

# SUTRA JOURNAL

ETERNAL TRUTHS • MODERN VOICES

AUG/2015

YOGA

VEDANTA

TANTRA

BUDDHA DHARMA

AYURVEDA

INDOLOGY

SANSKRIT

YATRA

INTERVIEWS

HINDU CULTURE

BOOKSTORE

# HERE SHE COMES

## THE INAUGURAL ISSUE



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INVOCATION

O LIGHT, ILLUMINATE ME

RG VEDA



Tree shrine at Vijaynagar

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Sutra Journal, a free, monthly online magazine with a Dharmic focus, featuring articles on Yoga, Vedanta, Tantra, Buddhism, Ayurveda, and Indology.

Yoga arose and exists within the Dharma, which is a set of timeless teachings, holistic in nature, covering the gamut from the worldly to the metaphysical, from science to art to ritual, incorporating Vedanta, Tantra, Buddhism, Ayurveda, and other dimensions of what has been brought forward by the Indian civilization.

Sutra Journal aims to cover all this and to extend the conversation, involving more and more people who are also looking for depth of discussion on this wide ranging set of interconnected subjects, towards their own process of individuation. Extending this conversation even further will in the future involve conferences, on-line courses, retreats, and yatras to India.

Sutra Journal is a platform for diverse voices and the inaugural issue spans a wide range, from a first person account of sadhana to a survey of the integration of dharma shown in the writings of Fritjof Capra, to a scholarly investigation of mantra, to showing how Dharma relates to the scientific worldview and to the larger religious landscape, and more. There are articles pertaining to the intellectual, devotional and service aspects of Dharma, the latter being featured in interviews with practitioners bringing Seva, or service to the world.

Along with extending this conversation for the benefit of one's personal development, Sutra Journal will extend this to initiatives which 'bring Dharma to the world' through trauma informed yoga workshops, retreats, documentaries, informative blogs and training programs.

Our consulting editors Dr. Jeffery D. Long, Dr. Sthaneshwar Timalsina and author of *American Veda*, Philip Goldberg bring an enormous amount of knowledge and experience to this venture. Our *Seva Council* members Dr. Stuart Sovatsky and Dr. Richard Miller bring an equally deep and holistic approach to tying together the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of the human condition, both towards healing and self-development.

The purpose of the *Seva Council* is to highlight and support individuals and organizations that are applying Dharmic teachings to systemic issues that plague the modern world like trauma, depression, dependency and abuse. We intend to organize retreats, workshops, yatras for vulnerable and underserved communities and train Yoga teachers to serve these communities. We hope to hold conferences towards establishing new standards in how Yoga is taught and certified.

Sutra Journal was created after the desire to effect positive change in the world we all share. Our ways of thinking and doing things, if we don't change them, will lead us to ecological and social disaster. While this is true, we are now also at a moment of paradigm change.

The Dharmic worldview has much in common with the currently occurring shift in Western thinking, which has marginalized monotheism due to the rise of the non-dual view of modern science. Yoga is now here to stay and it brings in its wake the depth and richness of the Dharmic worldview. "Spiritual but not religious" is now an oft-heard phrase and it represents the rejection of exclusivist theism, scientific materialism, and the cynicism of post-modernist thinking.

More than 2000 years ago in India, the Chandogya Upanishad forwarded the non-dual view as "Tat Tvam Asi", meaning 'This is you'. This is just the same as what Carl Sagan said about the newly arisen view of self in the Western civilization: "We are a way for the Cosmos to know itself". India and the West now see eye to eye.

Welcome to the party! We have lots to talk about...

## EDITORS IN CHIEF



Dr. Pankaj Seth is a Naturopathic Physician, Yoga/Meditation teacher and filmmaker based in Toronto. His Naturopathic medical practice of 25 years features Ayurveda, Yoga, Pranayama and Acupuncture, where self-care is a prominent aspect to wellness. Along with his clinical practice and speaking engagements at many venues, Pankaj Seth also teaches workshops on Ayurvedic self-care, Clinical Pranayama and Yoga philosophy and technique.

[www.doctorseth.ca](http://www.doctorseth.ca) [www.deeepyoga.ca](http://www.deeepyoga.ca). Pankaj is currently nearing completion of a film on Yoga philosophy called *Soma: The Yogic Quest*. [www.somatheyogicquest.com](http://www.somatheyogicquest.com)



Vikram Zutshi is a writer-producer-director based in Los Angeles. After several years in indie film and network TV production, then a stint as Creative Executive at 20th Century Fox and later in International Sales/Acquisitions at Rogue Entertainment, he went solo and produced two feature films before transitioning into Directing. His debut feature was filmed at various points along the two thousand mile US-Mexico border and has since been globally broadcast. He is a passionate Yogi and writes frequently on Shamanism, Metaphysics, Buddhism, Shaivism, Culture, Art and Cinema. Vikram often travels on photo expeditions to SE Asia and Latin America, and is currently prepping his next two films, a 'mystical screwball comedy' called *The Byron Project* and a feature documentary on the global yoga movement.

## FOUNDING EDITORS



Virochana Khalsa has taught Kriya, Tantra, and ways of working consciously on the earth for 35 years in a dozen countries. He is the author of 4 books including *Eternal Yoga: Awakening into Buddhist Consciousness* and *Tantra of the Beloved*, creator of Sacred Mountain Retreat, and has a software company Silver Earth. He emphasizes the value of deeper practice and developing a continuum of awareness.



Lea Horvatic started her journey through yoga at the very young age over 35 years ago, and following 20 years of exploration and study of being human through various prisms which still continues today, in 2009 qualified as a Homeopath (MLCHom), after which she completed 350 hours YTT, and now teaches yoga and practices ayurvedic massage. Her approach to life and yoga is decidedly Tantric in that she views the body as a vehicle to explore existence and its non-dual nature, viewing world as something not to escape or overcome, but rather embrace with juicy excitement.



Brandon Fulbrook (Tejas Surya) lives, works, and attends college in Missoula, MT where he also holds study groups related to Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism), and its various philosophies and practices such as Yoga and Vedanta. Although still young, he has spent nearly the entirety of his youth in study of world religions before finding his home in the Vedic tradition. He has done formal training through Kauai's Hindu Monastery, and has spent additional time under the instruction of Pandits based out of Las Vegas and Missoula. He writes articles with a Dharmic focus, and he aims overall to educate a Western audience on the reality of Sanatana Dharma, beyond common misconceptions as portrayed frequently in news sources and popular culture.



With undergraduate degrees in English (with Honors) and Art, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Claremont Graduate University, Mary Hicks continues to work as an artist and as editor for scholars in religious studies. Her watercolor paintings draw on Chinese philosophy, art, and Song dynasty ceramics, and Japanese art. In addition to memorizing Sanskrit texts, she has recently studied Nāgārjuna at university. [www.maryhicks.com](http://www.maryhicks.com)

## FEATURES EDITORS



Sri Louise is a Contemporary Dancer interested in the politics of whiteness as it pertains to both Art and Spirituality. She has been in an intimate process with Yoga since 1993 and met her Guru, Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1999. She is an outspoken critic of philosophical appropriation and is the visionary behind the Underground Yoga Parlour for Self-Knowledge & Social Justice in Oakland, Ca.



Aditi Banerjee is a practicing attorney at a Fortune 500 financial services company in the greater New York area. She is on the Board of Directors of the World Association for Vedic Studies (WAVES) and is an advisor to the Hindu Students Council (HSC). She co-edited the book, *Invading the Sacred: An Analysis of Hinduism Studies in America* and has published several essays in *Outlook India* and elsewhere on Hinduism and the Hindu-American experience, including *Hindu-Americans: An Emerging Identity in an Increasingly Hyphenated World*, which was included in *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion in America since 1945* and *Hindu Pride*, which was included in *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America*. She earned her Juris Doctor from Yale Law School and received a B.A. in International Relations, magna cum laude, from Tufts University.

## CONSULTING EDITORS



Dr. Jeffery D. Long is Professor of Religion and Asian Studies at Elizabethtown College, in Pennsylvania, USA. He is associated with the Vedanta Society, DĀNAM (the Dharma Academy of North America). A major theme of his work is religious pluralism.

Dr. Long has authored three books, *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism*, *Jainism: An Introduction*, and *The Historical Dictionary of Hinduism*. He has published and presented a number of articles and papers in various forums including the Association for Asian Studies, the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, and the American Academy of Religion.



Dr. Sthaneshwar Timalsina completed his Master's degree in 1991 from Sampurnananda University in Varanasi, India, and taught for several years in Nepal Sanskrit University, Kathmandu. He completed his PhD from Martin Luther University in Halle, Germany (2005) with a focus on the history of the philosophy of Advaita. His dissertation is published under the title, *Seeing and Appearance (Shaker Verlag, 2006)*. Before joining San Diego State University in 2005, Timalsina has taught in a number of institutes including University of California, Santa Barbara, and Washington University in St. Louis. His areas of research include classical Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain literature and philosophies with a specific focus on consciousness studies.

His book, *Consciousness in Indian Philosophy (Routledge, 2008)* is a result of a comparative study between Advaita and Buddhist understandings of the self and consciousness. Timalsina also works in the area of Tantric studies and his recent publications, *Tantric Visual Culture: A Cognitive Approach (Routledge, 2015)*, and *Language of Images: Visualization and Meaning in Tantras (Peter Lang, 2015)*, explore the cognitive and cultural domains of Tantric visualization. Besides these books, Timalsina has published over forty articles, book chapters, and review essays on religion, culture, literature, aesthetics, and philosophy. Timalsina teaches courses on Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious, philosophical, and literary traditions, and his teaching interests include 'Religion and Science' as well as 'Yoga Philosophy and Practice.' His current areas of research include theories of mind, with a particular focus on the cognitive aspects of recognition, memory, imagination, and emotion.



Philip Goldberg has been studying India's spiritual traditions for more than 45 years, as a practitioner, teacher and writer. An Interfaith Minister, meditation teacher and spiritual counselor, he is a skilled speaker who has lectured and taught workshops throughout the country and in India. He is the author of numerous books, most recently *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation, How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, which was named one of the top ten religion books of 2010 by Huffington Post and the American Library Association. He blogs regularly on the Huffington Post and Elephant Journal.

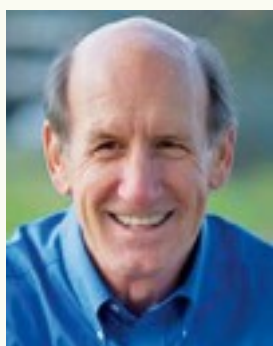
[www.PhilipGoldberg.com](http://www.PhilipGoldberg.com) and [www.AmericanVeda.com](http://www.AmericanVeda.com).

## SEVA COUNCIL



Dr. Stuart Sovatsky (AB, Ethics/Psychology, Princeton University; PhD, CIIS), was first choice to co-direct Ram Dass's "prison ashram" and first in the US to bring meditation to the homeless in the 1970s that led to being selected to the 1977 Princeton University Outstanding Alumni Careers Panel. Co-president of the premiere professional organization for spiritually-oriented psychologists in the US, the Association for Transpersonal Psychology since 1999, he was a board trustee for the California Institute of Integral Studies for 20 years and in 1999, recipient of its Most Outstanding Alumni Award 1978-2008.

In 2006-08, he was initiating co-convenor of the forty country World Congress on Psychology and Spirituality in Delhi, India, supported by the Office of the Dalai Lama and where BKS Iyengar, SS Ravi Shankar, Jack Kornfield and Robert Thurman keynoted. Author of critically acclaimed books like *Eros Consciousness & Kundalini*, *Words From the Soul*, and numerous articles on love, ideal marriages and families, spirituality of infancy and Buddhist dissolution of suicidal thoughts. A serious scholar-practitioner of tantra yoga with NUMEROUS academic publications and university presentations throughout the US, India and Europe, he now leads couples retreats and trains therapists in the US and in Russia, is a faculty member at Moscow Psychoanalytic Institute and is the director of two psychotherapy clinics in the San Francisco Bay Area.



Richard C. Miller, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist, author, researcher and yogic scholar. He is the founding president of the Integrative Restoration Institute (IRI), co-founder of The International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) and founding editor of the professional Journal of IAYT. He is also a founding member and past president of the Institute for Spirituality and Psychology, Senior Advisor to the Baumann Institute, and was the founding president of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit Marin School of Yoga. For over 40 years, Miller's primary interests have included integrating nondual wisdom teachings of Yoga, Tantra, Advaita, Taoism, and Buddhism with Western psychology. In addition to his research and writing projects, Miller lectures and leads trainings and retreats internationally.

Miller worked with Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the United States Department of Defense studying the efficacy of iRest Yoga Nidra. The iRest protocol was used with soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Based on this work, Eric Schoomaker, Surgeon General of the United States Army endorsed Yoga Nidra as a complementary alternative medicine (CAM) for chronic pain and PTSD.

Miller and his organization have iRest programs in the military, homeless shelters, prisons, hospices, senior facilities, universities, chemical dependency clinics, Multiple Sclerosis and cancer outpatient clinics, as well as yoga and meditation studios.







*We hope you enjoy Sutra Journal, and walk through the door to the (inner) Sun... OM*



Vijaynagar

# WHAT IS DHARMA?

By Pankaj Seth

What is Dharma? There is Hindu Dharma. There is Buddha Dharma. The root of Dharma means 'support', so Dharma is 'that which supports'. Dharma refers to teachings and a way of life which support what the Rg Veda calls 'Rta' or 'Rtam'. The words 'rhythm' and 'ritual' are derived from 'Rta'. The movement of the stars, the flowing of rivers and seasonal and biological rhythms are all aspects of Rta. Rta is the cosmic order observed with the senses, discerned through reason, and directly known via moral awareness.

From the Dharmic point of view, the cosmic order is not restricted to a mathematical or mechanical order but also includes the moral dimension. This is so because the Dharmic teachings forward a consciousness-first view of reality. Consciousness is not seen as an evolute of inert matter but as the basis of all perceived phenomena. Consciousness is not like an inert sensor of things but is inherently



Varanasi

alive and aware, with freedom of choice and creativity, and depending on the material context that enfolds it, consciousness makes diverse moral judgements possible.

## DHARMA: MORE LIKE SCIENCE OR RELIGION?

Due to its own history, the West has become fractured into Science and Religion. Of the two, the Dharma is closer to Science than Western Religion. The various religion-like elements are applications of the truth found via the Dharma's epistemic approach, as Ananda Coomaraswamy points out:

“The original intention of intelligible forms was not to entertain us, but literally to “re-mind” us. The chant is not for the approval of the ear, nor the picture for that of the eye (although these

senses can be taught to approve the splendor of truth, and can be trusted when they have been trained), but to effect such a transformation of our being as is the purpose of all ritual acts. It is, in fact, the ritual arts that are the most “artistic,” because the most “correct,” as they must be if they are to be effectual.”

## THE RITUAL ARTS

Of all the arts, the ritual arts were the first and remain the most sublime. They exist within a worldview where a form of transformation called wholeness is explicitly sought. Ritual is a process whereby an inspired picture of the world is entered. It's also a cure for the stance of the distant, disinterested observer who feels alienated from the world. It is a cure for the 'world negating' attitude of the modern era.



Ritual joins the finite to the infinite, joins the mortal human being to eternal cosmic rhythms, saying 'this is you'. You are the temple where divinity lives. In you is Immortality and Illumination.

## ORIENTALISM

The Orientalist views projected onto the non-dual Dharma make it look more like dualistic Western religion than it is, and thus causes the Science-dominated West to see it improperly, leading to the situation where Westerners want to associate with some aspects like Yoga, but not with other aspects like 'empty ritual'.

But in the Dharma, what exists is not empty ritual to supplicate an a priori God (like in the Religions), but rather as Coomaraswamy said above, "The Ritual Arts" are part of an epistemic approach as well as a way of life that respects not just Science but Art. What in the West are called Art, Science, and Religion, in India co-exist as an integrated approach, not fractured and thus fractious.

## SEEING THE TRUTH

What is meant by 'SEEING' in the Dharmic/Vedic/Yogic context?

Meditation and Puja are part of the epistemic approach of the Dharma, for knowledge acquisition, and are not reducible to prayer as it exists in the context of religions. The example of the mathematician Srinivasan Ramanujan is instructive in this regard.

Ramanujan has been called the greatest of mathematicians. His colleague Hardy said: "Here was a man who could work out modular equations and theorems... to orders unheard of, whose mastery of continued fractions was... beyond that of any mathematician in the world, who had found for himself the functional equation of the zeta function and the dominant terms of many of the most famous problems in the analytic theory of numbers..."

Ramanujan credited his acumen to his family goddess, Mahalakshmi of Namakkal. He looked to her for inspiration in his work, and



claimed to dream of blood drops that symbolized her male consort, Narasimha, after which he would receive visions of scrolls of complex mathematical content unfolding before his eyes.

Professor Bruce C. Berndt of the University of Illinois, during a lecture at IIT Madras in May 2011, stated that over the last 40 years, as nearly all of Ramanujan's theorems have been proven right, there had been a greater appreciation of Ramanujan's work and brilliance. Further, he stated Ramanujan's work was now pervading many areas of modern mathematics and physics.

## DHARMA AND RELIGION

The word 'religion' historically exists to define monotheisms which hold a belief in a transcendent, all-controlling deity. They are credal in their beliefs, so that nothing may be admitted as evidence against those beliefs. Religions are also exclusivist in that their beliefs define 'in' and 'out' groups, and these lines lead to the concepts of conversion, deconversion, blasphemy and apostasy. However closely the Dharma might appear to be like the Religions on the surface, the Dharma has none of their features.

## DHARMA AND SCIENCE

Western science both converges with, and diverges from, the Dharma.

### CONVERGENCE

Both espouse a non-dual view. Western science militated against the dualistic view of Christianity, where Creator-Creature is a duality never to be reconciled. Western science seeks to know the Universe as a self-created reality, and not as being created by something

outside the Universe, for by definition there can be nothing outside 'all there is', or the Universe.

## DIVERGENCE

Western science in its current iteration tends to be strongly Materialistic, seeing awareness as an historically arisen 'phenomenon'. However, science more and more acknowledges that awareness is not a phenomenon, but is instead the a priori condition for the arising of phenomena.

Due to seeing awareness as epiphenomenal, Western science has no choice but to see values as secondary in its Materialist view, whereas the Dharma sees values as primary, because it sees Awareness as primary.

## THE COMING CONVERGENCE

The Materialist, Neo-Darwinian view is now being severely challenged, in particular because consciousness is coming to be seen as 'irreducible'.

The Dharma is not credal, belief/faith based, exclusionary as is Western religion, nor is it a search for truth limited to the confines of Western science, as meditative methods refined over millennia enable a direct seeing for oneself that is central to the Dharmic approach.

## KNOWING DHARMA ON ITS OWN TERMS

The Dharma is, from its own epistemic point of view, a search for the truth, Satya, or 'that which is'. A study of Dharmic texts yields much in terms of arguments and methods to 'see for oneself'. Belief is not enough, so arguments which help

with understanding, and meditation methods which enable a direct knowing are forwarded.

Dharmic epistemology sees two kinds of knowledge, Gyana and Vigyana. Vigyana is Science, the method of measurement, thought, and theory and since it relies upon causality but invariably gets stuck at the 'first cause' it is understood as useful but limited. It could be said that as early as the Vedas and Upanishads, an epistemic approach like Logical Positivism (featured in Scientism) was seen to have the limitations that have now been seen about Science by the Philosophers of Science in the West.

While Vigyana is divided or dualistic knowledge, Gyana is non-dual knowledge, transcendent of measurement and thought, and in the context of self-knowledge transcendent of even the subject-object distinction. This is the goal of Yoga.

In the Mundaka Upanishad, we hear that there are two kinds of knowledge, historical and timeless, and that thought cannot reach the timeless. This is why Yoga is important towards achieving knowledge, an experiential not discursive knowledge about the nature of being, consciousness, and the self. So the approach in the Dharma to knowledge is eminently clear-sighted and accurate, and Yoga fits into that. Here we don't need loosely defined words like 'mystical' or 'spiritual' because they cause confusion, not being well-defined. As Sita Ram Goel said in contrasting Dharma with Religion, "I dwell in a different universe of discourse which begins with 'Know Thyself' and ends with 'That Thou Art'.



Himalaya

## DHARMA SUPPORTS LIFE

The Purusharthas, or ‘The Four Aims of Life’, comprise the over-arching organizational scheme in Indic thought. The four aims of life are Dharma/Virtue, Artha/Prosperity, Kama/Pleasure and Moksha/Enlightenment.

In the context of the four aims of life, Dharma refers to practices that reinforce a way of life which is virtuous, which is supportive of Rta, and which is true to oneself. Here, the term ‘Svadharmā’ applies, and means ‘one’s own dharma’ or way. A Dharmic life is dutiful towards others and not just oriented towards material prosperity (Artha) or pleasure (Kama). Dharma, Artha, and Kama are known as the Trivarga, or the ‘Three-fold path’, and is fused within the temporal aspect of reality.

Along with the Trivarga, there is Moksha, knowing and becoming ‘the deathless’. What is deathless? The deathless is without end, infinite, beyond measure. This refers to one’s deepest identity... irreducible, deathless consciousness.



Dr. Pankaj Seth is a Naturopathic Physician, Yoga/Meditation teacher and filmmaker based in Toronto. His Naturopathic medical practice of 25 years features Ayurveda, Yoga, Pranayama and Acupuncture, where self-care is a prominent aspect to wellness. Along with his clinical practice and speaking engagements at many venues, Pankaj Seth also teaches workshops on Ayurvedic self-care, Clinical Pranayama and Yoga philosophy and technique. [www.doctorseth.ca](http://www.doctorseth.ca) [www.deeepyoga.ca](http://www.deeepyoga.ca). Pankaj is currently nearing completion of a film on Yoga philosophy called *Soma: The Yogic Quest*. [www.somatheyogicquest.com](http://www.somatheyogicquest.com)



Siva at CERN

## FRITJOF CAPRA AND THE DHARMIC WORLDVIEW

By Aravindan Neelakandan

On 18-June-2004, a 6.5-foot statue of dancing Siva was unveiled at CERN by its Director General, Dr. Robert Aymar. A special plaque next to the statue explained the traditional symbolism of Siva's dance also quoted Fritjof Capra a particle physicist himself, 'For the modern physicists, then, Shiva's dance is the dance of subatomic matter.' The statue, a gift from the Indian Government, was to commemorate the long association of Indian scientists with CERN that dated back to 1960s.

Fritjof Capra became a well-known name among 'New Age' aficionados as well as serious thinkers (not necessarily mutually exclusive groups) in the 1970s. His fame in India has been largely through the way he integrated the image of dancing Siva with the dynamic nature of sub-atomic particles. Capra wrote quoting Ananda Coomaraswamy in the cult classic, the 'Tao of Physics,' which he edited with Heinrich Zimmer:





Dravidian Propaganda Panel  
1972

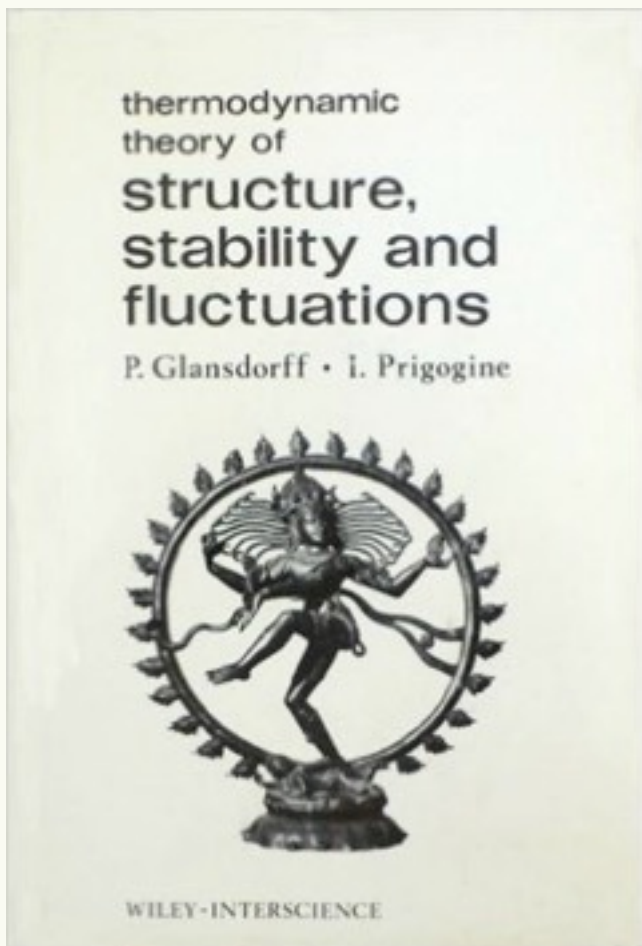
For the modern physicists, then, Shiva's dance is the dance of subatomic matter. As in Hindu mythology, it is a continual dance of creation and destruction involving the whole cosmos; the basis of all existence and of all natural phenomena. Hundreds of years ago, Indian artists created visual images of dancing Shivas in a beautiful series of bronzes. In our time, physicists have used the most advanced technology to portray the patterns of the cosmic dance. The bubble-chamber photographs of interacting particles, which bear testimony to the continual rhythm of creation and destruction in the universe, are visual images of the dance of Shiva equalling those of the Indian artists in beauty and profound significance. The metaphor of the cosmic dance thus unifies ancient mythology, religious art, and modern physics. It is indeed, as Coomaraswamy has said, 'poetry, but none the less science' (The Tao of Physics, p. 272).

**For Hindus who had been constantly abused as worshippers of barbarous grotesque deities, the book and its imagery came as a sort of scientific vindication of ancient wisdom.**

It was the powerful way in which the physicist–author wrote about the parallels between the dancing Deity and the web of relations emanating and dissolving in the realm of sub-atomic particles that ultimately led to the establishment of a Siva statue at CERN.

## THE DANCING SIVA

How the 'Tao of Physics' actually affected the psyche of educated Hindus is in itself an interesting phenomenon. Just a few years before its publication, Dravidian racists had put up a poster which showed the very cosmic dance as nonsensical superstition with American astronomers putting their feet right on the crescent moon adorning the dancing Siva – thus Siva was under the feet of the American astronaut. For Hindus who had been constantly abused as worshippers of barbarous grotesque deities, the book and its imagery came as a sort of scientific vindication of ancient wisdom. Interestingly, while Capra saw the symbolism of Siva's cosmic dance in the sub-atomic particle trajectories captured in the bubble chamber, the famous chemist, Ilya Prigogine who was best known for his concept of dissipative structures, had used the dance of Siva to symbolize the thermodynamic 'theory of structure, sta-



bility and fluctuations.’ Siva’s cosmic dance, even as a metaphor, thus pervaded both the sub-atomic and molecular levels of reality. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Carl Sagan saw in the cyclic cosmic dance of Siva ‘a kind of premonition of modern astronomical ideas’ like the oscillating universe. More recently Dr. V. S. Ramachandran, the modern cartographer of the dynamic brain, used the metaphor of the dance of Siva in an existential sense: “If you are really part of the great cosmic dance of Shiva, other than a mere spectator, then your inevitable death should be seen as a joyous reunion with nature rather than a tragedy.” One wonders if there is another spiritual/artistic/mythological symbol like that of the dancing Siva that humanity has created which can accompany our own understanding of the universe, inner and outer!

Unfortunately, the interest mostly stopped right there. In 1982, Fritjof Capra delivered a series of lectures at Bombay University, arranged by University Grants Commission of India that accompanied the publication of his next book, ‘The Turning Point.’ In the lecture series, the physicist enlarged upon his vision and spoke of a systems view of life. Interestingly among the Hindu circles, the founder of the trade union with Indic ideology BMS (Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh: Association of Indic workers), Dattopant Thengadi alone seemed to have been aware of the importance and relevance of Capra’s expansive vision in relation to their ideology – particularly in the larger context of ‘Integral humanism,’ an ideology advocated by Jan Sangh (a party perceived as rightwing, though such categories do not accurately apply to Indian politics) ideologue Deendayal Upadhyaya.

## PARADIGM SHIFT

In ‘The Turning Point’ (1982), Capra explored how the changed vision of nature emanating from the ‘new physics’ also changes the way we look at life, our psychology, society, politics, economics, and environment. He identified the interconnectedness that the theoretical physicists like David Bohm were talking about in such a powerfully poetic language as having an impact on the way other disciplines viewed and approached their own subject matter. In general, a ‘paradigm shift’ has been happening, he claimed, from the Newtonian-Cartesian essentially mechanistic vision of the universe to a more holistic, interconnected, organic vision of universe.



Here Capra takes a sympathetic view of Marx that would later become central to ecological movements throughout the world.

