

Discourses/Articles

by

Swami Krishnananda

The Divine Life Society

Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

HINTS FOR THE PRACTICE OF YOGA

(A Talk delivered on the concluding day of Sadhana week in July 1977)

First of all, you must love God from the very bottom of your heart. Be very careful to be true to your own self. Yoga is not for anybody's sake, neither for your friends or relations, nor for the sake of your Guru, nor for the sake of telling others, "I am also doing Yoga". You do it for your own self. Be sure that you want God, and nothing else, when you close your eyes and sit for meditation. Be sure that you are not doing so merely for becoming a student of Yoga or start with an intention of building an institution of Yoga. These are terrible travesties. If such are your motives, you are not going to succeed in Yoga. Be honest to yourself. You can deceive others many times but not yourself. You know very well what is behind your mind. You cannot put God in your pocket and say, I can come to you through Yoga, but my motive is something different, something else; that will not work. Honesty is the gateway to success; it is indeed fifty per cent of success. Learning is not necessary, no need to be learned. All that you have to do is to be sure and sincere that you are crying for God only and nothing else. Let the aim of life be clear in your mind, first. I repeat, your aim should be nothing other than the Ultimate Reality.

The world is also real, this idea may come to your mind. I am not saying that the world is unreal. I am only talking about your misconception about the nature of the world: that it is outside you. It is not really outside you. The world is real, but it is not outside you. You are not outside it, but a part of it. You also are in the world. The exclusion of the world from you is your problem and then many questions arise. Is the world real? Is God real or not? etc. Let the world be real. We have no objection. But it is not real in the sense of its being outside you in space and time; it is connected with you. Is the hand of your body real or unreal? If it is a part of your body, then it is real; if it is cut off and thrown out or is paralysed, then it is unreal. In Yoga, we identify consciousness with the being of the world, with the selfhood of the world. Again, to come to the point, the Selfhood is in everything. But when we think of the world as an entity outside us, then we have removed this Selfhood from the world, divested it of its Selfhood and placed it as an object, an instrument or tool of utility for our satisfaction and then we place ourselves in the position of 'the self'. 'I am the self, you are the objects!' Anything that you look upon as outside you is an object. The object also is a subject from its own point of view, and you are its object; if I am an object for you, so are you an object for me. And this, that, everything is an object. There are, then, only objects, and no 'subject' anywhere. This situation is called Samsara or bondage; these are materialistic ways of looking at the world. Everything is external. Now turn the argument the other way and look at everything from its own point of view. It is true I am an object to you, you are an object to me, everything is an object to everything. But I am also a subject from my own point of view.

So, if you take everything from its own point of view, there is no object, everything is subject only everywhere. This realisation is freedom. So in one moment of time, you can be in bondage or freedom by merely shifting the mind from one view to another: from subject to object or the other way round. If you can extract the selfhood of things, it does not matter whether the world exists or not; you will yourself understand that it exists. But if you look upon it as an object, you are also looked upon as an object by it. Now you are turned out. The exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden is nothing but the isolation and externalisation of the individual from God. You also have been exiled and alienated in this manner. You are cut off from the Whole. The five elements are in your body; the same five elements are in the world. From this point of view, at least, you should not think that the world is outside you. Yet we think so. The space, air, fire, water and earth principles, which are the constituents of the world, are also what constitute your body. Then where comes the question of the world being outside you? That space, that which has separated you from your object is also within you. It is only in thinking spatially, that the world is separated from you. Nothing has happened. It is only a kind in your way of thinking. In the ultimate analysis, creation has not taken place.

The creation of the world is an experience that has been introduced into our mind by the projection of the principle of externality, which is described as the so-called "Maya" of the philosophers. And many such words are used to designate the mystery. If the world has been really created and really externalised and projected and we have been thrown out, then there would be no going back. That such a thing (going back to the Real) is possible, that Yoga is practicable, that Samadhi is a real experience, that God-consciousness can be had even today, shows that there has been no such a catastrophe as we imagine. The catastrophe is psychological, mental, inward; it is created by our own self. So from this point of view, at least, you must be sure that the aim of life is God-Realisation, realisation of the Absolute, Brahman. It is not things we are asking for, it is happiness that we are seeking. And the happiness you are asking for is in the Selfhood of things, the Self which is the Absolute. Even the greatest fool is therefore asking for that only; he wants nothing else. It requires a little bit of understanding to know this difficulty. Hence be clear in your mind that when you practise Yoga, you want only that and your heart is fixed on that.

