

Monthly Program Schedule for November 2024

9th (Sat)

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

10:30 ~ 12:00

(Japanese Only) (Video Uploaded Later)

13th (Wed)

Monthly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~ 10:30

(Japanese Only) (Zoom) (Video Uploaded Later)

17th (Sun)

Monthly Retreat at Zushi

10:30 ~ 16:30

(Bilingual) (Livestreaming)(Video Uploaded Later)

Speaker: Swami Medhasananda

23rd (Sat)

Akhand Japam

5:00 ~ 20:00

*Contact: vedanta.karmayoga@gmail.com

26th (Tue)

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

14:30 ~ 16:30

(Japanese Only) (Zoom)(Video Uploaded Later)

Yoga in Daily Life

by Swami Medhasananda

on 16th June 2024, Post Lunch Session

Let us understand Yoga in daily life from some other perspectives. Yoga is Union. Yoga is not only a union of the individual soul and the Supreme soul. But if we take it from the devotee's point of view, it is the union of devotee and his chosen deity. Whatever terminology we use, the union between Bhakta and Bhagavan or the union between

Jiva and Brahman, the result is the same. All spiritual aspirants, whichever path they follow, will reach the same goal, i.e., supreme peace, supreme bliss, absolute knowledge and freedom, and their lives will be fulfilled. Suffering, fear, bondage and secular desires will not remain. The knots of the hearts will be broken, and they will attain freedom.

Whatever path one follows, whether Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga or Jnana Yoga, the aim of all spiritual practices is constant communion with God. As the Upanishad says – Asupte (असुप्ते – In Wakefulness), Amrite (अमृते - Immortal). So, every day from the time we get up and till the time we fall asleep, our aim should be to maintain that connectedness. All our activities, thoughts etc. have to be aligned with this one objective in view - how not to forget God. This is Yoga. But when we try to put this into practice, we can understand how difficult it is. Because one has to attend to so many responsibilities and duties, one has to come in contact with so many persons. During all these occasions, one part of the mind should be connected with God. Once we know that this is the goal, this is spiritual life, then we understand how difficult it is.



Now, there are certain time periods which we allot for meditation. During those times, we sit quietly, we don't meet any person, nor do we do any work, but we try to think only of God. But still, it is so challenging to think of God alone, eliminating all other thoughts. So, naturally, during the day, when we have to attend to various duties and meet several people, it is all the more challenging to think of God simultaneously. Apparently, it seems to be impossible, but there are some realised souls, who, although they are not sitting quietly in meditation, but throughout the day, they have an inner awareness of God. I site an illustration from the life of Swami Shivananda. Once, he was walking in the courtyard of Belur Math, and suddenly a devotee made pranams to him. Maharaj almost stumbled upon the devotee and then he gave a very good scolding to the devotee. Needless to say, the devotee was embarrassed. Later Maharaj told him that he was inwardly in communion with the divine and was not at all aware of the presence of the devotee, although his eyes were open.

I am reminded of another incident from the life of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, let me illustrate it. He was the President of the Ramakrishna Order, so he was often required to sign important documents. Swami Saradanandaji was then the General Secretary. So, often it happened that when Saradanandaji would bring papers for

signature, Swami Brahmanandaji would feel reluctant and say, 'Not today'. But for Government documents, there is a last date for submission, so during such occasions, when the last day was approaching, Saradanandaji would insist, saying 'today you have to sign, because we don't have any more time.' Then Swami Brahmananda would say, 'Okay, give me your pen.' When the pen was brought, He would say, 'I don't remember my name.' Actually, His mind was in a very high state, and he was finding it difficult to bring it down to the ordinary plane of consciousness. These are some illustrations to show that one can remain in a constant communion with God all the time.

According to Raja Yoga, there are seven *chakras* or energy centres in our body. These are called Muladhara, Swadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, Vishuddha, Ajna and Sahasrara. As long as our mind moves around the first three chakras - *Muladhara, Swadhisthana and Manipura*, our life revolves around three principal activities: eating and drinking, evacuation and generation.

After long years of spiritual practice, if one is successful in taking the mind to *Anahata* chakra, then one has spiritual experiences. But still, one has chances of coming back to the lower chakras. Still higher is the chakra called *Vishuddha* chakra. In that state, the person likes to talk only of God. After reaching the *Vishuddha* chakra, chances are rare that the mind will come down to a lower chakra.

