

THE PHILOSOPHY AND TRADITIONS OF YOGA

Yoga is essentially the science of tuning the mind and body towards emancipation or complete deliverance. This liberation of human mind and body can be interpreted in different ways. It is as per the seekers desire or chosen objective. Yoga only provides practical pathways to the final goal of complete liberation.

Many believe that Yoga is a way to take the mind off the worldly desires. This is not true, at least not in totality. Yoga, as said previously provides a pathway to attain the final goal, whatever that goal might be. For some it could only mean good health. For some it may mean mental peace and stress control. For some it many mean renouncing the world. Whatever it may be, Yoga provides the practical pathway to achieve it. For some, the goal may simply be to find out what this goal may be. In such cases also Yoga is very handy as through its methodology one can develop enough insight and know one's true calling in life.

The philosophy of Yoga is based on development of awareness of mind and body. This is often done in various traditions using the tool of breath. The breath energizes and unites the entire being in one chord. Concentrating on breath one becomes aware of the inner self and feels a transition and merger of the self with the surroundings. Many supporters of Yogic philosophy strongly report attaining a blissful state of expansion of inner faculties and their merger with something vast and universal. This leads to the state of meditation or *dhyana*. The in-depth knowledge of meditation leads to immense awareness and ultimate wisdom of liberation.

In the orthodox Hindu philosophy that follows the Vedic authority there are six schools called *astika*. They are paired in three complimentary pairs. Yoga and *Samkhya* form one pair. *Samkhya* School of thought is the oldest Hindu philosophical system. Since Yoga also falls in the same category as this, it has immense influence on the philosophies of Yoga too. *Samkhya* School believes in the existence of two components of nature. One is the *Purush* and the other is *Prakriti*. The word *Samkhya* means numbers, so the philosophies of this system are recorded in detailed inventory styles. The recognition of two components as eternal realities suggests duality, *purush* being the seat of human consciousness and *prakriti* being the seat of all creation and material existence. Sage Kapila is considered to be the founder and chief propagator of this school, although no historical evidence can be produced to support this belief.

The philosophy of Yoga is essentially considered to be of Hindu origin but various other religions have adapted it and nurtured it to their own ways and beliefs. Thus various traditions have emerged in Yoga. Main being the Buddhist Yoga, Buddhist Tibetan Yoga, Patanjali Yoga, *Tantra* Yoga and Therapeutic Yoga.

Buddhism and Yoga are greatly comparable and have a lot of similarities. This may be due to Buddha being heavily inclined towards studying Yoga available during his time. Buddhism principles of the *sila*, the *yama* and *niyama* of Yoga and the Hindu principle of non-violence or *ahimsa* are very close to each other. Similarly Buddhist *Samma Vayama* (Effort) and Yogic *Dharana* (Concentration) are also similar. Buddhist *Samma Sati* (Mindfulness) and Yogic *Dhyana* (Meditation) are also comparable. And

Buddhist *Samma Samadhi* and Yogic *Samadhi* are also similar concepts. Buddhist *Anatta-lakkhana-sutta* and Yoga's *asmita-samapatti* is directed towards resurrection of the Self.

In Tibetan Buddhism the correlation seems to be particularly strong. Tibetan Buddhism practices *Trul khor* a practice of 108 types of postures with breath and heart rhythm. Many *prajna* energy exercises and pictures of postures of Tibetan ancient Yogis can be found at *Lukhang*, the summer temple of Dalai Lama.

Patanjali Yoga Sutra also seems to have some influence of Buddha, who lived during 563 to 483 BC and studied Yoga, as it was composed afterwards. Yoga Sutras of Patanjali describes 196 aphorisms given by sage Patanjali during 100BC to 200AD. The concept emphasizes *cittavrtti nirodha* or control of mental fluctuations. It is a form of Raj Yoga according to the classification used in Bhagwad Gita. But Patanjali himself calls it *Ashtang* Yoga.

Tantra Yoga is based on the worship of *Shiva* and *Shakti*. It empahsizes the rising of *Kundalini*, a three and a half coiled snake of spiritual energy lying at the bottom of spine which rises upwards through the spine until it reaches the point in the brain between the eyes. The person becomes truly liberated then.

Therapeutic Yoga is a way of cleansing the body completely of any ailments by getting rid of all external causes of disease. It uses many principles of all kinds of Yoga and is very popular these days in the health conscious upper category lifestyle people both in India and the West. Many practitioners are available for this.

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