

An Exposition of Yoga from Two Vaishnava Sources

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1. Vishnu Purana 6:7:26 — 99

Discourse between the two grandsons of Janaka Khandikya — renown for his works (karma-khanda) and Kesidhvaja renown for spiritual knowledge (atma-vidya).

Kesidhvaja said:—

Listen now to the [teaching] on the real nature of ignorance. The (erroneous) notion that non-self is the self, and the notion that property actually belongs to one, constitute the double seed of the tree of ignorance. The embodied being, enveloped by the darkness of delusion, situated in a body composed of the five elements; space, air, fire, water and earth, confidently asserts, “This is I!” — but who would ascribe essential being to a body in which the Self is distinct from the ether, air, fire, water and earth (of which that body is composed)? Lands, houses and the like exist for the enjoyable use of the body, what intelligent person would say:— “These are mine”? What wise person entertains the idea of possessiveness in regard to sons or grandsons begotten of the body when the Self indeed is bodiless?

Humans perform all acts for purpose of physical utility, and the consequence of such acts is another embodiment; so that their result is nothing but continuation in embodied existence. Just as an adobe house is plastered with clay and water, so the body, which is made of earth, is perpetuated by earth and water (or by eating and drinking). The body, consisting of the five elements, is nourished by substances which are also composed of those elements: but since this is the case, what is there in this life that should be enjoyed?

Roaming through Samsara for many thousands of births, one is wearied by delusion (moha) and is smothered by the dust of desires (vasana). When that dust is washed away by the warm water of true knowledge, then the weariness of delusion sustained by the wayfarer through repeated births is removed. With that weariness relieved, the mind attains peace, and then one obtains that supreme joy (nirvana) which is unequalled and undisturbed. This Self is [of its essential nature] pure, and comprised of bliss and wisdom.

The properties of pain, ignorance, and impurity, are those of Nature (Prakrti), not of Self (Atman). There is no affinity between fire and water, but when water is placed in cauldron over the fire it bubbles and boils, and exhibits the properties of fire. In like manner, when Self is associated with Prakriti it is adulterated by egotism and the rest¹, and assumes the qualities of

¹ Attraction (raga) aversion (dvesha) and clinging (abhinivesha)

grosser nature, although essentially distinct from them, and Incorruptible. Such is the seed of ignorance, as I have explained it to you. There is but only one known cure of suffering (kleshas) — that is the practice of Yoga."

Khandikya said: "Then, O foremost of Yogis explain to me what that is; for among the descendants of Nimi² you are best acquainted with the sacred texts in which it is propounded."

Kesidhwaja replied: "Listen now to the dissertation on Yoga³, which I impart to you, and by perfection in which, the practitioner attains absorption into Brahman, and never separates from It again. The mind is the cause both of bondage and liberation: its addiction to the sense objects is the cause of bondage; renunciation of [attachment to] sense objects is the means of liberation.

The discerning must therefore redirect the attention from sense objects to contemplation upon the Supreme Being in order to attain liberation; for that Supreme Being attracts to Itself the one who meditates upon it, and who is of the same nature:— just as the magnet attracts iron because of some commonality between them.⁴ Yoga is unification with Brahman, effected by the mind which has attained perfection through those specific exercises practiced with self-discipline⁵ (atma-prayatna) and the meditator who has achieved such absolute perfection, is in truth a Yogi, expectant of final liberation from Samsara.

The meditator, when commencing the practice of Yoga is called the *neophyte* (Yogayukta - yogi); when he has attained the goal he is called the *adept* (Yogi), or "the one whose meditations are accomplished" (*vinishpanna-samadhi*). When the neophyte has freed his mind from any obstructing imperfections, Liberation will be obtained after practising Yoga through several

² That is, in the tribe of kings of Mithilla

³ The term Yoga in its literal interpretation signifies "union", "junction" from the root yuj — 'to join.' in a spiritual sense it denotes 'union of individual consciousness with cosmic consciousness' and it signifies the goal as well as the means to that end. In the Bhagavad Gita it is defined in a variety of ways, the performance of religious ceremonies as duty, and not for interested purposes — "perform rites, Dhananjaya, being indifferent to success or failure: such indifference is called Yoga." II. v. 48. It is also defined, as "liberation from the contact of pain". VI. 5:23

⁴ This analogy is however only to a limited extent, explanatory of the goal of Yoga ; for though the magnet and iron unite by virtue of a community of kind yet the union that takes place is only that of contiguity — Samyoga not that of identification or unity — Tadaikyam .

