

Purpose, Method, and Policy of this Work

Part 12 of 15

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The present discussion will be upon the subject of the five *Koshas* and the five yogas. When I was waiting in my study preliminary to delivering the tape for last Sunday, a thought correlating the five *Koshas* with five specific yogas came to my mind, and I gave extemporaneously a brief outline of this thought before turning to the tape for the day. The thought has developed further, and I propose to present perhaps a full tape or so upon this subject. I shall repeat the material.

In the Hindu religious philosophy and psychology, there are presented five *Koshas*, or sheaths, which are interpreted as covering the real entity, which in the system of Shankara is identified as *Atman*. These *Koshas*, or sheaths, are as follows moving from the lowest level upward: first, the *Sthula Kosha*, or the physical body sheath; second, the *Prana Kosha*, or the vital body; third the *Mano Kosha*, or the sense-mind sheath; then the *Buddhic Kosha*, or the intellectual mind sheath, or that which I commonly call the conceptual function; then fifth, the *Ananda Kosha*, or the bliss sheath. There are thus five sheaths which are viewed as covering the real entity.

It came to my mind that these five sheaths made a reasonable correlation with five forms of yoga. Corresponding to the physical body there would be *karma* yoga, or the yoga of action; corresponding to the vital vehicle there would be *bhakti* yoga, or the yoga of devotion; corresponding to the sense-mind there would be the *raja* yoga; and corresponding to *Buddhi*, or the intellect, or the conceptual power in man, there would be the *Buddhic* sheath; and fifth, corresponding to the principle of delight, the element of joy, which is the activating factor in the motivation of all creatures, there would be the yoga of the Great Renunciation, or that which is called the *Arya* yoga in *The Voice of the Silence*. There is a correction or addition to be made. Corresponding to the *Buddhic* sheath the yoga is *jnana* yoga, the yoga associated most strongly with the name of Shankara.

We shall consider first *karma* yoga. The principles governing in *karma* yoga may be listed as three in number: to act and yet renounce the fruits of action; second, to be of equal attitude with respect to success and failure; and third, ultimately, to renounce even the actions themselves, regarding them not as my possession but as belonging to that which rules from on high. The quality or attitude most strongly identified with this yoga is that which is called fortitude—the capacity to meet all vicissitudes and successes with an equal mind, to accept all, even though there is much loss, without lamentation, without strong excess of feeling, and likewise to treat success, even great success, without extreme jubilation. Naturally one feels loss and one feels a certain joy with success, but that to be avoided is an excess of these feelings, to move with equal attitude at all times as far as is possible.

The practicing of this yoga does not require the withdrawal from the affairs of daily life and the entering into a monastery or a hermitage. The very affairs of life itself become the instruments of the yoga. One may be a worker, an employee of others; one may be a manager; one may be an owner who hires the managers and the employees, and in the midst of this functioning he makes of it a form of yoga by his attitude towards the performance of the tasks that come to him. Or on another level, one may take the tasks of domestic life and make of them instruments that advance him on the path of yoga. It's a matter of attitude in the performance of these tasks.

Now, since part of the attitude is that of looking upon success or failure in the performance of one's labors with an equal eye or an equal attitude, one could give to this yoga a mistaken interpretation. One could think this way: that since I am to look upon success and failure with an equal eye, it does not matter, therefore, whether I succeed in this task upon which I am employed since success and failure are to be looked upon with an equal eye. But that would be a very grave *tamasic* mistake. The *karma* yogin should seek to achieve his objectives with all of his best thought and endeavor. He should aim at success in that endeavor with all of his capacities; but, after giving all that he can give, with all the efficiency which he can command and all of the judgment which he may bring to bear upon his work, then if it emerges in success or in failure, then he looks upon the two in a detached way—learns from them. He should learn from his failures that which he may have done wrong, and thus learn to avoid future mistakes of the same kind. And if success comes, he should avoid becoming puffed up or inflated or gloat upon it; but rather view this as an approval of what he has done, but go on to further achievement building upon the foundation of that success. This is no place for weaklings. It calls for strength.

