

Chapter 15. Eightfold Discipline of Yoga

Q. To get the fortune of escaping birth and death, elders say that *yoga* is very important. What *yoga* are they talking about?

A. The *Yoga-sastra* declares that certain postures have to be utilised in order to remove the ever-widening circles of mental agitations and purify the mind —also to steady faith, to establish spiritual wisdom (*jnana*), and to arouse the spiritual power that is latent in people (*kundalini sakthi*).

Q. It is said that *yoga* has certain auxiliaries or parts. How many are there, and what are their names?

A. They are eight parts in all: control of the inner senses, control of the outer senses, sitting postures, breath control, control of the mind, concentration, meditation, superconscious state (*yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi*).

Q. If liberation (*mukthi*) is to be attained, do all these have to be practised to perfection, or is one of them enough?

A. Oh, liberation can be won if the first two, control of the inner and outer senses, are mastered. Why, the universe is maintained by just these two!

Q. When we speak of *yoga*, do we mean only this particular *yoga* with the eight parts, or are there other *yogas*?

A. *Yoga* is not just this one; there are four in all.

Q. What are they? What are their names?

A. Their names are popularly given as *mantra yoga*, the royal *yoga* (*raja-yoga*), the *yoga* of merging (*laya yoga*), and the *yoga* of body postures (*hatha yoga*).

Q. What parts do these four have, in their turn?

A. Silly fellow! For all the millions of humans, the two eyes are the instruments of vision, aren't they? So too, for all the *yogas*, control of the inner and outer senses (*yama* and *niyama*) are the eyes; without them, nothing can be visualised. Purity of mind is essential for every *yogi*. And for that, control of the inner and outer senses are indispensable.

Q. What do you mean by control of the inner and outer senses? By any chance, do these also have auxiliaries parts or characteristics that mark them out?

A. Of course. Each has ten such. It is only when you are well-established in all these that you are liberated.

Q. Tell me the ten that are under control of the inner senses.

A. Nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, compassion, honesty, patience, fortitude, moderate food, cleanliness (*ahimsa, sathya, a-stheya, brahma-charya, daya, aarjava, kshama, dhrithi, mithaahaara, soucha*). All ten are included in control of the inner senses.

Q. May I know the ten included in control of the outer senses?

A. Intense spiritual practice, contentment, piety, charity, worship of God, listening to spiritual texts, modesty, devotion, repetition of the name, spiritual vows. These ten form control of the outer senses. They are the very foundations of the mansion of liberation; all *yogis* must be well established in these —in control of the inner as well as the outer senses. (In Sanskrit, the ten are: *tapas, santhosha, aasthikya-buddhi, dana, Iswara puja, Vedanta vaakya-sravana, lajja, mathi, japa, vratha*).

Q. *Yoga* insists on postures also, you said. What exactly does that mean?

A. They are very helpful for wise men cognizant of the *Atma* (*Atma-jnanis*) and *yogis*.

Q. There must be many varieties of physical postures, yes?

A. Yes, they are many. But the chief are perfect sitting posture, bound lotus pose, and shoulder stand. Besides, there are postures like peacock and seated forward bend.

Q. What are benefits result from these physical postures?

A. They give hardihood to the body and enable the mind to concentrate for long periods.

Q. Swami! You mentioned the part of yoga called breath control Now tell me about breath control (*pranayama*). How many types of breath control are there?

A. There are many types, but since in this present world most types are impossible in practice, only those that help meditation have to be adopted. They are simplified systems of breath control.

Q. Simplified systems? How are they beneficial?

A. Like metals purified over fire in a crucible, the slag of *karma* is removed by breath control and the mind is freed from contamination. This and bodily purification are brought about; both mind and body are rendered pure. There are two types of breathing exercises: one with and the other without a mantra. The one without can at best transform only the body, but with a mantra, the mind is also transformed.

Q. Swami! How are we to practise it?

A. Two seconds inhaling, four seconds exhaling, and eight seconds holding the breath. Breath control has to be practised carefully for three months. Later, the duration of inhalation, exhalation, and retention can be doubled. When six months are spent in this steady practice, the activities of the senses are laid low.

If practised with faith and feeling, breath control will tame the agitations of the mind; otherwise, it becomes mere physical exercise, improving just physical health. Pure food, celibacy (*brahma-charya*), living in solitude, moderate speech —these conditions also have to be strictly observed.

Q. Swami! The next one you mentioned is control of the mind. How many mind-control methods are there?

A. Three methods: with form, without form, and attention to the Self, depending on the purpose for which the senses are controlled and the mind concentrated. If the purpose is to approach or worship a deity with qualities, it is with form; to approach or worship the quality-less, it is formless; to realise the truth-wisdom-infinite Highest *Atma*, it is attention to the Self itself.

Q. And concentration? Swami! What is meant by that? How many types of concentration are there?

A. My boy, there is only one type. The wise person steadily established in the awareness of the chosen deity or *Brahma*-consciousness, like the earth carrying a mountain —that is concentration.

Q. The next one is meditation, I believe. That must be of many varieties.

A. No, no. This also is one and only one. Whether of the formful or the formless, if it is one-pointed, devoid of deviations, it is entitled to be called meditation.

Q. The last part of *yoga* that you mentioned was *samadhi*. What does that mean?

A. *Samadhi*, or perfect equanimity, means the fixing of the mind, free from all impulses and agitations, on the Lord or on one's own reality. It indicates the state in which one is in one's own real nature. Perfect equanimity is freedom from all duality. The mind will be unshaken by dual experiences; it will shine like a flame in a windless

room; it is unmoved, unmovable.

Q. Swami! That type of mind, how will it behave? Please make it clearer, by some examples.

A. My dear fellow, when you have to thread a needle, you have to be intent on the job, and the end of the thread has to be kept straight and pointed, right? Similarly, to enter the grace of God, which is subtler than the subtlest, the mind has to be steady and the eye and the senses have to be concentrated on the same process.