

The Ultimate Science of Yoga

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The Meaning of Yoga

It is common to associate the word *Yoga* with a system of physical postures and meditation. But *Yoga* in its original form has a deep spiritual significance which is lost in today's body-centered world.

The Sanskrit* word **Yoga** comes from the verb root **Yuj**, which means **to link** or **to connect**. When we talk about linking or connection, an obvious question arises: to connect what with what? The very word "connection" implies that there must be two different entities separated from one another, and they need to be connected. The ancient Vedic† text *Bhagavad Gita* explains that these entities are the individual consciousness and the universal Supreme consciousness. Some may call this universal consciousness an all-pervading energy, whereas most theists consider this Supreme consciousness to be God. The Vedic philosophy combines these two apparently contradictory concepts very beautifully. It explains that there is definitely an all-pervading universal energy. But the very existence of energy implies that there also exists a possessor and controller of the energy – the energetic – who is an intelligent being. Our individual consciousness or energy is a manifestation of the spirit soul inside our body, and this soul is a part of the Supreme Soul or the Supreme Energetic or God. The purpose of Yoga is to connect the individual energy with the universal energy, or put another way, to connect the individual being to its source – the Supreme Being.

Yoga or divine union with the Supreme does not mean that we merge into the Supreme and become one with Him. *Bhagavad Gita* explains that we do become one, but in quality and not in quantity. This oneness is spiritual, not physical. For example, the perfect realization of sugar is not becoming sugar, rather tasting its sweetness. Similarly, the perfect divine union means that we do not lose our individuality, but we become united with the Supreme

* An ancient language in which most of the Eastern philosophy texts have been written.

† *Vedas* are the most ancient recorded scriptures of knowledge of the Self.

in a deep, eternal, sweet, personal, loving relationship, and taste the nectar of its mellows.

What is Bhagavad Gita?

Bhagavad Gita literally means *Song of the Absolute*. It is a conversation between *Arjuna* and *Krishna*, which took place around 3000 B.C. in a battlefield. *Krishna* represents the Supreme Being and *Arjuna* represents an ordinary living being like us. Through *Arjuna*'s questions and *Krishna*'s answers, the complete science of *Yoga* is revealed. It is considered a science because it describes the concept of *Yoga* in a systematic step-by-step way. It tells us exactly how to follow the *Yoga* processes and also what will be the results of different practices.

In modern days, *Yoga* is often misunderstood just as a process of achieving good health through the practice of physical postures. *Yoga* as a practice of physical exercises was first systematically compiled by the sage *Patanjali*‡ in his *Yoga Sutras*, and the same *Yoga* is also discussed in chapter 6 (entitled *Abhyasa Yoga*) of *Bhagavad Gita*. However, the original purpose of this *Yoga* was to connect one's consciousness to the Supreme consciousness by controlling one's body, mind and senses; good health is just a by-product of this endeavor. Because a healthy mind resides in a healthy body, *Abhyasa Yoga* is supposed to help focus one's mind upon the Supreme.

Different Yoga Systems in Bhagavad Gita

Abhyasa Yoga is just one of the many ways to connect to the Supreme, and *Bhagavad Gita* discusses all of them in detail. In fact, the title of each of the 18 chapters of *Bhagavad Gita* ends with the word *Yoga*, as each chapter discusses a unique way of connecting with the Supreme.

Below is a brief summary of the particular *Yoga* system that each chapter of *Bhagavad Gita* talks

‡ Believed to have lived around second century B.C.

about. Interested readers may consult the *Bhagavad Gita* itself for a full exposure [1].

1. **Visada Yoga** – the Path of Dejection. Here, *Arjuna* is under severe depression and is confused about his duties as he stands in the battlefield. He then approaches *Krishna* to seek advice from Him. Actually, each one of us is *Arjuna* struggling in the battle of life. Many times we also seek guidance from a spiritual person, when we are utterly frustrated with the sufferings of this material world. That is why this is called the Yoga of Dejection.
2. **Sankhya Yoga** – the Path of Analysis. It describes how to understand the Absolute by means of logical analysis and reasoning. Philosophers and intellectuals may prefer this Yoga.
3. **Karma Yoga** – the Path of Action. It talks about actions and reactions. Activity for one's personal sense gratification can cause bondage. Activity performed as a sacrifice, as a service, and as a duty without attachment or aversion can set one free and link one with the Absolute.
4. **Jnana Yoga** – the Path of Knowledge. This chapter discusses the transcendental knowledge about the form, birth and activities of the Supreme Being. It also stresses that the knowledge about the Supreme has to be obtained in disciplic succession, originating from the Supreme Being Himself. Just like an athlete needs to take appropriate training from a bona fide coach in order to achieve perfection, similarly, a practitioner of *Yoga* needs to take shelter of a bona fide spiritual master. Only then one can connect oneself properly to the chain of self-realized *Yogis* leading all the way up to the Supreme.
5. **Karma-Vairagya Yoga** – the Path of Renunciation of Action. Another name of this chapter is *Karma-Sanyasa Yoga*. It explains what is action, what is inaction, who is the doer of action, and what is actual renunciation. True renunciation is not just mechanical detachment from work. True renunciation means working not for oneself, but for the Supreme.
6. **Abhyasa Yoga** – the Path of Practice (of Self-Control). Other names of this chapter are **Dhyana Yoga** – the Path of Meditation, or

