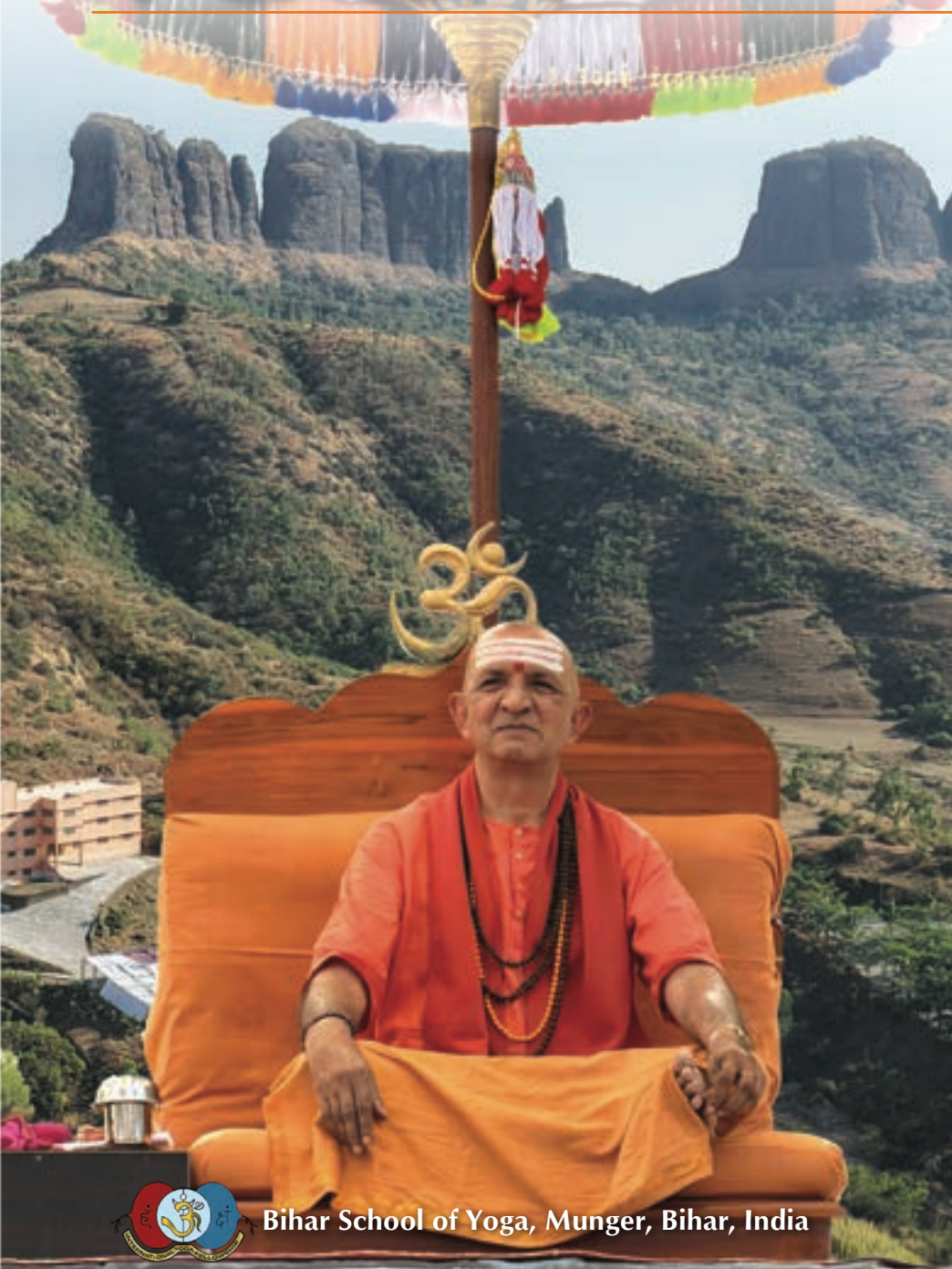


# YOGA

Year 15 Issue 4  
April 2026



Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India



## Hari Om

YOGA is compiled, composed and published by the sannyasin disciples of Swami Satyananda Saraswati for the benefit of all people who seek health, happiness and enlightenment. It contains information about the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar Yoga Bharati, Yoga Publications Trust and Yoga Research Fellowship.

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**YOGA** is a monthly magazine.

**Published** by Bihar School of Yoga, Ganga Darshan, Fort, Munger, Bihar – 811201.

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### Useful Resources

#### Websites:

[www.biharyoga.net](http://www.biharyoga.net)  
[www.sannyasapeeth.net](http://www.sannyasapeeth.net)  
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#### Apps:

(for Android and iOS devices)

Bihar Yoga  
APMB  
YOGA (English magazine)  
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FFH (For Frontline Heroes)

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Total no. of pages: 56 (including cover pages)

Front cover & plates: Bharat Yoga Yatra 2026



## GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

### Yoga in daily life

Self-sufficiency, impertinence, pride, luxury, name, fame, a self-assertive nature, obstinacy, idea of superiority, sensual desires, evil company, laziness, overeating, overwork, too much mixing and too much talking are some of the obstacles on the path of yoga. Yoga is not a turning away from life; yoga makes life spiritual. Equanimity is yoga. Serenity is yoga. Skill in action is yoga. Control of the senses and the mind is yoga. Anything by which the best and highest in life can be attained is yoga. Yoga is something that has to be assimilated and put into practice in daily life.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

**Published** by Swami Shivadhyanam Saraswati on behalf of Bihar School of Yoga, Ganga Darshan, Fort, Munger – 811201, Bihar

**Owned** by Bihar School of Yoga    **Editor:** Swami Gyansiddhi Saraswati

# YOGA

Year 15 Issue 4 • April 2026  
(64th year of publication)

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This issue of YOGA is dedicated to the teachings of Sage Vasishtha.

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The Yogi is superior to the ascetic. He is deemed superior even to those versed in sacred lore. The Yogi is superior even to those who perform action with some motive. Therefore, Arjuna, do you become a Yogi. (*Bhagavad Gita* VI:46)  
तपस्विभ्योऽधिको योगी ज्ञानिभ्योऽपि मतोधिकः । कर्मिभ्यश्चाधिको योगी तस्माद्योगी भवार्जुन ॥

# The Central Teaching

*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*



The world is your best teacher. This world is your best Guru. There is a lesson in everything. There is a lesson in each experience. The world is the best training ground for the development of various divine virtues, such as mercy, forgiveness, tolerance, universal love, generosity, nobility,

courage, magnanimity, patience, strong will. The world is an arena for fighting with the diabolical nature, and for expressing divinity from within.

The central teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Yoga Vasishtha* is that one should realize one's Self by remaining in the world. Be in the world, but be out of the world. Behave like the water on the lotus leaf. Give up the lower asuric nature which consists of selfishness, lust, anger, greed, hatred and jealousy. Assert the divine nature.

Live a life of mental renunciation and self-sacrifice. Have a simple and unassuming manner of life. Live not to eat, but eat to live. Bear no envy. Commit no slander. Speak no falsehood. Practise no deceit. Harbour no malice. You will be ever joyful, happy and peaceful. Righteousness is the rule of life. Lead a virtuous life. Strictly adhere to dharma. Human life is not human without virtues.

The salt of life is selfless service. The bread of life is universal love. Life is not fully lived, life has not been fully realized, if you do not serve and love the entire humanity. The secret of true life is in the love of God and the service of humanity. Live to help others. The divine power will stream through you as life-giving force.

Study the lives of saints and draw inspiration from them. Cultivate a melting heart, a giving hand, a kindly speech, live a life of service, equal vision and impartial attitude. Your life will, indeed, be blessed.



# Karma and Dharma

*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



Problems arise when one confronts a reaction and reacts to reaction. When a karma is accepted and understood there is harmony, but when there is reaction against karma, problems arise.

The aspirant learns how to flow in life with ease and grace, understanding and wisdom by fine-tuning his nature and karmas, by cultivating a balanced attitude and awareness, and through the practices of yoga. This learning is known as karma yoga. It is harmony of karmas, which are performed unconsciously, subconsciously and consciously through the body, mind and ego. The aspirant learns from the different



exposures he receives. When he is able to confront the exposures and crises that he encounters in a positive way, it becomes a learning process. The aim is to follow the human dharma, not contradict it. When one follows the human dharma, one is free. If one does not follow dharma and does not apply *jnana*, wisdom, karma binds. Karma fructifies only when it is attached to dharma, one's duty.

