

Aims of Yoga

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December 6, 1951

Tonight, let us review the aims of yoga. Yoga envisages two possible goals, as we have known it: one is the liberation of the consciousness principle; the other, the transformation of the nature. A third form may be that which we have been considering in the writings of Sri Aurobindo.

Let me repeat. There are two contrasting forms of the aim of yoga: one is that of the liberation of the consciousness principle; the other, that of the transformation of the nature. A third possible form is represented by Sri Aurobindo in as much as he conceives of an integration of both a liberation and a transformation. There is a problem in dealing with yoga with which we have to contend as Westerners which is not a problem for the Oriental, and that is this: an Oriental yoga is based upon certain assumptions or prerequisites that are native to the Oriental peoples. Western man approaching yoga from an Oriental standpoint faces this difficulty: that his prerequisites, his background, is different from the Oriental background. If, then, he takes the techniques, the instructions, of the Oriental with his different background and tries to apply them in his life he may very well find that he is using what has been called a right method but with the wrong man and with a result that would bring wrong results. Now, it is perfectly true that the aim of yoga is for all men. But it is not by any means necessarily true that the yogic means, the technique, or instruction, that is the fit adaptation to certain races or peoples is also fit for all people. Western man very often has gotten into trouble by trying to apply Oriental methods. So much is this the case that I long ago abandoned certain methods that were taught by a Hindu here that were essentially of the Tantric type. We found there were those who got into trouble. And as a result of my observation and study since, I've been forced to the conclusion that rarely can a Western man apply the specific means that are valid in general for the Oriental. Hence, yoga must be evolved for Western man in terms that fit his nature, his background, the features that are essential for him.

The particular value of Sri Aurobindo lies in this fact: that more than any other Oriental sage, he effects a crossing between Western man and Eastern man, and the methods that he teaches are therefore more apt to be adapted to the peculiar nature of Western man than any of the ancient Oriental teachings. Aurobindo is familiar with the intellectual and scientific background of Western man. Here, then, there is the possibility of techniques that are more universal in their availability than those which we have known heretofore.

There is one psychologist in the West who has been brought to the problem of yoga through his experience with his patients. I refer to Dr. Carl G. Jung. Certain points that he makes are very important; for instance, science is a cultural heritage of Western man which he cannot safely discard entirely in order to adapt himself to an Eastern yoga. Western man has a certain intellectual development that has been fundamental in his cultural experience which the Oriental of old did not know, and the Oriental of the

present day knows it, in so far as he does, by his learning from the West and perhaps imitating the West. But in any case, this intellectual scientific culture is not fundamental in the background of the Oriental culture.

Now, our scientific background has with its obvious advantages given us certain liabilities. We have reached a point where we seem to agree with certain positions that are affirmed in the Buddhist and other Oriental yogas. The position, namely, that formations, psychical formations are illusions. Now, while it's true that in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, for instance, which is a Buddhistic text, it is said that when the soul that has passed on has appear before him the gods of wrath and the beneficent gods, he should not regard them as real entities, but as essentially formations of his consciousness. And as a demonstration of his superiority to these gods, he should march right into the gods of wrath and not be attracted by the gods of beneficence, but cling wholly and alone to the Clear Light. But the Buddhist position here, as Dr. Jung points out, presupposes a natural belief in the gods—the gods being, in psychological terms, powers of the psyche. He has believed in them so strongly that they have become too great a power in his life. They have fulfilled that office, and the yogic move that must then be taken is towards a transcendence of the gods. In other words, one who has not first known the gods is in no position to transcend the gods. Western man imagines he has transcended the gods when in point of fact he has not. He has as yet to become acquainted with them. I thought I would read a couple of paragraphs from Jung's "Commentary" to *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, which is rather thought provoking.

