YOGA: THE SCIENCE OF CONSTRUCTING
POSITIVE ATTITUDES

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Being is an attitude, a stance which the centre of consciousness takes in relationship to the world within and the world without. This collection of attitudes constitutes the sense of self and is the "starter button" for the myriad events of one's life. An attitude not only determines what happens to one, but also enables one to evolve or devolve. No one has free will or power over one's destiny. But everyone has one last and final freedom which even the most ferocious dictator cannot take away. That is the freedom to choose one's attitude towards whatever happens to one. Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so. Thinking is the conscious creation of the attitudes one chooses towards all experience.

The Hindu Culture contains a treasure trove of Bhavana, positive attitudes, positive stances of thought in regard to all of life's experiences. These attitudes towards being (be-attitudes) were formulated by the Rishis to aid humanity in crossing the treacherous ocean of Samskara. The cultural attitudes keep the Jiva (soul) afloat even in the most fierce of storms. The attitudes are life boats, rafts which save the soul (SOS) of the shipwrecked sailor (Jiva). These attitudes are seeds which when sown in the field of experience and nourished with the sun of consciousness grow into mighty trees, offering the Jiva solace from the intense heat of Samskaric life.

The science of Yoga is the distillation and sublimation of all the finest, most noble attitudes bequeathed as the legacy of the Rishis, a treasure trove of thoughts. The Veda, Upanishads, Manusmithi, Yoga Vashisha, Ramayana, Yoga Sutras, Bhagavad Gita, Shastras and Mahabharata are the treasury house wherein are stored these precious thought forms for safe keeping. The wise soul knows how to approach the keeper of this treasure and avail himself of the wealth of wisdom contained therein.

Two powerful strong holds of precious attitudes extremely useful in navigating Samskara - are contained within four Sanskrit words: Dharma, Prakriti, Vikrithi and Samskrithi. Let us examine our consciousness and establish powerful attitudes in the contemplation of these words.

Dharma: The Bed-Rock of Consciousness

Dharma in its root sense means: that which integrates and establishes stability. Dharma, is not only a personal but also a Universal Law. Just as abiding within man-
made law gives stability to society, so also abiding within the framework of Cosmic Law gives stability to the human mind and personality. "Dharma" literally means, “that which endures”. "Sanathana Dharma" is another term used in Sanskrit, which means-The Eternal Law. It is sometimes defined as “The Law of Virtuous Living” or “The Law of Right-Use-Ness (Righteousness). It cannot be broken. Those misguided and arrogant human egos, which attempt to break this Law, will find themselves instead broken over the Law. How does one know the Eternal Law has been broken? The consequences are there for all to see. Unhappiness, restlessness, illness, stress, mental and emotional disorders, disharmony, confusion, blatant escapism, perversion etc. Thus, an understanding of the Law of Dharma may be a useful tool in understanding human psychology. Counselling people in the relationship between fulfilling Dharma and achieving mental peace and stability may be a useful psychological approach.

No one can plead ignorance of the Law of Dharma. As in human jurisprudence, "ignorance of the law is no excuse". Just as a citizen of a social unit has a duty to be aware of the laws of his community and abide by them, so also man has a similar duty to be aware of the Laws of the Universe and must abide by them or face the consequences. Nature forces man to abide by Her Laws. In actual fact, man has no choice. It is literally, “Do Or Die”. Disobedience to Natural Law ensures harsh, often instantaneous punishment, as anyone who has tried to defy gravity by jumping off a steep cliff soon discovers. Physical survival depends on obedience to Natural Law. No one will dispute that. Perhaps it could also be contended that psychological and spiritual survival depends on obedience to that Universal Law of Sanatana Dharma.