Therefore, to harmonize karmas the human dharma must be known first. Human dharma is the inherent responsibility. When karma and dharma unite, the karma changes and becomes *kartavya*, duty. In order to perform a karma as duty,

it is necessary to attach it to dharma. The word dharma is not being used here in the sense of religion. *Dharma* is a natural responsibility. To come to terms with karma, duty has to be made the primary component and not the karma. When one attaches oneself to responsibility there is a beautiful union of karma and dharma. With this union, everything flows naturally, the plans are made, the actions are performed, the results come about and life progresses.

When a householder looks after his home and family and educates his children, he should do it as a duty. The feeling of kinship makes him constantly aware of what is going on. If something goes wrong, he is immediately involved and sees that involvement as his responsibility. If two members of the family fight, he tells them not to fight, and sees it as his responsibility to do so. He does not see it as karma. Therefore, any karma that brings out the dharma through which harmony and a positive environment are created is duty. Sage Vasishtha says in *Yoga Vasishtha* (5:6:11):

*Tamaanseeva divaa yaanti tatra dvandvaani sankshayam;  
Sharadeeva ghanaastatra gunaa gachchhanti shuddhataam.*

The defects of the dutiful and their pain and pleasure are all lost in their duty, as the darkness of night is dispelled by the light of day, and the clouds of the rainy season are dispersed in autumn.

To become a karma yogi is as simple as perfecting karma. It is to become like the tree which gives its fruits irrespective of who climbs up to pluck them, throws a stone to bring them down or cuts the tree to pick the fruits. In every condition, the duty of the tree is to give fruits. Nature always follows duty and a human being follows karma. Nature looks upon everyone equally, but a human being considers himself first on the basis of karmas. When duty is followed, everyone receives equal importance. The simple way to become a karma yogi is to connect the karmas with dharma.

# At a Juncture

*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*



Awareness has evolved through the laws of nature from the beginning of time to this day. Nature's scheme is that everyone's consciousness will rise above instinct and above the body, senses, mind and intellect. Ultimately, the consciousness will operate on a higher level, a spiritual level, which is the level of yoga. Humanity is now at the threshold between two levels of evolution, the animal nature and the spiritual nature.

Karma yoga, which concerns the actions of daily life, is an important yoga for man at that juncture.

Karma is the expression of life. This expression has to be accepted and made the medium of spiritual development and upliftment. A person gains spiritually by karma yoga, and this should be remembered whenever one performs actions or talks about karma. Most people want to avoid work or lessen the burden of their work, and consequently their individuality is not developed. A person feels satisfaction and develops himself and his surroundings by doing karma yoga. He experiences satisfaction and satisfies and pleases the people around him. Karma yoga is an expression of life and it should be accepted as a means towards spiritual life.

One should, therefore, involve oneself in the life which one understands, which one can catch hold of, which one can handle, which is not beyond one's mind and with which one is concerned at every moment. One should involve oneself with one's partner, children, friends, enemies, business, wealth, kitchen, bank balance, radio, television, games, fun, thoughts, passions, ambitions, jealousies, hatred and greed. This is karma yoga and this is life!

A person who has come to the beginning of spiritual evolution should understand this life. Man is already crossing the threshold of natural evolution and entering the domain of spiritual evolution. Man is still half-animal and half-human, and the crown of the gods is over his head. The animal instinct does not enable man to know his personality; it does not make him free. He has to move with a yoke on his shoulders like an ox revolving around the grinding mill, in order to work through this animal instinct. Therefore, performing karma yoga is the means to liberate man from karma. Spiritual development only becomes possible when there is respect for karma and the relationship between karma and spiritual life is understood.

Karma and spiritual life are opposed when karma is done for pleasure or reward. However, when karma is done for the sake of the work, it helps one to grow in spiritual life. Karma

yoga is the performance of karma without attachment to the results, and this becomes an integral part of spiritual life. Spiritual life does not mean sitting and meditating all day long. Karma yoga is a part of spiritual life. Karma yoga is the starting point of the spiritual chapter of life. It is said in the *Yoga Vasishtha* (3:88:13):

*Atah sushuptopamayaa dhiyaa nishkaamayaa tayaa;  
Sushuptabuddhasamayaa kuru kaaryam yathaagatam.*

Therefore, do your work as it comes to you, with a cheerful heart, calm mind and tranquil soul, as if you were acting in your sleep, devoid of desires which you can never reap.

No one can remain without action even for a split second, as action is in the mind. When one thinks, one is active; there is not even one moment in life when the mind is not active. A lazy man may be physically inactive, but his mind is active. External actions do not bind a person. One may perform any work or do anything as an external action and it will not necessarily cause bondage, but when the ego is involved, one is bound. When the individuality is involved, one is in trouble. When a person identifies with karma, he suffers. Karma is not the cause of suffering; the identification with karma is the cause of suffering. It is a kind of neurosis.

According to *Yoga Vasishtha*, therefore, one must take care of one's innate identifications, rather than react obsessively for or against one's karmas. Sage Vasishtha instructs Sri Rama (5:93:89):

*Evam roopam parityajya sangam svaatmaavikaaradam;  
Yadi tishthasi nirvyagrah karvannapi na lipyase.*

Abandon, therefore, your desires and attachments, which trouble the soul. Your freedom from them keeps your mind untainted, while you willingly continue to discharge your duties in life.

# Karma and Karma Yoga

*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



Sage Vasishtha describes the process of karma yoga by saying that everyone has to live their karmas and samskaras. Everyone has to live their destiny. One has to go through the path, the journey, which starts from point A and goes on to point B. This movement from point A to point B is called evolution or the forward movement of life. In this evolving life one cannot shun karmas. One can better understand the karmas by responding to them in a positive and creative way, rather than reacting. Do not react, but respond. Reaction is unconscious, response is conscious. Reaction is not thought about; response is thought about. While engaged in karmas, try to improve the performance, efficiency and creativity in order to avoid the pitfalls from the 'loss or gain' attitude associated with a karma. So respond consciously to a karma and do not react unconsciously.

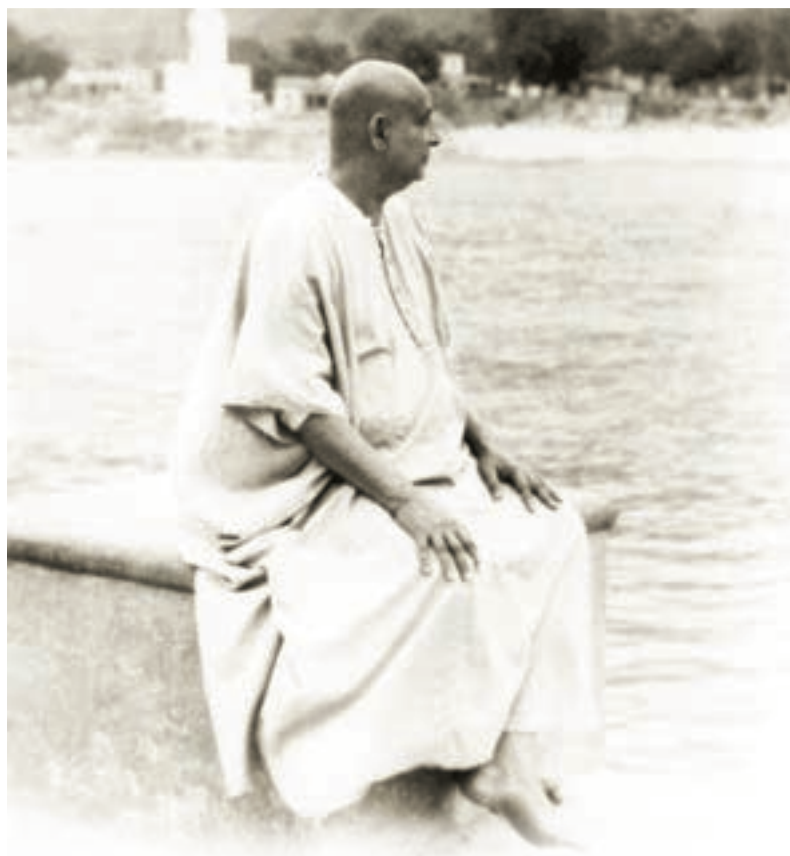
This is the theory of karma yoga, in a nutshell, that Sage Vasishtha tells Sri Rama to remember. He says that when one is able to respond in the appropriate manner to the karmas, liberation takes place. He does not say that meditation becomes the path of liberation. He says, "Proper understanding and response to the karmic situation makes one liberated. Therefore, Sri Rama, do not avoid participation and involvement with karma." The entire concept of karma and karma yoga has been defined by Sri Swami Satyananda in the most beautiful manner. He says, "Realization is not escaping from life and shunning karma but running into life with the arms open to embrace all the karmas." This is an important sutra, an important statement, to remember.

