

Cultivating Moral Values through Yoga

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Abstract:

Moral values are closely integrated with human life. They are intertwined with our day to day chores. No human life is possible without value. It's really values which make an individual valuable in the real sense. Even a fully dry and waterless river looks like a river. But is such a river of any use? A river is of great use only when it is ever flowing with water. Likewise a person becomes human in real sense only when he has imbibed basic human values within himself. Needless to say that moral value plays a pivotal role in the holistic development of an individual. While a person having moral values creates peace, harmony for himself and society, a person without moral values creates panic and chaos for himself and society as well. The present research paper basically explores how moral values can be cultivated within an individual through the practice of yoga.

Key words: Moral values, individual, yoga, holistic, development etc.

Introduction

No doubt, technological excellence in the new millennium has made our life more comfortable and luxurious. But it is equally true that we have lost the moral and spiritual realms. And it has in turn given birth to several inhuman and immoral activities in personal and social life. Various evils like violence, crime, corruption, dishonesty, hatred, jealousy, lust, greed, anger etc. are the result of degeneration of human values. Man probed the mysteries of the universe but ignored the mystery of his own self. From necessities he moved to comforts and from comforts to luxuries in forgetting the supreme source of comfort and bliss. The man, therefore, becomes the victim of tremendous stress and strain that, in fact, leads towards various physical and mental problems. The net result is that a strongly individualistic and materialistic culture has taken birth, which promotes self-aggrandizement, nurtures opportunism and chicanery, and generates tension in society. The erosion of human values of truth, co-operation, non-violence, peace,

love, and respect for parents, elders, authority and hard work is leading to the decay of moral and social fabric of society at a speed never witnessed in the history of civilization. Our stress is too much on standards of living and not on standards of life. Thus the problem of decaying values extends to the whole range of human activities. The Indian culture is deeply rooted in spiritual and ethical values. Philosophers and educationists over the ages have identified goodness, truth and beauty as an ultimate value, which do not change fundamentally from generation to generation, society to society and culture to culture. The humane values such as honesty, tolerance, justice, self-control, compassion, freedom etc. enable man for self-control than other animal, so that he cultivates certain ideals, which are available in plenty in our rich cultural heritage. In fact, Gyan yoga, Karma-yoga and Bhakti yoga lead to wisdom and proper spiritual development that makes individuals to understand real values in human. The Indian concept of education is more inclined towards spiritual

development, receiving knowledge and disciplining the mind as well. Swami Vivekananda viewed education as “manifestation of divine perfection already existing in man.”¹ He said, we want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, and the intellect expounded and by which one can stand on one’s own feet². In the light of the above goal of education, it becomes relevant to assign the role to Yoga to fulfill this goal. Yoga, the ancient treasure of our nation has stood the test of time. The various definitions of Yoga, -Samatvam yoga uchyate,³ *Yogah Karmasu Kausalam*,⁴ *Yogascittavritti Nirodhah*,⁵ etc. teach us- What we should derive from life; and What should we give to others. In modern time, the education is much inclined towards Western bent of “Learn only to earn.” But education can’t become only the source to livelihood, because human life has more precious and gracious purpose. The value-based education leads us steadily towards that purpose. The basic Sanskaras of Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Aparigraha, and Bramhamacharya form the foundation of values, which are the part of Ashtanga Yoga. The Yama- Niyama concept, if deeply cultivated and inculcated within an individual from his very childhood would mold the soil to the desired shape at the right time. The Asanas, Pranayamas, Kriyas, Bandhas, Mudras are not only beneficial for body but also for the mind. The healthy mind resides in healthy body. When integration of body, mind and spirit is achieved, one’s personality blossoms. The number of such personalities can be created with the help of Yoga education and yoga practice.⁶

Meaning and importance of Value

Moral values have been employed in so distinctively different ways in human discourse. It is often said that a person has a value or an object has a value. These two usages have been explicitly recognized by writers in various disciplines such as Charles Morris in Philosophy, Brewster

