

What Is Yoga?

Part Three by Swami Jyotirmayananda

Minor Yogas

There are many minor Yogas that are offshoots of the four major Yogas that have been described in brief. Hatha Yoga is the Yoga of psychophysical exercises that promote a healthy mind in a healthy body. Laya Yoga is a process of discovering a Divine melody within oneself—and the mind is led to a state of purification through this practice. Kundalini Yoga is the Yoga of meditation upon different centers of vital energy located in the spinal column. This Yoga enables an aspirant to prepare the mind for entry into Raja Yoga and its ascending summits. Kriya Yoga is a Yoga of purifying the mind through the practice of various specialized observances and exercises. *Pranayama* is the practice of controlling the universal vital energy through a process of breath-control.

Is Seclusion a Requirement for Success in Yoga?

Many have developed the misconception that Yoga can be best practiced in the solitary caves of the Himalayan mountains, or in deep forests far away from the society of other people. The idea that you will be free from the distractions of the world if you were to live in a cave, or in a forest, is wrong. You carry the basis of the world process—the impressions of attachment and hatred, fear and egoistic complexes—in your mind wherever you go.

Therefore, with a deeper insight into the mysteries of life, you do not seek seclusion as a

requirement for spiritual development. You realize that you can acquire concentration of mind even during a busy life. You can maintain inner peace even during intense activities. You can enjoy the serenity of the Himalayan caves even in noisy crowds.

As you increasingly see Divine wisdom underlying all conditions of life, you can live as a Yogi while performing all your duties in day-to-day life. When you truly understand that the world unravels different conditions of pleasure and pain to aid your spiritual advancement, you will not live in contradiction with it. Rather, you will consider the world as an aid in the spiritual task of discovering your deeper Self. You will attain such mastery over the mind that the various developments of day-to-day life will not thwart the steady flow of your mind towards the spiritual destination of Self-realization.

What Is Yoga's Approach to Overcoming Defects?

The method of thought-culture promoted by Yoga is very advanced and effective. You are not encouraged to relentlessly pursue the possible causes of your limitations; rather, you are asked to direct your mind to the positive potentiality of your personality by adopting the following methods:

1. *Pratipaksha Bhavana* (adopting a positive thought process): Suppose you want to overcome your irritable nature. Do not allow your mind to enter a state of worry and gloom about your failure in controlling the mind. Rather, con-

tinue to elevate the mind by thinking of the glorious advantages of practicing endurance, understanding and love.

Continue to assert: “I am the architect of my own destiny. I am an embodiment of peace and love.” Continue to endeavor towards the expression of love and harmony. You will find that this positive element is already in you. And as you continue to endeavor day by day, you will be able to promote it to such an extent that your habit of irritability will become myth. On the other hand, if you continue to dwell upon and worry about the negative habit, you are intensifying it in an unconscious manner.

Positive overcomes negative without any effort. Bring light, and darkness is gone. Bring joy, and sorrow will vanish. Bring courage, and diffidence will disappear. Bring humility, and pride will evaporate. Bring the understanding of your deeper Self, and all problems will be resolved.

2. *Sakshi Bhava* (adopting the attitude of being a witness) is an advanced method of keeping yourself detached from the thought-waves of your mind. Just as you would watch the formation and dissolution of clouds in the sky, you continue to watch the myriad clouds that come and go within your mind. With sustained practice, your mind will be gradually rendered calm and steady, and you will be able to eliminate what is unwanted in your personality in an effective manner.

What Is the Law of Karma?

The law of karma is the most profound theme of Yoga philosophy and the very foundation for Yoga *sadhana*—the practice of Yoga in day-to-day life. A correct understanding of the law of karma is the basis for gaining an aerial view of one’s existence, rather than a fragmentary interpretation of life’s meaning.

The law of karma is the universal law of cause and effect operating with perfect accuracy through the mental plane of every person. This Divine law operates with profound intelligence, translating into impeccable justice and spiritual upliftment for every soul. All circumstances in life, the events in the world, and the experiences of pleasure and pain are not the expressions of a blind intelligence, or the acts of a capricious God. They are expressions of the law of cause and effect.

Briefly presented, the law of karma implies that you are a traveler through many lives. You are not born with a clean slate; rather, you are born with the impressions that you have created by your own thoughts, words, and deeds from many lives. These impressions exist in the subconscious and unconscious depths of your mind. Combined with your free will, these impressions continue to determine your mental thoughts, desires, and sentiments, and thus lead you to various physical actions,

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achievements and conditions in life—and in the afterlife.

Many people entertain a convenient notion that all their weaknesses and limitations have arisen from factors completely independent of themselves. They are convinced that their failures and successes are due to hereditary factors, parents, a defective education, or the prevalent cultural climate in society—not due to their own choices. The fact that one does not remember their own erroneous actions performed in the recent or distant past leads them to lose themselves in a perpetual search for causes in the outer world.

With deeper insight into the law of karma, it becomes clear that all your external and internal conditions are the accumulated result of your own choices made over countless lifetimes. Further, the karmas operating in your current life have surfaced solely for your spiritual upliftment. As a result, you learn to confront your conditions in an artistic manner, maintaining a balance of mind during pleasure and pain, gain and loss, and other diverse conditions of life.

Throughout this Yogic process, you are guided by the truth that you are essentially the immortal Self, having the infinite Divine potentiality to change and reconstruct the conditions of your life. Even if you commence the practice of Yoga without faith in God, you increasingly feel your personality enveloped by Divine Presence. This allows you to attain a higher order of aspiration, to gain new energy for overcoming your defects, and to enjoy an ever-increasing ability to promote impressions of purity and peace within

your heart. It becomes clear that You are, indeed, the architect of your destiny!

Yoga for Universal Wealfare

The Yogic goal of realizing one's essential Self is not a "selfish" goal. Living a Yogic life has far-reaching universal effects. Any degree of integration that you promote within yourself renders a sublime service to humanity.

The way you function in the world depends upon the nature of your mind. If your mind is highly complexed, filled with the impressions of fear, sorrow, selfishness, greed, hatred, and violence, you will not be able to serve humanity in a healthy way. You will be spreading the contagion of theses mental maladies. But, as you advance on the path of Yoga, you begin to emanate the fragrance of Divine qualities: courage, tolerance, endurance, sincerity, truthfulness, and universal love. As this fragrance continues to radiate from within your personality, you are helping to create a foundation for a very advanced culture.

Consider the attention that is given to fighting external enemies in the political realm. Imagine what would happen to human civilization if the same effort were directed to defeating the enemies of the soul in the form of ignorance, egoism, pride and greed! The basis of all evils lies in the human heart, and this basis must be removed by knowledge. Yoga shows how the Divine qualities of the soul in every human being can be revealed and nurtured, leading to the unfoldment of Intuitive Knowledge, which destroys all problems at their very root!

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