The practice of *karma* yoga affords an excellent opportunity for gaining the power of concentration. The aim in all work should be this: to know everything that is relevant to the task at hand and to be unconscious of everything that is not relevant to that task; in other words, eliminate idle thoughts that are not relevant, wishes, or engage in emoting while engaged in the task. Know only what is being performed, but have this concentration extended to everything that is relevant to what is being performed but no further than that. One can make a simple operation like that of washing dishes an excellent way of building this power of concentration. Be aware only of the particular dish one is washing at the time he is washing it, then when he picks up another dish to seek to be aware only of that dish while he is washing it, and so on through all the steps of the process. This is not easy, but this is an extremely important power which becomes an enormous aid in the more advanced stages of yogic development.

In the beginning stages of this yoga, one has a right to the actions which he chooses to perform, but renounces the fruits of the action. He acts because he has determined that this action is that which should be done. Then with concentration, he performs that action being unconcerned about that which he may receive as a fruit of the action, to renounce this as his own personal claim; in other words, to offer it up to the higher power. Now, the higher power may dispense to him positive fruits, and that he should receive gratefully. On the other hand, the higher power may deny him those fruits, which is governed by a wisdom that may be inscrutable to the practitioner. He does not work for pay. He does not work for a crop of fruit or other food production. He does not

work to have the particular object as a possession upon which he is working. He works because it should be done in an impersonal attitude and leaves the fruits of that work to the action of the Good Law. To be sure, pay may come to him because of his working, but his attitude should be that he does not work for pay. He works to produce that which has been assigned to him to do and leaves the pay to the higher power. This is a very different attitude from that which generally governs in the world, yet though the pay, the fruit, is renounced, he may well find that indeed he achieves better compensation than would have been his with a different attitude.

The principle in the whole constitution of man which is most particularly developed in *karma* yoga is the principle of will, the principle which is implied in all action whatsoever, the principle of determination to perform, to produce, to create, to manifest. This is of fundamental importance in all yoga, but here in *karma* yoga we have the discipline best adapted for its development.

The third rule governing the performance of the discipline of *karma* yoga is that of renunciation of the action itself. This belongs to a more advanced phase of *karma* yoga. In the beginning, one has a right to his actions, but not a right to the fruits of action; but, ultimately, he forfeits the right to the actions themselves. What this means is that in the beginning the actions are determined egoistically, but in the end they are determined by some other principle, something which will appear to him as a spontaneous principle. This spontaneity is not the action of the ego, but the action of the higher power, which in the last analysis is the true reality of himself, but which in the beginning appears other than himself. The higher power in the end is that which acts through him. The actions, therefore, are not those of a given personality, of a Mr. A or a Mrs. B, but the action of the supreme power which ultimately rules in all things.

The particular *sutra* or yogic manual which is perhaps the most perfectly developed for the yogin of works is that of the *Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna gives instructions to Arjuna as to his relationship to the battle which lies before him. Arjuna is told to do his very best in the cause which he represents and not to be downhearted because he finds friends in the forces aligned against him. His is to do the duty that lies before him whether successfully accomplished or not, to leave the consequences of his action to the Good Law. So I recommend for all those who practice the yoga of action to read, to meditate upon, and to saturate themselves with the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is true that the *Bhagavad Gita* refers to other yogic forms, namely, that of knowledge and that of devotion, but the vast mass of the material in this manual is devoted to the principles of *karma* yoga.

We come next to the consideration of the vital sheath and the yoga which seems best correlated with it, namely, *bhakti* yoga, or the yoga of devotion. The vital sheath consists of the life principle and its vehicle. It is the force that makes the living machine, the body, the organism, function. But it is more than just a simple raw force. It carries with it a number of qualities, namely, the various affections. Examples of these affections, in both their positive and negative aspects, are as follows: love and hate, peace and anger, aggression and submission. Of these, the outstanding quality is that which we call love. It is the basis of the prime motivation which leads to our endeavors and searchings in this life. Concerning these qualities it may be said that they manifest in a lower and a higher form. It is in the lower form that they are associated with the life

principle. They also have their higher correspondences. Thus, for example, the ordinary love of men which leads to the fulfillment of the biological purposes of life has also at a higher level the compassion of the Buddha.

