

Transcript ~ Guru Yoga

Answers to Questions by Sri Raghavan Iyer

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What is the connection between *Guru Yoga* and *Atma-Vidya*? If *Atma-Vidya* is, you might say, true spiritual knowledge, in which there is no distinction—or let's call it spiritual knowing, or wisdom in which there is no distinction between knower, known, and knowing—how is this connected with *Guru Yoga*? What does *Guru Yoga* mean?

Guru Yoga is a phrase used in Tibetan texts for the science of discipleship: How can an individual relate himself or herself to a guru? And it's a very severe doctrine, because it is stated in the Tibetan texts—and you could see the whole of human life in this way—all bad karma that comes to anyone comes because of abuse of teachers in previous lives. All that is good that comes to any human being comes because of proper attitudes, proper use of what is received from teachers. Because this is based upon a scheme where the archetypal relationship is not the man-woman relationship. In recent centuries in the West, and earlier under the influence of Islam, there was a tremendous overstress upon the man-woman relationship. That is not, in the oldest wisdom, the primary relationship. The primary relationship of all in human life is a teacher-pupil relationship.

Not a single human being can learn how to speak without a teacher. The parent could be a teacher. In addition to the parent, there could be a teacher in the school. And it is extraordinarily sacred, the privilege of learning how to form words and sentences. And every human being's reaction at that primitive, fundamental level is very suggestive of the character that that person has brought over from previous lives. That cannot be explained in terms of environment, it cannot be explained in terms of heredity, it cannot be explained in terms of collective karma. Any mother with several children knows this or senses this, and certainly a teacher who teaches very little children. There is something unique about the response and the reaction of each child. And in that response, there is something that is very pure, something that is selfless, something that is truly based upon

true selfless love, a reaching out. And you might even call it—there is respect, there is reverence.

But there is also, of course, in that reaction something that is false, something that is contrived, something that is perverse, something that is proud, something that is ungrateful, something that is utilitarian. And there is a mix, and that mix is what determines the very tone of voice of the individual, which is, of course, what initially any teacher immediately recognizes: the tone of voice, the light in the aura, the dominant color, the presiding number in reference to a human being. But despite these myriad differences, there is an immense commonality in all human beings' primary reactions. Therefore, in all the ancient Eastern systems, the greatest emphasis is always upon gratitude, reverence for teachers. Gratitude and reverence for teachers is like the very breath of one's being. You violate it and you might as well not be alive in these old Eastern traditions. Once you feel it, then you can extend it. It is instinctive in every human being to feel it towards the mother. It is also instinctive in every human being to feel it towards the father.

It is true in *Kali Yuga*, in the Age of Iron, in the Age of Darkness, there has been a tremendous perversion of what is natural. It is also true that in Atlantean times there was, because of sorcery, a tremendous misuse of human powers. And there you could see that all human beings are burdened by this inheritance, this inheritance of ingratitude, also referred to in the article "Atma-Vidya": the ingratitude of ancient civilizations towards their predecessors. That which worried Herodotus very much, who kept pointing out that the Greeks had much to learn from Egyptians and the Persians; that the Greeks were like beginners in relation to Egyptians and Persians. But in every culture, they are pointing to predecessors, to those who went before. Among many Americans, as a kind of corrective to the shallow conceit of education, it comes in their attitude, which is somewhere very common, towards the American Indians: some kind of respect for people who were there before. And quite apart from the injustice done to them, a feeling of not having learned something, not having really taken advantage of that heritage. So it is innate in all human beings.

Guru Yoga, then, is based positively upon putting to work the magic—the magic of devotion, the magic of true gratitude. When this can become a force that can give fuel to right aspiration, to the energy of aspiration—that which makes you turn upwards, move forwards—it has a tremendous motor power; it motivates you. And this is universally true. How many human beings are there, not even in this society, who cannot do something purely for themselves, but if they respect someone else they can be moved to do it? This is quite natural. But instead of it happening arbitrarily, accidentally, to build a whole human civilization around the principle of true motivation in terms of that which makes you look upwards and forwards. It is as if the Guru is one who is pointing to the sky, to the stars, to that which is beyond. And therefore, to look in the direction where he is pointing becomes a tremendous source of strength. It helps to act as a stimulus to growth. It sustains one in times of trial. And one can always simplify this at the psychological level by saying: Let me follow the advice of *The Voice of the Silence*, which says, “Be like the mango fruit, be like its hard stone towards your own woes, but be like its soft pulp to the woes of others”.

