

# **RAJA YOGA**

**THE PATH OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE**

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA**



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Four Paths of Self-Realization	1
I.    The Path of Knowledge	4
II.   The Path of Self-Knowledge	4
III.  The Path of Selfless Action	5
IV.   The Path of Devotion	6
The Path of Self-Knowledge	9
Preface	11
Chapter I    Introduction	15
Chapter II   The First Steps	27
Chapter III  Prana	37
Chapter IV   The Psychic Prana	49
Chapter V    The Control of Psychic Prana	55
Chapter VI   Pratyahara and Dharana	61
Chapter VII  Dhyana and Samadhi	69
Chapter VIII Raja Yoga in Brief	79

Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms	85
Introduction	89
Chapter I      Concentration : its Spiritual Uses	95
Chapter II     Concentration : its Practice	127
Chapter III    Powers	159
Chapter IV    Independence	177

# THE FOUR PATHS OF **SELF-REALIZATION**

**F**rom ancient times, people of India have practiced spiritual disciplines designed to clear the mind and support a state of serene, detached awareness. The practices for developing this desired state of balance, purity, wisdom, and peacefulness of mind are known collectively as yoga.

“Yoga” means “yoke” or “union”—referring to union with the true Self, the goal described in the Upanishads.

The sages distinguished four basic types of people and developed practices that are particularly suitable for each type, in order that each man can attain the desired union with the Self.

- For rational people, there is the Path of Knowledge.
- For meditative people, there is the Path of Self-Knowledge.
- For naturally active people, there is the Path of Selfless Action.
- For emotional people, there is the Path of Devotion.

## I. The Path of Knowledge

### —Jnana Yoga

An attempt to realize the Brahman-Atman identity through the study of the Vedas (i.e. the sacred texts of the Hindu tradition) and direct contemplation of the self:

*After negating [one's identity with the body, the senses, and the mind] as "not this," "not this," that Awareness which alone remains—that I am. ...*

*The thought "Who am I?" will destroy all other thoughts, and, like the stick used for stirring the burning pyre, it will itself in the end get destroyed. Then, there will arise Self-realization.*

—*Living Religions*, 81

## II. The Path of Self-knowledge

### —Raja Yoga

Various systems (such as those described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras or the later system known as Kundalini) that focus on the use of techniques (including the adoption of physical postures, breath control, mantras and visualization) to bring the mind to a state of one-pointed concentration, known as samadhi, in which union with the absolute is attained.

*Words and language are imperfect to describe this exalted state. ... Mind, intellect and the senses cease functioning. ... It is a state of eternal Bliss and eternal Wisdom. All dualities vanish in toto. ... All visible merge in the invisible or the Unseen. The individual soul becomes that which he contemplates.*

—*Living Religions*, 80



### III. The Path of Selfless Action

#### —*Karma Yoga*

Karma Yoga originally focused on varnasrama-dharma—the performance of actions in accordance with the duties (dharma) associated with one's caste (varna) and stage of life (asrama). By acting in accordance with the principles of varnasrama-dharma, one gradually worked through the four stages of life (student, householder, forest-dweller, renunciate) towards ultimate release from the cycle of rebirth (moksha)—though the process might take many lifetimes to complete.

In the Bhagavad-Gita, however, Krishna redefined Karma Yoga by combining it with the fundamental insight of Jnana Yoga—namely the ultimate identity of the individual self (atman) and the Universal Self (Brahman)—leading to the conclusion that “it is the Absolute who performs all actions.” Through this realization, one is able to perform action “without any interest in its fruits and without any personal sense of giving.” By relinquishing one's own attachment to the fruits of one's actions, one attains “liberation from the self in the very midst of work”:

*I pervade the entire universe in my unmanifested form. All creatures find their existence in me, but I am not limited by them. Behold my divine mystery!*

*... The foolish do not look beyond physical appearances to see my true nature as the Lord of all creation. The knowledge of such deluded people is empty; their lives are fraught with disaster and evil and their work and hopes are all in vain.*

*But truly great souls seek my divine nature. They worship me with a one-pointed mind, having realized that I am the eternal source of all. Constantly striving, they make firm their resolve and worship me without wavering. Full of devotion, they sing of my divine glory. ...*

*Whatever I am offered in devotion with a pure heart—a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water—I partake of that love offering. Whatever you do, make it an offering to me—the food you eat, the sacrifices you make, the help*

*you give, even your suffering. In this way you will be freed from the bondage of karma, and from its results both pleasant and painful. Then, firm in renunciation and yoga, with your heart free, you will come to me.*

