

1 *The Yoga Tradition*

Yoga has spread far from its home in India, yet its message has remained the same: one can experience freedom and spontaneity through the adoption of a specific way of life, defined by ethics, movement, and meditation. This philosophy has a long history in North America, beginning with the discussion of Yoga and the Upaniṣads by the transcendentalists. In 1893 an authentic Indian teacher, Swami Vivekananda, introduced Indian philosophy to the American public at Chicago's Parliament of World Religions. Yoga proved very popular in the early twentieth century particularly due to the efforts of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Mission and the Self-Realization Fellowship of Yogananda. Both these organizations continue their work at centers throughout the country.

During the past thirty years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Yoga, but with a difference. No longer are Americans at the mercy of third-hand accounts of Yoga, relying on translations given through the medium of translators who rewrite texts extensively to make them comprehensible to the Judeo-Christian mind. Nor is the spectrum of teachings available limited to the Neo-Vedantic syncretism that captured the imagination of the masses from the 1920s to the 1960s. Philosophers, Sanskritists, and a new wave of Yoga teachers have enriched our interpretations and brought a new understanding of this ancient discipline. Yoga teachers are exacting radical transformations in their students, requiring extended periods of serious *sādhana* study. Studios established by followers of the primary disciples of Krishnamacharya, such as B. K. S. Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois have found a niche within the fabric of American life.¹ In some cases, new followers of Yoga undergo a phase of "Hinduization," wherein the Indian mindset is rehearsed, recited, and embodied. This approach can be found in the practice of devotional (*bhakti*) Yoga in the Hare Krishna movement. In other cases, some Indian gurus in the

West have “modernized” their teachings and tolerate behavior that would not be found in India. The Kripalu movement in Massachusetts has pioneered a style of Yoga management that emphasizes democratic principles rather than reliance on a central figure.

Whether Hinduized or not, the contemporary followers of Yoga have, for the most part, questioned their fundamental approach to life. The superiority of Western advances in science are no longer taken for granted; the horrors of chemical pollution, increased cancer rates, and rampant stress have soured the comforts brought by technology. Due to a number of cultural changes enacted in the late sixties and early seventies, the notions of progress and development are no longer seen as ultimately healthy or even worthwhile. Many modern-day practitioners find in Yoga an integrated spiritual practice that serves as an antidote to the cynical, sedentary, and often opulent lifestyle that has developed in the postmodern world.

The Yoga tradition perhaps can be traced to the earliest identifiable phase of religion and culture in India, the Indus Valley civilization (ca. 3500 BCE). In seals and small statues, artists of these early cities depicted figures in meditative poses, somewhat recognizable in later tradition as named Yoga postures.² Although Yoga does not appear as a discrete practice in the literature of the four Vedas, the Upaniṣads (ca. 600 BCE ff.) refer to Yoga and list several of its practices. Buddhist and Jaina texts explicitly list practices of Yoga beginning approximately 350 BCE, and by the year 200 CE various styles and modes of Yoga became codified by Patañjali in his *Yoga Sūtra*. Because Yoga emphasizes practices for mystical religious experience without specifying a fixed theological perspective, it has been appropriated in one form or another by nearly all the religions found in India, including Christianity.³

Patañjali defined Yoga as a state of consciousness bereft of pain or discomfort during which the preoccupations of the mind cease. He stated that Yoga can be applied to alleviate human suffering (*duḥkham*), leading to a state of purified witnessing. The Buddha taught various forms of yogic meditation to help one achieve *nirvāṇa*. The Jina advocated the scrupulous observance of the yogic practice of vows with special emphasis on nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) to advance one toward *kevala*. The *Bhagavad Gītā* described three styles of Yoga: Action or Karma Yoga, Knowledge or Jñāna Yoga, and Devotion or Bhakti Yoga. The Sufi mystics of India taught the goal of *tauhīd* or complete union, a state not unfamiliar to yogic thinkers. The Sikhs of India included many yogic practices in their religious life. In these various traditions, Yoga established a common discourse of interpretation for religious experience that can be understood across cultures and traditions.

The *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali is now studied by Yoga practitioners worldwide. It helps to orient Yoga students into ethical behavior, movement, breathing, and meditation practices that characterize a serious undertaking of Yoga. Yoga deals explicitly with liberative states of consciousness (*samādhi*), listing several varieties and diverse means to achieve them. For cross-cultural purposes, its emphasis on practice is extremely useful, as it discusses process, not doctrine or belief. Fundamentally, Yoga explains how and why we hold beliefs and feelings and prescribes methods for transcending them. Yoga does not dogmatically dictate *what* to believe, feel, or do, but seeks to cultivate understanding leading to self-mastery.