So similarly, be as hard as the stone of the mango in taking credit for what you do. Don't ever do that. Because the more you take it, life will take it all away from you. And think of the pathos after death in *kamaloka*, an orgy of self-justification enormously accentuated by necromantic psychiatry, so-called, in our time. It's very bad. “Do your sighing and whining within yourself,” said Judge—something that the nineteenth century understood. Hold it back. But talk about that which you owe to others. Give credit freely and generously in every direction. And always be aware, like a great musician, at the time when the most beautiful music comes out of your instrument, have the deepest reverence and gratitude for him or her at whose feet you first learnt to play the instrument—all your teachers, all those who went before, all the makers of music. When a person really then makes very deep-rooted this tendency of always giving credit, even where you think you did it, but give it to those who taught you, to someone other than yourself, and take nothing for yourself—when you can make this a state of mind, then you achieve what Keats called “negative capability”. You become very pure in your

receptivity. You have a pure receptivity, not only to the mind, the mind of the master or the mentor, but indeed, to the Universal Mind.

So therefore, you begin to realize what the Hindus always knew as the ultimate shortcut: that if *Atma-Vidya* is so inexhaustible, and if the path to it is so extremely difficult, at the same time potentially it is there in every soul—how will it be released? Just as a human being cannot be born except through conception, through the coming together of a man and a woman, so also there can be no spiritual birth unless a person becomes a *chela* of a guru. And the true gurus are those who manifest the boundlessness in compassion, in strength, in fearlessness, in energy, in wisdom, in truth, in love of the *Atman*. They are unconditional, uncalculating. And therefore, they give and do not take. And they are wholly absorbed in the joy, you might say, the bliss of the infinite ontological resources, and riches, and potential of the *Atman*. They are magnanimous human beings—those who have large minds, large hearts, who are capable of ever extending their love and their sense of fellowship to all that lives, to what is disembodied, to what is unborn. This is an incredible thing.

It is very wise for an individual, even if an individual is lost and alone, is deprived of the possibility of instruction by a teacher—but it's possible to take the teaching, and on the basis of the teaching to generate so great a devotion to the authors of teaching that one establishes a rapport within one's heart and mind to these minds, these Mahatmaic Minds, these Mahatmaic Hearts, to these Souls that embody that teaching. And that is why we often suggest as a systematic method to use in meditation: It is going to be difficult to meditate upon *Sat*, That which is without attributes, though you can take great metaphors like Absolute Abstract Space, Eternal Duration, Eternal Motion, or Perpetual Motion; yes, these help, but you can also meditate, meditate upon the Self-Governed Sage, as characterized in the second chapter of *The Bhagavad-Gita*, which we have every seven weeks given to us by a student on Wednesday. The Self-Governed Sage—Gandhi's favorite passage in *The Gita*, which he had chanted every evening at sunset at his prayer meeting, listened to by thousands upon thousands of people. The beauty of adoration of the excellences, the graces, the *lakshanas* of the Self-Governed Sage.

And you can do this, of course, in a variety of forms. You can do it through the *Tao Te Ching*. You can do it through *The Voice of the Silence*. You can do it by looking at a picture of the Buddha. You can do it by looking at an image of Christ, in a variety of ways. But by this intense devotion to the invisible, hidden perfections of an enlightened being, you can gain great help, great help in moving closer. And that help comes unknown to you, like a kind of grace. It may come in deep sleep. Part of that help may itself take the form of letting you think you did it yourself. So it may come in very mysterious ways. But that help will infallibly come if you continually energize that devotion. So then, of course, there is a very intimate connection between Guru Yoga and *Atma-Vidya*.

