

# SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: AN EXPONENT OF PRACTICAL VEDANTA

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## Abstract

Spiritual regeneration is the essence of rational yoga and practical Vedanta. Vivekananda paved the path for global revolution through yoga. My paper talks about various sciences of yoga as told by a spiritual leader and saint from India, known as the messenger of Hindu philosophy and spiritualism. According to the Vedanta philosophy, knowledge is intrinsic in a man, like a spark in a piece of flint, and all that is needed is the strike of suggestion to bring it out. 'Manifestation' indicates spontaneous growth, provided that the impediments, if any, are removed. When India struggled to regenerate forgotten glory, a great monk, Swami Vivekananda, was born to revitalise the motherland with spiritual reawakening. Strength was lying deep in the roots of Indian culture and Vedantic philosophy, but tyrannies of time covered souls with layers and layers of ignorance. Nevertheless, he regenerated and revitalised the spiritual quest of humans in the East and the West, kindled the spirits of humans, and gave meaning to their lives. Now the question arises, why do we need spiritual regeneration today?

**Keywords:** Yoga, Practical Vedanta, Consciousness, Spiritualism, Parivrajak

Man is on the verge of spiritual degeneration; he must feel the practical Vedanta by realising absolute consciousness. Vivekananda energised the entire universe with a yogic aura by preaching through actions:

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*You are the mark of platonic Karma Yoga  
 Walking tirelessly on the path of life  
 Glowing with a seamless flame  
 Evolution of the universal mind  
 Example of untiring rational Yoga  
 Bridging the East and the West  
 Non-dualistic understanding of truth  
 You are the child of Swami Vivekananda!*

-Priyanka Vaidya

Swami Vivekananda was born Narendranath Datta in a respectable middle-class family on 12 January 1863 in Calcutta. His father, Viswanath Datta, was an attorney and lover of art and literature. Although radical and liberalistic, Viswanath was cynical about religious practices. On the other hand, Narendra's mother, Bhubaneshwari Devi, was a pious, kind-hearted lady devoted to the Hindu culture, rituals and traditions.

Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were the saints to fathom the untouched depths of Indian consciousness. Their disciple Nivedita took their message to the West after breaking all the barriers of race, class, gender and country. Sister Nivedita was a *Manas-Kanya* and disciple of Swami ji, and she was a true exponent who devoted her life to the service of India and Vedantic learning. She used to say that a disciple is born before the birth of the Guru. A Guru reaches the farthest corner of the earth to sow the seeds in the darkness of ignorance. Ramakrishna was waiting for Vivekananda, and Vivekananda was waiting for Nivedita. While spreading the rays of wisdom, Vivekananda, a Hindu Yogi, a parivrajak, reached London in October 1895. Margaret Noble was fighting with conflicts; inner turmoil was unbearable. The faith she had followed since childhood could never satisfy her mind and heart. She could never attain peace before meeting the Master of her soul. Nivedita said:

All is in mind. Nothing outside us has any power save what we give it. However imposing the external world may seem, it is, in reality, only the toy of the mind. It is but a feeble expression of what has first been thought. "All that we are is the result of what we have thought," says Buddha; "it is founded on our thoughts; it is made up of our thoughts." (CWSN Vol. III 427)

This is why education is so much the most important concern in life. The mind must be kept in a condition to work. It must be held at the command of the will, from its lowest up to the highest possible activity. It must be made competent to envisage any problem and answer it in a fashion that is not inadequate. A people can afford to

eat poorer food and less of it than was their custom. They cannot afford to let their mind grow dim. They cannot afford to part with education.

Vedanta is a universal principle that travelled through collective wisdom from seers, sages and scriptures, and it is all-pervading. Vivekananda simplified it and talked about practical Vedantic learning, making it local to global. Global consciousness is possible only through rational yoga, which is possible through an understanding of the physiological, psychological and scientific aspects of life:

Swamiji had the head of Shankara and the heart of Sri Chaitanya, the eyes of a Monist and hands of a Monotheist, the tenacity of a scholar and tenderness of a lover, the devotion of a theist and the spirit of service of a humanist. We may call his interpretation of the Vedanta doctrine by a new name, "*Manavadvaita-vada*" or "*Humanistic Monism*". For who has sung "*manav-mahatmya*" or the glory of man in sweeter tones than he? (Chaudhuri 295)

The main focus of learning is the manifestation of supreme reality. As Vivekananda said, 'What a man "learns" is really what he "discovers", by taking the cover off his soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge' (*CW*, vol. I, 28).

