

The Sunlit Path



Sri Aurobindo Chair of Integral Studies

Sardar Patel University

Vallabh Vidyanagar

India

15 May, 2026

Volume 19, Issue 231

Contents

Yoga and Skill in Works

Sri Aurobindo

Dear friends,

I am happy to bring to you the combined issue of 15 May 2026.

*The present issue contains **an article by Sri Aurobindo entitled 'Yoga and Skill in Works.'** I am sure you will find the contents deeply inspiring and illuminating. It is an article to be read again and again to imbue its Truth for knowing The Secret of Action.*

Sincere regards,

Dr Bhalendu Vaishnav





Humility before the Divine in the physical nature
First attitude needed for transformation.

The Mother

Yoga and Skill in Works

Sri Aurobindo

Yoga is skill in works.

Gita

YOGA, says the Gita, is skill in works, and by this phrase the ancient Scripture meant that the transformation of mind and being to which it gave the name of Yoga brought with it a perfect inner state and faculty out of which the right principle of action and the right spiritual and divine result of works emerged naturally like a tree out of its seed.

Certainly, it did not mean that the clever general or politician or lawyer or shoemaker deserves the name of a Yogin; it did not mean that any kind of skill in works was Yoga, but by Yoga it signified a spiritual condition of universal equality and God-union and by the skill of the Yogic worker it intended a perfect adaptation of the soul and its instruments to the rhythm of the divine and universal Spirit in a nature liberated from the shackles of egoism and the limitations of the sense-mind.

Essentially, Yoga is a generic name for the processes and the result of processes by which we transcend or shed off our present modes of being and rise to a new, a higher, a wider mode of consciousness which is not that of the ordinary animal and intellectual man. Yoga is the exchange of an egoistic for a universal or cosmic consciousness lifted towards or informed by the supra-cosmic, transcendent Unnameable who is the source and support of all things.

Yoga is the passage of the human thinking animal towards the God-consciousness from which he has descended.

In that ascent we find many levels and stages, plateau after plateau of the hill whose summit touches the Truth of things; but at every stage the saying of the Gita applies in an ever higher degree.

Even a little of this new law and inner order delivers the soul out of the great peril by which it had been overtaken in its worldward descent, the peril of the ignorance by which the unillumined intellect, even when it is keenest or sagest, must ever be bound and limited, of the sorrow and sin from which the unpurified heart, even when it wears the richest purple of aspiration and feeling, must ever suffer soil and wound and poverty, and of the vanity of its works to which the undivined will of man, even when it is most vehement and powerful or Olympian and victorious, must eternally be subject.

It is the utility of Yoga that it opens to us a gate of escape out of the vicious circle of our ordinary human existence.

The idea of works, in the thought of the Gita, is the widest possible.

All action of Nature in man is included, whether it be internal or external, operate in the mind or use the body, seem great or seem little. From the toil of the hero to the toil of the cobbler, from the labour of the sage to the simple physical act of eating, all is included. The seeking of the Self by thought, the adoration of the Highest by the emotions of the heart, the gathering of means and material and capacity and the use of them for the service of God and man stand here on an equal footing.

Buddha sitting under the Bo-tree and conquering the illumination, the ascetic silent and motionless in his cave, Shankara storming through India, debating with all men and preaching most actively the gospel of inaction are all from this point of view doing great and forceful work.

But while the outward action may be the same, there is a great internal difference between the working of the ordinary man and the working of the Yogin,—a difference in the state of the being, a difference in the power and the faculty, a difference in the will and temperament.

What we do, arises out of what we are.

The existent is conscious of what he is; that consciousness formulates itself as knowledge and power; works are the result of this twofold force of being in action. Mind, life and body can only operate out of that which is contained in the being of which they are forces.

This is what we mean when we say that all things act according to their nature. The divine Existence is pure and unlimited being in possession of all itself, it is *sat*; whatever it puts forth in its limitless purity of self-awareness is truth of itself, *satya*; the divine knowledge is knowledge of the Truth, the divine Will is power of the Truth, the divine workings are words and ideas of the Truth realising themselves in manifold forms and through many stages and in infinite relations.

But God is not limited or bound by any particular working or any moment of time or any field of space or any law of relation, because He is universal and infinite. Nor is He limited by the universe; for His infinity is not cosmic, but supracosmic.

But the individualised being is or acts as if he were so bound and limited, because he treats the particular working of existence that

he is and the particular moment of time and field of space in which it is actually operating and the particular conditions which reign in the working and in the moment and in the field as if they were self-existent realities and the binding truth of things.

