

Discourses/Articles

by

Swami Krishnananda

The Divine Life Society

Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

THE ART OF LIVING

We are not merely individuals. This is a very important truth that we have to learn when we study anything. If we are, in fact, isolated individuals, speaking strictly from the point of view of the logical definition of the word 'individual', there would be no communication between one individual and another. The scientific definition of the term 'individual' implies self-affirmation and a segregation of the selfhood of the person to such an extent that there is a complete demarcation of one individual from the other. If such a difference of such a marked nature were to be present in the individuality of the human being, you could very well imagine the consequence. There would be no communication between individuals, merely because of the fact that they are 'individuals'. The isolation that is implied in the affirmation of the self is a bar to any kind of amiable relationship among persons. But what is it that we are aiming at in public life, if not social harmony, peace as we call it, in public life and in our existence as units of society as well as the international system. Thus, it would come to light that Yoga is not merely a personal affair, it is not the business of the individual as a self centred something, but it has a connotation with a wider dimension, with its connections extending through its tentacles to the far reaches of all creation, as it were. The practice of Yoga is, really, the practice of the art of living. It is not any mystical doctrine of any section of people, it is not a creed or a cult but a system of living, a system which is of such a universal character that no one can afford to forgo it. It is the science of the basic structure of the human individual in its relationships with all that exists, whether in Society or in Nature outside; and from this point of view we may say that the practice of Yoga is the practice of the art or the science of public living in its principal sense. For our purpose we may classify human life into four broad aspects, though there can be minor details of this classification.

The four main sections or facets of human life are the social, the psychological, the natural and the universal. We are units of human society and all our activity seems to be towards the achievement of social good. The enterprises of humanity through governmental systems or social welfare organisations or family units, etc. do all seem to be tending towards a single goal of achievement, namely, welfare of mankind, humanity in its entirety, – social good, well-being, happiness; the greatest happiness of the greatest number, as some people put it. We may say that we are aiming at this much; nothing more and nothing less. We would like to have the intensive form of happiness both in private and public life, in the largest quantity possible. If we carefully analyse the character of our activities and the structure of our enterprises in any field of life, we will realise that there is nothing but this much in our intentions inside while we engage ourselves in any kind of work outside. But what is the measure, or the yardstick, that we are going to employ in the judgment of social values? How are we going to discover that such and such a thing is going to pave the way for social peace? What is our concept of

social well-being, what is the meaning of international good? What is it that we are actually aiming at, finally?

The aim behind this total enterprise of mankind's mind has to be measured by a standard that is set by the individual himself. What we call commonweal or social peace is the happiness or the peace that the individual aspires for. And what is society if there are no individuals, though it is true that, from the point of view of a certain branch of psychology, society has an abstract character of its own independent of the individuals that constitute it? We may, from the practical angle of vision at least, conclude that there is no society if there are no individuals. Thus, the pattern of social existence is set by the individual himself. What is good for the individual is good for the society, because the society is an enlarged form of the individual. It is a miniature Visvarupa of human nature. I myself become the standard of the judgment of social welfare. It comes to that, finally. What I regard as good for me must be good for all. I feel that a certain type of satisfaction is my requirement and I hold that it is the requirement of everybody else, also. If this were not to be the standard of judgment of values, how else would people work in this world? Here we come to a very interesting secret behind social life: the psychology of human nature, which seems to be the determining factor of all social activity.

Our enterprises in social life, in public life or in political life, are ultimately guided by the standard set by the individual. Psychology becomes the guideline for public activity. So we move perforce from the social outlook to a study of the psychology of human nature. This is the second aspect of the study of human life. The social is the most obvious, visible side of human existence. But the strings which are behind this apparent picture of human society, controlling the movement of society as a whole, are the patterns of human nature. So, unless you are a good student of psychology, acquainted with the nature of the structure of the individual, to a satisfactory extent, there would be no tangible success, perhaps, in your public existence. If you cannot understand human beings, you cannot make them happy, and you cannot also be yourself happy. But you have to go deeper still. Psychology is not everything, though it seems to be a very important aspect of study. What is it that determines the character of the individual? While we have concluded tentatively that human nature as a psychological unit determines social patterns of existence, we have now to understand how it is that the human mind thinks in the way it thinks. There must be something determining the very way of thinking itself. We have an idea of what is good for us. How does this idea arise in our mind? Who put this idea into our heads? How are these ideas implanted in our being? Now we go deeper into a field which is not visible to the eyes, perhaps not included even in the field of the study of psychology. We go to a section of study, a field of analysis and research which usually goes by the name of philosophy, a poor word, indeed, which cannot connote all that we are intending to convey, but which points to a necessity to study human nature in a perspective which is wider than what is comprehended in psychological studies. Here begins the role of Yoga.

