

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

In ancient India before religion was even developed there were people dedicated to understanding the mysteries and purpose of life. During the evolutionary process of mind there arose a culture of very powerful thinkers who were able to realise the subtle nature of the mind and transcend the influence of all mental conflicts and habits. These great thinkers witnessed in deep meditation the inspired intuitive mind. The spontaneous intuitive mind revealed a new understanding of their true identity and existence. This knowledge awakened the realization that there is a spiritual essence that is eternal and lives within the mind and body of all creation. Those great thinkers gave birth to the eternal science of spiritual wisdom and knowledge of the spirit. The great thinkers and revolutionary spiritual teachers were known as a Rishi and their scientific practical philosophy became the basis of a highly developed society. Rishi means to see and to know what is normally unseen and unknown. What the ancient Rishi's saw became Yoga and therefore one definition of yoga is that yoga is a science of spiritual wisdom and knowledge of the spirit. The Rishi's lived in communities that were integrated with everyday life. These communities were established by people who lived in and cultivated an atmosphere of yoga. The residents were called yogis and the community was known as an ashram. Real ashrams are dedicated to self- development and offer an education in all aspects of social and spiritual life. In addition to the yoga techniques and daily meditation the basis of ashram life was karma yoga. This is the process of working together in an effort to learn new skills and transcend the weaknesses of each individual personality. All the yoga techniques combined with the teacher's vision of active social service were an integral part of ashram life. The children practised yoga to improve their concentration and awareness of themselves and the schools were full of opportunities to learn the life skills that are so important for our future independence. Social ethics and laws of conduct were not dogmatic but were taught through awareness and practical demonstration. Wise elders who had realised the truth of their inner mind body and spirit were the guides and gurus (teachers). Yoga was the link that unified the fulfilment and purpose of everyone's lives

Anyone who wants to understand the principles and purpose of happiness and how to fulfil their dreams must realize within themselves the nature and relationship of their own body heart and mind. The Rishi's were motivated by the instinctive desire for knowledge and the difficulties in life to find solutions for happiness. Those Rishi's of ancient India were the ones who realised within themselves the nature of creation. It was from that realisation that the universal and practical science known as Yoga emerged. Every science begins with an Aim and to achieve that aim there must be a method, which if followed will give us a positive result. The aim of yoga was harmony, wisdom and inner peace. The method of achieving that aim was the integrated practices of yoga and the philosophy of tantra. Yogis should not isolate themselves from the society. Their role is to work and live in the world offering inspiration by example and teach the techniques of yoga. Yoga is the method and the practice of exploring and transcending the individual mind. Yoga allows us to liberate the awareness from the conditioned mind and become aware of a subtle spiritual consciousness that is inherent in everything and is transcendental. The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root verb which means to join. Yoga is often translated as union; however we must ask the question what is united in Yoga? Let us begin with the basics and the most fundamental beginnings of what is meant by Yoga and union.

We live in the world of materialism and have no choice but to begin with everything that is tangible and physically known to us. It is easier for you to accept something that you can see and experience directly. Yoga or union is not isolated to only one experience. Within the science of Yoga every aspect of life, every layer of personality, every cell of existence is understood and has been realised. Yoga means an integrated society based on the principles of union that are essential for survival and future existence. Men and woman when they unite conceive and give birth to children. Families united together bring support and a common agreement for safety and social growth. Seeds united with the earth become plants for food and shelter. Animals united with humans become companions and can facilitate our work. Yoga is definitely a very important science with a very detailed philosophy that offers guidelines as to how we can best achieve social unity Yoga implies a process, and also the attainment of a goal. Yoga will unite the various aspects of individual personality and it will also develop social unity. It is a material science and spiritual science. Yoga is a holistic individual self-development programme with a philosophy and practice to enhance individual and social growth. Therefore there are basic principles within the Yogic philosophy that lay the foundation for a successful life. They apply to individual evolution equally as well as they apply to the social culture of society.

FOUR PRINCIPLES

Artha: The first principle is Artha or material prosperity. Unless you have the necessary material prosperity will not be able to facilitate yourself. After all you need to eat, find shelter and have clothing. These basic material needs are required in order to facilitate your learning experiences. How much material prosperity you require is proportional to your spiritual wisdom and knowledge. Jesus of Nazareth made a statement

"The birds have trees to build their nests and foxes have holes in the ground to build their lair but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head".

Such a great spiritual consciousness had no need for personal ownership and yet he was provided for. He was hosted in the wealthy home of Lazarus and was equally comfortable sleeping in the desert. He was anointed with oils and perfumes by Mary Magdalene and yet in his spiritual consciousness Jesus was able to accept the cross and death with the same degree of humility and simplicity. Your spiritual consciousness is reflected in your attachment to material prosperity. If you are content with simplicity and satisfied with a humble life then it is an indication of your spiritual wisdom. But if you are constantly restless and dissatisfied with what you have and always trying to fill your life with more distractions and more possessions, this is clearly an indication of a limited spiritual understanding.

Kama: With material prosperity the second principle of Karma Yoga begins. Karma is the work and action that allows you to achieve your material prosperity. Unless you dig the earth you will not eat and unless you work you will not build a shelter. Karma Yoga is the process of action and interaction. Without Karma you will never experience anything new or realize the conflicts that exist within you. You will not learn the value of trust humility or forgiveness. Karma Yoga allows you to learn about yourself and others. As your spiritual consciousness develops you begin to understand the subtle aspects of how Karma is perpetuating the experiences in your life. The word Karma means the effect of an action. "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction". When someone approaches you with anger they are reacting to something. That is their Karma. When you experience their anger you react to them. That is your Karma. "When you react you perpetuate the Karma".

Dharma: The third principle in Yoga is Dharma. The difference between Karma and Dharma is that when we cease to react we can recognize and understand what needs to be done for the benefit of others. When you perform an action without expectation of reward, you are acting with a spiritual purpose. You approach me with anger, you are reacting to something and I understand that. Your anger has nothing to do with me. Your anger is your own karma. Your reaction is your own suffering. How I respond to your anger will make the difference between perpetuating Karma and performing my spiritual Dharma or purpose. Perhaps all that I have to do is listen and agree with you. Maybe it will be necessary to protect you because sometimes in your anger you become a danger to yourself and others. Well there are so many ways that I can act. In each and every moment the proper action must be understood. If you are capable of recognizing and understanding the proper action in any moment you are capable of performing dharma. When you act without reacting you are spiritually conscious and aware. A Yogi develops material prosperity through Karma and the experience of those two principles allows the Yogi to develop a spiritual consciousness and begin to live in dharma acting without reacting.

Moksha: The fourth principle is Moksha. When you are able to act without reacting, you experience liberation of consciousness. You are no longer influenced by the gross afflictions of the mind. Your mind becomes a spiritual consciousness that is free of jealousy, fear, greed and hatred. These four principles lay the foundation for a successful life. They are a natural progression of your personality. Artha or Material prosperity leads you into Karma. Work and action allows you to recognise and achieve the higher dharma of living your spiritual purpose. You learn to act without reacting. Finally you experience Moksha, liberating yourself from the gross mental behaviours of the mind, which allows you to realise the spiritual consciousness. These are the basic principles however the structure of Yoga and the philosophy behind the structure has to be applied in a practical way. The system of yoga is based on an integrated holistic philosophy that covers every aspect of our lives.