

The Yoga of the Nine Emotions

All too often we find our emotions slipping out of control. One moment we are happy and calm, the next we might be taken by anger or feel sad like a hurt child. Rasa Sadhana brings us an ancient Indian yoga that teaches us how to remain happy by knowing and exercising various Rasas.

For example, we find the Karuna Rasa both in compassion as in pity or sadness. The Karuna Rasa is the essence of these emotions, a kind of energy that affects body and mind in such a way that a member of this family of emotions is manifested. Vedic science categorizes our emotions into nine of these emotional essences: Love, Joy, Wonder, Courage, Peace, Anger, Sadness, Fear and Disgust. To get control over our emotions we must understand and exercise each of these Rasas.

To exercise our emotions is a kind of fasting. To control the Anger Rasa, we need to refrain from all anger or irritation for a day and then a week or a month, until we feel we are in control. It seems very difficult but actually it is very simple. The moment we promise ourselves that today we will not be angry, then this creates a real blockage against anger in our mind. The minute we detect any irritation inside, we can apply some techniques that dissolve it. Rasa Sadhana is not about suppressing emotions! Negative thoughts and emotions must be allowed sufficient expression for their origin to be properly analyzed. It is most of all this very analysis, which emphasizes the witnessing factor, that will dissolve them.

Of course, all emotions make sense sometimes. Anger can be instructive, like when it helps a mother to teach a child that something is not allowed. If we feel angry then we should not let it simmer inside where it will only grow and damage our biochemistry. Same way, if we lose somebody near and dear, then tears should flow. It is very natural and healthy to be sad about those things. But when we do Rasa Sadhana, all good reasons for being angry or sad are no longer important. Like when we do food fasting, then food is no longer important, even though we never question the natural need for food. Still, after doing these Rasa exercises for a prolonged period of time, we may feel to give up on negative emotions like anger completely. A saint will never be really angry, even if sometimes he or she may put up an angry act if it seems instructive.

The first key is about understanding these emotions and the second about achieving self-confidence through exercise. Anger is always based on some unfulfilled expectation. If we

stop expecting things from others, then there is no more need for anger. When we realize that one minute of anger can kill the peace obtained through a long period of meditation, then we understand that getting angry turns a little problem into a really big one. If we stop getting irritated about other people's errors, we refrain from turning their problem into our own problem. There is a lot of knowledge about the Rasas that can help us not to lose energy this way. One Rasa can be strengthened or weakened by another Rasa. And it is also possible to remove the biochemical basis of a Rasa.

While we mostly think with our brain, we mostly feel with our body. On a physical level, emotions are detected as neurotransmitters that effect the transmission of electrical energy between our brain cells and nerve cells, reflecting the way emotions affect our thoughts. According to the Ayurveda, Rasas are mostly dominated by the Water element, though also Fire and Air play a major role in some emotions. By influencing the elements in our body we can influence our emotions very effectively. Like whenever you feel very angry but you do not want to be, drink 3 or 4 glasses of water. Most anger will go with such a simple remedy because the water will quench the Fire of anger. For very persistent anger, taking a cure of pearl powder may be necessary. For sadness, which is dominated by the Water element, taking some ginger juice will burn us out of it. When we feel disgusted with ourselves and the world, we should purify our biochemistry because it has become polluted. For fear and worries, listen to some calming music and they will be reduced.

The senses affect our emotions all the time, whether we are conscious about it or not. They are real gateways for emotional information. Soothing sounds, sights, smells, tastes, also massage, make us more happy and calm, while harsh and chaotic sensory input will make us more nervous, irritated and unhappy. All sensory input directly affects the levels of various neurotransmitters in our body and thus influences our emotions. Foods also will do that, because foods contain many emotionally active molecules. Like meat contains the adrenalin hormone, which will make us more easily irritated. This way, serious advancement on the

path of Rasa Sadhana requires healthy cooking, balanced sensory input and some rather simple daily routines.

Controlling negative emotions is just the starting point of Rasa Sadhana. Life should be enjoyed and Rasas are the juice of life. This world is not only an illusion, it is also a grand theatre of energy and consciousness playing a game of hide and seek. Once we achieve control over the less desirable emotions, like after doing anger sadhana for a month or a year, we no longer disturb the natural process towards a more harmonious biochemistry and more agreeable feelings. Then love, joy, wonder, calmness, courage and compassion all come out very naturally, while they in turn can also be exercised. Instead of fasting from a particular type of emotion that we need to avoid, we then start fasting on a specific emotion that we like to develop. Love sadhana means that for a day or more we are concentrating on only feeling kind, delicate and loving. Or we may chose to be only joyful for some time and never let a serious thought come to our mind, because when our intellect intervenes true joy is impossible. By meditating for some time, we do sadhana of the Shant Rasa. These sadhanas are quite difficult to maintain over longer periods and if we do not first achieve full control over our negative emotions, then it is really impossible.

Where this yoga originated from is still somewhat of a mystery to me. I learned it from my teacher Harish Johari, who left his body in 1999. He said to have learned it from his parents and that it is Tantric in origin. There are references to the Rasas already in the oldest vedas and in India adolescents are taught about the Rasas in many primary schools. It has never been established as a separate yoga branch because it is mostly a yoga for householders and so fully integrated within other yoga branches that it became somewhat invisible. It mostly relates to the time when there were no yoga schools or ashrams, when yoga was taught in the Gurukul, the household of the teacher. There, in real life, Rasa Sadhana was among the first exercises yoga students had to perform.

So how does this rasa-yoga relate to other kinds of yoga ? There are many saints out there that never heard about it and they are still very much in control of their emotions. So it no requirement. It is also no alternative to other kinds of yoga, but rather a discipline that can be easily integrated within most of them. Not being angry requires no extra time, so it is a kind of yoga that is very useful to the householder that may have only an hour a day or so to practice

meditation. If during the day one can remain free from disturbing emotions, then the meditation that one can do will be much more fruitful and in turn that meditation will help to remain more happy in life. It is easy to learn how to do Rasa Sadhana and easy to teach. No special degrees or institutes are required. It may not be easy not to be angry for a month – for some people that are in need of therapy it may not be easy for even one hour - but all we need to know is that trying it will gain us more and more control.

Attaining happiness is that easy, because feeling good or bad is always a matter of choice. Whatever unpleasant thing happens only become unpleasant if we let it and the same goes for pleasant things. With Rasa Sadhana we can really become masters of our emotions. It may take some time to change our emotional patterns, but it is a wonderfully simple kind of magic that anybody can do.

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