Astanga Yoga – the Path of the Eightfold Mystic Processes. When we refer to *Yoga* as a system of physical exercises, we actually mean this particular *Yoga*. The purpose of this *Yoga* is to connect one's consciousness to the Supreme Consciousness by controlling one's body, mind and senses. There are 8 progressive stages of self-control: namely, *yama* (don'ts), *niyamas* (do's), *asana* (postures), *pranayama* (breath control), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of senses), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (trance).

7. **Paramahansa Vijnana Yoga** – the Path of Realization of the Ultimate Truth. Another name of this chapter is *Vijnana Yoga* – the Path of Wisdom. It describes how to achieve the Supreme by realizing His material and spiritual energies and their relationships.
8. **Aksara-Parabrahman Yoga** – the Path of Imperishable Brahman. Here, the nature of the living entities, the nature of material activities, and the ever-changing material manifestation have been discussed. This chapter also teaches us how to remain connected to the Supreme by remembering Him at the time of death.
9. **Raja-Vidya-Guhya Yoga** – the Path of the Most Secret of Royal Knowledge. Here, devotion has been stated to be the topmost important means to connect to the Supreme. Because the Supreme is a person, He is especially pleased when one performs personal devotional service unto Him. He reciprocates with His devotees by bestowing blessings upon them and providing them with His protection.
10. **Vibhuti-Vistara-Yoga** – the Path of Manifestation of Opulence (of the Absolute). This chapter discusses the opulence's of the Supreme throughout this universe, and also how to know God as the origin of all.
11. **Visvarupa-Darsana Yoga** – the Path of Vision of the Universal Form. It explains how the Supreme Being is pervading the entire cosmic creation and how can we connect to Him by seeing Him in everything.
12. **Bhakti Yoga** – the Path of Devotion or the Path of Love. It discusses how to link with the Supreme through loving relationship and devotional service. According to *Bhagavad*

Gita, this is the highest form of *Yoga* and we will come back to this again at the end of our discussion.

13. ***Ksetra-Ksetrajna Vibhaga Yoga*** – the Path of Fields and the Knower of the Fields. Another name of this chapter is *Prakriti-Purusha-Viveka Yoga* – the Path of Nature, the Enjoyer and Consciousness. This chapter discusses how to relate to the Supreme through these three aspects of His energies.
14. ***Gunatraya-Vibhaga Yoga*** – the Path of the Three Divisions of Modes. There are three modes of material nature: *Sattva* or the mode of goodness, *Rajas* or the mode of passion and *Tamas* or the mode of ignorance. The qualities in the mode of goodness are peacefulness, contentment, compassion, patience, discipline etc. The mode of passion includes attachment and aversion, anxiety, desire to control etc. Anger, fear, intoxication, laziness etc. are the symptoms of the mode of ignorance. This chapter describes how every moment of our lives we are subject to one or more of these modes and how can we transcend these modes in order to connect to the Supreme.
15. ***Purusottama Yoga*** – the Path of the Supreme Enjoyer. This chapter explains how the Supreme Being is also the Supreme Enjoyer. All other living beings can derive enjoyment not by trying to enjoy themselves, but by working for the enjoyment of the Supreme.
16. ***Daivasura-Sampad-Vibhaga Yoga*** – the Path of Divine and Demonic Qualities. It enlists the qualities of a *Yogi*. It also describes the qualities that are obstacles in the path of *Yoga* such as lust, envy, illusion etc.
17. ***Sraddhatraya-Vibhaga Yoga*** – the Path of the Three Divisions of Faith. It discusses foods, sacrifices, austerity and charity in the three modes (goodness, passion and ignorance) and how do they relate to connecting to the Supreme.
18. ***Moksa-Opadesa Yoga*** – the Path of Advice for Liberation. Renunciation is a qualification for the perfection of *Yoga*. This chapter stresses that a true renunciate is not just a monk who does not do any work, but who works simply according to one's duty, without being attached to the results. Working in this consciousness, one can get liberation from the

bondage of action and reaction, and finally, one can achieve devotion, which is the highest means to reach the Supreme.

