

Review of and Reflections on *Yoga and Psychotherapy*

Part 1 of 4

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Not long ago we received through the mail a book entitled *Yoga and Psychotherapy: The Evolution of Consciousness* written by three men as follows: Swami Rama, Rudolph Ballentine, M.D., and Swami Ajaya whose Western name is Allan Weinstock, PhD. I am deeply impressed with this contribution to the subject of yoga as being correlated with Western psychotherapy. It brings about an introduction of the subject to the Western mind in terms that are likely to be acceptable. I would recommend it to any student of the subject as a serious and able work. It would rate as the most important contribution to the subject that we have received since the publication of *Pathways Through to Space* and *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*. There is no question about the ability of the men who have produced this work.

However, there are points which I would like to make concerning features that fail to cover the whole of the subject of yoga. The work can give the impression that yoga psychology is essentially related to pathology; and while I recognize this as a possible approach to the subject, it is in many ways an unhappy one, for the association of yoga and the objectives of yoga with pathology introducing a denigrating effect that is far from satisfactory. No doubt, part of the meaning of yoga is found in the conception of becoming at last wholly well, wholly sound, wholly pure, and it is no doubt true that many are led to the Way because of illness, either in a physical, a psychological, or a moral sense, or because the impact of suffering has become too severe. But this is not the only way that one may be led to the yogic search. Indeed, he may prosper in this world; he may have good health; he may be essentially happy in so far as happiness is possible in the *Sangsara*; he may have everything aiding him on to a career that he would love. And yet, because he found that there was intimation of a greater Truth than that known to the dwellers in *Sangsara*, he may start upon the journey, not from a base of essential pain, but from a base of relative happiness. Yoga is not merely therapy, although therapy is one of its incidental effects. Yoga is an Awakening, ultimately, to the final Truth; and the orientation to Truth as the goal, whatever the cost may be, is a possible cause for one's entering upon the path. No doubt, the latter course would correspond to that which Sri Aurobindo has called the "Sunlit Way," the path of minimum suffering and of largest happiness while on the journey. But, although this may not be possible for a given *sadhaka*, yet whatever the cause, whatever it is that may lead him to the Way, though it is profound suffering, yet the Way is the ultimate objective that leads to the highest possibility available for all men. Wise is he who follows close to the carrot which proceeds before him and who lingers not on the Way, for if he does so linger, he will know the lash of the drover behind him; and that drover may well be a case of psychiatric illness.

The writers of this book do not handle the whole of yoga, as their purpose is limited. I find two forms handled with considerable elaboration, namely, the Tantra yoga and the yoga of Patanjali. There is a brief but inadequate consideration of the yoga of Shankara. I find no treatment of the *Trimarga* of the *Bhagavad Gita*, consisting of the yoga of knowledge, the yoga of action, and the yoga of devotion. Further, there is no development of the *Dhyana* and *Arya* yogas of *The Voice of the Silence*, a Buddhist *sutra*.

Throughout the text there is a continual emphasis of the idea that yoga involves an *expansion* of consciousness. This is undoubtedly true as the ultimate outcome, but there appears to be a sense in which this expansion is understood with which I cannot agree. It seems to be understood in the sense of expansion while moving in the direction in which the consciousness of the *Sangsara* is oriented, namely, a movement toward the object. Here I use the term ‘object’ as the equivalent to *Sangsara* and the universe of objects of Shankara. The development or expansion of consciousness in this direction is toward an objective position, not a subjective one. To bring this point into clearest focus, I shall read a quotation from the volume itself. This to be found on p. 284 and is as follows:

This process of growth moves ultimately toward the higher states of consciousness which have been the subject of the most respected and, at the same time, most misunderstood writings in literature, philosophy, and even religion. The higher levels of consciousness are the most difficult to understand because they are furthest from the ordinary, everyday awareness. But they are neither “other-worldly” nor beyond the reach of ordinary men. On the contrary, they are seen to be simply the outcome of an orderly process of growth in which each of us is, at least to some extent, involved.¹

There is nothing in this to indicate that the movement is other than that which is common to ordinary men, a movement toward the object, towards an expansion in the objective sense. With this position, I must demur; to make my demurral clear, I’ll refer to my own personal background.

