

## **Embodying Transpersonal Psychology Through Yogic Practices**

[Kathy Falge](#)

### **Abstract**

Transpersonal psychology and the teachings of yoga hold many parallel and complementary views and practices. In this paper I will be examining the concepts of nonduality, self-transcendence, intrinsic health, and service; particularly as they are viewed in the Yoga Sutras and transpersonal psychology. The insights held in these time-honored teachings of yoga can help expand and enhance many of the practices and methods utilized by contemporary transpersonal psychologists and vice versa. These teachings contain profound wisdom for cultivating peace, truth, simple living, compassion, and unconditional love as they encourage us to live our lives openly, receptively, and mindfully. They guide us toward the realization of our Oneness, the nondual nature of all existence, and a profound healing on all levels.

Keywords: Transpersonal psychology, Yoga Sutras, ashtanga yoga

### **Introduction**

The concepts of nonduality, intrinsic health, self-transcendence, self-realization, and service are central themes in both transpersonal psychology and in yoga practices. In this paper I will be looking at some of the ways that yoga practices, particularly the yoga darshana (system) set forth in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, can lead us towards uncovering these same concepts within ourselves and in our relationship to the world. In addition, I hope to show how the teachings of the sutras, as well as my personal experience through the practice of yoga, are transpersonal in nature and complement many concepts and aims in transpersonal psychology.

As both a student and teacher of yoga and psychology I have a keen interest in conveying the deeper dimensions of both yoga and psychology. I believe that with the increased interest in yoga it will be of vital importance for those of us who are teaching yoga to remain true to the deeper spiritual and transpersonal nature that is the true essence of the tradition. Furthermore, I feel that in order to convey the deeper spiritual messages of the yoga tradition, it is essential that these teachings have relevancy and meaning in the lives of contemporary yoga practitioners. It is my belief that many of the practices and concepts in transpersonal psychology support and enhance the ancient teachings of yoga and can help make them applicable in our lives today. Likewise, there are also many teachings and concepts that have been passed down through the yoga tradition that can enrich and expand the views and practices in transpersonal psychology. In this paper I will be examining how transpersonal psychology can bring to life the practices and teachings of yoga as well as how yoga practices can expand the view of contemporary transpersonal psychology.

The yoga tradition embraces an immense collection of teachings, ancient texts, and practices that have been passed down and perfected for over 5,000 years. In this paper however, I will be focusing primarily on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, with particular emphasis on the second chapter of the Sutras, and the 8-limbs of Ashtanga yoga. I will explore the yamas (external disciplines) of ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truthfulness), and aparigraha (freedom from desire), and the last three niyamas (internal disciplines), that are collectively known as Kriya yoga; tapas (intensity), svadhyaya (self-study), and isvara pranidhana (orientation toward the divine) together with the final six limbs of Ashtanga yoga—asana (postures), pranayama (breath awareness), pratyahara (sense withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (unity consciousness).

Briefly, the yamas make up the first limb of the Ashtanga yoga system. The yamas are external disciplines that help guide us in maintaining responsible and compassionate relations with all living beings and the environment. The niyamas, the second limb, refers to internal disciplines that guide us toward purification of the body and mind in order to “channel one’s personal energies toward realization” (Hartranft, 2003, p. 31). The third limb, asana, develops the ability to sit in a meditative posture with steadiness and ease. Pranayama is breath regulation. Through observation and regulation of the breath the yogin becomes aware of the subtle energies that connect breath, body, and mind. This leads naturally to the fifth limb, pratyahara, or inward focus of the senses. As the mind becomes more steady through these practices, the yogin experiences deeper levels of concentration (dharana), and eventually meditative absorption or dhyana, the seventh limb. The second sutra sums up the culmination of the yoga darshana, it says, “Yogash chitt vritti nirodhah. The state of Yoga is freedom from identification with the modifications of the mind” (Eaton, 2003, p.6). Here the ultimate state of yoga is realized as the eighth limb—samadhi, the state of Oneness—where all dualities are transcended. This direct experience of nonduality through contemplative practices is also a central concept and aim in transpersonal psychology.

### **The Yoga Sutras and Patanjali**

Patanjali’s yoga darshana, is one of the most important and influential teachings in the yoga tradition, and as in transpersonal psychology, its teachings are contemplative, holistic, and experiential in nature. Although history provides us with very few definitive answers about who the sage Patanjali was, most scholars and historians agree that Patanjali lived sometime around the second century C. E. In the Hindu tradition Patanjali was believed to be a reincarnation of Ananta, who, having a thousand radiant heads, symbolizing infinity and omnipresence, was the serpent ruler assigned to watch over the hidden treasures of the earth. Ananta was given the name Patanjali because he wished to teach yoga, the hidden treasures, on earth. Although Patanjali is held in the highest regard as a knowledgeable and accomplished yogi in his own right, it is thought that his contribution of the Yoga Sutras was essentially one of compiling and systemizing the earlier oral teachings and traditions, rather than being entirely his own original work (Feuerstein, 1998). Even so, Patanjali’s contribution to the yoga tradition through the development of the Yoga Sutras is substantial. In these 196 short aphorisms, he, simply and concisely, brings us to the heart of yoga; which is to “yoke” or rein in, through steady practice, (abhyasa), the wandering tendency of the mind that leads us toward identifying with and seeking happiness in the external material world.

Although these are very ancient teachings that hold great wisdom, it is wisdom that is applicable even in today's world. This knowledge has been passed down through the ages by sages, mystics, gurus, spiritual seekers, and others. It is experiential and direct, as are many of the practices of transpersonal psychology. These teachings and practices have stood the test of time, and even now, can bring us a better understanding of our true nature and interconnection with all of life, allowing us a life of compassion, service, and spirit.

The Yoga Sutras are an open-minded book—a generic process for cultivating mystical experience and perfecting the “art of inquiry” (Freeman, 2001, tape 5A). The emphasis of the Yoga Sutras is on self-realization through direct personal experience and they set forth the spiritual practices that can guide us toward this end. Transpersonal psychology also recognizes mystical and spiritual experiences as well as contemplative practices as significant aspects of human experience, growth, interconnection, and self-realization. And, while affirming spiritual and mystical experience, neither transpersonal psychology nor the Yoga Sutras are considered to be a religion in themselves, but instead an affirmation of the wide variety of human experience.

The Yoga Sutras provide us with a time-honored method for directing the mind inward upon itself so we can recognize the true nature of the Self. This realization does not come about through willful effort, but instead as a natural, relaxed quality. The practices set forth in the Yoga Sutras help us to quiet and still the body-mind, thereby making it easier to relax into this awareness, and to give us the ability to understand the nature of things (Hartranft, 2003). As in transpersonal psychology, the yoga teachings remind us that this ability to understand the nature of things is intrinsic. In the Yoga Sutras we have a methodology, a systematic organization of practices that can lead us, through direct experience, toward the discovery of our true nature, which is “total indivisibility—oneness” ...“unity consciousness” (Eaton, 2003, cd 5).

In yoga this state of “oneness” is known as Samadhi, or the realization of the nondual nature of existence. The realization of nonduality is also a central theme in transpersonal psychology and is uncovered in much the same way, through contemplative practices such as meditation and self-inquiry.

"Passionate enquiry into the self and its source constitutes the activity of yoga, which uncovers samadhi and undermines the duality of the seer and the seen. The seer exists in seeing alone by virtue of reaction to projection. For that reason only does the seen exist. As long as any seer remains, the seen remains. These two: subject and object take their form only in relation to one another. That correlation is caused by ignorance. When ignorance dissolves, that correlation dissolves into otherlessness. The limbs of yogapraxis dissolve restrictions into the radiant wisdom of nondual awareness. Its eight limbs are, yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi" (yogadarshana, 2003).

