

YOGA AND KNOWLEDGE

by

Ravi Ravindra
Departments of Physics and Comparative Religion
Dalhousie University
Halifax, CANADA

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THE AIM OF YOGA:

It should be stressed right at the outset that the point of view informing Yoga theory and practice originates from Above, that is to say, from the vision of the highest possible state of consciousness. It is not something forged or devised, or even understood by the human mind, however intelligent such a mind may be. Yoga is a supra-human (apaurusheya) revelation, from the realm of the gods; mythologically, it is said that the great God Shiva Himself taught Yoga to His beloved Pārvati for the sake of mankind. It is not validated or refuted by human reasoning; on the contrary, the relative sanity or health of a mind is measured by the extent to which it accords with what the accomplished sages transformed by the practice of Yoga say. It is a vision from the third eye, relative to whose reality the two usual eyes see only shadows.

However, it is important to emphasize that no mere

faith, certainly nothing opposed to knowledge, is recommended in Yoga; what is in fact required is the utmost exertion of the whole of the human being --mind, heart and body-- for the practice which would lead to a total transformation of being, a change not less than in a species mutation. Thus, Yoga not only brings the vision from the third eye of Shiva and of the sages for us to passively accept, but aims at helping us develop and open the third eye in ourselves so that in reality we may be of like Spiritual vision with Shiva and the sages. This is conveyed by the etymology of the word yoga: it is derived from the root yuj, meaning to yoke, unite, harness. When the human body-mind is harnessed to the Spirit (Purusha, Ātman, Brahman), which is as much within a human being as outside, he is in yoga.

Yoga is as much religion, as science as well as art since it is concerned with being (sat), knowing (jñāna) and doing (karma). The aim of Yoga, however, is beyond these three, as well as beyond any opposites that they imply.¹ Yoga aims at moksha which is unconditioned and uncaused freedom; by its very nature this state of freedom is beyond the dualities of being-nonbeing, knowledge-ignorance, and activity-passivity. The way to moksha is Yoga, which serves as the path, a discipline and integration.

The aim of Yoga requires the transformation of a human being from his natural and actual form to his perfect and real form. The *prākṛita* (literally, natural, vulgar, unrefined) state is one in which a person compulsively acts in reaction to the forces of *prākṛiti* (nature, causality, materiality) which are active both outside him as well inside. Thus the common man is a slave of the mechanical forces of nature; all his actions are determined by the law of *karma*, the law of action and reaction. Through Yoga he can become *saṃskṛita* (literally well formed, cultured, refined) and thus no longer be wholly at the mercy of natural forces and inclinations. The procedure of Yoga corresponds to the root meaning of the word education: it helps draw out what in fact already is in man but was not perceivable in his unpolished form. The progressive bringing out of The Real Person within (*Puruṣa*) in an aspirant is much like the releasing of a figure from an unshaped stone.

The undertaking of Yoga concerns the entire man, resulting in the reshaping of mind, body and emotions; in short in a new birth. Unlike sculpture, the remoulding involved in Yoga is essentially from the inside out, for the yogi himself is the artist, the stone and the tools. Lest this analogy be misunderstood to suggest that Yoga leads to a rugged individualism in which a man is the

maker of his own destiny and there is nothing above him, it should be remarked that the freedom that a yogi aspires to is less a freedom for himself, and more a freedom from himself. From a strict metaphysical point of view, the yogi himself cannot be said to be the artist of his life; the real initiative belongs only to Brahman who is lodged in the heart of everyone. A person does not create the state of freedom; if he is properly prepared, and does not insist on possessing and controlling everything, he can let surface, and be possessed by, what is deep within himself.