In order to find peace and happiness, there is no need to renounce, avoid or shun anything. Most people say, "Oh, I have to avoid karmas. I have to detach myself from karmas, therefore I am not going to do any karma whatsoever." Meditation can only give a momentary glimpse, a fleeting glimpse, of what lies beyond the mind, but one cannot stay there. The karmas and vasanas pull one back down, the family pulls one back down, problems pull one back down, the profession and difficulties pull one back down.

Both Sri Swami Satyananda and Sage Vasishtha say, "Do not worry. Do your karma as your dharma, just as a doctor can treat hundreds of patients with the same awareness, objectively, knowing and understanding everything. The moment the doctor becomes subjective, he is not a doctor anymore. In the same manner, if a person can maintain objectivity to the karma, he can be a 'karma yogi', but if he becomes subjective, he loses the plot of karma yoga. Through karma yoga, when one has realized one's dharma, and one is free from the influences, the reactive nature of the karma, one is liberated, and once a person is liberated there is no return to ignorance. One continues to live in this world but as an enlightened being, not as an ignorant being."

# Vairagya

*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*



In the *Vairagya Prakarana* in the *Yoga Vasishtha*, one will have a comprehensive understanding of the real essence of vairagya. A clear description of the actual dispassionate mental state of Sri Rama is given there. Palatable dishes, refreshing beverages, an affectionate father and mother, brothers, dear friends, diamonds, pearls, flowers, sandal, ornaments, soft beds or gardens had no attraction for him. On the contrary, their very sight gave him intense pain. Vairagya is purely a mental state.

# Ego – the Root Cause

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

For day-to-day life, the ego is a great obstacle. Problems arise when the ego operates. There are always differences when the purpose of personal interaction is motivated by ego and not by devotion, or *bhakti*. Many minds pulling in different directions blow a fuse. The ego is the source of calamities, anxieties and desires; therefore, no enemy is stronger than ego. This 'I', or *ahamkara*, is the root cause of problems in the mental and psychic fields. In *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:27:21) it is said:



*Ayam so'ham mamedam tadityaakalpitakalpanah;  
Aapadaam paatrataameti payasaamiva saagarah.*

The knowledge that this is I and these are mine, and all others are separate or apart is the bane of human life; one with such thoughts becomes the receptacle of evils like the sea of salty waters.

The ego is dangerous in life, not only at the individual level, but at the social and national levels as well. The whole world is in a deep crisis on account of this ego. Kingdoms are breaking down, homes are falling apart and couples who have sworn to love each other quarrel publicly due to the powerful ego. The sages have declared that the feeling of self is a personality aberration. The ego is an obstacle between husband and wife.

The accidents that take place in family life are due not only to circumstances, but to the unbending ego.

It is not possible to be perfect in life. There will be cordiality, understanding and love only as long as there is no ego. Love and ego cannot coexist. Where there is ego, there is definitely no love. There is a process of giving, giving and giving, until one gives oneself completely, and there is no ego left. It is necessary to change the quality of the mind. The ego must be extricated and eliminated.

Therefore, for a householder it is important to create a true philosophy within, a true approach, a true understanding of oneself in relation to humankind. Finally, one realizes that this 'I' is a mythological 'I', not the real 'I'. If one knows that the mind, aspirations and everything in life is illuminated with divine light, effulgence and realization, everything goes smoothly. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:31:7):

*Ahankaaramato raama maarjayaantah prayatnatah;  
Aham na kinchideveti bhaavayitvaa sukhee bhava.*

Therefore, O Rama! Be diligent and wipe away the sense of egoism from your heart. Always try to be happy by thinking 'I am not anything'.

What happens when the mind becomes pure? Clarity, purity and concentration arise. When the mirror is cleansed, one's face can be seen. If the mirror is not cleansed, the face cannot be seen. Through karma yoga the personality becomes purer and purer, day by day, until unbroken peace of mind is experienced. Sage Vasishtha says to Sri Rama in *Yoga Vasishtha* (3:114:76):

*Tishthatastava kaaryeshu maastu raageshu ranjanaa;  
Sphatikasyeva chitraani pratibimbaani grihnnatah.*

Employ your mind in your duties, without being tarnished by your attachment to any; but remain as the unsullied crystal, receiving the reflections of outward objects, without being stained by any.

# Yoga Vasishtha

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Our seers, our *rishis*, had a vision, a realization and an experience. That experience and vision was of Advaita Vedanta. What is Vedanta? People think of it as thoughts of realized beings. People who are not at that level of realization, knowledge or understanding declare it to be a philosophy. There is a huge difference between darshan and philosophy. *Darshan* is the living experience, the actualization of a belief, the realization that this is the truth. Philosophy is nothing but intellectual gymnastics of ignorant people. I am saying it in a straightforward and blunt manner. Vedanta has been classified as a philosophy by those who are not able to understand the meaning of Vedanta.

*Veda* is derived from the Sanskrit root *vik*, which means to know, and *veda* means the repository of knowledge. To this they have added the word, *anta*, which means the end. So what is the end of knowledge? The end of knowledge is nothing intellectual. The end of knowledge is always experiential. Let

me give you an example. While living in America, I met a person who wrote a dissertation on rasgulla. In that dissertation, he wrote about the process of making the *chhena*, Indian cottage cheese, the *chashni*, syrup, about how much sugar and jaggery to add. That was all from his intellectual capacity.

Once on a flight, he was sitting beside me. We started to talk. He said, 'You are Indian?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'You know, I have written a dissertation on rasgulla.' I was quite interested and said, 'Can you show me?' He took out his dissertation, and I turned a few pages. He said, 'You know Swamiji, I have never tasted a rasgulla in my life, and I am going to India to taste the rasgulla.' At that moment it struck me that what he had written was the philosophy of rasgulla, he had not had the darshan, the experience, the realization of rasgulla. He had written from his own mind, his own analysis and intellect, but the taste was missing. This is the difference between philosophy and darshan.

Vedanta is the same; it is the end of knowledge. What you know becomes a living experience, and that is known as Vedanta. In the vedic scriptures, the rishis who wrote and contributed to the Vedas, said at the end, '*Neti, neti* - not this, there is more beyond it. From our perception, this is what we have understood and realized. This is not the final; there is much more beyond our realization as well.' So, Vedanta always means end of knowledge, where what is known is experienced and realized.

Then another word is added before Vedanta, Advaita. *Advaita* means where duality does not exist; everything is one, everything is unified, everything has come together. That state, that experience is known as the Brahman experience; the Brahman which the Vedas and scriptures talk about. In *Advaita* duality does not exist. This has been clarified by Sage Vasishtha. The basic philosophy of every human being is to overcome the process of duality. There is no *bheda*, no *dvaita*, no division between you and me, day and night, good and bad. Everything is one expression and one experience.

In this world, the senses and mind interact with life, we are born in this material dimension. When the senses and mind interact with the sense objects and the material world, the *annamaya* dimension, *advaita* does not exist. There only *dvaita* exists, duality. This is the world of duality and life is experienced in the dimension of duality, the dimension of *dvaita*. In this dimension, nothing is permanent, nothing is eternal. All the phenomena that we perceive are always in constant flux, changing every second.

We perceive our life and environment differently according to our mind, the understanding of mind and our experiences of life. One situation can be observed in ten different ways by ten people. The same situation, the same condition observed by ten people, who will never reach an agreement. Each one is having a different experience and understanding, according to their mental conditioning, growth and evolution. Sage Vasishtha says that this is the cause of problems in life.

One has to manage the mind to eradicate duality and establish oneself in unity through meditation and vairagya. From here the *Yoga Vasishtha* begins – keeping these ideas in mind that everything is Brahman, everything leads to the experience of the non-dualistic nature, but also recognizing that we live in this material dimension, that we perceive the phenomena in our own manner, in different ways and forms, according to our understanding, knowledge, wisdom and conditioning. We are constantly being influenced. We cannot say that we are beyond influence or conditioning.

The challenge is how do we separate the mind from this dualistic experience, to attain the *advaita* realization? When we are in the dualistic experience we become aware of the suffering, the pains and pleasures, desires and ambitions. We are attracted by sense objects and we begin to identify with them. In this condition our mind is totally dissipated. Sri Rama faced the same situation, ‘How do I deal with this mind?’ The instructions that Sage Vasishtha gave him are divided into different chapters.



## Vairagya

The first one is the *Vairagya Prakarana*, thoughts on vairagya. When you think of vairagya you conjure up the image of renunciation, not of balance. The *Yoga Sutras* say, '*Sukhanushayi raga, dukhanushayi dwesha* – when mind is attracted to pleasure, there is *raga*, attachment, association which is recognized as attachment.' *Raga* always represents the search for pleasure. *Raga* represents something which makes you happy and feel fulfilled in this material dimension. When *raga* is absent, there is a feeling of suffering, there is a feeling of FOMO, Fear Of Missing Out. Later that is experienced as separation



from pleasure, which is *dwesha*, and that gives pain.’ If raga is attachment to the sense objects, then vairagya is the opposite of that. You become aware of your ragas and try to separate yourself from experiencing raga, without going into the dwesha dimension.

