

SOME CORE CONCEPTS OF THE GITANANDA YOGA TRADITION

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In modern times when the grandest art and science of Yoga has been reduced to a skeletal manifestation of mere physical postures with a little breath manipulation and some so called meditation, Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri's contribution to the development of Yoga in the past century and his codification of these ancient teachings in a modern scientific manner is unparalleled. Pujya Swamiji's teachings like him are huge and are seemly never ending in their depth and multidimensional manifestation.

In this article, the author aims to present some of the core concepts that are unique features of this living Yoga tradition, now known worldwide as the Gitananda Yoga or Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga tradition.

1. YOGA IS A WAY OF LIFE

Yoga is not something you do but a way of life to be lived 60/60/24/7/365/x. It is the conscious transformation from a state of "doing" to a state of "being". This requires immense introspection, consciousness, awareness, dedication and determination. Many will exclaim that this is easy to say and tough to do but Swamiji has "walked his talk" and showed us how to do it by his magnificent example and it is now unto us to follow him.

2. CREATE GURUS NOT FOLLOWERS

Swamiji never desired huge numbers of students, a multitude of ashrams, name, fame or a vast organizational empire. All that mattered to him was the growth of the student and he aimed to help manifest the potential inherent in each one of his students even if they later hated him for it! Each and every one of Swamiji's students became "the best" they could have been in this lifetime. Each one of them is truly an individual and Swamiji brought out the best in each one. No stereotyping or mass mould production at all. In fact, I would venture to say that Swamiji made them all so aware of their inherent Divine nature that many a time they actually forgot him!!

3. BREATH IS LIFE

Though there has been some interest in Pranayama in recent times, no other system seems to even come close to Swamiji in terms of the vast repertoire and depth of his Pranayama teachings. He was truly a grand master of this intricate and detailed science of subtle energy control. In this tradition, great emphasis is placed on learning how to breathe properly and the students start with the Vibhagha Pranayama and then step-by-step build up towards the knowledge and practice of more than 120 intricate Pranayamas. All of this is done so that Prana, that vital cosmic catalyst may naturally fill each and every one of our trillions of cells with life and light.

4. NO OPTION YOGA

Swamiji termed Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga as the "No Option Yoga" and placed great importance on a deep understanding of the Yamas and Niyamas which are the firm foundation upon which the real Yoga life can be built. "You wouldn't build a colossal building without a foundation but you want to do it with Yoga?" he would ask numerous easy going aspirants who wanted some 'quick fix' Yoga.

5. STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH

Every aspect of Swamiji's teachings follows a step-by-step, structured approach that is easy to follow, detailed and methodical. Emphasis is placed on learning and re-learning the proceeding steps until the teachings are well digested, before proceeding any further on the path. "No shortcuts please" was his constant refrain for it is always better to be slow and steady, than fast and sorry. Great emphasis is placed on growing into the practice rather than forcing oneself into it thus enabling growth to occur at all levels. This is one of the reasons why the use of props and other contraptions that have made modern Yoga so costly today have never been part of this tradition.

6. LOVE FOR INDIAN CULTURE

One of the major issues facing Yoga in the West is the fact that Yoga has been cleaved away from Indian Culture (Sanathana Dharma). Without an understanding of the Indian (Hindu) culture and the way of life from which Yoga originated, it is very difficult to find answers for many questions confronting the sincere seeker. Swamiji tried to inculcate in his students a deep love and understanding of the ancient living culture from which Yoga has sprung. Our most loving Ammaji has continued by enriching this tradition by her unique contribution to the cultural renaissance in nationally and internationally.

7. BOUNTIFUL PRACTICES

Scores and scores of practices and techniques are part of this tradition that has

numerous Hatha, Laya and Jnana Yoga practices for the sincere aspirant. Polarity practices and the Mantra Laya deserve special mention as also the Laya Yoga Kriyas. To the best of my knowledge, the intricate and in-depth understanding of the twelve Chakras, Nadis and Bindus etc gleamed from the Dakshina Marga Tantra tradition of Yogamaharishi Swami Kakananda Brighu is not found elsewhere. Each of these practices and concepts have multiple levels for the sincere seeker and those who have gone deep into them understand that they are not mere playthings at all, for they are indeed very powerful and life transforming.

8. YANTRA, IN TUNE WITH NATURE

In this Paramparai there are three important sciences, namely Mantra, Yantra and Tantra. Yantra is the mystical science of number, name and form and is a method by which one can live to learn "in tune" with the cycles of the universe rather than be "off tune" with those very cycles. According to the Yantric concept as taught by Swamiji each number has a special quality to it and is not merely a measure of quantity as is usually presumed. Every aspect of life goes through a phase of Nines. This phase may be nine years, nine months, nine weeks or even nine days. This concept can be further extended both ways to go up to nine milliseconds on one hand and nine lifetimes on the other.

9. MUDRAS, DIVINE COMMUNICATION

One of the main features of the Gitananda tradition is the detailed exposition and understanding of Mudra, the ancient Yogic art and science of gesturing and sealing vital Pranic energies. These advanced techniques designed to improve neuromuscular coordination, culture human emotions and still the restless mind are a means of non-verbal communication that is subtle and refined. They enable us to communicate intra-personally with our inner self, interpersonally with others and trans-personally with the Divine. The Oli Mudra teachings as well as the usage of Hastha Mudras in the Vibhagha and Pranava Pranayamas are unique to this tradition.

Pujya Swamiji was in tune with the Akashic record (the cosmic living storehouse of wisdom) as there is no other way one can explain the phenomenal and limitless knowledge and wisdom that sprouted forth through his eloquent roar of truth. "Health and happiness are your birthright, claim them and develop them to your maximum potential as you evolve towards liberation". This message of Swamiji is a firm reminder that the goal of human existence is not health and happiness but is Moksha (liberation). Most people today are so busy trying to find health and happiness that they forget why they are here in the first place. The art and science of Yoga truly helps us regain our birthrights and attain the goal of human life. May we always be worthy of these great teachings and may his blessings always be with us as we traverse the evolutionary path he envisioned for us.