



Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I am able to present these notes to students and to my friends and colleagues. I firstly wish to thank my partner Marie for her support and her gentle nudges along the way to continue with this publication. I wish to acknowledge and thank all the Yoga teachers that I have been fortunate to have spent time with over the years. Putting these notes together started as an attempt to compile my various note books that I often referred to when I was teaching. As a teacher of regular asana yoga classes it never really felt satisfying for me to introduce yoga concepts during a 1 to 1.5hr class. On occasions, I felt that I may not have elaborated on or properly introduced the material that I may have quoted. These notes are meant for students of all levels. I am confident that you will, at the minimum gain an insight into where my wider views and interpretations on Yoga are drawn from. I am still formulating my deeper understandings of the yoga material quoted here. I am still very much in the process of integrating the teachings into my practice and life.

“Patanjali Yoga Sutra 11.28, practicing the aids to yoga brings about the dissolution of impurities resulting in the increase of the flame of wisdom up to and including liberating discerning insight”. Ref – Christopher Wallis.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My intention is to provide this manual as an introduction to yoga philosophy. The following notes are derived from my studies, practice and reflections. If you already have an existing practice then my hope that your practice, Sadhana will be enriched by learning about and hopefully incorporating some new yoga concepts. If you do not already have a yoga practice, then my hope is that these notes will prompt you to become curious enough to commence your own studies and practice.

If these notes help to motivate you to question your understanding of yoga or to commence your own journey of inquiry, then they have achieved my goal.

Nearly everything in Yoga is open to interpretation and personal inquiry and personal experience. Yoga, in its broadest definition, is your life. Conversely, your life is your yoga. In this sense, yoga is more about a state of “being” than a state of “doing”. Yogarij Alan Finger in his book Chakra Yoga states.

To me, the success of your yoga practice is not measured by how well you can do poses or how long you can sit and meditate. It is measured by how well you are living your life. Ask yourself: Do I feel there is a balance in my life and harmony in my relations with others? Can I experience unconditional love? Am I fulfilling my needs from the abundance of the universe?

My personal study of yoga has greatly enriched my physical yoga and meditation practices and has provided many hours of pleasurable reading enjoyment as well as improved my relationships in life.

Committing to a practice is like planting a vegetable garden. We do the research, prepare the soil, plant the seeds and continuously water and cultivate the seedlings and by adopting this approach to our own

practice and study we can experience a more intimate relationship with ourselves. Like gardening, our practice should be an organic interactive process with continuous feedback. In time the benefits of cultivating our practice will be revealed by the softening of the outer layers or shells to allow the flowering of our inner being. Freedom from limiting, self-defeating, conditioning or adverse cultural programming are some of the other benefits. In many ways, yoga is the science of experiencing our latent untapped potential to unfold to our full authentic natural state.

Gardening is more enjoyable when we have a playful sense of adventure and curiosity to the process. Sometimes we don't know how the seeds we plant will germinate and whether we have planted them in the optimal part of the garden. Some seeds sprout and others don't.

Yoga study can be enjoyable and rewarding if we release any goal orientated outcomes. Just observe if you have developed any unhelpful inner commentary about the process or any compulsive need to understand everything you are reading. The aim is not to create a grueling task where you are required to produce an essay or answer an exam about what you are reading.

In considering the material presented in these notes, it is true: none of the material you read or study, including these notes ultimately matters unless you learn to incorporate and integrate that which you have learned into your life in a way that supports you.



A common misunderstanding of yoga is the identification of yoga as a physical exercise, and that it's all about which style of physical yoga you choose.

Is it Vinyasa, Hatha, Yin, Ashtanga, or Iyengar? This question is understandable, given how modern western yoga has promoted and marketed itself as primarily a physical practice to supply to a fastmoving society with a short attention span.

The physical aspects of yoga generally do not incorporate the deeper layers of available yoga practices and experiences. According to most traditional yoga texts, the purpose of the physical movements is to detox the body and mind and to remove tension to allow the body and mind to settle so that the practitioner can meditate on the deeper aspects of yoga.

Yoga is like a mystical matrix. Sometimes our studies and practice lead us to impressions and insights that are conducive to a sense of the integrated wholistic nature of the teachings. On other occasions we are left scratching our heads wondering about the contrasting or seemingly conflicting aspects of various yoga texts or scriptures.

A physical yoga practice is generally more approachable for the western mind. Even with a physical yoga practice we can experience deeply satisfying moments and in time, once the skills of focus, surrender and embodiment are incorporated a physical yoga practice can take on the qualities of a moving meditation.

When making a decision to select which University or school to attend for educational purposes, it is common to investigate the curriculum offered and it is rare for the decision to be made based exclusively on the sports offered at that institution. However, that is how many people approach yoga for the first time. They make a choice based on what they understand about the physical style of yoga being offered rather than on the particular yoga curriculum offered. I suggest you ask yourself these preliminary questions;

1. Will the yoga I enroll in facilitate my ability to develop clarity about my life?
2. Will it lead to a richer life with stronger relationships, less conflict and an ability to be less reactive?
3. Will it challenge some of my long-held beliefs and ideas about reality?
4. Will I need to surrender some of my grip on my story and/or my identity?

The material in this handbook should assist you in making your choice as to how you intend to approach your yoga experience. If it has the opposite effect and you are more confused about yoga after reading these notes, remember that even confusion may set the stage for the beginnings of your enquiry.

Your age, body shape, size, Doshas, past trauma, injuries, ailments, strength, alignment and personality is unique to you and ideally the yoga that you pursue should support your individual requirements. Note- Doshas is the term used for the 3 body/mind/consciousness categories integral to the science of Ayurveda.

It is totally valid and available to you to commence your practice of yoga purely from a nonphysical perspective by commencing a study, philosophy or a meditation program. However, in the west it is more common to commence yoga as a physical practice.

In my view, if you are suffering from injuries, anxiety or depression or simply unsure of what style of physical practice to start, I recommend looking for gentle restorative, hatha or yin styled classes. Specialised teachers may also be trauma informed and others, such as Kundalini Yoga teachers may offer a stronger emphasis on meditation and breathing techniques.

Attending a few one on one private or small classes maybe the best way to commence your practice. If you are over fifty and looking to join your first yoga class, find a gentle Hatha, Yin or restorative type class to begin with. Finding a class that meets you where you are at is the first step in approaching the science of yoga.

Setting your intention and your approach to yoga provides the foundation for a practice that is enjoyable, supportive, stimulating and relaxing in ways that are beneficial to your overall long-term wellbeing.

I suggest that beginners carefully review any expectations or preconceived ideas they have about yoga and I would encourage you to discuss your assumptions with your teachers.

Yoga should not be approached or considered in the way that we approach a gymnasium or workout class like cross fit. If we approach yoga in a similar way to how we approach a university or a place of learning, i.e., with a sense of fascination, awe and anticipation, we are likely to be in a more receptive state to sense the wider meaning of the teachings.

I strongly recommend that you make an intention to include meditation and breathing techniques, Pranayama, as part of your initial introduction to yoga. My advice is to give as much attention and spend as much time

with pranayama and meditation as you spend practicing a physical asana practice.



If you intend to start a physical yoga practice it might also help to ask yourself how you see yourself in 1, 5 or 10 years.

Do you see yourself moving with ease and freedom, pain free and enjoying your lifestyle into your future?

Also think about the things that currently really trigger your levels of anxiety, whether it is your job, money, possessions, health, relations or friends and what that experience does to your body or mind. Do you want these same triggers to affect you in the years to come in the same ways?

The physical asana practice needs to be tailored to suit the individual. However, this is not normally the case in a modern western generic yoga class.

My 8 recommendations for new students are;

1. Explore the various classes on offer and find a teacher and style that appreciates and understands where you are.
2. Become curious about any unfamiliar experiences in your body or mind and any new yoga terms and references referred to in any yoga classes you may be attending.
3. Introduce some form of meditation early on in your yoga practice.
4. Start reading about yoga.
5. Commence a home practice.
6. Become curious about the nature and experience of awareness and consciousness.
7. Let time work for you in the process rather than create time-based outcomes.
8. Have fun!

If we are not defined by a vision of our future, we may find it challenging to release habits and patterns from the past which are not supporting our growth. We may not even be aware of which habits or patterns are hindering our expansion until we deepen our yoga practices.

If we do the same thing every day our future becomes our past. Sometimes the hardest part of making change is not making the same choice as yesterday. This is particularly important as we make the big transitions in life, from adolescence to adulthood and the various stages thereafter including the transition out of a working career into life after our careers.

I am not a yoga purist and I deliberately draw on material from a wide variety of yoga influences. As a result of my reference to diverse teachers and teachings in these notes, the inferences I make about the common aspects of such teachings and any scientific support, are based on my own assumptions, observations and secondhand research, and may not be supported by the authors of such yoga texts in the same way that I have adopted.

Chapter 2

Background

2.1 Taking a review

What are you actually signing up for once you have set your intention to immerse yourself in the study and practice of the yoga tradition? This text is my attempt at providing an answer to that fundamental question.

It is my experience that at some stage, after you begin your yoga practice, someone or some inner urge or intuition will inform you that you are also committing to the process of reconnecting to the language of your inner world.

It is not uncommon for most people to be totally engrossed in achievement and goal orientation in the external world. The price some of us pay for our careers and external achievements is the lack of knowledge or awareness of the inner world and how it relates back out to our outer world.

As we move into talking about the inner world, I issue a word of caution. Since it may be unfamiliar territory for some, it is important not to fall into the trap of selectively choosing material out of the vast field of yoga data available that reinforces your existing beliefs and habits. I admit that I have on occasions fallen into this trap.

It is tempting and often easy to validate one's own beliefs when conducting any research. If this is the case, then I invite you to become curious about this trend and to question your approach.

It is important to always carefully assess through personal validation and experience if any new beliefs arising out of your practice or studies

have strengthened or softened any previous held beliefs, habits or philosophies. Also note, if you tend to become a fundamentalist about your new held beliefs. If you think you are joining some special or elite group, you are missing the whole point of yoga which is to cultivate the liberation and expansion of self-realization and self-awareness.

The essence of yoga is that we are not mere puppets that life pushes around and that we are, at our essence, free and unbound, known sometimes as the essential self. The process of discovering and illuminating the qualities of the “Essential Self”, is the journey of self-realization and there is no single method to this discovery.

