

[Chatushpada](#)

Category : [January 1995](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jan. 02, 1995

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By good behavior and selfless service we step onto the path to wisdom.

What Are the Four Stages on the Path?

The path of enlightenment is divided naturally into four stages: charya, virtue and selfless service; kriya, worshipful sadhanas; yoga, meditation under a guru's guidance; and jnana, the wisdom state of the realized soul. Aum.

Charya, kriya, yoga and jnana are the sequence of the soul's evolutionary process, much like the natural development of a butterfly from egg to larvae, from larvae to pupa, from pupa to caterpillar, and then the final metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly. These are four padas, or stages, through which each human soul must pass, through many births, in order to attain its final goal. Before entering this path, the soul is immersed in the lower nature, bound in fear and lust, hurtful rage, jealousy, confusion, selfishness, consciencelessness and malice. Then it awakens into charya, unselfish religious service, or karma yoga. Once matured in charya, it enters kriya, devotion or bhakti yoga, and finally blossoms into kundalini yoga. Jnana is the state of enlightened wisdom reached toward the path's end as a result of Self Realization. The four padas are not alternative ways, but progressive, cumulative phases of a one path, San Marga. The Tirumantiram affirms, "Being the Life of life is splendrous jnana worship. Beholding the Light of life is great yoga worship. Giving life by invocation is

external worship. Expressing adoration is charya."

What Is the Nature of the Charya Pada?

Charya is the performance of altruistic religious service and living according to traditional ethical conduct and culture, by which the outer nature is purified. It is the stage of overcoming basic instinctive patterns. Aum.

Charya, literally "conduct," is the first stage of religiousness and the foundation for the next three stages. It is also called the *dasa marga*, meaning "path of servitude," for here the soul relates to God as servant to master. The disciplines of charya include humble service, attending the temple, performing one's duty to community and family, honoring holy men, respecting elders, atoning for misdeeds and fulfilling the ten classical restraints called *yamas*. Within a strong society, one performs charya whether he wants to or not. Young or rebellious souls often resist and resent, whereas mature souls fulfill these obligations most naturally. Right behavior and self-sacrificing service are never outgrown. The keynote of charya, or *karma yoga*, is *seva*, religious service given without the least thought of reward, which has the magical effect of softening the ego and bringing forth the soul's innate devotion. The Tirumantiram explains, "The simple temple duties, lighting the lamps, picking flowers, lovingly polishing the floors, sweeping, sing-

ing the Lord's praise, ringing the bell and fetching

ceremonial water-these constitute the *dasa marga*."

What Is the Nature of the Kriya Pada?

Kriya is joyous and regular worship, both internal and external, in the home and temple. It includes puja, japa, penance, fasting and scriptural learning, by which our understanding and love of God and Gods deepen. Aum.

Hinduism demands deep devotion through *bhakti yoga* in the *kriya pada*, softening the intellect and unfolding love. In *kriya*, the second stage of religiousness, our *sadhana*, which was mostly external in *charya*, is now also internal. *Kriya*, literally "action or rite," is a stirring of the soul in awareness of the Divine, overcoming the obstinacy of the instinctive-intellectual mind. We now look upon the Deity image not just as carved stone, but as the living presence of the

God. We perform ritual and puja not because we have to but because we want to. We are drawn to the temple to satisfy our longing. We sing joyfully. We absorb and intuit the wisdom of the Vedas and agamas. We perform pilgrimage and fulfill the sacraments. We practice diligently the ten classical observances called niyamas. Our relationship with God in kriya is as a son to his parents and thus this stage is called the satputra marga. The Tirumantiram instructs, "Puja, reading the scriptures, singing hymns, performing japa and unsullied austerity, truthfulness, restraint of envy, and offering of food-these and other self-purifying acts constitute the flawless satputra marga."

What Is the Nature of the Yoga Pada?

Yoga is internalized worship which leads to union with God. It is the regular practice of meditation, detachment and austerities under the guidance of a satguru through whose grace we attain the realization of Parashiva. Aum.

Yoga, "union," is the process of uniting with God within oneself, a stage arrived at through perfecting charya and kriya. As God is now like a friend to us, yoga is known as the sakha marga. This system of inner discovery begins with asana-sitting quietly in yogic posture-and pranayama, breath control. Pratyahara, sense withdrawal, brings awareness into dharana, concentration, then into dhyana, meditation. Over the years, under ideal conditions, the kundalini fire of consciousness ascends to the higher chakras, burning the dross of ignorance and past karmas. Dhyana finally leads to enstasy-first to savikalpa samadhi, the contemplative experience of Satchidananda, and ultimately to nirvikalpa samadhi, Parashiva. Truly a living satguru is needed as a steady guide to traverse this path. When yoga is practiced by one perfected in kriya, the Gods receive the yogi into their midst through his awakened, fiery kundalini. The Vedas enjoin the yogi, "With earnest effort hold the senses in check. Controlling the breath, regulate the vital activities. As a charioteer holds back his restive horses, so does a persevering aspirant restrain his mind."

What Is the Nature of the Jnana Pada?

Jnana is divine wisdom emanating from an enlightened being, a soul in its maturity, immersed in Sivaness, the blessed realization of God, while living out

earthly karma. Jnana is the fruition of yoga tapas. Aum

The instinctive mind in the young soul is firm and well-knit together. The intellectual mind in the adolescent soul is complicated, and he sees the physical world as his only reality. The subsuperconscious mind in the mystically inclined soul well perfected in kriya longs for realization of Siva's two perfections, Satchidananda and Parashiva. Through yoga he bursts into the superconscious mind, experiencing bliss, all-knowingness and perfect silence. It is when the yogi's intellect is shattered that he soars into Parashiva and comes out a jnani. Each time he enters that unspeakable nirvikalpa samadhi, he returns to consciousness more and more the knower. He is the liberated one, the jivanmukta, the epitome of kaivalya-perfect freedom-far-seeing, filled with light, filled with love. One does not become a jnani simply by reading and understanding philosophy. The state of jnana lies in the realm of intuition, beyond the intellect. The Vedas say, "Having realized the Self, the rishis, perfected souls, satisfied with their knowledge, passion-free, tranquil-those wise beings, having attained the omnipresent on all sides-enter into the All itself."