

# introduction

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*Yoga* is a very popular word in the West these days. From exercise programs to meditation training, yoga teachers abound in most communities of Europe and North America. In bookstores the self-help sections contain numerous “yoga” titles. In most cases these modern presentations of yoga are updated versions of some aspect of the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali, the basic presentation of the Indian Yoga school dating from 200 to 300 CE.<sup>1</sup> Among the classical schools of Indian philosophy, the Yoga school has been widely accepted as foundational as far as psychological processes are concerned. In this book we will show the role Yoga played in the classical Indian philosophy of language of Bhartṛhari, examine Yoga’s influence on Carl Jung’s psychology, observe parallels with Sigmund Freud’s conception of how memory works, and study the impact of Yoga on transpersonal psychology. From a comparative perspective, it is noteworthy that during the past decades contemporary philosophy and psychology have refocused attention on “mind”<sup>2</sup> and “consciousness”<sup>3</sup>—topics that occupied the central focus in Yoga theory and practice. Thus the comparative explorations with Western psychology are timely.

## YOGA IN INDIAN THOUGHT

Within Indian thought, conceptions such as *karma* (memory traces from previous actions or thoughts) and *saṃsāra* (rebirth) are taken as basic to all Jaina, Buddhist, and Hindu schools. So also there are certain common conceptions about the psychological processes of human nature (e.g., the existence of cognitive traces or *saṃskāras*) which are seen to exist in and through the specific differences of the various schools as a kind of commonly understood psychology. Jadunath Sinha supports this contention in his finding that the psychological conception of yogic intuition (*pratibhā*) is found in all schools with the exception of the Cārvāka and the Mīmāṃsā.<sup>4</sup> Mircea Eliade states that Yoga is one of the four basic motifs of all Indian thought. T. H. Stcherbatsky, the eminent Russian scholar of Buddhism, observes that Yogic trance (*samādhi*) and Yogic courses for the training of the mind in the achievement of *mokṣa*

or *nirvāṇa* appear in virtually all Indian schools of thought.<sup>5</sup> Probably the most complete presentation of this traditional Indian psychology is to be found in the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, and it is from this source that the following overview is presented.<sup>6</sup>

Yoga starts with an analysis of ordinary experience. This is characterized by a sense of restlessness caused by the distracting influences of our desires. Peace and purity of mind come only when the distractability of our nature is controlled by the radical step of purging the passions. But if these troublesome passions are to be purged, they must be fully exposed to view. In this respect, Yoga predated Freud by several hundred years in the analysis of the unconscious. In the Yoga view, the sources of all our troubles are the karmic seeds (memory traces) of past actions or thoughts, heaped up in the unconscious, or storehouse consciousness, as it is called in Yoga, and tainted by ignorance, materialistic or sensuous desire, as well as the clinging to one's own ego. Thus, it is clear that traditional Yoga psychology gives ample recognition to the darker side of humans—the shadow consciousness.

At the ego-awareness level of consciousness, Yoga conceives of human cognition on various levels. There is the function of the mind in integrating and coordinating the input of sensory impressions and the resurgent memories of past thoughts and actions (*saṁskāras*). These may all be thought of as “learned” if we use behaviouristic terminology. Then there is the higher function of the mind in making discriminative decisions as to whether or not to act on the impulses that are constantly flooding one's awareness. This discriminative capacity (*buddhi*) is not learned but is an innate aspect of our psyche and has the capacity to reveal our true nature. This occurs when, by our discriminative choices, we negate and root out the polluting passions (*kliṣṭa karmas*) from our unconscious until it is totally purified of their distracting restlessness—their pulling and pushing of us in one direction and then another. Once this is achieved by disciplined self-effort, the level of egoic consciousness is transcended, since the notion of ego, I or me, is also ultimately unreal. It is simply a by-product of my selfish desiring. Once the latter is rooted out, the former by necessity also disappears, and the final level of human nature, pure or transcendent consciousness, is all that remains.

