

Perfecting Kriya-Yoga enables the Yogic practitioner to naturally attain the ordained destination

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Abstract

A Yogi, among other primary attributes (that positively influence others), should have one basic quality, which is “lack of Conflict in mind”. A Yogi will not have ambiguity about anything that is countenanced. KriyaYoga readily prepares the practitioner to attain the stage naturally. The paper brings out the rationale as to why “Kriya- Yoga” is a great path to be treaded and what is that the yogi accomplishes by perfecting ‘Kriya Yoga’ which is a ‘part of Niyama. Yama and Niyama (Restraints & Virtues) which precede actual yogic practices need not be over- emphasized, as they prepare the yogic practitioner and mellow down the person and make the other angas (steps) of yoga become much easier to perform before attaining the ultimate goal. Since Kriya Yoga is a primary yet an important part of the Yogic angas, it assumes greater significance. More and more the practitioner works on Kriya Yoga part of the Ashtanga Yoga, the yogic attributes within the practitioner become part of the personality, accomplishing which the quality of Sadhana becomes natural. The paper also touches the deeper aspects of yogic practice while unfolding the nuances of Kriya-Yoga.

Keywords: Kriya Yoga – Ashtanga Yoga – Yama – Niyama – Sadhana.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is more an exploratory research work taking the authentic work on the subject as the basis. The paper mainly is based on the reference of the book “The Science of Yoga”, (ISBN 0- 8356-7140-2) which was authored by Dr. I.K. Taimni. Dr. Taimni (1898-1978) was a Professor of Chemistry at the Allahabad University in India, and an influential scholar in the fields of Yoga & Indian Phyilosophy. Dr. Taimni, authored a number of books on Eastern Philosophy including a modern interpretation of Patanjali Sutras Yoga. Dr. Taimni was an authority on the subject of Yoga Sutras, and the same would be clearly visible through his work – the book “The Science of Yoga”. The book was first published in the year 1961 and since then several editions of the book was brought out, published by The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai.

INTRODUCTION

There cannot be a better way to understand spirituality than through Yoga. Spirituality is a subjective experience in understanding the spirit in us lying deep within us - the body – the matter. It is understanding one-self and relating the core-inner-self, which each of us are, with the outside world (the cosmos) and the Universal Consciousness; it is the ability to understand the Jeevatma (the selves that we are) & the Paramatma (Universal Consciousness). Performing Yoga has, in every step, benefits that one can find useful for enhancing the personality – the body, the mind and the Soul. Ashtanga Yoga (the 8 steps of Yoga, as propounded by Sage Patanjali) is – Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Dharana, Dhyana, Pratyahara, Samadhi.

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1. Yama – are the Restraints - Ahimsa (Non-violence), Satya (Truthfulness) Asteya (non- stealing), Brahmacharya (Celibacy) and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness)
2. Niyama – are Soucha (Purity), Santhosha (Contentment), Tapah (Steadfastness, Strict Adherence), Svadhyaya (Self-study) and IswaraPranidhana (Devoted to God Almighty) – the last three virtues in Niyama are together called Kriya-Yoga
3. Asana - Bodily posture (Padmasana or Siddhasana)
4. Pranayama – Control of Breath (Prana)
5. Dharana – Concentration
6. Dhyana – Meditation
7. Pratyahara – Withdrawal of senses
8. Samadhi (Trance or transcendental state)

Every step in yoga is a process of discipline that starts with the Yama & Niyama, which are Life practices (activities & habits), Asana & Pranayama (body posture for attaining ease), Dharana, Dhyana (mind discipline), Pratyahara & Samadhi (Yogic state). These stages of yoga lead to peace, bliss and a mind-less state – union of Jeevatma with Paramatma. Patanjali Yoga practice is the most scientifically advocated practice for the great spiritual experience one can attain.

DISCUSSION:

Yama & Niyama are what we say and do and which affect the person - individually and also the surrounding society. While the law of the land insists that they are crimes – small and big in nature and people are punishable for certain of the crimes, it is not a decision that one can take on a fine morning, since it requires a great amount of obsession for deciding to follow the virtues and be strong against the restraints. And further the decision to follow Yama and Niyama have to come from within the individual. Every precept under Yama and Niyama are highly difficult to sincerely and honestly follow. But that is the kind of preparedness is required to follow them consistently which only mellows down the individual. It is normally (not as a rule) very difficult to follow Yama and Niyama by youngsters, since they are all mostly driven by their instincts and body-mind needs. The vasanas / samskaras of a person decide how impulsively one goes about breaking these precepts and keep saying that those following know not to live in this world. And truly, the decision to follow Yama and Niyama in its core sense is almost impossible to follow. There is every likelihood that one taking a firm decision to follow Yama and Niyama would eschew the value/s, when going is difficult for them. Now let us delve a little deep into each of the precepts under Yama and Niyama. YAMA – Speaks about the important restraints one should follow. Ahimsa or Non-violence is the first one. Satya – Being Truthful always and ever; Asteya is non-stealing and Brahmacharya is celibacy – the self-imposed discipline on the sexual urge and the last one is Aparigraha, which is non-possessiveness.

