

On a day when the sun is shining brightly, if you open all the doors and shutters, your house will be brilliantly lit up, illumined. But if you close them, sunlight may be everywhere else, but the inside of your house will be in darkness. In this way, it is only you who can give Liberation to yourself, not anyone else. If we expose ourselves to God, God pours into us, blesses us and makes our life divine. If we are not ever in a state of being exposed to Divinity, then naturally to that extent, our life will be denied Divinity, peace, bliss, light. The onus, the main responsibility, is on the seeking soul and not upon God. It is you who can give Liberation to yourself. God's grace is always available; it is never denied, never withheld. This is the truth.

- Swami Chidananda

Yoga of Synthesis

By

[Sri Swami Sivananda](#)

Yoga of Synthesis is suitable for the vast majority of persons. It is a unique Yoga.

Man is a strange complex mixture of will, feeling and thought. He is a triune being. He is like a tricycle or a three-wheeled chariot. He wills to possess the objects of his desires. He has emotion; and so he feels. He has reason and so he thinks and ratiocinates. In some the emotional element may , while in some others the rational element may dominate. Just as will, feelings and thought are not distinct and separate, so also, work, devotion and knowledge are not exclusive of one another. He must, therefore develop his heart, intellect and hand. Th en alone can he attain perfection. Many aspirants have lop-sided development. They do not possess an integral development, as they neglect one or the other of these aspects of their personality.

One-sided development is not commendable. Religion and Yoga must educate and develop the whole man - his heart, intellect and hand. Then only he will have integral development.

In the mind there are three defects, viz., *Mala* or impurity, *Vikshepa* or tossing, and *Avarana* or veil. The impurities of the mind should be removed by the practice of Karma Yoga, by selfless service. The tossing should be removed by worship or Upasana, by Japa and devotion. The veil should be torn down by the practice of Jnana Yoga, i.e., by study of Vedantic literature, enquiry, self-analysis, service to the Guru, and deep meditation. Only then Self-realization is possible.

If you want to see your face clearly in a mirror, you must remove the dirt in the mirror, keep it steady, and remove the covering also. You can see your face clearly in the bottom of a lake only if the turbidity is removed, if the water that is agitated by the

wind is rendered still, and if the moss that is lying on the surface is removed. Even so is the case with Self-realization.

Action, emotion and intelligence are the three horses that are linked to this body-chariot. They should work in perfect harmony or unison. Then only the chariot will run smoothly. There must be integral development. You must have the head of [Sankara](#), the heart of [Buddha](#), and the hand of Janaka.

The Yoga of Synthesis alone will develop the head, heart and hand, and lead one to perfection. To become harmoniously balanced in all directions is the ideal of religion and of Yoga. This can be achieved by the practice of the Yoga of Synthesis.

To behold the one Self in all beings is *Jnana*, wisdom; to love the Self is *Bhakti*, devotion; to serve the Self is *Karma*, action. When the Jnana Yogi attains wisdom, he is endowed with devotion and self less activity. Karma Yoga is for him a spontaneous expression of his spiritual nature, as he sees the one Self in all. When the devotee attains perfection in devotion, he is possessed of wisdom and activity. For him also, Karma Yoga is a spontaneous expression of his divine nature, as he beholds the one Lord everywhere. The Karma Yogi attains wisdom and devotion when his actions are wholly selfless. The three paths are, in fact, one in which the three different temperaments emphasize one or the other of its inseparable constituents. Yoga supplies the method by which the Self can be seen, loved and served.

Hence everyone should have one Yoga as the basic Yoga and combine other Yogas. You can combine Nishkama Karma Yoga, Hatha Yoga, [Raja Yoga](#), [Bhakti Yoga](#), [Sankirtan Yoga](#), etc., with Jnana Yoga as the basis. This is my Yoga of Synthesis, which will ensure rapid spiritual progress.

A little practice of Hatha Yoga ([Asanas](#) and [Pranayamas](#)) will give you good health. Raja Yoga will steady your mind. Upasana and Karma Yoga will purify your heart and prepare you for the practice of Vedanta. Sankirtan will relax your mind and inspire you. Meditation will take you to liberation.

Such a Yogi has all-round development. The Yoga of Synthesis will help you to attain God-realization quickly. [Upanishads](#), [Gita](#) and all other scriptures speak of this Yoga. Therefore, O Mokshapriya, practice this unique Yoga of Synthesis and attain Self-realization quickly.