From a reductionist mechanical view of life, we are moving towards a systems view of life. From Freudian and behaviorist models in psychology, we are moving towards the more holistic and humanistic approaches to the psyche propounded by Maslow and Jung. In economics, Capra also identified a shift as reflected in the 'Buddhist economics' of E. F. Schumacher. His book explored all these developments in detail.

Here Capra takes a sympathetic view of Marx that would later become central to ecological movements throughout the world. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Marxist activists as well as scholars have shifted their focus to an ecological critique of capitalism. Capra does see Marx as a sort of pioneering holistic thinker far ahead of his times:

Many of these experiments were very successful for a while, but all of them ultimately failed, unable to survive in a hostile economic environment. Karl Marx, who owed much to the imagination of the Utopians, believed that their communities could not last, since they had not emerged "organically" from the existing stage of material economic development. From the perspective of the 1980s, it seems that Marx may well have been right (The Turning Point, p. 203).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Marxist activists as well as scholars have shifted their focus to an ecological critique of capitalism

In Capra's assessment, Marx comes out as a pioneering, organic process-philosopher studying social dynamics:

Marx's view of the role of nature in the process of production was part of his organic perception of reality, as Michael Harrington has emphasized in his persuasive reassessment of Marxian thought. This organic, or systems view is often overlooked by Marx's critics, who claim that his theories are exclusively deterministic and materialistic (The Turning Point, p. 207).



However, Capra makes it clear how he differs from Marx:

The Marxist view of cultural dynamics, being based 'On the Hegelian notion of recurrent rhythmic change, is not unlike the models of Toynbee, Sorokin, and the I Ching in that respect. However, it differs significantly from those models is in its emphasis on conflict and struggle. ... Therefore, following the philosophy of the I Ching rather than the Marxist view, I believe that conflict should be minimized in times of social transition, (The Turning Point, p. 34-35).

In terms of the history of political ecology, others differ from Capra's assessment of Marx. As economist Joan Martinez-Alier points out, the neglect of ecology has been inherent in Marxism from the very beginning as seen in the rejection of the work of Sergi Podolinsky by Marx and Engels. Podolinsky, an Ukrainian physician and socialist, tried to integrate other issues with the theory of value of the laws of thermodynamics – particularly the second law. Martinez-Alier points out that Podolinsky had analyzed the energetic of life and had applied it to the dynamics of economic system. Podolinsky had argued that the human labor “had the virtue of retarding the dissipation of energy, achieving this primarily by agriculture, although the work of a tailor, a shoemaker or a builder would also qualify, as productive work, affording 'protection against the dissipation of energy into space,'” (Martinez-Alier, Energy, Economy and Poverty: The Past and Present Debate, 2009, p. 40).

## TOWARDS ECO-FEMINISM

The Turning Point also reveals a growing influence of eco-feminists on Capra like Charlene Spretnak, Adrienne Rich, and Hazel Henderson.

Particularly important is Charlene Spretnak, an eco-feminist. Capra co-authored with Spretnak 'Green Politics,' subtitled 'Global Promise' (1984). The book projects Green politics as an alternative politics emerging from the new vision of reality. In 1983, 27 parliamentarians elected in West Germany belonged to Green Party – a new phenomenon then. Capra and Spretnak saw this as the Greens transcending 'the linear span of left-to-right.' The Marxist influence was very much visible. What was even more visible was the way Marxists within the Greens were out of sync with the cardinal principles of the holistic Greens. Capra and Spretnak record:

We began to perceive friction between the radical-left Greens and the majority of the party as we travelled around West Germany and asked our interviewees whether a particular goal or strategy they had described was embraced by everyone in this heterogeneous party: ... 'Does everyone in the Greens support nonviolence absolutely?' we asked. 'Yes... except the Marxist-oriented Greens.' 'Does everyone in the Greens see the need for the new kind of science and technology you have outlined?' 'Yes ... except the Marxist-oriented Greens. 'Does everyone in the Greens agree that your economic focus should be small-scale, worker-owned business?' 'Yes ... except the Marxist-oriented Greens.' (pp. 20-1)

Spertnak seems to advocate the indigenous Goddess tradition of Marija Gimbutas, according to which the Kurgan people descending from the steppes brought with them patriarchy and sky gods and destroyed the earth-goddess tradition then prevalent throughout Europe.

Spertnak seems to advocate the indigenous Goddess tradition of Marija Gimbutas, according to which the Kurgan people descending from the steppes brought with them patriarchy and sky gods and destroyed the earth-goddess tradition then prevalent throughout Europe. Spertnak herself had written a book on the lost goddesses of early Greece. This of course is the 'Aryan invasion Theory' of Europe that was later relegated to the sidelines of the academic stream in the West. Marxist historian and polymath D. D. Kosambi had attempted a similar model for ancient Indian history.

## DISCOVERING THE DYNAMIC UNIVERSE

Heisenberg was intrigued when Capra showed how 'the principal Sanskrit terms used in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy - brahman, rta, lila, karma, samsara, etc. - had dynamic connotations' (p. 49).

Capra's next important book, ('Uncommon Wisdom,' 1986), was about his encounters with the remarkable personalities who shaped his worldview. In some way, this book is an autobiographical account of the evolution of his worldview. It was in this book that Capra documents Heisenberg being 'influenced, at least at the subconscious level, by Indian philosophy' (p. 43). During his second visit to Heisenberg, Capra shows the venerable old man of physics the manuscript of 'Tao of Physics'. To Capra the 'two basic themes running through all the theories of modern physics, which were also the two basic themes of all mystical traditions' are the 'fundamental interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena and the intrinsically dynamic nature of reality.'

Interestingly Heisenberg, while agreeing with Capra on his interpretation of physics, states that though he was 'well aware of the emphasis on interconnectedness in Eastern thought, however, he had been unaware of the dynamic aspect of the Eastern worldview.'

Even the great minds like Heisenberg, while not unaware of the depth of Indian culture and philosophy, were still susceptible to the stereotype of a passive, fatalistic, mystic India

Heisenberg was intrigued when Capra showed how 'the principal Sanskrit terms used in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy - brahman, rta, lila, karma, samsara, etc. - had dynamic connotations' (p. 49). Even the great minds like Heisenberg, while not unaware of the depth of Indian culture and philosophy, were still susceptible to the stereotype of a passive, fatalistic, mystic India. It is interesting to note that Capra could find dynamism in the terms, especially Karma, for the term has been singled out in academia for stereotyping Indian culture as fatalistic. There is also the encounter with Geoffrey Chew – the physicist who pioneered the S-Matrix theory that today survives largely in string theory. He also recounts how he was shocked to find parallels between his own formulation and the philosophical vision of ancient Buddhists (particularly Mahayana school) when his son in senior high school pointed it out to him (p. 53). Comparing David Bohm, another cult-physicist

who also looked for a deeper order under the quantum realm, Capra emphasizes the influence of J. Krishnamurthy on both David Bohm and Capra himself.

The book wades through the thoughts of anthropologist and cyberneticist Gregory Bateson, whose emphasis was on the connections and circularity of cause-effect relations, particularly in biological systems.

Capra also details his interactions with psychiatrists R. D. Laing and Stanislav Grof. To Capra they signified a shift from Freudian psychology, while sharing a deep interest in Eastern spirituality and a fascination with 'transpersonal' levels of consciousness.

To Capra, Chi is 'a very subtle way to describe the various patterns of flow and fluctuation in the human organism' (p. 160).

What he says for Chi can also apply to Prana as well, and this framework allows those who synthesize Indian knowledge systems with modern science escape the Aristotelian/Cartesian binary trap of vitalism.

In medicine, he emphasizes holistic medicine. When he talks of the Eastern medical systems, it is Chinese medicine and Chi that get mentioned. It is through Margaret Lock, a medical anthropologist, that the physicist gets his knowledge of the Eastern medical system. To Capra, Chi is 'a very subtle way to describe the various patterns of flow and fluctuation in the human organism' (p. 160). What he says for Chi can also apply to Prana as well, and this framework allows those who synthesize Indian knowledge systems with modern science escape the Aristotelian/Cartesian binary trap of vitalism. Another very important person in the book is Hazel Henderson, the author of 'Creating Alternative Futures.' Often described as an iconoclastic economist and futurist, one important aspect of Henderson's thinking is, according to Capra, her prediction that 'energy, so essential to all industrial processes, will become one of the most important variables for measuring economic activities' (p. 236). Here again she has been anticipated by Podolinsky. Henderson today champions the cause of what she calls ethical markets.

'Belonging to the Universe' (1991) is a dialogue between Capra, and David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk. Thomas Matus, another Catholic theologian, was also present during this exchange. Here Capra reveals how he turned away from Catholicism, the religion of his birth,



Vyasa Shrine, Kerala

and ' found very striking parallels between the theories of modern science, particularly physics [which is Capra's field], and the basic ideas in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism.' Then he re-connects with the religion of his birth through David Steindl-Rast. Here one sees how Capra, a lapsed Catholic now returning with an acquired Eastern heritage, struggles to belong to a common human spiritual heritage. He says: "Now Juliette (his daughter) is two, and soon she'll be at the age of stories.

## I want to tell her tales from the Mahabharata

and the other Indian stories, the Buddhist stories, and some of the Chinese stories. But I certainly also want to tell her Christian and Jewish and

Western stories of our spiritual tradition and Sufi stories, too" (p. 4).

However, there are problem areas. For an Indian reading this conversation, he might find how amazingly Capra's questions reflect his own, and some of the answers that Steindl-Rast gives are elusive and not exactly what one can call honest (For an example, see pages 78-9). In hindsight, Capra might not have known then, but both Matus and Steindl-Rast would have known for sure, that Mother Teresa was definitely engaging in conversion activity and that, more often than not, the native spiritual traditions were branded by missionaries as agents of 'oppression, exploitation, human misery,' with secular terms that are the equivalent of 'Satan' and 'Devil' of the bygone medieval and even early colonial ages, when inquisition was openly called Inquisition.



Nevertheless this book is important for Hindu scholars who want to study and have dialogue with Christianity. It reveals the inner churning happening in the Christian psyche - not at the institutional level perhaps but at the individual level. If Hindus want to have a global Dharmic network as they often imagine, then they have to seriously look for networking nodes in such spaces. Capra also provides an insight into how Christianity created a new narrative of its missionary activities – which remain almost the same as it was during the colonial times, yet couched in a new language that even the admirers of Eastern systems in the West would accept.

In *EcoManagement* (coauthored with Ernest Callenbach, Lenore Goldman, Rudiger Lutz and Sandra Marburg, 1993), Capra proposed ‘a conceptual and practical framework for ecologically conscious management.’ In 1995, he co-edited a collection of essays with Gunter Pauli, an eco-entrepreneur, (*Steering Business toward Sustainability*), with essays by likeminded people in economics, business management, and ecology, trying to chart a practical model for sustainable development through private enterprise.

## LIFE AS COGNITION: A NEW SYNTHESIS

‘The Web of Life’ (1996) is equally as important as the ‘Tao of Physics.’ It was a great integration of evolution, ecology, and cybernetics. It was a veritable manifesto of systems biology directed towards the common man as well as the professional biologist who lived compartmentalized lives. The book explains in great detail how the paradigm shift much discussed in physics with the emergence of now a century-old new physics, has also been happening in biology. The concept of biosphere formulated by Edward Suess at the end of nineteenth century was developed by Russian geo-chemist Vernadsky. His conception of biosphere comes closest to the Gaia theory—earth as an evolving living system independently arrived at by James Lovelock, a bio-physicist, and Lynn Margulis, the micro-



The concept of biosphere formulated by Edward Suess at the end of nineteenth century was developed by Russian geo-chemist Vernadsky. His conception of biosphere comes closest to the Gaia theory—earth as an evolving living system independently arrived at by James Lovelock, a bio-physicist, and Lynn Margulis

biologist who also proposed symbiogenesis which was opposed fiercely by orthodox Darwinians but eventually accepted by mainstream biology today. The book conceptualizes evolution more as a cooperative dance rather than a struggle for existence. At another level the book looks at life fundamentally as a process of cognition. This view of life is based on the path-breaking work of two Chilean scientists, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela.

Influenced by Buddhist epistemology, these two biologists see cognition as not representing 'an external reality, but rather specify one through the nervous system's process of circular organization.' Capra quotes Maturana's decisive statement with agreement: "Living systems are cognitive systems, and living as a process is a process of cognition. This statement is valid for all organisms, with and without a nervous system." (pp. 96-97).

Another important view of biological systems developed by Maturana & Varela team is autopoiesis. Capra points out from the original paper of Maturana & Varela that this model enquires not into the 'properties of components,' but studies the 'processes and relations between processes realized through components.' One cannot miss the overtone of Alfred North Whitehead's process view of consciousness here. In Indian culture the autopoiesis is celebrated as Divine and we

have a name for it – Swayambu. Most of the Lingams today enshrined in the grand splendor of stone temples are Swayambu. So are many of the roadside deities under the trees. In South India a self-evolved termite mound is venerated as a living manifestation of Divine Feminine. Autopoiesis can be traced to the non-linear dynamics of Illya Prigogine's dissipative structures. And curiously, he like Capra had used Siva's dance as a metaphor for the basic process of the realm he studied – the molecular dynamics of chemical systems. The book is a veritable odyssey into the billion years of evolution of the phenomenon of life at the planetary level and lays the foundation for the future work of Capra.

## DISCOVERING THE NETWORKS

The next book 'The Hidden Connections' (2002), as the subtitle of the book suggests, aims to integrate the 'the biological, cognitive and social dimensions of life into a science of sustainability'. It speaks of networking at the social level based on the views of life he had presented in his 'Web of Life'. He sees this as already happening. One of the hardest problems in integrating social sciences with the physical sciences is the tendency to 'reduce' social, economic or psychological phenomena into simplistic, sweeping, and hence often wrong as well as dangerous generalizations.

The most glaring examples are social-Darwinism along with many pop bio-psychological explanations which appear in popular magazines.



In this book, Capra provides that much-needed yet elusive connection between social sciences and other physical sciences in a non-reductionist framework that is more importantly also workable and can have practical applications in community welfare and sustainable development without compromising the freedom that a market economy provides. From the molecular communications networks slowly evolving in the proto-cells of the primeval ocean to the digital social networks connecting the planet, Capra charts out a path for sustainable development by bringing to notice connecting strands of life, cognition, nature and community which have hitherto gone unnoticed.

## TO SCIENCE THROUGH ART: DA VINCI AS SYSTEMS THINKER

The next two books review the science of Leonardo da Vinci and the relevance of his science to

the present evolution of systems science. Leonardo was known more as an artist and technological innovator than as a scientist. For Capra, Leonardo arrived at science through art and that makes all the difference. Thus he avoided the pitfalls of reductionism we encounter in Newton, Galileo and Bacon. In 'The Science of Leonardo' (2007), Capra reveals many interesting dimensions of Leonardo's worldview that far exceeded his own time. He was the first systems thinker according to Capra. Leonardo envisioned rivers as almost beings with life. In planning any city, he would make the river an integral part of the city landscape – almost a biological integration. He was asked to build Cathedrals and he designed "temples". His architecture, his town planning, and his view of nature – all these emerged from his holistic understanding of nature. Capra shares how he arrived at this vision of Leonardo da Vinci:

Europe unfortunately never adapted Leonardo's ideas for city planning. However, centuries later another European, a Scot, would discover a similar organic city planning in another civilization.

In the planning of the temple cities of South India, Patrick Geddes saw an integration of the social life and cultural life cycle of the people that was unheard of in the West.

As I gazed at those magnificent drawings juxtaposing, often on the same page, architecture and human anatomy, turbulent water and turbulent air, water vortices, the flow of human hair and the growth patterns of grasses, I realized that Leonardo's systematic studies of living and nonliving forms amounted to a science of quality and wholeness that was fundamentally different from the mechanistic science of Galileo and Newton (Preface, XVIII).

Capra sees in the painter of *The Last Supper* "a systemic thinker, ecologist, and complexity theorist; a scientist and artist with a deep reverence for all life, and as a man with a strong desire to work for the benefit of humanity." Clearly in the centuries that followed Leonardo, the science he envisioned was lost to the science of Newton, Bacon and Descartes. One interesting aspect of Leonardo is his novel approach to city planning. Capra points out:

It is clear from Leonardo's notes that he saw the city as a kind of living organism in which people, material goods, food, water, and waste needed to move and flow with ease for the city to remain healthy (p. 58).

Europe unfortunately never adapted Leonardo's ideas for city planning. However, centuries later another European, a Scot, would discover a similar organic city planning in another civilization. In the planning of the temple cities of South India, Patrick Geddes saw an integration of the social life and cultural life cycle of the people that was unheard of in the West. According to Leonardo, if one wants to change the course of a river for human purposes then it should be done gently through such sustainable technologies like small dams. He wrote: "A river, to be diverted from one place to another, should be coaxed and not coerced with violence" (p. 263).

An Indian mind cannot but remember the legend of young Sankara singing and appealing the Purna River to change its course. Buried in

this legend of Sankara is perhaps a poetic invitation for the science of sustainable water management.

According to Capra, Leonardo developed an empirical method. The Church that considered Aristotelian philosophy its theological bedrock viewed experimental science with suspicion. But da Vinci broke with that tradition.

In *Learning from Leonardo* (2013) Capra studies the notebooks of Leonardo, and the book provides a new approach to the history of science. With a detailed timeline of milestones in science from the time of Leonardo (16<sup>th</sup> century) onwards into twentieth century, Capra purports to show how the artist anticipated or even independently discovered many of the later developments of science. According to Capra, Leonardo developed an empirical method. The Church that considered Aristotelian philosophy its theological bedrock viewed experimental science with suspicion. But da Vinci broke with that tradition. Capra claims:

One hundred years before Galileo Galilei and Francis Bacon, Leonardo single-handedly developed a new empirical approach to science, involving the systematic observation of nature, logical reasoning, and some mathematical formulations—the main characteristics of what is known today as the scientific method (p. 5).

In almost every field from mechanics to ecology – some of these disciplines not even imagined at his time - Leonardo through observation, experimentation and contemplation - had made a remarkable addition to human knowledge. For example, Capra points out:

“Leonardo did not pursue science and engineering to dominate nature, as Francis Bacon would advocate a century later.”

Leonardo understood that these cycles of growth, decay, and renewal are linked to the cycles of life and death of individual organisms: Our life is made by the death of others. In dead matter insensible life remains, which, reunited to the stomachs of living beings, resumes sensual and intellectual life. . . Man and the animals are really the passage and conduit of food (p. 282).

This remarkable insight according to Capra anticipates the concept of food chains and food cycles that was developed by Charles Elton almost four centuries later in 1927. Finally Capra distinguishes the basic difference between the science of Leonardo and the science of Francis

Bacon: “Leonardo did not pursue science and engineering to dominate nature, as Francis Bacon would advocate a century later.” Leonardo had a ‘deep respect for life, a special compassion for animals, and great awe and reverence for nature’s complexity and abundance.’ If this assessment of Leonardo by Capra makes the artist sound like a Jain born in late medieval Italy, check this statement by Leonardo himself “One who does not respect life does not deserve it.” Does it not reflect the Jain dictum, ‘Live and let live?’

The book is actually the encapsulation of the entire pilgrimage of exploration that Capra undertook from the dance of Siva to the drawings of Leonardo.

The book is of immense relevance to India, a developing nation with rural communities that are almost lost in the era of globalization with a skewed playing field.

## A LIFE IN HOLISTIC DIALOGUE

The most recent work of Dr. Capra is ‘A Systems View of Life – A Unified Vision,’ coauthored with biochemist Pier Luigi Luisi. Published by Cambridge University Press in 2014, the book is intended to serve as a text book for students as well as the general reader who want to study sustainable development integrating the physical, biological, cognitive, ecological, and social dimensions. In the first part Capra explores the rise of mechanistic world-view and in the second part the emergence of systems thinking. The third part studies the new concept of life and the fourth is about sustaining the web of life even as human societies develop. The book is actually the encapsulation of the entire pilgrimage of exploration that Capra undertook from the dance of Siva to the drawings of Leonardo. The book is of immense relevance to India, a developing nation with rural communities that are almost lost in the era of globalization with a skewed playing field.

With eco-conflicts set to escalate in the future and divisive forces try to exploit them in both sides of the left-right fence, the worldview of Capra provides a holistic alternative. Preservation of local knowledge systems, creating networks of green innovators and eco-entrepreneurs at the local level and globally networking them – all these are possibilities envisioned in Capra’s worldview. While most leftwing eco-militants devalue local spiritual and cultural elements, Capra has also brought out a powerful reading of the Eastern spiritual symbols in the light of modern science. For sustainable development, we ultimately need a drastic change in the educational system. Capra, though not explicitly or perhaps even intentionally, has provided a Dharmic framework, or at least



Siva at Kailashnath Temple, Ellora

has sown the seeds for developing a broader inter-disciplinary science of sustainable development with a Dharmic framework. Using his pioneering works spanning a lifetime, each native culture and tradition can chart out a spiritual, holistic pathway to sustainable development. After all, the native traditions which are struggling for their very survival on a planet dominated and to a significant extent devastated by the supremacy and expansionism of Abrahamic values, can now knowledge-network themselves with mutual spiritual validation to become important vehicles for the sustainable development and preservation of the web of life. In this they may even transform the expansionist and monocultural tendencies in the Abrahamic value system.



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Ellora

# VEDANTA IS SELF STUDY

By Chris Almond

For many of today's meditators, yogis, and devotees there is an unfortunate misunderstanding about the nature of vedantic self-inquiry that hinders access to some of the most profound discoveries in our tradition. The typical thinking among this group is that study or intellectual knowledge of a sacred text is a hindrance to spiritual growth because it interferes with one's meditation or disturbs the mind's search for special experiences by promoting intellectual activity. To back this idea, people will smartly cite traditional sources.

*“This Atman cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, or by intelligence, or by much hearing of sacred books.....” Kathopanishad 2.23*

Many seem to think this verse negates any kind of approach to liberation that involves studying the traditional texts or using the intellect. It is not quite so simple, but it does tell those of us who are committed to shruti something very important. It tells us that merely studying, reading or hearing a sacred text is insufficient to gaining the highest goal of life. So this creates a couple of interesting questions. If studying the scripture alone doesn't work, for what purpose do we need the Vedic texts? And what is the role of the intellect here since it seems to be saying that Atman can't be reached through intellectual reasoning?

A person who is committed to using vedanta to grow understands well that when a text is given by the teacher, it is not to learn the words themselves, it is for what the words have to say about you.

What exactly does the text reveal about you that you don't know and can't discover conventionally? What does it reveal about your world? What does it reveal about your own experience? The text in this way is like a perfect mirror for yourself. As a result of this, when you explore the question 'who am I?' you have some means to answer which is not based on the intellect's prior misunderstandings.

As the teacher handles the words of upanishads with great care, a picture begins to emerge about the nature of what you are and what causes you to suffer. Though the truth of yourself is quite simple, maybe the simplest thing that can be imagined, ignorance itself is quite complex. Thus the whole methodology of vedanta is brought in.

The word 'upanishad' reveals its own methods. This definition is from the introduction to Shankara's Kathopanishad Bhashya.

## UPANISHAD

***Upa* - means that which is not remote, that which is always near - This means atma.**

***Ni* - means Nischayena - Definiteness, that which is well ascertained, or a guarantee of effectiveness of the material to work for those who are qualified.**

***Sad* - Root verb has three meanings from dhatupada:**

**1) *viśaraṇa* - Destroying Ignorance**

**2) *gati* or *gamanam* - Going to knowledge**

**3) *avasādanam* - Wearing out samsara**

For the most part, what vedanta does is remove false associations which when present do not allow us to see what we are - Upa, that non-remote self which is you/atman. It does this through various teaching models such as panca kosha prakriya given originally in Taitryopanishad. This model shows us 5 categories of experience that we falsely associate with 'I' and one by one negates the idea that they are the self. This negation is largely based on the temporary nature of each class of experience. For example, anandamaya is the confusion that I am identified with the one who experiences temporary joy. We do this when we see a loved one, laugh or enjoy an object. Simply stated, we are not that experiencer of joy any more than we are the temporary experiencer of sorrow. We are not that which comes and goes.



Udaigiri Caves

## INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE

The mistake people make with applying these teachings is that they learn the model as intellectual knowledge and fail to apply the teaching to their experience of temporality at each level.

As a result, they take the model to be a description of reality instead of an effort to remove those false associations with 'I.'

We are worse off than when we started because now we think somehow we have all these koshas. Disaster! This is what the Kathopanishad is warning us about in telling us not to take this knowledge as mere book learning. It is not there to create other realities for you. It is there to remove your association with suffering which comes from associating 'I' with temporary experiences.

This is what the Kathopanishad is warning us about in telling us not to take this knowledge as mere book learning. It is not there to create other realities for you. It is there to remove your association with suffering which comes from associating 'I' with temporary experiences.



Khajuraho

## MOKSHA

If this teaching has been understood and applied to removing false understandings of experience after MUCH more exposure like this, your sense of suffering will start to measurably decline. Eventually the guidance of the teacher will lead to the total removal of self-ignorance-*viśaraṇa*. This removal uncovers the unlimited nature of 'I' bringing one clear, error free knowledge of the self-brahmagamanam. That knowledge reveals the 'you' which never grows old, changes, dies, or suffers. That is liberation or moksha. Importantly, this does take some substantial time, almost like raising a child, but there are rewards along the way.

Regarding the rewards, my teachers, backed by Gaudapadacarya's Mandukya Karika, have said that liberation from this suffering is not a one time event. It is an observable process which proves itself by reducing suffering first a little, then a lot, then completely. This confirmable process is the wearing out of samsara or *avasādanam*. I can tell you personally, it works to this extent. But, it does require a lot of persistence, effort, and ulti-

mately understanding. What I like about this approach is the fact that it proves itself over time. It also gives some immediate pragmatic results that can be enjoyed. Like windshield wipers on a car, the teachings given by guru will remove the rainwater of ignorance received in each experience and allow you to see the vision of yourself clearly. These metaphorical wipers require more effort in the beginning and become more spontaneously active over time.

There is one other warning given in the tradition that should be brought out here as to why *vedanta* doesn't work sometimes. In fact, this was referenced in the Ni definition. The Ni piece is saying that if you are qualified, this exposure to guru's handling of *shruti* will work. The very next verse in *Kathopanishad* states:

*He who has not first turned away from wrong deeds (adharmā), who is not tranquil and subdued and whose mind is not at peace, cannot discover Atman. It is realized only through the Knowledge of Reality' Kathopanishad 2-24*

## DEVOTION

Devotion in fact is so important that there is never a time you are not a devotee.

If this is not the case, the knowledge will not work.

Many modern non-dualist thinkers believe that this self-knowledge can be given and retained without really developing the mind in meditation or devotion. Devotion in fact is so important that there is never a time you are not a devotee. If this is not the case, the knowledge will not work. The mind will definitely not be able to retain this knowledge unless it is well trained in these practices. The guru plants the seed of knowledge and the student must protect the soil of the mind through devotion and constant relationship to all experience as ishvara.

Perhaps nothing is more important however than the student's relationship with the teacher/guru. It can not be emphasized enough that the student needs a teacher. A book will not do. Can you get self knowledge without having a teacher? It is like asking can you learn to play a Mozart piano Concerto without a teacher. Maybe, who knows, if you were a pianist in a former life even playing the piece through once could do it. I have seen it with very small children who could play better than most adults. If you are not a prodigy however, and I would just say that is virtually all of us, a teacher should be there because this requires a lot of effort and a lot of understanding. And why go it alone? This knowledge is freely given. Ultimately, there is no difference between the guru and the student.

*“Though appearing different from himself, the light of the guru leads the student to one-ness with himself, through reasoning based on vedanta, endowed with dispassion and discernment.” - Bodhasara of Narahari*



For the past 5 years, Chris and his wife Vivian have pursued firm self-knowledge using the teaching methodology of advaita vedanta under the personal guidance of Swamini Svatmavidyananda and Swami Tadatmananda, both disciples of Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati. This is a Shankara parampara whose knowledge is based on the teaching of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras. If there is anything of value in what is written, it comes from these teachers and parampara alone. In the spirit of humility, it is hoped these teachings can help remove obstacles to anyone wishing to pursue spiritual growth. This writing is introductory in character and should be followed up within an established guru-shishya parampara. Chris resides in the Washington D.C. area where he teaches piano professionally.



Tree shrine at Varanasi

# YOGA AND FOUR AIMS OF LIFE

By Pankaj Seth

In the context of the Indian civilization Yoga is a path to Moksha, or Self realization. Moksha is itself one of the four aims of life, along with Dharma/Virtue, Artha/Prosperity and Kama/Enjoyment.

