

WHAT IS YOGA

New Year Lecture by Swami Paramarthananda 2013

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NOTE: Swami Paramarthananda has not verified the transcription of talks. The transcriptions have been done with Swamiji's blessings by his disciple.



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What is Yoga?

sadāsiva samārambhām sankarāchārya madhyamām
asmad āchārya paryantām vande guru paramparām

Nowadays, I see one traditional Sanskrit word used widely all over. That Sanskrit word is **Yōgaha**. Yōga is becoming very popular. Not only all over India, but all over the world, people are getting interested in Yōga. Various magazines, including News Papers, carry a lot of articles regarding Yōga.

Therefore, I thought it would be nice to have an idea about Yōga, as discussed in our traditional Vēdic scriptures. The word Yōga, as often written, is derived from the Sanskrit word **Yuj**, which means to unite, to combine, to come together etc. The word **Yōgaha**, derived from that root means union, merger, coming together etc (**Bhāva Vyutpattihi**).

Naturally, the question will come - **union between what and what?** Therefore, the scriptures point out that it is the union between **Jīvātma**, the individual self and **Paramātma**, the universal self. Therefore, the word **Yōga** means **Jīvātma Paramātma Yōgaha, Jīvātma Paramātma Aykyam**.

Then, the scriptures point out that this **Yōga** - the **Jīvātma Paramātma Aykyam** is the real and the primary goal of human life - **Parama Purushārthaha**. It is also called **Mōkshaha**. Thus, **Yōgaha, Jīvātma Paramātma Aykyam, Parama Purushārthaha** or **Mōkshaha** are all synonymously used.

Thereafter, the scriptures themselves elaborate this. Later, interestingly, the scriptures themselves point out that, really speaking, this union is not possible. Having presented this union as the goal initially, the very scriptures themselves point out later, that really speaking, this union is not possible. It is not possible because **Jīvātma** and **Paramātma** are not two different things, to join together.

Joining is possible only between two things which are different and away. Later, the very scriptures reveal that Jīvātma and Paramātma are only two words, but they are not two things separate from one another. Jīvātma is Paramātma and Paramātma is Jīvātma. [aytadātmya idagm sarvam tat satyam sa ātma tat tvam asi shwētakētuḥu.](#)

Naturally, the question will come - **if Jīvātma and Paramātma are one and the same and if the union itself is not possible, why should the scriptures introduce the Yōga as a goal?** The scriptures themselves explain that and point out that really speaking, Yōga is a form of [Viyōgaha.](#)

What we really require is not Yōgaha (union), but what we require is Viyōgaha (separation). **Separation from what?** The scriptures say separation from our delusion or [Mōhaha.](#) **What delusion?** - The misconception that Jīvātma and Paramātma are different. This is our misconception - Jīvātma is different and Paramātma is different.

Jīvātma is here, Paramātma is there. We have to travel and travel and ultimately, merge into Paramātma. This is the delusion. What is required is separation from, removal of this delusion. When this delusion is removed, I understand that Jīvātma and Paramātma are one and the same. Therefore, [Yōgaha](#) is nothing but [Bhēda Bhrama Viyōgaha.](#)

Therefore Shankarāchārya and Bhagawān Krishna in the 6th chapter say that the word Yōga really means [Viyōgaha](#) or separation from our delusion. [viyōgaha eva viparīta lakshanayā yōgaha iti uchyatē.](#) Just as we often use the word [Brihaspati](#) in the opposite meaning. In scripture, Brihaspati means a very wise, learned Dēvaha.

We use the word Brihaspati in the meaning of fool. So, as a word will have an opposite meaning similarly, the word Yōga is nothing but the removal of the misconception and claiming that I, the Jīvātma and Paramātma, the individual self and the universal self, the essence of me

and the essence of the world, the essence of the micro and the essence of the macro are one and the same.

This is the meaning of the word **Yōgaha**, **Aykyam**, **Mōkshaha**, **Viyōgaha**. According to Vēda, this is the primary goal. The Vēda points out that every human being will have to discover this Mōksha. Only then, the fundamental and universal quest, urge of every human being will end. Every human being has got a fundamental quest, fundamental desire to know three things.

