

# The Yoga Tradition

## How Did We Get Here?

### A History of Yoga in America, 1800-1970

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#### Abstract

*Yoga has been gaining acceptance in America. This acceptance rests, in large part, on the increase in medical research on Yoga. Despite the benefits of this research, the biomedical approach is often held accountable for America's de-emphasis on the rich, spiritual dimensions of Yoga. This article reviews the academic literature of the 1800s-1970s to show that America's focus on Yoga's health benefits is not new, but has been a part of the ongoing debate on how Yoga should be regarded.*

#### Introduction

In the last 25 years, there has been a growing interest in research on the medical benefits of Yoga. This research has been invaluable to the acceptance of Yoga in a wide range of settings. However, some individuals hold the relatively recent emphasis on medical research accountable for the de-emphasis on the essential spiritual dimensions of Yoga. This article presents an alternative perspective: that the current focus on biomedical and therapeutic applications of Yoga is not a recent development. It is the expected outcome of America's long-standing dilemma about how to view Yoga.

This article follows Yoga's presence in academic circles and public discourse from the 1800s through the 1970s in an attempt to answer the question, "How did an ancient East Indian practice of transcending the physical body transform into a significant method to improve the body's health?" After all, Hatha Yoga is the only branch of Yoga that gives primacy to the body. What about Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Tantric Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Raja Yoga? It is tempting to think that the burgeoning interest in biomedical research on Yoga rests solely on Western fascination with the physical body. A review of Yoga's history in the United States shows something else: the emphasis on Yoga as a practice for improving physical health is a way to make sense of and accept a tradition that in many ways runs counter to our essentially

Judeo-Christian culture. This position was not only the product of academic thinking; it was encouraged by many vocal practicing Yogis, including teachers from India.

#### Yoga in the 1800s: With Intimacy Comes Controversy

Yoga was developed on the Indian sub-continent as a system for increasing physical and mental clarity so as to transcend our limited concepts of self. It is a diverse discipline that offers numerous techniques to explore the human experience: physical postures (*āsanas*), breathing practices (*prānāyāma*), ethical disciplines (*yāmas and niyāmas*), chanting, concentration techniques, and meditation. In the 1800s, Yoga made its way from the rigorous shores of East India to the rigors of American higher education. As the two cultures met, issues of identity, religious fidelity, language, social class, and authenticity materialized. Scholars who began the study of India's spiritual traditions were often left questioning their own religious beliefs and long-held philosophical assumptions.

#### *Academic Embrace of the Bhagavad Gita*

One of the first significant English translations of a Hindu text in which Yoga is discussed is Charles Wilkins'

*Bhagvat-Geeta*.<sup>1</sup> With this translation, Sanskrit began to be associated with the intellectual elite in Europe and America. Wilkins, Sir William Jones, and Henry Colebrook transformed the study of Sanskrit and East India into a serious hobby for influential intellectual circles. Events sponsored were for limited audiences and required a formal invitation and black-tie dress.<sup>2-5</sup> Yoga's embrace by the elite initiated the process of viewing Yoga as something "worth knowing."

Wilkins's *Bhagvat-Geeta* arrived on American shores in 1845, 60 years after its initial publication in England. New England poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson sorely lamented its late arrival.<sup>6,7</sup> As one of the founders of Transcendentalism in America, Emerson's enthusiastic and public embrace of Wilkins' *Bhagvat-Geeta* inspired serious inquiry into the texts of Hinduism and Yoga. Emerson, like other intellectual elite of his time, embraced Yoga philosophically. It was his noteworthy student, Henry David Thoreau, who first moved from "knowing about" to "practicing" the discipline of Yoga.<sup>8</sup> Thoreau<sup>a</sup>, author of *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*, stated in a letter to a friend, "Depend upon it that rude and careless as I am, I would fain practice the yoga faithfully... to some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a yogin."<sup>9(p412)</sup>