## THE FOUR AIMS OF LIFE

The Purusharthas, or 'The four aims of Life' is the over arching organizational scheme in Indic thought. There are teachings and texts for each of the four aims, such as the the Arthashastra, a voluminous text on statecraft and worldly wisdom, the Kama Sutra, Dharmashastras like the great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, and Mokshasashttras like the Yoga Sutra. Depending on aptitude, individuals may be strongly inclined towards one or more of the aims at different times in their lives. Individuality is key here as not all humans will take the same path, and this makes for the great diversity seen in India within the worldly and spiritual spheres.

## SELF REALIZATION

The theme of Yoga and self-realization is found in the earliest Indic texts, the Vedas and Upanishads and this becomes codified as the Yoga Sutra about 2000 years ago, giving a well defined path and practices. Other, related paths were also developed and codified over this time, like Buddhism, Jainism, and later Tantra.

In the Bhagavad Gita different types of Yoga are mentioned, such as Karma Yoga (service), Bhakti Yoga (devotion) and Janana Yoga (knowledge), once again giving individuals a choice according to their aptitude.

The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali contains an 8-fold path, beginning with ethical considerations for the aspirant, and describes a stepwise praxis leading to meditation. This text does not list postures other than the seated meditation pose and the mention of postures familiar today occurs in later Yoga texts as an assistance to the practise of meditation.

## THE LIMITS OF THOUGHT

The Yoga Sutra begins with “The aim of Yoga is to still and thereby transcend thought.”

The Mundaka Upanishad, centuries before the Yoga Sutra gives a very good understanding of why this would be stated in saying “Self knowledge is of two kinds, historical and timeless. And thought cannot reach the timeless.” Therefore, Yoga/Meditation.

Thought in trying to derive ultimate self- knowledge seeks through constructing cause- effect

chains the absolute beginning of the world, of which the individual is a part. Without knowing how it all began one’s self knowledge remains partial. But thought cannot reach what it frames as the first cause, its attempts being similar to chasing the horizon and which can never be reached. Therefore the transcending of thought is desired because it is too limited an approach to self-knowledge. In this regard, the physicist David Bohm once asked, “If thought is only part of the whole, can it ever contain the whole?”

## CONSCIOUSNESS

In the Yoga tradition consciousness is understood as the deepest aspect of reality, on which all sensory and cognitive phenomena depend, including the body. If consciousness were merely an historically arisen attribute of matter then the exploration of consciousness could not lead to an ultimate knowledge as the Yoga tradition asserts.

The Yoga tradition is opposed to the philosophy of Materialism, and Theism, both of which do take seriously the idea of ‘the first cause’, the former mathematizing it as ‘the big bang’ and the latter anthropomorphizing as ‘God’. The idea of God found in traditional Western theology, as the Creator apart from its creation does not exist in the Indian approach. In fact, the text ‘Yoga Vasishta’ says “If this God is truly the ordainer of everything in this world, of what meaning is any action?”. Due to this, there is nowadays academic criticism of using the words ‘Religion’ and ‘God’ in talking about what in India is called ‘Dharma’. Dharma is not the same as Religion.

## TWO KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Dharmic epistemology sees two kinds of knowledge, Gyana and Vigyana. Vigyana is akin to Science, the method of measurement, thought and since it relies upon causality but invariably gets stuck at the 'first cause' it is understood as useful but limited.

While Vigyana is divided or dualistic knowledge, Gyana is non-dual knowledge, transcendent of measurement and thought and this is the goal of meditation in Yoga.

## SELF

It is easy to see that thought encounters immeasurability when it reaches for the first cause. The Upanishads say that three things are beyond measure, Atma/Self, Jnana/ Consciousness and Brahman/Totality. These are all beyond measure because they are not external objects, they are all self. One cannot step outside of oneself, nor awareness, nor the totality. Knowledge of what is beyond measure can only be in the form of self-knowledge.

Meditative states if deep enough, give rise to a visionary self knowledge that Yoga points to, and the Chandodya Upanishad speaks of as "Tat Tvam Asi", meaning "This is you." You are the universe looking at itself.



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*"The Indian term yoga is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root yuj, 'to link, join, or unite,' which is related etymologically to 'yoke,' a yoke of oxen, and is in sense analogous to the word 'religion' (Latin re-ligio), 'to link back, or bind.' Man, the creature, is by religion bound back to God. However, religion, religio, refers to a linking historically conditioned by way of a covenant, sacrament, or Quran, whereas yoga is the psychological linking of the mind to that superordinated principle 'by which the mind knows.' Furthermore, in yoga what is linked is finally the self to itself, consciousness to consciousness; for what had seemed, through māyā, to be two are in reality not so; whereas in religion what are linked are God and man, which are not the same."*

**Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God, Vol. III: Oriental Mythology**



Vyasa shrine, Kerala

## THE GITA AND ME

By Philip Goldberg

I first became aware of the Bhagavad Gita in the mid-1960s. I was in college then, and taking my first tentative steps onto the spiritual path that would virtually define my life ever since. Instead of my assigned textbooks, which not only bored me but irritated me with their lack of profundity, I was reading about Eastern philosophy, mostly from secondary sources. Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist ideas had just entered the counterculture bloodstream, and it seemed that every author and scholar I admired—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell, Alan Watts, J.D. Salinger—wrote with great admiration of the Gita.

Thoreau apparently read it every day of his famous retreat on Walden Pond: “In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita ... in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seems puny and trivial.” The other respected thinkers were equally appreciative, albeit less romantically effusive in their praise. Even the renowned physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer had quoted the Gita, most famously when the first atomic bomb exploded in the New Mexico desert, but also at President Franklin Roosevelt’s memorial service. With endorsements like that, and the sublime passages the authors extracted from the Gita itself, I had to get myself a copy.

I couldn't find one. None of the bookstores I usually frequented carried it—and this was in New York City! But it was nearly half a century ago, when no one dreamed of having access to millions of books with a few taps on a keyboard. I eventually found a copy at Weiser Antiquarian Books on lower Broadway, which is known as “the oldest occult bookstore in the United States.” I purchased the translation and commentary by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood because I recognized the latter as a celebrated writer of fiction. I remember being shocked by how slim the volume was, having assumed that a text that enchanted famous intellectuals would be hundreds of pages long. Grateful that it was so lean (and cheap, at 95 cents), I read it start to finish that evening.

It was mind-bogglingly new and heartwarmingly familiar at the same time, as if I were being fed the same revelations I'd imbibed in the past and forgotten. I went to bed knowing my life would never be the same. And it was not. Because Swami Prabhavananda was in the lineage of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and Isherwood was his disciple at the Los Angeles Vedanta Society, their Gita quickly led me to the other books published by the Vedanta Press and, eventually, to the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras, some of Adi Shankaracharya's works and other treasures of Sanatana Dharma.

It also led to my first yoga class, in an apartment on West End Avenue, led by a regal Indian man whom, I realized a few years later, was none other than Swami Satchidananda, the “Woodstock guru.” It led as well to my taking up Tran-

scendental Meditation in 1968, and to teacher training two years later with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, whose Gita I read repeatedly (only chapters one through six; sadly, he never published seven through eighteen).

My first Gita, with its tattered cover, torn and yellowed pages, underlined passages and scribbled-in margins, sits on a shelf with a dozen other translations and commentaries. I compare them whenever an opportunity arises, their nuanced differences never failing to intrigue me and the verses themselves never failing to illuminate and inspire.

I know of no other text, sacred or secular, that packs so much wisdom into so few words and still maintains a sense of narrative movement.

## AMERICAN VEDA

I interviewed more than three hundred people for my book, *American Veda*, and over the years I've had countless conversations about spirituality with yoga practitioners, meditators, devotees of various gurus, spiritual independents, secularists and dedicated adherents of every faith tradition. It is astonishing how many of those diverse seekers of truth have been influenced by the Gita. There seems to be something in it for everyone, regardless of their religious orientation. For some it is a holy text, on a par with what the New Testament is to Christians, the Hebrew Bible is to Jews and the Koran is to Muslims. For others, it is a philosophical treatise, or a practical guide-



Khajuraho

book for living, a concise summary of yogic principles or simply something they're required to read in a comparative religion class. Like every great book, its meaning and impact depends upon the reader, and I've always loved the fact that Hindus have, for centuries, relished debate over differences in interpretation without descending into factionalism or sectarian violence. That such antagonism seems unthinkable says a great deal about the universality of the Gita and the inherent pluralism of the Vedic tradition from which it springs.

In fact, that generosity of spirit, with its acknowledgement of individual pathways within a framework of unifying Oneness, is one reason the Gita captured the hearts and minds of Westerners like me.

I have noticed over the years that people tend to memorize or paraphrase different passages, depending on their own personalities, preferences and spiritual orientations. Devotees with their eyes on the ultimate prize remember descriptions of moksha (liberation). Those with a devotional bent reference bhakti verses. Intellectual types cite jnana passages or the many illuminating and provocative philosophical precepts. Karma yogis might quote the verse about nonattachment to the fruits of action.

For me, the child of free-thinking, non-religious parents, who became a political activist and charter member of the anti-authoritarian Sixties, two themes were of central importance, and I memorized the relevant Gita verses—not intentionally, but as a byproduct of reading them so often. One was “Established in yoga, perform action”

(2:48), which conveys the message that unitive consciousness is not just for ascetics but is a prerequisite for a purposeful life in the world. That single sentence has remained with me, as call to daily sadhana, for all the subsequent decades.

The other verse was 3:35: “Because one can perform it, one’s own dharma, though lesser in merit, is better than the dharma of another. Better is death in one’s own dharma; the dharma of another brings danger.” I was part of a generation for whom personal authenticity was supreme and challenging tradition, conventional wisdom and authority figures was practically a moral imperative. In contrast to the strict codes of the Abrahamic religions—and the moralizing, shaming and threatening that often accompanied them—the Gita told me that being true to myself was not only permissible on the spiritual path, it was absolutely essential. It was, in fact, an imperative. This meant a great deal to someone who was allergic to both the religious and secular brands of conformity and biologically incapable of believing in something just because an authority figure told me to.

## FREEDOM

Whereas, at the time, religion to me stood for constraint and repression, the Gita sang of that most American of values: freedom. The entire tone, purpose and pedagogy rang with the chimes of freedom flashing, to cite a Bob Dylan lyric of the time: freedom of inquiry, freedom of choice, freedom of pathway, freedom from suffering, freedom from ignorance, freedom from illusion, free-

dom from duality and above all the freedom of liberated consciousness.

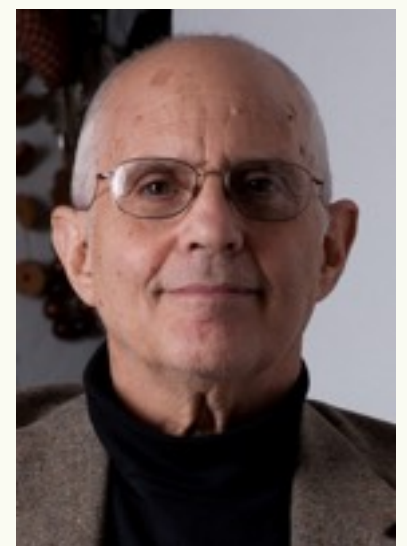
I do not expect to come close to reading all the books I want to read in this lifetime. I will never penetrate all the Vedic literature I’d like to study. But I know I’ll return to the Gita again and again, because every time I do I discover something new. At the risk of closing with a cliché, it is a gift that keeps on giving.

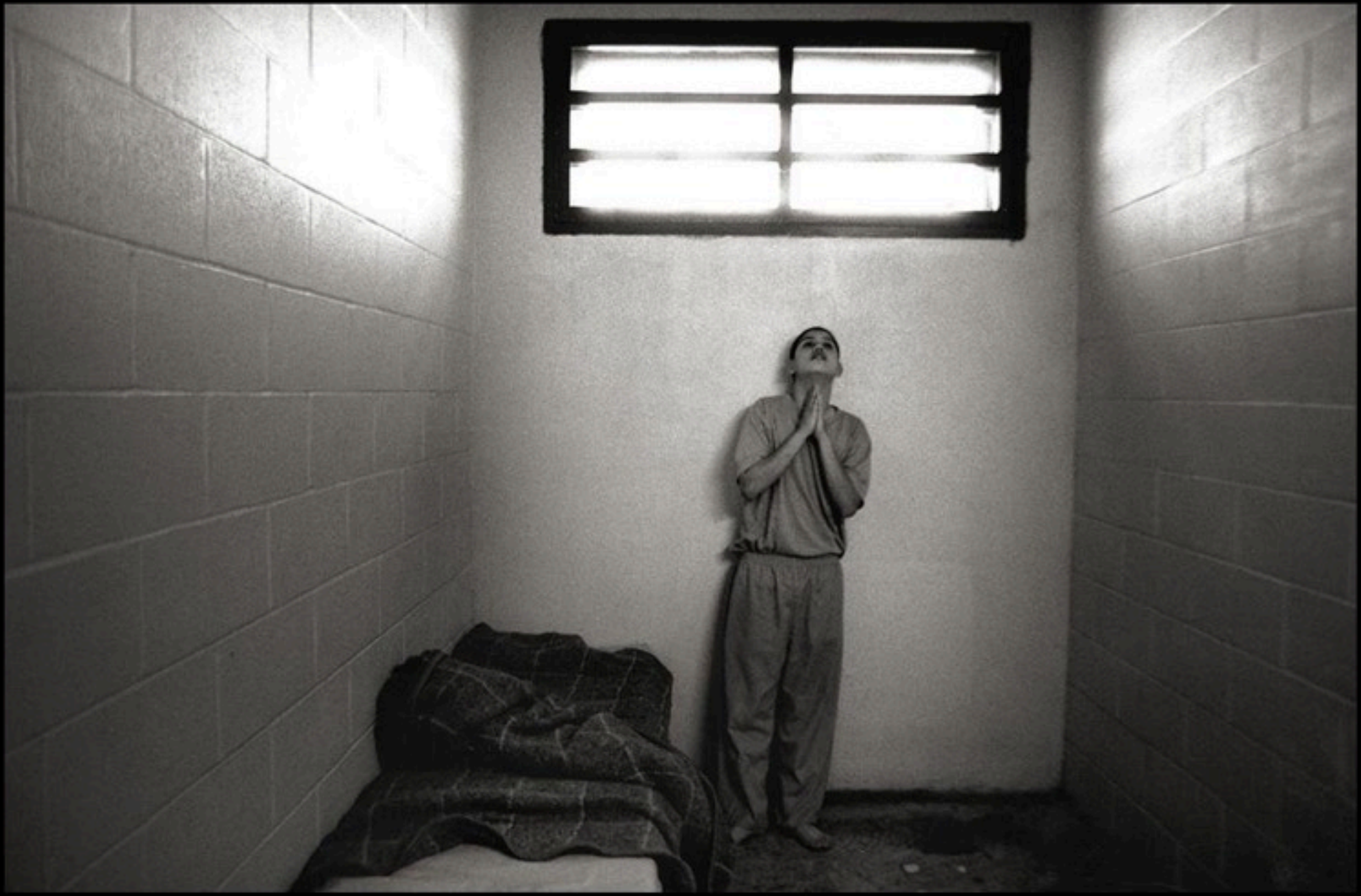
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Philip Goldberg has been studying India’s spiritual traditions for more than 45 years, as a practitioner, teacher and writer. An Interfaith Minister, meditation teacher and spiritual counselor, he is a skilled speaker who has lectured and taught workshops throughout the country and in India. He is the author of numerous books, most recently *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation, How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, which was named one of the top ten religion books of 2010 by Huffington Post and the American Library Association. He blogs regularly on the Huffington Post and Elephant Journal.

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## INTERVIEW | ANNEKE LUCAS

By Vikram Zutshi

**Sutra Journal:** What is the Liberation Prison Yoga project? Could you please explain how it came about?

**Anneke Lucas:** Liberation Prison Yoga is a non-profit organization that brings trauma-informed yoga to incarcerated populations, and trains yoga instructors to serve inside prisons.

In 2010, James Fox, the founder of the Prison Yoga Project, asked me to find a space in New York so that he could train his yoga teachers. I did, and feeling responsible for the space, I ended up helping to organize the training. By the end, the participants looked to me for guidance as to the next steps might be. By then I knew there was no organized effort in New York to help yoga teachers go into the prisons, so I began teaching incarcerated women at women who could then go to Bayview Correctional and men at Rikers, and brought in others who had trained with Fox. This became the Prison Yoga Project New York, which grew very quickly, serving six facilities. Running the programs became a full-time volunteer job, so I started Liberation Prison Yoga in 2014.

**Sutra Journal:** Where and when did you first encounter or discover Yoga? Can you tell us a little bit about your background, early experiences? How has Yoga changed something in you, or allowed you to see the world in a different way, perhaps?

**Anneke Lucas:** In 1993, living in Los Angeles, I read Autobiography of a Yogi and started attending meditations and services in temples that the author, Paramahansa Yogananda, had built there.

As a child, I had experienced extreme abuse, trafficked in a murderous pedophile ring in Belgium. During those years I had often felt a loving presence that seemed to guide me.

As a child, I had experienced extreme abuse, trafficked in a murderous pedophile ring in Belgium. During those years I had often felt a loving presence that seemed to guide me. I had often sat cross-legged with closed eyes, falling into spontaneous meditation without knowing what it was. Meditation came naturally to me, and from 1993 on I learned the techniques that Yogananda came to teach in the West. Also in 1993, I took my first yoga class in Los Angeles.

I had often sat cross-legged with closed eyes, falling into spontaneous meditation without knowing what it was. Meditation came naturally to me, and from 1993 on I learned the techniques that Yogananda came to teach in the West.

In my late teens, before I left Belgium, I had taken stretching and strengthening classes in a dance studio, without being interested in dance. I liked the movements and continued to practice those exercises on my own after I moved out of the country. I had sustained severe injuries being tortured just before being rescued from the network at the age of eleven. I walked purposefully, to hide a limp from being stabbed in the back of my left knee. I was sworn to secrecy about anything regarding the network, and either way, I felt much too ashamed to ever speak up about how I received the injury, afflicted by a massive guilt complex in trying to make sense of the abuse.

At school, I had done all sports offered, and noticed that athletics helped me to walk without limping. When I began doing yoga, I realized the dancer's exercises had been the closest I had found to yoga; it was as though I had been looking for a yoga practice my whole life. The yoga, especially ashtanga, was the miracle cure that enabled me to work through all the issues that arose from the past injuries, and maintain an extra healthy, youthful body.

**Sutra Journal:** What attracted you to working in prisons? What are your observations on the effects of Yoga after working many years with traumatized individuals and/or sex trafficking survivors?

**Anneke Lucas:** I didn't mean to go teach yoga in prisons, but the moment I set foot inside, I felt right at home. I was once a prisoner too. I also have been treated as the lowest of the low. I have also been treated as though I were evil.



I went in expecting to find psychopaths, like the adults of my past, and instead found sweet, humble women and men who were open and full of grace. The connection I make with prisoners fills my heart with awe and gratitude.

I went in to share love and receive back so much more than I can ever give. I found pieces of my own past inside the prisons, finally meeting others who have survived similar degrees of vio-

lence and personal devastation. I feel, for the first time in my life, really useful, knowing that the healing I've been privileged to enjoy brings hope to others struggling with the effects of abuse.

The yoga we bring inside the prisons is trauma-informed. The most important aspect of this is the human connection, so whatever the class is going to look like, we are there mostly to be present for our students. I've witnessed people coming out of deep isolation, able to share their pain in the group, followed by relief, upliftment, and support from the others.

In jail, we don't really work with people for long periods of time, but I have witnessed moments of incredible beauty. Sometimes we can just help to lighten someone's load for a moment, and help them know that they can be heard, and understood – that there is hope.







Students have reported that they felt they were changing because of the groups, that they were able to create space for their feelings, and as a result could muster the will to stop with drugs, which are of course available inside. I've heard powerful reports. In some instances I've been able to stay connected with students after they were released from jail, and am witness to their continued growth in their circumstances that embrace yoga as a living philosophy – not necessarily the physical practice.

Some of our students in prison, where our programs are more focused on trauma-informed hatha yoga, have found miraculous improvements in serious conditions, like the woman who had had a botched operation on her knee and walked with two canes when she first came to class.

She immediately felt that yoga was helping her, then started walking with one cane, then none, and she continues to come to class every week. More often we hear about mental benefits.





We want to make sure we observe our own mental processes carefully, inside and out, so as to be fully present for the students. We do try to foster the idea of free choice through the asanas – that within each pose, each moment, there is a choice

Students report they can accept themselves better now, and that they are better able to cope with prison life. Some students practice yoga every day in their cell.

**Sutra Journal:** What is your understanding of the word 'Yoga'? Do you delve into the deeper aspects of the Yoga Sutras or other spiritual texts? How has your personal practice evolved over the years?

**Anneke Lucas:** Yoga informs my life, and affects every single aspect. Paramahansa Yogananda has written extensive commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, and I am well aware that the field of Kurukshetra is before me every moment of my life, and that I have free will.

I have studied the Yoga Sutras and the Sutras of the Shankya system, but I and the other teachers at Liberation Prison Yoga do not teach any philosophy unless we get specific questions – and that happens sometimes. What we do as teachers is make sure that we are mindful of the Yamas and Niyamas in our own lives and as we enter the prison.

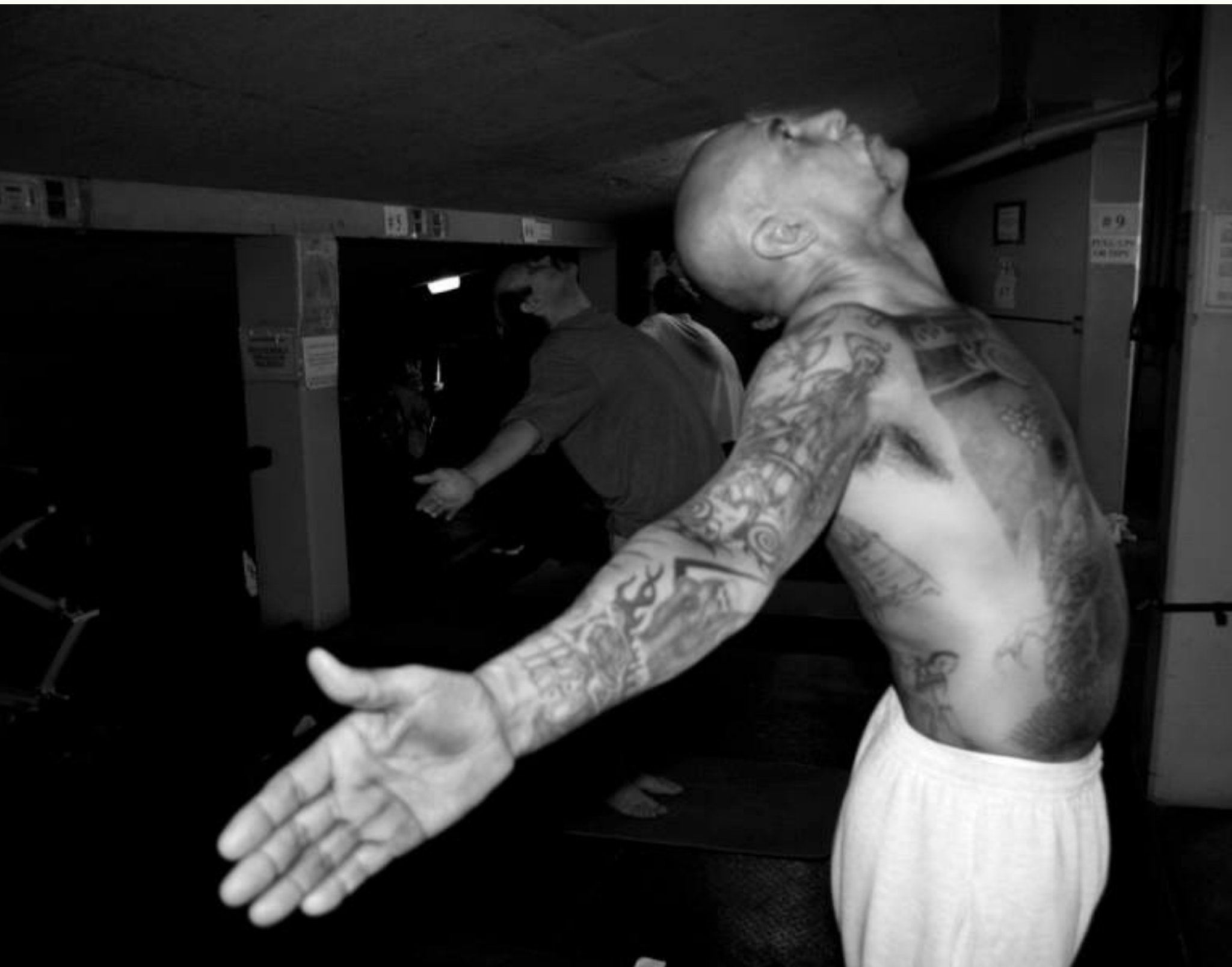
We want to make sure we observe our own mental processes carefully, inside and out, so as to be fully present for the students. We do try to foster the idea of free choice through the asanas – that within each pose, each moment, there is a choice – i.e. how much or how little sensation to experience, and we stress that there are no wrong choices, no wrong thoughts.

We are not there to teach, but to share and to serve. We are not there to rehabilitate, but to help students discover that they are already perfect.

When I started meditation and yoga in 1993, the two were completely separate. I thought of the meditation as the real yoga, and the physical yoga as physical therapy. Bringing the yoga inside the prisons has finally helped me to combine the two, where the physical practice has its part within the much greater scope of the system.

In developing programs and teaching others, I learned to apply these techniques to help myself. Mindfulness especially, has really helped me to remain conscious of myself, and introspect.

I have heard my own message of self-acceptance, and have been able to allow my anger to exist. I can observe my impulse to unleash it, and have worked to control that impulse with the very tools I teach. Service has helped me grow tremendously, and it remains the key to my happiness.





**Sutra Journal:** Do you have any advice for people who may be going through an overwhelming personal crisis in their lives? How did you put the past behind you? How were you able to live positively?

**Anneke Lucas:** Overwhelming personal crises are tremendous opportunities for spiritual growth. Is there anything that matters more than the spiritual life, in the end? We want to be prepared for death – and I don't mean that in a morbid way, but with the knowledge that life doesn't end when we leave the physical body. All the great tests in life help us to know more deeply that we are not the body, and that the more we realize this, the stronger we are. If we were to trace every fear that we have down to its root, we'd find that it is some variation on the fear of death – of our own or our loved one's bodies. The awareness that life is a school, and that the greater the

lesson, the greater the resultant benefit -- we need to be reminded of this when the struggle seems too great to bear.

We can't judge anyone's life from the outside. The Holocaust, for example, had many people believe that God cannot exist. But on a personal level, we have no idea what each person who died or lived through this experience went through. My childhood experience was of that magnitude, and I can honestly say that I would not want it to be different, because the insights I have received give me everything I needed for my particular spiritual journey.

I'm not saying that I would wish anyone else to go through the suffering I went through, including my abusers, but that we can only speak for ourselves.



Spiritual readings and expressions of the pain through poetry, journaling, or whatever creative means best suit the individual, and support from others through therapy or 12-step groups or other groups, are all helpful. There are so many resources available now. We do need to honor that the feelings, the grief, the anger, and so forth, all need room for safe expression, and that we don't want to use the resources and helpful tools as buffers to prevent the feelings from being felt.

There is no spiritual bypass. It's a process, and we can do whatever we need to do to remind us of its eventual benefit – even if that seems impossible in the moment. If we can embrace the challenge and truly heal, we will never have to go through that particular suffering again. That's the karmic law.

This to me is why I feel I've met so many beautiful, graceful, spiritual guides in jail and prison – people who have fully embraced their journey, who have found gratitude and true humility in the most horrifying conditions – mostly unrecognized by the world.



Yoga class at San Quentin taught by Anneke Lucas, hosted by the Prison Yoga Project.

**Sutra Journal:** What is it about yoga that makes it specially suitable for trauma, depression, emotional crises, personal loss, and so on? Most of us go through a myriad of issues in our daily lives, some worse than others. How does this practice differ from a health and fitness routine?

**Anneke Lucas:** Yoga itself offers the broadest possible context for suffering, which is very helpful when you're in the midst of it. The physical yoga practice has many recorded mental health benefits, as medical and academic studies have shown.

The only reason trauma-informed yoga is more helpful is because of its approach. It is the same, physical, yoga practice offered in a kind, respectful, accessible way, and maximized so that the participant can take advantage of all the benefits.

**Sutra Journal:** How do you feel about the commodification of yoga in the west and the narcissism that goes along with it? Is it being advertised and marketed in the wrong way, as a purely physical practice?

