

# Radikal Freedom - Yoga as realisation



## Life is the Practice

Dealing with change seems to be one of the biggest difficulties of the human condition. Resistance to change is perhaps responsible, through the stress response mechanisms, for a vast number of physical, emotional and psychological dis-ease states.

The ability to respond consciously and with ease to change rather than struggling against it is rare. Being in the moment, free from the desires and expectations to which we have been conditioned is what is necessary to truly and easily be with the flow of life and its changes and the challenges that arise from this. It is this ease that yoga in its various forms leads us towards.

It is because of desire that we are here. Desire also drives much of what we do. In yoga practice we desire fitness, health, well-being or even enlightenment. Wanting some outcome or another and the need to strive for and control these outcomes is perhaps, responsible for much of the pain both in individual human lives and collectively in society. Arising from this need to feel as if we are in control are all our personal and collective dogmas and rigidities.

As products of the Judaeo-Christian-Materialistic synthesis which we call Western Society, a society with many technological, artistic and medical wonders; with its contemporary religions of science and consumption; with its history of militarism and warfare, oppression and class and gender politics, we have every one of us been steeped in the consciousness of control. A society focused around control over nature, control over the individual, men's control over women and therefore breeding and property rights, there is much about control.

Other societies also seek control, they just express it slightly differently. The caste system and gender oppression in Hindu and Chinese culture are just two of many possible examples.

Yoga offers us the tools to step out of the conditioned self and its limited perspective. Yoga offers us the tools to allow the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind. To step out of identifying with the constant ebb and flow of whatever cerebral activity happens to be going on in this moment. Conditioning from whatever social imprint is a creation of particular patterns in those mental fluctuations. Since most social imprints have large control components, part of this process of liberation is to address our needs to be in control.

The disciplines and practices of yoga can unfortunately counteract this liberation. These tools misapplied, can feed egoic structures, they can lead to attachment to outcomes and a deep attachment to the techniques themselves. The skilful application and balance of the use of these particular change technologies is highly subtle.

The application of yogic tools or techniques that merely address our strengths will lead to greater imbalance. Our weaknesses need to also be addressed and any developmental path should also

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challenge and assist in the nourishment of our weaker facets, leading to a more balanced human being.

Yoga is the path and the outcome. Yoga is the healing of the inner schisms of ego and shadow, mind and body, bodymind and spirit, being and cosmos and there is no recipe to get there!

There is no recipe purely because each persons path is unique, their journey, some say through many lifetimes, will take the shape it takes. It is not in the remit of any of us to cast judgement upon where anybody else is on the path, nor is it useful of any teacher to force their particular recipe upon others as the only way.

Where then are we going? Where is this Yoga that yoga leads us to?

Enlightenment, Illumination, Evolution.

How are we getting there?.....The Path.

Our path is our life, it is the process of life itself, guided in the way that life guides us, our prime navigational aid on this journey is our heart. The heart once we can allow the rust and the chains of conditioning to fall away is our guide and our teacher.

The external teacher can help, the practices can help, they can also get in the way if we have merely dropped one set of conditioning for another.

Ironically we are all already there, here that is! We are all already enlightened, already awake, we just don't know it! If we look for enlightenment we miss it because it is here, right here and now. If we don't seek it we may not find the tools to allow us to drop our delusions of who we think we are.

Disciplines are merely tools to help us get there and then we put them down.

Tools such as asana, a powerful way of integrating body-mind can become due to the nature of the levels of control required a way for practitioner to hold onto their need for control rather than let go of it. Asana can due to the possibility of feeling achievement lead to a strengthening of the egoic structure.

For a practitioner who has not resolved their ego-shadow splits, meditational practices can lead to a deeper divorce from their shadow such that they create the 'other'. The other might be the non-yogic or the bhoga, the them and the us. This dualism is of course a regression from Yoga (unity) yet it is done using yogic tools and the practitioner believes themselves truly 'yogic'.

Guru devotion can become a way to project one's ideal male/father/lover or feminine/mother/lover stereotypes onto. This can be a very 'safe' behaviour because if the teacher is distant enough the projections remain enshrined in the depository of the guru. The yogic devotee never really has to

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challenge or confront their issues and deal honestly and deeply with real flesh and blood relationships.

Disciplines such as mantra can be used as anaesthetics to block awareness, to reduce the pain of existence, when what we perhaps need is to fully explore and celebrate that pain and see it for the delusion it is.

If we use any discipline to keep our emotional existence unknown, unexplored or repressed then we are misapplying those disciplines. This is merely using the discipline to stay in control.

The very concept of a spiritual practice is difficult, a practice can help us become more aware of the possibility of spirit, but in itself is no more of spirit or spiritual than anything else. Defecation with awareness and a sense of gratitude is more of spiritualising practice than using a yogic tool such as asana or meditation to look good or feel 'spiritual'.

