

*Selected Background Material
on the Development of Yoga
in Early Hindu Thought*

This chapter will provide, within the context of early Hindu thought, an exposition of the term “Yoga,” outlining some of the general and more specific meanings of “Yoga” as well as elaborating upon various Hindu spiritual disciplines that are intrinsic to, representative of, or related to yogic praxis. Thus we will review some of the earliest recorded scriptures within Hindu traditions of Yoga showing how selected primary, “revealed,” canonical texts (*śruti*) as well as “remembered” texts (*smṛti*) exemplify different aspects of the development of ideas that lead into Patañjali’s Yoga (ca. second-third century CE). The chapter will conclude with a look at Yoga in its pedagogical context, which functions as one of the foundations or crucial building blocks of Yoga philosophy and enriches our understanding of Yoga *theoria* and *praxis*. It is through the pedagogical dimension that ideas in Yoga are put into practice and authentically lived in daily life. While providing only a limited, sketchbook account revealing a panoramic view of Yoga within early Hindu thought, this background chapter, nevertheless, functions as an embedding matrix and contextual pointer for the study that follows on classical Yoga. In other words, this introductory chapter highlights and profiles certain key pointers that will come into their own over the full course of this study.

THE TERM "YOGA"

What is "Yoga"? As G. Feuerstein states, "the word *yoga* has a great many meanings which range from 'yoke' to 'mathematical calculus'."¹ If we accept a broad and very general definition of the term "Yoga," such as, according to M. Eliade, "any ascetic technique and any method of meditation,"² then there are as many kinds of Yoga as there are spiritual disciplines in India, for example: *bhakti-yoga*, *rāja-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga*, *haṭha-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, *mantra-yoga*, and so forth. Moreover, numerous traditions can be easily cited both in India and elsewhere in which the term "Yoga" in the above broad sense can be employed, for example: Buddhist Yoga, Vedānta Yoga, Jaina Yoga, Sāṃkhya Yoga, Integral Yoga, Taoist Yoga, Tibetan Yoga (Vajrayāna Buddhism), Chinese Yoga (Ch'an), Japanese Yoga (Zen), and even Christian Yoga. Yoga is thus the generic term for various paths of "unification," Hindu or otherwise. The term "Yoga" can thus become, according to G. Larson,

indistinguishable from the general notion of spiritual *praxis* or *sādhana*, and in a secular environment *Yoga* may become any method of meditation for inhibiting heart disease, toning muscles, increasing concentration, fostering relaxation. . . . *Yoga*, then, becomes what Patañjali, Śaṃkara, Bhakti Vedānta, Agehananda Bharati, Maharṣi Mahesh Yogi, Baba Ram Das, Yogi Bhanjan, Jack Lalane, the YMCA and the Roman Catholic Church all have in common. Admittedly the ecumenical possibilities are nearly endless.³

In its proper historical and philosophical context, however, Yoga refers to South Asian Indian paths of spiritual emancipation, or self-transcendence, that bring about a transmutation of consciousness culminating in liberation from the confines of egoic identity or worldly existence. Feuerstein calls Yoga, "the psychospiritual technology specific to the great civilization of India."⁴ Within the Hindu tradition, six major forms of Yoga have gained prominence: classical Yoga or *rāja-yoga* (the "Royal Yoga" in later times often used to refer to Patañjali's school of Yoga in order to contrast it with *haṭha-yoga*), *jñāna-yoga* (the Yoga of "knowledge" or "wisdom"), *haṭha-yoga* (the "forceful Yoga" of the physical body), *bhakti-yoga* (the Yoga of "devotion"), *karma-yoga* (the Yoga of "action"), and *mantra-yoga* (the Yoga of the "recitation of sound"). To this list can be added *laya-yoga* (the Yoga of "dissolution") and *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* (a discipline with Tantric associations that involves the intentional arousal of the "serpent energy" or *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*), which are closely associated with *haṭha-yoga* but are often presented as constituting independent approaches.⁵ Histori-

cally speaking, the most significant of all the schools of Yoga is the system of classical Yoga as propounded by Patañjali. It is also known as the “perspective of Yoga” (*yoga-darśana*) and is classified among the so-called six *darśanas* or philosophical traditions of orthodox Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, the other five being: Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta (Uttara Mīmāṃsā).

The word “Yoga” is etymologically derived from the verbal root *yuj* meaning “to yoke or join or fasten or harness”⁶ and can have several connotations including: “union,” “conjunction of stars,” “grammatical rule,” “endeavor,” “occupation,” “team,” “equipment,” “means,” “trick,” “magic,” “aggregate,” and “sum.”⁷ In fact, the English word “yoke” is acknowledged by the Oxford English Dictionary to be cognate to *yuj*, as is the word “join.”⁸ *Yuj* has other significant meanings for the purposes of this study, which include: “to connect,” “to unite,” “to restrain,” “to keep under control,” “to concentrate or fix the mind in order to obtain union with the Universal Spirit,” “to make ready, prepare,” and “to be absorbed or deeply engaged in meditation.”⁹

Yoga has developed over a period of several millennia. Mircea Eliade has appropriately referred to Yoga as “a living fossil.”¹⁰ The *Bhagavadgītā*—written perhaps around the beginning of the Common Era—describes Yoga as being already ancient (*purātana*).¹¹ Studies by J. W. Hauer and Maryla Falk have provided convincing evidence that Yoga was not initially created by the adepts of the *Upaniṣads* (i.e., in the sixth or seventh century BCE)—as had been assumed earlier by Indologists—but had already arisen in the form of rudimentary ideas and practices going back to the time of the *Ṛg Veda* (ca. 1200 BCE)¹² or, as some would argue, as far back as the Indus Valley Civilization between about 2500 and 1800 BCE.¹³

