

WRITINGS FOR A BETTER WORLD

SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA

YOGA
&
CHRISTIANITY

EDITION HEAVEN ON EARTH

SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA – YOGA AND CHRISTIANITY

I shall speak to you at some length upon the subject of 'Yoga and the Christian Religion' because most of you are from a Christian background, very pious and very religious. Some are only Christian because they are born Christian, but some are halfway going to the Church once in two months, but all are from a Christian background, may be some Roman Catholic, may be not, may be Protestant, may be Methodist, may be some other. Some of you are Jews. Whatever religion you belong to, when I speak about Yoga and the Christian religion, it could equally apply to Yoga and any other religion. So, what is the connection between Yoga and one's religion? One takes it for granted that Yoga is of the Hindu religion, and asks: 'What is the connection between, this Hindu thing and my religion?' Anyone belonging to another religion must wonder. So, it is worth-knowing how to relate Yoga to religion. Is it like other religions or are there sharp divergences between Yoga and other religions? If these things are not clear, may be some would feel a sense of guilt. 'O, I am a Christian, am I doing the right by coming and taking to Yoga? Perhaps, I am being a little irreligious in the particular area of my interest in Yoga.' Thus, a vague sort of uneasiness may be felt.

First and foremost, it has to be known that Yoga has arisen from a background or basis of the Hindu religion. It has its origin in India and it is part of the Hindu religion. But it is not Hindu. It is a universal science that has arisen out of the Hindu religious ground – a science that has risen above religion. It is a universal technique. Because in Yoga, as it is given in the Yoga-Darsana of Patanjali, one of the six systems of philosophy, no particular dogma is laid down and no particular God is pointed out for your worship. Yoga doesn't say that you must worship Rama or Siva or meditate upon Krishna, or you must worship Kaali or Durga, or Hanuman; Yoga has nothing to say upon all these things. Yoga doesn't say that you must repeat any particular Name of God. Yoga only says that repetition of one of the Divine Names is one of the ways of concentrating the mind. It says repetition of the Divine Name. You may repeat the Divine Name, you may say the prayer of Jesus, you may say Allah, you may say Rama, you may say the name of Siva, or you may say some other Name if you are in some other religion, but it does not specify that Name and also whom to worship. The All-perfect Divine Being, who is ever-free, ever-perfect, free from all the imperfections, ever-free beyond Maya, the Supreme Purusha, means the Supreme Being, Almighty Father in Heaven, Allah, Jehovah, you can call it by any name, it does not matter, the ever-free Being is not bound by Maya, and who is free from affliction, who is of the nature of Bliss-Absolute, Consciousness-Absolute; that is the object of meditation to be attained, that is the goal of Yoga. So, it does not give for you a goal other than the goal of Yoga; it does not give for you a goal other than the goal of your religion. It does not point out a God different from the one pointed by your own religion—Christianity, Islam, etc.—and it does not give a special name of that God so that you will have to change Gods. It does not give any special name to the one God. Emerging from the ground of Hinduism, it goes beyond religion.

Yoga is a Religious Science, which means that it goes beyond religion, and assumes a universal characteristic. Secondly, Yoga is a science for Man. It is not a science either for an Easterner or a Westerner, an Oriental or an Occidental. Yoga is for man on earth. It was given to mortal man on this earth of birth, pain and death. It was given to man on earth, no matter what he is or who he is; and it is given to man for all times. It was not given to an ancient man or medieval man or a modern man, or anyone who might come, wanting to go beyond all sorrow, pain and suffering, go beyond bondage and delusion. If he takes to this path, it brings him to the place of supreme experience. So it is the answer to the need of mortal man, on this earth plane. So it is something that is the property, the heritage of humanity—Yoga is the heritage of humanity. It does not interfere with religion. What does Yoga do? Yoga supplies to the life of man and makes up for certain lack brought about by religion failing man or man failing religion. There is a condition created by the failure of religion administering to man's highest needs, or the failure of man to take advantage of religion or properly utilise his religion which it is, we cannot say.

Some say religions have failed. I say, no. Man has failed to follow religion. It is not due to religion that man suffers. It is due to the neglect of religion, the ignoring of religion and its teachings and its wisdom. Mostly, this is the situation. But in some places where religion has become totally institutionalised, it has become a

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great impersonal structure, and lost living contact with the individuals. Under it, then, it becomes barren of real spirit. It becomes only a pattern for dogma and ritual, and ceremony and belief. You are a Christian; if you say 'I believe in salvation through the blood of Christ'. Yes, I believe, then you are a Christian. You are a very good Christian; so go your way. Do what you like, drink, smoke, break all the ten commandments, but you are a Christian. Religion has come to mean just accepting certain things which an institution has set to be the very heart of religion—a set of dogmas, and if you say you accept all this, then, you are a religious man. But, then, this is not religion. In each religion there is a certain spiritual content which has direct relevance to that part of you which is your innermost essential being, which is your innermost reality, a true, essential reality, and where religion fails to touch that part of your being, and loses its concern with that, and only concerns itself with the way in which you live, your social life and pattern of your social life, and your domestic life, whether you pay your tithe and whether you attend the Church regularly once in a week, or whether you go through all the various sacraments. You Baptise, and you are Christian. It is interested only in that but not in that highest part of you. It never asks you to question yourself or query 'What is the purpose of my life? Why have I come here? What have I to attain? What is the true meaning of my life? What is my goal?' In organised religions, the structure does not encourage you to ask these questions, does not insist that you raise these questions and seek an answer and make life a quest of that great goal which you ascertain through the answer. In such case, religion is not ministering to you in depth, while it is ministering to you on the surface. It fails to deal with you in that dimension of your being where you are the real being. Other dimensions are touched and affected, but that dimension is left untouched.

