

THE ASHTANGA YOGA: A CLASSIC VALUE LESSON

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Abstract: For building the foundations of life, the classic value lessons of the ancient Indian Philosophy which were mostly value based and aimed to cultivate such virtues in the form of ulterior value-Truth Beauty and Goodness, it was the ultimate aim and purpose of education to lead us to self-realisation and divine perfection. The Ashtanga yoga can be rightly regarded in both senses as classic lesson (highest quality, ageless), from the classic times (past, ancient) which is still the need of the hour in our time.

Key Words: Ashtanga yoga, Value education, Ashtanga yoga.

A classic Value Lesson

From the past India as an ancient civilization has been a remarkable one and has achieved immense admirations in the field of imparting value education to its people. Centres of learning like Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Varanasi etc are few to be mentioned. In the ancient Indian society, the first 25 years in human life is the student life or the *brahmacharya* stage, it is an important stage in human life because it is the time where the students are prepared to build their foundations of life, the lessons and values of life are imparted under the guidance of a guru. Ancient Indian education were mostly value based and aimed to cultivate such virtues like non violence, sincerity, honesty etc, in the form of ulterior value-Truth Beauty and Goodness, the ultimate aim and purpose of education is self-realisation and divine perfection. This paper seeks to place the practice of Ashtanga yoga as a way for educating oneself, and in the process achieves the highest goal. The Ashtanga yoga can be rightly regarded in both senses as classic lesson (highest quality, ageless), from the classic times (past, ancient) which is still the need of the hour in our time.

Yoga, a way to be practiced

The great sages spent their lives meditating far and withdrawn from the distractions of the external world and attained profound spiritual wisdom, and from these great spiritual wisdom arose the practise of Yoga, which means yoking or unification. i.e, the union of the individual spirit (*jivatman*) with the universal Spirit (*paratman*). It also means concentration of the mind, and in another sense it is the complete suppression of the mental modes. Though the word is used in variety of senses yoga simply means that which enables man to appreciate the life around him and gives him the power to make that life appreciating. The practice of yoga enhances the sensibilities and powers of man, and one must learn to educate the human mind.

The world today is much corrupted and we witness each day the ugly scenarios around us. Lack of imparting proper value education in the educational system is also responsible for present day value crisis. Education is regarded as an instrument of social development. Through promotion of self reliance, economic growth and social and national integration, education stands as an apparatus for social change. Education ought to relate to the life, needs and aspirations of the people. Education is perceived as the most important tool for change, and progress which aim towards perfection. The trend of education today is to train the mind in knowledge, ideas and skills which can be utilized in the future to further our aspirations and ambitions in life. Value education which is much needed today, means inculcating not only in the children but to any rational being a sense of humanism, a deep sense of concern for the well being of others and the world at large. Values aim at perfection, self-realisation, satisfaction, development, integrity and cohesion etc. values are the guiding principles of life and they in turn bring the force for marching ahead. Swami Vivekananda points out, "Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making and character-making assimilation of ideas".

Just by developing the ability to gather, store and retrieve vast information, does not mean a student is educated. Self-understanding, peace, and social concern cannot be attained by mere academic knowledge, without deep rooting in moral and spiritual values it will go the other opposite extreme. Stressing on this fact, Swami Vivekananda said, “Excess of knowledge and power, without holiness, makes human beings devils.” One must learn to discipline oneself in order to live in peace and harmony within and around him. One needs an education based on values, an education that disciplines, and an education that tame human action and mind, an education that paves way for attaining bliss. Yoga begins with discipline. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* says, that “yoga is a discipline”. This discipline is physical and mental, as well as spiritual. The discipline is the knowledge of the self and not just an imposed routine. The heart of Patanjali's teachings is the ***Eightfold path of Yoga***. It is also called the ***Eight Limbs*** of Patanjali, because they intertwine like the branches of a tree in the forest. These are not commandments, laws, or rules. These are Patanjali's suggestions for living a better life through yoga. Here are the eight limbs of Patanjali. The ***Eight Limbs of Yoga*** are considered the eight steps to living a meaningful and purposeful life. By following these steps one attains the greatest lesson of life.

