

CULTURING ONE'S SELF THROUGH YOGA

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Abstract: All aspects of our human personality are cultured through the process of Yoga helping us evolve towards perfection until we reach the state of being ONE with the Divine Self. Yoga helps destroy the *kleshas*, the psychological afflictions that warp our vision, as well as it eradicates the *karma bandha* that prevents us from realizing our potential Divinity. Maharishi Patanjali has given us a clear road map for this evolutionary journey and has given us vital clues towards understanding both the internal and external culturing processes of Yoga. The cultural teachings of Yoga that spring forth from the antiquity of Indian culture help us in becoming "All One" by loosing our sense of individuality to gain an unparalleled sense of wholesome universality.

INTRODUCTION:

Yoga is the mother of all religions, cultures and sciences; the evolutionary path of cultural synthesis through which we may ultimately become the Divine itself. Indian culture is the fertile soil from which this great art and science has sprung millennia ago, and an understanding of the Indian cultural ethos is essential to know "Real Yoga".

Yoga is union/re-union, integration/re-integration, synthesis/re-synthesis and is the process as well as the goal by which we can integrate all aspects of our very being thus becoming ALL ONE.

The *kleshas* (built in, psychological afflictions that warp our vision) and *karma bandha* (being caught in the action-reaction spiral) prevent us from realizing that we are the Divine Self who is beyond these imperfections (*klesha karma vipaka ashayaih aparamrushta purusha vishesha ishwara - Patanjala Yoga Sutra I-24*). Yoga gives us a clear road map for our evolutionary journey towards re-synthesizing ourselves to ultimately reach that unlimited, unparalleled, unified state of ONENESS (*kaivalya*).

NATURE OF THE INDIVIDUAL HUMAN CULTURE:

The evolutionary Yogic process of culturing ourselves in order to attain the highest state of "universal perfection" deals with both the external as well the internal aspects of our individuality that are cultured in a step-by-step manner to integrate all levels thus producing completeness of our whole being.

In the *Gheranda Samhita*, a classical treatise on Hathayoga, the human body is likened to an unbaked clay pot that is incapable of holding the contents and dissolves when faced with the challenge of water. It is only through intense heat generated by practice of Yoga that the human body gets baked, making it fit to hold the Divine Spirit (*aama kumbha ivaambhastho jeeryamanah sada gatah yoganalena samdahya ghata shuddhim samacaret- Gheranda Samhita I: 8*)

The regular practice of Yoga as a 'Way of Life' helps reduce our physical, mental and emotional stresses that are destabilizing us. The Yogic 'way of life' lays emphasis on right thought, right action, right reaction and right attitude. No wonder Pujya Swamiji, Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj has defined Yogic living as the "right-use-ness of body, emotions and mind" - a life of righteousness indeed.

The regular practice of *jathis, yogasanas, kriyas, mudras, bandhas* and *pranayamas* helps to recondition the physical (*annamaya kosha*) and energy (*pranamaya kosha*) bodies. The practice of *pratyahara, dharana* and *dhyana* techniques helps to recondition the mind body (*manomaya kosha*) apparatus. All of these Yogic practices help to foster a greater understanding of the union of body, emotions and mind and to bring about their harmony. This righteous (right-use-ness) union of all aspects of our personality is Yoga in its truest sense.

IMPORTANCE OF THE EXTERNAL CULTURING PROCESSES:

The importance of the human body and its culturing through Yoga has been stated in the *Tirumandiram*, one of the most important Dravidian Yoga scriptures. Saint Tirumoolar has described the human body as the temple of the Divine stressing on the proper preservation of the body with reverence and care (*udambinai munnam izhukken drirunden udambinuk kulle yuruporul kanden udambule uttaman koilkon daan endru udambinai yaanirun thombugin drene - Tirumandiram 725*). He has emphasized purification of internal organs to attain an imperishable body with perfect health (*chuzhattrik kodukkave chuttik kazhiyunj chuzhattri malatthaik kamalatthaip poorithu uzhattrik kodukkum ubayam arivaarkku azhattrith thavirththudal anjana mame- Tirumandiram 726*).

The worldly man always feels that his problem lies elsewhere and that he is the innocent victim of circumstances and fate. Yoga teaches us that most of our problems lie within us and that we have to undergo conscious change in order to solve them. Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri used to often tell his students, "You don't have any problem---YOU are the problem!"