What is the “Essential Self”? The yogic texts go to great length to explain that we are not limited by our thoughts, occupations, egos or emotions. All of these important aspects are temporary in nature and come and go. What is it about us that is permanent and never comes and goes?

Science accepts that the energy flowing through your body right now is the same exact energy that was blazing at the beginning of the universe.

According to the science of yoga this energy is known as having certain qualities and aspects.

There is something that is moving and a medium, and something else that is unmoving and unchanging. Some schools of yoga particularly the non-dualists call this unmoving aspect: “awareness” or “consciousness” (*Siva or Brahman*), and the moving aspect as Shakti. The two are in a divine dance throughout the cosmos and through eternity.

The moving aspect includes the entire observable universe originating from frequency, which manifests as energy and matter. The energy in us was once in the fiery guts of a star!

When we become still and observe what is happening within ourselves, we may be able to observe the movement of energy in our minds,

thoughts and feelings. This may be one of the greatest blessings of yoga practice in the early stages.

2.2 Integrating new patterns

The fundamental system for integrating energy into the mind body is the human nervous system, which has two main networks: - the sympathetic nervous (fight and flight) system and the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest).

When the nervous system is in balance, we are better equipped to navigate our way through life and relationships and to access a greater sense of belonging and wholeness. It is a fact that in modern society the sympathetic, i.e., the “fight and flight “nervous system”, is overactive and as a result, we tend to be on alert and more in our heads and less connected to the inner intelligence of the body.

Neuroscientists now know that our thoughts direct neurons to fire in the brain and this sets up networks and creates the messages for the nervous system and the blood to carry throughout the body. The problem is that 70% of the time we are in survival mode. Not in the sense of an immediate live or die situation, but any thoughts connected with threats real or imagined from the past or the future, whether it's in connection with our status, income, job or financial security, relationship security, health, old fears and regrets can trigger the same sense of survival patterns in the brain and nervous system.

Dr Bruce Lipton provides scientific evidence in his book, “The Biology of Belief” that only 5% of all diseases are genetic and that the other 95% of diseases are related to environmental factors. Furthermore, the placebo effect confirms that our perception of our environment can and does influence our internal physiology.

It's also interesting to realize that neuroscientists state that 50% of our memories are not even accurate! According to scientific research,

humans operate mainly from the subconscious. That storehouse of pre-programmed habits, behaviours, response patterns, memories and emotions from our past and our conditioning is known as the cycle of *Samsara*.

If most of our thoughts are survival related and a significant portion of our memories are not even true, and if we are overly relying on the memories of the past, we may find that we end up creating a future that very much resembles the past. Hence, the way we think, feel or perceive the environment has a significant influence on our physiology and hence our nervous system, endocrinal and immune systems.

Once we begin to understand this link, we can learn techniques to become more aware from where our thoughts, emotions, feeling, reactions and breath patterns etc., originate.

In summary, neuroscience now confirms that the brain is not hard-wired and the good news is that we are not genetically pre-destined to live a life based on the patterns of our past health experiences or the experiences of our parents or ancestors.

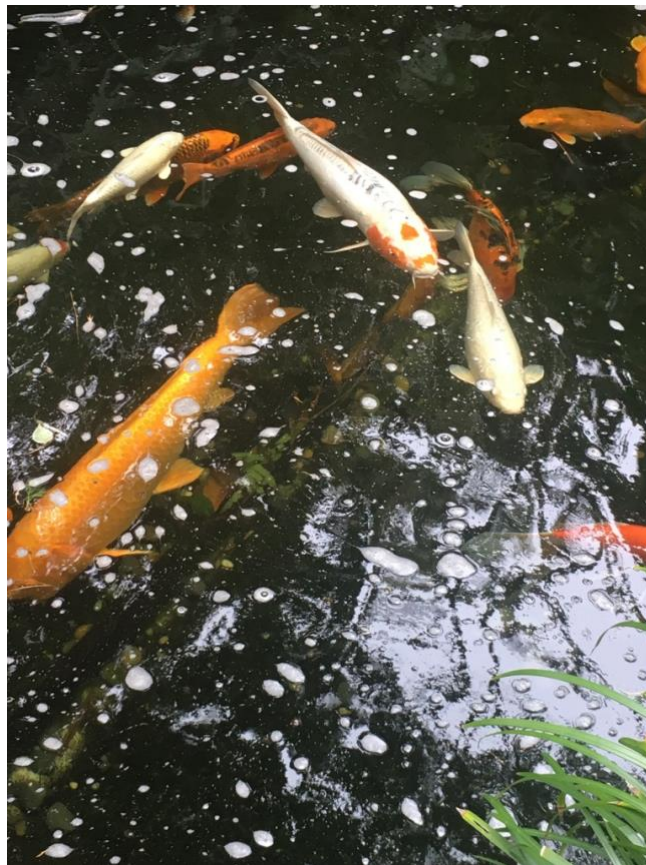
The teachings of yoga offer guides and tools to closely examine these patterns and emphasize the importance and quality of where and how we place our attention and focus. Our own life experiences, disciplines and understandings can become fertile ground to explore the teachings.

On my way to integrating the teachings of yoga I was inspired and often motivated by many of the findings of quantum physics. This may not mean that this information will have any relevance to or inspire or motivate anyone else.

It was mind blowing to me to learn that scientific studies had confirmed that the quantum field was essentially a field of pure potentiality at the particle level. The particle operates as a wave and only appears as an object in time and space with the act of observation. When we are not observing the particle, it is impossible to predict where it is going to

appear next on its wave pattern ie; it reverts back to a wave of pure potential!

Quantum entanglement is another fascinating concept which appears to point to some underlying connecting fabric of the universe which is beyond time and space.



In place and time

I love the ocean and have been blessed to have enjoyed many years of being in the ocean riding and surfing waves off the Western Australian coastline. The ocean is often referred to as a metaphor for consciousness, with the individual consciousness being represented as a droplet of the oceanic consciousness containing all of the same qualities and consciousness of the vast ocean.



Growing up in Western Australia I was blessed to be able to share my love of the ocean with the love of the great wide-open spaces of the outback. Both the ocean and the ancient silent Australian outback with its mind-boggling horizon-to-horizon landscapes, had a similar formative impact on my fundamental capacity to be comfortable with something huge and vast and beyond the mind to fully contemplate.

“Being in Country” is a sense of belonging referred to in Aboriginal culture and is a kind of sacred sense of something much larger than our small brains can contemplate. This felt sense, can only ever be experienced and no amount of words can substitute for that experience. Similarly, no amount of yoga knowledge or study can replace or substitute for the state of being that one experiences when the teachings have been integrated and absorbed.



“Emu dreaming” – by Anthony Little – Mullewa

The vastness of the outback can lead to an expansion of time and space and in this stillness of the mind new perspectives of our everyday patterns may arise. On one trip in the outback, I found myself daydreaming about what the world be like if energy was as abundant, free and as vast as the open spaces?

Would humankind, having solved this massive survival requirement, go onto to evolve more consciously? Or maybe it will take an evolution of consciousness for this to happen in the first place?

Without wishing to blow your mind, it is also correct to say that according to some ancient yoga lineages consciousness does not evolve in that it has nothing to evolve from or to evolve to. Consciousness is the absolute. At its deepest sense it is beyond time and space and any attempt by the limited capacity of the mind to apply linear rational will be insufficient.

Lokah Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu

May all beings everywhere be happy and free and may the thoughts words and actions of my own life contribute to the happiness and freedom for all.

2.3 Present moment awareness

Not being able to fully access the spaciousness of the present moment awareness is often a by-product of a nervous system that is out of balance. According to Dr Gabor Mate, the inability to be present is known as a common symptom of many health disorders including ADHD.

Neuroscience has established that one of the hallmarks of an overactive nervous system is the lack of present moment awareness, and this may explain why some people find it challenging to be still or to meditate.

This inability to be fully present and open to the experience of the moment is ingrained into the nervous system, the breath (including the muscles of breathing), the muscles and connective tissues, and the thoughts and emotions.

When our nervous system is in balance the energy of the system flows more freely. Imagine what happens to a hose with water flowing through it when it has a kink or knot in it? The pressure will build up until something gives.

In my case, I tend to oscillate between overdoing and underdoing. The yoga concept known as *the 3 Gunas*, refers to the essential qualities of nature and humans to oscillate between being active, i.e.: outwardly spiraling and projecting and actions that support that (*Rajas*): and inactive i.e., inwardly spiraling and projecting (*Tamas*) and (*Sattva*) i.e.: the harmony, peace and balance point between the poles. The aim of our sadhana (all the elements of putting into practice what we have learned)

is to spend more time in the Sattvic state of being, thereby allowing the nervous system to rest in the space between doing and not doing.

Le Shaun Middlebrooks Collier

*Doing as others told me, I was blind
Coming when others called me, I was lost
Then I left everyone, myself included
Then I found everyone, myself included.*

Chapter 3

Getting started

3.1 *Asana*



For most beginners, joining a physical asana yoga class will probably be the way that they first experience yoga. From the outset it is worth remembering that physical flexibility is not the ultimate goal of yoga. In fact, in some cases too much flexibility, as in the case with people who are hyperflexible, can be a detriment. Having a flexible, open mind is often more important.

Rigidity and fundamentalism originate in the mind. People often ask, “how flexible should I be?” The answer is that you only need the level

and range of movement required to achieve your lifestyle goals and ambitions with ease and freedom from pain.

If yoga was only about physical asana exercises, it would still provide many wonderful benefits to practitioners. However, it is not the only form of exercise that could provide such benefits.

Some of the benefits of asana practice;

- Longer leaner muscles
- Improved posture and breathing
- Re – alignment of the skeletal system
- Enhanced digestion
- Better circulation
- A relaxed nervous system
- Greater immunity
- Greater balance in life

In my case, it was my desire to deal with work related stress that inspired me to enroll in my first Hatha yoga class 25 years ago. Vidyhan Kosh, introduced me to my first meditation, pranayama, mantra and asana practices all in my first class! Looking back now I realize that the asana component was very gentle and was exactly what I needed at the time.

I adopted the practices as offered and taught. Immediately, I observed a change in the quality of my relationship with my work commitments.

