

Principal Ideas of Yoga Vasistha



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Yoga Vasistha is a detailed conversation between Shri Ram and his spiritual teacher Maharshi Vasistha. The ideas contributed in this greatest classics ever recorded are mostly in the form of parable stories. This book also known as Maha Ramayan, composed in 32000 verses and 64000 lines. The book deals with six major sections. On knowing Shri Ram's reason for depression Maharshi Vasistha contributes following ideas for liberation. There are four gatekeepers to the Realm of Freedom: 1)Shanti (Self Control), 2)Vichara (spirit of enquiry), 3)Santosh (Contentment), 4)Satsanga (good company) t

1. Introduction

The Yoga Vasistha is described as the Science of Self Realization. One of the greatest spiritual classics ever recorded, the Yoga Vasistha is a detailed conversation between Sri Ram and his spiritual teacher Vasistha Maharshi and written by sage Valmiki. The conversation goes into the details of the intricacies of the mind. The unique feature of the text is, much of the ideas are explained with the help of parable stories which hold many hidden depths within them.

The text also known as Maha Ramayan , Vasistha Ramayan is an elaborate work consisting of 32000 verses and 64000 lines. The text deals with six major sections:

1. Depression or Indifference.
2. Longing for Liberation.
3. Origin.
4. Preservations.
5. Quiescence.
6. Liberation.

The soul is undergoing a dream from which it must awake is the main theme of the Yoga Vasistha. This dream represents our association and identification with the world.

2. Why Yoga Vasistha?

Sri Ram the reincarnation of Bhagwan Vishnu accepted the incompleteness of human being, his ignorance and also the depression coming out of that. In his ignorance and depression (Vairagya) Sri Ram went on asking questions to Maharshi Vasistha so as to get spiritual knowledge. Sri Ram's concern was if Paramatma (God) alone is real and the world is unreal and that the latter appears as real in man's vision and if there is not even iota of happiness in this world and men are born to die and they die to be born again then why one should do anything? If everything is predecided (destiny) then why one should work(do Karma)? He further says " I am trying to find out means which will relieve me from pains of repeated births. This thought consumes me like a wild fire.

He raises the following issues:

1. Body : Body which is loved so much is composed of flesh, bones, fats, nerves and blood. It is a home for various diseases and is filled with impurities.
2. Mind : Mind arises only through ego. It is full of love and hatred like a storm . All pains are generated by Mind. How do I control this Mind?
3. Ego : Ego generates actions, desires, pains and is the source of all illness. How do I free myself from Ego?
4. Wealth : Wealth is source of all misery and cannot generate happiness. It is temporary and unsteady.
5. Desires : Desires are enemy of peace. The fire of desires has burnt us.

There is fear and all things of this world pertaining to human beings are attended with fear like an enjoyment there is a fear of disease, in social position the fear of falling off, in wealth the fear of loosing it, in honors the fear of humiliation, in power the fear of enemies, in beauty the fear of old age, in body the fear of death and Sri Ram requests Maharshi Vasistha please tell me

how I may become free of grief, fear and worldly troubles and may have the light of Truth. Show me the way to attain ever lasting peace, eternal bliss and immortality.

3. Principal Ideas of Yoga Vasistha

Maharshi Vasistha to answer the questions raised by Sri Ram and to set aside his ignorance gives a spiritual discourse. In today's context this text is a classic example of psychological counseling giving the Science of Self Realization. Maharshi Vasistha claims that moving beyond the temporary illusions is the path to true enlightenment and gives in depth how such journey can be undertaken. Maharshi Vasistha explains this by narrating many stories and their deep rooted philosophies are designed to open our levels of awareness. The nature of human being, his origin, his mind, purpose of life, the nature of Parabrahman, Supreme God, consciousness and the methods to attain Self Realization are vividly described in the text. In doing so Maharshi Vasistha puts forth the following Principal Ideas:

3.1. Destiny and Karma

In the beginning itself Maharshi Vasistha discards the idea of destiny and very strongly puts forth the principle of Karma and states that there is nothing like destiny in this world. It is only the efforts (Karma) of man which can bring him success Only thing is these efforts should be scientific, logical and in the right direction. The following verse explains this idea:

पूर्वजन्मकृतं कर्म तदैवमिति कथ्यते !
प्राक्तनं पौरुषं तद्वै दैवशब्देन कथ्यते !! 2-6-35 !!

Meaning whatever karma in the past life is destiny of this birth. Today's Karma is tomorrow's destiny. So where is the difference between effort and destiny. Effort (Karma) is the main source of destiny. So to make tomorrow's destiny best efforts (Karma) should be made today itself.

