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The Doctrine of Yoga: Humility

by John C. Kimbrough

Individuals are frequently drawn to paths and disciplines such as Yoga and Buddhism because they think that they are different than the religious and spiritual traditions that they have been exposed to.

Many may even express a dissatisfaction or distaste.

Sometimes this distaste manifests itself in stronger feelings and emotions such as resentment, bitterness and anger, so we hear phrases such as "I am a recovering Catholic".

It is possible to imagine that individuals have been in some way damaged in a deep or permanent way by the traditions, religion or practices they were exposed to.

This has become more evident in the last twenty years, with the widespread surfacing of sexual abuse by the clergy in some denominations.

Those who are unaware may think that this phenomenon is only widespread in the west, but similar forms of abuse have taken place in eastern religions and disciplines as well.

It seems though, regardless of negative past experiences, and cynical and pessimistic attitudes, that all people are looking for some guidance or set of teachings that they can follow with trust and grow with and from.

A closer examination and knowledge of Yoga and Buddhism will show that they put forth many of the same teachings as Christianity and Catholicism do.

How those teachings are understood and brought into one's life may differ though.

Some of the teachings of Yoga and Buddhism are very obvious and easy to see.

Other teachings are subtler, but just as important to understand.

Individuals unfamiliar with Yoga or new to it, frequently think of it as being a physical practice only.

Some Yoga practitioners will cringe when they hear Yoga being referred to as an "exercise".

Hatha Yoga works on the mind and body through the practice and performance of the various techniques, breathing practices and postures that make it up.

It seems that these days many are very busy, going from one thing to another, and we happily fit in our Yoga practice, among other things, knowing that it brings us many benefits.

Sometimes, practitioners can be reluctant or resentful in being exposed to any more than what they want out of Yoga or feel that their Yoga practice should consist of or give them.

Many do not realize that Hatha Yoga and Yoga in general professes a doctrine of morals and ethics to understand and practice.

Some individuals, maybe free thinkers, perhaps some new-agers, may feel uncomfortable with spending any time looking at teachings that advise them how to be or behave.

They want to work with their body and mind, not feel like they are in church.

In reality, these doctrines and teachings, be they put forth in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism or Yoga do not tell us how to be or behave as much as offer us guidelines that we can choose or not choose to understand and apply.

In Yoga or Buddhism, there is no real conceptualization or judgment of someone as being a sinner because of their mental and physical activities and actions.

This type of judgment, with its strong pejorative connotation, does not do anyone any good.

It hinders the cultivation of the one who puts it forth and it hinders the cultivation of the one it is put upon.

The ability of us to understand the doctrine of Yoga, like our ability to understand any doctrine, may and will be hindered by our interests, our perceived need of it and our time and energy available.

When we are young, we tend to pursue fulfillment in various ways, some that may not be healthy or wholesome.

Later, we realize the unskillfulness of this search.

Many come to me saying, regretfully, that the whole thing was a waste of time.

The doctrine of Yoga, put forth in various scriptures teaches us those things that will lead to failure in Yoga and those things that will lead to success in Yoga.

And it teaches us how to live and behave in ways that cultivate the consciousness in ways that are conducive to achieving Yoga.

One of the recurring themes in this writer's sharing with others, and in the teachings of Yoga and Buddhism is that these morals and ethics form an important part of the practice.

It is useful to be reminded of that, so that our attention is drawn to them, so we reflect on what they consist of and mean, and that we understand them well enough so that we attempt to apply them to our thoughts, words and life experiences and situations.

Humility or being humble means that we are not involved in bragging about ourselves, our life or our achievements.

It means that we have tendencies to modesty.

This writer has always found that the more effective and skillful teachers and individuals that he has met and been exposed to in his life were those who possessed humility.

We do not have to tell others that we do Hatha Yoga, or show them postures and such.

In practicing or teaching Yoga, we do not feel ourselves as being special or put ourselves above or over others.

With humility, we have a sense of detachment from the world and our life experiences.

With humility, we can see and appreciate the gifts of others, instead of being deluded as to what we perceive our own gifts to be.

With humility, we know that we can always learn, instead of thinking that we have learned and seen it all.

With humility, we understand that we have been humbled by life's dynamics and wonders, and can be humbled in such a way again, in the future.

Some individuals seem more understanding of humility and manifest it as they walk further down the path of life.

They realize that they are mortal, that things pass by, that they and people do change.

With this sense of humility, they can wisely stay in the present, instead of trying to live in the past, or continue to abuse their bodies, or act younger than they are.

Who do we have to impress anyway?

With humility, we can share in ways that may enliven another's understanding of their own lives and feelings.

With humility, we can listen, and give another a chance to grow, instead of overpower them with meaningless discourses about our own greatness.

How can we grow when we feel the need to talk or brag about ourselves?

Does that open us up to something greater in ourselves?

Or just deceive and delude us further?

Of course, much of it, like all things in spiritual practices, has to do with our intentions behind what we are saying.

Is it to learn or impress?

Is it to share or feel important and superior in some way?

Is there some ulterior motive behind it, or to just better understand oneself and one's experiences and feelings?

Sometimes a lack of humility is just an expression of our need to be noticed and admired, loved and respected by others.

Humility is one of many spiritual attributes that we all possess and benefit from being mindful of and attempting to bring into our lives.

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