

Yoga Vashishtha of Valmiki

Introduction

Yoga Vashishtha of Valmiki is one of the best spiritual treatise, being the least altered over time. Vashishtha was Rama's Guru who answered Rama's questions and evoked his Self-realization.

Yoga Vashishtha comprises of six books as under:

Book I:	On Detachment
Book II:	The Aspirant Who Longs for Liberation
Book III:	On Creation
Book IV:	On Existence
Book V:	On Dissolution, Becoming Quiet
Book VIA:	On Liberation
Book VIB:	The Latter Treasury

Yoga Vashishtha is the record of how young Rama, the avatar of Lord Vishnu, attained Self-realization through the teaching of the sage Vashishtha. Over the course of twenty-two days, Rama asked questions and Vashishtha answered, lectured, and told stories. All this took place before the assembled court of Rama's father, King Dasharata, and numerous sages, gods, nobles and Brahmin priests.

The book is attributed to sage Valmiki, the same person who wrote the epic history of Rama, the *Ramayana*, which events take place after those in *Yoga Vashishtha*.

The essence of the philosophy in *Yoga Vashishtha* is that creation is not a separate existence from God but a reflection of God. God is consciousness and there is nothing material anywhere. Each individual is consciousness, ultimately the same indivisible Divine Consciousness, and not any physical body.

Book I is about Rama's dissatisfaction with everything the world has to offer. This Book is entitled vairagya, detachment. The emphasis is on the need for the aspirant to keep company with the wise, and to listen and reflect upon their teaching and the meaning of the scriptures.

Book II is about the qualities of the aspirant who longs for liberation, enlightenment. It introduces themes that permeate the rest of the book: dispassion, control over one's desires, company of the wise, study of the scriptures, and self-inquiry.

Constantly throughout all of its seven Books, *Yoga Vashishtha* emphasizes that detachment or lack of desire is the essential preliminary to spiritual awakening.

Excerpts from Books

Speaking on the different names for mind, Vashishtha said: The mind is mere thought, and thought is the mind in motion. Its actions are directed by the nature of the thoughts, and the result of the acts is felt by everybody in his mind:

Book III, Chapter 96

Verse 8

"The mind is known by many names according to its various faculties and functions, its various thoughts and desires, and their manifold operations and consequences."

Verse 10-11

"Whoever has set his desire in anything as if it were a reality, finds the same to be attended with the like fruit as he had expected of it. It is the movement of the mind that is said and perceived by us to be the source of our actions, and the actions of the mind are as various as the branches, leaves and fruits of trees."

Verse 12

"Whatever is determined by the mind is readily brought into performance by the external organs of action. Therefore, because the mind is the cause of action, it is identified with the effect."

Verse 13-15

"Mind, understanding, egoism, intellect, consciousness, action and imagination, together with memory, desire, ignorance, and effort are all synonyms of the mind. Sensation, nature, delusion and actions are also words applied to the mind to bewilder one's understanding. The simultaneous collision of many sensations diverts the mind from its

clear sight of the object of its thought and causes it to turn about in many ways.”

What motivates any person to seek this knowledge is the same thing that motivated Rama, a deep apathy towards everything the world has to offer. Upon attaining the state of enlightenment, the living liberated abide in bliss and see all as Divine Consciousness:

Book III, Chapter 84, Verse 25

“All intellectual conceptions cease upon the spiritual perception of God. There ensues an utter and dumb silence.”

Book VIB, Chapter 163, Verse 46

“Without painstaking and continued practice of contemplation, you cannot attain this state of infinite bliss. Know that this state of transcendent bliss can only be attained through intense meditation.”

Such a person does not identify with his or her body and has no sense of personal identity. They engage in ordinary activities, as is the custom for the society in which they live, but they have an utter disregard for any personal benefit. Such people are unrecognizable by the ignorant, yet they command the respect and affection of all. The Self realized have a feeling of fellow-love towards all creation:

Book VIB, Chapter 198, Verses 7, 35

“Regard everything in the same light as yourself and observe a universal benevolence towards all beings. . . . Let your continued observance of toleration preserve you from acts of intolerance, which tend at best to oppress others.”

They see all things in a different light:

Book VIB, Chapter 194, Verse 36, 37, 39, 41

“The perfection of wisdom and renunciation is a treasure which is called liberation because anybody attaining it remains in a state of infinite bliss freed from all the bonds of care.

In this state of emancipation we see past and present, and all our sights and doings in them, as present before us. We find ourselves situated in a state of even calm and tranquillity of which there is no end or any interruption whatever.

We scarcely find one man in a hundred thousand human beings who is strong enough and has the bravery to break down the net of his earthly desires, like a lion breaking the iron bars of his cage.

Lack of desire is the knowledge of the knowable and stands above all things that are desirable or worth desiring. It resembles a breath of air without any external action."

Book VIB, Chapter 178, Verse 59, 60, 61

"When this material world is viewed in its ethereal and intellectual light, the distresses of this delusive world take to flight and its miseries disappear.

