

## The Yoga practiced at Nataraja Gurukul

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### Abstract

Even when the word yoga has attained global popularity, it is a misfortune that it is not understood and practiced correctly. Further, it is disheartening to see that many of the popular versions are deeply immersed in commercial interests. The essence of yoga, as defined, taught and practiced by the Gurus and sages, and according to the *shastras*, is to have personal discipline to establish and maintain balance within the body-mind complex. The yoga taught by the Gurus Nataraja and Sree Narayana is the intelligent practice of uniting the body with its instinctive faculties with the higher faculties of the reasoning-self and the soul so that all aspects of the psycho-physical entity function together in harmony towards the one purpose which that soul loves to contemplate and for which it lives. The ultimate yoga happens when all attraction to outside things has been sublimated by the realisation that it is the self alone which is experiencing every kind of bliss and one then practices the art of making the subject its own object so that there is no duality between the Knower and the Known.

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**Keywords:** Yoga, Sree Narayana Guru, Nataraja Guru, Bhagavad Gita, Religion

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### Introduction

The word *yoga* has attained much popularity all across the globe, but not many are aware of the correct meaning or the practice involved. Of late, made popular as a form of breathing exercise or bedroom calisthenics, the original meaning of "personal discipline to establish and maintain balance within the body-mind complex" has been buried under the commercialised versions which have become a form of socialised spirituality or at best a method of relaxing from the tensions of a fast paced and stressful modern life. Here, we would like to bring forth the essence of *yoga* as defined, taught and practiced by the Gurus and sages, according to the recognized canons (*sastras*) of India.

According to the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter XII, Verse 2), Krishna, the Guru of Arjuna says: "Those with minds entered into Me, who unitively meditate on Me, with a fervour pertaining to the Supreme, those according to Me are the most unitively (attuned) in *yoga*.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that the *Bhagavad Gita* is a spiritual text on quiet meditation alone. In fact, the *Gita* equally stresses the virtue of performing necessary action: "Whichever may be the way of life that a superior man may adopt, that very one is by other people too (followed). What he might make his guiding principles, the world too behaves even according to the same."<sup>2</sup> (Chapter III)

The teaching here is that, although the *yogi* is not interested in worldly benefits, s/he is aware that giving the example of laziness or lack of sense of responsibility

1 Nataraja Guru, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Sublime Hymn of Dialectics*, (translated and commented, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), New Delhi, R & K Publishing House, 1973.

2 *Ibid.*, Chapter, III, Verse 21.

would give a wrong message to other human beings. The wise wo/man must be aware that his/her own example is perhaps the most powerful instrument which s/he has in his/her efforts to guide others to live life rightly. Therefore, after starting off recommending the practice of attuning the mind with the Supreme which seems to suggest purely the quietest practice of contemplative meditation, the *Gita* runs through a series of verses which mention and define all the extant versions of *yoga* which have been recommended by different teachers such as *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, *jnana yoga*, and *dhyana yoga*. After naming them all, in verse 12 there is a conclusive statement:

"Better indeed is knowledge than practice; than knowledge meditation is superior; than meditation, renunciation of the benefit of action - after renunciation - peace."<sup>3</sup>

Nataraja Guru<sup>4</sup> has commented on these verses as follows:

The alternatives given from verses 6 to 11 were based on the motive of easiness. In this verse a gradation is indicated which is based on superiority. Whether a man worships a manifested God in the form of Vishnu or Rudra, or whether he is capable of meditating on the abstract notion of the Absolute as the Unmanifested the final criterion by which all devotees have to be measured consists primarily of the question of how far their devotion has brought them happiness or peace. Judged from this normative principle of peace it is possible to grade and arrange all forms of devotional practice or contemplation as is done here.

Blind practice of devotion without knowledge can only be inferior to a devotion that is guided by knowledge. It is therefore legitimate that the author has given knowledge primacy over practice. Practice covers quite a variety of items from *hatha yoga* (*yoga* which is forced, involving severe psycho-physical disciplines) and ritualistic and religious practices, to the *pranayama* (restraint of vital forces like breath etc.), mentioned by Patanjali. Even taking the most respectable connotation implied in practice here, as indicated in Chapter VI, verse 26, there is an artificial and mechanistic effort to be made by the devotee to bring back the mind to the subject of meditation. Unless the interest in the subject is intelligent, the effort to bring back the mind constantly would in most cases be futile. Therefore, here, primacy is given to knowledge.