Aparigraha is the first step to understanding vairagya. It is necessary, because the *vidhi*, the process, to attain vairagya has to be known, not the end result. We think of vairagya as renunciation, but it is not that. Vairagya is separation from raga without falling into dwesha. Separation from raga will begin in your life, in this materialistic world, with aparigraha. *Aparigraha*

means non-possessiveness. It means recognizing what adds value to your life and retaining that. It means recognizing what does not add value to your life and removing that.

The best example is your own home – the stuff which you have accumulated in your own home. You think of vairagya as renunciation, but it is not. Aparigraha is the stepping-stone leading to vairagya: understanding what is your need and separating that need from the ambition. You need to develop that skill in you. Without it, yoga is nothing. Until you are able to recognize your attachments and associations, and learn to manage them, you will not be able to progress even one step in meditation. That is only your imagination and fantasy, not the harmonious, balanced realization of your mind.

This is the first recognition that Sage Vasishtha is saying to develop: In this world, to what are you attached? How does that attachment or association influence you? Is that influence constructive, positive and uplifting, or is it restrictive, destructive and limiting? If you have the wisdom to recognize that, you embark on the yogic path. If you do not have the wisdom to recognize that, your condition will be like the boatman who rowed the whole night, but the boat was tied to the shore and did not go anywhere.

## **Mumukshutva**

The second aspect is mumukshutva. People translate *mumukshutva* as desire for liberation. Liberation from what? Recognizing and realizing the causes of pain and suffering and coming out of their gravity is known as is mumukshutva. If your suffering is caused by something, then you are totally identified with your pain and suffering. If you are able to recognize that this is the cause of your problem and difficulty, and how you can come out of it and attain *shanti*, peace, then that is mumukshutva. It is not a desire for liberation which is a high-up ability beyond you, but it is a practical recognition of the obstacles in your life, and making the effort to overcome these obstacles.

## Aham Brahmasmi

The third is *Aham Brahmasmi*. Aham Brahmasmi means dis-identification with duality and identification with unity. *Aham Brahmasmi* does not mean 'I am That', as many people have said. *Aham Brahmasmi* is dis-identification with duality and connection with unity. When you are connected to that unified consciousness, you are It. There is no duality, 'I am experiencing', because if you say, 'I am experiencing,' then experience is different and 'I am' is different. My guru, Swami Satyananda, says that when people meditate, they are in a state of *traita*; then they have to move to a state of *dvaita* and then they have to move into the state of *advaita*. *Traita* is three types of awareness: first, I am sitting; second, the process which I am doing, the meditative process; and third, the object of meditation. The object of meditation is there, I am here and the process that I am doing – that is *traita* awareness.

As you deepen your meditation, the process dissolves; only you and the object remain, and that becomes *dvaita*. In the course of time, when you lose yourself and only the identification of the object remains, then that is *advaita*. This *advaita* awareness, where only the object remains, is the statement of *Aham Brahmasmi* – 'I am That; I have become That; That is in me.' That can happen not only through meditation, but also by changing the attitude and awareness.

Everyone says that the Divine, God is within everyone. Right now it is only a statement, there is no realization. My guru, Swami Satyananda, says that God is not separate to human experience. When somebody is suffering, God inside that person is also suffering. God within that person is not separate to the experience of the person. He used to say, 'If you see a hungry person, then God within that person is experiencing hunger. Feed him. If you see a thirsty person, God within that person is experiencing thirst. So, give water to that God. In this way, recognize the spark of divinity in each one.' That is known as *atmabhava*. Up to a certain degree, mothers experience this *atmabhava* with their children. When the child



is sick, the doctor is the person who is giving medication to the child and treating the child, but the mother is sitting beside the bed of the child day and night. What for? She has no role. The child is sick and the doctor is treating the child. Why is the mother sitting day and night beside the child? The mother sees her reflection in that child, and therefore she is sitting there. If the mother did not see her reflection in the child, she would not be there.

It is the *atmabhava* of the mother with the child that makes her sacrifice her sleep and food, and just stay there with the child, until the child gets well. Yogis have the same experience; they see that divinity in each and every person. To be able to see that divine spark and to serve that Divine seated, enthroned in each one of us, is *Aham Brahmasmi* – I am That. I am That. I am That. By saying, 'I am That,' this 'I' loses its duality and becomes one with That. That is the third aspect of the *Yoga Vasishtha*.

## Nirvana

*Nirvana* is dissolution of the ego. When you make tea or coffee, you take a spoonful of sugar and mix it in the water. The sugar dissolves and becomes one with water. There is no separate identity of the sugar anymore. This dissolution or *laya* is known as *nirvana*. In the context of the *Yoga Vasishtha*, it is the dissolution of ego. Ego is the principle which creates your identity and separates you from others. In today's world, everyone is out for their ego fulfilment. By trying to be famous, you are only boosting your self-esteem, self-image, self-prestige, your ego. Calling oneself a yoga guru is an expression of the highest ego.

In our tradition of sannyasa, whether it be Adi Shankaracharya, Swami Sivananda or anyone for that matter, they never called themselves gurus. People refer to them as acharyas. We know Shankaracharya not Shankaraguru. Sages and rishis have never identified with that identity, and they have been referred to as acharya. Those who are able to sacrifice their egos and establish themselves in truth are known as people who have experienced nirvana.

## Advaita

*Advaita* is recognizing the divisiveness of the world. Who recognizes this divisiveness? It is not my intention to hurt anybody, but to present the truth. In Indian society, some people put themselves in an exalted position by saying, 'I belong to this caste.' Some people are put in the lowest position by saying, 'You belong to this caste.' If you read the *Purusha Suktam*, there is the statement (sloka 12):

*Brahmano-asya mukham-aasid bahu rajanyah krtah.*

*Uru tad-asya yad-vaishyah padbhyam shudro ajayata.*

The *Purusha Suktam* says that *Brahmanas* emerge from my mouth. What is that? Wisdom comes out of the mouth, not you or me. *Bahu rajanyah krtah*, the power of protection comes from the arms, not you and me who identify ourselves as *kshatriyas*.

*Uru tad-asya yad-vaishyah*, the stability of society comes from the thighs, *the vaishyas*, the trade, commerce, growth, upliftment. *Padbhyam shudro ajayata*, and shudras come from the feet. When you go to a temple, visit your guru or an enlightened being, what do you do? Do you touch their mouth because wisdom is coming out of that? Do you touch their arms because strength is coming from their arms? Do you touch their thighs because they are strong and hold the body upright and straight, or do you touch their feet?

We touch their feet. What you call the lowest class comes from the feet. They are the people who are the architects of our society, who make homes, bricks, mortar, cement and make a house for you to live in. Can you, a PhD holder, a degree holder, even make a single brick? Can you mould and make mortar and plaster your home with it? Many things for society are done by those Vishwakarmas whom society calls shudras. They are the actual people who serve society. They are the social workers without whom we would not be here today. Is this not our folly that we do not respect and honour them, and instead say that they are low caste?