In a discourse in New York, Vivekananda talked about *Ekatm darshan*. Merging the object with the subject is Aum Tat Sat's true principle, Ramakrishna's doctrine of *Bramha Satyam, and Jagat Mithya*. The subject should not be merged with the object. I am the absolute subject. World is the object; that is an illusion. The world dies, and I am eternal, supreme consciousness. I am the only one that remains till eternity.

Vivekananda couldn't bear the pain of his master and asked him to pray for his own body.

"Can't you pray to Maa Kali to destroy this devilish cancer? Your devotees can't see you in deep agony."

"Narendra! I will pray for your happiness."

Ramakrishna prayed to the goddess. Oh, Ma Kali! I can't eat; my throat is hurting. Please help me to eat.

Maa's words echoed: "Ramakrishna! You are eating through numberless mouths. Can't you experience the universal consciousness in this agony? You are not the body but a living soul, one with the universe, and your body is the divine abode."

*A vow stops*

*On the narrow and narrow paths of life*

*In sadness, in cry*  
*In the agonised mortal body*  
*Infinite bliss*  
*Absolute self*  
*Supreme consciousness*  
*Gives flicker*  
*Shows light on moonless nights*  
*Life plays numerous games*  
*Steady like Polar Star, only that vow.*

After knowing the divine truth of human existence, Vivekananda couldn't utter a single word. "Spiritual facts are to be gathered mostly from the superconscious state of mind" (CW 5, 293). Indeed such thoughts will penetrate the mountains, cross the oceans, and travel through the world. They will enter deep into human hearts and brains and raise men and women who will give them practical expression in the workings of human life... The Buddhas and the Christs will go from place to place preaching these truths... These *Sattvika* men are too near the Lord to be active and to fight, to be working, struggling, preaching, and doing good, as they say, here on earth to humanity (Rolland 168).

Non-dualistic understanding of truth is the essence of yoga. Vivekananda believed in the principle of *Vasudhaiv kutumbakam*, and he talks about greater consciousness that connects the universe, same divinity pervades the entire universe; no colour, sex, creed, or race can separate spiritually extended family. We have different beliefs and paths to reach the divine, and all paths lead to the same destination. *The Mundaka Upanishad* has a beautiful verse monitoring streams and rivulets that arise in different parts of the world but ultimately flow into the same ocean.

Vivekananda is the exponent of four yogas: *Raja Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Jnana Yoga* and *Karma Yoga*. Yoga is joining the omnipresent Atman with universal Brahman. *Raja Yoga*, the yoga of concentration, includes many psycho-spiritual ways like *pranayama*, control of prana, breath and physical postures and asanas. This practice leads to releasing kundalini, transmuting consciousness, and energising chakras. Out of four yogas, *Raja Yoga* is the practice that triggers the consciousness of the West the most through Eastern practical yogic learning and Vedanta manifested by a global leader, Swami Vivekananda. *Raja Yoga* is a completely scientific practice; it leads to global revolution through the death knell of fanaticism and propagation of true Vedantic learning. This practice is based upon the union of inner divinity and supreme divine while living in the

