

YUKTAHAR (TEMPERANCE IN EATING): WITH REFERENCE TO SHRIMAD BHAGVAD GEETA

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Research Guide

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Abstract



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The term *yoga* is inclusive of all practices in *yogas*. Yet, *Ashtanga Yoga*, the *yoga* of eight-fold steps, is another name for *Raja Yoga*. *Sanatana Yoga*, the eternal and universal *yoga*, is the most ancient one, as authenticated by the Vedas. After mastering it, Maharshi Patanjali wrote about it in '*Yogadarsana*', which is also known as Patanjali's *Yoga*.

Yogadarsana follows the *Saankhya* system of philosophy and hence it has the knowledge concerned with the scriptures. It deals with the existence of God and His testimony as an example. It is also called the scripture of *bhakti* and the scripture of *yoga* as it teaches the eight-fold steps of *yoga*.

यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानमधयोष्टावङ्गानि ॥ योगदर्शन-साधनपाद - 29

These eight-fold steps are:

Yam-Niyama

Aasan- Pranayama

Pratyahar- Dharna

Dhyan - Samadhi

The First Step To *Yoga* : *Yama*

First a seeker (*Sadhak*) must purify his body and mind through *yoga* (*Sadhana*). This alone is not enough. When he seriously starts this uphill task, he has to vividly know that *Yama* is designated as a *mahavrata*, a great vow. He has to ensure that no new impurities creep in.

Yama and *niyama* (restraints and observances) are aids to purification. They help to make the *sadhana* simpler. If they are neglected, many hurdles crop up during *sadhana*. It takes a long time to up-root these evils. To save time and energy, it is necessary that one must resort to *yama* and *niyama*.

Yama and *niyama* build up an impregnable fort for *Sadhana*. A seeker has to erect a wall of *yama* to prevent the entry of forbidden acts in his life.

Yama is not bounded by race, country or time. Therefore, it can be practiced at any stage.

The above five disciplines are described in *Yogadarsana*.

In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* there are ten disciplines:

"*ahimsa*, non-violence; *satya*, truth; *asteya*, non-stealing; *brahmacharya*, celibacy; *ksama*, forgiveness; *dhrti*, steadfastness; *daya*, compassion; *arjava*, straightforwardness; *sauca*, cleanliness and *Mitaahara*, moderate food." (DhyānVignān Swami Kripalvanndji, 2016, 49)

Last *yama* is *Mitaahara* (moderate food).

सुस्निग्धमधुराहारश्चतुर्थशिविद्रजितः ।

भुज्यते शिवसंप्रीत्यै मिताहारः स उच्यते ॥ हठयोगप्रदीपिका ॥ 58 ॥

"Eating a digestible and tasty meal for the love of God while leaving the stomach one-fourth empty enables *mitahara*. One has to take food for the objective of mastering yoga and not merely for the pleasure of eating. Overeating repels one from *Sadhana* (spiritual practice).

Fasting with proper worship and observances does purify both the body and the mind, but the results are not permanent. Furthermore, it weakens the body making it challenging to practice *sadhana* in its proper form. He, who practices *mitahara* with determination is forever in a proper fast." (Krupalu, 1977, 20)

In *Niyama* – *Mitahar* is connected to *Yuktahar*. *Shrimad Bhagvadgeeta* says regarding to *Yuktahar* as :

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।

युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥6 : 17॥

One who properly balances his diet, activity and works, his hours of sleeping and waking, gains this sorrow-destroying yoga (Jasol, 2021,62)

It means those who are temperate in eating and recreation, balanced in work, and regulated in sleep, can migrate all sorrows by practicing Yog.

Yog is the union of the soul with God. The opposite of Yog is *bhog*, which means engagement in sensual pleasures. Indulgence in *bhog* violates the natural laws of the body, and results in *rog* (disease).

As stated in the previous verse, if the body becomes diseased, it impedes the practice of Yog. Thus in this verse, Shree Krishna states that by being temperate in bodily activities and practicing Yog, we can become free from the sorrows of the body and mind.