Ahimsa –

Ahimsaa-pratisthaayam tat-samnidhauvaira-thyaagah

Yes, “On being firmly established in non-violence there is abandonment of hostility in (his) presence

Ahimsa in its true sense should be positive and dynamic in nature so that it actually means Universal love and definitely not just the opposite of violence. It is said and also the experience of the yogis that one who totally – body, mind and soul - practices ahimsa a normally invisible aura could adorn the individual charged with the love and the compassion which “may not be expressed at the emotional level”. It is also said often that the people who are violent and carry about hateful vibes – when approaching the yogis, become sober for a period of time by the much stronger vibes that direct from the Yogis. Ahimsa is, and means, even the slightest hurt felt by others on account of us.

Satya –

Satya-pratisthayamkriya-phalasrayatvam

“On being firmly established in truthfulness fruit (of action) rests on action (of the Yogi) only”

Satya is truthfulness. It is perfect truthfulness. It is not just saying something but also meaning -- the same thing. It is said that the yogi who practices perfect truthfulness at all times and all places without exception of any sort could predict what is to happen in future – about things and situations. But this again is not falsifying the natural laws, but well within them.

Asteya -

Asteya-pratishaayaamsarva-ratnopasthaanam

“On being firmly established in honesty all kinds of gems present them- selves (before the Yogi)”

If we have the tendency of misappropriating things not belonging to us, we are supposed to be governed by what generally is happening. But in case we are evolved and do not even think of touching anything not belonging to us, then it would only be “strictly within the limited means of what is allotted to us by our Karma”. So it is this state of being firmly established in honesty. Never – not even in a solitary occasion failing from this state of firm level of honesty.

Brahmacharya –

Brahmacarya-prathistaayaamvirya-laabhah

“On being firmly established in sexual continence vigour (is) gained”

“Sexual energy is known to be the gross form of the subtler energy which is Ojas. When Brahmacharya is well established the conserved energy is leveraged for bringing about changes in the body and mind. “Sublimation and diversion of this energy is possible only for those who have obtained a complete mastery of their sexual instincts and not merely abstained from indulgence for some time. Such people who are able to conserve, transmute and direct this energy continuously towards the cerebrum are called Urdhva-retas, Urdhva meaning upwards and Retas meaning sexual energy.” This complete control of sexual energy is acquired not merely by abstention from the sex act but also by a very strict and rigid control of thoughts and desires, so that not even the slightest thought or desire connected with sex or suggesting sex ever enters the mind of the Sadhaka.”

Aparigraha –

Aparigraha-sthairyejanma-katthamta - sambodha

“Non-possessiveness being confirmed there arises knowledge of the ‘how’ and ‘wherefore’ of existence”

“Why should knowledge of his previous births arise in the case of a Yogi who has conquered the instinct of possessiveness? To understand this enigma we have to recall the relation between the transitory personality which is formed anew with every incarnation and the permanent individuality which is the root of every personality and which persists through the succession of incarnations. The development of aparigraha (non-possessiveness) frees us from identifying of ourselves with our bodies and the things and thus loosens the bonds of the personality. The natural result of this loosening is that the centre of consciousness gradually shifts into the higher vehicles of the Jivatma and the knowledge present in those vehicles is reflected more and more into the lower vehicles. So, although the lower vehicles have not gone through the experiences of the previous lives, this gradual fusion of the personality and the individuality results in the filtering down of some of this knowledge into the lower vehicles and thus enables the personality to share all this knowledge. This is how the practice of Aparigraha enables the Yogi to have knowledge of previous births. The development of such an extraordinary power from the intensive practice of Aparigraha shows the importance of doing things with intensity. The secret

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of discovering the hidden and mysterious facts of life seems to lie in intensity of effort. But the moment we do anything with great intensity and try to penetrate into the deeper recesses of life we come across the most extraordinary results and experiences. “

Aparigraha is non-possessiveness. Anything not taken by us as belonging to us and not given attention to at all does not leave impression/s on our mind. Lack of impression means mind is free of that to that extent. When Aparigraha is adopted as a way of life (some people do that) then such people have clear blank in mind with no impressions of any sort. There is therefore no memory load. When the Yogi lives whole of his life or a major part of his life. His mind has less and less to connect to the memory relating to this birth. And therefore if an intense yogic pursuit to reach the memory of the last life is tried, it becomes possible to connect at a stage, the knowledge about previous births, since series of births of the practice of Aparigraha makes the practitioner possible to connect and reach the memory impressions of the past births. Aparigraha has great connotation – it is non-possessiveness, non-attachment and is but non-responsive to anything material. When the yogi is totally detached from any possession nor a possessive thought, his mind being empty and his past lives also being so, he would with intense focus can connect not only previous birth, but the births that he had gone through previously. Aparigraha is hence a great virtue that one should develop.