K. S. Joshi¹⁴ informs us that one interpretation of Yoga (which we have traced to being that of S. Dasgupta)¹⁵ specifically explains the word “Yoga” as a noun form derived from the root *yujir* meaning “to unite” or “connect.” The noun “Yoga” was thus originally used to designate a union or connection between things. For example, in the *Ṛg Veda* a Vedic “seer” inquires about the “Yoga” (i.e., “connection”) between the words of a verse.¹⁶ According to Joshi, perhaps the most common example of “union” in the Vedic period was “the union of bullocks or horses, and the fact that these animals were kept together by means of the yoke seems to have made an impact on the meaning of the word ‘Yoga’.” The word, in due course, began to denote the ‘tool of the union’—the yoke¹⁷ or, it must be added, the animals even. For example, the term *matanga-yoga* was used to designate the “animals for yoking to chariots.”¹⁸

There are numerous examples, however, where the word “*yuga*” has also been used instead to denote the “yoke,”¹⁹ and we may understand the above usage of the term “Yoga” as only an intermediate step to a further shift of meaning that was more significant and lasting. This dramatic shift of meaning—from referring to the yoking of external objects or things like hymns, the ‘gods,’ and the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*, see below), animals and carts, and so forth, to an internal “joining” or “harnessing” (e.g., the union between the senses and with the mind)—constitutes the most noteworthy change in the meaning of the term “Yoga” and is traceable to an apparent similarity between the human senses and horses: A well-controlled horse allows the rider to travel with ease; similarly, one can go through life more comfortably if one is not repeatedly and compulsively drawn to the objects of the senses, that is, if the senses are under “control,” or are properly harnessed.

Hindu scripture often compares the human senses with horses.²⁰ It was thus that the term “Yoga” evolved to indicate the method by which the senses and, by implication, the mind could be controlled, mastered, and transcended. S. Dasgupta states: “The force of the flying passions was felt to be as uncontrollable as that of a spirited steed, and thus the word ‘*Yoga*’ which was originally applied to the control of steeds began to be applied to the control of the senses.”²¹ The fact that the yoke was a tool used for bringing horses under control might have helped the meaning of the word “Yoga” to be shifted to the “tool,” method of harnessing, or way of integration or union that can be utilized to bring the senses and the mind under control. It must be stressed, however, that the term “Yoga” as applied to the human senses and mind comes to refer to a philosophically sophisticated and highly technical meaning and presupposes the formation of a well-arranged program or system of practices capable of steadying the mind, bringing it under “control,” and thereby transcending the trammels of worldly existence including the human (egoic) barriers to spiritual freedom (*mokṣa*). Dasgupta explains that the techniques of controlling and steadying the mind were already developed and organized by the time of Pāṇini (ca. 400–500 BCE). To indicate these, Pāṇini thought it was necessary to derive the word “Yoga” from a root form different from *yuj-ir* (the original supposed root) and the root *yuj* was thus invented by him from the noun ‘Yoga’.²² Elsewhere, in his *History of Indian Philosophy*, Dasgupta writes: “In Pāṇini’s time the word *Yoga* had attained its technical meaning and he distinguished the root *yuj samādhau* (*yuj* in the sense of concentration) from *yujir yoge* (root *yuj* in the sense of connecting). *Yuj* in the first sense is seldom used as a verb. It is more or less an imaginary root for the etymological derivation of the word ‘Yoga’.”²³

While the term "Yoga" was being used to denote simply a "union," the facts about controlling and steadying the mind were probably known. In the *Vedas* there are clear indications that the Vedic "seers" (*ṛṣis*) were familiar with various methods that, upon being followed faithfully, were known to bring about a state of self-transcendence, a transformation of consciousness and self-identity beyond the limitations of the ego-personality, resulting in an exalted and expanded sense of identity and being. These methods or techniques were spoken of variously as *dhyāna* (meditation), *dīkṣā* (spiritual initiation), *tapas* (asceticism), and so on.²⁴ Joshi notes that

we find examples of Vedic seers aspiring to reach the heavens or even for attaining *Brahman*, through *dhyāna*, *tapas*, etc. But, in all probability, these practices were in the beginning in a more or less fluid form, lacking elaborate classification and differentiation. Later on, they were organized into a system, and it was possibly then that the name "Yoga" came to be associated with it. The word "Yoga" is thus older than the discipline or system of philosophy which goes by that name.²⁵

YOGA IN THE VEDAS

The notion of sacrifice (*yajña*) is one of the foundational premises upon which Hinduism has developed. Sacrificial rituals played an integral and crucial role in the early Vedic age. Through the performance of sacrifice, the followers of the *Vedas*²⁶ attempted to attract and maintain the favor of the deities (*deva*). Cosmic existence itself was seen to be molded on the principle of sacrifice. This is illustrated in *Ṛg Veda* X.90, where we are informed that the primordial Being (*puruṣa*) sacrificed "itself" in order to generate the cosmos. The transformative nature of cosmic existence, beginning with the creation and preservation of life in all its separate forms, inevitably leads to a dissolution of those forms. By analogy with the sacrifice of *puruṣa*, the dissolution of manifold existence is the way in which life continuously regenerates itself. In the celebrated hymn of the primeval sacrifice of the Cosmic Person, called the *Puruṣa Sūkta*,²⁷ the spiritual essence is as if sacrificed so that from out of the undivided "Oneness" the diversity or multiplicity of life-forms may come into being. The Vedic gods are shown as performing a sacrificial rite by immolating *puruṣa*, the Cosmic Person, as a result of which the world as we know it is generated. The *Puruṣa Sūkta* goes on to state that the various castes within society and the heavenly bodies such as the sun and the moon are all born

from the various parts of *puruṣa*'s body. From the perspective of the seer or *ṛṣi*, cosmic order (*ṛta*)—with its regular movements and activities converging on the main purpose of upholding and sustaining life—was all laid in “heaven” (*svarga*) from the very beginning of its manifestation.²⁸

