

Leadership and Yoga: Time-tested recipe to become a better leader

Prashant Joshi, M.A. M.Phil.

Co-Founder, Gurukul Yoga Holistic Center, A Science Of Living Institution,
Bridgewater, NJ

gurukul@gurukulyoga.com | www.gurukulyoga.com

Introduction: In this article, we will define the attributes of a leader using the yogic definitions, principles and practices, and establish an inseparable connection between the two. Yoga is about creating harmony at all levels of our existence – physical, emotional, social and spiritual. Leadership is about having the vision and direction for betterment of a cause and executing the same, time and again. We know from history about the contribution of good leaders and the bad. It can be the difference between ignorance and bliss, war and peace, or life and death. By understanding and practicing Yoga, we feel that we can create better leaders at all levels and in all fields, creating social harmony from the individual to the community, and within the larger community – the entire world. Would it not be nice to have a pipeline of outstanding leaders at all times focused on the betterment of the society at all levels?

History has shown that the Yogic principles and practices can benefit the mankind, and it is our humble goal to do the same in our present time.

So, if we put this age-old science of Yoga to use, we can create better leaders to serve the seven billion people of the world and in turn help us become truly a one-world full of harmony, health, and happiness!

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Leadership my way is to stand behind the people I am leading”. Mahatma Gandhi was a student of Yoga. He used the yogic principles of non-violence(*Ahimsa*);

Truth(*Satya*); steadfastness(*Sthita-pradnyata*), and yogic practices of Meditation(*Dhyana*), Silence(*Mauna*) and Chanting(*Bhajans*) effectively.

To stand *behind* to lead *forward* the masses on the right path takes certain attributes.

Attributes of a leader: Yoga and Leadership 101

- Level-headed (*Samatvam Yoga Uchyate*); Listener
- Efficient (*Yogaha Karmasu Kaushalam*); Energetic
- Aware (*sensitivity: taralata* – quality of a yogi); Agile
- Daring (*courage: dhairya* – quality of a yogi); Durable
- Exemplary (Only way to lead is by example)
- **Righteous** (dharma: *Do The Right Thing!*)

L for level-headed: *Samatvam Yoga Uchyate*: “Evenness of Mind is Yoga,” thus says Krishna to Arjuna in *Bhagwad Geeta*. The true test of leadership comes during crisis. How to remain even-keeled despite the chaos and panic is very important so rational decisions are taken. Yogic practices of Praanayaama, Shavasana and Dhyana are very practical tools to help us build and enhance level-headedness. Consistent practice trains the body and mind to function efficiently despite the adverse situation. As we increase our ability to listen to our own body and mind well, listening to the masses becomes easier. There is a reason why we have *two* ears and *one* mouth. We should listen twice as much we speak!

E for efficient: *Yogaha Karmasu Kaushalam*: Another quote from *Bhagwad Geeta* defines Yoga as “*efficiency in action.*” Efficiency is an important attribute of a leader. Someone has said, Managers do the things right whereas leaders do the right thing! It is not about doing ten given tasks but is about optimizing and doing them in just five. Efficiency comes through careful analysis and action. Yoga makes your body and mind more efficient so the energy is conserved and used efficiently towards the crisis in hand. We are all focused on making our cars, houses, environments more

efficient, we forget to restore the efficiency of our own body and the mind. Health-care can be made more efficient if proper Yoga practice is prescribed and practiced.

A for Aware: (Sensitivity - *Taralata* – quality of a yogi) Leaders are expected to solve the problems and intervene in crisis. If we are aware of the root of the problem at hand, solving it becomes easier! Developing awareness is how we get to the root of any problem. We are a very busy society with no time for self-awareness. Yoga helps tremendously increasing the sensitivity of our body and mind so we are aware of when it is sick, hungry, tired, and so on. A leader with heightened sense of awareness can do wonders for the society. Pre-emptive actions can be taken before crisis is developed and escalated at all levels. After all, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure, is it not?

D for Daring: (Courage - *Dhairya* – quality of a yogi) A good leader should dare to do the right thing which not necessarily is the most popular(thing to do.) To stand up against a bully – whether the bully is an individual, a community or a nation, - tremendous courage is required. Yoga practice makes your body and mind strong so it does not fall prey to internal and external bullies. Weak mind succumbs to bad temptations. Weak body succumbs to diseases. Yoga makes you strong, at the same time keeps you soft so courage and compassion can co-exist! Practice of *Praanaayaama* is how you conquer Anxiety. FDR has said, Fear has fear to fear itself. This statement can be experienced with consistent practice of *Praanaayaama*. Practice of *Asanas* can make the body so strong that you conquer disease!

E for Exemplary: (Only way to lead is by Example) Leadership is not just talking about these attributes but putting them into action! Leading by example is the only way to lead. To motivate the masses to lead a life full of purpose, energy and vitality, leader needs to exhibit those qualities through his or her actions. Yoga is one therapy where the therapist must be experiencing the therapy that is being prescribed to the patient. Consistent Yoga practice helps you be energetic and then that energy can be used efficiently

for the betterment of the society at large. Many a times, leaders do exhibit a lot of energy directed towards wrong things, or at the expense of relationships or health. Yoga helps you have the cake and eat it too!

R for Righteous: (*Dharmam Chara* – Do the Right Thing) After defining leadership in the context of Yoga, we come to the punch line. All the above attributes culminate into doing the right thing! Talking about doing the right thing has to end in doing the right thing! Leaders through their level-headedness, efficient approach, awareness of society's needs, daring to stand up for the just cause, leading by example need to do the right thing in the context of the situation! Right is relative. Yoga practice keeps your rationality and intuition alive. Leaders need to lead using their head and heart given the context of a crisis.

Dharmam Chara (live righteously) is nothing but saying – do the right thing! Dharma is a universal principle of holding the society together.

Summary: In this article, we have shown an inseparable link between Yoga and Leadership that is universally applicable to all times. Putting the Yogic principles and practices to use can help us all tremendously at all levels – from an individual to a nation, to the entire world! *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* - the whole world is a family - can then become a reality when every person in the world thinks and acts with these leadership attributes. We would like to see Yoga practices added in our primary, secondary, high-school and college curriculums to bring physical, emotional, social and spiritual harmony. Corporate leadership and management training needs to adopt the Yogic practices to make sure the all the attributes mentioned above are addressed. Once we lay a strong foundation, the new, emerging leaders can lead the way for a bright future for the society with thriving global health, global economy and the entire ecosystem!

Well, practice, practice and practice! Thanks for l(r)eadng!
Let there be harmony, health, and happiness to everyone in this world!

Here is a Poem to put the life and leadership in perspective.

Doing The RIGHT Thing

Is Life about winning or losing?
Or is it about doing the RIGHT thing?
Winning is hard and losing is harder
Doing the RIGHT thing is the hardest of all!
You may want to go for a win then, if doing RIGHT is such a pain!
Wait, before you go for a win, try doing the RIGHT thing once
What do you know, you may hit some home runs!
If you ask me, life is about doing the RIGHT thing
If you do it long enough, winning is easy, losing is easier
And doing the RIGHT thing is the easiest of all! -----*Prashant Joshi (January 2002)*