It is instinctive and universal which is natural to every thinking human being. Human being is supposed to be a thinking human being. These fundamental questions occur off and on. Those fundamental questions are - **Who am I? Why am I here? What am I here for? In short, what is the meaning of life?**

This question often arises in the mind especially, when we confront problems in life. Otherwise, it will be suppressed because we are in a party celebrating New Year. Most of the time, we are engaged in worldly, superficial activities. They suppress the fundamental question, but now and then, this question keeps on arising - **what is the meaning of life?**

This question disturbs every human being. As we grow older and as our external activities come down, this question, which was previously feeble becomes bigger and bigger now. It is like the ticking of the clock which we don't hear during the day time, but in the night when everything has ended and you are not getting the sleep, the clock ticking becomes louder and louder.

Similarly, this fundamental quest is the subtlest form of Samsāra. The fundamental quest which disturbs everyone, this Samsāra will come to end only when I discover answers to these questions. That is possible only through this **Yōgaha**. Since this Yōgaha is the primary goal of every human being, in Sanskrit we call it **Sādhyā Yōgaha**.

Sādhyam means the destination, the goal, the ultimate goal of every human being. Of course, there are so many other goals in life, but they are all subservient to this primary goal. Therefore, Sādhyā Yōgaha; Sādhyam means the ultimate goal. Having presented this Sādhyā Yōgaha, the scriptures themselves talk about the method of accomplishing or fulfilling this ultimate goal.

As we have got a short life and there are so many distractions and activities, scriptures talk about how to design the life in such a way that, preferably before death, I will hit at the bulls eye. The scriptures themselves design methods and three disciplines are prescribed by the scriptures as a means, as a path, as a method to attain that goal.

Those three methods are otherwise called **Sādhanās**. **Sādhana** means a means to attain the **Sādhyā**, the end. **What are those Sādhana?** They are **Karma Yōgaha**, **Upāsana Yōgaha** and **Gnyāna Yōgaha**. Shankarāchārya points out that these three are called Yōga even though, they are really not Yōga.

They are figuratively called Yōga because they are all meant for the real Yōgaha - **yōgārthatvāt yōga**. Being a means for Yōgaha, they are called **Gowna Yōgaha**, secondary Yōga meant for the primary Yōga. **Sādhana Yōgās** are called secondary Yōga and **Sādhyā Yōga** is called primary Yōga. Secondary leads me to the primary.

Of these three Yōgās, the fundamental and the most important one is **Karma Yōgaha** because that alone gives the foundation for the other two. Therefore, in the Bhagawad Gīta which is one of the most important spiritual books of the Hindus, which contains the essence of all the Vedas, Lord Krishna elaborately talks about all these three.

We get the topic of Karma Yōga in one full chapter. It is titled Karma Yōga itself. Having elaborately discussed that, Krishna condenses the entire essence of Karma Yōga in one beautiful, cryptic verse. In the 30th

verse of the 3rd chapter, Krishna encapsulates this Karma Yōga principle. Krishna advices Arjuna -

**mayi sarvāni karmāni sanyasya adhyātma chētasa
nirāhīhi nirmamaha bhūtvā yudhyasva vigata jwaraha**

In this one of the important verses of the entire Gīta, Krishna presents five principles of Karma Yōga - **Pancha Angāni, Panchāngam**. This Panchāngam is extremely important and it is nice to remember on the New Year's Day, so that we can implement the Pancha Angam the rest of the year.

mayi sarvāni karmāni sanyasya adhyātma chētasa - adhyātma chētāh bhava - This is instruction number one given by Lord Krishna to all of us on New Year's Day. I don't know to what extent you will accept, if I say. Therefore, I say that this is Krishna's first instruction. **adhyātma chētāh bhava** means may you keep **Mōksha** as your primary goal of life.

You can have any number of your own personal, family, corporate goals. But may you keep Mōksha as the primary and ultimate goal or destination. **Mōksha** means **Jīvātma Paramātma Aykyam** or **Bhēda Bhrama Viyōgaha**, freedom from delusion. This is called becoming a spiritual human being.

What is instruction number one? Don't be a materialistic human being. Life will become a greater and greater burden. Old age will become still greater burden. Therefore, let there be materialistic goals. There is nothing wrong, but may you balance it by having Mōksha as the primary goal.

In short, become a spiritual human being. Spiritual has got a proper meaning. Don't take any other spirit as it is New Year. People go for so many other types of spirit. Therefore, take it in the right spirit. **adhyātma chētāh bhava** is instruction number one. Then, the second instruction is **mayi sarvāni karmāni sanyasya** - may you dedicate all your actions as an offering to the Lord.

