

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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Q. Does a study of the arts have any Yogic value?

A. Music and art appeal mainly to the emotions, or the soul and the heart, and so are especially correlated to Bhakti Yoga, the path of the heart, love or devotion. Jnana Yoga, the path of knowledge and wisdom, is especially difficult for most people, that of devotion and love somewhat easier. But in all lives there are times when it is difficult to love, and in a strife-torn world where love is so needed it is often necessary to make a conscious effort not to hate.

Here then is an important function of arts, especially music. Who has not felt its impact? The beauty of motion in a ballet can move one to tears; to gaze on beautiful surroundings is a joy, and ugliness can readily depress us. Music can change a bad mood to serene one. It rests the weary, soothes the broken-hearted, raises out of despair, melts hard hearts, dissolves hate and anger and transmutes them to love and kindness. Leadenness, through the catalyst music, turns to ecstasy. Yet not all music is good. Some exalts and some drags down, deadens the finer senses and stirs the baser emotions, and here is where it is important to learn discrimination. Music works mostly through the subconscious, through a medium other than reason and refines the Being in a way that reason cannot, and brings beauty, a facet of Divinity, into one's life.

For the heart-side of music one does not have to study but study does enrich its value tenfold. But there is very great value in the serious study of music that correlates with the Wisdom or Jnana Path much more than the average person realizes. Great art requires something more than mere feeling. To produce great music, which is perhaps the highest of the arts, very exacting disciplines are required which are essentially of the order of Jnana Yoga. A mental, reasoning process must enter in, whether in the process of creating or performing the music. One may be rich in inspiration but he still must prepare the instrument and develop the skill to bring that inspiration through.

It is not necessary to make of music a career or aspire to the concert stage although these attainments do offer added benefits. If one fails at such attainment (and actually most promising students do because too much is demanded of them), all is certainly not lost. One reason the value of music study is greater than most other studies is the fact that there is no ceiling on learning. One never learns all or quite reaches perfection, only approaches it. Perhaps the same may be said about a few other subjects, as the sciences, but music study is demanding in several ways and in the process develops more useful by-products apart from just learning the music, qualities that should become a more permanent part of the student. These by-products include: development of a high sensitivity, discrimination, imagination, understanding, reason, patience, coordination, self-discipline, self-confidence, self-mastery, a love of beauty, etc. Music is a mind trainer.

One can and should learn to listen to music intellectually as well as emotionally. He may learn how to manufacture a musical climax or a device to convey tragedy, such as Beethoven's use of diminished seventh chords, and the psychology and physics of tonal systems. All this brings about greater understanding and appreciation so long as one does not miss the forest for the trees, and miss the primary aim of music, which is to exalt. He who is both performer or creator and lover of fine music combines the Bhakti and the Jnana Paths and reaps a double harvest.