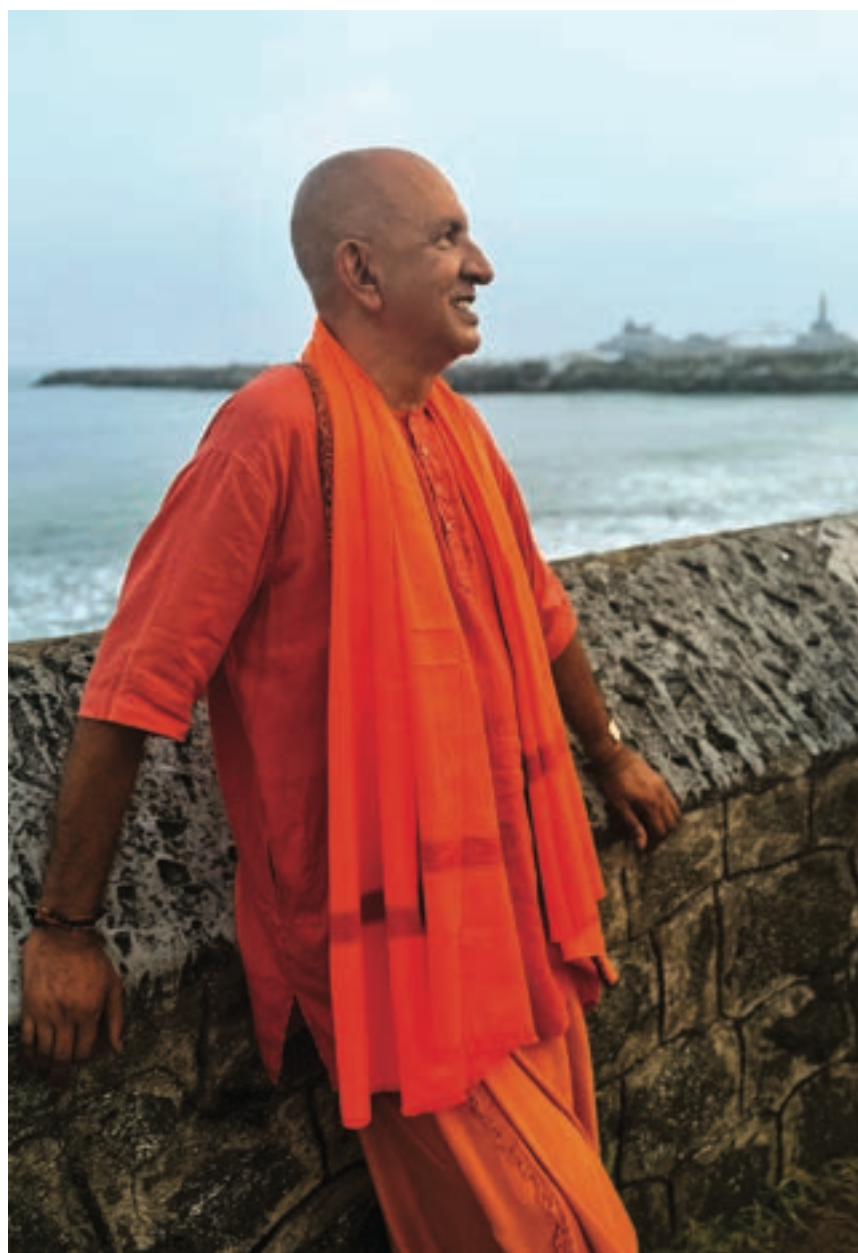
This is the divisiveness of the world. If you are followers of Advaita Vedanta, this divisiveness has to disappear. Respect, honour, love and support should be for everyone – not just for your type or class of people, but for those who actually sustain your life on this planet. You call the shudras untouchables, but I call them the most touchable. We have to put our heads on their feet, because they have come from the feet of God. This is the divisiveness that I am talking about, the difference we create for our own ego fulfilment, the division we create for our own satisfaction, power, position, name and fame.

Advaita Vedanta does not mean that you retain your external identity and begin to think like the ostrich. This big black bird puts its head inside the ground, thinking that it is invisible to everyone, while its big body is jutting out, and believing, 'Now I cannot be seen by anyone.' We are all like this ostrich. We all have a split personality. We say one thing









and our life is something different. We talk about unity, but our life, expressions and actions are divisive in nature. And we are the people who want to become realized? Woe to this type of society and civilization.

Until today, and I can say it emphatically, we have not followed a single mandate of our rishis and avatars who have come to guide us in this life, on the journey of ultimate realization that we are one. Yet we call ourselves Vedantin, devotee, jnani. How much hypocrisy do we want to live with? I don't understand. As spiritual aspirants, we have to make the effort to overcome our own divisive policies, that we nurture in our mind and head. Once that is happening, then there is hope for spiritual growth and enlightenment. This is the whole concept of Advaita Vedanta.

Then comes shanti. When you have realized this, then you are at peace with yourself. *Jnana*, knowledge, and awareness of the Advaita concept develops. That awareness ultimately leads you to shanti. This shanti will lead you to mukti.

### **Atmavichara**

These are the various chapters of the *Yoga Vasishtha*, and the process of exploring, discovering and harmonizing the mind. The methods and the *vidhis* are also defined by Sage Vasishtha. The different instructions that he gives are: first, reflection, *atmavichara*. You reflect and plan on how to earn more and more money, how to become more and more famous, how to increase the number of your followers on social media. That is atmavichara, but at the material level. You are thinking about it, reflecting on it, planning for it and preparing yourself to do that.

In the same way, when you divert this type of thinking for your own inner peace and development, it is only a case of diversion – from looking in this direction to looking in that direction. You are looking at the worldly direction with atmavichara, for your satisfaction, pleasure, ego, name, fame and prosperity. For that you are willing to do everything. In

this material dimension, we are in a market of thieves – taking something from here, something from there, something from here. This is the market of thieves. Can you, as a sadhaka, an aspirant, a sincere seeker, divert your awareness from this type of vichara to another type of vichara, which brings happiness, positivity, peace, creativity and hope in your life? Atmavichara is one of the ways defined by Sage Vasishtha to realize how we can live and interact properly in this world and experience *sat*, *chit* and *ananda* – truth, expanded awareness and bliss.

## **Meditation**

Along with atmavichara comes meditation, to know the nature of the mind. Yoga has been clear in defining the process of meditation. Even the Upanishads have made it clear that there is no abstract meditation in yoga. I have come across people who say, ‘Oh, I practise vedantic meditation.’ ‘What do you practise as Vedantic meditation?’ ‘I feel I am Brahman.’ ‘Very good, how long have you been doing it?’ ‘Oh, for decades. I am an adherent of the vedantic meditation.’ I ask, ‘And by thinking that, have you reduced any of your vasanas? Have you reduced any of your eshanas? Have you reduced or worked with any of your moods of mind? As you have been practising meditation, are you able to control your own frustration and anxiety? What is the use of meditating, if there is no change in you?’

Yoga has been clear and precise in defining the progression of meditation. You are familiar with the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, and you call it the eightfold path. In this entire eightfold path, Sage Patanjali focuses more on pratyahara and dharana. The first two components, the yamas and niyamas, are not ethical and moral disciplines of yoga. *Sadgunas*, positive qualities, cannot be called ethical and moral principles of yoga. The words ethics and morality are not Indian words. The Indian word is sadguna – get out of your durguna and connect with sadguna. This is what the Indian tradition and the scriptures say.



Where the concept of sadguna has never existed, sadgunas can be the moral and ethical principles needed to improve society. Where sadgunas have always been the baseline for spiritual development, they can never be called the ethics and morality of yoga. Therefore, Sage Patanjali identifies yamas and niyamas for raja yoga. Every yoga has its own yamas and niyamas; even *Yoga Praveshika* has its own yamas and niyamas. There are not only five, but hundreds of yamas and niyamas in yoga. Just like in primary school, from class 1, to class 2, to class 3, you keep on moving through classes until you come to your degree. In each class you have to be competent to move onto the next class. If you are not competent, you will fail and you will have to do one more year.

The same principle applies in yoga, because without yamas and niyamas, the yogas cannot be experienced. You can do hundreds of asanas, that is your choice, but that is not yoga. After all, you wear clothes. Just think that yamas and niyamas are the clothes of the 'you'. That is what a spiritual aspirant wears, and after wearing that, there is protection from the environment, nature, the influences, people, the conditions of society, culture and religion, and you remain true to your path.

Sage Patanjali, in the context of raja yoga, describes only five yamas and five niyamas. The context of raja yoga is management of mind. He does not teach any asana, implying

that you should have perfected your asanas during hatha yoga training. Here your asana is *sthira* and *sukha*, quiet and comfortable. Can you sit even for five minutes on a chair, quietly and comfortably? Somebody is holding their feet, somebody is moving their arms, somebody is shifting their body. There is no *sthira* and there is no *sukha*, even when you sit on the sofa. How can you be still when you practise your padmasana, your siddhasana, or other asanas? This implies in the *Raja Yoga Sutras* that you have perfected your asanas beforehand. Sage Patanjali says that *puraka*, *rechaka* and *kumbhaka* are pranayamas. He does not tell you what is *kapalbhati*, *nadi shodhana*, *bhastrika*, *bhramari*, *suryabhedha* or *chandrabhedha* is. You have to perfect that when you are practising hatha yoga.

In one sentence, Sage Patanjali has skipped the hatha yoga tradition, with the understanding that by the time you come to raja yoga, you have perfected it. Then, he focuses on mind management through *pratyahara* and *dharana*, to lead you to *dhyana* and give you the experience of *samadhi*. Every yoga speaks of *samadhi*, not only the *Yoga Sutras*. Even hatha yoga and *kriya yoga* speak of *samadhi*. They give different definitions of *samadhi*. *Samadhi* was thought to be the depth of meditation, where you feel one with everything.

The practices of *pratyahara* and *dharana* have been amply described in the yogic and tantric traditions. For example, the *Vijnana Bhairava Tantra* describes over one hundred *dharana* practices. The subject of *pratyahara* is to transform the conditionings, the *pratyayas*. We all have *pratyayas*, impressions or seeds, that control and nurture our personality. An example: Thirty or forty years ago, you had a fight with somebody, and you see the person again after forty years; which memory will come out? The fight you had with this person. That is *pratyaya*. You are not able to dissolve that *pratyaya* in forty years' time. How can you dissolve that *pratyaya* in half an hour of meditation, when you are not even a witness to yourself or your mind?