Whether the action is small or big, secular or sacred, convert all your actions into worship throughout the day, throughout life, by dedicating the actions as an offering to the Lord - **ēshwara arpana bhāvanayā karma kuru**. **What do you mean by dedication to the Lord? How do you do that?**

By dedication, what we mean is - may you invoke the relationship between you and God in the context of every Karma. **What do you mean by that?** We will understand this only if we remember the definition of God, according to our scriptures. According to our scriptures, God is not a person sitting somewhere beyond the clouds.

God is defined as the invisible, all-pervading, intelligence principle which pervades the entire universe. It not only pervades the entire universe, but one which pervades all the cosmic network of laws which maintain the creation in rhythm and harmony. The creation is crisscross pervaded by WWW.

What is WWW? WWW is the World Wide Web of infinite number of laws at the micro and at the macro level which function perfectly, because of which the universe is functioning as one cosmic organism. Not only there is a cosmic network of laws, but there are special laws governing all the actions and reactions.

The special laws called the **Law of Karma** which includes the physical laws as well as the moral laws called **Dharma**. Therefore, there are special laws governing **Karma** and **Karma Phalam** at the physical level as well as at the moral level. Scientists study only the physical laws. They don't think about the moral laws governing the universe.

Thus, the laws of the creation in general, and the special law called the Law of Karma. **Who is Bhagawān?** He is the intelligent, invisible, all-pervading intelligence pervading the creation, pervading the general laws and pervading the specific law of Karma. That means, whenever I do any action in the world, sooner or later, this action itself will produce

its reaction called Karma Phalam, which is determined by all the laws of Karma.

These laws of Karma will give me Karma Phalam, the reaction. When we say the laws of Karma will give me the Phalam, the scriptures say - don't say the laws of Karma give the Phalam. The laws are presided over by a cosmic intelligence principle. Instead of saying the laws, you change the word to the 'Lord'.

Therefore, who will give me the result? For every action, the Lord presiding over the law of Karma will give me the result. Therefore, Bhagawān is defined as **Karma Phala Dātā**. I am **Karma Karta** and Bhagawān is **Karma Phala Dātā**. If you shorten these two words, I am Karta and Bhagawān is Dātā.

What is the relationship between me and Bhagawān? It is **Karta-Dātā Sambandhaha**, doer-giver relationship. This relationship is activated when I am involved in action. I keep on doing the action and Bhagawān keeps on giving the result. Generally, we ignore or forget this fact. **Karma Yōgi** is one who invokes **Katru-Dātru Sanbandha**, doer-giver relationship existing between me and God.

I am constantly aware of it. This awareness, the invocation of this relationship is called **Ēshwara Arpana Bhāvana**. This is instruction number two - invoke the relationship between you and God. **What is the third instruction?** **Nirāhīhi Bhūtva**. It is a very important instruction. In Sanskrit the word **āhīhi** has got several meanings. It means wish, desire, expectation etc. We will have to note the third meaning.

āhīhi means expectation - expectations with regard to future and expectations with regard to the **Karma Phalam**, the result of actions. Expectations are natural to every human being. But Krishna says expectations are natural and in-fact, expectations are also very useful when you are planning your program. Suppose you want to plan today's program.

Naturally, you will expect our Pūja to start at 6.30 and you will expect my talk to end at 8.15 and you expect to leave this place and you have made other programs. Therefore, all our planning is based on expectations. Therefore, expectations are useful at planning stage.

Krishna says - keep the expectation at the stage of planning, but once planning is over, kindly set aside all your expectations. **Nirāhīhi** means **nirgatāha āhishaha yasmāt saha**. Never keep any expectations in the mind or don't dwell on the expectations. Dwelling on the expectations will have several adverse consequences. There are disadvantages.

What are the disadvantages? There are many. The first disadvantage is - when I dwell on the expectations, the mind gets preoccupied in those expectations. Therefore, your mind is not available for the task at hand. If you keep on watching your watch, you don't listen. Therefore, dwelling on expectation causes preoccupation.

Preoccupation will reduce your efficiency. That is a definite recipe for a wrong result. Therefore, expectations are obstacles during the implementation of plan but not during plan. Therefore, **Nirāhīhi** - don't think of the result.

Then, the second and worse disadvantage is - when we live a life in which we keep the expectations in the mind all the time, we are looking at the world, looking at people, looking at events through the spectacles of our expectations. We get into a problem because most of the people will not measure up to our expectations. And no event will happen or measure up to my expectation.

Therefore, when I look at the creation, people and events through the goggles of expectation, we will only develop a negative attitude, a pessimistic attitude, a cynical attitude towards the creation because we will conclude that everyone is selfish because he did not do whatever I wanted him to do to me. So, our judgment will be that everyone is selfish or everyone is ungrateful.