**Anneke Lucas:** One of the wonderful things that emerges from my work in developing these trauma-informed practices - adding other healing modalities, focusing on conscious self-awareness - is that it's obvious that everyone stands to benefit from being taught yoga in this manner. There is no reason why yoga should be taught by barking commands at students like a drill sergeant. False gurus stand to benefit from controlling students to cover over their hidden purpose of greed and selfish aggrandizement, yet we all know that yoga is about self-empowerment, self-development, and that it is a personal journey.



Yoga philosophy is often taught as a dogmatic religion, and it may not be very accessible to students who have experienced the benefits of the physical practice and want to learn more. My teacher training sessions focus entirely on the teachers. We want to lead by example.

We want to share what we have learned on our own journey of recovery in the context of spiritual growth, and not teach anything we can't really know. Yoga teachers should not teach about Kaivalya or Samadhi – because only the truly enlightened beings could possibly give accurate accounts of these states, and we know these are extremely rare and probably too humble to be recognized by the masses.

Yoga is experiential – that is why it is not dogmatic. And that is why it is potentially the greatest force to bring health and healing and peace to the planet.



64 Yoginis Shrine at Khajuraho

**Sutra Journal:** Can you recommend some books that have made an impact on you and changed the way you see the world?

**Anneke Lucas:**

*Autobiography of a Yogi* – Paramahansa Yogananda (SRF publication)

*The Holy Science* – Swami Sri Yukteswar

*Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* - Michelle Alexander



Anneke Lucas is the Executive Director of Liberation Prison Yoga, a non-profit she founded in 2014 with the purpose of addressing the physical and psychological traumas of incarcerated people through yoga and meditation. Lucas is also a writer and speaker. She covers topics such as surviving child sex trafficking, the psychological effects of sexual abuse, and the importance of service as a personal and global tool for healing. Her background, including her path of recovery have provided Lucas with skills and perspective for working with the traumatized populations inside jails and prisons.

Vikram Zutshi is a writer-producer-director based in Los Angeles. After several years in indie film and network TV production, then a stint as Creative Executive at 20th Century Fox and later in International Sales/Acquisitions at Rogue Entertainment, he went solo and produced two feature films before transitioning into Directing. His debut feature was filmed at various points along the two thousand mile US-Mexico border and has since been globally broadcast. He is a passionate Yogi and writes frequently on Shamanism, Metaphysics, Buddhism, Shaivism, Culture, Art and Cinema. Vikram often travels on photo expeditions to SE Asia and Latin America, and is currently prepping his next two films, a 'mystical screwball comedy' called *The Byron Project* and a feature documentary on the global yoga movement.







# MANTRA

By Sthaneshwar Timalisina

## INTRODUCTION

Mantras are central to religious experience in India, found in all modes of ritual and practices, and accompanying all life events from birth to death. While mantras ground meditative practice and the many paths to liberation, they are also applied for magical power, alchemical transformation, and medicinal purposes, and for prosperity in various phases of life. Found in the earliest Vedic literature, mantras transcend Hindu culture and are also found in Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh traditions. Even within Hindu culture, mantras defy a single interpretation. The understanding of mantra found in the Vedas, Tantras, and folk traditions often overlap and shift. Subsequent traditions utilize some of the earlier mantras, changing their meaning, ritual, and visualization.

The concept of mantra cannot be reduced to a single interpretation, and understanding some characteristics is required to identify mantras. In general, specific lineages assume traditional authority in transmitting specific mantras with a focus on the oral instruction. Receiving a mantra, thus, becomes identical to receiving ritual initiation (dīkṣā). Mantras are considered to be divine revelation, and the authorities, the Ṛṣis in the Vedic tradition and Siddhas in the folk pantheons, are considered capable of ‘hearing’ the cosmic resonance. The power of mantra is believed to transcend its linguistic ability to signify something, and they often defy the rules of spoken language. Thus the efficacy of a mantra relies less on grammatical correctness than on its precise articulation. Distanced from common language, a mantra can also be an acronym of the names of deities or of various mantras.

Mantras are often identified with distinct deities, and just as the images of the deities receive rituals of life-installation and worship, so also do mantras. Here, mantras assume their own personalities. When mantras are applied in specific rituals, their very nature shifts accordingly. Mantras, then, are often flexible; they can be used for different and sometimes contrasting purposes. This application of mantras often relates to the construction or visualization of various geometric designs. Although the incorporation of geometric designs for rituals that require chanting mantras is found in both Vedic and Tantric rituals, the interrelationship between mantra and maṇḍala becomes prominent in the latter. In the Tantric depiction, just as peripheral deities are considered to be emanations of the central deity, the mantras of the deities in the circle are considered to

be limbs of the core mantra. Tantras often reverse the Vedic ritual paradigm by placing a mantra at the center of the ritual, and in many cases, the recitation of mantra replaces the ritual itself. In this changed paradigm, the mantra is regarded as the foundation for reflection, and the mental resonance of mantra is considered to be more powerful than its vocalic articulation.

## THE VEDIC MANTRAS



Gayatri mantra as Devi • 1909

The composers of the Vedic mantras are called ‘seers’ (Ṛṣis). The Vedic citations identified as ṛc are metrical and are loudly pronounced, whereas

**The concept of speech (vāc) as divine is at the core of mantra. In the Vedic world, speech is considered to be the teacher of gods, immortal, and of the nature of light.**

**This divination of speech manifests in Indian philosophical traditions, on one hand, in the concept that the signifying power (śakti) of language is divine, and on the other, in the magical power of speech with its ability to transform reality.**

the yajus sections contain prose to be uttered slowly in various ritual contexts. Vedic tradition stresses exact articulation, and variation in chanting gives rise to different branches of the Vedas (Carpenter 1994, 19-34). As rcs are associated with deities, mantras identified as yajus are linked with rituals. The sāman is metrical and chanted with musical effect. The mantras in the Atharvaveda are often linked to magical effects.

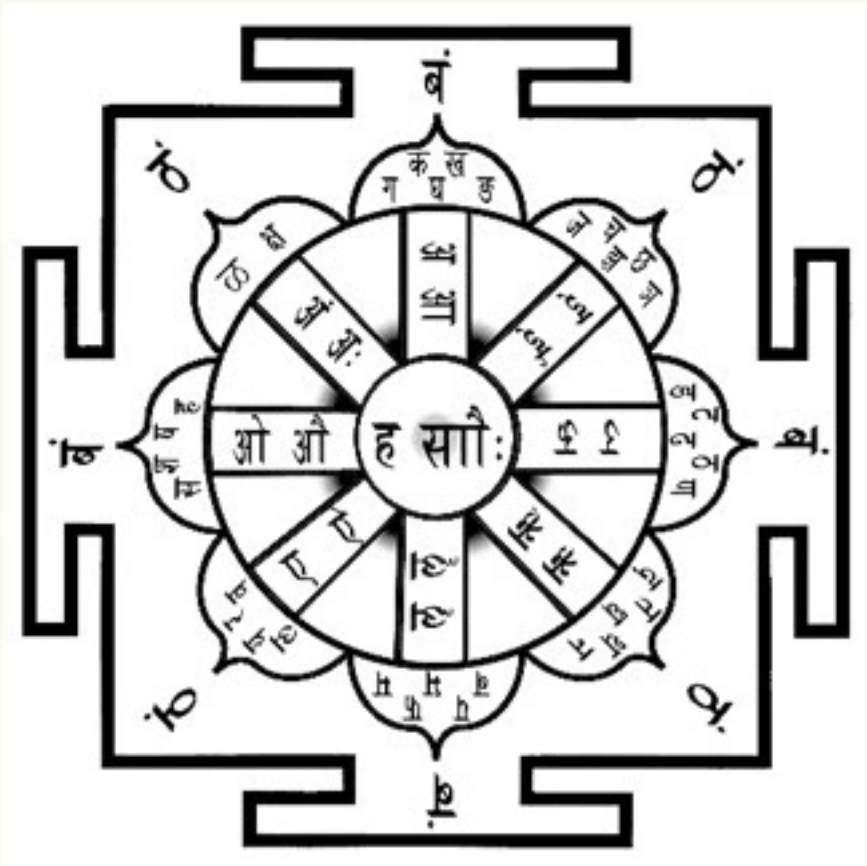
Due to the stature of the Vedas in Indian society, vernacular traditions occasionally link themselves to the Vedas. The authority in the Vedic paradigm concerns the power of speech, limited to that embodied by the Ṛṣis through their penance. Myths often highlight the seer's power to transform reality through speech. As this is not simply linguistic signification, authoritativeness is crucial to mantric identity.

The concept of speech (vāc) as divine is at the core of mantra. In the Vedic world, speech is considered to be the teacher of gods (Ṛc 8.100.10; 10.125.3), immortal (Ṛc 1.139.8), and of the nature of light (Ṛc 9.73.5). They are the mothers (mātaraḥ) (Ṛc 8.6.20), and are indestructible (akṣarā) (Ṛc 1.80.1). This divination of speech manifests in Indian philosophical traditions, on one hand, in the concept that the signifying power (śakti) of language is divine, and on the other, in the magical power of speech with its ability to transform reality. Vedic tradition relates correct understanding and articulation of mantras to magical results. A narrative suggests that the demons lost the war by failing to pronounce the mantras correctly (MB 1.1). In the Hindu paradigm, all rituals require mantra. It is arguable that rituals and mantras exist independently and are superimposed upon each other for magical effect. In the later traditions, the efficacy of mantras supersedes the ritual paradigm.

The repetition of mantras comes to prominence in the later Vedic period, with soft recitation in the morning and louder articulation later in the day. This stylistic shift in chanting evolves in the form of three recitations: low, inaudible, and mental (Patton 2005, 29). This structure of chanting unfolds with the divine vāc being not merely speech having

power, but Vāc as the goddess of wisdom and the procreative force associated with Prajāpati, the god of creation (Holdrege 1996, 89-93, 105-112).

## IMPORTING MANTRAS: VEDIC MANTRAS IN THE TANTRIC CONTEXT



Ashtamatrika yantra

The vast gap between the Vedas and the Tantras is bridged through the concept of mantra. The deities invoked in the Vedas, the mantras associated with the deities, and the rituals differ greatly when compared to Tantric deities, mantras, and ritual application of those mantras. Vedic mantras are poetic in nature, which is not the case for Tantras. Despite differences, the mantra which embodies the concept of the power of speech, is central to both Vedic and Tantric traditions. Most Tantras attribute mantras to various Vedic seers, suggesting that their authority in Indian society remains undiminished despite the changed ritual context.

Tantras frequently draw upon the Vedic mantras. An exploration of the Gāyatrī mantra, which is both the most popular Vedic mantra recited today as well as a Tantric mantra, demonstrates the nuances added in transporting mantras from one to another context. GT delineates the detailed ritual, visualization, and application of this mantra. While the name Gāyatrī comes from the verbal root  $\sqrt{gā}$  or  $\sqrt{gai}$ , meaning 'to sing,' the mantra is no longer sung, but is quietly articulated or repeated mentally. The deity of the mantra is no longer Savitr (the sun), but Sāvitrī, a goddess with benign anthropomorphic form. The mantra is no longer read only once in the ritual context, but is repeated many times. Each letter of the mantra links with distinct principles found in Sāṅkhya cosmology, and certain perfections are associated with letters of the mantra. The practice includes maṇḍala construction and worship, wherein various deities are invoked as emanation of the goddess Gāyatrī (PST, Chapter 30).

Duplicating the Vedic Gāyatrī mantra, Tantras produce multiple versions, with each of the deities having its own Gāyatrī mantra. In the changed context, this mantra transforms to a 'class,' referring to a particular type of mantra associated with various deities. Adopting this structure, even peripheral deities in the mandala have their own Gāyatrī mantra.

Another example of this process of adaptation and transformation can be found in the Śaiva Āgamas, which utilize five Vedic mantras in ritual visualization of the five faces of Śiva. These mantras are at the center of the Pāśupata vows and practices. The Svachhandatantra describes the

**The Vedic understanding, that rituals constitute and transform reality, embodies the notion of the power of mantras, as there are no rituals without mantras.**

**In the Vedic paradigm, one aspires to 'see' mantras, and be a Ṛṣi, whereas in the Tantric context, mantras are divine revelations and one aspires to achieve siddhis through the mantra practice.**

Aghora mantra, associating it with Svachanda Bhairava. Parallel to the Tantric practice of Gāyatrī, these Śaiva mantras change in the new ritual paradigm, not only in visualization and preparatory rituals, but also in the meaning of the mantra. They now correspond to various Śiva or Bhairava forms, and the practice includes the installation of mantras in the body, construction and visualization of a maṇḍala, demonstration of various gestures, and a high number of mantra repetitions. Various perfections and magical powers are associated with repetition of these mantras. These examples demonstrate the fluidity of the Hindu traditions, and illustrate the shift of the ritual paradigm with the mantras remaining unchanged.

## THE POWER OF MANTRAS

The Vedic understanding, that rituals constitute and transform reality, embodies the notion of the power of mantras, as there are no rituals without mantras. The later Vedic concept that praṇava (Om) is the source of the three planes of the cosmos typifies Tantric exegesis, and the early Indian notion of penance (tapas) is reversed in later Indian culture, with mantras replacing rituals and penances. In the Vedic paradigm, one aspires to 'see' mantras, and be a Ṛṣi, whereas in the Tantric context, mantras are divine revelations and one aspires to achieve siddhis through the mantra practice.

Mantras are often compared to weapons. Mantras that grant protection, identified as Sudarśana, Aghora, Pāśupata, Nṛsiṃha, Brahmā, and so on, and those given mythological names for weapons, highlight the paradigm of warfare. If practiced differently, mantras generate the opposite effect: the mantra for granting long life, when recited in reverse order, is applied as a mantra for killing. Read from back to front, the DM grants supernormal powers, and the Gāyatrī mantra carries out magical effects. Although the etymological and syntactic meaning of a mantra does not apply in these reversals, the concept of Mātrkā generating power in the mantra is not challenged even in the changed sequence.

Patañjali identifies certain perfections achieved through mantras (YS 4.1) and these are clearly distinguished from those attained through tapas and absorption. In his commentary, Vyāsa identifies perfections such as having multiple bodies through birth, agelessness and deathlessness through the application of elixir, powers such as manipulating body size through mantras, and the ability of shape-shifting through tapas (Vyāsa in YS 4.1). This categorization is not applicable to both Vedic and Tantric understandings, as they unequivocally proclaim the unparalleled powers of mantras.

In Tantric practice, the power of mantras is discovered through acquisition of a specific state of mind. The gesture called *khecarī*, for instance, depicts the state of mind beyond thoughts, identifying it as the supreme state and origin (*yoni*) of all deities and mantras (NT 7.35-41).

Mantras are considered more powerful in their seminal (*bīja*) form. *Aham* is one of these seed mantras that stands as acronym for all the letters and also for self-awareness (Padoux 1991, 386-389). Mantras, along these lines, are the specific arrangements of the powers found in letters (*mātrkā*), which are the ‘unrecognized mothers’ for bound individuals and divine forces for the realized ones (ŚS 1.4). The rise of powers that underlie these letters determines perfections, and when all the forces of these letters are con-

cealed, one is bound and compared to a beast (SK 45). The realization of the divine aspect of the I-sense through the complete recognition of *aham* is therefore considered to be the essence of all mantras.

The vigor (*vīrya*) of mantra is considered to be experienced through immersion in pure consciousness (ŚS 1.22 and *Vimarśinī* thereon). Tantras agree that the letters pronounced are not mantras if they are repeated without awareness.



Tripura bhairavi yantra

An aspirant merges his self-awareness with a mantra through ritual installation of mantras and through visualization, wherein the focus lies on the integration and dissemination of mantra and letters. The vigor of mantras is felt through the expansion of the self-awareness that embodies the cosmos (ŚS 2.3).

The power of mantras parallels that of *Kuṇḍalinī*. As mantra stands for both its phonetic resonance

and the awareness embedded in it, so does Kuṇḍalinī, with its relationship to life force (prāṇa) and awareness. Tantric texts such as ŚV discuss the physical effects of the rise of Kuṇḍalinī. The manifestation of mantric powers coincides with the awakening of Kuṇḍalinī. There are physical symptoms associated with this process, and the folk belief that mantras can be 'dangerous' and should not to be practiced without a proper guide.

## THE MEANING OF MANTRAS

The cognitive and phonic aspects are inseparable from one another in mantras. Just as the sound of the mantra, its correct articulation, and the number of repetitions are equally important, both the Vedic and Tantric literature likewise stress that understanding the meaning of mantras is an integral part of mantra practice. Later Mīmāṃsā treatises state that 'mantras call to memory things associated with some performance,' suggesting that mantras used in rituals are meaningful in the ritual context, whereas others have 'unseen' (adr̥ṣṭa) meaning. Mantras are deciphered in different ways, with different perspectives that are valid. Exploration of several prominent exegetes and the traditions that endeavor to discuss the meaning of mantras follows. The philosophy of Bhartr̥hari (5th Century) offers the greatest context to bridge the Vedic and Tantric understandings of the mantras.

Although the scope of Bhartr̥hari's philosophy of language concerns not only mantras, it nonetheless provides deep insight into the classical understanding of the nature of 'word' (śabda), identified with Brahman.

His concept of 'word' as the absolute, the concept of sphoṭa in which meaning is a unitary whole, and the analysis of speech at four esoteric levels are foundational to mantra exegesis in Tantric literature (Iyer 1992, 98-180).

The concept of pratibhā, or the intuitive linguistic power, becomes the cosmic procreative force in Trika Śaiva doctrine, allowing the interpretation of speech at four levels, placing parā or pratibhā at the heart of the evolution of speech.

In Bhartr̥hari's paradigm, there is no distinction between word and its powers that materialize reality. Because of this intimate relationship between the absolute and the word principle, one who is aware of the reality of the word principle is said to realize the absolute (Sastri, 1991, 1-33). In the absence of this concept that bridges the absolute and the word, the realization of the self and attaining liberation through mantra would not be possible.

The Tantric understanding of mantra substantially depends upon the concept that there are various levels of speech. Following this principle, audible speech is merely the external form of the word principle that manifests first in its self-revealing stage identified as paśyantī. Addressed briefly by Bhartr̥hari, the concept of the levels of speech dominates the exegesis of man-

tra in Trika Śaiva and other Tantric traditions. Tantras add the category of the 'supreme' (parā) form of speech, describing it as consciousness itself, pulsating eternally, giving rise to both linguistic and material manifestation. This word principle is recognized as the non-dual awareness being aware of itself. In this self-awareness of speech, all that is to be cognized is cognized, and this is the foundation for the rise and collapse of names and forms (Padoux 1991, 172-204).



Sri yantra

The self-seeing (paśyan) word principle, the śabda Brahman, appears as the first pulsation and orientation toward creation.

Tantras identify it as subsequent to supreme speech, awareness itself, where subject and object are not distinguished. The dialogue of the primordial couple Śiva and Śakti is related to this

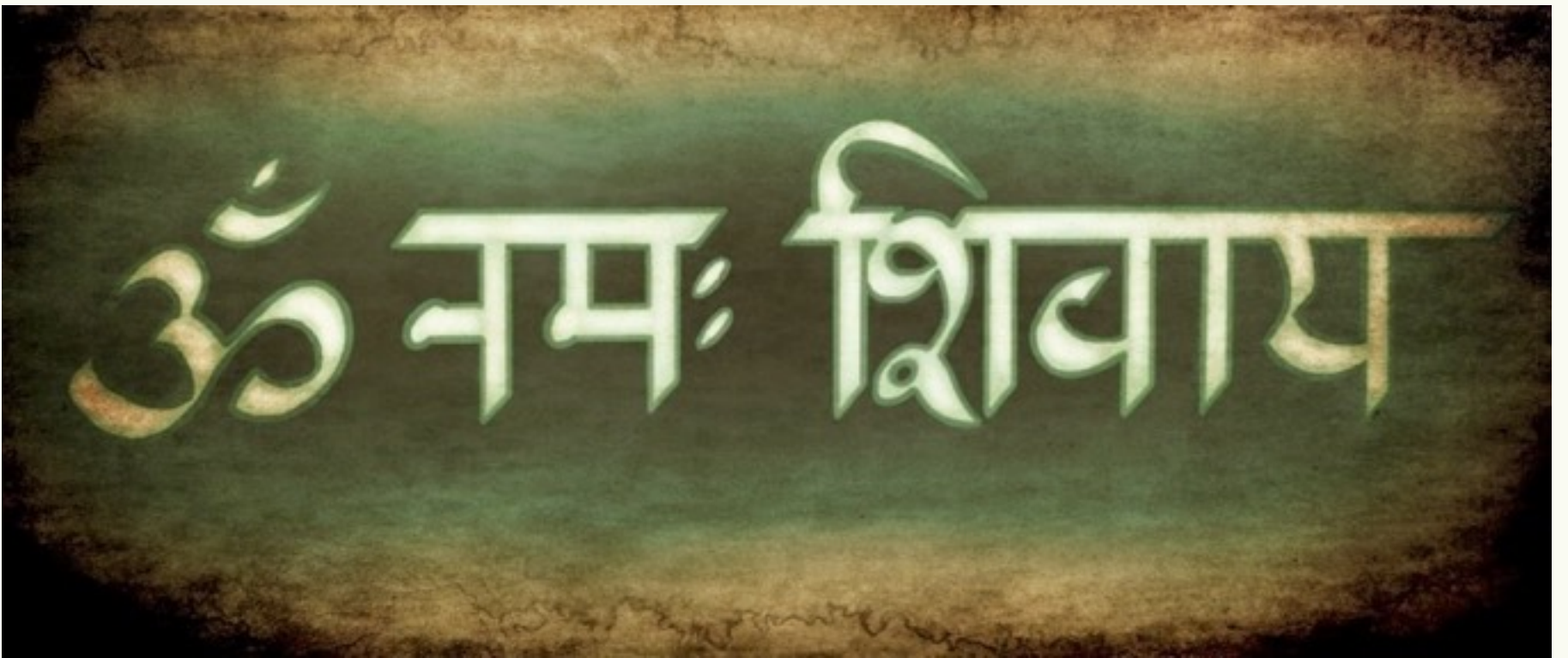
level of speech in Tantras. This self-seeing (paśyantī) speech is correlated with the power of will (icchā), which is found in consolidated form in the manifestation of the power of knowledge (jñāna), and in the power of action (kriyā). The first throb of mantra found in paśyantī is of the character of vision, and can be compared to the visionary power of the seers in their ability to see the mantras. In other words, 'knowing' mantra is a singular audio-visual perception. This hierarchy of speech allows Tantras to develop their esoteric interpretation of mantras, where the subtle sound is more powerful, and sound and cognition merge in self-awareness.

Mantra is the ground of speculation both for Mīmāṃsā exegesis and Bhartrhari's philosophy of grammar. These ideas predate most of Tantric literature and are the bedrock in the development of the Tantric interpretation of mantras. Furthermore, both Bhartrhari and Trika Śaivites similarly embrace the doctrine of Ābhāsa, adopting the concept that the absolute appears in manifoldness without really being polluted or falsely projecting non-existing entities. In other words, utilizing both Mīmāṃsā and the philosophy of Sanskrit grammar for speculation on mantra is crucial to understanding classical mantra exegesis.

## DECIPHERING MANTRAS

Both Vedic and Tantric practice focus on deciphering mantras. There are millions of mantras and as many ways to decipher them. Due to space considerations, I will focus on the most widely known single syllable mantra, Om, gener-





Om Namah Shivaya

ally addressed as Praṇava. The letter Oṃ, identified as Praṇava, is the most widely circulated mantra. By analyzing this single syllable, the later Vedic, Smārta, and Tāntric approaches to interpreting mantras can be demonstrated. In order to describe the plasticity of mantras and their meanings, it is important to know how the same mantras are understood or visualized differently in different traditions. Praṇava makes a strong case for that as well.

In the later Vedic tradition, Oṃ is visualized as the seed mantra that gives rise to bhū (earth), bhuvā (the middle ground), and sva (heaven). This is also identified with the three sections of the Gāyatrī mantra, with each section considered to be the manifest form of a+u+m. These three letters successively refer to the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states of the self at both cosmic and individual levels (see MU). The fourth state, awareness itself that transcends both the letters and triadic manifestation, is identified as the true nature of the self.

The yoga system of Patañjali considers Oṃ as the signifier of Īśvara, who is never bound by ignorance, the conditioned I-sense, passion, aversion, or death, and is eternally omniscient. Patañjali maintains that the repetition of Oṃ is the contemplation of its meaning, which is Īśvara.

Tantras describe nine subtler layers in addition to the three letters of Oṃ. These stages refer to very subtle moments of time, all of which are to be visualized while pronouncing the mantra. Their location within the body, their visualization and correlation with specific deities, are all considered part of the meaning of Oṃ. Tantras also specify the seer, the meter, and the deity of Oṃ for meditation (PST 19.3).

Following another description, the deity of Oṃ is lord Viṣṇu, visualized sitting atop a lotus and having four arms, one carrying a lotus, mace, disc, and conch shell (PST 19.4), and this image confirms Vaiṣṇava cosmogony.

In light of these descriptions, the meaning of Om appears to be the prescribed visualization that varies with each tradition. In other words, whatever is supposed to be brought forth in the mind when Om is recited is the meaning of Om. Patañjali refers to positive attributes such as omniscience as the subject matter for contemplation, whereas Tantras build a hierarchy of subtle grounds and describe this as the meaning. Deities to be visualized in each of the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, or Śākta traditions differ, and this visualization is identified as the meaning. Explicitly, the meaning of Om cannot be separated from the context of recitation.

Some observations can be made based on the above discussion of meaning. As highlighted already, 'meaning' here is mental rather than its correspondence to external objects, and knowing meaning is transformative rather than informative. It is the self, not objects, to be visualized and confirmed as the meaning of the mantra. Knowing the meaning here is not simply knowing the way things are, but changing their previously cognized condition. As mantra is envisioned, so is its meaning construed. Understanding a mantra, following this, is a purely cognitive process that does not depend upon external reality for identifying the relationship between signifier and signified.

#### Abbreviations:

DM	Devīmāhātmya
GT	Gāyatrītantra
MB	Mahābhārata
NT	Netratantra
PST	Prapañcasāratantra
PT	Parātrīśikā
Ṛc	Ṛgveda
ŚS	Śivasūtra
ST	Svacchandatantra
ŚV	Śāktavijñāna
YS	Yogasūtra



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His book, *Consciousness in Indian Philosophy* (Routledge, 2008) is a result of a comparative study between Advaita and Buddhist understandings of the self and consciousness. Timalisina also works in the area of Tantric studies and his recent publications, *Tantric Visual Culture: A Cognitive Approach* (Routledge, 2015), and *Language of Images: Visualization and Meaning in Tantras* (Peter Lang, 2015), explore the cognitive and cultural domains of Tantric visualization. Besides these books, Timalisina has published over forty articles, book chapters, and review essays on religion, culture, literature, aesthetics, and philosophy. Timalisina teaches courses on Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious, philosophical, and literary traditions, and his teaching interests include 'Religion and Science' as well as 'Yoga Philosophy and Practice.' His current areas of research include theories of mind, with a particular focus on the cognitive aspects of recognition, memory, imagination, and emotion.





# YATRA • INDIA AND THE SACRED

By Sutra Journal

Link - [YATRA: India and the Sacred • Multimedia Presentation](#) (Youtube)

India's coherence as a civilization depends in part on its commitment to Yatra – pilgrimage to sacred sites spread throughout the far reaches of the subcontinent. From Śaktī pīthas that sprung up when Satī's body fragments fell to earth as the inconsolate Śiva carried her corpse through the skies, to Advī Śaṅkara's māthas established in the far corners of Bharat, these places embody the sacred.

This past year's Kumbh Mela – an event occurring every 12 years - represents the largest migration of any people at any time, and countless millions gathered at the confluence of two rivers because of spiritual longing.

Sacred geography continues to draw the peoples of India, as it did their ancestors for thousands of years, to visit the rivers and the mountains prominent in the stories that remain alive and compelling. Stories of the birth and career of Devas and enlightened beings, epic and historical, are mapped onto the Indian landscape.

One makes a Yatra to a sacred space to remember a story about what happened a long time ago, but this also connects to the spiritual process of the Yatri, in the present. In reaching the destination one has entered the inner sanctum, where vows may be made, a recognition may occur, or a healing. This way, the world left behind may change, because of the Seer.





Sanchi

## IF YOU MEET THE BUDDHA ON THE ROAD, KILL HIM

By Vikram Zutshi

The deliberately shocking line above is a “koan,” one of many coined by Chinese Zen master Linji Yixuan, progenitor of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism.

A “koan” is a non sequitur, a seemingly paradoxical statement or question that cannot be grasped by the logical mind. For example, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Its purpose is to subvert the causal nature of consensual reality, thereby inducing a sudden, intuitive insight or revelation into the underpinnings of consciousness itself. The Japanese referred to this moment of ecstatic truth as satori.

