

HUMANITY AS YAJNA OR SACRIFICE FOR PERFECTION

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

I am supposed to be here to introduce to you, under the auspices of 'The Yoga Society' of this Academy, a way of the assessment of values, which we may regard as a little removed from the usual manner of the human outlook of life, a system of living whose physical expression is the Yoga-Asanas.

We are here to bestow a little thought upon the impact that Yoga can have on human life as a whole and the relevance it has to the objectives of human existence. There is a need for a reorientation of the assessment of values, at least from the point of view of Yoga, and this necessity for re-orientation arises on account of the very nature of Yoga itself. Literally, or grammatically, Yoga means 'Union'. The definition or the explanation of the word does not go beyond this simple implication, 'Union is Yoga'. But union with what? And who is to be united, with what? This is not easily explained, and it is left to us to go into the depth of the suggestiveness of this term, 'Yoga'.

The objectives of life are also the purposes of life. Our culture regards the central aims of existence as the Arthas, or the Purusharthas, to be pursued by every human being. We live in the world for a purpose, and the activities of life are

nothing but implementations of various methods for the fulfilment of the objectives of human life. We are after the fructification of our ideas and the fulfilment of our desires. The object is counterposed with the subject. The object, in its general perspective, is the whole world before us. We are facing the world, in front of us, every day, as an object of our consciousness. Matter is there staring at Spirit, and the Spirit within us envisages the movement and the structure of Matter, which is the world in front of us. Human activity or endeavour, in all its phases, may be said to be an act of Consciousness, struggling to establish an adjustment of itself with the structural patterns of Matter. We are daily trying to adapt ourselves to circumstances, physically, socially, politically and in all the fields or vocations of life. The adjustment of Consciousness is the principal motive, the guiding factor behind the various vocations of life in general. This is the *Arth* which we speak of in philosophical language – the purpose of existence. We pursue the objective of life and try to make it a part and parcel of our experience. And experience is nothing but the union of the object with the subject. The desire of the Spirit or Consciousness gets fulfilled, when it is united with its object, and a desire is nothing but the movement of Consciousness in the direction of the object. The impulsion of Consciousness towards the object that it has set before itself is the aspiration, the longing, the desire; the craving, whatever you may call it. The intention behind this desire is the cessation of the desire itself, and we are supposed to be happy, when the desire is fulfilled. We are in a state of anguish when the desire is not fulfilled. The unhappiness that follows from the propulsion of a desire from our Consciousness can be explained psychologically as a result of a self-aberration of Consciousness itself. We go out of ourselves in the act of desiring an object. I move away from myself, as it were, in the direction of something other than myself, and this is what we mean by desiring anything. The subject alienates itself into the object. The *Seer* moves towards the *Seen*. I try to behold myself in something other than my own self, with the basic

intention or aspiration to come in union with that which is the so-called object of desire.

There is something interesting about all this movement of Consciousness in the direction of the object. It is not easy to understand why this movement takes place at all. Why should we desire anything, is a simple question that we can pose for ourselves. Why is it that we should be perpetually asking for one thing or the other? How is it that we never remain contented with what we have or what we are? This is a question which takes us beyond the empirical structure or feature of human society. A mere perception of the existent conditions of life will not enable us to give an answer to this question. The phenomena of ordinary human life cannot provide an answer. This question arises from a realm of values which transcends the perceptual ken of our sense-organs. The world that we perceive is the object of our senses. Whatever the senses can cognise or perceive, is the world around us. But the senses are only the external instruments of this propelling force, the desire of Consciousness. There is something deeper and more implicit behind the activities of the senses, which is the reason behind these activities themselves. This basic or fundamental urge, being precedent to the activities of the senses, cannot be explained by the senses themselves. Why we should ask for anything, is a question that the senses cannot answer: well, our mind or the reason may be able to answer. Not so, is the position. Even our reason is incapable of delving into the depths of this mystery. Because, unfortunately, our mind, and even the so-called reason, seems to be working like a handmaid of the senses and doing merely the function of collecting the evidences given by the senses sifting them into a pattern and arranging them in some sort of an order, passing a judgment on the nature of the various reports received through the senses. Though there is a coordinating and synthesising activity exercised by the reason subsequent to the reports given by the senses, the quality of the judgment does not much differ. It does not mean that our reason gives a superior judgment in respect of the world of

perception, quite different in every way from what the senses themselves are able to perceive. The mind and the reason seem merely to agree with the basic structure of the evaluation of values envisaged by the senses.

