

## YOGA II

*Abandoning without reserve all the desires born of mental fancies, and restraining completely by the mind the entire group of the sense from all directions,*

*With understanding held by firmness, and mind established in the Self, let him (the yogi) (thus) by degrees attain tranquility, let him not think of anything else,*

*Wheresoever the restless and unsteady mind may wander away, let him withdraw it from there and bring it under the control of the self alone.*

*He whose passions are quieted and mind perfectly tranquil, who has become one with Brahman, being freed from all impurities, to such a yogi comes supreme bliss.*

*Bhagavad Gita, VI. 24-27*  
(tr. by Swami Prabhavananda)

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As was mentioned in the previous section, the first two limbs of Yoga, the Yama and the Niyama, were terribly important in ancient times. The reason for this will become more apparent as we look further.

The third limb of yoga is associated with what are called *the Asanas*—the body positions. There are, in fact, 84 classical postures. Although mastering these will insure a supple, well controlled body, keeping people trim was not their primary function in ancient times. They were intimately related to the control of *energy flows* that were and still are believed to exist within and around the body.<sup>1</sup>

One of the best-known examples of energy flow around the body is encompassed in the idea of *the aura*. As ridiculous as some within New Age circles have made this possibility seem, the aura is believed to be a complex energy field that both exists around and interpenetrates the physical body. Since ancient times, well respected holy men within the East have spoken about the fine structure of this energy field. So complete has been their meditative dissection of the phenomenon that they have identified various

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<sup>1</sup> There are no counterparts to this in western medicine. In fact, if such energies exist, western science hasn't a clue about them.

aspects of the aura: the emotional body, the mental body, the astral body, the ethereal body, the spiritual body, all intermingled within the auric structure.

The aura is said to have color associated with it.<sup>2</sup> The emotional body, for instance, clouds over with a deep, murky red when an individual becomes angry, whereas the area around the head of a spiritually evolved individual is bathed in a bright, golden hue (how many paintings have you seen of Christ with a golden halo around the head—interesting that artists would use that color in their works).

In short, there are very specific doctrines within Eastern meta-physics concerning the *auric energy field* and the way it reflects and interacts with the *state of being* of a human.

Related to this are the individual *energy centers* that are believed to exist within the body. Called *chakras* in Sanskrit, much has been written about these centers and their purposes. When artistically depicted in ancient writings, they were shown as opening flowers. Today, as in ancient times, each is believed to have its own geometric form, color, and tone.

Although different books list different combinations, a fairly decent representation of the seven major chakras follows:

- 1.) The first chakra (also called the lower chakra) is located at the base of the spine and is associated with power and the sexual energies;
- 2.) The second chakra (this is sometimes linked to the sun) is located at the solar plexus and is associated with physical vitality;
- 3.) The third chakra (called the heart chakra) is located in the heart area and is associated with compassion and remembrance;
- 4.) The fourth chakra (called the throat chakra) is located in the throat area and is associated with creativity and the creative energies;
- 5.) The fifth chakra (called the web chakra) is located at the base of the neck and is believed to be something like a central switchboard

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<sup>2</sup> If the East is correct, it is possible that one might become sensitive to this subtle auric energy field (though following disciplines designed to make it so is not suggested—we'll talk more about forcing open "abilities" later). In reality, very few people are sensitive on this level. Nevertheless, one of the standard ploys of those who would like to appear sensitive but who aren't is to comment on, "how beautiful your aura looks today," the tacit implication being that they can *see* your aura. Beware of New Agers bearing compliments.

between the physical body and the energy complex associated with the aura.

- 6.) The sixth chakra (called the third eye) is located at the middle of the forehead and is associated with wisdom.
- 7.) The seventh chakra (called the crown chakra) is located at the top of the head and is associated with higher spirituality.
- 8.) In addition to the major chakras there are minor chakras located in a number of different places, the hands and feet included.

What is important here is the fact that from this very ancient metaphysical perspective, the body is considered to be a lot more complex than one might think.