### **The 8-limbs of Ashtanga Yoga or Raja Yoga**

In this section of the paper I will be taking a look at the eight-limbs of Ashtanga or Raja Yoga, (the royal path), that are revealed in the second chapter of the Yoga Sutras, and how these teachings interweave with many of those in transpersonal psychology. Patanjali's yoga darshana as set forth in the Yoga Sutras “is primarily an

applied and experimental psychology" (Rama, Ballentine & Ajaya, 1976, p. 77). The eight-limbs of Ashtanga yoga move from an external perspective to a deepening internal perspective. The path can be seen as a journey inward, moving from the material, phenomenal world, to a subtler world of pure awareness. Raja yoga is a systematic approach that expands awareness beyond the individual ego consciousness. The eight-limbs work synergistically. In other words, they are all interrelated and interactive, enhancing and supporting one another. Metaphorically the eight-limbs of Ashtanga yoga can be described as limbs of the same tree having "the same essential nature as sap or essence" (Wade, 2004, email). For example, when dhyana (meditation) is disturbed by "latent impressions" (samskaras), we may return our awareness to our breath (pranayama), or the body (asana) in order to begin to re-settle the body-mind and return again to a deeper meditative state (Hartranft, 2003). In this way we become aware of the mind's tendency to wander, one thought leading to another, eventually taking us away from the actual moment to moment experience of simply sitting and breathing. The conscious act of bringing awareness back to the sensations in the body and the flow of the breath become very potent tools in the practice of meditation and mindfulness of the present moment.

### **The Yamas and Niyamas**

As mentioned earlier the first two limbs of the eight-limbs of the Ashtanga (Raja) yoga system are the yamas and niyamas. The yamas and niyamas are very practical, down-to-earth principles that can help us to be in the world without adding suffering to the larger whole or to ourselves (Hartranft, 2003). They encourage us to be aware of and take responsibility for our thoughts and actions in such a way that we not only consider how they affect and reflect on our own lives, but others' lives as well, including the environment in which we live. The yamas and the niyamas are not to be viewed as moral commandments that we reluctantly follow out of a sense of duty or obligation. They "are actually emphatic declarations of what we are when we are connected to our true nature" (Richard Miller, quoted in Farhi, 2003, p. 29). Observing and living our lives in accordance to the guidelines set forth in the yamas and niyamas, therefore, is experienced as a natural expression originating from our own inner wisdom and compassion.

"The external disciplines of Ashtanga Yoga begin with the yamas. These principles help facilitate a compassionate and loving way to be and act in the world. The yamas are beneficial not only to the individual, but to all. They are guidelines "for living a pure, live-supporting life" (Eaton, 2003, p. 7). When we take the 'great vow' (mahavrata) of the yamas we are reminded that we are not alone and that we truly are interconnected and part of a larger whole. "Yam reaches its peak when a man becomes so established in it that he always acts and thinks for the universe as a whole. Then, he thinks beyond the bounds of any kind of species, and beyond any space, nation, or time" (Shyam, 2001, p. 74).

### **Yamas – the 1st limb**

The five yamas are: ahimsa, non-harming; satya, truthfulness; asteya, non-stealing; brahmacharya, movement in Brahman or chastity; and aparigraha, freedom from wanting.

Beginning with ahimsa, Patanjali tells us in Sutra 2.35, "Being firmly grounded in nonviolence creates an atmosphere in which others can let go of their hostility" (translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 34). The practice of ahimsa can be internal as well as external. On the internal level the practice of ahimsa gives us the opportunity to become more aware of the ways we sometimes create harm and violence toward our own minds and bodies. The ultimate injury is separation from the Self. In this respect perfect ahimsa would be samadhi, "the state of Oneness, absorption of the individual I in the Self," however we can also practice ahimsa on the external level of form (Eaton, 2003, cd 5). On the external level, as we become more aware of how we create violence or harm toward others, we can begin to let that go and as we do this we also, in turn, give others permission to drop their defenses and tendencies toward violence and harm (Hartranft, 2003, p. 34). Practicing ahimsa creates an atmosphere in which "violence and enmity must cease to exist because they find no reciprocation" (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1981, p. 148). In this respect practicing ahimsa is both personal and transpersonal, as it becomes "a manifestation of self-transcending love" and "a building block of spiritual practice" (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 203). Ahimsa is a natural response that arises as the yogin seeks to cultivate the qualities that will allow them to transcend separate ego identity and the apparent differences between beings. As this happens the yogin comes to realize their true nature. The Bhagavad-Gita (13.27) refers to this as the realization of sama-darshana (sameness). This realization allows us to go beyond the apparent differences between ourselves, and others to an understanding of oneness (Feuerstein, 1998). We go beyond and through self/ego, subject/object identification to the transpersonal. This is direct knowledge of nonduality and it cultivates the qualities of ahimsa and compassion towards self and others.

Satya (truthfulness) is the second yama and it is intimately related to ahimsa. Sutra 2.36 tells us that "For those grounded in truthfulness, every action and its consequences are imbued with truth" (translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 34). Satya is being truthful with ourselves as well as those around us—speaking from the heart of truth. It is important to keep in mind that satya also reaches beyond relative truth to a truth that considers the larger whole. A story that Swami Shyam often tells about a deer and a hunter illustrates the higher truth of satya and its connection to ahimsa.

"There was a yogi meditating in the peacefulness of the forest and a deer pranced by in front of him. He looked and was awestruck by its grace and beauty. Five minutes later a hunter came by and asked the yogi if he had seen a deer go by. The yogi pointed in the opposite direction in order to save the deer. Was this yogi practicing satya and ahinsaa? He was acting for life and for the whole, not for the individual needs of the hunter" (re-told in Wade, 2004, email).

"For the traditional yogin, truthfulness is a manifestation of the absolute Truth, which is the ultimate spiritual Reality itself ... when we are truthful we participate in some way in that ultimate Truth" (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 221). This Truth can be the realization of our interconnection with all of life. If our speech and actions are coming from a place of truthfulness, then the effects will also be filled with truth, therefore not only affecting our own personal actions, but also allowing others to let down any inclination or feeling that they must deceive (Hartranft, 2003, p 34). This ability to speak from the heart of truth or satya is essential in council practice, which is a key method utilized in transpersonal psychology.

Council practice is an effective means for opening up and maintaining authentic communication among groups. It can be used in small groups between individuals or among families, as well as larger groups such as communities, businesses, schools, and other organizations. In its most basic form council practice involves passing a talking piece, which is an object the group agrees upon, such as a stone or stick, etc. When an individual holds the talking piece their intention is to tell their story with the feeling and truthfulness that comes naturally in that moment. This is called "speaking from the heart." As the person holding the talking piece speaks, the intention of the other participants is to listen with an open heart and mind, and without judgment, to what is being said. This is called "listening from the heart." It is also important to "speak spontaneously," meaning that we let our words flow from the moment without rehearsal or pre-planning. This is important to remember, because if a participant is planning what they would like to say before the talking piece comes to them, then it is likely they were not "listening from the heart" to those who were speaking before them. In addition, it is important to say only what is necessary. In other words, "speak leanly." Use only enough words to get your story across; keeping in mind that others would also like an opportunity to tell their story as well (Council, 2004).

Council practice is satya (truth) in action and it has the ability to transform those involved. Satya is the heart of council practice. When we sit in council we are applying a practical method in which satya can manifest in our lives. Council practice awakens deep open-hearted expression of our own truth, while it simultaneously asks for empathetic and attentive listening to others as they express their truth. In council practice satya reveals our interconnection with others as we learn to go beyond our own individual, sometimes limiting perspectives and beliefs, and simultaneously to become open to others as well (Ojai Foundation, 2004). This is the Truth based on Self, the Oneness and interconnection of our underlying principle of being and living in this truth (Eaton, 2003).