LOWER SELF AND HIGHER SELF, SEEN AND SEER

Yoga regards life as a continuing relationship between two fundamental experiences, *prakṛti* or the manifest realm and *puruṣa/ātman*, one's higher self. The *ātman* or "true nature" is amply described in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad:

Than whom there is naught else higher,
 Than whom there is naught smaller, naught greater,
 The One stands like a tree established in heaven.
 By that, *puruṣa*, this whole world is filled.
 That which is beyond this world
 Is without form and without ill.
 They who know That, become immortal;
 But others go only to sorrow.⁴

In reading this or any other text describing a person's highest nature, it is important not to regard the self as a static state. When reified or objectified, the concept of higher self loses its dynamism. The self is an experience, a body-feel, a state of silent absorption. Though not described through conventional language, it nonetheless is not an unattainable ideal.

The state of absorption, wherein the separation between subjective and objective breaks down, is referred to in the *Bhagavad Gītā* as the "higher self." Although this contrasts with the "lower self," both are necessary for human life; their relationship is reciprocal, not mutually abnegating.⁵ The elements, senses, mind, and emotions comprise the lower self. Difficulties in life arise because one identifies wholly with the lower forms of embodiment, residing only in the ego, ignoring the higher self. The seer (*puruṣa-ātman*) is always a witness, always neutral and inactive, and hence easy to ignore or overlook.⁶ Due to lack of alertness, the Seer or higher self (*puruṣa*) becomes buried and one identifies with the Seen (*prakṛti*): *draṣṭṛ-dṛśyayoḥ saṃyogo heya-hetuḥ*.⁷ This

attribution of consciousness to an aspect of the non-conscious *prakṛti* results in ego identification and suffering. The ego or *ahaṃkāra* erroneously claims experience to be its own and fixes the world as seen from its own limited perspective. The lower ego self elevates itself to the status of highest priority: all that matters is what relates to the “me.” With this attitude in control, a damaging rigidity arises, and the pain of *saṃsāra* continues. With each selfish action, a seed for further action is planted; as these seeds mature and flourish, strengthening selfish motives, the primal, pure *puruṣa* mode of detached witnessing becomes concealed. The breath of life is constricted, and the suffering (*duḥkha*) continues.

In such states, the Seer (*puruṣa*) and Seen (*prakṛti*) no longer interact in reciprocity; only the ego is apparent. The antidote for this “disease” is found through meditation, during which the nonselfish, *puruṣa* state may be engaged and embodied. To achieve this goal, the *Yoga Sūtra* prescribes many different paths, all aiming to effect *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, the suppression of mental modifications.⁸ The mental modifications, which define the nature of the Seen, are five in number: cognition, error, imagination, sleep, and memory.⁹ When these are held in abeyance, the highest self gains ascendancy, and the freedom of detachment is made present.

YOGA AS PATH

Essentially, Yoga is technique. Its elaborations on the causes of suffering (*kleśa*) provide a conceptual framework for understanding the operations of the ego, ultimately to be transcended through meditation. Yoga provides a phenomenological investigation of suffering and its transcendence, its sole presupposition being that each person has the ability to reach a state of liberation. The closest “definition” of liberation in the *Yoga Sūtra* is *dharma-megha*, a beautifully metaphoric and appropriately vague term that lends itself to a variety of interpretations, including “cloud of virtue.”

How can Yoga, a tradition steeped in Indian culture and atmosphere, be translated for application by Westerners? Have the attempts made by various Indian teachers been successful? Can Yoga be applied universally to enrich non-Asian religious practices? In order to answer these questions, the basic presupposition of Yoga must be examined, to see if the needs that gave rise to Yoga are also relevant in the postmodern, technological era. Along with virtually all systems of Indian philosophy, Yoga is predicated on the supposition that humankind is plagued with discomfort and suffering (*duḥkha*) and that this suffering can be alleviated. The *Yoga Sūtra* states that “the pain of the future is to be avoided” (*heyam duḥkham anāgatam*).¹⁰ To the

extent that this analysis holds true, Yoga can be applied by any individual seeking self-fulfillment of a spiritual kind. If someone has perceived a degree of suffering in life, Yoga practice offers a means to transcend that suffering. Unless one shares the basic intent of alleviating pain, the suitability of Yoga would be questionable.