Be in an atmosphere suitable for this practice. Be in the company of people who think alike, not in that of people who think the opposite way. Be in an atmosphere holy and sacred; and to the extent possible, from your own point of view, have friends of this nature. Either have good friends or no friends. But don't have bad friends. Bad friends will distract your mind, shake your faith by saying things contrary and illogical.

Find a suitable time for sitting silently, though everybody is busy no doubt. In the 24 hours of work, you have to find time for two to three hours a day, which can not be difficult to find, if you use your will, despite the fact that all of us are busy with our own work all day. And, in those two to three hours, you must find time to sit unseen by people. Even if you are in a family, you must find time for this. Have a separate room for meditation. If you cannot afford to do this, then go away to such a place as will help you to be alone. When in your room, shut the door and for three hours don't see anyone. Don't lift the phone, don't have newspapers and such things in that room. But you should have good books like the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita etc. Have, if possible, elevating pictures or portraits of worthy people, spiritual or philosophical people. Then

be seated. Every day you should sit at the same fixed time and this should not be changed. Changing this to different hours of the day is like having lunch at different times of the day and thus ruining your health. You should have the same fixed time for every activity that you do. If it is 6 P.M. that you have chosen, you should stick to it. If any other time is decided upon, stick to that hour alone.

Be seated in one posture. When fatigued in this posture, you can relax a little and stretch your legs and again sit in meditation. You can even stand and move about and sit again. Try to control your body, muscles and mind. Then recite "OM" to create a vibration in your system. And implant in your mind the idea and the feeling 'I am in search of God'. Then try to analyse the nature of God. Yesterday someone asked me, what is God. It is just that which is before you; but divest it of the name and form complex. And then, what you see before your eyes is God Himself. He comes in a masquerade. He has put on a mask upon His body in the form of space-time, and then He looks like the world, 'playing' a drama before our eyes. God is not outside. He is just here. What you see with your eyes is just that minus space and time. This is very important to remember. So just analyse this for yourself. Take the help of the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads, the Sermon on the Mount or any other such elevating scripture and bring your mind back to the point of being able to think of God as being of the same nature of the Self that you are seeking. Chant a Mantra, repeat a formula, so that the ideas contained in the Mantra can help you to create an idea in your mind of what God is.

Fix the attention of the mind on this concept and then identify yourself with the selfhood of all things. You will immediately see a vibration taking place. You must know that everything is alive, full of vitality. In the world, nothing is dead. Even the walls will speak to you, if you actually identify yourself with them and all things. So feel the presence of things in yourself and yourself in things. Atmavat Sarva Bhutan - feel this.

After a protracted time in this practice, you will begin to realise that there is some sort of a vital connection between you and others, which was absent till now. You can't see any connection between you and the actions of others because your mind is conscious of the physical body only. Gradually the mind should be allowed to go higher from the physical to the vital, from the vital to the mental, from the mental to the intellectual, as is said in the Upanishads. Then, when you go higher and higher into the deeper layers of your personality, you begin to feel the relationship with others in greater and greater intimacy. The more internal you go, the greater is the relationship you feel with others. Outside on the surface of the waters every wave is different, but when you go deeper into the ocean, they are the one and the same ocean. We are different from one another on account of our identification with our body. We are really one internally; there is a vibration connecting one with the other. Even now the ether of the waves is moving from one place to another place. There is a connection which is not felt on account of the identification of the mind with the body. So de-hypnotise yourself. You are not this body but something different; you are not the Prana; you are not the mind; you are not the intellect; you are one with the Cosmic Intellect in the end, Hiranyagarbha. Then move higher and higher until you begin to feel yourself in the Self of all beings. These are the Samadhis or Samapattis as Patanjali calls them and these are the various experiences you will have in meditation when you go deeper and deeper into the practice.

