

## The Relationship Between Āsana & Yoga

The following article is an expansion of a number of philosophical discourses that I make in workshops and courses. I have also included supporting information on specific master teachers relevant to the different forms of Yoga philosophy that I am discussing. My purpose is to encourage students to follow these links, and as inspiration strikes to put these subtle aspects of Yoga into practice - by actually studying with a teacher or organisation that has expertise in that field.

I have collated these various thoughts into a sequential order, describing the stages of consciousness from gross to subtle to causal - from Āsana to Yoga. This includes Holistic Āsana Practice, Patañjali, Kuṇḍalinī, Inter-Personal Therapy, Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta. I hope to convey some of my experiences and understanding on these subjects - in particular the idea that Yoga is not limited to technique or tradition. The only limitation is your mind, or belief. Letting go of false beliefs and perceiving with the unclouded light of your natural attention is a goal we can all aspire to.

### Introduction: Ken Wilber, Integral Philosophy

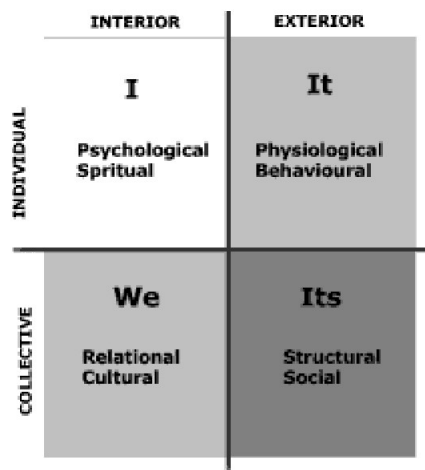
One of the problems of creating such a large article as this is having a broad enough scope to see how it all fits and connects. That is, providing an inclusive vision rather than an exclusive one. Another potential problem is using the "scalpel of reason", and pointing out the flaws in a system. I don't do so out of any negativity, rather to be practical. It is important to use logic and rationality in the pursuit of "Yoga", in order not to be blinded by dogma and false assumptions.



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

Ken Wilber is one of the most detailed and broad-minded writers of the modern age, a long term meditator, teacher, and integral philosopher. One of the great messages that Wilber conveys is an inclusive model of spiritual awareness rather than an exclusive one. As he has clearly explained, he also professes to being a map-maker, and cautions any spiritual seeker from mistaking the map for the territory. For example, practicing a Haṭha Yoga tradition is giving you a map - or directions for how to navigate your body. Your experience is the territory. Be careful that you don't make the tradition more important than the experience.

I like Wilber's depth of understanding. As a critical thinker he's not afraid to point out both the benefits and deficits in the different traditions. Simply put, a stand-alone method or tradition cannot adequately convey all aspects of the human spirit and its multiple expressions.



### Integral Philosophy Quadrants

When exploring the four quadrants of Integral Philosophy, it can be shown that certain aspects of Yoga belong in some quadrants, and other aspects in others.

For example, Haṭha Yoga (including Aṣṭāṅga Vinyāsa Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Bikram, Anusara, etc., any Āsana based system) is not actually working on spiritual development, it is predominantly structural. It helps you open, strengthen, and change some of the body's characteristics. The physical systems might also help you to be aware of the body as impermanent.

Some of this may disturb some Āsana practitioners who believe their method to be innately spiritual. Be careful of any fixed beliefs. I will say that the traditions that encourage self practice (versus led classes) are closer to the boundary between psychological / physical, but by and large it is still personal rather than spiritual. The body is an object, it is not the subject. The subject is your consciousness itself, and only

by dealing with that directly are you practicing the spiritual (higher consciousness).

Subtle body practices like Prāṇāyāma, Kuṇḍalinī, most Tāntra practices, Dreaming and Iowaska, lie on the boundary between I and It. They are not necessarily, or not usually, targeting higher consciousness also. These kinds of practices reveal many wonderful possibilities for opening the subtle body. Enjoying freedom on this level is an important aspect of spiritual growth, but also only an aspect.

Inter-personal development and psychotherapy, work on both the I and We quadrants, and usually lies partway between the two. Dealing with both your inner psychological landscape (I), and cultivating compassionate, non-violent methods of communication (We), is a necessary aspect of personal development which can then also aid spiritual understanding.

Some meditation practices are more psychological than spiritual. For example, any method that relies overly on techniques, and keeps the practitioner performing the rules and rituals tends to only work on the psychological aspect of "I" versus the spiritual aspect. Meditation practices that allow for any possibility of experience, and have the least dogma, tend to guide consciousness directly back to itself.

*The self is on a journey, looking for itself, and eventually simply coming back to rest in itself, effortlessly.*

Many of the philosophical systems are predominantly in the "I" quadrant, but importantly, are also often targeting psychology versus spirituality. Unless the writings and teachings involved in the philosophy are largely practical, (for example Sāṃkhya Philosophy and the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali are largely intellectual versus practical) then no matter how much they talk about "spirituality" they don't actually take you there. An intellectual understanding is vastly different from an experiential one.

One last layer or quadrant that is often undernourished or under-expressed by the Yoga community is "Its". That is, the greater collective political and social environment. You are a part of your own politics, you are not separate to it. You are the Yoga culture. It is all around you, world wide, you are not separate from it.

I liken this to radio announcers who often denounce "the media" as being irresponsible. What?! That very announcer is the media. So you are the very Yoga culture that you may find distasteful. I have been prone to this myself at times. It is like some ex-smokers: it is difficult being around smokers.

So don't exclude yourself from your political or social environment. You are producing that environment, just like everyone else. Your attitudes create the culture around you. So we are responsible for our politicians and for our government's choices. Don't just blame that government, you're only blaming yourself. Now in some situations this may mean taking a stand against political injustice and social wrongs. This is important. My point here is that it is better to be conscious and proactive on all levels, within all

quadrants. Don't get lost down the rabbit-hole of only one aspect of what you are.

- Practicing Āsana is one aspect. Do the physical practice for the health of your body, and include the next layer above it:
- Practicing Subtle Body awareness involves multiple aspects. Practice them, and include the next layer:
- Psychological Awareness and Interpersonal Development is another layer, and it's critical that it is not ignored.
- Awareness as Self, the Spiritual Layer is the last, also don't exclude the layers below it.

### **Gross, Subtle and Causal**

Using the vertical model of self awareness, we can also describe the layers of self and of consciousness in a complementary way. There are three layers of consciousness and three layers of the day: Gross, Subtle and Causal, or Waking, Dreaming and Deep Sleep. Likewise, you have three layers of natural awareness: physical sensation, feeling and thinking. Each of these can be experienced, none of these are the experiencer. They are the objects, you are the subject. You can be aware of these three experiences, but each one inevitably points back to awareness itself.

Another way of describing this are the terms:

- **manifested** (physical, past tense)
- **manifesting** (subtle, present tense)
- **unmanifest** (causal, timeless, undifferentiated)

Some aspects of Yoga - physical Āsana practice for example - target the Gross layer, dealing with the health of the body and attachments to the physical (non-vegetarian food, body image, performance of postures, etc.) and the first couple of layers of the subtle body (but definitely not all of them.)

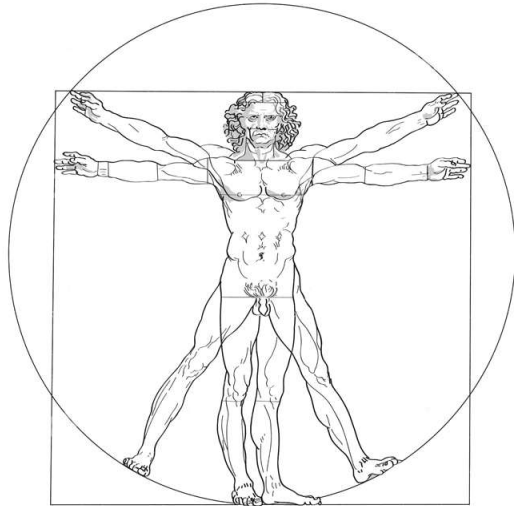
Prāṇāyāma and Kuṇḍalinī and Psychotherapy all target the Subtle layer, and if effective, also the reduction of attachments to the subtle layer: attachments to sex, sexuality, drugs, dreaming, money, relationships, etc.

Lastly, Observer Consciousness Meditation, including some Tāntra, Bhakti and Buddhist practices, and Advaita Vedānta all target the Causal layer and help to reduce attachments to the form (tradition) of spirituality and attachments to the mind and ego directly. Only at the Causal layer can the mind and ego be dealt with thoroughly, and superseded by the formlessness of pure undifferentiated consciousness.

Using these models as a reference, we can follow the map of this article, pointing at the wonderful journey the self is taking, and experiencing great possibility and abundance at each step along the path.

## Part I: The Physical Body

### Holistic Haṭha Yoga



There are two directions of Yoga:

- Yoga as the Path
- Yoga as the Goal

We can liken these two concepts to climbing a mountain. The winding path up the mountain is the technique but also the present moment. The peak of the mountain is enlightenment, but may also seem forever out of reach. Ultimately both the path and the goal need to be synonymous. When it comes to Āsana practice therefore, it is easy to get lost on the path when the intention of the goal is not clearly understood or acknowledged.

Are you focusing on the process or the end result? There are arguments for both. Getting lost on one section of the path, e.g. blinded by dogma, or a traditional-purist, or rigidly applying a technique are all variations on the same possible error: losing sight of the goal.

Or are you focusing on the goal such that you become unwilling or unable to see what is right in front of you. Are you being present? Is the goal of liberation within the here and now, or only a future dream? So set your intention as high as possible, but remain present and practical as you walk your path.

*Yoga includes Āsana but Āsana does not necessarily include Yoga.*

Holistic Āsana practice is meant for the whole body - and so modern Haṭha Yoga should be holistic. Traditionally, physiologically, it is not. As the older system of Haṭha Yoga was typically a support tool to be used to help one be comfortable for sitting in

meditation, it can be said, traditionally, that it is not necessary to explore complete balance for the physiological self. Āsana is simply a stepping stone for meditation, or advanced stages of Kuṇḍalinī practice, and so its original purpose may not be (precisely) for your physical well-being.

If you look at the position of Haṭha Yoga within the Integral Quadrants, this point is highlighted there also. Haṭha Yoga is largely physical which then helps the practitioner to begin engaging on more and more subtle levels. That is, from the "It" quadrant, to exploring both the "We" - interpersonal - and "I" - psychological/energy - quadrants.

As I have written in previous articles, when the bulk of most Haṭha Yoga postures are focusing on opening the hips more than any other area of the body, it is good to ask the question why? Is this appropriate for everyone? If the goal is meditation, then yes. If the goal is a holistic physical practice, then no.

I do think that modern Haṭha Yoga is moving towards greater physical holism, and many practitioners and teachers are now exploring the deficits - gradually there is greater and greater honesty in what these deficiencies are. So many individual teachers are becoming more well-rounded in what they offer, I find my outlook more positive than pessimistic these days.

To summarise, there are three fundamental purposes for Āsana practice. The first two are more or less traditional, the last is a recent development, and nevertheless important for all modern practitioners.

1. For stable meditation and *prāṇāyāma* practice
2. For attaining *siddhis* (powers) and stopping *karma*
3. Physically balancing the whole body (strength and flexibility)

In this article I will be mostly discussing the first and last. The second purpose is linked mostly to the Kuṇḍalinī traditions, and although significant, not the main focus of this current work. Based on these three purposes there is a question I like to ask students. What is the most important commitment for every Yoga student? Answer: Your commitment to your own Liberation. Nothing else truly matters next to that.

Having said that, there are three commitments in order of importance:

1. Your commitment to your Liberation - or commitment to God
2. Your commitment to your personal well-being: physical and mental health
3. Your commitment to the teacher or tradition

The third commitment may be important at times (to the teacher or tradition), but is always secondary to the first two. The first commitment, to God or Liberation, includes the two commitments beneath it. When a teacher starts talking about commitment or devotion to the tradition and then does not give full allowance for the student's choice of direction regarding their personal health and connection to the Divine, then that teacher is unfortunately not one to follow or devote to.

One of the first and only rules of spiritual practice is this: *Do not seek to change someone else to your liking.*

A person's individual path and direction in Yoga is theirs alone. Someone else's practice is not yours to censure or condemn; it does not belong to the teacher or to the tradition. However, each individual's practice should be clearly influenced by the teacher and the tradition, and by the environment and other students. Understanding the correct direction of this relationship is important: it is both ethical and positively affirming.

In the tradition of Yoga lineages (Paramparā), the Guru-Śiṣya relationship (enlightened master and disciple) is intended primarily as a relationship between each individual and the Divine. So it is not about blindly following a teacher, as everyone has their faults. It is seeing what is beyond the frailties of the body and personhood, and recognising the true Divinity in each person - both teacher and student. When the Guru is truly realised he/she recognises this Divinity in all students and all beings. Simply being in the presence of such a person raises you up even just a little, to experiencing and seeing that Grace more clearly in yourself.

It is important to note that a true Guru-Śiṣya relationship requires the teacher to be enlightened. Without that most admirable quality, the personhood of the teacher can often restrict or retard the true spiritual growth of the student.

When we are focusing on the second commitment (to your overall health and well-being), the first question is, does your physical practice adequately balance strength and flexibility in all areas? I don't know any Āsana traditions, new or old, that are adequate for all conditions and constitutions: a more inclusive attitude is required from both teachers and students to be able to support a variety of differences. That is, using different postures and physical practices outside of the tradition of Yoga. To give a short list; strength and flexibility both externally and internally from head to toes:

- Upper body strength and flexibility
- Mid-section and spine strength and flexibility
- Lower body strength and flexibility

So far I have not seen or experienced any Haṭha Yoga style that adequately covers all of that. And that short list doesn't begin to cover the broader list of Yoga: Mantra, Prāṇāyāma, and Dhyāna, plus Study, Ethics, and Self Restraint.

In all other physical disciplines such as sports, dance, weight training, running, swimming, gymnastics, etc., cross training is considered ideal. You don't just do that activity, whatever you're training in, but you balance it with others. Why is Yogāsana considered separate to this principle? Because if it's not traditional, it's not Yoga. That argument is religious, ignorant and misguided. Yoga is all of it, not just the small part claiming to be traditional.

For example, for many traditions one is not "allowed" to do anything outside of it: In the case of Haṭha Yoga, no other form of Āsana, or complementary exercises, no meditation, no massage, nothing. This is the standard rule in Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, if you are adhering to the words of its principle teachers. The unfortunate logic of this is that you're somehow more spiritual or more devoted if you only follow the tradition. There is no support for this argument, proven time and again by teachers who are willing to allow students other forms and practices that would be of benefit. For example, Iyengar Yoga for alignment, various forms of Yoga therapy, supportive Prāṇāyāma practices, meditation, and of course, massage therapy!

