VALUE EDUCATION FOR VALUABLE LIVING
THROUGH YOGA EDUCATION THE IDEAL BECOMES REAL

By
YOGACHARINI MEENAKSHI DEVI BHAVANANI
Director, International Centre for Yoga Education and Research (ICYER)
Pondicherry, South India

“Values” are those things in our life, which we hold to be “valuable”. What is “valuable” to modern man? Money, prestige, power, material possessions, success, recognition. But, are these things of any “true, intrinsic value?” A “value” is something, which lasts, which does not perish over time. “Sanathana Dharma” is the term used by our ancient Rishis for “Eternal, Imperishable Values.” What are these precious, valuable ideals? Satyam (Truth); Shivan (Goodness); Sundaram (Beauty). Sometimes they are described as Sat (Truth); Chit (Consciousness); and Anandam (Bliss). It is these immortal attributes, which have been held as “invaluable” by our ancient Rishis. From these “Root Values” all other human, societal values have sprung, like flowers from a strong mother tree: truthfulness, honesty, steadfastness, self-sacrifice, discipline, contentment, non-harmfulness, self-restraint, cleanliness.

But to live a life, which literally “radiates” these values, one must be strong, healthy, alert and aware. Hence, Yoga Education, which “educes” or “pulls out” these qualities from the human personality is the need of the hour. Yoga, the ancient Indian science and art of living, produces an individual who is vigorous and courageous enough to “live his values” or “walk his talk”. With an expanded, refined, aware consciousness, a controlled strong body and sensitive, soft emotions, the Eternal Imperishable Values become manifest in the human personality. Values do not remain verbal in such a person but are expressed in every word, every deed, every thought in the Yogic personality. Hence, the most efficient, effective method of cultivating a value-based society is through intelligent Yogic training of the populace, especially the children. Yoga education must become part of the national curriculum if “valuable life styles” are to be adopted by our nation’s youth. Through Yoga Education this grand Ideal may become Real!

THE MEANING OF YOGA

What is Yoga? This four-lettered word has become one of the most misunderstood terms in modern times. Most will associate Yoga with Asanas, body contortions which are good for health. Some will call Yoga a “keep fit exercise” or a good way for weight control. What a crying shame that this glorious term which has echoed down through the ages from the brilliant minds of our Rishis has been reduced to a triviality.

First and foremost, Yoga is a way of life bequeathed to us by our Vedic Rishis. It is a life based on the highest, most exquisite values. The basic value is one of
reverence, a realisation of the sacredness of all life. From that exquisite feeling comes all proper attitudes, which make for a quality life: respect for teachers, parents, family, society, plants, animals, the earth planet itself. Yoga is a way of life in which the body is looked upon as the temple of the spirit, and is cared for, kept clean, exercised properly and given good nutrition. Mind is controlled and good positive thoughts are consciously cultivated. Emotions are exercised in a healthy, positive manner.

The key word in a Yoga life style is “control” but not the rigid control of enforced, harsh discipline. It is rather a control, which springs naturally from awareness at all levels: awareness of body, awareness of emotions; awareness of mind, and ultimately, awareness of awareness itself.

Another important definition is “Yoga is conscious evolution”. Yoga is a science by which the human being can evolve himself / herself out of his / her animal tendencies into a humane, even god-like existence. When we see the state of the world today, we realise that a large percentage of people live lives, which are still at a bestial level. Bombings, destruction, wars, selfishness, ego-centric activity hedonistic living are the order of the times. The science of Yoga helps us to “lift ourselves” from the lower realms of sub-conscious compulsions into the light of conscious controlled living, where we act, instead of “react”, where we view each challenge and act consciously according to the circumstance, rather than surcomb to blind, impulsive reactive.

ASHTANGA YOGA: THE PATH OF EIGHT STEPS

Yoga is a science and like any science, it has a terminology, a methodology, a technology. But unlike other sciences, Yoga is firmly based on a value-system. In the Ashtanga Yoga system of Maharishi Patanjali, the first two steps of the eight-runged ladder are called Yama and Niyama. Yama literally means “restraint” and Niyama means “observances.” In short, one restrains one’s animal nature and then, cultivates one’s higher nature. Yama includes five restraints. Ahimsa (non-harmfulness); Satyam (truth); Asteya (non-stealing); Aparigraha (non-greed) and Brahmacharya (control of sexual nature). The Niyamas are also five in number: Saucham (cleanliness); Santhosam (contentment), Tapasya (austerities); Swadhyaya (self study, also study of the scriptures) and Iswara Pranidhana (surrender to Divine Will). Until one is firmly entrenched in the Yamas and Niyamas no progress can be made on the Yoga path.

Only after establishing restraint and positive observances, does one precede to the next two steps, Asana and Pranayama. Asana is a firm body position and Pranayama is control of breath (Prana). These practices are very important in developing will power, strength, stability, energy, clarity of emotions and thought, health and self-control. Asanas in the twenty-first century have become a highly developed aspect of Yoga and hundreds, if not thousands, of body postures exist. Though there are believed to be eight classical Pranayamas, according to the HathaYoga Pradipika of Swatmarama Suri, in actual fact, in some Paramparyas, hundreds of Pranayamas are taught. In the initial phases, Pranayama means, “controlling the breath patterns” and in more advanced stages; it means “controlling Prana, or Universal energy.”

The fifth stage of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga is Pratyahara, or restraint of the sensual organs. The sixth level is Dharana, concentration of mind. The seventh
stage is Dhyana, or meditation and the eighth level is Samadhi, or Cosmic
Consciousness. Taken as a whole, this is called Ashtanga Yoga, or the Eight
Limbed Path of Yoga.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YOGA IN VALUE BASED EDUCATION

Introducing the concepts of Yoga at the school level is value-based education par
efficiency. A textbook on Yoga Science may be devised, containing its
theoretical and value-based concepts and children may be assigned this as a
reading matter. Discussions may be held on the Yamas and Niyamas and their
relevance in modern life. Passages from ancient Indian texts which embody the
universality, harmony and reverence for life peculiar to the Indian ethos may be
included. Children may be asked to write essays on the Yamas and Niyamas and
fully express their own feelings.

A practical textbook should also be devised which contains various Yoga Asanas,
Kriyas, Mudras and Pranayama, which are suitable for children. A period of one
hour daily should be allotted for this practical work. Practicing the Asanas and
Pranayamas develops discipline and self-control and aids the child in curbing his
a-social and destructive tendencies.

The author of this paper has been working for thirty-five years in teaching Yoga
to more than ten thousand children and has developed many practices which are
very suited to children. It should be cautioned that Yoga practices which are safe
for adults, may not necessarily be safe for children, and so experts in the field
with long years of practical experience should be consulted before drawing up
any syllabus.

CONCLUSION

Yoga is a science, which contains the potentiality for making the “Ideal Real.”
Unlike modern physical sciences, it has a strong value-based foundation. Yoga
also has a technology, and contains a methodology for implementing and making
possible a noble, dignified life. The theory of Yoga contains exalted thoughts
and values, which inspire the human soul to strive for perfection. The practices
of Yoga bestow the strength, will power, determination, and energy to attain the
goal. Yoga theory and practice should be included in the National school
curriculum. This will go a long way in creating a value-based consciousness in
our nation’s children. Thus, the Ideal may become Real through the practice of
Yoga.