

Finding the True Path

The word yoga means union, which is, generally speaking, understood to be the union of the individual soul and the Universal Soul. It also means the path or paths that lead to that union. And so when the individual soul feels a call to the Divine, they follow a path or a yoga that is natural to them in their search for this union. Or, as disciples of Swāmī Sivānandajī, we will follow an integral yoga, so that all parts of our being are involved in our search.

But whether we follow an individual path or an integral path—no matter how close we may feel to the goal from time to time—the goal always seems to be just out of our grasp. We think we’re close and then it seems impossibly far away. Ultimately we begin to feel, “Forget the goal, what I need is to just find the true path, a path that will lead to the goal—a path where the goal isn’t always escaping my grasp. It is in this context that the ceremony of being initiated into *sannyās* can shed some light.

In the Vedic tradition taking *sannyās* came towards the end of our life after completing the student stage, householder stage and retired stage. In other words, after life had been lived to the full and the individual had had time to contemplate God and to understand the human situation, they then determined to dedicate their entire life to God, and therefore entered the stage of *sannyās*. But the stage of *sannyās*, which is meant to be dedicated entirely to God, is not just following another path. It is as if we stop searching because at this point we are meant to die to everything we have ever tried before. Something new is meant to happen.

Traditionally the day before taking *sannyās* one undergoes one’s own funeral preparations and ceremony. Then during the fire ceremony, every part of our human nature is offered into the fire—all twenty-five categories—the organs of knowledge, the organs of actions, the sheaths, the body, everything about us is offered into the fire until all that is left is pure Spirit—That which knows everything but can never know Itself. Then if we haven’t understood the significance of this ceremony, the *guru* initiates the candidate into the *mahāvākya*-s. “That thou art,” the *guru* declares. The disciple then, if he hasn’t understood before is, in theory, supposed to awaken to the fact that That which he can never grasp, never know with the mind but which is everything, is what he really is. He then lives his life in that light.

So it is meant to be with all of us as seekers. We keep seeking something that we can have union with. Finally when we have sought and sought, a recognition comes that it is not something we are going to get, it is something that we recognize when we have got rid of everything that we presently think we are. So actually the true spiritual life is not a matter of attaining in the normal sense, rather it is a getting rid of.

It is all the accretions that we have accumulated on top of our true Self that cause all our problems and all our pain—all the ideas of who we think we are, how we think we should be acting, how we think the world should be. When we begin to let go of all that conditioning, then gradually our true Self with its peace and its knowledge begins to reveal Itself.

Therefore, if the goal constantly seems to be eluding us, perhaps the answer is to change direction just as if we were undergoing the initiation of *sannyās*.