

On the Yoga Traditions

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The brilliant jewel of Yoga flashes forth its light from many facets. These facets are the Classic paths: Hatha, Bhakti, Raja, Jhana, Karma, Dhyana, Mantra, Yantra, Laya, Tantra and Jappa Yogas.

These paths do not define Yoga. They represent the various *upaya* or means by which Yoga may be experienced. It is widely understood that there is no single, universal method applicable to all whereby Yoga or Union may be attained. The beauty of the yogic tradition is that a number of paths have evolved in response to the differing tendencies and requirements of different individuals.

In order to develop an understanding of the breadth and depth of Yoga, it will be useful to briefly examine three of the Classic paths: Tantra, Hatha and Karma Yogas. Though these may appear to represent three distinct approaches to attainment, in actuality they dovetail into a single, integrated system of development.

Tantra Yoga

Tantra Yoga is said to be the Yoga of choice in Kali Yuga, the age of darkness, dissipation and destruction within which we presently find ourselves.

The practice of Tantra does not necessitate a denial or renunciation of the world in which we find ourselves. On the contrary, the tantric approach recognises that in order to function more effectively in a decaying order, physical, mental and energetic empowerment are essential pre-requisites.

Tantra Yoga is a Yoga of extremes. Extreme situations require extreme remedies. Through the processes of Tantra, one does not seek to actively suppress aspects of oneself that one recognises may be in need of transformation. Rather, those very aspects form the means whereby transformation is effected through the act of *consciously* fulfilling one's nature. As William Blake once sang, "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

Because of its extreme nature, Tantra has often been misunderstood. It has been viewed by many more orthodox practitioners of Yoga as a spurious form of pseudo-spirituality that not only condones, but encourages licentious, profligate and dissipative behaviours. Such attitudes reflect a limited understanding.

The tantric practitioner will make use of whatever means he or she feels comfortable with to attain those experiences that will lift one out of the mundane and into a mystical, transcendental and empowered state of existence. Such means are invariably associated with conscious effort and self-discipline in authentic practice.

Power of itself is impartial. One who possesses power is free to direct it according to his or her will. Within the path of Bhakti Yoga, the Yoga of devotion, there is a recognition of the potential danger to one's spiritual growth by using personal power carelessly and wilfully. The Bhakta, or practitioner of Bhakti Yoga will therefore offer the fruits of all thought and action to God and thereby work in the world with choiceless necessity rather than conscious purpose.

To the Tantric, all choices are consciously made. The Western adept of the left-hand path, Aleister Crowley gave voice to that understanding in his declaration: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."

The tantric approach demands constant vigilance. To practice such methods without the direction of a preceptor who has perfected the forms and attained mastery of the energies released through the practices of Tantra is considered to be not only foolish but dangerous.

Successful practice within such a framework does, however, provide one of the most potent means of experiencing the subtle reality that subliminally weaves the continuously changing fabric of existence.

Hatha Yoga

Hatha Yoga is one of the primary disciplines used by practitioners of Tantra. In such practices, the main emphasis is on the perfection of physical form through sustained and diligent effort. It is said that such efforts will, if maintained, lead one to a state of incomparable wellbeing and freedom from disease. This is a most desirable basis for the difficult task of attaining Realisation.

The practices of Hatha Yoga perfect not only the physical body, but vivify and empower one's mental and spiritual energies. A mind unencumbered by the pain and limitation of a diseased body is more capable of engaging in work that leads to the development of one's higher nature and the realisation of union with the One Source. "Mens sana in corpore sano."

Hatha Yoga is a defined and highly articulate system of physical, mental and spiritual culture. It represents one of the most accessible and evolved of such systems available to us in the present time.

Karma Yoga

Karma Yoga is the means whereby one can attain realisation through carefully and conscientiously attending to one's duties in life. Through Karma Yoga, one makes use of methods similar to those employed by "Fourth Way" schools, such as that of Gurdjieff and the Hermetic traditions where the particular circumstances of one's life provide the matrix from which can emerge an understanding of the nature of causation.

Through Karma Yoga, one develops an awareness of one's own role in the creation of influences that will attract certain events and situations into one's life. Observing how we respond to such situations provides the essential means for the development of understanding. The practice of Karma Yoga requires a diligent awareness of self in relation to others, a lack of attachment to the fruits of one's labours, an ability to work freely and dispassionately without emotional involvement, and a capacity to simply observe the patterns of changing relationships in time.

As success is attained in Karma Yoga, one's actions become progressively more appropriate to the needs of any given situation. One becomes, in effect, a mediator of harmony, attaining union between the inner and the outer. Karma Yoga embodies the essence of Zen. One gives precisely what is needed.

Through a successful integration of the paths of Tantra, Hatha and Karma Yogas, one can progressively develop those qualities that enable one to function as a skilful and compassionate agent of Change.

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