According to Yoga, transcendent consciousness is not immaterial but is composed of high-quality, high-energy luminous material (*sattvic citta*). Since all egoity has been overcome, there is no duality, no subject-object awareness, but only immediate intuition. All experience is transcendent of individuality, although this is described differently by the various schools of Indian thought. The Hindus, for example, overcome the subject-object duality by resolving all objectivity into an absolute subject (i.e., *Brahman*). The Buddhists seem to go in the opposite direction and do away with all subjectivity, leaving only bare objective experience (i.e., *Nirvāṇa*, which may be translated as “all ego and desiring is blown out”). For our present purpose, the metaphysical speculation, although interesting, is not important. What is significant is that Yoga psychology finds the essence of human nature to be at the transcendent level of consciousness, where ego and unconscious desires have been excised. The various kinds of Yogic meditation are simply different practical disciplines, or therapies, for removing conscious and unconscious desires, along with the accompanying ego-sense from the psyche.

Let us stay with Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, although there are many other yogic schools of disciplined meditation from which one could choose (e.g., Tantric, Hatha, Jaina, Taoist, and Zen). For Patañjali there are five prerequisite practices and three ultimate practices. The prerequisite practices include: (1) self-restraints (*Yamas*: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and absence of avarice) to get rid of bad habits; (2) good habits (*niyamas*) to be instilled (washing of body and mind, contentment with whatever comes, equanimity in the face of life's trials, study and chanting of scriptures, meditation upon the Lord); (3) body postures (*āsanas*) such as the lotus position to keep the body controlled and motionless during meditation; (4) controlled deepening of respiration (*prānāyāma*) to calm the mind; and (5) keeping senses (e.g., sight, hearing, and touch) from distracting one's mind (*pratyāhāra*) by focusing them on an object or point of meditation.

The ultimate practices are: (1) beginners spend brief periods of fixed concentration (*dhāraṇā*) upon an object (usually an image which represents an aspect of the divine that appeals to one, e.g., Īśvara, Śiva, Krishna, Kali); (2) as one becomes more expert, concentration upon the object is held for longer periods (*dhyāna*), and the sense of subject-object separation begins to disappear from one's perception; (3) *Samādhi* occurs when continuous meditation upon the object loses all sense of subject-object separation, and a state of direct intuition or becoming one with the object is achieved.

Through these yogic practices one has weakened the hold of the egocentric memories and desires (*karmas*) from the conscious and unconscious levels of one's psyche, and the discovery of the true self has begun. Four levels of *samādhi*, each more purified than the last, may be realized through repeated practice of yogic meditation. The final state (*nirvicāra samādhi*) occurs when all obstructing ego desires have been purged from the psyche, which is now like a perfectly clear window to the aspect of the divine (e.g., Īśvara, Śiva or, for a Westerner, perhaps Christ) which has served as the object of meditation. According to the *Yoga Sūtras*, any image will do. The divine image is only an instrument to aid in the direct experience of the transcendent, at which point the image is no longer needed.

Meditation of the sort prescribed by the *Yoga Sūtras* is esoteric in nature, requires the supervision of a teacher (*guru*) who has achieved perfection, and is a full-time occupation which, even in traditional India, was not possible for most people until the final stage of life in retirement from worldly affairs and withdrawal to a forest ashram. Another and much simpler yoga was and still is practiced by the masses—the yoga of the word. Thus the important inclusion in this book of Yoga's involvement with language. In Eastern psychology it is generally accepted that the chanting of a special scriptural word or phrase (*mantra*), chosen for one by one's teacher (*guru*), has power to remove the obstructing ego desires until the transcendent stands fully revealed.<sup>7</sup> The Yoga of the word assumes that the scriptural word and the divine are mutually intertwined, very much as stated in John's Gospel 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The word is therefore filled with divine power and when meditated upon by repeated chanting is able to remove obstructions of consciousness. The *guru* chooses the scriptural word best suited to remove current obstructions (*karmas*) in the mind of the devotee. The power of the chosen *mantra* to remove obstructions is enhanced by the intensity and duration of the chanting. Chanting may

