

Guide to a Fuller Life

□ Dr. Jayadeva Yogendra

We meet with problems and difficulties every day all throughout our life. Some we solve, others remain insoluble. We wonder at times : is there something wanting in our way of growing up and living, that creates so many problems for us ?

Indeed the intensity with which we feel at times and the sort of fixation to trivialities that we indulge in, often, has much to do with our predicament. If I was insulted by someone, the feeling of hurt totally occupies my attention. I cannot tear myself apart from this feeling, nor can I look at myself than as others look at me. Not to get too subjectively involved with things and to view situations in a larger perspective is one way out of the situation.

Have we received any training here ? Probably not. Though there is a sort of training and learning when in the hustle bustle of life one tries to keep on proceeding and immunises oneself to the feelings like this feeling of hurt. All this helps and yet one may wish that one did receive some instruction on how not to remain too sensitive and thus vulnerable to external stresses or to keep to some higher kind of a thinking when buffeted by trivial matters.

We live a life that is very limited. It just takes into account our physical person and our psychological self at a very low level. As Alexis Carrel said, we are little Eskimos overprotected, incapable of facing the realities of life. We have grown oversensitive to noise, to climatic changes and a host of allergens. Are we not limiting ourselves in this way from embracing life in its fullness ? We are also facing difficulties at the psychological front. A disintegration of our personality is occurring as a result of increasing "double-think" on our part and a host of similar tendencies. We adjust to things without having arrived at a clear understanding of them. We tolerate a lot of injustice, corruption etc., as a stopgap arrangement. We hope and wish that things would be different and better sometime, somewhere, but the Shangrila of our dreams recedes as we advance in age.

The cause of our difficulty is that we refuse to grow up. The journey of man in the external world of unfortunately wholly guided by the physical sciences. His inward journey to explore the consciousness never starts though it could be considerably helped by the science of spirituality.

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Is there a learnable technique to a fuller life ? While physical exercises, rituals and such external expressions are not by themselves spiritual, one may yet benefit from them. One may thus gain clarity, set up worthwhile goals and objectives, take to healthy habits of living, put oneself in certain states of consciousness and create sufficient strength to provide momentum to spiritual urge.

These attempts are possible. One can work at each of these activities like arriving at some clarity, setting up short term targets, organizing life on this basis, cultivating good habits and as a result experiencing positive feelings. The impressions which these wholesome attempts make, foster a kind of passion for self development.

One such programme as detailed below is being worked out at the Yoga Institute, Santacruz, through its short residential courses :

Objectives of a programme for a "Fuller Life".

1. Acceptance of life situations.
2. Arranging priorities of duties.
3. Full participation in life.
4. Continuous broadening of our views.

1. Yoga is basically an art of living. In Yoga we learn to accept life as it is. We seek a meaning in it. We create a trust in nature. The larger process of life is good. We should find our place in this process. Let us not sit idle and think negatively. Let us not remain at war with life. We should rather remain involved in the business of living.

- (a) What is needed is a good habit of observation and mindfulness.
- (b) We must examine the more worthwhile experience from the less meaningful.
- (c) A disciplined attitude of this kind is the minimum needed.

2. Whether it is arranging priorities or understanding our motivations, a study of our own inner self is a must. How am I related to life ? When we decide on doing a thing do we create a sense of duty ? Do we generally do things half-heartedly ? Do we reach levels of efficiency in what we do ? Is the work done just for the sake of doing ? Do our acts, turn out to be a series of ritual acts ? How can one gain an inner grasp of things and avail of an insight that dawns spontaneously ?

- (a) A study of motivations should be attempted.
- (b) Understanding of emotional factors that colour our thinking is necessary.
- (c) Looking at ourselves as others look at us.
- (d) Cultivating a code of conduct and routine for oneself.

3. Sincerity, devotion and duty consciousness, all generate attention and concentration.

- (a) Steadiness of mind, in acts undertaken may be cultivated.
- (b) Growth of more meaning in work undertaken should occur.
- (c) Subtler changes in level of consciousness should be detected.

4. We should outgrow our limited understanding of ourselves and the world around. Beyond our egoistic thinking is a larger principle of consciousness that finally lends meaning to many of our activities.

- (a) Continuous evaluation of our ability to forget our little self.
- (b) To reach for a direction in life.
- (c) Coming closer to the larger processes of life may be here experienced.