Patanjali was the ancient sage credited with being the author of the Yoga Sutras and in *sutra 11.48* proposed that: - *From Asana comes non affliction from the pairs of opposites.*

I do not propose to go into detail about the science of yoga asana in this text as it is my intention to promote the case for including a study program into your overall yoga schedule. By doing this, I do not wish to

down-play or de-emphasize the many wonderful benefits of practicing asana.

3.2 Setting the intention

Once we have set the intention to start a study program, we have a few options. You could enroll in an online course or attend a workshop.

Alternatively, acquire some stimulating yoga reading material. In addition, I also suggest that you look for yoga studies that are related to any area that interests you, such as movement, anatomy, philosophy, spirituality, physiology, biology or mental health. Readily available good scientific studies have researched the benefits of yoga and meditation involving all of these areas.

At first, your study program may lead you to conclude that yoga literature is quite mysterious. My advice is not to dwell on the matters that seem mysterious but to start your studies in familiar territory and to move outwards as you become more comfortable with the language and the interpretations that you sense are meaningful to you, even if you don't fully understand.

3.3 Where to begin

I suggest that you may wish to explore the classic foundational yoga texts such as the "Hatha Pradipika", "The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali" or the "Bhaghava Gita", the writings of the Buddha or the lives of past yoga masters.

For those more scientifically inclined or curious perhaps you may find inspiration from investigating the weird properties of the actions of particles, energy and time as described by quantum physicists.

Max Planck, regarded as the father of modern physics, is quoted as saying, "*I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything we regard as existing, postulates consciousness.*"

3.4 Non-Dualism - My favourite area of study

From the outset, I admit that my favourite past time is studying the various yoga concepts regarding the nature and properties of consciousness/awareness. As a result, this text leans towards more discussion on this topic than other yoga concepts.

Yoga practices are available to incorporate and experience all of the yoga concepts being discussed in this text. Some of these practices are quite simple and easy to practice. However, I do not propose to introduce any of these actual practices into this text.

Yoga studies would be quite boring if it wasn't for the benefit of complimentary yoga practices. Some of these practices may involve asana but mostly these practices fall under the category of "seated practices". Sometimes mistakenly called meditation.

According to yoga wisdom consciousness is not just an artefact of the brain. Neither is it something that evolved out of inert matter. It is nonlocal. It always existed and can never not exist. It existed prior to the Big Bang!

The names for consciousness are numerous. There are literally hundreds of gods and deities designed to represent various aspects of consciousness in the eastern religions.

In classical Tantra, Siva is the deity that represents universal consciousness. Shakti is the deity for all that manifests from universal consciousness. The two are aspects of the one and in Tantra this is known as nondualism. I will be elaborating on the teachings regarding the model of consciousness of nondual tantra later in this text. The other main school of nondualism is Advaita Vedanta. Rupert Spira, is one of the world's leading teachers of the school of Advaita Vedanta and he describes non dualism as;

“Nonduality is the experiential understanding that our experience is not essentially divided into two parts (1) part in here: the self, the separate self that KNOWS and (2) another part out there: the objects, the person and the world that is KNOWN.

This is the normal way we think: “I” “in here”. This is the way our experience is normally defined in our culture. These two essential ingredients ; (1) The inside self and (2) the outside world.

So nonduality, refers not just the understanding but the experience that our experience is NOT divided into these two parts. It is ONE whole; not made of two separate parts: a self and another”.

I have dedicated chapter 4 to an introduction to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Traditionally the yoga sutras were regarded as presenting a dualist philosophy where the concept of universal consciousness/infinite intelligence/singularity is known as *Brahman*.

Brahman manifests first as *Ishvara* which is the term used to describe the blueprint for manifestation. The intelligence that is within us that is without any attributes of mental patterns and yet contains all of the intelligence of *Ishvara* is known as *Parusha*. Alan Finger, explains that the mind likes to think that it is the pattern maker when in fact it is a part of the pattern.

I have deliberately chosen to refer to the Tantrik interpretations of the yoga sutras by two leading Tantrik masters and scholars, Alan Finger and Christopher Wallis.

I believe that the yoga sutras can be authentically interpreted through the lens of nondualism. Please note that there are many interpretations of the yoga sutras. Most yoga lineages will offer their preferred view or interpretation of the yoga sutras. Some lineages claim that the wisdom of the yoga sutras was superseded by later more sophisticated models.

I do not wish to suggest that understanding the yoga sutras is necessary for every yoga student. My reason for referring to the yoga sutras throughout this text is because I believe it is a good place to begin. If you can begin to grasp some of the language and concepts referred to in the yoga sutras you will be able to take that knowledge and apply it to other yoga texts that you wish to investigate.

One of the written treasures that my mother gave me was an original hard back copy of the “Platonic Dialogues” by William Whewell handed down from her grandmother and dated 1860.

The Platonic dialogues are over 400 years older than the yoga sutras of Patanjali and are generally regarded as one of the foundational texts of classical western philosophy.

For those already familiar with the yoga sutras you may recognize the similarity of some of the principles outlined in the following quote from the Platonic Dialogues.

“The True philosopher does not care for the things of the body, as far as he can he abstracts his attention from it and turns to his soul. He more than any other men, removes the soul from the influence of the body. The sight, the hearing cannot discover to us truth. The world of eye and ear delusions all. When then does the soul apprehend truth, since the body cannot serve it in such a task? It is not by reasoning if at all that real truth is made manifest. And does not the mind reason best, when it is not drawn aside by the ear or the eye, by pleasure or pain when it acts for itself and abstracts from bodily agencies, aims at absolute truth”

I also treasure the first yoga book that I obtained over 20 years ago. It was an interpretation of the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali as translated by Swami Senkatesanda. As mentioned above, I recommend the translation of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali which was published in 2018 by Yogirij Alan Finger, known as “Tantra of the Yoga Sutras”.

In a world of knowledge ignorance is now a choice. It is not necessary to read about ancient knowledge, whether it's in the Bible, Koran, Torah or ancient gnostic texts like the Nag Hammadi or the ancient yoga texts known as the Upanishads and Vedas to appreciate that wisdom has a timeless nature to it. We can relate to some of this old material even though in some cases we may know very little about the cultures that created such wisdom.

In an age when knowledge is at the click of a button and science and technology is in hyper advance it is nice to stop and wonder if there are underlying universal principles common to all of nature or reality? My guess is that certain individuals in ancient cultures were as interested in understanding the causes of anxiety, fear, joy or peace as any individuals today.

The fundamental question that many of these inquiring individuals contemplated was whether the human condition/consciousness is at the mercy of the controlling cultural structure? Does our culture form our beliefs, and therefore our sense of justice, freedom, right and wrong? Or on the other hand, do we have autonomy and sovereignty over our own minds/consciousness? Plato and Aristotle are regarded as introducing the intellectual debate about these topics.

At different ages in the past, advocating the preeminence or primacy of soul or consciousness over cultural programming on the public stage may have led to persecution and death. Socrates lived at the height of the Democratic Republic of Ancient Greece and yet he was persecuted and ultimately sentenced to death by drinking hemlock for promoting enquiries into wisdom and truth. The Gnostics and Cathars were also persecuted throughout history for daring to suggest that a personal connection to god was available without the need for an intermediary. Depending on your beliefs and religion, Jesus Christ could also fall into this category.

One of the first yogis in America may very well have been the famous civil rights activist and famous author, Henry David Thoreau, who was

deeply inspired and moved by reading the Bhagavid Gita in the 1850s. Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King- amongst others admitted to being inspired by Thoreau; who was quoted as saying;

“What lives behind us and what lies ahead of us are tiny matters compared to what lives within us”

And

“You must live in the present. Launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment “

With the era of transhumanism rapidly approaching and with the advance of artificial intelligence and digital body and mind enhancements, I passionately believe that understanding what makes you different to artificial intelligence (robots) is required now more than ever.

The timeless wisdom of the ancient texts reminds us that human beings are the embodiment of divine essence and that as such we are not limited by the mind. Our creative source is the source of all there is.

Sutra 1.25

“Not limited by the individual mind’s natural fragmentation process, our Spirit contains all knowledge at once. When consciousness is fragmented into form, only a seed of this omniscience remains”. Alan Finger p 30.

Sutra 1.26

“Spirit is beyond time and form, and it is the source of all teachings and all knowledge”. Alan Finger p 30

According to various schools of yoga the universe is conscious.

According to the yoga sutras the concept of infinite unbound universal consciousness is represented as Brahman. The individual is seeded with

a droplet of the ocean of this universal consciousness and according to the yoga sutras this is known as Atman.

Unfortunately for humans, the yoga sutras claim that the mind cannot actually know Brahman because the mind is by its nature limited. It is the Atman, that Alan Finger is referring to in the use of the word "Spirit," in *Sutras 1.25* and *1.26* above.



WHAT IF?

What if our religion was each other?

If our practice was our life?

If prayer our words?

What if the temple was the earth?

If Forests were our churches?

Holy water – The rivers and lakes and oceans?

What if meditation was our relationships?

The teacher was our life?

Wisdom was self-knowledge?

Love was the centre of our being?

-Ganga White-

And what if “Time” is the movement of consciousness through space?

Chapter 4

4.1 Introduction to the Yoga Sutras

According to Alan Finger, the author of “Tantra of the Yoga Sutras”, the Yoga Sutras are a road map for cultivating the ability to be in the now.

The author of the Yoga Sutras is known as Patanjali. The ancient sage, Patanjali introduced the eight limbs of Yoga over 2000 years ago. Note; The word “yoga” means to yoke or join together, and the word “sutra” means to stitch.

Yoga teacher Gregor Maehle summarizes the methodology of the yoga sutras as follows;

“First Patanjali describes samadhi to create an interest in the practitioner. Then he shows that we shouldn’t be satisfied with our present situation since it is suffering and darkness. After that he shows how the suffering comes to be and, finally what removes it.”

The yoga sutras recognize that there are various obstacles and afflictions to our natural state of being. Avidya, (Ignorance of our true selves) being the big one. Subsets of avidya such as, Asmita, (I amness) and our various attachments to pleasure or pain and our fears. *Sutra 11.5* Ignorance is to see the transient as eternal, the impure as pure, pain as pleasure and the non self as self. (ref: Gregor Maehle)

According to Maharishi, the goal of yoga is the experience of Samadhi (the 8th limb of the Yoga Sutras). International yoga teacher, Gregor Maehle published a textbook dedicated to the subject of Samadhi in which he claims that Samadhi is the natural state of being and is the goal of yoga. Further, that Samadhi is otherwise known as the “mystical state”.

