

**Vedânta Philosophy**

# **How to be a Yogi**

**by**

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## ***Introduction***

The Vedânta Philosophy includes the different branches of the Science of Yoga. Four of these have already been treated at length by the Swâmi Vivekananda in his works on "Râja Yoga," "Karma Yoga," "Bhakti Yoga," and "Jnâna Yoga"; but there existed no short and consecutive survey of the science as a whole. It is to meet this need that the present volume has been written. In an introductory chapter are set forth the true province of religion and the full significance of the word "spirituality" as it is understood in India. Next follows a comprehensive definition of the term "Yoga," with short chapters on each of the five paths to which it is applied, and their respective practices. An exhaustive exposition of the Science of Breathing and its bearing on the highest spiritual development shows the fundamental physiological principles on which the whole training of Yoga is based; while a concluding chapter, under the title "Was Christ a Yogi?" makes plain the direct relation existing between the lofty teachings of Vedânta and the religious faiths of the West. An effort has been made, so far as possible, to keep the text free from technical and Sanskrit terms; and the work should therefore prove of equal value to the student of Oriental thought and to the general reader as yet unfamiliar with this, one of the greatest philosophical systems of the world.

The Editor

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## ***Introductory***

True religion is extremely practical; it is, indeed, based entirely upon practice, and not upon theory or speculation of any kind, for religion begins only where theory ends. Its object is to mould the character, unfold the divine nature of the soul, and make it possible to live on the spiritual plane, its ideal being the realization of Absolute Truth and the manifestation of Divinity in the actions of the daily life.

Spirituality does not depend upon the reading of Scriptures, or upon learned interpretations of Sacred Books, or upon fine theological discussions, but upon the realization of unchangeable Truth. In India a man is called truly spiritual or religious not because he has written some book, not because he possesses the gift of oratory and can preach eloquent sermons, but because he expresses divine powers through his words and deeds. A thoroughly illiterate man can attain to the highest state of spiritual perfection without going to any school or university, and without reading any Scripture, if he can conquer his animal nature by realizing his true Self and its relation to the universal Spirit; or, in other words, if he can attain to the knowledge of that Truth which dwells within him, and which is the same as the Infinite Source of existence, intelligence, and bliss. He who has mastered all the Scriptures, philosophies, and sciences, may be regarded by society as an intellectual giant; yet he cannot be equal to that unlettered man who, having realized the eternal Truth, has become one with it, who sees God everywhere, and who lives on this earth as an embodiment of Divinity.

The writer had the good fortune to be acquainted with such a divine man in India. His name was Râmakrishna. He never went to any school, neither had he read any of the Scriptures, philosophies, or scientific treatises of the world, yet he had reached perfection by realizing God through the practice of Yoga. Hundreds of men and women came to see him and were spiritually awakened and uplifted by the divine powers which this illiterate man possessed. To-day he is revered and worshipped by thousands all over India as is Jesus the Christ in Christendom. He could expound with extraordinary clearness the subtlest problems of philosophy or of science, and answer the most intricate questions of clever theologians in such a masterly way as to dispel all doubts concerning the matter in hand. How could he do this without reading books? By his wonderful insight into the true nature of things, and by that Yoga power which made him directly perceive things which cannot be revealed by the senses. His spiritual eyes were open; his sight could penetrate through the thick veil of ignorance that hangs before the vision of ordinary mortals, and which prevents them from knowing that which exists beyond the range of sense perception.

These powers begin to manifest in the soul that is awakened to the ultimate Reality of the universe. It is then that the sixth sense of direct perception of higher truths develops and frees it from dependence upon the sense powers. This sixth sense or spiritual eye is latent in each individual, but it opens in a few only among millions, and they are known as Yogis. With the vast majority it is in a rudimentary state, covered by a thick veil. When, however, through the practice of Yoga it unfolds in a man, he becomes conscious of the higher invisible realms and of everything that exists on the soul plane. Whatever he says harmonizes with the sayings and writings of all the great Seers of Truth of every age and clime. He does not study books; he has no need to do so, for he knows all that the human intellect can conceive. He can grasp the purport of a book without reading its text; he also understands how much the human mind can express through words, and he is familiar with that which is beyond thoughts and which consequently can never be expressed by words.

Before arriving at such spiritual illumination he goes through divers stages of mental and spiritual evolution, and in consequence knows all that can be experienced by a human intellect. He does not, however, care to remain confined within the limit of sense perception, and is not contented with the intellectual apprehension of relative reality, but his sole aim is to enter into the realm of the Absolute, which is the beginning and end of phenomenal objects and of relative

knowledge. Thus striving for the realization of the highest, he does not fail to collect all relative knowledge pertaining to the world of phenomena that comes in his way, as he marches on toward his destination, the unfoldment of his true Self.