All over the world, Yoga and systems related to Yoga are being practiced; discontented people are searching for viable paths of transformation. Part of the appeal of Yoga lies in the many diverse means it prescribes. Patanjali offers the practitioner an abundance of practices. The student of Yoga is told that the liberating suppression of the mind's unruliness is achieved through well-cultivated practice and detachment. One who applies faith, energy, mindfulness, nondual awareness, and insight (*śraddhā, vīrya, smṛti, samādhi, prajñā*), is said to gain success.¹¹ Another way is to devote one's meditation to the primal teacher, *Īśvara*, who remains untainted by the ravages of change inflicted by association with *prakṛti*.¹² This teacher defies objectification as an external deity, being also identified with the recitation of the syllable *om*, a self-generated vibration within the body of the practitioner. Appropriate behavior in interpersonal relationships is seen to be another tool for self-evolution: "One should cultivate friendship with the joyful, compassion for the sorrowful, gladness toward those who are virtuous, and equanimity in regard to the non-virtuous; through this, the mind is pacified."¹³ The emphasis here is on flexibility, being able to recognize a situation and act as called for. Goodness does not suffice in all circumstances; at times, the best lesson is provided by restraint, as in the cultivation of equanimity among those who are nonvirtuous (*apunya*).

Breathing is seen as a means to achieve the peace of *nirodha*.¹⁴ By recognizing the most fundamental of life's processes, a closeness to self is achieved. The word *ātman* is in fact derived from the verbal root *āt*, breathe. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* tells the story of a contest among the bodily functions of speaking, seeing, hearing, thinking, and breathing. Each respective faculty takes a turn at leaving the body and remaining away for a year. When speaking leaves, the body becomes dumb; when the eye leaves, blindness results; upon the departure of the ear, deafness follows; and when the mind leaves, a state of mindlessness sets in. But when the breath begins to go off, "as a horse might tear out the pegs of his foot-tethers all together, thus did it tear out the other Breaths [speaking, etc.] as well. They all came to the breath and said 'Sir! Remain! You are the most superior of us. Do not go off!'"¹⁵ Of all bodily functions, the breath is the most fundamental, without which life is not possible. In gaining control over the breath, the yogin masters the other senses, including the thinking process.¹⁶

Other practices prescribed in the *Yoga Sūtra* include directing one's consciousness to one who has conquered attachment (*vīta-rāga*) or meditating on an auspicious dream experience or centering the mind in activity or cultivating thoughts that are sorrowless and illuminating or by any other means, as desired.¹⁷

The purpose of these various practices is to diminish the influence of past actions that have been performed for selfish or impure motives (*kleśa*). These motives are five in number and catalogue pitfalls in the path. The first, nonwisdom (*avidyā*) is seen to be the cause of the other four. Patañjali describes this *kleśa* as "seeing the self, which is eternal, pure, and joyful, in that which is non-self, non-eternal, impure, and painful."¹⁸ The "I" mistakes its limited experience for the ultimate reality, and life is pursued through combinations of the other four *kleśas*: from the attitude based solely on self-orientation and self-gratification (*asmitā*) or clinging (*rāga*), despising (*dveṣa*), or because of an insatiable desire to hold on to life (*abhiniveśa*).¹⁹ These influences, which define the ego, must be lessened through Yoga in order for the experience of freedom to take place.

The Yogic process of transformation begins at the ethical level through the practices of disciplines (*yama*) and constructive action (*niyama*). Through the adherence to particular behavioral practices, the yogin begins to erode the past impressions that have bound one to a life of rigidity. For the yogin, freedom is found through disciplined action. By restraint from violence, stealing, hoarding, and wantonness, and through the application of truthfulness, the influences of the self-centered past are lessened. Cultivation of purity, contentment, forbearance, study, and devotion to a chosen symbol (*tīśvara-praṇidhāna*) establishes a new way of life, deconstructing the old, pain-ridden order and constructing a new body of free and responsible action. *Yama* and *niyama*, although listed first among Patañjali's eight limbs, are not to be seen as preliminary practices. As Feuerstein points out, "it would be quite wrong to interpret these 'members' as stages, as has often been done. Rather they should be compared with functional units, which overlap both chronologically and their activity."²⁰