Therefore it is better [Jung says] for Western man not to know too much about the secret insight of Eastern wise men, because it would then be a case of the "right means in the hands of the wrong man". Instead of again convincing himself that the daemon is an illusion, the Westerner ought to experience the reality of this illusion again. He ought to learn to recognize these psychic powers again, and not wait until his moods, nervous states, and insane ideas, make clear to him in the most painful possible way that he is not the only master in his house. The splitting tendencies are effective psychic personalities of a relative reality. They are real when they are not recognized as real and are therefore projected; relatively real when they are related to the conscious (in religions this stage leads to the forming of a cult); but they are unreal in so far as consciousness has begun to detach itself from its contents.¹

This whole paragraph is rather recondite. Take the statement, "They are real when they are not recognized as real and are therefore projected . . ." We have seen this happen in a terrific way in recent history. When, for instance, the Nazi Germans persecuted and destroyed vast numbers of Jews and heaped all sorts of abuse upon them, finding in them every evil thing, they were really projecting a psychical content outward onto the Jew, the other fellow. Just as the Jews had done the same thing in their relationship to the ritualistic scapegoat, and in other respects upon the gentile in his ancient and perhaps not so ancient history. In other words, we have powers or forces in our being, in our psyche,

¹ Carl G Jung, commentary to *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (New York: Causeway Books, 1971), 112.

as it were, that for most of us are unconscious powers. They produce effects upon us, and though we deny their existence, in fact all the more because we deny their existence, the power is real. But when we deny their existence, do not recognize them, we tend to project this quality from our own unconscious into the other fellow, into the object, and thus you get the persecution of peoples and of races when it's on a massive form. In that case, Jung says they are real when they are not recognized as real. They are relatively real when they have come into some connection with consciousness, the conscious side of man; that is, I mean, the ordinary relative conscious side of man. And, finally, when consciousness has been able to detach itself from all content, then they cease to be real. This means that we're dealing with a relative notion of reality and unreality—not an absolute unreality, not an absolute reality here, but with powers that are effective in certain conditions and on other conditions are no longer relevant.

Now, these powers do manifest in certain states of consciousness and particularly in certain transitions in the yogic practice. One has experiences in which he sees various formations, various beings. They may come to him in dreams; they may come in what is known as the hypnogogic vision—that's a waking state that is sleep-like; it's a semi-trance state—or they may come in a full *savikalpa samadhi* in which there's a severance of consciousness with this plane, but it's not a sleeping state. What are these? What sort of reality do they possess? The question calls for a rather complex answer. The formations in some cases may be no more than subjective formations, symbolical of something which is happening in one's own consciousness privately; but, the question arises, may they be also existences, super-physical existences beyond—some of them? The answer of Sri Aurobindo on this latter question would be positive. He would agree that sometimes they're only subjective, only have reference to the individual consciousness, therefore essentially symbolic; but at the same time, it is possible to contact beings of other planes in these states of consciousness. The question that has arisen often times is whether there are such metaphysical existences and how is one to prove whether there are such metaphysical existences?

I was prepared to have a questioning mind here tonight and intended to take up this question at some length. However, it is hardly necessary in connection with this group alone. The two views of that which is typically the non-Tantric Buddhist, and that which is represented by Sri Aurobindo and others like him, take a contrasting position here. The Buddhist denies this metaphysical order as being real; Aurobindo affirms that there is a metaphysical order that is real.

I've been spending some time in getting you acquainted with the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. As in the past we have devoted some time to the Buddhist teachings. I am not going to undertake to adjudicate between these two positions. I simply wish to present them with as much justice as I can. Our primary concern is with a philosophy and a technique that will lead on towards Realization, and philosophies that do contrast, nonetheless, can be effective means towards the Realization. For practical yoga, one does not have to decide which philosophic position is the truer. But it is important for us to come to a just appreciation of these different possibilities that grow out of states of Realization, for the standpoint of the Buddhist and the standpoint of Sri Aurobindo is in each instance grounded in profound Realizations.

The thought that has come to me in connection with this problem is that the ultimate nature or the nature of Ultimate Being is such that a number of different philosophic views, or a number of different portraits, can be true, in the sense of part truths. It is as though one approached this ultimate reality from one or another of different perspectives, and from these different perspectives it appeared differently; and therefore, we are not forced to draw the conclusion that the one or the other of two contrasting philosophies, yogic philosophies, must be false. But, on the other hand, we are free to choose that philosophy which fits in with our individual sense of truth.

Jung goes on to say, after the last sentence or fraction of a sentence:

. . . but they are unreal in so far as consciousness has begun to detach itself from its contents.

