

SAMKHYA AND YOGA: TWO CLASSICAL HINDU "PATHS OF INSIGHT"

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The term *yoga* generally means "restraint," "discipline," and "meditational technique." In these senses, it constitutes an aspect of *almost all Indian religious systems* (including Jainism and Buddhism), not a particular system.

As a specific religious system within Hinduism, *Yoga* was, for a long time, an adjunct of the older *Samkhya* system. The theoretical part of Yoga, i.e. its philosophy, was derived almost entirely from Samkhya. Later, Yoga was restated in the *Yoga-sutras* of Patanjali, and was eventually recognized as a distinct *darshana* (one of the six systems of Hindu religious thought). Like Samkhya and the other *darshanas*, classical *yoga* is a system of **liberation** (*moksha*).

SAMKHYA

Samkhya is often called a "dualist" philosophy, because it asserts a fundamental difference between what Westerners tend to regard as matter and spirit. But one must bear in mind that the basic Samkhya categories of *purusha* and *prakriti* do not really correspond to the Western categories of "matter" and "spirit." We would be much closer if we called *purusha* "subject(s)" and *prakriti* "object(s)." *Purusha* corresponds fairly well to the Western concept of "soul," while *prakriti* simply means everything *other* than "soul." Samkhya also recognizes the multiplicity of subjects or souls: each individual is ultimately a separate subject. In their natural state, each *purusha* is totally isolated from each other and from everything else. But at the moment, all *purushas* find themselves merged with elements of the alien reality called *prakriti* (object), and fail to realize that they are essentially distinct from it. That confusion of *purusha* and *prakriti* constitutes the state of **bondage** (*samsara*). **Liberation** (*moksha*) consists in the unravelling of this temporal union by realizing that the subject or soul (*purusha*) is truly different from the object or non-soul (*prakriti*).

These concepts are somewhat reminiscent of the Gnostic religious system of Western antiquity. But while many Gnostics (including many Christian Gnostics) assumed "matter" to be nasty or actually evil, the Samkhya philosophy does not: *prakriti* may be alien to the *purusha*, but it is never regarded as nasty. And in Samkhya, ***prakriti*** includes not just matter, but also the mind, which evolved when *prakriti* came into contact with *Purusha*. *Prakriti* was originally inert and unconscious. It consists of three qualities or "strands" (*gunas*): goodness (*sattva*), energy (*rajas*), and dullness (*tamas*). At first, the three were in equilibrium, but that equilibrium was disturbed by the arrival of *Purusha*, and the world as we know it began to evolve from *Prakriti*. The first and the most sublime of the evolutes of *Prakriti* was Intelligence (*buddhi*). When the conscious light of *Purusha* fell on Intelligence, it enabled Intelligence to function as the agent of knowledge and consciousness on the empirical level. The great mistake — the cause of bondage — is that we normally take that "intelligence" to be the core of our subjectivity, i.e., our "self." But in reality, it is merely a product or evolute of nature, and of itself (i.e., without the presence of *purusha*) is actually not conscious at all. Right knowledge allows us to discriminate the true subject or soul (*Purusha*) from Object (*Prakriti*) and from all of its products. In Samkhya, this discriminatory knowledge is achieved through a purely intellectual process; later, in Yoga, it is achieved through a long process of mental, moral, and physical discipline.

YOGA

The central aim of yoga is to focus all of one's energies — moral, physical and mental — on one point. This goal is called *ekagrata*, "one-pointed-ness."

The Yoga technique has eight stages. The first, *Yama*, consists of the five "restraints": non-injury (*ahimsa* — a value that Hindus and Buddhists probably learned from the Jains); truthfulness; not stealing; sexual abstinence; and non-possession. Note that in true Yoga (as in virtually all Asian religious systems), the religious life rests firmly upon the moral life. **It is not possible even to begin the process of seeking liberation unless one is committed to treating others properly**. Note also that yoga is not compatible with sexual activity, or with the accumulation or use of property. Westerners who think that it might be neat to practice yoga should bear in mind that they are deluding themselves that they are truly doing so unless they are actually practicing the five restraints.

The second element of yoga, *Niyama*, is also ethical in nature: *Niyama* consists of the five "disciplines" — purity, serenity, austerity, study, worship of god (*Iavara* — a generic term for "deity"). Note that these elements of what we might call "personal ethics" complement the "social ethics" of the *Yama* stage. Note that it is not possible to begin meditation unless one has first learned self-discipline. Note also that Yoga is a theistic system: it assumes that one believes in god, worships god, and seeks god's help in the effort to lead the life of yoga. This fact, too, is one that many Westerners — anxious for a "fresh, new" religion unlike their own religions — try to ignore.

The next three stages in yoga are directly connected with meditation as such, while the last three, called *samyama*, form the very heart of the technique:

3. *Asana* — posture: onepointedness on the physical plane; reduces physical effort and allows long periods of concentration without physical discomfort.
4. *Pranayama* — the control of breathing: recognizes the influence of psychosomatic functions on breathing and vice versa; induces calm and helps concentration. Control is exercised at two levels:
 - a. one makes the three component actions of breathing (i.e., inhalation, retention, and exhalation) to be of equal duration;
 - b. one makes the duration of each of the three acts longer and longer.

5. *Pratyahara* — withdrawal of senses from the objects of sensation. The object is now internalized, i.e., known without the presence of the external object. This removes one of the greatest sources of distraction — the senses.
6. *Dharana* — concentration: total comprehension of the object of meditation.
7. *Dhyana* — meditation: prolonged concentration on the object thus comprehended.
8. *Samadhi* — enstasis (the opposite of ecstasy): total identification of the mental process with the object; total coincidence between the knowledge of the object and the object of knowledge. This state is invulnerable, i.e., closed to all external stimuli.

Samadhi is of two types, one lower and the other higher:

1. *Samadhi* with the object of meditation as a basis. Here one realizes the difference between this purified consciousness and the Soul (*purusha*). This stage is attained as the fruit of human effort. Liberation is not reached at this stage.

2. *Samadhi* without an object of meditation. Here, the mental flux caused by the intelligence (*buddhi*) is completely destroyed. This state is a total rupture of planes — a transcendence of the ordinary consciousness. It is not the fruit of action: it just happens, unprovoked. This experience constitutes liberation.

(Based on notes by Professor J. Patrick Olivelle, University of Texas)