Here is my little song of the Yoga of Synthesis, for your daily practice:

Eat a little, drink a little
Talk a little, sleep a little

Mix a little, move a little
Serve a little, rest a little
Work a little, relax a little
Study a little, worship a little
Do Asana a little, Pranayama a little
Reflect a little, meditate a little
Do Japa a little, do [Kirtan](#) a little
Write [Mantra](#) a little, have [Satsang](#) a little
Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realize
Be good, Do good; Be kind, Be compassionate
Enquire 'Who am I ?', Know the Self and be Free

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The Yoga of Synthesis

The main points of Swami Sivananda's teachings can be summarized in a few simple words which have become his creed, and the symbol of his mission and message to humanity: 'Serve, Love, Give; Purify, Meditate, Realize. Be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate. Enquire, 'Who am I?' and know the Self.' These points are the foundation of a complete system for man's spiritual evolution which integrates all the yogas for modern man to apply in daily life.

Many other yogis advocate only one form of yoga, such as raja, gyana, bhakti or kriya yoga. But Swami Sivananda daringly integrated all the yogas and created the yoga of synthesis or synthetic yoga, so that man's personality could be developed as a whole without any side being either over or under developed. Definitely all the yogas lead ultimately to the one goal, but by combining them in the right way, the aspirant is able to utilize each minute of the day as active spiritual sadhana.

The actual motivating factor which inspired Swami Sivananda to combine the various yogas was a three-fold insight into man's nature. He knew that (1) every being is evolving towards illumination; (2) man's nature is made up of different types of temperaments and each one must be expressed during evolution; and (3) unfoldment of man's nature cannot take place by the use of only one form of yoga. Each yoga supports the others, and each can become the starting point for any of the others.

It was Sri Krishna who first expounded this truth in the Bhagavad Gita (Ch, 18, v. 54-57). Krishna explains that "To behold the Self in all beings is wisdom, gyana; to love the Self is devotion, bhakti; to serve the Self is action, karma. When the gyana yogi attains wisdom, he is endowed with devotion and selfless activity. Karma yoga becomes the spontaneous expression of his spiritual nature as he sees the one Self in all."

Four yogas or one?

In Swami Sivananda's synthetic yoga system, the four yogas, karma, bhakti, raja and gyana, are intricately connected and intermingled, and give expression to the different aspects of an individual's nature. The dynamic temperament is expressed through karma yoga. Bhakti yoga fulfils the requirements of emotion and devotion. Raja yoga expresses the mystic aspect in man and gyana yoga is for the intellectual aspect.

Ultimately all the paths converge into one. For Swami Sivananda, 'Service is love in expression. Knowledge is diffused love, and love is concentrated knowledge. Karma yoga is always combined with bhakti and gyana yoga. Bhakti yoga is the fulfilment of karma yoga. Gyana yoga is the fulfilment of karma, bhakti and raja yoga.' His system was like the blueprint for the construction of a building. Each component was an essential part of the total structure. Thus the entire building depends on the foundation of karma yoga being laid in the soil of bhakti yoga. Raja yoga is the superstructure and gyana yoga provides the dome.

Have time for all

It is not by living a life of extremes, austerity and narrow mindedness that one attains darshan of the Self. Rather, by following the middle path with a receptive mind, the goal can be achieved. Swami Sivananda explains that it is 'not nakedness or matted hair; sitting motionless in padma or siddha asanas; nor living on neem leaves, potatoes, buttermilk and fruit; moving about without clothing in winter; or living in a solitary cave in the Himalayas, which gives one moral and divine virtues, or makes one a yogi, sage, devotee, saint or perfect man.' Instead, it is in the performance of all the yogas, throughout each and every minute of the day, that fulfilment lies. Life itself becomes the sadhana.

It goes without saying that the average man cannot sit and meditate for hours on end contemplating the infinite, nor can he feel absolute devotion for the Supreme twenty four hours a day. Likewise, it is not possible for him to participate unceasingly in action without stopping to rest and reflect. Therefore, a little of each, applied in moderation, creates balance and harmony. This is the theme of Swami Sivananda's 'Song of a Little':

'Eat a little, drink a little, talk a little, sleep a little;
Mix a little, move a little, serve a little, sing a little;
Work a little, rest a little, study a little, worship a little;
Do asana a little, pranayama a little, reflect a little, meditate a little;
Do japa a little, do kirtan a little, write mantra a little, have Satsang a little.'
'Do a little of each; you will have time for all. God-realization is thus brought within your easy reach, and you are saved from the fear of a fall.'

Guidelines for sadhana

For the development of the perfect way of life, Swami Sivananda offered three basic guidelines to help the aspirant persevere in the spiritual path. The background thought behind all three remains the same - the awareness of Brahman, the universal Essence. This is the central point around which all sadhana must revolve.