After an initial phase of learning from the tradition (for some students perhaps a few months, for others perhaps a few years) encouraging the student to conduct research, or learn some complementary therapy, whatever is missing, is more than useful - it is profoundly life changing. A teacher needs to be able to see when it is useful to ask a student to stick with it, and when referrals and other guidance are needed. Not one or the other, but both. Blindly following any tradition has as many problems as the reverse - i.e. the unwillingness to surrender to the process of learning within the tradition. I have written a considerable amount on this in the past, so there is no need to repeat it all here.

Having said all of that, the first traditional purpose of Āsana is to prepare you - physically and psychologically - for meditation. One of the main reasons that the predominance of all Yoga postures are focusing on the hips, and outward rotation of the hips in particular, is to make it easier to sit comfortably.

*If you believe that Āsana practice is somehow innately spiritual, then it is likely you are avoiding looking at something important.*

Spirituality is simple: all human beings, indeed *all* beings, are spiritual. It is our innate spiritual beingness that yearns to be set free from the shackles of conditioning and attachment. Therefore there is no such thing as a spiritual practice. Whether it be Dhyāna, Āsana or Prāṇāyāma - these are maps, they are not the territory. A practice, no matter how refined, is an object, not the subject - or even beyond subject and object. So trying to claim spiritual superiority because of how diligently you practice something is rather misguided. The inner self is spiritual, the object of attention is not.

The question is, why do you practice Haṭha Yoga? For the health of the body, or to have a stable meditation practice? Personally I advise not just one or the other but rather both - inclusive rather than exclusive. Modern Haṭha Yoga should be aiming at overall health for all constitutions and conditions, not just the elite, and aiming the dedicated practitioner directly at Meditation, and not just after 20 years of Āsana practice, but immediately. Why wait?

One of the problems inherent with this approach (do all of it not just a small part of it) is that your average Yoga teacher doesn't have sufficient experience or qualifications in all



of it. But as long as there is willingness for each teacher to keep studying and learning (within the tradition and beyond it), that's enough!

For students it's important to have some critique of the teachers also: don't accept every utterance or adjustment with blind faith. Have some critical thinking when it comes to what a teacher is saying, don't be afraid to make discourse or argument, and certainly don't accept pain as your due for accepting the teacher's forceful adjustments! Rage against any abuse, and stand up for your rights as an independent and beautiful being worthy of respect.

The other sections of this article are designed to shine a light on the different forms of philosophy and meditation and then start applying those as a complement to your Āsana practice. Keep reading to find out.

It is interesting to note that physiologically, doing advanced postures grants no significant improvements to your physical health. Doing a number of basic and remedial postures, as suitable for your constitution, gives the same basic health benefits as doing advanced postures. I have seen this time and again with students who are content with a simpler practice - both physical and psychological health is often better than for a student who habitually pursues advanced postures and thus runs significant risk of both injury and attachment.

The main benefit of advanced postures is how this can help the practitioner access awareness of subtle body states: awareness of subtle sensations, energy movements, and Kuṇḍalinī. Just keep in mind that the requirement for Kuṇḍalinī rising isn't ultimately an advanced Āsana practice or specific posture, but awareness. The advanced posture simply aids awareness, thus awareness - not the posture - is the key.

Strangely enough for many advanced Āsana practitioners I often see increased attachments to the physical, versus letting that aspect go, at least for a period of time. It often takes tragedy or injury for the real Yoga practice to begin. Sadly, deep pain is one of the greatest motivators for true spiritual transformation.

Advanced postures are interesting, enlivening and even fun. They may allow you to sit more comfortably but in no way do they automatically grant the doer any extra spiritual brownie points. The latter is a ridiculous concept, obviously, but not that uncommon a belief with anyone attached to doing advanced postures. Doing advanced postures is neither wrong nor right: do them if you like, just be careful of focusing on a goal versus the here and now process.

Conversely doing absolutely nothing in order to protect a joint or contain an injury is a temporary solution. With any injury, after a suitable rest and recovery period, it is better to start doing something versus nothing. By encouraging the body back into mobility (without adding insult to injury) will bring healthy function back sooner than later.

Therefore, apply relaxed effort in your practice, without pushing forward. Don't fall into

laziness, sleepiness and distraction. Stay awake, remain alert on all levels. Be happy with what is occurring versus trying to be what you are not. You don't have to constantly push at your Āsana development, nor do you want to avoid everything that is painful and difficult. One is Rājasic (overactive), the other is Tamasic (underactive). Both extremes tend to be linear and time-bound: you will be without much peripheral vision, which does not allow for your full presence in the here and now. Only by not pushing forward and not running away can you truly be here. The latter is Sattvic (rhythmic). Thus, I would also say there is a large difference between discipline, Tapas, and contentment, Santoṣa, in the general Yoga community. The first is often practised, the second less so.

To conclude this small piece on Haṭha Yoga, one of the most important and lasting realisations you can have from physical practice is the following:

*It is not the body that I have that is important. What is critical is the relationship that I am having with it.*

Nor is Yoga indicated by how perfectly you're adhering to the tradition. In this case the goal has been clouded by the process. The linear nature of focusing on one sequence after another, one posture after another, from basic to intermediate to advanced, is a huge distraction and an even bigger source of attachment.

Love your body now. Don't wait. If you're trying too hard, you're not loving your body. Be compassionate, there is no special place you have to get to.

## **Part II: The Philosophical Path Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra**

The Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali is a popular text for many modern Yogis, in particular it seems to be required reading and study for most Yoga teacher training courses. It has served me as an initial source of guidance for Yoga philosophy, and is a valuable tool for understanding some of the principles of Yoga beyond just physical, biological health. However applying Yoga philosophy with more than mere intellectual understanding is critical; it needs to be practical and experiential also.

I have found that these Sūtra are often interpreted to try and give credibility and support to an Āsana system when there is no historical link between the two. Because of this my sense is that some aspects of this text and it's application are misleading. As the historical validation often seems to be used to convey a limited point of view, I would like to point out some of the misunderstandings and advantages as I see them.



Some details as per Wikipedia:

The text is comprised of 196 Sūtra, believed to be compiled prior to 400 CE by the Sage Patañjali, taking materials about Yoga from older traditions. It was the most translated ancient Indian text in the medieval era, having been translated into about forty Indian languages and two non-Indian languages. It fell into obscurity for nearly 700 years from the 12th to 19th century, and began to regain popularity in late 19th century.

Firstly, there is no current tradition that adequately describes what exactly Patañjali is writing about - I don't imply the intellectual understanding of the text - but rather the actual practical application and technique that would have lain behind the Sūtra. The details of the method that Patañjali is writing about is never described, merely hinted at.

I would like to outline some other peculiarities also. As Patañjali seems to be writing mostly on Rāja Yoga, a style of dualistic meditation practice, and doesn't seem to be writing about Haṭha Yoga (Āsana and Prāṇāyāma techniques), there is some mystery as to why modern Yogis practicing the one seem to think that indicates a real or valid link to the other.

Basically there is rarely a clear historical link between modern Āsana practices and the older traditions of meditation, Prāṇāyāma and Rāja Yoga - "current tradition" may be the most accurate term. Most of the traditions of the Āsana practices taught today historically would stem from Haṭha, Tāntra, and some Advaita practices, which would link more directly to such texts as the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, the Kuṇḍalinī Yoga Upaniṣad, and the Yoga Tārāvalī and some others. Even then it is rare for modern Yoga to source its philosophy accurately or historically.

There are 6 Principal Schools of Indian Vedic Philosophy:

**Nyāsa** - Logic

**Vaiśeṣika** - Vedic Theory

**Saṃkhyā** - Dualism

**Yoga** - Meditation / Action

**Mīmāṃsā** - Elevation through Duty

**Vedānta** - Revelation

Firstly, Yoga is one of the 6 schools, secondly the term "Yoga" in this case means the path of Rāja Yoga Meditation - leading to liberation. Yoga does not necessarily imply doing Āsana, other than simply sitting still. Action doesn't mean Āsana, rather it means putting the philosophy into practice directly and immediately - an experiential style of teaching, but also including philosophy and "right behavior". Whereas the path of Āsana, to be considered Yoga at all (also as per the above philosophies), would have to involve obligatory meditation practice, and most likely Prāṇāyāma and other Kriyā Yoga disciplines. Yoga, usually meaning to join and to unite, implies both direction (action) and duality.

Historically Āsana was considered a stepping stone or support towards an effective meditation and contemplative practice. It was not considered particularly important in and of itself. In modern times this smaller (physical) aspect of Yoga has become a massive industry and the raison d'être for many practitioners. This alone would be considered "not traditional". Traditionally most Haṭha practices are a branch of various Kriyā or cleansing practices, as I wrote earlier, for physical well-being and preparing the practitioner for meditation.

That is, Āsana on its own was never the reason for being, and was not considered critical for finding deeper meaning and peace. Āsana can be meaningful and peaceful, don't get me wrong, but Āsana is not essential for the purpose of "Yoga". The latter is pointing us towards unification with God, Self, or Higher Consciousness. Āsana is just one of a few tools towards meditation, or in Kuṇḍalinī terms, for cultivating higher subtle vibrations and awareness. It's important to realise that no technique or tool is essential for the latter, a technique is a guide or signpost which points out the way. Once again, don't mistake the map for the territory.

The history and traditions of Yoga purely as meditation are significantly different to the traditions of the Haṭha-Āsana variety. Many of the Haṭha traditions, stemming from Kuṇḍalinī and Tāntra practices were not considered part of the six orthodox schools above, rather were unorthodox and quite individualistic in their approach. That is, a particular Guru or Āchārya teaching a specific method, somewhat separate to the overall collective that the traditional Vedic Darśana represented.

To put it another way, many of the Rāja Yoga meditation practices were intended to yoke or unify the individual consciousness with divine consciousness. The Haṭha/Kuṇḍalinī practices typically involved the purposeful movement of both body

and subtle energy towards unification at the crown of the head, also believed to be divine energy. The goal may have been similar, the application fundamentally different.

Therefore we can say that Patañjali's Sūtra are more closely tied to both Saṃkhyā and Rāja Yoga philosophy than to Haṭha Yoga. For example, Patañjali and Saṃkhyā share concepts such as Puruṣa, pure consciousness, in relation to Prakṛti, manifested nature, and God as Īśvara, the Teacher. The Haṭha Yoga traditions encouraged following a particular teacher, emphasis on the awakening of Kuṇḍalinī, and typically also devoting to a particular Murti - or individual God.

In addition, although the Saṃkhyā and the older Rāja Yoga traditions would share some similar concepts and philosophies, in application they also differed. Saṃkhyā is largely philosophical, Rāja Yoga and Patañjali Sūtra are Yoga in Action, or meditation as a dualistic practice.

So, to continue with my earlier thoughts... Historically Patañjali's Sūtra first started to re-emerge (after a 700 year absence) in modern times when Swami Vivekānanda began giving lectures on the text to the American public in the 1890s.

Vivekānanda drew upon the neo-Vedāntic form of Yoga, including Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra, to emphasise the fact that Yoga was not necessarily an "Indian" tradition, nor limited to a Hindu one. Further the Western concept of humanitarianism that formed the basis of modern neo-Vedāntic Yoga made it all the more appealing to American followers - they were consistently asking for Indian spiritual teachings that could apply to them.

Having said that, it is also interesting to note that up until that point Vivekānanda was not an expert on Patañjali's Sūtra, having never particularly studied it before, but was soon to use it in a number of lectures over the following years, including writing more than one book on the subject. He was merely using it as a means to an end: The Yoga Sūtra were one of the ways in which Vivekānanda sought to assert Indian spiritual authority.

In more modern times, Prof. T. Kṛṣṇamāchārya (the teacher of K. Pattabhi Jois, B.K.S. Iyengar and T.K.V. Desikachar), was often to say "The Yoga of Patañjali" in reference to his teachings. But my understanding of this is that he was pointing the Yoga student towards Prāṇāyāma and meditation practices rather than using Āsana on its own as a direct link to the divine. It seems many Āsana teachers forget this and simply mash the practical Āsana techniques together with Patañjali's philosophy without actually trying to apply that philosophy directly. e.g. through meditation.

There seems to be fairly clear historical reasons why the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali were buried for some time, and also clear reasons for its reemergence. For the first, other philosophies and practices which gained prominence (from about 1200 to 1900) included various forms of Buddhism, Advaita Vedānta and Saṃkhyā philosophy. As I would consider the Sūtra more closely tied to Saṃkhyā philosophy than Haṭha Yoga,

then it's easy to see why it was abandoned, as on its own it would have been considered incomplete and impractical by the Saṃkhyā philosophers - as it doesn't provide you with a practical method of meditation, or a historical lineage from which you could learn the method.

There are also some Tāntra and Kuṇḍalinī philosophical systems that are highly compatible with the physical discipline of Āsana - although there is less research and evidence showing consistent, concrete results for these latter two. That is, there can be a lot of "belief" in these two systems, but not often any scientific or empirical evidence for what they can achieve. For example, experiences of an energetic nature may allow heightened awareness temporarily but do not typically last or become a permanent enlightened trait. (See below, Part III of this article.)

So it should be obvious, one of the reasons Patañjali's Sūtra is so popular is the very real need to find deeper meaning beyond just physically doing Āsana for the health of the body. The latter is in fact a fine and worthy goal, pointing us towards liberation and undifferentiated consciousness. Patañjali's Sūtra can help start that journey, but it is important not to be limited by it either.

Here are a few examples from Patañjali's Sūtra, I will start by making some comments on some of the first:

*yogaśchitta vṛtti nirodhaḥ* (1:2)

[ Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind ]

*abhyāsa vairāgyābhyām tanirodhaḥ* (1:12)

[ The fluctuating thought patterns (*vṛtti*) are mastered through practice (*abhyāsa*) and non-attachment (*vairāgya*) ]

*tatra sthitau yatnah abhyāsaḥ* (1:13)

[ Practice (*abhyāsa*) means choosing, applying the effort, and doing those actions that bring a stable and tranquil state (*sthitau*). ]

*sa tu dīrgha kāla nairantarya satkāradarāsevitaḥ ḍṛḍha bhūmiḥ* (1:14)

[ When that practice is done for a long time, without a break, and with sincere devotion, then the practice becomes firmly rooted; a stable and solid foundation ]

Abhyāsa, or practice, does not necessarily mean doing the same Āsana day in, day out. A disciplined Āsana practice is simply a means to an end: a tranquil, non-attached mind, rather than a tired, dogmatic one. Note: tiredness and tranquility are not the same! By practicing not to practice; being in the empty state without being the one who is empty; being absorbed in silence, without being the one who is silent, only then can Abhyāsa and Vairāgya be realised equally. That is, practice without true non-attachment is flawed.

