

What way of life is Hinduism?

There is a popular saying that Hinduism is a way of life. Naturally, the question arises, “What way of life is Hinduism?” or, “Whose way of life is Hinduism?,” “Can any type of life be called Hinduism?”

We have to answer, “Anybody’s way of life cannot be called Hinduism. It is a particular way of life that is called Hinduism.” Naturally, the question arises, “Which particular way of life? Who decides that particular way of life?” We answer, “It is a particular way of life prescribed by the Hindu scriptures.”

What are the Hindu Scriptures?

The next question is, “What are the Hindu Scriptures?” You all know that the Vedas are the primary Hindu Scriptures, and based on the Vedas there are several allied derivative literatures. They all put together form the corpus of Hindu literature. The primary one being the Vedas. We Hindus believe that the Vedas are a gift from Bhagavan Himself, given to us through the Rishis. We have the well-known Shloka:

शिवं शिवकरं शान्तं शिवात्मानं शिवोत्तमं ।

शिवमार्गप्रणेतारं प्रणतोस्मि सदाशिवं ॥

śivam śivakaram śantam śivatmānam śivottamam

śivamārgapraṇetāraṁ praṇatosmi sadāśivam

I offer namaskāra to sadāśiva, which is another name of Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti who has given us the *śivamārgaḥ*, meaning the auspicious way of life. It is *śivasyamārgaḥ*, a way of life given by Lord Śiva, and also it is *śivaḥ mārgaḥ*, an auspicious way of life – both *ṣaṣṭhi-tatpuruṣa* and *karmadhāraya -samāsaḥ*.

Our Vedas are broadly divided into two portions – the *vedapūrvāḥ*, the former portion, and the *veda-antaḥ*, the latter portion. Both of them present two different ways of life. The first portion of the Vedas is called *karma-kāṇḍam*. Therefore, the way of life prescribed by the first portion is called *karma-yoga* way of life. The final portion of the Veda is called *jñāna-kāṇḍam*. The way of life prescribed by the *jñāna-kāṇḍam* is called the *jñāna-yoga* way of life. Therefore, Hinduism consists of two ways of life namely, *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*.

Karma-yoga and Jñāna-yoga

This teaching of the Vedas has been condensed by Lord Krishna in His well-known Bhagavadgītā teaching. Taught by Krishna and compiled by vyāsācārya, Lord Krishna clearly says in Chapter 3 Verse 3 in Bhagavadgītā

लोकेऽस्मिन् द्विविधा निष्ठा पुराप्रोक्ता मयानघ

ज्ञानयोगेन साङ्ख्यानं कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम्

*loke'smivividhā niṣṭhā purāproktā mayānagha
jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām*

The blemish-less one (Arjuna)! The two-fold committed lifestyles in this world were told by Me in the beginning – the pursuit of *jñāna-yoga* for the renunciates and the pursuit of *karma-yoga* for those who pursue activity.

There are two different ways of life known as *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*. Both of them put together make the Hindu way of life. What is the relationship between these two ways of life? Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavadgītā that *karma-yoga* is a stepping stone to entering *jñāna-yoga*, and *jñāna-yoga* is the stepping stone to discovering our final destination which is total fulfillment, otherwise called *pūrṇatvam*, otherwise called *mokṣaḥ*. Thus, *karma-yoga* takes us to *jñāna-yoga*, and *jñāna-yoga* takes us to *pūrṇatvam*. This is Hinduism. This is the Hindu way of life. Since this is given out by the Vedas, it is called *vaidika-mārgaḥ*, otherwise called *sanātana-dharmaḥ*.

The Vedas have designed this way of life consisting of *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* based on fundamental teachings given by the Vedas themselves. If we know and register the fundamental teachings, we will know the significance of the Hindu way of life. What are the fundamental principles?

The Fundamental principles of Hindu way of life.

