

NEW YEAR'S DAY is a special time to reflect on what you have accomplished in the previous year and what you need to accomplish in the coming year. You think about the errors of the past twelve months, you formulate ideas to correct them, and you make resolutions that you hope will ensure a golden future for yourself. Making resolutions and keeping them becomes easy when you have spiritual insight into life—when you understand the goal of life and what you should do to attain it.

In this respect, however, the vast majority of people in the world today are confused. This confusion needs to be dispelled, because once a person has a clear understanding of the goal of life, the process of attaining it becomes easy. For example, there is confusion in the mind of those who study the Upanishads and other Yogic literature. There are teachings that extol the need of *sanyasa* or renunciation, and also teachings that glorify selfless action. An aspirant wonders, “Should I renounce my job and family and go to the Himalayas, or should I remain as a *grihastha* (householder)?”

Similar confusion plagues spiritual seekers of every religion. When Christians read the injunction of Lord Jesus, “Seek ye first the kingdom of Heaven,” they wonder how they are supposed to do this. Many say, “I’ll seek the Kingdom of Heaven when I get older—when I won’t have anything else to do. What’s the rush now? The kingdom I’m living in right now looks fine to me.”

An aspirant must understand the important fact that spiritual movement is an enrichment of one’s life. To grasp this more fully, imagine that there is a tree in a forest that wishes to express itself more fully and become more beautiful. One day the breeze brings it a message: “Deck yourself with flowers and make yourself colorful.” Then soon after, the tree gets another message: “Don’t do that at all; it’s nonsense. What you must do instead is to try to send your roots as deep into the ground as possible.” The two suggestions seem contradictory, and the tree is confused. “Should I attend to my roots, or should

I go to a beautician and have myself well-pruned and adorned with flowers?”

The fact is that both alternatives are two aspects of the same process. Finding one’s roots, however, is the more important; it is toward your roots that you must direct your self-effort. If the tree were to send its roots deep into the earth and find a virtually boundless reservoir of water and nutrients, it would then enjoy great health and beauty. Similarly, if a person were to find his roots in God, the Divine Self, everything about him, including his personality, his relationships, his business affairs, his role in society, would be transformed—and he would be truly prosperous and successful.

Furthermore, when a tree blossoms it not only becomes beautiful, but fragrant as well; indeed, its fragrance drifts beyond the tree and permeates the entire atmosphere. Similarly, when you enrich yourself through spiritual attainment, your personality wafts a fragrance that is heavenly, and your contribution to the world becomes unimaginably great.

When you attain heights of spirituality, or higher levels of integration, you become a center that radiates peace, harmony, goodwill, and positive thoughts. All these emanate from you like the fragrance of a thousand flowers.

In order for you to send your roots deep into the bedrock of wisdom, three things are important: you need to have an insight into what Liberation is, you need to make it your goal, and you need to practice the techniques associated with the goal with patience and perseverance.

You gain insight or knowledge by studying the scriptures through the medium of *satsanga*, or positive association with the wise. When you study the great scriptures with patience and under proper guidance, you realize that the goal of Cosmic Consciousness is not far away; it is deep within your own heart. The fact is that you are essentially Divine. Every religion declares that in its own special way. In the Vedantic tradition, however, this is spoken of with particularly great fervor: “*Tat Twam Asi*”—“Thou Art That!”

Does not the Bible say, “I and the Father are one,” “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you,” “Know ye not that ye are Gods?” Everywhere the scriptures are telling you that you are essentially Divine; you are not the personality that you think yourself to be. In fact, you are already rooted in God. It is just a matter of discovering this truth. Without God how can a person exist? Human life has never really been in the hands of the ego! How could ego guide all the intricate mechanisms of your body? How could ego control even a single cell?

When you begin to reflect on the things that you hear through *satsanga*, you realize that your deeper roots have always been in God. Without God you cannot exist.

God is not something or somebody completely apart from you, existing somewhere in the vastness of the universe. God is your innermost essence. The Upanishads have presented this teaching in the form of questions: Who is the mind of the mind, the eye of the eye? Who is the knower, who is the seer? As you begin to develop more profound spiritual insight, you realize that to find God you do not have to go anywhere; all that is involved in finding Him is changing the pattern of your mind. The Upanishads declare: “*Mana eva manushyaanam, kaaranam bandha mokshayoh*”—“Mind is the cause of bondage and release.”