### *Intimacy and Conflict: Yoga and Christianity*

Thoreau's Yoga practice was a challenge to the academic community of a relatively new and predominately Christian nation. American scholars were "tolerant" of and interested in Asian religions, but contemplative practices smacked of infidelity to Christianity. Christians (then and now) genuinely struggled with how their interest in Eastern spiritual practices aligned with their religious ideal of one path to God. While other scholars of East Asia (e.g., Muller, Wilkins, and Colebrook) were sensitive to Christian anxieties, Thoreau ignored them. Thoreau's actions contradicted the Christian notion of one path to God.<sup>10</sup> He blatantly stated that he practiced Yoga, and eagerly proclaimed that the Yogic system of understanding the mind was equal to and, at times, superior to Western models. Thoreau's practice of Yoga led to questions that its academic study alone did not: Does the study and practice of Yoga lead individuals away from Christianity? Can one respect religious pluralism while maintaining one's Christian faith?

a. For a thorough discussion of Yoga and Thoreau, refer to the following resources: Machane F. Walden and Yoga. *The New England Quarterly*. 1964;37(33):322-342 and Stein WB. The Hindu matrix of Walden: the king's son. *Comparative Literature*. 1970;22(4):303-318.

The tension between Christianity and Yoga was given profound expression in the works of German-born scholar Max Muller, who was dubbed the "founder of the science of religion" and played a pivotal role in shaping Euro-American Religious Studies during the 1800s.<sup>11</sup> Muller's interpretations of Vedic texts were undoubtedly influential; his popular scholarship, widely read in America throughout the 1800-1900s, alternated between awe and revulsion toward the ancient Hindu scriptures.<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to interpret his comments regarding the *Rg Veda*, "hidden in this rubbish are precious stones."<sup>12(p29)</sup> Was he writing to appease a Christian audience who had difficulty embracing religious pluralism? Or did he really mean the text was useless despite a few well-chosen phrases? Muller's negative depiction of Hinduism was so disturbing to Hindus in India that his *Hibbert Lectures* was boycotted; there were rumors that it had been printed with the blood of India's sacred cows.<sup>13</sup> Whether or not Muller's intentions were racist continues to be a subject of debate.<sup>12,14</sup> However, it is probable that this early, negative depiction of Hinduism within academia played a role in the way Yoga has become so strongly divorced from its Hindu roots in America.

Hindus in the United States and abroad were deeply affected by Christian scholars' negative attention to the subject of Yoga and Hinduism.<sup>b:15,16</sup> Some Hindus converted to Christianity. Others began to re-think and re-position the way religion was situated in their personal and cultural lives. For example, sectarian beliefs were downplayed, and there was a de-emphasis on multiple deities. Sacred texts like the *Bhagavad-Gita* were emphasized for their practical, uplifting message that readily appealed to the "modern" individual's struggle.

### *Vivekananda and Changing the Discourse on Yoga*

By the late 1800s, attempts to reduce tension between religious systems became the work of Yoga practitioners, not academics. In particular, Swami Vivekananda assumed this role. Vivekananda (1863-1902) was as well educated in Western philosophies as in the meditation traditions of his native India. As one of the chief disciples of Ramakrishna with a Western education, Vivekananda was pivotal to sharing the wisdom of Yoga with an international audience.

b. Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) was also vocal regarding the way in which Hinduism and Yoga was depicted as a static religion. His work should be included in the MIA (missing in America) literature review.

Vivekananda is frequently portrayed as “the” individual who first introduced Yoga to American discourse.<sup>17,18</sup> This is a slight exaggeration, but perhaps is warranted because of the great popularity of his speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. His handsome physique, charisma, charm, and mastery of the subject of Yoga were exactly what American intellectuals outside of academia were looking for. He played on the American fascination with the exotic, for example by wearing silk turbans for his lectures—while alleviating many Americans’ fears about religious fidelity.