The world is intended and constructed through personal behavior, and the world created by the practitioner will continue to operate, even when the state of liberation or *kaivalyam* is reached. The *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* states that even when the highest wisdom has been attained, and *prakṛti* has displayed herself and retreated, the force of past impressions causes the body to continue to operate, just as a potter's wheel spins on even after the kick of the potter ceases.²¹ Similarly, the state of *dharma megha*, so tersely mentioned in the *Yoga Sūtra*, does not seem to imply that life evaporates. Rather, this may be seen

as a cloud wherein the totality of the nondual experience is made apparent, and all distinctions of “grasper, grasping, and grasped” dissolve.²² In conventional consciousness, the world stands against and apart from the experiencer. Through Yoga, self unites with circumstance, and the ground of all possibilities is laid open. Life does not cease but is freed from the constraints of a limited perspective.

The system of Yoga presents various avenues by which the pettiness of self-centered orientation may be overcome and the fullness of human potential may be realized. Yoga emphasizes ethical behavior, movement, and meditation. This meditation may be guided or shaped by the notion of deity. Yoga suggests that one chooses his or her own deity ideal (*iṣṭa devatā*).²³ This open approach is Hinduism at its best and even defies the label “Hindu.” In fact, the practice of choosing one’s deity form spread throughout Asia with Buddhism, which developed an entire pantheon of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. In both Hinduism and Buddhism, the human condition is regarded in much the same manner. Two pathways are open to humankind, one associated with affliction (*kliṣṭa*) and one oriented toward enlightenment (*akliṣṭa*). By continually generating afflicting behavior or “words,” one is bound to misery. By cultivating the opposite, the practitioner of meditation builds a life of responsible freedom. Both systems set forth ideal religious figures to emulate. These gods, goddesses, or Buddhas inspire one to persist on the spiritual path.

Because of its existential and practical thrust, the concepts of the *Yoga Sūtra* hold a nearly universal appeal. Like the Buddha, Patañjali emphasizes suffering as the prime catalyst to spark the spiritual quest. Like the *Rg Veda* and the Sāṃkhya school, the *Yoga Sūtra* divides its characterization of experience into the seer and the seen and suggests that Yoga requires the pacification of the seen to allow the seer or pure consciousness to emerge. Like Jainism, it requires strict adherence to five ethical practices: nonviolence, truthfulness, not stealing, sexual restraint, and nonpossession. Presaging later devotional or *bhakti* schools, it suggests that one should model oneself after an idealized deity (*īśvara*), defined as the perfect soul “untouched by afflictions, actions, fruitions, or their residue.”²⁴

The brilliance of Patañjali lies in his ability to weave together key theological themes that in a different context would be seen as incompatible or contradictory. By restricting his discussion to techniques for alleviating distress, by delicately avoiding a commitment to a specific deity manifestation, by appealing for adherence to a foundational set of ethical precepts, and by personalizing the process of spiritual self-discovery, Patañjali evades many conflicts that normally would arise regarding the existence of God and the existence or nonexistence of a soul. He does not overtly deny the possibility of

God as do many Buddhist and Jaina thinkers, nor does he downplay the validity of human experience as do many later thinkers of the Advaita Vedanta schools. He evokes a minimalist though thorough approach to overcoming the negative influences of past karma, advocating the application of reflective analysis, ethical precepts, and physical as well as mental disciplines.

A VEDĀNTA APPROACH TO YOGA

The emphasis on the transcendent nature of consciousness in Indian philosophy led some theorists to postulate an underlying universality within the world's religious traditions. Although this idea might seem quite modern, the *R̥g Veda* itself, arguably as old as if not older than the Hebrew Bible, proclaims, "To what is one, sages give many a title"²⁵ and "the One has developed into All."²⁶ The theme of oneness can also be found in the great sentences of the Upaniṣads (*mahāvākya*) and the nondualist philosophy of Śankara (ca. 700 CE).

The Neo-Vedānta taught by Swami Vivekananda a century ago advanced this theory of oneness as both a way to harmonize the world's religious traditions and to alleviate human alienation. He wrote, "As manifested beings we appear to be separate, but our reality is one, and the less we think of ourselves as separate from that one, the better for us. The more we think of ourselves as separate from the Whole, the more miserable we become."²⁷ Though the Vedānta emphasis on oneness and unity might tend to deemphasize or even trivialize individual and/or cultural differences, it nonetheless provides a compelling appeal for religious harmony and provides a rationale for respecting the religions of others.