Practices can lead us to the delusion of separation. Separation between 'physical' and 'spiritual'. These separations or schisms are once again leading away from a sense of unity or Yoga. Once a separation is created and a duality exists, we place our view of our 'self' on one side of this duality. Ideas such as 'that is just physical practice', 'this is a higher practice', generally indicate that there is some ego created duality occurring. The conditioned self and egoic structure is terribly subtle and will find any way it can to sustain it's sense of existence. Misapplication of practice can bind us to the conditioned self.

The basic concept here is that the use of particular tools does not make a craftsperson nor does it guarantee that the product will be of a particular quality.

It is human evolution and development that is the aim. It is not the adoption of particular practices and trappings, whether material or behavioural. If the practices and trappings are no longer appropriate for the here and now, if they no longer lead us to liberation they must be let go of.

People who have developed minimal levels of awareness of their inner landscape and geography will do many things with their innergy (internal dynamic life energy). The thoughts and feelings that are uncomfortable (possibly because of their conditioning and how they prefer to perceive themselves) are often moved around in a tortuous manner rather than being seen, felt, heard or sensed. From this initial awareness can arise acceptance. It is from accepting and allowing that change occurs, we can't control it or shape it. If we try to shape it we merely stop it from actually happening.

Of course we can also be really clever at pretending that because we do all these good practices we are transforming. Sublimation, repression, conversion into dis-ease, displacement and projection are some of the routes whereby this innergy is rerouted. We use others as cinematic screens onto which we play out much of our shadow as well as our joy. This practice we probably carry out for much of our existence. With increasing levels of awareness, acceptance and allowing we do it less and less.

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Staying in control is a way of attempting to keep the wraps on our shadows, shadows which constantly present themselves in response to life's changing circumstances and demands.

Facing, accepting, perhaps understanding and beginning to love our personal and collective shadows and demons is perhaps the most enlightened way of dealing with this innergy. Accepting and loving the inner aspects of our being does not mean we have to act them out, however by facing, accepting and loving we free our life energy. Methods of subterfuge and control are energy expensive and internally violent.

Huge amounts of energy can be freed for more creative and constructive living through honouring what is really happening, by being here with what really is.

Internal non-violence (ahimsa) is a way of flow, a way of awareness and a way of knowing our inner geography. Knowing ourselves and loving ourselves as we really are is the first step. From this first step we can begin to reach out to others in a way that is not rooted in a confusion of unconscious ego, desire and need but in a reflection of love for our incarnation, love for who we are reflected through this incarnation, whatever it is. Love thy neighbour as thy self!

To love our being requires awareness followed by acceptance. Awareness is partly an ability to see, hear and feel the workings of our mind-body. One way of understanding Yoga is as connection or relationship, understanding the intricate inner connections and then the outward connections and relationships is Yoga. Kindness for these inner workings as they really are, not as we would like them to be is crucial. Equally crucial is developing the capacity to be aware that we are aware of them and thus not identifying with any of them.

The Sanskrit term 'Vairagya' usually translated in the negative, non-attachment or even as the separating, detachment, is much more usefully understood as choiceless awareness. It is this choiceless awareness that allows the perception of all of who we are, all of the conditioned and egoic self and all of that which is aware.

Attachment of identity (which is itself a form of separation and therefore egoic) to particular bits of us that we like, means we cannot progress with the work of sensing and loving the whole.

Concentration and awareness are required because ultimately awareness develops of processes of mind and processes of being twenty four hours a day, awake and asleep. This constancy of practice needed to attain liberation from the conditioned self is called Abhyasa.

In essence it is about about the changing identification of our being with aspects of body-mind. The more we can see the shadow play of the mind for what it is the less we are inclined to call it I.

We still have to live in the world and continue in our relationships and our occupations. To allow transformation, yet not retreat from relationship and our interaction with humanity requires very high levels of awareness as we understand and balance our internal and external worlds.

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Viveka is the name given to the faculty of discrimination, this faculty proves invaluable as we negotiate our inner and outer worlds and choose what to act on or not and what to act out or not. In a physiological sense we are becoming intimately aware of our hard wiring and actively creating new pathways and new behaviours.

The tools of yogic technology should lead us to this transitional phase. If we have been misapplying discipline we will be identifying ourselves as a spiritual practitioner, a yogi(ni), as holy, righteous, different, better than, etc. If we are hanging in there we perhaps see ourselves as human, as being alive as a composite of strengths and weaknesses, perhaps even with uncertainty.

Traditionally this path was traversed by being guided through the pitfalls of egoic attachment by an awakened master. Like in everything we make mistakes, then we must learn the lessons and move on. Some teachers collect large numbers of devotees around them, is being a devotee what you want? If you seek enlightenment in this lifetime, then seek the teacher who has awakened followers not merely devotees.

Guru is the name of the principle that leads from the darkness of ignorance to the illumination of truth. In my experience, Guru has three aspects, the three in one. These aspects are firstly the transcendent divine (ParaBrahman, Buddhamind, Allah, God, Goddess,); secondly the external teacher who in some ways is a technical guide to help us more effectively reflect this first aspect to us; thirdly our own inner connection, our internal guru principle focused in our own heart. Ultimately these three are one, this is Yoga.

