

## The history of Yoga

### *Long ago ...*

The intended aim of Yoga is described in the origin of the meaning of the word Yoga, which contemporary Spiritual teacher Heinz Grill points out ‘...comes from the Sanskrit root yui, which means to connect’. (The Soul Dimension of Yoga, 2010) The word Yoga, historians commonly agree, was first recorded in the Vedic scriptures, which arose out of the ancient Indian civilisation approximately 2000 years ago. The Vedic scriptures describe a Yogic path, on this path people carried out various exercises and followed a way of life in an endeavor to connect that which is spiritual with that which is earthly. This is generally understood as the meaning of Yoga, the union or coming together of spirit and matter.

The Vedic scriptures describe at length the aim of Yoga as understood during the time of the Ancient Indian culture, but if I read some of these books to try to understand what was meant by the practice of Yoga its quite difficult. The language, the images, the structure and the ideas in these books seem a bit alien to me as a contemporary western reader. From this I begin to understand the ancient civilisations had a very different conception of the world in which they lived, they had a different way of connecting to each other and to their surroundings. Their thought life expressed a different view to the world.

Since the time of this ancient Indian civilisation the path of Yoga and the exercises practiced have changed, and in this current time there are many diverse paths of Yoga being followed both in the East and in the West. Some are more practiced for health and well-being, and some on a more spiritual endeavor.

Today, spiritual teacher Heinz Grill proposes an approach to the Yoga path founded on his conception of the need of the human being today, that through the capacities of the soul a person is able develop an awareness of how they relate out of themselves towards the physical body and outwardly towards others. In this endeavor the connection between the realities of spirit, soul and body stand in a clearly, discerned awareness, rather than an emotionally conceived amalgamation. In the Soul Dimension of Yoga (2010) he writes:

**‘The soul receives impulses from physical existence, and it receives also influences and stimuli from the thought-life and thus from the spirit. Those impulses that they receive from the body, can only serve as information, but they cannot widen the consciousness. In all exercises, especially in the physical exercises, but also in all concentration and meditation exercises, the soul should receive its attunement from a higher spirit. Not the sense arrested or involved body consciousness grants permission to motivate the Yoga exercise. Very concrete thoughts, which from a spiritual truth consciousness are shaped, must accompany the yoga exercise. In simple terminology you can picture the direction of action, and imagine it as an influence or better said recognise it as a thought process, which flows from above to below in the soul and which from the spirit or transcendent truth-reality outwardly enriches the inner soul structure. The path from above to below or from the thought to the feelings, from the unmanifest to the knowable and finally to the manifest, is for the exercise practice in the given time extremely necessary.’ (The Soul Dimension of Yoga, 2010)**



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The path of yoga described here is an orientation in which the soul becomes active in discerning, it discerns between the experience of a spiritual truth filled thought and an experience rising out of the physical body. Through this the soul forms a connection in which the higher thought shines into the inner life, radiating outwards it lifts up and warms the inner life, and as it does so it gives new life to the physical body. So, just as the sun shines from above with light and warmth onto the earth below, bringing forth growth in many colourful, scent-filled forms, so too a soul life that ‘attunes’ to a true sunny thought shining from above, creates a connection that brings forth a more colourful soul life that enlivens and enriches the physical body.

The aim of yoga then, is a consciously made connection out of the soul, to the higher existence of the spirit, via the thought life, onto the tangible visible earthly form.

### ***Yoga from the ancient past –the Aryans***

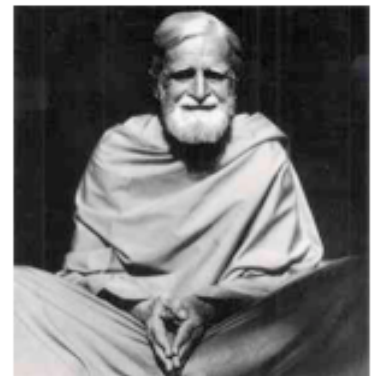
How did this orientation to the path of yoga, as described by Heinz Grill, come into being? How has the path of yoga evolved since the ancient time from which it originates?

Over 2000 millenium ago there lived in Euro-Asia a nomadic group of people called the Aryans, it is said by historians they were a fierce, war-like race, whose culture was orientated around warfare, even their religion was dominated by a 'storm-god' or 'sky-god' who enjoined warfare. Historians describe they were very accomplished on horseback, and charged into battle with ferocious success on their chariots. In the early part of the second millenium BC they began to migrate southwards across Persia and India, here they conquered and took over the land into which they spread. They entered India from the North-West and settled in the Indus valley, they lost their tribal names and began to call themselves 'noble' or 'superior' ones to distinguish themselves from the local people whose land they had conquered. The arrival of the Aryans germinated a new start in Indian history, the Harrapan civilisation faded out and the Aryans moved in. Their way of social organisation entered into Indian culture, they arranged themselves into individual tribes, which were ruled over by a war-chief. From historical sources it is said the Aryan society had a great love for poetry, for lyric, for music and dance.