3.2. Atman (the eternal self): Non Duality

The Atman exists and is certainly different from the body, senses, mind and prana. It is a blissful Supreme, permanent, formless and pure. One who realizes this gets liberated. The truth of unity between jivatma (soul of man) and the paramatma (God) needs to be realized. One who constantly thinks of Atman, one gets purified and the ignorance gets uprooted. When the mind is pure one gets unalloyed bliss. Supreme Bliss cannot be experienced through contact of senses with their objects. The Supreme State is that which the mind is annihilated through one point enquiry. Like mud in a mud pot the Supreme Lord who is existence and space----- like consciousness and bliss exists everywhere, non----separate. Do not cut up Brahman into "I am one thing and this is another". As soon as it is realized that Brahman is all pervasive this vast samsara is found to be the Supreme Lord. One who realizes that everything is Brahman truly becomes Brahman. Even if you have known the real Truth you have to practice always. Know always that Self is Brahman, one and whole. Just as a statue is contained in a pillar (block) even if it is not actually carved out, so also the world exists in Brahman. Therefore, the supreme state is not void.

3.3. Mokshya (Liberation):

Mokshya can be attained by one who diligently cultivates the Friendship of the Four Gatekeepers of the Palace of Mokshya

मोक्षद्वारे द्वारपालाश्चवारः परिकीर्तितः
शमो विचारः संतोषश्चतुर्थः साधुसंगम् !! 2-12-59 !!

Meaning of the verse: there are Four Gatekeepers (Pillars) to the Realm of Freedom. They are,

A) Sham (Shanti):

When the mind is at peace, pure, free from delusion, it does not long for anything nor does it reject anything. This is Self Control. All that is good and auspicious flows from Self Control. The delight one experiences in the presence of Self Control is incomparable. " Self Control O Ram is the best remedy for physical and mental ills." When there is Self Control even the food that you eat tastes better, else it tastes bitter. One who wears the armor of Self Control is not harmed by sorrow.

B) Vichara (Inquiry):

Inquiry should be undertaken by intelligence that is purified by a close study of the scripture and this inquiry should be unbroken. Strength, Intelligence and Timely Action are the fruits of Inquiry. Indeed that final liberation is the fruit of Inquiry. It is the absence of Inquiry that gives rise to actions that are harmful to oneself and to others and to numerous psychosomatic illnesses. " O Rama, in the light of inquiry there is realization of eternal and unchanging reality, this is the Supreme". What is inquiry? To inquire thus Who am I? How has this evil of sansara (repetitive history) come into being? Knowledge of Truth arises from this Inquiry. This knowledge then brings the Supreme Peace in the Self and the ending of all sorrow.

C) Santosh (Contentment):

What is contentment? To renounce all craving for what is not obtained unsought and to be satisfied with what comes unsought without being elated or depressed even by them ----- this is Contentment. As long as one is not satisfied in the Self he will be subject to sorrow. He who has qualified the nectar of Contentment does not relish craving, no delight in this world is as sweet as Contentment which destroys all sins. The contented man, who possesses nothing, owns this world.

D) Satsang (Company of wise, holy, enlightened persons):

Satsang enlarges one's intelligence, destroys one's ignorance and one's psychological distress. Satsang is indeed superior all other forms of religious practices like charity, austerity and the performance of religious rites. Satsang alone is one's light on the path of life. Maharshi Vasistha reiterates these four are the surest means of Liberation. According to him ----- Contentment is the Supreme Gain, The Spirit of Inquiry is the greatest Wisdom, Self Control is the Supreme Happiness. If one is unable to resort to all these four, then practice One diligently and the other three will also be found in oneself. Therefore O Rama strive by all means to cultivate these noble qualities.

3.4. Yoga and Knowledge:

Maharshi Vasistha explains Yoga and Knowledge as two paths to control the Mind (Chitta).

द्वौ क्रमो चित्तनाशश्च योगो ज्ञानं च राघव !
योगस्तदवृत्तिरोधो हि ज्ञानं सम्यगवेक्षणम् !! 5-78-8 !!

O Rama Yoga and Knowledge are the two paths of Mind Control (Chitta nasha) . Controlling the Mind is Yoga and with the proper Inquiry know the unity of Jivatma and the Patamatma is the Knowledge. When the Mind is at peace and the heart leaps to the Supreme Truth, there is unbroken flow of peace and the heart is filled with the Bliss of absolute, then this very world becomes an abode of Bliss.

Youth-Bravery-Emotions:

Maharshi Vasistha explain the significance of Youth stage in the life of Man. The Child is in a helpless condition. He is ignorant. In the Old Age also the Man is helpless. So it is the Youth Stage in which the Man can show Bravery and fulfill dreams. But in this stage the Emotions are also very strong so a young Man can become a slave to Lust. His Mind is filled with evil thoughts. He commits various sins. So the Young Man needs to balance his strength and emotions so that he can do good to the society. In this stage man needs Wisdom (Vivek).

तर तारुण्यमस्तीदं यावत्ते तावदम्बुधे !
अन्तस्त्यागी बहिःसंगी लोके विरह राघव !!

O Rama in the Young Age be with the World, do all Actions (Karma) be detached from everyone and everything. This is the skill to live life and achieve Liberation.

4. Conclusion

In this classic work Maharshi Vasistha not only is advising Sri Rama but to all men. His teachings are relevant even after 5000 years and should be taught to all, particularly in the young age. He says peace does not come from anywhere outside. It is to be experienced within. Bliss similarly is not something to be sought from outside. It is the state of Mind.