Constant remembrance of God

The first guideline focuses on the practice of bhakti yoga. The disciple makes the awareness of the Supreme Being his ideal. Whether he conceives Him to have form or no form, the ideal will manifest only through constant remembrance. Krishna advises in the Gita (Ch. 12, v. 8): "Fix your mind on Me and establish your reason in Me alone; thereafter you will abide in Me, there is no doubt about it."

All throughout daily life the attitude of bhakti can be evoked, and all actions, karma, performed with the awareness continually dwelling on the Supreme. Apart from this, Swami Sivananda emphasized two other major practices: japa yoga and sankirtan. Japa is the continuous repetition of the Absolute's name or one's own personal mantra. It 'purifies the heart, steadies the mind, destroys birth and death, burns sins and

scorches the samskaras, annihilates attachment, induces vairagya, roots out desires, makes one fearless, removes delusion and gives supreme peace.'

To fulfil these requisites, Swamiji advises the sadhaka to get up an hour and a half before sunrise, during the period known as brahmamuhurta, and practise japa meditation. Especially when getting up and going to bed, he should think of God, and sing his name. He should also be prepared with a japa mala in his pocket or around his neck for times when the mind might be left idle.

The other important practice, sankirtan, is the singing of God's name with feeling, love and faith. Of course, God is not implied here in a religious sense; it refers to the cosmic Self, and may take many forms. Kirtan was one of Swami Sivananda's favourite antidotes for the suffering endemic in this modern age. He claimed it to be 'the easiest method for attaining God-consciousness in the Kali Yuga. Kirtan gives pleasure to the mind, and at the same time purifies the heart.'

Spiritualizing daily activities

The second guideline encourages the aspirant to wholly transform all of the common mundane events of his daily life into spiritual sadhana. With the attitude of karma yoga, each action becomes an expression of Self, not merely an attempt at self-aggrandizement. Swami Sivananda said to 'feel you are the instrument of the Lord's hands and that the indriyas (senses) belong to Him. Repeat this formula: I am Thine, all is Thine, Thy will be done.' This implies the automatic performance of karma yoga, entailing the renunciation of the idea of doership and sensual satisfaction. The Gita reiterates this theme:

"Man does not attain freedom from action without entering upon action, nor does he reach perfection by mere renunciation of action
(Ch. 3, v. 4).

He who, controlling the organs of sense and action by the mind, and remaining unattached, undertakes the yoga of action through those organs, Arjuna, he excels
(Ch. 3, v. 7).

Therefore, dedicating all actions to Me with your mind fixed on Me, the Self of all, freed from hope and possessiveness, and cured of mental fever, fight
(Ch. 3, v. 30)."

Perfection in one's daily household duties thus curbs the assertive ego, and leads to renunciation - sannyasa. Sivananda emphasized the importance in this respect of an organized and achievable program of daily sadhana, and of recording one's daily progress in a spiritual diary. He recommended that the disciple first resolve to practise a definite amount of pranayama, japa and asanas, and to develop specific virtues and habits. These can cover sleeping and waking times, diet and fasting, study of scriptures, etc. Then both the successes and the failures, the periods of regularity and tranquility, and the times when negativity has overpowered the mind, can all be entered into the diary. Over the months it can be reread and one's progress gauged.

The practitioner of synthetic yoga must plan the day's routine correctly so that no time is wasted and each moment is dedicated to some element of sadhana. Swami Sivananda constructed various programs depending on one's individual situation in life. For the average 'busy person' he suggests a total of six hours of formal sadhana per day. This is divided into three hours for the practices of hatha and raja yoga and three hours for self-reflection, study and kirtan. The rest of the day is left free for karma yoga in household duties and business, thus leaving six hours for sleep.

Cultivation of virtues

Finally, the aspirant must have a framework of specific observances which develop positive aspects in his nature and lead to the disintegration of the strong identification with the ego. Raja yoga provides (his framework through the practices of the yamas, niyamas, concentration and meditation. The five yamas are non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, sensual abstinence and non-possessiveness. The five niyamas are cleanliness of body internally and externally, contentment, austerity, self-analysis and surrender to God. Perfection in yama and niyama leads to samyama, perfect control, where the mind is equipoised. Thereby meditation is deepened and we are brought closer to the inner being, thus developing the virtues of humility, generosity and compassion. Gyana yoga further develops these virtues through the practices of discrimination, detachment, control of the senses and a keen desire for liberation.

