

The Secret Science of Yoga - Seen through the Sacred Eye of a Sikh

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For many years, those of us who have shared in the 3HO way of life and have grown into the Sikh Dharma, have been confronted with the apparent conflict between our status as Sikhs and our status of practitioners and teachers of yoga. Although for those of us who are practicing both (and the combination of the two) there is clearly no conflict, it is still important to understand the historical perspective of the relationship of yoga to the Sikh Dharma, and how that perspective has influenced the attitude of people, toward yoga in general.

As a system and a technique, yoga has been known and practiced by humanity for literally thousands of years. As it was preached in mediaeval India, yoga was totally interwoven into the fabric of Hinduism, and in fact was one of the major sources of exposure to religious life for the masses of people. The yogis of that period of time used to retire from the world, to practice the techniques of Hatha Yoga, to practice celibacy and to make their livelihood by begging from the local householders. Their involvement in the ritual performance of certain practices, their achievement of the mastery of various occult powers, made them objects of great veneration by the common people, though they were also regarded with great fear and anxiety. The yogis developed the relationship with the common people that whenever they would appear with their begging bowl, one felt both privileged and utterly compelled to fill the bowl with good. The yogis would be included to share their wisdom and knowledge with the people and it was through the association of these wandering, begging yogis, that the common people learned about God, about the philosophy of Hinduism and of the nature of life and death. However, many of these wandering yogis would also not be above using their occult powers to cause harm or discomfort to those who did not properly receive them or who did not offer them food or hospitality. Because of this, and also because they had withdrawn from any work or worldly occupation and had become a burden to society, the yogis earned rather unpleasant reputations.

Because the terminology of yogic practice was so widely spread and in such common usage at the time of Guru Nanak, it was natural for him to speak of these same higher truths, using much of yogic terminology. It is also true that yogic terminology and the objects of yogic practice were totally in accord with the realizations with Guru Nanak was sharing during his lifetime. Therefore, many of Guru Nanak's hymns speak about yoga and yogis, admonishing against ritualistic practices which seek enlightenment and union with God through one's efforts alone, and reminding the yogis and the people of the highest meaning of yoga, and of the real object of self-discipline, most of which had become lost in superstition and fear. Guru Nanak exposed the meaninglessness and contradiction of the life of the recluse and called everyone to the path of love and righteous action, and he gave a fresh spiritual and ethical orientation to their esoteric terminology.

The word Yoga comes from the Sanskrit root "yuj" which means "to join." It also has been pointed out by Yogiji that it arises from the word "yoke" (from the Bible) and again refers to the action of uniting. Yoga therefore means "union" -union of the individual soul with the Universal Soul. This experience has been given many names, according to many languages and religious traditions, including: Christ Consciousness, Anand (Bliss), Enlightenment, Mukti (Liberation), etc. The influence of yoga in Indian spiritual tradition has been so great that the Bhagavad Gita is a work which is essentially an exposition

of yoga in its several varieties, particularly the Yoga of Action (Karma Yoga), the Yoga of Love (Bhakti Yoga) and this emphasis in the 'Gita' helped to dispel the impractical and pessimistic tendencies which the doctrine of yoga in its extreme forms had spread among the masses, where retirement from life has come to be looked upon as the highest attainment.

In the light of this brief background, it is clear that Yogi Bhajan has been teaching yoga in the spirit and in the light of the wisdom of Guru Nanak, for he has taught Kundalini Yoga, the yoga for the householder, and surely Karma Yoga is one of the practiced techniques in the 3HO way of life. However, much misunderstanding does arise just out of the use of the word "yoga" and out of the name of "Yogi," in the minds of some Sikhs who have had a great many years of indoctrination against the practice of yoga. This kind of prejudice, however, indicates a lack of understanding of Sikh Dharma and of the message of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

Realizing that yoga means quite literally 'union with God' then it is clear that the goal of yoga is the same as the goal of the Sikh, which is the same as the goal of a true Christian, Hindu or Muslim. The goal is to realize the highest truth in our everyday life and the very practice of Nam, or repetition of the Name of God, which is the entire message of Siri Guru Granth Sahib is in itself the highest form and practice of yoga.

The Sikh Dharma is one way of life, or religion, which was developed through the lifetime of more than one man in order that it might take a shape and form through the unique contributions of each of them. Therefore many things were realized as a part of the Dharma, itself, as time and example placed them there. During the lifetime of Guru Nanak it was at first thought that Guru Nanak was himself the Guru, but it came to be understood upon his departure that the 'Bani' of Guru Nanak was his Guru and the Guru which would manifest through each of the ten embodiments of the Guru, until reaching its finalized form in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, which is more obviously and clearly the Bani, or the Word of the Guru. When Guru Hargobind introduced the use of the sword among his Sikhs, it was first looked upon as just a necessary tactic of living in that particular time. However, today we know that the sword, like the Bani, is the very spirit and basis of the Dharma. When Guru Gobind Singh administered Amrit, it was first thought that this was a new and unexpected thing, but it has become clear that the Amrit and the body of the Khalsa are essential parts of the Dharma itself.

