

# THE YOGA OF RESPONSIBILITY

Yogacharya

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We reap only by first sowing and constructive and conscious effort is required every moment as nothing in life is obtained without effort. We must remember to lay the foundations well and “leave no stone unturned” if we truly wish to fulfill our ambitions. Nature goes through phases of seeding, nurturing much before the fruition occurs. We must never forget ancient wisdom that says, “As you sow so shall you reap” (Galatians 6:7).

## **CHATUR ASHRAMA:**

Indian culture has for millennia stressed on the importance of responsibility or the fulfillment of one’s Dharma as the bedrock of life. One of the many ways in which this is inculcated is through the division of the four stages of human life as described in the Yogic science of Yantra. These Chatur Ashrama are Brahmacharya, Grahasta, Vanaprasta and Sanyasa and each of these has specific responsibilities and duties that enable us to grow fully as a human being. Brahmacharya is the period of life from birth to 27 years of age. This is the period of one’s life that is devoted exclusively towards attaining knowledge. It is the period of study at the feet of a realised master (Guru). The second phase of one’s life is the Grahasta Ashrama or the householder phase. It is said to be from 27 to 54 years of age. This is the period of responsibility and obligations. It is the productive period of life in family, financial as well as personal pursuits. The world can be said to turn because of the population in this Ashrama as they have the responsibility to take care of all the other three groups. The third stage of life is the Vanaprasta that runs from 54 to 81 years of age. This is the retirement time when one can sit back and relax in a quiet, reflective, meditative state. Inner unfoldment may be given paramount place without undue concern for worldly matters. Sanyasa Ashram is the fourth stage of life where total renouncement occurs. It is the period of ones, life beyond 81 years of age wherein the spiritual consciousness of the person may manifest in totality. It is important to note that this final stage of Sanyasa is to be entered after completing one’s duties in the three earlier phases. Many take Sanyasa as an escape from the world and this is not to be. It is the culmination of a life well lived and never an escape from responsibility. As Pujya Swamiji used to say, “Many want to renounce, but they don’t have anything to renounce in the first place!”

### **CHATURVIDHA PURUSHARTHA:**

Indian culture accepts the Chaturvidha Purushartha, that there are the four legitimate aims of life, namely Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Tiruvalluvar deals with the first three in his great Tamil scripture Tirukkural under the headings of Aram, Porul and Inbam. Dharma or Aram is the living of a righteous life with fulfillment of all duties in the spirit of Nishkama Karma (selfless service) and Karmasu Koushalam (perfection in action). Artha or Porul is the fulfillment of all legitimate material needs in the proper manner. We must realise that in many instances our needs are legitimate but our wants may not be correct as they only mirror our greed. Man needs a house for shelter but his greed makes him want ten houses. There are examples of even ‘spiritual leaders’ (?) who have trillions in banks, hundreds of cars and numerous houses!

As the great soul Mahatma Gandhi once said, “There is enough for everyone’s need but not for every man’s greed”. Kama or Inbam is the fulfillment of desires especially of the sexual nature in the proper, legitimate, socially accepted manner. Family life is an important learning experience and is the stepping stone to further experiences. It is important that the sexual potencies are utilised for the right purpose in the right way. When the first three goals are achieved in a legitimate manner, then we are ready for attainment of the ‘goal of all goals’, Moksha or the final liberation.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE MATRIX OF KARMA:**

Karma is the universal law of action-reaction. As long as the Kleshas exist, the Jiva is bound to the fructification of the Karmas. The three main sources of Karma are Adhyatmika, Adhibauthika and Adhidaivika. Adhyatmika is that which is due to the self. This is due to our thoughts, words and deeds. They may be due to our acts of omission as well as commission. Not doing the right thing is sometimes Karmically as bad as doing the wrong thing. Adhibauthika is that which is due to the worldly side of creation. It may manifest through animals or forces of nature. Adhidaivika is that which is due to the great clockwork of the universe at the time of our birth. Astrology and numerology deal with this, but the Yogic science of Yantra gives us a complete understanding as well as a master plan of this manifestation.

The three major types of Karma are Prarabdha Karma, Kriyamana (Agami) Karma and Sanchita or Sabija Karma. Prarabdha Karma is the fructifying Karma and is the load of Karma with which we are born to work out in this lifetime. Kriyamana (Agami) or Vartamana is the one that we are generating in the present. These actions that are generated day by day may either join the Prarabdha and become operative in this very life or join the Sanchita and become operative in future lives. Sanchita Karma or Sabija Karma is the one that has most negative connotations. It is the accumulated store of Karmas from many past embodiments that is stored in our sub conscious and manifests if we create an atmosphere conducive for it to fructify. It strikes when least expected and can cause havoc with a peaceful productive life. According to Patanjali, Karmic fructification determines the class into which one is born (Jati), the life span (Ayu) as well as enjoyment (Bhoga) of pleasure and pain.

