

A Raja Yogi's Response to Transformation

Vedanta Center of Atlanta June 28, 2020

Br. Shankara

GOOD MORNING ... ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Saturday July 4**

9am On the first Saturday of each month Chandi is chanted in Sanskrit, led by Rita Mathew. This year Guru Poornima also falls on July 4th, so she has arranged an additional program. Accessible by Zoom, these two activities will start at 9am and will end around 10am. For full details about the event, click on the link in our e-newsletter, or on the Center's website or FB page

- **6:30pm** A Special Arati will be done, accessible by Zoom. This will be followed a brief talk on Swami Vivekananda and his work in the West by Br. Shankara, then readings and reflections on the Swami and the day, by members of our congregation. Please prepare something for that evening, to share with us — either a tribute to Swami Vivekananda, or remarks about the anniversary of our nation. **NO MORE THAN 5 MINUTES PER PERSON!** Be courteous to others who are waiting to contribute. You WILL be timed, and muted if you go much over the 5-minute limit.

CHANT • SONG • WELCOME • TOPIC

A Raja Yogi's Response to Transformation

We — our entire planet — seem to be on the road to a major transformation. Yet, we cannot see far ahead down this road. Experts — health care scientists, economists, political leaders, help as best they can. But they don't have meaningful precedents for this situation. So what they offer are their best science, educated guesses, and sometimes conflicting day-to-day guidance.

In the face of such uncertainty, fear and despair are a very natural human response.

Fortunately, as spiritual aspirants we have a powerful alternative — the four yogas as taught to us by Sw. Vivekananda (Swamiji).

Last month we looked at how a karma yogi could respond to transformation.

This morning we'll take up raja yoga — and in July, jnana yoga. We'll see what guidance each yoga offers us about how to live calmly and constructively during a great wave of change.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND — WHAT I'M ABOUT TO SAY IS NOT MEANT AS PERSONAL **INSTRUCTION** — IT IS NOT ULTIMATE TRUTH, OR ANY KIND OF DOGMA, WHICH YOU ARE EXPECTED TO ADPT OR FOLLOW. IT IS A REVIEW OF THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF RAJA YOGA AS THEY COULD APPLY TO AN IDEAL YOGI WHO FINDS HERSELF THE CURRENT SITUATION. PLEASE TAKE FROM IT WHAT YOU MAY FIND USEFUL TO YOU.

So, how might that ideal raja yogi deal with what we're facing? Let's start from principle — the control of nature, both external and internal.

June has been a month for study of Raja Yoga, a spiritual path often called the yoga of meditation. As a raja yogi, you use ancient, proven spiritual techniques to quiet your mind and gain control of your attention.

Regular daily practice of Raja Yoga increases your ability to concentrate, and may lead to meditation. This can unite you with the Divine Presence, the source of your being, and liberate you from the cycle of rebirth and death. In the vocabulary of the raja yogi, this state of liberation is called *kaivalya* — isolation, or independence.

According to Vivekananda's book Raja Yoga, a yogi attains kaivalya by controlling Nature, both external and internal. We'll start with a frame of reference for the external:

Aeons ago, the Divine Being created "that which breathes" (*jiva*) — life as we understand it. According to Swamiji, all of Nature's possibility was present (involute, or involved) in that first life-form, and it has been evolving ever since. Evolving means becoming more complex and specialized, taking on ever more names and forms.

Physicists add to Swamiji's story by telling us that 13.7 billion years ago all that existed was an unimaginably hot, dense plasma, expanding at a mega-explosive rate. This Big Bang continued expanding, cooling, and differentiating until, all these billions of years later, that primordial plasma became the Universe and life-forms we know now.

Scientists further define the fundamental nature of everything you and I experience as vibration. Your five senses take in the wide variety of vibrations in which all of our action-and-experience suits — your and my bodies — are immersed, and of which each suit is an inseparable part.

Listen up, now — to understand what a raja yogi does, you must know this:

Exposed to the wide spectrum of Universe's vibrations, each of your inner sense organs selects the frequencies of vibration appropriate to its function and transforms those vibrations into the names and forms you are familiar with — what you feel, hear, see, smell and taste.

These names and forms are then projected onto your awareness (you mind). Taken as a whole, this projection becomes your individual universe, the reality you know, understand, and feel more or less comfortable with.

Which brings us to Raja Yoga: As translated by Vivekananda, the first two aphorisms of Patanjali's Yogas Sutras are:

1. Now concentration is explained.

2. Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (Chitta) from taking various forms (Vrittis).

Sutra 1 is the method for achieving sutra 2. By practice of concentration, we learn to prevent the mind from making a reality (Vrittis) out of the stimulation (vibration) which produces them. As Swamiji tells us, when you can still the Vrittis in the Chitta, your universe disappears.

When you are successful in this effort, you have controlled Nature — both external and internal. You have achieved the purpose of the first six limbs of Patanjali's Raja Yoga. You are capable of deep meditation — samadhi and kaivalya await you.

Now, you and I have caught a glimpse of why a yogi would want to accomplish this feat. And that understanding can help us grasp how a dedicated Raja yogi lives, and will respond to transformation in the world around her.

A truly committed (ideal) raja yogi is often an anchorite: (def. from the Cambridge English Dictionary — “someone who lives alone and away from other people for religious reasons.”).

- Julian of Norwich
- Yogis of the forest and mountain caves
- Thomas Merton

The whole point of a raja yogi's pursuit is to be apart from the constant change, transformation, of life in the world, and to restrain the compulsion of the mind-stuff to make a reality (vrittis) of her internal world — the innumerable mental impressions retained from the yogi's aeons-long evolution.

An ideal raja yogi might not even be very much aware of the great changes — the virus and its economic and social effects, for example — wracking our world today.

Swamiji, from the end of Raja Yoga:

“Thus the practice of Yoga leads to discriminating power, to clearness of vision. The veil drops from the eyes, and we see things as they are. We find that nature is a compound, and is showing the panorama for the Purusha, who is the witness; that nature is not the Lord, that all the combinations of nature are simply for the sake of showing these phenomena to the Purusha, the enthroned king within. When discrimination comes by long practice, fear ceases, and the mind attains isolation (independence, Kaivalya).”

“Nature's task is done, this unselfish task which our sweet nurse, nature, had imposed upon herself. She gently took the self-forgetting soul by the hand, as it were, and showed him all the experiences in the universe, all manifestations, bringing him higher and higher through various bodies, till his lost glory came back, and he remembered his own nature. Then the kind mother went back the

same way she came, for others who also have lost their way in the trackless desert of life. And thus is she working, without beginning and without end. And thus through pleasure and pain, through good and evil, the infinite river of souls is flowing into the ocean of perfection, of self-realisation. Glory unto those who have realised their own nature. May their blessings be on us all!”

DISCUSSION AND COMMENTARY

Closing chant