

Introduction

The three main philosophies of India were developed thousands of years ago. They are known as *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, and *Vedanta*. *Sankhya* explains why one should reject as delusive everything he perceives through the senses, and why he should seek a higher, non-material reality. *Yoga*, the second in the series, is the supreme science, for it enables one to *experience* truth for himself. And *Vedanta* explains, insofar as human reason can grasp it, the nature of that Truth.

These philosophies are best taught sequentially. People should understand, first, their need to banish delusion from their consciousness in comprehending that delusion is the source of all life's pain, uncertainty, and suffering. When they recognize their need to live by higher principles, they develop the willingness to undergo the discipline necessary for attaining a higher understanding. *Yoga*, for that reason, comes second in the series.

Beyond *Yoga* practice there lies the wisdom of *Vedanta*. One may ask why wisdom needs to be explained if it can be realized personally. The answer is that *Vedanta* shows where all true spiritual practices lead, lest people be tempted to stray off the trail to the top of the mountain by reaffirming their egos and developing, for example, the eight *siddhis* or spiritual powers. The true purpose of yoga is to bring one to the highest state of Self-realization. The *Vedanta* teachings help to keep one's aspirations directed toward that goal.

There is a story my Guru enjoyed telling about a great yogi named Baba Gorakhnath, whose life span was three hundred years. In that long time, Baba Gorakhnath developed all the yogic *siddhis*. When it was time for him at last to leave his

body, he wanted to find someone highly advanced enough to receive those powers.

Gazing through the spiritual eye,¹ he saw a young man seated by the river Ganges in deep meditation. Here, he realized, was a fit person to receive his *siddhis*. He materialized before the young yogi and announced, "I am Baba Gorakhnath." If he, with his high renown, expected a gasp of amazement from the young man, he was disappointed. The younger one only looked at him with an expression of calm inquiry.

The old yogi continued, "I have seen that the time has come for me to leave my body. Over many years of spiritual practice I have perfected the eight yogic *siddhis*. Today I am here to confer them upon you, for I have seen in meditation that you are worthy of them."

Baba Gorakhnath, holding in his hand eight pellets of mud, continued: "I have infused these pellets with my yogic powers. Meditate holding them in your right hand, and their powers will be infused into you."

The young yogi took them in his right hand, looked at them for a moment, then asked, "Are these mine to do with as I choose?"

"Of course!" the other replied. "I have given them to you. They are yours."

Thereupon, the young man flung all eight pellets into the river.

¹The seat of spiritual vision, located just behind the forehead at a point midway between the eyebrows.

“What have you done!” cried the other in horror. “It took me three hundred years to develop those powers. You have thrown away my life work!”

The young yogi gazed at him with still eyes and answered, “In delusion yet, Baba Gorakhnath?”

His words vibrated with divine realization. The ancient yogi was suddenly wakened from his lifelong fascination with powers.

“How can I thank you?” he cried. “I can do so only by leaving my body in a state of perfect freedom!” He sat down on the sand forthwith, entered into deep meditation, and left his body, a fully liberated soul.

The traditional scripture of yoga is Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, or aphorisms. Those *sutras* begin with a word that has probably puzzled many students over the years: “*Now* [we come to] the study of Yoga.” Why did he insert that seemingly unnecessary word, *now*, in that aphorism? The answer is that, if one would comprehend the need for spiritual attainment, he must first understand the message of *Sankhya* which explains the nature of delusion. Armed with that understanding, one is ready to pursue in earnest the science of yoga.

Yoga gives the “how to” of the spiritual path. Since this is an inward journey, the main emphasis of yoga is on withdrawing one’s consciousness from the body and centering it in the spine. Yoga practice enables one to *raise* his consciousness to the highest level of Self-realization.

Many obstacles confront one as he makes this inward journey. The first obstacle is the fact that human understanding is limited to the information it receives from the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Man’s understanding is

limited, next, by reason’s fumbling attempts to process that information.

From birth onward, the human being sees the world, as revealed to him through the senses, as the only reality. Even before birth, one’s energy flows outward from his inmost center to create the embryo. At birth, on entering this world, his energy must immediately be engaged outwardly to sustain his body by breathing, eating, and keeping his muscles activated.