Three Primary Yoga Systems

Among all these *Yogas*, three are considered to be the most prominent: namely, ***Jnan Yoga*** – the Path of Knowledge, ***Karma Yoga*** – the Path of Action and ***Bhakti Yoga*** – the Path of Devotion. The first six chapters of *Bhagavad Gita* deal primarily with *Karma Yoga*, the next six with *Bhakti Yoga* and the last six with *Jnan Yoga*.

The Highest Yoga System

Which one of these *Yoga* systems are the highest and most beneficial? According to *Bhagavad Gita* itself, *Bhakti Yoga* is the topmost of all. *Bhakti* means “love” or “loving service” unto the Supreme. *Bhakti Yoga* is also the perfection of *Karma Yoga*. *Jnan* means “knowledge,” *Karma* means “action,” and *Bhakti* means “action in knowledge.” Each *Yoga* system is like a step in the ladder to self-realization, and the topmost step is *Bhakti*. So if we do not strive for *Bhakti*, if we get caught up in the mid-way in some *Yoga* or other, then we cannot achieve perfection. In chapter 6 of *Bhagavad Gita*, after describing the process of *Abhyasa Yoga*, *Krishna*, who represents the Supreme Consciousness, Himself declares the supremacy of *Bhakti Yoga* (Verse 6.47): **“And of all yogis, the one with great faith who always abides in Me, thinks of Me within himself, and renders transcendental loving service to Me — he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is My opinion.”**

Three levels of “Connection”

Once we are properly connected with the Supreme through the process of *Yoga*, we can then realize His true nature.

According to the Vedic philosophy, there are three different levels of realization of the Supreme: *Brahman* – the all-pervading effulgence of the Supreme, *Paramatman* – the supersoul expansion of the Supreme within the heart of each living entity, and *Bhagavan* – the Supreme Being as a person full of eternity, knowledge and bliss.

Consider three people standing on a platform and seeing a train from a distance. The first person sees

the headlight and says, “Oh! A train is nothing but a light,” and he leaves. The second person waits longer and is able to see the steel body of the train. He says, “A train is a huge moving iron box,” and leaves. The third person waits further, boards the train, explores the compartments and fully experiences what a complete train is.

Brahman, *Paramatman* and *Bhagavan* realizations are compared to these three person’s realizations respectively. All three realizations are correct, none of them are wrong. But *Bhagavan* is the most complete realization, which includes all other realizations of the Supreme. *Bhagavan* literally means one who possesses 6 *Bhagas* or opulence’s in full, namely all beauty, all wealth, all power, all fame, all knowledge, and all renunciation.

In *Brahman* realization, one is watching the Supreme from a far distance and sees no more than the mere effulgence of the Supreme. In *Paramatman* realization, one gets closer to God, but still one is not intimately associated with Him. In *Bhagavan* realization, however, one can become a close associate of the Supreme, and one can have different kinds of personal relationship with Him according to one’s desire and mood.

The Highest Yoga and the Highest “Connection”

It is said that *Gnan Yoga* can take one only up to the *Brahman* realization. *Astanga-Yoga* can take one to the *Paramatman* realization. It is *Bhakti Yoga* (i.e. the perfection of *Karma Yoga*) only that can take one to the *Bhagavan* realization. A *Gnan Yogi* merges himself with the effulgence of the Supreme. An *Astanga Yogi* meditates upon Him in awe and reverence. However, a *Bhakti Yogi* can have 5 different kinds of personal loving relationships with the Supreme, namely: Neutrality, Servitude, Friendship, Parenthood, and Conjugal Love. Of these, Conjugal Love is said to be the highest kind of relationship with the Supreme that one can aspire for.

As an analogy, consider three different ways in which people may relate to the President of America. Some people see the President’s picture in newspapers and magazines, hear him giving speech in radio and television, but they never have a chance to see him or talk to him face to face. They are like the *Gyan Yogis* realizing the *Brahman* aspect of the Supreme. The members of the parliament sees the President face to face, they can even talk to him, but

they need to maintain certain protocols. They are not allowed to peep into President’s personal life and are supposed to keep a distance from him. They are like the *Astanga Yogis* realizing the *Paramatman* aspect of the Supreme. On the other hand, when the President comes home, his wife may hug him and kiss him, his mother may cook a delicious meal for him, and his kids may ride on his back in a playing mood. Thus there is a sweet and intimate exchange of love between the President and his family members, who are like the *Bhakti Yogis* realizing the *Bhagavan* aspect of the Supreme.

Just as people see the same President differently according to the level of their “connection,” so do different *Yogis* when they see the same Supreme. The most intimate connection is obviously the personal relationship where there is love and reciprocation. This very personal and devotional union is achieved only through the process of *Bhakti Yoga*.

Chapter 12 of Bhagavad Gita and other Vedic texts like Srimad Bhagavatam discusses in detail how to establish this intimate connection with the Supreme through Bhakti Yoga.

WORKS CITED

[1] *Bhagavad Gita As It Is* by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, ©1997.