We cannot, therefore, understand what is happening to us by the exercise of the phenomenal reason. We are conditioned by the factors which are at the back of the operation of the reason itself. I had occasion, sometimes back, when I had visited this Academy in this very context, to speak on the other aspects of the subject: how the mind is conditioned by the structure of the universe itself. The universe that is perceived by the mind, the reason and the senses, seems to be weighing heavy upon the mind and the reason in such a manner that the mind cannot think independently of the way in which the world is made. The phenomenal character of the world impinges upon the mind in such a manner that the mind can think only phenomenally. The so-called noumenal implications behind the phenomenal perceptions remain untouched by the exercise of the phenomenal reason. We think in terms of the laws that operate in the physical universe so that we are compelled to be satisfied with being physical entities. But you know very well, physical satisfactions are not real satisfactions. People who are physically comfortable are not necessarily happy people in the world. Which person can say that he is really happy in spite of material possessions that he may have, the social status which he may occupy? Why is it that we are always kept on tenterhooks and we always go on hoping for a better future even when not knowing what that future would be like? How is it that we are always impelled by an urge whose nature is not clear even to our own minds? Is it not true that we are perhaps beckoned by some transcendental meaning in our own selves? Transcendental, because we seem to have no access to that realm. Well, it comes to this, that we do not know our own selves, a very uncomfortable conclusion though. If that is the case, how can I understand anybody else? If the very instrument of action, which is my own personality, is beyond my own self, how

could I use this instrument as a tool in the understanding of the world-structure outside? We are unhappy today, as intensely, as people were two thousand years ago. It is a futile patting ourselves on our backs to imagine that we are advancing in civilisation. Where are we advancing, we do not know. Well, it is true, that we are moving, but it is uncertain, in what direction it is. If we are sincere and honest in the investigation of the world situation today, and the psychological condition of people anywhere in the world, we would be in a state of discomfiture, and we should be really sorry to learn that, basically, we have not advanced a whit culturally, beyond what people had to experience and pass through in the ages that are gone by. We are as insecure and unhappy today as the people in the past were. The reason is something that appears to be beyond the investigating capacity of the psychological apparatus with which we are endowed today; and our education has not helped us. Our certificates, our degrees from colleges and universities have not taken us far. We have doubts, the very same misgivings that people had centuries back, and we do not sleep with a satisfied heart. We go to bed with a doubt, get up with a doubt and live our day with a doubt, and at the back of it there is a sense of insecurity gnawing into our vitals. The reason is not far to seek. We have been moving in the wrong direction, under the impression that we are advancing in civilisation, technology etc. We are fond of technological development and industrial revolution and scientific advancement. Very good, all this is well. But where does it take us? What is the objective? What is the Artha? What is it that we are pursuing, and for what aim or end, is a question that we have not posed before ourselves and we have not been able to answer.

We have in one grand hymn of the Vedas, a point given to us, enabling us to contemplate in the right direction. The ancient seers of the Vedas, in their grand contemplation of the cosmos as a unitary structure, visualised the human being as an inseparable part of the cosmos. They viewed the individual as inextricably involved in the purposes of the

cosmos. The involvement of the individual in the structural pattern and the purpose of the cosmos implies a sort of obligation on the part of the individual in respect of the cosmos. We have a duty towards the world, towards the universe, in its entirety. This obligation that we are expected to perform in respect of the world outside, is what goes by the name of Dharma. We may translate this term, for the time being, as the law that operates in the world. Any kind of law is Dharma. The essential nature, intrinsic to the substance of a particular thing or object is the Dharma of that object. It is the Dharma of the fire to burn, to give an example; it is the Dharma of the wind to move in a direction, to blow; it is the Dharma of the body, to evolve, to grow, decay and to move towards its cause. The intrinsic nature of anything is the Dharma of that particular thing. The ancient seers emphasised this obligation on the part of every individual, which they designated as Dharma. Now, I must, at the very outset, tell you that Dharma does not mean religion in the commonsense meaning of the term. It is not a belief in God; it is not a worship that you perform in the temple; it is the necessary obedience which you owe to the very nature of things. It has nothing to do with religion in the sense of piety as a super-phenomenal or extra-cosmic attitude in life. It is a scientific truth or principle which has to be accepted on the part of the individual. There is a 'Dharma' of the body, for example. The legs have to walk and the brain has to think. The various limbs of the body have to perform their coordinating functions. Every limb of the body has a Dharma in respect of every other limb of the body. There is a cooperating Yajna, or a sacrifice, being performed by every limb of the body.