Asteya is the third yama. It means non-stealing and is also related to ahimsa or non-harming. "For those who have no inclination to steal, the truly precious is at hand" (Sutra 2.37 in Hartranft, 2003, p. 34). Asteya means letting go of any longing for that which belongs to others. This letting go of the desire to acquire something that belongs to someone else releases us to see what is really important and valuable in our own life. The desire to appropriate more material possessions in order to find happiness is a result of avidya (spiritual ignorance) in which we believe ourselves to be separate from others, and possessing a limited body-mind. If we apply the practice of asteya in our lives it can help us to subdue the many messages we receive daily that try to convince us that we need more external "stuff," and that we can't be truly happy without the newest gadget, or that happiness has more to do with size of our house or the make of our car than what we can discover when we look inside our own heart and mind. When we realize our true nature as spiritual and that we are unity consciousness, we can begin to release the feelings of envy, jealousy, and wanting. We recognize that lasting happiness is not going to be a result of obtaining more material possessions.

Brahmacharya, the fourth yama, literally translates, "moving in Brahm" (Eaton, 2003, p. 7). Sutra 2.38 says, "The chaste acquire vitality" (translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 34). This sutra refers to responsible and proper behavior in all our relationships. It is often translated to mean chastity, or sexual abstinence. This yama asks us to be aware of how we use our energy and to focus on directing our energies

toward Brahman, reaching our full potential, God consciousness or Self. "By maintaining complete and uninterrupted brahmacharya or one-pointed attention on Brahm, the yogi gains tremendous powers of mind, intelligence, sense, and body" (Paad 2, Verse 38, translation in Shyam, 2001, p. 74). Energy is required to follow and persevere in our spiritual practice each day. If we dedicate our energies toward our spiritual practice, at some point this effort will become effortless and we begin to tap into, replenish, and live from the deep well within. From a yogic and transpersonal perspective when this happens our energy can be guided in such a way that we become more fully alive, grounded in the present moment, spontaneous, open, receptive, and available to others. We transform our tendency toward expectation and competition into aspiration and inspiration.

Aparigraha, freedom from desire, or from the compulsion to obtain more is the fifth yama. "Freedom from wanting unlocks the real purpose of existence" (Sutra 2.39 translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 34). It can also mean simple living (Eaton, 2003, cd 5). It is the freedom we can experience when we choose to live simply and not take more than we need, not accumulating excess. We free ourselves from the notion that external "things" will make us happy and we reconnect with that which brings us true happiness. Aparigraha also frees us to live more contentedly, as we let go of reaching toward something that is always beyond our grasp.

Aparigraha and asteya are closely related and can be directly applied in our lives as we consciously try to develop a non-consumerist, more environmentally friendly attitude in our lives. Kanner & Gomes (1995) writes that one of the most detrimental environmental issues we are now encountering is the consumption practices of the First World, where consumption is often viewed as positive by many governments and their economic policies. We are encouraged to consume more and more because there is always something "out there" that can make us feel better. Corporate advertisers barrage us daily with messages that happiness can be a result of buying something new and shiny, in acquiring something we don't already possess. This could be "the single largest psychological project ever undertaken by the human race, yet its stunning impact remains curiously ignored by mainstream Western psychology" (Kanner & Gomes, 1995, p. 80). This may indeed be true for some schools of Western psychology, however neither transpersonal psychology nor the yoga darshana have overlooked or condoned the psychological affects of advertising, or its' connection to consumerism and, in turn, its effect on the human psyche and the environment. This is one area where transpersonal psychology and yoga psychology consider the expanded view. Both encourage us to seek happiness by turning our awareness inward and inquiring more deeply and, at the same time, further beyond the phenomenal material world to find happiness. We do not become whole by trying to fill ourselves from the outside, but by relaxing into our true nature. This is where lasting happiness is ultimately found, and as we connect with the spiritual Self we also come to realize our connection with all, our oneness or unity consciousness.

I have found through the contemplative practices of yoga and transpersonal psychology, that as I direct my awareness inward, I bring about a deeper connection and awareness of just how my thoughts and actions manifest in the world in which I live. The practices of asteya and aparigraha are transpersonal in nature because they bring me to an understanding of the inward focus that must take place in order to find true and lasting happiness. Then, paradoxically, from this inward turning, I am able to soften and expand outward, connecting with and becoming more aware of

others and my environment. Yoga practice and the application of transpersonal psychology help me to uncover glimpses of a deeper happiness that is already present within my being. I have only to open to it.

### **Niyamas – the 2nd limb**

The second limb of the Ashtanga yoga darshana is the niyamas. They are internal disciplines that yoke us personally with the process of self-realization. (Hartranft, 2003). Collectively they are: sauca, (purification), santosha (contentment), tapas (intensity), svadyaya (self-study), and isvara pranidhana (orientation toward pure awareness).

Sauca, or purification, is the first niyama. In sutras 2.40 and 41 Patanjali says that, "With bodily purification, one's body ceases to be compelling, likewise contact with others. Purification also brings about clarity, happiness, concentration, mastery of the senses, and capacity for self-awareness" (translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 35). Sauca refers to physical cleanliness and taking care of one's self properly, as well as mental purity in regards to thinking wholesome thoughts. Interestingly, as sauca manifests our attachment and/or relationship with our physical body and to another's physical body doesn't hold as much significance or attachment. We begin to see beyond the physical body to the Divine that is within each and everyone. We begin to understand that everyone and everything has significance and all are part of, and contribute to a much larger whole, of which we are part of. This is an important concept in transpersonal psychology and in yoga, particularly regarding the area of service, because practicing sauca asks us to look beyond the physical and mental challenges, and to truly open our hearts to the beauty that is within each person, not just those we might be attracted to. Our hearts are open to unconditional love and compassion.

Santosha is the second niyama and it means contentment. "Contentment brings unsurpassed joy" (Sutra 2.42, translation in Hartranft, p. 35). Santosha refers to the joy that comes when we let go of our attachment to the idea that obtaining material or external "things" will bring us lasting happiness. When we can begin to do this we are more able to live in the present or the "here and now" (Hartranft, 2003, p. 36). For example, if we take a moment to remember the times when we have felt contentment, most likely they were those times "when we lived—as we so seldom do—in the depths of the present moment, without regretting the past or worrying about the future. This is what Patanjali means by contentment" (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1981, p. 152). In transpersonal psychology and in yoga practice, being present for our experience as it is happening is very important for living our lives authentically, as well as being more authentic with others.

At the beginning of yoga practice I will often remind myself and my students, that one of the most important aspects of yoga as "yoking" is the ability to be present for our experience as it is happening in each moment. We "yoke" or "join" our attention to the present moment by remaining attentive to our breath, and then linking or synchronizing our breath around the movement and stillness of the yoga postures. We remain receptive to the sensations in the body, as well as the emotions and thoughts that arise and fall from moment to moment as we practice. In this manner, we, without effort, begin to tend and cultivate the quality of contentment as we give ourselves permission to be present for our experience without judgment of any kind, negative or positive, or trying to be somewhere other than where we are.



The last three niyamas: intensity (tapas), self-study (svadhyaya), and orientation toward pure awareness (isvara pranidhana) are known as the yogic path of action, or kriya yoga. Patanjali asserts that the path or way to freedom is through action of these three disciplines (Hartranft, 2003). "Yogic action has three components—discipline (tapas, literally heat), providing energy; self-study (svadyaya), serves as a road map; and orientation toward the ideal of pure awareness (iswara), which is the destination" (Yoga Sutras 2.1-2, translated in Hartranft, 2003, p 21). Tapas (intensity) generates heat and energy for our spiritual practice (sadhana), this heat and energy enables us to go deeper, allowing for self-study (svadhyaya), and meditation on the Self. This leads naturally toward aligning ourselves with isvara pranidhana, the knowledge that we are One with all, the state of nonduality, or samadhi. Through samadhi we go back into the very root of the mind and eventually become fully grounded in the present moment (Freeman, 2001). These three niyamas are directly related to transpersonal psychology, in regard to the value of dedicated spiritual practice, meditation, and self-inquiry.