be either aloud or silent. As the first obstructions are removed, the *guru* prescribes a new *mantra* better suited to tackle the remaining, more subtle obstructions. The more obstacles in the mind to be overcome, the more repetitions are needed. When the chanting removes the final obstacles, the psyche is like a purified or cleaned window fully revealing the divine as a direct intuition to the devotee; a vision of the lord is experienced, and *samādhi*, or union with the transcendent, is realized. With proper Yoga, words are experienced as having the power to remove ignorance (*avidyā*), reveal truth (*dharma*) and realize release or salvation (*mokṣa*). It is this traditional Eastern Yoga of the word that is behind the *mantra* chanting that is common throughout traditional Hinduism and Buddhism, and is today encountered in North America or Europe in the chanting of “Hare Krishna” and the teaching of meditation *mantras* by Transcendental Meditation. A detailed exploration of this practice is offered in part I.

Much of the current Western fascination for the East is with its much expanded view of human nature. This is what is felt to be lacking in contemporary Jewish and Christian religion. It is also this larger experience of human nature that is glimpsed in the psychedelic drug experience. The fascination of these practices is that they provide a technique which enables one to break out of the too-narrow Western rational-empirical view of human nature into which the whole society has been conditioned. But there are dangers here for the freeing of a person from his or her rigid ego encapsulation is only beneficial if the shadow or unconscious dimension of one’s nature is also known and controlled. When this latter aspect is ignored, disastrous results occur. The person is “freed” from rational encapsulation, only to be made captive to the darker side of one’s animal passions. The radically transcendent Eastern view of human nature is also open to the misinterpretation that “all is ONE” means nothing is good or evil, love equals hate, life equals death. The esoteric knowing of the transcendent mystical vision is open to dangerous distortion when placed in the hands of one who has not yet controlled the darker animal desires and power-hungry ego and who is not under the supervision of a *guru*.

Yoga’s critique of modern life is that if the transcendent is not taken as absolute, then humankind is no longer seen as splendid or divine but simply “raw nature”—on par with minerals and rocks—to be manipulated for purposes of economic, political, and personal selfishness. First our lower nature must be controlled and our higher nature actualized, and then when the power of science and technology is placed in our hands, it will not enslave us in the endless attempt to satisfy our lower desires, as clearly has happened in the modern world.<sup>8</sup>

As usual, a middle road between the extremes seems indicated. A human being is neither all spiritual nor all animal desires, but a psychosomatic unity of the two. Two Western scholars attempt to champion such a balanced approach to psychology. Rudolf Otto argues for an analysis of humans which would include their feelings, rationality, and supra-rationality or transcendent consciousness.<sup>9</sup> Carl Jung is one modern Western thinker whose insights seem to be able to encompass most of the Yoga and Western psychologies without committing the academic sin of too much reductionism on one side or the other. Although a thoroughly Western psychologist, he is acclaimed by many from the East as expressing their understanding of human experience. The ways in which Jung has been influenced by Yoga, along with critical assess-

ments of where he draws the line in his acceptance of Yoga are offered in part II, Yoga and Western Psychology.

Taken together, parts I and II offer an assessment of how the traditional Yoga psychology of India, as systematized by Patañjali in his *Yoga Sūtras*, supports the Indian view of how language functions and continues to influence modern Western thinkers such as Carl Jung and the Transpersonal Psychologists. A more detailed preview of each chapter follows.

## OVERVIEW OF EACH CHAPTER

Chapter 2 examines the notion of *āgama* or how language functions as a valid communication of knowledge as presented in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*. Not only our ordinary everyday encounter with language but more especially our experience of scripture is analyzed. How do we know that Hindu scripture, the Veda, is trustworthy? Because, says the *Yoga Sūtras*, it was spoken by the "Original Speaker," Īśvara, who is completely free from karmic obscuration and has directly "seen" the things spoken of in the Vedas. How this speech works is given detailed study. Īśvara, the seer/speaker of the Veda, at the beginning of each cycle of the cosmos, is described in the *Yoga Sūtras* as a uniquely pure *puruṣa*, untouched by obscuring *karma*, such as ignorance, egotistical desire, lust, hatred or clinging to life. Thus Īśvara has always been free and yet always in the world for the purpose of helping the rest of us to realize release from the cycle of *saṃsāra* (birth-death-rebirth). The chanting of Vedic verses or syllables (e.g., AUM) as *mantra* is a means by which language may function as a yoga to remove obscuring *karma* until it is all purged from consciousness and release is realized. The psychological mechanism by which such *mantra* chanting works to achieve release (*mokṣa*) is given detailed explanation in *Yoga Sūtras* I: 42–44 and is described in chapter 2.