⁵ The first stage is the Atma prayatna, the practice of moral and religious restraint, Yama, Niyama. etc. When the novice is perfect in these then he is becomes qualified for the advanced practices which treatises on the Yoga prescribe. When one becomes perfected in the practice of meditation, then the union with Brahman, which is the consequence, is called Yoga:

The *Atma prayatna* is defined to be that which has Yama & Niyama for its goal. The next phrase — *tat-sapeksha* — is explained as *tad-adhina* — 'depending upon, or relating to mind control. *Mano-gati* is the same as *mano-vrtti* a condition or state of mind which 'perfected' — ie in which the fluctuations have ceased. This is the state of union of the individual jiva with Brahma. (jivatma-brahmaikya-vishayatva

lives.⁶ The adept speedily obtains liberation in this existence [in which perfect samadhi is attained], all one's Karma is consumed by the fire of Yoga.

The meditator who is desirous of seriously practicing Yoga must overcome the desire-nature, and observe [the *yamas*] brahmacharya, non-injury, truth, honesty, and non-grasping⁷: Being constantly mindful of the supreme Brahman one should practise [the *niyamas*] study of the Vedas, purification, contentment, self-discipline, and self-control.⁸ These virtues, respectively termed the five acts of restraint (Yama), and five of obligation (Niyama), bestow excellent rewards when practised for the sake of reward, and eternal liberation when done without being motivated by transient material benefits.

Endowed with these merits, the practitioner, self-restrained should sit in one of the postures termed Bhadrasana,⁹ etc. and engage in contemplation. Through the practice of *Pranayama* the five vital forces called *Pranas*, are brought under control, by repeated practice — this is, as it were, a seed within a seed.¹⁰ In this practice the expiration and inspiration are alternately obstructed, this is the twofold act; and the complete retention of breathing is the third.¹¹

The persistent practice of fixing the attention upon a concrete form of the Divine is called *Alambana*. One then practices *Pratyahara*, which consists in restraining the attention being diverted to external sense impressions like sound and the rest, and directing it inward. By constant practice, control of the vacillating senses can be achieved; if the mind cannot be restrained from indulgence in the sense-impressions the Yogi will not attain the goal. When by *Pranayama* the vital forces are restrained, and the senses are subjugated by *Pratyahara*, then the Yoga practitioner will be able to keep the mind steady in its perfect refuge (subhasraya).

Khandikya then said to Kesidhvaja. — Illustrious sage, pray tell me what is that perfect refuge of the mind, resting on which it overcomes all the afflictive emotions (doshas) which arise within it. To this, Kesidhwaia replied: “The refuge of mind is the Supreme Brahman, which of its own

⁶ After three lives, according to the Vayu Samhita,

⁷ *brahmacharya m ahimsa ca satyasteya-aparigrahan* — these are the five Yamas which relate to personal conduct.

⁸ *svadhyaya shauca santosa tapamsi niyatatmavan* — these are the Niyamas which relate oneself to others. Patanjali has *Isvara-pranidhana* — surrendering to the Lord instead of self-control.

⁹ There are various Asanas in which the Yogi is directed to sit when engaged in meditation.

¹⁰ *Sabijo bija eva ca* — It is itself figuratively the seeds of the fruit which is meditation ; but it is to be accompanied with what is also technically called Bija, or seed inaudible repetition of certain mantras and meditation on the visible form of the deity termed likewise Alambana, and presently mentioned.

¹¹ *Pranayama* is performed by three modifications of breathing: the first is expiration through the right nostril whilst the left is closed with the ring-finger and little finger of the right hand; this is called *Rechaka*: the right nostril is then closed with the thumb and the fingers raised from the left, through which breath is then inhaled ; this is called *Puraka*: in the third act both nostrils are closed, and breathing suspended: this is *Kumbhaka*: this sequence is called *Pranayama*.

nature is twofold: — the supreme (para) being inaccessible to the mind and secondary (para) which is contemplable.¹²

Bhavana or attitude¹³ is of three types. I will explain the different kinds to you: they are, *Brahma-bhavana*, *Karma-bhavana*, and *Ubhaya-bhavana*. That mentality which is “God-centred” is called *brahma-bhavana*; that which is “action-orientated” called *karma-bhavana*; and that which includes both is the *ubhaya-bhavana*: so that mental apprehension (of the object or refuge of the mind) is threefold.¹⁴

Sanandana and other (perfect sages) were endowed with apprehension of the nature of Brahman. The gods and others, whether animate or inanimate, are possessed of that which regards Karma. The apprehension that comprehends both Karma and Brahman exists in Hiranyagarbha (the Creator) and others¹⁵, who have contemplative insight into their own nature, and who also exercise certain active functions, such as creation and the rest [sustentation and transformation of the cosmos].