American and British literature has long held a great fascination with the Vedānta concept of Brahma or the absolute. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote several poems inspired by his reading of Indian texts in translation, including the aptly titled "Brahma," which was inspired by the *Bhagavad Gītā*. This poem revels in the inner nature of religious experience and pokes fun at the gods who seek but can not attain *samādhi*:

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
 When me they fly, I am the wings;
 I am the doubter and the doubt,
 And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
 And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
 But thou, meek lover of the good!
 Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.²⁸

Similarly, W. Somerset Maugham (1874–1968) waxed eloquent in *The Razor's Edge* about Vedānta, creating a rhapsodic summary of Indian philosophy, “According to the Vedantists, the self, which they call the atman and we call the soul, is distinct from the body and its senses, distinct from the mind and its intelligence.”²⁹ Maugham attributes to Larry, the lead character in this novel, a life-transforming blissful experience, which he describes tentatively as “oneness with reality.”³⁰

Despite the glowing narratives about the nondual nature of religious experience found in the Upaniṣads and later literature influenced by Vedānta, the Yoga tradition does not espouse a monism. It grounds itself in the recognition of multiple points of view and, in fact, argues for individual exploration and discovery as the only means to liberation. Yoga texts examine different paths while acknowledging the need for common guidelines for spiritual practice. We have already introduced a plurality of practices as found in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali. Several other texts of Yoga also exist, including a series of Upaniṣads on Yoga, extensive Yoga passages in the great epic *Mahābhārata*³¹ (including the *Bhagavad Gītā*), and in various texts of Buddhism. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, an eleventh-century text, combines strands of Indian thought including Vedānta, Buddhism, and Yoga in an expressive epic style. Haribhadra’s *Yogaśiṣṭhisamuccaya*, an eighth-century Jaina text, juxtaposes numerous Yoga systems, takes a firm stand on issues of ritual purity, and serves as Haribhadra’s biographical statement on the issues of conversion and religious conviction, an enduring theme in the broader religious traditions of India. Yoga also found prominence in the intellectual discourse of Sikhism and Islam, underscoring the plurality of theological schools that adopted some form of Yoga practice.

THE YOGAVĀSIṢṬHA

The desire to reconcile different meditative traditions finds expression in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, a text developed over several centuries, reaching its present form

by the eleventh century. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* emphasizes a Vedānta-style universal consciousness but also delineates practices of Yoga.

Demonstrating the author's familiarity with Sāṃkhya, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vedānta, and Yoga, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* states,

This is seen as the Puruṣa of the Sāṃkhya philosophers,
the Brahman of the Vedāntins,
The Vijñāptimātra of the Yogācāra Buddhists,
And the Śūnya of the Śūnyavādins.³²

This sweeping statement seems to equate various religions or theological perspectives. More significantly, it indicates a style of doing theology or studying religions that seems thoroughly modern in its ecumenism.

To understand this interest in developing a broad theological perspective, it is helpful to explore the context for the discourses contained in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Rāma, despairing over the burdens of kingship and in quest of transcendent knowledge, has approached his teacher Vasiṣṭha for answers. Vasiṣṭha outlines the central metaphysics of Indian thought, teaching Rāma about the unseen, eternal, changeless aspect in contrast to the apparent, finite, changing reality of human life and responsibility. In the style of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, he urges Rāma to integrate these two aspects through the performance of Dharma, to take up his kingly duties. As he prospers, so also his kingdom will prosper. Included in this survey summation of Indian thought are Vedāntic monism, the Yogācāra "mind-only" and Mādhyamika emptiness schools of Buddhism, and the Sāṃkhya spiritual psychology of the silent witness.

Each of these schools was represented in India during the time of the composition of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, around 1100 CE. The king or kings symbolized by Rāma for whom these discourses were intended would need to be familiar with each of these traditions to be effective in his rule. In a pluralistic polity, sensitivity to diverse perspectives is essential to maintain peace. The rhetoric put forth by the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* allows the king to regard each religion with respect. By appealing to the universals, the government becomes the protector of virtue in its specific and various forms.

The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* integrates aspects of diverse schools into a coherent theological view. However, Vasiṣṭha states that the world relies on the workings and habits of the mind; it changes frequently. Moreover, he urges Rāma to transcend the realm of desire and change through performing his required tasks with zeal, working for the benefit of all his subjects. By acting selflessly, both goals are achieved: rising above the cares of the world while yet performing what needs to be done to maintain the world order. This approach integrates

the teachings of Karma Yoga as found in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: by performance of action without attachment one attains an equanimity that sanctifies the nature and content of one's actions, setting an example for others. It also provides a working model for the adoption of a tolerant point of view, essential for the maintenance of harmony in a social setting characterized by diversity.