Our true Self is all-knowing by its nature. It is the source of infinite knowledge within us. Being bound by the limitations of time, space, and causation, we cannot express all the powers that we possess in reality. The higher we rise above these limiting conditions, the more we can manifest the divine qualities of omniscience and omnipotence. If on the contrary, we keep our minds fixed upon phenomena and devote the whole of our energy to acquiring knowledge dependent entirely upon sense perceptions, shall we ever reach the end of phenomenal knowledge, shall we ever be able to know the real nature of the things of this universe? No; because the senses cannot lead us beyond the superficial appearance of sense objects. In order to go deeper in the realm of the invisible we invent instruments, and with their help we are able to penetrate a little further; but these instruments, again, have their limit. After using one kind of instrument, we become dissatisfied with the results and search for some other which may reveal more and more, and thus we struggle on, discovering at each step how poor and helpless are the sense powers in the path of the knowledge of the Absolute. At last we are driven to the conclusion that any instrument, no matter how fine, can never help us to realize that which is beyond the reach of sense-perception, intellect, and thought.

So, even if we could spend the whole of our time and energy in studying phenomena, we shall never arrive at any satisfactory result or be able to see things as they are in reality. The knowledge of to-day, gained by the help of certain instruments, will be the ignorance of tomorrow, if we get better instruments. The knowledge of last year is already the ignorance of the present year; the knowledge of this century will be ignorance in the light of the discoveries of a new century.

The span of one human life is, therefore, too short to even attempt to acquire a correct knowledge of all things existing on the phenomenal plane. The life-time of hundreds of thousands of generations, nay, of all humanity, seems too short, when we consider the infinite variety to be found in the universe, and the countless number of objects that will have to be known before we can reach the end of knowledge. If a man could live a million years, keeping his senses in perfect order during that long period, and could spend every moment in studying nature and in diligently endeavoring to learn every minute detail of phenomenal objects, would his search after knowledge be fulfilled at the expiration of that time? Certainly not; he would want still more time, a finer power of perception, a keener intellect, a subtler understanding; and then he might say, as did Sir Isaac Newton after a life of tireless research, "I have collected only pebbles on the shore of the ocean of knowledge." If a genius like Newton could not even reach the edge of the water of that ocean, how can we expect to cross the vast expanse from shore to shore in a few brief years? Thousands of generations have passed away, thousands will pass, yet must the knowledge regarding the phenomena of the universe remain imperfect. Veil after veil may be removed, but veil after veil will remain behind. This was understood by the Yogis and Seers of Truth in India, who said: "Innumerable are the branches of knowledge, but short is our time and many are the obstacles in the way; therefore wise men should first struggle to know that which is highest."

Here the question arises: Which is the highest knowledge? This question is as old as history; it has puzzled the minds of the philosophers, scientists, and scholars of all ages and all countries. Some have found an answer to it, others have not. The same question was voiced in ancient times by Socrates, when he went to the Delphic oracle and asked: "Of all knowledge which is the highest?" To which came the answer, "Know thyself."

We read in one of the Upanishads that a great thinker, after studying all the philosophies and sciences known at that time, came to a Seer of Truth and said: "Sir, I am tired of this lower knowledge that can be gained from books or through the study of the world of phenomena; it no longer satisfies me, for science cannot reveal the ultimate Truth; I wish to know that which is the highest. Is there anything by knowing which I can know the reality of the universe?"

The sage replied: "Yes, there is; and that knowledge is the highest, by knowing which you can know the true nature of everything in the universe." And he continued, "Know thyself. If thou canst learn the true nature of thine own self, thou wilt know the reality of the universe. In thy true Self thou wilt find the Eternal Truth, the Infinite Source of all phenomena. By knowing this thou wilt know God and His whole creation." As by knowing the chemical properties of one drop of water, we know the properties of all water wherever it appears, so by knowing who and what we are in reality, we shall realize the final Truth. Man is the epitome of the universe. That which exists in the macrocosm is to be found in the microcosm. Therefore the knowledge of one's true Self is the highest of all knowledge. Our real Self is divine and one with God. This may seem to us at present a mere theory, but the nearer we approach the ultimate Truth, the more clearly shall we understand that it is not a theory but a fact, that now we are dreaming in the sleep of ignorance and fancying ourselves this or that particular person. But as all experience gained in dreams afterwards appears of little consequence; so, waking up from this sleep, we shall find that the knowledge of phenomenal nature, upon which we place so much value at present, is of little importance. We shall then realize that all research in the various branches of science depends upon Self-knowledge, and that Self-knowledge is the foundation upon which the structure of phenomenal knowledge is built.

