

## MY PRACTICE DOESN'T WORK AND IT'S TOO DIFFICULT

Well are you doing it? Do you know what practice is and are you applying it? And who says it's difficult? Probably the ego that wants to retain all its old habits and avoid the change that will undermine it.

All the texts of yoga and associated teachings will make the key point that practice needs to be:

- a) Skilful and applied
- b) Persistent
- c) Followed patiently for a long time

This is just the way it is for all, it is the nature of things and can easily be accepted.

But does any practice “work” and what you mean by “work”?

For instant feedback and result, pranayama, yoga nidra, etc. will provoke relaxed states and well-being and that is all good. Chanting, bhajan, good fellowship, etc. will all lift the spirits and that is all good. All these things can be utilised, encouraged and promoted as excellent aids to life but you can't do them all the time. If the well-being of your day is always dependent on applying these active practices you will have to get up at 2am!! And when the practices are absent you will revert to the previous state and be disappointed.

These active practices are tangible and immediate, they do produce change and are cumulative but they primarily have a temporary result. Would you say that is what you mean by “work”?

Notice that all the active approaches of yoga culminate in meditation or absorption because it is only that that will invoke sustained change in the mind, and that, I suggest is what you are getting at when you say “work”.

What are people principally aiming for in undertaking any spiritual practice? There will be a range of answers to this but when they are paired down most people will agree that what they want is happiness and peace of mind.

This is understandable but is incomplete and superficial. Don't look for peace of mind as that will cause you to seek out and expect a particular state that is limiting and unsustainable, unless you are in particular circumstances, are protected from any disturbance and persist with active practices all the time. For people in the active world this is a yogic delusion and the cause of much angst and frustration. It is not peace of mind that should be sought, it is **freedom** of mind. This means ... well, I am sure you can answer that for yourself. This is the treasure that should be cultivated and this is the true measure of what “works”.

Atma Vichara leads to freedom of mind and that is a structural, permanent change, not dependent on top-up practice. However, in the beginning you do not know this, there is little evidence and you cannot verify it. To progress at all something profound and elusive is needed something essential and often skirted over; faith.

In the beginning you do not know if something is right but you can choose to trust it and act upon it. Actually you are doing this all the time, even with the things that do not work, but you are probably chopping and changing them in the hope that something will be more effective more quickly. The risk is that you continue doing this all your life or until your enthusiasm runs out. Better to accept that the elusive, quick, reliable and easy thing doesn't exist.

All the teachings emphasis faith and application. Faith in the teacher and teachings and application of practice as the fuel of sadhana. Now for modern people who are so empowered as individuals, faith challenges our sensibilities. We want to be in charge.

For success, that has to be overcome. In the overcoming, we face our own qualities of humility, compliance and respect. Accepting these and overcoming the challenges and often resistances they present, is of itself central to loosening the egos' hold. It is therefore intrinsic to the serious adoption of practice. That which is on offer is replicating tried and tested processes that you can choose to go with fully or not. They are:

- ❖ Believe in the validity of the practice (have faith - satyam)
- ❖ Take up the practice (yogam)
- ❖ Apply it (properly and patiently through sadhana)
- ❖ Seek support throughout the journey (guram)
- ❖ Come together frequently to strengthen your resolve and current (sangham)

The other thing about what "works" is that effects are not on your terms because your terms are the egos' assertions of what it wants and what it will accept. This is deeply superficial and constraining and is, sadly, what continues to drive most people. Properly applied, practice is working actively upon you but you may be misjudging the results or resisting them as they are not immediately what you expect or want.

Know with clarity what the practice is, read about it, ask questions, put forward your doubts to the teacher, to one another and to yourself. Talk and act, don't do nothing, claim the moment.