



PATHS TO THE DIVINE

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There are two types of religions—one in which God is believed to be outside man and the other in which God is believed to be within man. On the first religious path, God is described as an entity descending from above, from heaven. Heaven is up in the sky, beyond man's reach and remote from his existence. The main method of communication with God on this path is prayer.

The person who follows this path believes that God's grace will save him, remove his pain and suffering and restore him to a distant and future heaven. He believes himself to be totally dependant on God and relies completely on the compassion and mercy of God. "Thy will be done, O Lord, and not mine," is his prayer. This person's journey begins with surrender. His path is the path of prayer and surrender—the path of *Bhakti Yoga*. Christianity and Islam are clear examples of religions which fall into this category.

The second type of path teaches that God exists within man. He is not remote from man's existence nor far from his reach. He is as close as man's very breath. The purpose of following such a path is to uncover the God who already exists within, while the purpose of following the path of prayer is to gain the favour of a God who exists outside. The path that believes God to be outside solicits His grace through prayer; the path that believes God to be within strives to uncover Him through meditation. Prayer speaks to God without; meditation listens to God within. The man of prayer says, "My Lord, come to me. Do this for me." The man of meditation, on the other hand, says "*Aham Brahmāsmi*" (I am the Brahman—I am God) and "*Tat Twam Asi*" (Thou art That).

When the actual presence of God is believed to reside within the body of man, the body is considered to be the temple of God. As such, care of the body is stressed to a greater degree than it is on religious paths which believe God to be an entity separate from man. Yoga has designed an elaborate system which considers care of the body to be an integral part of spiritual growth. In most religions, spiritual growth has nothing to do with body. The body is ignored and, in some cases, even shunned. This is not the case in Yoga. Spiritual practices on the yogic path concern themselves initially with the tangible body, the body which man experiences and feels. They gradually lead man to understand the more subtle levels of his being. The physical practices are designed to affect the glands, muscles, nerves, tissues, cells and organs of the body as well as the body's major systems.

The body which is seen as the temple of God is also recognized as the instrument through which oneness with God is achieved. It is like a bowl which is full of milk. The bowl is useful to contain the milk which is not yet drunk. When the milk is gone, however, the bowl has served its purpose and is no longer useful. In like manner, the body is useful to contain the energy of God within man. When man has fully realized God, the body is no longer useful. It is a tool and not an end in itself—it is the temple of God, but it is not God Himself.

Kuṇḍalinī Yoga is based upon this approach. Thus the yogi on the *Kuṇḍalinī* path begins with the body and gradually progresses to the deeper spiritual practices of meditation. He applies his will as well as his reason and logic to his search for God. In contrast with the practitioner on the path of prayer, who begins with surrender, the yogi's journey begins largely through the path of will. The beauty of the path of will is that the journey starts where the majority of aspirants are—it starts with what they can readily understand, communicate, experience and accept. It begins with the known, the external, the tangible and the concrete. The practitioner can be sure of what is happening when he deals with the body. He can feel and see the results of his practices. Thus the path of will is well-suited to the Western mind, which responds best to what is external, tangible and concrete.

The practitioner on the path of will, however, eventually comes to a stage in which he must let go of his will and allow the inner workings of the God within him to direct his progress. This 'letting go' is called surrender. In eight-limbed *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga** the first six steps, that of Yama (abstention from wrong doing), Niyama (moral observances), *Āsana* (posture), *Prāṇāyāma* (control of breath), *Pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of the mind from sense-objects), and *Dhāraṇā* (concentration) belongs to the path of will. The last two *Dhyāna* (meditation) and *Samādhi* (merger into centre of the Self) belong to the path of surrender. When the disciple arrives at the stage of surrender, he can no longer progress by using his will. His will, in fact, becomes a hindrance to him. At this stage, faith, trust and surrender are necessary to make continued growth possible. The faith and trust needed by the disciple, however, are now available to him as a result of his prior wilful practices.

The *Kuṇḍalinī* path progresses from the known to the unknown. When your journey begins with a God of whom you know nothing, it starts with the abstract, with what you are not. Such a search is a journey from the unknown to the unknown. To make such a journey is difficult for the man of logic, the man of reason and will. If you have the faith to surrender to the unknown, to jump into the unknown, then the path of surrender is valid at the very beginning of the search. If you do not have a sufficient amount of faith, however, you will find it difficult to use this approach. Such is the predicament of the average Western practitioner of traditional, faith-oriented religion.

The devotee, the follower of the path of prayer and faith, folds his hands and prays to the Father for His grace—and waits. The yogi, who believes the dormant aspect of God to be within himself, goes through various disciplines to awaken the energy of God, known as *Śakti*, within him. He acts. He begins with wilful, conscious practices. This difference in approach does not mean that prayer can be used only by those who believe God to be outside themselves. It also plays a useful role on the path of will, for prayer, in some form, can be and is used by all paths and in every religion. Prayer without attention to and care of the body, however, is an abstract prayer—a useless prayer.

If the person who prays to God lacks total faith and abiding trust, he will become vague in his belief of God. If he further ignores his body and condemns it, he will fail to see the power of God functioning through his body. He will tend to reject and separate the apparently lower forces of the body from the higher forces of God. As a result, it will become psychologically difficult for him to believe that the kingdom of heaven is within, that God can express Himself through man.