Tapas, literally meaning heat or intensity refers to passionate commitment toward freeing the body-mind from attachment and aversion. "As intense discipline burns up impurities, the body and its senses become supremely refined" (Sutra 2.43 translated in Hartranft, 2003, p. 35). True tapas requires us to access our inner reserves, courage, and endurance with patience. It is a mindful exploration of our own limits at all levels; body, mind, and spirit. As Feuerstein (2003, p. 144) tells us, tapas is "voluntary self-challenge."

When we practice tapas we become both aware and mindful of the times we can see beyond and not reactively follow the distractive impulses of ego's tendency toward attachment and aversion. In yoga and other contemplative practices this is often referred to as developing the witness function. It is an ability to let go and simply observe the workings of our own body-mind without identifying or mindlessly reacting to them. We use detached observation as we are able to note a distracting inclination or tendency without reactively following it. In other words, "we use the senses—we are not used by them" (Eaton, 2003 cd 5). Cultivating the energy, warmth, passion, and "discriminating awareness" of tapas can be transpersonal in nature as we become more attuned to our usual ego reactions and begin to respond more authentically from our true Self, instead of the reactive ego.

During the practices of hatha yoga and meditation we can generate tapas in the body and mind simultaneously. My own practices of ashtanga vinyasa yoga and meditation have helped me to understand and appreciate the importance of tapas, and how it reflects and can transform my entire life into a spiritual practice. In my own experience, practicing tapas can be very different from day to day. There are times when I find myself welcoming the "self-challenge" of my practice and the heat it generates, and the concentration, courage, and patience it requires. I may enjoy exploring the physical strengths and limitations of my body as well as the mental craziness and occasional stillness of my mind. There are other days when it takes all I've got to simply convince myself to get up early in the morning and begin my practice. Tapas can be different from day to day and from individual to individual. It is very important to recognize this. Practicing tapas not only means physical self-challenge, it also means mental self-challenge. It challenges thoughts and presumptions and requires recognition of the variety of mind games that my hungry ego plays to feed itself. I have found myself at times giving myself a mental pat on the back, for being "so good." I think about how wonderfully virtuous I must be for

getting out of bed to practice when "most people are still sleeping." Real tapas, however is not meant to warm and comfort the ego-self. As Feuerstein (2003, p. 146) reminds us, "Genuine tapas makes us shine like the sun. Then we can be a source of warmth, comfort, and strength for others." Real tapas goes beyond the ego-self to create a compassionate heat that can provide warmth and nourishment to the indivisible Self or in transpersonal terms, to reach "beyond the self."

Svadhyaaya or self-study is the fourth niyama. Sutra 2.44 says that, "Self-study deepens communion with one's own personal deity" (translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 35). It is important to keep in mind here that although studying traditional scriptures and texts is important, these teachings are not to be taken purely on blind faith, but instead on a feeling of trust or deep faith (shraddha) that our "own" inquiry and practice evolves. Self-knowledge or svadhyaaya, in the yoga tradition is experiential in nature. It is an inward "journey of self-discovery, self-understanding, and self-transcendence" (Feuerstein, 2003, p.164). Svadhyaaya is about recognizing and trusting in our own inner wisdom and ways of knowing. This type of study is based in the understanding of the transpersonal concepts of intrinsic health and the basic goodness that exists within us all, as well as the felt knowledge that we are all part of, and can contribute to, the larger whole. We learn to open up and listen to our own inner wisdom through self-inquiry as we also respond to the wisdom of others who have come before us. This learning is transpersonal in nature as it entails listening to our own intrinsic knowledge as well as collective knowledge, and it is also experiential and experimental in nature. It is knowledge that results from an inward turning, as well as an outward expansion toward the Self. The Vishnu-Purana 6.6.2 tells us that, "From study one should proceed to practice (yoga), and from practice to study. The supreme Self is revealed through perfection in study and practice" (in Feuerstein, 2003, p. 164). This passage encourages and requires us to put forth the effort of practice and self-inquiry in our studies, to test it for ourselves. It also reminds us that we are not alone, that there is guidance available from others who have also tested it themselves through their own practices.

Svadhyaaya refers not only to study and self-inquiry into the wisdom teachings, but also to how we may then apply what we have learned to our own life and our relationship to others as well (Hartranft, 2003). In this respect what we learn from our study and self-inquiry and how we apply this knowledge in our lives is analogous to the two wings of a bird. The two wings being, self-study (learning) and right action (application). One without the other cannot lift us to the state of yoga. We must yoke learning with application, as we would yoke the individual self and the universal Self. When practiced together they allow us to transform our own life and apply passionate and compassionate action in the world.

Isvara-Pranidhana, the fifth niyama, is devotion or dedication to the knowledge that the self is the same one indivisible Self, and therefore, there can be no difference. It is aligning oneself with the knowledge that the one Being is the Truth of everything (Eaton, 2003). Sutra 2:35 tell us that, "Through orientation toward the ideal of pure awareness, one can achieve integration" (translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 35). At the beginning of hatha yoga and sitting meditation practice I observe a short ritual. Often I will also suggest this to my students at the beginning of a yoga class. It is quite simple, but it is very helpful, to take a few moments and establish a foundation of mindfulness and presence for our practice. We bring ourselves into stillness and silence, feeling the body and listening to the flow of the breath, as we also become aware of our state of mind, just as it happens in the moment. I call it "taking time to

re-acquaint ourselves with ourselves” and we do this without judgment or expectation or trying to change anything. We just notice what we notice and let our practice unfold as an open-ended inquiry. When we sit in stillness we “align” ourselves with the knowledge that prakriti (nature), will unfold as it will, regardless of our attachment and/or aversion to this unfolding. Isvara provides the inspiration to cultivate non-reaction (vairagya) toward this unfolding (Hartranft, 2003). Then, as we turn our focus inward we also open to our own hearts’ blessing, and how we might be able to bring what we discover in our practice to the rest of our life. There may even be an intention, dedication, or spontaneous prayer that emanates forth from the heart that places our practice in a larger perspective, adding a spiritual and devotional attitude to it.

### **Asana - the 3rd limb**

The third limb is asana or posture. “The postures of meditation should embody steadiness and ease. This occurs as all effort relaxes and coalescence arises, revealing that the body and the infinite universe are indivisible. Then one is no longer disturbed by the play of opposites” (Yoga Sutras 2.46.47; 48, translated in Hartranft, 2003, p. 37). Both the place and the posture in which the yogin sits are considered asana. Patanjali identifies two important factors in asana; sthira (steadiness) and sukha (ease). Patanjali first talks about the importance of relaxing effort. “Asana is a window that opens onto some of our deepest personal conditioning and the suffering it generates. In order to relax into things as they actually are, one must surrender every last drop of the internalized desire to feel good” (Hartranft, 2003, p. 38). The second factor is the arising of coalescence (samapatti). As effort releases we begin to see the connection between the body and consciousness with more clarity. In the Yoga Sutras, the aim of asana is to achieve an “effortless alertness, in which the body is perfectly steady and yet perfectly relaxed,” because “...a maladjusted body only expresses a tense and restless state of mind...” (Prabhavananda; Isherwood, 1981, p. 61).

Patanjali’s practice of asana in The Yoga Sutras is quite different from current hatha yoga practices that move the body into a seemingly infinite variety of postures or asanas. However, through hatha yoga practice we can learn a tremendous amount about ourselves if we pay attention to when and where we tend to contract and tighten up when faced with challenges, difficulties, and uncertainties. As we become more aware of the ways that our body-mind tends to constrict or armor itself against the challenges, as well as how we tend to hold on to the pleasurable experiences in our hatha yoga practice, we begin to recognize how these tendencies also act themselves out in other areas of our life. When we learn to relax and allow ourselves to come more fully, openly, and receptively into the present moment just as it presents itself during hatha yoga practice, we can also learn to bring this same quality of mindfulness and attention to the rest of our life (Hartranft, 2003).