*I look upon all creatures equally; none are less dear to me and none more dear. But those who worship me with love live in me, and I come to life in them. ... All those who take refuge in me, whatever their birth, race, sex, or caste, will attain the supreme goal; this realization can be attained even by those whom society scorns. ... Therefore, having been born in this transient and forlorn world, give all your love to me. Fill your mind with me; love me; serve me; worship me always. Seeking me in your heart, you will at last be united with me.*

—*Anthology of Living Religions*, 66–68 (*Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 9); cf. BG/9

#### IV. The Path of Devotion

##### —*Bhakti Yoga*

Bhakti Yoga is closely related to the notion of Karma Yoga as presented in the Bhagavad-Gita, since it is precisely by performing action in a spirit of “devotion” to Krishna (rather than as a means of generating “good” karma that will benefit one either in this or some future life) that one attains release from the cycle of rebirth. This “devotion” is manifest as an intense feeling of love for God that is frequently expressed through poetry and song, such as the following offering from Mirabai:

*Without Krishna I cannot sleep.  
Tortured by longing, I cannot sleep,  
And the fire of love  
Drives me to wander hither and thither.  
Without the light of the Beloved  
My house is dark,  
And lamps do not please me.  
Without the Beloved my bed is uninviting,*

*And I pass the nights awake.  
 When will my Beloved return home?  
 ... What shall I do? Where shall I go?  
 Who can quench my pain?  
 My body has been bitten  
 By the snake of "absence,"  
 And my life is ebbing away  
 With every beat of the heart.  
 ... My Lord when will you come  
 To meet your Mira?  
 ... When, my Lord,  
 Will you come to laugh and talk with me?*

—*Anthology of Living Religions*, 79

Since Bhakti Yoga is more easily pursued than either Raja or Jnana Yoga, it is by far the most common form of Hindu practice. Its appeal is nicely expressed in the following quote from Sri Ramakrishna:

*As long as the I-sense lasts, so long are true knowledge and Liberation impossible. ... [But] how very few can obtain this Union [Samadhi] and free themselves from this "I"? It is very rarely possible. Talk as much as you want, isolate yourself continuously, still this "I" will always return to you. Cut down the poplar tree today, and you will find tomorrow it forms new shoots. When you ultimately find that this "I" cannot be destroyed, let it remain as "I" the servant.*

—*Living Religions*, 83

# **RAJA YOGA**

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# Preface

Since the dawn of history, various extraordinary phenomena have been recorded as happening amongst human beings. Witnesses are not wanting in modern times to attest to the fact of such events, even in societies living under the full blaze of modern science. The vast mass of such evidence is unreliable, as coming from ignorant, superstitious, or fraudulent persons. In many instances the so-called miracles are imitations. But what do they imitate? It is not the sign of a candid and scientific mind to throw overboard anything without proper investigation. Surface scientists, unable to explain the various extraordinary mental phenomena, strive to ignore their very existence. They are, therefore, more culpable than those who think that their prayers are answered by a being, or beings, above the clouds, or than those who believe that their petitions will make such beings change the course of the universe. The latter have the excuse of ignorance, or at least of a defective system of education, which has taught them dependence upon such beings, a dependence which has become a part of their degenerate nature. The former have no such excuse.

For thousands of years such phenomena have been studied, investigated, and generalised, the whole ground of the religious faculties of man has been analysed, and the practical result is the science of Rāja-Yoga. Rāja-Yoga does not, after the unpardonable manner of some modern scientists, deny the existence of facts which are difficult to explain; on the other hand, it gently yet in no uncertain terms tells the superstitious that miracles, and answers to prayers, and powers of faith, though true as facts, are not rendered comprehensible through the superstitious explanation of attributing them to the agency of a being, or beings, above the clouds. It declares that each man is only a conduit for the infinite ocean of knowledge and power that lies behind mankind. It teaches that desires and wants are in man, that the power

of supply is also in man; and that wherever and whenever a desire, a want, a prayer has been fulfilled, it was out of this infinite magazine that the supply came, and not from any supernatural being. The idea of supernatural beings may rouse to a certain extent the power of action in man, but it also brings spiritual decay. It brings dependence; it brings fear; it brings superstition. It degenerates into a horrible belief in the natural weakness of man. There is no supernatural, says the Yogi, but there are in nature gross manifestations and subtle manifestations. The subtle are the causes, the gross the effects. The gross can be easily perceived by the senses; not so the subtle. The practice of Raja-Yoga will lead to the acquisition of the more subtle perceptions.

All the orthodox systems of Indian philosophy have one goal in view, the liberation of the soul through perfection. The method is by Yoga. The word Yoga covers an immense ground, but both the Sāṅkhya and the Vedānta Schools point to Yoga in some form or other.