This is *pratyahara*, a system by which we first dissolve the *pratyayas* which are the building blocks of our material world – *kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, matsarya*. They form the *pratyayas* which you knowingly avoid confrontation with. You do not want to look at yourself in this manner, or recognize yourself, ‘I have these passions, I have this greed, this jealousy and anger;’ and so they remain inside. As long as they are inside, there is no hope in spiritual life. It is for this reason that *pratyahara* is the first step to meditation. *Dharana* is the second step to meditation and *dhyana* is the third step where you experience peace. Through peace in *samadhi*, you experience unity, oneness.

### **Viveka**

Then comes *viveka*, discrimination. You hear about the swan who is able to separate milk from water, about yogis who are able to distinguish the difference between appearance and reality. Have you ever tried to know that all that glitters is not gold? People think that everything that glitters is gold, yet they are unable to distinguish the appearance from reality. *Viveka*, the discriminatory power, plays an important role in making you realize, ‘What I see is different to what there is.’ That is the actual *viveka*, to know the difference between appearance and reality.

### **Satsang**

Then comes *satsang*; people think of it as discourse. *Satsang* means in the company of truth, the good, the positive. In the *Ramcharitamanas*, in the exposition of *Navada Bhakti*, it is said, ‘*Pratham bhagati santan kar sanga* – the first form of *bhakti* is the company of good people, the pious people.’ That is *satsang*. *Satsang* is not discourse. What is given in a discourse, you do not carry with you anyway. At the end of my session, if I ask you what I have said, you won’t remember anything, because when you get up you will be dusting your clothes, and any trace of *satsang* which has come through will be dusted off. So, you won’t be remembering anything.

Satsang always implies that you should associate with the good, not with the gossip. Always associate with the positive and not with the negative. Always associate with good people and not with bad people. However, good people do not stimulate us; in satsang we go to sleep. Bad people will always stimulate us, for they will be telling us new methods of how to bug a person. A thief will plan for months how to rob a place. A good person who wants to do social service will never plan, but will simply go headlong into trying to do good. Why don't you plan how to do good in the best manner possible? If you are able to plan how to do good in the best manner possible, and accomplish that, you will actually be doing a service. Satsang always means association with the good and the positive, and negation of the bad, destructive and negative.

You talk to each other in the form of gossip, which influences your thoughts, behaviour and action; and you are not even aware of it. How can you be aware of satsang, when you don't even know that the talk of this person is making your thinking, behaviour and actions negative? You have no awareness of that, but you are influenced by it. Somebody can say to you, 'Oh that person is bad.' You will believe that statement although you have never met that person in your life. We all have such weak minds that anybody can say anything, and we believe it, without actually exploring, 'Is that the truth, or is that a statement to deviate me from understanding the goodness of the person?' Satsang is not something that can be taken lightly. Satsang is a process of transformation of life, behaviour, thinking and expressions of life. That is how satsang has to be recognized.

## **Bhakti**

Then comes bhakti in the *Yoga Vasishtha*. According to our sages, the form of bhakti is the expression of pure love. This is the statement of the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*. What is bhakti? 'Sa tasmin param prem roopa, it is the highest love.' It is not karmakanda, upasana kanda or jnanakanda. Karmakanda,



upasana and jnana are necessary, there is no denying it. Yet the ultimate result has to be the awakening and expression of the highest quality of love for the divine. If that highest quality of love for the divine comes, then that love also connects every single being of this planet. We have seen the examples of yogis and their ashrams, where tigers and deer drink from the same pond. In that state of love, animosities and differences disappear and dissipate. Bhakti is that power – the luminosity which eradicates every tint of darkness of tamas, and brings you into the luminosity of the transcendental nature. Bhakti is that type of light, power and force.

We have misunderstood bhakti, and we utilize bhakti for our own fulfilment of desires and needs. Sages are bhaktas because of spiritual needs, not material needs. From this statement itself, you can understand the difference in our bhakti, and the bhakti which sages have propounded throughout the ages. Bhakti is the cultivation of love in its purest form, which transcends all boundaries, all divisions and negativities. Bhakti makes you one with the luminous nature of the divine.

## Stories

In the *Yoga Vasishtha* there are also narrations of the prince, more specifically the stories of Queen Chudala who is taken to different lokas and dimensions, parallel universes, by Saraswati. Why have these stories and narrations come in? To indicate that we live in many dimensions simultaneously. We know of three dimensions in this material world – *jagrit*, *swapna* and *nidra*. In the *swapna* state, in the dream state, you are in a dimension of experience, and you are experiencing the same sentiments, joys and fears which are real to you while you are dreaming. When you have a nightmare, don't you wake up sweating and fearful? When you have good dreams, don't you wake up happy and elated? That is a different level of experience, where the mind goes.

The same thing in *nidra*; it is a different level of experience. Your mind is able to free itself from object, time and space, and experience *shoonya*. These are three dimensions that we can experience in this life. A person who is meditating, contemplating and who is connected to that divine power, is able to experience the different or parallel dimensions, where we can be a witness to our own life, in a different manner and form, and have a different experience. This is one of the most inspiring parts of the *Yoga Vasishtha* – giving through stories the understanding of different dimensions in which a human being can interact.

## Dharana

Then, there are also references of *dharana* – how you can make your mind totally fixed and one-pointed. There is the story of Arjuna. At the time of archery, when his guru Dronacharya placed the wooden bird on the branch and asked everyone, 'What do you see?' only Arjuna said, 'I see nothing but the eye of the bird which I have to hit.' It was only to that person that the guru said, 'Shoot the arrow!' To the others he did not say, 'Shoot the arrow!' He said, 'Put your bow and arrow down.' With Arjuna it was an indication of *dharana*, of *ekagrata*, the

one-pointed awareness which he had developed. In that one-pointed awareness, the mind is bound by its goal; it does not see anything else.

There was a disciple of Adiguru Shankaracharya, whose name was Padmapad. He was just a worker serving his guru. At one location, the guru was on one side of the river and the disciple was on the other side of the river. The guru called out to him, 'Come here!' This disciple did not look left or right, or think about how to cross the river. Was there a boat, was there a bridge, were there stones? No, nothing. He only heard the command, 'Come here!' And he said, 'My guru has called me.' He ran across the waters, and wherever his feet fell on the water body, a lotus bloomed. He stepped on lotuses to come to his guru. The guru said, 'You are Padmapad.'

That is the power of dharana, one-pointed awareness of guru, one-pointed awareness of the eye of the bird. It is not a fleeting one-pointed awareness, but a constant one-pointed awareness. How much is your awareness? How long is your awareness? Psychologists and psychoanalysts say that human awareness is less than that of a goldfish. The attention span of a goldfish is seven seconds. Yours – five, five and a half seconds. You are in a lower koti, lower yoni, level and birth, than that of a goldfish, as you have less of an attention span. Can you increase it and hold that awareness fixed, without fluctuation, on the object of your meditation?

These are the follies of the human mind that Sage Vasishtha is dealing with. It is not me saying it, but he has said it before that these are the follies that you have to control, and come to the point of *samatvam*, balance, harmony, equilibrium, equipoise. With *samatvam*, you have to come into *sannyasa*, and from *sannyasa* to *prapatti*, surrender. *Sannyasa* does not mean wearing *geru* clothes; that is *sannyasa diksha*. *Sannyasa* is a condition of the mind where you have transcended the limitations and negativity, and are connected constantly and continuously with your Guru and your God. When *sannyasa* happens, then *prapatti* happens. In that surrender life is transformed – no struggle, total acceptance.



A king can be in total acceptance of his post and position like King Janaka, and in total acceptance of his situation. It is that total acceptance of what I am, where I am, who I am, without craving, without expecting anything good or bad, without expecting any change to happen. Being in the state of *mast* or god-intoxication all the time, knowing that God is in me and I am in God – that is Rama.

These are the teachings of Sage Vasishtha to Rama, to realize the impermanence of the world, and to know that within you is the hidden God, and to connect with that God. This was the message of the *Yoga Vasishtha*, and I hope you will carry some sentences with you without dusting them off from your body and mind. Let the teachings be the seeds, which will in the course of time grow and become a tree under which you can find your shelter and peace.