And the yogic asanas? They were originally designed to help a yogi control *energy movement within and around the body*.

Side point: It probably should be noted that the idea of controlling energy flows within the body has been incorporated into some forms of Eastern medicine. Chinese acupuncture is a good example.

There is absolutely no medical justification from a western perspective for acupuncture. The neurological receptors in your hand are no different from those in your arm; needling one should have no more significant effect on the body than needling the other. Yet if done by a knowledgeable practitioner under appropriate circumstances, the needling patterns employed by acupuncturists can produce remarkable effects.<sup>3</sup>

When a truly knowledgeable acupuncturist is questioned about what is actually taking place when the body is treated with acupuncture, he or she will tell you that the

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<sup>3</sup> Acupuncture has been used in China to relieve pain for thousands of years. According to a November 4, 1991 *Time* magazine article on alternate health care, "In the U.S., the technique (acupuncture) was virtually unknown outside Chinese neighborhoods until New York *Times* journalist James Reston needed an emergency appendectomy while on assignment in China in 1971. Reston reported that an acupuncturist's needles effectively blocked his pain following the operation." There are now western medical researchers who claim that needling specific areas of the body stimulates the body to secrete endorphins (endorphins are opiate-like compounds that act as natural pain killers in the body).

Knowledgeable acupuncturists, on the other hand, maintain that although that may be the case, there is more going on with acupuncture than simple neuro-chemical stimulation.

needling patterns are used to balance *flows of energy* along *meridian lines* within the body. Energy movement is at the root of acupuncture theory.

The yogic asanas are believed to do the same kind of thing, they manipulate and control the flow of energy within the physical form we call the body. Part of the reason the asanas are deemed so important is that when a disciple is ready to attempt a leap in understanding—a step toward enlightenment—it is imperative that the individual controls the vitalizing energy flows that are generated when such an effort is made.

How so? It is believed within Eastern (primarily Hindu) metaphysics that there exists a kind of energy *dormant in human-kind* that is located at the base of the spine. It is called in Sanskrit *the kundalini*, and it is likened to a spiritual fire (it is sometimes called *the dragon fire*).

The tradition maintains that when an individual moves to a point in his or her spiritual evolution when the time is right, this kundalini fire will begin to slowly, naturally open. As it begins to awaken, the energies associated with it will pour into and vitalize the first chakra—the chakra associated with sexual force fields. This vitalization tends to focus the individual's attention on sexual interaction, heightening the sexual appetites and sexual pleasure.

A spiritually advanced individual, one whose motivations are clear and whose intentions are beyond the self-indulgent, self-interested attitudes exhibited by most of us most of the time (someone, in other words, who has mastered the Yama and Niyama stages of yogic training), will force the kundalini energies up and out of the first chakra by sheer will. In doing so, the energy can then be used to enliven and vitalize the higher chakras.

Example: Ramakrishna was an Indian saint who lived from 1836 to 1886. As a child he was an uneducated peasant. As a young man his purity and devotion led to enlightenment accompanied by the complete opening of the kundalini. As this happened, his creativity blossomed and his mental faculties expanded geometrically. It was as though he had tapped into pure Knowledge. He could talk knowledgeably to men of science and philosophy alike even though he had had no formal schooling. A sample of this uneducated man's thoughts:

"Religion is the path which leads to God, but a path is not a house."

and

"Only undertake those actions that fall within the limits of your purified thoughts and dreams. Seek not to flatter yourself with gigantic deeds. Undertake duties as small in size as your self-surrender to God. Then as your selflessness and purity grow—and things of the Soul grow very fast—it will pierce its own way through the material world and benefit others as the Ganges sprang through the hard rocks of the Himalayas and watered thousands of miles with her beneficence."<sup>4</sup>

When used correctly, the kundalini is an energy that allows a spiritually awakening individual to unfold in ways that are way beyond the norm. The responsible teachers say: Focus that fire in the heart chakra and compassionate action becomes the tone of one's life; center it in the third eye and the mental capacities explode; allow it to simply circulate in the lower chakra and, as pleasurable as it might be for a time, that potent force field will burn the user emotionally, psychologically, physically, and worse of all spiritually.

