

Chapter X. The Yogis

Three stages of philosophic discovery

There are three steps in the progression of philosophic enquiry (or *Vedantic* thought) in India: dualism, qualified nondualism, and nondualism (*dwaitha*, *visishta-adwaitha*, and *a-dwaitha*). It is not possible to advance beyond these three steps by human endeavour. Nondualistic thought is beyond the reach of the common person; it is not so easily comprehensible. To conceive it with the intellect is itself hard. To experience it, a powerful faculty of penetration is needed. Therefore, it is best to start with the dualist step and experience it as the reality behind things; then, the second stage of qualified nondualism is rendered easier to reach.

The individual must progress as fast or as steadily as the community. We pass through boyhood, childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age, and old age; it is an imperceptible but inevitable progress. We experience each only when we are passing through it. So, too, with these three stages of philosophic discovery. Each view is latent in the rest, and each proceeds out of the experience of the previous stage. It is not possible to be aware of all three at the same time. Based on our spiritual discipline (*sadhana*) and the experiences gained therefrom, each viewpoint comes into the consciousness and forms the spring of action and thought.

Those who assert that the universe is real but declare at the same time that the existence of God is but a dream are only proving themselves foolish. For when the effect, namely the cosmos is real, it must have a cause—how can there be an effect with no cause? God can be denied only when the universe is denied. God can disappear only when the cosmos disappears. What now appears as the cosmos is really God; this is the vision that true spiritual aspirants will get when they succeed in their endeavour. As a matter of fact, the universe we experience is the dream. When we awake from the dream, the truth of its being God will shine in the consciousness. From the beginning of time, the God whom we posit outside ourselves has been the reality inside us also. This truth will also become steady in the faith of people.

Meeting dogmatism and fanaticism

Of course, no existing philosophy can be satisfying to all types and levels of mental equipment. Each has a distinct value. The stages of intellectual development or the powers of reasoning are different from each other. So, the three schools of philosophical interpretation mentioned above (dualism, qualified dualism, nondualism) attain acceptance among different temperaments and different groups of people. No one school has the right to claim superiority and impute inferiority. Only those who are unwise will resort to such tactics.

When people approach us with fanatic views, we must meet them with a smile, eager and yearning, filled with devotion to God. One can get intoxicated, of course, but only as a result of quaffing the wine of love (*prema*). When people frantic for work approach us, we must share our skill and strength and join with them in work. By this means, it is possible to bring harmony among followers of various faiths and philosophic thoughts. It will bring together schools of thought and belief. If only this principle of harmony and harmonious cooperation would become a permanent asset of each person, how excellent it would be! How happy the world would have been if everyone had this knowledge that their viewpoint can at best be only partial and that it requires the harmonious commingling of many other facets to posit truth!

Yoga, path of harmony

Yoga means “coming together”. In India, where *yoga* has been flowing in the veins of everyone for ages, it is possible to have the harmonious coexistence of many faiths and beliefs, which is the ideal type of universal religion. Those who can heroically put their faith into daily living can accomplish this togetherness in the human community. Togetherness or union can be established between one’s outer behaviour and inner nature. The spiritual aspirant intent on the path of love can strive for union between themselves and the embodiment of love, namely God. The *vedanthin*, the nondualist, can achieve the union of all that IS in the one concept of God. The path of *yoga* is designated differently in Sanskrit under different contexts; but those who are able to conceive and execute the union are revered as *yogis*.

Those who strive through activities and achievements to establish the union are *yogis* of action (*karma-yogis*); those who follow the path of love are *yogis* of devotion (*bhakthi-yogis*); those who strive to manifest their latent powers and canalize them are royal *yogis* (*raja-yogis*); those who stick to logical analysis and rational interpretations and attain intuitive perception are *yogis* of wisdom (*jnana-yogis*). In the Indian (*Bharathiya*) spiritual history, these four types recur again and again.

