

## The Meaning of Yoga

The word yoga has two fundamental meanings. It means union, a state of oneness with the Divine. It also means those practices that lead us towards that state of union. But what is that state of union? Teachers and scriptures try to describe it in so many ways, but our mind is unable to grasp it. Finally teachers will either say that it cannot be described or even more enigmatically they will say, “I am trying to show it to you” or “Watch me.” In any case, the seeker is left still puzzling.

However, often a teacher will say, “Study the Gītā, keep the Gītā with you always, read the Gītā every day.” There are some who say that every verse of the Gītā can help us understand. But interestingly enough, there are at least three verses in the Gītā that define yoga, and these three verses are worth our consideration and daily meditation if we want to uncover the mystery of yoga.

One definition (Gītā 2.48) is, “Yoga is evenness of mind.” What do we mean by evenness of mind? Does it mean that our mind will not experience the three *guṇa*-s, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*? Does it mean we are no longer subject to the pairs of opposites, heat and cold, good and evil? Not at all. It means that amidst the pairs of opposites, amidst the three *guṇa*-s, we have a different angle of vision, a different perspective. Yoga then means a different perspective on our mind. It means beyond the three *guṇa*-s, beyond the pairs of opposites; we experience life from a different perspective.

And what does that bring about? The second definition of yoga (Gītā 6.23) is: “Yoga is separation from pain.” In other words, not being totally lost in our experience, becoming the witness, or having a different perspective on our experience brings about separation from pain. As Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī says, “Where the deepest sorrow cannot touch you.” It doesn’t mean that the deepest sorrow isn’t there, but it cannot touch a state of yoga—yoga is beyond all experience.

And how does that allow us to function in the world? The third definition (Gītā 2.50) tells us: “Yoga is skill in action” We think that in order to function effectively in this world we have to be emotionally and mentally involved. Exactly the opposite is true. Skill in action comes from

this state of detachment or a different perspective. Then we see clearly what the situation is and we are able to act wisely.

Yoga is described in so many superlatives. We tend to look for something spectacular. What we really want in our heart of hearts is peace of mind and skill in action. We should cease looking for the spectacular and discover what we already have, what is right at hand. And if we do, we will have evenness of mind, separation from pain, and skill in our daily actions.