However, the latter is only the case when life has been lived so exhaustively, and with such devotion, that no more unfulfilled life-duties exist, and when, therefore, there are no more desires which cannot be sacrificed without hesitation. In a word, this detachment of consciousness can only begin when nothing remains to prevent an inner superiority to the world. It is futile to lie to oneself about this. Wherever one is caught, one is still possessed; and, when one is possessed, it means the presence of something stronger than oneself. (“Truly from thence will’t thou ne’er come forth until thou hast paid the last farthing.”) It is not a matter of unconcern whether one calls something a “mania” or a “god”. To serve a mania is detestable and undignified, but to serve a god is full of meaning, and rich in possibilities because it means yielding to a higher, invisible, and spiritual being. The personification enables one to see the relative reality of the autonomous partial-system, which, in turn, makes its assimilation possible and depotentializes the forces of external life. When God is not recognized, selfish desires develop, and out of this selfishness comes illness.²

Perhaps you can see part of the bearing of the yoga of surrender, surrender to the Divine. One must first find the god as real before he is ready to effect the detachment of consciousness from its contents. In other words, Western man is not ready to take the step of detachment of consciousness from contents, but must first surrender to the god, to the Divine. With the surrender to the Divine, the Divine becomes real to man.

Yoga teaching assumes the recognition of gods to be something granted. Its secret instruction is therefore only intended for him whose light of consciousness is capable of freeing him from the powers of life, in order to enter into the ultimate undivided unity, into the “centre of emptiness”, where “dwells the god of utmost emptiness and life”, as our text says. “To hear such a teaching is difficult to attain in thousands of aeons.” Obviously, the veil of *Maya* cannot be lifted by a mere decision of reason, but demands the most thoroughgoing and wearisome preparation

² Ibid., 112-113.

consisting in the right payment of all debts to life. For, as long as one is in any way held by the domination of *cupiditas*, the veil is not lifted, and the heights of a consciousness, empty of content and free of illusion, are not reached, nor can any trick nor any deceit bring it about. It is an ideal that can only be completely realized in death. Till then, there are real, and relatively real, figures of the unconscious.³

Right there, we're having a contribution to a Western yoga, in those words, and in fact in the body of all of the "Commentary" in this book.

The question as to whether there is a metaphysical reality is one in which I've placed a good deal of thought. Let us look at things this way. What do we mean by a metaphysical reality? This, I think, is the answer: it implies that corresponding to subtle psychical experiences there are super-physical existents—beings, in other words, fields, relationships. In our ordinary relationship to this world, we have our shared experience. That exists in our minds, in our individual consciousness, and in a measure in our collective consciousness. The only contact we have with anything is actually something that's already in our consciousness. The objects around us exist for us as sense impressions, and they fill up a complex of those sense impressions, but all of that is something in our consciousness. It is our custom and our habit to view these elements in our consciousness as corresponding to a physical existence out beyond. Now, the affirmation of a metaphysical actuality or reality is doing the same thing with respect to subtle experiences, subtle states of consciousness. There's no question about the actuality of these states of consciousness because they are experienced. Do they correspond to a metaphysical reality beyond them? It's just as reasonable to suppose that they do as it is to suppose that our experiences here correspond to a physical reality beyond them.

Now, there are four possible positions that one can take here: one can say that there is a real existent corresponding to our physical sense experiences, but that there is no real existent corresponding to the experiences of dreams, of hypnogogic visions, or of *samadhi*; or we can imagine another position which would affirm that there is no physical reality corresponding to these sense experiences, but that there is a metaphysical reality corresponding to the subtle experiences; third, we may take the position that affirms that there is a physical reality and a metaphysical reality corresponding to experiences of the two types; and fourth, we may deny reality of a physical existence or a metaphysical existence corresponding to these experiences, affirming simply that the experiences and the consciousness which bears them is all that there is.