Of this great oblation the human ritual is understood to be the microscopic reflection. The original idea, as implied in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, simply expressed the offering, by the gods, of the divine life, the *puruṣa* as essence of all, the life-blood for the many (i.e., the spiritual essence that flows through all and animates all). It is split up into many forms but is one in essence. It both issues forth yet transcends its creation. The main word used for sacrifice—*yajña*—is derived from the root *yaj* meaning “to worship,” “to pay honour to.” It is an act of relatedness linking one level to another, making use of the concentration of mental power that “yokes” the mind to the object of worship. The wise, thus, are said to “integrate the mind, integrate spiritual insight.”²⁹ In the sacrifice the mind is harnessed to a vision of the subtler realities, or to one god or other, or to the conception of the cosmic order (*ṛta*),³⁰ hence the interrelatedness of all, the rite being a framework or the means whereby the mind is directed toward, and can likewise attain insight into, the transcendent realm. As is expressed by R. Panikkar, “Worship does not consist solely in prayer . . . it is action, an action by which duality is transcended and dissimilarity banished. This act contains within itself, essentially, a sacrificial aspect, a death and a becoming, a doing, *karman*.”³¹

The prime function of the sacrifice is to generate heat within the body of the performer. This heat, called *tapas*, arises out of action³² and is generated when the thoughts and intentions of the sacrificer are totally absorbed into that which is the object of the sacrifice. Through the performance of ritual action (*karman*) *tapas* is produced that allows the sacrificer to take on the qualities of the intended deity. For example, sacrifice performed to the god *Indra* may enable one to become a great warrior and achieve the desired goal. Through the application of *tapas*, creative intention (*kratu*) is cultivated that has the power to link the microscopic world of the sacrificer with the macrocosm, giving him or her the power to determine and alter circumstances, to bring forth new possibilities. This sacrifice has as its objective a “unification” of the sacrificer with the powers represented in what is sacrificed to. The performance of creative action generates a specific world symbolized by one of the various deities in the Vedic pantheon (e.g., *Indra*, *Agni*, *Varuṇa*, and so forth).³³ The deity to whom one sacrifices may change as one's needs and desires change. This sacrificial action, which is, according to Panikkar, “a death and a becom-

ing," is the creative act par excellence. Ritualized in the sacrifice, it is sacred work performed according to certain well-attested rules, hence its identification with *rta*. The *Rg Veda* declares that cosmic order is maintained by sacrificial order: *rta* is upheld by *rta*.³⁴

Based on her innovative study, which takes into account the role of spiritual practice and insight in Vedic times, J. Miller argues that meditative discipline as the core focus of Yoga praxis can be traced back to the period of the *Rg Veda*: "The Vedic bards were *seers* who *saw* the *Veda* and sang what they saw. With them vision and sound, seership and singing are intimately connected and this linking of the two sense functions forms the basis of the Vedic prayer."³⁵ By means of the performance of prescribed ritualistic sacrifices (*yajña*), the *rsis* directed their vision (*dhīh*) to the Divine.

In his work entitled *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, Jan Gonda's examination of the Vedic word *dhīh* and its derivative *dhītih*³⁶ has provided ample evidence that *dhīh* is not just "thought" as it is usually translated, nor "hymn" or "devotion"; rather *dhīh* refers to "visionary insight," "thought-provoking vision," a spiritual power that enabled the seer-poets to see in depth what they duly expressed as songs, hymns, or prayers, so that the word has often the meaning of insight leading to song, hymn, or prayer. The term *dhyāna* (meditation), referring to a practice that is basic to Yoga, is derived from the root *dhyai* and is related to several Vedic terms derived from the root *dhī*.³⁷

Miller understands meditative discipline in Vedic times as manifesting three distinct but overlapping aspects that she refers to as: mantric meditation, visual meditation, and absorption in heart and mind.³⁸ Mantric meditation corresponds with the absorption of the mind by means of sound or sacred utterance (*mantra*). Visual meditation is exemplified in the concept of *dhīh* (which precedes the later related term *dhyāna*), in which a specific deity is envisaged. The subtlest meditative stage, called absorption in mind and heart, involves enheightened experiences in which the seer, on the basis of what Miller refers to as a "seed-thought," explores the mysterious psychic and cosmic forces that gave rise to the composition of the Vedic hymns, such as the *Purusa Sūkta* (mentioned above) and the *Nāsadiya Sūkta* ("hymn of creation," *Rg Veda* X.129). Successful meditation as disclosed in the Vedic hymns culminates in illumination wherein the seer perceives the "immortal light" (*jyotir amrtam*).³⁹ Thus, in this highest form of meditative insight, the ancient sage Atri is said to have "found the sun concealed by darkness."⁴⁰ This occurs, according to Miller, in the course of the fourth degree of "prayer," which she equates with *samādhi*⁴¹—seen here as an ecstatic merging, as it were, with reality and the attainment of immortal knowledge. Miller

points out that although the word *samādhi* does not appear in the *Rg Veda*, it is, however,

almost certain that the *ṛsis* experienced *samādhi* but they did not analyze this in terms used in later ages as Patañjali was to do; its culmination meant for them contemplation of and perhaps merger with the sun.⁴²

There is no direct statement that the beholding of the “golden one” becomes a blending of the beholder and the object perceived but the knowledge of immortality which is part of the experience of *samādhi* is clearly stated.⁴³

Scholarship does not easily acknowledge that yogic forms of contemplative discipline were known to the *ṛsis* of the early Vedic period thus failing to make a connection here with some of the core aspects of Yoga as expressed in its classical form, namely: concentration, meditation, and “unification.” The integrating or harnessing of the mind (see n. 29 above) clearly points toward forms of yogic mental discipline insofar as it involves practices focusing on concentration, meditation, and the quest for a higher transcendent goal.

The very claim to seership entails the ability to see “within,” which itself implies a contemplative perspective. That the overall aims of Yoga and of the Vedic seers may have been different is another question, the former purporting to lead to liberation from the limitations of worldly or cosmic existence, the latter emphasizing an expanded knowledge of the cosmos rather than freedom from its impediments. In view of the this-worldly, earthy nature of many of the Vedic hymns, it is easy to conclude that the Vedic prayers were only for material benefit⁴⁴ or selfish gain, and that forms of asceticism and contemplation that may have been intrinsic to the Vedic tradition were simply borrowed from the indigenous cultures. But to deny the Vedic Aryans any impetus for self-transcendence or capacity for metaphysical speculation could well prove to be an unwarranted position or oversight on the part of some scholars. As Miller’s study indicates, the proto-Yoga of the Vedic *ṛsis* is an early form of sacrificial mysticism and contains many elements characteristic of later Yoga that include: concentration, meditative observation, ascetic forms of practice (*tapas*),⁴⁵ breath-control practiced in conjunction with the recitation of sacred hymns during the ritual, the notion of self-sacrifice, impeccably accurate recitation of sacred words (prefiguring *mantra-yoga*), mystical experience, and the engagement with a reality far greater than our psycho-physical identity or ego.