Principle #1: Seeking Peace, Security, and Happiness (PSH): We see that the entire humanity is involved in a variety of activities. There are millions of human beings, each one having his/her own set of activities, which varies from individual to individual. The Vedas say that in and through these different activities, all human beings are looking for certain fundamental things. Even though the activities are different, all human beings are looking for certain common things; certain universal things, in the past, in the present, and the future. The Vedas say, there are three fundamental things sought after by human beings. What are they? **Peace, Security and Happiness.** **Peace** – Peace is one thing that everyone is looking for. The second thing that

everybody wants is **Security** because everyone constantly has the feeling of insecurity. Right from birth we feel insecure, therefore we hold on to particular individual or things. Throughout our lives, we try to acquire things hoping that they will give us security. Despite having all of them we have a constant sense of insecurity. As we grow older, the sense of insecurity only increases, because everybody faces the Three Ds – Degeneration, Disease, and Death! Thus, we start with insecurity, grow in insecurity, and till death, we have this problem. Therefore, there is ‘looking for security.’ What will give me security? This is the second thing universally sought after. The third and most important thing sought after is **Happiness**. We all look for happiness. So, Peace, Security, and Happiness – **PSH** – put together, the Vedas call *pūrṇatvam*; otherwise *mokṣaḥ* from *apūrṇatvam*. *pūrṇatvam* means fulfillment; *apūrṇatvam* means non-fulfillment. So, we want *mokṣaḥ* from *apūrṇatvam*, and we want *pūrṇatvam*, which constitutes P, S, and H. This is the first Vedic teaching. Everybody seeks PSH.

Principle #2: The world cannot provide Peace, Security, and Happiness (PSH):

The human being looks for PSH in the world that is known to him; grabbing more and more in search of PSH. The Vedas reveal a shocking message. What is that? The entire universe that we know cannot provide these three! A very disturbing and shocking message. People may not agree, but the Vedas ask them to try! Thus, the second lesson is that the entire world cannot provide PSH. The Vedas give us the logic too. The reason is, the entire world is bound by time and space. Therefore, everything is changing. This means everything is continuously appearing and disappearing. Nothing is permanent. Everything appears, survives briefly, and disappears. **Born- is-Gone! Born- is -Gone!** Therefore, in the entire world, there is nothing that we can hold onto permanently. Everything is unstable; everything is fleeting; therefore, one cannot rely on anything for PSH. Whatever we hold onto is insecure! I feel insecure, and because of this, I hold onto something else which is itself insecure. After holding onto something I feel more insecure because I am not only worried about my security, but also about something I held onto. I got something to remove my worry, but I found that my worry had compounded. As my family expands, I am worried more about the security of not only the spouse but the children and the grandchildren. Thus, there is only an expansion of insecurity. The Vedas ask the question, “As long as there is a constant sense of insecurity, the mind will always have concerns, fear, anxiety, etc.; how can such a mind have peace?!” Real deep peace is never possible for

an insecure mind. Whatever peace we experience is only a pseudo-peace, which is nothing but a gap between two disturbing events! Therefore, being insecure, peace is not possible. Even if it is, we will get only a piece of peace, which will go to pieces very soon! Therefore, a fleeting world cannot give us PSH. If security and peace are not in the mind, where is the question of happiness? Happiness, as seen by an individual, is nothing but varieties of entertainments that one engage in, to forget my insecurity! Happiness is nothing but a variety of escapist entertainments – going to a club and partying, drinking all sorts of things, jumping up and down, which is called thrill and happiness, temporarily forgetting the insecurities that are there. After the party is over I go home and lie down. When everybody has left and I do not get sleep, what remains is insecurity. Therefore, the Vedas say, the world cannot give PSH.

The Chandogya Upanishad says,

यो वै भूमा तत् सुखम्। अल्पे न सुखम् अस्ति ॥
yo vai bhūmā tat sukham| alpe na sukham asti
A fleeting world cannot give real happiness;
it can only give pseudo-happiness.

