achieving contact with the whole world by concentrating on even one aspect of it. Any form that we conceive in our mind in this creation may be adequate for the purpose of our consciousness entering through it into the very substance of what it is made of. This is the secret of concentration. Any object can be taken as an object of concentration, provided it pleases us, satisfies us, and we consider it adequate enough to satisfy us emotionally, and not merely intellectually. The object of meditation should be emotionally attractive, intellectually very clear. This is the *Ishta Devata* usually spoken of in yoga practice. An *Ishtha Devata* is the god that we have created before us.

The god is any part of the cosmos. Anything is a god. As I mentioned, any part of the body is that person. So we need not go on hunting after gods or searching for too many things in the world for the purpose of concentration. Anything is good enough, provided the concentration is wholehearted and entire. The entirety of the concentration on the object is most important, and there should be no dual fractioning or partitioning of mind in terms of anything else.

Concentration becomes complete when it precludes even the consciousness of there being space and time outside. There should not only be no consciousness of objects outside, but not even spatial distinction should be allowed in that act of concentration. The pouring of consciousness wholly into

that chosen object becomes so complete that one becomes that itself. Yoga tells us in that state of complete absorption the subject and the object coalesce in such a manner that we cannot say which is the object and which is the subject, whether the object is meditating on the subject or the subject is meditating on the object. They become united. And because of the fact that all objects are part and parcel of one single organic structure called the universe, we can enter into the very soul of creation by concentrating on anything in this world.

This practice is greatly described in wonderful detail in the Yoga Shastras like Patanjali Maharaj's Sutras, the Bhagavadgita and also the Upanishads, all which you must read at the feet of a great Guru.