Why might someone act so? Ignorance!

Example: A number of years ago I opened up a New Age newspaper—one of those free throw-aways you can get at any health food store—and noticed a large advertisement that trumpeted "INCREASE YOUR SEXUAL PROWESS—COME LEARN KUNDALINI YOGA!"

It seems that a bright young soul posing as a spiritual teacher had melded basic yogic asanas with a few of the more chaotic yogic breathing patterns to create a free-form yoga he dubbed Kundalini Yoga. Its design? To force open the kundalini. His selling point? The fact that if the kundalini could be pried open, energy would flow into the lower chakra and the sexual appetites would be wildly enhanced.

Teaching unsuspecting people to force open the kundalini is monumentally irresponsible. Fully opened, the kundalini moves through the body is like a million amp current passing through a wire. In the spiritually unprepared, the metaphorical wire is impure and the force of the fire will inevitably burn it (i.e., the person) out. Anything from mild dislocation to full-blown insanity can ensue, depending upon the circumstances. Fortunately, most people are so ill able to hold difficult mental

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<sup>4</sup> Both quotes are from The Life of Ramakrishna by Romain Rolland.

disciplines for any period of time that the kundalini rarely opens even in the most ardent disciple. But that doesn't excuse those who teach the discipline.

People who are searching don't understand what they are getting into when they begin to practice non-recreational yogic practices—kundalini yoga included. Why? Because the teachers of these practices don't tell them (either by design or, more commonly, through their own ignorance). It never seems to dawn on the students that when it's time for forces like the kundalini to flower, they will open naturally without prodding. Only then is it appropriate to learn to deal with the powers such energies offer and the restrictions such energies require.<sup>5</sup>

Going back to yoga, you can now see why controlling energy flows in the body was deemed important to Patanjali and the masters who made yoga their life (you can also see why the Yama and Niyama were so important). As an individual moves successfully up through the limbs of yoga, it is believed that the kundalini will open. When it does, it is paramount that the yogi be able to control the tidal-wave of energy (the lotus position alone forces the spine into a position that allows energy to flow up and down the spinal pathways unimpeded). The ancients did so through purity, will-power, and with the help of the asanic postures.

In short, the asanas are not as trivial as they seem at first look.

The fourth limb is called Pranayama. Prana is another energy-form believed to exist within Eastern metaphysics. Animated by sunlight and riding on air (specifically oxygen), it is taken in when one breathes (pranayama is the Sanskrit word for *breathe*). As such, Pranayama is associated with breathing patterns that are, once again, designed to liberate and control energy flows within the body. In addition, this limb helps an aspirant steady and control the mind. As the Bhagavad Gita says, "When the breathe is steady, the mind is calm."

An example of a breathing exercise at the Pranayama level is alternate nasal breathing—closing off one nostril while breathing in through the other, then breathing

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<sup>5</sup> One wonders what that intrepid entrepreneur was thinking when he decided to set out upon this venture (his following is considerable today)? If the Indian tradition from which he borrowed his discipline at all reflects the real world (i.e., if the kundalini fire does exist), it is probable that other ideas from that tradition might also have reality . . . like karma. As eye-catching as his ad was, helping to addict people to sex even more than they already are (not that there is anything wrong with sex in its place) and/or giving the psychologically unprepared a meditative tools that could well scramble their brains, is not a very bright move, karmically speaking. In short, he'd better hope that the East is wrong and that all he's done is sell gullible people a swindle. Otherwise, he could be in for a considerable karmic backlash down the line.

out the other with the first closed, all the while visualizing energy flowing up one side of the spinal column and down the other.