In its turn, knowledge cannot be sustained and focused for a long time uninterruptedly without that element of interest which can give it that smooth flow so often referred to, which distinguishes meditation from mere thought or knowledge. The condition of

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter, XII, Verse 12.

<sup>4</sup> Nataraja Guru (1895 - 1973) was a disciple of Narayana Guru and himself an Indian social reformer. His father was Palpu, a doctor who founded the *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana* (Society for the Propagation of the Religion of Sree Narayana, or SNDP) in 1903, of which Narayana Guru was the first president. Natarajan founded his *Narayana Gurukulam Movement* (NGM) and University for the Science of the Absolute in 1924. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataraja\\_Guru](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataraja_Guru)

bipolarity in devotion is better fulfilled in *dhyana* (meditation) and therefore it is given primacy over knowledge.

To sustain meditation uniformly and to save it from distractions that might develop at any time, one should have the power to eliminate all those factors that are likely to drag the mind into channels of instinctive desires. This implies a certain kind of neutrality with regard to means and ends, which is implied in the word *karma phala tyagam* (renunciation of the benefits of action). Whether this renunciation is in the form of a limited relinquishment of benefit only, or in the form of fuller renunciation, as implied in verses 6 and 7, the element of giving up personal interest goes very far in establishing that final value in spiritual life leading to peace or happiness for the contemplative devotee. Thus, renunciation has its place higher than meditation because it is by renunciation that peace is accomplished.

This verse brings the subject of devotion further in line with the discipline of yoga or contemplation. "Devotion or practice in the *Gita* are not to be confused with indications in such texts as the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* which should be considered as distinct *darsanas* (systematic visions of reality) of their own with very little in common with the pure contemplation of the Absolute."<sup>5</sup> The significant point to note is that to sustain meditation uniformly and to save it from distractions that might develop at any time, one should have the power to eliminate all those factors that are likely to drag the mind into channels of instinctive desires. In the present highly consumerist world, where even our most private aspects of life are commoditized, even *yoga* is marketed as a fashionable item with which to show off one's supposed 'spirituality'.

That the *Bhagavad Gita* gives the highest status in yogic practices to "renunciation of the benefit of action" means that the best *yoga* is not something that is done as a show for other or even which is done together with others. The quiet contemplation of one's own proper function (*svadharma*) and the dedicated performance of the same, regardless of the difficulties and without concern for personal benefit, for a lifetime, is defined by the *Gita* as the most superior practice of *yoga*.

To have the power to stick to a purpose with dedication even while not gaining recognition or even while being scorned requires a meditation which is 'other-worldly'. This is the commitment of Socrates who refused to escape from prison by bribing the guard saying: "to live is nothing, to live rightly is everything" and thus accepting without fear or hatred the destiny of dying by drinking poison. Let us remember that Jesus Christ also said: "when you pray to your Father, go inside your closet and lock the door and pray to your Father in secret." Even the intention that others should see you "praying" is a falsehood. If there is a genuine desire to attain to "union" with God,

5 Nataraja Guru, *Op. Cit.*, Chapter XII, Verse 12, pp. 522-523.

the Almighty or the Absolute, one must be willing to lose something in the world, forget about benefits or even security. One must, in a word, "forget about oneself". This is exactly what Vedanta teaches us. It is *ahambhav* (sense of individuality), our feeling of being separate from God and the rest of the creation which causes pain and anxiety. A sense of isolation, a feeling of being "alone" haunts the person who has cultivated strongly her/his personality as distinct from fellow human beings and other elements of creation. The more one reduces one's sense of individuality, the easier it is to participate with all the elements of the Universe, to experience the blessing of feeling, the Creator's presence in everything, everywhere, always and to 'feel' one's participation in this unity. This is the true aim of *yoga*.

In the *Maitri Upanishad* we find a similar description of this state. "For by tranquillity of thought, deeds good and evil one destroys. With soul serene, stayed on the soul, delight eternal one enjoys." So, we find in these selections confirmation of Guru's claim that without the element of interest, no matter how severe the discipline one might attempt, the intention to steady the mind and restrain it, would mostly be futile. The same *Upanishad* also states:

As fire of fuel destitute becomes extinct in its own source, so thought by loss of activeness becomes extinct in its own source. Becomes extinct in its own source because the mind the real seeks. For one confused by things of sense, there follow action's false controls.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, if one has not attained a genuine appreciation for "other-worldly values", the attempt to pull the mind away from its attraction for the things of this world would mostly be futile. It is exactly here where the Guru is so helpful, even necessary.