Karma yoga

First, the *yogi* of action (*karma-yogi*). The *yogi* adopts the path of establishing union with Godhead by elevating and sublimating acts. We meet in the world many who seem to have been born just to accomplish one particular mission or project. Their intellect is not satisfied with mere imagination or planning. Their minds are full of actual concrete achievements that they yearn to realize. For such people, a guidebook or scripture is needed to direct them along beneficial paths.

Everyone in the world is seen engaged in some activity or other, all the time. Yet, very few know the significance and worthwhileness of activity (*karma*) or how best to realize the best results out of this inescapable trait. Hence, life is being made banal and barren. The *yoga* of action teaches the awareness of this significance and guides people along to achieve the maximum benefit out of the activity. Where, when, and how action (*karma*) has to be done, how spiritual urges can reinforce strength of mind in the performance of action, and how action is to be taken up so that spiritual development can result—these are taught by the *yoga* of action.

One great objection is raised by some people about this, and we have to pay attention to it. The objection is that the *yoga* of action involves too much physical strain. But, basically, it is the company one keeps that decides the strain and stress to which the mind and body are subjected. “I like very much to engage myself in only this task.” “I sought only to do good to him, but he ignored my desire and tried to injure me.” These are the usual causes for the strain and stress mentioned above. Such disappointment makes one lose interest in activity. One wants to do good, and one seeks to do good to someone in some way, hoping to derive joy therefrom and distribute joy. When such joy does not arise, despair sets in.

But the real *yogi* of action does activity without getting attached, without being aware of whom the action helps or how. The lesson that the *yoga* of action teaches is: do the action as action, for the sake of the action. Why do *yogis* of action fill their hands with work? Because that is their real nature; they feel that they are happy while doing work. That is all. They do not bargain for results; they are not urged by any calculation; they give but never receive. They know no grief and no disappointment, for they had not hoped for any benefit.

Yoga of love and devotion

The second path is the *yoga* of love or devotion (*bhakthi-yoga*). This is congenial for those who are emotionally oriented. It is the path for those capable of filling their hearts with love. The urge is to have God as the Beloved. The activities will be different, for they relate to incense-burning, gathering flowers for worship, building shrines and temples where one could install and adore symbols of beauty, wisdom, power, etc.

Are you inclined to remark that this is not the right means of achieving union with divinity? Remember that saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and guides throughout the world have emerged just from this devotional and dedicatory stage of spiritual endeavour. Some faiths tried to imagine God as formless and described worship of God through various such acts as blasphemy. They tried to suppress the cults of devotion, and in the process, they slighted the Reality and its power and majesty. The belief that God cannot be symbolized in a form is evidence of blindness; the charge that such worship is barren is hollow. The history of the world is witness to the efficacy of devotion (*bhakthi*). It is not proper to ridicule these activities, ceremonials, and rituals and the descriptions of the lives of spiritual aspirants who adhered to them in order to earn union with divinity. Let those who yearn after the joy of worshipping the Form do so; certainly, it would be a sin to shatter their faith and treat it as infructuous.

The glory of the great heroes of the spirit, those who have scaled the highest peaks of realization and those who attained spiritual fulfilment, is exercising immense influence on the mind of mankind. It is as a result of a long line of such seers that the spiritual message of India has attracted the attention of all nations. If India has been able to earn the reverence of the world, the reason has to be sought in the precious treasure that the seers have earned and preserved. Here, love of God and fear of sin have been the chief pillars of life and the everlasting guides for living. India (Bharath) has won a name for being a holy land, a land steeped in renunciation and in spiritual exercises (*sadhanas*) aimed at union with the Absolute, renowned for sacrifice (*thyaga*) and *yoga*. The urges that this culture encouraged were all directed to the conquest of the vagaries of the mind.

Can the explanations offered by this culture on the nature and characteristics of Reality be palatable to those afflicted by agitated feelings and passion? To the great builders of this culture, God was tangible truth, the one and only real Fact, the goal of their entire love. So the inheritors and followers of this culture treat the nihilist arguments based on inescapably limited “reason” as the fool is treated in the story. The fool saw an idol, and, eager to discover the God, he broke it to pieces with a hammer.