It is because we calculate whatever things we did to them. We will make a list without forgetting anything. I have done so much, and those people do not reciprocate. Therefore, I will conclude that everybody is ungrateful, opportunist. I will only have a negative attitude towards the creation.

Later, I will extend it to Bhagawān also because we have got an expectation with regard to what all things should happen everywhere. We have defined some people as good. Of course, we are the main one in that list and good people (i.e. me) should never suffer. We have got a list of bad people and they all should suffer.

Thus, we have got our own expectations and we find God is not doing that. Therefore, even God comes down from the standpoint of our expectations. Therefore, we conclude that God is also unjust or unfair. Some people go further and ask the fundamental question - does God really exist or not? It is the way our politicians and the scammers thrive.

Therefore, if we dwell on our expectations, we will become pessimistic, cynical and negative and our life will be miserable. Therefore, Krishna says - don't live on expectations. When you look through that, you are living in [Jīva Srushti](#). You are living in a private world. Remove the expectations and live in the world of God without labeling anyone.

This is the third instruction. **What is the fourth instruction?** - [Nirmamaha](#). Each one is a profound thing worth meditating upon the rest of the life. Each one is a very pithy verse. [Nirmamaha](#) means without claiming ownership with regard to anything in the creation. It is because according to the scriptures, the entire creation belongs to Bhagawān.

Bhagawān is not a person sitting somewhere. Remember that Bhagawān means the cosmic, invisible, intelligence principle. The entire creation belongs to the Macro, the total called Bhagawān. As an individual, I cannot claim or own or anything. Legally, for the sake of convenience,

we can own a flat etc. We can have some documents and claim that this is my property.

We can have some ownership for the sake of convenience of transaction. But it is only a superficial thing. Vēdānta says don't take this ownership seriously. From spiritual angle, you remember that I am not the owner of anything. I am the user of a few things which are gifts from God, based on the Law of Karma.

I have to use this for discovering my goal, but let me not try to own and hold on to that. Anything which is with me, can be snatched away at anytime, including our closest and most valuable possession called body. Death never comes after asking permission. Bhagawān gives and takes not according to fancy, but according to the Law of Karma. Always remember this.

Only then, you will have detachment. Ownership and attachment are synonymous which will create lot of problems. Because I don't own anything, I don't have control over anything. It is because ownership and controllership are always two sides of the same coin. Therefore, [Nirmamaha](#) means always remember that I don't own anything.

And as an individual, I don't have control over anything, including my own body. But that does not mean that we should become fatalistic. Everything is decided by God. **Therefore, why should I do?** We don't say that as it is fatalism. We do accept that there is a free will, but we say that we should understand the free will properly.

We don't have controlling free will. We have got a contributing free will. We contribute our share to the totality. It is like voting. What is going to happen after our contribution, we cannot control. Therefore, I accept contributing free will.

I understand that I don't have controlling free will. Remembering this fact is called [Nirmamaha](#) - [Nirmamaha Yudhyasva](#). [Yudhyasva](#) means

keep on contributing. To maintain good health, you go to the gym regularly, but irrespective of all these things, after five years, we do not know whether your body will continue or not.

But you should continue your exercise. Continuing is contributory free will, but what will be after five years is some other thing. **Nirmamaha Sanyudhyasva** - just keep on doing keeping expectations out. This is the fourth instruction. The fifth and most powerful and most difficult instruction is **Vigata Jwaraha**. **Jwaraha** literally means fever.

Here, Krishna talks about mental fever. Mental fever is anxiety regarding the result of the action I am going to undertake or I am undertaking. This anxiety is called Jwaraha. This anxiety is very natural. Therefore, Krishna advises - neutralize this anxiety because anxiety weakens our efficiency.

Therefore, may you learn to neutralize this anxiety. Really speaking, if you follow the first four instructions properly, anxiety will be less. But if you want to further reduce the anxiety, we can neutralize it further by offering an appropriate prayer. We do pray in our life. At-least, many people offer prayer, but the problem is that the prayer is inappropriate.

What is our general prayer? O God, give me success. But this prayer is not appropriate prayer because what I am going to get will depend upon not what I pray, but it will go according to the Law of Karma. The result is going to come according to the quality of actions. As the popular saying goes - Bhagawān doesn't give what I desire. Bhagawān gives what I deserve.