Maehle says, that the mystical state is experienced for 15 minutes each night in deep sleep. Further, it is the state where geniuses such as Galileo, Einstein or Tesla make their breakthrough discoveries when after intense focus and concentration, the breakthrough often arises after the focus is relaxed from a state of focused convergent thinking to a more unfocussed open divergence.

Yogi Maharishi, said that the 8 limbs of the Yoga Sutras do not describe a practice to obtain yoga but are basically describing the state of yoga. Christopher Wallis, also reinforces that this is the proper definition as described by Patanjali and that this is what Patanjali is referring to in,

Sutra 1.2;

“Yoga is that state of being when the state of mental fluctuation has become still”.

In this state, the mind as we experience it dissolves and at that moment, we realise we are still there and that we are resting in our essential nature. Wallis states, *“that it is this state of being that we need to nourish through practice until it becomes our default state”.*

According to Alan Finger, the process that the yoga sutras describe is one of spiritual evolution and growth. Universal intelligence is our own true nature and that experience is known as “Samadhi” (The 8th limb of the Yoga Sutras).

At that moment Christopher Wallis says, *“That which we think we are dissolves and we discover we are still here. What we mainly think we are is the mind, the discursive thinking mind. We think we are the thinker of our thoughts. However, as Patanjali says we can have an experience of a profound inner stillness or silence then the mind as we know it has gone. We realize wordlessly, non-conceptually that we can’t be the mind because it has gone.”*

Then according to *Yoga Sutra 1.3, “You rest in your own essential nature”.*

We all have a story. The story includes our upbringing, our education, our career, preferences, likes, dislikes, hobbies and interests etc. The inquiry we are asked to make as part of our yoga studies is; who would we be without our story?

This is not to say that we need to judge our story or the accurateness or correctness of it. We are asked to first of all accept that we are more than the story, ie; that we are not limited by our story. We are also reminded that others in our lives are not limited by the stories we give them either.

Are we more than just the analytical thinking mind? If you believe, trust or simply have faith that the answer to this question is yes, then you have passed the first gateway on the yoga path.

Returning to the yoga sutras, whether the sutras are describing a set of practices or whether they are describing a state of being is a question that may inspire you to do some of your own research.

The four chapters or Padas of the Yoga Sutras as described by Alan Finger are as follows:

1. Samadhi Pada- Yoga is being in the now.
2. Sadhana Pada- The actions that lead us to being in the now.
3. Vibhuti Pada- Channeling the experience and wisdom of the now back into the living.
4. Kaivalya Pada- The freedom of living every moment from the now.

4.2 The 8 Limbs

Sutra 2.29 of the yoga sutras sets out the 8 limbs. Wallis points out that the correct interpretation of the title to this section of the yoga sutras is, “The 8 aids to Yoga”. According to Alan Finger, the goal of the 8 aids to yoga as outlined in the yoga sutras is to shift from avidya (“twisted

perception”) to clarity known as viveka, (“seeing things as they really are”.)

The first 2 limbs, (Yamas and Niyamas) are classical concepts not unlike the Christian concepts of the cardinal virtues or the Greek concepts of the virtues of the gods and goddesses.

The 3rd limb of the yoga sutras known as “asana” is concerned with the physical postures of yoga. In fact, the yoga sutras state that asana is any posture practiced with ease and steadiness.

The 4th limb is known as pranayama. Under this limb a world of prana/ breath awareness/control and prana manipulation techniques have developed over the centuries. Different lineages and styles of yoga will allocate more significance and time to various forms of pranayama than other lineages and styles.

The remaining 4 limbs set the stage for deep meditation and ultimately the attainment of samadhi.

Whilst most modern commentators agree that the 1st two limbs, ie; the yamas and niyamas are not prescriptive, and are not a list of do’s and don’ts they are occasionally presented as sequenced steps to be achieved or practiced.

The 1st limb.

Yamas

Nonviolence (Harmlessness or Kindness)

Non stealing (including non-desiring what others have)

Satya (Truthfulness)

Aparigraha (non-hoarding, nonattachment)

Bramacharya (moderation of the attachment to the senses)

The second limb.

Niyamas

Tapas (discipline, austerity)

Svadhaya (Self Study)

Ishvara Pranidhana (The Lord or surrender to a higher value or purpose. Something greater than ourselves)

Santosha (Contentment)

Sauca (cleanliness)

Patanjali also provides a list of the obstacles that we create that may prevent us from becoming aware of our innate nature.

Chapter 2 of the yoga sutras outlines the 5 Kleishas in *sutras 2.3 to 2.9* which are responsible for causing the mind to become engrossed in the belief patterns that create mental disequilibrium and psychological distress.

The first of the 5 Yamas is known as *Ahimsa*, which is defined as becoming free of all violence, injury, and harm toward others and ourselves. Master teacher, Krisnamurti goes to great lengths in his lectures and discussions to first promote the enquiry into the basis of “conflict” within our-selves to lead to a personal revelation, before moving on to trying to deal with conflict at a cultural level.

4.3 Contemplation example.

But let’s step back from the eight limbs of the yoga sutras for a moment to look at the big picture before returning for a more in-depth analysis of some of the Yamas and Niyamas.

Yoga students are encouraged to question everything including any of their deeply held foundational beliefs about reality. Not because we must

necessarily change any of those deeply held beliefs or declare them as right or wrong, but to hopefully provide a stronger connection or a new relationship to those beliefs that are more supportive of our true nature.

For instance, if we consider a question such as, "If the universe is infinite, then is it infinitely abundant, what would be your reaction?"

Your answer to this question may be influenced by your personal experiences, your background and your culture and as such you may have consciously or unconsciously created all sorts of beliefs about your reality. You may have formed a belief based on a concept of "shortage", ie not enough for me, wanting more or, "abundance". How you feel and relate to the concepts of shortage or abundance may be a good place to commence your studies.

In my case, one of my fundamental beliefs that has developed over the course of my yoga journey is that I do not accept that the world is overpopulated or that population growth is the cause of climate change or that humans are intrinsically greedy or selfish.

I find support for this belief in the yamas and niyamas, and in my opinion, believing that the world is overpopulated is also an anti-human and elitist viewpoint. This belief may be evidence of the holding of unconscious programming and beliefs which when exposed to the light of compassion and consciousness as set out in the yoga sutras may be found to lack foundation.

Before we condemn certain sections of the population to a Malthus style culling, we could spend many years dealing with the causes of conflict, wars, mismanagement of resources, pollution, global warming, corruption, mismanagement of entire economies and all forms of fundamentalism.

Surely, we haven't yet exhausted the full human creative potential of mankind to find solutions in a more compassionate fashion!

I note that the World Economic Forum has formulated a vision of the world for 2030 and have coined the term “The Fourth Industrial Revolution”.

This revolution promises the universal roll out of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a ubiquitous part of life and society solving all problems from health care and crime to aging. I have no doubt that AI has the potential for a major shift in all areas of culture. My question is whether that shift will leave us with a better, healthier, less polluted, just, fair and equitable society?

Unless there is also a contemporaneous shift in societies understanding of what it takes to be a sovereign conscious being, as the foundation of your essential nature, then the 4th Industrial Revolution may not be the antidote. This would be the equivalent of understanding what it is that all humans have in common.

How we see the world has been shown to be very relevant from the point of view of quantum physics and our internal biology. Stem cell pioneer, Bruce Lipton’s book, “The Biology of Belief” is essential reading to gain an insight into the power of beliefs to affect our internal chemistry and even trigger the genes to switch on and produce different proteins in response to the environment that we live in. A science known as “Epigenetics”.

In the *Biology of Belief* Dr Bruce Lipton explains that internal chemistry acts in response to our experiences of the outside world, an environment that is dictated by our filters, i.e., belief forming assumptions and perceptions of the outside world. Lipton explains the importance of the Placebo affect and how it works. *Page 131*

Every medical student learns in passing, that the mind can affect the body. They learn that some people get better when they believe (falsely) they are getting medicine. When patients get better by ingesting a sugar pill, medicine defines it as the placebo effect.

Rather than calling it the placebo effect, Dr Lipton prefers to call it the belief effect.

This may be an appropriate opportunity for you to take a piece of paper and prepare a list of your most fundamental core beliefs about yourself or reality as you perceive it. Perhaps identifying your top 5 beliefs on one side of a sheet of paper and on the other side of the sheet a brief description of how you believe this belief supports you, (if in fact it does).

Examples:

*I currently have/ don't have everything I need for my life to flourish?
If the answer is Yes, then the support recognition would be that this belief supports my life.*

If the answer is no, then we are saying that at this moment we don't have what we need for our life to flourish. The questions then arise, ie;

How do we feel about that? What do we think we need to achieve, attain or obtain for our life to flourish? Does this belief act like a condition that prevents us from experiencing our full capacity for health, happiness and joy in the moment? Are we then denying our sense of peace or happiness to some future event that may never arise?

4.4 Santosha and Svadhaya

Without wishing to skip over a discussion of each of the 5 yamas and 5 niyamas or to elevate any particular yama or niyama over any others, I offer some commentary below on the concepts of Santosha and Svadhaya.

The niyama known as Santosha has been described as the felt sense of contentment for no reason at all.

We cannot dwell in this experience if we are waiting until some external event that we may have unconsciously held, or consciously decided is a

precondition to experiencing Santosha. By exploring the meaning and depth of Santosha we may find that we start to become aware of how often we deny ourselves the ability to be fully be present in the moment. When this becomes a fully ingrained habit, the mind develops infinite excuses for finding something that needs to be fixed or put right before allowing it to rest.

If love is conditional is it in fact love?

Sutra 2.42 - Alan Finger, p 57 of the Tantra of the Yoga Sutras,

“Svadyaya: Svadyaya is self-awareness. It requires a willingness to look deeply into ourselves so that we don’t stay stuck in what we habitually believe ourselves to be. This kind of deep investigation of the patterning of the mind leads to a connection with who we are as pure consciousness”.

“Santosha: Santosha is being content with one’s karma and dharma. It is acceptance of what is. When you recognize a challenge and accept it as your karma, you can stop struggling with it and start living in alignment with your dharma”.