universe; by making this mortal body a bridge to cross the unknown ocean and attaining salvation through channelising energy in chakras; the West understands Science and Vivekananda's concept of Yoga made everything scientific, it leads to bridging East and West through practical wisdom. *Raja Yoga* is divided into eight steps. These steps are: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayam*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*. *Yama*: the vows of abstention, including the non-killing of sentient beings, refraining from lying, stealing, moderating one's physical desires, and refusing to accept gifts (*Raja Yoga* 72). *Niyama*: the positive precepts, whereby one keeps oneself clean both physically and mentally, has a contented and cheerful attitude, develops good habits in one's study of yoga, and devotes oneself wholly to God (*Raja Yoga* 73). *Asana*: the discipline of good posture when meditating, holding the back erect and keeping the chest, neck, and head in a straight line (*Raja Yoga* 75). *Pranayama*: the control of the prana energy, which connects the individual with the rest of the universe according to Hindu philosophy. The starting point of pranayama is breath control, but it also involves the heartbeat and the flow of all one's psycho-spiritual energies (*Raja Yoga* 75). *Pratyahara*: the internalisation of perception (literally, it means a "gathering toward," *Raja Yoga* 74), whereby one detaches the mind from the externality of objects and experiences them rather as functions of one's awareness. In other words, one still perceives objects but no longer considers them "out there," separate from oneself. *Dharana*: forcibly holding the attention fixed on a single object of experience, excluding any others (*Raja Yoga* 75). Since one has already mastered *pratyahara* at this stage, the one-pointedness is not outwardly but inwardly directed, usually toward one of the chakras. While doing so, one is focusing on the mind itself as it keeps hold of a fixed centre of awareness. *Dhyana*: that is, total concentration, conferring such mastery of the thought waves that one can direct them in an unbroken current toward any object, external or internal (*Raja Yoga* 76). In effect, one has learned how to enter the trance state at will. *Samadhi*: the supreme bliss of enlightenment, in which the mind achieves a superconscious state (*Raja Yoga* 77) of objectless contemplation. This is the ultimate goal of all religions, according to Vivekananda.

Mind is an instrument, as it were, in the hands of the soul, through which the soul catches external objects. Mind is constantly changing and vacillating and can, when perfected, either attaches itself to several organs, to one, or none. For instance, I hear the clock with greater attention, and I will not hear, perhaps, anything although

my eyes may be open, showing that the mind was not attached to the seeing organ, while it was to the hearing organ. But the perfected mind can be attached to all the organs simultaneously; it has the reflexive power of looking back into its depths. This reflexive power is what the Yogi wants to attain; by concentrating the powers of the mind and turning them inward, he seeks to know what is happening inside ... One can perceive how the sensation is travelling, how the mind is receiving it, how it is going to the determinative faculty, and how this gives it to the *Purusha*, the soul. As each science requires certain preparations and has its method, which must be followed before it could be understood, even so in *Raja Yoga* (Sen 221). The Yogi teaches that the mind has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a superconscious state and when the mind gets to that higher state, then this knowledge, beyond reasoning, comes to man. Metaphysical and transcendental knowledge comes to that man (Sen 226).

*Bhakti Yoga*, the yoga of devotion, the lover has divine qualities like the love of Mira Bai, and love of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In India Hindus have personal manifestations of divinity in the Godmen, just as Buddhists adore Buddha, and Christians adore Jesus Christ as manifestations of divinity. *Bhakti Yoga* is a genuine search after God, a search beginning, continuing and ending in worship and compassion. One moment of the madness of intense love for God brings us everlasting emancipation. ‘*Bhakti*,’ says Narada in his explanation of the *Bhakti*-aphorisms, ‘is intense love to God’; ‘When a man gets it, he loves all, hates none; he becomes satisfied forever’; ‘This love cannot be reduced to any earthly benefit’ because so long as worldly desires lasts, that kind of love does not come; ‘*Bhakti* is greater than *Karma*, greater than *Jnana* because these are intended for an object in view, while *Bhakti* is its own fruition, its own means and its own end’ (Quoted in Paranjape 80).

It must never be forgotten that it was the Swami Vivekananda who, while proclaiming the sovereignty of the Advaita Philosophy as including that experience in which all is one, without a second, also added to Hinduism the doctrine that Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita are but three phases or stages in a single development, of which the last-named constitutes the goal. This is part and parcel of the still greater and more simple doctrine that the many and the One are the same reality, perceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes; or as Sri Ramakrishna expressed the same thing: “God is both with form and without form. And He is that which includes both form and formlessness” (CWSN Vol. I 9). Though

Vivekananda propagates non-dualism, he says that religion always takes three steps. The first is dualism, and then the man goes to a higher level, partial non-dualism. On the zenith of self-realisation, he becomes one with the universe. The Advaita and dvaita are the levels, neither antagonistic nor contrary.

