

YOGA – ITS MEANING AND APPLICATION IN OUR LIVES

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society

Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: www.swami-krishnananda.org

(Spoken to Officials of the Government of India)

Idealism of Yoga

It is, indeed, not strange that most people do not have access beyond the physical level of Yoga, because true Yoga needs intense personal discipline, coupled with hard thinking, under the guidance of an able Teacher. The majority looks for material advantages, and when Yoga promises superphysical and spiritual blessings, it becomes unattractive to the common mind, clamouring for immediate tangible results.

Yoga is not merely a means of personal regeneration but is universal in character, and can be and should be effectively applied in all walks of life – social, national, educational, etc. This concept of Yoga ranges beyond not only the physical but also the mental realms of existence. Hence the idea of novices that Yoga constitutes physical exercises or merely *asanas* and *pranayamas*, etc., is an error.

We understand Yoga as a Cosmic Process of the Divine Nature (Aishwara-Yoga) making itself felt in every individual in the Cosmos. Physical exercises have nothing to do with real Yoga, though certain exercises like *asanas* and *pranayamas*, *bandhas*, *mudras* and *kriyas* are considered to be aids in Yoga practice.

Purpose of Yoga

Yoga is not one-sided: this is the essence of the whole matter. Yoga is all inclusive – it comprises physical, mental and moral education and culture in the highest spiritual life which is the supreme ideal of existence. When it is said that the statesman or the administrator should first be a philosopher, what is meant is that Spirit should direct matter, that the universal should determine the particular, that integration of living in the different stages and strata of the realization of ideals and values should govern personal interest and desire.

Yoga does all this, and genuine philosophy is life in Yoga. There cannot be different Yogas for the personal level and social and governmental level, etc. Yoga is One. It is applied in different ways in different departments of life. Yoga is a system of integral education, i.e., education not only of the body and the mind or the intellect, but also of the inner spirit. Yoga is the *complete life*.

Social work, educational reforms and philanthropic deeds, as well as political activity and effort towards national uplift are, at least according to the standard scripture of Yoga – the Bhagavadgita – meaningful only in the light of this Yoga of self-integration in the individual,

family, community, nation and the world. What can be a greater joy than the hope that the governments of the world, especially of India today, will awaken to the knowledge of this great and grand art and science of life, and bring it into full use in the daily life of the people!

At present no such Yoga is observable in the life of our nation, and the responsibility in this regard is not merely of the government; it is also of the people. They must take more interest in a proper understanding of it and be able to feel how essential it is for significant living. The whole point is whether we live for food, clothing and shelter, and name, fame, power and wealth, or whether there is a deeper and wider purpose in our existence and activity here.

Even supposing the secular and material ideals are worth striving after for their own sake, Yoga proclaims that these can be successfully achieved, in their true forms, with a vision that is lifted above the simply secular.

Yoga in National Life

Provided people take sufficient interest in acquiring this knowledge and take the initiative in applying it in their daily lives, the government will naturally have to pay proper attention to it. Public support is based on public interest, and this interest again is based on right understanding. The first thing to be done is to dispel ignorance. The expected result will follow.

What are the cultural and national interests? An answer to this question will bring out the extent to which human society is in need of the practice of Yoga. Culture is basically personal; for the society or the nation is nothing

but a group of individuals bound by kindred purposes. The good of the nation cannot be bad for the individual, nor the true good of the individual derogatory to national interest; for THE GOOD is one, though likes and dislikes may be variegated.

To achieve this Good, all have to endeavour. The government is the protector of the principal interests of the nation, not only material and intellectual but also moral and spiritual. Here the need for Yoga in national life comes into high relief. People should feel it. The government should help it. The grace of the Almighty is on us.

The unique feature of Yoga is that it is a method which overhauls all the sides of the human personality, and the pursuit of any aspect of it, fully and correctly, means a parallel advancement along all the other aspects, also. One should be able to fulfil the demands of the conditions to which one's individuality is subject, by resort to the transempirical reality underlying the individuality.

The Yogi par excellence is he who, ever united with the Eternal Being within, lives as a normal person, working in the world for the good of all, guiding others without disturbing their faith. It means to learn to be friendly with the universe, not to try to conquer it as if it is one's enemy. The relative should conform to the Absolute, though the relative is not the Absolute in the characteristics it manifests. It is supreme obedience to law, by love.

Attunement

With the equipment of this inner enlightenment, the aspirant may seek to tread the path of Yoga in any vocation

of life. Every act then becomes a necessary expression of the impulse to see and serve the Virat in all beings. All actions turn into an adoration of God with love that inundates the heart of the devotee. Every category of the universe, every item of experience, every mode of consciousness becomes a divine worship and a sport of the Infinite.

The beauty here is that one attunes oneself to the Infinite at every stage of life, even at the most fundamental step, with the powers given at that particular level. The one condition, however, is that there should be a thorough abandonment of the lower appetites, and of vanity and conceit. None who hugs delusions and worships flesh and mammon, none who is not humbled before the wonder of the vision beatific in the form of this creation, none who believes that this is exclusively one and that is another, can hope to achieve success in Yoga. Yoga, to us, is the life that anyone has to lead, only with the knowledge as to what it is, and its relations to the universe really are.