

Spiritual Essence of Yoga

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Talk given at Bharatiya Temple of Lansing during First Sunday Pūjā in September 2006.

“Who am I?” A 14-year-old boy asked his teacher this question one day. The teacher said, “Go and find out for yourself.”

The boy looked at the world with his own eyes, smelling the flowers, enjoying the fruits on his way. He thought: “I am the body.” He went to his teacher and told her, “I am the body. I can touch, smell, see, hear, and taste. I can experience my body. So I am the body.”

Teacher said: “Go find out more.”

The boy, walking, saw a crowd around a dead body. He saw people crying. He asked them: “Why are you crying?” A man from the crowd said: “We are crying because this person is gone.” Boy asked: “The body is here. How then can you say that the person is gone?” The man replied: “The body is here but the person living in this body is gone.” So the boy thought: “Aha, I am more than body, I am the life force (*prāṇa*).” He was happy to go to the teacher and tell her: “I am the life force.”

Teacher said: “Go deeper and find out more.”

The boy saw a man driving a car, stopping at a stoplight. The light turned green but the man was still not moving. So the boy thought: “Where is he? He has body, he has life force, but he is not there. Aha, it must be his mind that is absent.” He went back to the teacher and said: “I am the mind.”

Teacher said: “Go and find out more.”

The boy then turned to the scriptures, studied all of them, and came to the conclusion “I am the intellect.” He was very happy to tell this to the teacher. But the teacher was still looking for a deeper answer and so told him to continue his search.

Not knowing what more to do, where else to go, the boy sat under a tree and closed his eyes. He went within, i.e. meditated. There he experienced bliss. He came out of meditation and told the teacher: “I am bliss; *cidānanda rūpam, śivo’ham, śivo’ham*.” The teacher was pleased with this answer and replied: “Yes, we are the eternal bliss.”

We have the body, we have *prāṇa*, we have the mind, and we have the intellect. Yet we are not any of these, we are the bliss. All the others – body, life force, mind, and intellect – are the tools to experience bliss. So, bliss is the essence of our being.

Now, what does yoga have to do with bliss? Yoga is a tool given to us by our sages, who had the wisdom to guide us on this journey of bliss. “Yoga” means union. There are 82 types of yoga described in our scriptures. This means that there are 82 ways in which we can achieve union within and experience bliss.

When we discipline our body, it is called Hatha Yoga, physical postures. When we regulate our breath, it is called Kriya Yoga. When we regulate our mind, it is called Rāja Yoga. When we study and understand the scriptures, it is called Jñāna Yoga. When we love selflessly, unconditionally, and include in our love all beings, including plants and animals, it is called Bhakti Yoga. When we work selflessly and without selfish motives, doing all activities as an offering to the Lord and accepting whatever be the results of those activities as *prasāda* from the Lord, it is called Karma Yoga.

One can start from any one of these paths. No one way is greater or better than any of the others. All the paths are given to us, and we are free to choose one from among them according to our temperament. In Bhagavad Gītā IV.11, Lord Kṛṣṇa says: “All paths in the end come to Me.” No matter which path one starts with, one eventually evolves in all directions. One who has evolved to that level is called a supreme integrated personality, like Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Let us pray together, to be blessed and to attain bliss.