When the mind reaches the *Ajna* chakra, one sees light. And reaching *Sahasrara* one experiences samadhi. Swami Turiyanandaji used to say that Holy Mother's mind would not come down below *Vishuddha* chakra. Although outwardly she would occupy herself with all sorts of household duties, such as attending to the devotees, cooking and serving food, answering letters from monks and devotees, and adjusting with her nagging relatives, but inwardly Her mind was always in communion with God.

Now, what are ways for our devotees to have constant communion with God? There are two main ways: One way is to constantly think that 'I am Atman' irrespective of whatever is the condition of our body, wherever our senses move to, wherever our mind goes, whatever our intelligence is busy with, one should discriminate that all these are non-self. One can discriminate like this: When we are hungry, instead of thinking, 'I am hungry' we should think 'The body is hungry' Similarly, it is not I who think, but the mind thinks, the buddhi decides a course of action, and so on. 'I am separate from the body, the mind, the intellect'. In this way, we can constantly discriminate between the Self and the non-self.

We know from our experience, how difficult it is to practice this. Suppose I have a toothache. Everyone must have experienced a toothache in some part of one's life. In such a situation, one can try to discriminate - I am separate from the tooth, I am Atman. So, let the tooth ache but there is no need for me to contact the dentist. But how many of us can practice this? Rather the opposite happens. The moment there is any pain,

we start looking for a painkiller. Finally, we consult a dentist, and week after week we have to go. Then where is this consciousness, that I am the Atman? So, needless to say, it is very difficult to practice this.

In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna tells Arjuna,

मात्रास्पर्शस्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।
आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥2.14॥

mātrā-sparśhās tu kaunteya śhītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ
āgamāpāyino 'nityās tāns-titikṣhasva bhārata

O son of Kuntī, the non-permanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.

Agama-Apayinah (आगम-अपायिनः) means, it comes and goes. So, Sri Krishna says, Forbear! Forbear! In the case of the toothache, the tooth may fall. So, we have to tell our mind all these. One illustration will make this point clearer.

Swami Shivanandaji was one of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and a brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji was ill at Belur Math and Shivanandaji, his brother monk was attending to him and serving Him. Swamiji wanted to start a centre at Varanasi, and he had thought of sending Shivanandaji there. So, when he expressed his wish to Shivanandaji, who was serving him, Shivanandaji didn't agree, because he didn't want to leave Swamiji. But Swamiji kept on pressing him. Finally, Swamiji became a little agitated and said angrily, 'Will you go, or shall I ask somebody else?' Shivanandaji reluctantly agreed. Varanasi has a very extreme climate. During winter, it becomes extremely cold and the same as for summer too. During those days, it was unimaginable to get an air-conditioner or a fireplace. So, what happened was that in severe winter, Shivanandaji's teeth started falling one by one due to extreme pain. He didn't complain, nor did he visit any dentist. Thus is an example of forbearance.

The other way to practice constant awareness of God, is to chant the holy name of God continuously, and at the same time, to try to see the chosen deity in everyone and everything. And to see the will of the Lord in every situation and event in day-to-day life. If we can practice these three, it will be easier than the path of reasoning to maintain the constant awareness of God. I know quite a few monks and devotees, who do this practice.

But, when we start practicing it, we find this also very difficult and challenging. For instance, when we resolve to chant the name of the Lord during our daily chores, we

find that we forget doing it and occupy our mind in worldly and unnecessary thoughts. It is the nature of our mind to think of secular thoughts. So, what is the way? We have to take help of our Buddhi (Intellect), to constantly watch our mind. The moment the mind starts thinking of something secular, we have to bring it back to the thought of God. It is like training a horse.

You can Imagine how difficult it is to practice when you are working in the office or when you are travelling. But if you are determined to chant the mantra inwardly whatever be the state of mind, then slowly the mind will come under control and that controlled mind will become your friend. The mind will gradually begin to follow the directions of the Buddhi. Then, as Swamiji says, even in the busiest streets of New York, one will experience silence, the quietness of a Himalayan cave. It is possible to achieve this state of mind by chanting the mantra and focussing our mind on our Ishta. Another fact to understand is that whatever happens, happens by the will of God. That again, is also very challenging to agree with and practice. When things are favourable it is easy to practice. But when something happens which we do not like, for example disease, loss, separation etc., then to accept such adverse happenings as the will of and almighty and loving God is also very challenging. But, if we can do it, then we shall be able to experience the purpose of Yoga in our life, that is the Union of the Jivatman and the Paramatman.