In actuality, Sikh Dharma is most unique among religions of the world because it is a religion of experience. By meditating on the Nam, by rising in the ambrosial hours, by living in the world and practicing the life of a householder, we are practicing the highest form of yoga. Let us look at how we can logically arrive at such a conclusion.

The system of Raja Yoga, the most well-known system of the Sikh Hindu schools of thought, was founded by a great sage called Patanjali, and his system (Patanjali's Yoga Sutras - How to Know God) have become the standard text for all discussion of this system. His system was based on eight steps:

1. Yamas - Bad habits to be avoided
2. Niyamas - Good habits to be cultivated
3. Asana - Control of the physical body
4. Pranayam - Control of the life force
5. Pratyahar - The law of substitution (removal of attachment to the senses and desires of the mind)

6. Dharana - Concentration
7. Dhyana - Meditation
8. Samadhi - Divine Bliss

All of these steps are clearly necessary ones to be achieved in order to reach a state of enlightened consciousness. However, Patanjali's approach calls for celibacy and the renunciation of family life, and is extremely intellectual, requiring many, many years of austere practice before achieving any level of perfection or attainment.

Guru Nanak, however, shaped Raja Yoga into a path that anyone can follow, regardless of caste, creed or family status. Guru Nanak gave three foundation pillars of Sikh Dharma: 1) Nam Japna - Meditation on the Name. 2) Dharma da kirt karna - Performance of righteous deeds, or earning through honest labor. 3) Wanda chakna - Sharing with those in need. Therefore, we can see that Guru Nanak, instead of making meditation as something to be practiced only after achieving success in six other techniques, has given this as the first duty - the joyful practice of repeating God's Nam in word, thought and deed. By so doing, one attains the last three steps in Patanjali's system. The next step is to earn and live a righteous life. A Sikh, already blessed by repeating God's Holy Nam will easily fall into the pattern of right conduct and of avoiding bad habits. By working hard and through his meditation he will master his physical body and his life force. Finally, by sharing all that one has, a devout Sikh will master his senses and emotions, and will realize that all comes to him from God and is to be shared with all.

Practically speaking, the Sikh Dharma has come about because our Gurus were the greatest yogis. This reality, a state of consciousness, is expressed many times by the Gurus and can be found recorded in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. The Gurus were in such a union with the Bani. With God, they had a total understanding of all things, the first quality of a true yogi. In this understanding they knew the reality and the misconceptions also of their Sikhs' minds. They knew the reality of every ritual and of every practice going on, and working from that point of truth which all people could relate to, they spread the Word.

Guru Nanak himself described his way as 'Sahaj Jog' (the natural yoga) and within the Siri Guru Granth Sahib we find the following line:

"Raj Jog tahgat dian Guru Ram Das."

"The throne of Raja Yoga was given to Guru Ram Das forever."

[p. 1399, p. 4621, M.M.S., (page numbers of Siri Guru Granth Sahib M.M.S.: Manmohan Singh translation)]

Since Guru Ram Das was given the throne of Raja Yoga by Guru Amar Das and he then passed it to his son, Guru Arjan, it would appear that this was a gift given to the house of Guru Nanak which would become the heritage of the Sodhis (the descendants of Guru Ram Das), who became the last six Gurus of the Sikhs. It has also been stated by Kall (the poet):

"Guru Arhan kalcharae tae raj jog ras janiao."

"O Guru Arjun, thou knowest the essence of Raja Yoga."
(p. 1408, p. 4652 M.M.S.)

Totally absorbed in Nam, the Gurus knew everything and gave that experience to their Sikhs and made it available today through the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. That experience is one of total ecstasy of love of the Guru that is "Wahe Guru." Wahe Guru is the ecstasy of experience of total selfless love of the Guru and this experience manifests on all levels of existence, physical, mental and spiritual. This experience is beyond karma and as every abnormality or disorder is due to one's karma, the result of the experience of 'Wahe Guru' is that all disorders and diseases of every level of existence leave the person:

"Jo jo dise so so rodi, rod rehet mera Sat Guru Jogi."

"Whosoever I see is suffering from disease. Only my Sat Guru, who is a Yogi is free from disease."

(p. 1140, p. 3753 M.M.S.)

In this perfect ecstasy of Wahe Guru, a being glows and his Kundalini rises from the base of his spine to the top of his head to the pineal gland. The pineal gland radiates, and the pituitary gland secretes. The pineal gland is the "Dasam Dwar" or the Tenth Gate. This experience is the real yoga and without this yoga, without this experience, there is no Sikh Dharma because the Dharma is based upon experience of this occurrence. By whatever name you call it, this stage of awareness, this state of consciousness is the ultimate goal of every spiritual path, of every yoga, and of every religion. Whether one starts by practicing Kundalini Yoga and then meditates on Nam and then his personality becomes lost in Gurbani, or whether he first develops a love for Gurbani, does not matter. No matter how it is accomplished, it all must be achieved: meditation on Nam, rising Kundalini and personality lost in Gurbani. Raj Jog means that very experience and Guru Ram Das was given the throne of Raj Yog forever. So in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, in the praises of Guru Ram Das, it is written:

"Kundalini surjhi sat sangat
Paramanand Guru much macha."