Knowledge of the Self or *Âtman* is therefore the highest of all. It is the ideal of the Science of Yoga, and should be the aim of our life. We should hold it as our first duty to acquire this Self-knowledge before we try to know anything concerning the objects of sense-perception. How can we gain it? Not from books, not through the study of external phenomena, but by studying our own nature, and by practicing the different branches of Yoga.

### ***What is Yoga?***

In all the Sacred Writings of the world as well as in the lives of the inspired teachers, prophets, saints, and Seers of Truth, we find frequent descriptions of miraculous events and powers, which, admitting a certain measure of exaggeration, must still have had some foundation in fact. We, indeed, know that from time immemorial in every age and in every country there have arisen among the different nations persons who could read the thoughts of others, who could foresee and could prophesy that which afterwards came to pass; but most of these people did not understand the causes of their own peculiar gifts, and tried to explain them by attributing them to the influence of external Beings, whom they called by various names - gods, angels, good or evil spirits.

Some among them even fancied that they were especially chosen to be the instruments of these higher powers and sought to be worshipped as the elect of God or of their particular deity, just as the leaders of certain sects in this country to-day desire to be adored by their followers. In some instances, those who possessed these unusual powers were looked upon as divine exceptions, as Jesus by the Christians, Mahomet by the Mahometans, and Buddha by the Buddhists. Others again were condemned as sorcerers or witches, and the fear aroused by such persecutions led to the secret practice of divers methods which resulted in still further extraordinary manifestations.

These methods were never written down, but were passed orally from the master to the disciple, who in turn carefully guarded them as sacred mysteries. This is the reason why among ancient nations there grew up so many secret societies, the object of which was to develop certain powers through various kinds of discipline and practices. The Egyptians, the Essenes, Gnostics, Manicheans, Neo-Platonists, and the Christian mystics of the middle ages all had their secret organizations, and some of them still exist, as, for example, the Masonic Lodge. None of the members of these societies ever gave out their secret instructions, nor did they write any books

offering a logical or scientific explanation of their practices. Therefore, while there were some among them who advanced far in the attainment of higher powers, the unusual manifestations resulting there from were never understood by Western nations, neither were they generalized into a system or science.

In ancient India, on the contrary, as there was no fear of persecution, the case was altogether different. Every Hindu was obliged, as a part of his religious duty, to develop through daily practice certain powers and to strive to attain to the realization of higher truths. In the streets, on the market-place, in the courts, and on the battlefield were many who had not only reached such realization, but who had carefully classified their experiences and discovered those laws which govern our higher nature and upon which was gradually built up the profound Science of Yoga.

Thus we see that this science, like all others, was based on experience; while the method used in it was the same as that employed by modern science in making all its discoveries of natural law - the method of observation and experiment. This method is regarded in the West as a distinctly modern innovation, but as a matter of fact it was adopted in India in very ancient times by the "Rishis," or Seers of Truth. Through the process of close observation and constant experiment they discovered the finer forces of nature, as also the laws that govern our physical, mental, and spiritual being. The truths thus gained through their own experience and investigations, they wrote down in books, preached in public, and expounded to their pupils. Before, however, they affirmed anything about the nature of the soul or God, they had realized it. Before they asked a disciple to practice anything they had practiced it themselves, and had obtained definite results from that practice.

In this way, as the outcome of ages of research in the realms of nature, carried on by a succession of earnest seekers after light, there grew up in India various systems of science, philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, and religion, both speculative and practical, which were grouped under the one common name, "Aryan Religion." The term "religion" was used to include all, because at no epoch in India has religion been separated from these different branches or from the general conduct of everyday existence; and the methods by which these scientific truths were applied in the daily life of an individual to further his spiritual development, were called by the general term "Yoga."

"Yoga" is a Sanskrit word commonly used to signify the practical side of religion; and the first concern of the training for which it stands, is to enforce proper obedience to the laws of our moral and physical nature, upon which depend the attainment of perfect health and of moral and spiritual perfection. In Western countries the word has been grossly misunderstood and misused by many writers, who have employed it in the sense of jugglery, hypnotism, trickery, and fraud. Whenever people hear the word "Yogi," which signifies one who practices Yoga, they think of some kind of juggler, or charlatan, or identify him with a fakir or one who practices black magic. The Theosophists have been more or less responsible for this abuse of the term; but those who have studied the Sacred Books of India, as, for instance, the Bhagavad Gita or Song Celestial, as Sir Edwin Arnold calls it in his translation, will remember that each chapter of that Celestial Song is devoted to some kind of "Yoga," or method of realizing the Ultimate Truth and of attaining the highest wisdom; and that a "Yogi" is one who through various practices reaches the highest ideal of religion. This highest ideal, according to the Bhagavad Gita, is the union of the individual soul with the Universal Spirit.