One of the unique contributions of Swami Vivekananda in the field of Yoga is the integration of all the four Yogas. In our everyday life, we can practice all the four Yogas every day. In our Vedanta society, for instance, in the morning, when we meditate in the morning, we combine both Raja Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. Then when we chant the name of God, it is Bhakti-Yoga. When we read the Bhagavad Gita, it is Jnana Yoga. Then when we offer food to Sri Ramakrishna, that again it is Bhakti Yoga. When we undertake various activities like cleaning, washing, preparing food, gardening, organising celebrations - all these are a part of Karma Yoga. Again, when we sing the bhajans in the evening - that is Bhakti Yoga. When we meditate in the evening, that is a part of Raja Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. Reading from a Holy Book together at night is Jnana Yoga. All these activities we can continue to do, keeping constant remembrance of God, which is a part of Bhakti Yoga.

It is a model for everyone to follow. Let us not think that only a monk can follow this kind of schedule. Everyone can combine the four Yogas in one's day to day life. For instance, a devotee can study scriptures, and he can exercise discrimination between the real and unreal, both of which are part of Jnana Yoga. Doing all work as an offering to God and also knowing that the power and strength needed for undertaking the work comes from God, depending on God for the result of work – whether there is failure or success - are all part of Karma Yoga. Chanting the name of God, offering flower, incense stick and food to our deity are part of Bhakti Yoga. One can also practise the presence of his chosen deity in all beings and even all inert things around

him. This kind of imagination if persisted with faith and patience, will become a reality in course of time. This is an imagination of the reality, and this imagination will lead us to reality. However, in our day-to-day life, we go on imagining about unreal things and consequently our life becomes empty and leads us to dissatisfaction and disappointment.

The last point that I want to stress is, about lifestyle. There is a lot of fuss, especially in India about selection of food - whether one should have vegetarian or non-vegetarian food. People spend a lot of time in arguing about these matters. Then they also debate - with whom we should mix and whom we should avoid, how we should pass our leisure, etc. In our religious life, we need to pay attention to all these details. For instance, there is difference of opinion regarding food between Ramanujacharya and Shankaracharya. Ramanuja has mentioned about Jati Dosha (जाति दोषः) and Ashraya Dosha (आश्रय दोषः). According to him we should avoid all the defects related to food, for instance, the person who cooks the food - if his character is not good, we shouldn't eat food prepared by him. The place where the food is served, if it isn't clean and pure then we shouldn't eat there. Ramanujacharya has given emphasis to all these points. Whereas Shankaracharya gave more emphasis to the vibrations which enter into our mind through the gates of the senses - what we see, what we hear, smell, etc. The vibrations entering into our mind through these gates can make the mind pure or impure. These are Shankaracharya's arguments.

Now, people, systems, circumstances are so different, that it is very difficult to make a general rule regarding food, drinks and lifestyle. But we can make a rule regarding food, and that is, if a particular food excites our body and mind, disturbs our system and finally we lose control of our body and mind, then we should avoid that food. These are the three general golden rules regarding food. For example, alcohol- When a person gets addicted to drinking alcohol, he can't keep control of his senses or his mind. A devotee of Sri Ramakrishna was addicted to drinking. Sri Ramakrishna advised him to take care that his feet don't tremble while walking and head doesn't reel. So, if we take care of these three golden rules regarding food and drinks, everything is fine. About associating with people, visiting places, working, recreation, for example, listening to songs, reading books, etc., the advice is whenever any of these activities take us away from God, we should avoid them.

• Thought of the Month •

Achieving durable happiness as a way of being is a skill. It requires sustained efforts in training the mind and developing a set of human qualities, such as **inner peace**, **mindfulness**, and **altruistic love**.

- Matthieu Ricard

Talk on Sri Krishna

by Swami Medhasananda

On 18th August at Zushi

Sri Krishna was among the traditional ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, who lived around 3500 years ago. Now, the question is, why does God incarnate in the form of a human being? In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord himself has said:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥4.7॥

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥4.8॥

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata
abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṁ srijāmyaham

paritrāṇāya sādḥūnāṁ vināśhāya cha duṣhkṛitām
dharma-sansthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge

Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata,
And there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I Myself come forth.

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil doers,
For the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age.

Based on the above, we can say that there are four reasons why God incarnates on this earth.

1. When religion degrades, God comes down for the protection of mankind,
2. To show the path of peace and liberation to spiritual aspirants,
3. To punish the evil-minded persons,
4. To become a close companion of devotees; to love them and to receive love from them.