As long as this intellectual view of the world does not reveal itself to the sight of a man, the miseries of the world trouble him stronger and closer on every side.

Men, infatuated by their continued folly and blind to the view of the world as intellect, can never have reprieve from the troubles of the world or find their rest from the hardness of the times."

Rama asks how to tell the genuinely Self-realized from the pretended or hypocrites. Vashishtha answers that if they act as if perfect, that also is good:

Book VIB, Chapter 102

Verse 26

"Only those who know the knowable and are equally pure in their minds can distinguish hypocrites from other people, just as only a snake can trace the course of another snake."

He goes on to explain that the realized stay out of the public eye:

Verse 27-28

"They are the best of men who hide their good qualities from others. For what man is there who will expose his most precious treasure in the market with the raw produce of his land? The reason to conceal rare virtues is to keep them unnoticed by the public. The wise who lack desire for reward or reputation have nothing to reap or expect from the public."

Verse 36-39

“The wise man who has nothing to desire knows such practices (such as *khechhari yoga* – show of ascension in the air) to be as false as empty air. He refrains from displaying his actions, which he knows at best is only casting to the winds.

He derives no good from observing practical yoga, nor does he lose any of his holiness by not observing them. He has nothing to gain from anybody and loses nothing at the loss of anything.

There is nothing in earth or heaven, or among the gods or anywhere else, which may be desirable to the magnanimous or to one who has known the Supreme Soul.

What is this world to him who knows it to be only a heap of dust and who considers it no better than straw? Then what can be in the world which could possibly be desirable to him?”

[Note: *Khechhari Mudra* is also used by yogis to do astral travelling. The mudra helps the yogi to detach the astral body from the physical body and travel in the astral planes.]

Sage Vashishtha stresses on the need for personal effort. There is no fate or karma. What we call fate is the result of prior effort. Although we have become habituated because of our past efforts (desires, attachments, and *vasanas*), our efforts in the present time are more powerful than those of the past:

[Note: *Vasana* – the impressions stored in the mind: memories, attitudes, habits, etc.]

Book II, Chapter 4**Verse 8, 17**

“Know, O son of Raghu that everything in this world is obtainable by our efforts being properly employed.

Know our actions to be of two kinds, namely those of former and present lives. Know that the acts of the present life generally supersede those of the past.”

Speaking on the greatness of reasoning (self-enquiry), Vashishtha says:

Book V, Chapter 12, Verse 15-16-17

“Janaka obtained the obtainable and what is worthy to be obtained by his own reasoned analysis and not, O lotus-eyed Rama, by any other desire. Therefore we should reason and reflect in our minds until we succeed and arrive at the conclusion of the subject.

The presence of the Holy Light is not to be had by a teacher’s lectures or the teaching of scriptures. It is not the result of good acts or the company of holy men. It is the result of your own reasoning.”

Speaking on the government of the mind, Sage Vashishtha says that Consciousness is real whereas Mind (Imagination and Will) is not and he advises Rama:

Book V, Chapter 13, Verse 6-10

“Continue like Janaka in the wilful discharge of your duties, and prosper by placing your intellectual sight on the divine light shining in your inner spirit. It was by reflecting inwards that Janaka found the impermanence of the world. By placing his faith in the unchangeable Spirit, in time he found its grace.

Hence the pious acts of men, their riches and their friends are of no use for their salvation from the miseries of life. Only their own efforts are of use for the enlightenment of their soul.

They who place their reliance upon faith in gods and depend upon them to fulfil their desires and future rewards are perverted in their understanding and cannot be heirs to immortality.

He is saved from misery in this ocean of the world by reliance on his own reasoning and resignation, and by his spiritual vision of the Supreme Spirit.”

Speaking on the worship of the Formless versus the Forms of God, Sage Vashishtha advises Rama:

Book V, Chapter 43**Verse 9-12**

“Sometimes the soul is awakened of itself by one’s own intuition. At other times the soul is roused by the grace of the personal god owing to one’s faith in his person. And though this god may be pleased with a

devotee's prolonged service and devout worship, yet the god is unable to confer spiritual knowledge to one devoid of his reasoning faculty.

Hence the primary cause of spiritual light is a man's intelligence, which is only gained by exertion of his mental powers. The secondary causes may be the blessing and grace of a god, but I wish that you prefer the former method for your salvation, your own intuition.

Therefore, first exert your personal efforts to keep the fivefold organs of sense under proper control. Regularly and diligently practice cultivating your understanding and the power of reasoning."

Verse 15-18

"It requires no personal effort to see an idol of any god, but the mere sight of the idol is not enough to save you, or else the birds and beasts would all be saved by looking at it.

If a spiritual guide had the power to save his foolish followers by his preaching, it would also be possible for the spiritual guides of camels and cattle to save their herds in their future lives.

It is only in the power of the mind to acquire anything good for one's self. The favour of Vishnu or Shiva or the influence of money is not able to effect anything.

It is by constant practice accompanied by self-resignation and self-control that one is able to effect anything. Whatever he is unable to do by these means is impossible for anyone in the three worlds."