It is during the time of the Aryans the great Vedic scriptures came into being, and hence the beginning of the Vedic period from out of which, it is said, the path of Yoga began. The word 'Veda' means knowledge given by God, and this collection of hymns, eventually written in Sanskrit after some 1000 years of oral transmission from generation to generation, were said to be something, which had been seen rather than something which had been invented by man, they were regarded as 'nitya' (eternal) and 'apauruseya' (without human authorship). These sacred words were considered to be a mediator between God and humanity, they were said to be thoughts expressed by the Gods to which the ancient Rishis (a holy person) were able to see, and whom passed on their knowing insight to others. The words of the scriptures reflected the relation man had to the spiritual worlds at this time.

In his book 'The Marriage of East and West', Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine monk, describes an understanding of the development of the style and content of the Ancient Indian scriptures. He divides these into 3 main evolutionary sections, firstly from 1500 BC to 500BC the early books (Riga Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, Atharva Veda), secondly from 500BC the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, and thirdly from 500bc to 500 AD the Ithihasas, which comprised of the Mahabhrarata and Ramayana. The development of the scriptures he says shows how humanities consciousness, or how humanity relates to the world, moved from an 'imaginative experience' to a 'rational understanding.' 'He describes the poetic song like style and content of the early books suggest humanity was connected to all things through an 'imaginative' experience,

**'...man had lived in the world of the imagination, of intuitive wisdom in which sense and feeling, desire and thought and will had all been focused on symbols of words, and gestures, of dance and song, of images and paintings, of rituals and sacrifices, in which the world of the gods, of the cosmic and psychic powers was seen reflected in the human imagination.' (Bede Griffiths, 'The Marriage of East and West'p59)**



From this I understand Bede Griffiths says a person experienced the world in images and forms that contained sensation, something like experiencing a picture, which contains 'feeling', the imaginative view being a living experience of the spiritual worlds. This view of Vedic man was a sense of the whole, when a person looked to nature they saw themselves and the whole of the cosmos as one. There was no perceived separation between the spiritual worlds and earthly worlds.

But then a change in the way man relates to the world occurs, which Bede Griffiths describes as a most important moment in human history. This change is reflected in the Upanishads, these scriptures he says describe the birth of the 'rational mind', to him this is explained as:

'Human reason is a discriminating power. It is the power to distinguish, to analyse, to objectify, that is the great divider, which separates man from nature and man from himself. It creates a world of duality and destroys the original paradise in which man had lived in harmony with nature and himself.' (Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*)

Man is now able to see himself as something separate from the environment in which he lives, and Bede Griffiths further says humanity is now able to ask an important self-enquiring question 'Who am I?' This question is central to the teachings in the Bhagavad Gita.

Here is a common image from the Bhagavad Gita, on the right is Lord Krishna, on the left the warrior Arjuna. From the style and content of the image we can see a different conception of the world is portrayed, something which today seems mythical or fable like.



Since the time of the Bhagavad Gita there have been many Spiritual teachers each bringing with them an understanding of a Yoga path. Most notably from the Ancient past are Patanjali (200BC) who developed Raja yoga, this was an 8 limbed path that comprised of the Yoga sutras, and Swami Swatamarama (15th century) He developed Principles of Hatha Yoga, compiled Pradipika of Yoga, including practicing asanas and breathing exercises



## *Yoga arrives in to the West*

How did the practice of Asana arrive in the West?

In 1893 Swami Vivekananda travelled to America where he initially spoke at The Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, about the plight of his own country, India, and the religion of Hinduism, he is noted in saying on one occasion:

**"I do not come to convert you to a new belief. I want you to keep your own belief; I want to make the Methodist a better Methodist; the Presbyterian a better Presbyterian; the Unitarian a better Unitarian. I want to teach you to live the truth, to reveal the light within your own soul." (Vivekananda, 1893. )**



Through Vivekananda ideas prevalent in a Hindu way of relating to life had been presented to America, later in 1895 he travelled to England, and Europe teaching further his religious view to life. It was another Indian teacher who is more associated with the practice of the Yoga poses, the asana, his name was Krishnamacharya, who lived from 1924-1989, it is said by Sjoman in his book *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace*, Krishnamacharya presented an ...

‘...eclectic amalgam of Hatha Yoga techniques, British military calisthenics, and the regional gymnastic and wrestling traditions of Southwestern India.’ (Sjoman, N. 1996)

Krishnamacharya never left India, but from the 1950's 3 main disciples of Krishnamacharya travelled to America and Europe each bringing forth their own approach to Asana. These were K. Pattabhi Jois who developed Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, B.K.S. Iyengar who developed Iyengar Yoga, and Krishnamacharya's son Indra Devi who developed Vinyoga.

Swami Sivananda, pictured opposite, who lived 1887-1963 was another man who influenced Yoga in the West, in 1957 he sent a pupil of his Swami Vishnu Devanada to educate people in the West, today there are centres all over the world.