So how do you practice consistently without being attached to it? For the traditionally

minded: use the tradition to be aware, but don't be the one who is being traditional. This is the effortless state that we are cultivating: effortlessness through awareness, not effort through doing. One leads to less attachment, the other does not.

You can't fight conditioning by replacing it with more conditioning, this is the contradiction of Abhyāsa and Vairāgya - emphasis on practice alone leads to greater attachment, not less, typically up until the point that injury occurs.

*dr̥ṣṭa anuśravika viṣaya vitr̥ṣṇasya vaśīkāra samjñā vairāgyam (1:15)*

[ When the mind loses desire even for objects seen or described in a tradition or in scriptures, it acquires a state of utter (*vaśīkāra*) desirelessness that is called non-attachment (*vairāgya*) ]

By following any tradition for long enough, no matter how well intentioned, inevitably leads to being locked in time: a tradition, by definition, means to follow a technique as it was taught in the past, and applying that to get you to some future condition. All traditions and techniques if applied in a disciplined way will lead to this problem: without letting go of the tradition or technique, you will not arrive at the effortless natural state: that which you already are. Tradition and technique = time. Spontaneous awareness = timeless.

It is useful to note that following the map of a tradition is always going to be influenced by the present moment - and thus all traditions are modified by the inevitable force of change, the magic of the here and now - whether you (or they) want to admit it or not.

Also it is good to keep in mind that I am not being negative towards tradition or technique. They are all potentially useful. The map points the way. Just keep in mind every attachment (to tradition or otherwise) is a hindrance to liberation, particularly when the tradition is one that purports to take you there.

One of the best ways to truly understand "non-attachment" is distinguishing between that and the word "detachment". Detachment means to withdraw from something undesirable. For certain difficult situations this may be necessary. But true non-attachment occurs at the contact boundary of self and experiencing. You don't run away (or detach) from a feeling or experience; you embrace it and learn to be non-reactive to it.

*You cannot be non-attached to something you don't allow yourself to fully feel in the first place.*

So running away and detaching is also not the answer, and a very common mistake. Feeling happy or sad, or angry, or weak, or anxious is something to go through, not to resist or avoid. You practice non-attachment to these feelings as they come up, in order to practice non-reactiveness. It doesn't mean you no longer feel anything. In the beginning it is usually necessary to withdraw to a certain extent from outside stimulation - meditating in a quiet place for example, free from obstruction and turmoil. But it doesn't mean withdrawing from your own natural sense-experiencing.

*tatparam puruṣa khyāteḥ guṇa vaitrṣṇyam* (1:16)

[ Indifference to the subtlest elements, constituent principles, or qualities themselves (*guṇa*), achieved through a knowledge of the nature of pure consciousness (*puruṣa*), is called supreme non-attachment (*paravairāgya*) ]

By being non-attached to even the most seductive and powerful states of consciousness, subtle body energy states, dream awareness, Kuṇḍalinī rising and other experiences is very important. Attaching to such states prevents your own natural expansion.

Next we jump forward a little to Sūtra 2:29:

*yama niyama āsana prāṇāyāma pratyāhāra dhāraṇā dhyāna samādhayo aṣtau aṅgāni*

[ The eight rungs, limbs, or steps of Yoga are the codes of self-regulation or restraint (*yama*), observances or practices of self-training (*niyama*), sitting (*āsana*), awareness of breath and *prāṇa* (*prāṇāyāma*), withdrawal of the mind (*pratyāhāra*), concentration (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and perfected concentration (*samādhi*) ]

The most direct link to Haṭha Yoga practice within Patañjali's Sūtra is through the practice of Kriyā Yoga, or purifications. In particular the practices of Yama and Niyama highlight these methodological practices, or inner and outer observances.

**Yama:**

*Ahimsā* - Non-violence

*Satya* - Truthfulness

*Asteya* - Non-stealing

*Brahmāchārya* - Chastity

*Aparigrāh* - Non-greediness

**Niyama:**

*Śauca* - Cleanliness

*Samtoṣa* - Contentment

*Tapas* - Discipline

*Svādhyāya* - Study

*Īśvaraprannīdhāna* - Contemplation of God (the Teacher)

When both Āsana and Prāṇāyāma are mentioned, Patañjali does *not* mention techniques. It is clear that he is talking of meditation, specifically Rāja Yoga meditation practice, so it is odd that many modern Yoga teachers consistently reinterpret these Sūtra to give more validity to a Haṭha practice that has little to historically link it to Rāja Yoga. This is not to say that the message of these Sūtra don't then support a modern Āsana practice, and support Prāṇāyāma practice; they do! It is important to be careful of misapplying a false understanding, and then spreading misinformation.

Here are Sūtras 2:46 to 2:48:

*sthira sukham āsanam*

[ Steadiness and lightness in one's seat (should be balanced/maintained) ]



This does not imply the necessity for these qualities in all Haṭha Yoga postures, rather just the ability to sit still without strain. It's simple, and means exactly what it says. Doing advanced postures is not necessarily meant to be tranquil (just try a few and you will see), rather such postures, as per the Kuṇḍalinī method, would be used to transcend the powerful nature of intense energies, and move those energies towards a higher purpose: up to the crown of the head to unite with the Divine. The practice of sitting as per Patañjali, and Āsana as per Haṭha / Kuṇḍalinī Yoga are obviously different.

*prayatna śaithilya ananta samāpattibhyām*

[ The means of perfecting the seat is that of relaxing or loosening of effort, and allowing attention to merge with endlessness, or the infinite ]

*tataḥ dvandva anabhighātaḥ*

[ From the attainment of the perfected (psychological) seat, there arises an unassailable, unimpeded freedom from suffering due to the pairs of opposites (such as heat and cold, good and bad, or pain and pleasure) ]

These three Sūtra (46 to 48) directly point us towards a meditation practice. No amount of Āsana on its own will get you there and resolve these core polarities. Sit still. Stop moving, if only outwardly. Be silent.

*tasmin sati śvāsa praśvasāyoh gati vicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ*

[ Once that perfected (psychological) posture has been achieved, the slowing or braking of the force behind, and of unregulated movement of inhalation and exhalation is called breath restraint and expansion of energy (*prāṇāyāma*), which leads to the absence of the awareness of both, and is the fourth of the eight rungs ]

*bāhya abhyantara stambha vṛttiḥ deśa kāla saṃkhyābhiḥ paridṛṣṭaḥ dīrgha sūkṣmaḥ*

[ *Prāṇāyāma* has three aspects: first the external or outward flow (exhalation); second the internal or inward flow (inhalation); and the third, which is the absence of both during the transition between them, and is known as the pause, or suspension (*stambha*) ]

*bāhya ābhyāntara viśaya akṣepī chaturthaḥ*

[ The fourth *prāṇāyāma* is that continuous *prāṇa* which surpasses, is beyond, or behind those others that operate in the exterior and interior realms or fields (also known as *kevala kumbhaka*) ]

*tataḥ kṣīyate prakāśa āvaraṇam*

[ Through that *prāṇāyāma* the veil of Karma that covers the inner illumination is thinned, diminishes and vanishes ]

*dhāraṇāsu cha योगyatā manasaḥ*

[ Through these practices and processes of *prāṇāyāma*, which is the fourth of the eight steps, the mind acquires or develops the fitness, qualification, or capability for true

concentration (*dhāraṇā*), which is itself the sixth of the steps ]

Once again it is important here to realize that Patañjali is not discussing Prāṇāyāma techniques. He is pointing at sitting still, and once physical stillness can be maintained, and right mental effort applied, then the breath naturally starts to pause/suspend. The Stambha between the breaths becomes greater as the breaths (the inhalation and exhalation) become lesser or weaker. This then leads directly to that sublime state, the fourth Prāṇāyāma, Kevala Kumbhaka, meaning 'one alone'.

The Prāṇāyāma that Patañjali is talking on is a simple meditation practice: by observing the breath, eventually it stops. It is exquisitely simple, so it is not necessary to complicate this simplicity with multiple techniques.

Further along in that same chapter we have Sūtra 2:54 and 2:55:

*sva viṣaya asaṁprayoge chittasya svarūpānukārah iva indriyāṇāṁ pratyāhāraḥ*

[ When the mental organs of senses and actions (*indriya*) cease to be engaged with the corresponding objects in their mental realm, and assimilate or turn back into the mind-field from which they arose, this is called *pratyahara*, and is the fifth step ]

*tataḥ paramā vaśyatā indriyāṇāṁ*

[ Through the turning inward of the organs of senses and actions (*indriya*) also comes a supreme ability, mastery over those senses inclining to go outward towards their objects ]

Now although on the surface of it, these two Sūtra sound good, it is unfortunately easy to misapply or misinterpret them. As mentioned above, you are not trying to halt yourself from feeling or eradicate sense contact. Despite the translation, rather you are withdrawing from the mind's reaction to sense contact. You are letting go of your attachment to your mind and personality; letting go of the mind's (and ego's) response to pleasant and unpleasant, to craving and aversion. To stop sense contact would be incredibly unhealthy and unenlightened. Feelings and sensations will be there, the *reaction* is not.

Likewise, the absence of suffering, as per the Buddhist concept, does not mean the absence of pain. By going through anger and pain and fear and loathing, one can let go of the mind's indulgence in its own importance. By fully withdrawing, or detaching from sense contact, although useful at the initial stages of meditation (sitting in a quiet place), later on is often a larger problem. That is, meditation is continuous, and not limited to time, place, or experience. Meditation is recognising that it is your natural state, effortlessly, rather than a technique you are practicing. Also, trying to halt sense contact is like trying to cut off a part of yourself, and denying your basic healthy functioning. This kind of detachment leads to ill-health instead of any state of enlightenment.

The self can easily become a prisoner of its own conceptual box of peace, versus passing through these feelings to the state of peace that is ever-present. One kind of peace, the

false kind, comes through the appearance of discipline and control. The other kind comes through letting go, and is typically very messy and awkward in stages. If you haven't gone through that personal messiness, then it's not yet real peace you are experiencing, merely a constructed one. Essentially it is your personality that comes and goes, including all of the troubles and joys that it brings. It is peace that is ever-present. Letting go of the person (the small "i" identity) is not easy! Thus personal difficulty will arise as you make various attempts.

To put it another way, feelings are fine, allow them, let them be. Feel it, let it go. Emotional (psychological) reactions to feelings, although understandable - it's good to be compassionate about such things - are not. We allow feelings, we drop all emotions. We allow the senses, we don't allow the mind to make a story out of what we feel and experience. Feelings are first, emotions are reactions to feelings: a feeling is baseline = innate. An emotion is a feeling plus a thought = reaction. Both feelings and emotions are still observed, but the first is natural and healthy, the second is not. Experiences are always occurring, and the observer is always watching them.

The latter can then effortlessly lead to the final states of Dhyāna and Samādhi, Patañjali's seventh and eighth limbs - Meditation and Reconciliation.

So on the one hand, although I think practicing Āsana and also studying Patañjali's Sūtra is a good start, even a great one, it is still just the beginning. It's not actually an answer in and of itself. Your own experience, and ultimately your own liberation is the only yardstick we can measure this by.

One should apply the principles of Yoga philosophy in a practical, experiential manner. That is, as expressed through your personal relationships, through contemplation of your experience at the contact boundary, your relationship to your body, your connection to your environment, your willingness to live in peace in relation to all beings; humans, animals, plants, all of it. Don't just think about philosophy or just study it. Live it.

### **Samkhya Philosophy**

Samkhya Philosophy is strongly dualistic, it regards the universe as consisting of two realities, Puruṣa (consciousness/self) and Prakṛti (matter). Jiva (a living being) is that state in which Puruṣa is bonded to Prakṛti in some form. This fusion leads to the emergence of Buddhi (intellect) and Ahamkara (ego consciousness). The universe is described by this school as one created by Puruṣa-Prakṛti entities infused with various permutations and combinations of variously enumerated elements, senses, feelings, activities and mind.

During the state of imbalance, one or more of the basic constituents overwhelm the others, creating a form of bondage, particularly of the mind. The end of this imbalance or bondage is called liberation, or Kaivalya by the Samkhya school. With this philosophy the existence of God or supreme being is not directly asserted, nor

considered relevant. Saṃkhyā denies the final cause of Īśvara (God). A key difference between Saṃkhyā and Yoga schools, state scholars, is that the Yoga schools accepts a "personal, yet essentially inactive, deity" or "personal God".

Saṃkhyā is also known for its theory of the Guṇa (qualities, innate tendencies). The Guṇa are of three types: Sattva being rhythmic, compassionate, illuminating, positive, and constructive; Rājas being activity, chaotic, passion, impulsive, potentially good or bad; and Tamas being the quality of darkness, ignorance, destructive, lethargic, negative. Everything, all life forms and human beings, state Saṃkhyā scholars, have these three Guṇa, but in different proportions. The interplay of the Guṇa defines the character of someone or something, of nature and determines the progress of life. The Saṃkhyā theory of Guṇa was also widely discussed, developed and refined by various schools of Indian philosophies, including Buddhism.

"The foolish declare that Saṃkhyā and Yoga are separate, not the wise. He who performs even one of them correctly obtains the fruits of both... Saṃkhyā and Yoga are one: who see this truly sees."  
*Bhagavad Gītā 5.4 & 5.5*

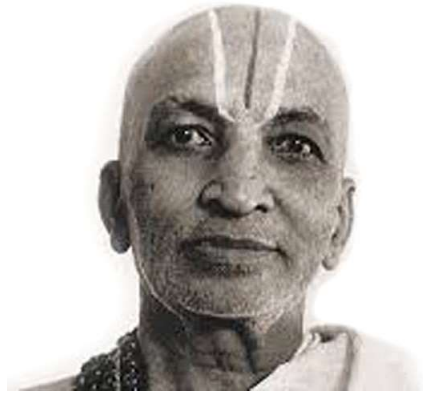
Puruṣa is soul, or pure consciousness. Prakṛti is nature, or that which is created. Puruṣa did not create Prakṛti; in fact, if given a choice, Puruṣa would prefer to have never met Prakṛti at all. But Puruṣa is responsible for Prakṛti becoming animated, alive.

Saṃkhyā philosophy holds that there are countless individual Puruṣas, each one infinite, eternal, omniscient, unchanging, and unchangeable. There is no single Puruṣa that sits hierarchically above any others. There is no creator god, no puppet master pulling any strings. Since Puruṣa is pure consciousness, it follows that Prakṛti is unconscious. Prakṛti is everything that is changing. Prakṛti is not just the physical aspects of the universe that we can sense; it is our very senses themselves - our thoughts, memories, desires, and even our intelligence and personality. Prakṛti is everything that is that isn't conscious. Prakṛti is conditioning and attachment. Consciousness resides only in Puruṣa, or more properly, as Puruṣa.