Until all Karma, which is the root cause of ignorance, is decreased, Brahman and the Cosmos appear different to those who see only difference; but what is called true knowledge, or knowledge of Brahman — which recognises no distinctions, which cognises only unified existence, which is inexpressible — is to be discovered only within one’s own being.

That [realisation] is of the supreme Vishnu, who is the epiphany of the formless (rupam-arupamasya) unborn and undiminishing. The Supreme Being (paramatma) arises from the Universal Form (visvarupat) and is characterised by three primary forms (trairupya-

¹² The Brahman that is without form (Amurta) may be Para or Apara. The formless Absolute is without attributes of any kind (nirguna). Secondary formless Being is invested with the attributes of power, glory, truth, perfection. Being embodied, or with form is the highest state — Vishnu and his manifestations. An inferior or secondary series of bodily forms is Brahma and all other gods.

¹³ *Bhavana* is defined as the act of mental apprehension based upon knowledge. Here it implies in particular the formation of a fixed idea by the Yogi of the object of his contemplations. It is also termed *Bhava-bhavana*. 'apprehension of the being the existence, or substantiality of the objects; the thing contemplated.

¹⁴ Here are being described the three types of innate conceptual tendencies by which everything in the universe is affected. They are:—

1. *Karma - bhavana* — the notion that one is the agent who does the action and experiences the result. All humankind, gods and animals are under this conception.
2. *Brahma - bhavana* — the notion that one is capable of becoming the Brahman or the Supreme Reality. Rishis like Sanandana and others are under this conception.
3. *Ubhaya - bhavana* — the dual conception that one is the agent and can become the Brahman. The creator Brahma suffers from this idea.

These three are also described respectively as (1) fitness to practise Karma Yoga — disinterested action alone, fitness to practise Jñana Yoga — meditation alone and fitness to practise both together.

¹⁵ The Prajapatis or administrative gods who assist Brahma in the creation of the cosmos.

lakshanam)¹⁶. But this [spontaneous] epiphany cannot be realised by neophyte practitioners and they must therefore direct their minds to the concrete form of Hari, which can be perceived by all.

They must meditate upon Him as Hiranyagarbha, as the glorious Vasava, as Prajapati, as the winds, the Vasus, the Rudras, the suns, stars, planets, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Daityas, all the gods and their progenitors, humans, animals, mountains, oceans, rivers, trees, all beings and all sources of beings, all modifications whatever of Nature and its products, whether sentient or insentient, one-footed, two-footed, or many-footed; all these are the many visible forms of Hari to be cognised by the three kinds of apprehension¹⁷.

This entire Cosmos, this transient world of moving and stationary beings, is pervaded by the *Shakti* (energy, force) of Vishnu, who is the Supreme Brahman. This Shakti or Divine Energy [of consciousness] is threefold the transcendent (*para*), that of the embodied being (*kshetraja*) and Spiritual Nescience (*avidya*) also known as karma, is a third type of energy.¹⁸ It is by this Nescience that the embodied jiva is enveloped, and whereby it suffers all the pains of repeated birth in Samsara. Obscured by that energy [of ignorance or delusion], the energy of higher consciousness in embodied jivas is characterised by different degrees of contraction in all beings.

In inanimate beings it exists in a very contracted degree: it is slight in plants that have life, but are [without motion] in insects it is slightly more expanded, and still more in birds; it is more [expanded] in wild animals, and in domestic animals the faculty is still greater: humans have a greater degree of conscious expansion than animals: the faculty exists in an ascending degree in Nagas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Devas, Indra — the King of the gods, Prajapati (the proxy creator) and Hiranyagarbha (the Supreme Creator): and is above all fully expanded in Vishnu of whom all these various creatures are but the body of God, penetrated universally by his energy, as all-Pervading as the ether.

The second form of Vishnu¹⁹ which is to be meditated upon by the (advanced) Yogi is that imperceptible, a-morphic (*arupa*) state of Brahman, which is called by the enlightened ones simply: “That which is” (*sad-iti*) and in which all the before described energies reside. From that proceeds the Universal Form (*visva-rupam*), the other great form of Hari which is the origin of those manifested forms (or incarnations) that are endowed with every kind of energy, and which,

¹⁶ Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

¹⁷ The 3 kinds of apprehension are (1) direct perception (2) inference and (3) report.