Genuine "initiation" is not a ceremony or a particular formal starting point. Initiation is what "happens" when the disciple begins to take interest in the new value system which Guru teaches. With the power of attraction created by his own happiness the Guru calls others away from the world of sensual objects and transient pleasures into a world of lasting, subjective values which produces peaceful enjoyment, which becomes more precious than anything in the outside world. When practiced for a long time, it becomes a permanent state of mind" which helps one maintain one's balance even in the midst of worldly life. The *yoga* which we are trying to explain has its final proof in its ability to help one preserve one's equilibrium and serenity even while engaged in every kind of necessary worldly work. By renunciation of the benefits of action, one can achieve a neutral attitude towards even one's own efforts and thus practice the attitude of trying sincerely and then accepting whatever Providence brings as the result of one's actions/efforts. Such renunciation of particular aims or ends is the means to peace. It requires trust in the justice of the Universe in which other human beings cannot interfere.

6 Hume, R.E., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 447

We would like to quote in full some very simple stories from a book titled *Tales Told by Mystics* by Manoj Das. The first tale clarifies the role which illusion plays in our lives. In India this is generally referred to as *Maya* and is often portrayed as a beautiful damsel or a temptress. As this may be repugnant to modern notions of gender equality let us clarify that male only means positive and female only means negative. Thus we must recognize that every human being has got a positive (male) and a negative (female) aspect. Inside every man there is also a woman and inside every woman there is also a man. The most normal and the happiest human being would have to be that individual who balances these complementary aspects and creates internal as well as external harmony in her/his psycho-physical makeup. But to clarify how the world (*samsara*) beguiles the immature mind and leads it into pathways of endless distraction which prevent the growth of wisdom, let us read the tale entitled *While God Waits*.

"O Lord, I feel like laughing when sages and philosophers speak of Maya with some awe. There must be some truth in their fear, but Maya surely cannot put everybody under its spell!" Narada observed while walking with Vishnu on one of their occasional visits to Earth. Needless to say, they looked like ordinary mortals.

"I'm too thirsty to answer," was Vishnu's brief comment. He sat down under a tree as if terribly tired and looked wistfully at the river flowing beyond a stretch of bushy meadow. "Wait a moment and I'll fetch water for you," said Narada. He walked briskly towards the river. Plucking a few leaves and thorns, he improvised a cup, entered the river and stood knee-deep in the water. It was indeed refreshingly cool. He leaned forward to fill the cup.

"O weary traveller!" the voice, extremely inviting, surprised Narada. He straightened up and looked at the shore. There stood a beautiful maiden, with a water-filled jar under her arm. "The water there is rather muddy, unfit for drinking. If you care to follow me to my house yonder, I will serve you with clean water," said the maiden, smiling bashfully. She turned and started to walk. Narada followed her. "You can throw away the leaf-cup. We have our tumblers!" the maiden said softly, looking over her shoulder and displaying yet another flash of bewitching smile.

Her parents received Narada with sincere affection and served him a sumptuous lunch and offered a cozy bed for his rest. Narada lay down for a siesta, but soon passed into a slumber. It was evening by the time he woke up. "My son, you still look tired, even though you are relaxed. Besides, it is not safe to travel after dusk. Better pass your night here," proposed the maiden's father. Behind him stood the maiden, reinforcing her father's proposal with a meaningful smile. Narada was only too happy to agree. At night it was the maiden who served him his dinner and who prepared his bed. Narada was overwhelmed.

"My boy," in the morning the maiden's father told him, I've only one child - my daughter. Providence has given me enough. Would you mind marrying my daughter and inheriting my property?" Narada blushed and made no protest. The proposed marriage was duly performed and slowly Narada took over the entire responsibility of his father-in-law's property and establishments. His parents-in-law died in due course. Narada was blessed with children. They grew up, got married and promoted Narada to the position of a grandfather. His days passed through pleasures, sorrows and hopes as normal in the life of everybody else. Once in a while, however, he was beset with melancholy. He felt as if he had forgotten something vital. But before he had the time to concentrate and find out what that was, his attention was diverted to some mundane problem.