– 2 March 2025, *Yoga Shastra Sangamam*,  
Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari, India

## *Where is My Path?*



What is the source  
And where does it end?  
What is this journey  
And where is my path?  
Constantly moving,  
Unceasingly yearning,  
Wondering, wandering,  
Watching and searching.  
The dawn brightens slowly.  
The road lies before me.  
I cannot look back,  
For the sun draws me forward.  
My feet walk despite me.  
Time has no bearing  
And the light is ever increasing.  
Thoughts of the past  
And hopes for the future  
Fade in the distance,  
But the centre shines brightly.  
As the waves rise higher,  
There is no sense of feeling.  
Just an awareness of now  
And the stillness of being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

# Bondage

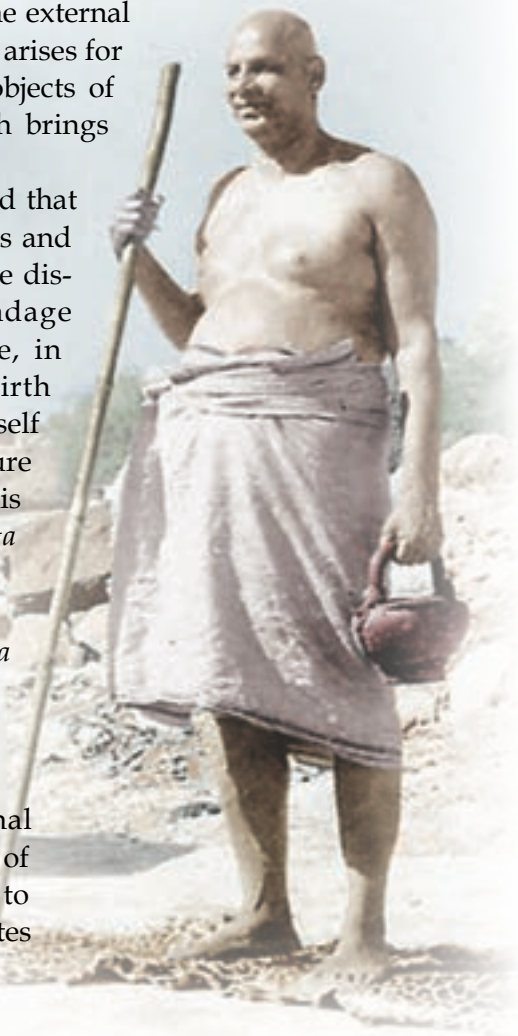
Swami Sivananda Saraswati

*Avidya*, ignorance, *kama*, desire, and karma bind one to this wheel of birth and death. The real, essential nature is forgotten. There is ignorance of the *satchidananda swaroopa*, the form of truth, consciousness and bliss. Therefore, it feels as if happiness lies in the external objects of the senses and desire arises for them. Exertion to obtain the objects of desire results in karma, which brings about birth and death.

It is the *vasanas* in the mind that cause attraction towards objects and brings about bondage. With the disappearance of *vasanas*, bondage naturally vanishes. Therefore, in order to free oneself from birth and death, one must free oneself from desires, attachments, impure *vasanas*, and ultimately, from this primordial ignorance. In *Yoga Vasishtha* (5:17:5) it is said:

*Baahyaarthavyasano chchhoonaa  
trishnaa baddheti raaghava;  
Sarvaarthavyasanonmuktaa  
trishnaa mukteti kathyate.*

The desire to enjoy external objects is verily the bondage of the soul, while indifference to worldly enjoyments constitutes freedom in this living state.



# Stories of Two Queens

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

## Queen Chudala

Many people regard spiritual life, including yoga, as separate from day-to-day activities and life in general, but this is completely wrong. A story is narrated in the *Yoga Vasishtha* about a king who was overwhelmed by *vairagya*, the sense of dispassion. He renounced his kingdom and went away to practise meditation and penance in the jungles far away from his kingdom. He left his wife, Queen Chudala, to rule the kingdom in his absence. The king did not know that Chudala was already an enlightened yogini. One day she realized that her husband was wasting his time and she decided to guide him.

She transported herself psychically to where her husband was sitting in meditation. The queen levitated in front of him and the king opened his eyes. "What are you doing here?" he asked. She said, "I am here to tell you that while ruling your kingdom I have attained siddhis, and that you, while doing sadhana and meditation in the jungle, are sleeping." Thunderstruck, the king realized that his wife was telling the truth. He asked his wife to instruct him on spiritual life. She said, "Material life can never contaminate spiritual life. Money and desires cannot touch the spirit, as they are eternally different entities."

When water and petrol are mixed, they will always remain separate. Likewise, material life and spiritual life are totally different. A person who thinks that worldly life can contaminate spiritual life is misguided. It is not necessary for an aspirant to evolve only through meditation. He can correct, formulate and affect the reorientation of his inner personality while working in the world. Therefore, one should not renounce the world, but use it in order to remove one's faults and imperfections.

## Queen Lilavati

Sage Vasishtha narrated a story in the *Yoga Vasishtha* about a king and his queen, Lilavati. One day while they were sitting and talking about politics and family affairs, the queen grew sleepy and dozed off. She had a dream in which she became old, died and was reborn. After her birth she became a child, a young woman, got married, had children, became old again and died. She was reborn, went through the process of life and died seven times. Then she woke up. In the external reality, however, hardly two minutes had passed and the king was still talking.

During that short time she had the experience of seven lives, and that experience was real to her, as she enjoyed her childhood and youth, loved her different husbands and children, and also suffered in old age. Everything in the dream was real from the point of view of experience. Of course, when her level of consciousness returned to the wakeful state, the experiences had no relevance, but still she had undergone them. In the same way, if one changes one's level of awareness, the mental and emotional situations being confronted in life will be as irrelevant as the dream experiences of Lilavati.

When Lilavati was undergoing the dream experiences, they were real for her. They became irrelevant only when she changed her level of awareness. In the same way, the experiences that one is having now, the people one meets, one's emotions and actions, seem to be real and have validity. From a higher level of awareness, however, they will seem unreal. The experiences one is undergoing are not absolute, they are relative.

Sage Vasishtha explains to Sri Rama that there are many levels of experience. In each level, the experiences one has appear to be real, but have no validity when that level is transcended. The mind identifies with the seemingly valid and real experience, and nothing more. If one thinks that renunciation of karma and duties is the way to gain spiritual knowledge, one is misguided and has missed the essential point of spiritual life. Karma and jnana are relative, as they are both experiences of the mind. Any



experience had through the mind is not absolute, but limited. In order to have the absolute experience, one must transcend the mind. However, one cannot transcend the mind without transcending karma by doing karma.

Sage Vasishtha told Sri Rama, "You are going to have to work to become king and rule your subjects. You have to administer the kingdom and maintain law and order. There are so many tasks you will have to do, and there is no harm in that, but you must remember that everything is an idea. Jnana is an idea, karma is an idea and renunciation is an idea, desire and passion is an idea, even spiritual experience is an idea. After all, the whole world is *maya*, the conglomeration of ideas." Sage Vasishtha closes his instructions to Sri Rama by saying, "Even if the world is unreal, participate in it, and that participation is unreal as well. Even if everything that is happening is stupidity, participate and be stupid with the stupid and foolish with the fools."

A person can become an emperor, a general, a swami, an administrator, a housewife, a trader, a businessman, an artist, an engineer or a prostitute. These are expressions of one's karma. Sage Vasishtha said, "O Rama, although you will rule a kingdom, it does not stand in the way of spiritual life. Renunciation is not leaving aside objects and duties. The renunciation of idea and identification is what is important. One must fulfil the obligations and duties of nature, so they do not come into direct confrontation with spiritual life."

# One Among Many

*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*



The empirical person believes only in sensory experience and is unable to rise above the dictates of the intellect. However, this does not mean that one should overlook those facts which are beyond one's comprehension. One cannot assert that this planet earth is the only concrete reality and that other worlds are mere apparitions. The stars are not mere points of twinkling light in the sky, although one perceives them to be so. If I have not seen America, I have no right to deny the existence of such a country. There is intuitional and rational evidence for the existence of other worlds which are entirely different in nature and size to this one. In the *Yoga Vasishtha* it is said (6(2):59:35):

*Vividhaanyapyanantaani svachchhaakaashaatmakaanyalam;  
Anyonyamanyavritteeni na mitho'nyasthiteeni cha.*

There are endless varieties of creations in the unbounded womb of vacuum, all of different natures and manners; and there are no two things of the same character and feature.

The *Yoga Vasishtha* says that the earth is only an atom among many other larger worlds existing beyond human perception. The earth is one particular kind of world among many others, which differ from it in every way. One has no authority to discard the account given by Rishi Vasishtha that other worlds exist, which are made of different materials like copper, iron, gold, etc., filled with water and milk, and inhabited by serpents, animals, demons and so on. It is not necessary that human beings alone should inhabit all worlds or that the same earthly conditions should prevail on all planes of existence.