*Bhakti Yoga* talks about spiritual love that is beyond the chains of sensual and bodily pleasures. Life is full of challenges if passions control us. Mira calls her body insignificant. She dances to the soul's music; she never emphasises bodily gratification. She loves the soul, and her soul is directly related to Lord Krishna. Soul never demands religious discussions and intellectual talks. The body is the medium through which we can meet God. It has come from dust and will be reduced to the dust. So there is no need to worship the body, but we should worship Krishna.

*Those who adopt the external garb of a Jogi,  
But do not penetrate to the secret,  
Are caught again in the net of rebirth.  
Mira's Lord is the courtly Giridhara.  
Deign to sever, O Master.  
All the knots in her heart.*

All forms of Yoga take us to the realisation of the same supreme truth. Vivekananda is an exponent of universal religion, collective philosophy and absolute wisdom. He talks about one mind, one body and one soul. He believes in the principle of *Bhagavad-Gita* that the soul never dies, but at the same time, he believes that the body never dies too because there is no death in the entire universe; there is only life, and we all are living through each other, mind and thought never die. In the autumn, numberless leaves fall, but the tree's roots keep giving life till eternity through seeds also. The highest men do not desire any name or recognition from their wisdom. They spread their ideas to the world but don't claim anything for themselves and establish no schools of wisdom:

In the life of Gautama Buddha, we notice him constantly saying he is the twenty-fifth Buddha. The twenty-four before him are unknown to history, although the Buddha known to history must have built upon foundations laid by them. The highest men are calm, silent, and unknown. They are the men who really know the power of thought; they are sure that even if they go into a cave and close the door and think five true thoughts, and then pass away, these five thoughts of theirs will live throughout eternity (Rolland 168).

*Karma Yoga* talks about attaining divinity through work, and

dedication to each and every action towards God, as told in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. *Jnana Yoga* is spiritual illumination through wisdom. Vivekananda's Yogas focus upon practice; practical explorations are more important than theoretical principles; for him, religion is always a consciousness, neither a theory nor a doctrine; it can't be discussed; it can be felt only. One thing that can help build a strong character and enhance morality in life is yoga. Vivekananda, the spiritual leader, saint, and messenger of Hindu philosophy, talks about the various sciences of practical Vedantic learning and yoga as science. He gave a new voice and shape to Indian spiritual ideology and travelled worldwide to introduce the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and yoga to the Western world. He always had an intellectual quest for God; Ramakrishna explained the deep mysteries of life to Vivekananda. JTF Jordens says, "The reform Vivekananda preached passionately was to be evolutionary, inspired by Hindu religious conviction that man is God, reaching out to the roots of all evils, the condition of the poor" (378).

There are two vital forces behind work. One is *Pravritti*, which means moving towards, and the other is *Nivritti*, which means moving away. The "revolving towards" is what we call the world, the "I, me and mine"; it includes all those things which are always feeding that "me" by possessions, wealth and supremacy, name and prominence, and which are avaricious, always tending to accumulate everything in one centre, that centre being "myself". That is the *Pravritti*, the natural tendency of every human. When this tendency begins to shatter, when it is *Nivritti* or "going away from," then begins morality and belief. *Pravritti* and *Nivritti* are of the forms of work: the former is selfish work, and the latter is divine work.

Work for work's sake should be the rule of life. Love, truth and selflessness are not merely words, but they form our utmost ideal because in them lies such a manifestation of divine supremacy.

*The ideal man  
In the midst of  
Silence and solitude  
Finds the intensest activity;  
Amid the intensest activity  
Finds the silence and solitude  
Of the desert.*

*Karma Yoga* is based upon a few principles: Ideal love is the essence of *Karma Yogi's* life. Activity is a must; inertia is considered a sin. Helping others spiritually is the best service; you can feed a person for a day, for a year; that bodily greed can never be satisfied, but



serving mankind through wisdom, knowledge, and learning can serve eternally. *Nivritti* leads to *Nishkam Karma*. Vivekananda says that man should work like a master, not a slave. Duty towards the welfare of all is the highest form of work. Non-attachment and non-resistance lead to bliss because all actions are dedicated to God.