This is the second lesson.

The first lesson is, that everybody seeks PSH. The second lesson is, that the world cannot give PSH. The Vedas then raise the question, “What blessed thing can give me PSH?!” Only that vastu or thing that is permanent, which is not fleeting, which is not bound by time and space, which is called

नित्यं च शाश्वतं शुद्धं ध्रुवम् अक्षरम् अव्ययम्
nityam ca śāśvatam śuddham dhruvam
akṣaram avyayamnityam, śāśvatam,

Only that which is permanent can give us PSH.

We will ask the Vedas,” Where is this permanent thing?” “Is there a permanent thing at all?” Science deals with all kinds of advancements, yet it has not found anything that is permanent. Whatever is discovered in the micro or macro world is impermanent. A star may last for millions of years but will explode. Scientists will name it a Supernova! Is there something permanent? This will be our question.

Nityavastu - Brahman or ātman alone will give PSH.

The Vedas say, “There is! I am willing to help you. Many names are used, among them the Vedas use two important names to call the *nityavastu - brahman* or *ātman*. The

Vedas say that the *nityavastu* alone can give us PSH. To our utter surprise, the Vedas say, that *nityavastu* is not somewhere else. It is inherent in the *anitya-prapañca*. Not only is it inherent, it supports the *anitya-prapañca*, but we ignore it. Being obsessed with the universe and worldly activities, we are distracted by the changing world, we miss the changeless reality, that is inherent in the world and, therefore inherent in ourselves.

Therefore, the Vedas instruct the entire humanity, “If you are interested in PSH, what should you be doing? “ Seek the permanent, discover the permanent, abide in the permanent, and enjoy PSH. We require a permanent thing to hold onto.

We miss that permanent vastu even though it is available in and through the world. Like the movie which is changing all the time. The characters come and go, but in and through the movie characters there is something permanently there. Behind the arriving and departing characters, there is something permanent that also supports the movie. What is that? The screen! You are all wise people! You know the screen, but while we watch the movie, we are so engrossed and absorbed, that we ignore the permanent screen. In life also, we have ignored the permanent.

Jñāna-yogaḥ* will lead to *nityavastu

The Vedas say, “If you are interested, I am willing to help you pursue, discover, abide, and enjoy PSH which is called freedom.” Thereafter, there will be no more struggles in life searching for PSH. Pursue, discover, and abide in the permanent, and let the entire life be a nice entertainment. There are no more struggles in search of PSH because I have found it! This pursuit is called *jñāna-yogaḥ*.

The Vedas make it very clear that scientific methods can never be used to arrive at the permanent. All scientific methods that are used are meant to analyze the changing matter and energy. Science is designed to analyze the changing universe. It is the intrinsic limitation of scientific methods that they cannot arrive at the permanent. Therefore, the Vedas rule out the scientific method of discovering reality. Science is grossly inadequate to discover the permanent.

Jñāna-yogaḥ involves *śravaṇam*, *mananam*, and *nididhyāsanam* - SMN

In the Kaṭhōpaniṣad, yama-dharmarājā says –

नैषा तर्केन मतिरापनेय प्रोक्तन्न्येनैव सुज्ञानाय प्रेष्ठ
naiṣā tarkeṇa matirāpaneyā proktānnyenaiva sujñānāya preṣṭhā.

Jñāna-yogaḥ involves *śravaṇam*, *mananam*, and *nididhyāsanam* guided by the teachings of a Guru who had gained the knowledge from his Guru. Guided by that Guru the pursuit of the permanent consists of *śravaṇam* – receiving the teaching, *mananam* – reflecting over the teaching, and *nididhyāsanam* – assimilating the teaching. This **SMN** method – *śravaṇam* (**S**), *mananam* (**M**), and *nididhyāsanam* (**N**) – is the method for finding PSH! Through SMN find PSH!