Vivekananda’s success, in part, rested on his unique ability to diffuse tension regarding Yoga’s association with infidelity to Christianity. Framing Yoga as a system that would lead to greater physical health, Vivekananda liberated the practice of Yoga from the popular conception that it was a practice primarily for Hindu men (which, of course, it had been). He spoke of Yoga as something accessible to all, and of central value to anyone concerned with health and freedom.<sup>19</sup> Understanding Yoga as a system of health served several purposes: 1) It diffused tension around fidelity to Christianity, 2) It made Yoga a subject accessible to Americans, and 3) It began America’s interest in the health benefits of Yoga that would eventually lead to the abundance of research on Yoga’s medical benefits in the 21st century.

Vivekananda’s popularity did not extend to academic circles. He was criticized by academics for his re-interpretation of Yoga. He blended everything from Nyaya, Mimamsa, Christianity, and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* within a single lecture.<sup>20-22</sup> Criticism of ambiguity and blending of East Indian spiritual traditions was nothing new. Thoreau had also been greatly disparaged for his “...wild juxtaposition on incongruous cultural forms as much an assault on aesthetic judgment as on religious fidelity.”<sup>23(p404)</sup> Academics saw (and in some ways continue to see) Yoga as something static, with clearly defined boundaries of study that are best understood in the context of the specific historical period in which they emerged. This perspective offered invaluable insights, but failed to address the public’s desire to see the study of Yoga as compatible with American religious and intellectual life.

While academics criticized practicing Yogis for inconsistencies and odd juxtapositions, practicing Yogis accused academics of being dry, abstract, and expounding ideas that

were not applicable to daily life.<sup>c</sup> Vivekananda, while highly educated, was not an academic. He stated, “No theories ever made men higher. No amount of books can help us to become purer. The only power is in realization, and that lies in ourselves and comes from thinking.”<sup>18(p262)</sup> Taking the power of knowing out of the hands of academic authority is an oft-repeated axiom of Yoga (and one that gained momentum in the American Yoga community in the 1950s).

Vivekananda’s approach of cultural inclusivity was further developed in William Flagg’s 1898 book *Yoga for Transformation*,<sup>23</sup> which offered a chapter each on Egyptian Yoga, Mohammedan Yoga, Christian Yoga, The Roman Stoics as Yogis, Hindu Yoga, and Chinese Yoga. Flagg assuaged Christian readers’ fears by arguing that there were many different methods to achieve spiritual unity—all of which could be enhanced through the practices of Yoga. His book’s message paralleled Vivekananda’s: Yoga is a discipline to free humanity from its mental constraints and an avenue toward greater physical health.

By the end of the 1800s, the choice on how to view Yoga was fairly straightforward: 1) Yoga is a discipline that upsets one’s allegiance to the religion of one’s birth, or 2) Yoga is a system that brings greater physical and mental health. American students of Yoga undoubtedly chose to describe and think of Yoga as a method for improving physical and mental health. This choice made the issue of religious affiliation irrelevant. It was also a choice espoused by influential Yogis such as Vivekananda.

## Yoga in America from 1900-1940: Magical or Practical?

From the 1900s to the 1940s, Yoga was pulled between contrasting points of view. Academic literature in this time period emphasized Yoga as a discipline heavily linked to magic and the occult, while popular literature of this period positioned Yoga as an eclectic practice concerned with physical health. Scholars began to understand the psychological themes in Yoga; simultaneously, this psychology was portrayed as substantially inferior to Western analysis. The movement toward and away from Yoga continued: while Yoga offered new ways to think about the human experience, it was also worrisome because it challenged long-held assumptions.

c. That Yoga is not an academic subject is heavily promoted by many practicing Yogis of the early 1900s. The most widely published is Yogi Ramacharaka: Ramacharaka Y. *A Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga*. Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society; 1906; Ramacharaka Y. *Hatha Yoga or The*

*Yogi Philosophy of Physical Well-Being*. Chicago: Yogi Publication Society; 1904; and Ramacharaka Y. *Advanced Course in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*. London: Fowler & Co. LTD.; 1905.