The *yogarudda*, or one who has attained to the state of Yoga, is described in the *Bhagavad Gita* as the one who is unaffected by the senses, not attached to the fruits of action and has renounced all desires (*yadahi nendriyartheshu na karmasu anushajatey sarva sankalpa samniyasi yogaroodh tada uchyate - Bhagavad Gita :VI-4*). This manifests in a detached

external attitude towards the impermanent material world and a development of the ability to go within oneself in order to find the ultimate eternal reality.

IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNAL CULTURING PROCESSES:

According to Maharishi Patanjali, the role of the limbs of Yoga is to facilitate the removal of impurities resulting in the attainment of a higher discerning intellect (*ashuddhiksaye jnanadeptih avivekakyate*- PYS II-28). This higher intellect is essential for the spiritual culturing process and must be cultivated arduously through the twin aspects of *abhyasa* and *vairagya*. Yoga also stresses the development of essential qualities such as *shraddha*, *veeraya*, *smriti* and *samadhi prajna* (PYS I-20) along with the cultivation of evolutionary *samskaras* (PYS I-50).

Controlling the *chitta vrittis*: The whirlpools of the subconscious mindstuff as described by Maharishi Patanjali (PYS I: 5-11) are of five types. These are *pramana* (cognition), *viparyaya* (misconception), *vikalpa* (imagination), *nidra* (sleep) and *smrithi* (memory). He also states that when the mind is not controlled there is identification with these Vrittis (*vritti sarupyam itarata*- PYS I: 4) and that the whole process of Yoga is aimed at "*chittavritti nirodhah*" so that we are established in our true self (*swarupavastanam*- PYS I: 3). Patanjali elucidates that the key to success is dedicated and determined practice (*abhyasa*) coupled with a detached, dispassionate objective attitude (*vairagya*) towards everything (PYS I: 12).

Working on the *chitta bhumi*: It is important to work on the internal and external states of the mind that consist of the undeveloped, inert mind that is as dull as stone (*mudha*), the totally distracted state of mind (*kshipta*), the partially distracted state of mind (*vikshipta*), the concentrated state of mind (*ekagratha*) and the controlled mind of the true Yogi (*niruddha*). Qualitative culturing of the mind from the lower states to the higher is part of the entire Yogic process.

Subjugating the *kleshas*: According to Patanjali most of our problems stem from the five psycho-physiological afflictions (*pancha klesha*), that are inborn in all human beings. The *pancha klesha* (PYS II-3) are ignorance (*avidya*), egoism (*asmita*) and our sense of needing to survive at any cost (*abinivesha*) as well as the attraction (*raaga*) to external objects and the repulsion (*dwesha*) to them. Ignorance (*avidya*) is usually the start of most problems along with the ego (*asmita*). Then, our sense of needing to survive at any cost (*abinivesha*) compounds it further. Both attraction (*raaga*) to external objects and the repulsion (*dwesha*) to them need to be destroyed for tranquility and equanimity to dawn. Maharishi Patanjali further states that the practice of *kriya yoga* (yoga of mental purification) consisting of *tapas* (disciplined effort), *swadhyaya* (self analysis) and *ishwara pranidhana* (surrender to the divine will) is the means to subjugate these five mental afflictions and attain to the state of *samadhi* or oneness with the supreme self or the divine (PYS II-2).

Dealing with the *antaraya / chitta vikshepa*: Patanjali is blessed with foresight and cautions us that there are many obstacles on the Yogic path to Kaivalya and offer the solutions to them too. In Sutras I-30 to 32 he describes the nine obstacles faced by *sadhakas* in their *sadhana* and enumerates these *antaraaya* or *chitta vikshepa* (PYS I-30) as *vyadhi* (disease), *styan* (dullness), *samshya* (indecision), *pramada* (procrastination), *alasya* (sloth), *avirati* (sensual craving), *brantidarshana* (fantasy / illusion), *alabda boomikatva* (inability to attain any higher state), *anavasthitatva* (inability to maintain that state that has been attained earlier). He also details the four-fold external manifestations of these internal obstacles (PYS I-31) as *duhkha* (pain / suffering), *daurmansya* (despair/ depression), *angamejayatva* (tremors) and *svasa prasvasa* (irregular respiration).

Patanjali then goes on to suggest different methods to stabilize and clear the mind in Sutras I-32 to I-39. Focused practice of one principle (*ekatatva abhyasa* - PYS I-32) is stated to be the best method to prevent and deal with the obstacles and their manifestations. The modern tendency of running from teacher to teacher and the following of method to method without any depth can never bring any result as it is the very opposite of this vital advice.