To love God is the central purpose of all spiritual practices. To love an abstract being is difficult but when he appears in the form of a human being, it becomes easy to love him. Jesus Christ came down on earth as the 'Son of God' and hence, the Christians find it easy to approach God through Christ. Similarly, though Buddha taught his followers the path to transcend sorrow and suffering, although he didn't stress on God much, instead showed the path to freedom by following morality, yet today millions and millions of his followers regard him as God. Hence, for a vast majority of mankind, approaching God as a human being who had become pure and perfect in his lifetime is the easiest way.

For Christians, Christ is an incarnation for them; no one can take the position of Christ. For Buddhists, Buddha is regarded as an incarnation, and no one can take the position of Buddha. But in Hinduism, there are several incarnations. One may follow Rama, or Krishna or Chaitanya - the result of our spiritual practices will be same. And in Hinduism, God incarnates in every age. When religion degenerates, God again comes down to earth to revive religion.



Today, I shall present a short life sketch of Sri Krishna. Though he belonged to the Kshatriya caste, but he was brought up among a cowherd tribe. His actual parents were Devaki and Vasudeva, but he was taken care of by His foster parents Yashoda and Nanda. On the other side of Yamuna, reigned Kamsa, who was a tyrannical King. According to an Oracle, he came to know that Krishna would be his slayer. So, he decided to kill Krishna. When Kamsa came to know that Krishna is growing up at Gokul in the house of Nanda and Yashoda, he sent demons there to kill him. Now, when Nanda and Yashoda saw this attempt of Kamsa to kill their beloved child, they became alarmed. They migrated to Vrindavan, where there were lush green fields and several ponds where the cows can graze easily (because they were a cowherd tribe).

After some years, Krishna and his brother Balaram went to Mathura and killed the tyrannical king Kamsa. Ugrasena, the father of Kamsa, who was thrown into prison by his son, was again put on his throne by Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna established his own kingdom at Dwaraka, which is at present situated at Gujarat.

Sri Krishna also played a prominent role in the battle of Kurukshetra, the battle between Kauravas and the Pandavas. Now Sri Krishna wanted to stop the war of Kurukshetra because he knew that if the war takes place, the war will be devastating, and many persons will be killed. Among the two warring groups, the Kauravas were headed by Duryodhana, who was a very evil-minded person. On the eve of the battle, Arjuna was deluded when he saw his relatives, teachers, his own cousin brothers and many senior people as his opponent, so he decided not to fight. Then Sri Krishna, the charioteer of Arjuna gave a sermon to Arjuna, saying, 'Since you belong to the kshatriyas, it is your moral duty to fight against evil minded Duryodhana and his

companions. Fight this war as your duty. While fighting, remember Me'. This sermon which Sri Krishna gave to Arjuna, later came to be known as the Bhagavad Gita. Consequently, the Pandavas, led by Arjuna defeated the Kauravas and many evil-minded people, such as Duryodhana were killed. So, one of the missions of the incarnation, i.e., destruction of the evil forces was successful.

Now, let us concentrate on Vrindavan where Sri Krishna played many divine sports. Even in his childhood, Krishna killed many demons sent by Kamsa - this was the power aspect of Sri Krishna. The love aspect of His divine sport was manifested in his relationship with foster parents, cowherd boys and girls - the Gopas and the Gopis. During these sports, we see two aspects - the divine aspect and the human aspect. Sometimes the divine aspect would manifest, while at other times the human aspect. So, often those who stayed with him would be puzzled and would think, 'Which is true? The divine aspect, or the human aspect?' When they saw his divine aspect, they would think, 'If we keep the divine aspect of Sri Krishna in our mind, then we will be in awe of him, and have reverence towards him, which will hinder in developing a loving relationship with him. We won't be able to mix with him as our near and dear one.' So, in Vrindavan, all who knew him - his foster parents, senior members of the community and his cowherd friends - overlooked his divine nature and loved him as their most near and dear one.

Krishna, as a child was very naughty and loved to steal cream, milk, butter, yoghurt, etc. from others' houses. Interestingly, if the neighbours would lovingly and willingly offer these milk products to him, he would refuse, rather he was fond of stealing them. So, often these milkmaids would complain to Yashoda about these deeds of the Baby Krishna. Then Yashoda would advise them, 'why don't you put the milk products on earthen pitchers and hang them from the roof of your house? Then Krishna won't be able to reach them'. But these milkmaids would answer: 'We have tried that method too, but Krishna is so naughty that he would climb on the shoulders of his friends and would reach them. And if that method didn't work, then Krishna would break those pitchers by stoning them, consequently, those pitchers would break and milk and butter would flow out from them and Krishna standing below, would gulp them. He is so naughty! Not only he would partake of them, but he would also distribute them to the monkeys. And when we try to catch him, he would run away and standing at a distance would smile. By seeing his smile, we forget all our grudges against him'.