THE BODY AND THE EMBODIED:

Yoga begins from a recognition of the human situation: human bondage to nature and the consequent suffering. Since our internal nature is assumed to be made up of the same stuff and to follow the same principles, as external nature Yoga proceeds by focussing on knowledge of oneself. Self-knowledge may be said to be both the essential method and the essential goal of Yoga. Self-knowledge is clearly a relative matter, depending not only on the depth and clarity of insight but also on what is seen as the self to be known. A progressive change from the identification of oneself as the body

(including the heart and the mind) to the identification of oneself as inhabiting the body is the most crucial development in Yoga. Ancient and modern Indian languages reflect this perspective in the expressions used to describe a person's death: in contrast to the usual English expression of *giving up the ghost*, one gives up *the body*. It is not the body that has the Spirit, but the Spirit that has the body. The yogi identifies himself less with the *body* and more with the *embodied*.

But this identification of the person in oneself with something other than the body-mind and the attendant freedom from the body-mind is possible only through a proper functioning and restructuring of the body and the mind. Here it is useful to retain the Sanskrit word *sharīra* in order to steer clear of the modern Western philosophic dilemma called the 'mind-body problem.' Although *sharīra* is usually translated as *body* it means the whole psychosomatic complex of the body, mind and heart.¹ *Sharīra* is both the instrument of transformation as well as the mirror indicating it. The way a person sits, walks, feels and thinks can help him in knowing the relatively realer self; the knowing of this self is then reflected in the way he sits, walks, feels and thinks.

Sharīra, which is miniaturized or individualized *prākṛiti*, is the medium necessary for the completion and manifestation of the inner spiritual being, which itself can be understood as individualized Brahman (literally, The Vastness) whose *body* is the whole of the cosmos, subtle as well as gross. There is a complete correspondence between the microcosmos which is a human being, and the macrocosmos; the more developed a person is, the more he can also correspond to the deeper and subtler aspects of the cosmos; only a fully developed human being (*Mahāpurusha*) mirrors completely the entire creation. To view the *sharīra*, or the world, as a hinderance rather than an opportunity is akin to regarding the rough stone as an obstruction to the finished figure. *Sharīra* is the substance from which each one of us makes a work of art, according to our ability to respond to the inner urge and initiative.

This substance belongs to *prākṛiti* and includes what are ordinarily called psychic, organic, and inorganic processes. The view that mind and *body* follow the same laws or the fact that the *psychic, organic and inorganic* substances are treated alike does not lead to the sort of reductionism associated with the modern scientific mentality in which the ideal is to describe all of nature ultimately in terms of dead matter in motion

reacting to purposeless forces. *Prākṛiti*, although following strict causality, is alive and purposeful, and every existence, even a stone, has a psyche and purpose. Creation is from Above downward; in contradistinction to modern scientific cosmology, *mind* precedes *matter*.

SEEING THROUGH THE ORGANS OF PERCEPTION:

Although there are many kinds of yogas, such as *karma yoga* (integration through action), *bhakti yoga* (union through love), *jñāna yoga* (yoking through knowledge), and others, the Indian tradition has in general maintained that there is only one central Yoga, with one central aim of harnessing the entire body-mind to the purposes of the Spirit. Different yogas arise owing to varying emphasis on the methods and procedures adopted by different teachers and schools. The most authoritative text of Yoga is regarded to be the *Yoga Sūtra* --aphorisms of Yoga-- compiled by Patanjali sometime between the 2nd century B.C.E. and the 4th century C.E. from the material already long familiar to the gurus (teachers) of Indian spirituality. It is clearly stated by Patanjali that clear seeing and knowing are functions of *Purusha* (The Person) and not of the mind. The mind is confined to the modes of judging,

comparing, discursion, association, imagination, dreaming, memory through which it clings to the past and future dimensions of time. The mind with these functions and qualities is limited in scope and cannot know the objective truth about anything. The mind is not the true knower: it can calculate, make predictions in time, infer implications, quote authority, make hypotheses or speculate about the nature of reality, but it cannot see the objects directly, from the inside, as they really are in themselves.