One day it began to rain incessantly. At midnight Narada woke up with a jolt. The river was in spate and the embankment had broken, flooding the whole village. In no time parts of his house began to collapse. "Where are you, my husband!" cried out his wife. As Narada plodded through the water and mud in the direction of the voice, his grandchildren's cues were heard: "We are being swept away by the tide, Grandpa." He could also hear the shouts of his sons and daughters. The bewildered Narada groped in the darkness, his heart breaking at his inability to come to anybody's rescue. In the flashes of lightning he had flitting glimpses of his dear ones being carried away by the currents.

"O God!" cried out Narada. That woke him up. In fact, he had dozed off for a second while bending to fill the leaf-cup with water. He returned to Lord Vishnu with the water, but blushing almost to death. "Narada! Did you by any chance take a little more time than a moment?" Vishnu asked while receiving the water. "I understand, my Lord, Maya is that which keeps the souls away from you . . ." "While I wait!" added Vishnu.<sup>7</sup>

The beguiling power of worldly pleasure and comfort cannot be more poignantly portrayed than what has been done through this very simple tale. This represents the warning to those who are serious about the development of their awareness in order to realise, within this lifetime, answers to the questions: "Who am I?", "Whence this world?" and "Is there any purpose in life?" We may have made any number of mistakes in earlier days, even may have committed serious crimes but if once the insight into a higher purpose than bodily pleasure begins to attract our attention, gradually but very definitely, a change will begin to take place in our consciousness.

As Nataraja Guru is the disciple of Sree Narayana Guru,<sup>8</sup> it is fitting that we should

7 Manoj Das, *Tales Told by Mystics*, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 2001, p. 217.

8 Narayana Guru (1854-1928), also seen as Sree Narayana Guru Swami, was a Hindu saint, sadhu and social reformer of India. *Gurudevani*, as he was known by his followers, led a reform movement in Kerala, rejected casteism and promoted new values of spiritual freedom and social equality. As an erudite scholar of the ancient Pali and Sanskrit languages, the Guru gave new insight into the word wisdom of India's Vedic lore and

include here the original verses of Narayana Guru's *Darsana Mala*, Chapter 9, *Yoga Darsana*. We feel strongly too that Chapter 8 *Bhakti Darsana* which prepares the ground for *Yoga Darsana* should be included here.

*Darsan Mala*<sup>9</sup>  
(A Garland of Visions of the Absolute)  
Chapter 8 *Bhakti Darsana*  
(Vision by Contemplation)

I

Bhakti is meditation on the Self,  
because the Self is the source of all Value (ananda).  
A knower-of-the-Self meditates  
by the Self upon the Self, forever.

II

The Absolute is meditated  
because the Absolute is the source of all Value.  
Constant meditation on the Absolute  
is thus known as Bhakti.

III

All meditate the highest Value.  
No one meditates suffering.  
That meditation on the highest Value  
is taught as Bhakti.

IV

The Self alone meditates the Absolute.  
The knower-of-the-Self  
meditates the Self alone, and no other.  
Meditation of the Self is thus called Bhakti.

V

Value, the Self, the Absolute, are said  
to be the names of the One.  
He who has sure awareness of this  
is called a Bhakta.

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Upanishadic profundity. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narayana\\_Guru](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narayana_Guru)

9 Narayana Guru, *Darsana Mala*, A Garland of Visions of the Absolute, translated to English by Nataraja Guru.

VI

"I am Value. I am the Absolute. I am the Self."  
He whose vital imagination  
always takes such forms  
is known as a Bhakta.

VII

The wife does not adore only the husband,  
nor the husband the wife.  
It is the very form of highest Value they adore,  
shining within every sense object.

VIII

Thus, one-who-knows sees not a trace  
of anything other than  
the bliss of the Self anywhere.  
His is truly the highest Bhakti.

IX

Where there is sympathy  
toward the Father of the World, toward one's own Guru,  
toward Father and Mother, toward the Fathers of Wisdom,  
toward those who walk the same path

X

Toward those who put down evil,  
toward those who do good to all – that also is Bhakti.  
But that which pertains to the Supreme Self alone  
is the ultimate Bhakti.

Chapter 9 *Yoga Darsana*<sup>10</sup>  
(Vision by Meditation)

I

That which always unites the mind  
With the reasoning Self, and also gets united with it,

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



And which is of the form of restraint,  
That is praised as Yoga.