Every rational and physical blow given to the soul, by which power and knowledge are discovered, is *Karma*. I am talking to you, which is *Karma*. You are listening to me, which is *Karma*. Everything we do, bodily or cerebral, is *Karma*. All the actions we perceive in the world, all the actions in human society, and all the works manifest man's determination. *Karma* is the manifestation of the will. Our *Karma* determines what we earn and what we assimilate. We are responsible for what we are. The fire of Yoga burns the cage of sin around a man. Knowledge becomes purified, and *Nirvana* is directly obtained. From Yoga comes knowledge; knowledge again helps the Yogi. He who combines in himself both Yoga and knowledge, the Lord is pleased with him.

*Karma Yoga* recognises that spiritual awareness and evolution can be attained through one's actions in life. Unclouded by ignorance, desire and attachment, the *Karma* yogi always performs the right action, at the right time, in the right manner, and, in this way, finds liberation through active involvement in the world. The word *Karma* is derived from the Sanskrit *Kri*, to do; all action is *Karma*:

In connection with metaphysics, it sometimes means the effects of which our past actions were the causes. But in *Karma -Yoga*, we have to do with the word *Karma* as meaning work. The goal of mankind is knowledge. That is the one ideal placed before us by Eastern philosophy. Pleasure is not the goal of man but knowledge. Pleasure and happiness come to an end. It is a mistake to suppose that pleasure is the goal. The cause of all the miseries we have in the world is that men foolishly think pleasure is the ideal to strive for (*Karma Yoga* 1).

*Karma Yoga* is essentially performing or doing one's duties in life as per *dharmā*, or duty, without attachment to results – a constant surrender of action to the Supreme. It is the action done without thought of gain. In a more modern interpretation, it can be viewed as duty-bound deeds done without letting the nature of the result affect one's actions. Krishna advocates *Nishkam Karma* as the ideal path to realise the Truth.

“Fixed in yoga, do thy work, O Winner of wealth (Arjuna), abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called yoga.” (Radhakrishnan *The Bhagavadgītā* 120)

The fundamental theme of *Karma Yoga* is not focused on renouncing the work, but again and again, Krishna focuses on the purpose of the activity. Krishna mentions in the following verses that actions must be performed to please the Supreme, otherwise these actions cause material bondage and cause repetition of birth and death in this material world.

“To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction.” ( Radhakrishnan *The Bhagavadgītā* 119 )

According to the Sankhya philosophy, nature comprises forces called in Sanskrit, *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. As manifested in the material world, these are equilibrium, activity, and motionlessness. *Tamas* is typified as darkness or inactivity; *Rajas* is activity, expressed as attraction or revulsion; and *Sattva* is the balance of the two.

“*Karma -Yoga* has specially to deal with these three factors. By teaching what they are and how to employ them, it helps us to do our work better. Human society is a graded organisation”. (*Karma Yoga* 13)

Society is the driving force for worldly actions, and morality is expected in all divine *Karma*, but the question arises, what is morality? We all know about morals, and we all know about responsibility; we find that in different countries, the significance of ethics varies. What is regarded as ethical in one country may be considered completely wicked in another. He who has no faith in himself can never have faith in God. As Nivedita says:

Buddha died for smaller ends five hundred times, before it was possible for Him to become the Buddha! Each time He forgot Himself, forgot life, forgot death, and became merged in the struggle, without a thought beyond. In the end, He had earned the empire of the world, and had to renounce the certainty of that in order to mount the step beyond that made Him the vessel of compassion to the soul. (CWSN Vol. III 526)

Arjuna became a coward due to *Vishad* Yoga, his attachment to kith and kins makes him forget his duty towards his motherland. That is why Sri Krishna told him he was a hypocrite; thou talkest like a wise man, but thy actions betray thee to be a coward; therefore, stand up and fight! Vivekananda talks about activity and indolence:

I once met a man in my country whom I had known before as a very stupid, dull person who knew nothing, had no desire to know anything, and was living the life of a brute. He asked me what he should do to know God and how he was to get free. “Can you tell a lie?” I asked him. “No,”

he replied. "Then you must learn to do so. It is better to tell a lie than to be a brute or a log of wood. You are inactive; you have not certainly reached the highest state beyond all actions, calm and serene; you are too dull even to do something wicked." That was an extreme case, of course, and I was joking with him; but what I meant was that a man must be active in order to pass through activity to perfect calmness. Inactivity should be avoided by all means. (*Karma Yoga* 18-19)

It is the most difficult thing in this world to work and not care for the result, to help a man and never think that he ought to be grateful, to do some good work and at the same time never look to see whether it brings you name or fame, or nothing at all.

Helping others bodily by removing their material needs is indeed great. If a man's needs can be removed for an hour, it is a transient help; if his needs can be removed for a year, it will be more helpful to him; but if his wants can be removed eternally, it is surely the supreme help. Vivekananda, however, was a genuine friend of the poor. He once said, 'there must be equal chance for all – or if greater for some and some less – the weaker should be given more chance than the strong' (*Letters*, 255).

As the tortoise tucks its feet and head inside the shell, you may kill it and break it in pieces, and yet it will not come out; even so, the character of that man who has control over his motives and organs is unchangeably established. He controls his own inner forces, and nothing can draw them out against his will. By this continuous reflex of good thoughts and good impressions moving over the surface of the mind, the tendency for doing good becomes strong, and as a result, we feel able to control the Indriyas (the sense-organs, the nerve-centres). Thus alone will the character be established, then alone a man gets to the truth. (*Karma Yoga* 40)

To achieve true liberation, it is important to control all mental desires and tendencies to enjoy sense pleasures (Radhakrishnan *The Bhagavadgītā* 125-26).

Krishna says, "Look at Me, Arjuna! If I stop from work for one moment, the whole universe will die. I have nothing to gain from work; I am the one Lord, but why do I work? Because I love the world" (*Karma Yoga* 45).

With the body, with the mind, with the intellect, even merely with the senses, the Yogis perform action toward self-purification, having abandoned attachment. He who is disciplined in Yoga, having abandoned the fruit of action, attains steady peace.

Life is reflected according to the state of mind we look at; it is

neither by itself. Fire, by itself, is neither good nor evil. When it keeps us warm, we say, "How beautiful is fire!" When it burns our fingers, we blame it. Still, in itself, it is neither good nor bad. (*Karma Yoga*)

The man who can control his senses is the Master, and he is not the slave of his life and actions. He is responsible for his deeds and fate. Only lions can live a life of dignity; lions are the masters of their life on Earth. Men are trapped in two minds, one is of optimism, and the other is of pessimism. This very world will become optimistic when we become masters of our minds:

"When a man dwells in his mind on the object of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment springs desire, and from desire comes anger."

"From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory; and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes." (Radhakrishnan *Bhagavad-Gita* 125-26)

What is *Karma Yoga*? This is awareness of the secret of work. The entire universe is working. For what? For deliverance, emancipation, from the particle to the highest self, working for the one end, freedom for the psyche, the physical being, and the soul. Every speck of the Universe is trying to get freedom, cutting the bondages of material life.

*Karma Yoga* tells us to enjoy the beauty of every speck on the earth without attachment. Misery comes with possession. *Karma Yoga* teaches us that the thought of duty is on the lower plane; we all have to perform our duty. The true duty is to be unattached and to work as masters, not as slaves of results and consequences, to give up all work unto God. All our duties are His.

"Work done as a sacrifice for Vishnu has to be performed; otherwise, work causes bondage in this material world. Therefore, O son of Kunt , perform your prescribed duties for His satisfaction, and in that way you will always remain free from bondage." (Prabhupada *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is* Verse 3.9)

Most humans work like slaves, resulting in despair; it is all egocentric work. Work through free will! Work through love! The word "love" is complicated to understand; love never comes until there is liberty.