The same instruction was repeated two-and-a-half millennium after Shree Krishna by Gautam Buddha, when he recommended the golden middle path between severe asceticism and sensual indulgence. There is a beautiful story regarding this. It is said that before gaining enlightenment, Gautam Buddha once gave up eating and drinking, and sat in meditation. However, after a few days of practicing in this manner, the lack of nourishment made him weak and dizzy, and he found it impossible to steady his mind in meditation. At that time, some village women happened to pass by. They were carrying water pots to fill water from a nearby river and were singing a song. The words of the song were: "Tighten the strings of the *tānpurā* (a stringed Indian musical instrument, resembling a guitar). But do not tighten them so much that the strings break." Their words entered the ears of Gautam Buddha, and he exclaimed, "These illiterate village women are singing such words of wisdom. They contain a message for us humans. We too should tighten our bodies (practice austerities), but not to the extent that the body is destroyed." (www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org)

Benjamin Franklin (1706 – 1790), a founding father of the United States, is highly regarded as a self-made man. In an effort to grow his character, starting at the age of 20, he maintained a diary in which he tracked his performance related to the 13 activities he wanted to grow in. The first activity was "Temperance: Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation." (<https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org>)



Shrimad Bhagvadgeeta also Mentioned,
आहारस्त्वपि सर्वस्य त्रिविधो भवति प्रियः ।
यज्ञस्तपस्तथा दानं तेषां भेदमिमं शृणु ॥ 17:7॥

The food that a person prefers is according to their dispositions. The same is true for the sacrifice, austerity, and charity which they are inclined towards. Now hear of the distinctions from me. The mind and body impact each other. Thus, the food people consumed, influences their nature and vice versa. The *Chhândogya Upaniṣhad* explains that the coarsest part of the food we eat passes out as feces; the subtler part becomes flesh; and the subtlest part becomes the mind (6.5.1). Again, it states: *āhāra śhuddhau sattva śhuddhi* (7.26.2)[v1] “By eating pure food, the mind becomes pure.” *The reverse is also true—people with pure minds prefer pure foods.*



17 : 8

आयुःसत्त्वबलारोग्यसुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः ।
रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्या आहाराः सात्त्विकप्रियाः ॥17: 8॥

Person in the mode of goodness prefer foods that increases the life span, and enhances virtue, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, succulent, nourishing, and naturally tasty.

In Chapter 14, verse 6, Shree Krishna had explained that the mode of goodness is pure, illuminating, and serene, and creates a sense of happiness and satisfaction. Foods in the mode of goodness have the same effect. In the above verse, these foods are described with the words *āyuh sattva*, meaning “which promote longevity.” They bestow good health, virtue, happiness, and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, naturally tasteful, mild, and beneficial. These include grains, pulses, beans, fruits, vegetables, milk, and other vegetarian foods. Hence, a vegetarian diet is beneficial for cultivating the qualities of the mode of goodness that are conducive for spiritual life. Numerous *sāttvic* (influenced by the mode of goodness) thinkers and philosophers in history have echoed this sentiment:

“Vegetarianism is a greater progress. From the greater clearness of head and quicker apprehension motivated him to become a vegetarian. Flesh-eating is an unprovoked murder.” - Benjamin Franklin, www.consumerfreedom.com

"Is it not a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal? True, he can and does live, in a great measure, by preying on other animals; but this is a miserable way. I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized." Henry David Thoreau in "Walden, <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/>

"It is necessary to correct the error that vegetarianism has made us weak in mind, or passive or inert in action. I do not regard flesh-food as necessary at any stage." Mahatma Gandhi. chapter-4,
<http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/>

"O my fellow men, do not fill your bodies with sinful foods. We have corn and we have apples bending down the branches with their weight. There are vegetables that can be cooked and softened over the fire. The earth affords a lavish supply of riches, of innocent foods, and offers you banquets that involve no bloodshed or slaughter. Only beasts satisfy their hunger with flesh, and not even all of those, because horses, cattle, and sheep live on grass." Pythagoras,
<https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/>

and Bernard Shaw also states

"I do not want to make my stomach a graveyard of dead animals." George Bernard Shaw <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/>

Even amongst violence against animals, killing of the cow is particularly heinous. The cow provides milk for human consumption, and so it is like a mother to human beings. To kill the mother cow when it is no longer capable of giving milk is an insensitive, uncultured, and an ungrateful act.