Human embodiment is a rare opportunity for the soul as self-effort (Purushartha) is possible. A human being can modify the fructifications of the past by their present efforts, reduce the negative Karmas of the past and enrich the positive ones. They are also in a unique position that they can bring about the very eradication of the roots of the Karmic tree through a sincere Yoga Sadhana.

### **KARMA YOGA: THE PATH OF RESPONSIBILITY**

Karma Yoga is one of the central teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and aims at the attainment of Kaivalya or eternal freedom. The Karma Yoga Marga enables us achieve this exalted 'state of being' by performing with responsibility our day-to-day duties. Lord Krishna tells Arjuna, "Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform action which is duty, for, by performing action without attachment, man verily reaches the Supreme".

The other extreme is when some people translate Sanyasa as the total renouncement and try to escape from their responsibility through this 'spiritual loophole'. It is important to remember the real meaning of renouncement for Lord Krishna says, "Renouncing all actions in Me, with the mind centred in the Self free from hope and egoism and from mental fever, do thou fight", and who sit quiet, renouncing their own duty, will not derive any benefit by such renunciation.

The whole teachings of the Bhagavad Gita reiterate the need for self-responsibility and in so many ways Lord Krishna tries to persuade Arjuna to do his Dharma. In VI.5, Krishna preaches about 'right' exertion: "Let a man lift himself by his own Self alone, let him not lower himself; for this self is the friend of oneself and this self alone is the enemy of oneself". The Lord tells Arjuna that each one should do his duty according to his nature, and that doing duty that is suited to one's nature in the right spirit of detachment will lead to perfection. He says, "Do thou perform thy bounden duty, for action is superior to inaction and even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for thee by inaction".

Another modern tendency is to 'feel' that one can do somebody else's job better than them but not one's own job! This is a major ego based survival technique, an escapist tendency that must be watched carefully. So many people go around saying, "I would be the best prime minister of this country or I would run this company better than this guy" etc, but look at them and you find that they are totally incompetent messes! Arrogance and ignorance are a very dangerous combination and so many 'featherless bipeds' running around this planet today seem to be endowed with this combination in plenty.

No wonder Lord Krishna warns us, "Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear" (*shreyaan swadharmo vigunah paradharmaat swanushtithaat swadharme nidhanam shreyah paradharmo bhayaavahah*). He continues by saying "Each one, devoted to his own duty, attains perfection". He concludes by telling us that we become qualified for the dawn of Self-knowledge and perfection through the performance of our own duty. This idea of work-ship as worship is so relevant in this day and age.

## **SWADHARMA: SELF RESPONSIBILITY**

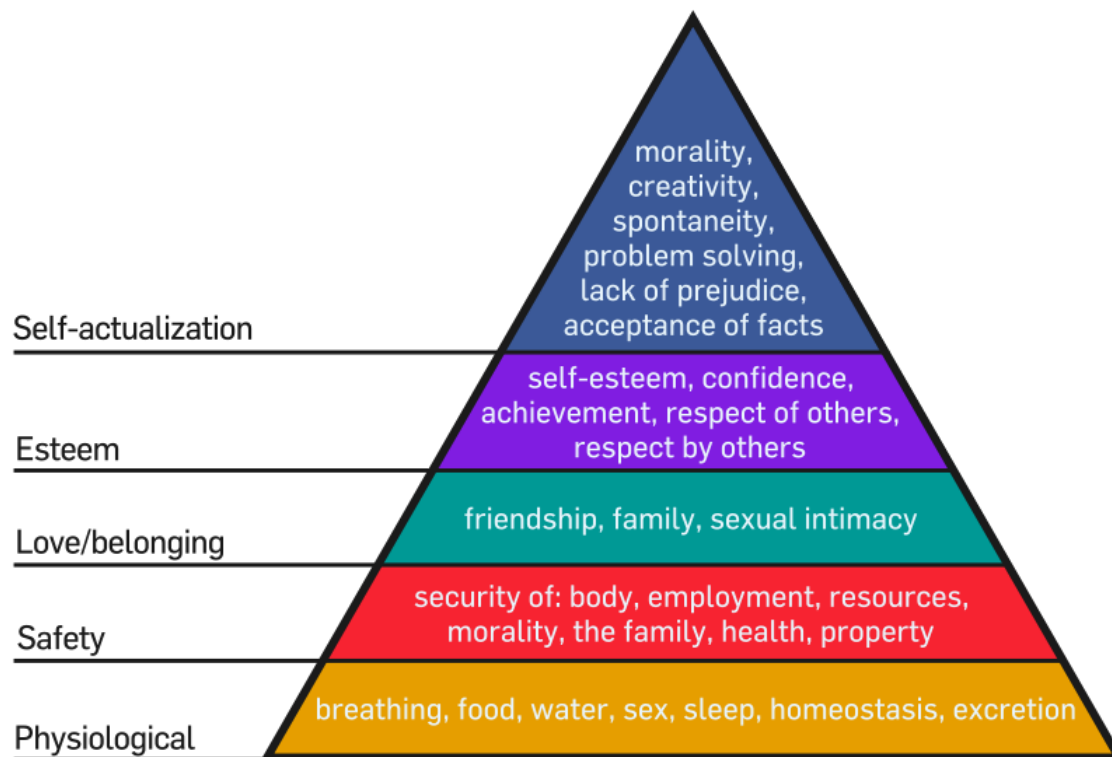
The Yogic concept of **SWADHARMA** or 'self responsibility' and the psychological concept of Self-actualization have many similarities. Self actualization is a term originally introduced by Kurt Goldstein for the motive to realize one's full potential. In his view, it is the organism's master motive, the only real motive. However, the concept was brought most fully to prominence in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all basic and mental needs are fulfilled and the "actualization" of the full personal potential takes place.

