

A full-page background image of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a river flows over rocks. To the left, a stone staircase leads up a grassy slope towards a small stone hut. The background features steep, green mountains under a blue sky with white clouds.

Kriya Yoga: Insights Along the Path

By Marshall Govindan
and Jan Ahlund

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PART 1

The Dilemma of human existence: Finding lasting happiness in things which do not last

1. Why Do We Practice Yoga?

One of the most important debates every student must win is one with their own mind over the doubt: “Why do I practice Yoga?” Until you are convinced of the value of Yoga relative to everything else in your life, your practice will not have the priority needed to escape your suffering. Your mind will create endless doubts and distractions until you begin to establish yourself in a perspective that transcends it. Read carefully, and absorb the implications of what is the most important debate of your life.

A change in perspective:

In one form or another we are all suffering. Individually and collectively. We may try to deny it, or avoid it, but it is pervasive. Our suffering takes so many forms: physical pain; emotional grief, fear, anger, envy, expectations regarding others, mental worry; depression. We seek to escape it through alcohol, drugs, television, eating, exercise, innumerable forms of distraction, work, therapy, and religion. Rarely do we take time to understand the root cause of our suffering, or why we cause so much suffering to one another. We rarely remember that everything in life is impermanent. Everything we experience changes: our physical circumstances, our emotional and mental state, our physical condition, our rela-

tionships, and our financial situation. And yet we often react with surprise, anger, disappointment, even shock when loved ones die, or things break, or we lose our job, or experience an accident or a betrayal. We foolishly expect to find lasting happiness in things which do not last!

Wisdom is to know the source of suffering, the source of joy, and to distinguish what is permanent from what is impermanent. The wise tell us that it is the confusion of our true Self with that of the body-mind-personality, which is at the root of suffering. They tell us that when we identify with our soul, standing firmly in the perspective of an inner Witness, we can know profound joy, instantly and effortlessly.

Who is it that suffers? There may be physical pain, turbulent emotions, troubling thoughts. But they come and go. And when they are gone, who we truly are remains. You are that which always is, throughout the passing spectacle of physical sensations, emotions and thoughts. You cannot be anything that comes and goes. You can only be that which always is and never changes. Take a few deep breaths now, and ask yourself: "What part of me never changes?" Thoughts change. Emotions change. The body's sensations change. What is left? Do not even put a label on it. Just notice "it." "It" is formless, timeless, unchanging. It is the one constant throughout all of the experiences of your life. It was present when you were five years old, seventeen years old, thirty years old, and it will be present in the last years, and moments of your life. It is like the thread upon which the string of pearls is strung. We rarely notice it, yet it is our true Self, your soul. Wisdom is to establish oneself in the perspective of this one constant, 24/7.

Due to the fact that your mind is engaged in reading this article, trying to understand the point I am making, thoughts are arising. But can you take a step back and change your perspective, becoming a Witness to whatever thoughts, feelings, sensations arise as you continue to read this article? If you can, you will be enjoying the perspective of your soul, which is pure consciousness. However, unlike everything else, "it" cannot be experienced, because it is not an object. It is the subject. Everything else is object. So, realizing "Who" you are is not about having a new experience. There is nothing "special" to experience. You are not going to become "special" either. Being "special" implies being apart from everything else. Who you are is that which is behind every "thing," and therefore non-separate.

“It” cannot be understood either. Understanding implies thoughts about an object of observation or consideration. But “it” is beyond all thoughts. It is simply love.

You are not your thoughts. Most of them are not even yours to begin with. You have thoughts; they come and they go. But you remain. Most of the thoughts are generated by others, float around in the mental atmosphere and then they enter your field of mental consciousness, where you add a little local color, a little personal twist, and then you express it with “I think,” or “I’m discouraged,” “I must do this,” or “I am angry or afraid” or whatever.

So, the wise are those who can change perspective, and remain in a state of realization wherein they identify not with thoughts, emotions and sensations of the body-mind, but with the Witness perspective of the soul. The Witness perspective of the soul is wide-giving love.

Egoism

Why do we ordinarily identify our self with our sensations and emotions? In the span of one day we are apt to confuse “who we are” with several, often conflicting, sensations and emotions. “I am happy,” I think upon awakening. The day is sunny and the drive to work is easy and indeed, “I am unflappable.” After a cup of coffee and two difficult phone calls, “I am angry and stressed.” Later in the day, “I am envious or jealous” due to the accomplishments and praise given by a co-worker. By the end of one day, and after a long stressful drive home, “I” might have identified myself as being happy, calm, bored, jealous, envious, unsettled, furious. “I” might even find “I hate” a person who “I adored” earlier in the day or visa versa. “I” cannot be all these changing emotions and sensations.