What is The Law, what is this Dharma? The answer to this question is not a final, static one but an ever-unfolding, ever-deepening awareness of more and more subtle levels. As consciousness expands and refines, so also the concept of Dharma expands and refines. The Jewish prophet Moses carved Laws of Dharma, the Ten Commandments, on stone tablets to control the wild, animal passions of his unruly tribe with basic restraints. "Do not kill" "Do not steal" "Do not commit adultery". These are Dharmic laws in the most basic sense, an attempt to curb barbaric appetites, which unrestrained would lead to death, destruction, chaos, and misery. This Jewish law of Dharma, which also included "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" became, with the advent of Jesus the Christ, "Do unto others, as thou would have them do unto you" and "Love God above all things and thy neighbor as thyself" and "If a man smiteth thee on one check, turn the other, that he may smiteth thee there as well". Ahimsa, the Hindu concept of non-violence, was The Law that Jesus the Christ taught.

Lord Rama, King of Ayodhya, was said to be the very embodiment of Dharma. Dharma implies that one willfully chooses to perform the right action, at the right moment in the right manner, no matter how much personal sacrifice such an action may entail. The classic example of this is Rama’s cheerful willingness to forego his kingdom and accept fourteen years of exile in the forests, in order to fulfill the pledge his father, king Dasaratha, made to Rama’s stepmother Queen Kaikeyi. The essence of Truth, Satya, is keeping one’s word. What one says, or promises, or vows, or pledges, that one is duty-bound, bound by the laws of Dharma, to perform, even at the cost of one’s life. Thus, Lord Rama with heroic even-mindedness gave up his crown and his kingdom so that his
father's promise might be honoured. At the moment of his departure to the forest Rama's own disconsolate mother Kausalya blessed her valiant son with these brave, true words: "May that Dharma which thou has protected so heroically, now protect thee". Thus comes the saying in Hindu culture, "Dharma protects those who protect it". This is the Universal Law, the Universal Truth. One who upholds Dharma will always be safe. One, might add, one will be "safe" in the cosmic sense, in the Universal perspective. Even though from the human viewpoint such a person may appear to be suffering, they are actually undergoing spiritual purification, which enables them to ascend to higher and nobler planes of consciousness and existence. Thus, Rama's nobility earned for him everlasting glory. It is for this that it is said, "Rama is the Lion of Dharma".

Dharma implies stability. The symbol of Dharma is the bull. Hence, Dharma is balanced on Chatus-Pada, or "four-legs". The four legs of Dharma are "Tapas" - Austerity; Karuna-Compassion; Saucham-Purity and Satyam-Truth. The Bull Nandi is the vehicle of Lord Shiva. The word "Shiva" means "Goodness," "auspiciousness". "Shiva" is the embodiment of goodness. What is good? Something, which we think is "good" today, we may think, is "bad" tomorrow. Usually, men mistake the "good" for merely "the pleasant". Three pieces of chocolate cake "taste good today" but are "bad" tomorrow when they cause a bellyache. Yama, the Lord of Death, (who interestingly enough, is also called "Dharmaraj" or the "Lord of Dharma") cautions that great spiritual seeker Netchiketas in the Kathopanishad; "Do not mistake the pleasant for the good". The knower of Dharma must be able to distinguish the "good" from the "pleasant" and he must always, if he wishes to "protect Dharma" choose the "good". What is the real quality of "Goodness?" If it is to be a quality of Dharma, it too must endure, it too must be eternal. It must be permanently good, and not change from day to day, year to year, millennium to millennium or even from culture to culture or from place to place. True "Goodness" must always have been Good, be Good now in present time, and always be Good in all times to come. What can possibly fit this highly exalted qualification? Evolutionary growth and change! Only a constant spiritual growth, a constant change towards higher levels of being, can fit this high concept of Eternal Goodness. It has always been, is, and always shall be "good" to change and grow towards higher states of being! This growing constantly into higher states of consciousness is a personal practical goal, which gives stability to the human personality.

