

IS YOGA SECULAR?

Dr Ananda Explores the Roots of Yoga in Sanātana Dharma.

Note: This is an edited transcript of Dr Ananda's talk on Facebook that can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEuXUi73nRQ&t=618s

Svāgatam!

You may be wondering why Dr. Ananda is live today. Well, I'm alive every moment. Usually, I come live on Saturdays on my Yogācārya page. Today I am coming live to discuss a topic that I am seeing coming up a lot on social media about Yoga and being secular.

I think we have to understand that Yoga is universal, Yoga is timeless, and Yoga is beyond all *isms*. So, **don't put Yoga in a box!** That is the first message I would like to give.

The second message is: **Yoga makes you better at whatever you are**, makes you a better version of yourself, irrespective of what culture you belong to. If you belong to the Indian culture, you become better, if you belong to a culture such as the Asian you become better, the European you become better, better whatever culture you belong to. And hence whatever way of life you are living, you become a better version of that through the practice of real Yoga.

Now real Yoga - traditional Yoga - has sprouted from the fertile soil of Indian culture, and Indian culture is a way of life called Sanātana Dharma: that which is **the eternal culture in tune with the universal law, a way of life that is eternal and in tune with the universal**. Sanātana Dharma is the fertile soil in which the art, science, philosophy, psychology, spirituality of Yoga has sprouted and flourished for millennia. Now, in modern times, people want to take Yoga out of its cultural context, they want to take Yoga out of the cultural context and divorce it from its roots, but yet they still want to call it Yoga, because Yoga is a marketable term these days.

The modern approach to Yoga is **plasticized Barbie Doll Yoga**. Now that is as good as going to a gym and having a good workout. So then, why for god's sake call it Yoga? Call it exercise and go on. I'll have no issues with it. But when we call it Yoga it has to be living. It has to be alive, and to be alive something has to be connected to the source! You take a fish out of water, put it on concrete, and then you say: "I have a beautiful fish." Yeah! But it's dead! When the fish is connected to the water, its life source, the fish is alive, and it thrives in its bountiful multi-dimensional existence. So, when Yoga is connected to Sanātana dharma, the pan-Indian culture that is eternal, a way

of life in tune with the universality, Yoga will be Yoga. Otherwise it becomes this mutated, plasticized, mummified version which is not Yoga anymore.

Then, you have questions where “oh, if people learn Yoga will it make them, you know, go into Hinduism, and we will lose control over them.” That is all nothing but control freakism, power-mongering control freakism, that exists in all these orders that have been created by human beings, not divine created by human beings. You see, Yoga is in tune with all cultures, all religions because it is universal. Now, definitely, if you are a Christian, you become a better Christian. If you are Muslim you become a better Muslim. If you are a Jew, a better Jew, Jain a better Jain, a Hindu a better Hindu. But that is in the bigger picture of things. The problem is when you become a better version of yourself, you may no longer be sheeple - you may no longer be one of those people who can be controlled by the power-hungry, money-hungry systems that have been created artificially by human beings.

Definitely, Yoga is compatible with all religions at the highest point, but then that highest point comes down in all these different orders that we create in order to maintain control - control freakism, power-freakism, money-freakism. They create these structures, and the people in charge of those structures - artificial, human-made structures, are scared of Yoga and, yes, they should be scared. Because the moment you really get into Yoga, real Yoga - not plasticized Barbie Doll, dead **Jada Yoga, Shava Yoga**, no! - When you get into real Yoga you start to connect to the universal self. You start to connect to the highest aspect of yourself and you start to evolve, grow, and transform from individuality to universality.

Now every religion wants that at the highest point, every religion wants it at the highest, but then, as I said, the power-hungry people in charge of the structures, will not like it. And this is where the struggle comes and then people start to say: “Oh, don't teach Yoga there, because then Hinduism will come in.” First of all, Hinduism itself, the word Hindu, is an artificially coined foreign word. Sanātana Dharma was a universal, eternal way of life that is open to everyone, every aspect. "That" **Truth is One**. The wise people call it different names.