Now, three of those positions have been maintained. The materialist maintains the first one. I don't know whether anybody or any group or class has ever maintained that there are metaphysical existents but that there are no physical existents. I don't know whether anyone has taken that position; but if I had to choose between the two I'd be more inclined to affirm a metaphysical existent myself than a physical existent, that is, if I had to choose between those two positions. The position of Sri Aurobindo is one that affirms that there is an existent corresponding to physical experience and an existent corresponding to our subtle experience. And the Shunya Buddhist maintains that there is

³ Ibid., 113.

neither a physical existent nor a metaphysical existent, but only a consciousness, *Vijnana*, which supports the play of states of apparent formation that have no substance in them. Therefore, this form of Buddhist philosophy is called an “emptiness” philosophy. It’s empty of substance—substance being equivalent to affirming an existent; the only reality being a flux in consciousness. I don’t know whether you get the subtlety of this distinction here. This would present in rather strong terms the difference in view between Aurobindo and the Shunyata Buddhist.

There is something powerful for practical yoga in the Buddhist position. I know that if one starts to wipe away all value from experience, treat it as just empty and without significance, just a play which you may ignore or participate in but carefully avoid taking seriously, view it as having no effect upon you, just drop it off, let it go, attach no value to the meaning of evolution in the developmental process, either in the gross or the subtle sense, one succeeds in doing that radically, he can relatively quickly and with suddenness experience the detachment of consciousness from its content. And when consciousness is so detached, it is as though the whole of formation was just erased and just dissolved, and here lies simply an illimitable field of pure consciousness, utterly complete in every sense with every possible potential in it, but in its essence, unconcerned with either the presence or the absence of formation. But quite clearly, that’s something that appeals only to certain temperaments. It is feasible only for those who have, as Dr. Jung has pointed out, become superior to all essential desire, reached the point where he no longer feels that anything is essential to him that experience can give, where he can touch experience or let it go with ease, no longer looks upon it as a guru or teacher—and I mean all kinds of experience—but just rests back on the pure consciousness itself.

Now, this thing, this can be experienced—realized. Properly, we should not use the word ‘experience’ in connection with this at all, and for that reason I invented a word which I called “introception.” It’s a new way of consciousness, or a new movement in consciousness which couldn’t properly be called experience, couldn’t properly be called reasoning or conceptual cognition at all, but just disassociation from all content, and one is back in the illimitable infinity of a pure consciousness.

Now, that sort of thing isn’t a step-by-step process. When the break comes, it’s sudden and radical. And that’s why the Sixth Patriarch emphasized the point of its suddenness.⁴ There are no steps or stages really from formation to pure, detached consciousness. You’re at one time in the state of consciousness concerned with formation and then instantaneously detached. It’s like a shift from a finite order to an infinite, instantaneously; just an overturn—a radical overturn when that happens.

But that kind of yoga is not concerned with transformation of the nature. When we’re dealing with transformation of the nature, we enter the field of evolution, the process of becoming something different. Yoga in this sense serves a different kind of end. And it’s not impossible to conceive that the two yogas may be brought together so that the one who has realized the detachment of consciousness may again reassume connection with experience and formation, entering from above, as it were, and playing

⁴ Dwight Goddard, ed., *A Buddhist Bible* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1938), 547-552.

with formation as a sort of *lila*, as a play, not a serious business, and then undertake the task of transformation of the nature. It's also conceivable that an individual who approaches yoga first of all from an interest in transformation may, after he has progressed to a certain critical point, also realize the detachment of consciousness from its content. I think for most individuals, transformation of the nature is a more understandable and a more wished for achievement. When you're dealing with transformation of nature, the progress is step-by-step. It's not a sudden, one moment overturn, but a progressive advance. You see, if consciousness is detached from its content, it means that the consciousness principle withdraws from the nature, the *adhar*, and it's no concern of it whether that nature is defective or not. It just severs from it—the nature being viewed as irrelevant; it's severed from it. Traditionally the individual who's achieved that detachment continues correlated with the body until the body runs down. He doesn't try to perfect the body, or the vital, or the mental, to use Aurobindo's psychology, but just detaches himself from it as much as possible and lets it run down. When that body runs down, there's no compulsion to make him reincarnate again.

But if one is concerned with transformation of the nature, then there is a progressive making over of the mind, and of the vital, and ultimately of the physical, so that they may become fit vehicles, fit instruments, of a higher power—the higher power being that which we call the Divine. And this, note, is a long labor necessarily. We're dealing with something that is necessarily in the time field because it's in the range of evolution—a space and time process. We have a perfecting of the nature until finally it becomes ideally a perfect instrument, or at least so we envisage the possibility. Aurobindo so envisages it.