Here, in the West, many of us associate “yoga” with hatha yoga or postures (asanas). Although hatha yoga may appear to be no more than physical exercise, it is far more than a mere external form. When we practice hatha yoga mindfully, with our full attention, we ultimately bring an internal awareness and a “yoking together” of body, breath, mind, and spirit. Farhi (2003, p. 86) reminds us that, “As we give our full attention to every breath, movement, and the subtlest of sensations, the body becomes mindful, and the mind becomes embodied.” It is important, however, to remember that while “embodied awareness” is a significant part of the yogic

tradition, we are more than our body, and "that which is eternal in us is not the body, but that which is eternal, lives through the body" (Farhi, 2003, p. 92). The path of hatha yoga reminds us that because we are embodied, in order to realize the Self, we cannot avoid the body or the mind. We cannot simply transcend the body or the mind, but instead we must go through them, experience them, live in them, and eventually come to understand them. Part of how we do this is by taking care of our body and mind, using both with respect and compassion.

There are many styles or paths of hatha yoga that are currently being practiced in many parts of the world. These various forms of hatha yoga have been tested and re-tested (replicated), expanded upon and perfected by countless yogins through the ages and although they might appear to be very different they are all designed to guide us toward the ultimate state of yoga. This is described in many ways; self-realization, union with the Divine, unity consciousness, or the nondual awareness of Samadhi. In the practice of hatha yoga the body itself becomes the ground for self-realization.

After a few years of dabbling in various forms of hatha yoga I found the path of ashtanga vinyasa yoga. This is the form of hatha yoga that I practice, and I will be drawing from this tradition as I discuss my own experience with hatha yoga, but also keep in mind that this is but one of many paths and all are equally valid and eventually lead to the same place.

In the ashtanga vinyasa system there are both visible and invisible tools that we use to help us stay attentive and open to our present experience. What we see at first glance are the postures of the practice, and the flow of movement between the postures. The ashtanga vinyasa system consists of a specific series of postures, one posture flowing into the next. It is an intelligent and logical sequence of postures that, followed in the proper order, prepares the body and mind for the next posture in the series. It is a natural progression that allows us to do what might otherwise be impossible (Freeman, 1993). What we don't see are the tools or essential elements that go beyond the visible outward form of the postures. These invisible elements are: vinyasa (breath around movement), specifically ujjayi pranayama (victorious breath), bandhas (internal energy locks), and drishti (gazing points).

Vinyasa means breath/synchronized movement. In ashtanga vinyasa yoga ujjayi pranayama and movement are never separate. They are intimately linked throughout the entire practice. In this way we are integrating both the 3rd limb of classical Raja yoga, asana, with the 4th limb, pranayama (breath awareness). In the ashtanga vinyasa practice these two limbs are meant to be practiced together. When performing ujjayi pranayama we breathe through the nose as the breath is drawn in from the back of the throat. The muscles around the glottis are slightly contracted. This contraction controls the flow of air, creating friction as the breath passes through the glottis (throat). This is what creates the ujjayi sound. This sound is similar to the sound heard when holding a large seashell to your ear or the sound of a whisper, or sometimes, to help young people understand the sound that ujjayi pranayama produces, it might be compared to Darth Vader breath. Ujjayi pranayama means victorious stretching of the inner breath. We do this in two ways. The first stretching of the breath involves creating an even length of inhalation and exhalation, then the second stretching of the breath involves synchronizing both the length of the breath to the body's movements or transitions (vinyasa) (Scott, 2000).

The bandhas, or locks, are a series of internal energy gates in the body that help to regulate the flow of prana (life energy or force) within the subtle energy channels known in yoga as nadis. There are said to be 72,000 nadis (energy channels) in the subtle body. When we engage these locks, which are gentle internal contractions, this energy is spread throughout the nadis. This energy is then assimilated on a cellular level as the prana cleanses and nourishes our subtle body and balances the gross nervous system (Swenson, 2000). Engaging these energy channels, we actually unlock the life force energy and direct prana. Through the combination of ujjayi pranayama and the bandhas, an "internal alchemy is achieved," and when this happens our postures take shape from the inside out, "and the outer body eventually reflects that which is created within" (Scott, 2000, p. 21).

There are two bandhas that are utilized throughout the ashtanga vinyasa system. The first lock is called mula bandha or root lock. It occurs at the base of the spinal column, symbolically, our base of support and connection to the earth. This lock is a lifting or drawing up of the perineum or pelvic floor. Mula bandha is a safety lock that seals the energy of prana internally so that the next lock, called uddiyana bandha, can then direct the energy upward through the nadis (Scott, 2000). Uddiyana bandha means, flying upward. This lock is a drawing up and lifting of the lower abdominal muscles below the navel. It is a "softness and stillness" of the lower abdomen and allows us to fully expand the ribcage and lungs as we breathe (Scott, 2000, p. 22). Because these locks don't occur without concentration and effort, they help provide a foundation for establishing mindfulness in our practice. As we synchronize focused breathing (ujjayi pranayama), with an uninterrupted flow of postures (asanas), and locks (bandhas), we cultivate an internal heat in the body-mind. This heat contributes tapas, or intensity to our practice. On the physical level this internal heat produces sweat, increases flexibility, and removes toxins. On the psychological level this internal heat helps us burn through avidya (spiritual ignorance) and the false illusions we might hold about ourselves, and the world. This results in "a powerful cleansing, purifying, and detoxifying of body and mind" (Gauci, 2003, p. 1).

Another important element of the ashtanga vinyasa system is drishti. The drishti's are specific gazing points where we focus our eyes during the practice. This helps to focus the mind and our attention by drawing the outward-looking eyes and senses inward. The inner focus of the drishti begins to cultivate pratyahara, the turning of the senses inward, which is the 5th limb of the Ashtanga darshana system (Scott, 2000). When we unite these essential elements of the ashtanga vinyasa yoga system, vinyasa, bandhas and drishti, through sustained practice (abhyasa) we experience the state of tristana (Scott, 2000).

"When this union blossoms, a powerful wave of fluidity and grace flows from our practice, and the resulting chemistry unleashes the energies of the five elements:

**Earth**—mula bandha producing foundation, stability, and strength.

**Water**—the fluidity of vinyasa producing sweat.

**Air**—ujjayi breathing and bandhas for lightness.

**Fire**—the purifying digestive fire of agni.

**Ether**—the subtle, all-pervading prana."

(Scott, 2000, p. 23)

The primary intention of hatha yoga is to develop a deeper connection to the life force that animates and moves through us, and through all of existence. As we do

this we open ourselves to the inherent wisdom of discovering who we truly are (Farhi, 2003). Through perfect attention or present-mindedness of body, breath, mind, and spirit as we practice ashtanga vinyasa yoga, or any hatha yoga system, we begin to experience nonduality within our own being, and an expanded awareness as well as the underlying animating force that connects all of life.

As I look back now I cannot say what initially drew me to yoga, but like many people in the West my first experience of yoga was through hatha yoga. I began practicing hatha yoga on my own—with guidance from a couple of books and a CD. I discovered almost immediately that yoga was much more than a physical practice. I connected to something that was beyond just the physical body. I felt connected within my own being, and at the same time connected to something beyond my own limited or normally closed bodily feelings; a feeling of wholeness and connection. I felt centered and expansive at the same time. I felt effort release into effortlessness as I experienced a sense of balance. I came to realize that my thoughts did not necessarily define “who” I was. I realized a remarkable paradox, that as I allowed myself to be ever more present in my body, breath, and mind; I simultaneously discovered that I was really so much more than just these things. I felt small, and yet, at the same time, infinite. I dug deeper and eventually found my spiritual practice of ashtanga vinyasa yoga, which in time led to seated meditation, chanting, prayer, and service. I feel that I have embarked upon the most amazing journey.