Therefore, the prayer 'God give me success' is inappropriate prayer. Secondly, in the vision of God, there is only **Karma Phalam**. There is no success or failure. Karma Phalam alone exists. Success and failure are nothing but our own private judgment of the result. It is our subjective interpretation. Objectively, there are neither successes nor failures. There are only Karma Phalams.

Therefore, in Bhagawān's dictionary, there is neither success nor failure. Therefore, if you ask for success, he does not understand because that is **Jīva Srushti**. Then, you will say - can I ask for Karma Phalam? That also is meaningless because whether I ask or not, as a Dātā, Bhagawān's job is to give Karma Phalam.

If he is going to keep the Karma Phalam, he will not have place to keep it. Therefore, he will disburse, distribute. Therefore, 'Give me success' is inappropriate prayer. 'Give me Karma Phalam' is inappropriate prayer. **If at all I pray, what should I pray for?** O Lord, give me courage. Courage means to make two important statements and mean them.

The first statement is - O Lord, I am willing to go through any Karma Phalam that you want me to go through, according to the Law of Karma. This statement is very important. The second statement is - I am confident of going through any Karma Phalam that you want me to go through, according to the Law of Karma.

I should make these two statements. It should not be at the lip level, but it should be from the innermost heart. It requires a lot of courage to make these statements. Especially, if I have to say that in crucial projects, it requires tremendous guts or courage. I take that courage and according to scriptures, getting this courage alone is success.

I keep on making these statements and meaning these statements - I am willing to go through and I am confident of going through. **How long?** Until the Karma Phalam comes, I keep these statements in my mind. If I build up the courage, anxiety will come down because anxiety is inversely proportional to courage - Greater the courage, lesser the anxiety and lesser the courage, greater the anxiety.

Therefore, I build up the courage to make these two statements until the result comes. After the result comes, the courage itself will get converted into mental strength to go through any Karma Phalam. Before result comes, it is courage. The courage becomes strength after the

Karma Phalam. Therefore, a **Karma Yōgi**, who builds up this courage doesn't have anxiety at all.

sukha dukhē samē krutvā lābhālābhau jayājayou, tatō yuddhāya yujyasva. Therefore, there is always **Samatvam**. There is no anxiety. There is no labeling of the creation. I don't say that life is terrible. I always have got either a wonderful or neutral attitude towards life. This is called equanimity or poise - **samatvam yōga uchyatē**. These are the five principles.

1. Keep **Mōksha** as the primary goal.
2. Dedicate every action to the Lord by invoking Doer-Giver relationship between you and God.
3. Keep off all the expectations from the mind.
4. Remember that I am not the owner or controller. I am only the user and contributor.
5. Practice or train yourself, saying from the innermost heart that I am willing to go through and I am confident of going through any Karma Phalam.

If these **Pancha Anga** are followed, I am called **Karma Yōgi**. **What are Upāsana Yōga and Gnyāna Yōga?** I will summarize them in two minutes. **Upāsana Yōga** is private mental rehearsal of **Karma Yōga**. **Upa Āsanam** means mentally being in the presence of God.

Few minutes every morning, I invoke the Lord and remain in the presence of the Lord. We like Lord invoked in any form. In the presence of the Lord, I recollect all these five principles and I take a resolve that throughout the day, I will implement all these five principles. O Lord, I seek your grace to follow.

Above all, I seek courage from you so that I am ready for facing any blessed thing - **yad yad bhavyam bhavatu bhagawan pūrva karmānurūpam**. I invoke this courageous life in **Upa Āsanam Yōga**. **Upāsana** means remaining mentally near the Lord. If I practice the

Karma Yōga and **Upāsana Yōga** which is a rehearsal for **Karma Yōga**, I am ready for **Gnyāna Yōga** which is nothing but going through a spiritual education program under a Guru.

Gnyāna Yōga is spiritual education or program under the guidance of a Guru who has got a beautiful syllabus to go through. When I go through that, my delusion goes away. **Jīvātma-Paramātma Bhēda** delusion goes away. **Jīvātma-Paramātma Aykya**m is accomplished. **Sādhana Yōga** will lead to **Sādhyā Yōga** which is the ultimate success of life.

It is this success we seek on the auspicious New Year's Day. With this, I conclude my talk and I wish you a very happy, healthy, prosperous Yogic New Year 2013.

***Pūrnmadah Pūrnamidam Pūrnāth Pūrnāmudachyatē.
Pūrnasya Pūrnāmādāya Pūrnāmēvāvasishyatē..***

Om shānti shānti shāntihi



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