In chapter 3 Patañjali's Yoga psychology is shown to be assumed by Bhartṛhari (c. 500 CE) in his *Vākyapadīya*, or Philosophy of Word and Sentence. The concepts outlined in *Yoga Sūtra* III: 17 are shown to provide the psychological processes necessary for Bhartṛhari's language theory to function in everyday life. And when it comes to the ultimate state of *mokṣa* or the realization of release, Patañjali's practices of *svādhyāya*, or concentrated study, including *mantra* chanting, provides the psychological mechanism by which that release (called by Bhartṛhari *śabdapūrvayoga*) may be achieved.

Just as Bhartṛhari's philosophy of language is shown to assume Patañjali's Yoga psychology, chapter 4 shows that Yoga psychology is also consistent with Bhartṛhari's poem the Vairāgya-Śataka. The five types of ordinary experience (*citta vṛttī*), identified by Patañjali in the *Yoga Sūtras* are given exposition in Bhartṛhari's poetry. In both the poem and in Yoga psychology, the *kleśas* or ordinary experiences of ignorance (*avidyā*), egoism (*asmitā*), passion (*rāga*), disgust (*dveṣā*), and clinging to life (*abhiniveśa*) are shown to end in suffering. The treatment offered by both Bhartṛhari and Patañjali is the renunciation of worldly desires by the concentration of *citta* or consciousness through Yoga. By intense devotional concentration on the Divine (Īśvara for Patañjali, Śiva for Bhartṛhari), release from rebirth may be realized.

Leaving India's traditional world of classical philosophy and psychology, we turn in part II to explicit influences or implicit parallels of Yoga in modern Western psychology. In chapter 5, parallels are noted between the Yoga conception of *karma* and the thinking of Freud and Jung on memory. It is suggested that Freud's theorizing and Eccles's experimentation on memory and motivation may well serve as the modern explanation of the neuro-physiological character of *karmic saṃskāras* and *vāsanās*—an explanation which, in Patañjali's time, involved a long discussion as to how the *guṇas*, or constituents of consciousness, function in various *karmic* states. In ancient Yoga, the storing of a memory trace was described as a latent deposit of *karma*, which would have as its neural basis a significant *tamas*, or physical structure component, perhaps parallel to the enlarged dendritic spines of modern neuro-physiology. The Yogic notion of *vāsanās*, or habit patterns, as resulting from repetitions of a particular memory trace, or *saṃskāra*, fits well with the modern idea of growth at the synaptic spines. Both Yoga and Freud agree that memory and motivation are parts of a single psychic process which also embodies choice or selection, but there is disagreement between Yoga and Freud as to the degree that this choice process is free or determined, as well as to the extent to which the processes of memory and motivation can be transcended. But both Yoga and Freud agree that the bulk of this memory/motivation psychological process occurs within the unconscious. Carl Jung seems to chart a middle course between Yoga and Freud. Although Jung remains resolutely Western and, along with Freud, denies that the unconscious could ever be totally overcome or transcended, Jung is influenced by the Yoga notion of *karma* in important ways. Jung read the *Yoga Sūtras*, and the notion of *karma* sparked the formation of Jung's archetype idea. Jung provides for collective memory and motivation from the unconscious in the form of the archetypes and allows for free choice in his requirement that the archetype be creatively developed by each individual within his or her own ego-consciousness. However, three differences between Jung and Yoga are identified, the most important being Jung's complete rejection of the Yoga contention that the ego-sense which memories produce is composed of nothing but obscuring *saṃskāras* (memory traces) and must be transcended for true knowledge and release (*mokṣa*).