AIM OF EXTERNAL CULTURING:

In the *Patanjala Yoga Darshan* we find an excellent description of the attributes of bodily perfection (*kaya sampat*) that arise out of the external culturing processes of Yoga. It is said in *Vibhuti Pada* that perfection of body includes beauty, gracefulness, strength, and adamant hardness (*rupa lavanya bala vajra samhanana kaya sampat-PYS III: 47*). The effulgence that is characteristic of good health is also mentioned when it is said that deep concentration on *samana* (energy of digestion) leads to radiant effulgence (*samana jayat jvalanam -PYS III: 41*).

This is also exemplified in *Shvetaasvatara Upanishad* where it is said that the first signs of entering Yoga are lightness of body, health, thirstlessness of mind, clearness of complexion, a beautiful voice, an agreeable odour and scantiness of excretions (*laghutvam arogyam alolupatvam varnaprasadam svara sausthavam ca ganghas subho mootra pureesam Yoga pravrittim prathamam vadanti- Shvetaasvatara Upanishad: II-13*).

The various Hatha Yoga practices help in reconditioning of neuro-muscular and neuro-glandular system - in fact, the whole body - enabling it to withstand stress and strain better. This is well brought out in the *Hathayoga Pradipika* when Yogi Svatmarama says, "Slimness of body, lustre on face, clarity of voice, brightness of eyes, freedom from disease, control over seminal ejaculation, stimulation of gastric heat and purification of subtle energy channels are marks of success in Hathayoga" (*vapuh krsatvam vadane prasannataa naadasputatvam nayane sunirmale arogataa bindujayogni diipanam naadiivishuddhir hatha siddhi lakshanam- Hathayoga Pradipika II-78*).

Swami Kuvalayananda, the visionary founder of Kaivalyadhama says that the Yogic way of living places a great emphasis on appropriate diet conducive to producing a peak state of health along with an encouragement of the natural processes of elimination through various cleansing processes such as the *nadi shuddhi* or *mala shuddhi*.

AIM OF INTERNAL CULTURING:

Yoga not only considers the importance of attaining a dynamic state physical health but also more importantly mental health. Qualities of a mentally healthy person (*stitha prajna*) are enumerated in the *Bhagavad Gita* as follows:

- Beyond passion, fear and anger (*veeta raga bhaya krodhah-BG II.56*)
- Devoid of possessiveness and egoism (*nirmamo nirahamkarah- BG -II.7*)
- Firm in understanding and unbewildered (*sthira buddhir asamudhah-BG - V.20*)
- Engaged in doing good to all creatures (*sarva bhutahiteratah- BG V.25*)
- Friendly and compassionate to all (*maitrah karuna eva ca- BG XII.13*)
- Pure hearted and skilful without expectation (*anapekshah sucir daksah- BG XII.16*)

Maharishi Patanjali tells us that we can gain unexcelled happiness, mental comfort, joy and satisfaction by practicing contentment (*santoshat anuttamah sukha labhah- PYS II: 42*). This link is quite apparent once we think about it, but not too many associate the need for contentment in their greed for anything and everything in this material world.

The *Bhagavad Gita* delineates qualities of a spiritually healthy person in verses 1, 2 and 3 of Chapter XVI. These include: fearlessness (*abhayam*), purity of inner being (*sattva samshuddhih*), steadfastness in the path of knowledge (*jnanayoga vyavasthitih*), charity (*danam*), self control (*dama*), spirit of sacrifice (*yajna*), self analysis (*svadhyaya*), disciplined life (*tapa*), uprightness (*arjavam*), non violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satyam*), freedom from anger (*akrodhah*), spirit of renunciation (*tyagah*), tranquility (*shanti*), aversion to defamation (*apaishunam*), compassion to all living creatures (*daya bhutesv*), non covetedness (*aloluptvam*), gentleness (*maardavam*), modesty (*hrir acaapalam*), vigour (*tejah*), forgiveness (*kshama*), fortitude (*dhritih*), cleanliness of body and mind (*saucam*), freedom from malice (*adroho*), and absence of pride (*naa timaanita*).