Growing children relate ever more, and more *specifically*, to the world around them. This need to do so takes precedence over every other consideration, including the soul’s call within to remember the eternal, ever-blissful reality.

We have entered, without realizing it, into a house of mirrors. Everything we see and experience in the world is only a reflection of our own awareness. We see, first, only what we are capable of seeing. We understand only what we are capable of understanding. Happiness, which everyone craves, is reflected back to us, only, from the surrounding world: we project it outwardly from our center. If we lack inner joy, we will find not a hint of it outside. Melodies of a lost happiness pluck on our heartstrings, but sound faint and far away until we recognize that their source is ever inside ourselves.

It is only in our egos that we experience happiness or sadness. What *is* the ego—*ahankara* is the Sanskrit word—anyway? It is not our true self. Paramhansa Yogananda defined ego as *the soul identified with the body*. Man reaches out to the world through his senses, trying ever to grasp the joy which he intuitively to be his birthright. Ego-consciousness is a delusion. It imprisons joy instead of letting it flow out toward infinity. Man’s every thought and gesture affirms his own separate individuality to be his reality. He fails to realize how cramped his self-identity becomes, in consequence. Aspirations that

arise from ego-consciousness seize possession of his mind. “I am this body,” he affirms. “I am a man. I am a woman.” And so it goes on.

As the child grows, it develops in the awareness of its surroundings. If, when the person grows to adulthood, he clings to self-involvement, the adult may remain immature. A child’s self-preoccupation is natural—even necessary. It is its way of getting a firm purchase on outer realities, even as a person learning to walk on a tightrope must be exaggeratedly aware of his every movement. In an adult, however, excessive self-preoccupation betrays childishness. In exaggerated cases, indeed, such self-preoccupation may even lead to madness. The awareness of the super-egotist is expansive only insofar as it reaches out to take what he can for himself. He wants more and more wealth, more and more power, more and more self-importance, indifferent to the needs and interests of others.

Thus, we see that there are two outward directions in which the ego can grow: toward mature acceptance of objective realities; or toward a desire for possession and dominion over others.

Expanding sympathy helps the ego to be aware of its subtle identity with other people and with the universe. One’s own happiness, in consequence, expands exponentially. If, on the other hand, the ego grows more self-centered, this “expansion” of self-consciousness becomes suffocating. Any happiness one experiences shrinks, in time, to virtual nonexistence. Selfish people imagine that the more they possess, the happier they will be. This is a delusion: What they accomplish is quite the opposite, for they squeeze their ever-dwindling happiness in a tightening grip that becomes even physically painful at last, owing to the tension that they build up in themselves.

When the ego’s sympathy for others expands, and it grows in appreciation for the world around it, it relaxes from exaggerated consciousness of its body, and expands effortlessly into ever-clearer awareness of the indwelling soul. Ego—the soul, as I said earlier, identified with the body—discovers its identity, in this case, with the Infinite Spirit. One sees one’s self no longer as the little self (with a small *s*), but as identified with the infinite Self (written with a large *S*.)

There is another way that self-awareness can grow: not by outward expansion, but by withdrawing the energy altogether from outward consciousness. One realizes, thus, that the essence of life is unitive. All things, so distinct in appearance from one another, are then realized to be expressions of the one, changeless reality.

It is possible to grow spiritually in both ways: by sympathetic expansion into a sense of one’s relationship with the world; and, alternatively, by withdrawing inwardly and realizing all reality as a manifestation in consciousness of the one, infinite Self. Both directions are necessary for those who want to practice yoga most effectively. The hermit-yogi, seeking only to withdraw from outwardness, may find himself not expanding at all, but diminishing, rather, in his self-involvement.

Those who are highly enough realized to be in breathless *samadhi* for indefinite periods at a time no longer need to balance their inward union with God by outward service. For those who are not so highly realized, however, it is important to serve outwardly as well as inwardly—the inward service being a self-offering of their whole existence into the ocean of divine love. One’s life should be balanced, inwardly and outwardly. If he withdraws too unilaterally from the world, he may find himself excluding God in creation from his

sympathies. Yet the world, too, is a manifestation of God and, therefore, of His love. God's presence is everywhere. To despise creation is self-limiting. The yogi should behold all things as part of the one, infinite Self. Even evil people are struggling, albeit ignorantly at present, to find happiness, which they will realize at last is their own, true nature.