Shiva, the Lord of Dance, as a true Cosmic Dancer is always changing his bodily position. He is the personification of "evolutionary growth and change". Thus, he is the embodiment of "Goodness." And what is his vehicle? What allows him to move through time and space? None other than his Nandi, his faithful bull, who, in turn, is the embodiment of Dharma, or righteousness (Right-use-ness".) Following Dharma enables the human to change, to grow spiritually, to evolve, and thus, to pursue the "GOOD LIFE". This is the essence of the deep symbolism of Lord Shiva and Nandi. And the four legs of Nandi, the four aspects of Dharma, are: Austerity, Purity, Compassion and Truth in their most rarified, subtle essence. Understanding these things help us to lift veil after veil shrouding the Cosmic Law, and enables us to consciously live within that Law and harmonize ourselves with that Law. The more we follow Dharma the more inner
peace we will feel, the less conflict we will experience, and a deep satisfaction will penetrate our bones. A stability of mind and character will develop which produces a joy and happiness, which needs no external crutches to hobble about upon. It can stand alone, for it is firmly anchored to the immovable rock of Dharma.

Lord Krishna declares in the BHAGAVAD GITA, “Whenever there is a decline in Dharma (Righteous order) and a rise in Adharma (unrighteousness) I manifest Myself, controlling my Yogamaya (the power of Cosmic Illusion). This I do for the protection of the Sadhus (truth seekers) and for the destruction of the Duskritas (doers of evil, Cosmic law breakers). For the establishment of Dharma, I incarnate from time to time.”

The purpose of an Avatara (an incarnation of the Divine Spirit) is to restore righteous order in the society. In the great Hindu Epic the SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM there are listed twenty-five avatars of Lord Vishnu. Normally, in Hinduism only ten Avataras are given prominence. This concept is called the “Das Avatara.” Nine Avataras have already conducted their play upon our human stage: Matsya (Fish); Kurma (Tortoise); Varaha (boar); Narasimha (man-lion); Vamana, the dwarf; Parasurama (Rama with an axe); Rama (He Who Delights); Balarama (Rama with Might and Power); Krishna (He Who Attracts). The tenth Avatara Kalki (He Who Destroys) has not yet appeared. The purpose of each of these incarnations or Avataras was to restore the Law of Dharma, which was being destroyed by Duskritas (the doers of Evil or Unrighteous Men or breakers of the Cosmic Law).

There is another interesting aspect to the concept of Avataras. This is called “Amsa Avatara” or a “Partial Incarnation of the Divine Spirit.” This implies that the Divine Cosmic Spirit may incarnate in many different beings, but only partially. It also implies that each and every one of us becomes an “Amsa Avatar” when we successfully implement the Law of Dharma in our lives. The purpose of the Avatara is to restore order in society, which has fallen into disorder because of the lack of Dharmic living. Hence whenever we restore order, either in our own body-mind, emotions-spirit complex, in our family unit, our community, our nation, or in the world, we are acting as an “Amsa Avatara”, or a “Partial Incarnation of God”. Internally whenever we experience noble, altruistic, beautiful, mystical, elevated thoughts and insights, it is the Divine manifesting in us. Whenever we are able to express those same deep insights by our acts, our life, our words, or even just by our service and benevolent presence, we are upholding Dharma, the Universal Principle or Divine Order.

The Mahabharatha like all our Hindu Scriptures is a brilliant practical “study sheet” to guide us in the understanding of Dharma and its role in human life. It is said that everything that has ever happened in the world and everything that could ever happen is contained within these stories! It is true! Every situation faced by the heroes and villains of this epic are faced by us as well in our daily life, perhaps not on so grand and spectacular a scale, but the challenges and the structure of the situations are basically the same. The situation in the story is merely magnified, so we can see its intricacies much more clearly. It is, literally, the eternal battle between light and darkness, good and evil, Dharma and Adharma. Thus, reading such scriptures for their psychological significance and guidance is also a useful psychological tool.
The great Rishi Vedvyasa was a sad and disappointed man after he completed his masterpiece, the MAHABHARATHA however. His closing words were: "O! foolish men! I stand here shouting, with my arms uplifted! And yet, no one listens to me! Do your Dharma! Then Artha (wealth) and Kama (desire and its fulfillment) will come automatically to thee!"

Yes! If one does one’s Dharma, then one will legitimately obtain all the wealth he needs and his desires will be automatically fulfilled. But even today, five thousand years later, few men have learned this lesson and few have heeded the great Rishi’s words: “Do your Dharma, and all else will be given onto thee!” We can only shake our heads, and ask: “When will we ever learn? When will we ever learn!”