II

Where the seer, the sight and the seen  
Are not present, there the heart  
Should be joined, as long as incipient memory-factors (are present);  
Such is Yoga, (says) the knower of Yoga.

III

All this consisting of name-form (knowing)  
As verily the Absolute, the mind ever merges  
In the Absolute; what constitutes such  
As Yoga is ascertained.

IV

That unbroken functioning of reason  
Which in the Self, like a streak of oil,  
Finds incessant joy-such as Yoga  
Is by Yogis recognized.

V

To which or which other (interest) the mind goes  
From that or that other into the Self,  
Ever restraining it, it should be joined;  
In such Yoga here let it be united.

VI

Uprooting those incipient memory- factors of willing,  
The source of all human disasters, (he) who  
Together with their various willed objects  
Restrains in the form of Self (saying),

VII

"What is seen has no existence as such;  
"Thus what is seen is the seer's Self"-  
He among knowers of Yoga  
Is the most superior.

## VIII

When the mind-bee drinking  
Of the nectar-sweetness of Self-bliss  
Is drawn into union with Yoga-breeze  
And does not flutter, (Yoga takes place).

## IX

When meditation with gaze fixed between eye-brows  
And the tongue-tip touching beyond the uvula (takes place)  
Then happens (khecari mudra) that space-freedom attitude  
Of drowsiness and fatigue dispelling capacity.

## X

As of wisdom or action, Yoga in this world  
Is of two kinds; and within these summarily  
The whole of the further elaboration of Yoga  
Is comprised conclusively.

The *Bhagavad Gita* mentions action (practice), knowledge, meditation and finally, renunciation of the benefit of action in a graded series of superior practices. How have we to understand the statement that renunciation of the benefit of action is superior even to knowledge and meditation? The correct understanding of this is that without knowledge and without meditation one cannot transcend the attitude of doing action with the motive of personal benefit. It is the highest practice of yoga to be so absorbed in the Absolute that one loses one's sense of individuality, has no sense of selfishness or personal benefit and simply "performs action according to what is considered as right", in every situation.

Following after the *Darsana on Yoga* (Chapter 9), the *Darsana Mala*, chapter 10 named *Nirvana Darsana* (Vision by Emancipation or Absorption) explains how the *yogi* who has attained Absolutist understanding will behave. Verse 5 of that chapter reads:

Established in the Absolute, a knower of the Absolute,  
By the fire of wisdom having burnt everything up,  
Aiming at the good of the world,  
Performs action according to what is considered as right.

It means that the perfected *Yogi* has no personal benefit motive but as long as there is health and strength in his/her body, s/he will use that force directed at the welfare of humanity and the world. S/he will not engage in anything that is aimed at the benefit for an individual at the expense of another individual, s/he will not engage in action that brings benefit to one, while it brings distress to another. His/her actions could

bring distress to someone who cannot accept this universal attitude but it is for the love of general welfare that sometimes an individual has to suffer.

We have been fortunate once again to discover a very simple tale which illustrates this state of mind very clearly: *The Man Atop the Hill, The Man Midway the Hill and the Climbers*. Two young scholars were climbing the hill. Midway the hill, in a cave, lived a savant. They must meet him. But the savant's cave was not their final goal. The savant had promised to lead them to the top of the hill. There, in a hut lived a sage. They would like to be blessed by him. Two other persons who were climbing the hill at the same time were a shepherd and an old man. The shepherd was leading his flock of sheep and a few pigs. One of his pigs had been injured and it walked with great difficulty. The shepherd thrashed it from time to time to make it move faster. But that only added to the pig's plight. The shepherd too was much troubled on account of that pig. He had to check the speed of the other animals to keep pace with it.

Suddenly the old man asked the shepherd, "Will you let me carry the pig up till you reach your destination?" "What stops you from doing that?" said the shepherd. The old man stopped and lifted the pig on his shoulders and walked on quietly. But one could see that it was not an easy feat for him. The two young men were greatly impressed because he retained his unusually calm and dignified bearing. Of the two young men, one was an adept at reading the thoughts of men. He observed the shepherd who looked at them and smiled meaningfully. The fellow's smile conveyed what he thought of the old man: "There are fools and fools, but there is no fool like an old fool!" The second young man had learnt the art of reading the feelings of animals. He looked at the pig's half-closed eyes. Instantly he knew that the pig had forgotten its trouble. It had no sense of gratitude either. In other words, it felt nothing!

