



The Transcendent Self: Yoga, Training the Mind

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Systems of Yoga * Types of Asceticism * Illumination as the Transformation of Consciousness * Enlightenment and Kundalini * Superconsciousness and Brain Attunement * The Window of the Soul * Fasting, Withdrawal of the Senses, Breathing Exercises and Meditation as Techniques for Training the Mind

In all the ancient literature of India, yoga-adepts hold a place unequalled by any other class of men. The amount of literature on Yoga is enormous. Only a tiny fraction of it has been translated into the languages of the West, and one of the results of this lack of sufficient information on the subject has been that the real significance of Yoga is still not clearly understood. Broadly speaking, all systems of Yoga in India fall into two categories, Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga. Raja in Sanskrit denotes king, and Hatha means violence. Raja Yoga implies the kingly or easy way to self-actualisation, and Hatha the more strenuous one. Both systems base their stand on the Vedas and the Upanishads; the main practice is common to both.

It should not be thought that Yoga in these forms has provided the only channel for self-actualisation. On the contrary, there is hardly any mention of Yoga in the Vedas, the oldest written scripture in the world. Even in the principal Upanishads, the fountainhead of all philosophical systems and spiritual thought in India, there is only a passing reference to Yoga. The most popular scripture of India – the Bhagavad Gita – and some of the greatest spiritual teachers recommend other disciplines for the attainment of enlightenment. These are Nishkana Karma (selfless action as service to God), Bhakti (intense devotion to the divine Power), Janana (exercise of the intellect in distinguishing the real from the false), and Upansana (worship and other forms of religious discipline prescribed in almost all great religions of the world).

The most authoritative book on Raja Yoga is Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, a highly respected work more than two thousand years old. The Yoga expounded by Patanjali consists of eight steps or parts: Yama, which means abstention from all kinds of evil thought and deed; Niyana, which means daily religious observances, such as purity, austerity, contentment, devotion to God. The third is Asana, which means posture or, in other words, the most healthy and convenient way to sit for the practice of Yoga. The fourth limb is Pranayama, which means the regulation and control of breathing. The fifth is Pratyahara, which means the subjugation of the senses to bring them within the control of the mind, a very necessary preparation for concentration. The sixth is concentration of the mind, known as Dharana. The seventh is Dhyana, which means a steady, unbroken concentration for a certain length of time, and the eighth is Samadhi, which means the state of



ecstatic or rapt contemplation of the inner reality.

It will thus be seen that Yoga is more comprehensive and complex than is often supposed. It is not only Asana, or posture, which is only a method to keep the body steady and straight when practicing meditation. The practice of various Asanas is an exercise for health, and it is incorrect to say that one who is practicing several Asanas efficiently is practicing Yoga. The correct thing would be to say that he is practicing these exercises to keep his body in a healthy and flexible condition.

Most mere concentration, or even concentration with Asana and Pranayana, despite the claims of so-called Western teachers, is NOT Yoga. There are ascetics in India who can perform all the eighty-four Asanas to perfection and continue performing them all their lives, but they never attain to enlightenment. There are also ascetics who can suspend their normal breathing for days so that they can be buried underground or placed in hermetically sealed chambers for days without being suffocated. But despite such drastic measures, they often awake as one awakes from a deep sleep or a swoon without experiencing the least enlargement of consciousness or gaining any insight of a transcendental nature.

There are also ascetics in India who sit in meditative postures twenty-four hours a day. They sleep while sitting upright, and on awakening after a few hours continue their meditational practices. They live austere lives, occupying all their time with meditation or the recitation of mantras prescribed by their Gurus, and continue the practice for scores of years but without ever rising above the level of human consciousness, or experiencing the divine.