Himself, his knowledge, his force and will, his relations with the world and his fellows, his need in it and his desire from them he treats as the sufficient truth and reality, the point of departure of all his works, the central fact and law of his universe. And from this egoistic error arises an all-vitiating falsehood. For the particular, the individual can have no self-existence, no truth, no valid force except in so far as it reflects rightly and relates and conforms itself justly to the universal, to the all-being, the all-knowledge, the all-will and follows its true drift towards selfrealisation and vast delight in itself.

Therefore the salvation of the individual lies in his universalising himself; and this is the lesson which life tries always to teach him but the obstinate ego is always unwilling to learn; for the universal is not any group or extended ego, not the family, community, nation or even all mankind, but an infinite far surpassing all these littlenesses.

Nor is the universalising of himself sufficient for liberation, although certainly it will make him practically more free and in his being nearer to the true freedom. To put himself in tune with the universal is a step, but beyond the universal and directing and determining it is the supracosmic Infinity; for the universe also has no self-existence, truth or validity except as it expresses the divine Being, Knowledge, Will, Power, Delight of Him who surpasses all universe, so much that it can be said figuratively that with a petty fragment of His being and a single ray of His consciousness He has created all these worlds.

Therefore the universalised mind must look up from its cosmic consciousness to the Supernal and derive from that all its sense of being and movement of works. This is the fundamental truth from which the Yogic consciousness starts; it helps the individual to universalise himself and then to transcend the cosmic formula.

And this transformation acts not only on his status of being but on his active consciousness in works.

The Gita tells us that equality of soul and mind is Yoga and that this equality is the foundation of the Brahman-state, that high infinite consciousness to which the Yogin aspires.

Now equality of mind means universality; for without universality of soul there may be a state of indifference or an impartial self-control or a well-governed equality of temperament, but these are not the thing that is meant. The equality spoken of is not indifference or impartiality or equability, but a fundamental oneness of attitude to all persons and all things and happenings because of the perception of all as the One.

Such equality, it is erroneously thought, is incompatible with action. By no means; this is the error of the animal and the intellectualman who thinks that action is solely possible when dictated by his hopes, fears and passions or by the self-willed preferences of the emotion and the intellect justifying themselves by the illusions of the reason.

That might be the fact if the individual were the real actor and not merely an instrument or secondary agent; but we know well enough, for Science and Philosophy assure us of the same truth, that the universal is the Force which acts through the simulacrum of our individuality. The individual mind, pretending to choose for itself with a sublime ignorance and disregard of the universal, is obviously working on the basis of a falsehood and by means of an

error and not in the knowledge and the will of the Truth. It cannot have any real skill in works; for to start from a falsehood or half-truth and work by means of blunders and arrive at another falsehood or half-truth which we have immediately to change, and all the while to weep and struggle and suffer and have no sure resting-place, cannot surely be called skill in works. But the universal is equal in all and therefore its determinations are not self-willed preferences but are guided by the truth of the divine will and knowledge which is unlimited and not subject to incapacity or error.

Therefore that state of the being by which the Yogin differs from the ordinary man, is that by which he rises from the foundation of a perfect equality to the consciousness of the one existence in all and embracing all and lives in that existence and not in the walls of his body or personal temperament or limited mind.

Mind and life and body he sees as small enough things which happen and change and develop in his being. Nay, the whole universe is seen by him as happening within himself, not in his small ego or mind, but within this vast and infinite self with which he is now constantly identified. All action in the universe he sees as arising in this being, out of the divine Existence and under the stress of the divine Truth, Knowledge, Will and Power.

He begins to participate consciously in its working and to see all things in the light of that divine truth and governance; and even when his own actions move on certain lines rather than others, he is not bound by them or shut to the truth of all the rest by his own passions and preferences, gropings and seekings and revolts. It is evident that such an increasing wideness of vision must mean an increasing knowledge.

And if it be true that knowledge is power, it must mean also an increasing force for works. Certainly, it would not be so, if the

Yogin continued to act by the light of his individual reason and imagination and will; for the intellect and all that depends on it can only work by virtue of rigid limitations and exclusive determinations.

Accordingly, the continued activity of the unilluminated intellect and its servants conflicts with the new state of consciousness and knowledge which arises out of this larger existence, and so long as they remain active, it cannot be perfect or assured; for the consciousness is being continually pulled down to the lower field of ego-habit by the claim of their narrow workings. But the Yogin ceases, progressively, to act by the choice of his intellectual or emotional nature. Another light dawns, another power and presence intervenes, other faculties awake in the place of the old human-animal combination.

As the state of being changes, the will and temperament must necessarily be modified. Even from an early stage the Yogin begins to subordinate his personal will or it becomes naturally subordinate to the sense of the supreme Will which is attracting him upward. Ignorantly, imperfectly, blunderingly it moves at first, with many recoils and relapses into personal living and personal action, but in time it becomes more in tune with its Source and eventually the personal will merges upward and all ways into the universal and infinite and obeys implicitly the transcendent.