Although no form of Yoga is explicated in the Brāhmaṇas (1000–800 BCE)—exegetical works expounding and systematizing the Vedic sacrificial ritual and concerned with the significance of the *brahman*, the inner power of the sacrificial utterance—we can see contained in their sacrificial ritualism⁴⁶ one of the key contributing elements of the later Yoga tradition. Thus the treatment of the ceremony of the “fire sacrifice of the breaths” (*prāṇa-agni-hotra*)—consisting of the oblation of food to the different kinds of breath, reveals a form of practice and thinking that helped to lay a foundation for the full-blown yogic study and discipline of breath control (*prāṇāyāma*). The *prāṇa-agni-hotra*⁴⁷ is a symbolic replacement for the earlier Vedic fire ritual (*agni-hotra*), one of the most frequently performed and therefore most popular of all the rites. In the *prāṇa-agni-hotra*, the more invisible, unobvious life-force or vital energy takes the place of the visible, obvious ritual fire. The *prāṇa* is associated with the transcendent essence—the *ātman* or spiritual Self. The more esoteric emphasis given here, however, does not as yet constitute the more fully developed form of self- or “mental” sacrifice as is the case in yogic forms of meditation. It was enacted through one’s body. Nevertheless, this important sacrifice was a major stepping-stone toward a most interesting phenomenon that has been referred to as the interiorization of sacrifice: the transformation or conversion or redirection of attention from externally oriented rites to internally oriented or mentally enacted rites.

YOGA IN THE UPANIṢADS

The sages of the early Upaniṣads (800–500 BCE) presented a real challenge to the normal, formalized sacrificial cult of Vedic society by instigating what was to become an ideological—one might even say a spiritual—“revolution” by “internalizing” the ritualistic norms of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas and establishing the path of intense thought, reflection, and meditation as the “inner sacrifice.” Once it is understood that life perpetuates itself through its transformative or changing nature, that is, the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of separate life-forms, the only appropriate and spiritually mature response is to relate to existence as a continual sacrifice of the sense of separate selfhood or individuality. While the external rituals of orthodox Brāhmaṇism were acknowledged as having a proper place in the social order, the Upaniṣadic adepts denied outright their soteriological efficacy. If the externalized forms of sacrifice involving a variety of rituals were the means to attain “heaven” for the Vedic people, then the sacrifice of the self,

or egoic identity, is the means par excellence to liberation for the Upaniṣadic sage and, as we will see, the authentic Yoga practitioner. What is interesting to note is that the means of achieving both heaven (*svarga*)⁴⁸ and liberation (*mokṣa*) can be seen as converging on basic yogic-oriented practices such as concentration, meditation, absorption, and unification. The internalization of the Vedic ritual in the form of meditational praxis is well illustrated, for example, in the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* (II.5) (ca. 800 BCE) which refers to the “inner fire sacrifice” (*āntaram agni-hotram*).⁴⁹

Like the Vedas, the Upaniṣads are looked upon as sacred revelation (*śruti*). Yet in contrast to the Vedas, the Upaniṣads are regarded as belonging to the “wisdom part” (*jñāna-kāṇḍa*) as opposed to the “ritual part” (*karma-kāṇḍa*) of the Vedic heritage. The knowledge that “behind” our ever-changing universe—the reality of multiple forms and phenomena—there abides an eternally unchanging and unfractured (single) Being was communicated already in Vedic times. For example, the *Rg Veda* (I.164.46) clearly discerns a unitary principle in which the personal gods to whom people sacrifice are seen as merely names for, or manifestations of, this unitary principle (“To that existence which is one [*ekam sat*] the sages give many a name.”). However, the Upaniṣadic seekers disclosed, so it appears, a new or fresh insight: that the single transcendent Being is nothing more and nothing less than the essential core of one’s own existence or Self. This finds clear expression, for example, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, by one of the most profound thinkers of ancient India, Yājñavalkya (ca. 800 BCE).⁵⁰ Yājñavalkya was asked how that Self is to be conceived, to which he responded:

You cannot see the seer of seeing. You cannot hear the hearer of hearing. You cannot think the thinker of thinking. You cannot understand the understander of understanding. He is your Self, which is in everything. Everything else is irrelevant.⁵¹

This passage epitomizes one of the essential teachings from the Upaniṣads that was transmitted orally from an enlightened preceptor (*guru*) to disciple (*śiṣya*): the transcendent Source of the world is identical with the transcendent core of the human being; *brahman* and *ātman* are one in identity.⁵² There is no possible way to exhaustively describe or define that supreme Reality. One must simply realize it, and in this state of the fully awakened consciousness of Self (*ātman*) or *brahman* one could doubtlessly declare, as did Yājñavalkya, “I am the Absolute (the Whole).” This ultimate essence of life is described as being pure Selfhood—that is, the knower who is unknowable, the seer who cannot be seen, and so forth, as being the One—

transcendent of all multiplicity—as being pure consciousness, that is, consciousness that is free from any enslavement or limitation within the subject-object duality of ordinary experience.