People of this belief unconsciously treat the body and its forces as devilish. They see that the sensual pleasures of lust and passion are so powerful that they distract the aspirant from the higher path. The saying 'the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak' is correct. The

* *Aṣṭāṅga* (Eight-Limbed) Yoga : A scientific approach to God-realization based on progressively unfolding levels of growth, expounded by the sage Patanjali in his *Yoga Sūtra* (200 B.C.).



body can indeed be an obstacle, but when ignored, it becomes a greater obstacle. Only through understanding, study and proper care can man permanently transcend any obstacle including the body.

When man accepts the presence of Divine energy in each centre of his body, even in the traditionally condemned sex centre, he truly realizes that God is everywhere. Thus he begins to see God's presence manifesting through every aspect of his being. He realizes that God is energy, God is neutral in nature like electricity, which can be used to help man or to hurt him. It is man's choice to use this energy of God within him for higher growth or to misuse it for his own selfish gain and sensual pleasure. Yogis realize this fact and, through *Haṭha* and *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga* techniques, they purify the body and mind, thereby internalizing so-called sensual energy for use as a vehicle to achieve expanded states of consciousness. Thus the very sensual energy which is regarded as man's greatest obstacle on the path of prayer becomes the means of higher growth when God is accepted as existing within man through the understanding available in *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga*.

When man sees God within himself, he easily recognizes His presence within everyone and everything that surrounds him. He finds it easy to be at one with God. When man sees God as outside and above himself, he experiences a separation, a psychological dichotomy of good and bad, high and low, a dichotomy between heaven and the hell of the flesh, between all earthly beings and their remote Creator. He fails to understand the implications of his belief that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. If God is everywhere, He is also in the body.

Because he believes God to be other than himself, man unconsciously condemns himself and the world in order to love a God who is other than himself and the world. He feels he is nobody, that he is weak because of his human flesh. Because he has separated himself from God by separating his body from God, he suffers a tremendous amount of guilt and shame. He feels only God's grace can save him. And God's grace can save him—but if man does not have total faith and trust, he will not be able to receive this grace. At the same time he will fail to do anything on his own will, to transform himself. If such a man does not receive God's grace or establish some sort of communication with the divine, he has nothing. He has neither a way to contact grace nor the concrete methods of working through the body.

The path of prayer is difficult for the average person to follow because it is based on faith. Man lives in an age of reason, an age of scientific explanation. The average person who wants logic and experiential proof of the truth of teachings finds it hard to accept a religion through faith alone. For this reason, the path of prayer and faith is difficult for modern man to accept. Yoga, on the other hand, is easily followed and well accepted because it uses logic and reasoning as tools to acquire faith. It provides unique benefits to many people because it does not require either faith or will alone, but provides approaches which are suited to people of varied temperaments. The faith-oriented person, the person for whom trust, selflessness, surrender and a prayerful attitude come easily, can practise the path of prayer—*Bhakti Yoga*. The will and reason-oriented can practise *Haṭha*, *Karma*, *Kriyā* and *Raja Yogas* with equally effective results.

Eventually all paths of yoga—both the path of prayer and the path of will—are designed to awaken the dormant energy known as *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti*. As the active *Śakti* begins to automatically hasten the practitioner's growth, he naturally enters the path of surrender in which devotion and faith play a predominant role. When the follower of the path of will reaches this stage, however, he experiences faith naturally as a result of his concrete experience of growth in the earlier stage of practice. Faith is not demanded at the outset of the search. Instead, it develops gradually and naturally as a result of sustained, wilful practice.

Whether God comes from above or exists within makes no difference to those who have experienced the heights of higher consciousness, but it does make a difference to beginners.

Sometimes a misunderstanding as to the most suitable path for an individual may retard the growth of even the most sincere seeker. The path that begins from man, from the known, is naturally much easier for most people to follow. The path of will and action is readily understood and practised by most Westerners, who have habitually relied upon logic and reason. Total surrender and faith are very hard to come by in this age of reason and science.

The path of prayer—the path of surrender—is a difficult path for most beginners. The beauty of yoga lies in the fact that each individual can follow the most suited to his nature, for yoga teaches that all paths lead to the same place—to the divine within.

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There is a fixed state; sleep, learn and working states are mere movements in it. They are like pictures moving on the screen in a cinema show. Everyone sees the screen as well as the pictures but ignores the screen and takes in the pictures alone. The jñān, however, considers the screen and not the pictures. The pictures move on the screen but do not affect it. The screen itself does not move but remains stationary. The state is called *Turiya* and it is not a separate state but that which underlies the three states. Another name for it is the *Self*.

—Raman Maharshi

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of the ego. Exhalation makes one impersonal and hence is a fit instrument of surrender to the Lord. It is the highest form of surrender to the Lord.

Exhalation can also be understood as a cleansing process. As the breath is gently exhaled from the heart, the heart is cleansed of evil desires and emotional disturbances. This cooling-cleansing process initiated by the lungs can be compared to the *ārāḍhanā* or *abhiṣeka* performed each morning for the idols in the temples. Or again as the waters of *Ganga* drip on the *Śivaliṅgas*. So exhalation flows over the life-giving *liṅga* within, keeping it ever clean and pure. This surrender to the Lord has to be accepted and so there is a period of stillness after exhalation for the Lord to accept this surrender before inhalation begins.

Meditation is a subjective experience and the transplanting of subjective fall short of reality. To use a trite example; no amount of description of how a mango tastes will ever equal the delight that the first bite into that delicious fruit brings, so too with meditation. The sure and safe techniques can be given, the state of the mind can be described, but the savour of the fruit is only granted to those who “taste and see that the Lord is sweet.”

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