



The Star of Yoga

Guidance from the Light

(From an upcoming book “Meditation For the Monkey Mind”)

By

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As we look up to the night sky we get a spectacular glimpse of the vast galaxy we see from earth. Stars abound through out the sky like mini suns each creating their own distinct light, some forming clusters and interesting configurations. There is an inherent quality in humanity to feel an attraction to light, be it sunlight or open spaces. It makes sense as we have come to understand the science behind energy we know that like attracts like. We realize there is great value that comes from being in the light, which breeds an optimism and greater awareness. In general people feel a kinship towards one another when they share something in common. A star’s light is symbolic of the highest ideal of every human being to live in love, light and harmony (sat, chit andanda) with nature and all aspects of life. The ancients have always looked to the stars for guidance, healing and understanding the cycles of nature. A star’s five points symbolize a connection to the five great elements (pancha maha bhutas) and reflects the gradation of energy from gross (earth) to subtle (sky).

The mystical star of yoga provides guidance on the journey towards enlightenment as various pathways, with each empowering us to reach the culmination or *purna* as the true yogic ideal of living a fully integrated lifestyle. Such integration is based on a balance between spirit and ecology thus reminding us of the importance of responsibility in our thoughts, words and actions that can either connect us or create greater divide from the Divine.

Great scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita proclaim that human beings can abide in the presence of nature both physical (external) and Divine (internal) without the conflict that is apparent today. However we must surrender to mother or the divine feminine as Radha to discover these virtues. The stark contrast that exists today between “mankind” or human *beings* and nature is compelling enough for us to question who we really and perhaps what is the purpose of life. Perhaps we should ask ourselves, are we really “being”, living in the present moment? Are we thinking, speaking and acting in a “kind” manner to all living beings or is it preferential depending on our mood, company or desires? Something to ponder...

When I speak of a star, I use the term as a metaphor to encourage us to connect to that mystery, the unknown but yet intriguing side of our awareness that we rarely explore in this high speed and material world. Yoga is a call towards self-empowerment, a growing into a feeling of connectedness that we can all

share on earth. The stars points or five S's of empowerment are *sadhana* (disciplined practice), *sangha* (good community), *seva* (service and charity), *sampradaya* (lineage and teaching) and *samadhi* (enlightenment). These five features represent the wholeness of evolution and reflect the depth of yoga's spiritual tradition.

SADHANA simply refers to spiritual practices. One who performs sadhana is a sadhaka or one who aspires towards evolution and self realization. Sadhana is any type of ritual or disciplinary exercise that is supportive to building a sound mind-body relationship. Yoga is basically a system of practices, rituals and techniques to harmonize the mind-body complex. Although the term *yoga* means to unite and bring the mind and body together, its highest intention is to merge them into oneness with spirit and this requires detachment, surrendering identification with body, mind and thoughts. The body is the outer form or vehicle, the mind is the bridge and the spirit brings us into the true nature of our existence. The main factor in balancing the body is in dealing with the spine where the central nervous system is mainly housed. Postural yoga is the practice of choice for energizing the spine and increasing its strength and suppleness. A stiff and tense spine often results in a stifled mind. Pranayama are various breathing exercises that remove mental impurities, as they affect the brain and thus the two (posture and breath) produces equilibrium between mind and spine. On the outer level, sadhana in essence is the discipline of the body and senses. On the inner level sadhana is about purification of the ego and intellect. Good sadhana produces feelings of contentment (*santosh*) and peace (*shanti*) and aids in balancing the doshas (inner physiology). The practice of *vairagya* or (dispassion) is an important sadhana for the mind that enables us to enjoy life in a somewhat detached manner, although some misinterpret it and conclude such a person lacks empathy. Sadhana culminates in the experience of being, living, breathing and embracing existence on a moment to moment basis.

SEVA is the natural capacity of humanity to serve one another. When we serve each other it breeds greater compassion within our hearts. Seva is the action of brotherhood and cultivates harmony and abundance. When we help someone we help ourselves as we begin to recognize the unity in all living things. Seva is service but more specifically it is selfless service to others without expectation of any collateral gain. The practice of *seva* is a tremendous form of ego purification because when we focus our attention on a task or another person it shifts the energy off the ego. When we give our listening attention to someone else it is also a form a serving another. However this means real whole-hearted attention, not partial attention, which is rare these days. Seva supports the law of detachment and affords us greater trust in God. In Divine service we embrace the highest trust in God, thus producing greater empathy, compassion and sensitivity towards life. Sadhana without *seva* is selfish, sadhana empowers us so that we can empower others.