### *Magic, Kundalini, and Yoga as “Other”*

For academia in the early 1900s, Yoga was distinctly magical, mystical, and “other.”<sup>24-27</sup> Academics de-emphasized Yoga’s attention to mental obstacles and ethics; instead they chose to focus on its supernatural elements. This choice may have been influenced by the scholars’ choice to study the classical texts of Yoga, with little consideration to the contemporary context and views of Hindus and contemporary practicing Yogis.

In E.W. Hopkins’ 1901 article “Yoga Techniques in the Great Epic,” published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, he analyzed the ancient scriptures of Yoga and stressed its exotic and mystical nature. He succinctly stated, “The exercise of Yoga imparts magical powers.”<sup>28(p336)</sup> The burgeoning interest in Kundalini Yoga throughout the 1920s and 1930s provides another example of how the mystical nature of Yoga was emphasized in America.<sup>29,30</sup> Kundalini, a dormant spiritual energy that can be accessed through specific practices of Yoga, is frequently associated with mystical powers. Carl Jung’s *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*, published in 1932, was very influential in bringing this esoteric subject to the forefront of academic thought.<sup>31</sup>

### *Attempts to Integrate Western and Eastern Psychology*

Carl Jung was one of the first well-known Western scholars to seriously examine the psychology inherent in Yogic practices. Jung attempted to make descriptions of Yoga more familiar by drawing comparisons between the West and the East. For example, he made statements like, “Christianity also is based on the *sukhma* [subtle internal energy] aspect.”<sup>31(p67)</sup> Whether such statements clarified or created greater confusion and division for Christians struggling to understand Yoga is difficult to know. Work like Jung’s, which attempted to create bridges between these worldviews, often raised more questions than it answered. These attempts often failed because they imported Yoga practices into a therapeutic model that was at odds with the original intentions of Yoga. For example, Jung believed that the aim of his work as a psychologist was to “cure souls,” not just the personality.<sup>32</sup> Yoga, however, is based on the assumption that our souls (if we can even use this word) are pure, unaffected by our mental distress. While Jung’s work spurred interest in the intersection of Yoga and psychology, many of these early depictions hinged on a Yoga that was illogical and offered little more than a naïve understanding of psychology.<sup>33,34</sup>

Despite being well-informed and well-meaning, some academics may have accidentally reinforced doubts about Yoga’s ability to offer insight into the human condition.

### *Yoga as Practical*

Outside of academia, intellectuals were embracing Yoga as a practical discipline with renewed vigor. In 1948, Ernest E. Wood published *Practical Yoga*, stating, “...I am now promoting the subject of Yoga here [in America], knowing that it is as well adapted to modern life as to the simpler life of ancient India, and believing that it can make the individual stronger and freer and help to promote social harmony and material progress.”<sup>35(p23)</sup> This kind of unbridled enthusiasm pervaded the popular literature on Yoga throughout the 1930s and into the 1950s.<sup>d:36,37</sup> While these publications popularized the physical practices of Yoga, they also gave great attention to the underlying philosophical system of Samkhya-Yoga. This attention to the philosophical and methodological details of Yoga in the popular literature would lose momentum in the 1960s, and all but cease by the year 2000.

By the end of the 1940s, the choice of how to view Yoga was complicated. Was Yoga magical and mystical, or a means to improve health? Without an answer to this question, those from a Judeo-Christian background had difficulty resolving how they should view Yoga. If Yoga could be set up as a practical discipline, this might offer a solution to the tension involving conflicting spiritual points of view. This period in history seemed to be setting the stage for the modern emphasis on Yoga as a discipline for physical and psychological health. “Yoga as practical” untangles the individual’s practice of Yoga from the debate around its impact on identity. Viewing Yoga through this lens offers almost immediate respite from seeing Yoga as something mystical and exotic—this is something that Hindu practitioners and Yogis alike will emphasize in the literature of the 1950s.