Why is Yoga so necessary for us? It tells us where we stand, and the answer to the 'why' of a thing comes from the system of Yoga. While science can tell you how things work it cannot tell you why things work in the way they work. The 'why' is a difficult thing for us to comprehend and answer, but Yoga has the answer. If we are thinking in a particular pattern say, in the three-dimensional pattern in thinking to which we are all

shackled, unfortunately for us, it is because we are planted in a world of space, time and causal relationships. We are now placing our feet on an almost forbidden land, not accessible to science and not visible to the naked eye of the human individual. We think in the way we think merely because of the set-up which can be called spatio-temporal. This is a familiar term, but it is difficult to understand correctly the meaning behind it.

What is this spatio-temporal structure in which the individual seems to be placed? The spatial context is the three-dimensional context. We can think only in terms of length, breadth and height. There is no other way of thinking. Even with the farthest stretch of our imagination we can think nothing else but length, breadth and height. This is what we call the three-dimensional way of thinking. But Yoga tells us that this is not the only way of thinking possible, though perhaps it is the only way available to us, limited as we are to the space-time set-up. It will be very interesting indeed to go a little deeper into this subject. You know, this space-time complex weighs so heavily upon our minds that we are almost its slaves, we are not masters as we imagine ourselves to be. We are forced to think only in a particular manner. We may say, we are brainwashed by space-time which compels us to think only in this way, and no other way.

Everything is quantitative. This is one way of thinking. You may think anything, and you think it in terms of a quantity. It is a measure with length, breadth and height. Even if you think of a minute particle, as small as an electron, you cannot think of it in your mind except as a very little dust that has a small dimension, unthinkable though. This is thinking in terms of quantity. The second aspect is the thinking in terms of quality. Every quantity has a quality. It has a character. There is a way of defining it. It has an attribute. This is how we think of a quantitative substance, whether it is large or small. The third way of thinking is relation. Everything is related to something else. Either it is positively connected or negatively related. You cannot define any object without relating it to something else. When I say that grass is green I mean that this particular thing I call grass is of a colour which is different from what is not green. If non-green things do not exist, green things cannot be seen. A cow cannot be seen unless there are non-cows, and so on. This is only to give you a broad idea of what our definition of relation is, ultimately. Every definition is qualitative, and this definition is given through abstraction of character by relationship with other objects, and if something eternal does not exist, definition is impossible. So this is a third limitation on our mind. Everything is caught in terms of relationship, definition, abstraction from the external. The fourth limitation on our mind is what is called thinking in terms of conditions or modes. Everything is in some state. You are in one condition, I am in another condition, and X, Y, or Z is in some other condition. Everything is in a particular state, susceptible to change into another state, etc.

These are the only four ways of thinking: thinking in terms of quantity, quality, relation and mode. Now, this limitation is imposed on our minds by the peculiar set-up of space and time. It means that we are conditioned by the laws of Nature – the Universe. This is the third aspect of life which Yoga studies, apart from the aspect of human society, and human nature as a psychological unit, that is, the relationship of the human individual to Nature as a whole. You are a part of Nature, not merely a part of your family or of human society in this world.

We do not pay sufficient attention to this aspect, unfortunately. We always think in terms of our little family, our mother, father, brother, sister, husband, wife, etc., and if we are a little more generous, we think of the community or the nation. And the best thinking possible for us is what we call the international way of thinking. But what is international thinking? It is just human way of thinking only, quantitatively enlarged. We do not include animals, etc., in our idea of world-solidarity. We think of people only. We are not concerned with anything else than human nature, human beings, and even when we think of the U.N.O., for instance, or the greatest thing conceivable, we as human beings think only of human beings. But the world does not contain only human beings, and it is doubtful if the human being is the best of all items available in the world. There may be things better than the human unit, not visible to us, not intelligible to our minds, yet conditioning our very existence, like the cosmic rays emanating from imponderable space, for instance. The destiny of man is not necessarily in human hands. That complacency would be futile vanity with no substance.

Today our modern thinkers tell us of such things as cosmic rays and other subtle forces jetting forth from stellar systems and the regions of nebulae, etc. whose existence is only a name for us. But to what extent they determine our existence here, nobody can understand. Perhaps we could be blown out of existence in one second, if these forces were to begin working actively. With all our efforts, we would then land ourselves in nothing. There is a universal set-up of things beyond the natural forces definable in terms of science. What is mankind, what is man, what is human individual in this vast controlling organisation? First of all, we thought man was one drop in the ocean of human society. Then we came to the conclusion that this drop was very important because it was the totality of the drops that made the whole called society. Then we were led to the more advanced conclusion that even the human individual could not be a self-determining item, because the human individual was controlled by forces which are spatio-temporal, far beyond the reach of human thought, understanding or power. The last step that we have to take is towards the understanding of a universal principle latent in the individual.

