

# YOGA THEORY AND PRACTICE: SEPARABLE?—Part 1

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The basic premise of yoga theory is the fundamental unity of all existence: God, man, and all of creation are ultimately one divine reality. An editorial in the *Yoga Journal* declares this basic premise:

**We are all aware that yoga means “union” and that the practice of yoga unites body, breath, and mind, lower and higher energy centers and, ultimately self and God, or higher Self. But more broadly, yoga directs our attention to the unity or oneness that underlies our fragmented experiences and equally fragmented world. Family, friends, the Druze guerrilla in Lebanon, the great whale migrating north—all share the same essential [divine] nature.** <sup>1</sup>

This is why physical yoga and Eastern philosophy are mutually interdependent; ultimately, you cannot have one without the other. David Fetcho, a researcher with an extensive background in yoga theory and practice, states:

**Physical yoga, according to its classical definitions, is inheritably and functionally incapable of being separated from Eastern religious metaphysics. The Western practitioner who attempts to do so is operating in ignorance and danger, from the yogi’s viewpoint, as well as from the Christian’s.** <sup>2</sup>

One of the leading contemporary authorities on kundalini yoga is Gopi Krishna. In his article “The True Aim of Yoga,” he says: “The aim of yoga, then, is to achieve the state of unity or oneness with God, Brahman, [and] spiritual beings....” <sup>3</sup>

Yoga authorities Feuerstein and Miller comment that the postures (*asana*) of yoga and its breathing techniques (*pranayama*) are much more than just physical exercises:

**Again, we see that the control of the vital energy (*prana*) by way of breathing, like also *asana*, is not merely a physical exercise, but is accompanied by certain psychomental phenomena. In other words, all techniques falling under the heading of *asana* and *pranayama* as, for example, the *mudras* and *bandhas* [physical positions or symbolic bodily gestures utilizing *pranayama* and concentration for physical or spiritual purposes] of Hathayoga, are *psychosomatic* exercises. This point, unfortunately, is little understood by Western practitioners....** <sup>4</sup>

Actually, yoga practice is *intended* to validate occult yoga theory. And as noted, yoga theory teaches that everything is, in its true inner nature, divine—not only divine but ultimately equal to everything else—everything from God and the devil to the athlete and the AIDS virus.

Yoga theory also teaches that in their outer nature, everything is *maya*, or illusion. For example, only in his inner spirit is man divine; his “outer nature,” of body and personality, are ultimately a delusion that separates him from awareness of his real inner divinity. Thus, another purpose of yoga must be to slowly dismantle the outer personality—man’s illusory part—so the supposed impersonal divinity can progressively emerge” from within his hidden divine consciousness.

This is why people who practice yoga only for physical or mental health reasons are ultimately the victims of a confidence game. *They* are promised better health; little do they suspect the end goal of yoga is to destroy *them* as individuals. As yoga authorities Feuerstein and Miller comment, yoga results in “a progressive dismantling of human per-

sonality ending in a complete abolition. With every step (*anga*) of Yoga, what we call ‘man’ is demolished a little more.”<sup>5</sup>

In “Yoga as Methods of Liberation,” Moti Lal Pandit observes that (as in Buddhism) “the aim of yoga is to realize liberation from the human condition. To achieve this liberation, various psychological, physical, mental, and mystical methods have been devised. All those methods are anti-social (sometimes even antihuman) in that yoga prescribes a way of life which says: this mortal life is not worth living.”<sup>6</sup>

Yoga is, after all, a *religious* practice seeking to produce “union” with an impersonal ultimate reality, such as Brahman or Nirvana. If ultimate reality is impersonal, of what final value is one’s own personality? For a person to achieve true “union” with Brahman, his “false” self must be destroyed and replaced with awareness of his true divine nature. That is the specific goal of yoga. If we examine yoga theory in more detail, it is easier to understand why yoga practice has such specific occult goals.