This journey, like all journeys, has its inevitable ups and downs. Sometimes I find myself struggling with the kleshas, which the Yoga Sutras call the “causes of suffering.” There are times when I doubt my intentions, find myself becoming lazy about practicing, and wondering if there might be an easier way. I struggle with the klesha of avidya (spiritual ignorance), as I turn to the material world for happiness. Sometimes this is felt as the need to buy something new, or stay up too late and then sleep in, or become too “busy” to make time to practice each day. Interestingly, something inevitable brings me gently back to the practice. Many times I have picked myself up and began again—and yet again. I remind myself to approach each day on the mat and the meditation cushion as a “brand new” experience and I am also aware that, if I allow it to, the practice will unfold like a microcosmic journey for life. Practice mirrors life and teaches me so much about myself, and my “self” in the world. I have learned compassion for others as I have learned to extend compassion towards my own struggle. My practice takes me through a full range of the human condition; sometimes I am bored, other times I am challenged by it. I may become apathetic, and doubt why I am doing this yet again. At other times I may feel complete, serene, focused, and content to simply release into the practice and the process. In staying attentive as I practice, I may find myself attached (the klesha of raga) to certain postures and thoughts that I feel as “good,” and wanting to avoid (the klesha of dvesha) other postures and thoughts that challenge me, and my concepts. As I watch the flow of thoughts and sensations and breath in my body, I sometimes find myself reacting, and identifying with them as a sense of “I-am-ness,” the klesha of asmita or ego-self identification. On my mat and cushion everyday I face myself. Here, as I learn to pay attention and stay present with the sensations in my body, my breath, and watch the thoughts that pass through my mind, I am reminded that while this is where I am in this moment, I am also ultimately more than all of this—I am a spiritual being. I try to remember to remain present and cultivate the qualities of openness, kindness, curiosity, maitri (friendliness), even a sense of adventure, humor, and compassion toward myself, and as I learn to extend these qualities toward myself I can in turn extend and bring these qualities into the

rest of my life and my relationships with others. My yoga practice becomes sadhana, a spiritual practice that informs and guides my entire life.

### **Pranayama – the 4th limb**

Pranayama or breath awareness is the fourth limb. Pranayama is the bridge between body and mind. Although there are many different pranayama or breathing practices that are taught in yoga practices, the basic foundation for pranayama practice is to cultivate a smooth, steady, even rhythm of breathing. Pranayama is a vital component of a formal yoga practice, such as in asana and meditation, as well as in our everyday life experiences. In asana practice, when we come up against tightness and resistance in the body, or postures that challenge us, we learn to relax, soften, and breathe through whatever we are resisting. In meditation, when thoughts and/or emotions arise, we learn to give ourselves some space to acknowledge the emotion or thought, and then let it fall away with the flow of our breath. We then learn that through all kinds of real-life situations, we can take a moment, steady our breath, and return to a neutral point. It isn't so much that we control our breath or the situation, but instead we use the "breath to remind us of the place inside us that is always steady ... like a companion ... reminding us of who we are" (Farhi, 2003, p. 98). As we do this we are making the conscious choice to either be more open and relaxed or to close down and harden ourselves.

Pranayama means "the expansion of vital energy." Prana translates to mean "the vital energy hidden in the breath" and ayama translates as "infinite expansion" (Osho, 2002, p. 145). By breathing in this manner we are not only breathing individually, but breathing in an expanded way that connects us to all of existence (Osho, 2002). In pranayama we allow ourselves to let go of restlessness and struggle and we effortlessly expand and release the breath in rhythm with the whole. And as the breath expands infinitely, we connect to the life energy that flows through us and all of life in such a way that we are breathing in harmony with the whole; "with the trees, and mountains and sky and stars." Pranayama happens when "you no longer breathe; the whole breathes in you." (Osho, 2002, p. 147).

"Sit with a tree. If you are silent, enjoying, delighting, suddenly you will become aware that the tree, somehow, is breathing the same way you are breathing. And there comes a moment when one feels that one is breathing together with the whole; one becomes the breath of the whole" (Osho, 2002, p. 145).

When breathing expands to the point that we "become aware that the tree, somehow is breathing the same way you are breathing" and "one is breathing together with the whole" then pranayama can help us discover the qualities that connect us with our natural environment. In the field of ecopsychology, which is transpersonal in nature and closely related to transpersonal psychology, this type of expanded pranayama practice can be very useful.

Ecopsychologists hold the view that humans and the natural environment are one and the same (nondual). We share jointly and equally in our existence. When we disconnect from the natural environment we also disconnect from our own psyche and the profound healing that can take place between the human psyche and nature. One way that ecopsychologists are bridging this disconnect is to provide people with various opportunities to experience nature first-hand, as part of who they are. As Davis (1998, p. 8) tells us "conceiving of nature as a broader, more inclusive self

may be a necessary step in developing our views of the human-nature relationship." Because breathing is something we all must do, something, both conscious and unconscious, and is our life force itself, pranayama practices can bring us into an expanded awareness of the reciprocal giving and receiving that takes place when we sit with a tree and breathe with it. This could be very helpful in creating the recognition that we are nature herself, and her, us—a central concept in yoga practices, transpersonal psychology, and ecopsychology.

### **Pratyahara – the 5th limb**

Pratyahara, the fifth limb, is the turning point—moving away from the external to a more internal orientation. Pratyahara is the inward focus of mindfulness or attention. "When consciousness interiorizes by uncoupling from external objects, the senses do likewise; this is called withdrawal of the senses. Then the senses reside utterly in the service of realization" (Yoga Sutras 2.54 & 55, translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 42). In pratyahara we begin to center our awareness in the inner source. The powers, or shakti that operate through our senses begin to become withdrawn from our senses as we attend more fully to our "inner being" and "it becomes clear that we have to cultivate this inner mechanism of knowing" (Eaton, 2003, cd 5). Pratyahara reverses the energy of the senses from seeking external stimulation to internal experience. In combination with the previous two limbs, asana and pranayama, particularly the union of vinyasa, bandhas, and drishti, we begin to experience this inward turning of the senses. Then, with pratyahara, the "yogi crosses the threshold of interiorization" (Hartranft, 2003, p. 43). "Only when external distractions have been completely transcended can concentration and absorption develop enough to reveal that one is always observing one's consciousness of an object and never the object itself" (Hartranft, 2003, p. 43).

This turning of the senses inward leads toward the development of the final three limbs, a focused mind (dharana), meditative stability (dhyana), and eventually Samadhi, the state of Oneness or nonduality, which leads to spontaneous compassion toward others and ourselves, as we experience how interconnected we truly are.

### **Dharana – the 6th limb**

The sixth limb is dharana. Dharana is concentration, but without force or control; a relaxed concentration that we release into, without striving to achieve anything. In dharana, we bring our attention to one point. "Concentration locks consciousness on a single area. In meditative absorption, the entire perceptual flow is aligned with that object" (Yoga Sutras, 3: 1 ; 2, translation in Hartranft, 2003, p. 45). One technique that can help establish dharana, or joining our attention to one point, is mantra practice. Without force or control one simply repeats a mantra, over and over again. When the mind wanders away from the mantra to other thoughts, it is gently brought back to the mantra, the one place you have chosen to attend to (Eaton, 2003). One can also choose to join attention to the body sitting (asana) and breathing (pranayama). By joining our attention to mantra, body, and/or breath we become aware of the distractibility of our own minds. "The "effortless effort" of abhyasa (constant application or practice) manifests here as the effort both to focus and to return from distraction, while the will not to react (vairagya) is the mechanism through which distractibility is attenuated" (Hartranft, 2003, p. 46). Vairagya is the ability and willingness to let phenomenon, feelings, emotions,



thoughts, etc. simply arise before our consciousness without reactivity or adding to them in any way. When we do this we can actually be more fully aware and open to direct experience. We have begun to eliminate some of the confusion and self-illusion we often create, and this leads us toward “profound stillness and clarity” (Hartranft, 2003, p. 6). This is an important skill that can be developed through the various practices of yoga, and in particular through hatha yoga and meditation as we learn to remain open to all the sensations in the body, as well as the thoughts and emotions that arise, without letting ourselves be drawn into them or distracted by them.