Now, it's entirely possible that one who deals with the transformation of the nature, has followed that way, has a compensation for his laborious working with detail, may know numerous moments or periods of spiritual and other subtle experiences which may not come the way of the one who follows the other path, and which indeed the one who follows the other path would try to avoid because he's going after only one thing—the radical turnover. If I were to put this question to all people who could understand the conception of yoga, which really would you rather do, dissociate consciousness from content, be utterly unconcerned thereafter with process, of perfecting, or would you rather go step-by-step in the evolution, perfecting the nature—that is the physical, the vital, and the mental—transforming it, not simply perfecting it, transforming and perfecting, until it becomes divinized, that is, a vehicle or an instrument of a divine being, that divine being being also your own true person. In the first yoga there is no place, no ultimate place, for the notion of person—person being a concept valid within the field of relations. In the second yoga, the person, in a divine sense, remains permanent.

I have represented the picture of the two contrasting goals and the suggestion of their possible synthesis in the two ways: first, of one who has achieved the dissociation of consciousness and then voluntarily returns to working with the nature; and the one who has worked first upon the transformation of the nature and ultimately received the dissociation of consciousness from its content.

After we've had the offering and perhaps sung again, I'll throw the meeting open for questions.

Wolff: Have you any question?

Participant: One word I'd like you to clarify in my mind, yogi, and that is the word 'Tantric'.

Wolff: Oh, the word 'Tantric'. What does it mean? Yes, I thought that was known to everyone. The Tantras are those forms of yoga which make particular use of *mantram*, *artha*, *raja*, and in general are known as the *laya* yoga. They concentrate upon the raising of the *kundalini* in the spine, the awakening of the various *chakras*. They're interested in life here, as well as life in subtle planes, are concentrated more in the field of formation than that of liberation or the detachment of consciousness; although they do envisage in their theoretical statement, the possibility of a full liberation. The Tantra is extremely ritualistic in its stronger development. It is to be found in some forms of Tibetan Buddhism, but probably its strongest development is in the Indian Tantra. They are very flowery in their language sometimes. They deal with methods that are peculiarly not available to Western man. I'd say to Western man avoid the Tantra. All sorts of postures they take—making the body take certain positions: standing on the head and so on, intoning *mantra*, heavily, not occasionally, dealing with very many intricate techniques.

Now, for instance it's said to be in the *manipura*, the *chakra* in the general region of the solar plexus, I think it is the *mantram* Rama, if I remember correctly, and you can intone your particular *mantram*, with a particular breath, sitting in a particular position, and awaken a force in that particular *mantram*—in that particular *chakra*. All right. If you're unsuccessful you're lucky. If you're successful in awakening a force you may get into a psychical conflict, something that can just tear you to pieces and you may wind up in Agnews. It's a good way to go to the asylum. I'd say to Western man, leave that alone. It's something never to be practiced without being under the immediate personal supervision of a competent guru, and I think Indian Tantrics who come over into this country have made a mistake—assuming that they have been honest and sincere—in trying to inculcate such practices in Western man. I am strongly opposed to Western man tampering with such things. They're not essential to the fundamental yoga. It's not required for the yoga of surrender and it's not required for the yoga of detachment of the consciousness principle.

Now, Aurobindo takes a position that's intermediate between the Tantra and the Mayavadin or the Buddhist position—very close to the center between the two; a little bit over, I should say, more closer to the Tantra than he is to the other because of his emphasis of the qualities of the devotion and action, and rather suppressing the knowledge feature, giving it a kind of a subordination to these other two. I'd put him a little bit to the Tantric side of the center, but not very far from the center.

Any other questions?

Participant: Does one have to follow the path of integral yoga to effect a complete transformation or should he follow the direct path and then comes back and practice integral yoga?

Wolff: He could follow the path toward detachment of consciousness, the *jnana* yoga, and return. Aurobindo says that he himself went through *Nirvana* first.

Participant: By going the way of the senses, one would not be in danger of being caught in the intermediate zone, would he?