The two scholars reached the savant's cave. When they were relaxed, they narrated the incident to the savant. One of them said, "I wonder if the old man did any good to either the shepherd or even to the pig. The shepherd, in fact, was laughing at him. The pig felt nothing." "And, even if he lessened the difficulty of one of them, he increased his own difficulty in climbing. Objectively speaking, his action was unwarranted, for one had to suffer anyway! The pig's suffering stopped, but the old man suffered!" said the second young man. Replied the savant: "Whoever be the old man, he acted to forestall a future suffering." "Whose?" asked the young men. "His own. He would have remembered the scene and would have suffered from the fact that he did not do anything to assuage the pig's travail, or even the poor shepherd's. He must have been extremely compassionate, a man of delicate conscience," said the savant. The two friends appreciated the savant's observations.

Late in the afternoon they climbed the rest of the hill and reached their last destination. To their great amazement they found that the sage was none other than the old man who had carried the pig. They talked on various issues. But, before taking leave of the

sage, the young seekers could not help asking him, "Sir, what exactly was your motive in carrying the injured pig uphill? Was it to reduce the shepherd's botheration? Was it to relieve the pig of its pain? Or was it to satisfy your own conscience?" The sage blinked at them. He did not remember a thing! The three visitors came out. "What a fool I was to interpret his action even in glowing terms! Does one remember one's breathing process? It just happens!" commented the savant.

We see in this simple tale the perfect illustration of Narayana Guru's verse given above. If *yoga* is something more than an exercise or a fashion, it must be able to influence consciousness which has its ultimate expression in behaviour. As Nataraja Guru wrote about Narayana Guru: "He entered into a permanent state of mind, to reside there, forever." "Established in the Absolute..With mind so firmly attracted to that value that the attraction of worldly objects, pleasures and even the opinion of other people around him/her is of no concern, the yogi is simply "working off" his/her stored up inclination to action, until all such inclination and the energy of an individual body is exhausted. "By the fire of wisdom having burnt everything up ..." By understanding of what is "the Real" and what are only transient interests, the wise wo/ man lets go of the world of sense. "Aiming at the good of the world . . ."With no selfish motive for personal benefit or profit, the wise wo/man continues in the world, for as long as there is energy in the receptacle called a body, merely using his/her stored up energy to create harmony in his/ her environment, without thinking of any reward for oneself.

All wise wo/men have said that the best action is what is aimed at general welfare (*sarvajanik het*). This is the only motive behind the actions of the realised man or woman. He or she continues such activity, regardless of benefit or loss to himself/herself until the impetus to action is worked off or exhausted. When by understanding the term to action has been reached, the *yogi* knows that it is time to direct full attention to the Self within and the outer world will be more thoroughly left behind. Narayana Guru has defined these more exalted states in Chapter 10 of the *Darsana Mala*. Narayana Guru also describes what is the ultimate aim of *yoga*, before the actual passing of the body. However, it has been our intention to clarify the "state of mind" of the active *yogi*, and how such a one, after being "established in the Absolute" but still blessed with health and strength to do something in this world should behave. How such a soul should pass his/her days until it is time to actually leave the body are the point dealt with in verse 5 of Chapter 10 of the *Darsana Mala*.

For purposes of clarification, let us just quote verses 6-10 of Vision by Absorption by Absorption/Emancipation to show where the final stages of *yoga* should lead. These are more exalted states when all impetus to has been thoroughly transcended. Then we will cite some additi verses from *Bhagavad Gita* which deal with the behaviour of one has attained "yogic understanding" but continues to be active in the world.

VI

(He who) renouncing all action,  
Always established in the Absolute,  
Continues the course of the bodily life, wandering  
In the world-(he) is the elect knower of the Absolute.

VII

(He who) being informed by another is able to know,  
But (he) himself does not know  
He is the more elect, who always  
Enjoys absorption in the Absolute.

VIII

(He who) by himself does not know anything,  
And even when made to know (knows) not--  
Such a one, always void of activity,  
The most elect, is the Absolute alone (in itself).

IX

Of this (world) there is certainly nothing to be accepted or rejected;  
As for the Self, it is self-luminous.  
Having understood (thus), one should withdraw (from all functioning);  
Thereafter, function does not repeat (itself).

X

The one Absolute alone there is without a second;  
Nothing else there is, no doubt herein.  
Having thus understood, the well instructed one  
From duality should withdraw; (he) does not return again.