Santosha, for example, is referring to a state of being where the struggle has given away to ease. Does this mean that one can sit back and ignore life’s challenges? Do we stop being activists for a better world for others and ourselves?

Cultivating Santosha may seem difficult especially if you are genuinely concerned about the many issues confronting the human race and this planet. Resting in the experience of gratitude or abundance does not mean that we should ignore the reckless exploitation of the environment or natural resources.

Santosha is forever complete and requires no ambition and no goal, and no becoming can make it more complete. Contemplating this quality of

Santosha can lead us to the here and now of pure consciousness which is awareness.

According to Wallis;

our essence nature is always in love with reality. It gives itself unconditionally to what is, to the reality of the present moment. The body mind nearly always wants something that is not now happening, ie slightly different temperature or less wind etc. However, when the body, mind wants something it doesn't have your essence nature is simply enjoying the experience of wanting.

The point here is that on the yoga path you don't have to get rid of desire or pretend you are ok with something that you are not ok with. Instead of trying to persuade the body mind that it doesn't really want what it wants we simply engage in yoga in order to access a level of being where we are already totally content with what is.

This does not mean that we need to abandon being an activist or pursuing areas of change in our life or society. Rather the wisdom of the sutras provides tools to become more centered, focused and clear about our own true nature. From this secure understanding and experience of our own true nature we can radiate this out into our lives without letting it activate our flight/fight nervous system and drain us on an energetic level.

I don't propose to go into details regarding the yamas and the niyamas. I suggest that if you are interested that you may enjoy Alan Fingers description of the gifts of the yamas and niyamas on pages 60 and 61 of his text, "Tantra of the Yoga Sutras".

When I reflect on the qualities of the yamas and niyamas, I continually arrive at fresh and unique perspectives. Whenever we read the scriptures, it is important to approach them with an open heart/mind and not get caught up with our previous interpretation. Particularly, if it becomes an obstacle for a deeper connection gained from additional study, reflection or teachings.

As mentioned above, how you relate to the yamas and niyamas may be influenced by any foundational beliefs you have about the nature of reality. Do you relate to reality from a perspective of belief in change, or a denial that change is possible on a personal, cultural or global level? This inquiry could be an important starting point for your framework of how you integrate the yamas and niyamas into your life.

In summary, I believe that the 5 yamas and 5 niyamas refer to our natural internal states of being which we can experience more and more as we cultivate our yoga practice and integrate its learnings into our life.

RUMI –

*A strange passion is moving in my head.
My heart has become a bird
Which searches the sky
Every part of me goes in different directions
It is really so that the love I Love is everywhere.*

4.3 Greek mythology

Yoga texts are not the only source for systems of ethical principles and reasoning. Many cultures and religions throughout history have outlined basic fundamental human qualities as hallmarks for navigating a peaceful and fulfilled life. Classical Greek mythology presented the Greek culture with the four cardinal virtues. Represented by gods or goddesses that were meant to remind us of our inner compass.

The goddess prudence was often depicted as a female holding a mirror in one hand and a snake in the other hand. It represents the ability to know in all situations when to proceed and when to retreat, when to take action and when to be still, when to offer help and when to keep silent. Does this sound familiar to the principle of Sattva as mentioned above? To know in exact measure what is required, whether it is in baking a

cake or healing a psychic injury. Aristotle defined Prudence as the right reason applied to practice.



Fortitude: Allows us to overcome fear and remain steady in our will in the face of obstacles, and it is always reasoned and reasonable. The person exercising fortitude does not seek danger for dangers sake.

Temperance: When a person has acquired the habit of deciding correctly the actions to take in response to his instinctual cravings.

Justice: is the fourth of the Cardinal virtues.

Checking in with the quality and tone of your relationship to the concepts outlined in the cardinal virtues or the yamas' and niyamas' may

help you to recognize where you are on the scale of your own beliefs as to the blessings in your life.

4.4 Blockages

Do you feel blocked in any way from the natural abundance of life? Remember that beliefs are responsible for our thoughts and our habits, and as they gain traction become part of our personalities.

In the *Taittiriya Upanashad*, an ancient tantric yoga text, a human being is described as having 5 sheaths, or Koshas, that interpenetrate each other, encasing the soul like the layers of an onion. Our beliefs and cultural conditioning become meshed and embedded into our 5 layers of physical, subtle and gross body, mind and energy centres. They influence our breath patterns, habits, diet, body, tissues and thinking patterns.

It is common for yoga texts to refer to various layers and categories of mind and consciousness, all of which can seem a bit confusing at first. There are the 5 yamas and 5 niyamas and the 5 kleishas (afflictions/twists) and the 9 obstacles and the 4 keys and so on.

Again, my advice is not get bogged down in the analysis or try to remember the various yoga subcategories. Initially, all we need to do is to realize that the intent of such systems is to open us up to our full human divine potential with access to our full intelligence at all levels.

This evolutionary process is enriched by studies at the individual level which may at first, simply stimulate the enquiry process. However, once stimulated the practitioner is then encouraged to adopt such practices and techniques suitable to the individual to eventually, cultivate, anchor and integrate the new experiences into everyday life.

4.5 The 5 Kleishas

In *Sutra 2.13* Patanjali states that our primary source of misconception of reality is “Avidya”.

Avidya is a catch all phrase for our general ignorance of our minds inability to see itself in its proper relationship to *Atman*. (A Finger p42). The remaining 4 Kleishas can be regarded as subsets of this overriding principle. *Raga* is the second of the 5 *Kleishas* as set out in *Sutra 11.7* and describes the affliction of clinging to pleasure. Maehle, points out on page 190 of his text on (*Ashtanga Yoga Primary Series*), that the important fact to see here is that the pleasurable experience itself is not the problem.

With practice and progress comes discernment, and in time you may discover that the particular experience of pleasure may have simply become a habitual pattern influencing behaviour. That behaviour may also have acted as a defense mechanism or distraction from confronting or dealing with karma from difficult experiences or memories from the past.

The *3rd Kleisha* describes the human tendency to avoid pain or suffering. It is the minds tendency to automatically reject those things that we dislike or are adverse to. For instance, some people would rather climb a mountain than face deeply buried emotional traumas. Being a marathon runner may be pleasurable and healthy for some people, but if it has become a mechanism for avoiding or coping with emotional pain then such activity may hold back our full potential.

According to the *yoga sutras*, once one is firmly established in, and has embodied, the *yamas* and *niyamas* and has put the body and mind at ease with *asana* and *pranayama*, one is free to move onto the final 4 limbs, which as I said above are concerned with the process of meditation.

Yoga Master Rod Stryker stated,

“Finding out who we are when we are free of obligations will be the most important thing, we can do to put meaning into our obligations”

It is significant that Stryker uses the words “free from obligations”. He is suggesting that our obligations on their own can be limiting if we overly identify with them as ourselves.

Patanjali’s teachings remind us over and over again of the techniques and methods to detach from limitation and to expand and experience liberation and that what we are looking for is already within us.

“Within the depths of authenticity lives integrity, waiting for our return. When we arrive there, we are met with effortless joy, abundant living, peace and wholeness, nothing lacking, nothing broken. This is the state of pure alignment with the will of source and will of self.”

Unknown author

RUMI-

I will meet you there

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I will meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too full to talk about. ideas, language, even the phrase each other doesn't seem to make any sense.

Chapter 5

The 4th limb-Pranayama

Pranayama is a term for the broad field of breath related techniques common to most yoga disciplines. Prana means “life force” and is often referred to as a form of control. In the eastern traditions the word for prana is “Chi”.

Gregor Maehle, quotes T. Krishnamacharya in his book, “Pranayama – the breath of Yoga” as saying that pranayama is the most important of the 8 limbs of the Yoga Sutras and the prime means for extending one’s lifetime.

In my view, becoming aware of and experiencing life force or prana is one of the fundamental foundational steps in the initial inward phase of yoga. Prana is a more subtle form of energy and cannot be limited to the nervous system.

I think we all know what it feels like when our life force feels scattered or our mind feels scattered. Restlessness and being constantly out there instead of resting in one’s own center are also familiar experiences for most of us.

Pranayama techniques are an antidote to restlessness and compulsive thinking and act to settle the mind and the body. They are also used to concentrate prana in the body and to withdraw the projection of prana out into the surroundings.

Humans breathe up to 26000 thousand times per day. Generally, the breath patterns are unconscious. However, when we deliberately set out to interrupt or alter our breath patterns we may experience some form of resistance both physically and mentally. Some of the intrinsic muscles of breathing may have been limited or restricted over time and the mind may also resist new breathing patterns.

I was reminded of this when learning to play the Didgeridoo. I observed that I had a lot of resistance in my mind and body to the new breathing patterns that I wanted to practice and learn.

Circular breathing is the commonly adopted technique to be able to play the didgeridoo and is a form of pranayama. Circular breathing involves breathing in through the nose whilst you are exhaling through the mouth. Mechanically this technique is quite simple and does not involve any new muscles or physical capacities we don't already possess. The only challenge is to overcome the habitual breathing patterns and the bodies resistance to change.



Yoga students may also initially experience unease and or unfamiliar sensations when practicing various pranayama techniques for the first time. My advice is to pay close attention to these new sensations and to be kind to yourself and not continue if the experiences become uncomfortable or painful.

Yoga pranayama techniques offer a new world of opportunities to explore the inter relationship between our physical, mental and subtle bodies.

I remain as fascinated with the practice of pranayama techniques as I was when I was first introduced to them over 20 years ago. In fact, in my case I would not consider myself as a practicing yogi if I was not doing pranayama.

In the yoga tradition prana is the primal subtle energy within us. Translated as “life force”. Prana flows like rivers and tributaries within the body and is never static. It is also information or intelligence.

In scientific terms, it is through the transformation of energy that light is produced. It is through the transformation of energy that heat is produced. It is through the transformation of energy that electricity is produced. In other words, energy is acting upon itself. In yoga the internal engine of energy is the subtle form known as prana or “life force”.

According to traditional yogic texts, prana travels in the body in a network known as the nadis, and in the far eastern tradition via the meridians.

Prana breathes life into life, and it is always in-formation. In simple terms this is called intelligence.

We can practice pranayama at any time of the day or night. We can practice it before, during or after a physical asana class.

The pranayama technique known as Ujjayi, for example, is a powerful form of controlled breathing often adopted in asana practices.

Scientific studies have confirmed that controlled breathing can reduce stress, increase alertness and boost the immune system.