Yoga unfolds layers of life's accomplishments and catastrophes, glories and shame, tolerances and disillusionments, inclinations and soreness. Overall, the essence is far more subtle, pervasive, unconstrained and universal –beyond the boundaries of religious,

sectarian and social traditions. Life is barren without following the spiritual paths of truth and wisdom. Modernity is making human beings mechanical; they are lost in the ocean, struggling to learn the true art of survival. Yoga helps us eliminate the emptiness and meaninglessness of barren life.

The practice of *Jnana Yoga* is a must for fulfilment. Neuroscience is proving what masters and practitioners of yoga have known since immemorial times, that yoga and meditation can change your brain. Vivekananda propagates the ultimate truth that the science of *Yoga* proposes to give us means of observing the internal states. Vivekananda distinguishes among three levels of the mind or psyche: the unconscious mind, which consists of one's instinctive urges and desires; the conscious mind, which is self-aware but still driven by selfishness, ambition, and greed; and the superconscious mind, which comes from the highest source of spiritual reality, namely the supreme Brahman-Atman or Purusha.

*Raja Yoga* teaches that desires and wants are in man, that the power of supply is also in man; and wherever and whenever a desire, a want, a prayer has been fulfilled; it is out of the infinite ocean that the supply comes, and not from any supernatural being.

Every religion has three parts: philosophy, mythology, and ritual. Philosophy of course, is the essence of every religion; mythology explains and illustrates it by means of the more or less legendary lives of great men, stories and fables of wonderful things, and so on; ritual gives to that philosophy a still more concrete form, so that everyone may grasp it—ritual is in fact concretised philosophy. This ritual is *Karma*; it is necessary in every religion because most of us cannot understand abstract spiritual things until we grow much spiritually. (*Karma Yoga* 40)

All four yogas are incomplete without each other. All help humans to realise the supreme self. *Jnana Yoga* is the realisation of the absolute self. Here there is no subject, no object, no knowing, no thou or he or I, only the one absolute Unity. We are this all the time; once free, ever free. Man is not born, nor does he die; he is not in time and space. These ideas are mere reflections of the mind, but we mistake them for reality and lose sight of the ultimate truth. The secret of *Jnana* is to give up all and be sufficient unto ourselves. Worship the Self within; nothing else exists. All that binds us is Maya's delusion. Life is called Samsara—it is the result of the conflicting forces acting upon us. The Self is beyond both freedom and bondage. We are Brahman, and we are immortal knowledge beyond the senses; we are Bliss Absolute (Excerpted from 'Discourses on *Jnana Yoga*' Quoted in Sen 233-34).

The illusion of the universe will vanish one day. The clouds of worldly *maya* can't stand in front of Yogi. Wisdom and realisation show the true path that leads to absolute. As told by Vivekananda in *Jnana* Yoga, the circle of *kaalchakra* and *Karma* yoga moves on and on and on eternally. Still, after following the path of yoga, man realises the essence of his existence, now no trap is enough for absolute self, "Again this world will come, men and women and animal will come ... but not with the same force; along with it will come to the idea that I know its nature now, and it will cause no bondage, no more pain, nor grief, nor misery. Whenever anything miserable comes, the mind can say, 'I know you as a hallucination.' When a man has reached that stage, he is called *Jivanmukta*, living free even while living. The aim and end of this life for the *Jnana* Yogi are to become *Jivanmukta*, 'living free'. He is *Jivanmukta*, who can live in this world without being attached. He is like the lotus leaves in water, which are never wetted by the water. He is the highest of human beings, nay, the highest of all beings, for he has realised his identity with the Absolute and that he is one with God. So long as you think you are different from God, fear will seize you, but when you have known that you are He, that there is no difference, entirely no difference, that you are He, all of Him, and the whole of Him, all fear ceases... What will become of the world then? What good will do the world? Such questions do not arise" (Discourses on *Jnana* Yoga, Quoted in Sen 234-235).