Smith in Psychology and Robin Williams in Sociology. If one wants to know the origin of the term ‘VALUE’, it may be stated very firmly that the term ‘VALUE’ comes from the Latin word ‘VALERE’ which means ‘to be of worth’. Whereas, the concise Oxford Dictionary defines the term VALUE’ as the ‘worth, desirability or utility of a thing’. In fact, it is difficult to define values, for they are as comprehensive in a nature as our human life. Somewhere, some other dictionary states that Value is that which renders anything useful, worthy or estimable. It is price, worth or importance of a thing’. Value is “a concept explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristics of a group of those desirable traits which influence the selection from available modes and ends of action. “In fact, value is an abstract term which is commonly regarded as an economic conception. In the words of John Dewey, “Value means primarily, to price, to esteem, to appraise, to estimate. It means the act of cherishing something holding it dear and also, the act of passing judgment upon the nature and amount of its value as compared with something else, “According to Rokeach, “Value is an enduring belief, a specific mode of conduct or an end state of existence, along a continuum of relative importance. “Values are part and parcel of human life. Without basic human values like truth, love, compassion, honesty, sensation we can’t imagine of a successful and blissful human life. The guiding social aims and beliefs which are regarded as the important aspects of a culture, then, the different aspects of culture are also ‘valued’ by the people; and the ideas lying behind which they think worthwhile, are called as VALUES. A value is a preference as well as conception of the preferable. According to Kluckhohn a value is a conception of the desirable and not something “merely desired”. Values are defined as something which are desirable and worthy of esteem for their own sake. Human values are

defined as those values which help man to live in harmony with the world. Values that may be included in the general definition of human values are love, brotherhood, respect for others — including plants and animals — honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, non-violence, gratitude, tolerance, a sense of responsibility, cooperation, self-reliance, secularism and internationalism. In spite of the definitions quoted so far, one more definition still remains and it is of the eminent sociologist Prof. R. K. Mukerjee, who defines ‘value’ as follows — “Values are socially approved desires and goals that are internalized through the process of conditioning, learning or socialization and aspirations.”

The sociologists are concerned with the questions like value-diversity, value-clashes, value-tensions, value-conflicts, social change, socialization, innovations, modernization and preferred futures. The legitimacy of the sociologists’ involvement is based on the task of examining the social relations and processes as valuation phenomena. According to Shaver, “Values are standards and principles of judging worth. They are a criteria by which we judge things — people, objects, actions, ideas and situations — to be good, worthwhile, desirable or on the other hand, worthless, despicable, undesirable or somewhere in between these two extremes”.⁷

We can generally observe that there is a decline in the basic human values of compassion, generosity, sharing and caring, trust, patience, perseverance, dignity and humility etc... We are born with these human values. They are the hallmark of human evolution and the basis of a peaceful and prosperous world.⁸

The concepts of morality, ethics, duty, honesty, sincerity, kindness and compassion should be imparted to each person. Each person should know how to

adjust with others and be prepared to sacrifice his whims and pleasures for the benefit of the group or family so as to avoid conflict and live in harmony. Individuals who are living engrossed in sensory engagement cannot understand the detrimental results of their own actions. It is the responsibility of elders and enlightened people the best way of life, and then disseminates the knowledge through all available media. Such a planned method of living should be inculcated as a holistic education in all institutions to truly civilize all people, whatever may be their other fields of study. According to Martin Luther King “The prosperity of a country depends not on the abundance of its revenues, not on the strength of its fortifications, nor on the beauty of its public buildings; but on its cultivated citizens, in its men of education, enlightenment and character.”⁹

Role of yoga in cultivating and inculcating moral values

The word ‘Yoga’ is derived from Sanskrit word ‘Yuj’ which means ‘to join. The first use of the root word yoga is in hymn 5.81.1 of the Rigveda where it has been interpreted as yoke or yogic control.¹⁰ The earliest evidence of yogis and yoga tradition is found in the kesin¹¹ hymn 10.136 and 10.136.3 of the Rigveda.¹² According to Maharshi Patanjali “*Yogascha Chittavrittinirodhah*” i.e., yoga brings complete cessation of modification mind. Rishi Yagyavalkya has defined it “*Jivatmaparatmanoyogoyoga*” i.e., the union of the individual soul with the supreme soul. Maharshi Vyas defines it as “*Yogahsamadhi*” i.e. Yoga is trance. Samadhi shows integration. Internal integration of a person is the motto of Yoga. Samadhi or self-realization is the ultimate goal of yoga. We can attain balance at physical, mental and spiritual level through Yoga. The part of aphorism “*Chittavrittinirodhah*” of Patanjali states that unless ‘chitta’ is stable, a person cannot be integrated. This concept of Yoga