By taking longer, slower breaths with the Ujjayi technique, our brain gets the message that all is well, and it gives the brain a point of focus like a personal mantra. It also increases energy levels and heats the body especially when combined with the restriction of the muscles at the pelvic floor known as Mula (earth) Buda (bind).

The combination of these techniques can have the effect of taking the restless mind from wandering off and daydreaming about the day ahead and into the body for a more fulfilling and embodied experience of asana practice.

The pranayama breathing techniques known as Nadi Shodhana (opposite nostril breathing), helps to promote balance between the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Clears the nostrils and sinuses and brings us into greater breath awareness.

BREATH

*Breathing in I know I'm breathing in
Breathing out I know
As the in breath grows deep
The out breath grows slow
Breathing in makes me calm
Breathing out makes me ease
With the in breath I smile
With the out breath I release
Breathing in there is only this present moment
Breathing out it is a wonderful moment*

Author unknown

There are various names and types of actions that prana performs in the body. The upward movement of prana is known as Kundalini. The downward movement is known as Apana. I recall a definition of Kundalini as the untapped reservoir of our own unique potential and intelligence.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Tune into the greater intelligence that created the universe and let that intelligence inspire you in your living.

A wide variety of schools of yoga specialize in practices that help awaken awareness with techniques that focus on the movement and flow of prana. Tantra, Hatha, Kundalini and Kriya Yoga all offer a wide range of pranayama techniques and practices together with movements to help deepen and enrich the understanding and integration of prana into daily life.

According to Gregor Maehle, there are many ways to meditate. However, in yoga, meditation grows out of pranayama.

Other well-known pranayama techniques include;
Bellows breath - Bastrika
Fire breath- Kapalabhati,
Breath holds – Kumbhaka

Simple pranayama techniques are usually incorporated in most physical asana practices and at the start of most mindfulness and meditation programs.

In time, and with practice, you may be comfortable including and incorporating pranayama techniques with a combination of breath awareness, bandhas (energy locks) and mantras.

Depending on the yoga tradition some of these combinations may or may not be optional. Added layers of complexity improve focus, attention, awareness and feedback allowing access to deeper levels of perception and discernment.

Chapter 6

The 5th limb “Pratayahara”

Pratayahara is defined as the practices that stimulate sense withdrawal or independence from external stimuli.

The senses tell us much about reality and are necessary for navigating daily life. However, our senses are not accurate and cannot be relied on as the only way to assess the true nature of reality. The senses notice objects we desire and draw our minds outwards.

Pratayahara creates the ability to become absorbed internally. I believe that pratayahara would be a familiar experience for most people. Sometimes described as a sense of an awake aware presence. It's like peeling an onion to rest in the inner state. This state can cross fade or melt into the next phase which is the 6th limb, ie Dharana- which is to fix the attention on a single point

If our senses cannot be relied upon to provide a full picture of reality what about our own thoughts and feelings?

Quote from “Tantra Illuminated” – Christopher Wallis

The cause of all suffering is not experiencing yourself as you truly are. The primary identification with the body causes suffering because it conceals the true nature of the self. Even more common is mind- identification. That means that you believe the contents of your mind, ie your thoughts and feelings actually tell you about who you really are, about the nature of yourself. This is a critical error, for clear introspection reveals that thoughts and feelings do not tell you about who you really are or about the nature of yourself.

Because thoughts and feelings are culturally conditioned and constantly changing, yet there is an inner knower which witnesses this

mental/emotional phenomena, and this knower has been with you throughout your life.

The strange and self-limiting error we make is to pay more attention to the contents of our awareness than to the nature of the ever-present field in which they arise and subside.

Thoughts and feelings are simply vibrations of energy and according to the nondualist tradition the field in which they vibrate in is awareness.

I have attempted to explain this classical tantra view below from various teachings offered by Christopher Wallis that I am familiar with.

To put it another way, what we are most familiar with about ourselves is mostly thoughts, memories, opinions and views, all of which change.

Awareness is not a personality trait and is not a thought form. It's a felt sense of beingness itself -the fundamental feeling of being you. It is the one aspect of yourself that has been the same your whole life. It is undying as well as unchanging.

The importance of this understanding once integrated in our lives is earth shattering because it means that our essential nature is available to us at anytime and anywhere. People imagine that it is only available if the emotions are quiet and the mind is calm. That's not true. Once we experience it clearly, we can learn to access it no matter what our emotional state might be. In other words, we can hold space for our own emotional experience even if it's a racing mind without inhabiting it. We don't get absorbed in the chain of thought such that we lose connection with any other possibilities that maybe available to us. C.Wallis.

These concepts initially challenged my perception of reality. The teachings reminded me that I cannot have a vision of the self because I cannot see the point from where all seeing is done.

Contemplating these concepts took me into a deeper appreciation of my own reasons for continuing with my meditation practices.

This is what Patanjali calls "Yoga ". In that moment, you realize that you are and what you are not.

Chapter 7

Meditation begins

6th Limb Dharana

Dharana is the type of focused concentration where, even though it waivers, we can keep coming back to the focus. We learn techniques to fix our attention to a single point either external or internal, but that attention still waivers.

7th Limb Dhyana

Dhyana is defined as successful concentration. It is sometimes wrongly described as meditation.

When we visualize pouring oil, even though the oil is in fact droplets of oil, the oil looks as though it is continuous. That is because the attention is flowing towards the object continuously. When attention is flowing towards an object continuously it is known as “dynamic stillness”. According to Patanjali this is still not the state of meditation. However, any thought or emotion that arises now arise in the flow.

Christopher Wallis provides a useful analogy:

“Let’s say that the object is a flower. When samadhi (8th limb or goal of yoga) arises, the mind gets so absorbed that all that is left is the flower shining within consciousness: ie pure flowerness. The fullness of the flower state is now apparent. Who we think we are versus who we really are. Who we really are always wants what is in any given situation. The concept of pre discursive reality may help explain this apparent paradox. In this analogy reality is defined as pure experience right up until the moment we have a thought about it. As soon as we have the thought we are engaging in the process of labelling or describing the experience. It doesn’t take a

leap of faith to accept that our mental labelling or mental description is a projection from our own conditioning or perception. On the other hand, pure awareness or our essence nature can never be labelled, described, analyzed or divided up. There is simply no words adequate to describe it and all teachings in this area are simply pointers.

On the path of nondual awareness, the goal of the yogi, if there is one, is full surrender and openness to reality. Acceptance on this path includes the acceptance of my mind's resistance. Hence, in this understanding of reality the ability to be with what is, is the highest joy. Known as Satchitananda. The joy of awareness or reality is intimately linked with a deep trust of life". C.Wallis

In the early stages of meditation, the process is about becoming more aware of the thought process without judging, analyzing and comparing the thoughts even if this is just for a few moments.

It is in this meditational space of non-judgement or non-analysis that the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems can achieve balance and the autonomic nervous system can go to work to help return the body to homeostasis.

The body has amazing healing powers and opening up, honouring and becoming more aware of all of our inner states, no matter how scary or difficult this awareness appears is, I believe, the road to inner peace and a life free from conflict and stress.

Have you ever heard yourself or anyone else say that they will feel relaxed and at peace when everything around them settles down? When we settle down and find inner peace, (which is our natural state of being) then this state of being radiates out from us so that we can be the change we want to see in the world. If you want to see less conflict and more peace, then cultivate this as your inner state.

Alan Finger said that if you want to know how your Yoga is progressing, look at your relationship with yourself and the quality of your relationship with the people in your life.

The initial stages of meditation may prompt a greater level of awareness of what we absorb during the day that doesn't belong to us. In addition, we may identify repetitive thought patterns that we may be unconsciously keeping alive. Some of these may even trigger the pain and problems in our life.

Most yoga teachers will reinforce the importance of setting an intention to meditate on a daily basis and the benefits of setting aside a space in the house for your daily meditation.

I believe it is important to not create any preconceived notions about the outcomes of your daily meditation practice. Don't over analyse the meditation process or be critical of your progress. The process will unfold according to its own natural sequence and the best thing you can do is to set aside the time, do the practice and then get up and get on with your day without creating an internal dialogue about the practice.

I have often heard friends and colleagues state that their form of meditation happens during some form of exercise including surfing, diving, cycling or even extreme activities such as mountain climbing and deep diving.

Some physically athletic experiences/moments do provide an extreme clarity of mind and a single pointed mind. In that sense they can be regarded as a form of meditation.

My question is, what happens when you can't climb the mountain or run the marathon? If necessary, become curious about what and where the physical drive originates within your mind and body. In any event, why not add another tool to your meditation kit bag by developing a more readily available, less physically dependent method of meditation? Such a practice may compliment, deepen and enhance the relationship and

quality of the free diving, mountain climbing, surfing or marathon experience.

It is not usually the case that we can easily engage in contemplative philosophical concepts whilst performing athletically. In my view, it is more likely that we can contemplate concepts such as, “consciousness” as the universal fundamental underlying fabric of the ever-expanding infinite unbound universe whilst seated in meditation than by climbing a mountain. However, like all generalizations there will be exceptions. I am sure that some extreme athletes have experienced such heightened moments of clarity of reality.

All of the teachings that I have studied confirm that this experience is beyond words to describe and is not something that can be analyzed or dissected by the intellect. As such, awareness is beyond any study as an object in itself. More about this later.

7.3 Stillness within the movement



It may be easier for some to experience a moment of stillness when they are in nature or when they are engaged in an outdoor activity. In nature we can experience the transcendence of duality as the body and mind taps into the stillness and calmness of the earth and the nature around us.

In that moment when mind appears to quieten you may become still. In that moment it appears that you may have drawn your focus away from

that which is unstable by your thoughts, to that which is stable; nature and the earth.

Asana practice with the challenging postures, balance and strength is a great medium to emphasize and relate to the quality of stillness within the movement. This awareness of stillness within the movement creates the basis for change to happen.

Stillness is where two opposites meet and become one. As you begin to become more comfortable in stillness you may begin to feel more strength no matter what is going on around you.