When you still the mind and free it of the burden of unconscious complexes, you get an immediate revelation that you are not the ego; you are not this perishable personality. You are one with God, the Divine Self. When you realize this, nothing can shake you again.

In Yoga Vasistha it is written that even if there were a great catastrophe and the whole earth were to explode, causing burning embers to rain down everywhere, you would remain unshaken if you had the experience of being rooted in God. This poetic imagery shows the feeling of invincibility that can



New Year's Message
By Swami Jyotirmayananda

Discover Your Roots in God

be awakened in an individual when he realizes that his roots are in God—and have always been in God.

Integrating Your Life in a Harmonious Way

The Bhagavad Gita, which is one of the most important scriptures of Yoga, outlines four great paths to the revelation of Truth: action, meditation, devotion, and wisdom. Blending these four harmoniously in daily life gives one the best technique for attaining Self-realization.

Action

The path of action is referred to as Karma Yoga in Yoga philosophy. It implies that you develop an attitude of worshiping God through the duties that you have to perform. There are two kinds of duties, broadly speaking: those arising out of your family situation or your job—your personal responsibilities in daily life—and those related to your eagerness to serve humanity.

At a very advanced stage, everything you do can be thought of as service to God. But until that spirit develops you need to promote selflessness, and let your actions reach out beyond the needs of your own personality or that of your relatives. You should always have a project that will help other people. Ask yourself what it is that you can do best for other people. Marshall the special talents that God has endowed you with and serve others.

Of course the Vedic tradition offers a wonderful outlet for doing this by encouraging aspirants to spend time in an ashram and to serve its spiritual mission. By helping to publish spiritual literature and by bringing knowledge to others in various ways, you are actually helping humanity most effectively. The best help that one can render to other people is to spread spiritual knowledge that helps others aspire for and attain Enlightenment.

Apart from that, performing any selfless action of any kind can be thought of as Karma Yoga. Whatever duties your nature inclines you toward

should not be personalized. The actions you perform should get you out of yourself; they should encourage you to feel that you are dedicating your energy and talent to improving society-at-large. And while working selflessly, whether for your family, society, or yourself, you offer your labor as a sacrifice to God. According to the Gita, even the act of eating is a sacrifice—a form of worshipping God. The spirit that proclaims that every action is a form of worship is Karma Yoga. When that spirit develops, your mind does not center itself on the fruit of action.

People nowadays are much more interested in the fruit of their labor than in the merits of their labor; accomplishing the task is all that matters. Under pressure to get the job done “by hook or by crook,” we have taken to leaning and depending on technology more and more. This form of erroneous vision is the basis of much of the stress that has developed in society. Pressure to accomplish tasks faster and faster has made life much more tense.

A spiritual aspirant should cultivate the art of enjoying the work he is doing instead of just doing it to get the job done. The very process of performing a task should be enjoyable. The essence of Karma Yoga lies in the insight that by performing your duties without leaning upon the fruits of action, you are promoting *chitta-shuddhi*, or purity of the heart.

Once this understanding develops you remain balanced whether your projects succeed or not. You are satisfied that the work you have accomplished has given you some internal fulfillment that no one can take away from you. Even when you do not succeed at a project, you enhance your willpower and gain the inner satisfaction that you have done your duty to the best of your ability. Thus, it is so important to cultivate the spirit of Karma Yoga in your daily life.

Meditation

The next important aspect of Yoga to harmoniously blend in your daily life is meditation. Learn the art of meditation and practice it every day.

The best time to meditate is early in the morning from four to six o'clock. This is known as *Brahmamuhurta*.

Start by setting aside half an hour for your practice. When you are relaxed and ready to concentrate, light a candle and burn some incense, and then fix your gaze on a deity or whatever ideal you wish to meditate upon. Then sit comfortably and let your mind flow peacefully towards the object of meditation. Follow this process of meditation and try to still your mind day by day. Regular meditation will help you think more clearly, comprehend life's subtler points, and also give you more concentration for the work at hand. When you work at a task with a dissipated mind it takes a long time to succeed; but with a concentrated mind you can accomplish a great deal of work and remain relaxed.