In former years, I experimented with different yogas, including the practice of breath control, and so forth, and had no success whatsoever. In fact, the work with breath control, between the years of 1910 and 1915 resulted in a weakening of the automatic, unconscious control of the breath, and I learned through a physician who had experience with those who had engaged in such experimentation that this can even lead to a state in which one when he goes to sleep stops breathing and enters a coma.

And incidentally, this brings up the question of how far it is wise to tamper with the autonomic system. No doubt, yogic power exists which would enable one to bring about a conscious control of functions normally governed by the autonomic system, but if this is not done with extreme care and understanding, there seems to be the possibility that the autonomic control will deteriorate as a conscious practice is taken over. It would

¹ Swami Rama, Rudolph Ballentine, and Swami Ajaya, *Yoga and Psychotherapy: The Evolution of Consciousness* (Glenview, Ill.: Himalayan Institute, 1976), 284.

be a sad condition if one could control consciously the operation of the heart at the price of losing the unconscious operation of it.

But continuing with my report, I found nothing that worked until I ultimately discovered Shankara, and there I found the yoga that was really effective. Now, this, of course, may be an experience that is relative to psychological type, a conception introduced by Dr. Jung; but, nonetheless, the discipline here is the opposite of an expansion of consciousness in the sense of the normal movement in the *Sangsara*. On the contrary, it is a yoga that involves the radical depreciation of the objective order. It is treated as only a *maya*, a thing of little value, not much more than a phantasmagoria which controls and enslaves mankind. The movement in the yoga of Shankara is toward the Self, the subject to consciousness. It implies what we call in Western psychology radical introversion, a rejection of the extraverted attitude, a radical depreciation of it, an attitude that reaches a point of an extreme *vairagya* or disgust, as is indicated by his description of the physical body as only a sack made of sinew, skin, and bones; and filled with odore, urine and phlegm—a description particularly designed to regard it with an attitude of rather extreme disgust. On the other hand, there is a strong positive orientation to the subjective pole of consciousness which, in a way, may be interpreted as a radical, single-pointed contraction of consciousness involving a concentration of all energies upon the smallest possible area until finally, by sheer force, as it were, a breakthrough is established. Now, the result of the breakthrough is a sudden Realization of an enormous expansion of consciousness, but in a different sense from that which one would achieve by a greater and greater acquaintance with the objective pole of consciousness.

Now, when the authors say that the orientation of yoga is not “other-worldly,” it certainly is not true with respect to this yoga. It is an orientation to a withdrawal from the world to consciousness of a totally other order. In Shankara’s language it is called *Moksha*. The Buddhists would call it *Nirvana*. The characteristic of the breakthrough to that consciousness is a state not concerned with objects, but of the most extreme delight and inner richness, and a condition that involves a sense of maximum self-control and control of the nature. This, I submit, is the most extreme possible other-worldliness beside which the other-worldliness of the popular religions in which there is pictured a life concerned with objects is only a childish domain in which the heaven world is nothing more than a subtle kind of *Sangsara*. The supreme goal of Shankara’s yoga is Liberation, not the acquisition of powers or *siddhis*. It is the attainment of that state where the *nirvanic* withdrawal is possible and all suffering ceases. All obligation to involuntary incarnation no longer applies, though it does appear that the power of voluntary incarnation does remain. But this is not the final word in yoga. There is a stage beyond this, something which apparently Shankara did not know. But before we enter into a discussion of the stage in yoga beyond Liberation, let us return to the subject of *siddhis* and of the proper attitude towards these.

Shankara warns, and so does *The Voice of the Silence*, against all intriguery with the powers that are the incidental fruits along the path of yoga. These include the power to control the autonomic system so that there can be demonstrations of control of the heartbeat and of the other functions. No doubt, this is very impressive to the physiologist and the medical materialist—in fact, so much so, that it is entirely possible that proof of this power by demonstration could drive the latter into a psychotic condition—but the

literature tells us of many, many other powers. But the reason for the avoidance of interest in these, of putting forth the specific effort for the breaking out of these powers, is that it drains the energy that is needed for the drive to the kingly power involved in Liberation. The interdiction of concern with these powers applies only to those who are on the Way, not to those who have attained the fruit of Liberation. It is then possible, if the interest is so inclined, to return to the development of these minor *siddhis*. One may consciously control the functions governed by the autonomic nervous system; one may without aid of the post, deliver letters upon the pillow of the recipient; or one may feed 5,000 with three loaves and five fishes. None of these are miracles or violations of law, but simply mastery of subtler aspects of law in nature. But all this is only of incidental value. Liberation is the supreme goal, the supreme desirable objective, and he who attains this may find that all else is added unto him, if not in actuality, then as a potential.