For a moment in time, two opposites create stillness, a neutral point. For this to happen we have to become aware of the relationship between apparent opposites ie like the opposing qualities of;

*Ying and the Yang, or
Ha and the Tha of Hatha or
Rajas and Tamas
Vata, Pitta and Kapha Doshas
Gravity and resistance to it
Prana and Apana
Ida and Pingala Nadis
Masculine and Feminine
Sun and Moon
Earth, water, fire, air and space*

The Baghavagita

*To action alone you are entitled never to its fruit
let not the fruit of action be your motive
neither let there be any attachment to inaction
abiding in yoga do your work without attachment
and with being balanced in success or failure
balance is called yoga.*

When we observe that state of being where we can naturally experience the balance between opposites such as;

Strength and softness

Power and tranquility

Effort and letting go

Active body – quiet mind

Grounding or rooting down to simultaneously lift or rise up

Giving and receiving

Holding on and letting go

Stillness and movement

Expansion and contraction

Rajas and Tamas

With balance we are more likely to be able to respond from our center to any situation and life flows in a direction that supports our growth.

Chapter 8

Transformation

At some point along the yoga path, you may reach a threshold when you have left the tried and true and not yet replaced it with anything else. It is when you are between your old comfort zone and any possible new way of being. This is known as the liminal space and maybe the place where transformation takes place: the unknown.

Seventeenth Century scientist, Blair Pascall is given credit for saying, "Somewhere, something incredible is wanting to be known"

The liminal space is an invitation to surrender. Some physical spaces are liminal in nature, like being in a waiting room on your own or at an airport at night. They are places that exist for things that come before or after them such as the area on the beach between the high and low tides.

The words of Prema Chodron maybe helpful when in the liminal space:

'When you begin to touch your heart and let your heart be touched you begin to realize that it is bottomless, that it doesn't have any resolution That this heart is huge, vast and limitless. You begin to discover how much warmth and gentleness is there as well as how much space. Peace starts in our hearts and minds and not outside ourselves and until its roots are firmly entrenched in our own self, we cannot manifest it externally.'

Here are some quotes about transformation and change that I have collected over the years. My apologies to any authors of these quotes for not referring to you accordingly;

- *Yoga is not about the shape of your poses but about the shape of your life.*
- *In some ways Yoga could be described as the science of transformation. It doesn't care about where you have been but what you are becoming.*
- *Change is not only inevitable but always happening. When you truly embrace this concept of change being the only constant, the only thing left to do is to grow, detach, venture outwards and touch the spirit and find your source.*
- *It has often been said that the secret to change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.*

In approaching and relating to the process of change and transformation Patanjali refers to the concept of Vairagya and Abhyasa as guiding principles;

1. Vairagya involves the letting go of the attachment to expectations. For example, the simple act of letting go of having to be right or having to have the last word can be very liberating. Maybe you are a perfectionist. Having to be perfect can be crippling and will become an obstacle to your own process of transformation.
2. Abhyasa is rooted in the word to sit (but more than). It involves action without interruption. Not distracted, builds like a ball rolling down a hill. The more we practice the more we want to practice. Also means to be present.

I recall an old saying that the transformative power of any knowledge is to experience it yourself.

Plato is quoted as saying, "*all learning is remembering*".

In opening up to the possibility of the transformative power of yoga, you may need to initially accept that there are possibilities for your health and wellbeing that you are not currently aware of. The point of practice is not to work on or get rid of problems.

For yoga teacher Baptiste, a “True North Moment” is when you feel whole and complete for no reason at all- not because you have attained any particular goal. Perfectly whole moments are sufficient on their own. Even in a yoga pose, resist the urge to be different or better. There is no lack or sense of disappointment. No need to hold on, align, consume or protect. Perfectly whole moments are sufficient on their own.

Zen Master Adayashanti

We realize often quite suddenly that our sense of self which has been formed and constructed out of ideas, beliefs and image is not who we really are. It doesn't define us and has no center

RUMI

*Commit yourself to a daily practice
your loyalty to that is like a ring at the door
keep knocking and eventually the joy that lives inside
will look out to see who is there.*

This may be another opportunity to pick up your notebook and make some notes about what your beliefs about the process and outcome (if any) of transformation are.

Water

What is stronger? Water or rock?

Apply this to your thoughts

ie; soft thoughts that are not rigid are like water

Water can enter into any space effortlessly

Water is patient

Visualize yourself as water

Water does not resist – water flows

Water will not stop you

Dripping water wears away a stone

If water can't go through an obstacle it goes around it.

I feel that Yoga Sutras once understood and integrated into your life will orientate you towards the heart of consciousness and to the space where change and transformation is not only possible but unavoidable.

Chapter 9

Karma and Dharma

A definition of Karma that I like is that karma is the description of any experience that we have not fully digested. Because it isn't fully digested it is still in the body mind and resurfaces from time to time providing an opportunity to fully digest whatever experience was undigested on a spiritual and conscious level.

In other words, it has been said that what we resist persists even if we are resisting something unconsciously, habitually or based on a deliberate decision.

Karma and Dharma. (Alan Finger Page 57- Tantra of the Yoga Sutras)

The word "karma" refers to the activities and experiences of your life. It is all the challenges you face and the actions you take in response to those challenges.

The word "dharma" refers to the structure of your life including your family, nationality, cultural milieu, natural skill set, and other circumstances, all of which give rise to your path and purpose in life.

On a personal level, this applies to how we look at solutions to any problem areas such as our relationship with our loved ones or relatives or health, wealth, personal peace and so on.

Opening up to the potential to live in peace with ourselves and those around us, even when we don't know how this is going to take place, may be the first step. To acknowledge that even though we haven't thought of the solution, or that we have exhausted our analysis without an answer, does not mean that the answer doesn't exist. This approach

acknowledges the concept of universal consciousness and the droplet of that unbound, unlimited spacious consciousness known as our Atman.

The wisdom of the yoga sutras is that at our core (Atman), we are whole. Nothing to fix, nothing to put right. Imbalances only happen when we detach from our own natural perfection. As Alan Finger mentions, "Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional".

I believe that if you are diligent and committed to progress on your yoga journey you will eventually come face to face with any addictions. Clearly some addictions are milder and less painful than others.

Dr Gabor Mate is a world leading expert on addiction and childhood trauma. I attended a workshop with him in 2019 and recommend listing to his you tube videos or acquiring one of his books. *"In The Realm Of Hungry Ghosts"*, *"Close encounters with addiction"*.

Dr Mate defines an addiction as anything that we do that gives us short term pleasure that we can't stop doing knowing that it has adverse long-term consequences. As set out above, the yoga sutras define attachment to pleasure as one of the 5 Kleishas.

I refer to the following Interview with Gabor Mate regarding childhood trauma and addiction directly from his web page;

Question- Are you saying that everyone who ends up addicted was traumatized or abused in childhood?

Answer. No, I'm not; I am saying that all addictions come from emotional loss and exist to soothe the pain resulting from that loss. Trauma and abuse, as we define them, are certainly surefire sources of loss but they're far from the only ones. The human infant and toddler is a highly vulnerable creature, and emotional stresses of all kinds in the rearing environment can create long-lasting wounds in the psyche that a person will later try to soothe or numb with addictive behaviour. In addition to

things that do happen that shouldn't happen, like abuse, there are things that (developmentally speaking) ought to happen that don't.

For instance, any sustained sense of emotional disconnection with the parenting figure – which can often happen when the parent is excessively stressed or preoccupied over a period of time – has the capacity to have this sort of impact, especially if the child is constitutionally very sensitive. In a stressed society like ours, with fewer and fewer supportive resources for parents, this is more and more common.

So many of us, whether or not we were acutely traumatized or faced extreme adversity as kids, have these sorts of lingering challenges to contend with. We can and should be grateful things weren't worse, but we shouldn't discount or minimize the pain we carry from childhood even if it didn't result from severe neglect or abuse.

Dharma- Life Purpose

Once the yoga journey has begun, the quality of your relationship to aspects of your life may change. If this happens, you know that the process is working. Hopefully, this is a graceful and fulfilling transition, but this it may not always be the case. This brings me to one of the definitions of, "Sankalpa"
as - *An Intention in alignment with your Dharma.*

I like the following definition of Dharma;

Your dharma can be explained as the song you were born with in your soul and all you have to do is let the life that you live be the singing of it.

San (connection to the highest truth) Kalpa (vow) starts with the assumption that you already are who you need to be to fulfill your life's dharma. It is our overriding reason for being here. The good news is that it is intrinsic to a Sankalpa that you already have the inbuilt will to do it.

Discovering your Sankalpa is a process of listening because your heartfelt desire is already waiting to be seen and felt and is not something you need to invent.

Alan Finger regarding ***sutra 3.14***

At the causal level, there is a subtle substratum of prakriti which contains all of the unmanifested particles of intelligence, which are called "Dharmis". Dharmis are the most subtle particles of the material world, and they eventually manifest as one's dharma. or life experiences.

According to the definition given by Alan Finger, Prakriti is a general term for mother nature and it manifests everything in the material world.

Chapter 10

The Subtle Body

I don't propose to go into detail about the various definitions and explanations of the central subtle body known in yoga as the human Chakra system.

With pranayama practice and cultivation of inner awareness, it doesn't take long to realise that prana or life force isn't static within the body. Our bodies are not lumps of clay.

Patanjali does not mention the chakra system in the yoga sutras. According to Christopher Wallis the chakra system (Wallis prefers to use the term "cakra") originates from the Tantrik traditions. He further explains in his treatise, "Tantra Illuminated", that this knowledge went underground during the middle ages in Kashmir Northern India due to the Muslim invasion. It later reemerged in the form of Hatha yoga.

There is dynamism to the subtle movement of prana within the body and cultivating an experience and awareness of the movements of the subtle body will provide you with a feedback loop on the quality of your relationship with yourself and life.

However, it is the case that in many yoga practices the chakras feature as meditational and transformational tools. There are many amazing yoga teachers who are more qualified than I to discuss the chakra system.

Please note that some versions of the chakra system taught by modern yoga schools are derived from modern western interpretations of much older historical practices.

Notwithstanding the differences in teachings about the chakra body, I believe that our language and cultural conditioning already acknowledges the significance of various centres of energy, intuition and intelligence within the body.

My high-level overview of 7 of the chakras in descending order.

1 and 2 chakra- crown and 3rd eye (spiritual eye)

When we have an insight, we often raise the eyes towards the crown or mid brow. This maybe an unconscious recognition of these 2 centres.

3. Throat

Not speaking our truth can lead to the experience of feeling tension in the throat area associated with the throat chakra.