"Associating with the saints their Kundalini radiates and through the Supreme Guru they enjoy the Supreme Bliss."

(p. 1402, p. 4634 M.M.S.)

The confusion regarding yoga and its place within Sikh Dharma undoubtedly arises out of the fact that the Gurus in their role as teachers rarely missed an opportunity to point out to the yogis of that time the error of their ways:

"Eho jogna hov jogi je kutamb chod parbhavan kareh."

"If you leave your family and wander abroad, O Yogi, this is not Yoga."

"Jog na baghvi kapre
Jog na melae ves."

Nanak dhar bethia
Jog paias Satguru ke updesch."

"Yoga does not lie in dirty clothes,
Nor in wearing dirty robes.
Nanak says that yoga is acquired while sitting in one's own home
And by practicing the teachings of the Sat Guru."
(p. 1420, p. 4696 M.M.S.)

"Jogi jugat gavai handhe pakhand jog na pai."

"O Yogi, having lost the path of yoga thou wanderest about. Through hypocrisy yoga is not obtained."
(p. 909, p. 2964 M.M.S.)

It is this conception and image of a yogi which creates much misunderstanding and confusion in the minds of many Sikhs, and yet there is very much within the Siri Guru Granth Sahib itself to also support the place of yoga in the life of a Sikh, when it is related to in its original and highest meaning:

"Mohe gaia baeragi yogi ghat ghat kingur vai."

"The detached yoga (Sat Guru) has bewitched all and has played the lyre of the Lord's love in every heart."

(p. 907, p. 2957 M.M.S.)

The pages of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib abound with terms that are thought of as being 'esoteric' or 'mystic,' but actually describe the scientific changes that take place in the body through the practice of Kundalini Yoga, which includes all forms of yoga:

"Dasam duara agam apara param pukh kighate beni."

"The Tenth Gate is the abode of the inaccessible and Infinite Lord."

(p. 974, p. 3195 M.M.S.)

"Sukh man nari sahaj samani pivae pivan hara.
Aoduu mera man matvara.
Unmad chodha madan ras chakhia tribhavan baia ujiara."

"The sukh man (central channel for Kundalini energy) is in balance (between prana and apana) and the drinker drinks the wine (Kundalini shakti).
With this wine my soul is intoxicated.
When that wine ascends to the brain, man tastes not the relish (worldly attachments) and sees the three worlds clearly."

(p. 939, p. 3178 M.M.S.)

"Sant charan darao mathe chandna greh hoi andharae
Sant Prasad kamal bigasae gobind bhajao pekh marae."

"Meditate on the feet of the Satguru at the brow chakra (third eye point).

The pituitary gland will secrete and man sees the inner light.

The Satguru will open the heart chakra, center of divine compassion then by repeating God's Name you will receive His vision."

(p. 1301, p. 4293 M.M.S.)

As we move out of the Piscean Age into the Aquarian Age, religions based on belief alone will wither away. The new religions of the world will be religions of experience. Sikh Dharma is based on experience and practice; it is not based on theory and theology alone. In the Aquarian Age the keyword will be, "I know, therefore I believe." We who have been at the mercy of our subconscious minds and negative egos for so long are now using the yoga of Guru Nanak, the practice techniques laid out in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, to cleanse and purify ourselves so that we may have that direct vision of God. We strengthen and purify our bodies through physical yoga, so that these bodies which are the temples of our souls, may be as clean as the Golden Temple is kept immaculate.

At one time the Khalsa was made up of the strongest and healthiest people to be found anywhere in the world. All of the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh, men and women, participated in martial training in addition to their daily sadhana, karma yoga and participation in all duties of family life, and thus kept extremely fit. As Sikhs of the Western Hemisphere, we have been fortunate to have been given the practical techniques of Kundalini Yoga to help us to achieve new levels of self discipline and awareness, to overcome our materialistic upbringings and to purify our systems which are bombarded daily with impure air, water and food.

Actually, this is the fundamental law of the Sikh way of life, to raise the 'kala' - the expression which is commonly used is 'chardhi kala.' We should clearly understand that in reality, as Yogiji has stated: "Sikhism is nothing but a total yoga, and total yoga is nothing but to be a Sikh. You use the divine gift of life through the breath to call the Name of God and through these pranas you can obtain the Pranpatti (the Giver of life) which is the Infinity of you. The longing to belong, the love of the beloved, the 'prana' calls forth the Pranpatti through the Nam. The finite is the longing in you, and the Pranpatti is the Infinity of you and they, through your meditation, through your Nam Japna, merge in the Oneness of the One. That is the cycle. If you understand that, there is nothing you should misunderstand."