At the highest level, Yoga makes you a better version of whatever you are. You become that highest manifestation of your potential divinity. But this scares people who are control freaks, and this exists in all organized structures - be it political, be it religious, or be it corporate. This is why when we talk about Yoga, Yoga is truly secular at the highest level, it is truly secular at the highest level, but then, in modern times, people think to be secular is to be anti-Hindu, especially in India. The secular front is anti-Hindu front.

Now that is not the secular I'm talking about. The secular is universal at the highest level, but please remember the culture, the Indian culture of Sanātana Dharma, you cannot divorce it from Yoga. And if you want to divorce it from Yoga, please call it something else. I meet people who say: "Oh! we do Yoga, but we don't like India and Sanskrit. Sanskrit is a dead language and India is a dirty country." Then, why call it Yoga? The word Yoga is Sanskrit, mind you. Call it exercise, call it keep fit, and then I will not come into your zone at all. You can do whatever nonsense you want, but if you call it Yoga, I will stand up for it. Because Yoga is a Sanskrit word. And please, remember: Yoga comes from the culture, the Sanātana dharma, the pan-Indian timeless culture.

One doesn't have to be a Hindu to practice Yoga, but one has to understand the culture from which Yoga has sprouted, the culture that has nourished it, that continues to nourish it. When we talk about Bhârat, Bhârat is not a geographical location of India. It is a cultural ethos. That cultural ethos is alive and kicking and it sustains and nourishes the true Yoga. So, whenever people get confused about this, anybody can practice Yoga - no doubt about it - you will become a better version of yourself, but because you grow out of the box! And please remember anything in a box is usually dead. Anything in a box is usually dead. Don't put Yoga in a box. If you are going to put Yoga in a box, call it something else - then I have no issues. Yoga is something which is timeless. Yoga is something which is priceless. Yoga is something that is universal. And that is why I always like to say that Yoga is truly universal, to such an extent that Yoga is for all. I'll repeat that. Yoga is for all, but all may not be for Yoga, and that is what we have to realize.

Because we break our boundaries, we break those limitations of the box that we have been put into, and by transcending the boxes, we transcend boundaries, we transcend limitations, we transcend structures that have been artificially created by human beings for the sake of controlled freakism, power freakism and money freakism. And there Yoga becomes a threat. So, please remember when we live Yoga, when we love Yoga, we are becoming a better version of ourselves. We are connecting to that universal powerhouse, that universal prâna, because that is what Yoga is. It is the universe itself.

So, to come back to my question, Yoga has its roots in Sanātana Dharma: do not divorce it from its roots! When you cut a plant away from its roots, you kill it! When you cut a fish away from its source of water, you kill it! When you cut Yoga away from Sanātana Dharma, you kill it! And then, you have mummified plasticized Barbie Doll, jada Yoga - dead body Yoga. You have the body, but not the soul. Without the soul it's not Yoga. It's a keep fit exercise.

I just wanted to share these thoughts today, because I've been seeing a lot of things coming on my timeline, and people get very confused. Please remember: Yoga helps you to become the best version of whatever you are! You become a better Christian, a better Muslim, a better Jew, a better Jain, a better Buddhist, a better Hindu, a better human being. But the organized structures which want you to be controlled, they will feel it's a threat, because you are getting out of control now, because you are now connecting to the source, all the middlemen are getting cut out. And this I must say, even of Yoga organizations, which in modern times, sadly, have got also caught up in control-freakism, power-freakism and money-freakism. Yoga is liberating. Yoga is not binding. It is liberating!

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me, a bit of a rant diatribe today, but I thought I must share it with you, because we must be true to Yoga. Yoga is our Mother. Let's not sell her for plastic.

Namaste, dhanyavâda, thank you so much.