So which of these describe “who you are?” “You” are not any of these things.

If I ask you who you are, you may tell me your name, and what you do for a living; perhaps your marital status and to whom you are related to, like the “mother/father of three children.” You may tell me where you are from, what you like, what you do not like; where you work, your politics, your religion. If we have more time you begin to tell me stories about yourself and what you believe. However, if I meet you a year later, any of these may have changed, you may have lost your job, gotten di-

vorced, changed your political and religious affiliations and changed what you like and do not like about the world. And now you have new stories to tell me. So, who are you? Really? You cannot be any of the above, because they are all temporary. You can only be that which never changes. Because if it changes; it no longer is.

We are so confused about our identity. We say or think “I” a thousand plus times a day! But who is this “I”? The word for “I” in Greek is “ego.” Ego may be defined as the habit of identifying with the body, mind, and emotions. Whenever we do or think or feel something repeatedly, a habit forms. The interior lobes of the brain program our habits to facilitate our responses to external stimuli, coming through the five senses. We have thousands of habits, which are unique to each individual. The way we walk, talk, eat, drive a car, treat others, the things we like and don’t like, all these are based upon habits. Taken together, their sum adds up to what is referred to as our *karma*: the consequences of our past thoughts, words and actions. The most significant habit that we each have is the habit of identifying with our thoughts, emotions and sensations. We say or think: “I think” or “I feel” or “I am suffering” or “I am angry.” However, truly, we are not anything of these experiences. It is correct to say: “Here’s a thought about that” or “my body is tired,” or “I am feeling upset about this or that.” That is, anything we experience is an object; it is not the subject. Who I truly am, pure Witness consciousness, is the subject. So egoism is really a case of mistaken identity. Like an actor, we pretend that we are someone who we are not, forgetting our true identity.

The Consequences of Egoism

The most important consequence of egoism is suffering. Suffering depends upon how you react to what happens. It is therefore distinct from pain. For instance, pain may occur when you trip and fall and bruise your body. Suffering involves the emotions like anger, embarrassment and regret that follow. Due to egoism, you identify with such emotions, swear and lose your sense of equanimity and humor. Suffering throws you off balance. The ego can be thrown off balance. Who you truly are cannot. Who you truly are, maintains a sense of equanimity. It is therefore important to be vigilant, and notice the manifestations of the ego, before it unbalances and sweeps you away into negative feelings. These include:

1. Desire: imagining or fantasizing the pleasure to be derived from some object or circumstance, or feeling aversion towards something,

which we believe will cause us some pain or discomfort. They are fleeting, but prevent us from enjoying the present moment. Desire is a trap, for any desire will convince us that we would be “better off” if only we could satisfy that desire. It burns until it is satisfied; then there is a temporary suspension of the desire, until, the next desire arises, usually immediately afterwards. Desires are endless. The next time you feel desire for something, ask yourself “Who desires?” Immediately you will turn toward your true self, and see things from its true perspective, that of the Witness. In truth, there is no one who desires; desires come, and then they go away. When you are satisfying a desire, again, watch yourself enjoying it. Cultivate the perspective of a detached loving observer. One who loves, desires nothing.

2. Anger. These include all of those strong passionate feelings held towards something or someone, even oneself, when desires are frustrated. Anger itself is habit-forming. It must be rejected or re-directed. Anger always negatively affects the one who owns it most. The wise do not hold on to anger. Anger can always be re-directed into positive action to help correct a mistake. One who loves cannot hold onto anger.

3. Greed: involves wanting more for yourself, rather than wanting the best for others. Greed is a practice of being self-centered with regard to everything; wanting the lion’s share of everything whether it is financial wealth, food, sensual gratification, emotional gratification or spiritual gratification. One, who loves truly, is not greedy.

4. Pride: this is a highly exaggerated opinion of oneself, frequently resulting in contempt for and ill treatment of others. One feels oneself to be somehow superior. It may manifest when one identifies with one’s personal accomplishments, or with the accomplishments of a religion, a sports team, one’s race, nationality, or whenever there is a thought of “me” or “us” versus “them.” Pride hides the realization of our true Self and makes us unable to see the underlying unity of everyone. Pride confines love.

5. Envy, malice and jealousy: the bitterness experienced on seeing others being happy or having something that one does not have. It also obscures the true inner source of joy. Bitterness restricts love so that one is not able to experience it even for oneself.

The wise see these manifestations of the ego as opportunities for self purification: letting go of what one is not, so that one can enjoy the inner source of well being and love.