The fifth limb, Pratyahara, is a preparatory step toward deep meditation. The effort here is to pull attention away from the senses. In most people, the mind is not focused to any great extent most of the time. Sense perceptions are often a stimulus to thought. For instance, when you smell an unusual, exotic perfume your mind might shift to the old boy or girlfriend who wore it, or to the circumstance during which you first smelled it. Sound is another thought stimulant. Baby boomers who hear songs from the 60's are taken back to *how life was* when they heard those songs (that is what nostalgia is all about).

In Pratyahara, attention is pulled away from sensory input. This is not a deadening process. Many people associate it incorrectly with a kind of drawing away from life. People say, "I just don't think I could live without my emotions and my sensory stimuli—I'd die trying to pull away from all that."

Patanjali had something to say to those who are so attached to their emotions. In his book, *How to Know God*, Christopher Isherwood quotes, then discusses Patanjali's message:

"The universe exists in order that the experiencer may experience it, and thus become liberated."

This last sentence (of this aphorism) is one of the most important in the entire book. It is Patanjali's answer to the pig-people, to those who want to stay wallowing in their mire.

When told that all sense-experience is, in the last analysis, painful, the pig people become scornful and angry. They find such a philosophy cowardly and lacking in spirit. "One should not be afraid of pleasure," they exclaim; "One should seize the flying moment and enjoy it, whatever the consequences." They quote approvingly from their poets (for many of the finest poets write pig-poetry) saying that "one crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name," and Patanjali is a timid old lady.

To this accusation, Patanjali replies: "It is you who are really afraid. It is you who shrink from experience. You talk so much about your pleasures, yet you know nothing about Pleasure. You never try to understand its nature. The universe of sense-experience is a great book; and he who reads it through to the end with discrimination will know at length that there is nothing but the Atman. No experience is in vain, no

page of that book is superfluous, *provided that the reader learns something from it and passes on to the next*. You read the same page over and over, repeating the same meaningless experience, like a man who is half asleep, reading without remembering a word."

Put in an altogether different way, the disciple practicing Pratyahara is not trying to go into limbo. Certainly, attention is being directed away from the normal sensory world you and I are familiar with, but what one comes to experience in this sense-less state is said to be far-and-away more interesting . . . even in some cases downright blissful. These meditative bliss states can be so pleasurable that they are actually considered potentially dangerous to the spiritual growth of the aspirant. Would you be willing to leave a state that was completely joyful only to re-enter this world of pain and suffering?<sup>6</sup>

Again, the Yama and the Niyama come into play. Pure motivation is very important to the salvation of the seeker.

The sixth limb is Dharana. This limb is devoted to preliminary concentration. In it, the disciple focuses the mind on some specific point of consideration. It can be a divine form—Christ, for instance—in an attempt to come into a better understanding of that Being; it could be the focusing of the mind on a particular energy center within the body—the heart chakra with its close ties to compassion; or it could be the focusing on a principle such as *unconditional love* and the thoughtforms associated with that.

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<sup>6</sup> A story about Ramakrishna from the book, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, highlights this idea. "For six months, if such a statement is credible, he (Ramakrishna) remained in a state of cataleptic ecstasy, recalling the description given of the fakirs of old—the body, deserted by the spirit like an empty house . . . If it hadn't been for his nephew, who watched over the masterless body and nourished its forces, he would have died. It was impossible to go further in ecstatic union with *the Formless*."

"Ramakrishna himself recognized afterwards that he had been tempting Providence and that it was a miracle that he had ever returned. He was careful to warn his disciples against submitting to any such test. When young Naren (Vivekananda) importuned him to open to him the Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the terrible door leading to the gulf of the Absolute—Ramakrishna refused with anger, he, who never lost his temper . . . "Shame on you!" he cried. "I thought you were to be the great banyan tree giving shelter to thousands of tired souls. Instead you are selfishly seeking your own well-being. Let these little things alone, my child. How can you be satisfied with so one-sided an ideal? You must be *all-sided*. Enjoy the Lord in all ways!" (By this he meant both in contemplation and in action, so that he might translate the highest knowledge into the highest service of mankind)."