### *Yoga in America in the 1950s*

Eastern writers began to think of Westerners as part of their audience,<sup>38</sup> offering critiques of American interpretations of Yoga in academic journals.<sup>39-41</sup> American academics reacted to this by shifting their focus to how Yoga was being practiced within their own society. Americans began using Eastern texts to gain insight into their own Judeo-d. This enthusiasm was no doubt influenced by current, positive interpretations of Yogic texts that were circulating in academic circles.

Christian traditions.<sup>42,43</sup> The idea of “East” and “West” as monolithic and inseparable categories was beginning to break down. What emerged was a dynamic conversation about the ways in which both cultures mutually benefited from and were challenged by the intimate exchange; this exchange was seen as potential to fuel a deeper understanding of the human experience.

The interplay between cultures and religious ideologies was vigorously explored in the 1958 *East-West Philosophers Conference*, which met in Honolulu, Hawaii. The Vice President of the East-West Philosophical Society, Radhakrishnan, avowed, “There is no reason to believe that there are fundamental differences between East and West; human beings are everywhere human and their deepest values are similar.”<sup>38(p216)</sup> Everyone did not share this optimistic view. A conference participant stated, “While no bridges between ideas have yet been built, at least canoes have been fashioned to get from shore to shore.”<sup>38</sup> The metaphor of the canoe implies an undertaking that is unsteady at best. Canoes require calm waters and seem an unsteady vessel in which to go from American to Indian shores.

During the 1950s, American academics were interested in breaking down obstacles to the study of Yoga. For example, scholar David White encouraged the layperson, without Sanskrit knowledge, to embrace the “wisdom of the East”<sup>44</sup> that was now available in English translations. He encouraged personal exploration to fully grasp what was being conveyed in the texts. White stated, “If one begins by reading the most careful and scholarly translations, he is likely to meet with a dull awkwardness well calculated to convince him that the ‘Wisdom of the Orient’ is much exaggerated.”<sup>44(p247)</sup>

It was not only Westerners who were breaking down barriers to the study of Yoga. This movement was greatly aided by the circulation of English books on Yoga written in the voices of its own practitioners: Paramahansa Yogananda,<sup>45</sup> Krishnamurti,<sup>46</sup> Swami Sivananda,<sup>47-51</sup> and Sri Aurobindo.<sup>52-55</sup> These East Indian teachers of Yoga were distinctly bi-cultural. They had all been trained and influenced by Western schools and were therefore able to speak directly to the concerns of many Euro-Americans. As Westerners began to seriously study Yoga with these individuals, misperceptions of Yoga were broken, and a new generation of American Yoga teachers was born.

The bi-cultural individuals (of Eastern and Western origin) who began teaching Yoga in America increased the tension between academic and popular perceptions of Yoga. As Vivekananda had done earlier in the century, these individuals began to question the validity of academic, intel-

lectual knowledge. Krishnamurti stated, “The mind escapes into knowledge, into theories, hopes, imagination; and this very knowledge is a hindrance... To know is to be ignorant; not to know is the beginning of wisdom.”<sup>56(p207)</sup> With more Americans studying Yoga in India, and Indian practitioners of Yoga discouraging “mere” academic study, the stage was being set for a focus on personal and cultural exploration in the 1960s and 1970s.

## Yoga in America in the 1960s and 1970s: Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll?

Tension between those who practiced Yoga and those who taught about Yoga in academia turned to fierce polarization as Yoga increasingly became associated with sex, drugs, and, yes, even rock and roll. Teachers like Swami Satchidananda and the Maharishi influenced pop stars from Carol King to the Beatles. The popularization of Yoga brought the discipline into mainstream publications and the media. The intersection between popular culture and academic interest contributed to an intense period of academic mayhem in which Yoga moved from a traditional association with monasticism to an unlikely association with orgies. This American adaptation of Yoga in the 1960s and 1970s shocked some East Indian academics.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, some East Indian Yoga teachers saw the youth culture’s desire to break free of tradition as a confusing but hopeful era in which a new generation was struggling to embrace new ways of being.