This term 'Yajna' comes into high relief in this context of the great hymn to the Vedas, I made reference to. The central culture of Bharatavarsha, India, may be summed up in one term, 'Yajna'. You have heard this word uttered many a time. People perform Yajna. They perform Havan; they offer sacrifice, pour sacred ghee in the fire. But, this is only an outward expression, a symbol of the intention behind what is

known as Yajna. The performance of a ritual is a spatio-temporal shape given to the inner idea expectation which is the Yajna. I am coming to the point, again. Your obligation to the world, as a whole, is the Yajna. You may ask me, why do you call it a Yajna? Why do you call it a sacrifice? Why do you say that my duty towards my nation is a Yajna? It is a Yajna because of an important factor involved in this process of the fulfilment of duty. In the discharge of duty, whatever be the nature of that duty, we diminish ourselves in one way and enlarge ourselves in another way. The diminution of the assertive or the individuating factor in ourselves is the Yajna or the sacrifice that we perform for the sake of the enhancement of the larger dimension of our personality.

Human society, in the Vedic hymn I mentioned, is envisaged as one single organism. We owe an obligation mutually among ourselves, merely on account of the fact that we live a single life of immanent relationships which obliges us to manifest this inner communion in outward activity, conduct, behaviour etc. Our conduct or behaviour, externally, in human society, is an outward manifestation of the internal bond that is perpetually maintained among ourselves, even without our knowing the very existence of this relationship. We are called phenomenal beings merely because of this fact – phenomenal, because we do not know the ‘noumenal’ implication of our existence. Yoga is the technique, the art, the science of bringing you into union with the noumenal implication of your own self. The phenomenal individuality of yours is brought into coordination with the noumenal universality of your existence. This is something very profound for us to contemplate. Phenomenally, we are cut off from the world. On an outward observation through the perceptual faculties of the senses, we may regard ourselves as men and women, people belonging to different nationalities, age groups, different levels in economic existence, etc. This is not our real nature. Our unhappiness, to reiterate, is our inability to recognise the fact that we belong to a different order of existence altogether, raised above the one in which we seem to be involved today in this

world of diversities. Yoga tells you of the great implication of the Vedic hymn which proclaims that, ultimately, finally, basically, we are neither men nor women. We are not even human beings as we understand ourselves to be. We are bits of universal force. We are eddies, waves as it were, in the ocean of Cosmic Power and it is this deeper reality of ours that keeps us ever restless. That is why we cannot sleep a single night with composure in our hearts, because we have lost our mother, our parent as it were. We have been cut off from our own very source. We are sundered completely from our own self. This is 'Atmaghata', that has taken place, as the Isavasya Upanishad puts it. These people who have lost the consciousness of the Self, are the killers of the Self, and they go to regions which are Sun-less, dark and torturous, says the Upanishad. This is a way of putting the condition that awaits a person who takes appearance for reality and completely misconstrues the relation of himself empirically with this basic Reality of all things. We have a reality in our own selves which is commensurate with the Reality of everyone else. The Artha that we are pursuing, the objective of our life, the Kama, or the desire that we are evincing in respect of objects of sense, are nothing but the phenomenal expressions of the beckoning of the noumenal Reality within us. It is calling us. The mother is calling the child, "You come". The universal call is the pull that is exerted upon us in the form of a desire for things in the world. This is the metaphysical meaning, the philosophical explanation behind even ordinary desires or any kind of impulsion from within us to do anything whatsoever, personally or socially, or in any other capacity.

So, Yoga gives us a great message: the message not of any scripture, not of any religion, but the message of the Cosmos, the message that comes from the distant stars, like the cosmic rays, as the modern scientists tell you, which come and impinge on us without our knowing that they are on our heads. The Universe is speaking to us in the language of desire and it tells us that our destination, our central goal of life, is a graduated attunement of our personality with the various degrees of manifestation of this ultimate Reality. The

necessity to tune ourselves with the requirements of political administration, the needs of human society, the requirements of even a family or the demands of our own physical personality – all these are the various degrees of the expression of the law of the one Universal Existence. The various duties that we are called upon to perform in the different vocations of life are the obligations that we owe to this one Reality in its various facets. So, Dharma is Universal. It is not a religious term. It is a scientific expression. It is the Law that binds you to the Whole. It is the principle by which the part is coordinated to the completeness of the structure of the universe. Here is the message of Yoga for you, and difficult as it is to contemplate the further implications of this wonderful message, it is imperative at the same time to bear this in our mind every moment of our life, if we are to breathe a breath of satisfaction, if we are not merely to go on cursing our fate, finding fault with things and becoming dissatisfied with anything and everything in life. If it is given us to be happy at least for a moment in our life, if this is a practicable proposition at all, I would tell you that this cannot be, if you are not to be in union with Reality.