Zen master Dogen said that in order to perceive reality we must “drop mind and body.” In other words, it is essential to drop all habits of thought and preconceptions, in order to understand the truth. The koan forces the student to face this type of thinking. Therefore, ‘killing the Buddha’ symbolizes the annihilation of all mental constructs comprised of name and form (Sanskrit: Namarupa), including the Buddha, in order to grasp the true nature of reality.

Rinzai, established in 12th century Japan, along with Soto and Obaku, is one of the three schools of Zen in Japanese Buddhism. South Indian Brahmin monk Bodhidharma, who lived during the fifth century CE, is traditionally credited for the transmission of Ch'an (Sanskrit translation: Dhyana, Japanese translation: Zen) to China, from where it migrated to Japan.

Bodhidharma, the first Zen Patriarch, is also regarded as the founder of Shaolin Kung Fu, said to be based on Hatha Yoga movements. It was originally designed to train monks to defend the monastery from invaders, as well as providing a physical regimen to complement the practice of intensive sitting meditation or Zazen.

## ORIGINS

The word Zen is derived from the Chinese word Ch'an, which in turn is a cognate of the Sanskrit term Dhyana (Jhana in Pali). According to the Yoga Sutras, Dhyana, along with Dharana and Samadhi, comprise Samyama, a term that summarizes the comprehensive psychological understanding of absorption in the object of meditation.

Samyama is defined in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali as the following:

### 1. Deśabandhaścittasya dhāraṇā

Fixing the consciousness on one point or region is concentration (Dhāraṇā).

### 2. Tatra pratyayaikatānatā dhyānam

A steady, continuous flow of attention directed towards the same point or region is meditation (Dhyāna).

### 3. Tad evārthamātranirbhāsaṃ svarūpaśūnyam iva samādhiḥ

When the object of meditation engulfs the meditator, appearing as the subject, self-awareness is lost. This is samādhi.

### 4. Trayam ekatra saṃyamaḥ

These three together [dhāraṇā, dhyāna and samādhi] constitute integration or Samyama.

### 5. Tajjayāt prajñālokaḥ

From mastery of Samyama comes the light of awareness and insight, ie Prajna.



Stupa at Sanchi

Shakyamuni Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was essentially a catalyst for the global dissemination of the Vedantic concept of non-duality, or the 'oneness of opposites', which predated him by at least three thousand years. The Vedanta is the final distillation of the 'revealed wisdom' or Shruti contained in the Vedas and Upanishads, ancient Indian books of supreme knowledge acquired by deathless Rishis ensconced in the womb of the Himalyas.

## ZEN MOUNTAIN

After years of studying the scriptures, on a personal level I felt that the purity of Samyama and the Vedanta had been clouded by intellectual sophistry and embellishment over the millennia, and perhaps a departure from Hindu convention

would be necessary to taste the essence of the teachings.

**The simplicity and spontaneity of the Zen tradition seemed to be an attractive antidote to the voluminous tomes of 'eastern' philosophy, which fascinating as they were, could only take one so far and no further.**

After making some enquiries, I soon found myself knocking at the gates of Yokoji Zen Mountain Center in the San Jacinto mountains.

Yokoji was situated about halfway between Los Angeles county and Palm Springs and was built at an altitude of 6000 ft. It sat on a 160 acre plot and boasted of gorgeous views, stunning sunsets, crisp, cool climate and a rich vegetation





hosting a wide variety of plant communities: Sierra mixed conifer riparian forest, oak woodlands, montane chaparral, alder-willow-cedar riparian forest and dry meadows. In addition, the U.S Forest Service reported 18 species of reptiles, over a hundred species of birds and 35 mammal species.

The daily routine at Yokoji consisted of hour-long morning, noon and evening sitting meditation (Zazen) sessions, interspersed with four to six hours of hard physical labor on the premises.

**The work component was an integral part of the Zen system and could include anything from chopping wood to mopping floors, kitchen detail, cleaning toilets, hauling cement, building a woodshed, laying a water pipe etc.**

The work assignments were executed by motley crews of three to five people led by their respective supervisors. Placed above the supervisors were 'senior students,' long term residents, who led ceremonial functions in the Zendo or meditation hall and a few notches above them were Enforcers and finally the 'Roshi' or head of the monastic order, and his 'Jisha' or assistant. The hierarchy was rigid and atavistic, presumably harking back to its medieval origins in Shogun-era Japan.

The supervisors and enforcers, jokingly called 'dharma police' by residents, were given Japanese names like Yugen, Jokkai, Hakujo and did not hesitate to admonish inmates who stepped out of line. The constantly chafing micro-management was supposedly beneficial for 'training the mind'. David, the Eno, seemed to take his role a tad too seriously and had dispensed with social graces entirely. He, like many others entrusted with authority within the confines of a closed spiritual community, was overcompensating with zeal-



Bodhi Tree at Sarnath

ous fervor. Everyone had to be dressed in traditional black robes, adding to the surreal vibe of the place. The set-up was strangely reminiscent of the film *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*.

**I encountered a colorful cross-section of spiritual aspirants, with widely divergent backgrounds.**

**Among them was a recovering alcoholic, a medical cannabis cultivator, a retired rock 'n' roller, a heart surgeon, an out of work screenwriter, a Mexican au pair, and an Argentinian wine maker.**

I wasn't quite sure whether to be amused or feel compassion for these hapless souls, who like myself, had come here seeking answers to the eter-

nal quandary of human existence. We were urged to 'watch the reactions within' to mental obstacles or manifestations of the ego that might arise under pressure, and to 'use the resistance' as a tool to break through delusion and conditioning. It was a twist on the age-old dilemma of how to deal with authoritarianism in personal and political life.

The Dalai Lama often urged his fellow Tibetans to deal with Chinese aggression and cultural imperialism by viewing one's personal demons and tormentors in a compassionate light, as a device to strengthen the practice in the face of insurmountable odds.

To transcend the duality of pain and pleasure, one had to grasp the inherent emptiness of both by observing the constant rising and falling of the five skandhas or aggregates: rupa or form (matter), vedana or sensation (feeling), samjna

or perception (conception), samskara or mental formations (impulses) and vijñāna or consciousness (discernment).

Buddhist soteriology, derived from the much older Sanātana Dharma of India, posits the five skandhas as functions or attributes that give rise to the false notion of “self”. The Buddha taught that nothing among them was really ‘I’ or ‘mine’ and that ultimate liberation, moksha or nirvana, could only be realized by penetrating the nature of the aggregates as intrinsically empty of independent existence. The deceptively simple koan,

### **“Who drags this corpse around?”**

touches upon the essence of false identification with the “self”, with sense objects and their ripple effect across the psychophysical hierarchy enumerated in Sāṃkhya philosophy of the Hindus.

The Buddha explains the emptiness of the aggregates by using the analogy of a chariot (identical to Lord Krishna’s instruction to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita): the identity of a ‘chariot’ is predicated on the aggregation of its individual parts, therefore it comes into “being” only when the five aggregates are available.

The constituents of “being” too are unsubstantial in that they can only function in relation to each other, for example, their very existence is interdependent, like the chariot as a whole.

Rather than an ontological thought experiment, the chariot metaphor is a caution against conceptual literalism. Siddhartha Gautama was known

to undermine the misleading character of nouns as solidified concepts possessing substance.

## **ONLY HUMAN**

Yokoji had been established in 1981 under the auspices of the White Plum Asanga, created by the late Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi. Charles Ten-shin Fletcher, an Englishman, who received Dharma transmission from Maezumi Roshi, is the current abbot in residence. His two primary assistants, David aka Jokkai and Jim aka Yugen, both British, were residing in the U.S on a “religious visa,” and over the years had successfully navigated the immigration system to stay in the country.

Maezumi Roshi, the erstwhile founder of Yokoji, had a colorful past. In addition to being a declared alcoholic who had undergone treatment at the Betty Ford clinic, he was also a serial womanizer who had conducted sexual affairs with a number of female disciples, including some who had received Dharma transmission from him, compelling his wife, children and several monks to leave the Sangha. He passed away ignominiously, drowning in a hot tub in Japan, where he had been drinking himself to oblivion all week.

### **In spite of his flaws and peccadillos, Maezumi Roshi was renowned for his “awakened Buddha nature.”**

According to authors Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, in their book *Zen Masters*, “Maezumi was by all accounts an impressive Zen master, someone who it was impossible not to love and respect, but with weaknesses and vulnerabilities



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that derived from the simple fact that he was also finite and human. While living a truly profound and visionary Zen life, Maezumi Roshi was at the same time mortal and vulnerable to the tragedies of life.”

Indeed, the human condition was a pervasive and all encompassing aspect of Zen practice. Maybe that is what made it so potent and transformative; the fact that there was no escape from overwhelming emotional states or human weaknesses while engaged in Zazen. That daily life, work and interactions were not separate and distinct from the practice itself. That every demon and ugly carcass from the past could arise at any given moment and the warrior had no choice but to face them, like the Buddha faced his Mara. The mind was a receptacle for the sublime, the mundane and the ungodly—treating

them all with equal diffidence, and then slaying them with the sword of insight, was the true revolution, the only jihad.

Jim Morrison’s famous line, “Kiss the snake on the tongue”, came to mind more than once. At the end of the early morning or late evening sessions, we were invited to Dokkusan or private consultation with Roshi Tenshin. He was strikingly down to earth and projected an innate simplicity and compassion. He said that thoughts were no more than “secretions of the mind” and one must never try to suppress them, only strive to cultivate a space between them and the reactions they produced, eventually causing delusions to fall away. Shikantaza or “just sitting” was the only way to achieve this.

Most people weren't ready to plunge headlong into the immediacy of pure Zen, without first establishing an epistemological foundation and context.

On hearing about my irritation with the authoritarianism and anachronistic Shogun-era martial sensibility that pervaded the center, the Roshi responded by describing how strong emotions like anger could be used as tools and the key was not to succumb but to transform the powerful energy they contained. He did, however, agree with the need to simplify the practice and make it more relevant to contemporary times.

We also discussed the need to incorporate the intellectual aspects and pillars of traditional Buddhism into the practice as most people weren't ready to plunge headlong into the immediacy of pure Zen, without first establishing an epistemological foundation and context.

## KISS THE SNAKE ON THE TONGUE

In the days and weeks of intense meditation that followed, repressed memories, sensations and a billion random thoughts rained down on me like multicolored confetti at a victory parade. It took a huge effort to merely keep sitting on the mat and not storm off into the wilderness and shout at the hills. I could feel toxic residues seeping from the subconscious to the surface and was constantly in the churn of a great battle,



entirely within my own head. All accumulated theories and constructs fell away in the heat of war, till only the witness remained, teetering precariously at the edge of a swirling vortex.

**At the end of one such harrowing session, I opened my eyes to the statue of Tibetan Buddhist deity Manjusri, seated on a roaring lion in the center of the Zendo. The image of Manjusri taming a powerful beast captured the essence of Zazen; that the practice could contain the most fearsome states of mind and “just sitting” was the greatest battle that a true warrior could undertake.**

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, life on earth is comparable to people dwelling in a house that is being razed to the ground by a blazing fire. Deluded beings perceive this world as the only reality, obsessing over transient and meaningless pleasures without realizing that the house is on fire and will soon burn down—a metaphor for the inevitability of death.

A Bodhisattva is one whose ultimate goal is to free all sentient beings from Samsara and its cycle of death, rebirth and suffering.

After the retreat, upon returning to life in the city, the most relevant and lingering impression I took away was that of the Bodhisattva—“the heroic

one”, an enlightened being who motivated by great compassion, relinquishes final liberation to work towards the Buddhahood of all sentient beings. He can be found at work in the most challenging of environments, such as brothels, war zones and leper colonies.

In all humility, I don't think I'm up to the challenge, as of yet. There lies a long road ahead before I arrive at that exalted state. But there is no escaping the truth of the human condition—with all its blood, guts and glory. Clearly, salvation cannot be found by retreating from the meat-hook realities of mundane existence.

Kissing the snake on the tongue was clearly the only option left.



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## NIBANNA SUTTA

*There is, monks, an unborn — unbecome — unmade — unfabricated. If there were not that unborn — unbecome — unmade — unfabricated, there would not be the case that release from the born — become — made — fabricated would be discerned. But precisely because there is an unborn — unbecome — unmade — unfabricated, release from the born — become — made — fabricated is discerned.*



## WHO IS A HINDU?

By Jeffery D. Long

### INTRODUCTION

In future issues of Sūtra Journal, I hope to share essays that will argue for various aspects of a Hindu worldview and way of life. The intent of these essays will not be to proselytize, much less to denigrate other traditions; for I see both of these activities as incompatible with a Hindu way of thinking, as I understand it. One may, and indeed one has a duty to, offer fair criticism of any view that one encounters, and also to turn the lens of criticism back upon oneself. Spiritual advancement is not otherwise possible. But to offer such a fair critique in the name of illuminating truth is not the same as to denigrate or distort the view or practice of another out of hatred or malice.



My intention, rather, is to think out loud: to share with others what draws me to Hinduism in the hope of sparking a constructive dialogue that will aid all involved in our ongoing search for truth. This essay, however, is devoted less to arguing for specific Hindu practices or ideals than to arguing for the use of the term 'Hinduism' itself.

Good philosophers must of course define their terms, so it is important to make clear from the outset what I mean by both 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism.' It is also the case, though, that these words are, at the moment, contentious, with some scholars going so far as to argue that Hinduism does not exist. I will argue in this essay not only that Hinduism exists (as much as anything does in this constructed realm of *māyā*), but also that the ideal of Hinduism is an important one to the future survival of humanity.

Finally, I will note that I come to this topic as a scholar-practitioner. My spiritual affiliation is to the Vedānta tradition of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. As a professional scholar, I am a professor of religion and Asian studies at a small liberal arts college in North America, trained at the University of Chicago.

For complex reasons, the Hindu community and the academy of religion are often seen as mutually antagonistic. I am however dedicated to the belief that practice and scholarship are inseparable and, in fact, mutually illuminating. I hope this mutual illumination will be evident in this essay.

## THE NATURE OF HINDUISM: TWO EXTREME VIEWS (AND THE TRUTH IN BOTH)

In the often-conflicted conversation between Hindu practitioners and scholars of Hindu studies, two views have tended to predominate in each respective camp regarding the basic character of Hinduism. I shall call these, respectively, the eternalist view and the constructivist view.

According to the eternalist view, which is held by many Hindus, Hinduism has always existed.

It is the eternal, Sanātana Dharma, essentially unchanging and true, and encompassing the vast range of spiritual traditions that have emerged in the Indian subcontinent over the course of many millennia, anchored by the ancient authority of the Veda. Hindu and Hinduism are, from this perspective, words that evoke deep pride in a wise and ancient family of traditions that form the inheritance of all Hindus.

According to the constructivist view, held by many academic scholars, Hinduism is a construct, an artificial term of relatively recent coinage which creates a deceptive impression of unity where the reality is an irreducible diversity. From a constructivist perspective, it is only proper to speak of Hindus and Hinduism when one is discussing the last couple of centuries of



Ganga at Varanasi

**While the great diversity to which the constructivist points is certainly real, the incompatibility of the various Hindu systems can be overstated.**

history. And even these usages are seen as problematic and contentious: as more obscuring than illuminating.

Both of these views are, each in its own way, limited and problematic, and each also points to important truths about the nature of Hinduism. As the constructivists tend to argue, the eternalist view can obscure or elide the real differences among the numerous traditions that make up what is now called Hinduism. Many schools of thought now seen as Hindu were, in ancient times, engaged in sharp polemical debate with one another on a variety of important topics. To call them all Hindu can underplay this indisputable fact.

The constructivist view, on the other hand, errs in the opposite direction.

While the great diversity to which the constructivist points is certainly real, the incompatibility of the various Hindu systems can be overstated; for these ways of living and thinking also share a great deal in

common, such as belief in karma, rebirth, and liberation, a shared set of moral and social values, assumptions about logic and styles of argument, ritual norms, and so on. At the risk of oversimplification, one could argue that the differences among Hindu traditions are, with a few noteworthy exceptions, about the subtle details in how a shared set of ideas and practices are understood and implemented.

The truth of the matter, as I see it, incorporates the core insights of each of these perspectives: that there is indeed an eternal truth, a Sanātana Dharma, but that this truth manifests in the world through profound diversity, and through temporal processes that can be studied by the means employed in conventional scholarship.

This distinction between an eternal truth and the means by which it manifests in the world is made by Swami Vivekananda himself.

In a lecture titled “Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna,” Swami Vivekananda discusses an eternal, uncreated (apauruṣeya) Veda, which he identifies with “The whole body of supersensuous truths, having no beginning or end... The Creator Himself is creating, preserving, and destroying the universe with the help of these truths.” (Complete Works, Volume 6, p. 181)

Swamiji, though, further distinguishes this eternal Veda from the collection of texts called by the

same name: “These are a series of books which, to our minds, contain the essence of all religion. But we do not think they alone contain the truths.” (Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 329) Eternal truth cannot be exhausted by any single text, tradition, or teacher. The incredible diversity of what we now call Hinduism is therefore entirely to be expected. Hindu diversity is not a problem, or a puzzle to be solved, though it may be confusing to one who expects truth to come in a clear and tidy package. It is, rather, a natural outcome of the creative efflorescence of the truth itself, the manifestation of the Infinite in lived human experience.

## AVERSION TO “THE H WORD”

The process by which a variety of traditions, with many overlapping assumptions, views, and practices, as well as many points of divergence and contention, came to be seen as a singular, albeit internally diverse, tradition called Hinduism is a complex one. I have elsewhere used the image of the upside down tree that is found in the fifteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā* to describe this process (Long 2014). Whereas other traditions tend to start with a single founding figure on the basis of whose teachings a community of practice forms – a community which can be likened to the trunk of a tree – and branches of this community gradually form on the basis of differences of interpretation, Hinduism can be said to have coalesced gradually from many branches coming together to form the trunk of what is now seen by Hindus as the Hindu tradition.

Many arguments have been presented, not only by academic scholars, but also by Hindu practi-



Kailashnath Temple at Ellora

tioners, against the terms Hindu and Hinduism. As many have pointed out, the terms themselves are a foreign imposition. Asko Parpola (2015, 3) notes that,

“The etymology of ‘Hindu’ goes back to about 515 BCE, when the Persian king Darius the Great annexed the Indus Valley to his empire. Sindhu, the Sanskrit name of the Indus River and its southern province – the area now known as Sindh – became Hindu in the Persian language.”

‘Hindu’ was a name coined by invaders and conquerors, and can be seen as derogatory. Some of this derogatory character seems to persist, as many westerners who have taken up practices that draw heavily from Hindu traditions—such as Yoga and Tantra—often display what appears to be a visceral aversion to having their practice, or themselves, identified as Hindu (though some of this also derives from an aversion to any identification with a religion, which is what Hinduism is considered to be). And even many self-identified Hindus favor jettisoning these ‘foreign’ terms in favor of the indigenous Sanskrit name Sanātana Dharma. The view of many scholars is that, given that most of the people and traditions that we now call Hindu were not called that for most of history, the term is simply inaccurate and distorting (for reasons mentioned earlier).



Shore Temples at Mahabalipuram

## A CASE FOR HINDUISM

There is a case to be made, though, for the use of the terms Hindu and Hinduism, albeit with more nuance and self-awareness than has often been the case in the past.

One of the most common arguments made by academic scholars against the use of these terms is that they are a distorting colonial imposition, an outgrowth of the work of European indologists to try to comprehend the vast variety of Indian spiritual traditions as part of the broader effort to control the Indian subcontinent.

An important work of recent scholarship, though, Andrew Nicholson's *Unifying Hinduism: Philoso-*

*phy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History*, demonstrates that the process of the bringing together of the many 'branches' that make up the 'trunk' of what is now called Hinduism (my image, not Nicholson's) began centuries before Europeans began to study and write about Indian traditions. And forthcoming work by scholar James Madaio affirms the very clear line of continuity between the work of modern Hindu thinkers, such as Swami Vivekananda, to articulate a unified Hindu identity, and those of pre-modern thinkers going back to Adi Śaṅkarācārya.

The import of this work is that Hinduism and Hindu identity are not solely impositions by outsiders, to be discarded as colonial distortions, but are the continuation of a process that has been at work in Indian history for a very long time.

Why, then, should there be any objection to the use of 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism'? To be sure, one who is doing careful scholarship, especially on the period before these terms were widely embraced by practitioners, needs to be clear about the fact that these terms, if they are being used, are being projected retroactively into the past.

It may be perfectly proper to refer to the Vedic sage Yajñavalkya as a Hindu sage, given that the Vedic tradition in which he stands is integral to what we now call Hinduism.

But we should also be mindful that the term 'Hindu' was unknown to Yajñavalkya, just as the name Confucius was unknown to the Chinese master K'ung fu tzu, as European Jesuits coined that name centuries after his death upon translating his works into Latin.

The objections to using 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' seem to run deeper than merely a concern for scholarly historical accuracy. They have a political dimension as well.

Part of the history of the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' that scholars emphasize, apart from the fact that they are a foreign imposition, is the fact that these terms were also integral to the rise of national self-consciousness among Indians, and to the movement for Indian independence. The idea of Hindu identity became a way to unify Indians who practiced a wide array of spiritual traditions, and who lived in diverse regions, speaking a multiplicity of languages and adhering to a variety of cultural practices. All could claim the Hindu tradition as their shared inheritance, proclaimed by such figures as Swami Vivekananda.

What unites, however, can also divide, for not all Indians are Hindu, as this term has come to be understood. Many scholars are uncomfortable with the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' because they see these terms primarily as divisive: as definitive of an Indian identity that marginalizes or problematizes the identities of non-Hindu Indians, primarily Muslims and Christians.

Why, then, should I want to make a case for Hinduism? Let me first repeat what I affirmed at the outset. My intention here is neither to proselytize nor to denigrate other traditions. I will add, in the same spirit, that it is certainly not my intention to call into question or to marginalize the identities of minority communities in India, nor in fact to intervene in any way whatsoever in India's internal politics.

I have come to this tradition from the outside. I did not grow up in India, nor am I of Indian de-



scent. (I may have been in a past life, or in many past lives, but that is beside the point at hand.)

I was drawn to Hinduism – to the Bhagavad Gītā, to the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, the pluralism of Sri Ramakrishna, the practice of yoga, the spiritual aesthetic of bhakti and Tantra – because I found it to be a life-affirming path that enabled me to make sense of some of life’s biggest and most urgent questions. The fact that these ideals and practices came from India was, for me, secondary to their content: to the way they helped me to navigate my life experiences. I suspect I am similar to most western seekers in this regard.

To be sure, I have since lived in India, married an Indian, and in many ways adopted an Indian way of thinking and living, while still retaining what I find to be of value in the western culture of my upbringing. I feel that I have the best of both worlds, and am every day grateful to be following the path that I do.

My case for Hinduism is that, while it may be true that this term, like any term that marks an affiliation, can be divisive (particularly in the context of Indian politics), it also has a capacity at least as great to unify not only people in India or of Indian descent, but people of all nations and ethnicities. Many Hindus are averse to the term ‘religion,’ and point out, quite rightly, that it is a deeply inadequate translation of the term dharma. But let us say not that Hinduism is simply a religion, but that it is, among other things, a religion: a way of life centered on certain normative ideals in which its adherents believe very deeply. To the extent that Hinduism can be seen as a religion, it shares the quality that anyone who accepts its ide-



Hanuman Temple at Vijaynagar

als and practices can be an adherent of it. Who, then, is a Hindu? Anyone who consciously adheres to a way of life and worldview derived from the ancient family of traditions known as Hinduism. The term 'Hindu' may be seen as divisive by some in India; but this is if we insist on defining it in a way that confines it to the Indian subcontinent. If the dharma is truly universal – truly sanātana – then there can be, and there are, European Hindus, African Hindus, Latin-American Hindus, and so on.

Moreover, because Hinduism encompasses such an enormous diversity of views and paths – the very diversity that makes some scholars puzzle over how it can possibly be seen as a unified tradition – it provides, I believe, a model for how all of humanity may one day be united. Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, Śāktas, and Smārtas have all been able to unite, while yet each preserving its distinctive identity, under the term Hindu. As I argued in my first book (Long 2007, 96), *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism*, “Rather than reject the use of the term *Hinduism*, which has become so fixed in the shared lexicon of India and the West ... one can make a virtue of necessity and celebrate the emergence of a tradition that can ground and justify a pluralism in which a variety of spiritual paths can co-exist in peace and mutual support.”

In other words, anyone can be a Hindu. A religion, in contrast with a national or an ethnic identity, has this capacity for universality, for inspiring people globally, and not only those of a particular ethnicity or nationality. Hinduism certainly has this capacity.





While it is true that the exclusivist ways in which the adherents of some traditions conceive of salvation are currently an obstacle to any kind of unification of all religions under a single umbrella, it is also true that there are voices in each tradition that argue for a more pluralistic understanding: the kind of pluralism that is embodied in Hindu unity-in-diversity, and found in the lives of such sages as Sri Ramakrishna. As Arvind Sharma (1997) has argued, the Hindu equivalent of the missionary imperative found in other traditions is to encourage the voices of pluralism and acceptance that exist among adherents of those traditions. The objective is not so much to make the world Hindu as it is to foster relations among global traditions like those among Hindu traditions. There was a time when Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas clashed violently. Now they worship together in the same temples. Might the same one day be true of all of humanity? And importantly, this is not a unity that obliterates diversity. Śaivas continue to be Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas continue to be Vaiṣṇavas, even while both are Hindu.

## CONCLUSION

It has become a common practice among scholars of Hinduism to use this term as an umbrella term to encompass a wide range of traditions: Vedic, Yogic, Tantric, and so on. Much scholarship is devoted to separating out these various threads and determining what in Hinduism is purely Vedic, what is purely Yogic, what is purely Tantric, and so on. On the other hand, some works, such as Christopher Wallis' *Tantra Illuminated* (2013), tend to identify that which is 'Hindu' in Hinduism as existing solely within the Vedic tradition, thus implying that non-Vedic traditions such as Tantra are not Hindu, or were not originally Hindu.

Of course, as we have seen, even the Vedic tradition was not 'originally Hindu,' in the sense that the term Hindu did not yet exist when the Vedic tradition emerged. The process of separating out the various threads of what we now call Hinduism is difficult indeed, for all of these strands interpenetrate and overlap to such a great extent that it is probably impossible to find an artifact of one that bears no influence from the others. The Vedic literature itself – especially the Atharva Veda

– includes many elements that are arguably Tantric, or Proto-Tantric, just as Tantra incorporates many elements of Vedic mantras and ritualism (See Timalisina’s *Mantra* essay in this volume). So even calling Tantra non-Vedic is problematic. And for Hindu practitioners today, of course, all of this variety is part of one tradition, one dharma, so all of these questions of what is what and what comes from where can be seen as, at best, a useless distraction, from a spiritual standpoint, and at worst, as a deliberate attempt to undermine Hindu unity – a continuation of the divide-and-rule policies of the colonial era.

The hope behind this essay is that the terms ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’ can emerge, not as designating an artificial construct (or at least not one any more artificial than any other element in our constructed human experience in this virtual spatio-temporal realm), nor as divisive terms bandied about in Indian politics, but as terms pointing to a tradition that is many things in one: a pluralistic tradition capable of pointing the way towards a more pluralistic world for us all.

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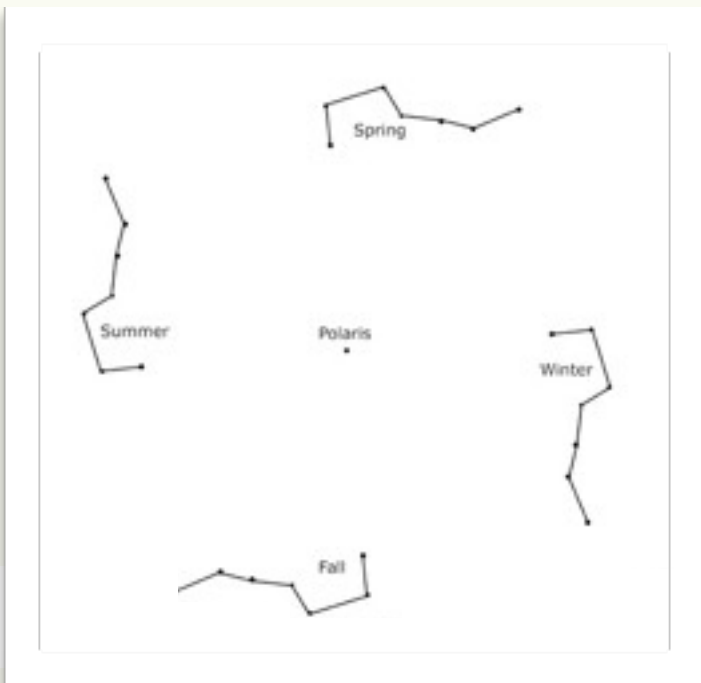
## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE YOGA VĀSIṢṬHA

By Mary Hicks

### Editor's Note

The seven stars comprising the 'Big Dipper' are considered the self-reflexive eyes of the seven Seers of the Veda. In Sanskrit, this cluster of stars is called Rksa, the abode of the Seers. The Seer Vāsiṣṭha is a legendary figure who has been visioned and heard by mystics, and in a shamanic culture such as India this is not unusual. The Yoga Vāsiṣṭha is a very important text in the sacred tradition of India and has been part of its vibrant oral history for a very long time. The teaching of Yoga by Sage Vāsiṣṭha is considered by historians to have been set to writing more than a thousand years ago.