The subject of the present book is that form of Yoga known as Raja-Yoga. The aphorisms of Patanjali are the highest authority on Raja-Yoga, and form its textbook. The other philosophers, though occasionally differing from Patanjali in some philosophical points, have, as a rule, acceded to his method of practice a decided consent. The first part of this book comprises several lectures to classes delivered by the present writer in New York. The second part is a rather free translation of the aphorisms (Sūtras) of Patanjali, with a running commentary. Effort has been made to avoid technicalities as far as possible, and to keep to the free and easy style of conversation. In the first part some simple and specific directions are given for the student who wants to practice, but all such are especially and earnestly reminded that, with few exceptions, Yoga can only be safely learnt by direct contact with a teacher. If these conversations succeed in awakening a desire for further information on the subject, the teacher will not be wanting.

The system of Patanjali is based upon the system of the Sāṅkhyas, the points of difference being very few. The two most important differences are, first, that Patanjali admits a Personal God in the form of a first teacher, while the only God the Sāṅkhyas admit is a nearly perfected

being, temporarily in charge of a cycle of creation. Second, the Yogis hold the mind to be equally all-pervading with the soul, or Purusha, and the Sankhyas do not.

—Swami Vivekananda

*Each soul is potentially divine.*

*The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.*

*Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.*

*This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.*

# Chapter I

## Introduction

All our knowledge is based upon experience. What we call inferential knowledge, in which we go from the less to the more general, or from the general to the particular, has experience as its basis. In what are called the exact sciences, people easily find the truth, because it appeals to the particular experiences of every human being. The scientist does not tell you to believe in anything, but he has certain results which come from his own experiences, and reasoning on them when he asks us to believe in his conclusions, he appeals to some universal experience of humanity. In every exact science there is a basis which is common to all humanity, so that we can at once see the truth or the fallacy of the conclusions drawn therefrom. Now, the question is: Has religion any such basis or not? I shall have to answer the question both in the affirmative and in the negative.

Religion, as it is generally taught all over the world, is said to be based upon faith and belief, and, in most cases, consists only of different sets of theories, and that is the reason why we find all religions quarrelling with one another. These theories, again, are based upon belief. One man says there is a great Being sitting above the clouds and governing the whole universe, and he asks me to believe that solely on the authority of his assertion. In the same way, I may have my own ideas, which I am asking others to believe, and if they ask a reason, I cannot give them any. This is why religion and metaphysical philosophy have a bad name nowadays. Every educated man seems to say, "Oh, these religions are only bundles of theories without any standard to judge them by, each man preaching his own pet ideas." Nevertheless, there is a basis of universal belief in religion, governing all the different theories and all the varying ideas of different sects in different countries. Going to their basis we find that they also are based upon universal experiences.



In the first place, if you analyse all the various religions of the world, you will find that these are divided into two classes, those with a book and those without a book. Those with a book are the strongest, and have the largest number of followers. Those without books have mostly died out, and the few new ones have very small following. Yet, in all of them we find one consensus of opinion, that the truths they teach are the results of the experiences of particular persons. The Christian asks you to believe in his religion, to believe in Christ and to believe in him as the incarnation of God, to believe in a God, in a soul, and in a better state of that soul. If I ask him for reason, he says he believes in them. But if you go to the fountain-head of Christianity, you will find that it is based upon experience. Christ said he saw God; the disciples said they felt God; and so forth. Similarly, in Buddhism, it is Buddha's experience. He experienced certain truths, saw them, came in contact with them, and preached them to the world. So with the Hindus. In their books the writers, who are called Rishis, or sages, declare they experienced certain truths, and these they preach. Thus it is clear that all the religions of the world have been built upon that one universal and adamant foundation of all our knowledge — direct experience. The teachers all saw God; they all saw their own souls, they saw their future, they saw their eternity, and what they saw they preached. Only there is this difference that by most of these religions especially in modern times, a peculiar claim is made, namely, that these experiences are impossible at the present day; they were only possible with a few men, who were the first founders of the religions that subsequently bore their names. At the present time these experiences have become obsolete, and, therefore, we have now to take religion on belief. This I entirely deny. If there has been one experience in this world in any particular branch of knowledge, it absolutely follows that that experience has been possible millions of times before, and will be repeated eternally. Uniformity is the rigorous law of nature; what once happened can happen always.