This is called *jñāna-yogaḥ* way of life. It is a dedicated pursuit. What is permanent does not have a form. It is abstract like space. Here, there is space in the hall, but it does not have a form. We miss space all the time. Anything that has a form will be deformed! It will change. What is permanent is formless, colorless, and extremely subtle. Therefore, it requires a dedicated pursuit; it being abstract. Thereafter, the Vedas say, that since *jñāna-yogaḥ* is a very fine and subtle pursuit, it requires a lot of preparation.

Karma-yoga* is preparatory for *Jñāna-yoga

The Vedas themselves prescribe a lifestyle that involves several preparatory exercises. All the preparatory exercises put together are called *karma-yoga* way of life.

Karma-yoga helps in entering *jñāna-yogaḥ*. *Jñāna-yogaḥ* will help us discover PSH. Therefore, follow *karma-yoga* and prepare yourself. Follow *jñāna-yogaḥ*, abide in the permanent, and discover PSH. There is no other method other than this. Permanent happiness is possible only by this method

Kaṭhōpaniṣad further says,

तम्-आत्मस्थम् येनुपश्यन्ति धीराः तेषां शान्तिः शाश्वतम् नेतरेषाम् तेषां शान्तिः

tam-ātmastham yenupaśyanti dhīrāḥ teṣāṃ śāntiḥ śāśvatam

netareṣāṃ teṣāṃ śāntiḥ

through this method alone permanent peace is achievable; *netareṣāṃ*

There is no alternative method. Again another Kaṭhōpaniṣad mantrā says

य इमं मध्वदं वेद। आत्मानं जीवमन्तिकात्। ईशानं भूतभव्यस्य। न ततो विजुगुप्सते

ya imam madhvadam veda| ātmānaṃ jivamantikāt|

īśānaṃ bhūtbhavyasya| na tato vijugupsate

Only the one who has gone through these two – *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* – will get out of the sense of insecurity. There will be no fear of degeneration; no fear of disease; no fear of death - *abhayaṃ pratiṣṭhāṃ vindate*. This is possible only through the

karma-yoga plus *jñāna-yoga* way of life, the Hindu way of life; the Vedic way of life; sanātana way of life.

***Karma-yoga* and religious practices**

1. ***Kayikaṁ-vācikaṁ-mānasaṁ-karmāṇi*** This *karma-yoga* has some important features. In *karma-yoga*, our scriptures incorporate countless exercises. Many of them are ritualistic exercises involving three accessories – *trikaraṇam* – the body, the speech, and the mind; as we followed in *rudrābhiṣekam*. We used the body to perform *abhiṣekam*, *pradakṣiṇam*, *namaskāram*, etc. We used our organ of speech to chant the rudram. We used our minds to look at the *śivaliṅgam*, etc. The Vedas prescribe ritualistic practices that involve the three *karaṇas*. We have ritualistic practices that involve only two *karaṇas*! Several exercises involve only the speech and the mind. One can recite the entire *pūjā* without physically performing the *pūjā*, being absorbed mentally – using two *karaṇas*. What is the third possibility? Neither the body nor the speech is used. The *pūjā*, *pradakṣiṇa*, and *namaskāra* are all done mentally. Thus, there are countless ritualistic exercises.

2. ***Pañca-mahā-yajñāḥ*, service activities.** The Vedas also talk about countless service activities as a part of preparatory exercises – *pañca-mahāyajñāḥ* - Service to the family; service to the society; service to the living environment consisting of animals and plants; service to the *pañca-bhūtāḥ*, the non-living environment consisting of the *pañca-bhūtāḥ*; service to the Vedic culture by promoting the Vedic culture. They are all service activities part of preparatory exercises.

We have so many. Nobody can do all of them; nobody needs to do all of them. We can construct our package in consultation with informed people, according to our inclination, resources, and time availability, and prepare ourselves. As time and society change, the emphasis on preparatory exercises will also change.