The seven Seers circle the pole star, the central axis of the universe relative to our place in our era. The Sapta Rishi from their vantage point continually see the Veda, for what is the Veda but the rising of the (inner) Sun.





Sapta Rishi at Kinnaur Kailash Mountain

*Brāhman! In every manvantara, when the sequence of the world is reversed and the structure is altered and the wise people have passed away, I have different friends, different relatives, different and new servants, and different habitations.*

*YV, 6.1.22.37-38*

**What exactly is real?  
What is the nature of  
reality? What is the  
purpose of any  
particular life?**

**These are some of the  
questions that the Yoga-  
Vāsiṣṭha explores.**

Imagine yourself awakening one morning, preparing your breakfast, only to see yourself performing these actions in a parallel universe. These worlds can then be seen to collapse upon themselves, nesting in ever-smaller frames, until you recognize that it is you that is moving, one speck of dust within the faint sheen of dust capturing the sunlight in the corner of the house.

What exactly is real? What is the nature of reality? What is the purpose of any particular life? These are some of the questions that the Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha (YV) explores in tales that are epic in size and minute in their detailed storytelling, interlocking tales of kings, sages, and people from the entire spectrum of occupations.

In an era of contemporary identity politics, self-proclaimed enlightened masters, and the invention of bizarre practices under the title of yoga, it has become necessary to re-examine the traditions themselves and the texts that have been classically dedicated to establishing yoga. We need to go back to the sources of this global phenomenon that has come to be known as yoga and read the practices and philosophies that once were archaic and reserved for very few practitioners and bring them to global discourse for public awareness. My effort here is to offer a small introduction to one of these foundational texts, the Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha.

**The Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha is a synthesis of the Hindu and Buddhist yogic traditions and philosophies. While placed in the context of a discourse between a prince wanting to recognize the nature of reality and questioning an enlightened master, the text borrows from a wide range of Hindu and Buddhist literature.**

The style of the book is like that of the storytelling found in the Rāmāyaṇa, and the text itself is deeply philosophical in nature. Although the text borrows ideas from Pantañjali to Vasubandhu, the unifying philosophy is closer to the Advaita of Śaṅkara. Due to subtle differences in teachings and philosophy, it took time for the mainstream Advaita to acknowledge the text as significant to its philosophy, and the text has only been fre-

quently cited by mainstream Advaitin scholars in school of Śaṅkara after around the 15th century. Setting the philosophical premises aside, the text is exemplary poetry, and the author – one Vālmīki – is impeccable in his use of meter, choice of words, application of metaphors and metonymy, and the overall application of suggested meaning to convey the message. The text can be read as a mythical narrative, poetry of the highest quality, a text on philosophy, and as a manual for a yogic practice.

Traditionally, the Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha is considered one of the Rāmāyaṇas and the authorship is attributed to Vālmīki. The text is staged in the platform of a dialogue between the protagonist Rāma and his enlightened master Vāsiṣṭha who then re-tells his conversations to the ṛṣi Bharadvājā, one of seven seers to whom the Vedas are attributed. Historically, the Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha could have been compiled between the 9th Century and 12th Century; however, the text was not always known by that name. An earlier iteration of YV is known as Mokṣopāya, and a summarized version of the text, the Laghu Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha, is more popular among the scholars and practitioners than the lengthy text that is divided in six sections consists of 32,000 verses, four times the size of Homer's Illiad.

**The text begins with Rāma the prince recognizing the dissatisfactory nature of the world, and finding himself in front of the sage, Vasiṣṭha.**



Ajanta

The most external layer of the text presents teachings of the sages from Vedic times to tales of the characters from the Rāmāyana. The inner layer of the text weaves multiple stories as a means for Vasiṣṭha to instruct Rāma. The essential core of the text is the monistic philosophy of pure consciousness giving rise to the diverse experiences in the world. The text also maintains that the intrinsic nature of consciousness is never polluted, albeit being given the appearance of bondage. The objective of all the stories is to teach Rāma that in consciousness itself, no deviation as such has ever occurred, no world external to consciousness has ever come into being, and no bondage is ever possible. All the narratives aim to reveal the eternally liberated nature of the self that is manifest as if bound in the world, constituting a finite reality in terms of the external world and the inner subject.

## DISPASSION

As the text unfolds with the frustration of Rāma, the first section is rightfully identified as Vairāgya (dispassion), and the 33 chapters in this section highlight the ephemeral nature of the world. The text, however, is meticulous in teaching that human endeavor is central to recognizing reality, directly countering and even ridiculing the fatalists. The second section, Mumukṣu Vyavahāra, consists of 20 chapters and identifies the conduct that is required for the individual seeking liberation. These two early sections lack stories that can be read as philosophical. Instead, they primarily contextualize what is to subsequently unfold, and in this regard merely lay the foundation for the philosophy beginning in the next section on origination.



## CONSCIOUSNESS AS PRIMARY

The third section, called Utpatti or origination, has 122 chapters and is significant both for the stories themselves and the philosophy embedded within them. The most important stories in this section include that of Līlā and King Padma, the story of a demoness Karkaṭī, and the story of king Lavaṇa who in his hypnotic state wakes up in a different identity and when he returns to being the king, questions his very subjective state. Although the stage within which these narratives are woven appears to support some form of illusionism, the text is clear that there is an unchanging essential core of pure consciousness manifest in multiple forms.

Next is the section on Stithi or sustenance, with a total of 62 chapters. Prominent are the stories of Vāyu and Śukra, of Śambara a demon, and of Dāsura. Philosophically this section addresses the nature of mind, different states of consciousness such as waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, the reality of time and space, the scope and function of ignorance, the nature of the self, and the issue of morality in light of subjective illusionism.

The fifth section concerns Upaśama or controlling the senses. The highlight of this section is the Siddha Gītā, where Vasiṣṭha narrates to Rāma the instructions given by the enlightened siddhas to King Janaka. This section includes the stories of Pāvana, of Bali, of Prahlāda, Gādhi, Uddālaka, the conversation of Suraghu, and the story of Bhāsa and Vilāsa. There are in total 93 chapters in this section.

## YOGIC REALIZATION

The final section on Nirvāṇa is divided into two, with the first part containing 128 chapters while the last has 216 chapters. The highlights of the first section are the stories of Bhuśuṇḍa, Arjuna, Jīvaṭa, Śikhidvaja and Cuḍālā, and Kaca. In this section, there is also a conversation on the seven stages of yogic realization and reality as perceived by the enlightened beings. The very first narrative in this section reveals the central premise of the book, that there are two fundamentally different upāyas or

approaches to liberation: one, the practice that pursues supernatural powers while integrating self-realization, and two, the contemplative practice that focuses only on liberation. The discourse between Vasiṣṭha and Bhuśuṅḍa in this narrative is the epitome of embodied and disembodied approaches to self-realization. The last part in this section weaves the narratives of Vidyādhara, Maṅki a sage, Pāṣāṇa or a Rock, Vispaścit, Śava a Corpse, and Tāpasa. The highlights of this section are two small sections identified as Vasiṣṭha Gītā and Brahma Gītā. In essence, this section focuses on the nature of liberation and a discourse on the absolute reality while describing the phenomena of the world through the perspective of the enlightened being. Concurrent are the themes of the illusion of time and space, of the nature of subjectivity, and of the reality of the world.

**The yoga addressed in this text is not so much the physical āsana practice that has become the mainstream yoga of current popularity.**

**On the contrary, the text begins with depression and culminates in liberation.**

Fundamentally, the Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha is addressing all the issues that became relevant after the development of the momentary stream-of-consciousness theory as promulgated by the Yogācāra Buddhists, the non-dual nature of reality as the Brahman in relation to the illusory nature of reality as established by Śaṅkara in the school of Advaita Vedānta, and the absolute freedom of consciousness in constituting reality as propounded by the Trika philosophers of Kashmir. The yoga addressed in this text is not so much the physical āsana practice that has become the mainstream yoga of current popularity. On the contrary, the text begins with depression and culminates in liberation.

The problems addressed therefore are primarily psychological, and the issues related to the mind and mental phenomena are the central themes found throughout the text. Vasiṣṭha repeatedly addresses Rāma, chiding him for his limited ability to constitute his subjective mental state, and seeing the world through this altered state of consciousness. Noteworthy also are the concepts of relativism, the holographic nature of consciousness, parallel reality, different layers of time and space, altered states of consciousness, and embodiment and the world. The narratives of Līlā and Cuḍālā also raise the issues of gender and subjectivity. Accounts such as that of Lavaṇa also bring to the fore the issue of the caste identity. While the primary concern of the text is not the social fabrication of reality, this text can be used as a source-book for these issues.





View from Vasistha Shrine, Himalaya

Contemporary scholars such as Bhikhan Lal Arteya, Walter Slaje, Wendy Doniger, Christopher Chapple, Bruno Lo Turco, Jürgen Hanneder, and Sthaneshwar Timalsina have extensively studied these texts. Although there have been some summary and translation of the text, the complete version of Mokṣopāya has not yet been published. A philologically sound version of the Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha does not yet exist, and any inter-textual analysis of YV in relation to other classical texts and traditions is very rare. The nature of consciousness and reality as proposed in this text presents a holographic nature of reality, places consciousness as capable of constituting reality, and makes the questions regarding subjective states insignificant in light of the altered states of consciousness. The text deserves a clear phenomenological and cognitive psychological interpretation in order for it to be widely accessible to global scholarship. As for myself, I have found this text highly inspirational, and it has helped me in advancing my own meditation practice.

### Suggested Readings:

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Seeing and Appearance, by Sthaneshwar Timalsina. Aachen: Shaker Verlag. 2006.



With undergraduate degrees in English (with Honors) and Art, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Claremont Graduate University, Mary Hicks continues to work as an artist and as editor for scholars in religious studies. Her watercolor paintings draw on Chinese philosophy, art, and Song dynasty ceramics, and Japanese art. In addition to memorizing Saṅskṛit texts, she has recently studied Nāgārjuna at university.  
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# SANKALPA

By Molly Birkholm

Sit for a moment. Yes, you, the reader of this first edition of Sutra Journal. Close your eyes for a moment, before you read the rest of this article or turn the page. Take a few deep breaths... feel back into the heart and ask yourself the question, “How is my heart feeling in this moment?” Listen for the honest response, and if it feels right, continue, “What will bring my heart into harmony?”

The Sanskrit word ‘sankalpa’ is often translated in the West as “intention.” On a deeper level, your sankalpa is, “that which brings you into harmony.” The Vedas define ‘sankalpa’ as “the will that precedes all actions.” It’s the thing that gets you out of bed in the morning. No, not the forced kind of will power when the alarm clock goes off and you begrudgingly drag yourself to the shower. It is the natural will, the one that feels like the authentic expression of your thoughts, your words and your actions. Your sankalpa is a guidepost, a touchstone. It is the point on the horizon that keeps your ship headed in the right direction.

I remember the first time I felt my sankalpa. I was studying at the Sivananda Ashram in India preparing to return to the U.S. after nearly two years of traveling, volunteering and studying yoga and meditation. I had first arrived in Asia after leaving my career in investment banking and surviving a near-death car accident in Manhattan in which my cab driver was killed.

While much of the trauma from that accident was healed sitting in meditation, a tremendous amount of healing also happened serving those who were living in profound suffering - the people who were dying by the thousand in the Thar Desert because they lacked the most basic human need - water; the sex slaves in Thailand getting sold for less than the price of a Coca-Cola; the orphans with missing limbs in Cambodia. Sometimes I wasn't sure how they could have lost more than they already had.

As I meditated on the totality of the experience, my sankalpa arrived like a lightning bolt, "I want to help alleviate the deepest suffering on Earth." I wanted to serve the people who were out of chances and choices. I had absolutely no idea what that would look like, but the sankalpa was clear.

## YOUR DHARMA FINDS YOU

What I experienced next is what happens when sankalpa blooms into dharma. While dharma does not have one definition, the term is used to represent one's duty. It is not a job. It is the thing that lives through you for a higher purpose. Dharma is what sustains you and allows you to learn your lessons so that you can move onto your next stage of evolution. Symbolically, it also represents the role we play in life that, in our own personal way, sustains the universe. Not everyone lives their dharma, but you know it when you feel it. You don't 'find' your dharma. Your dharma finds you.



Shortly after returning from India, my dharma began unfolding in an unexpected way. A doctor friend asked if I would volunteer to teach a yoga class each week at the Miami VA (Department of Veterans Affairs) Hospital. Initially, I felt the irony of teaching yoga in the military. We soon discov-



**Survivors of all kinds of trauma are discovering that as Swami Sivananda said, “Within our biggest weakness resides our greatest strength.”**

**We are empowering survivors now, not just to heal their traumas, but also to step into the reality that they themselves are the healers and change-makers of the world.**

ered that yoga and meditation were powerful tools for healing the physical, mental and spiritual wounds of war. I would have never guessed that ten years later, I would have taught thousands of soldiers and veterans yoga and meditation; conducted clinical research with the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Department of Defense and Harvard University; or that I would be the co-founder of Warriors at Ease, a non-profit organization that has trained and ‘deployed’ more than 575 teachers into military communities, serving more than 100,000 veterans at more than 60 bases and VAs and 10 foreign militaries. I have never felt like I was ‘doing’ this work. It still feels like it is living me.

This dharma is evolving now to include survivors of human trafficking and domestic abuse, prisoners, kids in inner-city schools and so many more. Survivors of all kinds of trauma are discovering that as Swami Sivananda said, “Within our biggest weakness resides our greatest strength.” We are empowering survivors now, not just to heal their traumas, but also to step into the reality that they themselves are the healers and change-makers of the world. Don’t believe me? Take a look at any person you admire- perhaps a family member or friend, perhaps one of the greats like Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama or Mar-

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tin Luther King. They became great not because their lives were easy. They became great because they suffered tremendously and they used their adversity to find wisdom, truth and love.

Trauma in many ways prepares us for the experience of dharma. Our traumas are defined by a loss of control, a shattering of our former paradigm. It is this shattering of our former existence that breaks us open to find our authentic self. Likewise, there is a letting go of control when dharma starts to happen.

It is not enough to study yoga. It is not enough to 'practice' yoga. The teachings have to be lived. Dharma is what brings the yogic teachings to life in the world, not as a theory, but as practical change that transforms suffering into meaning. We are each a vessel for the teachings of yoga to take life in the world. These teachings are valuable to the degree in which we live them. We have to let the teachings of yoga become us. When we do, we become the change-makers and the architects of a more humane destiny for all sentient beings.

So take a moment, again. Close your eyes, take some deep breaths and then listen. What is the song of your heart that wants to play itself out through you? Just listen. The answer wants to be heard.



Molly Birkholm is a recognized leader in Sivananda Yoga, iRest Yoga Nidra and treating trauma with yoga and meditation. She is the co-founder of Warriors at Ease, an organization that builds yoga programs in military communities. Her curriculums have been taught to over 100,000 veterans. Molly also serves as the Director of Yoga Programming & Yoga Therapy for the Sivananda Yoga Retreat. She is the Director of Human Trafficking Relief for the Integrative Restoration Institute. Molly leads worldwide retreats and teacher trainings. She has four iRest Yoga Nidra CDs and is the author of an upcoming book.

[www.healingriveryoga.com](http://www.healingriveryoga.com)

[www.warriorsatease.org](http://www.warriorsatease.org)

[www.irest.us](http://www.irest.us)



Udaigiri Caves

## DEVELOPING A CONTINUITY OF PRACTICE

By Virochana Khalsa

Spiritual practices, such as formal meditation, chanting, pranayama, contemplation, and silent centering gain momentum when the clarity, presence, and wisdom unveiled continues into the next session as if it never ended. Through such an unbroken chain, sacred connectivity begins to pervade all the moments of our life, and our old frameworks, like clouds in front of the eternal sun start evaporating faster than we so expertly create them.

A beautiful picture it is, and yet, not always the prevalent one when our limitations paint a different picture of never quite getting off the ground. As a long-time teacher and practitioner, this essay represents my thoughts – tips, if you will – that can support momentum from one sitting to the next, and in the process develop a greater tantric integration into greater wholeness.

## EARLY STAGE OF PRACTICE

For the beginner, the challenges of ongoing life sometimes derail daily practice. When competing with social concerns, mood swings, work, and family; maintaining continuity can be no easy task. The first tip is to pick one and only one practice, for example a chant or a pranayama (breath exercise) that you do every day, and then do anything else on top of that for fun as you feel like it. Spiritual practices have a way of not only physically, but also emotionally and mentally detoxifying us, and to have too many demands at first can become overwhelming.

Another tip is to pick a practice that is uplifting. We could say that all practices are uplifting but, for example, a beginner might become sleepy in more subtle explorations of meditation and lose interest, whereas the vitality occurring with pranayama that follows stretching usually gives an immediate benefit. Later, as you develop the ability to consistently hold an inward focus, then the subtle practices become very fun and life changing.

Set parameters for yourself before committing to a particular practice, say for a month or two and stick to it. For example, what happens if you get home at 3 am? Do you skip practice or engage for even 5 minutes? Make it workable, not too fanatic, but also disciplined for the moments when you wonder why-am-I-doing-this. By giving yourself guidelines, then your inner-self has a framework for effecting the subtle cleansing and trans-

formative processes of the mind and the subconscious.

When I first lived in an ashram in the late 70's, one of the long-time residents said to me, "You know I see a lot of young people come and go here. The same thing happens for most of them; they start to detox and get sick, and then they miss the 4 am practice, or sleep through it, and they never get back on track." Now this guy had some presence, some gravitas, and I felt he was doing something right. I really took what he said to heart, and for the first year vowed never to let my head touch the ground. Sure enough, as I went through a detox, the laughable bobbing of my head and body trying to stay awake was surely not meditation, but it developed stamina which later served me tremendously. The daily kirtan (chanting and devotional singing to music) following the group sadhana was my reward, and I could not even speak of the bliss it gave me.

## AJAPA

Once an initial practice has so solidified that you are hooked, you might want to give 'japa/ajapa' a try. Here, you choose or are given one mantra that resonates with you, and you repeat it continually throughout the hours of the day, for a considerable length of time, say a year, whereupon it becomes the background shimmering in your awareness. At times it comes into the foreground as the only awareness, such as when sitting.

Some examples are the Gayatri mantra, On Namo Bhagavate, Om Namah Shiva(ya), among

many others. Mantra recitation awakens you very powerfully to that which does not sleep, and for some practitioners, it is the glue that holds their practice together during the 'dry' intervals.

## IN THE MOOD

No doubt about it, spiritual states require a more rarified atmosphere so that it can be perceived and understood. Part of maintaining a continuity of practice is to keep your mind stream elevated. Reading stories of saints and how other practitioners have overcome the challenges in front of them, keeps one in the mood, and is fun. Having like-minded friends, visiting sacred places, and if you are so fortunate to have a spiritual teacher, their inspiration and wisdom are like gold.

Communicate with yourself. Ask, "hmm, I wonder how my pranayama is going to like that second serving of chocolate cake?" It is not about the chocolate cake, it is about the specialness of your practice and intentions; in this way you maintain a positive current.

## WHAT DO YOU WANT?

In 35 years of teaching, I have learned to ask people at the beginning of their journey, and then again at various times, "What is it that you want?" This is important, because there is a ripeness to sincere spiritual practice. For those who are ripe, it is not an entertainment, it becomes a necessity. If you recognize that this is your time, then you can really come to terms with it and embrace it fully!

Often this is a difficult question, because until we gain experience, the value of sadhana is difficult to articulate, and we craftily use concepts we have read or heard, such as enlightenment, liberation, great bliss, etc. Still, it is good to ask and reflect upon this honestly. It helps to acknowledge the pull rising from an inner place, and bring that into the relationship. Even a glimmer helps in the process of getting there by being there.



Sanchi



## THE LITTLE THINGS

So if we practice 30 minutes, 1 hour, 2 hours, 5 hours in a day, that still leaves a lot of other hours in the day. A great secret is not to just focus on the big moments, but on all the little ones. Have an inspiring picture in your work area, and take a moment here or there to remember your mantra. If you catch yourself in a funk and change a thought to an elevating one, send a good thought someone's way, and remember the positive moments, then all of these together help to create a continuity. This cannot be overemphasized, and the bloom you experience in your practice carries over into your daily life.

## A FRAMEWORK

Sometimes the seeker may stumble into spiritual practices without really giving much thought as to how they exist as part of a larger framework, and not knowing better, may isolate these practices from a more expanded context. For example, we pick up a chant, or start moving into the spiritual side of martial arts. This works fine in the beginning, but we can quickly get ourselves in over our head, as we start to activate our energy.

A number of practitioners throughout the ages have collectively created various frameworks in which practices, written knowledge, lifestyle, and different types of transmission work together to support an overall transformation, with the common goal of achieving great clarity. There are different approaches, each geared to individuals with different characteristics. It takes some

searching to discover these resources, but it is well worth it.

## A TEACHER

Traditionally, a teacher or a lineage has always been an important part of this equation. There are some who have developed the ability to have these relationships on a non-physical level, but most need the physical connection as an anchor, which when given permission, can challenge us in areas we might otherwise avoid, as well as help give a voice to our own inner voice. The primary job of a teacher-student relationship, as it matures, is to return a student to themselves; but it is also one of the great joys of life because of the inner connection.

A teacher is a vehicle of transmission, which can be defined as getting a taste of what a heightened state feels like, which you then cultivate for yourself. A teacher can at critical moments give feedback and protection in subtle arenas; however, they are not a substitute for your own sadhana.

## TWICE PER DAY

Meditate at least twice a day. Even if you are exhausted in the evening after a long day's work, at least sit for a couple of minutes. Make this a habit. In the end there is no one to complain to.



Ellora Cave Temples

## RETREAT

For most of us it is a dance as to how much time we get for personal sadhana in relation to our overall life. Hence, it becomes really important to schedule at least one or two retreats in a year, where you can go into deep practice for many hours of the day. In the days leading up to your retreat, further refine your diet, and if possible lengthen your practice. On retreat, outside of your practice, take as much rest as needed.

## A TIP TO REMEMBER

Say you have an enlightening moment, or a special realization during your morning sitting, something you really want to carry forth and not forget.

Go to a point 3 or 4 inches above your head, while maintaining bodily awareness. Visualize or feel yourself as a point or area of light there, and place your realization into it. Make the strong intention that the next time you sit, it will all come back in perfect clarity.

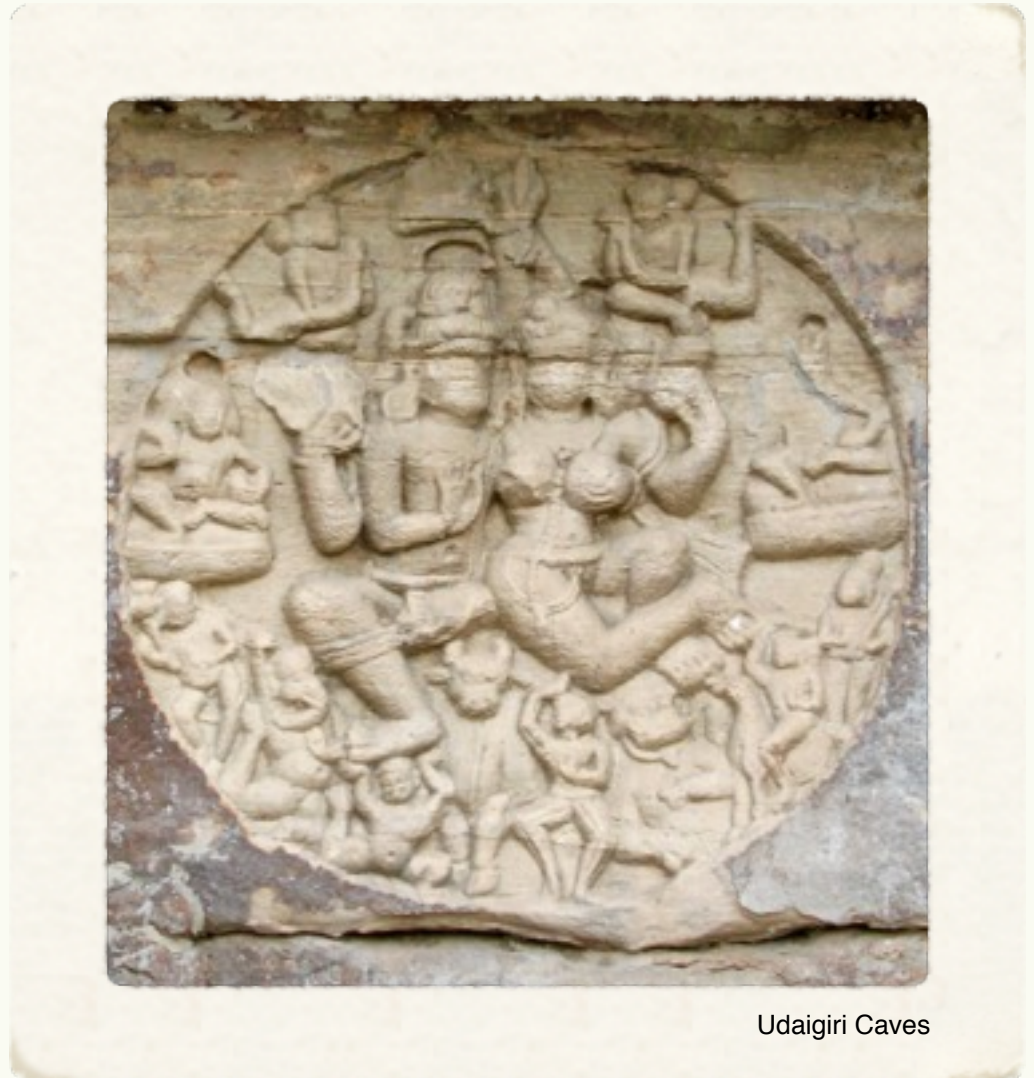
Each time when you subsequently start your practice, first touch into that place. In this way you can retain these very refined understandings to continue building upon them when you next sit. You simultaneously deepen the relationship with yourself, bringing it to more subtle levels.

## MOVE ENERGY

Practice moving energy. This is key. For example, try jumping into cold lakes and rivers; not only is it refreshing, but it also give us practice in moving from one state to another. No River, jump in a cold shower – it's invigorating! Upset, have a grudge – go for a walk. Do some kicks, stretch, move the energy.

I have often seen enthusiastic practitioners moving like rocket ships, and then they come up against an obstacle and stop. In effect they keep their practice safely away from the crisis so that they do not really need to look at it, or rely on it, or question how their practice might help them through this challenge. It could be a job, a relationship, or a personal quirk that one becomes attached to. It takes courage, and practice moving the energy in little moments to sustain you in these big moments.

When I would arrive home from work a bit tired, I would instinctively go to the refrigerator (we used to call them ice boxes) to see what was available. I would also do a few pushups against the counter top, then look again, and do some squats or a few kicks. I would say, "oh I will sit for a moment," and then start a practice (rather than eating first thing). Not fighting against the energy, I would rather transform it through movement. This strategy becomes an important skill in maintaining a clear focus of what we want, and it is constructed through these little moments.



## RELATIONSHIP

If I were to pick one word as a substitute for the word 'spiritual', it would be 'relationship.' Here, I am talking about the vastness of subtle, interior relationship. When it dawns on us that we are always in relationship with life, with everyone, we can begin to cultivate our thoughts more carefully and consequently, we pay attention to our environment. As we develop the richness of inner relationship, it becomes our springboard to greater spiritual practice. Sadhana is not just about developing sensitivity, but also the strength to support that refined sensibility.

Think about it, entering into the body of the one, is entering into relationship with all of those who are awake in the body of the one. So how better

to enter that than through cultivating such a relationship? Beings such as Krishna, Shiva, Tara, Vajra Yogini, etc., become very real. Have an altar, and when you travel, set up a makeshift altar in a hotel room, or even a picture next to your sleeping bag. Relationship, and the love within that builds an awareness of its continuity.

