

Defining Integral Yoga

Gurudev believed in integral yoga. To many people integral yoga means the reconciliation of yoga of the heart and yoga of the head, the yoga of devotion and the yoga of the intellect. This is quite natural because most yogas reduce themselves to fundamentally either a yoga of the intellect or a yoga of the heart. If we only practice a yoga of the intellect then we can become, as Gurudev described, dry Vedāntins or lip Vedāntins. Gurudev also cautioned about those who only had devotion. He said they can become emotional, without proper understanding. Therefore, we should integrate head and heart.

But Gurudev went further. He wanted us to integrate head, heart, and hand. He said never give up on selfless service, meaning that selfless service, in Gurudev's eyes, was not just a preliminary yoga, but rather something that we should never cease doing. Thus, there is another way of looking at integral yoga that actually fits what we do see in the world. That is, on the one hand, a concentration on doing, on being good, on the outer world, and on the other hand a concentration on the inner yogas—yoga of the head and yoga of the heart, on enquiry, repeating God's name.

From this point of view we have to be sure that we integrate both aspects, because the truth is that if we are busy with outer spiritual practices, we can find that there is little energy or desire left to go inward, to enquire Who am I?, to keep going deeper and deeper until we find something ultimate. On the other hand, if we find something ultimate, if we feel that everything is divine, then we may discard the outer world, saying that it is unreal. But this is not what we see in the lives of Gurudev or Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī. We see examples of ever abiding in That which never changes and at the same time taking extremely seriously the outer world—never giving up on their efforts to do good in this world, always thinking of what they can do to help.

Thus if want to follow Gurudev's integral yoga, we will find some sort of a balance that considers both the inner and outer worlds equally important, because they are both part of that One without a second. We will constantly be searching within for that which is absolute and to which everything belongs. On the other hand we will keep ourselves ever active in the outer world trying to reflect the oneness that we have found within. Both are equally vital to an integrated spiritual life.