Spiritual Process As A Kind Of Agriculture

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Over 15,000 years ago, on the first full moon after the summer solstice, Adiyogi, the first yogi, turned south and became Adi Guru, the world’s first guru. It was on this day that a radical exploration of the mechanics of life unfolded on the planet. This was the birth of yoga.

To this very day, the period of Dakshinayana, the first six months after the summer solstice in the northern hemisphere, is considered to be the period of sadhana or practice. The angle of the planet and the sun’s relationship with Earth ensure that there is natural support for those practising any spiritual discipline. Several cultures, ranging from the Japanese to the Native American, have recognised this and enjoined certain spiritual practices and observances at this time.

In yogic tradition, Dakshinayana is seen as sadhanapada, the period of practice, while Uttarayana, the six months following the winter solstice, is seen as samadhipada or kaivalyapada, the period of enlightenment. It is not an accident that many yogis have attained their ultimate state at the beginning of Uttarayana. The famous example is Bhishma, patriarch of the Mahabharata, who postponed his passing and waited on a bed of arrows for Uttarayana, in order to shed his body. The sadhanapada is held as the most important phase in a yogi’s life, and Adiyogi turned south when he began teaching to emphasise this very point. Dakshinayana is for ‘doing’ and ‘effort’; Uttarayana is for ‘waiting’ and ‘grace’. If you do the right things now, you will reap the right harvest later.

Do planetary movements decide our spiritual destinies? No. But it is good to make use of the natural support they offer. A wise farmer knows how to harness the support of Nature and the seasons. Similarly, spiritual aspirants would be wise to make use of these last weeks preceding the winter solstice to intensify their practice. Even to attract Grace, you have to do the right things! This is the time to water the plants, to enrich the soil with manure. Flowers and fruits are not of our doing, but they will happen anyway as a consequence of right action.

The spiritual process is a kind of agriculture. The yogic system does not believe in sudden enlightenment. In Zen, enlightenment happens suddenly, like a thunderclap. But in yoga, we turn enlightenment into a gradual process. When it is sudden, there is sometimes the danger of leaving the body. So, in yoga, we allow the individual to grow stage by stage, from one level of realisation to the next. There is no suddenness, no shock.

This is a slow process. Flowers will bloom, but in yoga we are not bothered about flowers. We are like gardeners. The work seems to be dull. We plant the seed. We don’t bother with the plant, flowers or fruits. Our hands are always in the soil. We make a system out of gardening. You cannot make a science out of blossoming flowers, but you can make a science out of gardening.

Suppose I plant a 100,000 trees and only one bloomed, could I call myself a gardener? That single tree might have bloomed even if I were not there. But if at least 50,000 bloomed, I could call myself a gardener.

This is the difference between yoga and other systems. If you do a good job of your gardening, flowers will come anyway. This is yogic science, a deep science. Significantly, the system works even after the gardener is gone.

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