Niyama – covers the precepts what one needs to follow. They are the Virtues that are most worthy to follow. The first virtune is Soucha – it is purity (body and mind), Santosha (Contentment), Tapah – steadfastness, strict adherence, Svadhyaya (Self-study) and Iswarapranidhana (deep devotion to God Almighty)

Soucha

“Saucaatswnga-jugupsaaparairasamsarga”

“From physical purity (arises) disgust for one's own body and disinclination to come in physical contact with others”

When purity in us is talked about, it is actually purity of body and mind. Body being the most materialistic, purity of it being external, it is achieved by bathing and yogic Kriyas, etc., Body is a vehicle and so it is important that the vehicle in-housing the Self and the mind has to be clean and pure; without the body being clean it is difficult to keep the self and the mind to be clean. But it should be understood that it is not repulsion towards one's own body or the others, which will be against the fundamental law of love. And it is emphatically said here that “A positive love towards the owner of the vehicle is quite compatible with a lack of desire to come in contact with the vehicle itself when a person has the capacity to distinguish between the two”. Soucha is purity and purity of the body and the mind should be maintained, which is a sure path to tread to attain the pure self.

“Satvasuddhi-saumanasaikagyendriya-jayaatma-darsana-yogyatvanica”

“From mental purity (arises) purity of Sattva, Cheerful-mindedness, one pointed-ness, control of the senses and fitness for the vision of the Self.”

While the three results of mental purity can be understood, clarity on Sattva-Suddhi is needed. It is known that the Hindu Conception of manifestation and the various phenomena are based on the Tri-gunās – Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Sattva Guna corresponds to the equilibrium which only enables the mind to reflect consciousness. Yogi in order to become adept should eschew the gunas Rajas and Tamas and make only the Sattvaguna predominant, so that the chitta mirrors the purusha – to the best of its real self. Purification gradually eliminates the Rajasic and Tamasic elements from the Chitta – at different levels. Reducing Rajas and Tamas and to attenuate them to attain the state of perfect equilibrium would take the consciousness totally away from the manifestation. So Sattva Suddhi, is in other words the purification in terms of the Gunas. “It will also be seen that Sattva-Suddhi is the fundamental change involved in inner purification and the other three results which are brought about are the natural consequences of this change. “The accompaniments of Viksepa are the result of the predominance of Rajasic and Tamasic elements in our nature. A disturbed and disharmonized mind is certainly not fit for the vision of the Self”.

Samtoshha

“Samtosaad anuttamah sukha-laabhah”

“Superlative happiness from Contentment”

Staying contented in life is superlative happiness. It is actually quite natural. “cause of our constant unhappiness is the perpetual disturbance of the mind caused by all kinds of desires”. It is to be noted that “when a particular desire is satisfied there is a temporary cessation of unhappiness”, which we feel and say is happiness. The feeling, it is said, is illusory. And also, the absence of desire at the conscious level may mean we have become desire less. But it is not true. Real and perfect level of contentment is attainable by the total elimination of desires – sources of unhappiness. Absence of unhappiness also does not mean the presence of happiness. “A calm mind is able to reflect within itself the bliss which is inherent in our real Divine nature”. “The constant surging of desires prevents this bliss from manifesting itself in the mind”. When the desires are totally eliminated and won over, mind becomes totally calm which is true happiness. The subtle and constantly prevailing joy is Sukha – which is independent of external conditions prevailing and is the real Ananda one of the three fundamental aspects of the Self.

Tapah

“Kaayendriya-siddhirasuddhi-ksayaattapasah”

“Perfection of the sense-organs and body after destruction of impurity by austerities”

Perfection is more functional and it prepares the Yogi to use the body for pursuing yoga so that the body does not resist. Tapas is the process of purification culminating in perfection. It is actually the impurity of the body and absence of control which makes it necessary for engaging in the purification process. Yes, it is sound mind in the sound body. And the sound mind only can be a perfect instrument of consciousness. Practicing of Pranayama controls the currents of Prana which the yogi does with all seriousness. The function of sense organs is dependent on the currents of prana. Pranayama, hence, controls the sense organs through prana and the flow of currents properly. Pranayama is Tapas by all means. “The significance of the phrase Asuddhi-ksayat should be kept in mind. It shows conclusively that the removal of impurity is the main purpose of performing Tapas and also that it is only when the body has been completely purified that it can function perfectly as an instrument of consciousness”