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The Ashtanga Yoga or the Eight Limbs

Yama: These are the moral precept, which includes the moral principles. Yama can be defined as a social behaviour, of how a person deals with others and the world around him or her. According to *yoga Sutra* there are 5 yamas-

Ahimsa : non-violence

Satya : truthfulness

Asteya: non-stealing

Bramacharya: abstention

Aparigraha: non-possessiveness

Niyama: *Niyama/s* are Principles for how to treat ourselves, it focuses on inner discipline and responsibility. The *niyamas* address inner observance and self-discipline, *niyamas* are 5 in number too, they are-

Saucha: purity

Santosha: contentment

Tapas : austerity

Svadyaya : spiritual self studies

Ishvara pranidhana : constant devotion to the lord

Asana: postures, *asanas* is the practice of physical postures which help for concentration. Each pose includes three parts: rising, abiding and dissolving. These components are also described as coming, being and going. These aspects stress that yoga poses are not static contortions. The mind and the body are intimately related, so, the control of mind requires the control of body.

Pranayama: control of life force, *Pranayama* is the control of the breath. *Prana* translates as life force or breath. *Ayama* means length, expansion, extension, stretch, regulation or restraint. Therefore, *pranayama* is the prolongation and restraint of life force or breath. Breath control is conducive to the concentration of mind.

Pratyahara: withdrawal of the senses the mind is to be resolutely shut against all impressions from outside.

Dharana: concentration, it simply means one pointed concentration, *dharana* is steadfastness of mind. Being able to fix one's mind on particular object, qualifies him for the deeper stages of yoga.

Dhyana: meditation, it is the undisturbed and continuous attention to a particular object.

Samadhi: absorption or absorptive concentration in this state the sense of identity is lost, in *Samadhi*, the subject is no longer conscious of the act of meditation. in it the distinction between the subject and object is effaced, and there remains only the self in its eternal status. By this absorptive concentration the *citta* is stripped of all fluctuations and workings, and is reduced to a condition of absolute passivity. the aim of yoga is the complete and absolute suppression of the modifications of *citta*, and the eight disciplines/ *ashtangas* are the means to it.

The ultimate goal of the *ashtanga* /eightlimbs of yoga is *samadhi* or absolute bliss. This is pure contemplation, superconsciousness, in which the enlightened soul and the universe becomes one. Paramahansa Yogananda called it the state of God-Union.

The first five steps — *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, and *pratyahara* — are regarded as the external aids to yoga and build the foundation for spiritual life. They are concerned with the body and the brain. These first five steps makes possible for the next three steps. The last three steps — *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*, are known as internal aids, and are concerned with reconditioning the mind. Of these last three; *dharana* and *dhyana* represent the stage of illumination, while *Samadhi* represents the union.

To still the mind and abide permanently in our true nature cannot be achieved in a snap of fingers, therefore, it is important to connect more deeply with our true selves and live our lives in greater balance and harmony. It is not about attaining what is external to us, but only discern our self through yoga. This is the best way for learning the values of life. This will form in us healthy habits calculated to develop introspection; capacity of self-evaluation, etc. today's generation must develop the rich dimension of personality, physical, intellectual and spiritual growth. We need education that brings transformation both within him and around him for peaceful constructive purposes. Meditation moulds the best in us and gives insight of our own inner dimension. Yoga is the missing link through we regain our lost awareness of our self for uniting oneself with the higher self. One must weave meditation with his everyday lives which would revive him and bring out the better in him. The philosophy of yoga is not just a form of classical Indian spiritual heritage or tradition to be marvelled at, but it is indeed noble and wise to practise the

disciplines by maintaining the values and attain the growth, and progress for responsible citizens of human society.

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