### *Yoga’s Intersection with Drug Culture*

The movement of Yoga and Eastern consciousness studies from academia to the youth culture is best told in the story of two infamous Harvard psychologists: Dr. Richard Alpert and Dr. Timothy Leary. Both individuals became cultural icons known as much for their positive view of drugs as for their involvement with Eastern forms of consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Leary designed several studies in which he and Alpert administered LSD to over 300 professors, graduate students, writers, philosophers, and clergymen. The ethical nature of these studies was questioned, as was Alpert’s and Leary’s own use of hallucinogenic drugs. As they became associated with the burgeoning drug culture that began to swirl around Harvard, their dismissal seemed inevitable.<sup>58,59</sup> Alpert left

e. The reader is referred to the documentary film *Fierce Grace* for a touching testament to the power of Dass’ life and work.

America to study Buddhist meditation in India. He returned as the practicing Yogi, Ram Dass. Dass helped revolutionize and publicize new ideas on consciousness with his illustrated text *Be Here Now*.<sup>60</sup> Students traveled long distances to hear him teach about Yoga, while academics shrank at the thought of American students (and professors!) leaving rationality behind.

Dass's colleague Leary urged the youth of America to "Turn on, tune in, drop out." Their simultaneous interest in altered states of consciousness and Eastern states of consciousness (primarily Yoga) led to Yoga's gradual association with the blooming drug culture of the 1960s and 1970s. The relationship between Yoga and drugs in America was consummated when Yoga teacher Swami Satchidanada opened the famous music festival "Woodstock" in New York. Woodstock was as well known for its "bad acid" (LSD) as it was for its music. Researchers studying drug use in American youth culture confirmed the relationship between drugs and Yoga. One researcher stated, "Most [LSD cults]...share an interest in various forms of Eastern mysticism, especially Yoga and Zen Buddhism, and interpret the LSD experience as a confirmation of Eastern metaphysics."<sup>61(p319)</sup> In an article on "deviant behavior," researchers Clark and Tiffit list Yoga, along with alcohol and drugs, as a method of inducing indifference and lack of interest in society.<sup>62</sup>

### *Yoga as Recovery of Wholeness*

By the 1970s, the association of Yoga with sexuality influenced both academics and popular culture. Academic work addressed topics ranging from male sexuality<sup>63-66</sup> and the vibrant nature of female energy known as *sakti*<sup>67</sup> to ethnographies of female saints.<sup>68</sup> Embracing sexuality was seen as part of the recovery of our wholeness, and Yoga was a part of this process.<sup>69-71</sup> Poet Allen Ginsberg expressed this idea:

*"It's an important human experience to relate to yourself and others as a hunk of meat sometimes. That's one way of losing ego, one holy divine Yoga of losing ego: getting involved in an orgy and being reduced to an anonymous piece of meat, coming and recognizing your own orgasmic anonymity."*<sup>72(p397)</sup>

Ginsberg's association of Yoga with a divine, anonymous orgy is an odd juxtaposition of ideas that seems to associate sexual gratification with liberation. Perhaps it more correct to view Yoga in the 1970s as part of a multifaceted package designed to open the doors of perception.