SANGHA begins with the environment we share and is our greatest influence especially over time. For the most part, humanity is a product of its era. In brief, *sangha* means the spiritual community or society in which one lives or performs sadhana and *seva*. A *sangha* or community is the bedrock of our spiritual evolution and can ultimately determine the direction of any person's life. Good company produces good deeds. Energy is everything and everything is energy and therefore the environment in which a person frequents the most is what will shape their life and will produce outcomes based on the quality (*guna*) of that environment. A new aspirant on the spiritual path must consider their social choices very carefully otherwise they end up mixing with the wrong crowd and this is especially important for teenagers. Yogananda often said...to mix with those types you want to most be like. If you want to be successful in

art, spend time with artists etc.. Sangha is like a community bath, a place to wash our selves of I, me and mine, cleaning the mind of mental stains so we can grow closer to the Divine.

SAMPRADAYA are the teachings of Vedic-Hindu lineage and are linked to the eternal tradition of truth. These traditions of yoga have endured thousands of years of global change, wars and cultural destruction all because of devotion to truth. Truth is celebrated through monotheism however there are many forms of understanding the One God that exists behind all forms and names. The yoga sampradayas express their teachings via a lineage of teachers or gurus that link their energy to each other and honor the transmission of this knowledge as sacred. Love (bhakti) and loyalty support the dissemination of wisdom so that each student can cultivate the capacity to invoke pure knowledge with in them selves. Credit is never taken by the guru and should always be focused on the source of all existence and that we are all merely preceptors. The Vedic sciences are merely a methodology for cultivating the capacity of becoming a vessel for the attainment of knowledge. It is important that we as practitioners of yoga honor the tradition, its wholeness and sacredness. So the saying goes...get linked before it becomes extinct, why practice style when you can experience tradition. Americana with its fad based and sensationalized lifestyle creates dazzle and frazzle while never latching on to anything of substance or purpose. We have no myths or traditions to live by. I think its one main reason such a demand for yoga exists today, it has deep roots and great stories to relate too. The yoga tradition is anchored in truths, techniques and rituals that lead us to the highest ideals of life, liberty and happiness, sound familiar?

SAMADHI is the aim of yoga as Self realization, the union of mind-body-spirit. Although yoga provides us with many great outer benefits we must keep perspective of its higher purpose. Yoga in many ways is a system designed to unravel the human mind so to discover the Divine mind beyond the illusions of time and space. Yoga exists to break down social barriers, human conditions, pride, greed and fear and it happens in a unique and distinct manner according to a person's karmic code. Yoga sadhana helps us break the code of condition, the code of *samskaras* or mental conditions. During this yoga journey one begins to discover the underlying essence of all human existence as love. Yoga teaches us to realize that love is within us and that peace, kindness and compassion are all natural features of who we really are. Samadhi itself is a very exalted state of consciousness experienced by few, except highly disciplined yogis, saints and sages. However what matters most is the journey of arriving into an awareness that allows us to enjoy the divine process unfold, as it exists on a moment to moment basis. The great teachers of yoga have consistently said, love is in our hearts, peace exists in the presence of being and happiness is the true nature of the soul, why look anywhere else besides the star within?

The true inner **STAR** or spiritual eye in yoga is referred to as the *Kutashta* center at the point between the eye brows (ajna chakra). In deep meditation the pentagonal (five-pointed) shaped star appears when the mind attains a high level of stillness and concentration. Initially, what appears is a ruff shaped circle of light with a tiny dark spot in the center. With greater concentration a bluish color surrounds the circle with an additional white-golden layer around it. The synthesis of yoga is essentially the merging of our individualized consciousness into the star of Krishna Consciousness or Spirit. This beatific vision is then coupled with the cosmic sound or Pranava as Aum. Peace and calmness are the amalgamated feelings that are experienced with regular meditation and exist as subtle preparations for bliss consciousness (ananda). Let us keep in the mind the grand notion of yoga dharma; all that we seek, lies within ourselves. A promising statement that runs consistent between various ages, cultures and lineages of yoga. Alternatively, Swami Rama Tirtha once said...."Realization is not a thing to be achieved, you have not to

do anything to gain God vision, you have simply to undo what you have already done in the way of forming dark cocoons of desires around you."