METHODS OF CULTURING:

Abhyasa and Vairagya: Patanjali stresses the importance of *abhyasa* and *vairagya* in Sutra I-12 when he says that the *vrittis* will cease on their own accord once one has perfected the twin keys of *Abhyasa* and *Vairagya*. He goes on to define *abhyasa* as the uninterrupted, disciplined and dedicated practice done with Divine aspiration (PYS I-14). The nature of *vairagya* as a cultivated nature of dispassionate objectivity, so essential for

every scientist be they either the experimental modern ones or the experiential ancient sages is dealt with in Sutras 1-15 and 16. He gives a cross reference to the highest state of *kaivalya* (described in the final Sutras of *Kaivalya Pada*) when he states that one must develop dispassionate objectivity towards even the highest state (*para vairagya*) if one is to attain it (PYS I-16). As it is often said, if you really love something let it go. If it comes back to you it is rightfully yours and if not, it was never yours in the first place!

Ashtanga Yoga: The real purpose of *Yoga Sadhana* is expressed by Patanjali in Sutra II-28 when he states that the sustained practice of the various limbs of Yoga is meant for the destruction of the impurities, thus enabling the *sadhaka* to cultivate the highest wisdom of enlightenment (*yoganga anusthand ashuddi kshaye jnana deeptir aviveka kyatih-PYS II-28*). To this end he enumerates the eight-fold royal path of Ashtanga Yoga as "*yama niyama asana pranayama pratyahara dharana dhyana samadhi*" in II-29. Though all aspects of Yoga do in truth work at all levels of our existence, a generalization may be loosely made by saying that the *Bahiranga* practices such as *yama, niyama, asana* and *pranayama* help in the process of external culturing while the *Antaranga* practices of *dharana* and *dhyana* produce internal culturing along with *pratyahara*.

Kriya Yoga: The potent combination of *tapa, swadhyaya* and *ishwara pranidhana* (PYS II-1) is prescribed as the method to facilitate attainment of *samadhi* through the elimination of the *kleshas* (PYS II-2). The *kleshas* are the root source of the Karmic manifestations in class (*jati*), life span (*ayus*) and experience (*bhoga*) and so their eradication is vital for culturing the inner aspects of one's personality to attain the universality.

Pratipaksha Bhavanam: The concept of *pratipaksha bhavanam* is an amazing teaching and must be inculcated in our *sadhana* of day-to-day living as we face it so many times each day. Even if we cannot replace negative thoughts with emotion-laden positive reinforcements, we must at least make an attempt to stop them in their troublesome track! I have personally found that a strong "STOP" statement works wonders in helping block out the negative thoughts that otherwise lead us into the quicksand-like cesspool of deeper and greater trouble.

Healthy living: To live a healthy life it is important to do healthy things and follow a healthy lifestyle. The modern world is facing a pandemic of lifestyle disorders that require changes to be made consciously by individuals themselves. Yoga places great importance on a proper and healthy lifestyle whose main components are:

- *Achar* -Yoga stresses the importance of healthy activities such as exercise and recommends *asana, pranayama* and *kriyas* on a regular basis. Cardio-respiratory health is one of the main positive by-products of such healthy activities.
- *Vichar* -Right thoughts and right attitude towards life are vital for well being. A balanced state of mind is obtained by following the moral restraints and ethical observances (*yama-niyama*). As Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "there is enough in this world for everyone's need but not enough for any one person's greed".

- *Ahar* - Yoga emphasizes the need for a healthy, nourishing diet that has an adequate intake of fresh water along with a well balanced intake of fresh food, green salads, sprouts, unrefined cereals and fresh fruits. It is important to be aware of the need for a *satwic* diet, prepared and served with love and affection.
- *Vihar* - Proper recreational activities to relax body and mind are essential for good health. This includes proper relaxation, maintaining quietude of action-speech-thoughts and group activities wherein one loses the sense of individuality. Karma Yoga is an excellent method for losing the sense of individuality and gaining a sense of universality.

IMPORTANCE OF YOGIC CULTURAL CONCEPTS:

Various Yogic cultural concepts guide us in shaping our personal life as well as in culturing ourselves in relation to the interpersonal relationships in our social life.