4. Heart

Ignoring the wisdom and energy of the heart also cuts us off from the universal intelligence of this center, which also hosts neurons. This may lead us to experience strong physical sensations in the heart area calling for our heartfelt attention.

5. Gut

Having gut feelings and gut instincts is recognition of the energy of the solar plexus chakra. The Solar plexus is associated with the fire element and when properly balanced we do not fire up and overly react to life's challenges but learn to respond and integrate our fire center for our overall well-being and health. Science has now confirmed that the gut is the third brain and hosts numerous neurons. Ignoring or being disconnected from gut feelings over a long period of time can lead to imbalances and health issues.

6. Sacrum

The area of the sacrum is connected to our relationships with others and ourselves. As mammals we are social creatures and we interact with other humans on a daily basis. The sacrum chakra is connected to the element of water and to all of the body's fluids and the sense of taste. It is also connected to our ability to flow through life linking one event and one day to the next seamlessly for our higher benefit.

7. Base

The base cakra, centered at the pelvic floor is connected to our sense of security and foundation. It is connected to the earth element and our sense of smell.

The chakra centres present a whole world of interesting opportunities for personal growth and awareness.

Metaphorically, each centre is also connected to either a solar (male) or lunar (female) quality and also to the elements moving up from the earth to water, fire, air and space. Combining these elements with mantra and pranayama techniques can be a powerful way to infuse your practice and personal growth.

According to many yoga traditions, yoga means, "*unity, freedom, liberation.*" On another level, yoga is also describing a state of being.

A state of being can never actually be accurately described because the experience is individual and like tasting chocolate you can read all you like about the taste of chocolate, but until you actually taste it the definitions will be meaningless.

For some the subtle body system associated with the cakras may be the ideal entry point into actually experiencing and identifying in your body and mind, the concepts you have read about in yoga studies.

Combining subtle body awareness with asana lets us see, feel and experience the relationship between our conscious and subconscious

mind, breath, prana and the tissues, muscles, organs and bones of the body at rest and in movement.

With a regular practice of asana and seated practices, you will find yourself inquiring as to why there are subtle areas of tightness or constriction in your mind, breath, energy level or body. Further, you may begin to identify the chakra centers that restrict your freedom of movement or sense of wellbeing.

You will quickly notice that every day is different as a result of different activities undertaken and even changes to the environment etc.

In time you may learn to observe the movement of the experience from one state of being to another by experiencing the shift of energy in the chakra centers as it happens and thereby develop more clarity regarding your own patterns and behavior and how they affect you on an energetic level. We can learn to observe the connection between attention, intention, movement, stillness, breath and prana.

Different schools of yoga offer various techniques to combine asana, subtle body awareness, breath awareness, imagination and mantra together as powerful tools of transformation. I believe that the appropriate chakra awareness techniques for you are guaranteed to lead to both inner and outer transformation. However, one of the most likely ways you are going to discover the appropriate chakra awareness techniques for you is through careful examination, regular practice, consistent study and working with your preferred teacher.

As mentioned above, in the quantum world, a particle exists in a field or wave of pure potentiality. In one sense, since we are made up of quantum particles, we can say that the ground of our being is subject to these quantum forces of pure potentiality.

By committing to a yoga practice, you will be challenged to surrender your habitual pattern of identifying exclusively with your old ways of doing things. That process is designed to free you up to be open to the

new potential that is/was always within you. Further, that at the quantum level, the tiniest source of all resources is inexhaustible.

In summary, when we place our attention into the stream of infinite potential within our own bodies, it may help us to open to all the goodness, joy, beauty, love, opportunities, support, guidance and creativity that life has to offer. I believe that this is what subtle body chakra awareness techniques are preparing us for.

The subtle body awareness techniques include the whole world of pranayama breathing techniques, mudras, mantras kriyas and energy body locks ie bandhas.

Chapter 11

Mantra

According to yoga cosmology the manifestation of creation flows outwards from pure consciousness, intelligence and energy. It flows down to the densest element of earth and matter by means of vibrating patterns of waves.

Thus, according to yoga reasoning, the most effective way to ascend the individual consciousness is through waves and vibratory patterns known as bioplasmic sound waves – Mantra

Our thoughts particularly the ones that we repeat over and over become our own Mantra!

By focusing on the interdependence of the breath and thought waves, we can interrupt the unconscious mantra and replace it with a conscious mantra. The mind itself is powered by the breath. Where vritti (thought wave) goes, there prana (breath wave) goes. Mantra also stimulates the vagal nerve which is associated with the back of the throat.

Practicing mantra can lead us to experience deeper levels of awareness. Mantras naturally oscillate. The primal force of oscillation in the classical Tantrik world view is known as “Spanda”. Spanda means pulsation or oscillation, expansion and contraction. The whole universe expands and contracts.

Contraction is a pre-requisite for further expansion, so a contracted emotion needs to be dealt with.

Quoting from Alan Watts

Sound waves are compression and rarefaction and are actually made up of sound – silence – sound- silence and all light is made up of Light – darkness-light-darkness because that’s what a wave is.

Christopher Wallis, in his excellent commentary on the Recognition Sutras asks, *how do we honor contraction all the way? Even in the deepest silence there is still a pulsation – which is the potential for everything and is very subtle.*

In the Recognition Sutra, Wallis makes the suggestion that we need to practice getting out of the habit of identifying with a small slice of reality, and he offers a spanda meditation:

Go smaller into the center and get very inward to a single point of being, feeling your own existence and when you are pulled into that point with practice you can feel it in a moment – not an empty space it is”.

Now moving from there to all there is type sensation. Open up to the whole sense field and push the senses all the way out without trying also helps to include in it a field of love, suspend your thinking mind.

Wallis points out that it is the quality of contraction and expansion known as spanda which accounts for one of the primary features that distinguishes between the two main schools of nondual yoga teachings.

According to classical Tantra, spanda is intrinsic to universal consciousness or Siva. Whereas in the Advaita Vedanta schools Universal Consciousness is void of contraction and expansion. This leads me into my next chapter.

Chapter 12

Consciousness – Awareness

According to classical interpretations of science, consciousness evolved out of matter as a survival mechanism. In other words, according to this model, consciousness is a by-product of the brain and originates in the brain.

The enquiring philosopher asks the question, “How can consciousness evolve if it wasn’t there before the existence of matter”? It’s the classic chicken and egg question. According to yoga wisdom, consciousness existed before matter existed, before the Big Bang and further that matter evolved out of the fundamental nature of consciousness.

I think we all understand that machine learning, as demonstrated by artificial intelligence, can do many wonderful things and such devices can now beat the best chess players in the world. However, unlike humans, the machine doesn’t know it is playing chess and doesn’t know what else it could be doing, in other words, it has no consciousness.

If, prior to the Big Bang there was “No thing”, then it naturally follows that the “No Thing” must have held the potential for the “Everything” which emerged out of the “No thing”. In other words, we could say that the “No thing” was a field of pure potential.

According to some of the nondualist schools of yoga, this field of pure potential is in fact the same field as the field of universal consciousness and can be known as Consciousness, Awareness, God or the Self.

Otherwise known as the fundamental essence of the macro universe and the micro universe ie; "Me".

Wallis explains –

*"The car going by is the movement of energy within what you are.
The sound is what you are and is within what you are.
It's not an empty silence. Silence is full of quiet presence.*

A birds' tweet is a little sparkle in all that you are. The sound is what you are. It is a vibration within what you are.

Get over the idea that a piece of awareness is you and the rest isn't you. This is false conditioning.

Awareness is the only factor in every experience you have and ever had. Therefore, it follows I must be awareness!

So how can I be separate from awareness? Nothing is separate from awareness.

I am everything I perceive. How can it be anything else?

The truth is always hidden in plain sight. Every day we have Spanda ie; expansion and contraction at all times at all scales.

Stop seeing contraction as a problem.

The sound is an expression of who you are. It is not who you are.

Awareness is the only constant thread running through your entire life. The tweet of the bird arises within awareness.

Nothing can arise outside of awareness.

So obvious so simple but takes practice.

The center of what you are is always alive. But it is not correct to think that it is always peace full.

Most (but not all) forms of suffering exist because of mis alignment”.

For instance, if you perform a yoga posture over and over again and again without correct alignment eventually it hurts, and the pain is warning you of misalignment.

Patanjali in *sutra 2.26* states that, Viveka is to perceive things as they really are. Practicing the 8 limbs of yoga is a process of purification that causes the dwindling of the Kleishas and enables us to experience Viveka.

Viveka is a steady and uninterrupted awareness of who we are – pure consciousness. When our experience of yoga goes deep enough, it removes the samskaras about body mind identification and leads to absolute liberation.

Wallis states that once you have this experience it cannot go away and you know yourself so deeply that you can't be pulled back to body, mind, emotional level attachment. You are free at every level. This is known as Kaivala- absolute liberation.

As your yoga practice and studies unfold you will naturally find yourself being more comfortable with contemplating this subject and including it into your sadhana. My purpose, including these comments is to sow the seed of inquiry and contemplation.

According to the Tantralocka

“The complete absence of wonder is in effect the complete absence of life”.

Aesthetic receptivity in the heart of a person, shedding of its attitude of apathy immediately starts a wonderful vibratory movement, known as Ananda Shakti (energizing bliss).

I highly recommend that if you are at all interested in understanding the foundational roots and history of classical Tantra, that you acquire a copy of both “The Recognition Sutra” and “Tantra Illuminated” by Christopher Wallis.

Summary

In some sense, yoga reminds us of the benefits of cultivating a perpetual state of beginning and that in this fertile state of being, we can plant the seeds for our own harvest.

Like a gardener, whose awe is renewed annually with the fruits of every season’s effort and whose simple satisfaction and awe never tires after years of gardening, so we can continually appreciate our own uniqueness from this same state of being.

In this state of being, we remember that beauty and abundance are not something to get or acquire but a practice to recognize the beauty of the world. On this basis, it is a form of spiritual practice. Beauty can be described as the experience which arises when we sense the lack or absence of otherness. In that moment we sense something familiar as being common ie; not, other.

The Navaho prayer reminds us of this inner state of being.

Navaho Prayer

*I will walk with beauty before me
I will walk with beauty behind me
I will walk with beauty above me
I will walk with beauty around me
My words will be beautiful
In beauty all day long may I walk.*