In order to allow the direct seeing to take place, the mind which by its very nature attempts to mediate between the object and the subject has to be quietened. When the mind is totally silent and totally alert, both the real subject (*Purusha*) and the real object (*prākṛiti*) are simultaneously present to it: the seer is there, what is to be seen is there, and the seeing takes place without distortion. Then there is no comparing or judging, no misunderstanding, no fantasizing about things displaced in space and time, no dozing off in heedlessness nor any clinging to past knowledge or experience; in short, there are no distortions introduced by the organs of perception, namely the mind, the feelings and the senses. There is simply the seeing in the present, the living moment in the eternal now. That

is the state of perfect and free attention, kaivalya, which is the aloneness of seeing, and not of the seer separated from the seen, as it is often misunderstood by the students of Yoga. In this state, the Seer sees through the organs of perception rather than with them.

It is of utmost importance from the point of view of Yoga to distinguish clearly between the mind (chitta) and the real Seer (Purusha). Chitta pretends to know, but it is of the nature of the known and the seen, that is an object rather than the pure subject. However, it can be an instrument of knowledge. This misidentification of the seer and the seen, of the Person with his organs of perception, is the fundamental error from which all other problems and sufferings arise (Yoga Sūtra 2:3-17). It is from this fundamental ignorance that asmitā (I-am-this-ness, egoism) arises, creating a limitation by particularisation. Purusha says 'I AM'; asmita says 'I am this' or 'I am that'. From this egoism and self-importance comes the strong desire to perpetuate the specialisation of oneself and the resulting separation from all else. The sort of 'knowledge' which is based on this basic misidentification is always coloured with pride, a tendency to control and fear.

The means for freedom from the fundamental

ignorance, leading to all sorrow, is an unceasing vision of discernment (*viveka khyāti*); such vision alone can permit transcendental insight (*prajñā*) to arise. Nothing can force the appearance of this insight; all one can do is to prepare the ground for it; it is the very purpose of *prākṛiti* to lead to such insight, as that of a seed is to produce fruit; what an aspirant needs to do in preparing the garden is to remove the weeds which choke the full development of the plant. The ground to be prepared is the entire psychosomatic organism, for it is through that and in that whole organism that *Puruṣa* sees and *prajñā* arises, not the mind alone, nor the emotions nor the physical body by itself. One with dulled senses has as little possibility of coming to *prajna* as the one with a stupid mind or hardened feelings. Agitation in any part of the entire organism causes fluctuations in attention, and muddies the seeing. This is the reason why in *Yoga* there is so much emphasis on the preparation of the body for coming to true knowledge. It is by a reversal of the usual tendencies of the organism that its agitations can be quietened, and the mind can know its right and proper place with respect to *Puruṣa*: that of the known rather than the knower (*Yoga Sūtra* 2:10; 4:18-20).³

SAMYAMA ATTENTION AS THE INSTRUMENT OF KNOWLEDGE:

In classical Yoga, there are eight limbs: the first five are basically concerned with a purification and preparation of the body, emotions and breathing and acquiring the right attitude; the last three limbs are called inner limbs compared with the first five which are relatively outer. These three are *dhāranā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*. *Dhāranā* is concentration in which the consciousness is bound to a single spot. *Dhyāna* from which is derived the Japanese Zen through the Chinese *Tchan*, is contemplation or meditative absorption in which there is an uninterrupted flow of attention from the observer to the observed. In these the observer acts as the centre of consciousness which sees. When that centre is removed, that is to say when the observing is done by *Purusha*, through the mind emptied of itself, that state is called *samādhi* -- a state of silence, settled intelligence and emptied mind, in which the mind becomes the object to which it attends, and reflects it truly, as it is.