Wolff: That is true. Remember in that quotation from the intermediate zone that I gave three Sundays ago from Sri Aurobindo? At the end, he spoke of the fact that not all paths involved going through this intermediate zone. But if you don't go through the intermediate zone, of course you don't have the powers that come from that experience. See, one may attain Liberation and Enlightenment and have practically no powers, no occult powers at all. Occult powers are not necessarily at all connected with Realization. They may be or they may not be. Realization first is a better base for the entering into the mastery of occult powers; but one may strive for occult powers without even striving for Realization. They belong, really, to two different orders. There is usually some spontaneous capacity that breaks forth in the individual as the result of a Realization, but large mastery of powers is not the direct consequence even of the loftiest Realization—your loftiest Realization being the power to detach consciousness from all content.

Participant: . . . the two descriptions you gave, are you saying that the last, the transformation of the nature belongs to the Western man more than the others?

Wolff: I'd say that they probably will appeal to Western man more than the detachment of consciousness. And I should say that that probably is his way. He's *rajasic*. He's very *rajasic*. A *rajasic* nature has to go the way that's feasible for a *rajasic* nature. He shouldn't abandon—he can't suddenly abandon his action. But he can devote his action to the Divine.

Participant: It seems to me like it would be a fuller, a richer way . . .

Wolff: Aurobindo says it's very much richer. Now, that brings us into a question, and I think the answer involves difference of temperament. Aurobindo, again and again, speaks of an abstract intellectual statement as being dry and lacking dramatic detail and filling, and that where's there's a lot of filling, a lot of something like drama, or the correspondence of it, that you get in *Savitri* for instance, that is rich. Well, I was just thinking of its effect on me: when I go through all those details, I feel a weariness from the great mass of them. I like to take a short concise statement that has an infinite number of applications—substantiality is inversely proportional to ponderability; an infinity of cases covered in a few words. And that has the effect of richness in my consciousness. It's the richness you get from mathematics. It's not a dramatic richness at all. It doesn't seem dry to me; but it does seem dry, evidently, to Sri Aurobindo. Well, now I think we have a matter of temperament here we've got to take into account. I would hate to have to go into that enormous elaboration of detail you get in Indian architecture, dealing images of persons with twenty arms upon them and perhaps a thousand arms sticking out there, whew! Oh, so much detail, how tired you get. If you can get to that thing that can be—anything, a simple concept that has an infinity of particulars under it—you sweep through it. Well that's the mathematical type of mind, if you can get that. Well, there's a beauty in that, and I've known that beauty. And to me that beauty has cheapened all other beauty. It may not be that other people would feel the same way if they even saw that beauty. It's not dramatic, not at all dramatic. It's not at all sensuous, even in the highest sense of sensuality. It's another kind of beauty. It's a quite subtle beauty.

Participant: It's majestic.

Wolff: Majestic? Well, yeah, but it has no royal robes on it—no purple robes. In one way it's austere, but I know it can grip your consciousness in a very deep way. Well, the only answer I can see is that we have different temperaments and we have to go according to our temperament; and I don't know that these very complex zones would hold me very long—too much like a jungle. But some people—where I might say jungle, another person would say rich. So, you have a right to choose your own way, choose your own valuation; and that's probably determined by what you are essentially in your own basic temperament.

Any other questions?

Participant: I'd like to have a small share of those people that . . . a thousand arms on my team. It . . . through a lot of work.

Wolff: Well, yes. Yes, you can get through a lot of work, and that's what it does represent; it's a capacity to get through a lot of the manifestation and expression. Now, you've got to get the view that this expressing is a *lila*, a play, a delight—just simply doing it. Well, there is another expression in that that all “embracingness” of a simple formula. It's powerful, too. It's powerful in its way, and it's another kind of divinity. I like that kind of expression all right. But the sensuous manifoldness, intricacies, and so forth, act as a barrier as though it is a mess between you and it. It's like a lot of stuff in your room that hides the beautiful lines of the room. I want to puke it out; to spit it all out so that I can get those clear, sharp, pure lines. Now, there's a difference. I don't think that I am going to change that very much because it's too fundamental and too natural. I'd hate to have to. However, you don't have to go that way if you're not made that way.

Well, I think that's enough for tonight. Let's close with the closing words:

Let there be peace within the universe.

Let the power of the warriors of light be made manifest.

Let wisdom guide us and love protect us throughout our lives.

Peace be with you.

And with you, peace.