Satyameva jayate, is a great motto with which you are all familiar. And what is this Satyam, the Truth? *Satyatvam badha rahityam* said a great master. That which is 'uncontradictable', is the Truth, and if 'Truth alone triumphs', it is another way of saying that the 'Uncontradictable' alone triumphs. My dear friends, can I put you a question? Have you seen anything in this world which is uncontradictable? Everything is contradicted by everything else. There is supersession of values. Everything is transcended by something else. There is nothing in this world which cannot be negated by a subsequent occurrence or historical procession. It is because of this fact that it is said that there is no Reality in the appearance of this world. The appearance carries Reality, no doubt, the appearance of the world is a vehicle of Reality, but the structure itself is not Reality. We may make a distinction between Nama-Rupa-Prapancha (the world of names and forms) and Vastu-Tattva (essential

Reality). The vehicle is the outer, phenomenal, transient expression of a particular degree of Reality and not the whole of Reality, so that at no occasion in the process of human history can you discover the whole of Reality. By a study of human history the entirety of Reality cannot be known because at every moment of human history there is only a partial expression of it and the reason behind the procession of human history can only be said to be the universal impulse within everything to effloresce into the realisation of the destiny of history. The rivers will not be quiet until they reach the ocean. There is roaring and rushing and moving and meandering of the rivers and rivulets. All this noise continues until they reach the sea. So is human history supposed to cease moving when the destiny of the cosmos is reached. This destiny is known as Moksha, a term with which, I believe, you are familiar, again. Moksha is the 'Infinite Value' or the ultimate determining factor of the principles that govern the fulfilment of all objectives – of Artha or material gain, and the achievement of Kama or desire both conditioned by a tremendously restrictive discipline, the rule of Dharma. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha – these four aims are so comprehensive that they mean the total Integral Life of all.

Moksha is the Infinite Value. It is not the last value, or one of the four ends of life. It is the Infinite itself. You cannot say that the Infinite is the last end in the long chain of development. It is Infinitude and, therefore, it subsumes within itself all other values. The temporal values, the objects of the world, the desires of life, the various vocations which we pursue, are all subsidiary to our allegiance to this ultimate call of life in its totality which we designate as Moksha, or liberation of the Spirit. The activities in life, in the various fields, and the various aspirations of mankind, whatever be its movements, whatever be the directions they take, all these are the gradual growth of the human personality towards this attainment.

This is the message of Yoga. It is, thus, impossible for a person not to be a Yogi. Tasmāt Yogi Bhava, (therefore,

become a Yogi), says the Bhagavad Gita. This is the message of the Eternal to the temporal. It is not Krishna speaking to Arjuna; it is the Absolute admonishing the relative. Tasmāt – therefore, because of the fact that it is impossible even to exist maintaining one’s integrity without relationship with Reality. Just as, without life-breath, we cannot live, without contact with Reality we cannot exist. The values that we seem to be admiring in life, are assertions of this Universal Spirit, and it is the battle between the Spirit within and the material universe without that we call history. It ceases, it fulfils itself, it finds its consummation, when Matter emerges into Spirit, and Spirit unites itself with Matter, so that the subject and the object cease to be two contending parties. They stand as one integrated Principle – the Absolute.

This is the goal of life towards which everyone is moving. ‘You’ and ‘I’, and everyone else, not merely human but even the other levels of existence are all tending towards this mysterious culmination of the values of all life, and what can be a greater call, what can be a more solacing message than this wondrous word that we hear from the adepts who have trodden this path, seen through the vicissitudes of life, and plumbed the depths of existence.

At this auspicious moment, I invoke the blessings of the Almighty upon you all, that, in the words of the great Mantra called the Gayatri, we have our understandings properly directed. We have no other prayer except this, that our understandings move in the direction of Reality. We need understanding and nothing else. Understanding itself is satisfaction. Chit (Consciousness) *is* Ananda (Bliss). The more you understand, the more do you become happy. It is wisdom that gives you satisfaction and not material possessions. The more you know, the more do you commingle with Reality. The goal of life is wisdom of existence, the knowledge of Reality, union with the cosmos, and this is the ultimate aim of Yoga. It is not merely the ultimate aim, it is also the immediate aim. It is that which is under our very nose, just new, and the step that we have to take now is the step in the direction of Yoga. Life is Yoga.