The insight obtained in the state of *samādhi* is truth-bearing (*ritambharā*): the scope and nature of this knowledge is different from the knowledge gained otherwise, by the mind or the senses. Unlike the latter,

the insight of *prajñā* reveals the unique particularity, rather than an abstract generality, of an object. Unlike the mental knowledge, in which there is an opposition between the object and the subjectivity of the mind, an opposition that inevitably leads to sorrow, the insight of *prajñā* born of sustained vision of discernment is said to be the deliverer. This insight can pertain to to any object, large or small, far or near; and any time, past, present or future, for it is without time-sequence, present everywhere at once, like light in Physics.

The three inner limbs of Yoga, namely, *dhāranā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*, together constitute what is called *saṃyama* (discipline, constraint, gathering). It is the application of *saṃyama* to any object which leads the direct perception of it because in that state the mind is like a transparent jewel which takes on the true colour of the object with which it fuses (*Yoga Sūtra* 1:41). The special attention which prevails in the state of *saṃyama* can be brought to bear on any aspect of *prākṛiti* which encompasses all that can be an object of perception, however subtle.

THE NATURAL SCIENCE OF YOGA:

The basic research method of the science of nature according to Yoga is to bring a completely quiet mind, and to wait without agitation or projection, letting the object reveal itself in its own true nature, by colouring the transparent mind with its own colour. This science is further extended by the principle of analogy and isomorphism between the macrocosmos and the microcosmos which is the human organism, so that self-knowledge is at the same time a knowledge of the cosmos. An example of this isomorphism is to be found in in the *Yoga Darshana Upanishad* (4:48-53) where the external tīrtha (sacred ford, place of pilgrimage, holy water) is considered inferior to the tīrtha in the body, and external mountains and other places are identified with the various parts of the organism: "The Mount Meru is in the head and Kedara in your brow; between your eyebrows, near your nose, know, dear disciple, that Varanasi stands; in your heart is the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna..."

A large number of aphorisms in the *Yoga Sūtra* (3:16-53) describe the knowledge and the powers gained by attending to various objects in the state of *saṁyama*. For example, we are told that through *saṁyama* on the sun, one gains insight into the solar system, and by *saṁyama* on the moon, knowledge of the arrangement of the stars (*Yoga*

Sūtra 3:26-27). Similarly, many occult and extraordinary powers (siddhis) accrue to the yogi by bringing the state of samyama to bear upon various aspects of oneself: for example, by samyama on the relation between the ear and space, one acquires the divine ear by which one can hear at a distance or hear extremely subtle and usually inaudible sounds. Many other powers are mentioned by Patanjali; however, none of them are his main concern. There is no suggestion that there is anything wrong with these powers; no more is there a suggestion that there is something wrong with the mind. The point is more that the mind as it is is an inadequate instrument for gaining true knowledge; similarly, these powers, however vast and fascinating, are inadequate as the goal of true knowledge.

It is wrong to suggest that Yoga is not interested in the knowledge of nature, and is occupied only with self-knowledge. From the perspective of Yoga, this is an erroneous distinction to start with, simply because any self, however subtle, that can be known is a part of the great nature and is not distinct from it in substance or laws or principles. And the deepest Self, to which alone belongs true seeing and knowing, cannot be known; but It can be identified with. One can become that Self (Ātman, Purusha) and know with It, from Its level, with Its

clarity. In no way is *prākṛiti* considered unreal or merely a mental projection; she is very real, and though she can overwhelm the mind with her dynamism and charms and veil the truth from it, yet in her proper place and function she exists in order to serve the real Person (*Puruṣa*).