The *yoga* of devotion (*bhakthi*) will teach people the path of love. It will tell them not to love with a view to gain profit. Love all; love all as you love yourselves. No harm can come to you then. It will only spread joy and happiness to all. God is present in all beings as love. So the love is directed to and accepted not by the individual but by God, who is resident there. The seeker of God who relies on the path of devotion and dedication soon becomes aware of this fact.

Some love God as the mother, some as the father, and some as “dearest and closest friend”. Others regard God as the Beloved, the only desired goal. They all endeavour to merge their love with the ocean of love that God is. Wherever love is evident, take it that it is God’s own love. God is the greatest lover of mankind. Therefore, when anyone decides to serve humanity, whom He loves, God showers grace in plenty. When the human heart melts at the suffering of others and expands as a result of that sympathy, believe that God is present there. That is the sign of the validity of the path of devotion (*bhakthi-yoga*).

Royal path of unitive wisdom

Now about the royal *yoga* (*raja-yoga*). Royal *yoga* means the process of establishing mastery over the mind. One need not surrender one's intellect or follow the guidelines of religious leaders. There is no chance of being misled or mistaken. At every step, one has to rely on one's own intellect and experience, as tested by oneself.

Every being has three varieties of instruments for acquiring knowledge and, through that knowledge, wisdom. The first is "instinctive"; this is very strong, active, and advanced in animals. This is the earliest, the lowest, and therefore the least beneficial of the three. The second is the "rational", the instrument that seeks the cause and the effect thereof. This is most evident in people. The instinct can operate only in the limited field of senses and sensory experiences.

In people, instinctive knowledge is largely subordinated by the rational instruments. The limits of the rational are very thin; reason can range over vastly wider fields. In spite of this, reason is also capable only of very poor performance. Its reach is restricted; it can proceed only a certain distance; it cannot venture further. The road that logic takes is not straight. It is more circular, returning again and again to the place from which it started.

Take, for example, our knowledge of the objective world, of the elements and energies that compose it. That which urges and prompts the objective world and its components does not stop with just this much. It absorbs also that which is immanent outside the objective world. So, the extent that reason can spread over and explain is as the "consciousness" that is imprisoned in the tiny molecule as compared with the vastness and grandeur of the transcendent fullness.

To go across the boundaries of reason into the full, free realm of intuition, certain spiritual disciplines and exercises are essential. They can be grouped under the name God-propelled wisdom (*jnana*). For we have only three stages of wisdom: native, or derived from the senses of action and perception (*sahaja-jnana*); knowledge derived by the process of discrimination and evaluation; and God-induced knowledge, i.e. gained through grace by inner vision or intuition. The first of these is the knowledge possessed by animals; the second is the characteristic of humanity, and the third is the special treasure of high-souled individuals. It possible for everyone to foster, cultivate, and develop the seedlings of this third wisdom; the capacity is latent in all.

Another fact has to be borne in mind. The three are stages of growth, so they are not mutually exclusive types of knowledge. God-induced knowledge will not contradict discriminative knowledge; it will only bring to light what is unmanifest in discriminative knowledge. The later stage only confirms and elaborates the previous ones. Afflicted by the vagaries of the mind and its fancies, some consider their distorted attitudes to be God-given or grace-induced. They may even call upon others to heed their counsel and lead people astray by their barren guidance. These morons announce their absurd prattle as God-propelled.

True teaching can never be counter to discriminative knowledge —the conclusion arrived at by discrimination and evaluation. The *yogas* mentioned above are all established in consonance with this view. Royal *yoga* has to be practised mostly by the mind and its resolution. This is a vast subject, so we consider here only its central theme, something that is the only refuge for the lowest of the low and the highest of the *yogis*: single-pointed meditation. For the person engaged in research in a laboratory, one walking along a road, a scholar reading a book, or an individual writing a letter or driving a car, concentration of all their attention on the articles before them and the activity in which they are engaged is very important. The person understands the nature and peculiarities of the object being handled. The more intense the concentration, the more successful the activity. When the mental

abilities are focused on one effort, knowledge can be acquired quicker and from a wider field. And, that is the only way by which knowledge can be earned.