THE *YOGADṚṢṬISAMUCCAYA*: JAINISM AND YOGA

The Jaina tradition, similar to Sāṃkhya and Yoga, does not espouse a universal common soul or consciousness but asserts a multiplicity of souls, each on an individual, heroic quest, with the ultimate goal found in the elimination of all karma. Jainism emphasizes the scrupulous practice of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) as the path to liberation.

The *Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya*, written in the eighth century of the common era, presents Haribhadra's comparative analysis of several Yoga schools from a Jaina perspective. Born into the Brahmin caste, Haribhadra, according to hagiographical tradition, converted to Jainism after hearing a Jaina nun outline the basic precepts of nonviolence, karma, and liberation (*kevala*). Drawing upon his extensive training in the Vedas and Vedānta, and building on his studies of Buddhism, he pioneered the tradition of doxological texts, which summarize rival schools of thought quite fairly. His *Saddarśanasamuccaya* provides a thoughtful, accurate summary of the prevailing theological and philosophical schools of medieval India.

In the *Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya*, Haribhadra applies this methodology not only to theories of Yoga but also to various groups of its practitioners. He recasts Patañjali's eightfold limbs in terms of a goddesslike tradition. The Disciplines (*yama*) take on the name Mitrā; Observances (*niyama*) become Tārā; Postures (*āsana*) become Balā; Breath Control (*prāṇāyāma*) becomes Dīprā; Inwardness (*pratyāhāra*) becomes Sthirā; Concentration (*dhāraṇā*) becomes Kāntā; Meditation (*dhyāna*) is called Prabhā; while Absorption (*samādhi*) takes on the name Parā. Each of these titles evokes a goddess, whose qualities may be translated into English as Friendly, Protector, Power, Shining, Firm, Pleasing, Radiant, and Highest, respectively. Haribhadra also describes four Yoga schools and arranges them in a hierarchy that privileges nonviolence and purity as essential for proper Yoga practice.³³

Haribhadra criticizes some Yoga practitioners as deluded, chiding them for fanning the flames of desire while thinking they are free. He praises others for their adherence to proper ethical behavior. However, while he clearly states his negative opinions regarding animal sacrifice and trying to quell desire by attempting to satisfy it, Haribhadra also advances a viewpoint that emphasizes

a need to look beyond differences toward the commonalities of Yoga practice. He states that all yogis seek to overcome suffering and that this can be accomplished by diligent practice, keeping good company, and studying the scriptures. In keeping with the Jaina tradition of avoiding extreme views, he criticizes the Buddhist emphasis on impermanence and the Vedāntin teaching of illusion. Nonetheless, he presents a tableau of spirituality that sees a common ground and purpose to the pursuit of Yoga, regardless of the theological tradition to which it is attached.

BUDDHISM AND YOGA

The Buddhist tradition is closely linked with Yoga. Both Buddhism and Yoga place emphasis on the centrality of human suffering, the need to meditate in order to gain clarity, and gradual processes of purification required to attain the shared goal of *nirodha*, or the cessation of the causes that lead to suffering. The Brahma Vihāras in the *Yoga Sūtra* (the cultivation of friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity [I :33]) derive directly from the teachings of the Buddha, as will be examined in chapter 15. The emphasis on suffering or *duḥkha*, found in *Yoga Sūtra pāda* II, correlates directly to the first truth of the Buddha. The release from suffering for Buddhism is found in right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (*samādhi*). Patañjali offers a similar eightfold practice of precepts, observances, movement, breath, inwardness, concentration, meditation, and *samādhi*. Winston King has suggested a correlation between states of yogic *samādhi* and stages of Theravada Buddhist meditation (Pāli: *jhāna*, Sanskrit: *dhyāna*).³⁴

In the later Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, we find that *dharma megha samādhi* is considered to be the tenth and highest level attained by the bodhisattva.³⁵ Similarly, *dharma megha samādhi* plays a central role in Patañjali's system. Mahayana Buddhism also refers extensively to a concept known as 'emptiness' or *śūnyatā*, which it equates with an elevated state of insight. Similarly, Patañjali refers to a state of being "empty of own form" (*svarūpa-śūnya*, I:43, III:3, IV:34) that he regards to indicate entry into the state of *samādhi*. However, not all the references to Buddhism are direct borrowings or affirmations of the system. Seemingly in response to the Yogācāra notion that all things proceed from the mind, he states that the reality of the external world cannot be disputed (IV:16) but that the mind itself can be purified of tinge or coloration (IV:17). The tradition of Vajrayāna Buddhism or Tantra holds many common themes with classical and Haṭha Yoga, including veneration of the guru and meditation on the *cakras*.