Swami Sivananda compiled a list of twenty instructions, which was widely distributed by the Divine Life Society to all its members, and has been used by thousands of yogic aspirants all over the world. Covering all aspects of daily life, it reminds everyone to be charitable, serve sadhus and poor and ailing persons, to be self-reliant, not to depend on others, and to keep one's lifestyle simple in all respects. Swami Sivananda advised kindness to all, not to be injurious or offensive at any cost, to speak the truth, and to speak only when necessary. Fasting and a sattvic diet help to quiet the mind and purify the body, and unclean habits such as smoking should be avoided. For inspiration and understanding, one should read scriptures like the Gita and Upanishads.

Obstacles in the spiritual path

Swami Sivananda considered the three main obstacles and causes of disturbance in man's spiritual life to be: the trickery of the lower mind; the profound feeling of 'I', ego; and the identification with the stimuli received through the senses. The first obstacle, the lower mind, is like an uncontrollable, boisterous monkey, and most people are swayed by its mischievous tactics. However, if one merely watches its games without reacting, after some time control comes. Swami Sivananda likened the mind to a 'menagerie of wild animals, each pursuing the bent of its own nature and going its own way.' To pacify its wild tendencies, he suggests that the aspirant 'purify and control the itching mind by uninterrupted, undaunted, regular practice of sadhana, meditation, devotion, selfless work, wisdom and self-analysis.'

Secondly, because of his involvement with ego, or 'I-feeling', man imagines himself to be a separate entity from the rest of creation. Of course, on a gross level, the physical body is separate, and everybody has a unique vehicle for expression in this world. But consciousness is much deeper than this; it is only our experience which is limited. The intellect, or buddhi, tends to identify only with the body and the mind. Swami Sivananda explained that 'the ego is like a steel wall that separates man from the immortal Atma. This world is a play of ego. If you can understand the nature of ego, you have understood the whole mystery of creation... Scrutinize and study the nature of ego.'

The third obstacle is the lure of the senses. It is only through his identification with the knowledge received through the senses that man gets caught by them. We always seek pleasurable sensations and avoid unpleasant ones. Swami Sivananda reminds us that both will always exist, so why not accept both without hankering for one and running from the other? Rigorous austerities are not necessary. In fact Swami Sivananda writes that 'repression and suppression bring vehement, turbulent, boisterous reaction and the senses become formidable. The senses are strong and impetuous; they should be controlled gradually by intelligent methods, enquiry and discrimination.'

'Plod on with patience'

Therefore, once the sadhana is established, constancy is required to bring it to fruition. For without regularity, the mind becomes uncontrolled, irregular and wavering; regularity makes it systematic and brings firmness to one's efforts. Sivananda said, 'Regularity in sadhana is of paramount importance. He who meditates regularly, gets samadhi quickly. That man who acts with fits and starts cannot reap the fruits of his efforts. Sadhana is the real wealth. It is the only thing of real and everlasting value. Just as there is buttermilk which can only be got after the churning, in the same way to realize the Self, do sadhana and worship constantly in true earnest.'

He cautioned the disciple to remain unperturbed, no matter what may befall him on his journey. A relative may die, a business venture collapse, or some psychic experience may occur. Whatever the situation, it is vital to carefully analyse the mind and not to fall prey to sorrow, laziness or ignorance. Sadhana then becomes automatic and sustaining: 'If one is eager to do sadhana it will be impossible to find any excuse not to do it; and if you persist in your sadhana diligently, if you are regular, systematic and punctual, you will achieve success.'

The use of ethics for spiritual sadhana

The system of synthetic yoga may seem idealistic and philosophical at first, but in fact it is highly practical, and given in language any layman can understand. It is actually a system of ethics, or rules of spiritual living, which leads to sublation of the lower ego and base instincts into awareness of a higher mind. Therefore, spiritualised ethics form an integral part of sadhana. To quote Swami Sivananda, 'Ethics lead to wisdom of the Self, where all duties, diversely practised, find a final satisfactory goal.'

However, after the final goal is reached, one inevitably comes to the realization that 'moral principles are not absolute; there is a state which transcends moral restriction. Nevertheless moral laws cannot be neglected. All duties, domestic, social and the like, are only relative. The ultimate, chief duty of every being is the attainment of truth - God-realization. The discharge of all duties qualifies man to do this highest duty.'

Practising what is preached

To Swami Sivananda these were not just philosophical ethics; they were a reality which he taught primarily by example, for the enlightenment of his disciples. The yoga of synthesis was a sadhana which he himself practised throughout his daily life. Truly he had developed all the divine qualities of Siva in every part of his being, diffusing them into the whole universe. The eyes of Siva are made of a substance which sees good in everything. The power emanating from his hands serves all with love and compassion. Through his direct example may many more aspirants be inspired and guided in their search on the spiritual path.