YOGA AND SOCIAL LIFE

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The science and art of YOGA, has for millennia guided man in his search for truth. Even in his personal and social life, Yoga has given him the tools and techniques with which he can find happiness, spiritual realization and social harmony.

Various yogic concepts have guided man towards shaping his life and the interpersonal relationships in his social life.

a) Vasudeva Kudumbakam - The whole world is one family. This is an excellent concept which helps one to understand that division 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 irrespective of any barrier.

b) 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". The concept of "nara" or psychic disassociation help us to be aware of why things happen to us and others in our daily life.

c) Chaturvidha Purusharthas - 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).

d) Chatur Ashramas - 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. Brahmacarya 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. Grahasta 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.

e) **Pancha Klesha**: Avidya (ignorance), Asmita (ego), Raaga (attraction), Dwesha (repulsion) and Abinivesha (urge to live at any cost) are the five *Klesha’s* or mental afflictions with which we are born into this human life. Through Yoga we can understand how these control our life and see their effects on our behaviour. These 'kleshas' hinder our personal and social life and must be destroyed through the practice of *Patanjali's Kriya Yoga* which is *tapas, swadyaya and iswar pranidhana (atman prasadhanam)*.

f) **Nishkama Karma**: Selfless action and the performance of our duty without any motive, are qualities extolled by the *Bhagavad Gita* which is one of the main yogic texts. 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.

g) **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 life. 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 any asana, pranayama etc..

h) **Samatvam**: 'Yoga is equanimity ' says the Bhagavad Gita. Development of a complete personality who is neither affected by praise nor blame through development of vairagya (detachment) leads to the state of "stitha prajna" or "sama bhavd". This is a state of mind which is 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.

**ROLE OF THE PANCHA YAMA AND PANCHA NIYAMA**

The *pancha yama* and *pancha niyama* provide a strong moral and ethical foundation for our personal and social life. They guide our attitudes with regard to the right and wrong in our life and in relation to our self, our family unit and the entire social system.

A) **Pancha Yama**:

- *ahimsa*: Non-violence
- *satya*: Truthfulness
asteya - non-stealing  
bramhacharya - proper channeling of the creative impulse  
aparigraha - non-coveted-ness  

These are the "DO NOTS" in a yoga sadhak's life. Do not kill, do not be untruthful, do not steal, do not waste your god given creativity and do not covet that which does not belong to you.

These guide us to say a big "NO" to our lower self and the lower impulses of violence etc. When we apply these to our life we can definitely have better personal and social relationships as social beings.

B) Pancha Niyama  
soucha - cleanliness  
santhosha - contentment  
tapas - discipline  
swadyaya - study of one's-self  
ishwar pranidhana - gratitude to the divine self (atman prasadhanam)  

The pancha niyamas guide us with "DO'S" - do be clean, do be contented, do be disciplined, do self - study (introspection) and do be thankful to the divine for all of his blessings.

They help us to say a big "YES" to our higher self and the higher impulses. Definitely a person with such qualities is a God-send to humanity.

Even when we are unable to live the yama and niyama completely, even the attempt by us to do so will bear fruit and make each one of us a better person and help us to be of value to those around us and a valuable person to live with in our family and society. These are values which need to be introduced to the youth in order to make them aware and conscious of these wonderful concepts of daily living which are qualities to be imbibed with joy and not learnt with fear or compulsion.

The parents can by example show their children the importance of these qualities and when the children see the good examples of their parents living there principles they will surely follow suit sooner than later.

ROLE OF THE OTHER ASPECTS OF YOGA  
Living a happy and healthy life on all planes is possible through the unified practice of hatha yoga asanas & pranayamas, dharana, dhyana and bakthi yoga especially when performed consciously and with awareness.
Asanas help to develop strength, flexibility, will power, good health, and stability and thus when practiced as a whole give a person a 'stable and unified strong personality'.

Pranayama helps us to control our emotions which are linked to breathing and the pranamaya kosha (the vital energy sheath or body). Slow, deep and rhythmic breathing helps to control stress and overcome emotional hang-ups.

Dharana and Dhyana help us to focus our mind and dwell in it and thus help us to channel our creative energy in a wholistic manner towards the right type of evolutionary activities. They help us to understand our self better and in the process become better humans in this social world.

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.

CONCLUSION
Thus we can see that yoga is not just performing some contorsionistic poses or huffing and puffing some pranayama or sleeping our way through any so-called meditation. It is an integrated way of life in which awareness and consciousness play a great part in guiding our spiritual evolution through life in the social system itself and not in some remote cave in the mountains or hut in the forest.

It is therefore fitting to end with Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj’s statement that "Yoga is the science and art of right-useness of body, emotions and mind".

The yogi wishes peace and happiness not only for himself, but for all beings on all the different planes of existence. He is not an "individualist" seeking salvation for only himself, but on the contrary is an "universalist" seeking to live life in the proper evolutionary manner to the best of his ability and with care and concern for his human bretheren as well as all beings on all planes of existence.

"Om, loka samasta sukhino bhavantu
sarve janaha sukhino bhavantu
Om shanti, shanti, shanti Om"