Nor does this change and ascension and expanding mean any annihilation of the will-power working in the individual, as the intellectual man might imagine; but rather it increases it to an immense forcefulness while giving it an infinite calm and an eternal patience. The temperament also is delivered from all leash of straining and desire, from all urge of passion and pain of wilful self-delusion. Desire, even the best, turns always to

limitation and obscurity, to some eager exclusive choice and pressure, to some insistent exclusion of what should not be excluded and impatient revolt against the divine denials and withholdings. It generates anger and grief and passion and obstinacy, and these bring about the soul's loss of its divine memory or steadfast consciousness of itself and its self knowledge and its equal vision of the truth of things.

Therefore desire and its brood are incompatible with skill in works and their persistence is the sign of an imperfect Yoga.

Not only must the will and fundamental knowledge-view of things change, but a new combination of faculties take the place of the old. For if the intellect is not to do all our mental work for us or to work at all in its unilluminated state and if the will in the form of desires, wishes, intellectual preferences is not to determine and enforce our action, then it is clear that other powers of knowledge and will must awaken and either replace the intellect and the mental preference or illumine and guide the one and transform and dominate the other.

Otherwise either the action may be nil or else its impulses mechanical and chaotic, even if the static being is blissfully enlarged; for they will well up indeed out of the universal and not the personal, but out of the universal in its lower formula which permits the erratic action of the heart and mind, while the old personal will and reason will not be there to impose some light and order on their ill-connected impulses.

Such faculties and new combination of faculties can and do emerge and they are illuminations and powers that are in direct touch and harmony with the light and power of the Truth; therefore in proportion as they manifest and take hold of their functions, they must increase the force, subtlety and perfection of the Yogin's skill in works.

But the greatest skill in works of Yoga is that which to the animal man seems its greatest ineptitude. For all this difficult attainment, the latter will say, may lead to anything you please, but we have to lose our personal life, abandon our personal objects, annul our personal will and pleasure and without these life cannot be worth living.

Now the object of all skill in works must be evidently to secure the best welfare either of ourselves or of others or of all. The ordinary man calls it welfare to secure momentarily some transient object, to wade for it through a sea of grief and suffering and painful labour and to fall from it again still deeper into the same distressful element in search of a new transient object.

The greatest cunning of Yoga is to have detected this cheat of the mind and its desires and dualities and to have found the way to an abiding peace, a universal delight and an all-embracing satisfaction, which can not only be enjoyed for oneself but communicated to others.

That too arises out of the change of our being; for the pure truth of existence carries also in it the unalloyed delight of existence, they are inseparable in the status of the infinite.

To use the figures of the Vedic seers, by Yoga Varuna is born in us, a vast sky of spiritual living, the divine in his wide existence and infinite truth; into that wideness Mitra rises up, Lord of Light and Love who takes all our activities of thought and feeling and will, links them into a divine harmony, charioteers our movement and dictates our works; called by this wideness and this harmony Aryaman appears in us, the Divine in its illumined power, uplifted force of being and all-judging effective will; and by the three comes the indwelling Bhaga, the Divine in its pure bliss and all-seizing joy who dispels the evil dream of our jarring and divided existence and possesses all things in the light and

glory of Aryaman's power, Mitra's love and light, Varuna's unity.
This divine Birth shall be the son of our works; and than creating
this what greater skill can there be or what more practical and
sovereign cunning? (1)



Humility in the love for the Divine

**Delicate, effective and surrendered, but very persistent in its
feeling.**

The Mother



Power aspiring to become an instrument for the divine work

Power, opening to a higher consciousness, awakens to the need of being at the service of the Divine.

The Mother



Perfect Working of the Mind

Can take place when the mind is determined exclusively to fulfil its role.

The Mother



Work of the enlightened mind

It is very powerful in leading the being to the Divine. Can be very useful for progress.

The Mother

Acknowledgements

All passages from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are copyright of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India and taken with kind permission of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. Their titles, paragraphs and highlights made by the editor. The sources of selections in the present issue are:

1. Sri Aurobindo CWSA, 119-126

The Sunlit Path is an e magazine of **Sri Aurobindo Chair of Integral Studies, Sardar Patel University**. It can be viewed at the University webpage: http://www.spuvvn.edu/academics/academic_chairs/aurobindo/

Editor: Dr. Bhalendu S. Vaishnav, Chairperson, **Sri Aurobindo Chair of Integral Studies, Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, 388120, Gujarat, India**.
Contact: Department of Medicine, Pramukhswami Medical College, Bhaikaka University, Karamsad 388325, Gujarat, India.
e mail: Sriurobindochair@gmail.com