The academic literature of the 1970s explored the idea of personal liberation in other ways. There was an academic interest in focusing on Yogis who had found inner freedom despite external systems of oppression, including Sai Baba,<sup>73</sup> Muktananda,<sup>74</sup> Anandamayi Ma,<sup>68</sup> and Sri Aurobindo.<sup>75-77</sup> The Yogic concept of the untouched pure spiritual aspect of humanity, or *atman*, was taken up as a subject with renewed vigor.<sup>29,30</sup> The idea that Yoga might somehow lead us to a more perfect sense of Self was explored. By the end of the 1970s, the focus on the freedom of the Self was transformed into what might better be called "self-improvement." Yoga was positioned as a complement to Western forms of psychology,<sup>76,78</sup> a tool to assist in psychological release,<sup>79</sup> and a way to stimulate creativity.<sup>80</sup>

### Linking the Past with the Present

The image of Yoga as a practical discipline for greater health and vitality gradually led to scholars turning their attention to Yoga's relationship with the body in the 1990s.<sup>81-84</sup> This interest has evolved into the current focus on the medical and psychological benefits of Yoga. Courses on Yoga are offered to psychology, nursing, and medical students. Yoga is increasingly viewed as practical, and seems to be increasingly spoken of in medical terms. Although this approach has its costs, there are specific benefits to viewing Yoga through the biomedical lens. Yoga's link with medical benefits solves a whole host of issues that have plagued Yoga's reputation in America since the early 1800s. No longer does the Yoga practitioner need to concern him- or herself with issues of religious fidelity, occultism, magic, or association with drugs and sex. While these associations may be unique to the history of Yoga in America, they are real concerns that color the way Yoga is viewed. The biomedical approach to Yoga helps cut through these concerns, making Yoga accessible to a wide range of individuals throughout America.

A biomedical approach builds on the idea of Yoga as practical, but it does something else: it lends a marginalized practice authenticity and authority. The medical model is America's gatekeeper. It has sanctioned our culture's use of practices that emerge from East Indian mystical traditions. It is relatively easy for Americans to understand that a seated forward bend, *paschimottânâsana*, balances the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. It is substantially more difficult to understand that *naddhi suddhi* balances *ida* and *pingala nadi*. Both descriptions are jargon-laden, but the latter challenges our identity in both subtle and overt ways. Sanskrit terms are not only unfamiliar; they also

ask us to understand Yoga's subtle anatomy which challenges fundamental and agreed-upon American conceptions of the body.

One of the gifts of studying Yoga is that it gives voice to the subtle aspects of the human experience. I am not denying that many of these subtle aspects cannot be conveyed through biomedical language. However, I am introducing the possibility that Yoga can be as challenging to issues of identity and religious fidelity today as it was in the 1800s. Viewing Yoga as a practical adjunct to our physical well-being appears to be a method of dealing with the complex issues of religious and cultural pluralism that arise when a largely Judeo-Christian culture adopts East Indian practices associated with Hinduism.

Whether or not we agree with reframing Yoga in biomedical language is, practically speaking, irrelevant. It is happening. Accepting Yoga as a practical discipline with specific medical benefits has been a long road. Was it the academic focus on mysticism and the exotic that inspired a return to viewing Yoga as practical? Or was it the popularized versions of Yoga as practical that were disseminated by East Indian practitioners of Yoga themselves? This article has reviewed some of the important ways the interplay between academic and popular conceptions of Yoga have gotten us to our current destination.

We need to acknowledge how different perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding of Yoga in America. Without these many voices, Yoga's multifaceted nature may be lost to those who are seeking greater wholeness. Yoga is simply too complex to be dealt with using the knowledge and methodology of a single discipline. A discipline that places more emphasis on quantitative "rigor" in research may offer insight into how Yoga works, but an approach that emphasizes the philosophical or ethical dimensions of Yoga may offer important insights into the human condition. Dialogue between these approaches can remedy the intellectually isolating effects of excessive specialization.

How Yoga teachers and therapists approach issues of identity, authenticity, and authority is significant. We are in a unique position to craft new ways of speaking across differences. We must ask: Are we ready to communicate across disciplines? For that matter, are we ready to critically engage with scholars of other faiths, and people of diverse traditions? What will it take to find a truly cross-cultural environment in which intense intellectual debate and the evolving Yoga tradition are nourished? These are the questions that Yoga therapy's presence in America asks. These are not new questions; they have been with us since the 1800s. We may, however, have new answers.

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