Concentration will enable one, whoever one is, whatever the activity engaged in, to finish it much better than otherwise. Whether in material assignments, ordinary day-to-day work, or spiritual exercises (*sadhana*), concentration of mental energies is a must if success is to be achieved. It is the key that can open the treasure chest of wisdom (*jnana*). This is the most important aspect of royal *yoga*. It can even be said that it is the only important aspect of that *yoga*. Millions of unwelcome, unwanted, unnecessary, and even harmful thoughts enter our minds and confound their activities. These have to be kept out; the mind has to be guarded and controlled and kept under our rigorous supervision. Royal *yoga* is the one refuge for persons endeavouring to win this victory.

Yoga of supreme wisdom

The *yoga* of wisdom (*jnana-yoga*) is devoted mostly to the study of basic principles. This universe or cosmos, which we cognize as outside ourselves, can be explained by means of various theories of knowledge, but none of them can be convincing to the uninitiated. Wisdom-*yogis* weave many such theories and hypotheses. They are not convinced of the reality of any material object in the universe, or of any activity, or even of anyone else who propounds any other explanation. They believe that they should transcend the daily chores of life and not be bound by social or other obligations. In the vast ocean of ISNESS, or truth (*sath*), all objects are but drops, in their view. They are all struggling to move from the circumference to the center, from which they manifested through illusion (*maya*). Wisdom-*yogis* also yearn to merge in the centre, the core of reality, away from the tangle of apparent diversity. They exert themselves to become the Truth, not only to become aware of it. Of course, as soon as they are aware of it, they become it. They cannot tolerate the thought that they and truth are separate and distinct.

The divine is the only kith and kin of wisdom-*yogis*. They know none other. They entertain no other urge, no other attachment, no other desire. God is all, in all. They cannot be affected by grief or joy, failure or success. They see and experience only one unbroken, unchallenged stream of bliss-consciousness. For the people who are firmly established in this state, the world and its ups and downs appear trivial and illusory. In order to stay in that consciousness, they have to counter the pulls of the senses and face the fascinations of the world without any agitation of mind.

Wisdom-*yogis* are vigilant against the temptations held before them by the senses; turning them aside, they approach the Divine and seek strength and solace there. They realize that the power and energy that vitalize the tiniest of the tiny and the vastest of the vast is the same divine Principle. Their actions, thoughts, and words reveal the vision that they have experienced: the Supra-vision (*Paramaartha-drishti*). They see all elements—earth, fire, water, wind, and sky—as the divine itself and all beings—humanity, beast, bird, and worm—as emanations from God and therefore fully divine.

Experience Godhead with faith in the Vedas

One fact has to be noted here. Just because people have this knowledge of the immanence of the Divine, and even of its transcendence, they cannot be honoured as people of wisdom (*janis*), for the knowledge has to be digested through actual experience. This is the crucial test. It is not enough if the intellect nods approval and is able to prove that Godhead is all. The belief must penetrate and prompt every moment of living and every act of the be-

liever. Wisdom should not be merely a bundle of thoughts or a packet of neatly constructed principles. Faith must enliven and enthuse every thought, word, and deed. The self must be soaked in the nectar of the spiritual wisdom.

The intellect is a poor instrument, for what the intellect approves as correct today is rejected tomorrow by the same intellect on second thought! Intellect cannot judge things finally and for all time. Therefore, seek the experience. Once that is won, the *Atma* can be understood “as all this”. That is the *yoga* of wisdom (*jnana-yoga*).

According to the Indian (*Bharathiya*) way of thought, the *Vedas* are taken as the voice of God. Thus, the *Vedas* are the primary source of all knowledge for Indians. Everything is tested on the basis of the *Vedas*. The ancient sages have laid down that what agrees with the *Vedas* is agreeable to people and what does not thus agree cannot agree with them. The *Vedas* were not spoken by humans or composed by men and women. They were heard and recorded by sages and transmitted by guru to pupil for generations by word of mouth. The guru recited, and the pupil listened and recited just as the guru did, with the same care and correctitude. Thus, the *Vedas* have been handed down for centuries. No one can determine the exact dates when the *Vedas* were first heard or recited. Therefore, they are taken as eternal (*sanathana*).