¹⁸ The term used throughout is Sakti , 'power,' 'ability, energy.' By the first kind, or *Para* is understood knowledge able to appreciate abstract truth, or the nature of universal Being ; by the second, ability to understand the nature of embodied Jiva ; and by the third, Inability to discern one's own true nature, and reliance on moral or ceremonial merit. These different kinds are called “energies” because they are the energies or faculties of the Supreme Being Vishnu, accompanying the Self in all its various conditions of existence.

¹⁹ The first. which has been described in the foregoing passages, was the universal, visible form of Vishnu . the second is his formless or imperceptible state.

whether they be gods, animals, or humans, are assumed by Hari in his cosmic play. This active decent of the indefinable Godhead, omniscient and irresistible, is for the purpose of benefiting the world, and is not the necessary consequence of Karma.

This Universal Form is to be meditated upon by the Yogi to achieve [mental] purification, as it destroys all sins (kilbisha)²⁰. In the same manner as fire, blazing in the wind, burns dry grass, so Vishnu, seated in the heart, consumes the sins of the Yogi. Therefore let him resolutely strive to focus the mind upon that Ground of all the three energies, for that process is called concentration (Dharana²¹) and is the perfect all encompassing refuge of individual. When that which is beyond the three modes of apprehension, is attained, the Yogi is liberated for all eternity. The minds of other beings, which are not fixed upon that refuge, are altogether impure, and are all the gods and the rest, whose embodiment arises from Karma.

The retention or focussing of the mind on that visible form of Vishnu without regard, to subsidiary forms, is called *Dharana*. I will now describe to you the visible form of Hari, which no mental retention will manifest, except in a mind that is fit to become the receptacle of the image.

The meditator must visualise Vishnu having a joyful and lovely countenance, with eyes like the petal of the lotus, smooth cheeks, and a broad and brilliant forehead ; ears of equal size, the lobes of which are decorated with splendid pendants; a conch-like neck, and a broad chest, on which shines the Srivatsa mark; a beautiful belly with a deep navel; eight long arms, or otherwise four arms; shapely, toned thighs and calves, with well-formed feet and toes. Clad in a yellow robe, wearing a rich crown on his head, and brilliant armlets and bracelets, and bearing in his hands the bow, the conch, the mace, the sword, the discus, the rosary, the lotus, and the arrow.²² The Yogi controlling the thought flow should contemplate thus upon Hari, as long as possible till the concentration becomes intense.

When this image is constantly present in the mind, whether one be lying down, moving or standing, or be engaged in any other voluntary act, then the retention is said to be perfect. The Yogi may then meditate upon the form of Vishnu without the arms holding the conch, mace, discus, and bow and as peaceful and holding only his rosary. When the visualisation of this image is firmly retained, then one may meditate on Vishnu without his crown, bracelets, or other ornaments. He may next contemplate upon him as having a simple normal (human) form fixing one's whole attention upon that.

²⁰ Sin is defined as that which obstructs the vision of the Lord within the heart.

²¹ Retention or holding of the image or idea formed in the mind by contemplation.- from Dhri 'to hold' literally or figuratively.

²² The text actually mentions only 6 —bow, conch, club, sword, discus, rosary.

This process of visualisation of the Deity, excluding all other objects; constitutes *Dhyana* or meditation proper, which is perfected by six stages²³; and when perfect realisation of the Atman free from all concepts, is attained by this process, that is termed *Samadhi*.²⁴

When the Yogi has reached this stage, he acquires insight (*vijñanam*), which enables the *jivatman*, to attain the Supreme Brahman when all the three kinds of apprehension are destroyed. The knowing Self (*kshetrajña*) is the agent which uses the instrument of insight to realise its essential identification with Brahman.²⁵ Liberation (*mukti*), which is the goal, having been accomplished, insight ceases.

When endowed with clear vision of the true nature object of inquiry, then, no difference remains between the individual Atman and supreme Atman: perception of difference is the consequence of the absence of (true) wisdom. When that ignorance which is the cause of the difference between individual and universal Atman is eliminated once and for all, who will ever again make that distinction between them which does not in truth exist?

Thus, in reply to your question, have I, Khandikya, explained to you what is meant by Yoga, both briefly and comprehensively. What else do you wish to hear?