The teachers of the science of Yoga, therefore, declare that religion is not only based upon the experience of ancient times, but that no man can be religious until he has the same perceptions himself. Yoga is the

science which teaches us how to get these perceptions. It is not much use to talk about religion until one has felt it. Why is there so much disturbance, so much fighting and quarrelling in the name of God? There has been more bloodshed in the name of God than for any other cause, because people never went to the fountain-head; they were content only to give a mental assent to the customs of their forefathers, and wanted others to do the same. What right has a man to say he has a soul if he does not feel it, or that there is a God if he does not see Him? If there is a God we must see Him, if there is a soul we must perceive it; otherwise it is better not to believe. It is better to be an outspoken atheist than a hypocrite. The modern idea, on the one hand, with the “learned” is that religion and metaphysics and all search after a Supreme Being are futile; on the other hand, with the semi-educated, the idea seems to be that these things really have no basis; their only value consists in the fact that they furnish strong motive powers for doing good to the world. If men believe in a God, they may become good, and moral, and so make good citizens. We cannot blame them for holding such ideas, seeing that all the teaching these men get is simply to believe in an eternal rigmarole of words, without any substance behind them. They are asked to live upon words; can they do it? If they could, I should not have the least regard for human nature. Man wants truth, wants to experience truth for himself; when he has grasped it, realised it, felt it within his heart of hearts, then alone, declare the Vedas, would all doubts vanish, all darkness be scattered, and all crookedness be made straight. “Ye children of immortality, even those who live in the highest sphere, the way is found; there is a way out of all this darkness, and that is by perceiving Him who is beyond all darkness; there is no other way.”

The science of Râja-Yoga proposes to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching this truth. In the first place, every science must have its own method of investigation. If you want to become an astronomer and sit down and cry “Astronomy! Astronomy!” it will never come to you. The same with chemistry. A certain method must be followed. You must go to a laboratory, take different substances, mix them up, compound them, experiment with

them, and out of that will come a knowledge of chemistry. If you want to be an astronomer, you must go to an observatory, take a telescope, study the stars and planets, and then you will become an astronomer. Each science must have its own methods. I could preach you thousands of sermons, but they would not make you religious, until you practiced the method. These are the truths of the sages of all countries, of all ages, of men pure and unselfish, who had no motive but to do good to the world. They all declare that they have found some truth higher than what the senses can bring to us, and they invite verification. They ask us to take up the method and practice honestly, and then, if we do not find this higher truth, we will have the right to say there is no truth in the claim, but before we have done that, we are not rational in denying the truth of their assertions. So we must work faithfully using the prescribed methods, and light will come.

In acquiring knowledge we make use of generalisations, and generalisation is based upon observation. We first observe facts, then generalise, and then draw conclusions or principles. The knowledge of the mind, of the internal nature of man, of thought, can never be had until we have first the power of observing the facts that are going on within. It is comparatively easy to observe facts in the external world, for many instruments have been invented for the purpose, but in the internal world we have no instrument to help us. Yet we know we must observe in order to have a real science. Without a proper analysis, any science will be hopeless—mere theorising. And that is why all the psychologists have been quarrelling among themselves since the beginning of time, except those few who found out the means of observation.

The science of Raja-Yoga, in the first place, proposes to give us such a means of observing the internal states. The instrument is the mind itself. The power of attention, when properly guided, and directed towards the internal world, will analyse the mind, and illumine facts for us. The powers of the mind are like rays of light dissipated; when they are concentrated, they illumine. This is our only means of knowledge. Everyone is using it, both in the external and the internal world; but, for the psychologist, the same minute observation has to be directed to

the internal world, which the scientific man directs to the external; and this requires a great deal of practice. From our childhood upwards we have been taught only to pay attention to things external, but never to things internal; hence most of us have nearly lost the faculty of observing the internal mechanism. To turn the mind as it were, inside, stop it from going outside, and then to concentrate all its powers, and throw them upon the mind itself, in order that it may know its own nature, analyse itself, is very hard work. Yet that is the only way to anything which will be a scientific approach to the subject.

What is the use of such knowledge? In the first place, knowledge itself is the highest reward of knowledge, and secondly, there is also utility in it. It will take away all our misery. When by analysing his own mind, man comes face to face, as it were, with something which is never destroyed, something which is, by its own nature, eternally pure and perfect, he will no more be miserable, no more unhappy. All misery comes from fear, from unsatisfied desire. Man will find that he never dies, and then he will have no more fear of death. When he knows that he is perfect, he will have no more vain desires, and both these causes being absent, there will be no more misery — there will be perfect bliss, even while in this body.

There is only one method by which to attain this knowledge, that which is called concentration. The chemist in his laboratory concentrates all the energies of his mind into one focus, and throws them upon the materials he is analysing, and so finds out their secrets. The astronomer concentrates all the energies of his mind and projects them through his telescope upon the skies; and the stars, the sun, and the moon, give up their secrets to him. The more I can concentrate my thoughts on the matter on which I am talking to you, the more light I can throw upon you. You are listening to me, and the more you concentrate your thoughts, the more clearly you will grasp what I have to say.

How has all the knowledge in the world been gained but by the concentration of the powers of the mind? The world is ready to give up its secrets if we only know how to knock, how to give it the necessary blow. The strength and force of the blow come through concentration. There



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