Puruṣa, pure and distant, is beyond subject and object. One cannot intellectually understand Puruṣa, for that would make it an object. Puruṣa cannot know or understand anything either, for that would make Puruṣa a subject. Puruṣa simply just is. But, because of the presence of Prakṛti, Puruṣa gets attracted to nature as the form of experience. And then the disaster occurs: Puruṣa becomes trapped inside Prakṛti. Soon Puruṣa forgets that it was ever separate and ceases to struggle to regain its freedom.

The union of Puruṣa and Prakṛti can be seen as a horrible mistake. The only remedy: a fast and thorough divorce! The forceful effort of this dissolution is the traditional practice of Yoga. Saṃkhyā Philosophy and the Yoga of Patañjali are not about union. They are about getting a divorce as quickly as possible. And if you don't focus on this right now, you will have to come back, both this life and the next and the next, suffering in countless lives until you finally get that divorce and are freed from your bondage.

## Prof T. Kṛṣṇamāchārya



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

If there is one name that can be considered pretty much synonymous with contemporary Yoga, it is T. Kṛṣṇamāchārya, who is well known the world over as the Yoga Guru of renowned teachers such as Indra Devi, B.K.S. Iyengar, Pattabhi Jois and T.K.V. Desikachar. Among most contemporary styles of Yoga, several trace their roots back to this master, whose teachings remain the inspiration for thousands of Yoga practitioners around the world. Be it fitness, healing or a spiritual quest, T. Kṛṣṇamāchārya is among the few Yoga Āchārya who seemed to give every seeker exactly what they needed.

He was an acclaimed master of Āsana, Prāṇāyāma and Dhyānam techniques, a seeker of knowledge, a prolific writer and orator, one of the pioneers of adapting Yoga techniques for therapy, and an adept in Vedic chanting.

He never crossed an ocean, but Kṛṣṇamāchārya's Yoga has spread through Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Today it's difficult to find an Āsana tradition he hasn't influenced. Even if you learned from a Yogi now outside the traditions associated with Kṛṣṇamāchārya, there's a good chance your teacher trained in the Iyengar, Aṣṭāṅga, or Viniyoga lineages before developing another style.

Many of his contributions have been so thoroughly integrated into the fabric of Yoga that their source has been forgotten. He was a pioneer in refining postures, sequencing them optimally, and ascribing therapeutic value to specific Āsana. By combining Prāṇāyāma and Āsana, he made the postures an integral part of meditation instead of just a step leading toward it.

My own experience of Viniyoga taught by Kṛṣṇamāchārya's son T.K.V. Desikachar, and in particular the integration of Yoga philosophy and learning to correctly chant Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra (rather than just reading about it) had a deep effect on my Yoga

practice - shifting the emphasis from the linear aspect of learning the Aṣṭāṅga Āsana series one by one, and seeing how I could apply real Yoga philosophy in daily life. This then led to other explorations, so it certainly opened a number of doors for me. So I offer the link above for students to see and explore and research for themselves.

Further to this, there is an important question about Kṛṣṇamāchārya's teaching that I like to ask. When he moved from Mysore to Madras, in 1950, he also changed from teaching Aṣṭāṅga Vinyāsa in favour of teaching Yoga as therapy, individually. The very Guru of the Aṣṭāṅga method - either its inventor, or its main modern progenitor - stopped teaching the "traditional" series, completely and utterly. Why? If you can't answer this question, then it is not justified or logical to teach the Aṣṭāṅga method in a dogmatic or overly strict way.

Logically if you are strict with Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, then the only way to justify this is to claim that Kṛṣṇamāchārya wasn't K.P Jois' Guru and only what Pattabhi Jois or S. Rangswamy says is true. Alternatively if you accept that Kṛṣṇamāchārya shifted to teaching differently because the standard Aṣṭāṅga Vinyāsa doesn't allow for individual conditions and constitutions, then you will have to do something similar yourself. Thus it is good or every Aṣṭāṅga teacher to be a little more thoughtful and educate yourself on a few subjects outside of the "current" Aṣṭāṅga Vinyāsa tradition. And then apply that for your students - for example, Yoga therapy, alternative postures, breathing exercises, meditation, and medical referrals.

I would be one of the first to say that Aṣṭāṅga Vinyāsa is a good system, and useful, particularly for building on basic flexibility and strength, for concentration and discipline, and for using the Primary Series as a diagnostic tool for determining what then is best for the student... However, I'm also one of the first to say that sticking arbitrarily with the sequence is a huge mistake for many, many students. Kṛṣṇamāchārya basically proved it with his actions, and being traditional, you can't go against the Guru!

Here are two of my favourite quotes from Prof. Kṛṣṇamāchārya:

"Mūla Bandha is not something you do, it's a blockage that gets removed."

"Inhale, and God approaches you. Hold the inhalation, and God remains with you. Exhale, and you approach God. Hold the exhalation, and surrender to God."

### **Part III: The Subtle Body Prāṇāyāma, Kuṇḍalinī, Tāntra and Psychedelics**

There are a number of Prāṇāyāma practices that promote awareness of the breath and awareness of energy, and perhaps that also increase energy in peculiar ways. One definition of the word Prāṇāyāma is the restraint of breath - Prāṇa and Yama - or breath control. Another definition is the development of energy - Prāṇa and Āyama. That latter description indicates the direction of awareness: Prāṇāyāma doesn't fundamentally change your energy, as there is nothing fundamentally missing, it simply shows you what's already there, under the surface.

Secondly although Prāṇāyāma doesn't typically take us to higher consciousness, it does help your ability to remain still and quiet for periods of time, and greatly helps you to see and experience yourself as not the body: it reduces attachments to the physical. Prāṇāyāma is an invaluable resource for students who may require a stepping stone between Āsana practice and the more subtle layers of Meditation.

Conversely, from reducing the physical attachments, Prāṇāyāma and Kuṇḍalinī practices can lead to greater attachment to the subtle body; addiction to heightened energetic experiences. It is good to be mindful of this.

#### **Kuṇḍalinī, Dreams and Tāntra**

Numerous accounts describe the experience of Kuṇḍalinī awakening. When awakened, Kuṇḍalinī is said to rise up from the Mūladhara Chakra through the central Nāḍī (called Suṣumṇā) inside or alongside the spine and reaching the top of the head. The progress of Kuṇḍalinī through the different Chakra leads to different levels of awakening and mystical experience, until Kuṇḍalinī finally reaches the top of the head, Sahasrāra or Crown Chakra, producing an extremely profound transformation of consciousness.

Energy (the three and a half coils of the Kuṇḍalinī serpent) is said to accumulate in the Mūladhara and the Yogi seeks to send it up to the brain, transforming it into 'Ojas', the highest form of energy. Physical effects are believed to be a sign of Kuṇḍalinī awakening by some, but are also described as unwanted side effects pointing to a problem rather than progress. The following are common signs of the movements of Kuṇḍalinī, but are also common symptoms of the problem rather than the cure, commonly referred to as Kuṇḍalinī syndrome:

- Involuntary jerks, tremors, shaking, itching, tingling, and crawling sensations, especially in the arms and legs
- Energy rushes or feelings of electricity circulating the body
- Intense heat (sweating) or cold, especially as energy is experienced passing through the Chakra
- Spontaneous Prāṇāyāma, Āsana, Mudrā, and Bandha

- Visions or sounds at times associated with a particular Chakra
- Diminished or conversely extreme sexual desire sometimes leading to a state of constant or whole-body orgasm
- Emotional upheavals or surfacing of unwanted and repressed feelings or thoughts with certain repressed emotions becoming dominant in the conscious mind for short or long periods of time.

My experience of this over the years is that Kuṇḍalinī practices can be very helpful to feel and connect with various subtle energies that may be blocked or restrained - as you become more self-aware subtle body practices are highly beneficial. It is also important to take the process slowly, being mindful of what is appropriate individually. Unsurprisingly Kuṇḍalinī Yoga can lead to a wide range of side effects - which can easily spiral into addictive behavior patterns. Or the side effects create such turmoil, and due a lack of support or training from the teacher, results in highly exaggerated anxiety, and in some cases leading to hospitalisation. Ultimately Kuṇḍalinī practice is working in the subtle body, and so, significantly, it stirs up whatever is there - whether you like it or not, and whether it's appropriate or not.

One of my criticisms of many modern Kuṇḍalinī teachers is a lack of forethought as to whether teaching certain aspects are appropriate for certain students. Asking questions of each student and gauging their relative well-being (psychological and physical) would be important before every class.

Another aspect about Subtle Body "study", is that for many practitioners the initial learning about the Chakra and the Energy Systems leads to a mere intellectual understanding. Or just confusion.

For the first, you can spend years studying about the Chakra, and never have any real intimate connection with your body (the first stage, and requiring an absence of technique in order to be truly present), and even longer before you actually begin to feel resonance on an energetic level and grasp its significance. The key is in feeling your body somatically (feeling versus an emotional reaction is important), and then allowing attention to follow the movements of energy naturally. Prāṇāyāma and breathing exercises can enhance this process of feeling awareness, but also are not strictly necessary. So experience is more important than knowledge, particularly on the subtle level. Don't just read about the Chakra: observe them unfolding.

Secondly, without the appropriate foundation both physically (a stable Āsana practice for example) and psychologically (meditation and psychotherapy practices) advanced Kuṇḍalinī either brings energetic confusion, best case scenario, or intense catharsis and emotional breakdown. Due care is necessary! I provide the following link, a book by Gopi Krishna that explains some of the interesting perils and benefits of Kuṇḍalinī.

[www.amazon.com/Living-Kundalini-Autobiography-Shambhala-Editions](http://www.amazon.com/Living-Kundalini-Autobiography-Shambhala-Editions)



## The Three Bandha and Three Granthi

The concept and practice of the three Bandha are intimately tied to Kuṇḍalinī and Tāntra practices. But what does it mean? There are three Bandha and three Granthi - Bandha means 'lock' and Granthi means 'knot' - both the words and the physiological locations for these three are so similar they may as well be synonymous.

1. Mūla Bandha means root or earth lock.
  2. Uḍḍiyana Bandha means to fly upwards.
  3. Jālandhara Bandha means net in the stream.
- 
1. Brahma Granthi, means blockage of the lower body, or physiological self.
  2. Viṣṇu Granthi means blockage of the middle body, or subtle body.
  3. Rudra Granthi means blockage at the level of consciousness, or psychological self.
- 
1. The root Bandha / Granthi connects the base Chakra, Mūladhara and Svadisthana.
  2. The middle Bandha / Granthi connects the Manipura and Anāhata Chakra.
  3. The upper Bandha / Granthi connects consciousness with Viśuddha and Ājñā Chakra.

### First Layer

Mūla Bandha is unlocked / unblocked when you no longer have any issues with your body, food and sex. Your relationship to these layers is resolved. This does not necessarily imply complete abstinence from these layers, though it does typically mean the willingness to abstain, at least from time to time.

For example, practicing Āsana that is Sattvic and without ambition. Can you look at your body, and experience your body with nothing but kindness? No fear, no anxiety, no rigidity of your mind controlling the body, no insecurity. Love and kindness-in-action for the physical self.

Unblocking Mūla Bandha will also typically mean a vegetarian or vegan diet. Non-vegetarian indicates separation from compassion, and the opposite of non-harming. If you are eating only for pleasure, (i.e., eating meat) then you are unlikely to be in harmony with your physical self.

Here is an ethical logic loop for you:

1. Eating meat is harming the animal.
2. Unlike other animals humans can choose to be vegetarian and vegan.
3. Go back to point 1.

## Second Layer

Sexual "right relationship" means not making another person the source of sexual appetite and sexual fulfillment. You are the source of your sexual energy; you are the source of your Love, not the beloved other. You can make love or not make love, either way, your sexual energy is yours, and thus free to move up or down the Suṣumṇā Nāḍī without restriction.

At the level of Uḍḍiyana Bandha, this means unblocking all of your relationships, both past and present. There is no hatred, anxiety, fear or trouble with relationships. Some small difficulties might come and go, but the deeper self is always present, the lower self remains uplifted, and cannot return to the attachments to the gross layers below it. Some of the indicators for this include: compassion for all beings, the willingness to sacrifice self for others, and altruistic behavior. Generosity on all levels of being, from money, to time, to listening and receptivity. Awareness of self has moved from ego-centric to family-centric.

The classical icon of Hanuman cracking open his chest and revealing Sītā and Rām within demonstrates his surrender to this level of consciousness. He is willing to sacrifice himself for his love and friendships.



True love, universal love, or altruistic love (in the heart) does not ultimately mean turmoil, aggravation, grief, depression, or other emotional responses. Nor does it mean passion, neediness, sexual love, or other typical ego-driven forces. Love in the heart can reveal those things, but is not fundamentally belonging to them. Love in the heart is kind, soft, wide-open, abundant, universal.

*Altruistic love is not personal.*

This kind of love is much harder for most individuals to recognise or even feel, as the psychological-emotional states tend to dominate and cover altruistic love like a blanket.

### **Third Layer**

At the level of Jālandhara Bandha, this means unblocking the relationship to your mind. No longer allowing the mind to be in the driver's seat. This is the net in the stream: a combination of universal love and observer consciousness. The art of this practice is to catch the fish that are affirming and fulfilling. When there is difficulty, don't feed the shark of your mind, don't focus on the difficulty. Rather focus on what is positive: kindness and compassion, for yourself and others. Catch the fish, or any loving and generous thought, rather than catching and holding negative thoughts and negative behavior patterns. What you put energy into, grows. What you give no attention, fades away.

On one level Jālandhara Bandha is practised through holding the breath: the mind can become quiet. On another level, it means letting go of the mind entirely, to begin to operate from the purity and emptiness of consciousness itself. The observer is ever-present, no matter what fish are being held or caught or played with. In an odd kind of way this is the movement of vegetarianism: from catching fish, to abstaining from fish, to realising that fish are also a distraction. Loving consciousness is all there is.

I will make an important point here - Many students can experience sharp fear at this stage. The sense of isolation and challenge that the mind, albeit the ego, and the self is disappearing. A strong sense of dislocation and deep rooted contraction can be revealed, which is troubling and often tumultuous. Fear might be there, but it is good to recognise that this is one of your final attachments before real peace becomes your blessing.

Another way of putting it is the following trio:

- Self Care (health for the body and mind, lower self)
- Family Care (serving family, friends and community, middle self)
- Universal Care (serving all life, higher self)

### **Dreams**

At first, at the lower level of dreaming we experience fight or flight, and various fear-driven emotional states. This layer of dreaming is the subconscious revealing your day to day troubles and worries.