## NECTAR

I have saved this aspect for the last, because it is an intermediate-to-advanced characteristic of spiritual practice. As we advance in our sadhana to the stage where we can enter deep meditation within seconds, and hold an inward focus upon subtle energies, then it becomes natural to start a practice with the elemental qualities and the nectar body. Nectar is a substance that is part physical (or very nearly physical), part subtle, and part very subtle. Thus it is a tangible substance that can help bridge the worlds within us while giving us various experiences of ecstasy and bliss. When we enter into this essence, something simple but even more profound occurs - happiness.

We first need to refine our elemental makeup so that the vitality and strength we possess can support the experience of the nectar within our very own body. Typically the practice is very simple; for example, feeling a drop of sensual nectar in the head, or a loving quality in a drop in the heart. One's focus sustains this experience and it becomes even more real. This becomes a profound component of creating a continuity and depth within our practice.

Prior to this, practices such as the refinement of posture, incorporating longer mantras, breath work, and developing the inner relationship, all bring you to that tantric place.

**Beings such as Krishna, Shiva, Tara, Vajra Yogini, etc., become very real.**

**Prior to this, practices such as the refinement of posture, incorporating longer mantras, breath work, and developing the inner relationship, all bring you to that tantric place.**

## CONCLUSION

As you can see, it is not one thing alone that creates a continuity, but many different aspects working together. As our practice advances we, at times, gain effortless focus and a clear, mostly thought-free, space. Through familiarity and sustained practice, this quality underlies everything, every single moment of the day. As you come to understand this as the ever-present, unchanging reality, this state in which you live becomes a vehicle beyond life and death.

With this, it becomes obvious that everything is made out of various permutations of consciousness. This awareness becomes the true continuity, for you are never outside of it. Within this, we can simultaneously remain inwardly grounded and aware of how our consciousness is independent of outer form, as a causal existence. In this, we gain great freedom and spaciousness.

This is a natural unfolding of sadhana practiced within a framework. While some may see this as the goal, many consider it to be the true beginning of the spiritual path, for you realize the vastness and beauty of who you are. In truth everything occurs in this timelessness state, which from another way of looking at it, is a continuity. Our mind, itself created of the same substance, creates the fog that conceals this from our experience.

May we all become clear and luminous. May our light be a blessed presence for all.



Virochana Khalsa has taught Kriya, Tantra, and ways of working consciously on the earth for 35 years in a dozen countries. He is the author of 4 books including *Eternal Yoga: Awakening into Buddhist Consciousness* and *Tantra of the Beloved*, creator of Sacred Mountain Retreat, and has a software company Silver Earth. He emphasizes the value of deeper practice and developing a continuum of awareness.



# IN APPRECIATION OF THE GITA

By Jeffery D. Long

## A HEALING REVELATION

My first direct encounter with the Bhagavad Gita was in the parking lot of the Methodist church in Montgomery City, the small Missouri town where I spent most of my growing up years. I was reared Catholic, not Methodist, but was in the church parking lot because a flea market was being held there. I had gone there with my grandmother to sell her handmade arts and crafts. My mission was to find old sci-fi paperbacks and comic books.

But the Bhagavad Gita was also very much on my mind. My father had died two years previously – after a long, painful ordeal – and I had consequently undertaken a search for answers to the deep questions of life: Why is there so much suffering? What is the purpose of this life? And what happens after we die? In the intervening months, I had also seen the film Gandhi and begun reading anything I could find by or about the nonviolent Indian freedom fighter.

I had simultaneously developed a great fondness for the music of the Beatles – especially George Harrison, whose fascination with India in turn became a source of fascination for me. I'd been seeing references to Lord Krishna and the Bhagavad Gita in the writings of Gandhi and in the lyrics, interviews, and album cover art of George Harrison, even in Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics*, which I was reading. So I was quite keen to read this ancient text and go right to the source of the wisdom that had inspired my heroes. I was fourteen years old.

The Bhagavad Gita, however, was not easy to come by in Montgomery City, so I was not sure when I would get to read this wise and ancient book. But on that spring day in 1983, something happened that changed the course of my life. Seeing a flea market table that looked like a promising place to find books, I saw the Bhagavad Gita sitting on top of a pile of old magazines. It was the richly illustrated *Bhagavad Gita: As It Is*, the Gita as translated by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and friend and teacher of George Harrison.

I opened the text, seemingly at random, to one of the illustrated plates – a portrait of a man who had died and was surrounded by his grieving family. The picture hit me like a lightning bolt, as it seemed to sum up perfectly the experiences of my family over the past couple of years. Standing at some distance from this grieving family was a wise Hindu sage, gazing upon them with a serene, compassionate detachment, and gifted with the ability to see the divinity within each fam-

ily member (illustrated by a small image of Lord Krishna floating over each person's heart). Beneath this picture was a caption that read, "The wise lament neither for the living nor the dead," with a page number given.

Reading these words, I felt as if I was hearing the voice of God speaking directly to me in this Methodist church parking lot.

I looked up the page reference indicated next to the caption and came to the eleventh verse of the second chapter of the text: "Those who are wise lament neither for the living nor the dead. Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be. As the embodied soul continually passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth, and then to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. The self-realized soul is not bewildered by such a change."

I cannot begin to describe the power these words had for me that day, a power that resonates to this day. Transfixed, I could not put the book down. Here was the wisdom I was seeking. Here were answers that actually made sense, both logically and intuitively. I bought the book for a quarter – the best quarter I've ever spent!



Krishna Temple at Vijaynagar

The Bhagavad Gita is actually a fairly small portion – eighteen concise chapters – of a much, much longer text, the Mahabharata, which is roughly four times the length of the Bible. Composed, at least in its current form, about 2,000 years ago in the sacred Sanskrit of ancient India, the Mahabharata tells the story of a war between two branches of a royal family – the Kurus or Kauravas, and the Pandavas, though it also includes many other stories and discourses on ethics and spirituality.

The Bhagavad Gita, or “Song of the Blessed Lord,” is simply called “the Gita” by most Hindus, though many gitas, or songs, have been composed through the centuries, songs such as the twelfth century Gita Govinda of Jayadeva, narrating the love story of Radha and Krishna, and Guru Gita, a hymn to one’s teacher.

The Bhagavad Gita recounts a dialogue at one of the most dramatic points in the Mahabharata, just as the final battle of the Kuru-Pandava war is about to begin. The Pandava hero, Arjuna, is about to lead his forces into battle by blowing the conch shell horn that will signal the charge. He asks his charioteer (who is not only his cousin and best friend, but, it turns out, Krishna – God incarnate) to drive him to the center of the battlefield, between the two assembled armies.

Arjuna observes the brave, heroic, and noble men in both armies. His own teacher, Drona, and the grandfatherly Bhishma, out of adherence to their oaths of loyalty, have actually ended up on the other side of the battle against Arjuna and his brothers, although the mutual affection between the Pandavas and these two figures remains undiminished.



It is, in short, a classic civil war situation, with family member fighting family member. Arjuna, despondent at the thought of the slaughter to come, and the fact that he is duty bound to take up arms against the very men whose feet he has previously touched in respect, men to whom he still looks up to with profound reverence, wishes that he was anywhere but on this field of battle. He turns to Krishna for advice.

Krishna – who, again, is no ordinary friend, but Bhagavan, the Blessed Lord – proceeds to advise Arjuna. His advice may be shocking to someone who associates Hinduism with Gandhian nonviolence and grew up during or in the wake of the great peace movements in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Krishna does not tell Arjuna to become a pacifist and embrace his enemies. He advises Arjuna, rather, to fight the battle before him as duty demands. As Gandhi and others who adore this text attest – Gandhi famously called the Gita his “dictionary of daily reference” – the point here is not to endorse violence, but to inspire all of us to face the challenges of life with courage.

From a literary perspective, the battlefield situation functions to give Krishna (and the author of the text) the occasion to launch into an extended discourse on the meaning of existence and the way to our ultimate goal: the supreme peace of Brahman (brahma-nirvana). Beginning with the doctrines of the immortality of the Self and the process of birth, death, and rebirth (which I found so reassuring in my youth and that con-

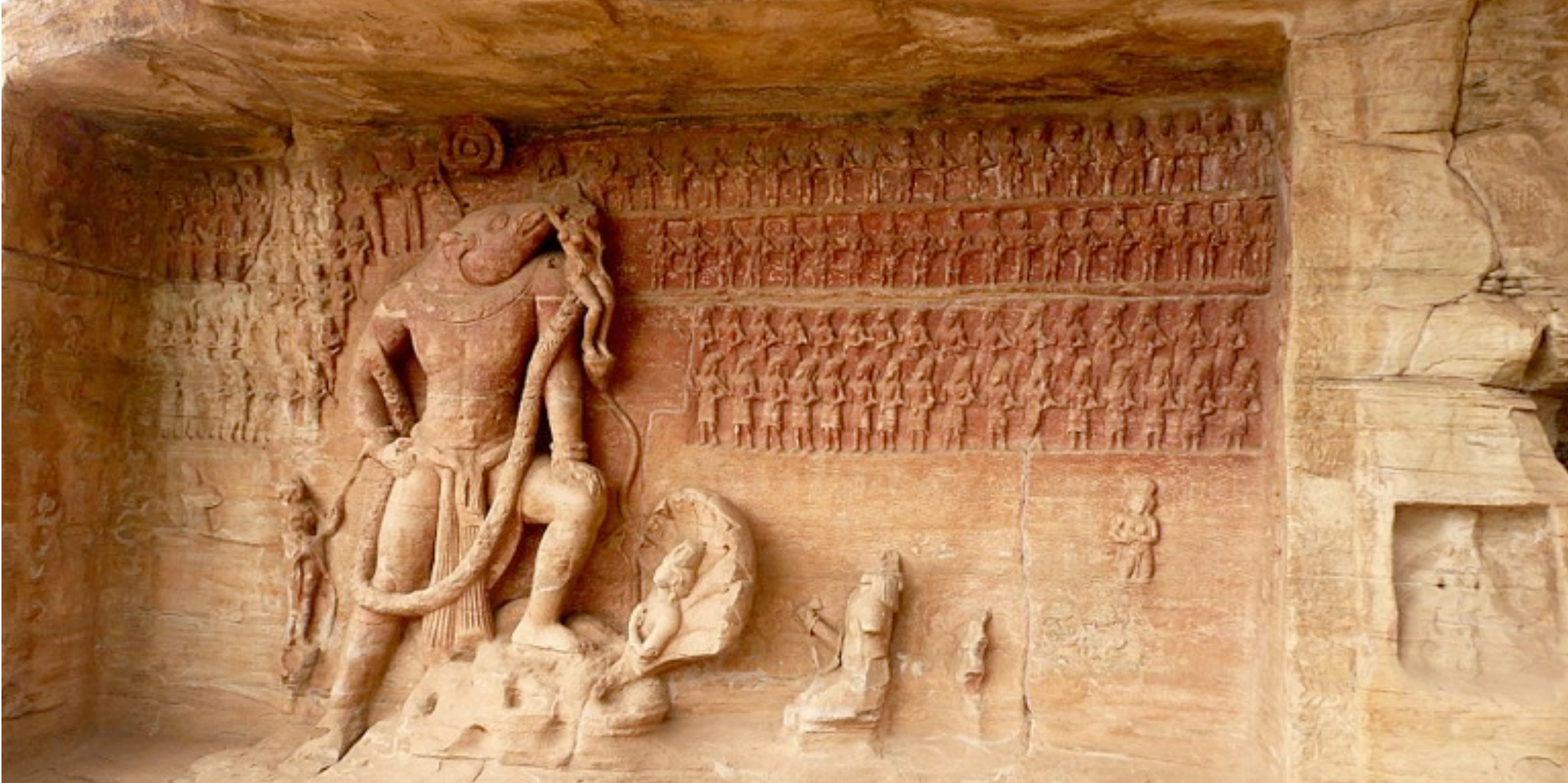
tinue to reassure me today), Krishna takes Arjuna on a comprehensive and detailed journey. The journey visits the various spiritual paths, or yogas, that lead to ultimate bliss.

It is not by avoiding the things that we fear, the Gita teaches us, that we become free. It is by facing them head-on, with the courage of a warrior, and offering each action and experience as an offering to the divinity who dwells within us all that we can at last reach the state of transcendence, in which we see God in everyone and everything that we encounter. And if God is everywhere, in everyone and everything, what is there to fear? An encouraging message indeed, for a fourteen-year-old who has lost his father, and for people struggling everywhere to find a way to true and lasting inner peace.



Dr. Long is Professor of Religion and Asian Studies at Elizabethtown College, in Pennsylvania, USA. He is associated with the Vedanta Society, DĀNAM (the Dharma Academy of North America). A major theme of his work is religious pluralism.

Dr. Long has authored three books, *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism*, *Jainism: An Introduction*, and *The Historical Dictionary of Hinduism*. He has published and presented a number of articles and papers in various forums including the Association for Asian Studies, the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, and the American Academy of Religion.



Udaigiri Caves

# THE ROLE OF DEVOTION IN YOGA

By Bill Francis Barry

What do the classic yoga texts teach about the role of devotion in yoga practice? Is devotion to a higher force, deity or divine principle considered optional? What are the forms of devotional practice that are relevant to yoga? Answers to these questions are clearly stated in the Yoga Sutras, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the Ramayana as well as less well known yogic texts such as the Yoga Yajnavalkya, and the Gheranda Samhita.

As a preface, here is some context which begins to answer the question: devotion to whom or what? Understanding of key verses from the Yoga Sutras, and other texts, will be aided by a brief look at the Sanskrit phrase Ishwara pranidhana which is frequently translated as 'devotion to God'. The term, Ishwara, often translated as the Lord of the Universe, represents that primordial force that sustains order in the universe, as explained by Paramahansa Yogananda<sup>1</sup>. Ishwara is translated as "Supreme Consciousness" by Swami Satchidananda<sup>2</sup>. Pranidhana, means devotional submission according to Professor Edwin F. Bryant<sup>3</sup>. Pranidhana, as devotional submission, is often explained in terms of surrendering the fruits of all actions to God or to humanity. Humanity, in this context, is seen to represent "God in manifestation" according to Swami Satchidananda<sup>4</sup>.

A perhaps simpler alternative to understanding Ishwara pranidhana as devotion to God is offered by Swami Niranjananda Saraswati who translates Ishwara pranidhana as “surrender to the highest reality”<sup>5</sup>. And for those who may not be comfortable with the term “surrender”, the respected author David Frawley explains that devotional surrender does not mean accepting a teaching as an end in itself, but as a means that can take us beyond all specific belief systems<sup>6</sup>.

## YOGA SUTRAS

What does Patanjali teach in the Yoga Sutras about devotion’s role in attaining samadhi, the highest goal of yoga? Yoga Sutras, book 1 sutra 23, states that samadhi is attained by devotion with total dedication to Ishwara<sup>7</sup>. Elsewhere in the Yoga Sutras, Sage Patanjali reinforces this teaching, by presenting devotion as a required prerequisite for attaining the goal of yoga.

The Yoga Sutras teach about the ten Yamas & Niyamas. These ten principles are more than just rules to live by. They are taught as prerequisites to the advanced stages of yoga! In Yoga Sutras, book II sutra 32, Patanjali teaches that one of the niyamas, devotion to the divine (Ishwara pranidhana), is a mandatory prerequisite for the higher stages of yoga. Patanjali states clearly that devotion to the divine is one of the required practices toward the attainment of samadhi.

Now, just to be sure we didn’t miss it, Sage Patanjali, reinforces this teaching, in Yoga Sutras book II sutra 45, where he states: From surrender to the divine comes the perfection of samadhi. The great Swami Satchidananda sums up this sutra

by calling this the easy path. Sri Satchidananda quotes the Bhagavad Gita verse where Krishna states “do everything in My name, then you will get peace”. Satchidananda emphasizes that by focusing on this one approach, you will attain all<sup>8</sup>.

Some yoga students may say that they have chosen to pursue the highest goal of yoga through the ‘path of action’, therefore they are less interested in devotion. Those students may want to be aware that Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras teach that devotion is one of the three requirements of the path of action. In Yoga Sutras book 2, sutra 1, the path of action is explained to have three components: self-discipline, study, and dedication to the divine. Most translations of this sutra state clearly that all three of these components are required in the path of action. (It is interesting to note that in this sutra, the term Ishwara pranidhana is translated as follows: Swami Satchidananda translates it as ‘surrender to the supreme being’; Edwin F. Bryant as “dedication to the Lord”; and Prabhavananda & Isherwood as “dedication of the fruits of one’s works to God”.)

## OTHER CLASSIC YOGA TEXTS

In the widely respected Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the first verse in chapter one, begins with an offering of reverence to Shiva as the source of yogic knowledge that is the “first step to the pinnacle of raja yoga”<sup>9</sup>. In this verse we have a clear demonstration of the importance of acknowledging, with humility, a transcendent universal consciousness represented in the form of Shiva, “for



Khajuraho

those who wish to ascend to the highest stage of yoga, raja yoga”<sup>10</sup>.

As with most scriptures, the quality of the translation is dependent on the clarity of consciousness of the translator! But whether that first verse in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika is translated as “reverence to Shiva, the Lord of Yoga”<sup>11</sup> or it is explained as an acknowledgement of the supreme cosmic consciousness which is known by many names<sup>12</sup>, this verse teaches that acknowledgement of an extraordinary source of the special knowledge of yoga is an essential step in establishing the yoga student’s focused intention and receptivity. Such a sankalpa, a focused intention and receptive attitude, is a fundamental requirement of progressing on the path of yoga.

Another great source book is the Yoga Yajnavalkya discourse on yoga. Older and less well known than the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the Yoga Yajnavalkya, in chapter 9 verses 12-44, describe the importance of developing a practice of dhyana (meditation) on the deity within, in order to achieve union with the Paramatman in order to

achieve liberation. These verses, describe the image of the luminous being Narayana (known also by other names), experienced within the heart lotus with eight petals (the Hrit Padma) which has “bloomed due to the practice of pranayama”, described as “the Supreme Being and the lord of the celestials, present in the heart of all beings”. These verses further state that “by this dhyana (meditation) itself, one attains unity with the Divine ... and becomes liberated”<sup>13</sup>.

A similar teaching is found within the seventeenth century yogic text Gheranda Samhita. As explained in the translation and illuminated commentary by Swami Niranjananda Saraswati, we find instruction<sup>14</sup> on meditating on one’s ishta-devata (one’s chosen form of deity) to provide methods to reach the inner chamber of the heart (the Hrit Padma, the hidden 8-petalled lotus beneath the Anahata Chakra). A teaching which, Swami Narajananda explains will aid in turning the attention within (pratyahara) and focus (dharana) as a means to enable meditation (dhyana).



## THE UPANISHADS

Teachings of the spiritual essence of yoga practice has its foundation in the Vedic scriptures. The Shvetashvatara Upanishad contains one of the oldest references to yoga's physical and devotional practices. Regarded as one of the authoritative Upanishads in explaining Vedanta philosophy, the Shvetashvatara Upanishad has a greater emphasis on the bhakti (devotional) elements than most other Upanishads<sup>15</sup>. The role of the Shvetashvatara Upanishad as an important link between modern yoga teachings and their Vedic foundation, is explained very well in the book "Vedic Yoga, The Path of the Rishi" by David Frawley<sup>16</sup>.

## JNANA YOGA & BHAKTI YOGA

It is somewhat well known that teachings in the Bhagavad Gita place great emphasis on the significant advantages of bhakti yoga, the path of devotion. Yet, the Gita also teaches that there exist multiple paths to achieving the highest goal of yoga. One of those other paths is called Jnana Yoga, the path of knowledge. Some advocates of the yogic path of knowledge may assume that devotion has no role, and that by attaining the fullest experiential knowledge of the truth of our existence one achieves enlightenment. However, one of the greatest advocates of Jnana Yoga was the esteemed teacher Adi Shankaracharya who held a very high regard for the importance of devotion to the divine, as evidenced by his 8th century hymn Bhaja Govindam. "In this prayer, Adi Shankara emphasizes the importance of devotion for God as a means to spiritual development and to liberation from the cycle of birth and death"<sup>17</sup>.

## THE NINE FORMS OF BHAKTI

Well the Yoga Sutras and these other esteemed yoga texts have told us how important devotion is. Let's now look to one last authority to understand some of the forms of devotion. In the epic story, The Ramayana, we have Sri Rama's teachings on the 9 forms of Bhakti, the Nava-Bhakti.

1. Satsang – keeping the company of saints, association with devotees with spiritual interests
2. Katha – listening to stories and positive attributes of God and the great masters
3. Seva – Service to guru, service to others, service to humanity
4. Kirtan – Group chanting of mantra, community singing in praise of God
5. Japa (mantra) and bhajan – chanting the divine names, the mystic mantras and bhajans
6. Dama & Birati – self-control, control of the senses and dispassion
7. Mohimaya Jaga Dekha – to see God in everything and everyone
8. Jathalabha santosha – contentment, finding no fault in anyone
9. Mama Bharosa – Depending on God for everything, surrender to divine will

The nine forms presented above are as taught by Sadguru Sant Keshavadas, in his book Prema Yoga page 46 - 47. The source documents for the Nava-Bhakti are: Tulasi Das' Ramacaritamana<sup>18</sup> and Valmiki's Ramayana<sup>19</sup> (see footnote <sup>19</sup> for an abridged version of The Ramayana written by Sadguru Sant Keshavadas "Ramayana At A Glance"). A different list of the Nine Forms of Devotion, is found in the scriptures Srimad - Bhagavata and the Vishnu Purana.

## IN CLOSING

Devotion to the divine encourages humility, receptivity and a tendency towards service. As devotion is cultivated, one's orientation shifts from habits of self-centered thinking or being overly critical, to becoming inspired towards more unconditional love. Prema, the highest form of love<sup>20</sup>, eventually begins to manifest and dominate one's outlook.

When we set our commitment to serve, and dedicate more of our actions to the divine, this will often lead to an increased awareness of, and attunement with, the divine forces of dharma (divine law). Taken further, when one's perceptions of life, perceptions which had been saturated by the dampening field of the phenomenal world, begin to be replaced by a presence, experienced within and all

around, of an attunement to that 'Supreme Consciousness', something wonderful happens. There begins a transition to a place of increased trust in that divine 'Supreme Consciousness'. When this happens, our individual ego's control of our will begins to relax and the initial steps of surrender can begin.

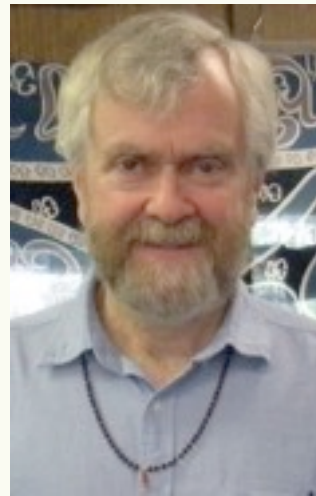
As this process unfolds, those divine forces respond and begin to embrace, support and lift us up. This is Divine Grace. Divine Grace becomes a resource and guide to further the yogi's progress on the path of redefining our self-identity from the finite temporary individual personality to a recognition of, a remembrance of, our divine oneness with that 'Supreme Consciousness'. The distinction between the devotee and the object of devotion disappears when the yogi's individual consciousness transitions to an experiential identification with that infinite, immortal unbounded supreme consciousness.

The great master Sri Ramakrishna compared this Divine Grace "to an ever-blowing breeze; you have only to raise your sail in order to catch it"<sup>21</sup>. So, through the path of devotion, the yogi catches that wind of ever-blowing Divine Grace and then lets go, and the Divine Grace nurtures, helps protect and guides us on the path to Self Realization.

There is a teaching common to many yoga traditions which says that the last act before liberation is surrender. Although for most of us, the notion of surrender can be hard to fully imagine. For the advanced yogi, they eventually gain direct experi-

ential knowledge of 'That' to which they will surrender to! 'That' being the 'Supreme Consciousness', the object of their devotion. They experience the great Vedic teaching I am That, Thou art That, All of This is That. Their identity has been transformed. They move from the realm of duality, to unity. And within such a context the surrender becomes a release which leads to unfathomable gain.

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Bill Francis Barry (Bharata) is a certified Teacher of Mantra, Vedic Priest and Yoga Teacher. He has been a student and practitioner of mantra, yoga and Vedic studies since 1969. His studies included in-person training with Namadeva Acharya, Yogi Bhajan, Paramahansa Muktananda, Swami Satchidananda; plus the works of Sadguru Sant Keshavadas. He has

four degrees and 500+ hours Yoga Teacher Training from University of Massachusetts. He teaches workshops in Sanskrit mantra, puja ceremony and offers remote puja services & personal consultations.

[www.mantravijaya.com](http://www.mantravijaya.com)

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Spiti, Himalaya

# ROAD TO DHARMA

By Tejas Surya

At age 13, I decided to leave the religion of my birth, Christianity, in search of something different. At the time I had no idea what I was looking for, or where I would find it. I was simply spurred on by an internal, unquestionable knowing that the relationship between man, God, and the world was very different from what I had previously thought.

## DIVINITY

Divinity is manifest as the Universe itself. Divinity is the context also in which the content exists. Divinity and man's true identity is one, and non-different from each other. God is more than a man in the sky condemning us for sins; there must be more to the story.

After having been exposed to books by mystic authors, that was the conclusion I had come to, and that voice simply would not keep quiet. I explored Western Neo-Paganism for most of my teenage years, followed by Buddhism, followed by "spiritual but not religious/New Ageism."

There is one thing I always noticed in all my searching, and that is each source always credited a Hindu text or teacher for its understanding. Without fail some of the most eye-opening, attention grab-



Ganga aarti at Varanasi

bing, paradigm shifting works credited the Vedas, or the Bhagavad Gita, or the Yoga Sutras, or a Hindu guru.

The occasional Rumi reference was thrown in, but the ideas that really re-shaped my outlook came from these Hindu sources. I didn't understand Hinduism though. As a Westerner I felt very "on the outside looking in" because there was this subtle programming in my mind that said that to follow this tradition, I must share the ethnic identity as well.

## BHAGAVAD GITA

**As a Westerner I felt very "on the outside looking in" because there was this subtle programming in my mind that said that to follow this tradition, I must share the ethnic identity as well.**

I later learned this idea was a total misconception; I could absolutely be a Western Sanatana Dharmi (Hindu). I realized that I had never really learned about Sanatana Dharma, known most commonly in the West as Hinduism, fully. The information was never really presented to me in school, or by any peers, nor by the media whatsoever.

When I was 19 years old, I met a man named Anupam at the Buddhist center where I practiced meditation. He was starting a Bhagavad Gita study group in my town, and I decided to attend. Over the weeks I had studied, I was amazed at the depth and gravity of the insights that poured out from this book. I was also amazed by Anupam himself, as he was constantly striving to put the ideals of the Gita into practice in his day-to-day life, and he had a very spiritual aura about him.

Although he had many degrees and a high paying job with a chemistry firm, he lived extremely modestly. The Gita was his life, Vishnu was his ishta devata, and his every waking moment was a sadhana. After learning from him for a few months, he left for California and I continued to

help teach the study groups after his departure. After a while, my schedule became more hectic, and I had to discontinue the study groups.

## MEDITATION

I intensified my own study of the Upanishads and Gita on my own whenever I could, but my path on Sanatana Dharma was still not fully concrete until 2013. It was an incredibly difficult year with many health issues resulting in hospitalization, and then a car accident where I broke my wrist and fractured my pelvis in several places. This was all coupled with financial issues. During this time of immense pressure, I found a new equanimity I had not before known.

**In my meditations I began having intense realizations where, I feel, I began to experientially perceive some the truths that used to only be intellectual ideas I had read about.**

In my meditations I began having intense realizations where, I feel, I began to experientially perceive some the truths that used to only be intellectual ideas I had read about. These series of realizations led me to firmly dedicate myself to the path of Sanatana Dharma. I began to study the Master Course under the auspices of Kauai's Hindu Monastery, as well as take courses and study programs from Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. It is my mission to spread awareness of Sanatana Dharma in my community, and have opportunities to share the gifts that it has given me with others.

So how is Hinduism different from from the other paths I was on, and what made it stand out? When I considered myself "spiritual but not religious," I expected anything considered to be a "religion" to be restrictive and moralistic. Just a list of do's and dont's laid down by someone



at some far off place in history. I felt that to call myself any one religion in particular was somehow limiting. There were a series of experiences that I had in meditation that changed all of that forever.

## FREEDOM

I began to see those things that I experienced, were talked about in great detail in the various Hindu shastras (scriptures) in a way that no other path on Earth I had studied had laid it down. I began to realize that the Hindu Dharma was a process, a science, and a particular high vision of life, rather than a simple philosophy and belief system. The Hindu Dharma is in no way limiting of one's freedom to explore and inquire, in fact, it urges you to!