His biography is available online at  
<http://www.dlshq.org/download/autobio.pdf>



*An Integrated Yoga that moves outwards into everyday life.*

In the early 1900's we see the human being asking deep questions about life and about the very nature of the human being, both from the East and the West, meeting each other. But further to this we also see a new orientation in the consciousness being described, in the West, Anthroposophy lead by Rudolf Steiner was bringing into life a kind of 'spiritual science', which pointed out the human beings task was to rightly understand how the spirit was finding its way into matter, into earthly life. Hence his work speaks of the aim of Yoga, indeed in a lecture titled 'The Mission of the Archangel Michael : The Ancient Yoga Culture and the New Yoga Will. The Michael Culture of the Future.' November 30, 1919, he describes the need to create a 'new Yoga will', this is explained as:

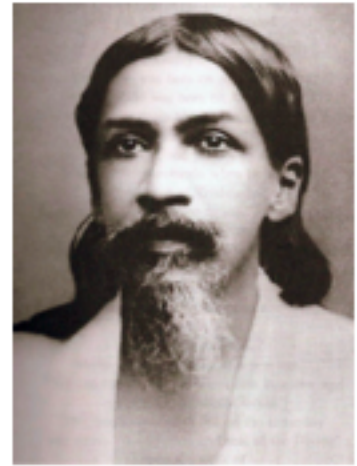
**'From outside, cosmic thoughts work into us, from inside, humanity's will works outward. Humanity's will and cosmic thought cross in this crossing point, just as the objective and the subjective element once crossed in the breath. We must learn to feel how our will works through our eyes and how the activity of the senses delicately mingles with the passivity, bringing about the crossing of cosmic thoughts and humanity's will. We must develop this new Yoga will. Then something will be imparted to us that of like nature to that which was imparted to human beings in the breathing process three millennia ago. Our comprehension must become much more soul-like, much more spiritual.'** (Rudolf Steiner)



To Steiner the human being has the capacity to establish an objective receivership position, that which comes from outside has a depth of meaning, which the human being can become aware of, and in doing so develops a new connecting comprehension living in the moment, and so express a new will movement or action. Therefore, from outside something comes towards the human being, how he receives it is then expressed outwardly in action. A process of movement from outside inwards, back again to the outside in which the soul can learn to become aware of a higher, truer, more spiritual part of oneself.

Interestingly in the East we see the emergence of an Integrated approach to Yoga as brought forth by Indian Sage Sri Aurobindo. In 1914 his understanding of an integrated Yoga path was beginning to be published, in these books he describes his aim of seeking unity between spirit and matter through the development of a 'recipient consciousness'. This orientation Aurobindo writes is like no other Yoga, here the consciousness works to open to an influence from the spiritual worlds above in order to transform the world of matter below.

**‘The way of Yoga followed here has a different purpose from others, - for its aim is not only to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness into the divine consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body, to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a divine life in Matter.’ (Sri Aurobindo: Lights on Yoga, 1935)**



So the same orientation or standpoint being described in the early 1900's by Steiner in the West , and by Aurobindo in the East.

### ***The arrival of a New Yoga Will or a New feeling in Yoga***

Today Heinz Grill has been developing the yoga path further, he has not stayed with the approach or methods from the past, but has conceived of an approach which meets the need of the human being today. To him the capacities of the soul, namely the capacity to think, to feel and to act – the will, can be developed in such a way that a clearly discerned connection arises to the spiritual realities onto the physical body. In their usual everyday orientation, these forces are more mixed up, creating something like a cloudy atmosphere around a person. But with the introduction of thoughts, which contain a depth of meaning that relate into life, then the soul comes into an order that gives the possibility for something new to be created, something is given into the soul life and to the physical body.

These meaningful thoughts are descriptions of a higher reality, they are the ‘cosmic thoughts’ which Steiner speaks of, so something like a thought which stands higher above, like a starry constellation that shines onto the earth below. Through out time various spiritual teachers who speak out of a higher insight have given these meaningful thoughts into life.

Heinz Grill suggests through a kind of thought building process the soul comes into a new order in which these thoughts can find their connection into life. In this process the ‘thinking’ begins to picture the thought, the ‘feelings’ learn to sensitively sense the thought, and the ‘will’ participates and gives space to a higher action. With time and much practice the soul takes on a new position, which participates with the thoughts in an active way, and supports a persons way of relating to themselves and outwardly into everyday life. To this Heinz Grill writes on his current website:

*‘All exercises, for example the physical exercises of yoga, the breathing exercises, and finally even the mediation exercises need selected and newly formulated content, so that the human being is not removed from social life, but they with the different developmental processes of the present time, connect meaningfully and harmoniously.’ (Heinz Grill)*

Looked at in this way Yoga is a path of practice that addresses the soul life, it speaks to the wish of the soul to seek a meaningful connection from out of the depths of ones higher self into practical life, in a joyfully uplifting relationship.