However, it is certainly true that the procedures, methods, attitudes and perceptions involved in Yoga are radically different from those in modern science, as are the aims of the two types of knowledge⁴. In a summary way, one can say that in contradistinction to modern science the knowledge in Yoga is a third eye knowledge, transformational in character, without violence to the object of its investigation; it is a knowledge by participation rather than by standing apart or against the object, and is ultimately for the sake of true seeing and the corresponding freedom.⁵

YOGA, PRĀNA AND OI:

Proper breathing plays an extremely important function in Yoga. The quality of breathing in a person is intimately and directly related with his inner state, as is apparent from even a superficial observation of

oneself. Traditional appreciation of this fact is reflected in all ancient, particularly scriptural, languages, in which the words for spirit, breath and air are either the same or very close to each other. This is, for example, true in Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Hebrew, Arabic and Greek. One of the eight limbs of classical Yoga is *prānāyāma*, which involves a training in right breathing. *Prāna*, which is translated as breath, is in fact the whole subtle energy of life, connecting mind with consciousness. *Prāna* is said to be present everywhere at all times. In Indian thought *Prāna* is equated with *Purusha* and *Ātman* and with the cosmic essence and with *Brahman*. It is the vital energy making anything alive, the quality of being corresponding to the quality of *Prāna*.

Even at the most ordinary level of physical culture, tremendous feats of strength are accomplished by people who are able to control their breath. However, it is important to emphasize that to the extent *Prāna* comes closer and closer to the Spirit (*Purusha*, *Pneuma*), it cannot be manipulated or controlled from below, by the mind or the body. What one can do and needs to do is to allow the mind and the body to be pervaded by the subtle *Prāna*, which by itself will bring about an alchemical transformation of the organism making it more and more

sensitive. Thus, in the final analysis, it is less a matter of controlling the Prāna and more a matter of being controlled by Prāna. Therein lies the chief difficulty of making a scientific study of Prāna: what can be studied by the mind in the modern scientific mode is only that which can in some senses be manipulated and controlled by the mind, and is thus below the level of the mind.⁶ In the presence of something higher than itself, the mind needs to learn how to be quiet and listen.

Another remark needs to be made about the various practices of Yoga: what is below cannot coerce what is above. One cannot force higher consciousness or Spirit by any manipulation of the body or the breath. A right physical posture or moral conduct may aid internal development but does not determine it or guarantee it; more often the external behaviour reflects the internal development. For example, a person does not necessarily become wise by breathing or thinking in a particular way; he breathes and thinks in that way because he is wise.

From what I can gather and understand about the notion of Qi in the Chinese, Korean and Japanese traditions, it strikes me as very close to that of Prāna in the Indian thought, with a similar range of breadth

and subtlety, as well as similar difficulty of explication in the usual scientific terms. However, I may be entirely mistaken, and we may be dealing with quite different notions which only partially overlap. I look forward to the clarity which I anticipate emerging from the Conference about the nature of Qi and its importance in Oriental thought.

ENDNOTES:

1. In this connection, see R. Ravindra, "Is Religion Psychotherapy? --An Indian View"; *Religious Studies*, 14, 389-397, 1978.

2. *Sharīra* here has the same import as flesh in the Gospel According to St. John for example in John 1:14 where it is said that "The Word became flesh and dwelt in us." In this connection, see R. Ravindra: *The Yoga of Jesus Christ in the Gospel According to St. John*; 1987, (in press). The important point, both in the Indian context and in John is that the spiritual element, called *Purusha*, *Ātman*, or *Logos (Word)* is above the whole of the psychosomatic complex of a human being, and is not to be identified with mind.

3. In this connection, see R. Ravindra: "Yoga: the Royal Path to Freedom," *Encyclopedic History of World Spirituality; Volume on Classical Indian Spirituality*; ed. K. Sivaraman; Crosscurrents/ Continuum, New York, 1987.

4. In this connection, see R. Ravindra, "Perception in Yoga and Physics," *Re-Vision: Jour. Consciousness and*

Knowledge, 3, 36-42, 1980.

5. The reader's attention is drawn to R. Ravindra, *Whispers from the Other Shore*, Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1984, especially Chapters 1, 2 and 6.

6. In this connection, see R. Ravindra: "Experiment and Experience: a Critique of Scientific Knowing," *Dalhousie Review*, 55, 655-674, 1975-76.