Hindu writers, however, have used the word "Yoga" in various other senses. I will mention a few of them in order to give some conception of the vastness of the field covered by this term. First, "Yoga" means the union of two external objects. Second: the mixing of one thing with another. Third: the interrelation of the causes which produce a common effect. Fourth: the orderly equipment of a soldier or of any person in any profession. Fifth: the application, discrimination, and reasoning that is necessary for the discovery of a certain truth. Sixth: that power of sound which makes it convey a specific idea. Seventh: the preservation of what one possesses. Eighth: the transformation of one thing into another. Ninth: the union of one soul with another or with the



But He found neither peace nor consolation until He could absolutely resign His will to that of the Father and could say from the bottom of His heart, "Thy will be done." Complete self-surrender and absolute self-resignation are the principal virtues of Bhakti Yoga, and as Christ possessed these to perfection up to the last moment of His life, He was a true Bhakti Yogi.

Like the great Râja Yogis in India, Jesus knew the secret of separating His soul from His physical shell, and He showed this at the time of His death, while His body was suffering from extreme pain, by saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is quite an unusual event to see one imploring forgiveness for his persecutors while dying on the cross, but from a Yogi's point of view it is both possible and natural. Râmakrishna, the greatest Yogi of the nineteenth century, whose life and sayings have been written by Max Müller, was once asked, "How could Jesus pray for His persecutors when He was in agony on the cross?" Râmakrishna answered by an illustration: "When the shell of an ordinary green cocoanut is pierced through, the nail enters the kernel of the nut too. But in the case of the dry nut the kernel becomes separate from the shell, and so when the shell is pierced, the kernel is not touched. Jesus was like the dry nut, i.e., His inner soul was separate from His physical shell, and consequently the sufferings of the body did not affect him." <sup>7</sup> Therefore He could pray for the forgiveness of His persecutors even when His body was suffering; and all true Yogis are able to do the same. There have been many instances of Yogis whose bodies have been cut into pieces, but their souls never for a moment lost that peace and equanimity which enabled Jesus to forgive and bless His persecutors. By this Christ proved that, like other Yogis, His soul was completely emancipated from the bondage of the body and of the feelings. Therefore Christ was a Yogi.

Through the path of devotion and love Jesus attained to the realization of the oneness of the individual soul with the Father or the Universal Spirit, which is the ideal of a Jnâna Yogi as well as the ultimate goal of all religions. A Jnâna Yogi says: "I am He"; "I am Brahman"; "I am the Absolute Truth"; "I am one with the Supreme Deity." By good works, by devotion, love, concentration, contemplation, long fasting, and prayer, Jesus the Christ realized that His soul was one with God, therefore He may be said to have attained the ideal of Jnâna Yoga.

Like Krishna, Buddha, and all other great Yogis of India, Jesus healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, made the lame walk, and read the secret thoughts of His disciples. He knew exactly what Judas and Peter were going to do; but there was nothing supernatural in any of His actions, there was nothing that cannot be done again over and over by a true Yogi, and there was nothing in His life that cannot be explained rationally by the Science of Yoga and the Philosophy of Vedânta. Without the help of this science and this philosophy Jesus the Christ cannot be fully understood and appreciated. By studying His character, on the other hand, in the light of the Vedânta Philosophy we shall be able not only to understand Him better, but to have a larger appreciation of His true glory.

Material science now scoffs at His miracles, but they are corroborated by the Science of Yoga and confirmed by the deeds of the great Yogis of India. No devout Christian need for a moment fear that physical science can ever undermine the work of Jesus so long as the Science of Yoga is there to sustain all that He did. Let him study the character of Jesus through the Philosophy of Vedânta and I am sure that he will understand Him better and be a truer Christian, a more genuine disciple of the Son of Man than ever before. Let him follow the teachings of Yoga and he will someday become perfect like Christ.

It is through the teachings of Vedânta that the Hindus have learned how to glorify the character of Jesus; so also it is through Vedânta that a Christian will learn to adore the great Yogis like Krishna, Buddha, Râmakrishna, and others. It is through Vedânta that a Christian will be able to see how Divinity dwells in all animate and inanimate objects, and thus comprehending the true

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<sup>7</sup> See "The Life and Sayings of Râmakrishna," by Prof. F. Max Müller. Published by Charles Scribners' Sons, New York. P. 111.

relation of the individual soul to the Supreme Spirit, will be enabled to say with the great Yogi Jesus the Christ, "I and my Father are one," and reach salvation in this life.