There are three states of consciousness we go through every day: waking, dreaming and deep-sleep. At the stage of dreaming, there is no body, there is no longer a physical self to be attached to. Yet if your attachments to the physical are strong, they will reveal themselves in the dream: being chased, being lost in a forest all alone, running away from a bad experience, being in a plane while it crashes, experiencing such things with great fear (in the dream world). The possibilities are endless. However in the dream state, as your body is absent, you no longer need to fear its absence, nor even fear death. Be conscious of this in future and hold it close to your heart each time you go to sleep.

Running dreams, or fight/flight dreams can be replaced by flying dreams, where you are able to move in three or even four dimensions: space and time are no longer obstacles. This is also called astral traveling. Sometimes we feel that movement of the astral self as it partially leaves the body, and then as it abruptly returns, from a noise, or from fear, or some other startlement, we suddenly wake up. Do not be afraid of this stage, even if you are witnessing your own body sleeping.

Likewise, a pursuit dream, or falling off a cliff or being attacked can be faced. Allow yourself, somehow, to remain in the dream, even in the face of your own death. Once you die in your dream, then you have realised and experienced something magical and profound. The dream body dies, but consciousness remains. You cannot die in your dreams, as consciousness and universal love is all there is. This experience can have profound and far reaching effects. It is also a sign of waking up from your "normal" attached bodily life.

*Learn to embrace every fear in the dream state, do not run from them.*

Also be careful what you ask for. If you start indulging in a lot of surface level dreaming, then you won't enter deep-sleep as often, the third layer of consciousness: in deep sleep both the gross and subtle layers are absent, and only consciousness remains. If you dream (REM, or Rapid Eye Movement) significantly more than deep-sleep, you will typically start to feel more and more tired and suffer from greater ranges of sleep-deprivation and the stress that this brings. To reverse this troubling process, before you go to bed each night keep asking for deep-sleep, request it of the universe. She is sure to oblige, at least eventually. Don't make dreaming your main habit, this also indicates an attachment.

If you do tend to have disturbing dreams, also be aware that afternoon and evening Yoga practices (Āsana or Prāṇāyāma) can make this worse. Likewise increasing back-bends can make it worse, or meditating too long on the exhalation breath. Rather, if this is a problem, focus on more forward bends and hip-openers, do strengthening, grounding practices in the morning, only do early morning practices, and eat calming Sattvic food: less spices, more warming soups and stews, that kind of thing. Focus on a soft inhalation and relaxed exhalation to stabilise the nervous system. Avoid Kumbhaka and other stimulating Prāṇāyāma practices, and if you do Prāṇāyāma regularly, focus on the Inhalation techniques such as Viloma rather than Anuloma.

One last point I will make on this aspect of the subtle body. The rising of the Kuṇḍalinī Serpent, and awakening consciousness from its attached "sleep" patterns, manifests uniquely in every individual. Thus some individuals feel Mūla Bandha as a clear physiological effect from Āsana. Some do not. Some students feel the movement of energy spiraling up and down the spine, and beyond the crown of the head in Prāṇāyāma. Some do not. Some experience the death of the body, and the freedom of astral traveling in the dream state. Some do not. Subtle body awakening is unique for everyone. It is enough that you can be open to the possibilities.

## **Tāntra**

Tāntra literally means "loom, weave", and denotes the esoteric traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism that co-developed about the middle of 1st millennium CE. The term Tāntra, in the Indian traditions, also means any systematic broadly applicable "text, theory, system, method, instrument, technique, or practice".

Modern neo-Tāntra may be a little different than traditional or old-school Tāntra, particularly in comparison to the Aghoris (practitioners of the left hand path). Where modern Tāntra does shine is in applying mindfulness and compassion in relation to one's sexuality. As one of my Tāntra teachers used to say "do not make the other person the source of your love." This also means, do not make your lover the source of your sexuality. You, or the higher-self rather, is the only source. Thus whatever sexual energy you experience or feel, is yours. It is not dependent on someone else.

So ultimately Tāntra places emphasis on your awareness and cultivation of sexual energy and using it for a higher purpose: your liberation. This includes liberation from sexual desire.

A branch of Tāntra, called Non-Dualistic Tāntra, points at some of this deeper truth. A spiritual path is considered Tāntric when its goal is to bring about the direct recognition of the immediate availability of our boundless nature. Non-Dualistic Tāntra does not see the world, the mind, or anything else (including sexual connection) as an obstacle to this awakening because every aspect of reality is seen as inherently sacred. The divine can be found everywhere at anytime. In a Tāntric path we do not leave the world to find heaven. We find Heaven in our experience of the world as it already is.

## **Iowaska (Ayahuasca) and Psychedelics**

The sacred ceremony of Iowaska tends to have similar effects as Kuṇḍalinī, it is working on the same series of layers. Iowaska is a specific brew made out of Banisteriopsis caapi vine and other ingredients. The brew is used as a traditional spiritual medicine in ceremonies among the indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin.

When used for its medicinal purposes, Iowaska affects the human consciousness up to six hours, beginning half an hour after consumption and peaking after two hours. Iowaska also has cardiovascular effects, moderately increasing both heart rate and diastolic blood pressure. In some cases, individuals experience significant psychological stress during the experience. It is for this reason that extreme caution should be taken with those who may be at risk of heart disease.

The psychedelic effects of Iowaska include visual and auditory stimulation, the mixing of sensory modalities, and psychological introspection that may lead to great elation, fear, or illumination. Its purgative properties are important (known as la purga or "the purge"). The intense vomiting and occasional diarrhea it induces can clear the body of

worms and other tropical parasites.

For many psychedelic users, sacred Iowaska can have profound and deeply moving long term effects. It should not be taken lightly, and is certainly a powerful method for awakening certain layers of consciousness. Once again, I will stress that such methods can also be addictive: what you are most attracted to, is often your greatest weakness and greatest attachment.

My own experience of Iowaska and DMT, although relatively brief, has led me on a few different magical journeys. In one particular experience, I was met by Quetzalcoatl, the Mexican Bird/God of Medicine. Without words, this Being conveyed to me a message of peace and healing, a message that I can not intellectually interpret, but still resonates with me to this day.

For me, I do not have an addictive nature towards any of the drugs or medicines such as this that I have taken. Nor do I have much fear. I am quite philosophical about it, and also don't need to revisit such experiences. They were useful, magical, but nothing to hold on to. So my suggestion here is that it is good to be aware of your capacity, and not indulge those tendencies that cause greater attachment and suffering.

For example:

- Āsana practitioners tend to be more attached to the body and physical accomplishment.
- Yoga Philosophers tend to be intellectual / critical.
- Kuṇḍalīnī practitioners tend to be attached to intense energy experiences.
- Psychedelic explorers tend to be attached to the drug.
- Personal Therapy can lead to attachment to 'personal' indulgence.
- Buddhist practitioners can label themselves as 'Buddhist', or blindly rote learn such things as Mantra and the traditional rules, without some critical, independent thinking.
- Advaita practitioners can tend to be 'detached' / disconnected versus 'non-attached'.

### **Terence McKenna**

Terence McKenna (November 16, 1946 - April 3, 2000) was an American ethnobotanist, mystic, psychonaut, lecturer, author, and an advocate for the responsible use of naturally occurring psychedelic plants. He spoke and wrote about a variety of subjects, including psychedelic drugs, plant-based entheogens, shamanism, metaphysics, alchemy, language, philosophy, culture, technology, environmentalism, and the theoretical origins of human consciousness.



[www.terencemckenna.wikispaces.com](http://www.terencemckenna.wikispaces.com)

In the early 1980s, McKenna began to speak publicly on the topic of psychedelic drugs, becoming one of the pioneers of the psychedelic movement. His main focus was on the plant-based psychedelics such as psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, cannabis, and the plant derivative DMT. He conducted lecture tours and workshops promoting natural psychedelics as a way to explore universal mysteries, stimulate the imagination, and re-establish a harmonious relationship with nature.

Though associated with the New Age and Human Potential Movements, McKenna himself had little patience for New Age sensibilities. He repeatedly stressed the importance of the "felt presence of direct experience", as opposed to dogma.

In addition to psychedelic drugs, McKenna spoke on a wide array of subjects including; shamanism; metaphysics; alchemy; language; culture; self-empowerment; environmentalism, techno-paganism; artificial intelligence; evolution and science.

"It's clearly a crisis of two things: of consciousness and conditioning. These are the two things that the psychedelics attack. We have the technological power, the engineering skills to save our planet, to cure disease, to feed the hungry, to end war; But we lack the intellectual vision, the ability to change our minds. We must decondition ourselves from 10,000 years of bad behavior. And, it's not easy."

I would like to finish with a transcript from one of McKenna's YouTube clips.

"The great evil that has been allowed to flourish in the absence of mathematical understanding is relativism. And what is relativism? It's the idea that there is no distinction between shit and shinola. That all ideas are somehow operating on equal footing... We have been taught that political correctness demands that we treat all these things with equal weight. Because we have no mathematical ability, no logical ability, we don't know how to ask the questions that expose some positions as preposterous, trivial, insulting to the intelligence, and unworthy of repetition.

So we are all very comfortable bashing science, and flailing away at that, but that isn't our enemy. Science is capable of undertaking its own reformation and critique

and has been engaged in that fairly vigorously for some time. The enemy that will really subvert the enterprise of building a world based on clarity is the belief that we cannot point out the pernicious forms of idiocy allowed to flourish in our own community...

(Sadly) We are not willing to take on the karma involved in taking on argument and discourse that actually gores somebody's ox."

~ Terence McKenna, published on YouTube, May 2011.

So there is a question here: What ox (attachment) are you holding on to, and does it need to be gored?

#### **Part IV: Inter-Personal Development Gestalt Psychology**

Most of the Yoga traditions don't place much emphasis on inter-personal development; understanding and applying non-violent communication, exploring the roles of feminine and masculine in a direct, communicative style, and understanding your own peculiar, wonderful mess of a personality. Not just from the higher consciousness point of view, or from an Ayurvedic constitutional point of view, but from a direct, experiential point of view.

To integrate your Yoga practice with appropriate psychological and personal tools is critical for the alignment between the personal-self / mind and higher-self / observer. Don't assume that one practice alone will fix or directly connect you to every layer of your self: from the physical, to the subtle body, to the relational and higher consciousness, each require some specific guidance.

Many Yoga teachers have little to no training in non-violent communication and personal process work, which also helps in navigating the ethical boundaries between teacher and student. I would say it is necessary from a professional level for all Yoga teachers to get some mentorship in this area.

I would like to point out some of the benefits of personal therapy as I see them.

Firstly, seeing a therapist does not automatically mean you are "sick" or mentally unstable, any more than any other person. In fact it typically means that you are simply being more honest. Having someone to talk to about your personal troubles, and then apply a compassionate, and practical series of tools to help you observe your own behavior and see where your adaptations interfere with healthy functioning, is an excellent way to climb out of, or let go of whatever personal difficulty you are in.

To think that practicing a lot of Āsana is going to fix a broken relationship, or certain kinds of emotional turmoil, is neither practical nor rational. To think that Meditation alone will simply eradicate any future difficulties with relationships because you are



working on the deepest level of the mind, can also be a common fantasy. To avoid intimate relationships entirely because they are difficult for you, may also be a considerable temptation!

The most direct way to deal with relationship and psychological difficulties, is to address them directly. And just like all the good Yoga traditions, we do so compassionately, mindfully, and strangely enough, gently and peacefully. Going to therapy doesn't just mean talking about your problems and indulging in your ego. It does mean seeing these problems so clearly, that the light of your refined consciousness, through the help of the therapist, is able to dissolve "problems" just through looking, just through the nature of being utterly immersed in the here and now.

I will give an example. I grew up with parents that were used to maintaining the household in a fairly logical, but rigid way: we all ate together, sitting at the dining table for all meals, no dessert unless you had eaten all of your main meal, we all left the house for sports on Saturday morning with our father so our mother could clean the house, we went to church on a Sunday morning with our father so she could have that morning by herself. My father controlled a lot of the small things in our behaviors, lights turned off as soon as you left a room, minimal time on phone calls, minimal use of heaters, food in the fridge was to be monitored, doing the dishes, helping with the gardens, other chores, etc. For me it wasn't a difficult childhood, there were many beautiful and uplifting moments, but I did grow up with this generalised fear of my parents, a sense that I could always do things wrong, and I would be reprimanded for it. There was rarely a sense of abundance, of peacefulness, of just being happy in the here and now. Perhaps this is common for many people, I don't know. What I do know is that these seemingly small details affected me deeply.

Through the application of Gestalt therapy, I started to see how this was affecting my relationships, either trying to be in control, or an inability to express my feelings without fear of being reprimanded by my partner. Through consciously applying here and now language of communication, I am able to express such things better, in a clear and clean way that doesn't lessen who I am, nor does it lessen the person hearing my authentic responses. It is a way of applying consciousness in a direct and compassionate style, just like we would hope from the theory posed by the Yoga Sūtra: Satya, truthfulness, and Santoṣa, contentment. So not just theoretical understanding, but actual application.

## **Gestalt Psychology**

Here are some of the teachings I have gathered from my Gestalt practice, teachings that have universal applicability, just like all the great Yoga philosophies.

Firstly the word gestalt indicates a realisation, or the "aha moment", also meaning "whole". That is: *the organised whole is experienced as more than the sum of its parts*. It is a positive, complete outlook: all systems seek wholeness. Whether physical, psychological, energetic or even trans-personal. Every element of your being yearns for wholeness, because innately, that's fundamentally what you are: beautiful and complete.

Secondly, one of the more important theories of Gestalt ties this together in one expression:

### **The Paradoxical Theory of Change**

*Meaningful change is not possible when you are trying to be other than what you are. It is when you are.*

Understanding the difference between vertical time and horizontal time is useful here. Horizontal time is the normal, personal way in which we operate: to get from A to B, we organise our resources, gather the materials necessary for a project and work towards the goal. To put it another way, you are born, you grow older, and then you die. This is inevitable.

Vertical time is different. The here and now is everlasting, it is your only truth. There is no past, no future, only now. Any methodological practice, any attempt at equating spiritual practice with technique, tradition, or everlasting happiness in heaven, is horizontal time, and ultimately a psychological distortion. The here and now is available to all beings, and only requires the unclouded light of your attention to reveal itself. This is not to say you have to abandon technique or tradition. Rather they simply point at this truth.