is the nearer to 'Samadhi'. It means stability of 'chitta' is possible due to the stability of mind and body. In fact, our 'Karmas' are closely related with stability of chitta. To reach this stage Maharshi Patanjali has suggested 'Astangayoga' i.e., eight-fold Yoga viz., Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Here five steps are external and three are internal. The word yoga (or its variations) occurs in katha, Brhadaranyaka, Maitrayani, Svetasvatara Upanishads etc. To discover, to know, to realize oneself, one's true nature. This is what Maharshi Patanjali says in Yoga sutra-1/3: *Tada drastuhsvarupevasthanam* i.e. then the seer is established in his own real nature.¹³ Thus Yoga is the awakener. Values are the by-products of this awakening. Spirituality is the source, Yoga is the way and Values are the flowers.

It is a common belief in Indian culture that moral values should be instilled right from the very childhood. It is believed that, as the persons grow older the character traits start to show marks of yoga. Persons behave in a more refined and intellectually improved manner. The yogic activities make them exercise self-control and self-discipline in their day to day life. The society becomes a better place as there is enrichment of moral values and prosperity for all. YOGA is thus believed to be the catalyst to cultivate and inculcate moral values in human beings. This study makes an evaluation of how and where yoga makes this impression on human mind. The investigation is based on the existing knowledge on yoga and its influence on moral values.

It is a fact that there is a gap between what we expect and what we actually get. This gap widens day by day and inner dissatisfaction grows along with it. A dissatisfied and unhappy person likes to bring out his anger, frustration and bitterness. While doing so, he may get into crimes, atrocities, coercion, sexual

assaults, frauds, corruption, accidents etc. When this type of people grows in number, such incidents occur more frequently. That is precisely what is happening in modern times. Daily newspapers are flooded with such stories.

The Ancient Science and Art of Yoga is the real, time tested, comprehensive, long-term solution to all human problems. The greatest advantage of Yoga lies in the fact that it addresses human problems at individual and collective levels. It helps create harmony within the person and the society in which he lives. It integrates body, mind, intellect, emotions and spirit. Integration brings harmony and harmony brings happiness. Happiness brings peace. A happy and peaceful person knows the real meaning of spiritual wealth. Patanjali enumerates eight limbs or stages at Yoga. Among eight limbs of yoga, the first of these is yama. Ethical disciplines - ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha are the rules of morality for society and the individual, which if not obeyed bring chaos, violence, untruth, stealing, dissipation and covetousness. The roots of these evils are the emotions of greed, desire, attachment, which may be mild, medium or excessive. They only bring pain and ignorance. Patanjali strikes at the root of these evils by changing the direction of one's thinking along the five principles of Yama. A regular practitioner of yoga can achieve all the six stages of moral development, which was described by Kohlberg. In fact, a Yogi is much above the sixth stage or moral development, which is described here. He is naturally moral. He does things right and stays away from wrong in a natural and spontaneous manner. He is the real ambassador of morality. His value system is an outward expression of inner equilibrium. Patanjali's Yoga explains the real significance of emotional intelligence by way of complete cessation of modification of behavior. In fact, yoga practices work at the visceral and the

emotional level in following psychophysiological principles and tackles functional disturbances of the neuro-vegetative system and emotional disturbances. Some specific asanas which we perform for relaxation are claimed to give rise to chittavishranti i.e. tranquility and peace. Asanas are supposed to develop stability, steadiness and lightness of the body. Emphasis on relaxation taking help of gravity to ensure eternal effects of tackling emotional aspects of the individual has been indicated. *Asanas, Bandhas, Mudras, Kriyas* and *Pranayamas* could be special beneficial effects on autonomic nervous system, brain and the mind. Yoga aims at improving the emotional control and overcoming of the imbalance rhythm. Yoga ultimately enriches our emotions, value systems and attitude to life as a whole and influences our personality. In fact, Yoga is a bridge between body, mind and spirit. The views of Patanjali and Holy Gita are also illustrated to prove the fact that yoga is a stage of the union of Self and almighty God through its act of *Chitta Vritti Nirodhaso* that one can make life valuable, physically, mentally and spiritually.