The *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads* are the foundation for all of Narayana Guru's compositions and for Nataraja Guru's extensive commentaries. The question here is, among the millions of devotees of commercialised *yoga*, are there any who are genuinely desirous of losing the "sense of individuality"? Is there anyone who is genuinely interested to abandon all self-will regarding what one experiences and what one gets in this life? To abandon oneself to the will of the Absolute is necessary for the practice of yoga for how else would one transcend the constant concern for one's personal security, comfort and benefit? And until we find the way to lose "sense of

individuality" (*ahambhav*) how could we possibly unite with the Absolute? This is the same as the teachings which we have quoted which explain that the wise wo/man should continue to expend his/her stored energy "aiming at the good of the world" without any concern for personal benefit, trusting to Providence (the Absolute/God) for whatever fruit may or may not come forth as a consequence.

Before closing let us now quote some additional verses from the *Bhagavad Gita* which after all, calls itself a *Yoga Sastra* in the colophon at the end of every chapter. There are chapters which deal with action, reason, wisdom, devotion, contemplation and renunciation. We wish to dwell on some verses from Chapters II, III, V and VI in order to add authority to all which we have presented here.

Engage in activity, O Dhanamjaya (Arjuna) taking your stand on the unitive way (of *yoga*) discarding attachments and capable of regarding both attainment and non-attainment as the same: in sameness consists the unitive way (*yoga*).

Far inferior is the (way of) action to the unitive way of reason, O, Dhanamjaya (Arjuna); Resort to reason for final refuge; Pitiful are they who are benefit-motivated. Affiliated to reason one leaves behind here both meritorious and unmeritorious deeds. Therefore, affiliate yourself to the unitive way (of *yoga*), Yoga is reason in action.<sup>11</sup>

Krishna said:

There are two kinds of disciplines in this world as declared in ancient times by Me, O Sinless One (Arjuna) by the unitive way of wisdom (*jnana yoga*) of the *samkhyas* and by the unitive way of action (*karma yoga*) of the *yogis*.

By refraining from initiating activities a person does not come to have (the attainment of) transcending action (*naishkarmya*) nor can one by renunciation alone come to perfection.

Not even for a single instant can one ever remain engaged in no action at all. By virtue of modalities (*gunas*) bom from nature, all are made to engage in action helplessly.

He who sits controlling the organs of activity while ruminating mentally over items of sensuous interest, such a lost soul is said to be one of spurious conduct.

He, on the other hand, who keeps the senses under control by means of the mind, and then commences unitive activity (*karma yoga*) while still unattached, he excels.

Do engage yourself in action that is necessary; activity is indeed better than

11 Nataraja Guru, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter II, Unitive Reasoning, Verses, 48-50.

non-activity and even the bodily life of yours would not progress satisfactorily through non-action.<sup>12</sup>

But renunciation (*sanyasa*), O Mighty-Armed (Arjuna), non- unitively (without *Yoga*) is full of pain to achieve; (but) one unitively harmonized (*yoga-yuktah*) of subdued ways, without any delay attains the Absolute (*Brahman*).

One affiliated to the unitive way of life, attained to lucidity of Self, one of Self conquest, one who has gained a victory over the senses, whose Self-existence has become the same as the Self-existence of all, though active, is unaffected (thereby).

By the body, by the mind, by intelligence, and even by the senses alone, *yogis* engage in action, abandoning attachment, for (purposes of) purity of Self.

The one of unitive (discipline) (*yuktah*), discarding benefit-motive, attains to ultimate peace; The one of non-unitive discipline being desire-motivated, attached to results, is bound.

He of inward happiness, whose inner life is free and easy, and likewise of inward brilliance, he also of unitive understanding, he having become the Absolute, enters the self-effacement of the Absolute.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, there is no *yoga* for a glutton nor for one who fasts, nor even, O Arjuna, is it either for one who over-sleeps or wakes. To one of proper food (habits) and recreation, who engages in activities in proper moderation, who sleeps and wakes in a well regulated way, *yoga* takes its course painlessly. When the subdued relational mind stays in the Self itself, desire-less of all desires, then (it) is said to be united. As a lamp set in a windless place does not flicker, such a simile is thought of in regard to a *yogi* who has brought under restraint his (relational) mind, (ever) uniting thus in the union of the Self. (That state) where the (relational) mind attains tranquillity, restrained through continued cultivation of a yogic attitude, and where also the Self by the Self in the Self enjoys happiness; that which cognizes the ultimate limit of happiness which can be grasped by reason and goes beyond the senses, and wherein also established, there is no more swerving from the true principle; and which, having obtained, there is no other gain thought of which could be greater (in value), in which when established, there is no swerving even by heavy suffering; that should be known by the name of *yoga*- disaffiliation from the context of suffering.<sup>14</sup>