As yourself - pure consciousness without a label - you are free. By fully investing in observer-self, versus the busy mind-self, by staying with your present experience, and not trying to change anything, all of your experiences, no matter how fleeting, can radically change. It is a contradiction: do something, and you tend to focus on "not-self". Do nothing, and you become self, that which you already are. This is meaningful change: the expansiveness of the "whole" self that all the Yoga traditions are pointing us towards.

Gestalt therapy follows four broad guidelines:

### **1. Here and Now Phenomenology**

By bringing awareness to the here and now, to your physiological and tactile experience, the client and therapist can engage in dialogue that is authentic and builds effective relational support. By using language that is descriptive rather than explanatory, keeps the conversation in the here and now, versus constantly wandering off into a story and therefore into the past and future. For example, describing an experience (sound, colour, sensation, feeling) versus explaining why you think an experience occurred. The first is experiential, the second is theoretical. Here and now phenomenology also uses non-violent, first-person communication, using such terms as "I feel, I am experiencing, I notice, etc.," to keep a conversation alive in the moment and authentic.

### **2. Field Theory**

There are a number of ways to describe field theory, but my personal favorite is this: The therapist is not separate to the therapy. A therapist / teacher is not trying to "fix" a broken client, like a toy. Compassionate presence allows healing, and by revealing your own inner world to the client or student, deeper connection and meaning is maintained. Superficial relationships promote superficial change only. This is not just critical for an inter-personal therapist, but for any teacher: you are not separate from your client. This is the field. Whatever is going on in the greater field, whether personally for the client, or between client and therapist, affects all of the elements of the field. Nothing is separate. Whatever the client goes through is a part of you. So any pain or difficulty the student experiences, is ultimately the teacher's pain and difficulty. The teacher is not isolated from these events. They are intimately connected. The more the "Yoga" teacher tries to divorce himself from the human condition, the worse the teaching process becomes. That is, the worse the student / teacher relationship will be. The more open and revealing the therapist is, within ethical boundaries, the more love is experienced by all.

### **3. Dialogical Relationships**

In essence a dialogical relationship is not a subject/object relationship. The client or student is not just a body, or a set of problems to resolve. It is a subject to subject relationship. The student is the beloved other, the unique self that is equally as sacred as the teacher-self. Language of responsibility, authentic revealing on behalf of the therapist, appropriate support for the client's personal traits are all part of an open-ended dialogical relationship. See below for I/Thou relationships.

### **4. Freedom to Experiment**

One last interesting facet of Gestalt is the willingness to experiment and take a risk with various behaviors and aspects of any relationship. Experimentation demonstrates an ability to embrace change, no matter how awkward, embarrassing or contradictory. The experimental process, moreover, is enacted by the client or student, it is not controlled by the therapist. Thus ultimately the student becomes her own source of motivation, direction, empowerment and love. No outside source can replace that, whether the

therapist, an intimate relationship, or Guru. I find importance in this in relation to most Yoga methods: the teacher is not the expert, the student is. The teacher does not dictate what is appropriate, the student does. The therapist or teacher simply keeps referring back to her own authentic experience, back to the here and now, and back to observer consciousness.

So I like to ask students some simple questions in relation to self-awareness and interpersonal development: Are you prepared to be uncomfortable? Are you prepared to experiment? To take a risk and change, and do something different?

Here is a link to some Gestalt Therapy resources for reading, study and practice.

[www.gestalttherapy.org/publications-resources/](http://www.gestalttherapy.org/publications-resources/)

A valuable point I would like to make next is on ethics. A teacher who gives space for open communication, should not be indulging in personal fantasies and crossing the ethical line. Clear boundaries regarding personal space, sexuality, the role of teacher and student, financial transactions, etc, are incredibly important. Here are the basics, as per modern Medical Ethical Guidelines:

1. **Non-maleficence**, or non-harming: the teacher will seek the highest good for the student, and as a minimum, cause no harm - much the same as non-violence (Ahimsa).
2. **Beneficence**: the teacher or therapist must act for the greatest benefit of the client. This includes informed consent, letting the student or client know ahead of time what they are being taught or prescribed.
3. **Autonomy**: the student or client has the right to refuse or choose their treatment or practice. All teachers need to take particular note of this one. Students: please don't be afraid to stand up for yourself!
4. **Equality**: all clients receive the same possible treatment regardless of age, sex, race or background.

I find all of these relevant for Yoga teachers.

1. Is following the tradition best for the student or not? If the answer is always yes, then I think it highly likely you are causing harm.
2. What is of greatest benefit to the student? The honest answer to that, for any teacher, is "I don't know." Once that is said, then the teacher can be spontaneous and compassionate versus rigid with preconceived ideas.
3. Is the student allowed to decide what hurts and what doesn't? At some point the student must be the expert, not the teacher, and given room to decide if something is working or not. They know their body and pain threshold better than any teacher will.
4. Is everyone treated equally? This applies obviously to sex, age and ability. For the last, for example, just because a student is doing a more advanced practice doesn't mean they should always get more (or less) input.

## Martin Buber

Martin Buber was an Israeli philosopher best known for his existential philosophy of dialogue. This was encapsulated in the term I/Thou, which also means I/You. It is a subject / subject relationship rather than a subject / object relationship. I/Thou stresses the mutual, holistic existence of two beings. It is a concrete encounter, because these beings meet one another in their authentic experience, without any qualification or objectification of one another. Even imagination and ideas do not play a role in this relation. In an I/Thou encounter, infinity and universality are made actual, rather than being merely concepts.



Buber stressed that this kind of relationship lacks any composition or structure, and communicates no content or information. Despite the fact that I/Thou cannot be proven to happen as an event, as it cannot be measured, Buber stressed that it is real and perceivable. It can be felt. Common English words used to describe I/Thou include encounter, meeting, dialogue, mutuality, and exchange.

One key I/Thou relationship Buber identified was that which can exist between a human being and God. Buber argued that this is the only way in which it is possible to interact with God, and that an I/Thou relationship with anything or anyone connects in some way with the eternal relation to God, every time.

To create this I/Thou relationship with God, a person has to be open to the idea of such a relationship, but not actively pursue it. The pursuit of such a relation creates qualities associated with It-ness, and so would prevent an I-You relation, limiting it to I-It. Buber claims that if we are open to the I/Thou, God eventually comes to us in response to our welcome. Also, because the God Buber describes is completely devoid of qualities, this I/Thou relationship lasts as long as the individual wills it.

These concepts of Buber help us to link the idea of the personal self, and the challenges of the mind and ego, and how personal relationships are equally a vehicle to the divine as much as meditation or any other activity. He also points us towards the idea that God

without qualities cannot be held or captured, merely invited to the relationship. This also prevents attachment and conditioning from occluding one's potential experience of the divine, or oneself as the divine.

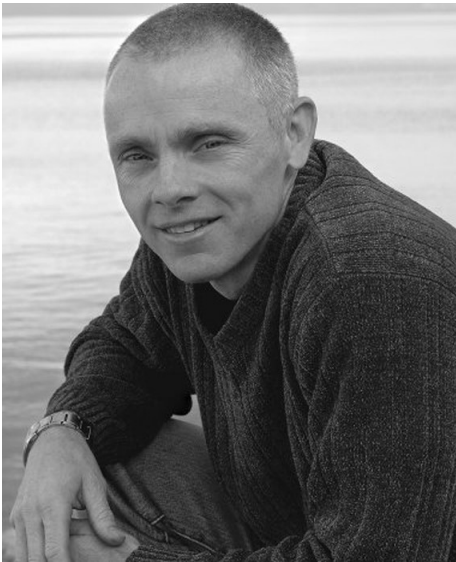
Following any tradition rigidly, therefore, Buber thought was a way to prevent this divine relationship from ever occurring. That is, be careful of "believing" that a tradition is going to help you to get to a better place. This is a restriction, and a dogma that most religions and many traditions require you to swallow. To paraphrase one of Buber's quotes:

"I am not against method, or tradition or technique, I just don't believe in it."

Belief indicates your hope for the future, your attachment to doing something specifically and consistently that is somehow going to lead to a better place in the future. Let it go, there is nothing wrong with you. Just be.

### **Adyashanti**

To finish this section of the article, I will quote Adyashanti, an insightful teacher, enlightened master, spiritual guide and author.



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

Adyashanti:

"Our psychology is intertwined with our spiritual, or existential yearning, and at the same time they are also distinct lines of development. Psychology deals primarily with the development of the personal domain of consciousness, from our inner subjective experience of ego development to our outer development as relational beings, again from the ego-minded state of consciousness. In the relative world, it is of great advantage to have a healthy, well-adjusted, functional ego.

Strictly speaking, the spiritual domain has to do with existential issues, like who we are beyond self or ego, what ultimate reality is, and awakening from the dream of ego-minded identity. A simple way to think of the difference between the psychological and spiritual domains is that the psychological domain is oriented toward self-improvement (becoming a happier and more well-adjusted person), while the spiritual domain is focused on transcending and awakening from the self and embodying awakened perception in everyday life.

So while the psychological and the spiritual domains of experience are distinct, in actual experience they are not separate from one another. As I have said before, one will almost always involve the other to some extent. The reason that I take the time to define the difference between the two is that psychological self-improvement will not, in and of itself, lead to spiritual awakening, nor will spiritual awakening necessarily heal all of one's psychological blind spots. They are related but not the same.

I would say that 90 percent of my teachings are oriented toward the spiritual domain. And even though this is so, probably 75 percent of the questions that I get are about improving some aspect of people's personal psychology. This is neither right nor wrong; it is just the way that it is. But it is helpful to understand that the two domains, while related, differ in their approach and ultimate aims.

Most spiritual teachers are not trained as psychologists, and most psychologists are not trained as spiritual teachers. Having said this, it is good for both psychologists and spiritual teachers to have some working knowledge of the others' domain for the simple reason that, although the two domains of human experience are different, they are also related and part of any truly deep inner work.

To be a truly realized, happy, free, an embodied human being, we will need to be both psychologically healthy and spiritually awake, however that comes about."

[www.facebook.com/adyashanti.org/posts/479378475760660](http://www.facebook.com/adyashanti.org/posts/479378475760660)

Note: by putting the words of Adyashanti here at this stage of the article, I am not implying his teachings are limited to psychotherapy. Far from it. I am including this explanation here as it clearly shows the usefulness of balance between the psychological and spiritual.

Secondly, in my experience, Adyashanti's observation that 75% of questions, even if posed as "spiritual", are actually personal questions, is a little generous. I would say over 90% of such questions are personal, as the need to ask questions fundamentally comes from the person. In addition many or most Āsana practitioners typically don't know how to ask the right questions that actually expose spirituality. The standard dedication to physical practice can often lead to a false assumption that the method is spiritual or leads to spirituality.

## **Part V: Altruistic Love**

### **Bhakti Yoga, the Bhagavad Gītā and Ānandamayī Mā**

Bhakti Yoga is the path of devotion, focusing on what I would call Undifferentiated Love for the Guru or God, and indeed, all beings. It is considered one of the more direct paths to liberation, as it tends to quickly circumvent the difficulties of the mind, as it gives that aspect of self (the lower mind) absolutely no importance. Rather the focus is on the positive force and feeling engendered by devotion, service and surrender to God.

Also called Bhakti Marga, it is a spiritual practice within Hinduism (though not limited to that religion) that focuses on loving devotion towards a personal Mūrti (God). The tradition has ancient roots. Bhakti is mentioned in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad where it simply means participation, devotion and love for any endeavor. Bhakti Yoga, as a path for salvation, is discussed in depth by the Bhagavad Gītā.

The personal god varies with the devotee. It may include a god or goddess such as Gaṇeśa, Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, Rāma, Sītā, Viṣṇu, Lakṣmi, Saraswatī, Śiva, Pārvatī, Durgā among others.

One of the difficulties I have observed with Bhakti practice is to make the transition from personal love to universal love. The first is temporary, and usually comes with attachments and suffering. The second does not. What is interesting is that many Bhakti practitioners make a personal and emotional state out of their practice, and can have great trouble letting go of attachments to an emotional relationship with the Divine. Conversely many serious meditators, focusing purely on the mind and concentration, can easily end up becoming attached to meditation as a necessity, all the while becoming more trapped by the subtle aspects of the mind and intellect. Every path has its pitfalls.

The Bhagavad Gītā, meaning "Song of the Lord", typically referred to as simply the Gītā, is a 700 verse Hindu scripture in Sanskrit that is part of the Hindu epic Mahābharata (chapters 23-40 of the 6th book of the Mahābharata).

The Gītā is set in a narrative framework of a dialogue between Pandava prince Arjuna and his guide and charioteer Lord Kṛṣṇa. Facing the duty as a warrior to fight the righteous war between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, Arjuna is counselled by Lord Kṛṣṇa to "fulfill his duty as a warrior and establish dharma." Inserted in this appeal to chivalry



is a dialogue between diverging attitudes concerning methods toward the attainment of liberation.

The Bhagavad Gītā presents a synthesis of the concepts of Dharma, or virtuous action / duty, theistic Bhakti, the Yogic ideals of liberation, Rāja Yoga and Saṁkhyā philosophy.

Numerous commentaries have been written on the Bhagavad Gītā with widely differing views on the essentials. Vedānta commentators read varying relations between Self and Brahman in the text: Advaita Vedānta sees the non-dualism of Ātman (soul) and Brahman as its essence and Dvaita (dualistic teachings) sees them as different. The setting of the Gītā in a battlefield has been interpreted as an allegory for the ethical and moral struggles of the human life. Mahātma Gandhi referred to the Gītā as his "spiritual dictionary".

Here are some interesting quotes from the Bhagavad Gītā in relation to Yoga - Kṛṣṇa (God) speaks to Arjuna (disciple) - Arjuna is each of us:

"Renunciation and the Yoga of Action both bring about ultimate bliss, but of the two, Yoga of Action is superior to the Renunciation of Action." 5.2

"Some see the Self in the self by means of Meditation; others through Saṁkhyā Yoga; and others through the Yoga of Action." 13.25

"He who serves me steadfastly through the Yoga of Devotion (*Bhaktiyoga*) crosses beyond these Guṇa and is ready to become Brahman." 14.26

"Concentrating with the mind absorbed in the Yoga of Repeated Practice (*Abhyāsayoga*) and not diverting elsewhere, one reaches the divine supreme spirit, O Arjuna." 8.8

"If you are not capable of keeping your mind absorbed steadily in me, then seek to reach me through the Yoga of Practice." 12.9

"Living apart, eating little, disciplined in speech, body and mind, always have your intention on the Yoga of Meditation (*Dhyānayoga*), taking refuge in dispassion." 18.52

### **The Importance of Mantra and Aummm**

One of the important aspects of Bhakti Yoga that I often felt was missing either from my own practice in the early days, or from any purely psycho-physical practice, was the use and benefit of Mantra. Chanting and bringing your attention to the embodiment of the Divine within you, and indeed within all beings, is definitely a shortcut to many aspects of liberation. Mantra is kindness in action, love on an altruistic level, and the letting go of the mind and ego as the music, sound and song take you to rapture with God and your own beautiful Self.