Just as withdrawal of the senses (pratyahara) arises from bringing our attention to asana and pranayama, dharana (concentration) arises from stilling the senses (pratyahara), and as the attention remains more and more ‘joined’ to the chosen object or field of concentration through dharana, the next limb dhyana, or meditative absorption will begin to unfold (Hartranft, 2003). As we move through the eight-limbs of the Ashtanga yoga system we can experience how each limb supports and cultivates the others.

### **Dhyana – the 7th limb**

Dhyana, the seventh limb is meditative absorption. “When only the essential nature of the object shines forth, as if formless, integration has arisen.” (Yoga Sutra, 3: 3, translated in Hartranft, 2003, p. 45). Now that the attention has been brought to one point through dharana, there is a shift to dhyana, where the object of concentration is dropped. “In dhyana you also drop that point. Now you are totally centered, “nowhere-going”—because if you are going anywhere it is always going out” (Osho, 2002, p. 110). Even in dharana (concentration) there is subject/object awareness—two—you are not alone, but in dhyana the object of concentration is also dropped. “The object has fallen, but the subject is still there. You still feel you are.” This “I” is not the same, however, as ahankar (ego), or “I am,” but instead it is asmita, simply “amness” without the “I/ego” (Osho, 2002, p. 111).

The concept of asmita is part of the very definition of transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal literally means “beyond the mask” (Davis, 2004). “Mask,” in the definition of transpersonal, refers to the ego-self or ahankar in yoga, and “beyond” refers to self-transcendence, or transcending the ego-self. In both yoga and transpersonal psychology, ahankar or ego-self refers to the many limited self-concepts and images we hold about ourselves, as well as the various roles we assign ourselves. We continue to experience ourselves as separate—subject/object identification. Transpersonalists and yogins embrace the view that the ahankar is not our true nature, but that our true nature is in yogic terms kaivalya, or in transpersonal terms nonduality. “Kaivalya means alone.” But this aloneness is not the same as separateness (duality), “Kaivalya is in the sense of all One, or One alone, in which there is no other form from which one could be separate or apart” (Eaton, 2003, pp. 5–6). This is the state of self-liberation, where all duality dissolves into the state of Oneness or Self. We have gone beyond the “mask” of the ego-self or ahankar, to amness or asmita, and begin to glimpse kaivalya (nonduality).

The practice of dhyana, or meditation is a key method utilized in the yogic tradition as well as transpersonal psychology, and it is here that we begin to taste the freedom of kaivalya, nonduality, or self-transcendence. In dhyana the ego has dissolved into “amness,” however, it is still easy to return to ahankar (I/ego) at this

point. The ego seed is still there because of *asmita*, (*amness*), so the journey continues (Osho, 2002, p. 112).

### **Samadhi – 8th limb**

The next limb is *samadhi*, the eighth limb, here even "*amness*" disappears, and becomes integrated. Now object, subject, and *amness* (perceiving) coalesce and have become one and the same. Here *kaivalya* is fully realized. "The forms and distinctions that had individuated these entities fall away, leaving just their essential natures, recognized as the same stuff" (Hartranft, 2003, p. 46). *Samadhi* is sometimes called integration or absorption. In *samadhi* consciousness merges with the object of meditation.

Historically Western psychology has tended to deny, or at least fail to acknowledge the expanded consciousness, or transpersonal state attained in *samadhi*. Instead *samadhi* is sometimes viewed as "a self-hypnotic trance, a relapse into unconsciousness, or even an artificially induced schizophrenic state" (Feuerstein, 1998, p. 335). In other words going beyond the "I/ego" state of *samadhi* is seen as a breakdown of the ego-self, which is often believed to be pathological. This view tends to deny or even relegate mystical and spiritual experience to the realm of psychopathology. In many current Western psychological views the individuated ego/I state is thought to be a state of optimal psychological health, and the final stage of development (Davis, date unknown). In my experience this creates a limited view of our full human potential and is most likely the result of limiting oneself strictly to the material phenomenal world where one has not had the opportunity to experience first-hand an awareness that goes beyond I/ego identification or *samadhi*. I believe that the following quote sums this up very accurately.

"Denial of the reality of the yogic experience, or criticism of certain of its aspects, is inadmissible from a man who has no direct knowledge of its practice, for yogic states go beyond the condition that circumscribes us when we criticize them" (Mircea Eliade, in Feuerstein, 1998, p. 336).

In the yoga tradition the highest state of consciousness is *samadhi*. (Rama, et al, 1976). *Samadhi*, literally means "putting together." *Samadhi* is the ultimate "end-state" of the practices of yoga. The self is not experienced any longer as separate from *prakriti* (nature), as subject and object coalesce and all sense of duality breaks down. Here "I" and the world are "put together"(Hartranft, 2003). The state of *samadhi* is a result of realizing that subject and object is the same and there is no division between our inner and our outer life.

Transpersonal psychology and the yoga teachings not only accept an expanded awareness that goes beyond I/ego identification as being healthy, but also encourages the practices that help cultivate the spiritual, nondual knowing that is intrinsic to our very being. Transpersonal psychology and yoga affirm and support mystical, spiritual, and peak experiences, as well as a variety of altered states of consciousness, and their practices; practices that have been passed down through many, many years of direct experience and inquiry by sages, mystics, shamans, yogins, and indigenous cultures throughout the world.

*Samadhi* is a result of direct knowledge gained through various contemplative practices that encourage an inward turning or self-inquiry. It is not a state of mind

that we simply decide to believe in and accept because we are told about it. We must experience it for ourselves. The methods utilized in the practices of yoga and transpersonal psychology gently guide the body-mind toward integration, or samadhi. These practices can include a variety of contemplative self-inquiry methods; expressive dance, movement (hatha yoga), breathing practices (pranayama), music (drumming), chanting, prayer, art, direct personal contact with the natural environment, fasting, ritual, walking meditations, as well as sitting meditation, and many others.

### **Transpersonal psychology and yoga psychology**

What does "transpersonal" mean in yoga psychology? "As the sense of "I" expands, personal definitions of I-ness increase until they eventually overlap. Then they become 'transpersonal'" (Rama, et al., 1976, p 125). In other words, when we experience life more from the sensory-motor mind (manas) we are inevitably drawn here and there, as the mind chases after one thing and then another. There is disparity in our own self, and also between our self and others, because we are all drawn to a variety of different things throughout our lives. For instance, one person may be drawn toward money, another may be drawn toward establishing meaningful relationships, and another may be drawn toward a life of service. These disparities can be quite evident even in our everyday activities and preferences; for example, the kind of food we prefer, the clothes we wear, or the leisure activities we prefer. When we live more from the sensory-motor mind we are more aware of these differences instead of our underlying similarities, and therefore, we feel less connection with others. We believe ourselves to be separate from others. However, when our mind calms down and we experience life from the expanded awareness of samadhi, or even dharana or dhyana, dropping subject/object awareness, we come to realize our commonalities rather than our differences. We move away from the sensory-motor mind and all its disparities toward a more transpersonal consciousness and realize that we have more in common than we may have thought (Rama, et al, 1976).