Meditation thus becomes a gateway to great achievements. As you practice meditation, you explore the heights that mind can achieve. Super-consciousness, intuitional experiences, profound insights—all these await the spiritual seeker who follows the path of meditation.

Devotion

The next aspect of Yoga to be blended in your life is devotion, or love of God. Most of the world's religions emphasize this path. If one has love of God it makes the path to Liberation easier, because it helps to efface one's ego. Ego is a great obstacle to spiritual advancement, and devotion dissolves it faster than any other method.

Day by day one should develop the clear understanding that God is the source of infinite love. Your soul has been seeking that love, trying to discover it through many embodiments. Everyone has an inner urge to find someone or something that can be loved with tremendous and intense fulfillment. But this urge leads one into many karmic entanglements. You try to find love through husbands, wives, and children. But when the karma for such love is over, you can no

longer find the perfect satisfaction you envisioned in those associations.

Ultimately, when your mind turns to God you realize that it is actually that Divine Self who makes people shine with life and beauty. When you find delight in friends, that delight actually comes because God abides within them. Once God withdraws His glory from a person's body it lies dead, all its beauty fading in a single moment.

Japa, or repetition of mantra, is a very simple yet effective means for developing devotion to God. Train your mind to repeat any Divine name again and again, as if it were a psychic sugar candy. Try to think of nothing else as you do this. Repeating a mystic formula daily does a great deal to build up impressions of spiritual strength in your unconscious.

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Prayer is another important means of coming closer to God. When you pray you open your heart to God, no matter what form of prayer you adopt. To guide you in developing the art of prayer, read devotional literature. In all the religions of the world there are examples and stories from the lives of Sages and Saints that illustrate the power of prayer. Read the prayers they recited during trying times in their lives. Try to muster the love of God that was the crowning glory of their lives.

Knowledge

The path of knowledge entails a thorough, day by day study of scriptures, such as the Gita, Yoga Vasistha, Upanishads, or any other works that enhance your philosophical insight. Studying these scriptures exercises your reason, and you will be led to understand that the real You is neither the body nor the mind. You are essentially the Absolute Self! When you are ignorant of this fact, you are as if hypnotized.

Each day you impress upon yourself that you are this body, that your happiness depends upon objects, and that if only you could accomplish a certain thing you would be happy. Even when you turn towards spirituality you still hypnotize yourself by feeling, “I am so far away from the spiritual goal; it may take me a hundred births to attain it.” By judging yourself like this you are creating an obstacle on your path. On the other hand, instead of allowing your mind to move in this negative direction, again and again try to relax your mind and reflect upon your true nature: you are essentially the Divine Self!



If you practice these four points everyday, even in small measure, you will make significant progress on the road to Liberation. To be spiritual you do not have to do something totally fantastic—like walk

the length of the United States, wade into the cold waters of the Ganges River at three o'clock in the morning, or fast for forty days. The notion that you have to do something bizarre and uncomfortable to be a spiritual person is entirely wrong.

Actually you do greater austerity when you harmonize yourself day by day. The person who meditates a little, reflects a little, does some devotional practices, and surrenders himself to God while doing his daily chores is going to make much greater progress than the person who subjects his body to dramatic austerities.

Of course, a spiritual aspirant should understand that there are going to be ups and downs in the daily practice of *sadhana*. Human life does not unfold in a straight line. Problems often make one take backward steps. In spite of these changing circumstances, try to balance yourself to whatever extent you can as you practice the four points. Daily, sustained effort on the spiritual path is far more important than the greatest austerities you can imagine. Harmony of spiritual practice is much more effective than the most glaring forms of austerity, for such harmonization is actually a more intensive kind of spiritual movement. Furthermore, if you do practice spiritual discipline harmoniously, nothing will ever change abruptly in your life; rather, your life will become increasingly enriched.

Think of the tree reflected upon earlier. The moment it sends its roots deep into the earth and draws richness from it, the tree begins to flourish. Similarly, the moment you seek your roots in God through spiritual harmonization, your personality flourishes; you bring the best you have to all your relationships with others. You become a shining example to society-at-large, and everyone around you becomes inspired. You will be astounded at how easily all this can happen if you harmonize your life.

So, this New Year, resolve to practice a blend of dedicated action, devotion, meditation and reflection in daily life, and always keep the Goal before you—the Goal of Self-realization.