In the nineteenth century, when this teaching was first given in the Modern Age, in the West, in the open public forum that it assumed in the *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, the very idea of perfected men was mind-blowing. It was also very exotic, very strange, and Judge found that it was much easier for Americans to grasp the idea than the Europeans. The ideas that there are these extraordinary beings—because somehow it came more naturally to them out of their very universality, and maybe also invited in their very atmosphere in which they lived and grew up. Because of also their contact with these other cultures that have been exploited, but which represented to the early immigrants signs of greatness in self-control, where true greatness lies. That is what was so hard for these others. They had an external concept of strength. But self-control, control over temper, control over pride—this, of course, was quite mind-blowing.

Now of course, a hundred years later, we have reached a point where the idea of wisdom and enlightenment is enormously spread all over the world. In all cultures people are open to the idea, but at the same time, because of a certain desperation, or an escapism, that people bring to this quest, they then, of course, draw, draw to imperfect gurus, pseudo-gurus, or they get involved in the very language which is utilitarian, that caters to results, that like the language of modern education works through bribes and threats. But those who are disillusioned with that and yet do not give up their quest, do find that really what they were doing was making discoveries about their own karma. It was where they were at that attracted them to certain situations. If they are willing to be

more unconditional, and if they seek not so much for themselves hedonistically, but for the sake of suffering humanity, so as to be able to help other human beings, then they will be drawn, they will be somehow brought into the orbit of real gurus, true bodhisattvas—they who are all of one mind, one race, one language, one heart, one lip; they who are all united in the *AUM*; and therefore, who have no visible tokens, no external signs, but whose signs are all in the forehead, in the relation between the centers, and which cannot be known from the outside. It can only be known by the corresponding development of centers within a human being.

So if then a kind of maturation is painfully gained a hundred years after the idea of Mahatmas, how much more then may now be expected in the coming century, and indeed more than the century, the coming millennium, when human beings gain a much greater understanding of karma, and from much earlier on avoid elaborate exaggerations in relation to the world, in relation to success, in relation to wealth, in relation to pleasure, and elaborate rejections, reactions in the opposite direction, but try to go beyond the pairs of opposites fairly early on; and to bring closer together the intuitions of the heart, the intimations of deep sleep, and the questions, the deep questions of the human mind and the human heart in waking life. When they come together faster, and when they come together more decisively, sparks, sparks of insight could fly which can then quicken the contact by individual souls with like-minded souls, and with a teaching that is universal, and which is unsectarian and free, and also bring them into the current, the vibration, the vibration of the true gurus, the true Mahatmas, the true Bodhisattvas, the anonymous teachers of the human race.

And when one is brought into that vibration, whoever the guru, will always lead you to the assembly of all gurus. Will lead you to Mahatmas who themselves are on that plane which is *Mahat*. The *Atman* is the *Shanti Atman*. It is known by many names, beautifully pointed out in the talk. It is also the *Mahat Atman*—that *Atman* which may be seen as Universal Consciousness, as a Divine Mind, the plane on which all the great enlightened beings function, ideate, meditate. This is often shown beautifully in

Buddhist *thangkas*. We have one Buddha, in whom there are many, many Buddhas, Buddhas within Buddhas. What a tremendous thought.

So in other words, you really begin to see that there is a metaphysical richness to this idea of the Fellowship of the Wise, the *Sangha* of the Enlightened, the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas. And therefore, you can use your love of them to increase your love of humanity, because they have total love, unconditional love, of all living beings. So you could, as in the words of Sir Edwin Arnold in *The Light of Asia*, as happened to the Buddha, the greater love could lift the lesser love. So by love—and that is the only way—love of Gurus, Gurus unseen, unknown, Gurus independent of one's own needs and desires, out of that very love, one can fan the very power to recognize one's own potential for love of the human race, and make that love more and more of a force that is unconfined, that is uncalculating, that is free, that is ever-expansive.