One day, Yashoda decided to bind him. So, she brought a rope and as she was trying to bind Krishna, the rope felt short. She added more rope, but every time it felt short. When Yashoda became exhausted by doing it again and again, and seeing her in that condition, Krishna allowed her to bind Him. Now, the significance of this anecdote is, one cannot bind the infinite. God, being infinite, His incarnation is also infinite, and hence, he cannot be bound. In other words, He cannot be reached by our senses, the mind, etc. But when a devotee, trying all his means fails to reach Him, and surrenders at His lotus feet, He by His own mercy comes to the devotee and grants him His vision.

On another occasion, Krishna was playing a game with his friends and in that game, he was again and again getting defeated. Piqued, Krishna took some soil from the ground and put it in his mouth. The other playmates reported the matter to Yashoda. Yashoda came there, and when she opened his mouth, what she saw was the whole Universe, including herself. She was puzzled. However, she had that vision for a short while and Krishna came back to his normal form. This again shows the divine aspect as well as the human aspect. As divine, the whole Universe rests in Him. Again, when He came back to His normal form, he was in his human aspect. This is a mystery of the divine sport of the Lord.

Photographs from the Annual Outdoor Retreat

At Zentsuji From 5th~7th July 2024
(this is the third and final set)





• Story to Remember •

Secret of Unswerving Righteousness (Story of Dara)

Dara was a humble shepherd in the land of Persia. He was of low birth and extremely poor but endowed with deep wisdom and possessed a shrewd insight and great understanding in the nature of men and things.

The Shah of Persia coming to know of Dara's wisdom and insight took him into his services where Dara soon rose to the highest position of the Shah's Chief Councilor and trusted Prime Minister. This made the other nobles very jealous of Dara and they eagerly awaited a proper opportunity of bringing disgrace upon Dara and pulling him down from the high status he occupied.

The Shah had unlimited confidence in Dara and once he sent Dara as Governor-designate of one of the most important provinces of his great kingdom. In his absence, the hostile and jealous nobles reported many unfavorable things about Dara to the Shah. They accused Dara of corruption and told the Shah that Dara had amassed great riches by misappropriating Royal revenues and always took this ill-gotten treasure with him closely secured in a chest. Wherever he went, this chest followed him on camel's back and he opened it only at night within the privacy of his own tent. He never once parted with the chest nor ever opened it in public. This was the grave charge.

The noble Shah trusted Dara implicitly; but the nobles insisted upon Dara being examined and exposed. At last, the Shah one day paid a sudden surprise visit to Dara and entering Dara's tent at night said, "O Dara, my faithful friend, pray, show to me the contents of that chest. I have a great curiosity to see inside". Though he was reluctant, yet Dara obeyed the royal command and before all slowly unlocked the chest, raised the lid and opened it full. And lo! to the astonished gaze of the onlookers was revealed an old shepherd's cloak of plain simple cloth, brown with dust and tattered with age. Except this, there was naught else inside the chest — no gem, nor gold, nor silver or brass not even a single copper.

The mystified Shah directed inquiring eyes at the silent Dara and the latter spoke and said, "Royal Shah, thou knowest now what I guarded closely all these years. This shepherd's garment I wore in those days before you found and favored me with thy royal kindness. But position, prestige and power are dangerous things for the unwary man. They raise one high and pull him down to the dust as well. Prosperity and plenty, authority and respect turn a man's head and take him away from the straight path. He is safe who constantly remembers who he was before his fortune smiled upon him and God graced him. This alone reminds him what he really is and keeps him humble, true and righteous. Therefore, I have retained this old cloak of mine to remind me of my former life. I look at it every night lest I forget it in the intoxication of my present position and glory. This makes me ever humble, true and simple. O Royal Master, though outwardly Dara is your chief councilor and a great Governor by your favor, yet even to this day in reality he is the same simple shepherd humble, poor and incorruptible. And his one constant prayer to the Lord, his divine master is that he may continue to be so."

Aspirants and seekers, take this great lesson from the sagely Dara. Never forget what you really are in your heart of hearts. Let not external changes and vicissitudes of fickle fortune turn your head and make you plunge into delusion and unrighteousness. Cherish the lessons of life carefully even as Dara treasured his humble cloak. Remember life's lesson every day and thus remain unaffected by external passing phenomena. Even as Dara constantly remembered his shepherd origin, ever bear in mind your own true Atmic origin. Do not be overcome by the influence of impermanent secular Abhimana.

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