It is important to keep in mind that even though transpersonal psychology and yoga both recognize the inherent Oneness or nondual nature of existence they also recognize and honor the wisdom, health, and wholeness inherent in each person, as well as the worth and value that each person brings to the larger whole. "Transpersonal psychology does not exclude the personal; it integrates it and reveals it as only a small part of a much bigger whole" (Davis, 2002, p.19). Yoga psychology also recognizes this same concept. In fact, even though their underlying consciousness is one and the same, those who have realized kaivalya or samadhi still remain outwardly quite different in many ways from one another, in personal style and in their behavior. "Social conformity, uniform behavior and uniform dress are, in a sense, polar opposites of the unity that is experienced through advanced awareness" (Rama, et al, 1996, p. 126). There really is no need to feel the desire (sensory-motor mind) to conform outwardly, which is in reality ego or ahankara based, when we experience first-hand our underlying unity and interconnection.

According to yoga and transpersonal psychology this knowledge of wholeness, interconnection, and self-realization is already present, within each of us. We just have to uncover it. In this respect the search for truth is negative, that is, there is nothing you have to add to your being, but instead you begin to subtract, peel away layer after layer of avidya (spiritual ignorance) to uncover the treasure that is

already within you. The yogic search takes us inward, removing, cleaning, shining, polishing, the jewel that is already there at the core of our being. We do not create anything, we simply unearth what is already there. We negate until we reach the Self, pure consciousness, "which cannot be negated—because who will negate it?"... "And then a point comes when only you are, the negator. There is nothing else to cut anymore" The treasure may be forgotten but it can never be lost, because it is you, "your very being." It is not external; it is intrinsic (Osho, 2002, pp. 92-93).

Interestingly, what is revealed through this inward exploration is an expanded awareness of our transpersonal nature, that which is beyond our limited concept of self. We come to realize our interconnection to a much larger whole and that we all have something unique and valuable to contribute to the larger whole. It is from this expanded sense of Self that a genuine longing to serve others originates.

### **Karma yoga and service**

In this section of the paper I would like to discuss another concept that is equally important in the yoga tradition and transpersonal psychology. This is the yoga of action, Karma yoga, or "service" in transpersonal psychology.

In the area of service, "transpersonal psychology's view points to authentic helping, which is nondualistic, selfless, and oriented to process as much as outcome. Transpersonal service is a natural reflexive response springing from awareness, love, openness, and understanding" (Davis, 2002, p. 16). This is karma yoga or seva in yogic terms. This is service that originates from a growing sense of transcending the self, and experiencing the larger Self, or that one is part of a larger whole. Karma yoga, service, is compassionate, self-transcending action that is grounded in and arises from intimate knowledge of our spiritual connection with all.

"Compassion is not something one person has for another, but rather something that arises when one begins to see all others' as ones own self. As real compassion develops within, the sense of 'other' begins to lessen. When we cut our own finger, the first impulse we have is to rush to heal it, because we see the finger as belonging to us, as part of ourselves. Likewise, when we see others suffering, our first impulse should be to rush to comfort and help them, seeing them as belonging to us, as part of ourselves" (Ammachi, online 2003).

From the transpersonal and yogic perspectives, "we need to get involved." Holding back from allowing one's self to be "deeply involved" limits our ability to serve. When we become involved we open ourselves to "a source of energy and sustenance" (Davis, 2002, p. 17). There is a paradox however, as "selfless" service does not mean not putting yourself into service. What is meant by "selfless service" or "self-transcendent service" is that we let go of our own ideas of how things should be. In order to be of genuine service we must be willing to allow ourselves to remain open to the pain and suffering of others as well as our own. Of course we must first do what we can to relieve any physical suffering, providing food, shelter, healthcare, etc. for those in need of these services, but then there may be another type of service that we must also be willing to provide. This is the ability to sit with and take in suffering and pain without adding to it in anyway through denial or reactivity. Dass and Gorman write,

"However much we have been able to break our own reactivity to pain, however well we have cultivated those qualities of mind and heart that allow us to be open to affliction yet not be reactive to it, we will have that to offer others. The right form, the right words, the right moment, will all follow. At this stage we do not have help to give, we are help itself" (Dass & Gorman, 1985, pp. 87– 88).

In yogic terms this quality is known as *vairagya* (non-reactive and unconditional presence), which is cultivated in *dharana* or concentration, the sixth limb of *Ashtanga yoga*. When we practice *vairagya* we open to what Arthur Diekman (2003, p.5) refers to as forgetting the self and serving the task. When we allow ourselves to surrender to what is, to the task at hand, without any thought for personal gain or self-interest we "meet the task and merge with it" and this is ultimately "more meaningful than personal gain." In yogic terms this is often called *ishvara pranidhana*, the fifth *niyama* of the second limb of *Ashtanga yoga*. It refers to dedicating, or giving away the fruits of our actions to the Divine. We perform service in union with that which is beyond ourselves. *Karma yoga* entails acting without attachment to personal agenda or gain, without "doership and enjoyership," or "expectation of fruit" and ". . . as an instrument in the hands of the Lord, as a participant in the cosmic activity of Nature. . ." (Sivananda, 2004, p. 3). When we serve without attachment to outcome, without thought for personal gain, or a specific agenda we are acting from the heart of unconditional love and compassion, the wellspring of compassionate action in the world.

## Conclusion

The teachings and practices in transpersonal psychology and the *yoga darshana*, have much in common and can guide us on an inward journey that ultimately reminds us of our true nature, *kaivalya* or nonduality. The *yoga darshana* and transpersonal psychology provide the methods to cultivate this inward turning, as they both encourage us to engage fully in life, resulting in the recognition of our inherent wisdom and wholeness within the whole.

"All of existence is You, the Knower. You are One, the existence of all, not an individual ego separate from other egos. You alone are. You are one being giving life and consciousness to all. The result of this highest knowledge is that you will love all your own forms everywhere, for you are One alone, there being no form other than You, the immortal, blessed Being. The unbroken establishment in this state will be *Kaivalya*, the perfected state of *asampragyaat samadhi*, the formless *samadhi*." (Eaton, 2004, p.186)

The *Yoga darshana* is defined as "the vision of Oneness...One Self or One Being" (Wade, 2004, email). Similarly, a central concept in transpersonal psychology is self-transcendence, or the knowledge that one is not ultimately a separate self, but part of a unified whole. The One Self, the transcendental Self, integrates and draws upon the experiences of the ego-self, the mind, the senses, and even the body in order to understand and express itself. "The Self is the light which shines and everything else manifests only due to the light of the Self" (Wade, 2004, email). The practices in both transpersonal psychology and the *yoga darshana* help cultivate the recognition that we are One Self with all of existence and not limited to an individual ego-self.

Found within the *yoga darshana*, the 8-limbs of *Ashtanga yoga* can be utilized and integrated with the practices of transpersonal psychology and together they can

provide a guide for yogins, yoga teachers, transpersonal psychologists and others on a spiritual journey. Integrating the contemporary practices of transpersonal psychology with the 8-limbs of the Ashtanga yoga system helps each to expand and enhance the other. The practices of transpersonal psychology enliven and bring relevancy to the ancient teachings and practices set forth in the Yoga Sutras, while the ancient teachings of the Yoga Sutras bring time-honored wisdom to the field of transpersonal psychology. In the same way that the 8-limbs are self-supporting, transpersonal psychology and the yoga darshana inspire and inform one another as they bring us to the ultimate realization of our true nature. As we awaken to our true nature of Oneness we also awaken to the qualities of unconditional love, compassion, kindness, empathy, and selflessness; all qualities that can transform our lives, and eventually transform and heal the world. I have felt deeply the world's longing, hunger, and cry to open our hearts to these qualities within our own being, and then to let them shine forth from the Self within and without.

The Divine door is always open.  
Yield to the pulse.  
Surrender to the dance.  
Hear the call.  
It graciously touches the depths of your heart.

The raw, tender heart of love yearns to be joined in celebration,  
and released into the Divine energy that shines forth in us all.  
Joined in the dance the heart cannot be contained.  
In the depth of the soul Divine love emanates brilliantly from all.

Let the inner ear hear, the inner eye see,  
the inner chamber that contains the fire in your heart open wide.  
Brahm is constantly calling us all.

Feel your being complete with all.  
Be home.

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