

THE FOUR YOGAS

by godfridev

Yoga is not a simple word, and that to which it points is deep, subtle and multifaceted. To those who practice yoga in any of its many forms it is first and foremost a practice. Although these practices, depending on what they are, have many effects, they also all share a common purpose or destination: Yoga as a being state. This is actually very rarely reached. Yet it is usually done so by way of awareness states that we encounter in and through our practice, six of which are: asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Yet each one of these has different aspects or component elements, none of which are static or fixed. Many of these states happen spontaneously outside of our practice when we are totally relaxed. We slip out of the structure of the social and cultural persona with which we are normally identified and into the delight and satisfaction of more subtle 'egoless' states of consciousness. These awareness states can do more than delight and nourish. If we enter them in complete lucidity they can provide insights into the mechanisms that usually keep us identified with the transient intensities of our superficial experiences. This is the purpose of yoga practices.

The being state of Yoga has been given many names, even in other traditions and cultures. They all point to the deepest possibility of being human within which all longing and anxiety have vanished to be replaced by a deep satisfaction and contentment that expresses itself in many different ways. Many are the qualities traditionally associated with this possibility: compassion, fearlessness, playfulness, wisdom, peace, silence, spontaneity. Yet these qualities, which are not so hard to temporarily pretend to, are not things we need to learn. They are direct expressions of human nature unrestricted by distorting cultural conditioning. Yoga the being state is our natural, fundamental state as lucid, sensitive and intelligent beings. As social and cultural beings our expressions of this state are shaped and limited by the society and culture in which we have been conditioned. Sufis, Taoists, Christians, Jews, jains, Buddhists, Occultists and others have found and been lived from this fundamental being state. Each tradition offers us different terminology, references and techniques for accessing and understanding it. Whether we call it enlightenment,

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illumination, absorption, liberation, salvation or yoga what is important is our own experience.

Yet the practices of yoga neither cause nor lead directly to Yoga the being state. All they can do is reveal its existence and nature. Yet revelation is not enough for Yoga to become our functional disposition as a being state. We need to see so clearly into the mechanisms that hold it at bay so that they start to dissolve. Only when these mechanisms have completely dissolved does Yoga become more than a temporary awareness state and saturate our experience as a being state. There are two fundamental and deeply interlinked mechanisms by which we obscure the ground of our being and cling to the sense of personal self convinced that we are functioning independently and autonomously in the vast otherness of existence. These two mechanisms are the dynamics of identification, and the dynamics of cognition upon which it rests. It is necessary to distinguish between these two interwoven layers of mental activity that lie at the root of our sense of isolated self, for only one of them can and must be relinquished. We need perception in order to act and think, we do not need identity except perhaps as a cloak we put on to ease our passage through the world. In the privacy of our own solitude and silence we have no need of identification, but we still have need of perception. Yet these two dynamics are deeply entangled. They need to untangle if we are to enjoy the deepest human possibilities. This disentanglement, like so much else, is not something that we must or can actually do. It only happens as a result of deep, clear seeing. If our practice does not provide this depth and clarity we will never enjoy the being state of Yoga.