There are ascetics in India who resort to extreme self-torture and even mutilation to assuage their burning thirst for spiritual experience. They lie on beds of nails or keep one arm constantly upraised until it becomes atrophied and withers to a stump. Drug-taking hermits number hundreds of thousands and are a source of unhappiness to themselves and to others. Narcotics, hallucinogens, intoxicants, are not a help but an insuperable barrier in the path of God-realization. Interestingly, the word “yoga” is derived from the Sanskrit root Yuj, which means to yoke or join. Yoga, therefore, implies the union of the individual soul with the universal spirit or consciousness.

According to all authorities, the final stage of union with the divine is extremely hard to achieve. “After many births,” says the Bhagavad Gita, “the discriminating seeker attains to me, saying all this (creation) is the Lord. Such a great soul is hard to find.” According to the Tantras, out of thousands who take to Hatha Yoga, hardly one succeeds. In India, the number of enlightened men during the last one hundred years can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Even a momentary contact with the divine is a stupendous experience. Some of the most famous men on earth – the greatest thinkers and the ablest writers – such as Plato, Plotinus, Parmenides, Dante, Wordsworth, and Tennyson had the experience. Emerson and many, many other renowned men and women had this singular experience thrust upon them often to their grateful amazement.



Most of them had undergone no spiritual discipline whatever, and there were several who had no belief in God.

The experience always has the same basic characteristics. It is incredible that so many learned men and women, both scientists and scholars, should ignore a phenomenon as widespread as mystical experience has been.

“I call him alone a Brahman, that is, a spiritually-awakened person,” said the Buddha, “from whom lust, anger, pride and envy have dropped off like a mustard seed from the point of a needle.”

Mere recitation of the well-known mantra, “Om Mani Padme Hum,” popular among the Buddhists in Tibet, or its rotation millions of times on prayer wheels, could not bear any fruit in one who did not follow the other teaching of Gotama the Buddha. The tragedy is that people do not understand what “enlightenment” or “self-actualization” means. It is a colossal achievement. According to the records available, all the men who had the genuine experience through the whole course of history do not number more than a few hundred. They are far fewer in number than the men of talent and genius in all other branches of knowledge and art, but they created the revolution in thought which continues to affect the world to this day.

The spiritual-adept or religious genius is extremely rare for this reason: “Illumination” represents a transformation of consciousness, the opening of a new channel of perception within, by which the boundless universe is opened to the vision of the soul.

It is because of the extremely arduous nature of the undertaking that the Buddha prescribed celibacy and a monastic life for the aspirants. This is the Kingdom of Heaven spoken of by Christ into which only the pure of heart can enter. “I call him alone a Braham,” says Buddha, “who has gone past this difficult road, the impassable and deceptive circle of existence, who has passed through it to the other Shore, who is meditative, free from desire and doubt, and released from attachment, gaining a transhuman state of consciousness.” In his knowledge of the spiritual and evolutionary needs of mankind, he must tower head and shoulders above the greatest intellects of the age.

“That state is called Yoga,” says the Bhagavad Gita, “which having obtained one does not reckon any other gain to be greater, and established in which one is not disturbed even by great sorrow.” True enlightenment consists of reaching beyond the highest intellects of the time to grasp and proclaim the universal law. There is no uncertainty or vacillation, because the truly enlightened one is as sure of his perception of the higher truths revealed to him as he is of the existence of the physical world seen with mortal eyes.

It should be remembered that ideas, intuitions, and inspirations are as much a gift from the universal consciousness as are the revelations of the “enlightened”. The life-energy stimulating the brain in both instances is Kundalini. The same biological centre of the body is responsible both for



mystical experience and for genius. The spiritually enlightened person is simply more evolved than the talented man of science or the gifted master of art.

It has been known for thousands of years that in the higher states of consciousness hidden knowledge can pour into the mind independent of experience, education, or understanding. Oracles in ancient Rome, Greece, and Egypt were expected to prove the validity of this belief.

The ability to come into contact with this blissful ocean of perfect knowledge and infinite wisdom is the Final Achievement of Yoga. But we must not forget that EVERY SPIRITUAL TRADITION THAT IS CONCERNED WITH THE RE-BIRTH PROCESS HAS ITS OWN MODEL – the Final Achievement of Yoga is the Illumination of Bucke, which is the same as the psychedelia of Gowan, the Self-Actualization of Maslow, the Universal Mind of Troward, the Essence of Being of Zen, and a hundred other names from as many different spiritual disciplines.