Such a *yoga* should be adhered to with determination, free from spiritual regret. This

12 Nataraja Guru, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter III, The Unitive Way of Action, Verses, 3-8.

13 Nataraja Guru, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter V, Unitive Action and Renunciation, Verses, 6,7,11,12 and 24.

14 Nataraja Guru, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter VI, Unitive Contemplation, Verses, 16-23.

is the 'state of mind' which can explain Socrates calmly accepting his death sentence, refusing to escape from the prison by deceit and calmly drinking hemlock while his disciples cried. This is the 'state of mind' of Jesus Christ who is so absorbed in his 'divine purpose' that he does not identify with what is being done to his body. It is intense *yoga* which has excluded all that is related to the body and the senses. It is the 'state of mind' of Buddha who knew that his energy had been exhausted in purposeful living and that there was nothing more for him to do on Earth, asking a dear disciple to cook for him what he knew was poisonous mushrooms. A lifetime of living for a purpose which has united all the faculties of the body, mind, intellect and soul in a harmonised effort to be what is thought to be one's own best contribution to the world.

### **Conclusion**

The *yoga* taught by the Gurus Nataraja and Narayana is the intelligent practice of uniting the body with its instinctive faculties with the higher faculties of the reasoning-self and the soul so that all aspects of the psycho-physical entity function together in harmony towards the one purpose which that soul loves to contemplate and for which it lives. The word 'soul' or the *Atma* of Sanskrit psychology is that which encompasses the value appreciation of a particular psycho-physical unit. When we find another person who shares our own value appreciations, we say that we 'love' that person. What is happening is that we are meditating on our own highest value which is expressed by another psycho-physical entity which is outside of ourselves. The 'union' that married people are seeking is best achieved not through the act of sex but by the sublime sharing of commonly appreciated value which is so intense that the sense of individuality is transcended. The ultimate *yoga* happens when all attraction to outside things has been sublimated by the realisation that it is the self alone which is experiencing every kind of bliss and I one then practices the art of making the subject its own object so I that there is no duality between the Knower and the Known.

Some of the other names which have been given to such an attitude are *Ekantika Bhakti Yoga*, *Kaivalya Yoga* or Plotinus, 'The Flight of the Alone to the Alone'.<sup>15</sup> If one is sincere, one must know from the beginning that the 'initiation' into *yoga* is going to take one away from the sensual interests of worldly life. The ultimate question to be answered by any individual who has genuine spiritual longing is: "Who am I?" When we state that naming one's mother and father does not really answer this question, nor does giving registration ; numbers which appear on any official document, we stand in danger of again being accused of being 'challenging'.

Therefore we would like to close with a short excerpt from one more selection from *Tales Told by Mystics*, entitled *Wisdom Through Chanty*.<sup>16</sup>

15 Plotinus, *The Essence of Plotinum, Extracts from the Six Enneads and Porphyry's life of Plotinus*, translated by Stephen Mackenna, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1948.

16 Manoj Das, *Op. Cit.*



The sage was giving a discourse to three young seekers.' You have, without question, accepted certain identities for yourselves. A moment's introspection would show you that such identities were imposed on you. Your first identity is your name. Did you choose your own name? No, it was awarded to you by your parents or some other loving relative. Your second identity is your parentage. But you never chose your parents! Then follow your nationality, your religious faith, your language, etc. None of them is your conscious choice.

Contemplation on the Self will lead to such thinking which will abolish all identification with closed static groups such as castes, religious groups or even nations. If one accomplishes such awareness there will be only one question left in life: "Who am I?" When one finds the answer to that question through the instrumentality of yoga there will be nothing left to do except dedicate one's life energy to the fulfilment of the *svadharma* (one's own proper function) which one will have discovered and the performance of the same, until the life-energy which was placed inside one's body by the Absolute, has been completely returned to the Absolute. The "Flight of the Alone to the Alone" will have been accomplished and one will merge with the Absolute.