Everything one does has a certain potential, however slight, for danger. People have died from slipping in their bathtubs! The danger on the path of meditation is that the yogi may become absorbed, not in his true Self, but in his little ego. Such a person becomes ego-centered instead of God-centered. This is why devotion to God as a separate Reality from oneself is advised even in the Vedanta teachings. An "I-Thou" relationship helps one to avoid the trap, yawning wide for the unwary, of identifying their egos with the Infinite Self. Adi Swami Shankaracharya himself, the supreme *advaitin* or non-dualist, wrote poems expressing adoration to the Divine Mother.

A serious problem for those who seek fulfillment only in their little egos, rejecting completely their true identify with the Infinite Self in which ego-consciousness disappears, is that they lose touch with true principles. Such a person inclines to take more and more whatever he can from others, forgetting that he shares with all beings the same, universal reality.

Most people, in fact, are not aware that a non-material reality exists. The world calls to them in silvery, siren tones: "Come! Make your own pleasure your entire reality!" When suffering comes to them—as it must in this world of duality—they have no notion of where to turn for help—unless it be some "professional" who is powerless to bring them the true solace they need. They've lost conscious contact with their inner homeland of joy and freedom. They feel themselves

swept along, therefore, like pebbles down a raging stream, tumbled helplessly about by events over which they have no control. Young people may imagine sometimes that they'll be able to manipulate the outer events in their lives. As they grow older, however, they find themselves involved, instead, in a dog-eat-dog fight for survival.

"How can I be honest," they ask themselves, "with so many people doing their utmost to take advantage of me? How can I live by high principles, and still make an adequate living? How can I, on my wages, put my son through college so that he, in turn, can help to support our family? How can I be scrupulously truthful, when I know there are many who would eagerly use the very truths I tell to do me harm?"

A shopkeeper may sell a product in the knowledge that it is unreliable or even defective. Perhaps he hopes that his customer won't be too disappointed. Indeed, he may not really care one way or the other, justifying his misdeeds by reasoning, "Well, a person has to live, doesn't he?" In the struggle to keep his head above water as he swims with the stream, his motto becomes, "*Me first.*" Like the rat in that children's fable, "Charlotte's Web," his criterion in every circumstance is, "What's in it for me?"

The pebbles in a stream become gradually rounded by rubbing against one another. Wisdom too, shines more and more clearly as the little pebble of the ego gets smoothed by the constant rubbing together of success and failure, joy and disappointment, gain and loss. The maturing ego comes in time to understand the ancient Sanskrit saying, "*Yata dharma, tata jaya:* Where there is right action, there is victory." Unrighteous behavior brings only failure, disappointment, and grim karmic retribution in the end.

The *Sankhya* philosophy analyzes and exposes the errors of delusion. *Vedanta* teaches the eternal nature of reality, yet states that philosophy alone cannot bestow the certainty that is born of experience. Only *yoga* teaches the way out of delusion: how to walk firmly, without stumbling, in the raging waters of *maya*, in full command of one's life and inwardly singing with joy.

Yoga principles applied to the field of action will be the primary focus of these lessons. Lofty teachings need to be externalized in daily life, and not taken inside only, in meditation. This need for balance is important especially in modern life. The purpose of this course, then, is to bridge the gap between two realities—the inner and the outer.

For material success to be more assured and lasting, it must be paired with high principles. The science of yoga proves these principles to be dynamically valid. In these lessons you will learn how to direct your activities from your inner center, and to control your whole life from that center. In a word, as you practice these lessons you will find yourself becoming a *cause*, and no longer a passive *effect*. You will cease being a pebble tumbled helplessly down the stream of life by circumstances.

The yoga teachings offer principles and practices, not pious maxims. They show convincingly why everyone should practice them. And they offer practical guidelines to a better, more fulfilled life, both outwardly and inwardly.

Such was the message which my great Guru, Paramhansa Yogananda, brought to the world. The yoga he taught was twofold: the path to inner enlightenment, and important secrets, also, for achieving outer success.

It is my hope—indeed, my fond expectation—that these lessons will help you to be successful in every aspect of your life.