How can the infinite, eternal, utterly free and real, and immeasurably blissful Self be realized? The Upaniṣadic sages emphasized the need for renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) and intensive meditation (*dhyāna*), but the earliest Upaniṣads reveal very few practical instructions about the actual practice of meditation. It appears this was a matter to be settled between teacher and disciple. But the purpose of meditational praxis, as Patañjali was later to explain,⁵³ is to transcend saṃsāric existence and its afflicted modes of mistaken identity and spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) that ensconce one in the repeated drama of birth, life-span, and death and that merely result in pain, distress, and dissatisfaction, that is, suffering (*duḥkha*). There being no real relief in this cycle (*saṃsāra*), the Upaniṣadic sages taught the necessary means by which saṃsāric existence, that is, the world of change, unending rounds of rebirth and ignorance of one's true identity, could be transcended. Yājñavalkya urges one to see that the true Self (*ātman*) is beyond all action (*karma*) and not to be deceived by ideas of what is ritually right and wrong, so that what one has done and what one has not done do not bind or affect one⁵⁴ as in the saṃsāric condition of selfhood. Through this attainment, having seen that the Self is “not this, not this” (*neti neti*), the Self is then seen in all things, in fact everywhere, making one free from evil, impurity, doubt, fear, and confusion.

Elsewhere in the same scripture, Yājñavalkya proclaims:

He who has found and awakened to the Self that has entered this perilous and inaccessible place [psychophysical being or body-mind], is the creator of the world, for he is the maker of the universe and of all. The world belongs to him. He is indeed the world.⁵⁵

It should be seen as only one [i.e., as single], immeasurable, perpetual. The Self is taintless, unborn, great, perpetual, and beyond [the subtle element of] space.⁵⁶

The realization of the unchanging, ever-pure Self (*ātman*)—an immortal state of existence—is itself emancipation (*mokṣa*). This awakening coincides with the transcendence of the identifications with the limited sense of self or ego-personality and thus of conditional existence (*saṃsāra*) itself. Moreover, Self-realization is the *telos* of human existence and the universe.⁵⁷ Being in truth all that there is the Self, or *brahman*, cannot be an object of knowledge. Therefore, Yājñavalkya argues that, ultimately, all

descriptions of the Absolute amount to being mere words, ideas, or concepts of reality. Repeatedly he responds to all positive characterizations of the Self by exclaiming “not this, not this” (*neti neti*).⁵⁸ This famous method of approaching the undivided nature of Reality is an attempt to liberate the disciple from clinging to any erroneous predications about Reality and open the way to an unbound, unmodified state of existence and identity beyond all description. It is later adopted even in the nondualist schools of Yoga and Vedānta, where it is known as *apavāda* (“refutation”).⁵⁹ Yogins who embark on this more Vedāntic approach to spirituality are asked to remind themselves constantly of the fact that all the states, functions or modes of our psychophysical existence are, in themselves, not the transcendent Reality. Neither the body, as it is ordinarily experienced, nor our thoughts and feelings as they normally present themselves are our true identity. The Self is no-thing or object that could be located in the external or experiential (empirical) finite world. This form of alert discrimination is called *viveka*. Through vigilant cultivation of *viveka* the yogin develops an inner watchfulness or attentiveness to what is of a changing nature, that is, what is within the realm of experience, as well as to the eternal Being or Source of all experiences, the unchanging identity or experiencer. By this form of practice the yogin cultivates a steadfast will to renounce all attachment to the changing, phenomenal world. Discrimination and renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) ultimately are said to lead to the discovery of the formless dimension of Self, the *ātman*, beyond all conceptual understanding and imagery. Moreover, the true purpose of life and highest knowledge to be attained is not of the manifest sphere of existence, but rather is of the imperishable (*akṣara*), the unknown, unreflective Self or knower (*avijñātaṁ vijñātṛ*), which itself gives rise to the outer world of manifestations.⁶⁰ The seeker of truth and lasting fulfillment must be free of all attachment to the knowable (or seeable), must learn to sacrifice all egoic identification with what is experienced in order for authentic identity and, thus, liberation to arise.

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (ca. seventh or eighth century BCE) also gives us valuable insights into the early development of metaphysical ideas within Hinduism and the transformed nature of sacrifice (*yajña*) as articulated in the Upaniṣads. As we have seen, the external sacrificial ritual so prominent in early Vedic times was largely shunned by the Upaniṣadic sages who emphasized disciplines that brought about an interiorization of attention resulting in the internalization of the sacrificial ritual. This in turn opened the door for the development of Yoga within orthodox Brāhmanism. In the *Chāndogya*, Ghora Angirasa explains to Kṛṣṇa that

austerity (*tapas*), charity (*dāna*), rectitude (*āṛjava*), nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) and truthfulness (*satya*) are themselves the sacrificial gift (*dakṣiṇa*),⁶¹ thus implying that the inner attitudinal dimension as well as the way in which one lives one's life are the best recompense for what one has imbibed from one's teachers. The above idea clearly links up with an earlier notion presented in the same scripture: insofar as one is spiritually motivated, that person *is* a sacrifice.⁶² This recognition led to the full-fledged perspective of the internalized or spiritualized sacrifice, which entails the dedication of one's life to an intrinsic, higher, transcendent purpose in contrast to the more extrinsically motivated ritual offerings of libations to the deities.

In an illuminating section in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Prajāpati instructs Indra as follows:

When the eye is directed toward space, that is the seeing witness (*cākṣuṣa puruṣa*); the eye is but the instrument for sight. . . .

The one who knows "Let me think this"—that is the true self; the mind (*manas*) is the divine eye (*daiva cakṣu*). That one, with the divine eye, the mind, sees desires here, and experiences enjoyment.

Those gods who are in the Brahmā world reverence the Self. Therefore all worlds and all desires have been appropriated by them. He obtains all worlds and all desires who has found out and who understands that Self (*ātman*).⁶³

While the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* articulates the unspeakable or indescribable aspect of the Self (*ātman, puruṣa*), the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* reveres the Self as the context for the unlimited obtainment of worlds, and the fulfillment of desires. In both instances, the Self is not found in what is seen, but in the one who sees—the seer: detachment from the objects of the senses is a prerequisite to the realization of the Self. These important insights, which point to a practice (*abhyāsa*) involving a high-level form of discernment capable of distinguishing between the seer/knower and the seeable/knowable coupled with the need for dispassion (*vairāgya*) toward worldly existence (*saṃsāra*), are crucial in the context of Yoga philosophy as will be seen in our examination of Patañjali's Yoga.