As we mature into a deeper spiritual perspective we take responsibility for our own internal states. It is daunting to be faced with a mind that is unruly (and who is facing what anyway) and the practices of concentration and energetic clarity developed through a balanced asana practice are of huge importance.

Supported meditation using either visual (yantra, mandala,), auditory (mantra, music) or kinaesthetic (breath, body sensation) helps to focus the mind to the degree necessary to allow space and stillness for transformation. There are excellent practices for the development of watchfulness, such as Swami Satyananda's Antar Mouna (1), the practice of Tratak (2) is also useful in developing concentration.

Mantra practice as in Japa(3), breath awareness as in Ajapa japa (4) and Vipassana (5) are all practices that can be extended into everyday life. To break out of the concept of the separation between spiritual and secular life, life itself must be seen as the practice. All life is spiritual all space is sacred. If we begin to recognise that life is the practice, we can then also see that yogic practice is a tool. These tools help us to expand our experience of life, to make it altogether more powerful and wonderful and ordinary than we could have ever have dreamed possible.

To be truly 'awake' and truly 'human' requires the full integration of body, emotion, cognition, unconscious, environment, spirit and cosmos and beyond into being. Pure Being in this complexity

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and simplicity is yoga, it is integration and inclusion not exclusion. Using practices to surgically remove or obscure aspects of being is playing the 'yoga without' game. Spiritual awareness is bigger than we can ever conceive, bigger than any limits we can ever place on it.

Refusing to see this takes one back into dualistic space where ego rules. Everything is spirit or consciousness, we only have to see it. Yogic practice takes one to the conclusion that the who and the what are in unity. Every stick, stone, pebble, mountain, grain of sand, tree, insect, thought, dream etc are all the play of consciousness or spirit. Whatever we do that helps us to remember, more fully appreciate, celebrate and live this truth is a spiritualising practice. It is our conditioning and our condition that prevents this awareness.

How do we get 'out of control'? It is only when we let go of our conditioned perspective that we can really begin to celebrate spirit, only then can we be truly and integrally present.

How do we achieve vairagya? Well, we don't. It is organic and grows with appropriate practice and the development of awareness. We see, hear and feel our attachments. This being aware through the day using practices to return to as foundations for this developing awareness is Abhyasa in a contemporary sense. Is this really possible in our society? Many of us have no choice, perhaps the hardest sadhana is realising whilst remaining with work, with family, with partner, with duties and responsibilities.

If our life truly is to be our spiritual practice then we face it with awareness and acceptance. Running to a perceived (perceived by the current limiting condition) more 'spiritual' life is then foolishness and escapism. A modest commitment to begin to watch, hear, feel, and be with attachment is a way of exploring egoic states. Watch through a day, forgetfulness is fine, just return to this awareness as you can. In essence this is developing mindfulness and returning to mindfulness when we realize we have become mindless. Through weeks, months, years or perhaps lifetimes we develop awareness of internal relations and geography and how this connects across our imagined boundaries to the external 'reality'.

Ahimsa or loving kindness comes in here, we need to work towards being gentle and treating the inner world with acceptance and love. Trying to kill, maim, excommunicate or surgically remove aspects of being is temporary and unsuccessful.

If one considers open, inclusive and expanding energy as love; contracted, separated energy is then fear. Aspects of being may be in a fear space, ego is the quintessential characteristic produced out of the fear of dissolution. The only successful medicine for fear is love. The accepting and inclusive nature of love dissolves fear, as it says in the bible 'in perfect love there is no fear'. We have to love our own existence before we can truly love others, ahimsa is therefore in the first place an internal event.

Viveka is the wisdom of discrimination, choosing which aspects of inner geography to act on or not and understanding why. The learning process requires that we make many mistakes, just as babies fall many times in learning to walk, we also fall and sometimes we cry. Each fall is a learning, once

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again we apply ahimsa and move on. It takes time for the inner awareness to develop, forgetting and then remembering, constantly returning to awareness. It is this process of firm, gentle but unrelenting awareness that is our abhyasa. Abhyasa in conjunction with ahimsa applied with Vairagya leads to the wisdom of Viveka. With greater degrees of choiceless awareness and the discrimination of action we have the possibility of the exhaustion of the chatter of speech and feeling of the conditioned mind. This is the beginning of the inner stillness that Patanjali referred to as the cessation of the modifications of the mind.

The outer practice becomes the inner practice and life becomes the spiritual practice.

Christopher Gladwell

## Notes

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4) Meditations from the Tantras. Swami Satyananda Saraswati.
- (5)
- (6) Meditations from the Tantras. Swami Satyananda Saraswati.
- (7)
- (8) Yoga Darshan, Paramahansa Niranjanananda
- (9)
- (10) Meditations from the Tantras. Swami Satyananda Saraswati.
- (11)
- (12) A Path with Heart, Jack Kornfield..
- (13)
- (14) Integral Psychology, Ken Wilber.
- (15)
- (16) The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Georg Feuerstein.
- (17)
- (18) Tantric Quest, Daniel Odier