Working on oneself

The ordinary human being swings on a pendulum between seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. However, both of these involve suffering. Suffering follows even when one obtains what one desires, out of the fear of losing it. The wise, however, find a middle path and cultivate equal-mindedness. Equal-mindedness is contentment and equanimity towards what comes or does not come. It is the litmus test of true spirituality. When asked to describe his state of enlightenment, the great sage, Ramana Maharshi replied: “Now nothing can disturb me anymore.” From the perspective of our soul, if it costs one’s peace of mind, it costs too much! However, because the mind is addicted to seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, it rarely finds that state of balance. The wise cultivate this balance in thought, word and deed. Everything in the life of the wise becomes an opportunity to cultivate equanimity and love. This does not mean that pain or discomfort or bad karmic consequences cease to intrude into one’s life; it does mean that one does not react, but rather responds consciously, cultivating presence, awareness and love. This provides the optimum situation in which inspiration may come and resolve difficulties. It also helps to prevent the needless loss of energy expended in worry, anger, and grief, when things do not go according to plan!

Our true Self is seated beyond the senses that take in, and react to what is happening around us; it is beyond the conditioning of the mind and the intellect, which interprets what is being seen, heard, tasted, touched and felt. Our true being is blessed, seated secretly in limitless, illuminated love and bliss. With this understanding we can transcend the ordinary human perspective of the ego, and access the perspective of our soul, which is one of peace and unconditional love.

Those who have reached the pinnacle of human perfection, the Yoga Siddhas, or perfected ones, did so because of a long process of ego purification. All genuine spiritual traditions emphasize this process. Jesus said: “Listen to me, all of you, and try to understand! It’s not what goes into a person from the outside that can defile; rather it’s what comes out of the person that defiles.” (Mark 7.14-15 with parallels in Matthew 15.10-1 and Thomas 14.5) What comes out of the person is a manifesta-

tion of the ego, as described above. How to purify oneself? The inner purity which Jesus is emphasizing here, begins with discrimination against thoughts, words and actions that defile: judgment, greed, lust, anger, hatred and desire. All of these cause suffering for others and for the person harboring them. Words and actions are preceded by thoughts, so one must develop awareness of the negative mental tendencies and detach from them as soon as they begin to manifest within.

The practice of meditation helps one to develop the presence and awareness necessary to do this. But one cannot expect that merely going deep into meditation is going to miraculously transform one's everyday behavior. One must learn to bring the detached perspective of the soul into the challenging moments of everyday life. This process can be summarized in two acts of spiritual discipline, which define Classical Yoga: "Yoga is remembering Who AM I, and letting go of what I am not." Like the two wings of a bird they lift one to the perspective of a realizing a heaven on earth. For, where is God not? Only where we are not truly present. It also requires a direct approach to negative thoughts and tendencies. Patanjali tells us in Yoga-sutra II.33: "When bound by negative thoughts, their opposites should be cultivated." This may be done, for example, by blessing others, rather than judging them, loving them rather than hating them, repeating affirmations, auto-suggestions, visualization exercises and prayer.

Too often we sink into worry and depression when invaded by negative thoughts. Worry and depression is meditating on what we do not want! The wise, realizing that all manifestations begin in the mind, cultivate the best of thoughts and feelings through meditation in daily life. This entails cultivating a continuous stream of awareness with regards to all happenings. Awareness occurs when part of one's consciousness stands back and watches what the rest of the consciousness is engaged in. It does not think; it watches thoughts coming and going. It does not do anything; it watches things happening. It does not feel. The Witness is equal-minded loving compassion, which watches emotions arising and subsiding in the vital part of one's body. With a little practice, it becomes the foundational perspective of one's life, ensuring a state that is quite the opposite of "egoism and suffering." Being present, one is automatically aware, and when one is aware, bliss arises. So "presence and love" replace "egoism and suffering." This is the promise of those who have suc-

cessfully scaled the Mt. Everest of ordinary human nature, and arrived at the peak of Self-realization.

Egoism is a principle of nature by which consciousness becomes contracted around objects of experience. Every living creature experiences this contraction of consciousness primarily within the range of its senses. The consciousness of the ordinary person, for example, is absorbed in physical sensations during childhood. As one matures, one becomes absorbed in mental and emotional movements: fantasies, fear and desires. Later, one gets caught up in thoughts: memories, ideas and problems. This contraction of consciousness around objects of experience, be they physical, emotional, mental or intellectual, is due to egoism. It is not a personal defect. It is part of nature's design, which relates to the fundamental existential question: why did the One become many? And how can one return to the state of oneness?