- *Vasudeva Kudumbakam* - The whole world is one family. This is an excellent concept which helps one to understand that narrow, fanatical divisions on the basis of class, creed, religion and geographical distribution are all 'man made' obstructions towards oneness. One can then look upon all as his own and can bond with everyone sans any barrier.
- *Pancha Kosha* - The concept of our five sheaths or bodies helps us to understand how all our actions, emotions and even thoughts can influence our surroundings and that "No man is an island". Concepts of "*hard*" or psychic disassociation help us to be aware of why things happen to us and others in our daily life.
- *Chaturvidha Purushartha* - The four legitimate goals of life tell us how we can set legitimate goals in this life and work towards attaining them in the right way, following our *dharma* to attain *artha* (material prosperity), *kama* (emotional prosperity) and finally the attainment to the real goal of our life, *moksha* (spiritual prosperity).
- *Chatur Ashrama* - This concept of the four different stages in life helps us to know how, what and when to perform the various activities in our life. *Brahmacharya* is the period from birth till 27 years and is the period for study, conserving the creative impulse and channeling it towards elevating spiritual pursuits. *Grahashta* is the period of responsibility, spanning the period from 27 - 54 years in which we learn to care about others in the family and the social network, fulfilling our *dharma* towards both the young and the old. *Vanaprasta* or retirement is the period after 54 years when one's life can be played over again and again in the mind with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction having not to worry about anything at all. *Sanyasa* is the period of life when after performing our duties to the best of our

ability for 81 years and after having attained perfection in life we renounce everything for the divine.

- *Nishkama Karma*: Selfless action and the performance of our duty without any motive are qualities extolled by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Performing one's duty for the sake of the duty itself and not with any other motive helps us to develop detachment (*vairagya*) which is a quality vital for a good life.
- *Karmasu Koushalam*: 'Skill in action' is Yoga says Yogeshwar Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. 'To do our best and leave the rest' is how Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj used to describe the best way of living. Even if we don't practice the other aspects of Yoga, we can be 'living' Yoga, by performing all our duties skillfully and to the best of our ability. A great artist, doctor, worker, singer or sportsman can be a Yogi by performing their duty to perfection and without care for the rewards of the action, even if they do not practice *asana*, *pranayama* etc.
- *Samatvam*: 'Yoga is equanimity' says Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Development of a complete personality, neither affected by praise nor blame through the development of *vairagya* leads one to the harmonious state of "*stitha prajna*" or "*sama bhava*". This is a state of mind equally predisposed to all that happens, be it good or bad. Such a human is a boon to society and a pleasure to live and work with.
- *Bhakti Yoga* enables us to realise the greatness of the Divine and understand our puniness as compared to the power of the Divine or nature. We realize that we are but 'puppets on a string' following his commands on the stage of the world and then perform our activities with the intention of them being an offering to the Divine and gratefully receive HIS blessings. "It is only with the blessings of the Divine, that we can even worship his holy feet (*avanarula avan thal vanangi*)" says the Shiva Puranam, a Dravidian classic.

CONCLUSION:

According to Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Director of the International Centre for Yoga Education and Research at Ananda Ashram in Pondicherry, Yoga has a step-by-step method of culturing that produces effects at all levels of existence. She explains that social behaviour is first optimized through an understanding and control of the lower animal nature (*pancha yama*) and development and enhancement of the higher humane nature (*pancha niyama*). The body is then strengthened, disciplined, purified, sensitized, lightened, energized and made obedient to the higher will through *asana*. Universal *pranic* energy that flows through the body-mind-emotions-spirit continuum is intensified and controlled through *pranayama* using breath control as a method to attain controlled expansion of the vital cosmic energy. The externally oriented senses are explored, refined, sharpened and made acute, until finally the individuals can detach themselves from sensory

impressions at will through *pratyahara*. The restless mind is then purified, cleansed, focused and strengthened through concentration (*dharana*). If these six steps are thoroughly understood and practiced then the seventh, *dhyana* or meditation (a state of union of the mind with the object of contemplation) is possible. Intense meditation produces *samadhi*, or the enstatic feeling of Union, Oneness with the Universe. This is the perfect state of integration or harmonious health.

At the conclusion of the *Vibhuti Pada*, Maharishi Patanjali tells us that it is only the equality between *buddhi* and *purusha* that brings about liberation (*sattvapurusayoh suddhisamyekaivalyam*- PYS III-56). Such a state can only happen if we ourselves become a pure medium for the crystal-clear transmission of the Divine Universal impulses. Purity of thought, word and deed is of paramount importance if we are to become the purest vehicles of the Divine Grace. Yoga cultures us towards attaining that state of perfect clarity.

Yogis wish peace and happiness not only for themselves, but for all living beings. They are not "individualists" seeking salvation for themselves, but on the contrary are "Universalists" seeking to live life in the proper evolutionary manner to the best of their ability and with care and concern for their fellow human brethren and those beings living at all planes of existence.

May we all become true Yogis as extolled by Yogeshwar Sri Krishna when he says, "*tasmad yogi bhavarjuna* -become thou a Yogi, oh Arjuna"

Hari Om Tat Sat-may that be the reality!

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