The step beyond the yoga of Liberation is to be found, so far as I know, only in certain *sutras* of the Buddhists. It is implied in the vow of Kwan-Yin which runs this way, “Never will I seek nor receive private, individual salvation; never will I enter into final peace alone; but forever, and everywhere, will I strive for the redemption of all creatures.” It is further the central message of that Buddhist *sutra* known as *The Voice of the Silence* where the pilgrim on the Way is urged not to retreat into the glorious Realization of *Nirvana*, but to sacrifice that glory in the service of all creatures. In the words of *The Voice of the Silence*, it says, “Do not make of that stream which flows from Sumeru a private pond, but make of yourself a channel whereby it can flow to the needs of all creatures.”² But what is suggested here is known as the Great, the even Supreme, Renunciation, where one, having through a struggle perhaps of several lifetimes, has at last reached the supreme goal of utter felicity, and then is urged to renounce this fruit for himself that he may bring it to others. It is said to be a renunciation of supreme austerity; and that, indeed, it is. This austerity, when one has had a glimpse of the utter glory and supreme knowledge, is far worse than the austerities of the ascetics. The living naked, the dependence upon a begging bowl for sustenance, the lying on beds of thorns pointed upward, the smearing oneself with cow dung, is only relatively a childish austerity—in fact, one that is not necessary.

But, what is implied by the Supreme Renunciation? Ultimately, if one continues on this Way there can be a still vaster, more commanding, breakthrough. And here is, so far as we know, the final yoga, though there may be a still vaster Beyond. The *sadhaka* may find himself transported in consciousness to a state which is objective with respect with the inmost state, a state of neutrality between the objective and the subjective, between the *sangsaric* and the *nirvanic*, between the object and the subject—a sort of zero-point which could well suggest indifference. I called it the *High Indifference*. In this state one finds himself in a neutral position between the suffering of *Sangsara* on one

² H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1928), 72:

Would'st thou thus dam the waters born on Sumeru? Shalt thou divert the stream for thine own sake, or send it back to its prime source along the crests of cycles?

If thou would'st have that stream of hard-earn'd knowledge, of Wisdom heaven-born, remain sweet running waters, thou should'st not leave it to become a stagnant pond.

side and the inconceivable delight of the *nirvanic* on the other—a position of power. Here one is not locked in to either the *sangsaric* consciousness nor the *nirvanic* consciousness.

The Buddhistic *sutras* tell of a distinction between a fixed or locked-in *Nirvana* and the non-fixed *Nirvana*, a *nirvanic* state that may be entered and left at will—manifestly a commanding position. This state is one in which the deliberate entering into the experience of those who dwell suffering in the *sangsaric* zone would be as easy as entering into the state of the highest bliss. It is a position which is supreme above both suffering and delight. One may find when induced into this Consciousness that the object—consisting of all the world about, the sidereal universe and the domain of our common interests—is absorbed and dissolved into the Consciousness, and also, the Self, the subject to consciousness, is also absorbed, and only Consciousness remains—a Consciousness which is not centered in a Self and is not concerned with content. And here, so far as I know, is the supreme possibility available to man in this time.

And there is evidence that this is known and recorded in the literature. One can find it in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* under that name *Rig-pa* which contrasts to *shes-rig* which is our common relative consciousness concerned with phenomena. He also can find it in *The Secret Doctrine* under the heading of Absolute Consciousness, which, there it is said, is a state which is indistinguishable from our unconsciousness though it is consciousness. And for one who has reached this state, what does he know? He knows, first of all, with absolute immediacy and certainty that Consciousness is. Second, he knows less unequivocally that the Self is, that I am. And then, at a still lower level, at a lesser degree of certainty, he knows that objects exist contained within the Consciousness. And beyond that, in a purely practical sense, he may be inclined to believe or pretend to believe that there is such a thing as a non-conscious universe which exists, though in his heart of hearts he knows that that is a delusion.