In *kr̥ta-yuga* it was *dhyāna-pradhānam*, meditation was predominant; in *treat-yuga* was *yajña-pradhānam*, Vedic fire rituals were dominant; in the *dvāpara-yuga*, *arcana-pradhānam*, floral offerings with *nāma* – names of the Lord – were predominant; in *kali-yuga* all of them declined with *nāma-saṁkīrtanam* being *pradhānam* –

हरे राम हरे राम राम राम हरे हरे
हरे कृष्ण हरे कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण हरे हरे
hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare;
hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare

– either individually, or collectively as a family, as a team, or group changing. If people can sing, it can be in the form of a musical bhajan. We can have our package according to our facility. The Vedas are very considerate. It never insists that everybody must do all activities. This is one feature – ritualistic exercises or service activities, one can choose.

3. **Karma-yoga involves īśvara.** The second important activity of *karma-yoga* is that all these exercises are in the form of worshipping *īśvara*. All preparatory exercises are in the form of *īśvara-pūjā* or *īśvara-ārādhnam*, otherwise called *yajña*. Therefore, *īśvara* must be brought in. **There is no karma-yoga without īśvara.** *īśvara* or God is none other than a personified version of the Eternal, Permanent, and Formless Reality, who is personified as *śiva*, *viṣṇu*, *kr̥ṣṇa*, etc. for the facility of *pūjā* and meditation. The form is not the permanent reality. The form **represents** the permanent reality. Just as the flag is not the country, it only represents the country. Similarly, any form of *īśvara* is brought in to represent the Eternal, Permanent Reality, and all these exercises are in the form of *īśvara-ārādhnam*. Why is it so? It is because of two reasons. One reason is that because of *īśvara - pūjā* we earn the grace of the Lord, which we help prepare ourselves. The second reason is *īśvara-pūjā* reminds us about our goal which is to ultimately find that permanent, changeless Reality represented by *īśvara*. While chanting the rudram in the beginning, a few verses described the Lord *śivas* beautiful features

त्रिनेत्रं पञ्चवक्रकं गङ्गाधरं दशभुजं सर्वाभरणभूषितं नीलग्रीवम्
trinetrām pañcavakrkaṁ gaṅgādharaṁ daśabhujam
sarvābharaṇabhūṣitaṁ nīlagrīvam ...

Initially, Lord *śiva* is personified. Later, it is said, the person is not *śiva* but,

नित्यं च शाश्वतं शुद्धं ध्रुवं अक्षरं अव्ययम् सर्वव्यापिनमीशानम् रुद्रम् वै विश्वरूपिणं
nityaṁ ca śāśvataṁ śuddhaṁ dhruvaṁ akṣaraṁ avyayam sarvavyāpinamīśānam ru-
dram vai viśvarūpiṇam.

śiva is not a person, but *śiva* is the inherent changeless *Brahman* or *ātman*. Keeping this in mind, we will be constantly reminded to not get lost in wordly things. All these are fine, but they are not our primary goal. We must remind ourselves daily during our *pūjā*, and prepare ourselves.

Preparing ourselves consists of three things.

1. The desire for *jñāna-yoga* – *śravaṇam* (S), *mananam* (M), and *nididhyāsanam* (N) – must arise. *karma-yoga* is an appetizer for spiritual hunger.
2. An opportunity to practice *jñāna-yoga*, a conducive lifestyle, a conducive infrastructure, a cooperative family, and the availability of a spiritual guide. All these require the grace of the Lord. The desire and opportunity for *jñāna-yoga* are important. Many have the desire, but no opportunity; many have the opportunity, but no desire. Many do not value for *jñāna-yoga*.
3. The fitness to pursue consistently and systematically, *śravaṇam* (S), *mananam* (M), and *nididhyāsanam* (N). Physical, emotional, and sensory health are required. If the hearing is not proper, whenever Swamiji says Immortal, we may hear it as immoral! Whenever Swamiji says renunciation, we may hear it as remuneration! Therefore, physical, emotional, sensory, and above all intellectual health are required for the pursuit of *jñāna-yoga*.