SIKH YOGA

Another tradition that acknowledged and incorporated various aspects of classical Yoga is Sikhism, founded by Guru Nanak (1469–1538) in northern India. According to Trilochan Singh, Bhai Gurdas (1551–1636) referred to Patañjali as an “enlightened sage.”³⁶ The sacred writings of Sikhism, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, discuss Haṭha Yoga. Guru Nanak uses the word *Yoga* to refer to his own religious system, which he calls “Gurmukh Yoga,” “Gurmat Yoga,” or “Sahaja Yoga.” The Sikh scriptures make frequent reference to the Sāṃkhya and Yoga theories of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Concepts and practices from the later Haṭha Yoga traditions are also recognized, such as *prāṇa*, *kuṇḍalinī*, and the *ṇadīs*. Guru Nanak, who lived at a time when Gorakhnath school of Yoga was widely practiced,³⁷ was highly critical of their “selfish individualism.” According to Trilochan Singh, Guru Nanak visited their centers throughout India up into Afghanistan in an attempt to convince them of the preeminence of God or the Akal, the timeless *puruṣa*.³⁸

In America, the Sikh Yoga developed by Yogi Bhajan starting in Los Angeles’ East-West Center in 1969 utilizes the very techniques criticized as excessive by Guru Nanak. In particular, Yogi Bhajan’s practices include breathing exercises and Yoga postures designed to elevate the *kuṇḍalinī* through various *cakras*. Other aspects of American Sikh Yoga follow traditional Sikhism, including belief in one God, rising before sunrise, not cutting one’s hair, following a vegetarian diet, serving the community, living as a householder, and being available for military service.³⁹ Though Daniel Michon, who has studied Sikhism extensively in India, claims that physical aspects of Yoga are not readily apparent in the Punjab, the mention of the concepts of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* and the practices of what Guru Nanak calls a “Gurmukh Yoga” in the *Guru Granth Sahib* indicate a close connection between the two forms of Yoga.

ISLAM AND YOGA

The Muslim world has long held a deep interest in the religions and spiritualities of India. Intellectuals from within the Muslim community sought out and translated two primary philosophical texts on the Yoga tradition, the *Yoga Sūtra* and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Additionally, a third text, the *Amṛtakunḍa*, was translated into Arabic, which explains yogic physiology and practices, for which the original Sanskrit or Hindi has been lost. Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra* was translated into Arabic by al-Bīrūnī (d. 1010). The *Laghu Yogavāsiṣṭha* was translated into Persian by Nizam al-Din Panipati for the Mughal emperor

Jahangir in the late 1500s and, according to Fathullah Mojtaba'i, "is the earliest exposition of Vedānta philosophy written in a language that could be read outside India."⁴⁰ It includes descriptions of various Yoga practices.

Perhaps the most pervasive awareness of Yoga within the Muslim world came through a text known as the *Amṛtakuṇḍa*, rendered as the *Hawd mā al-hayāt* in Arabic and as *The Pool of the Water of Life* in English. This text, which has been translated into English by Carl Ernst (forthcoming, State University of New York Press), describes various styles of breath control, different Yoga postures, inner visualizations, and meditation exercises. It provides something of a manual for the practice of Sufi Yoga and was widely disseminated in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu translations. Ernst surmises that this text first appeared in the fifteenth century and combines aspects of the Gospel of Thomas with the Koran, Hellenistic philosophy, and Sufism, all within the context of Haṭha Yoga practice. Though Ernst is careful to point out that Sufism did not originate from India, as R. C. Zaehner⁴¹ and other scholars have hypothesized, this text amply demonstrates that Sufis in India were aware of indigenous forms of meditation and Yoga.

PLURALISM, TOLERANCE, AND YOGA

Pluralism has been the core of what can be called the "Hindu faith," from the seals of the Indus Valley culture and the Vedic pantheon of gods and goddesses to the contemporary coexistence of Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas. Likewise, Hindus have always lived in a pluralistic society, side by side with Greeks,⁴² Jains, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, and Christians.