There are many stages, but so long as the final stage is not reached, one cannot be said to have been stabilized in whatever discipline one has followed; one still belongs to the normal class of human beings. It is only when one has gained access to superhuman levels of consciousness and is receptive to revelation that one is considered to be “illuminated”.

In this connection it must be noted that the number of people attaining superconsciousness is increasing exponentially, as was predicted by Richard Bucke at the end of the 19th century, by Carl Jung in the 1930s, and has been noted by Dr. Lee Sannella, who runs the San Francisco Kundalini Clinic today.

The soul of every man and woman is capable of this prodigious leap from the human to the superhuman level of knowledge when the brain is properly attuned. In dreams, in reverie, in meditation, or while listening to music, praying, walking, working, the window of the soul may be suddenly thrown open.

Often there is a brief glimpse of the transcendental world, but many people stand face to face with the ineffable and never understand the nature of the experience. The window of the soul cannot be forced open. The aspirant, trying his best year after year, has to wait patiently for grace. The window must be opened from the inside. The custodian of the window, in the shape of hidden devices in the brain, knows exactly when the shutters are to be opened. Thus, the ascent to the stage of illumination is difficult to be achieved.

It would be nice if open-mindedness and the right frame of mind were all that would be required from a student of mysticism. But the training of a mystic generally demands vastly more strenuous and specific discipline and exercises, and it is unlikely that any student could obtain results without them. Many of the required or recommended methods are likely to be irrelevant, because they are religious or moral paraphernalia belonging to what may be described as a superstructure. The number of these increases with the extent to which mystical experiences have been integrated



into a religious cult or a philosophical or ethical tradition. And none of these is, of itself, really necessary.

An example is fasting. At first sight this may seem to be primarily a meritorious form of suffering or self-sacrifice. But apart from its fairly apparent effect on the mind, fasting has very definite effects on the body. Many medical experiments require an empty stomach on the part of the patient – so do experiments with drugs. Specific effects have been observed. For example, mescaline produces bradycardia and hypoglycaemia.

Transcendental meditation has the same effect. Once we abandon the armchair approach to the study of mystical experience, we need not be surprised that we may have to prepare an investigator of mystical experience by means of an appropriate course of fasting, just as we may prepare an astronaut by an appropriate course of eating.

Another prerequisite mentioned in the *Yogasutra* is ‘withdrawal of the senses’. Very simple-seeming, but consider what remarkable effects sensory deprivation has on subjects who undergo a simple experiment.

Among the most important methods used by mystics in the traditions of Yoga, Buddhism and Taoism, are meditation and breathing exercises. While fasting has in the course of time been provided with a moralistic superstructure, breathing exercises illustrate more clearly that the discipline of the mystic is a specific type of training of the body-mind complex. All these methods help first to increase the awareness of what is going on inside the mind, AND SUBSEQUENTLY TO REDUCE THE MOVEMENT OF THE MENTAL FLUCTUATIONS.

Fasting, withdrawal of the senses, breathing exercises and meditation are closely related to what in Indian religion is generally called *tyaga*, ‘detachment’. Here again we have a concept that in the context of Western religion smacks of morality. But the significance of this detachment does not lie in the realm of ethics. It is an aspect of most of the techniques for training the mind.

Before the fluctuations of the mind can be brought to a standstill, they have to be examined, when they are found to exhibit a person’s preoccupations in life, his plans, expectations, desires, tensions, memories, etc.

For a mystical experience to come about in the mind, all these fluctuations have to be shelved – at least temporarily. Since struggling against them would only introduce new waves of motion, the natural method to bring about this cessation is detachment.

First, a gradual ‘stilling’ then a quietessence. Finally, a ceasing in the wheels of the thought machine grind to a halt.