In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*,⁶⁴ another of the older Upaniṣads (but not as old as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* or the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*), one of the earliest technical references of the term Yoga is found, probably standing for the sage's mastery of the body and senses. However, the tradition of Yoga in its classical sense would not emerge and assume its place alongside other Hindu soteriological perspectives until several centuries

later.⁶⁵ The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (fifth century BCE) can perhaps be acknowledged as the oldest *Upaniṣad* that deals explicitly with Yoga. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* one of the key doctrines relating to Yoga is called *adhyātma-yoga*, the “Yoga of the inner self.” The goal of this form of Yoga is the realization of the supreme Being, which is concealed within the “cave” of the heart. As this *Upaniṣad* states:

The wise one relinquishes joy and sorrow, realizing, by means of the Yoga of the inner self that primal God who is difficult to be seen, immanent, seated in the cave [of the heart] residing in the body.⁶⁶

This Self cannot be attained by instruction, or by thought, or by much hearing. It is attained only by the one whom it chooses. To such a one the Self reveals its own nature.⁶⁷

In the above, the author (anonymous) explains that the Self (*ātman*) is not an object like other objects we can experience, speculate on, or analyze. As the transcendent essence—in effect, the authentic nature, being and identity of everything—there is nothing anyone can do to “acquire” or “obtain” the Self. For how can one “acquire” *that* which one already *is*? Thus the realization of the Self must be a matter of the *ātman* disclosing itself to itself. In religious terminology, this means that spiritual emancipation is dependent upon the element of “grace.” The *ātman*, as the *Kaṭha* surmises in the above passage, is attained by “one whom it chooses.” This should not be misconstrued to imply that the spiritual practitioner should therefore relinquish all efforts for attaining salvation. On the contrary, the practitioner must undergo the necessary preparation for the reception of grace. Practice is valid as a means for someone who is progressing on the path to enlightenment. Until the “goal” of liberation is reached, efforts toward its attainment, including purification of mind and body, are not rendered invalid.

In chapter three of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, the *ātman* is said to be at the summit of a hierarchy of levels of existence. By way of a metaphor, the instruction is given to: “Know the Self as lord of the chariot, and the body as the chariot. Know further that the intellect (*buddhi*) is the driver, whereas the mind-organ (*manas*) is the rein. The senses, they say, are the horses, and the sense-objects their arena.”⁶⁸ By understanding spiritual practice as a return to the transcendent origin of being or retracing in consciousness, in reverse order, of the various stages of the evolutionary unfoldment of manifest existence only to “arrive” at the origin of all, the *Kaṭha* distinguishes seven levels that comprise the hierarchy of existence: the senses (*indriya*);

the sense-objects (*viṣaya*); the mind-organ (*manas*); the intellect (*buddhi*); the “great self” (*mahān ātmā*) or “great one” (*mahat*)—the initial level of manifest existence; the unmanifest (*avyakta*)—the transcendent source or unmanifest ground (*prakṛti*) of all manifest existence (including nature/the cosmos and psychophysical being); and the Self (*puruṣa*)—our intrinsic identity which is an immortal state of consciousness.⁶⁹ *Puruṣa* is eternally beyond the dynamics of *prakṛti* in her manifest and unmanifest aspects. In the *Kaṭha* one finds both the old Upaniṣadic notion of the Self (*ātman*) together with the beginning of the Sāṃkhya notion of *puruṣa*. The above ontological scheme is characteristic of the Sāṃkhya tradition. In the context of the *Kaṭha* it was probably never intended as mere metaphysical speculation, rather it served to provide contemplative directives, a “map” as it were, for the yogic processes of “interiorization” (i.e., the sacrifice of saṃsāric identity) involving the expansion or ascent of consciousness to subtler levels of identity, terminating with the ubiquitous/omnipresent Being, *puruṣa* itself. The disclosure of authentic identity as *puruṣa*, the transcendent Self, is the purpose of all efforts to transcend saṃsāric identity and the finite realm.

A clear definition of Yoga is given in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* II.3.11, which states: “This they consider to be Yoga: the steady holding of the senses. Then one becomes attentive (*apramatta*), for Yoga can come and go.”⁷⁰ Here Yoga means the condition of inner steadfastness or equilibrium that depends on one’s one-pointedness of attention. When the mind is undistracted and stabilized, then one can discover the “inner” or subtler dimensions of existence and consciousness that are revealed to the diligent aspirant. Ultimately, however, as we have seen, even this subtle exploration and disclosure of inner awareness and space does not result in liberation. It is merely a precondition for the reception of grace (see n. 67 above). Sheer determination (will power) and successful effort must be tempered with considerable patience and humility. The pedagogy of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* represents an important breakthrough in the tradition of Hindu Yoga. Some of the fundamental ideas underlying Yoga *theoria* and *praxis* are found. The *Kaṭha* marks a definite transition between the esoteric, monistic trends of proto-Yoga as expressed in the early Upaniṣads and preclassical forms of Yoga as illustrated in later Upaniṣadic works such as the *Śvetāśvatara* and *Maitrāyaṇīya* as well as the famous epic, the *Mahābhārata*—especially as revealed in the *Bhagavadgītā* (see below for a discussion on these scriptures). Notwithstanding the obvious lack of any formal structure or systemization of Yoga, the recordings in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* helped to mold together some of the crucial building blocks and central philosophical ideas so basic to the enterprise of Yoga. The consequence of this clear development of Yoga

was nothing less than Yoga becoming a recognizable tradition that could stand more or less on its own.