Conceptually, Hinduism has dealt with this multiplicity through a creative application of a theory of universalism. The Jains state that all beings want to live; the Buddha proclaimed that all beings suffer; the *Dharmaśāstras* state that all people seek wealth, pleasure, and societal harmony. The Neo-Vedānta of Vivekananda specifically emphasizes the need to study multiple traditions, citing Ramakrishna's immersion into mystical Islam, goddess worship, and the teachings of Jesus.

In many ways, the modern academic discipline of religious studies follows the Vedic adage, Truth is one, though the paths are many. Many academic departments, though within the context of a largely Christian worldview, seek full representation of all major faiths on their faculties. The Roman Catholic Church proclaimed during the Second Vatican Council that

religions to be found everywhere strive variously to answer the restless searchings of the human heart by proposing "ways," which consist of

teachings, rules of life, and ceremonies. The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all.⁴³

Both the academic disciplines of religious studies and the Roman Catholic advocacy of interreligious dialogue exhibit a pragmatism that resembles India's age-old attempt to deal with multiplicity.

Tolerance, dialogue, and syncretism are important qualities of the Hindu tradition that bear contemporary relevance. Patañjali's universalization of spirituality outlines an implicit argument for tolerating the existential reality and choices of others. Haribhadra provides a model for conducting a thoughtful, probing study of the religious thought of one's neighbors. The author of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* shows that syncretism can be an effective tool for promoting societal peace.

The religious traditions of India extend from Indus remnants and Vedic chants to classical formulations, epic embellishments, medieval devotionism, and the rationalistic apologetics of Aurobindo and Vivekananda. This rich legacy demonstrates the subtlety of theological reflection and nuance in response to changing needs within Indian society. It also underscores the difficulty of defining religion within India or confining it within a fixed set of doctrines, practices, or beliefs. Yoga traditions and their practices offer an important response to plurality that might be helpful as India continues to grapple with this ongoing issue and as scholars of religions continue their search for paradigms through which to conduct interreligious dialogue. By emphasizing spiritual practice and remaining mute on disputations of theological issues, Yoga has emerged through the centuries not only with effective methods for spiritual practice but also with an adaptability that accords well in multicultural contexts.

Given the basic thrust of Yoga as practice, not belief, it has served as a bridge between cultures and diverse religious forms for millennia. At the beginning of this chapter, Vivekananda was mentioned as a great bringer of Eastern truths to the West. He was certainly far from the first Indian to transmit Indian philosophy to foreign places. Bodhidharma took Zen to China.⁴⁴ Padmasambhava introduced Buddhist meditation techniques in Tibet. Closer to the Western world, major texts on Yoga such as the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* were translated into Persian during the thirteenth century. At even earlier times, Indian influence on Greek and Roman thinking through various trade routes is well documented.⁴⁵

This dialogue between India and the world has not been a one-way street. Mughal rule greatly influenced large sectors of the population; India now contains the world's second largest Muslim population. British rule in India led to a new cultural and philosophical exchange. A sizeable group of respected English scholars held the native philosophies of India in high regard. Concurrently, Indians began imbibing in European traditions. Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), partly due to his exposure and exchange with Christian missionaries in Bengal, contributed greatly to the revitalization of Hinduism, incorporating some aspects of church services into the meetings of Brahma Samaj. This in turn influenced later Hindu movements and undoubtedly made Vivekananda's message more easily understood during his lecture tours of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Meditation does not strive to create a new cultural identity but provides the occasion for insight into the very presuppositions that determine the need for personality. Yoga does not require an identity crisis wherein a better self-image is sought; rather, Yoga stems from a desire to examine and overturn *all* notions that perpetuate clinging to one's self-identity. Yoga, in itself, is cross-cultural. It can be used by Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Sufis, and Sikhs, but the practice cannot be bound by the symbols chosen or the language used to convey its teachings.

Americans and Europeans are intellectually and spiritually prepared to benefit from Asian meditation techniques. However, unless the needs spoken to by the traditions are the needs motivating practice, the would-be practitioner runs the risk of self-deception and perhaps a few wasted years. Education about Yoga must accompany education in Yogic techniques to ensure that the remedy suits the illness. Yoga is a cross-cultural tool for cultivating religious insights and has demonstrated a universal applicability. Its effectiveness rests on a desire to transcend suffering; for one who shares this desire, Yoga offers a way of release.