The universe is a gradual revelation of the infinite absolute in various degrees of consciousness, which is inclusive of every sort of life and experience. The infinite is a great wonder and no one can say what things are thriving in its womb! This world is but one among the many within it.

# Prana and Pranayama?

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



In the *Yoga Vasishtha* Sri Rama asks his guru Sage Vasishtha a question: “You are telling me many things, but are there any practical ways in which I can experience them?” Sage Vasishtha answers, “Yes, O Rama, practise pranayama.” Why does Sage Vasishtha suggest the practice of pranayama?

According to the yogic concepts, there are three flows in the body: the solar force, the lunar force, and the balanced force. The solar force is known as *pingala*, the lunar force is known as *ida* and the balanced force is known as *sushumna*. The three flows are carriers of a specific gross, subtle and spiritual energy.

Pingala is the gross energy, *prana shakti*. The body functions because of prana shakti. In the absence of prana, one is devoid of physical life. Ida is the *chitta shakti*, the mental force. The mind is sustained and nurtured by this flow of ida shakti, the subtle prana. The spiritual nature of every individual is nurtured by sushumna, the balance of both. Sage Vasishtha tells Sri Rama, “If the body is disturbed, or if it is experiencing

ill health, you can manage all the imbalances and rectify all the defects and diseases of your body by awakening prana shakti.”

This has been seen in the life of yogis who are able to manage many physical conditions with the practice of pranayama. Even asana is not necessary, as pranayama increases the vital energy, the prana shakti, and removes the blocks of prana.

Disease occurs when there is a block of prana. Headache occurs when there is a block of prana. Eyesight is lost when there is a block of prana in the eyes, hearing is lost when there is a block of prana in the ears, and speech is lost when there is a block of prana at the throat in the speech centre. Digestion becomes sluggish when there is a loss of prana in the digestive system. Muscles become weak when there is a loss of prana in the muscular system. Nervous tensions and nervousness arise when there is a loss of prana in the nervous system. Respiratory problems occur when there is a loss of prana in the respiratory organs. In *Prashnopanishad* (2:12) it is written:

*Yaa te tanoorvaachi pratishtithaa yaa cha chakshushi;  
Yaa cha manasi santataa shivam taam kuru motkrameeh.*

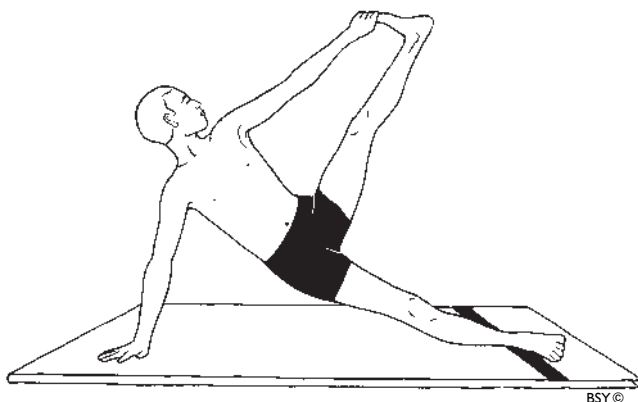
O prana, remain in the body calm and quiet; do not leave the body. You are the Lord who abides within the speech, ear, eye and mind.

That is the theory and concept of yoga therapy. Remove the blocks to prana which are afflicting a particular organ or system or location within the body. Many yogis practise pranayama as their sadhana. They have no blocks in their body; they are in optimum health.

In the same manner, once the mental prana, the chitta shakti, also becomes active and powerful all the activities of the mind can be controlled, guided and calmed. Therefore, Sage Vasishtha talks of pranayama practice to Sri Rama and tells him, “Pranayama is a method by which you can regulate the functions and the deficiencies of your body and mind.”

# Vasishthasana

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Asanas were used to evolve the consciousness from the lowest to the highest state. Some asanas imitate the shapes of a bow, a boat, trees, the lotus, reptiles, fish, the foetus, birds, saints like Vasishtha and gods such as Nataraja. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:18) it is written:

*Vashishthaadyaishcha munibhirmatsyendraadyaishcha yogibhih.  
Angeekritaanyaasanaani kathyante kaanichinmayaa.*

I will proceed to describe some of the asana accepted by munis such as Vasishtha and yogis such as Matsyendranath.

The yogic tradition says that in all, there are eighty-four lakh (8,400,000) of asanas – that is, there are as many asanas as forms of life. No wonder Yogi Swatmarama says he is only going to describe “some” of the asanas! In the yogic texts the maximum number of asanas described is thirty-three. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Yogi Swatmarama describes those asanas which are essential and which were performed by the founders of hatha yoga.

It is interesting that he should describe asanas practised by munis such as Sage Vasishtha. It is natural that he would

discuss those performed by Yogi Matsyendranath as he is the founder of this hatha yoga system. Vasishtha, however, was a jnana yogi, so it can be assumed that he would have mainly used sitting and meditative postures rather than the more dynamic asanas. By mentioning Vasishtha he makes it clear that even those concerned with contemplation and higher wisdom realized the necessity of yoga asanas.

It also implies that the influence of asanas is more than physical. If saints such as Vasishtha were able to become honoured as jnanis, asanas must also be beneficial in the development of higher wisdom. This sloka infers that whether one is specifically practising hatha or any other form of yoga, asana is important and should be incorporated.

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### **The Task of Yoga**

Through asana and pranayama you maintain sound health, and through selfless service you exhaust your *vasanas*, impressions. Through devotion and self-surrender you stabilize your emotions. Through mental control you increase your mental efficiency, through self-analysis and enquiry you sharpen your discriminative faculty, and through meditation you expand your consciousness. Thus all the layers of your personality are properly developed and you become an integrated personality. This is the main task of yoga.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati



# Paths to Spiritual Realization

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

In the tradition of the Vedas and Upanishads, there has always been a debate as to whether one should perform karma or renounce karma. This has been a constant dialogue during the vedic period, the period of Gandhi, and even to this day. The subject of whether a person should have a link with karma or should break the link with karma has been discussed in India so many times in so many ways, whether for self-realization, perception of God, becoming a supreme being or for spiritual evolution. Some people say that one attains the highest by renunciation of karma. Others say that one attains the highest by involvement in life. In fact, scriptures such as the *Yoga Vasishtha* and *Bhagavad Gita* declare that both ways are correct.

This supreme consciousness cannot be realized by one who has either renounced karma, or who is involved in karma. By karma one can only experience darkness and by renunciation one experiences much deeper darkness. Therefore, an aspirant should blend these two together. There has to be a blending of karma and renunciation. In the *Yoga Vasishtha*, Sage Vasishtha says that both duty and inner renunciation are necessary (1:1:8):

*Kevalaatkarmano jnaanaannahi moksho'bhijaayate;  
Kintoobhaabhyam bhavenmokshah saadhanam toobhayam viduh.*

It is neither our acts nor knowledge alone that produces emancipation, but both together are known as the means.

A bird needs two wings in order to fly and, in the same way, the two wings of fulfilment of duty and inner renunciation are also required for the spiritual flight. Sage Vasishtha tells Sri Rama the secrets of spiritual life and the relationship between karma and realization. He explains that it is not



necessary to renounce karma and only meditate. Many people are misguided and think they have to leave work as they accumulate more karma and samskaras by work. They think that by doing karma they become impure and contaminated, so they retire from the active arena of life. Sage Vasishtha makes it clear that this is not at all necessary. What is important is that one should aspire for spiritual life whilst continuing to live in the world.

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## Websites and Apps

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ISSN 0972-5717

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|                      |                                           |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------|
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| Nov 19-22            | Padma Jayanti: Yoga Nidra Symposium       |
| Dec 27-31            | Padma Jayanti: Yoga Lifestyle Celebration |
| Every Saturday       | Mahamrityunjaya Havan                     |
| Every 4th, 5th & 6th | Guru Bhakti Yoga                          |

### Bihar School of Yoga Yogavidya Training

|                   |                                                                  |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Feb 1-Apr 30      | Sannyasa Lifestyle Experience<br>(for overseas aspirants)        |
| Apr 4-10          | Dharana Training (English)                                       |
| Sep 28-Oct 6      | Hatha Yoga-Karma Yoga                                            |
| Oct 11-19         | Raja Yoga-Bhakti Yoga                                            |
| Oct 25-Nov 2      | Kriya Yoga & Tattwa Shuddhi                                      |
| Oct 2026-Oct 2027 | Sannyasa & Yoga Lifestyle Experience<br>(for overseas aspirants) |

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|              |                                     |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mar 1-Apr 30 | Yogic Studies (Hindi)               |
| Apr 1-30     | Traditional Yoga Training (English) |
| Nov 1-Dec 31 | Yogic Studies (English)             |



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