Rama asks whether there is any good studying the scriptures or listening to spiritual teachers. Vashishtha says they are not the means to understanding:

Book VIB, Chapter 196, Verse 10-11

"So it is, O mighty armed Rama, that the scriptures are not the means to divine knowledge. Scriptures are profuse with words; divine knowledge is beyond the reach of words.

Yet hear me tell you, O best of Raghu's race, how the dictates of the scriptures and the lectures of your teachers are of some help towards improving your understanding."

This is followed by a story of the Wood-Cutters and the Philosopher's Stone and its explanation.

Speaking on the value of Scriptures, Sage Vashishtha continues:

Book VIB, Chapter 197

Verse 18-19

"Transcendental knowledge of God cannot be derived from the doctrines of the scriptures, or from the teachings of our preceptors. We can never know the unknowable one through gifts and charities, or by divine service and religious observances. These and other acts and rites are falsely said to be the causes of divine knowledge, which can never be attained by them."

Verse 20-22

Now listen to me, O Rama, and I will tell you the way to your rest in the Supreme Soul: "The study of the scriptures serves, of course, to purify the mind from vulgar errors and prejudices. But the lack of desire or aversion to worldly enjoyments makes the mind look within itself where it clearly sees the image of God shining.

Scripture establishes right understanding instead of ignorance, and this right reasoning serves to drive away all gross errors from the mind. Scriptures or learning principally and initially serves to cleanse the mirror of the mind from its impurity of errors, then it purifies the person of its possessor by the force of its doctrines."

Verse 31-32

"Learning acquired to obtain the triple good of this world, namely virtue, wealth and the objects of our desire, is no learning at all without the knowledge of the scriptures leading to our liberation. Much learning, both in theory and practice, is worth nothing without the salvation of our souls.

The best learning gives us the knowledge of truth. True knowledge causes our mental evenness in all states of our being. That is called perfect equanimity and it produces our trance in waking."

Verse 33-34

Thus all these blessings are obtained from learning the scriptures. Therefore let everyone devote himself to the study of the scriptures

with all diligence. Hence, O Rama, know that the study of the scriptures and meditation upon their hidden meanings, together with one's attendance on his teacher and listening to his lectures and counsel, as well by equanimity and observing vows and discipline, a man can attain supreme bliss in the everlasting God, who is beyond all worldly things and is the supreme Lord God of all."

Religion, scriptures, the company of the wise, and good deeds serve to create the opportunity to understand, but ultimately, one has to do the work alone.

One has to become dispassionate, learn to be without desires, practice good conduct, study scriptures and learn from teachers. Then one has to internalize everything.

Sage Vashishtha continues:

Book VIB, Chapter 203, Verse 20-21

"Rama, you have heard whatever is worth hearing. You also know all that is worth knowing. Now I see there is nothing left worth communicating to you for your higher knowledge.

Now you have to reconcile in yourself, by your best understanding, all that I have taught you and what you have read and learnt in the scriptures, and harmonize the whole for your guidance."

This is followed by a chapter on transcendental knowledge. All forms, dream or awake, are manifestations of our intellect. Vashishtha resumed and said:

Book VIB, Chapter 204, Verse 1-3

"O Rama, let me tell you a few words on transcendental knowledge. The mirror of the mind shines more brightly when it is cleaned and polished of external images, rather than when it is clouded by outer shadows.

The significant words that describe what we know are as insignificant as the hissing murmurs of waters and waves. Phenomena are only an apparent resemblance of ideas, just as a dream is the reflection of the mind and the visible world is only a reflection of a visionary dream.

The waking state is that of dreaming and its scenes are those of our dreams. These scenes present themselves before us in both waking and sleeping states from our memories of them. They are the inner concepts of our consciousness appearing to be situated outside our consciousness."

Our desires, attachments, and vasanas become the cause of our rebirth time and again:

Book VIB, Chapter 207, Verse 33-38

"As a sleeping man sees an imaginary world in his dream as if it were real, so the unenlightened person sees the phenomenal world as a factual reality before him. In the same way, the souls of the dead see the world of their departed spirits in the emptiness before them.

The souls of the departed see earth and heaven and mountains and everything else as they had seen before appearing in the open air. The departed soul perceives its separation from a dead body and thinks of its rebirth in another body on earth where it will have its enjoyments and suffering again as before.

The soul never gets rid of this delusion of its reincarnation as long as it neglects to seek its salvation and final liberation. It is freed from its error of reproduction through knowledge of truth and the absence of desire.

The consciousness of the soul, its righteous or unrighteous desire, represents the picture of this airy world in the hollow sphere of the mind.

Therefore the world is neither substantial nor empty but the display of Divine Consciousness. The lack of this knowledge is the source of all misery to man. Its true knowledge, that it is a show of divine wisdom, is filled with all bliss and joy."

[Liberation can be sought only while living in human body. God created man in His own image and having done His part by giving us human birth, the onus is on us that we seek our liberation from the never ending cycle of birth, death and rebirth.]