But this would be a very hard task indeed. So you don't find time to sit and sit as per the strict discipline. You should sit for meditation at the same fixed time. Today at this time, tomorrow another, and then the thread is broken. Even if you are on a railway train, you should sit for a few minutes. It is the train that is moving, what does it matter to you? You sit and control the mind. The mind is not moving along with the train. Why can't you practise Yoga? So, don't miss any opportunity. Every day, the mind should be trained to think in this manner, and afterwards, even in the ordinary life of day-to-day routine you must create the habit of continuing this practice. Even when talking you must have this practice. It is not that you can talk some nonsense and then go and sit for meditation. It is not like that; that will not work. What happens is that the greater part of the day is spent in irrational thinking and only a few hours are given to meditation. The former will spoil the latter practice. So in the more advanced stages of practice, you must cultivate this de-hypnotising type of thinking and practise to think only in this way even when engaged in office work or in the ordinary business in life. This work in the office or in business in the ordinary way of life is not contrary to the practice of Yoga. All (this) work should be vitalised, i.e., charged with meditational consciousness, so that your background becomes only that. There is a story of the ayah looking after her mistress's child. Ayahs are people who take care of other people's children; they go to a stranger's house and fondle and take care of the child in that house with such love that it seems as if she is the mother. But her mind is not there. Her mind is on her own child at home. Her thoughts are centered on her own child's activities. Is it safely playing? Has it had its feed properly? I must go home at 5 o'clock in the evening and see what is happening to it, etc. etc. Such is the background of her thoughts. Her mind and love is only for her child at home, though outwardly she is lovingly looking after the child under her care. But the outward work she is engaged in, earns her salary; and she is working as an ayah. This outward appearance is not a real fact. You cannot at once make out this fact, its being an outward appearance, this distinction between her outward act and the thoughts in her mind. For all outward appearances, it looks as if it is her own child now in her care.

This is the way it is said that you should conduct yourself in the world. When in office or in ordinary business of life, you are like the ayah, looking after your work as she does her work in all good will for the salary it brings. She seems to be looking after her own child even when she is only an ayah looking after someone else's child. Her mind is somewhere else - on her own child at home. You are working for the sake of somebody, for some other purpose or intention in your mind. Your intention and purpose in the background, as already pointed out, is to maintain a meditative habit so that all work is charged and vitalised with the meditative consciousness. Your work is only the training ground for orienting all your activities to this meditative consciousness. Hence, all your office work etc. should be done only to the extent necessary and indispensable, not beyond this limit, not to amass wealth, not to become rich or make a name or gain power; that is not the intention behind your work in the world. It is only to that extent necessary and indispensable - your office work; the purpose is that it is the training-ground for the mind towards the higher aim you have in your mind. This is the true picture of things. Understand that you should not go beyond this amount of work in the world, beyond this limited purpose. The higher purpose is something internal, the true Yoga. All work becomes Yoga only then. Work should not be opposed to it. In this way, then, you will find gradually that work becomes natural. You do not need to bring into play any stress or strain in doing your work. The concentration also becomes better.

Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj used to say that if the Yogi does the work of a sweeper, he does it better than anybody else; if he washes vessels, they are cleaner than an ordinary man cleaning them. Whatever work he does, it is perfect, because his concentration is so much on his work and his love for things is equal to the love he has for God! Because he sees no distinction; he has begun to see the universal in the particular. The name and form are gone. The substance is seen; the potness of the pot is gone, only the clay remains and there is only universality, and Karma-Yoga becomes practicable. It is this great art that is taught in the Bhagavadgita. The whole gospel of the Gita is only a sermon of the seeing of divinity in things and transforming activity into yoga by visualising the Ultimate Substance in name-and-form. The name-and-form has completely gone from the substance; it does not exist at all. It is only spatiality and temporality that is called a pot; what you see is actually clay. So that what I see is not the wall; I see the Reality behind it, in fact, but invest it with a name-and-form that I give to it on account of the spatiality gone into it.

The Substance is the Absolute Itself. What does it then matter If I touch the wall, it is not the brick wall that I touch but my own Self extended in space and time. This is a very advanced condition in Yoga; all cannot visualise this state. I am merely mentioning it to you that this is possible. This state of experience where you live in the world with the consciousness of the Substance of things, free from the externality characterised by name and form, space and time, is called Jivan-Mukti or liberation even while living in this world. There is no harm in living in this world. The world is not the devil it looks. It looks like a devil because it is outside. The non-Self has got identified with the Self. The devil is the non-Self; the Self is God. So, the moment the non-Self is identified with the Self, the devilness in it goes! How the evil of things in the personality can be obviated and how even the worst of things can be converted into the best of things is another subject.

I have no doubt that all of you will strive hard in the practice of Yoga, you have set your minds on, and focus all your attention and energy on it, all through the Sadhana. May God bless you all. May Gurudev Swami Sivananda's grace be upon you all is my prayer.