कट्वम्लत्वणात्युष्णतीक्ष्णरूक्षविदाहिनः ।

आहारा राजसस्येष्टा दुःखशोकामयप्रदाः ॥17: 9॥

Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, very hot, pungent, dry, and spicy, are dear to persons in the mode of passion. Such foods produce pain, grief, and disease.

When vegetarian foods are cooked with excessive chilies, sugar, salt, etc. they become *rājasic*. Thus, *rājasic* foods are very bitter, very sour, very salty, very hot, very pungent, very dry, very spicy, etc. They produce ill-health, agitation, and despair. Persons in the mode of passion find such foods attractive, but those in the mode of goodness find them disgusting. The purpose of eating is not to relish bliss through the palette, but to keep the body healthy and strong. As the old adage states: "Eat to live; do not live to eat." Thus, the wise partake of foods that are conducive to good health, and have a peaceful impact upon the mind i.e., *sāttvic* foods.

यातयामं गतरसं पूति पर्युषितं च यत् ।

उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम् ॥17: 10॥

yāta-yāmaṁ gata-rasaṁ pūti paryuṣhitam cha yat
uchchhiṣṭam api chāmedhyaṁ bhojanam tāmasa-priyam

yāta-yāmam—stale foods; *gata-rasam*—tasteless; *pūti*—putrid; *paryuṣhitam*—polluted; *cha*—and; *yat*—which; *uchchhiṣṭam*—left over; *api*—also; *cha*—and; *amedhyam*—impure; *bhojanam*—foods; *tāmasa*—to persons in the mode of ignorance; *priyam*—dear

yata-yamam gata-rasam puti paryushitam cha yat
uchchhishtam api chamedhyam bhojanam tamasa-priyam

Foods that are overcooked, stale, putrid, polluted, and impure are dear to persons in the mode of ignorance. Cooked foods that has remained for more than one *yām* (three hours) are classified in the mode of ignorance. Foods that are impure, have bad taste, or possess foul smells come in the same category. Impure foods also include all kinds of meat products. Nature has designed the human body to be vegetarian. Human beings do not have long canine teeth as carnivorous animals do, or a wide jaw suitable for tearing flesh. Carnivores have short bowels to allow minimal transit time for the unstable and dead animal food, which putrefies and decays faster. On the contrary, humans have a longer digestive tract for the slow and better absorption of plant food. The stomach of carnivores is more acidic than human beings, which enables them to digest raw meat. Interestingly, the carnivorous animals do not sweat through their pores. Rather, they regulate body temperature through their tongue. On the other hand, herbivorous animals and humans control bodily temperature by sweating through

their skin. While drinking, carnivores lap up water rather than suck it. In contrast, herbivores do not lap up water; they suck it. Humans too suck water while drinking; they do not lap it up. All these physical characteristics of the human body reveal that God has not created us as carnivorous creatures, and consequently, meat is considered as an impure food for humans.



अन्न एवं परब्रह्म ॥

Meat-eating also creates bad karma. The '*Manu Smṛiti*' states:
māṁ sa bhakṣhayitāmutra yasya māṁsam ihādmy aham
etan māṁsasya māṁsatvaṁ pravadanti manīṣhiṇaḥ (5.55)[v2]

"The word *māṁsa* (meat) means "that whom I am eating here will eat me in my next life." For this reason, the learned say that meat is called *māṁsa* (a repeated act: I eat him, he eats me)."

Hence, Yuktahar is a very important factor in practicing yog including it in daily life routine and also to vanish all sorrows, as Geetaji says.

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