Svadhyaaya

“Svadhyaayaadista-devataa-samprayaogah”

“By (or from) self-study union with the desired deity”

Communion with the Ista-Devata is possible with the self-study. It is the realization of the channel between the Sadhaka (practitioner) and his objective. It is the knowledge that flows freely that works essentially, and along with it, the power and direction from consciousness flow from higher to lower level

Isvarapranidhana

Samaadhi-siddhir Isvara-pranidhaanaat

“Accomplishment of Samadhi from resignation of God”

It is a startling revelation by the practising yogis that Isvara-Pranidhana leads to Samadhi ultimately. By voluntary suppression of the ChittaVrittis (mental modifications) and the will of a person Samadhi cannot be attained. Upon surrender of the self, the will of Isvara (the divine will) could be merged with the Yogi's desires, which will be satvic in nature. Achieving Samadhi through Isvara-pranidhana is the most outstanding experience. Purusa (the self in its pure form) gets into the bondage and often muddled by the chittavrittis, which prevents the Purusa being in truly Divine nature. The chittaVrittis are mostly caused and even maintained by the “I “ consciousness – which is followed by limitless desires keeping the mind in a stage of ceaseless agitation to

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quench the desires. If through Isvarapranidhana the mind comes to a state of rest, so be it. “IsvaraPranidhana develops Para-Vairagya, breaks the bonds of the heart, eliminates the desires of the personality and thus naturally and inevitably reduces the mind to a state of Citta-Vrtti-Nirodha which is nothing but Samadhi”.

Patanjali gives a foolproof method to follow and take up Yogic practice. The beauty of these precepts is that even if someone follows one precept with all sincerity and honesty, he is sure to slowly adopt all others and have control over them. The values are such. One value that is respected, come what may, by people, will make it necessary to look at the others seriously and adopt, since the one that is followed sincerely and honestly would make the practitioner to adopt one after the other (all others)

Yama & Niyama – are the current day’s do’s and don’ts. But the practice of Yama and Niyama cannot be a casual decision to follow - as far as possible, which may be a rider that works for the normal do’s and don’ts. Practising of Yama and Niyama has to be in letter and spirit and without exception. Further strict adherence in practicing of Yama & Niyama makes the sincere practitioner very easy to follow the other stages of Ashtanga Yoga, since practice of Yama and niyama bring an unadulterated calm and peace to the person. The body, mind and soul will be in a state of ecstatic ease and the body and mind of the practitioner does not say no in further practicing of the Ashtanga yoga stages

It would seem, it is ‘just moving ahead’ with ease and comfort going about practicing the other angas – which are Asana – a bodily discipline; Pranayama (Breathing discipline), Dharana or Concentration (a mind-discipline), then the Dhyana (meditation – an act of being attached with one thing mentally with the self-driven focus). Pratyahara is withdrawal of Consciousness from the object of focus. And finally the state of Samadhi – which is emptiness of mind. If one looks back through the whole process ‘Yama and Niyama’ is actually retracting of acts and deeds that create inner and outer world conflicts; for calming the body, calming the breath through the smooth flow of it which helps the mind to slow down in its chitta- vritti and becomes one that listens to the Self. Dharana – the Concentration will then be an order by the Self on the mind, which would just implicitly follow to concentrate on the object chosen. Then meditating on the object – which could be the God’s chosen image or an Omkara mantra. In the process when everything listens to the SELF which is determined to unify with the Universal Consciousness – the Iswara, then it’s mind-emptied state and the practitioner sits in total trance – moving out of Time and space, belonging to nothing – but just unified with Iswara. And it is a state that the practitioner would not know that he is in one such state – which is SAMADHI.

Conclusion:

Vasanas that people carry through the lives that they pass through, are the tendencies which become part of their likes and dislikes & obsessions and otherwise. These likes and dislikes could be brought under different categories which fall under one or the other aspect of Yama (restraints) and Niyama (Virtues). For the Yogic practitioner to advance smoothly in his pursuit of Yogic practice, it is imperative that the restraints are properly governed and the virtues are strengthened as far as actual behaviours in life. are concerned. Without adhering to Yama and Niyama, moving on pursuing the further steps in Ashtanga Yoga would be a futile exercise. As every step (and the qualities under each step) has to be successfully crossed before moving on to the step ahead. Hence perfecting Kriya-Yoga (essential steps identified under Niyama) the Yogic practitioner cannot naturally attain the ordained destination – the Samadhi, which is bliss - the holy feet of Iswara OR the Lord Almighty – going beyond the religions and the Gods.

References

- [1] “The Science of Yoga” – I.K. Taimni