The sound and repetition of Aum (or Om) - called *praṇava* - is of great benefit to all, and

particularly useful for all practitioners of Yoga. There are three syllables: Aaa (correctly pronounced as Ooo), Uuu and Maa (correctly pronounced as Mmm.)

- Aaa exhalation (creation - Brāhma and Saraswatī, waking state)
- Uuu inhalation (preservation - Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, dreaming state)
- Mmm retention (destruction - Śiva, Pārvati and Kali, deep sleep)

When chanting the Aaa, feel the vibration and resonance in the lower body, the abdomen, and the creation force of your sexual pelvis. When chanting Uuu, feel the vibration and resonance in the middle body, the chest, and the balancing force of the loving heart. When chanting Mmm (or Maa), feel the vibration and resonance in the upper body, the head, and the destruction of ego and attachment in the mind.

Chant each sound with equal emphasis and duration.

### **Ānandamayī Mā**

I first became introduced to Bhakti Yoga in the early 90s when I attended a number of Bhajans, and in particular some all night chanting over Guru Purnima, the holy day for the teacher in July, at the Siddha Yoga Ashram in Sydney, Australia.

It was here that I was also introduced to my first experience of Bhakti through chanting and the blessing of Ānandamayī Ma. Although she had passed by this time, her energy and presence could be felt when chanting her name, to this day she is revered as one of the highest Indian saints, she transmitted love and Bhakti in all its forms, for all beings. No one was rejected, all beings from all walks of life and religions were accepted and embraced.

Ānandamayī Mā (30 April 1896 - 27 August 1982) was an Indian (from Bengal) spiritual leader. Śivānanda Saraswatī of the Divine Life Society described her as "the most perfect flower the Indian soil has produced." Precognition, faith healing and other miracles were attributed to her by her followers. Paramāhansa Yogānanda translated her name Ānandamayī as "joy-permeated". This name was given to her by her devotees in the 1920s to describe what they saw as her habitual state of divine joy and bliss.



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

"As you love your own body, so regard everyone as equal to your own body. When the Supreme Experience supervenes, everyone's service is revealed as one's own service. Call it a bird, an insect, an animal or a man, call it by any name you please, one serves one's own Self in every one of them."

Ānandamayī never prepared discourses, wrote down, or revised what she had said. People had difficulty transcribing her often informal talks because of their conversational speed, further the Bengali manner of alliterative wordplay was often lost in translation. A devotee, Brahmachari Kamal Bhattacharjee, however made attempts to transcribe her speech before audio recording equipment became widely available in India.

A central theme of her teaching is "the supreme calling of every human being is to aspire to self realisation. All other obligations are secondary" and "only actions that kindle man's divine nature are worthy of repetition". However she did not ask everyone to become a renunciate. "Everyone is right from his own standpoint," she would say. She did not give formal initiations and refused to be called a Guru, as she maintained that "all paths are my paths" and kept saying "I have no particular path".

She did not advocate the same method for all. "How can one impose limitations on the infinite by declaring this is the only path - and, why should there be so many different religions and sects? Because through every one of them He gives Himself to Himself, so that each person may advance according to his inborn nature."

She taught how to live a spiritual life in the world and provided the living inspiration to

enable thousands to aspire to this most noble ideal. She also advocated spiritual equality for women; for example, she opened up the sacred thread ritual, which had been performed by men only for centuries, to women. Her style of teaching included jokes, songs and instructions on everyday life along with long discourses, meditation and reading of scriptures.

## **Part VI: Higher Consciousness Buddhism, Attachment and Compassion**

There are many areas where Buddhism and Yoga philosophies intersect (compassion, concentration, devotion to the teacher, etc.) but a number of areas where they do not (soul vs emptiness, God vs consciousness). There is some truth to the notion that certain aspects of Yoga practice and Buddhism are therefore incompatible. Focusing on where they intersect may be enough, particularly the practices of loving kindness, compassion, tolerance, and equanimity are wonderful ways to encourage your own natural peacefulness, and recognising and connecting with the same innate qualities in others. Like attracts like.

I will discuss here the general direction of practice and awareness that Buddhism is pointing us towards.

### **The Four Noble Truths**

1. All life involves pain (whether physical or psychological), which leads to suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by attachment and desire.
3. Letting go of attachments leads directly to letting go of suffering.
4. There are various practices (the eightfold path) that lead to letting go of attachments.

*Enlightenment (true liberation) is the absence of suffering.*

The latter expression also means the absence of attachments. It is said that the last attachment you will have, prior to liberation, is the desire to be desireless. It is the king of all attachments, but also the one that eats all of its children.

### **Noble Eightfold Path**

#### **1. Right View/Understanding**

(Understanding the Four Noble Truths) - See things as they truly are without delusions or distortions, for all things change. Develop wisdom by knowing how things work, knowing oneself and others.

#### **2. Right Thinking**

Decide to set a life on the correct path. Wholehearted resolution and dedication to overcoming the dislocation of self-centered craving through the development of loving

kindness, empathy and compassion.

### 3. Right Speech

Abstinence from lies and deceptions, backbiting, idle babble and abusive speech. Cultivate honesty and truthfulness; practice speech that is kind and benevolent. Let your words reflect your desire to help, not harm others.

### 4. Right Conduct

(Following the Five Precepts) - Practice self-less conduct that reflects the highest statement of the life you want to live. Express conduct that is peaceful, honest and pure showing compassion for all beings.

### 5. Right Livelihood

Earn a living that does not harm living things. Avoidance of work that causes suffering to others or that makes a decent, virtuous life impossible. Do not engage in any occupation that opposes or distracts one from the path. Love and serve our world through your work.

### 6. Right Effort

Seek to make the balance between the exertion of following the spiritual path and a moderate life that is not over-zealous. Work to develop more wholesome mind states, while gently striving to go deeper and live more fully.

### 7. Right Mindfulness

Become intensely aware of all the states in body, feeling, and mind. Through constant vigilance in thought, speech and action seek to rid the mind of self-centered thoughts that separate and replace them with those that bind all beings together. Be aware of your thoughts, emotions, body and world as they exist in the present moment. Your thoughts create your reality.

### 8. Right Concentration

Deep meditation leads to a higher state of consciousness (enlightenment). Through the application of meditation and mental discipline seek to extinguish the last flame of grasping consciousness and develop an emptiness that has room to embrace and love all things.

## **Attachment**

A common and interesting Buddhist interpretation of the word attachment is replacing it with the word "acquisition". That is, any or even all acquisition leads to suffering. This is an interesting point. Perhaps there is truth that acquiring money fundamentally equals attachment. So beyond a certain point for basic shelter and health, the acquisition of wealth is, inevitably, also a state of suffering. On that note therefore, the acquisition of postures also leads to suffering. Both of these may require some contemplation (and letting go) to resolve.

When it comes to a consistent meditation practice there can be some questions around attachment. I am often asked questions by students, what is meditation, or why meditate? Also, if meditation itself is a possible obstacle, and another subtle form of attachment, why do it?

Meditation, by definition and common use of the word, is a technique. Whereas observation, being present without becoming lost in the object of attention, is the beingness of what you naturally are. Consciousness is all there is. Spaciousness is all there is. Emptiness is a core tenet of Buddhism.

What may often come up for many students first time meditating, or struggling with meditation, is repetitive thinking, or negative thinking. If negativity is a problem, it doesn't necessarily mean doing something else, or changing techniques, as anything else may inevitably cause the same reaction. It's the tendency to invest in negative thoughts that's the problem, not the technique itself. So it's the acquisition of negativity that needs to be dropped. It is simply another attachment, that through the light of your consciousness awareness, will dissolve when you no longer spend time dancing with it and enjoying its company.

All techniques are useful road maps. They show us the way, they guide us along the path. A tradition is the same: it is simply a map. *Do not mistake the map for the territory!* Many traditions are often pointing at the past, and saying (usually falsely) that "It has always been like this, thus forever-more it shall be!" Or to put it another way, do this practice and you will go to heaven, you will be more spiritual, do it incorrectly, and it's straight to hell for you.

A tradition and technique is there only for helping you to see and experience your beautiful natural self, effortlessly. Don't allow tradition or the technique to obstruct you. A tradition is there for you to use, not the other way around. Don't allow anyone, whether it be a teacher or a colleague, to blind you to this truth: you are perfect and complete as you are, you need nothing to be better than this.

Just be aware that it is the self that realises this, not the mind or ego. If your mind or ego is spending time negatively judging tradition or technique, that won't help you also, quite the opposite. Techniques and traditions, teachers and gurus (many of them, not necessarily all of them) can be wonderful, helpful, practical and inspiring. They are your guides, pointing your way along the path. Enjoy and appreciate, just don't become attached! Attachment to a method or tradition or teacher leads to suffering just like every other attachment.

One of the beauties of the various Buddhist methods is their practical application of consciousness. It is not difficult to practice Buddhist philosophy as the core tenets are all compassionate, humanistic, and connecting us all. Above all, they are elegant in their simplicity.

## Compassion and Kindness in Action

An important example of Buddhism in practice, is the necessity of compassion for all beings, including animals, plants and the environment. Being vegetarian or vegan, therefore, is one aspect of developing true self-awareness. I would say, in some ways, it is even necessary for the development of higher consciousness. If you don't feel direct sadness at the thought of eating meat, for the life that has been taken, then it indicates a tendency to be only in surface mind, to be in attachment, versus true undifferentiated feeling. You feel all animals, you cannot remain separate from this.

Conversely, one common experience I have had with the more strict application of Vipassana has been the reductionist approach that this conveys - less emphasis on compassion and kindness (*metta bhavana*) and greater emphasis on control, correctness, and the limited technique. Without compassion and direct connection with the outer environment - compassionate meditation in action - many meditation practices (whether Buddhist or otherwise) can become stale or isolating rather than expanding us towards undifferentiated consciousness.

To put it another way, simply being vegetarian or vegan is not enough. It is a good start, but like many "techniques" this facet merely points the way. To be conscious of your judgments (they don't just disappear by saying "now I am no longer going to be judgmental") and your relationship to others and the environment, directly, can allow you to let go of what is unimportant: be compassionate in action, directly engage with others, and feel your way into this natural and personal state of acceptance. You can love others, the environment and all its beings, without having to be isolated, separated and withdrawn. Thus the vegan who judges others who are not, or a vegetarian who feels isolated amongst meat-eaters, or an activist who lacks compassion for the ignorant, does himself as much harm as he feels these others are causing. Learn to be light in how you touch others, even when strong action is necessary to protect those that cannot protect themselves.

To use a common Buddhist analogy: the nature of the thinking mind, when it is largely trying to stay in control, tends to keep each individual at the surface level of consciousness only. The variations of the surface of the ocean are many - sometimes calm and peaceful, sometimes choppy, sometimes seemingly random and chaotic, and sometimes a full storm. These conditions come and go, but the deepest, and the most spacious depths of the ocean, are ever-present. It is always there, and it, as consciousness itself, is always able to observe the comings and goings on the surface, without losing itself. While the surface of the ocean constantly changes (the mind and what it experiences), the deep ocean goes nowhere, without trouble or suffering (to self or others).

As you begin to inhabit this undifferentiated self, naturally, you stop identifying yourself with the surface. This may also mean to stop identifying yourself as "Buddhist". Attachments simply start to fall away. Undifferentiated consciousness, (which I also call

undifferentiated feeling), is your natural state. An ever present awareness that is kind, flowing, abundant, and full of subtle joy.

Another small criticism I will make of some of the Buddhist systems is the tendency to fall into dogma, and theoretical practice, versus applying the teachings personally. For example, the over-use of chanting, prayer, and rote learning. As far as anyone can tell, the Buddha did not teach any chanting, and was known to discourage it. It was believed to be a distraction from actually putting the noble truths into action.

The system of rote learning various chants came into being after the Buddha's time, when Buddhism became organised into its various systems. The method of chanting was used to keep certain concepts and theories clear and precise, but was not overly important in and of itself. Naturally, when human beings are involved, greater and greater importance was then placed on the packaging versus the practice that the packaging contains. It is the idea that rote chanting actually leads to some special place, as if you are collecting spiritual brownie points. The technique then becomes a religion, versus revealing the deeper meaning of attachments. All repetitious actions can easily lead to attachment and suffering.

One of the greatest teachings from Buddhism I have gained is that emptiness is not to be feared. It is to be embraced. Emptiness is not the annihilation of self and self-consciousness, although it can appear that way. It is one of the main reasons why people can react so strongly to meditation: fear of losing this personality-self. Fear of losing the attachments one has invested in. It is one of the main reasons why the thinking mind resists not being in control: fear of mind-death.

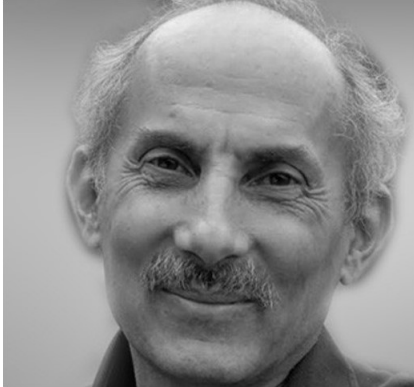
Firstly, what did the mind ever do that was for your actual benefit? Does thinking about this really help you?

Secondly, it is one of the kindest gestures of the universe: in emptiness we have spaciousness, which is to say, the abundance of freedom. Allowing you to be whatever you want to be. This includes attachment to your mind, and the confusion of thinking. But only when we embrace this emptiness ourselves, and grant it to all our fellow beings, can we naturally align with the universe. By practicing being not-self, or to stay in thinking, prevents the reality of the universe from revealing itself. In emptiness is kindness, compassion, and altruistic love. It is not personal, but it is abundant. There is nothing to fear, only attachments to let go of.



## Jack Kornfield

I would like to finish some of my thoughts on Buddhism with some wise words from Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist practitioner, author and Theravada / Vipassana teacher.



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

"We need to be practical. Our first task is to learn to distinguish the mirror-like nature of consciousness from its content, our sense perceptions and thoughts. When we learn to distinguish consciousness from the states and experiences that color it, we are freed from reacting to each passing state.

We can notice the distinction between consciousness and all the transient states and experiences that arise and pass away within it. When we do not understand this point, we take each of the passing states to be real. But when changing conditions such as happiness and unhappiness are seen for what they are, we find the way to peace. Most people lump everything together as the mind itself, without distinguishing between the temporary states of mind and the knowing of them. If you can rest in the knowing, the pure consciousness, there's not much more to do.