Yoga plays a big role in inculcating ethical, moral and spiritual values in children. Yoga is not just about Pranayama and Asana, in fact it reaches far and influences the moral and ethical values of life. The spiritual dimension of yoga is about the development of values. The yogic activities try to evoke feeling of self-actualization in one for realizing one's true potential. Yama, Niyama, Dhyana and Pratyahara are found to be very helpful in developing one's moral character. Meditation (Dhyana) is also believed to be an important activity of self-introspection and weeding out the irrational feelings.

An in-depth investigation of the Vedas would reveal that Yama and Niyama are the principles of day to day life and must

be practiced coherently. The rishis consider them as the universal codes of conduct which are an important part of our personal and social life. Social life is governed hugely by the principles of Yama and Personal life is based entirely on the principles of Niyama; together Yama and Niyama are taught under Ashtanga Yoga. Yama teaches the 5 principles of Ahimsa (non-violence), Asteya (non-stealing), Satya (Truthfulness), Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness) and Brahmacharya (Abstinence).

Niyama teaches the 5 principles of Tapas (austerity), Shaucha (cleanliness), Swadhyaya (study of self and good literature), Santosha (satisfaction) and Ishwarpranidhana (surrender to God). Yoga is widely recognized as a psychosomatic-spiritual discipline for achieving union and harmony between our body, soul and mind. The yogic activity helps in attaining the ultimate union of our individual consciousness with our universal consciousness. A regular and persistent yogic activity would unfold a unique spiritual personality for developing our personality in a holistic and integrated manner.

On physical level yoga makes the bodywork more efficiently by directing the energies in the most controlled way. On mental level it enhances the power of imagination, creativity and will power of the mind. On intellectual level it enhances the power of sharpness and comprehensive development of the intellect with powerful concentration. On emotional levels it enables to systematically sharpen and sensitize their emotions. On Spiritual level it helps to move towards the causal state of the mind by introspection wherein the subtle layers of mind unfold themselves and the inner dimensions of personality open out.¹⁴

Yoga could thus help equip oneself with basic knowledge about one's personality, to learn to handle oneself well in all life situations, to learn techniques of gaining good health, to develop a discriminative mind capable of knowing the real from the unreal and to face the dualities of life with equanimity. Yoga is very helpful in cultivating moral and spiritual values. It has multidimensional potentials for the growth of personality. The yoga coordinates body mind and spirit.

Conclusion

Materialism and spirituality are the two ways of living. A man of materialistic life style runs only after material possessions and comforts. The material possessions, for him, are the be all and end all of his life. He wants to get material possession by using every foul means and therefore creates problems for himself and society. He goes on carrying the burden of miseries and agonies throughout his life.

Now that he has nothing to do with moral and human values. All his activities are against the interest of the society and

humanity as well. On the other hand the man who leads a Yogic and spiritual life style never uses foul means for the good of himself. He changes his thoughts, mode of living or his philosophy and view of life. To manifest the inner consciousness is the goal of yoga. The purpose of yoga is to eliminate all that is negative and evil in man's personality and to develop in him all that is sublime, good, auspicious and noble. This is done through the means of self-discipline and righteous living. Cultivation of positive traits and human values such as purity, truthfulness, nobility, unselfish love, forbearance, absence of anger and greed and lust, spirit of brotherhood, self-sacrifice, integrity, composure of the mind, and restraint of the senses, form the various disciplines in spiritual life. Wherever he is, peace, prosperity and wellbeing follow him. Thus whatever problem, we witness today is the result of degeneration of human and moral values and materialistic vision of life, therefore yogic life style or yogic vision of life is the best philosophy of life and is the key solution to the problems of the day.

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