

Integrating Our Spiritual Life

One of the weaknesses of most religions—the weakness is not in the religion but in the devotees—is the gap between what we preach and what we practise. We are one thing in the temple or the church or the mosque, we are something else in our daily life, in the market place. The Vedic way of life tries to bridge that to a certain extent. Every shop has its place of worship where prayers are offered daily. But still, we must admit that many shopkeepers don't carry out the spirit of their prayers. The moment a customer appears, they become a different person: "I am one thing in the temple, church, or mosque; another thing in the market place."

Let us consider our spiritual life and yoga from this point of view. Yoga is usually thought of as taking advantage of our strengths. If we have a devotional nature, practise *bhakti yoga*. If we have an intellectual nature, *jñāna yoga*. If we have a strong will, *rāja yoga*. If we are very active, then *karma yoga*. And while this is a very good way of teaching the yogas, it may not bring our entire being into our spiritual practices. There may be lust, greed, hatred, and jealousy left out of our spiritual life, and thus we are led to a position where at the very least we are hypocrites and at the worst we can have a fall that can be a tragedy—not only for us but for those that we are associated with.

We are meant to bring our entire being into the spiritual life. We are not meant to leave a lustful nature buried trying to pretend it is not there. Rather, we are to offer that lustful nature up to God in a spirit of devotion, turn that passion into a passion for God. If we have an intellect that never leaves us alone, that is always wanting to know things, turn that curiosity, turn that intellect to wanting to understand everything about God. If we have a very competitive nature, a controlling nature that wants everything its own way, then turn that controlling nature against our mind: In every way we want to control things around us, have people do things the way we want them to be done, then do that to our own mind—take that entire energy and focus it right at home on our own mind. If we are by nature very restless, cannot keep still, always have to be on the move, doing something different, then expend that energy on helping others, as many as we possibly can in as many ways as we can.

In this way yoga becomes our entire life; it involves our entire being and brings our entire being along with us, so it obviates any chance of a fall

or falling back. And the real beauty of this way of looking at yoga is that we are offering our whole being to God just as we are. There is an old saying, “Come as you are.” We are meant to come with our whole being just as we are. God knows us just as we are. He created the world the way it is. He doesn’t mind us just as we are as long as we are prepared to evolve, to change.

If we try to leave part of ourselves behind, to deny it, our spiritual life can never make real progress. If we have the humility to offer our entire being to God, ask His help, then His help will be there. We will be shown the way; many difficulties will just melt away. And we will walk in an integral way toward the goal—which is to offer our entire life to God, in His service and as His expression.