Chapter 6 gives detailed explanations of the psychological processes of memory, perception, and knowledge offered by Patañjali's Yoga and Carl Jung's Analytical Psychology but focuses on the places where Jung draws the line in his acceptance of Yoga. While Jung was strongly influenced by Yoga psychology during the 1920s and 1930s, he is critical of the Yoga failure to distinguish adequately between philosophy and psychology. This, Jung argues, leads directly to Yoga intuition's over-reaching of itself, as, for example in the Yoga claim that the individual ego can be completely deconstructed and transcended and some form of universal consciousness achieved. For Jung, this claim is nothing more than the psychological projection of an idea which has no foundation in human experience. Yet this is precisely the Yoga claim, namely, that accomplished persons, such as the Buddha, had transcended the limitations of the individual ego and realized omniscience and release (*mokṣa*). However, according to Jung, to the extent that the removal of ego is achieved, the result would not be the recovery of memories from this and previous lives (the Yoga claim), but rather the person falling unconscious on the floor. This fundamental difference between Yoga

and Jung in the assessment of the limits of human nature is explored in chapter 6 in terms of memory, perception, and knowledge.

Chapter 7 begins by defining mysticism so as to avoid current misinterpretations of mysticism as something “misty,” vague, or emotional. By contrast, mystical experience has been experienced by the great mystics of all religions as something like sensory perception—only more direct and more vivid! For Patañjali’s Yoga, mysticism is a case of intuition or supersensuous perception (*pratibhā*) from which distorting emotions have been purged by disciplined meditation. While modern Western philosophers such as Bertrand Russell have attempted to dismiss mysticism as merely subjective emotion, Patañjali’s claim is just the opposite. According to his Yoga psychology, mystical experience is a case of the direct supersensuous perception of reality, with various levels of impurity of the mystical vision being caused by obscuring emotions not yet purged from the perception. In Yoga, the major cause of obscuring emotion is the individual ego (*ahamkāra*). The Yoga analysis achieves depths of sophistication beyond anything known in the West. Four levels of increasingly pure mystical experience when focused on an image (e.g., Īśvara, Krishna, Śiva) are identified, followed by the ultimate mystical experience, according to Patañjali, of imageless mystical experience—becoming one with the divine that is beyond or behind the image or object. For this to happen, the limiting individual ego has to be totally transcended, and that indeed is the goal of Patañjali’s Yoga practice. While Carl Jung, in his analysis of mystical experience, also begins with an object (e.g., a cross) as the point of focus for individuation of the unconscious archetype into a conscious symbol, Jung differs from Yoga in that he never leaves the object or the experiencing ego. This difference, which is explored in chapter 7, is profound for its implication as to whether mystical experience is a full and “literal” experience of the divine, or “metaphorical,” as John Hick suggests in his most recent book.<sup>10</sup> It is also important for an assessment as to the limits of human nature: can we as humans be perfected or actualized beyond the finite ego limits accepted by most Western philosophy, psychology, and theology?<sup>11</sup>

Chapter 8 continues this discussion as to the different assessment of the limits of human nature in Yoga when compared with modern Western thought, especially the transpersonal psychologists. Like Jung, Michael Washburn is shown to attempt to bridge Eastern and Western thought. While Washburn goes further than the structural-hierarchical paradigms of Piaget and Kohlberg and simplifies Freud’s Id, Ego, and Superego, Washburn, like Jung before him, remains resolutely Western in his claim that the limitations of ego-awareness can never be totally transcended, as Yoga psychology claims. Alan Roland, a New York psychiatrist, goes further in the Yoga direction by adding a psycho-social analysis showing that Indians living in extended families have an extended sense of self, a “we-self” as he calls it, in contrast to the limited “I-self” of modern Western experience. This “we-self” has permeable boundaries and is open to expansion outward to include both nature and the divine, much as Patañjali’s Yoga suggests. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the argument by the contemporary Western philosopher John Hick for the necessity of an ego-limited human nature, even in mystical experience, in contrast to the more open approach of transpersonal psychologists such as Charles Tart or Robert Ornstein.