

Leading A Spiritual Life In A Material World

By
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Kriya Yoga teaches that one should make progress and achieve Self-Realization while acting as a householder. This requires not just an outward renunciation of the world, nor the actual retiring to a cave, but an inner renunciation, a non-attachment to the material world. It requires that the *kriya* initiate skillfully lives and works in the world of impermanence and ultimate illusion, deriving the resources necessary to accomplish the spiritual goal of achieving the experience of reality.

An example often cited by the ancient yogis is that of the lotus plant that grows and flowers in the muddy waste-waters, but is not tainted by its surroundings. It remains pure, while absorbing the nutrients from the water and the sun.

In the Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna counsels that we should offer the fruits of our actions to the Divine. In this way, we do not become enmeshed in the results of our actions and are free to do our best without attachment. To expect a reward from our actions is a material way of thinking, while to act selflessly without expectations is the spiritual way of being. Even when we are being paid for our services, we need not be attached to the money, but can offer it to the Divine, to be used to maintain our spiritual life and to help others.

Now, from a practical perspective, how should a spiritually inclined person act?

The first key to the spiritual life is to set-up and maintain a regular practice or *sadhana*. Regularity is critical in overcoming inertia and other obstacles to spiritual evolution. A daily practice, preferably once in the morning and once in the evening, no matter how brief, is superior to intermittent efforts performed for hours. This is due to the continual accumulation of negativity that must be overcome before they have the opportunity to take root in the subconscious. Once rooted and supported by existing negative habit patterns, then the effort to eradicate them become ten times more difficult.

Even in mundane matters, we have learnt to brush our teeth everyday – waiting every three days and then brushing for half an hour would seem absurd to our sensibilities. There are those who would brush their teeth after every meal to prevent the build-up of plaque. Take this same enthusiasm into your spiritual life. Perform your *sadhana* regularly and prevent the build-up of negativity and *karma*.

The second key is to maintain a constant awareness of our spiritual goal. This awareness is often disrupted by our uneven and irregular life-style. Therefore, it is necessary to examine one's life-style. Take a few moments to note down your daily and weekly activities and examine them. Do you take enough rest, or are you depriving

yourself of your health by insufficient sleep? Are you eating healthy food, deriving sufficient life-force or *prana* to remain energetic and positive? It is paradoxical that taking good care of the material body is a mark of spirituality. This does not mean that one should fall into the trap of compulsive dieting, exercising, or absorption in body beautification procedures, which have become part of our consumer culture. However, a consistent asana or postures practice is highly beneficial for the physical and energy bodies.

A healthy body is necessary for spiritual evolution. It is recorded that the great *yogi* Siddhartha Gautama mortified his body through excessive fasting and found that he could not make any further progress in his meditation. Finally, he was so weak that he was dying, rather than evolving, and so he crawled to a stream and bathed himself, ate a small meal, rested and continued his meditation, subsequently achieving enlightenment, becoming the Buddha. He always taught moderation in all things – the middle way.

The third key is to find a balance between spiritual and material activities. How much time do you devote to your spiritual life? It is not necessary to spend all your time or even the majority of your time on spiritual activities. However, examine your material activities and determine their necessity. Doing things with your family is necessary and working is necessary to support oneself and one's family. Is working late and taking work home necessary? Is watching television necessary? What is commonly called entertainment is usually an excuse for stimulating a tired mind. Rest and meditation may be a better remedy. Strike a balance.

The fourth key is to examine the people we associate with - the relationships that we value. This does not mean that one should give up our long-cherished friendships because they do not involve spiritual activities. It is helpful to cultivate friends who share similar spiritual aspirations and who can provide much needed support. There is a tendency among those new to the spiritual path to try to explain their new beliefs and practices or even attempt to convince close friends to join them. This should be done very delicately and not from a missionary perspective. If one finds that they are not receptive, one should stop annoying them. It is never productive to force your beliefs on others. To keep their friendship, you would need to downplay your spiritual activities. If and when they wish to know more, they will know to ask you. Don't expect understanding and support from even close family members. They fear the unknown and they fear to lose you. Have patience to explain what you are doing – you may have to explain many times, until they see that you are not becoming a fanatic or ignoring them.

The fifth key is to examine one's work. Since most of us spend the majority of our day at work, if its performance is a hindrance to our spiritual values, then we need to consider a change. It is possible to work and have provision for financial sustenance without compromising ourselves, or selling our integrity. It is needful to keep in mind the values of truth (*satya*), non-harming of ourselves and others (*ahimsa*) and non-stealing (*asteya*), when examining our work. Another value to keep in mind is our self-actualization – is the work that you are doing utilizing your highest potential? Are you happy in this type of work, or did you stumble or get driven into it? Is this what you want in your life?

Consider moving from a high paying but unsatisfying role to a more satisfying position, or moving from a dull low paying job to becoming self-employed.

The possibilities are many, but we need to have confidence in the Divine will. We need to tune in to the Divine and find our *dharma* or right path in this world. When we came into this world, we came with the self-imposed burden of *karma*, but also with the promise of the right path or *dharma* for all of us. By following our *dharma*, we can overcome all our *karma*, and achieve Self-Realization in this life.

Constant awareness of our goal and constant vigilance of our activities will help us steer a spiritual path through the turbulent seas of materiality.

It is a blessing to know that we need and not be enmeshed in what we want. It is a blessing to be satisfied with what we have and not desire what we don't need.