Pure Existence (*sat*) and Pure Consciousness (*cit*)

A finely developed intellect is required to discern the changeless in the changing world, which will be defined as the Pure Existence principle, and the Pure Consciousness principle. These are the two fine concepts - Pure Existence (*sat*) and Pure Consciousness (*cit*) of Vedanta that our intellects have to absorb and understand. They should not remain as mere words. When we say **saccidānanda**, the words **sat** and **cit** should not be mere words; they should make sense to me, which requires a finely developed intellect. Therefore, all the preparatory exercises are meant to develop a desire (D), have an opportunity (O), and the fitness (F) – **DOF** – to pursue *jñāna-yoga*.

***Karma-yoga* is meant for DOF, and *Jñāna-yoga* SMN is meant for PSH!**

Since *karma-yoga* involves *īśvara*, in Bhagavadgītā Verse 9 of Chapter 3 says

यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः।

yajñārthātkarmaṇo'nyatra loko'yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ

A person is bound by *karma*, if it is not done as a *yajñā* as *karma-yoga*.

Without bringing in *īśvara* it cannot be called *karma-yoga*.

Worldly /daily activities, by proper attitude can be converted into *karma-yoga*.

Another interesting and important point mentioned in our Vedas is that our daily activities and worldly activities like eating, bathing, sleeping, etc. can be converted into *karma-yoga*, preparatory exercises, by entertaining the proper attitude. By an appropriate attitudinal change, even our daily activities karma can be converted into a *karma-yoga*.

This is what is to be done – before we eat food we should close our eyes and imagine it to be an offering unto Bhagavān who is everywhere, including my big tummy! By this attitudinal change, a simple breakfast will be converted into a *prāṇāgnihotram*. Lunch becomes *prāṇāgnihotram*. Dinner becomes *prāṇāgnihotram*. You can say, “I am a *nityagnihotrī!*” What am I doing? I am successfully eating three meals a day! Thus, daily eating can be converted into a *pūjā*. Bathing can be converted into an *abhiṣekam*. All I must remember is *ārādhayāmi*. When I pour water on my head, I must remember that the Lord śiva resides in my heart, and I am doing an *abhiṣekam*. Taking your bath uttering the words śiva converts it into *karma-yoga*.

Thus, involve *īśvara*, offer everything to Bhagavān, and accept all the consequences as *īśvara-prasāda*. *Īśvara-arpana-bhāvana* plus *īśvara-prasāda-bhāvana*. Śiva, śiva, śiva will convert your very life into a *pūjā*.

यद्यद् कर्म करोमि तत्तदखिलं शम्भो तवाराधनम्.

yadyad-karma karomi tattadakhilam śambho tavārāadhanam

Religious plus Spiritual ways of life is the Vedic way of life

Thus, *karma-yoga* is a religious way of life involving *īśvara-ārādhana*. *jñāna-yoga* is called a spiritual way of life because permanent Reality is often called in English as Spirit. Therefore, *karma-yoga* is a religious way of life, and *jñāna-yoga* is a spiritual way of life. Religious plus Spiritual ways of life is the Vedic way of life; that is the Hindu way of life. Whoever follows a religious way of life leading to a spiritual way of life is a true Hindu. **This is Hinduism.**

On this auspicious śivarātri day, let us offer our gratitude to Lord śiva who has given us this wonderful way of life. Let us not stop with merely offering our gratitude every śivarātri, but let us follow this twofold way of life depending upon our level. Then we will discover the permanent, abide in the permanent, and enjoy Peace, Security, and Happiness. With these few words, seeking the grace of Lord śiva, I conclude my talk.

- Transcribed and Edited by devotees