The understanding of the relationship between one’s state of mind and one’s ability to fulfill one’s Dharma could be a psychological tool of great aid in counselling persons disturbed by modern anxiety and stress. Such concepts, of course, would have little relevance for the severely disturbed person, but for those majority of persons who lack peace of mind and direction in life, and hence, exist in a state of constant unrest, such ideas may give them a basis on which to build a more stable life. The ancient Rishis realised well the relationship between mind and body, and knew thousands of years ago the principles of Adhi-Vyadhi, or psycho-somatics. They also saw the close relationship between mental and physical health and leading a clean, disciplined, responsible and virtuous life. It is well to keep in mind here Lord Krishna’s advice to Arjuna: “When in doubt as to the course of action to be taken, follow the example of the elders and the wise men who have gone that way before.” The Rishis have shown a clear path to health, mental peace, stability and personal fulfillment.

An important attitude towards being is to construct a firm mental resolution to hold to Dharma at all costs.

PRAKRITHI, VIKRITHI AND SAMSKRITHI

Another powerful attitude which will enable the soul to live a noble, meaningful life is the resolve to fulfill Prakrithi within the laws of Dharma, avoiding Vikrithi and embracing Samskrithi. What attitudes of being do these potent words embody?

There is an interesting schematic in Indian thought which views human nature and the culture or society by which it is conditioned as three-fold. Three words are essential: Prakrithi is a large word, like most Sanskrit words, and has many meanings, but in this context Prakrithi means “the basic urges of man and animal life:” sex, food, power urges, desire for dominance, aggression as a survival mechanism, herd instincts, hierarchical status (pecking order), need for ritualized behaviour in relationship, the play instinct, emotional drives etc. In other words, the term “Prakrithi” encompasses all the primal urges which man shares with his mammalian and reptilian brethren, powerful sub-conscious drives which are part and parcel of the DNA baggage stored in the ancient parts of his brain. These drives or needs are seen as part of nature’s grand design in the evolution of consciousness from lower to higher life forms. In the proper place and at the proper time, they have their own legitimacy, and their own right to fulfillment.
“Vikrithi” is the term used to describe a situation where these normal and natural drives (Prakrithi) have become perverted and distorted. One rarely encounters “Vikrithi” in the animal world. Occasionally, a rogue elephant will emerge from the herd, or a “mad dog”, but usually these creatures destroy themselves or are destroyed by the herd or the pack. It is a peculiarity of the human race that “Vikrithi” or perversion of these natural instincts is much more common than in the animal world. In fact, one could go so far as to say, at the risk of alienating almost everyone, that “Vikrithi,” or “perversion of natural urges,” is now the standard behaviour in modern society! The sexual act, which is designed for procreation at its lowest level and as a sublime spiritual union at its highest, is the most visible case in point. Vulgarity in sex, multiple sex partners, pornography, one night stands only to satisfy bestial lust, devices to enhance sexual pleasure, prostitution, pedophilia, homosexuality, sado - masochism, entertainment based mostly on sexual stimulation etc are just a few of the signs of this Vikrithi. Sex has been taken out of its context and sexual satisfaction glorified as the highest goal of human life. In our Indian tradition, this is “Vikrithi,” or “perversion.” Another easily visible example of Vikrithi is the obscene modern attitude towards food, characterized by the so-called “fast-food industry” which has reduced food to a “pleasurable-sensation” without any concern for preparation, for propriety, nutrition, spiritual aspects, or the morality and ethics surroundings ingestion and procurement. A gross vulgar and perverted attitude towards food has emerged along with deplorable eating habits. At its extreme, this perversion takes the form of bulimia and anorexia. But most people, especially those living modern, westernized life styles, have a perverse relationship with food. Food is a necessity. The body must be nourished and in the process, enjoyment may be felt. But the rising popularity of fast food and hotel culture has produced a perversion towards food resulting in a very selfish, wasteful, self-indulgent attitude. Eating anything, moving or still, alive or dead, in any manner, at any time, prepared by anyone, has become the norm. Food totally devoid of any nutritional value, abounding in artificially created taste stimulators, is the food of choice. The concepts of eating simply, at regular hours, enough to sustain and nourish the body, food in season, freshly prepared, food shared with other men and beasts, food taken in a reverential manner, are no longer important values. Frozen food, stored food, canned food, chemically preserved food, all literally “dead food”, allow the taste buds to enjoy bananas in Alaska in the heights of winter! Eating in hotels allows one to selfishly choose whatever one wishes to eat whenever one wants and demands no self-effort or self-involvement at all! Only the capacity to produce the paper money necessary to provide the service is required. Eating alone is common, or eating while reading or watching television. These activities, of the human being are all gross perversions of the natural hunger instinct and need for food, and are classified as “Vikrithi” in Hindu thought. One could go into detail with all the natural urges and see how they all have become perverted in the modern materialistic life style. As a contrast, the Hindu traditional view towards satisfying hunger is amazingly refined. In fact, it is said to be “a sin to eat alone.” Traditionally, when women cooked, they would prepare five chapattis: one for crows (to appease the hunger of ancestors), one for the cow, one for any guest or passing stranger, one as Prasad to the Divine, and one for themselves. One ate what was given, quietly first offering the food to God. Timings
were regulated as well as quantity. Giving food to others, especially the hungry, was considered the highest charity. These are only a few of the sublime attitudes towards basic human needs in the Hindu Culture.