Let us now consider what has transpired in this process from the psychological, or rather, from the metapsychological standpoint—not from the standpoint of real meaning and value which are really the concern of philosophy and of religion in the deepest sense of the word. First of all, there is a rejection of the normal movement of consciousness toward the object, toward external concerns—the way of the man in the world—to a radical, conscious introversion—a movement towards the subject. This is a process of contraction and concentration. It is in its first stage an experience of deprivation symbolized by the journey through the desert, as I have done in the poetic statement called “The Supreme Adventure.”³ This is an experience of extreme poverty in consciousness, a possible domain of despair, but when successfully continued results in a breakthrough where there is a sudden, instantaneous expansion which cannot be covered by the conception of “growth,” but by the idea of a finite state immediately becoming an infinite state—without growth, but as at once full and complete. And then along with it, a sense that this is the familiar domain, that this is the true home, that through all the journey of necessity in the *sangsaric* or external world of consciousness, one has been an exile, a stranger, and that at last he has returned to the domain which inwardly he always knew with full perfection.

³ See the audio recording “Abstract of the Philosophy,” part 12, for this poem read by the author.

The concept of “growth” is not valid here as it applies to the affairs and states in the external world. One does not reach this state by a series of finite acquisitions, but, it is a step from a finite zone, be it large or small, which is a distinction of no importance, but a step into the infinite from a finite condition. And then, in the second stage, the movement to the High Indifference is a second inversion, a movement outward to externality as compared with the inmost state, but reaching only the point of zero between the *sangsaric* and the *nirvanic*—a state of equilibrium and balance.

This process is a zigzag one. The final state compares with the second as does a second order of infinity. Here we must draw our figures from the mathematics of the transfinite as was developed by Cantor, where we have the conception of a hierarchy of transfinite numbers where the \aleph_0 (*aleph-null*) is infinitely transcended by \aleph_1 (*aleph-1*), and so on up the series— \aleph_1 (*aleph-1*) is equivalent to $\aleph_0^{\aleph_0}$ (*aleph-0* raised to the *aleph-0* power). This is the only figure I know that effectively expresses the transformation. All sensuous images fail; all finite conceptual ideas fail at this point. No finite number of steps in terms of finite acquisitions in consciousness could ever reach this goal in finite time. It is a radical transcendence from a finite order to a transfinite order. So, I must demur at the idea that this is simple expansion of consciousness by a finite aggregation.

Absolute assurance can be achieved only by absolute immediacy. Thus it is that one can know without per adventure of doubt that Consciousness is the most certain knowledge of all. In the domain of the *Sangara*, there is one discipline that reaches the highest point of a certainty, but it is much less than this absolute certainty. This is the discipline of pure mathematics—not applied mathematics, which might be called the discipline of allowed error or tolerance, but in the very conception of tolerance we have the elimination of the very essence of the pure mathematics. This, I submit, may serve as a prime yogic discipline. Many of the problems of learning how to concentrate, to keep out interfering factors—the wandering of the mind, the attraction of objects and the diversions that that affords—is effected by the discipline of mathematics itself. It does not involve the dull labors imposed by sitting in strained tied up postures such as the closed *padmasana*. It does not involve the counting of the breath, and so forth, and the engaging with dull and uninteresting things. But one can make a progress in mathematics only by concentration—which may reach to the utmost limit of concentration of which an individual is possible—and trains in absolute purity of thought. So, here is a domain of knowledge of relative assurance. I think of it as an Ariadne thread which if held firmly may lead one safely through the complicated maze of the *Sangara* so that he may emerge into security. But this knowledge is less than certain, for it is grounded upon certain apparently simple assumptions which are not themselves proven and not themselves a matter of absolute immediacy. And also, at its base there are many serious paradoxes.

Below this level, far below it, there is the domain of science—covering all of the disciplines from physics up to psychology—that operates upon a principle that involves many serious uncertainties, for empiric science operates on the principle of induction, whereby, universals are obtained, supposedly, by the observation of concrete particulars. But the step from the concrete particular to the supposed universal, known as the hypothesis, is essentially by a means of guessing. And in point of fact, no group of empiric observations imposes one particular theoretical construction. Just as by imposing

a series of conditions one may determine a curve, if he determines that the curve shall be of a second degree or of some specific degree; yet, there are an infinity of curves that would satisfy those conditions if we consider curves of still higher degrees. So, there is no empiric universalization or theory that is determinate. Therefore, empiric knowledge is essentially of only pragmatic value, not of ultimate theoretical value. Yet many individuals in the academic and scientific community build their faith upon this foundation, and it is a very shaky one indeed. The scientist may indeed learn from yoga, but they cannot teach it. They can contribute only language by which the knowledge which bursts forth from yogic attainment may be communicated.