Abraham Maslow studied the greatest people of his generation in an attempt to identify the hallmarks of what he called "self-actualizing" individuals. Maslow studied what he called exemplary people such as Albert Einstein, Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Frederick Douglass rather than mentally ill or neurotic people, writing that "the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy."

He basically concluded that "**There are no perfect human beings**"! Persons can be found who are good, very good indeed, in fact, great. There do in fact exist creators, seers, sages, saints, shakers, and movers...even if they are uncommon and do not come by the dozen. And yet these very same people can at times be boring, irritating, petulant, selfish, angry, or depressed. To avoid disillusionment with human nature, we must first give up our illusions about it. This is so similar to Lord Krishna's teachings when he says, "One should not abandon, O Arjuna, the responsibility to which one is born, though faulty; for, all undertakings are enveloped by defects, as fire by smoke"!

## **SELF ACTUALISATION AND YOGA**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs deals with life as a pyramid of growth or self evolution from the lower physical needs to safety needs, need for love and belonging, need for self esteem and then self actualization. When a human being ascends the steps of the pyramid he reaches self actualization. At the bottom of the pyramid are the "Basic needs or Physiological needs" of a human being, food and water and sex. The next level is "Safety Needs: Security, Order, and Stability." These two steps are important to the physical survival of the person. Once individuals have basic nutrition, shelter and safety, they attempt to accomplish more. The third level of need is "Love and Belonging," which are psychological needs; when individuals have taken care of themselves physically, they are ready to share themselves with others. The fourth level is achieved when individuals feel comfortable with what they have accomplished. This is the "Esteem" level, the level of success and status. The "Need for Self-actualization," occurs when individuals reach a state of harmony and understanding. Self actualization is at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs - becoming "'fully human"...maturity or self-actualization' - and is considered a part of the humanistic approach to personality.



Maslow based his study on the writings of other psychologists, Albert Einstein and people he knew who clearly met the standard of self actualization. Maslow used Einstein's writings and accomplishments to exemplify the characteristics of the self actualized person. He realized that all the individuals he studied had similar personality traits. All were "Reality Centered", able to differentiate what was fraudulent from what was genuine. They were also "problem centered", meaning that they treated life's difficulties as problems that demanded solutions. These individuals also were comfortable being alone and had healthy personal relationships. They had only a few close friends and family rather than a large number of shallow relationships. One historical figure Maslow found to be helpful in his journey to understanding self actualization was Lao Tzu, The Father of Taoism. A tenet of Taoism is that people do not obtain personal meaning or pleasure by seeking material possessions.

It is too bad Maslow didn't study any of the realised souls of India for there have been so many such 'self actualised' masters from time immemorial! Each age or Manvantara has seven great Rishis. The seven great Rishis of the first Manvantara are said to be Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulaha, Kratu, Pulastya and Vashista. The Sapta Rishis of the present Manvantara are the forefathers of all present day Brahmanas. The Gotras that are named after these Rishis are used to identify the different families that have sprung from their progeny. These seven great seers of this age are Kashyapa Maharishi, Atri Maharishi, Jamadagni Maharishi, Bharatwaja Maharishi, Vishwamitra Maharishi, Vashishta Maharishi and Gauthama Maharishi. They have been immortalized by a constellation of seven stars being named the Sapta Rishi Mandalam (constellation of seven Rishis).

The great minds of our Indian culture have given us thoughts about responsibility in such a lovely poetic manner. One such example is the **Purananuru** that is a Tamil poetic work belonging to the Sangam period corresponding to between 200 BCE – 100 CE. Purananuru is part of the Ettuthokai anthology which is the oldest available collection of poems of Sangam literature in Tamil. Purananuru contains 400 poems of varying lengths in the Akaval meter. More than 150 poets wrote the poems. It is not known when or who collected these poems into these anthologies. Purananuru is a source of information on the political and social history of pre-historic Tamil Nadu. Purananuru poems deal with the puram (external or objective) concepts of life such as war, politics, wealth, as well as aspects of every-day living.