I also found that the Hindu Dharma is a complex living system of practices designed to help a person grow into their fullest potential, and learning how to be in harmony with eternal Natural Law (Sanatana Dharma). Many in the West have taken individual disciplines from the Hindu Dharma and have left the rest, like Hatha Yoga, meditation, and so on. I found that, although these disciplines can be effective on their own, they are 100 times more effective when included in the entire system of Sanatana Dharma (Hindu Dharma).

All of the systems of Yoga, Meditation, Scriptural practice, Contemplation, Devotion, and so on, are designed to work together, in tandem with each other, to help the person on the path to moksha (freedom from suffering/bondage). The Hindu Dharma has such diversity, that one is free to pick whichever avenue to spiritual unfoldment suits him or her, often with guidance of a Guru

and a community of peers. It is freedom with responsibility.

The Hindu is free, and strives to use this freedom to uplift self and others, to service the community, and to come to the realization of Divinity within, and within every living thing.

Harih Om Namah Shivaya.



Brandon Fulbrook (Tejas Surya) lives, works, and attends college in Missoula, MT where he also holds study groups related to Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism), and its various philosophies and practices such as Yoga and Vedanta. Although still young, he has spent nearly the entirety of his youth in study of world religions before finding his home in the Vedic tradition. He has done formal training through Kauai's Hindu Monastery, and has spent additional time under the instruction of Pandits based in Las Vegas and Missoula. He writes articles with a Dharmic focus, and he aims overall to educate a Western audience on the reality of Sanatana Dharma, beyond common misconceptions as portrayed frequently in news sources and popular culture.

*The term "Polytheism" comes from Biblical discourse, which has the term 'theism' as its starting point.*

*[As a Hindu] I have no use for these terms. They create confusion.*

*I dwell in a different universe of discourse which starts with 'know thyself' and ends with the discovery, 'thou art that'.*

*Sita Ram Goel*



## AYURVEDA • LIST OF FOREMOST THINGS

*From the Ayurvedic source text, Charaka Samhita • 500 BCE*

*Food is the foremost among those that sustain life*

*water among those that are refreshing*

*exercise among those that make for firmness of the body*

*air among those that restores animation and consciousness*

*overeating among those that are causative of digestive disorders*

*eating according to one's digestive capacity among those that are stimulative of the gastric fire*

*eating and working in conformity to one's constitution among sound practices*



*timely eating among those that promote health*

*the giving of satisfaction among the properties of food*

*the suppression of natural urges among those that are causative of ill health*

*wine among those that cause exhilaration*

*intemperate indulgence among those that impair understanding, resolution and memory*

*excessive indulgence in sex among those that cause consumption*

*the constant suppression of seminal ejaculation among those that cause emasculation*

*the sight of a slaughtering place among those that destroy the inclination for food*

*abstinence from food among those that curtail life*

*irregular eating among those that impairs the gastric fire*

*the eating of foods of an antagonistic nature among those that lead to disease*

*self-restraint among those that are wholesome*

*overstraining among those that are unwholesome*

*wrong indulgence among those that are generative of diseases*

*grief among those that promote disease*

*bathing among those that remove fatigue*

*joy among those that give delight*

*grief among those that cause wasting*  
*inactivity among those that promote corpulence*  
*corpulence among those that induce sleep*  
*excessive sleep among those that give rise to lethargy*  
*an infant among those that require mild medication*  
*an old man among those requiring palliative treatment*  
*cheerful spirits among those that help to retain conception in women*  
*zest for life among attributes of health*  
*an assemblage of physicians among those that help to resolve doubts*  
*practical skill among the qualities of a physician*  
*applied scientific knowledge in pharmacology*  
*reason supported by scripture among the means of knowledge*  
*a sense of propriety among the results accruing from a knowledge of time*  
*indolence among the causes of procrastination*  
*practical work and observation among those that dispel doubts*  
*incompetence among the causes of fear*  
*clinical discussions among those that help to broaden one's understanding*  
*the teacher among those that help in the acquisition of knowledge*  
*Ayurveda among those that deserve to be practiced*  
*a misunderstanding among those that are injurious*  
*and the renunciation of greed among those that give happiness*







Tree shrine at Samajam Ayurvedic Hospital, Kerala



Orientalism: Exoticized Yogis

## CRITICS CORNER: YOGA AS THE COLONIZED SUBJECT

By Sri Louise

Within the serene, spare yoga studios across Europe and America, yoga has become so assimilated into everyday language and activity that, to the predominantly Caucasian practitioners, the idea that violence and privilege have created their practices might have never even occurred.

My own teaching practice has become a pedagogical experiment in shedding light on the continuing historical imbalances that shape our lives. I have just completed teaching a week long workshop titled *Yoga & Whiteness; Mapping the Self Construct or Outing the Hippie Woowoo Colonial Crap at Impulstanz Festival* in Vienna.

When I asked participants whether anyone in the room had ever heard of the European scramble for Africa or the Berlin Conference of 1894, only 2 of the 20 plus students raised their hands. I did something similar during a Yoga workshop in the States where we sat in a circle and I asked participants,

which Indigenous people preceded them in the territory where the students were born. No one in the room knew. Eerily, our ignorance allowed for the collective erasure of Native lives to be immediately visible in that unnamed space.

Without understanding the History of Occupation, students lack the means to deconstruct the colonial views inevitably internalized in the process of becoming American, or in this case European.

In *Yoga & Whiteness*, I showed a video titled *13 Depressing Photographs That Will Make You Lose Your Faith in Humanity...* [Youtube](#). Each photo depicts how Indigenous peoples were forced on display for the Colonial Gaze.

These human zoos occurred in both North America and Europe. One image depicts Ota Benga, who was Congolese, shown at the Bronx Zoo in 1906. He was coerced into carrying around orangutans and other apes while being exhibited right along side them. To understand the relationship between Whites and the Congo here is an account of Belgian Colonial terror... [Youtube](#).

The 13th image in the series is that of an African girl, probably Congolese, exhibited in a human zoo in Brussels, Belgium, the year is 1958. The

image also shows a white boy on the other side of the enclosure and I asked the Europeans, what does this white boy internalize about the situation? What does he come to believe about

his own self-concept? About his Ethnic position in the world? About White Supremacy?

It made me think of an orientalist postcard included in the Smithsonian Exhibit titled, *The Art of Transformation: 2000 years of Yoga*. The media fact sheet for the show, this [pdf](#), classifies the gallery in which this particular photo is exhibited in as **Yoga in the Transnational Image, 1850-1940**.



"The Gallery explores the exoticized 'yogis' that dominated public discourse and popular representations between 1850 and 1940. Highlights include an albumen print of 'Yogis' staged and photographed by Collin Murray (for Bourne and Shepherd) and Thomas Edison's *Hindoo Fakir*, the first movie made of an Indian Subject." Here is a link to the film... [Youtube](#).

It does not show an Indian subject, but rather the objectified representation the white mind holds of the Indian subject.



British Indian Empire 1909 Imperial Gazetteer of India

The Smithsonian exhibition was curated by a white woman, whose use of the word 'Transnational' obscures the power differential that is the engine behind Colonial rule and extraction. Whether intentional or not, the effect is the same. The curator uses a word that describes something that extends beyond national boundaries, suggesting some kind of mutual participation in the construction of image/identity, but included in this gallery are images that have been produced solely by the gaze of whites, for their exotic entertainment, highlighting 'the micro politics of desire' as proposed through the 'libidinal economy'.

The libidinal investment is one of psychological gain and the psychological gain is one of superiority. A show curated by whites, mainly patronized by whites, conveniently obscures the colonial gaze by referring to the gallery as *The Transnational Image*. 1850-1940 spans the culmination of British Colonial rule in India. Perhaps if the exhibit had not whitewashed the colonial history

in India, it could have been an invitation for Euro-American 'Yogis' to gain some congruency among our Colonial assumptions and entitlements around Yoga, especially with regards to 'ownership'. After all, Americans own the stolen land upon which we now live...

If we could name the space where Yoga now resides, we might call that gallery 1947-2015 Yoga in the Transnational Image. Still we would have to reconcile what Champa Rao Mohan sites as "the excruciating state of inbetweenity...where identities remain clouded in uncertainty because of the complex amalgam that constitutes them." American 'Yogis' have enjoyed an unimpeded foray into the identity and business of Yoga for over a hundred years, but alas, as with all colonial enterprises, resistance is inevitable and a new South Asian intervention 'reversing the white gaze' has thrown a wrench in the North American Yoga Industrial Complex. Since 2008 the on-

going debate over who 'owns' Yoga, and what exactly defines Yoga has dominated the Yoga discourse. The answer depends wholly upon the subjectivity granted to the topic.

Derek Beres is a North American self-styled, Yoga entrepreneur. He recently wrote a blog post on International Yoga Day. His thesis? Indians, or more specifically, Hindus, only want to reclaim Yoga after the West turned it a billion dollar Industry.

For Derek, International Yoga Day is about India harnessing the monetary value of Yoga for itself. I call this Colonial shaming. The 'colonizer' who extracts great profits from Yoga, chastises the 'colonized' when they want to reclaim their own spiritual resources for themselves...

Derek defines Yoga, not from an Indigenous perspective, but rather quotes another white male subject, Mircea Eliade when he writes, *"If the word 'Yoga' means many things that is because Yoga is many things"*, which is code for I am therefore not constrained by what Hindus think Yoga means and am justified in giving it my own meaning.

But even more unnerving than the above is the following quote, "It's hard to separate the spiritual from the physical, especially when the physical bodies traveling to India arrive with wallets. Most incredible about this claim of ownership is that for quite some time, mainstream Indian civilization wanted little to do with yoga." Derek presents the Westerner as being a victim of Indian greed, only seen for their wallets. How's that for inverting the colonial dynamic?

Hindu American Foundation asked Yoga Journal why it had never linked Yoga to Hinduism. Yoga Journal responded by saying, "because it carries baggage."

When you look at the semantics of the divide between Indian/Desi Yoga and American Yoga, words tell an interesting story. Originally, the debate began in 2008 when Sheetal Shah, senior director at the Hindu American Foundation, asked Yoga Journal why it had never linked Yoga to Hinduism. Yoga Journal responded by saying, "because it carries baggage." This reply prompted Ms. Shah to launch 'Take Back Yoga', which was intended to highlight Yoga's roots. Where Hindu's use language like 'origin' or 'heritage', American 'Yogis' revert by colonial default to 'ownership', so that the debate concerning cultural roots, swiftly becomes a struggle for proprietorship, especially on the part of Western Yoga Entrepreneurs desperate to maintain their investments.

From Derek Beres and Leslie Kaminoff to Matthew Remski and Carol Horton, 'Yogis' across North America will insist that no one can own Yoga, so maybe the question should be changed to whether someone can appropriate Yoga and what is the relationship between cultural appropriation and neo-colonialism? What are the entitlements that the colonizer has over the colonized subject, in this case, the colonized subject being Yoga itself?

Beres' entire post is littered with imperial perversion, but perhaps the most dangerous is the assumption that mainstream Indian civilization wanted little to do with its own heritage. He is met in the comment section with a South Asian perspective that he unabashedly continues to marginalize.



Leslie Kaminoff also parades this colonial trope in his article *Who Own's Yoga* when he asserts, "The India of 1925 had long rejected her own gift, and Yogis were held by most of society in the lowest esteem possible, associated with street beggars, fakirs, criminals and frauds. The tireless work of Krishnamacharya and his contemporaries resurrected, in decades, what it took India centuries to discard."

One way to understand India's relationship to Yoga is by appreciating the Ashrama system, or the four stages of Hindu life, Brahmacharya, Grhastha, Vanaspratha and Sannyasa. Certain yoga texts and practices were only intended for the Sannyasin, the one who renounces the material condition for the sole pursuit of self-knowledge. While Yoga conceived in this way was never intended for the mainstream, the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita are replete with discussions of Yoga that have been held in the hearts of mainstream Hindus for thousands of years before Americans capitalized on the commodification of what it now refers to as Yoga.



Beres' entire post is littered with imperial perversion, but perhaps the most dangerous is the assumption that mainstream Indian civilization wanted little to do with its own heritage. He is met in the comment section with a South Asian perspective that he unabashedly continues to marginalize. You can read the whole exchange [here](#).

**When Derek Beres lashes out suggesting Indians didn't want their own heritage, he is not forwarding the discourse, he is throwing salt on the colonial wound.**

It is well documented that the British sought to not just undermine the Hindu, but to remake India in its own image as summarized by Thomas Macaulay: "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."

This was done by casting the English as superior and everything Indian as inferior. He also stated that he had "never found one among them, who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia (...). It is, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England,".

Writer Champa Rao Mohan describes the Post-Colonial effects of political subjugation as follows:

"Cultural colonization accomplished what military conquest alone could not have achieved for the colonizers. It paved its way into the minds of the colonized and made them complaisant victims. This colonization of the minds maimed the psyche of the colonized in a severe way. It

robbed them of all originality and instead, instilled in them a dependency complex. In fact the sense of alienation that the colonized experience and their mimicking tendency have their roots in the feeling of inferiority that was methodically ingrained in the psyche of the colonized through cultural colonization. The crippling effect of this complex manifests itself in the post-independence period in the inability of the former colonized people to stand independently on their own and in their continuing dependence on the west for ideas and technology. Intellectual as well as financial dependence of the third world countries on the west has made them vulnerable to neocolonialism."

Cultural colonization was implemented to deceive Indians out of knowing about their own rich civilization, supplanting it with the notion that nothing of value came from India. "Indians were to be taught that they were a deeply conservative and fatalist people - genetically predisposed to irrational superstitions and mystic belief systems. That they had no concept of nation, national feelings or a history. If they had any culture, it had been brought to them by invaders - that they themselves lacked the creative energy to achieve anything by themselves. But the British, on the other hand epitomized modernity - they were the harbingers of all that was rational and scientific in the world. With their unique organizational skills and energetic zeal, they would raise India from the morass of casteism and religious bigotry."

This lingering colonial attitude is at the heart of the current East/West debate with respect to the origin/

ownership of Yoga, and it needs to be deeply considered and deconstructed before a truly transnational conversation on the identity and meaning of Yoga can occur. When Derek Beres or Leslie Kaminoff lash out, suggesting Indians didn't want their own heritage, they are not forwarding the discourse, they are throwing salt on the colonial wound.



British Raj, Red Ensign

What does neocolonialism look like in American Yoga today? Susanne Barkataki in *How To Decolonize Your Yoga Practice* describes what it's like to be South Asian in the landscape of White, American Yoga:

"To be colonized is to become a stranger in your own land. As a Desi, this is the feeling I get in most Westernized yoga spaces today. Of course, powerful practices that reduce suffering persist, despite all attempts to end them. These facts are critical to understanding the power and privilege we continue to possess or lack, to clarifying the



positionalities we embody as we practice, teach and share yoga today."

Derek Beres concludes his article by using the Indigenous Ontology of Samkhya Darshana to scandalize the defense of the colonized. He does this by whitesplaining Vedic concepts, "This notion of ownership, though, is rooted in the same *prakrti* that the *puruṣa* was to be liberated from. It's hard to recognize that when all you desire is recognition." This is how passive aggression works in spiritual community. Technical terms are used to silence critique. Is he really suggesting that the desire for the world to acknowledge the historical origin of Yoga is just some kind of narcissistic ploy for attention on the part of Hindus?

Has he really been so bold as to use the Sanskrit words of the very people he seeks to dominate by schooling them out of their own quest for self-determination? What is the recognition that he gains from writing the article and why is there no self-awareness of his own stake in the profits?

To suggest that Hinduism comes with baggage while not acknowledging the Judeo-Christian baggage that most Westerners inflict upon their interpretation of Yoga is to continue the debate and the divide by maintaining the asymmetry in

'first and third world' politics. I'll end with a quote from bell hooks *Waking Up to Racism: Dharma Diversity and Race*: "We cannot separate the will of so many white comrades to journey in search of spiritual nourishment to the 'third world' from

the history of cultural imperialism and colonialism that has created a context where such journeying is seen as appropriate, acceptable, an expression of freedom and right."



Sutra Journal's 'Critics Corner' aims to tease out the colonial complexities which superimpose Western ideology onto Eastern ontologies, obscuring the latter with the secularization of the former.



Sri Louise is a Contemporary Dancer interested in the politics of whiteness as it pertains to both Art and Spirituality. She has been in an intimate process with Yoga since 1993 and met her Guru, Swami

Dayananda Saraswati in 1999. She is an outspoken critic of philosophical appropriation and is the visionary behind the Underground Yoga Parlour for Self-Knowledge & Social Justice in Oakland, California.

Notes: [Quotes about Macaulay](#) (wikidot article)



Vasisth, Himachal Pradesh

## **MEDITATION: WHEN THE THUNDERBOLT STRIKES** By Kathleen Reynolds

Tonight I was on bedtime duty. My son and I were both very tired but managed to keep each other stumbling down the path of our bedtime routine. Teeth were brushed. Stuffed animals were tucked in with him. And we were both too tired to have any strong opinions about which bedtime books to read. So, I did what I've done before in times like that and picked up *Where the Sidewalk Ends* from the bookshelf.

We snuggled in next to each other, book on my lap. And my son looked down at the cover showing the two children hanging over the edge of the crumbling pathway, past the sign that warns "Edge, Keep Off," their eyes wide, taking in whatever is below. And, seeming to really notice the picture for the first time, though we know by now many of the poems by heart, he traced the crumbling pathway with his finger, and asked, "What is this?" And I said, "Well, let's read." And I turned to page 64.

There is a place where the sidewalk ends  
And before the street begins  
And there the grass grows soft and white,  
And there the sun burns crimson bright,  
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight  
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Earlier in the day, I taught the 9:00am class at Al-lay. My theme was intention, and I introduced this theme by sharing my experience when I first heard the directive to “set an intention for your practice” in a yoga class. I didn’t know what the teacher meant. I had some idea of what she didn’t mean by intention.

It didn’t mean goal-setting — I did that enough in the job I had at the time — and I knew enough to realize that I was coming to yoga for something different from that. Kind and gracious as she was, this teacher offered some suggestions for setting intentions. Be aware of your breath. Notice the effects of your practice today in your body. Dedicate your practice to someone in your life.

Being that there wasn’t some huge thunderbolt of intention striking as I sat crossed-legged on my mat, I was happy enough to take her suggestions. I would repeat one of those intentions to myself at the start of class. And during the classes, I began to become aware of my breath as we moved through poses. I started to notice

what was taking place in my body as I practiced. And on occasion, I dedicated my practice to the first person who came to mind as I sat, hands at heart center.

And time went by, and I loved the magic that was created on my yoga mat. And one day after class, still wearing that hazy yoga “all is right with the world” after-glow, I got in my car. And then someone cut me off as I got on the on-ramp to the highway. First, I got mad at the driver. Then, I said some things that blew that hazy yoga after-glow right out the window. And finally, I felt sad that the magic from my mat hadn’t stay with me longer.

Life went on, as it does. I continued to burn myself out setting goals that I thought I should set, all the while stirring with some vague feeling that something needed to shift in my life. And not knowing what that was, I just started to do more yoga. I tried different types of classes. I experienced different teachers. And I decided to return to a specific type of practice I had been introduced to a couple of years prior. This decision led me to a silent meditation retreat over a long weekend.

There, a thunderbolt did strike on my mat. Like many times before, I sat crossed-legged, closed my eyes, and simply focused on doing what the teacher instructed. I inhaled and exhaled when he cued the breath. I directed my breath to the places in my body where he said to direct the breath to. I noticed the space that existed at the end of the inhale and before the exhale began. I noticed that the exhale seemed to go on and on.

And at the end of that day, I started the long drive home from the retreat center, filled with that beautiful silence. And I drove for awhile in silence. And then I turned on the radio.

And in a moment, a shock ran up my spine from my tailbone to the crown of my head. I was aware I sitting more upright than I had ever sat in my life. And then I was being held in the hand of God. And it was so beautiful that I wanted to hold on to that moment forever. I wanted to rip that page from the book, hold it close to my heart and have it be the only story I ever had to read or tell again. And then the moment was gone.

And on the third and final day of the retreat, I sat on my mat again. And I tried really hard to get that thing to happen again. And it didn't. Still, it felt really nice to sit and be silent. And at the end of that day, I started the long drive home from the retreat center, filled with that beautiful silence. And I drove for awhile in silence. And then I turned on the radio.

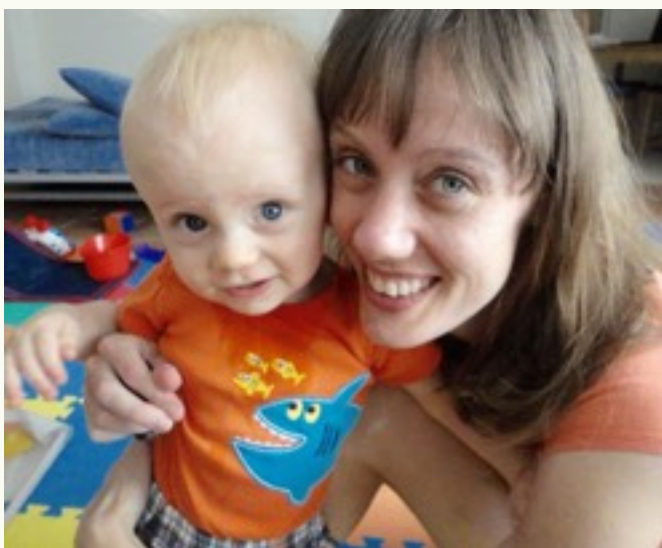


What happened next is this. I changed careers. I did a lot more yoga. My husband and I moved to Maryland. I did a lot less yoga. I gave birth to my son. It was a very long and difficult labor. In those early months with him at home, sometimes I listened to guided meditations while he nursed or napped. But most of the time, I napped with him when I could. He was not a good sleeper at night. I didn't set foot in a yoga studio again until he was 10 months old. Yes, there are a lot of gaps in this part of my story. Gaps tell their own story.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black  
And the dark street winds and bends.  
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow  
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go  
To the place where the sidewalk ends

And the story continued, as all stories do. There will be many more chapters to write. But the ending is the same as the beginning. This is true for all stories. My practice tonight has been to write this chapter of my story. And I dedicate this practice to my son.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,  
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know  
The place where the sidewalk ends.



Kathleen Reynolds began a yoga practice in 2006 and has since practiced and trained in alignment-based Hatha styles, Ashtanga Vinyasa and several forms of meditation. She completed her 200-hour teacher training at Blue Heron Wellness in Silver Spring, MD and currently teaches at Allay Yoga, a warm and welcoming studio, in Kensington, MD. Kathleen enjoys drawing on her prior academic work in the humanities, as well as her career experience in the education field, to inform her yoga experience. Her practice and teaching -- on and off the mat -- is influenced by all of the people in her life, most often and profoundly, by her amazing 4 year old son. Kathleen is continually humbled and inspired by those who offer their vast knowledge and experience out there in the big, wide world of Yoga. [www.lookingglashouseyoga.com](http://www.lookingglashouseyoga.com).



Khajuraho

# DEVATA: WHAT IS DEITY WORSHIP?

Sutra Editorial

Hindus grow up on the stories in the epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the numerous Puranas, where heroes, heroines, Devas and Devis are extolled as to their exploits and virtues. We fall in love with them. They become our role models. We do not grow up in fear of them, and so visit temples and shrines, and participate in kirtans with affection and devotion. Also, some of us don't actively worship deities at all, for there is no social pressure to do so.

As we get older, we begin to come across deeper sources and aspects of the Dharma such as found in the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Vasistha, in the dialogues in the epics and puranas, and more. This changes our attitudes to the Devas towards becoming not just devotional but also philosophical. The worship aspect changes internally. It looks the same on the outside still, but internally a different process begins to mature.

There is much freedom in how one sees and approaches this process, or indeed leaves it alone.

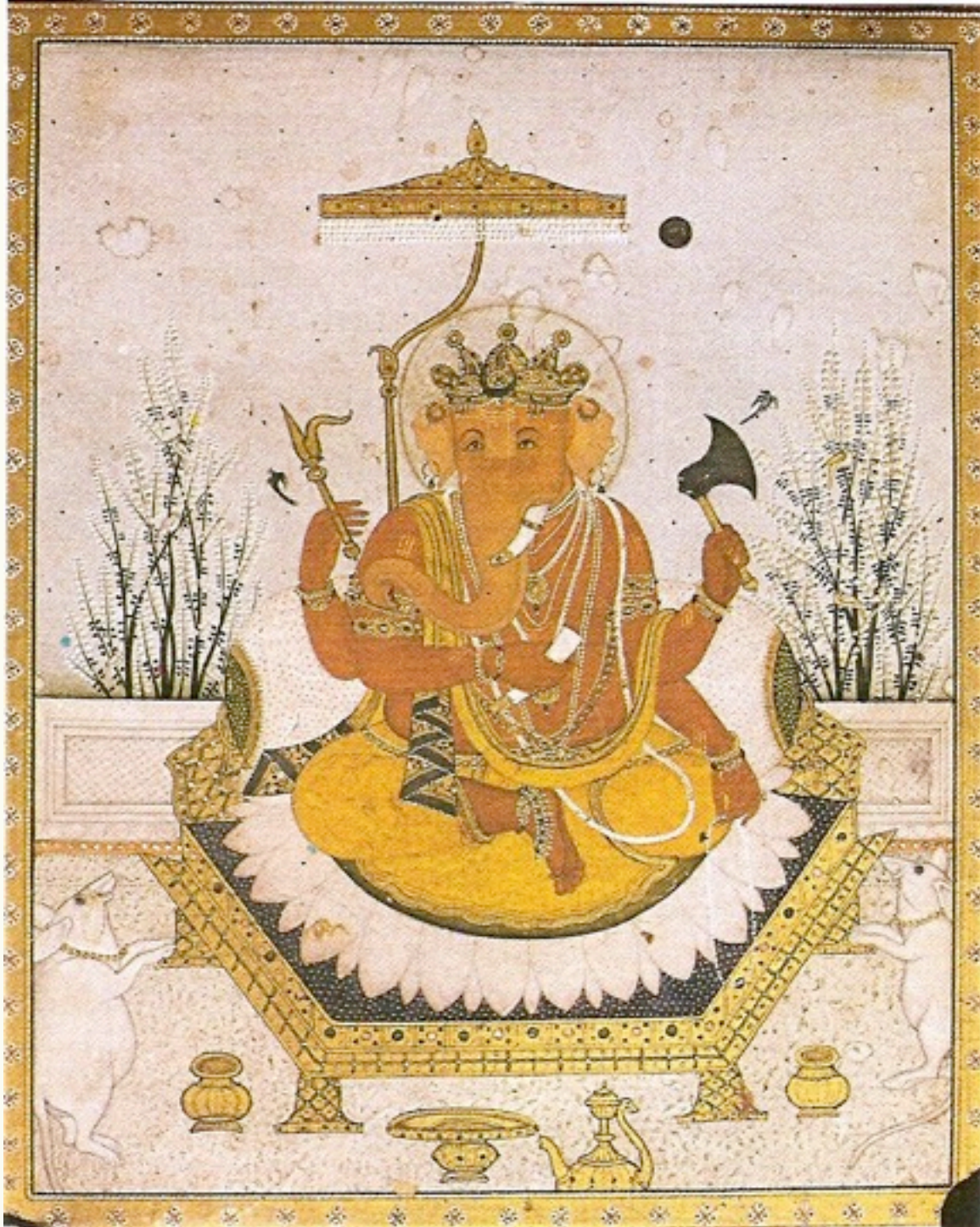


So what looks like worship to an outsider, especially from an Abrahamic religious point of view where fearing God's wrath is the norm if something is not done, or done, is definitely not what is going on in the Hindu consciousness. Even the highest of the Devas and Devis are subject to the following from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

“This self was Brahman/limitless in the beginning. It knew itself only as ‘I am limitless.’, and therefore it became all. And whomever among the devas had this enlightenment, also became That. It is the same with the seers, the same with ordinary people. And to this day, if one knows in a like manner the self as ‘I am limitless’, one becomes all. Even the devas cannot prevent this, for one has become their very self. One who worships a deity thinking ‘I am one and it is another’ does not know.”

Articles in future issues of Sutra Journal will present the various Devas and Devis extolled and worshipped in the Hindu Dharma, within the context of the process described above, where how they are seen and approached varies according to the development of the aspirant, as described and prescribed in the voluminous Hindu literature.

# GANESHA



*I meditate on that Devata with a single tusk  
Who is the son of Shiva who killed death  
Whose form is beyond imagination  
Who is endless  
Who tears asunder all obstacles  
And who forever dwells in the hearts of Yogis*

*Adi Shankara*