In the *Śvetāśvatara Upanisad* (ca. third century BCE), a form of Yoga is proclaimed that is indicative of the panentheistic teachings of the epic age. The Lord (*īśa*, *īśvara*) is portrayed as dwelling eternally beyond “His” own creation. This *Upanisad* states:

Following the Yoga of meditation, they perceived the inner power of God concealed by “its” own qualities. God is the one who presides over all the causes associated with time and the self.⁷¹

By knowing God there is a dwindling of all fetters. When the afflictions are destroyed, there is cessation of birth and death [i.e., changing identity]. By meditating on “Him,” there is a third state, universal lordship, upon separation from the body. Being alone, [the yogin’s] desire is fulfilled.⁷²

The process of meditation recommended in this scripture involves the recitation of the sacred syllable *Om* (called the *pranava*). Meditation generates a necessary churning process by which the inner fire, likened to the Self, is rekindled. This in turn leads to the revelation of the intrinsic glory of the Self or God.⁷³ The disciplined practice of meditation (*dhyāna*) can lead to a variety of inner experiences that, as the text cautions, must not be confused with liberation itself. The culminating realization is described as follows: “I know that supreme Self (*purusa*) effulgent like the sun beyond the darkness. Only by knowing ‘Him’ does one pass beyond death. There is no other way for passing [beyond *samsāra*].”⁷⁴ Here, like the *Katha Upanisad*, the highest goal is the realization of the supreme, transcendent Self. Far from being portrayed as a colorless or dry ascetic, the yogin is placed in the role of a devotee (*bhakta*), that is, where devotion (*bhakti*: VI.23) to God and to one’s spiritual teacher (*guru*) is an integral component of yogic practice. Spiritual growth and emancipation are seen not as a calculated or mechanistic enterprise stemming from self-effort alone, but rather the fruit of one’s spiritual discipline is perceived to be enveloped in a mysterious process that is clearly dependent on some measure of “divine grace” as the sage—Śvetāśvatara himself—comes to experience and speak about to others.⁷⁵

The later *Maitrāyaṇīya Upanisad* (ca. second century BCE)⁷⁶ presents a more concrete, formalized, and systematic portrayal of Yoga than had previously been developed. In the *Maitrāyaṇīya* we can read about many intriguing ideas pertaining to Yoga which easily suggest a further breakthrough in the development of Yoga. Included here are a series of practices that laid much groundwork for the classical formulations contained within the *Yoga-*

Sūtra of Patañjali (see below). As this scripture discloses, the “elemental self” or *bhūtātman* (referring to our psychophysical being or empirical self) is ineluctably entrenched within the *saṃsāric* world implying afflicted states of identity leading to struggle and conflict due to the “pairs of opposites” (*dvandva*) such as loss and gain, or pleasure and pain. As a result, our sense of self, irrevocably confined to the forces—constituents or qualities (*guṇas*)—of nature and existence (*prakṛti*) as we normally know it to be, is constantly undergoing change⁷⁷ and sets itself up for inevitable pain and dissatisfaction (*duḥkha*), which follows until it appears to disintegrate at death. The transcendent Self, however, always remains unaffected by these ongoing changes.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Self can be realized through knowledge (*vidyā*), austerity (*tapas*), and deep contemplation (*cintā*).⁷⁹ The revered Śākāyana explains this realization in terms of a union (*sāyujya*)⁸⁰ of the elemental (individual) self with the intrinsic Self, the “ruler” (*īśāna*), and later proclaims the “sixfold” Yoga (*ṣaḍaṅga-yoga*):

This is the rule for effecting this [oneness or union with the Self]: breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhāra*), meditation (*dhyāna*), concentration (*dhāraṇā*), reflection (*tarka*) and unification (*samādhi*); [this is] said to be the sixfold Yoga. When the seer sees the brilliant Maker, the Lord, the Person, the Source of the Creator-God (*Brahmā*), then, being a knower, shaking off good and evil, collapses everything into unity in the supreme Imperishable.⁸¹

The above list (excluding *tarka*) mentions five of the eight limbs (*aṅgas*) of the later classical Yoga—the philosophical system that has developed around Patañjali’s *Yoga-Sūtra*⁸² and its commentarial literature. Also some of the physiological theories of later Yoga begin to appear in the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* (chapter VI) along with meditations on the mystical syllable *Om*.⁸³ S. Dasgupta writes, “The science of breath had attracted notice in many of the earlier *Upaniṣads*, though there had not probably developed any systematic form of *prāṇāyāma* . . . of the *Yoga* system.” He goes on to state that it is not until the *Maitrāyaṇīya* “that we find the *Yoga* method had attained a systematic development.”⁸⁴

YOGIC THEMES IN THE *BHAGAVADGĪTĀ* AND THE *MOKṢADHARMA*

The *Bhagavadgītā* (lit., “Song of the Lord”) is the most popular and famous of all Yoga scriptures and forms part of the great Hindu epic, the *Mahābhārata* (VI.13–40). The *Bhagavadgītā* (like the *Mahābhārata* as a

whole) is not formally a part of primary, revealed scripture (*śruti*, the canonical *Veda*) but belongs to the noncanonical sacred literature called “tradition” or *smṛti* (lit., “remembering” past wisdom). Yet in its own context, in Sanskrit or in translation, the *Bhagavadgītā* has for centuries functioned as revealed or primary scripture for a large number of Hindus. It was composed probably between 150 BCE and 250 CE. This widely acclaimed scripture has often been regarded as a self-contained text by a long line of Hindu thinkers and spiritual preceptors (*gurus*). The *Bhagavadgītā* is a seminal text for much of Vaiṣṇavism, the tradition centering on the worship of the Lord in the form of Viṣṇu, specifically the descent by Viṣṇu in the embodied form (i.e., *avatāra*) of Kṛṣṇa. Placing before us a rich and challenging body of moral, mystical and metaphysical teachings in the form of a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and his close friend, Arjuna, the *Bhagavadgītā* on the whole recommends an approach to spiritual liberation that incorporates *karma-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga*, and *bhakti-yoga*. Though not disposing of the kind of world-renouncing asceticism that characterizes much of the earlier Upaniṣadic literature, the *Bhagavadgītā* nevertheless advocates the ideal of “actionless-action” (i.e., non-self-centered or ego-transcending action = *naiskarma-karma*)⁸⁵ as being superior to the renunciation of all action. A central aspect of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching to Arjuna on *karma-yoga* is encapsulated in the following verse: “Steadfast in Yoga be active, relinquishing attachment and having attained equilibrium in success and failure, O winner of wealth. Yoga is called ‘evenness’ (*śamatva*) [of mind].”⁸⁶ As Kṛṣṇa affirms, in order to attain enlightenment and supreme peace it is unnecessary to abandon the world or one’s responsibilities even when they summon one into battle, as in the case of Arjuna. To be sure, renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) of action is, in itself, a legitimate means. Kṛṣṇa, however, declares a superior approach, that being the path of renunciation *while engaged in action* or “actionless-action,” which results in freedom from the bondage of action (*naiskarma*). In other words, *naiskarma-karma* refers to a special “kind” or “quality” of action that comes into being through a particular inner attitude toward action, a mental form of activity that can be classified as a kind of action itself. Life in the world can be spiritualized; one’s commitment to spiritual discipline and engagement in the world can be, indeed should be, cultivated simultaneously thereby establishing a basis for an integrated life through Yoga:

Not by abstention from actions does a person enjoy freedom from the bondage of action, nor by mere renunciation does one attain perfection.⁸⁷

He who restrains his organs of action but continues to remember in his mind the objects of the senses is deluded and is called a hypocrite. But

he excels, O Arjuna, who controlling the senses with the mind engages the organs of action in *karma-yoga*.⁸⁸

Kṛṣṇa points to his own activity as an enlightened example of *karma-yoga*: "For Me, O Pārtha [Arjuna], there is nothing whatever to be done in the three worlds, nothing unobtained which is to be obtained—and yet without fail I engage in action."⁸⁹ The secret to *karma-yoga* lies not in the action itself but rather in the state or quality of the human mind which gives rise to the action. If the mind is pure, that is, the yogin having sacrificed all selfish or inordinate desire (*r̥ṣṇā*) and attachment (*rāga*) to the self-centered fruit of deeds, it cannot be defiled by actions even as they are engaged in daily life. What sets in motion the dynamic of *karma* through which a person is bound in *saṃsāra* is not action itself, but, rather, attachment. The mind that remains "even" yet alert, lucid and free of the stain of attachment⁹⁰ born of ignorance (*avidyā*), allows for a mode of selfless or non-covetous action (*niṣkāma karma*) through which salvation is attained. *Niṣkāma karma* integrates *samatva* (evenness, serenity of mind) with the resolution to act with detachment. The perfected yogin enjoys a vision of the everywhere-ness (*sarvatra samadarśana*) of Self: all things are revealed as they truly are, that being of the Self (*ātman*): "One whose self is disciplined by Yoga and who sees everywhere the same, sees the Self abiding in every being and every being in the Self."⁹¹

Acts must not only be carried out in the spirit of detachment or selflessness, they must also be ethically sound and reasonable, that is, have a high degree of moral content and value. For, as G. Feuerstein incisively states, "If action depended solely on one's frame of mind, it would be the best excuse for immoral behaviour. The [*Bhagavadgītā*] does not propound such a crude subjectivism. For action to be wholesome [*kṛtsna*] it must have two essential ingredients: subjective purity (i.e., nonattachment) and objective morality (i.e., moral rightness)."⁹² Kṛṣṇa elaborates on the true nature of action as follows:

Indeed, one must understand not only action, but improper action (*vikarman*) and inaction (*akarma*). The way of action is impenetrable. He who sees action in inaction and inaction in action is a wise person performing whole actions in a disciplined way.⁹³

Having relinquished the attachment to the fruit of action (*karma-phalāsaṅgam*), the yogin is freed from compulsive desire and abides in a state of constant satisfaction and without dependence on any object. Such a person is said to do nothing whatever (as a separate agent) even though

engaged in action.⁹⁴ Sacrifice is cited as the model for proper action; the sacrifice of knowledge (*jñāna-yajña*)—superior to the sacrifice of material things—brings about the completion of action (i.e., all action culminates in knowledge).⁹⁵ The doctrine of *karma-yoga* states that one is no longer effected by the enslaving power of *karma* if action is done in the spirit of sacrifice. One is free to live as the Self (*ātman*) rather than be bound to an egoic identity. Thus, *naiṣkarmya-karma* liberates the yogin from a misidentified, separate sense of self and is a special form of action in which the ego is transcended. As such it must not be confused with mere action (*karman*) or inaction (*akarman*).

The final vision or liberated state of Being that the *Bhagavadgītā* acknowledges is union with the Lord. For Kṛṣṇa, Yoga consists essentially in the complete alignment of one's practical, daily life to the divine Being, Kṛṣṇa. In short, every aspect of the yogin's life must become engaged or "yoked" in Yoga.⁹⁶ By discarding all attachments in the form of personal volitions, intentions and expectations, and by seeing everywhere and in everything the Divine, the yogin's life is purified and illuminated. Kṛṣṇa is revealed as the ultimate source of all including the unmanifest and the manifest existence in all its diversity. The ethical teachings of the *Bhagavadgītā* basically stem from a panentheistic metaphysical understanding of reality: All is in God, while God transcends everything. Kṛṣṇa embraces the indestructible nature of Being as well as "becoming"—the ever-changing, destructible realm of existence. As Kṛṣṇa professes:

This whole universe is pervaded by Me in my unmanifested form. Though all beings abide in Me, I do not subsist in them.

Yet beings do not abide in Me. Behold my lordly Yoga: Generating all beings, yet not being generated by them, My Self is the source of beings.⁹⁷

Since the Lord is everywhere and in everything, the idea of renouncing or extricating the world in order to seek salvation or enlightenment ultimately becomes superfluous. What one needs to do is to cultivate a higher intelligence (*buddhi*),⁹⁸ the "eye of wisdom" (*jñāna-caṅṣus*)⁹⁹ in order to discern the purity of Being, the knower, and thereby attain liberation.

Complementary to, and as some would argue, integral with, while yet even surpassing the insights and realizations attained through *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*, is the highly recommended "path" in the *Bhagavadgītā* of the Yoga of "devotion" or *bhakti-yoga*. Interestingly, in chapter II Kṛṣṇa discusses a type of emancipation called *brahma-nirvāṇa* ("extinction in the