I give below one of the most famous songs from therein with special highlight (mine) on the fact that we are responsible for all the good things (punya phala) and bad (papa phala) that comes upon us. It also states so beautifully that both the **cause of the pain** as well as the **antidotal remedy** for it lies within our own very selves. It is very interesting to contrast this with the prevalent modern idea that "I am the poor innocent victim".

யாதும் ஊரே, யாவரும் கேளிர்,  
தீதும் நன்றும் பிறர்தர வாரா,  
நோதலும் தணிதலும் அவற்றோ ரன்ன  
சாதலும் புதுவது அன்றே, வாழ்தல்  
இனிதுஎன மகிழ்ந்தன்றும் இலமே,  
முனிவின்  
இன்னாது என்றலும் இலமே, பின்னொடு  
வானம் தண் துளி தலைஇ ஆனாது  
கல் பொருது இரங்கும் மல்லல்  
பேர்யாற்று  
நீர்வழிப் படுஉம் புண்போல் ஆருயிர்  
முறைவழிப் படுஉம் என்பது திறவோர்  
காட்சியின் தெளிந்தனம் ஆதலின்  
மாட்சியின்  
பெரியோரை வியத்தலும் இலமே,  
சிறியோரை இகழ்தல் அதனினும்  
இலமே.

-கணியன் பூங்குன்றன், புற நானூறு, 192

To us all towns are one, all men our kin,  
**Life's good comes not from others'  
gifts, nor ill,**  
**Man's pains and pain's relief are from within,**  
Death's no new thing, nor do our blossoms thrill  
When joyous life seems like a luscious draught.  
When grieved, we patient suffer; for, we deem  
This much-praised life of ours a fragile raft  
Borne down the waters of some mountain stream  
That o'er huge boulders roaring seeks the plain  
Tho' storms with lightning's flash  
from darkened skies.  
Descend, the raft goes on as fates ordain.  
Thus have we seen in visions of the wise !  
We marvel not at the greatness of the great;  
Still less despise we men of low estate.  
Kaniyan Poongundran, Purananuru – 192  
(Translated by G.U.Pope, 1906)

## SELF TRANSFORMATION AS A PREPARATION

The evolutionary Yogic process of culturing ourselves in order to attain the highest state of “universal perfection” deals with both the external as well the internal aspects of our individuality that are cultured in a step-by-step manner to integrate all levels thus producing completeness of our whole being.

The regular practice of Yoga as a 'Way of Life' helps reduce our physical, mental and emotional stresses that are destabilizing us. The Yogic ‘way of life’ lays emphasis on right thought, right action, right reaction and right attitude. No wonder Pujya Swamiji,



Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj has defined Yogic living as the “right-use-ness of body, emotions and mind” – a life of righteousness indeed.

An integration of multiple factors needs to occur both externally and internally. Our higher mind needs to be tapped and the inherent powers released with the flowering of higher consciousness. The three powers of Buddhi (discriminatory intellect) are the Iccha Shakti (power of will), Kriya Shakti (power of action) and Jnana Shakti (power of wisdom). Many persons have the will but not the power to act. Many have the will as well as the power to act but do not know right from the wrong. Only the best of us is endowed with all three and know what is right as well as have both the will and the power to act in the right manner.

We need to get our selves ready and that is a great effort in preparation too. When the student is ready the Guru will appear and this means that the sincere sadhaka should get themselves ready by cultivating the required characteristics. The four fold essential qualifications necessary in a spiritual aspirant are Viveka (discriminating intellect), Vairagya (dispassionate dedication with detachment or non-attachment to worldly pursuits), Shat Sampat (the six noble virtues) and Mumukshatwa (a burning desire of aspiration for self-realization). The Shat Sampat or six noble virtues that are part of the important qualities necessary for a spiritual aspirant are Sama, Dama, Uparti, Titiksha, Shraddha and Samadhana. Sama is mental poise, Dama, sensory control, Uparti, selflessness, and Titiksha is endurance. Shraddha is faith and Samadhana is the surrender to the Divine will. These are real spiritual qualities that are found lacking in most modern seekers and that is why frustration overcomes them and they stray off the path. These qualities were in abundance in ancient society when men lived a natural life and unless and until these qualities are cultivated, there is no chance for spiritual evolution. Strict Gurus of ancient days would not accept disciples who didn't have these qualities, but in today's world which Guru can afford to refuse a disciple on such grounds especially when they themselves don't possess them in the first place?

As my dear Guru-father Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj so rightly said, "**Only the responsible will evolve while the others continue to stagnate**"!

#### **FURTHER READING:**

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