Does resting in consciousness mean we are simply checking out of the world, or withdrawing into navel gazing? Not at all. Resting in the knowing is not the same as detachment. When I look back at my own life I can see my struggles to discover this truth. Because of the conflict and unpredictable violence in my family, there were many times I wanted to run away but couldn't. To cope with the trauma, at times I became depressed, angry or cynical. But as a primary protection, I developed the capacity to detach myself from what was happening. Detachment came naturally to me. I used it to become peaceful within myself and to try to calm those around me. Of course, these patterns persist and now I do it for a living.

So when I began Buddhist practice, shifting my attention to rest in consciousness felt familiar, natural. It seemed similar to my strategy of detachment. But gradually I discovered how wrong I was. My detachment had been a withdrawal from the pain and conflict into a protective shell. It was more like indifference. In Buddhist

psychology indifference is called the "near enemy" to true openness and equanimity, a misguided imitation of real peace.

To rest in consciousness, I had to unlearn this defensive detachment and learn to feel everything. I had to allow myself to recognize and experience the feelings and thoughts, the conflicts, the unpredictability of life in order to learn that I could trust the openness of consciousness itself. We are invited us to rest in consciousness and allow every experience in a fearless way. To rest in consciousness is the opposite of contraction and fear. When we rest in consciousness we become unafraid of the changing conditions of life."

*Jack Kornfield, The Wise Heart, 2008*

As the subject of Buddhism is quite vast, with multiple lineages/branches (Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana for example) and multiple authentic practices, it is not practical for me to include details on all of them here. However I would like to include four different links of note, that I think are globally recognised and admired.

Dalai Lama

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

Dan Brown

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

Thich Nath Hanh

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

Vipassana

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

## **Part VII: Observer Consciousness**

### **Advaita Vedānta**

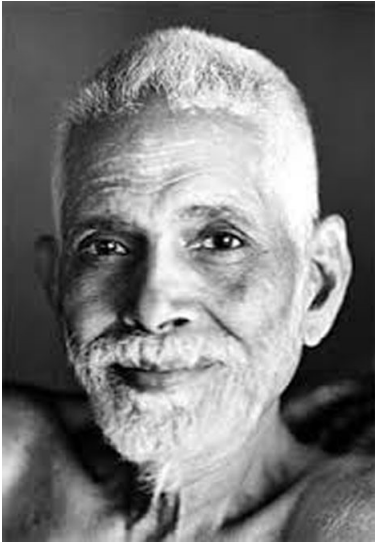
So what is Advaita Vedānta? Literally it means non-dual teaching. What is it to be not-separate? When self enquiry is honest and direct, we can experience all objects that come across our screen of attention as "not I". You have a body, but you experience it. Not I. You have feelings, but you experience them. Not I. You have a mind, but you experience thoughts. Not I. Only the experiencer is perceiving. Can you perceive the perceiver? Can you find the one who is looking?

If there is anything that is found, anything that comes and goes, it is not-self. Only that which is, the abiding self, undifferentiated consciousness, remains ever-present. It cannot be witnessed, and can only be witnessed from. So do not become that which you are not. Don't put energy into false beliefs and attached identities. Even your personality, your sex, your culture, all of these things come and go. They are not you. Thus all beings are of merit, all beings deserve compassion and love.

One of the terms in traditional Dualistic Yoga that crosses over into Non-Dual Advaita practices is Kaivalya. It means to be alone (not lonely!) and to be non-attached. The solitude or emptiness described in non-dualism is similar to that described in dualistic practices, despite that they may disagree on how to get there.

### **Bhagavan Rāmana Mahārṣi and Sri Mooji**

My first introduction to Advaita Vedānta was in the early 1990s in India when I first started to read about Rāmana Mahārṣi. To this day I consider Rāmana as Bhagavan, the beloved, or the adored one.



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

Rāmana Mahārṣi (30 December 1879 - 14 April 1950), was born in what is now Tiruchuli, Tamil Nadu, India. In 1895, an attraction to the sacred hill Arunachala was aroused in him, and in 1896, at the age of 16, he had a "death-experience" where he became aware of a "current" or "force" which he recognised as his true "I" or "self", which he later identified as Īśvara. This resulted in a state that he later described as "the state of mind of Īśvara."

Six weeks later he left his uncle's home in Madurai, and journeyed to the holy mountain Arunachala, in Tiruvannamalai, where he took on the role of a Sannyasin (though not formally initiated), and remained for the rest of his life. He soon attracted devotees who regarded him as an avatar and came to him for Darshan, and in later years an ashram grew up around him, where visitors received spiritual instruction by sitting silently in his company and raising their concerns and questions. Since the 1930s his teachings have been popularised in the West, resulting in his worldwide recognition as an enlightened being.

Rāmana Mahārṣi approved a number of paths and practices, but recommended self-enquiry as the principal means to remove ignorance and abide in Self-awareness, together with Bhakti (devotion) or surrender to the Self.

Bhagavan Rāmana was known to answer questions based on the level of the questioner. If a seeker came with questions on the Guṇa, or a more personal question he would answer those questions, typically in a more theoretical way. If the question showed deeper spiritual yearning or application he answered on the deepest level possible, and the seeker was transformed.

Here are some of my favorite quotes from him:

"Wanting to reform the world without discovering one's true self is like trying to cover the world with leather to avoid the pain of walking on stones and thorns. It is much simpler to wear shoes."

"All that is required to realise the Self is to 'Be Still.'"

"You can only stop the flow of thoughts by refusing to have any interest in it."

"Become conscious of being conscious. Say or think "I am", and add nothing to it. Be aware of the stillness that follows the "I am". Sense your presence, the naked unveiled, unclothed beingness. It is untouched by young or old, rich or poor, good or bad, or any other attributes. It is the spacious womb of all creation, all form."

### **Śri Mooji**

In recent years I have been going to Satsaṅg with Śri Mooji in Rishikesh. Mooji Baba was a student of Papaji, who was himself a student of Rāmana Mahārṣi. All of Mooji's wonderful teachings, his very presence, has deepened my awareness, my practice of non-doing, and added to the prior teachings from Rāmana Mahārṣi.

Since 1999, Mooji has been sharing Satsaṅg in the form of spontaneous encounters, retreats, intensives and one-to-one meetings with the many seekers who visit him, from all parts of the world, in search of the direct experience of truth. Few amongst the modern teachers of the Advaita tradition expound the method of self-enquiry with such clarity and love. There is an energy that radiates from Mooji's presence, a kind of impersonal intimacy, a curious mix of playfulness and authority. His style is direct, clear, compassionate and often humorous.



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

Here is a sample: What do you practice?

"Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, etc."

You can try the mantra for yourself:

"I am nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, etc."

If you find yourself reading that and feeling strange or challenged, or rejecting it without really looking, then you may be rejecting the most fundamental truth of what you are: nothing. If you are something, or you are trying to be somebody, and that is overly important to you, then you are invested in your attachment, mind and ego. This is not a judgment, or a negative viewpoint. It is simple reality.

Quantum physics proves it: the body (and all matter) is a whole lot of empty space from which electrons and other particles seemingly magically appear, sometimes at random, yet maintaining the physical form, which our eyes and touch tell us is there. This is also experienced in meditation. By feeling sensation and surrendering to the constancy of the arising and passing of bodily sensation (all at once) the physical self shows its reality: it disappears, as it too is nothing. It's empty. And from that vast compassionate emptiness, matter, body, mind and ego all manifest and hold their form.

Here are some other quotes from Mooji:

"Don't be too quick to interpret the moment. Just be quiet. My encouragement would always be: never think that anything is against you, everything is a blessing. Why should it be different? Just be quiet. Let it all work itself out."

"Feelings are just visitors, let them come and go."

"Dying to your own attachments is a beautiful death. Because this death releases you into real life. You have to die as a seed to live as a tree."

## Ādi Śaṅkarāchārya



My own explorations have lead me further along the path of non-dualism, and currently Advaita is what I use most as a central reference point for my other daily Yoga "activities" and teachings. For me it has taken ongoing research and development to reconcile these different aspects. Modern (neo) Advaita Vedānta does not typically allow or encourage technical practices in addition to the "non-dual" witnessing.

As I am also a practitioner of Yoga, Vinyāsa Krama, Prāṇāyāma and Gestalt, there may be some contradiction between Advaita and these "techniques". Simply enough, each of these techniques I apply individually, moment by moment. I am not interested in further conditions and improvement: each one is addressing a different aspect of "I", and can be picked up or dropped as needed. Nothing is necessary. Everything is good.

In modern Advaita Vedānta, there can be a tendency to reject all technique, all practices, that aren't "nothing". I find this both impractical, and just as attached as doing something. As Martin Buber or Ken Wilber might say, any method is fine, just be careful what you believe in.

Ādi Śaṅkara was an early 8th century Indian philosopher and theologian who consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta. He is credited with unifying and establishing the main currents of thought in Hinduism. His teaching of "nirguṇa" or Brahma without qualities, is a direct path linking simple Prāṇāyāma techniques with the Advaita concept of awareness - "consciousness is all there is."

One compatible source for linking Haṭha Yoga, Prāṇāyāma and Advaita is the Yoga Tārāvali - particularly the Prāṇāyāma and meditation practices mentioned therein. Tārāvali means a necklace of stars, or a lineage of stars: the teachings of Advaita from one Guru to the next.

Below is a Śloka from the Yoga Tārāvalī (by Sri Ādi Śaṅkarāchārya):

*anāhate chetasi sāvadhānaiḥ  
abhyāsa śurairanu bhūyamānā  
saṁstambhita śvāsamanah prachārā  
sā jṛmbhate kevala kumbhakaśrīḥ*

[ If one focuses gradually and carefully on the *anāhata*,  
And practices the *stambha* with courage,  
The mind and breath are naturally suspended;  
Then there blooms the splendour of the *kevala kumbhaka*. ]

Over the years I have developed an evolving and insightful Prāṇāyāma practice, sourcing both the Yoga Tārāvalī, my own experiences with different teachers, some of the other Haṭha traditions, and most importantly the need to teach Prāṇāyāma based on self-practice versus led classes. Basically there are very few Yoga teachers that I know that are teaching both self practice classes, and a therapeutic system of Prāṇāyāma - taught individually vs collectively - that progresses directly to a deeper meditation. Most Prāṇāyāma classes are taught in a "led" fashion, and little care taken to ascertain what techniques are appropriate for individual students.

The simplicity of witnessing one's energy and observing the Stambha and then tracing the path back to the observer is a profound and delicate dance that is possible for any committed and patient practitioner. The process by necessity is individual, so can only be developed if the teacher is offering Prāṇāyāma in selective ways for each student, all of whom need to be fully committed to self-practice.

## Summary

### Two Directions of Yoga

- Yoga as the Path (the present moment)
- Yoga as the Goal (enlightenment)

### Three Layers of Consciousness

- Gross (waking) / Manifested
- Subtle (dreaming) / Manifesting
- Causal (deep sleep) / Unmanifest

### Four Quadrants of Humanity

- I (personal)
- We (collective personal)
- It (impersonal)
- Its (collective impersonal)

### **Three Purposes of Yoga**

- For stable meditation and prāṇāyāma
- For attaining siddhis (powers) and stopping karma
- Physical health - balancing the whole body

### **Haṭha Yoga And Rāja Yoga**

- Haṭha Yoga will not succeed without Rāja Yoga and Rāja Yoga will not succeed without Haṭha Yoga.
- This means that a dedicated physical practice must be balanced with meditation practice and vice versa.
- Traditionally this implies that one can attain the grace of Yoga without having to renounce all worldly pleasure

### **Four Yoga Paths of Action / Practice**

(all paths are linked and best practised concurrently)

- Āsana
- Mantra
- Prāṇāyāma
- Dhyāna

Dhāraṇā (fixation / concentration) and Pratyahara (withdrawal / non-reactiveness) are included within each of the above 4 practices, only with increasing subtle awareness and subtle application at each level.

### **Yoga as Dualism**

(Sāṃkhya and Patañjali)

- The Separation of Puruṣa from Prakṛti
- Samādhi / Pure Consciousness is Puruṣa

### **Yoga as Union**

- Higher Self, God, Shiva, Emptiness
- The Resolution of all Polarities
- The wider the polarities the higher the neurosis (and ego attachment), the more integrated your polarities (union/one) the neurosis and ego attachment are neutralised

### **The Importance of Mantra and Aummm**

- Aaa exhalation (creation)
- Uuu inhalation (preservation)
- Maa retention (destruction)

### **Bhagavad Gītā**

- Yoga as Equanimity (similar to Buddhism) and
- Yoga as Skill in Action (being in the zone, peak experiences)



## **Buddhism**

- Yoga as Compassion and Kindness
- Yoga is the Absence of Suffering
- Yoga as Emptiness

## **Yoga As Aloneness / Non-Duality**

- Be Still (I Am)
- Consciousness is all there is (not-two)
- Kaivalya and Kevala Kumbhaka

## **Conclusion**

There are some contradictions in the different systems that may be difficult to resolve. For example, God versus consciousness, and dualistic versus non-dualistic. Does God exist or not? Is consciousness innately separate or not? These larger questions, I think, are not that useful however, particularly at the beginning. What is important is that you begin - and that you experience it for yourself rather than debating the truth.

With this in mind, I would encourage all Āsana practitioners to spend some time exploring different Yoga philosophies and different Yoga methods. Not just within the confines of Āsana, but beyond that with Meditation, Prāṇāyāma, and Inter-Personal Development. With a broader application of Yoga you will be informed enough to make better choices as to what you need to look at or work on.

From your beginning explorations (and this may take years), you should then choose one of these systems to devote to. What inspires you, what do you feel connected to the most? Immerse yourself in that. For committed Haṭha Yoga practitioners, from a traditional point of view, focusing on a Yoga Meditation method might be ideal - Rāja Yoga or Tāntra / Kuṇḍalinī Yoga would be a compatible choice for traditional Āsana practitioners. However, if you find yourself preferring Buddhism; Theravada Meditation, Zen, or Tibetan, then that can easily work for you. Likewise, as I have experienced, you may find Advaita Vedānta appealing and you can immerse yourself in the non-dual pointings.

Lastly, do not ignore any prompting you may get towards exploring your psychology, personal therapy and non-violent communication. This aspect of personal growth is a needed counterbalance to many of the older traditions of "Spiritual" Yoga Practice.

Keep in mind that Yoga is the path of action, therefore it is not just philosophical but something practical - so find your own conclusions experientially. Guidance in the presence of a live teacher is of immense benefit.

*May all beings be peaceful*  
Matthew Sweeney