Vedas: the voice of God in eternity

At this point, we have to keep in mind another important truth. All other religions prevalent in the world hold as authoritative communications made to some holy persons by God Himself in His corporate Form, or through some superhuman personalities or embodiments of parts or portions of Divinity. Indians do not follow this line. They declare that the *Vedas* are based on no human authority; they do not depend on any person for their validity. They are emanations direct from God; they are primeval; they are their own authority and validity. They were not written down or composed, constructed, or put together.

The cosmos or creation is limitless, eternal, with no beginning or end. So too, the voice of God, namely the *Vedas*, have no limit; they are eternal; they have no beginning nor end. *Vid*, the root from which the word *Veda* is derived, means “to know”. When knowledge began, the *Vedas* manifested. Sages (*rishis*) visualized and announced them. They are the “see-ers of mantras”.

The *Vedas* have two major sections: the *Karma-kanda* and the *Jnana-kanda*. In the *Karma-kanda*, a number of different sacrifices are mentioned, in which oblations are offered in the sanctified fire. Most of them have been given up by Indians in recent times, since it has become difficult to perform them with the exactitude the *Vedic* rules prescribe. Some still continue in a very attenuated form. In the *Karma-kanda*, moral codes are insisted upon very much. The moral rules and restrictions regulating life and conduct refer to the student (*brahmachari*), householder (*grihastha*), recluse (*vanaprastha*), and monastic (*sanyasa*) stages. Also, the *Karma-kanda* declares what is right and wrong for people following various professions and occupying different statuses. These are being followed here and there, in some thin form, by people in India.

The *Jnana-kanda* is called the end of the *Vedas* (*Vedanta*), the goal, the finale. It is enshrined in the *Upanishads*. Adherents of the dualistic, qualified nondualistic, and nondualistic (*dwaitha*, *visishtha-adwaitha*, and *adwaitha*) schools of philosophical thought, worshipers of Siva, Vishnu, Sakthi, Surya, and Ganapathi—all accept the supreme authority of the *Vedas*. They may interpret the *Upanishads* and other texts according to their own predilections and intellectual calibre, but no one dare question the authority of the *Veda* or *Vedanta*. So, it is possible to use the words Hindu, Indian (*Bharathiya*), and *Vedanthin* for the same person.

Currently, the various schools of philosophical thought may appear difficult to comprehend or as derived from unripe understanding. But when the matter is thought over in quiet, or the texts are studied in silence or investigated without prejudice, it will become clear that they have all relied on the points raised and the conclusions arrived at in the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* are being symbolized and worshiped in image form in temples and in private shrines, as a tribute to this universal appeal. They have entwined themselves, inseparably, in our lives.

“The *Vedas* are endless (*Anantho vai Vedaah*).” But they were reduced into four collations, and their essence was preserved in them. For promoting peace and prosperity in the world, the four were taught and propagated. They are the *Rig-*, *Sama-*, *Yajur-*, and *Atharvana-Vedas*. They uphold righteousness (*dharma*), proclaim the reality, and promote peace and harmony by developing among people the attitudes of worship, music, and adoration and also by cultivating skill in weaponry and war. They present the ideal before people and exhort them to follow it.

Whether the Indian is aware of it or not, invariably, every right act of the Indian will have some *Vedic* injunction or prohibition behind it as the regulator or the illuminator. From marriage rites to funeral rites and even rites for the propitiation of the ancestral spirits, the *Vedas* are the guides. A true Indian should never forget the *Vedas* or be ungrateful to them. The dualists, qualified monists, monists—all direct their lives according to lines laid down in the past by sages. But they do not now know the origin and the purpose of these guidelines. If only they did, the fruit would be much more plentiful and permanent.