

DANAM CONFERENCE 2006

SESSION Yoga 1

Theme: Yoga Philosophy and Its Implications in Dharma Traditions

Sub-Theme: Re-imagining Yoga, Imagining Yoga-s

Jeffrey C. Ruff, Marshall University, *Convener*

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ABSTRACTS

Jeffrey C. Ruff, Marshall University

Re-imagining Yoga, Imagining Yoga-s

Abstract unavailable at the time of printing.

Ian Whicher, University of Manitoba

Kaivalya in the Yoga Sutra: Ultimate Disengagement or Engagement?

This paper challenges the common isolationistic interpretations of classical Yoga and suggests that, as classically envisioned, Yoga does not lead to abandonment of material life but to an enhanced engagement with the world. Rather than approach Patanjali's thought from the perspective of a set of dualistic metaphysical assumptions (classical Samkhya), this paper pursues a reading of the Yoga Sutra that privileges the experience of yoga over metaphysical abstraction. Yoga can be seen to incorporate clarity of awareness with the integrity of being and action. While recognizing that aspects of yoga do entail an actual cessation of mental activity, I argue that it would be a serious misreading of Patanjala yoga to assume that such cessation is permanent. Cessation of mental activity is episodic, and the true goal is not cessation of mental activity, but the cessation of the misidentification with thought. It is not thought itself, or the dynamism of prakrti as a whole, that is the source of suffering and dissatisfaction (duhkha), but one's incorrect relationship or attachment to it. It is the mistaken identifications born of ignorance (avidya) that are dissolved, not prakrti itself, which is on the contrary purified and illuminated. The full emancipatory stage of kaivalya, "aloneness," at which practice ultimately aims, is not so much a state of spiritual isolation, as is frequently interpreted, as it is a state of nonattached "seeing".

Sthaneshwar Timalsina, San Diego State University

Nath Yoga: Union of the Body and the Cosmos

This paper compares the central components of medieval hatha yoga of the Nath Siddhas with the classical yoga of Patanjali. The literature of Gorakhnath (as well as other Nath authors, and the practices of hatha yoga themselves) provides a philosophical foundation for hatha yoga that builds upon two central tenets: that the world is a play of consciousness, and that the body is identical to the cosmos. The Nath focus on the body, on psychosomatic practice, on the role of sound and inner resonance, techniques of absorption all grow out of and are consistent with Gorakhnath's two-part formulation. These basic practices, combined with certain inspirations from alchemy and their deep connection to Tantric traditions specially characterize Nath Yoga and differentiate it from the classical yoga doctrine of Patanjali.

Jeffrey Stephen Lidke, Berry College

The Royal Wisdom: Power or Transcendence? That is the question

This paper examines two different yoga systems to consider and test the ways in which South Asianists use the intellectual category yoga. The paper considers texts of the Pasupata tradition in order to elucidate the yoga of these early Saiva devotees. The Pasupatas in many ways are predecessors to such later yoga traditions as those of the Kapalikas and Nath Siddhas—whereas it is not fully possible to reconstruct a total system of yoga, their texts do give some clues about what these practitioners understood yoga to be. In contrast, selections from medieval “yoga upanisads” are also examined in order to look at a particular kind of Vedanta yoga and see how it challenges or supports contemporary scholarly notions about Brahmanical understandings of yoga practices.

Alfred Collins, Anchorage, AK

Dharma Cloud Samadhi: The Other Side of Release (kaivalya) in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and the Samkhya Karika

The central thought in both the Samkhya Karika (SK) and the Yoga Sutra (YS) is *purusartha*, the idea that the world process (*prakṛti*) takes place solely for the sake of consciousness (*purusa*). Psychophysical reality, including the body/mind of humans, exists to give enjoyment and release to consciousness. The ultimate state, *kaivalya*, arising when consciousness achieves bliss and freedom, is a highly dynamic and duplex process described in metaphors of a rain cloud and a potter's wheel. Close reading of both texts shows that their aim is the attainment of a condition where the "ego self" (*ahamkara*, *asmita*) and "consciousness self" (*purusa*) are neither separate nor merged. On the level of culture, the aim is a transformed human world like the one imagined by *bhakti* and *tantra*. In the modern age, yoga's aims parallel the cultural visions of Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo.

Beverley Foulks, Harvard University

Super Samskara-s: Soteriological Subliminal Impressions in Patanjali's Yoga-Sutra

This paper focuses on the Patañjali's definition of yoga as "cessation of the turnings of thought" (*citta-vṛtti*). I argue that Patañjali affords a new role to be played by *samskara-s* (subliminal impressions) in bringing about cessation of such turnings of thought. Not only do *samskara-s* perform their traditional function of perpetuating such turnings of thought along with *vasana-s* (perfumes, memory traces) and *asaya-s* (subliminal intentions), but one particular type of *samskara* generated by wisdom (*prajña*) also has the ability to bring about a cessation of turnings of thought altogether. This *samskara* has supreme soteriological significance within Patañjali's system of yoga, as it represents the mechanism through which the *purusa* might cease identifying with turnings of thought and become able to observe the world unobstructed. It describes the achievement accomplished by yoga in bringing about freedom from an afflicted or deluded consciousness.