

November has been a month for study of Raja Yoga, a spiritual path often called the yoga of meditation. A raja yogi uses ancient, proven spiritual techniques to quiet the mind and gain control of her or his attention. Regular daily practice of concentration may lead to meditation, which can reveal your True Original Nature and liberate you from the cycle of rebirth and death.

Self discovery. Self actualization. Self realization

Self realization is one way to talk about the goal of all spiritual practices. We can think of your progress toward that goal in three steps:

- **First, self discovery:** What does it mean to be fully human? *If you are bold, you find this out during your student years, and the early part of householder life — up to about age 30. This is a time of exploration, definition, adventure. And if we're blessed to be a spiritual aspirant, it is a time of both making a habit of the yamas AND breaking through boundaries. It's never too late ...*
- **Yama** means the restraint of a tendency that keeps you “at odds” with the world. When you are habitually harmful to others or the environment, deceitful, greedy or selfish, immoderately sensual, or covetous, calmness of mind is impossible.

- A calm mind is essential for spiritual progress, and an immeasurably great aid in becoming self-confident, self-determined, and self-sufficient.
- **Next, self actualization:** As this phase unfolds, you bring the talents and attributes you have discovered, and the life lessons you are learning, to their greatest manifestation. *Normally, this period, from about age 30 to age 60, is spoken about as your career. Yet, for many of us it also means creating a successful marriage and bringing one or more children into the world. This is very demanding and challenging! (Sri RK: heroes!) So, for spiritual aspirants, the niyamas will probably take up more of your attention.*
- **Niyama:** These observances broaden Yama to include your internal world of body, mind and spirit. You make daily, determined efforts to:
 1. eliminate all forms of inner and outer impurity
 2. to be content with the circumstances of your life
 3. to prefer the good over the pleasant (viveka-vairagya)
 4. to learn from sacred texts, and from your own weaknesses and mistakes; and
 5. to offer the every aspect of your life and all it contains — including the results of your spiritual practices — to the Divine Presence.

- **And finally, Self realization:** Sometime during that period of self actualization — after you have been practicing the yamas, niyamas, and some form of prayer or meditation for a number of years — you start to realize that what you are manifesting is an appearance only.
- You become aware that your human self, no matter how accomplished or successful, is merely the expression of, the outward evidence of a far greater power that lies behind and empowers all your activities, thoughts, and experiences. You begin to feel that Living Presence, to know your True Original Nature — in raja yoga, the Atman.

Here is a prayer to that Divine Essence:

*You are the source of infinite energy;
fill me with that energy.*

*You are the source of infinite strength;
endow me with that strength.*

*You are the source of infinite courage;
inspire me with that courage.*

*You are the source of infinite fortitude;
grant me that fortitude.*

In 1896, Swami Vivekananda wrote *Raja Yoga* as a guidebook for Westerners who have more than a casual interest in self realization. Pointing directly at the purpose he had in mind, Vivekananda said:

“Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship or psychic control or philosophy – by one or more or all of these and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms are but secondary details.”

Swami Vivekananda yearned for each of us to access the illimitable source of knowledge within — our everlasting birthright — and manifest our divinity. Raja Yoga — the yoga of psychic control, of meditation and other special techniques — is one gateway to our birthright — one path by which we can overcome the world.

We can take the inner, subtle knowledge of cause and effect gained by raja yoga’s practices and turn it into ever more perfect action in the world.

As Swami Swahananda often said, “The only true measure of spiritual progress is change in behavior.”

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the Master says:

“What is beyond speech and mind is born in the flesh, assuming various forms and engaging in various activities ...

"How long should a man perform his duties? As long as he has not attained God. Duties drop away after the realization of God.

Then one goes beyond good and evil. The flower drops off as soon as the fruit appears. The flower serves the purpose of begetting the fruit ...

“But one who has attained perfection, realized God, cannot commit sin. An expert singer cannot sing a false note.”

Conversation/Commentary and Regular Closing prayer