The quality of love is the one which most concerns us here. In its normal manifestation it is a relationship between person and person, but when it reaches the level of the guiding principle in yoga, it is the principle of devotion to the higher power or that which I have called the “transcendental component.” But with the *bhakti* particularly, this component appears as and manifests as a personal principle, and is commonly called by one of the various names of the deity: God, Allah, Brahman, Ishvara, or whatnot. The qualities most strongly associated with the *bhakti* yoga are devotion, self-giving, surrender, and sacrifice. The *bhakti* seeks not merely to realize the divinity, but to give himself completely over to that divinity. It is the surrender of determination by the personal ego that is here most emphasized, and the complete acceptance of the governance of the divinity. Those who aim at the goal of being a bambino in the arms of God are true representatives of the spirit governing in *bhakti* yoga. This yoga is not governed by rules that are laid down formally, but is of all yogas the most spontaneous. It is as though the process employed by the aspirant arises into his consciousness spontaneously. He is, before all things, the lover of the supreme beloved. And in surrendering himself, he would rather be handled roughly by that supreme beloved than to be separated from that divine one. It is a spirit that is more typical of the feminine side of humanity than of the masculine, although some of the great *bhaktis* of history have been men—Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, among others, arise in my memory.

Whereas in the practice of *karma* yoga the *sadhaka* may choose to follow this way without the aid of a guru making use of the actions of life as the instruments of the yoga, in contrast, the *bhakti* yoga is preeminently oriented to the guru. Those who are inclined to lay themselves down at the feet of the guru, to kneel before him, or prostrate themselves before him, or to be oriented to the feet of Krishna, as it were, are characteristic of the *bhakti* practice.

Since the guru occupies a position of especial importance in this particular yoga, this would seem a good time to say something about the office and the attitude of the guru. Nobody who is wise would ever seek to set himself up as a guru. There are those who do this, it is true, but in the last analysis they are foolish. One who is wise does not seek to become a guru, but he rather has the experience of guruship being forced upon him. A guru is one who has a special spiritual capacity. Aurobindo says he may not be a man or woman of lofty Realization, but simply has a certain spiritual capacity which the aspirant has recognized, and by taking the true attitude and relationship towards the guru, the aspirant can make use of him for affecting his own progress on the way. There are those who have attained a kind of Buddhahood who reject the offering or the acceptance of this service to the *sadhakas*. They are called the *Pratyeka* Buddhas, and are regarded by many as spiritually selfish. If one finds himself in the position where the *sadhaka* treats him as a guru, it becomes a spiritual responsibility to accept the office.

There is a story in the literature concerning Dilip Kumar Roy. He had an especial influence upon a certain feminine *chela*, who became known later as Indira Devi. When he sang, she went into a state of *savikalpa samadhi*, and she insisted of becoming a *chela* of Dilip Kumar Roy. But Dilip did not think, so the account goes, that he was fit to be a

guru for anyone and took up the matter with his own guru, who was Sri Aurobindo. And Sri Aurobindo told him he had to accept the *chela* and function as her guru. It is a duty to accept the office if it thrust upon you, but it is a grave mistake to set oneself up as a spiritual teacher. This is not ordinary professionalism.

If one happens to be bearing the requisite spiritual capacity which is recognized by some aspirant and that aspirant drops on his or her knees before him or prostrates himself, the one who bears the spiritual capacity should realize that he is not so much a surrogate for God as a catalyst whereby the aspirant meets the divinity; and the effect tends to be not one of causing an inflation, but rather a state of authentic and real humility, for one realizes the aspirant is not kneeling to him or prostrated before him because of his human personality, but because of that which he bears to the aspirant. He should give a blessing.

As an illustration of the power of *bhakti* devotion there is a story which I once read or heard which is to be found in the literature. I cannot vouch for the truth of this story, it may even be apocryphal, but it illustrates the point. It is said that there once was a sage on the dark way, namely, one who belonged to the Brothers of the Shadow and had gained certain powers, one of which was very rare. There was a certain feminine *sadhaka* who was drawn to him and she became his disciple. She became a nearly perfect, if not completely perfect, *bhakti*, obeying him in all things, with the result that the guru repented of the path that he had chosen and sought to be redeemed and to correct that which he had done wrong. He ultimately met Brothers of the Noble Path and they accepted him. They saw with their wisdom that a rare power which this one had attained and which they did not have would be of use at a future time in the world, so they set the condition that he should be placed in a state of cold storage, as it were, a state of suspended animation, until the time should arrive when this power could be of great use. He accepted the condition and was redeemed. This illustrates the power of pure, unconditional devotion. Let no one underestimate it.

A final word about the meaning of sacrifice. Ordinarily we think of sacrifice as being a forgoing, a giving up, a renouncing. That is one aspect of sacrifice as it is commonly understood, but it's not the real meaning. The real meaning—and this is something that can be found in the dictionary—is rendering sacred. It is a lofty function.