As a final word concerning the thesis that yoga is not “other-worldly” and is therefore this-worldly in its orientation, I will say that this is clearly not so of the yoga of Shankara which is explicitly oriented to *Moksha*, nor is it true of that form of Buddhistic yoga which is oriented to the *Prajna Paramita*. There may be yogic disciplines which seek to go no further than attaining a power position which renders one to be able to command a good deal in the domain of the *Sangsara*, but that is not the grand yoga. This is represented very well by the *Prajna Paramita*, which gives as the Great Logic an aphorism in the form, “*Tadyatha gate gate para-gate para-sam-gate bodhi sva-ha;*” which being translated is, “[O Wisdom], departed, departed, departed, to the Other Shore, disembarked on the Other Shore.”⁴ The attained one may indeed return as is directed by the Kwan-Yin vow and the message of *The Voice of the Silence*, and he may again be a dweller among men, but though he dwells in the world, he is not of this world. Though he deals with the problem of this world, he deals with it from a different perspective, from a height from which he looks down upon those problems and is not caught up in their midst. The ultimate yoga, so far as we know it, may be the attainment of Absolute Consciousness transcending *Nirvana* as well as *Sangsara*, but offering the chance to move freely into an unfixed *Nirvana* and a non-confining *Sangsara*. This is the highest vision that we yet can comprehend.

In the volume *Yoga and Psychotherapy* there is a frequent reference to “I-ness.” At first, I thought the referent of this term was the true Self, or the *Atman*, and I found it very confusing when there were statements to the effect that the I-ness changes and becomes different from what it was. But then it dawned upon me that this was a reference to the “I” of ordinary parlance, which I would rather call “this person.” Yes, this person is subject to change, for the law of nature is constant change, a constant becoming and a becoming-not; whereas, in contrast, this ultimate Self which is attained and realized in the journey of yoga is that which remains constant and unchanging, like the eye of the storm. This gives a different meaning from that which I at first thought was intended, but the implication here is that “process” is the supreme fact. Now, process may be the supreme fact in the *Prakriti*, but it is not the supreme fact in the *Purusha*.

In this I-ness or the “I” of ordinary parlance, we have a confusion of the nature and the Self, and the very purpose of the self-analysis given by Shankara is the dissolution of this confusion. By analysis one isolates ultimately the true I as distinct from all the nature. The process is one in which one isolates himself from everything

⁴ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 358.

whatsoever which is part of the nature—like the body, the emotions, the thoughts, and so forth. One finds that he cognizes these elements and that he is the cognizer which stands above. Ultimately, he learns that his own real identity, the true Self which he is, is that which is never an object before consciousness, never that subject matter which is the material of our cognitions, but is eternally the cognizer alone.

This true Self may be viewed as being a witness which cognizes what happens, but in its purity neither judges, nor performs action, or feels, but is simply witness of the fact of action, of thought, and feeling. Around it there is a gossamer-thin sheath consisting of judgment, discernment, and discrimination, and through this there is a condition of purely witnessing that which happens, cognizing, so that this center may be called an epistemological center without ego, without differentiating between myself and thyself, but essentially aloof and looking down. But in operating through that gossamer-thin sheath, it cognizes, accepts and rejects, but does not act, think, or feel, but simply witnesses these facts. It can accept and reject; and that which it rejects, is cut off at the root and slowly or rapidly withers away, and that which is accepted proceeds to grow according to its nature. This is a method of self-control, self-guidance which does not require the strong action of the will which we ordinarily apply in our ordinary application of self-control, for by rejection, that which seems undesirable disappears of itself; it cannot grow, and only that which is accepted is capable of development. The unchanging witness Self abides ever in the calm eye at the center of the storm. Nature surrounding it is subject to a never-ending process of becoming and becoming-not—in it is all turmoil; in it lies all of suffering. Growth and decay may be predicated of the nature, but not of the Self.