Our restlessness, the insecurity that we feel in life, the unhappiness to which we are subject, whatever be the nature of that unhappiness – all this is due to the working of the universal in us as particulars. There is something in us telling us that there is something wrong with us; – “All is not well, my dear friend!” You are pursuing a will-o’-the-wisp, a phantasmagoria under the impression that you are all-in-all. You are not. You have sides and aspects in you which reach beyond yourself, and the call of the universal in you is the restlessness that is felt in your mind. If you cannot sleep happily at night, if you do not know what will happen to you tomorrow and if you are anxious about your future, all this is because of the working of a secret transcendent power within you from which you are not really separate. You are a particularised unit of a universal organisation in a more real sense than the fact of your being a unit in human society or in any other conceivable whole to which you may empirically belong. Here comes the great clarion call of Yoga. You are not a perishable mortal physical body merely, though in your ignorance you may think that you are such. The law of the conservation of energy, with which you may be acquainted, tells us that nothing can be ultimately destroyed. There can be transformation of nature or character but annihilation is unthinkable. Death is a misnomer, finally, for Yoga. What you call death or destruction is merely the subject becoming aware of a field beyond its local measure,

to which also it belongs, and where also it has a duty of its own. Every change, every transformation or mutation, physical or otherwise, is the tendency of the individual to transcend itself into a higher order of reality to which it belongs and which it is essentially. The only word we can use to define this reality, which the individual ultimately is, is the universal.

What do you mean by the universal, may be a question. It is that something indescribable which is the common denominator behind all individuals. This is the reason why we are urged by the impulse to do good to people. Otherwise, wherefrom does this impulse come? Why should I work for the welfare of people if that universal element is not present in me? There is a common principle working in all creation, not merely in human nature but even in the sub-human species, and all that you call the panorama of Nature is guided by a single law, and that law is the reason behind the feeling of oneself for another, the affection that you evince, the love that you express, the connection that you wish to establish with others, and the infinitude that you wish to achieve in your personal as well as public life. There is an endlessness before us. If you need something, you want it endlessly. Suppose you have a little requirement, you would prefer to have it as much as possible, whether it is happiness, or a salary or a status, or even long life. You want to live in this world as long as possible; even if it be for ten thousand years, that would be very good. You would like to live for a long number of years. There is no limit to these desires. Everything that you require ultimately hangs on a limitlessness because of the fact that limitless being is behind you working, of which you are only a phenomenon.

Thus the call of Yoga is the call of the universe, and the Yoga practice beginning with the physical exercises that you have beautifully performed just now is nothing but an adjustment of your personality to the requirements of the universal law which operates in every field of life, including the physical, the body. Thus it is that we are placed in a very happy atmosphere by the Creator of this universe. We have to be happy in our minds that there is something great beckoning us from behind as well as from before. The ultimate goal of all of us is, therefore, success and not failure. We are never going to fail. We are always after victory. Jaya is our motto. Triumph is our heritage. Defeat should be unknown to us. Nature never gets defeated, it always succeeds. And if you are inseparable from Nature, victory is your birthright. There is no question of defeat or setback. Positivity is the law of life. Unhappiness is unknown to us. Sorrow, unhappiness, the sense of defeatism is born of the ignorance of these values, and a subscribing of oneself to the lower values of life, the selfish centres which begin to operate sometimes due to the limitation of our outlook to the physical body and its physical needs merely. Yoga takes us beyond the limits of human perception and tells us that our human outlook and aspirations are only an insignia of an omniscience that is our ultimate heritage, we being immortal units of the Reality which is the centre and the heart of all creation. We belong to all and everything belongs to us. Perhaps the universe is a tremendous democratic set-up where each is for everyone else and everyone is for all. Everyone is yours and you are everyone else's. Everything is your duty. It is a duty because it is your right. The two are not separable from you. When the law of Nature begins to work, when the principle of universality begins to guide our life, rights and duties commingle and become one single act, while in our ordinary life they appear to be two different things, where rights are not the same as duties. But there, in that true achievement, they are identical. There is no difference. Because, here, you do not stand

outside the law of creation. When the law operates from outside, it looks like a limiting force, sometimes annoying us and making us unhappy. But when we are set in tune with the law, we become the determiners of the law, and we 'will' the law. Obedience to law is happiness. Violation of law is sorrow. And why should you violate the law when you are inseparable from the workings of the law, when the very law is working through you and your very existence is due to the existence of the law? Thus, Yoga makes us beautiful citizens, good administrators and most unselfish individuals, not working for our own personal self, for one's own self does not exist in the scheme of creation. Such a thing is a myth. There is no such thing as 'I'. What exists is a universal purpose, a common good. When this is the great Reality to which we are awakened by the system of Yoga, why should not humanity live in peace? Why should not international solidarity be a reality? Why should not God descend into this world?

This is to give you a short outline of the great heritage before us, the legacy that has been handed down to us by our ancient Masters, the great Seers, who could see through things and not merely see things, as we see. We must be happy, because we are blessed, and a great fortune of positive victory is ahead of us. God bless you all.