According to the sages, beyond this ephemeral world of objective nature, there is a higher "causal plane" from which everything originates. Suffering motivates everyone to go beyond the limited perspective of the ego, but with more or less wisdom. The unwise do so through distraction. The wise, perceiving the Reality beyond the surface, expand their consciousness through spiritual disciplines and secure unconditional, unchallenged love in their hearts in order to purifying the ego based consciousness, and as a result, realize ever new joy in a state of Self realization.

Practical means to uncover egoism:

1. Do something for others every day, without expecting anything in return as selfless service. This can involve any activity, even in your work if done in a spirit of detached awareness, while seeing the Divine in others.

2. Meditate on love: that which is behind the surface movements of the body, mind and emotions.

3. Cultivate detachment. This feeling of letting go is the opposite of "attachment," which we often confuse with love. See yourself on the riverbank of thoughts and experiences, watching them flow by. Avoid slipping down into the river of thoughts and being carried away by them.

4. Cultivate calmness. Be calmly active: when you respond to the world, respond calmly and with care. Actively work to remain calm, re-

ardless of what is happening around you. Calmness is the window of our soul. By cultivating it, we see the Presence of Love everywhere.

5. “Self study”: keep a journal in which you record your experiences. Notice the habits of your mind. Study sacred, spiritual texts which remind you of your higher, true Self.

6. Before speaking, reflect, and speak only what is true, necessary, helpful and uplifting.

7. Stretch your body and watch your breathing. Take up a discipline of body mind spirit exercises, which help to manage stress, relax you deeply and increase energy. By managing our stress and relaxing deeply, we can avoid the ego’s tendency to get “caught up” in the dramas of our lives.

8. The food you eat can affect your thoughts. Eat consciously and don’t allow unconscious thoughts to predominate in your mind. Bad food habits can perpetuate fear, depression, anger or unhappiness in your life. Eating poorly or too much will deplete your energy level. When you do not feel energetic you will be less able to let go of identification with your body.

9. Cultivate the opposite of negative thoughts and feelings through affirmations and auto-suggestions.

10. Enjoy your daily life by living it consciously. Make each day as beautiful as possible. Opportunities arise in the moment. Be conscious of each moment. Walk consciously really seeing what is in front of you.

The cultivation of practices like these can help to raise your consciousness above the limited perspective of “me,” “myself,” and “I.” Make a conscious effort to move beyond the ego and become “a light unto oneself.” Others will find joy in your presence.

2. Karma: Cause or Consequence?

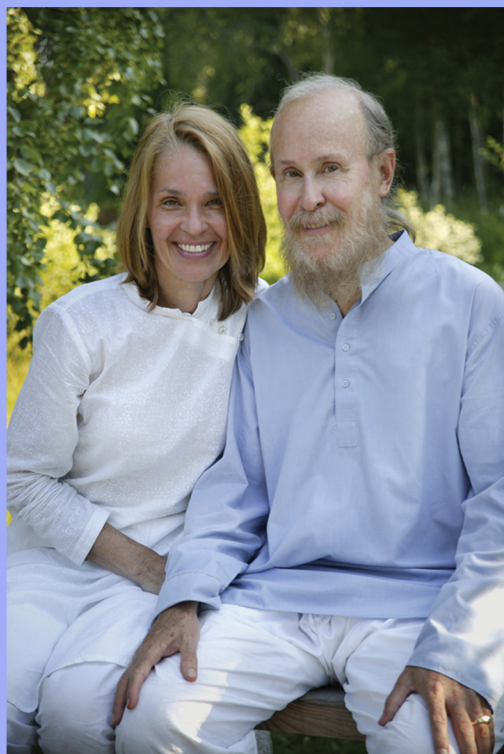
The term “karma” brings to mind notions of law and justice, reward and punishment, as well as judgment and fate. In the Christian and Judaic context it also seems to include the concept of sin and punishment. As such, it is not something we care to dwell upon; but rather dread. Because it is related to such difficult concepts, we generally prefer to avoid thinking about it; too often our attitude is “I don’t understand it,” or “it is diffi-

Kriya Yoga: Insights Along the Path

BY M. GOVINDAN AND JAN AHLUND

My wife, Jan “Durga” Ahlund and I have recognized for many years the need for a book that would explain to both those interested in learning Kriya Yoga and those already embarked on its path, why they should practice it, what are the difficulties, and how to overcome them. We believe that this book will help prepare everyone for the challenges and opportunities that Kriya Yoga provides. Every one of us faces the resistance of our human nature, ignorance as to our true identity, and karma, the consequences of years of conditioning by our thoughts, words and actions. By cultivating aspiration for the Divine, rejecting egoism and its manifestations, and surrendering to our higher Self, pure Witness consciousness, we can overcome this resistance, our karma and the many obstacles on the path. But, to do so, we need much support and insight along the way.

Marshall Govindan, from the preface.



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