There should be a confluence of all forms of yoga. Ramakrishna's life is an example of the confluence of *Jnana* and *Bhakti* Yoga. Although his life revolves around *Bhakti*, the essence of his teachings reveals the depth of Advaita, a non-dual reality called absolute, Brahman, supreme consciousness. He passed the Advaitic realisation to Vivekananda, who, though a sceptic disciple, attained the ultimate state of Samadhi by the divine touch of his Guru. Ramakrishna had the curiosity of a child, and he felt supreme consciousness. The terms 'child' and Paramahansa often refer to Sri Ramakrishna, who affirms the kinship of the child and the Paramahansa. The Paramahansa is like a five-year-old child. He sees everything filled with Consciousness. He cannot distinguish between a stranger and a relative. He isn't particular about worldly relationships. He doesn't keep track of his whereabouts. He sees everything as Brahman.

*Bhakti* takes a man to the path of *Jnana*; Sri Ramakrishna attained supreme Consciousness, Brahman, the very first time he had the vision of Kali. Still, he retained the ego of a *bhakta*, a separate self not quite merged with the universal Self. He calls this state of his 'the ego of

Knowledge'. The 'Glossary' of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna states: Some souls, after realising their oneness with a Brahman in samadhi, come down to the plane of relative consciousness. In this state, they retain a very faint feeling of ego to teach others spiritual knowledge. This ego, called by Sri Ramakrishna the 'ego of knowledge', does not altogether efface their knowledge of oneness with Brahman even in the relative state of consciousness. The bhakta, the lover of God, coming down to the relative plane after having attained samadhi, retains the I- consciousness by which he feels himself to be a lover, a child, or a servant of God. Sri Ramakrishna called this the 'devotee ego, the 'child ego, or the 'servant ego' (1034).

Life revolves around questions, and man is always searching for eternal truth. In childhood, Vivekananda used to ask everyone: 'Are there any people who have seen God? Is it possible to see God at all? What does he look like? Which of the pictures I have seen in books does he resemble?' Swami Vivekananda struggled a lot to get the answer to the universal quest, he was in continuous search, and he didn't get any reply through words but through realisation, as mentioned in the complete works of Swami Vivekananda:

'He is principle, not person. You and I are all Personal Gods. The absolute God of the universe, the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe, is impersonal principle. You and I, the cat, rat, devil, and ghost, all those are its persons – all are Personal Gods ... It is the worship of your own self.' (CW 8)

Love can lead to wisdom, which paves the path for *Nishkam Karma* and leads to universal spiritual regeneration. Vivekananda envisaged a renaissance at that time, and now again that spiritual regeneration is required. Religion, Vedantic learning and yoga are understood in two extremes, but practical learning is a dire need in the contemporary world. Various interpretations have been initiated from times immemorial. Isaac Newton decentralised the equation of considering God as the centre of the universe. Even Sigmund Freud considered a theist as a child who is insecure and seeks the lap of a powerful protector. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda paved the path towards the renaissance in the context of practical Vedantic learning.

Life is about the convergence of *Raja Yoga*, *Karma Yoga*, *Jnana Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*. The realisation of the divine strengthens the soul, and *Bhakti* keeps the soul pure; it shields the mind from impurities of worldly life, and lotus leaves are never touched by mud. *Jnana* is the realisation of supreme consciousness. When Vivekananda went deep into Samadhi, he wanted to remain in that spiritual world by walking upon the path of *Bhakti Yoga*. Still, Ramakrishna asked him

to work and follow the path of *Karma Yoga* to show the divine path to the coming generations. To spread Vedantic philosophy worldwide, he practised and preached a practical Vedantic path and walked on the path of *Raja Yoga*.

*Bhakti* and *Jnana* can't exist without each other. God is love itself, absolutely manifest everywhere in the entire universe, in every speck of this world; a worshipper loves every creature because he sees the existence of the divine universally. If there is *Bhakti*, then the feeling of seeing absolute and universal consciousness is prevalent in the human psyche. When you become one with love, you attain spiritual wisdom, leading to the supreme *Jnana*, which is to realise the oneness everywhere and see oneself as the Self in everything. Living through others, breathing through others, and universal connectivity is the true Vedantic learning that is practical Vedanta.

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