Khandikya replied to Kesidhvaja, and said:— "The explanation which you have given me of the real nature of Yoga has fulfilled all my wishes, and removed all negativity from my mind. The expression "mine" which I have been accustomed to use, is false, and cannot be seriously used by those who know what is to be known. The words "I" and "mine" constitute ignorance; but their use is born out of ignorance. The Ultimate Reality in truth is undefinable, for it cannot be explained in words.

²³ They are. 1. Yama & Niyama acts of restraint and obligation ; 2. Asana — Yoga postures; 3. Pranayama, — regulation of breathing; 4. Pratyahara — withdrawal of the mind from external objects; 5. Bhavana, — apprehension of internal ideas ; 6. Dharana — fixation or retention of those ideas.

²⁴ The result of the *Dhyana* or *Samadhi* is, the absence of all idea of individuality, when the meditator, the meditation, and the object meditated upon, are all considered to be but one. According to the text of Patanjali; 'Restraint of the body, retention of the mind, and meditation, which thence is exclusively confined to one object, is *Dhyana*: the idea of identification with the object of such meditation, so as if devoid of individual nature, is *Samadhi*.

²⁵ The text is very elliptical and obscure. Having stated that embodied spirit (*Kshetrajña*) is the *Karanin*, the possessor or user of the *Karana*, which is insightful knowledge, it adds. *Tena-tasya-tat* literally, 'by that, of that, that'. i.e. *Tat* "that which is" and Brahman, is the attainment of that *jiva* which abides in body by that instrument, or discriminative knowledge, of which it has become possessed through perfect meditation.

2. Garuda Purana 1: Chapter 238

Essence of the Gita

The Lord said:

1. O Partha, the eight components of Yoga are *Yama* (restraint), *Niyama* (observances), *Asana* (Posture), *Pranayama* (breath-control), *Pratyahara* (abstraction), *Dhyana* (meditation), *Dharana* (focus) and *Samadhi* (trance). These are conducive to Liberation.

Yamas

2. **Ahimsa** (non-violence) is the dharma of refraining from inflicting injury upon living beings by actions, thoughts and speech at all times. It accords great happiness.

3. Even an injury inflicted in accordance with Vedic injunctions is also [considered to be] Ahimsa. The eternal Dharma is the telling of truth (**satyam**), the telling of the pleasant. One shall not tell even truths which are unpleasant and untruths which may be pleasant.

4. Seizing of another person's property by stealth or by force is called *Steya* (theft). Not doing it is called **Asteya**. It is Dharma.

5. Avoidance of all sexual intercourse by act, thought and speech in all states, at all times and everywhere is called **Brahmacarya** (celibacy).

6. **Aparigraha** is [defined as] the non-acceptance of commodities from others — even when unsolicited in troubled times, acceptance of gratuity from others should always be avoided.

Niyamas

7. **Sauca** or purification is of two types — the external one by means of earth and water and the internal one by means of positive sentiments and thoughts. **Santosa** (contentment) is the sense of satiety with what is casually secured. It gives everlasting happiness.

8. **Tapas** [austerity] is the focussing of mind and the sense organs. It is also the voluntary drying up of the body by practice of vows such as Krcchra, Candrayana, etc.

9. The learned refer to **Svadyaya** as the chanting of the Upanishads, Sata-Rudriya, Pranava, etc which purify the mind and generate sattva.

10. **Isvara-cintana** is the unflinching devotion to Hari by means of eulogy, constant mindfulness and offerings — by speech, thought and act.

11. **Asana** is the postures such as Svastika, Padma and Ardhasana. **Prana** is the life force within the body. **Ayama** is it's training.

12. O Pandava, the restraint and redirection of the sense organs that stray into their respective objects, is called **Pratyahara**.

13. **Dhyana** (meditation) is the contemplation of Brahman with or without form (murta-amurta), at the beginning of the practice of Yoga, Hari can be meditated upon as either having form or formless.

14. The deity of Vayu must be contemplated upon situated in the middle of the Agni Mandala. The four armed deity (Vishnu) must be visualised upon bearing Sankha, Cakra, Gada and Padma and also as having Kaustubha.

15. Endowed with Kaustubha and a garland of wild flowers (Vanamala) I'm known as Brahman. This practice is called **Dharana** because the deity is retained in the mind which becomes absorbed thereby.

16. The state in which one has the realisation — "I am Brahman" is called **Samadhi**. Liberation is obtained through the insight generated by the Vedic statement — "I am Brahman" [aham brahma-smi]. The two words 'I' and 'Brahman' must be taken to mean the implied sense and the feeling of identity realised.