This brings us to the third Sanskrit term “Samskrithi”. Samskrithi, in its most basic sense, means “culture”. In the Hindu tradition culture or “Samskrithi” is that “collective ethos of a group of people which evolves a pattern of behaviour which regulates, refines and sublimes the basic Prakrithi or the bestial urges which man shares with the creatures who are lower than him in the Great Chain of Being. The greatness of a culture or Samskrithi is its capacity to restrain, refine, transcend and make sublime (sublimate) the primordial urges of man.

By this definition, one can see that the modern materialistic life style cannot be called a “culture” at all! The modern way of life does not in any way quality as “Samskrithi”. Instead of refining, controlling, and sublimating the animal instincts, it glorifies, indulges, magnifies and worst of all, perverts them. The modern life style is a collective “Vikrithi,” or perversion of primordial instincts.

In discussing “Yoga Psychology” and construction of positive attitudes, it is necessary to clearly understand this concept for “individual mind” is conditioned by the “culture” into which it is born. A mind, which is born into “Vikrithi”, will almost certainly become perverted. Perversion of natural urges can never lead to permanent happiness, stability, peace of mind, health or spiritual unfoldment. Instead, perversion will only lead to devolution of the psyche, a return to the bestial state. That this is a fact is easily witnessed by the animal-like behaviour of huge numbers of human beings in today's society and the horrendous social, personal, mental and physical health problems, which now abound. One can hardly meet a same, happy, healthy, controlled, balanced or stable personality in today's society. According to World Health Statistics depression will reach endemic proportions and be the world's number one “Killer Disease" by 2040! Mental and physical wrecks, wracked by the most complicated problems, are the order of the day. Yoga Psychology considers much of this is caused by lack of Samskrithi and the prevalence of Vikrithi in modern society. This in turn results in adopting wrong attitudes towards being. Psychological disorders are caused by “Vikrithi”, perversion of Prakrithi, natural urges, and due to lack of Samskrithi, or strong cultural values and controls.

Attitude is all. Heaven and Hell lie within the human mind. The mind can make a hell of heaven or a heaven of hell. Thus the essential truth of Yoga is to choose the right attitude guided by one’s own experience, the scriptures and the examples of Gurus and wise elder.

Dharma is the Ultimate Attitude. To desire to do the right thing in right way at the right time with the right person is Dharma. Dharma is the Science of Right-Use-Ness or using everything in the right way. This is the Mother of All Attitudes. To support this mind fame which is committed to Dharma, one must fulfill Prakrithi in accordance with moral law, avoid Vikrithi and embrace Samskrithi, or a cultured way of life. This is the true science of mind, a treasure which is the legacy of the Rishi.