So Guru Yoga seen in this way could be seen as, you might say, a shortcut to *Atma-Vidya*. It's a shortcut, but it is also sometimes said to be the most difficult of the paths, because in all the other paths you can afford a degree of self-interest, because you will gradually have to overcome it, and karma will teach you. But in this realm, it doesn't matter if you only have 1% or 5% pure selfless love, but let that be pure and selfless. Because the moment you take to selflessness, it could work in reverse. So it's a very—like all shortcuts, very dangerous, double-edged. You have to make it totally selfless. It doesn't matter if you can only do one thing selflessly, if you can only think at certain moments selflessly, but let it be the real thing, the real goal, and it will increase. Start, like the article says, like the Buddha said, with drops, but let them be pure drops of clear water—pure drops of true selfless love, of true selfless hunger for the truth, true compassion. And these pure drops, however slowly, will add up, will add up, and in time they will become capable of acting as an alchemical solvent, pushing up that which is incompatible, precipitating in karma choices which will force you through self-testing to define yourself, and to declare yourself.

And thereby, at the moment of death, you will have the strength and the satisfaction that what you began in life became assured, unqualified. It became total; it had

something of the completeness, the self-validating total assurance of the *Atman*, a sovereign quality. And therefore, it is the dominant solvent at the moment of death. And that can become extremely powerful in determining what happens after death, and what happens in one's next life. So seeing in this way, of course, it is extremely inspiring to think of the awesomeness and the beauty of this mode, which is the mode of *The Gita*. It is *buddhi-in-bhakti*, intuition-in-devotion, where through devotion, intuition is aroused and something of the bliss, the joy of the *Atman* is experienced.

Humanity cannot afford at this point of time to enter into true spiritual quests with bitterness as a compensation. The time for that is over in history. There were times in history when people were fed up with the world, and therefore entered monastic environments, but they in turn became caught up in the world. No, this time the spiritual life has to be freely chosen, freely chosen out of joy, out of love, and then it will be cheerful, then it will be expansive, then it can be brought into the world. Then the ultimate dualism of the separation between the monastery and the world can be broken. Then the world itself, though very far from even being a habitable place for normal healthy human emotions at the moment, but still could be sanctified and consecrated, leaving it in time to those who know, who also work with a better timetable than usually one has, how to bring about the Garden of Eden, or a Golden Age. It has to be first brought about in consciousness. If it is materialized, it will die. It will have nothing in it of that which is commensurate with the spiritual and psychological development of humanity.

So in this sense, it cannot be a mere harking back to anything in the past, or anything in myth and legend. It must be that which, though out of pain, releases a kind of inner joy, strength, toughness, fearlessness in the darkest of times, and thereby gestates that which is in line with the continuities of evolution. It is in line with the Golden Age in which every little child participates. And it is in line with taking fully into account the immense suffering, the immense pain of all human souls. And it is also in line with the great descent of the Mahatmas through the messenger into the world on a plane where everything can be seen to those who can see the fourteen colors simultaneously, and yet

everything is hidden to those who are caught up in any of the rays of the spectrum. It is both hidden and it is open. This is paradoxical, and this is very appropriate at this time.

So if one kept this in mind in the coming year, one is going to pay less attention to what is visible, less attention to what cries out to be noticed, more attention to that which is hidden, that which is unadvertised, that which is only whispered—whispered in sleep and dream, intimated in the eyes, in the gestures of human beings. One is going to become more detached, more disinterested. One is going to become more of a man or a woman of true meditation. And when one realizes the shift of Uranus into Scorpio—what exoterically is wrongly called Sagittarius, but it is really Scorpio, lasting 'til '88—one is going to go through a long dark period of death, disintegration, decay, and regeneration, rebirth at the same time. Where one has to have very strong nerves. One has to be very cool, courageous, compassionate. Where one has to increase the ratio of the inner to the outer. Where one has to really build strong reserves and resources through meditation, through meditation upon Universal Good, the good of all humanity. So thereby, one can prepare oneself after '88 to be able to find whatever means of service enables one to help in the unraveling that is to come. So we hope that all of you will help individually and collectively in making this coming seventh year a very strong and a very meaningful one in the history of the movement.