So, when the spiritual content in religion is no longer active, no longer progressive, then that religion has petrified. It is not alive in such cases. Yoga is a wonderful answer because the prime concern of Yoga is the spiritual reality within you, the attainment of the spiritual goal for which you have taken this human birth; that is the prime concern of Yoga. Yoga is the path to God-realisation. Yoga is the path of Divine Experience, and the Divine Experience is the heart of religion. Trying to attain God-realisation is the very heart, the very essence of religion. That is the inner spiritual core of religion, and where that spiritual core has been neglected and cast aside, and is forgotten, then religion is only there as a great forum; a great structure is there, but inside there is no one living. There are a hundred houses, only a built palace is there, no one is living. It is a deserted palace. Like that, religion becomes a huge imposing structure with no life; and if such has become the religious life of any person, be he a Christian, a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew, a Parsi, or a Muslim; if such it has become, then Yoga comes as life-giving waters, the living waters to revive that withering, languishing inner spiritual core, that innermost spiritual path that has been neglected and dried away. Yoga comes as the life-giving force. Once again it makes spring into life the spiritual centre of your religion. It makes your religion alive for you. It can make religion alive for anyone, be he a Christian or a Muslim, and it gives back to you the life within your religion. It is the common experience of many people that after Yoga came to them they started being really religious. After Yoga came to them a Christian became a real devoted Christian, started going to Church, started reading the Bible and trying to find out more interest in the words of Jesus, began to understand the meaning of many things he is now doing in the name of Christianity, which he otherwise stopped doing because he found it to be meaningless,—'I find no meaning, it is mechanical'. It has no meaning, and once now he has found meaning, he begins to get interested in it. He begins to practise the teachings. Many things which were just meaningless once, become now meaningful. So one becomes a better Christian. In many cases Yoga has helped a person to find the inner meaning of his religion. He begins to see the reason behind the practice and then he begins to take more interest in his own religion, understand it better than he understood it before. Yoga restores to people whatever religion they may belong to. It restores to people the inner spiritual content of their religion. It restores to people the spiritual life which is the centre of any real religion, lacking which religion becomes merely an external facade. Yoga restores, makes it alive, makes it green, brings it forth into life. Yoga can be applied to Christianity and to any other religion.

In what way does it differ? That also we shall see. It differs in its refusing to accept the doctrine of 'original sin'. It does not call man a sinner. It may call man a fool but it doesn't call him a sinner. Man is God playing

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the fool, or, man is God who has lost his way home, wandered away, stumbling and running about in circles. It clears up the path, puts light and puts man on the path again and says, 'go ahead now, go straight to your home'. So it doesn't want you to consider yourself a sinner. And the other thing is this: Much of Christianity, unfortunately, in certain of its areas, becomes wholly a preoccupation with avoiding hell, trying to avoid hell, and somehow or other slip past the doors of heaven; somehow or other, even if you are not fully qualified for it. Yoga says: 'This is a little childish, you have got something more glorious. Why do you play this game of heaven and hell?' Yoga rejects hell, and Yoga rejects heaven also. Go to the Creator of heaven, the Master of heaven. Why heaven? Heaven is also a petty desire. You don't want it. 'I want God. I want to experience God, the Supreme Being, the Master of heaven'. Yoga concerns itself with God, not heaven or hell. You can say these are some of the differences, the way that Yoga differs from Christianity. It is where orthodox Christian doctrine differs from Yoga.

Yoga restores the most precious part of religion, which, unfortunately, by and large, is not present. In most of the major religions of the world, except in a microscopic section of people who enter into monastery for all life, the nuns and the monks, who somehow or other concentrate all their life upon this spiritual content, except for them, by and large, normally, the spiritual content is found to be lacking in religion. But since the impact of Yoga over the past fifty years, gradually, we see a very wonderful phenomenon, a revival is taking place in the Christian world, emphasising this inner spiritual aspect, your connection with this Godhead. There are many such examples. Some of them are working like the apostles. In the early days, some of them were really fired, like Pentecostal inspirations. They are all good signs. Yoga is presently doing that, restoring to religion the religious life of any being. It restores to him the spiritual quality, the spiritual factor and that is the greatest thing that it does. It doesn't disturb your religion. It doesn't contradict your religion. In no way does it contradict anything. It says: 'wherever you are, whatever you are, try to find God, try to live a noble life. Purify yourself of the lower nature. Shine with virtue. Create in yourself divine qualities and awaken the divine within you, and move towards God.' That is the central message of Yoga. It can be harmoniously incorporated into any religion and the religious life of any being, any faith to enrich that religion and make it alive and take you towards the true goal which is the goal of any religion.

APPENDIX: BOOKS

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- Music and Creation
- Nutrition for a successful life
- Only Beauty can save the World
- Proper knowledge of Human and Divine Justice
- Purity as the Key to Self-Realisation
- Real Freedom (F)
- Reflections on Birth (F)
- The Cosmic meaning of Marriage (F)
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- The Laws which govern the Universe
- The Power of Thought
- The Quintessence of Christianity
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- The Two Principles – Masculine and Feminine
- Traditions, the Gospels & the Holy Scriptures
- True Happiness (F)
- True Love (F)
- Working with Light

(F) = also in French available; (D) = also in German available

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- Swami Krishnanada: « Ordinary- and Super-Consciousness »
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