I shall say a little more on the subject of *bhakti* yoga before we pass on to a consideration of the third form, namely, the *raja* yoga associated with the sense-mind sheath. In *bhakti* yoga we have the use of certain attitudes on the part of the *sadhaka* in the form of ritual, ceremony, rite, and genuflection. It is thus this yoga which has the strongest religious cast of all. There are other yogas that are very austere that may lead one to seek Enlightenment through life in a cave without making any provisions for one's sustenance, depending entirely upon the circumstance that food may be brought to him, or the other necessities of life may be provided. *Bhakti* yoga, thus, is highly religious. It does not necessarily have any philosophical orientation at all, or anything like a scientific attitude. It may be the expression of a purely devotional spirit.

To illustrate something of the way of the *bhakti* yoga, I shall report from memory as best I can certain accounts in the biography of Sri Ramakrishna. As a young aspirant he was strongly oriented to the *bhakti* pattern. He had the free access to a certain temple,

and there he worshipped before a stone image of the Mother. He seemed to be constantly oriented to her, entering into conversation with her. Now, to the external observer it would seem that he was behaving in a very eccentric way before a stone image, but to him it was not a stone image, but a living Presence with the Divine Mother with whom he communicated. He was, as it were, simply a bambino in a relationship of deep affection or devotion to the Mother. It is said that when he ate his lunch, he would lift up a portion of the food offering it to the Mother, which to the external eye seemed to be a stone statue, but which to him was a living Presence. Now, a psychiatrist would probably say he was simply crazy, but fortunately the priests of the temple understood otherwise and he was allowed to go his way. This kept up for some time.

Now, a day arrived when a certain one whose name, as I remember it, was Totapuri, or the naked one, came to this temple. This Totapuri had been a severe ascetic *jnani*, and after 40 years of endeavor had succeeded in making a breakthrough. He had decided to go about the country to find, if possible, someone who might be interested in following the yogic path. He came upon Ramakrishna and saw at once that here was a potentially very important aspirant. He offered to Ramakrishna to initiate him into the *jnani* path. Ramakrishna said, "I will ask my Mother if I should do this." This somewhat disgusted Totapuri since Totapuri thought that Ramakrishna was referring to his earthly mother and by this time he had reached the age of manhood and should have been more independent. But he soon found out what Ramakrishna meant. Ramakrishna, so the story goes, got the permission to accept this initiation. Totapuri for some time gave instructions and directions, outlined practices, and so forth, but was not making any particular headway. Then one day when he was giving instruction to his new aspirant, he picked up a stone and pressed it heavily on Ramakrishna's forehead over the region of *ajna*, and then Ramakrishna made the breakthrough. He saw his Mother dissolved into pieces and he wept bitterly; but he went through and ultimately achieved the objective of *jnana* yoga. It is said of Ramakrishna that he went over many paths as outlined by various religions and quickly mastered all of them. He has been viewed as an *avataral* descent.

Bhakti yoga is said to be dualistic and does not achieve the position of the *Advaita* state or that of Nondualism, for *bhakti* yoga depends upon a relationship between a devotee and some form or appearance of the divinity. It achieves the delight of this relationship, and there may be resistance on the part of a *bhakta* to go beyond this state. Sri Aurobindo mentions a famous *bhakta* of the past who so preferred this state of relationship that he said in rather crude terms, "I want to eat sugar; I do not want to be sugar."¹ In other words, he did not seek identity with the divinity, to reach the position where he could say, "I am Brahman," or "I am God," which is a true state in the *Advaita* form of Realization—not to be understood in the sense of an egoistic exaltation, for it always implies, so art thou. So is every other creature in this universe. There is none other than Brahman, none other than the Root Principle in this universe. All is he, that is the Realization of the *jnani*; but it is not that of the *bhakti*, and this typical *bhakti* referred to by Aurobindo preferred the relationship than the state of ultimate identity. That would express the limitation of this form of yoga taken by itself. But yoga is in many forms, and

¹ Ramakrishna often said, "I don't want to become sugar, I like to eat it. I never feel like saying, 'I am Brahman.' I say, 'You are my Bhagavan and I Your servant.'"

he who travels all the way will pass through all the stages represented by the different yogas. It is part of the whole. Devotedness, the intensity involved in a full devotion, is necessary for the ultimate attainment.