On Living...

Rudrani Raj, IInd Year

I'm quite certain I am not the only one with such a worked up life. Who am I kidding, I bet every reader of this article must already be mentally going through all the hundreds of things s/he has to get done today or else face the wrath of teachers, parents, bosses and yes, even your dog. So hopefully by now I have got your eyes open, heart racing and feet tapping. No, no as a psychologist in training the last thing I want to do is give you a panic attack, now wouldn't that be a blow to my career. So tolerating me up to this point might have got some of you wondering as to why this girl doesn't get straight to the point and quit beating around the bush. That my dear friends is the exact point I want to make. Most of us have got so caught up in the whirlwind of day-to-day material life , moving from one activity to another that for even a moment we have not stopped and reflected on whether there can be a life sans all this mayhem.

A lot of us by now may have realised that nothing stays with us forever, be it our job, car, or family. Hard to accept isn't it? Something that we have all painstakingly worked to obtain??obtained only to watch it disappear after a period of time has elapsed is certainly something difficult to come to terms with. In fact with time even our minds and bodies shall wither away. However ancient Indian sages, scriptures and more specifically the philosophical system of yoga believes that in thinking so, we are seeing only one side of the coin. It espouses the belief that all of us could lead our lives from a completely different perspective, with slightly altered attitudes that would help us not be overwhelmed or be defined simply by social roles and demands that all of us are expected to fulfill. According to yogic philosophy there is something that is permanent and eternal and that is your very own real self. Realizing our real self can give us so much happiness that even me who has been blabbering non-stop shall have no words for.

We tend to associate the Self with our minds and bodies but in yoga the self is akin to pure consciousness. This pure consciousness, unlike the mind and body is permanent and everlasting. For those who are familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is not self-actualization that I am talking about. The concept of Real self moves far beyond the idea of self-actualization.

For an ordinary person like you and me, our day-to-day lives come to be associated with many problems and miseries and such miseries may be related to loss ,hurt, egos, anger and disrespect. But let us question why we experience such debilitating emotions in the first place? Yogic philosophy says it is because we associate and confuse the real self or pure consciousness

with the material world. The material world is clearly ever- changing and we have no control over it , however much we may try to "keep things under control". So what is this real self I am referring to again and again? The real self is synonymous with the concept of soul that is believed to be never changing. It is that Self that can be completely at peace with itself and experience pure consciousness. During the pure consciousness experience one may become utterly silent inside, as though in a gap between thoughts, where one becomes completely perception- and thought- free. One neither thinks nor perceives any mental or sensory content. Yet, despite this suspension of content, one emerges from such events confident that one had remained awake inside, fully conscious. This Pure Conscious Event(PCE) has been identified in virtually every tradition and is defined as a wakeful but contentless consciousness. However due to ignorance we mistake the perishable non-self and body for the self, the impermanent for the permanent.

When something good or bad happens in the external world we take it as a blessing or blow to what we as people stand for. This is where our ignorance comes in. The mind plays Dennis-the-menace! It is uncontrolled and unrestrained. The contents of the mind are shaped by whatever is being attended to. Like a magnet it is immediately attracted to seek explanations for another person's behaviour or events occurring in the material world. We fail to understand that the mind is part of the material world and that the soul has the capacity to become aware. The mind instantaneously reacts depending on the combinations of the three different *gunas* or qualities present in the mind. These are *sattva* which stands for truth, discipline, clarity and goodness, rajas represents dynamic, egoistic energy and attachment to material gains and finally *tamas* that stands for inertia, lethargic life. Thus if a person is predominately operating by rajas or *tamas* , s/he is involved in continuous disturbing mental activity. This in turn sets in motion the cycle of karma. How so you may ask. In response I ask, don't we all do what our minds tell us to do?

Karmais thought to constitute all those traces left behind by ones experiences and actions that are accumulated and carried from one life to the next in unending cycles of birth and death. The mind carries within it all these residues. Hence it is assumed that when we are in the material world we are driven by ignorance, egoism, pleasure, lust, pain avoidance. These actions leave their own sets of traces and shape our karmas. As long as our actions are driven by such things , the cycle of karma in both life and death, shall continue. Hey, caught you there! Were you mentally cursing a professor who gave you too many assignments to do this break? Better be careful now then sorry later. Please don't accuse me of being cynical. If we reflect on our lives, we may realise that there is a logical reasoning to all of this.

How does one realize the real self? In yoga there is a concept called Samadhi which is usually a short-livedstate, lasting from a few hours to one day and only legendary yogis like Ramakrishna Paramahansa were said to be able to pass into for long periods of time. It is at this stage that one can experience pure consciousness and realize the impermanent nature of oneself. Should this deter you, I am not encouraging you to give up your studies, job or family but only seek to spread awareness that a person who has experienced a Samadhi state will release himself gradually from the miseries of everyday life.

Because Samadhi does not depend on any external stimulation or pleasure- seeking egoism, it tends to impede rather that perpetuate the cycle of karma. As more and more Samadhi experiences accumulate the person seeks inner bliss and prevents more and more tendencies to seek ordinary pleasures. Over a period of time , the yogi is able to eradicate the stranglehold of the burden of past karma and attain absolute freedom from the miseries of life.

Do not be misled however. Samadhi is not the next i-pill or disprin that will miraculously relieve you of your worries. I sincerely do not want to discourage you, but the process of attaining Samadhi is not for the faint hearted. As students the 3-Ds namely dedication, discipline, determination have been shoved down our throats and those who have been slightly inspired and I pray at least a handful of you have by yoga, would actually have you swallow it for real this time.

Yoga gives 8 techniques for the systematic control of the mind and they in turn will bring us closer to the knowledge of our real self. Starting from abstinence from stealing, lying, harbouring envy, it goes onto the cultivation of virtues such as cleanliness, self- control etc., then to certain *asanas* and breathing exercises. Finally it teaches to control the thought processes , contemplate about whatever object one has chosen to concentrate upon. It is only after one has gained complete control over these practices will s/he reach Samadhi which is the final eighth stage. Samadhi can be attained only through concerted effort under the guidance of a yogi or sage. In India, centers such as 'The Divine Life Society' carry out such programmes. To many, such practices may not seem practical. However, even by incorporating certain principles like restraint , observance and practicing the various *asanas, pranayama*, meditation one can have a healthier and a more controlled life style. We find ourselves in good health, the usual aches and pains disappear, we feel naturally more strong and sense a serene calmness or peacefulness of heart and mind. A feeling of being connected to ourselves and to other's develops, and we begin to see the world in a kinder and gentler way.

Indian psychology can take the world by storm and in fact it has succeeded in attracting the attention of many western countries where yoga is being actively practiced and propagated. In India, new age Gurus such as Baba Ramdev have revived yogic practices and their popularity is such that they have gone on to become, no less than idols in some households which is quite expected given the tendency of many Indians to glorify and idolise humans among a large number of other things under the sun. As rational individuals let us not dismiss yoga as something mystical but in fact strive to realise that in the long run we may all be the ultimate beneficiaries. Does the thought of leading a more yogic life bring to mind the picture of men with unkempt hair and dirty beards with no clothes? It most certainly might but then again book covers are misleading. There is no rule that a person in tune with his real self cannot live amongst others as an ordinary man, enjoying the company of his family, and going about other day to day jobs. In fact he/SHE could help others do likewise and contribute to a healthier society. No matter where we come from we are the masters of our own destiny, lets hope it's a fulfilling one.