One of the most authoritative texts on yoga theory within the Hindu perspective is Patanjali’s text on raja Yoga titled *Yoga Sutras*.<sup>7</sup> In this text, he puts forth the traditional eight “limbs,” or parts, of yoga. These are defined within the context of a basic Hindu worldview (reincarnation, *karma*, and *moksha*, or liberation) and intended to support and reinforce Hindu beliefs. Each “limb” has a spiritual goal and together they form a unit. These eight limbs are:

1. *Yama* (self-control, restraint, devotion to the gods [e.g., Krishna] or the final impersonal God [e.g., Brahman])
2. *Niyama* (religious duties, prohibitions, observances)
3. *Asana* (proper postures for yoga practices; these represent the first stage in the isolation of consciousness and are vital components for “transcending the human condition”<sup>8</sup>)
4. *Pranayama* (the control and directing of the breath and the alleged divine energy within the human body [*prana*] to promote health and spiritual [occult] consciousness and evolution)
5. *Pratyahara* (sensory control or deprivation, i.e., withdrawal of the senses from attachment to external objects)
6. *Dharana* (deeper concentration, or mind control)
7. *Dhyana* (deep contemplation from occult meditation)
8. *Samadhi* (occult enlightenment or “God [Brahman] realization” i.e., “union” of the “individual” with God).

Because the eight steps are interdependent, the steps of “postures” and “breathing” cannot logically be separated from the others. Thus, the interdependence of all eight steps reveals why the physical exercises of yoga are *designed* to prepare the body for the spiritual (occult) changes that will allegedly help one realize godhood status.

The concept of *prana* (“breath”) is a key to the process. *Pranayama* refers to the knowledge and control of *prana*, or mystical energy, not merely to the control of one’s physical breath.<sup>9</sup> *Prana* is believed to be universal divine energy residing behind the material world (*akasa*). *Prana* is said to have five forms, and all energy is thought to be a manifestation of it. Swami Nikhilananda describes it in his *Vivekananda—The Yogas and Other Works* as “the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this universe.”<sup>10</sup> Perfect control of *prana* makes one God. One can have “infinite knowledge, infinite power, now”:

**What power on earth would not be his? He would be able to move the sun and stars out of their places, to control everything in the universe from the atoms to the**

**biggest suns. This is the end and aim of pranayama. When the yogi becomes perfect there will be nothing in nature not under his control. If he orders the gods or the souls of the departed to come, they will come at his bidding. All the forces of nature will obey him as slaves.... He who has controlled prana has controlled his own mind and all the minds... and all the bodies that exist....** <sup>11</sup>

The aim of *pranayama* is also to arouse the coiled-up power in the *muladhara* chakra called *kundalini*:

**Then the whole of nature will begin to change and the door of [psychic] knowledge will open. No more will you need to go to books for knowledge; your own mind will have become your book, containing infinite knowledge.** <sup>12</sup>

According to Vivekananda, all occult manifestations are accomplished through yogic control of *prana*:

**We see in every country sects that attempted the control of prana. In this country there are mind-healers, spiritualists, Christian Scientists, hypnotists, and so on. If we examine these different sects, we shall find at the back of each is the control of prana, whether they know it or not. If you boil all the theories down, the residuum will be that. It is one and the same force they are manipulating.... Thus we see that pranayama includes all that is true even of spiritualism. Similarly, you will find that wherever any sect or body of people is trying to discover anything occult, mysterious, or hidden, they are really practicing some sort of yoga to control their prana. You will find that wherever there is any extraordinary display of power, it is the manifestation of prana.** <sup>13</sup>

In other words, *prana*, God, and occult energy are all one and the same. The one who practices yogic breathing (*pranayama*) is by definition attempting to manipulate occult (“divine”) energy.

#### **Notes:**

1. Editorial, *Yoga Journal*, May/June 1984, p. 4.
2. David Fetcho, “Yoga,” Berkeley, CA: Spiritual Counterfeits Project, 1978, p. 2.
3. Gopi Krishna, “The True Aim of Yoga,” *Psychic*, January-February, 1973, p. 14.
4. George Feuerstein, Jeanine Miller, *Yoga and Beyond: Essays in Indian Philosophy*, New York: Schocken, 1972, pp. 27-28.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
6. Moti Lal Pandit, “Yoga as Methods of Liberation,” *Update: A Quarterly Journal on New Religious Movements*, Aarhus, Denmark: The Dialogue Center, vol. 9, no. 4, December, 1995, p. 41.
7. e. g. Rammurti S. Mishra, *Yoga Sutras: The Textbook of Yoga Psychology*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973.
8. Mircea Eliade, *Yoga Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 54.
9. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda, The Yogas and Other Works*, New York: Ramadrishna and Vivekananda Center, 1953, p. 592.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 592-93.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 605.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 593, 599.