





a perceptible gap between what we aspire to do, how we yearn to speak, act, live, and how we actually do. This is not at all unique. And perhaps, it is comforting to know that. It is easy enough to imagine that others move along some imagined ascending trajectory of spiritual accomplishment while we seem to go around in circles—at times returning to old issues or challenges we thought we had mastered. What gives?

If we turn to the Bhagavad Gita, we find the seeking soul Arjuna asking the same question of Lord Krishna, the higher true Self. In Chapter Three, verse thirty-six Arjuna asks, “What makes us do those things we decide we will not do and neglect to do those things we said we would do?” Krishna responds that the cause is the force of desire, driven by the quality of rajas guna. Verses thirty-eight and thirty-nine describe it: As fire is obscured by smoke, and a mirror by dust, as the embryo is enveloped by the membrane, so the intellect is obscured by passionate desire. Even the wise experience this. The remedy? Learn to master our senses and banish the ability of desire to cloud our wisdom!

## Who is Driving the Vehicle of Our Life

In Vedic teachings, a powerful metaphor is offered for the connection of intellect, sense mind, and physical body. We are invited to imagine our body as a chariot with the intellect as the driver, the divine Self as the rider who witnesses, the reins as the thinking mind or sense mind, and the horses as the senses. The question then is: what is in charge? Is the chariot of our body/mind moving through life with the clear-seeing intellect determining the direction? Are we making choices based on what serves the higher good or complete well-being? Or, have the blind horses of the senses run down the road of desires that are not useful? It’s a great metaphor. It shows us all the points where we can make course corrections. First, master the senses. Don’t let them run off with our good intentions dragging behind. But how do we do that? Can we even do it?

Once the great yoga master, Paramahansa Yogananda, instructed a devotee to accomplish a particular practice. The man was taken aback at what he assessed to be the difficulty of what



Paramahansaji was asking of him. Taking a stand for what he felt to be his shortcomings, he replied to Yogananda, “That’s easy for you to say; you are a master!” Yoganandaji, responded to him, “How do you think I became one?” Step by step, action by action, mastery is attained.

## Eight Steps for Self-Mastery

Kriya Yoga identifies eight steps for self-mastery. This is often referred to as the system of Raja Yoga, or the Royal Way of Spiritual Realization. The first two steps comprise our foundation for spiritually conscious living by specifying guidelines for healthy relationships with others and enhanced self-awareness and knowledge. They are, first, the *yamas* or restraints—which are practices for restraining the lower drives of ego and supporting engagement with others guided by higher wisdom. The restraints are: harmlessness, truthfulness, nonstealing, right use of our energy, and nonattachment. Next are the *niyamas*, or observances—practices for awakening our inner wisdom. The observances are purity, contentment, self-discipline, study of the nature of consciousness, and surrender of the false self, the sense of being separate from the one Reality. These foundational steps are followed by the six steps of superconscious meditation practice which delineate a progressive path of interiorization of our attention and awareness leading to conscious abidance in the Self. The six steps leading to samadhi, or superconscious meditation are: right posture, enhancement of the flow of vital energy, interiorization of attention and awareness, concentration on a single point of focus, meditation, and superconsciousness. Each of these skills will be addressed in depth in later lessons in this program. While there are eight steps in all, they can be thought of as consisting of two parts—life skills and expansion of consciousness into realization of the higher Self.

Swami Adiswarananda wrote: The practice of raja-yoga is a twofold process: (1) to discard the small and egotistic old self and, at the same time, (2) to recognize and grow into one’s new Self. The practice of raja-yoga completely transforms an aspirant’s life. Yoga is not possible for the



halfhearted, curious, or casual. It requires changing oneself entirely by changing one's aspirations, thoughts, habits, and tendencies through persistent and conscious self-effort.<sup>2</sup>

## Begin the Journey of Mastery Today

Would you be a spiritual master? If the answer is “No, I don't think it is possible for me,” I must say you are selling yourself short. Only the ego would respond that way. The divine Self within us all is already established in mastery! Thus, it is only a process then of revelation and allowing the divine Self its rightful place. To do that, we need to understand what it takes; know that we can do it; and decide that we must. *Understand. Know. Decide.*

Earlier in this lesson, I offered the Vedic metaphor of the body/mind as a chariot. Contemplating that metaphor is an excellent way to understand what mastery requires. The following verses from the Bhagavad Gita clarify the relationship of senses, intellect, and divine Self.

The senses, some say, are superior. [In truth] superior to the senses is the mind; superior to the mind is the power of the intellect; and superior to the intellect is the Self. Thus, knowing that which is superior to the intellect, sustaining [steadying] self-consciousness by Self-knowledge, eliminate the obstacle of insistent desire [that is often difficult to overcome]. 3.42-43<sup>3</sup>

Mastery requires understanding this fundamental relationship between senses, intellect, and higher, true Self. And, above all, understanding where the greatest power is. Sometimes it seems the senses can carry us away, but in truth, intellect is stronger. And beyond that, the Self. What does this mean? It means that we have more power than we think to make a good choice. We simply must harness it. Harnessing the power we have is a matter of knowing we can and deciding to do it.

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<sup>2</sup> Swami Adiswarananda, *The Four Yogas: A Guide to the Spiritual Paths of Action, Devotion, Meditation and Knowledge*, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, 2006), P.167.

<sup>3</sup> Roy Eugene Davis, *The Eternal Way: Inner Meaning of the Bhagavad Gita*, (Lakemont: CSA Press, 1996), p. 80

# Dharma 365!

A Year of Living Purposefully



We have all experienced the tremendous power of our will. When we truly decide to do something, even if it is difficult, we can succeed. Yogis note that the winning combination is the right use of our will in self-discipline combined with the supportive influence of divine grace. Deciding we will overcome a bad habit and instigate a new useful behavior is powerful. If we open ourselves to divine grace along the way, we are lifted up by the Self. It can be difficult to make lasting change from the level of the small self alone but opening to the greater wisdom of the divine Self, and the influences of grace, we are carried along.

While we cannot say that spiritual mastery happens in a day, we can say it begins on a day. Why not today? Time moves swiftly. The ego always says, *tomorrow*. *Why not begin tomorrow?* Why not wait a day or two? But the divine Self says, *Now*. Why not live the life of mastery you yearn for starting right now? This is the royal way, the way of your divine life.



