

Yoga, the Path of Refinement

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Gold is put in a furnace to remove all its impurities in order to reach a state of refinement. Nothing is added to it, what does not belong is removed. Similarly, all that we have come to accept as part of our nature or who we are has to be removed if we are to see ourselves as we are and which is our true nature.

The yoga way is the way of purification – of removal of all that does not belong in all levels of our being. One who treads the path of self-purification in the quest to know the self is a yogi.

Yoga refinement is also harmonizing and universalizing our existence – starting with our ethical and moral refinement called the yamas and niyamas. These are very different from the commonly known ‘do’ and ‘don’t do’ – as in yoga, these cannons are in place so we can find a way to live that is akin to the purpose for living – to know one’s true nature, self-realization or God-realization. The means must reflect the end by a very large measure so the individual-centric way of living must first give way to a universal way of living.

What follows are not sequential steps but rings of refinement that come closer to one’s self from the outside to the inside. Asanas and pranayama concern with refining or cleansing the body and vital sheaths of their dross. Aside from the commonly known postures, there are many cleansing techniques that remove all impediments to health and all these together make up the hatha yoga system. Diet and lifestyle adjustments are also required to promote better health and well-being.

When one is in harmony with things outside, within one’s own mind, when one’s body and energy are all well – it becomes natural to learn how to look within and separate oneself from the pull of habit – this is called pratyahara or withdrawal. The inner focusing towards this leads to concentration where the rays of the mind that were scattered earlier – begin to gather – this is known as dharana or concentration. Pratyahara and dharana also work together as without withdrawal from the many – how can the mind’s rays gather in concentration? Taking these or any of the earlier steps lightly will make meditation difficult if not impossible.

Now, one is ready for meditation which is direct observation of the mind. The inner awareness is like the ocean which observes the movement of thought which are like its waves till all wrong notions and conditioning are abandoned and awareness becomes self-aware in samadhi or the state of oneness. The different levels of samadhi are the shifting of one’s center of gravity or being from individualistic to universal and beyond.

Thus, the journey of refinement has gone from the outer: our relationships with others, conditions and things by the yamas and niyamas, our bodies and energy by asanas and

pranayama – to the inner: our attitudes and values by pratyahara, gathering the dissipated rays of the mind by concentration – still deeper within: to the core of one’s being and understanding by meditation and finally: towards resting in our true nature as a natural and irreversible state that is lasting through samadhi.

Refinement is not knowing about expensive wines, exotic foods, artists and painters, castles or faraway places as all these are little pieces of information which are all data in the mind plane. Just as gold is purified in the crucible, the gold of one’s being is purified by yoga so one’s true nature can be seen in its limitless splendor. One who walks the way of yoga, walks the way of refinement and is not satisfied with little things that do not last and seeks what is durable, most expansive and unending – one’s true nature. To thine own self be true.

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