We need support to begin our work in self-development. The fullness of life has to be experienced in life situations and in actions. Abstract thinking or reading is not substitute here. In fact, our present sensate culture makes us extorverted. We do accept the existence of things which are beyond our senses. We have therefore to begin with the tangible, the physical, the so-called rational thinking. A code of disciplined conduct is suggested called Yama Niyama.

How to integrate an objective approach to life? Can we learn to look at things from a slight distance? One simple way is to look back on events that have occurred earlier. It is like looking at yourself in a mirror. One may sit in Vajrasana or any meditation asana, close the eyes and recall incidents that occurred earlier. Go into details, preferably chronologically the earlier event first the later event next. This will help in concentration develop good memory any help in creating mindfulness and awareness.

In Yoga a healthy person is considered an individual, who lives in a balanced state of body, mind and soul. This is a fuller life. A healthy person is an individual, whose thoughts and actions have their equivalent in higher values. Fuller life, in a yogic understanding can only be reached through a harmonious way of living. This may imply a total change of our values and round of habits, since it is not primarily the cure of diseases which is important but the prevention of them. Yoga deals with the root cause of our problems.

All illness is originating from a state of imbalance between our physical, mental and spiritual levels. Our diseases are closely related to our understanding of life and the patterns we follow. The more materialistic (in the widest sense of the word) values we cherish, the more we expose ourselves to pain suffering and diseases. The constant struggle for satisfaction of our desires and ambitions leaves us no rest. Our constantly overstrained

nerves make our body and mind restless and weak, opening all doors to the bad impact of passions and emotions. Just practising Asanas now and then is not enough. Our healthy daily routines should also contain pranayama, internal and external cleanliness (selected kriyas and body hygiene) small healthy habits, such as taking early morning sun, little strolls after meals etc. Besides all this it is equally important to observe a pure and healthy diet, considering quality and quantity of food taken in, and last but not least psychosomatic and relaxing practices (conditioning, Savasana, Nispanda bhava etc.). But the most important of all these is the spirit in which they are carried out.

The external world troubles some. They see problems. They see injustice, imperfections and difficulties. Yoga tells us that external things are neutral and are not the real cause of our suffering. The external world is a product of certain inherent material forces called the Gunas. Like a toy kaleidoscope these ingredients of matter keep changing their position and create different patterns and designs. Some one likes the colour and designs, some one gets bored. To a large extent our involvement with things creates various feelings and various attachments. One person gets excessively attached and suffers a lot. Another has a different philosophy and does not get easily affected. Let us not talk of how big is our problem, rather let us say how strong is our identification with the problem, because another man watching the situation may not feel any problem at all. A glass is filled with some water and one may say it is full with water, another may say it is half empty.

1. The essence of a fuller life is Karma-Yoga of the Gita. It includes—
 - (a) A belief in a higher reality.
 - (b) Acceptance of full responsibility of duties you are expected to perform.
 - (c) Total participation in the work at hand.
 - (d) Overcoming the sense of I and acceptance of a higher power that guides us.
2. Cultivate the habit of taking stock of yourself. Stop to reflect.
3. Cut away your mind from the hubbub of the outside world. For a short while do not think of your appointments and pressing engagements. Think of yourself.
4. Become aware of your own body and the working of your own mind.
5. Condition your mind with the help of yogic practices.
6. Learn to train your mind to participate in whatever you do.
7. Develop co-ordination between mind and body through simple yogic asanas like Talasana, Utkatasana, and kriyas like Trataka.

8. To enjoy good health—physical and mental, exercise the spine systematically. There are simple yogic practices meant for exercising the spine.
9. Control the act of respiration. When you breath rapidly and unrhythmically your mind is certainly not very steady. In fact, in Yoga, bioenergy expressions are controlled to develop your inner self.
10. Relaxation promotes and stabilizes a fuller life. Relaxation should not be in a particular posture or in a place. It should be an attitude.
11. Tension leads to disease. Overcome tensions through relaxation.
12. Sitting in meditation and reflecting on the true nature of things the real and the unreal—helps in purifying the mind.
13. Simple yogic practices are available which help in withdrawing the mind from the sense objects.
14. When the mind is tranquil and clear like the still water of a lake, insight into the true nature of life is gained.
15. When the mind is thus clear and is engaged in work in the spirit of karma-yoga, one has progressed well on the path of self-improvement, and thus to a fuller life.

—Santa Cruz, Bombay.



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