Bliss states can be dangerous . . . or so it is taught by those who have knowledge about such things.



The seventh limb is Dhyana. It is advanced meditation in which the disciple brings the mind so completely into control that unbroken thought can be formed around a single point-of-interest. As Isherwood puts it, "(it is) like the pouring of oil from one container to another."

The eighth and final limb is Samadhi. Samadhi is the complete absorption of the self into an object or individual-of-interest. It is total union. This state of *oneness* is usually held for a short period of time. By coming into a union with an object or person, it is believed that the disciple touches the essence of God (remember, within the context of this view, God is all things).

It should be noted that Samadhi is not the same thing as the Hindu idea of Nirvana. Nirvana is a state of evolution in which all the negative aspects of one's self (accumulated over all incarnations) have been corrected and redressed. Going into Nirvana, one moves into union with God, the One Self, the Divine Mind, and remains in that state until a new sweep of evolution brings it out again.<sup>7</sup>

Aside from the eight great limbs there are many styles of yoga extant today. Each generally adheres to the teachings of Patanjali while emphasizing particular limbs. As such, each has an undertone that is characteristic of itself alone. Some examples:

1.) Karma Yoga: the yoga of selfless action. A follower of Karma Yoga focuses on taking action without thought of gain. It is primarily a mental discipline, though the asanas are practiced.

2.) Jnana Yoga: the yoga of wisdom. A follower of Jnana Yoga focuses on constant inquiry: "Are my actions taking me toward my spiritual goal?" It requires a constantly open mind, a constant discrimination.

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<sup>7</sup> Most Hindus believe that Nirvana is for eternity . . . forever. The problem is that an eternity for us humans is surely not an eternity for God. If the view we have set forth so far is accurate, going into Nirvana *is* the ultimate bliss from our perspective but *is not* "absolutely forever." After all, existence without the possibility of further expansion at some later time "is a static state, and static states stagnate."

3.) Bhakti Yoga: the yoga of devotion. A follower of Bhakti Yoga fills himself or herself with devotion and love for the Creator or some aspect of the Creator. Example: Ramakrishna devoted himself to the *mother figure* (if he had been a Christian, he would have devoted himself to Mary). His every act was in honor of that aspect of God.

4.) Raj Yoga: the Kingly yoga. Most yogic traditions claim to be off-shoots of Raj Yoga as it is associated with all aspects of the purification of the body and mind.

5.) Hatha Yoga: emphasizes breathing exercises. Most recreational yoga in the Western world today is Hatha yoga.

6.) Kundalini Yoga: already discussed—designed to force open the kundalini using postures and radical breathing exercises. If the responsible teachers in the East are correct, following the discipline of Kundalini Yoga is a fool's move and very dangerous.

7.) Tantric Yoga: the yoga of sex. Tantric Yoga is a part of the Tibetan tradition. It strives to use the sexual energies to elevate the self into a knowledge of God. One has to be some-kind-of-a-together-character to be able to use this yoga without ending up with an overactive, highly inflamed first chakra. The book, The Kama Sutra (subtitled by a friend of mine *The Original 101 Positions*), is a part of the Tantric Yoga tradition.

Bottom line: For those who attempt to move ahead of the stream of humanity in a spiritual sense, the tools of the effort are not found in the local library. So when it comes time for a disciple to come into a complete control of the mind and body, where does he or she turn?

In ancient times, Patanjali saw the need. He also knew the terrors and powers that would come when one made such an effort. That is why yoga was devised. It was never intended for *the man on the street*. Neither was it intended to be an end in itself.<sup>8</sup> It was a tool to be used by the well motivated as they attempted to grow into a spiritually enlightened, spiritually responsible human Being.

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<sup>8</sup> It isn't hard to see that a lifetime of devotion to this discipline would certainly allow one to come into a deeper control of the mind and body—a step all spiritually motivated individuals will have to take sooner or later. It is unfortunately that later followers of Yoga took the Yogic goal of "knowing God" as an end in itself. Patanjali never saw it that way.